

GROUP CONFLICT  
and POLITICAL  
MOBILIZATION  
in BAHRAIN  
and the ARAB GULF

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RETHINKING THE RENTIER STATE

JUSTIN GENGLER

# Ethnic Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf

by  
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To our carefree days in *Arabia Felix*



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# CHAPTER I

## An Introduction to Bahrain: The Dysfunctional *Rentier* State

In February 2011, encouraged by successive mass uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, hundreds of thousands of Bahraini citizens took to the streets to call for the ouster of the ruling Āl Khalīfa tribe. The date chosen for the start of protests, February 14, marked the nine-year anniversary of Bahrain’s 2002 Constitution, a charter promulgated unilaterally by a then newly-ascended King Ḥamad bin ‘Īsā, and one that has come to symbolize for regime opponents, in particular for the country’s long-disenfranchised Shi’a majority, the false promise of political reform in Bahrain. Exactly one month after the onset of demonstrations, which saw the violent deaths of protestors and riot police alike and prompted a counter-mobilization by pro-government Sunnis, the movement was finally crushed with the intervention of several thousand ground troops dispatched by neighboring Arab Gulf states eager to contain the mounting crisis.<sup>1</sup>

The present work is not the story of that uprising—not, at least, in the immediate sense. It was conceived and mostly written long before protestors occupied the now-flattened Pearl Roundabout and renamed it “Martyrs’ Square.” Of course, in describing the conditions that made possible Bahrain’s failed revolution, it does offer a framework through which to view this latest episode in a tumultuous recent history. Yet its real purpose lies elsewhere, and the net it aims to cast is far wider. Though its primary focus be Bahrain, the investigation here seeks to examine a much larger class of cases of which this tiny archipelago in the shallow waters off Saudi Arabia is but the best contemporary representative. This category I call the

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<sup>1</sup> While it is much too premature to finish the book on the February 14 uprising, which in many ways is still ongoing, the International Crisis Group’s *Middle East Report N° 111*, “Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (VIII): Bahrain’s Rocky Road to Reform,” gives a useful overview. Available at: <[http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle-East-North-Africa/Iran-Gulf/Bahrain/111\\_Popular\\_Protest\\_in\\_North\\_Africa\\_and\\_the\\_Middle\\_East\\_VII\\_Bahrain's\\_Rocky\\_Road\\_to\\_Reform.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle-East-North-Africa/Iran-Gulf/Bahrain/111_Popular_Protest_in_North_Africa_and_the_Middle_East_VII_Bahrain's_Rocky_Road_to_Reform.pdf)>.

dysfunctional *rentier* state: a state flush with historical levels of resource revenues yet unable to buy the political acquiescence of its citizens—or, of a particular sort of citizen. That such a government is unable to do so is a problem not only for it, likely, but one moreover for political science, whose standing interpretation of the Arab Gulf monarchies revolves precisely around this pretended ability to appease would-be opponents through material benefaction, more specifically via guaranteed state employment and exception from taxation. So if there exist, then, identifiable circumstances under which this formula for political buy-off does not obtain, we must revise not merely our expectations about the inherent political stability of the Arab Gulf regimes, but also our understanding more generally of the nature of politics in rent-based societies. The present thesis outlines this revision.

### **Testing the Untested**

A curious fact about the proposition that economic satisfaction breeds political indifference in resource-dependent states—about this “*rentier* state thesis”—is that for a conceptual framework first proposed some three decades ago and popular ever since, it has yet to be put to the test empirically. Certainly, some of its corollaries have invited quantitative research, most notably its implication that, at the country level, the extent of a nation’s reliance upon rents from the sale of natural resources should tend to be inversely-related to its democraticness, since more rents means more citizens content to relinquish their political prerogative in exchange for material benefits. Other studies proceed one step further to associate democracy with rates of taxation and government-sector employment. Yet, for all their effort, these analyses cannot bring us closer to demonstrating the individual-level link between material contentment and political apathy that is the explicit theoretical mechanism underlying the *rentier* framework, precisely because such analyses do not operate on the individual level. That the regimes of the Arab Gulf are both non-democratic and resource-dependent does nothing to show that, in early 2011 in the United Arab Emirates, or in Kuwait, individual citizens who are satisfied with their economic situation also tend to be satisfied with their country’s political situation. Equally, that Saudi Arabia and Qatar maintain high government employment rates and do not impose income taxes cannot directly connect the individual-level economic outcomes of these policies to citizens’ political orientations. In short, extant evaluation of the *rentier* hypothesis has been limited to tests of the very observations that gave rise to the theory originally, while its own proposed causal logic remains unexamined.



At its core, then, the *rentier* state thesis is less a story about the political machinations of greedy governments than it is about human nature and its impact on individual political behavior under particular conditions. Indeed, the most provocative claim of *rentier* theory is exactly this, that it purports to understand the very political motivations of individual citizens such as those of the Arab Gulf: *why it is* that people become involved in, or alternatively shrink from, politics; *what it is* that leads them to support or oppose a government. Economics, it insists, is king; other competing factors, it implies by omission, must take a back seat. From here it is plain that any proper assessment of the *rentier* framework must investigate what the latter professes already to know: the individual-level determinants of political orientation in highly-clientelistic, rent-based societies. And as it was the Gulf region itself that served as archetype for these early *rentier* theorists, it is perhaps only fitting that its first real test should be conducted there.

But such a thing is easier said than done. To be sure, that the *rentier* causal processes have escaped rigorous evaluation is not explained by choices of academic focus merely, but by a lack of empirical data with which to carry out any analysis whatever. Macro-level data on resource exports, political openness, and rates of taxation and state-sector employment are readily available for most countries of the world; those recording the political opinions and behavior of ordinary Gulf Arabs are emphatically not. Even the two foremost survey research projects attempting to compile such data—the World Values Survey (WVS), begun in 1990, and the Arab Democracy Barometer (AB), in 2005—have succeeded despite their considerable efforts and resources in surveying but three of the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council: Saudi Arabia in 2003 (WVS), Kuwait in 2006 (AB), and Qatar in 2010 (WVS). And of these, only the Kuwait survey managed to field the crucial but highly-sensitive questions about normative political opinions and political activities, while the Qatar data are not yet public.

However, even were one to obtain such individual-level data, what is it exactly that one would expect to find? In other words, why should one doubt the abilities of the GCC states to purchase political quietude by distributing rent-funded material benefits to citizens? Indeed, with the exception of Bahrain, the Arab Gulf as a distinct category of nations seems to have succeeded in avoiding the sort of mass revolt that today continues to threaten regimes across the Middle East and North Africa, and all but Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have appealed to citizens' wallets with generous social welfare packages announced soon after the Arab Spring arrived in the Gulf. So, to ask the question again: what indication is there that the

*rentier* paradigm does not offer a more or less accurate account of the relationship between Arab Gulf governments and ordinary Gulf Arabs? Why bother probing a theory that appears thus self-evident?

The answer, I argue, turns around how one interprets the case of Bahrain. If one views the country's defiance of basic *rentier* assumptions—of citizen disinterest in politics, of a lack of organized political opposition, and ultimately of regime stability—if one believes such contradictions the result of a Bahraini domestic politics that is *sui generis* in the Arab Gulf, then, certainly, there is little to learn from it. Either Bahrain's rulers are particularly inept at political co-optation, they somehow lack the resources to accomplish it, or Bahraini citizens are uniquely recalcitrant among Gulf peoples. But if, as I propose herein, the conditions that make possible Bahrain's dysfunctional *rentier* state apply in degrees to the other nations of the region; if the furious politics of Bahrain represent not a theoretical exception but merely the realization of a latent possibility that exists in all the Arab Gulf regimes according to their peculiar vulnerability to such conditions, then the case of Bahrain is far more instructive. If there exist identifiable circumstances under which the standard *rentier* interpretation of Gulf politics is not valid—circumstances that describe Bahrain particularly but not uniquely—then through studying this case one may not only arrive at a necessary revision of the *rentier* state thesis, but a better practical understanding of citizen-regime (and, as we shall see, citizen-citizen) relations in the Arab Gulf region and beyond.

### **Ethnic Conflict and the Dysfunctional *Rentier* State**

This condition underlying Bahrain's inability to buy popular political disinterest and assent is, as the present study explains, the longstanding societal division between its Sunni and Shi'i communities, an ethnic-based<sup>2</sup> competition over no less than the very character of the Bahraini state. Beyond offering a viable basis for mass political coordination in a type of regime said by its very nature to lack one, this Sunni-Shi'i conflict also serves to disrupt the mechanisms of political buy-off available to Bahrain *qua rentier* state by, in the first place, making the political orientations of ordinary Bahrainis dependent not primarily upon economics but upon ethno-religious affiliation and concern for the empowerment of the rival group; and, in the second place, by prompting the government to forego the liberal and indiscriminant use of

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<sup>2</sup> Here and throughout, I use the term "ethnic" or "ethno-religious" in lieu of "sectarian" broadly to describe the ascriptive social categories Sunni and Shi'i. This usage may therefore be understood as synonymous with confessional religious community and should not be confused with Arab or Persian descent.

public-sector employment to mollify would-be opponents for fears over national security, of Iranian-inspired Shi'a emboldening, and, more generally, as punishment for those perceived to lack national loyalty. The latter effect, which operates on the political supply side, means that the state is unable effectively to utilize even those political pressure-relieving measures assumed to be distinctively available to it as an allocative economy. The former, operating on the demand side, ensures that such state-side efforts, even if they could be employed, would be employed in vain.

In the ethnically-divided *rentier* state, citizens' orientations toward the regime depend fundamentally on their perceptions of the confessional balance of power enshrined therein. This means that concerns for the empowerment of ethnic rivals at the expense of one's own group inevitably compete with more mundane matters of economic welfare in determining the extent of an individual's support for, and actions in favor of or against, the government as conservator of the political status quo. Political attitudes and actions are influenced not simply by the question "What has the government done for me?," but by the more elementary question "What—or who—does the government represent? By whom exactly am I being governed? and is it my interest they have in mind?" For members of Bahrain's Shi'a ethnic out-group, a perennial political minority despite its demographic majority, opposition to the regime stems on principle from its structural exclusion from the instruments of power, not from dissatisfaction with its collective share of the nation's oil revenues. Thus, for example, were government opponents only enraged further when King Ḥamad attempted to pre-empt their February protests with the announcement of a \$2,600 hand-out for each Bahraini family. As said by one now-imprisoned opposition leader, "This is about dignity and freedom—it's not about filling our stomachs. ... The core of this is political, not financial."<sup>3</sup>

The issue is also, for many Shi'is, one for which inspiration may be found readily in religion itself, the historical arc of Shi'ism being precisely one of struggle and self-sacrifice in the face of a more powerful but corrupt political-*cum*-religious oppressor. In Bahrain, religious rites and celebrations are replete with allegory and even explicit comparison connecting the seventh-century conflict over the leadership of the Muslim community to the present-day struggle in Bahrain. Indeed, to an outside observer of the most holy Shi'i festival of 'Āshūrā',

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<sup>3</sup> In Thomas Fuller, 2011, "Bahrain's Promised Spending Fails to Quell Dissent," *The New York Times*, March 6. Available at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/07/world/middleeast/07bahrain.html>>. The quote in fact comes from a prominent (and now jailed) Sunni opposition figure, Ebrāhīm Sharīf, whose leftist political society Wa'ad faces similar persecution (and targeted electoral disenfranchisement) for its expressly secular views.

it is difficult to perceive whether the myriad processions, passions plays, and sermons tell of the battle against the 'Umayyad caliph or against the Bahraini monarch. In sum, as many Shi'a believe (or can be motivated by the idea that) they have a collective right to political authority based on religious notions of injustice and betrayal rooted in the very foundations of Islam, it is difficult to pacify their demands with mere promises of jobs and relief from taxation.

At the same time, moreover, anti-state mobilization on the part of Bahrain's Shi'a-dominated opposition elicits a popular response in kind from ordinary Sunni citizens anxious to avoid any serious revision of the nation's political balance of power, much less a wholesale change in regime instigated by Iranian agents. As a result of this Sunni counter-mobilization, in the ethnically-contested state of Bahrain it is not only members of the political out-group that defy the basic *rentier* assumption of apoliticality but the entire political community, pushed on the one side by Shi'a reformists, pulled on the other by a countervailing force of Sunnis motivated by the fear, exaggerated or not, that a Shi'a-empowered Bahrain may begin to look much like another post-2003 Iraq. "If the Shias took control of the country," one plain-speaking Bahraini told *The New York Times* amid turmoil in August 2010, "they would pop out one eye of every Sunni in the country."<sup>4</sup> More recently, this same apprehension was evident in the massive rallies and even campaigns of armed violence organized by pro-government Sunnis aiming to stifle the momentum of the February 14 uprising, a counter-revolution that by mid-March threatened to culminate in open Sunni-Shi'i conflict.<sup>5</sup> For their efforts, these "loyal citizens" would later be paid homage by Bahrain's premier, who "lauded [them] for their honourable mobilization against wicked plots," and "for standing united as a bulwark defending their country against subversive conspiracies."<sup>6</sup>

The *rentier* state of the Arab Gulf must therefore sink or swim on its capacity for economic appeasement, yet in ethnically-divided societies this ability is hampered not only on the demand side by those citizens unwilling to take the bargain but also on the supply side by a state reluctant to enrich or empower members of a community it views as an open or

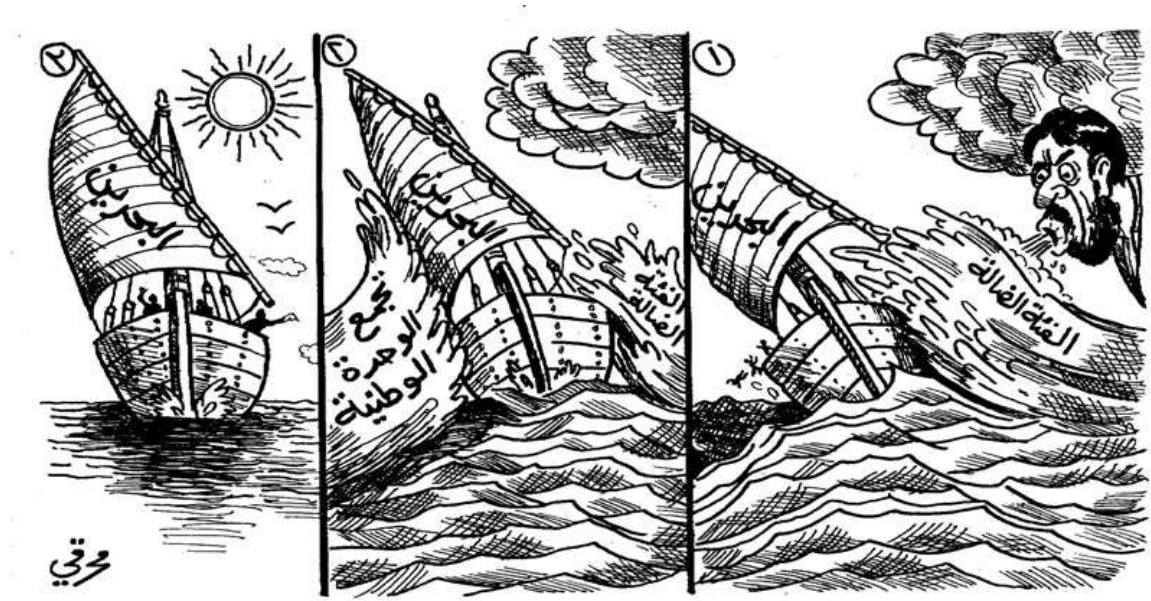
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<sup>4</sup> In Thanassis Cambanis, 2010, "Crackdown in Bahrain Hints of End to Reforms," *The New York Times*, August 26. Available at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/27/world/middleeast/27bahrain.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Michael Slackman, 2011, "Bahrain's Sunnis Defend Monarchy," *The New York Times*, February 17. Available at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/18/world/middleeast/18voices.html>>. Perhaps the most infamous case of Sunni-Shi'i civil violence took place on March 13 at the state-run University of Bahrain, where anti-government protestors clashed with pro-government mobs. Similar incidents took place throughout the country, including at public schools, which were consequently closed for an extended period.

<sup>6</sup> "Premier's tribute...", 2011, *Gulf Daily News*, April 22. Available at: <<http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=304489>>.

FIGURE I.I. A Cartoon in the Government-Affiliated Akhbār al-Khalij Depicts the Nation’s Sunnis Righting the Bahraini Ship Inundated by “the Deviant Denomination”



latent political opposition with ties to hostile regional challengers (namely, Iran), individuals readily-identifiable moreover on the basis of geography, family names, language, and other ascriptive ethnic markers. The question such a state faces, accordingly, is whether its power of economic benefaction—most notably, government employment—is best used to reward friends or to attempt to convert known and potential enemies. In Bahrain, at least, the answer is clear: public-sector employment does not secure political allegiance; it is political allegiance that secures public-sector employment,<sup>7</sup> especially when the work in question carries national security implications. And, in a part of the world that spends more of its wealth on internal

<sup>7</sup> In case there were ever any doubt about the direction of causality here, one need only witness the more than 2,000 individuals fired from public-sector positions for suspicion of having taken part in protests in February and March. This mass termination of Shi'a employees and beneficiaries extended, *inter alia*, to government agencies, publicly-owned companies, hospitals, schools, sports clubs, and university scholarship-holders. The response was so sweeping, in fact, that it prompted the U.S.-based AFL-CIO to file a labor rights complaint against the Bahraini government, contending that the firings violated its free trade agreement with the United States. See “Concerning the Failure of the Government of Bahrain to Comply with Its Commitments Under Article 15.1 of the US-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement,” 2011, The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), April 21. Available at: <[http://www.aflcio.org/issues/jobseconomy/globaleconomy/upload/bahrain\\_fta04212011.pdf](http://www.aflcio.org/issues/jobseconomy/globaleconomy/upload/bahrain_fta04212011.pdf)>.

and external security than any other,<sup>8</sup> the scope of the resulting ethnic-based exclusion from this most far-reaching of *rentier* government benefits is far from trivial. Yet not only are Bahraini Shi‘a excluded altogether from police and military service, but fear of Iranian-inspired emboldening—of a veritable Shi‘a fifth column—serves to limit their employment also in those institutions close to the exercise of state power, including the Ministries of Defense, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Justice, and others. And where they do find public employment, political correctness dictates that Shi‘is are suffered disproportionately to fill lower-ranking positions. Paradoxically, then, though with only economic patronage at its political disposal, still the ethnically-contested *rentier* state chooses to forgo or curtail what is assumed its most powerful weapon, for fear that the cure should be worse than the disease.

### **The Significance of Bahrain**

The decisive question, of course, preceding even that of how one might test such claims, is whether the foregoing describes Bahrain merely or is in fact generalizable to a larger class of societies. Is this dysfunctional *rentier* state simply that: a case made unique by a confluence of unhappy circumstances from which little else may be gleaned? or are the conditions outlined above more widely applicable to the region or to the greater Middle East? In short, does a study of ethnic conflict and political mobilization in Bahrain tell the interesting but ultimately one-off story of political life on a tiny island off the coast of Saudi Arabia? or are its insights of more general interest to students of political science?

First, from a strict theoretical standpoint it is clear that the endogenous and exogenous causes of this dysfunction—domestic ethnic division, politically-sidelined Shi‘a populations, and fear of Iranian expansionism—are not limited to Bahrain, and indeed are growing today only more widespread and more acute throughout the Arab Gulf and beyond. Ever since the Islamic Revolution designed to bring Shi‘a populism to the Gulf monarchies, and, more recently, since the inadvertent empowerment of Iraq’s long-disenfranchised Shi‘a majority, ruling families from Syria to Yemen have grown increasingly fearful of what Jordan’s King ‘Abdallāh II famously described as the expanding “Shi‘a crescent,” of Shi‘a citizens increasingly

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<sup>8</sup> According to the authoritative database compiled by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, between 2000 and 2009 the top 11 military spenders as a proportion of GDP include five of the six GCC states: Oman (#1), Saudi Arabia (#2), the UAE (#4), Kuwait (#6), and Bahrain (#11). Data for Qatar are not reported for the years 2000, 2001, and 2009, but based on the incomplete data it would rank at #30. Data available at: <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>>.

forceful in their demands for political inclusion, and of patron regimes willing to back their cause. Of course, in those Gulf countries with marginal Shi'a populations—Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates—this concern is less pressing both for governments and for ordinary Sunnis; and, one presumes not coincidentally, there bilateral relations with Iran remain on non-confrontational and, in the former two cases, even cordial terms. Among the six GCC nations, then, one may distinguish between halves that are more and less (or perhaps not at all) vulnerable to an ethnic-based disruption to *rentier* business-cum-politics as usual.

In line with these *a priori* expectations, moreover, evidence from elsewhere in the Arab Gulf suggests that the same Sunni-Shi'i division that underlies Bahrain's dysfunction drives a similar process of ethnic-based political mobilization in the region's other rent-based regimes, which, if on account of demographics are less endangered by it, are affected in a manner that is conceptually equivalent. In the two other GCC states with significant Shi'a populations—Saudi Arabia and Kuwait—opposition has also arisen and, as Okruhlik (1999, 297) has observed, “with it a discrepancy between the expectations derived from the rentier framework and empirical reality.” There as in Bahrain, “windfall profits of petroleum exports do not translate into a politically quiescent population,” (295) because such rents do not automatically “buy the support or loyalty of different social groups” that are disproportionately excluded from state benefits, these distributed not in a way that is politically-agnostic but on the basis of “family relations, friendship, religious branch, and regional affiliation” (297).

Yet, as the ongoing political crisis in Bahrain has put into stark relief, triggers of ethnic-based political arousal in the Arab Gulf need not even originate from some domestic cause. In the days and weeks following February 14, Shi'is from Iran to northern Yemen to Lebanon to Iraq demonstrated in solidarity with their Bahraini coreligionists.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the main impetus behind the heavy-handed GCC intervention to squash the Bahrain uprising was the fear that neighboring Shi'a populations—in particular those of Saudi Arabia's oil-rich Eastern Province adjacent to Bahrain—would take the cue to begin their own mass protests. The United Arab Emirates openly threatened to deport any Shi'a residents speaking out publically against the

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<sup>9</sup> In Iraq, not only ordinary citizens but also prominent Shi'is in government strongly criticized the GCC response in Bahrain. Prime Minister Nūrī al-Mālīki himself warned that “the region may be drawn into a sectarian war” if the situation were allowed to fester. For such perceived one-sidedness, the Gulf states forced the cancellation of a March Arab Summit scheduled to take place in Iraq, insisting that “the atmosphere is not right.” See Serena Chaudhry and Waleed Ibrahim, 2011, “Iraq's Maliki says Bahrain may ignite sectarian war,” *Reuters*, March 25. Available at: <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/03/25/us-iraq-politics-idUSTRE72O6JK20110325>>.

GCC action in Bahrain, and are said to have expelled several hundred Lebanese ex-patriots.<sup>10</sup> But most dramatic of all was the impact in Kuwait, where the entire government fell directly as a result of a Sunni-Shi'i split in parliament over the country's response to Bahrain.

Not wanting to inflame its own sizable Shi'a community, in late March the Kuwaiti government offered in lieu of sending ground troops to mediate talks between Bahrain's rulers and the opposition. This proposal earned the swift condemnation of other GCC members and of its own Sunni politicians, who accused Kuwait's rulers of showing more concern for Iranian-backed Shi'a terrorists than for their (Sunni) brothers in Bahrain. When Kuwait next tried to send a medical delegation to help treat Bahrain's wounded, it was refused entry at the Saudi-Bahrain causeway, a further public embarrassment that prompted several Salafi politicians to initiate proceedings to quiz the country's prime minister for his decision to spurn military aid to Bahrain. At the same time, Shi'a parliamentarians moved to question two separate *Āl Ṣabāḥ* ministers for allowing foreign and domestic media to "fuel sectarian tension in the country." Under siege from all sides, Kuwait's emir opted to dissolve the government rather than allow the inquest to proceed.<sup>11</sup> Then—at last—shamed and bullied into participation, Kuwait dispatched a naval detachment to Bahrain. The lesson: the Arab Gulf *will* stand together against the shared threats of Shi'a irredentism and Iranian meddling—whether individual members like it or not.

### **The First Mass Political Survey of Bahrain**

This proposition, that Sunni-Shi'i competition explains not only the dysfunctional *rentier* state that is Bahrain but the inability for ethnically-diverse Arab Gulf regimes to buy political assent more generally, presents no lack of challenges for the one looking to demonstrate it empirically. For now one requires not only individual-level data on the political attitudes and economic conditions of ordinary Gulf Arabs, but moreover ethno-religious data identifying individuals as a member of one or the other community. And when even the aggregate proportions of Sunnis and Shi'is in the GCC states is a matter of speculation—as governments refuse to offer (or claim not to collect) such statistics—these two requirements render inadequate all extant

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<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., "Iraq, Bahrain and the region: Sectarian bad blood," 2011, *The Economist*, March 31. Available at: <<http://www.economist.com/node/18491700>>.

<sup>11</sup> For a more complete version of the story, see Ḥusayn al-Ḥarabī, 2011, "محمد الصباح السبب المباشر وراء استقالة الحكومة," ["Muḥammad al-Ṣabāḥ Is the Direct Reason behind the Government's Resignation"], *Al-Ra'ī*, April 1. Available at: <<http://www.alraimedia.com/Alrai/Article.aspx?id=266356&date=01042011>>.



data sources, including the aforementioned World Values and Arab Barometer surveys of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and (even were the data publically available) Qatar.

Hence, in early 2009 I endeavored to collect new data from Bahrain, undertaking the first-ever mass political survey of Bahraini citizens. Based a nationally-representative sample of 500 random households, the survey employed the standard Arab Barometer questionnaire that asks respondents about their economic situations in addition to their social, religious, and political behaviors and attitudes, including normative political opinions. The Bahrain survey also recorded respondents' confessional affiliations, allowing not only an empirical test of the present argument but also the first window into the country's ethnic demographics in almost 70 years. For the last time the Government of Bahrain reported official statistics on its Sunni and Shi'i communities was in its very first census, in 1941 (QUBAIN 1955). Utilizing these new Bahrain data, I carry out the first proper assessment of the individual-level assumptions that underlie the long-accepted but never-tested *rentier* state framework.

Because no equivalent data exist from elsewhere in the Arab Gulf, however, the parallel inquiry to determine how far the relationships discovered in Bahrain obtain across other country contexts is undertaken using survey data from Iraq collected in 2004 and 2006. Although the two cases to be examined thus differ qualitatively on many levels, still the exercise is a fruitful one precisely for this reason: if we find that, despite considerable cross-national variation in social, economic, and political institutions, to say nothing of history itself, the individual-level determinants of political opinion and behavior operate similarly in Bahrain and Iraq—if it turns out that Sunni and Shi'i Iraqis as well as Bahrainis are influenced more by ethnic considerations than by economic, then we will have evidence that Bahraini politics is not *sui generis* but applies in degrees to the region's other societies according to their specific ethnic configurations. In which case we may conclude that the dysfunctional *rentier* state of Bahrain is but the theoretical archetype—not the exception—of the Arab Gulf.

### **Summary of Chapters**

The exposition outlined here proceeds in seven chapters, the first of which is now at an end.

Chapter 2 offers a more expansive account of the conceptual framework introduced already, a theory of ethnic-based political mobilization in the Arab Gulf *rentier* states.

Chapter 3 gives additional substance to this theoretical account by studying the case of Sunni-Shi'i conflict in Bahrain. Drawing insights from interviews conducted with some

dozen Bahraini political and religious leaders—four of whom now face lengthy prison terms for their alleged roles in the February 14 uprising—this section describes how, in Bahrain, the individual-oriented politics of economic competition assumed to operate in allocative societies is superseded by an ethnic-based contest to determine the very character of the nation itself: its history and cultural identity; the bases of citizenship; and the conditions for inclusion in public service.

Chapter 4 supplies a practical and methodological preface to the analysis of my Bahrain mass survey, detailing the actual survey procedure, likely theoretical and methodological objections, and a first reliable look at Bahrain's ethnic demographics since its 1941 census.

Chapter 5 employs the previously-unavailable data from my Bahrain mass survey to explore the determinants of political opinion and action among ordinary Bahraini citizens. It seeks to discover whether Bahrainis' normative attitudes toward their government and the political actions they take for or against it are influenced foremost by material satisfaction, as per the *rentier* state hypothesis, or by ethnic affiliation and orientations, as argued herein.

Chapter 6 mirrors the Bahrain mass survey analysis with a parallel study of political opinion and behavior in Iraq. Using comparable survey data, this investigation aims to learn how far the individual-level relationships uncovered in the previous section are limited only to the Bahrain context or, on the contrary, obtain more widely.

Chapter 7 reviews the preceding, makes note of its limitations, and suggests how it might be extended as part of a larger revised Arab Gulf research agenda.

## Notes for Chapter 1

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## CHAPTER 2

### A Theory of Ethnic-based Political Mobilization in the Arab Gulf *Rentier* States

Borne of the newfound importance of oil-exporting nations in the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of the “*rentier* economy” arose in economics as a description of those countries that rely on substantial external rent (MAHDAVI 1970, 428), the latter defined broadly as a “reward for ownership of natural resources” (BEBLAWI 1987, 51), whether that resource be strategically-located territory, mineral deposits, or, more to present purposes, oil or natural gas reserves. A special category of the *rentier* economy, a “*rentier* state” came to describe those economies in which only a few are engaged in the generation of this rent, the archetypal examples of which being the oil-rich kingdoms of the Arab Gulf. In *rentier* states, in other words, the creation and control over wealth is limited to but a small minority of society—that is to say, to “the state,” or, in the case of the Gulf regimes, to the ruling tribe *qua* state—while the vast majority plays the role either of distributor or consumer.

With such an extreme economic-*cum*-political imbalance thus written into the very definition of what it means to be a *rentier* state, a significant portion of the *rentier* literature concerns itself with an inherent puzzle: namely, how are these regimes seemingly so durable? Stated negatively, why do the citizens or residents of *rentier* states not simply confiscate for their own benefit the rent-generating resource from their physical owners?—the latter, after all, are hopelessly outnumbered. Yet, indeed, far from the gloomy predictions about the post-independence fates of the Gulf monarchies, more than 40 years after British withdrawal “the Arab states of the Gulf region continue to be ruled by the same families, sometimes the same individuals, under the same traditional forms and within virtually the same borders that had been engineered by the British political agents as they departed” (SICK 1997, 11). And all this despite their having witnessed three major regional conflicts; several oil crises; the

rise and fall of Arab Nationalism; as well as the Iranian Revolution, the Arab Spring of 2011, and the consequent threat of similar revolutionary episodes across the Gulf. What, then, to pose the question once more, has enabled these regimes to survive?

Beginning with the earliest statements of the *rentier* state framework, theorists have posited that the resource-controlling parties within *rentier* states can, in short, buy off their would-be domestic opponents through judicious economic policy. The form of such policy may be either positive (rent-controllers offer citizens a portion of their wealth as public and private goods) or negative (they agree to *not* expropriate from citizens as they otherwise would like to). In practical terms, these avenues of popular co-optation correspond to two complementary mechanisms by which modern Gulf governments are said to use their positions as economic hegemon to elicit political acquiescence: first, they employ those who need employment; and, second, they agree not to levy taxes “on the basis,” in Vandewalle’s (1987, 160) words, “of the reverse principle of no representation without taxation.” Together these incentives foster a rent-induced consensus that “helps explain why the government of an oil-rich country ... can enjoy a degree of stability which is not explicable in terms of its domestic economic or political performance” (BEBLAWI AND LUCIANI 1987, 10).

“Every citizen” of a rent-based economy, tells Beblawi (1990, 91), “has a legitimate aspiration to be a government employee; in most cases this aspiration is fulfilled.” Given current public sector employment rates in the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), it would seem that this idea obtains today as much as it did 20 years ago: as of 2007, Gulf citizens working in the public sector “are estimated to account for 58% of total GCC nationals employed. ... This ratio ranges between 50% in Saudi Arabia to 84% in Kuwait and almost 90% in Qatar” (ZAHER 2009, 5). Among the respondents in my 2009 Bahrain survey, around 43% report being employed in the public sector. These already-vast proportions, moreover, are on the rise: public sector jobs in the GCC rose at an average of 5.2% per year during 2006 and 2007, with Qatar recording a spectacular 33% annual growth rate, followed by the UAE and Oman at 5%, Kuwait at 4.4%, Saudi Arabia at 2.9%, and Bahrain at 2.4% (5).

By establishing an entanglement of bloated government ministries; subsidizing large, state-owned conglomerates; and spending huge sums on disproportionately large and well-equipped militaries, Gulf regimes can sop up a young populace that is easily disaffected, eager to marry and find housing, and generally college-educated yet nonetheless ill-equipped for work in the private sector. The upshot, so the argument continues, is that the latter will

be content to live their days as government pensioners and social welfare recipients, careful not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. For its part, the ruling faction gains a political ally—at worst a self-interest-maximizing, apolitical animal—and needs forfeit only a portion of its rent proceeds to guarantee continued enjoyment of the remainder.

The other half of the standard recipe for achieving political buy-off in *rentier* states is that the government graces the population by not levying taxes. “The cry of the American Revolution,” writes Gause (1997, 77), “was ‘no taxation without representation.’ None of the Gulf governments seems willing to take the political risk that direct taxation entails.” First expressed by Luciani (1987, 75-77) in his seminal volume with Beblawi, the notion that rent-dependent governments will exchange political accountability for freedom from taxes has inspired a wide literature. Anderson’s (1987) influential analysis of the Middle East and North African state offers a similar lesson, that a country with sufficient non-tax revenues “may be virtually ... autonomous from its society, winning popular acquiescence through distribution rather than support through taxation and representation” (10). Crystal (1986; 1990) describes how the once-powerful merchant classes of Kuwait and Qatar shrunk from politics after the discovery of oil relieved them of onerous taxation. Ross, perhaps the most prolific contemporary author of empirical works linking aspects of the *rentier* state to political outcomes, has more recently (2004) refined these claims about taxation in light of his findings that it is not higher taxes *per se* that lead to greater accountability but higher taxes relative to the quality of government services. Still other studies abound, including those that extend the investigation to non-petroleum sources of rent such as minerals, foreign remittances, and international aid; and those that explore the link between taxation and representation in countries outside the Middle East.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the precise version of the story, however, the theoretical implications in any case are clear: as Ayubi (1990, 144) rightly observes,

The taxation function is thus reversed in the oil state: instead of the usual situation, where the state taxes the citizen in return for services, here the citizen taxes the state—by acquiring a government payment [i.e., a salary]—in return for staying quiet, for not invoking tribal rivalries and for not challenging the ruling family’s position.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the theoretical foundations of this entire line of argument can be said to originate outside the Middle East in the former monarchies of Western Europe, following the state-building tradition of Schumpeter (1918) and Tilly (1975) and later the institutionalist economics approach epitomized by North and Weingast’s (1989) pioneering account of post-Glorious Revolution England. For a considerably more exhaustive review of this wider taxation-begets-representation literature, see Ross (2001, 232-235; 2004, 230-236).

This, then, is the political bargain that has allowed the unforeseen longevity of *rentier* states, and the Gulf monarchies especially, since their rise to prominence over the last half century. Ordinary citizens are content, ostensibly, to forfeit a role in decision-making in exchange for a tax-free, natural resource-funded welfare state. By this conception, economic well-being is the primary variable influencing the extent of popular political interest and expectations of participation in decisionmaking, with other, non-material individual-level factors playing no important systematic role.<sup>2</sup>

### Studying the *Rentier* State

At first blush, then, there seems to be little about this classical account of the *rentier* state that one should wish to argue, much less write an entire academic thesis. We have seen already how government employment of Gulf citizens is indeed extensive and increasing. We know that taxes on Gulf nationals are non-existent and unimaginable for the foreseeable future. And, above all, we observe that the GCC states continue to enjoy, if not democracy, at least much higher levels of political stability than their non-*rentier* Arab counterparts, presumably as a consequence of items one and two. To illustrate this final point consider the extreme discrepancy in rank between the Gulf and non-Gulf countries on one prominent index of regime stability, the Failed States Index compiled by The Fund for Peace. This list, which is published in *Foreign Policy* and in 2009 reached its fifth iteration, grades 177 nations along twelve social, economic, and political indicators of “state vulnerability.”<sup>3</sup>

The rankings of all Arab countries included in the 2009 index are recreated below in TABLE 2.1. In addition to its ordinal “Failure Rank” given by the sum of all twelve indicators as reported in the final “Overall” column, also listed is each country’s “Selected” total based on

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<sup>2</sup> Some theorists have tried to expand this list of relevant variables. Skocpol’s (1982) work on Iran concludes that resource-exporting states are able to use their revenues to fund draconian security forces that suppress government opposition, and that this repression explains *rentier* regimes’ durability. Boix (2003) argues that the immobility of oil and other natural resource assets precludes political liberalization because elites could not relocate them in the event that such a move spurred popular calls for redistribution. Ross (2001; 2009) tests the argument that rent-based wealth does not lead to democracy because it does not involve the typical changes in socio-cultural attitudes that come via the standard processes of modernization. Such additions, however, are less convincing than the original mechanisms described by Beblawi and Luciani, a fact that Ross himself now concedes in a working draft of “Oil and Democracy Revisited,” admitting, “I no longer find support for two of the three mechanisms discussed in Ross [2001]; nor is there evidence to support mechanisms alleged by others. The only mechanism that seems to matter is the *rentier* effect” (2009, 25), that is, “the combination of low taxes and high government spending that seems to dampen support for democratic transitions” (2).

<sup>3</sup> Descriptions of all twelve indicators are available at <[www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?Itemid=140](http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?Itemid=140)>. Note that two “selected” indicators below are taken from the political category as it contains six of the twelve.

**TABLE 2.1.** *The Failed States Index among Arab Countries*

Country	Failure Rank	Grievance	Delegitimization	Services	Uneven Dev.	Selected	Overall
Sudan	3	9.9	9.8	9.5	9.6	38.8	112.4
Iraq	6	9.7	9.0	8.4	8.6	35.7	108.6
Yemen	19	7.7	8.3	8.5	8.9	33.4	98.1
Lebanon	29	9.2	7.8	6.2	7.4	30.6	93.5
Syria	39	8.2	8.8	5.7	8.0	30.7	89.8
Egypt	43	8.0	8.6	6.4	7.6	30.6	89.0
Algeria	73	7.7	7.7	6.7	7.3	29.4	80.6
Jordan	86	6.8	6.0	5.4	7.4	25.6	77.9
Saudi Arabia	89	8.0	8.4	4.3	7.0	27.7	77.5
Morocco	92	6.8	7.4	6.5	7.8	28.5	77.1
Libya	112	5.8	7.1	4.2	7.1	24.2	69.4
Tunisia	121	5.4	6.6	6.1	7.2	25.3	67.6
Kuwait	125	5.1	6.5	3.5	6.1	21.2	63.4
Bahrain	133	6.4	6.9	3.1	5.9	22.3	59.0
Qatar	138	5.2	6.5	2.6	5.3	19.6	51.9
UAE	139	4.7	6.7	3.6	5.7	20.7	51.8
Oman	146	3.0	6.0	4.5	2.3	15.8	47.2

*Source:* The Fund for Peace Failed States Index 2009. Available at [www.fundforpeace.org](http://www.fundforpeace.org). Note that data for the Palestinian Territories are not included in the index.

four indicators representative of the three categories of “state vulnerability,” which are: (1) “Legacy of Vengeance-Seeking Group Grievance or Group Paranoia”; (2) “Criminalization and/or Delegitimization of the State”; (3) “Progressive Deterioration of Public Services”; and (4) “Uneven Economic Development along Group Lines.” These data are instructive in two different respects. First, they afford empirical support for the general *rentier* conclusion that countries bankrolled by substantial external rents are more likely to achieve political stability than those that must depend on healthy domestic economies. We easily perceive, whether by the Overall or Selected total, that the six Gulf states on average far outperform their non-Gulf Arab counterparts in terms of regime stability. Indeed, excepting Saudi Arabia, the GCC countries occupy the five least “vulnerable” positions among all Arab nations. More concretely, even when one includes Saudi Arabia the states of the Gulf achieve mean Overall

**TABLE 2.2.** *The Failed States Index: Difference in Means between Gulf and Non-Gulf Arab States*

Group	Failure Rank	Grievance	Delegitimization	Services	Uneven Dev.	Selected	Overall
Non-Gulf	128 (20)	7.3 (1.2)	7.6 (0.92)	6.2 (1.1)	7.6 (0.55)	28.7 (3.1)	82.6 (10.7)
Gulf	68 (37)	5.4 (1.7)	6.8 (0.82)	3.6 (0.72)	5.4 (1.61)	21.2 (3.9)	58.5 (47.0)
Difference	60	1.9	0.76	2.6	2.3	7.5	24.1
<i>p</i> -value	0.0033	0.024	0.13	0.0003	0.0018	0.0011	0.0010

*Notes:* standard deviations reported in parentheses; *p*-values based on two-tailed difference-in-means tests assuming unequal variances.



and Selected failure scores of just 58.5 and 21.2, respectively, compared to 82.6 and 28.7 for non-Gulf societies, as reported in TABLE 2.2 above.<sup>4</sup> Not only does the Gulf outperform the Non-Gulf group in aggregate, moreover, but it does so also for each of the four individual indicators, and all this with a high degree of statistical confidence.

The other way these data are helpful is that, while they do certainly lend evidence to a broad link between *rentier* states and stability, on closer inspection they also serve to raise fundamental questions about the exact processes by which that link operates theoretically. As noted already, Saudi Arabia, the largest net rent-earner in the entire Gulf, lags noticeably behind other GCC members and even three North African countries, while Libya<sup>5</sup> and more surprisingly Tunisia boast scores that rival those of the five top-performing Gulf states. Furthermore, according to their Overall scores Qatar, the UAE, and Oman appear to be in a league of their own in terms of regime performance even within the GCC.<sup>6</sup> Thus we have significant (if not vast) cross-country variation in stability that one cannot explain by relative differences in resource rents—that is, in standard *rentier* terms of political buy-off through rent-funded employment, non-taxation, and public goods. Indeed, the best performer across the board, Oman, has the lowest per-capita rents of any Gulf state save for Bahrain.<sup>7</sup>

These observations call attention to the conditional nature of the *rentier*-stability link, reminding us of the multitude of other possible intermediating variables that may influence how or whether resource wealth translates into state stability. This fact is made plain by the construction of the Failed States Index itself, which is comprised not of one grand “stability” measure but of twelve different subcomponents taken from three larger categories, and no doubt one or another would complain of the omission of some additional indicator. Looking once again at TABLE 2.2, we observe that although the Gulf group achieves lower failure scores than the Non-Gulf group for each of the four selected indicators, nonetheless the magnitude and statistical confidence of this between-group difference varies greatly. Not coincidentally, perhaps, the discrepancy is largest and most significant for those indicators most intimately

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<sup>4</sup> These and all the means of TABLE 2.2 exclude from the Non-Gulf category the extreme cases of Iraq and Sudan, ensuring that these two observations do not unduly influence the tests while rendering the results more robust.

<sup>5</sup> The strong showing of Libya is not so unexpected, it being the only other Arab state that even approaches the per-capita oil and gas rents of the GCC nations, according to Ross’s (2008) newly-constructed measure. While for this reason Libya may be grouped theoretically with the Gulf states (as it is by Beblawi and Luciani in their original work), in order to maximize in-group homogeneity among constituents of the “*rentier*” category across such relevant variables as geography, political system, history, etc., and so facilitate cross-country comparison, Libya will not figure in the analysis to follow.

<sup>6</sup> A two-tailed difference-in-means test confirms this, reporting a *p*-value of 0.0478.

<sup>7</sup> Again, using Ross’s (2008) operationalization.

related to the *rentier* causal logic—the quality of public services and universality of economic development—whereas with regard to the indicators unassociated with material well-being it is less robust. In fact, in the case of the “state deligitimization” indicator, based on levels of corruption, unaccountability, and popular protest, one is unable to affirm with the standard level of statistical confidence that the Gulf average is less than that of the Non-Gulf group.

So it is that after further analysis the *rentier* interpretation of politics in the Arab Gulf does not seem so unassailable. True, the Gulf regimes do not levy income taxes, and, yes, they do benefit their citizenries through employment and other domestic expenditure. They also, at least according to one well-respected operationalization, enjoy more overall stability than their non-Gulf counterparts, on average. Yet in the end none of this can confirm for us what requires confirmation: that it is precisely these economic benefits for ordinary citizens that have *caused* the Gulf states to achieve greater stability. On the contrary, we have from our brief examination of the Failed States Index evidence of variation in stability among the Gulf states that is inexplicable with reference to cross-country differences in public spending and taxation rates merely. What makes Qatar, the Emirates, and Oman stand apart from the geographically and demographically similar Bahrain and Kuwait? Why is Saudi Arabia, in the midst of a massive \$400 billion public spending initiative,<sup>8</sup> rated as far less stable than any other GCC country, while Oman, the Gulf’s second-lowest per-capita rent-earner, ranks at position 146 above several members of the European Union?

What is more, not only do we witness cross-country variation in overall stability, but we see how the supposed *rentier* advantage obtains more for some of the Index’s individual drivers of stability than it does for others. In particular, the performance of Gulf states as a group vis-à-vis other Arab societies appears to decrease as the indicators move further away from the purely economic toward the underlying social or political. While on the one hand this may be said to be in line with the core *rentier* concern for the economic bases of the state, it also implies that the paradigm thus neglects many other categories of explanatory variables that likely help determine the health of state structures. If initially *rentier* theorists sought to call attention to the crucial role of economics in determining the nature and development of the Arab state, a purpose they have now realized, perhaps it is time we complicate this story further by reemphasizing the conditional nature of the rentierism-stability relationship.

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<sup>8</sup> Announced in 2009, the program was predicated on \$75-per-barrel oil. See “Scenarios: Oil price impact on Gulf Arab spending plans,” *Reuters Online*, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5BJ0KO20091220>>. It has since been augmented by some \$130 billion in new social spending announced in the wake of the 2011 uprisings.

Not all the blame, however, is to be laid at the feet of early expositors of the *rentier* thesis, who, while highlighting the role of the economy, did acknowledge the conditionality of the linkage between economic performance, rent-induced or otherwise, and state stability. Luciani (1987, 65), but two pages into his critical chapter outlining the theoretical framework of the *rentier* state, explains,

The stability of state formations is increased if, beyond being able to appropriate resources for their own ends, they also play an economic role which objectively increases the sum total of resources available to the country that they run. While this is, in itself, neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for stability of state formations, it is reasonable to expect that states that perform a useful economic function will be more easily accepted in the specific form and configuration that they take.

Even more telling, the entire investigation ends with a case study of the Islamic Revolution, a stark lesson in ascribing undue political omnipotence to the Middle East's oil monarchies. No, the problem with contemporary analyses of the *rentier* state stems not primarily from the original theoretical framework itself, which, if it never clearly delineates the “necessary [and] sufficient condition[s] for stability,” seeks justifiably to lay a foundation rather than to see the inquiry through to the end—rather, the real trouble lies with the subsequent attempts in political science to demonstrate the theory's empirical validity. These problems are both methodological and theoretical.

First, in their empirical testing of the *rentier* hypothesis, contemporary scholars have used the causal mechanisms proposed in the early literature—resource rents, government expenditures, and taxation rates—to explain an altogether different dependent variable than that of explicit concern to original *rentier* theorists, namely their modern preoccupation with democracy or the lack thereof. In this way our above examination of the Failed States Index has the important benefit of refocusing the discussion of the *rentier* state back to the political outcome of principal interest to its early framers: state stability (LUCIANI 1987, 65 ff.). For, as Luciani (74) asserts quite unequivocally, “Democracy is not a problem for allocation [*rentier*] states. ... [T]he patrimonial form of government is very well adapted to the specific character of allocation states and vice versa” (77-78). Yet beginning with Ross's 2001 article *Does Oil Hinder Democracy?*, which provoked at least a dozen follow-up studies,<sup>9</sup> quantitative tests of

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<sup>9</sup> According to his own summation in Ross 2009. Strictly speaking, BARRO 1999 was the first quantitative study to test the influence of oil wealth on democracy, though this was not made the focus of the paper as a whole.

the link between resource rents and democracy have dominated the *rentier* literature. What is more, almost all of these have elected to utilize exactly the same operationalization for their dependent variable: the ubiquitous Polity IV –10 to 10 scale of regime type.<sup>10</sup> The difficulty with this procedure is that, since there is understandably little within- or between-country variation in this measure among the *rentier* states—Saudi Arabia and Qatar are rated –10 for each year of their existence; the UAE is a perennial –8; modern Oman ranges between –10 and –8; and Bahrain and Kuwait from –10 to –7<sup>11</sup>—and because the fuel rents of the six Gulf states exceed the rest of the world by two orders of magnitude—according to Ross’s own replication data for his 2008 article on oil and gender equality,<sup>12</sup> the GCC mean for per-capita fuel rents is \$11,339, compared to \$270 for the other 163 countries in the sample—for these two reasons nearly all of the variation in “democracy” attributed to “oil” should in truth be attributed to the Gulf only. In which case we find ourselves in the same position we began, namely with the question of how to understand the uniqueness of Arab Gulf politics.

A simple plot of these two variables for the full sample of 170 nations clearly reveals the methodological issue underlying attempts to associate resource rents with democracy in the customary manner. Below FIGURE 2.3 depicts the relationship between a nation’s 2007 Polity IV regime score and Ross’s 2008 fuel rents per capita measure<sup>13</sup> using data obtained from the latter author for purposes of statistical replication. Now, the first thing one notices is that only a small proportion of the countries are even identifiable due to the large cluster of observations hovering at the far end of the *x*-axis. Of those that do stand out, six are the GCC states, highlighted in red for ease of identification; the others include Brunei (BRN) and Libya (LBY). We see therefore how despite standardization of the rents per capita measure the extreme between-country variation in rent-generation noted above—that is to say, the vast difference separating *rentier* and non-*rentier* economies—obscures the true relationship between resource rents and democracy. Indeed, it is evident that the bivariate least-squares regression line describing this relationship, which purports to show an immensely significant

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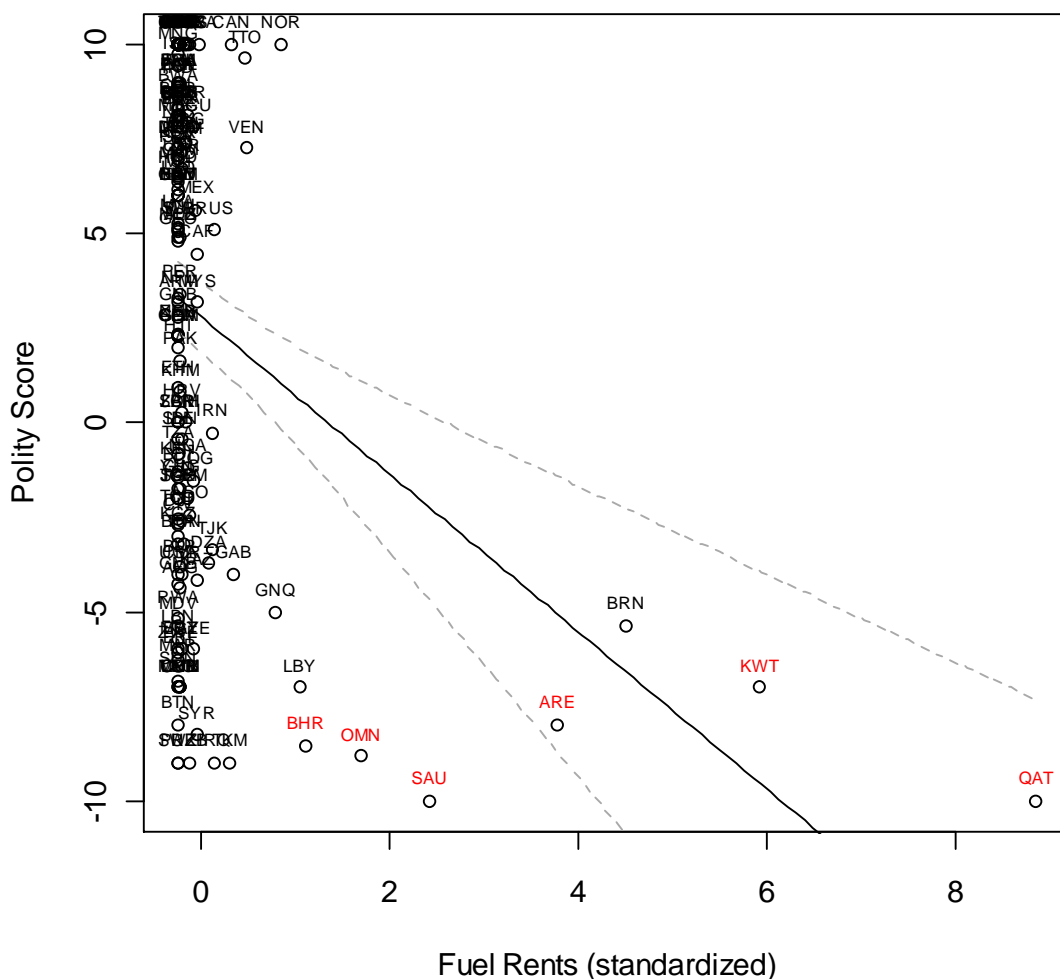
<sup>10</sup> The popular REGIME variable from Gurr’s Polity IV dataset places states on a scale from full autocracy (–10) to full democracy (10) for the years 1800-2008. See <<http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>>.

<sup>11</sup> Libya, if one wished to include it, is a perennial –7.

<sup>12</sup> A paper, incidentally, which won the 2009 award for best article in the *American Political Science Review*.

<sup>13</sup> An upgrade over the standard “oil exports-over-GDP” operationalization of rent-dependence, OIL RENTS PER CAPITA is defined as the total value of a state’s yearly oil and gas production minus country-specific extraction costs, including the cost of capital. The new measure is more precise for its inclusion of domestically-consumed oil and gas and, adds Ross (2008), it also “avoids endogeneity problems that come from measuring exports instead of production, and from using GDP to normalize oil wealth” (III-II2).

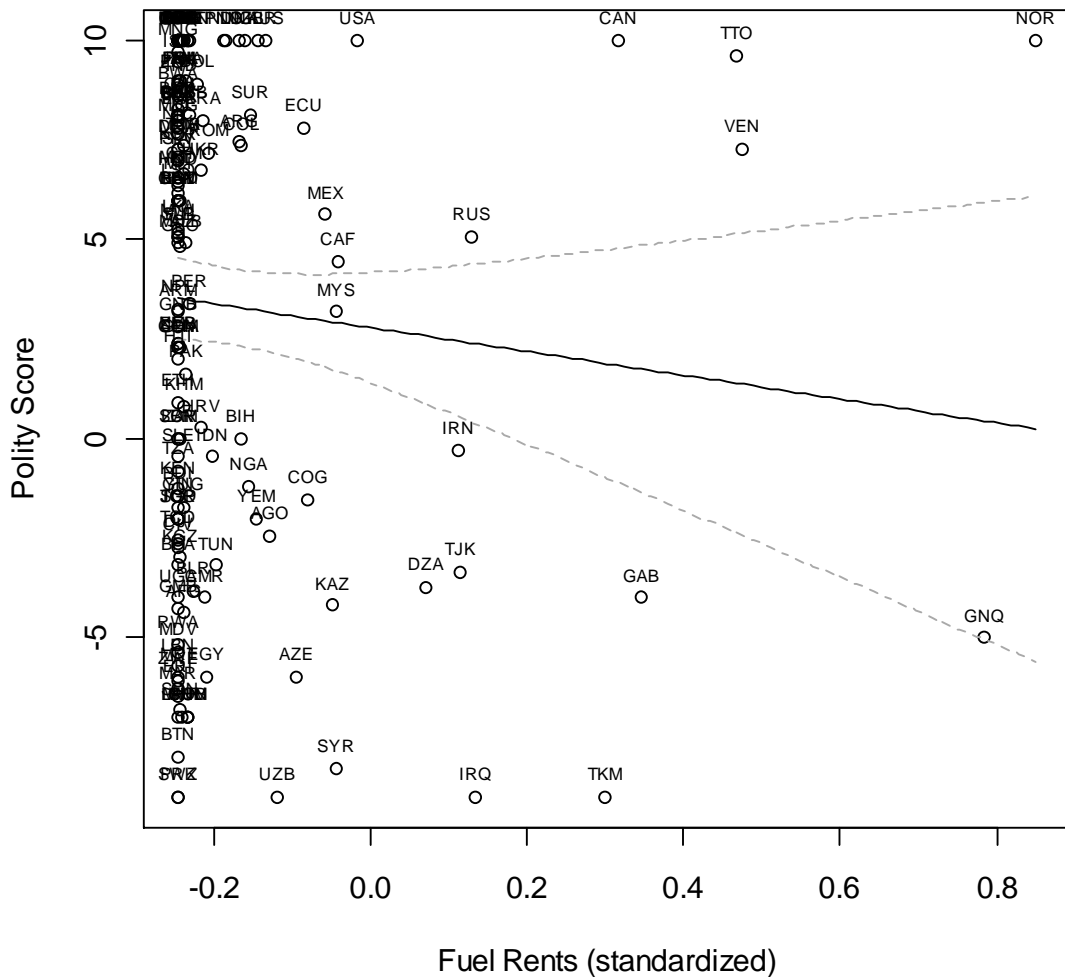
FIGURE 2.3. *Fuel Rents per Capita and Democracy (from Ross 2008)*



negative association between a country's per capita rents and polity score, is almost entirely dictated by the small number of outlying observations comprised of the *rentier* economies of the Arab Gulf along with Libya and Brunei.

When we omit these eight outliers we find that the picture, though more in focus, is still far from clear. FIGURE 2.4 illustrates the results of this exclusion. While the regression line describing the estimated relationship between polity and rents remains apparently negative, its coefficient (slope) is no longer statistically significant. In fact, as indicated by the dotted upper and lower bands of the 95% confidence interval, one is unable to rule out the possibility even that the true relationship is positive (upward-sloping) rather than negative. It might

FIGURE 2.4. *Fuel Rents and Democracy, excluding the Rentier States*



therefore be said that the most common application of the *rentier* state framework in political science today, as an explanation for the lack of democracy in resource-rich nations, not only errs in its choice of dependent variable but, in doing so, paradoxically draws one back to the original task of the *rentier* theorists: understanding the political ramifications of a mode of economy unique to a finite group of nations. At bottom, FIGURES 2.3 and 2.4 demonstrate how the category “*rentier*” exists as a class of state of which one either is or is not a member, as per Luciani’s (1987, 63 ff.) dichotomy of allocative (*rentier*) versus productive (*non-rentier*) states. The mystery, accordingly, is not whether an additional dollar of oil profits in Denmark leads to some marginal political change, but whether it indeed is true that in a handful of *rentier*

states, six of which are the Arab Gulf monarchies, politics operates qualitatively differently than it does elsewhere.

This discussion leads directly to a consideration of the more fundamental, theoretical problem affecting extant attempts to demonstrate the empirical validity of the *rentier* state model. Simply stated, previous studies have failed to test the actual individual-level causal processes that the theory posits. It is, after all, very explicit in claiming that the reason states with sizable external rents tend to be stable (and authoritarian) is because ordinary individual citizens, if satisfied economically, are content to remain deferential politically. Rather than evaluate this specific causal hypothesis, however, investigators have sought to link country-level economic variables such as resource rents, taxation rates, and government spending to country-level political outcomes like regime type or democratization. Yet such studies can, at best, only confirm the existence of these macro associations; absent a new theory that ties the latter together directly without recourse to the individual level of analysis, they bring us no closer to knowing whether the *rentier* model is correct in its account of what underlies these links. For the theory's boldest statement is not what it says about rent-dependent states themselves but what it assumes about their citizens: that it understands the drivers of popular interest and participation in politics, what it is that inclines ordinary citizens to seek an active role in political life or, alternatively, to shrink from it. These are no small claims.

Of course, the form of previous empirical testing was likely determined in large part by the nature of available data, which for reasons one might well understand have not been informed by mass surveys of the political attitudes of ordinary Arabs, to say nothing of those of Gulf Arabs, until quite recently, and even then on a limited and sporadic basis. Thus the failure of extant studies to test the individual-level causal story posited by *rentier* theorists, while significant, is not necessarily a product of theoretical or methodological oversight. With the completion in 2008 of the first wave of the Arab Democracy Barometer (AB) survey project, however, as well as that of my Bahrain study one year later, further neglect of this inquiry now that such an opportunity presents itself would represent continuation down a path that is incapable, ultimately, of answering the most elemental questions to which we seek answers: What causes individuals to incline toward, or abstain from, politics in the *rentier* states?—indeed, in the most emblematic and, in practical political terms, the most important of all *rentier* states, those of the Arab Gulf? Is the prevailing explanation correct in identifying material well-being as the dominant factor determining such an outcome? If so,

is this relationship between personal economy and personal politicality a universal one, or does it obtain only under certain conditions? in certain countries? or for certain individuals?

Thus one might dare to say that the theoretical architecture of the *rentier* state first described in the 1970s and repeated until today—the wealth-for-silence bargain extended to citizens of rent-based regimes—in fact has never actually been evaluated empirically. For all the studies that have since purported to do so, insofar as these have examined associations between country-level phenomena rather than analyze the link between material well-being and political involvement among individuals, like the science of gravity they have tested only the observable outward effects of *rentier* state theory rather than its internal causal processes. And, to be sure, the difference is not inconsequential. We have seen in our consideration of the Failed States Index that not all states are equally successful at converting external rents into domestic stability, there being important cross-country variation within the Arab Gulf that one cannot explain without a clearer understanding of how interceding variables—at both the country- and individual-level—serve to condition the relationship between politics and economics in rent-reliant states.

In sum, our current comprehension of politics in the *rentier* states, of which the six Arab Gulf nations represent the archetypal examples, suffers from two critical flaws that the present study aims to remedy. First, the *rentier* framework posits in effect an unconditional relationship between external rents, political buyoff, and ultimately regime stability that is supported neither empirically as represented by our review of the Failed States Index nor by more general observation of domestic political oppositions across the GCC, which in their relative strength and composition vary of course quite dramatically. While it is therefore correct in predicting the superior performance of rent-based countries vis-à-vis their non-*rentier* counterparts in absolute terms, the theory is unable to account for relative differences among the *rentier* (that is, Gulf) states themselves, which for one interested in knowing how politics operates in the region is precisely the most important bit. Second, notwithstanding the vigorous research agenda that has surrounded the *rentier* state, in fact we still know quite little about the causal processes that underlie this category, particularly if one's question does not concern these regimes' relative lack of democracy but rather their unforeseen longevity and the persistence of their supposedly obsolete modes of rulership and citizenship, the latter inquiries being of foremost interest to the early *rentier* theorists. And such will remain the case until we investigate the latter's claims as actually formulated rather than mere proxies.

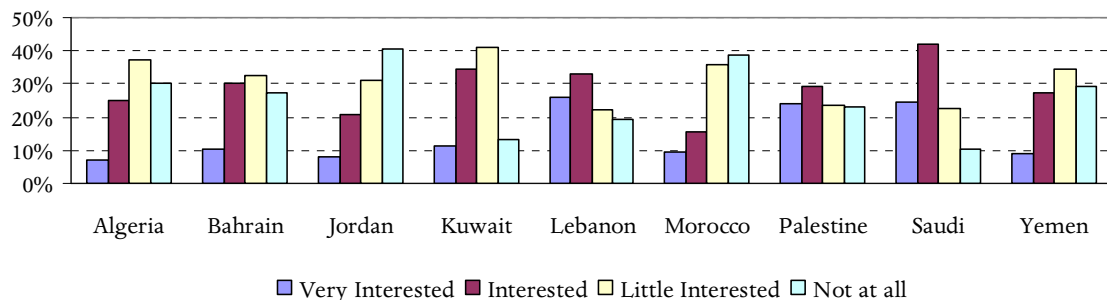


## Mystery Solved?: A Direct Assessment of the *Rentier* Hypothesis

Armed now with the individual-level data required to do so, all that is left, then, is to show that the variation we observe in regime stability both (a) between the *rentier* and non-*rentier* Arab states; and (b) among the six Gulf *rentier* states themselves is simply a function of their relative levels of popular political demands, itself a product of regimes' relative abilities to buy off their domestic constituencies through the standard *rentier* mechanisms, i.e. to make individuals sufficiently well-off materially as to cause them to disavow politics. This proved, one will have finally answered the questions stemming from our analysis of the Failed States Index above and, more generally, will have confirmed the efficacy of the causal mechanisms proposed in the *rentier* state thesis—correct? Not exactly. In fact, as it turns out, probing the relationship between rentierism and the political orientations of ordinary Arab citizens, far from solving our puzzle, only confuses matters much further. This is because, according to data from recent Arab Barometer and World Values surveys, citizens of the Arab Gulf *rentier* states, rather than being *less* political than other Arabs, in fact show themselves consistently as being *more* political, *more* inclined towards politics and political action, and *less* likely to defer to the wisdom of their governments.

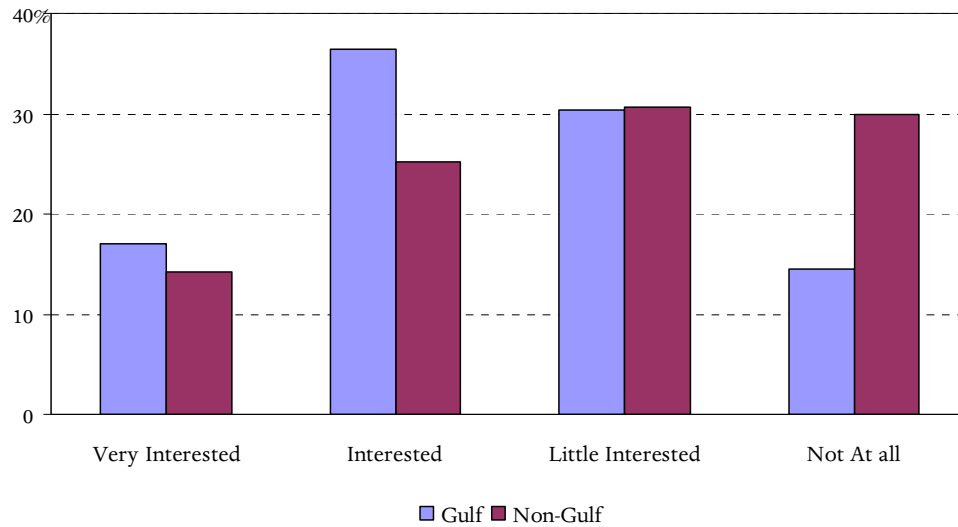
For a clearer illustration of the challenge facing the student of Arab Gulf politics, consider FIGURE 2.5 below, which shows the aggregate levels of political interest in nine Arab countries.<sup>14</sup> Along with Palestinian and Lebanese respondents, citizens of the three Gulf

FIGURE 2.5. *Aggregate Levels of Political Interest in Nine Arab Countries*



<sup>14</sup> The data for Saudi Arabia are from 2003 (the 2000-2004 wave of the World Values Survey); those for Bahrain from my 2009 survey; and the rest from the Arab Barometer between 2005 and 2008. The samples are random and nationally-representative, and range from 500 individuals in Bahrain to 1,300 in Algeria. Respondents were asked: “In general, what is the extent of your interest in politics?” (“بصفة عامة، ما مدى اهتمامك بالسياسة؟”)

FIGURE 2.6. Political Interest in Gulf versus Non-Gulf Arab States



states report, contrary to *rentier* predictions, the highest levels of political interest of all those asked. The proportion of respondents who answer that they are either “very interested” or “interested” in politics is 67% in Saudi Arabia, 59% in Lebanon, 54% in the Palestinian Territories, 46% in Kuwait, 40% in Bahrain, 36% in Yemen, 32% in Algeria, 28% in Jordan, and 25% in Morocco. Furthermore, even including those in Palestine and Lebanon the mean proportion of “very interested” and “interested” respondents reaches just 39% among non-Gulf countries, compared to 51% for Gulf Arabs. This marked discrepancy is depicted in FIGURE 2.6. A formal comparison of means test rejects the null hypothesis that the Gulf average is equal to or less than the non-Gulf average with a *t*-statistic of more than 13. If one would worry that this relationship between Gulf citizens and higher political interest is perhaps a spurious one confounded by intervening variables such as education, economy, gender, and so on, TABLE 2.7 below confirms that this is not the case. Here we find the results of an ordered probit model estimating the effect on political interest of an individual’s residing in a Gulf country compared to a non-Gulf country. We see that even after controlling the effects of AGE, SEX, EDUCATION, ECONOMIC SATISFACTION, and RELIGIOSITY still the GULF RESIDENCE indicator predicts POLITICAL INTEREST at a very high level of statistical significance. In more practical terms, the estimated marginal effect of GULF RESIDENCE—that is, the expected change in political interest if one could hold all other variables constant at their means and simply switch an individual from a non-Gulf resident to a Gulf resident—is to decrease the

TABLE 2.7. *Estimating the Effect of Gulf Residence on Political Interest by Ordered Probit*

Variables	POLITICAL INTEREST (ascending)		
	<i>B</i>	<i>z</i>	$p >  z $
AGE (ascending ordinal)	0.0634	6.58	0.000
SEX (dummy: 0 equals female)	0.231	9.53	0.000
EDUCATION (ascending ordinal)	0.123	15.54	0.000
ECONOMIC SATISFACTION (descending ordinal)	0.0342	1.97	0.048
RELIGIOSITY (ascending ordinal)	0.00641	0.40	0.689
GULF RESIDENCE (dummy: 0 equals non-Gulf)	0.345	12.20	0.000
<i>N</i>		8055	
<i>Pseudo R</i> <sup>2</sup>			0.0252

Note: Both models are estimated by ordered probit (`oprobit` in Stata 10.2) with robust standard errors.

probability that one has “no political interest” by 10% and the likelihood that he has “little political interest” by 4%; and to increase the probability that he has “some political interest” by 5% and the chance that he has “a lot of political interest” by 9%.<sup>15</sup>

Now if one should further wonder, finally, whether after all mere political interest among citizens is about as much an existential threat to the *rentier* model as it is to the Gulf regimes themselves—that is to say, not the gravest one—and that a 9% or 10% boost from Gulf residence is equally anticlimactic, then he will be glad to discover TABLE 2.8, which exhibits two political actions of more moment each of which is similarly impacted by one’s being a resident of a Gulf state and each of which, therefore, once again flies in the face of *rentier* logic. We see for a second time that the GULF RESIDENCE variable as a determinant of political activity is both statistically and substantively significant. In this case, it is a positive predictor of the extent of individuals’ participation in two political actions that are noteworthy at least by Gulf standards: meeting with others to discuss an issue or to sign a petition; and attending a demonstration or protest march.<sup>16</sup> As for its substantive impact, this Gulf residence effect

<sup>15</sup> These as other marginal effect estimates were obtained with Stata’s `mfx2` and `prchange` scripts.

<sup>16</sup> Respondents were asked whether they have engaged in the following “never,” “once,” or “more than once”:

TABLE 2.8. Estimating the Effect of Gulf Residence on Political Actions by Ordered Probit

Variables	PETITION SIGNING OR MEETING ATTENDANCE			DEMONSTRATION OR PROTEST ATTENDANCE		
	B	z	p >  z	B	z	p >  z
AGE	0.000993	0.09	0.932	-0.0464	-3.98	0.000
SEX	0.357	11.18	0.000	0.344	10.78	0.000
EDUCATION	0.100	10.59	0.000	0.0700	7.29	0.000
ECONOMIC SATISFACTION	-0.0364	-1.71	0.087	0.0323	1.52	0.129
RELIGIOSITY	0.00977	0.47	0.636	0.0124	0.061	0.539
GULF RESIDENCE	0.307	7.07	0.000	0.228	5.27	0.000
N		7115			7139	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>			0.0307			0.0235

Note: Both models are estimated by ordered probit (`oprobit` in Stata 10.2) with robust standard errors.

is approximately on par with the effect of the *SEX* control variable in this model. That is, the augmenting effect of Gulf residence on issue meetings/petition signing and demonstration participation (with its coefficients of 0.307 and 0.228, respectively) approaches that of gender (0.357 and 0.344). So to the extent we can agree that among the countries surveyed one's being a woman rather than a man presents a substantial barrier to participating in such activities, then to a like degree we must be impressed by the substantive influence of one's being a resident of a Gulf country on inclination toward political activism.

Yet perhaps even with this one or another skeptic is not convinced, one who might note that political activity per se does not imply political opposition, that there are many reasons one might sign a petition or join a protest that have nothing to do with frustration with one's government or any political cause at all—in short, that nothing in the preceding precludes the *rentier* position that citizens of the Gulf, if maybe politically energetic, are not still politically deferential in return for their lives of economic privilege. To address this final

(1) "حضور لقاء أو اجتماع من اجل بحث موضوعا ما أو التوقيع على عريضة"؛ (2) "المشاركة في مظاهرة أو مسيرة." Note that in Saudi Arabia, unsurprisingly, this question was not asked. Hence the "Gulf" component of the sample here include just Bahraini and Kuwaiti respondents. This also applies to the TABLE 2.9 model below.

TABLE 2.9. Estimating the Effect of Gulf Residence on Political Deference by Ordered Probit

Variables	POLITICAL DEFERENCE (ascending)		
	B	z	$p >  z $
AGE	0.0229	2.08	0.037
SEX	0.0704	2.45	0.014
EDUCATION	-0.0617	-6.57	0.000
ECONOMIC SATISFACTION	-0.105	-5.11	0.000
RELIGIOSITY	-0.0328	-1.73	0.084
GOVERNMENT SATISFACTION (ascending continuous)	0.127	23.51	0.000
GOVERNMENT HELPS IMPROVE LIVES (descending ordinal)	-0.160	-8.93	0.000
GULF RESIDENCE	-0.465	-11.60	0.000
N		5936	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>			0.0772

Note: Both models are estimated by ordered probit (oprobit in Stata 10.2) with robust standard errors.

ambiguity we require one last test of the explanatory power of Gulf residence, the results of which are summarized above in TABLE 2.9. One notices the inclusion for additional assurance of two new control variables: a measure of government satisfaction<sup>17</sup> and a measure of the extent to which a respondent agrees that his government provides citizens with the means to improve their lives.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the dependent variable of interest here, political deference, is measured as the extent of a respondent's agreement with the following statement: "citizens must support the government's decisions even if they disagree with those decisions."<sup>19</sup>

Just as before, though, these new controls do nothing to dampen the effect of the GULF RESIDENCE variable, whose statistical and substantive significance is here as pronounced

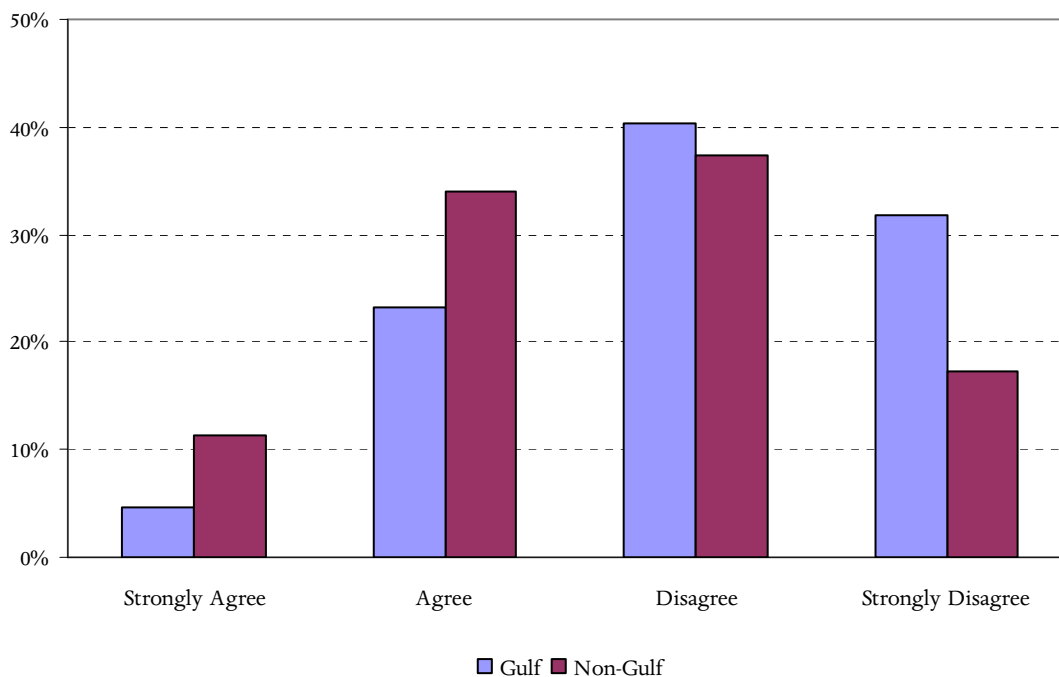
<sup>17</sup> This is a simple 1-10 scale on which a respondent is asked to rate his overall satisfaction with government performance. The Arabic reads, "إلى أي درجة أنت راض عن أداء الحكومة؟"

<sup>18</sup> Specifically, respondents are asked the extent to which they agree that "the government provides citizens the necessary conditions to improve their lives through their own efforts":

"هل تقوم الحكومة بتوفير الظروف الملائمة للمواطنين لتحسين حياتهم من خلال جهدهم؟"

<sup>19</sup> That is, "ما مدى اتفاقك أو معارضتك للعبارة التالية؟: 'يجب على المواطنين دعم قرارات الحكومة حتى لو اختلفوا مع هذه القرارات.'"

FIGURE 2.IO. *Predicted Probabilities of Political Deference amongst Gulf versus Non-Gulf Respondents*



as ever. While the relationships between political deference and the other controls variables are as one might have supposed—older respondents are more deferential, more educated ones less so; those more satisfied with government performance more deferential; those less economically satisfied less so; and so on—once more we find a strong, negative relationship between being a Gulf resident and political deference. In fact, the marginal effect of Gulf residence—again, the difference between two respondents identical across all other controls and distinguished solely by one’s being from the Gulf—is a 15% increase in the probability that one “strongly disagrees” with this statement, a 3% increase in the likelihood that he “disagrees”; and, on the other hand, a 11% decrease in the probability that one “agrees” and a 7% decrease in the likelihood that one “strongly agrees.” For a clearer illustration of what these effects mean in practical terms, consider FIGURE 2.IO above, which shows the predicted levels of POLITICAL DEFERENCE among Gulf and non-Gulf citizens based on estimates from our TABLE 2.9 model. Here we see how these seemingly small percentage changes due to Gulf residence are in fact very substantial: the estimated probability that one “strongly disagrees” with our statement of political deference, for example, jumps from just 17% amongst non-

Gulf respondents to 32% amongst Gulf Arabs. This 15% increase in absolute terms, then, is more than an 88% relative increase in the likelihood of “strong disagreement”; likewise, the 7% absolute decrease in the probability one “strongly agrees” attributable to Gulf residence equates to a drop of over one-half, or –58%; and so on with the remaining two responses.<sup>20</sup> Recall, moreover, that these are the residual effects of Gulf residence *after* controlling for the other variables that one might imagine relate on the individual level to political deference. In other words, that the GULF RESIDENCE variable is a consistently strong predictor of the sort of political activities and opinions recorded in TABLES 2.7–2.9 indicates that there is something about Arab Gulf residents, something *independent of* their education levels, their economic satisfaction, their happiness with their governments’ performance, and so on, that renders them more likely to incline toward politics, makes them more likely to undertake political actions, and leads to lower levels of political deference.

What this something is leads us to a separate set of questions—indeed, impels us on to the remainder of the present inquiry; for now, though, what we know is that the foregoing represents no less than the exact opposite of the result one would expect to obtain based on simple *rentier* assumptions. It would be one thing, certainly, if ordinary citizens of the Gulf were found to be neither more nor less likely than other Arabs to be politically interested, active, and deferential. Even this would run counter to *rentier* predictions, but perhaps our measures were imprecise, sample of countries too limited, etc., and thus we might dismiss the outcome as ambiguous. Yet we have seen that citizens of the high-rent Arab Gulf states, far from being *less* political than other Arabs, in fact show themselves consistently as being *more* political, *more* inclined towards politics and political action, and *less* likely to defer to the wisdom of their governments. In sum, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that, at least for Bahraini, Kuwaiti, and Saudi Arabian nationals in the latter half of the 2000s, the ostensive *rentier* link between the economic benefits of citizenship and political apathy does not exist.

One might recall that the foregoing analysis was intended to explain an empirical anomaly tied to our introductory reading of the Failed States Index, namely why it is that among the Gulf *rentier* states the most stable regimes are not those with the greatest levels of

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<sup>20</sup> It may be obvious now that the marginal effects reported for our very first model predicting levels of political interest are likewise quite substantial in relative terms. There, the absolute percentage changes for the four respective response categories: –10%, –4%, +5%, +9%, correspond to relative percent changes of –37%, –11%, +18%, and +67%. At the time this was left obscured so as to allow us to develop the devil’s advocate position.

per-capita resource rents (with which they might be able to pacify their populations), as one would expect according to a standard interpretation of the *rentier* political bargain. Instead, we found no apparent relationship between stability and external resource rents in the Gulf, with the largest net rent-earner and public-spender of all, Saudi Arabia, being by far the worst performer, while the second-lowest per capita rent-earner in the GCC, Oman, proved the best. Well, no matter, we thought: if we can simply show that this variation is a result of variation in the underlying political attitudes of citizens in these countries, then the issue is solved. After all, why should we expect a direct relationship between per-capita rents and political placation when the link may be conditioned by any number of intervening variables such as the character of political institutions, the quality of rent-funded economic benefits, and so on? This investigation offered the added bonus, finally, of constituting an initial first test of the individual-level causal story implied in the *rentier* state framework.

Alas, our one empirical anomaly is become two. On the other hand, with this new wrinkle the inquiry is also much more interesting. For now we must explain not only (1) the variation in relative stability of the Gulf states if the answer is not to be found in the relative political orientations of their citizenries, as per *rentier* assumptions; but also (2) how it can be that the Gulf *rentier* regimes, inasmuch as their populations seem to be *more* politically active and conscious than their non-*rentier* Arab peers, enjoy on average far more stability than the other Arab countries. That is, if the ubiquitous stereotype of the Gulf “oil sheikh,” happy to abandon his country to rule by princes and “Islamic extremists” while he revels in a life of luxury and excess made possible by his cut of the nation’s oil revenue—if this apolitical Gulf Arab does not exist, or exists only as an exception or as a possibility of an altogether different political reality, then how is it that the entire region has fared so much better than the rest of the Arab world? Stated differently still, if the Gulf region is home to an unexpected cache of political enthusiasm among everyday people, whither is all this directed if not, apparently, toward ruling families and governments?

To answer these questions we must first form some conception of the origins of this popular inclination toward political life in the Gulf, contradicting as it does so much received wisdom from decades of *rentier* theorists. Here our observations admit of two possibilities, each with its own implications for the efficacy of the *rentier* model. First, political activism may just be a result of structural limitations upsetting the typical system of patronage linking



the region's rulers and ruled—public sectors may now be too saturated to employ additional would-be supporters; immigration and fertility rates too high to allow ample construction of new housing projects; or military budgets too vast to finance competing public goods—in which case the question is one of public policy. To quell heightened political concern states might improve education to produce graduates who qualify for private sector positions and thus need not look to the state for employment; stem the incessant inflow of cheap migrant labor; and, most obviously, cut military expenditures to less than their current world-leading levels. A second possibility, however, is that the *rentier* state paradigm itself has misjudged the drivers of political interest among Gulf Arabs, or has not defined them clearly in the first place. Then the issue at stake is more fundamental and reopens the inquiry into how politics actually operates in the region. In which case standard refrains such as “No taxation, so no [basis for] representation” to describe the political bargain cut in Arab oil monarchies may be more analytically familiar and convenient than they are accurate.<sup>21</sup>

At the most basic theoretical level, then, the aim of the present dissertation is to solve this problem of the dysfunctional Gulf *rentier* state—a state swimming in historical amounts of rent and yet unable to buy political disinterest. The key to explaining the puzzle, it shall be seen, lies in a factor omitted altogether from the *rentier* state framework: the region's deep-seated ethno-religious divide that not only strains internal relations within Gulf Arab societies but also shapes in fundamental ways relations between them, with their neighbors, and with great power patrons, especially the United States. By providing an alternative basis around which class-based politics, otherwise precluded by the allocative nature of the *rentier* state, can emerge in Gulf societies, the Sunni-Shi'i division in Islam, I argue, leads to higher levels of popular political activity and dissent than the standard *rentier* model would predict. Whereas typically citizens of *rentier* societies have incentives to compete independently for a greater personal share of state benefits, in countries with a significant ethnic cleavage, such as exists in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and to a lesser extent Kuwait, a shared sense of communal

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<sup>21</sup> A possible third explanation, based on the so-called “repression effect” tested in Ross 2001 (cf. note 2), is that states' security forces are for some reason unable to carry out their normal, rent-funded duty of suppressing government opposition. That such a breakdown has occurred, however, is theoretically posterior to and indeed only begs the question of *why* it has occurred. In which case we are returned once again to the same two possibilities: structural difficulties (perhaps the state no longer has the money to fund the secret police; they lack the manpower to keep up with a growing opposition; the police is growing too powerful and leaders wish to reign them in; etc.); or a mischaracterization of the nature of the opposition (i.e., government critics understand the consequences of acting out but choose to do so anyway).

identity and solidarity offers a focal point around which group politics can crystallize and supplant individual jockeying for government favor as the dominant political *modus operandi* in the *rentier* state. This explains why the more ethno-religiously homogeneous<sup>22</sup> Gulf states of the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Qatar have been more successful at converting oil and gas surpluses into political stability *à la* standard *rentier* procedure, but it also suggests a reason why heightened political consciousness in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, while perhaps a headache for their ruling families, has not spelled disaster either.

For while ethno-religious categories come to supersede the individual as the basis of political action, these blocs do not emerge primarily as contenders to the ruling family's political power but as competitors against each other—competitors certainly over their relative shares of state benefits, but competitors too over the very character of the nation itself: its history and cultural identity; the bases of citizenship; and the conditions for inclusion in government service. One's political involvement in the ethnically-contested *rentier* state is thus not limited by the acquisition of material goods but is influenced crucially by the pursuit of intangible goods tied to one's group: its relative status in society, its relative political power as enshrined in state institutions, and its relative access to the ruling elite. Thus no little energy is spent vying for greater allocation of resources and societal influence for one's group, decrying the inequitable distribution thereof, and vilifying the opposing faction; yet in the end a great deal of this effort is directed not at the government but at the rival camp. In this sense a potentially-destabilizing force can be captured or deflected by the regime, which often has an interest (and a hand) therefore in perpetuating these inter-ethnic struggles.

### **Ethnicity, Group Politics, and the Dysfunctional *Rentier* State**

“Consider,” says Yates (1996, 35) of a *rentier* society, “the following options for class-based politics: a declining rural-agricultural sector; a state-sponsored industrial sector; a booming service sector. Whence the revolution?” Indeed, beginning with the earliest *rentier* theorists observers have held out little hope that anything resembling a party system or a popular political movement might take root in an allocative economy. Not only, as Yates laments, is there no natural social grouping like a taxpaying middle class from which such a push might originate, but moreover the patronage system itself incentivizes individual—rather than

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<sup>22</sup> Here as elsewhere I speak only of Arab nationals and exclude any systematic consideration of foreign laborers, the latter subject demanding a separate inquiry unto itself.

group—efforts to secure material benefits. “To the individual who feels his benefits are not enough,” Luciani (1989, 74) explains,

the solution of manoeuvring for personal advantage within the existing setup is always superior to seeking an alliance with others in similar conditions. In the end, there is always little or no objective ground to claim that one should get more of the benefits, since his contribution is generally dispensable anyhow.

Thus it is that in *rentier* societies the economy offers little basis for political coordination, since “the politics of allocation states leave little ground for economic interests of citizens not belonging to the elite to be represented” (76).

All this leads Luciani to make in passing what today can only appear a rather prescient prediction, that in *rentier* societies “parties will develop only to represent cultural or ideological orientations. In practice, Islamic fundamentalism appears to be the only rallying point around which something approaching a party can form in the Arab allocation states.” A look at the region’s two operative legislatures in Kuwait and Bahrain, for instance, seems to confirm exactly this: at the time of writing, a majority of the seats in both parliaments are held by political blocs based on religion.<sup>23</sup> In Kuwait, followers of the Salafī (“Wahhābī”) and Muslim Brotherhood ideologies combine to form a Sunni bloc of 13 (of 50 total) seats, while three separate Shi‘a blocs control a total of 6. Only two blocs are unrelated to religion: a bloc of Sunni and Shi‘i political liberals, which controls 7 seats, and the Popular or People’s Bloc, with 3 seats. The remaining 21 seats in Kuwait are held by individuals from prominent tribal families, generally allies of the ruling family who run euphemistically as “independents.”

More striking, however, is the situation in Bahrain, where save for 9 pro-government “independents” (who naturally are Sunni allies) all the seats in the elected lower chamber are divided along confessional lines: 18 for a united Shi‘a bloc, 6 for a Salafi society, and 7 for a Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated society. When the results of this election were announced in December of 2006, even the pro-regime *Gulf Daily News* could not avoid the conclusion that the group politics of religion had won the day, summarizing the outcome with its headline that read in part: “After the Announcement of the Final Results: Religious Control over the Council [of Representatives].”<sup>24</sup> And this despite the controversial electoral boycott of two

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<sup>23</sup> Neither country allows political “parties” (أحزاب), though in Bahrain political “societies” (جمعيات) and in Kuwait political “blocs” (تكتلات) do exist to serve the same function.

<sup>24</sup> Karīm Ḥamad, 2006, “بعد إعلان النتائج النهائية: سيطرة دينية على المجلس,” *Akhbār al-Khalīj*, 4 December.

other influential Shi‘i political groups—one known commonly as the “Shirazi faction,” so-named for its following of Shirazi *marja’* Ayatallāh Hādī al-Mudarrisī; the other a powerful (though banned) underground opposition movement called al-Ḥaqq<sup>25</sup>—on grounds that the entire process was illegitimate, a disagreement that literally split the Bahraini Shi‘a in two between those who chose to vote (i.e., for the Shi‘a bloc) and those who abstained.

We see, then, that in some of the Arab Gulf *rentier* states ethno-religious categories—at their broadest, Sunni and Shi‘i—do offer viable focal points for mass political coordination that otherwise, for lack of both an alternative basis of cooperation (e.g., common sectoral or class interests) as well as institutional incentives for such joint action, would be quite difficult to achieve. While identification of an individual’s ethnicity or religious tradition may seem a crude substitute for knowledge of his precise political preferences, given the Gulf’s relatively barren political landscape deficient of such institutions as non-governmental organizations, independent media, and proper political parties that could provide information about others’ political characteristics—in the absence of such proxies, therefore, one relies in one’s choice of potential political allies on the only data available: names and genealogies, language and accent, skin color, geographical origin, and so on (CHANDRA 2004). In short, individuals must depend almost exclusively upon ascriptive social categories such as family and tribal descent or religious affiliation; that is, upon ethnic categories. And although the inferences gleaned from such cues are likely only to approximate the true natures of individuals, they are, first of all, very simple and cheap to obtain and, moreover, probably still quite accurate given the impermeability of ethnic, and to a lesser extent religious, boundaries. Political cooperation in this way becomes most likely among individuals of similar ethno-religious makeup, who form a common bond that may be “imagined” in the sense of having a dubious basis in historical fact or in shared political interests (ANDERSON 1983), but one that “denotes not just a certain stream of belief but a certain version of peoplehood” (HOROWITZ 1985, 492).

As for the actual content of political claims and positions adopted by the resultant coalitions, Horowitz (1985) in his classic volume on ethnic conflict offers some instruction. In “unranked” ethnic systems such as describe those of the Arab Gulf—those defined by parallel, internally-stratified ethnic groups produced by invasion, migration, or redefinition of borders to include previously-separated groups—in such systems, Horowitz explains,

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<sup>25</sup> Or more properly: al-Ḥaqq (“the right,” in the sense of both “political rights” and also “in the right” or “the truth”) Movement for Liberty and Democracy.

domestic politics is a zero-sum struggle akin to life under the anarchy of an international system, where “[t]he fear of ethnic domination is a motivating force for the acquisition of power,” the exercise of which “entails an effort to dominate the environment, to suppress differences, [and] to prevent domination and suppression by others” (187). As a consequence, says Horowitz, and for present purposes here is the most decisive part (my emphasis below),

[b]road matters of group status regularly have equal or superior standing to the narrow allocative decisions often taken to be the uniform stuff of everyday politics. Fundamental issues, [like] citizenship, electoral systems, designation of official languages and religions, the rights of groups to a ‘special position’ in the polity, rather than merely setting the framework of politics, become the recurring subjects of politics. *Conflicts over needs and interests are subordinated to conflicts over group status and over the rules to govern conflict.* Constitutional consensus is elusive, and the symbolic sector of politics looms large.

For one who has spent some time around the Arab Gulf, this description certainly rings familiar. In the region’s ethnically-divided societies, whether the new public housing development ought to be built in a Sunni or Shi’i neighborhood is certainly cause for spirited debate; yet such distributional matters represent but features of a more fundamental locus of conflict, namely whether the status quo of the entire system of politics ought to be revised or, alternatively, preserved. An important upshot is that, in the Gulf context, the faction that stands to lose from any such revision tends naturally to ally with the ruling tribe, which for its part also has a clear stake in maintaining the prevailing rules of the regime. This situation creates an ethnic “out-group” that is not merely the societal opposition to its rival *qua* ethnic group but constitutes a political opposition to the government and a pro-government ethnic “in-group.” A telling way to gauge the severity of ethnic tensions in the Gulf, accordingly, is to consider the ideological bases of political opposition societies and movements. In places like Kuwait and even Saudi Arabia, one finds that groups traditionally linked to political opposition, such as those based on the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, do indeed play these antagonistic roles despite their members’ ethnic proximity to the ruling families there. In the more charged environment of Bahrain, on the other hand, where the Shi’a opposition is not only more adamant in its demands for constitutional reform but also comprises an absolute majority of the population, ethnic expediency trumps political ideology for the Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood blocs in parliament, which together form the core of a pro-government Sunni majority that by the slimmest of margins holds the Shi’a opposition at bay.

There are two basic ways that those in the out-group may find political inspiration in their shared ethnicity or religious tradition. First, and related to this line of argument, they

may come to perceive that society's defining political fault line is not economic but lies in something more elemental; that their relatively lower economic station is not a cause but an effect of their political subjugation at the hands of a united front comprised of the ruling family and its ethno-religiously similar political allies. This is why, for instance, the very question of the nature of the inequity prevalent in modern Gulf societies—whether it is at bottom an economic issue or one of ethno-religious discrimination—is a mainstay of the region's domestic politics and, indeed, constitutes perhaps the most fundamental point of departure for political groups on both sides. In this way, shared religious tradition serves as a source of group identity and solidarity around which political coordination might naturally coalesce.

The other manner in which religion may inspire political mobilization by members of the ethnic out-group is if the doctrine itself carries (or in any case can be interpreted as carrying) lessons in political behavior and principles on the part of its followers. These may exist, for example, in the form of positive or negative regulations regarding proper actions or values in the political sphere or, alternatively, they may arise from the very historical events and circumstances surrounding a religion's genesis and development, such history bearing special political relevance for schismatic traditions, which by definition exist in contraposition to some greater religious and thus political authority. The personalities and events of these founding days, in particular, may evoke powerful remembrances of political grievance when institutionalized in ritual and lore, and when put to good use by shrewd political entrepreneurs looking to rally the troops. Perhaps the most poignant example of this is the Shi'a ritual of 'Āshūrā', which culminates in a frenzy of mass self-mutilation in mourning of the murder of the Shi'i Imām Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī at the hand of the (Sunni) 'Umayyad caliph Yazīd I, to whose despotic rule the Imām refused to pledge political allegiance. Too often these days of heightened religious emotion correspond to increased ethnic tensions and, in the case most visibly of those Shi'a making pilgrimage to holy sites in Iraq, violence and bloodshed.

Yet religion's role in augmenting political interest is not limited to members of the marginalized out-group. By shaping political opinion and spurring political action amongst the latter, it works simultaneously to marshal regime allies in defense of the status quo and, more to the point, in defense of their favorable cut of the political-economic pie. While perhaps regime allies may dismiss the critics as merely blaming their own economic failures on invented discrimination, inevitably they cannot help but be drawn into the ethnic dichotomy injected into the national political consciousness and, aided by a heated geopolitical environment, they

begin to define themselves along the same dividing line. So it is that ethnic identity comes to play a dual role in the community: for members of both the in-group and the out-group, greater ethnic allegiance stimulates increased political action and alters political opinion; but among the former these actions and opinions are in defense of the government and the larger status quo that it symbolizes, while among the latter they form the basis of its opposition.

So far we have illustrated the way in which ethnicity presents a viable alternative to economic- or class-based political coordination in the *rentier* state, the latter options rendered prohibitively difficult by the structure of allocative economies, which encourage individual efforts to secure additional patronage and whose disjointed, state-owned sectors offer little foundation, as Yates aptly points out, for any radical political change. When we peer even closer, moreover, we readily perceive why this ethnic-based political mobilization is not easily suppressed—that is, why those who awaken politically are not easily co-opted using the typical pressure-relieving mechanisms thought to be available to allocative economies. One will recall that the latter are said to educe political quiescence through at least two mechanisms—high public employment and non-taxation—and arguably a third—repression. The introduction of societal division along ethno-religious lines serves to handicap *rentier* states, however, by at best making these options less efficient, at worst by taking them off the table altogether.

In the first place, members of the (Shi'a) oppositional out-group, for concerns over state allegiance, are disproportionately excluded from civil service and entirely disqualified from police or military service, precluding three of the most common avenues of economic co-optation in the *rentier* state. What is more, in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and more recently the inadvertent empowerment of Iraq's Shi'a majority, Shi'a populations across the Arab world are seen as being increasingly forceful in their demands for greater authority, invoking historical claims of political right rooted in the very origins of Islam. This activism in turn serves only to mobilize members of the (Sunni) pro-government in-group, which, in order to offset a perceived growth in Shi'a—and, by association, Iranian—influence, organize themselves as a counterweight to perceived domestic Shi'aization and Iranian expansionism, in effect making their own political demands upon governments. Citizen interest in political participation becomes, then, not a function of material well-being as per *rentier* expectations, but one of religious identification and regional power struggles, an extension of the zero-sum struggle inherent to ethnically-divided societies described by Horowitz.

With such a surplus of political energy and limited means to diffuse it, it is no wonder, then, that the ethnically-divided societies of the Gulf—Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia—are today less successful than the other GCC countries in converting their resource windfalls into political stability. On the contrary, one must be surprised that some, especially Bahrain with its full Shi'i majority, have fared as well as they have. Yet stability is of two sorts: total lack of activity; or a balance or complementarity. As Luciani (1989, 84) remarks, "Stability may, in fact, mean political immobilism, which is seldom for the better: what is frozen is not necessarily peace, but conflict." What we have in these ethnically-polarized Gulf countries, on the other hand, is the case of two broadly-delineated countervailing forces—orthodox Sunni Muslims and heterodox Twelver Shi'a<sup>26</sup>—competing for power and influence not only in pursuit of their relative shares of state benefits, but in order also to shape the very nature of the regimes they inhabit. Of course, the vigor and scope of this ethnic competition depends in large part on the two groups' relative standings in the population, and in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia where Shi'a represent only about a quarter and an eighth of all citizens, respectively, these struggles tend to play out on the provincial or regional level rather than the national.<sup>27</sup> All the same, in vying with each other over additional material allocation—what Horowitz calls "the uniform stuff of everyday politics"—as well as over the more fundamental issue of relative group status in the polity, a great deal of society's energy is expended on horizontal contestation, a fight officiated by the ruling family as by a referee in a boxing match, and less is directed vertically toward the referee himself. This explains why Gulf regimes like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, even if home to higher levels of political activism than the *rentier* thesis would predict—higher, indeed, than exists in the rest of the Arab world, on average—have not been consumed by it but are, generally speaking, little worse for the wear.

### **A Theory of Ethnic-based Political Mobilization in the Arab Gulf *Rentier* States**

The foregoing represents a theory of ethnic-based political coordination in the supposedly-apolitical Arab Gulf *rentier* states, one that dispels the myth of the politically-agnostic Gulf oil sheikh as the region's stereotypical citizen, and one that proffers a new independent variable to account for country-level differences in regime stability both between GCC and non-GCC

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<sup>26</sup> The explicit focus throughout is the Arab Shi'a of the Twelver tradition (in Bahrain, the Bahārnah).

<sup>27</sup> Given the transnational character of Islamic and particularly Shi'i politics, however, these proportions mean less now than they did before the introduction of satellite television and the Internet, which allow members of both ethnic groups to keep minutely updated on the status of friends and adversaries at home and abroad.



nations and among the Gulf *rentier* societies themselves. It began by probing the elementary *rentier* assumption that allocative states will win popular political quiescence by distributing a part of their resource windfalls, either directly or indirectly, to ordinary citizens, examining to that end perhaps the best-known quantitative index of political stability: the Failed States Index assembled by The Fund for Peace. From this investigation arose an empirical puzzle with the observation that, in fact, although the six *rentier* economies of the Arab Gulf do seem to enjoy more stability on average than their non-GCC counterparts, in this there appears to be significant variation among the *rentier* states themselves and, what is more, that variation is apparently unrelated to the explanatory variable identified by *rentier* theorists, namely the oil and gas windfalls available to states for redistribution, which we operationalized as Ross's (2008) measure of per-capita resource rents. The question, then, was how to explain these intra-Gulf differences in stability if the answer does not lie in relative disparity in rent income.

Next we considered the extent to which our inquiry might be informed by existing empirical tests of the *rentier* state framework in political science, concluding that such studies suffer from basic methodological and theoretical limitations that diminish their usefulness for our purposes. Principal among those of the former category is a modern preoccupation with the question of democracy and democratization, a concern that has seen the monopolization of the *rentier* research agenda by works competing against each other to explain the apparent relative lack of democracy in resource-rich nations, with nearly all of these employing exactly the same dependent variable from exactly the same dataset: the Polity IV twenty-point scale of regime type. Not only is this choice out of line theoretically with the *rentier* paradigm's concern with regime stability over against regime accountability, but the results of its use in statistical analysis as typically undertaken are susceptible to bias. In particular, when some measure of rentierism (such as Ross's resource rents per capita variable) is used to predict a country's regime score, the resulting positive and highly significant relationship is an artifact of a small number of outlying cases: the six GCC states along with Libya and Brunei. When these observations are removed, so too is the statistically-significant link between resource rents and democracy; all that remains is evidence of such an association among a finite group of states—the *rentier* states—and a compelling reason to refocus the effort back to the latter.

Yet even in the absence of these methodological issues, we noted, there remains still an underlying theoretical difficulty plaguing extant efforts to study the *rentier* state, namely their failure to investigate the actual individual-level causal mechanisms that form the basis

of the *rentier* hypothesis. If the theory posits that allocative states achieve stability by buying off ordinary citizens with rent-funded material benefits, then evidence of a link between rent income and macro-level political outcomes like regime type, democratic transition, or even taxation and public spending rates is not proof of the theory itself, does not verify its internal causal story, but simply reiterates its own observations. It is as if one were to suggest that a parliamentary candidate was elected through bribing his prospective voters, and offered as evidence the fact that he spent more than ten times the amount of his competitor: at the end of the day one would like to see these supporters' incriminating bank statements or, short of that, at least to ask them the reasons behind their votes. So too for convincing proof of the *rentier* explanation one needs evidence that, among individual citizens of rent-based regimes, there exists a veritable relationship between material well-being and political abstention.

And so we endeavored to do precisely that. More specifically, we aimed to explain our earlier empirical anomaly—the intra-Gulf variation in state stability that appeared to bear no obvious relationship to regimes' relative distributive capabilities as measured by their per-capita resource rents—by making use of an altogether different tool than those employed by extant studies, namely individual-level survey data capturing the political views of ordinary Arab citizens that only recently have become available with the completion of several timely research projects, including the Arab Democracy Barometer and my own survey of Bahrain. By demonstrating a link between a state's stability and the political orientations of its citizens, we reasoned, one could show why a country like Oman, with its comparatively meager fuel rents, still can attain more stability than a rent-accumulating powerhouse like Saudi Arabia if it is more effective at translating the rent income it does receive into lower levels of popular political dissent. This investigation also made a more fitting test of the *rentier* theory causal framework, cutting out as it were the theoretical middle-man of resource rents in order to link regime stability with citizens' political orientations directly.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than answer our question, however, this analysis of popular political behavior in the Arab world served only to confuse matters further. Contrary to all expectations, citizens of the Arab Gulf countries reported higher levels of political interest and political action and

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<sup>28</sup> Note that because our "Gulf" sample consisted of respondents from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait only (mass survey data from the other three GCC states so far do not exist), we could not perform the preferable and even more direct test of comparing political dissent in the former three, relatively lower-stability Gulf states against that in the latter, relatively higher-stability group composed of Qatar, the UAE, and Oman. Given the results of the analysis carried out, however, this limitation made no practical difference.

lower levels of political deference than did non-Gulf Arabs, even after controlling possible confounding variables such as the sex, education level, economic satisfaction, and religiosity of respondents. Thus cross-national variation in regime stability could not be a direct result of differences in popular political activism because, if this were true, we should expect to see the non-GCC states tending to outperform their Arab Gulf counterparts in terms of stability. As the latter is decidedly not the case, our initial empirical puzzle transformed into two: first, what explains intra-Gulf variation in stability if the answer is neither differences in fuel rents *nor* differences in popular political quietude?; and, second, how is it that the Gulf states, with citizenries that are on average more prone to political action and dissent than those of other Arab countries, still enjoy much more stability than the latter? Whither is all this political enthusiasm of Gulf peoples directed, we asked, if not at their governments?

To resolve this difficulty we turned to another politically-salient feature of Arab Gulf society, a new independent variable to account for relative regime stability that finds no place at all in the extant *rentier* literature: the region's long-standing ethno-religious schism dividing orthodox Sunni Muslims and heterodox Shi'is. This tension disrupts the normal function of *rentier* societies by offering a viable basis for popular political mobilization among members of both groups while simultaneously precluding the most common avenues of political buy-off available to allocative governments. Because Shi'a are often perceived by Sunnis and the uniformly-Sunni Gulf governments as being not only religiously deviant but also politically subservient for doctrinal reasons to their religious authorities in Iran, Iraq, or elsewhere, ruling families find it difficult to appease their discontented Shi'a constituencies because they do not trust them enough to allow them to serve in the leading public employers: the police, military, and power ministries; and it is politically unpalatable for the rulers' pro-government Sunni populations to give Shi'a anything more than low-level civil servant positions in other bureaucracies. Moreover, because many Shi'a believe they have a collective right to political authority based on religious notions of injustice and betrayal rooted in the very foundations of Islam, it is difficult to pacify their demands simply by making them rich or by agreeing not to tax them. At the same time, the prospect of an emboldened Shi'a populace operating at the behest of a belligerent Iranian regime makes it intolerable for their Sunni counterparts to remain on the political sidelines, further undermining the myth of our apolitical *rentier* state.

This revised story of Arab Gulf politics is able to account for each of our above-noted empirical irregularities. In the first place, it explains the intra-Gulf variation in stability: those

states lacking a politically-salient ethnic cleavage, like the Emirates, Qatar, and Oman, tend to adhere to the standard *rentier* framework. With no viable basis for political coordination, citizens in these countries compete individually within the bounds of their existing patronage systems to secure greater personal shares of state benefits, so precluding cooperative political action. Finding their motivation in material gain as per *rentier* assumptions, such individuals reinforce rather than undermine the prevailing political order, begetting greater stability. In *rentier* societies like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, conversely, societal division enables political coordination around ethno-religious categories, leading to the political mobilization of rival groups that battle not only over their respective allocations of state benefits but over the very nature of the regime itself. While some of this competitive force can be deflected by a shrewd ruler skilled at inducing inter-group rather than group-state confrontation, these regimes still will tend to fall short of the stability achieved by the more ethnically-harmonious Gulf countries, as their citizens are stirred politically by factors other than personal economic well-being, and therefore are not so easily bought off as *rentier* theorists would have it.

As for our other puzzle, why it is that on average the GCC states report higher levels of popular political interest and participation than the non-*rentier* Arab countries, this answer is now clear as well: the former display heightened political consciousness and less political deference not because they are *rentier* or Gulf states but because they are ethnically-contested states.<sup>29</sup> This interpretation is supported by the fact that respondents in Lebanon, another nation divided intensely along confessional lines, report the second-highest levels of political interest of all the peoples surveyed, higher even than Bahrainis or Kuwaitis.

### **Ethnic Conflict in the *Rentier* Gulf: The Case of Sunni-Shi'i Relations in Bahrain**

The modified framework of the Gulf *rentier* state outlined above will in the ensuing chapters undergo empirical evaluation with reference to one such nation in particular: the Kingdom of Bahrain. This case offers important practical and theoretical advantages. In the first place, due to the sensitive status of religion (to say nothing of intra-Islamic discord) and politics in Bahrain as everywhere in the Arab Gulf, few have succeeded in administering nationally-representative surveys in the region that ask the sort of questions one would need to analyze the link hypothesized here between economic welfare, ethno-religious identity, and political

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<sup>29</sup> Recall that unfortunately for practical reasons our “Gulf” sample consisted of respondents from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait only.

outcomes at the individual level. Indeed, it is telling that in its 20-year history even the near-comprehensive World Values Survey, which has been conducted in more than 150 countries and whose questions are not particularly sensitive, has managed to administer its poll in the Arab Gulf only twice: in Saudi Arabia in 2003 and in Qatar in 2010, and in each case the most revealing questions about normative political opinion and political behavior were generally not fielded. Of the seven states included in the first wave of the Arab Barometer survey project, similarly, only Kuwait is represented among the Gulf nations. The first practical difficulty, then, is the sheer lack of survey data being collected in the Arab Gulf.

The second is that the data that are available—from the 2006 AB survey of Kuwait and the 2003 WVS of Saudi Arabia, for example—lack ethnic identifiers for respondents, meaning that one cannot distinguish Sunnis from Shi'is. This is of course not by chance. If one should like to make an already-delicate interview even more so, proceed to ask a Saudi or Kuwaiti his religious affiliation. But to test a theory that predicts inter-ethnic variation in responses, it is precisely this information that one requires, making extant AB and WVS data unfortunately of limited use. Hence the real practical advantage presented by the case of Bahrain is that, owing to a nationally-representative survey of 500 randomly-selected households I administered in early 2009, the requisite data actually exist. A full methodological overview follows in Chapter 4; it is enough to say here that interviewers followed the standard Arab Barometer survey instrument and, aided by the plain linguistic and geographical segregation of Bahrain's Sunni and Shi'i populations, were able easily to infer the ethnic membership of respondents. This study, then, was the first of its type to be conducted in the Arab Gulf.

Yet the impetus for and theoretical importance of the Bahraini case lay not in a lack of previous data but in the character of Sunni-Shi'i relations in this Gulf *rentier* state. Almost since the day the ruling Āl Khalīfa dynasty arrived in Bahrain in 1783 along with its Sunni tribal allies, having just wrested the island from the Persian Empire, their relations with the indigenous Shi'a inhabitants have been marked by social detachment, mutual suspicion, and often open hostility. This is especially true of the period following the Islamic Revolution, which saw in 1981 an Iranian-backed failed coup attempt by members of a Shi'a opposition organization, a popular Shi'a uprising stretching much of the 1990s, and since 2002 festering ethnic tension and sporadic violence between government security forces and Shi'a activists increasingly frustrated by stalled constitutional reforms announced by King Ḥamad bin 'Īsā

upon his accession to the throne. Such strained ethnic relations, we shall observe in the next chapter, not only complicate the ordinary task of this *rentier* state of buying political silence, but they also ensure that this silence, once broken, is not easily restored.

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## CHAPTER 3

### Ethnic Conflict in the *Rentier* State: The Case of Sunni-Shi'i Relations in Bahrain

Tiny though it is, the 33-island archipelago of Bahrain, situated 15 miles off the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf, is an ideal location in which to examine the influence of ethnic-based political mobilization on the normal function of the *rentier* state and, in turn, on regime stability. Indeed, for a kingdom but 3.5 times the size of Washington, D.C., Bahrain holds a number of distinctions: the global center of pearl production and trading until the 1930s; the first Gulf country in which oil was discovered and mined; the former home of colonial Britain's Residency of the Persian Gulf and present base of the U.S. Fifth Fleet; and, since the 2003 fall of the Iraqi Ba'athists, the only Middle East nation still ruled by a Sunni minority.<sup>1</sup> Although the exact proportion is itself a much-debated and highly divisive issue, it is generally accepted that Shi'is comprise between 55% and 75% of the total population of Bahrain, making it one of just three Mideast states, along with Iran and Iraq, wherein this perennial minority holds an absolute majority.<sup>2</sup>

That Sunnis are here outnumbered, however, is not Bahrain's qualification for study. More important is that relations between Bahraini citizens and the ruling Āl Khalīfa tribe *qua* government, to a degree unparalleled anywhere else in the Arab Gulf, fail to operate according to the standard patron-client formula represented by the *rentier* state model. The lesson to be learned of the past 15 years of political turmoil in Bahrain—to say nothing of the

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<sup>1</sup> That is, if one respects S. Mūsā al-Ṣadr's 1974 *fatwā* proclaiming the 'Alawīs to be a branch of Twelver Shi'ism.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, among the other products of my representative national survey is the first reliable estimate of this Sunni-Shi'a ratio (i.e., one based on direct sampling and not extrapolations from birth or immigration rates, government figures, *etc.*) since 1941. This discussion follows in Chapter 4. For a recent study that puts the proportion at between 65-75% Shi'a, see Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population, Estimated Percentage Range of Shia by Country," October 2009, p. 1.

popular uprising and ethnic clashes of the 1950s; the showdown over a 1965 Public Security Law and ensuing dissolution of parliament in 1975; and the Iranian-organized failed coup attempt of 1981—is that either (a) the Bahraini royal family is singularly inept at using its sizable external rents to placate would-be opponents; or (b) there is something about the way politics operates in Bahrain that renders the state systematically unable to do so. To make a case for the latter is the purpose here.

### **The “Opening” of Bahrain: The Enduring Legacy of the Āl Khalīfa Conquest**

The Āl Khalīfa’s 1783 capture of Bahrain from the Safavid Persian Empire is immortalized for all who see the island in the ubiquitous references to the conqueror (“*al-Fātiḥ*”) himself, Aḥmad bin Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa. Having crossed the bridge into Manama from the airport in Muharraq, one likely turns south onto the Al-Fātiḥ Highway, passing on the way the enormous Al-Fātiḥ Grand Mosque, by far the largest place of worship in Bahrain and one of the largest in the Islamic world. The mosque is flanked to its west by the Guḍaibiyah Royal Palace and to its north by the newly-opened National Library. More than just a painful reminder of the social and political upheaval occasioned by the Āl Khalīfa’s arrival, however, the prominent place of “Al-Fātiḥ” in the national lore and present-day geography of Bahrain represents for the country’s Shi’a population something more hateful. For while the word “*al-fātiḥ*” (الفتاح; literally, “the opener”) can mean “the conqueror” or “the victor” in the military sense, it also carries overt religious overtones that certainly are not lost on ordinary Bahrainis as they would not be on any Arabic-speaking Muslim.

When seventh-century Muslim armies fought to spread their nascent religion across the Arab world and beyond, they were said to be effecting the “*fath al-islām*” (فتح الإسلام)—the “opening of Islam”—a euphemism for the conversion and, upon refusal, destruction of non-Muslim peoples.<sup>3</sup> Its use in the Bahraini context, then, implies not simply that the island was conquered militarily by Aḥmad Āl Khalīfa and his Sunni tribal allies, but that it was “opened” for Islam—that is, for true Islam—in view of its indigenous Shi’a inhabitants and its prior status as a protectorate of Safavid Persia, which since 1501 had embraced Shi’ism as

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<sup>3</sup> More recently, and in line with the interpretation here, “Fath al-Islām” is the organizational name adopted by Sunni militants who made headlines in summer 2007 for their armed rebellion inside a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon that had the larger aim, reportedly, of striking at Ḥizballāh, arousing tensions with the latter and its Shi’a supporters. See Robert Worth and Nada Bakri, 2008, “Hezbollah Ignites a Sectarian Fuse in Lebanon,” *New York Times*, May 18.

a state religion. The continued glorification of this event and of this terminology on the part of Bahrain's rulers thus serves only to further alienate its majority Shi'a population, and aptly symbolizes the socio-political divide separating ordinary Sunni and Shi'i citizens. As pithily expressed by one of my Bahraini contacts, popular Shi'i cleric Sh. 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ḥusayn, a powerful force in the uprising of the 1990s and of February 2011 (and currently serving a life sentence for his role in the latter), the difference between Sunnis and Shi'is in Bahrain is the difference between "*al-fātiḥ wa al-maftūḥ*" (الفاتح والمفتوح): "the opener and the opened."<sup>4</sup>

Precisely how Bahraini society looked prior to the appearance of the Āl Khalīfa is the subject of much speculation. For their part, the Shi'a make, as Khuri (1980, 28) notes in his yet unrivaled sociological survey of Bahrain, an unlikely religious interpretation:

They say that Bahrain had three hundred villages and thirty cities and towns before the Al-Khalifa conquest, each ruled by a jurist who was well versed in Shi'a law. These three hundred and thirty jurists were organized into a hierarchy headed by a council of three, elected by an assembly of thirty-three who, in turn, were acclaimed to power by the jurists of the whole country.

This fanciful portrait of pre-Āl Khalīfa Bahrain governed by the magical number three is but one element of what Louër (2008, 23) has called a "myth of golden age," a tale ingrained into the collective consciousness of the region's Shi'a that draws upon the historical usage of the appellation "Bahrain" to refer to all the Gulf coast from Basra to the Qatari peninsula, the heart of this ancient territory being the modern Bahrain archipelago along with the oases of al-Qaṭīf and al-Ḥasā' now part of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. This narrative, recounted to her in interviews by Saudi and Bahraini Shi'a alike, Louër summarizes as follows:

There was a time when the Shias of Eastern Arabia were united in one single country called Bahrain extending from Basra to Oman. Its inhabitants were called the Baharna and had embraced Shiism since the beginning of Islam. Bahrain was a wealthy country blessed by several natural resources: fresh springs, arable lands and pearls. People were living a simple but fully satisfactory peasant life in accordance with the prescriptions of the Imams. It was a time of social harmony and order. Everything changed when the Sunni tribes—the Al-Khalifa and the Al-Sa'ud—took over the region, appropriated the natural resources for their own use and imposed their brutal and autocratic manners on the native population. They not only oppressed the Shias but cut their unity by breaking the organic ties between the islands and the inland. Since then, marginalized Shias have fought to recover their legitimate rights as the native inhabitants of Ancient Bahrain.

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<sup>4</sup> The choice of the Al-Fātiḥ Mosque as the base of counter-revolutionary protests by pro-regime Sunnis at the height of Bahrain's crisis in February and March 2011 was no coincidence. Indeed, there even emerged an Al-Fātiḥ Group for Electronic Jihād, meant to combat an effective international media campaign waged by protesters.

These tales of the glory days of Bahrain, of the time it was ruled by enlightened Shi‘a jurists for the sake of its Shi‘a inhabitants and unspoiled by unjust alien intrusion, are not mere bedtime stories related by parents to sleepy children. Historically embellished and selective though they are—where, for example, are the Portuguese and the Ottomans? who by 1550 had already divided “Ancient Bahrain,” the former controlling the archipelago via its Sunni allies in Iran while the latter administered the mainland—they nonetheless represent for today’s Bahraini Shi‘a population a common historical and ethical starting point that is both a symbol and legitimizing force of their contemporary struggle for a greater influence over Bahraini society in the face of continued foreign domination thereof. Thus they refer to themselves using the collective demonym Baḥārnah (بحارنة; sing. Baḥrānī, بحراني) in reference to their status as the “original” inhabitants of Bahrain (“البحرينيين الأصليين”) and in contrast to Āl Khalīfa and their Sunni Bedouin allies who migrated from the Arabian hinterland and who only later, it is said, invented the modern designation “Bahraini” (that is, Baḥraynī) as part of their effort to rewrite the country’s Shi‘i past.<sup>5</sup> This ethnic distinction showed itself repeatedly during the process of conducting field interviews for my Bahrain mass survey: questionnaires, which employed the standard Arabic demonym “بحريني” throughout, regularly returned with lines drawn through the term and “Baḥrānī” scribbled in the margins. Field interviewers, in particular those operating in the rural villages exclusive to Shi‘a, recounted how they were lectured by respondents about Bahraini history and how the latter, when asked as part of the interview, for instance, “How proud are you to be a Bahraini?,” replied matter-of-factly, “I am not proud of being *Bahraini*; but I am very proud of being *Baḥrānī*!”

The influence of this nativist discourse is likely all the more powerful because of the active effort by authorities to suppress it. Prominent books on the pre-Āl Khalīfa history of Bahrain, the royal family itself, and pre-independence political history are banned and subject to confiscation. This includes, for example, Fuad Khuri’s masterful *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, which chronicles the political transformation of Bahrain, with the development of oil, away from what he calls a “feudal estate system” comprised of independent agricultural fiefdoms worked by structurally-indebted Shi‘a and administered by absentee landlords from among Āl Khalīfa and their Sunni tribal allies, the latter having been granted considerable lands for their part in the Bahrain conquest. Despite being ideologically unsympathetic to Bahraini

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<sup>5</sup> Like the myth of Ancient Bahrain, the term “Baḥārna” is also popular, Louër tells (12), among Saudi Shi‘a, especially among intellectuals and political activists, who use it to denote Shi‘is living in the Eastern Province. I have also heard the term used widely in Qatar as a generic name for the country’s Shi‘a.

Shi'a, the book is in high demand nonetheless for its vivid account of nineteenth-century and early to mid-twentieth-century Bahrain—so much so, in fact, that I was requested upon my return to the United States to send a Bahraini friend but one gift: a copy of Khuri's book to replace one that had been confiscated from his father some time ago at Bahrain Airport.

The second most significant volume on the modern political history of Bahrain is undoubtedly the journals of Charles Belgrave, the British officer who served in the position of personal “advisor” to the Bahraini ruler for some thirty-one years between 1926 and 1957 and who eventually came to be known simply as “المستشار”—“the advisor” (KHURI 1980, 110). In the wake of British intervention just three years prior to replace recalcitrant ruler 'Īsā bin 'Alī with his son Ḥamad, Belgrave's appointment was meant to provide Bahrain with some measure of political continuity. At the same time, he was charged with finishing the task of modernizing the whole of the country's outdated bureaucracy, an initiative that effectively spelled the end of the prevailing feudal estate system and one therefore strongly endorsed by ordinary Shi'a but resisted by the ruling and wealthy elite. Belgrave's diary, then, consists of detailed daily reports of meetings and conversations with the ruler and various state officials, observations on Bahraini society, and other quotidian affairs.

Like Khuri's, this important work too is banned inside Bahrain. Or, more precisely, while selected excerpts from the diary were published in 1960 and again in 1972,<sup>6</sup> the original papers are said to reside in the royal library and in any case have not been made available. Unauthorized copies of the diary somehow made their way onto the Internet in June 2009, however, and were thereafter translated, made to be published, and imported for distribution by the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), itself outlawed. The printed copies were subsequently confiscated by the Ministry of Information, which informed the publisher of the government's decision to ban the book, barring any further imports.<sup>7</sup> But the damage was already done. The leaked version has persisted in the form of a massive, 2,302-page electronic document that has become required reading for the country's political opponents, having been viewed over 7,000 times in but three years.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, upon hearing of my study

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<sup>6</sup> In Charles Belgrave, 1960, *The Pirate Coast* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban); and Charles Belgrave, 1972, *Personal Column* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban).

<sup>7</sup> For further details see Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, “Banning one of the Most Significant Historic Books in the History of Bahrain,” 25 May 2010. Available at <<http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3105>>.

<sup>8</sup> “Papers of Charles Dalrymple-Belgrave, 1926-1957.” Available at <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/16225787>>. This figure is probably a rather low estimate of the total readership, as many more people, myself included, received the document indirectly from those who had already obtained it.

of Bahraini politics, my contacts repeatedly directed me to the text as a sort of prerequisite to any understanding of the local political situation. Yet for all the controversy surrounding the Belgrave diary, and despite its constituting perhaps an embarrassing intrusion into the private lives and court politics of the ruling family, there is nothing in it that could be considered a direct attack on the Āl Khalīfa or that substantiates any heretofore unknown wrongdoing that must be covered up at all costs. No, the papers of Belgrave, like *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, are banned not for their contents per se but for what they represent: information, and more importantly the contradiction of the “official,” sanitized version of Bahraini history that the regime has worked hard to construct. Curiously, the same Minister of Information who enacted the Belgrave ban has herself published at least two separate editions of translated excerpts from the journals,<sup>9</sup> a coincidence that has led the BCHR to speculate about the completeness and accuracy of the latter volumes, and ask whether this might not help explain the ban on its own, presumably less abridged Arabic translation.

Such promotion of an idealized Bahraini history goes beyond mere suppression of conflicting accounts, however, and pervades nearly all aspects of state-sponsored media and cultural displays. Holes (2005), for instance, has demonstrated that characters in the serials (مسلسلات) produced by Bahraini national television speak a distinct Sunni Arab dialect and ignore almost entirely the vernaculars of both the Baḥārnah and the ‘Ajām,<sup>10</sup> Bahraini Shi‘a of Persian origin. In similar fashion, the Bahrain National Museum in its sprawling dioramas depicting pre-oil industry gives a prominent place to the Sunni-dominated activity of pearl fishing while neglecting the quintessentially Shi‘i agricultural sector, most obviously the widespread cultivation of date palms, which was the basis of the Baḥārnah’s existence for the centuries preceding the discovery of oil. Even Bahrain’s prehistoric stone burial mounds, which some prominent Salafī politicians have suggested should be destroyed for their pre-Islamic origins, are represented quite extensively, with an entire full-sized mound and pieces of others having been reconstructed inside a large exhibit. The National Museum, naturally, is accessible via an exit along Al-Fātiḥ Highway.

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<sup>9</sup> Sha. Mai bint Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, 2000, *Charles Belgrave: Biography and Diary, 1926-1957* (Beirut: The Arab Institute for Studies and Publishing); and Sha. Mai bint Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, 1999, *From the Surroundings of Kufa to Bahrain: The Carmathian, from an Idea to a State* (Beirut: The Arab Institute for Studies and Publishing).

<sup>10</sup> *عجم* sing. *عجمي*: lit., one who is illiterate in language; silent; mute. Though the term can refer to non-Arabic-speaking peoples more generally and is often considered an ethnic slur, in Bahrain it is used exclusively to denote Shi‘a of Persian origin, who even have named for them a neighborhood in Manama (فريق العجم) as well as several prominent religious institutions, including most notably the *مأتم العجم الكبير*.



The nativism employed by Bahrain's Shi'a that has given rise to the present categories Baḥrānī and Baḥraynī—to the land's "original" Shi'i inhabitants versus their "foreign" Sunni oppressors—is therefore fueled in no small measure by the countervailing effort on the part of the regime to downplay the nation's Shi'i past and, more generally, to obscure the details of Bahrain's pre-oil history while emphasizing its subsequent economic modernization and development under Āl Khalīfa leadership. That the authorities would expend such resources in rebranding the state away from its Shi'i roots, the Baḥārnah reason, only goes to prove the validity of their version of the country's contested history and, by extension, the legitimacy of their attendant claims to a collective right in political decisionmaking.

Today, however, there is being written a final, more sinister chapter to this narrative. It tells how the ruling family and its Sunni allies, having failed in their attempt to suppress and distort the true history of the country and so extinguish the embers of Shi'is' legitimate political aspirations, have settled now on a more radical solution: the physical elimination of the Baḥārnah's longstanding demographic majority through an organized program of political naturalization (التجنيس السياسي) of Arab and non-Arab Sunnis. Known simply as "*al-tajnīs*," the issue of granting Bahraini citizenship on a sectarian basis for political purposes is *primus inter pares* among the nation's myriad contentious subjects, and it presents an instructive lesson in miniature on the ethnic bases of political action in Bahrain.

### **Passports for Allegiance: Political and Demographic Engineering in Bahrain**

Accusations that Bahrain was attempting to alter its demographic balance through selective naturalization first surfaced in the aftermath of the 2002 parliamentary elections, which were to be the country's first since the legislature was suspended in 1975 by the former emir, Sh. ʿĪsā bin Salmān Āl Khalīfa. Upon the latter's death in 1999, his son Ḥamad ascended to the monarchy promising a general *rapprochement* aimed at easing political tensions and, more specifically, at ending a tumultuous decade of Shi'a-state conflict punctuated by a wholesale Shi'a uprising spanning 1994-1999.<sup>11</sup> The reestablishment of the parliament, then, was but one facet of an auspicious but ultimately illusory plan for political change outlined in a new

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<sup>11</sup> The 1994-1999 uprising has been covered in detail. See, e.g., Louay Bahry, 1997, "The Opposition in Bahrain: A Bellwether for the Gulf?" *Middle East Policy* 5(2): 42-57; Munira Fakhro, 1997, "The Uprising in Bahrain: An Assessment," in Sick and Potter, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-188; Adeed Darwish, 1999, "Rebellion in Bahrain," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 3(1): 84-87; Louay Bahry, 2000, "The Socio-economic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 11(3): 129-143; and J.E. Peterson, 2004, "Bahrain: The 1994-1999 Uprising," *Arabian Peninsula Background Note*, N° APBN-002. Available at: <www.JEPeterson.net>.

National Action Charter, a reform framework approved by referendum in February 2001. The document also mandated the release of political detainees arrested during the uprising; a general amnesty for political exiles; and the amendment of a repressive State Security Law to disband the notorious State Security Courts.<sup>12</sup> Prior to the vote, finally, King Ḥamad made a dramatic personal visit to the home of prominent Shi'i religious leader S. 'Abdallāh al-Ghurayfi, who received him along with Bahrain's most senior cleric and the spiritual force behind the 1990s *intifāḍah*, Sh. 'Abd al-Amīr al-Jamrī, where he signed and ostensibly agreed to a list of political demands stipulating that the lawmaking power of the new regime should reside in a democratically-elected lower house of parliament, with any appointed upper chamber limited to a strictly advisory role. The widely-circulated document, complete with photos capturing the act of signature, was seen as a *coup* for the opposition (PETERSON 2008).<sup>13</sup>

The Charter was approved overwhelmingly—a full 89% of eligible voters were said to have taken part, with 98.4% in favor—so overwhelmingly, in fact, that King Ḥamad took its passage for a mandate to fashion a permanent constitution unilaterally, a non-negotiated document revealed on nearly the one-year anniversary of the referendum in a flurry of royal decrees. The opposition was floored. Not only did the king renege on his public declaration by subordinating the elected *majlis al-nuwāb* to a royally-appointed *majlis al-shūrā* with an equal number of seats and a tiebreaking vote, but the constitution also explicitly proscribed any amendment to this system, affirming that “it is not permissible under any circumstances to propose the amendment of the constitutional monarchy and the principle of inherited rule in Bahrain, as well as the bi-cameral system.”<sup>14</sup> Additional decrees promulgated later in 2002 further infuriated opponents: Decree No. 56 extended a previous amnesty order to the

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<sup>12</sup> For more on King Ḥamad's reform initiative, see, e.g., Abdulhadi Khalaf, 2000, “The New Amir of Bahrain: Marching Sideways,” *Civil Society* 9(100): 6-13; J.E. Peterson, 2002, “Bahrain's First Reforms under Amir Hamad,” *Asian Affairs* 33(2): 216-227; Edward Burke, 2008, “Bahrain: Reaching a Threshold,” Working Paper 61, presented at *El Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE)*, Madrid, June 5. Available at: <<http://www.fride.org/publication/452/bahrain-reaching-a-threshold.html>>; and Abdulhadi Khalaf, 2008, “The Outcome of a Ten-Year Process of Political Reform in Bahrain,” *Arab Reform Brief* N° 24. Available at: <<http://arab-reform.net/spip.php?article1748>>.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, the event remains so infamous that one can still find a video of the entire ceremony, including King Ḥamad's signature, on the Internet. Since its posting in August 2007, it has been viewed almost 300,000 times. See “ملك البحرين يحلف على القرآن وينكث” [“The King of Bahrain Swears on the Qur'ān and [Then] Reneges”]. Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ux3dIonYpQ>>.

<sup>14</sup> Article 120, para. C of the February 14, 2002, Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain. Quoted in S. M. Wright, 2008, “Fixing the Kingdom: Political Evolution and Socio-Economic Challenges in Bahrain” (Doha: Center for International and Regional Studies). See Wright's (2008) work for a thorough analysis of the various provisions of the 2002 constitution.

employees of the Ministry of Interior in the face of widespread claims of torture and other human rights abuses by those imprisoned during the 1990s, denying thousands of victims the opportunity of legal redress; another, released in July, forbade the *majlis al-nuwāb* from “deliberating on any matter or measure taken by the government prior to 14 December, 2002”—that is, prior to the inauguration of the National Assembly (KHALAF 2008, 4-6); yet another rearranged the country into 12 municipalities within 5 governorates, producing 40 gerrymandered electoral districts ranging from 500 to 17,000 registered voters (WRIGHT 2008). In the Sunni-dominated Southern Governorate, 6 members of parliament would represent some 16,000 voters, while a single district in the Shi‘i suburb of Jidd Ḥaḥḥ, District No. 1, itself exceeded that number. Indeed, the entire Northern Governorate, a Shi‘a-populated region home to 79,000 registered voters, was allotted a mere 9 seats in parliament (SHARIF 2009).

Now just months away, the impending October parliamentary elections transformed into a referendum on the new constitution. Municipal elections held earlier in May had seen a meager 51% turnout, a stark contrast to the near-universal participation of the prior year. Sensing its constituency’s deep frustration with the government’s now-unmasked “reform” agenda, the united Shi‘a bloc, al-Wifāq National Islamic Society (جمعية الوفاق الوطني الإسلامية), opted to boycott the parliamentary vote despite an extremely successful showing in the local elections, a move that temporarily averted an intra-Shi‘a schism that was to occur four years later when its leaders would make the opposite decision to participate. Three other notable opposition societies—two liberal secular groups and one affiliated with the Shirāzī *marja‘* Ayatallāh Hādī al-Mudarrisī—followed suit, and thus voter turnout reached just 53% in the first round and a dismal 43% in the second (WRIGHT 2008, 6). The resulting parliament would be comprised wholly of Sunni Islamic candidates and pro-government “independents.”

It was under this charged political backdrop that rumors resurfaced about a concerted government effort to alter Bahrain’s demography. Similar claims had been made as early as May 1998, when in the darkest days of the Shi‘a *intifāḍah* the *Financial Times* reported that

Critics of the government say one sinister development is the building by the ruling family of a *cordon sanitaire* around itself by giving nationality to between 8,000 and 10,000 Sunni families from Jordan, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen, whose men, working in the security services, would be loyal to the al-Khalifa family should unrest break out again on a scale which can no longer be contained.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Maṣṣūr al-Jamrī, 1998, “State and Civil Society in Bahrain,” paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Middle East Studies Association, Chicago, December 9.

This time, however, the accusers would offer hard evidence in the form of a 17-minute video interview taken in June 2002 with members of the al-Dawāsir tribe of Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province, who tell how they were solicited to obtain Bahraini nationality and public housing in the run-up to the 2002 elections. Not only were they granted passports in just a matter of months, said the al-Dawāsir, but for Bahrain’s 2002 elections they were gathered and driven to a polling station on the King Fahd Causeway linking Bahrain to Saudi Arabia in order to cast their votes. Among the al-Dawāsir, they estimated, perhaps 20,000 had received this dual-citizenship, which they said was now being extended to other tribes around Dammām. Those interviewed were dually able to produce Bahraini passports, national identification cards, and addresses in the country.<sup>16</sup> When the documentary was aired publicly in July 2003 at a meeting of opposition groups in Manama, the reaction was not primarily one of surprise but of vindication: observers had long argued that a June 2002 royal decree allowing other GCC citizens to hold dual-Bahraini citizenship and *vice versa* would be put precisely to this end.<sup>17</sup> All the same, the release of the film and subsequent public outcry did prompt the formation of a parliamentary committee charged with investigating the scandal, though in a clear act of sabotage its members were forbidden from examining citizenship cases prior to the December 2002 establishment of parliament as well as those “special” cases falling under the exception granted the head of state as per Bahrain’s 1963 Naturalization Law.<sup>18</sup> Since all of the cases in question could be made to fall under one or the other category, the matter was effectively closed for official discussion.

It was closed, that is, until the sudden appearance three years later of a leaked report by a British national of Sudanese origin, Dr. Sālah al-Bandar, working then as an advisor to the Cabinet Affairs Ministry.<sup>19</sup> The 216-page document purports to outline a secret network of Sunni politicians led by Sh. Aḥmad bin ‘Aṭiyatallāh Āl Khalīfa—current Minister of Cabinet

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<sup>16</sup> The video and an English transcript can be found at Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, 2002, “Documentary Film Script: The Political Naturalization in Bahrain.” Available at: <<http://www.bahrainrights.org/node/269>>.

<sup>17</sup> See Habib Trabelsi, 2002, “Bahrain’s Shiite Muslims cry foul over dual nationality plan,” *Khaleej Times*, June 16.

<sup>18</sup> See HAQ: Movement of Liberties and Democracy—Bahrain, 2007, “Motivated Change of Demography.. Infringements of Political Rights and Inadequate Living Standards,” report submitted to the Universal Periodic Review Working Group of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 19. Available at: <[http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session1/BH/MLD\\_BHR\\_UPR\\_S1\\_2008\\_MovementofLibertiesandDemocracyHAQ\\_%20uprsubmission.pdf](http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session1/BH/MLD_BHR_UPR_S1_2008_MovementofLibertiesandDemocracyHAQ_%20uprsubmission.pdf)>.

<sup>19</sup> Sālah al-Bandar, 2006, “البحرين: الخيار الديمقراطي وآليات الإقصاء” [“Bahrain: The Choice of Democracy and the Machinery of Exclusion”], unpublished report prepared by the Gulf Centre for Democratic Development. The entire Arabic document is available at: <<http://www.bahrainrights.org/files/albandar.pdf>>. The so-called “Bandargate scandal” received no little press and is treated in, e.g., BURKE 2008, LOUËR 2008, and WRIGHT 2008.

Affairs, president of the obscure Central Informatics Organization, and founder of the High Committee for Elections—working to undermine the overall political position of Bahrain’s Shi‘a. According to al-Bandar’s report, this network arose at the recommendation of a 2005 study written by an Iraqi academic under commission from the Bahraini government titled “A Proposal to Promote the General Situation of the Sunni Sect in Bahrain.”<sup>20</sup> The proposal, which al-Bandar appended to his dossier in a “documentation” section, blames “the rise of sectarian conflict” (“بروز الصراع الطائفي”) in Bahrain—a conflict “between the Sunni sect on the one hand and the Shi‘i sect on the other”—on “the existence of an unspoken agenda on the part of Shi‘a movements to control Bahraini society, and [these] ambitions may extend to taking over the reigns of power in the country.”<sup>21</sup> This situation, the essay continues, is the product of “the historic changes that threaten the Arab Gulf region [as a consequence of] the fall of the former Iraqi regime.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, it concludes, Bahrain’s case is that of post-2003 Iraq:

the marginalization of Sunnis and the lessening of their role in Bahrain is part of a larger regional problem, whereas [our] sons of the Sunni sect in Iraq face the same problem, meaning there is a direct correlation between [the Iraqi situation and] the marginalization of the Sunna in the Gulf countries, and their marginalization in Bahrain in particular. Thus there is a dangerous challenge facing Bahraini society in the increased role of the Shi‘a [and] the retreat of the role of the Sunna in the Bahraini political system; namely, the problem concerns the country’s [Bahrain’s] national security, and the likelihood of political regime change in the long term by means of the present relationships between Bahrain’s Shi‘a and all the Shi‘a in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia’s eastern region, and Kuwait.<sup>23</sup>

To combat this long-run existential threat posed by Bahrain’s Shi‘a acting in concert with their co-sectarians across the Gulf region, the paper advocates that the state undertake a multifaceted program designed to dampen the group’s influence in Bahrain and its ability

<sup>20</sup> “A Proposal to Promote the General Situation of the Sunni Sect in the Kingdom of Bahrain”, 2005, unpublished paper dated September 1, in *ibid.*, pp. 184-202.

<sup>21</sup> Translated from *ibid.*, p. 185:

“... وجود أجنحة غير معلنة لدى تيارات شيعية إلى السيطرة على المجتمع البحريني، وقد تمتد طموحاتها لتولي مقاليد الحكم في البلاد”

<sup>22</sup> Translated from *ibid.*:

“... التغيرات التاريخية التي تشهدها منطقة الخليج العربي من سقوط النظام العراقي السابق”

<sup>23</sup> Translated from *ibid.*, which reads:

تتميش السنة وتراجع دورهم في البحرين هي جزء من مشكلة إقليمية أكبر حيث يواجه أبناء الطائفة السنية في العراق نفس المشكلة، مما يعني أن ثمة علاقة طردية بين تهميش السنة في بلدان الخليج، وتهميشهم في البحرين تحديداً. وبالتالي فإن هناك تحدياً خطيراً يواجهه المجتمع البحريني مع تزايد دور الشيعة مع تراجع دور السنة في النظام السياسي البحريني خصوصاً أن المشكلة تتعلق بالأمن الوطني للبلاد، واحتمال تغيير نظامها السياسي على المدى الطويل من خلال العلاقات القائمة بين شيعة البحرين، وكل من الشيعة في إيران والعراق والمنطقة الشرقية من مملكة العربية السعودية والكويت.

to elicit sympathy and support from audiences abroad. As summarized in the proposal, the overall “goals of the project” would be threefold: to

1. Protect the gains achieved by the national reform project launched by His Majesty the King;
2. Protect the Kingdom of Bahrain from any external interference from regional powers in which the role of the Shi‘a has increased, such as Iraq and Iran, and this in order to prevent the destabilization of the [Bahraini] political system; and
3. Protect the Sunni sect in the Kingdom of Bahrain from any Shi‘a attempts at marginalizing [it] in the political system or within Bahraini society in general.<sup>24</sup>

In pursuit of these aims the document urged the Bahraini government toward a coordinated plan of, *inter alia*, increased naturalization of Sunnis; infiltration of Shi‘a non-governmental organizations; establishment of parallel civil society groups including the still-extant Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society<sup>25</sup> in order to counter the effective media campaigns of Shi‘a activists in- and outside the country; and a Shi‘i-to-Sunni religious conversion program.

It was this agenda, then, for which the clandestine network of Sunni politicians and officials led by Sh. Aḥmad bin ‘Aṭiyatallāh Āl Khalīfa was allegedly organized. As evidence of this central claim, al-Bandar’s report documents bribes and payments totaling more than one million Bahraini dinars (nearly \$2.7 million) dispersed amongst various members of an electronic group, a media group, an intelligence team, a newspaper, and other organizations launched under the initiative. This documentation, consuming more than 80% of the report, includes photocopies of hundreds of receipts, letters, bank statements, and account sheets, and outlines the personal relationships linking those involved. Bahrain’s 2006 parliamentary elections, then only one month away, were consumed by talk of the “Bandargate” scandal.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Translated from *ibid.*, p. 186, which reads:

١. حماية المكتسبات الوطنية التي حققها المشروع الإصلاحي الذي دشنته جلالة الملك المفدي.

٢. حماية مملكة البحرين من أية تدخلات خارجية من القوى الإقليمية التي زاد دور الشيعة فيها، مثل العراق وإيران. وذلك للحيلولة دون زعزعة استقرار النظام السياسي.

٣. حماية الطائفة السنية في مملكة البحرين من أية محاولات شيوعية للتهميش في النظام السياسي أو داخل المجتمع البحريني بشكل عام.

<sup>25</sup> Compare the coverage and tone of their English-language website (<http://www.bhrws.org/eng>) with that of, e.g., the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights. The Bandar Report contains several documents pertaining to the establishment and funding of the Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society. See *ibid.*, pp. 162-169.

<sup>26</sup> For still more on al-Bandar’s report, see Zara Al Sitari, 2006, “The Al Bander report: what it says and what it means,” Bahrain Centre for Human Rights. Available at: <<http://www.bahrainrights.org/node/528>>.

Like the allegations three years earlier of improprieties in granting citizenship and of electoral fraud, however, the revelations unleashed with al-Bandar's exposé could sustain only a temporary outburst of public protest due to a swift government containment effort. Indeed, of those alleged to have been involved in the plot, it seems that the only political casualty was al-Bandar himself, who upon the release of his report was promptly dismissed, arrested, and then deported. Sh. Aḥmad bin 'Aṭiyatallāh, on the other hand, to the universal consternation of Bahrain's Shi'a, retained his position as Cabinet Affairs Minister and head of the secretive Central Informatics Organization. In fact, some Bahraini contacts suggest he even gained influence within the Āl Khalīfa family for his perceived role in managing the Shi'a threat. Whatever the case, public discussion of the matter would be abruptly cut short following a press gag order handed down less than two weeks after the story began to appear in newspapers, at a time when even the pro-government *Gulf Daily News* was forced to lead with the dramatic page-one headline: "BANDARGATE!"<sup>27</sup> Crowds of protesters marched in "anti-political naturalization" rallies through Bahrain's posh Seef shopping district, and one hundred prominent political figures (nearly all of them Shi'is) composed a public petition to King Ḥamad "appealing to [him] to give a public speech to the common citizens to answer all those dangerous queries and to announce what will be done in regards to that sectarian plan and secret organization that is implementing it."<sup>28</sup> But no official government comment—to say nothing of an address by King Ḥamad—would be forthcoming.

Debate surrounding al-Bandar's report, in particular the "dangerous query" as to the ultimate source of the funds made available to Shaykh Aḥmad and his associates, would be confined to private dīwāns until the swearing in of the new parliament the next year. Just four months into the session in May 2007, members of al-Wifāq, which reversed its previous electoral boycott to capture 17 of 40 seats, walked out of the chamber in protest when their resolution to question the Cabinet Affairs Minister twice failed to muster the additional four votes needed to pass. Prompted by newly-published government data indicating a dramatic jump in the number of Bahraini citizens (an increase, according to critics, that could not have

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<sup>27</sup> "BANDARGATE!," 2006, *Gulf Daily News*, 24 September. See also the in-depth follow-up, "BANDARGATE: The unanswered questions," *Gulf Daily News*, 27 September.

<sup>28</sup> A full English translation of the letter can be found at Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, 2006, "A Petition From A Hundred Prominent Figures And Activists To The King Of Bahrain," dated 13 October. Available at: <<http://www.bahrainrights.org/node/610>>.

FIGURE 3.I. A photograph posted to a popular Shi'a discussion forum depicts the "Massive Popular Anti-Political Naturalization Rally" of January 30, 2009.



occurred without mass naturalization<sup>29</sup>), al-Wifāq MPs tried again to quiz Shaykh Aḥmad in March 2008. Their action provoked a three-week-long stalemate that ended with the hasty replacement of a longstanding parliamentary legal advisor with another who ruled the entire motion unconstitutional. "Parliament's future is blurred," remarked al-Wifāq MP Jawād Fayrūz, "a crippled and unworthy institution, which pokes its eyes with its own fingers."<sup>30</sup> Bandargate, and with it a decisive chapter in the ongoing controversy of *al-tajniīs*, was over.

<sup>29</sup> According to the head of the leftist National Democratic Action Society (جمعية العمل الوطني الديمقراطي, or Wa'ad), Ebrāhīm Sharīf, the published figures indicated that around 60,000 people had been naturalized since 2001. This was based on the average population growth rate for the preceding years, which was around 2.4%. As the new data implied a growth rate of about 4.2% from 2001 to 2007, they suggested an annual naturalization rate of approximately 1.8%, or about 9,000 citizens per year. All of whom are assumed to be Sunnis, as no Shi'a are known to have been naturalized since several thousand second- and third-generation stateless individuals (*bidūn*) of Persian origin were granted citizenship in 2001 as part of Ḥamad's reforms. Personal interview, May 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Muḥammad Al-Ālī, 2008, "Session disrupted over 'Bandargate,'" *Gulf Daily News*, 12 March. Available at: <<http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=211314>>.



FIGURE 3.2. Another photograph posted to the same forum shows protestors holding a banner saying “NO to Naturalization: A Betrayal of the Nation”



### A Myth of Their Own: The Bahraini Shi'a as an Imagined Fifth Column

Whether one inclines to believe al-Bandar's account or dismisses it as an elaborate, calculated forgery, the viewpoint it embodies, the notion that the Shi'a today represent a transnational political front to be necessarily managed and contained by Arab governments, is certainly no fiction. Even the seemingly inflammatory "Proposal to Promote the General Situation of the Sunni Sect in Bahrain" says little more than did, for example, Jordan's King 'Abdallāh II in a now-famous interview with the *Washington Post* in December 2004. Therein he characterized the newly-empowered Shi'a of Iraq as part of a menacing "Shiite crescent" that could extend all the way from Syria and Lebanon through Iraq and Iran and into the Arab Gulf. Such a bloc of dominant Shi'a governments and movements would constitute a destabilizing force, King 'Abdallāh complained, from which "[e]ven Saudi Arabia is not immune. ... It would be

a major problem. And then that would propel the possibility of a Shiite-Sunni conflict even more, as you're taking it out of the borders of Iraq."<sup>31</sup> The news media and several prominent books, exemplified by Vali Nasr's 2006 work *The Shia Revival*, offered extended elaborations of King 'Abdallāh's broad anxiety, weaving disparate events across the Islamic world into a coherent narrative of coordinated Shi'a emboldening that included a combative new Iranian president hell-bent on erecting a military nuclear program; an Iraqi state transforming into an Iranian puppet; a confident Hizballāh in Lebanon and Ḥamas in Gaza, each prepared to take on the Israeli army using sophisticated hardware from Iran; and a set of Arab Gulf states looking increasingly vulnerable to Shi'a irredentism. As Louër tells, the power of this "Shiite crescent" concept "no doubt lay in its ability to sum up in a short formula the spontaneous perception of the Shias by the majority of the Sunnis: people united by a corporate solidarity beyond national borders and subservient to Iranian expansionism" (2008, 244).

In the case of Bahrain, this interpretation has prevailed since long before its unofficial coinage by the Jordanian king. It was during an interview with an outspoken Salafī preacher and member of Bahrain's parliament that I would hear the clearest articulation of what is essentially the Sunni counterpoint to the Baḥārnah's "myth of golden age" describing the pre-modern history of Bahrain. Shaykh Jāsim al-Sa'īdī, a well-known imām who delivers regular Friday sermons at a mosque near his home, agreed to meet me at his weekly public *majlis*<sup>32</sup> despite expressing some hesitation to our intermediary that as an American, and given his reputation for controversial remarks, I may attempt to misrepresent his words. Indeed, he was fresh off a showdown in which members of al-Wifāq nearly succeeded in stripping him of parliamentary immunity in preparation for prosecution in response to a sermon in which he reportedly "compared some Shiites of Bahrain, without naming their sect, to 'the sons of Zion bent on acts of destruction and sabotage.'"<sup>33</sup> It was for comments such as these that Sh. al-Sa'īdī was deemed "too extreme" to stand for elections even with the main Salafī society al-Aṣālah, itself not known for its liberality, and so in 2002 and again in 2006 he ran and won as an independent. As it happened, however, no manipulation of his words would be necessary.

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Robin Wright and Peter Baker, 2004, "Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Elections from Iran," *Washington Post*, December 8.

<sup>32</sup> مجلس, pl. مجالس: lit., "a council"; a weekly public audience held by a notable.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Habib Toumi, 2009, "Call to lift Bahrain parliamentary immunity over offensive remarks," *Gulf News*, February 26. Available at: <<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/call-to-lift-bahrain-parliamentary-immunity-over-offensive-remarks-1.53433>>.

The gathering, a popular forum attended that evening by at least 50 to 75 guests, was organized on this occasion around a particular piece of legislation—the contentious “Sunni Family Law” that codified important religious regulations in civil law<sup>34</sup>—agreed earlier that day after much argument, delay, and most importantly government pressure for its passage. Sh. al-Sa’īdī, known to be a staunch supporter of the king, offered a sermon in defense of the measure on religious grounds, arguing that civilian codification of the Islamic Law is implied by the very writing of the Qur’ān, prophetic Sunna, and Ḥadīth. Any notion to the contrary, he railed, is an obvious “influence of secularism, whose forces continue to wage war against Islam.” He then fielded several questions from the audience, to which the ultimate answer was that in such matters people ought to follow their religious leaders; and that if the latter are wrong, they will be held to account for it in front of God. Sh. al-Sa’īdī next handed the microphone to another imām seated next to him to deliver some concluding “news items.” The first involved the reading of a report by a Bahraini scholar revealing the “true” historical populations of Sunnis and Shi’is in Bahrain by region, statistics that demonstrated to what extent the Shi’a are wrong in asserting that they have always been a majority and that it was *they*, not the Sunnis, who have achieved numerical superiority as a result of naturalization. (Sh. al-Sa’īdī, incidentally, is known by many Shi’a as “*shaykh al-mujannasīn*,” “shaykh of the naturalized ones,” for his tacit political and ideological support of *al-tajnīs*.) The audience was made to show shock and consternation at these data as the speaker read aloud the respective populations of Sunna and Shi’a across various parts of Bahrain. Then, by way of closing, and one assumes not coincidentally, the speaker noted that the following day there was planned an anti-naturalization meeting to be held in the Sunni neighborhood of ‘Arād and organized by Ebrāhīm Sharīf of Wa’ad—a Sunni no less—and members of al-Wifāq. God willing, he said, it would be cancelled (i.e., by the Interior Ministry), but, if it went ahead, those present should plan to protest the site and also block access to it with their cars.

After the *majlis* I thanked Sh. al-Sa’īdī for the opportunity to speak with him and said that I hoped one of my questions, his take on the recent royal pardon of 178 Shi’a detainees arrested over the course of the previous months’ rioting, had not been too sensitive. At this he opened a discussion about those who had been imprisoned and then released, calling them “terrorists” doing “the work of Iran.” The Shi’a, he explained, smuggle others across the Gulf

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<sup>34</sup> As implied by the name, the law applies only to Sunni Muslims. Shi’i religious leaders, incidentally, several of whom then sat in parliament, were able to resist the promulgation of a corresponding Shi’a Family Law.

from Iran illegally in large boats. Once they arrive, they are taken to *mawātim*<sup>35</sup>—holy places that the police cannot enter—until they have been able to learn sufficient Arabic to apply for Bahraini citizenship under the pretext that they had been residing in the country for decades but never naturalized.<sup>36</sup> “أمرٌ جداً خطيرٌ”—“A very dangerous situation,” I agreed as I left.

Here, then, we find the basic outline of the Sunni rejoinder to the Shi‘i political history of Bahrain: in the first place, historically speaking the Baḥārnah have never formed a majority of the island’s population, having come close to doing so only recently and through decades of immigration from the Iranian mainland, al-Qaṭīf and al-Ḥasā’, Iraq, and Kuwait; thus their complaints of political under-representation and discrimination, made on majoritarian and nativist grounds, are ill-founded and disingenuous. Moreover, even if Shi‘is did outnumber Sunnis today in Bahrain, why should they expect an equal or greater share of state benefits while they show themselves to be lesser citizens? Their highest religious leaders, who by their own doctrine also wield supreme political authority, are not Bahrainis or even Arabs but Persians living in Iran and Iraq, and yet they still somehow see fit to interfere in the internal affairs not of Bahrain only but those of Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Kuwait, and so on. So if the government is afraid to let the Shi‘a serve in the military or sit on the *dīwān al-malikī*, who can blame them? They have already attempted a *coup* once, with Iranian help, and continue to burn tires, kill police officers, and in general cause trouble for society every day. And all this despite a generous if measured program of reform announced by the king in 2001 that has improved the political situation dramatically over the past ten years: Bahrain now has elections, a parliament, many Shi‘a ministers—what more do they want?

One might suppose that such a combative response to the Shi‘a “myth of golden age,” one that echoes precisely the suspicion of the “Proposal to Promote the General Situation of the Sunni Sect in Bahrain” and the idea of a united “Shi‘a crescent,” would be confined to the personal views of noted “extremists” like Sh. al-Sa‘īdī. Yet far from being an outlying opinion, this perception of the Shi‘a—at a minimum, of Shi‘a political dissidents—as constituting a veritable fifth column in Bahraini society I found to be common among ordinary citizens and Sunni political elite alike. Another Salafī parliamentarian and member of al-Aṣṣālāh, Dr. ‘Alī

<sup>35</sup> مَوَاتِم sing. مَأْتَم lit., “funeral houses”; known elsewhere as *ḥusayniyyah*, in Bahrain the *ma’tam* is a Shi‘a center of learning and of worship on special religious occasions or holidays, especially during the month of Muḥarram. Most *mawātim* are copiously decorated with images of the Imām Ḥusayn; popular *marāji’* such as Ayatāllāhs Rūḥallāh Khomeini and ‘Alī Khāmene‘i; and large banners embroidered with Qur’ānic verses or exaltations.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *supra*, the conclusion of note 29.

Aḥmad, spoke of a similar link between the foreign ambitions of Iran and its assumed agents abroad, saying,

As for the polarization in the country, this is the result of Iran's using some people in Bahrain for its own interests—that is, to achieve Iranian control of Bahrain. Before the Iranian Revolution there were no sectarian problems in the country. I attended school with and lived next to Bahraini Shi'a and didn't even know it because [the situation] wasn't politicized. If democracy in Bahrain becomes divided along sectarian lines such as in Lebanon or even in Iraq, then the situation will be bad.<sup>37</sup>

Here the explicit words of Sh. al-Sa'īdī are replaced by the more diplomatic “some people in Bahrain,” a standard euphemism whose meaning is betrayed by the subsequent reference to “Bahraini Shi'a.” The implication in any case is clear: there are Shi'is inside Bahrain working at the behest of the Iranian government and in pursuit of the same agenda that has driven it for the past three decades, namely the exportation of the Islamic Revolution to the Arab Gulf countries in general and to Bahrain in particular.

A less restrained version of this argument was articulated by yet another (now-former) member of parliament from al-Aṣṣālah, 'Īsā Abū al-Faṭḥ, who when asked to name the biggest challenges currently facing the country concluded by saying,

The other big challenge, facing not only Bahrain but the entire Gulf, is Iran, which wants to recreate the Persian Empire throughout all of the Gulf areas from Kuwait to the UAE. It will be a nightmare for everyone as Iran continues to grow in power, and the U.S. will be too afraid to do anything about it.<sup>38</sup>

Yet despite these Iranian pretensions, I noted, the Gulf seems still to enjoy more security and stability than other Arab countries. How can this be? True, he admitted,

However the terrorist attacks that do occur are mostly done by fighters trained in Iran. How do most of the Taliban fighters and Arabs in Afghanistan get there? Just pay 2,000 dollars and they will get you a ticket to Tehran and from there you can go to Afghanistan. Even the 9/11 attacks—those Saudi hijackers were trained in Iran. ...

Even the Bahraini Shi'a train in Iran or with Iranian help in Lebanon with Ḥizballāh. During the 2006 war between Israel and Ḥizballāh, the Bahraini Interior Ministry went to Lebanon to try to evacuate all the Bahraini citizens stuck there, and they found a lot of Bahrainis fighting with Ḥizballāh. The Bahraini Ministry of Immigration found that in just one year over 200,000 Bahrainis traveled to Syria for “vacation.” Ḥizballāh is also buying any land it can get in the GCC countries with money from Iran; and Iran's money

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<sup>37</sup> Translated from the Arabic. Personal interview, May 2009.

<sup>38</sup> This and the following quotation are from a personal interview, April 2009.

in turn comes from the *khums*<sup>39</sup> [one-fifth] tax that Shi'a pay to the mullahs in Iran. We in al-Aṣālāh tried to introduce a 2.5% *zakāt*<sup>40</sup> tax for Bahrain in parliament, and the Shi'a [i.e., in al-Wifāq] opposed it; yet they pay 20% of their incomes to Iran. And then they complain of being poor. If they are so poor, how can they afford to pay?

Rhetoric of this kind, which has in common the belief that some or all of Bahrain's Shi'a are knowing pawns in a larger game of Iranian geopolitics, blindly following whatever orders arrive from Tehran or Qom, has more recently escalated to ascribe to them a new role: that of principal graduated from mere agent. It is one thing, in other words, to say of the Shi'a community in Bahrain that it is exploited as an instrument of domestic subversion by a scheming regime in Iran, serving the latter's political agenda as its local representative; but it is more serious to suggest that it constitutes in its own right an independent center projecting political destabilization elsewhere, that the Shi'a of Bahrain are themselves a sort of Iran vis-à-vis the rest of the Arabian Peninsula—no longer students but the teacher. Yet this is precisely the accusation that surfaced in August 2009 in a controversial interview with the aforementioned Sh. al-Sa'īdī printed in the Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ* (*The Middle East*). In it, he claimed to have learned that members of al-Wifāq had met secretly inside Bahrain with high-level representatives of 'Abd al-Malik al-Ḥūthī, the leader of a Yemeni separatist group comprised of members of the same extended family whose ongoing conflict with the Yemeni government, portrayed in the Arab and Western media as a "Shi'a insurgency," had just resumed for a sixth iteration. Sh. al-Sa'īdī revealed,

We have confirmed information that members of the al-Wifāq bloc met in Bahrain with key political figures with strong ties to the Yemeni Ḥūthīs, and this but a few months prior to the outbreak of the [sixth Ṣa'adah] war between the Yemeni government and the Ḥūthīs, which raises a lot of questions about the connection linking the Ḥūthī insurgents in Yemen and the Wifāqīs in Bahrain.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The *khums* (خُمْس), literally "one-fifth," in fact applies only to a family's yearly surplus income or to a windfall gain. This Shi'a-specific tax, considered an unlawful "innovation" (بدعة) by Salafīs and other Sunnis, typically is paid to a particular *mujtāhid* or *marja'*, though of course not all of these will be "mullahs in Iran."

<sup>40</sup> زكاة, or alms-giving to the poor, is common to Sunnis and Shi'a and is one of the five Sunni "pillars of Islam."  
<sup>41</sup> Salmān al-Dawsarī, 2009, "البحرين: نائب رئيس اللجنة التشريعية في البرلمان يتهم الوفاق بتحركات مشبوهة مع الحوثيين في اليمن," ["Bahrain: Vice-Chairman of the Legislative Committee in Parliament Accuses the al-Wifāq Opposition of 'Suspicious Dealings' with the Hūthīs of Yemen"], *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, 24 August. Available (in Arabic) at: <<http://www.aawsat.com/print.asp?did=533078&issueno=11227>>. Note that the author, fittingly, is a member of al-Dawāsir of *al-tajnīs* fame, and that *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ* has a clear pro-Saudi bias. The original quotation reads:

لدينا معلومات مؤكدة بأن أعضاء من كتلة الوفاق قد التقوا بشخصيات سياسية بارزة ذات علاقة وثيقة بالحوثيين اليمنيين وذلك قبل اندلاع الحرب بين الحكومة اليمنية والحوثيين بأشهر قليلة في البحرين، الأمر الذي يطرح الكثير من التساؤلات عن العلاقة التي تربط بين المتمردين الحوثيين في اليمن والوفاقيين في البحرين.

The meeting, he continued, took place

with the knowledge that this Ḥūthī figure has a [criminal] past and a suspicious history in the Yemeni Republic, where previously he was arrested on the back of visits and conferences he participated in [inside] the Iranian Republic, which embraces the errant Ḥūthī [i.e., Twelver Shi‘i] ideology and funds it through an octopus-like network of cells distributed throughout all of the Gulf and Arab countries.<sup>42</sup>

Sh. al-Sa‘īdī’s insinuations are noteworthy on several accounts. First, they reinforce the idea of a transnational Shi‘a front united in religious solidarity. Why, otherwise, would the Shi‘a of Bahrain, represented here by al-Wifāq, have any connection to a few thousand individuals living in an isolated mountainous region of northern Yemen? Indeed, if anyone should be suspected of taking an interest in their cause, a more natural choice would be the sizeable Ismā‘īlī Shi‘a community concentrated but a few miles away across the Saudi border in Najrān.<sup>43</sup> That Bahrainis would sympathize with their Shi‘a brethren in Yemen, one is left to infer, is a foregone conclusion owing to their inviolate bond as co-sectarians. This view is further implied by some pregnant wordplay that draws a clear parallel in Arabic between the “Ḥūthīs in Yemen and the Wifāqīs in Bahrain” (“الحوثيين في اليمن والوفاقيين في البحرين”), where the adjective “insurgents” (“المتمردين”), almost always used in the media to describe the Ḥūthīs, can be interpreted as applying to both them and *al-Wifāqīn*, a non-standard eponym used here as an epithet suggestive of an ideological cause.

The other, more remarkable aspect of these claims by Sh. al-Sa‘īdī is that, rather than accuse al-Wifāq of meeting with the Ḥūthīs as an intermediary of Iran, he credits the group with operating its own agenda outside Bahrain, interfering in the affairs of its neighbors and fomenting Shi‘a irredentism as a veritable Iran-in-miniature on the Arabian mainland. He even goes so far as to imply that al-Wifāq had some role in the resumption of hostilities in Yemen, seeing as how their meeting with Ḥūthī representatives took place “but a few months prior to the outbreak of the war,” a coincidence, Sh. al-Sa‘īdī hints coyly, that “raises a lot of questions about the connection linking the Ḥūthī insurgents in Yemen and the Wifāqīs in Bahrain.” Such allusions to direct assistance—and military assistance at that—in aid of Shi‘a

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* The original quotation reads:

مع العلم بأن هذه الشخصية الحوثية لها سوابق وتاريخ مشبوه في الجمهورية اليمنية حيث سبق أن اعتقل على خلفية زيارات ومؤتمرات شارك فيها الأخير في الجمهورية الإيرانية التي تحتضن الفكر الحوثي الضال وتموله في شبكة أخطبوطية وخلايا موزعة في جميع الدول الخليجية والعربية.

<sup>43</sup> And, in fact, the Saudi Ismā‘īlīs have often been accused by the Yemeni government of just that. See, e.g., “The Shi‘a of Saudi Arabia Call for Better Rights in the South; and Yemen Accuses Iran of Trying to Create a Shi‘a Mini-State”, 2009, *Ma’rib Press*, May 27. Available (in Arabic) at: <<http://marebpress.net/nprint.php?lng=arabic&sid=16782>>.

factions abroad are almost always reserved for Iran proper, whom the Yemenis routinely criticize as a matter of course for its alleged part in prolonging the conflict in Ṣa‘adah. That the same role should be ascribed now to al-Wifāq, the most moderate if largest of Bahrain’s numerous Shi‘a political societies, betrays a grave apprehension on the part of Bahraini and Gulf Sunnis, including Sunni royal families, for whom the danger is not al-Wifāq *qua* political bloc but al-Wifāq as a symbol of the increasing Shi‘aization of the Arab Gulf.

Yet even Sh. al-Sa‘īdī was loath to spell all this out explicitly, at least not publically, in the manner of the Jordanian king and his evocative “Shi‘a crescent.” For this, however, we may turn to Yemen’s president of 33 years, ‘Alī ‘Abdallāh Ṣāliḥ, himself a Zaydī Shi‘i and also not one to mince words. In a primetime interview with the Saudi news channel *al-‘Arabiyyah* in March 2010, at a time when the sixth war for Ṣa‘adah threatened to spiral into a full-scale regional conflict after the Ḥūthī rebels crossed into Saudi territory, Ṣāliḥ was asked about his knowledge of foreign support for the group. In the first place, he began, the attempt to drag Saudi Arabia into the war is proof in itself of outside involvement, since the Ḥūthīs would not have taken such a step on the basis of military considerations alone. Said Ṣāliḥ,

I am certain that more than 80 to 90 percent of it is foreign encouragement, in order for countries of the region to settle their scores with Saudi Arabia, to preoccupy Saudi Arabia, and to send a message to Saudi Arabia via these Ḥūthī elements. [I say this] because we don’t have a problem with [‘Abd al-Malik] al-Ḥūthī—al-Ḥūthī ... what problem is he? [But] al-Ḥūthī now has a foreign ideology: let’s say, [one] based on Twelverism, [while] he is Zaydī. We in Yemen are Zaydīs and Shāfi‘īs. We have no problem [between us]. The entry of the Twelver sect, introduced to the Ḥūthīs [from outside], is something new ... something new. We aren’t against the Twelver sect ... the Shi‘i [sect] anywhere. We aren’t against [them]. We believe in a diversity of sects. But we reject its being imposed on our country, or [that] we [should] adopt it. Because for thousands of years in Yemen we’ve been Shāfi‘īs and Zaydīs; and there is no dispute between Shāfi‘īs and Zaydīs. And this new, errant sect will pay ... say, will pay the price [for promoting sectarian strife].<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> From “In His Interview with ‘Meet the Press’ with Dāwud al-Sharyān, the Yemeni President: ‘There is not a Single American on Our Soil, and I Won’t Run for the Presidency,’” 2010, televised interview with *al-‘Arabiyyah*, 19 March. The video and a partial transcript can be found at: <<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/03/19/103454.html>>. The excerpt quoted above, which spans from about 9:50 to 11:00, corresponds to the following speech:

أنا أكد بأنه أكثر من ثمانين في المئة الى تسعين في المئة هي دفع خارجي، ولذلك لتصفية حسابات دول المنطقة مع المملكة العربية السعودية ... لإشغال السعودية وتوجه رسالة الى المملكة العربية السعودية فيا هذه العناصر الحوثية. لأن إحنا ما عندنا مشكلة مع الحوثي ... الحوثي ... شو يشكله هو مشكلة؟ الحوثي هو عنده مؤدلج أدلجة خارجية ... حلينا أن نقول لتبنى على الاثنى عشرية، وهو زيدي. إحنا في اليمن زيود وشوافع، ما عندنا مشكلة. الدحول المذهب الاثنى عشرية الى الـ... التّعطي الى الحوثيين شيء جديد ... شيء جديد. إحنا لسنا ضد المذهب الاثنى عشرية ... الشيعي في ... في ... أي مكان. إحنا لسنا ضده. نؤمن بتعددية المذاهب. لكن نرفض فرضها على بلادنا أو نتبنا ... هذا مرفوض جملة وتفصيلا لأننا من آلاف السنين في اليمن شوافع وزيود، ولا خلاف بين الشوافع والزيود. هذا مذهب ضال جديد بمدفوع ... تقول بمدفوع ثمة.



When asked directly to name the “countries of the region” known to be giving the Ḥūthīs such “foreign encouragement,” Ṣāliḥ hesitated but went on to acknowledge that some of these “foreign elements” (“جهات خارجية”) can be found in “Saudi Arabia, London, and America.” He explained,

They are countries and individuals ... individuals in countries ... in most of the countries in the region. They are all those who sympathize with the Ḥūthīs in the name of Twelverism ... in the name of Shi‘ism. So any Shi‘a in the region, they are the ones that sympathize with and raise some funds to support the Ḥūthīs.<sup>45</sup>

Here, then, are the words that Sh. al-Sa‘īdī in his reproach of al-Wifāq intended but could not say: the “Wifāqīs” have forged a relationship with the Ḥūthīs of Yemen not by chance, not because they are by nature a meddling group that tends to interfere in other countries’ affairs, but because they identify and commiserate with them as fellow Shi‘a, as a people that itself complains of political repression borne of religious discrimination. In this respect Ṣāliḥ’s seemingly out of place reference to Ḥūthī supporters in “London and America” is instructive, as the physical remoteness of both locations contrasts markedly with their importance as new global centers of Shi‘a activism,<sup>46</sup> giving the impression that wherever one finds a Shi‘i, whether in Dammām or Detroit, there he finds a friend of all other Shi‘a, a loyal soldier and when he senses any of his brood in trouble runs instinctively to their defense. This “new, errant sect” that has infiltrated Yemen, upsetting “thousands of years” of religious harmony, has arrived therefore not from Iran only, the most obvious party looking to “settle [its] score” with longtime Wahhābī rival Saudi Arabia, but through the help and support of Shi‘a everywhere, where “Shi‘a” is understood to refer specifically to Twelver Shi‘is.<sup>47</sup> That members of al-Wifāq might be involved, it would seem, is just the tip of the iceberg.

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<sup>45</sup> From *ibid.*, at approximately 14:30 to 15:00. The original speech is as follows:

هي دول وأشخاص ... أشخاص في دول ... في أكثر دول المنطقة. ... هي كل من هو يتعاطف مع الحوثيين باسم الإثنا عشرية ... باسم الشيعة. فأَيُّ شِيعَةٍ فِي الْمُنْطَقَةِ هُمَ الَّذِينَ يَتَعَاظِفُوا وَيَجْمَعُوا بَعْضَ التَّرَعَاتِ لِدَعْمِ الْهُوثِيِّينَ.

<sup>46</sup> London in particular is known as a “foremost centre of Shia activity” worldwide. It was in here, for example, that the Islamic Bahrain Freedom Movement (IBFM) was founded in 1982. An offshoot of the Bahraini branch of al-Da‘wa, itself active in London following crackdowns in Iraq and in the Gulf throughout the 1970s and 80s, the IBFM continues to be a thorn in the side of the Bahraini regime, maintaining a popular bilingual website ([www.vob.org](http://www.vob.org)) and electronic newsletter called “Voice of Bahrain” (“صوت البحرين”) that catalogue Āl Khalifa abuses. The group’s real success, however, lay in its effective targeting of English-speaking audiences, which it does by lobbying individual politicians, organizing parliamentary and congressional hearings on Bahrain, and working with human rights bodies like Amnesty International and the UN. Cf. Louër (2008, 202-203, 266).

<sup>47</sup> For reasons that are not exactly clear to me, neither the president nor ordinary Zaydīs would call themselves “Shi‘a,” a fact that has occasioned many an argument with Yemeni friends.

Whether or to what extent such recriminations reflect reality—whether the claims of Sh. al-Sa‘īdī, Yemen’s president, Jordan’s king, or the other Bahraini parliamentarians quoted above—we need not consider. The decisive point is the degree of apprehension itself, this palpable unease among Sunni leaders and citizens alike at what is perceived as the rebirth of Shi‘a oppositions across the Arab Gulf in a seemingly coordinated political mobilization that harkens back to the early days of the Islamic revolution. As Louër (2008, 245-263) persuasively argues, the supposed “Shi‘a revival,” accordingly, is as much an artifact of changing threat perceptions as it is a result of the Shi‘as’ own initiatives. She writes (258),

[I]t is through the representation that it aroused in the Sunni psyche and not through the modification of the Shia agenda that the regional context played a role in moving the Sunni/Shia relation. For the Shias, the new context only adds to the tools at their disposal to continue with their previous strategy. It is the Sunnis who now feel under siege.

Hence, at a time when the entire region has at least one eye fixated on Iran, the undisputed if inadvertent winner of the U.S.’s “New Middle East” project, Gulf ruling families recognize a new domestic menace in those seen to be divided by competing national and religious-cum-political loyalties. If the 1990s was the decade for most Gulf monarchies to combat Sunni Islamic radicalism, the present era is one of managing the Shi‘a, including Shi‘a frustrations, as a way of checking Iranian influence.

While this reprioritization has led to notable developments in the two countries other than Bahrain with substantial Shi‘a populations—a policy of what Louër (245) calls “relative religious recognition” in Saudi Arabia and in Kuwait through the enlargement and reform of specialized Shi‘a religious courts in the former and the creation in the latter of a special Shi‘a department in the Ministry of Religious Endowments (*Waqf*), in both cases administered by prominent Shi‘is—Bahrain has found itself unable to arrive at a similar compromise with its Shi‘a citizens. In the first place, the Shi‘a of Bahrain face less religious discrimination at the institutional level than those of Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, there being, for example, already separate Mālikī (Sunni) and Ja‘afarī (Shi‘i) sections of the governing *sharī‘ah*, religious courts, and *waqf*.<sup>48</sup> More importantly, though, unlike in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait the Bahraini Shi‘a do not represent an irritating minority but a full demographic majority, and one for whom,

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<sup>48</sup> This is not to say that both traditions are represented in all areas. Notably, few Shi‘a are employed in the Ministry of Education, which continues to reject calls to include Ja‘afarī perspectives in the Mālikī-dominated school curriculum. For more, see “International Religious Freedom Report: Bahrain,” 2009, *U.S. Department of State*, October 26. Available at: <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127345.htm>>.

as Louër remarks, “a politics of merely religious recognition cannot substitute for a genuine democratization policy” (255). In the case of the Baḥārnah, then, the demand is not for *religious tolerance* as practitioners of a particular faith but for *political equality* as members of a religious group that happen, for the most part, to share the desire for greater political influence on the basis of history and of majoritarianism. And this, of course, the Bahraini authorities have shown no intention of conceding.

If we interpret such post-2003 developments in standard *rentier* theory terms, we easily perceive the extent of the dilemma facing Bahrain’s rulers. If we say, in other words, that what occurred in the cases of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait was essentially a political buy-off—an agreement to provide desired public goods to their respective Shi’a communities (and some private goods for those who would be newly employed) in return for relative political calm—we see how it is that Bahrain arrived at the alternate route of even greater political repression. In short, its leaders were caught in a situation in which the very act of political concessions, meant to pacify Shi’a opponents and preclude their turning to Iran for support of their cause, would itself be seen as opening the door for increased Iranian influence. That is, from the standpoint of the Āl Khalīfa, the intermediate goal of quieting the Shi’a—which could only be bought by agreeing to their demands of major constitutional reform, an end to political naturalization, and equal government employment, including in the military and power ministries—is necessarily at odds with the primary objective, indeed the motivation for the entire exercise, which is to protect against Iranian expansionism. Given the choice between a Shi’a population that is politically agitated but militarily impotent and one that is politically satisfied but strategically better-positioned within the government apparatus, the Bahrainis have decided that it is better to have the former, which while it may be driven closer to Iran could never, even with Iranian help, pose an existential threat to Āl Khalīfa rule of Bahrain, particularly so long as the U.S. Fifth Fleet remains docked at Mīnā’ Salmān. In Bahrain, it turns out, overall regime stability entails not political tranquility but its opposite.

### **Ethnic Conflict and the Limits of Rentierism**

As we return then to Bahrain *qua rentier* state in light of Bahrain *qua* ethnically-divided state, it is clear in what ways the latter must revise our understanding of the former. Mutual ethnic suspicion—the feeling among Shi’a of political and possibly (if those behind *al-tajnīs* had their

way) physical disenfranchisement at the hands of foreign Sunni occupiers and their co-ethnic supporters; and the perception among Sunnis that the so-called “Baḥārnah” are more akin to Iranians than to loyal Bahraini citizens—such mutual antagonism demonstrates how a class-based politics can indeed emerge in *rentier* societies, supplanting individual jockeying for royal patronage as the dominant political *modus operandi* in the rent-based state. Whereas typically citizens of allocative economies have incentives to compete independently for a greater personal share of state benefits, in countries with a significant ethnic cleavage, such as exists in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, in-group solidarity combines with between-group rivalry to produce a system in which two broadly-delineated factions—an out-group opposition and nominally pro-government ethnic in-group—contend for the benefaction of the ruling tribe. More than just their relative economic allocations, however, the two parties vie to influence the very nature of the state itself, including their relative stations therein, for fear of ethnic domination by the other (cf. Chapter 2). Thus we have observed in the case of Sunnis and Shi‘is in Bahrain how the key battles of politics are fought not along distributive lines but along the very defining lines of the regime: the nation’s history and cultural identity; the bases of citizenship; and the conditions for government and military service. To be sure, in a society where it is a matter of significant debate whether the true citizen is a “Baḥ-RAY-nī” or a “Baḥ-RĀ-nī,” it is clear that the *rentier* politics of allocation has taken a back seat to an ethnic struggle over group status and national ownership; that, to recall what Horowitz says of ethnically-divided societies, “the symbolic sector of politics looms large” (1985, 187).

It is equally apparent, under such circumstances, why the traditional pressure-releasing levers of the *rentier* state here lack the effectiveness they might otherwise have. If one recalls the discussion of Chapter 2, he will remember that allocative states are said to educe political quiescence through two basic mechanisms—high government employment and non-taxation. In the case of Bahrain, however, ethnic division serves to handicap the *rentier* government by at best making these options less efficient, at worst by taking them off the table altogether. “Every citizen” of a *rentier* state, Beblawi (1990, 91) assures us, “has a legitimate aspiration to be a government employee; in most cases this aspiration is fulfilled.” Though his qualification “most cases” is ambiguous, it is certain that one instance in which this aspiration will *not* be fulfilled is when a government harbors suspicions of disloyalty with regard to a prospective employee. And what if these suspicions extend to a full majority of a country’s indigenous population? Then the state must fill shortfalls in the ranks of the police, the military, and the

power ministries, those pertaining directly to the use of force, with individuals whom it does trust, namely “non-partisan” foreigners imported specifically for this purpose.<sup>49</sup> In short, this state begins to look much like Bahrain and other Arab Gulf regimes: employment itself being a political tool, those whose political allegiance is doubted are systematically excluded from the public sector; and for every one individual undeserving of service, governments reason, a dozen can be recruited from Yemen, Syria, or Baluchistan.

In moderation this situation may pose few problems for regimes, begetting nothing more than a small percentage of the population who must look to the private sector for work or who perhaps remain unemployed and individually disaffected. But extend it to half of all citizens, indeed the very half that would tend toward government opposition even in the best of economic conditions, and one quickly runs the risk of systematic dissent by members of the excluded out-group. In a survey published in September 2003 of thirty-two ministries and the state-run University of Bahrain, the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights found that

of 572 high-ranking public posts ... Shiite citizens hold 101 jobs only, representing 18 per cent of the total. When the research was conducted, there were 47 individuals with the rank of minister and undersecretary. Of these, there were ten Shiites, comprising 21 per cent of the total. These do not include the critical ministries of Interior, Foreign [Affairs], Defense, Security, and Justice.<sup>50</sup>

More recently, the same BCHR revealed in a March 2009 report that according to a list of over 1,000 employee names obtained from Bahrain’s National Security Apparatus, a mere 4% were Shi’a, while 64% were “non-citizens, most of Asian nationalities.”<sup>51</sup> Finally, without digressing too far yet into the results of my own study, not a single Shi’i of those randomly

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<sup>49</sup> This presumes that members of the extended ruling family, of tribal allies, and of prominent houses, which together will form at least the top echelons of bureaucracy, are numerically insufficient to fill all posts.

Military reliance upon ostensibly non-aligned foreigners is a common practice in the Arab world generally. Khuri (1980, 51 ff.) documents the use in Bahrain of so-called *banī khḍayr* (“the green stock”)—Sunnis with “no clear tribal origin: Baluchis, Omanis, ‘stray’ Arabs who lost tribal affiliation, and people of African origin”—since the time after the Āl Khalifa arrival. He describes them as “essentially a ‘coercive apparatus’ whose task was to execute the will of the ruler,” a feared group who “carried sticks and never hesitated to strike those who refused to acquiesce to their orders.”

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in International Crisis Group, 2005, “Bahrain’s Sectarian Challenge,” *Middle East Report N° 40*, May 6, p. 8. Available at: <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iran-gulf/bahrain/040-bahraains-sectarian-challenge.aspx>>.

<sup>51</sup> The individual accused of leaking this list of names, himself an employee of an unspecified ministry, was soon imprisoned and purportedly “offered ... a bargain in return for his release, on the condition that he signs a statement in which he accuses both Nabeel Rajab – President of the BCHR – and women activist Layla Dishti – administrator of [www.bahrainonline.org](http://www.bahrainonline.org) [a popular Shi’a opposition web forum where the names first appeared] – that they incited and funded him to publish those names” (BAHRAIN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS 2009). That the authorities would go so far to discredit it lends some evidence as to the authenticity of the list.

FIGURE 3.3. Cartoons posted to a popular Shi'a Internet forum depict:

“an unemployed Bahraini” hindered by “the government + political naturalization”;



“a university graduate” falling into the trap of “discrimination,” “the government,” “wasṭah,” “corruption,” and “political naturalization”;



“unemployed graduates” being consumed by “sectarianism,” “administrative corruption,” and “wasṭah” in government ministries; and



a representative of the “Ministry of Sectarianism,” giving “government jobs” to “those of the Sunni sect” and “clerical positions” to “those of the Shi'i sect”



selected for interview as part of my representative national survey identified himself as an employee of the police or armed forces.<sup>52</sup> Compare this to 13% of the 131 total working Sunni households that gave occupational data. In sum, even a cursory look at patterns of public sector employment in Bahrain is enough to show that, at least in this *rentier* state, we must revise the familiar line that “every citizen has a legitimate aspiration to be a government employee” by adding, parenthetically, “so long as he is not a member of that *other* sect.”

<sup>52</sup> Two questions ask the respondent’s and his/her spouse’s industries of employment. “He works in the armed forces, the public security [police]”—“يعمل في القوات المسلحة، الأمن العام”—is the exact wording of one of the choices.

Of course, one need not rely in these conclusions on the likes of anonymous Internet reports prepared by the opposition. For one can readily glean as much from public officials themselves, who while they deny any specific cases of ethnic-based discrimination seem in their comments to agree with the general sentiment. In an interview with *The New York Times* in March 2009, the chairman of Bahrain's parliamentary committee on foreign affairs, defense, and national security, 'Ādal al-Ma'āwdah of al-Aṣālah, replied when asked about Shi'a claims of exclusion from the armed forces, "There are so many riots, burnings, killings, and not even one case is condemned by the Shiites. Burning a car with people inside is not condemned.<sup>53</sup> How can we trust such people?"<sup>54</sup> My own contacts echoed this reasoning. Sāmy Qambar, a (now-former) parliamentarian from Bahrain's other Sunni political society, the pro-government and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Islamic National Tribune (جمعية المنبر الوطني الإسلامي), hereafter al-Manbar), told me in regard to the Shi'a complaints,

[S]adly, the Shi'a feel that they are a majority of the population and therefore entitled to have a greater presence in the government and army and police, while the government feels these posts should be filled with people who they can trust and who are loyal to them, not with people from the opposition.

Even top government officials will make the same acknowledgment. Ḥasan Fakhrū, then and current minister for industry and commerce, admitted during the anti-naturalization protests following the release of the Bandar Report, "There is a lack of confidence between the ruled and the rulers. It is not unusual. There is a small percentage who do not have loyalty to the state. Sometimes, for good reasons, you have to be careful who you employ."<sup>55</sup>

And careful the Bahrainis are. Applicants for "sensitive" positions within the police, military, and bureaucracy are required to include a "certificate of good history and conduct" ("شهادة حسن السيرة والسلوك")<sup>56</sup> issued by the police to verify that an individual has no prior record of arrest or detention, including for political reasons (BAHRY 2000, 134). A difficult hurdle to

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<sup>53</sup> The allusion here is to a case then very much in the news about a man killed reportedly after his vehicle was hit by a Molotov cocktail thrown by Shi'a rioters in the southern village of Ma'ameer. Seven were arrested and later handed life sentences in July 2010 under Bahrain's broadly-defined (and -criticized) "anti-terrorism" law of 2006. See Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, 2010, "Bahrain: life Sentences against 7 activists in the 'Ma'ameer' Case after an Unjust Trial," July 11. Available at: <<http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3175>>.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Michael Slackman, 2009, "Sectarian Tension Takes Volatile Form in Bahrain," *New York Times*, March 28. Available at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/28/world/middleeast/28bahrain.html>>.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Bill Law, 2007, "Riots Reinforce Bahrain Rulers' Fears," *Sunday Telegraph*, July 22. Available at: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1558179/Riots-reinforce-Bahrain-rulers-fears.html>>.

<sup>56</sup> More literally, a "certificate of good biography and conduct." Note that Bahry's translation and transliteration mistakenly invert the final two words.

overcome for one accustomed to near-daily street demonstrations for the past three decades, the requirement has the effect of discouraging if not precluding Shi'a applicants for all but a limited set of "non-sensitive," low- and intermediate-level positions within the government ministries. Yet, more significantly, Fakhrū's words summarize well the basic problem of public sector employment as seen from the standpoint of Bahrain's rulers, or indeed from that of any regime distrustful of a certain subsection of its population: absent a reliable way to distinguish a good prospective employee from one lacking "loyalty to the state"—for even a clean past is no guarantee save for that one is prudent—does one rather exclude the class of "disloyals" at the greatest possible level of abstraction (say, on the basis of ethnicity) but with the largest margin for error? or attempt to fish them out individually with the knowledge that one or another may slip by? In its choice between a trawler and a butterfly net, the Bahraini government has settled decidedly upon the former instrument, casting a general web of suspicion upon all Baḥārnah as a certain class of citizen, and accepting the collateral damage of whatever "loyals" may be inadvertently caught up in the mesh. It is this collateral damage, this lost opportunity for the allocative state whereby potential regime allies are made into political opponents by the inefficient use of its greatest organizational advantage—the capacity for abnormally high public employment—it is, again, this foregone co-optation due to ethnic distrust that is a central feature of the dysfunctional *rentier* state.

As for the second half of the classic formula for *rentier* buy-off, the so-called "taxation effect" whereby untaxed citizens of allocative states are left with no objective (read: economic) basis for political participation, it is equally dubious whether this actually obtains, in ethnically-divided Bahrain or elsewhere. The first problem with this line of reasoning is that, historically speaking, it is simply inaccurate. For there were prior to the discovery of oil in Bahrain indeed taxes levied on citizens—that is, on Shi'a citizens—and there certainly was no expectation of political benefits in return. Of the various forms of tax and tribute collected by the pre-oil state, the most prominent were a poll tax, a water tax for irrigation, and some say a tax for organizing Shi'a processions during 'Āshūrā'. The former two types, Khuri explains (1980, 48), "were collected only from the Shi'a, on the grounds that they did not serve in the military. It should be added that they were not invited to do so." On the other hand, he continues, "towns, such as al-Hidd and Rifa, where the tribal allies of Al-Khalifa lived, were not taxed. Highly placed, rich merchants did not pay taxes; they presented 'gifts,' delivered to the ruler in person, to his intimates, or sometimes to his foreign guests" (52). For Bahraini Shi'a, the



taxes and tax collectors—the latter “regarded with suspicion and disgust” (48)—were so hated that when they were poised to be abolished as part of sweeping institutional reforms initiated by the British in the early 1920s, the Shi‘a seized the opportunity to express their frustration with the onerous burden, voicing strong support for the reforms and officially petitioning for British protection against the rulership of Āl Khalīfa. They even went so far as to compose a long poem in praise of the local British political agent, Major Daly, and the reforms (92-93). The result was to prompt island-wide rioting and attacks upon Shi‘a villages by Sunni tribes, including by members of Āl Khalīfa, and ultimately the forced abdication of Shaykh ‘Īsā bin ‘Alī, who opposed the reforms, in favor of his more conciliatory son Ḥamad (94-95). Khuri tells how many a tax collector found it necessary after the reforms to relocate from the Shi‘a villages to the city of Manama, in order to escape as they said the “burden of the past” (48).

From a historical standpoint, therefore, the idea that taxation in Bahrain or the other Arab Gulf monarchies should necessarily have some relation to political rights or benefits, that they would inevitably follow the same state-building pattern exhibited by Western Europe, is a simplification. In fact, if one is impressed by anything from Khuri’s account of taxation in pre-oil Bahrain it is the degree to which the island’s politics seem not to have fundamentally changed since the day of the Āl Khalīfa arrival: the Shi‘a, whether to preserve the elite status of the regime’s Sunni tribal allies or out of sheer mistrust, were systematically excluded from the nascent state apparatus, including most notably the military.<sup>57</sup> In return, the Baḥārnah not only bore the economic burden of subsistence living on feudal estates, but were forced in addition to pay tribute to the Āl Khalīfa and their allies, who administered the lands as absentee landlords. It was thus on the basis that they were the victims of discrimination, not because they connected taxation with political privileges, that the Shi‘a came out so strongly in favor of the British administrative reforms. Political conflict, in other words, was as now one between a Sunni ethnic in-group and Shi‘a ethnic out-group, rather than an economically-powerful merchant class and politically-dominant ruling class as described other pre-oil Arab Gulf states. The latter case, for example, is the subject of Crystal’s (1986) well-known study of Qatar and Kuwait, where she concludes that in each instance a formidable merchant class was content to exit politics in return for non-taxation and an economic monopoly in non-oil sectors of the *rentier* state. The Shi‘a of Bahrain, of course, have made no such concession, not after the end of taxation and of the feudal estate system, nor following the new economic

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 49.

opportunities afforded by the post-oil state. At least in Bahrain, taxation and demands for “representation” have been so far inversely related.

Thus we arrive at the other, more basic problem with this taxation thesis: theoretically it conflates two distinct matters: the motivations of governments and those of citizens. So while Vandewalle’s (1987, 160) *rentier* principle of “no representation without taxation” may be able to explain the conditions under which governments are less likely to demand “taxation,” it says little about when citizens are likely to demand “representation” apart from rule out a single possibility, namely when they wish to have a say over how their taxed income is spent by the state. Under what circumstances and to what extent individuals might be spurred politically on some non-economic basis, we are left to wonder. In the end, therefore, that untaxed citizens are, *ceteris paribus*, less likely than taxed citizens to insist on government accountability is not a model of how politics operates in rent-dependent states but a model of how it does *not* operate, and one that makes all the more baffling the current push among Bahrainis and other ordinary Gulf Arabs, untaxed as they are, for a greater role in political decision-making. As expressed by Bahraini parliamentarian ‘Īsā Abū al-Faṭḥ,

Nowadays in Bahrain ... about the past 3 years ... everyone is worried about politics—too much about politics and not enough about their own business. I go to the dentist, or a doctor comes to my *majlis* ..., and the first thing he does is starts to ask me what I think about some political issue. I tell him, “Worry about your patients, and leave the politics up to politicians.” But no one minds their own business anymore. It is like this now in all the GCC countries, whereas three years ago it was never like this. Even in Saudi [Arabia] they are talking politics—three years ago you would never hear that.

This revealing response was elicited by a direct question about whether an interest in political participation would exist among Bahraini and Gulf citizens irrespective of their economic situation. While Abū al-Faṭḥ skirts around the root cause of the surge in political awareness that he describes, Sāmy Qambar from al-Manbar does not. Even if everyone were rich, he begins in response to the same question,

I think Bahrain would still face the issue of how things should be divided within the society between Shi‘a and Sunna. When you asked at the beginning what is the biggest issue facing Bahrain, this is one of the biggest issues. The Shi‘a feel they have a right to power and influence in the society, and a role in the government. This is especially so since the Iranian Revolution. The influence of the Shi‘a in Iraq and Iran is very great in Bahrain, and the country needs to know how to deal with and cooperate with them.

Shi'a in- and outside the official channels of politics echo this view. Khalīl al-Marzūq, the deputy head of al-Wifāq at the time of writing, explains that

If the economic situation were better in Bahrain—or at least equal between the Sunna and Shi'a—the sectarian problem would become less but still wouldn't disappear altogether. This is because sectarianism has become part of the national or individual consciousness here in Bahrain since the Iraq war brought empowerment to the Shi'a there. Even post-Iranian Revolution the sectarian thinking reached a certain height, but it was never this bad.

'Abd al-Hādī al-Khawājah, founder of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and prominent regime critic then only recently-released from prison for a fiery oration at the height of 'Āshūrā' (and today serving a life sentence for his part in the February 14 uprising), tells a similar story:

Before I left Bahrain [for exile in Denmark] when I was 17, ..., there was no “sectarian problem.” The political conflict at that time [i.e., the 1960s and 70s] was between socialist groups amongst each other and with the government. Then following the Iranian Revolution and more recently the Shi'a empowerment in Iraq, the feeling in Bahrain is that they should not be marginalized anymore in the face of a ruling Sunni minority.

While the fervor surrounding Arab nationalism may have seemed to overshadow Bahrain's “sectarian problem” for a time, still it is clear from accounts of the period that animosity still burnt brightly between the two sides even prior to the upheavals in Iran and Iraq. Al-Rumaihi, writing in 1976, says of the Shi'a of his native Bahrain (26),

[their] beliefs, whilst strongly held, are at variance with the interpretation of Islamic teaching according to the orthodox sect of Islam, the Sunna, who in Bahrain refer to the Shia as Rafidi (‘the Rejectors’<sup>58</sup>). Both points of view are fanatically held by their proponents and these differences of interpretation created the tensions which led to social and political conflict.

Herein, then, lies the basic trouble with the “no taxation, so no representation” thesis, and indeed with the extant *rentier* state paradigm more generally. Without ever saying such explicitly, it purports to understand *why* people become interested in politics, *what* motivates citizens to support a certain government or oppose it: economics is the key, other individual-level factors like ethno-religious identification or personal piety afterthoughts if treated at all. Whereas, in fact, we know quite little about the determinants of individual political behavior in the context of the Arab Gulf, or how such behavior might be influenced by country-level

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<sup>58</sup> That is, rejectors (روافض sing. رافضي) of the “rightful” successors of the Prophet in favor of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib or, less specifically, of (Sunni) Islamic leadership and authority.

variables such as demography, ethnic relations, and so on. To do so would mean, *inter alia*, to actually ask individuals. And to gain access to everyday citizens of Gulf countries one faces many practical and political barriers; to gain access to hundreds or thousands spread across an entire nation even more obstacles; and to ask them how they feel about their ruling families one should keep one's suitcase and passport at the ready.

Even absent a systematic empirical analysis of mass political orientations, however, which we shall reserve for the following chapter, it is clear based on the preceding examination of ethnic conflict in Bahrain that we do know at least one thing about the bases of political action and opinion in the Arab Gulf: namely, that they are not limited to the economic. On the contrary, from the nativist claims of the Baḥārnah and their fear of falling victim to Sunni-sponsored demographic engineering, to Sunni suspicions of an Iranian-backed "Shi'a revival" that threatens to overrun the entire region, political calculation in this Gulf *rentier* state is not dictated by mere economic self-interest. Instead, for fear of ethnic domination by the other, the material rewards citizens might expect for remaining quiet are insufficient to deter them from seeking an active role in political life, which they do not as individual state benefit-maximizers but as members of a larger coalition seeking influence and control over the state itself, and this precisely over against the rival group. Ultimately, therefore, non-taxation as a means of political pressure-relief for *rentier* regimes is, like that of government employment, vulnerable to one fatal circumstance: when strictly economic concern is not the fundamental driver of political action; when the wealthy, corpulent, and politically-disinterested "oil sheikh," the standard caricature of the Gulf Arab both within the Middle East and in the West, does not accurately represent the average citizen, who is neither rich nor poor, is politically-agitated, and, above all, is either a Sunni or a Shi'i.

Yet there remains, in addition to the ethnic-based political mobilization described thus far, a final source of political inspiration in the Arab Gulf *rentier* state that until now has gone untreated: that of religion—of Islam—itself. To this point, the line of argument connecting Bahrain's Sunni-Shi'i conflict to higher-than-expected levels of popular political involvement has not appealed to anything intrinsic about the two conflicting groups themselves; the latter could just have well been left-handers competing with right-handers, or Tamil-speakers with Sinhalese-speakers, for domination of the state and for their relative shares of its benefits. But in fact the Sunni-Shi'i conflict in Bahrain and across the Arab world more generally is not an ethnic conflict merely but one overlapping with a 1,300 year-old religious schism precipitated

itself by a dispute over political succession, a division that as such provides ample historical fodder for those looking to rally the troops for a political cause. This religious dimension is foreshadowed already in al-Rumaihi's preceding description of Bahrain's social problems as stemming primarily from the Baḥārnah's "rejection" of orthodox Islam. Elsewhere he makes the point even more explicit, saying, "The root cause of the problem [is] the conquest of the Shia by the Sunna tribes of the mainland. The latter regarded Shi'ism as a form of heresy, and consequently missed no opportunity to oppress the original Shia inhabitants" (25). We may doubt, of course, whether the social or political outcome of the Āl Khalifa capture of Bahrain would have differed qualitatively had the native population been Sunni, yet as to the role of religion *per se* in stoking the flames of the ongoing political conflict there is no question.

### **Shi'ism and the Politics of Religion**

In Bahrain one may readily distinguish Sunni from Shi'i from any number of details: speech and accent (the former pronounce *k*, e.g., the latter *ch*); facial hair and dress (Salafis keep long, unkempt, often henna-dyed beards, while Shi'a rarely do); given (Khalīfah versus Ḥusayn, Īsā versus 'Alī) and, if all else fails, family name. Yet among the most straightforward methods is to observe the unmistakable adornment of private property.<sup>59</sup> Shi'a houses, all clustered together in a tight formation, fly black or multicolored flags bearing the name of the Imām Ḥusayn and other Shi'a martyrs, eulogizing, "يا حسين يا شهيد"—"O Ḥusayn! O Martyr!"; Sunni houses, with their gated entrances and garden courtyards, fly the red and white national flag of Bahrain. Vehicles driven by Shi'a are decorated invariably with an embossed sticker decal bearing the words "اللهم صلّ على محمد وآل محمد"—"O God, bless Muḥammad and the House of Muḥammad." This line, with which they conclude each prayer and whose invocation of the family of the Prophet flies in direct defiance of Sunni practice, reiterates that they are indeed the Shi'a: *shī'ah* 'Alī, "the partisans of 'Alī" and the hereditary line of the Prophet against rival claimants to the Islamic caliphate.<sup>60</sup> For their part, Sunnis don their vehicles with the familiar

<sup>59</sup> Though out of place here, worth noting in this regard is the prominent use of newspaper subscription boxes as indicators of political allegiance. An *Al-Wasaṭ* (*The Center*) box, for example, affixed to many a Shi'a home, is a clear indicator of political opposition and adherence to the pro-Shi'a line. On the other hand, *Al-Ayām* (*The Days*), *Al-Bilād* (*The Country*), and *Akḥbār al-Khalīj* (*The Gulf News*), are all safe pro-government choices, the first liberal-leaning but owned by a former minister of information turned advisor to the king; the latter two close to the prime minister. For a more hard-line statement one can opt for *Al-Waṭan* (*The Nation*), close to the royal court and often inflammatory.

<sup>60</sup> And, as if to be even more emphatic in this point, the vowel in the word آل (Āl) that refers to the "family" of the Prophet is elongated for several seconds for each of three recitations, producing an affecting meter in which every syllable is deliberately uttered: "allāā / ḥum ṣal-lī / wa sal-lim / 'alāā muḥammad / wa āāāāāāāāāā muḥammad."

Muslim profession of faith and first pillar of Sunni Islam, the *shahādah* bearing witness that “لا اله إلا الله و محمد رسول الله”: “There is no God but God, and Muḥammad is God’s Messenger.”

During the holy month of Muḥarram, however, in particular the first ten days building up to ‘Āshūrā’ proper, this religious ornament reaches a new height, crossing the line from private to public and hence drawing the ire of many Sunnis for whom such advertisement represents unnecessary embellishment and even provocation. Black banners with brightly-colored, intricately-embroidered calligraphy, usually in the Persian-style *nasta‘līq* script, sprawl across the streets of Shi‘a neighborhoods, recounting the martyrdom of Ḥusayn and brought to Bahrain, I was told, from Iraqi makers in Karbalā’ itself. So too hang building-size portraits of local religious figures such as Sh. ‘Īsā Qāsim, Bahrain’s highest *marja‘*, or source of religious emulation for Shi‘is, as well as decidedly non-local ones like Ayatāllahs Rūḥallāh Khomeini, ‘Alī Khāmene‘i, and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh, not to mention Ḥasan Naṣrallāh. To commemorate the occasion one may purchase a Ḥizballāh flag, Khomeini t-shirt (which in 2008 were entirely sold out after the first night), or for the younger revolutionary even a Khomeini jigsaw puzzle. Such overt symbolism does not go unnoticed by the government.

Following the 2007 festivities, which saw the brief arrest of three opposition leaders for anti-government speeches, Bahrain’s Minister of Interior, Sh. Rāshid bin ‘Abdallāh Āl Khalīfa, spoke out against the “politicization” of the ‘Āshūrā’ ceremonies, which he said had been “used to excite people through spreading false rumours, inciting hatred, belittling national achievements and seeking to erode unity.” The occasion, he continued, “was also used to put up negatively-worded banners and posters and flags that indicated a lack of national loyalty and allegiance.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, one “negatively-worded banner” that particularly incensed the government and Sunnis had appeared the previous year under the sponsorship of the Islamic Enlightenment Society (جمعية التوعية الإسلامية), the front of Iraqi al-Da‘wa in Bahrain.<sup>62</sup> A supposed quotation from a sermon by the aforementioned Sh. ‘Īsā Qāsim, the large banner, distributed across various parts of Manama, recalled the very historical event behind ‘Āshūrā’ itself: the decisive Battle of Karbalā’ of 680 AD in which the Prophet’s grandson Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, along with much of his family and supporters, was martyred by a military detachment

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Habib Toumi, 2007, “Minister: Don’t use religious events to fuel sectarianism,” *Gulf News*, February 15. Available at: <<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/minister-don-t-use-religious-events-to-fuel-sectarianism-1.161278>>.

<sup>62</sup> That is, حزب الدعوة الإسلامية, or “Party of the Islamic Call,” that originated in 1957 in Najaf and today comprises one-half of the United Iraqi Alliance bloc led by Prime Minister Nūri al-Mālikī. For more information on the history of al-Da‘wa in Iraq and the activities of its Bahrain wing, see LOUËR 2008, 83-88 ff.

FIGURE 3.4. A banner featuring Ayatallāhs Khomeini and Khāmene'i hangs from the Mu'min ("Believer's") Mosque as drummers proceed through the Manama Sūq on January 5, 2009. Their sashes bear the words "lovers of al-Ḥusayn."



sent by the second ‘Umayyad caliph Yazīd I. Our ubiquitous commentator Sh. Jāsīm al-Sa’īdī publically denounced the banner as “a flagrant call to sectarian division in Bahrain.” A writer for *Al-Waṭan* called it “a blatant violation of the constitution and a shocking incitement to sectarianism taking place months before historic elections in Bahrain and at a critical time when the region is dealing with the Iranian nuclear crisis.” The message, she warned, “is an

attempt to provoke Sunnis into a counter-reaction that could lead to a dangerous situation.”

The banner read:

The Battle of Karbala is still going on between the two sides in the present and in the future. It is being held within the soul, at home and in all areas of life and society. People will remain divided and they are either in the Hussain camp or in the Yazid camp. So choose your camp.

For the nation’s Sunnis, this “flagrant,” “blatant” provocation seemed nothing short of, as the reporter from *Al-Waṭan* put it, a “declaration of war by calling upon Bahrainis to choose between the Sunni camp and the Shiite camp.”<sup>63</sup> Its timing, moreover, coinciding as it did with heightened domestic and international tensions, was from their point of view either very inopportune or downright suspicious. Whatever the case, it evidenced at a minimum “a lack of national loyalty and allegiance” by those who would subscribe to such Manichean thinking. Yet notwithstanding the rawness of its expression, a contrast to the Sunni tendency toward euphemism (“some groups,” “certain people”) when discussing the inter-communal conflict, the banner does little more than paraphrase the fundamental lesson, past or present, of ‘Āshūrā’: there exists in the world just rule and unjust rule, and it is incumbent upon the lovers of the good and of the just to resist the evil oppressors, even if that means by material and bodily sacrifice; for just as the Imām Ḥusayn gave his life before he would give allegiance to Yazīd, so too must all who are subjugated be prepared to forfeit earthly enjoyment for the true reward in the hereafter. In the words of one leading Shi‘i political activist and theologian known commonly by the title *al-ustādh* (“the professor”), “The history of Shi‘ism is the history of opposition against Sunni powers.”<sup>64</sup>

Here as elsewhere one is indebted to Khuri (1980, 73-74), who provides a vivid account of the Bahraini adaptation of the ‘Āshūrā’ ritual, the particulars of which, as he notes, “need not and do not correspond to the facts of history.” He tells,

The ritual begins on the first day of Muharram and ends on the thirteenth, reaching its climax on the tenth, the day Imam Husain was slain by the Omayyad troops.

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<sup>63</sup> All quoted in Habib Toumi, 2006, “Bahrain’s Islamist MP calls for removal of sectarian banners,” *Gulf News*, February 19. Available at: <<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-s-islamist-mp-calls-for-removal-of-sectarian-banners-1.225726>>.

<sup>64</sup> Personal interview with Sh. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Ḥusayn, Bahrain, May 2009. Incidentally, it is perhaps for such sentiments as this that his popular website, [www.alostad.net](http://www.alostad.net), was blocked by Bahrain’s Ministry of Information in September 2010. The site contains mosque sermons from 1994 and 2001 to 2003 (from 1995 to 2000 he was in prison), a widely-circulated “Tuesday meeting” address (“لقاء الثلاثاء”), and transcripts of his many religious works.



Between the first day and the sixth, the mullahs [preachers] relate Husain's military expedition against Yazid from his starting point at Medina until he arrived in Karbala by way of Mecca. They prepare the audience for the battle, which, according to the ritual, comes on the seventh day. In these six days the mullahs expound on the uncompromising stand of Husain on matters of principle. This refers specifically to his right to the caliphate, according to Shi'a traditions. The mullahs refer to the many temptations for Husain to abandon his cause, temptations he utterly rejected. They believe Husain was chosen to be a martyr; he knew in advance that he was "destined" to lose the battle and be slain at Karbala. His martyrdom was meant to demonstrate to the faithful that "giving away one's blood for a right is an act of eternal justice," as one mullah put it. The determination of Husain to fight in spite of the temptations not to do so or of his prior knowledge of the fateful result are strongly projected in the ritual against the vulnerability of human-kind, who easily fall victim to temptations and mundane matters: material gain, positions of power, worldly pleasures, the fear of loss of wealth.

Although it revolves around the person of Husain, the ritual of 'Ashura' is depicted as a form of group sacrifice, the catastrophe of an entire family—men, women, and children. Only the infant Zain al-Abidin survived the battle; the men and children were slain as martyrs, the women were taken captive. ... Of the many male relations of Husain (about seventeen) who took part in the battle, only three receive elaborate treatment in the ritual. ... In the historic battle of Karbala these men were all slain in one day, the tenth of Muharram, but in the ritual each is assigned a specific day.

The preachers who relate these events, which they do in a *ma'tam* or "funeral house" designed specifically for the purpose<sup>65</sup> and fitted with enormous loudspeakers, Khuri divides into two types: those who focus on the accepted "historical" events of the battle rather than alter the narrative "to accommodate ... the rising sociopolitical circumstances of the day"; and "those who take the battle as a symbol signifying the right of rebellion against injustices, wherever and whatever they be" (76). The latter, as one might expect, he says have been better represented in times of political turmoil, as they were when I attended in 2008-2009. In fact, it was difficult to perceive many of the former category. For both types, though, the goal is the same: to arouse unrestrained grief in one's listeners, if only temporarily. As Khuri says, "Public opinion asserts that a mullah who cannot make his audience cry is 'no good.' [But as] the ritual comes to an end, and it often lasts about an hour, those who have been shedding real tears quickly shift back to ordinary moods." Crying at the death of the martyrs, it is held, "assures the faithful of a place in paradise."

With the murder of Husayn's stepbrother al-Qāsim on the eighth night of the ritual, however, there commences an even more emotionally- and politically-charged feature of 'Āshūrā': mass street processions in which organized groups of mostly young men march in

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 35.

FIGURE 3.5. ‘Azzah processions move through central Manama; below, with sangal



unison, beating their chests rhythmically and chanting religious poems that glorify the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) and the Shi‘a martyrs. Known locally as ‘azzah, or “mourning,” the processions are led by a eulogist (*rādūd*) who composes and recites the chants, the most famous of whom in Bahrain is Sh. Ḥusayn al-Akraf, who played a central role in the Shi‘a uprising of the 1990s by developing new chants “in which he connected the drama of Karbala and that

of the Bahraini martyrs, Husein's fight against Yazid and the Bahrainis' fight against the Al-Khalifa" (LOUËR 2008, 208). For this he was imprisoned for five years, released only after the general amnesty of 2001. Among al-Akraf's poems, all of which are readily available online complete with video footage from Bahraini 'Āshūrā' celebrations, are "Liar! O [Bahraini] Law!" ("كذاب يا قانون"), "Where's Saddam?" ("وين صدام؟"), a gibe at the late Iraqi dictator and warning to the Āl Khalīfa, and "Oh How You Oppressed Us!" ("ظلمتينا وكم كنتي ظلومة"), which on YouTube has been viewed more than 200,000 times since 2007 and carries the subtitle, "God Help the Bahrainis and God Damn the Āl Khalīfa" ("ساعد الله البحرينيين ولعن الله ال خليفة").<sup>66</sup>

On the tenth day, the day of Ḥusayn's murder, 'Āshūrā' reaches its climax. It is this day with which outside observers are most familiar for its gruesome images of self-flagellation often broadcast in the Western and Sunni Arab press. This act of *taṭbīr*, called "*ḥaydar*"<sup>67</sup> in Bahrain, is performed only by the most enthusiastic of the cortèges, Sunnis condemning it outright and the Shi'a themselves divided between those who deem it (or, rather, whose *marāji'* have ruled it) forbidden, permitted, or even obligatory.<sup>68</sup> We turn again to Khuri (77):

One procession advances at the sound of drums with the participants beating their back with bundles of wire (*sangal*), or with chains whose ends are tied to sharp bits of steel that continually make slight wounds around the waist, gradually biting into the outer layer of the skin. The members of another procession, wearing white robes, beat their closely shaved heads with swords, chanting rhythmically, "Haidar, Haidar ...," referring to Imam Ali. The blood that splatters over their bodies is intended to illustrate the horror of life when injustice prevails in the world. ...

Between the processions there march a number of separate small groups, each depicting a particular scene of the battle. These scenes include stray horses or camels covered with sheets of green and black cloth, indicating that their murdered knights belonged to the House of Ali; or huge paintings of Husain being slain by al-Shimr or grasping his infant son to protect him from the enemy; or a young child in grief mounted on a horse treading lonely on earth, in reference to Zain al-Abidin, the only male child to survive the battle. ...

<sup>66</sup> See "ظلمتينا وكم كنتي ظلومة للبحرينيين" ["'Oh How You Oppressed Us!' for the Bahrainis"]. Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aS6eu1RfTc>>.

<sup>67</sup> حيدر, or "lion," is one of the nicknames of the Imām 'Alī and is a common given name among Bahraini Shi'is.

<sup>68</sup> This intra-Shi'a disagreement gives occasion to highlight another important aspect of 'Āshūrā', which if less central to the present argument bears mentioning nonetheless. Just as the ritual reiterates the magnitude of the Sunni-Shi'i schism, so too does it serve to throw into stark relief the many factions of Shi'ism in Bahrain: the Persian Shi'a vs. the Baḥārnah; adherents of Khomeini's *vilāyat-e faqīh* (rule by the "Guardian Jurist") doctrine vs. the Shirāzīs (cf. LOUËR 2008 for more on the "transportation" of this longstanding Najaf-Karbalā' rivalry to the countries of the Gulf); and the supporters of al-Wifāq vs. those who eschew formal political participation. All of this intra-communal enmity, finally, is formalized in the institution of the *ma'tam*, whose membership revolves primarily around such ethnic, political, and jurisprudential distinctions, and which compete against each other for the largest and most elaborate 'azzah processions, which they organize. On this see KHURI 1980, all of CH. 8.

FIGURE 3.6. Dressed in red and faces painted black, members of Yazīd’s army carry on pikes the decapitated heads of Husayn and his stepbrother, as captured members of his family, dressed in green, follow in shackles. Camels carry the green coffins of the martyrs.



On the tenth day these processions start early in the morning, about eight o'clock, and continue until one or two in the afternoon. The line of participants in Manama, when I observed them in 1975, continued about four hours. When the processions end, each wounded participant retreats to his own “funeral house” to wash his blood away by “Husain’s water,” believed to heal the wounds instantaneously. After washing their wounds the participants are offered a free meal, called *‘aish al-husain* (literally the rice of Husain), to which other people are invited.

Thus far we have limited our consideration to the political symbolism of the formal, ritualistic aspects of ‘Āshūrā’, whether the elaborate decoration that spills into public space, the mullahs’ recitation of the Battle of Karbalā’, street processions and passion plays, or the

FIGURE 3.7. Bystanders look on as a ḥaydar procession moves through the Manama Sūq on the morning of January 7, 2009.



performance of *‘azzah* and *ḥaydar*. Yet there remains another, more strictly political side of the commemoration in which political rather than religious leaders take the opportunity to address their constituencies, aided by the overflowing emotion and sense of eternal betrayal and injustice stirred up over the course of these thirteen days. It is here that the usual dynamic of *‘Āshūrā* is reversed, and instead of the religious making use of the political to reinforce its spiritual lessons, the political makes use of the religious—and to good effect.

Of course, not everyone uses the occasion to “excite people,” “incite hatred,” “belittle national achievements,” and “seek to erode unity,” as the Bahraini government would say. One session I attended styled itself a forum for inter-faith dialogue, bringing together Sunni and Shi’i imāms along with an Orthodox Christian bishop to discuss, respectively, the similarity

of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Imām Ḥusayn, and Jesus, who were said to share in common the venerable qualities of justice, self-sacrifice, divine guidance, and so on. At the same time, though, it was difficult to overlook the enormous television screen positioned directly above the tent where the discussion was being held, tuned conspicuously to a ‘Āshūrā’ address by Ḥasan Naṣrallāh broadcast live on Ḥizballāh’s pan-Shi‘a satellite television station, *Al-Manār* (*The Beacon*). In it he cursed the despicable, Yazīd-like Israelis for their then-ongoing military offensive in Gaza, reminding one that for all the efforts at spiritual reconciliation, the realities of domestic and regional politics were never far away.

For those looking to make a real political statement, the venue of choice is the early morning of the tenth of Muḥarram, in the wake of the almost hysterical mourning at the death of Ḥusayn earlier that night and preceding the much-awaited performance of *ḥaydar* later on after sunrise.<sup>69</sup> Since the mid-1990s it is an anomaly if at least one political activist is not arrested for an ardent anti-government speech at this the zenith of ‘Āshūrā’ and of the entire month of Muḥarram. The year I attended the outcome would be no different. The keynote speaker was rumored to be ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Khawājah, who shortly before 2:30 AM duly arrived outside his namesake mosque in the Manama Sūq district. Despite his being from a prominent Shi‘i family that gives its name to the large and beautifully-adorned mosque and attendant *ma’tam*, ‘Abd al-Hādī has no claim whatsoever to religious authority, his popular following mainly a result of his well-known foundational role with the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and, even more so, because of a brazen 2004 attack on the country’s prime minister—the uncle of the current king, he has held the position since independence in 1971 and among the Shi‘a is comfortably the most hated and feared man in Bahrain, his name rarely uttered, certainly not in public—an unheard-of verbal assault that landed him in prison for one year.<sup>70</sup> In fact, far from a political asset, the little religious affiliation that al-Khawājah does have, as an adherent

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<sup>69</sup> Indeed, it is no coincidence that Khomeini himself chose this exact date to voice his first attack on the Shah in June 1963 during the so-called Khordad uprising (LOUËR 2008, 187 n. 32). The mass street protests of December 1978 that led to the downfall of the Iranian regime some two months later began on the twelfth of Muḥarram, spurred on by an oral communiqué issued by Khomeini on November 23 titled “Muharram: The triumph of blood over the sword,” which opened thusly (in *Islam and Revolution*, 2002, Hamid Algar, trans., New York: Kegan Paul):

With the approach of Muharram, we are about to begin the month of epic heroism and self sacrifice — the month in which blood triumphed over the sword, the month in which truth condemned falsehood for all eternity and branded the mark of disgrace upon the forehead of all oppressors and satanic governments; the month that has taught successive generations throughout history the path of victory over the bayonet (242).

<sup>70</sup> For more about the incident, see “Bahrain: Activist Jailed After Criticizing Prime Minister,” 2004, Human Rights Watch, September 28. Available at: <<http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/09/29/bahrai9413.htm>>.

FIGURE 3.8. *Huge crowds pack the streets adjoining the al-Khawājah Mosque in anticipation of ‘Abd al-Hādī’s speech*



of the minority Shirāzī faction of Shi‘ism, is in Bahrain rather a liability. It is a testament, then, to his political cache that he is able still to command such a general audience as the one that convened on this unusually frigid January night to hear him speak.

The title of al-Khawājah’s address, the text of which would soon be posted to various opposition websites along with video capturing much of the event,<sup>71</sup> was “How the Sacrifices of al-Ḥusayn Exposed ‘the Ruling Gang’ and Toppled It from Power.”<sup>72</sup> It began by invoking the “anniversary of the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn, son of the Prophet’s daughter,” and “the anniversary of the Battle of ‘Āshūrā’, wherein the corrupt ‘Umayyad regime carried out the murder of al-Ḥusayn and his companions from the House of the Prophet Muḥammad.” “On this great occasion,” he appealed to “all who are free”—“from every stream or sect,” “from any social class, whether rich or poor,” to “men, women, and the elderly”—he called upon them all as he called upon himself, to “stand together, to demand reform, to support what is right,

<sup>71</sup> The video has since been uploaded to YouTube and features a quite heated argument in the comments section. See “الناشط عبد الهادي الخواجة: فالنسقط العاصابة الحاكمة” [“Activist ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Khawājah: ‘Let’s Take Down the Ruling Gang’”]. Available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rC8ANW0UarU>>.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Khawājah, 2009, “تضحيات الحسين تفضح العصابة الحاكمة وتسقطها من الحكم” [“How the Sufferings of al-Ḥusayn Exposed ‘the Ruling Gang’ and Toppled It from Power”], unpublished address delivered in Manama near the al-Khawājah Mosque, January 7.

to promote virtue and prevent vice, all in the name of the martyr al-Ḥusayn bin ‘Alī.”<sup>73</sup> He beseeched his listeners “to disengage psychologically from the unjust regime, and to refuse to give it allegiance or to allow it to rule on the necks of the people,” “to break promises ... and humiliate the people, to employ mercenaries [brought in] from everywhere in order to impose itself on the necks of [its] subjects.” For “when the orders came from Yazīd bin Ma‘āwiyah to his governor in Medina,” he continued, “that he should take an oath from al-Ḥusayn or else lop off his head, al-Ḥusayn proclaimed his political disobedience and refused to swear allegiance, and [instead] prepared himself for his own sacrifice, and for that of his family (*ahl baytihi*).”<sup>74</sup> And this political defiance, al-Khawājah said, was not aimed at the person of the ‘Umayyad ruler, Yazīd, “but at the entire ‘Umayyad regime. So when al-Ḥusayn addressed the enemy’s army he referred to them, saying, ‘O! Partisans of Āl Sufyān!’”<sup>75</sup> and did not say ‘partisans of Yazīd.’” Accordingly, the introduction concluded, “the result of the sufferings of al-Ḥusayn in the Battle of Karbalā’ was the fall of the ‘Umayyad Empire, a regime that would last no longer than 90 years, inundated by revolutions brought on by the Movement of al-Ḥusayn.”<sup>76</sup>

The next section of the speech, titled “Sectarian Alignment and Political Alignment,” cautions listeners against assuming they are part of the solution, participants in the Movement

<sup>73</sup> It is ironic of course that people from “all streams and sects” should be called to action in the name of such a quintessentially Shi‘i figure. The corresponding text of the speech, of which portions are omitted above, reads:

في ذكرى استشهاد الحسين (ع)، ابن بنت رسول الله (ص)، وسبط الرسول وحببيه ..  
 في ذكرى واقعة عاشوراء، حيث قام النظام الاموي الفاسد بقتل الحسين واصحابه من أهل بيت النبي محمد (ص) ..  
 في هذه المناسبة العظيمة ..  
 اتوجه بالنداء: الى كل حر، والى كل صاحب ضمير حي، من اي مذهب او طائفة، ومن اية طبقة اجتماعية، غنيا كان او فقيرا، ..  
 اتوجه الى الشباب والنساء والشيوخ ..  
 اتوجه لهم جميعا .. واطالب نفسي واطالبهم ..  
 بالوقوف صفا واحدا: لطلب الاصلاح، ونصرة الحق، والامر بالمعروف، والنهي عن المنكر، تيمنا بالحسين بن علي الشهيد (ع) ..

<sup>74</sup> The corresponding text, which again contains some omissions, reads:

اتوجه لهم لفك الارتباط النفسي والمصلحي بنظام الحكم الظالم، ورفض مبايعته، وعدم الاقرار له بالحكم على رقاب الناس، ما دام ..  
 يغدر، ويخلف الوعود، ويستأثر بالفئى ويذل الناس، ويستعين بالمرتزقة من كل مكان، ليفرض نفسه على رقاب العباد.  
 فحين جاءت الاوامر من يزيد بن معاوية، الى واليه على المدينة المنورة بان يأخذ البيعة من الحسين او يقطع رأسه، اعلن الحسين ..  
 العصيان السياسي ورفض المبايعه، وهياً نفسه للتضحية بنفسه واهل بيته.

<sup>75</sup> That is, the dynasty to which Yazīd belongs, known collectively as the “Sufyanids” after his grandfather Abū Sufyān. Notice the clever use of “Āl Sufyān,” itself not unusual but inevitably suggestive of “Āl Khalīfa.”

<sup>76</sup> The complete corresponding text is:

و لم يكن الحسين في عصيانه السياسي يستهدف شخص الحاكم الاموي يزيد، بل كان يستهدف النظام الاموي برمته. فهو حين خاطب جيش العدو ناداهم بالقول: يا شيعة آل سفيان .. و لم يقل يا شيعة يزيد.

و كانت نتيجة تضحيات الحسين في واقعة كربلاء، سقوط نظام الحكم الاموي، حيث لم يعمر هذا النظام اكثر من تسعين عاما، كانت تموج بالثورات التي تمخضت عن حركة الحسين (ع).



of al-Ḥusayn, simply because they happen to be Shi'is. "Know," he said after a brief historical review, "that the Shi'a of al-Ḥusayn's Movement are they who stood by him and supported him against political and social injustice, and not all those who identified with *ahl al-bayt* historically or doctrinally or psychologically": "for you may be of the Ja'afarī sect doctrinally-speaking, or of Twelverism ideologically-speaking, but at the same time you might be one of the partisans (*shī'ah*) of Āl Sufyān, or of any ruling gang who enslaves [its] people and sheds [their] blood." Thus, he warned in language that mirrored almost exactly that of the controversial 'Āshūrā' banner treated earlier,

The differentiation of people in our society today between Ḥusaynīs (*ḥusaynīn*) and Yazīdīs (*yazīdīn*) is not based on the sect inherited from [their] fathers and grandfathers, nor the school of jurisprudence they rely on in their individual worship, but rather on [their] political and social stance embodied by the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice: the taking charge by the people of the right and of what is good (*ahl al-ḥaqq wa al-khayr*), and the washing of [one's] hands of oppressors and the people of vice (*ahl al-munkar*).

For ordinary people in their dealings with any ruling gang are of two types: there is the one who puts principle and values first but perhaps is involved with the oppressor in earning a living or in his political and social activity; yet there is on the other hand the one who puts his own self-interest first, even at the expense of what is right and true (*al-ḥaqq*) and of the people's best interests. And each of them will reveal his true nature when the injustice ... and the bloodshed becomes too much, and then he either will be of the Shi'a of al-Ḥusayn in his opinions and sacrifices, or he will be of the Shi'a of Āl Sufyān. And so a battle like that of Karbalā' is necessary to reveal every human [type], in front of himself and in front of others.<sup>77</sup>

With this statement of what might be called the thesis of the entire address, 'Abd al-Hādī moved on to his longest and most substantive section: "The Ruling Gang and the Necessity of Uprooting it from Power Whatever the Cost in Effort and Sacrifices." Here the subject "the ruling gang" transitioned naturally from the corrupt 'Umayyad dynasty, in which the right to rule "moves within one family from father to son, and which looted booty and lands, and

<sup>77</sup> The corresponding text, which concludes with an arcane aphorism attributed to Ḥusayn that I did not translate, is:

وهكذا فإن تمايز الناس في مجتمعنا اليوم الى حسينييين ويزيديين، ليس على اساس المذهب الذي ورثوه من الآباء والاجداد، او المدرسة الفقهية التي يتبعونها في عباداتهم الفردية، وانما على اساس الموقف السياسي الاجتماعي المتمثل في الامر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر، وتولي اهل الحق والخير، والتبرئ من الظالمين واهل المنكر.

ان عامة الناس في تعاملهم مع اية عصابة حاكمة على صنفين: فهناك من يضع المبادئ والقيم اولا ولكنه قد يتداخل مع الظالم في كسب معيشتة او في نشاطه السياسي والاجتماعي، ولكن هناك في المقابل من يضع منافع الشخصية اولا ولو على حساب الحق ومصالح الناس. ويتميز جميع هؤلاء وينكشف معدنهم عندما يستفحل الظلم وتنتهك الاعراض او تسفك الدماء، فعندها اما ان يكون من شيعة الحسين بمواقفه وتضحياته، او ان يكون من شيعة آل سفيان. ولذلك فان معركة مثل كربلاء ضرورية لتكشف كل انسان امام نفسه وامام الاخرين. يقول الحسين (ع): "الناس عبيد الدنيا، والدين لعق على السنتهم، يحوطونه ما درت معايشهم، فاذا محصوا بالبلاء قل الديانون."

which made God’s wealth [i.e., natural resources] into a state, and enslaved the people”—all this he equated to the contemporary Āl Khalīfa “ruling gang” that plunders Bahrain and which claims to rule on the same basis of hereditary succession. Neither state, he said, “was founded around a single person but rather around a gang bound by tribal or familial *‘aṣabiyyah*,<sup>78</sup> [one] that uses bribery and intimidation to gain support and allegiance from the self-interested,” then, this support secured, “dominates [its] subjects by force.” This is true to such an extent, he continued, “that the son of the Prophet’s daughter [al-Ḥusayn] left Medina and then Mecca fearful because he refused the political oath [of Yazīd],” and left with “no supporter and no certainty ... was murdered, and the women from *ahl al-bayt* taken captive.” A state such as this, he concluded, “chose not to accept conciliation and compromise, and thus there is no use but to uproot [it]: and al-Ḥusayn’s own sacrifices as well as those of his family were the means of uprooting that state, of overthrowing the gang running it, even if [it took awhile].”

He arrived finally at what the listeners had been anticipating the entire night. “The ruling gang in Bahrain,” he boomed, “is embodied in the ‘Supreme Defense Council’ comprised of fourteen of the elites from the ruling family, and they are: the king, the crown prince, the prime minister, the royal court minister, and others of the top ministers and officials” from the ruling family. Among them, he said, “there are not any national sons [*abnā’ al-waṭan*] from the Sunna or the Shi‘a, as they don’t trust anyone but themselves. And since the establishment of this council there have issued from it all of the conspiracies hatched against the people.”<sup>79</sup> All of these “conspiracies” we need not revisit at length. Suffice it to say that al-Khawājah was careful not to omit any of them: the appropriation and gifting of lands (especially seaside lands) by the Āl Khalīfa; al-Bandar’s report and “the strategy of sectarian cleansing” that it revealed,

<sup>78</sup> *عصبية*: 14th-century Arab historian Ibn Khaldūn’s notion of “group feeling” borne of tribal co-sanguinity. Cf. *Al-Muqaddimah*, I, 234. For a modern application see SALAMÉ 1990, which analyzes the central role of *‘aṣabiyyah* in the unification of the Arabian Najd under Āl Sa‘ūd.

<sup>79</sup> The corresponding, somewhat abridged text is:

ان العصابة الاموية التي استأثرت بالحكم، وجعلته عضوا: ينتقل في اسرة واحدة من الاب الى الابن، والتي نجت الفئى والاراضي وجعلت مال الله دولا، واستعبدت الناس وجعلتهم حولا ومستعبدين، هذه الدولة لم تكن تقوم على شخص واحد وانما عصابة تربطها العصبية القبلية والاسرية، وتستعين بالرشوة والتخويف لكسب المناصرة والولاء من اصحاب المصالح. فتسيطر على العباد بالقهر، الى درجة ان يخرج ابن بنت رسول الله حائفا من المدينة ثم من مكة لانه يرفض المبايعه السياسة، ولا يجد ناصرا ولا معينا، ثم يقتل وتسيى النساء من اهل بيت النبي (ص). مثل هذه الدولة احتارت ان لا تقبل المهادنة والحلول الوسط، لذلك لا ينفع فيها الا الاقتلاع، فكانت تضحية الحسين بنفسه وعياله هي الوسيلة لاقتلاع تلك الدولة، والاطاحة بالعصابة التي تديرها ولو بعد حين.

ان العصابة الحاكمة في البحرين تتمثل في ‘مجلس الدفاع الأعلى’ الذي يتكون من اربعة عشر شخصا من كبار العائلة الحاكمة، وهم الملك وولي العهد ورئيس الوزراء ووزير الديوان وغيرهم من كبار الوزراء والمسؤولين من الاسرة الحاكمة، وليس بينهم اي من ابناء الوطن من السنة او الشيعة، فهم لا يتقون باحد سوى انفسهم. ومنذ انشاء هذا المجلس تم فيه اقرار جميع المؤامرات التي دبرت ضد الشعب.

including of course the related program of political naturalization; the use of “tens of thousands of mercenaries from various [countries]” that “violate the sanctity of our homes and of our mosques”; and abuses of human rights and the use of torture in dealing with political activists, among whom he named one who had been recently killed in a confrontation with riot police. For all such offenses and humiliations perpetrated by the ruling Āl Khalīfa gang, he directed, “the primary order must be to bring it down from power by all means of peaceful civil resistance, and by the willingness to suffer sacrifices for the sake of it, just as the result of the sacrifices of al-Ḥusayn was to bring down the ‘Umayyad gang from power.” To this end, he continued, “there must be a coordination of efforts, a putting aside of sectarian and factional differences, and an avoidance of supporting the regime’s institutions or participating in them.” For, he said, “we are the generation of anger and sacrifice, and from our sacrifices will come a generation that assumes the responsibility of selecting the system of government that suits it, [one] far from injustice, corruption, and sectarian discrimination.”<sup>80</sup>

He ended his long oration with a poem:

حين طالب الحر بن يزيد الرياحي إمامنا الحسين بأن يرجع من حيث أتى والأفأنه مقتول — كما اننا ربما نقول  
مقتولين — ردّد الحسين قائلاً:

When al-Ḥurr bin Yazīd al-Riyāḥī<sup>81</sup> demanded of our Imām al-Ḥusayn to go back whence he came or else be killed—just as we perhaps may be killed—al-Ḥusayn answered, saying,

سأمضي وما بالموت عار على الفتي إذا مانوى خيراً وجاهد مسلماً

I will go on, and death is no shame for a man, / if he sought the good and struggled [jāhid] as a Muslim,

وواسى الرجال الصالحين بنفسه وفارق مذموماً وخالف مجرماً

consoled the righteous through himself, / and died where he was cursed and in dispute with a criminal.

<sup>80</sup> The corresponding text, considerably abridged, reads:

لذلك ففي مقابل استراتيجية التطهير والاقصاء، من السذاجة السياسية الاكتفاء بطرح مطالب الإصلاح الجزئي، والاستمرار على البيعة السياسية لهذه العصاة التي لا يضبطها مبدأ أو دين أو اخلاق. ولا يمكن مواجهة سياسة الالغاء والتطهير الا بشعار اسقاط العصاة الظالمة الطائفية. ازاء هذه العصاة المنتهكة للحريات والحقوق، الممارسة للتعذيب، الفاسدة والناهبة للاموال العامة وللاراضي، لا بد ان يكون المطلب الرئيسي هو اسقاطها من الحكم بكل وسائل المقاومة المدنية السلمية، والاستعداد لبذل التضحية في سبيل ذلك، وهكذا فقد كانت نتيجة تضحية الحسين (ع) اسقاط العصاة الاموية من نظام الحكم. وفي سبيل ذلك لا بد من تنسيق الجهود، ونبذ الاختلاف الطائفي والفتوي، وتجنب دعم مؤسسات النظام أو المشاركة فيها.

ان النهضة ضد الظلم واجبة لذاتها، وان من سيحكم بدل هؤلاء العصاة قد لا يكون من بين من هم موجودين في هذا الجيل، فان كل من يؤمنون بالحقوق والحريات في هذا الوطن ليس امامهم ان ينشغلوا بالتفكير في غنائم او حكم، بل في العمل على قطع جذور حكم هذه العصاة من الارض الطاهرة، فنحن جيل الغضب والتضحية، ومن تضحيتنا سيأتي جيل يتحمل مسؤولية اختيار نظام الحكم الذي يناسبه، بعيداً عن الظلم والفساد والتمييز الطائفي.

<sup>81</sup> A son of Yazīd and one of his military commanders. According to the Shi‘i account, al-Ḥurr was charged with obstructing al-Ḥusayn’s passage near al-Kūfah but instead was convinced of his cause and defected to his side.

أقدم نفسي لا أريد بقاءها      لتلقى خميساً في العراء عرمرماً

I offer up myself; I do not wish to stay / to receive on Thursday a colossal host in the desert.

فإن عشت لم ألم ... وإن مت لم أذم      كفى بك ذلاً أن تعيش مرغماً

For should I live I wouldn't be pained, and should I die I wouldn't be blamed. / It is humiliation enough to be forced to live.

These final words<sup>82</sup> were met with chants of “Let’s bring down the ruling gang!” and, though more muted, “Death to Āl Khalīfa!”

Thus al-Khawājah’s address in the early morning on the tenth of Muḥarram, attended by perhaps a thousand listeners from all over Bahrain, from Manama as well as the various Shi’a villages, appeared by all measures to be nothing short of a call to arms against the ruling Āl Khalīfa in the very image of Ḥusayn’s rebellion that culminated in 680 AD. Indeed, as one commentator says of the online video of the speech, “People, / This guy’s calling for civil war. / Stupid and *ḥarām*. / It’s *ḥarām* for a Muslim to kill his Muslim brother. / Of course, he’d go and say that they were unbelievers [*kuffār*; i.e., Sunnis].”<sup>83</sup> Yet beneath this religious imagery and bombast lies a much more measured policy prescription: political and “psychological” detachment from the state, a coordinated rejection of “the regime’s institutions” in both word and in deed. The “sacrifices” of which al-Khawājah speaks are, in contrast with the overall tone of the speech, quite pragmatic and modest. The “Ḥusaynīs,” he says, are those who “put principle and values first” even if it interferes with their immediate material self-interest, as the aim of “earning a living” is no excuse to become “involved with the oppressor.” The false Shi’i, on the other hand—the Shi’i of Yazīd—is he “who puts his own [economic or political] self-interest first, even at the expense of what is right and true.” In sum, to combat a regime “that uses bribery and intimidation to gain support and allegiance from the self-interested,” individuals must resist the temptations of money and power, which are offered only at the expense of their ethical principles and political freedom. For the state, as expressed to me by another of Bahrain’s prominent (and now jailed) Shi’i critics, possesses “a bait for every fish.”<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> For additional emphasis the conclusion of the second line—“in dispute with a criminal”—was augmented by the interjection: “a criminal that is in the palace; the criminals that are [living] in the palaces!”

<sup>83</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 72. The comment is written in colloquial Sunni dialect:

“يا ناس / هالإنسان يطالب بحرب أهلية / غباء وحرام / حرام المسلم يقتل أخيه المسلم / طبعاً أهو يبطلع ويقول أنهم كفار.”

<sup>84</sup> Interview with ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-Singace, April 2009. The political spokesman of the al-Ḥaqq Movement, al-Singace is among Bahrain’s most identifiable opposition figures. In August 2010 he was arrested upon his return from a British parliamentary session on human rights in Bahrain, accused of heading a “terrorist network.” Cf. *supra*, note 53.

## The Clerics Speak: Religious Authority and Political Participation in Bahrain

When I later had the chance to speak with ‘Abd al-Hādī—some four months later, that is, after his release from prison by royal pardon—he would indeed emphasize this need for ordinary Shi‘is to avoid political cooptation. For the Āl Khalīfa, he said, the problem is

just one of demographics, and how that translates into politics. In a democratic system the Āl Khalīfa could not continue in power, so the goal is to preclude the emergence of such a system, or to co-opt enough Shi‘a so that they have an outlet for political participation without really challenging the status quo.<sup>85</sup>

With the commencement of King Ḥamad’s supposed political reform project, he continued, “The government attempted to co-opt as many Shi‘a as possible but knew that some would reject the elections and parliament and pursue other means to influence politics. So for these people the government had another tactic: crackdown and harsh treatment.” Hence his own arrest, he said, and those of the other 178 activists alongside whom he was pardoned.<sup>86</sup>

The institutional manifestation of this effort at a wholesale Shi‘a boycott of the state apparatus is, since its 2006 split from al-Wifāq, the al-Ḥaqq Movement. Indeed, as mentioned before, the movement’s entire *raison d’être* is its continued rejection of the parliament and electoral process in the wake of al-Wifāq’s decision to join in the 2006 vote. One of its main rallying cries, appropriately, is the slogan: “This isn’t the parliament we asked for!” which still decorates the walls of many a Shi‘a village. The movement, however, suffers from one critical organizational disadvantage compared to its rival al-Wifāq: though it enjoys a large grassroots following as well as the charismatic leadership of Ḥasan al-Mushaima‘, a founding member of al-Wifāq and popular hero of the 1990s *intifāḍah*, it makes no claim to religious authority. Al-Wifāq, on the other hand, is led politically by its well-respected Secretary General Sh. ‘Alī

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<sup>85</sup> Personal interview, Bahrain, April 2009.

<sup>86</sup> These pardons by the king set off what might be termed a mild media controversy. Though glad to see the release of so many political detainees, most Shi‘a cynically chalked up the gesture to Bahrain’s fast-approaching Formula One race, whose foreign spectators were unlikely to be impressed at the sight of thousands of protestors along the main highways leading to the track. Sunnis, for their part, were largely critical of the leniency shown to these troublemakers, with some even sensing dissent within the Āl Khalīfa ranks. One Sunni member of parliament with whom I spoke said that the prime minister, the king’s uncle, personally opposed the action, as did the Saudis, whom the latter visited the very day before the pardons. According to this conspiratorial account, the Saudi king had also made his displeasure known by sending a secret message to King Ḥamad, and then by temporarily halting the passage of 300 semi trucks bound for Bahrain at the Saudi side of the causeway. Interview with ‘Isā Abū al-Faṭḥ, Bahrain, April 2009. See “عفو ملكي عن 178 محكوماً بقضايا أمنية وسياسية ... والبحرين تبتهج” [“A Royal Pardon of 178 Convicted on Security- and Political-related Cases ... and Bahrain Rejoices”], 2009, *Al-Wasaṭ*, Issue 2416, April 18, p. 9. Available at: <<http://www.alwasatnews.com/data/2009/2416/pdf/all.pdf>>.

Salmān, who studied in Qom from 1987 to 1992 and thereafter “assiduously frequented the circles of [the late ranking cleric of Bahrain] ‘Abd al-Amir al-Jamri” (LOUËR 2008, 237). What is more, al-Wifāq is widely assumed to have the tacit support of Bahrain’s two highest-ranking clerics today, Sh. ʿĪsā Qāsim and S. ‘Abdallāh al-Ghurayfi, who are said to be its spiritual leaders.

This disadvantage would reveal itself in dramatic fashion in the run-up to the 2006 elections. Having already made the decision to take part, the leaders of al-Wifāq were faced with a vocal opposition in the newly-splintered al-Ḥaqq, which was redoubling its call for a unified Shi‘a boycott of the powerless and unilaterally-imposed parliament. It was at this decisive moment that al-Wifāq fell back on its main asset: its claim to represent the religious line. Already backed by Bahrain’s Shi‘a leaders, al-Wifāq conceived the idea of obtaining the added support of Iraqi cleric Ayatallāh ‘Alī al-Sistānī, whose role in mobilizing the Shi‘a for his country’s 2005 elections had been instrumental and well-publicized. His intervention in the case of Bahrain, the leaders of al-Wifāq reasoned, would be equally effective, not least as it would naturally call to mind the spectacular empowerment of Iraq’s Shi‘a as a result of their electoral participation. So, just months before the Bahraini elections, Sh. ‘Alī Salmān (290)

declared publically that ‘Ali al-Sistani was in favor of the participation and this is hence what al-Wifaq wrote on several of its leaflets. While none of the leaders of al-Wefaq dared to say that they have received a *fatwa* from ‘Ali al-Sistani, the average Bahraini was nonetheless convinced that [he] had actually issued one in which he compelled his emulators to vote.

In fact, al-Wifaq did not dare to invoke the word *fatwā* because what it had received from the Iraqi cleric was considerably less impressive than this. Louër (292) tells that, according to al-Sistānī’s personal representative in Bahrain, “‘Ali al-Sistani answered to the solicitation of al-Wifaq in the framework of a private telephone conversation between his son, Mohammed Redha al-Sistani, and a Bahraini of al-Wifaq’s sphere whose name he did not mention.” The conversation, moreover, “was not meant to be made public,” a fact which led al-Sistānī’s envoy in Bahrain to compose a public communiqué only weeks before the elections clarifying that while “His Excellency S. ‘Ali al-Sistani considers that participation is most appropriate (*aslah*),” “the point of view of His Excellency the Sayyid is not a *fatwa*, not a religiously legal ruling (*hukum shar‘i*). It is an objective assessment (*tashkhis mawdu‘i*) and anybody has the right to make his own assessment even if this leads him to boycott” (quoted in LOUËR 2008, 292-3).

Quite apart from the controversy surrounding the legal status of al-Sistānī’s advice, the leaders of al-Ḥaqq were incensed that al-Wifāq would resort to such manipulative means to

convince ordinary Shi'is to take part in the elections. Louër (290) says that in an interview with al-Mushaima', he "went as far as saying that the Shias were on the verge of committing the same mistakes as the Christians by giving too much authority to the clerics." In my own meeting with al-Ḥaqq's political spokesman, 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Singace, the *fatwā* episode was said to have "coerced [the Shi'a] to vote." But since that time, he insisted, "the past four years have shown the failure of al-Wifāq to deliver on its promises," as "the record of the authorities is that they will do what they want even if you participate" in the political process. They convinced people once, al-Singace said of al-Wifāq, "but they can't convince people now," referring to the then-upcoming 2010 election cycle.<sup>87</sup> But when asked about the possibility of such a backlash in 2010, two-term al-Wifāq MP Jāsīm Ḥusayn responded confidently,

As for a boycott, I don't think that we will have to worry too much about that. We have backing from many religious leaders in Bahrain that call on people to vote. We met with al-Sistānī in Najaf and he supports it as well. There may be some people who boycott, but I don't think turnout will be a large problem.<sup>88</sup>

For the proponents of total disengagement with the regime, such scheming by al-Wifāq was not to be taken lying down. Instead, Shi'a opposition leaders moved to remedy their main strategic disadvantage vis-à-vis al-Wifāq by bolstering their own religious credentials; they would fight clerical authority with clerical authority. To this end, Sh. 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ḥusayn, a powerful spiritual force behind the mid-1990s uprising whose activities landed him in prison until the amnesty of 2001, left his longtime leadership role with al-Ḥaqq sometime in 2008-2009 to organize what was initially referred to simply as "the New Movement" ("التحرك الجديد"). Later renamed the Islamic Loyalty Movement (التيار الوفاء الإسلامي) in an obvious swipe at al-Wifāq—its operative term *al-wafā'*, or "loyalty," being but one letter off from *al-wifāq*, "accord"—this new opposition faction would mimic the latter in its design, placing its political activities under the direction of a well-known religious authority in Sh. 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Miqdād, who, if he hardly stood up to Sh. 'Īsā Qāsim as few could, at least commanded a significant following in the southern part of the country, where both he and 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ḥusayn resided. As Sh. 'Abd al-Wahhāb would explain at his home in the village of Nuwaidrāt, whereas al-Ḥaqq was limited to being a political movement led by "the old guard," al-Wafā' could be a "total movement"—"religious, political, and societal"—precisely because it had a "Qur'ānic basis" inasmuch as it was directed by "religious leaders." Wa'ad head Ebrāhīm Sharīf, speaking of

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<sup>87</sup> Personal interview, Bahrain, May 2009.

<sup>88</sup> Personal interview, Bahrain, April 2009.

Sh. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, was even more direct in his description: the movement, said Sharīf, was explicitly designed to be “*sharī‘ah-compliant*” so that it “will be able to counter criticism from al-Wifāq that the other Shi‘a movements, like al-Ḥaqq, have no legitimate religious basis, such as that that Sh. ‘Īsā Qāsim gives to al-Wifāq.”<sup>89</sup>

The motivating fear of Sh. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, like that pervading al-Khawājah’s ‘Āshūrā’ polemic and that revealed by al-Singace in his remark about the government’s “bait for every fish,” is political co-option. At the time of writing, al-Ḥaqq and al-Wafā’ remain the only two Bahrain-based Shi‘a opposition political groups<sup>90</sup> that have yet to conform to the country’s amended Political Associations Law of 2005, which requires all political societies to register for approval by the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs.<sup>91</sup> During the most recent drive for general registration in preparation for the 2010 elections, leaders of the two groups continued their conspicuous defiance of this process despite being called upon personally to meet with the minister himself, Sh. Khālīd bin ‘Alī Āl Khalīfa. “Sometimes,” Sh. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb told me, “the government sends a message to the [unregistered and therefore “illegal”] opposition that it’s prepared to allow them to play by its rules and become co-opted. But, if it refuses, the government will play without any red lines and will stop at no immoral practices” in its fight against them. By way of illustration he claimed that the Bahraini king has met some top opposition figures, most notably al-Mushaima’, “more than once,” most recently in 2008 in London, where the former, as Sh. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb put it, “wished to see if they were ready to talk.” Yet the meeting, he continued, “was not for talk but for cooptation like al-Wifāq,” and when al-Mushaima’ refused the authorities “decided to punish him” by cracking down on opposition activities from late 2008 to early 2009, an offensive that as we have already seen ended with a mass pardon in mid-April 2009.<sup>92</sup> Yet this, it turned out, was only the beginning. In August 2010, al-Mushaima’, al-Singace, and much of the leadership of al-Ḥaqq and al-Wafā’ were newly arrested, this time charged under Bahrain’s nebulous “Protecting Society from Terrorist Acts” legislation of 2006. Pardoned en masse in February 2011 in an attempt to quell protests, they would be rearrested only weeks later along with the rest of Bahrain’s opposition leaders—including Sh. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, Sh. Al-Miqdād, al-Khawājah, and Ebrāhīm Sharīf—to stand trial before a closed military tribunal. All but Sharīf were sentenced to life in prison.

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<sup>89</sup> Personal interviews, Bahrain, April and May 2009.

<sup>90</sup> The aforementioned London-based Bahrain Freedom Movement is the other. Cf. *supra*, note 46.

<sup>91</sup> See “Bahrain’s Controversial Political Associations Law,” 2005, *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available at: <<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=21150>>.

<sup>92</sup> Personal interview, Bahrain, May 2009.



We now approach our goal of illustrating the decisive role of religious authority in influencing the course of political action taken by ordinary Bahrainis. We have seen that this role, over and above the separate if also powerful *symbolic* role of religion as represented in the ‘Āshūrā’ ritual of Shi‘ism, is of itself undefined, malleable according to the ends of those making use of it and limited only by the degree of respect afforded those who exercise it. If al-Wifāq wishes to convince its constituents of the right of voting, here we have Sh. ‘Alī Salmān, Sh. ‘Īsā Qāsim, or indeed S. ‘Alī al-Sīstānī himself. If the proponents of regime boycott should wish the opposite, here we have an entire new organization in al-Wafā’ designed just for the purpose, headed by religious authorities in their own right. All of this of course is very well served by the Shi‘a doctrine of the *marja‘iyyah*, which accords every individual the right to choose his own source of religious emulation. Is it, though, a distinctly Shi‘a phenomenon, a product only of the modalities of the exercise of religious authority inherent to Shi‘ism?

It would seem not. In fact, it would seem that the notorious incident of the al-Sīstānī *fatwā*, or non-*fatwā* as the case may be, was only following precedent set four years earlier by the Sunni groups that agreed to participate in the 2002 elections boycotted by al-Wifāq. At that time, the previously-noted head of al-Aṣḥāh, Sh. ‘Ādal al-Ma‘āwdah, “referred to Sunni religious authorities in Saudi Arabia to obtain the edict that allowed him and other Sunnis to vote and run in the elections.”<sup>93</sup> “Entering the parliament is not a religious act,” he had said, “but it becomes a must when there is a need to counter probable harm”: and “abandoning the stage to ‘miscreants’ who would enact or pass laws incompatible with religious values would amount to a passive participation in propagating evil.” While we cannot be certain what exactly is implied in this “probable harm,” and whether the “miscreants” al-Ma‘āwdah had in mind were Shi‘is, leftists, liberals, women’s rights advocates, or just plain non-Salafis, it is reasonable to think that the prospect of a Shi‘a-controlled parliament, however far-fetched given their official boycott, could not have been entirely absent. Neither can we be sure that the Sunni participation was not the result of governmental pressure (as we have witnessed already in the passage of the Sunni Family Law), in order to preserve some semblance of legitimacy for an election already spurned by more than one-half of Bahrain’s population. Whatever the truth, it is clear that the Shi‘a are not the only Bahrainis to exploit the influence of religious authorities for specific political ends, a fact that earns a sardonic reproach even from the *Gulf News* writer

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<sup>93</sup> Habib Toumi, 2006, “Religious fatwas used to explain poll participation,” *Gulf News*, November 21. Available at: <<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/religious-fatwas-used-to-explain-poll-participation-1.266432>>. All subsequent quotations originate from this source.

of the article quoted here, a Tunisian who cannot help but lament “the increasing significance that religious statements from foreign-based scholars are playing in Bahrain’s polls.” He mocks,

They have become so important that many parliament hopefuls did not have the slightest hesitation to invite religious figures to deliver lectures at their campaign tents.

Suddenly Bahrain has become a favourite destination for eminent scholars who [deliver] lectures that [have] nothing to do with the candidates’ electoral platforms.

Thus is the electoral politics of Bahrain: while Shi’a opponents are worried that their participation would be tantamount to state co-option, Sunnis are concerned lest their *non*-participation should allow a Shi’a takeover. In this way the electoral dynamic simply mirrors that of society’s larger ethnic division, in that substantive questions of policy and resource allocation—the stuff of “candidates’ electoral platforms”—are superseded by fundamental disagreement over the legitimacy of the actual institutions themselves, a question that turns around the ethnic balance of power enshrined therein. Sunnis have come to see in the extant electoral and parliamentary structure a system that, even if it does provide a forum for Shi’a frustrations, at bottom preserves the status quo. Their participation in it, therefore, is not on account of any real enthusiasm, but is essentially negative, out of the “need to counter probable harm”—i.e., to forestall change. And while al-Wifāq has succeeded in convincing many Shi’is that the material rewards of participation outweigh their moral opposition to the system—with the help of course of some well-timed if dubious religious prodding of its own—it remains to be seen whether its constituency will continue to agree that this calculation has been borne out by parliamentary experience, or if the warning of al-Singace will instead prove accurate: that al-Wifāq duped the Shi’a before, to recall his words, “but they can’t convince people now.”

### **Conclusion: Assessing the Determinants of Individual Political Opinion and Action in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf *Rentier* States**

With constant reference to the case of Bahrain, this chapter has sought to illustrate in systematic fashion the limitations of the extant *rentier* state framework under conditions of ethnic division, considering in turn each of the mechanisms said to work in rent-dependent nations toward the attainment and preservation of popular political acquiescence. It was seen in the first place that, in societies divided by ethnic rivalry such as describes three of the six Gulf monarchies, the typical, individual-oriented politics assumed to operate in allocative states, wherein citizens compete against each other *qua* citizens for greater individual shares of state benefits, does

not obtain. In its place is a group-based politics of ethnicity marked by two broadly-defined classes competing not merely over relative benefit allocations but over the very character of the nation itself: its history and cultural identity; the bases of citizenship; and the conditions for inclusion in public service. One's political involvement in the ethnically-contested *rentier* state is thus not limited by the acquisition of tangible (i.e., economic) goods but is influenced crucially by the pursuit of intangible goods tied to one's group: its relative status in society, its relative power as enshrined in state institutions, and its relative access to the ruling elite.

Next we examined the extent to which this higher-than-expected political involvement among ordinary Gulf citizens may be assuaged by the pressure-releasing levers supposed to be at the disposal of the *rentier* state since its description some thirty years ago. These, of course, are its inordinate capacity for public employment and its ability to forego taxation of the vast majority of citizens. Later theorists have added to the list repression by rent-funded police and intelligence services, which as we shall perceive shortly is actually just a stronger version of the non-taxation argument. In ethnically-divided Bahrain, we first observed, the public employment mechanism is neutralized as a tool for political co-optation because Shi'a citizens, for fears about state security and their possible support of or even direct collusion in the regional ambitions of Iran, are disproportionately excluded from the civil service and all but disqualified from police and military service, precluding three of the leading public employers in any *rentier* state. As the Bahraini minister for commerce and industry revealingly asserted, "Sometimes, for good reasons, you have to be careful who you employ." In this case, such Iranophobic paranoia comes at the expense of many thousands of Bahraini Shi'a who might otherwise have been made into regime allies, such foregone co-optation due to lack of trust or outright suspicion being a central feature of the ethnically-contested *rentier* state.

We then considered the second ostensive political advantage of the *rentier* state, its capacity for non-taxation, which in Bahrain we found to perform equally poorly in winning friends of the ruling family from among its would-be political opponents. More precisely, we found that the case of Bahrain gives reason to question the idea that taxation and demands for political representation should go hand in hand in the Arab monarchies *à la* the institutional economics account of eighteenth-century Western Europe. Historically, we noted, the pre-oil Bahraini state did levy several forms of tax, most all of them on the Shi'a, while the latter did not on that account dare to make any claim to reciprocal political privileges. Indeed, their mere support of the British initiative to modernize this feudal system was enough to spark

attacks on Shi'a villages and island-wide ethnic rioting. If one should point as a counter-example to Crystal's (1986) well-known study of the evolution of political authority in post-oil Qatar and Kuwait, we noted further, the difference is that in these cases the taxed party was a cohesive and very wealthy merchant class that constituted a formidable political rival. Compare this to a vanquished ethnic out-group indentured to labor in independent agricultural fiefdoms.

Yet quite apart from this historical objection, we continued moreover, the argument about non-taxation is unsatisfying theoretically. Rather than explain what we would indeed like to understand—the circumstances under which citizens incline toward the political—it merely elaborates one specific situation wherein they are more likely to do so: namely, when they demand to oversee the usage of their taxed income. And even this positive conclusion is obscured by the double-negative contained in the usual articulation of the argument, which posits simply: people will *not* seek a role in decisionmaking if they are *not* taxed. Accordingly we expounded two alternative causes of political inclination in the *rentier* state, two other likely influences of political opinion and action among ordinary Gulf Arabs apart from economics. These are, appropriately, ethnicity and religion.

First, we said, recalling the previous discussion, the competition between Sunnis and Shi'is is not limited to the tangible, to material goods, but encompasses too the intangible. As one Bahraini parliamentarian tellingly admitted, even if all citizens were rich, there would remain “the issue of how things should be divided within the society between Shi'a and Sunna,” things in addition to wealth per se such as status, influence, and participation in governance. For in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and more recently the inadvertent empowerment of Iraq's Shi'a majority, Shi'a populations across the Arab world have been increasingly forceful in their demands for greater authority, an activism that in turn serves only to mobilize their Sunni counterparts who, in order to combat a perceived growth in Shi'a (and, by association, Iranian) influence—in order, as al-Ma'āwdah says, “to counter probable harm”—organize themselves as a political counterweight to domestic Shi'aization and Iranian expansionism. Citizen interest in political participation thus becomes not a function of material well-being as per *rentier* assumptions, but one of ethnic identification and regional power struggles.

The other key source of political inspiration in the Gulf *rentier* state, we went on, is religion itself, such inspiration being of two types. The first is inherent to Islam itself, to its very history, disputed succession, and resultant political-*cum*-religious division. In emphasizing their unrelenting partisanship of *ahl al-bayt* and the hereditary line of the Prophet, the Shi'a

continue to invoke historical claims to political rule rooted in the very origins of Islam. The immortalization of these poignant episodes of political betrayal and sacrifice in the annual ritual of ‘Āshūrā’, with its evocative passion plays, street processions, and self-flagellation, ensures that no one, Sunni or Shi‘i, will soon forget the lesson of Sh. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Ḥusayn, that “the history of Shi‘ism is the history of opposition against Sunni powers.” The tension stirred up during this month of Muḥarram, utilized to good effect by al-Khawājah in his rant against the “ruling gang” of Āl Khalīfa as it was by Khomeini against the Shah, is a political springboard to rival any other today. That it would be difficult to remedy such deep-seated grievances simply by making the Shi‘a rich, or by not taxing them, goes without saying.

The second way that religion may be put to political service in the *rentier* state is less specific to Islam, applicable anywhere the word of religious leaders is taken as authoritative in political matters. As exemplified in the Bahraini debate over electoral boycott, the shrewd exercise of religious authority for finite political ends can be a powerful if unpredictable influence over individual opinion and behavior. We observed how there was no shortage of religious guidance and even binding edicts for anyone looking to convince the multitude of its political duty, whether that be electoral participation along with al-Wifāq; electoral boycott and total disengagement from the regime *à la* al-Khawājah, al-Ḥaqq, and al-Wafā’; or participation by Sunnis precisely over against the former two groups, out of the “need to counter probable harm” that would come by “abandoning the stage to ‘miscreants.’” Just as the Bahraini regime has “a bait for every fish,” as al-Singace says, so too do the country’s religious leaders possess a *fatwā* to back every political orientation, and they are not shy in employing them.

In short, then, the thesis that *rentier* citizens will be less inclined to make political demands on their governments because they do not pay taxes is most problematic in that it makes the implicit assumption that, absent an economic one, there is no other basis upon which such demands might possibly be made. “In the end,” Luciani tells us in Chapter 2 (23-24), “there is always little or no objective ground to claim that one should get more [state] benefits,” so for the one unhappy with his share “the solution of manoeuvring for personal advantage within the existing setup is always superior to seeking an alliance with others in similar conditions.” Of this someone may wish to inform the Bahrainis, seemingly lacking in objectivity, for whom politics is no less than the exact opposite of this description, tied inextricably to alliances “with others in similar conditions”—“conditions” not, as Luciani had in mind, synonymous with economic circumstances, but rather the societal conditions of ethnicity and religion—and this

not “within the existing setup” but precisely in order to influence, to alter, or to defend “the existing setup” according to one’s loyalties and perceived group interests.

From here, finally, we can easily see why repression<sup>94</sup> as an explanation of individual political behavior in the *rentier* state suffers from the same flaw as the non-taxation thesis. The only difference is scale: political activism despite non-taxation simply implies that one is moved to engage in politics by something other than strictly economic concerns. Although this does fly contrary to *rentier* assumptions, it is certainly common enough, as illustrated throughout the present chapter. But in the case of breakdown of the “repression thesis,” that a citizen is so motivated by religious or political ideals that he is willing to risk life and limb by engaging in activities in defiance of the state; in defiance of, for example, laws banning “unauthorized demonstrations,” as exist in Bahrain and elsewhere in the Arab Gulf—in such a case, the same underlying force operates but at a higher threshold. Thus to explain the failure of the repression mechanism is to explain a stronger case of the failure of the non-taxation mechanism: as scholars of capital punishment might attest, citizens often simply are not deterred by threats of repercussions, whether physical or economic. Witness the hundreds who since 2003 have died annually in Iraq, braving attack while attending ‘Āshūrā’ commemorations in Karbalā’; those Shi’a who, despite the assurance of physical reprisal by the Saudi *muṭawwa’in*, sneak away during the Ḥājj ceremony to pray at *jannat al-baqī’*, the revered burial site of the Prophet’s daughter and four Shi’i Imāms; and the several dozen would-be Bahraini revolutionaries killed in standoffs with riot police and indeed army infantry since February 14, 2011.

No one will deny that the Gulf regimes maintain incommensurably large and well-equipped militaries and intelligence services; that these are funded by rents from oil and gas resources; and that their use on the domestic front to repress political opponents, not rarely in brutal fashion, probably equals or exceeds their use as deterrents to foreign aggression. Yet when ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Khawājah, after already having spent some two decades in exile and in prison, can stand in the streets of Manama and call for the overthrow of the Āl Khalīfa “by all means of peaceful civil resistance, and by the willingness to suffer sacrifices for the sake of it, just as the result of the sacrifices of al-Ḥusayn was to bring down the ‘Umayyad gang from power”—when such a one is prepared to take this action with the knowledge that

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<sup>94</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, notes 2 and 21, this argument dates to Skocpol’s (1982) work on Iran. It is thereafter taken up in GAUSE 1995, CLARK 1998, and FEARON 2005 and is tested along with many others by ROSS (2001; 2008; 2009). Finally, it receives extensive treatment by Fearon and Laitin (2005), who appeal to repression to explain the incidence (or non-incidence) of civil war in countries heavily-reliant upon primary commodity export rents.

arrest and probable bodily harm will not be too far away, then it is clear that “repression” as an explainer of political behavior in the *rentier* state must be weighed against the countervailing power of individuals to suffer and indeed embrace sacrifice for the sake of a political cause.

At the most elementary level, then, what is required to disarm the extant *rentier* state framework is to show that there are specific, not uncommon circumstances under which everyday citizens of rent-dependent nations will be motivated politically by something other than or in addition to their wallets. With this examination of ethnic conflict in Bahrain we have given substance to the theoretical account of Chapter 2 that explains when and why one might expect this to be the case, depicting in detail the way that a group politics of ethnicity and religion can come to overwhelm the normal *rentier* politics of patronage and individualized struggles for material self-interest assumed to operate universally in the Arab Gulf states. For a more stringent empirical analysis of these central claims, we turn now to the next chapter, which introduces the first-ever study of the popular political orientations of ordinary Bahraini citizens, informed by a mass survey of the country that I carried out between January and May 2009.

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## CHAPTER 4

### Surveying Bahrain: A Practical and Methodological Preface

The foregoing argument, first outlined theoretically and then substantiated by a qualitative survey of Bahraini politics and society, has proceeded so as to move in parallel with the prevailing *rentier* state interpretation of the Arab Gulf. As the latter suggests two primary paths by which the economic character of the region's rent-dependent nations works to influence their politics, reducing popular political involvement and thereby increasing overall regime stability, so too have we organized our analysis around these by-now familiar mechanisms of political co-optation said to be available to the *rentier* state: public-sector employment and non-taxation. In so doing, we have sought to demonstrate systematically their failure, and accordingly that of the larger *rentier* state paradigm, to operate in the case of Bahrain and in the class of ethnically-contested allocative states of which Bahrain is only the best example. From this refutation one may distill a number of specific hypotheses suitable for empirical evaluation that in this way correspond precisely to the individual-level causal logic internal to the *rentier* framework. In contrast to extant attempts at quantitative testing (cf. CH. 2, 21-27), then, we shall not have need to rely upon theoretical proxies operating at the country level—rent proceeds, taxation rates, democracy levels, etc.—and interpolate from these our conclusions about the efficacy of the *rentier* logic. We can, in other words, at last offer a direct evaluation of the *rentier* state theory of Arab Gulf politics by interrogating its claim to understand the individual political behavior of Gulf Arabs.

“At last,” that is, because the individual-level data required to undertake such a study is only now become available with the completion of several timely research projects, including the first wave of the Arab Democracy Barometer finished in 2008, a World Values Survey of Saudi Arabia in 2003, and my own nationally-representative survey of Bahrain in 2009. Together, these efforts capture the individual political orientations of some 10,000 ordinary citizens across

nine Arab countries, including those of three Gulf nations. As we previewed briefly in the introduction to Chapter 2, such mass survey data offer a heretofore inaccessible angle from which to analyze the efficacy of the *rentier* model of Arab Gulf politics, one that cuts out the theoretical middle-men employed in extant empirical testing and instead walks hand-in-hand as it were with the original argument laid out by Luciani and Beblawi. That we should proceed thus is all the more fitting because their argument, in contrast to other accounts of authoritarian politics that center around the behavior of rulers and elites, that describe the machinations by which these remain in power in spite of the actions of everyday citizens—contrary to such theories, that expounded by Luciani and Beblawi in 1987 makes specific predictions about the political behavior of individual citizens of *rentier* regimes according to the economic incentives given them. The *rentier* model therefore not only admits of evaluation at the individual level of analysis but indeed uniquely demands it.

The present thesis, however, entails a modification of this classic model such that its evaluation demands something in addition: a way to distinguish Sunni and Shi'i respondents. Because our theory of ethnically-divided *rentier* societies explains that individual employment as well as individual political actions and opinions are as much a function of ethnic group membership and personal religiosity as they are of economic satisfaction, we cannot test this revised *rentier* model absent ethnic identifiers in the survey data we employ. Unfortunately, this requirement serves to rule out most all of that currently available,<sup>1</sup> the one notable exception being Inglehart, Moaddel, and Tessler's (2006A; 2006B; 2008A; 2008B) surveys of Iraq carried out in 2004 and 2006. But for obvious reasons—not least that Iraq differs historically, socially, and economically from the GCC states; differs no less significantly in its political institutions and mode of governance; was then largely administered by a foreign occupying force; and was playing host to an ethnic conflict that bordered on full-scale civil war—these data would not offer an unambiguous test of the present argument. They will, however, for lack of a better alternative be examined in Chapter 6 in order to further clarify and corroborate the results of the analysis to follow here—our analysis, that is, of the first-ever political survey of Bahrain.

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<sup>1</sup> One might wonder, then, why we were able to put these data—those from the Arab Barometer and the WVS of Saudi Arabia—to good use early in Chapter 2. Recall, though, that the purpose there was simply to evaluate the notion that popular interest and involvement in politics is less in the Gulf countries than it is elsewhere in the Arab world on account of the *rentier* political effects assumed to operate in the former class of states. While these ethnically-aggregated data were thus helpful in demonstrating the existence of a puzzle to be investigated, they can bring us little closer to solving it.

### **Bahrain: A Gulf Exception or the Rule?**

Presenting as it does simultaneous advantages and disadvantages of a sort both practical and methodological, the choice of Bahrain as empirical testing ground for the study of ethnic conflict in the *rentier* state requires some preliminary words. Though only now do we have occasion to offer them, these of course apply equally to the foregoing qualitative discussion of Chapter 3. We may begin by considering the more important, methodological implications of our selection. Foremost among these is the dialectic implied in the title of this section between Bahrain as a model case of ethnic conflict in the *rentier* state, as the Platonic Idea of the ethnically-contested allocative economy, and Bahrain as a case that is simply *sui generis*. In the former instance, we may imagine Bahrain as an ethnically-contested *rentier* state whose internal dynamics apply in degrees to the other Gulf nations according to the levels of ethnic tension having arisen there either exogenously by chance of history or endogenously as a result of exclusionary allocative policy. The other GCC states, then, while less perfect forms than Bahrain, share its underlying potentiality and so remain of the same class of state. That Qatar thus fails to exhibit the sort of popular political agitation borne of ethnic wrangling so evident in Bahrain, for example, is so largely by the historical accident that its native population is more ethno-religiously homogenous. The central upshot of this interpretation is its admission that the insights gleaned from the case of Bahrain necessarily inform the study of other *rentier* states. At the other extreme sits the counterpoint to this argument: that little or nothing is to be gained by consideration of the Bahraini case beyond insights about Bahrain, as its exceptional historical circumstances—its native Shi'a population conquered by foreign Sunni tribes and determined ever since to reclaim its lost political autonomy—render it unique, irreconcilably different from the region's other regimes, to say nothing of their domestic politics.

While the latter view cannot be ignored, one would like to think that the truth more closely approximates the former, more sanguine interpretation, or in any case may be found somewhere near the mean. That such hope is probably warranted we have some positive indicators. The first is our introductory analysis of the Failed States Index of overall regime stability, which indicated among other things a general gap in performance between those Gulf states with more sizable Shi'a communities—Saudi Arabia (at 10-15% Shi'a, with a failure total of 77.5), Bahrain (65-75%, 59.0), and Kuwait (20-25%, 63.4)—and those whose Shi'a populations are small and non-native—Oman (5-10%, 47.2), Qatar (~10%, 51.9), and the UAE (~10%, 51.8).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These estimates come from PEW FORUM ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE 2009, *op cit*.

While such a broad relationship with so few observations is hardly conclusive, and though Bahrain's outperformance of both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia reminds us of the imprecision of such aggregate measures; and that regime stability is not synonymous with political quietude, still we have in our review of this respected Index at worst no evidence in refutation of the idea that ethnic competition influences *rentier* politics in countries not called Bahrain.

Further, because one of the chief contemporary drivers of ethnic division in the Gulf, and source of fear on the part of Gulf leaders, is a militarily-powerful and regionally-meddlesome Iran, we have reason to suppose that all the Gulf regimes should be equally affected in proportion with the size of their domestic Shi'a populations. Insofar as Sunni citizens and leaders across the Gulf—Bahraini, Saudi, and Qatari Sunnis alike—believe they have cause to fear for the national loyalty of their domestic Shi'a populations—to the extent, as Louër says, that it is “the Sunnis who now feel under siege” from an ominous “Shiite revival”—then, again, we should expect Bahrain to be disproportionately but not uniquely subjected to the popular pressures and apprehensions that stem from Gulf geopolitics. And, in fact, if one considers for a moment the bilateral relations of Iran and its Gulf neighbors, he will easily perceive separating the region's more ethnically-heterogeneous and -homogenous countries precisely this difference: whereas the former maintain strained relations with the Islamic Republic, the latter, with the partial exception of the Emirates,<sup>3</sup> remain on better terms with Iran even to the annoyance of the United States. Indeed, among them only the UAE has agreed to implement the June 2010 U.S.-backed sanctions on Iran's nuclear program, and this only after considerable delay and one imagines considerable political pressure from Washington. So while there are no doubt other reasons why one might expect Iran's relations with, say, Oman to be more cordial than those with Saudi Arabia, the discrepancy in latent potential for domestic Iranian influence as a function of a state's native Shi'a population is perhaps not the least important.

Finally, evidence that a group politics of ethnic rivalry operates in the Gulf outside of Bahrain may be found simply by reflecting on the present state of Sunni-Shi'i relations across the region—both citizen-citizen relations and citizen-regime—which seem to have reached a nadir not seen since the immediate aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. The situation in Saudi Arabia perhaps needs no great treatment. It is aptly summarized by the title of a September 2009 report by Human Rights Watch: “Denied Dignity: Systematic Discrimination and Hostility

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<sup>3</sup> The case of Emirati-Iranian relations is complicated, however, by a longstanding dispute over three islands in the waters bordering the two countries claimed by the UAE but controlled by Iran.

toward Saudi Shia Citizens,”<sup>4</sup> which catalogues the latter’s wholesale exclusion from the regime, including from the military and state apparatus. One might add simply that the now-infamous “Medina clashes” of February 2009 in which Saudi security forces sparred with Shi’a pilgrims for five days near the gravesite of the Prophet Muḥammad—the Shi’a practice of visiting the cemetery on the Prophet’s birthday seen as idolatrous by Salafis—have, as the aforementioned report observes, “stoked the sharpest manifestation of long-standing sectarian tensions that the kingdom has experienced in years.”<sup>5</sup> This includes in the Eastern Province, which thereafter witnessed popular demonstrations in expression of solidarity with the Medina pilgrims. When these too were met with brutal police suppression, the situation spiraled further, with one regime critic “suggest[ing] in a Friday sermon ... that his coreligionists consider secession from Saudi Arabia if their rights were not respected.”<sup>6</sup> The manhunt that followed led only to more quashed demonstrations, a tit-for-tat culminating in the formation of what is thought to be the kingdom’s first full-blown opposition movement among al-Aḥsā’ Shi’a. Called “*khalāṣ*” (“خلاص”), its name means literally “deliverance” but also, colloquially, “enough!”<sup>7</sup>

Yet even prior to this recent downturn in government-Shi’a relations in Saudi Arabia, it was clear that this supposed model of rentierism was not succeeding in achieving the social harmony implied in its title. A prescient paper by Okruhlik (1999) called “Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition” argues precisely this, that the case of Saudi Arabia demonstrates how “windfall profits of petroleum exports do not translate into a politically quiescent population” (295) because rents cannot always “buy the support or loyalty of different social groups” (297), namely ethnic and religious out-groups like non-Salafi Sunnis, non-Najdīs (Najd being the tribal home of Āl Sa’ūd), and of course the Saudi Shi’a. Since the allocation of state benefits is governed “by family relations, friendship, religious branch, and regional affiliation,” says Okruhlik, the regime actually creates as many enemies as friends through its biased distribution of oil rent. Thus, he concludes, “in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain opposition has arisen and with it a discrepancy between the expectations derived from the rentier framework and empirical reality.” As his treatment elaborates only the first case, perhaps the present thesis can be seen as further extending this same inquiry.

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<sup>4</sup> See also the earlier but essentially similar paper: The International Crisis Group, 2005, “The Shiite Question in Saudi Arabia,” *Middle East Report N°45*, September 19.

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2009, “Denied Dignity: Systematic Discrimination and Hostility toward Saudi Shia Citizens,” September, p. 1. Available at: <<http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/09/03/denied-dignity-0>>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Additional details may be found in Mai Yamani, 2009, “Saudi Shia are standing up,” *The Guardian*, March 15. Available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/mar/11/saudi-arabia-islam>>.

Confessional relations in Kuwait too have recently soured, precipitated in part by an unlikely event: the assassination of a Ḥizballāh military commander, ‘Imād Muḡhniyyah, in Damascus in February 2008. At a commemoration held in Kuwait, two Shi‘a members of parliament eulogized the man once feared in Kuwait for his association with terrorist attacks that rocked the nation throughout the 1980s. Refusing to apologize, the two were thereafter expelled from their parliamentary bloc and referred to the public prosecution. But this did little to avert mass street demonstrations and ultimately the “transformation of the campaign against the two MPs into a campaign against the Shia of Kuwait,” the latter seen as having grown increasingly provocative since their co-religionists to the north assumed power after 2003.<sup>8</sup> Their renewed demands for additional ḡusayniyyāt (*mawātīm* in Bahrain) and the recognition of ‘Āshūrā’ as an official holiday even sparked an attack by young men on a Shi‘i mosque in October 2005. Much more recently in September 2010, and in a seeming show of solidarity with Bahraini leaders and their ongoing crackdown on Shi‘a activists, Kuwait stripped a prominent Shi‘i cleric of his citizenship for “inciting sectarian strife” on the very same day that Bahrain announced it was revoking the passport of Ayatallāh Ḥusayn al-Najātī, whom we know already as the main representative of Ayatallāh ‘Alī al-Sīstānī in Bahrain. Then on the following day began the trial of six men and women charged with spying for Iran in Kuwait, accused of passing information and photographs of U.S. and Kuwaiti military installations to the Revolutionary Guard.<sup>9</sup> All this led the head of political science at Kuwait University to say in an interview with the *Financial Times*, “You could cut the tense atmosphere and apprehension here with a knife. There is a great deal of apprehension among elites and among academics and among ordinary people who see the Iranians’ imprint all over the place.”<sup>10</sup> Kuwait’s Interior Ministry thereafter moved to ban all “sectarian” meetings and demonstrations. As the Minister of Defense (and acting Prime Minister) explained, there are those “employing such difference in sectarianism [sic] in order to ignite sectarian [conflict],” seeking to “drag us into hateful strife” and to exploit a “fragility in the society which we must avert as much as possible.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In Mshari al-Zaydi, 2008, “What is the Point of Kuwait?,” *Al-Sharq Al-Awsaṭ English*, March 1. Available at: <<http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=2&id=11956>>.

<sup>9</sup> On these and other episodes see D. Parvaz, 2010, “Shia Crackdowns in Middle East,” *Al-Jazeera English*, September 22. Available at: <<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/09/2010921131347921736.html>>.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in James Drummond, 2010, “Sunni-led Arab states on alert over Shia Iran,” *Financial Times*, September 23. Available at: <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cde302c6-c732-11df-aeb1-00144feab49a.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> More of this speech is available in Muna Shishter and Nouri al-Osthath, 2010, “Kuwait will firmly confront anyone trying to drag it into nasty strife—Acting PM,” *Kuwait News Agency (KUNA)*, September 19. Available at: <<http://www.kuna.net.kw/NewsAgenciesPublicSite/ArticleDetails.aspx?Language=en&id=2111987>>.

Neither has the UAE been immune from this “tense atmosphere and apprehension.” In July 2010 the Emirati ambassador to the U.S. was admonished by his own Foreign Ministry after offering that the U.S. should “absolutely” use force to halt Iran’s nuclear program, adding that the UAE’s armed forces “wake up, dream, breathe, eat, sleep the Iranian threat. It is the only conventional military threat our military plans for, trains for, equips for.”<sup>12</sup> And it seems this apprehension has permeated through to the civilian front. That same month Human Rights Watch published an exposé accusing the UAE of deporting without warning or appeal “at least 120 Lebanese families—all of them Shiite—since June 2009,” apparently on suspicions they might be Hizballāh supporters.<sup>13</sup> Some had resided in the country for over 30 years. One of those deported, a Lebanese professor at the University of Sharjah, recounted how she was accused during questioning of “belonging to a Hezbollah ‘sleeper cell,’” and that her interrogator “mocked [her Shi‘a] religious beliefs and practices.”<sup>14</sup> In sum, even a cursory review of the Iranian-fueled anxiety currently overrunning the Gulf, afflicting Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE alike, is enough to show that Bahrain is not alone in being affected by Sunni-Shi‘i tensions. One is persuaded instead to accept the conclusion of another Gulf political scientist, Mustafa Alani of Dubai’s Gulf Research Centre, when he warns, “We are witnessing a major change in the perception of the average citizen of the Gulf region. Iranian interventionist policy is a major concern in the region from Lebanon to Palestine to Iraq and possibly to Yemen.”<sup>15</sup>

The other main trade-off occasioned by the choice of Bahrain as a research subject is at once practical and methodological. This is the consideration that, in choosing to study the ideal case of ethnic conflict in the Gulf, the case that offers the most to observe, our conclusions may be susceptible to selection bias; to the criticism that we have, for those versed in such language, selected on the dependent variable. Distinct from the first point above, this concern is not about the Bahraini case per se but about the lack of one or more additional country observations to which to compare it in a structured cross-national analysis. Undertaking the latter, one could better discern what of one’s country-level outcomes are attributable to the independent variable of interest—ethnic conflict—and what to the peculiarities of the individual cases themselves. Absent this, some skeptic might say, one can draw through a single point whatever regression line he likes—that is, of a single case any interpretation is equally defensible.

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> In “UAE/Lebanon: Allow Lebanese/Palestinian Deportees to Appeal,” 2010, Human Rights Watch, July 19. Available at: <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/07/19/uae-lebanon-allow-lebanese-gazan-deportees-appeal>>.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in James Drummond, 2010, “Sunni-led Arab states on alert over Shia Iran,” *Financial Times*, *op cit.*



Of course one must agree with the general conclusion of such an argument: that a more perfect methodology would have seen the replication of my Bahrain study in one or all of the remaining Gulf countries, complete with respective nationally-representative surveys of Sunni and Shi'i citizens. In this way, not only would we gain extra statistical leverage with which to test the individual-level relationship between ethnic group identification and political action and opinion, but we could make in addition a more robust test of our larger theory here linking country-level differences in Sunni-Shi'i tension to overall regime stability in the Gulf. Yet in that case we would also have had to contend with a much-augmented set of practical challenges that in Bahrain alone were enough to prove nearly insurmountable. To be sure, the present dearth of such quantitative studies of the GCC nations is not for lack of demand.

That said, one might still make a more spirited rebuttal independent of practicality. In the first place, recall that we will in the penultimate chapter have occasion to undertake such a cross-country analysis when we consider the case of inter-ethnic relations in Iraq. While one might have hoped, as noted earlier, for a country and context more similar to that of Bahrain, we will not on this account excuse ourselves from trying to draw some comparative insights using this the only other extant data serviceable to our ends. Secondly and more importantly, however, one must remember what are these ends, what is the impetus behind our whole inquiry, which is to execute a proper test of the dominant understanding of political life in the Arab Gulf. As such, our assessment of the *rentier* state theory is not only concerned with what it concludes about Gulf regimes themselves—that, for example, they will tend to enjoy greater stability than their non-*rentier* Arab counterparts insofar as they can more easily satisfy their populations economically—but our inquiry is interested also, indeed more so, in examining the individual-level causal mechanisms said to operate in effect of such a relationship. If the former analysis is perhaps then limited temporarily by a lack of relevant data, yet there remains the latter, more fundamental question of the political behavior of Gulf Arabs, which if it is only this we will have gone far toward answering we should not anyway be disappointed.

Let us return, finally, to the practical challenges of conducting research in Bahrain alluded to earlier, which are far from trivial. Foremost among these is the government's extreme reluctance that political research of any sort be undertaken. In a context, then, where the mere number of Sunnis and Shi'is in the populace is a veritable state secret, having been last measured officially (i.e., revealed publically) in the nation's very first census of 1941, investigation into Bahrain's ethnic relations is encouraged even less and one may say is barely tolerated. This was

never so evident as in my dealings with the Bahrain Center for Studies and Research (BCSR), a government institution that served for almost 30 years as a research clearinghouse for various ministries and, during my stay in Bahrain, as the sponsor of my Fulbright award. Dissolved less than a month after my departure under somewhat vague circumstances,<sup>16</sup> the BCSR had originally agreed to administer my Bahrain survey through its own political polling center, the latter having been erected with the help of several University of Michigan trainers sent to the country by a U.S. State Department grant. But after almost a year of meetings and edits of the survey instrument to remove “sensitive” questions—by the end there remained just 65 of the 110 or so standard Arab Barometer items—it became apparent that my fellowship funding would sooner be exhausted than the BCSR actually carry out the work. At the end of the day, I was told, the Center, a state institution, could not risk administering a survey the results of which may well damage or at least earn the displeasure of the government. We arrived, at length, at a compromise whereby the BCSR would continue to sponsor my residence visa while I would organize and execute the survey alone.

In the meantime, I received frequent, unsolicited e-mails and calls from altruistic persons offering to be of service in carrying out my study. One message arrived from the director of a non-existent “National Centre for Studies,” another from a worker at a government-affiliated organization suggesting that if I would only send my survey data, he may be able to assist in “analyzing” them. When I thanked the latter for his offer, noting that as yet there were no data to analyze, he replied that in any event he had a “friend” Muḥammad who would be happy to work as a field interview for the project, providing a mobile number at which I might contact him. Then, when interviewing finally commenced some months later, I received a call to come that day to the local police station, where the area police chief wished to discuss my survey project. As I stepped into his office, I saw in front of him a photocopy of the full questionnaire, which he said he obtained from one of those interviewed, who had happened to work for the undercover political police (الأمن السياسي) and was apparently alarmed at some of the questions. Sensing a genuine interest on his part and hearing that he agreed there was strictly speaking nothing illegal about such a study, I asked if he might consent to fill out a

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<sup>16</sup> A June 15 article in *Al-Wasat* reports that the BCSR was “liquidated” by virtue of Royal Decree No. 52 of 2009, its employees being “distributed among the ministries” and its building taken over by a “Center for Strategic and Energy Studies.” See “حل مركز البحرين للدراسات والبحوث وتوزيع الموظفين على الوزارات” [“The Dissolution of the Bahrain Center for Studies and Research and Distribution of the Staff amongst the Ministries”], 2009, *Al-Wasat*, June 15. Available (in Arabic) at: <<http://www.alwasatnews.com/2839/news/read/434786/1.html>>.

questionnaire himself that I could later retrieve, seeing that no one else from the Interior Ministry would agree to meet with me as part of the elite interview portion of my research. My calls the following week, however, would go unanswered.

If the Bahraini government is thus made nervous by such a sensitive investigation,<sup>17</sup> the ordinary Bahraini citizens who must form the basis of it are not less so. In light of my own experience, of course, one certainly cannot blame them; yet this pervasive mutual suspicion makes the task of conducting face-to-face interviews very difficult. Compounding matters is what Fearon and Laitin (2005, 8) refer to as the island's "metrocommunity scale," which they argue is a primary reason why Bahrain so far has averted ethnic civil war. Some sense of this may be related by a conversation I overheard in Sana'a airport between two Yemenis bound for Bahrain. One, distinguishable by his dress as a long-time resident, asked the other if this was his first time travelling to Bahrain. When the latter replied that yes, it was, the former nodded his head, saying, "I thought so. I haven't seen you there before," words that elicited a confused expression on the face of his interlocutor. "What do you mean you haven't seen me there before?" he replied. To this day I can hear the exact words of that Yemeni-Bahraini: "البحرين مثل القرية، كل واحد يعرف الثاني": "Bahrain is like the village: everyone knows the other." As one who probably remembered well from his childhood what it was like to live in a tiny, remote village, the Yemeni traveler immediately understood.

Beyond mere suspicion, then, Bahrain features a general lack of social anonymity to an extent not seen elsewhere in the Arab world, and this sometimes uncomfortably so when one finds oneself outside of a handful of ethnically-mixed, urban areas. For Bahrain, taken as a whole to be no more than a village by our Yemeni observer, in fact is home to several dozen even more isolated village enclaves settled exclusively by Sunnis or Shi'is. Until 30 years ago this ethnic residential separation—which Holes (2005, 60) describes as an "almost apartheid-like system of voluntary segregation"—extended across the entire island, to urban and rural areas alike. Indeed, it is only for this extreme isolation that Holes has been able to complete a comparative study of the country's Sunni Arab and Baḥārnah dialects. On this he remarks,

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<sup>17</sup> It must be noted that the U.S. government as represented by its embassy seemed also to share this anxiety, not only about the political implications of the execution of such a project but about those too of its likely findings. At one point after the fallout with the BCSR, in fact, it was asked whether I should be altogether proscribed from administering the mass survey. While it was decided at last that the U.S. Embassy is not in the business of blessing or striking down the academic pursuits of its citizens, and though many there showed much-appreciated support for the project, when I finally left Bahrain I was asked with keen interest about when I anticipated the results to be made publically available.

One consequence of the separation of the two communities has been the preservation, over more than two centuries, and in an area no bigger than a medium-sized English county, of a major dialectical cleavage that pervades all levels of linguistic analysis: pronunciation, word structure and vocabulary. The historical origins of this split, as is usual in cases of major communal differentiation of this kind, are geographical.

For one aiming to conduct personal interviews across the whole of the island, the upshot of all this is that field interviewers are immediately identifiable as, first, Bahraini or non-Bahraini and, second, as Sunni or Baḥrānī and perhaps, depending on the respondent's knowledge of dialect and family names, even as a resident of a particular village or region. Moreover, this information may then be translated into a perhaps stereotypical but not unreliable overview of one's likely social and political affiliations (for Sunnis, e.g., tribal vs. non-tribal, *mujannas* vs. non-naturalized; for Shi'is, Shirāzī (and so anti-Iranian) vs. *vilāyat-e faqīh*; pro-government vs. al-Wifāq supporter vs. al-Ḥaqq supporter). One called "al-Rumayḥī" will at once be supposed a government ally perhaps hailing from the village of al-Jaw, the traditional home of the Āl Rumayḥ. One whose accent betrays him to be a resident of al-Dirāz will be branded a follower of Sh. ʿĪsā Qāsim, born in the village, and thus most likely of al-Wifāq, and may meet with a cold reception in the neighboring Shi'a villages off al-Budayyi' Road such as Banī Jamrā, which has its own revered cleric in the late ranking *marja'* of Bahrain, Sh. ʿAbd al-Amīr al-Jamrī.

As if not already complicated enough by this claustrophobic social atmosphere, survey work in Bahrain must also contend with the physically claustrophobic villages themselves, which are both isolated and poorly served by roads, the latter often little more than paths cut through the sand and gravel. Those roads that are paved are so narrow that one is often stuck inside one's vehicle at length when, inevitably, some other vehicle appears traveling in the opposite direction, at which point one is forced to navigate the same narrow road in reverse for several hundred feet. Village driving is so difficult, in fact, and one is so easily recognized as an outsider, that employees of the U.S. Embassy are altogether banned from visiting. One official told me with pride how he had defied this order and driven through a village adjacent his housing compound in order to observe the colorful political graffiti he had heard about. A resident of the Shi'i village Karrānah complained bitterly that the police themselves refuse to enter unless to make an arrest or to chase away teenagers burning tires. Even in the event of a simple car accident, he explained, exasperated, the police demand that villagers themselves drag the damaged vehicles to the main road for examination, so that any facts of the incident gained by observing the wreckage or through interviewing witnesses are necessarily lost. As

a result, many of the Shi'a villages, though the capital and most ministry headquarters be but five miles away, have learned to operate to a startling degree independently of the state, referring disputes to local religious notables, aiding poorer residents through the local village charity (صندوق خيري, literally "charitable [donation] box"), and undertaking infrastructure repairs and construction.<sup>18</sup> Being thus largely inter-dependent upon each other for most everything save for electricity and sanitation, it is understandable why they may not immediately welcome outsiders, not to mention ones asking probing political and religious questions.<sup>19</sup>

It is also easy to see how this isolation, this isolated frustration, may easily erupt in the form of protests, tire-burning, and other localized violence, a final and most severe impediment to field research in the Bahraini villages. The riot police, generally loathe to intervene in these so-called "terrorist acts" out of fear for their own safety, are content to assemble in dozens of armored SUVs along a village's main access road, effectively cordoning it from the outside. In times of substantial Shi'a-government confrontation, then, such as was the situation after the post-'Āshūrā' arrests of 'Abd al-Hādī al-Khawājah, Ḥasan al-Mushaima', and the more than 170 other political activists, mere entry and exit is made problematic for village residents, and any interviewing is out of the question. So it was that only four months later, after the royal mass pardon of April 2009, were we able to commence surveying in these areas, and even then there remained a small number of locations where, due to continuing tension or the unease of would-be field interviewers, we were unable to conduct interviews. Indeed, among these locations were the very home villages of several of the Shi'i field interviewers, who nonetheless refused to work there for fear of being deemed by their neighbors government spies.

Fortunately, such difficulties were limited to the mass survey portion of my Bahrain research; the other half, structured interviews with political leaders representing the various

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<sup>18</sup> While now is not the time to elaborate this thought, we will return to it later in our mass survey analysis.

<sup>19</sup> If one wondered before at the decision to oversee the survey myself after the problems with the BCSR, rather than outsource the job to another local polling institute, perhaps the foregoing may serve as an explanation. As there is no private Bahraini alternative to the BCSR, the only other options would have been two foreign-based market research companies: the Pan Arab Research Center and the Market Research Organization, the latter employed, I was told, by the U.S. Embassy for its internal Bahrain-related polling. But after communicating with the heads of both organizations, which in any case were quite back-logged with consumer survey work, I concluded that each would be ill-suited for my needs: a majority of their field interviewers were foreigners; they could not be expected to be attentive to the political sensitivities and idiosyncrasies of the various regions of Bahrain, above all in the Shi'a villages; and finally it seemed advantageous to have a personal relationship with those conducting the interviews, which would not only afford me more control over the interviewing process but would also allow me a window into the more intimate details of the interviews by hearing individual anecdotes and experiences in the field, such as have been related already. Finally, this hands-on approach meant that I could be certain of the quality of the survey's sampling frame, about which more will be said shortly.

factions of Bahraini society, was able to progress more smoothly. The only complexity here was making the acquaintance of some of these individuals, in particular those who belong to political societies with whom the U.S. Embassy deliberately maintains no ties. This includes, most notably, the two main Sunni political societies, whose ideological bases—Salafi Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood—evidently preclude such cooperation; as well as all the Shi‘a groups and movements not named al-Wifāq, presumably on the consideration that they are technically illegal. Having attended many Embassy-sponsored social events and receptions, I was struck at length by the monotony bordering on perfunctoriness of the political guest lists, which were made to include invariably several (generally lower-ranking) Āl Khalīfa bureaucrats, a familiar set of technocrat MPs from al-Wifāq, a diverse group of former Marxists-turned-“liberals,” and perhaps a few Sunni “independents.” The far limit of this political diversity was the presence of one particular member of al-Aṣālah—“a moderate,” I was assured. Never did I observe anyone affiliated with al-Manbar or with the non-parliamentary Shi‘a opposition—“the Ḥaqqīs,” as Embassy officials are fond of calling them.

All the same, I was able to meet a quite representative set of individuals spanning the length of Bahrain’s political continuum. These included at the time of interview: two members of parliament from al-Manbar; three from al-Wifāq; one from al-Aṣālah; one Salafi independent; the head of the liberal-socialist party Wa‘ad (not then represented in parliament); the head of the liberal Progressive Tribune Society (المنبر التقدمي, neither represented); the founder of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights; a senior leader of al-Ḥaqq; and a famous Shi‘a religious personality and founder of the then recently-formed New Movement, now called al-Wafā’.<sup>20</sup> Most of these individuals have been referenced already. I also attended the weekly *majālis* of several parliamentarians as well as those of prominent Sunni businessmen who, judging by their speech, guests, and choice of television programming (the dull but uncontroversial BahrainTV is a sure tell), were at least nominally pro-government if essentially seeking to appear apolitical.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The only political current one might consider absent is the Shi‘a Islamic Action Society (العمل الإسلامي) headed by Sh. Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Maḥfūdh. The direct modern descendent of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain well-known for its failed coup attempt of 1981, the group adheres to the Shirāzī school of theology and as such is fundamentally at odds with al-Wifāq, competing with it over popular support. After boycotting the 2002 elections, however, its candidates failed to win any seats in 2006 and is therefore seen as a relative political non-player in the category of Wa‘ad or the Progressive Tribune. Moreover, the al-Khawājahs being among the most prominent of the Shirāzī families, my interview with ‘Abd al-Hādī perhaps served to compensate for this omission.

<sup>21</sup> This was less so of the business elite of Muḥarraḡ, the historical seat of Bahrain’s government until its move to al-Rifā’ on the main island in 1923. Bahrain’s second-largest city and only city-governorate other than Manama, Muḥarraḡ is widely acknowledged as home to “the most politically-aware” citizens—that is, Sunni citizens—in the country, as said by one of its leading merchants. In practice this means that the natives of this traditionally Sunni

Given the liberal use of these interviews in service of the argument thus far, my purpose in conducting them may already be clear. That is, namely, to complement and corroborate the secondary source material to which one must unavoidably appeal in studying the ethnic conflict of Bahrain, which whether newspaper or website is equally one-sided, abridged, and often shrouded in euphemism. If the responses obtained in my interviews may be assumed of a similar quality—though one will likely agree from the quotations visited thus far that few from either side seem to mince words—then at least they have been obtained first-hand and, since all were asked the same questions, are readily comparable. International outreach being, however, an explicit strategy adopted by Bahrain’s ethnic-based political societies in shaping the domestic debate against their respective rivals,<sup>22</sup> one imagines that these interviews were viewed by participants in a similar light, that is, as a chance to give a clear statement of one’s political positions and ideology over against those of opposing groups.

### **Executing the First Mass Political Survey of Bahraini Citizens**

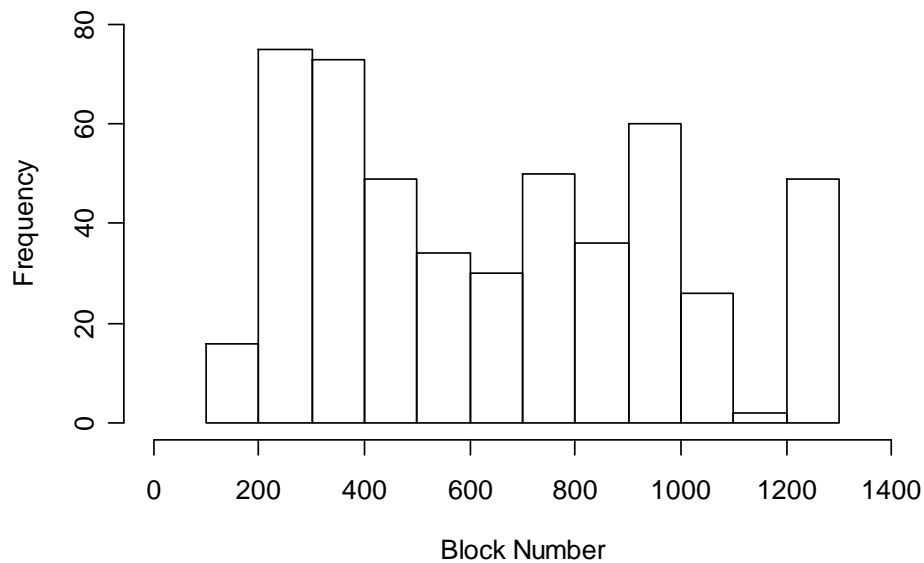
Having thus outlined the main methodological and practical difficulties occasioned by the choice of Bahrain as a subject with which to test the thesis developed here, we move now to a more detailed overview of the mass survey itself, whose data will form the basis of this empirical analysis. Though I was present in Bahrain from April 2008 to June 2009, active surveying could begin only in January 2009, following the aforementioned compromise with the BCSR, and lasted until early June. This somewhat elongated five-month timespan was a direct result of the post-‘Āshūrā’ disturbances discussed previously, the political situation calming only in late April. Even then, many of the more embattled Shi‘a villages would for some time remain unsuitable for interviewing. On this account we were forced to begin surveying in ethnically-mixed or Sunni-dominated areas first and expand to the rural Shi‘a districts as they became accessible. As a rule, Shi‘i fieldworkers conducted interviews in Shi‘a-dominated areas, and likewise Sunni interviewers were sent to Sunni areas, though in urban centers like Manama, Madīnat Ḥamad, Madīnat ‘Īsā, and parts of Muḥarraq, inter-ethnic interviews were inevitable. In the end, however, this was a fortunate development in that it embedded into the survey a natural experiment: one that revealed the effect on respondents of being interviewed by a member of the rival group rather than by a co-ethnic, which as we shall see is not trivial.

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stronghold are less shy than their counterparts on the main island in voicing criticism of the government and of the Āl Khalīfa, particularly on the issues of naturalization and economic management and policy.

<sup>22</sup> This is especially true of the Shi‘a groups, both registered and unregistered. Cf. CH. 3, 75, note 46.

FIGURE 4.I. *Histogram of Sample Block Numbers*



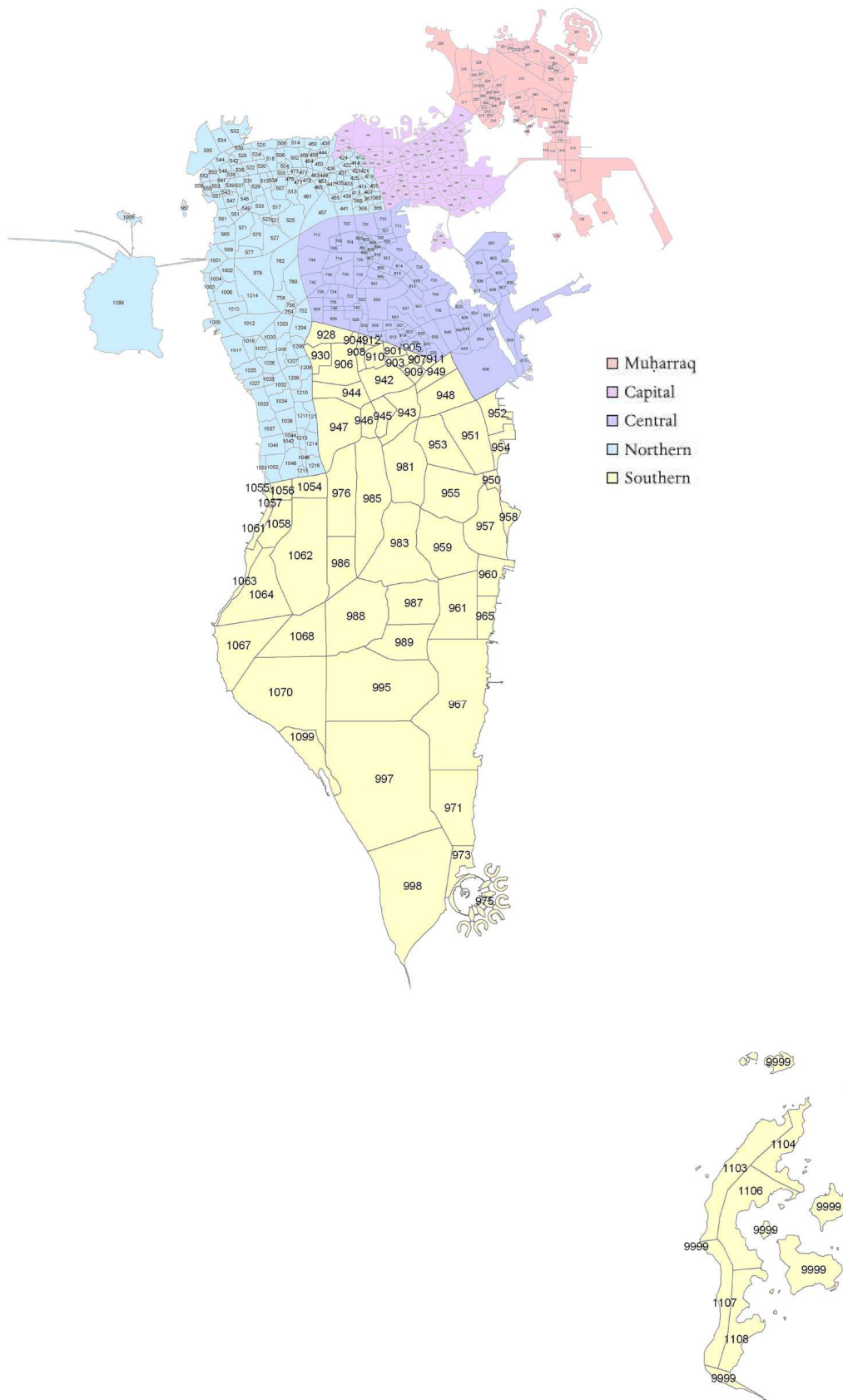
The one contribution of the BCSR to the execution of my survey, though an enormous one to be sure, was its provision of a random sample of 500 Bahraini households that it received directly from the Central Informatics Organization, which administers the nation’s census and maintains this and other electronic population databases. Since Bahraini zip codes (“block numbers”) correspond numerically to one of twelve geographical zones, I was able to confirm before commencing surveying that the sample was in fact reflective of Bahrain’s general population distribution.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, it even included two addresses in the remote Ḥawār Islands, a disputed archipelago used by Bahrain as a military outpost but claimed by Qatar and situated just a few miles off its western coast. Above is a histogram showing the sample divided geographically. From this one can easily judge the representativeness of the sample by comparing the frequency of specific block numbers to the known populations of the districts to which they correspond.<sup>24</sup> The 100 and 200 blocks, for example, comprise the

<sup>23</sup> Beyond this, the fact that the sample was destined originally for use in one of the BCSR’s own, state-sponsored national surveys before being passed to me makes it very unlikely that it would have been doctored or truncated.

<sup>24</sup> Block numbers beginning with 100 correspond to the area of al-Ḥidd; the 200s to Muḥarraq; 300s to Manama and the island of Nabīh Ṣāliḥ; 400s to Jidd Ḥafṣ and several Shi’a villages; 500s to the “Northern Region” dominated by Shi’a villages; 600s to the Shi’a stronghold of Sitra; 700s to a Shi’a “Central Region”; 800s to Madīnat ʿĪsā (Isa Town); 900s to ʿĀl Khalifa tribal ally-dominated al-Rifāʿ, where Shi’a are said to be barred from owning property, and the sparsely-populated, militarized southern two-thirds of the island; 1000s to a “Western Region” inhabited only in a few coastal villages; the 1100s to the Ḥawār Islands; and the 1200s to the ethnically-mixed Madīnat Ḥamad (Hamad Town), the country’s newest urban development and home to many naturalized Sunnis. See FIGURE 4.2.



FIGURE 4.2. Scale Map of the Five Governorates of Bahrain, with Block Numbers



Governorate of Muḥarraḡ, whose citizen population was officially reported in 2007 as being 94,558, or about 17.9% of Bahrain’s total 527,433.<sup>25</sup> A much more recent figure based on the number of voters registered for the 2010 parliamentary elections puts this proportion at 57,233 of a total 318,668, or 18.0%.<sup>26</sup> Computing the proportion of 100 and 200 blocks to the entire sample, then, we see that Muḥarraḡ households comprise 92 of the 500 total, or exactly 18.4%. When we repeat these calculations for the remaining four governorates we find that the rest of the sample contains 83 or 16.6% Capital Governorate households, 145 or 29.0% in the Central Governorate, 150 or 30.0% in the Northern, and 30 or 6.0% in the Southern. By comparison, the respective 2007 census figures are: 13.3%, 29.7%, 33.1%, and 5.9%.

More than just geographically representative in the aggregate, moreover, the BCSR sample includes, amazingly, at least one respondent from each Bahraini village, district, and city. There are indeed few areas of Bahrain signified by a proper name that are not represented in the sample. Lastly, while this 500-household sample is smaller in *magnitude* than those employed elsewhere—for example, in the other Arab Barometer surveys—yet because of Bahrain’s miniscule population the *proportion* of citizens that were interviewed is easily the highest of any mass political survey administered to date in the Arab world, at 1 interview per 1,055 citizens, using the 2007 census population figure. The next highest ratio, achieved in the 750-household Arab Barometer survey of Kuwait, is 1 to 1,868.<sup>27</sup>

As mentioned previously, however, we were unfortunately unable to complete all of these 500 interviews on account of the ongoing political and social turmoil that lingered even after the mass pardons of late April 2009 meant to ameliorate it. Of the full sample, therefore, 87% was completed, or 435 interviews. The unfinished areas are dominated by the crowded, urban neighborhoods of Manama (19 interviews unfinished) and Muḥarraḡ (14); and the remainder are spread across isolated Shi’a villages and suburbs and adjacent Sunni enclaves. These two types of areas proved particularly challenging in that field interviewers who were unfamiliar with the neighborhoods, especially females, were loath to go there as one is forced

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<sup>25</sup> “Population of the Kingdom of Bahrain by Governorate, Nationality & Sex - July 2007,” 2007, Bahrain Central Informatics Organization. Available at: <[http://www.cio.gov.bh/cio\\_eng/SubDetailed.aspx?subcatid=295](http://www.cio.gov.bh/cio_eng/SubDetailed.aspx?subcatid=295)>.

<sup>26</sup> “المعاودة: 318668 مجموع الكتلة الانتخابية للعام 2010” [“al-Ma’awdah: 318,668 is the Total Electoral Bloc for 2010”], 2010, *Al-Wasaf*, September 9. Available (in Arabic) at: <<http://www.alwasatnews.com/elections/page/473874.html>>. Though the pro-Shi’a newspaper *Al-Wasaf* contradicts this official government count, its own estimate of 19.0% (60,906 of 321,000) is not so different. See “سادسة الجنوبية الأقل بـ770 ناخباً وأولى الشمالية الأكبر بـ16223” [“The Southern Sixth [District] is the Smallest with 770 Electors and the Northern First is the Biggest with 16,223”], 2010, *Al-Wasaf*, August 25. Available (in Arabic) at: <<http://www.alwasatnews.com/elections/page/471405.html>>.

<sup>27</sup> Using the July 2010 CIA *World Factbook* estimate of Kuwait’s citizen population, which is 1,401,172. Available at: <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>>.

to wander through foreign territory from the nearest road large enough to fit a car; while those who did know the areas were equally unwilling to conduct interviews there for fear of gaining a reputation as a spy. If thus not excluded in as random a fashion as one would have preferred, these blocks at least are spread rather equally between Sunni- and Shi'a-populated districts,<sup>28</sup> and even in these problem locations we often salvaged one or two interviews if households happened to be located in a less isolated position. One direct upshot of this difficulty, however, was the underrepresentation of Shi'i females, which form only 29% of the Shi'a sub-sample.

Finally, the survey instrument itself is the standard Arab Barometer questionnaire with only slight textual adjustments to fit the Bahraini context. The only substantive change was the inclusion of two open-ended questions at the very end of the interview. The final, 16-page questionnaire contains 106 separate instruments inclusive of demographic details, and requires approximately 30 to 45 minutes to administer. The sample containing the exact address (house number, street number, block number) of the households to visit, these were located using the now-defunct BahrainExplorer website, a searchable GIS map of the island maintained then by one of the BCSR's commercial subsidiaries, GEOMATEC.<sup>29</sup> This resource proved invaluable in directing field interviewers along Bahrain's labyrinthine and ill-marked roads to find equally ill-marked houses; without it, indeed, our exceptional sample would have been rendered of little use. Yet despite this aide an overall response rate of about two-thirds, even lower in predominantly Sunni areas, betrays the general ambivalence of ordinary Bahrainis to such a seemingly strange project, which at best could do them no benefit and at worst may be no more than a ploy to discover non-allegiant subjects.<sup>30</sup> In case of refusal or non-response,

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<sup>28</sup> Although the large representation of the urban Manama and Muḥarraḡ neighborhoods, which together account for nearly half of the uncompleted interviews, perhaps implies a slight disproportionate omission of Sunnis. For the interested reader, the un- and under-represented areas correspond to the following names and block numbers: 209 (Muḥarraḡ Town); 213-214 (Muḥarraḡ Sūq); 216 (South Muḥarraḡ); 301 (Manama Sūq); 306 (Ra'as Rumān); 314 (al-Nu'aym); 318 (al-Ḥūrah); 321 (al-Guḍaybiyyah Sūq); 408 (Sanābis); 419 (Jidd Ḥafṣ); 430 and 434 (Karbābād); 433 (Jablat Ḥibshī); 436 (Seef); 526 (Barbār); 542 (al-Dirāz); 551 (al-Gharbiyyah); 555 (al-Budayyi'); 561 (al-Janabiyyah); 623-624 (East and West 'Akar); 633 (Ma'āmīr); 644 (al-Nuwaidrāt); 721 (Jidd 'Alī); 1010 and 1014 (al-Ḥamalah); and 1101 and 1103 (al-Ḥawār Islands). See FIGURE 4.3.

<sup>29</sup> The site previously existed at [www.bahrainexplorer.com/bex](http://www.bahrainexplorer.com/bex). The BCSR's parent organization, the Central Informatics Organization, now seems to offer a similar interactive GIS map at [www.bahrainlocator.gov.bh](http://www.bahrainlocator.gov.bh). Further information about GEOMATEC, which also produced the maps used to make FIGURES 4.2 through 4.5, is still available at: <http://www.bcsr.gov.bh/BCSR/En/geomatec.aspx>.

<sup>30</sup> It was clear that on the whole Bahrain's Shi'a saw more to gain from participation in the survey than did Sunnis, many of whom viewed the entire project with suspicion and as an elaborate, covert test of their national loyalty. One might easily have expected the opposite, that in general the Shi'a would have shown more distrust toward would-be field interviewers given the prevailing political climate. Though some certainly did, and asked the latter if they were sure that the information would not be passed on to the government, even more Shi'i respondents asked whether the results of the survey would actually make any difference—that is, improve the lot of the Shi'a

fieldworkers moved three doors to the left of the designated house, while obliging respondents (18 years and older) were selected, as in the other Arab Barometer surveys, using a Kish Table.

### **An Initial Look at Bahrain's Ethnic Geography**

The last time the Government of Bahrain reported official demographic statistics on its Sunni and Shi'i communities was in its very first census in 1941, which put the percentage of Shi'a citizens at 53% of the population.<sup>31</sup> In the intervening 70 years, speculation about Bahrain's evolving Sunni-Shi'i balance has become both a local flash-point and a source of frustration for those attempting to study the country. This ambiguity has been complicated only further by the government's decade-long program of naturalizing Arab and non-Arab Sunnis for work in the police and military. Because Bahrain's Sunni-Shi'i balance is not simply a product of nature, in other words, there is no obvious way to estimate it based on, for example, natural birth or immigration rates. As a result, a wide range of disparate estimates put Bahraini Shi'a variously at between 60% and 75% of the current citizen population. If one would trust our direct sampling, however, such educated guesses are considerable overestimates. For Shi'i respondents comprised slightly less than 58% of those surveyed, a finding that would seem to call attention to the pace and scope of Bahrain's program of Sunni naturalization.

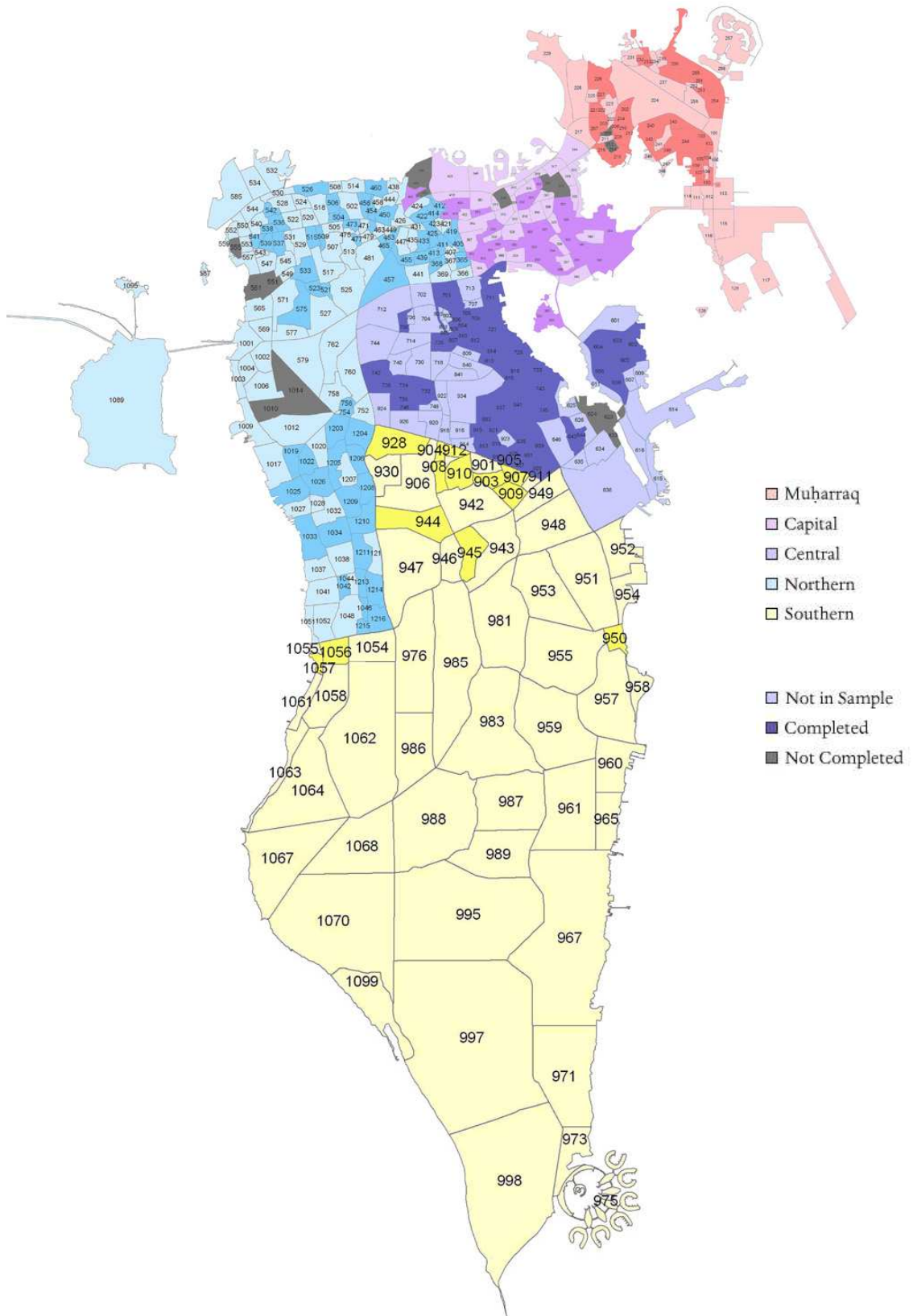
The results of surveying are depicted visually in FIGURE 4.3, which more fully reveals the representativeness of the 500-household sample. Here, blocks with at least one completed interview are highlighted; those not included in the sample are not highlighted; and the few cases in which a block was included in the sample but we failed to complete an interview there are shaded in gray. The latter, plainly, are well-distributed geographically. Given the quality of the sample, moreover, this FIGURE 4.3 may serve also as a basic demographic map of the country, illustrating well the overall population patterns across the island. None of these is more striking than the barrenness of the southern two-thirds of the island, which apart from the lower half of al-Rifā'; the ex-patriot enclaves of 'Awālī (945-946) and Rifā' Views (943); a few sprawling royal palace complexes; and the Sunni seaside villages of al-Zallāq (1056-57), 'Askar (950), al-Jaw (960), and al-Dūr (965), the land is uninhabited except by military personnel and foreign laborers housed in compounds spread across the desert landscape. The 13 artificial

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or of this or that village—and on the rare occasions when I was forced to accompany field interviewers to the villages to help prove that s/he was not a government agent, I was almost always implored to see that their contribution be used to somehow “improve the situation.”

<sup>31</sup> Qubain (1955) tells that the census was taken “primarily for food control purposes.”

FIGURE 4.3. Map of Survey Interview Locations, Highlighted



islands comprising the ex-patriot oasis of Durrat al-Bahrain (975) at the southeastern tip of the country remain unfinished and in any case are unlikely to house many Bahraini nationals.

Likewise, the large swaths of un-surveyed blocks in the north of the island largely correspond to reclaimed or uncultivated land as well as commercial and industrial areas. On the island of Muḥarraḡ, for example, the large, central space corresponds to Bahrain Airport, while the southeastern peninsula is in fact a network of dry-docks and warehouses known as the al-Ḥidd Industrial Area. The manmade Amwāj Islands off the northeast coast of Muḥarraḡ form yet another posh ex-patriot community, while its western coast is reclaimed or in any case undeveloped land, though the neighborhood of al-Busaytīn is fast encroaching in that direction. Depicted in the map as land, the un-highlighted border area connecting Muḥarraḡ to Manama is in fact two separate bridges. This unpopulated area stretches southward along the eastern shore of Manama, where one finds numerous spas, a large district of hotels, embassies, and government buildings known as the Diplomatic Area, the National Museum, an extensive public park, a marina, the National Library, and finally the gigantic Al-Fātiḡ Mosque. Nearby in Shi'a-dominated Juffair sits the U.S. naval base. So too are there no private residences along the entire northern coast of the Capital Governorate, this whole region formed of reclaimed seabed and comprised, from east to west, of a 3 kilometer-long, still-unfinished Financial Harbor, some half-dozen shopping malls and supermarkets, a massive Ritz-Carlton Hotel with its own artificial harbor and beaches, and the centuries-old Bahrain Fort.

West of here in the Northern Governorate settlements follow the Budayyi' Highway, which straddles a dozen or so rural Shi'a villages before terminating in the Sunni enclave of al-Budayyi' situated on the far northwest coast of Bahrain (blocks 552, 555, and 559). Several large, reclaimed islands being constructed to the direct north (585, 534, 532) are uninhabited, and much of the area surrounding al-Budayyi' proper (e.g., 544, 540) consists of expansive, privately-owned gardens. South of al-Budayyi' the coastline is dotted with spectacular mansions and resorts, interrupted only by the King Fahd Causeway to Saudi Arabia. The large islands connected by the causeway, Umm al-Na'sān (1089) and Jiddah (1095), are privately-owned by Bahrain's king and prime minister, respectively. South of the causeway entrance the seaside compounds continue all the way to al-Zallāḡ in the Southern Governorate, interrupted, as far as I saw, by a single public beach. Caught between these private coastal plots and the extended western border of newly-constructed Hamad Town (the 1200s) are the rural Shi'a villages of Dumistān, Karzakān, al-Mālikiyyah, Ṣadad, Shahrakān, and Dār Kulayb, among the poorest

places in Bahrain and not infrequently the sites of violent confrontation with the government. The extreme discrepancy in the apportionment of land in this western coastal region helps fuel one of Bahrain's most explosive political issues, one that unites Sunni and Shi'i alike against the perceived excess of the Āl Khalīfa and their traditional family allies, who appear inexplicably well-endowed of premium property while ordinary citizens are suffered to make the best of the remainder—if, that is, one is lucky enough to own property at all.

The Central Governorate, finally, exhibits a similar pattern of segregated population centers. Here, though, the eastern coastline is dedicated primarily to industrial and naval use: the un-highlighted northern portion of the Sitra peninsula is a warehouse zone; the south and east regions are used by the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) and other petro-chemical companies for refinement, storage, and distribution. Directly south of the BAPCO complex is an equally-large Aluminum Bahrain (ALBA) installation, which uses the adjacent coast for its own smelting operations. The only notable non-industrial users of this shoreline are the unfortunately-located al-Bandar Resort and neighboring Bahrain Yacht Club. The interior portion of the peninsula is divided between a half-dozen Shi'a villages, whose residents complain bitterly of the transformation of their landscape once known for its verdure and natural springs. One villager told how two local children had recently drowned when the beach they used for swimming was unknowingly dredged for sand, creating a precipitous drop but a few feet from shore. When asked what had been done to remove the danger, he pointed to a tattered fence bearing a "Keep Out" sign erected, he said, by the responsible company. Owing perhaps to such circumstances, and to their geographical isolation, the Shi'a of Sitra are commonly held to be the most "extreme" in their anti-government views and xenophobia, and I was met more than once with surprise and horror upon mentioning that I would travel there to assist in surveying. Also considered part of larger Sitra are the three Shi'a villages of al-'Akar, Ma'āmīr, and al-Nuwaidrāt, which straddle the highway that runs through the peninsula after it reaches the mainland. The other mainland Central Governorate population is concentrated around several centers: the Shi'a villages of A'ālī (the 730s) and Salmabād (706, 708) to the far west and northwest; the large, ethnically-mixed Isa Town, whose suburbs span the length of the eastern interior coast; and the northern portion of al-Rifā', separated from Isa Town and the mainland Sitra villages by the six-lane Istiqlāl Highway. In the remaining western third of the Central Governorate, in the lands surrounding A'ālī, are found the Dilmūn Burial Mounds, a necropolis consisting of some 100,000 above-ground tombs believed to date to the fourth

millennium BC. Bifurcated unceremoniously by the Sh. Khalifa bin Salmān Highway that divides the Northern and Central Governorates, these mounds also account for the large region of un-surveyed blocks situated north of Hamad Town in the Northern Governorate.

All these demographic peculiarities are summarized in FIGURE 4.4 below, which shows the ethnic composition of the areas surveyed at the level of block number. For those blocks where no surveying occurred, it is indicated whether this is for lack of data or for lack of a Bahraini population outright. Those blocks nominally populated by Bahrainis—say, the personal islands of the king and prime minister, the palace compounds around al-Rifa‘, or the large, block-sized private compounds of the eastern shore—that in reality have no chance of appearing in the sample, are marked for our purposes as “unpopulated.” If the picture that emerges from this color-coding be common enough knowledge to the average Bahraini, still I am aware of no one who has yet put it to paper, this diagram being to my knowledge the first ethnic demographic map of the country. In fact, of the two demographic maps of any sort I can find of Bahrain, both of which show only rough population density, one is published by the CIA and is based on the 1981 census,<sup>32</sup> the other proprietary and its source unspecified.<sup>33</sup> While one might have hoped to have visited more of the “no data” blocks in order to paint a more complete portrait, this ethnic map is a byproduct of the Bahrain survey rather than the goal of it. In any case, moreover, the population of many of these blocks, if not zero, yet is so sparse as to require a sample that is orders of magnitude larger than the 500 households we surveyed in order for them to appear at random. And since the government population data are reported only at the regional (pre-2002) or governorate level of aggregation for fear of giving any further ammunition to the many who decry its blatant ethnic gerrymandering of the 40 electoral districts (cf. CH. 3, 61), we are unlikely to soon have recourse to such a sample.

What we can do alternatively, however, is utilize this assumption of gerrymandered electoral districts to our advantage, as a basis upon which to construct an alternative ethnic demographic map that might at once confirm and expand upon our patchwork FIGURE 4.4. This effort is represented below in FIGURE 4.5, which assumes the ethnic composition of a given block according to the electoral district to which it belongs. Those districts carried by al-Wifaq are assumed to have a Shi‘a majority; conversely, those won by anyone else—i.e.,

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<sup>32</sup> “Bahrain – Population Density,” 1993, *Atlas of the Middle East*, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. Available at: <[http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/atlas\\_middle\\_east/bahrain\\_pop.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/atlas_middle_east/bahrain_pop.jpg)>.

<sup>33</sup> “Population Density Map of Bahrain,” 2007, *Best Country Reports*, The World Trade Press. Available at: <[http://www.bestcountryreports.com/Population\\_Map\\_Bahrain.html](http://www.bestcountryreports.com/Population_Map_Bahrain.html)>.



FIGURE 4.4. Map of Respondent Blocks, by Ethnicity

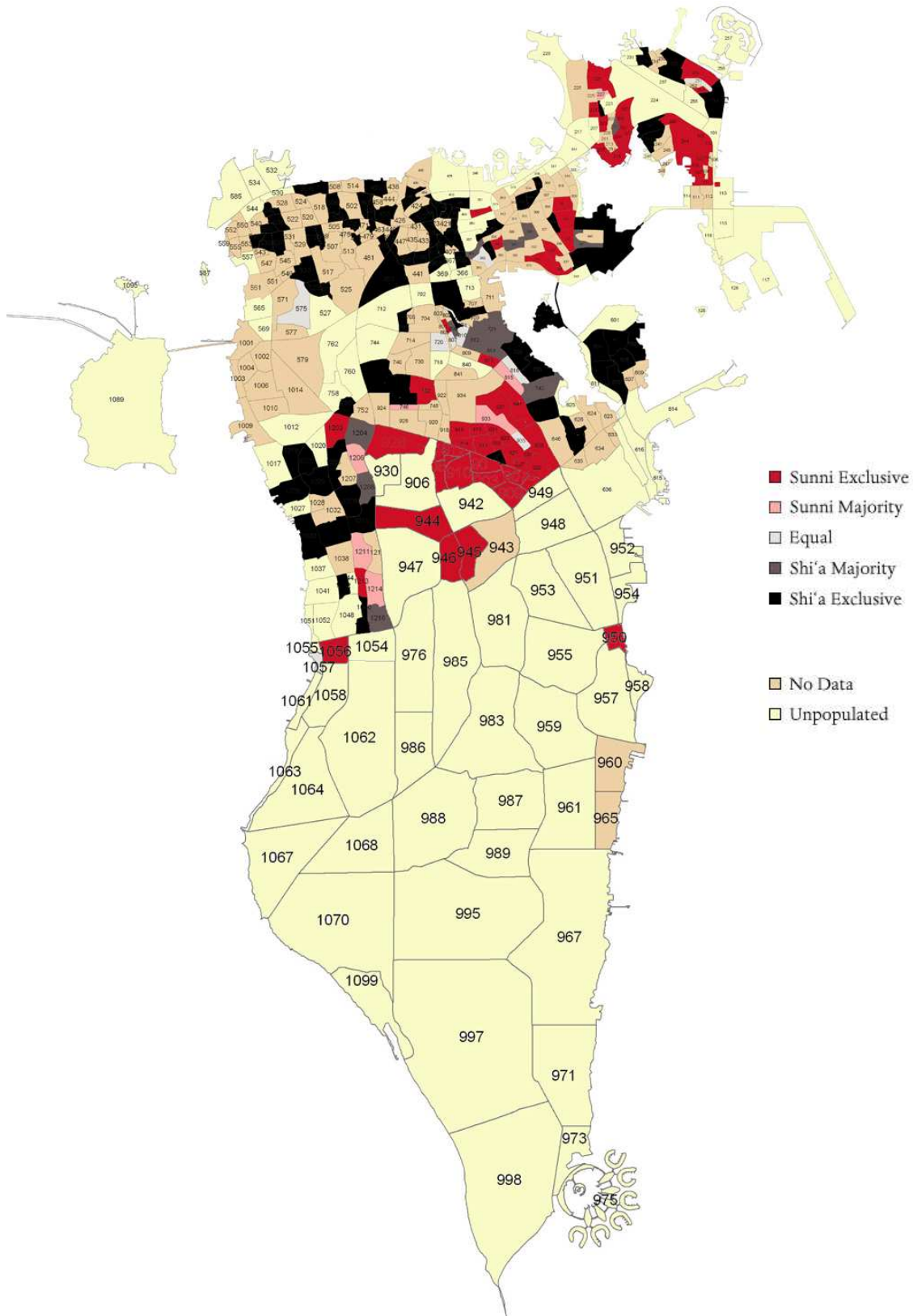
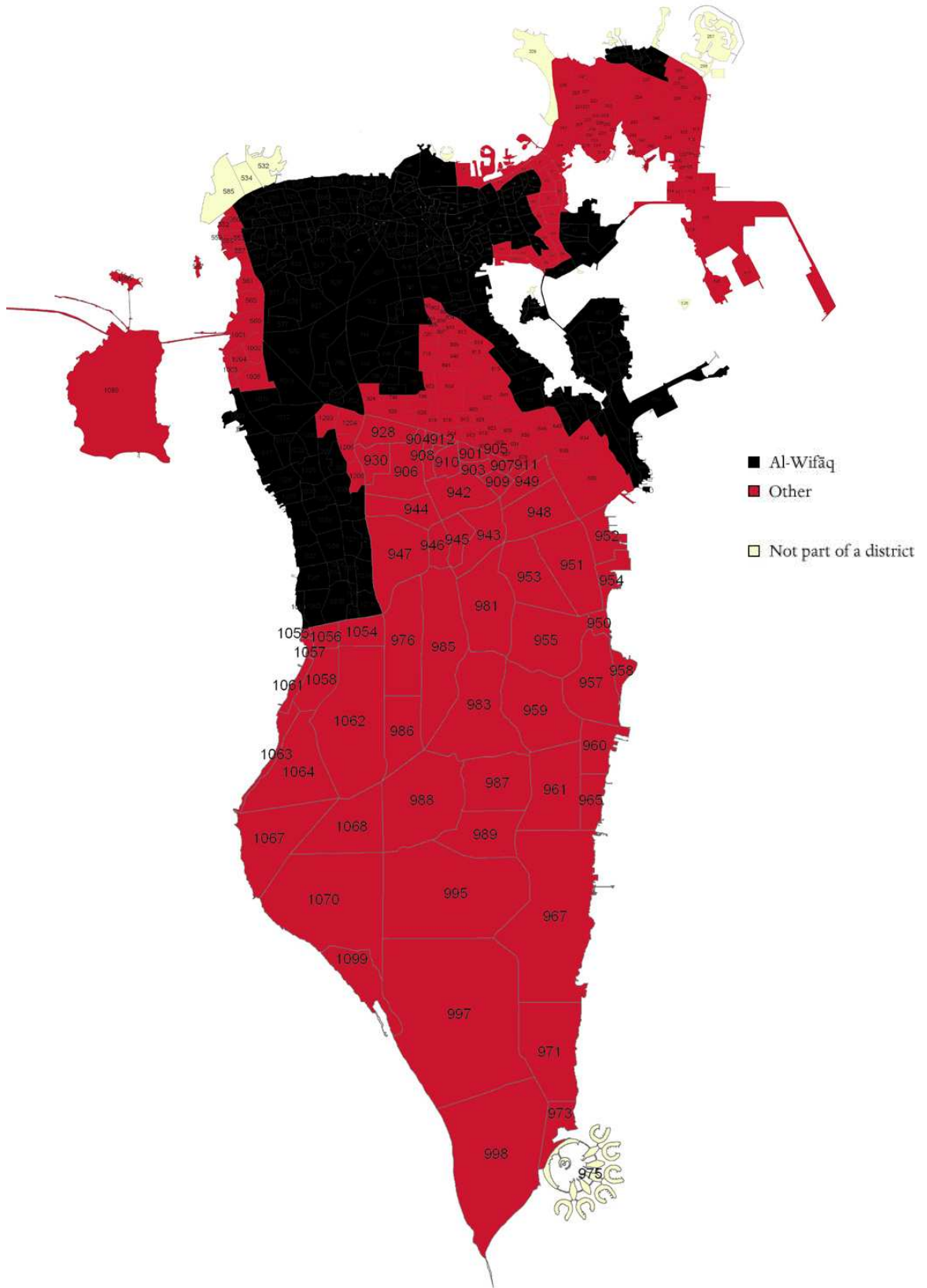


FIGURE 4.5. Map of Bahraini Electoral Districts, by 2010 Winner



by Sunni Islamic candidates and pro-government “independents”—are assumed to be Sunni-majority.<sup>34</sup> Comparing FIGURES 4.4 and 4.5 we easily notice an astonishing coordination in the ethnic composition of the blocks, even in the most heavily-integrated areas of Isa Town and Hamad Town. This simplified map is not perfect of course, under-representing the Shi‘a presence in Muḥarraḡ and the Sunni presence in south Hamad Town and western Manama. Yet it does offer a useful estimate of what our ethnic map may have looked like had we been able to interview, say, 10,000 households, to say nothing of its rather shocking confirmation of systematic ethnic gerrymandering and disproportionate inclusion among the Sunni-majority districts of large swaths of unpopulated territory.<sup>35</sup> (Indeed, when we do the math, we find that the mean Shi‘i district represented 9,533 electors in 2010, the average Sunni district 6,196.<sup>36</sup>)

### A Portent of Division to Come

More notable for our purposes, however, is what FIGURE 4.4 says about ethnic segregation in Bahrain, which, if it perhaps no longer exactly fits Holes’ description of “apartheid-like,” remains glaring nonetheless. Of the 187 total block numbers visited in our survey, 119 or 64% are represented by more than one interviewee. Of these, only 30 or 25% were not exclusive either to Sunnis or Shi‘is, and of these mixed blocks a combined one-half were located either in Isa Town (11) or Hamad Town (6). Away from these two urban developments, we found just 13

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<sup>34</sup> These results come from the most recent 2010 parliamentary elections, in which al-Wifāḡ gained one seat (in a central Manama district) to increase its total to 18. Using the 2006 election results would not have substantially altered the contours of FIGURE 4.5, therefore. For the 2010 results, see “Bahrain’s first round parliamentary election results,” 2010, *Gulf News*, October 24. Available at: <<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-s-first-round-parliamentary-election-results-1.701190>>.

<sup>35</sup> It is a clear testament to the shrewdness of the Bahraini public relations department that the district won in 2006 and 2010 (both times unopposed) by the celebrated “first woman MP in the Gulf”—the Southern 6th—consists of the unpopulated Ḥawār Islands along with mainland blocks 998, 997, 973, 971, 967, and 965, of which only the last is home to any considerable population, and which in total accounted for just 770 registered voters in the 2010 election. See “سادسة الجنوبية الأقل بـ770 ناخباً وأولى الشمالية الأكبر بـ16223” [“The Southern Sixth [District] is the Smallest with 770 Electors and the Northern First is the Biggest with 16,223”], 2010, *Al-Wasaṡ*, *op cit*. For this, as for the country’s 2008 appointment to the United States of the first female, Jewish ambassador of an Arab nation from among its 36-strong Jewish community—as explained by the head of the Bahrain Human Rights Society, “We always believe here that control of America is governed by the Zionist lobby. The media and the money are all in the hands of the Jews. We believe if we have a Jewish ambassador and Jews in the Shura Council, this is a positive indicator for the country”—one is impressed at the scale of its political maneuvering. See Michael Slackman, 2009, “In a Landscape of Tension, Bahrain Embraces Its Jews. All 36 of Them,” *New York Times*, April 5. Available at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/06/world/middleeast/06bahrain.html>>.

<sup>36</sup> By governorate, these voter averages are: 5,146 Shi‘i to 3,294 Sunni in the Capital; 7,182 to 7,675 in Muḥarraḡ; 13,107 to 7,631 in the Northern; 12,699 to 9,470 in the Central; and the average Southern Governorate district, all six of which were easily carried by Sunni MPs, contained a meager 2,913 electors in 2010.

other ethnically-mixed blocks across the remainder of the island, amounting to 11% of the 119 multiple-respondent districts. And even these proportions are likely far too conservative, as included among the 68 single-respondent blocks are doubtless many more Sunni- and Shi'i-exclusive areas. No less than 15 of these 68, for example, correspond to Shi'a villages in Sitra and along al-Budayyi' Road, where one would be surprised to find even a single Sunni. While thus ameliorated somewhat by the construction of new urban housing settlements like Madīnat 'Īsā and the yet-expanding Madīnat Ḥamad, Bahrain's systematic ethnic self-segregation<sup>37</sup> shows little indication of having eased qualitatively almost since the time of the Āl Khalīfa conquest.

How far this geographical polarization reflects an underlying ethnic-based political divide among respondents, and to what extent the latter supersedes purely economic concerns in shaping the political opinions and actions of ordinary Bahrainis, of our ostensibly-quiescent Gulf *rentier* citizens, we are finally prepared to learn. This we are following the practical and methodological preface to my 2009 Bahrain mass survey, the latter portion addressing the two major questions likely to be raised about the present study. The first is whether the choice of Bahrain as a subject perhaps limits the wider applicability of any potential findings owing to the country's unique historical and socio-political circumstances; that is to say, whether the case of Bahrain perhaps lacks external validity in a way that renders the present inquiry one fundamentally about the ethnic politics of Bahrain, rather than one about the efficacy of the *rentier* state framework in the Arab Gulf. To this objection our response was three-fold: in the first place, we said, there exists some quantitative evidence in support of a general link between ethnic conflict and regime stability among the six GCC states, with the three more homogeneous states—the Emirates, Qatar, and Oman—faring demonstrably better in the Failed States Index of regime stability than their more ethno-religiously diverse counterparts.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, we continued, since a common cause of Sunni-Shi'i tension in the Gulf region is the perceived belligerence and deleterious influence of Iran, a disconcerting force acting upon all the area's regimes equally in proportion to the size of their domestic Shi'a populations, then there exists a compelling theoretical argument to explain why the case of Bahrain should be

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<sup>37</sup> Though, again, many Shi'a would say they are barred from owning property in al-Rifā' and parts of Muḥarraḡ.

<sup>38</sup> If one should wonder, this is not a mere artifact of the 2009 index. The same intra-GCC division exists in the 2007 iteration as well, which is the only other sample that includes all six Gulf states (previous editions were limited to failed and failing states). The 2007 totals are: Saudi Arabia (76.5), Kuwait (62.1), Bahrain (57.0), Qatar (53.6), UAE (51.6), and Oman (45.5). See "Failed States Index Scores 2007," 2007, The Fund for Peace. Available at: <[http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=229&Itemid=366](http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=229&Itemid=366)>.

generalizable in degrees to the wider Gulf. Finally, we noted, there is the present and recent state of inter-ethnic, and relatedly Shi'a-government, relations in the Gulf, which even before the 2003 ethnic reconfiguration of Iraq gave birth to political oppositions in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain, and with them, as Okruhlik concludes as early as 1999, "a discrepancy between the expectations derived from the rentier framework and empirical reality."

The second main methodological objection we preemptively addressed concerned the lack of additional country observations to which to compare our Bahraini case in a more rigorous cross-country analysis. On this point we were obliged to make more of a concession, agreeing that it would indeed have been preferable to have replicated the Bahrain study in one or all of the remaining Gulf nations, the more ethnically-homogenous countries being particularly attractive targets from a theoretical standpoint. Yet, we said, such an expansion would have further burdened a project that as it was often seemed destined for failure even in Bahrain, whose small size, high share of citizens, and relatively free academic environment make it without doubt the most favorable to such a study of any of the Gulf countries. The many practical difficulties plaguing the execution of the mass survey we need not revisit; it is enough to mention a lack of social anonymity and trust, physical and social isolation of ethnic enclaves, and persistent citizen-government confrontation.

But even beyond such practical considerations, we argued further, there is reason for sanguinity as regards our Bahrain inquiry: for the larger purpose of understanding the role of ethnic division in influencing the political stability of *rentier* or Gulf *rentier* nations, if perhaps complicated at present by a lack of requisite data, does not sabotage the entire undertaking if not realized fully. This is because the more fundamental question remains in any case answerable, and answerable for the first time only, which is whether the individual-level causal story of the *rentier* framework, these theoretical assumptions about what motivates the political behavior of ordinary *rentier* citizens like those of the Arab Gulf, finds substantiation in the actions and opinions of actual Gulf Arabs. Besides, we noted, we will in the penultimate chapter offer a provisional cross-country analysis of the *rentier* political effects of ethnic conflict by utilizing the only other applicable mass survey data from the greater Gulf region, which come from two surveys of Iraq administered in 2004 and again in 2006. We proceed now in this direction.

## Notes for Chapter 4

Fearon, James D. and David Laitin. 2005. "Bahrain." Unpublished manuscript. Available at: <[http://www.stanford.edu/group/ethnic/Random Narratives/BahrainRN1.1.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/ethnic/Random%20Narratives/BahrainRN1.1.pdf)>.

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## CHAPTER 5

### *Rentier State Theory versus Rentier State Reality: Economic Benefits and Individual Political Behavior in Bahrain*

More than simply give empirical evidence to a general political disagreement between Sunnis and Shi'is in Bahrain, the present chapter seeks to evaluate the specific theoretical arguments elaborated thus far in explanation of the larger case of Bahrain, of the case of the dysfunctional *rentier* state. As such, it proceeds deliberately in toe with the extant *rentier* framework in order to show how far its predictions about individual political behavior in the Arab Gulf accords with the reported actions and opinions of our real-life Gulf Arabs. Since these predictions stem directly from the economic devices through which allocative regimes are pretended to buy popular political quiescence, our own line of argument has offered an alternative account of the function of these *rentier* mechanisms under conditions of ethnic division, a modified theory of contemporary Gulf politics that explains the behavior of Gulf citizens and rulers in terms of intra-state ethno-religious rivalry tied inextricably to the region's furious geopolitics, dominated by a near-hysterical fear of Iran and of Iranian-inspired Shi'a emboldening. These revised predictions we may restate as a series of hypotheses that both summarize our changes to the standard *rentier* model and organize our quantitative analysis of the Bahrain mass survey.

The first two of these correspond to the supposed ability of rent-based states to co-opt domestic political support through the judicious and liberal use of public employment. Yet in the case of the ethnically-contested *rentier* state, we have argued, this course is curtailed by the veritable exclusion of the Shi'a from the largest state employers—the police, the armed forces, and to a slightly lesser extent the intelligence services (one always needs infiltrators)—and their disproportionate exclusion from the power ministries and other so-called “sensitive” bureaucracies for fear of their treachery. And as for those Shi'is who do find government employment, we said further, they will be suffered to fill comparatively lower-level positions,

as per the incisive political cartoon of Chapter 3, which has the “Ministry of Sectarianism” distributing “government jobs” to Bahrain’s Sunnis and “administrative positions” to the Shi‘a. Thus we arrive at the following testable conclusions:

*Hypothesis 1.1: Ethnic affiliation is a significant predictor of public-sector employment in Bahrain, such employment being negatively associated with Shi‘i identification; and*

*Hypothesis 1.2: Among public-sector employees, Shi‘i ethnic membership is negatively associated with occupational level.*

The second set of empirical predictions corresponds to our theoretical critique of the other alleged *rentier* pacifying mechanism, the so-called “taxation effect” whereby citizens of *rentier* regimes, not asked to pay taxes, in return are loath to make any political demands on their leaders out of an apparent moral insistence on subject-ruler parity, an ethical qualm with receiving while not giving. On this point, we said, *rentier* theorists may well be correct: untaxed citizens may, all else being equal, demand fewer political goods than their taxpaying counterparts. But far from implying a disinterested public, this statement serves only to rule out a single possibility from among the many plausible drivers of popular political zeal, not all of which will revolve around economics. In short, we said, the rallying cry of the American Revolution need not coincide with that of the Islamic Revolution; in the Arab Gulf, ethnic solidarity and rivalry offers a viable basis for political coordination. This argument suggests:

*Hypothesis 2.1: Ethnic affiliation is equally significant as, or more significant than, economic well-being in predicting individual political opinion and action in Bahrain; where*

*Hypothesis 2.1<sub>A</sub>: Sunni ethnicity is associated with less political action; and*

*Hypothesis 2.1<sub>B</sub>: Sunni ethnicity is associated with more positive political opinion; further,*

*Hypothesis 2.2: The strength of ethnic identity is a significant predictor of individual political opinion and action in Bahrain; where*

*Hypothesis 2.2<sub>A</sub>: Among Shi‘is, stronger ethnic identity is associated with more negative political opinion; while*

*Hypothesis 2.2<sub>B</sub>: Among Sunnis, stronger ethnic identity is associated with more positive political opinion; and*

*Hypothesis 2.2<sub>C</sub>: Among Sunnis as well as Shi‘is, the strength of ethnic identity is positively associated with political action.*



The distinction between *Hypotheses 2.1* and *2.2*, then, is that while the former simply posits a between-group discrepancy in survey responses—i.e., that Shi'is will tend to report being more politically-active and -interested; and will report less favorable opinions about Bahrain's government and general political situation—the latter hypothesis goes a step further to predict that these effects are further augmented as the ethnic identity (defined later as "religiosity") of a respondent increases in strength. In other words, *Hypothesis 2.2* posits that the more strongly a Bahraini identifies as a Sunni or a Shi'i, the stronger the respective effects on his political opinions and actions. This argument entails specific, falsifiable predictions the substantiation of which will lend considerable support to our larger thesis outlined in Chapter 2. Particularly crucial in this regard are the subsidiary *Hypotheses 2.2<sub>b</sub>* and *2.2<sub>c</sub>*, which represent our claim that ethnic-based political mobilization in Bahrain is not a phenomenon driven wholly by Shi'a but entails a countervailing force composed of ordinary Sunnis aimed at preventing their rivals from gaining political power and influence. We should, accordingly, find that the same measures of the strength of one's ethnic identity (or "religiosity") have a different—indeed opposite—effect depending on whether one is Sunni or Shi'i: for Shi'is, greater ethnic identification should cause one in his opinions to be more critical of the regime; for Sunnis, spur one to rally further in its defense. And thus should members of both groups, and here is *Hypothesis 2.2<sub>c</sub>*, exhibit more political engagement and interest as their ethnic identification increases: for the Shi'a, this is directed against the state; for Sunnis, over against the Shi'a—in order, as al-Ma'āwdah so helpfully articulated, "to counter probable harm."

Regarding the prediction of *Hypothesis 2.1* that individual material well-being will be a relatively less significant determinant of political action and opinion in Bahrain as compared to ethnic group membership, this is not to assert that it will be altogether unimportant or will not prove a statistically significant predictor of political behavior. The point is merely that its influence will be one of many competing effects, and of these likely not the greatest in magnitude; that the role of personal economy in explaining individual political behavior in *rentier* regimes has been overemphasized to the exclusion of other likely causes, not that it is irrelevant. One might ask the question, finally, whether our theory of ethnic-based political mobilization implies any specific expectations about the effect of economic well-being, more particularly whether we should expect its effect to be mediated by the ethnic membership of individuals. Is there a theoretical reason, that is, to think that the effect of personal economy

on the political behavior of Sunnis should differ from its effect on that of Shi'is? In one sense, perhaps not: our theory, though it explains why Shi'i citizens will be *disproportionately* excluded from public employment and from higher-level government service, does not suggest that they are *completely* excluded from such *rentier* benefits and thus from the clientelism assumed to alter citizens' political orientations toward the state. Hence, while the effect of economic well-being may be presumed to be more systematic among Sunnis inasmuch as they qualify more universally for employment-related benefits, this difference may or may not be enough to produce a between-ethnic discrepancy in the effect of household economy itself. This possibility, however, we shall certainly investigate.

### **A “Legitimate Aspiration” for All?: Ethnicity and Public Employment in Bahrain**

Among the most central and seemingly incontrovertible statements of the foundational *rentier* literature is Beblawi's assertion visited already in Chapter 2 that “Every citizen — if not self-employed in business and/or working for a private venture — has a legitimate aspiration to be a government employee; in most cases this aspiration is fulfilled.” After elaborating the conditions giving rise to the other half of these “most cases,” those cases in which our *rentier* citizen is more likely to be rebuffed than have his public employment aspiration fulfilled, at last we have the opportunity to test this counterargument using individual employment data from the mass survey of Bahrain. The aim of this analysis is straightforward: to discover whether ethnic group membership is a significant predictor of individual employment status among Bahraini citizens, both in terms of one's sector of work as well as one's occupational level. If we find, as anticipated, that one's chances of being a state employee are reduced significantly when one is a Shi'i, and again that Shi'i ethnic membership is negatively related to the professional level of one's public-sector position, then we will have evidence that government employment in Bahrain does not operate neatly in the service of popular political pacification as *rentier* theorists would have it, precisely because it disproportionately excludes those most in need, from the state's perspective, of pacifying.

At first glance, the data from our Bahrain survey clearly point toward an ethnic-based discrepancy in public-sector employment. Of the 143 Shi'i respondents that reported being employed at the time of surveying, only 55 or about 38.5% worked in the public sector.<sup>1</sup> By

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked exactly this, i.e. “What is your sector of work: public or private?”

**TABLE 5.I.** *Individual Sector Employment, by Ethnicity*

Sector of Employment	Shi'i	Sunni	Total
Private	88	51	139
Public	55	52	107
Total	143	103	246

Notes: Pearson's  $\chi^2$  test statistic (with 1 degree of freedom): 3.5221;  $p = 0.061$

contrast, 52 or 50.5% of the total 103 working Sunnis reported being state employees. When we compute Pearson's *chi*-squared statistic measuring the statistical independence of the two columns, we can comfortably reject the null hypothesis that they are equal, obtaining as we do an associated *p*-value of 0.061. That is, if one were to estimate the effect of ethnicity on sector of employment in a simple probit model, Shi'i identification would be found to be a negative predictor of public-sector employment at the 0.061 level of significance. Although a positive indication, these preliminary results are yet unsatisfactory for two key reasons: first and most obviously, the association between ethnicity and employment sector may be confounded by relevant individual-level variables such as gender, education level, and so on. Less obvious but even more important, moreover, is the fact that our standard probit model, even if were to include relevant control variables, is not an accurate model of the data-generating process we are attempting to explain. More specifically, because we only observe values of the SECTOR variable when a respondent is employed, our sample of the 246 respondents comprising TABLE 5.I above is not a random sample of the Bahraini population but is systematically truncated to include only the *employed* Bahraini population. As a result, our apparent between-group difference in public employment may be a function not of ethnic-group membership per se but rather of a Sunni-Shi'i discrepancy in employment in general. That is, there may be unobserved variables affecting participation in the workforce—women's participation, education, etc.—that are also correlated with ethnic group membership and therefore give us biased estimates of the effect of ethnicity on public sector employment.

For an accurate test of our hypothesis, then, we must adopt an estimation strategy that reflects both stages of our data-generating process and so avoids the selection bias implied above: a first that models the probability that a respondent, a random individual from among the entire Bahraini population, is employed; and a second that models the probability that this respondent, given that he is employed, is employed in the public sector. Fortunately,

we have recourse to Heckman's (1976) two-step selection model, which carries out exactly this procedure, designed as it was specifically to correct the sample selection bias problem inherent in analyses of workforce participation. The Heckman strategy, in short, is a two-equation structural model that employs one or more identifying variables in the selection equation (i.e., the model of workforce participation) to obtain unbiased estimates in the behavioral equation (i.e., the model of sector employment).<sup>2</sup> These identifying variables must be such that they influence an individual's chances of being selected (in our case, employed) but *do not* influence the outcome of the behavioral model (public-sector employment) except insofar as they do so via their impact in the selection model. When this condition is satisfied, Heckman's method provides unbiased behavioral model estimates no longer influenced by unobserved variables.

In practice, all this is to say that by using a well-known technique we may easily offer a more robust test of the effect of ethnic group membership on public sector employment in Bahrain than that of TABLE 5.I. This (behavioral) model we may specify in the following way:

$$\Pr(\text{SECTOR} = 1) = B_0 + \text{ETHNICITY} \cdot B_1 + \text{FEMALE} \cdot B_2 + \text{EDUCATION} \cdot B_3 + \lambda \cdot B_4 + \varepsilon ,$$

where FEMALE and EDUCATION are two control variables that might be presumed related to public-sector employment in Bahrain, and  $\lambda$  is the inverse Mills ratio calculated from the selection model (see note 2). Our argument about the role of ethnicity is already known. As for the controls, their predicted effects we may ascribe to the same cause: to the extent we

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<sup>2</sup> More generally, the Heckman model offers a correction for sample selection bias by modeling the selection process using data on those *not selected*, treating the problem as if it were one of an omitted variable. The selection model is first estimated as a probit model, producing estimated inverse Mills ratio values for each selected case. Using these estimated values, the behavior model is then estimated by generalized least-squares (GLS) regression of  $Y$  on the  $X$ s and estimated inverse Mills ratios. This two-step procedure gives us unbiased estimates for  $B$  and an estimated  $\rho$ , the correlation between the error terms in the behavioral and selection models. More formally, then, the two components of the Heckman model are the behavioral model,

$$Y_i = X_i B + \varepsilon_i ;$$

and the selection model,

$$Z_i^* = W_i C + u_i , \text{ where}$$

$$Z_i = 1 \text{ if } Z_i^* > 0 .$$

This combination, then, gives us the following expression for the expected value of  $Y$ , effectively a model of a truncated distribution:

$$E(Y_i | Z_i^* > 0) = X_i B + \rho \sigma_\varepsilon \lambda_i(a_u) ,$$

where  $a_u$  is the inverse Mills ratio of each observation estimated from the selection model, and  $\lambda_i$  is the inverse Mills ratio estimated from the predicted linear (behavioral) model,  $\mathbf{X}B$ .

conceive government employment in the Gulf as an alternative for those unable to find work in private industry or business, we should expect the state sector to be disproportionately filled with those less-readily employable (by local standards) elsewhere, including with females and with those with lower educational qualifications.

What is left, then, is our (selection) model of the determinants of employment proper, which we may express as the following:

$$\Pr(\text{WORK} = 1) = B_0 + \text{ETHNIC} \cdot B_1 + \text{FEM} \cdot B_2 + \text{EDUC} \cdot B_3 + \text{MARRIED} \cdot B_4 + \text{OLD} \cdot B_5 + \varepsilon,$$

where a respondent's marital status and a dummy for respondents aged 60 and older (a proxy for retirees) serve as our identifying variables. These indicators, that is, we expect to be significant determinants of employment status but *not* of one's sector of employment per se. About the predicted effects of these five independent variables perhaps little needs to be said: the FEMALE dummy we should imagine to be a strong, negative predictor of employment; EDUCATION, coded on a seven-level scale, a strong, positive predictor; marital status another very strong, positive predictor of employment (few families would consent to a marriage if the prospective husband were unemployed; and unmarried women working outside of the home are relatively rare); and the retiree proxy clearly a strong, negative predictor. The ETHNICITY indicator we include again here in the selection model to confirm that its effect on public-sector employment is not simply a result of its effect on employment more generally. If our explanation is correct, therefore, the ETHNICITY variable (coded 0 for Shi'is, 1 for Sunnis) will remain a positive predictor of public-sector employment even after controlling its effect on employment proper. That said, since there is little theoretical reason to believe that ethnic group membership should be related to wider workforce participation, our prediction in this case is a non-relationship between ETHNICITY and WORKING.

The results of estimating this *Model 1* are summarized below in TABLE 5.2. We see that even after modeling our two-step selection process by Heckman's method, the influence of ethnic group membership on public-sector employment in Bahrain remains statistically and substantively significant. (Compare the biased probit estimates of *Model 2*.) More specifically, the marginal effect of ETHNICITY is a 13.4 percentage point increase in the probability of being employed in the state sector. In substantive terms, the predicted probability of public-sector employment (given employment) of two individuals of the same gender and education level jumps from 38% for a Shi'i Bahraini to 52% for a Sunni, a relative increase of some 36%. By

TABLE 5.2. *The Determinants of Public-Sector Employment, estimated two ways*

Variables		Model 1			Model 2		
		Heckman <sup>a</sup>			Probit <sup>b</sup>		
		<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>
<i>Behavioral (SECTOR)</i>	ETHNICITY (1 = Sunni)	0.134	0.0685	0.050	0.263	0.168	0.117
	FEMALE (1 = female)	0.245	0.0973	0.012	0.352	0.192	0.067
	EDUCATION (ascending ordinal)	-0.0504	0.0352	0.152	0.00513	0.0671	0.939
	MARRIED? (dummy)	-	(omitted)	-	-	(omitted)	-
	60 OR OLDER? (dummy)	-	(omitted)	-	-	(omitted)	-
	Constant	0.735	0.222	0.001	-0.386	0.351	0.271
<i>Selection (WORKING)</i>	ETHNICITY	0.0430	0.144	0.766	-	-	-
	FEMALE	-0.868	0.151	0.000	-	-	-
	EDUCATION	0.355	0.0567	0.000	-	-	-
	MARRIED?	0.828	0.152	0.000	-	-	-
	60 OR OLDER?	-1.460	0.371	0.000	-	-	-
	Constant	-1.544	0.314	0.000	-	-	-
<i>Mills</i>	Lambda	-0.306	0.140	0.029	-	-	-
	Rho	-0.731	-	-	-	-	-
	Sigma	0.556	-	-	-	-	-
	Lambda	-0.406	0.153	-	-	-	-

<sup>a</sup> Two-step estimates using the MARRIED? and 60 OR OLDER? dummies as identifying variables; *n* = 401, with 238 uncensored

<sup>b</sup> Includes only 245 observations (where WORKING = 1); robust standard errors reported

contrast, every one-point increase on the education-level scale decreases one's probability of being employed in the public sector by an estimated 5 percentage points (though the statistical significance of this estimate is suspect); and being a female increases that likelihood by a whopping 24.5 percentage points. The predicted probability that a male is employed in the public sector is just 37%; a female 62%. So in relation to our two control variables, then, the impact of being a Shi'i on one's public-sector employment chances is about one-half that of

being male rather than female; or nearly that of a three-point difference on our education scale (e.g., an elementary school versus college graduate). If perhaps of less substantive importance than the considerable influence of gender, therefore, yet this observed effect of ethnic group membership<sup>3</sup> on government employment in Bahrain is far from trivial, and lends powerful empirical support to our critique of the theoretical assumptions underlying the *rentier* state framework, in particular to our first hypothesis, *Hypothesis 1.1*.<sup>4</sup>

The results of the selection model estimation likewise are on par with our *a priori* expectations. We find that FEMALE is a strong, negative predictor of workforce participation, as is our proxy for retirees; whereas being more educated and being married have strong effects in the opposite direction. Thus we see that our two identification variables—MARRIED? and 60 OR OLDER?—are highly-significant determinants of employment, giving us confidence that we have fulfilled the identification condition of the Heckman model.<sup>5</sup> Of more substantive importance, though, is that the ETHNICITY variable is shown to be unrelated to employment per se, confirming that its effect on sector of employment is a direct effect rather than an indirect one operating via its impact on workforce participation. Finally, we may conclude from the highly-significant Mills *lambda* term of  $-0.306$  that the error terms of the selection and behavioral equations are negatively correlated, which means that the (unobserved) factors that make employment more likely tend to be negatively associated with the SECTOR variable, i.e. tend to be negatively associated with public-sector employment. Those qualities *other than*

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<sup>3</sup> If the ETHNICITY variable is excluded from the selection model its behavioral coefficient estimate changes only slightly to 0.139 ( $p = 0.034$ ). Neither do things substantively change if only one of the identifying variables is used.

<sup>4</sup> In their recent article “Is the Magic Still There? The Use of the Heckman Two-Step Correction for Selection Bias in Criminology,” Bushway, Johnson, and Slocum (2007) caution users of the Heckman model against, *inter alia*, employing the two-step estimator versus the maximum-likelihood estimator, which they say is more efficient; and predicting a dichotomous dependent variable in the behavioral model, which they say is explicitly designed as an OLS regression and thus must employ a continuous dependent variable. Since our *Model 1* commits both of these supposed blunders, some reassuring words are perhaps required. In short, neither modification makes any substantive difference with regard to our *Model 1* here. In the first case, using the maximum-likelihood estimator changes our estimated coefficient on the ETHNICITY variable from 0.133 to 0.132 and does not alter its *z*-score. The signs of the control variables EDUCATION and FEMALE are also unchanged and their magnitudes, if reduced somewhat, are relatively unchanged, though the standard error of the former increases a bit to produce an associated *p*-value of 0.197. As for the authors’ second objection about employing a dichotomous dependent variable in the behavioral model, when we estimate the latter by probit (with the inverse mills ratios from the selection model included manually among the regressors) rather than by OLS via the standard Heckman implementation, again the change makes no difference. Here, in fact, the substantive difference is much less even than that between the two-step and maximum-likelihood estimators: the marginal effect of ETHNICITY is increased to 0.137, that of FEMALE to 0.249, and that of EDUCATION to  $-0.0503$ ; and each coefficient has a larger *z*-statistic than its two-step equivalent. The *lambda* term remains negative and is significant at the 0.053 level. Far from erroneous, then, compared to these probit results the estimates of our *Model 1* are actually conservative.

<sup>5</sup> Neither of these is a significant predictor of SECTOR when inserted into the behavioral model.

our five selection model variables that make a Bahraini citizen more likely to be employed, in other words, make him less likely to be employed by the government.

On the one hand, this latter finding would seem to support the common view of public employment in Bahrain and in the larger *rentier* Gulf as a sort of sponge with which to sop up those otherwise relatively less able to find work; yet in that case it only makes even more glaring the negative influence of Shi'i ethnic membership on state sector employment, since according to the selection model results this ethnic membership is altogether unrelated to one's likelihood of being employed. In other words, if we make the argument based on our results that, for example, females and less educated individuals are disproportionately *included* in the public sector precisely because they would have a hard time securing work elsewhere, then we must formulate an entirely different theory to explain why Shi'is are disproportionately *excluded* from the public sector, since we know that after controlling education level, gender, and so on, they have no harder and no easier a time finding employment than do Sunnis. An alternative interpretation, accordingly, is that the unobserved factors that make employment more likely are negatively related to public-sector employment because whereas the private sector seeks to maximize the productive output of its employees and thus tends to hire on a meritorious basis, Bahrain's government sector is more clientelistic than market-driven and so its hiring process procures fundamentally different employees. Hiring decisions governed less by candidates' objective qualifications and more, as Okruhlik says of Saudi Arabia's state sector, "by family relations, friendship, [and] religious branch," the average state employee will tend to be of a like quality: less desirable by private-sector standards but better connected, better recommended, and of course better able to produce a "certificate of good history and conduct." If such is true it explains why EDUCATION seems to be unrelated to SECTOR; and indeed it is then no great mystery why Bahrain's Shi'a would be systematically under-represented.

The next step in this analysis is to consider not simply whether one is publically- or privately-employed but the character and status of that employment. A corollary of the first, *Hypothesis 1.2* predicts that Shi'i ethnicity will be negatively related to occupational level in Bahrain. To test this proposition, respondents were asked<sup>6</sup> to place themselves on a professional

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<sup>6</sup> The exact choices were: 1. "employer/manager of establishment with 10 or more employees"; 2. "employer/manager of establishment with less than 10 employees"; 3. "professional worker (lawyer, accountant, teacher, etc.)"; 4. "supervisory office worker"; 5. "non-manual, non-supervisory office worker"; 6. "foreman, supervisor"; 7. "skilled manual worker"; 8. "semi-skilled manual worker"; 9. "unskilled manual worker"; 10. "farmer, owns farm"; 11. "agricultural worker"; 12. "member of the armed forces, police"; and 13. "housewife." See FIGURE 5.3.



scale ranging from “an employer/manager of an establishment with 10 or more employees” to “an agricultural worker.” Appended to this descending scale were two additional options that eluded easy categorization: members of the armed forces and police; and housewives. The latter for our purposes we need not consider, but the question of how accurately to classify military and police personnel is a more difficult one and, as we shall see, one that has a considerable impact on what we conclude about the effect of ethnic group membership on occupational level in Bahrain.

This is because, as mentioned briefly already in Chapter 3 (79-80), not a single Shi‘i of all those interviewed indicated being employed in these services,<sup>7</sup> compared to 12 (or 12.1%) of the 99 working Sunnis who reported their occupations, of whom just one was a female.<sup>8</sup> Among employed Sunni males who reported occupational data, then, 11 of 66 (or 16.7%) said they worked for the military or police, compared to 0 among 117 working Shi‘i males who reported data. So that, even if we include both sexes, we arrive at an estimate of 1 in every 8¼ Bahraini Sunnis being employed in the state security apparatus. Moreover, when we add the data that respondents provided about their spouses, we find that 5 (or 7.2%) of the 69 married Sunnis who reported their spouse’s occupation indicated that s/he worked in the military or police. Aggregating the two sets of responses, finally, we discover that these 168 observations correspond to just 131 unique Sunni households in which a respondent and/or a respondent’s spouse was working. This means that of the 131 working Sunni households in the Bahrain mass survey, a minimum of 17, or 13.0%, are police or military households.

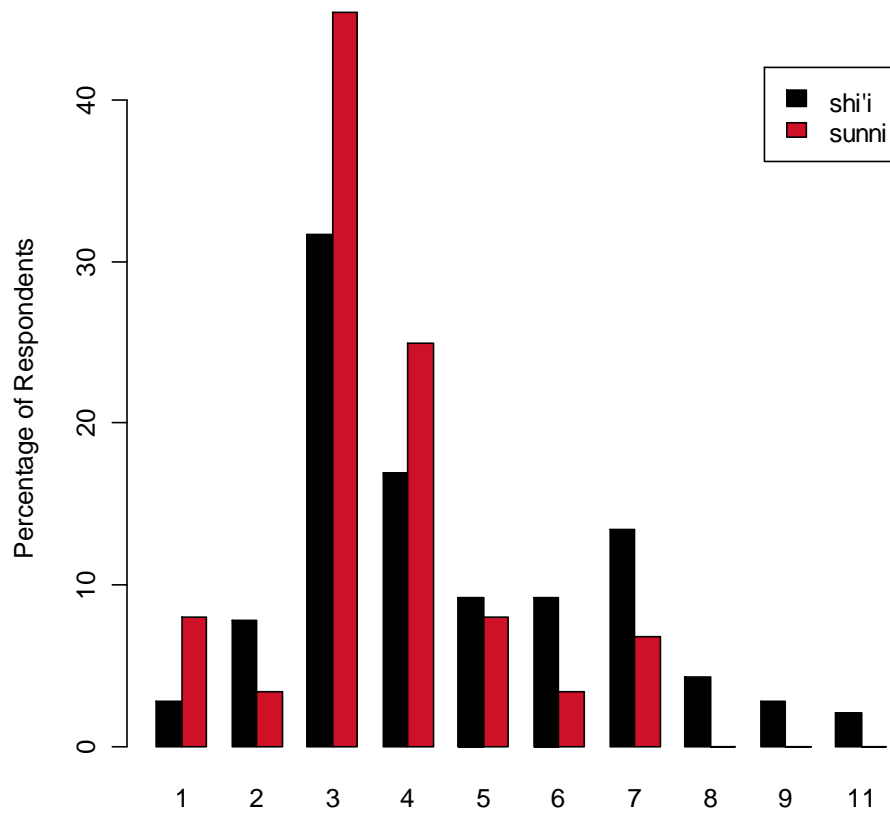
Beyond seeming to vindicate those Bahraini Shi‘a who complain of their exclusion from the armed services, the fact that we here have a Sunni-exclusive category comprising some 11.1% of all Sunni respondents is also of more immediate significance, for where we place it on our scale of occupations will necessarily have a great statistical influence on any estimated relationship between ethnicity and job level in Bahrain. The question, then, is in which job category does this group belong? Surely, its present, concluding position below even farmers and agricultural workers makes little sense. Yet should we deem police and military personnel “professional workers” of category 3, along with teachers and accountants?

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<sup>7</sup> One female Shi‘i respondent did report that her spouse worked for the police or armed forces, but since he was not interviewed one cannot be certain of his ethnicity. The same applies to the analogous discussion of Sunni spouses below.

<sup>8</sup> Moreover, two older Sunnis report being members of the armed forces or police but indicate that they are not currently working, so these two observations are here excluded.

FIGURE 5.3. Occupational Level among Employed Bahrainis, by Ethnicity



“skilled, manual workers” of category 8, along with mechanics? or should the “military/police” category itself be moved to some other position along the existing scale? Further, given the heterogeneity of ranks within the military and police, should we assume that all respondents are lower-level soldiers? commanding officers? or some level in between? Ultimately, such questions point to the safest course of action, which is to omit the category altogether from the upcoming quantitative analysis. If we thus lose a bit of statistical leverage on our question about the relationship between occupational level and ethnicity in Bahrain, at least we shall avoid making conclusions about it that are unduly influenced by a single category that in any case seems to be out of place, both physically and theoretically, among the others.

Even with this omission of the military/police sector, however, we face no shortage of inter-ethnic occupational discrepancies in Bahrain. Consider FIGURE 5.3, which depicts the professional categories reported by our employed Bahraini respondents, divided by ethnicity. Looking at levels 1 through 11, we see that Sunnis are relatively better-represented than Shi'is

as “employers/managers of establishments with 10 or more employees” (1); “professional workers” (3); and “supervisory office workers” (4). By contrast, Shi’a Bahrainis are relatively better-represented as “employers/managers of establishments with less than 10 employees” (2); “non-manual, non-supervisory office workers” (5); “foremen, supervisors” (6); and “skilled manual workers” (7), and they alone report belonging to the categories of “semi-skilled manual worker” (8); “unskilled manual worker” (9); and “agricultural worker.” No respondent reported owning his own farm (10). Certainly, then, we seem to have strong evidence that Bahrain’s executive, supervisory, and professional classes are relatively better-occupied by the nation’s Sunnis, and this despite their forming an overall minority of the population.

But as in the case of *Hypothesis 1.1*, these relative proportions are insufficient to evidence a general relationship between ethnicity and occupational level. Here we encounter again the same two problems: the seeming pattern of FIGURE 5.3 may disappear or change once we add relevant control variables that also influence one’s occupational level; and our sample is biased as it includes only those Bahrainis who are employed. Furthermore, the relationship of most theoretical interest to us is not this between ethnicity and occupational level generally but that between ethnicity and occupational level among public-sector workers, as per *Hypothesis 1.2*. We must therefore employ an estimation strategy similar to but slightly different from that used already to test our first hypothesis: one that models the selection process inherent in our occupational data, but one that also can be disaggregated by sector of employment.<sup>9</sup> This two-part model will thus utilize our same selection equation for employment:

$$\Pr(\text{WORK} = 1) = B_0 + \text{ETHNIC} \cdot B_1 + \text{FEM} \cdot B_2 + \text{EDUC} \cdot B_3 + \text{MARRIED} \cdot B_4 + \text{OLD} \cdot B_5 + \varepsilon,$$

while the behavioral equation becomes:

$$\text{JOBLEVEL} = B_0 + \text{ETHNIC} \cdot B_1 + \text{AGE} \cdot B_2 + \text{FEM} \cdot B_3 + \text{EDUC} \cdot B_4 + \lambda \cdot B_5 + \varepsilon \text{ if } \text{SECTOR} = 1.$$

Compared to *Model 1* above, then, the setup is little changed: only the behavioral equation is estimated now by standard OLS regression given our continuous measure of `JOBLEVEL`. Our variable of interest, `ETHNICITY`, stays the same, as do the control and identifying variables with

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<sup>9</sup> If the latter condition seems trivial, due to the design of the Heckman selection model, or rather due to its implementation in common statistical packages, it is not. Using the `heckman` command in Stata, for instance, if one would attempt to limit the estimation to those cases where `SECTOR` equals 0, or to where `SECTOR` equals 1, this would necessarily exclude all cases of unemployed individuals, which simply brings us back to square one and the problem of selection bias. That is to say, to benefit from the Heckman procedure we must apply our sector limitation only to the behavioral model, which we cannot do directly using a standard software implementation. Instead, we must estimate our two equations separately, which is exactly the procedure below.

the exception of one additional variable, AGE, which we might assume to be positively related to professional level. Also as before, we include the additional regressor  $\lambda$  in the behavioral equation, which is the inverse Mills ratio for each observation computed from the selection model (which, again, functions as the control for our sample-selection bias; see *supra*, note 2).

Substantively-speaking, this estimation procedure corresponds to the following data-generating process: a random individual from among the adult Bahraini population either is employed or is not employed, this being determined by the individual's ethnicity, gender, education level, marital status, and whether s/he has reached typical retirement age. Having been thus "selected" for employment, this individual assumes a job that corresponds to a particular occupational category, and this separate process determining occupational level is influenced anew by the individual's ethnicity, age, gender, and level of education. Finally, this latter process operates differently depending on whether the job in question happens to be in the private sector or in the public sector; that is, the effects on occupational level of ethnicity, age, gender, and education are conditioned by sector of employment.

What we should expect to find if our *Hypothesis 1.2* were correct, accordingly, is that the ETHNICITY variable is a substantively and statistically significant predictor of occupational level when we restrict the behavioral model to include only public-sector workers. More specifically, we should expect the relationship between ETHNICITY and JOBLEVEL, which again is coded in descending fashion from 1 to 11, to be negative: all else being equal, Sunni ethnicity should cause the expected value of JOBLEVEL among Bahrainis to decrease; or, said differently, Sunni ethnicity should be associated with higher (i.e., closer to 1) professional levels. As for the control variables, we may offer predictions about their likely effects. Education level and age one should expect to be strongly associated with higher professional levels for obvious reasons. The likely effect on occupational level of the FEMALE variable, however, is more ambiguous and depends on our interpretation of its effect witnessed already in *Model 1*: if we think that being a female is a strong, positive predictor of public-sector employment because women are disproportionately excluded from the private sector due to gender discrimination, then we might expect that the average woman employed in the state sector will be relatively more qualified than the average male and so will hold a relatively higher occupational position. On the other hand, if we think that females are relatively better-represented in the public sector because the public-sector employment process is fundamentally different from that of

the private sector, being mediated by unobserved factors such as nepotism, favoritism, and so on, in this case we have little theoretical guidance to help us predict the influence of gender on occupational level, which may then be positive, negative, or non-existent.

To gain some empirical leverage on this our primary inquiry, let us first consider the case of the private sector, which will offer a basis for comparison of our public-sector results. Here we replicate the estimation procedure described above, simply limiting the behavioral sample to private-sector rather than public-sector employees (i.e., we specify `SECTOR = 0`). We find the results of this *Model 3* in TABLE 5.4 below, which reveals that ethnic membership has a strong, negative effect on `JOBLEVEL` that is statistically different from zero at a high level of confidence. As we predicted for the public sector, then, *Model 3* indicates that Sunni ethnicity is associated with higher professional levels, *ceteris paribus*: among private-sector employees, being a Sunni rather than a Shi'i is associated with an estimated 0.582-unit decrease in the dependent variable `JOBLEVEL`. When we use these estimation results to predict the occupational category of a Sunni respondent, we find it is approximately 3.9, compared to 4.5 for a Shi'i. Sunni ethnicity thus effects a relative improvement in `JOBLEVEL` of a bit more than 15%.

Yet in substantive terms this influence remains somewhat abstract. Let us compare the effect of ethnicity on occupational level to those of the several control variables. We see, for example, that the `AGE` variable is a highly-significant predictor of occupational level in the private sector, as one might expect given the time it takes for one to advance professionally. Its coefficient of  $-0.0537$  tells us that, all else being equal, a one-year increase in a person's age corresponds to an estimated 0.0537-unit improvement in job category. If this itself also means little in substantive terms, yet we see that the effect of `ETHNICITY` on `JOBLEVEL` is more than ten times that of `AGE`; that is, Sunni ethnicity corresponds to a 10-year age advantage. So, to the extent we believe that a ten-year difference in seniority is likely to be of substantive advantage to one individual over another in terms of professional level in the private sector, then to a like degree we must acknowledge the significant impact of ethnic membership.

The other *Model 3* control variable estimates also warrant mention. Of these perhaps the least interesting is the `EDUCATION` measure, which as one would imagine is an extremely strong predictor of occupational level, with every one-unit increase in the 7-level education scale producing, *ceteris paribus*, a 0.704-unit decrease in `JOBLEVEL`, i.e., upward movement in professional level. This effect of education level, then, is easily the most important substantive

TABLE 5.4. *The Determinants of Occupational Level in Bahrain's Private Sector*

Variables		Model 3			Model 4		
		Selection <sup>a</sup>			OLS <sup>b</sup>		
		<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>z</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>t</i>
<i>Behavioral</i> (JOBLEVEL)	ETHNICITY (1 = Sunni)	-0.585	0.319	0.069	-0.461	0.315	0.146
	AGE (ascending continuous)	-0.0537	0.0188	0.005	-0.0524	0.0163	0.002
	FEMALE (1 = female)	-0.567	0.478	0.238	-0.270	0.316	0.394
	EDUCATION (ascending ordinal)	-0.705	0.204	0.001	-0.858	0.155	0.000
	MARRIED? (dummy)	-	(omitted)	-	-	(omitted)	-
	60 OR OLDER? (dummy)	-	(omitted)	-	-	(omitted)	-
	Constant	9.657	1.727	0.000	10.669	1.018	0.000
<i>Selection</i> (WORKING)	ETHNICITY	0.0357	0.144	0.804	-	-	-
	FEMALE	-0.887	0.151	0.000	-	-	-
	EDUCATION	0.359	0.0568	0.000	-	-	-
	MARRIED?	0.830	0.151	0.000	-	-	-
	60 OR OLDER?	-1.464	0.371	0.000	-	-	-
	Constant	-1.548	0.315	0.000	-	-	-
<i>Mills</i>	Lambda ( $\lambda$ )	0.733	0.963	0.448	-	-	-

<sup>a</sup> Manual two-step estimates using the MARRIED? and 60 OR OLDER? dummies as identifying variables; *n* = 132

<sup>b</sup> Includes 135 observations (where SECTOR = 0); robust standard errors reported

impact of all those estimated in *Model 3*. Next, we notice that the coefficient on the FEMALE control variable, though similar in sign and magnitude to that of ETHNICITY, is not statistically-distinguishable from zero at a tolerable level. We must thus conclude that gender, while a significant predictor of sector of employment itself, nonetheless is unrelated to occupational level, at least in the private sector. This seems to suggest the absence of any systematic gender-based discrimination in occupational level among private-sector employees; indeed,

if anything the results may be said to support the opposite conclusion, that women, all else being equal, tend to hold higher-level positions than men.<sup>10</sup>

Finally we have the *lambda* term, which one will remember is computed from the selection model and functions as a control variable that corrects for our sample-selection bias. As such, its coefficient estimate tells us to what extent our model of occupational level is affected by unobserved variables operating indirectly via their impact on workforce participation. In this case, we find that unlike in *Model 1*, the error terms of our behavioral and selection equations are unrelated: the unobserved variables that make employment more likely—i.e., those apart from ethnicity, gender, education, marital status, and being of retirement age—are not related to occupational level in the private sector at a statistically-significant level. In other words, estimating occupational level directly, without our selection-model correction, may not entail sample-selection bias after all. And, indeed, when we estimate our behavioral model by standard OLS regression (*Model 4*), the resulting estimates are reasonably close to those of our more robust *Model 3*. Yet we notice that the coefficients on the ETHNICITY and FEMALE variables are now rather lower than before, and that on EDUCATION higher, meaning that selection was biasing down the impact of ethnicity and gender on occupational level, and biasing up the influence of education. In the end, then, our two-stage estimation strategy may have been overkill, but it has afforded us results in which we may now be more confident.

With these results thus serving as a baseline, let us proceed to consider the more theoretically-important case of public-sector occupational level in Bahrain. Before continuing to the estimation results, however, we might first compare the distributions of job level in the private and public sectors, respectively, to learn how far they appear to follow a similar pattern. These sector-specific distributions we find below in FIGURES 5.5 and 5.6. Comparing the two, we perceive at once that they differ substantially: save for a single Shi'i respondent, the categories of 1 and 2 are entirely unoccupied in FIGURE 5.6, indicating a dearth of director-level public servants among our sample of respondents who volunteered occupational data;<sup>11</sup> further, we see that compared to private-sector employees an overwhelming majority of

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<sup>10</sup> Of course, this is not to say that there exists *no* male-female discrepancy at the level of specific job categories or positions (e.g., among job levels 1 and 2 (see note 6), where women are entirely unrepresented, compared to 26 men), but that in the aggregate the average female employed in the non-governmental sector has, *ceteris paribus*, a higher occupational level than the average male employee.

<sup>11</sup> This may be the artifact of a selection effect whereby high-level government employees as a class of respondent were systematically less likely to agree to be interviewed, to answer questions about their employment, to answer these questions honestly, or all the above.

FIGURE 5.5. Private Sector Occupations

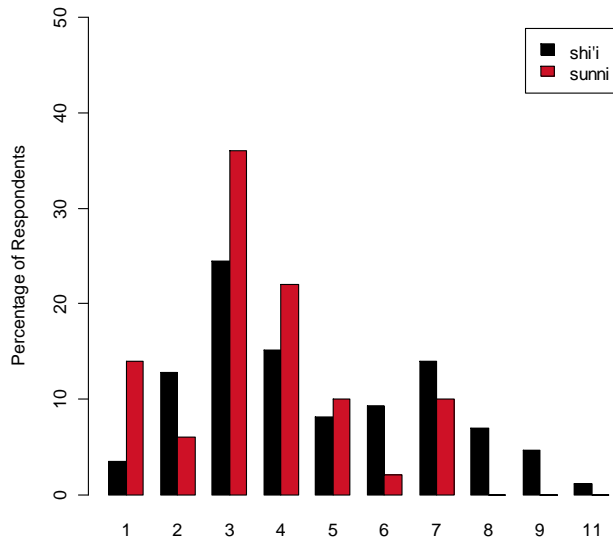
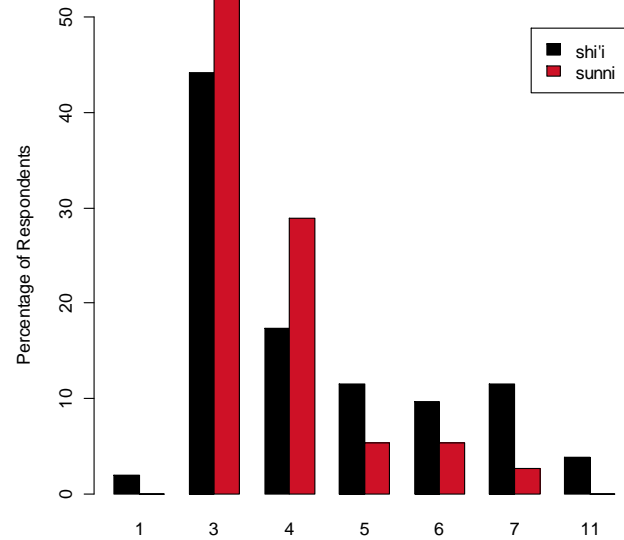


FIGURE 5.6. Public Sector Occupations



those working in the public sector occupy jobs in either category 3 (“professional workers”) or 4 (“supervisory office workers”): 62% of Shi’is and a full 87% of Sunnis. While these two categories are also modal in the private sector, there we find relatively more variation in job level among members of both groups, especially among Sunni respondents. In sum, rather than indicate a common, cross-sectoral distribution of occupational levels, FIGURES 5.5 and 5.6 seem to reveal two distinct patterns of employment.

This conclusion finds evidence in the results of our regression analysis, summarized below in TABLE 5.7. There we see to what extent the determinants of occupational level in Bahrain’s public sector differ from those in the private sector. An individual’s age, found to be of such significant import in predicting occupational level in the non-state sector as per our *a priori* expectations, we discover is altogether unrelated to one’s professional level in the government sector, its coefficient having an associated *p*-value of 0.756. Even with our various controls in place, therefore, our *Model 5* results indicate that the seemingly intuitive assumption that older individuals will tend to occupy higher-level positions does not obtain in the case of Bahrain’s public sector. Likewise, we find that a person’s gender, not a statistically-significant predictor of occupational level in the private sector, in the state sector does indeed play a role,



TABLE 5.7. *The Determinants of Occupational Level in Bahrain's Public Sector*

Variables		Model 5			Model 6		
		Selection <sup>a</sup>			OLS <sup>b</sup>		
		<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>
<i>Behavioral</i> (JOBLEVEL)	ETHNICITY (1 = Sunni)	-0.452	0.293	0.127	-0.431	0.276	0.122
	AGE (ascending continuous)	-0.00576	0.0185	0.756	-0.00420	0.0173	0.809
	FEMALE (1 = female)	-0.937	0.443	0.037	-0.764	0.245	0.002
	EDUCATION (ascending ordinal)	-0.566	0.193	0.004	-0.651	0.197	0.001
	MARRIED? (dummy)	-	(omitted)	-	-	(omitted)	-
	60 OR OLDER? (dummy)	-	(omitted)	-	-	(omitted)	-
	Constant	7.614	1.257	0.000	8.219	1.555	0.000
<i>Selection</i> (WORKING)	ETHNICITY	0.0357	0.144	0.804	-	-	-
	FEMALE	-0.887	0.151	0.000	-	-	-
	EDUCATION	0.359	0.0568	0.000	-	-	-
	MARRIED?	0.830	0.151	0.000	-	-	-
	60 OR OLDER?	-1.464	0.371	0.000	-	-	-
	Constant	-1.548	0.315	0.000	-	-	-
<i>Mills</i>	Lambda ( $\lambda$ )	0.591	0.699	0.401	-	-	-

<sup>a</sup> Manual two-step estimates using the MARRIED? and 60 OR OLDER? dummies as identifying variables; *n* = 87

<sup>b</sup> Includes 90 observations (where SECTOR = 1); robust standard errors reported

and a considerable one at that: its salutary effect on occupational level is to decrease JOBLEVEL by nearly an entire unit; that is, for two public-sector employees differentiated only by gender, the female is associated with a professional level that is 0.937-units higher (closer to 1) than that of the male. This coefficient estimate is statistically-distinguishable from zero at a high degree of confidence. Yet even apart from its magnitude, the fact that gender is at all related to job level is a significant departure from the results of our private-sector model. As for our remaining control variables, EDUCATION and the *lambda* term, neither differs substantively in

its effect on occupational level from that in the private sector: education level is once again a strong predictor of *JOBLEVEL*, and the non-significance of the *lambda* term again indicates that our model of occupational level is not systematically biased by unobserved variables operating indirectly via their impact on employment per se (hence the similar OLS estimates of *Model 6*).

We turn finally to our independent variable of most interest, *ETHNICITY*. From its estimated coefficient of  $-0.452$ , we see that Sunni ethnicity is again associated with higher professional levels, all else being equal, and that this effect of ethnic membership is similar to if somewhat lower than its estimated effect in the private-sector model. More worrying than this slight drop in magnitude, though, is the statistical confidence of our coefficient on *ETHNICITY*, which has an associated *p*-value of only 0.127. Yet two things bear mention. First, recall that for concerns about their proper categorization we have excluded from this public-sector model all the respondents who indicated that they worked for the military or police. As each of these 12 respondents was Sunni, the omission of this category is a very influential one from the standpoint of our estimate of *ETHNICITY*. What is more, this exclusion leaves us with just 87 observations with which to estimate *Model 5*, compared to 132 for our private-sector model. By omitting these 12 observations, therefore, we omit a full 12.1% of our sample, meaning that we have thrown out valuable information that could have helped make our coefficient and standard error estimates more robust. This latter point leads to a second consideration: with such a relatively small sample, any outlying observations are rendered even more influential than they would be otherwise, and thus our anomalous Shi'i respondent who reports a public-sector occupational category of 1 (see *FIGURE 5.6*) has a disproportionate impact on our estimate of *ETHNICITY* and its standard error, militating against a statistically-significant relationship between ethnic group membership and public-sector position level.

To better illustrate these concerns, we have in *TABLE 5.8* below the results of several diagnostic regressions. The first, *Model 7*, excludes a single observation—our director-level Shi'i; while the second and third demonstrate how our results change when we include the 12 military/police respondents: *Model 8* codes these responses at the level of category 5, one above the median category; and *Model 9* codes them less conservatively as being equivalent to category 4. (Note that the outlying observation omitted in *Model 7* remains in the latter two.) In all three of the models, the effect of *ETHNICITY* on public-sector occupational level is increased significantly compared to the *Model 5* estimates, and this both in magnitude and in

TABLE 5.8. *The Determinants of Occupational Level in Bahrain’s Public Sector, Sensitivity Analysis*

Variables	Model 7			Model 8			Model 9		
	Omitted Outlier			Army = Category 5			Army = Category 4		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>t</i>
ETHNICITY	-0.511	0.286	0.078	-0.481	0.293	0.104	-0.716	0.298	0.018
AGE	-0.00139	0.0184	0.940	-0.00841	0.0161	0.604	-0.00686	0.0167	0.681
FEMALE	-0.999	0.441	0.026	-0.974	0.403	0.018	-0.857	0.411	0.040
EDUCATION	-0.509	0.189	0.009	-0.459	0.140	0.001	-0.352	0.141	0.014
Constant	7.206	1.254	0.000	7.111	0.991	0.000	6.467	0.998	0.000
Lambda ( $\lambda$ )	0.621	0.716	0.389	0.688	0.612	0.264	0.665	0.622	0.287
<i>N</i>	86			99			99		
Prob. > F	0.0008			0.0000			0.0016		

Notes: selection model results omitted as they are identical to those reported in TABLES 5.4 and 5.7; robust standard errors reported

statistical significance. In *Model 7*, the coefficient estimate on the ETHNICITY variable increases in magnitude to  $-0.511$ , while its *p*-value falls to 0.078. Similarly, the *Model 8* estimate is a slightly-smaller  $-0.481$ , with an associated *p*-value of 0.104. In the case of *Model 9* the change, as one would expect, is even more dramatic. In this last estimation the coefficient on the ETHNICITY variable balloons to  $-0.716$  and its associated *p*-value drops to a highly-significant 0.018, demonstrating the decisive impact of the 12 military/police cases, and likewise that of the choice of how to treat them.<sup>12</sup> Finally, we see that none of the changes instituted in these three diagnostic models affects the estimates of the other independent variables, including of the *lambda* term, such as to alter our substantive interpretation of them, confirming that these 13 cases—the Shi’i government-sector director and the police/military respondents—are outliers above all on account of ethnicity and not on the basis of some other variable(s).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, if these 12 observations are coded as belonging to category 6, the median occupational category, then the ETHNICITY variable is rendered altogether insignificant, with a coefficient of  $-0.287$  and *p*-value of 0.334.

<sup>13</sup> That said, the magnitude and significance of the coefficient estimates on the FEMALE and EDUCATION controls do drop considerably from *Model 8* to *Model 9*. This is because, in the first place, all but one of the additional cases are males; and, in the second place, because the average education level of these police/military respondents is just 3.67, or somewhere between a primary and secondary school graduate, compared to a mean of 5.18 for the other Sunni state employees in job category 4. The added cases thus dilute the effects of education and gender.

What, then, are we to take from this diagnostic testing? and to what extent does it alter our initial interpretation of *Model 5* and the larger question of ethnicity's impact on public-sector job level in Bahrain? In short, it would seem that the diagnostic results should be rather reassuring, both about the robustness of our *Model 5* findings as well as about our earlier decision to omit the police and military cases from our final statistical analysis. On the first issue, *Model 7* has verified in support of our *Hypothesis 1.2* the substantive and statistical importance of the ETHNICITY marker as a predictor of occupational level among public-sector employees. If at first we were troubled by the high *p*-value associated with ETHNICITY in *Model 5*, we understand now that this is an artifact of a single outlying observation that happens to exert an undue influence over the coefficient and standard error estimates. When this is omitted we see that, as per our theoretical expectations, Sunni ethnicity is associated with higher-ranking occupations in the state sector: the predicted job level of a Sunni is about 13% higher than that of a Shi'i, all else being equal. As for the matter of the police and military employees, the extreme volatility introduced by the inclusion of these cases as illustrated by the *Models 8* and *9* results would seem to justify our initial choice to exclude them altogether. In the end, to preface our results in support of *Hypothesis 1.2* with the qualification that these conclusions are limited to the civilian population only is less damaging than the alternative.

There remains, finally, a lingering theoretical issue that, while not tied directly to the two hypotheses investigated in this section, has arisen naturally over the course of our analysis here. This is the more general question of how properly to conceive public-sector employment in Bahrain, or in the class of Gulf *rentier* states, independent of the effect on this of ethnicity. Do the preceding results suggest any coherent conclusions about the bases of public-sector *vis-à-vis* private-sector employment? Can they tell us, that is, what sort of citizen tends to be employed by Gulf governments? and why? So far we have evaluated our empirical results in light of two competing interpretations: a first that views state employment as a sanctuary for those less suited for the private-economy workforce; and a second that sees it not as a labor market correction but as a political tool in its own right. If the latter would seem plausible enough, recall that the former is much closer to the notion articulated by *rentier* theorists, in particular to Beblawi's parenthetical qualification that "Every citizen — *if not self-employed in business and/or working for a private venture* — has a legitimate aspiration to be a government employee" (emphasis added). Yet, as pointed out already, we have several pieces of evidence seeming to run counter to this standard *rentier* understanding.

In the first place, apart from a person's ethnicity only gender seems to be a statistically-significant determinant of public-sector employment among Bahrainis, whereas if Beblawi's interpretation were correct we would also expect education level to be a strong, negative predictor of state employment.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, since we found that ethnicity has no independent effect on employability per se, it is difficult to square the strong, negative relationship between Shi'i identification and public-sector employment with the idea that the latter serves mainly as a fallback for those otherwise unable to secure work. Looking now to our *Hypothesis 1.2* testing, we find similarly that the results are inconsistent with the idea that government jobs tend to be provided to those less able to find employment elsewhere. For one thing, gender is shown to be unrelated to a person's occupational level in the private sector while female employees in the public sector hold systematically-higher positions than do males of identical education, age, ethnicity, and so on. Even more strangely, the notion of workplace seniority wherein, *ceteris paribus*, older employees will tend to occupy higher-ranking jobs insofar as they are likely to be better-endowed with professional experience and the intangible skills it implies, obtains only in the private sector, whereas in the public sector an individual's age is entirely unrelated to occupational level. Yet at the same time, education level is the single most important predictor of occupation in both sectors, and Shi'i ethnicity likewise serves as a professional hindrance in each; so why is the public sector in Bahrain responsive to these two "market" forces but not to the influences of age or gender?

Though our analysis above can provide no direct answer, these facts do suggest that the process by which a Bahraini comes to gain employment in a given position operates in a fundamentally different way depending on whether that position is in the public or private sector, a conclusion also supported by our *Model 1* finding that the unobserved factors that make employment more likely are negatively associated with *public*-sector employment. As discussed already, one alternative interpretation based on these observations, therefore, is that whereas employment and occupational advancement within the private sector tends to proceed more according to one's objective qualifications (notwithstanding the impediment of ethnicity), that in the public sector operates along qualitatively-different lines: favoritism,

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<sup>14</sup> If one would wonder whether Beblawi's conception of government employment and employees is indeed as suggested here, he need only consider the sentences that follow the quotation above, which read: "Though utterly free enterprise oriented, the number of government employees in the oil states is only matched by socialist-oriented states. Civil servant productivity is, understandably, not very high and they usually see their principal duty as being available in their offices during working hours" (91).

personal and family relationships, and notions of national loyalty and one's being "deserving" of state employment. Whether or not one is satisfied with this alternative explanation, it is clear in any case that the original understanding of Beblawi and other *rentier* theorists, the notion that in allocative regimes the public sector serves as a sort of parallel job market that, if less demanding of its aspirants, remains fundamentally economic-based (or "utterly free enterprise oriented"; cf. *supra*, note 14) and politically-agnostic—it is clear that this conception cannot tell the whole story. Instead, here as elsewhere we find evidence that the ostensive material underpinning of the *rentier*-based economy, the cold economic bargain said to exist between Gulf rulers and their clients-*cum*-citizens, is a rather more pragmatic partnership, colored and adulterated by other, competing considerations. In Bahrain at least, the smooth translation of *rentier* wealth into tangible material benefits for *all* citizens seems not to operate so smoothly after all. How this fact serves to alter the final step in the supposed *rentier* equation—the translation of material gains for citizens into political dividends for rulers—we shall now see.

### **The Determinants of Individual Political Opinion and Action in Bahrain**

The aim of this second section is to provide evidence from the Bahraini survey in support of *Hypotheses 2.1* and *2.2*, which together embody our critique of the notion that untaxed *rentier* citizens make politically-passive *rentier* citizens. The thrust of this critique is, again, that an argument positing a relationship between one's tax burden and one's political behavior is not a theory of *rentier* politics but rather a single empirical prediction, and as such one that can tell us little about the overall political orientations of citizens in rent-based states insofar as there likely exist other, non-material determinants of political action and opinion. That one did not vote in order to protest a new tax hike, in other words, does not mean that one did not vote. So too with our politically-active Bahrainis, for whom, if one is convinced by the account of Chapter 3, at stake is something perceived to be larger than individual economic prosperity.

To keep our analysis as parsimonious as possible, we will test the several predictions that comprise *Hypotheses 2.1* and *2.2* simultaneously within a standard, comprehensive model, which will be employed to investigate first the individual-level determinants of political opinion among our Bahraini respondents followed by those of political action. As *Hypotheses 2.1<sub>A</sub>* and *2.1<sub>B</sub>* simply imply a significant between-group difference in the dependent variable, we will test these with the inclusion of a dichotomous ETHNICITY indicator such as was used in the previous section's analysis of employment. *Hypotheses 2.2<sub>A</sub>* through *2.2<sub>C</sub>*, on the other hand,

make a relatively more complicated argument: that political opinion and action in Bahrain is influenced not only by ethnic group membership per se but also by the strength of one's ethno-religious identity as measured by individual religiosity; and that, moreover, the effect of this RELIGIOSITY itself depends on whether one is a Sunni or a Shi'i. What *Hypotheses 2.2<sub>AC</sub>* imply, that is, is that the political orientations of Bahrainis are determined in part by an interaction between the effects of two variables: one's ethnic identity per se and the personal salience of that identity as measured by one's religiosity,<sup>15</sup> a claim we may evaluate by including in our model a multiplicative interaction term ETHNICITY × RELIGIOSITY.

As for the measure of respondent religiosity itself, we have several alternatives. One commonly-used measure is the frequency with which one performs religious rituals such as prayer, reading of the Qur'ān, or mosque attendance. The difficulty with such measures, however, is that due to the practical differences between Shi'i and Sunni Islam, the substantive meaning of, say, "mosque attendance" is likely to differ across the two groups. For a Bahraini Shi'i, for example, this may be taken to include religious services at a *ma'tam* or for a religious commemoration. Likewise, Shi'is, who in Bahrain as elsewhere seek edification in "Ḥusayni" literature (الأدب الحسيني or كُتُب حُسَيْنِيَّة), may report reading the Qur'ān less than Sunnis of equal religiosity, rendering that measure inconsistent. Moreover, all but overtly secular respondents will probably tend to exaggerate the frequency of their observance lest they appear irreligious, an incentive operating upon Sunni and Shi'i alike. For the same reason one must be careful too in employing the other standard instrument used in survey research to gauge religiosity, which is to ask the respondent directly: "In general, would you describe yourself as a person who is religious (متديّن) or non-religious (غير متديّن)?" In the first place, once again apart from deliberately-secular individuals, a typical Arab Muslim of any religiosity is unlikely to wish to describe himself in this fashion as "non-religious" and so will tend to default to "religious." In the second, the most commonly-employed word "religious" (متديّن) here carries overtones in Arabic of someone who is not simply religiously-observant but unusually devout and perhaps even fanatical in his faith. It is no wonder, then, that of the 389 Bahrainis who responded to

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<sup>15</sup> One might wonder why we would resort in gauging the strength of a Bahraini's ethnic identity vis-à-vis the rival group to a general measure of religiosity as opposed to, say, by asking a respondent directly about his views of, trust in, or relationship with members of the other ethnic group. Assuming one could have elicited truthful responses (and this is a questionable assumption), such indeed might have been preferable. In fact, this has been the procedure elsewhere, for example in the 2004 and 2006 surveys of Iraq to be dealt with in the next chapter. Yet how the Iraqi field interviewers managed to avoid being sent away by or irreparably offending interviewees upon asking such pointed questions remains a mystery to me (although their avoidance of 4 of Iraq's 18 governorates may be part of the answer), for I am sure that we would not have been so fortunate in Bahrain.

this question, 57 (or 15%) were unsatisfied with both choices and so asked the interviewer to record an alternative answer: “معتدل,” or “moderate”; and one assumes that many others who were less concerned for the accuracy of their response simply picked one or the other option.

An alternative method of measuring religiosity, then, is to infer it indirectly from one’s response to another, less transparent question. If the resulting indicator enjoys perhaps less outward validity than one based on a direct inquiry, still it is less affected by incentives to misrepresent oneself and, in reference to the first class of indicators discussed above, is also consistent across the two religious subgroups. The RELIGIOSITY measure we will adopt for our analysis is of this final type, constructed on the basis of the question: “Which of the following factors [would] constitute the most serious impediment to your acceptance of the marriage of your son, daughter, sister, or brother?”<sup>16</sup> “lack of (عدم) prayer [on the part of the betrothed], lack of fasting, the social status of the [betrothed’s] family, poverty, lack of education, lack of employment, or other.” Our RELIGIOSITY variable is coded 1, then, when a respondent identifies either or both of the first two factors as being the most important or adds an “other” category response that invokes religion. Among the latter instance are included, for example, responses that the most important attribute of the betrothed is reputable “ethics” or “morals” (الأخلاق), “religiousness” (التدين), or simply “belief in God.” Several individuals even state explicitly that the most important thing is that s/he be a Sunni/Shi’i. That the “other” category would in this way be filled almost entirely with religious stipulations, including with ethno-religious stipulations, speaks well for the validity of this measure as a proxy for an individual’s level of religiosity.<sup>17</sup> As a diagnostic check, finally, we may substitute for this RELIGIOSITY variable the more conventional “Are you religious?” indicator to confirm the robustness of our results.

The other independent variable of interest here is a respondent’s material well-being, whose relative impact on political opinion and action in Bahrain is predicted in *Hypothesis 2.1* to be less than or equal to that of ethnic group membership in substantive and statistical terms. Later we asked (cf. *supra*, 147-148) whether there was theoretical cause to expect that the influence

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<sup>16</sup> The exact wording of the question is:

”أي من العوامل التالية يشكّل العائق الأكثر أهمية أمام موافقتك على زواج ابنك/ابنتك/أختك/أخوك؟“

<sup>17</sup> By this measure, 268 of 401 (or 69% of) total respondents are coded as “religious,” and 133 as “not religious.” Compare this to the 221 of 389 (or 57% of) individuals who self-identified as “religious” when asked directly. (If we include those who replied “moderate” this rises to 71%). Yet the correlation between the two measures is a relatively-low 0.263 (or 0.295 if the “moderates” are excluded), meaning that on the whole the sort of person who self-identifies as “religious” when asked directly is not the same sort of person who exhibits concern for the religious in the case of what is in the Arab world perhaps life’s most significant practical matter: marriage.



of this *ECONOMY* indicator should vary across our two ethnic groups. While we ultimately replied that there probably is not, we noted that the disproportionate exclusion of Shi'is from the state sector (and thus from the *rentier* benefits of public employment) may serve to dampen the link between economic well-being and political orientations among Bahraini Shi'a as compared to among Sunnis, who as a group have a more reasonable expectation of receiving government benefits in return for (outward) political allegiance. To evaluate both of these predictions regarding the effect of household economy,<sup>18</sup> therefore, we may simply repeat the procedure above to include in our model of political behavior a standalone *ECONOMY* variable along with the interactive term *ECONOMY* × *ETHNICITY*. And as for the specific claim of *Hypothesis 2.1*, we may easily assess it by comparing the relative influence of *ETHNICITY* to that of *ECONOMY*.

Concerning control variables, we will include of course the standard indicators of *AGE*, *FEMALE*, and *EDUCATION* that have been utilized already in our study of employment. The first we may expect to be negatively related to political action (i.e., to be associated with less frequent political action) and positively related to political opinion (i.e., to be associated with more favorable or pro-government political opinions) inasmuch as we may expect that people will tend to become more risk-averse as they age and acquire things—families, homes—the enjoyment of which could be jeopardized by political dissent or activism. Women we should also suppose to be less likely to engage in political action given the persistence of traditional gender roles in Gulf society; yet we have no *a priori* reason to assume that Bahraini women should be more subdued in their political opinions than men, and, indeed, my experience in Bahrain would sooner suggest the opposite. As for the expected effect of education, lastly, little needs to be said: higher levels of respondent education should be associated with more frequent political action and more negative political opinion.

Beyond these basic demographic measures, moreover, we will include in our model of political behavior in Bahrain a final control variable alluded to in our discussion of survey procedure in Chapter 4: a dummy indicating whether a respondent happened to be interviewed by a fieldworker of the other ethnic group. This control, coded dichotomously as *DIFFETHNIC*,

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<sup>18</sup> Note that, as its name implies, our indicator here is not a measure of wealth per se but one that captures the overall economic well-being of a respondent. This is in order to remain faithful to the *rentier* causal story, whose predictions about individual political behavior are based not on finite measures of citizens' income or prosperity but according to their overall economic *satisfaction*. Thus we might just as easily have named our *ECONOMY* variable *SATISFACTION*. The exact instrument from which this indicator is taken reads as follows:

“كيف تقيم الوضع الاقتصادي لأسرتك الآن؟: ١. جيد جداً، ٢. جيد، ٣. سيئ، ٤. سيئ جداً”  
 “How would you rate your family's economic situation right now?: 1. Very Good, 2. Good, 3. Bad, 4. Very Bad.”

will allow us to test the suggestion of Chapter 4 that respondents' answers, in particular their answers to sensitive socio-political questions, should be significantly influenced by the ethnicity of their interviewer; and, more generally, it offers a straightforward metric by which to gauge the extent of ethnic mistrust in Bahrain. Moreover, if we interact this `DIFFETHNIC` variable with `ETHNICITY`, we may also learn something about the nature of that mistrust: specifically, if we find that both Sunni and Shi'i respondents of inter-ethnic interviews tend to give politically-safer answers as compared to same-ethnicity interviewees, if they tend alike to report having engaged in less political action and holding more pro-government opinions (or, said differently still, if the interaction term `DIFFETHNIC × ETHNICITY` is not a significant predictor of responses), then we may conclude that this apparent mistrust of the ethnic other in fact is something more akin to mistrust of the survey project itself (that is, uncertainty whether it is not perhaps a government effort to identify dissenters), with the unfamiliar ethnicity of the field interviewer serving only to increase a respondent's overall discomfort and suspicion.

But if, on the other hand, we find that the effect of inter-ethnic interviewing varies across ethnic groups, if we find that Bahraini respondents do not uniformly moderate their answers to assume more pro-government positions but instead alter them to be more in line with the presumed, ethnically-ascribed political views of their interviewers, then we have evidence of an entirely different dynamic. In this latter case, we must conclude that inter-ethnic interviewees are indeed influenced by the ethnicity of the interviewer per se and not by the interviewer's foreign ethnicity as a proxy for the overall dubiousness of the interview. Though in both instances the respondent tends to offer a "safer" answer as compared to his unaffected response, here his answer is not safer vis-à-vis the state but vis-à-vis his interviewer, to whom he ascribes specific, ethnically-defined political views that he understands differ exactly for this reason from his own.<sup>19</sup> Precisely when and why an individual will tend to misrepresent his own views and actions to avoid confrontation with another who is known to differ is a question for psychology. The important upshot for our purposes is that, should this be found the case, we will have evidence of an ethnic division in Bahrain that not only

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<sup>19</sup> There remains the alternative, of course, that respondents of one or both ethnic groups are unaffected by this inter-ethnic interviewing, in which case Bahraini Sunnis, Shi'is, or both tend to remain consistently either honest or dishonest in their responses irrespective of interviewer. But note that so long as the `DIFFETHNIC` variable is significant, we should always expect it to be related to more positive political opinion and to less political action (answers that may be "safer" vis-à-vis the government *or* vis-à-vis the other-ethnic interviewer), meaning that it is the sign and significance of the `DIFFETHNIC × ETHNICITY` term that must decide between our competing interpretations. See TABLE 5.9 below.

**TABLE 5.9.** *The Determinants of Political Opinion and Action among Bahrainis, Predictions*

Variables	Opinion (improving)		Action (increasing)	
	Relationship	Significant? <sup>a</sup>	Relationship	Significant? <sup>a</sup>
ETHNICITY (1 = Sunni)	+	Yes	–	Yes
DIFFETHNIC (1 = Yes)	+	Yes	–	Yes
DIFFETHNIC × ETHNICITY	?	Yes	?	Yes
AGE	+	Yes	–	Yes
FEMALE	None	No	–	Yes
EDUCATION	–	Yes	+	Yes
ECONOMY (descending)	–	?	+	?
ECONOMY × ETHNICITY	–	?	+	?
RELIGIOSITY (1 = religious)	–	Yes	+	Yes
RELIGIOSITY × ETHNICITY	+	Yes	None	No

? indicates ambiguous theoretical expectations

<sup>a</sup> Note that the marginal effects and the statistical significance of those effects for the interactive term components—i.e., all variables but the controls AGE, FEMALE, and EDUCATION—will not be given simply by the reported coefficients and standard errors of our model output as per usual. Rather, since our theory states that the effects of these variables on individuals' responses with vary depending on the values of some other variable(s) (namely, ETHNICITY), we must estimate these marginal effects and standard errors manually over a substantively-meaningful range of our modifying variable(s). See the instructive 2006 *Political Analysis* paper "Understanding Interaction Models: Improving Empirical Analyses" by Brambor, Clark, and Golder.

influences individual political opinion and action but even transcends the political sphere to alter basic social interaction between members of the two ethnic groups.

Taken together, the above-described variables give us the following standard model of individual political behavior in Bahrain:

$$RESPONSE = B_0 + ETHNIC \cdot B_1 + DIFFETH \cdot B_2 + DIFFETH \times ETH \cdot B_3 + AGE \cdot B_4 + FEM \cdot B_5 + EDUC \cdot B_6 + ECON \cdot B_7 + ECON \times ETH \cdot B_8 + RELIG \cdot B_9 + RELIG \times ETH \cdot B_{10} + \varepsilon,$$

where RESPONSE is a given dependent variable of interest. For variables coded continuous, the model is estimated by ordinary least-squares regression; for those that are ordinal, by ordered probit; and for those that are dichotomous, by probit. Before commencing our analysis, we

may review our theoretical predictions about the effects of our ten independent variables on the political opinion and action of ordinary Bahrainis. These are summarized above in TABLE 5.9 and should require no further elucidation. Note finally that in addition to our combined standard model here we may wish to carry out ethnically-segregated estimations (i.e., one model for Sunnis and one for Shi'is) in order to obtain separate, ethnic group-specific estimates for all the independent variables. In that case ETHNICITY and the three interaction terms will drop out of the equation due to collinearity, leaving just six independent variables.

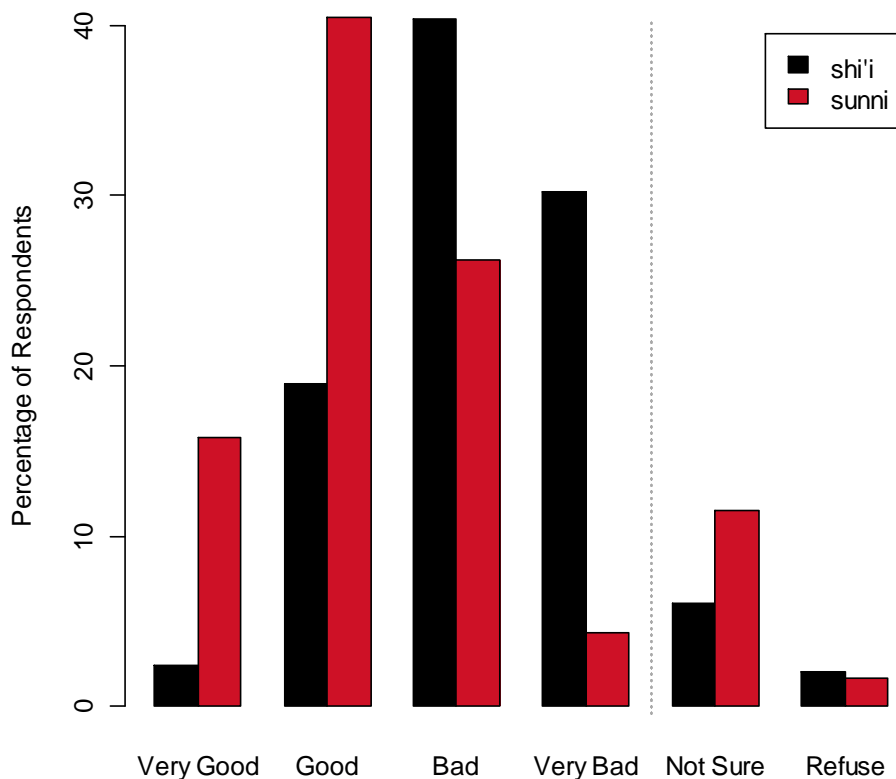
### **Tempered by Non-Taxation?: The Sources of Bahraini Political Opinion**

To clarify our generic term employed thus far, we may say that the “political opinions” we shall investigate here are of a particular type. These are not, in the first place, general attitudes toward political systems (“Is democracy better than the alternative?”), political tolerance (“Do women make good leaders?”), the place of religion in politics (“Should clerics be able to influence the way people vote?”), and so on. The indicators we shall use are not, in other words, hypothetical, regime-agnostic questions about political values or orientations. While the answers to these questions may be interesting for other reasons, and while such questions were duly asked of the Bahraini respondents as were all those of the Arab Barometer survey instrument, nonetheless the theoretical argument propelling the present inquiry forward has little to say about this category of opinion. Instead, the *rentier* theory we wish to evaluate makes the specific claim that in allocative economies citizens will tend to be more passive and quiescent politically in proportion to the material benefits that accrue from the *rentier* state, a prediction about citizen-state interaction rather than about citizens’ innate political natures or ideals.<sup>20</sup> The indicators we shall select, then, are meant to represent popular attitude toward the regime itself, toward the basic legitimacy and desirability of the prevailing political order in Bahrain. As such they will measure the following opinions of citizens: (1) the quality of the nation’s overall “political situation” (“الوضع السياسي”); (2) the government’s overall positive or negative influence on a respondent’s daily life; (3) the legitimacy of the 2006 parliamentary

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<sup>20</sup> Of course one might also make the latter argument, as indeed the early *rentier* literature tends to do in its talk of a deleterious “*rentier* mentality” affecting the citizens of rent-based regimes. Defined generally as “a break in the work-reward causation” (LUCIANI 1990, 88)—that is, an aversion to (physical) work coupled with a sense of material entitlement—this complex of citizen values is posited as one of the very defining characteristics of an allocative state. It is an interesting question whether such a change in culture, could it occur at all, could have occurred already in the timeframe of but a few generations since the foundation of the modern *rentier* states. Yet it is a question that demands an altogether separate inquiry.

FIGURE 5.10. *Opinion of the Overall Political Situation in Bahrain, by Ethnicity*



elections; (4) the degree of respect for human rights in Bahrain; (5) one’s level of trust in important state institutions; (6) one’s overall satisfaction with “government performance” (“أداء الحكومة”); and (7) one’s level of national pride.

The first variable, POLITICAL SITUATION, derives from what is perhaps the most direct and general political question of the entire survey, appearing very early in the interview: “In general, how would you rate the present political situation in the country?”<sup>21</sup> The response categories descend in the standard manner from “very good,” “good,” “bad,” to “very bad.” As expected, we observe in FIGURE 5.10 above a drastic between-ethnic difference in response: whereas a majority (a combined 56%) of Sunni respondents report that Bahrain’s present political situation is “good” or “very good,” Shi’is are tilted even more in the opposite direction, with a full 71% of respondents describing the political situation as “bad” or “very bad.” Indeed,

<sup>21</sup> Respondents are asked in Arabic:

”بشكل عام، كيف تقيم الوضع السياسي الحالي في البلاد؟“

some Shi'a even preferred in lieu of "very bad" to give still more emphatic responses such as "دمار" ("[in] ruin") or "ما في سياسة في البحرين"—literally, "there is no politics in Bahrain," implying a total domination of political decision-making by the Āl Khalīfa. Finally, it is clear from the relatively high rate of "I'm not sure" responses that many individuals, especially Sunnis, were wary of answering this question altogether on account of its overt politicality.<sup>22</sup> Overall, though, the utter inversion of the red and black bars for the valid responses seems to offer an excellent visual summary of Bahrain's ethnic divide surrounding the political status quo.

Below in TABLE 5.II we find the results of the more complete analysis employing our standard model of political opinion in Bahrain. In addition to this ordered probit estimation of *Model 1* we have two diagnostic models to verify the robustness of these results: a first uses the alternative RELIGIOSITY measure described above—the more common "religious" or "not religious" indicator, including the "moderate" responses in between—and a second estimates the standard model by ordinary least-squares. The main benefit of the latter is that, even if it makes less efficient use of our categorical dependent variable POLITICAL SITUATION, giving us perhaps more conservative coefficient and standard error estimates, still it allows for a more straightforward interpretation of the marginal effects of our independent variables of interest. We may begin by observing that all three models appear to offer substantively-equivalent results: the signs of all the coefficient estimates remain the same, and their significance too is little changed from *Model 1* to *Model 3*. Yet recall (cf. TABLE 5.9, note a) that only the effects of our three control variables—AGE, FEMALE, and EDUCATION—are directly interpretable from the raw model output of TABLE 5.II. This is, once again, a necessary result of our conditional hypotheses tested here by the several interaction terms: the latter imply by definition that the effect of one variable (say, religiosity) on individual political opinion is itself dependent upon another condition (namely, one's ethnicity). It makes little sense, then, to speak of an unconditional marginal effect of RELIGIOSITY ON POLITICAL SITUATION, which is the coefficient 0.327 reported in *Model 1*, when our theory tells us that this effect is *not* unconditional but will

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<sup>22</sup> Ideally, one would prefer to make use of these "I'm not sure" and "refuse to answer" responses rather than just exclude them from model estimations, since these markers of apprehensive respondents may provide helpful measures of individuals' propensities to give honest answers. One might, for example, construct a variable based on the frequency of an individual's "I don't know" or "refuse to answer" responses to selected sensitive questions. The difficulty, of course, apart from distinguishing a reluctance to answer from genuine ignorance or indecision, is that for those questions where such a variable would be most useful as a control—i.e., for the most sensitive questions—the most apprehensive individuals are disproportionately likely not to appear in the sample at all, since they will have responded "I don't know" or refused to answer with a relatively high probability. Thus our measure of apprehension may be hampered by a selection effect of this sort. While we do not include such a "refuse" variable in our standard model, then, we do employ one later as a diagnostic control. Cf. *infra*, 270 ff.

TABLE 5.II. *Bahrainis' Opinion of the Country's Overall Political Situation, estimated three ways*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard			Alt. Religiosity Measure			OLS Regression		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>
ETHNICITY	-1.009	0.474	0.033	-1.050	0.474	0.027	-0.750	0.318	0.019
DIFFETHNIC	-0.783	0.180	0.000	-0.764	0.181	0.000	-0.519	0.120	0.000
DIFFETH × ETH	0.830	0.330	0.012	0.985	0.317	0.002	0.547	0.229	0.017
AGE	-0.0111	0.00466	0.017	-0.0133	0.00453	0.003	-0.00739	0.00316	0.020
FEMALE	0.0740	0.123	0.547	0.0741	0.119	0.533	0.0451	0.0816	0.581
EDUCATION	0.0892	0.0476	0.061	0.107	0.0466	0.022	0.0614	0.0328	0.062
ECONOMY	0.396	0.143	0.006	0.409	0.146	0.005	0.242	0.0864	0.005
ECON × ETH	-0.0524	0.199	0.793	0.0366	0.206	0.859	-0.00525	0.130	0.968
RELIGIOSITY	0.327	0.175	0.061	0.191	0.0850	0.025	0.213	0.117	0.069
RELIG × ETH	-0.498	0.266	0.061	-0.366	0.142	0.010	-0.335	0.182	0.067
Constant	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-	2.497	0.330	0.000
<i>N</i>	357			347			357		
Prob. > F ( $\chi^2$ )	0.0000			0.0000			0.0000		
(Pseudo) <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.1624			0.1620			0.3466		

Note: Robust standard errors reported for all models

depend rather on a person's ethnic affiliation. Therefore, to interpret properly the impact on political opinion of our four explanatory variables of interest—ETHNICITY, DIFFETHNIC, ECONOMY, and RELIGIOSITY—we will offer estimates of the magnitude and statistical significance of their marginal effects over a substantively-meaningful range of the appropriate modifying variable as suggested by Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006).<sup>23</sup> Except when evaluating the effect of ethnic group membership itself, this modifying variable will be the ETHNICITY indicator, whose “substantively-meaningful range” is of course 0 (Shi'i) and 1 (Sunni).

<sup>23</sup> More than just for their instructive paper, I must thank these authors for their indispensable Stata code (available at <http://homepages.nyu.edu/~mrg217/interaction.html>) that makes presenting these effects much easier.

We will begin by analyzing the marginal effect of ETHNICITY on respondents' opinion of the overall political situation in Bahrain, which should reflect the dramatic between-group difference revealed already in FIGURE 5.10 above. It is tempting simply to point to the large and statistically-significant coefficient on the standalone ETHNICITY indicator in TABLE 5.II and from this conclude that ethnic group membership is indeed an important predictor of Bahrainis' views in this case. Recall, though, that according to our theory the effect of ETHNICITY should depend on the religiosity of an individual, with more religious Shi'is tending to give less favorable and more religious Sunnis tending to give more favorable opinions. Similarly, the effect of ethnicity also operates in our model via its impact on DIFFETHNIC and ECONOMY (i.e., via the two interaction terms DIFFETHNIC  $\times$  ETHNICITY and ECONOMY  $\times$  ETHNICITY).<sup>24</sup> In sum, the effect of ETHNICITY will vary across individual respondents depending on their religiosity, economic satisfaction, and whether they were interviewed by someone of the other ethnicity.

For the purposes here of testing *Hypotheses 2.1* and *2.2*, however, we are less interested theoretically in ethnicity's influence on political opinion as one's economy changes or in the case that one is part of an inter-ethnic interview. Instead, we are interested in the opposite relationships: the effect on political opinion of economy and inter-ethnic interviewing as respondent ethnicity changes (hypothetically, that is) from Shi'i to Sunni. In computing the marginal effect of ETHNICITY, therefore, our modifying variable of interest is RELIGIOSITY, and will remain such throughout the section. So as not to exclude the impact of ETHNICITY via ECONOMY and DIFFETHNIC, though, we fix the latter two variables at their mean values, which are approximately 2.08 and 0.232, respectively. That is, we will compute the effect of ETHNICITY for an individual of "average" ECONOMY and "average" DIFFETHNIC (though the latter is not substantively meaningful).<sup>25</sup> All this is to say the following: we wish to discover the extent of ETHNICITY's impact on POLITICAL SITUATION: does this influence obtain only for individuals of high religiosity, low religiosity, or both?; and, in the final case, is its magnitude indeed greater among individuals of higher religiosity as per our *Hypotheses 2.2<sub>A</sub>* and *2.2<sub>B</sub>*?

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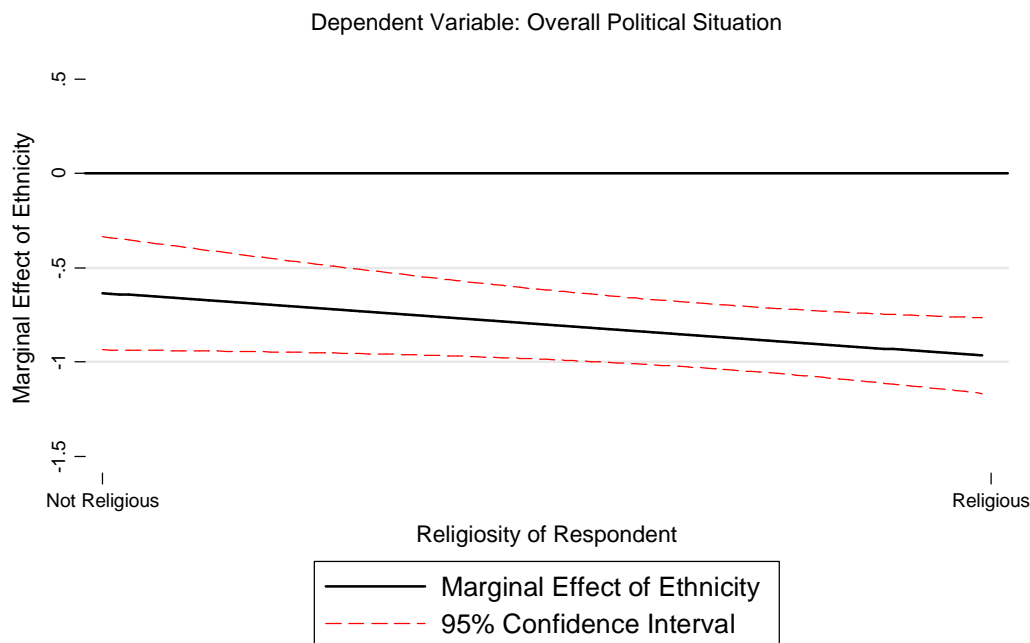
<sup>24</sup> More exactly, the marginal effect of ETHNICITY ON POLITICAL SITUATION is the first derivative of ETHNICITY with respect to the dependent variable, POLITICAL SITUATION. In our model, then, this gives us:

$$\frac{\partial(\text{SITUATION})}{\partial(\text{ETHNICITY})} = B_1 + \text{DIFFETHNIC} \cdot B_3 + \text{ECONOMY} \cdot B_8 + \text{RELIGIOSITY} \cdot B_{10}.$$

<sup>25</sup> One might ask why we do not choose to set DIFFETHNIC at 0—i.e., why we do not choose to compute the effect of ETHNICITY when one's responses are entirely unaffected by inter-ethnic interviewing. For one thing, we do not yet know the precise impact of the latter. For another, we may always adjust this value later for illustrative purposes. In any case, its current value of 0.232 serves only to make more conservative our estimates of the marginal effect of ETHNICITY, which is no great harm.



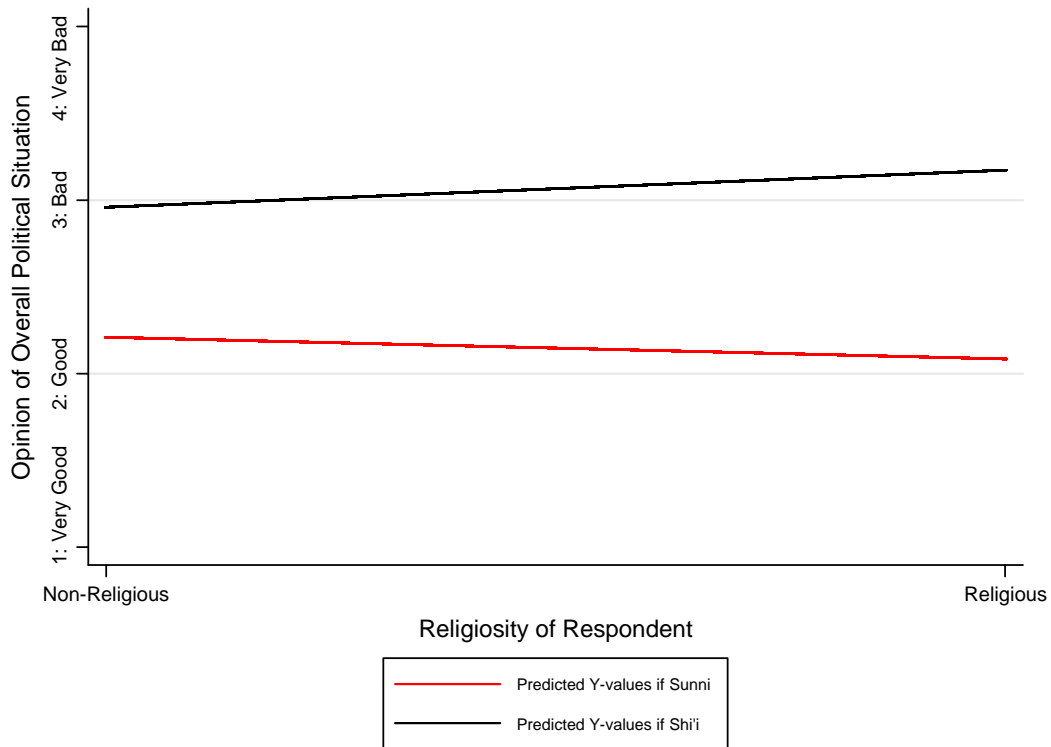
FIGURE 5.12. *Marginal Effect of Ethnicity on Opinion of Overall Political Situation*



We find in FIGURE 5.12 above a plot of the marginal effect of (Sunni) ethnicity on a Bahraini’s opinion of the overall political situation in the country.<sup>26</sup> The  $y$ -axis represents the magnitude of this effect and the  $x$ -axis represents the (0 to 1) range of individual religiosity. The estimate of the effect of ETHNICITY is statistically-significant at the 0.05  $p$ -level whenever both the upper and lower bounds of the 95% confidence are either below or above zero. In this case, we see that its effect is significant across the entire range of RELIGIOSITY—that is, it is a statistically-significant predictor of POLITICAL SITUATION irrespective of whether one is a religious individual according to our measure. More specifically, the marginal effect of one’s being a Sunni rather than a Shi’i ranges from about  $-0.63$  among non-religious respondents to  $-0.97$  among religious respondents. In terms of our dependent variable, this corresponds to a change of around two-thirds of one category in the first case and to an entire category in the second. Sunni ethnicity, in other words, is associated among religious individuals with a change from, say, “bad” to “good” or “good” to “very good,” when asked about the country’s

<sup>26</sup> It should be clear by now that the marginal effects reported here correspond to the OLS-estimated model (*Model 3* in TABLE 5.11) rather than the ordered probit model. This is to allow a more intuitive substantive interpretation and, at worst, simply renders our marginal effect estimates more conservative.

FIGURE 5.I3. *Predicted Values of Response Variable, by Ethnicity and Religiosity*

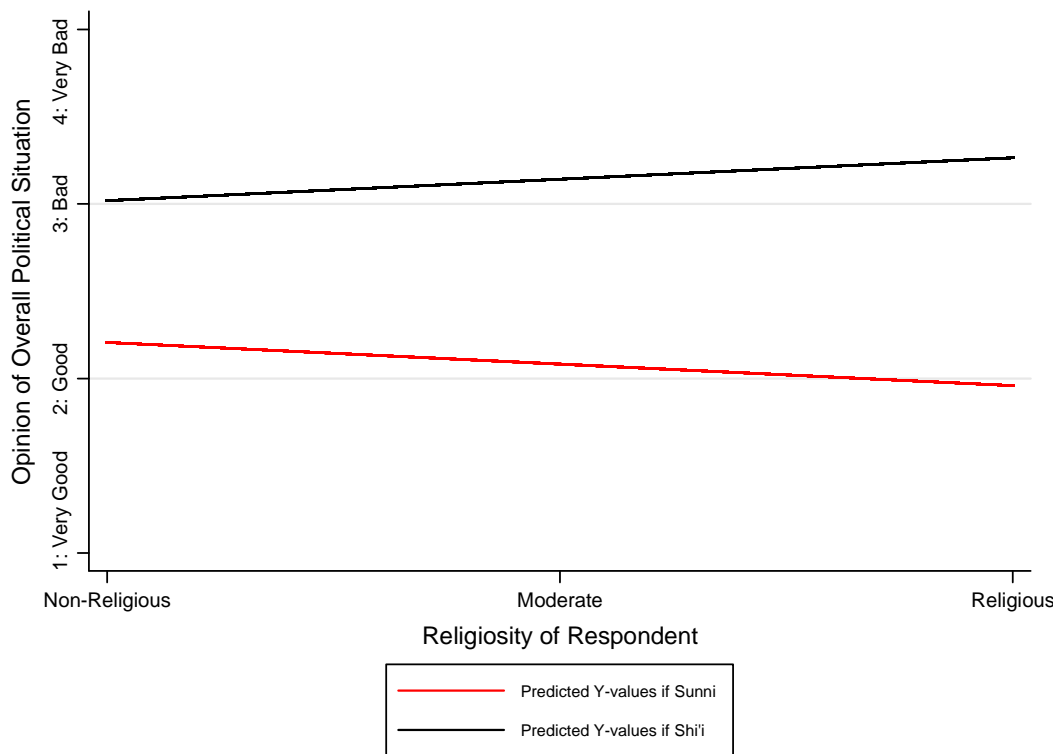


political situation as compared to a Shi'i respondent of identical economic satisfaction, age, gender, education, and so on.

FIGURE 5.I3 above may provide a more intuitive depiction of our findings by showing predicted values of our response variable POLITICAL SITUATION for Sunni and Shi'i respondents according to their religiosity and after controlling for all other explanatory variables.<sup>27</sup> The predicted response of a Shi'i respondent is shown to be just shy of category 3 ("bad") among non-religious individuals and to cross further into category 3 towards category 4 ("very bad") as religiosity increases. Conversely, the predicted response of a Sunni Bahraini hovers around category 2 ("good") for non-religious individuals, moving closer toward category 1 ("very good") as religiosity increases. Finally, we may repeat this exercise using our alternative measure of religiosity—"Would you describe yourself as religious or not religious?"—in order to verify that the pattern above is not an artifact of the way we measured our modifying variable. FIGURE 5.I4 below gives these new predicted values, which if anything reveal an even

<sup>27</sup> Note that in this and the other predicted values plots of this section, all control variables are standardized.

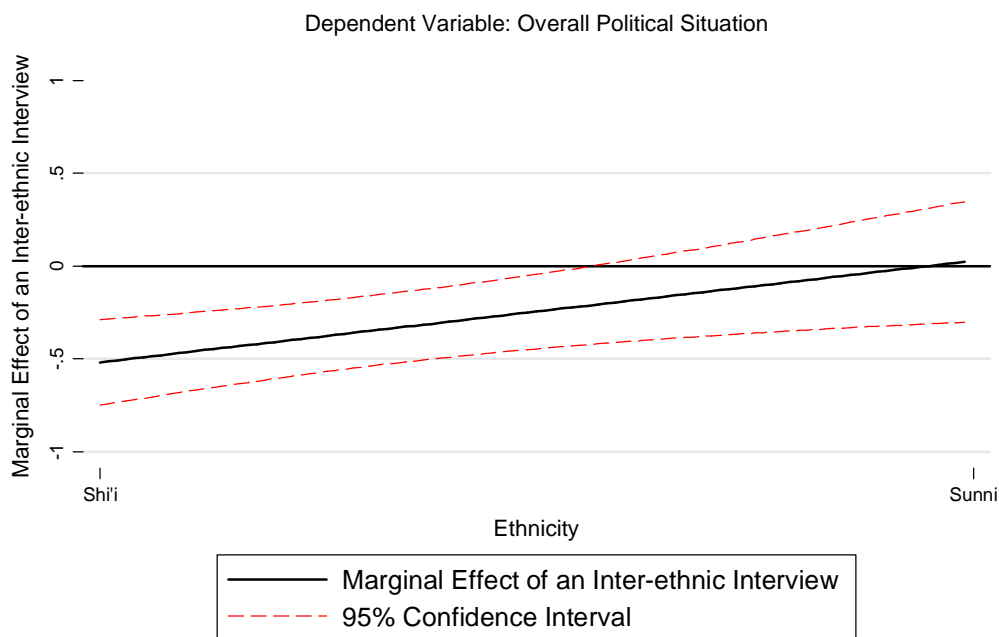
FIGURE 5.14. *Predicted Values of Response Variable, with Alternative Religiosity Measure*



greater divergence between Sunni and Shi'i respondents as they increase in religiosity: here we see that the line describing the predicted response of a Shi'i Bahraini is shifted upward as compared to that in FIGURE 5.13, while the line describing Sunnis has a negative slope that is noticeably greater in magnitude than that of FIGURE 5.13, even crossing below the category 2 threshold as it approaches the far end of the religiosity scale. In other words, our substantive interpretation remains the same regardless of the modifying variable RELIGIOSITY we employ; our conclusion—that Shi'i ethnicity in Bahrain is associated with less favorable opinions of the country's overall political situation, and that this between-group divergence in opinion increases with respondents' religiosity—is robust across both measures.

Having learned of the impact on POLITICAL SITUATION of ethnic group membership, we now proceed to analyze the effects of our other independent variables of interest, namely DIFFETHNIC, RELIGIOSITY, and ECONOMY. We may begin with the first. Depicted in FIGURE 5.15 below is the marginal effect of DIFFETHNIC as respondent ethnicity changes from 0 (Shi'i) to

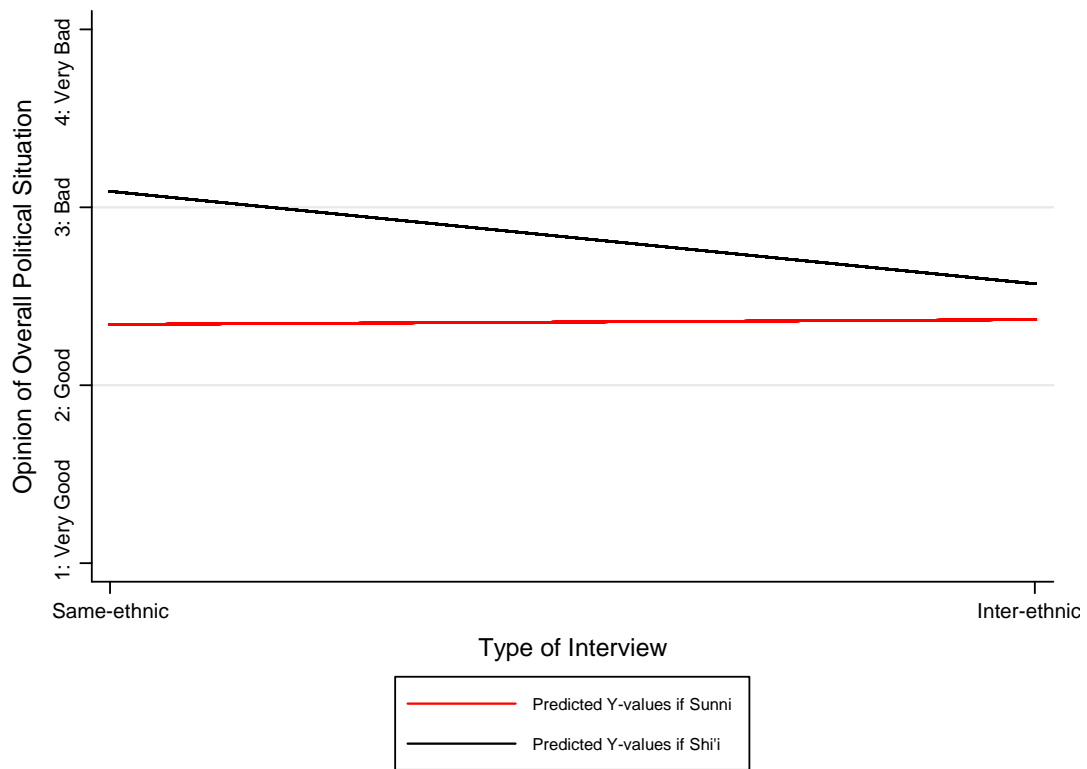
FIGURE 5.15. *Marginal Effect of an Inter-Ethnic Interview, by Respondent Ethnicity*



1 (Sunni). Once again, this change is not meant literally, and clearly the values between 0 and 1 have no substantive interpretation. The idea is simply that, as with *ETHNICITY*, there is no single or unconditional “effect” of inter-ethnic interviews; rather, our theory tells us that the effect on *DIFFETHNIC* will depend on the ethnicity of a respondent, with Shi’is tending to give more Sunni-like responses and Sunnis tending either to give more Shi’i-like or more pro-state responses.<sup>28</sup> The marginal effect of an inter-ethnic interview on a respondent’s evaluation of Bahrain’s political situation is given above in FIGURE 5.15, which reveals that *DIFFETHNIC* is a statistically-significant predictor of *POLITICAL SITUATION* only among Shi’i respondents. We can determine this, as before, by looking at the two bands of the 95% confidence interval: wherever these are both below or above 0, *DIFFETHNIC* is significant at the 0.05 *p*-level. Thus we easily see that for the entire right-hand side of the ethnicity continuum the upper band has crossed into positive values, and that, accordingly, inter-ethnic interviewing seems here to have no effect on Sunni respondents. Among Shi’is, however, its impact is quite significant, being associated with a change of about one-half of a response category in the direction of more

<sup>28</sup> Recall that we have two plausible theories with competing expectations regarding the response of Bahraini Sunnis to inter-ethnic interviewing. See *supra*, 172-173.

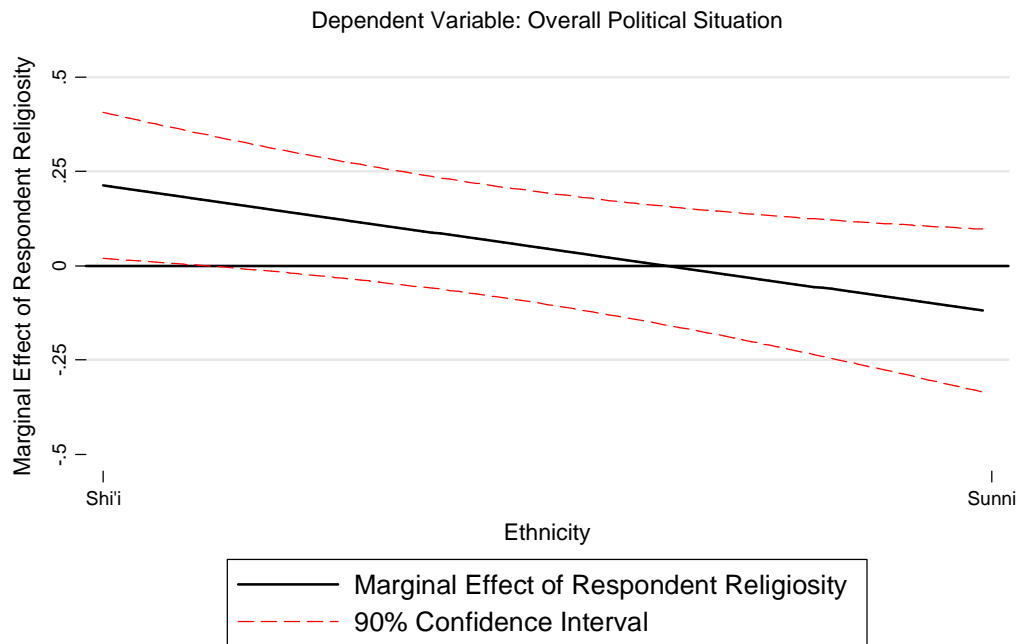
FIGURE 5.16. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by DIFFETHNIC



favorable opinion regarding Bahrain’s political situation. This influence is illustrated above in FIGURE 5.16, which once again shows predicted values of Sunni and Shi’i respondents as the type of interview changes (theoretically) from a same-ethnic interview to a inter-ethnic interview. We see that whereas the predicted responses among same-ethnic interviewees is similar to those of FIGURES 5.13 and 5.14 above, for Shi’i respondents interviewed by Sunni fieldworkers the predicted value of POLITICAL SITUATION is, as per the marginal effect charted in FIGURE 5.15, decreased by approximately one-half of a response category. This influence is so significant indeed that the predicted responses of inter-ethnic Sunni and Shi’i interviewees nearly converge around  $Y = 2.5$ . Finally, notice also that the slope (marginal effect) of the line corresponding to Sunni respondents, while not statistically significant, is slightly positive, a fact we should bear in mind as we proceed in our analysis of other political opinions.

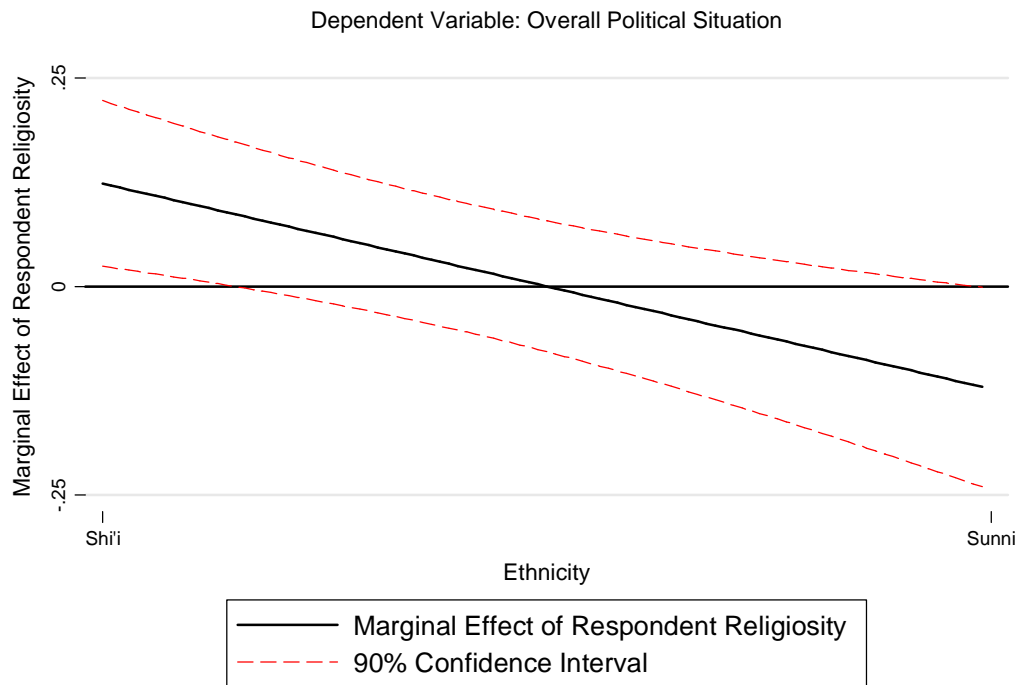
We move next to another independent variable of considerable theoretical interest, RELIGIOSITY. According to *Hypotheses 2.2<sub>A</sub>* and *2.2<sub>B</sub>*, the religiousness of a respondent, taken to

FIGURE 5.17. *Marginal Effect of Religiosity, by Respondent Ethnicity*



be a proxy for the strength of his ethnic identity, should be a significant predictor of political opinion among both Bahraini Sunna and Shi'a. Yet for members of the former group we expect higher levels of religiosity to be associated with more favorable opinions of POLITICAL SITUATION whereas among Shi'a we expect more religiosity to be associated with less favorable opinions. Our theory is, again, that a stronger ethnic identity should cause Sunnis to rally in support of the Bahraini government and the larger political status quo it represents, while a stronger Shi'i ethnic identity should cause individuals to be more critical and less accepting of the country's current political order. From FIGURE 5.17 above we have some evidence that this is in fact the case: we see that the marginal effect of respondent religiosity is positive among Shi'is and negative among Sunnis. The statistical confidence of the latter effect gives us pause, yet the overall picture in any case seems clear: Shi'i respondents tend to report more critical evaluations of the political situation in Bahrain as they increase in religiosity; this influence among Sunnis is precisely the opposite. In this, then, we have confirmation of the pattern witnessed already in FIGURE 5.13, which showed that the predicted responses of Shi'is and Sunnis diverged as RELIGIOSITY increased from 0 to 1. There we were concerned with the

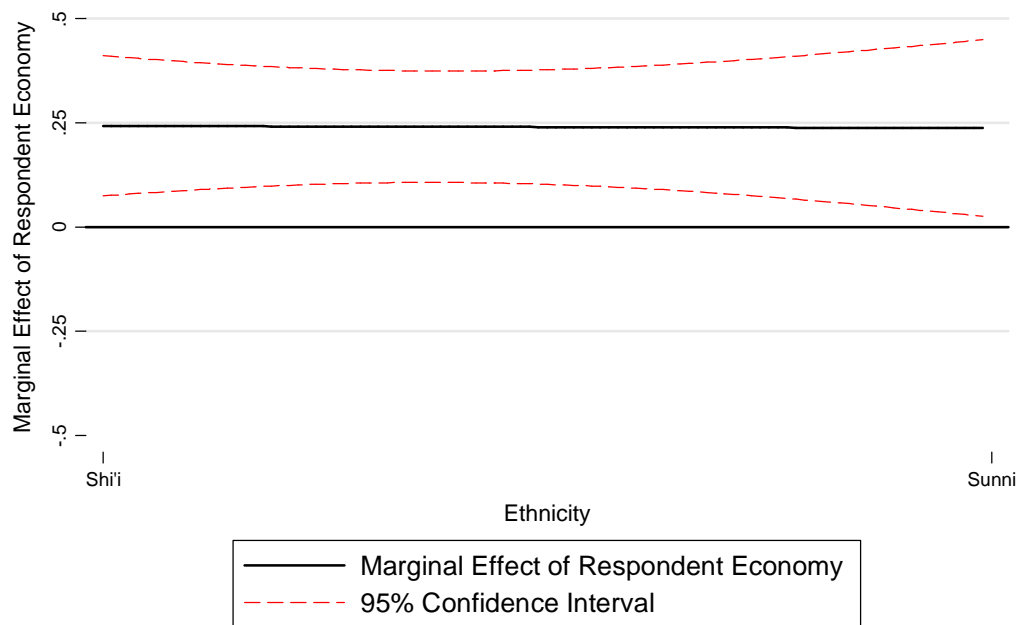
FIGURE 5.18. Marginal Effect of Religiosity, with Alternative Religiosity Measure



effect of ethnic group membership as religiosity changes; here we are interested in the utterly opposite influence of religiosity depending on the ethnicity of a respondent. FIGURE 5.17 serves to confirm statistically, that is, what FIGURE 5.13 suggests visually. All this may be repeated, finally, in the case of our alternative RELIGIOSITY measure, whose marginal effect is plotted in FIGURE 5.18. Once again we see that religiosity is an anti-government influence among Shi'is and a pro-government influence among Sunnis, and that both of these effects are statistically significant at the 0.100  $p$ -level. An analogue to the predicted values graph of FIGURE 5.14, the picture of FIGURE 5.18 supplies even more evidence in support of our *Hypotheses 2.2<sub>A</sub>* and *2.2<sub>B</sub>*.

One final element of our theoretical predictions remains, however, to be tested: the claim of *Hypothesis 2.1* that the effect of ethnicity on political opinion is equal to or greater than that of economic satisfaction. We thus turn lastly to our analysis of this independent variable. As with the others, we must evaluate the marginal effect of ECONOMY conditional on respondent ethnicity, yet recall that we were uncertain theoretically whether to expect this influence of economic well-being to differ for Sunnis and Shi'is. We hypothesized that its effect may in fact be stronger among Sunnis, who as a group were shown in the first section

FIGURE 5.19. *Marginal Effect of Economic Satisfaction, by Respondent Ethnicity*

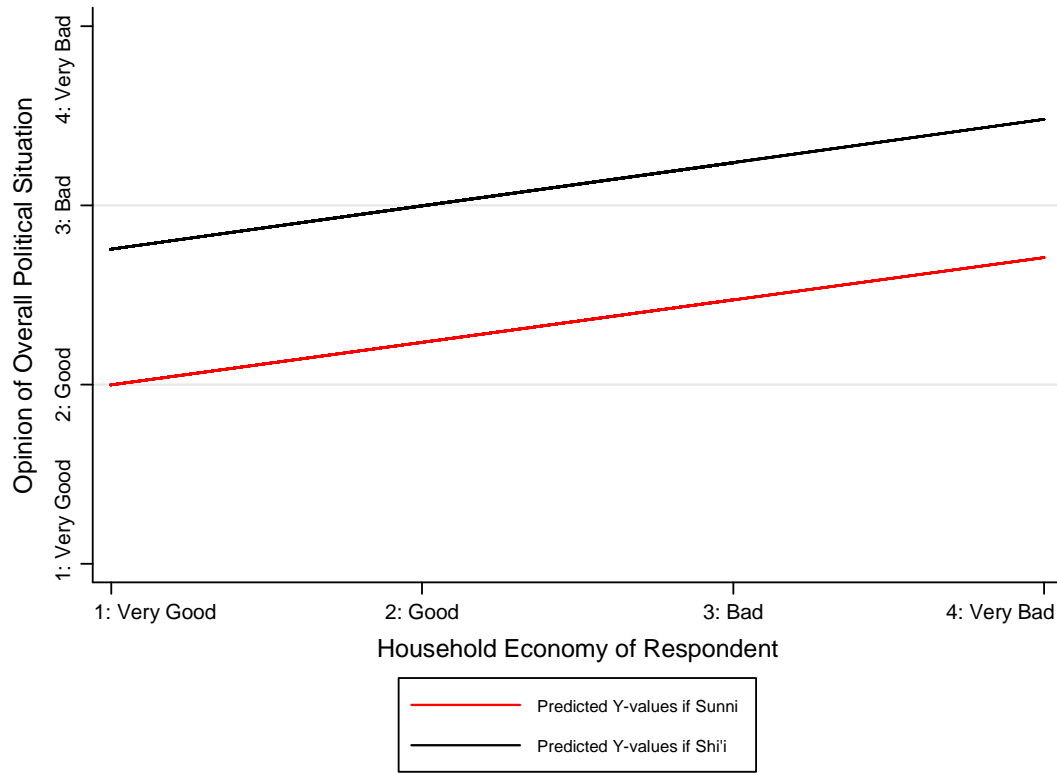


of this chapter to have a more reasonable expectation of economic benefits, of employment benefits, in exchange for political quiescence. As we can perceive from FIGURE 5.19, though, this is clearly not the case. Instead, we see that the marginal effect of economic satisfaction on a respondent’s evaluation of the political situation in Bahrain is virtually constant across Sunnis and Shi’is in addition to being uniformly statistically-significant at the 0.05  $p$ -level. In terms of magnitude, the impact of `ECONOMY` is substantial, with a one-unit increase in the indicator—say, from “good” (2) to “bad” (3) or from “bad” to “very bad” (4)—producing a 0.24-increase in `POLITICAL SITUATION`. The worse one’s personal economy, that is, the worse one’s evaluation of Bahrain’s overall political situation.

Compared to that of `RELIGIOSITY`, therefore, we must say that the impact of economic satisfaction is greater in magnitude: FIGURE 5.17 shows that the marginal effect of the former is about 0.20 for Sunnis and  $-0.13$  for Shi’is. But this is not the whole story. Since `RELIGIOSITY` is coded dichotomously, these are the marginal effects of a change in `RELIGIOSITY` across its entire range, i.e. from its minimum of 0 (“non-religious”) to its maximum of 1 (“religious”). By contrast, a one-unit increase in `ECONOMY` corresponds to a mere 33% change over its entire range, which goes from 1 (“very good”) to 4 (“very bad”). So for a more fair comparison of



FIGURE 5.20. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by Economic Satisfaction



the relative effects on POLITICAL SITUATION of ECONOMY and RELIGIOSITY, we must compare their marginal effects over an equivalent range. And since we cannot meaningfully divide the range of the RELIGIOSITY variable into smaller segments, we choose to compute the marginal effect of ECONOMY for a transformation of  $\pm 1$  standard deviation away from its observed mean of 2.08, which is  $2 \times 0.606 = 1.212$ . So we may say that the marginal effect of ECONOMY in this case is  $0.24 \times 1.212 = 0.29$ , or a little less than 1½-times that of RELIGIOSITY among Shi'is and 2¼-times that of RELIGIOSITY among Sunnis. Interestingly, then, while the marginal effect of economic satisfaction is the same for Sunnis and Shi'is, its impact relative to that of individual religiosity is indeed greater among Sunnis. This result we shall keep in mind as we proceed.

Of course, the specific prediction of *Hypothesis 2.1* regards the relative influences of ECONOMY and ETHNICITY rather than those of ECONOMY and RELIGIOSITY. FIGURE 5.20, which depicts the effects of ETHNICITY and ECONOMY simultaneously, shows that the two comparisons are very different. Here, the gap between the red and black lines represents the effect of

ETHNICITY as values of ECONOMY increase, while the slopes of the lines represent the effect of ECONOMY ON POLITICAL SITUATION among Sunnis and Shi'is. Looking at the far left of the diagram where ECONOMY = 1, we see that the red line crosses exactly at  $Y = 2$  whereas the black line crosses around three-quarters of the distance between  $Y = 2$  and  $Y = 3$ . And since these lines are parallel across the entire range of ECONOMY, we know that the marginal effect of ETHNICITY ON POLITICAL SITUATION is steady across all values of ECONOMY at about 0.75, or nearly three times greater in magnitude than the marginal effect of ECONOMY as per our computation above. As for our *Hypothesis 2.1* prediction, therefore, the evidence here is in its favor: the impact of ethnic group membership on Bahrainis' political opinions, on their evaluations of the nation's overall political situation, is much greater than that of their economic satisfaction, to say nothing of the additional, augmenting effect of individual religiosity. Accordingly, we may conclude in this case that the individual-level causal story underlying the *rentier* state framework of Arab Gulf politics, if not wrong per se, is quite incomplete.

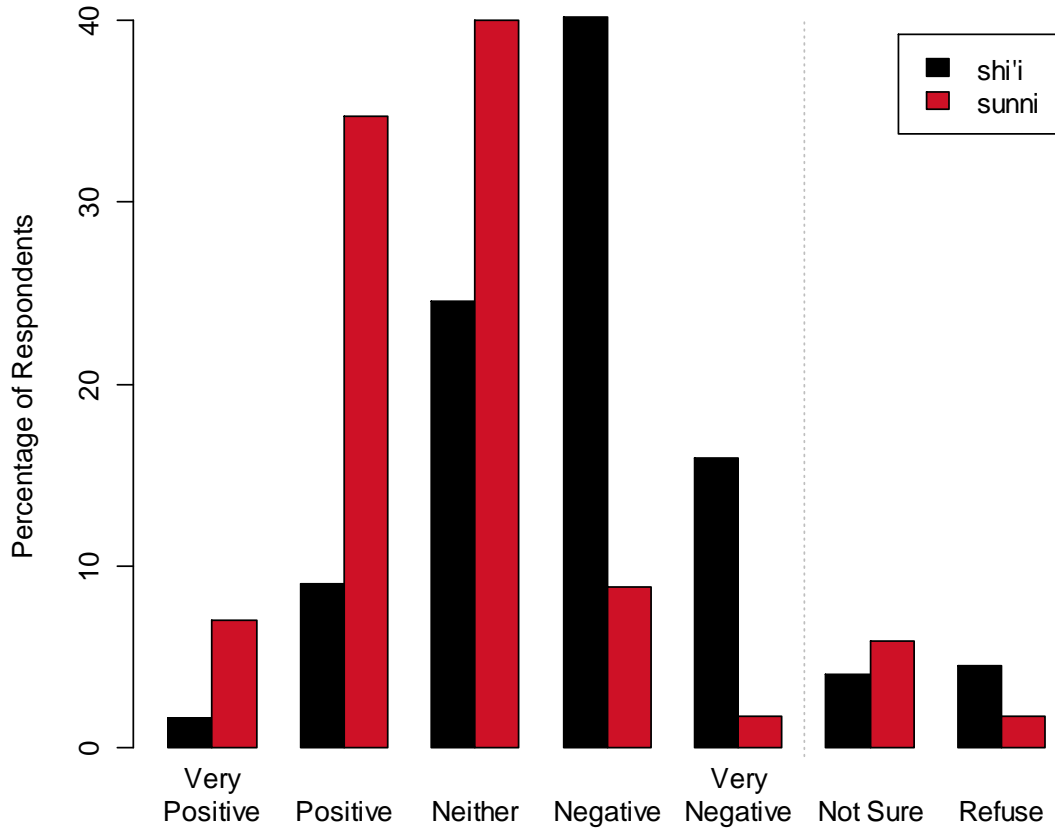
Now that we are familiar with the method of analysis to be employed in evaluating *Hypotheses 2.1* and *2.2*, for the sake of space we may move somewhat more quickly through the eight political opinions remaining for consideration, seeing that the only new element in each case will be the specific survey question (that is, opinion) serving as dependent variable. Next on this list, then, is respondents' opinion of the overall influence of government policy on their daily lives. Bahrainis were asked to answer the question: "In general, do you feel that government policies have an influence on your daily life?"<sup>29</sup> with one of these five responses: (1) "they have a very positive influence"; (2) "they have a positive influence"; (3) "they have neither a positive nor negative influence"; (4) "they have a negative influence"; or (5) "they have a very negative influence." Below in FIGURE 5.21 we see the proportions of Sunnis and Shi'is that answered in each of the five categories. Overall, the picture looks little different from that witnessed above in FIGURE 5.10 in the case of POLITICAL SITUATION: Bahrain's Sunni respondents disproportionately offer a positive or neutral evaluation of government policy, while the tendency among Shi'a is exactly the opposite. Indeed, a combined 81.7% of Sunni responses fall in categories 1 through 3, whereas 80.8% of Shi'i responses fall in categories 3 through 5. And were we to exclude the "Not Sure" and "Refuse" responses, these percentages would be nearly 10 points higher.

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<sup>29</sup> The corresponding Arabic is:

”بشكل عام، هل تشعر بأن سياسات الحكومة لها تأثير على حياتك اليومية؟“

FIGURE 5.2I. *Opinion of the Influence of Government Policy on Daily Life, by Ethnicity*



Our model estimations below in TABLE 5.22 appear to tell a similar story, the ETHNICITY indicator seeming to be a quite large and highly significant determinant of INFLUENCE along with DIFFETHNIC and DIFFETHNIC  $\times$  ETHNICITY. Yet to be sure we must repeat our procedure above and examine the marginal effects of ETHNICITY and DIFFETHNIC across the entire range of their respective modifying variables. What we *can* say from the raw model output of TABLE 5.22, however, is that in contrast to our analysis of POLITICAL SITUATION, here we find that none of the three control variables—age, gender, or education level—is a significant predictor in any of the three estimations, a result owing perhaps to the overwhelming impact of ethnic group membership as illustrated in FIGURE 5.2I. A final fact worth mentioning is that our alternative RELIGIOSITY measure—“Are you religious or not?”—seems to do a better job here of predicting INFLUENCE (in *Model 2*) than does our standard indicator (in *Model 1*). To determine whether

TABLE 5.22. Bahrainis' Opinion of the Influence of Government Policy on their Lives, estimated three ways

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard			Alt. Religiosity Measure			OLS Regression		
	B	s <sub>b</sub>	p >  z	B	s <sub>b</sub>	p >  z	B	s <sub>b</sub>	p >  t
ETHNICITY	-2.158	0.461	0.000	-1.756	0.449	0.000	-1.784	0.358	0.000
DIFFETHNIC	-0.961	0.182	0.000	-0.965	0.188	0.000	-0.762	0.137	0.000
DIFFETH × ETH	1.303	0.322	0.000	1.314	0.311	0.000	1.037	0.253	0.000
AGE	-0.00462	0.00455	0.310	-0.00438	0.00446	0.326	-0.00348	0.00359	0.334
FEMALE	0.0811	0.118	0.494	0.0224	0.118	0.850	0.0630	0.0935	0.501
EDUCATION	0.0346	0.0472	0.463	0.0458	0.0465	0.325	0.0290	0.0373	0.437
ECONOMY	0.267	0.151	0.078	0.252	0.155	0.105	0.190	0.112	0.092
ECON × ETH	0.311	0.217	0.153	0.306	0.216	0.156	0.275	0.169	0.104
RELIGIOSITY	0.135	0.155	0.383	0.0960	0.0869	0.269	0.103	0.122	0.402
RELIG × ETH	-0.147	0.235	0.533	-0.366	0.129	0.004	-0.110	0.188	0.559
Constant	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-	3.364	0.371	0.000
N	352			344			352		
Prob. > F ( $\chi^2$ )	0.0000			0.0000			0.0000		
(Pseudo) R <sup>2</sup>	0.1573			0.1564			0.3761		

Note: Robust standard errors reported for all models

this corresponds to a substantive discrepancy, though, we must wait to compare the relative magnitude and significance of their marginal effects, in which direction we now move.

We may start by confirming the implication of FIGURE 5.21 that Bahrainis' opinion of the salutary or detrimental character of government policy is strongly influenced by an individual's ethnic group membership. This we conclude from FIGURE 5.23 below, which shows that the marginal effect of ETHNICITY is substantively large and statistically significant across the entire range of its modifying variable RELIGIOSITY. We observe further that, as in the case of Bahrainis' opinion of their overall political situation, this "ethnic effect" seems to increase with a respondent's personal religiosity: among non-religious respondents Sunni

FIGURE 5.23. Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity

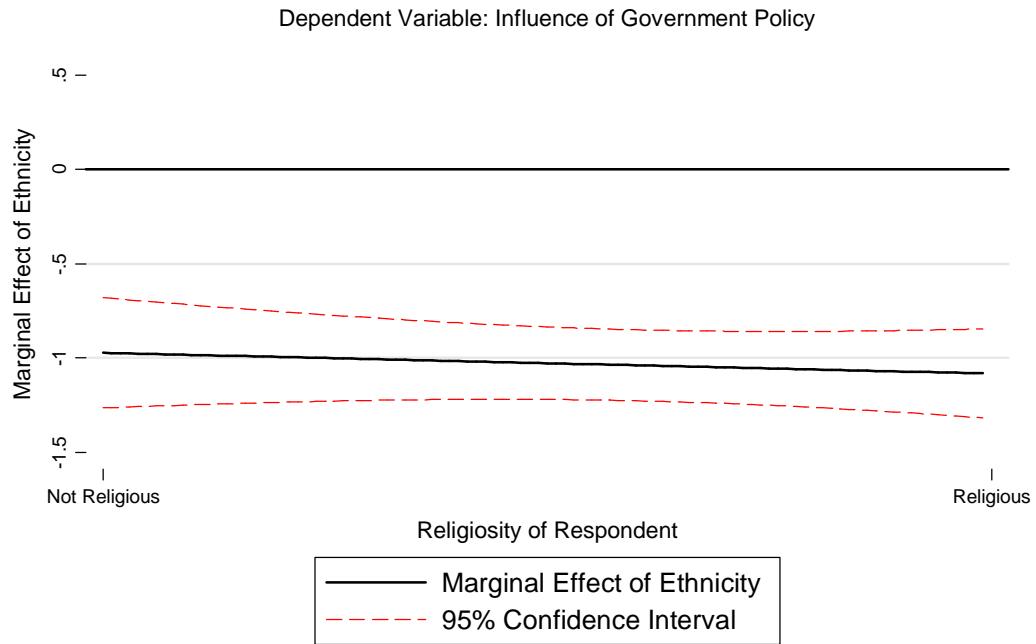
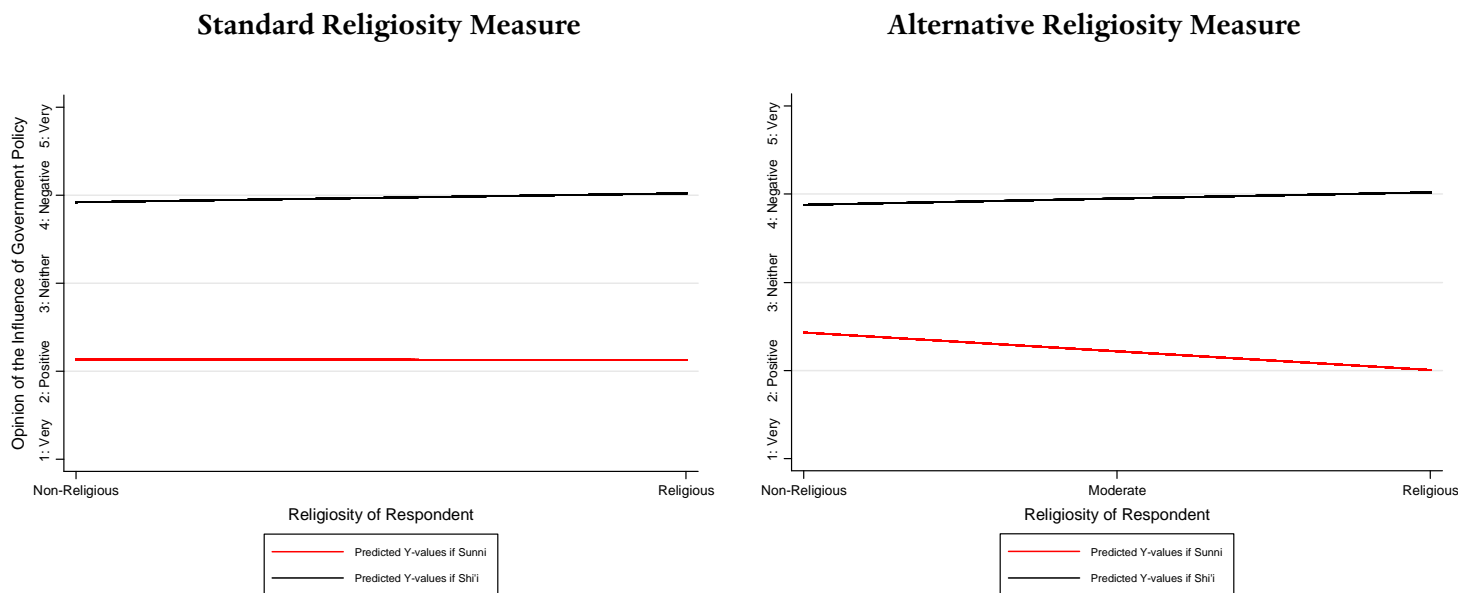


FIGURE 5.24. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by Religiosity



ethnicity is associated with an estimated 0.97-point decrease in the dependent variable INFLUENCE, whereas among religious individuals this estimated impact is  $-1.08$ , a difference of a bit more than 11%. In other words, the Sunni-Shi'i discrepancy in opinion regarding the nature of government policy appears to increase, as per our hypotheses, with religiosity.

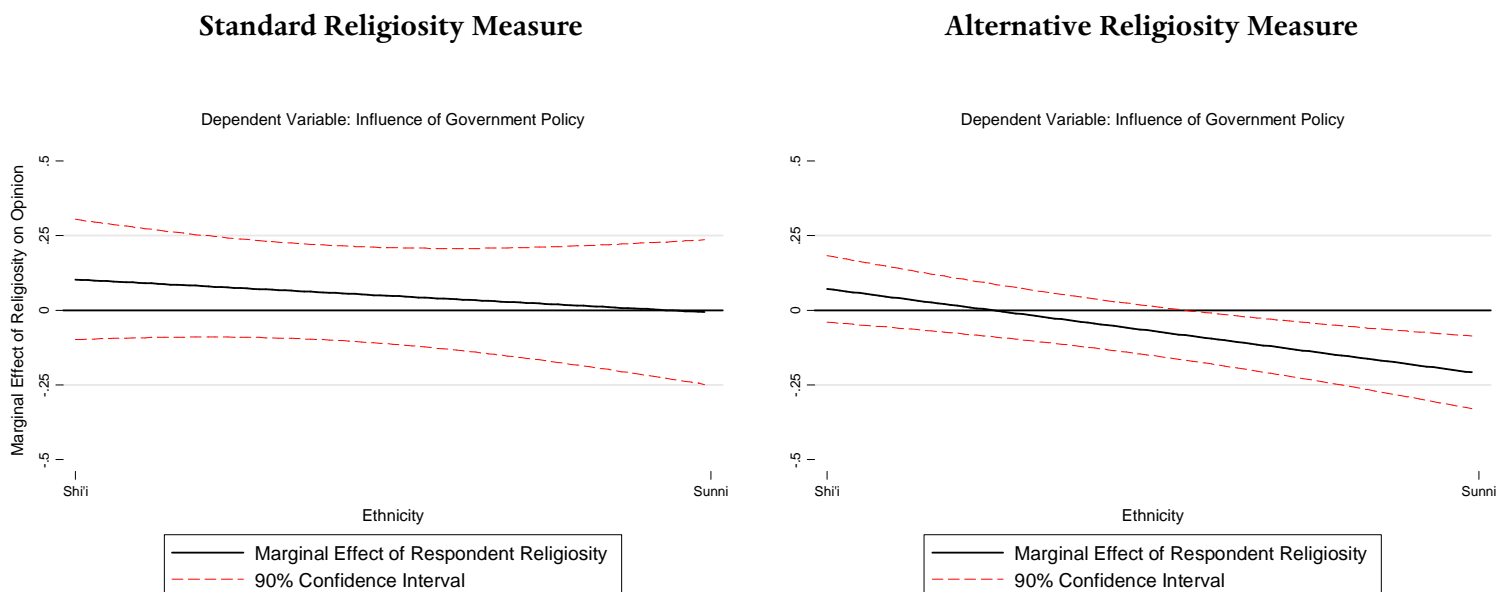
We may offer a visual representation of this modifying effect by plotting once again the predicted values of INFLUENCE for Sunnis and Shi'is as the RELIGIOSITY variable increases. The two panels of FIGURE 5.24 correspond to our two alternative measures of RELIGIOSITY. On the left side we see the predicted values of INFLUENCE using our standard dichotomous measure. Corresponding to FIGURE 5.23, this plot reveals the extent of the between-ethnic difference in opinion: the predicted response of a Sunni is about 2 (that government policies have a "positive" impact) while that of a Shi'i is about 4 (that they have a "negative" impact). Yet we also see that the moderating influence of religiosity, if still discernable among both Sunnis and Shi'is, in fact appears weak and seems to operate disproportionately among Shi'i respondents. That it does exist nonetheless, however, we find some evidence in the other half of FIGURE 5.24, which repeats the procedure employing the alternative "Are you religious or not?" measure of a respondent's religiosity. On the right we perceive the basic pattern of the left much more distinctly, with the predicted opinions of "religious" Sunnis and Shi'is being noticeably more extreme than their "non-religious" co-ethnics.<sup>30</sup>

To verify that this graphical pattern actually denotes statistical significance, we compute the marginal effects of the two measures of RELIGIOSITY below in FIGURE 5.25. We see that, in line with our visual observations, whereas the standard RELIGIOSITY variable does not predict INFLUENCE for respondents of either ethnicity at the 90% confidence level, our alternative, more direct measure is a statistically significant predictor among Sunnis and nearly is such among Shi'is. While we might thus have liked to see both of our measures of religiosity perform equally well, still the Bahrain mass survey data point overall to the same two conclusions: Shi'a tend to offer much more negative evaluations of Bahrain's government and political status quo than do Sunnis; and individuals of both ethnic groups tend to be only further entrenched in their respective, conflicting opinions as the strength of their ethnic identification increases.

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<sup>30</sup> In fact, the moderating effect of religiosity among Shi'is is relatively unaffected by the choice of RELIGIOSITY measure; the real difference lies with Sunnis, for whom the straightforward "Are you religious or not?" indicator seems to have relatively greater validity than our standard measure. Looking back we notice the same to have been true in our foregoing analysis of the dependent variable POLITICAL SITUATION, suggesting that this peculiarity may be more general. To what extent this is indeed the case will become clearer as we proceed.

FIGURE 5.25. Marginal Effect of Respondent Religiosity on INFLUENCE, using Two Measures



Still, as before we wonder about the substantive import of these two relationships—the augmenting influence of religion as well as the more general “ethnic effect”—compared to the impact of economic satisfaction. Is a respondent’s household economy once again a significant predictor of political opinion in Bahrain? and, if so, is its effect overshadowed by those of ethnicity and religion, or perhaps vice versa? The first question we may answer in the affirmative on the basis of FIGURE 5.26 below, which shows that the marginal effect of the *ECONOMY* variable is a statistically-significant determinant of *INFLUENCE* along the entire range of its modifying variable. That is to say, its marginal effect on one’s evaluation of government policy is significant among both Sunni and Shi’i respondents, at an estimated 0.46 among the former group and 0.19 among the latter. For a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation-change in the *ECONOMY* variable, then, these effects become 0.56 and 0.23, respectively. By either measure, the impact of economic satisfaction among Bahraini Sunnis is thus more than twice that among Shi’is. To answer our second question about the relative influence of *ECONOMY* we return to FIGURE 5.25, which tells us that the marginal effect of *RELIGIOSITY* (using the alternative measure) is about 0.07 among Shi’is and  $-0.21$  among Sunnis, or 0.14 and  $-0.42$  for a full 0-to-2 change. Thus we see that the substantive impact of *ECONOMY* is an estimated one and one-third times that of *RELIGIOSITY* among Sunnis and one and two-thirds that of *RELIGIOSITY* among Shi’is.

FIGURE 5.26. Marginal Effect of Economic Satisfaction, by Respondent Ethnicity

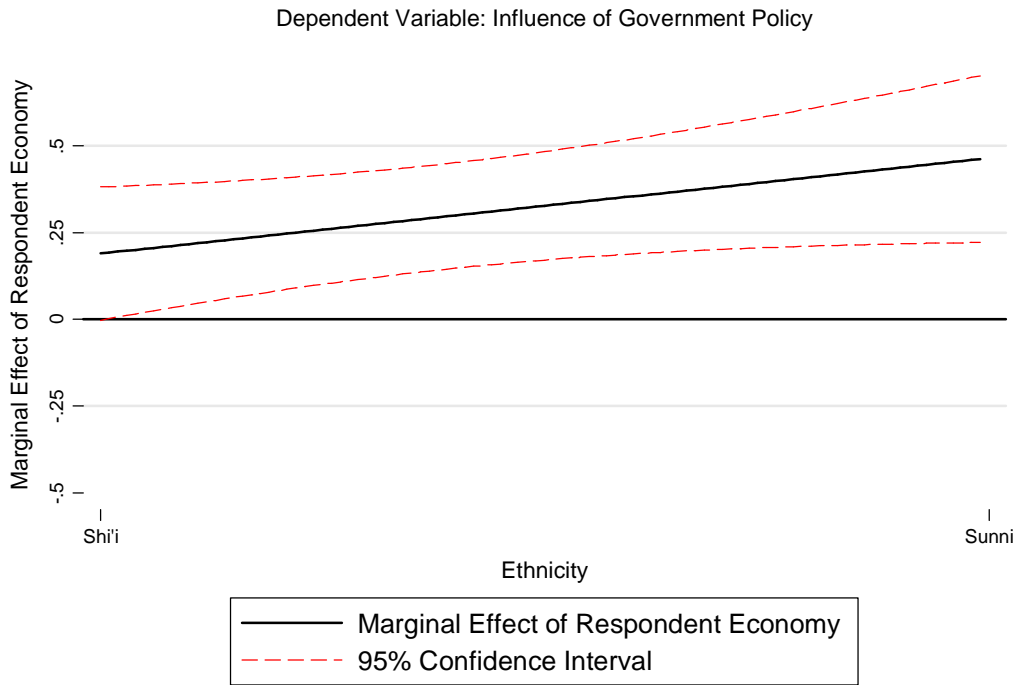


FIGURE 5.27. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by Economic Satisfaction

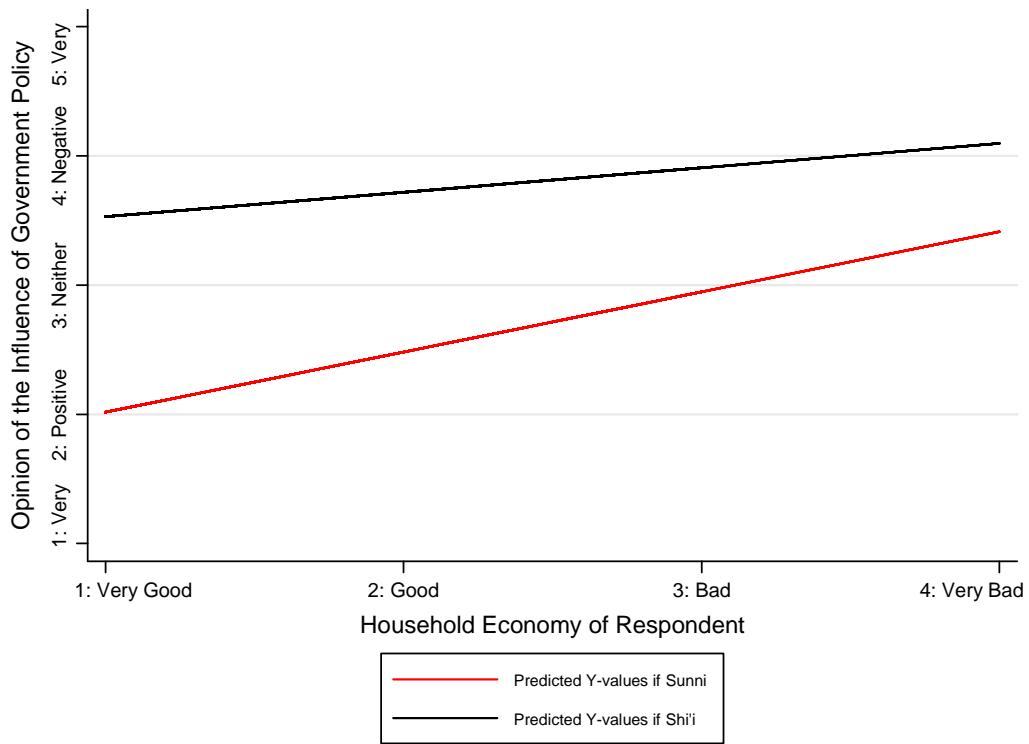
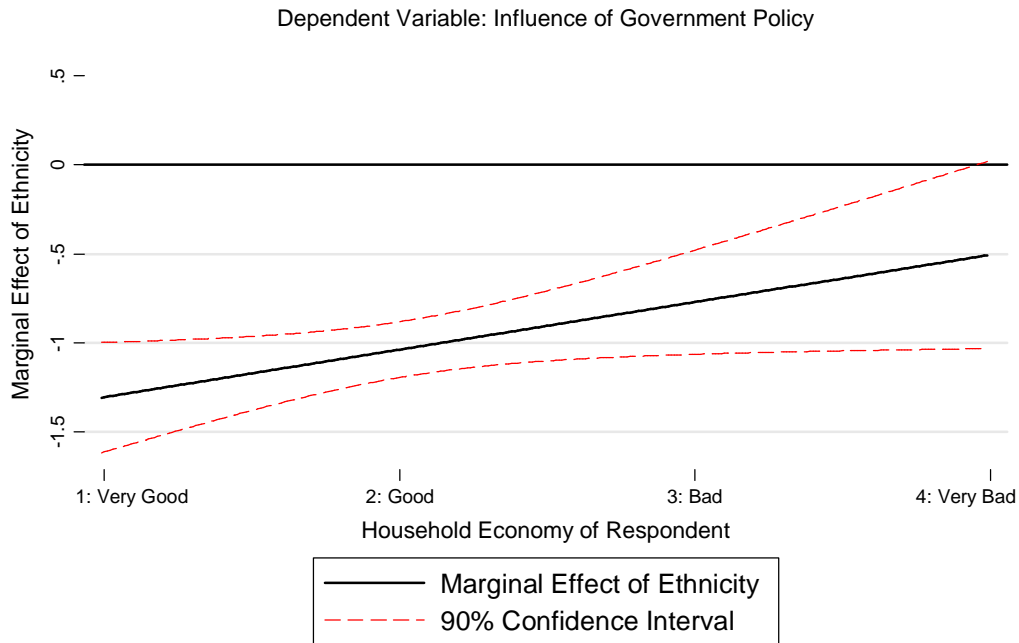




FIGURE 5.28. *Marginal Effect of Ethnicity as Household Economy Changes*



But what of its impact compared to that of ethnic group membership? For this we turn to FIGURE 5.27, a graph of the predicted values of INFLUENCE among Sunnis and Shi'is as household economy changes. We easily perceive the grave implications of economic well-being on a respondent's opinion of Bahraini government policy: among Shi'is a total change in economy from "very good" to "very bad" is associated with an estimated change of about one-half of a response category in the direction of more negative opinion; among Sunnis its negative impact is considerably greater at a change of nearly 1.5 response categories. Yet at the same time we see that even as household economy deteriorates, there remains a marked between-ethnic difference in predicted response, with more than half of a response category separating the predicted Sunni and Shi'i answers. That respondents are in a similar position of a "very bad" household economy, in other words, does not erase the observed Sunni-Shi'i discrepancy in political opinion. On the contrary, the case is precisely the opposite: the predicted opinion of a Sunni of "very bad" economy is still *more* favorable than the predicted view of government policy of a Shi'i of "very good" economy. Another way we can visualize

this same result is by plotting the marginal effect of ETHNICITY as ECONOMY changes,<sup>31</sup> in order to verify that the former remains a statistically-significant predictor of INFLUENCE even when ECONOMY = 4. This procedure gives us FIGURE 5.28 above, which shows that although the marginal effect of ethnic group membership does indeed decrease in magnitude as household economy deteriorates, it remains statistically-significant at an acceptable level even at the most extreme values of ECONOMY—that is, even among the economically worst-off Bahrainis. To conclude with a more exact comparison, we can say (according to FIGURE 5.24) that the estimated marginal effect of ETHNICITY on INFLUENCE ranges from 1.5 to 2 depending on a respondent's religiosity, while that of a change in ECONOMY *even across its entire range*—from the best- to worst-off respondents—is only about 1.5 for Sunni respondents and 0.5 for Shi'is. We must conclude, therefore, that once more the substantive influence of ethnic group membership on political opinion in Bahrain outstrips that of economic well-being, while the latter's impact is again greater than the augmenting effect of individual religiosity.

All that remains, therefore, is to consider our final independent variable of interest, DIFFETHNIC, whose marginal effect is plotted below in FIGURE 5.29. Once again inter-ethnic interviewing is shown to have a strong effect upon Shi'i respondents, being associated with a -0.75 change in the dependent variable INFLUENCE. Bahraini Shi'a who were interviewed by Sunni fieldworkers, in other words, tended to offer less negative answers about the influence of government policies on their lives to the tune of about three-quarters of one response category. Among Shi'a, then, the moderating influence of an inter-ethnic interview is greater in magnitude even than that of a complete change in household economy from "very bad" to "very good." What is more, in contrast to our analysis of POLITICAL SITUATION above, here we see that an inter-ethnic interview does not impact Bahraini Shi'a only but Sunnis as well, albeit to a lesser extent. According to FIGURE 5.29, Sunni respondents that were interviewed by Shi'a tend not to give more *moderate* or politically-safer answers as do Shi'a of inter-ethnic interviews, but they offer instead answers that are *less moderate, more anti-government, more* akin to those likely to be given by their Shi'a interviewers themselves. This observation is made plain in FIGURE 5.30 below, which plots the predicted values of Sunni and Shi'i responses for single-ethnic and inter-ethnic interviews. To recall our earlier theoretical discussions about

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<sup>31</sup> Recall that until now (i.e., in FIGURES 5.12 and 5.23) we have been interested in the marginal effect of ETHNICITY as RELIGIOSITY changes, which we have computed while holding ECONOMY and DIFFETHNIC constant at their means (cf. *supra*, note 25). Here we hold the (alternative) RELIGIOSITY variable at its mean along with DIFFETHNIC.

FIGURE 5.29. Marginal Effect of an Inter-ethnic Interview, by Respondent Ethnicity

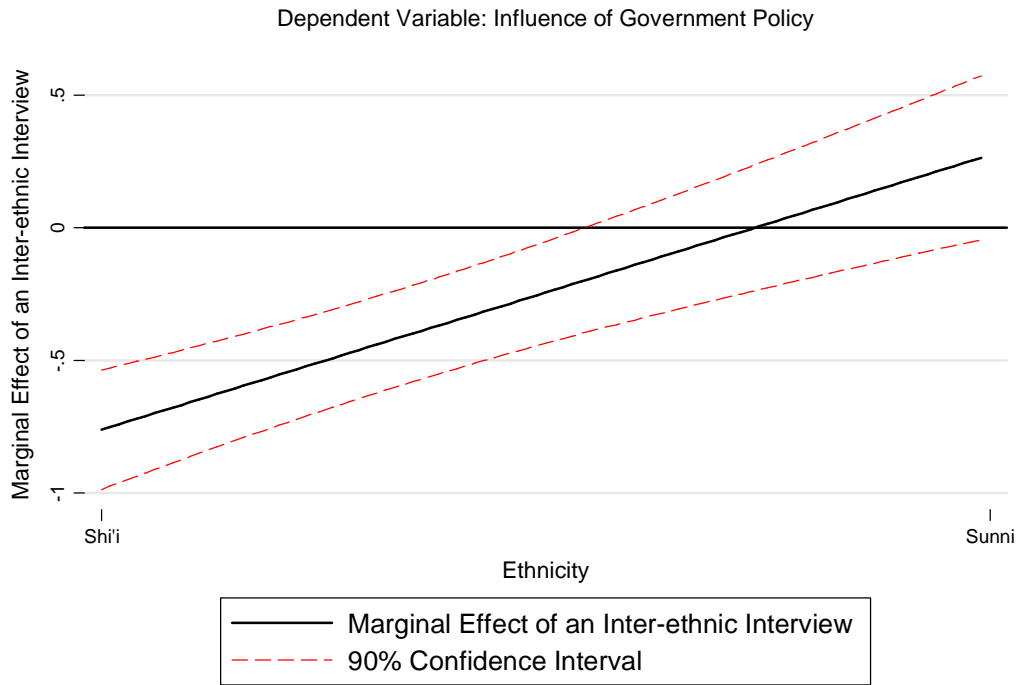
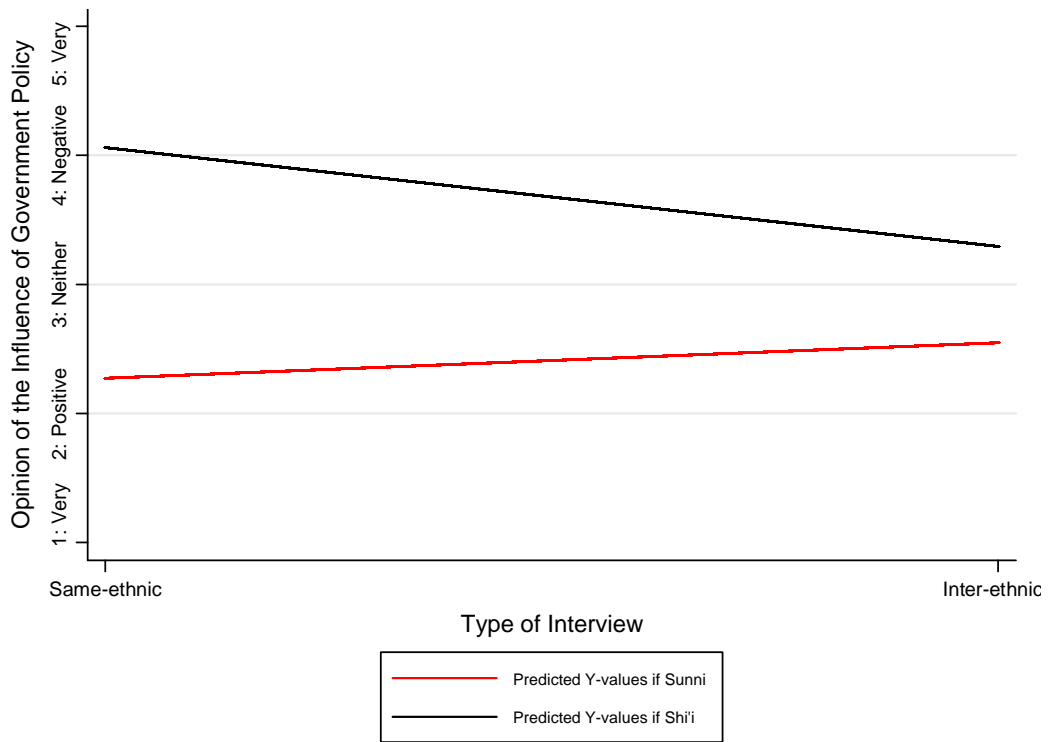


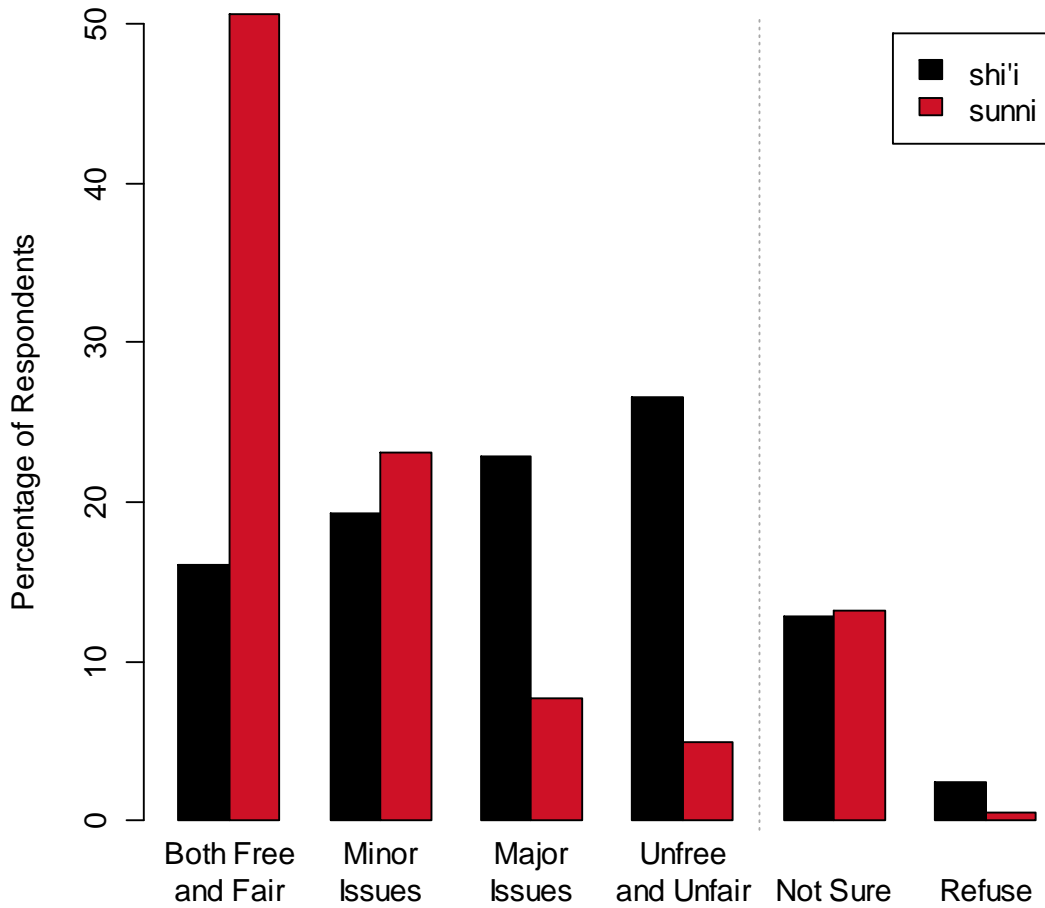
FIGURE 5.30. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by DIFFETHNIC



the possible effects of inter-ethnic interviewing, wherein we concluded that it would be the influence of DIFFETHNIC on Sunni respondents that would decide between the two alternative theoretical explanations—to recall this discussion we now have an early indication as to our answer: it seems from the positive effect of DIFFETHNIC among Sunnis that respondents of inter-ethnic interviews moderate their preferred responses to conform not with the government line but out of some sense of deference or shame vis-à-vis their other-ethnic interviewer. It appears that respondents are not worried that their true responses may bring them political trouble, that is, but that their true answers would offend or be otherwise unacceptable to the person asking the questions, a telling portrait indeed of Sunni-Shi'i relations in Bahrain.

The next political opinion we shall consider involves a subject that received no little attention in our Chapter 3 analysis of Bahraini ethnic politics: the nation's 2006 parliamentary elections. One may recall well the ethnically- and religiously-charged atmosphere of the day, including al-Wifāq's decision to end its electoral boycott and the resultant founding of al-Ḥaqq; the political powder keg that was al-Bandar's report on the government's alleged program of political naturalization, released but weeks before the vote; the timely intervention of al-Sistānī meant to impel Bahraini Shi'a to the polls; and the scandal four years earlier regarding the granting of citizenship and voting privileges to thousands of members of the al-Dawāsir and other tribes around Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. At the same time, the more standard issues of housing and employment remained a constant backdrop, forming in fact the bases of most of the political societies' campaigning, including that of al-Wifāq, barred as they were from discussion of the more sensitive issues of *al-tajnīs* and Bandargate. What we expect to find here, then, is empirical evidence of this influence of ethnicity and religion on Bahraini perceptions of the 2006 election over against those of economics. Is it the case, that is, that materially better-off individuals as a class of citizen (i.e., across the two ethnic groups) will tend to exhibit more deference for an electoral process that, objectively-speaking, was and remains closer to unfree and unfair than the reverse (and so will tend to preserve the socio-economic and political status quo)? Or will we find this claimed *rentier* effect to be superseded by the political agenda-setting and opinion-shaping influence of ethnic group membership and identity? Which, in other words, is a better marker of an individual's orientation toward the farce of electoral politics in Bahrain: that one has a large house and fashionable car? or that one's house flies a black pennant and one's car sports the sticker "اللهم صلّ على محمد وآل محمد" on the rear windshield?

FIGURE 5.3I. *Opinion of the Legitimacy of the 2006 Elections, by Ethnicity*



Respondents were asked: “In general, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the most recent parliamentary elections that took place on November 25, 2006?”<sup>32</sup> The valid response options were: (1) “They were marked by complete freedom and fairness”; (2) “They were free and fair, with some secondary problems (violations)”; (3) “They were free and fair, with some substantial problems (violations)”; and (4) “They were neither free nor fair.”<sup>33</sup> Above in FIGURE 5.3I we find the evaluations of our respondents divided by ethnicity.

<sup>32</sup> The Arabic is: “بشكل عام، كيف تقيم حرية ونزاهة الانتخابات النيابية الأخيرة التي جرت في ٢٥ نوفمبر ٢٠٠٦؟”

<sup>33</sup> The Arabic responses options are: “1. تميزت بحريتها ونزاهتها المطلقة.”

“2. كانت حرة ونزيهة، مع وجود بعض المشاكل (الاختراقات) الثانوية.”

“3. كانت حرة ونزيهة، مع وجود بعض المشاكل (الاختراقات) الجوهرية.”

“4. لم تكن حرة ونزيهة.”

As always, we perceive an extreme between-ethnic group divergence in response, with Shi'is tending to offer more negative opinions of the electoral process and Sunnis more positive. Indeed, more than half of all Sunnis interviewed insisted that the elections were “completely free and fair,” while only a combined 13% acknowledged anything more serious than minor issues of freedom and transparency. On the other hand, just 16% of Shi'is called the elections “completely free and fair,” while a combined 50% cited “substantial problems” or considered the process entirely “unfree and unfair.” The sizable number of “Not Sure” responses, finally, is a combined product of the sensitivity of the question and the fact that many Bahrainis, particularly Shi'a, abstained from the vote altogether.<sup>34</sup>

When we estimate the determinants of Bahrainis' views of the legitimacy of the 2006 election—let us call this new dependent variable *ELECTION*—we obtain the raw model output given below in TABLE 5.32. On the surface, of course, there is relatively little we can learn owing to the interactive nature of our independent variables of interest. Nonetheless we can see, for example, that our estimates are stable across the three models with the exception of that of the *RELIGIOSITY* × *ETHNICITY* interactive term in *Model 2*, which utilizes our alternative religiosity measure. This implies that our “Are you religious or not?” indicator for respondent religiosity once again performs better among Sunnis (i.e., when *ETHNICITY* = 1) in predicting our dependent variable than does our standard dichotomous measure. (Recall that this was also found to be the case in our preceding analysis of *INFLUENCE*.) If we find that this result continues a lengthier discussion of its possible causes is probably warranted. For now, we may proceed in our preliminary discussion of the estimation results by noting that, of our three non-interactive control variables, only a respondent's education level is found to be a significant determinant of opinion about the 2006 election. Though consistent across the three models, however, this effect is quite weak substantively: in the *Model 3* linear regression estimation, for instance, the marginal effect of a one-unit change in education level is only about 0.08. Accordingly, even a total transformation in *EDUCATION* from 1 (“illiterate”) to 7 (“master's degree or higher”), a six-unit increase, would produce an estimated change in our

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<sup>34</sup> That said, a full 10 of 32 (31% of) “Not Sure” responses among Shi'is come from those who indicate in an earlier question that they *did* in fact participate in the election. Among Sunnis this number is 5 of 19 (or 21%). More generally, only 22 (23%) of 96 Shi'is and 19 (42%) of 45 Sunnis who report *not* voting in the election responded “I don't know,” meaning that respondents did not systematically withhold their opinions about the legitimacy of the elections simply because they did not participate. Besides being interesting per se, this fact is important as it shows that our distribution of observations here is not truncated by a selection effect such that we only observe opinions about the election by those who voted. In such a case, we would have been forced to employ a selection model as we did in our earlier analyses of employment in Bahrain.

TABLE 5.32. Bahrainis' Opinion of the Legitimacy of the 2006 Parliamentary Elections, estimated three ways

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard			Alt. Religiosity Measure			OLS Regression		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>z</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>z</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>t</i>
ETHNICITY	-1.190	0.505	0.018	-0.941	0.495	0.057	-1.023	0.382	0.008
DIFFETHNIC	-1.129	0.203	0.000	-1.172	0.215	0.000	-1.044	0.171	0.000
DIFFETH × ETH	1.807	0.314	0.000	1.787	0.323	0.000	1.534	0.267	0.000
AGE	-0.00456	0.00506	0.367	-0.00654	0.00515	0.204	-0.00362	0.00401	0.368
FEMALE	0.0363	0.138	0.792	-0.00888	0.142	0.950	0.0454	0.111	0.683
EDUCATION	0.107	0.0533	0.045	0.110	0.0535	0.041	0.0799	0.0406	0.050
ECONOMY	0.141	0.127	0.268	0.188	0.135	0.164	0.112	0.115	0.328
ECON × ETH	-0.120	0.217	0.581	-0.120	0.228	0.597	-0.108	0.165	0.512
RELIGIOSITY	0.258	0.180	0.153	0.110	0.0962	0.253	0.230	0.164	0.160
RELIG × ETH	-0.250	0.281	0.373	-0.351	0.150	0.019	-0.249	0.219	0.257
Constant	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-	2.278	0.428	0.000
<i>N</i>	340			329			340		
Prob. > <i>F</i> ( $\chi^2$ )	0.0000			0.0000			0.0000		
(Pseudo) <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.1532			0.1641			0.3597		

Note: Robust standard errors reported for all models

dependent variable of just 0.48, or less than one-half of one response category in the direction of a more cynical view. Although a statistically-significant predictor of ELECTION, therefore, a Bahraini's education level is hardly a substantively-significant predictor. In contrast to the EDUCATION control, notably, the other variable one might expect to be related to a respondent's opinion, his age, is not estimated to be a significant determinant of ELECTION at an acceptable level of confidence, though the negative sign on the coefficient estimate is on par with our theoretical expectations. Finally, as before and as predicted the FEMALE control continues to be shown unrelated to Bahrainis' political opinions.

FIGURE 5.33. Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity

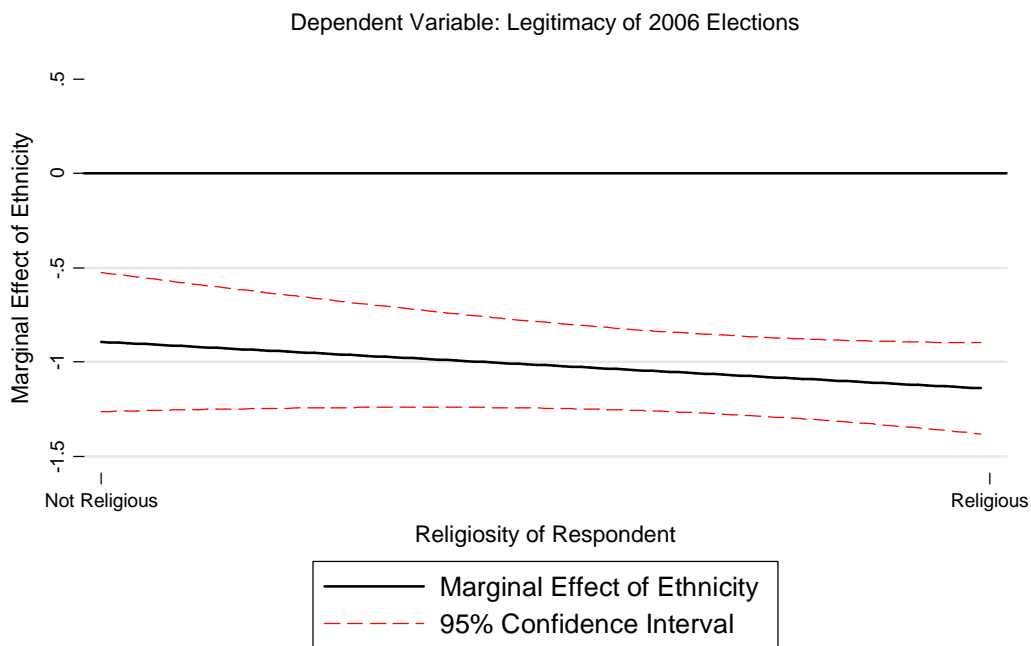
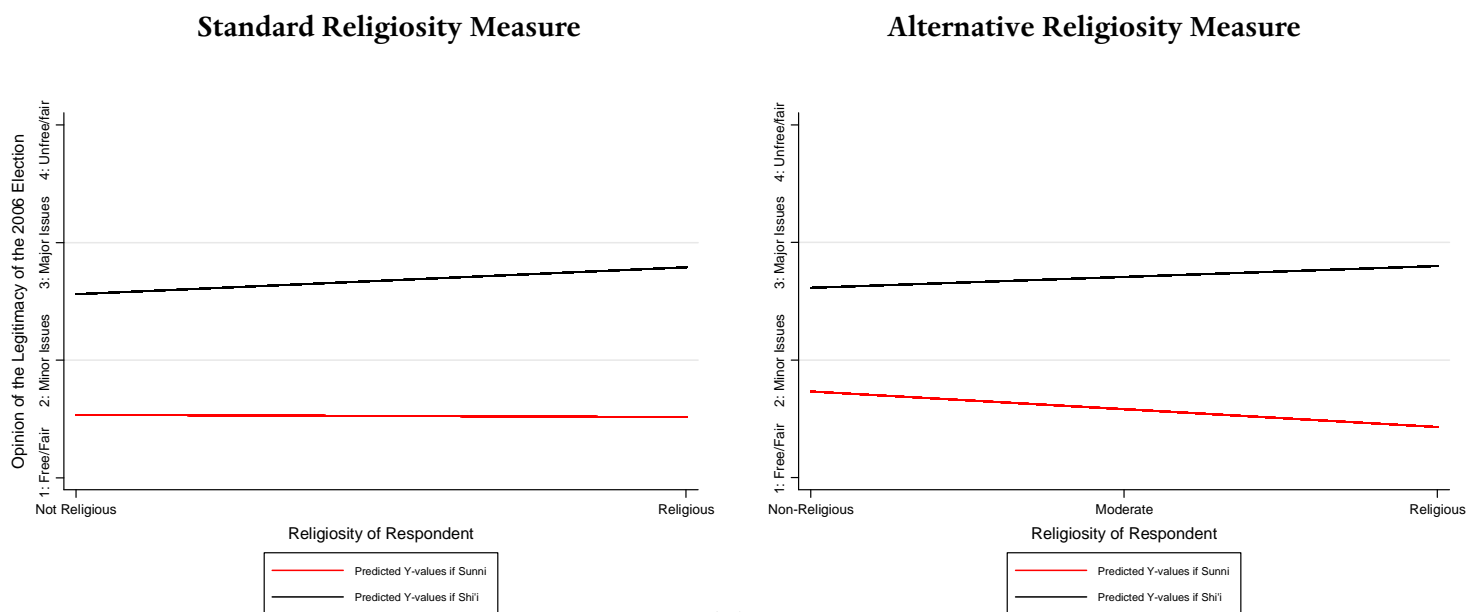


FIGURE 5.34. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by Religiosity





Together, FIGURES 5.33 and 5.34 tell exactly the same story about the impact of ethnic group membership and religiosity as we just finished telling in our analysis of INFLUENCE above: a respondent's ethnicity has a substantial impact on his opinion about the 2006 election, and this influence tends to increase with individual religiosity, the latter working to amplify this "ethnic effect" in the direction of more positive, pro-government opinion among Sunnis and more negative opinion among Shi'a. As there, we see according to FIGURE 5.33 that the marginal effect of ETHNICITY is statistically-significant across the entire range of its modifying variable RELIGIOSITY, and that this effect is larger in magnitude among "religious" individuals (an estimated  $-1.14$ ) than among the "non-religious" ( $-0.89$ ). We further observe that, also as in the case of our analysis of INFLUENCE (cf. FIGURES 5.23 and 5.24), and as noted already, our standard measure of religiosity does relatively poorly among Sunnis in predicting respondent opinion about the elections compared to the more direct "Are you religious or not?" indicator. The two plots of FIGURE 5.34 attest to this fact: whereas the black line describing the predicted response of Shi'is as religiosity increases remains unchanged regardless of the measure used, the red line describing that of Sunnis has a slope only slightly less than 0 in the left-hand plot while in the right-hand plot using the alternative measure of religiosity we observe a strong, negative relationship between Sunnis' religiosity and their view of the 2006 election.

To speak more precisely, we may state on the basis of FIGURE 5.35 below that the marginal effect on ELECTION of a respondent's religiosity as measured by our standard variable is an estimated  $0.23$  among Shi'is and  $-0.02$  among Sunnis. Whereas the former estimate is statistically-significant at a tolerable level of confidence, however, the latter definitely is not, so we must say that there is no discernable effect of religiosity on Sunni respondents when it is measured by our standard indicator. Looking next to the right side of FIGURE 5.35, we see that our alternative religiosity measure performs much better among Sunnis and about equally as well as the standard measure among Shi'a. Among the former, the marginal effect of a one-unit change in RELIGIOSITY is an estimated  $0.09$ , among the latter  $-0.15$ . For a total transformation in RELIGIOSITY from its minimum of 0 to its maximum of 2, then, these effects become  $0.18$  and  $-0.30$ , respectively, which compared to that of ETHNICITY are quite weak. At the end of this analysis, therefore, we find that there is indeed an augmenting effect of religiosity among our Bahraini survey respondents—one that causes Sunnis to be even more steadfast in their positive evaluation of the 2006 parliamentary election and Shi'a to be even more critical of it—but one that also pales in comparison to the influence of ethnicity itself.

FIGURE 5.35. Marginal Effect of Respondent Religiosity on ELECTION, using Two Measures

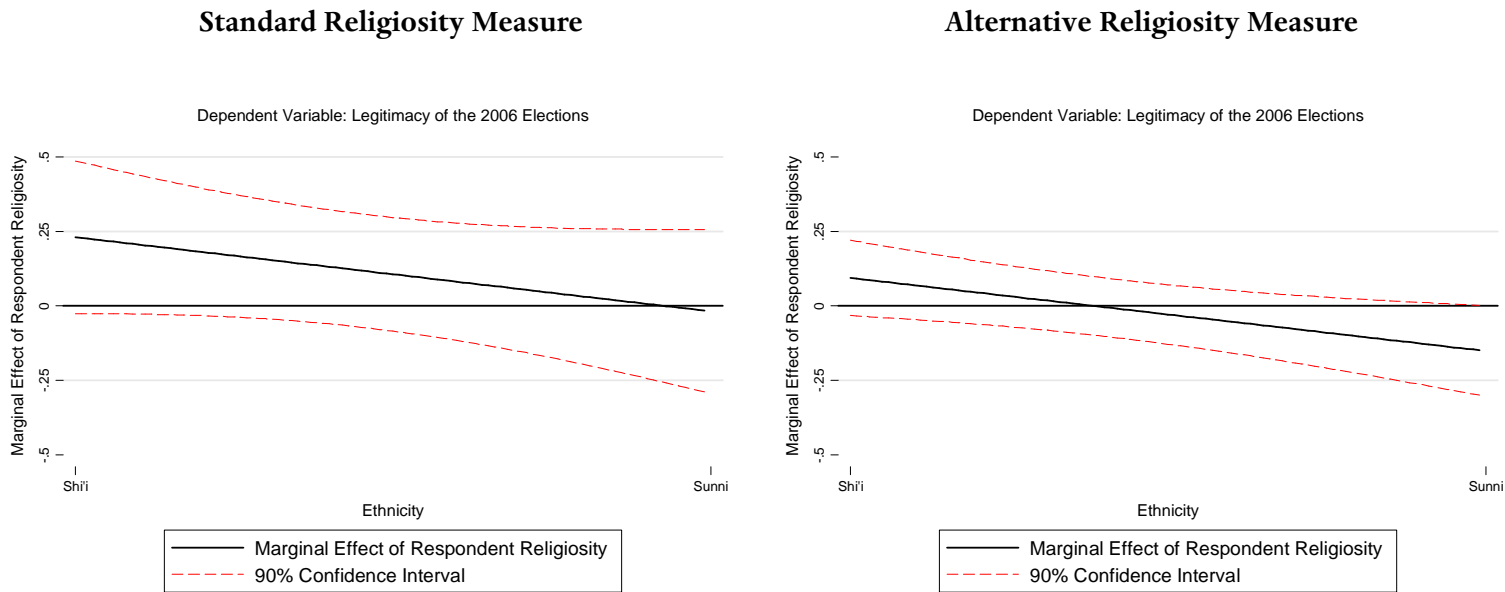
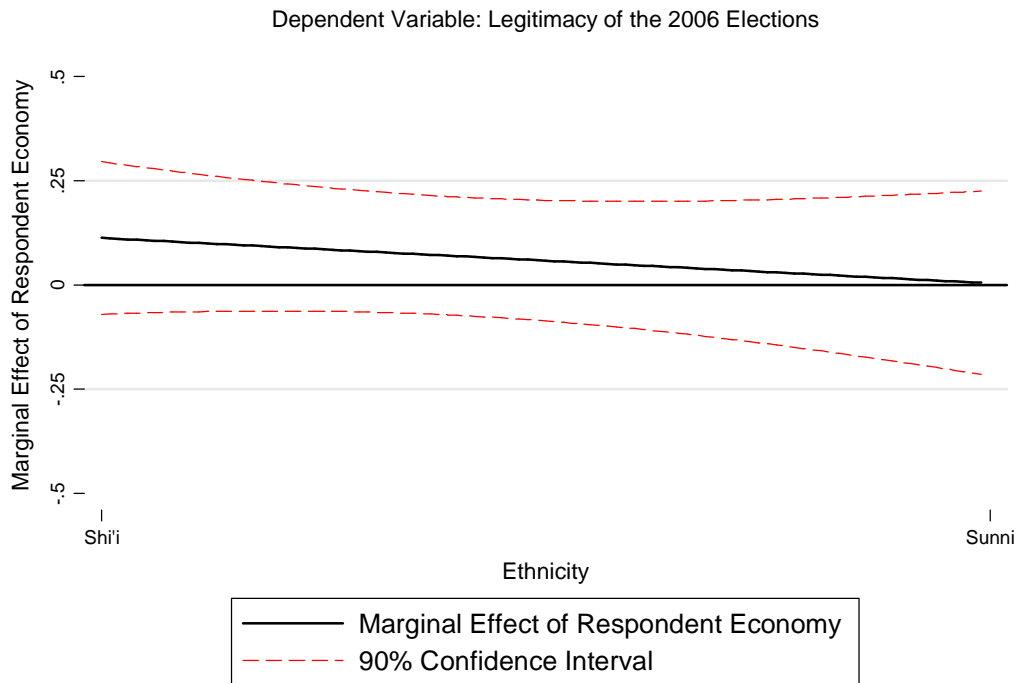


FIGURE 5.36. Marginal Effect of Economic Satisfaction, by Respondent Ethnicity



Our real interest, though, is not in the absolute impact of individual religiosity but in its impact relative to that of economic satisfaction. That the former's influence on ELECTION amounts to just one-fifth or one-third of one response category may seem anticlimactic, but if the effect of household economy is found to be less or non-existent then one's impressions change. And this is precisely the case here: as we glean from FIGURE 5.36 above, the estimated marginal effect of ECONOMY on respondent opinion of the election is not statistically-significant at an acceptable level of confidence at any point along the range of its modifying variable—that is, among either Sunnis or Shi'is.<sup>35</sup> While this fact does not make the substantive influence of religiosity more impressive per se, it does offer stronger support for our *Hypothesis 2.1* that ethnic group membership and individual religiousness will be more important determinants of Bahrainis' political opinions than economic well-being.

We have left to examine the influence of inter-ethnic interviewing on respondents' opinions of the 2006 election. To this end FIGURE 5.37 below plots the marginal effect of an inter-ethnic interview according to respondent ethnicity. We see that, as in the case of the dependent variable INFLUENCE just considered, while the influence of inter-ethnic interviewing is statistically significant among respondents of both ethnicities, its impact is negative among Shi'is and positive among Sunnis. Shi'is, that is, tend to give more Sunni-like answers when interviewed by a member of the other ethnic group, and vice versa, though the magnitude of this effect is about twice as large among Shi'i interviewees. When we observe these two effects in the predicted values plot of FIGURE 5.38, we are made to appreciate the implications of inter-ethnic interviewing in Bahrain. The substantive impact of DIFFETHNIC is so immense, in fact, that the predicted responses of Sunni and Shi'i respondents are turned on their heads entirely from the case of a single-ethnic interview: whereas in the latter an entire response category separates Sunnis and Shi'is, in the case of inter-ethnic interview respondents Shi'is are actually predicted to be *more* sanguine about the election than Sunnis, to the tune of more than one-half of a response category. Incredibly, then, if one were to look only at inter-ethnic interviewees one would have to assume it was indeed the Sunnis who tended to form the government opposition in Bahrain and that the Shi'a were its allies. Here we have further evidence, then, in favor of the theory that inter-ethnic interviews affect respondents not by

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<sup>35</sup> At best, we might argue based on FIGURE 5.36 that there is some indication that economy *may* play a role among Shi'i respondents in the manner predicted by *rentier* theorists, that lower levels of economic satisfaction are associated with less favorable opinions about the election. Yet even here, where we have not been beholden to the arbitrary  $p < 0.05$  cut-off of "statistical significance," such a claim would be on thin statistical ground.

FIGURE 5.37. Marginal Effect of an Inter-ethnic Interview, by Respondent Ethnicity

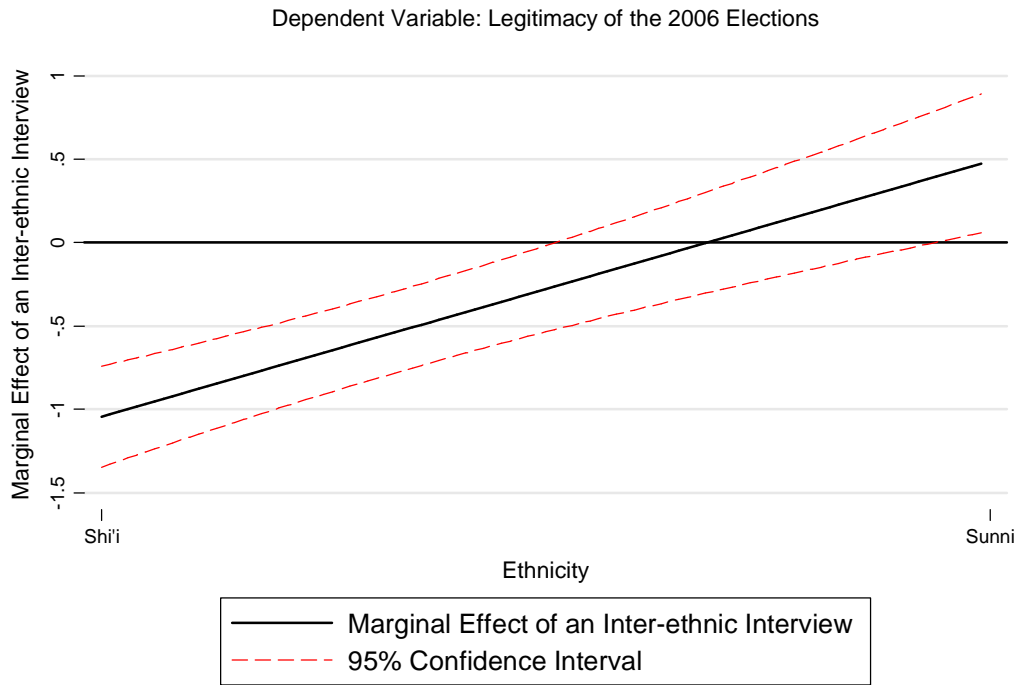
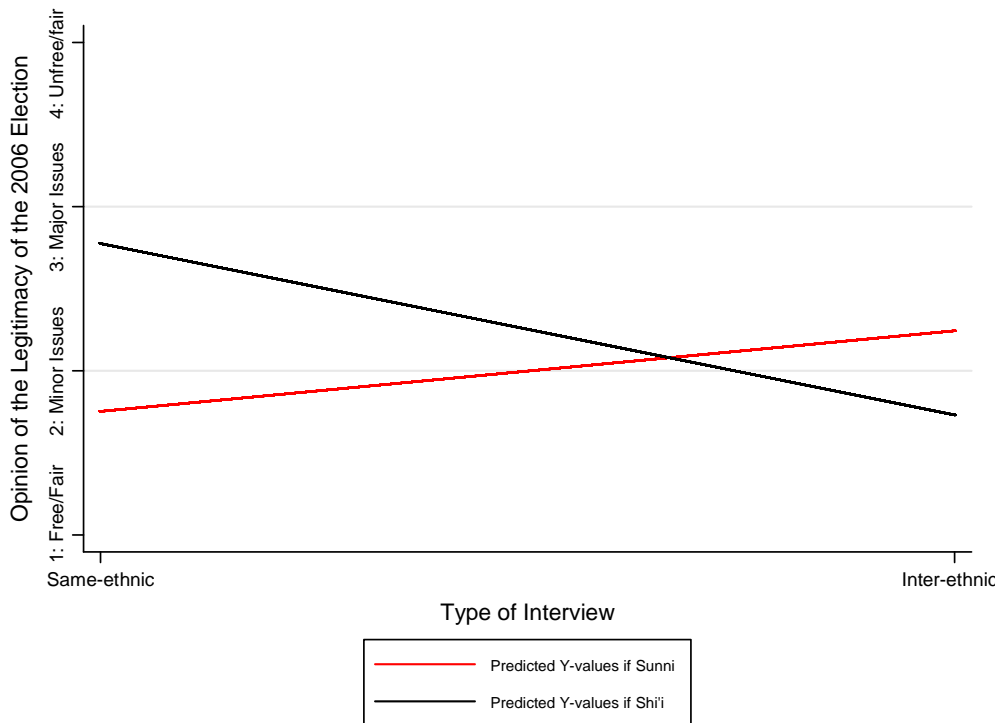


FIGURE 5.38. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by DIFFETHNIC



making them less comfortable about participation in the survey more generally—in which case those of both ethnic groups would be likely to present more pro-government views—but by making them more mindful of their opinion vis-à-vis the opinion they ascribe to their interviewer on the basis of the latter’s ethnicity. If this is true, then ethno-religious division in Bahrain not only plays a critical role in shaping individual political opinion but serves also to perpetuate this group-based political discord through its effect on basic social interaction between ordinary Sunnis and Shi’is, who instead of revealing their true political preferences to the other side tend to misrepresent themselves as being less extreme and more conciliatory in their ethnically-defined positions than they are in fact, giving the false impression that the two factions are perhaps not as far distanced politically and socially as they nevertheless are.

The next political opinion we shall investigate is similar to the last in that it too touches on a highly-contentious subject, and one that was likewise treated at some length in Chapter 3. This is the debate surrounding “human rights” in Bahrain, more particularly the Bahraini government’s respect therefor. We have seen already the way that groups such as al-Ḥaqq, the Bahrain Freedom Movement, the Bahrain Human Rights Society, and especially the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights have utilized the well-developed international human rights regime as a way of garnering outside attention for the otherwise-domestic issue of Shi’i-Sunni—or more accurately Shi’i-state—relations in Bahrain. In this sense any mention of “human rights” in Bahrain is understood immediately to mean something more akin to “Shi’a rights,” and Bahraini political activists do not shy in stretching this euphemism to categories beyond those normally associated with the term. At the same time, however, the degree of international notice directed in this way to the political situation in Bahrain has not been lost on the government, which as discussed previously has consequently banned the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights as of 2004 (the Bahrain Freedom Movement has operated in exile from London since the 1990s); arrested and later pardoned its founder ‘Abd al-Hādī al-Khawājah on several occasions; and has established parallel, state-sponsored “human rights” organizations such as the Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society (cf. CH. 3, 64) that work to counter the successful propaganda of the BCHR and other groups. Even more recently, the government moved in September 2010 to dissolve the governing board of the oldest and only remaining legally-operating rights organization in Bahrain, the Bahraini Human Rights Society, appointing a new, government-backed director. The steps were taken, according to the Ministry of Social Development, because of complaints received from Bahraini journalists

who “were insulted by members of the society for merely requesting the society to extend its activities to all sections of the Bahraini community instead of limiting them to one section”—that is, of course, the Shi‘a section. The group was accused further of “coordinating with a number of illegal entities,” which refers again to Shi‘a opposition groups or perhaps to the BCHR itself.<sup>36</sup> In sum, then, the debate over “human rights” in Bahrain is an illustrative microcosm of the larger Shi‘a-government conflict, wherein the former seeks to dictate the terms of debate and thereby to elicit the sympathy of foreign governments, to transform the issue from a domestic political problem to one of more universal interest and import; while the latter hopes to silence these critics or at least to drown out their message with competing voices, voices that tend to rebrand these “human rights campaigners” as political malcontents—indeed “terrorists”—in sheep’s clothing. For this reason one of the most anticipated days of the Bahraini political calendar is the release of the U.S. State Department’s annual Human Rights Country Report for Bahrain, the relative reproof or encouragement contained in which is taken as a tangible end-of-season scorecard for this perennial contest.

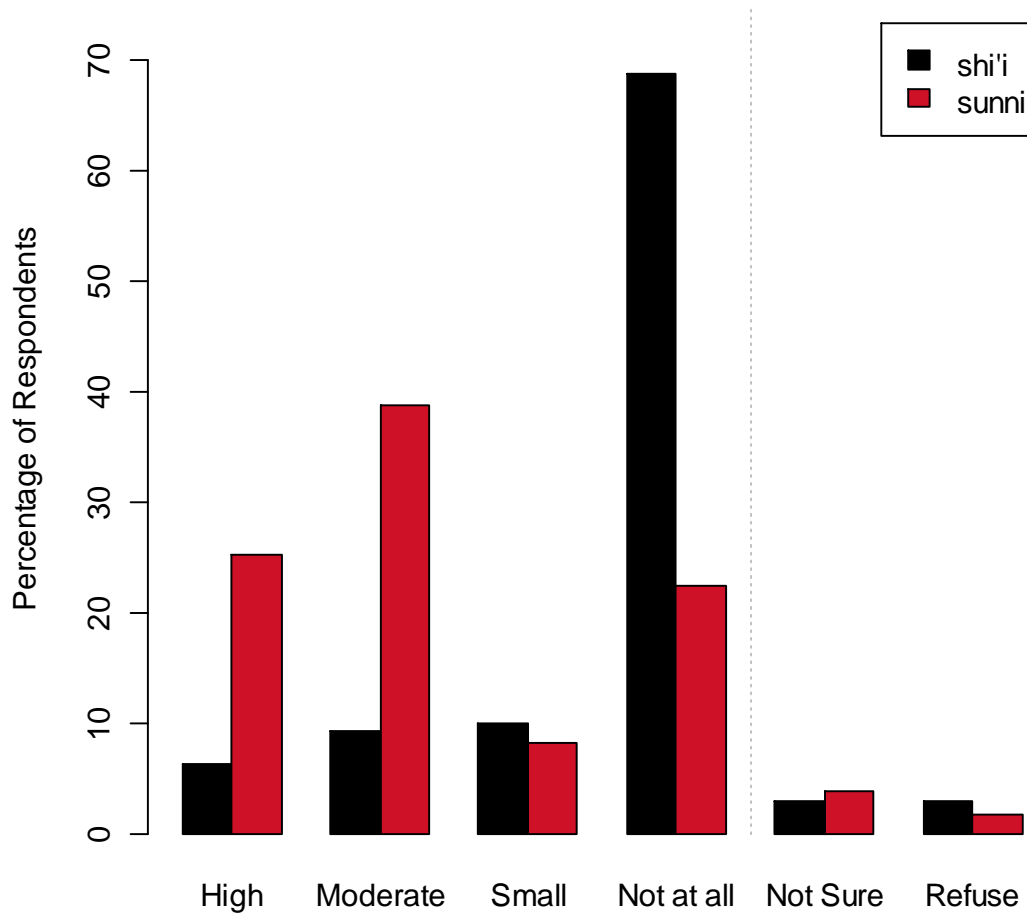
The question for our purposes thus turns around the relative influences of ethnicity, religion, and economics in determining Bahrainis’ orientations toward this controversy. In particular, where do individuals fall on the continuum of protecting individual rights on the one hand and maintaining a stable society on the other? Are materially better-off Shi‘is more willing to overlook the government record on human rights in preservation of the status quo? Are Sunnis necessarily more supportive of the state’s conduct simply by virtue of their ethnic rivalry with Shi‘is? Should one exist, is the intensity of this “ethnic effect” increased by one’s individual religiosity as we have seen before? Do Sunnis and Shi‘is misrepresent their true opinions about respecting human rights when asked by a member of the other ethnic group? This and more we shall learn by our analysis of the following survey question: “To what extent do you think that the lack of respect for human rights in Bahrain is justifiable in order to maintain security?”<sup>37</sup> Though it may seem tailor-made for the Bahraini context, this question in fact is a standard instrument of the Arab Barometer questionnaire. But whereas it was intended originally to measure a respondent’s relative preference for stability over freedom

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<sup>36</sup> In Amānī al-Musqaṭī, 2010, “التسمية» تجمد إدارة الجمعية البحرينية لحقوق الإنسان“، “مجلس الإدارة يقرر اللجوء إلى القضاء للطعن في القرار: [The Ministry of] Development’ Freezes the Administration of the Bahraini Society for Human Rights”, *Al-Wasaf*, September 9. Available (in Arabic) at: <<http://www.alwasatnews.com/2925/news/read/473750/1.html>>.

<sup>37</sup> The Arabic is: “إلى أي درجة تعتقد أن عدم احترام حقوق الإنسان في البحرين للحفاظ على الأمن مبرر؟”

FIGURE 5.39. *Opinion of the Justifiability of Human Rights Violations in Bahrain, by Ethnicity*



in the abstract, here it carries much more practical connotations, representing a referendum on the Bahraini government’s very own line of argument, which is that security crackdowns on political activists (or “terrorists” seeking and/or inciting others to “overthrow the regime”) are necessary to uphold public security and order. Asked of Bahraini respondents in early 2009, then, amid an ongoing “security crackdown” that had seen the arrest and subsequent royal pardon of some 178 (mostly Shi’a) demonstrators and opposition leaders, this question must be understood as inquiring about a very timely and very real societal issue, one that several Shi’i respondents admitted had touched their own families directly.

Above in FIGURE 5.39 we find a graph of respondent answers whose pattern comes as perhaps little surprise: whereas Sunni Bahrainis tend to prioritize public security over respect

for human rights, responding that sacrificing the latter in the name of order is justified to a “high” (25%) or “moderate” degree (39%), the vast majority (69%) of Shi’is reject this notion outright, deeming it “not at all” justified, compared to less than one-quarter of Sunnis. In fact, the condemnation of human rights violations among the Shi’a is so universal (i.e., there is so little variation in the dependent variable among Shi’i respondents), that it may prove difficult to discover any additional statistical determinants of HUMAN RIGHTS among Shi’is beyond ethnic group membership. In any case, here we have a clear visual indication of the extent of ethnic division in Bahrain regarding the proper handling of the country’s political opponents and others whose “human rights” would be set aside in the execution of public safety. Not included in FIGURE 5.39, finally, are the invalid answers of two additional Sunnis, who responded respectively that “Human rights are highly respected in Bahrain” and that “There are no human rights abuses in Bahrain!”

Moving on to our by-now familiar regression analysis procedure, we find below in TABLE 5.40 the results of our three model estimations. On the whole these appear largely as we have come to expect from our foregoing analyses: the first three regressors have estimated effects that are large and statistically significant, as does the ECONOMY variable, and once more our alternative RELIGIOSITY indicator performs better among Sunni respondents in predicting views toward human rights violation than does our standard dichotomous measure. We do, however, observe something new in the estimated effects of our three control variables: not only older individuals but also women are found to be more willing to sacrifice respect for human rights in the name of security and stability. When we investigate this result further by estimating separate regressions for our Sunni and Shi’i sub-samples (not shown here), we find that while the former effect operates among both Sunnis and Shi’is, and indeed is nearly twice as large in magnitude among Sunnis, the latter relationship involving gender obtains only among Shi’a, with the FEMALE control variable being associated with almost a one-half category shift in the direction of more acceptance towards non-respect for human rights.<sup>38</sup> With this one mystery is solved, as it is no wonder why when compared to Shi’i males, who as a group have a disproportionately large stake in the matter of the state’s respect for human rights insofar as it is they whose rights are most likely to be violated, Shi’i females will tend to

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<sup>38</sup> The estimated (by OLS regression) coefficient on the FEMALE variable in the Shi’a sub-sample is  $-0.469$  with an associated  $t$ -statistic of  $-3.39$  and sample size of 201. In the Sunni sub-sample the coefficient estimate is  $-0.00628$  with a  $p$ -value of 0.971 and  $N$  of 157.



TABLE 5.40. Bahrainis' Opinion of the Justifiability of Violating Human Rights, estimated three ways

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard			Alt. Religiosity Measure			OLS Regression		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>z</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>z</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>t</i>
ETHNICITY	-0.715	0.497	0.150	-0.892	0.513	0.082	-0.773	0.407	0.058
DIFFETHNIC	-0.700	0.196	0.000	-0.679	0.201	0.001	-0.497	0.141	0.000
DIFFETH × ETH	1.211	0.357	0.001	1.273	0.344	0.000	1.067	0.309	0.001
AGE	-0.0205	0.00510	0.000	-0.0231	0.00514	0.000	-0.0153	0.00399	0.000
FEMALE	-0.341	0.137	0.013	-0.324	0.138	0.019	-0.258	0.111	0.020
EDUCATION	0.0394	0.0505	0.435	0.0380	0.0505	0.451	0.0459	0.0392	0.242
ECONOMY	0.338	0.168	0.044	0.316	0.178	0.076	0.214	0.0941	0.024
ECON × ETH	-0.276	0.220	0.208	-0.171	0.229	0.456	-0.189	0.168	0.261
RELIGIOSITY	0.228	0.198	0.250	0.144	0.104	0.164	0.114	0.134	0.396
RELIG × ETH	-0.379	0.271	0.162	-0.273	0.147	0.063	-0.265	0.226	0.241
Constant	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-	3.485	0.384	0.000
<i>N</i>	371			358			371		
Prob. > <i>F</i> ( $\chi^2$ )	0.0000			0.0000			0.0000		
(Pseudo) <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.1838			0.1950			0.3847		

Note: Robust standard errors reported for all models

report relatively more comprising views. As for the effect of age on Bahrainis' opinions our interpretation must be more equivocal, however, for we cannot ascribe the relatively lower tolerance expressed by young people for human rights violations to their higher propensity to be the target of these, since this fear cannot be said to operate strongly among Sunni youth. Hence we must hypothesize that among Sunnis the preference among older respondents for security over liberty results from a generational gap or changing priorities over time—in any event, from an effect of aging itself rather than out of a sense of self-preservation. While we cannot then wholly discount the idea that among Shi'i respondents the effect of AGE owes

FIGURE 5.41. Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity

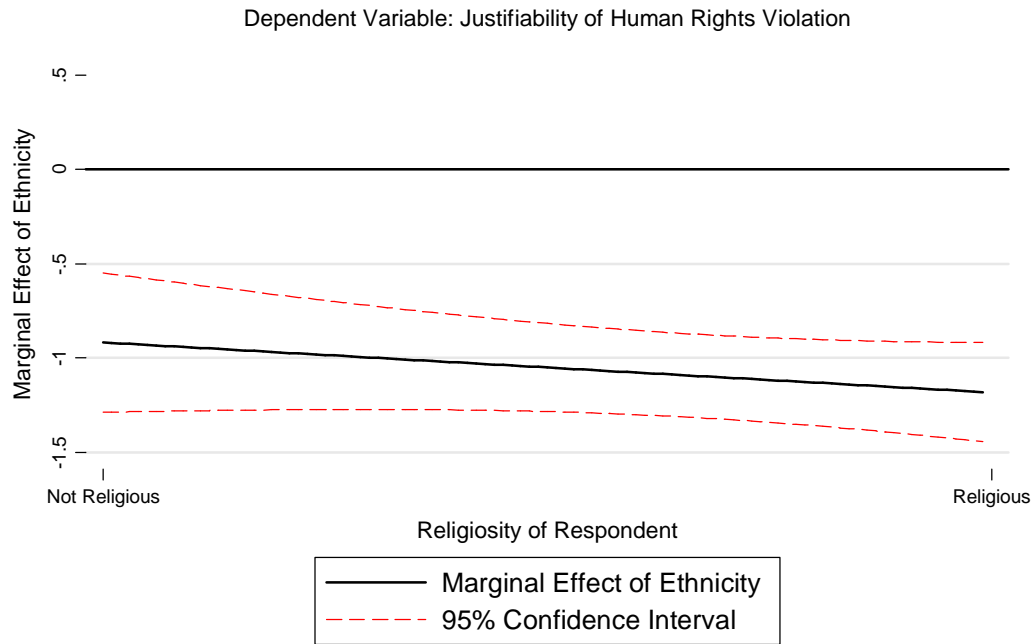
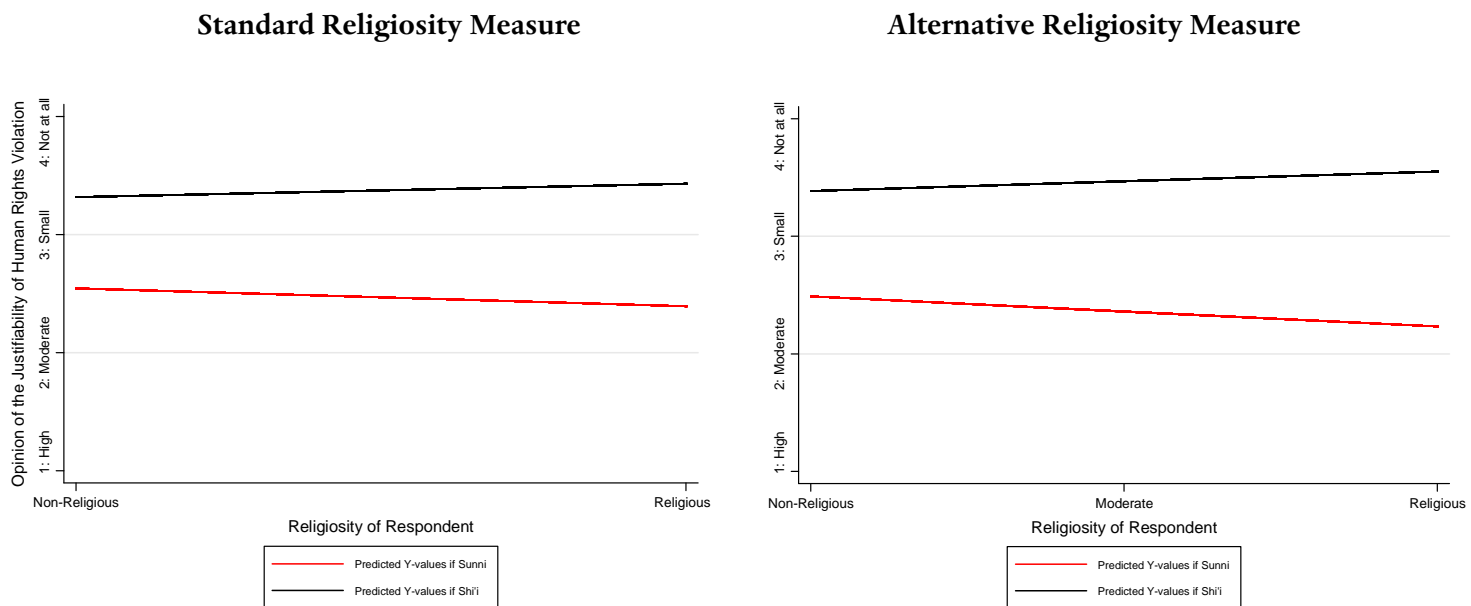


FIGURE 5.42. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by Religiosity



entirely to the same cause, it would seem naïve to believe that young Shi'i males, many of whom admitted incidentally that they had been involved in police altercations themselves, were not swayed in their answers here by personal experience, or by the specter of it.

Returning now to consider the influence of our independent variables of interest, we see from FIGURE 5.41 that things appear again as before: ethnic group membership is as always a strong predictor of our dependent variable with a high degree of statistical confidence, being associated with an estimated 0.92-unit decrease in HUMAN RIGHTS among irreligious individuals and a 1.18-unit decrease among religious individuals. The between-ethnic discrepancy in Bahrainis' opinions of the justifiability of non-respect for human rights is thus an estimated 28% greater among those deemed "religious" by our normal measure as compared to those coded "non-religious." Looking at the right side of FIGURE 5.42, moreover, we see that this augmenting effect of religiosity is even more pronounced if we measure it according to our alternative "Are you religious or not?" indicator, which does a comparatively better job once more of predicting respondents' political opinions, especially those of Sunni respondents. The respective marginal effect estimates for these two RELIGIOSITY variables are depicted below in FIGURE 5.43, which shows that only the alternative measure approaches statistical significance at the 90% confidence level among both Sunni and Shi'i respondents. Yet even if we would have hoped for two more statistically- and substantively-significant estimates—the estimated marginal effect is just 0.08 among Shi'a and -0.13 among Sunna, by the alternative measure—still we may be assured in the fact that in this our fourth political opinion examined the pattern has remained always the same: by either measure, greater religiosity is associated among Shi'is with more negative political opinion, among Sunnis with more positive political opinion.

For our purposes, however, more important theoretically is the impact of ethnicity and religiosity relative to that of household economy. And we see from FIGURE 5.44 below that, in the present case, the latter is a significant determinant of Bahrainis' views on human rights violations only among Shi'a respondents. It is significant not only statistically at the 0.05 *p*-level but also substantively, being associated with an estimated marginal effect of 0.21, or 0.25 for a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation-change in ECONOMY. Compared to that of RELIGIOSITY among Shi'a, therefore, which by the alternative measure is an estimated 0.16 for a total change from "non-religious" to "religious," the marginal effect of economic satisfaction on HUMAN RIGHTS is more than one and a half times as great. Some indication of this is given in FIGURE 5.45, which plots how the predicted opinions of Sunnis and Shi'is change as economic

FIGURE 5.43. Marginal Effect of Respondent Religiosity on HUMAN RIGHTS, using Two Measures

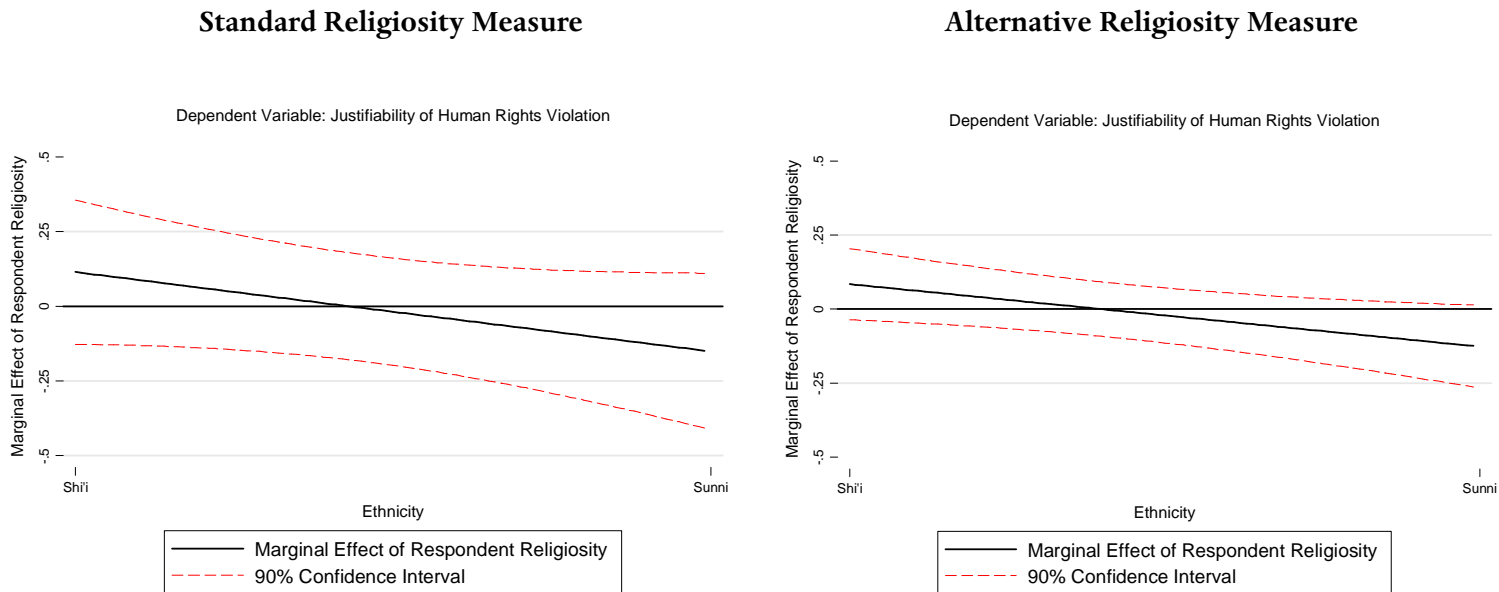


FIGURE 5.44. Marginal Effect of Economic Satisfaction, by Respondent Ethnicity

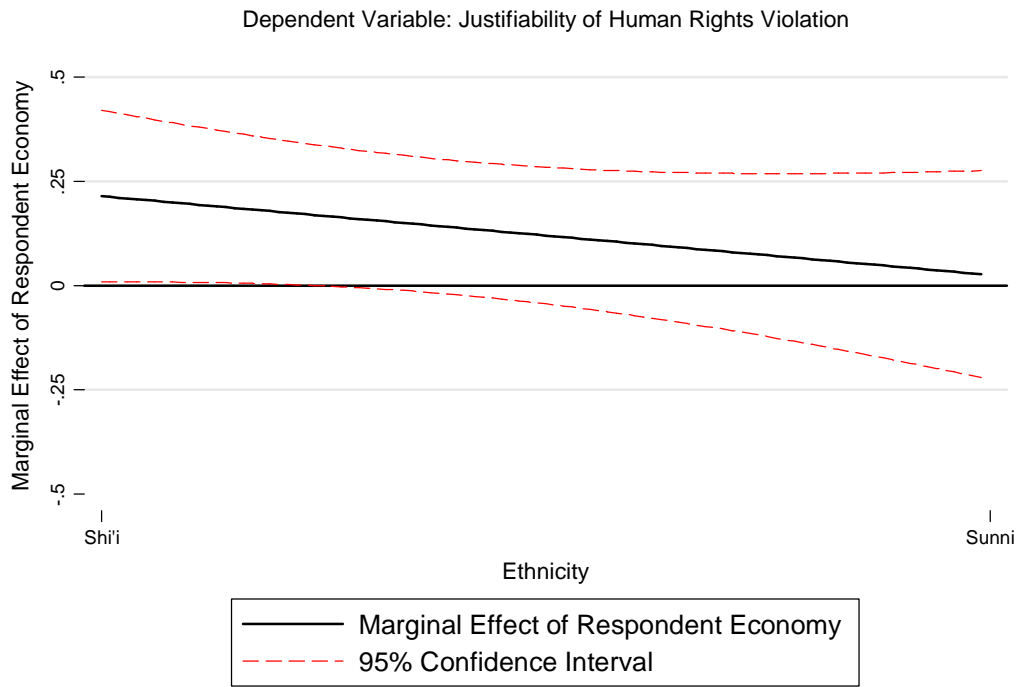
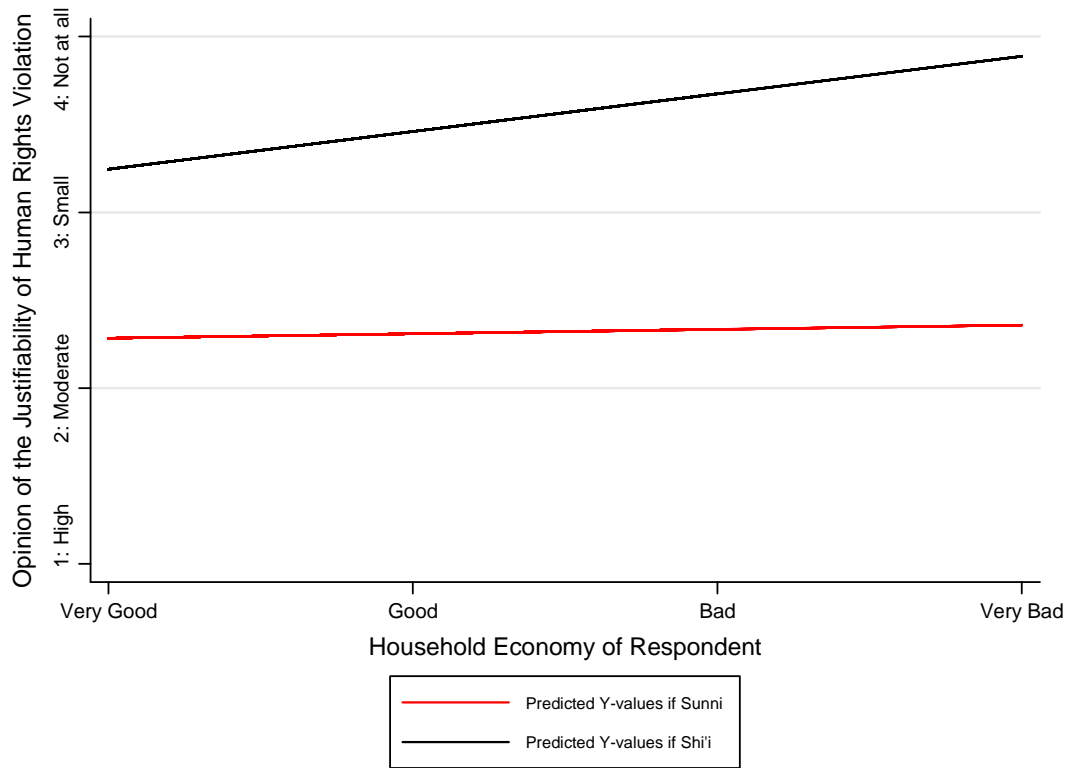


FIGURE 5.45. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by Economic Satisfaction



satisfaction decreases. We see that the predicted response of Shi'is who report a “very good” economic situation is around 3.25, while that of Shi'is of “very bad” economy approaches response category 4; the predicted response of Sunnis, we notice, does not vary substantially with ECONOMY. At the same time that it demonstrates the substantive influence of economic satisfaction among Shi'a and its unimportance among Sunna, however, our predicted values graph also serves to reiterate the still much more decisive impact of ethnic group membership itself, which even among Sunnis and Shi'is of “very good” household economy produces an ethnic-based discrepancy in predicted response of an entire category, or a third of the whole range of our dependent variable HUMAN RIGHTS.

We can say, then, that in Bahrain's ongoing battle of nomenclature to decide “terrorists” from “rights activists,” “security crackdowns” from “human rights violations,” citizens' positions are determined foremost by their place along the Sunni-Shi'i divide, a position that is further bolstered if not intensely by the added impact of individual religiosity. On the other hand, the potential economic benefit to society and citizens of increased stability owing to

more lax enforcement of human rights (i.e., more vigorous prosecution of political opponents) seems to play a limited systematic role in influencing individuals. Among Shi'is, true, more economically well-off individuals we found to be more accepting of the latter, yet in substantive terms this effect is but one-half that of ethnicity and, moreover, one might imagine it results primarily from the fact that it is the poorest Shi'is that tend to feel the brunt of what one might euphemistically call “non-respect for human rights” on the part of the Bahraini government. Indeed, when one young Shi'i villager was unable to follow this question as posed by the interviewer (i.e., as it appears on the survey questionnaire—in *fuṣḥā* or literary Arabic), he asked by way of clarification, “You mean when they go around beating and arresting people [i.e., during street protests] and then they say it's ‘to maintain security’ [لِلْحِفَاظِ عَلَى الْأَمْنِ, as in the original question]?” One may guess how this respondent answered.

One might also guess, in light of the divisiveness evidenced already, the likely impact of inter-ethnic interviewing on Bahrainis' responses to this question about human rights. In a word, there is every reason to expect a repeat of our most recent finding, that when asked by Shi'is about the legitimacy of the 2006 parliamentary elections Sunnis tend to alter their response to be even *more* extreme than the presumed, ethnically-ascribed view of their field interviewer; and vice versa for Sunni respondents questioned by Shi'is. This suspicion is confirmed in FIGURES 5.46 and 5.47 below, which show, respectively, the marginal effect of an inter-ethnic interview and the predicted responses of Sunni and Shi'i participants in the latter. We see that, exactly as in our foregoing analysis of ELECTION, the variable DIFFETHNIC has such an effect on HUMAN RIGHTS that, among inter-ethnic interviewees, Shi'is appear as Sunnis and Sunnis as Shi'is. More specifically, the marginal effect of DIFFETHNIC is an estimated one-half category change in the direction of a more pro-government view among Shi'is, and somewhat more than this in the opposite direction among Sunni respondents. Once again, then, the effect of Bahrain's ethnic conflict is seen in the mass survey to operate on two distinct levels: as a determinant, first, of individuals' actual political opinions; and, second, of their willingness to reveal them. And if the latter would seem more a problem for conductors of survey research than for the country itself, one might consider whether this tendency for self-misrepresentation in cases of between-ethnic interaction is likely to end here, or rather to permeate more deeply and decisively into Bahraini society and politics.

As part of the standard Arab Barometer survey instrument respondents were asked to rate their level of trust in five basic state institutions: political societies, the police, the lower

FIGURE 5.46. Marginal Effect of an Inter-ethnic Interview, by Respondent Ethnicity

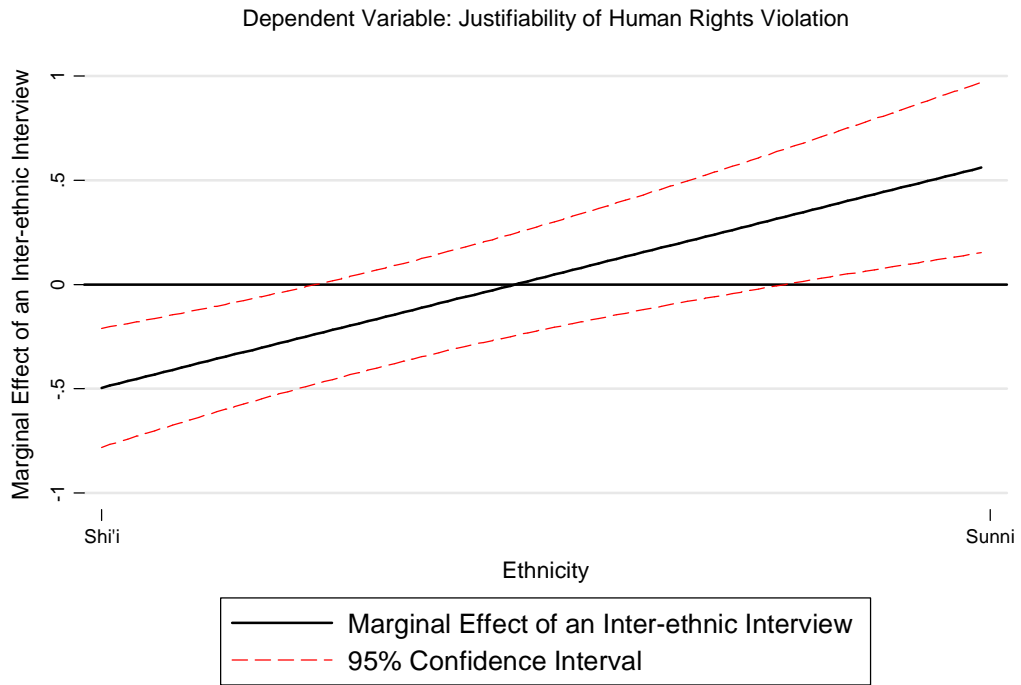
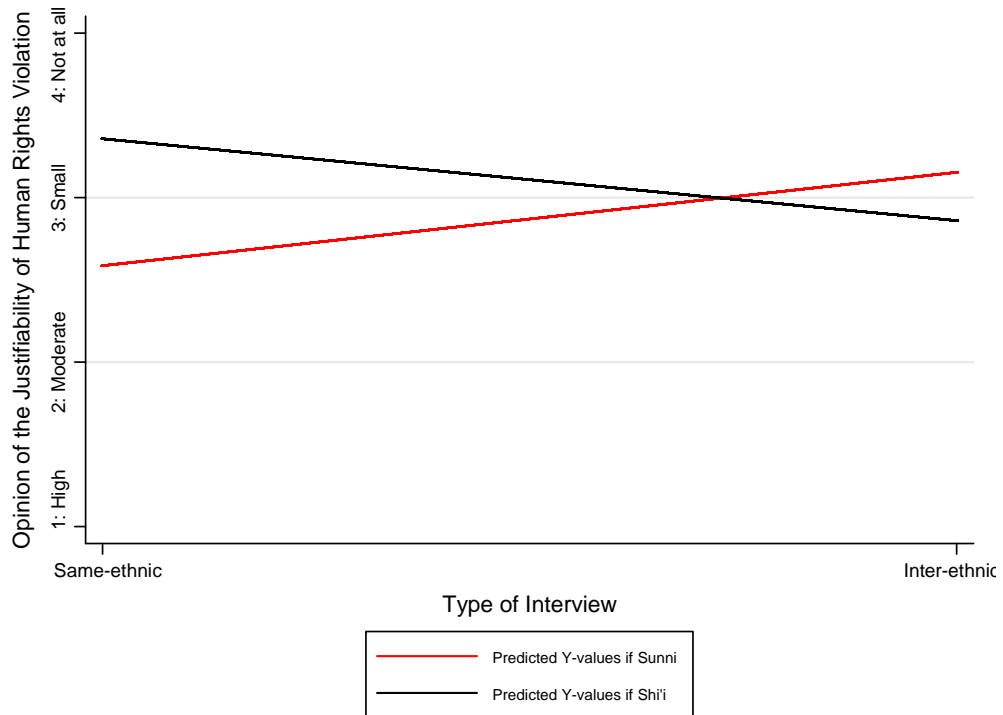


FIGURE 5.47. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by DIFFETHNIC



(elected) house of parliament, the courts, and the prime ministership. Now, if one wishes to evoke the maximum terror and disgust in an arbitrary Bahraini, the surest way is to mention the name of the late king's brother, the uncle of the current king, and the prime minister since 1971, Khalifa bin Salmān Āl Khalifa. The longest-reigning unelected prime minister in the world today, he is said to be the wealthiest (and, depending on whom one talks to, the most powerful) member of the royal family, having to his name as previously mentioned the large island of Jiddah<sup>39</sup> and (by all accounts) the prominent dailies *Al-Bilād* and *Akhhbār al-Khalīj*. One memorable Shi'i respondent called him "Mr. Guinness" for his place in the *Guinness World Records*, another "Mr. 50-50" for his presumed cut of the national revenues. However the case, more than any other state institution the prime ministership represents for many Bahrainis the lack of fundamental political change, the persistence and immutability of the status quo, in spite of the apparent reforms and improvements introduced over the previous 40 years. While one might therefore also be interested in Bahrainis' views toward the *majlis al-nuwāb*, the courts, political societies, and so on, none of these evokes the same political symbolism and, one imagines, polarization as the person of the prime minister.

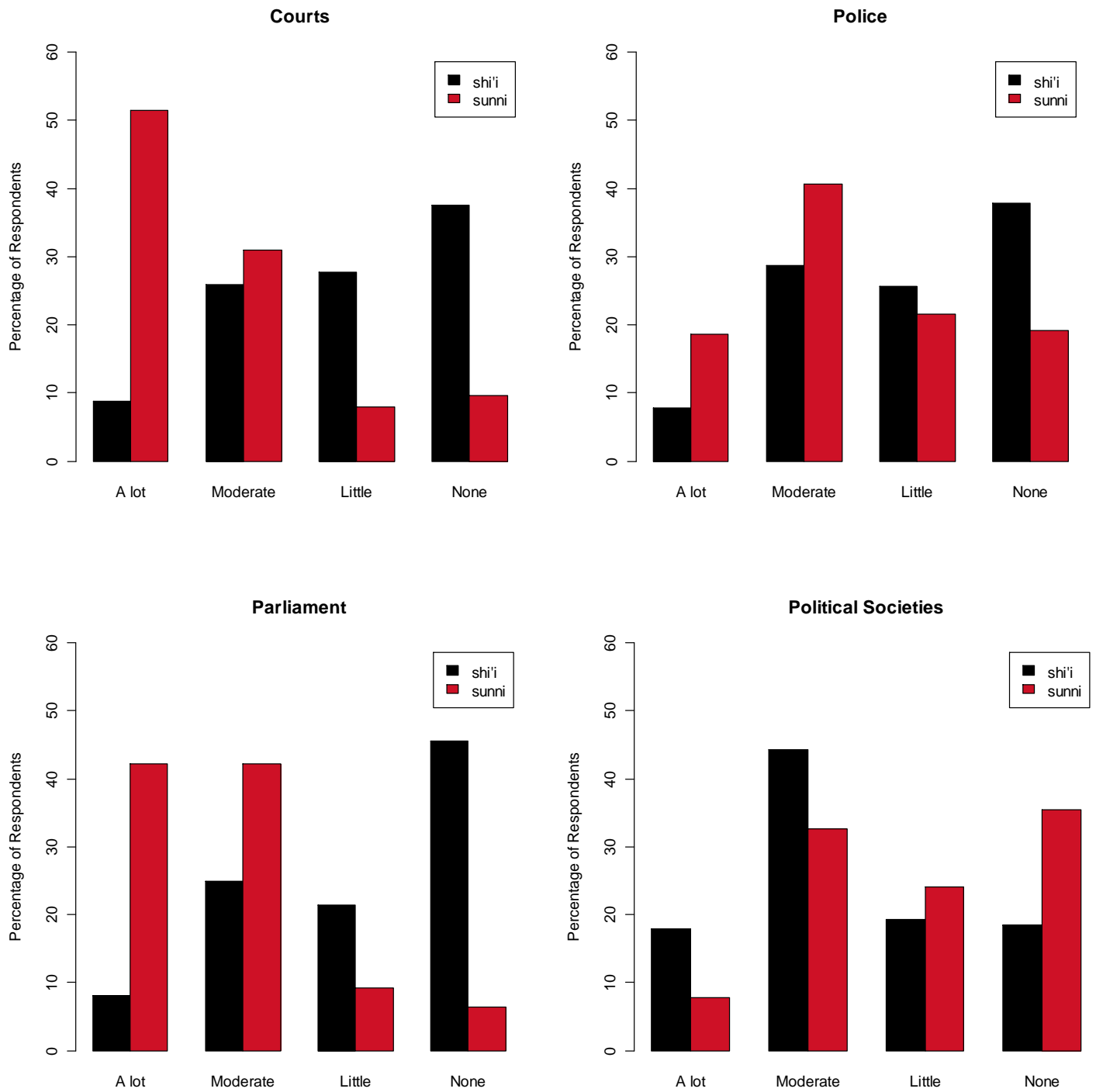
This is not to say that this question was selected for extended analysis here simply because it is the most likely to elicit a between-ethnic discrepancy in opinion. In fact, as we gather from FIGURE 5.48 below, ethnic group membership is a critical factor in explaining respondents' views of each of the other institutions. In all cases, ethnic group support for an institution tends to follow its relative power or advantage in that sphere. Thus we see that Sunnis express demonstrably more trust in the courts, police, and the parliament itself, but not in political parties ("societies"). Why? Because there they are relatively outmaneuvered by al-Wifāq, which enjoys more widespread legitimacy among its constituents and high party discipline among members. Its continuing success was evidenced most recently in the 2010 parliamentary elections, as previously related. Sunni parties, by comparison, though they nominally form a majority caucus, in fact are split between Salafis, Muslim Brothers, and a more heterogeneous contingent of Āl Khalifa tribal allies from among various family groups.

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<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the opulence of the prime minister's residence at Jiddah was fully revealed only with the advent of the Google Earth software, which allowed ordinary Bahrainis to see for the first time the full scale of the Āl Khalifa's property holdings. The backlash was so great that the government immediately blocked usage of the program from inside Bahrain, only to relent some time later when it was clear that the damage had already been done. See, e.g., the commentary of one of Bahrain's most popular bloggers: Mahmood al-Yousif, 2006, "Google Earth Does Bahrain," *Mahmood's Den*, June 12. Available at: <<http://mahmood.tv/2006/06/12/google-earth-does-bahrain>>.



FIGURE 5.48. Degree of Trust in Basic State Institutions, by Ethnicity



That Sunni respondents should express more ambivalence about political societies than Shi'a is thus little wonder. In similar fashion, the relatively low trust reported for the police by Sunni and Shi'i alike is understandable when one recalls that although those who fill its ranks tend of course to be Sunnis, their most distinguishable trait is not their religion but that they are overwhelmingly "foreigners"—Pakistanis, Yemenis, Syrians, Iraqis, and so on—albeit perhaps foreigners with Bahraini citizenship. In this way—and this indeed is precisely the idea, or at least the intended idea—they identify neither with indigenous Bahraini Sunnis nor Shi'is, and vice versa, but are loyal only to the state itself.

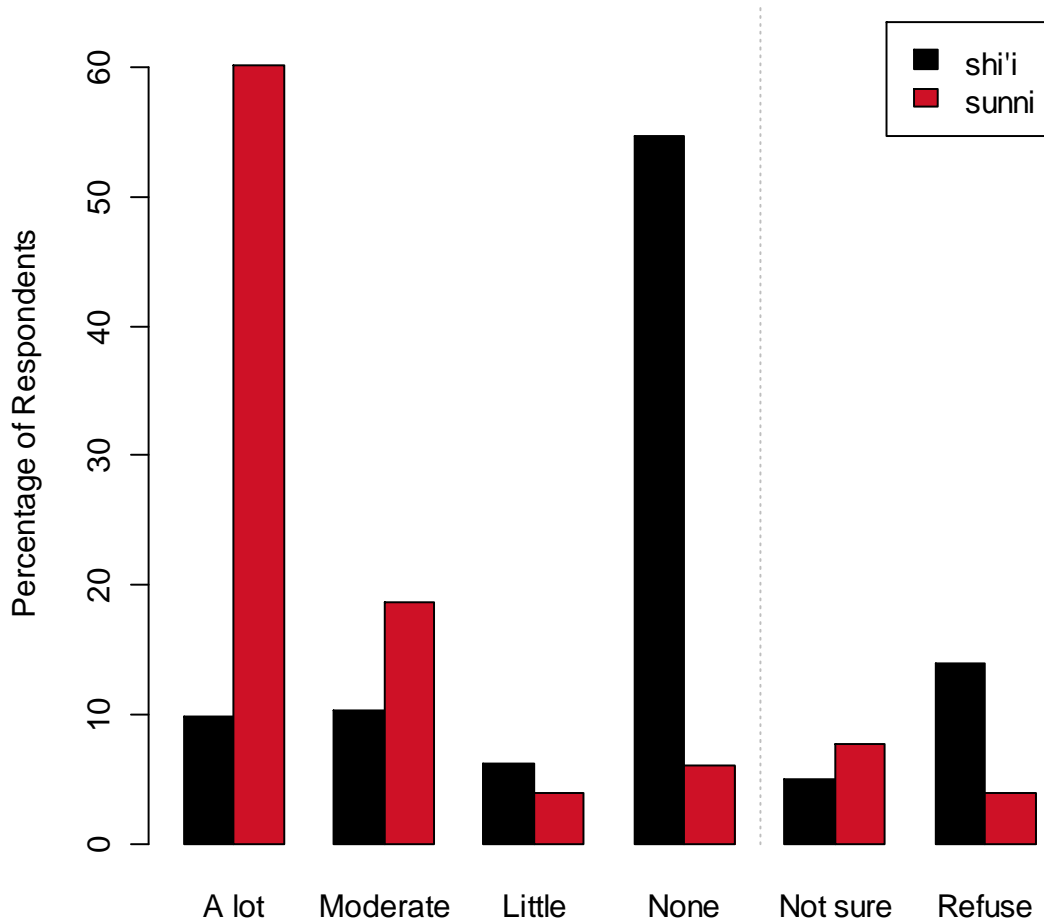
Having thus explained the reasons for our choice of political opinion to examine next, and shown that statistical expediency was not one of them, we may now proceed to analyze Bahrainis' trust in the institution of the prime ministership, and the determinants thereof. The exact question as posed to respondents is the following: "I am going to name a group of institutions, and I would like you to tell me to what extent you trust in each of these institutions: / 1. The prime ministership (the prime [minister] and the [cabinet] ministers)."<sup>40</sup> In FIGURE 5.49 below we find the familiar graph of the frequency of responses disaggregated by ethnicity. We see that even compared to the considerable ethnic polarization witnessed in the plots of FIGURE 5.48 above, here there is still less within-group variation in response: 60% of Sunni respondents (a full 67% of valid responses) report "a great degree" of trust in the prime ministership, while 55% of Shi'a (68% if we exclude refusals and "unsure" responses) say that they have "none at all" ("لا أثق بما على الإطلاق"). The discrepancy in the last two proportions is a testament to the sensitivity of this question particularly among Shi'a, several of whom joked with more or less seriousness that we were trying to get them thrown in jail. It is indeed no stretch to say that of the entire survey this is the most politically-sensitive question asked, and for a time there was debate whether it could be asked at all.

Be that as it may, and despite the 18% who directly refused to answer and the other 13% who in reality refused by saying "I don't know," we succeeded nonetheless in recording 362 valid opinions about this most permanent of all modern Bahraini political institutions, a number more than sufficient to carry out our usual statistical analysis of the relative influence of economic well-being and ethno-religious identity in determining individuals' answers. We see in TABLE 5.50 below the results of our standard model estimation in addition to those of

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<sup>40</sup> The Arabic is: "سوف أقوم بتسمية مجموعة من المؤسسات، وأود أن تخبرني إلى أي درجة تثق في كل واحدة من هذه المؤسسات: ١. رئاسة الوزراء (الرئيس والوزراء)"

FIGURE 5.49. Degree of Trust in the Prime Ministership, by Ethnicity



two new models: one restricted to Sunni respondents, another to Shi'is. The purpose of these new *Models 2* and *3* is, in the first place, to offer a more traditional and probably more intuitive look at the impact of our independent variables of interest, without the added complexity of interaction terms and attendant modifying variables; but also, in the second place, to show that in the end the latter do afford insights into the relationships we wish to understand that are necessarily lost when we analyze our ethnic sub-samples independently, as is often done.

To begin, the most obvious and significant difference between the combined model and the two restricted models is that the latter can never tell us the influence on our dependent variable of ethnic group membership itself, since by definition it admits of no within-sample

TABLE 5.50. *Bahrainis' Trust in the Institution of the Prime Ministership, estimated three ways*

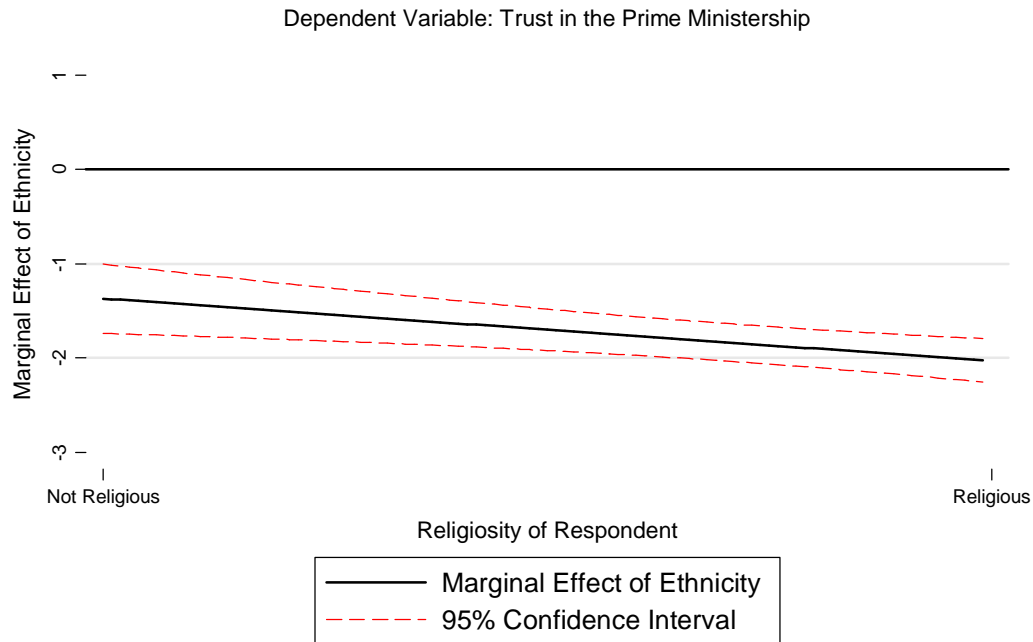
Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard (OLS)			Sunnis Only			Shi'is Only		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>
ETHNICITY	-1.558	0.363	0.000	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
DIFFETHNIC	-1.286	0.196	0.000	0.373	0.204	0.070	-1.288	0.200	0.000
DIFFETH × ETH	1.633	0.278	0.000	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
AGE	-0.00936	0.00387	0.016	-0.00906	0.00482	0.062	-0.00919	0.00605	0.130
FEMALE	0.178	0.100	0.076	0.298	0.127	0.020	0.0679	0.154	0.660
EDUCATION	0.0884	0.0377	0.020	0.0889	0.0432	0.041	0.0983	0.0643	0.128
ECONOMY	0.0948	0.106	0.370	-0.000	0.111	0.999	0.0985	0.107	0.359
ECON × ETH	-0.0920	0.153	0.548	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
RELIGIOSITY	0.301	0.160	0.060	-0.383	0.150	0.012	0.297	0.163	0.071
RELIG × ETH	-0.660	0.219	0.003	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
Constant	3.028	0.383	0.000	1.418	0.356	0.000	3.003	0.534	0.000
<i>N</i>	334			149			185		
Prob. > F	0.0000			0.0059			0.0000		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.6160			0.1381			0.3358		

Note: All three models report robust standard errors

variation in ethnicity. Thus we see that whereas the standalone ETHNICITY regressor has an estimated coefficient of  $-1.558$ —corresponding to a marginal effect that is hugely significant both substantively and statistically as depicted in FIGURE 5.51 below<sup>41</sup>—in our standard *Model 1*, it is dropped from the Sunni- and Shi'i-only models due to perfect collinearity. The difference, then, is not merely procedural but substantive, and as such corresponds to substantively-different research questions: we ask, “Among ordinary Bahraini citizens, what is the effect on one’s trust in the prime ministership of being a Sunni rather than a Shi’i?” The procedure

<sup>41</sup> Note that all three models are estimated by OLS to allow straightforward comparison of marginal effects.

FIGURE 5.51. *Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity*



of *Models 2* and *3*, by contrast, implies a rather different inquiry: “Among Bahraini Shi’is (or Sunnis), what are the factors that affect trust for the prime ministership?” Though neither is more “correct” than the other, the first more accurately corresponds to our theoretical interest, which lies in the individual-level influences, including crucially that of ethnicity, on political opinion and action among Arab Gulf citizens in general, rather than the influences among Sunnis on the one hand and Shi’is on the other. Furthermore, we notice—according to the reported  $R^2$  test statistics, which measure the proportion of variation in the dependent variable accounted for in each model—that our fully-specified interactive model explains an impressive 62% of the total variation in responses, whereas the Sunni- and Shi’i-only models can account for only around 14% and 34%, respectively.

At the same time as we gain an estimate of the impact of ethnicity through use of the interactive model, moreover, we also arrive at the same place as the ethnically-segregated models vis-à-vis our other independent variables of interest. If the apparent benefit of the Shi’i- and Sunni-only models is their ethnically-specific estimates of our independent variables, in other words, then we are at no disadvantage in this regard in employing our interactive model, which provides the same, if not immediately in the raw regression output. For example, the

FIGURE 5.52. *Marginal Effect of Respondent Religiosity, by Ethnicity*

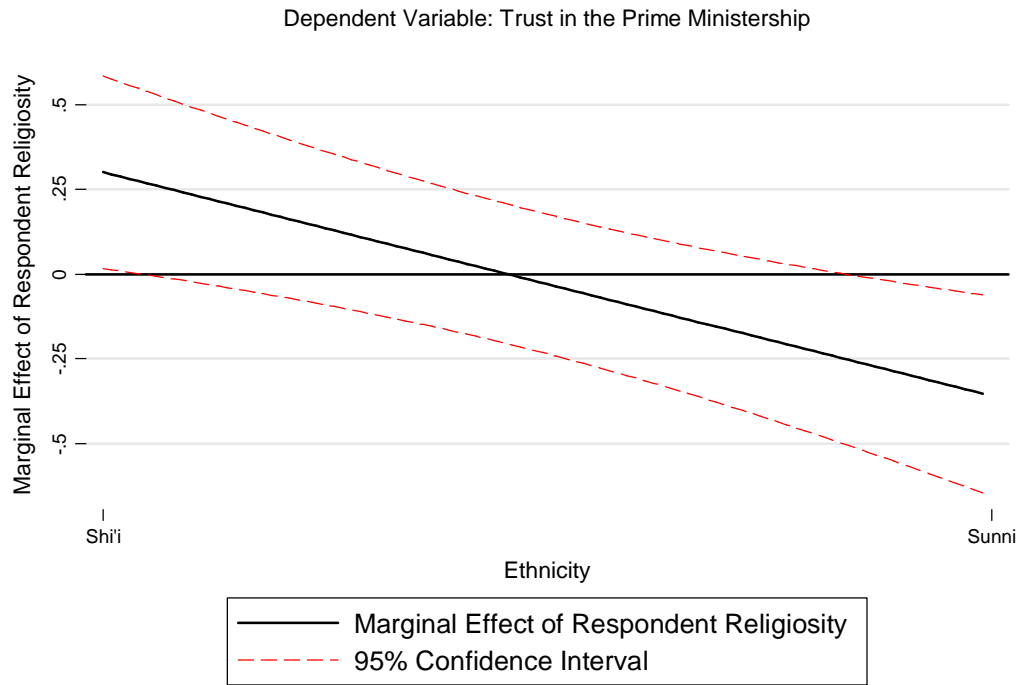


FIGURE 5.53. *Marginal Effect of Respondent Economy, by Ethnicity*

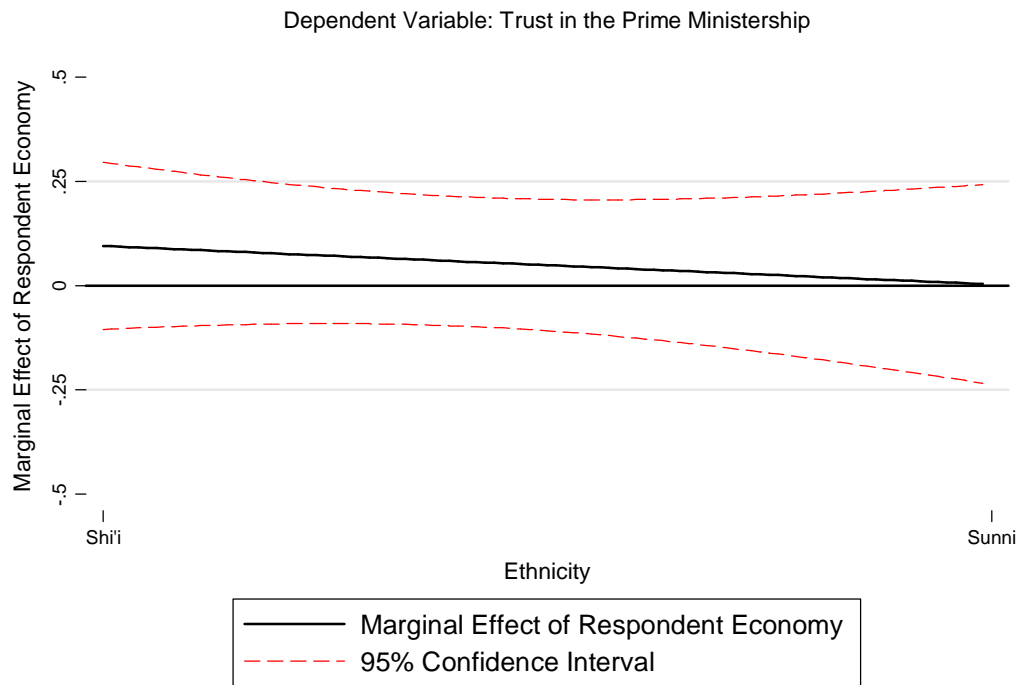
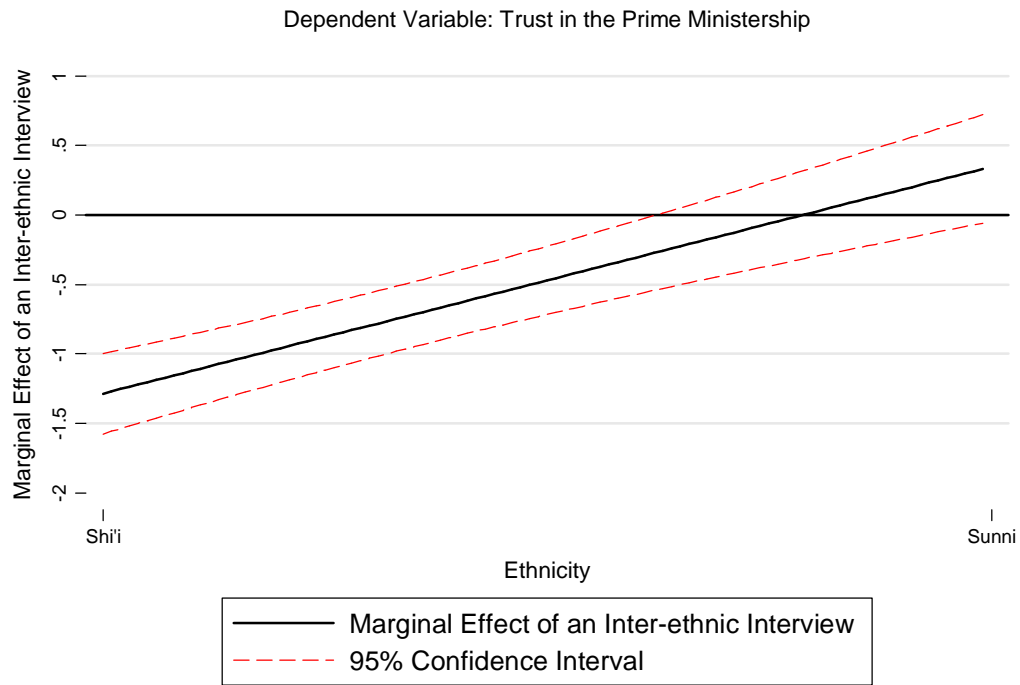


FIGURE 5.54. *Marginal Effect of an Inter-ethnic Interview, by Ethnicity*



marginal effect of RELIGIOSITY (using our standard measure) is an estimated  $-0.383$  among Sunnis according to *Model 2* and  $0.297$  among Shi'is according to *Model 3*; these estimates are significant at the  $0.012$  and  $0.071$   $p$ -levels, respectively. When we plot the marginal effect of the RELIGIOSITY variable as per our normal procedure, then, we find almost exactly the same: FIGURE 5.52 shows that its impact among Shi'is is an estimated  $0.301$ , among Sunnis  $-0.359$ ; and this at similar levels of statistical confidence.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, the Sunni- and Shi'i-only models tell us that ECONOMY has an estimated marginal effect of exactly  $0.000$  among Sunnis and  $0.0985$  among Shi'is, but that neither estimate is statistically-distinguishable from sampling error. Looking then at the picture of FIGURE 5.53 above, we find that the estimated marginal effect of household economy according to our interactive model is a very comparable  $0.00281$  among Sunnis and  $0.0948$  among Shi'is and that, again, neither comes close to statistical significance at the 95% confidence level. Finally, repeating this procedure for our last independent variable of interest, DIFFETHNIC, we see according to our ethnically-segregated models that the estimated

<sup>42</sup> The slight discrepancy compared to the *Model 2* and *3* estimates is due to the influence of the four additional regressors that appear in the interactive model—i.e., ETHNICITY and the three interactive terms.

effect of an inter-ethnic interview on Shi'i respondents is  $-1.288$ , on Sunni respondents  $0.373$ , and that both of these estimates are statistically-distinguishable from zero with a high degree of confidence. Comparing these estimates to those of FIGURE 5.54 above, which charts the marginal effect of DIFFETHNIC as ethnicity varies, we find that we have arrived once again at almost exactly the same place, for the latter estimates the effect of DIFFETHNIC among Shi'a as  $-1.286$ , among Sunna as  $0.347$ , and these at analogous levels of statistical confidence. In sum, then, the interactive model offers us all the benefits of separate ethnic sub-sample estimations while remedying their main drawback, namely the inability to measure and control for the effect of ethnicity itself—for the Sunni-Shi'i discrepancy in responses that has shown itself to be so central thus far in determining Bahrainis' political opinions, from their evaluations of the country's overall political situation to their trust in the office of the prime minister.

This methodological point having been made, we may remain here for a moment to consider more thoroughly the substantive meaning of our findings regarding the determinants of popular attitudes toward Bahrain's prime minister. In the first place, we saw at the outset that the effect of ethnic group membership is strong—indeed, the strongest of any witnessed so far—Sunni ethnicity being associated, among “religious” individuals, with more trust in the office of the prime minister to the tune of more than one and one-third response categories; and among “non-religious” individuals to the extent of two entire response categories, as per FIGURE 5.51. Simply being a Sunni rather than Shi'i Bahraini, that is, produces an estimated change from, for example, having “a great deal of trust” in the prime ministership to having but “little trust,” this difference effected among two respondents who are otherwise identical across all other independent variables included in our model. This great chasm separating members of the two groups may be more easily appreciated in the familiar predicted values plots of FIGURE 5.55 below, which tell a similar substantive story to that of the bar graph of responses seen already in FIGURE 5.49. In the latter case, however, we had not yet controlled for the many other factors thereafter found to influence responses, namely EDUCATION, AGE, FEMALE, RELIGIOSITY, and DIFFETHNIC. Hence the depiction of FIGURE 5.55, representing as it does the estimation results of our model rather than a mere visual depiction of descriptive statistics, is at once more complete and more robust than the histogram of FIGURE 5.49.

The other thing we are made to see by the two plots of FIGURE 5.55 is the mediating influence of individual religiosity on the effect of ethnic group membership. The marginal effect of our standard RELIGIOSITY measure we saw already in FIGURE 5.52, and as we observe



FIGURE 5.55. Predicted Values of PRIME MINISTER, by Religiosity

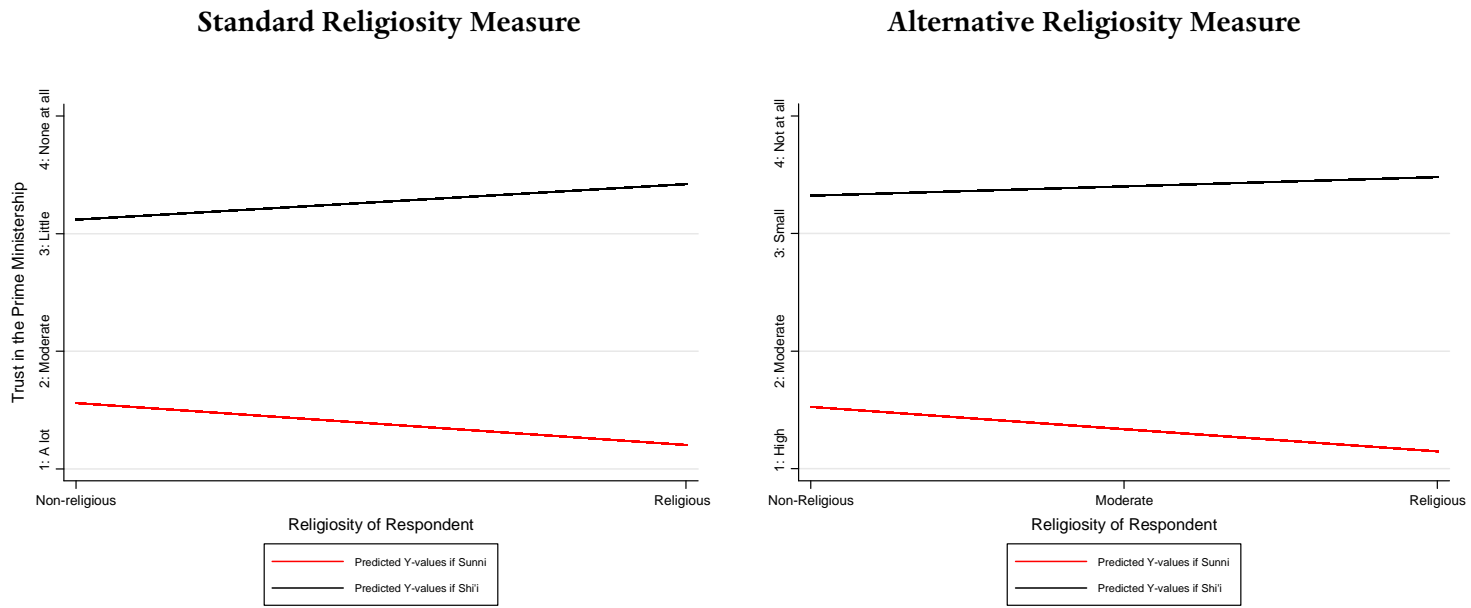
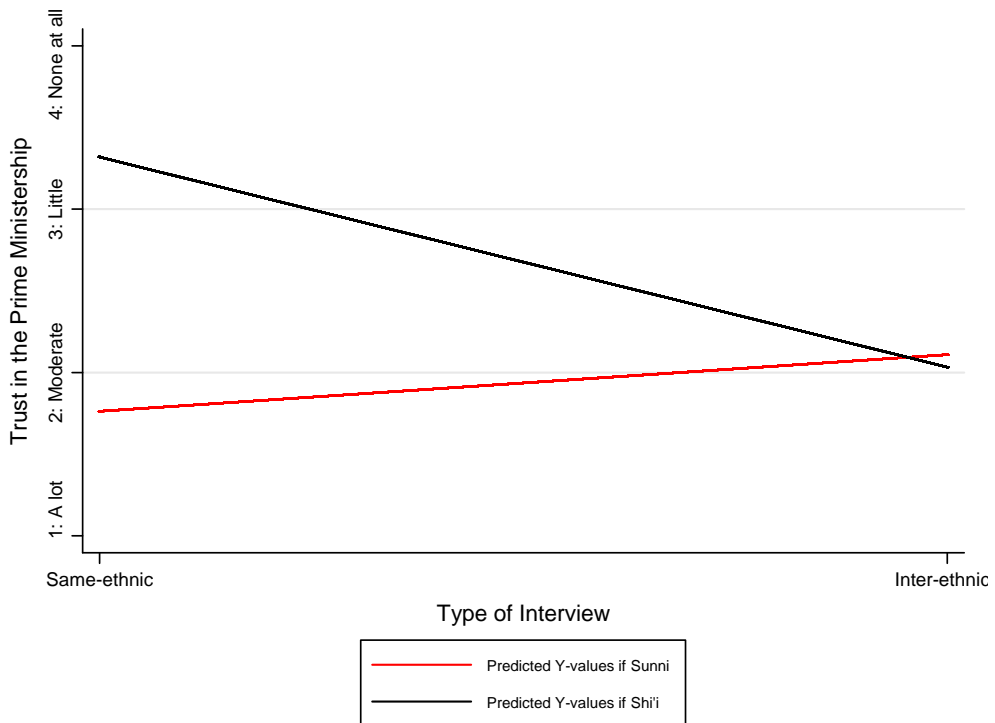


FIGURE 5.56 Predicted Values of PRIME MINISTER, by DIFFETHNIC



above its substantive impact is comparable regardless of which measure we use, though once again the alternative “Are you religious or not?” measure performs relatively better among Sunnis than Shi’is in predicting respondents’ opinions. The augmenting effect of religiosity is, more specifically, an estimated 0.30 among Shi’a and –0.36 among Sunna, or about a third of a response category in each case. Here as always the effect of religiosity is not static but varies by a respondent’s ethnic membership: for Shi’is, being more religious corresponds to less trust in the office of the prime minister; for Sunnis, religiosity serves to bolster one’s trust. Finally, we may skip our customary comparison at this point of the relative substantive influences of ethnicity, religiosity, and household economy, as we have discovered already that the latter is a significant determinant of PRIME MINISTER neither among Shi’is nor Sunnis.

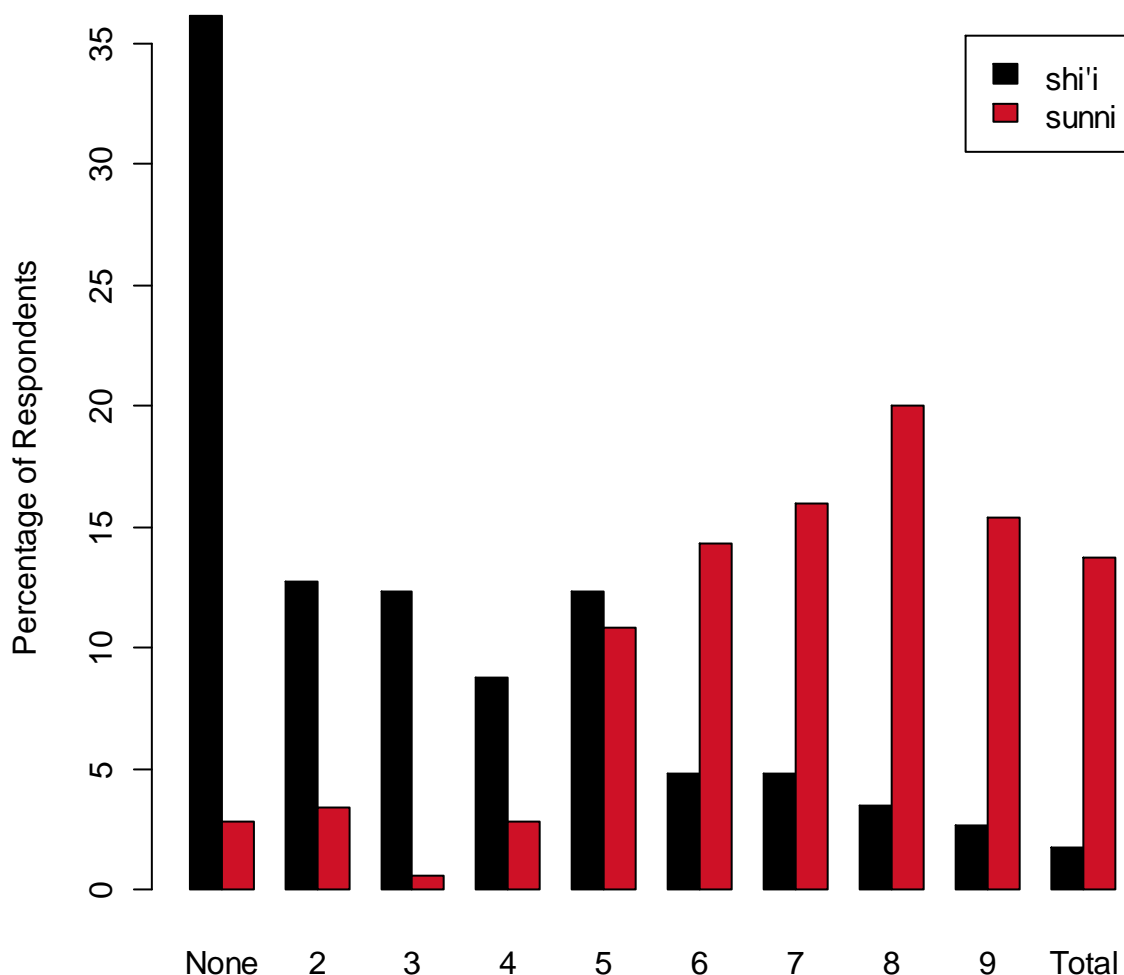
The last thing, then, that demands reiteration is the extraordinary impact of inter-ethnic interviewing on Sunni and especially Shi’i responses to this question. The between-ethnic difference in survey response, so striking in FIGURE 5.55, is utterly erased in the case of inter-ethnic interviewees, whose predicted response according to FIGURE 5.56 above is nearly the same—at right around category 2: a “moderate degree of trust” in the prime minister—irrespective of a respondent’s ethnicity. This result is driven primarily by the remarkable moderating effect of DIFFETHNIC among Shi’a, who report values of PRIME MINISTER that are a full one and a third category lower (more trusting) when asked by Sunni field interviewers. Among Sunnis interviewed by Shi’a this effect is precisely the opposite if substantially less pronounced, producing a little more than a third of a category change in the direction of *less* trust for the prime ministership. Quite notably, therefore, we have here the third consecutive political opinion to have been analyzed for which the predicted responses of Sunnis and Shi’is are altogether inverted when obtained as part of an inter-ethnic interview.

The penultimate survey question we shall consider in this examination of the sources of popular political opinion in Bahrain is also perhaps the most general and straightforward, thus presenting more than any other a transparent window into the views of ordinary citizens toward the Bahraini government. Bahraini respondents were asked to rate on a ten-point scale their level of satisfaction with overall government performance “(أداء الحكومة).”<sup>43</sup> The

<sup>43</sup> In its entirety the question reads, “Using a 1-10 scale to measure the extent of your satisfaction with the performance of the Government of Bahrain, where 1 means that you are entirely unsatisfied with its performance and 10 means that you are very satisfied with its performance, ‘To what extent are you satisfied with the performance of the government?’” The corresponding Arabic reads:

”على فرض وجود مقياس من 1-10 لقياس مدى رضائك على أداء حكومة البحرين، بحيث 1 تعني أنك غير راضٍ على الإطلاق عن أدائها، و10 تعني أنك راضٍ جداً على أدائها، إلى أي درجة أنت راضٍ عن أداء الحكومة؟”

FIGURE 5.57. Overall Satisfaction with Government Performance, by Ethnicity



relative distribution of these responses is given above in FIGURE 5.57. A telling picture indeed, the near total ethnic polarization depicted in the latter requires little by way of explanation. Whereas some 90% of Sunnis report being more satisfied than unsatisfied (i.e., report a score of 5 or above), an almost equal proportion (82%) of Shi'a express exactly the reverse opinion, with a full 36% replying that they are “not at all satisfied” (“غير راضٍ على الإطلاق”). Thus, at the same time that a clear one-third of Bahraini Shi'a assign the government the lowest possible grade of overall satisfaction—with a few memorable respondents going even further to offer such responses as “0,” “-1,” “تحت الأرض” (“below the ground”; that is, less than 0), and, most

**TABLE 5.58.** *Bahrainis' Satisfaction with Overall Government Performance, estimated three ways*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard (OLS)			Sunnis Only			Shi'is Only		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>
ETHNICITY	2.285	0.793	0.004	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
DIFFETHNIC	1.697	0.357	0.000	0.0280	0.500	0.955	1.693	0.364	0.000
DIFFETH × ETH	-1.654	0.609	0.007	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
AGE	0.0230	0.00902	0.011	0.0128	0.0123	0.301	0.0326	0.0130	0.013
FEMALE	-0.0956	0.247	0.699	-0.0604	0.355	0.865	-0.145	0.352	0.680
EDUCATION	-0.199	0.0818	0.016	-0.226	0.107	0.037	-0.167	0.126	0.185
ECONOMY	-0.554	0.217	0.011	-0.0698	0.272	0.798	-0.558	0.219	0.012
ECON × ETH	0.463	0.336	0.170	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
RELIGIOSITY	-0.997	0.331	0.003	0.558	0.379	0.142	-0.975	0.335	0.004
RELIG × ETH	1.581	0.493	0.001	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
Constant	4.830	0.807	0.000	7.590	1.093	0.000	4.362	1.037	0.000
<i>N</i>	373			161			212		
Prob. > F	0.0000			0.0556			0.0000		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.5337			0.0675			0.2374		

*Note:* All three models report robust standard errors

humorous of all, “Is there any choice lower than ‘1?’”—at the same time, less than one in ten Sunnis supplies anything more negative than a neutral evaluation of government performance. Whatever the additional influence of economic well-being, then, it is apparent already that it will be difficult to match the immense impact of ethnic group membership.

To make this determination authoritatively, of course, we must carry out our usual analysis, which we begin by repeating the estimation procedure of the previous dependent variable. This procedure, one may recall, complements our standard interactive model with separate Sunni- and Shi'i-exclusive estimations. Though strictly speaking not as informative

as the interactive model, these two ethnically-segregated models offer the benefits of, first, being more directly interpretable; and, second, allowing separate Sunni and Shi'i estimates of our EDUCATION, FEMALE, and AGE control variables. The results of these three estimations appear above in TABLE 5.58. We notice immediately that our independent variable estimates are highly dependent upon a respondent's ethnicity; in fact, of our six regressors in the Sunni- and Shi'i-only models, only the FEMALE control variable admits of the same substantive interpretation—that it is unrelated to Bahrainis' evaluations of government performance—across both ethnic groups. As for the other two controls—EDUCATION and AGE—we see that the former is a significant, negative predictor of our dependent variable only among Sunni respondents, the latter positively related to GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE only among Shi'a. That ETHNICITY is likewise a statistically-significant modifier with respect to our independent variables of interest we can tell directly by the significance of the three interaction terms of *Model 1*. Alternatively we may simply compare the coefficient and standard error estimates of DIFFETHNIC, RELIGIOSITY, and ECONOMY across the two ethnically-restricted *Models 2* and *3*, which communicates the same result: household economy and participation in an inter-ethnic interview are related to evaluations of government performance only among Shi'is; among Sunnis, the only variables one may connect with a high degree of confidence to GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE is a respondent's education level and to a lesser extent personal religiosity.

To assess the influence on Bahrainis' views of government performance of ethnic group membership itself, however, we must rely on our interactive model. Depicted below in FIGURE 5.59 is the marginal effect of ETHNICITY as respondent religiosity increases. As we have deduced already from the highly-skewed distribution of FIGURE 5.57 above, a respondent's opinion of the Bahraini government is influenced tremendously by ethnic group membership, an effect that is powerfully conditioned in turn by the additional augmenting influence of individual religiosity. While Sunni ethnicity is associated with more favorable views of government performance among both “religious” and “non-religious” individuals, among the former this effect corresponds to a between-group difference of nearly 4½ points on our 10-point scale of responses, compared to a difference of 2.9 points among the latter category of respondent. The effect of ETHNICITY ON GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE is magnified by some 55%, then, among those Bahrainis who indicate that they are religious. And, as indicated by the corresponding predicted values plots of FIGURE 5.60, we obtain very similar estimates of this substantive influence of religiosity irrespective of the measure we employ.

FIGURE 5.59. Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity

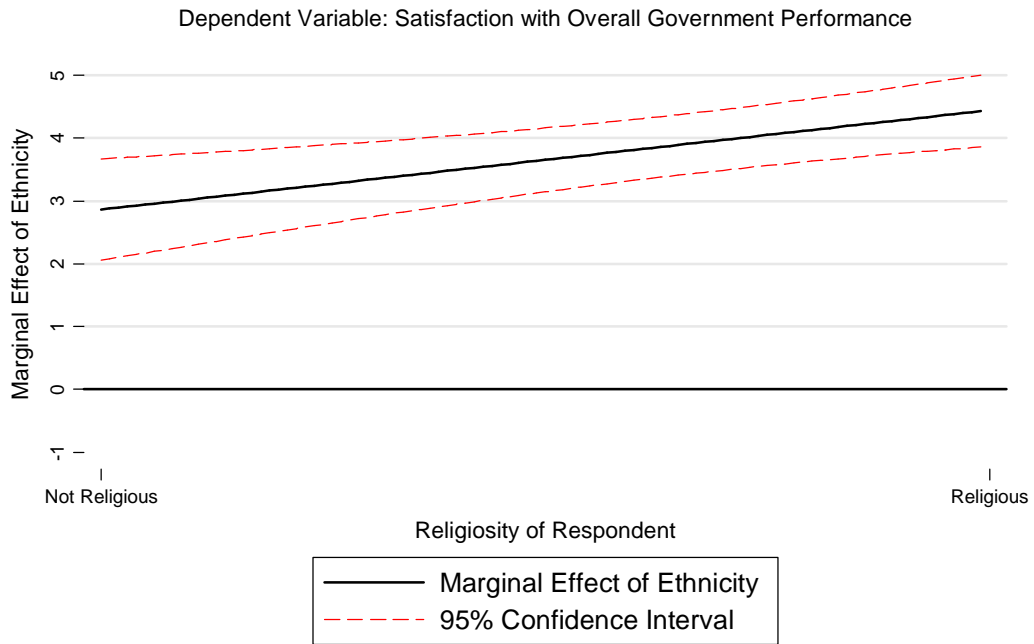


FIGURE 5.60. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by Religiosity

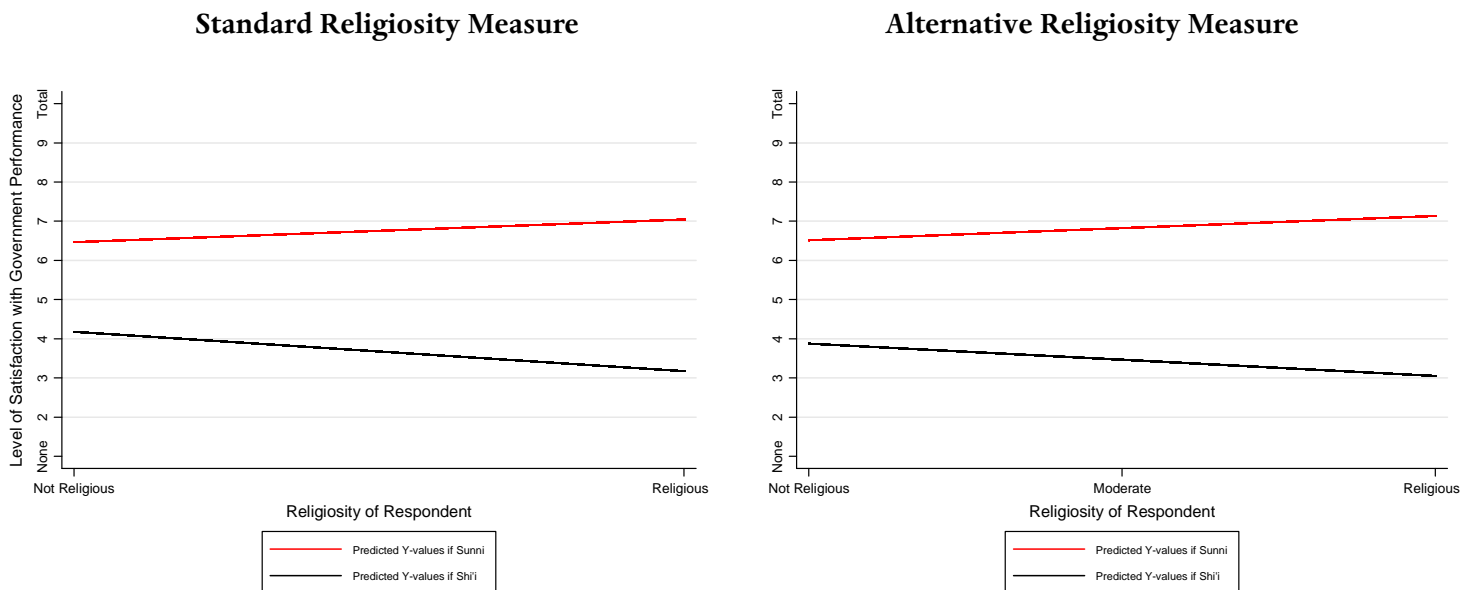
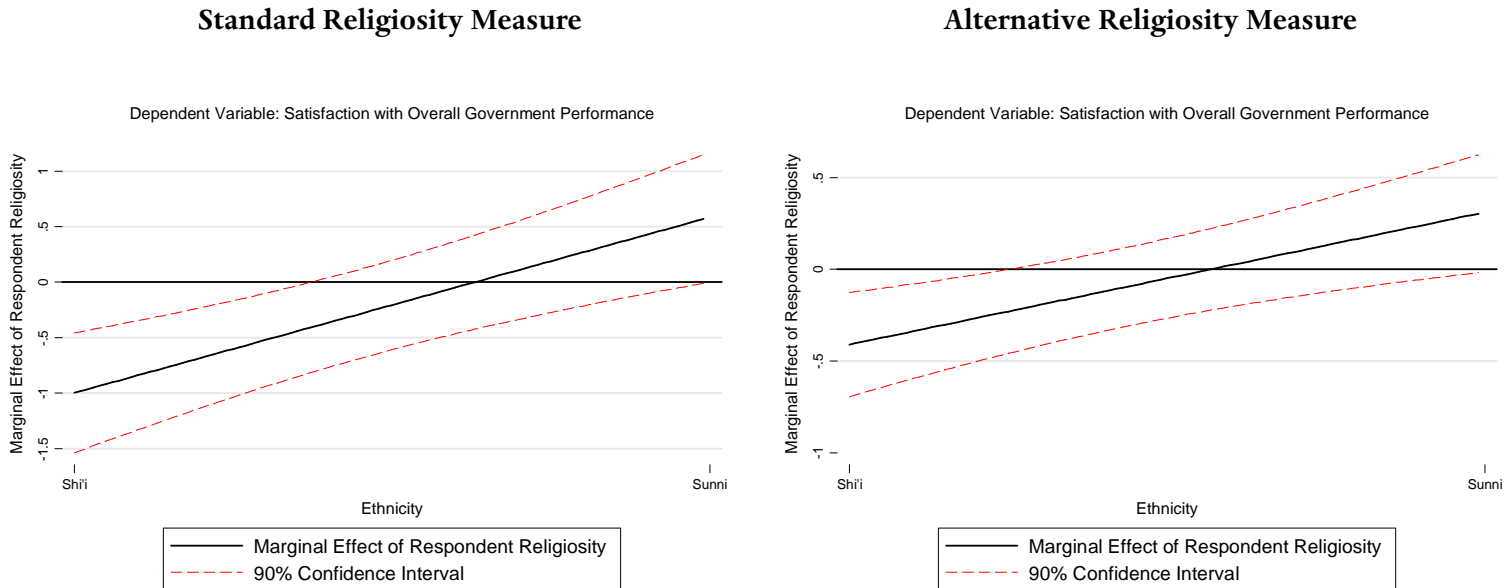


FIGURE 5.6I. Marginal Effect of Respondent Religiosity, using Two Measures



Finally, to verify that religiosity’s role in magnifying the effect of ethnicity is not only substantively-significant but statistically-significant as well, we compute the marginal effects of our two alternative measures along with the 90% confidence interval of each. These we find in FIGURE 5.6I above, which, even if we might have wished for greater statistical confidence in the estimated effect of religiosity among Sunni ethnics, nonetheless serves to reinforce the constant conclusion of our investigation thus far into the determinants of political opinion among Bahrainis: as increased religiousness drives Shi’is toward more anti-government orientations, it marshals Sunnis further to the regime’s defense. To be sure, the predicted level of satisfaction with government performance is more than 7 out of a possible 10 among religious Sunnis; among religious Shi’is it barely reaches 3. Once more, then, we say that the influence of economic satisfaction on GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE, the influence of this supposed driving force behind individual political posture in *rentier* states, must be powerful indeed if it is to eclipse the combined impact of ethnicity and religion.

And, in fact, as illustrated in FIGURES 5.62 and 5.63 below the effect of a respondent’s household economy is not inconsiderable—not inconsiderable, that is, among Bahraini Shi’a, among whom the marginal effect of ECONOMY is an estimated  $-0.55$ , corresponding to a drop

FIGURE 5.62. Marginal Effect of Economic Satisfaction, by Respondent Ethnicity

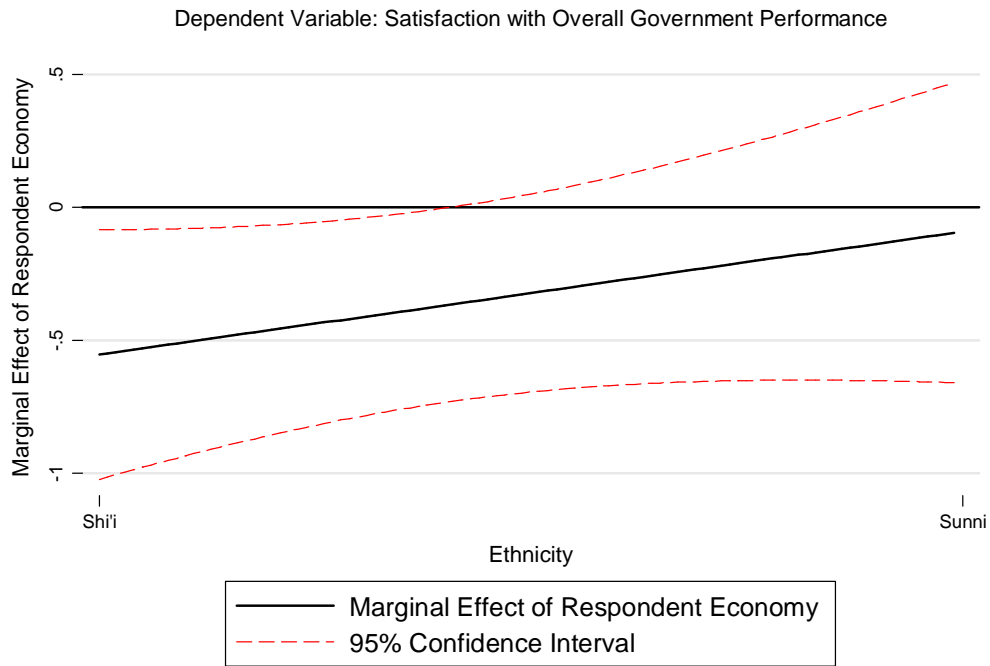
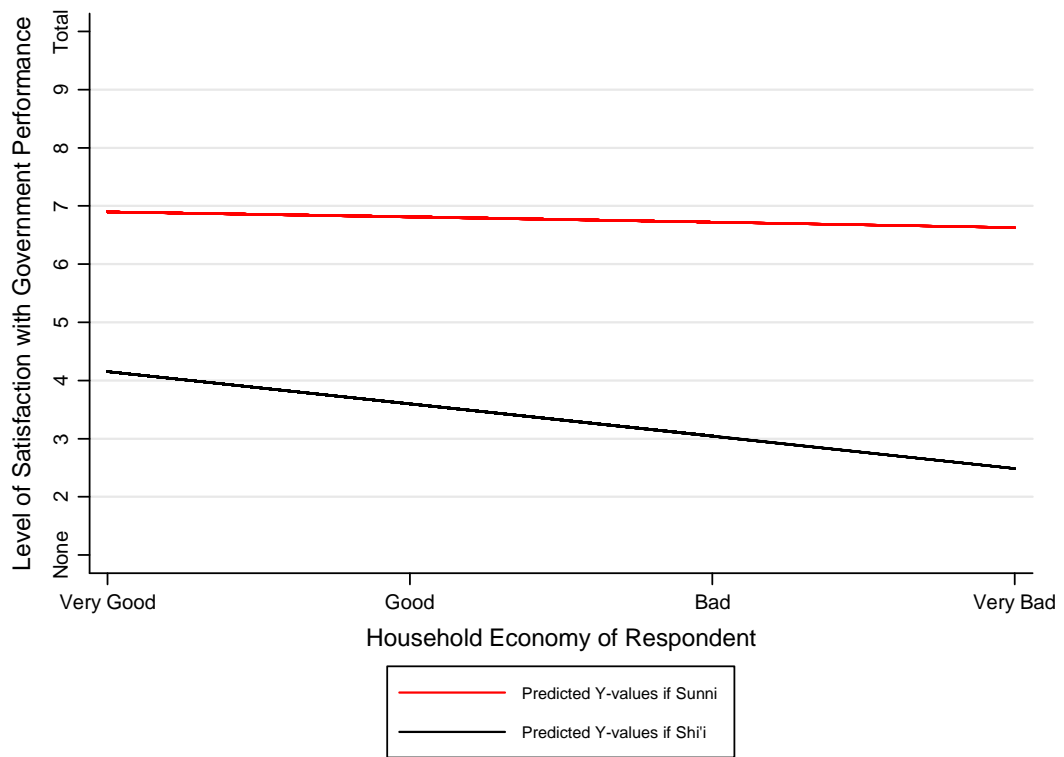


FIGURE 5.63. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by Economic Satisfaction





of two-thirds of a response category in predicted satisfaction with government performance for a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation-change in *ECONOMY*. Yet among Sunnis the corresponding marginal effect is not only negligible at an estimated  $-0.09$  but also statistically-indistinguishable from random chance, as is plain from the confidence interval bands on the right-hand side of *FIGURE 5.62*. Of the six political opinions analyzed so far, then, this is the second instance in which Shi'a respondents were found to be responsive to our measure of economic satisfaction while Sunnis were not, the other instance having been observed in the case of the dependent variable *HUMAN RIGHTS*. It is worth noting that, on the other hand, the reverse case—*ECONOMY* being a significant determinant of political views among Sunnis only—has not yet been observed, a curious fact inasmuch as it would seem to contradict the logical theoretical presumption that the bonds of political-economic patronage will tend to operate most strongly between the Sunni-dominated Bahraini government and ordinary Sunni Bahrainis. We will return to this observation at the end of the present section.

As always, we conclude by analyzing the impact of inter-ethnic interviewing on our Sunni and Shi'i respondents. Here its influence mirrors that of *ECONOMY*: substantively-robust and statistically-significant among Shi'is; non-existent among Sunnis. More precisely, *FIGURE 5.64* below shows that the marginal effect of the *DIFFETHNIC* variable is an estimated  $1.70$  among the former group and but  $0.04$  among the latter. Yet even without its usual countervailing impact among Sunnis, the effect of an inter-ethnic interview among Shi'a alone is strong enough to bring the predicted responses of Bahraini Shi'a who were interviewed by Sunnis to within about two-thirds of a category of the predicted response of Sunnis. That is to say, inter-ethnic interviewing produces such a positive change in Shi'a respondents' evaluations of government performance that, even in the absence of the corresponding negative shift in opinion that we typically observe among Sunnis interviewed by Shi'is, the between-group discrepancy in predicted opinion is cut from about two and one-third points among same-ethnic interviewees to two-thirds of one point among inter-ethnic interviewees, or by nearly 72%. This sizable gap-bridging effect we perceive clearly in *FIGURE 5.65*.

Seemingly out of place among the preceding dependent variables, all of which have sought to capture popular attitude toward the Bahraini regime itself, toward the fundamental legitimacy and desirability of the nation's prevailing political order, the final indicator to be analyzed in this section measures the national pride of our Bahraini survey respondents. The purpose is not to determine which of the two ethnic groups is the more patriotic—a question,

FIGURE 5.64. Marginal Effect of an Inter-ethnic Interview, by Respondent Ethnicity

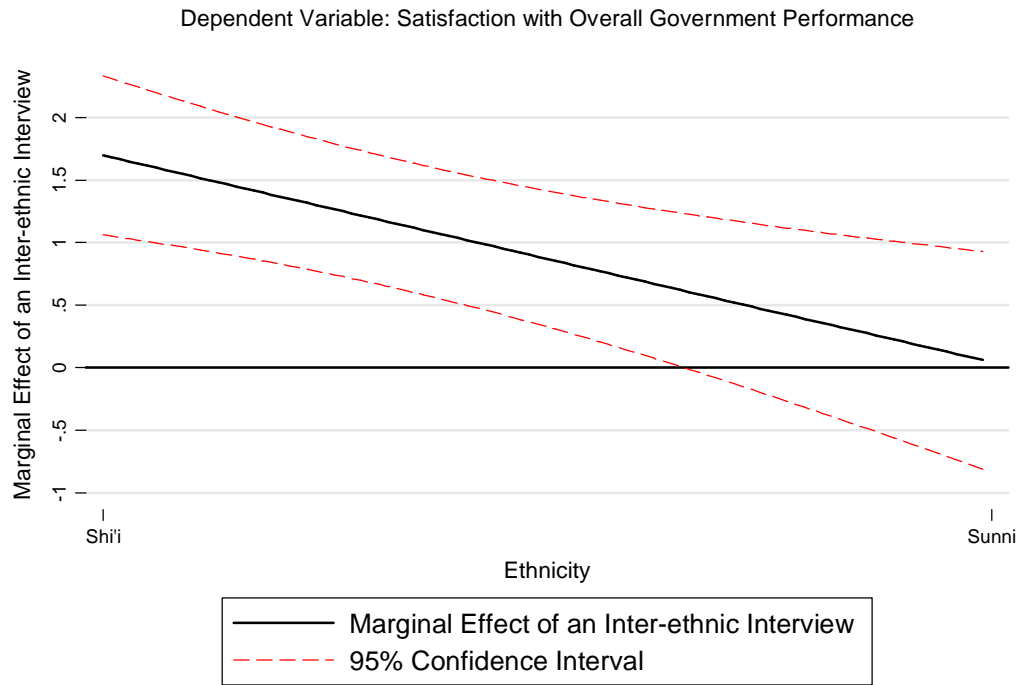
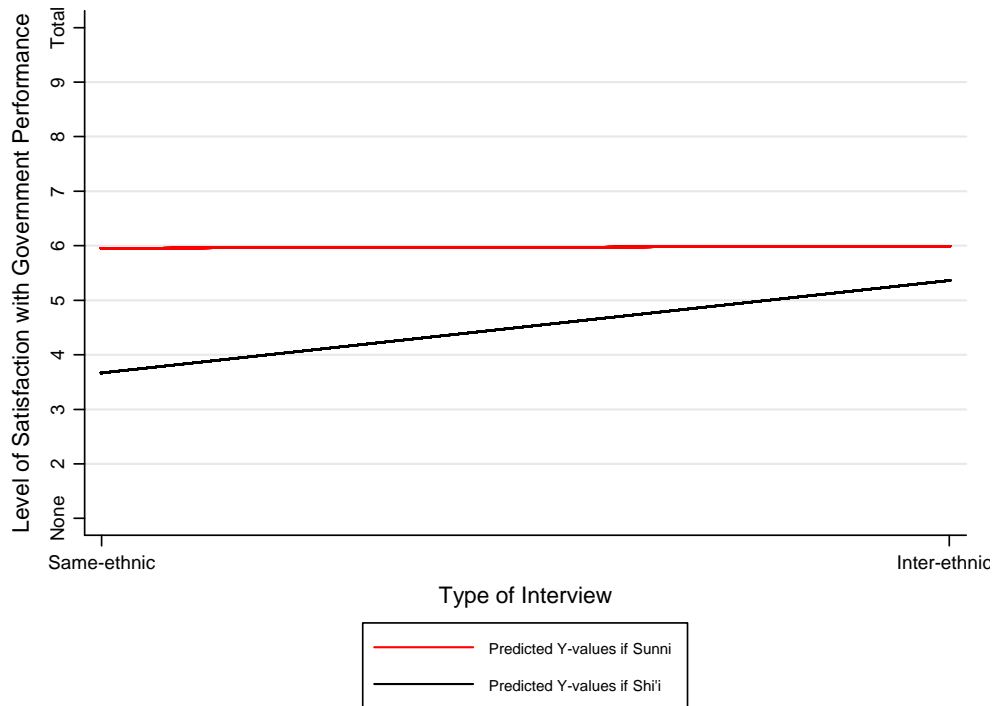


FIGURE 5.65. Predicted Values of Response Variable, by DIFFETHNIC



incidentally, made the subject of no little debate—but to assess the extent to which the same factors that help determine individual political opinions might also help explain the origin of those opinions. That is, if our theory of how ethnicity and religion work to influence Bahraini politics turns around a Sunni-Shi'i conflict over the very nature of the state itself, one in which the ancient, Shi'a-governed land of Baḥrān competes in the popular imagination as in the political arena for supremacy and legitimacy over against the modern Kingdom of Baḥrayn won by “Al-Fātiḥ” Aḥmad bin Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa—if this is indeed a valid conception of the basis of socio-political division in today's Bahrain, then we should expect to find that those same factors that help determine one's political standpoint are also related to the pride one feels for being a Bahraini—for being, that is, a “true” Bahraini. Accordingly, we should find that, contrary to our results heretofore, increased religiosity should effect the same change in our dependent variable PRIDE among both Sunnis and Shi'is. Being more religious, in other words, should not draw Sunnis and Shi'is farther apart in opinion as we have witnessed until now but push them in the same direction toward greater national pride, albeit toward two separate prides for two competing conceptions of nationhood.

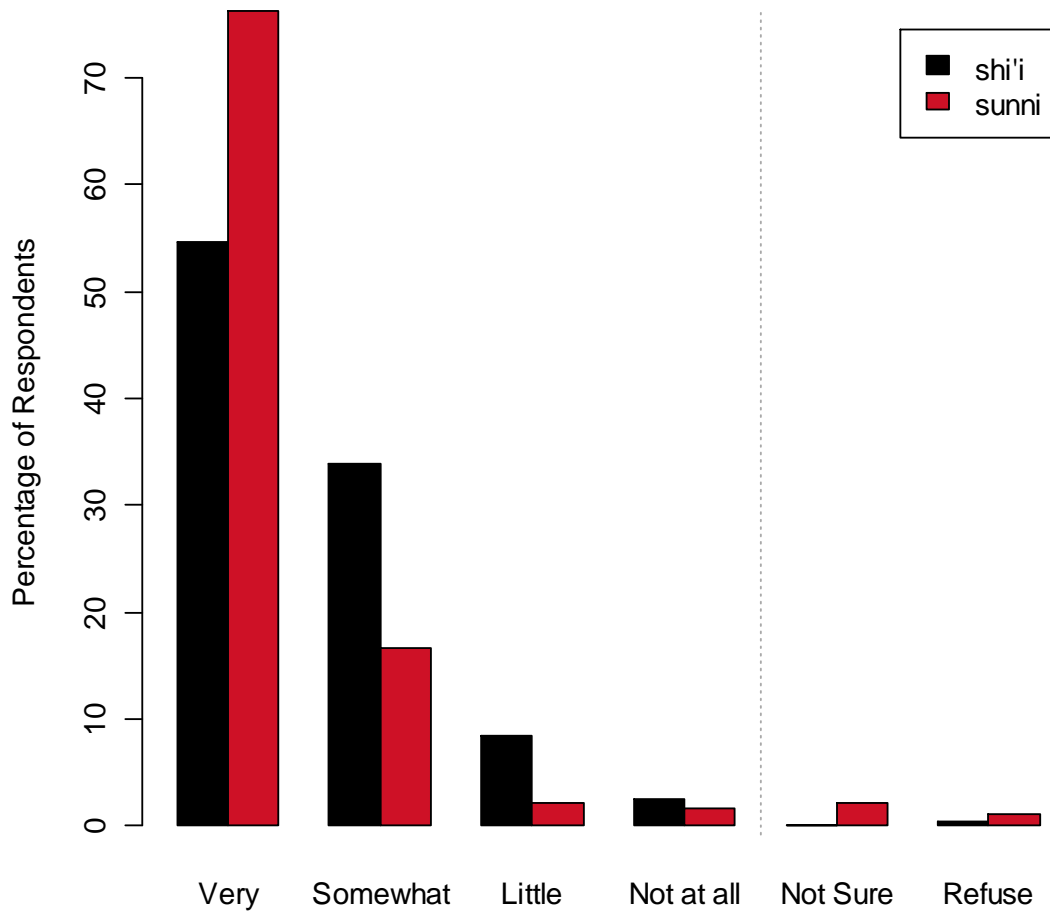
Respondents were asked, “How proud are you to be a Bahraini?”<sup>44</sup> As we glean from FIGURE 5.66 below, nearly four-fifths of Sunni respondents report the highest level of national pride, compared to around 55% of Shi'a. Two things may help account for this not inconsiderable difference. The most obvious is a possible disproportionate inclination among Sunna to feel (or at least convey) more patriotism toward the country and, by association, more loyalty to the regime, an explanation that follows the trend witnessed thus far in which Sunni ethnicity is associated with more pro-government attitude. The second likely cause is more subtle and depends once again on the acute politicization of the standard demonym “Bahraini,” the necessary use of which in the survey questionnaire almost certainly served to alter the answers of some Shi'a who choose to identify primarily as Baḥrānī. Indeed, several Shi'i respondents specifically qualified their answer in this manner by saying, “I'm 'very proud'—not to be *Bahraini*, but to be *Baḥrānī*!” However the case, to interpret FIGURE 5.66 as a clear-cut comparison of national allegiance among Bahraini Sunnis and Shi'is would doubtless be an oversimplification.

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<sup>44</sup> The Arabic questionnaire reads:

“إلى أي مدى تشعر بالاعتزاز والفخر لكونك بحرينياً؟”

FIGURE 5.66. “How Proud Are You to Be a Bahraini?”; Responses by Ethnicity



For our purposes, however, more interesting than group-level differences in response are the determinants of national pride among individual Bahrainis, in particular the question of the influence of personal religiosity. Do we find, as predicted, that more religious people tend to report higher levels of national pride? and this alike among Sunnis and Shi'is? As an initial step toward providing an answer we may first divide our respondents between the “religious” and the “non-religious” (according to our standard dichotomous measure) to see whether the former group in fact seems to display higher levels of PRIDE. The results of this we find below in FIGURES 5.67 and 5.68, which seem indeed to confirm our expectation: among religious Bahrainis—Sunnis as well as Shi'is—the proportion of “very proud” individuals is markedly higher compared to among religious respondents. In the case of Sunnis, the ratio of

FIGURE 5.67. *Pride among the Non-Religious*

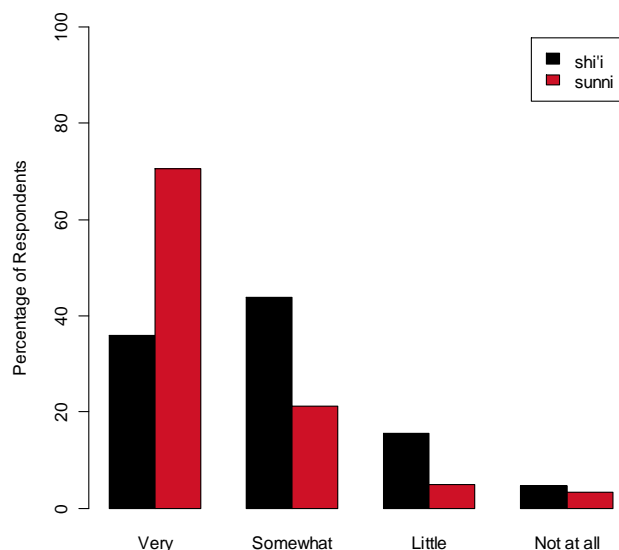
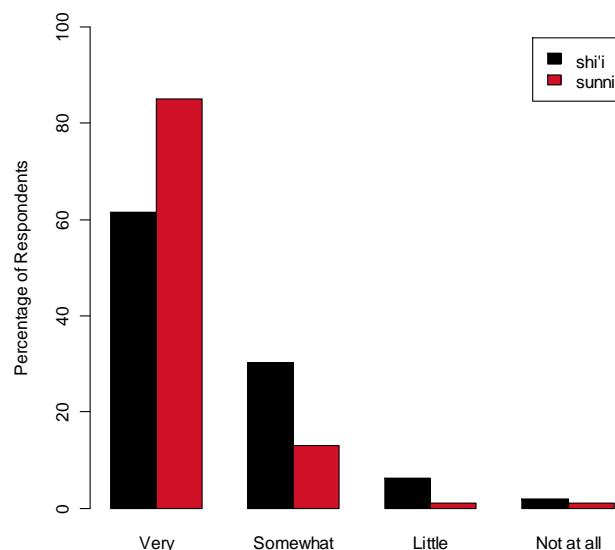


FIGURE 5.68. *Pride among the Religious*



“very proud” individuals rises from 70% among the non-religious to 85% among the religious, an increase of more than 21%; among Shi’is, this increase is even more dramatic, from 36% of respondents to 62%, a change of some 72%.

To verify that this seeming relationship between personal religiosity and national pride is not spurious, we perform our usual test of the statistical significance of the RELIGIOSITY variable as a predictor of PRIDE. TABLE 5.69 below reports the estimation results of our combined and ethnically-segregated models, which confirm that RELIGIOSITY is a statistically-significant determinant of Bahrainis’ reported levels of national pride and that, unlike in each of our previous estimations, its effect operates in the same way on Sunnis and Shi’is. Among respondents of both groups, that is, identification as a religious individual is associated with higher levels of PRIDE. Conversely, neither of our other independent variables of interest is a consistent predictor of PRIDE across both ethnic groups: inter-ethnic interviewing is entirely unrelated to respondents’ answers, while household economy is a significant predictor only among Sunnis (though among Shi’a its coefficient, if significant only at the 0.180 level, is of the expected magnitude and direction). In similar fashion, each of our three control variables is related to PRIDE only among respondents of one of the two ethnic groups: higher levels of education and female gender produce lower levels of pride among Shi’a, and older Sunnis tend to report feeling greater pride than younger Sunnis.

TABLE 5.69. *The Determinants of National Pride among Bahrainis, estimated three ways*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard (OLS)			Sunnis Only			Shi'is Only		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>
ETHNICITY	-0.599	0.263	0.023	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
DIFFETHNIC	0.133	0.113	0.243	0.00856	0.114	0.940	0.145	0.114	0.205
DIFFETH × ETH	-0.0859	0.170	0.613	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
AGE	-0.00447	0.00280	0.111	-0.00831	0.00398	0.039	-0.00174	0.00401	0.664
FEMALE	0.176	0.0767	0.022	0.0396	0.0941	0.675	0.258	0.116	0.027
EDUCATION	0.0823	0.0323	0.011	0.0101	0.0367	0.784	0.146	0.0554	0.009
ECONOMY	0.0952	0.0910	0.296	0.182	0.0923	0.050	0.121	0.0903	0.180
ECON × ETH	0.0946	0.130	0.466	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
RELIGIOSITY	-0.324	0.126	0.010	-0.199	0.103	0.056	-0.289	0.129	0.026
RELIG × ETH	0.139	0.159	0.384	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
Constant	1.291	0.326	0.000	1.269	0.311	0.000	0.786	0.450	0.082
<i>N</i>	384			163			221		
Prob. > F	0.0000			0.0781			0.0002		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.1522			0.1019			0.1336		

Note: All three models report robust standard errors

The marginal effects of ETHNICITY and RELIGIOSITY we plot below in FIGURES 5.70 and 5.72, respectively. Together, they lend further empirical support to our above theory about the sources of national pride among Bahrainis and, in turn, about the nature of the country's political conflict. As indicated already by the between-group discrepancies of FIGURES 5.66 through 5.68, Sunni ethnicity is shown to elicit lower values (higher levels) of PRIDE among both religious and non-religious individuals. Yet notably, FIGURE 5.70 also shows that this influence of ethnic group membership decreases in magnitude with religiosity; that is, that the more religious a respondent is, the lesser the impact of ethnic group membership on his

FIGURE 5.70. Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity

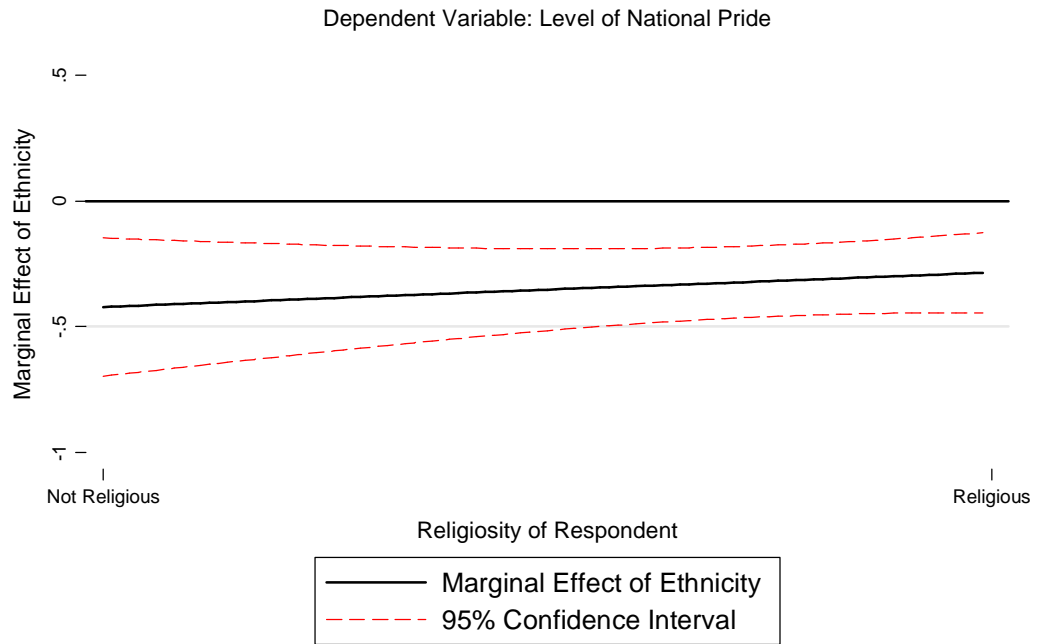


FIGURE 5.71. Predicted Levels of National Pride, by Ethnicity and Religiosity

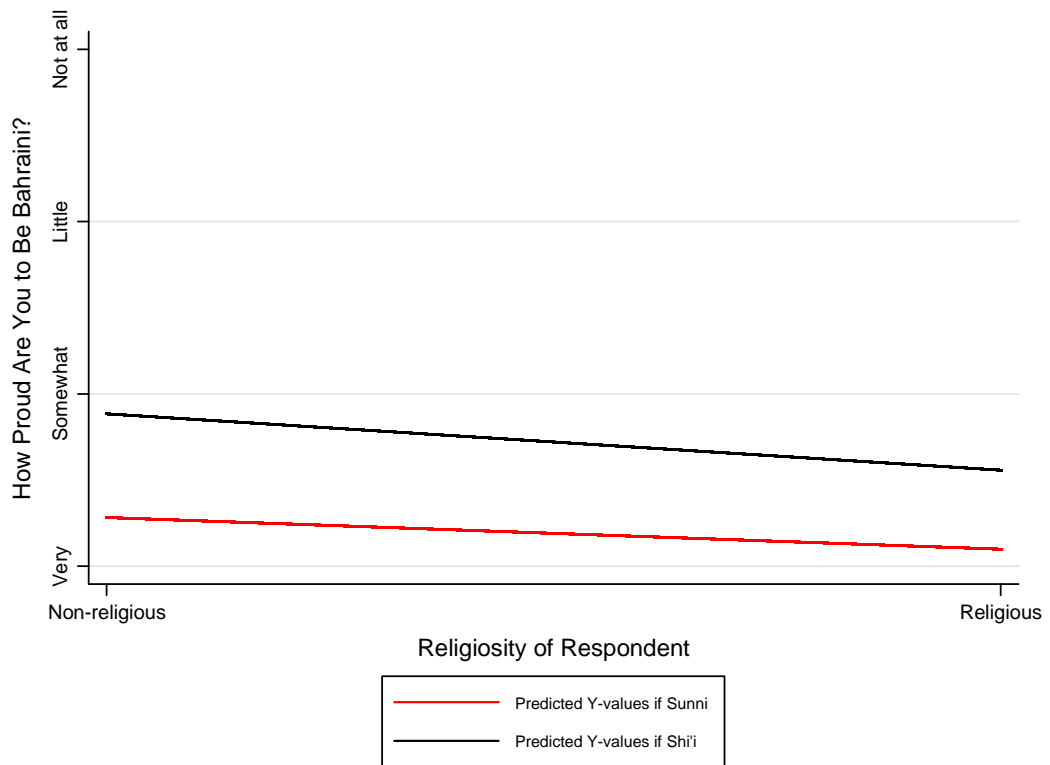
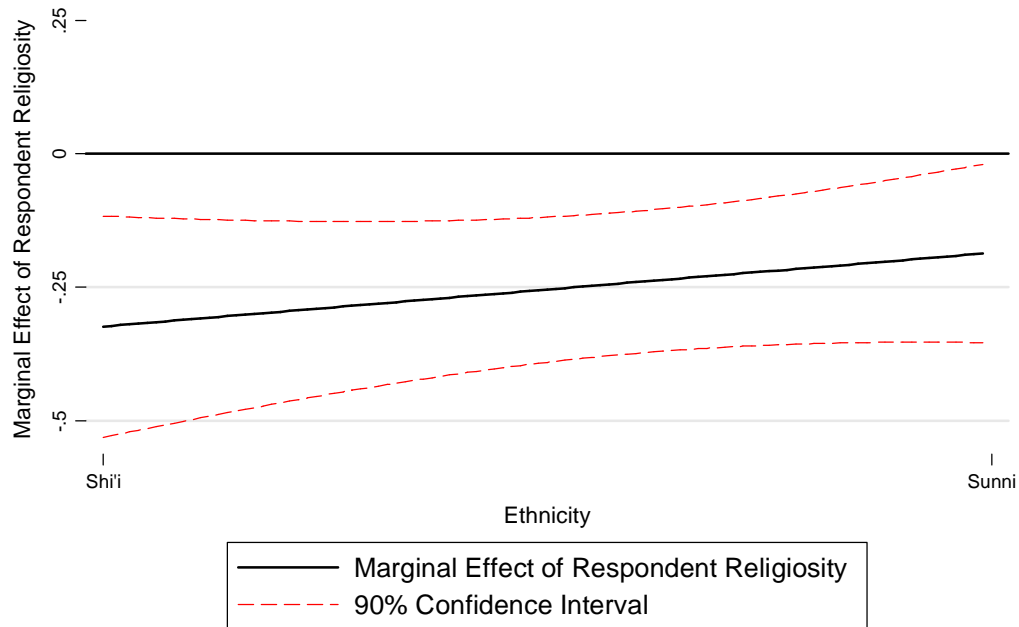


FIGURE 5.72. *Marginal Effect of Religiosity, by Ethnicity*



answer. To state the matter still differently, as religiosity increases, it begins to eclipse ethnic group membership as the most substantively-significant determinant of PRIDE, a result we had not yet even come close to witnessing in our analyses of political opinion heretofore. Among Bahraini Sunna, for instance, the marginal effect of RELIGIOSITY as given by FIGURE 5.72 is an estimated  $-0.185$ , whereas that of ETHNICITY is an estimated  $-0.423$  among the non-religious and just  $-0.284$  among the religious. When we weight the latter two effects by the proportion of religious people in the sample, we arrive at an estimate of the substantive impact of ETHNICITY that is  $(-0.423 \times 33.2\%) + (-0.284 \times 66.8\%) = -0.330$ . The substantive influence of RELIGIOSITY on national pride among Sunnis, then, is a little more than one-half the magnitude of ethnic group membership. While thus still overshadowed by the latter effect, the influence here of RELIGIOSITY relative to that of ETHNICITY is the strongest of any seen so far. It is the strongest, that is, until we consider its impact on PRIDE among Shi'a, which according to FIGURE 5.72 is an estimated  $-0.324$ , or a mere 0.006 units shy of the weighted effect of ETHNICITY. Among Shi'i respondents, therefore, ethnic membership and personal religiosity play near-equivalent roles in determining the amount of pride one feels for being a Bahraini, an outcome that is at



once unprecedented in our analysis thus far of political opinion in Bahrain and also a useful foreshadowing of the anticipated results to come.

For we turn now in this chapter's final section to examine our theoretical predictions about the determinants of political action, over and above political opinion, in Bahrain, these contained in the two hypotheses that remain to be tested: *Hypothesis 2.1<sub>A</sub>* and *2.2<sub>C</sub>*. The latter, one will remember, predict respectively that *Sunni ethnicity is associated with less political action*; and that *Among Sunnis as well as Shi'is, the strength of ethnic identity [i.e., religiosity] is positively associated with political action*. The first assertion is straightforward enough; but the second speaks directly to our investigation just completed: as with national pride, which if not a political action per se is perhaps closer to one than to an opinion, we anticipate that the effect of individual religiosity no longer operates in conflicting directions on Sunnis and Shi'is but pushes members of groups forward simultaneously. We have seen how religiosity augments anti-government opinion among Shi'a at the same time that it buoys pro-government opinion among Sunna. When we reached the dependent variable PRIDE, however, its effect diverged from the norm, reinforcing nationalist feeling among Sunni and Shi'i alike. Why?—because as opinion is countered with opposite opinion, as information with misinformation, so action is not fought with inaction but with countervailing action, with reaction. To head off a Shi'a takeover of parliament, to “counter probable harm,” our oft-quoted al-Ma'āwḍah implored Bahrain's Sunnis not to boycott the election but to vote in turn for Sunni candidates. In like fashion, the more religious a respondent—the stronger a Bahraini's ethnic identity—the more likely he is to engage in political action or reaction, in the first case (as among Shi'i opponents) vis-à-vis the state, in the second (among ordinary Sunnis) vis-à-vis the rival faction itself. Yet since our measures of political action cannot distinguish between these two types, we find that personal religiosity demonstrates a similar mobilizing effect among both Sunni and Shi'i respondents. And indeed were this not to be the case, if our RELIGIOSITY variable were found to continue to operate in the manner encountered already, encouraging political action among Shi'a while stifling it among Sunnis owing to the latter's political deference, out of a desire to remain apolitical, then our results will have contradicted our theory. In sum, we have argued that it is not the Shi'a only who defy *rentier* assumptions in Bahrain but Sunnis as well, that the presumed bargain of wealth-for-political quietude fails not simply due to the unique agitation of the former, but also to the reaction of the latter. It is now time to test these claims.

Before moving on, however, we may spend a moment to summarize the (admittedly extensive) results of this section in order to see how far, taken together, they bear out the relevant predictions of our *Hypotheses 2.1* and *2.2*. These are: that *Ethnic affiliation is equally significant as, or more significant than, economic well-being in predicting individual political opinion ... in Bahrain (Hypothesis 2.1)*; where *Sunni ethnicity is associated with more positive political opinion (2.1<sub>b</sub>)*; and further that *The strength of ethnic identity [religiosity] is a significant predictor of individual political opinion ... in Bahrain (2.2)*; where *Among Shi'is, stronger ethnic identity is associated with more negative political opinion (2.2<sub>a</sub>)*, while *Among Sunnis, stronger ethnic identity is associated with more positive political opinion (2.2<sub>b</sub>)*. Now, we have already outlined our specific model predictions, including the expected sign and significance of each independent variable, in TABLE 5.9 at the outset. Though useful as a prelude to estimation, however, as a summary of conclusions this presentation is less so, not least as it includes all interaction terms and control variables, in whose effects we have limited direct interest. Most helpful in evaluating the performance of our several theoretical predictions, then, will be a comparison of the substantive effects of our four independent variables of interest—ETHNICITY, RELIGIOSITY, ECONOMY, and DIFFETHNIC—across the seven dependent variables we examined. Doing so gives us TABLE 5.73 below, a summary of the determinants of political opinion in Bahrain.

So far we have expressed the marginal effects of our variables of interest primarily in absolute terms: as “a 1-response category change” in some dependent variable, “a 0.75-unit decrease,” and so on. And for the basic purpose of comparing the relative effects on the same dependent variable of, say, RELIGIOSITY and ECONOMY, this method is instructive. Now that we wish to compare these effects across differently-scaled dependent variables, however, some with four response categories and some with ten, we require a new nomenclature. Thus the marginal effects of our four variables of interest are summarized below in terms of the percent change they produce in a given dependent variable. A marginal effect of  $-0.75$  for a question with response categories 1 through 4, for instance, corresponds to a  $-0.75/3$  or 25% decrease across the entire 3-category range of the dependent variable; a marginal effect of 1.5 for a dependent variable with 10 response categories to a  $1.5/9$  or 16.7% increase.

This method works without alteration for the dichotomous RELIGIOSITY and DIFFETHNIC measures. In the case of ETHNICITY, on the other hand, because its marginal effect depends on an individual's religiosity it must first be weighted as above by the proportion of religious individuals in our sample (cf. the arithmetic of *supra*, 242 and note *d* to FIGURE 5.73). We must

similarly adjust the marginal effect of our alternative “Are you religious or not?” RELIGIOSITY measure, which is trichotomous owing to a substantial number of “moderate” respondents. In order to maintain comparability with the dichotomous measure, therefore, we double the estimated marginal effect so that it measures the impact of a change from a “non-religious” person to a “religious” person, rather than to a “moderate” person. Finally, we must decide how to calculate the substantive impact of the ECONOMY variable, whose response categories range from “very good” to “very bad.” Here we diverge from the previous procedure, for if we took the analogous step and multiplied the estimated marginal effect by three—i.e., if we calculated the impact of a change from “very good” to “very bad” economy—the resulting effect would be unrealistically exaggerated, since the observed range of the ECONOMY variable is much more limited than that of RELIGIOSITY, where many are described as both religious and non-religious. Only 7 respondents, by contrast, reported that they had a “very bad” household economy; indeed, more than 67% of all respondents described their economy as “good.” To offer a more realistic measure of the substantive impact of ECONOMY, then, we multiply its marginal effect by  $\pm 1$  standard deviation of its observed mean of 2.08, which gives us  $2 \times 0.606 = 1.212$ . In TABLE 5.73 below, then, the percent change in the dependent variable is calculated using the estimated marginal effect of ECONOMY multiplied by 1.212.

This introduction given, we are ready to analyze the overall substantive influences of our independent variables of interest on political opinion among ordinary Bahraini citizens. In the first place, we may immediately confirm *Hypothesis 2.1<sub>b</sub>* that Sunni ethnicity is positively (or, equally, that Shi‘i ethnicity is negatively) associated with more pro-government political opinion. We easily perceive from TABLE 5.73 the uniformly-enormous impact of ethnic group membership on respondents’ evaluations of the Bahraini government, wherein the positive effect of Sunni ethnicity ranges from a low (not including the unrelated dependent variable PRIDE) of 26.1% to a high of 60.3%. Even the *minimum* observed influence of ETHNICITY, then, still corresponds to a change in the associated dependent variable of more than a quarter of its entire range of possible responses. That there exists a substantial Sunni-Shi‘i discrepancy in Bahraini political opinion we can thus state without hesitation or qualification.

That “ethnic affiliation is equally significant as, or more significant than, economic well-being in predicting individual political opinion ... in Bahrain” (*Hypothesis 2.1*), we can verify with equal confidence on the basis of TABLE 5.73. We see that the substantive impact of the ECONOMY variable, where it is statistically-significant at all, is far from rivaling that of

TABLE 5.73. *The Determinants of Political Opinion among Bahrainis, Summary of Results*

Dependent Variable (Opinion)	Impact of Independent Variables of Interest			
	Ethnicity <sup>c</sup> (Shi'i   Sunni)	Religiosity (Increasing)	Economy (Worsening)	Interviewer (Inter-ethnic)
POLITICAL SITUATION	Pro (28.6% <sup>d</sup> )	Anti   Pro <sup>a</sup> (7.1%   8.2%)	Anti   Anti (9.8%   9.6%)	Pro   none (17.3%)
INFLUENCE	Pro (26.1%)	Anti <sup>ab</sup>   Pro <sup>a</sup> (3.6%   10.6%)	Anti   Anti (5.7%   14.1%)	Pro   Anti <sup>b</sup> (19.1%   6.9%)
ELECTIONS	Pro (35.2%)	Anti <sup>b</sup>   Pro <sup>a</sup> (7.7%   10.1%)	none   none	Pro   Anti (34.8%   16.3%)
HUMAN RIGHTS	Pro (36.5%)	Anti <sup>ab</sup>   Pro <sup>ab</sup> (5.6%   8.5%)	Anti   none (8.7%)	Pro   Anti (16.6%   19.0%)
PRIME MINISTER	Pro (60.3%)	Anti   Pro (10.0%   12.0%)	none   none	Pro   Anti (42.9%   11.6%)
GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE	Pro (43.5%)	Anti   Pro (11.1%   6.5%)	Anti   none (7.4%)	Pro   none (18.9%)
PRIDE	More (10.9%)	More   More (10.8%   6.2%)	none   Less (7.7%)	none   none

<sup>a</sup> Based on the alternative ("Are you religious or not?") RELIGIOSITY measure

<sup>b</sup> Coefficient has the expected sign and is significant in magnitude, but its related *p*-value falls slightly outside the *p* < 0.100 threshold of significance

<sup>c</sup> Recall that since our ETHNICITY variable is coded 1 for Sunnis, the effect of ethnic group membership is always expressed as the effect of a respondent's being a Sunni rather than a Shi'i. This choice is arbitrary of course, and to express the effect in terms of Shi'i ethnicity one merely has to reverse the sign of the coefficient.

<sup>d</sup> The exact formula used to calculate these percentages is:  $(((\text{marginal effect of ETHNICITY when RELIGIOSITY} = 0) \times (1 - \text{mean of RELIGIOSITY})) + ((\text{effect of ETHNICITY when RELIGIOSITY} = 1) \times (\text{mean of RELIGIOSITY}))) / (\text{range of dependent variable})$ .

ethnic group membership. On the contrary, its largest substantive influence, at 14.1% in the case of Sunnis' opinion of the overall influence of government policy on their lives, still makes barely one-half the impact here of ETHNICITY. More problematic than its magnitude, however, is its inconsistency as a predictor of political opinion whatsoever. Even with our relatively relaxed use of 90% as well as 95% confidence intervals to gauge the statistical significance of marginal effects, nevertheless the ECONOMY variable was seen to be a significant predictor in only four of our six models of political opinion, and only twice among Sunni ethnics.

In fact, then, a much better match for the substantive influence of ethnic membership on Bahraini political opinion is the additional, augmenting effect of individual religiousness,

described elsewhere as the strength of ethnic identity. A proxy for the latter, our measure of RELIGIOSITY is not only a more consistent predictor of Bahrainis' opinions than ECONOMY, but since it operates in opposite directions on Sunni and Shi'i respondents its aggregate divisive impact is much more considerable. In support of *Hypotheses 2.2<sub>A</sub>* and *2.2<sub>B</sub>*, TABLE 5.73 shows that in each of our six models of political opinion the effect of increased RELIGIOSITY is to produce more anti-government opinion among Shi'a at the same time that it educes more pro-government opinion among Bahraini Sunna. Although the ethnic group-specific impact of ECONOMY does surpass that of RELIGIOSITY in all but one of the cases in which the former is a significant predictor of opinion (i.e., except in the model of GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE), still these two sets of Sunni- and Shi'i-conditional effects are quite comparable and, in any event, the overall substantive impact of RELIGIOSITY remains greater inasmuch as it works only to further polarize political positions already entrenched utterly along ethnic lines.

Of all the results summarized in TABLE 5.73, therefore, certainly the most surprising is this relatively weak and intermittent role of economic well-being in determining Bahrainis', and especially Sunni Bahrainis', opinions. To be sure, if one were forced to choose one group for whom economic satisfaction would surely influence opinion towards the government, it would be the latter. If any measure of a wealth-for-acquiesce bargain exists in Bahrain, that is, certainly it must involve the group closest ethno-religiously and, as we have demonstrated here, politically, to the country's leaders. Yet such seems not to be the case. Only two political opinions investigated—Bahrainis' evaluations of the country's overall political situation and of the overall influence of government policy on their lives—were related to economic satisfaction among Sunni respondents. The remainder—their evaluations of the legitimacy of the 2006 parliamentary elections; of the degree of respect for human rights in Bahrain; of their trust in the prime minister; and of overall government performance—were unaffected, whereas among Shi'a ECONOMY influenced both HUMAN RIGHTS and GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE.

What is more, we have evidence from our Sunni- and Shi'i-exclusive results that, quite apart from the question of the role of economy, our empirical model of political opinion in Bahrain preformed much better more generally in our two Shi'i subsamples than it did in the Sunni. Looking back, we see that the respective  $R^2$  statistics for our two ethnicity-segregated estimations of PRIME MINISTER and GOVERNMENT SATISFACTION differ dramatically, at 0.336 and 0.237, respectively, for the Shi'a sample, compared to just 0.138 and 0.0675 for the Sunni. Our two models of Shi'a opinion, that is, accounted for around 34% and 24% of the total variation

in their respective survey responses, while the Sunni-only models could explain but 14% and 7%, respectively. While some of this difference may be attributable to the somewhat larger sample sizes of our Shi'a-exclusive models, still one must conclude that, overall, beyond the obvious impact of ethnicity itself we have a much more difficult time explaining the political opinions of ordinary Bahraini Sunnis than we do those of Shi'is.

This more general result may help elucidate our more specific finding about the lack of influence of household economy on Sunni political opinion: it might be that the ethnic effect among Sunnis simply tends to drown out the impact of other variables; that Sunnis as a class of citizen represent for the state a captive ethnic constituency that is less responsive to competing factors that might otherwise shape political opinion, for example as we observe among Shi'is. One might then ask why Bahraini Shi'a, among whom the effect of ethnicity operates equally strongly, are not then similarly immune to the influence of other variables. This question we cannot answer but with speculation. Yet we do have some window into the first from our interviews with (now former) Sunni parliamentarians. Three in particular offer helpful insights: al-Aṣālah's ʿĪsā Abū al-Faṭḥ and ʿAlī Aḥmad, and Sāmy Qambar from al-Manbar al-Islāmī. When asked about the causes of Shi'a frustration in Bahrain, all three retort that, in fact, it is the Sunnis who have equal or greater cause for complaint. "[The Shi'a] villages used to be not cared for and were very backward and under-developed," notes ʿAlī Aḥmad. "Now a majority of the [government's] projects—in housing, for example—they are targeted toward the village areas." Sāmy Qambar makes the same observation, saying,

There is an area [in my district] of al-Rifāʿ known as "Lebanon" that is one of the poorest regions of Bahrain. So it not simply that the Shi'a are poor and Sunna rich. The challenge of poverty and socio-economic inequality [in Bahrain] is not just a Shi'a issue or an issue based on religious differences. We [al-Manbar al-Islāmī] are working in the parliament to the raise the quality of life of these people as a whole—not just Sunnis or just Shi'a.

The most emphatic response, however, came as usual from ʿĪsā Abū al-Faṭḥ. "Look," he began,

the Shi'a need to understand that none of the GCC governments pay attention to their publics—it's not just them who are ignored. Even for us Sunnis—who represents us in the government? The Shi'a—at least they have [Muḥammad ʿAlī bin Mansūr] al-Sitrī, who is a special advisor to the King [for legislative affairs]; they also have several [Shi'i] ministers. Who do the Sunnis have? We are the ones suffering—more than them.

This interpretation, in fact, is not uncommon among Sunni and Shi'i alike. It follows an oft-heard Bahraini view that positions the royal family, and by extension the government, not as the unwavering benefactor of Sunnis but as the final arbiter—if not an entirely neutral one—of the island's intrinsic social dispute. The Āl Khalifa are in this way seen as representing a “third ethnicity,” which in fact they are insofar as they and the other tribal families alone follow the Mālikī tradition of Islamic jurisprudence. Even Khuri, writing in 1980 of Bahrain's first-ever parliamentary elections nearly a decade before, noted that

Like all other ruling families in the Gulf and Arabia, the Al-Khalifa of Bahrain consider government a legitimate right that they earned historically by defending the island against external aggression—a “right” that must not be subjected to “the fluctuating, controversial moods of public opinion,” as one Al-Khalifa sheikh put it. Members of the ruling family were not permitted to run for election because they were aloof from politics, above the National Assembly and the appeal to public opinion (225).

Much more recently, Bahrain's Justice Minister Khālid bin 'Alī Āl Khalifa described the role in similar terms, telling *The Economist* during pre-election turmoil in 2010 that the family positions itself as “‘a buffer zone’ between Sunni and Shia.”<sup>45</sup>

Hence, when 'Īsā Abū al-Faṭḥ laments that “we Sunnis” have no one in the government (i.e., in the executive branch) to represent “us,” he is not being disingenuous but simply excludes as a matter of course the members of Āl Khalifa and many other political elites from among the allied families, who, while obviously Sunni, are above all of the ruling, tribal class, assumed to represent ordinary Sunnis no more than does Muḥammad al-Sitrī. While this is not to endorse his claim that the Sunnis “are the ones suffering,” Abū al-Faṭḥ's argument is informative to the extent that it provides a possible explanation for our empirical observations. Ordinary Sunni Bahrainis, he says in essence, are poorly-repaid for the allegiance they show the Āl Khalifa: disproportionately supportive of the government, they lose out on the majority of its benefaction to the very side that opposes it. This follows of course not from malice but from the dictates of political expediency, which say that when resources are scarce, better to spend them where they are likely to matter most. If Sunnis can be expected to remain supportive of the status quo, whether due to natural disposition, out of ethnic affinity, or so as not to give political ground to their rivals, why then offer them benefits that might be used

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in “Bahrain's pre-election jitters. Backward steps: A Gulf monarchy's experiment in controlled democracy is looking shaky,” 2010, *The Economist*, October 14. Available at: <<http://www.economist.com/node/17254432>>.

to win additional friends from among today's enemies? When one is the Democratic nominee for president, in other words, what use spending campaign dollars in New York?

The larger question moving forward, however, is whether this relative immunity to the effects of economic well-being among Sunnis continues into the realm of political action. It is one thing for individuals to offer, when asked, more positive government opinion despite being dissatisfied economically; yet it is another to abstain from taking some action that may help alleviate this frustration out of political deference. That ethno-religious competition drives Sunnis to tend to support the Bahraini government irrespective of economic station, in other words, does not preclude their acting politically on the basis of economy. On the contrary, the complaints of the three parliamentarians summarized above seem to give the opposite indication: that ordinary Sunnis, while certainly happy to trade the leadership of al-Wifāq or al-Ḥaqq for that of the Āl Khalīfa, nonetheless have grievances of their own for which they are prepared to fight politically. Sāmy Qambar even describes his role and that of his party in these terms when he says, "We are working in the parliament to the raise the quality of life of [the] people as a whole—not just Sunnis or just Shi'a." In sum, despite finding that material well-being is an inconsistent and relatively weak predictor of Sunni political opinion in Bahrain, we should not now assume that its impact is equally marginal in the field of political action.

A final result to underscore before proceeding is that of the influence of inter-ethnic interviewing on respondents' answers to survey questions. On this little more need be said: TABLE 5.73 aptly summarizes the decisive impact of the DIFFETHNIC variable among Shi'is and Sunnis, the influence of which is surpassed only by that of ETHNICITY itself. Among the former group it works in each of the six models to produce more Sunni-like, more pro-government opinion, while the latter group it makes more anti-government, more Shi'a-like in four of the six cases. In these four models, moreover, the cumulative effect of an inter-ethnic interview approaches or exceeds that even of ethnic group membership, turning reality on its head to make the Shi'a the relative champions of the Bahraini regime, the Sunnis now its detractors. Two lessons, then, have we learned. The first, corresponding to our theoretical argument, is that the political conflict between Sunni and Shi'i in Bahrain bleeds clearly into the social realm, altering and one must say disrupting basic inter-personal relations such that members of the two groups are generally unwilling to reveal their true political positions to one another, each misrepresenting himself so as to appear more in step with the views he ascribes, on the



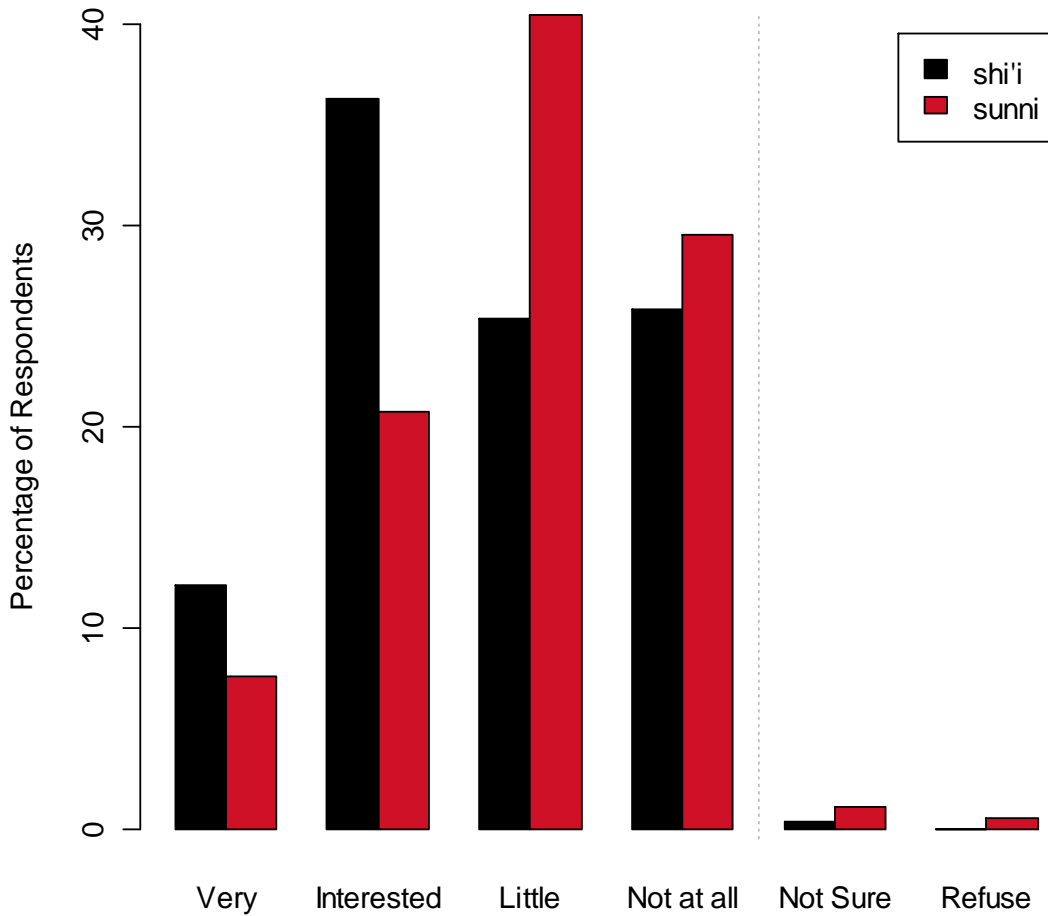
basis of ethnicity, to the other. Secondly, this finding in the Bahraini context would seem to caution care elsewhere in the selection and deployment of field interviewers, especially in locations where rival populations are clearly segregated and where an interviewer's preferred survey responses may be reasonably inferred from ethnic, linguistic, or other proxies. While such concerns are not unknown to survey research, still this problem's particular manifestation in societies marked by Sunni-Shi'i division should be well heeded by those conducting such work in the Arab and Islamic world. Presently, few if any other extant mass attitude studies administered in the Middle East and North Africa—including those of the World Values Survey, the Arab Barometer, and Inglehart, Moaddel, and Tessler's (2006A; 2006B; 2008A; 2008B) surveys of Iraq—control or even discuss the relevant characteristics of field interviewers, ethnicity or otherwise, and thus it is impossible to know whether the transformative effect we observe here in Bahrain operates elsewhere, and with what substantive consequences.

### **The Bases of Political Action in Bahrain**

With such an extended preface, our analysis of political action in Bahrain we may begin with few words of introduction. Our familiar interactive model and mode of analysis remain the same, and we add here only one new theoretical prediction: *Hypothesis 2.2<sub>c</sub>*, which states that “Among Sunnis as well as Shi'is, the strength of ethnic identity is positively associated with political action.” If it would thus seem like much ado to embark on a whole new investigation simply for the sake of testing one hypothesis, recall that the latter is crucial as it can confirm that ethnic-based political mobilization in Bahrain is not a phenomenon driven wholly by the Shi'a but rather entails a countervailing force composed of ordinary Sunni citizens aimed at preventing their rivals from gaining political power and influence. So should members of both groups, and here is *Hypothesis 2.2<sub>c</sub>*, exhibit more political activity and interest as their ethnic identification, their religiosity increases: for the Shi'a, this is directed against the state; for Sunnis, over against the Shi'a—in order, to say it once more, “to counter probable harm.”

The Bahrain survey contains at least five questions that may be used to measure the extent of respondents' involvement in politics. Indirect indicators include: (1) one's reported interest in politics; and (2) the extent to which one follows local political news. More direct indicators are: whether a respondent (3) has ever signed a petition or attended a political meeting; (4) has ever taken part in a demonstration; or (5) voted in the 2006 parliamentary election. The first, which we call INTEREST, corresponds to the question, “In general, what is

FIGURE 5.74. Degree of Interest in Politics, by Ethnicity



the extent of your interest in politics?”<sup>46</sup> We recognize in FIGURE 5.74 the familiar pattern of significant Sunni-Shi'i discrepancy in response. A combined 48% of Shi'a report being “very interested” or “interested” in politics, compared to just 28% of Sunnis. As always, however, we cannot be sure of this apparent relationship between ethnicity and political interest until we estimate our multivariate model and then the marginal effect of ethnicity.

The results of this model estimation we find below in TABLE 5.75, where the small coefficient and large standard error on the ETHNICITY variable seem to signify on the contrary that ethnic group membership has no independent effect on respondents' reported levels of political interest. In fact, apart from our control variables few indicators in the standard model

<sup>46</sup> The Arabic is:

”بصفة عامة، ما مدى اهتمامك بالسياسة؟“

TABLE 5.75. *The Determinants of Individual Political Interest in Bahrain, estimated three ways*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard (OLS)			Sunnis Only			Shi'is Only		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>t</i>
ETHNICITY	-0.0757	0.353	0.830	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
DIFFETHNIC	0.0516	0.143	0.718	-0.0939	0.227	0.680	0.0359	0.145	0.804
DIFFETH × ETH	-0.137	0.264	0.605	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
AGE	0.00565	0.00371	0.129	0.00661	0.00526	0.210	0.00425	0.00528	0.422
FEMALE	0.168	0.0970	0.084	0.0489	0.141	0.729	0.293	0.133	0.028
EDUCATION	-0.138	0.0377	0.000	-0.0855	0.0501	0.090	-0.202	0.057	0.001
ECONOMY	-0.100	0.115	0.385	0.0593	0.11	0.600	-0.123	0.116	0.287
ECON × ETH	0.132	0.157	0.399	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
RELIGIOSITY	-0.232	0.141	0.101	-0.108	0.155	0.487	-0.259	0.142	0.069
RELIG × ETH	0.0664	0.206	0.748	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
Constant	3.421	0.382	0.000	3.026	0.475	0.000	3.810	0.498	0.000
<i>N</i>	389			166			223		
Prob. > <i>F</i>	0.0000			0.1482			0.0001		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.0918			0.0506			0.1014		

Note: All three models report robust standard errors

seem to be related to INTEREST. This is especially true in the case of the Sunni-only model, where the *p*-value on the *F* test statistic of 0.1482 means that we cannot even comfortably reject the null hypothesis that each of our coefficients is 0—that is, that all of our independent variables are statistically unrelated to political interest. Still, we do see that education level is a strong, positive predictor at least among Shi'a and probably also among Sunnis, and that female gender is negatively related to political interest among Shi'a.

As for the effects of our independent variables of interest, however—including that of ETHNICITY—we can as usual say nothing on the basis of this raw regression output. Instead,

FIGURE 5.76. Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity

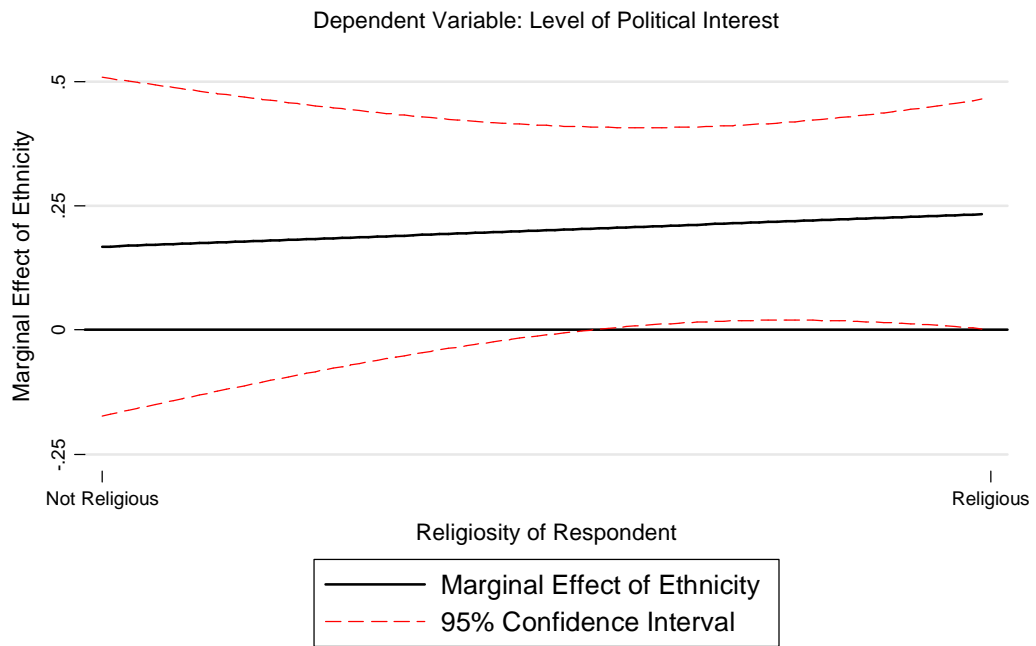


FIGURE 5.77. Marginal Effect of Religiosity, by Ethnicity

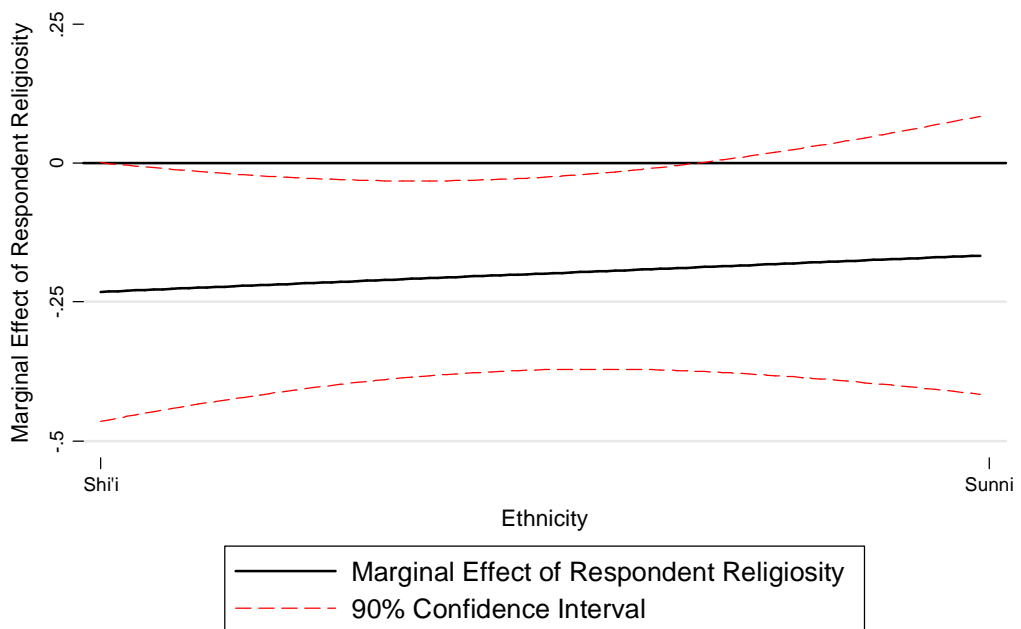


FIGURE 5.78. *Marginal Effects of ECONOMY and DIFFETHNIC*

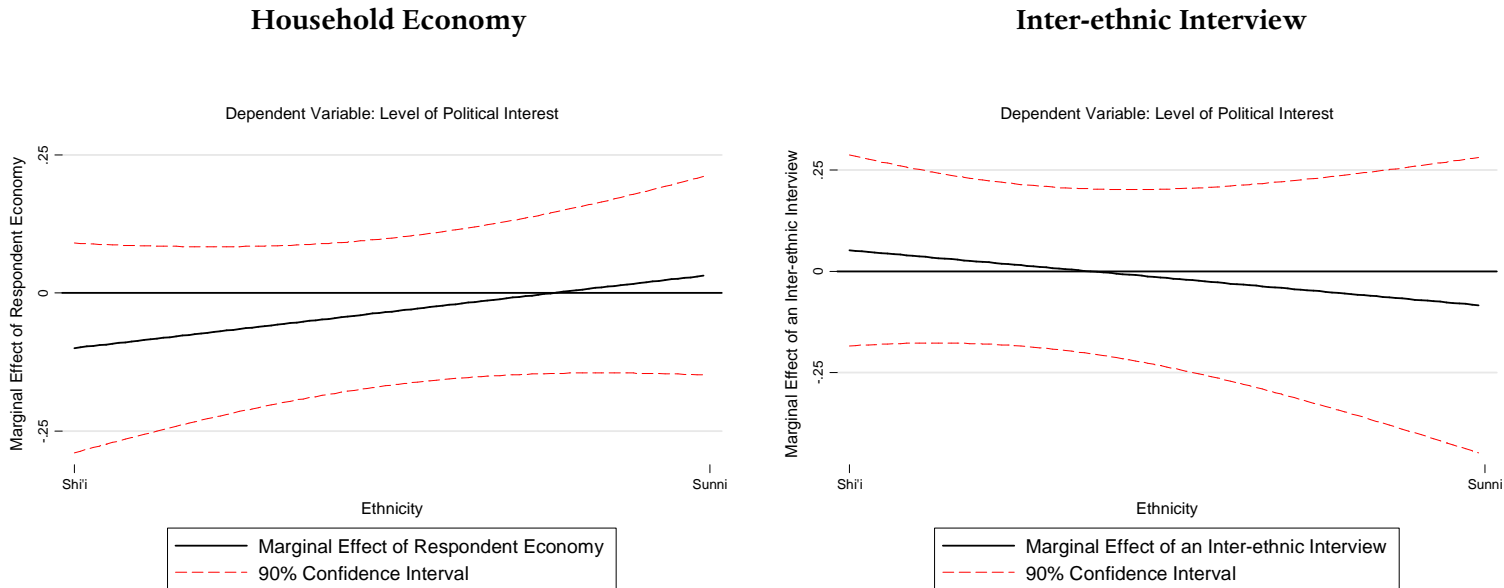
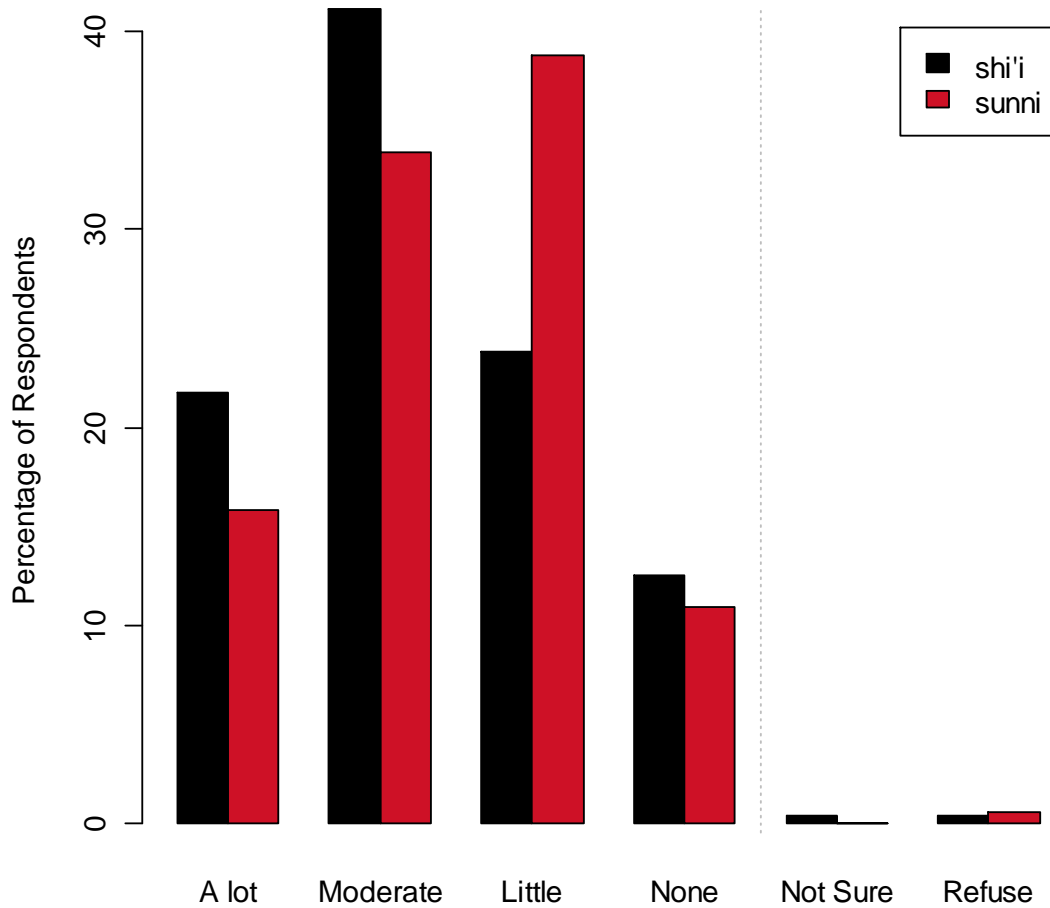


FIGURE 5.76 shows the marginal effect of Sunni ethnicity as respondent religiosity increases from 0 to 1. We see that, in contrast to the indications of our raw regression output, ethnic group membership is indeed a statistically-significant determinant of political interest among Bahrainis, but, as indicated by the two bands of the 95% confidence interval, only among religious Bahrainis. For the latter, being a Sunni rather than a Shi'i is associated with less interest in politics to the extent of about 0.23 units, or a change of only about 8% across the entire 3-unit range of the dependent variable. If still of some statistical significance, therefore, the substantive impact of ethnicity is here not nearly so decisive as in our preceding models of political opinion. Unlike their views *about* politics, it seems that Bahrainis' interest *in* politics is relatively unaffected by whether one is a Sunni or a Shi'i.

Yet more interesting for our purposes is the influence of religiosity among Shi'is and Sunnis, which is charted above in FIGURE 5.77. Here we see that the marginal effect of the RELIGIOSITY variable on INTEREST, as on PRIDE before, does indeed operate in the same direction on Sunni and Shi'i alike: being a religious person is associated with higher levels of political interest among members of both ethnic groups. Among Shi'a, this effect is an estimated  $-0.23$ , or about on par with that of ETHNICITY itself; among Sunnis, it is a relatively weaker (both in

FIGURE 5.79. *Following of Local Political News, by Ethnicity*



magnitude and in robustness of the estimate)  $-0.17$ . Thus, though preliminary and perhaps leaving something to be desired in terms of statistical confidence, this initial result does lend early support to our *Hypothesis 2.2<sub>c</sub>* about the sources of political action in Bahrain, and in turn for our claim that ordinary Shi'is as well as Sunnis are drawn to politics on a common basis.

As for our usual inquiry about the relative influence of religiosity compared to that of household economy, this we may compute easily—or, rather, we need not compute it at all, for as we see from the two graphs of FIGURE 5.78 above, neither a respondent's household economy nor inter-ethnic interviewing has any impact on a respondent's political interest, Sunni or Shi'i. The only factors that seem to influence individual political interest in Bahrain are the familiar culprits: ethnic group membership and religiosity.

Our second measure of political interest (and indirect measure of political action) in Bahrain is the extent to which a respondent reports following local political news.<sup>47</sup> As evident from FIGURE 5.79 above, the pattern of Sunni and Shi'i responses seems to resemble that just investigated: on the whole, Shi'is report greater following of local political news, though the between-ethnic difference is not so manifest as it was previously in the case of Bahrainis' political opinions. A combined 50% of Sunnis say they follow political news about Bahrain "to a great extent" (16%) or "to a moderate extent" (34%), compared to a combined 63% of Shi'a (at 22% and 41%, respectively). Whether this discrepancy still exists after controlling for our several independent variables, however, remains to be seen.

In fact, when we estimate our model of NEWS we find that the results, reported below in TABLE 5.80, continue to mirror almost exactly those of our preceding analysis of political interest. Once more the only control variables related to one's following of local political news are gender and education, and these only within the Shi'a sub-sample. Also as before, with the exception of RELIGIOSITY our independent variables of interest are generally poor predictors of NEWS, especially among Sunnis. Indeed, as indicated by the *p*-value of 0.483 on the *F* test statistic reported for the Sunni-only model, the cumulative effect of our predictors of NEWS among Sunnis is statistically-indistinguishable from 0. Our entire Sunni-only model, in other words, is statistically-insignificant.<sup>48</sup>

When we proceed further to estimate the marginal effects of ETHNICITY, RELIGIOSITY, ECONOMY, and DIFFETHNIC, the similarities between our models of INTEREST and NEWS continue. First, ethnic group membership is a significant determinant of NEWS again only for respondents who are religious, as per FIGURE 5.81, and its estimated effect of 0.19 among the latter group is very similar to the 0.23 estimate obtained in our model of political interest. Secondly and of greater substantive importance, the marginal effect of RELIGIOSITY as given by FIGURE 5.83 operates once more in the same direction upon both Sunni and Shi'i respondents. This effect is illustrated most clearly in FIGURE 5.82, which plots the effect of RELIGIOSITY on predicted political news following among Sunnis and Shi'is. Rather than diverge from one another as in all our previous plots of predicted political opinions, here the Sunni and Shi'i lines slope in the same direction toward increased following of local political news. Though the magnitude

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<sup>47</sup> The Arabic question reads the same:

“إلى أي مدى تتابع الأخبار السياسية في البحرين؟”

<sup>48</sup> Note that this does not preclude the possibility that our independent variables of interest are statistically-significant predictors of NEWS among Sunnis when we estimate them from the combined interactive model.

TABLE 5.80. *The Determinants of Local Political News Following in Bahrain, estimated three ways*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard (OLS)			Sunnis Only			Shi'is Only		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>
ETHNICITY	0.113	0.347	0.744	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
DIFFETHNIC	-0.118	0.141	0.404	-0.0721	0.212	0.735	-0.142	0.148	0.339
DIFFETH × ETH	0.0706	0.248	0.776	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
AGE	-0.00295	0.00371	0.427	-0.00974	0.00526	0.066	0.00234	0.00498	0.639
FEMALE	0.0667	0.0983	0.498	-0.0817	0.148	0.581	0.203	0.130	0.120
EDUCATION	-0.108	0.0400	0.007	-0.0599	0.0526	0.256	-0.175	0.0597	0.004
ECONOMY	-0.00637	0.0931	0.945	-0.0257	0.105	0.808	-0.0369	0.0933	0.693
ECON × ETH	-0.0727	0.135	0.589	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
RELIGIOSITY	-0.446	0.139	0.001	-0.171	0.156	0.275	-0.467	0.139	0.001
RELIG × ETH	0.208	0.208	0.318	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
Constant	3.243	0.386	0.000	3.302	0.476	0.000	3.428	0.508	0.000
<i>N</i>	389			167			222		
Prob. > F	0.0154			0.4830			0.0004		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.0542			0.0306			0.0999		

Note: All three models report robust standard errors

of this effect is estimated to be about twice as great among Shi'is (at 0.43) as among Sunnis (0.23), still the upshot is the same: greater personal religiosity works among members of both ethnic groups to augment interest in politics, in line with our theoretical expectations. What is more, for the first time in our analysis the substantive impact of religiosity outweighs that of ethnic group membership for all respondents. When it comes to keeping up with local politics, more important than being a Sunni or a Shi'i is being a religious Sunni or a religious Shi'i.

The final commonality linking our models of INTEREST and NEWS is the utter lack of explanatory power exhibited by our remaining independent variables of interest, household



FIGURE 5.81. Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity

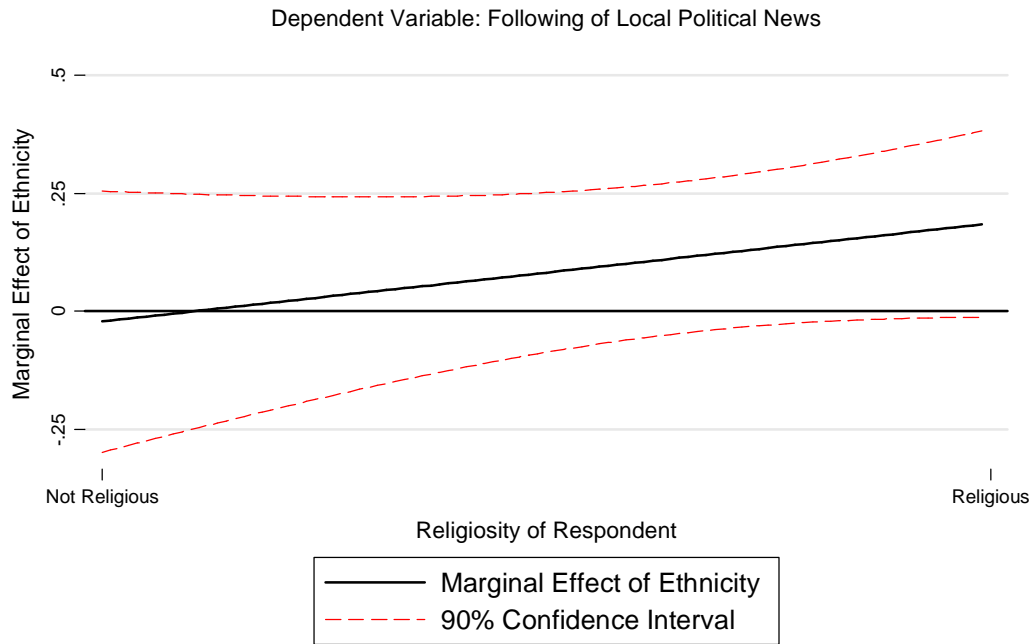


FIGURE 5.82. Predicted Levels of News Following, by Ethnicity and Religiosity

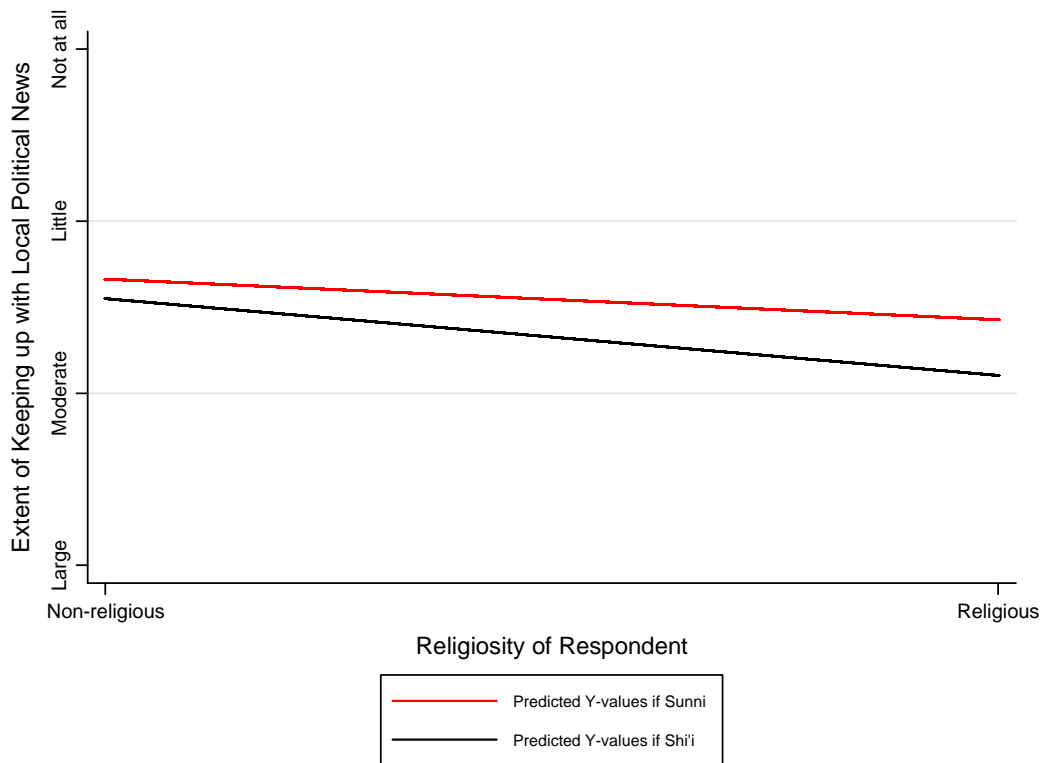


FIGURE 5.83. Marginal Effect of Religiosity on News Following, by Ethnicity

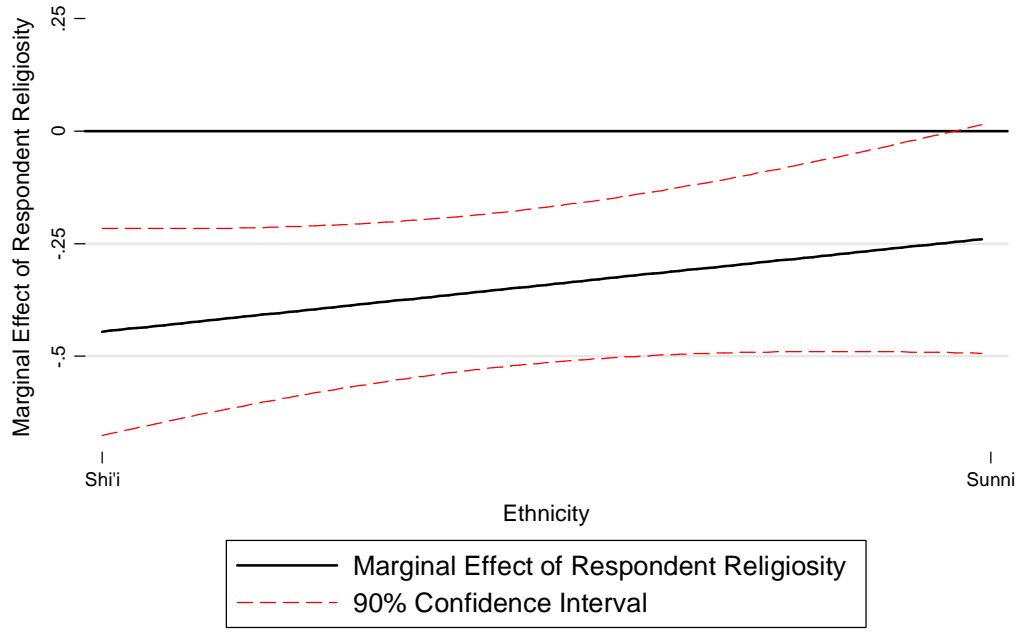
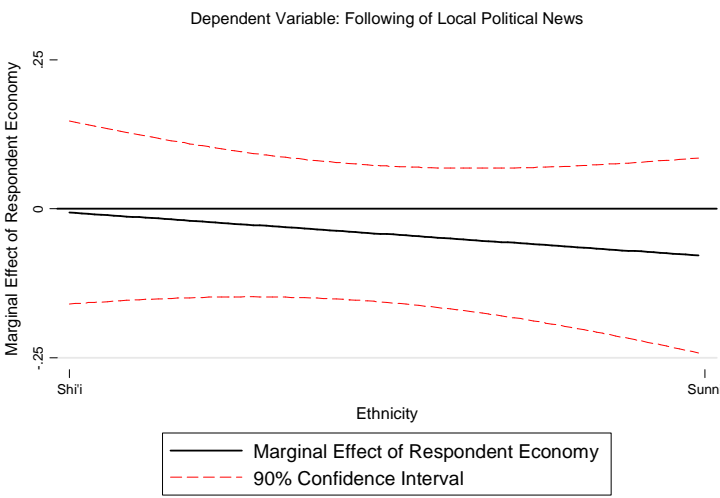
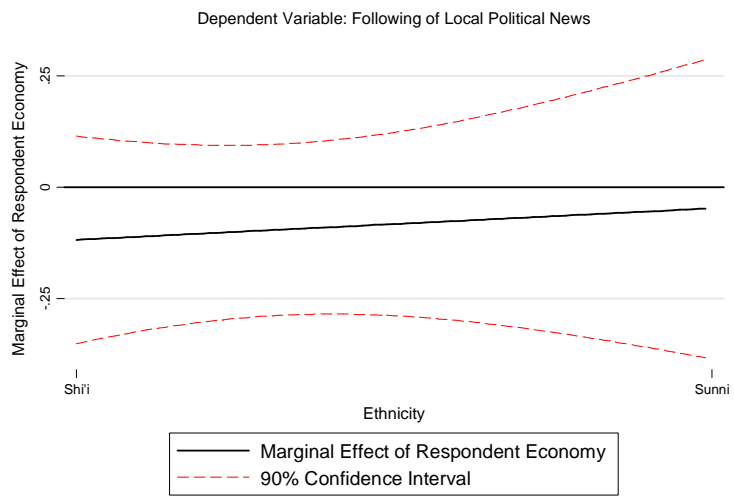


FIGURE 5.84. Marginal Effects of ECONOMY and DIFFETHNIC

Household Economy



Inter-ethnic Interview



economy and inter-ethnic interviewing, whose respective marginal effects are plotted above in FIGURE 5.84. The picture is self-explanatory: neither variable approaches statistical significance among respondents of either ethnicity, and in any case their estimated effects are negligible in substantive terms compared to the strong influences of ethnicity and especially religiosity.

Having thus seen and compared the determinants of the dependent variables NEWS and INTEREST, we cannot but conclude that these two questions measure one and the same quality in our Bahraini survey respondents, namely the extent of one's political engagement. Yet political engagement is still short of political action per se, and these two preliminary results, if seemingly in support of *Hypothesis 2.2c*, are not entirely satisfying. So we proceed now to assess the relative impacts of ethnicity and religiosity over against that of economic satisfaction on Bahrainis' political actions proper, namely on their propensity to participate in political meetings/petitioning, demonstrations, and elections. As each of these dependent variables is binary, our model design changes accordingly, and we employ probit regression to estimate the effects of our independent variables on the probability that a respondent partakes in the three political actions of interest here.

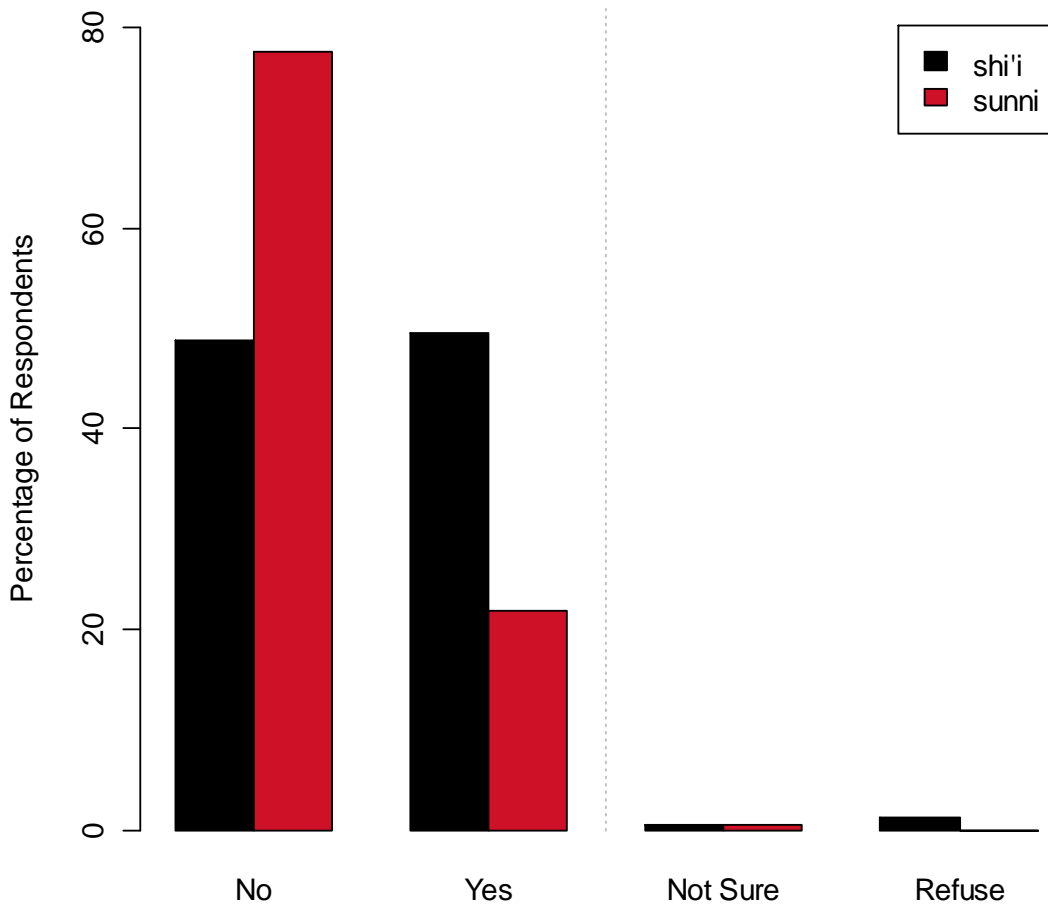
The first indicator to be considered is constructed on the basis of the survey question: "Here we have a group of activities that citizens sometimes engage in. In the previous three years, have you: attended a meeting to discuss some issue or to sign a petition?"<sup>49</sup> Respondents could answer that they participated "one time," "more than once," or "not at all." However, to allow more straightforward interpretation and to help correct for possible underreporting due to the question's sensitivity, the former two responses are here collapsed into a single category, producing a dichotomous indicator measuring participation versus non-participation. The distribution of this variable we find in FIGURE 5.85 below by ethnic group. Shi'i Bahrainis, we see, are split nearly equally between those who report having attended a meeting/signed a petition (49%) and those who have not (50%). Sunnis, by contrast, are much more likely to report having not participated (78%). It would seem, then, that ethnic group membership is strongly related to this first measure of political action.

When we look at the results of our probit model estimation in TABLE 5.86, we find further that several other of our independent variables, including all three control variables, are highly significant predictors of the MEETING/PETITION variable. In the first place, the single

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<sup>49</sup> In Arabic: "هنالك مجموعة من النشاطات التي عادة ما يقوم بها المواطنون، خلال السنوات الثلاث الماضية، هل قمت بالمشاركة في: 1. حضور لقاء أو اجتماع من أجل بحث موضوع ما أو التوقيع على عريضة؟"

FIGURE 5.85. Meeting Attendance / Petition Signing, by Ethnicity



most important determinant in substantive and statistical terms is the FEMALE control, and this among both Sunnis and Shi'is as we see from the disaggregated *Model 2* and *Model 3* results. More precisely, the predicted probability that a respondent reports attending a meeting or signing a petition drops from an estimated 48% among male Bahrainis to just 19% among females, keeping all other factors constant. Though this result is perhaps unsurprising given social realities in the Arab Gulf, still the extent of this gender effect is impressive nonetheless. Perhaps equally important is the influence of a respondent's age, with younger Bahrainis much more likely to report having taken part than older individuals. The predicted probability of participation for a 20 year-old respondent, for example, is 46%, compared to just 28% for a 50 year-old. If we consider only male respondents, moreover, the influence of

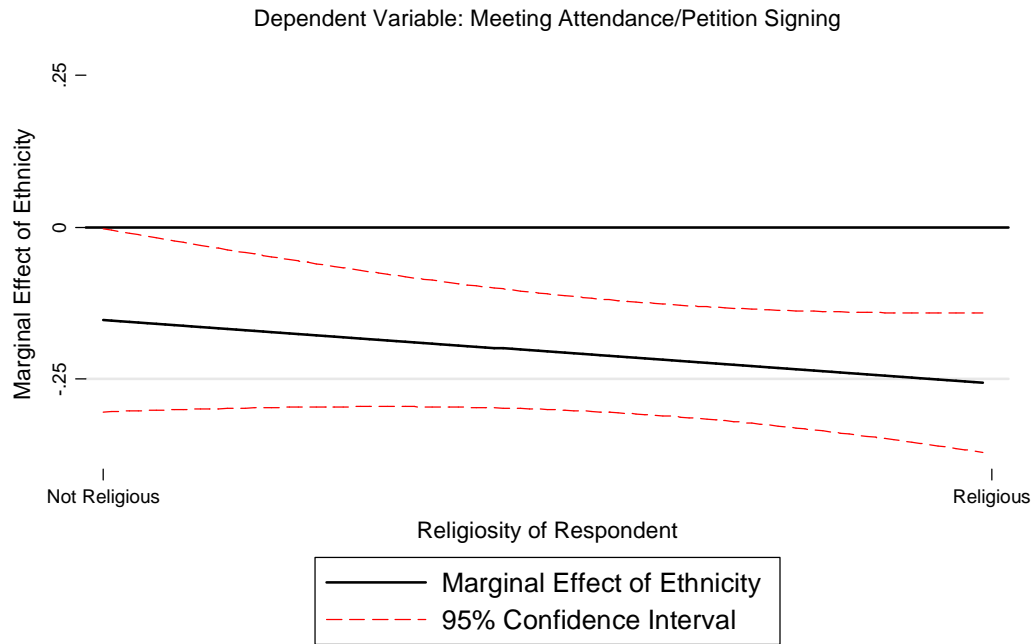
TABLE 5.86. *The Determinants of Meeting Attendance/Petition Signing in Bahrain, estimated three ways*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard (Probit)			Sunnis Only			Shi'is Only		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>
ETHNICITY	0.121	0.560	0.829	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
DIFFETHNIC	0.514	0.208	0.013	-0.373	0.326	0.253	0.521	0.209	0.013
DIFFETH × ETH	-0.879	0.378	0.020	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
AGE	-0.0158	0.00569	0.006	-0.0194	0.00946	0.041	-0.0137	0.00720	0.057
FEMALE	-0.819	0.157	0.000	-0.874	0.254	0.001	-0.797	0.201	0.000
EDUCATION	0.126	0.0607	0.038	0.0884	0.0933	0.343	0.152	0.0812	0.061
ECONOMY	0.0831	0.142	0.559	-0.128	0.199	0.522	0.0922	0.143	0.519
ECON × ETH	-0.210	0.240	0.381	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
RELIGIOSITY	0.677	0.209	0.001	0.397	0.270	0.141	0.692	0.212	0.001
RELIG × ETH	-0.265	0.323	0.412	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
Constant	-0.583	0.576	0.312	-0.118	0.872	0.893	-0.818	0.707	0.247
<i>N</i>	388			167			221		
Prob. > F	0.0000			0.0007			0.0000		
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.1929			0.1341			0.1309		

Note: All three models report robust standard errors

age increases further such that these proportions become 57% and 39%, respectively. Finally, higher levels of education are associated with higher probabilities of petition signing and meeting attendance among respondents of both ethnic groups, though this estimated effect is only statistically-significant within the Shi'i subsample. The predicted probability of answering "Yes" to MEETING/PETITION is an estimated 47% among Shi'i males with a secondary education, for example, compared to a somewhat higher 59% among those having attended university, all else being equal.

FIGURE 5.87. *Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity*

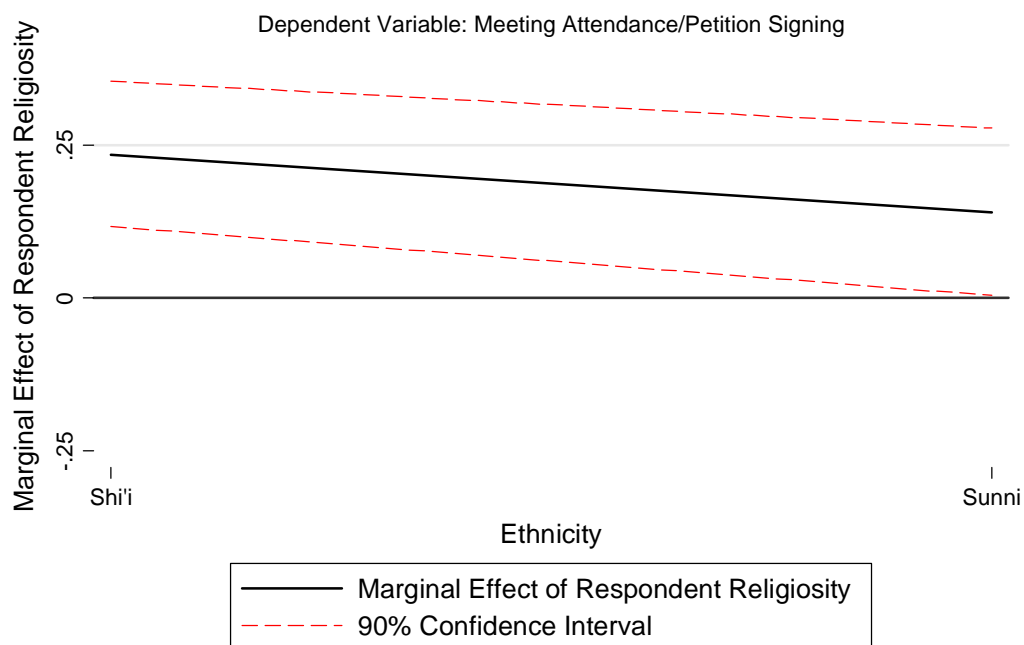


To confirm the significance of ethnic group membership we estimate the marginal effect of ETHNICITY ON MEETING/PETITION AS RELIGIOSITY INCREASES.<sup>50</sup> Contrary to the raw probit output reported above, FIGURE 5.87 shows that ethnic group membership does indeed affect the likelihood of Bahrainis’ participation, both among religious and non-religious individuals. Even more notable is the impact of personal religiosity, here as strong as ever. Its respective marginal effects among Shi’is and Sunnis are given below in FIGURE 5.88: an estimated 0.23 among the former and 0.14 among the latter, both of which are statistically-significant at the 90% confidence level. To help interpret the substantive impact of these effects we chart the change in predicted probability of meeting attendance/petition signing resulting from the influence of religiosity.<sup>51</sup> These predicted probabilities we find in FIGURES 5.89 and 5.90 below.

<sup>50</sup> As before, I follow the suggestion of Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006) regarding the computation and presentation of marginal effects for multiplicative interaction models. In this case I have adapted their Stata code for binary dependent variables, available at <http://homepages.nyu.edu/~mrg217/interaction.html>.

<sup>51</sup> These predicted probabilities are computed using the post-regression utility `mfx` in Stata, which calculates the predicted probability that a dependent variable equals 1 given specific values of independent variables. The probabilities reported in FIGURES 5.89 and 5.90 represent all four permutations of the ETHNICITY and RELIGIOSITY variables (i.e., Sunni religious, Sunni non-religious, Shi’i religious, Shi’i non-religious). All control variables are held constant at their means, while interactive terms are evaluated as appropriate (e.g., at 0 for Shi’i ethnics).

FIGURE 5.88. *Marginal Effect of Religiosity, by Ethnicity*



The first, whose calculations are based on male and female respondents, shows that while the marginal effects of RELIGIOSITY are seemingly small in absolute terms, their relative influences on respondent behavior are profound. For Sunnis, the estimated probability that a non-religious respondent answers “Yes” to MEETING/PETITION is approximately 13%, compared to nearly 23% among religious individuals, using the *Model 2* results. For Shi’is the influence is even more pronounced: as per *Model 3*, among those identified as non-religious the predicted probability of participation is just 33%, while among the religious it is 60%. Being a religious rather than irreligious person thus increases the likelihood of meeting attendance/petition signing among Sunnis by some 77%, among Shi’is by an even greater 82%.

Finally, given our finding that females are much less likely to participate than males, we may wish to compute a more real-world estimate of the substantive impact of RELIGIOSITY on MEETING/PETITION by assessing its effect on male respondents only. This we have in FIGURE 5.90, which shows, as expected, increased probabilities of participation across all types of respondent. The likelihood that a non-religious, Sunni male will have taken part in this political action is estimated at 23%, compared to 37% among the religious. Among Shi’i males

FIGURE 5.89. Predicted Probability of Meeting Attendance/Petition Signing

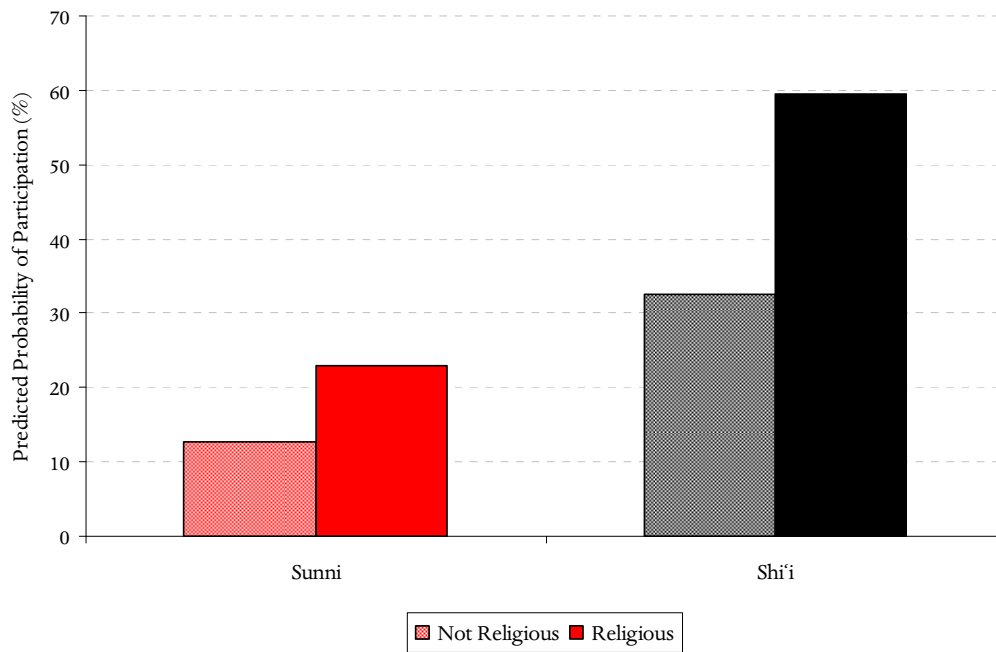
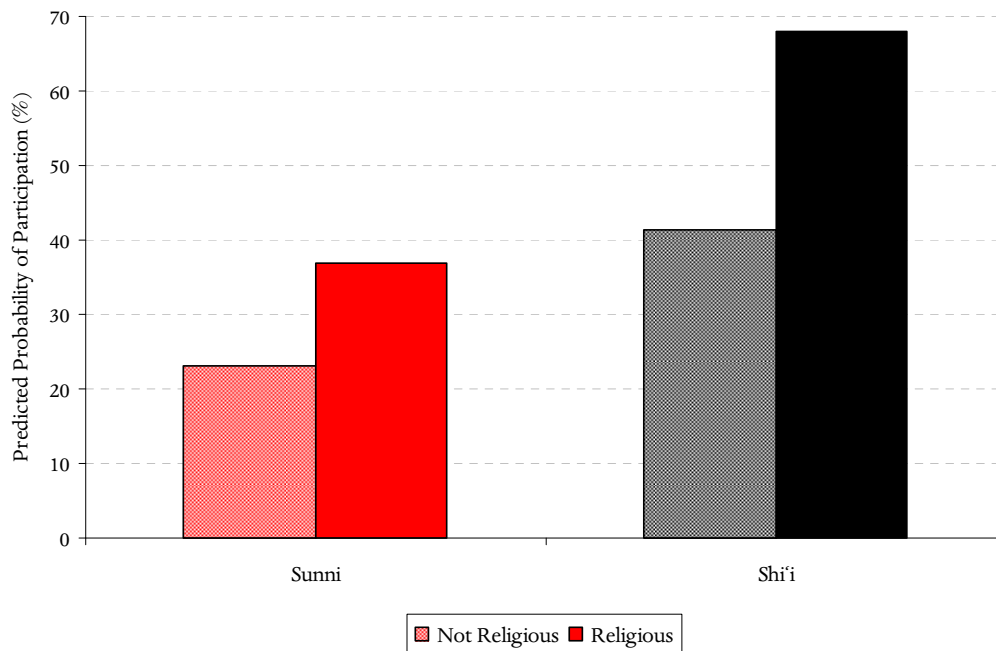


FIGURE 5.90. Predicted Probability of Meeting Attendance/Petition Signing, Males Only



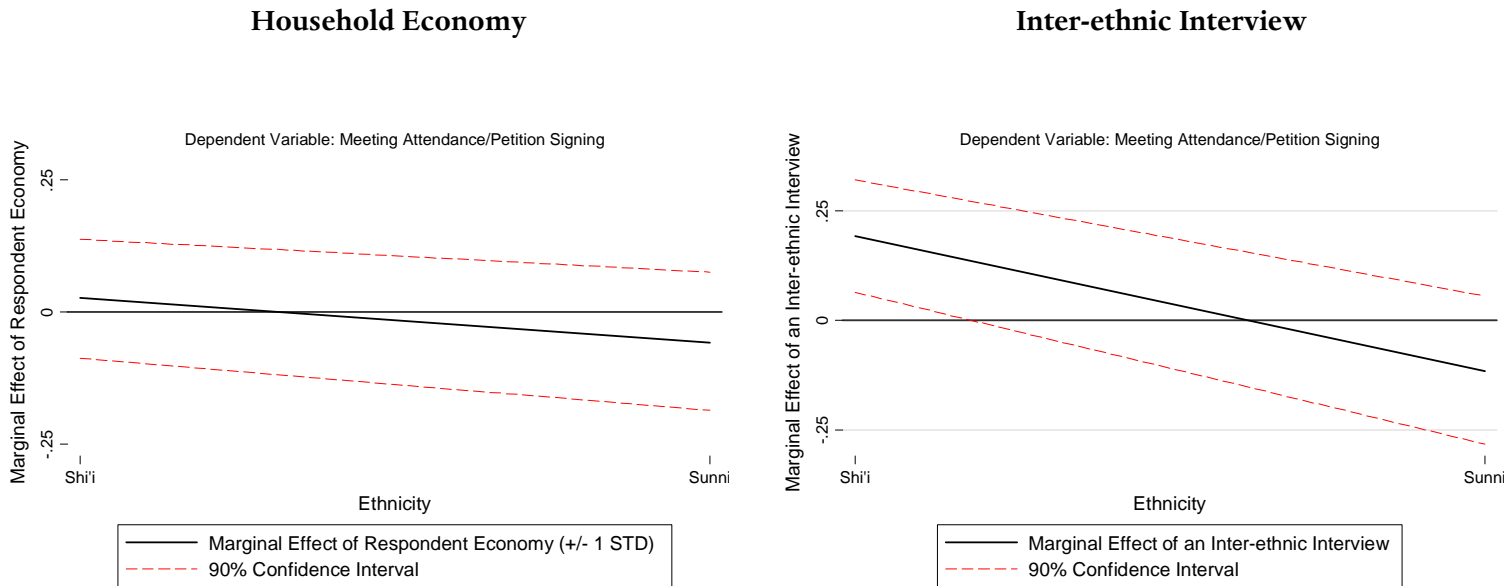


these estimated probabilities are 41% and 68%, respectively. The impact of being a religious person among Sunni males is therefore an increased probability of political participation to the tune of some 61%; among Shi'a respondents this reaches 66%. If the substantive influence of heightened religiosity is somewhat reduced, then, when we restrict our analysis only to male respondents, still its effect is tremendous, particularly among Bahraini Shi'a.

It remains only to evaluate the effect on MEETING/PETITION of household economy, and the latter's substantive significance compared to that of ethnicity and religiosity witnessed already. Yet once more this exercise proves trivial; the left panel of FIGURE 5.9I shows that the variable ECONOMY has no predictive power in our model of meeting attendance/petition signing in Bahrain. Not only is its estimated marginal effect not significant from a statistical standpoint, but the estimate itself is minuscule for both Sunni and Shi'i respondents, in each case little different from 0. Thus are our theoretical predictions about the determinants of political action among Bahraini citizens borne out here again: Shi'i ethnicity is associated with a higher probability of acting; being a religious Sunni or religious Shi'i greatly augments this likelihood, by approximately 66% and 75%, respectively; while household economy is entirely unrelated to a respondent's chances of participating. So too, accordingly, do we have evidence supporting our larger argument about the bases of political mobilization in Bahrain, that engagement in politics, if perhaps disproportionately high among Shi'is, is not exclusive to them *qua* opposition. Sunnis, incited by ethno-religious rivalry, can be political animals too.

Before moving on to our next measure of political action—participation in a march or demonstration—we may attempt some explanation of the right-hand panel of FIGURE 5.9I, which plots the marginal effect of an inter-ethnic interview for Sunni and Shi'i respondents. We say “attempt” because its impact in this case runs counter to previous findings, in which inter-ethnic interviewing had always the effect of making Shi'i respondents appear more like Sunnis (i.e., in their political opinions) and vice versa. Here, by contrast, Shi'is who were interviewed by Sunnis are much *more* likely to report having attended a political meeting or signed a petition than those interviewed by a co-ethnic. And though we have less statistical confidence in the estimate of the reverse effect—that is, the impact on Sunnis interviewed by Shi'is—there is some indication that the DIFFETHNIC variable operates here as well, making Sunnis *less* likely to answer “Yes” to having participated. It thus seems that respondents—Shi'i respondents, at the very least—tend to exaggerate the extent of their participation or non-participation when asked by a member of the other ethnic group. What explains this change?

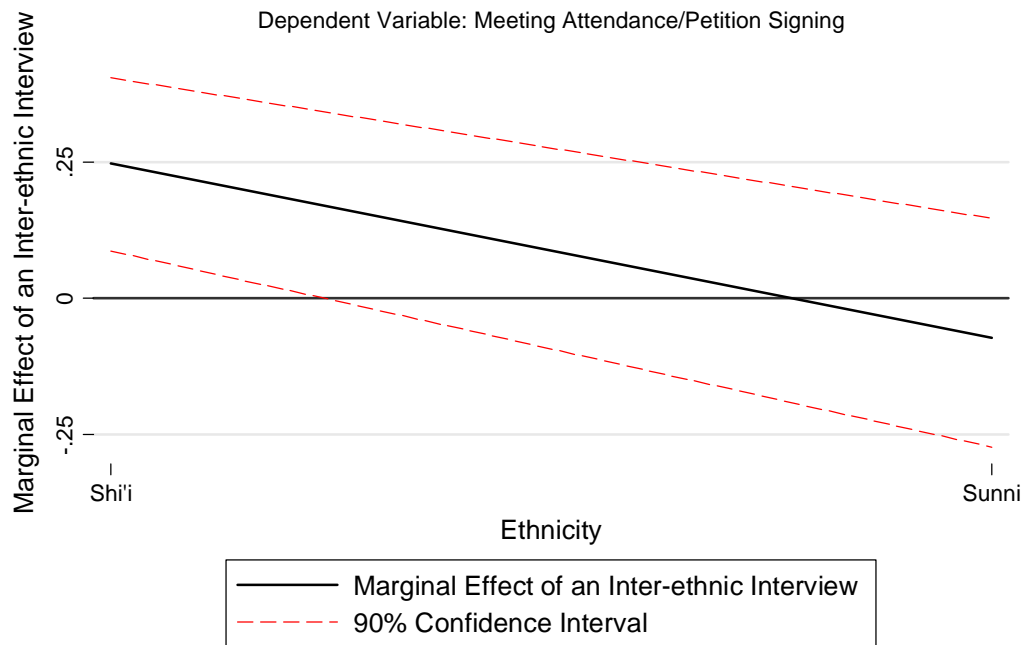
FIGURE 5.9I. Marginal Effects of ECONOMY and DIFFETHNIC



Our first thought may be that the sensitivity of the question, to the extent that it asks respondents to reveal behavior that may be supposed illegal or at least undesirable, perhaps injects a systematic bias into our responses: respondents simply may have been untruthful in a manner that relates to interviewer ethnicity. For this explanation to make sense, of course, we must assume, to take the first case, that a Shi'i's being interviewed by another Shi'i somehow induces more anxiety than if he were questioned by a Sunni. All the same, for the sake of the argument let us make this assumption. We will reason, "To be asked about political opinions and general evaluations of the government is one thing, about actual behavior that may land one under suspicion or arrest quite another. If a Sunni interviewer makes it more uncomfortable for a Shi'i to reveal his true opinions because he knows well that the former disagrees, yet to be asked about one's political actions by a fellow Shi'i is just plain suspicious." And so it is, perhaps, that we arrive at our finding.

But this interpretation has at least two flaws. First, from a theoretical standpoint it cannot explain the reverse case, explain why Sunnis seem to underplay their participation to Shi'i interviewers rather than, as one would predict on the basis of this new explanation, to Sunnis. While strictly-speaking our estimate here of the effect of inter-ethnic interviewing is

FIGURE 5.92. *Marginal Effect of an Inter-ethnic Interview, with REFUSE Control*



not significant among Sunni respondents, still it is not far removed from the 90% confidence interval, and the negative coefficient estimate is a fairly large  $-0.12$  in magnitude. Yet even if we decide that *DIFFETHNIC* has no effect among Sunni respondents, our difficulty is made only slightly easier, for we then still face the question of why only Shi'is would be sensitive to revealing their political behavior to co-ethnics. The second major problem with this question sensitivity explanation is that it does not hold up empirically. When we include in our model of *MEETING/PETITION* an additional variable to help control for interviewee anxiety,<sup>52</sup> the impact of inter-ethnic interviewing remains and indeed grows even stronger in magnitude among Shi'i respondents. This marginal effect we plot above in FIGURE 5.92. Though the estimate

<sup>52</sup> This variable, named *REFUSE*, counts the number of times a respondent refuses to answer a select group of the survey's most sensitive political questions, including many of those investigated already in the political opinion section. (Note that to avoid any selection effect the dependent variable of a given model is not included in this index of questions.) The resulting count is then divided by the total number of sensitive questions, giving a 0 to 1 measure of respondent refusal. In the model referenced here, the *REFUSE* variable is highly significant both substantively and statistically (at  $p = 0.007$ ). The predicted probability of meeting attendance/petition signing for a respondent who refused to answer all the sensitive questions, for example, is just 1%, compared to 41% for one who answered all these questions. Bahrainis who refuse to answer questions, in other words, tend also to lie when they do answer—that, or else they tend to be very outstanding citizens. Cf. *supra*, note 22.

among Sunnis is now far from statistical significance, that among Shi'a gives us additional confidence that the observed relationship between DIFFETHNIC and MEETING/PETITION is not spurious—or at least is not a consequence of interviewee suspicion of, and misrepresentation to, co-ethnic interviewers.

We are left, then, with only two basic explanations. Either there remains some form of systematic bias in Shi'i responses for which we simply cannot account; or Shi'i respondents do in fact tend to exaggerate the extent of their political activism (as measured by MEETING/PETITION) to Sunni interviewers, even as they tend to moderate their political opinions. This latter result, if unexpected, is no less interesting, and we shall revisit it shortly.

First, though, we repeat this analysis for the second direct measure of political action among our Bahraini survey respondents, participation in a demonstration or march.<sup>53</sup> If the previous question may not necessarily imply *political* action per se—there are many reasons one may have occasion to “attend a meeting to discuss an issue” or to sign a petition, strictly-speaking—here the question carries an overt political connotation that could not be lost on respondents. The distribution of responses, summarized in FIGURE 5.93 below, would seem to evidence this fact. Here only 17% of Sunni respondents report partaking in a demonstration or march in the previous three years, while a full majority of Shi'a (52% when we exclude those who refuse to answer or are ostensibly “not sure”) report having done so.

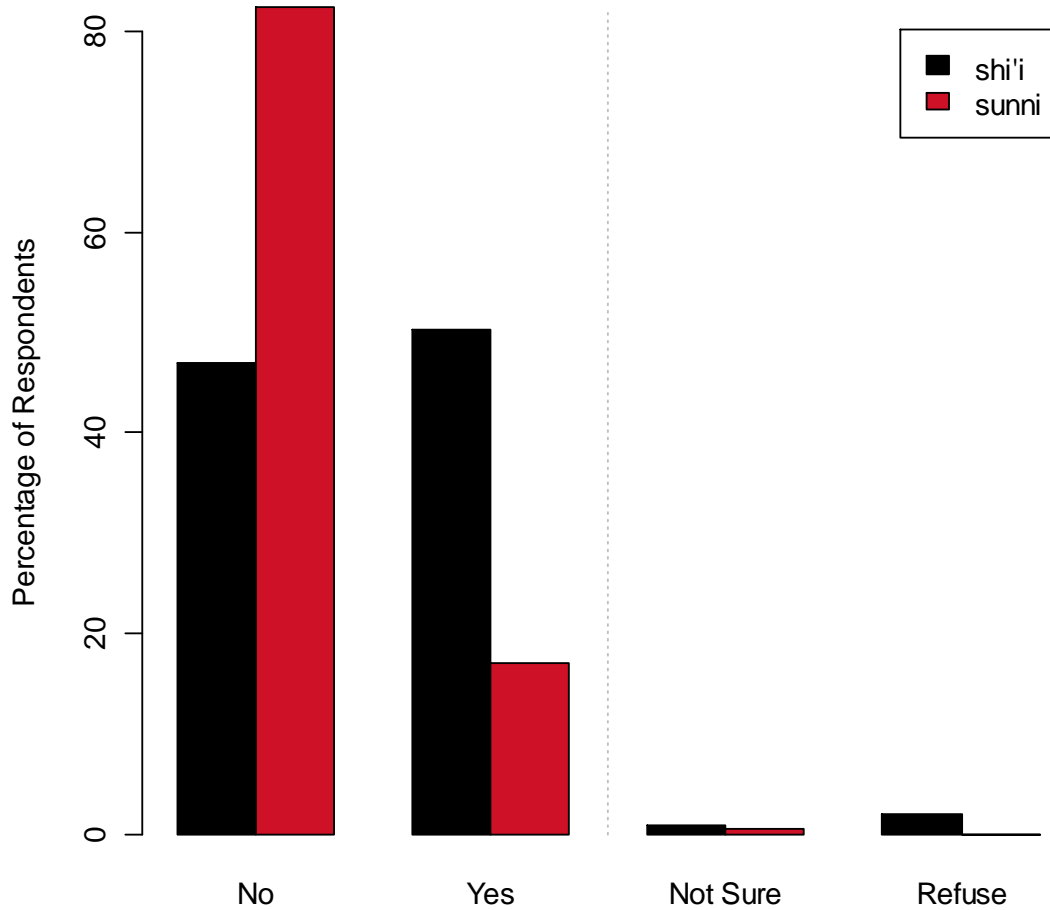
In TABLE 5.94 below we find the results of our model estimating the determinants of demonstration participation in Bahrain. Included this time is the additional control variable REFUSE, found to be so effective in our previous model (cf. *supra*, note 52) in capturing respondent anxiety.<sup>54</sup> Looking first at the impact of our standard control variables in the ethnically-segregated models, we notice that in each case two of the three are related to DEMONSTRATION. Female gender as expected is a strong, negative predictor of participation among Sunnis and Shi'is alike. Based on the combined model results, the probability of a respondent having participated in a march or demonstration drops from 43% among male respondents to just 18% among females, all else being equal. Yet this is not the full story. Although the female control is negatively associated with DEMONSTRATION among both Sunni and Shi'i respondents, this does not mean that females are altogether unlikely to participate. When we calculate the

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<sup>53</sup> The Arabic, which otherwise follows the wording of the previous question, reads: “المشاركة في مظاهرة أو مسيرة.”

<sup>54</sup> In the end, however, while the REFUSE control is once again highly substantively- and statistically-significant, its inclusion hardly alters our coefficient estimates and does not at all change the substantive interpretation thereof.

FIGURE 5.93. *Participation in a Demonstration or March, by Ethnicity*



predicted probability of DEMONSTRATION for Shi'i females based on the *Model 3* results, for example, we find that it is nearly 31%. Among Sunni females, by contrast, the chance is just 8%, according to *Model 2*. In fact, then, at a 31% probability Shi'i females are some 63% more likely to have taken part in a demonstration even than Sunni males, for whom the predicted probability is 19%, *ceteris paribus*.

As for the remaining control variables, age is a significant predictor of DEMONSTRATION only among Shi'a, whereas education is only among Sunna. The substantive impact of AGE is here again considerable: as per the *Model 3* results, the predicted probability that a 20-year-old Shi'i respondent will have participated in a demonstration is 60%; that of a 50-year-old, but 44%. Similarly, the probability that a high school-educated Sunni took part is less than one

TABLE 5.94. *The Determinants of Demonstration Participation in Bahrain, estimated three ways*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard (Probit)			Sunnis Only			Shi'is Only		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>
ETHNICITY	-1.777	0.685	0.010	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
DIFFETHNIC	0.215	0.218	0.324	-0.114	0.352	0.746	0.206	0.226	0.361
DIFFETH × ETH	-0.332	0.402	0.324	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
AGE	-0.00867	0.00587	0.140	0.000822	0.00929	0.930	-0.0138	0.00751	0.066
FEMALE	-0.737	0.162	0.000	-0.556	0.268	0.038	-0.817	0.198	0.000
EDUCATION	0.141	0.0661	0.034	0.267	0.108	0.014	0.0654	0.0832	0.432
ECONOMY	0.0301	0.147	0.838	0.497	0.236	0.035	-0.00443	0.153	0.977
ECON × ETH	0.413	0.278	0.137	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
RELIGIOSITY	0.368	0.208	0.077	0.466	0.296	0.115	0.324	0.215	0.132
RELIG × ETH	0.0432	0.346	0.901	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
REFUSE	3.120	0.867	0.000	1.759	1.338	0.189	3.700	1.049	0.000
Constant	-3.403	0.965	0.000	-5.062	1.544	0.001	-3.289	1.202	0.006
<i>N</i>	382			166			216		
Prob. > F	0.0000			0.0382			0.0000		
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.2363			0.1389			0.1540		

Note: All three models report robust standard errors

in ten; a college-educated Sunni, more than one in five. If we exclude female respondents, these probabilities rise to 14% and 30% of Sunni males, respectively. Among Sunnis, then, our results suggest that it is the better-educated who incline toward political protest; among Shi'is, the youth (and, at least relative to Sunnis, women). Finally, we may note the decisive impact once again of the REFUSE variable, whose overall statistical significance is second only to our gender indicator. Among Shi'i respondents, for example, those who refuse to answer one-quarter of the sensitive questions included in the index (that is, when REFUSE = 0.75), the

FIGURE 5.95. *Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity*

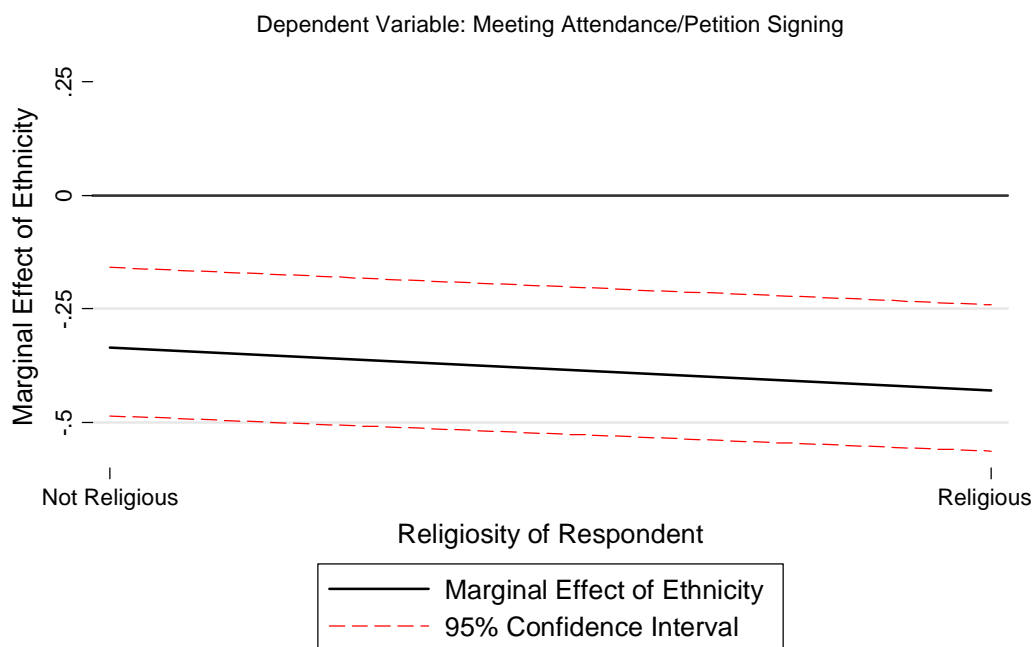
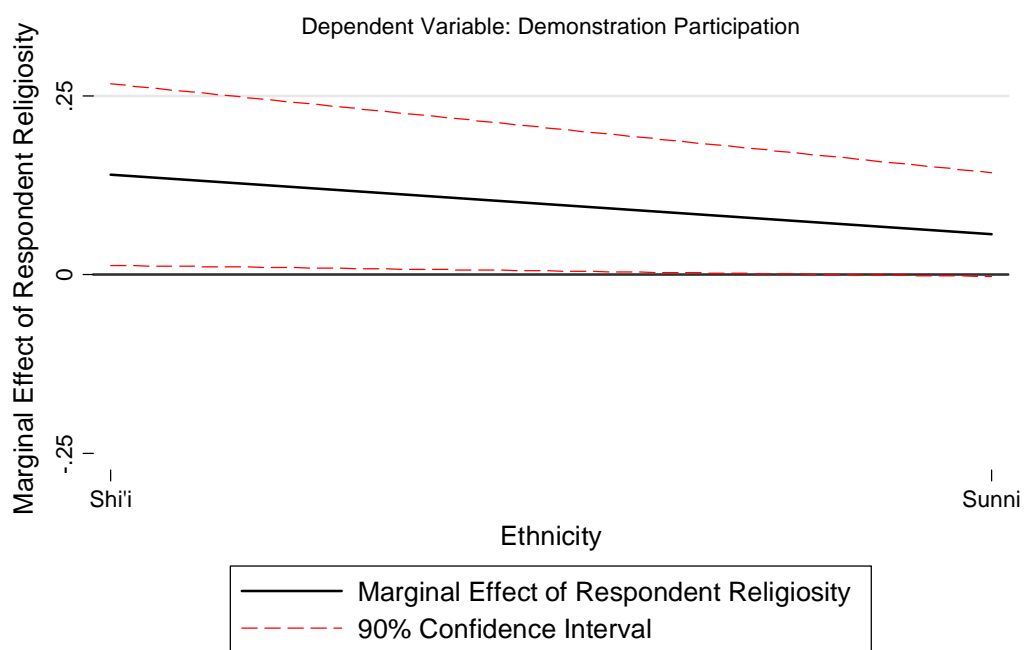


FIGURE 5.96. *Marginal Effect of Religiosity, by Respondent Ethnicity*



predicted probability that a respondent answers “Yes” to DEMONSTRATION is just 26%, compared to 62% for those who refuse none of the questions. Once more, therefore, either there exists a strong correlation between distrustful citizens and very upstanding citizens, or else those who refuse to answer questions also tend to give dishonest answers when they do respond.

As if the picture of FIGURE 5.93 were not evidence enough, FIGURE 5.95 confirms that ethnic group membership is a significant predictor of DEMONSTRATION across the full range of its modifying variable RELIGIOSITY. All else being equal, Sunni ethnicity is estimated to bring a decreased likelihood of participation of around 32 percentage points among non-religious individuals and 41 percentage points among religious individuals. (Note that these are absolute rather than relative changes in probability.) But as this conclusion comes at little surprise, more notable is the estimated effect of RELIGIOSITY on Sunni and Shi‘i respondents, depicted in FIGURE 5.96. Once more are our expectations confirmed: among Shi‘is, being a religious person is associated with an absolute change in predicted probability of DEMONSTRATION of an estimated 0.14; among Sunnis this marginal effect is 0.05, which if only around one-third the magnitude of the former is nonetheless statistically-significant.

For a more useful illustration of the influence of religiosity on Bahrainis’ propensity to take part in demonstrations, consider FIGURES 5.97 and 5.98 below, which are based on the combined *Model 1* results. From the former, we see that the likelihood that a non-religious Sunni respondent will have reported taking part in a demonstration is only around 4%, compared to 10% for a religious Sunni. For Shi‘is, religiosity increases this probability from an estimated 39% to 54%. Thus, while the absolute change effected among Sunnis is perhaps smaller in magnitude, the relative influence of religiosity is indeed greater among this group than among Shi‘a, for whom the baseline likelihood of participation is much higher owing to the effect of ethnic membership. All in all, being a religious person makes it 38% more likely that a Shi‘i respondent, and 150% more likely that a Sunni respondent, will have participated in a demonstration in Bahrain.

When we follow our previous procedure to restrict the sample to male respondents only, we find that these changes in predicted DEMONSTRATION owing to RELIGIOSITY remain substantively equivalent. The baseline likelihood of participation among Sunnis is now an estimated 7%, jumping to 15% among the religious. Non-religious Shi‘a males are now 50% likely to report having participated, compared to 64% among religious individuals. The relative increases in DEMONSTRATION probability due to religiosity drop to 25% among Shi‘a and 103%



FIGURE 5.97. Predicted Probability of Demonstration Participation

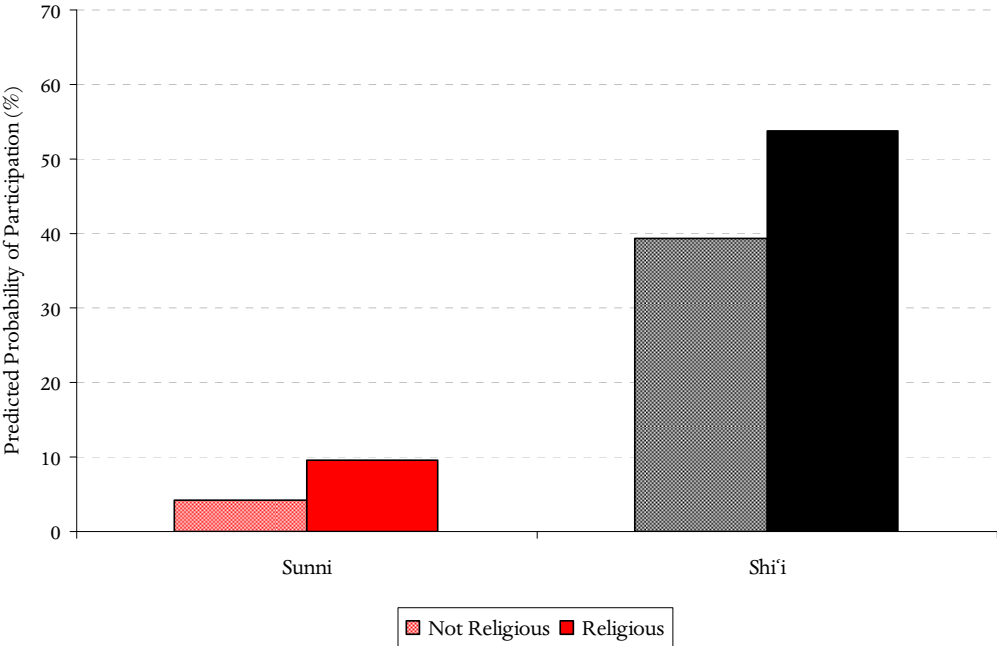


FIGURE 5.98. Predicted Probability of Demonstration Participation, Males Only

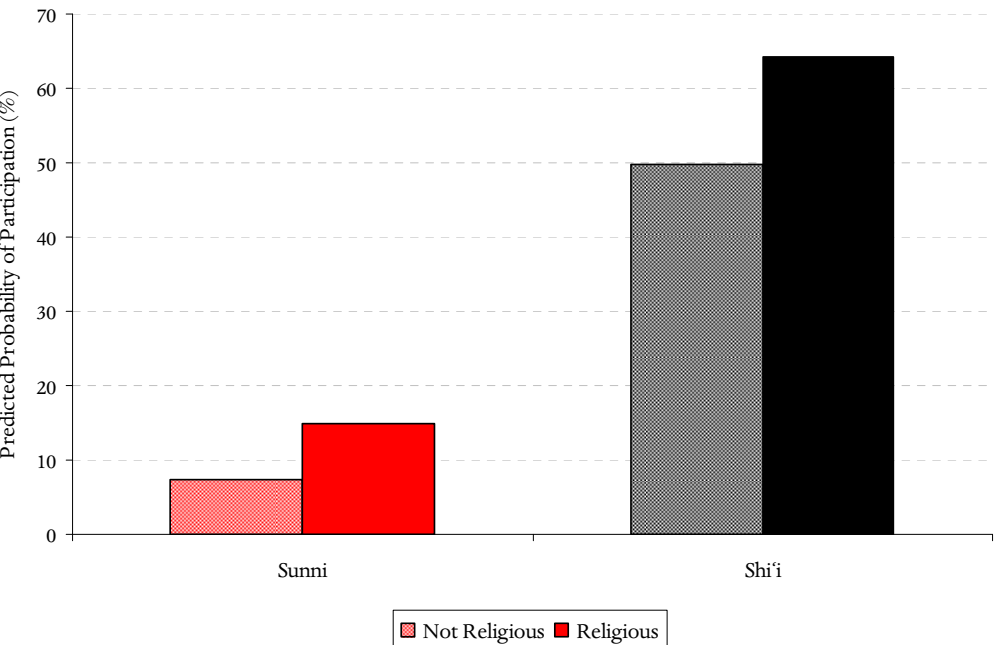
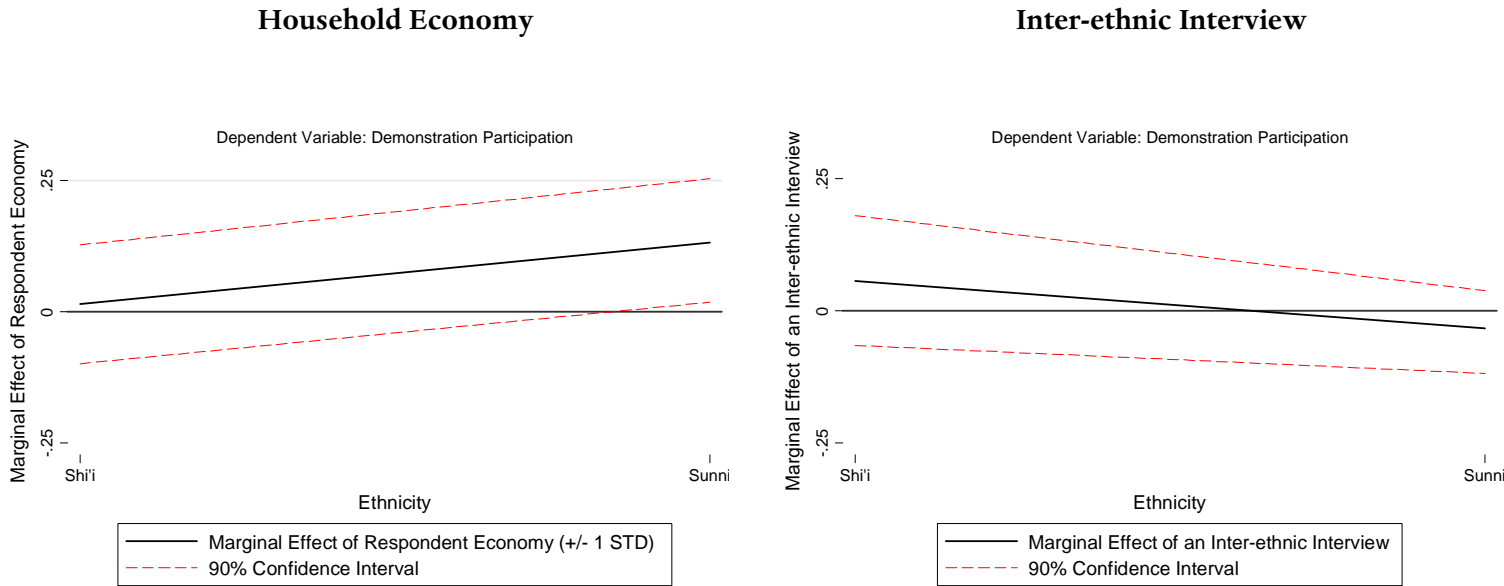


FIGURE 5.99. *Marginal Effects of ECONOMY and DIFFETHNIC*



among Sunna. By either measure, then, notwithstanding the mobilizing effect of religiosity upon Sunni and Shi'i alike, still ethnic group membership continues to play the most decisive role in determining individual behavior in the sphere of political action. Even with an augmenting effect of some 100% to 150%, religious Sunnis remain several times less likely to have taken part in a political demonstration than their Shi'i counterparts, religious or not. In this case, “Sunni or Shi'i?” still trumps “religious or non-religious?”

The question of “rich or poor Bahraini?,” on the other hand, seems here to apply only to Sunnis. We observe in FIGURE 5.99 the marginal effect of a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation increase in the ECONOMY variable (i.e., a change in the direction of poorer household economy) among respondents of both ethnic groups. Among Shi'is the change makes utterly no difference in predicting a respondent's probability of DEMONSTRATION, yet among Sunnis it is associated with an absolute increase of approximately 0.13. Put in substantive terms, the estimated likelihood of demonstration participation for a Sunni of “very good” household economy is 7%, all else being equal, of “good” economy 16%, of “poor” economy 29%, and of “very poor” economy 45%. Among Shi'is, by contrast, the estimated probability of DEMONSTRATION increases from 48% among those who report “very good” economy to 51% among those with “very bad,”

a change that in any case is not statistically-distinguishable from 0. Poorer Bahraini Shi'a, it turns out, are no more likely to demonstrate than are any other Shi'a. In *rentier* language, when the basis of political conflict is not economics but ethnicity and religion, a wealthier opposition does not a more mollified opposition make.

We turn our attention, finally, to the other half of FIGURE 5.99, where the `DIFFETHNIC` variable is shown to be statistically unrelated to a respondent's likelihood of demonstration participation. This result would appear to cast doubt upon our foregoing discussion about the effects of inter-ethnic interviewing on `MEETING/PETITION`. Why would respondents tend to misrepresent the extent of their participation in a relatively innocuous political activity—signing petitions and attending public inquiries—and yet remain unaffected in their answers to this even more sensitive question about demonstration? To help resolve this paradox, we repeat our analysis using an aggregate measure of direct political action that combines these two variables. This combined indicator is coded 0 only if a respondent reports having *never* participated in either a meeting/petition or demonstration—that is, for total non-participation. A code of 1, then, means a respondent has participated in at least one activity. The principal benefit of this indicator is that it affords increased statistical leverage with which to estimate the effect of `DIFFETHNIC`, particularly among Sunni respondents. Whereas the standalone `MEETING/PETITION` and `DEMONSTRATION` variables had little variation in responses among Sunnis (with 78% and 83% saying they had not participated, respectively), in our combined indicator 32% of Sunni respondents report having joined in at least one activity. In sum, the issue we face is not that the estimated effects of `DIFFETHNIC` are inconsistent for these two measures—in each case this estimate is positive among Shi'a and negative among Sunnis—but that their standard errors are so large as to preclude statistical significance. By increasing the variation in our dependent variable, especially among Sunnis, we should obtain more robust estimates.

The upshot of this reanalysis we see in FIGURE 5.100.<sup>55</sup> Using the aggregate measure of direct political action, the `DIFFETHNIC` variable proves to be a significant predictor among both Shi'is and Sunnis. Equally importantly, its substantive impact remains the same as observed already in FIGURES 5.91 and 5.99: Shi'is who are interviewed by Sunnis tend to exaggerate the extent of their participation in direct political action, while Sunnis interviewed by Shi'is tend

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<sup>55</sup> For the sake of space, we exclude here the full model estimation results, which are otherwise substantively unchanged. Religiosity remains strongly associated with participation among both Sunni and Shi'i respondents. As before, younger people are more likely to have participated irrespective of ethnicity, while higher education results in more participation only among Sunna. For the influence of household economy, see FIGURE 5.101.

FIGURE 5.100. *Marginal Effect of DIFFETHNIC, using Aggregate Measure of Political Action*

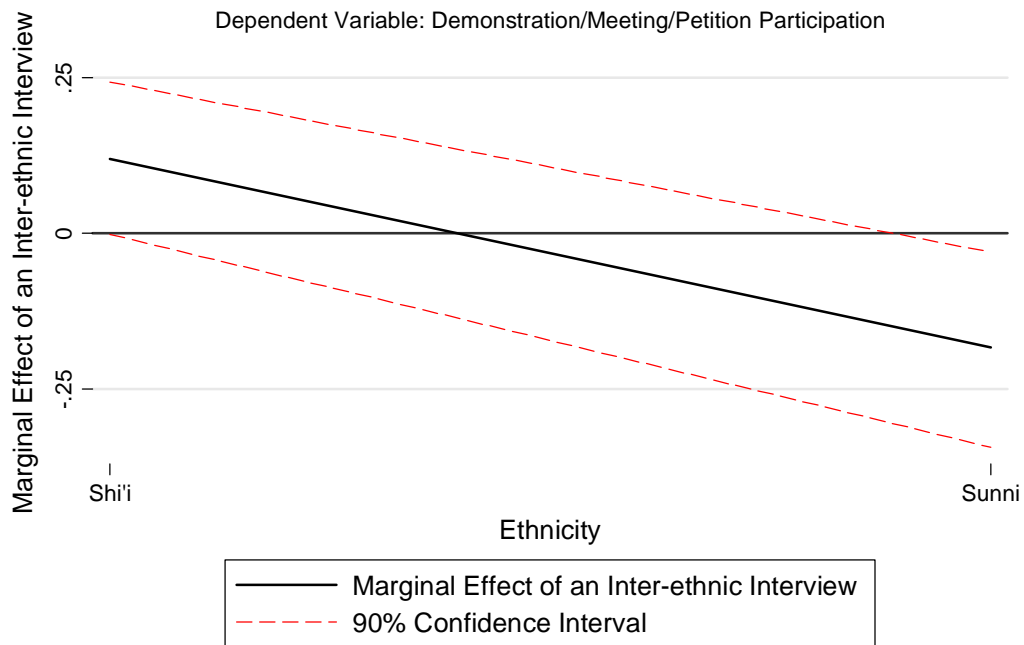
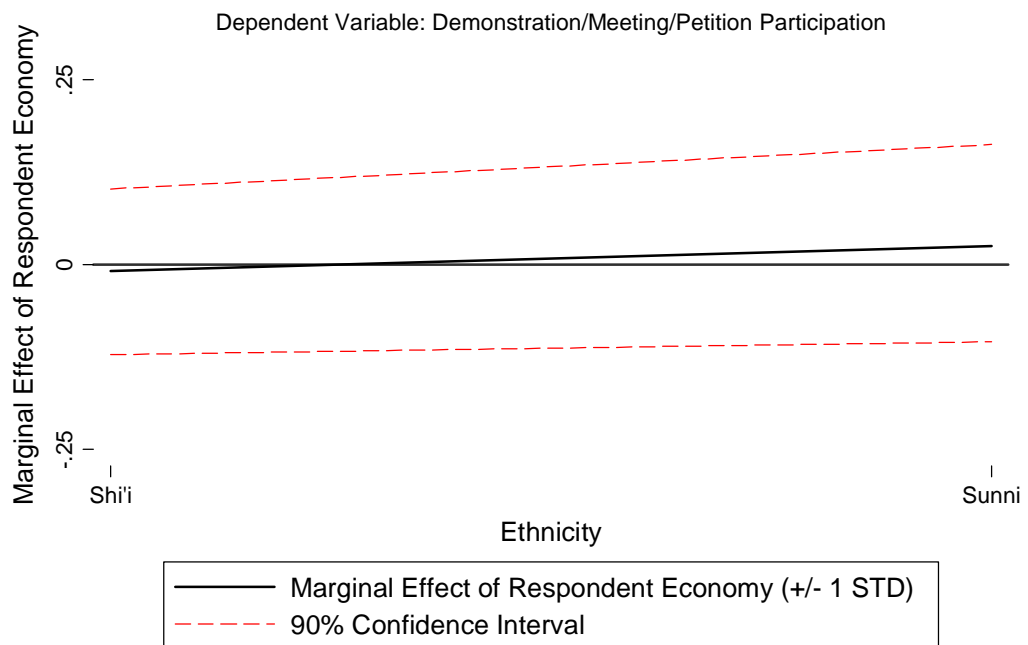


FIGURE 5.101. *Marginal Effect of ECONOMY, using Aggregate Measure of Political Action*



to understate it. (If one would wonder whether our estimate of the effect of *ECONOMY* on direct political action might also benefit from this aggregate measure, *FIGURE 5.101* should remove any doubt. Plainly, it does not.) Having so gained some confidence that the observed effect of inter-ethnic interviewing is not spurious, we must return to our original question: Why is the substantive impact of *DIFFETHNIC* on political action opposite that on political opinion? If Shi'a tend to moderate their political opinions to Sunni interviewers, and Sunnis tend to give more anti-government opinions to Shi'is—of these effects we have ample evidence—then how can we explain the tendency of Shi'a to exaggerate their political participation to other-ethnic interviewers, and of Sunnis to conceal it?

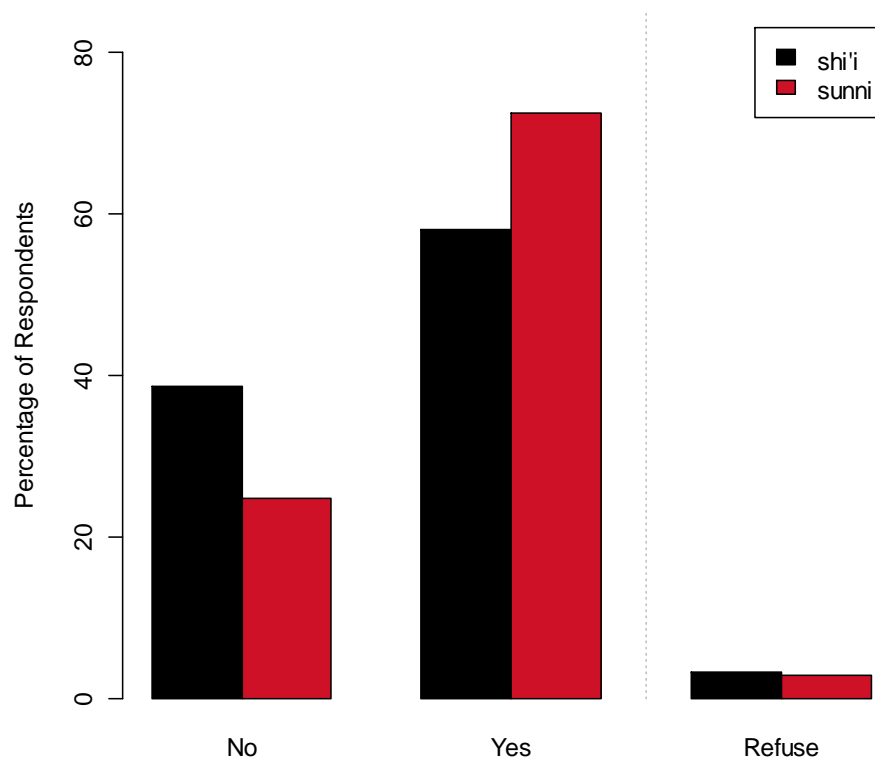
Recall, first of all, that we cannot simply appeal to interviewee anxiety, for which we duly accounted through use of the *REFUSE* indicator. This was seen in *TABLE 5.94* to operate in the same direction upon Sunnis and Shi'is. Respondents—all respondents—who refuse to answer sensitive questions also tend to give more moderate answers when they do respond. Thus question sensitivity is not a cogent explanation unless we assume arbitrarily that in the case of questions regarding political actions it is *Shi'i* interviewers that influence respondents' answers, not *other-ethnic* interviewers. In this case, our interpretation is that Shi'i fieldworkers somehow exert the same influence upon respondents from both ethnic groups, making them underreport the extent of their political actions compared to respondents interviewed by Sunnis.<sup>56</sup> But this raises even more questions than it answers.

To avoid such leaps in argument, we may proffer at once a simpler solution and one more in keeping with the picture of Bahrain's ethnic politics constructed over the preceding chapters: that Sunni and Shi'i respondents are both merely bluffing. When asked by Sunnis about their political actions, Shi'a may tend to exaggerate the extent of their participation to give the picture of a more vigorous and active opposition; Sunnis, when asked by Shi'a, to exaggerate the extent of their *non*-participation, to signal a more unified and steadfast pro-government faction. Why this runs counter to our previous findings, wherein inter-ethnic interviewees consistently give answers closer to those they attribute to their questioner, requires of course some speculation. Yet we may conjecture that the incentive to misrepresent an opinion known to be considered deviant—essentially, avoidance of shame—differs from that to misrepresent an action the revelation of which may convey valuable information to an adversary. Here the motivation is not to escape shame but the appearance of weakness.

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<sup>56</sup> Or, equally arbitrarily, we may say that Sunni interviewers make respondents exaggerate their political actions.

FIGURE 5.IO2. *Participation in the 2006 Parliamentary Elections, by Ethnicity*



We arrive finally at the last dependent variable in our analysis of political action in Bahrain, and in our investigation of the Bahrain survey more generally. We have witnessed already the effects of ethnicity and religiosity on respondents' views of the 2006 parliamentary elections. We conclude now by assessing the causes of their participation therein. Asked directly, "Did you participate in the most recent parliamentary elections that took place on November 25, 2006?",<sup>57</sup> around 72% of Sunni respondents reported voting, compared to just 58% of Shi'a. This between-ethnic discrepancy, as well as the relatively high proportion of refusals—a combined 6% of respondents—reflects once again the controversy surrounding the vote. The question of electoral participation, recall, precipitated the fissure of al-Wifāq, with the resulting al-Ḥaqq Movement leading the charge for an electoral boycott. Not to be outdone, al-Wifāq promulgated a religious directive from Ayatallāh 'Alī al-Sīstānī in which he ostensibly compelled pious Shi'is to vote. As it would be the first election with official Shi'i

<sup>57</sup> The Arabic is:

“هل شاركت في آخر انتخابات نيابية جرت في 25 نوفمبر 2006؟”

TABLE 5.103. *The Determinants of Electoral Participation in Bahrain, estimated three ways*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Standard (Probit)			Sunnis Only			Shi'is Only		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  z </i>
ETHNICITY	0.00543	0.571	0.992	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
DIFFETHNIC	-0.0485	0.202	0.810	0.323	0.313	0.302	-0.0467	0.206	0.820
DIFFETH × ETH	0.208	0.372	0.576	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
AGE	0.0306	0.00677	0.000	0.0257	0.0112	0.022	0.0342	0.00821	0.000
FEMALE	-0.0851	0.150	0.569	-0.0261	0.238	0.913	-0.143	0.201	0.478
EDUCATION	0.104	0.0612	0.090	0.0812	0.0913	0.374	0.138	0.0857	0.107
ECONOMY	0.0204	0.147	0.890	0.310	0.196	0.113	0.0455	0.152	0.765
ECON × ETH	0.262	0.249	0.292	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
RELIGIOSITY	0.581	0.206	0.005	0.435	0.251	0.083	0.642	0.215	0.003
RELIG × ETH	-0.105	0.315	0.740	-	n/a	-	-	n/a	-
REFUSE	0.395	0.564	0.484	2.505	0.948	0.008	-0.864	0.817	0.290
Constant	-2.102	0.799	0.009	-3.859	1.218	0.002	-1.288	1.063	0.226
<i>N</i>	382			165			217		
Prob. > F	0.0001			0.0111			0.0006		
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.1106			0.1165			0.1016		

Note: All three models report robust standard errors

participation (al-Wifāq had boycotted the 2002 vote), Sunnis were urged for their part not to be lulled into complacency by the prospect that many Shi'a would reject the elections along with al-Ḥaqq. The harm of not voting was seen once again to outweigh that of cooptation.

Our model estimation results, summarized in TABLE 5.103, mirror this history. Sunni ethnicity is associated with a higher probability of electoral participation among both religious and irreligious individuals. Its conditional marginal effect, given in FIGURE 5.104, is an estimated 0.22 among the former category and 0.14 among the latter. Religiosity too is shown to have

FIGURE 5.I04. *Marginal Effect of Ethnicity, by Respondent Religiosity*

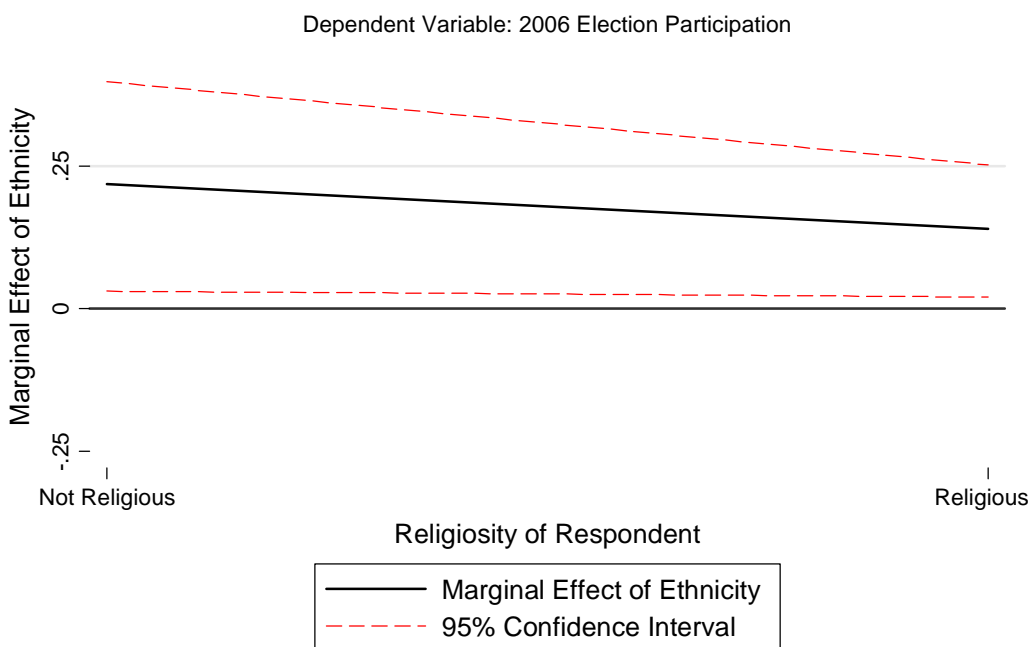


FIGURE 5.I05. *Marginal Effect of Religiosity, by Ethnicity*

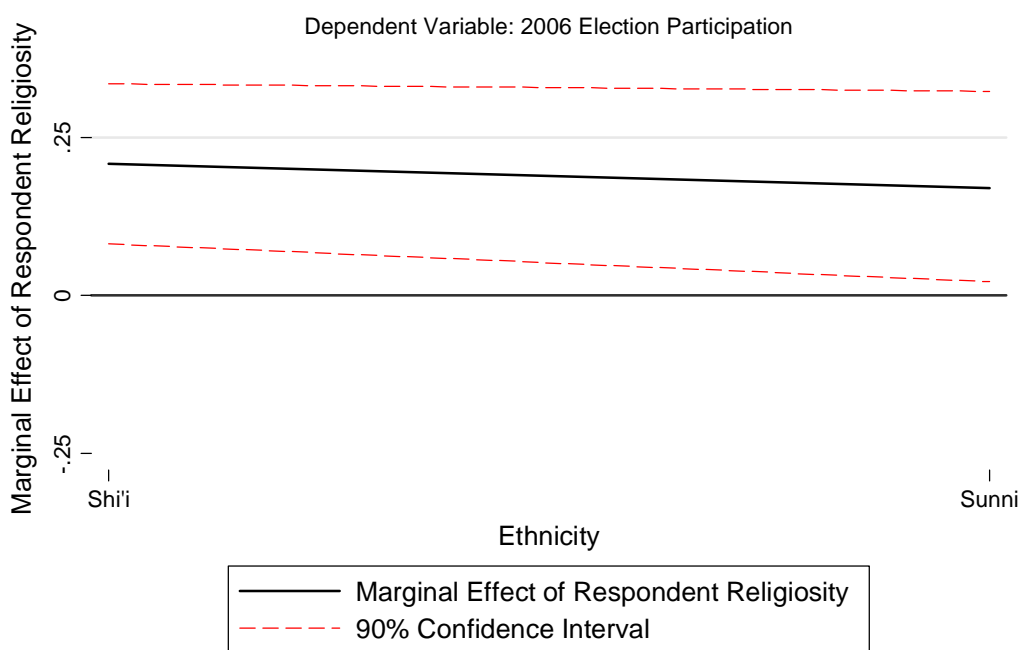
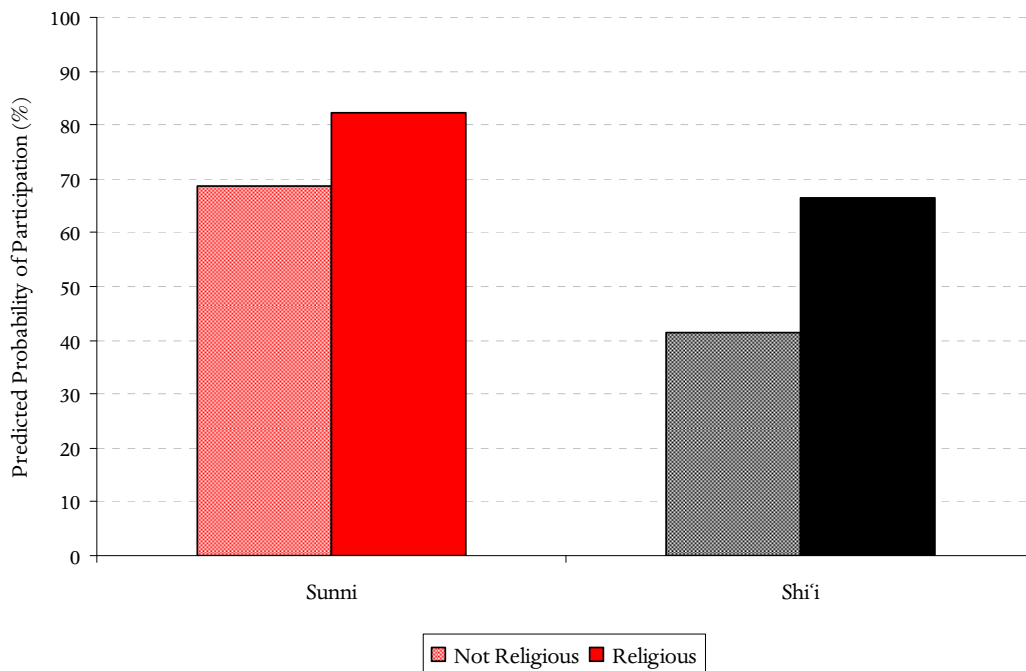




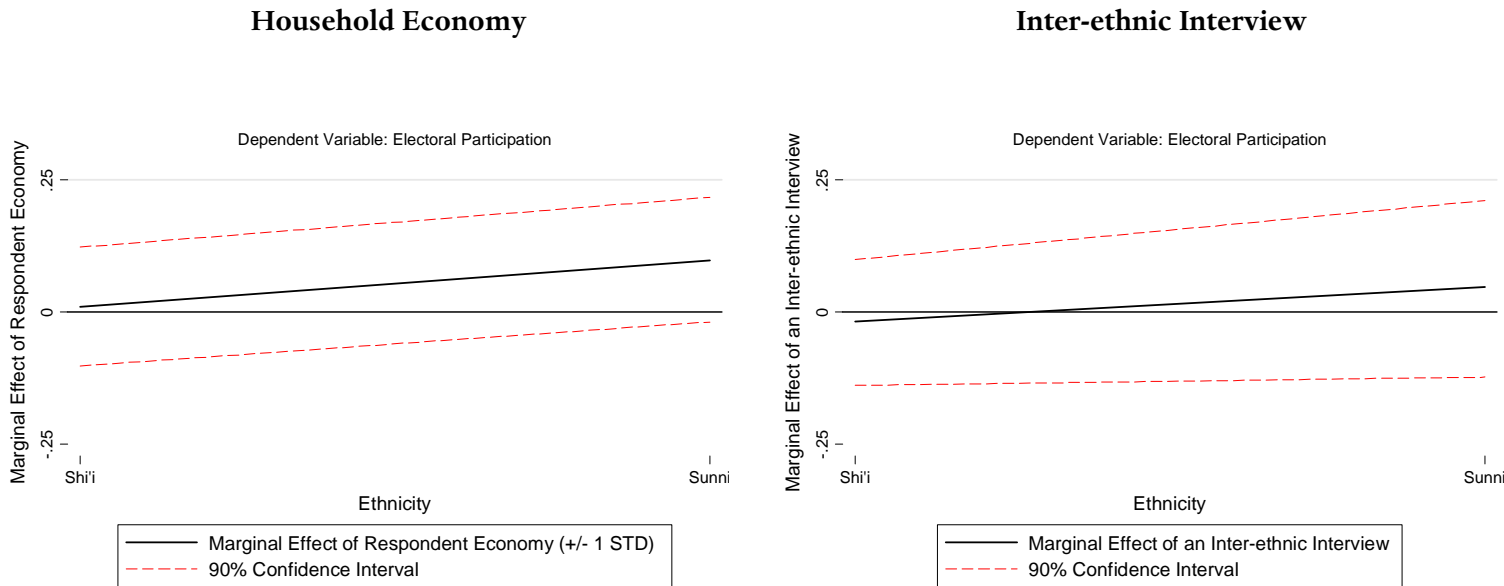
FIGURE 5.106. *Predicted Probability of Electoral Participation*



a considerable augmenting effect on electoral participation, and this on both Sunni and Shi'i respondents, as per FIGURE 5.105. When we combine these two effects we get FIGURE 5.106, which illustrates the substantive influence of both ethnicity and religiosity on participation in the 2006 elections. As for the first, we see that the influence of ethnicity is such that a non-religious Sunni is more likely to have voted even than a religious Shi'i. The relative impact of religiosity is much stronger among Shi'a, however, for whom being a religious individual increases one's likelihood of participation from 41% to 66%, or by 61%. Among Sunnis, on the other hand, the baseline probability of voting is 69%, buoyed only to 82% by one's being religious. The relative influence of religiosity among Sunnis, then, is an estimated 20%.

Yet how far do our other results accord with the story of the 2006 elections? More specifically, how important is a respondent's personal economy in predicting participation? To be sure, in lobbying their respective constituencies to take part in the vote, political societies of all stripes appealed constantly to economic well-being. A united Shi'a bloc in parliament, argued al-Wifāq, would help raise the standard of living for all ordinary Shi'is; boycott, on the other hand, would only ensure that Bahrain's socio-economic divide will worsen. Sunni

FIGURE 5.107. *Marginal Effects of ECONOMY and DIFFETHNIC*



representation in parliament, the two Sunni Islamic societies maintained, would guarantee not only that “miscreants” could not “enact or pass laws incompatible with religious values,” as al-Ma’āwdah warned, but also that al-Wifāq could not succeed in directing state benefits to its Shi’a constituents at the expense of Sunni citizens. Compared to the effects of religiosity and ethnicity witnessed already, then, to what extent did these economic-based arguments convince Bahrainis on both sides to go to the polls?

As we see from the left side of FIGURE 5.107 above, if they had any effect at all, it was upon Sunnis only. The estimated marginal effect of ECONOMY on the probability of electoral participation is virtually 0 among Shi’a respondents and around 10 percentage points among Sunnis.<sup>58</sup> More concretely, the probability that a Sunni of “very good” economy voted is an estimated 68%, compared to 77% for those of “good” economy, 85% for those of “poor” economy, and 90% for Sunnis of “very poor” economy. In deciding whether to take part in the 2006 elections, Sunnis were thus driven simultaneously by ethnic mistrust and by their

<sup>58</sup> Though strictly-speaking neither estimate is statistically-significant at the standard level of confidence, if we omit the lowest level of household economy—“very poor”—reported by only 7 (or 2% of) respondents, the effect among Sunnis is then statistically-significant and slightly greater in magnitude at 0.13. We may thus be confident that economy did indeed play a role in driving Sunnis to vote in 2006. Note that even with this omission the effect of economy among Shi’a is essentially unchanged, at an estimated -0.01.

wallets; Shi'a, it would seem, only by the concerted appeal to their religious conscience made by al-Wifāq and, eventually, by 'Alī al-Sīstānī's *fatwā*. The complaint of al-Ḥaqq Movement leaders—that al-Wifāq and its clerical authorities “coerced” Shi'a to vote—here finds evidence in the Bahrain survey.<sup>59</sup>

What else have we learned from our investigation of individual-level political action in Bahrain? Summarized in TABLE 5.108 below are the results of all six model estimations, including those relating to the combined DEMONSTRATION/MEETING/PETITION indicator. As in our previous summary of the determinants of political opinion (cf. TABLE 5.73), here we report the substantive impact of each of our independent variables of interest on each dependent variable analyzed. If different in other respects, in one important way this overview mirrors our previous summary: the results are reassuringly stable across a rather diverse set of models, some involving dichotomous dependent variables, others not; some measuring direct political action such as participation in demonstrations, others measuring indirect involvement such as interest in and following of politics. In every case, our theoretical explanators, in particular the ETHNICITY and RELIGIOSITY variables, exert a similar substantive influence, with higher religiosity consistently associated with more (or a higher probability of) political activity, and Sunni ethnicity consistently associated with the opposite save for when that activity itself, as in the case of electoral participation, is in support of the regime. With this we have all but confirmed the final theoretical hypothesis underlying our investigation of the Bahrain survey: *Hypothesis 2.2<sub>c</sub>*, which predicts that “Among Sunnis as well as Shi'is, the strength of ethnic identity is positively associated with political action.”

As for our wider theoretical prediction that ethnic affiliation has equal or greater power in explaining individual political action in Bahrain as compared to economic satisfaction, here our conclusion may be offered with equal confidence. Of the six models summarized in

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<sup>59</sup> Another way we may come at this question is by looking at respondents' reported political affiliations. While too many (47% of Shi'a, including those who answered that “there is no society” that approximates their political views) declined to answer this question to allow a full regression analysis, still the data are instructive. Of those Shi'a who do identify with a political society, a little over half, 55%, named al-Wifāq. A further 10% of respondents aligned with socialist-leaning Wa'ad, which attracts Sunnis together with Shi'is. Around 15% of Shi'is, finally, mentioned various minor groups, including local charities, human rights organizations, and liberal parties. The remainder—approximately 20%—identified al-Ḥaqq.

Now, the average household economy score of those who identify with al-Wifāq is 2.25; of those who name al-Ḥaqq 2.28. A standard, one-tailed difference of means test rejects the hypothesis that the al-Ḥaqq average is larger than that of al-Wifāq supporters, with an associated *p*-level of 0.5782. This result remains if we exclude those outlying observations at the lowest level of household economy. In sum, Bahrain's most ardent political opponents, those who refuse to “participate in the political process,” as is said, are not simply its poorest.

TABLE 5.108. *The Determinants of Political Action among Bahrainis, Summary of Results*

Dependent Variable	Impact of Independent Variables of Interest			
	Ethnicity <sup>b</sup> (Shi'i   Sunni)	Religiosity (Increasing)	Economy <sup>c</sup> (Worsening)	Interviewer (Inter-ethnic)
<i>Indirect Actions</i>				
INTEREST	Less <sup>c</sup> (7.7%)	More   More <sup>a</sup> (7.7%   5.6%)	none   none	none   none
NEWS	Less <sup>c</sup> (6.3%)	More   More <sup>a</sup> (14.3%   7.7%)	none   none	none   none
<i>Direct Actions<sup>d</sup></i>				
MEETING/PETITION	Less Likely (45.1%)	More   More (64.9%   59.1%)	none   none	More <sup>f</sup>   none (50.2%)
DEMONSTRATION	Less Likely (79.3%)	More   More (28.7%   103.1%)	none   More (99.5%)	none   none
COMBINED MEETING/PETITION OR DEMONSTRATION	Less Likely (43.1%)	More   More (17.1%   42.0%)	none   none	More   Less (17.7%   60.0%)
VOTED	More Likely (37.0%)	More   More (60.6%   19.7%)	none   More <sup>a</sup> (14.0%)	none   none

<sup>a</sup> Coefficient has the expected sign and is significant in magnitude, but its related *p*-value falls slightly outside the *p* < 0.100 threshold of significance

<sup>b</sup> Recall that since our ETHNICITY variable is coded 1 for Sunnis, the effect of ethnic group membership is always expressed as the effect of a respondent's being a Sunni rather than a Shi'i. This choice is arbitrary of course, and to express the effect in terms of Shi'i ethnicity one merely has to reverse the sign of the coefficient.

<sup>c</sup> Ethnicity's effect is only statistically-significant among religious individuals.

<sup>d</sup> Recall that because each of these "direct action" measures is dichotomous, the reported percentages represent relative changes in probability that a respondent answers "Yes." To offer the most conservative estimates possible, except in the case of VOTED (where gender does not influence the likelihood of participation) the probabilities are calculated here for male respondents only. Cf., e.g., FIGURES 5.90 and 5.98.

<sup>e</sup> The percentages reported here correspond to the percent change in likelihood of participation associated with a change in respondent economy from -1 standard deviation to +1 standard deviation, or from approximately 1.5 to 2.7 on our 1-4 scale. So as to remain directly comparable to the impact of RELIGIOSITY, this probability is also calculated only for men in the case of the dependent variable DEMONSTRATION.

<sup>f</sup> Based on the revised model including the REFUSE control variable

TABLE 5.108, household economy is a significant predictor of respondent behavior in just two cases, and in both of these only among Sunni ethnics. Moreover, in each case the substantive impact of economy not only is less than or on par with that of ethnic group membership, but it is outweighed even by the additional, augmenting effect of religiosity. By any standard, the explanatory power of economic well-being simply cannot compare to that of ethnicity and personal religiosity. In today's Bahrain, "Rich or poor?" is a secondary matter beside the more important questions: "Sunni or Shi'i?"—then: "How Sunni?" and "How Shi'i?"

More notable than the effect of economy on political action per se, then, is the fact that it this effect operates upon Sunnis only, particularly as this represents a reversal of the trend witnessed in the realm of political opinion. There, in four out of six models the *ECONOMY* variable proved a significant predictor of political opinion among Shi'a. Among Sunnis, it was associated with respondents' answers only twice. And so the overall picture that emerges regarding the substantive influence of economic well-being is seemingly paradoxical: Shi'a of more depressed economy tend to form more negative opinions of the government, but are no more likely to act out as a result; while poorer Sunnis are more likely to take part in direct political action yet seem to be relatively unaffected in their political opinions, at least as compared to the Shi'a. But such is Bahrain. Sunnis remain ideologically-supportive of the government *qua* protector of the status quo even as they register their political grievances about economic conditions. Shi'a remain opposed to the political status quo on principle, a position perhaps bolstered by but in the end independent of material circumstances.

### **Conclusion: *Rentier State Theory versus Rentier State Reality in Bahrain***

Utilizing the individual-level data only now available from my 2009 mass survey, the present chapter sought empirical evidence of the patent disconnect between *rentier* state theory and *rentier* state reality in Bahrain as demonstrated in earlier pages. In this it has succeeded. Our analysis has shown that neither of the two basic arguments forwarded to explain the supposed link between *rentier* wealth and political quiescence obtains in the case of Bahrain. Individuals are bound to the government neither by the promise of public-sector employment nor by freedom from taxation. Instead, Bahrainis' orientations toward the state—as represented both by their opinions and actions—are determined above all by their position in the larger ethnic conflict that divides society. Sunnis tend to align with the prevailing regime, Shi'a tend to oppose it, and individuals from both groups are only further entrenched in their respective positions as their ethno-religious identification increases. At the same time that it further divides opinion, finally, the latter serves also to augment political activity among all citizens, begetting a society that is neither politically-quiescent nor satisfied economically—begetting, in short, an ethnically-divided, dysfunctional *rentier* state.

We saw first how an individual is substantially more likely—nearly 40% more likely—to be employed in Bahrain's public sector if s/he is a Sunni ethnic, even after accounting for

other relevant individual-level factors. Beblawi's theoretical conception of state employment as a "legitimate aspiration" for all citizens of allocative economies was shown accordingly to depend on naïve assumptions about the bases of and preconditions for government service in *rentier* states. In Bahrain and elsewhere in the Arab Gulf, public-sector employment does not lead to political allegiance; political allegiance leads to public-sector employment, and even more so when the employment in question carries national security implications. This interpretation was bolstered by our finding that not a single Shi'i of the 117 employed males interviewed reported working for the police or armed forces. By contrast, 17 separate Sunni households, representing some 13% of all those surveyed, reported at least one member working in the police or military. In sum, Bahrain's leaders cannot effectively use employment to appease would-be opponents precisely because they disproportionately reject as unsuitable those whom they would most like to appease.

Not only are Bahraini Shi'a less likely to find work in the public sector, moreover, they also tend to hold lower-level professional positions when they are employed, and this in the state and non-state sectors equally. An individual of Sunni ethnicity, we found, is predicted in each case to occupy a professional level that is around 15% higher on our 11-point scale. In the private sector, this effect is substantively equivalent to more than a 10-year advantage in age. Its relative influence in the public sector is less clear, however, because professional level in the state sector was shown to depend on fundamentally different criteria: unlike in the private sector, here females tend to occupy higher positions, for example, while one's age plays no role in determining professional level. In sum, contrary to the notion of the public sector of *rentier* economies as a sort of parallel job market available to those less able to find work in private industry, our empirical findings suggest rather that both employment and advancement proceed in Bahrain not on the basis of economic need but political expediency, personal favors, and of course, whether one happens to be a Sunni or a Shi'i.

The second half of our survey analysis investigated the relative influences of economic well-being and ethno-religious identity in determining Bahrainis' political views and behavior. We found that the political opinions of ordinary Bahrainis—from their trust in important state institutions, to their overall satisfaction with government performance, to their views of Bahrain's 2006 parliamentary election—are determined almost entirely along ethnic lines, with Sunni ethnicity associated with much more pro-government opinion even after one accounts for the effects of age, gender, and education. What is more, heightened religiosity

among respondents serves only to augment this between-group difference, driving opinion farther apart. Among Sunni ethnics, measures of personal religiousness correspond to even more favorable government opinion; among Bahrain's Shi'a, to more anti-government views. At the same time that religion pushes Shi'is toward more adversarial political orientations, that is, it marshals Sunnis further to the regime's defense.

As for the influence of household economy, on the other hand, its effect on opinion is inconsistent and relatively weak. Where it is shown to alter Bahrainis' views, its substantive impact remains on average some two to three times less in magnitude than that of ethnic affiliation. Even the additional, augmenting effect of personal religiosity is more robust. While it is true then that, on the margin, more economically dissatisfied Bahrainis tend to hold less favorable positions toward their government, this relationship is but a footnote in the larger narrative of Bahraini politics, which has been woven firmly around ethnic difference since the time the Āl Khalīfa and their Sunni tribal allies arrived on the island. In none of our six models of political opinion does the influence of economic satisfaction negate that of ethnic group membership, much less the combined impact of ethnicity and religiosity. That untaxed and economically-satisfied citizens make pro-government citizens is a notion ill-suited to the socio-political conditions that, unfortunately, prevail today in much of the Arab Gulf.

Neither, according to our results, do materially better-off citizens necessarily make more inactive citizens. In only two of our six models of political action is household economy a significant predictor of direct or indirect participation, and there only among Bahrain's Sunnis. Shi'a citizens protest, sign petitions, attend public inquiries, and vote in elections not on the basis of economy, not because they seek redress for economic grievances, but on principle. Their political engagement stems not from material dissatisfaction but from dissatisfaction with the regime as a whole, wherein they find themselves limited as a group in political power and social standing on the basis of ethnicity. Only among Sunnis, then, do we have evidence that better economy elicits more political quiet. This also implies on the other hand that Bahrain's rulers do not earn a free pass from Sunni citizens merely on account of shared ethnicity. For their near-unwavering support, and for their help in keeping the government's fiercest critics at bay, ordinary Sunnis expect something in return.

Yet even among Sunnis the role of economy in determining one's propensity for political action is only half the story, or indeed is less. More powerful than this is the impact

once again of ethno-religious identification. Although as a group Sunnis are much less likely to engage in political action, personal religiosity augments this likelihood among individual Sunnis and Shi'is alike, and this in every one of the six models we analyzed. Thus proceeds the battle over Bahrain's political status quo, pushed on the one side by Shi'a reformists, pulled on the other by a countervailing force of Sunnis acting, to quote al-Ma'āwdah a final time, "to counter probable harm."

The survey offered still one more insight into ethnic politics in Bahrain. A last but perhaps no less revealing result of our investigation is the effect of inter-ethnic interviews on individuals' survey responses. In short, Bahrainis are unwilling to divulge their true political positions and behavior to members of the other group. Both Sunni and Shi'i respondents misrepresent themselves so as to appear more in step with the opinions they ascribe, purely on the basis of ethnicity, to their interviewer. Shi'i respondents misstate their views to appear much more pro-government, more Sunni-like, whereas Sunnis do precisely the opposite, offering answers that are more anti-government, more Shi'i-like. If one would look only at inter-ethnic interviewees, one must conclude that it is the Shi'a who are the champions of the Bahraini regime, the Sunnis its detractors. In the realm of political action, these effects are reversed: now Shi'is tend to exaggerate the extent of their participation in order to convey a stronger and more active opposition; Sunnis, when asked by Shi'a, exaggerate the extent of their *non*-participation, to signal a more resolute pro-government bloc. Among the many dysfunctions contributing to the dysfunctional *rentier* state that is Bahrain, then, this deep-seated ethnic mistrust—combined, it seems, with political posturing—is not the least telling.



## Notes for Chapter 5

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## CHAPTER 6

### Bahraini Exceptionalism or (Ethnic) Politics as Usual?: Sunni-Shi'i Conflict and Political Orientation in Iraq

Having seen then the way that *rentier* state reality falls short of *rentier* state theory in Bahrain, at least one nagging question remains: what is it exactly that Bahrain represents? If its case reveals how ethnic competition can come to displace economics in determining individual political behavior, political opinion, and ultimately regime stability in the Arab Gulf, does such a result apply here merely—to a single, in many ways atypical, Gulf state?—or is it generalizable to a larger class of countries? If it is more widely-applicable, upon what basis, again, is Bahrain representative of some broader category? Is its most salient characteristic that it is a *rentier* economy? That it features an ethnically-divided society? Or its combination of the two?—that it is, as described here, an ethnically-contested *rentier* state?

The present chapter seeks to help answer these lingering questions by examining the determinants of political action and opinion among citizens of another Arab nation divided notably along Sunni-Shi'i lines: Iraq. If we discover that our theory of ethnic-based political mobilization and orientation obtains also in the case of Iraq, a country that clearly differs on many levels from Bahrain and other GCC states, then we will have evidence that Bahraini politics is not *sui generis* but applies in degrees elsewhere according to the severity of ethnic competition over power and influence in a society. In that event, Bahrain's most essential attribute as it relates to our Chapter 5 findings is not the nature of its rentierism but of its ethno-religious divide, a divide that within the Arab Gulf describes Bahrain particularly but not uniquely, and one that today is only deepening and spreading. What we hope to come closer to learning, then, is whether Bahrain's ethnic-based politics results from an ineffective *rentier* state, or, as argued here throughout, Bahrain's ineffective *rentier* state from its sabotaging ethnic politics.

Of course, we have already (cf. CH. 4, 118 ff.) offered a number of reasons to suggest why Bahrain is not alone among Arab Gulf states in failing to achieve the socio-political consensus supposed to prevail in *rentier* nations. These include the observations that regime stability in the GCC tends to track closely to ethnic diversity; that ethnic competition throughout the Gulf monarchies is underpinned by a common exogenous force, fear of Iranian expansionism and resultant domestic Shi'a emboldening; and, most simply, that the current state of Sunni-Shi'i and government-Shi'i relations in the region belies the notion that Bahrain's ethnic politics, if perhaps exaggerated owing to demographics, are qualitatively unique. On the contrary, we noted, echoing Okruhlik (1999), "in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain opposition has arisen and with it a discrepancy between the expectations derived from the rentier framework and empirical reality" (297). In an increasing number of locations across the Arab Gulf, "windfall profits of petroleum exports do not translate into a politically quiescent population," precisely because rents cannot always "buy the support or loyalty of different social groups" (295)—especially when, as we saw in the last chapter, the social groups most in need of buying-off are the ones disproportionately excluded from *rentier* benefits.

By investigating the effect of Sunni-Shi'i division on political behavior in Iraq, we aim therefore to offer more systematic evidence in support of this line of argument. Critically, this evidence will operate once again on the individual level in line with the causal story of *rentier* theorists, based as it is on two surveys of Iraqi citizens administered in 2004 and 2006. These data offer several practical and theoretical advantages. First and most importantly, they exist, something that cannot be said, unfortunately, of data from elsewhere in the Arab Gulf save for in my Bahrain survey. Indeed, Gulf governments refuse to publish statistics even on the aggregate populations of confessional groups in their societies, so one may imagine their willingness to allow survey research that asks about ethnic and religious membership. In the second place, these Iraq data provide not only cross-country variation but also temporal variation, allowing us to connect changes in ethnic and political orientations at the individual level with known changes in the Iraqi political arena (for example, the results of elections) and in inter-ethnic relations (for example, the onset in 2006 of what would approach a full-scale civil war fought mainly between Sunni insurgents and Shi'a militias). Finally, the Iraq surveys fielded questions relating more directly to respondents' orientations toward their ethnic rivals than those asked in Bahrain (cf. CH. 5, 169, note 15), affording alternative and indeed improved measures of the strength a person's ethnic identity vis-à-vis the opposing group. For all these

reasons, the investigation of Iraq to follow, if more limited in scope, is no mere afterthought to our Chapter 5 analysis, but rather clarifies and extends it.

### **Iraq *Contra* Bahrain**

A comprehensive treatment of the nature and historical development of Sunni-Shi'i relations in Iraq is beyond the scope of this section. Yet it is worth noting the major differences that distinguish the Bahraini and Iraqi cases. First and most obviously, Iraq's ethnic composition is not a product of conquest as in Bahrain but of internal socio-political transformation and redefinition of boundaries. In his respected volume *The Shi'is of Iraq*, Nakash (2003) argues persuasively that the larger part of Iraqi Shi'a are relatively new converts from the early twentieth-century, brought to Shi'ism via the settlement of nomadic Arab tribes in the area around the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbalā' following the completion of several vitalizing irrigation projects. Accordingly, the ethnic narrative of Iraq does not overlap with a nativist discourse such as colors relations in Bahrain. Neither Sunnis nor Shi'is can lay claim to the title of "العراقيين الأصليين"—the "original" Iraqis. Indeed, the category "original" Iraqis includes more than a dozen ethno-religious groups, many of which are non-Muslim. If Bahrain likewise is home to more than just Arab Sunnis and Shi'is—with Persian Shi'a, Hawala, and so on—still its ethnic composition is not nearly as heterogeneous as that of modern-day Iraq, a product of the Ottoman and British imaginations whose boundaries pay no heed to societal cohesion. Thus is included within its borders a separate nation entirely in the historically-autonomous region home to some five million ethnic Kurds, whose rivalry with Arabs constitutes yet another source of conflict in Iraq. To preserve theoretical continuity and to facilitate a more direct comparison with our Bahrain results, however, we shall exclude Kurdish respondents from our coming quantitative analysis.

A second key factor differentiating the cases of Bahrain and Iraq is the nature of their respective political institutions. It is obvious enough that Bahrain is a tribal monarchy and Iraq a military dictatorship-turned-consociational democracy. Yet more important than this is the way these institutions condition the balance of ethnic power and influence in the two societies. Our argument about the institutionalization of Sunni ascendancy in Bahrain is well-known, as is the way the ruling Āl Khalīfa manipulate society's ethnic fault line in service of their own political survival. In Iraq, until the U.S.-led overthrow of the old regime in 2003, Sunni power had been institutionalized for nearly a half-century in their domination of the

ruling Ba'ath Party, the military, and a brutal security apparatus. The forced transition to democracy instantaneously turned the long-standing confessional balance of power on its head, with Iraq's Shi'a majority suddenly thrust into the political driver's seat following Iraq's first parliamentary elections under its new constitution in December 2005. The nascent legislature would come to mirror the country's larger consociational arrangement, with the three largest vote-getters a united Shi'a bloc, a Kurdish bloc, and a Sunni bloc, respectively. As is Bahrain, then, Iraq's legislature would be divided conspicuously along ethno-religious lines—with the difference that in Iraq the parliament would actually be endowed with political power.

Finally, we may observe that the Iraqi state, if reliant to a large extent upon rents from the sale of oil (and, since the U.S.-led invasion, from direct foreign aid), is nevertheless not a pure *rentier* state as represented by Bahrain and the other GCC nations. We observed already in Chapter 2, for example, that by Ross's (2008) respected measure of rentierism Iraq did not approach the outlying cases of the Arab Gulf, Libya, and Brunei even prior to the 2003 war. Instead, Iraq's rents per capita tend to be on par with those of Russia, Iran, and Tajikistan (cf. CH. 2, 23-24, FIGURES 2.1 and 2.2). To the extent that we understand rentierism to be a proxy a country's overall citizen-regime clientelism, therefore, and insofar as it is exactly this clientelistic relationship between ordinary citizens and the state *qua* economic patron that is supposed to underlie the link between individual economic satisfaction and political acquiescence in the *rentier* state, then one might suppose strictly on the basis of *rentier* theoretical assumptions that, all else equal, this individual-level relationship will tend to operate less strongly in Iraq than it does in Bahrain and elsewhere in the Arab Gulf. Moreover, as Iraq was at least by the time of the 2006 survey a functioning democracy, we might expect this *rentier* link to be dampened there still further inasmuch as those rents that do accrue, accrue to a popularly-elected government rather than to a single ruling tribe that then distributes them down the clientelistic food chain.

If outwardly similar, therefore, Iraq and Bahrain in fact diverge qualitatively in each of the social, political, and economic spheres. Iraq's Sunni-Shi'i division is a relatively new phenomenon compared to that of Bahrain; is the product of conversion rather than conquest; and overlaps with another prominent ethnic cleavage. Iraq's political institutions not only differ in principle and organization from those of Bahrain but serve accordingly to mediate the link between rulers and citizens in quite different ways. Moreover, particularly at the time the surveys were administered, Iraq's democratic system constituted a mode of governance

that diverged essentially not only from that of Bahrain but from the country's own modern and premodern history, representing no less than an experiment in democratic state-building unprecedented in the Arab world. Lastly and relatedly, the Iraq of 2004 or 2006 is a model *rentier* state neither in the extent of its economic reliance upon resource rents nor in the way that those rents that do accrue are distributed by the state apparatus, facts that may prove to alter the economic-*cum*-political clientelism by which private material benefits are supposed to translate into political deference in rent-based regimes.

For all these reasons, therefore, one might expect that in Iraq the individual-level link tying economic well-being to political acquiescence may not be conditioned by the effects of ethnic conflict in the manner witnessed already in Bahrain. It may be, in other words, that in determining Iraqis' opinions of and actions toward the state, ethnic group membership and orientations toward the rival ethnic group play no role—or in any case not the decisive role seen in Bahrain—over against that of personal economy. On the other hand, however, if we do find evidence from our survey analysis that the same causal processes are at work in Iraq and Bahrain alike despite their historical and institutional dissimilarities; if we find that Iraqis' political orientations too tend to be ethnically- rather than economically-determined, then we must conclude that Bahrain's ethnic-based politics is unique only in representing an especially acute case of Sunni-Shi'i division, one that within the Arab Gulf region describes it particularly but not uniquely. What we will have learned, to repeat the earlier formulation, is that Bahrain's ethnic-based politics does not follow from a dysfunctional *rentier* state, but Bahrain's dysfunctional *rentier* state from a disruptive ethnic politics.

### **The Determinants of Political Opinion and Action in Iraq**

In investigating the effect of ethnicity on the political behavior and orientations of Iraqis, the present section proceeds as far as possible in line with the foregoing analysis of Chapter 5 so as to maximize cross-national comparability. Thus our basic theoretical hypotheses remain the same, as does the mode of testing them.<sup>1</sup> In general, we seek here again to understand the relative explanatory power of ethnic group membership and identification *contra* economics in determining the political opinions and actions of ordinary (Arab) Sunnis and Shi'is. Yet several

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<sup>1</sup> As the respondents to the Iraq survey were not asked their sector of work, however, we are unable to examine patterns of public-sector employment in Iraq. Of course, the country's public sector having been so drastically altered just prior to the fielding of the two surveys, not least via the notorious program of "de-Ba'athification," the insights offered from this analysis would likely have been in any case relatively limited.

key contextual differences demand revision of our empirical expectations. First, while in Bahrain it is the Shi'a who comprise the political out-group, in post-2003 Iraq this position is occupied by the Sunni community. Accordingly, we should expect that it is not the Shi'a but Iraqi Sunna that will tend to report more negative orientations toward the government led by their ethnic rivals, and increasingly so the more negative their orientations toward Iraqi Shi'a *qua* political force. On the other hand, Shi'a should tend to exhibit more positive orientations vis-à-vis the Iraqi government, and increasingly so the greater their apprehensions toward Sunnis *qua* political force.

The second complication is the matter of temporal variation. Between the fielding of the first Iraq survey in late 2004 and the second in the spring of 2006, the nation's political and social landscapes changed radically. In late 2004, Iraq was administered by the caretaker Interim Government installed by the U.S.-led coalition. Having itself replaced the infamous Coalition Provisional Authority less than six months earlier, the Interim Government, while headed by Shi'i Prime Minister Iyād 'Allāwī, was a conspicuously secular government. Indeed, 'Allāwī's strong stance against Sunni insurgents (he was accused of killing six in cold blood<sup>2</sup>) as well as the rebel militia of Shi'i cleric S. Muqtadā al-Ṣadr earned him wide criticism from Sunni and Shi'i alike. His support for coalition military incursions into Najaf and Fallujah in August and September of 2004 further cemented his reputation as a friend to neither group.

Beyond being simply unelected, then, the Iraqi Interim Government of late 2004, if nominally headed by a Shi'i and certainly a break from Iraq's erstwhile Sunni monopoly on power, was by no means a Shi'a-led government. As such, while we might expect more pro-government orientations from Iraqi Shi'is compared to Sunnis in 2004 simply on the basis of their much-improved political position compared to the pre-2003 status quo, we may question whether individuals who more strongly identify as Sunni or Shi'i in 2004 will be more or less supportive of the regime. That is to say, while it seems reasonable to expect an absolute Sunni-Shi'i discrepancy in orientation toward the interim government, we may doubt whether the secondary relationship between ethnic orientation and political orientation operates at all in 2004, or at least as strongly as it should in 2006.

For in the latter period Iraqi politics clearly had reached a state of direct Sunni-Shi'i confrontation. As described previously, following the country's first parliamentary elections

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<sup>2</sup> Paul McGeough, 2004, "Allawi shot prisoners in cold blood: witnesses," *Sidney Morning Herald*, July 17. Available online: <<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/07/16/1089694568757.html>>.

under its new constitution in December 2005, political fault lines exactly mirrored ethnic cleavages, and the resulting government of then and current Prime Minister Nūrī al-Mālikī, even as it was billed a coalition of “national unity,” signaled the unmistakable arrival of Shi‘a political dominance in Iraq. Underground revolutionary movements just years earlier, Shi‘a parties such as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and Iraqi al-Da‘wah now governed the country through the United Iraqi Alliance. Sunnis and Kurds countered with electoral blocs of their own, but Iraq’s ethno-religious demographics proved immutable. Furthermore, this political battle famously was fought in parallel on the streets of Iraq, culminating in what by 2007 approached all-out Sunni-Shi‘i civil war.

In 2006, therefore, the individual-level relationships between ethnicity and political orientations should tend to be the opposite those expected for 2004. As argued already, in the latter case Shi‘is should tend to be more supportive of the regime on principle as it opened the door for their political inclusion; yet since neither group could claim the 2004 government as its own, the additional impact of ethnic identification should be relatively weak. In 2006, by contrast, the regime does not represent merely the potential for Shi‘a empowerment but the fulfillment of it, and this amid armed inter-ethnic conflict. More than by ethnic group membership per se, then, Iraqis’ political views and behavior should be determined above all by their orientations toward the opposing group. Shi‘is with stronger in-group orientations—those who tend to view Sunnis as ethnic-cum-political rivals—should offer more support for the 2006 government, Sunnis with stronger in-group orientations less support. And this, of course, independent of any influence of personal economy.

A final issue arises regarding our predictions about the effect of ethnic membership and orientation on political action. In Bahrain, it was argued, political action took the form not only of Shi‘a versus state but also of Sunna versus Shi‘a, the latter in defense of the regime itself. Thus, for example, were Sunnis called to the polls to counter the “probable harm” of not voting, and Sh. al-Sa‘īdī exhorted his *majlis*-goers to protest an anti-naturalization rally (cf. CH. 3, 69). More generally, Sunni counter-mobilization is likely in Bahrain whenever mass political action by the Shi‘a-led opposition is seen to threaten the status quo. In the context of the armed Sunni-Shi‘i conflict playing out at the time of the 2006 Iraq survey, however, we must recognize the existence of an alternative to political action proper that individuals could opt to take against the government or against the rival ethnic group, namely physical violence. In Iraq, that is, more negative other-ethnic orientations may not push individuals



toward increased political action and interest—toward legitimate forms of political protest such as demonstration, petition, and so on—but toward terrorism, insurgency, or some other actual physical confrontation either with the state or with members of the rival group. It may be, accordingly, that Iraqis who most strongly identify with their own ethnic group are not more likely to be politically active and interested as in Bahrain, precisely because their other-ethnic orientations find expression through non-political means. While strictly speaking the same could be true of Bahrainis in 2009, what is known about the environment of 2006 Iraq makes such a result here considerably more likely.

More generally, political involvement among Iraqi citizens is conceptually distinct from that among Bahrainis and other Gulf populations. Iraq, though still a fledgling democracy at the time of the 2004 and 2006 surveys, was a democracy nonetheless. As such, in stark contrast to the situation in the Arab Gulf, where political action and interest itself is a form of protest, post-2003 Iraq is premised exactly upon citizen involvement in politics. Unlike the Shi'a of Bahrain, accordingly, the Sunnis of Iraq should be neither more nor less likely to take part in political action strictly on the basis of ethnic membership, for there is no expectation that they abstain from politics as in the Gulf. Political action among Bahraini Shi'a *qua* ethnic out-group, in other words, represents something rebellious and even dangerous; action among Iraqi Sunnis just another quotidian feature of participatory, democratic politics.

These caveats noted, our study of ethnic- versus economics-based political orientation in Iraq will now proceed to examine the following familiar hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1.1: Ethnic affiliation is equally significant as, or more significant than, economic well-being in predicting individual political opinion in Iraq; where*

*Hypothesis 1.1<sub>A</sub>: Sunni ethnicity is associated with more negative political opinion; further,*

*Hypothesis 1.2: The strength of ethnic identity is a significant predictor of individual political opinion and action in Iraq; where*

*Hypothesis 1.2<sub>A</sub>: Among Shi'is, stronger ethnic identity is associated with more positive political opinion; while*

*Hypothesis 1.2<sub>B</sub>: Among Sunnis, stronger ethnic identity is associated with more negative political opinion; and*

*Hypothesis 1.2<sub>C</sub>: Among Sunnis as well as Shi'is, the strength of ethnic identity is positively associated with political action. Finally,*

*Hypothesis 1.3: In 2004, the relative influence on political action and opinion of ethnic affiliation is stronger than that of ethnic identity, while in 2006 the reverse is true.*

The method and measures to be used in testing these propositions closely follow the formula of Chapter 5. Yet, as noted already, among the virtues of the Iraq survey data is that they offer a much more direct measure of other-ethnic orientations than that used in our Bahrain analysis. There, in the absence of a direct question about a respondent's orientations towards the rival ethnic group, an individual's level of personal religiosity was used as a proxy for the strength of one's ethnic identity, the latter overlapping as it does with religion. While the measure was shown to be valid, and while it did serve to bear out our theoretical predictions about the determinants of political orientation in Bahrain, nonetheless it also posed several difficulties that one would be remiss not to rectify here when the opportunity arose. In the first place, our primary RELIGIOSITY measure was itself a proxy based on another question about the qualities one deems most essential in a prospective suitor for a family member. For exactly this reason, moreover, we also checked our results with an alternative measure of religiosity that had more outward validity—"Are you religious or not?"—but was thought to be less reliable. Finally, to complicate matters further, it was found that although both measures of RELIGIOSITY tended to demonstrate the expected associations with political action and opinion, the former consistently was a better predictor of political orientations among Shi'i respondents, the latter better among Sunnis.

For all these reasons, the impending Iraq survey analysis employs a different and no doubt much-improved measure of ethnic orientation among Sunnis and Shi'is. It is based on a direct question about the extent to which a respondent considers the empowerment of one's own group and the rival ethnic group *qua* political forces as obstacles in a future Iraq.<sup>3</sup> In other words, since we hope to capture an individual's orientation toward the other group *relative to that toward one's own group*, our IDENTITY indicator measures the difference between a respondent's worry about his own group gaining power and his worry about the other group gaining power. This variable, coded by subtracting the in-group response from the out-group response for Sunnis and Shi'is, offers a scale of ethnic orientation that ranges from -3 to +3, where -3 signifies much more apprehension about one's own group gaining power

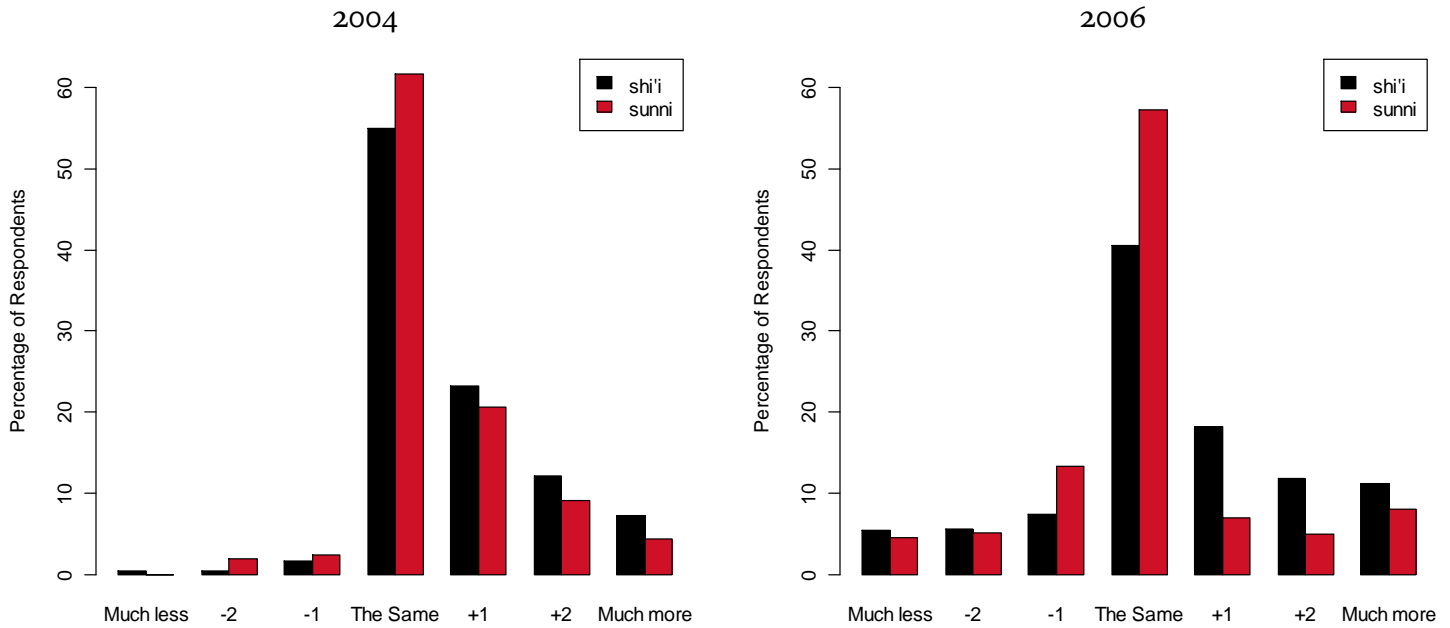
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<sup>3</sup> The exact wording of the question is: "To what extent, if any, do you think each of the following would be an obstacle for the formation of an independent, prosperous Iraq?":

1. "Shi'i groups gain a great deal of power in Iraq."
2. "Sunni groups gain a great deal of power in Iraq."

The valid response codes are (1) "a great deal," (2) "quite a lot," (3) "not very much," and (4) "not at all."

FIGURE 6.I. Concern about Empowerment of Rival Ethnic Group vis-à-vis that of Own Group (IDENTITY)



compared to the other group, and +3 much more worry about the empowerment of the rival group vis-à-vis that of one's own group. Apart from the clear conceptual validity of this measure, it also offers the practical advantage of standardized responses: by comparing one's other-ethnic orientations to an in-group orientation baseline, the measure can differentiate a respondent who is apprehensive about *either* ethnic group gaining power (say, a secular Sunni or Shi'i) from one worried specifically about the *other* group gaining power, who if we based our measure only upon other-ethnic orientations would be indistinguishable.

The distributions of this IDENTITY variable for the years 2004 and 2006 are depicted in FIGURE 6.I above. In general, one sees that although a majority or plurality of both Sunnis and Shi'is report no difference in apprehension toward the empowerment of the other ethnic group over against that of their co-ethnics, in 2004 this other-ethnic concern was much more pronounced than that in 2006. Indeed, in the latter case nearly a quarter of Sunnis and Shi'is report more apprehension about the empowerment of their own group than that of the rival, a result one might attribute to respondent reaction to the armed inter-ethnic conflict being fought at that time. Finally, one perceives that across both surveys Shi'i respondents tend to report more negative other-ethnic orientations than Iraqi Sunnis. In 2004 some 43% of Shi'a

were more worried about the empowerment of Sunni groups, while the reverse was true among only 34% of Sunnis. In 2006 the difference is even more pronounced, with 41% of Shi'a indicating more worry about other-ethnic empowerment, compared to only 20% of Sunna.

Apart from this change in ethnic identity measure, the only other difference between our models of political orientation in Bahrain and Iraq is the inclusion in the latter of two additional control variables.<sup>4</sup> The first, a ten-category scale of respondent household *INCOME*, was not used in Bahrain because of an extremely low response rate for this question. The second, not at all applicable in Bahrain, is a measure of respondent attitudes toward the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq.<sup>5</sup> This control is meant to separate respondents' orientations toward the Iraqi government per se from their views about the U.S.-led intervention. Particularly at the time of the 2004 survey, when the Iraqi government was still coalition-appointed, this US control is important in order to avoid spurious associations, since it is probable that those individuals more strongly-oriented against their ethnic rivals are also more likely to reject the U.S.-led involvement in Iraq and by association the Western-backed interim government.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding our other independent variable of theoretical interest, household economy, its operationalization is substantively unchanged from the Bahrain survey analysis, though it does here offer wider variation in response. Iraqi respondents were asked to rate from one to ten their overall satisfaction with the financial situation of their household.<sup>7</sup> The remaining control variables are also unchanged from the Chapter 5 model and include education level on a nine-point scale, respondent age, and a dummy for female gender.

As clarified already, finally, the model specification itself retains its previous form:

$$RESPONSE = B_0 + ETHNIC \cdot B_1 + IDENTITY \cdot B_2 + IDENTITY \times ETH \cdot B_3 + AGE \cdot B_4 + FEM \cdot B_5 + EDUC \cdot B_6 + ECON \cdot B_7 + ECON \times ETH \cdot B_8 + INC \cdot B_9 + US \cdot B_{10} + US \times ETH \cdot B_{11} + \epsilon,$$

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, as previously noted, the Iraq survey data lacks information about field interviewer characteristics, so an analysis of the impact of inter-ethnic interviewing on Sunni and Shi'i responses is not possible here.

<sup>5</sup> The question asks, "When do you think U.S. and other Coalition Forces should leave Iraq?" Valid responses are: (1) "They should leave now"; (2) "They should remain until after the new government is formed"; (3) "They should remain for another year"; (4) "They should remain for more than a year"; (5) "They should remain until security is restored"; and (6) "They should never leave."

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the bivariate correlation between this control variable and confidence in the 2004 government is 0.21 among Shi'is and a tremendous 0.34 among Sunnis. (And even in 2006 these correlations remain substantial at 0.15 and 0.22, respectively.) At the same time, the control is also highly correlated with our *IDENTITY* variable, at around 0.10 among both Sunnis and Shi'is in 2004 (and about 0.05 in 2006).

<sup>7</sup> More exactly: "How satisfied are you with the financial situation of your household? If '1' means you are completely dissatisfied on this scale, and '10' means you are completely satisfied, where would you put your satisfaction with your household's financial situation?"

where RESPONSE is a normative political opinion or a political action; and the third, eighth, and eleventh terms are all multiplicative interaction terms that allow, respectively, for separate estimates of the effects of IDENTITY, ECONOMY, and US for Sunni and Shi'i respondents. As before, the model will be estimated by OLS or probit regression as appropriate.

To conclude our introduction with some description of the dependent variables to be utilized, here too the analysis mirrors as far as possible that of the previous chapter. Thus each of the three response variables matches or closely corresponds to those investigated in the study of Bahrain. These are, as for political opinions: (1) one's overall confidence in the government and (2) one's evaluation of overall government performance; and, with respect to political actions, (3) the extent of one's participation in protest demonstrations. Note that the final indicator is only available in the 2006 survey.

### **The Sources of Political Orientation in Iraq**

The first political opinion to be examined is overall confidence in the Iraqi government (in 2004, "the interim government").<sup>8</sup> The 2004 and 2006 distributions of responses are depicted below in FIGURE 6.2, which demonstrates the difference a mere two years can make. In 2004, only 12% of Sunnis were either "somewhat" or "a great deal" confident in Iraq's government, while some two-thirds reported no confidence at all. Although a combined majority (55%) of Shi'a also were less confident than confident in 2004, still Shi'a confidence was almost five times the magnitude of that among Iraqi Sunnis. Yet by 2006 this marked between-ethnic difference had all but disappeared: now a combined 59% of Sunnis were "somewhat" (27%) or "a great deal" confident (32%) in the government, as were 57% of Shi'is, a fact that offers some preliminary evidence in support of *Hypothesis 1.3* that ethnic affiliation per se should tend to be a much greater driving force of political orientation in 2004 than in 2006.

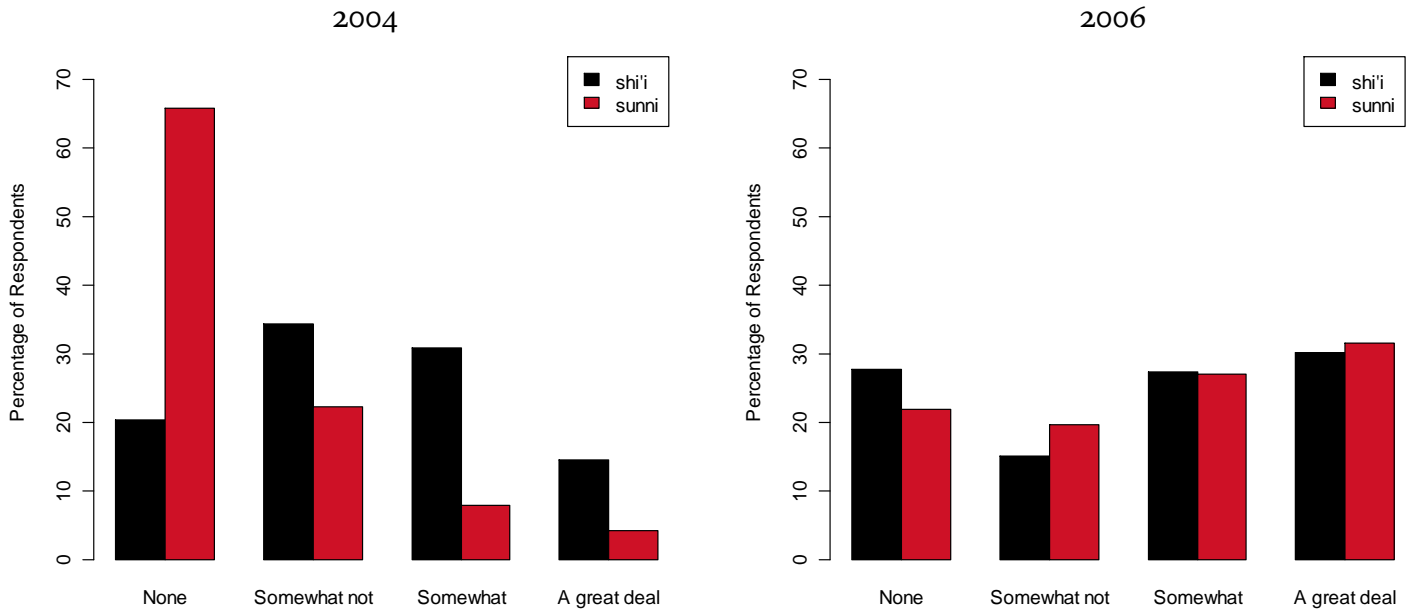
To confirm these indications, we proceed to the results of our multivariate analysis. Summarized in TABLE 6.3 are the findings from three separate OLS regression<sup>9</sup> estimations: a pooled model, a 2004 model, and a 2006 model. The first is instructive mostly in illustrating the need for the latter two. Indeed, despite the benefit of a sample size that is doubled from

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<sup>8</sup> The exact wording is: "I am going to name a number of groups and organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?"

<sup>9</sup> Note that for the same reasons as previously (cf. CH. 5, 179, note 26), namely the ease of interpretation, OLS regression is employed here despite the ordinal coding of the dependent variable. In any case, the substantive results are identical and indeed even more robust if the models are estimated by ordered probit.

FIGURE 6.2. “How Confident Are You in the Iraqi (Interim) Government?,” by Ethnicity



the year-specific models, the pooled estimation in fact explains *less* of the total variation in government confidence than either the standalone 2004 or 2006 model, with an *R*-squared statistic of only 0.20 compared to 0.23 and 0.32, respectively. More obviously, many of the variables that are extremely significant predictors of government confidence in the pooled model—including ETHNICITY, FEMALE, EDUCATION, and US × ETHNICITY—are thereafter shown to be such only in one of the two years. In the interpretation to follow, accordingly, we focus always on the disaggregated results.

Because the substantive effects of the independent variables of interest are not directly interpretable from the raw regression output alone, we again follow the procedure established in Chapter 5.<sup>10</sup> Namely, we represent the marginal effects of our explanators visually, showing the range of the modifying variable across which a given effect is statistically-significant. At the same time, we offer plots of the predicted values of a dependent variable given those of the independent variables of interest. The latter is especially illustrative as it allows one to visualize the effects of ethnic group membership and ethnic identification simultaneously.

<sup>10</sup> More generally, this procedure is that recommended by Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006) in “Understanding Interaction Models: Improving Empirical Analyses.” Cf. CH. 5, 177, note 23.

**TABLE 6.3.** *The Determinants of Government Confidence among Iraqis, estimated by OLS Regression*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<b>Combined</b>			<b>2004</b>			<b>2006</b>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>
ETHNICITY	-0.503	0.116	0.000	-0.838	0.151	0.000	-0.00219	0.166	0.989
IDENTITY	0.286	0.0165	0.000	0.0616	0.0309	0.047	0.389	0.0181	0.000
IDENTITY × ETH	-0.546	0.0451	0.000	-0.0968	0.0526	0.066	-0.602	0.0568	0.000
ECONOMY	0.0491	0.0107	0.000	0.0320	0.0139	0.022	0.0843	0.0165	0.000
ECON × ETH	-0.00774	0.0200	0.698	-0.0177	0.0229	0.440	0.0229	0.0284	0.420
AGE	-0.000484	0.00147	0.741	0.00408	0.00190	0.032	-0.00457	0.00200	0.023
FEMALE	0.127	0.0390	0.001	0.0590	0.0486	0.225	0.213	0.0545	0.000
EDUCATION	-0.0326	0.00759	0.000	-0.0117	0.00941	0.213	-0.0542	0.0108	0.000
INCOME	0.0154	0.0119	0.195	0.00125	0.0150	0.934	-0.0142	0.0167	0.394
US	0.0780	0.0153	0.000	0.140	0.0189	0.000	0.144	0.0293	0.000
US × ETH	0.202	0.0349	0.000	0.173	0.0563	0.002	-0.00124	0.0474	0.979
Constant	0.969	0.0871	0.000	0.692	0.119	0.000	1.190	0.121	0.000
<i>N</i>	2838			1451			1387		
Prob. > $F(\chi^2)$	0.0000			0.0000			0.0000		
$R^2$	0.2012			0.2313			0.3204		

Note: Robust standard errors reported for all models

The predicted values plots corresponding to the 2004 and 2006 models are given below in FIGURES 6.4 and 6.5, respectively. One sees that, as suggested already by FIGURE 6.2, in 2004 ethnic membership itself plays the largest role in determining the extent of Iraqis' confidence in the government. While this between-ethnic gap is seen to increase—indeed, nearly double—as in-group ethnic orientation increases from its minimum of  $-3$  to  $+3$ , still the substantive impact of ethnic membership remains stronger. In the first place, the IDENTITY variable in 2004 is distributed with a mean of about 0.6 and standard deviation of around 1. So

FIGURE 6.4. Predicted Levels of Government Confidence in 2004, by IDENTITY

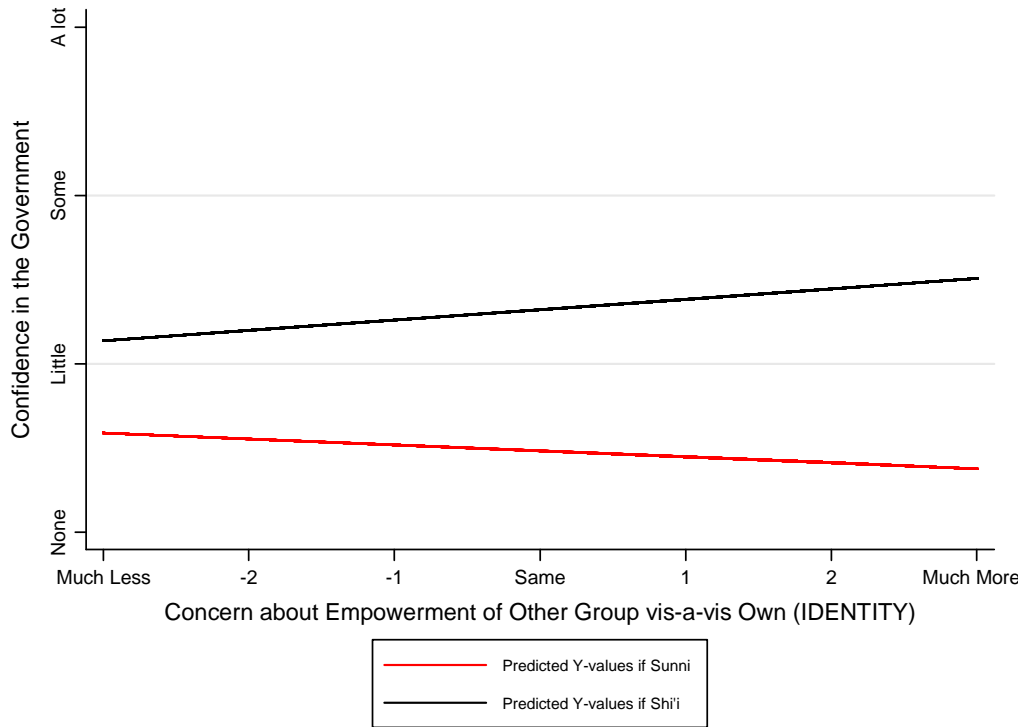


FIGURE 6.5. Predicted Levels of Government Confidence in 2006, by IDENTITY

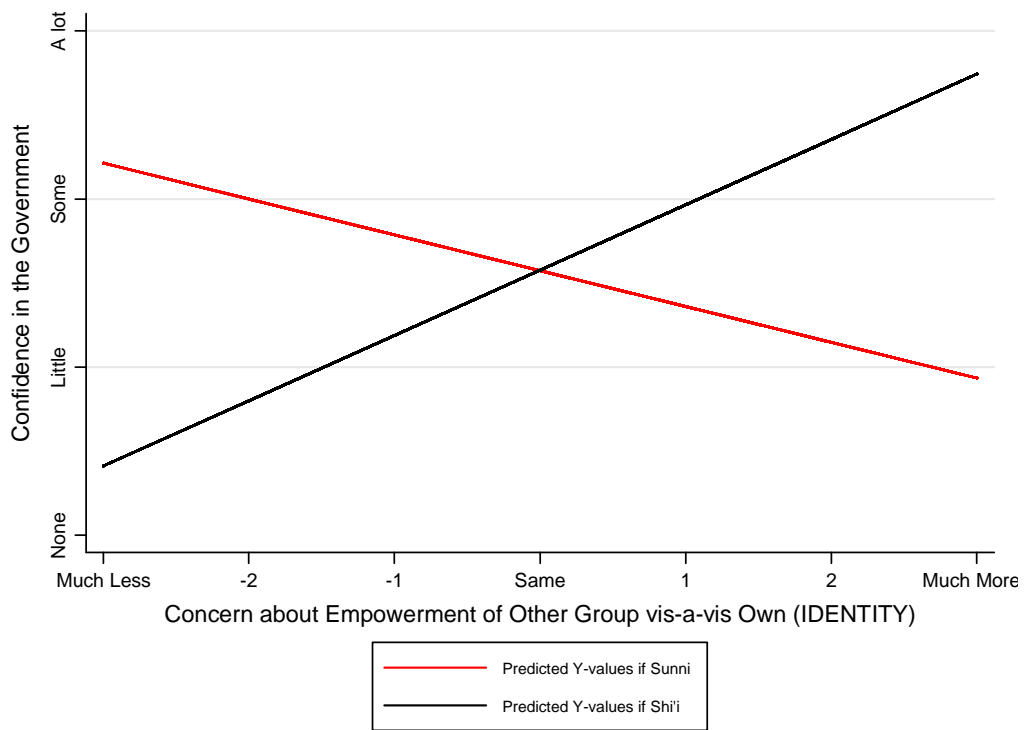
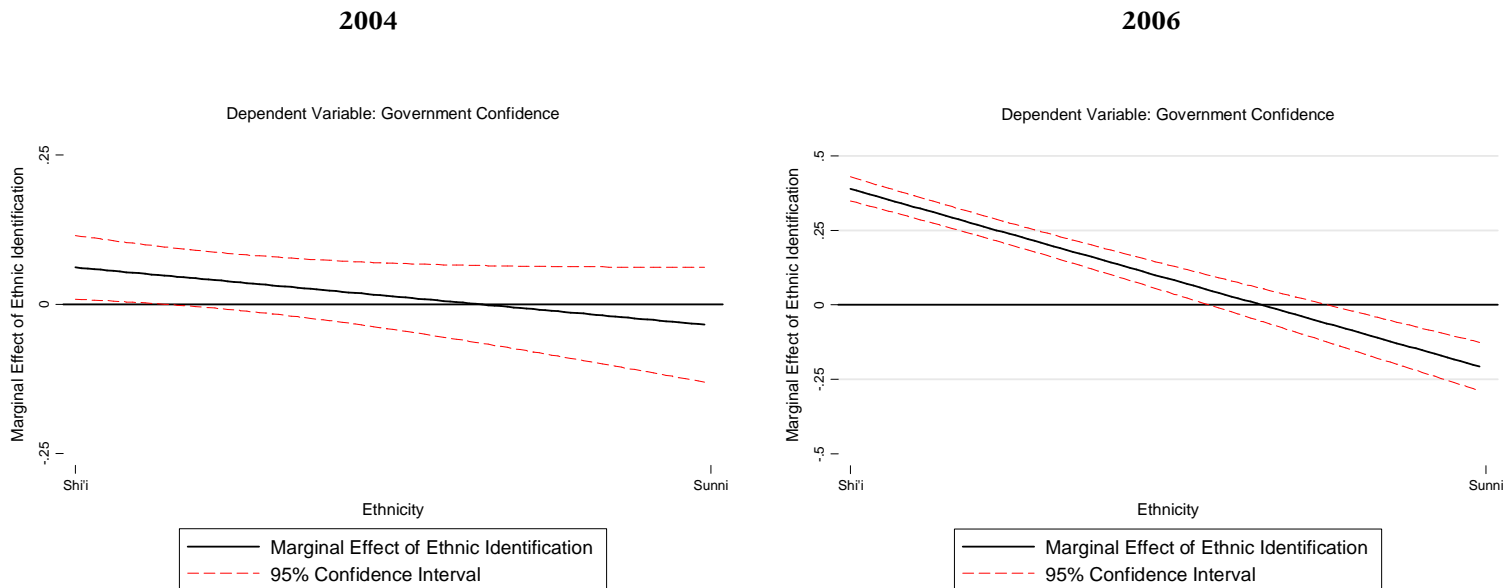




FIGURE 6.6. *The Marginal Effect of IDENTITY on Government Confidence*

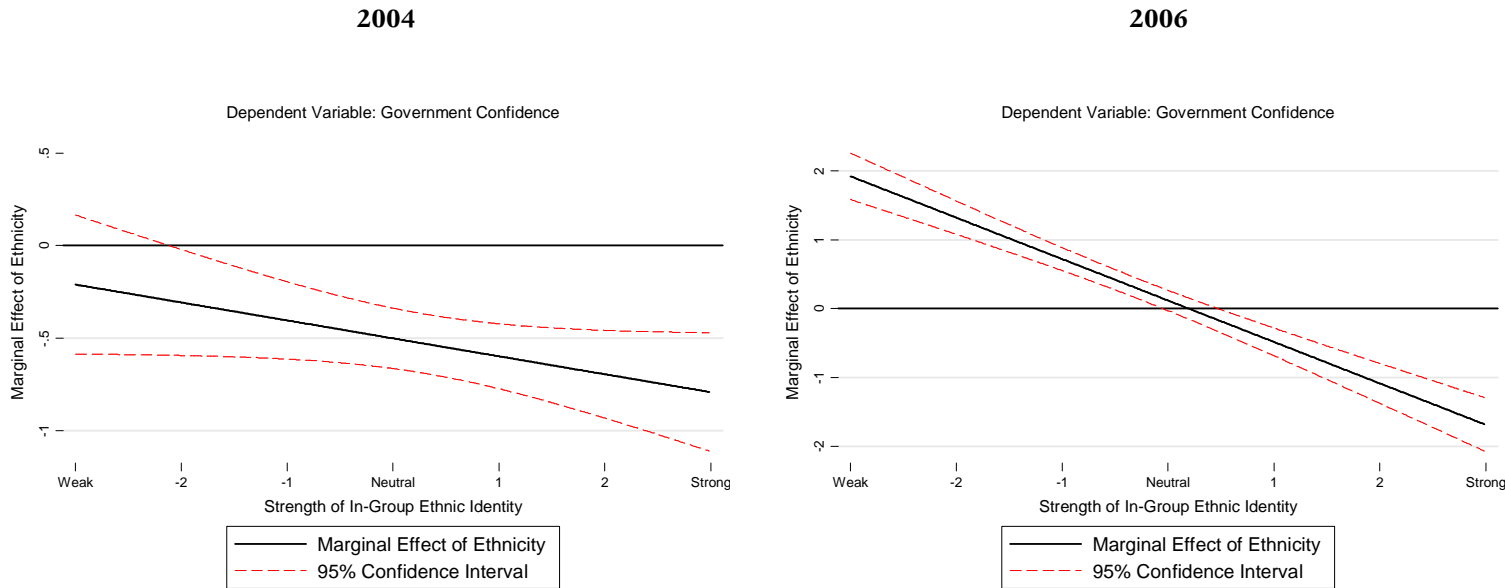


while the additional augmenting influence of *IDENTITY* on government confidence appears great when viewed across the entirety of its range, in fact a more substantively-significant range would be that of  $\pm 1$  standard deviation, i.e. from  $-0.6$  to  $+1.6$ . Furthermore, as seen in the left-hand side of FIGURE 6.6, the effect of identification among Sunnis in 2004, though in the expected direction, is not even statistically-significant at a tolerable level.

In 2006, by contrast, the substantive impact of ethnic in-group identification is no less than staggering among both Sunnis and Shi'is. Indeed, the bivariate correlation between the *IDENTITY* and *GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE* variables is  $-0.15$  among Sunnis and an astounding  $0.53$  among Shi'a, and the *t*-statistics associated with these *Model 3* coefficients are  $-12.87$  and  $18.84$ , respectively.<sup>11</sup> The statistical significance of these effects is most easily appreciated from the right-hand panel of FIGURE 6.6, which tells that a one-unit increase in *IDENTITY* is associated with a  $0.39$ -unit increase in government confidence among Shi'is, while at the same time it produces a  $0.21$ -unit *decrease* in government confidence among Sunnis. Since in 2006 *IDENTITY* has a standard deviation of approximately  $1.5$ , a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation change in *IDENTITY* is associated with an increase in *GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE* of around  $1.17$  among

<sup>11</sup> Note that the relatively lower bivariate correlation among Sunnis is due to the confounding influence of their more oppositional orientations toward the U.S. occupation, for which we control in the multivariate model.

FIGURE 6.7. *The Marginal Effect of ETHNICITY on Government Confidence*

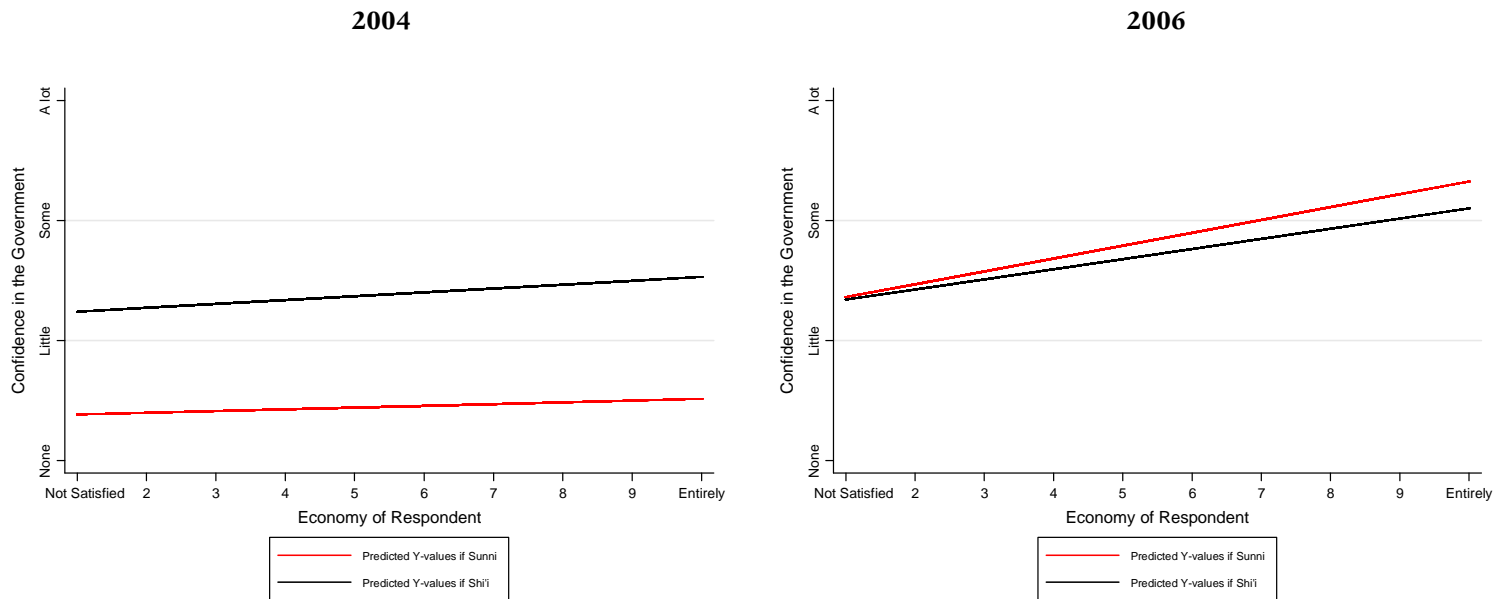


Shi'is and a *decrease* of 0.63 among Sunnis. In substantive terms, these changes correspond to about 39% and 21% of the entire 3-category range of the dependent variable, respectively.

Thus, each of our theoretical hypotheses regarding the impact on political opinion of ethnicity and ethnic orientations in Iraq finds evidence in this first indicator investigated. In 2004, confidence in the government is determined above all simply on the basis of one's being a Sunni versus a Shi'i. While neither group expresses great confidence in absolute terms, still Sunni confidence tends to be some 0.3 to 0.8 units lower (depending on *IDENTITY*) and, as depicted in FIGURE 6.7, systematically decreases as ethnic in-group identity grows stronger. This Sunni-Shi'i difference obtains among all citizens except those with the weakest in-group ethnic identity (i.e., when *IDENTITY* equals  $-3$ ). In 2006, meanwhile, one sees from the other half of FIGURE 6.7 that the operative variable is not ethnic group membership itself but ethnic orientation: Sunnis with a stronger than neutral ethnic identity report much less confidence in the Shi'a-led government;<sup>12</sup> those with a weaker than neutral identity report much more confidence. In similar fashion, Shi'a hold much less confidence in the government if they are wary of their own ethnic group becoming too powerful, and much more confidence as their

<sup>12</sup> Recall that *ETHNICITY* is coded 1 for Sunnis, so its marginal effect is always expressed in terms of Sunni ethnicity.

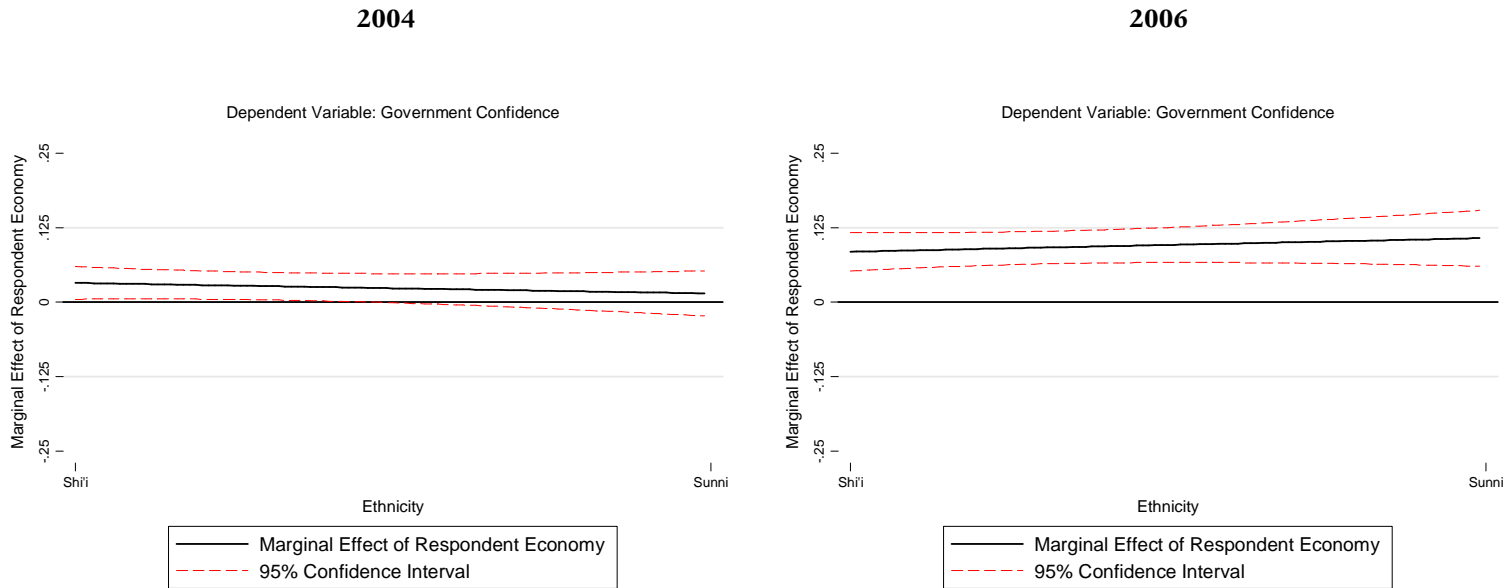
FIGURE 6.8. *Predicted Levels of Government Confidence, by ECONOMY*



concern for Sunni empowerment mounts. The influence of ethnicity, in other words, depends inextricably upon an individual’s orientation toward the rival group vis-à-vis his own. In Iraq as in Bahrain, “the government” is not understood as a neutral executor of state power but as an institutional embodiment of ethnic domination, and Iraqis’ views toward it—both in 2004 and in 2006—are fashioned accordingly.

The only remaining question, then, is how far these ethnic effects are drowned out by the competing individual-level influence of economics. Depicted in FIGURE 6.8 are the predicted values of GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE according to a respondent’s level of satisfaction with the financial situation of his household. Both results tend to agree with the foregoing: in 2004, the scant effect of household economy is entirely overshadowed by that of ethnic group membership, whereas in 2006 the orientations of those from both communities are influenced in identical fashion by ECONOMY. Relatively-speaking, therefore, in 2004 ethnicity is doubtless the more powerful determinant of government confidence among Sunnis and Shi’is. In fact, as shown below in the right side of FIGURE 6.9, the marginal effect of economy among Sunnis (like that of IDENTITY before) is not even statistically-significant in the 2004 model. And this effect among Shi’is is estimated at only 0.03—or about  $0.03 \times 4.55 \approx 0.14$  for

FIGURE 6.9. *The Marginal Effect of ECONOMY on Government Confidence*



a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation-increase in the *ECONOMY* variable. In 2006, by contrast, the effect of household economy is substantively- and statistically-significant. As illustrated in the right-side panel of FIGURE 6.9, the marginal effect of *ECONOMY* is an estimated 0.08 among Shi'is and 0.11 among Sunnis—or 0.36 and 0.49, respectively, across a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation range of the *ECONOMY* measure, which in 2006 corresponds to around 4.45 units.

In comparative terms, therefore, the substantive influence of *ECONOMY* on government confidence is weaker than that of the combined influence of *ETHNICITY* and *IDENTITY* both in 2004 and in 2006. In the first year, the substantive impact of economic satisfaction is some 4 to 5 times less than that of ethnic affiliation and nearly equals that of the additional, augmenting influence of *IDENTITY* among Shi'a,<sup>13</sup> at 0.14 compared to 0.12. Then, in 2006, even as the effect of household economy increases substantially to an estimated 0.36 among Shi'a and 0.49 among Sunna, nonetheless it is still surpassed by that of *IDENTITY*, a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation-increase of which produces an estimated increase in *GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE* of 1.14 among

<sup>13</sup> In reality, the lack of statistical significance of the *ECONOMY* and *IDENTITY* variables among Sunni respondents is more likely a product of a small sample size than of absence of an empirical relationship. At only 500 observations, the Sunni sub-sample comprises only 28% of all (Arab) respondents in both 2004 and 2006. That the estimates here offer less statistical confidence than those among Shi'a, then, may be forgiven, especially since the direction and magnitude of the estimated relationships with *GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE* accord with our theoretical expectations.

Shi'is and a decrease of 0.63 among Sunnis. Especially among Iraqi Shi'a, then, in 2006 concern for the empowerment of the rival ethnic group far outstripped that for material well-being in determining the extent of an individual's confidence in the Iraqi government.

We may conclude this opening analysis, finally, with a brief discussion of two issues related to the several control variables employed in the regression model. The first of these is the extreme statistical significance of the measure of anti-U.S. orientations in both the 2004 and 2006 models, a result which, if little surprising, still serves to demonstrate precisely why its inclusion in the model was necessary. The second notable finding regarding the control variables is the lack of importance of respondent income per se in determining government orientations, at least as measured here. Indeed, the *INCOME* variable has coefficients of just 0.00125 in the 2004 model and -0.0142 in the 2006 model, both of which estimates lack any statistical significance.<sup>14</sup> The main reason we highlight this result is that it supports the use here and in Chapter 5 of a respondent's subjective economic satisfaction in testing the logic of *rentier* theory rather than a measure of household income. Here the difficulty is not so important as we may simply include *INCOME* as a control variable and allow the estimation results to speak for themselves. However, in Bahrain, recall, we did not have this luxury due to a very high refusal rate there for questions asking about respondent and household income (cf. CH. 5, 171, note 18). That our choice of the independent variable *ECONOMY* is justified in the case of Iraq, then, gives us more confidence that this is true also in the case of Bahrain.

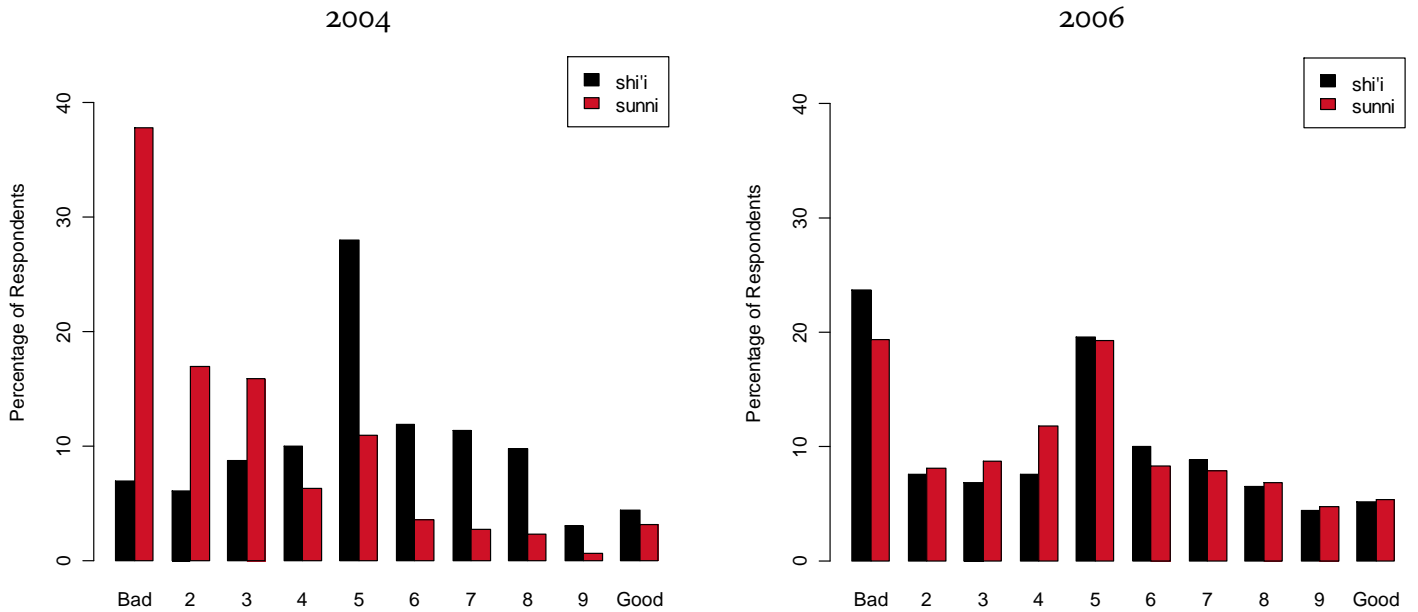
The other political opinion to be examined here is doubtless the most direct measure of government orientation of all the questions asked in the Iraq surveys. Iraqis were asked to rate on a 1 to 10 scale "how well the government is doing" in leading the country.<sup>15</sup> The year-specific distributions of responses are given in FIGURE 6.10, whose two panels bare an obvious resemblance to those before corresponding to *GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE*. In 2004, almost four in ten Sunnis give the Iraqi interim government a lowest possible 1 rating of overall performance. More generally, only 12% of Sunni respondents give of rating of more than 5, or neutral. Among Shi'a, meanwhile, a strong plurality (28%) offers a neutral rating of government performance, while another 40% reports a positive evaluation, i.e. one above 5.

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<sup>14</sup> Note that the same result obtains if one allows separate estimates of *INCOME* for the two ethnic groups; or if one excludes the *ECONOMY* and *ECONOMY* × *ETHNICITY* variables altogether from the model, leaving *INCOME* as the sole regressor measuring respondent wealth.

<sup>15</sup> The exact wording is: "People have different views about the ideal way of governing this country. Here is a scale for rating how well the government is doing: 1 means very bad; 10 means very good. What point on this scale would you choose to describe how well the government [in 2004: "interim government"] is doing."

FIGURE 6.IO. Overall Evaluation of (Interim) Iraqi Government Performance, by Ethnicity



By 2006, however, once again the Sunni and Shi'i distributions essentially converge in a single bimodal distribution, with one peak corresponding to the plurality of respondents from both ethnic groups (19% of Sunnis and 24% of Shi'is) that give the government the lowest possible rating; another to the 20% of Shi'is and 19% of Sunnis who report a neutral rating. In general, then, the year-specific response patterns seem to follow those of the previous dependent variable in revealing a considerable Sunni-Shi'i discrepancy in 2004, at which time Sunnis tend to report more negative government opinions, but no such between-ethnic gap in 2006.

These visual impressions are confirmed once more in the results of our multivariate estimation, summarized in TABLE 6.II. To see this we turn to the plots that follow. The first, FIGURE 6.I2, shows that even after controlling for the other individual-level factors included in our model of GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE, still the predicted evaluation of a Sunni Iraqi is an estimated  $1\frac{3}{4}$  to  $2\frac{1}{4}$  points lower than that of a Shi'i, a gap that increases with the strength of a respondent's ethnic identity but, as demonstrated in the left-hand panel of FIGURE 6.I4, remains statistically robust even at the lowest values of its modifying variable IDENTITY. All this is to say that, in 2004 Iraq, simply being a Sunni rather than a Shi'i citizen is associated with a government rating that is over one and a half times more negative.

TABLE 6.II. *The Determinants of Iraqis' Evaluations of Government Performance, estimated by OLS*

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<b>Combined</b>			<b>2004</b>			<b>2006</b>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p &gt;  t </i>
ETHNICITY	-0.959	0.271	0.000	-2.018	0.400	0.000	-0.472	0.384	0.218
IDENTITY	0.572	0.0387	0.000	0.109	0.0674	0.107	0.778	0.0480	0.000
IDENTITY × ETH	-0.955	0.105	0.000	-0.123	0.151	0.414	-1.112	0.140	0.000
ECONOMY	0.167	0.0268	0.000	0.0996	0.0344	0.004	0.211	0.0424	0.000
ECON × ETH	0.0392	0.0489	0.422	-0.00643	0.0623	0.918	0.132	0.0710	0.063
AGE	-0.00373	0.00339	0.272	0.00382	0.00434	0.379	-0.0128	0.00503	0.011
FEMALE	0.121	0.0912	0.186	-0.0341	0.117	0.772	0.262	0.133	0.050
EDUCATION	-0.0700	0.0176	0.000	-0.0499	0.0230	0.030	-0.0888	0.0256	0.001
INCOME	-0.00206	0.0281	0.941	0.0575	0.0366	0.116	-0.0918	0.0410	0.025
US	0.384	0.0356	0.000	0.471	0.0427	0.000	0.202	0.0698	0.004
US × ETH	-0.0275	0.0785	0.726	0.176	0.147	0.231	-0.131	0.111	0.235
Constant	3.361	0.217	0.000	3.327	0.292	0.000	4.014	0.322	0.000
<i>N</i>	2885			1476			1409		
Prob. > $F(\chi^2)$	0.0000			0.0000			0.0000		
$R^2$	0.2052			0.2719			0.2328		

Note: Robust standard errors reported for all models

Also as found in the analysis of GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE, the additional influence of IDENTITY is quite weak in 2004, and it operates only among Shi'i respondents. Its marginal effect is plotted in FIGURE 6.15. The estimate among Shi'a of 0.11 corresponds to a 0.22 point increase in GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE for a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation-increase in IDENTITY, a far cry indeed from the considerable substantive impact of ETHNICITY. Yet it is a farther cry still from the effect of IDENTITY in 2006, and this among members of both ethnic communities. As depicted strikingly in FIGURE 6.13, the government ratings of Sunnis and especially of Shi'is are

FIGURE 6.I2. Predicted Rating of Government Performance in 2004, by IDENTITY

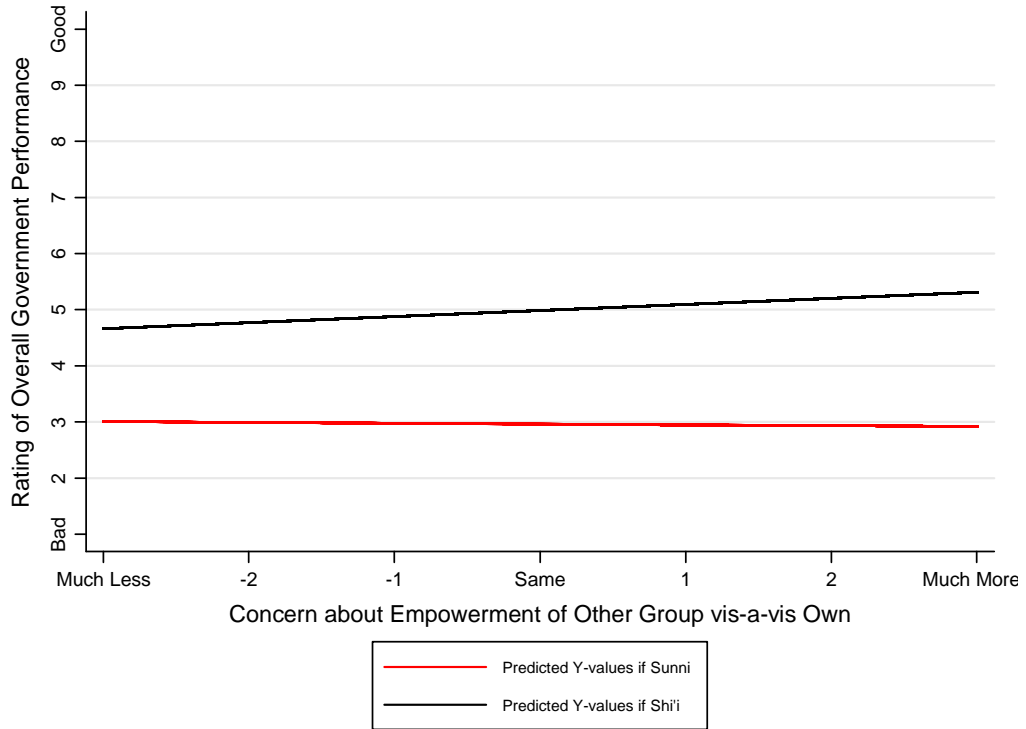


FIGURE 6.I3. Predicted Rating of Government Performance in 2006, by IDENTITY

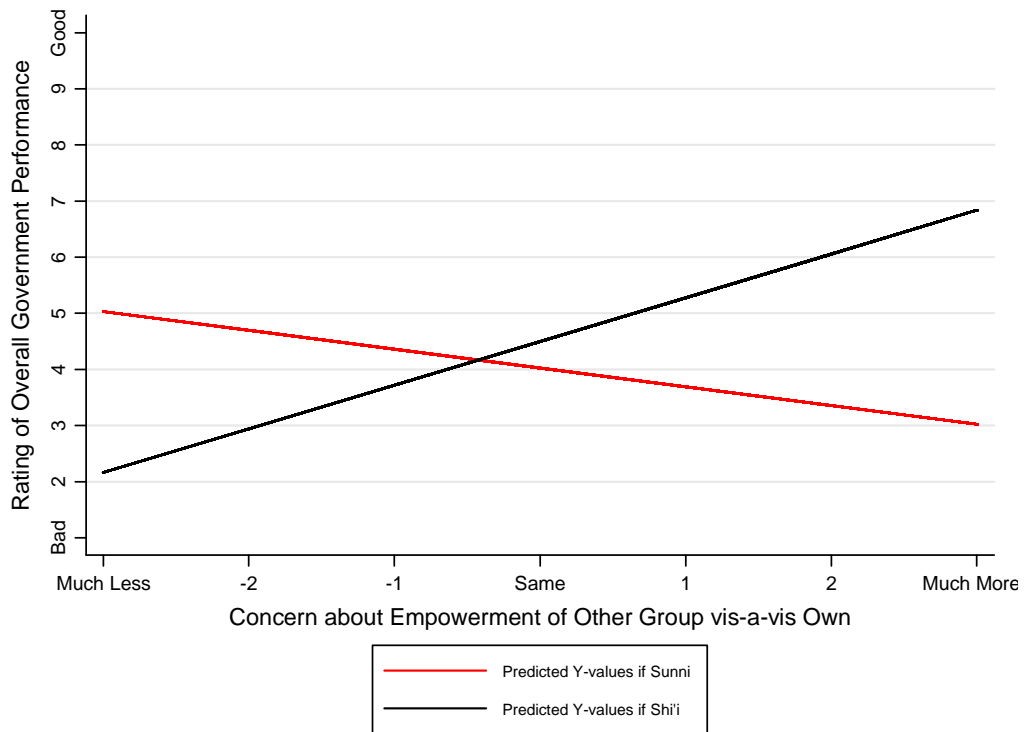
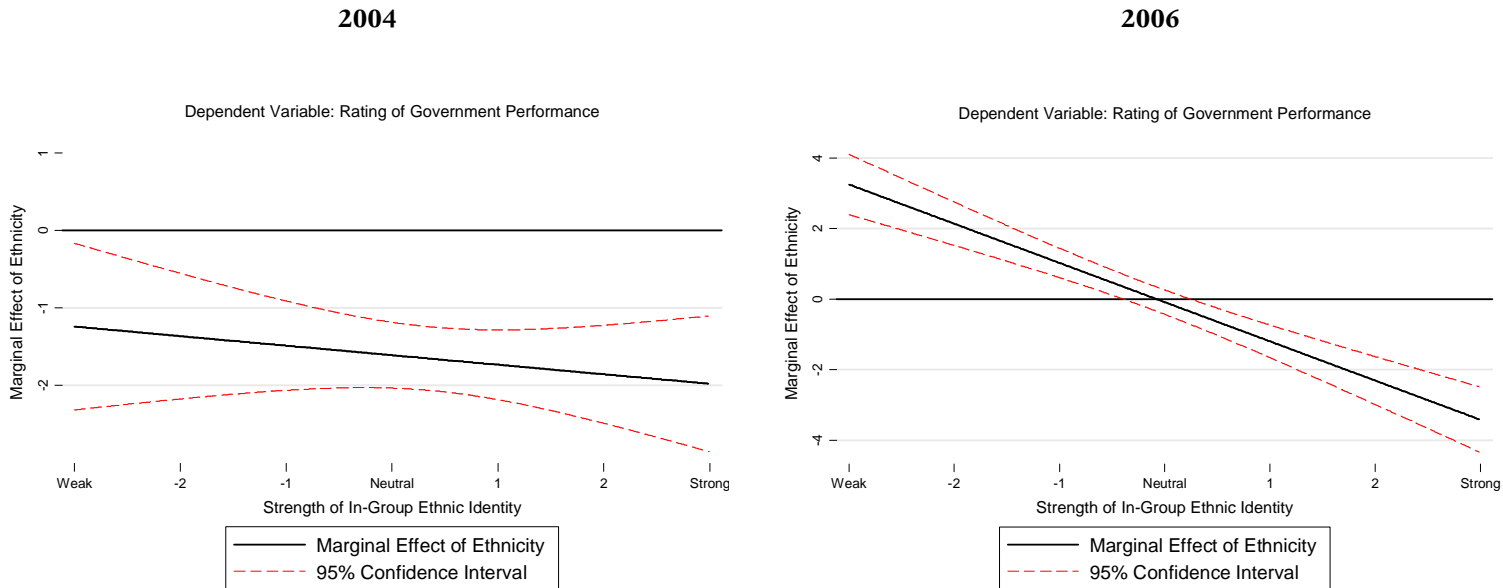




FIGURE 6.14. *The Marginal Effect of ETHNICITY on Rating of Government Performance*

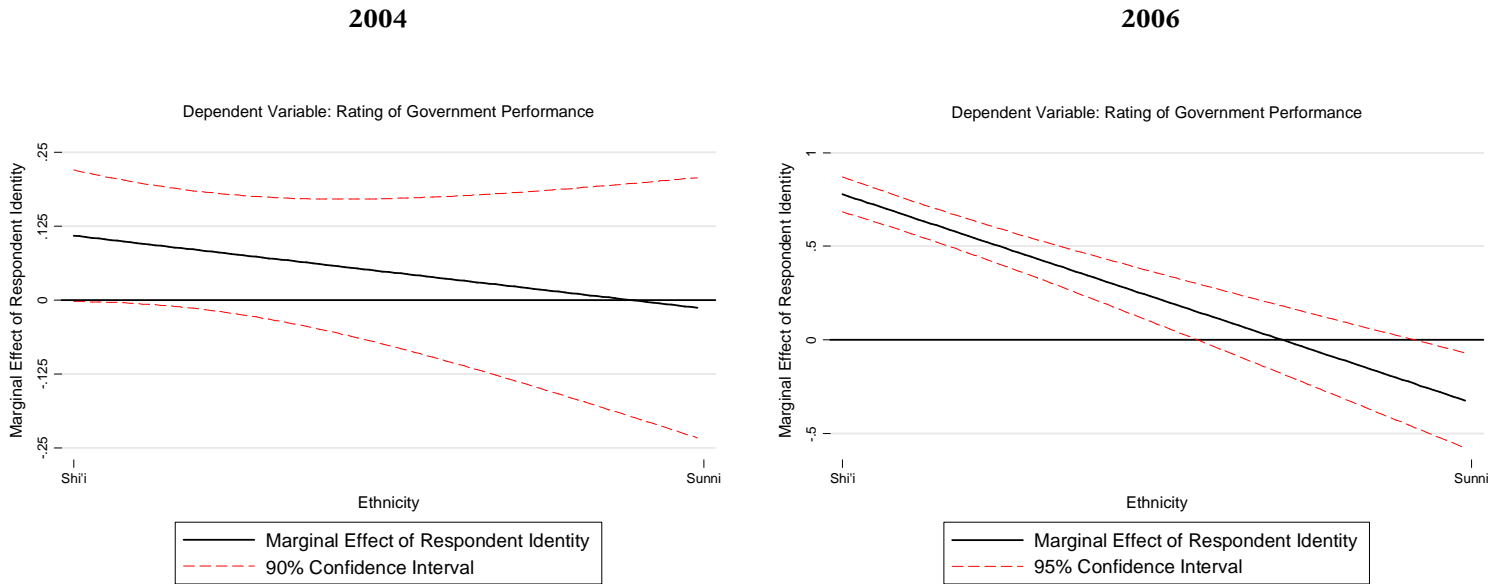


determined in no small part by their in-group versus out-group ethnic orientations.<sup>16</sup> Sunnis with strong in-group identification tend to report much more negative views of Iraq’s 2006 government, while Shi’a of equivalent orientations report much more positive views. Indeed, the difference separating Sunnis and Shi’is of the strongest in-group identity (+3) approaches 4 points, or 44% of the entire 10-point scale of government performance. Conversely, Shi’is who are more apprehensive of *Shi’i* rather than *Sunni* empowerment report substantially more negative government orientations, and vice versa for Sunnis who fear empowerment of their own group. In total, the estimated marginal effect of IDENTITY among Sunna in 2006 is  $-0.33$ , among Shi’a  $0.78$ . These one-unit changes, given in FIGURE 6.15, correspond to substantive effects of  $-0.97$  and  $2.29$ , respectively, for a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation-increase in IDENTITY.

To see how these ethnic effects compare substantively to that of economic well-being in shaping individual political orientation in Iraq, we examine finally this other independent variable of interest in our regression models. The predicted government ratings of Sunni and Shi’i respondents according to reported levels of economic satisfaction is found in FIGURE 6.16.

<sup>16</sup> As before, the bivariate correlation between the dependent variable here and IDENTITY is astounding, especially among Shi’a where it reaches 0.45. And the associated *t*-statistic on the regression coefficient in the multivariate model is over 16 (that on the interaction term corresponding to IDENTITY among Sunnis is approximately 8).

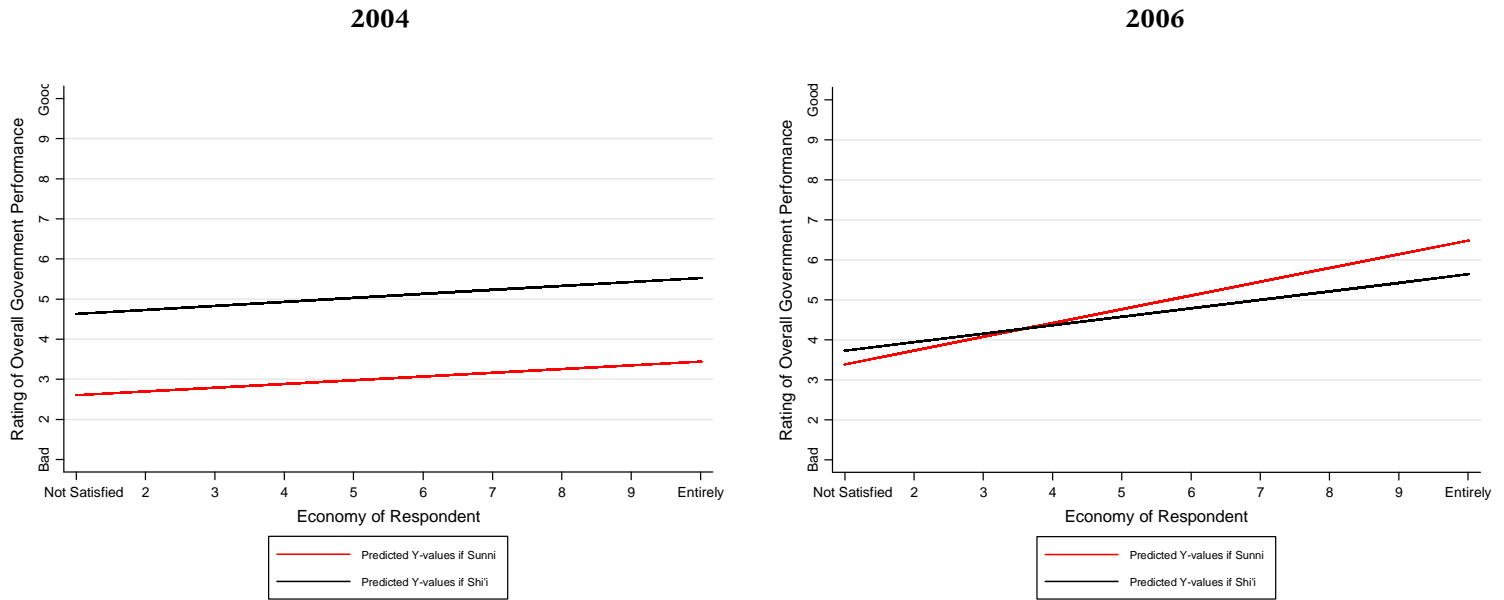
FIGURE 6.15. *The Marginal Effect of IDENTITY on Rating of Government Performance*



Like those of FIGURE 6.8, the two predicted values graphs reveal that, while members of both communities tend to report more positive government ratings the more satisfied they are economically, nonetheless this influence of household economy does nothing to erase the considerable Sunni-Shi'i gap that exists in 2004, and cannot eclipse the substantive impact of ethnic identification in 2006. In the first place, in 2004 the marginal effect of *ECONOMY* is an estimated 0.10 among Iraqi Shi'a and 0.09 among Sunnis, as per FIGURE 6.17.<sup>17</sup> For a  $\pm 1$  standard deviation-change in *ECONOMY*, these correspond to changes in *GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE* of 0.45 and 0.41, respectively, substantive effects that are thus dwarfed by that of ethnic group membership at between 1.75 and 2.25, depending on *IDENTITY*. Secondly, even the relatively more substantial effects of *ECONOMY* on Sunnis and Shi'is in 2006—an estimated 0.34 and 0.21, respectively, amounting to 1.51 and 0.95 in substantive ( $\pm 1$  standard deviation) terms—are merely on par in magnitude with those of *IDENTITY*, at 0.97 among Sunnis and 2.27 among Shi'is. Far from dominating competing factors that may influence political opinion as assumed in the *rentier* state literature, then, economic contentment is just one among many individual-level determinants of citizens' orientations toward their regime, be it in Bahrain or in Iraq.

<sup>17</sup> As already discussed, one can overlook the relatively lower statistical confidence of the latter estimate.

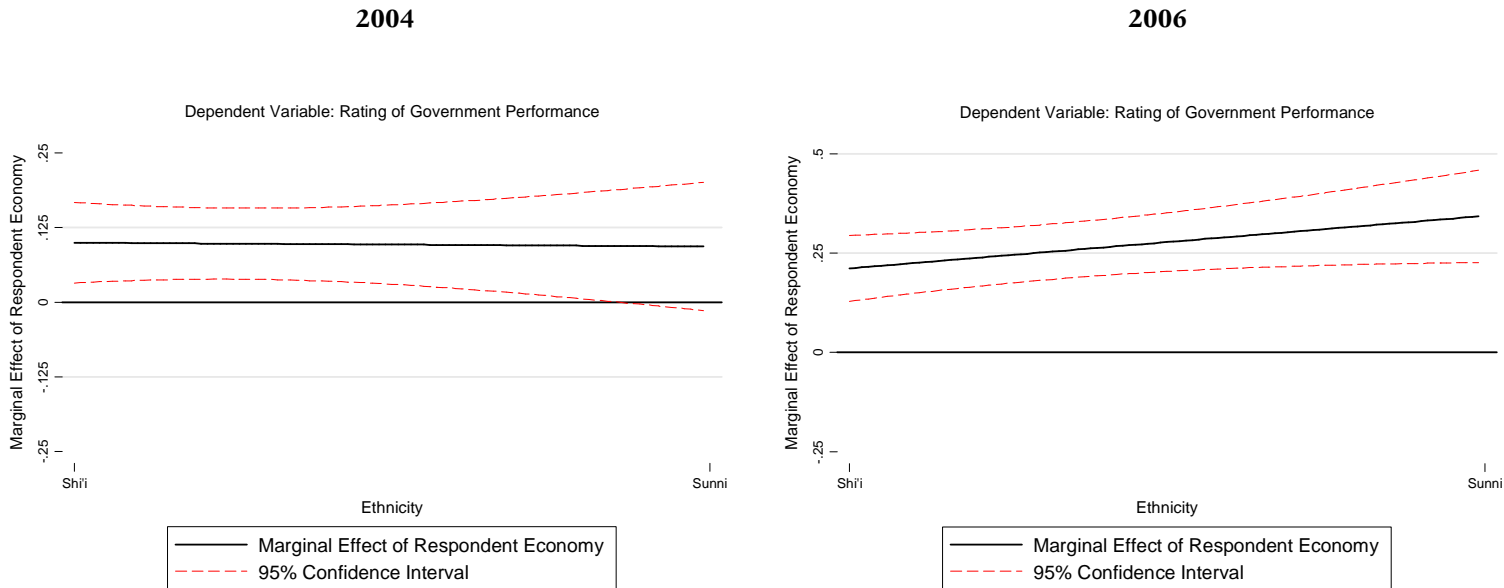
FIGURE 6.16. Predicted Ratings of Government Performance, by ECONOMY



Together with the preceding, these empirical findings lend strong evidence in favor of our theoretical predictions about the ethnic bases of normative political opinion in 2004 and 2006 Iraq. In fact, each of our hypotheses regarding the determinants of political opinion among ordinary Iraqis found compelling support in the analyses of GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE and PERFORMANCE. Sunni ethnicity was found to be powerfully associated with more negative political opinion in 2004 (*Hypothesis 1.1<sub>A</sub>*); stronger co-ethnic orientations were associated among Shi'is with more positive opinions of the Iraqi government (*1.2<sub>A</sub>*), among Sunnis with more negative regime orientations (*1.2<sub>B</sub>*); and the overriding determinant of citizens' orientations in 2004 was shown to be ethnic affiliation per se, whereas in 2006 it was the strength of one's ethnic identity (*1.3*). Overall, it was demonstrated that the combination of ethnicity itself as well as ethnic orientation was considerably more important than economic satisfaction in shaping citizen opinion toward the Iraqi government in 2004, and at least equally as important as the latter in 2006 (*1.1* and *1.2*).

All that remains, then, is to discover whether a similar result obtains also in the realm of political action. Unfortunately, since questions about Iraqis' political activities were not asked in the 2004 survey, here data from 2006 must suffice. We focus in particular on the most

FIGURE 6.17. *The Marginal Effect of ECONOMY on Rating of Government Performance*

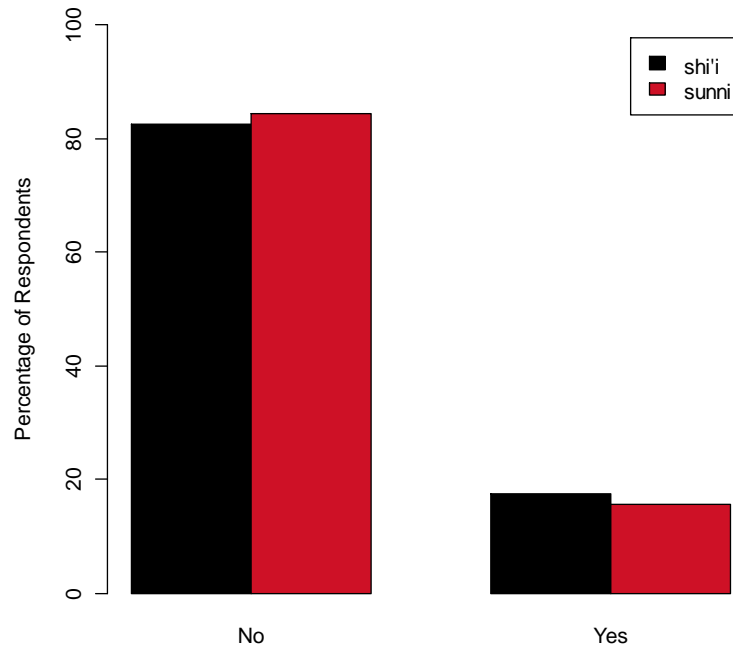


powerful of the activities inquired about: respondent participation in mass demonstrations.<sup>18</sup> Respondents were asked whether they have attended, might attend, or would never attend a “peaceful demonstration.”<sup>19</sup> Since the interest here is in participation versus non-participation, this indicator is recoded to be dichotomous, generating a variable `DEMONSTRATION` that takes a value of 1 for those who report having attended a demonstration and 0 otherwise. By this measure, around 17% of Iraqi Shi’a and 16% of Sunnis report having participated, as depicted in FIGURE 6.18. Though we have no corresponding data from 2004 to which to compare these proportions, the fact that demonstration attendance appears statistically-equivalent across the

<sup>18</sup> Beyond its substantive significance, we choose to focus in the limited space here on demonstration participation also because it allows a more direct comparison with our Bahrain survey results. As mentioned before (*supra*, 299), other indirect indicators of political action such as were employed in Bahrain—political interest, following of political news, and so on—are more specific to the Arab Gulf context, where mere political interest itself is, or is supposed by the *rentier* state framework to be, an exception. In obvious contrast, the Iraq of 2006 is premised exactly upon citizen interest and participation in politics. Conceptually, therefore, the relationship between ethnic orientations and political interest is unlikely to be consistent across the two country contexts. While one might note the same about demonstration participation—that the right to peaceful demonstration is likewise tolerated and even encouraged by democracy—still at least one may be confident that the latter indicator measures in Bahrain as in Iraq the same underlying concept: participation in corporeal political protest.

<sup>19</sup> The full question reads, “Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never under any circumstances do it.”

FIGURE 6.18. *Participation in a Peaceful Demonstration (2006), by Ethnicity*



two groups would seem to agree with our previous findings showing the lack of explanatory power in 2006 of ethnic affiliation alone.

The determinants of Iraqis' demonstration participation are given in TABLE 6.19 and, as per usual, are illustrated in the subsequent plots. Overall, the multivariate results closely follow those of our preceding 2006 analyses: the effect of ethnic membership itself depends entirely on that of ethnic identity (FIGURE 6.20), the latter exercising a powerful influence on the propensity for demonstration among both Sunnis and Shi'is (FIGURE 6.21). Yet, that these two marginal effects are substantively equivalent to those witnessed in the analysis of political opinion in fact runs contrary to our theoretical expectations. Whereas *Hypothesis 1.2<sub>c</sub>* predicts that "Among Sunnis as well as Shi'is, the strength of ethnic identity is positively associated with political action," the present results evidence a different, ethnically-contingent relationship: that, among Shi'is, IDENTITY is positively associated with demonstration participation, among Sunnis negatively associated. Such a result does not, however, come entirely by surprise. In our introductory discussion (*supra*, 298-299) we noted that the environment of 2006 Iraq, which bordered then on open inter-communal warfare, made possible or even likely an alternative to the type of non-violent political action represented by peaceful demonstration, namely

TABLE 6.19. *The Determinants of Iraqis' Participation in Demonstrations, estimated by Probit*

Variables	Model 1		
	2006		
	<i>B</i>	<i>s<sub>b</sub></i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>z</i>
ETHNICITY	0.429	0.244	0.079
IDENTITY	0.217	0.0338	0.000
IDENTITY × ETHNICITY	-0.476	0.0841	0.000
ECONOMY	0.0826	0.0253	0.001
ECONOMY × ETHNICITY	-0.0471	0.0425	0.267
AGE	-0.000527	0.00316	0.868
FEMALE	-1.140	0.101	0.000
EDUCATION	0.0322	0.0166	0.053
INCOME	-0.0681	0.0269	0.011
US FORCES	0.0672	0.0395	0.089
US FORCES × ETHNICITY	-0.169	0.695	0.015
Constant	-0.909	0.203	0.000
<i>N</i>	1444		
Prob. > <i>F</i> ( $\chi^2$ )	0.0000		
Pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.1704		

Note: Robust standard errors reported

physical aggression against the rival ethnic group. That is to say, in the context of 2006 Iraq stronger ethnic in-group orientations may find expression not through the ordinary channels of politics only but also through direct confrontation with the rival group, a path that history suggests was chosen by many Iraqis.

What our findings may reflect, accordingly, is a divergence in the political strategies adopted by Iraqi Sunnis and Shi'is, with individuals from the latter group tending toward more traditional forms of protest and lobbying as in-group orientations increase, individuals from

FIGURE 6.20. *Marginal Effect of ETHNICITY on Demonstration Attendance, by IDENTITY*

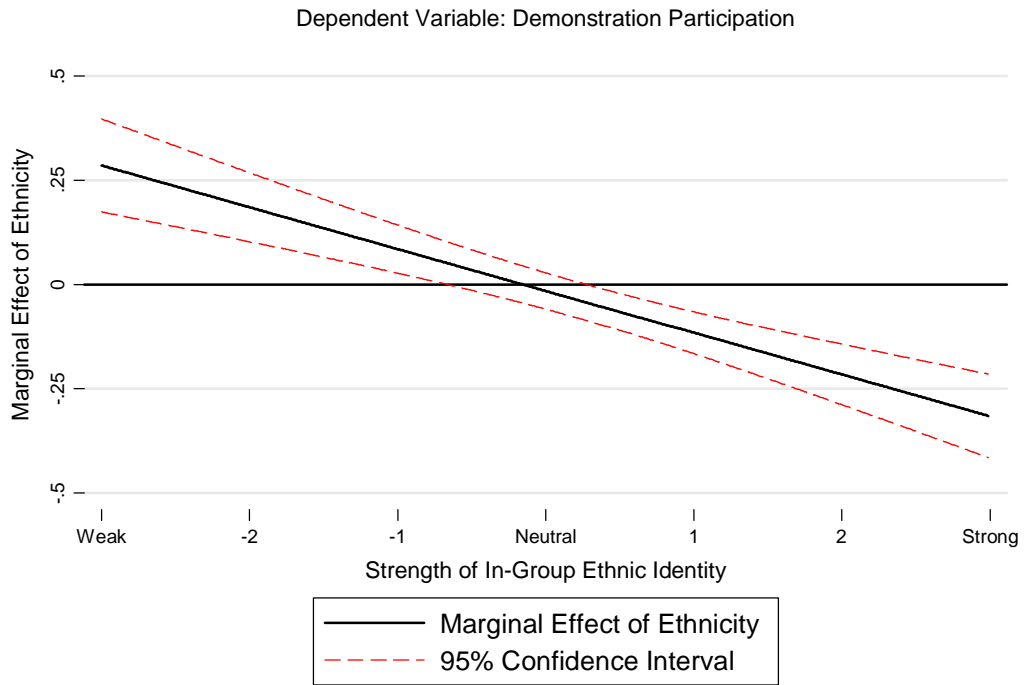


FIGURE 6.21. *Marginal Effect of IDENTITY on Demonstration Participation*

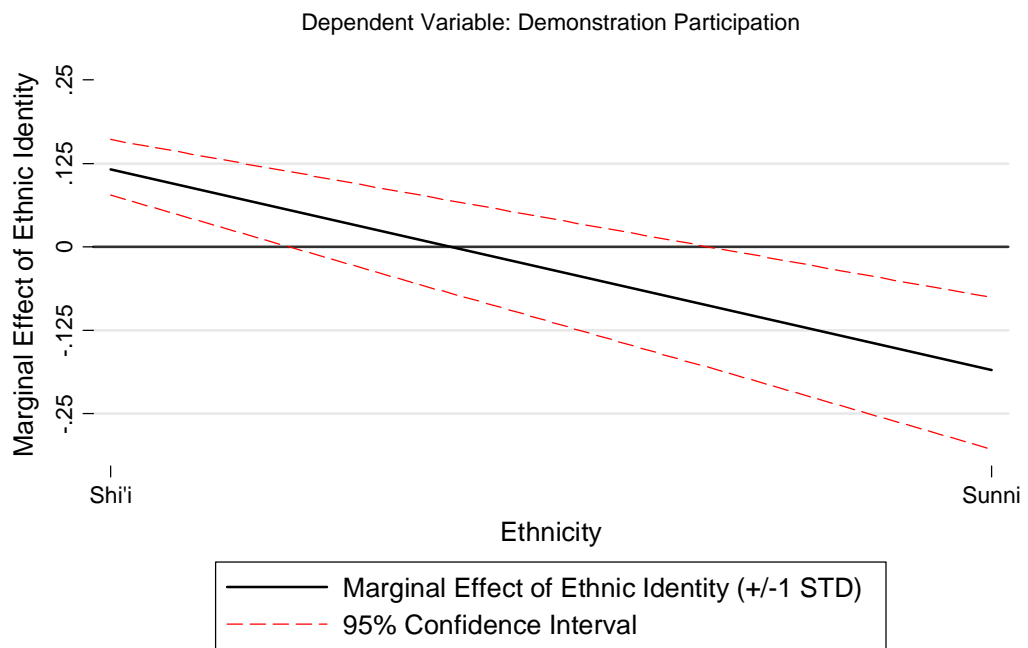


FIGURE 6.22. Predicted Probability of Demonstration Participation

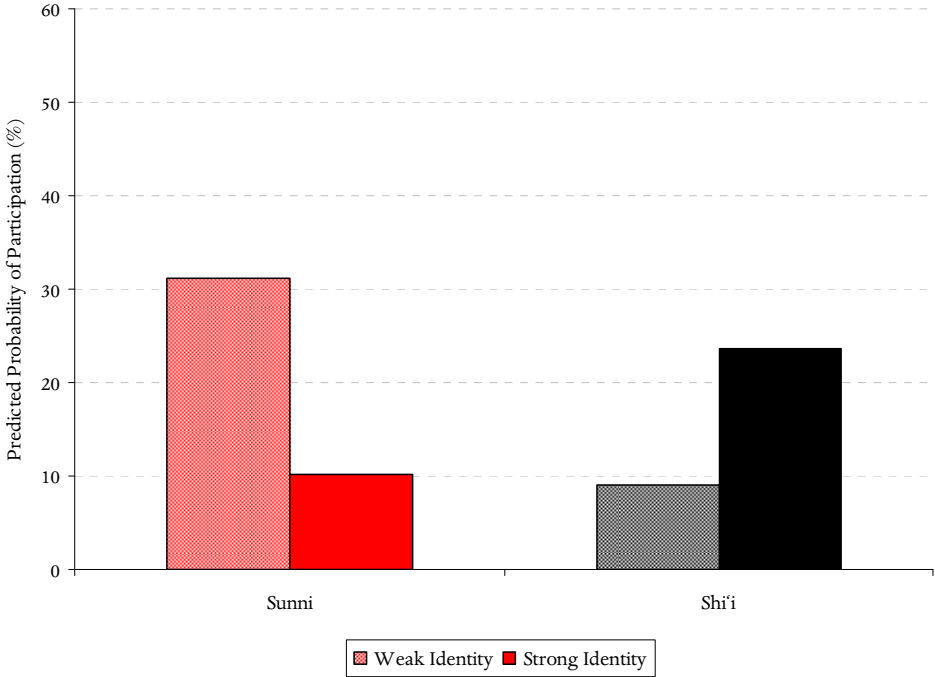
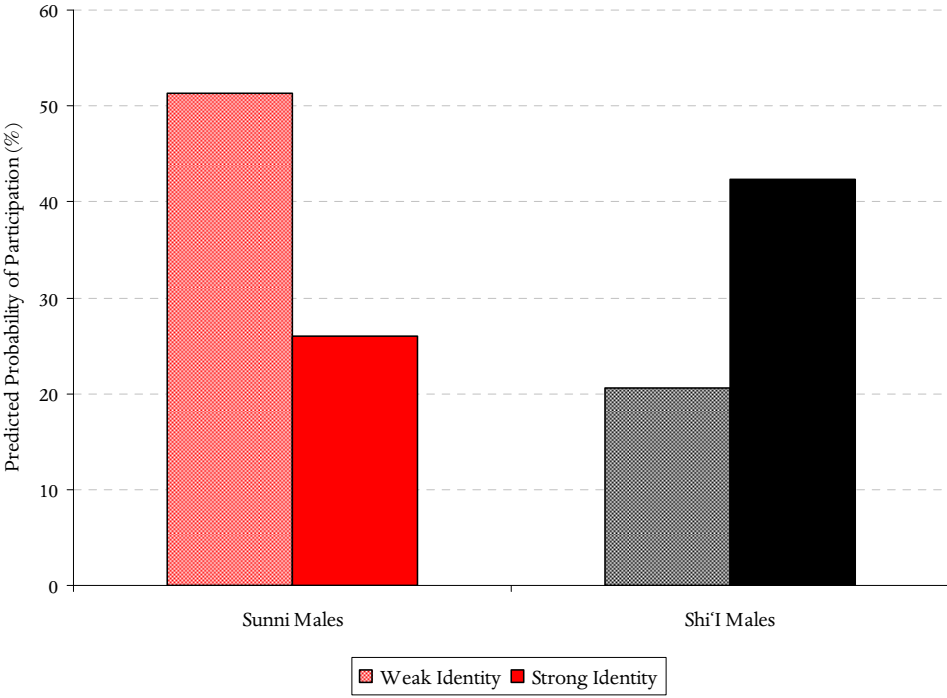


FIGURE 6.23. Predicted Probability of Demonstration Participation, among Males Only





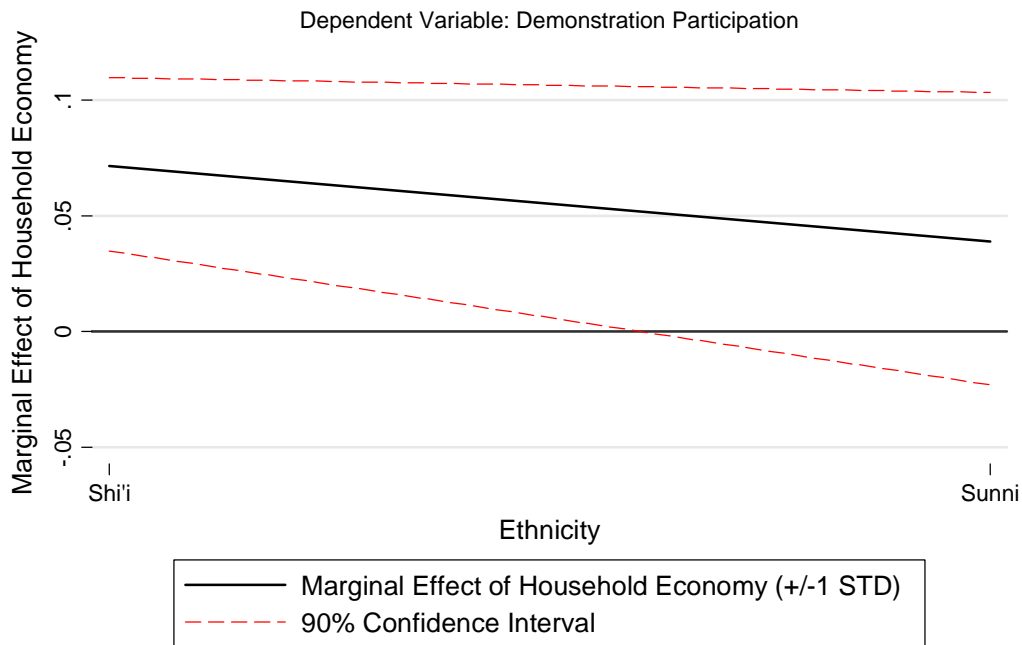
the former toward more direct actions against their political competitors. Not only does such an interpretation conform to our understanding of the Sunni-Shi'i civil war period, which saw Shi'a neighborhoods, religious sites, and ceremonies routinely targeted, leading to revenge killings of Sunnis,<sup>20</sup> but it also stands to reason intuitively insofar as Iraqi Shi'a, enjoying a considerable numerical superiority over the nation's Sunnis (and all the more so with respect to Arab Sunnis), may be relatively more confident in their ability to achieve political aims through regular democratic means. For Sunnis unsatisfied with their political position vis-à-vis their ethnic rivals, on the other hand, such mass action is likely to appear by comparison a far less efficacious if not altogether futile prospect, as a concerted Shi'a majoritarianism will always carry the day in a fair democratic fight. One assumes that it must be precisely this sort of logic underlying Iraqi Sunnis' repeated boycotts of the post-2003 political process.

This conditional relationship linking Iraqis' ethnic orientations to the likelihood of demonstration participation is depicted above in FIGURES 6.22 and 6.23. The first reports the estimated probability of DEMONSTRATION for Sunnis and Shi'is of "weak" and "strong" identity, where weak is defined as usual as -1 standard deviation from the 2006, ethnic-specific mean, and strong as +1 standard deviation. The second plot reports these predicted probabilities for male respondents only, in light of the considerable if predictable negative effect of female gender on an individual's propensity to demonstrate, as conveyed in TABLE 6.19. Both plots demonstrate the same basic finding: among Iraqi Shi'a, stronger ethnic in-group orientations are associated with a much higher likelihood of taking part in peaceful demonstrations; among Sunnis this influence of ethnic identity is similarly strong but in the opposite direction. More exactly, a change in ethnic orientation from weak to strong reduces the estimated probability of DEMONSTRATION among Sunnis from around 31% to 10%, a relative decrease of more than two-thirds. Among Shi'is, on the other hand, this change *augments* the likelihood of participation, from 9% among individuals with a weak identity to 24% among those with a strong one, a relative increase of 163%. When estimated for male Iraqis only, these relative effects are reduced somewhat, though they remain immense: a -1 to +1 standard deviation

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<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the February 2006 bombing of the revered al-'Askarī shrine in Sāmarrā' by Sunni militants linked to al-Qā'ida is often cited as the opening salvo in the conflict. More generally, the point here is not that Iraq's civil war was prosecuted only by Sunnis against Shi'is, but that the pattern of violence typically involved a spectacular attack on a Shi'a target (e.g., the al-'Askarī shrine, Ṣadr City in November 2006, a Baghdad market in February 2007, and 'Āshūrā' celebrants in March 2004) followed by Shi'a reprisals. In this sense, then, although the conflict was fought by both sides, Sunni insurgents tended both to be the aggressors and to target sites and occasions of religious significance.

FIGURE 6.24. *Marginal Effect of ECONOMY on Demonstration Attendance, by ETHNICITY*



change in IDENTITY among Shi'i males increases the likelihood of DEMONSTRATION from about 21% to 42%, or by 100%. Among Sunni males the estimated probability of DEMONSTRATION decreases from 51% to 26%, a relative change of -49%.

If this latter finding therefore runs contrary to our theoretical expectations about the determinants of demonstration participation in Iraq (our likely explanation notwithstanding), yet more unanticipated still is the effect on participation of household economy. For it turns out that, more than there simply being *no effect* attributable to economic satisfaction, in fact our findings reveal a *positive* relationship in 2006 between economic well-being and propensity for involvement in peaceful demonstrations, and this among Iraq's Sunnis and Shi'is alike. It is not Iraqis of poorer economic station that tend to report partaking in demonstrations, that is, but those of *more favorable* financial situations. The marginal effect of ECONOMY is given in FIGURE 6.24. It is estimated at 0.07 among Shi'a and 0.04 among Sunnis, although the latter estimate is not statistically-significant even at the 90% confidence level. So, not only is the relationship between ECONOMY and DEMONSTRATION in the opposite direction of that predicted, but its magnitude is rather weak compared to that involving IDENTITY.

FIGURE 6.25. Predicted Probability of Demonstration Participation

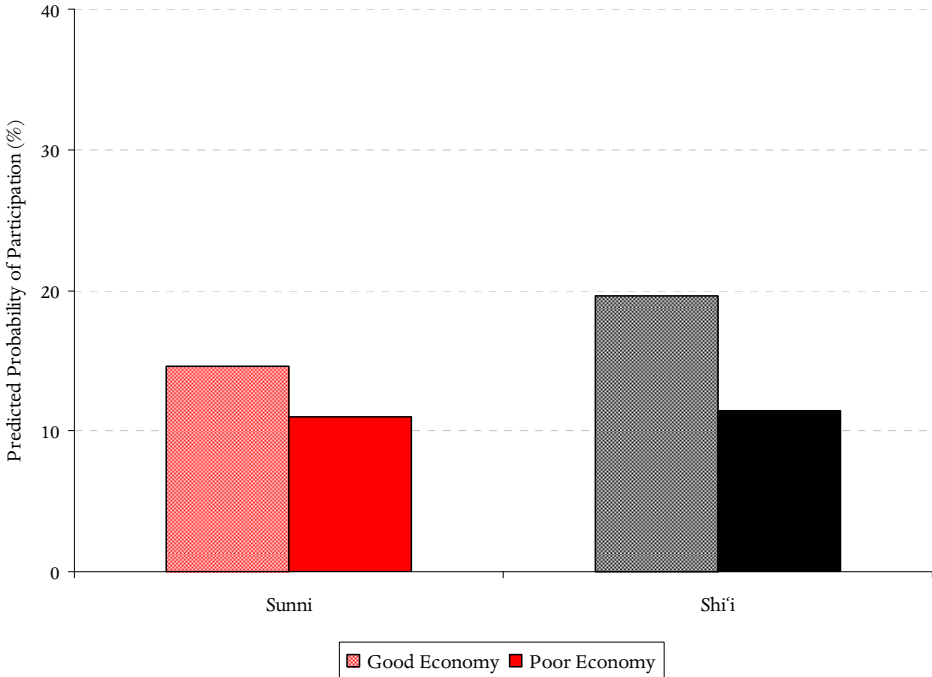
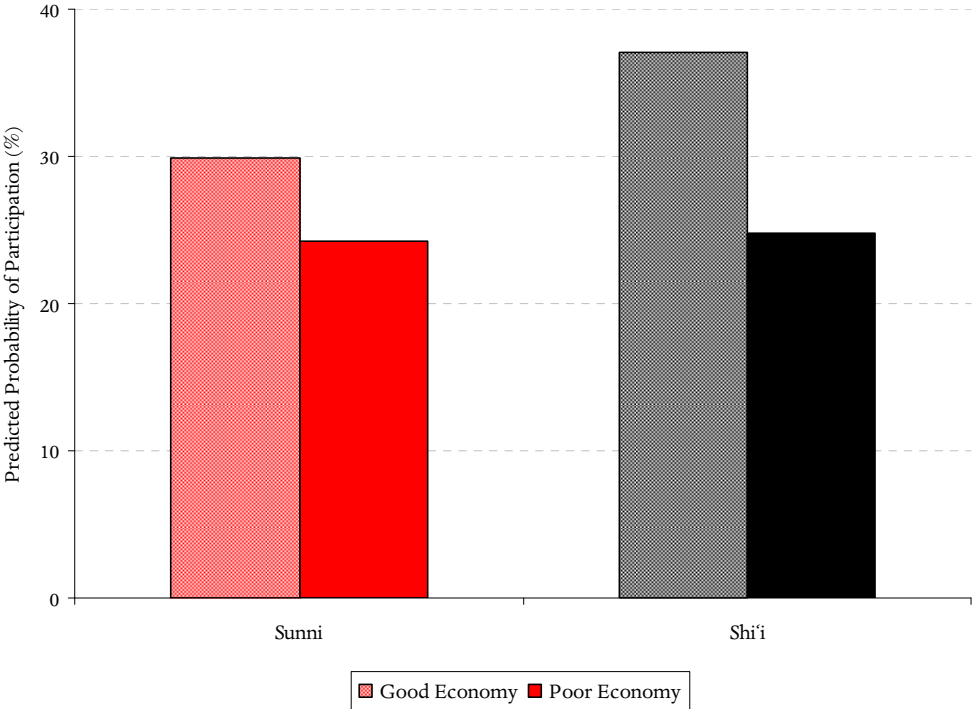


FIGURE 6.26. Predicted Probability of Demonstration Participation, among Males Only



A better indication of this can be gleaned from FIGURES 6.25 and 6.26, which illustrate the predicted probabilities of demonstration participation for Sunnis and Shi'is (in the latter case, male Sunnis and Shi'is) of "good" and "poor" economy, respectively, these being defined in the standard manner as -1 and +1 standard deviation from the 2006 mean of ECONOMY. One observes in the first place that, as per the marginal effect estimates reported already, the mobilizing effect of economic satisfaction is rather stronger among Shi'a than among Sunna. Sunnis of poor economy are 25% less likely than those of good economy to report having taken part in a demonstration, Shi'a of poor economy an estimated 42% less likely. When we restrict our sample to males only these relative changes fall by about a quarter to -19% and -33%, respectively. However one measures it, then, this relationship points to one and the same conclusion: according to the 2006 data, peaceful demonstrations are disproportionately attended by Iraqis—certainly Shi'i Iraqis and perhaps Sunni Iraqis—who are more content than not with their overall household financial situation.<sup>21</sup>

### **Conclusion: Lessons from Iraq**

In Iraq as in Bahrain, citizens' orientations toward the government depend fundamentally on their perceptions of the ethnic balance of power enshrined therein. Despite Iraq's attempt to limit feelings of ethnic exclusion and inequity through explicit consociational arrangements, ethnic agnosticism is all but an impossibility for a government led by one or another bloc (or alliance of blocs<sup>22</sup>) acting as political representative of (a) particular ethnic group(s)—whether Arab Sunnis, Arab Shi'a, or Iraqi Kurds. This means that, also as in Bahrain, concerns for the empowerment of ethnic rivals at the expense of one's own group inevitably compete with more mundane matters of economic welfare in determining the extent of an individual's support for, and actions in favor of or against, the regime. In the ethnically-divided Arab state, where political parties do not represent shifting coalitions of likeminded citizens but that bane

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<sup>21</sup> The fact that the INCOME control is found to be negatively-related to DEMONSTRATION (see TABLE 6.19) has no bearing on this finding. As has been demonstrated already, the INCOME and ECONOMY indicators are distinct conceptually, so the INCOME control should not be considered a proxy for economic satisfaction. Nor, indeed, does it act as such in our regression models. If one removes the INCOME control altogether from the model of DEMONSTRATION, for example, the positive effects of ECONOMY remain among Sunnis and Shi'is (decreasing only slightly to 0.05 among the latter), and their statistical significance is unchanged. In Iraq as in Bahrain, wealth in the absolute is not synonymous with material satisfaction.

<sup>22</sup> Most obviously, one involving Sunni Arabs and Kurds, whose attempt to form a new government exclusive of the top vote-getting Shi'a coalition following Iraq's 2010 parliamentary elections led to an eight-month political impasse and fears of renewed ethnic violence. See, for example, John Leland and Steven Lee Myers, 2010, "Tentative Deal in Iraq Keeps Maliki in Power," *The New York Times*, November 10. Available at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/11/world/middleeast/11iraq.html>>.

of liberalism, majority factions—“united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community” (*Federalist* N° 10)—in such a state, it can be no wonder when strict economic concerns take a backseat to ethnic affiliation and orientation in shaping political opinion and action.

This argument found consistent evidence in the preceding analysis of individual-level survey data from Iraq, the results of which are summarized below in TABLE 6.27.<sup>23</sup> In line with our theoretical expectations, Iraq’s Sunnis and Shi’is reported holding political views and engaging in political action in a pattern corresponding to the prevailing ethnic character of the Iraqi government. In 2004, when the coalition-appointed interim government represented neither Sunnis nor Shi’is per se, signaling instead a basic shift away from the Sunni-dominated Iraq of the pre-2003 era, citizen confidence in and satisfaction with the performance of the administration was determined above all by ethnic affiliation itself, with Iraqi Sunnis holding much more negative views of the interim government irrespective of their attitudes toward Shi’is. This Sunni-Shi’i discrepancy amounted in each case to around 20% of the entire range of the dependent variable considered—that is, to the possible response options of the survey question. By contrast, the difference in opinion separating Iraqis of below and above average economic satisfaction in 2004 barely surpassed 5%, a modest effect comparable to that the additional augmenting influence of respondents’ other-ethnic orientations (*IDENTITY*).

By the time of the 2006 survey, however, control over Iraq’s government had shifted in elementary fashion, and so, accordingly, did the basis of Iraqis’ political behavior. The united Shi’a bloc of Nūrī al-Mālikī now in firm charge following its victory in the first post-invasion parliamentary elections of December 2005, no longer were government orientations based upon ethnic affiliation itself but upon citizens’ views toward this newfound Shi’a empowerment and the larger shift in the balance of ethnic power that it heralded. Sunnis who expressed more worry for the empowerment of Shi’a groups over against that of Sunni groups reported much less confidence in and satisfaction with the performance of the Iraqi government *qua* Shi’a-led government, while Shi’is who were more concerned about the empowerment of Sunni groups vis-à-vis Shi’a groups reported much higher confidence and approval. This effect

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<sup>23</sup> Like the analogous summaries of Chapter 5, TABLE 6.27 attempts to standardize the substantive impacts of all the independent variables of interest by employing a common metric, which is the raw (or  $\pm 1$  SD) marginal effect of a variable divided by the entire range of the dependent variable. For a raw marginal effect of 0.5 on a response variable with possible values of 1-10, for example, reported below would be  $0.5/9 \approx 0.056$  or 5.6%.

TABLE 6.27. *The Determinants of Political Action and Opinion in Iraq, Summary of Results*

Dependent Variable	Impact of Independent Variables of Interest		
	Ethnicity <sup>b</sup> (Shi'i   Sunni)	Identity <sup>e</sup> (Increasing)	Economy <sup>e</sup> (Worsening)
<i>Opinions</i>			
GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE	Less <sup>c</sup>	More   Less <sup>a</sup>	Less   Less <sup>a</sup>
2004—	(20.0%)	(4.1%   2.3%)	(4.9%   2.1%)
2006—	none	More   Less (38.9%   21.2%)	Less   Less (12.5%   15.9%)
GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE	Less	More   none	Less   Less <sup>a</sup>
2004—	(18.9%)	(2.4%)	(5.1%   4.7%)
2006—	none	More   Less (25.9%   11.1%)	Less   Less (10.4%   17.0%)
<i>Actions</i>			
DEMONSTRATION <sup>d</sup>	none	More   Less	Less   Less
2006—		(104.9%   49.3%)	(33.1%   19.0%)

<sup>a</sup> Coefficient has the expected sign, but its related *p*-value falls outside the *p* < 0.100 threshold of significance.

<sup>b</sup> Recall that since our ETHNICITY variable is coded 1 for Sunnis, the effect of ethnic group membership is always expressed as the effect of a respondent's being a Sunni rather than a Shi'i. This choice is arbitrary of course, and to express the effect in terms of Shi'i ethnicity one merely has to reverse the sign of the coefficient.

<sup>c</sup> Because the effect of ethnic membership is conditional on IDENTITY, the percentages reported here represent marginal effects of ETHNICITY evaluated at the 2004 mean of IDENTITY—that is, for an individual of "average" ethnic orientations.

<sup>d</sup> Recall that because the DEMONSTRATION variable is dichotomous, the reported percentages represent relative changes in probability that a respondent answers "Yes." To offer the most conservative estimates possible, here the probabilities are calculated for male respondents only. Cf., e.g., FIGURES 6.23 and 6.26.

<sup>e</sup> The percentages reported here correspond to the percent change in likelihood of participation associated with a change in respondent ECONOMY/IDENTITY from -1 standard deviation to +1 standard deviation.

of what we termed ethnic identity was robust among Sunnis and Shi'is in 2006, and in all but one case (that of Sunnis' evaluations of government performance) it was larger in magnitude than that of economic satisfaction. Notably, the substantive impact of ethnic identity among Shi'a averaged around three times that among Sunnis, while among the latter group the effect of economic satisfaction was consistently if not vastly greater.

Finally, although a lack of 2004 data prevented a similar cross-temporal analysis of Iraqis' demonstration behavior, still our findings from 2006 were consistent with those from the two indicators of political opinion and, more generally, revealed the importance of ethnic orientations over against economic considerations in determining individual propensity to undertake political protest action in Iraq. The former influence was found to be some three

times the magnitude of the latter among both Sunnis and Shi'is. Of course, the direction of this effect among Iraqi Sunnis was not as expected: while stronger ethnic identity among Shi'a was shown to augment the likelihood of demonstration by more than 100%, Sunnis who worry disproportionately about Shi'a empowerment are nearly 50% *less likely* to report having participated in a peaceful demonstration. This we explained by our knowledge of the period during which the 2006 survey was administered, more specifically of the armed Sunni-Shi'i conflict that reached fever pitch between 2006 and 2008. The fact that Sunni Iraqis with more anti-Shi'a orientations are less likely to be involved in political demonstrations, we said, is a reflection of their disproportionate abstention from the official channels of politics (witness the several Sunni electoral boycotts) in favor of more direct societal confrontation, including violent insurgency. While many Shi'a too abandoned peaceful means of political contestation, their majority demographic status did and still does render mass mobilization a relatively more winning proposition. In a strict battle of bodies in the street, the Sunnis of Iraq are quite simply outgunned.<sup>24</sup>

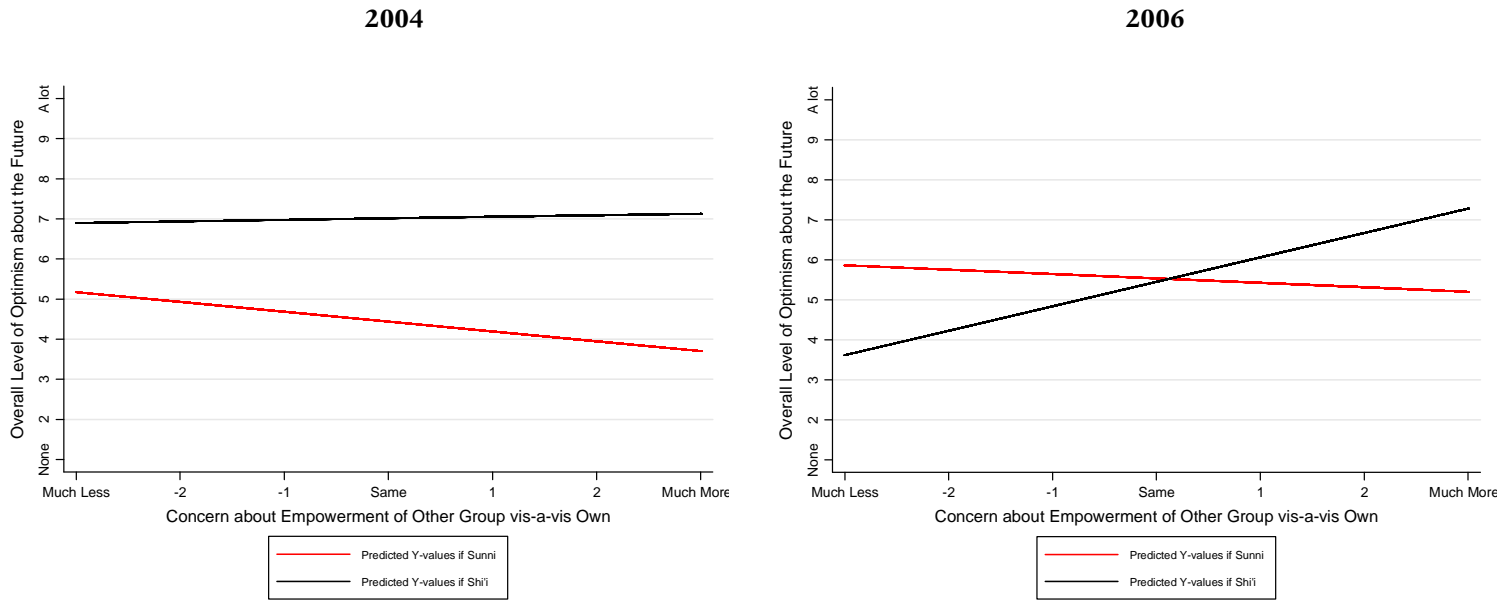
By now, the overall lesson from our investigation of political behavior in Iraq is clear: despite important historical and institutional dissimilarities distinguishing these cases, the same forces behind citizens' regime orientations witnessed in Bahrain are equally active in the case of Iraq and, one must suspect, in other Arab societies divided along Sunni-Shi'i lines. That Bahrain's rulers are unable to purchase the political acquiescence of their Shi'a citizens *à la rentier* state assumptions, then, is a result neither of some innate penchant for political opposition among adherents of Shi'ism, nor of larger Bahraini exceptionalism. For in Iraq today it is the Sunnis who comprise the *de facto* ethnic out-group, and their orientations toward the Iraqi government reveal as much. In Iraq as in Bahrain, political attitudes and actions are influenced not simply by the question "What has the government done for me?" but by the more elementary question "What—or who—does the government represent? By whom exactly am I being governed? and is it my interest they have in mind?"

Indeed, in the context of acute societal division, the answers to such questions go far in explaining an individual's outlook, not only toward the political regime under which he finds himself but toward the very quality of life itself. FIGURE 6.28 below shows the predicted level of future optimism of Iraqi Sunnis and Shi'is according to their ethnic orientations. For space

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<sup>24</sup> And this is to say nothing of the more general organizational advantage of Shi'ism as a relatively more unified and hierarchical system of religious-*cum*-political authority.

FIGURE 6.28. Degree of Optimism about the Future, by IDENTITY

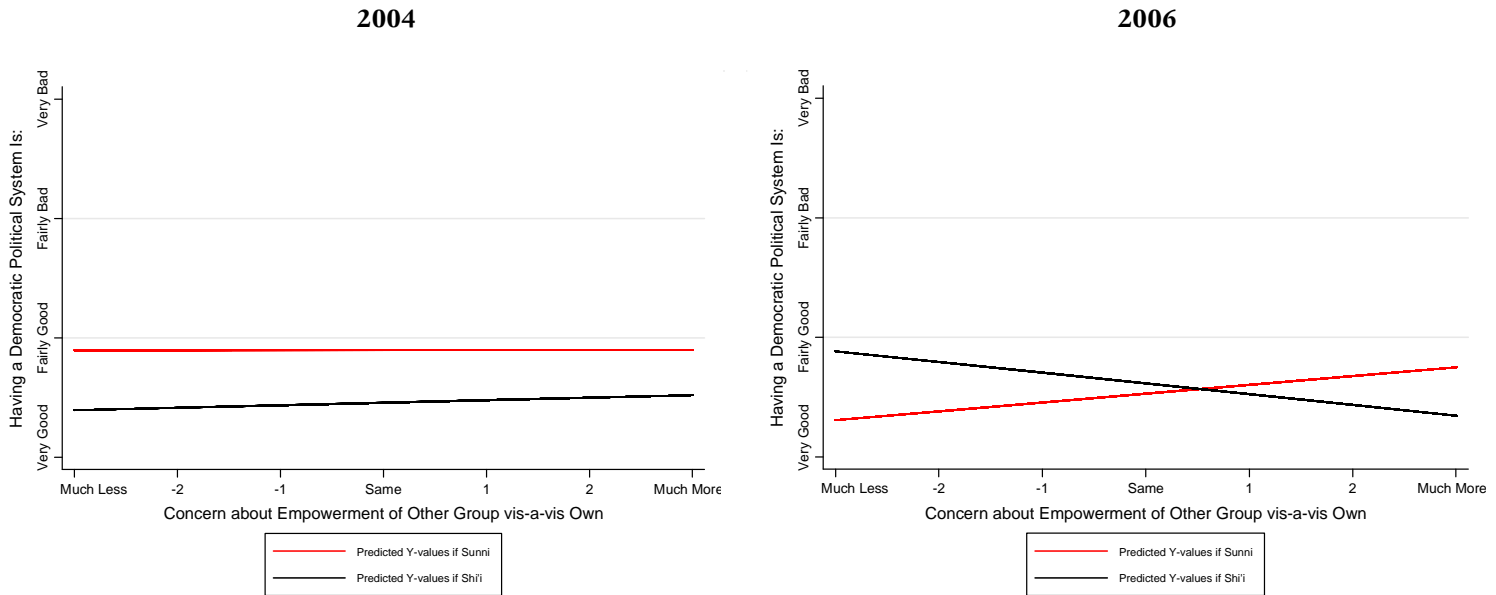


considerations we need not embark on a lengthy discussion. It is enough to say that the fear of subjugation at the hands of one's rivals or, alternatively, the hope of exercising power over them, has a decisive hand in shaping one's views of the future. Indeed, though newly freed from a vicious dictatorship of three-and-a-half decades, in 2004 but a handful of Iraqi Sunnis were more optimistic than pessimistic about their future, confidence dropping precipitously as worry over Shi'a empowerment grew. The Shi'a, of course, were uniformly optimistic. By 2006 the familiar pattern had emerged, future optimism now depending for all Iraqis, but especially for Shi'a, on one's level of apprehension at the opposing group. No longer trapped under a Sunni-dominated system, the Shi'is of Iraq perceived a bright future precisely insofar as they worried about a return of the past.

Concerns for ethnic domination also mold individuals' views about how a political community should be organized. Iraqis need not be students of political science to understand that democracy in their country is and will continue to be, short of a drastic secularization of political association, tantamount to Shi'i majoritarianism. And, as illustrated in FIGURE 6.29, such knowledge strongly affects Iraqis' orientations toward democracy. All else equal, in 2004 Iraqi Sunnis reported considerably less enthusiasm than Shi'a for having a democratic political



FIGURE 6.29. Support for Democracy as a Way of Governing Iraq, by IDENTITY



system in Iraq, and this irrespective of their specific concern for Shi'a empowerment. Once the latter became a reality, however, attitudes shifted in now-recognizable fashion, with Shi'is predicted to support democracy most strongly when they fear Sunni empowerment, Sunnis predicted to prefer it least when they fear Shi'a empowerment; and precisely the opposite for those individuals who fear the empowerment of their own ethnic community. In divided Iraq, then, the term "democracy" is little more than a codeword for Shi'a-led government, a concept far from Western ideals and much closer to its original, Aristotelian definition for which it ranks among the deviant regimes: the rule of the majority for its narrow self-interest. Over the dead bodies of many ordinary Sunnis did democracy come to Iraq, and only likewise would it ever come to Bahrain.

If the causes of government support and hostility be thus similar across Bahrain and Iraq, yet we may end this section with the observation that the latter state enjoys nonetheless a decided advantage in coaxing political submission and, ultimately, regime stability. For while the present chapter has demonstrated how Bahrain's *rentier* nature is not the source of its political dysfunction, it also has shown how it works to exacerbate the problem. Whereas political acquiescence in the Iraqi context implies only that citizens agree to the principles of

democratic political competition, that they abide by the basic rules of the game, in Bahrain political submission requires precisely the opposite. Iraq need only convince citizens to take part in politics; in Bahrain they must consent to keep out. In Iraq, accordingly, even those individuals whose political views and behavior depend more upon ethnic than upon economic considerations have available a lawful outlet through which to vent their displeasure with the status quo. One might not be won over to the government by material wealth, but no matter, as one has legal means to seek its change or a change in policy. For the unhappy Bahraini unswayed by the prospect of economic enrichment, on the other hand, change cannot come by his or society's initiative but only exogenously, by royal decree sent down like manna from heaven or, alternatively, like a thunderbolt from Zeus. In Bahrain, one is either satisfied with his lot, or is a political outlaw.

The *rentier* state of the Arab Gulf must therefore sink or swim on its capacity for economic appeasement, yet in ethnically-divided societies this ability is hampered not only on the demand side by those citizens unwilling to take the bargain but also on the supply side by a state reluctant to enrich or empower members of a community it views as an open or latent political opposition with ties to foreign governments, individuals readily-identifiable moreover on the basis of geography, family names, language, and other obvious markers. The question such a state faces, accordingly, is whether its power of economic benefaction—most notably, government employment—is best used to reward friends or to attempt to convert enemies. In Bahrain, at least, the answer is known: public-sector employment does not secure political allegiance; political allegiance secures public-sector employment, especially when the work in question carries national security implications. And, in a part of the world that spends more of its wealth on internal and external security than any other, the scope of the resulting ethnic-based exclusion from this most far-reaching of state benefits is far from trivial. Paradoxically, though with only economic patronage at its political disposal, still the ethnically-contested *rentier* state chooses to forgo what has been assumed its most powerful weapon, for fear that the cure should be worse than the disease.

## Notes for Chapter 6

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## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusion: Toward a New Arab Gulf Agenda

The present dissertation has sought to resolve several longstanding empirical and theoretical puzzles surrounding political life in the rent-dependent societies of the Arab Gulf, problems independent of, if only further illuminated by, Bahrain's Shi'a-led uprising of February 2011 and its far-reaching regional repercussions. The former category of difficulties is based on the observation that, far from the *rentier* assumption of popular apoliticality, in fact the Arab Gulf is not only home to citizens who take an active interest in politics, but indeed three of the six GCC states (and not simply the poorest)—Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait—feature no less than organized political oppositions, all of them decades-old. Moreover, the extent of this political interest and participation among Gulf peoples is not only considerable in absolute terms for countries assumed structurally capable of mollifying their political opponents, but so too in relative terms. For, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, individual-level survey data from the Middle East and North Africa reveals that, compared to other Arabs, Gulf citizens actually show themselves to be *more* interested in politics, *more* likely to participate in political protest actions, and *less* deferential to their governments. And yet, in spite of this popular political enthusiasm, somehow these Gulf regimes as a distinct class of state still manage to enjoy greater political stability than do other Arab countries. How can this be?

The theoretical difficulty attending these observations presents no less of a problem. This is that, for a conceptual framework that has dominated the interpretation of Arab Gulf politics since its initial articulation some 30 years ago, the behavioral assumptions upon which *rentier* theory rests have remained all but unexplored prior to the present study. Yet, before one can answer the question of why some Arab Gulf regimes appear unable to buy political support with economic benefits, it is necessary to know, in the first place, whether it is indeed

material well-being that tends to determine the political views and behavior of ordinary Gulf Arabs; and, in the second, whether governments are uniformly willing and able to offer such a wealth-for-silence bargain. The *rentier* state hypothesis having sprung from economics, that rational, self-maximizing citizens and rulers would happily barter political privileges for material benefits was presumed as a matter of course and, with no individual-level data to suggest otherwise, eventually achieved the status of a truism, assisted by a convenient parallel to the Western experience that *rentier* founding father Dirk Vandewalle (1987, 160) was soon to point out: “the reverse principle of no representation without taxation.” But such maxims proved poor substitutes for empirical evidence.

Thus, using previously-unavailable data from the first mass political survey of Bahrain along with insights from interviews with a dozen of the country’s political and religious leaders, the foregoing study has aimed to address these problems by answering three basic questions. First, what is it about Bahrain *qua rentier* society that renders its rulers particularly incapable of buying popular political quietude using rent-derived material benefaction? Second, to what extent does the variable that explains the case of Bahrain in fact describe a larger class of dysfunctional *rentier* societies that share this causal feature? And, third, should it exist, in what ways must this latter category demand a revision of the theoretical framework that underlies the prevailing *rentier* interpretation of politics in the Arab Gulf? Here we review our answers to these questions, note their limitations, and finally suggest an updated Arab Gulf research agenda that retreats from the economics-based model of the self-maximizing *rentier* state and citizen in favor of one rooted more firmly in the actual politics of the region.

### **The Trouble with Bahrain**

Two distinct sets of forces combine to hamper Bahrain’s ability to buy the political quiescence of its citizens using rent-funded state benefits. Each of these—one operating on the political demand side and one on the political supply side—owes to the same cause: the broad division of Bahraini society into ethnic Sunni and Shi’i constituencies, these being, if certainly not homogenous, sufficiently cohesive to allow mass political coordination in a type of state whose very productive organization is assumed to preclude any viable (i.e., economic) basis for it. The political salience of ethnicity in Bahrain dictates that, on the side of ordinary citizens, it is not simply economic contentment that influences political views and behavior, but one’s ethnically-ascribed position in society and the fear of societal domination by the rival group.

For politically-sidelined Shi'is, accordingly, opposition to Bahrain's status quo stems not from mere material dissatisfaction, but more fundamentally from their status as ethnic-*cum*-political out-group, and this despite enjoying a demographic majority. At the same time, this ethnic-based political mobilization against the regime on the part of Bahraini Shi'a spurs activism in kind from ordinary Sunnis, as eager to preserve the prevailing system as the former are to alter it. So it becomes that, in the ethnically-contested *rentier* society, it is not only the opposition but also the pro-government faction that rejects the state's material wealth-for-political silence bargain, for seen to be at stake is something more important than material wealth.

Opposition to the current regime is also, for many Bahraini Shi'is, a position for which inspiration may be found readily in religion itself, the historical arc of Shi'ism being precisely one of struggle and self-sacrifice in the face of a more powerful but corrupt and ultimately ill-fated political-*cum*-religious oppressor. In Bahrain, religious rites and celebrations are pregnant with allegory and even explicit comparison connecting the seventh-century conflict to decide the leadership of the Muslim community to the present-day struggle in Bahrain. Indeed, to an outside observer of the most holy Shi'i festival of 'Āshūrā', it is difficult to perceive whether the myriad processions, passions plays, and sermons tell of the battle against the 'Umayyad caliph or that against the Āl Khalifa monarchy. In sum, as many Shi'a believe (or can be motivated by the idea that) they have a collective right to political authority based on religious notions of injustice and betrayal rooted in the very foundations of Islam, their demands are not easily pacified with promises of jobs or monthly living stipends.

This problem is compounded on the supply side by a Bahraini government caught in a veritable catch-22, wherein the very attempt to purchase political stability in fact serves only to open the door, in the state's view, to increased instability. Specifically, the more Bahrain would seek to buy the political loyalty of opponents and would-be opponents using the most comprehensive clientelistic tool available to it *qua rentier* economy—private benefits conferred through employment in the public sector—the more it exposes itself to exactly that danger meant to be relieved in the first place, by inviting those citizens deemed most dangerous to walk in, so to speak, through the front door. As a result, government agencies and services deemed politically or militarily sensitive are made off limits to those (ethnically) identifiable as potential regime opponents, begetting a situation in which state employment is no longer an effective measure by which to procure political loyalty, but demonstrable political loyalty—in effect, the right family name—a prerequisite for most forms of state employment. Finally,

this two-tiered system of *rentier* benefits, including police and armed forces that would prefer to employ Sunni non-nationals than take a chance with Bahraini Shi'a subservient to their co-ethnics in Iran, works only to divide society further between those with a private stake in the regime and those who feel not only unfairly excluded from it, but indeed unwelcome in it.

Each of these lines of argument found compelling evidence in the Chapter 5 analysis of individual-level data from my Bahrain mass survey, an investigation that would constitute the first genuine empirical test of the *rentier* state hypothesis. First, it was demonstrated that Shi'i citizens are not only systematically less likely to be employed in Bahrain's public sector, but they also tend to occupy lower-ranking professional positions when they are employed. For two citizens of identical age, gender, and education level, the probability of government-sector employment (given that one is employed<sup>1</sup>) was estimated to be some 36% higher for a Sunni compared to a Bahraini Shi'i. The professional discrepancy was estimated at about 15%. Moreover, the data revealed, whereas 17% of working Sunni males who reported professional data indicated that they worked for the police or armed forces; and whereas 13% of all Sunni households reported at least one member employed in these services, not a single individual from among 127 employed Shi'i males who offered occupational data reported working for the police or military. The patterns of government-sector employment in Bahrain thus tell a fundamentally different story than the one articulated by *rentier* theorists.

The survey analysis also confirmed the primacy of confessional affiliation and identity over against economic satisfaction in determining the political orientations and behaviors of ordinary Bahrainis. For each of six different survey questions measuring normative support for Bahrain's government and political status quo, the most substantively- and statistically-significant predictor was a respondent's ethnicity, and this by no small margin (cf. CH. 5, 246, TABLE 5.73). Moreover, the analysis found, Bahrainis were only further entrenched in their respective ethnically-defined opinions—Shi'a tending toward more negative regime orientations, Sunnis toward more positive—by the additional augmenting influence of religiosity, used to proxy for the strength of one's ethnic identification. The influence of household economy, on the other hand, proved inconsistent and much weaker than that of ethnicity. Indeed, it was shown to be a statistically-significant determinant of political opinion in only four of six models, and among both Sunnis and Shi'is in only two models. And even in these cases,

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<sup>1</sup> That is, this sectoral effect was shown not to result spuriously from a Sunni-Shi'i disparity in employment more generally, the likelihood of employment itself being shown altogether independent of ethnic membership.

finally, its largest substantive effect on respondent opinion barely surpassed half that of ethnic membership. In Bahrain, popular political views depend much more upon one's being a Sunni or a Shi'i than upon one's being an economically-contented Sunni or Shi'i.

The last step in this theoretical progression found support in the concluding section of Chapter 5 examining Bahrainis' political behavior. This is the argument that ethnic-based political mobilization in Bahrain is not limited merely to Shi'a citizens as the primary basis of the opposition but draws in simultaneously ordinary Sunnis who rally, in the oft-repeated formulation of al-Ma'āwdah, out of the "need to counter probable harm." Analysis showed that, among both Sunnis and Shi'is, the extent of one's political interest and engagement—including one's likelihood of signing petitions and attending political meetings; participating in political demonstrations; and voting in parliamentary elections—is determined almost wholly by non-economic causes. In fact, of six models of political action, economy played a statistically-significant role in influencing behavior in only two, and in each case only among Sunni respondents (cf. CH. 5, 286, TABLE 5.108). By contrast, ethnic membership and religiosity were shown in each case to affect Sunni and Shi'i behavior in the hypothesized manner: while Sunnis consistently reported less political interest and engagement than Shi'a save for the in case of electoral participation, increased religiosity served to augment these levels of interest and engagement among members of both communities, typically in dramatic fashion. Even as Bahraini Sunnis are generally more inclined toward apoliticality than Shi'a, therefore, still they show themselves prepared, should the need arise, to take concerted action in defense of the regime, and of the larger political status quo it represents.

Apart from confirming the ethnic bases of supply- and demand-side politics in Bahrain, the mass survey analysis also offered one final—if essentially accidental—insight, a view into the very heart of Bahrain's Sunni-Shi'i divide. This is the finding of a significant ethnic-based interviewer effect upon survey respondents, who when questioned by a member of the rival community tend consistently to manipulate their answers in predictable ways. Specifically, when asked about their political opinions, both Sunnis and Shi'is misrepresent themselves so as to appear more in line with the views they ascribe to their other-ethnic interviewer simply on the basis of his or her ethnicity. Among Shi'a, this inter-ethnic effect exists in each of the six models of political opinion; among Sunna, four. What is more, this misrepresentation is so pronounced that in the case of several opinions investigated, the predicted responses of Sunnis and Shi'is are utterly inverted when obtained as part of an inter-ethnic interview: now



it is the Shi'a that appear the champions of the Bahraini government, the Sunnis its detractors. In the realm of political action, these effects are reversed: here Shi'is tend to exaggerate the extent of their political interest and participation in order to convey a stronger and more active opposition; Sunnis, when asked by Shi'a, exaggerate the extent of their *non*-participation, to signal a more resolute pro-government faction. In this way does Bahrain's deep-seated ethnic mistrust combine with political posturing to produce not only a broad Sunni-Shi'i divergence in political views and behavior, but so too a remarkable barrier to basic societal interaction.

If study of the Bahrain survey therefore provided compelling evidence in favor of the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 2 and given further substance in Chapter 3, still this empirical investigation was not without practical and methodological shortcomings. Thus, before proceeding to consider the second question here about the larger applicability of these Chapter 5 findings, we might first pause to assess their limitations, many of which have been treated elsewhere. A first group concerning survey procedure requires perhaps little additional elaboration. Certainly, it would have been preferable to have acquired a sample of more than 500 households; to have completed surveying of all these households; and to have achieved a more proportional representation of males and females among respondents. Yet, as noted previously, on account of Bahrain's miniscule citizen population, the survey's 500-household sample in fact represents a sample-to-population ratio that surpasses that of any other Arab Barometer survey undertaken to date. Furthermore, as examined at length in Chapter 4 (130-132), the final geographical distribution of block numbers included in the sample conforms almost exactly to their relative national-level proportions, as indicated by Bahrain's 2007 census and 2010 parliamentary election records.

As regards the latter points, indeed, interviewing reached only 435 (or 87%) of 500 sampled households, primarily on account of political and social tensions before and during the survey period. Still, because these remaining un-surveyed households were distributed randomly, there is no reason to believe that their omission compromised the representativeness of the final 435-observation sample. About the underrepresentation of female respondents, finally, in particular among rural Shi'a households, little can be said but that the practicalities of surveying Bahrain's isolated and conservative villages make such a result almost ensured. One might have attempted oversampling female respondents, but such a procedure would have militated against the competing goal of reaching a maximum share of the 500 sampled households, most of which were found in hostile environments. In the end, at a time when

any Bahrain mass survey at all seemed frequently in doubt, this and other concessions were made necessary.

Beyond issues of sampling, one may identify shortcomings in the survey instrument itself, or more precisely in the consistency and validity of the indicators used to measure the main theoretical concepts underlying the quantitative analysis: i.e., the independent variables measuring economic satisfaction and religiosity. These issues, also noted where relevant in the foregoing chapters, may be summarized here. The first case is not cause for much worry but bears repeat nonetheless. This is that the indicator used to measure economic satisfaction among Bahrainis in fact was more nearly an indicator of Bahrainis' household economy per se, respondents being asked to rate their household's financial situation from "very good" to "very poor." Unlike in the Chapter 6 investigation of survey data from Iraq, then, where this variable was indeed based on a subjective scale of satisfaction with one's household financial situation, in Bahrain such a direct question unfortunately was not fielded. Moreover, the resulting measure of economy among Bahrainis had less variation than one would have liked, with about two-thirds of both Sunnis and Shi'is reporting a "good" financial situation, and only a combined 2% describing their finances as "very bad." Still, since several other independent variables of interest—including ethnicity, religiosity, and the indicator signifying an inter-ethnic interview—were dichotomous measures with even less variation by their very construction, this latter concern should not be overstated.

More worrying, on the other hand, is the measure of Bahrainis' religiosity, and this on multiple levels. In the first place, in the absence of a direct question gauging respondents' other-ethnic orientations, which was deemed too sensitive to ask, the religiosity indicator served as a necessary proxy for a related but of course not identical concept: the strength of an individual's ethno-religious identification as a Sunni or as a Shi'i. This, in turn, was meant to capture one's personal orientation vis-à-vis the rival group. While acknowledged from the beginning, the conceptual distance of the latter theoretical notion from the actual construct of the religiosity variable was made only further plain by the complementary study of Chapter 6, where there was available a direct measure of Iraqis' orientations toward members of their own and of the other ethnic group.

Concern for the theoretical remoteness of the religiosity measure was compounded, furthermore, by the choice of its actual coding, which presented two imperfect alternatives. A first was based on a straightforward query, but one that invited dishonesty and perhaps a

Sunni-Shi'i discrepancy in interpretation; a second involved yet another layer of proxy but would thereby avoid manipulation and, it was thought, between-ethnic inconsistency. While the latter was thus given preference in the Chapter 5 analysis, in order to check for conflicting results a parallel model was also estimated for each dependent variable that employed the alternative, more direct measure of religiosity. Where the two differed in their substantive effects on political opinion or behavior, this was identified and explored. In the latter analysis, such a procedure proved unnecessary. Yet, unexpectedly, in the analysis of political opinion it happened several times that the alternative "Are you religious or not?" indicator was shown to be a better empirical predictor of political opinion than the baseline measure.<sup>2</sup> What is more, whereas among Shi'a the alternative measure simply increased the statistical confidence of a substantively-similar estimated effect, and this in only two of six models of opinion, among Sunnis *only* the alternative measure had a non-zero estimated effect on political opinion in half of the models. Exactly why it is that the straightforward indicator should carry rather more validity among Bahrain's Sunnis is not obvious, but, whatever the case, this irregularity does raise questions about the conceptual validity and consistency of the religiosity measures.

Yet, before this discussion would seem to negate the whole of the Chapter 5 findings related to the influence of religiosity on political orientation in Bahrain, one might step back to review how far these concerns actually undermine the results of the survey analysis, which, considered together, paint an overall picture that is remarkably coherent. To begin, we may note that, even in those four models where one or the other measure of religiosity fails to evidence a relationship with a particular political opinion among Sunnis or Shi'is, such a failure is simply this: a lack of statistical support for a hypothesized effect, rather than evidence of a conflicting, theoretically-unexplainable effect. On the contrary, of the six models of political opinion, in no case was the estimated effect of religiosity—whether statistically-significant or not—ever positive among Bahraini Shi'a or negative among Bahraini Sunna. That is to say, never once in 24 estimates (2 ethnicities × 2 measures × 6 models) was increased religiosity associated with more pro-government opinion among Shi'is or more anti-government opinion among Sunnis. Likewise, in the six models of political action, increased religiosity was seen by every estimate to augment—never to decrease—political interest and participation among both Sunnis and Shi'is. All told, of the 48 separate estimates of the influence of religiosity

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<sup>2</sup> One will recall that this latter measure is based on the qualities one seeks in a potential spouse for one's family members, with those identifying religious traits being deemed "religious" individuals. Cf. CH, 5, 170.

contained within Chapter 5, many a one was in the opposite direction of that predicted. Despite its acknowledged problems, therefore, one must conclude that the religiosity indicator used in the Bahrain survey analysis serves, in the absence of a direct measure of the latter, as an adequate if not ideal proxy for an individual's other-ethnic orientations.<sup>3</sup>

A final topic we may treat briefly is the actual model specification used throughout the Bahrain survey analysis, as well as that of Chapter 6. Although the several methodological and practical benefits of the multiplicative interactive model have been highlighted already, one may continue to question the worth of this estimation technique whose estimates of greatest interest were not even directly interpretable. To recall these previous arguments, we may say that, compared to the alternative of segregated Sunni and Shi'i models, the interactive specification offered most of the benefits of the former on top of additional advantages that only it could provide. Key among the latter are: utilization of the full sample of observations rather than two precariously-small sub-samples; the ability to estimate the critical effect of ethnic group membership itself, which is necessarily impossible using separate Sunni- and Shi'i-only models; and, not least, greater correspondence to our conceptual argument, which does not ask, "Among Bahraini Shi'is (or Sunnis), what are the factors that affect political opinion and behavior?" but rather, "Among ordinary Bahraini citizens, what is the independent effect on political opinion and behavior of, *inter alia*, being a Sunni rather than a Shi'i?"

At the same time that the interactive model offered these added benefits, moreover, its estimation results were otherwise substantively-equivalent to those obtainable from Sunni- and Shi'i-specific models. In fact, the only real difference between the two sets of estimates—apart of course from the additional estimate of the effect of ethnicity—was in their handling of the several control variables,<sup>4</sup> and the necessity of an excess of graphs to depict conditional marginal effects. In order to demonstrate this, the Chapter 5 analysis went so far as to present the marginal effects of our main explanatory variables estimated from the standard interactive model alongside those obtained from ethnically-segregated estimations (cf. 221 ff.). Not only

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<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, by a similar logic may we be more confident in the statistical robustness of the estimated marginal effects of the religiosity variable, several of which fell outside of the standard  $p < 0.05$  or even  $p < 0.10$  level of significance. For, in the context of our regression analyses, the arbitrary  $p < 0.05$  cutoff is simply a mathematical expression for the idea that, in order to rule out the possibility of a non-relationship between two variables, an observed coefficient estimate should be large enough in magnitude that it will occur by random chance less than once in 20 (i.e.,  $1/0.05$ ) times. That in 48 opportunities neither of our two different measures of religiosity was ever estimated to have an effect other than that predicted, then, offers some reassurance in aggregate.

<sup>4</sup> The segregated models allow separate Sunni and Shi'i estimates for each of our control variables—age, gender, and education—whereas the interactive model produces only a single estimate for each. Because the effects of these variables were not of primary theoretical interest, however, this procedure made little practical difference.

were the estimates identical within a few hundredths of a unit, but, by comparing the relative  $R^2$  test statistics of these two methods of estimation, it was shown that the interactive model consistently was able to account for much more of the total variation in Bahrainis' political views and behaviors than were the ethnic-specific models in combination. In sum, if the worst one may say about the multiplicative interactive model employed in the preceding chapters is that it demanded an unsightly profusion of marginal effect illustrations, then one must agree that its many methodological advantages far outweighed its aesthetic drawbacks.

### **Bahrain's Model Dysfunction**

Having so diagnosed the nature of the dysfunction that continues to sabotage the *rentier* state of Bahrain, we endeavored next to argue that this same Sunni-Shi'i competition drives a similar process of ethnic-based political mobilization in other rent-based regimes of the region, and to show such by a complementary analysis of individual-level survey data from Iraq. That the conditions underlying the case of Bahrain in fact apply to a more general class of societies, it was shown, follows from both theory and observation. First, from a theoretical standpoint it is plain that the internal and external causes of Bahrain's dysfunctional *rentier* state—domestic ethnic division, politically-marginalized Shi'a populations, and fear of Iranian-inspired Shi'a radicalization—are not limited to Bahrain merely, but instead are growing today only more widespread and more acute across the Gulf region and beyond. At bottom, therefore, the most basic condition to be fulfilled is a simple demographic one: in those Arab Gulf societies home to a non-trivial Shi'a population—whether the latter be a significant minority (Kuwait), a concentrated regional majority (Saudi Arabia), or an absolute majority (Bahrain)—one should expect to find governments unwilling and/or unable to purchase the sort of political silence predicted by the *rentier* framework. While this is not to posit a specific critical Shi'a mass beyond which such effects are inevitable, it is reasonable on this basis to distinguish Qatar, the Emirates, and Oman from the former cases, their Shi'a communities being both marginal by comparison as well as non-indigenous—and thus easily-deportable.

The contemporary empirical record would seem to support these *a priori* expectations, we continued. Not only does overall regime stability in the Arab Gulf tend to track closely to the relative size of countries' Shi'a populations (as do their bilateral relations with Iran), but, more generally, the current state of Sunni-Shi'i and government-Shi'i relations in the region runs contrary to the notion that Bahrain's ethnic politics are qualitatively unique. Bahrain is

far from alone among Gulf states in failing to achieve the socio-political consensus supposed to prevail in *rentier* societies. In Saudi Arabia and Kuwait also have organized oppositions formed, and in each case the basis for political coordination is ethnic or religious identity: in the former, among Saudi Shi'is and non-Najdī and non-Ḥanbalī Sunnis; in the latter, among Kuwaiti Shi'is, Salafi Sunnis, and Sunni followers of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it was noted, even those countries with relatively small Shi'a populations have demonstrated worry over their potential for political activism or Iranian-backed political subterfuge. Thus, for example, has the United Arab Emirates moved preemptively to expel more than a hundred Lebanese Shi'a families since 2009, these long-time residents accused of sympathizing with or supporting Ḥizballāh. And outside of the GCC, the Yemeni and Saudi governments continue to wage war against the purported Iranian-backed Ḥūthī rebels by arming Salafi tribesmen keen to uproot their heretic Shi'a neighbors from northern Yemen.

To lend more empirical substance to these observations, we sought in Chapter 6 to repeat the investigation of the Bahrain mass survey using analogous individual-level data from another ethnically-divided society. Such an analysis would reveal how far the individual-level relationships between ethnicity and political orientation uncovered in Bahrain apply outside of that specific country context. Yet, lacking the requisite data from elsewhere in the Arab Gulf proper, the complementary study was made to rely upon two surveys of Iraq undertaken in 2004 and 2006. The analysis revealed a broad agreement with the Bahrain findings and, owing especially to the temporal variation present in the two surveys, even offered some additional insights. In Iraq as in Bahrain, citizens' orientations toward the state were shown to depend fundamentally on their perceptions of the ethnic balance of power enshrined therein. For ordinary Iraqis, concerns about the empowerment of ethnic rivals at the expense of one's own group competed with and generally superseded more mundane matters of economic welfare in determining the extent of an individual's support for, and actions taken in favor of or against, the Iraqi government.

Iraq's Sunnis and Shi'is reported holding political views and engaging in political action in a pattern corresponding to the prevailing ethnic character of the government. In 2004, when the coalition-appointed Iraqi Interim Government represented neither Sunnis nor Shi'is per se, signaling instead a basic shift away from the Sunni-dominated Iraq of the pre-2003 era, citizens' confidence in and satisfaction with the performance of the regime was determined

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<sup>5</sup> Ignoring the case of the stateless Kuwaiti *bidūn*.

above all by ethnic affiliation itself, with Iraqi Sunnis holding much more negative views of the interim administration irrespective of their attitudes toward Shi'a. This Sunni-Shi'i discrepancy amounted in each case to around 20% of the two dependent variables (i.e., political opinions) considered. By contrast, the difference in opinion separating Iraqis of below and above average economic satisfaction in 2004 barely surpassed 5%.

By the time of the 2006 survey, however, control over Iraq's government had shifted in elementary fashion toward Shi'a dominance, and so too, accordingly, did the basis of Iraqis' political behavior. No longer were government orientations based upon ethnic affiliation itself but upon citizens' views toward this newfound Shi'a empowerment and the larger shift in the balance of ethnic power that it signaled. Iraqi Sunnis who expressed more worry for the empowerment of Shi'a groups over against that of Sunni groups were shown to report much less confidence in and satisfaction with the performance of the Iraqi government *qua* Shi'a-led government, while Shi'is who were more concerned about the empowerment of Sunni groups vis-à-vis Shi'a groups reported much higher confidence and approval. This effect of what we termed ethnic identity was robust among Sunnis and Shi'is in 2006, and in all but one case it was larger in magnitude than that of economic satisfaction.

Finally, although a lack of data from 2004 prevented a similar cross-temporal analysis of Iraqis' political behavior, still our findings evidenced once again the primacy of ethnic orientations over against economic considerations in determining an individual's propensity to undertake political protest action in Iraq. In affecting the likelihood that Iraqis had taken part in a political demonstration, the influence of ethnic orientation was found to be some three times the magnitude of that economic satisfaction among both Sunnis and Shi'is. In short, despite important historical and institutional dissimilarities distinguishing the two cases, the same forces behind citizens' regime orientations witnessed in Bahrain were seen to apply equally in the case of Iraq. This outcome suggests that the same should be true of other Arab societies in which identification as a Sunni or Shi'i is politically-salient.

Having recounted these main Chapter 6 conclusions, we may repeat the procedure of the previous section to note the methodological and theoretical limitations of this second survey analysis. As for the former type, the Iraq survey analysis may well have represented an improvement over that of Chapter 5, not least on account of sample sizes more than three times greater than that utilized in Bahrain.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the study was able to make use of

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, Iraq's citizen population is more than 50 times the size of Bahrain's.

more direct measures of each of the two main explanatory variables—respondents’ ethnic orientations and their level of economic satisfaction—as well as the temporal variation from separate data points in 2004 and 2006. Still, one may identify several shortcomings. First, the survey did not ask respondents about their sector of work, precluding an analysis of the bases of public-sector employment in Iraq to inform that undertaken in Bahrain. Moreover, in light of the extreme effects of inter-ethnic interviewing revealed in the Bahrain context, the absence of any data—about ethnicity or otherwise—regarding the Iraqi fieldworkers makes possible a severe case of omitted variable bias if Iraqi respondents tended to misrepresent their political opinions and behaviors when asked about them by members of the rival community, and if some non-trivial proportion of the interviews were inter-ethnic. Another potential source of the same bias is the confounding influence of foreign involvement in Iraq at the time of the two surveys. It was shown that those individuals more strongly-oriented against members of the rival ethnic group were also more likely to reject the U.S.-led involvement in Iraq and by association the Western-backed interim government. In order to avoid spurious associations, then, particularly in 2004 when the Iraqi government was still coalition-appointed, the Iraq survey analysis employed a control variable that attempted to capture Iraqis’ views toward the occupation. Despite this effort to limit it, however, some bias may remain.

The greater cause for worry is a more elementary issue: the necessity of resorting in our test of the wider applicability of the Bahrain findings to survey data from Iraq rather than from, say, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, a practical concession that introduces no little theoretical difficulty. Because this thesis has focused explicitly on the rent-based states of the Arab Gulf, a class of regime that Iraq approximates but poorly, corroboration of the Bahrain results in the context of post-2003 Iraq is a rather unsatisfying substitution for empirical evidence of the same from another Arab Gulf society. In particular, because Iraq’s (Arab) Sunni-Shi’i demographics are a close match to Bahrain’s, the question necessarily arises whether the observed political effects of ethnicity depend in part or in whole on the existence of a Shi’a majority or something approaching it. If Bahrain’s politics are assumed *sui generis* in the Gulf largely on account of its unique Sunni-Shi’i demographics, in other words, then support for the Bahrain findings in the case of Iraq does nothing to preclude the possibility that, at bottom, it is in fact this country-level variable that underlies the observed citizen-level link between ethnicity and political orientations. Whether or how far these findings apply in places where



Shi'i citizens comprise only a sizeable minority (Kuwait) or a majority at the regional level (Saudi Arabia)—these key questions the Iraq investigation leaves unanswered.

The matter of what Chapter 6 can or does teach us about Chapter 5 is therefore one that must balance two competing considerations. On the one hand, the finding that the same determinants of political orientation operate in two Arab societies separated by history, by political institutions, and by economic organization, sharing in common only a parallel Sunni-Shi'i competition over national influence—such a finding would seem to inspire confidence that the individual-level relationships observed in Bahrain are not the product of some unique complex of unhappy circumstances. Notably, this result suggests that the nativist element present in the ethnic politics of Bahrain (and Saudi Arabia) but not in Iraq (or Kuwait)—the Shi'a narrative of an Ancient Bahrain whose utopian, clerical-ruled society was plundered and subjugated by foreign Sunni tribes—is not a necessary condition of Bahrain's ethnic-based political mobilization. Similarly, in showing Sunnis to adopt more oppositional orientations toward the Iraqi regime *qua* Shi'a-led government as their anti-Shi'a orientations increased; and Shi'a more pro-government views as their anti-Sunni orientations increased, the Iraq survey analysis demonstrated that government opposition does not stem intrinsically from Shi'ism itself but from a community's status as a political out-group.

On the other hand, the feature of Bahrain that most distinguishes it from its Arab Gulf counterparts, and whose effect one would thus most like to gauge through any cross-country analysis, is exactly the one it shares with Iraq: its majority Shi'a population. Unfortunately, a want of alternative survey data—and of primary social science research in the Gulf region more generally—is likely to mean that this empirical ambiguity will remain for some time.

### **Revising the *Rentier State* Framework**

From here it is obvious what revisions to the standard *rentier* state framework must be made in light of the foregoing study. A first regards the naïve assumption that economic benefits are distributed in *rentier* regimes in a manner that is politically-agnostic. The clichéd image of the government critic-turned-government minister found little empirical or even anecdotal support in the preceding. Instead, the cause and effect would seem in Bahrain at least to be reversed: *rentier* benefits are not employed primarily to purchase new political supporters, but to reward existing ones. Increased political deference on the individual level is thus a principal cause of receiving greater state rewards; not, as *rentier* theorists would have it, the effect.

Such a relationship is reinforced even further by the nature of the public sector in the Arab Gulf, in particular its ever-mounting securitization. Over the past decade, five of the six GCC states counted among the top 11 military spenders as a proportion of GDP, and four fell within the top six (cf. CH. I, 7, note 7). The decision to extend a citizen government employment, accordingly, is one that often—and increasingly—intersects with concerns for national security. To be sure, it is for precisely this reason that most of the region’s militaries and security services are staffed largely with non-nationals assumed to have loyalty to no one but the state, with only officers taken from among the ruling and allied tribes. Service in power ministries such as Defense, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Justice demands similar precaution. And for those innocuous civilian positions that do remain, preference goes to satisfying political friends rather than buying off political enemies. In societies divided broadly into anti-government and pro-government factions whose members are assumed readily-identifiable on the basis of ethnicity, such targeted decisions to reward or punish are easily made—decisions the transparency of which serve to create as many government critics as government champions. In explaining the economic-*cum*-political clientelism supposed to bind citizens to rulers in *rentier* states, Beblawi (1990, 91) tells that “[e]very citizen” of a rent-based regime “has a legitimate aspiration to be a government employee; in most cases this aspiration is fulfilled.” While he fails to elaborate the opposite case, we may say that ethnic-based societal division and political mobilization, combined with a near-hysterical fear of foreign-inspired irredentism, is the cause of one such exception.

The second basic revision required of the extant *rentier* state paradigm concerns its undemonstrated trust in the economic bases of individual political behavior. This assumption, afforded familiar expression and intellectual encouragement in “the reverse principle of no representation without taxation,” says that citizens who receive from rather than give to a state can have no reasonable basis upon which to expect a vote—actual or proverbial—in how it conducts its business. That rational, self-maximizing citizens and rulers would happily trade political privileges for material benefits is the accepted point of departure for the entire *rentier* hypothesis. Not only this, but any sustained popular political coordination is all but ruled out as a casualty of the *rentier* politics of allocation: for, as Luciani (1989, 74) explains, “the solution of manoeuvring for personal advantage within the existing setup is always superior to seeking an alliance with others in similar conditions.” The mistake here, of course, is a too narrow—a too *economic*—definition of these “others in similar conditions.” Certainly, Bahrain and the

rest of the Arab Gulf may not be ripe for proletariat revolution, yet political alliances need not be built upon shared class interests.<sup>7</sup> Being born Sunni or Shi'i too is a "condition."

In Bahrain and other Shi'a-populated Arab Gulf states, ethno-religious categories offer viable focal points for mass political coordination that otherwise, for lack of both an alternative basis of cooperation as well as institutional incentives for such joint action, *rentier* theorists have hitherto judged unlikely or even impossible. While identification of one's ethnicity or religious tradition may be a crude substitute for knowledge of his actual political preferences, in light of the Gulf's relatively barren political landscape deficient of such institutions as non-governmental organizations, independent media, and proper political parties that could give information about others' political characteristics, one relies in one's choice of political allies on the only data available: names and genealogies, language and accent, skin color, place of origin, and so on. In short, individuals must depend disproportionately on ascriptive social categories such as family and tribal descent or confessional affiliation; that is, upon ethnic categories. And although the inferences gleaned from such cues are likely only to approximate the true natures of individuals, they are, in the first place, very cheap and simple to obtain and, owing to the impermeability of ethnic and to a lesser extent religious boundaries, probably quite accurate. Political cooperation thereby becomes most likely among individuals of similar ethno-religious background, who form a common bond that may not correspond to actual historical connection or even to shared political interests, but one that binds all the same.

For the extant *rentier* framework, the upshot of this ethnic-based mobilization is that political life in rent-based regimes can no longer be summarized neatly and axiomatically as a pragmatic bargain of economic happiness for political quietude. For, even if it were true that material satisfaction engenders more pro-regime orientations on the margin, in the first place such an effect does not lead to *apoliticality* but indeed to an *increase* in political action in defense of a regime and of one's more favorable position therein *qua* member of the dominant ethnic group; and, in the second, it operates as but one of several competing determinants of political views and behavior, which include ethnic membership and orientation. To restate an earlier formulation: that one's interest in politics does not stem from the wish to oversee

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<sup>7</sup> To be fair, one may recall that Luciani continues on to predict presciently (76) that "parties will develop only to represent cultural or ideological orientations. In practice, Islamic fundamentalism appears to be the only rallying point around which something approaching a party can form in the Arab allocation states." However, whether for a lack of interest or a lack of faith that such ideological-based political coordination, if possible in theory, is in fact likely, this line of argument does not receive further treatment and certainly has not been taken up by modern scholars in their empirical analyses of the theory (e.g., in Ross's several studies).

the usage of one's taxed income does not mean that one is disinterested in politics. So too, there are many grounds upon which a Bahraini or other Gulf Arab may oppose—or support—the political status quo, and the relative fullness of his wallet is only one of them.

Finally, as for the larger question of how the Gulf region as a distinct category of states continues to enjoy relative stability compared to the rest of the Arab world, and this despite an ever-heightening political consciousness due to the effects of Sunni-Shi'i division and the regional geopolitical rivalry from which it originates, it is plain now that the answer is not simply that the region's would-be political activists are paid by their governments to shut up. Instead, rather than seek to transform regime critics into regime clients, the ethnically-divided states of the Arab Gulf tend to cultivate in their place a more dependable ally: a captive ethno-religious constituency that already shares (or can be persuaded that it shares) an interest in preventing any significant change to the political status quo. Indeed, if the Sunni citizens of Bahrain will tend to support the prevailing political system irrespective of whether it benefits them personally, simply because they prefer it to what they imagine as the alternative, then why bother trying to win over Shi'a citizens who, from the regime's perspective, will never surrender their true loyalties in any event? More dramatically, if hundreds of thousands of ordinary Bahraini Sunnis are willing to mobilize largely of their own accord in order to avert a perceived takeover by Shi'a revolutionaries, why use one's limited resources to court the potential political support of the latter when it can be better spent in rewarding and thereby reinforcing the already-demonstrated support of the former? The same question applies to the regime in Saudi Arabia and, as illustrated recently in the row surrounding its tardy support for GCC military intervention in Bahrain (cf. CH. I, 9-10), that in Kuwait.

### **Toward a New Arab Gulf Research Agenda**

Such fundamental theoretical revisions call for corresponding changes to the present social science research agenda dominating studies of Arab Gulf politics, a paradigm whose narrow focus on macro-level outcomes—in particular, the region's lack of democracy and of armed civil conflict—misses much of the politics in between, or rather gives the distinct impression of a want of political life altogether apart from top-down decisions of resource allocation made by calculating, interest-maximizing rulers whose only concern is the continued co-option of elite competitors via rent-funded patronage. Conspicuously absent from this prevailing model

of the Arab Gulf, then, are the vast majority of ordinary Gulf Arabs, an odd fact for a theory that purports to understand the bases of individual political behavior in rent-based regimes.

Not only have previous quantitative studies operated at the incorrect level of analysis, moreover, but, in so doing, they have relied upon an elastic notion of “rentierism” that has served to draw attention away from the Arab Gulf states as a particular class of regime. In seeking to find universal relationships between macro-level political outcomes and various aspects of rentierism, that is, such studies imply that every country is to some degree a *rentier* state; that some marginal increase in Luxembourg’s oil production would lead to a marginal decrease in its political accountability. Yet the very data they employ suggest the opposite. According to the authoritative measure developed by Ross (2008), for example, the average per-capita fuel rents among GCC states is \$11,339, compared to just \$270 for the other 163 countries included in his sample (cf. CH. 2, 21-25). In fact, then, nearly all of the variation in country-level political outcomes attributed so far to “oil” should be attributed more simply to the distinct character of the Arab Gulf. As one either is or is not pregnant, so too is rentierism a dichotomous state, one whose representatives are clustered disproportionately in one peculiar corner of the globe, toward which scholars seeking to understand its political effects would do well to direct their attention.

Dictating this research agenda in no small part has been a lack of requisite data, helped by a regional political environment generally hostile to public opinion research, and particularly hostile to survey research that would elucidate religious and ethnic demographics. Given this scarcity of individual-level data about the political views and activities of ordinary citizens of the Arab Gulf, to say nothing of their ethno-religious characteristics, it is little surprising that the behavioral assumptions of *rentier* theory have for so long escaped systematic empirical examination. At the same time, however, if the three national surveys treated here—one undertaken in the midst of a security crackdown in Bahrain; the others in an Iraq but one year removed from inter-state war and, in the case of the 2006 poll, on the very brink of armed civil conflict—if such efforts remain possible, then so too are other studies.

And such efforts are ongoing. As mentioned previously, the World Values Survey was administered for the first time in Qatar in December 2010. At the time of writing, the second wave of the Arab Democracy Barometer is being fielded in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Yet, in order to expand on the findings of the present study, these two standard survey instruments must begin to include additional items, or to be more forceful in insisting that existing questions

be fielded. Most significantly, neither the World Values Survey nor the Arab Barometer has succeeded in capturing the ethnic or religious affiliation of Gulf Arab respondents, rendering pioneering mass surveys of both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia unusable for our purposes here. Further, in light of the considerable interviewer effects witnessed in Bahrain, surveys in the region should begin to report basic demographic information about field researchers, most critically their ethnic affiliation in societies where ethnicity is socially- and politically-salient, so that appropriate strategies may be adopted to avoid substantial bias in survey responses.

Above all, having been now sufficiently reminded through the thirty-year ascendancy of *rentier* theory about the importance of economic organization in determining the political character of Arab states, students of Middle East and Gulf politics should begin to proceed back in the other direction, to re-evaluate the received stereotype of the economically- and politically-satiated “oil sheikh” in light of evolving domestic and regional conditions, including Shi’a populations increasingly insistent in their demands for political authority and influence, growing securitization of the region’s government sectors, and the GCC’s open political and ideological competition with a resurgent Iran that has benefited much from the U.S.-imposed “New Middle East.” Such a reassessment of the continued efficacy of the *rentier* paradigm demands, in the first place, a thorough interrogation of its conceptual underpinnings, which implies a return to the individual citizen as the primary unit of analysis, be it quantitative or qualitative. In order to understand the unforeseen longevity of the monarchies of the Arab Gulf, we must first understand the actual processes by which they earn and preserve the political favor of ordinary Gulf Arabs. The hope is that this first true test of the theoretical foundations of *rentier* state theory is not also the last.

## Notes for Chapter 7

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