

Teim



TEIM Election Watch Analysis

ELECTION REPORT:

BAHRAIN/Parliamentary elections
23 and 30 October 2010

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Background to the elections:

Bahrain's third parliamentary elections¹ under King Hamad took place in an atmosphere of strong political tension. The election campaign period was preceded by a wave of arrests of more than 200 mostly-Shi'i individuals accused of inciting or involvement in street violence. It especially targeted the leaders and members of unlicensed political associations, Haq and al-Wafa', which had called for a boycott of the elections, accusing them of being involved in a "terror network" and plotting to overthrow the government by instigating unrest. This was followed in September by the blocking of the main opposition association's website, the banning of the publications of four opposition political associations and the withdrawal of their publishing licences.² In addition, the government dissolved the board of the independent Bahrain Human Rights Society, closed down all the electronic websites and forums that hold critical political opinions, and arrested bloggers.

"What we are seeing in Bahrain these days is a return to full-blown authoritarianism," said the deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa division Joe Stork a few days before the elections.³ "The government has taken over associations and shut down media it doesn't like to silence the loudest critics and intimidate the rest. Under the current circumstances, it is hard to see how these elections will meet basic conditions for fairness — such as freedom of expression and association."

In this perspective, the election campaign proved to be much more active than expected a few months before – given the growing political disenchantment felt by many Bahrainis since 2006, particularly regarding the limited political role of the Council of Representatives within the institutions. This disillusionment had not spared the opposition's main association, al-Wefaq, which had boycotted the 2002 polls but participated in 2006. Nevertheless, campaign events were extremely well-attended, especially during the last two weeks of the campaign, when the political rallies organised by all the political associations and independent candidates on an almost daily basis and the countless posters that flourished all over the country, led even the most reluctant citizens to take an interest in the event.

Quantitative indices of democracy:

Bahrain was classified in the following democratic performance rankings just before these elections:

Measurement	Name and year of report or database	Institution	Index	Points, ranking and classification
Political rights and freedom	Freedom House Report 2010	Freedom House (FH)	PR: political rights CL: civil liberties	PR: 6, CL: 5 (Scale of 1, free to 7, not free) Classification: Not free

¹On the same days municipal elections were also held.

² Al-Wefaq, Wa'ad, al-'Amal al-Islami and the Democratic Progressive Tribune.

³Agence France Presse, 21 October 2010.

Degree of democracy in earlier elections	Polyarchy 2.0 2004 (referring to 2002)	Peace Research Institute of Oslo and Tatu Vanhanen	ID: Synthetic democracy index, Part: participation, Comp: competition	ID: 0, max. 49 Part: 0, max. 70 Comp: 0, max. 70 (Democracy minimum: ID: 5, Part: 10, Comp: 30) Classification: No open election held until latest report
Consolidation of authoritarian and democratic institutions	Polity IV 2008	Center for International Development and Conflict Management, Univ. of Maryland	Democracy: consolidation of democratic institutions Autocracy: authoritarian consolidation Polity: synthesis of both	Democracy: 0 Autocracy: 7 Polity: -7 (Scale of +10, very democratic to -10, very authoritarian) Classification: Average authoritarian consolidation
Perception of corruption	Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2010	Transparency International (TI)	TICPI: corruption perceptions index	TCPI: 4.9 points out of 10 (Scale of 1, very corrupt to 10, not at all corrupt) Rank: 48 out of 178 countries
Management of political and economic change	Bertelsmann Transformation Index(BTI) 2010	Bertelsmann Foundation	MI: Management Index, quality of transformation management	MI: 4.36 points out of 10, Rank: 85 out of 128 countries Classification: management with moderate success
Democracy, including press status and corruption	World Democracy Audit Nov. 2010	World Audit	World Democracy Rank: political freedom (FH) + press and corruption (TI)	World Democracy Ranking: n.a.

Definition of the political system and parties

Bahrain is a hereditary constitutional monarchy in which the King holds executive power. Since Hamad bin 'Isa Al Khalifa succeeded his father on the throne in 1999, a series of reforms have been implemented, such as the unilateral promulgation by the ruler of a new Constitution in 2002, considered an amended text of the 1973 Constitution (suspended in 1975). According to the 2002 Constitution, the ruler appoints the members of the Cabinet, is the Supreme Commander of the Defence Force and can rule by decree (provided it does not violate the Constitution). He can also dissolve the bicameral National Assembly, which is composed of an elected Council of Representatives (*Majlis al-Nuwwab*) and a Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Shura*), appointed by the King a few days after the elections for the Council of Representatives. While members of the National Assembly have the right to propose legislation (concurrently with the King) and enact laws, the government only has the right to draft laws and put them to a vote. The head of state remains the authority responsible for their ratification and promulgation. The appointed and elected parliamentary bodies have equal legislative powers, but in case of dispute, the president of the appointed chamber holds the casting vote.

Bahrain employs a majority two-round system (TRS) for parliamentary elections.⁴ No minimum percentage of votes is required as a threshold. In the first round, candidates must obtain at least 50% of the votes cast to be declared the winner. In the event of no candidate achieving this, the first and second candidates go forward to a second round of voting, in which the one with the highest number of votes will be declared the winner.

Political parties are banned, but after the promulgation of the Constitution the ruler allowed political associations to register under the law regulating civil associations; only in August 2005 a law was passed dealing with political associations explicitly. The candidature registration period was between September 12 and September 16, 2010. The candidacies were individual but could be supported by political associations, so that the voters were usually aware of the ideas and political affiliation of the candidates. Candidates had to be Bahraini nationals, enjoying all civic and political rights and registered in their respective constituencies. To be qualified to be elected as an MP, the candidate had also to be aged 30 or over at the date of his or her nomination, and be able to read and write Arabic. The nomination application had to enclose a copy of the CPR, a birth certificate for those born in 1980, two photos and a receipt for 200 Bahraini dinars deposited at the Justice and Islamic Affairs Ministry, in addition to a copy of the candidate's school qualifications, if available. There was an automatic registration process but voters had the opportunity to check if their details were correct both online and in person until 27 August 2010. During the voter registration period 135,000 checks were made on voter details via the election portal, available at the official website responsible for the elections (<http://www.vote.bh>).

Polling stations were organised on a uniform model all over the country. There were specific areas with curtains where the voters could tick the name and picture of the candidate on the ballot. The vote is put into the ballot box directly, without an envelope. All Bahrainis carry an identity card with an electronic strip containing personal details, which are included on the central electoral roll. When a voter presents his ID card at the polling station, this electronically verifies his right to vote and his inclusion on the voters lists, and possibly if he has already voted. After casting the vote, a stamp is put in the passport of the voter.

Impact of the electoral process and size of the constituency on the elections:

The country was divided into 40 constituencies electing one member of the Council of Representatives each. But the number of registered voters varied tremendously from one constituency to another: the smallest constituency had 768 voters (Southern Governorate – 6th constituency) while the largest had 16,216 registered voters (Northern Governorate – 1st constituency) – a ratio between the numbers of voters in these two districts of more than 21. Opposition associations and independent observers have continuously complained since 2002 about this gerrymandering and asked for a redistricting of the constituencies on a fair demographic basis – without success.

There were 40 polling centres (one per constituency), but voters could also go to one of the 10 general polling centres which were set up across Bahrain. Bahraini citizens living abroad were allowed to exercise their right to vote. Thirty

⁴ The names of the electoral systems are those used by IDEA, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. For details, see the Electoral System Design on their webpage: <http://www.idea.int/esd/world.cfm>.

Bahraini embassies, consulates and permanent missions abroad conducted the election process on 19 October (1st round) and 26 October (2nd round).

Results

Shi'i Islamist association al-Wefaq won 18 of the 40 seats (all in the first round), although not enough to overcome the combined weight of pro-governmental forces: Sunni Islamists with 5 seats (al-Assala and al-Minbar al-Islami) and independent candidates with 17 seats. 5 of the candidates (including one woman) were elected by default as there was no competitor in their constituency. 26 out of 40 deputies were elected in the first round (October 23rd) while the remaining 9 were chosen in the run-off elections (October 30th). No secular or leftist association obtained a single seat.

Results by seats broken down by governorate and constituency (1 seat per constituency)

Governorate	Constituency	Winning political association
Manama (capital)	1	Independent
	2	al-Wefaq
	3	al-Wefaq
	4	al-Wefaq
	5	al-Wefaq
	6	Independent
	7	al-Wefaq
	8	al-Wefaq
Muharraq	1	Al-Asala
	2	Independent
	3	al-Minbar
	4	Independent
	5	Independent
	6	al-Wefaq
	7	Independent
	8	Al-Asala
Northern	1	al-Wefaq
	2	al-Wefaq
	3	al-Wefaq
	4	Independent
	5	al-Wefaq
	6	al-Minbar
	7	al-Wefaq
	8	al-Wefaq
	9	al-Wefaq
Central	1	al-Wefaq
	2	al-Wefaq
	3	Independent
	4	Independent
	5	al-Wefaq
	6	al-Wefaq
	7	Al-Asala
	8	Independent
	9	Independent
Southern	1	Independent
	2	Independent
	3	Independent
	4	Independent
	5	Independent
	6	Independent

Source: Results published by the Electoral Commission

Results by political association

Political association	Number of seats
Al-Wefaq (Shi'i Islamists, opposition)	18
al-Assala (Salafists, pro-government)	3
al-Minbar al-Islami (Muslim Brotherhood, pro-government)	2
Independent (pro-government)	17
Total	40

Qualitative analysis of the elections

Participation:

Number of registered voters: 318,668.

Minister of Justice Khaled bin 'Ali Al Khalifa, head of the Electoral Commission, estimated 1st-round turnout of "at least 67 percent," compared with 72 percent in 2006 and 53.4 percent in 2002. But this official participation rate is misleading, given that all the electors of 5 constituencies where candidates won by default (because there was no competitor) were discretionarily registered as participants in the elections to raise the participation rate. The effective 1st-round turnout was 63.9%, taking into account the number of votes cast (191,850) and that of registered voters in the 35 districts where elections took place (300,288).⁵

Four political associations called and campaigned for a boycott:

* *Haq Movement (Right – Movement for Liberty and Democracy)*, founded in 2005 by members of al-Wefaq and Wa'ad associations who opposed the decision of these associations to participate in 2006 elections. The Secretary-General is Hassan Mushaima' who returned to Bahrain from self-imposed exile to London in February 2011.⁶ The movement's leadership is both Shi'i and Sunni, but it enjoys an increasingly wide audience among the underprivileged Shi'i youth.

* *Islamic Action Society – Amal (al-'Amal al-Islami)*, a Shi'i Islamist association mainly composed of Shirazis (i.e. followers of the late Ayatollah Mohammed al-Shirazi). This non-violent legal society is the direct descendant of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, which orchestrated the failed attempt to overthrow the Bahraini monarchy in 1981. The association boycotted the 2002 polls but participated in the 2006 elections by supporting three of its members as "independent" candidates.

* *al-Wafa' Islamic Movement (The Loyalty)*, founded in 2009 by 'Abd al-Wahhab Hussain, a prominent Shi'i activist. This unlicensed association officially believes in *wilayat al-faqih* ('government of the Islamic jurists) principles and their religious reference is shaykh 'Abd al-Jalil al-Miqdad.⁷

* *Bahrain Freedom Movement*, a London-based unlicensed association led by Sa'id al-Shehabi, an opponent in exile who decided not to return to Bahrain after 1999. The association is active through its website 'Voice of Bahrain' (www.vob.org).

Unsurprisingly, 1st-round highest participation was recorded in pro-government constituencies (e.g. Central 4th: 76%; South 3rd: 76%) compared to Shi'i pro-opposition ones (such as Manama 8th: 55% or Central 5th: 54%), where boycott campaigns attracted much sympathy and where al-Wefaq candidates were virtually uncontested. In the 2nd round, the turnout was lower than one week

⁵ Calculation by the author for the 35 constituencies where a 1st-round was conducted (based on the results available on vote.bh and al-Wasat newspaper website).

⁶ Hassan Mushaima' was arrested again on 17 March 2011.

⁷ 'Abd al-Wahhab Hussain and 'Abd al-Jalil al-Miqdad were arrested again in March 2011.

before (from 66% to 63%) in eight out of nine constituencies where run-off elections were held (the only exception being Central 3rd).

Competition:

In theory, the degree of competition for these elections was rather high. Except for the three political associations that were not licensed by the government and thus unable to present candidates in the elections under the associations' banner (al-Wafa' Islamic Movement, Bahrain Freedom Movement and Haq Movement), all political associations registered under the Association Law (more than 15 at the time of the elections) could present candidates – 11 of them presented at least one candidate (see section "party representation" below). Moreover individuals were able to compete as 'independents' (*mustaqil*).

132 candidates, among them 9 women (down from 17 in 2006) were in the running for the seats (compared to 187 in the 2006 elections).⁸ Nevertheless five candidates were declared winners four weeks before the polls, given that there was no competitor in their constituency.⁹

Transparency:

These elections were held in the presence of a hundred international media representatives but the government did not allow international observers to monitor the elections. Two American think tanks, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Republican Institute, had applied to monitor the elections but were rejected.¹⁰ The Electoral Committee announced a few days before the elections that 379 Bahraini monitors (from five local organisations¹¹) were allowed to access the polling stations and monitor the ballot counting process. The only independent organisation among these is the Bahrain Transparency Society (BTS). According to its chairman, 'Abd al-Nabi al-'Akri, its observers faced many more difficulties to work in 2010 than was the case in 2006,¹² because of the tense atmosphere in the country¹³ and the officials' extreme sensitivity. On 23 October, numerous irregularities were reported by the BTS observers: many individuals, mostly from Shi'i villages, were refused the right to vote because their name did not appear on the list (while some of their close relatives were accepted or while they had made

⁸ Voters had also to select 40 other representatives out of 182 candidates, three of whom were women, to fill municipal council positions.

⁹ These five unopposed candidates (3 independent, 1 running for al-Wafaq and 1 for al-Assala) were already members of the 2006-2010 Chamber.

¹⁰ The Resident Director of NDI's Gulf office, Mrs Staci Haag, was not allowed to enter the country a few months before the elections (<http://www.habibtoumi.com/2010/04/21/ndi-gulf-resident-director-farred-from-entering-bahrain/>). Moreover two weeks before the elections, Joe Stork, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa division, was slammed by the Minister of Social Development for attending election gatherings of candidates (*Khaleej Times*, 7 October 2010).

¹¹ Among them there are three government-organised NGOs: the National Human Rights Institution (created by royal decree in 2009, with members appointed by the King); the Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society (no link with its homonym, Human Rights Watch), founded in 2005 by Faisal Fulad, a member since 2002 of the Parliament's Upper Chamber; the Bahrain Dialogue Society, created in 2009. The fourth organisation is the formerly independent and respected for its professionalism, Bahrain Human Rights Society. The Ministry of Social Development dissolved its board in September 2010 and appointed a ministry official as 'interim director', after the society had criticised the arrests and use of torture against opponents in August (<http://www.hrw.org/en/world-report-2011/world-report-2011-bahrain>).

¹² Personal interview with 'Abd al-Nabi al-'Akri, Manama, 23 October 2010.

¹³ A smaller number of candidates than in 2006 agreed to sign a code of conduct issued by BTS promising an honest campaign.

sure online that they were registered in time to do so).¹⁴ Moreover, the ban on candidates approaching polling stations by less than 100 metres (in order not to influence voters) was frequently violated. Last but not least, independent observers considered that the policy to grant citizenship to a large number of Sunni expatriates (of Jordanian, Yemeni or Pakistani origins) working in the security and military apparatuses gave the authorities the possibility to influence them to vote for candidates loyal to the government and affect the result in disputed constituencies.

Party representation and debate during the election:

11 political associations were represented in the 1st round of the parliamentary elections. The association with the largest number of candidates (18, all successful) was the Shi'i Islamist *al-Wafaq (National Accord Islamic Society)*. Headed by 'Ali Salman, a cleric who was one of the leaders of the 1990s' Bahraini 'Intifada,'¹⁵ al-Wafaq is the association with the widest audience in Bahrain. 'Ali Salman called during the campaign for an end to the ruling family's hold on some key positions: "It is unacceptable that power be monopolised by a single family, even one to which we owe respect and consideration," adding: "We look forward to the day when any child of the people, be they Sunni or Shi'a, can become prime minister."¹⁶

The other opposition associations which had no candidates elected were:

* the secular leftist *Wa'ad (Promise - National Democratic Action Society)*, established in 2001 by former exiled leaders of the clandestine Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (of socialist and Arab nationalist obedience). The association boycotted the 2002 elections but participated in 2006 (with one Wa'ad-supported candidate elected). It presented 3 candidates in 2010, among whom its general secretary Ibrahim Sharif¹⁷ (in Muharraq). As was the case four years before, Wa'ad and al-Wafaq agreed not to compete with each other.

* the secular leftist *Nationalistic Democratic Assembly (al-Tajammu')*, representing Ba'athism in Bahrain; the association boycotted the 2002 elections and presented candidates in 2006 (winning no seats). In 2010, it had one candidate (its secretary-general Hassan al-'Aali) who opposed an al-Wafaq candidate in Northern 7th.

* the secular leftist *Progressive Democratic Tribune Society (al-Minbar al-Taqaddumi)*, created in 2002 by returning exiles from the clandestine Marxist-Leninist 'National Liberation Front of Bahrain.' The ex-communist association participated in 2002 (3 members elected¹⁸), in 2006 (no seat won) and presented 3 candidates in 2010 (among whom its secretary-general Hassan Madan, competing al-Wafaq candidate Jawad Fairuz in Northern 8th constituency).

Among the pro-government associations that participated were:

* the Sunni Islamist *National Islamic Tribune (al-Minbar al-Islami)*, regarded as the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Bahrain. The association, headed by 'Abd al-Latif al-Shaykh (who was MP since 2002 but defeated in 2010), is

¹⁴ Personal observation, Northern governorate, 2nd, 5th and 7th constituencies (23 October 2010).

¹⁵ See Munira Fakhro, 'The Uprising in Bahrain: An Assessment.' in Gary G. Sick and Lawrence G. Potter (eds), *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security, and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp.167-88.

¹⁶ BBC News, 23 October 2010 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11611743>).

¹⁷ Ibrahim Sharif was arrested on 17 March 2011.

¹⁸ One of them, 'Abd al-Hadi Marhoon, served as Deputy Speaker of the Chamber.

particularly active in Muharraq. It had won seven seats in 2002 and 2006, and presented eight candidates in 2010 – though only two were elected.

* the Salafi *Islamic Authenticity (al-Assala al-Islamiyya)*, headed by Ghanim al-Bu'anayn, elected MP since 2002. The association, particularly active in Muharraq and al-Rifa', presented eight candidates in 2010 (3 won seats) – while it had won six seats in 2002 and eight in 2006. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis had agreed in 2006 not to present candidates in the same constituencies to maximise the Sunni Islamist votes. This deal could not be reached in 2010 and candidates supported by both associations competed against each other in 3 constituencies.

* the Shi'i Islamist *Islamic League (al-Rabita)* – presented one, unsuccessful candidate. Due to al-Wefaq's boycott in 2002, the association then won five seats but had no candidates elected in 2006.

Four smaller associations (three considered to be supportive of the government and one in the opposition), presented candidates but did not influence the results.

Openness:

The degree of openness in these elections was limited. The biased electoral districting, the difficulty for opposition candidates to voice their ideas in mainstream media (national TV and radios, pro-government newspapers)¹⁹ and defend themselves against smear campaigns,²⁰ as well as the polarisation that has developed in the political system over the last years have eliminated competition in many constituencies and made the results easily predictable. Nevertheless, some constituencies, where two charismatic personalities were competing, proved relatively uncertain and attracted much of the media attention during the campaign. Rival opinion polls were published by pro-government and pro-opposition newspapers, during the two weeks preceding the first round. While al-Wasat newspaper (independent) gave a relatively fair picture of the balance of power (compared to the final results), especially in constituencies where al-Wefaq association proposed a candidate,²¹ official newspapers (such as al-Watan) tended to hugely underestimate opposition candidates.²²

Significance:

While attendance at campaign meetings was high and the political debates virulent (except in government newspapers), the significance of this election was rather limited. Despite the generally unexpected excellent result of al-Wefaq and the collapse of both Sunni Islamists associations, the balance of power between the opposition and the pro-government representatives broadly remain the same as in

¹⁹See the study conducted by the Arab Group for Media Monitoring (report available here: <http://awgmm.net/eng/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/final-english.pdf>). It shows that 75% of the time dedicated to elections on national TV in October was allotted to senior state and government figures while all opposition societies together got less than 1%.

²⁰ An illustration of these attacks is the way in which Wa'ad leader, Ibrahim Sharif, was insistently compared to the Nazi minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels (see al-Watan, widely known as being the Royal Court's mouthpiece, 21 October 2010, p.11).

²¹In al-Wasat (21 October 2010), Khalil al-Marzooq (Manama – 2nd; al-Wefaq) is credited with 54% (compared to 58% as a final result) against 20% for his opponent Fadhil al-Hulaibi (final result: 28%).

²²See al-Watan (12 and 22 October 2010) regarding Muharraq – 3rd constituency. 'Ali Ahmed (al-Minbar al-Islami) is credited with 22.9% and 29% successively, compared to 4.7% and 15% for Ibrahim Sharif (Wa'ad) – while the final results were 37% and 32% respectively.

the previous term (2006-2010). Moreover the Council representatives' weak ability to influence the country's main policies has been completely internalised by the majority of voters. Thus very few nationals considered that the results could substantially change the post-election national situation and the general expectations of the population for the new legislature (2010-2014) remained terribly disillusioned.

International political reaction and implications:

As a traditional UK ally in the Persian Gulf and home to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, the Kingdom of Bahrain has enjoyed preferential treatment by the leaders of these countries since King Hamad's accession to power. Political reactions to this electoral process did not deviate from this principle. This leniency has been a crucial element in the Bahraini government's strategy to legitimise, in both the international and the local political arenas, its more than slow reform path.

International NGOs, like Human Rights Watch, urged US officials in September to issue a public statement about the deterioration of the human rights situation during the summer, but the US State Department responded on several occasions to media questions with a non-specific statement of concern,²³ which allowed the Bahraini official newspapers during the campaign to present it as US support for the government's actions.²⁴

The European Union as well as the UK Foreign Office welcomed the "smooth and peaceful conduct" of the elections and "commended the participation of a broad range of political groupings from different confessions and political traditions."²⁵ The UK Foreign Secretary William Hague emphasised "the gradual development of a liberal democratic society [in Bahrain]" and stressed that he is "encouraged by the important steps that the Kingdom is taking on its own journey towards democracy."²⁶ Similarly the US congratulated Bahrain, "a valued and strategic ally with a common interest in strengthening participatory democracy," and stated that, "with this election, Bahrain has demonstrated that multi-ethnic, multi-confessional societies can address their challenges through peaceful reform and representative institutions." Nevertheless the US mentioned their concern about the "efforts in the lead-up to the elections to restrict freedom of expression and association targeted at civil society."²⁷

Even if some hard-line political groups in Iran repeatedly denigrated the legitimacy of the Bahraini elections by calling the island the '14th province' of the Islamic Republic and although Iranian TV channels frequently hosted Bahraini opponents campaigning for the election boycott and broadcasted reports emphasising the idea that results were "pre-decided,"²⁸ Teheran officially kept a rather low-profile during the campaign and the election process, as was illustrated

²³ Human Rights Watch, 'Elections to Take Place Amid Crackdown,' 20 October 2010.

²⁴ This inaccurate account was denounced in the 2010 US State Department Human Rights Report published (see <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154459.htm>).

²⁵ 'EU Heads of Mission Welcome Smooth Conduct of Elections,' 17 December 2010 (http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/gulf_countries/press_corner/all_news/news/2010/20111217_01_en.htm).

²⁶ 'Foreign Secretary welcomes HRH Crown Prince of Bahrain to the UK,' 1 December 2010 (available here: <http://ukinbahrain.fco.gov.uk/en/news/?view=News&id=251488682>).

²⁷ US Secretary of State, Press Statement, 31 October 2010 (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/10/150194.htm>).

²⁸ For instance 'Bahrain election results pre-decided,' Press TV, 22 October 2010 (<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/147766.html>).

by the Iranian Parliamentary Speaker Ali Larijani, who congratulated his Bahraini counterpart Khalifa al-Dhahrani on his reelection in December and "wished success for the Bahraini parliament speaker and members of parliament in carrying out their duties."²⁹

Conclusions

Despite the disillusionment regarding the Council of Representatives that had beset a number of Bahrainis since 2006, the campaign proved active and relatively competitive. As Baqir al-Najjar, Professor of Sociology at the University of Bahrain, explains, "the way the media handled the security situation which prevailed prior to the elections unexpectedly raised al-Wefaq's shares" in the votes. Due to the lack of alternative within the opposition and even if hesitant or sympathetic towards the ideas supported by the boycotting associations, "Shi'a [...] voted intensely for al-Wefaq despite their restlessness with its performance throughout the past four years."³⁰

The most significant outcome of these elections was the setback suffered by the Sunni Islamist associations (which only won 5 seats, compared to 15 in 2006) and the concomitant election of a number of self-styled 'independent' candidates. This is a blatant illustration of the reluctance of the regime to have a Chamber controlled once again by Islamists (either Shi'i or Sunni) and its strategy to favour pragmatic businessmen and tribal leaders ready to support the regime's policies.

These elections mark the end of a cycle that started in 1999-2000 with Hamad's accession to the throne. The reform process initiated by the new ruler has proven deceptive in the long run, especially after the 2006 elections and the various corruption scandals ('Bandargate,' massive abuses in state-owned properties, etc.) revealed since then. Not only the limited capacity of the Council of Representatives to have a notable effect on major state policies, but also the unchanged balance of power within the ruling family (still tilting in favour of the Prime Minister) and the mixed results of the socio-economic reform embodied by the Crown Prince, have illustrated the incapacity of local political actors to propose a viable model for the future and the deadlock reached by the political system.

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²⁹ 'Speaker Felicitates Bahraini Counterpart on Reelection,' Fars News Agency, 30 December 2010 (<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8910090968>).

³⁰ Agence France Presse, 24 October 2010 (<http://www.france24.com/en/20101024-shiites-make-slender-gain-bahrain-election#>).