



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Bahrainis protest for democracy, February-March 2011

• Arab Awakening (2011)

14 February

2011

to: 16 March

2011

**Country:** Bahrain

**Location City/State/Province:** *Manama*

**Location Description:** *Pearl Square, Salmaniya Medical Complex, al-Riffa district*

### Goals:

Disband the National Assembly, abrogate the current Constitution and form a new Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution stipulating that legislative authority is vested in a parliament all the members of which must be elected, that executive authority is exercised by an elected Prime Minister, and that Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy ruled by the Al Khalifa family. However members of the royal family are barred from holding top positions in the three branches of government. The groups involved also called for the end of sectarian hatred in the state media and that the Bahraini government implement positive measures to validate the national dialogue and to release all political prisoners.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › Al-Wifaq, Wa'ad, Islamic Action Society, National Democratic Assemblage, Nationalist Democratic Society, al-Ikha National Society, and al-Menbar Progressive Democratic Society denounced the massacre at Pearl Square
- 011. Records, radio, and television › An SMC doctor pleaded for the international community's help on television
- 022. Protest disrobings › Protesters removed their shirts to show that they were unarmed
- 038. Marches › Bahrainis marched to Pearl Square and to the SMC
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Bahrainis gathered at Pearl Square and at the SMC to protest the government.
- 173. Nonviolent occupation › Protesters occupied Pearl Square
- 180. Alternative communication system › Protesters recorded and broadcast confrontations between themselves and security forces on their mobile phones.

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › Al-Wifaq, Wa'ad, the Islamic Action Society, the National Democratic Society, the al-Ikha National Society, and the al-Menbar Progressive Democratic Society reaffirmed their support and made a number of demands.
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › "The people demand the fall of the regime"
- 038. Marches › Martyr's March
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 117. General strike › Approx. 80% of the Bahraini workforce went on strike in support of the activists.
- 173. Nonviolent occupation › Protesters reoccupied Pearl Square after the departure of security forces

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 038. Marches › March to al-Riffa neighborhood.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Pearl Square

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- Youth
- but then grew to include people of all ages and occupations.

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

February 14th Youth Movement

**Partners:**

Bahrainis (mostly Shiite)

**External allies:**

Al-Wifaq, Wa'ad, the Islamic Action Society, the National Democratic Society, the al-Ikha National Society, and the al-Menbar Progressive Democratic Society

**Involvement of social elites:**

Crown Prince of Bahrain initially came out in support of protesters, U.S. President Barack Obama and the White House urged the government to stop the violence.

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

### Groups in 1st Segment:

- Al-Wifaq
- Bahrainis
- February 14th Youth Movement
- U.S. government
- Wa'ad
- and the al-Menbar Progressive Democratic Society
- the Islamic Action Society
- the National Democratic Society
- the al-Ikha National Society

### Groups in 2nd Segment:

### Groups in 3rd Segment:

### Groups in 4th Segment:

### Groups in 5th Segment:

### Groups in 6th Segment:

- Al-Wifaq exit
- Bahrainis (exit)
- February 14th Youth Movement
- Islamic Action Society exit
- National Democratic Society (exit)
- U.S. government (exit)
- Wa'ad exit
- the al-Ikha National Society (exit)
- the al-Menbar Progressive Democratic Society (exit)

### Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

All groups exited in the 6th segment.

**Segment Length:** 5.16 days

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### Opponents:

Government of Bahrain, police and riot police forces, security forces, Saudi Arabian soldiers

### Campaigner violence:

One protester killed two policemen with an SUV.

### Repressive Violence:

Government forces repeatedly repressed the protests forcefully. They killed three protesters and wounded hundreds more throughout the campaign. Pro-regime civilians also committed violent acts against protesters.

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

### Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

### Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

The campaign was completely unsuccessful--no regime change took place. The vestiges of the February 14th Youth Movement do remain, however, and they protest every year on that date. During the campaign, the number of protesters and groups aligned with their views grew significantly.

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Inspired by the protests in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011, Bahrainis rose up against the monarchy in February and March of 2011. Initiated by activists and propelled by the “February 14th Revolution in Bahrain” Facebook group, the protests had clear goals: disband the Bahraini National Assembly, abrogate the current constitution, and form a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution. They demanded the new constitution stipulate that an elected parliament hold legislative authority and that an elected Prime Minister exercise executive authority. Under their demands, Bahrain would become a constitutional monarchy ruled by the Al Khalifa family, but the constitution would bar members of the royal family from holding top positions in the three branches of government.

On 14 February 2011, over 6,000 Shiite Bahrainis began to march towards Pearl Square, a national monument in Manama, Bahrain’s capital. Though the march was peaceful, police shot and killed a demonstrator, Ali Abdulhadi Almeshaima, who doctors pronounced dead at 8:20 PM at the Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC) in Manama. The next morning (15 February), over one thousand protesters gathered at the SMC to receive Almeshaima’s body for his funeral procession, which ended at a local cemetery. During the procession, however, the police killed another protester, Fadel Salman Ali Salman Matrouk, whose death was confirmed at 9:30 AM. By the end of the day, several thousand protesters occupied Pearl Square, where they installed a projector and screen as well as tents for the night. The activists reached out via text message to inspire others to join them. By midnight on 16 February, an estimated 12,000 protesters occupied Pearl Square.

That same night, the demonstrators decided to sleep in the square. However, at 3:00 AM, security forces launched an attack to clear the demonstrators from the square. Carried out by 1,000 officers with sound bombs, sticks, shields, shotguns, and tear gas launchers, the attack killed three sleeping demonstrators and injured hundreds more. Police also shot and killed another protester an hour later. The attack angered Sunnis and Shias alike—Al-Wifaq, Wa’ad, Islamic Action Society, National Democratic Assemblage, Nationalist Democratic Society, al-Ikha National Society, and al-Menbar Progressive Democratic Society denounced the massacre at Pearl Square. In addition, the Bahrain Teacher’s Society called for a nationwide strike on 20 February.

After losing Pearl Square, protesters gathered at the SMC, attracting the attention of the media. Al Jazeera English aired the appeal of Dr. Ghassan Dhaif, who called on “everybody in the world, European Union, United States...all the Arab countries...please do come here to help us.” He described the protesters as “innocent,” and the violent assault as unbelievable. The violent repression notwithstanding, many demonstrators marched back in an attempt to reoccupy Pearl Square, though they found it under the control of heavily-armed security forces. On their way back to the square, young activists removed their shirts to show that they were unarmed. They also recorded and broadcasted confrontations between the nonviolent demonstrators and the riot police using their mobile phones.

The international community strongly condemned the night attack. On 18 February, U.S. President Barack Obama called the King of Bahrain and urged him to stop the violence against the demonstrators. A White House statement also urged the

Government of Bahrain (GoB) to respect and uphold the universal rights of its citizens and implement meaningful reform. Additionally, moderate Sunnis, including the Crown Prince of Bahrain, denounced the violence and underlined the necessity of a resolution. Also on 18 February, the Crown Prince addressed the nation on television, expressing his condolences to all Bahrainis and his desire for calm. At the same time, the King granted the Crown Prince the power to negotiate with the protesters. Al-Wifaq responded by requiring the removal of security forces from Pearl Square before negotiations could begin.

On 19 February, the GoB security forces left Pearl Square. Shouting “salmiya,” which means peaceful in Arabic, activists reoccupied Pearl Square and turned it into an encampment, installing tents, portable toilets, and satellite dishes. Organizers also distributed food, water, tea, and other amenities, and demonstrators held seminars, debates, and recited political poetry. Then, on 20 February, approximately 80 percent of Bahrain’s workforce, including teachers and lawyers, went on strike in support of the protest movement. They called for reform, rejected sectarianism, and some called for the end of the al-Khalifa dynasty. The strike and protest had a significant negative effect on Bahrain’s economy, and caused the flight of foreign investment from the country.

Meanwhile, support for the campaign grew. A joint statement issued on 19 February by Al-Wifaq, Wa’ad, the Islamic Action Society, the National Democratic Society, the al-Ikha National Society, and the al-Menbar Progressive Democratic Society reaffirmed all of those groups’ support for the movement, demanded the end of sectarian hatred in the state media and that the Bahraini government implement positive measures to validate the national dialogue and release all political prisoners.

On 22 February, the campaign reached its climax with the “Martyrs March,” which honored the protesters killed by the security forces. Over 150,000 men, women, and children participated in the nonviolent protest. The protesters chanted slogans, including “the people demand the removal of the regime.” However, the precise political aims of the movement remained unclear, and activists inadvertently inflamed sectarian tensions prompting the state media to vilify the activists and them foreign infiltrators.

Following this action, the nonviolent nature of the campaign soon began to deteriorate. On 11 March, protesters marched to the al-Riffa district of Manama, where the King’s palace and the residences of senior Sunni government officials were located. Over 3,000 demonstrators participated. When the police could not persuade the protesters to turn back, they used force to push them back. Behind the police stood over 3,000 Sunni residents of al-Riffa, who aided the police in violently pushing back the demonstrators. This was not the only time that pro-regime civilians joined security forces and attacked protesters. On 13 March, several hundred pro-regime Sunnis attacked Shiite students at the University of Bahrain with knives and clubs while security forces stood by, watching. Shiite demonstrators at Pearl Square rushed to Bahrain University to support the students.

The Bahraini government was not alone in its endeavor to crush the February 14 Movement, however—its allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council supported it. On 14 March, Saudi Arabia sent 1,000 soldiers to Bahrain to help the government. Over the following days, the GoB began to implement an operation to end the campaign and remove the activists from the streets of Manama. On 15 March, the king disseminated a decree imposing a State of National Safety throughout the country, banning any public demonstration and imposing martial law, under which no gatherings were permitted. The next day, 16 March, the government launched the operation that would expel the activists from Pearl Square. The government police forces violently took control of the square using tear gas, sound bombs, and water cannons, and they cleared the SMC armed with sticks, shields, handguns, and assault rifles. They also prevented injured demonstrators from receiving treatment and forced the wounded to turn to mosques or clinics for medical attention. One protester, however, killed two police officers with an SUV on the square. Nonetheless, the government achieved its goal of ending the protests. It arrested at least 1,000 activists, including many of the movement leaders, and, on 18 March, demolished Pearl Square in order to erase any symbol of the movement and symbolically seal its victory.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

Arab Awakening uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia

**Sources:**

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**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Caroline Dreyfuss, 01/11/2015

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