

Kingdom of Bahrain



SUMMARY

The Kingdom of Bahrain is mostly Arab within an archipelago of 33 mostly desert islands. Bahrain has a rich civilization and was among the first Gulf states to discover oil and build a refinery. However, it has not reached the production levels of other Gulf states and therefore has diversified its economy. The divide between the Shia majority and Sunni rulers has led to long-standing tension. Bahrain was once viewed as a promising model for political reform and democratic transition; after a crushing popular pro-democracy protest movement in 2011, the monarchy has eliminated a broad range of political rights and civil liberties.

Chief of State: King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa (March 6, 1999) AND Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa (October 21, 1969)

Head of Government: Prime Minister Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa (November 11, 2020) AND Deputy Prime Minister Khalid bin Abdallah Al Khalifa (May 2011)

Capital: Manama

Other notable cities: Al Muharraq, Sitrah, Mina Salman, Madinat Hamad

Gov Type: Constitutional Monarchy

Population: 1,566,888

History: Bahrain has been inhabited since prehistoric times and fell under Muslim rule following the 7th-century Arabian conquests. The Portuguese ruled the island and later the Persians between 1521 and 1783. Since 1783, the al-Khalifah family from the al-Hasa province in Arabia has ruled the nation.

GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bahrain is an archipelago in the Persian Gulf, east of Saudi Arabia. It is 760 sq km in total area. It has 161 km of coastline. Bahrain consists mostly of low desert plains which rise gently to a low central escarpment. Bahrain's natural resources consist of oil, natural gas, fish, and pearls. 11.3% of its land is used in agriculture, with 0.7% being forest and the remaining 88% being used as 'other'. It is the smallest of the Gulf States, but its urbanization rate exceeds 90%; it is also prone to periodic droughts and dust storms.

Economy and Politics

DEMOGRAPHICS

Noun: Bahraini(s)

Adjective: Bahraini

Ethnic Groups: Bahraini (47.4%), Asian (43.4%), other Arab (4.9%), African (1.4%), North American (1.1%), Golf Co-operative countries (0.9%), European (0.8%), other (0.1%)

Languages: Arabic (official), English, Farsi, Urdu

Religions: Muslim (74.2%), other (25.8% - includes Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i)

Bahrain has the smallest population of the Gulf States, but its urbanization rate exceeds 90%. Its largest settlement concentration is found on the far northern end of the island in and around Manamah and Al Muharraq.

ECONOMY AND GDP

Bahrain has a growing economy, with a diverse island economy. It has major recovery and balancing efforts to fulfill Economic Vision 2030. It is a regional finance hub and is currently trying to increase its openness. Yet, it suffers from high youth unemployment and water scarcity due to reservoir depletion.

Real GDP: \$106.35 billion (2024)

Real GDP Growth Rate: 2.6% (2024)

Real GDP Per Capita: \$66,941 (2024)

GDP (Official Exchange Rate): \$47.11 billion (2024)

GDP Composition: Agriculture 0.3% (2017), Industry 39.3% (2017), and Services 60.4% (2017).

Inflation Rate: 0.9% (2024)

Industries: Petroleum processing and refining, aluminum smelting, iron pelletization, fertilizers, Islamic and offshore banking, insurance, ship repairing, and tourism.

Labor Force: 932,073 (2024).

Unemployment Rate: 1.1%, youth unemployment rate stands at 5.4% (2024).

Population Below Poverty Line: 7.5% (2010-2021 UN estimate)

Public Debt: 111% of GDP (2020)

Exports: \$44.58 billion (partners include Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, United States, Japan, and India) 2022 est.

Imports: \$33.066 billion (partners include China, United Arab Emirates, Brazil, Australia, and India) 2022 est.

MAIN POLITICAL CONTENTIONS

Bahrain had adopted a distinct foreign policy, diverging significantly from the stances taken by other Arab nations. They currently stand out as a close ally of the West in the region.

In September of 2023, Bahrain entered into the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement with the United States to enhance security and defense collaboration, foster economic ties, and deepen scientific and technical cooperation. During 2023, the rest of the GCC members seemed to be moving in the opposite direction from Bahrain. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was pursuing reconciliation with Iran, alongside the Qataris. At the beginning of the conflict in Gaza, Bahrain condemned the actions of Hamas, aligning its position with the United Arab Emirates but contradicting the stances taken by many other Arab countries. In November of 2023, however, the Bahraini Parliament announced the Israeli Ambassador would leave the Kingdom and economic ties with Israel would be severed.

During the 2026 war with Iran, Bahrain, along with many other American Gulf allies, came under attack. The Iranians struck ports, airstrips, and buildings in Manama. The conflict further revealed internal divisions in Bahraini society, with the poorer Shi' population sympathizing with the Iranians and condemning the Sunni monarchy's alignment with the US. Several people were sentenced to prison for expressing support for Iran.

BAHRAIN: A TIMELINE

In May of 1981, Bahrain joined the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and that December, seventy-three people that are rumored to be members of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain are arrested and accused of conspiring to overthrow the government. In April of 1986, Qatari troops occupy Fasht al-Dibal Island, but withdraw in June after mediation by Saudi Arabia. In January 1991, Bahrain participates in the US-led operation Desert Storm against Iraq as part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Peninsula Shield Force. In October 1991, Bahrain signs a defense cooperation agreement with the United States which provided for port facilities and joint military exercises.

1981-1991

In 1999, Sheikh Abd-al-Amir al-Jamri is sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, but he is pardoned by the new Emir, Sheikh Hamad. In 2000, Emir appointed the first non-Muslims and women to the Consultative Council, one of which was Christian and another a Jewish businessman. In 2001, the Al-Wefaq opposition movement is founded and by 2002 Bahrain becomes a constitutional monarchy and allows women to stand for office. Emir Hamad proclaims himself as King. In the first time in 30 years, Parliamentary elections are held with women voting and standing as candidates for the first time, but failing to win a seat. In 2004, Nada Haffadh is made health minister and is the first woman to head a government ministry. In 2005, protest marchers demand a fully-elected parliament.

1999-2005

In February of 2011, thousands of protestors gather in Manama and a security crackdown results in the death of several. Later in March, Saudi troops enter Bahrain and Authorities declare martial law and clamp down on pro-democracy activists. Protests continue, despite this and the focal point of demonstrations, the Pearl monument, is demolished. In April, the government bans two main political parties that represent the Shia majority. In 2012, protestors clash with riot police in Manama at the funeral of Ali Ahmed Mushaima, who died in prison after taking part in pro-democracy demonstrations. Authorities ban all protests and gatherings.

2011-2012

In November of 2018, opposition leader Sheikh Ali Salman of the banned Al-Wefaq party is sentenced to life in jail on charges of spying for Qatar, although rights organizations denounce the trial as politically motivated. Many mass protests continue throughout 2019 after the executions of 2 Shia men for terrorism-related charges. In 2020, Bahrain is placed on a Human Rights Watch list and is still on this list as of today. Bahrain has aligned with Palestine and removed the Israeli ambassador from the Kingdom.

2018-2023

1971-1975

Bahrain joins the League of Arab States in 1971. Bahrain also declared its independence and signs a new treaty of friendship with Britain in 1971. Sheikh Isa becomes the first Emir and the Council of State becomes a cabinet. Bahrain and the United States signed an agreement which permits the United States to rent naval and military facilities. In December of 1973, elections are held for a National Assembly advisory body, but following claims by the Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifah Bin-Salman Al Khalifah that the National Assembly was impeding the work of the government, the Emir dissolved the assembly and rules by decree.

1992-1998

In December of 1922, a 30-member Consultative Council, appointed by the Emir for a four-year term, is set up. In 1994, Demonstrations are held following the arrest of Shia cleric Sheikh Ali Salman who is deported and seeks asylum in Britain. In 1995, the Cabinet is shuffled to include five Shia ministers. In June of 1996, the government claims it has uncovered a coup plot by Iranian-backed group, Hezbollah-Bahrain and recalls its Ambassador. In 1998, Bahrain provides military facilities for the US-British bombing campaign against Iraq in Operation Desert Fox.

2006-2010

In November of 2006, the Shia opposition wins 40% of the vote in a general election and a Shia Muslim, Jawad bin Salem al-Oraied, is named deputy Prime Minister. In May of 2008, a Jewish woman, Houda Nonoo, is appointed Bahrain's Ambassador to the US and is believed to be the Arab world's first Jewish Ambassador. In April of 2009, King Hamad pardons more than 170 prisoners charged with endangering national security, including 35 Shias being tried on charges of trying to overthrow the state. But by 2010, 20 Shia opposition leaders accused of plotting to overthrow the monarchy are arrested in the run-up to elections. Despite this the Islamic National Accord Association, makes a slight gain.

2013-2017

In 2013, King Hamad appoints Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa as deputy prime minister as he is viewed as a moderate. In September, the main Shia opposition groups pull out of talks with the government in protest at the arrest of a leading member of Wefaq and in 2014 the Al-Wefaq is banned for three months. The leader of Al-Wefaq opposition is arrested and protests begin again. In March of 2015, Bahrain takes part in air strikes on Houthi rebels in Yemen. In 2017, Bahrain executes three Shia activists who were convicted of killing three policemen in 2014.



2026

Bahrain was caught up in the United States' war with Iran. The IRGC claims to have targeted several US assets in Bahrain. In the early days of the conflict, videos emerged of Iranian drones hitting a Bahraini high-rise, and there were multiple reports of missile debris falling on civilian areas. Throughout this conflict, tensions spiked between the majority Shi' population and the ruling Sunnis. The Kingdom fiercely cracked down on citizens expressing support for Iran's retaliation.