



BAHRAIN ELECTIONS 2018

What They Mean for Iran

By Antonino Occhiuto

Developments in the Kingdom of Bahrain have, historically, acted as a prelude to changes in the wider Middle East. The 2018 elections represent an important test. Their success would indicate Bahrain's ability to maintain the momentum towards further democratisation, reforms and continued stability while failure could signal setbacks for representation to all segments of the population and provide Iran more opportunities to destabilise the Island—further.

The success of Bahrain's 5th consecutive parliamentary elections, and the projected high voter turnout signals that a true democratic culture has been anchored among the Kingdom's body politic (re: civil society). Turning to the polls is the ultimate reflection of a people that peacefully express grievances and insulate themselves from the radical aspiration of extremists and external actors that seek to export violent sectarianism — between Sunnis and Shiites — for their own agenda. Topically, in International Relations, is the notion that democratic dyads are war averse. Bahrain fits that model well.

Many would like to see the elections blighted, however. Contested results and political violence that would plunge Bahrain into an uncertain future, is on the agenda of some in the international community. This is particularly worrying since uncertainty is precisely what Iran's military-political-theological leaders pray for (literally, in the case of Khamenei). They want chaos between the sects so they could 'legitimately' intervene and swoop in to establish control over Bahrain—a long-term objective of Tehran from

even long before 1979. The Islamic Republic has a long history of using Shiite communities across the Arab Gulf and the Levant to create parallel states loyal to Tehran, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon or to project its power in the region as it did by supporting militias in the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

Bahrain, with its estimated 55% Shiite population has, so far, been prudent enough to steer clear of Iranian meddling; mostly because the Shiites of Bahrain are nationalist first—they are Bahraini before being Shiite. It is vital that Bahrain continues to develop independently, in its own way, at its own pace so to transition into what its people and leaders want. Otherwise, the risk is great that Iran turns Bahrain into yet another offshoot of the Islamic Republic.

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