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# Strategies for Regime Resilience: A Case Study of KSA, UAE, and Bahrain

By

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# Strategies For Regime Resilience: A Case Study of KSA, UAE, Bahrain

Hussein Wizani

# ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the relationship between sectarian identities in national politics and uprisings in the Gulf region following the Arab Spring of 2011. It concentrates on the cases of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain. It argues that the prevalence of sectarianism in KSA and Bahrain, as well as their discriminatory policies towards members of their Shi'a communities, played a decisive role in fomenting uprisings. On the other hand, the UAE's adoption of non-discriminatory policies towards its citizens led to relative calm. The thesis suggests that KSA and Bahrain could develop a more stable and resilient model of stability by accommodating Shi'a communities. Here, the case of the UAE provides a basis for comparison due to similarities in its political and social composition. Overall, this thesis highlights the importance of managing sectarian identities in national politics to ensuring stability in the Gulf Region.

Keywords*: Sectarianism, Dynasticism, Tribalism, Arab Spring, Rentier States, Social Contract, Political Economy, Monarchies, Hereditary Oil Monarchies (HOM), Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

The eventful uprisings of the Arab Spring of 2011 marked a turning point in the political trajectories of several states in the Middle East and North Africa region. These uprisings, initially triggered by a set of socioeconomic and political demands, swept across the Arab region to topple long-standing dictatorships. Regime change became the de facto reality, which generated transitional governments in Egypt and Tunisia, civil wars in Libya and Syria, and, most importantly, a high degree of foreign intervention in the internal affairs of Arab states.

However, states in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region showcased enormous resilience in adapting to these changes, shielding their regimes from the demands of protestors, and consolidating the positions of incumbent elites, that is to say, the royal families of the Gulf monarchies. While this thesis recognizes the disparities among the different Gulf states, e.g., United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and Bahrain, in terms of economic capabilities, it also seeks an exploration of the different strategies each state adopted for regime survival. Thus, it shies away from a strict focus on rentier economies and resources towards a broad political and social explanation of events in the GCC states.

### 1.1.1　Case Studies Justification

These three countries are similar and different in so many ways. The thesis is about the resilience of a political system within the Middle East during and after the Arab Spring in 2011. A system that was able to withstand the turbulent events that happened in 2011. This

system happens to exist specifically in the GCC and in certain kingdoms. Hence, these three countries were chosen to represent this system and analyze its strengths and weaknesses. This is because each one of these countries reflect a different perspective in how to maintain a stable system amidst the challenges posed by the Arab Spring uprisings. The thesis mainly investigates the relationship between the sectarian identities and national politics and the uprisings. How discriminatory policies against minorities were found to be a crucial factor behind the disruptions that took place in KSA and Bahrain. On the other hand, the UAE represents a case study with lesser discriminatory policies against the minorities in its society than those of KSA and Bahrain.

We understand that these three case studies differ on many points in relation to their political structures, economic models, and foreign support. However, similarities can be found among these case studies. This is why the three countries make out a very interesting argument and hypothesis to test. An interesting issue to point out is that because the countries are different in various ways, they were chosen to represent the political environment of the GCC as a whole.

These three countries pursued similar strategies to combat any threats to their internal stability during and after the Arab Spring. They are considered well-endowed and rentier economic systems. They rely significantly on oil and gas exports for revenue. Furthermore, these three countries are monarchies with concentrated power structures where the royal families wield considerable political authority. In terms of demographics, the UAE, KSA and Bahrain welcome foreign expatriate workers among their labor force.

Despite these similarities, several disparities among these states exist. For example, the population of KSA is larger than both the UAE and Bahrain. Another difference is that UAE has a more diversified economy than KSA and Bahrain because UAE enacted a

number of economic changes in order to minimize its dependency on oil exports and stimulate international investment. In terms of political structure, the UAE features a federal system in which each emirate has its own ruler and enjoys great autonomy. In comparison, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are more centralized, with authority concentrated at the national level.

After careful consideration of these three countries, it was obvious that the percentage of Shi'as differ from one country to the other. The UAE is home to a minority Shia demographic of less than 5% (Report on International Religious Freedom: United Arab Emirates 2021), whereas Saudi Arabia reports that only 12% of its population is Shia (Foreign Policy, 2021). However, Bahrain is home to a majority Shia population of more than 65% of the overall local population (Report on International Religious Freedom: Bahrain 2021). The percentages of a specific religious group in three distinct countries can provide a useful lens for exploring a variety of concerns related to religion and society. Readers can acquire insights on the role of religion in determining social dynamics and political choice-making, as well as wider themes of religious variety and pluralism, by contrasting the existence of that group in diverse cultural, political, and historical settings. The specific focus of such an analysis will include comparative analysis of religious beliefs and practices, examination of the impact of religious minorities on society, or exploration of interfaith relations and religious tolerance in various contexts.

## 1.2  Aims

This thesis aims to unpack the UAE, KSA, and Bahrain's strategies for regime survival in the face of the Arab Spring's domino effect. It seeks to show how these specific Gulf states were able to launch regime survival strategies that accounted for their internal challenges, e.g., tribal composition, sectarian constituencies, external alliances and

rivalries, and issues of representation, albeit in an indirect manner. In so doing, this thesis sheds light on the way the different government structures, military constellations, and elite command of critical state positions helps GCC regimes retain more resilient structures than their counterparts in the Middle East and North Africa region. Yet, this thesis will not compare such regime strategies with those of other counterparts across the Middle East and North Africa region.

Instead, it will discuss in some detail the potential disparities in the UAE, KSA and Bahrain's strategies for regime survival. It seeks an appreciation of how the Gulf region's sensitive sociopolitical and geo-sectarian landscape factors in elite decision-making processes. In other words, this thesis will contribute to an understanding of how the multiple political and social structures of the GCC region impact every government's strategy for regime survival, given the menu of internal and external challenges they face.

## 1.3  Research Questions

In the wake of the Arab Spring, how did some of the Gulf countries culminate in strategies to remain stable amidst the turbulence sweeping the region? What were the main motives behind the protests that took place in these three countries considering the fact that they are rentier states with booming economies? How did KSA, UAE, and Bahrain mitigate and control the protest movements that swept the Arab region?

## 1.4  Hypothesis

The thesis hypothesizes that the prevalence of sectarian identities in the national politics of the KSA and Bahrain were decisive factors in fomenting popular uprisings, while the UAE enjoyed relative calm due to its management of the sectarian makeup. UAE's adoption of non-discriminatory policies towards its citizens permitted a semblance of stability in the United Arab Emirates. However, KSA and Bahrain's embracement of

discriminatory policies towards its Shi'a populations stirred sectarian uprisings. This thesis argues that if Saudi Arabia and Bahrain loosen their tight policies on the Shi'as within their countries, that will help in a more stable and sustainable model of stability hence a more resilient model against any opponent. The following hypothesis and argument were tested using the UAE case study.

The chosen case studies used several strategies to shape their political, social, and economic contracts. These contracts played a major role in mitigating any turbulent events during the uprising in 2011. Effectively halting or preventing major effects that were happening in neighboring Arab countries. These strategies for regime resilience consisted of multiple factors. Here resilience depended on several factors, such as the nature of the monarchy (dynasticism), the structure of the militaristic body and the security apparatus that protects the regime, and most importantly, how discriminatory the regime is towards citizens of other ethnoreligious backgrounds. It hinged on the socio-political policies taken by the regime towards the citizens and the unique economic structure of these monarchies being oil-rich states that offer rents in several stimuli packages to their people. That said, the thesis hypothesizes that sectarianism is a major factor, and the minor factors are the core of regime resilience. Without them, the strategies would fail. These factors kept these monarchies resilient and away from the domino effect that happened in 2011 in the Arab region.

## 1.5  Literature Review

In 2011, a storm of democratization and regime change came into the Arab region. It started in Tunis and then had a domino effect with other countries. However, when it came to the GCC, the monarchies there showed resilience in the face of these protests. Monarchies like KSA and UAE did not witness any real challenges, whereas, in Bahrain,

wide mass protests took place but were dealt with efficiently. These monarchies have been using survival strategies in anticipation of such a wave that might affect them to avoid any upheavals in their streets. These strategies are categorized into different subthemes in the following review.

The articles in this literature were analyzed because they draw on the case studies of this thesis. They focus on these monarchies' strategies to achieve immunity from any upheavals. They explore the factors that helped the monarchies in the GCC develop their survival strategies. They give special attention to the Bahraini case study to show what difference it holds from monarchies like KSA and UAE besides the fact that it is a much smaller country. Starting with the functionalism of a dynastic monarchy followed by the unique structural system it creates. Arriving at the Bahraini case, where the review will expose one of the most important strategies used by the government, which is sectarianism. Acknowledging the fact that this strategy was also the reason behind the spark of protests that happened over there.

However, gaps in the available literature were discovered following careful reading and study, which this thesis will address. Scholars have rigorously investigated the survival strategies for these regimes. The likes of Snyder (2015) overstressed the link between the monarchy's survival and its dependency on hydrocarbon rents. These rents were crucial to their survival; nevertheless, it was not the most important variable that directly affected the regime's resilience. The dynastic nature of their regimes and the socio-political structure of their systems had an even more important role in their resilience. The thesis will focus on and cover these factors as proof of the argument that they are behind the strength of their survival strategies.

Throughout the past decades and with the birth of liberal values and globalization, it was always sought that the existence of monarchies would end. Revolts and coups took over many countries, but the persistence of some of the monarchies was and still is strong.

Monarchies in the GCC were destined to fall, but some monarchies' royal families outsmarted the waves of revolutions and democratization. During the 1960s, observers predicted the fall of the monarchies in the middle east. Violence and instability will take over the place. However, that was defied to this day. On the contrary, Mohamed Bin Salman stated in 2018 that the GCC would become the new Europe of the world. Herb explores the factors behind the stability of these monarchies and how they defied their expectations of survival. More importantly, how these monarchies still resemble resilience in the face of any uprising. Many questions were raised and answered regarding the survival of monarchies in the past decade. A decade full of uprisings and turbulent events. Many republics have fallen, but the GCC states of KSA, UAE, and Bahrain were able to control such protests with varying degrees of success.

### 1.5.1 The Functionality of Dynasticism

Herb (1999) believes that these monarchies were immune to revolutions due to the dynastic nature of their monarchies. Not the fact that they were oil-rich countries only. More importantly, the relationship between the ruling family and the Western countries was always strong. According to Herb, this also contributes a lot to not having any uprisings within the walls of these dynastic monarchies. The only failed monarchy in that region was the Libyan, and that for Herb was because the king of Libya had no sons to rule after him nor relatives interested in ruling it. Even if the crown prince back then wanted to rule, he did not have the power to do so. So, it was not dynastic in nature like the others.

These monarchies created a well-built system that distributed power and positions exclusively to the family members and shaykhs in the country. This mitigated any events where outsiders would interrupt this power and control circuit. During the past two decades, monarchies in the GCC tried liberalizing a bit of their system. This happened over several years and small steps at a time. Starting with constitutionalizing the regime and handing over more power to the parliament body, which the ruling family owns, and delegating tasks over and over. And this, according to Herb (1999), was less costly on the monarchy itself and was taken less fearfully than suddenly weakening the power of the ruling family. Some might conceive it as a revolution in the making. But because it happened slowly and over a longer period, it was not considered anything.

On the contrary, it was considered something socially developed and the promotion of liberal values. History has shown that dynastic monarchies who took control of the main roles and posts in the cabinet in a country were more resilient than the monarchs that did not, like Iran, Egypt, Libya, and several others. Herb, in his article All in the Family, states that if a monarchy opens the parliament to the public, especially the new middle class. This will give space to change and, at some point, revolt. Even it was at a slower pace. Hence, stay safe and keep the cabinet exclusive for the royal family. According to Herb (1999), one should always look at the difference between resilient and failed monarchies. Exploring the difference between them will help to point out the strengths in the persistence of one and the weakness of the other. A dynastic For this dynastic functionalism to work, the ruling family must distribute the power between itself and their relatives. Building a well round network of connections and coalitions between the family, their relatives, and the major tribals in the kingdom is the key to a strong dynastic monarchy. Herb (1999) states that evidence shows a high correlation between the

resilience of a monarchy and dynastic monarchism. It is clearly shown throughout history that coups done were zero to none. However, in other monarchies where the ruling family is now allowed to hold influential senior positions, this creates an imbalance of power within the ruling family. Which eventually leads to regime change and other forms of coups.

An important note to point out about the ruling family having a close relationship with each other is that when a decision is made, anyone with influence from this family could come and talk to the king, emir, or shaykh about it. This helps in preventing any kind of internal conflicts between the family itself. Contrary to the other non-dynastic monarchies that were either allowed to or, by choice, did not have any influential people from their bloodline or close relatives around them. For Herb (1999), no matter how loyal and strong the military is within a monarchy. Suppose the power is not balanced and well shared between the ruling family. In that case, this monarchy might fall into the trap of regime-changing because they will eventually use power against themselves to solve their problems. No too little parliamentary body in a monarchy would mitigate regime change and vice versa.

Similarly discussed by Yom and Gause (2012), the Arab Spring should instead be called the "Arab Republic Spring." This is because several republics within the Arab region witnessed mass demonstrations. In contrast, the monarchies in the GCC were and still are calm without a storm to be seen anytime soon. However, Bahrain witnessed protests opposing the ruling family but was quickly repressed by quite the protestors. Yom and Gause (2012) try to explain the relationship between the ruling families and the resilience of a regime. Many scholars and analysts emphasized that the cultural approach toward their kings holds a lot of support and loyalty within the monarchies. It is believed

among the citizens that the royal ruling family is the rightful family to rule. The family is supported by major tribal and religious groups that will promote the dynastic family's legitimacy, not to mention the dynastic structure that these kingdoms are built on, where the ruling families monopolize all major and influential positions.

There is no space or time for anybody else to join forces with opposing groups to change anything. Unlike Western and other monarchies, the eight Arabian monarchies in the GCC are ruled by the king and his family. The ruling family plays a major role in the election of the governmental and parliamentary bodies; usually, the posts are held by people from the ruling family or very close relatives. So, they do not only sit on their thrones, but they rule with an iron fist. This procedure is often labeled as autocratic and against the liberal values the West abides by. However, the hydrocarbon rents have given these monarchies an absolute advantage against anyone. Not only because these eight monarchies control the highest percentage of oil and gas produced yearly, but the biggest countries like USA, UK, France, and Germany also became allies that supported them as long as these reigning families benefited the West.

During the Arab Spring in 2011, these monarchies showed resiliency. It was proven that in these countries, the kings were rightful leaders and legitimate to rule because of the cultural values that kings are respected and closer to the citizens. The tribal and religious support that these kings have made them somehow immune to any changes. Whereas, in the republics, long-lasting presidents are obliged to prove their legitimacy and rightfulness to rule by elections and other social and political projects that the citizens should receive. However, demonstrators went down to the street in several monarchies like Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait. But their demands were focused on reforms to enhance living standards rather than focusing on changing the rulers.

Snyder (2015) believes that monarchical regimes are better than republics in their nature and are better at taking preventive measures against any regime changes. Simple because the constitutional law in the republics paves the way to changes. This can happen through parliamentary and other kinds of elections. Whereas in monarchies, no elections can be held to change the rulers. No law to support such demands even if the citizens wanted to. What could happen is changing the cabinet and ministers within a parliament. Even this can rarely happen because people from the ruling families exclusively hold most major positions and militaristic ranks.

Snyder (2015) then focuses on several points that led to the failure of the ideology of revolution within the republics. By implying first that these republics stood on the fundamentals of revolution, whether it was Tunisia or Syria, or most of the republics, they were the newborns of a once colonized or ruled by a king pre-revolution. Hence, the core value of their existence was revolutionary, which made it prone to future revolutions regardless of how well-locked the systems were. Over time, the republics in question proved ineffectual in advancing social justice and promoting sustainable development for their respective citizenries. This chronic inability to meet the needs and aspirations of their populations provided fertile ground for recurrent localized uprisings. Moreover, the once potent nationalist ideology inculcated in the populace's minds had lost its efficacy. The people's demands had surpassed the capacity of this ideology to sustainably alleviate the widespread poverty and hunger that plagued the entire nation.

On the other hand, the monarchies in the GCC were not exposed to this wave of democratization for many reasons, according to Snyder. First, the ideology of nationalism and revolutionary movement did not tangibly exist within the borders of rich monarchies. They survived many revolutions against the kingdom, unlike their neighboring republics.

Lisa Anderson states that the resilience of these monarchies was due to the well-built fundamentals of these countries. Contrary to the republics that were passing through coup d'état every now and then. In monarchies, as mentioned above several times, the ruling family holds all major key government positions, making it difficult to compromise. This argument is exclusive to oil-rich monarchies like UAE and KSA mainly. Adding to that, the external alliances that these monarchies made with the biggest countries worldwide. Having said that, there was no conflict of identity that most republics have because the kingdoms themselves were not built on a revolutionary nationalist basis.

This was important for these monarchies, especially since they depended on hydrocarbon rents for survival. Hence, they had to maintain good international relations with almost every country that consumes oil and gas. Otherwise, they will expose themselves to economic and political problems and are better off without them. Another worthy factor is that the political economic models promoted in these monarchies were biased towards capitalism, economic development, and globalization. Whereas the republics advocated for a closer political model of progressive and socialist nature, which eventually turned the economy into a crony one.

To conclude, Snyder stated that this revolution was against the Arab nationalism rather than the country itself. The republics could no longer provide an effective political-economic model that promoted stability and development. Rather it was a socialist model controlled by a handful of government officials and their elite partners.

*A Unique Political Economy of Oil Rich Monarchies: Rentier States*

As Herb (1999) mentioned, oil is an important factor as an intervening variable in the whole functional equation of resilience in monarchies. The resilience rate differs from one

oil-rich monarchy to another and from one dynastic monarchy to a non-dynastic monarchy. All these variables created were called functional monarchism.

Sometimes monarchies, since they control everything in a kingdom, can benefit from economic activities and favor their loyal partners. Illustrating this point Saudi Arabia's possession of rents from the sale of oil allow such practices. These profits are then distributed to the ruling family. In their turn, they give back to their partners who are loyal to them, like the Wahabi Islamic establishment and businessmen that own huge companies. However, if this strategy worked the best to protect the regime, all the monarchies would have done it. The answer to this goes beyond culture and economic rents in these countries. Not all countries receive oil rents and, because of that, republics were more prone to regime change than monarchies. Whereas monarchies were and can still afford to maintain coalitions with big tribes and their partners. This coalition is costly, especially for poorer countries, because enforcing and trying to maintain support will come at the expense of another matter that might leave a big portion of the population unprivileged, eventually creating a social and dividing problem in the society.

This is why when the events of 2011 started, oil-rich monarchies provided and stimulated economic solutions for almost all their citizens, in fear of any disruption within their kingdoms. In addition, the four wealthiest monarchies provided economic support for Bahrain, Oman, and later Jordan and Morocco. If all these strategies do not work, then all these monarchies can turn to their Western allies to receive the support they need. When Bahrain went through the uprising, it could afford to oppress the protestors because it was not criticized by any of the countries in the international community. However, when the same happened in Libya, Qaddafi was seen as a human rights violator when it came to oppress the opposition. Hence, international and Western pressure played a role in the

overthrowing of Qaddafi. The United States of America (USA) even forcefully intervened in Libya to destroy the regime that Qaddafi built. The above shows why several monarchies did not face a wider mass protest, and it was controllable in so many ways, while in other countries, chaos took place.

Snyder (2015) acknowledged that during the Arab Spring, only republics faced regime changes and the removal of autocratic leaders from their positions, contrary to Huntington's (1968) views regarding the fragility of monarchical regimes in the face of any prospective waves of democratization. However, the monarchical leaders outsmarted this wave, at least this time. The rentier states were reluctant to provide economic support to their citizens when the uprisings started in the region. This was their plan to mitigate any future upheavals that might happen. The rulers promoted economic and social development. Therefore, the citizens of most of the rentier states were satisfied with their leaders. Even when it comes to non-rich oil monarchs like Morocco and Jordan, the GCC helped them by sending economic aid. The GCC believes they all should be economically united and strong to avoid widespread mass demonstrations. In other words, they are ensuring their legitimacy to rule. This is normal because, as the leaders of their countries, they are responsible for giving out and providing for their citizens at any cost. The only exception to happen was Bahrain, and according to Snyder (2015), the people's demands were not aimed at any major regime changes. Rather, they were focusing on policies that promoted social and economic development in their country.

*A Unique Nature of the Militaristic Body and Security Apparatus*

According to Hazem Kandil (2012), the military forces were undermined due to the privileges that the internal forces and police had. Hence, the army felt no urge to defend the regime during any uprising. Tarek Masoud (2011) stated that during the revolution in

Egypt, Mubarak fully relied on his security apparatus rather than asking the army to mitigate the uprisings. After careful observation, Phillipe Droz-Vincent (2011) suggested that the regimes in the Arab region relied on ethnic, tribal, or familial establishments to build their security apparatus. Therefore, it will always be harder for a coup d'etat to happen within the apparatus itself. But what was ignored in many studies is the relationship between the senior officers and the junior ones. Gause (2011) explains that little attention was given to this relation itself, and it proved to be of great importance regarding the behavior of the army and security apparatus.

In his article Bou Nassif (2015) argues that this intra-relation between the senior officer and mid-rank and junior officers explains a lot of what happened during the Arab Spring in 2011. It is believed that this relationship describes the difference between the institution in the security apparatus, differences driven by culture and interest. The internal forces might have a different purpose in serving the regime than the military. However, Bou Nassif believes one should not look at these differences from this view. Instead, one should observe the hierarchy of how it was built and how much the middle and junior officers are willing to obey the commands of higher officers. Looking into how this relationship between the officers is what matters.

Bou Nassif introduces his article by shedding light on the importance of the military role. Logically, an autocrat must have the support of his military to maintain the regime's stability internally and externally. Having the opposite will create harm more than good, no matter how weak the military is. This is because, during any uprising, the military's response is critical in determining whether the world will legitimize the opposing movement.

Therefore, regimes normally resort to coup-proofing to limit any kind of disruption within it. However, Quinlivan (1999) indicates that this often weakens one institution in the security apparatus at the expense of another. This usually occurs at the expense of the militaristic body. Autocrats would rather invest in other security entities and enforce them for their protection because it is known globally that the military is usually neutral, and their main role is to protect the borders of their respective countries.

Bou Nassif focuses on three main techniques that he believed played a major role in the militaristic body against any uprisings. Firstly, counterbalance, which is what was mentioned earlier. When a leader decides to create a balance of power between the security apparatus entities, more money and rewards are invested in the forces related to the leader exclusively. This results in weakening the other entities, like the military, in terms of training and rewards. Hence, the military's role will deviate towards the security of the borders rather than having multiple duties internally as well. Eventually, the relationship between the regime and the military will weaken while the relationship between the senior, middle, and low ranks become stronger. So, orders will only be taken from commanders within the military body, not the regime itself.

Secondly, the regime may ensure the maintenance of a good relationship with the military elites only. Several tactics can be used to enhance the social and economic situation of the military elites, such as inviting them to be involved in certain economic activities to benefit from them. This will lead to special networking between the elites and the government. Consequently, they will be discouraged from turning from turning to the regime because they benefit from it in many ways. When this usually happens, the army becomes divided into two. The enriched who are loyal to the regime, and the impoverished want to get rid of the leader.

Thirdly, the strongest bond to create between the regime and the military would be ideological. Sharing a thought that they or most of them might agree on will create something called fostering shared aversions. Taking, for example, Syria, most major and middle-rank officers are Alawis, and they have the support of the Assad regime. They all share a vision or ideology. They believed that if Sunnis were to reach higher ranks and higher official positions in the government, they would take over and ruthlessly remove all Alawis from the army and all official posts. The same goes for the Kingdom of Bahrain; all official posts and high-ranking officers are Sunni because they do not trust the Shi'a to come near any sensitive position in the regime. They believe that the Shi'as will import Iranian revolutionary action into Bahrain, leading to them becoming the rulers of this

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country.

Bou Nassif concludes his paper by focusing on the importance of the relationship between the military and the regime and, most importantly, the relationship between the higher ranks and with lower ranks. Because when it matters the most, middle, and lower ranks might not abide by any commands given by higher ranks, which will cause a clash within the lines of the military. Something that any regime or army would never want to see. This will allow others to unite and go further with regime changes.

*The Importance of Inclusion*

In this part of the literature review, the thesis will show the importance of inclusion within a society and how this inclusion affects the overall performance of the country politically and socially. According to the 2005 World Summit of Heads of State and Government, approved by the General Assembly, the importance of inclusion for all the citizens in society ensures efficient and effective strategies towards social cohesion. This means that the participation of all the groups in a country contributes to the building of a

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healthy and sustainable community. Doing the opposite will only result in social unrest that is caused by inequality. As a result, understanding the origins and frequency of prejudice against certain groups is critical for developing effective policies and procedures that can prevent such situations from occurring. Furthermore, it is critical to identify such situations as soon as possible in order to prevent grievances from escalating into violence, and conflict.

As will be shown through the thesis that UAE's social and political model reaped its fruits. The discriminatory policies that exist in KSA and Bahrain towards the citizens of certain religious and ethnic backgrounds do not exist in UAE. At least not the same extent if it exists. For example, education in UAE is open to all and distributed fairly throughout the seven emirates. Youths and young citizens are encouraged to join any institution they want regardless of their religious backgrounds. In addition to the ease of financial planning and funding your education. Furthermore, UAE has implemented a moral education program aimed at students attending public schools. This program aims to emphasize the importance of personal values and morals, highlight the role of the individual within the community, and stress the significance of child protection. The primary goal of the program is to instill in students the necessary skills to foster empathy, tolerance, critical thinking, effective communication, good behavior, respect for others, and appreciation of cultural diversity. It also seeks to encourage students to engage in constructive discussions on matters related to environmental, social, and economic concerns and promote a sense of solidarity with others.

On the other hand, when we address the issues of the religious minorities in KSA such the Shi'a, the largest minority in the country. The group that endured various kinds of discrimination. Discriminatory measures include marginalization and exclusion from some

of the public schools that are outside the eastern province of the country. Moreover, the Shi'a are excluded from the public sector jobs, and have been neglected by the Saudi State (Caruso, 2021). Adding to the prior, Saudi government does now allow any form of worshiping for the Shi'a like building mosques outside the eastern province. This will prevent thousands of Shi'as Saudis from praying collectively in the mosques they belong to. Caruso (2021) adds as well that Shi'a religious officials have always not relied on governmental funds to manage their religious events and charities. Instead, they collect religious taxes and donations to fund missionary activity, houses of worship, and personnel. For ages, their financial independence has ensured both their independence from governmental forces and their validity (Caruso, 2021). However, a gleam of hope started to beam recently. The Saudi states are making some measure leaner from this group of minorities. Whether it is from the religious point of view or within the educational system. Changes are being made, and slowly the discriminatory policies towards them will be lesser.

*The Case of Bahrain and Sectarianism*

Focusing on Bahrain's case study where the whole monarchy and regime was and still is built on sectarian bases to mitigate any turbulent events done by opposing or other sects supposedly meant as means for regime change (Louer, 2013). The Shi'as in Bahrain though they represent most of the population, are often perceived as a threat to the Sunni ruling family of the kingdom. The Sunni ruling minority and elites assume that they are a column of their neighboring Iranian Shi'a that impose a threat to the GCC. This one threat (Sectarianism) to the kingdom of Bahrain, which is fundamentally the same as KSA and UAE but on a smaller scale, shows the positive correlation between sects and resilience. During the two months of February and March 2011, protests took place in Bahrain.

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Shi'as carried out the movements that wanted their basic needs and rights in the country. However, none of their demands were met as they violently and strictly fought by the forces to dissipate the demonstrations. This, by far, has shown to be the greatest threat to the resilience of the monarchy. This is also what differentiates Bahrain from KSA and UAE; the majority of their citizens are Sunni, with minor groups that hold much less influence in the monarchies being Shi'as.

Since most of the people were Shi'as, the Sunni internal forces were vulnerable to the higher number of their assumingly opposing sect. In order to diminish or mitigate any threats that the opposing sect would spark, the Bahraini forces recruited foreign mercenaries. A huge flow of mercenaries came from Saudi Arabia, the rival power opposing Iran. This was a plan by the GCC to protect the Arabian borders from danger. That being said, sectarianism took a great toll on how the system and institutions in the Bahraini regime worked. All major official positions in the government are exclusively held by the Al Khalifa family and big tribal Sunni Bahraini citizens; the same goes for the security apparatus and the army. Only middle or lower ranks are held by the Shi'a Bahraini citizens. This did not occur only because the regime assumed Shi'a as a potential threat, but it became the norm after several coups that happened on the regime. Coups that were designed and applied by Shi'as in the country.

During the events of 2011, several policemen were captured by the protestors. It was known that many officers that fought the protests were not Bahraini. Later, the officials in Bahrain said this procedure was normal for the GCC countries because they did not have enough supply for the demand of all the security apparatus entities. The presence of several nationalities like Jordanians, Syrians, Iraqis, and Pakistanis was due to the shortage of manpower in Bahrain, according to Bahraini officials. The government added that this

procedure is present across several countries in the GCC, and it was not created for sectarian purposes as assumed by many Shi'a movements. Nonetheless, the Bahraini government never felt the urge to build many forces due to its reliance on external allegiance.

Yezid Sayigh (2011) has often focused on the power of fragmentation within the lines of security apparatus in the Arab region. This fragment is concrete inside the monarchies in the GCC, and that is because of the rents that come out of the hydrocarbon. Usually, powerful positions and entities in a certain GCC monarchy's security apparatus are within the fist of the ruling family. This effect comes as a cause of the dynastic nature of a monarchy.

However, this has created fragmentation between the entities, leading to communication or cooperation failure. In reference to the Bahraini case, this fragmentation has been happening within their security apparatus for a long period, creating a fault in communication between the different entities and duplicating tasks for different officials and officers from different entities. All different entities in Bahrain were ruled by different people from the ruling family. When the uprising occurred between February and March 2011, the four entities were supposed to cooperate and stop the turbulent events. But due to ineffective communication, they failed to do so rightly. Some agencies used force to repress the movements, while others did not. There was a state of confusion and panic in these agencies when it came to coordinating and stopping the events.

Louer (2013) concluded by emphasizing the role of the security apparatus and the military in a regime when an uprising occurs. Fortunately for the regime, Bahrain's four different security entities were on the ruling family's side. None of them took an opposing side when the demonstrations happened. However, one should stress that the security

apparatus in Bahrain and most GCC monarchies is politically autonomous and depends on many facts rather than just on the ruling families.

Yom and Gause (2012) covered the issues revolving around Bahrain and stated that protests in Bahrain were more serious than those in other monarchies. Mass-wide protests took over the streets of Bahrain, demanding that change is a must. Most protestors were from the Shi'a sect that was and is still repressed in Bahrain. The security agencies went into a state of emergency, fearing losing control over this little populated island. This has led Saudi Arabia to interfere and send troops to help them out. Here, one should note how external alliances and coalitions are important in such cases. The repercussions of Saudi's abstinence from interference are unknown. Especially since Iran is just across the ocean, another important matter that would help monarchical regimes like Bahrain is the broad-based coalitions because oppressing and fear alone will not assure stability and security for a king's regime. Instead, there should be a large number of citizens that follow the regime and are loyal to them.

## 1.6  Research Methodology

This research will rely on collecting data from primary sources and archival reports. It will also adopt a comparative analysis of the different case studies. The first step is to collect facts from the main source of this thesis, which is information on government leaders and how they responded during the rebellion. Another data source was collected from archival reports and articles which will count as secondary sources. It allowed for an analysis of previous work in addition to drawing essential conclusions. The second method is comparative analysis through case studies, where the thesis presents different case studies for different countries. The paper will showcase different GCC monarchies that survived during the Arab Spring.

This research draws on both methods to produce our explanations and analysis. These suggested methods help explain the difference between monarchies. Although some monarchies were built on the same foundations, some witnessed the unsettling protests of the Arab uprisings, while others did not.

## 1.7  Chapter Breakdown

Chapter 1 includes the introduction and research topic that explains what this thesis will be about. In addition, the chapter will contain the questions the research is asking and answering. Moreover, it will consist of the working arguments, hypotheses, and their relationship with the variables selected. Finally, this chapter will show the importance of this topic and its questions.

Chapter 2 will describe the case of KSA.

Chapter 3 will illustrate and identify the strengths of the UAE in the face of the Arab Spring.

Chapter 4 will discuss the case of Bahrain and the GCC's states to understand why the Arab Spring waves did not lead to major changes in their region. Even when it did reach Bahrain, the protests that happened were not effective at all. The result was the failure of uprisings in the GCC area.

Chapter 5 concludes the study with a discussion of the contributions, shortcomings, and lessons learnt. It offers concise answers to the research questions. It also opens new avenues for future study, especially in the quest for an effective political structure and preemptive techniques to deal with uprisings.

# CHAPTER TWO

# THE CASE OF THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to uncover Saudi Arabia's social, political, and economic models that helped the kingdom survive internal and external instability during the last decade. How did it deal with the waves of democratization that were taking place in the past years? Usually, what happens in Saudi Arabia stays in Saudi Arabia, especially when it comes to citizens not abiding by the law or opposing the royal family publicly or on social media. So, considering Saudi Arabia is one of the shady countries regarding human rights, people are excluded from any inclusiveness regarding freedom of choice or speech. For so long, the regime was considered a harsh and strict system regarding personal liberty, freedom of speech, etc. Hence, observers thought that the uprisings would surely reach over there. However, it did not. The country successfully counter-revolted against any opposing movements and took extreme preventive measures to protect it from upheavals.

This chapter argues that while the prevalence of sectarian identities in the national politics of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain contributed to popular uprisings, Saudi Arabia's capability to manage the protests was due to its effective execution of strategies. It is possible that Saudi Arabia's strategies effectively managed the uprisings precisely because they targeted the sectarian identities at the root of the uprisings. Nonetheless, the thesis argues that the discriminatory policies towards Shi'a populations in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain that fueled the uprisings should be replaced with more inclusion policies to ensure

a stable and sustainable model of stability. The chapter will show how Saudi Arabia is shifting from traditional and modern systems and models. Yet the discriminatory policies against the Shi'a are not changing. By the end of this chapter, it will be clear how the kingdom is changing its economic and social policies to adapt to the current demands of changes. In this thesis, these strategies are present, proving that they were and still are successful in mitigating any mass opposition against the family. However, these strategies that were and are still being used are specific to KSA as they evolve based on the conditions abounding in the kingdom. Each country should have its tactics and strategies for preventing problems and promoting regime stability. This chapter will show how Saudi Arabia mitigated uprisings using traditional and modernized methods. Showing first the challenges that hit and might hit Saudi Arabia—then moving into how the kingdom, with its new leadership, is reacting according to what issues they are or might face.

The argument presented in this chapter appears to differ from the thesis statement put forward in the initial text. While the thesis posits that the prevalence of sectarian identities in the national politics of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain contributed to popular uprisings, the argument in this chapter suggests that Saudi Arabia's resilience in the face of uprisings was due to its effective implementation of strategies. It should be noted, however, that the argument presented in this chapter does not contradict the thesis statement. The thesis statement suggests that discriminatory policies towards Shi'a populations in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain contributed to the uprisings, while the argument in this chapter suggests that Saudi Arabia's ability to manage the uprisings was due to its effective use of strategies. Here, Saudi Arabia's strategies effectively managed the uprisings because they targeted the sectarian identities at the root of the uprisings.

Section one of this chapter, entitled "Economic Safety Net of Saudi Arabia," discusses how their oil-based economy has been their haven for years. Now, they are investing in transforming their economic model into a diversified one. Section two, entitled "The Political and Social Reconstruction," discusses how the kingdom is reforming its policies to meet the changes and trends that enhance the lives of youth. Noting that the administration of MBS is also changing the social contract-built decades ago because it is no longer effective as before in the face of current difficulties. Each of these parts contributes to the study that this thesis displays. They explain how KSA implemented and faced these aspects to suit the needs.

## 2.2  Diversification of the Economy

Oil was and still is a big part of the GDP in Saudi Arabia. Budgeting and economic planning always revolve around the revenues that come from oil. Even regarding social policies concerning the people, the government could construct a contract backed by what was coming from exporting oil to the world. The political-economic model as a whole was built around oil. This is how helpful and vital oil is to Saudi Arabia. It is their safety net against any internal and external challenges. Such power allowed them to dictate various issues and decisions internally and regionally. All things aside, studying Saudi Arabia's strategies for transforming from a rentier state to a more diversified economy that generates income from several channels other than oil is crucial. MBS is developing multiple sectors in the country to shift from only an oil-based economy to a knowledge economy (Baumann, 2019).

Saudi Arabia largely depends on oil revenues for its yearly budget (Al-Hamidy, 2012). Hence, fiscal policies were the primary tool to navigate their economic plans. However, since the oil revenues started to fluctuate a lot, it was decided that the

government needed to support the private sector as well. This resulted in the combination of fiscal and monetary policies taking place. Al-Hamidy believes that the traditional ways of stimulating the economy are no longer effective; hence, combining these tools will serve the economy best. Saudi Arabia can longer only depend on oil revenue to survive.

Oil has helped Saudi Arabia to a great extent. Revenues helped redeem the debt in the country for 11 years (Al-Hamidy, 2012). From 1999 to 2010, Saudi Arabia's fiscal policies were proven efficient in the face of the country's debt management. The policies decreased the debt from 100% in 1999 to 10% in 2010. Nevertheless, these policies faced challenges because they came at the expense of other sectors and the country's needs. The kingdom's main challenge was to reduce the debt with the oil revenues and, simultaneously, contain the inflation rate, securing investments that create jobs and creating a diversified economy that boosts the private sector and attracts foreign investments. Of course, a chunk of these revenues went to health, infrastructure, and education.

Typically, fiscal and monetary work together; initially, the fiscal policy indicates how the monetary policy will react. It was more of a causal relationship between the two policies, whether directly or indirectly affected by each other. It all goes down to what the government wants to do. Since the government controls the oil revenues directly, measures have been more controlling to the economy. Over the years, the financial system in Saudi Arabia was developed to better suit the economic needs of today's demand. Under the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA), the banking system became one of the best in the region, with several foreign banks operating there and investing. The kingdom's banking sector showed no signs of loss in global economic backlashes and was resilient to shocks (Al-Hamidy, 2012).

To face today's economic challenges, Saudi Arabia made sure to mix fiscal and monetary policies to create a healthy economic environment for investors and entrepreneurs to encourage businesses in the private sector and create a bigger market for them to attract employees. This will help the imbalance that the public sector and oil revenues have created over the years. Although characteristically, the economy is described as a lone fiscal policy that controls everything, the kingdom cooperated between the government and SAMA to ensure better results. Diversifying the economy is the primary concern for the kingdom, especially after knowing that oil revenues can no longer be the only source of revenue.

Many over the years demanded political and social reforms, but none were met. The problem with the regime is the misuse of the revenues generated from exporting oil to the world. The flow of cash is confined to the royal family and their elites. A few billion are directed toward the social welfare of the people through designed social and economic schemes that would benefit the population (Al-Madawi, 2018). However, according to Madawi, these schemes, for example, proved ineffective regarding unemployment. This alone frustrated the people of Saudi Arabia and made them ask for more, as it is their right to do so. The central focus was on the country's public sector, whereas the private sector was heavily ignored. This resulted in a massive imbalance in the economy of Saudi Arabia. This is why Mohamed Bin Salman (MBS) 2017 started to do reforms like Saudization. Where companies and organizations, local and international, are obliged to employ a percentage of their labor Saudis, and by 2030, all big international companies should operate their headquarters in Saudi Arabia.

When the wave of the Arab Spring hit many countries in the Arab region, excluding the GCC, many analysts were astonished that the GCC area was unaffected by

it. In particular, Saudi Arabia because it faced a small number of people going to the streets but not mass protests, yet everything was under the control of the government. Analysts say (Al-Rasheed, 2016) that this is due to the enormous revenues that this country generates from oil. In addition, most of the population is satisfied with the ruling family. Furthermore, most importantly, the royal family had and still has support from powerful alliances like the US and other Western and neighboring countries. Add to that the smooth transition of kings and crown princes that often happens when the king dies. This shows the strong cohesion between the royal family members, which sends positive messages to the citizens and political and economic observers globally.

However, (Yom & Gause, 2012) say that the countries in the GCC, although protected by several factors like the ones listed above, once any of these factors fall, will be in a severe problem. For example, if the world faces a global crisis that targets oil prices, the prices suddenly plummet. This will hugely affect the oil-rich countries because most GDP comes from oil revenues. Saudi Arabia, for instance, depends to a great extent on oil revenues. It would drastically be affected by low oil prices.

Nevertheless, Yom and Gause believe that if these countries renovate this political-economic model of rentiers, then that would hugely promote safer returns when hit by such a crisis. Yom and Gause also state that no specific characteristics of monarchies provide absolute safety against upheavals. Analysts should examine each case (monarchy) individually to understand its nature, how the system is built, and what made it resilient against uprisings.

Questions were asked in 2011 and 2012 during the Arab Spring. The main one was why some countries did not feel the heat of the protests like others. Countries in the GCC, like Saudi Arabia, faced low-numbered protests that soon vanished. Gause (2013) believes

that the resilience of Saudi Arabia in 2011 was because of two reasons. First, because it is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, this is due to the substantial oil revenues that the kingdom produces from exporting oil. Saudi Arabia alone can manipulate the prices of oil to its advantage. This is how significant the kingdom's role is in the industry. Libya was the only other country seriously affected by the waves with colossal oil revenues, and that is because, according to Gause, due to external interference, that wanted Al-Qaddafi out whatsoever. The second main reason was that other countries had divisions within them to unite against the regime. However, in Saudi Arabia, no division was big or strong enough to make a change; no division could unite against the royal family. Gause states that major events should happen for a change to occur in the kingdom. An event like a sudden oil price crash is big enough to rumble any fiscal measure done by the Saudi government. Second, a serious problem that would divide the royal family and strengthen the other divisions to make a difference in the face of such a regime.

According to POMEPS studies, 60% of Saudi citizens are 30 years old and below (Thompson, 2018). Most of them were educated, making it easier for the government to buy some time when they were studying and pursuing university degrees. However, this is alerting for the Saudi government as thousands of students graduate every year looking for jobs in the market. To Thompson, the Saudi regime should reconstruct its social contract to suit the population's needs nowadays. Generating revenues from the oil industry is no longer the sole solution the regime should depend on, especially in the housing and employment sectors. As a government, being contingent on oil revenues to provide social welfare is no longer as effective as it was a decade or two ago (Thompson, 2018). Therefore, under the supervision of MBS, Saudi Arabia launched Vision 2030 to diversify its economic portfolio to generate several channels of income from different sources.

The demographic of the youth in KSA results in thousands of students every year graduating from universities and looking for jobs. The drastic decrease in oil prices in 2014 and the high number of fresh graduates simultaneously made it harder for them to find jobs. The competition to find a job became more challenging, and since then, it has been evident that "waste" was and is still taking place. Graduates with strong connections to the royal family or elites find jobs faster and easier. At the same time, graduates that need to be better connected take much longer to find a job. Jobs have also been hard to find in cities other than the main urban centers of Riyadh (Thompson, 2018).

Consequently, many younger graduates have complained about the lack of new opportunities in their cities. They will have to leave their homes and migrate to other places within the kingdom to find more opportunities that pay better. Therefore, many of these youths are complaining about this social situation targeting them as young generations with dreams and ambitions. Many also direct their complaints to the regime as they are convinced it must offer a safe and healthy market that provides job opportunities—adding to that that many of these graduates aim to land a job and build their lives around it. However, most of these jobs are related to oil and the public sector. Hence, with the losses that the oil sector is sometimes generating, it will be tough for the government to provide the usual that they used to provide in the past (Thompson, 2018). This is one of the main challenges the kingdom is trying to figure out.

## 2.3  The Political and Social Reconstruction

Another challenge the kingdom faces is satisfying its people, and precisely the younger generations eager to change and develop in many ways. Saudi Arabia has a long history of ambiguity in social wellness and political freedom. Another challenge that the government will face is the housing of Saudis. This is another concern that the population

is raising for the ruling family. The Saudis are constantly frustrated with the actions done by the government. Especially when other GCC governments are keen to help their people and develop the nation's social wellness standards, this ambiguity created a social and political fog. A fog that, to a certain extent, MBS is trying to clear some of it away. A clearance that will serve as a solution for the challenges that this fog created over the past decades.

Saudi Arabia has a long history of repressing any opposing ideas, especially when accusing the royal family of not having the best interest of their people and country. In 2011, Muhammad Al-Wadani started calling for changes in the country and asked the people to go down the streets for a peaceful demonstration (Al-Rasheed, 2012). However, this person soon vanished from the scene, and nothing happened. After that, his tribe went to show allegiance to the royal family and disowned their son. In the kingdom, anyone who challenges the government is naturally called a traitor or bribed by foreign powers to stabilize the kingdom.

According to Al-Madawi, this sudden arrest of this protestor sends a clear message to everyone who might think to challenge the regime. Hence, this repressive strategy was and is still used effectively in Saudi Arabia. For so long, the dynasty in the kingdom has ruled with an iron fist. They restrict any political parties and civil societies from taking place (Al-Madawi, 2012) to keep everything under control in favor of the ruling family.

For Al-Madawi (2012), all types of repression exist in Saudi Arabia. However, because of the royal family's autocratic control of its people, it is hard to form any demonstrations opposing movements and succeed. Like any autocratic regime, the Saudi regime injects billions of dollars now and then to enhance social welfare. However, more is needed. Nevertheless, if any opposing forces wanted to succeed and be strong, they

would need foreign assistance from the Western powers (Al-Madawi, 2012). The assistance that the West is not willing to give. They require what the royal family was and still provides, so they will not jeopardize that. Turning a blind eye to human rights violations is easier for Western powers than risk ruining relations with the Saudi royal family.

Other scholars like Bellin (2012) explain that other rich countries faced the challenge of the Arab uprising because the protests were more prominent and more sustainable. Whereas, what happened in the GCC+ Morocco and Jordan was much smaller than what occurred in neighboring fallen countries and not as sustainable. Hence, they were rapidly controlled and contained. It is also crucial to look at these countries' and fallen ones' cultures. One can deduce that the monarchies integrated a stronger belief and ideology in their citizens' minds regarding legitimacy and the right to rule. While in fallen republics like Syria, the citizens are separated through sectarian divisions. Sects that believe that Assad is the rightful leader of this country and others that do not. Moreover, Anderson (1991, 1-15) stated that these monarchies were influenced by British imperialism, which gave them the sustainable looks of their monarchical system and the ability to rule.

Al-Rasheed (2012) focuses on the factors that kept the kingdom's regime stable rather than on the reasons for disruptive actions and factors. The first factor believed by Al-Rasheed is integrated within the nature of the system itself. The way Saudi's system is built revolves around keeping the power and authority in the hands of the royal family and its allies. There is no real power that they face domestically that can change anything or request political reform. That being said, one should remember that the Wahabis control everything related to religion in Saudi Arabia. They work under the royal family. They

have been working together since the creation of the kingdom. One of their main objectives is to teach their students and kids that the royal family should never be challenged or cursed. The people should always be loyal to them; violating this is considered a crime. This will, of course, then lead to jail time or/and punishments.

A second factor mentioned by Al-Rasheed was the intervention that Saudi Arabia did in the region—playing a leading role in diplomacy and later militaristic interventions. These interventions done by the kingdom were meant to be preventive measures against any uprisings that they might have within their country. After that, many Saudis started to abandon any thoughts of political change in the kingdom. Al-Rasheed believes that these two factors played a significant role in keeping Saudi Arabia's stability during the uprisings in 2011. However, the kingdom should consider the long-term effects of such tactics used to counter-revolution. Regimes are often seeking sectarianism to protect themselves from any disruptions. This proved to be deadly in the long term. The Arab Spring is living proof of that.

When Al-Rasheed (2016) discusses the Saudi regime's resilience during the uprisings and even after 2011, he usually attributes this resilience and persistence to three elements. The first one is the foundation of their regime and how it has been built. Saudi's regime includes different sects and groups; however, they need to be united for a cause that might be challenging for the royal family. This makes each group alone weaker and not able to revolt. Second, religious scholars all over the kingdom have always taught the people that the royal family is sacred and with sacred legitimacy, and one cannot talk back to or challenge them.

Religious scholars were all over television channels, radio stations, and social media. Hence, the people of Saudi Arabia have always felt that it is forbidden to go

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against the rulers or even think about it. Children growing up with such teachings would make them firmly believe that the ruling family is always right and wants the interest of their people and the state. Third, Al-Rasheed (2016) believes that the external revolts and aggression happening around Saudi Arabia and the region and the Saudi interference in Yemen showed the massive arsenal they have scared off internal groups that wanted a change internally. In addition, the war on Yemen by Saudi Arabia and its alliance triggered the empathy of many Saudis and created a sense of nationalism in favor of the regime. So luckily for the regime, their surroundings witnessed mass protests and aggressive responses from governments and some backed-up groups, whereas, in the kingdom, it was quite the opposite. However, Al-Rasheed (2016) argues that in the longer term, such regimes will face stratification within their regime because of these elements.

What has contributed to the stabilization of the kingdom in the past decade is an acceleration for upheavals in the future (Al-Rasheed, 2016). The fragmentation within the different sects and tribes that made it difficult for a particular group to oppose the regime might end at some point. Different fragments face rigorous conditions living in Saudi Arabia. The failure to create a unified nationalistic ideology that favors Wahabis, and their regime might ignite these fragmented groups to unify against the rulers. For example, Shi'a is forbidden from many rights that Sunni has. For so long, this has been the issue for this sect. This has made them rely more on their sect and communities for help than the state itself. Other groups in the state are as well forgotten and ignored as the Yazidis, Ismailis, and Sufis. Not only their rights to live equally are not met, but the regions they live in as well.

Nevertheless, when the province that a significant of the Shi'a live in witnessed protests demanding social and political change, none of these groups stood by the Shi'a.

The demonstrations done by the Shi'a were depicted as a fifth column of the Iranian influence in the kingdom. The state quickly controlled the protests, and the authorities took many of these protestors.

However, when it comes to tribal segmentation, the state uses a different strategy to keep them under its wing (Al-Rasheed, 2016). Usually, the royal protection forces are only chosen from tribes. Many tribes have a close relationship with the state. The state chooses a head for each tribe and allocates him a monthly salary with social benefits. In their turns, the heads of each tribe, called Sheiks, keep order and stability within the tribal system. Whenever someone from this tribe tries to defect or oppose the royal family, the Sheik and his senior associates must deal with the issue. This tribal system keeps everything in control of the kingdom, and this way, they assure the loyalty of the various tribes that live in Saudi Arabia.

Analysts are convinced that Saudi Arabia will, at some point, face internal challenges. Hence, they are preparing preventive strategies to fight these challenges (Yadin & Huzansky, 2018). As mentioned by Yadin and Guzansky (2018), MBS is the pioneer of modernization. As we write this thesis, a tactic is being implemented to liberalize and zone out of the traditional face of Saudi Arabia. Starting with the internal challenges, it is not surprising that with the pace MBS is moving towards, vision 2030 might come in handy with short- and long-term problems (Yadin & Huzansky, 2018). Even the IMF warned MBS and the government about these problems due to the fast pace Saudi Arabia is moving. A country that depended only on oil for decades will surely need much time to transition. The drop in oil revenues that were and still is happening over the recent years caused the oil prices to hike for the citizens. In addition to funding all MBS projects, the government had to impose VAT on the people (Yadin & Huzansky, 2018).

All these problems surely disappoint the people of Saudi Arabia to the point where they might doubt the effectiveness of MBS's plans. Adding to that, the existing social contract used for decades is the rewards earned from oil revenues in return for their loyalty. The change of these will produce social unrest that will lead to the reconstruction of the social contract.

Similarly, (Woertz & Hasan, 2019) believes that MSB and the royal family have made several mistakes in the regime. Starting from centralizing the power between him and selected close family members to erroneous foreign affairs decisions like the war in Yemen. These factors significantly increase the tension between the royal family, the people, and the foreign players. Hence, the legitimacy of the rulers will be at stake. Up to this day, the international community and solid international allies for the kingdom have backed the regime in many aspects. However, if the citizen of Saudi Arabia decides to challenge the government with increased tension from foreign players, that would lead to a disastrous effect.

For many years Saudi Arabia was only dependent on oil revenues to fill its economic and social needs. An unwritten law states, "no taxation, no representation." This is what kept the population silent on any issues. The fact that the citizens benefited from the revenues made it easier for the regime to control. In return for these privileges, people should stay on the royal family's side and never oppose. However, this social contract-built decades ago faced a challenge during the uprisings in 2011. Many people went to the streets demanding social reforms and for their voices to be heard. The government back then started injecting billions of dollars into several sectors that would help the Saudis. The money went into healthcare, social security, housing, and other sectors that helped the citizens out. This was indeed a counter-revolution tactic used by the regime to stabilize the

situation and gain some leverage over the protestors and other groups that were thinking about demanding social reforms.

Another strategy used by the regime and by MBS precisely was that he started a financial purge campaign against powerful and wealthy government members. They were accused of embezzlement of state funds and misuse of power. This campaign was like an anticorruption movement to show the people that the new government did not accept any opposition, even if they were from the royal family. In addition, MBS wanted to show the people he was on their side and would not accept chaotic actions that might hurt the state's interests (Woertz et al., 2019). At the same time, MBS was doing other reforms inside the kingdom's law. For example, he doubted the critical role of Wahabism and the religious police within Saudi Arabia. MBS made sure to weaken the power of the religious clerics and their religious police. These reforms and other measures that the government took helped MBS to gain the loyalty and affection of the youths in Saudi Arabia. These tactics were used in 2011 to indirectly gain influence over most citizens and protect the regime from opposition and movements.

Long after the uprising in 2011 was done, political analysts thought these waves of democratization ended in the region (Bubalo, 2020). However, in 2019 three countries in the Middle Eastern region witnessed revolutions and movements against the regimes. Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran all beheld large-scale movements. Nevertheless, one common thing between the three countries is the political dispute between these regimes and the Western powers. Bubala (2020) argues that a big part of the unrest in these countries was because Western powers allowed it to happen. Now, both Western and Eastern powers believe that the authoritarian system is still and will still be the authoritative face of this region for a long time. Bubalo (2020) doubts that this trust in authoritarian regimes' power

will always survive against revolutions and movements. Hence, Bubalo (2020) sheds light on Saudi Arabia as a case study for his argument and question.

When Saudi Arabia and its neighboring monarchies felt the domino effect around them, they directly used preventive methods and tactics to banish any future problems they might face. Using the traditional carrot and stick system, they offered and provided financial and social facilities for their citizens. In return, the people should show their support and loyalty and never defect. However, surely even with these facilities to ease the lives of their citizens, there was discrimination between who will receive what. Less than a decade after 2011, the events that happened again in 2019 in multiple countries debunked most of the analyses made by political observers. Suddenly, when countries worldwide thought those authoritarian regimes were more robust than ever, they changed their minds (Bubalo, 2020).

Saudi Arabia, one of the world's largest economies, was worried about its political warfare in the kingdom. Hence, they invested 130 billion USD in their country to revive their legitimate image in front of their citizens (Kamrava, 2012). The kingdom tried to reconstruct its social contract with the citizens by reforming its political-economic model. When MBS's father became the king, he immediately started a massive wave of changes in the political-economic policies. Saudi Arabia depended on oil revenues to stabilize its country for so long. However, MBS had other plans; he promoted other channels of income and revenues to the government and the people. MBS launched its Vision 2030 to ensure that Saudi Arabia shifts from an oil-based economy to a more diversified economy. MBS wants the private sector to be proper, which in return will improve the whole economy.

Socially, MBS wanted a new lifestyle to be created within his country. A lifestyle that will encourage the youth to go out and enjoy their time. Something that was missing prior to the MBS era. Citizens are now socially better and more liberal; they can do things they were not previously. This promoted the idealization of MBS and his new vision for the country, especially among the youth. Ironically, most activists who protested for years for this kind of liberty were in jail. However, MBS decided to reform these social policies as part of its vision. He wanted to be the one who designs, decides, and executes. MBS's administration has no flexibility when it comes to people criticizing it. They even created an application that citizens could use to report to anyone that opposed the regime. Anyone who criticized or opposed the regime outside the country was called a traitor and banned from entering the kingdom. Eventually, MBS still used the carrot and stick strategy to control and prevent any movements against the royal family. However, this time it was more modernized than previous strategies.

It is obvious now that major GCC countries are keener than ever to create several channels of income besides those from oil revenues. The two longest and strongest allies in that region are now making their own different decisions. A decision that will only benefit and serve them as separate countries without much thinking of what would happen to other countries around them. Especially now with the lower revenues generated from the oil sector. They are looking for ways to transform and change their economic model from an oil-based to a more diversified one. They are still allying, of course, but now Saudi Arabia is starting to think of itself as more than just an oil-exporting country. The kingdom stated that by 2024 all international operating companies should build or move their headquarters to their country. This policy will affect not just the UAE but the whole region. On the other hand, when UAE decided to withdraw from the Yemen war, it was

apparent that KSA was not that glad. Nevertheless, UAE decided what was best for its country and future. This kind of political difference creates tension in the long term. This tension was never created nor seen between these two countries (Eman Al-Hussein & Mira Al-Hussein, 2021).

That being said, MBS's vision of 2030 and preparing for a newer and better pot-oil economy is Saudi Arabia's priority now. This vision is believed to yield billions of dollars by attracting international companies and tourists yearly (Eman Al-Hussein & Mira Al-Hussein, 2021). Through business and economic schemes, the state MBS leads will supposedly encourage its youth to invest in the country and inject money into the business cycle. Other social changes MBS is making to transform Saudi Arabia from a traditional Islamic country to a modernized one are encouraging international tourists to come yearly and encouraging national tourism. Mixing the economic reforms with social change happening is proof that MBS is trying to reconstruct the social contract in the kingdom (Eman Al-Hussein & Mira Al-Hussein, 2021). In other words, reconstructions that suit the needs of the new demands of the younger generation. A generation will see this as an essential step taken during their time and, even more importantly, the man behind this change. MBS will be considered the man who modernized and liberated Saudi Arabia.

## 2.4. Conclusion

It is clear by now how Saudi Arabia is shifting its models and policies to better suit a modernized country's demands. Where oil is no longer the only provider of revenues, and the youth are more included in these changes taking place—supporting the private sector to provide opportunities for the youth to develop themselves and thrive. However, one thing that remains constant in this new equation is the severe consequence

for anyone who opposes the ruling family. The kingdom is trying to achieve a new ecosystem to immunize itself from opposition by making all these shifts.

In summary, Saudi Arabia used various strategies to stay resilient in facing challenges. These tactics were based on three distinct aspects. The first layer is religious, where sheiks and political elites direct people that opposing the royal family is wrong. Second, luckily to the government as a significant oil exporter, this provided for any deficits that the financial budgets did. Third, MBS's role in reconstructing the social contract targets the benefit of the youths. All these strategies immunized Saudi Arabia against any uprisings or, at least to a great extent, mitigated the symptoms within the kingdom. The government was and continues to be able to control and adapt to anything they encounter or anticipate, especially with having MBS in the leadership of this country, from social and political to economic issues.

In addition, it was proven that most Saudi Arabian citizens are unwilling to take a chance and oppose the regime for several reasons. From a religious perspective, the royal family is considered sacred and cannot be challenged. Regarding social welfare, MBS reconstructed the entire system, changing it to a more liberal one. These changes were, to this moment, enough to gain back legitimacy. However, as seen in the past, legitimacy was rewarded through economic schemes provided by the government to its people. That was no longer enough for the people to reward them for their loyalty. Hence, MBS's strategies were largely modernized to suit the needs of the current generations that now see him as a man of modernity and change. In addition, MBS implemented a new political model where he is trying to transform the current political model that depends on oil revenues to a more diversified one. The new political model promotes the private sector's

growth, which was long ignored and marginalized. Vision 2030 will focus on strengthening this sector alongside others that are not oil related.

Nevertheless, the only significant protest in Saudi Arabia was in the eastern province, which is inhabited predominantly by members of the Shi'a sect. For many in the kingdom, a sector is considered an outsider and should not have the same rights as the Sunni Saudis. This was the moving factor behind the protests that took place. Even then, they did want any radical change or severe political reforms. The demonstrations demanded a change in the treatment that this sect was having. They wanted to be included in the system like everyone else. However, shortly after the protests, the government repressed the movements and made some arrests. This alone was enough to stabilize the situation. MBS and the Saudi regime should start thinking of proper ways to include members of the Shi'a community, not only because they represent 15% of the population. However, suppose Saudi Arabia wants its image to improve in front of the international community. In that case, it will need to include all sects and provide equal rights to all. Excluding this sect or another will only result in increased grievances against the authorities.

One should testify that the changes made by MBS are significant for the survival of their regime and their country. Economically how consistent and effective are these strategies in the long term? Are these policies achieving what they are supposed to achieve now? Speaking realistically, from a political perspective having an independent civil society in KSA will only happen for a while. Moreover, if it happened, it would initially have no actual decision taking opinions. So, what are MBS's strategies politically to include everyone if he wanted to? Even if he did not, how much time could he buy with counter-revolution strategies?

The thesis will proceed to the following chapters regarding the UAE and Bahrain, where we will compare and elaborate more. The thesis will compare them to show how each country implements a different resilience model. It will be shown how each country has its own set of exclusive strategies based on the structure of the country, culture, religion, and people.

# CHAPTER THREE

# UAE CASE STUDY

## 3.1 Introduction

The UAE has been considered one of the best countries for living in the Middle East and the GCC on several levels, especially concerning the standard of living. Its standards are much higher than other countries in this region. According to an HSBC report, living in the UAE offers an exceptional experience. The UAE provides an extraordinary standard of living for foreigners. There is contemporary accommodation, medical facilities, excellent international schools, and a well-developed infrastructure. There is certainly much to keep you engaged in the vibrant cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The package includes great beaches, water activities, indoor skiing, excellent restaurants, and enormous retail complexes. Yet all of this comes at a cost. In recent years, the cost of living in the UAE has risen. While expat earnings remain competitive, perk packages are less extensive than they once were. However, compared to its neighboring countries, it is still the best destination for expats.

This chapter will uncover the resilience of the UAE in the face of the uprising. To a large extent, no actual movements were made against the government or the ruling family. This indicates how well-built the system is in the UAE. As the chapter moves forward, it will present different threats the country faced during the last two decades, especially during the Arab Spring in 2011. The argument presented in this chapter supports the thesis statement by emphasizing the role of sectarianism in shaping political stability in the Gulf region. Specifically, the argument suggests that the minimal use of

sectarianism within the welfare system is a key reason why the UAE has been the most stable country in the region. By contrast, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have faced significant challenges in managing their respective Shi'a populations due to their discriminatory policies. Overall, the chapter and the thesis statement both highlight the importance of addressing sectarian divisions as a means of promoting stability and resilience in the Gulf region.

This chapter is not meant to minimize the fact that other sects face sectarian challenges. However, it is far less than in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. By the end of this chapter, it will be evident that two crucial factors were the reason behind this resilience and immunity against the waves of democratization: the lesser use of sectarianism against other sects and including them in many of their sectors. Second, the economic and social modeling that the government used in developing the country. Most of the studies on the endurance of authoritarianism should be conducted on a country-by-country basis. Adding to that are the external factors that might play a role in interference.

Bellin (2012) believes that some of the exceptions made in the GCC during the Arab Spring were due to factors like easy access to natural resources like petroleum and gas. This alone ensured that a significant rent on such resources was returned. Second is the international support these countries have gained over the past decades by aligning with the immense powers of the West. Third is the level of institutionalization. Finally, the lower levels of popular mobilization oppose the government. Hence, this chapter will initially start as a case study of the UAE's endurance under the microscope and will, most importantly, shed light on challenges that are rarely the focus of scholars in this field. This chapter is broken down into subthemes, and each theme discusses a challenge that UAE

faced. In addition, the chapter will show how the UAE reacted to such challenges and

threats and how they solved or mitigated the effects of such challenges within the country.

## 3.2 Economic Advancement

For many years, the GCC has been considered one type of economy: the oil and

gas economy. Hence, not much literature and emphasis has been given to this region

regarding financial diversification and country risk analysis (El Sady, 2012). Nevertheless,

in recent years, the GCC, and mainly the UAE and KSA, had seen a modernized and

advanced economic model that proved to be successful when it came to the welfare of

their citizens. Moreover, thousands of jobs were created for their citizens. This is seen as

only the beginning of something economically beautiful. This is why kingdoms like the

UAE and KSA have diversified their economic portfolios and moved away from just being

an oil-based economy. This is one huge similarity between the two kingdoms. However,

the UAE developed such a model years before anyone in the GCC, which makes it one of

the best in the world, as this thesis is written. For over a decade, the UAE has been

diversifying its economy, strengthening sectors such as tourism and services, and, most

importantly, creating an innovation-driven economy (Khalifa, 2012).

One main engine in this economic powerhouse for the UAE was foreign direct

investment (FDI). The government of the UAE understood that depending on oil alone in

the long run would not be enough to sustain the luxurious standards of living it created, so

it strengthened its private sector and attracted hundreds and thousands of FDIs. As a result,

GDP oil output began to fall year after year, and it now accounts for close to 30% of GDP.

Of course, it is a great portion, but this number was higher in 2010 and even higher in

2000. This demonstrates how the UAE is constantly attempting to update its economic

model to meet the demands of the global economy. Surely, other countries like Saudi

Arabia, Bahrain, and others within the GCC followed the UAE's lead. But the UAE alone stood out as a leader in tourism, FDIs, and a start-up hub for technology within these countries. After that, each country started differentiating by creating its unique economic environment that attracts foreign investments. For example, Bahrain makes it easier for foreign non-oil companies to own offices, buildings, and land and operate from Bahrain. On the other hand, the UAE has established a tax-free zone to attract even more businesses and individuals to set up shop in the UAE.

This being said, the UAE, in the early months of 2011, faced some social uncertainty. Five activists went viral calling for a constitutional monarchy, and other civil society organizations supported them. However, this baby abruption did not last long, and the five activists were jailed for demanding such a thing. However, similar to what Saudi Arabia did in fear of any major strikes, the UAE stimulated massive economic schemes to avoid the pressure almost arriving from the Arab Spring. Raising the pay of public sector employees by a significant percentage, and in some cases by 100%, with a total of $2.7 billion introduced by the government to assist citizens, social welfare packages were enhanced to assist people experiencing poverty. These schemes were welcomed and received by the citizens in a very good manner, where they showed their gratitude and good faith in the government and royal family. Later that year, it was also reported that the crown prince of Abu Dhabi had been bringing in mercenaries to protect the sensitive properties of the country (Mazzetti and Hager, 2011). Something that the GCC is no stranger to because countries like Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have been employing thousands of foreign mercenaries to join their security apparatus.

Over the last few decades, the UAE has transitioned from an oil-dependent economy to a diverse economy. This resulted in the strengthening of other sectors, such as the private sector. This was following the decline in the price of oil in the 1980s. Back

then, the government of the UAE decided to take the path of diversification. A path that has turned out to be one of the best decisions they have made in the last century. Sectors like tourism and technology boomed and yielded huge revenue streams for the UAE government. The share of the private sector in the UAE's GDP grew from just 15% in the 1970s up to 50% by 2012. This rise reflects the efforts made by the government to enhance the private sector because they had a vision that the other countries in the GCC lacked. This is what made them different. This is what made them attractive to FDIs. Hence, the UAE had always shown positive economic growth, even when the price of oil barrels decreased.

During the Arab Spring, the UAE was immune to any real, tangible movements against the government. Besides the three main features mentioned above, another element in the composition of this system is the fact that the UAE's different emirates help each other in many ways. For example, when Dubai needed financial assistance in 2009, Abu Dhabi stepped in to back it up. This is crucial because, this way, the UAE would not have to borrow money from other countries to close the balance of payments deficit. Other HOMs and countries, on the other hand, do not have this privilege, making them vulnerable to external threats from other powerful countries. In addition to that, with all the other sectors that the country invested in to diversify, the UAE is now nearing self-sufficiency with the advancement of the agricultural technology they use and fishing they do. The UAE can now produce anything (Aydin, 2013).

When discussing the case of the UAE, it is only possible to mention Emiratization. Emiratization is a policy in the United Arab Emirates aimed at increasing the employment of Emirati citizens in the private and public sectors by providing them with job opportunities and training programs. The UAE lacked well-educated and skilled labor when it first began exporting oil and, with it, huge streams of revenue (Toledo, 2013).

Hence, the UAE was one of the main countries to import foreign skilled labor and highly educated people. This has nevertheless helped the UAE significantly by providing cheap and abundant labor for the construction and service sectors, which are the main drivers of the UAE's economy. They also brought in expertise and skills in various fields, such as finance, technology, and healthcare, that were necessary for the country's development. Additionally, their remittances helped to boost the UAE's foreign exchange reserves and contributed to the growth of the financial sector.

However, the government realized it couldn't always depend on foreign labor. This is why it started investing tremendously in the education system. This was because it wanted to have its own share of its citizens working in and handling high-ranking positions. So as time passed, the UAE attracted the world's finest colleges and universities to open branches in the country. This created a whole new generation of well-educated citizens with the will and skills to now take over many of the positions given to foreigners. Hence, the term "Emiratization" started to flow in the country and within the private sector. Back in 2004, a study was made by the National Human Resource Development and Employment Authority (Al-Ali, 2006), where they found that 90% of the labor in the private sector was made up of foreigners (Al-Ali, 2006).

It is estimated that by the early 2020s, the private sector labor force should be compromised of 25% citizens of the UAE (Toledo, 2013). The Arab Spring put more pressure on the government to be more inclusive when it came to Emiratization. Aside from the stimulus checks, they also offered social and economic relief. The government pushed harder on the citizens within the private sector in fear of any movements against it regarding the employment rate. However, firms are still finding it difficult to hire citizens in the private sector because the public sector is more prestigious and rewarding for citizens. Even with the fact that citizens get paid more than foreign labor by at least 32%

(IMF Report). This obliged private companies to recruit citizens even if they did not do any work in order to meet the Emiratization policy's mandated quota. However, this act on the medium and long run will not result in creating better opportunities for Emirati citizens (Toledo, 2013), as this is only an artificial creation of employment opportunities rather than real ones where the citizens are qualified and learning new skills to benefit their community.

In 2011, the government of the Emirates allocated a $1.5 billion package to aid the citizens, mainly targeting the Northern Emirates' poor citizens—areas where the prosperous life of Abu Dhabi and Dubai has never been seen. Unemployment rates are higher than in other emirates, and a proper water and electricity supply is needed. This package was to prevent any movements against the government in Abu Dhabi, movements made by groups deprived of many necessities that other citizens of the UAE have. Abu Dhabi extended its reach to the young in the Northern Emirates, hoping to have them as employees in federal institutions such as political entities, the army, and other security agencies, where nationalism is naturally enhanced (Bianco, 2019). These measures also attempted to further centralize allegiance toward Abu Dhabi as the Federation's leadership (Bianco, 2019).

## 3.3 Tribalism and the Loyalty of the Economic Elites

Despite all the economic boom and growth, the UAE remained an authoritarian regime, and rentiers continue to support the legitimacy of this authoritarian regime. Even with the increase in population, the UAE remains a government of generosity, offering benefits to those who support it, from wealthy families and tribes to normal citizens. Giving in to privileges and landing salary hikes, the core of this regime has always been

material rewards. This is used as a preventive measure against any domestic threat that might happen at any time. This was used during the Arab Spring and early in 2011.

For so long, there was and still is a historical relationship between the ruling family in the UAE and the merchants, especially the elites. If only these elites, who employ a large number of people, supported and backed the government, that would be enough to keep the country stable. Before the oil era, merchants used to support and promote the ruling family through financial support, and in return, the ruling family would protect them. This created a special bond between the merchants and the ruling family. As mentioned by Herb, this relationship was like a protection racket—a win-win situation for both parties.

In the aftermath of the uprisings, the UAE, like its neighbor Qatar, experienced no disruptions. On the contrary, their citizens showed more gratitude and support than ever. The business elites were on their side and supported them because they benefited from the government as well. And as mentioned earlier, the government actually provided material rewards. Even economically, the country saw a 3.8% growth because many of the businesses in the neighboring war-torn countries were diverted to the UAE (Almezaini, 2013). The real question would be, what will happen if the ruling family and the government can no longer provide material rewards?

A significant term to look out for when discussing the persistence of the GCC monarchies is hereditary oil monarchies (HOM). This is what distinguishes one monarchy from another. This even distinguishes one kingdom from another oil-exporting republic (Aydin, 2013). HOM had and continues to have the support of the kingdom's powerful tribes. This automatically legitimizes their existence and power in the monarchy as the rightful ruling family. The revenues generated solely from oil are the second-most

important factor promoting the legitimacy of these HOM. This revenue was also used to diversify their economic model to some extent (Aydin, 2013). The United Arab Emirates is an example of this; initially, a larger portion of their GDP revenue came from oil, but this portion gradually decreased as they used the revenues wisely to diversify their economy and transform it into a multi-service economy rather than an oil economy. A third crucial attribute was the regional and international support they had and still have from neighboring and powerful Western countries. The world does not want an increase in the price of oil. Hence, these countries are always, to a large extent, protected by the international community.

Like Aydin, Forstenlechner also agrees that tribalism and their loyalty to the regime gave the government legitimacy to rule. However, a new point was raised as well that promotes internal stability and security in the UAE: the social contract that the government makes with the people. A contract that secures and can provide for the needs of the citizens in healthcare, jobs, education, and so on. Furthermore, the government even renegotiated the contracts to improve them by applying a wider range of economic and educational developments (Forstenlechner et al., 2012).

In addition, in 2011, the Gulf News (2011) mentioned that Abu Dhabi had ordered the security of 6,000 positions for job seekers in the public sector as well as large infrastructure development initiatives in the less prosperous northern emirates valued at more than a billion dollars. However, this was announced as a routine government development rather than a preventative measure to avoid internal disruptions. With all the developments and social contract improvements, the government felt there was no need to lower gasoline prices. The country was sure that it would not face any backlash from its

citizens because it provided almost everything to them, keeping in mind that in 2012 the gasoline prices in the UAE were the highest after Tunisia and Syria.

## 3.4 Controlled Sectarianism

In both the KSA and UAE, because the royal families hold all the high-ranking political positions, the mobilization of an opposing apparatus or party is never an issue. Hence, no actual or real mobilization might lead to any disruptive events or actions against the government that would, in return, gain the people's trust, recognition, and credibility to the point that they might get down to the streets and protest. However, in the UAE, no real concrete reason is given to anyone to oppose the royal family and the government. Even minorities in the UAE are well treated, and wealth is distributed fairly among all citizens without differentiating between one group and another. So, no emotional trigger will drive anyone to protest or oppose the government. Something that some minorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia do not share, which was the reason behind the demonstrations in the eastern part of the Saudi kingdom.

However, according to Al-Ali and Pratt (2009), the UAE has a relatively small population compared to Saudi Arabia. Still, it is a diverse and complex society with many tribal groups. In particular, members of smaller tribes in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and other emirates hold key positions in the government, which helps to create a solid support structure for the rulers and the regime. According to the World Bank, the population of the UAE was estimated at 9.9 million in 2020, which is significantly smaller than Saudi Arabia's population of 34.8 million in the same year. However, the UAE's diverse population consists of various ethnic and tribal groups. The Al Nahyan family, who are the rulers of Abu Dhabi, are part of the Bani Yas tribe, which is one of the largest and most

influential tribal groups in the UAE. They have a solid support base among their fellow tribesmen, who hold many key positions in the government and other sectors.

Similarly, in Dubai, the ruling Al Maktoum family is also part of a larger tribal group known as the Al Bu Falasah. Members of this tribe hold important positions in the government and business sectors, which helps to solidify their support for the ruling family. Additionally, other smaller tribes, such as the Al Shamsi, Al Qawasim, and Al Kutbi, also hold influential positions in various parts of the government, including the military and police forces. This system of tribal patronage and support has helped to create a stable and supportive environment for the rulers and the regime in the UAE. The government has also implemented policies to promote national identity and unity among the various tribes and ethnic groups. For example, the government has emphasized the use of the Arabic language and the study of Emirati history and culture in schools. The UAE also celebrates National Day every year on December 2, which commemorates the country's formation in 1971.

While the UAE's population may be smaller than that of Saudi Arabia, its society is complex and diverse, with many tribal groups holding key positions in the government and other sectors. This system of tribal patronage and support has helped create a stable and supportive environment for the rulers and the regime in the UAE. The government has implemented policies to promote national identity and unity among the various tribes and ethnic groups.

Another major historical threat to the UAE was the Shi'a tide over the Gulf region (Branco, 2019). This threat against the Iranian regime and certain Shi'a extremist groups, especially in 2011, was at its peak. When the protests against the ruling family in Bahrain took place, the UAE rushed to support the regime of Bahrain (Bianco, 2019). The UAE

called the protests back then that it was the Iranian Shi'a groups behind the demonstrations to abrupt the region (Bianco, 2019). The government in the UAE had doubts that Iran might support Shi'a tribes or families within the country to move against it. All of this goes back to the 1970s and 1980s era when the Islamic revolution took place in Iran. However, no real threat was posed by the Shi'a Emirati citizens against their government. Hence, the national concerns against the Emirati Shi'a were eventually calmed (Bianco, 2019). In addition, as the UAE government suggested in 2008 in an article for the Daily Star, there are no hostilities between Sunni and Shi'a in the UAE. The government has supported the Emirati Shi'a financially by building mosques, schools, and hospitals for them.

Furthermore, in his paper (Bianco, 2019) he expressed how the Shi'a in the UAE are treated differently from those in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. They do not seem to suffer from being marginalized and excluded from the country and its communities. This is especially true when it comes to the economic sector in Dubai, for example, where multiple Shi'a families belong to the elites and run the biggest businesses (Bianco, 2019). Traditionally, Dubai has also always supported the Iranian residents, who number more than 200,000. However, after 2011 and the political tensions between Iran and the GCC, the UAE, in general, became more hesitant when it came to Iranians residing in the UAE and became less hospitable (Bianco, 2019). Nevertheless, this does not diminish the fact that the Shi'a sect faces, to a certain extent, some discrimination, especially when it comes to political and diplomatic positions or high-ranking positions within the army. Undeniably, Shi'a residents in Dubai experience a certain degree of marginalization.

## 3.5 Muslim Brotherhood Threat

Nevertheless, the only major concern that the government in the UAE thought of and acted to mitigate was the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) movements. Historically and nowadays, MB is always having small problems with how the ruling family tries to westernize the country. Even with the educational system, the MB opposes it because they see it as a way to diminish Arabian culture and traditions among the younger generations. In the past, during the Arab Spring and now, the government has always ensured this movement's influence is limited and controlled. They even arrested some individuals with strong ties to this movement. However, no real threat was shown during the 2011 revolution in the UAE.

(Bianco, 2019) Moving forward, another threat that the UAE prevented itself from facing was the threat from Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. A group of Muslims that is perceived by many as extreme Muslims and by others as not that extreme. Their existence dates to before the formation of the UAE. When the era of Gamal Abd Nasser took place in Egypt, the Egyptian president exiled many MB leaders. One of their destinations was the UAE, where they were well-integrated into society and grew as the country gained its independence. Their movements and presence were promoted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) primarily associated with or powered by the Islamic society. Their presence was initially strong, embedded in Emirati cultural and educational studies. However, after the UAE gained independence and formed what is now known as the United Arab Emirates, the country gradually began to shift away from traditional religious MB studies and toward a more modern, less implication, and more moderate one (Bianco, 2019).

In 1994, the government started a systematic campaign against the MB and started dissolving the society's board of directors. Moreover, they removed many government members that were associated with the MB. The government of the UAE clearly wanted to hold back the power and control that the MB had within the country. All of this was in hopes of reducing the national activities of MB in the country (Bianco, 2019), and one can now openly say that their strategies to diminish and mitigate the role and influence of MB in the UAE worked. All of these campaigns against the government started because the government (ruling family) wanted to implement economic and social reforms that suited the boom that was happening within the country itself. The leadership wanted to change the UAE's traditional model into a Westernized one of multiculturalism and globalization. Undoubtedly, the MB was against that, and to mitigate the influence of their power, the government did what it had to do.

## 3.6 Conclusion

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has one of the world's highest GDPs per capita, which has allowed the government to provide for its citizens' social and economic welfare. This includes free housing, education, and healthcare, which have helped shield the country from any disruptions that may have occurred in neighboring countries in 2011 (Shah, 2011). In the rare instance when a group of Emiratis was arrested for opposing the ruling family, a small group of citizens marched to the federal supreme court to show support for their government and its leaders. This special bond between the rulers of the UAE and the country's citizens has been created due to the government's provision of essential services and amenities. This has resulted in unwavering support and love for the ruling family by both the young and the elderly citizens of the country. The UAE's remarkable transformation from a desert to one of the best countries in the world is

attributed to the government's dedication to providing for its people, which has created a strong and enduring bond between them (Shah, 2011).

In conclusion, the UAE differs from its Saudi counterpart in several ways. The chapter explained the challenges the UAE faced and how they differed from the previous case study of Saudi Arabia. The UAE's economic comparative advantage provided and continues to provide it with a unique position within the region. It is the leading country in many sectors. Decades before the Arab Spring, the government in the UAE decided to diversify its economic portfolio using oil revenues. This diversification strengthened three major sectors. First, the service sector, including the private companies that operate. Second, the educational sector was impacted by a modernized educational model that attracted Ivy League universities globally. Finally, the innovation and technology sector. At this point, the UAE is the technology hub in the whole region. Huge companies are currently operating out of Dubai and Abu Dhabi. not to mention its space program that succeeded in various missions. All of this combines to form a unique and almost immune system to any upheavals.

Moreover, another crucial factor that this chapter sheds light on is the mitigation of sectarianism. Sectarianism exists to some extent but is far less extreme than in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The oppressed Shi'a in eastern Saudi Arabia was the first to protest against the government. They wanted equality and proper opportunities to live like other sects. The same applies to Bahrain, which this thesis will expose in the next chapter, focusing on the Bahraini case study during the Arab Spring. Having said that, the UAE does not discriminate against its Emirati Shi'a citizens in the same way that the KSA and Bahrain do. Shi'a in the UAE are well educated, with a proper supply of medical programs and business opportunities, just like the other sects in the UAE. Hence, we did not see any

demonstrations led by the Shi'a or other sects against the government or the ruling family.

The next chapter will showcase how the demonstrations were deeply rooted in the

sectarianism that the government of Bahrain implies on the Shi'a citizens, although the

majority of the citizens count as Shi'a.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# BAHRAIN CASE STUDY

## 4.1 Introduction

Bahrain is a tiny island nation in the Persian Gulf with a reasonably good quality of living compared to many other nations in the area. The nation has a highly developed economy that is mostly dependent on the production of oil and gas, as well as financial services, tourism, and other industries. Bahrain boasts a well-developed infrastructure, including cutting-edge transportation systems and a first-rate hospital system. Bahrain nonetheless has difficulties, including access to cheap housing and wealth disparity, just like many other nations. Notwithstanding these difficulties, Bahrain enjoys a generally high level of life and is regarded as an affluent and stable nation in the area. During Bahrain's colonial era, when the British established a Sunni-dominated monarchy and suppressed the Shi'a people, political and economic issues gave rise to sectarianism in the region. Economic and political oppression, as well as regional geopolitical concerns, have all served to aggravate tensions between the two populations.

Bahrain has recently seen a surge of protests and turmoil partly sparked by sectarian tensions. The government has been charged with deploying security forces to stifle dissent and target Shi'a community members. The government has responded to the turmoil by enacting several sectarian-related policies, including constitutional amendments and enhanced interfaith outreach. Despite these attempts, Bahrain's sectarian division and simmering tensions between the two sides persist. Human rights organizations and some

foreign observers have criticized how the government has handled the unrest and have demanded more political change and adherence to human rights in the nation.

The argument exhibited in this chapter appears to align with the thesis statement by emphasizing the role of sectarianism in driving social unrest and political instability in the Gulf region. Specifically, the chapter discusses the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 and the challenges faced by Bahrain's Shi'a population. This argument supports the thesis statement's claim that the prevalence of sectarian identities in the national politics of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia contributed to popular uprisings. By contrast, the UAE's management of sectarian divisions helped to maintain relative calm and stability. Overall, the chapter and the thesis statement both underscore the importance of addressing sectarianism as a means of promoting resilience and stability in the Gulf region. This chapter will answer the question behind the rise and collapse of the mass protests that happened during the Arab Spring. Furthermore, it will argue that the misuse of sectarianism is the main motive behind the demonstrations, hypothesizing that the external aid that Bahrain it received is what saved it from any mounting turbulent events—not needing to mention that when the protests took place, the people demanded to have equal rights and a better social welfare system as their Sunni compatriots. Discrimination between the citizens based on their religion and not treating everybody equally is the main fuel for the Shi'a getting down the streets.

## 4.2 Bahrain's Odd Demographic Structure: Oppression of the Majority

It appears that the GCC's decision to take opposing approaches to the "Arab Spring" problem—counterrevolutionary inside the Gulf region and pro-revolutionary outside of it—is the outcome of competing goals. In actuality, the GCC's actions within and outside of its boundaries have been motivated by the same logic: to control instability

by supporting benevolent governments internally and bolstering its influence externally. The GCC nations have also turned to sectarianism in an effort to find a way to survive the "Arab Spring" unharmed. It is not surprising that the GCC nations have endeavored to support Sunni movements throughout the region, given their status as an exclusive "club of monarchs" that adhere to a Sunni, fairly fundamentalist style of Islam.

Support from the GCC has also gone to authoritarian Sunni regimes challenged by Shi'a opposition groups comprising the majority of the populace, like Bahrain. The pro-democracy tenor of the "Arab Spring" sharply contrasts the policies that the GCC has devised in their own region, particularly in Bahrain. Yet Western democracies have not reacted negatively to this position. The quick suppression of the Bahraini uprising and the GCC's involvement in other "Arab Spring" fronts like Libya and Syria have liberated the West from the need to engage in the Gulf, endangering its long-standing relationships with the Gulf regimes. (Colombo, 2012).

Sunnis govern Bahrain, however traditional estimates place the percentage of Shi'a there at 60 to 70%, though these figures are under question and subject to change. Youth organizations in Bahrain have specifically worked to combat the sectarian narrative of social and political divides that the dictatorship has been promoting, both before and, particularly, after the 2011 unrest. (Hafidh & Fibiger,2019). In contrast to the majority of other Gulf monarchs, Bahrain's political environment has long been marked by resolute resistance to government policies and a well-established history of using public protest to express disagreement. The country's 2011 rebellion continued this pattern in many respects. Rather than being viewed only as a byproduct of the so-called Arab Spring's global contagion, it should be explained as the outcome of structural causes firmly established in Bahrain's past and present. (Moore-Gilbert, 2016).

The revolt in Bahrain in February 2011—which has now mostly been forgotten—marked the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring. This is true both in the sense that Bahrain saw the start of, and in many ways provided the impetus for, the fateful slide away from broad-based opposition movements into the poisonous sectarian and other factional conflicts that have since escaped beyond the Arab Gulf to consume a greater part of the Middle East and North Africa. Mass demonstrations there were the first to be successfully put down by a besieged government. The demonstrations started by Shi'as and secularists in Bahrain on February 14, 2011, and the subsequent counter-mobilization by the state's primarily Sunni allies, foreshadowed the sectarianism that would engulf much of the region in the years that followed. This sectarianism would be fueled by the political exploitation of hidden social group splits, military intervention from outside the country, and unintentional involvement of local forces in the larger regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran for influence.

Bahrain is so remarkable as the first Arab rebellion to collapse, but what is far more important are the reasons for Bahrain's protest movement's failure and the lessons that may be learned from it. As a result, Bahrain evolved into a unique variety of rentier states as opposed to other Gulf monarchs. Bahrain is an oil-dependent welfare state that neither has the resources nor a specific political or moral incentive to ensure the well-being of both its Sunni and Shi'a populations. Instead of attempting to buy universal political support through monetary patronage, Bahrain has resorted to a more cost-effective (and politically expedient) method of the ruling: distributing an excessive amount of state wealth to a core Sunni tribal support base, whose members will then have a direct economic-political stake in defending the system. (Gengler, 2016).

The Sunni-ruled Kingdom of Bahrain had its first demonstrations following the spread of revolutions against Arab rulers in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, with some Sunni Bahrainis also participating. The protests were mostly spearheaded by Bahrain's Shi'a population. Early in February 2011, thousands of Bahrainis demonstrated at the Pearl (Lu'lu'a) Roundabout, where protesters set up tents to call for political and economic changes. Bahraini military forces assaulted the roundabout on February 14 and murdered one protester. As a result, the largest opposition party in Bahrain's parliament withdrew in protest of the murder. In the days that followed, protesters continued to assemble, and on February 17, early that morning, military forces once more assaulted the roundabout, killing 4 more protesters. Further demonstrations were planned for the days and weeks that followed. On March 14, Saudi Arabia dispatched armed forces as part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to Bahrain, sparking intense debate in the small Kingdom out of fear that a Shi'a uprising would overthrow the monarchy and bolster Iran's influence in the Persian Gulf. The Arab Spring was a revolutionary movement that brought some significant political change to several Arab nations. Still, it also strengthened certain hardline religious groups and parties in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, with some of its leaders attempting to make their communities more conservative. One of the negative effects of the Arab Spring was that it occasionally made sectarian tensions between Shi'a and Sunnis worse in some nations, including Bahrain. (Al Rawi, 2015)

As this chapter already mentioned, the Shi'a encounter discrimination in many ways in Bahrain, despite being the majority. Shi'a protestors belong to a community that has been both politically and religiously disadvantaged in the contemporary GCC states, in contrast to the "Arab Spring," which is a movement that an entire ethnolinguistic group embraces. Oriental Gulf, with European imperialism and the consequent strengthening of

authoritarian Sunni governments in the Gulf, Shi'a experienced a major loss of political power. Several imperialist writers retaliated against the MENA people's efforts to overthrow European colonialism by emphasizing the sectarian divisions between the Sunni and Shi'a populations. The current Arab Spring movement is affected by this kind of anti-Shi'a discourse. Shi'a Muslims being alienated from their own historical homelands through this effective rhetorical device has had a significant impact on the Arab Spring movement itself. It is a sort of prejudice that exists today in the West as well as in many Shi'a-populated areas of the MENA region. The Arab Spring movement has put human and civil rights at the center, and the Shi'a of the GCC is only one of many groups asking for the creation of a new civil society in the region.

Bahrain's Uprising in 2011 failed mostly due to the convergence of sectarianism and geopolitics. Moreover, these elements will continue to worsen domestic tensions in Bahrain for the foreseeable future by feeding off of one another and the rising prominence of identity-based politics. Ironically, the sectarian and exclusionary policies that the Al Khalifa administration pursued to defend national sovereignty ultimately created exploitable community grievances and fault lines, allowing geopolitical entities to stifle Bahrain's sovereignty. The Bahraini Shi'a have been institutionally disadvantaged by the governing Al Khalifa government both politically and economically, making Bahrain the only majority-Shi'a Arab state now under Sunni administration. Internal Bahraini politics and economy follow rigid sectarian lines due to sectarian policies and the regime's repression of Sunnis sympathetic to the Shi'a predicament (Hoffman, 2018).

The Bahraini security forces did their duty of upholding the dictatorship without hesitation, in disparity to what occurred in the other Arab upheavals, where some members of the security forces at one point refused to shoot at the demonstrators and even joined

them. The regime's resilient approach has been effective in its primary goal of immunizing the regime against what it perceives as its biggest, though not unique, domestic threat: an uprising by the Shi'a population, even though it won't be adequate to stabilize the situation even in the medium term. According to most estimations, the Sunnis comprise around 30% of the country's population, while the Shi'a comprise the remaining 70%. These two groups are at odds in Bahraini culture. The Sunni Al Khalifa family has controlled Bahrain since the late eighteenth century. It had increasingly come to view its Shi'a citizens as intrinsically untrustworthy since the 1980s when Shi'a Islamic parties became the main domestic opposition force and a significant threat to Sunni regimes regionally. Although irredentist claims over Bahrain have frequently been made under both the monarchy and the Islamic administration, the Shi'a are seen as a possible, if not actual, fifth column of Iran.

## 4.3 Shared Fear of Existentialism

While the first demands for a "Day of Anger" came from anonymous online activists, they were expressly endorsed by illegal political organizations associated with the Shi'a community, including Al-Haq, Al-Wafa, and the Bahrain Freedom Movement in London. The largest opposition group Al-Wifaq, led by Shi'a cleric Ali Salman, gave an implicit nod to the gathering, as did well-known cleric Isa Qasim during his Friday sermon before it. Despite evidence of some Sunni participation, it is still challenging to determine the sectarian makeup of the gathering at Pearl Roundabout and, consequently, the efficacy of these tactics, especially given that the issue is directly related to conflicting political claims. (Wimmen, 2014)

In other countries that desired political and economic change, the Arab Spring produced a range of outcomes. It is critical to emphasize that economic frustrations played

a significant role in the emergence of many of these movements. However, they quickly turned into anti-government demonstrations that sought to impose democracy. Despite the success in toppling their authoritarian-style governments, Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya's new governments have not established stable democracies. The uprising in Bahrain seems to be over. The collective push for democracy in Bahrain was primarily mobilized by Bahrainis themselves. In fact, adopting constitutional provisions that have resulted in the development of a parliamentary system shows that the Al Khalifa administration has made a cautious effort to incorporate aspects of democratization. The Bahraini government has also failed to stop the development of a civil society whose primary goal is to increase the political and social rights granted to the Shi'a populace. The 2011 rebellion was, therefore, not very novel. The government of Bahrain has steadily incorporated more democratic characteristics. Yet, the level of public support for the most recent round of demonstrations was far higher than for earlier movements. (Al Ammar, 2016).

Even before the upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt shook the Arab world, emotions were high in Bahrain. In light of the escalating tension, Bahraini organizers scheduled a protest day for February 14, 2011. Instead of concentrating on the King or Bahrain's ruling family, the planned demonstration sought to ensure more political responsibility and involvement. The occasion was significant since it coincided with the tenth anniversary of the National Action Charter's 2001 approval referendum. That also happened after the upheavals that toppled the Ben Ali and Mubarak governments in Tunisia and Egypt, respectively. It was transforming to see the mostly non-violent protests that defied political repression and refused to surrender to the security systems that had maintained authoritarian governments in power for decades. In the lack of substantive or serious reform measures from the government or the opposition, tensions in Bahrain have

continued to rise. Despite repeated declarations of upcoming improvements, little has been done to address the abuses of authority and duty detailed in the BICI study.

Governments in the GCC have responded by putting an end to any resistance. The fight for Shi'a rights in GCC nations is primarily a political one rather than a religious one. As a result of the Arab Spring demonstrations and political activism, many MENA governments—including those in the GCC—fear political coups. GCC officials face the risk of escalating sectarian conflict throughout the whole MENA region by appealing to xenophobic speech, whether it relates to Iran or Lebanon. There is yet optimism for the future of the GCC Shi'a, despite the challenges they will face in rediscovering their political voice. The world community is appalled by the human rights violations committed against peaceful demonstrators in the MENA region and supports the protestors' calls for political reform. While the media's focus on the Arab Spring movement has mostly been on the uprisings in Egypt, there has been an increase in coverage of political events throughout the Gulf, especially Shi'a protest groups. Political protest, especially when it is conducted peacefully, as the majority of GCC Shi'a protestors have done, raises awareness and support for individuals who have been denied their rights by the ruling authority. (Patterson, 2015).

A wave of populist uprisings against authoritarianism, corruption, and government incompetence swept the Arab world in early 2011 when long-reigning autocrats were overthrown in Tunisia and Egypt. Eventually, the Arab Spring spread to four sharply divided cultures that had recently experienced sectarian and ethnic warfare and occasionally extremely violent behavior. (Wimmen, 2014). Being an island nation ruled by a Sunni monarchy over a Shi'a majority, Bahrain is frequently used as a textbook illustration of Sunni-Shi'a conflict. The ruling family-led administration in Bahrain

worked to undermine the protestors' national goals and reduce their popularity as the 2011 Arab upheavals expanded from Egypt to Bahrain. The state fostered a climate tolerant of overtly sectarian speech and behavior by highlighting their Shi'a identity and claiming their ties to Iran. Sunni Islamists took full advantage of this opportunity and launched a countermobilization as sectarian discourse grew in the state and on social media. (Diwan, 2020).

In the heart of Bahrain's capital, Manama, at the Pearl roundabout, the demonstrations got underway in February 2011. Young and elderly, Sunnis, and Shi'a, as well as organizations from the political and professional worlds, made up the protestors' rather diverse assemblage. The demands were diverse, as they often were at such assemblies, ranging from the enlargement of political rights to the overthrow of the monarchy. The magnitude of the protests grew, and voices calling for overthrowing the al-Khalifa regime became louder as time passed and attempts at political discussion between the government and the opposition failed. The Bahraini king secured the demonstrations in this context. He identified an existential threat to Bahrain's national integrity by using its sovereignty as the referent object (and, by extension, that of the other Gulf monarchy). Iran posed a concern because it attempted to undermine Bahrain by stirring up widespread Shi'a unrest. He used his speaking act to implore his neighbors to assist in restraining the demonstrations and preventing an upsurge in violence. (Pinto, 2014)

One area of Bahrain's domestic politics that has received little attention is the status of Sunni Islamist organizations since most studies have concentrated on the conflict between the Sunni ruling family and a predominantly Shi'a opposition movement. Since 2011, state officials have even attempted to organize these movements against Shi'a protestors. These sectarian dynamics have led Sunni Islamist movements in Bahrain,

including the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi groups, to align themselves politically with the government. The political apathy and allegiance typical of oil-rich governments are increasingly being resorted to by Bahrain's Sunni Islamists. This mentality reduces the likelihood that such movements will advocate for changes within a strong Sunni bloc's framework, which might hasten their influence's demise in Bahraini politics. Both the Brotherhood and the main Salafi group have fought to distance themselves from the dictatorship in Bahrain during the instability of the Arab Spring. Their local struggles are made worse by the worldwide backlash against Sunni Islamist organizations. (Freer, 2019)

Many publications have already discussed the various degrees of popular protest and dissent that occurred in all the Gulf countries. Yet, societal unrest in Bahrain reached levels that were not observed in the other Gulf monarchies. In contrast to the restricted scope and demands of public protest in nations like the UAE or KSA, this was not the case in Bahrain. Historically, Bahraini society was more liberal than that of other Gulf republics. Due to its earlier development, it had a better-informed populace and involved in the public. Since the nation's independence, there have been sporadic political demonstrations; prior to the current situation, the last significant ones took place in the 1990s. (Pinto, 2014)

Bahrain's security forces' recruitment pattern reflects the general civil-military relations typical of all Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, where members of the ruling dynasties hold the most important command positions but where the various security agencies do not actively recruit from the populace for social and political reasons. Since Bahrain's first parliament was chosen in 1973, the sectarian split has been a source of political polarization. A local chapter of the Iraqi Shi'a Islamic party al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya was represented by its activists. In 1976, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of

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Bahrain (IFLB) emerged as a further Shi'a Islamist movement. Also, a part of an international political-religious network with a basis in Iraq. Al-Da'wa and what would become the IFLB were first seen by the dictatorship as good counterweights to the leftist and Arab nationalist groups, which the regime at the time considered as its biggest danger because their primary goal was primarily to resist the dominance of the secular ideologies. This strategy changed when the progressive and religious members of parliament united in opposing a government measure on state security that restricted civil freedoms, forcing the dictatorship to dissolve parliament in 1975. They did so by putting aside their opposing views. The view of the regime as a danger changed significantly in this larger setting. The Bahraini rulers started to embrace a sectarian meaning of loyalty and disloyalty, being enticed to regard every Shi'a as a possible threat due to the outright use of the Shi'a religious identity for demonstrating against the state. (Louer, 2013)

Internal power battles within the royal family have kept Crown Prince Salman, who was once the leader of Bahrain's reformist elite, on the outside looking in. With advocates of compromise and agreement being outflanked by radical forces and proponents of violence over engagement, there has been a flight to extremes among both loyalist and opposition organizations. The impact of developments in Bahrain goes well beyond the boundaries of the islands. Bahrain acts as a barometer for determining the speed of change in the Gulf and the difficulties of transitioning to a future without oil because of its diminishing oil reserves. The nation is entangled in strong geopolitical currents that give internal developments a regional and global scope. Saudi Arabia's invasion of Bahrain in 2011 and Riyadh's unsuccessful attempt to establish a Gulf Union in 2012 resulted from an admission that Riyadh suffers the most from continued or significant instability in its eastern neighbor. This is especially true when viewed through

the lens of the regional battle between Saudi Arabia and Iran for hegemonic strength and influence in the Gulf. (Ulrichsen, 2013)

## 4.4 Structure of the Security Apparatus of Bahrain and the Military Foreign Aid

(Louër, 2013) From the beginning of time, the dynastic ruling family kept its structure of the government and army in the hands of close members of the royal family and their loyal tribes. This was and still is the strategy the government of Bahrain uses to protect itself from any outer threats. Needless to say, these threats are the Shi'a majority and other secular groups. Since gaining their independence, the army's high-rank officers were confined to the Al-Khalifa family and their loyal tribes, who are mostly Sunni Muslims. For the royal family, this was their strategy to keep away from any dangers that affected the country and its government. When it came to recruiting Shi'a officers, they were offered middle and low-rank positions in the army.

However, during the Arab Spring, when things went out of control, and the small army of Bahrain could not mitigate the riots and demonstrations, their neighbors were the first to help and support the regime. In Saudi Arabia, fearing the Iranian Shi'a tide that would reach Bahrain, it sent thousands of mercenaries to help fight the protesters and stop them. The sent troops were mainly Jordanian and Pakistanis, again turning this uprising into a sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shi'a. The reason for the presence of Jordanians and Pakistanis in Bahrain can be attributed, at least partially, to official security cooperation agreements between Bahrain and these two countries. This is why there were reports of several hundred Jordanian policemen and/or soldiers being sent to Bahrain to assist in suppressing the 2011 uprising, along with troops from the Peninsula Shield, which included Saudis and Emiratis. Similarly, the presence of Pakistanis can be

explained by their country's extensive involvement in Gulf security, as well as Arab security more broadly, through state-to-state relations. (Louër, 2011)

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were able to recast themselves in the region as powers capable of pursuing their regional goals not just via money and diplomacy but also through armed means, thanks to the post-Arab Spring climate. The militarization of their foreign policy is revealed in many ways through their military involvement in Yemen in 2015 and Bahrain in 2011. However, the sort of interventionist state emerging from these muscular policies, their domestic and regional legitimacy, and the institutionalization of this foreign policy pattern all pose challenges to the sustainability of the militarization of their policies.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are two of the most active nations in the area five years after the conclusion of 2010's "Arab Spring" swept over the Arab world. They now actively pursue an interventionist foreign policy in some Arab nations that they regard as a danger to their national security and their influence in the region. They are no longer merely concerned with averting the wave of changes brought about by the Spring. Bahrain has a peculiar status since it is not only geographically close to Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province but also because it has historically been a site of conflict and rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The power these two nations wield in Bahrain, in large part, is a reflection of the power they possess elsewhere in the Gulf. The Emirati authorities are more realistic in their views of Bahrain. Still, they frequently follow Saudi policies rather than disagree with them because they recognize Bahrain's importance to Saudi national security issues. (Ragab, 2017).

Saudi Arabia supplied Bahrain's government with military backing throughout the crackdown, and the government mainly put an end to these demonstrations. Due in part to

its affluence and political stability, the UAE also largely escaped the Arab Spring

uprisings. Nonetheless, some demonstrations in the emirate of Dubai were mostly

motivated by labor issues. In response, the government of the UAE increased social

expenditures and gave residents more possibilities to succeed economically. While there

was some social and political turmoil in all three nations during the Arab Spring, the

consequences varied. Saudi Arabia mainly avoided demonstrations due to its traditional

social norms and robust security infrastructure, the UAE suffered small protests that were

mostly motivated by labor complaints, and Bahrain had major protests that were greeted

with a harsh response.

## 4.5 Conclusion

In the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings, Bahrain witnessed widespread protests

and demonstrations demanding greater political freedoms, economic opportunities, and

social justice. The protests began in February 2011 and were led mainly by members of

the Shi'a Muslim community, who the Sunni-dominated government has long

marginalized. The government met the protests with a brutal crackdown, which used tear

gas, rubber bullets, and live ammunition to disperse demonstrators (Zunes, 2013). Human

rights organizations documented numerous cases of extrajudicial killings, torture, and

arbitrary arrests of protesters (Zunes, 2013). Despite the government's efforts to quash the

protests, they continued for months, and at their peak, hundreds of thousands of Bahrainis

took to the streets to demand change. The protesters' demands ranged from greater

political representation and an end to corruption to more basic demands, such as better

access to healthcare and education. However, the government responded by imposing

martial law, arresting opposition leaders, and impose curfews and media censorship.

As a conclusion, Bahrain's Arab Spring uprisings were sparked by a number of issues, including social, political, and economic injustices. Political repression has a long history in Bahrain, where the monarchy in charge strictly exercises its authority and limits people's freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. Many Bahrainis, especially those of the Shi'a majority, feel disenfranchised and outcast. Bahrain has significant levels of income disparity, and many of its residents live in poverty or struggle to make ends meet despite being a wealthy oil-producing nation. The majority Shi'a community of Bahrain, which is oppressed by the Sunni monarchy in power, has a long history of persecution. As a result, there have been conflicts and violent outbursts between the two populations on occasion. The Sunni-led Gulf nations were alarmed by the revolt in Shi'a-majority Bahrain because they feared the rise of Shi'a power.

Therefore, a desire for more political freedom, economic opportunity, and social fairness, as well as a rejection of sectarianism and corruption, were the main motivations for the Arab Spring uprisings in Bahrain. However, the underlying issues that gave rise to the protests remained unresolved, and there were concerns that the government's response had only served to deepen the divisions within Bahraini society. In the years since the protests, Bahrain has continued to face challenges, including ongoing political repression, sectarian tensions, and economic inequality. While the government has made some efforts to address these issues, including implementing limited reforms and increasing public spending on social services, many Bahrainis remain skeptical of the government's commitment to real change. While the protests initially sparked hope for change, the government's brutal crackdown and ongoing repression have left many Bahrainis disillusioned with the possibility of meaningful reform, and it is clear that Bahrain will continue to face significant challenges in the years ahead.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# CONCLUSION

The uprisings that swept the Middle East as of December 2010 have dramatically altered the region's authoritarian republics while mostly ignoring its autocratic monarchs. The Arab Spring scorecard distinguishes by the type of government. Republics performed far worse than monarchies. Arab kings and princes are supposedly "sitting on their thrones rather comfortably, protected against the storms of change," according to popular perception. Several experts have cited culture and institutions as possible explanations for this startling relationship between regime type and regime survival. According to the cultural perspective, Arab kingships have long-standing religious and tribal legitimacy, which inspires extraordinarily steadfast loyalty from the populace. The institutional view claims that monarchs may skillfully engage in the system to lead controlled reforms that allay popular unhappiness because they organizationally stand above daily politics.

This thesis finds that Bahrain, Saudi Arabia (KSA), and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) experienced the Arab Spring in different ways. In 2011, Bahrain had significant demonstrations, with demonstrators calling for more political freedom, economic opportunity, and social fairness. The nation's majority Shi'a population, who felt disenfranchised by the Sunni-led administration, was a significant motivator of the demonstrations. With the aid of troops from other Gulf nations run by Sunnis, Bahrain's leaders retaliated with a harsh crackdown. Bahrain's political situation did not significantly alter due to the demonstrations, but they enhanced worldwide interest in Bahrain's human rights record.

Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, discriminatory practices have been implemented with motives akin to those observed in Bahrain. However, in this instance, the Shi'a minority has been and continues to be subject to discrimination to a significant extent. Predominantly residing in the eastern provinces of the kingdom, along with a smaller number dispersed throughout other provinces, Shi'a citizens face challenges that Sunni citizens do not. The sectarian division that has been established to distance the Shi'a population will inevitably crumble in due course. Notably, if the royal family and government desire a sustainable future without any upheaval, they will have to acquiesce and promote social equity among all citizens. As evidenced in this thesis, previous demonstrations in both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have failed to yield positive outcomes, instead further exacerbating sectarian tensions between citizens. Ultimately, both countries may benefit from adopting the successful model of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain must be cautious in their internal policies that lead to the unfair treatment of their Shi'a citizens for several reasons. First and foremost, discriminatory practices based on religious affiliations can result in a breakdown of social cohesion. They may fuel sectarian tensions within the country, potentially leading to violent clashes between different religious groups and posing a threat to the nation's security and stability (Smith, 2021). Furthermore, the unfair treatment of Shi'a citizens could also result in feelings of marginalization and alienation among this group, which could lead to resentment and a sense of disenfranchisement, ultimately having a negative impact on the country's growth and development (Jones & Lee, 2019). Moreover, treating citizens unfairly based on their religious background is fundamentally unjust. It goes against the principles of human rights and equality, potentially damaging the country's international reputation and leading to diplomatic and economic consequences (Garcia,

2020). In light of these factors, it is crucial for Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to implement policies that promote social fairness among all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, contributing to a more inclusive society, enhancing national unity and social harmony, and ensuring sustainable long-term growth and development (Kumar, 2018).

When examining the United Arab Emirates (UAE), it becomes evident that the government and its ruling family possess an aptitude for controlling and equally promoting social welfare among all citizens. While it is widely known that the government and security apparatus comprise the ruling family and their loyal tribes, primarily of Sunni background, unlike in neighboring countries such as Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, the Shi'a population in the UAE is not subjected to the same level of discrimination. In fact, the Shi'a have equal access to resources as their fellow citizens, including education, healthcare, and business opportunities. This equitable model of treating all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, has proven successful on many levels, with the Shi'a demonstrating loyalty to the ruling family and supporting them wholeheartedly. Ultimately, as the country experienced unprecedented prosperity, all Emirati citizens reaped its benefits.

Many scholars have attempted to explain the phenomenon of authoritarianism in the Middle East by analyzing various factors, such as the weak civil society, the deliberate manipulation and division of opposition forces, the cooptation of social forces through rent distribution and cronyism, and the slow pace of economic liberalization (Maddy-Weitzman & Hirschberg, 2018). Additionally, cultural norms, the prevalence and logic of monarchy, the embrace of liberalized autocracy, and the manipulation of political institutions such as parties and electoral laws are also significant factors (Lust-Okar &

Jamal, 2002). These factors were drawn in a way that seemed to be the tactics behind these regimes.

However, a gap in these scholars' work is that they did not emphasize the importance of sectarianism. Other factors like those mentioned above oversee sectarianism's immense effect on countries. Nonetheless, when it came to some republics like Syria or other kingdoms like Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, sectarianism was the main motive behind the upheavals that took place. This hypothesis produced the arguments illustrating the points of this thesis. As shown in UAE, no major upsets happened, and nothing affected the country. Yet there were major movements against the government and its rule in KSA and Bahrain. The only factor that made the difference was sectarianism. The level of sectarianism in the UAE is way lesser than its neighboring countries. Hence, UAE was the most stable country in the Middle East.

In relation to sectarianism and its impact, one should emphasize the importance of inclusion as well. These two terms complement each other in various ways. Minorities' inclusion in a country can offer a number of advantages. For starters, by decreasing inequality and fostering diversity, it serves to strengthen social cohesiveness and prevent social fragmentation. This results in a more stable and harmonious community capable of dealing with social, political, and economic issues. Second, the inclusion of minorities can result in the creation of new ideas and viewpoints, which can help to further social and economic advancement. Allowing minority groups to fully engage in society allows their unique abilities, skills, and experiences to be used, resulting in innovation and progress. Third, the inclusion of minorities contributes to the protection of human rights and the advancement of social justice by ensuring that everyone can have equal opportunities and are treated with dignity and respect. This promotes a culture of shared comprehension,

openness, and acceptance, which improves a country's social fabric. Finally, the inclusion of minorities can have a positive economic impact. Countries may tap into the full potential of their human resources by ensuring that all members of society have equitable access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities, which can lead to higher productivity, economic growth, and prosperity.

Moving on, the remarkable endurance of authoritarianism has been a major conundrum of Arab politics for most of the previous four decades. The so-called third wave of democracy, which profoundly altered Latin America and Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s and had substantial repercussions in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, had never encountered resistance like it in any other region of the world. They said that due to the Arab Spring's abrupt emergence from what appeared to be an environment of authoritarian stability as well as its extensive and long-lasting ramifications for Middle East politics, there would be a great deal of scholarly discussion about it in the years to come. While competing political and social forces try to shape the new political order, afflicted societies will struggle to transition to uncertain futures. Some will be challenging; democratic transitions don't always work out, and violent acts frequently leave behind a legacy of ongoing civil unrest. Some autocratic governments will remain in power. Others may disagree. Others may undergo considerable changes as a result of adjusting to the new geographical environment.

Dynasticism, in which royal blood relations control important official positions, also contributes to the regime's maintenance. Politics in any state are, of course, fundamentally shaped by culture and institutions. Whatever their nature, autocracies frequently invoke cultural ideals to prove their legitimacy. Institutional systems determine access to power and methods of policymaking. In contrast, structures have nothing to do

with why eight monarchs have remained in power since the start of the Arab Spring when separated from such truisms. In countries as different as Morocco, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, there is no institutional or cultural DNA that makes the royal administrations there immune to revolt. A severe warning regarding comparative analysis is given by looking into the continued existence of Arab monarchies: Explanations for exceptional regimes need not follow essentialist reasoning that holds that some fundamental trait, such as cultural ancestry or institutional destiny, predetermines long-term results. As long as their leaders continue to build wide-ranging coalitions, get access to hydrocarbon rents, and receive generous assistance from foreign supporters, the chances of a popular revolt in the Arab kingdoms will remain modest. (Yom & Gause, 2012)

Middle Eastern politics have scarcely been those of a thriving postcolonial democracy. Nothing about this was out of the ordinary. In many situations, authoritarian politics or the politics of fragility and internal violence—and in many cases, a combination of both—were generated by the decolonization of the interwar and post-World War II years. Political changes during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s did not always lead to true democracies. In many situations, hybrid governments that were once authoritarian repurposed themselves as quasi-democracies. The Arab world, however, was largely excluded from this significant transition; to put it another way, the so-called third wave of democracy never truly made it to the Arab coasts.

This does not imply, however, that the region's fundamental politics remained constant. In fact, a compelling case can be made that authoritarian persistence in the region was not simply the result of immobilism and political stasis but rather of an adaptive process of "authoritarian upgrading," in which regimes adjusted their modalities of rule and power structures in response to social, economic, technological, and international changes. A

controlled level of political liberalization and constrained political plurality meant by regimes as a replacement for, rather than a move toward, complete democracy was sometimes involved in these partial or periodic political openings. Despite the turbulent events of the Arab Spring, many authoritarian governments in the area are still in place. However, it's possible that the challenging transformations taking place in the area may eventually give rise to brand-new authoritarianism, whether they be populist, hybrid, Islamist, military, or nationalist. Notwithstanding the events of 2011, it is still crucial to understand how Arab authoritarianism has operated from both a regional and larger comparative viewpoint. (Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, Zahar, 2013).

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