



Bahrain: Political Development in a Modernizing Society

Emile Nakhleh

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The book is a study of political development in Bahrain during the first five years after its independence in 1971. It is based on field research done by the author as the first senior Fulbright scholar in that country. The book was banned in Bahrain for 30 years but was allowed to be published in Arabic in that country in 2006. The study focuses on the tribal structure of Bahraini society and the rule of a minority Sunni government by al-Khalifa family over a largely disenfranchised Shia majority. To examine the making of the new state, the book analyzes the nature and characteristics of the Bahraini tribal society, the educational system of modern Bahrain, the nature of the political system, and popular demands for participation in decision making. The book also examines the making of the new constitution, the first ever national election to both the Constitutional Assembly and the National Assembly, and the electoral campaigns and candidates. The book also discusses the restrictions on freedoms of speech and assembly, the denial of women the right to vote, the banning of political parties and the role of clubs as surrogate political gathering places, the exclusion of the Shia majority from the economic and political centers of power, and the absence of government accountability and transparency. The February 2011 popular uprising in Bahrain underscores some of the key challenges discussed in the book, especially the autocratic nature of the regime and the urgency of political reform for domestic stability.

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