

MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN BAHRAIN

Name: Muslim Brotherhood in Bahrain

Year of Origin: Not determined.

Founder(s): Not determined.

Place(s) of Operation: Bahrain

Key Leaders:

- Al-Menbar MP Sheikh Mohammed Khalid¹
- Shaikh Isa bin Mohammed Al Khalifa²

Associated Organization(s):

- Al-Menbar al-Watani³

The [Muslim Brotherhood](#) began its operations in Bahrain in 1941, marking the establishment of the first major Brotherhood branch in the Gulf.⁴ The Bahraini branch of the Brotherhood, known as al-Menbar al-Watani,⁵ organizes charities and participates in the country's political process, with the stated goal of instating Islamic laws into Bahrain's constitution and charter.⁶ As with other branches in the Gulf, the Brotherhood has traditionally accommodated the ruling regime in Bahrain, and sought gradual reform toward an Islamist society.⁷ According to leaked U.S. diplomatic cables, the Bahraini government has funded the local Brotherhood via the Royal Court and Islamic banking sector.⁸ Despite this alleged cooperation, Bahraini authorities have

¹ Alex MacDonald, "Sunni Islamists could face uphill struggle in Bahrain elections," Middle East Eye, November 20, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/sunni-islamists-could-face-uphill-struggle-bahrain-elections-1404489268#sthash.RuVRhrs4.dpuf>.

² "Al-Dhahrani receives copy of Isa bin Mohammed biography," Bahrain News Agency, July 5, 2012, <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/507228>.

³ Helmut Pisecky, "Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arabic-Speaking World: The Best of Enemies," Rubin Center, January 14, 2016, <http://www.rubincenter.org/2016/01/iran-and-the-muslim-brotherhood-in-the-arabic-speaking-world-the-best-of-enemies/>.

⁴ "The Brotherhood in Bahrain," *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

⁵ Al Saeed Abbadi, "Interview With Leader of Bahrain's Al-Menbar Society," Ikhwanweb: the Muslim Brotherhood's Official English Web Site, March 4, 2007, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=2264>; Helmut Pisecky, "Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arabic-Speaking World: The Best of Enemies," Rubin Center, January 14, 2016, <http://www.rubincenter.org/2016/01/iran-and-the-muslim-brotherhood-in-the-arabic-speaking-world-the-best-of-enemies/>.

⁶ "Under the Gun," *Economist* (London), April 2, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2014/04/muslim-brothers-and-gulf>; Al Saeed Abbadi, "Interview With Leader of Bahrain's Al-Menbar Society," Ikhwanweb: the Muslim Brotherhood's Official English Web Site, March 4, 2007, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=2264>.

⁷ Giorgio Cafiero, "What Bahrain's opposition crackdown means for country's Brotherhood," Al Monitor, June 27, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/bahrain-crackdown-wefaq-shiite-opposition-muslim-brotherhood.html>.

⁸ "Popular protests in North Africa and the Middle East (III): The Bahrain Revolt," International Crisis Group, April 6, 2011,

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given vocal support to neighboring states that have acted to repress the Brotherhood.⁹

The Brotherhood has a long history of social activism and political engagement in Bahrain. The Brotherhood got its start in Bahrain in May 1941, when a number of students at al-Hedaya al-Khalifiya school in Muharraq established a local Brotherhood chapter. The branch—originally known simply as the “Student’s Club”—adopted as its slogan the Quranic verse, “I only desire reform to the best of my power.”¹⁰ In 1948, the name was changed to al-Eslah Club when the group began to expand its role in society. In 1980, the group rebranded and became al-Eslah Society, describing itself as an Islamic civil society dedicated to Islamic ideology and purportedly based on ideals of inclusion and moderation.¹¹

In the 1950s, Islamist campaigner Abdulrahman al-Jowder studied in Cairo, where he met Brotherhood founder [Hassan al-Banna](#). After returning to Bahrain, Jowder helped establish al-Muharraq Library, which published and stored Islamist literature from [Egypt](#), Syria, and [Lebanon](#). He was also a founding member of the council for mosques of the Muslim World League and a founding member of the Islamic Charitable Organizations based in Kuwait. The Brotherhood’s influence has since spread throughout the country, in large part due to its recruitment efforts. Since the Brotherhood was established in the 1940s, the group has inaugurated a number of religious courses and arranged social activities to disseminate its message.¹²

The Brotherhood did not limit its activities to the religious sphere. Although the group’s primary focus was to serve as a charitable organization, the Brotherhood reportedly secured positions in the country’s Ministry of Education, serving in various administrative roles. In 1973, Jowder participated in general elections for the National Assembly but fared poorly, winning only 73 votes.¹³

In 1984, al-Eslah Society formed a political arm under the name al-Menbar Islamic Society.¹⁴ The global Brotherhood movement endorsed al-Menbar Islamic Society, calling it “a Bahraini

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/105-%20Popular%20Protests%20in%20North%20Africa%20and%20the%20Middle%20East%20-III-The%20Bahrain%20Revolt.ashx>.

⁹ “Bahrain reiterates its stance against the Muslim Brotherhood,” *Economist* (London), March 26, 2014, <https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=491662433&Country=Bahrain&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=Political+stability&u=1&pid=424178426&oid=424178426&uid=1>.

¹⁰ “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

¹¹ “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

¹² “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

¹³ “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

¹⁴ Giorgio Cafiero, “What Bahrain’s opposition crackdown means for country’s Brotherhood,” *Al Monitor*, June 27, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/bahrain-crackdown-wefaq-shiite-opposition-muslim-brotherhood.html>.

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political society” that represents “Islam in the Kingdom of Bahrain.”¹⁵ The Brotherhood said that the movement was “built upon the ... the values derived from Islamic teachings, our political and academic leaders.”¹⁶ The society has since gone on to win seven parliamentary seats in 2002 and seven seats again in 2006.¹⁷ The party won only two seats in 2010.¹⁸

During the Arab uprisings of 2011, which spread to Bahrain in February of that year, al-Menbar issued sectarian condemnations of the primarily Shiite protestors. In January 2012, al-Menbar MP Mohammed Khalid dismissed the protestors via Twitter as “traitors” and as “agents of Iran” and called for violent retribution: “If you see a traitor crossing the road, you must run them over and keep going because you are in a country where the law allows you to strike and crush them,” Khalid tweeted.¹⁹ Khalid had previously spoken in support of terrorists fighting U.S. forces in Iraq, referring to them as “heroes.”²⁰

At times, Bahrain has stood apart from the recent trend in the region to bring pressure against Sunni extremist movements and parties.²¹ In March 2014, Bahrain’s foreign minister Khalid bin Ahmed al Khalifa made headlines when he announced that al-Menbar would not be classified as a terrorist group in Bahrain.²² In November 2014, al-Menbar won two seats in the country’s parliamentary elections.²³

Although not explicitly mentioning the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Eslah Society and al-Menbar Islamic Society issued a statement distancing themselves from any external religious ideology two days before the start of the June 2017 diplomatic crisis over [Qatar](#)’s support of terrorism.²⁴

¹⁵ “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

¹⁶ “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

¹⁷ “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

¹⁸ “Popular protests in North Africa and the Middle East (III): The Bahrain Revolt,” International Crisis Group, April 6, 2011, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/105-%20Popular%20Protests%20in%20North%20Africa%20and%20the%20Middle%20East%20-III-The%20Bahrain%20Revolt.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/105-%20Popular%20Protests%20in%20North%20Africa%20and%20the%20Middle%20East%20-III-The%20Bahrain%20Revolt.ashx).

¹⁹ Alex MacDonald, “Sunni Islamists could face uphill struggle in Bahrain elections,” Middle East Eye, November 20, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/sunni-islamists-could-face-uphill-struggle-bahrain-elections-1404489268#sthash.RuVRhrs4.dpuf>.

²⁰ Joan Smith, “Bridging the Gulf: Bahrain’s big experiment with democracy,” *Independent* (London), September 11, 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/bridging-the-gulf-bahrains-big-experiment-with-democracy-2077160.html>.

²¹ Guido Steinberg, “The Gulf States and the Muslim Brotherhood,” Project on the Middle East Political Science, March 9, 2014, <http://pomeps.org/2014/03/21/the-gulf-states-and-the-muslim-brotherhood/>.

²² Alex MacDonald, “Sunni Islamists could face uphill struggle in Bahrain elections,” Middle East Eye, November 20, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/sunni-islamists-could-face-uphill-struggle-bahrain-elections-1404489268#sthash.RuVRhrs4.dpuf>.

²³ Reem Khalifa, “Bahrain’s pro-government bloc dominates vote,” Times of Israel, December 1, 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/bahrains-pro-government-bloc-dominates-vote/>.

²⁴ Habib Toumi, “How the Muslim Brotherhood betrayed Saudi Arabia,” Gulf News, June 7, 2017, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/how-the-muslim-brotherhood-betrayed-saudi-arabia-1.2039864>.

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In the statement, they affirmed their alleged support of Bahrain’s leadership, constitutional rule, and efforts to root out terrorism.²⁵ On June 5, 2017, Bahrain, the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic ties with Qatar in response to that country’s ongoing support for the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist and terrorist groups.²⁶ The following month, Bahraini Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa labeled the Brotherhood a terrorist group and threatened terrorism charges against any Brotherhood sympathizers. Nonetheless, he had previously praised the Brotherhood and said the group enjoyed a “special status” in Bahrain unlike in other countries.²⁷

History:

- **1941:** The Muslim Brotherhood begins its operations in Bahrain.²⁸
- **1948:** The Bahraini Brotherhood changes its name from the Student’s Club to al-Eslah Club.²⁹
- **1973:** Islamist campaigner and Brotherhood sympathizer Abdulrahman al-Jowder participates in parliamentary elections but performs poorly, winning only 73 votes.³⁰
- **1984:** Al-Eslah Club establishes a political arm, al-Menbar Islamic Society.³¹
- **2002:** Al-Menbar Islamic Society wins seven seats in the country’s parliamentary elections.³²
- **2006:** Al-Menbar Islamic Society again wins seven seats in the country’s parliamentary elections.³³
- **2007:** The Muslim Brotherhood holds an interview with Dr. Salah Ali, then described as the chairman of the Brotherhood branch in Bahrain.³⁴

²⁵ “Al-Eslah, Al-Minbar Issue Statement,” Bahrain News Agency, June 3, 2017, <https://bna.bh/portal/en/news/788761>.

²⁶ Patrick Wintour, “Gulf Plunged into Diplomatic Crisis as Countries Cut Ties with Qatar,” *Guardian* (London), June 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/05/saudi-arabia-and-bahrain-break-diplomatic-ties-with-qatar-over-terrorism>.

²⁷ “Bahrain FM: Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist group,” Al Jazeera, July 6, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/bahrain-fm-muslim-brotherhood-terrorist-group-170706140931861.html>.

²⁸ “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

²⁹ “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

³⁰ “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

³¹ Giorgio Cafiero, “What Bahrain’s opposition crackdown means for country’s Brotherhood,” Al Monitor, June 27, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/bahrain-crackdown-wefaq-shiite-opposition-muslim-brotherhood.html>.

³² “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

³³ “The Brotherhood in Bahrain,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 22, 2013, <http://english.aawsat.com/2013/06/article55306719/the-brotherhood-in-bahrain>.

³⁴ Al Saeed Abbadi, “Interview With Leader of Bahrain’s Al-Menbar Society,” Ikhwanweb: the Muslim Brotherhood’s Official English Web Site, March 4, 2007, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=2264>.

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- **2010:** Al-Menbar Islamic Society wins two seats in parliamentary elections.³⁵
- **March 2014:** Bahrain recalls its ambassador to Qatar in protest of alleged Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁶
- **November 23, 2014:** Al-Menbar wins two seats in parliamentary elections.³⁷
- **June 3, 2017:** Two days before the start of the Qatar diplomatic crisis, al-Eslah Society and al-Menbar Islamic Society issue a statement distancing themselves from any external religious ideology and affirm their alleged support of Bahrain’s leadership, constitutional rule, and efforts to root out terrorism.³⁸
- **June 2017:** Bahrain, the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic ties with Qatar in response to that country’s ongoing support for the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist and terrorist groups. Two weeks later, the four countries issue a list of demands to Qatar, including that it cut ties with the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁹
- **July 2017:** Bahraini Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa labels the Brotherhood a terrorist group and threatens terrorism charges against any Brotherhood sympathizers.⁴⁰

Violent Activities: Not determined.

Ties to Extremist Groups: Not determined.

Designations by Governments and Organizations: Not determined.

In Their Own Words:

Mohammed Khalid, Tweet, January 2012

Condemning the protestors of the Arab Spring:

³⁵ “Popular protests in North Africa and the Middle East (III): The Bahrain Revolt,” International Crisis Group, April 6, 2011,

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/105-%20Popular%20Protests%20in%20North%20Africa%20and%20the%20Middle%20East%20-III-The%20Bahrain%20Revolt.ashx>.

³⁶ Saudi Arabia designates Muslim Brotherhood terrorist group,” Reuters, March 7, 2014,

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-security-idUSBREA260SM20140307>.

³⁷ Reem Khalifa, “Bahrain’s pro-government bloc dominates vote,” Times of Israel, December 1, 2014,

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/bahrains-pro-government-bloc-dominates-vote/>.

³⁸ Habib Toumi, “How the Muslim Brotherhood betrayed Saudi Arabia,” Gulf News, June 7, 2017,

<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/how-the-muslim-brotherhood-betrayed-saudi-arabia-1.2039864>; “Al-Eslah, Al-Minbar Issue Statement,” Bahrain News Agency, June 3, 2017, <https://bna.bh/portal/en/news/788761>.

³⁹ Patrick Wintour, “Gulf Plunged into Diplomatic Crisis as Countries Cut Ties with Qatar,” *Guardian* (London), June 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/05/saudi-arabia-and-bahrain-break-diplomatic-ties-with-qatar-over-terrorism>;

“Saudi-led bloc modifies demands to end Qatar crisis,” BBC News, July 19, 2017,

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40654023>; Eric Trager, “The Muslim Brotherhood Is the Root of the Qatar Crisis,” *Atlantic*, July 2, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/muslim-brotherhood-qatar/532380/>.

⁴⁰ “Bahrain FM: Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist group,” Al Jazeera, July 6, 2017,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/bahrain-fm-muslim-brotherhood-terrorist-group-170706140931861.html>.

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“If you see a traitor crossing the road, you must run them over and keep going because you are in a country where the law allows you to strike and crush them.” (Tweet)⁴¹

⁴¹ Alex MacDonald, “Sunni Islamists could face uphill struggle in Bahrain elections,” Middle East Eye, November 20, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/sunni-islamists-could-face-uphill-struggle-bahrain-elections-1404489268#sthash.RuVRhrs4.dpuf>.