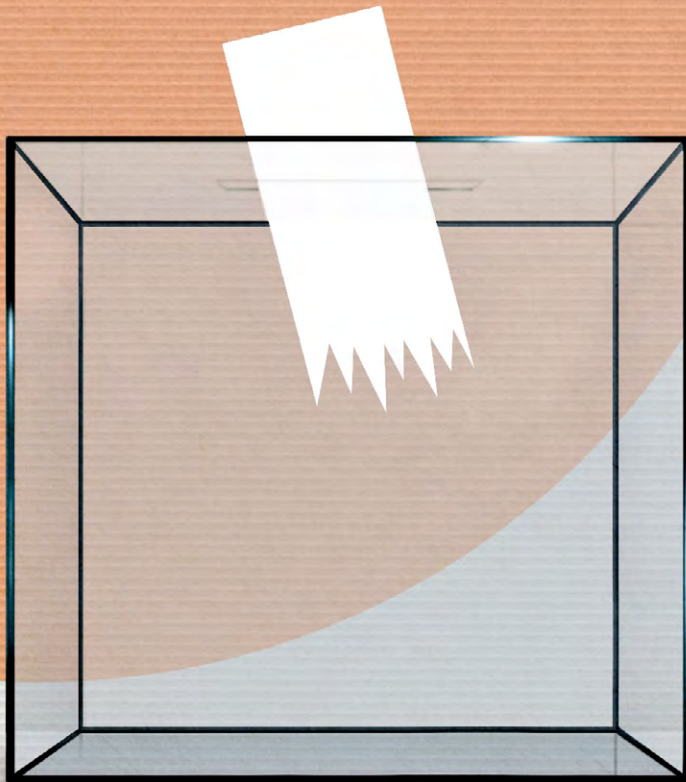


Electoral Intimidation

A report monitoring the most prominent forms of electoral intimidation in conjunction with the elections in Bahrain on Nov.24 ,Dec.1.2018



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A report monitoring the most prominent forms of electoral intimidation in conjunction with the elections in Bahrain on Nov. 24, Dec. 1, 2018



Salam for Democracy and Human Rights

Bahrain Forum for Human Rights

Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights

Designed by:  TYLOS

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Introduction

The elections held in Bahrain on November 24, 2018 coincided with the continuation of the crackdown and the escalation of serious human rights violations. The elections were held while international organizations were banned from observing them and international media was prevented from entering Bahrain. In addition, the elections were based on an electoral system, which set unfair constituencies, and a non-independent committee, which included 13 chairmen of subcommittees or general committees involved in violations.

The three human rights organizations, the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights, Salam for Democracy and Human Rights, and the Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, had given warning signs about possible electoral violations that have indeed taken place. Those violations include intimidating citizens who express their views about not participating in the elections or about the restrictive political environment, the constitutional reality of legislative articles that violate human rights principles, political isolation, and violating international standards in the conduct of elections.

In this brief report, we review the forms of electoral intimidation that citizens were subjected to in conjunction with elections in Bahrain.



Forms of Intimidation



الطالب: [Redacted] وبعد ،
نحيطكم علماً بأن الحضور في الجامعة
سبباً من الساعة 11 صباحاً وحتى 8 مساءً
ولذلك لسير فعالية " صوتي في الجامعة "
وتنوه على من يتخلف عن الحضور بأنه
سيتم عرض اللى لائحة العقوبات في الجامعة
عماً سواءً على معدل الطالب الجامعي إذ
إن نسبة من التقييم ستختص من ضمن
درجات الطالب
شاكرون لكم حسن التعاون ،
مع تحيات إدارة جامعة البحرين

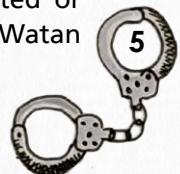
Forms of Intimidation

Many means of intimidation were used against citizens to force them to participate in the Bahraini elections, contrary to their personal convictions, whether in terms of participating or voting for certain candidates. We were informed of a large number of complaints about these abuses, which we summarize by the following:

1. Summonses: A number of citizens were summoned to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) building at the Ministry of Interior and were asked to bring their housing applications prior to the elections. When they went to the interrogation session, they were given a choice either to participate in the elections under duress or to be deprived of their housing applications. The waiting room was filled with a number of citizens who were prevented from talking to each other while waiting to enter the interrogation room.

2. Rumors: A number of intimidation rumors against the boycotters have been monitored, which have spread on social media while the Cyber Crime Directorate of Bahrain did not take any official steps to prosecute those involved in disseminating the rumors among citizens. Examples of the rumors are the following:

A rumor spread in the area of Jid Ali saying that boycotters would be deprived of jobs and retirement procedures and their nationalities would be revoked. Also, the following text was spread: «Dearness allowance will be suspended if the person did not participate in the elections, and a neutral committee will be established to monitor and study the cases of vote abstainers to look into their backgrounds; then, it will study the law, which provides for not allowing them to participate in the next national elections and depriving them of the privileges enjoyed by the citizen participating in the elections. The work of this committee aims to reinforce national unity and rationalize the consumption of state funds, which fall under the austerity measures. This same committee passed a law that bans MPs belonging to dissolved associations from running for office and suspends subsidies, bonuses and financial rewards of those who were convicted or are wanted in terror cases. This law was published in al-Watan



newspaper, approved by His Majesty the King and applied recently. The objectives of the committee include considering the cases of beneficiaries of housing services and support, electricity support, dearness allowance and social benefits in order to cut them in case of not participating in the upcoming parliamentary elections." It is noteworthy that the Speaker of the House of Representatives Ahmad al-Mulla made statements to the media two days after the spread of these rumors praising the official approach to apply the content of these threats, which violates the local law.

A rumor has also been widespread quoting the Instagram page of Bahrain-based al-Bilad newspaper that said the following: In the next few hours, the government intends to enact a law aimed at depriving those who abstain from voting in the parliamentary and municipal elections of 2018 from the housing units and lands allocated by the Ministry of Housing to the beneficiaries in the governorates of the Kingdom, and depriving the people of the Northern Governorate of more than 7000 units, which the Crown Prince ordered to be distributed last month and their distribution was postponed until after the parliamentary elections. The source confirmed that a law may be approved by the next parliament denying the vote abstainers of the dearness allowance and some other privileges if they abstain from voting. Even though the Bahraini al-Bilad newspaper denied in general the news attributed to it without giving details, the Cyber Crime Directorate did not investigate into who was behind such rumors of intimidation.

3. Communications: The Royal Court contacted former ministers, current ministers and government officials at the last minute when they felt that there was great reluctance among the citizens due to the frustration of the parliamentary experience, the pressure of the political crisis and especially the repressive environment in Bahrain. These bodies intervened by ordering the government ministries to send threat messages to their employees to make them participate in the elections. Examples of these ministries are the following: Ministry of Interior and its affiliated security institutions, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Defense. In addition, the employees of security and sensitive institutions were ordered to vote for certain candidates in the constituencies.¹



4. Messages: A number of written or text messages sent to citizens to intimidate them in case they do not participate in the elections were monitored. Examples include messages sent by the administration of the University of Bahrain, which sent a letter threatening to punish those who do not attend the event “My voice in the university” on November 24, 2018 through the list of university sanctions.

5. Media statements: A number of media statements were monitored in the atmosphere of electoral intimidation, but we will include some examples as follows:

a. On November 21, 2018, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Ahmad al-Mulla, praised the government’s intention to hold accountable the citizens who do not participate in the elections, and said that the decision to delay their housing applications is sound and promotes the principle of «good citizenship.» He also demanded the next House of Representatives to pay attention to the principle of «good citizenship», and enact strict legislation concerning holding citizens who do not perform their national duties accountable. Moreover, he stressed the need to make clear decisions and stances towards the participation in the elections, adding that reluctance or lack of participation must be met with strict accountability.²

b. On November 22, 2018, the Bahraini newspaper, al-Ayam, published a news story entitled: MPs support issuing decisions against not participating in the elections. The story included the statements of three MPs, namely: First Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Ali al-Aradi, MP and member of the Council of Commissioners of the National Institute for Human Rights (NIHR), Khalid al-Shaer, and MP Diab al-Nuaimi. It is noteworthy that the NIHR did not deny adopting the statement of Khaled al-Shaer, which means it supports taking illegal repressive measures against the boycotters of the elections.³

1-https://www.instagram.com/p/Bq2F5OAlCu4/?utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=mtlwbtrt9t453

2-<http://alwatannews.net/article/804474/Election/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%A9%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%85-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A9>

3-<http://www.alayam.com/online/local/765349/News.html>



c. On October 6, 2018, Bahrain's Interior Ministry announced that the General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security will «monitor any news or messages calling for not participating in the elections by using fraudulent telephone numbers, and will take legal action against those involved in them and submit them to the Public Prosecution. It will also take the necessary measures to ensure the movement of voters in a way that guarantees their exercise of their electoral rights with ease.” This statement was intended to warn any citizen exercising their right to freedom of expression about security pursuit and judicial prosecution if he criticized the elections.⁴

d. On November 21, 2018, the President of the Public Security affirmed that, according to the orders of the Minister of Interior and based on his continuous follow-up and constant support, the leadership of Public Security has prepared a comprehensive security plan that has been reviewed and training for it was conducted to ensure the highest levels of readiness and to firmly counter any illegal acts and to ensure a well presentation of this democratic event. These statements were made in conjunction with calls for peaceful protest in Bahrain.⁵

6. Legislation: Making amendments to the Law on Exercising Political Rights, in violation of Article 31 and 70 of the Constitution of Bahrain, as the amendments resulted in legalizing political isolation.

7. Hate speech: The official media and the four official newspapers continued to publish hate speech against citizens and to encourage their punishment because of their political stances. Moreover, there was unbalanced coverage by Bahrain TV on November 21, 2018, as the media content from 10 am to 12 pm included incitement against the boycotters and there was a call not to listen to what was called dubious calls for boycott. In addition, 75 minutes and 17 seconds minutes were allocated for live broadcast from 13 polling stations, and there was focus on 4 polling stations, which were given 75:17 minutes of repeated broadcasts, namely al-Ahd al-Zaher Secondary School for Girls (7 times), Khalifa Bin

4-<http://albiladpress.com/newspaper/3644/525135.html>

5-<https://www.policemc.gov.bh/news/ministry/86478>



Salman Institute of Technology (7 times), Um Al Hassam Primary Boys School (6 times), Isa Town Primary Boys School (5 times). Other polling stations that were weak in attendance were not covered.

8. Oral Threats: A large group of students at the University of Bahrain were orally threatened about denying them training and punishing them in case they do not participate in the elections. In addition, oral threats were made to employees in some ministries and security institutions. A large number of employees at the nursing department in the Salmaniya Medical Complex were threatened about not participating in the elections. Student eyewitnesses reported that they had received oral threats from Bahraini ambassadors, including the Bahraini ambassador in London and the Bahraini ambassador in Moscow.

9. Arbitrary Arrests: Arbitrary arrests continued during the elections period. The most prominent cases were the arrest of the former MP Ali al-Ashiri by the Public Prosecution for writing a tweet, in which he criticized the participation in the elections. Muhanna al-Shayji, the head of the Public Prosecution and head of Bahrain's electoral crimes unit, said on November 13, 2018 that «The Public Prosecution has received a notification from the Cyber Crime Directorate saying that they monitored tweets on the Twitter account of a person, which included incitement to abstain from participating in the upcoming parliamentary and municipal elections in a manner that would infringe on the freedom of voting and affect the integrity of the electoral process and confuse it.»

On Wednesday, November 21, 2018, the Public Prosecution referred al-Wefaq former MP Ali al-Ashiri to trial over the charge of «misusing a mobile phone» because of a tweet, in which he announced boycotting the elections.

On November 27, 2018, Ali al-Ashiri said on his Twitter account: I was released after being held for 15 days and paying a bail of BD 500 and the hearing was scheduled on December 10, 2018 because of the tweet I wrote on November 8, 2018, in which I described my stance regarding the parliamentary and municipal elections. ⁶

6- <https://twitter.com/AliAsheeri>



10. National Security Agency: Several intimidating practices by the National Security Agency (NSA), which is known for torturing rights activists and politicians, were monitored, including:

a. Forcing security personnel to vote for certain candidates in the four governorates.

b. Forcing a candidate in the Capital Governorate to withdraw from the elections after interrogating her and making her choose between facing criminal charges and withdrawing from the elections.

c. Threatening a candidate, who revealed to the media that a large number of voters were removed from his constituency, and making him choose between keeping silent and facing charges of fraud and of providing false information about the elections.

d. Monitoring the house of a candidate in the Northern Governorate in order to provide an opponent candidate with information related to the electoral contestation; the former was subsequently removed from the list of candidates.

e. Providing sensitive information especially to opponent candidates in the electoral constituencies in order to bring down other candidates through the appeals that preceded holding the elections.



Forms of penalties



Forms of penalties

It is clear from the above that the means of intimidation were based on the threat to punish citizens in case of abstention from participating or not following the issued orders, as follows:

1. Denial of civil and political rights.
2. Denial of economic rights.
3. Denial of citizenship right.
4. Denial of housing services.
5. Arbitrary dismissal from work.
6. Denial of the right to education.
7. Arbitrary arrests.
8. Prosecutions and security pursuits.

Some names of those involved in electoral intimidation practices

1. Follow-Up Minister at the Royal Court, Sheikh Ahmed bin Atiyatallah Al Khalifa
2. Bahraini Interior Minister, Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa.
3. Speaker of the House of Representatives, Ahmed al-Mulla.
4. The National Institute for Human Rights.
5. Head of Public Security, Tariq al-Hassan.
6. Minister of Education, Majid bin Ali al-Nuaimi.
7. Minister of Justice, Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa.
8. Minister of Defense, Yusuf bin Ahmed bin Hussain al- Jalahma
9. Minister of Health, Faeqa bint Saeed al-Saleh.



10. Chief Prosecutor and Chairman of the Commission for the Investigation of Electoral Crimes, Muhanna al-Shayji
11. Bahraini Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Fawaz bin Mohammed Al Khalifa.
12. Bahraini Ambassador to the Russian Federation, Ahmed Abdul-Rahman al-Saati.

Legal commentary

The legal and constitutional rules stipulate that the option of participation or boycott is one of the rights that have no obligation in return, and the individual is absolutely free to either participate or boycott; and in case of participating, the individual is free to choose any candidate. Therefore, it is called free elections based on secrecy. However, if the individual is forced to participate in the elections, then these elections will lose their integrity and credibility, because the reasons for the boycott may be due to the lack of a candidate worthy of voting for or due to other non-political reasons. Yet, even if the reasons were political, such as criticism of the electoral system, the constitutional situation and human rights, economic, social, political and other crises, there is no justification to intimidate citizens by legal texts such as political isolation or using rumors about imposing security, economic or service punishments. This applies to the situation in Bahrain, which has witnessed such violations by the authorities.



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