

# ETHNIC CONFLICT AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN BAHRAIN AND THE ARAB GULF

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# Overview



- Introduction
  - ▣ What determines political views and behavior in the nations of the Arab Gulf (the GCC)?
  - ▣ Problems with the prevailing *rentier* state framework
- A missing variable: the political salience of ethnicity
- Evidence from the first mass political survey of Bahrain
  - ▣ The (ethnic) politics of employment
  - ▣ Economic satisfaction vs. ethnicity as an explanator of political opinion and behavior
- Corroborating evidence from Iraq
- Conclusion: So what?

# Introduction



- The myth of popular apoliticality in the Arab Gulf
  - ▣ Citizens are content to accept rent-funded patronage (guaranteed employment, freedom from taxation) in exchange for keeping out of politics
  - ▣ As a result, the Gulf countries as a distinct category of states are structurally more stable than their non-*rentier* Arab counterparts

# Assessing the *Rentier* State Thesis

## □ Problems with this *rentier* state framework

### □ Theoretical

- Extant empirical “tests” of the theory miss the mark
- Demand side: Why must economic concerns necessarily be the most important determinants of citizens’ political orientations?
- Supply side: A state need not secure universal support, so why should it try? (buying new friends vs. rewarding current ones)

### □ Empirical

- Intra-Gulf variation in regime stability not explainable by diff. in rents (organized oppositions in Bahrain, Saudi, Kuwait)
- Gulf Arabs (Saudis, Bahrainis, Kuwaitis) actually more likely to participate in politics, less deferential than non-Gulf Arabs

# Ethnic Conflict & Political Mobilization



- A missing variable: the political salience of ethnicity (confessional affiliation: Sunni, Shi'i) in the Arab Gulf
- Ethnic conflict disrupts the ability of (and incentives for) rent-based states to buy political acquiescence
  - ▣ Shared ethnicity a viable basis for political coordination
  - ▣ Citizens (members of both ethnic in- and out-group) not driven primarily by concern for personal enrichment but for avoiding societal and political domination
  - ▣ States are reluctant to employ or empower those perceived as “disloyal,” and need not do so
  - ▣ The state may wish to promote horizontal competition

# Bahrain Mass Survey



## □ Questions:

- Are *rentier* benefits dependent upon ethnic membership?
- Which is more important in determining popular political views and behavior: economic satisfaction, or ethnic affiliation and orientation?

## □ Details

- 500-household random sample (435 interviews completed between January and May 2009)
- Nationally-representative sample from census
- Bahraini field interviewers
- Arab Democracy Barometer survey instrument

# Bahrain Mass Survey: Findings

## □ Public-sector Employment

- A Sunni selected at random from the Bahraini population is ~36% more likely to be employed in the public sector (given employment) than a Shi'i of identical age, gender, and education
- 0 of 127 working Shi'i males who gave occupational data reported working for the police/armed forces
- 11 of 66 (16.7%) of working Sunni males reported working for the police/armed forces
- 17 of 131 (13%) Sunni households report at least one member employed in the police or military

# Bahrain Mass Survey: Findings Cont.

- Bases of Political Opinion and Action in Bahrain
  - ▣ Sunni/Shi'i membership consistently more important predictor of opinions and actions than economic status
  - ▣ Shi'is who are more religious tend to give more anti-government opinions, while Sunnis who are more religious tend to give more pro-government opinions
  - ▣ Higher religiosity increases the likelihood of political activity (demonstration, petition-signing, voting) among both Sunnis and Shi'is
  - ▣ Shi'is tend to misrepresent their political opinions and activities to Sunni field interviewers and *vice versa*



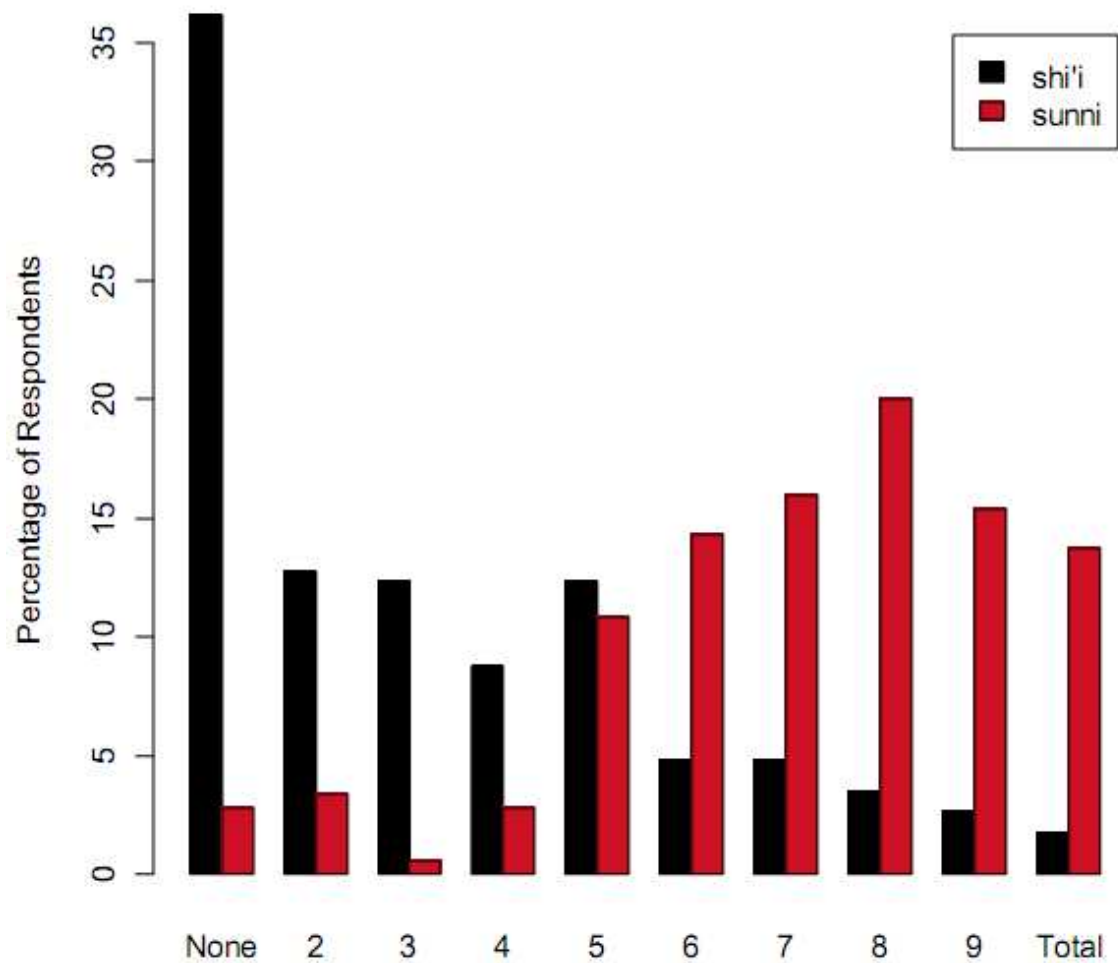
# Bahrain Mass Survey: Findings

TABLE 5.73. *The Determinants of Political Opinion among Bahrainis, Summary of Results*

Dependent Variable (Opinion)	Impact of Independent Variables of Interest							
	Ethnicity <sup>c</sup> (Shi'i   Sunni)		Religiosity (Increasing)		Economy (Worsening)		Interviewer (Inter-ethnic)	
POLITICAL SITUATION	Pro (28.6% <sup>d</sup> )		Anti   Pro <sup>e</sup> (7.1%   8.2%)		Anti   Anti (9.8%   9.6%)		Pro   none (17.3%)	
INFLUENCE	Pro (26.1%)		Anti <sup>ab</sup>   Pro <sup>e</sup> (3.6%   10.6%)		Anti   Anti (5.7%   14.1%)		Pro   Anti <sup>b</sup> (19.1%   6.9%)	
ELECTIONS	Pro (35.2%)		Anti <sup>b</sup>   Pro <sup>e</sup> (7.7%   10.1%)		none   none		Pro   Anti (34.8%   16.3%)	
HUMAN RIGHTS	Pro (36.5%)		Anti <sup>ab</sup>   Pro <sup>ab</sup> (5.6%   8.5%)		Anti   none (8.7%)		Pro   Anti (16.6%   19.0%)	
PRIME MINISTER	Pro (60.3%)		Anti   Pro (10.0%   12.0%)		none   none		Pro   Anti (42.9%   11.6%)	
GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE	Pro (43.5%)		Anti   Pro (11.1%   6.5%)		Anti   none (7.4%)		Pro   none (18.9%)	
PRIDE	More (10.9%)		More   More (10.8%   6.2%)		none   Less (7.7%)		none   none	

# Bahrain Findings Cont.

FIGURE 5.57. Overall Satisfaction with Government Performance, by Ethnicity



# Bahrain Mass Survey: Findings Cont.

TABLE 5.108. *The Determinants of Political Action among Bahrainis, Summary of Results*

Dependent Variable	Impact of Independent Variables of Interest			
	Ethnicity <sup>b</sup> (Shi'i   Sunni)	Religiosity (Increasing)	Economy <sup>a</sup> (Worsening)	Interviewer (Inter-ethnic)
<i>Indirect Actions</i>				
INTEREST	Less <sup>c</sup> (7.7%)	More   More <sup>a</sup> (7.7%   5.6%)	none   none	none   none
NEWS	Less <sup>c</sup> (6.3%)	More   More <sup>a</sup> (14.3%   7.7%)	none   none	none   none
<i>Direct Actions<sup>d</sup></i>				
MEETING / PETITION	Less Likely (45.1%)	More   More (64.9%   59.1%)	none   none	More <sup>e</sup>   none (50.2%)
DEMONSTRATION	Less Likely (79.3%)	More   More (28.7%   103.1%)	none   More (99.5%)	none   none
COMBINED MEETING / PETITION OF DEMONSTRATION	Less Likely (43.1%)	More   More (17.1%   42.0%)	none   none	More   Less (17.7%   60.0%)
VOTED	More Likely (37.0%)	More   More (60.6%   19.7%)	none   More <sup>a</sup> (14.0%)	none   none

# Bahrain Mass Survey: Findings Cont.



## □ Political Opinion

- Economy related to political opinion in only 4 of 6 models, and among both Sunnis and Shi'is in only 2
- Its largest substantive effect on respondent opinion barely surpasses half that of ethnic membership

## □ Political Behavior

- Economy plays a statistically-significant role in influencing behavior in only 2 of 6 models, and in each case only among Sunni respondents

# Similar Evidence from Iraq

TABLE 6.27. *The Determinants of Political Action and Opinion in Iraq, Summary of Results*

Dependent Variable	Impact of Independent Variables of Interest		
	Ethnicity <sup>b</sup> (Shi'i   Sunni)	Identity <sup>e</sup> (Increasing)	Economy <sup>e</sup> (Worsening)
<i>Opinions</i>			
GOVERNMENT CONFIDENCE			
2004—	Less <sup>c</sup> (20.0%)	More   Less <sup>d</sup> (4.1%   2.3%)	Less   Less <sup>d</sup> (4.9%   2.1%)
2006—	none	More   Less (38.9%   21.2%)	Less   Less (12.5%   15.9%)
GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE			
2004—	Less (18.9%)	More   none (2.4%)	Less   Less <sup>d</sup> (5.1%   4.7%)
2006—	none	More   Less (25.9%   11.1%)	Less   Less (10.4%   17.0%)
<i>Actions</i>			
DEMONSTRATION <sup>d</sup>			
2006—	none	More   Less (104.9%   49.3%)	Less   Less (33.1%   19.0%)

# Iraq Findings Cont.

## □ Political Opinion

- ▣ In 2004, the difference in predicted opinion separating Iraqis of below and above average economic satisfaction barely surpassed 5%, compared to a difference of 20% attributable to ethnic membership
- ▣ In 2006, other-ethnic orientations exert a greater substantive influence than economy in 3 of 4 models

## □ Political Behavior

- ▣ Greater economic satisfaction is actually associated with an increased likelihood of demonstration participation among both Sunnis and Shi'is

## □ Political Orientation

- ▣ Less favorable other-ethnic orientations alter citizens' views about the future and their support for democracy as a system of gov't

# Summary of Findings



- Economics is but one of many competing influences of popular political opinion and behavior in Bahrain and in other Gulf societies in which ethnicity is salient
- Benefit distribution (e.g., public-sector employment) is not politically-agnostic
- Ethnic division disrupts not only political views and behavior but also basic social interaction (interviewer effects) and citizens' outlooks on life and the proper way to organize a political community

# Conclusion: So what?

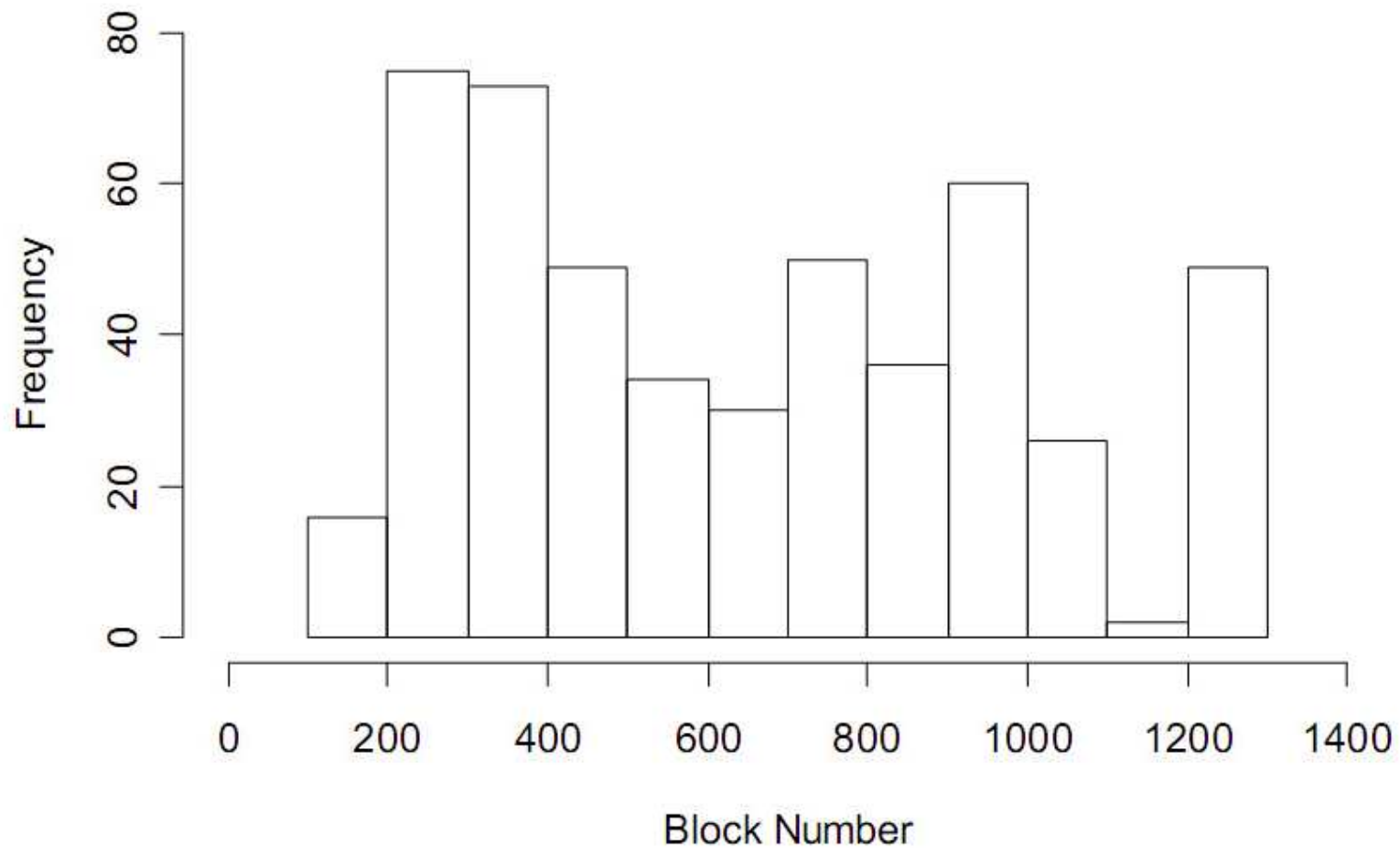


- The individual-level foundations of the *rentier* state paradigm of Gulf politics lack empirical evidence and require re-examination
- Its treatment of rentierism as a continuous concept, along with its focus on the top-down politics of material allocation, gives the false impression of a lack of popular political life altogether
- A false stability in the Arab Gulf?
  - ▣ Continued securitization of Gulf public sectors
  - ▣ Iran and the rising ethnic geopolitics of the Gulf



# Additional Information

**Histogram of Sample Block Numbers**



# Additional Information

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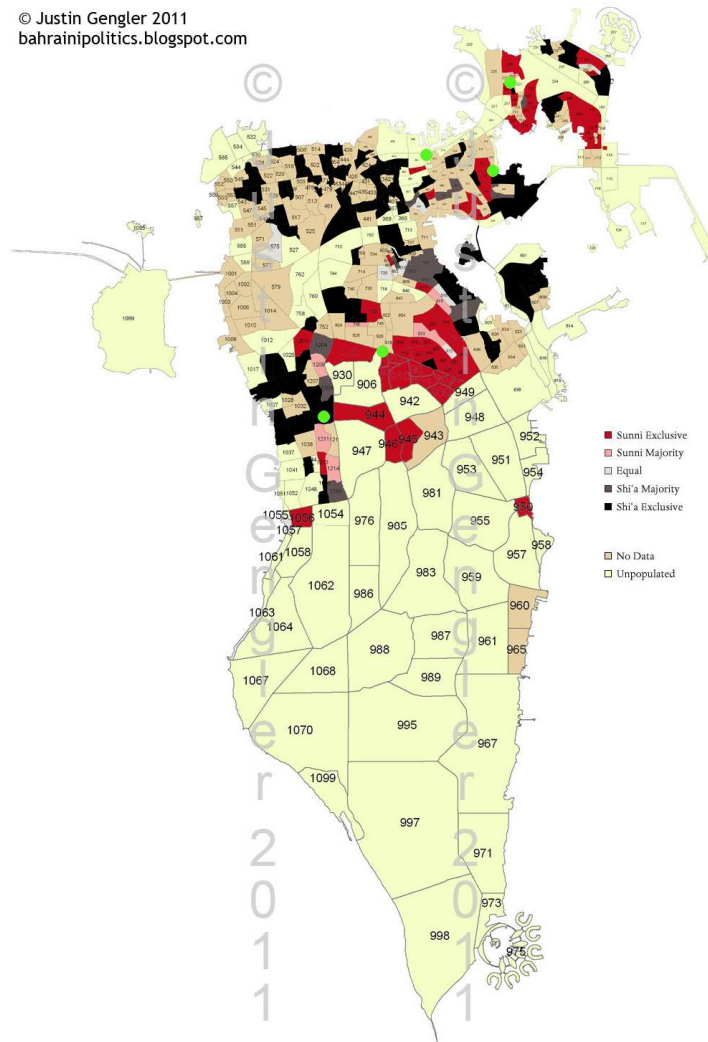
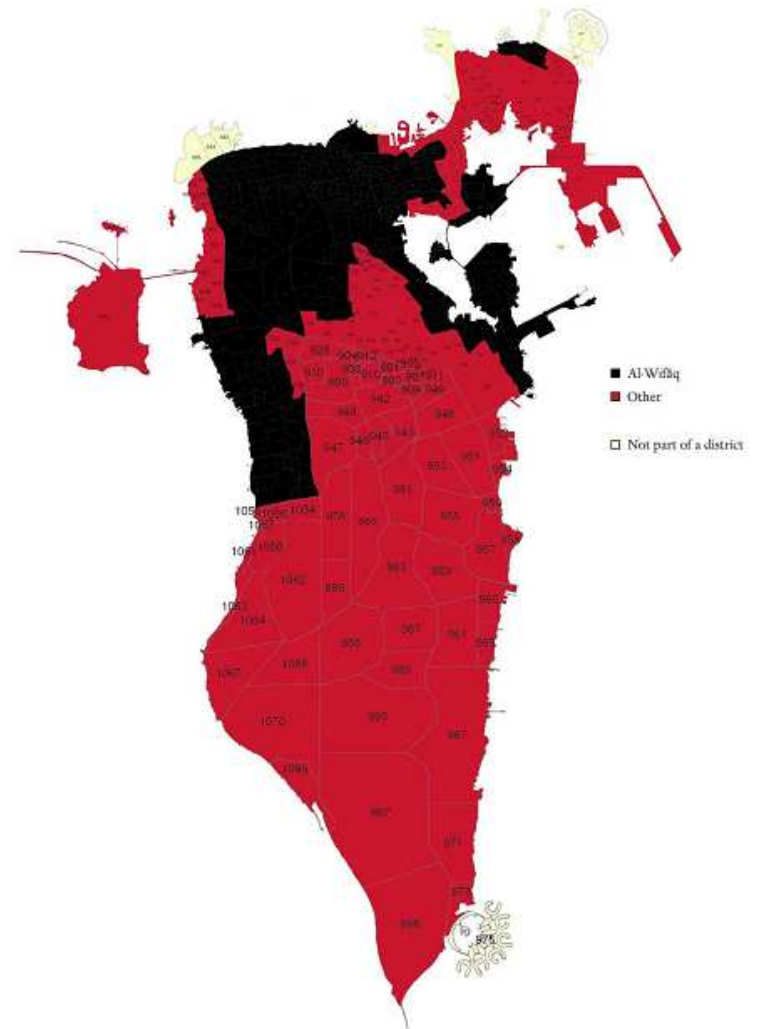
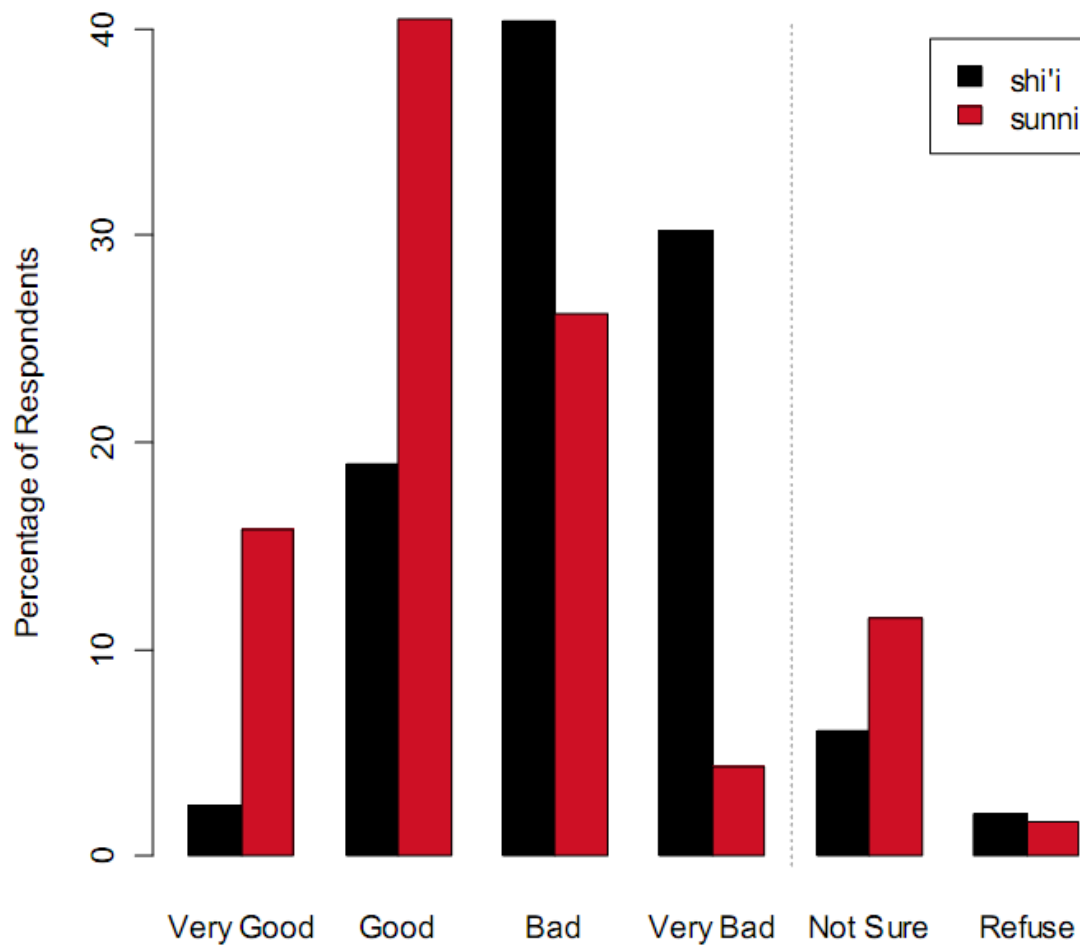


FIGURE 4.5. Map of Bahraini Electoral Districts, by 2010 Winner



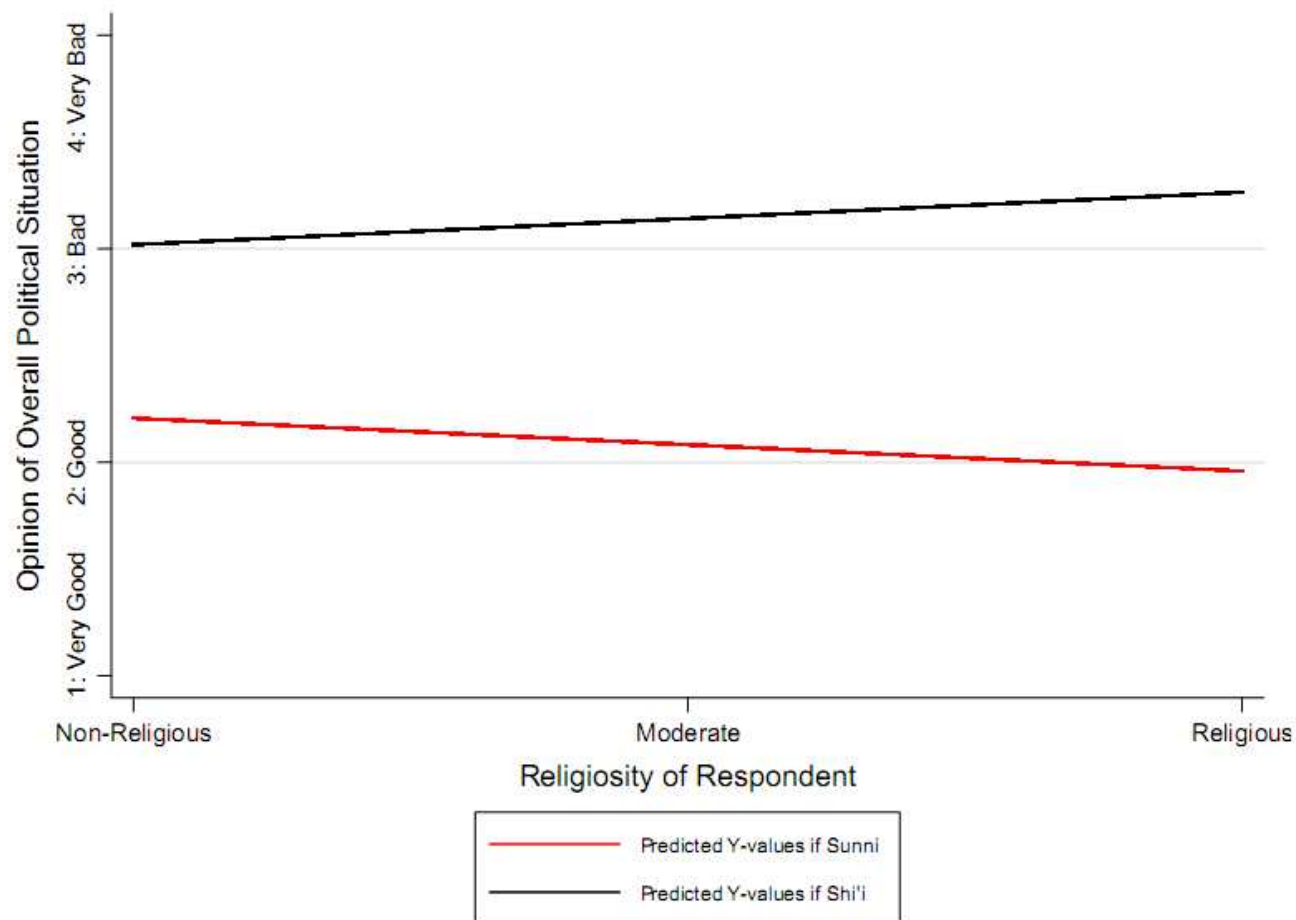
# Additional Information

FIGURE 5.10. *Opinion of the Overall Political Situation in Bahrain, by Ethnicity*



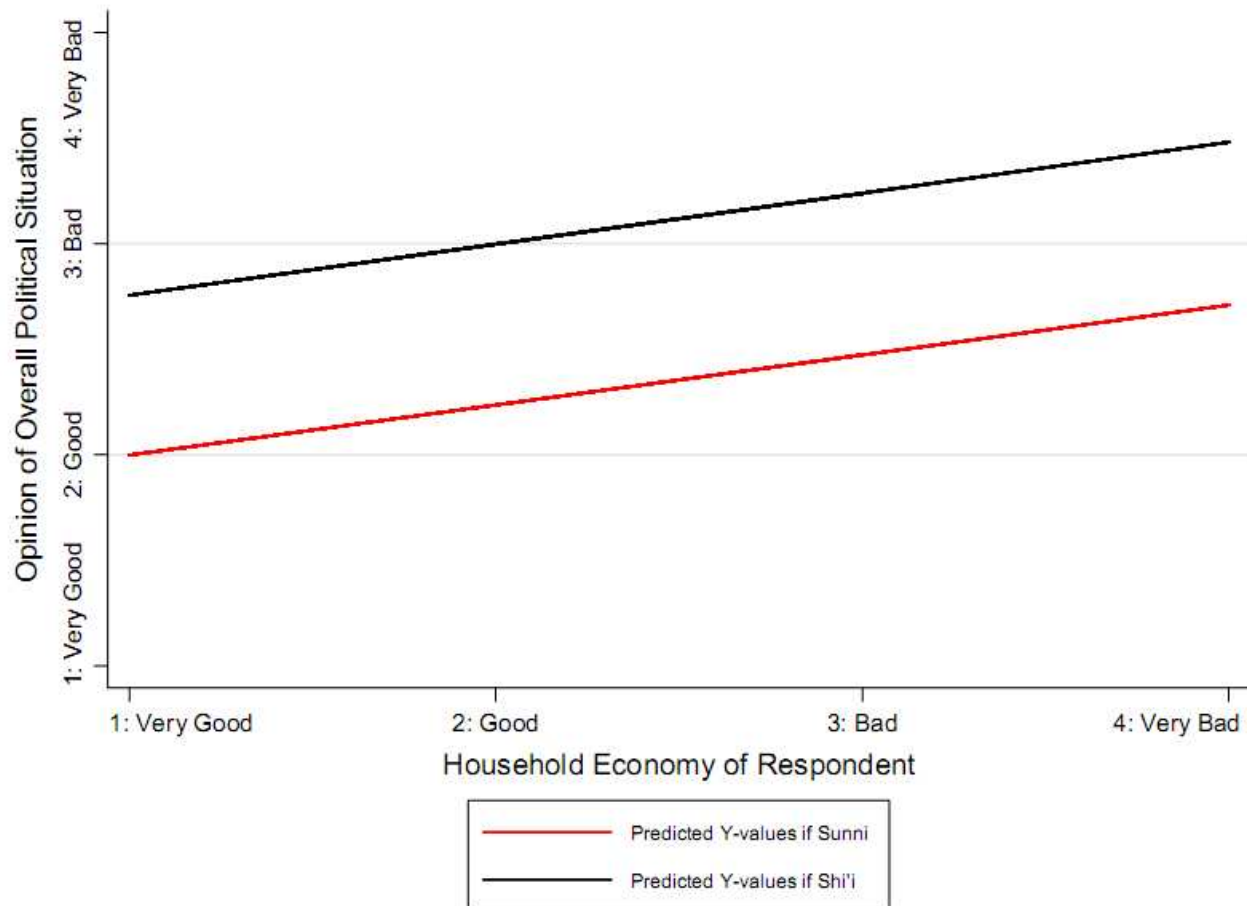
# Additional Information

FIGURE 5.14. *Predicted Values of Response Variable, with Alternative Religiosity Measure*



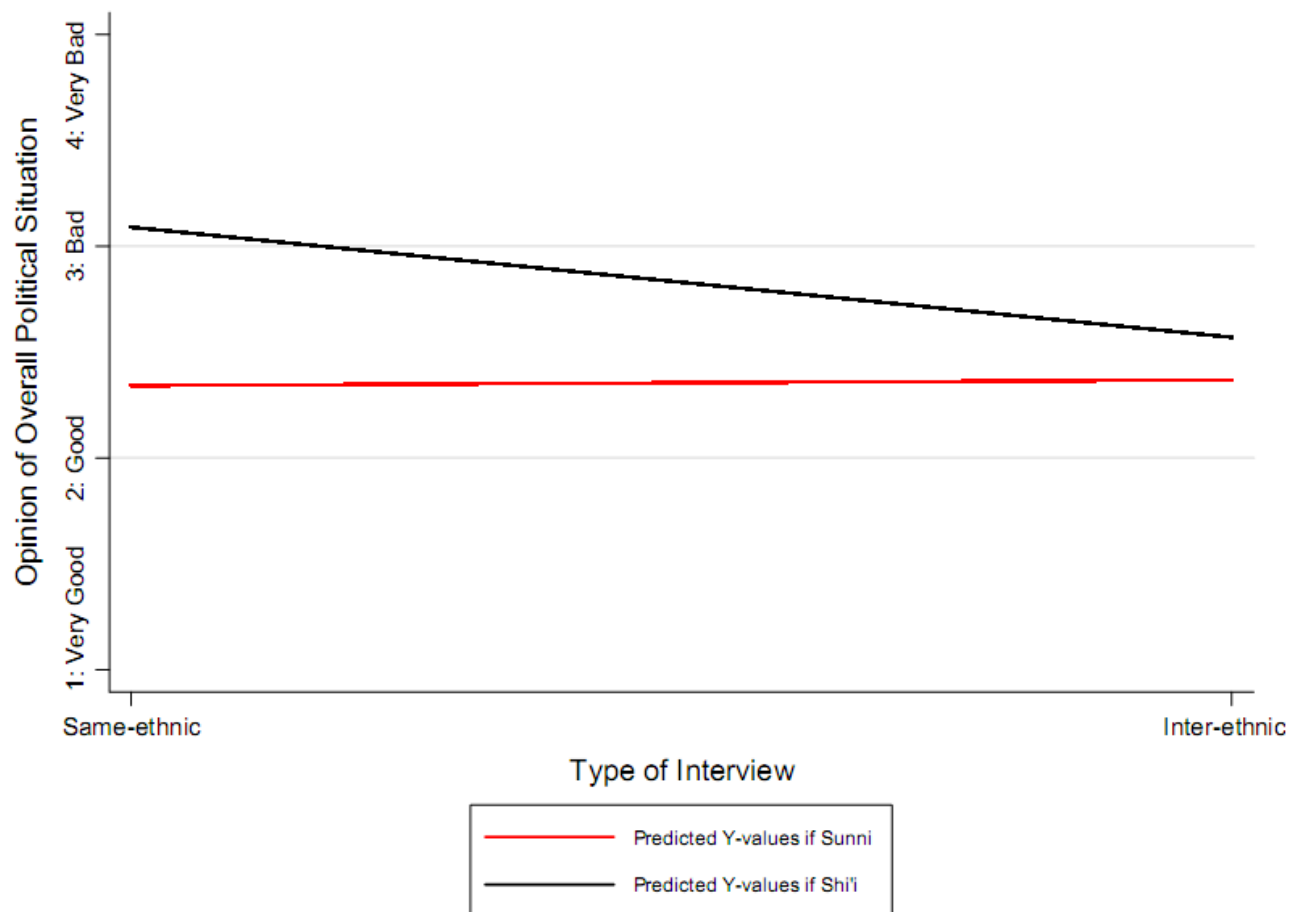
# Additional Information

FIGURE 5.20. *Predicted Values of Response Variable, by Economic Satisfaction*



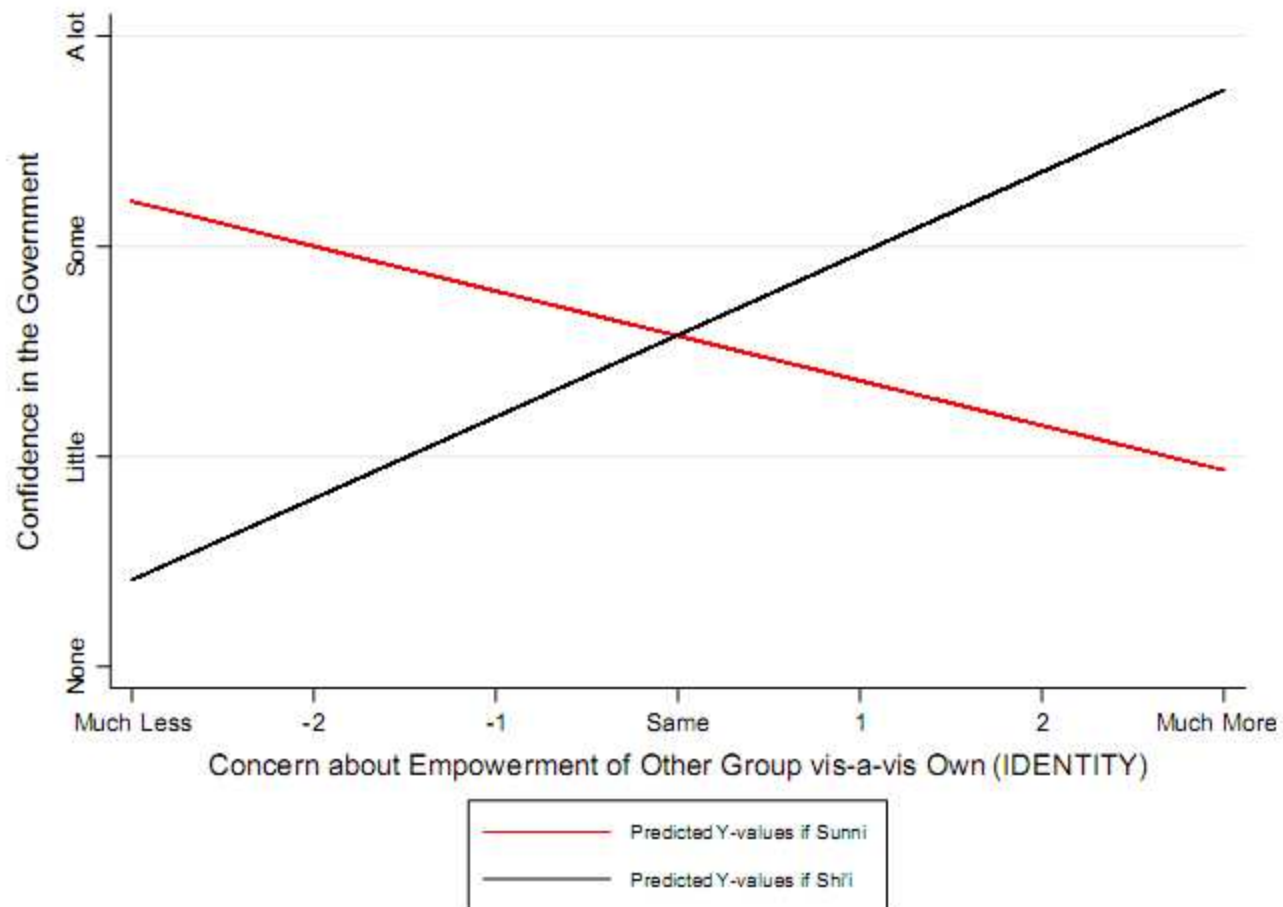
# Additional Information

FIGURE 5.I6. *Predicted Values of Response Variable, by DIFFETHNIC*



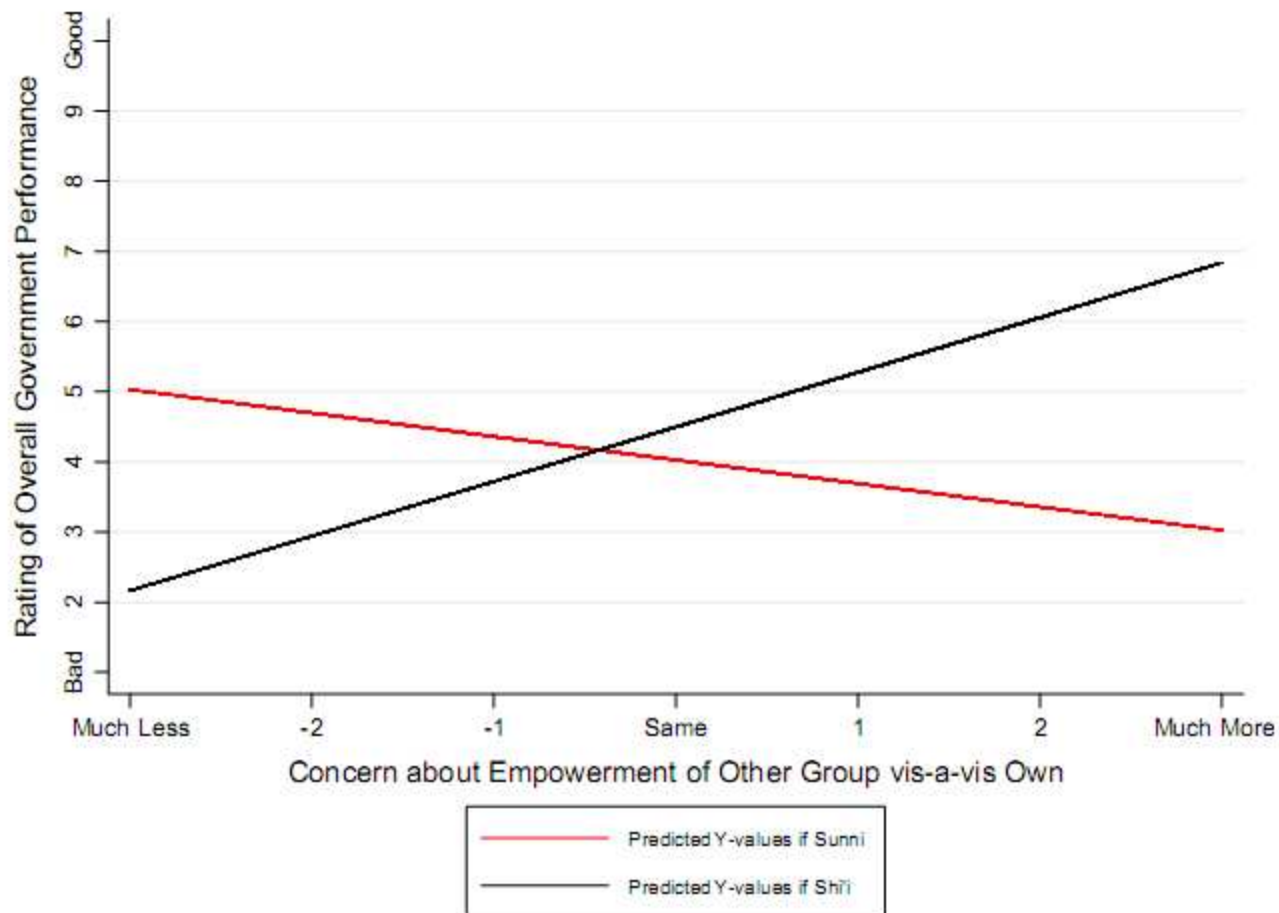
# Additional Information

FIGURE 6.5. Predicted Levels of Government Confidence in 2006, by IDENTITY



# Additional Information

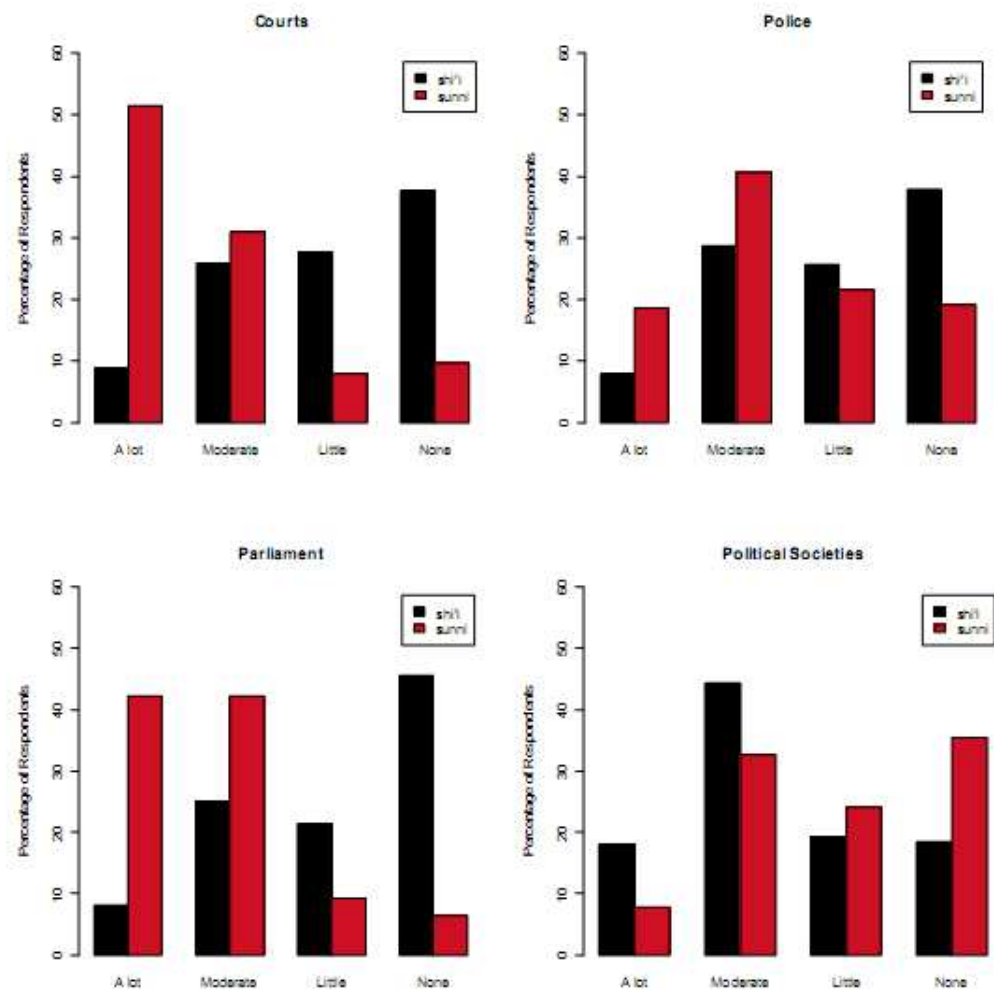
FIGURE 6.13. Predicted Rating of Government Performance in 2006, by IDENTITY





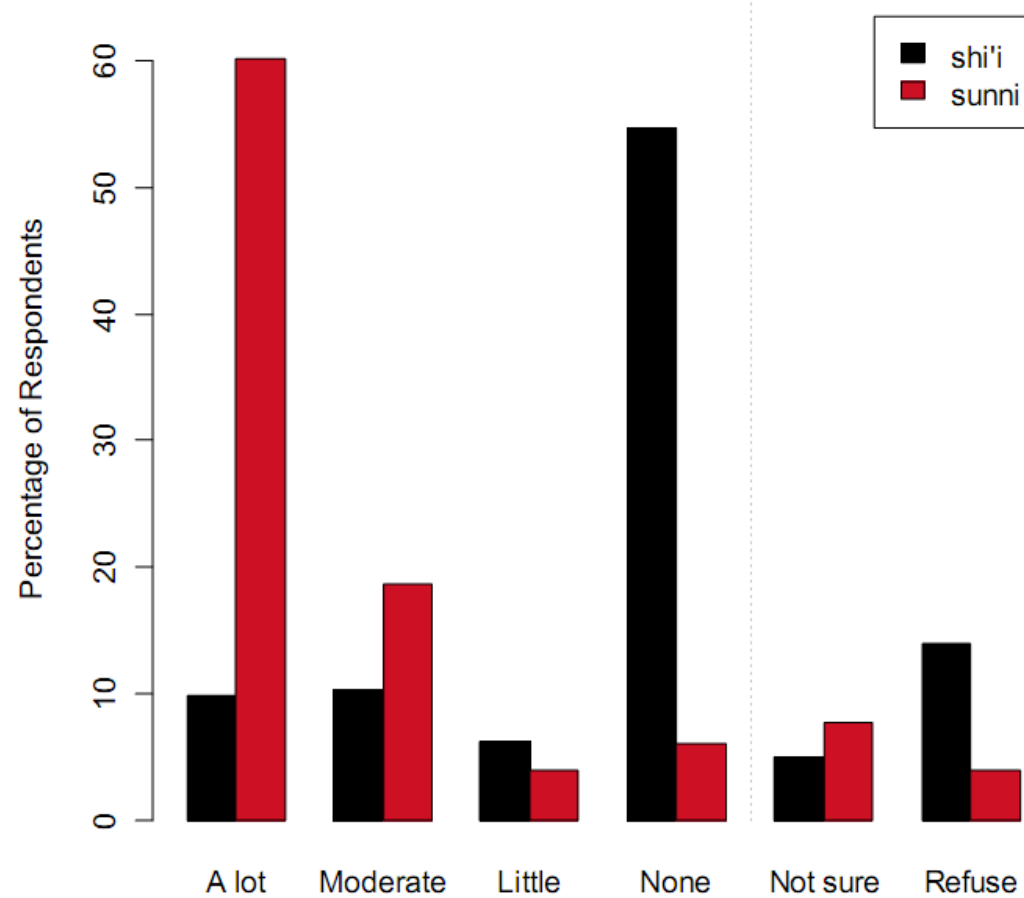
# Additional Information

FIGURE 5.48. Degree of Trust in Basic State Institutions, by Ethnicity

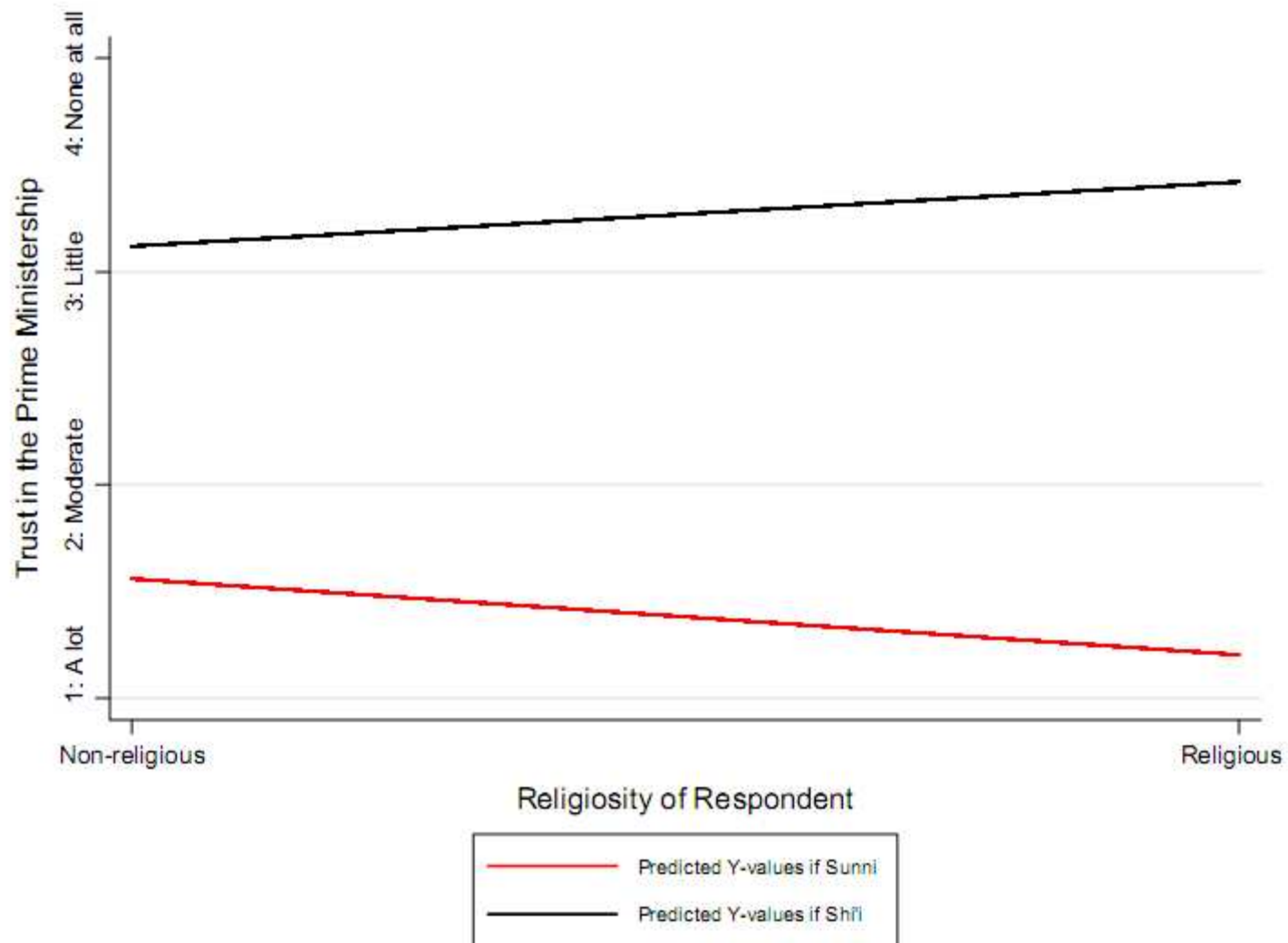


# Additional Information

FIGURE 5.49. Degree of Trust in the Prime Ministership, by Ethnicity



# Additional Information



# Additional Information

FIGURE 5.56 *Predicted Values of PRIME MINISTER, by DIFFETHNIC*

