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Radical Change or Normal Politics?
The 2006 Election in Kuwait

Mary Ann Tétreault [*]

Kuwait held in first parliamentary elections in 2006 which included women as fully enfranchised citizens with the right to hold public office. This election is unprecedented and well ahead of schedule in reforms that were proposed years ago. While women did seize the opportunity and ran for office, none were elected. Important structural changes took place in creating the culture of participatory democracy. This study details the major political participants and the competing factions that are in the throes of stabilizing a viable political culture of participation. For the region as a whole, the elections in Kuwait represent a successful milestone in the steps that are presently underway to achieve democracy.

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Most observers agree that the 2006 parliamentary election in Kuwait marked a dramatic, pro-democratic shift in Kuwaiti politics because women participated as candidates and voters in a national election for the first time. The sudden reversal of decades of parliamentary opposition to women's political rights was both unexpected and thorough. Despite Islamist attempts to limit the extension of women's rights either to municipal elections only or merely to voting and not running for office, the final version approved by the parliament in May 2005 conferred full citizenship rights on Kuwaiti women despite the last-minute inclusion of a phrase requiring that their participation in elections conform to Islamic principles.

The democratic character of the 2006 election was made even clearer by the circumstances that caused it to be held more than a year earlier than scheduled. It was the first Kuwaiti election triggered by direct citizen participation in a movement demanding that the system of elections in Kuwait be changed in a way the ruling family opposed. As a result of the success of Kuwait's "Orange

[*] Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas.

Movement," the next national election, scheduled for 2010, will take place on substantially different terrain.

The 2006 election was also a turning point, coming as it does between what was broadly understood as "normal" politics and a future of possibilities were are just beginning to imagine. It was the first held under a new amir, Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmad, whose accession also marked a departure from the norm. Instead of the smooth, tightly managed operation predicted by the corporate model of rule observed by Michael Herb (1999) in dynastic monarchies throughout the Middle East, the amiri transition of January 2006 was mediated by the parliament in the person of the speaker, Jasim al-Khorafy (Tétreault 2006a). By June 29, 2006, the date of the election, both the speaker and the prime minister had become more accountable than before to the parliament and citizens of Kuwait. What I have called Kuwait's *annus mirabilis*, its year of miracles (2006b), now can be seen as a period of transition on several fronts.

Change and transition are not the only words describing Kuwaiti politics in 2006. The election also demonstrated continuity in individual political behavior. Paradoxically, continuity in "personality politics" occurred at the same time as shifts institutionalizing the role of the parliament as an independent force in policy making. In addition to the speaker's intervention in the amiri transition, 2006 also witnessed an unusually successful attempt to bridge differences among political factions for the sake of the national interest. Another continuity paradox is that an election whose primary issue was corruption was itself corrupt. These continuities complicate predictions about what is likely to happen as the result of the radical changes in this astonishing political year.

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Plus Ça Change

The most extreme instance of political change is revolution, defined by Samuel Huntington (1968, 264) as "rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies." In 2006, Kuwait did not undergo a revolution, but it did experience rapid and fundamental changes on all the dimensions Huntington lists—except that they occurred

without violence. The amiri transition and the Orange Movement marked major alterations in the locus of agency in governance from dominance by the ruling family and its government to a power configuration including the institution of parliament and a popular movement. These changes followed a regime-managed democratic opening, which ended the exclusion of women from political life despite defiant protests from tribal and religious elements that constitute key elements of regime support (Ghabra 1997). That this took place with virtually no violence speaks volumes about shifts in the dominant values and myths of Kuwaiti society compared to earlier periods of strong opposition in 1938–39 and 1989–90. One shift, mostly generated by the women's movement, was toward an expanded vision of citizenship entitlement (interviews in Kuwait 2003, 2004, 2006). This was made possible by a rapid evolution of Kuwait's social structure, itself heavily influenced by the improved communications accompanying globalization (e.g., Wheeler 2006).

The sudden push to achieve women's political emancipation can be seen as the continuation of an old strategy to maintain ruling family control of election outcomes. Women's rights vaulted to the top of the political agenda at a time of rising parliamentary and public pressure to reform legislative districts as a means to reduce political corruption.

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> The government seems to anticipate that on the whole, women will constitute a moderate, pro-government force in national politics. A similar motivation was behind the government's 1981 naturalization and enfranchisement of large numbers of Bedouins whom it anticipated would be loyal pro-government voters (Al-Mughni 2004,10–11).

Until 1999, the Kuwaiti government was wary of the impact of female enfranchisement. Despite widespread expectations to the contrary, during the 1992 campaign season political scientist Ghanim Al-Najjar (1992) predicted that women would not be enfranchised by the new parliament despite their noteworthy participation in the struggle to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. Parliament had opposed women's rights for years, while the government's lack of enthusiasm came from uncertainty about the impact of

female voters on election results. An amiri decree conferring full political rights on women in 1999, during an interim period between the dismissal of parliament in May and a new national election in July, signaled a change in the government's attitude. But the decree was not followed up so that, when the 1999 parliament addressed the measure, they voted down the amir's proposal twice, clearly expressing their opposition to it.

The rulers probably had taken their new, pro-women's rights position gingerly. Women are an inherently unruly category of persons whose behavior is hard to predict because their interests are so difficult to chart. Gender is cross-cutting with respect to other bases of identity: women occupy different class, ethnic, religious, and status positions, each with its own set of interests. Additionally, women have gender interests that may take priority depending on the situation, particularly regarding issues like education, family services, and strategic interests in reducing male dominance in society as a whole (Molyneux 1985). Women also face family pressures to conform to the wishes of parents or spouses (Al-Mughni 2001; Barakat 1993; Sharabi 1988; interviews in Kuwait June 2006). They are difficult to resist even though Kuwait uses the Australian ballot system so that no one but the voter knows which candidates she has chosen. Yet many observers doubted that women would come out to vote in significant numbers, although some worried that the "wrong" women would flock to the polls. For example, members of parliament often excused their opposition to women's rights by citing fears that women aligned with their opponents would be more likely to vote than those aligned with their supporters.

By May 2005 when the election law was changed, the balance among these considerations also had changed, not only in response to women's increasingly well articulated demands but also because of external pressures. Continuing sex discrimination in politics threatened the status of Kuwait as a leader in democratization in the gulf. As female candidates and voters entered public life in other gulf states, Kuwaiti pride was damaged by its status as the only Arabian Peninsula country other than Saudi Arabia refusing to accord women equal political rights. Other external pressure came from the United States in the form of President George Bush's Greater Middle East Initiative. Emphasizing elections and female participation above all other indicators of political democracy, US officials expected Kuwait, as one of its regional allies, to show a stronger

commitment to democratization (e.g., Burns 2004; International Crisis Group 2004; Ottaway and Carothers 2004; interviews in Kuwait). Perhaps the most important external goad to action came from the first Arab Human Development Report (Fergany 2002), which identified the lack of female empowerment as a major reason for retarded development throughout the Middle East. All three challenged Kuwait's self-image as a progressive, democratic state, the Gulf country where women's rights were most advanced.

In 2006, newly empowered Kuwaiti women showed tremendous enthusiasm for politics, pouring out of their houses to engage with gusto in campaign events all across the country. Even staunch male opponents of women's political rights found themselves facing sharp questions from women at their campaign tents. Serious candidates of every persuasion felt compelled to set up women's committees, while evening visits to campaign tents and speakers' forums found female staff and visitors in attendance whether programs were scheduled or not.

But the unexpected election also exacted a toll on women's hopes, especially on the hopes of those who had been considering whether to run for the National Assembly in 2007, when the term of the 2003 parliament normally would have ended. Instead, the amir's decision both to close the parliament a year early and then truncate the allotted 60 days between a parliamentary dissolution and the election of a new one to only six weeks, required these women to make exceptionally difficult decisions. In the end, despite notable exceptions like Rola Dashti, a businesswoman, chair of the Economists Society and long-time women's rights activist; Fatma al-'Abdali, an employee of Kuwait's national oil company and a long-time environmental and women's rights activist; and Nabila al-Anjari, the daughter of a member of Parliament and herself a former Interior Ministry employee and head of Kuwait's tourism bureau, few politically prominent women chose to enter the fray on such short notice. Consequently, most of the female candidates were not well-known as political actors, and few had the political or economic resources to compete against well-heeled male opponents.

According to Rola Dashti (2006), however, all the other disadvantages faced by female candidates paled in comparison to the frame through which male candidates and most voters viewed the 2006 election. This context was a broadly based revolt against electoral—and other—corruption, triggered by a

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surprisingly successful popular challenge to the resistance of the government and many in parliament to address this issue seriously. Having been stymied in other attempts, reformers sought to focus on reducing corruption by choosing one easy-to-understand proposal. Although redrawing election districts has long been a way for status quo forces to create "safe" seats for political yes-men, it became the chief strategy of the reformers in Kuwait. The old system of 25 districts was attacked root and branch as an invitation to vote-buying and other illicit methods for influencing electoral results. Indeed, Kuwaitis' widespread concern about corruption framed the election so starkly that the novelty of female participation was, at best, a sideshow.

The reformers' electoral strategy also worked against female candidates. First, the liberal-led Alliance, a coalition of political groups pledged to support a limited set of issues, decided to work for the election of candidates who supported redistricting and the fight against corruption, regardless of their other leanings. Second, all the established political groups chose to back only male candidates because they believed that women would attract few votes. As a result, female candidates found themselves shut out of the primary arena in which the election was fought.

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> [T]he election was about two things, curbing corruption or deepening democracy. . . . [and] the priority was not deepening democracy but fighting corruption. [Yet] this corruption was already in process, vote buying and also a coalition among the corrupt. There is always vote buying. In 2006 it was unusual. The corrupted person usually does not mind where the second vote goes—it is your choice. The political groups also usually try to get at least one vote. The second vote, OK, it is your choice. So you always have the second vote floating.

When this election comes, the political parties made a coalition across ideologies. They focused on two votes by trading across groups to ensure two anti-corrupt candidates will win. There was no floating vote. The politically corrupt individuals saw what was happening and they did it too. When I buy

votes, I trade with someone else for the second vote. The corrupt trades and the anti-corruption trades went across ideologies.

So, here are the women trying to deepen democracy and they say not now. This is a different battle (Dashti 2006).

In spite of these disadvantages and in a campaign otherwise noteworthy for its vitriol, most female candidates generally ran on programs rather than personalities. They called attention to the financial problems of divorcées, widows and children, and the unequal treatment of women married to non-Kuwaitis, all the result of gendered policies governing entitlements and nationality. They focused on economic issues such as youth unemployment and the lack of planning for Kuwait's post-hydrocarbon future, and repeatedly pointed to the marked deterioration in health care and public education. But even women with detailed platforms on macroeconomic and foreign-policy issues repeatedly found themselves in gatherings where male candidates routinely were asked to address these issues while questions addressed to them focused on "social issues" (Dashti 2006). Given these handicaps, that two female candidates out of the 29 still in the race on election day managed to attract more than 1,000 votes each is something of a miracle by itself.

Anticipated and Unexpected Outcomes

No woman won a seat in 2006 but the Alliance strategy was successful, electing 35 candidates pledged to electoral reform. After the new parliament convened, this coalition pushed for the rapid approval of a plan to consolidate Kuwait's 25 districts into five. Alliance partners managed to hold together reasonably well on other issues, too, such as opposing an attempt to get the government to use windfall profits from oil sales to pay off consumer debt. The debt issue was very divisive but both liberals and Islamists held fast and even with divisions in the Popular bloc, the coalition defeated the consumer debt measure. By the end of the year, however, a conflict between Ahmad al-Sadoun, the leader of the Popular Bloc, and Ahmad Baqr, a Traditional Salafi, threatened to divide the Popular Block from the rest of the Alliance.

Cohesion in parliament depends even more on the efforts of members than it did before 2006 because of other changes in Kuwaiti politics. One was initiated

in 2003, when the positions of crown prince and prime minister were separated due to the inability of then crown prince, Shaikh Saad al-Abdullah, to continue to serve. After the 2003 election, Shaikh Sabah al-Ahmad, now the amir, replaced Shaikh Saad as prime minister, introducing a structural change in governance that shifted power, however imperceptibly at first, from the ruling family to the parliament.

When both positions were held by the heir apparent, parliamentary criticism of government policy was effectively stifled because the critics all knew they were challenging their future ruler when they criticized the prime minister (Tétreault 2000). The effect of the separation of the two offices was not immediately apparent. In effect, from July 2003 until January 2006, thanks to an ailing amir and an incompetent crown prince, Shaikh Sabah was the only active figure in the top level of the government. After the January amiri transition, it quickly became clear that the prime minister's position per se was neither secure nor unassailable. Indeed, a threat by parliamentarians supporting the five-district plan to interpellate the prime minister is likely to have been the chief cause of the parliamentary dissolution (see below). Since then, Prime Minister Shaikh Nasir al-Mohammad has sought support across parliament rather than following the lead of Shaikh Saad, who had relegated opposition critics to the status of pests. This developing relationship between the prime minister and the members is two-way street: the prime minister can bolster a coalition if it delivers dependable allies, but his need to seek and retain majority support further undermines a coalition that cannot maintain its own integrity.

Another reason why coalition politics in parliament relies so heavily on the members themselves lies in the loss of authority suffered by the speaker, Jasim al-Khorafy, because of his response to Orange Movement activities leading up to the dissolution of the 2003 parliament. During the amiri transition in January, Khorafy had staked out a strong position for himself by forcing closure on ruling family squabbles that threatened to block the orderly transfer of power for an indefinite period of time. Throughout days of interfamily negotiations, Khorafy maintained publicly that he would "do his best to safeguard the constitution and implementation of necessary procedures to ensure the stability of Kuwait" (*Arab Times*, January 19, 2006). As part of this strategy, he canceled regular parliamentary sessions to prevent logrolling among family and parliamentary

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factions that could permanently import the family's quarrels into the legislature. Instead, Khorafy chose to keep the spotlight on the Al Sabah, shutting the parliament out of all but its constitutionally mandated role. The result was as stately a transition as was possible given the intransigence of a few ruling family members; it also was a personal and institutional victory for the speaker of the National Assembly (Tétreault 2006a).

In contrast to his *sangfroid* throughout the transition crisis, Khorafy took umbrage at the three-day Orange demonstration at the National Assembly that began on May 14. Led by an informal coalition of twenty-something Kuwaitis, the Orange Movement supported a five-district plan to reform the electoral system. Beginning on May 5, movement organizers had mounted a series of demonstrations that, to their surprise, drew larger and larger numbers of Kuwaitis into the streets, members of parliament among them, in support of their position. The demonstrations culminated in mid-May in a confrontation between the reformers and the speaker. On May 15, following an all-night vigil outside, the demonstrators entered the National Assembly building to place orange leaflets advocating five districts on the desks of cabinet ministers (all ex officio members of the parliament) and MPs. Then they took seats in the gallery, a vantage point from which, as one organizer told me, "All you could see was orange." The government countered with a ten-district proposal drawn either so ineptly or so cleverly that it seemed designed to trigger the antagonism it quickly provoked. When redistricting proponents resisted this ploy, a cabinet member proposed forwarding the plan to the Constitutional Court. As soon as the roll call indicated that the referral had government (cabinet) support, all 29 elected proponents of five districts rose and left the building. A rebuke to the speaker, the departure of the 29 removed his quorum and forced him to postpone the session until the following day.

When the demonstrators converged on the National Assembly building the following morning, May 16, they found it surrounded by special forces dressed in riot gear and armed with batons. A number of MPs came outside to stand with the protesters. Despite parliamentary immunity, they were pushed back from the gate by the special forces. In the scuffle, at least two young demonstrators were struck and injured. Angry at the way these heretofore non-violent demonstrations had been sabotaged by the security police, the MPs

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refused the speaker's appeal to come in and vote, remaining outside to speak to the crowd. That evening, on the first anniversary of the passage of the women's rights law, perhaps 4,000 persons gathered outside the parliament where, once again, entry was blocked by special forces. The gathering turned into a rally with many impassioned speeches and some members indicated their willingness to mount an unprecedented interpellation of the prime minister (Brown 2007, 9). The next day, the amir dissolved the parliament and called a new election.

Among the issues on people's minds during and after the ensuing 2006 campaign was just who had admitted the state security forces to the precincts of the parliament, access to which is controlled by the speaker. A number of stories regarding the activities of the special forces and of a rumored group of thugs said to have been waiting for word to attack the demonstrators from outside continued to make the rounds months afterward (interviews in Kuwait, December 2006, January 2007). But most Kuwaitis, including members of parliament, attribute responsibility for the breach of parliamentary immunity to the speaker. Although he was narrowly reelected to his position by the 2006 parliament, his authority is much diminished (interviews in Kuwait 2006/2007).

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Plus C'est Le Même Chose

Despite these dramatic alterations in Kuwait's political universe, some of its aspects display strong continuity. One is personality politics. The tiff between Ahmad al-Sadoun and Ahmad Baqr is just one example of the tendency of some Kuwaiti politicians to behave like prima donnas rather than as rational holders of the public trust. Sadoun's antagonism to the ruling family had blossomed during the suspension of parliament from 1986 to 1992. It was annealed in the heat of the unusually brutal repression (by Kuwaiti standards—see Al-Najjar 2001) of the "Monday *diwaniyyas*" in 1989–90. As speaker, he had coordinated these weekly meetings to give citizens the opportunity to voice their dissatisfaction with the regime's crackdown on human rights and the continual absence of parliament from Kuwaiti political life (interviews in Kuwait 1990). Sadoun's reelection as speaker in the 1992 parliament restored the institutional forum from which he could continue his critique of the Al Sabah. His position

had become precarious by 1996, however, although he managed to hold on to the speakership by a one-vote margin against a challenge by Jasim al-Khorafy. Thanks to ruling family intervention, Sadoun lost to Khorafy when the 1999 parliament was organized (Tétreault 2000), and in subsequent reruns of their rivalry in the two subsequent (2003 and 2006) parliaments. Another example is Walid Tabtaba'i's attempt to prolong the amiri transition by taking sides in the ruling family's quarrels. It was quickly scotched by Khorafy. Parliamentary personages argue that their stands are taken for the benefit of constituents and there is some truth to this. Yet they are quick to grandstand against attempts to build coalitions intended for precisely that purpose. In an onslaught against Abdulla Nibari during a 2001 debate on privatization, for example, Abdulla was brutally attacked by Ahmad al-Sadoun and Walid Tabtaba'i among others (*Arab Times*, December 5, 2001). Their bullying performance earned them extensive coverage in the press but it did not produce a privatization policy that a majority of members could support.

Personality politics is corrosive not only because it damages the ability of interest-based coalitions to form and hold together, but also for what it portends for party politics in the future. Winning slates will depend upon the ability of parties to discipline their members, choosing among them both for their ability to attract voters to support the party slate and with regard to the likelihood that the persons chosen will stand fast on the party's platform as candidates and as members of parliament. In the 2006 parliament, the most potentially damaging result of Ahmad al-Sadoun's personality politics is that it will undermine the Alliance coalition.

The dangers of personality politics for any interest-based coalition can be found in the plethora of similar aspirants running for parliament in a single district. Each one may be quite convinced of his—and now also her—suitability for the job. Yet, given the predominance in Kuwait of what the late V. O. Key (1949) called "friends and neighbors" voting—which draws supporters on the basis of personality and relationships rather than program or party—the tendency to mount "vanity" candidacies does little more than scatter the vote. Tribal leaders figured this out very early and instituted "tribal primaries" to identify the most popular candidates from their clans who wished to run for office, requiring the losers to drop out to enhance the probability that at least

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one clan member would be elected (Gavrielides 1987). Quasi-primaries have been run by other groups, such as the Sunni primaries run in *diwaniyyas* in 1992 and 1996 (Tétreault 2000). In 1998, primaries by any group, tribal or otherwise, were made illegal but there has been virtually no enforcement of this law.

Vanity candidacies and personality politics had an unfortunate impact on female candidates in 2006. Jenan al-Boushehri started out as the only woman running in the April 2006 *baladiya* by-election in Salmiya but was joined by another female candidate some weeks later. In the interim, Jenan and her supporters had done a remarkable job, fanning out into the community to mobilize female and Shi'i voters and speaking at gatherings in and outside the *baladiya*. After the polling, the second female candidate, Khalida al-Kheder, threatened to challenge the results on the grounds that some women had voted with covered faces (*Arab Times* April 5, 2006), but the vast difference between Jenan's and Khalida's totals (1807 and 79 respectively) demonstrated the distance between serious politics and a vanity candidacy. Combining the votes of the two women would not have overturned the result, but a single female candidate with a strong program might have won a larger total vote as well being able to establish a firmer foundation for women running for office in the future.

A similar situation took shape in the parliamentary election a little over two months later. This was most notable in District 10, where the strongest candidate, Rola Dashti, competed not only against a long slate of men but also against five other women. Even if women expect to attract some support for their gender alone, this is not a reasonable basis for electoral success. The results in District 10 illustrate how the multiple valences of female identity work in practice. Women can't expect to get "the women's vote" because it does not exist any more than "the men's vote" exists. Women, like men, vote on the basis of many considerations from ideology and program to tribe and sect. Jenan al-Boushehri attracted more male than female votes in the Salmiya by-election, and it is highly likely that the majority came from Shi'i men. No doubt most of her female votes came from Shi'i women. The candidate who won the seat came from the dominant tribe in the *baladiya*; did Yousef Al-Suwaileh win because he was a man or because he was from Al Azmi? The importance of identifying with a broad coalition of interests and identities is clearly indicated by these results.

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The political changes that converged in 2006 could pale in comparison to the changes that the first major action of the new parliament set in train. How the five-district electoral system will shape the politics of the next parliament remains a bundle of unknowns. The new configuration of constituencies, plus the novel and as-yet-undetermined reactions of female voters to the performance of their 2006 choices, makes the 2010 election likely to produce another round of nearly revolutionary changes in Kuwait's body politic. Some argue that the only way to make electoral choices intelligible to voters, who will be able to select four from what are likely to be scores of candidates running in larger and more diverse districts, is to move to a party system that would offer slates. How the slates would be drawn up is another question. On the one hand, parties or, failing the legalization of parties, political groups, are likely to be constrained by fears of scattering their vote to limit their slates to four persons, thus acting as the equivalent of the tribal primary system. A desire to attract female voters to its slate might encourage a party to recruit one or two women. But even if such a party were able to win four seats in every district, it still would only have 20 members in the National Assembly, not even a majority among elected parliamentarians, much less in the body as a whole. Consequently, the need for coalition politics will not go away; indeed, the need to appeal to a more diverse constituency is likely to grow.

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The very worst example of continuity was corruption in the 2006 election. District 10 was most in the news on this issue, with charges supported by cell-phone recordings made of operatives for Jamal al-Omar offering Chanel handbags to women who promised to vote for him (interviews in Kuwait). Theoretically, the shift to five districts will make this kind of electoral corruption much more expensive and therefore less likely—it's one thing to buy one or two thousand votes; it's something else entirely to buy ten or twenty thousand. But it is too soon to conclude that the five-districts reform will end electoral corruption, although it may well alter its nature. Because elections will be more expensive, even wealthy candidates who wouldn't dream of buying votes outright will find it difficult to woo supporters in other ways, such as by plying them with ice cream and roses. They may be cheaper than Chanel handbags, but ice cream and roses for tens of thousands still can run up quite a bill. What is more likely than ending corruption outright is that the five-districts reform will

reverse the direction of agency. Instead of candidates buying votes, voters could buy candidates by exchanging campaign contributions for future services and favorable regulation.

This brings us to "service members," the most ubiquitous manifestation of electoral corruption in Kuwait. During the 1992 campaign I found that one of the most notorious service members kept a computerized list of his voters and the government benefits he had transferred to them in return for their support. Collusion with cabinet ministers ensures that electoral corruption equates to government corruption—cabinet ministers, serving at the pleasure of the amir and prime minister, are the sources of most of the benefits service members convey to their constituents. Although this interlocking system of favors and payback is not the sole source of corruption in the government, it is a crucial one because it normalizes criminal behavior and gives thousands of citizens vested interests in its continuation.

The Future Lies Ahead

This vacuous slogan presents a fascinating prospect for people who enjoy politics—whatever future lies ahead for politics in Kuwait is bound to be full of excitement and surprises. While I do not want to make predictions about who will win in 2010, I can suggest where to look for the some of the surprises as well as for sources of trends.

First, the strong performance of a few female candidates in 2006 has made them and perhaps other well-known women who did not run attractive as coalition partners in electoral politics in the future. Veterans also have the advantage of experience on the campaign trail. The pressure to compose slates to rationalize voting in the new large districts could very well lead to the inclusion of promising female candidates on party/group lists. While it make take more than one or two elections to produce a female winner, such an integration of women into the normal politics of elections will hasten this process.

Second, women's interests were incorporated into platforms because even highly misogynist candidates soon saw which way the wind was blowing. Most set up women's committees and cast themselves as champions of policies women were thought or known to favor. For the winners, it's time to deliver

because the prospects for payback are high. A huge number of women attended campaign events and even more turned out to vote. The intensity of women's interest in their first experience as voters means that they are unlikely to forget campaign promises, no matter how easily they slip the minds of the winners.

Third, since the amiri transition, the government itself has become more open to popular pressure. Because the prime minister is no longer the Crown Prince, he has to satisfy a broad range of interests to remain in power. The size of the reform coalition, thanks to the emphasis on corruption during the campaign, not only puts pressure on the reform winners to stick to their program but also gives the prime minister an interest in supporting them. This is another structural support for reform.

But a push for structural changes to the as-yet-untried five-district system is percolating, and they go beyond calls for the legalization of political parties. One is to revisit the five districts and merge them into one. Such a fully at-large system is arguably unconstitutional since the Kuwaiti constitution speaks of election districts in the plural, which, in Arabic, means three or more. Some favor a one-district system because they see in it a potential to include more political "minorities" in the parliament, yet one could just as easily imagine precisely the opposite result.

It is probably wiser first to concentrate on reforms that would help the five-district system to be run fairly, such as improving procedures and instituting measures to make ballots legible to voters whose choices will be expanded— by the inclusion of people they might never have heard of or whose ballot names are misleading (Arab Times, January 13, 2007; interviews in Kuwait). Such reforms are far from trivial, especially reforms to institutionalize political groups and give them greater authority. In Kuwait, the outcome could be a party system in which religious and secular parties would compete on substantially equal grounds, despite the relative advantages that religious parties enjoy in terms of organization and resources (e.g., Brown 2007). That these parties, through the Alliance "group of groups," have already tasted the fruits of cooperation, offers hope that political change in Kuwait can continue on the path of non-violent reform ■

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