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Arab Spring and Women in Kuwait

Muhamad S. Olimat¹

Abstract

The Arab Spring, a revolutionary wave of protests and rebellions, and a process of regime change and democratization is sweeping the Arab world, but marginally touching women's issues in Kuwait. While Arab women in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, Jordan, and Syria are active participants and co-beneficiaries of the process of change, Kuwaiti women have lost their electoral gains made in 2009 in the latest elections held in February of 2012. The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of Arab Spring on women in Kuwait, and their continued struggle for political participation in the country. It will also highlight the accomplishments of the women's movement and its inability to utilize the general atmosphere supportive of women's rights in Kuwait to maintain its parliamentary representation in the Kuwaiti National Assembly.

Key words: Arab Spring, Kuwait, Kuwaiti Women, Kuwaiti National Assembly, Elections, Parliamentary Government, women's issues, regime change, democratization, Arab women.

Arab Spring

Arab Spring is a term widely used in media and literature to refer to the Arab revolutionary momentum that gathered strength toward the end of 2010 and continues today. It accomplished major gains by toppling some dictatorial regimes in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia. The peak of the Arab Spring was the demise of the Mubarak regime in Egypt on February 11, 2011, eighteen days after massive demonstrations erupted in the country. After decades, if not centuries of systematic humiliation, the Arab people finally demanded freedom and justice.

In Kuwait, Arab Spring has had a mixed impact. Kuwaiti people observe and interact with changes occurring in the region, and are actively engaged in Arab Spring at home. They have strongly supported the process of change in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and elsewhere, and are particularly supportive of Syrians. Their financial and moral support, their donations, and the remarkable role of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have made the difference in mobilizing an international movement in support of the people of Syria. The GCC is an organization composed of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. The GCC has also been instrumental in managing the revolution in Yemen, and articulating the departure of former President Ali Saleh from office in January 2012.

Kuwait's Current Political Impasse

The Kuwaiti National Assembly hardly ever finishes its constitutional term of four years because of frequent conflicts between the executive and the legislative branches of government. Therefore, sometimes it holds more than one parliamentary election a year, sometimes one, and sometimes every other year. Its 2009 parliamentary assembly was deemed the most corrupt in the history of Kuwait. It was termed *Khabida*, an Arabic word that refers to someone who receives bribery, as nearly half its members were implicated in a bribery scandal that rocked the

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country. Kuwait's Prime Minister, Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, nephew of Sheik Sabbah, ruler of Kuwait, allegedly funneled \$350 million to assembly government supporters' foreign bank accounts. The scandal escalated when the emir refused to fire the prime minister or act upon legitimate popular demands to dismiss him. He relented only when he saw popular outrage and the willingness of his people to join the Arab world in its anti-regime protest. On November 17, 2011 protesters stormed and occupied the Kuwaiti National Assembly demanding the resignation of the prime minister and the dissolution of the corrupt assembly. This was unprecedented in Kuwait's history, but it resulted in the government resigning on November 28, 2011, and its resignation being accepted by the emir. The prime minister's resignation letter accused some members of the assembly of "promoting disunity, doubting the integrity of the country's leaders and fabricating unfounded accusations."¹ In the absence of a functional government, the emir issued a decree dissolving the 2009 assembly and calling for elections to be held on February 2, 2012.

In the interim, the emir appointed a new prime minister who formed a government that took the oath of office in front of the newly elected assembly. He called on the people to elect their representatives on February 2, 2012, and the elections produced an Arab-Spring-type assembly in which over half its members were from the Islamist opposition. The election was considered transparent, especially by foreign observers who were allowed for the first time to witness, and the government reluctantly accepted the results. Since February, the assembly has been in constant quarrel with the government over corruption, finances, development projects, etc., and when it uses its parliamentary grilling instrument—a procedure that involves intense questioning—the government objects. However, the assembly did manage to force out the minister of finance and the minister of social affairs and labor. When the tone of the debate exceeded the tolerable ceiling, the emir suspended the assembly for one month.

Although dissolving a parliament is not something new in Kuwait's history, in June 2012, four months after the dissolution of the 2009 Assembly, the Constitutional Court found that the emir's executive decree to dissolve the 2009 Assembly was unconstitutional. This was established after several members of the 2009 assembly objected to its suspension and filed law suites to examine its constitutionality; therefore, the court sided with the plaintiffs and ordered the reinstatement of the 2009 assembly and the dissolution of the 2012 one. This decision added more tension, even though it demonstrated that the court established and affirmed its judicial review power, a principle well established in modern democracies. Under the current conditions of two suspended assemblies, the resignation of most of their members, the resignation of some cabinet ministers, and the failure of the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches of government to cooperate, Kuwait was brought to a halt. The opposition called for renewed protest, and raised the ceiling of its demands. By the end of June 2012, thousands of people gathered in front of the assembly demanding change and chanting Arab Spring slogans. Their demand was a constitutional monarchy in which the prime minister comes from the elected assembly and not appointed by or from the family of the emir. Sadly, the 2012 "Arab-Spring" Parliament did not produce female members. In fact, women lost the four seats gained in the 2009 assembly, and this called into question their electoral credibility to win seats without government intervention.

Kuwait has conducted regular and irregular elections since 1921, making it a unique country in the Middle East. In fact, unlike its neighbors, it enjoys political freedom and freedom of the press. Kuwait's constitution organizes its political process in terms of government structure, parliamentary procedures, and governance at large. Table 1 provides a summary of

Kuwait's parliamentary elections over the past nine decades in terms of number of candidates, number of districts, appointed and elected MPS, and sectarian affiliation.

Table 1: Kuwait's Elections Since 1921

Year	# of Candidates	# of Districts	Elected MPs	Appointed Cabinet/MPs	Sunni MPs	Shi'at MPs	Women MPs
2012	286	5	50	15	43	7	0
2009	211	5	50	15	41	9	4
2008	275	5	50	15	45	5	0
2006	253	25	50	15	46	4	1
2003	246	25	50	15	45	5	0
1999	287	25	50	15	44	6	0
1996	229	25	50	15	45	5	0
1992	278	25	50	15	45	5	0
1985	231	25	50	15	47	3	0
1981	446	25	50	15	46	4	0
1975	86	10	50	15	41	9	0
1971	191	10	50	15	44	6	0
1967	219	10	50	15	42	8	0
1963	202	10	50	15	45	5	0
1962	NA	10	20	15	18	2	0
1938	NA	NA	20	NA	20	0	0
1921	NA	NA	20	NA	20	0	0

- Data collected from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior website: <http://www.moi.gov.kw/portal/venglish/>
- Michael Herb's database on Kuwait's elections: <http://www2.gsu.edu/~polmfh/database/database.htm>
- Author's calculations.

Women and Elections

Kuwaiti women have been an integral part of Kuwait's political scene in terms of participating enthusiastically in electoral cycles, and in the last four in particular. The nature of such engagement and organization, or the lack thereof, impacted women's electoral accomplishments and potential in Kuwait. The election law (35/1962) and its modified versions in 1981 and 2005 govern electoral politics in the country. In fact, the 2006, the 2008, the 2009, and the 2012 parliamentary elections were held under two different electoral systems, though the unifying element was women's active involvement, even though such involvement did not yield significant gains to women's cause in Kuwait.

In the 2006 election, Kuwait was divided in 25 electoral districts, each with two seats (the 25-district system), while the 2008, 2009, and 2012 elections were organized under the 5-district system, each with 10 parliamentary seats. Legislators should serve for four years with no term limit, and eligible voters were granted four votes to cast in the National Assembly's elections. The law prohibits members of the armed forces, police personnel, and members of the ruling family from running or voting in the elections. The law also prohibits naturalized citizens of less than thirty years from running for office, but not from voting.

The four elections are comparable among themselves as far as enthusiasm, organization, resources devoted to the elections, and to some extent, to platforms. In the 2009 elections, women's issues occupied center stage, while combating corruption and economic development were the main themes of the February 2, 2012 elections. The most recent elections were organized in the shadow of Arab Spring, brought about by a wave of protests in Kuwait, escalating demands for rooting out corruption, and efforts to develop a parliamentary democracy. In 2009, women became viable candidates for office on their own for the first time, and male candidates competed as never before for women's vote. This process prompted male candidates to give substantial support and concessions to women in the areas of social services, employment opportunities, family law, and custody and citizenship rights to children of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaiti citizens. In the 2012 elections, women's issues were marginal and hardly discussed on candidates' platforms. Kuwait was preoccupied with the corruption scandal that ended the 2009 assembly, development projects, and demands for a constitutional monarchy, in addition to regional issues associated with Arab Spring. Table 2 illustrates the general results of the February 2012 elections in terms of districts, precincts, number of male and female voters, and number of MPs. It becomes evident that the gains women made in the previous elections (2009) were totally reversed.

Table 2: 2012 Elections, number of districts, precincts, number of male voters, number of female voters, number of male and female MPs and total voters

Districts	Precincts	Male Voters	Female Voters	Male MPs	Female MPs	Total # of Voters
1	19	31, 613	37,519	10	0	69,132
2	13	20,380	23,093	10	0	43,473
3	15	27,754	34,833	10	0	62,587
4	18	43,552	56,330	10	0	99,882
5	20	52,380	57,336	10	0	109,716
Total				50	0	384,790

Source: Table constructed from data provided by Vote for Kuwait at <http://voteforkuwait.com/>

The most remarkable aspect of the 2009 election was electing four female candidates to the National Assembly. Women's struggle paid off when Massoma Al Mubarak ranked top winner in her (1st) district enjoying 14,247/69,132, Salwa Al Jassar won a seat in the 2nd district, and Aseel Al Awadi and Rula Dashti won seats in the 3rd district. However, the conservative nature and the demographic composition of the 4th and 5th district influenced voters against the four female candidates to the assembly. In this election candidates fought fiercely for female citizens' vote because women's issues were dominant in electoral platforms. For example, women demanded equal housing and employment opportunities. They also demanded citizenship rights to children born to Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaiti citizens.

The current Kuwaiti law and government policies are clearly in violation of the constitution because men and women married to non-nationals are treated differently. While Kuwaiti men married to non-Kuwaiti women enjoy the full protection of the law, Kuwaiti

women married to non-Kuwaiti men do not have any such security; their children are not citizens so they are not entitled to socio-economic or political rights and privileges. In 2012, platforms for the five districts had similar aims: economic development, a constitutional monarchy, scaling down corruption, and support toward Syrians and other Arab people under regime oppression.

Table 3 provides information on female MPs, districts, number of votes and rank among their counterparts in their districts in 2009 and 2012. The loss of Masooma Al Mubarak ranked 11th in the first district, losing with a margin of only 56 votes. In the 2009 elections, she ranked number one in her district. Women's issues are no longer top priority in the Kuwaiti national agenda, and the excitement of their participation in 2009 wore out; now the burden rests on women to once again regain popular support and win seats in the assembly. The Kuwaiti society does not seem to be impressed by women's brief experience in the assembly; this partially explains the lack of support of women candidates.

Table 3: Female MPs, district, number of votes/total votes and rank in 2009 and 2012

Candidate	District	Votes in 2009	Total Votes in the District (09)	2009 Rank among Winners in District	2012 Rank among Winners and losers in District	Votes in 2012
Masooma Al Mubarak	1	14247	69,132	1 st	11	7,563
Salwa Al Jassar	2	4776	43,473	10 th	19	2,995
Aseel Al Awadi	3	11860	62,587	2 nd	13	6,073
Rula Dashti	3	7666	62,587	7 th	20	2,784

- Table constructed from data provided in Al Jareda Daily, May 17th, 2009.
- Vote Kuwait, 2009 at: <http://voteforkuwait.com/>
- Vote Kuwait, 2012 at: <http://voteforkuwait.com/>

Districts and Election Results in 2012

In the 2012 elections, (Table, 4), only Masooma Al Mubarak had a strong chance in district 1 to win a seat. There were two other female candidates who won little below 200 votes in the district, however, all Masooma needed to win her seat back was exactly 56 votes. Had women voters in the district gave one of their four votes to Masooma she could have won her seat easily, and possibly ranking among the first top five winners. However, women in general have shown little interest in supporting female candidates, which is consistent with their voting pattern since women won their right to vote and run for the assembly, in 2005. For cultural reasons, women in Kuwait feel more secure to grant leadership roles to men, therefore, vote for men not for women. The top winners in District 1 (top ten), are all men, and no female candidate made it in this district.

Table 4: District 1- Top Ten Winners (1-10), losers (11-above) and Number of Votes

Number	Name	M/F	Number of Votes
1	Faisal S. Al Duissan	M	14,094
2	Syed H. Al Galaaf	M	11,394
3	Mohammad H. Al Kandari	M	11,305
4	Usama I. Al Shaheen	M	10,872
5	Abudlhameed A. Dashti	M	9,709
6	Saleh A. Ashour	M	9,622
7	Ahmed H. Lari	M	8,164
8	Adel J. Al Damkhi	M	8,090
9	Adnan S. Abdulsamad	M	7,812
10	Abdullah Al Turijie	M	7,619
11	Masooma Al Mubarak	F	7,563
12	Khalid H. Al Shatie	M	7,281
13	Mubarak S. Al Harees	M	7,233
14	Abdullah Y. Al Rumi	M	7,177
15	Wasmi K. Al Wasmi	M	7,009
16	Hasan A. Jaher	M	5,197
17	Mohammad M. Al Hadia	M	5,131
18	Esa A. Al Kandari	M	4,929
19	Mohammad H. Al Rasheed	M	4,113
20	Anwar B. Al Dahoom	M	3,877

Source: the table is compiled from data provided by Vote for Kuwait, 2012 at: <http://voteforkuwait.com/?p=9182>

In district 2 (table 5), platforms focused on the issues of development, protecting the constitution, and rooting out corruption. The voting pattern in the district is also consistent with other districts in which no female candidate made it to the assembly in this districts either. Salwa Al Jassar who ranked number 2/10 in the 2009 elections, ranked 19 in the 2012 elections, however, once again, if women rallied behind Salwa she could have easily won here seat back. But women voted consistently with the general trend of voting for male not female candidates leading to women's utter loss in this district as well, the table bellow presents data on district 2.

Table 5: District 2- Top Ten Winners (1-10), losers (11-above) and Number of Votes

Number	Name	M/F	Number of Votes
1	Jam'an Al Harbash	M	8,475
2	Ryad Al Adasani	M	6,401
3	Mohammad Al Sager	M	6,198
4	Ali Al Rashid	M	6,148
5	Marzouq Al Ghanim	M	5,667
6	Hamad Al Mattar	M	5,624
7	Abdulrahman Al Anjari	M	5,537
8	Adnan Al Motawe	M	5,064

9	Khalid Al Sultan	M	4,778
10	Abdulatif Al Omiri	M	4,643
11	Mishari Al Osimie	M	4,561
12	Khalil Al Saleh	M	4,402
13	Mohammad A. Abdeljadir	M	4,387
14	Khalad Dumithir	M	4,084
15	Fahd Al Khunna	M	3,626
16	Adel Al Khurafi	M	3,368
17	Abdullah Al Ahmad	M	3,331
18	Abdullah Al Arada	M	3,231
19	Salwa Al Jassar	F	2,995
20	Mohammad O. Al Mutiri	M	2,343

Source: the table is compiled from data provided by Vote for Kuwait, 2012 at: <http://voteforkuwait.com/?p=9182>

The 3rd district (table 6) was probably the most exciting in the 2009 and the 2012 elections in terms of popular involvement in the process, and in the nature of political fights that erupted among candidates. Aseel Awadi, Safa Al Hashim, and Rulla Dashti, three viable candidates, two of whom former assembly members, however, the three of them lost in this district as well. Once again, if the top three female candidates coordinated with each, and if one of them withdrew in favor of the two other candidates, women could have won at least two seats in the district. Also, if women voters in the district gave one of these four votes to female candidates, Aseel, Safa and Rulla could have been easily elected to the assembly, but women votes overwhelmingly for male candidates.

Table 6: District 3- Top Ten Winners (1-10), losers (11-above) and Number of Votes

Number	Name	M/F	Number of Votes
1	Faisal A. Al Musalam	M	16,383
2	Faisal S. Al Yahya	M	11,771
3	Walid Al Tabtabi	M	11,175
4	Mohamad Al Dallal	M	10,802
5	Ahmed Al Sadoun	M	9,950
6	Ali. S. Al Omeir	M	9,911
7	Shai'e Al Shai'e	M	8,959
8	Nabil Al Fadel	M	8,675
9	Mohammad Al Juihel	M	8,331
10	Ammar Al Ajmi	M	7,697
11	Saleh Al Mula	M	6,539
12	Rawdan Al Rawdan	M	6,522
13	Aseel Al Awadi	F	6,073
14	Safa Al Hashim	F	5,021
15	Jamal Al Omar	M	4,275

16	Hisham Al Baghli	M	4,229
17	Khalil Abdullah	M	3,505
18	Abdullah Al Mayouf	M	3,262
19	Mohammad H. Bushahrie	M	2,855
20	Rulla Dashti	F	2,784

Source: compiled from data provided by Vote for Kuwait, 2012 at: <http://voteforkuwait.com/?p=9182>

In district 4 and 5 (tables 7 and 8), candidates focused on issues of economic development, in addition to voicing their objection to the criminalization of tribal primaries in the district. The fourth and fifth districts have always been hard for women to compete in, due to their demographic composition, and tribal structures. However, Thikra Al Rashidi was a viable candidate in the 2012 elections although she ranked number 21 among candidates, but if women voters gave her one of their four votes, she could have easily won a seat in the assembly.

Table 7: District 4- Top Ten Winners (1-10), losers (11-above) and Number of Votes

Number	Name	M/F	Number of Votes
1	Mussalam Al Barak	M	30,118
2	Mohammad H. Al Mutiri	M	25,585
3	Obid Al Wasmi	M	22,068
4	Mubarak Al Wi'lan	M	14,593
5	Ali Al Dugbasi	M	14,371
6	Mohammad Al Khalifa	M	10,898
7	Shu'ieb Al Muwiseri	M	10,781
8	Usma Munawer	M	10,591
9	Sa'd Al Khanfoor	M	8,379
10	Mohammad Al Hatlany	M	7,251
11	Abdullah F. Al Enezi	M	7,240
12	Askar Al Enezi	M	7,038
13	Mohammad T. Al Enezi	M	6,649
14	Mohammad M. Al Musilem	M	6,649
15	Ahmed N. Al Fhuri'an	M	6,170
16	Majid M. Al Mutiri	M	5,915
17	Nawaf S. Al Mutiri	M	5,559
18	Mubarak Al Hajraf	M	5,408
19	Difullah Abu Ramia	M	5,063
20	Turgi S. Al Mutiri	M	4,990
21	Thikra A. Al Rashidi	F	4,943

Source: the table is compiled from data provided by Vote for Kuwait, 2012 at: <http://voteforkuwait.com/?p=9179>

In the 5th District (table, 9), candidates called for resolving the issues of the “stateless,” (people residing in Kuwait without citizenship and estimated at over 100,000) given the fact that most of them reside in the 4th and the 5th district. In addition to the two main issue which are rooting out corruption and economic developmental projects. In the fifth district, no female candidate was viable in the 2012 elections; however, if women voters gave one of their four votes, at least one female candidate could have won a seat in the district. If women learned how to build-bridges with the tribes in the fourth and fifth districts, women could have easily won at least two seats in those two districts as well.

Table 8: District 5- Top Ten Winners (1-10), losers (11-above) and Number of Votes

Number	Name	M/F	Number of Votes
1	Falah Al Sawagh	M	26,871
2	Khalid Al Tahoose	M	22,748
3	Bader Z. Al Azemi	M	15,027
4	Ahmed A. Al Azemi	M	14,765
5	Sifi Al Sifi	M	14,666
6	Naief A. Al Ajmi	M	13,747
7	Abdullah Al Bargash	M	13,075
8	Khalid S. Al Mutiri	M	12,560
9	Salem Al Nimlan	M	12,052
10	Mnawer Al Azemi	M	11,362
11	Ayed Al Utibi	M	9,712
12	Faisal Al Kandari	M	8,177
13	Humedi Al Subi’ei	M	8,075
14	Mohammad H. Al Huila	M	7,487
15	Madi Al Hajeri	M	5,903
16	Fahd Al Duiseri	M	4,738
17	Nasser Al Marie	M	4,729
18	Abdullah Al Tamimi	M	3,677
19	Khalid H. Al Haz’a	M	2,406
20	Eidan Al Khalidi	M	2,086

Source: the table is compiled from data provided by Vote for Kuwait, 2012 at: <http://voteforkuwait.com/?p=9178>

Kuwaiti Women and Electoral Impediments

In two previous articles², I discussed the main electoral obstacles to women’s electoral success in the 2006, the 2008 and 2009 elections. In the 2009 elections it was evident that women had managed to overcome some of these obstacles as they were able to obtain a limited, but remarkable electoral triumph, although lost it completely in 2012 elections. Women constitute 57% of the electorate in Kuwait. In practical terms, women should have 27/50 members, or the equivalent of 57% or more in the National Assembly, since they constitute the

majority of the vote in the country, however, none of that materialized. In 2009, women also managed to infiltrate districts 1, 2, and 3, but were unable to breakdown the rigidity in the 4th and 5th districts, while women lost in all five districts utterly in the 2012 elections. Masooma Al Mubarak in district 1, was the closest to winning a seat as she ranked 11 in her district. She needed 56 votes to win the tenth spot in the district, therefore joining the assembly. The results of the February 2, 2012 are disappointing in the sense that they are inconsistent with women's electoral potential, the size of their involvement in politics in Kuwait, and the national, regional and international support that women have enjoyed in terms of their political rights in Kuwait. At any rate, women's inability to maintain their seats in the 2012 alludes to the fact that, women's electoral potential suffers from structural problems that continue to persist, and therefore, will most definitely continue to have a destructive impact on women in Kuwait. Their inability to win any seat in the Eleventh (2006) or the Twelfth Assembly (2008), a limited number of seats in the Thirteenth Assembly (2009), and lost utterly in the Fourteenth Assembly (2012) is due to several reasons:

Time Considerations and the Election

In the aforementioned previous articles on the topic, I listed time consideration as one of the impediments for women to secure any electoral success in the 2006 and to some extent in the 2008 elections, however, in the 2009 and the 2012 elections, time had no significant impact on women's electoral success. Contrary, women in the last three elections have had seven solid years to coordinate their efforts, and achieve some accomplishments; something materialized in 2009, but totally lost in the 2012 elections. Women gained their right to run for office on May 19, 2005; however, their utter loss in last February's (2012) elections indicates that, other obstacles played their role in women's defeat in the elections.

Heavy Competition among Women Candidates

Heavy competition among women candidates continues to have a devastating impact on women's opportunities to win seats in the assembly. It limited their opportunities in the 2006 elections, it destroyed any electoral potential for women in the 2008 elections, and limited the scope of their success in 2009 to four seats, and did a fatal blow to women in 2012, whereas no female candidate managed to win a seat in the assembly. Masooma Al Mubarak who ranked number one in district (1) in 2009, and ranked 11 in 2012, could have easily won the tenth rank should the two other female candidates in the district withdrew in her favor, or if women voters in the district gave her one of their four votes. The same applies to the other districts. The heavy competition dilemma persists in district three (3) more than any other district, where prominent women candidates continue to compete in the district, leading to their defeat. Women in Kuwait, continued to ignore the urgency to unify their vote, and missed the opportunity to do so since 2006. In 2006, in which two leading female figures –Dashti and Anjari- competed, they split women's vote in critical areas like the Tenth District, leading to their loss, and in District 3 a catastrophic split of women's vote between Awadi and Dashti led again to their failure in 2008.

The same scenario nearly threatened both Dashti and Awadi in the 2009 elections, though both managed to win seats in the 3rd district given the fact that women's presence there proved to be solid. However, Dashti marginally won the 10/10 spot, while Awadi won the 7/10- spot. In 2008, if either Awadi or Dashti had withdrawn or coordinated with the other, women would have won at least one seat in District 3. The combined vote of Awadi and Dashti was 9637, which would easily have put one of them in the 6/10 position. The same scenario of 2006, 2008, and

2009, was repeated in the 2012 elections leading to the utter loss of all female candidates in the district. In the 2012 elections, nine (9) female candidates competed in the third (3d) district including two former members of the assembly, Rula Dashti and Aseel Al Awadi. Al Awadi ranked 13 with 6,073 while Dashti ranked 20, with 2784 votes. Had other women candidates in the districts supported Aseel and Rula, both of them would have won back their seats. Had anyone of them withdrew and supported the other, women could have easily won a seat in district 3, but they did not leading to their loss. As for District 2 in the 2012 elections, there were seven (7) female candidates, including former member of the assembly Salwa Al Jassar. She ranked 19 with 2,995 votes. Had the seven women candidates coordinated among themselves, at least Al Jassar would have won her seat back. In fact, women could have won two seats in the second district if they had realized the importance of unifying their vote, but they did not. As for the fourth district, there were three female candidates. Thikra Al Rashedi ranked 21 with 4943 votes, even with the two other female candidates withdrawing in her favor; it still could have been difficult for her to win a seat there. However, once again, if women voters in general supported women candidates, women could have won 5/10 seats in this districts and other districts as well. As for the fifth district in 2012, there was only one female candidate, Anwaar Al Gahtani. She ranked 36 with 316 votes. She had no chance of winning except with general support from female voters in the district, who as usual supports male candidates, not women's candidates.

While heavy competition might have been understandable in the 2006 elections as women were experimenting with electoral process given the fact that, they won the right to vote a year earlier, they had no excuse in 2008 or 2009 or in 2012 given that all indications alerted them to the necessity of unifying their vote to secure representation in the assembly. Table 9 illustrates women's heavy competition in the five districts, in the 2012 elections in terms of the number of votes and the rank among overall candidates in each district.

Table 9: 2012 Female candidate and number of votes among male and female candidates in each district

Name	District	Number of Votes	Rank among candidates
Sabah Al Mumin	1	122	48
Nora Al Darwish	1	71	54
Masooma Al Mubarak	1	7563	11
Salwa Al Jassar	2	2995	19
Uroob Al Rifaei	2	1838	23
Rehab Boursally	2	767	28
Rasha Al Saiegh	2	682	30
Khalida Al Khuder	2	67	48
Summer Al Rumi	2	31	51
Nawal Al Bakhet	2	15	59
Aseel Al Awadi	3	6 073	13
Saf'a Al Hashim	3	5 021	14
Rulla Dashti	3	2 784	20
Su'ad Al Tararwa	3	1 881	27
Nabeela Al Anjari	3	700	35
Na'ema Al Hai	3	95	47

Shikha Al Ghanim	3	93	48
Fatima Al Shaieji	3	85	49
Maytham Dashti	3	56	55
Latifa Al Sageel	3	14	66
Thikra Al Rashedi	4	4 943	21
Thikra Al Majdeli	4	447	37
Salwa Al Muteri	4	141	41
Anwar Al Ghtani	5	316	36

Source: table is constructed from data provided by: Vote for Kuwait at http://voteforkuwait.com/?page_id=9155

Also, Michael Herb's Database on Kuwait, Georgia State University at: <http://www2.gsu.edu/~polmfh/database/elec201200d200801.htm>

Rivalry, Animosity, and Division within the Women's Movement

Since the 1960s, rivalry, animosity, and division continue to have devastating consequences on women in Kuwait. In the Post-Oil era class divisions and the escalation of conflict among women led to the disbanding of the Kuwait Women's Union in 1974. Rivalry and conflict among leading figures that belonged to different classes made it impossible for women to work together in 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2012 elections.³ Divisions seemed unbridgeable. In 2009, these threatened women's opportunities and ended women's hopes for any seat in the 2006 and 2008 elections. The table above shows the intensity of women's competition in 2012 and its impact on women's utter defeat. In districts 1, 2 and 3, women had a significant chance to win minimum of four seats, however, their rivalry, division, and unwillingness to coordinate or work together led to their failure to win a single seat, although, Kuwait at large, and the regional and international support and momentum generated by Arab Spring is conducive for a remarkable electoral success estimated at 20 to 30% in the assembly, which has not materialized so far.

Political Culture in Kuwait

Political culture is cited by scholars of political development and democratization as a primary impediment to Arab women's progress, political participation and political leadership. Although this assumption might be partially accurate in the case of Kuwait, especially in districts dominated by the tribes, the fourth and the fifth district, it's not the case in Kuwait at large. Kuwaiti women enjoy a wide range of freedoms, and have managed to send four MPs to the 2009 Assembly, but lost their gains in this years' lections, February 2012. It's also true that tribes in Kuwait have mastered electoral politics in Kuwait and they act as full political parties with mechanisms of primary elections, fund-raising, campaigning, and platforms. Kuwaiti tribes usually control around (30%) of the assembly's seats, and strongly guard their rights and privileges. This does not mean that the 4th and 5th districts are immune to women's influence. On the contrary, women can win seats in those districts and the other three districts (1, 2 and 3) if they manage to coordinate with the tribes and coordinate amongst themselves. Tribes in Kuwait and in the Middle East at large have shown tremendous level of flexibility, accommodation, willingness to adopt to change, and be part of modernization in the region. The problem sometimes resides in modern civil society organizations that are unwilling to work with traditional and indigenous political arrangements to advance the cause of women in Kuwait, and

elsewhere. Although Thikra Al Rashedi ranked 21 among the candidates in the fourth district (4), but she managed to win 4943 votes, and she could have won a seat, had women in the district gave her one of their four votes, but they did not.

Lack of Confidence in Women Candidates

Women voters in Kuwait have consistently shown their lack of confidence in female candidates. They continue to vote for men, even at times, they vote in male candidates who are known for their hostility to women's rights in Kuwait. Furthermore, the Kuwaiti election law grants each voter a number of four votes: one man /four votes, instead of one man /one vote. The objective is to ensure that no tribe or political coalition can control more than 40% of the legislature. If each woman voted, gave one of her four votes to a female candidate, women would have a minimum of five seats and as high as 27/50, taken also into consideration that women account for 57% of the electoral vote in the country. The lack of confidence in women, by women can be explained in the sense that women feel safer to place leadership roles in the hands of men, than women. Also, the Kuwaiti politics has been dysfunctional for the last two decades in particular, and perhaps women believe that men are more able to manage parliamentary discord in the assembly than women.

Coalition Building and Electoral Politics in Kuwait

Although the Kuwaiti women movement has a long history of involvement in public life, it has demonstrated repeatedly its inability to build coalitions with existing political forces in Kuwait. Women have no clear strategy in dealing with conservative forces, Islamists, liberal Islamists, tribal coalitions, or even secular liberals who are traditional allies of the women's movement. Such failure led to the utter loss in the 2006, 2008, partial loss in 2009, and utter loss in 2012. Had women coordinated with other forces, Masooma Al Mubarak in district 1, could have easily won her seat back, as she ranked 11 in her district. The same applies to district 2 and 3 in particular, while 4 and 5 needed closer coordination, coalition building with conservative and liberal forces in the two districts. In order for women to win representation in the assembly, they must demonstrate willingness, ability and skills to exercise electoral politics including coalition-building, otherwise, they will continue to lose election in the country.

The Maturity of the Women's Movement in Kuwait

Despite the fact that the Kuwaiti women's movement has been active in public life over fifty years, it is very surprising that its maturity into an orderly, disciplined, and specific goal-oriented movement has been deeply questioned by observers. The lack of maturity was catastrophic in the 2006 and 2008 elections, while in 2009 women have shown some change in the way they perceive female candidates and their ability to run and win seats in the Assembly, a trend reversed in the February 2012 elections. If the women's movement manages to organize, assemble, mobilize women's vote and utilize the Arab Spring's atmosphere supportive of women's rights, women candidates should win 20/50 or a minimum of 5/50 of the seats, in the second 2012 up coming elections.

Tribal Primaries

Another aspect cited as an obstacle to women's electoral success was tribal primaries. This partially explains the electoral difficulties women continue to have in Districts 4 and 5, both of which are predominantly tribal in nature. Kuwaiti law criminalized and condemned tribal

primaries as an unfair political practice, but tribes continued to organize them. In the 2009 election was decriminalizing tribal primaries. From a tribal perspective, primaries assisted tribes in ruling out candidates with the least opportunity to win, therefore concentrating on candidates with better prospects of success. In fact, tribal primaries should be viewed as an indication of political development in Kuwait, rather than being a regression to tribal backwardness and self-centeredness. If tribes are conducting primaries, women should do the same to narrow the number of female candidates, and rally behind them to ensure parliamentary representation. Women should quit blaming the tribes and Islamists for their electoral misfortune and work with conservative current to win seats and representation in the assembly.

Islamists and Women in Kuwait

By far, Islamists are the biggest winners in Kuwaiti elections since the 1980s. They also highlighted their electoral success in the 2012 elections, when they won over half of the assembly's seats. Islamists are the clear winners of Arab Spring as well. In Tunisia, Morocco, Libya and Egypt, Islamist Prime Ministers and Presidents are the current incumbents in these countries. In other countries, Islamists are leading opposition and they are expected to lead in Jordan, Yemen, the Sudan, Mauritania, and in Syria as well. In fact, the obstacle here does not stem from Islamists' opposition to women, contrary; they have shown tremendous support to women's issues across the region. The obstacle is namely working together, coordinating together and building bridges between the Islamic movement and the women movement in Kuwait, as the case in other countries. Moreover, women's vote made Islamists triumphant in Kuwait, Morocco, Tunisia and elsewhere. Islamists reciprocated, supporting women in these countries and ensuring their parliamentary representation. Therefore, instead of colliding with Islamists, the women movement in Kuwait would be in a much better position to coordinate with Islamists: Salafis, Muslim Brotherhood and Shi'a Islamists. Female-Islamists should also be encouraged to run for office similar to women in Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq and Jordan.

Conclusion

Women have been active participants in Kuwait's public life. While they have made substantial progress in the socio-economic spheres, they have lagged behind in the area of political participation. Women won their right to vote and run for office in 2005, however, since then has not been able to solidify their presence in the national assembly or in the political life of Kuwait. Women constitute 57% of the electorate in the country, but they have no female representation in the assembly. Women managed in the 2009 elections to win four seats, alas, lost them in the 2012 elections. Therefore, in order for women to regain their seats in the assembly, women must overcome the electoral impediments that continues to prevent them from winning any seat in the assembly, among which are lack of confidence in female candidates by female voters, lack of coalition-building skills, inability to utilize the supportive atmosphere of Arab Spring to women's rights, heavy competition in some districts and rivalry. In the upcoming elections that has not been scheduled yet, but most certainly in the summer of 2012, women should be able to win at least five seats if they coordinate with each other, and with existing political forces in the country. The people of Kuwait want to see an active role of women in politics, but the women's movement is unable to utilize the public support into gains in the assembly.

Endnotes

¹ CNN News Network: <http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/28/world/meast/kuwait-government/index.html>

² See Olimat, Muhamad articles on Women and Politics in Kuwait. *Journal of International Women's Studies* Vol. 11 #2 November 2009, and Women and the Kuwaiti National Assembly. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 12 # 3.

³ For more information on inter-women conflicts see, Al Qabas, May 19, 2008, Al Jarida, May 19, 2008, and the authoritative book of Al-Mughni, Haya, *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender*, Saqi Books, 2001.