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By Muhamad S. Olimat[1]

Abstract

On May 17, 2008, Kuwait conducted its Twelfth election of its National Assembly. The most remarkable aspect of the election was the active participation of women, who gained their right to vote in May 2005. This paper argues that the main impediment for women's inability to win any seat in the 11th and 12th Assemblies is their failure to work with each other and support their political rights. The objective of this article is to examine the Kuwaiti women's struggle for political rights, their participation in the last two elections and investigate their inability to win any seats, in spite of the conduciveness of the political environment to their electoral success.

Key words: Kuwait, women's movement, Political IslamMuslim Brotherhood

Political Modernization in Kuwait

Kuwait's modern political history began in the 1960s. The country gained its independence from Britain on June 19, 1961. However, historians date back the existence of Kuwait as a political entity to the early years of the eighteenth century. For instance, Crystal maintains that Kuwait "has been a distinct political entity since it was founded early in the eighteenth century"1, while Tétreault refers to the period from 1896-1915 as a critical period in the history of the process of power consolidation in the country.2 Al-Mughni, maintains that "early in the eighteenth century, structural changes began to occur in Kuwait, caused by a complex of factors" among which "was the revival of European mercantilism and its penetration into northern parts of Arabian Gulf". She continued to say that "Kuwait flourished in the second half of the eighteenth century" due to its strategic location and its free-trade policy.3 Overall, the political history of Kuwait can be classified into three major periods; the pre-oil Kuwait which began in the early Eighteenth Century to 1960, the Independent Kuwait from 1960 to the Iraqi invasion on August 2, 1990 and the Post-liberation Kuwait. In the pre-oil era, Kuwait was a small port on the Northern tip of Arabia with limited resources. In the era of independence, Kuwait was a vibrant society empowered by a modernizing monarch –Amir Abdullah Assalim Assubah (r: 1950-1965), a vibrant government, and abundance of oil wealth. However, Kuwait's developmental efforts were greatly hampered by some domestic, regional and international challenges that shaped its politics over the past fifty years. These include the turbulence in the Middle East, Arab nationalism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iranian Revolution, political Islam, the Iraq-Iran War, the Iraqi invasion, the American occupation of Iraq and the current War on Terrorism. In spite of such challenges, Kuwait has managed to rebuild itself and build a distinguished model of democratization in the region. Currently, Kuwait is freer than any other Arab country in the region, and enjoys a wide range of freedoms incomparable to most Middle Eastern countries.

Women's Rights and the Constitutional Framework of Kuwaiti Politics

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The Kuwaiti constitution which was adopted in 1962, provided for a wide-range of freedoms for the people of Kuwait. In essence, the constitution was heavily influenced by the US Constitution, the French and the British legal tradition. It is also heavily influenced by Kuwait's Arab-Islamic heritage and body of jurisprudence.

Part III of the constitution entitled Public Rights and Duties provided for a wide range of freedoms for Kuwaitis equally. Article 29 states that "All people are equal in human dignity, and in public rights and duties before the law, without distinction as to race, origin, language or religion", but the article did not mention "gender". Furthermore, the constitution provided for citizenship and nationality rights (27), right to residency (28), equality (29), personal liberty (30), unreasonable search and freedom of movement (31), due process of law (32), personal reasonability and protection from collective punishment (33), presumption of innocence (34), freedom of religion (35), freedom of expression (36), freedom of the press (37), sanctity of the home (38), freedom of communication, from censorship and prior-restraint (39), right to education free of charge (40), the right to employment (41), no forced labor (42), freedom of association and the right to civil-society institutional building (43), freedom of assembly (44), the right to petition authorities (45), and the protection of political refugees (46). Moreover, the constitution listed some duties such as national defense (47), and the "observance of public order and respect for public morals are a duty incumbent upon all inhabitants of Kuwait" as major pillars of the Kuwaiti society.4

Women's Struggle for Political Rights & Participation:

In spite of the constitutional freedoms provided to all Kuwaitis equally -men and women- a systematic process of discrimination and marginalization of women from politics has been exercised and institutionalized by law over the last fifty years. I.e., women enjoyed a constitutional right of political participation, but they were denied it by practice. Al-Mughni put it neatly maintaining that:

> "The constitution of Kuwait declares men and women be equal before the law and guarantees them equal rights to education and paid employment. But equality means guaranteeing not only of equal rights, but also of equal opportunities for both men and women. In practice, the principle of equality has been absent from state policies. For instance, the Electoral Law denies women the right to vote or to run for election"5

The most oppressive manifestation of such discrimination was the election law of 35/1962 which deprived women of the right to participate in politics. Article (1) states that" to every Kuwaiti male of twenty one years of age the right to vote"6, therefore, excluding women from the political sphere and confining them to their homes. The male controlled legislature vehemently opposed women's rights from 1976-2005, and introduced strict gender-segregation bills in 1992, compelling the Amir (ruler) to issue decrees to enfranchise women such as the May 16, 1999 Decree, which was struck down by the conservative assembly. Al-Mughni maintains that in the pre-oil Kuwait, women lived in total seclusion to the extent that "the world of women has been so cut off from that of men that any history of Kuwait requires a separate chapter devoted to women"7; the purpose of the strict seclusion was to control women during periods of long male absence in trade voyages. Women were also subjected to harsh punishments to keep them in their place and "honor crimes" went unverified and unpunished. They were also required to exercise

extreme modesty in dress code, and social behavior. Honor crimes refer to "the murder of a woman by one or more members of her family for bringing shame or dishonor to her family or the community she lives in. These killings are the result of the belief that the defense of honor justifies the murder of a woman whose behavior tarnishes the image of her clan or family."8 Honor killings continues to be a major concern for international human rights organizations, as well as women's organizations not only in Kuwait, but also in Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and most of the Arab world.

In post-oil Kuwait, the government of Kuwait realized the importance of women in the modernization process, especially in labor force. Women benefited tremendously from the financial resources made available to Kuwaitis especially in the area of education. Some women pursued their higher education in leading Arab and Western universities and therefore, upon their return led a movement called for the expansion of women's rights in the country. They achieved remarkable levels of success in the areas of economic and social development, while continuing their struggle for political participation. Women established organizations which played a critical role in advancing their causes. They also channeled women's energies into social development, education, cultural activities, sports, charitable care, provided women with a voice in the public square, expanding women's opportunities and fighting for their political rights, which proved to be agonizing processes that consumed their energies for fifty years.

In the first three decades of the post-independence period, three women-secular organizations competed for women's voice in the country. The Cultural and Social Society (CSS) was established in 1963, which was a voice of merchant class women, while the Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS) licensed same year, was a voice of the middle class Kuwaiti women, and the Girls Club was established in 1976. Al-Mughni found out that the two main organizations, the CSS and AWDS "had very few contacts with one another. Each group pursued its own activities based on its own view of the correct role of women in the society. The CSS saw its role specifically in terms of providing entertainment for its members and charity for the poor, whereas the AWDS aimed to modernize society and raise the status of women"9. The lack of working relationship between them proved to be detrimental to women's cause and had an ever lasting impact on the women's movement in Kuwait. Its impact was apparent in the 2008 elections, when women due to historical discord failed to support their gender, leading to their utter loss. Remarkably, efforts were made to unite both organizations by the Kuwaiti government, and finally led to the establishment of the Kuwaiti Women Union (KWU) in December of 1974, but they remained organizationally separate. A third organization was formed, the Girls Club in 1976 due to the rivalry between the two groups. However, the continued rivalry between CSS and AWDS promoted the government to dissolve the KWU on the 27th of April, 1977, and the dissolution of AWDS, on November 15 1980. The disappearance of AWDS, left middle class women with no organizational representation, a trend continued to have devastating impacts on women's achievements in Kuwait. Some of them found refuge in Islamic women associations in the 1980s, onward. In retrospect, AWDS's most celebrated achievement was the 1973 Equal Rights Bill put before the National Assembly which highlighted women's quest for "equal rights"10 in all societal spheres. At the center of the bill, was AWDS's demand for equal political rights and restrictions on polygamy. While, there was a momentum generating for the enfranchisement of women, parliamentarians vehemently rejected any restrictions on polygamy, and were alarmed by the scope of feminist demands.

The 1980s witnessed the Islamic Revival and resurgence of Islam as a force to reckon with. At the heart of the revival movement was the Mosque becoming the center of life and

politics in the Middle East and the Islamic World. Kuwait was influenced heavily by such trend similar to other countries in the region. Kuwaiti-Islamists women established two civil society organizations; the Bayader al-Salam, and the Islamic Care Society to represent the emerging Islamic voice in the Kuwaiti politics. Their goal covered a wide range of issues such as charity, ethics and morality and contributing to the Islamic project. However, their agenda and mandate went far beyond Kuwait to include the Islamic causes worldwide such as Palestine, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Muslims in Africa, etc. as they were part of the international Islamic brotherhood societies. The later aimed at accomplishing "the Islamic Project" which entails a comprehensive process of Islamization to state and society across the Islamic world.

The government of Kuwait renewed its interest in women's political participation in the 1980s. In 1981, the Crown Prince stated that "the time has come to take note of the position of the Kuwaiti woman and her effective role in society and put forward the matter of the vote to study and discussion"11 Accordingly, Al-Takheim, a member of the parliament supportive of women's enfranchisement introduced a modest bill which calls for granting women the right to vote, but not to hold office. However, the bill was defeated by a margin of (27:7) with 16 members abstained.

The Kuwaiti women movement, however, was not deterred by the setback, and continued its struggle for enfranchisement. In 1982, some nationalist and Islamist parliamentarians reintroduced the bill for vote, but the assembly's Legal Affairs Committee blocked the bill and asked for a religious edict from the Ministry of Islamic Endowments and Islamic Affairs, on the permissibility of women's participation in politics. The ministry issued its edict on July, 24 1985 stating that "the nature of the electoral process befits men, who are endowed with ability and expertise; it is not permissible for women to recommend or nominate other women or men"12 The Muslim Brothers, liberals and nationalists, and feminists protested the edict. However, the Amir of Kuwait suspended the assembly few months later, and Kuwait went through a period of political stagnation until the Iraqi invasion in summer of 1990. In this period; the Kuwaiti women movement retreated to household issues. On the other side, the Kuwaiti government and the region was preoccupied with the devastating Iran-Iraq War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and its aftermath, the consequences of the Israeli occupation of Beirut, the growing influence of the Palestinian community in Kuwait, the decline of oil revenues and the internal strife. However, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, on August 2, 1990, was the most catastrophic event ever happened to Kuwait since its inception in the 18th Century. Its impacts seem eternal on the state and society in Kuwait.

In the post-War Kuwait, women's issues were on the top of the national agenda. Women's participation in liberation efforts, were recognized, and therefore, the government sought to reward them. The government also conceded that the absence of the parliament assisted in the deterioration of political conditions in the country, leading to the Iraq invasion. However, on the Kuwaiti political scene, there was tremendous chaos as the country struggled to rebuild itself. Major fights broke between the political forces especially liberals and Islamists. One of the aspects of such conflict was that; the Sunni-Muslim Brotherhood movement revised its position that was supportive of women suffrage, while liberals and Shi'at-Islamists continued their support to women's struggle for political participation. Kuwait was very polarized politically. Repeatedly in the 1990s, calls to enfranchise women were utterly rejected. Furthermore, Sunni Islamists supported by conservative tribal MPs introduced a sort of apartheid legislation sought to segregate the Kuwaiti society along gender lines in 1992. The 1990s decade was consumed by discord leading to the dissolution of the parliament repeatedly and

prematurely. The conflict had made it impossible to govern, to the extent that the ruler of Kuwait, Amir Jaber dissolved the parliament on May 3, 1999, and called for elections as the constitution stipulated in article 107, meanwhile, Amir Jaber issued 63 decrees among which was "granting women the right to run for office and to vote in parliamentary and municipal election by 2003, which surprised politicians, observers and women alike."13 The new parliament utterly rejected the 63 decrees. However, a bill was introduced to the parliament on November 30, 1999, in which women lost (32:30), with two abstentions, and six members absent.

The latest successful attempt to enfranchise women was made by late Amir Jaber in May 2005, which was approved by the assembly on May 16, 2005 by a margin of 35/23. Therefore, Article I, of the election law (35/162) reads: "every adult Kuwaiti citizen, aged 21, has the right to vote, except a naturalized citizen, who has not been in that status for at least 20 years." It further states that "A Kuwaiti women, voting and running for political office, should do so while fully adhering to the dictates of Islamic Shari'a".14 The suffrage of women doubled the number of the electorate from 195,000 to 350,000, with women representing 57% of the electorate. Granting women political equality was not only a moral imperative but also a culmination of hard work on the part of the women's movement in Kuwait over fifty years. It was also a result of education, youth involvement in politics, societal openness, the impact of regional and global trends of democratization, and the need for such a move in Kuwaiti's domestic political equation. However, despite the remarkable achievements women have made in the socio-economic realm, they lagged far behind politically. Women in Kuwait represent 33.8% of the labor force and 70% of higher educational institution's graduates, and have a literacy rate of (81.0)15, but their political accomplishments remain marginal.

Description of the 2008 and 2006 Elections
The Kuwaiti election law (35/1962) and its modified versions in 1981, and 2005, govern electoral politics in the country. Accordingly, the 2006, and the 2008 parliamentary elections were held under two different electoral systems. The 2006 election was organized under the 25 district system in which Kuwait was divided into 25 electoral districts, each of which with two seats, while the 2008 was organized under the 5 districts system, each of which enjoys 10 parliamentary seats. Legislators serve for four years with no term limit and eligible voters are granted four votes to cast in the National Assembly's elections. The law prohibits members of the armed forces, the police personnel, and members of the royal family from running or voting in the elections. The law also prohibited naturalized citizens of less than thirty years from running for office, but not from voting.

As far as enthusiasm, organization, resources devoted to the elections, and platforms are concerned, both elections are comparable. Tables (1,2) shows basic figures in terms of the number of districts, number of voters, total electoral votes, etc, for the 2008 elections, while Table (2) provides detailed date on the 2006 elections. Two major differences occurred; the redistricting of the 2008 elections, and the passing a way of former Amir Shiekh Sa'ad Al Abdullah on May 14th, 2008, three days before the elections. Shiekh Sa'ad, who was Crown Prince and Prime Minister, was accredited with his tireless efforts to restore the monarchy in Kuwait during the Iraqi invasion, at a time, late-former Amir Jaber seemed to resign to the idea that Kuwait's sovereignty won't be ever restored. There was a societal sadness, and three days national mourning, which limited the scope of campaigning in the last three most critical days of the election, from the 14th-17th of May 2008.

Table 1: The 2008 Elections:

Districts	Number of Candidates	Number of Female Candidates	Candidates Withdrew by May 9th, 2008	Number of Male Voters	Number of Female Voters	Total Electoral Votes
1	65	4	18	30070	36571	66641
2	47	2	12	19262	22103	41365
3	56	12	8	25618	33056	58674
4	54	5	45	39360	54351	93711
5	53	4	22	46876	54418	101294
Total	275	27	105	161186	200499	361687

Source:
- Data provided by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior at:
http://www.moi.gov.kw/portal/venglish/
- Author's calculations.

Table 2: The 2006 Elections: districts, total vote, number of candidates, male and female eligible and exercised vote and total turnout:

District Number	Total Votes	Number of Candidates	Males Eligible	Females Eligible	Male voted	Female Voted	Male vote Percentage	Female vote Percentage	Total Turnout Percentage
1	6959	11	3794	3165	3221	2170	85	69	77
2	5119	8	2392	2727	1996	2063	83	76	79
3	5158	8	2540	2618	1980	1752	78	67	72
4	7374	14	3817	3557	3152	2523	83	71	77
5	7614	11	3589	4025	2951	2833	82	70	76
6	7938	10	3354	4584	2634	3050	79	67	72
7	6690	6	3229	3461	2657	2422	82	70	76
8	20139	11	7709	12430	6140	7155	80	58	66
9	7873	9	3465	4408	2821	3028	81	69	74
10	18779	16	6882	11897	6547	5224	75	59	67
11	12962	13	4896	8066	4714	4531	54	52	67
12	14084	15	4977	9107	3948	5060	79	56	64
13	14672	15	7364	7308	5890	4827	80	66	73
14	8837	10	4735	4102	3952	2832	83	69	77
15	19847	6	8748	11099	6760	6496	77	59	67
16	16559	8	7032	9527	5418	6034	77	63	69
17	20025	7	7489	12536	5836	6733	78	54	63
18	13481	11	6064	7417	4929	5104	81	69	74
19	17823	11	5952	11871	4570	6695	77	56	63

20	15782	9		7144	8638	5645	5174	79	60	69
21	30970	10		11512	19458	7887	9286	69	48	55
22	16981	7		8412	8569	6198	4498	74	52	63
23	15319	6		6581	8738	4625	4348	70	50	59
24	17572	11		8704	8868	6547	5224	75	59	69
25	11691	6		4957	6734	3114	2056	63	31	44
Total	340248	194910	145338	194910	111118	114132	33.5. 2%	32.7%	66.2%

- Table is compiled of data provided by the Kuwait Ministry of Interior at: http://www.moi.gov.kw/portal/venglish/
- on the official results of the June 29th Elections of the 11th Kuwait National Assembly. The total eligible voters were 340,248 including 194,910 women and 145,338 men. Total voter-turn out was 66.2%.
- Author's calculations from data provided by KUNA, Newspapers, and other sources.

Table 3: Provides a summary of Kuwait's parliamentary elections over the past seventy five years in terms of number of candidates, number of districts, appointed, elected and sectarian affiliation.

Table 3: Kuwait's Elections Since 1921

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

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

Obstacles to Women's Electoral Success
There is no doubt that women in Kuwait have made remarkable levels of success in the socio-economic fields, but lagged far behind in the area of political development. This explains their inability to win any seats in the Eleventh, or the Twelfth Assembly due to several reasons:

The Timeframe Available and the Election
The margin of time necessary for women to prepare for elections was a major issue led to women's loss. While time was detrimental to women's cause in the 2006 elections, it had a mixed impact on the 2008 elections. Women gained their right to run for office on May 19, 2005. The dissolution of the 10th Assembly one year earlier, on May 25, 2006 and the announcement of election date for the 11th Assembly to be organized was on June 29, 2006. The suspension of the 10th Assembly and the announcement of early elections took political forces by surprise. "Kuwaitis were left with little time to prepare, especially women who are newcomers to the electoral process."16 In some previous confrontational episodes with parliaments, Kuwaiti rulers took considerable time to announce the next election's date, reinstate the parliament or suspend it indefinitely. The current Amir, Sabah opted for a swift popular vote on redistricting via announcing early elections. Kuwaiti women, who counted on a margin of time of two years to prepare for elections, were shocked to learn that they had only five weeks to undo the impact of decades of male dominance in the parliament and the effects of centuries of a political culture unwelcoming to their participation in public life. At least one year was gravely needed to build name recognition for female candidates, spread the awareness among women on the value of their vote, and build coalitions. Women needed more time to organize training seminars in electoral politics, secure funds, and develop an independent electoral preference free from spousal, familial or tribal intervention. Furthermore, women needed time to restructure the Kuwaiti women's movement and adjusting its platform to compete on equal footing with a well-established patriarchal dominance in the politics of the country. The women's movement in Kuwait went through major turbulence since the mid 70s that shock its foundations. Therefore, a process of reconstruction to its goals, mission and methods were urgently needed. In the May 2008 elections, time was a factor but not detrimental to women's inability to win and any seat in the parliament. Women had fairly ample time for more than two years to prepare for the election, but they were unable to utilize time well to their benefit. Less preparation coincided with a thought that the 11th Assembly would finish its constitutional term (2006-2010), contributed to women's electoral difficulties.

Heavy Competition among Female Candidates
Heavy competition among women candidates had a devastating impact on female candidates. It had limited their opportunities in the elections in both the 2006, and the 2008 elections. Women missed the opportunity to realize the urgency of unifying their vote. They split their vote in critical districts such as the Tenth District in the 2006 elections, in which two leading female figures –Dashti and Anjari- competed, leading to their loss, while a catastrophic split of women's vote in District 3 between Awadi and Dashti led to their failure in last May's elections. If one of them withdrew or coordinated with the other, women would've won at least one seat, in District 3. The combined vote of Awadi and Dashti is 9637, which would easily put one of them in 6/10 position, as illustrated in Graph 1. While, heavy competition might be understandable in the 2006 elections as women were experimenting with electoral democracy, they had no excuse in the 2008 election given the fact that all indications alerted women to the

necessity of unifying their vote to secure representation in the parliament. Probably, the division among the women movement along class, regional and racial lines was critical in limiting their electoral potential. Women in Kuwait are deeply divided to middle class and merchant class; among those two classes in particular little cooperation can be found. Additionally, some women candidates put there own interest and ego above the interest of the movement refusing to coordinate with other female candidates though they knew in advance that the movement may loose at large.

Figure 1: Rank of Male and Female Candidates in the Third District
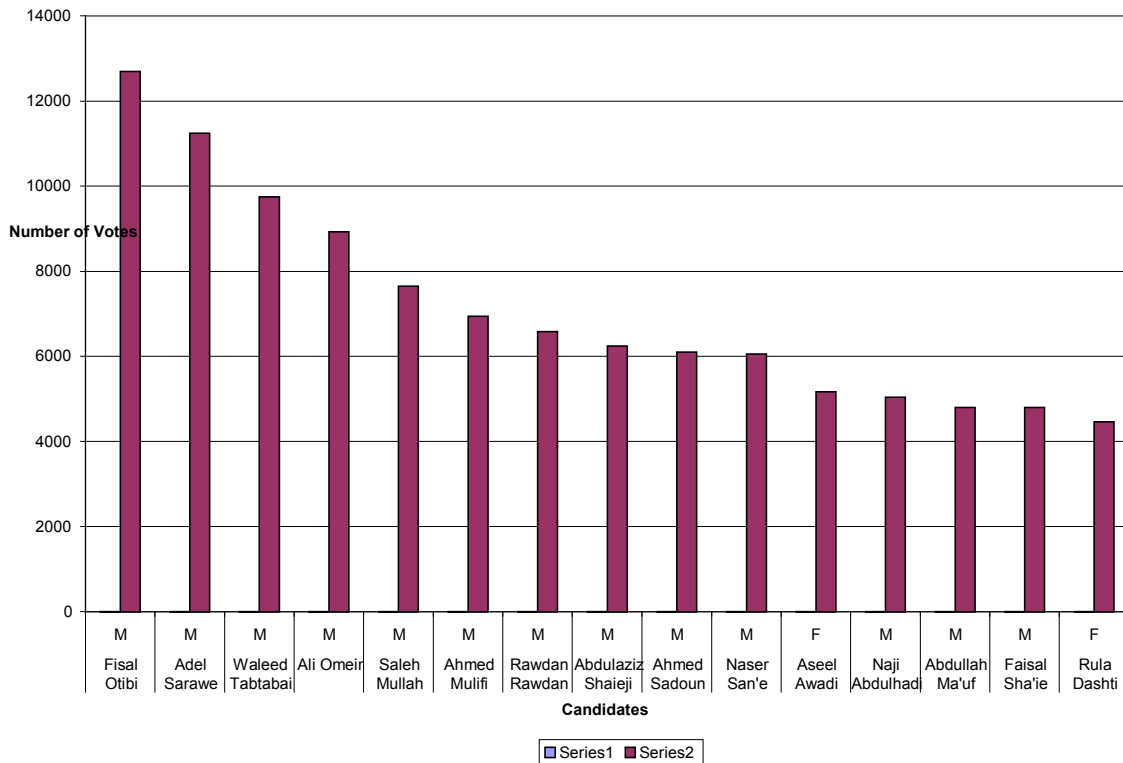
Source: Data collected from Al Qabas Daily Newspaper, Wednesday, May 21, 2008, Number 12563.

Rivalry, Animosity and Division within the Women Movement
        These three ills had their devastating roots on women in Kuwait in the 1960s. Their expression in the Post-Oil Era was class division and the escalation of conflict among women in the 1970s to the extent it led to dissolving the Kuwait Women Union in 1974. Rivalry and conflict among leading women figures who belong to different classes made it impossible for women to work together in both the 2006, and 2008 elections17. Division among women, who belong to merchant class (upper), middle class and lower classes, seems unbridgeable. Table (4) bellow shows the number of female candidates and the number of votes. A minimum level of coordination and compromise among women, would most certainly have led to wining at least one seat in the parliament. Awadi and Dashti who ran in District 3, had a combined vote 9637, which put anyone of them in the 6 out of 10 candidates.

Table 4: Names of female candidates, number of votes, district and the number of voters in the district.

Candidate	Number of Votes	District	Number of District total votes
Aseel Al Awadi	2215	3	39848
Rula Dashti	2184	3	39848
Salwa Al Jassar	2122	2	41365
Fatima Abdali	686	1	66641
Thikra Al Rashidi	558	4	93711
Fatima Al Naham	432	5	101294
Nadia Ali	428	5	101294
Ghanima Al Haider	374	3	39848
Aisha Al Khalifi	364	3	39848
Khalida Al Khader	348	2	41365
Sameera Al Shati	337	5	101294
Khazna Al Omani	300	5	101294
Najlaa Al Nagi	279	1	66641
Thikra Al Majdali	175	4	93711
Nadia Al Gina'i	151	1	66641
Shikha Al Ghanim	125	3	39848
Ameena Al Ghalaf	107	1	66641
Aisha Al Rajihi	97	4	93711
Salwa Al Mutairi	92	4	93711
Naema Al Hai	80	3	39848
Aisha Al Omiri	76	3	39848
Alia Al Enezi	72	4	93711
Jameela Al Foudari	57	3	39848
Taiba Al Ebraheem	35	3	39848
Nabeela Al Omiri	21	3	39848
Nawal Al Mugihet		3	39848
Nura Al Darweesh		3	39848

Source: Date compiled from Al Qabas Daily Newspaper, May 21, Number 12563

Political Culture in Kuwait

Political culture in Kuwait is perceived as an obstacle to women's participation18. Though Kuwaitis are much more open on global cultural trends than any country in the Gulf region, if not the entire Arab world, tribal tradition coincided with women dismissing the possibility of working with tribal coalitions jeopardized their electoral potential. Kuwait, similar to other Arab and Islamic societies, is largely driven by tribal customs and tradition. Such traditions are mostly unsupportive of women's active involvement in politics. Their role is still viewed within the domain of the household rather than in public affairs. The Kuwaiti society remains also, a male-oriented and patriarchal in nature where power and authority resides in the hands of men, the few and the elite. Overall, behind the façade of modernity, tribal traditions remain the dominant cultural framework of Arab societies and politics. On the other hand, tribes in Kuwait have mastered electoral politics. They are accustomed to conducting primaries, and devoting substantial resources to guarantee their electoral dominance in the assembly. Tribes not only have managed to secure their presumed number of candidates (30%), but also added new seats on the expense of women, liberals and even Islamists. The 3ed and 4th districts this year attest to this trend. Had women attempted to work with each other, or coordinate with tribes, they would have won at least one seat in the 3ed district.

Women's Lack of Confidence in Female Candidates

Kuwaiti women demonstrated clearly their lack of confidence in their gender when they voted overwhelmingly for male candidates. The Kuwaiti election law grants each voter, a number of four votes. I.e. one man/four votes, instead of one man/one vote. The objective was to ensure that no tribe or political coalition would be able to control more then 40% of the legislature. If each women voted, gave one of her four votes to a female candidate, women would have won a minimum of five seats, one seat in each district. It was also surprising that some male members who continued to oppose women's rights won overwhelmingly by women's vote. Probably, women's lack of support to their fellow women candidates stems also from cultural factors as Kuwaiti women, like other Arab women feel more secure in placing leadership roles in the hands of men, not women. It's true that women were overjoyed at their electoral participation; however, they continued to lack confidence in themselves and their candidate's ability to win seats in the parliament. Women seem to be satisfied with their "mere participation" in the election rather than being confident enough to secure at least one seat in the assembly.19 Women voted overwhelmingly for men instead of supporting their fellow female candidates leading to their utter loss.

Coalition Building and Building Bridges with Existing Political Forces

Failure to build coalition with existing political forces in Kuwait has been the most pervasive element in the inability of women to win any seat in the parliament. Women had no clear strategy in dealing with conservative and liberal Islamists, tribal coalitions, or even secular-liberals who are traditional allies of the women movement. The only exception in this year's election was Assel Awadi, which explains her near success in the 3ed district. Had Dashti withdrew in her favor, Awadi would have ranked 6/10, instead of marginally loosing the election as she ranked the 11th. Women must learn how to network, and coordinate closely with political coalitions to succeed. Otherwise, in the next election, their prospects wouldn't be better than the 2006, or the 2008 election.

The Maturity of the Women's Movement in Kuwait

It is very surprising that, despite the fact that Kuwaiti women movement has been active in public life over fifty years, its maturity into an orderly, disciplined and specific-goal oriented movement has been deeply questioned. Women needed to "put their house in order" so that, they could be successful in participation in politics. An important aspect of the maturity of the women movement has also to deal with women's confidence in women candidates. It's obvious from the past two elections that women had little confidence in their gender. Had women have minimal level of confidence, women would have won at least five seats in this election. But women, not only overwhelmingly voted for male candidates, but supported traditional foes of the women movement in the country. Moreover, women seem to have rewarded male candidates who established a reputation of being "anti-women's" rights, and strongly opposed granting women political rights.

Tribal Primaries

Another aspect cited as an obstacle to women's electoral success was tribal primaries. In 1998, the Kuwaiti law criminalized and condemned tribal primaries as unfair political practice, but tribes continued to organize them. Such practice assisted tribes in ruling out candidates with the least opportunity of winning, and 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. Tribes are learning how to coexist with modern political forces and live in peace with the state, table 5. Instead of blaming the tribes for their electoral difficulties, women might think in another direction, which is to attempt to work with tribes and cultivate their strength in wining parliamentary seats. I.e., women need to work with the Kuwaiti tribes rather than declare animosity towards them. Women need to realize that the underpinning of Arab politics is "tribalism", and therefore, there are no signs in the horizon showing any decline of tribalism, rather the enhancement of its role in governance. Tribes have shown tremendous level of flexibility in adapting to modernity, and therefore, provided the safest political framework for their members to participate actively in modern politics. In similar regional cases, female tribal candidates received tremendous tribal support as in case of Jordan. Tribes in the region do show pride in their male and female candidates. Thus, it is wrong to assume that tribes are "inherently" anti-women. Tribal-women movement coordination is feasible.

Islamists and Women in Kuwait

By far, Islamists are the biggest winners in Kuwaiti elections since the 1980s. The women movement and Islamists, therefore, needs to learn how to build bridges among themselves and develop a mutually beneficial working relationship. It is unfortunate to see a sort of collision occurring between women and Islamists in Kuwait. In addition to tribe, Islam remains the most powerful element in Arab-Islamic politics, and therefore, declaring animosity toward Islam is unproductive. Simultaneously, harboring ill-wishes toward women, would lead to the deterioration of support to Sunni-Islamists as we have seen in the latest elections. Both sides have comparable platforms especially in the areas of family, education, housing, pension, immigration reform, employment, national cohesion, etc. The apparent obstacle to such coordination seems to be ideological. Women's movement is viewed as "too" liberal, while Islamists are viewed as "too" conservatives and therefore, unable to work with each other. This is fundamentally wrong. Among the two movements, the commonalities outweigh differences.

Islamists must view the women movement as an ally and an asset rather than a foe, and visa versa. Islamists are not a monolithic movement in Kuwait. Shi'at Islamists are strongly supportive of women's political participation, while there is an apparent split among Sunni-Islamists. The Muslim Brotherhood is split on the issue, and predominantly supportive of women's right, while Salafi-Islamists oppose women's participation on doctrinal grounds.

Conclusion and Future Political Trends in Kuwait

Kuwaiti women have been actively involved in the process of development in the country since its independence. While, women were very successful in the area of socio-economic development, they lagged far behind in the political sphere. Their long struggle for participation did materialize in franchising women in 2005; however, it did not materialize into any electoral successes in the past two parliamentary elections. Structural factors prevented women from wining any parliamentary seat such as rivalry, animosity among women, lack of confidence in female candidates, political culture and lack of coalition-building with existing political forces. If women seek active participation in the politics of Kuwait, these concerns must be addressed before the upcoming election scheduled in 2012. However, hardly ever, did parliaments in Kuwait finish their constitutional term without being suspended for one reason or another. Therefore, it's incumbent upon women in Kuwait to evaluate their last two experiences and deal with their shortcomings immediately, in order for the women movement to assume its natural role in the politics of Kuwait. Women needs to work with each other, learn political compromise, coalition-building with tribal and Islamists camps, and coordinate with other political forces and learn how to run political campaigns. They also need to understand well the challenges facing the Kuwaiti society in order to be able to design suitable responses to such problems. Women in Kuwait need also to understand the depth of tribalism and Islamism in the country, and therefore, coexistence with such forces, is more profitable for the future of the women's movement in the country than confrontation.

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