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Kuwait: Democratization in Process

Five factors of democratization and their state in Kuwait

by

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Abstract

This thesis studies the extent at which five factors affect the democratization process in Kuwait: elections & opposition, gender, media, mass belief and international influence. This thesis finds that there are two factors that affect the process of democratization more than the rest; gender and media. Recent reforms in these respective factors affects the democratization process, the political participation and the media landscape to a considerable extent.

Keywords: democratization, Kuwait, factors of democracy, media, mass belief, international influence, gender, elections, opposition

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Table of Contents

- 1. INTRODUCTION 1**
 - 1.1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 1
 - 1.2 CURRENT RESEARCH 2
 - 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 3
 - 1.4 DEFINITION OF THE NOMENCLATURE..... 3
 - 1.5 METHOD AND MATERIAL..... 4
 - 1.6 RANKING AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE FACTORS 6
 - 1.7 LIMITATIONS 7
 - 1.8 DISPOSITION 8
- 2. BRIEF BACKGROUND ON KUWAIT..... 9**
- 3. FIVE FACTORS OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN KUWAIT 12**
 - 3.1 ELECTIONS & OPPOSITION 12
 - 3.1.1 ELECTIONS & OPPOSITION IN KUWAIT..... 13
 - 3.2 MASS BELIEF AND POLITICAL CULTURE..... 17
 - 3.2.1 KUWAITI MASS BELIEF AND THE CULTURE OF POLITICS 18
 - 3.3 GENDER..... 20
 - 3.3.1 WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION..... 21
 - 3.4 MEDIA 24
 - 3.4.1 THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE OF KUWAIT 25
 - 3.5 INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE 28
 - 3.5.1 INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES IN KUWAIT 29
- 4. CONCLUSION 31**
- 5. SOURCES..... 34**

1.Introduction

The Arabian Peninsula has not followed Samuel Huntington's three waves of democracy due to one decisive factor. Oil. Oil fuels the economies of the world, about 35% of the world's energy consumption is based on oil. The amount of oil that is concentrated on this peninsula is vast. While most countries in the Gulf Cooperating Council (GCC) do not demand taxation, they also do not provide representation in a meaningful manner. Kuwait however, is an exception, as it allows a modicum of representation. Kuwait has a long (in terms of GCC) tradition of parliamentarism. Political disputes are not only centered within the royal family, or the government, but also to an extent within the people of Kuwait. The media is relatively free and the political landscape in Kuwait is nonpareil in comparison to the rest of the GCC. Yet, democracy in Kuwait is still not even in its infancy.

1.1 Statement of Purpose

The aim of this thesis is to explore a specific set of factors and to see whether, and to what extent they play a part in the democratization process in Kuwait. This set consists of elections and opposition, gender, mass belief, media and international influence. These are factors of democratization that all exist in Kuwait. When these factors attain a certain standard, meaning that these factors could be considered 'free and functioning' by international measures, they increase the probability of democratization. However, they do not guarantee democracy by their presence alone.

Kuwait has democratic elements built into the state apparatus that make this a highly desirable country to investigate closer. The factors of democratization play an important role in the society of Kuwait, meaning that the stronger these institutional factors are rooted into the Kuwaiti society, the more democratic it will become. Due to these democratic elements Kuwait is the chosen country of research in this thesis.

It can be argued that the pivotal factor hindering democratization is oil and rent. Kuwait is a rentier state. It receives rent from natural resources and from investments made with the

profit received from hydrocarbons. The state, which is independent of the people, provides employment and security in return for acceptance of the current political order. It cannot be said that the royal Al-Sabah family rules the country with an iron fist, but they are nonetheless detached from society due to their wealth, much like the rest of the state. Because of the state's independence from the people, there is no pressure on the government to reform itself.

Much of the current research focuses on the rentier state model. I will investigate other factors beyond the rentier state model, while I acknowledge that the oil factor in combination with an extremely generous welfare state, is the main reason for why Kuwait, in its current state, has not developed into a democracy.

1.2 Current Research

Current research on Kuwait is available to an extent. Though international scholars do write about Kuwait in regard to oil a lot more than in relation to democratization studies.

Heather Deegan noted in her research, *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy* (1991) that Kuwaiti state building was problematic due to citizenship and oil while Bradley Louis Glasser considered the impact of rent in *Economic development and political reform: impact of external capital on the Middle East* (2001). In both Glasser's and Deegan's research Kuwait is used as an example not as a singular focus of a whole study. In addition to this Mary Ann Tétreault's monograph *Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait* (2000) is one of the most thorough studies of Kuwaiti political life since Jill Crystal's *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (1995). Tétreault's monograph contributed to the mapping and understanding of the Kuwaiti political sphere.

Over the last ten years the foundation of new institutes and economic development in the Persian Gulf has lead to the increased research on the GCC. Like for example the foundation of the Gulf Research Center in Dubai. However, scholars disagree on the outlook for democracy in the GCC, some are more positive while others remain pessimistic. For example the paper 'Challenges facing Kuwaiti democracy' by Ghanim Alnajjar (2000), is optimistic while other are more negative, like the article 'Democracy in Kuwait is a promise unfulfilled' by Susan B. Glaser (2003). Some have an even more pessimistic view like

Michael Herb's 'Parliaments in the Gulf Monarchies are a long way from democracy' (2008).¹ Out of this research my interest grew to look at factors that did not deal with traditional issues such as oil and rent. Hence five factors were considered to 'fill' the gap in the study of democratization in Kuwait.

1.3 Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to analyze and problematize the extent of the effect that the chosen factors (elections & opposition, mass belief, gender, media and international influence) have had on the democratization in Kuwait. In other words;

1. *What is the extent of these factors presence in Kuwait?*
2. *How do the factors function in Kuwait in terms of democratization and have these factors increased the momentum of democratization?*

1.4 Definition of the Nomenclature

There is no unequivocal definition of democracy, but the definition used in this thesis is provided by Robert Dahl;²

1. **Effective participation:** All citizens must have equal and effective opportunities for expressing their preferences through the process of making binding decisions.
2. **Voting equality:** Every citizen must have an equal and effective opportunity to determine the outcome of political decision making processes.
3. **Enlightened understanding:** Citizens must have adequate and equal opportunities to learn about relevant policy alternatives and their likely consequences.

¹ Kapiszewski, Andrzej, 'Elections and Parliamentary Activity in the GCC States: Broadening Political Participation in the Gulf Monarchies', Khalaf, Abdulhadi & Giancomo, Luciani (eds.), *Constitutional reform and political participation in the Gulf*, 2006, p.90.

² Dahl, Robert, *Democratization and its Critics*, 1989 as cited and arranged in Bernhagen, Patrick, 'Democracy and Democratization', Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009, p. 26.

4. **Control of the agenda:** Citizens must have the exclusive opportunity to decide which matters are placed on the public agenda, and how they get there.

5. **Inclusion:** All permanent adult residents must enjoy full rights of citizenship.

This is achieved when the following institutional factors are in place;³

1. Elected political officials
2. Free and Fair elections
3. Inclusive Suffrage
4. The right to run for public office
5. Freedom of expression
6. Alternative sources of information
7. Associational autonomy (the freedom to form organizations)

The definition for democratization used in this thesis is clearly defined by Oliver Schlumberger who states that "...describes a special case of systemic political transition, namely the one from a non-democratic system to democracy".⁴

In order to achieve democratization, a certain degree of liberalization must occur. Political liberalization means that the public space is expanded by recognizing and protecting political and civil liberties. The line between liberalization and democratization is blurred to the extent that these concepts are often confused. The distinction, however, is important. It is possible to have elements of one without the other.⁵

1.5 Method and Material

The method that is used in this thesis is a structural and an actoral analysis of the factors of democratization in Kuwait, preceded by a presentation of the factors. The presentation of each factor includes a description of its nature and how it affects democratization. With the help of this presentation, the effect that the factor has on Kuwait is then presented in the application chapter of each factor. The reason for the choice of these factors, as opposed to Freedom

³ Dahl, Robert, *Democratization and its Critics*, 1989 as cited and arranged in Bernhagen, Patrick, 'Measuring Democracy and Democratization', Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009, p. 29.

⁴ Schlumberger, Oliver, 'The Arab Middle East and the question of Democratization: Some critical remarks', *Democratization*, 2000, p. 109.

⁵ Brynen, Rex & Korany, Bahgat and Noble, Paul, 1995, pp. 3-4.

Houses index, is that these factors can exist without the democratization being ‘liberalized’.

The reason for why the study *Democratization*, edited by Christian W Haerpfer, & Patrick Bernhagen & Ronald F. Inglehart, and Christian Welzel (2009), is chosen as the main source for the theoretical framework of this thesis, is that few studies are so well structured in terms of the discussions surrounding democratization.⁶ Many of the subjects that appear in the study are well researched, like the link between business and democratization. The study was published in early 2009 and represents the most recent trends within the field of democratization research. In addition to this, the study also provides insight into areas that are less researched, like international influence, which has yet to receive a theoretical framework of study that scholars can agree on. This study highlights the essential pillars of democratization and easily defines them for students or scholars, who in turn can include these presentations in their respective fields. In addition to being an anthology of theory, the study also provokes further thought on democratization.

Other material, that has been chosen for specifically dealing with Kuwait, include studies like *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy* by Heather Deegan (1991). Even though it is almost twenty years old today, it is still relevant. This is due to the slow political development in Kuwait. For example, the Emir of Kuwait first promised to study the naturalization of women into society in 1992.⁷

The workbook *Democratization* that is edited by Christian W Haerpfer, & Patrick Bernhagen & Ronald F. Inglehart, and Christian Welzel (2009), in it self does not provide a method, but in combination with other research it can be used to develop a way of studying factors affecting democratization. For example, Mary Ann Tétreault published an essay on the state of emancipation in Kuwait in 2001.⁸ Her essay provides an excellent platform to combine with the Gender & Democratization chapter by Pamela Paxton in *Democratization*.⁹ In addition, both academic research and news items are used to support each of the applications of respective factors.

⁶ As opposed to singular studies of democratization like Louis Whitehead’s *Democratization: Theory and Experience*, 2002, and Jean Grugel’s *Democratization: A Critical Introduction*, 2001, both which also provide interesting frameworks but do not have the same scope of international expertise and clarity.

⁷ Deegan, Heather, *The Middle East and problems of democracy*, 1993, p. 40.

⁸ Tétreault, Mary Ann, ‘A State of Two Minds: State Cultures, Women, and Politics in Kuwait’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2001

⁹ Paxton, Pamela, ‘Gender and Democratization’, Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), 2009, *Democratization*, pp. 145-155.

1.6 Ranking and Justification of the Factors

Elections and Opposition are the core foundation of a functioning democracy, without them no democratization process can exist. Elections give citizens the chance to participate in the political system, to vote and to make a difference. In the case of Kuwait, elections that are conducted are considered to be 'free and fair'. This means that there is transparency according to international standards, and that real competition takes place between candidates, giving voters a real choice. Competition between candidates is not enough, a form of political opposition is also required. Without the opportunity to vote for an opposition to the majority, there is little room for the possibility to affect majority policy. This also exists in Kuwait, without there being legal parties, instead they have blocs of affiliation. Nevertheless it should be noted that no anti-governmental or anti-royalist opposition exists in Kuwait.

The following factor is women's participation in politics and is closely tied with elections and opposition. In order for a democratization process to function properly, women have to be included in the political spectrum under all circumstances. This is not only due to the fact that women usually make up half of the society¹⁰ but because men can not represent the values of women. Women see the patriarchy differently than men do, and therefore women's inclusion in the democratization analysis is the second most important factor.¹¹

Mass Belief and Political Culture also play their part in the process of democratization. What people believe, and whether they believe that the regime is legitimate or not, does affect democratization. If people are unhappy, they are more likely to support or vote for the opposition. With the help of its oil, the state of Kuwait has created an elaborate system of subsidies in order to keep its citizens happy. Generous subsidies, like a 250,000\$ bonus after ten years of employment within the public sector,¹² is guaranteed to garner support among the citizens. While Political Culture can be explained as "... defines and explains or questions the rules of the political game, and at the normative level it justifies or denies the authority of

¹⁰ In this case the female citizens make up circa 51% of the Kuwaiti citizens. - 'Kuwait population: 1 million citizens and 2.3 million expats', *Kuwait Times*, 2009, Retrieved May 18 2010, from http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=MjYxODIxMTQ5

¹¹ Paxton, Pamela., 'Gender and Democratization', Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009, pp. 145-155.

¹² El-Rashidi, Yasmine, 'Easy Money: In Kuwait, Gush Of Oil Wealth Dulls Economic Change; Government Spending Surges, As Perks Flow to Citizens; Long-Term Woes Put Off; Ms. Jaafar's Plush Villa', November 4 2005, *Wall Street Journal* (Eastern Edition), Retrieved May 17 2010, from http://www-personal.umich.edu/~twod/oil-ns/articles/democ/wsj_kuwait_boom_open_mkt_04nov05.txt

those who play it and of the institutions within which the players interact”.¹³

The Media is an indirect factor of democratization, but because it is centrally tied to everything in society, it is still counted as a factor of democratization. The media is *de facto* the most efficient method for the government to communicate with the people, via television and radio. Not only is the media a communication tool, but it also performs a series of functions, like observing or criticizing the government, corporations and their respective international relations.

Finally, international influence does affect democratization, mainly through governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, it is rather hard to measure international influence, as it occurs on so many different levels simultaneously, therefore it is not entirely clear how research would be conducted in this particular area. Conflicts can also bring about international influence and have an impact on democratization. This factor has not been subjected to comprehensive research and has only recently begun to interest social scientists. No coherent system of research exists to study international influence, as a result.

1.7 Limitations

One limitation of this thesis is that it will not discuss how oil affects the Kuwaiti society, as it does in so many ways. The state collects no major taxes, and so relies on income from oil and foreign investment. The effect of oil on Kuwait is widely researched, and is quoted as the main reason for the lack of political as well as economic reform.¹⁴ In spite of that, there are many aspects that are often overlooked which also play an important role in the political development of society. Kuwait is an extensively developed country, ranking as “highly developed” in UN's Human Development Index and surpassing all other countries in the Persian Gulf in this index.¹⁵ There is no question that oil has brought high-income levels and education to the people of Kuwait. Yet, there are troubles with a massive welfare state, and

¹³ Aronoff, M. J., 'Political Culture', in J. Smelser Neil and B. Baltes Paul (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford: Pergamon), 2001, 11640-44.

¹⁴ Cavatorta, Francesco, 'The Middle East and North Africa', Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009, pp. 330-331.

¹⁵ - Human Development Reports, *UNDP*, 2010, Retrieved May 17 2010, from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

the guarantee of employment for citizens. It is evident that oil is therefore the biggest hinder for the development of a democracy in Kuwait. Even though this thesis does not discuss oil as a factor per se, but because oil has a substantial impact on the factors chosen indirectly some examples portraying this will be used.

1.8 Disposition

After this introduction a short background of Kuwait will be presented. In the main body of this thesis each factor is first presented. Where its relation to democratization is clarified. After this the factors are discussed in relation to Kuwait. The presentation of the material is then followed by a conclusion part, tying together the highlights of the analysis, and with final remarks on the factors of democratization.

2. Brief Background on Kuwait

Kuwait has been ruled by the Al-Sabah (The Morning) family since 1751. Kuwaiti society is composed of the royal family, the merchant class, which owns several banks and other large corporations and, forms the central support of the Al-Sabahs, and the citizens. In addition to this, there are also Bidoons, people without Kuwaiti citizenship, but who are permanent residents of Kuwait. The Al-Sabah family came to power with the help of the merchant class, that gave them the power to reign whilst the merchant class would be in possession of all business and in this way finance the Al-Sabah's rule.¹⁶ This is how the status quo was achieved in Kuwait. This status quo was disturbed when oil was discovered. It tilted the balance of power, and the Al-Sabah family became financially independent of the merchant class. The merchant class was given lucrative contracts and subsidies in order for its continued support. The merchant class of Kuwait still makes up the backbone of the royal family's support.¹⁷

In 1899 Kuwait achieved a British protectorate status, having been a part of the Ottoman Empire up to this point. Nevertheless, Kuwait had autonomy during the Ottoman era. The Ottomans tried to regain Kuwait with the help of German support, but ultimately backed down due to British pressures.¹⁸ Kuwait declared independence from Britain in 1962, which is when it adopted a constitution. The discovery of hydrocarbon (in the late 1940s) gave the government unprecedented funds, and slowly made the government independent of the people. As a result of the oil crises in the 1970s and 1980s, massive wealth was accumulated and led to the creation of an extremely generous welfare state. For example, the Kuwait Investment Company owned stocks in 480 of the Fortune 500 companies, at one point during the 1990s. This also had the effect that in addition to profit from oil, notable rent from dividends and interest was received from abroad.¹⁹ By the late 1980s the amount of profit received from investments surpassed the profit from oil, and so Kuwait became the worlds

¹⁶ Persson, Magnus, 'Kuwait: Emirat, Oljestat Småstat', Tägil, Sven (ed.), *Konflikt och samarbete vid Persiska viken*, 1992, p. 49.

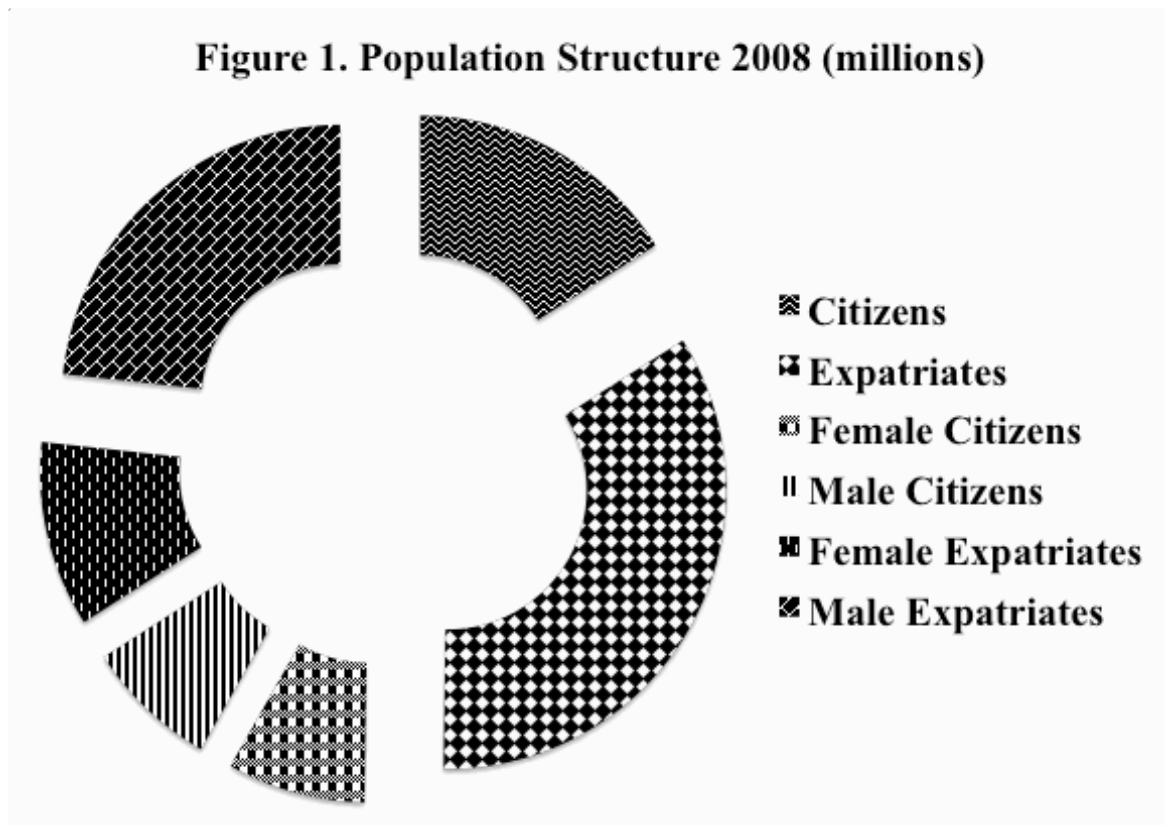
¹⁷ - Country Report: Kuwait 2009, *Political Risk Services*, 2009, Political Science Complete, Ipswich, MA., Accessed May 25, 2010. p. 10.

¹⁸ Persson, Magnus, 1992, pp 33-34.

¹⁹ Persson, Magnus, 1992, p. 15.

first rentier state.²⁰

The Kuwaiti constitution of 1962 created the National Assembly of Kuwait (Majlis Al-Umma), that was initially created as a democratic forum for official intercommunication between the merchant class and the Al-Sabah. In the beginning the National Assembly was unable to exert influence and achieved very little. High governmental posts were always held by the Al-Sabah family. For example, the prime minister post was traditionally held by the crown prince, this was changed as recently as 2003.²¹



Source: 'Kuwait population: 1 million citizens and 2.3 million expats', *Kuwait Times*, 2009

The structure of the population of Kuwait has changed dramatically since the discovery of oil. Kuwait wanted to develop its country to the fullest extent, this meant that it was necessary to import skilled and unskilled labor, in order to help with the building of the country. Thus the proportion of its citizens has steadily decreased in relation to the total population.²² Today, Kuwaitis are in a minority in their own country.²³ As a result of this structure, a clear-cut class system also emerged. The citizens are at the top of this pyramid (in

²⁰ Findlay, Allan M., *The Arab world*, 1994, p. 98.

²¹ Glasser, Bradley Louis, 2001, pp. 54-56.

²² Persson, Magnus, 1992, p. 41.

²³ - *Kuwait expatriate workforce decreases Saudi Gazette - Online Edition.*, 2009, Retrieved May 19 2010, from <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2009031632272>

terms of pay), followed by European expatriates, and then by the rest of the expatriate community. When guest workers do the jobs that pay less than the jobs in the Kuwaiti public sector it affects the general working morale of the people.²⁴ The government has tried, during the 1960s and 1970s to decrease, the amount of the foreign workers, but since Kuwaitis do not want to do the basic jobs, it would require significant political maneuvering to complete this.²⁵

Today, Kuwait is a highly developed nation with immense wealth. The power balance that exists between the merchant class and the royal family creates the unique political structure, that can only be found in Kuwait and nowhere else in the GCC.

²⁴ Persson, Magnus, 1992, p. 47.

²⁵ Persson, Magnus, 1992, p. 48.

3. Five Factors of Democratization in Kuwait

3.1 Elections & Opposition

Election is the process of choosing somebody to represent an individual or individuals by voting. Elections are tied closely to the definition of democracy, and why they are important. Virtually all scholars agree on the fact that there must be elections in order for democratization to occur. They must not only be held, but must also be “free and fair”.

Robert Dahl has five criteria for democracy; Participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of agenda and inclusion.²⁶ These criteria may be the definition for democracy but they are all related to elections directly or indirectly. These five criteria are however, not without problems. The first is the usage of citizen, and the question that arises is who is to be included. There can be multiple levels of citizenship, for example men could be allowed to vote, while women would not. This was the case in Kuwait before 2005. Dahl however, acknowledges that democracy cannot be attained unless some institutional factors are in place.²⁷ These institutional factors are also related to elections, the higher the number of these factors that are in place, the higher the quality of the elections themselves. Without these factors democracy has not been achieved, while democratization can still occur without some of these factors. In the absence of some of these factors, the probability of democracy as a result of democratization, however, is lowered. On closer inspection these criteria are in fact a type vertical democratization process. When one factor is achieved, the probability of the next one to occurring is considerably increased.²⁸

The function of an opposition party to bloc is to criticize the government, but it lacks

²⁶ Bernhagen, Patrick, 2009, p. 26.

²⁷ Bernhagen, Patrick, 2009, p. 29. As defined in 1.3 on p. 3.

²⁸ Bernhagen, Patrick, 2009, p. 31.

the votes in the parliament to block the majority from introducing legislation.²⁹ The opposition performs another important function. If the majority in the parliament (or the majority coalitions) fail to do what they promised in the elections it, might be voted out on the next turn, and be replaced by the opposition.³⁰

3.1.1 Elections & Opposition in Kuwait

Elections have been held in Kuwait since 1962, and have increased in importance over the last 40 years (and especially over the last ten). The National Assembly was created in 1962, the same year that the constitution was promulgated. This new National Assembly was created in order to provide an arena for political voicing for the citizens of Kuwait, that in 1962, were still in majority. It was also created to keep the merchant class happy, while at the same time weakening its influence.³¹

Elections for the National Assembly are held every four years in Kuwait. It was regular until the 1980s and 2000s, when the Emir dissolved the National Assembly a great number of times due to power struggles. The 1962 constitution provided unseen political freedom to the registered voters, and future politicians of Kuwait. So much in fact, that the Al-Sabah family never, really liked the constitution, and was determined to reduce the extent of the freedoms granted by the constitution.³² The constitution does grant the citizens access to the political sphere, but in terms of democracy or democratization the constitution offers very little, in real terms.

The National Assembly was used to sway the momentum away from the merchant class in the 1980s, and by the 1991 election they constituted a small minority, and had been efficiently marginalized in the National Assembly.³³ This was done through the ‘popularization’ of the electorate. The government wanted to add circa 90,000 voters to the total amount of voters, not only because the total amount of eligible voters was small, but also to reintroduce sectarianism. The Bedu were at the center of this new policy, and the government managed to impose new conflicts between the merchant class and the Bedu in the

²⁹ Rose, Richard ‘Democratic and Undemocratic States’, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009,

³⁰ Rose, Richard, ‘Democratic and Undemocratic States’, Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009, p. 14.

³¹ Persson, Magnus, 1992, pp. 52-54

³² Deegan, Heather, 1993, p. 36.

³³ Glasser, Bradley Louis, 2001, p. 113.

elections of 1981 and 1985.³⁴ The strategy the government used, was to increase the number of voting districts from 10 to 25, so that each district would elect two candidates instead of five. This led to a much larger influence of the Bedu, as the urban population was left with a smaller proportion of the candidates than before. Around half of these potential new voters were illiterate.³⁵ The influence of the merchant class in the National Assembly declined rapidly after these elections, due to the increased amount of Bedu voters. The merchant class held twelve seats in the 1963 parliament, six in the 1975 parliament and only two in both the 1981 and 1985 parliaments.³⁶

Kuwait differs greatly in the region of the Persian Gulf, in comparison to its Gulf neighbors, as it has the most developed political system in terms of competitive elections.³⁷ Calling these elections popular, however, might be slightly misleading. The eligible voters in the 1981 elections were a minuscule 6.4% of the total population.³⁸ This was also the case in the 1999 elections, when only 113 thousand men voted, out of the total 793,000 male population.³⁹ Non-Kuwaitis, so called Bidoons that are permanent residents without citizenship, still today outnumber Kuwaitis 3-1. In the elections of 2009 there were roughly 400 thousand voters of which more than half were women. This is an increase in vote turnout, but it can hardly be called popular. The naturalization process of permanent residents in Kuwait is not only almost unheard of, meaning that it is almost impossible for them to acquire citizenship. This is to prevent them from gaining access to the generous welfare system of Kuwait and, more importantly, the political arena, but also to prevent the state's expenditure from going up. When the amount of citizens increases, government spending does too, which in turn leads to less generous benefits for the citizens. Therefore the demand for reforms increases, and an increased rate of democratization takes place, much like when the price of oil goes down.⁴⁰

There are no officially recognized parties in Kuwait. Technically they are not banned, but it is hard to form a political organization in Kuwait.⁴¹ However, the Kuwaitis have resorted to blocs (alliances) instead of parties, that do represent different interests. Two liberal

³⁴ Glasser, Bradley Louis, 2001, p. 85.

³⁵ Glasser, Bradley Louis, 2001, pp. 87-88.

³⁶ Glasser, Bradley Louis, 2001, p. 86.

³⁷ Henry, Clement M. & Springborg, Robert, *Globalization and the politics of development in the Middle East*, 2001, p. 190.

³⁸ Deegan, Heather, 1993, p. 36.

³⁹ Kapiszerwski, A., 2006, p. 101.

⁴⁰ Henry, Clement M. & Springborg, Robert, 2001, p. 190.

⁴¹ - *Freedom of Association in the Arabian Gulf: The Case of Bahrain, Kuwait and Yemen*, International Federation for Human Rights, 2009. p. 47.

blocs ('Peace and Justice Alliance' and 'Popular Action Bloc') counter two Sunni conservative blocs (of which one is Salafi) and only one Shi'a bloc. There are also independents running that support the government or represent tribal politics.⁴² In other words the three biggest groupings in the parliament are the Islamists, the liberals and the independents. Even though the blocs are not officially recognized parties, they do work as real parties would in a political system. The minority elected grouping is naturally in opposition to the majority elected (in the case of the 2009 elections the liberals are in opposition while the Islamist bloc is in majority). There is also a strong division between the blocs and they are divided on what to do on the majority of issues, unable to achieve coherence.⁴³

The first opposition took root in the masses during the late 1980s, or specifically in 1989, when the parliament had been suspended for three years. During this time silent petitions had circulated that gathered over 30,000 signatories. Even a few pro-democracy rallies took place. Controversial elections were held in June of 1990.⁴⁴ There was a lot of controversy in regard to the voting. Indeed, the elections in Kuwait have not always had the same standard they have today, free and fair.⁴⁵

The opposition to the government grew strong in 1985, when it criticized the fact that the revenue received from hydrocarbon was so heavily invested in the USA.⁴⁶ This was the watershed, when the National Assembly underwent a metamorphosis to become a strong force in Kuwaiti politics. This newly gained power also caused its dissolution in 1986. Indeed true opposition only grows when revenues from oil dwindle. During this year the price of oil plummeted to below 10\$ per barrel and profits also plunged.⁴⁷ The increase of opposition may of course come from the fear that the wealth of today and the lack of true efficient diversification of the country, might not be passed on to the next generation.⁴⁸ At this stage the opposition was still too weak to force democratization.⁴⁹

The Islamists, whether in majority or opposition, always have an advantage, as they can organize through the mosques. The liberal blocs, on the other hand, find it more difficult to

⁴² - *Q&A: Kuwaiti elections, 2009*, Retrieved May 19 2010, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8048684.stm

⁴³ Economist Intelligence Unit (Great Britain), *Country forecast. Kuwait.*, 2009, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Deegan, Heather, 1993, pp. 39-40

⁴⁵ Tägil, Sven, 1992, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Deegan, Heather, 1993, p. 38.

⁴⁷ - *History and Analysis - Crude Oil Prices*", WTRG Economics, 2005, Retrieved May 19 2010, from <http://www.wtrg.com/prices.htm>

⁴⁸ Goddard, C. Roe, Passé-Smith, John T, Conklin, John G. (eds.), *International political economy: state-market relations in the changing global order*, 1996, p. 317.

⁴⁹ Persson, Magnus, 1992, p. 82.

organize. In this way the Islamists are 're-Islamizing' the country, for example, by re-introducing segregation at the universities.⁵⁰ The Islamists have been gaining momentum because of their ability to organize, and this has led to the stalling of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, over small issues, that hinder progress on real issues. This has been going on since the 1992 elections, and has weakened the National Assembly.⁵¹ The struggle between the liberals and the Islamists appears to be endless, and Kuwaitis believe that this power struggle is deteriorating the political life in Kuwait, despite increased voter participation.⁵² The government is taking the side of the Islamists, as it believes this is a 'safer' path than the liberal path.⁵³ However, the agenda of the Islamists, is not only to include Sharia jurisprudence as the main source of legislation in the constitution, but also to legalize political parties. This in turn would help the whole political spectrum, not just the Islamists. Even though there are elections in Kuwait that are free and fair in terms of competition, considerable problems exist, not with the elections, but within the National Assembly. The National Assembly grew from being a pet arena of the government to become a force that challenges the government. The policies of the government, that introduced the Bedu into the political arena, harmed the relationship between the merchant class and the Al-Sabah family to the extent that it created an opposition (supporting democracy) that the merchants could easily sympathize with.⁵⁴ The vulnerability of the government was clearly demonstrated by 1986, with the fall of the oil prices. The growing influence of the National Assembly has also led to an increased demand for the expansion of the National Assembly's political power. A crisis in the oil prices could harm the Al-Sabahs to the extent that they could lose the throne. In conclusion, the Al-Sabah family must slowly expand on political freedoms for the continuous support of the citizens. However, giving away too much authority presents the danger of losing it altogether.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Kapiszewski, Andrzej, 2006, p. 102.

⁵¹ MacFarquhar, Neil, 'Infirmity of Its Senior Sheiks Leaves Kuwait Stagnating'. *The New York Times*, 2002

⁵² MacFarquhar, Neil, 2002

⁵³ Kapiszewski, Andrzej, 2006, pp. 107-108.

⁵⁴ Country Report: Kuwait, *Political Risk Services*, 2008, p. 29.

⁵⁵ 'Kuwait: Risk Summary', *Middle East Monitor: The Gulf*, 2010, p. 8.

3.2 Mass Belief and Political Culture

Mass Belief plays an important role in democratization. The system of governance in a country is an indirect mirror image of what its people believe in, at any given time. This is true in most cases, however, the political order can also be enforced in an authoritarian system. The reflection of political order is therefore truer for a democracy than for an autocracy. An increased probability of democratization is achieved when people in a society “... share egalitarian participatory orientation”.⁵⁶

Structure focused research and analysis is concerned with modernization, education, income gaps, class coalitions and the level of GNP. This analysis shows the increase or decrease in probability for democratization. Though very valid points of analysis, these things cannot by themselves set in motion the democratization process.⁵⁷ The action-focused approach, on the other hand, analyzes the actions, of the masses and the elite, that are conducive to democratization. It portrays, rebuilds, codifies and replicates the events that have happened, all of this without properly explaining the cause for the action itself. Getting from structure to action is where mass belief comes in. It is the missing link between these two approaches.⁵⁸

Most people have a positive attitude towards democracy, as a concept. However, the masses are not mobilized into a democratizing force by a notion of the inherent virtue of democracy. The appreciation of the emancipative values and concrete benefits provided by democracy is required for the people to begin the pursuit of democracy, in a manner creating mass pressure for true change of the political order.⁵⁹

The priorities of people are also reflected in their socio-economic development. They prioritize their most pressing needs, like education and personal wealth, before emancipative freedoms. Nevertheless, rising levels of education and personal wealth can give people time to reflect on themselves and thus, spreading the need or rather want for emancipative values. This is when regimes tend to lose their legitimacy, and the likelihood for a shift toward democracy increases.⁶⁰ Though there is a clear relationship between socio-economic

⁵⁶ Welzel, Christian Inglehart, Ronald F., ‘Political Culture, Mass Beliefs, and Value Change’, Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009, p 127.

⁵⁷ Welzel, Christian & Inglehart, Ronald F., 2009, p. 128.

⁵⁸ Welzel, Christian & Inglehart, Ronald F., 2009, p. 128.

⁵⁹ Welzel, Christian & Inglehart, Ronald F., 2009, p. 129.

⁶⁰ Welzel, Christian & Inglehart, Ronald F., 2009, p. 131.

development and the desire for emancipation, one does not necessarily lead to the other.

Furthermore, mass demand for a change in the level of democracy occurs only when there is incongruence between the demanded level of democracy and the current level of democracy. Therefore a political regime is only stable when it reflects its people's belief in the authority it maintains.⁶¹

3.2.1 Kuwaiti Mass Belief and The Culture of Politics

The political culture of Kuwait is on a healthy level, the country has a long tradition of political debate within the official sphere. Mass belief, can be quantified with the help of statistics. Yet, statistics are easily manipulated and can be misleading. When it comes to research on Kuwait dealing with mass belief and political culture could be said to be narrow. This is why the application of this factor will use statistics from various international outlets and research groups, like The Economist Intelligence Unit.

From the perspective of a structural approach, Kuwait possesses all of the indicators that increase the likelihood of democratization. Kuwait has a high GNP per capita, the Human Development Index ranking is very high, education is universal, and illiteracy relatively rare, the country has a modern infrastructure and is competitive in the global market. Kuwait possesses a large part of the proven oil reserves of the world. Public employment is high, as the government guarantees employment within the public sector to all citizens. In turn 95% of Kuwaiti citizens are employed in the public sector.⁶² Yet, the number of people living in Kuwait, that are not citizens, outnumber the amount of citizens. The proportion of expatriates living in Kuwait is 68.4% of the total population. Many of these permanent residents have been living in Kuwait for a long time, and the naturalization of these permanent residents is extremely slow.⁶³ This is important, because they make up a large chunk of the population, and while they have no say officially, they may still have a political opinion and create affect politics through mass mobilization. For example, when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian expatriates sided with Saddam Hussein, and were consequently sacked from the country. Some of them have not been allowed to return to

⁶¹ Welzel, Christian & Inglehart, Ronald F., 2009, pp. 138-139.

⁶² - 'Freedom of Association in the Arabian Gulf: The Case of Bahrain, Kuwait and Yemen', *International Federation for Human Rights*, 2009 p. 36.

⁶³ - 'Kuwait expatriate workforce decreases', *Saudi Gazette – Online Edition*, 2009

Kuwait, in fear of a mass mobilization against the government.⁶⁴

Kuwaiti nationals have an apathetic disposition towards their government. However, they have a very positive attitude towards democracy, if only for its positive connotations. Yet the people remain relatively politically passive. For example, only 23% of the citizens voted in the last elections, and approximately the same proportion follow the news, according to a survey published in the *Journal of Democracy*.⁶⁵ Still, 88% believe that political reform should be gradually introduced.⁶⁶ This, of course, reflects the fact that Kuwaitis do not yet believe in emancipative values strongly enough to cause a democratizing mobilization of the masses. Therefore the Al-Sabah regime of Kuwait is legitimate in the eyes of the citizens.

The political culture of Kuwait is at a functioning level, the media inspects, criticizes and discusses the policies of the government. Elections are conducted on an internationally transparent standard. The citizens have the right to form and join any organization that is within the means of the law, according to article 43 in the constitution of 1962. Yet there are restrictions that have been put in place after the adoption of the constitution. For example, §2 of the 1965 law No. 28 states “Associations and clubs cannot exercise any activities and have no legal personality before their authorization is proclaimed”.⁶⁷ Meaning that the government has to approve all organizational activity. Unless approved, an organization can be considered illegal. Citizens, except for those working in the National Guard, military or police, are free to join any trade union, though this is not extended to migrant workers. Migrant workers may join unions only if they are in possession of a working-visa and have continuously lived in Kuwait for more than five years. In addition to this, migrant workers cannot vote for a person that will officially represent them within a trade union. This means that a trade union can only passively work towards the development of working conditions, and migrant workers cannot directly influence the trade union. Only citizens, who make up a small portion of the private work force can influence a union directly. The 54 trade unions that operate in Kuwait represent a mere 54,000 workers of the 2.2 million strong workforce.⁶⁸

To sum up, Kuwait does have a type of working political culture. The mass belief of the people will not affect the democratization process, currently, because it is satisfied, to a

⁶⁴ - ‘THE BEDOONS OF KUWAIT: "Citizens without Citizenship"’, *Human Rights Watch*, 2005, accessed June 18 2010 from <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1995/Kuwait.htm>

⁶⁵ Jamal, Amaney & Tessler, Mark, ‘Attitudes in the Arab World’, *Journal of Democracy*, 2008, 19 (1), pp. 97-110.

⁶⁶ Jamal, Amaney & Tessler, Mark, 2001, pp. 97-110.

⁶⁷ - Freedom of Association in the Arabian Gulf: The Case of Bahrain, Kuwait and Yemen, *International Federation for Human Rights*, 2009, p 36. footnote 197 and 200

⁶⁸ - Freedom of Association in the Arabian Gulf: The Case of Bahrain, Kuwait and Yemen, *International Federation for Human Rights*, 2009, p. 36. footnote 197 and 200

degree, with the current supply of democracy. If a more radical change in the political landscape would take place, mass belief of the Kuwaiti population may become increasingly conducive to democratization.

3.3 Gender

The representation of women in politics is still low, and in only eleven countries women have more than 35 per cent or more of the representation⁶⁹. Only women can represent themselves in politics, because they have a different experience from men and are victims of the patriarchal structures exerted by men⁷⁰. This is done in a number of ways, like placing them in special criteria groups or allowing domestic violence to continue. A good example of this patriarchal structure, is that women are often not included in the constitution or laws of a country explicitly. These official documents usually talk about ‘citizenship’ and ‘people’, which could be understood to include women, but often does not.⁷¹

The role women play in democratization is therefore vital. They can easily gather support among women and create momentum for a change because of their ‘non’-male’ perspective.

Even though women play a very important part in the gathering of support for democratization, they are often excluded from the political arena itself.⁷²

To sum up, women in accordance with the definition that is used in this thesis have to be included in politics. The different roles that women play in politics by for example advocating women’s rights, contribute towards the development of politics and society.

⁶⁹ Paxton, Pamela, ‘Gender and Democratization’, Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009, p. 153. Table 10.2

⁷⁰ Paxton, Pamela, ‘Gender and Democratization’, Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009, p. 149.

⁷¹ Paxton, Pamela, 2009, pp. 146-148.

⁷² *ibid*

3.3.1 Women's Political Participation

Women generally constitute circa half of society, and Kuwait is no exception to this. Of the citizens of Kuwait 51% are women and 49% are men.⁷³ Women were granted political rights in Kuwait on May 16, 2005. This was six years after the Emir published a decree of the inclusion of women in the public hemisphere⁷⁴. The vote in the parliament was 35 for while 23 were still against. It was not the first time, however, that the National Assembly voted on this issue. In fact, the first vote, in 1999, was 30 for and 32 against, and yet it took another six years before universal suffrage became a reality in Kuwait.⁷⁵ However, the National Assembly ratified (with reservations) the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* in 1992. Women started to register for the election in 1992, as a result of new reformist forces, but because the Emir met opposition from traditionalists he withdrew this right.⁷⁶ Incidentally, this shows that the issue of women's rights has been a part of the political discussion for many years.⁷⁷

The support for women's right is not universal in Kuwait. As with any political issue, there are people in favor of and against it. In this case, interestingly, older women and younger men support the expansion of women's rights while younger women and older men are against it.⁷⁸ The fact that younger men support the expansion of women's rights could be explained by the fact that some of them were not able to flee during the invasion of Kuwait and saw women in non-traditional roles, such as soldier in the UN forces.⁷⁹ But also because many women assumed non-traditional positions in society, during the invasion.⁸⁰ In fact, Kuwait was described as "a city-state of women" during the occupation.⁸¹ It went as far as joint military training, in the US, for a small group of Kuwaiti women, alongside their male

⁷³ - 'Kuwait population: 1 million citizens and 2.3 million expats' *Kuwait Times*, 30 March 2009, Retrieved May 27 2010, from http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=MjYxODIxMTQ5

Further comment: The proportion of women of the total population is considerably lower because of the large male immigrant population.

⁷⁴ Tétreault, Mary Ann, 2001, p. 213.

⁷⁵ Al-Nakib, Farah, 'The Constitutionality of Discrimination: A Search for Women's Political Equality in Kuwait', Khalaf, Abdulhadi & Giancomo, Luciani. (eds.), *Constitutional reform and political participation in the Gulf*, 2006. p. 159.

⁷⁶ Persson, Magnus, 1992, p. 81.

⁷⁷ Tétreault, Mary Ann, 2001, p. 213.

⁷⁸ Rizzo, Helen & Meyer, Katherine & Ali, Yousef, 'Women's political rights: Islam, status and networks in Kuwait', *The Journal of the British Sociological Association*, 36 (3), 639-62, 2002, p. 656.

⁷⁹ Rizzo, Helen & Meyer, Katherine & Ali, Yousef, 2002, p. 650.

⁸⁰ Tran, Mark, 'First women elected to Kuwait parliament' *The Guardian.*, 17 May 2009, Retrieved May 19, 2010 from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/17/kuwait-women-elected-parliament>

⁸¹ Tétreault, Mary Ann, 2001, p. 211.

counterparts.⁸² On the other hand, the support for political rights by older women, can be traced back to the Pan-Arab sentiments of the 1950s and 1960s. The link between education and support for women is also evident. Men of the elite, who are well educated and influenced by modern Arab literature (such as Taha Hussein) and nationalism, also have a tendency to support women's rights. This is the case with Kuwaiti men coming from wealthy merchant families.⁸³

Women were first given the right to run for public office and to vote in 2005. However, there was even a case reported in 2000 that women tried to register for the election, which just shows that the will was there all along.⁸⁴ The women running for election were not able to get elected until 2009, when a whopping four women were elected. All of them have Ph.Ds. from universities in the United States. The amount of female voters, in fact, outnumber the number of male voters giving women an advantage, that has yet to fully evolve in the National Assembly.⁸⁵ Considering the National Assembly only consists of 50 elected seats, four (8%) is a notable number. It should be noted that the cabinet members can attend the votes of the parliament. Even though women were given the right to vote and run for office, there are still many laws that treat women differently from men, which in turn only reinforce the political participation of women. An example of this is the law that dictates that a Kuwaiti woman must pay around 550€ per annum, if she marries a non-Kuwaiti and wishes to reside in Kuwait.⁸⁶

The language in the constitution of Kuwait is rather ambiguous in relation to gender issues. It could be argued that one of the reasons for why universal suffrage was achieved so late is that the language of the constitution is so vague.⁸⁷ In fact, gender seems to have been left out of the discussion when the construction of the constitution came about. The constitutional council used words like citizen and people, and because they did not explicitly exclude women, it can be argued that women were instead implicitly included in this category. Whether this was the intention is unknown.⁸⁸ Opponents to universal suffrage

⁸² Tétreault, Mary Ann, 2001, p. 211

⁸³ Rizzo, Helen & Meyer, Katherine & Ali, Yousef, 2002, p. 9.

⁸⁴ - *BBC News*- 'Kuwaiti women fight for vote', 1 February 2000, Retrieved May 17 2010, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/627694.stm

⁸⁵ Taqi, Ali, 'Kuwaiti women voters have the upper hand', *Gulf News*, May 22 2005, Retrieved May 19 2010, from <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwaiti-women-voters-have-the-upper-hand-1.288521>

⁸⁶ Thuroczy, Ferencz, 'A Revolutionary 8% for the Women of Kuwait' *Utrikesperspektiv.se*, 21 May 2009, Retrieved May 19 2010, from: <http://www.utrikesperspektiv.se/2009/05/21/stat-och-samhalle/a-revolutionary-8-victory-for-the-women-of-kuwait/>

⁸⁷ Al-Nakib, Farah, 2006, p. 163.

⁸⁸ Al-Nakib, Farah, 2006, p. 166.

argued that because the council members used masculine plural, a feature of Arabic, they only considered men to be real citizens. This argument is weak, at best, as when a number of people are unknown or mixed, in Arabic, you refer to the group as ‘they’ in masculine.⁸⁹

Article 29 of the Kuwaiti constitution dictates that “All people are equal in human dignity, and in public rights and duties before the law, without discrimination as to race, origin, language, or religion”, which is the main focal point for the two sides arguing for and against women’s rights.⁹⁰ The problem with this article lies, as Farah Al-Nakib points out, in the usage of word ‘al-jins’, ‘race’ which in Arabic can mean either ‘race, citizen or gender’. Women’s activists argue that women’s rights are included in the constitution, but this article is rather vague on that point. The meaning of the word ‘jins’ has come to evolve in its interpretation, in different parts of the country.⁹¹ Therefore it is impossible do draw any clear conclusion as to whether women are included in the constitution of Kuwait or not. Women advocating political rights and equality do not only face opposition from men but also from women who are either apathetic or oppose these sentiments.⁹²

The struggle for suffrage was long and had many setbacks, but was achieved in the end. While women do participate in politics nowadays, there is still a long way to go for the rights of women. As a result of formal participation, it will be easier to achieve emancipation for all women. Yet, in the short run, the Islamist opposition might block these advancements. Women’s formal participation in politics has only had positive results, both in terms of rights and democratization.

⁸⁹ Al-Nakib, Farah, 2006, p. 167.

⁹⁰ Al-Nakib, Farah, 2006, p. 170.

⁹¹ Al-Nakib, Farah, 2006, pp. 170-174.

⁹² - ‘Some say they don't want them’, *The Economist*, 394 (8675), 53-53, 2010

3.4 Media

There are both good and bad sides to the ‘watchdog’ reporting done by the media. For instance, in newly established democracies, the reporting is always biased towards a particular group or part of the society. Therefore, the media can easily adapt in order to influence the agenda of the political arena.⁹³ When a democracy is in its infancy, the media can destabilize a new regime when it is fragile and is trying to legitimize itself.⁹⁴ A free media is an essential part of a democratization process, and the media is a pillar of democracy. It is likely that the flow of information provided by the media enables or has a positive effect on political participation.

The international media is involved in both legitimizing and delegitimizing a regime. With the help of the international media, a massive spotlight can be focused on any particular issue, or country, and this in turn can hurt young regimes. On the other hand the international media can assist in building up a momentum that can bring about change, which, otherwise would be almost impossible to achieve, from a purely local perspective. In this manner the international media becomes a part of a country’s national politics. Naturally, the international media is an institution in pursuit of profits, searching for stories to sell.⁹⁵

A free media that not only inspects the government is rudimentary for democratization, but also for the development of civil society.

⁹³ Volmer, Katrin, Rawnsley Gary, ‘The Media’, Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009, pp 244-245.

⁹⁴ Volmer, Katrin, Rawnsley Gary, 2009, p. 235.

⁹⁵ Volmer, Katrin, Rawnsley Gary, 2009, pp. 237-238.

3.4.1 The Media Landscape of Kuwait

In Kuwait, the freedom of the media, or press, is relatively developed. The media in Kuwait performs its ‘watchdog’ function with only a few restrictions. There are 17 newspapers (including two written in English) in Kuwait and all of them are privately owned.⁹⁶ The political stands of these newspapers range from pro-governmental to government-critical.

Most newspapers got started during the 1960s or later, mainly due to the development of the economy. There was already a small number of newspapers that were founded during the 1920s. The constitution of Kuwait contains two important elements in terms of the publication of news. Article 36 (Freedom of Opinion and Expression) and Article 37 (Freedom of the Press). Article 36 provides freedom to express any opinion, within the limit of the law. Article 37 provides freedom of the press, printing and publishing, again within the limit of the law.⁹⁷ The press law was revised in 2006, which increased the freedom of the press. For example it abolished the use of prison sentences for journalists. Furthermore newspapers can only be closed by the order of a court, as opposed to the Ministry of Information.

Reporters Without Borders publishes an annual index of press freedom, where Kuwait is ranked at 60th place out of 175, in the 2009 report.⁹⁸ Freedom House ranks the Kuwaiti media as ‘partly-free’. The lines that may not be crossed by the media are quite clear, no criticism of the royal family or ministers is tolerated, and especially corruption related to the government. Also no criticism against Islam (or God or the prophet Mohammed) is tolerated. However the press clearly maintains its ‘watchdog’ status, and constructively and aggressively criticizes the government and its policies.⁹⁹

There are several implications of the revised press law of 2006, even though it eliminates prison sentencing of journalists, it instead imposes heavy fines. As recently as last year journalists were fined heavily for articles that were deemed insulting to the royal family.¹⁰⁰ The government still harasses journalists that dare criticize the ‘holy-trinity’. In one case a journalist called the Prime Minister, who has been reappointed several times and has

⁹⁶ - *BBC News* ‘Kuwait country profile’, 2010

⁹⁷ - ‘Kuwait Constitution’, 1962, Retrieved May 17 2010, from <http://www.pm.gov.kw/ConstitutionEnglish.pdf>

⁹⁸ - ‘Press Freedom Index 2009’, *Reporters Without Borders*, 2009, Retrieved May 17 2010, from <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2009,1001.html>

⁹⁹ - *BBC News* ‘Kuwait country profile’, 2010

¹⁰⁰ - ‘Journalist freed after finally agreeing to pay bail’, *Reporters Without Borders.*, 2009, Retrieved May 17, 2010, from <http://en.rsf.org/kuwait-journalist-freed-after-finally-03-12-2009,35083>

low public confidence, incompetent.¹⁰¹ The journalist was subsequently jailed, pending sentencing.¹⁰² Trough methods like these, the media is indoctrinated into using heavy self-censorship. A journalist cannot be sentenced to prison under the current press law, but can go to prison for ‘defamation’ or ‘attacks on religion’. This in turn eliminates all public debate of certain aspects of religion that remain taboo in Kuwait.¹⁰³ When the press law was revised, the penalties for lampooning Islam were raised to a one-year prison sentence and fines as large as 50,000€. Any citizen can accuse any journalist of defamation of Islam or the royal family, or of offending public ‘morals’. This happens frequently, as citizens engage in these accusations with political motives, there is little tolerance when it comes to issues like alcohol or sexuality.¹⁰⁴ The revised press law also ‘liberalized’ in the sense that it allowed the foundation of two new satellite channels in Kuwait. Talk of a similar type of network like Al-Jazeera was also discussed but no station ever materialized.¹⁰⁵ It is still hard to start a newspaper in Kuwait, because all newspapers are still licensed by the government. If an application is denied, there is no way to appeal the decision.

The state of Kuwait has a paradoxical relationship with the 24-hour satellite news channel Al-Jazeera. It has been banned several times from broadcasting in Kuwait for short periods of time.¹⁰⁶ The government of Kuwait felt that Al-Jazeera was siding with Iraq before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and so it was banned from broadcasting on Kuwaiti soil from 2002 to 2005.¹⁰⁷ Al-Jazeera has been a new voice in the Middle East and internationally, that has voiced criticism of countries like Jordan and Bahrain and consequently been banned there too. The banning shows that the state of Kuwait is not ready to welcome true press freedom. Kuwait thought that it would be a good idea to join the alliance of Al-Arabiya, which is a Saudi-sponsored Dubai-based satellite channel with a ‘softer’ approach on matters in the region. Kuwait quickly realized that it was a bad idea because of the nature of the coverage of

¹⁰¹ So low in fact that the cabinet has twice resigned on a personal appeal against the PM. *Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2009, p. 12.

¹⁰² - ‘Prosecutor orders Kuwaiti journalist held for 21 days’, *Reporters Without Borders*, 18 May 2010, Retrieved May 25 2010, from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4bf633c1c.html>

¹⁰³ This is also known as the ‘holy-trinity’ self-censorship that covers 1. The royal Family 2. The top governmental posts. 3. Islam

¹⁰⁴ - ‘Annual Human Rights Report’, *United States Department of State*, 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Sakr, Naomi, ‘Media Policy as a Litmus Test of Political Change in the GCC’, Khalaf, Abdulhadi & Giacomo, Luciani (eds.), *Constitutional reform and political participation in the Gulf*, 2006, pp 140-141.

¹⁰⁶ - *BBC News*, ‘Kuwait shuts down al-Jazeera bureau’, November 22 2002, Retrieved May 17 2010, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2395085.stm and,

- ‘Freedom in the World 2006 – Kuwait’, *Freedom House*, 2010, Retrieved May 17 2010, from http://www.freedomhouse.org/inc/content/pubs/fiw/inc_country_detail.cfm?country=6995&pf, and Sakr, Naomi, 2006, p. 151.

¹⁰⁷ - *BBC News*, ‘Kuwait shuts down al-Jazeera bureau’, 2002

the invasion of Iraq.¹⁰⁸

Kuwait falls far behind other Gulf countries in Transparency International's perceived corruption index, ranking 66th.¹⁰⁹ Freedom House reported that there was a case where charges were filed against two newspapers and their editors, because they accused the PM of being responsible for the bad corruption ranking. Because of cases like these, that have been increasing in the past year, the Kuwaiti media is practicing self-censorship to an even greater extent. This is starting to hurt the actual reporting of issues that should gain more attention¹¹⁰. In this sense it could be argued that the 'watchdog' fails to guard. On the other hand, the press is more and more willing to push the limits of what they are allowed to say even further, even though it might at times become costly.

The media of Kuwait, despite reforms of the press freedoms, have no legal ground to stand on in order to support a government-critical opposition, if one was to materialize. They could still chose to publish and print whatever they wanted to, but would face arrests and fines. In other words it is quite clear what it means to have the freedom of publication and speech within the limits of the law. It cannot be expected of the Kuwaiti media to provide an accurate coverage of issues that are sensitive, both politically and religiously. With a stronger momentum and the help of satellite networks such as Al-Jazeera, the Kuwaiti media could gain enough support to report accurately on events related to democratization. In conclusion, the Kuwaiti media has affected the scope of democratization greatly. By being both free and private it ensures critical reporting, excluding the 'holy-trinity'.

¹⁰⁸ Sakr, Naomi, 2006, p. 151.

¹⁰⁹ - 'Corruption Perceptions Index 2009', *Transparency International*, 2009, Retrieved May 17 2010, from http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table

¹¹⁰ Nacheva, Velina, 'Kuwait press crowned freest in the Arab World: Media watchdog', *Kuwait Times*, October 22, 2009, Retrieved May 17 2010, from http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=MTEzNDcwMTIwNw==

3.5 International Influence

National politics have become increasingly internationalized. As a result, international influence has become an important factor in regard to democratization. Influence can be exerted on a country, all the way from the highest governmental level to a micro-level, like the building of a female clinic in a rural area. The big democracy promoters are the United States of America and the European Union. The governments of both bodies wish to promote democracy because they believe it to be the best system of governance. This promotion of democracy includes two distinct approaches: the idealist and the realist approach. The idealist approach relies on the good will of mankind. It is based on Immanuel Kant's idea that if all nations of the world would have the same system of governance, they would not attack each other, because their people would not vote to go to war, except for in defense. The realist approach aims to make the world a safer place. In other words, meaning the promotion of self-interests, not only in relation to security concerns but also relating to the safe expansion of business.¹¹¹

Democracy promotion can be carried out through different strategies, for example diplomatic protests, military involvement (on behalf of idealist values), promotion of human rights, assisting in the establishment of institutions, and all of these can be applied at once.¹¹²

These are the promotion strategies of the US and the EU, but international companies exert a type of transnational influence too. They are hindered because they are driven by profit, not good will. Because of this, they also support authoritarian states, when the states offer lucrative deals to them. In this case the companies will not exert any democratizing influence.¹¹³

There are also several problems with the research of transnational democracy promotion and international influence. One of the main issues are that international influence is rather hard to measure. Companies operate on a different level than states do and on a micro level it is hard to see the results or actions taken by a whole array of organizations (or people) that deal with democracy promotion.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Yilmaz, Hakan, 'The International Context', Haerpfer, Christian W. & Bernhagen, Patrick & Inglehart, Ronald F. & Welzel, Christian (eds.), *Democratization*, 2009, p. 97.

¹¹² Yilmaz, Hakan, 2009, p. 96.

¹¹³ Yilmaz, Hakan, 2009, p. 101.

¹¹⁴ Yilmaz, Hakan, 2009, p. 95.

The question, that Hakan Yilmaz points out, is if a developed democracy can survive without the support of supra-national authorities, if it is surrounded by countries with a different system of governance.¹¹⁵ It is easier for a country to develop into a democracy if its neighbors are already using a democratic system.¹¹⁶ This may partly explain, why the countries lying on the Arabian Peninsula have remained ultra-authoritarian.

3.5.1 International Influences in Kuwait

International influence on the democratization has perhaps not affected the countries on the Arabian Peninsula, like Kuwait, as much as the rest of the world. There are a few reasons for this. Firstly, the agendas held by the EU and US are different, but both are careful when dealing with oil rich countries, as these can affect the world economy quite easily. Secondly, Kuwait invests heavily in the US and EU, and if they would start withdrawing their investments from the developed markets, it would have catastrophic consequences. Thirdly, the oil rich countries support each other on the political arena, and it is hard to push one country alone in a certain direction. Fourthly, because of its wealth, the countries can afford to be conservative and defend 'traditional' values. And finally, the lucrative opportunities for international business available in these countries, are so attractive, that companies will support the regime regardless of the extent of democracy or authoritarianism.

However, at times Kuwait has come under international pressure. The invasion of Kuwait in 1991 was one of these times. The Emir fled, and the opposition (both Islamic and secular) signed a manifesto of the freedom of the press and legalization of parties among other things. Kuwait was still under the spotlight of the international media, immediately following the invasion, and seeing as they had just been defended by the United Nations forces (including the US as the largest contributor) it would have been an opportune time to reform. So, when the Emir returned from his exile, he bowed to international pressure for reform and promised to study the 'naturalization' of the second-class citizens, women. No sweeping reforms were achieved, however. In this case international pressure did affect Kuwaiti politics, but to a very limited extent.¹¹⁷

Both the EU and the US have let their need for hydrocarbon dictate their politics up to

¹¹⁵ Yilmaz, Hakan, 2009, p. 97.

¹¹⁶ Yilmaz, Hakan, 2009, p. 95.

¹¹⁷ Deegan, Heather, 1993, pp. 40-41.

the September 11th terrorist attacks. Bush Jr. started talking about the need for increased democratization in the region. But, did not dare to upset the status quo. This is probably due to the fact that the energy crises in the 1970s and 1980s had grave consequences. The problem with democracy promotion in this region is that because of the wealth of the nations it is ineffective.¹¹⁸

In conclusion, it is hard to measure international influence in a country, or region, that can stand on strong feet in the international area by itself. Over the last twenty years, Kuwait has developed quite remarkably, in terms of democratization, but not due to international influence. Kuwait could come under pressure to speed up the democratization process, if the 'democracy' in Iraq would begin to function properly. Then again, Kuwait can pamper its citizens to an extent that they would continue to prefer the current system of governance.

¹¹⁸ Kapiszewski, Andrzej, 2006, p. 125.

4. Conclusion

All of the factors of democratization have been presented in the previous chapter, and interestingly, this research produced some interesting results. Firstly the democratization that is taking place is stronger than expected. The parliament has been dissolved many times due to power struggles. These struggles are showing that the National Assembly is, not only, increasing its influence, but also pushing for more power. Secondly, the achievement of universal suffrage has affected the political participation to a considerable extent. Female voters now outnumber men. This might be purely momentary, as women still have an excitement regarding their ability to influence. Thirdly, the media has also affected the democratization process. The reform in the press law of 2006, did lead to changes, but not to an extent that was anticipated. Still even slight criticism of the 'holy-trinity' is a dangerous area to enter. Generous subsidies have led to the fact that Kuwaitis are not aspiring towards real political change. The international influence has affected the democratization the least in Kuwait, as a result of oil, and the excellent relationship with the US and Great Britain. These countries do not make an effort to pressure Kuwait into an increased rate of democratization. In terms of regional politics, Kuwait will eventually be influenced by Iraq. If Iraq develops into a fully functioning democracy, the people of Kuwait might be influenced by this factor.

The factor that can be argued to have affected the democratization process in Kuwait most is the inclusion of women in politics. Even though women were not elected into the National Assembly in 2005 or 2008, the 2009 elections did result in a considerable change. In fact, the development of the Kuwaiti society in the past ten years has included a rapid liberalization agenda, like the press law, that sped up the democratization process. Despite the fact that women now have formal influence, they are facing problems from other directions, like the Al-Sabah or the Islamist bloc. The Islamists are trying de-emancipate women, but have found little success. The female elected representatives are all educated in western countries, and have no doubt learned to deal with opposition, in a democratic and constructive way. The will of the women to participate has been strongly present, especially since the invasion in 1991. In this way the mass belief of women has affected the way the country is run. Women clearly felt that their exclusion from the political arena was unacceptable, and

after little less than twenty years, change took place, benefitting them. Despite the long struggle, the momentum is increasingly in the favor of the emancipation of women.

The media factor plays a large part in the democratization process. By Kuwaiti standards the media is free, but by international standards it is not. The difference between these two distinctions is cultural. International standards require the tolerance of criticism against, for example, religion. In the west, criticism of religion is tolerated because religion does not play the same central part in society, as it does in the Arab world, and especially in the GCC. It is taboo for the media in any Arab country to criticize Islam. Kuwait can be perceived as conservative. However it still has a media that operates at a reasonable standard. The media focuses on and highlights important discussions in Kuwait, like the fact that Kuwaitis are in a minority position in their own country. By monitoring these issues and reporting on them, the Kuwaiti media is performing a vital service in terms of democratization. In addition to this, the media is centrally tied to all factors of democratization, and through its liberalization it was freed from the fears of imprisonment, held mostly by the journalists. Considering everything, the media has greatly affected the process of democratization, and continues to push boundaries of accepted criticism against the Al-Sabah. By doing this they are nurturing the momentum of democratization, and slowly blurring the lines of their limits. The media is aware that a time could come, when the expansion of political reform would curtail the power of the Al-Sabahs. The media could flip over to support an opposition that supported a transition to democracy.

At first it seemed that the elections to for the National Assembly and the opposition would have affected the democratization process the most in terms of this thesis. However, the National Assembly has merely become more established, and is rehashing the same fights with the Emir, that have been going on for a long time. A steady growth of its influence is attributed to the multiple dissolutions by the Emir. The National Assembly is pushing the boundaries by taking criticism one step further, like in 1986 when they criticized the investments made by the government. This constant criticism increases its influence every time, which leads to yet another dissolution of the parliament. Every time the Emir dissolves the National Assembly, an election is held. These elections are free and fair. They function well, but it is not the elections themselves, per se that affect the momentum of democratization, but their result. In spite of that, a dissolution of the parliament is only a temporary solution to the problem, and like a fever, the underlying symptom must be treated before, the fever goes away. It would seem that struggles between the government and the National Assembly are increasing in intensity. One of the reasons for this is, that the National

Assembly knows, that when the oil revenues will start to decrease, it is time to harness the Kuwaiti mass belief and make a change. This almost happened in 1991, but since the Emir was supported by the United Nations, no actual regime change was possible. The interest for this, however, was real. The question now is, whether the Al-Sabahs can stop the slow decrease of their political influence, and their eventual transformation into a representative royal family.

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