

# **Struggles for Women's Electoral Participation in Kuwait: Current Status, Challenges and Prospects**

**MOHD EJAZ AKHTAR**

Ph.D. Scholar

Centre for West Asian Studies

Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi (India)

## **ABSTRACT**

The political role of Kuwaiti women has become one of the debated topics in the modern world. In Kuwait, women's role is increasing in all domains of life. Women now outnumbered men in education and they made remarkable progress in the workforce too. However, women's representation in Kuwaiti electoral arenas has decreased. Since the introduction of women's political rights in 2005, women have been struggling for their appropriate participation in electoral arenas, but they could not yet secure the desired success in these fields. From the elections of 2006 to the elections of 2016, only ten women have served as members of parliament and no woman could win a single seat in the recent elections in 2020, leading to an all-male parliament in Kuwait today. Even in the municipal council, not a single woman has won any elections so far. Only four women were recently appointed to the council which can be considered an important step. It is important to comprehend the reasons for women's underrepresentation in Kuwait's electoral arenas. Therefore, this study tries to shed light on the struggles for women's political rights and participation. The study also looks into women's current political status and the barriers they face in this field. The study also attempts to make appropriate recommendations for overcoming the barriers that prevent women from playing a significant role in decision-making.

**Key Words :** Kuwaiti Women, Political Rights, Participation, Obstacles, Recommendations

## **INTRODUCTION**

Women's political role in the Gulf States particularly in Kuwait has become one of the debatable topics in the contemporary age. Women's role is increasing in all domains of Kuwaiti society. Currently, Kuwait has become the advanced country in the Gulf region in matters of women's emancipation. Kuwaiti women have experienced many progressive changes thanks to their long history of struggles and activism. They outnumbered men in education, made remarkable progress in the workforce, and gained almost all the sights. Now they can serve in all domains of Kuwaiti life. But, despite being granted full political rights in 2005, women could not secure any notable success in Kuwaiti politics since that time. Following the 2009 elections, women's

representation in parliament decreased to three in 2012, two in 2013, and one in 2016, and eventually, the Kuwaiti parliament became totally void of women's representation in 2020. Women could not yet succeed to win in Kuwait's history of municipal elections, only 4 women were recently appointed by the government to the municipal council. Now, Kuwait reached the bottom line in matters of women's political participation in the Arab Gulf region. While seeing women's suffrage and their activism, it was predicted that women's representation in electoral fields would increase, but instead of increasing, their political representation decreased. It is important to examine women's current political status and to understand the reasons behind the lack of women's participation in electoral arenas. The paper deals with women's political participation in Kuwait and it also tries to find out the

obstacles and challenges that diminish women's political role in Kuwait. Furthermore, this paper tries to analyze how to overcome the existing obstacles and challenges by offering some appropriate recommendations for promoting women's desired presence in the electoral arena in Kuwait, and finally, the conclusion gives the final remakes of the paper.

### **Struggle for Women's Political Rights and Participation:**

The struggle for women's political rights began in the 1970s when some male members of the parliament (National Assembly) and members of the royal Al-Sabah family advocated for women's political roles and raised women's issues on the national level.<sup>1</sup> Some women's organizations, such as the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS), the Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS), and the Girls Club, among others, came forward to raise women's issues and demand political rights.<sup>2</sup> One of the first bill proposals was submitted to parliament in 1973, thanks to the efforts of WCSS head Nouria Al-Sadani and the members of the AWDS.<sup>3</sup> The bill demanded equal rights in all societal spheres, particularly politics. The bill was fiercely discussed in the parliament and it was ultimately rejected due to pressure from conservative elements.<sup>4</sup> These organizations continued their struggles and led a far-reaching campaign protesting the above bill's dismissal.

Like other Middle East countries, Kuwait has also

influenced by the Islamic revival movements and Islamism in the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> There were some sensitive ideologies that emerged and were heavily discussed among people in the Gulf region, and the discussion of women's rights went to the margins.<sup>6</sup> As maintained by Meshal Al-Sabah "the quest for emancipation was ensnared in this political vortex and became part of the ideological battle between secularism, Pan-Arab nationalism, and traditional Islam."<sup>7</sup>

In this period, the opposition to women's civil rights and their political role began to be strengthened as a result of these Islamic trends. Some Islamic organizations were established like Bayader al-Islam and the Islamic Care Society. Their goal covered a wide range of issues such as charity, ethics, and morality and contributed to the Islamic project at the national and international levels.<sup>8</sup> These Islamic organizations were not included in advocacy groups that demand women's rights. But later, especially after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (1990-1991), these Islamic organizations began to realize the importance of women's role in decision-making and they also started to advocate women's political role.<sup>9</sup> However, during the 1980s the voice for women's political rights became faint but not ended. During the period, some support was evident from the government side when 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"<sup>10</sup> A feminist member of parliament, Al-Takheim along with some his colleagues introduced a

1. HIRAK Jyoti Das, "National Assembly Elections in Kuwait, 2016," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 4, no.2, (2017): 202, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2347798917694758>.
2. Zeynep N. Kaya, "Women's Electoral Participation in Kuwait," *LSE-Middle East Centre*, (June 11, 2021): 6-8, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/110877/2/Women\\_s\\_Electoral\\_Participation\\_in\\_Kuwait.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/110877/2/Women_s_Electoral_Participation_in_Kuwait.pdf). For further information, one can visit <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1114&context=jiws>.
3. Marwa Shalaby, "Women's Political Representation in Kuwait: An Untold Story," *Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy*, (2015): 12-13, <https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/91824/WRME-pub-PoliRep-Kuwait-091515.pdf?sequence1>
4. Ibid.
5. Haya-al-Mughni, "The Rise of Islamic Feminism in Kuwait," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* [Online], 128, (2010):170-172, <https://journals.openedition.org/remmm/6899?lang=en>.
6. Kaya, Women's electoral Participation, 12.
7. Meshal Al-Sabah, *Gender and politics in Kuwait: Women and Political Participation in the Gulf* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013) 4.
8. Ghada Hashem Talhami, *Historical Dictionary of Women in the Middle East and North Africa* (Rowman& Littlefield, 2013), 51.
9. Mughni, *The Rise of Islamic Feminism*, 172-175.
10. Haya Al-Mughni, *Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender*, (London: Saqi Books, 2001), 143.

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 abstaining.<sup>11</sup>

The Women's organizations and pro-feminists continued their struggle for women's enfranchisement. In 1981 and in 1982, a member of Parliament and women activists submitted bill proposals in the parliament to grant women political rights.<sup>12</sup> The bills were once again rejected, largely due to objections by the conservative Islamist and tribal M.Ps. The Women activists criticized the constant rejection of these bills and they accelerated protests.<sup>13</sup>

After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the awareness of women's rights in society increased. During the war, Kuwaiti women played a heroic role in resisting the invasion and liberating the country from the Iraqi clutches. Throughout the occupation, they played a significant role as hospital and military volunteers, many women sacrificed their lives for freedom and many of them advocated fiercely on behalf of Kuwait domestically and internationally.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the stereotypes about women's incompetence that were prevalent among people began to change. Kuwaiti people started to realize the significance of women's role in Kuwaiti society.<sup>15</sup> This period of conflict also provided Kuwaiti women a chance to be united from various backgrounds and raised their political consciousness.

Women's issues were at the top of the national agenda in post-war Kuwait. The government recognized women's role in liberating Kuwait and sought to reward them with a significant role in politics. However, the rising tide of conservatism, combined with the government's

preoccupation with the emotional and economic burdens of post-war reconstruction, delayed the issue of women's political rights for another decade. But the fight for women's rights did not end there; it continued and peaked in the mid-1990s.

The liberal and Shias and the WCSS and some other groups continued to support the suffrage movement. In 1993, the WCSS prepared the first post-liberation women's conference to spotlight gender discrimination and bring the issue of women's rights into the national consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Although women could not succeed to be granted political rights after the conference, their activism has increased in Kuwait. And Nabila al-Mulla was appointed by the government as the first female ambassador in the Persian Gulf in 1993.<sup>17</sup> However, in the 1990s calls for women's suffrage were repeatedly rejected by the male conservative-dominated parliament. The government showed some interest in women's suffrage and ratified some international bodies to improve women's status. In the 1990s, the government ratified the "Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women" (CEDAW), "The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (ICCPR), "The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" (ICESCR) the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the "Torture Convention").<sup>18</sup> These ratifications of the international bodies enhanced women's status in Kuwait and influenced the Kuwaitis' perception of women's political participation.

Kuwait was politically very polarised in the 1990s. During this decade, opponents of women's political rights

11. Kaya, Women's Electoral Participation, 12.

12. Ibid,9. For further information one can read this article: Muhamad S. Olimat, "Women and the Kuwaiti National Assembly," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 12, no.3 (March 2011): 80-95, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1114&context=jiws>

13. Kaya, Women's Electoral Participation, 9.

14. Maria Juliá and Hadi R. Ashkanani, "Women and war: the role Kuwaiti women played during the Iraqi occupation," *Journal of International Development* 13, no.5 (2001): 590-593, <https://sci-hub.hkvisa.net/10.1002/jid.782>

15. Shalaby, "Women's Political Representation in Kuwait: An Untold Story," 13.

16. Meyer, K., Rizzo, H., & Ali, Y., "Changed political attitudes in the Middle East: The case of Kuwait." *International Sociology* 22, no.3 (2007): 289-300, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580907076571>.

17. Arthur S., et al., ed., *Political Handbook of the World 1998* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 514-515, GB, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-14951-3>

18. Ibid. for further information, visit <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/kuwait/kuwait-03.htm>.

were dominant in Kuwait's decision-making process. As a result, in the 1990s, proposals for women's suffrage were repeatedly rejected.<sup>19</sup> Feminist and women's organizations, however, did not give up and continued their struggle. The women's movement first experienced more risky non-violent action in 1996, when 500 women went on strike for an hour to demand women's suffrage.<sup>20</sup>

1999, was the year in which the views of Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed Al- Sabah on women's suffrage appeared to soften. The Amir dissolved the parliament and called for elections in 1999 as a result of the political unrest in the legislature.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the Amir issued a number of decrees among was granting women the right to run for office and vote in parliamentary and municipal elections by 2003, which surprised politicians, observers, and women alike.<sup>22</sup> However, the bill was introduced in parliament and, once again, was rejected by a majority of votes.<sup>23</sup>

Between 2000 and 2004, Liberals collaborated with Shi'a leaders and several women's organizations and under the banner of the WCSS and the Kuwait Women Union (KWU), they launched a large-scale campaign promoting women's political rights.<sup>24</sup> In 2005, the campaign captured the attention of the entire country. The Kuwaiti Islamist Ummah Party came forward and supported the women's campaign and thus it became the first Sunni Muslim group in the Persian Gulf region to publicly support women's suffrage.<sup>25</sup> In March 2005, 1,000 demonstrators gathered peacefully outside Kuwait's parliament to demand suffrage.<sup>26</sup> finally, the day has come

on 17 May 2005 when the Kuwaiti parliament passed a bill for women's suffrage and women were granted the right to vote and run for office, and they took part in the country's 2006 elections for the first time.<sup>27</sup>

The decision for women's suffrage is not only important for women but also important for Kuwait. Women in Kuwait are highly educated and they are eligible to run the country's affairs. The decision of women's suffrage increased the number of female voters and doubled the number of the electorate from 195,000 to 350,000, with women representing 57% of the electorate.<sup>28</sup>

Giving women political equality was not only a moral imperative but also the culmination of over fifty years of hard work by the Kuwaiti women's movement. It was also a result of women's higher education, women's activism, youth involvement in political affairs, societal openness, the impact of global democratization trends, international pressure on the Kuwaiti regime for women's emancipation, and the need for such a move in Kuwait's domestic political equation.

#### **Current Status of Women in Kuwait:**

Women in Kuwait realized soon that in Kuwait's traditional and conservative society, only women's suffrage is not enough but they have to more struggle to increase women's participation. they continued their efforts to increase their participation in every segment of society. In the education sector, currently, women outnumber men in all three stages of education. In the

19. Kaya, "Women's Electoral Participation in Kuwait," 11-12

20. Julio Alicea, "Kuwaiti women struggle for suffrage (Blue Revolution), 2002–2005," *Global Nonviolent Action Database*. NV Database, February 16, 2011, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/kuwaiti-women-struggle-suffrage-blue-revolution-2002-2005>. (Accessed August 14, 2022).

21. Kaya, "Women's Electoral Participation in Kuwait," 11-12

22. Emily Wills, "Democratic Paradoxes: Women's Rights and Democratization in Kuwait," *The Middle East Journal* 67, no.2 (2012): 173–175, doi:10.3751/67.2.11. S2CID 145799054.

23. Ibid.

24. Julio Alicea, "Kuwaiti women struggle for suffrage (Blue Revolution), 2002–2005."

25. Ibid.

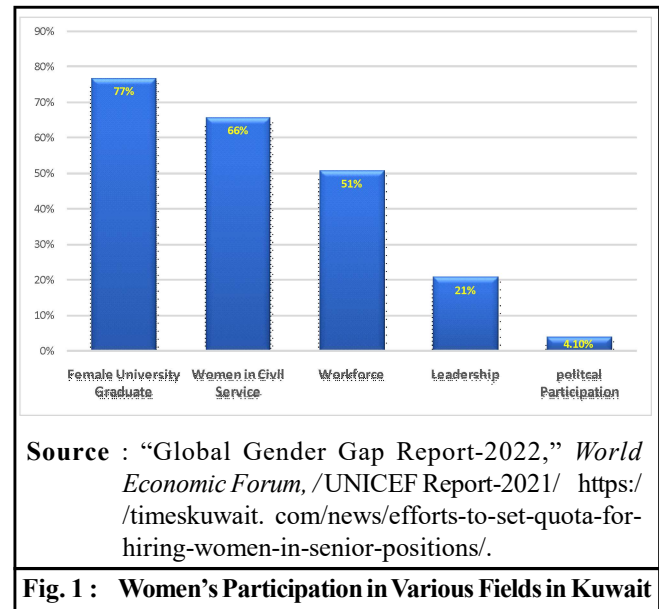
26. Souad T. Ali, *Perspectives of Five Kuwaiti Women in Leadership Role: Feminism, Islam, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 2, <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/resources/pdfs/978-1-5275-3131-4-sample.pdf>

27. Souad T. Ali, *Perspectives of Five Kuwaiti Women in Leadership Role: Feminism, Islam, and Politics*, 2.

28. Muhamad S. Olimat, ed., *Arab Spring and Arab Women: Challenges and Opportunities* (Abingdon: Routledge 2014), 89, GB, <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=-gg3AgAAQBAJ&pg=PA89&lpg=PA89&dq>.

workforce, they also gained remarkable achievements. According to the current World Economic Forum-Global Gender Gap Report, Kuwaiti women's enrolment in primary education is 99.12% in secondary education 100%, and most importantly in tertiary education is 81.78% whereas men's enrolment in tertiary education is only 43.45%.<sup>29</sup> It means that the number of female graduates is greater than men in Kuwait. And because of their higher education (according to UNICEF, women form 76% of university graduates), they are getting jobs in public administration more than their male counterparts.<sup>30</sup> They form about 66% of the civil service in Kuwait.<sup>31</sup> Their participation in the workforce is now increasing. According to the global gender gap report, the labour force participation rate is 47.43% which is significantly higher than the average rate of women's workforce participation in the MENA region (46%).<sup>32</sup> Women's role in leadership positions in Kuwait's public sector is also increasing. The available data has revealed that women currently occupied 21% of leadership positions in the country which is indeed a positive sign for women.<sup>33</sup> Since 2020, the door of Kuwait's courts has also opened up for women. now they can participate in all domains of Kuwaiti society. They can serve in the police, army, sports, and as judges in courts.<sup>34</sup> Also, they have consolidated their role in the development process in various fields as women they held senior posts in government ministries as secretaries and undersecretaries, in colleges and universities as heads, deans, and presidents, and as active members of the Supreme Council for Planning, boards, and unions in Kuwait. In addition, women have been participating at the international level as Kuwaiti ambassadors and as representatives in various international institutions and

human rights bodies. at the same time, women's representation in electoral arenas has been very small. As it is shown in the Fig. 1.



Kuwaiti women continue to fight against Kuwait's patriarchal culture and a male-dominated society that creates gender inequality in many areas, particularly in politics. Even the Kuwaiti constitution mentions the equality of women's rights and forbids any sort of discrimination based on gender.<sup>35</sup> However, in practice, there is still a gender gap, and women face many difficulties in eradicating gender-based discrimination and increasing their role in decision-making. They have been fighting for equal citizenship rights and against domestic violence. Most importantly, the Nationality act that does not allow women married to non-Kuwaiti to pass their

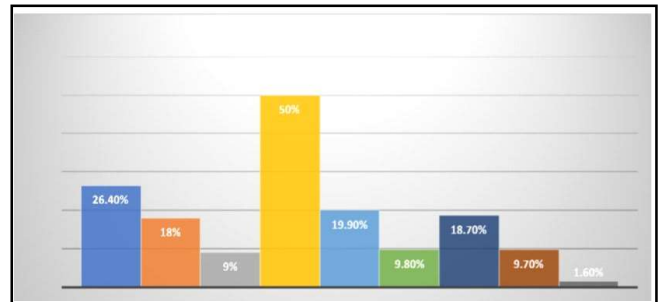
29. "Global Gender Gap Report 2022", *World Economic Forum*. Retrieved on 17 June, 2022, [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2022.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf).
30. Ismail Radwan and Fatma Ahmad al-Ibrahim, "Kuwait's #MeToo movement: "Lan Asket"— I will not be silent," *World Bank Blogs*, June 16, 2021, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/kuwaits-metoo-movement-lan-asket-i-will-not-be-silent>
31. Ibid.
32. "Global Gender Gap Report 2022", *World Economic Forum*. Retrieved on 17 June, 2022.
33. "Efforts to set quota for hiring women in senior positions," *Times Kuwait*, June 12, 2022, <https://timeskuwait.com/news/efforts-to-set-quota-for-hiring-women-in-senior-positions/>.
34. Fatima, Sakina, "In a first, Kuwait opens the door for women to join the army," *The Siasat Daily*, Dec.17, 2021, <https://www.siasat.com/in-a-first-kuwait-opens-the-door-for-women-to-join-the-army-2242978/>.
35. Article 29 of the Kuwaiti Constitution stipulates equality without discrimination according to sex, colour, language, or religion.

nationality to their children and husbands. And article 153 of the Kuwaiti Penal Code prescribes a minimal punishment or fine of about 225 Kuwaiti dinars for perpetrators of honour killing.<sup>36</sup>

Despite increased female activism and a greater number of female voters, women continue to be under-represented in electoral arenas. Women have not achieved notable success in Kuwaiti politics since women's suffrage. Following the February, 2009 elections, the number of female MPs decreased from four to three in December, 2012, two in 2013, one in 2016, and finally, the Kuwaiti legislature returned to its solely male version in 2020.<sup>37</sup> Also, women could not win any municipal elections so far. The government recently appointed only four women to the municipal council.<sup>38</sup>

### Comparative Analysis :

The growing activism and the high level of political awareness of women during the 2020 elections raised hope that women could obtain a significant seat in parliament, but the startling result dashed all hopes and it pushed Kuwait to the lowest level in matters of women's political representation in the Gulf region. Currently, Kuwaiti women's rate of political participation is not only lower than the GCC and the MENA region but also lower than the Global average women's participation rate. According to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2022, Kuwait reached the bottom in the Gulf region regarding women's political parity. The region's lowest subindex score in politics is that of Kuwait at 0.023 which pushed the country now to the 145th global rank out of 146 countries with 1.6% and 6.6% in terms of female representation in parliament and ministerial positions respectively.<sup>39</sup> As the below figure comparatively explains the percentage of women's participation rate in electoral arenas.



Source : "Women in Politics: Situation on 1 January 2021." *Inter-Parliamentary Union*, September 12, 2021, <https://www.ipu.org/news/women-in-politics-2021>

**Fig.2 : Percentage of Women's Participation in Parliament in World Average, MENA Region, and the GCC States**

### Obstacles and Challenges:

Many studies indicate that in Kuwait, patriarchal culture, deeply gendered structural inequalities, and male-dominancy in every domain of society create barriers to women's access to electoral arenas.<sup>40</sup> They also make it difficult for female candidates to organize election campaigns and build networks. In addition, the previous elections in Kuwait revealed a trust crisis regarding the significance of women's political roles and their ability to make changes.<sup>41</sup> Not only men but also a significant number of women, particularly from traditional families, did not build trust in women candidates. Despite more than 50% of female voters, the failure of women candidates in elections shows that they did yet not build trust in female candidates' abilities. Furthermore, women's vote also goes to male candidates, because, a significant number of women still are dependent on their male family members and they still obey their orders on for whom to cast their votes. As Kuwaiti writer, Abdul Aziz Alqenaei said that the absence of women from the National

36. Samyah Alfoory, "Abolish 153: Tackling Domestic Violence in Kuwait," *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, May 2, 2016, <https://agsiw.org/abolish-153-tackling-domestic-violence-in-kuwait/>.
37. Shareefa Fadhel, "Kuwaiti Women's Political Experience: A Khaleeji Affair," *LSE Blogs*, February 1st, 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2021/02/01/kuwaiti-womens-political-experience-a-khaleeji-affair/>.
38. Fatima, Sakina, "For the first time, 4 women appointed to Kuwaiti municipal council," *Siasat Daily*, June 2, 2022, <https://www.siasat.com/for-the-first-time-four-women-appointed-to-the-kuwaiti-municipal-council-2340152/>.
39. "Global Gender Gap Report 2022", *World Economic Forum*. Retrieved 17 June, 2022.
40. Zeynep N. Kaya, Women's Electoral Participation in Kuwait, *LSE Middle East Centre*, June 11, 2021, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/110877/2/Women\\_s\\_Electoral\\_Participation\\_in\\_Kuwait.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/110877/2/Women_s_Electoral_Participation_in_Kuwait.pdf)
41. Samia Aljaballi, "Women in the new Kuwaiti National Assembly: The Biggest Loser," *The Gulf House*, January 18, 2021, <https://gulfhouse.org/posts/4447/>.

Assembly is a “reason for great disappointment and a reflection of utter intellectual and cultural decline.”<sup>42</sup> He wrote on Twitter that women had not won seats in parliament because of “the persistence of the view of women as inferior to men, and a direct failure to support the efforts to empower Kuwaiti women, at the level of education, society, political and civil currents, and associations of public interest.”<sup>43</sup> However, according to recent data analyses, it can be said that the lack of Kuwaiti people’s trust in women as political leaders is more critical than cultural beliefs that negatively impact women’s political representation in Kuwait’s political arenas.

Furthermore, new changes to the electoral system in 2012, which reduced the number of votes per person from four to one (one vote, one person), lack of organized political parties with clear objectives, and the tribal and conservative Islamist forces also diminish women’s chances of winning elections.<sup>44</sup> For example, in tribal-dominated districts such as in 4th and 5th, women politicians have always faced difficulties to win the elections.<sup>45</sup> The one-vote system made it difficult for women to form networks and coalitions with other people and political groups. Under the one-vote system, voters generally cast their votes or support their favourite candidate or the candidates who are most likely to win the elections rather than give other candidates, including women a chance. A Kuwaiti Ex-campaign manager and businessman explained while giving his interview to Zeynep N. Kaya for her research project: “Previously, a voter had four votes and at least one of those votes would go to women. So, your first choice is the guy you know, your second choice is the guy you want, your third choices

is “we need to give women a chance”, and the fourth vote, you give to whomever. But now ... it is only one vote and that’s not good.”<sup>46</sup> Women also struggle to gain access to male-dominated traditional gatherings such as diwanias. In the Gulf States, diwanias are popular places for people to gather and discuss current issues.<sup>47</sup> During elections, diwanias serve as consultative platforms through which public opinions can be gauged. The agreed opinion of diwanias mostly goes in favour of male candidates. Additionally, tribal primaries are a significant impediment to women’s ability to win elections, particularly in tribally dominated districts such as the 4th and 5th, but also in other districts.<sup>48</sup> The tribes hold primary elections in these districts and select their candidates before the official polls. Despite the fact that they are illegal, they are still carried out. The tribal primaries create hierarchies and additional obstacles for women to overcome.

Furthermore, the lack of affirmative action policies, such as the quota system for women, the lack of financial resources for women, the ongoing Wasta (favouritism and clientelism) trend, corruption, and political polarization, have slowed the momentum of women’s political emancipation in Kuwait.<sup>49</sup> There are other barriers that prevent women from playing an important role in decision-making.

### Impacts and prospects:

The women’s suffrage and political development that women achieved so far are perceived as very important. their political involvement is also influencing women’s status and changing the discourse around women’s political role in Kuwait.<sup>50</sup> Now, Kuwaiti people started to realize

42. “Kuwaitis wonder why even the women voted for men,” *The Arab Weekly*, Monday 07/12/2020, <https://theArabweekly.com/kuwaitis-wonder-why-even-women-voted-men>

43. Ibid.

44. Marwa Shalaby and Adan Obeid, “Women’s Representation Under Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Kuwait,” Research Gate, May 16, 2017, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343059046\\_Women’s\\_Representation\\_Under\\_Authoritarian\\_Regimes\\_The\\_Case\\_of\\_Kuwait](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343059046_Women’s_Representation_Under_Authoritarian_Regimes_The_Case_of_Kuwait). Accessed August 12, 2022.

45. Muhamad S. Olimat, “Women and Politics in Kuwait,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 11, no. 2 (Sept. 2009): 209-210, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/48828433.pdf>.

46. Kaya, “Women’s Electoral Participation in Kuwait,” 19.

47. Ibid, no.47.

48. Muhamad S. Olimat, “Women and Politics in Kuwait,” 210.

49. Hirak Jyoti Das, “National Assembly Elections in Kuwait, 2016,” 205-210.

50. Kaya, “Women’s Electoral Participation in Kuwait,” 19-22.

the significance of women's representation in politics. now, they are coming forward to advocate women's role in politics. Women's issues are now accepted to openly discuss in parliament. the recent efforts and initiatives taken by the women's rights activists and Women's NGOs such as IBTKAR and its EKWIP program (Empowering Kuwaiti Women in Politics) Partners Global Program, Efforts of Kuwait University's Women's Research and Studies Centre, Women Mentor Forum, Mudhawi's List, etc. have positively been impacting the women's political status.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, women's growing activism and collaboration of women's organizations with various international organizations coupled with the Kuwaiti government's ratifications of international conventions and its New Kuwait Vision 2035 are becoming helping tools to enhance women's role in politics.<sup>52</sup> These all initiatives created hope that women's representation in Kuwaiti political arenas will increase in the future.

### Conclusion and recommendations:

However, Kuwaiti women have actively participated in the country's development process since its independence. They made remarkable progress in education, the workforce, and civil service. Nonetheless, despite their great efforts, they trailed far behind in electoral arenas. Women's representation has steadily decreased since the 2012 parliamentary elections. Finally, in 2020, the Kuwaiti parliament reverted to a purely male composition. The aforementioned barriers have played a significant role in limiting women's political participation in Kuwait. The Women's political progress can be achieved if these barriers are removed.

On the other hand, the fact that only a small number of women have been elected in Kuwait since 2005. It does not mean that women's participation is not in politics. Women hold unelected positions in the government and activism for women's legal, political and socio-economic rights, and women's participation in unions and political associations should also be considered as political participation in its informal form and it does not mean

that women's suffrage and the women's political development achieved so far have not made any impact on women's political participation. These developments have changed the discourse around women's political and public roles in Kuwait.

Women's political representation at the desired level is difficult only through women's efforts, the responsibility also falls on the government's shoulders to overcome the challenges that women face and transform the Kuwaiti political space into a more inclusive one. the government can provide direct support to increase women's participation by implementing affirmative action policies such as quota system and appointment in the political sphere. If the government wants to use women's abilities in political affairs, it should launch government-supported awareness programs. Through financial and other means of support, the government should encourage programs that focus on political awareness and political empowerment of women.

Kuwaiti women themselves have to organize first. Women activists and politicians have to initiate more awareness programs to aware women as well as men regarding the importance of women's role. They have to accelerate their efforts to find out ways to access male-dominated social gatherings such as diwanis. In these gatherings, women can influence people to change their perception of their role in politics.

In addition, Kuwaiti women's rights activists and organizations can expand their efforts in collaboration with international institutions and gender-related organizations to discuss Kuwaiti women's issues, train more women in politics, and persuade the Kuwaiti government to build an inclusive political system with more equitable female representation in decision-making. However, the women's growing struggles, their recent political development, and several initiatives at the private and government levels have been influencing women's status quo, changing the people's perceptions around women's political role and raising hope for further progress of women in politics in near future.

\*\*\*\*\*

51. Gharam A. Dexter and Abeer Al-Mutawa, "Kuwait taking promising steps towards women's empowerment & gender equality," *World Bank Blogs*, Mar.01, 2022, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/kuwait-taking-promising-steps-towards-womens-empowerment-gender-equality>. For more information, one can visit: <https://agsiw.org/mudhawis-list-advocating-for-kuwaiti-women-in-politics/>.

52. "Kuwait supports women's empowerment in line with vision 2035," *Kuwait Times*, June 6, 2022, <https://www.kuwaittimes.com/kuwait-supports-womens-empowerment-in-line-with-vision-2035/>.