POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN THE ARAB GULF MONARCHIES WITH A
SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF KUWAIT AND SAUDI
ARABIA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

İREM AŞKAR

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

AUGUST 2005

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN THE ARAB GULF MONARCHIES WITH A SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF KUWAIT AND SAUDI ARABIA

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August 2005, 164 pages

Arab Gulf monarchies including the constitutional monarchies of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman; and the absolutist monarchies of the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in general, have a poor record of political liberalization. Until the early 1990's, there have been attempts to implement political reforms, however even limited political reforms have been short-lived. Nevertheless, political liberalization in the Arab Gulf monarchies has accelerated particularly since the end of the Cold War, as most of the Arab Gulf ruling elites were then convinced of opening up their political systems. Yet, regardless of similarities in their domestic political contexts, the quality and the quantity of political reform implemented, differed from one Arab Gulf state to another. This study aims to examine, how the ruling regimes of the Arab Gulf have responded to changes in the international context along with the increasing demands for political reform. In addition, it aims to provide the reader with a detailed examination of political liberalization in two specific Arab Gulf states, namely the Kuwait and the Saudi Arabia. Throughout this study, overall performances of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in terms of political liberalization are compared and the reasons why Kuwait has been noticeably more successful than Saudi Arabia in this field are studied. It is the basic

conclusion of this study that despite Arab Gulf regimes have been slow in taking steps towards political liberalization, they are not immune to political liberalization, and that even the most conservative Arab Gulf monarchy, the Saudi Arabia has not been able to remain indifferent to change and political reform.

ÖZ

KÖRFEZ ARAP MONARŞİLERİNDE POLİTİK LİBERALLEŞME VE BU ALANDA SUUDİ ARABİSTAN VE KUVEYT' İN TECRUBELERİNİN KARŞILAŞTIRILMASI

Aşkar, İrem

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Ağustos 2005, 164 sayfa

Politik liberalleşme alanında tutucu oldukları bilinen Körfez Arap rejimleri Soğuk Savaş sonrasında farklı iç ve dış dinamiklerin de etkisi ile değişime ve politik reforma kayıtsız kalamamıştır. Özellikle 1990-1991 Körfez Savaşı ve 11 Eylül terörist saldırıları ile Körfez Arap rejimleri üzerindeki iç ve dış baskılar artmış, bu rejimler için meşruiyet krizi kaçınılmaz olmuştur. Dolayısı ile farklı nitelik ve niceliklere sahip olmalarına rağmen politik reformlar Körfez Arap monarşilerinde gerçekleştirilmeye başlamıştır. Bu çalışma Körfez Arap monarşilerinde politik liberalleşmeye yol açan nedenleri ve farklı rejimlerin bu alanda yapmış oldukları ilerlemeleri incelemektedir. Bunun yanında, Kuveyt ve Suudi Arabistan'ın politik liberalleşme alanındaki tecrübeleri ayrıntılı olarak çalışılmakta, karşılaştırılmakta ve bu alanda Kuveyt'in neden Suudi Arabistan'dan belirgin olarak daha başarılı olduğunun üzerinde durulmaktadır. Bu çalışmada elde edilen temel sonuç, her ne kadar Körfez Arap monarşileri politik liberalleşme alanında parlak bir geçmişe sahip olmasalar da, bu ülkelerim siyasi reforma tamamen kapalı kalamamış oldukları ve aralarındaki en tutucu ülke olan Suudi Arabistan'ın bile bu alanda belli bir yol almış olduğudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Körfez Arap Monarşileri, Suudi Arabistan, Kuveyt, politik liberalleşme, temsil kurumları

To My Parents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Dr. İhsan D. Dağı not only for his guidance and patience, but also for his advices, and feedbacks, while I was writing this thesis.

I would also like to thank Assoc. Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık and Assist. Prof. Dr. Recep Boztemur for their valuable suggestions, comments and kindness.

I am also grateful to my family for their understanding and encouragement. Last but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Can Karakır for his affectionate existence as well as his endless moral support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis emerged out of a discontent with the view that the Arab Middle East is exceptional, when the issue of political liberalization is concerned, due to resistance to change and political reform in this particular region. The sense of deep suspicion regarding any harmony between democracy and the Arab Middle East is mostly shaped by images of political violence, corruption, poor representation and insufficient political institutions. Arab states of the Middle East are represented as areas of instability. Without any doubt, a number of Arab states refused to go along with the new wave of political liberalization pointing out similar excuses. However, this does not necessarily suggest an induction that Arab states of the Middle East are exceptional when the issue of democracy is concerned.

In reality, immunity to political reform is not monolithic among the Arab states of the Middle East, let alone among the tiny states of the Arab Gulf. In recent years, there has been growth both in the number and influence of a variety of social movements to challenge the power of the ruling regimes in the Arab Middle East. At the same time, we are witnessing initiation and development of liberal practices and institutions by a range of Arab states to open their political systems and to enhance their legitimacy. In this regard, the arguments about the absence of political liberalization in the Arab Middle East are based on a narrow and static approach to these states. In order to find out whether or not political liberalization is absent in a given country, the analysis should also take into consideration the social, political, economic, cultural and historical setting of that given state. Otherwise, as democracy is a Western concept, the preconditions for democracy are

mostly Western-oriented, and therefore the setting in the Arab world appears to be contradictory to democratization.

Within the Arab Middle East, the Arab Gulf Monarchies exhibit an extraordinary case in terms of their stabilities. While monarchies are a minority in the world of the 21st century, the stability of the Arab Gulf Monarchies located in the heart of a reputably unstable region is very astonishing in today's world. One may wonder how the Arab Gulf ruling regimes survived the challenge of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, which toppled monarchs in Egypt, Libya and Iraq. Likewise, these regimes were able to survive Islamic extremism of late 1970s, which caused profound changes in the political structures of Iran and Sudan, in addition to triggering civil wars in Algeria and Lebanon. The ruling families in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have held power, largely uncontested, for a long time. In other words, process of political change, in general has been slow in the Arabian Peninsula. The reason for the uniqueness of the Arab Gulf states among the other Arab states may be that they have been able to keep some of their traditional political features, while also they have adapted to modernization, and here the role of the huge oil revenues should not be ignored.

The move towards more open political systems in the Arab Gulf states is primarily depended on the economic difficulties of the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The Arab Gulf states experienced a rapid modernization with the influx of massive oil revenues with the early 1970s. However, the scope of progress in the Arab Gulf has been uneven, due to a number of reasons including political exclusion, fluctuations in the price of oil, and unmanageable social changes related with increasing level of education, growing population, increasing unemployment and rising expectations of the people. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait were the additional factors to force ruling families to take into account the demands for political reform. Faced with severe economic difficulties, increasing popular demands for political reform, and the changes in the

international context, Arab Gulf ruling elites have had almost no other choice but to consider the introduction of political reforms. Moreover, it was impossible for the Arab Gulf states to prevent the impact of globalization over their populations.

Most of the Arab Gulf ruling elites were then convinced of opening up their political systems. Yet, they have been implementing political reforms at different rates and with different intensity. Some have chosen to introduce major reforms and cleared the way for the establishment of constitutional monarchies, while others have been more cautious and preferred to open up of political space within the boundaries of the existing political system. One of the strongest criticisms of the Gulf citizens against their government has been the lack of government accountability, which has in turn encouraged abuse of power and corruption. Besides, it is difficult to talk about any real transparency in the political systems of these states. What is more, decision-making process in these monarchies is hereditary and dominated by a few individuals, who are privileged by birth.

Nevertheless, since the ending of the Cold war, regardless of divergences in size and domestic political context, all the Arab Gulf Monarchies have faced the challenges of change and political reform. The main objective of this thesis is to find out whether Arab Gulf states are exceptional with respect to political liberalization or not. In addition, why the steps taken towards political liberalization has differed from one Arab Gulf state to another, despite the similarities both in their political cultures and their political economies will be examined. For this purpose, the study will analyze how the ruling regimes of the Arab Gulf have responded to changes in the international context along with the increasing demands for political reform. In this connection, the obstacles to political liberalization and the factors to encourage political reform in these states will be discussed.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are chosen as case studies with the former, generally perceived as a comparatively successful case, while the latter is accepted

as unsuccessful with respect to their performances in initiating political reform. Of all the states in the Arab Gulf, Kuwait has had the longest experience with representative institutions and relatively liberal procedures. In contrast, Saudi Arabia has always been conservative and unwilling to adapt change. On the one hand, Kuwait is the first Arab Gulf state to have an elected national assembly while on the other, Saudi Arabia still lacks a genuine elected representative parliamentary institution. Why has Kuwait been considerably more successful, in terms of political liberalization, when compared with Saudi Arabia? Throughout this study, overall performances of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia will be compared and the reasons for the noticeable success of Kuwait will be explored.

This thesis aims to demonstrate that even the most conservative Arab Gulf monarchy, the Saudi Arabia has not been able to remain indifferent to change and political reform which has been one of the critical issues on the world political agenda to be debated, especially since September 11.

This thesis is made up of six chapters. In the introduction part, the aim of the study is higlighted, along with explanations with respect to details to be examined in the proceeding chapters. The second chapter tries to give the reader necessary conceptual tools to understand the methodology which is used throughout the study. It provides an overview to political liberalization in the Arab Gulf monarchies, while also addressing both the obstacles to and reasons of shift towards political reform in the context of the Arab Gulf states.

Chapter three explores the Kuwaiti experience of political liberalization with a particular attention paid to the progress achieved in the post Cold war period. Reflections of political liberalization in the development of Kuwaiti representative institutions including the national assembly, the media and the civil society are analyzed in details. Eventually, challenges to political liberalization in Kuwait are examined including specific limitations and pitfalls.

Likewise, the focus is on the process of political liberalization in Saudi Arabia precisely since the end of the Cold War in chapter four. To this end, responses of the Saudi ruling elites to demands of the masses are highlighted. In addition, it points to the factors to influence political reform in the Saudi Kingdom. Both the Kuwaiti and the Saudi cases are compared in the fifth chapter. The comparison of the two experiences with respect to political liberalization clarifies that despite the similarities in their political cultures and political economies, Kuwaiti ruling elites have responded to calls for political reform noticeably more actively, when compared with the Saudi ruling elites. It is also argued that while changes in the international context was influential in the process of political liberalization in both states, its impact on Kuwait has been much more intense in comparison with the Saudi Arabia. Finally, the purpose of the last chapter is to put forward the conclusions which can be drawn from this thesis with reference to results of the analysis from previous chapters.

The overall aim of this thesis is to show that, despite Arab Gulf regimes have been slow in taking steps towards political liberalization, they are not immune or exceptional with respect to openings in their political systems, as they have had their own share from the winds of change and political reform. Moreover, the divergences in the experiences of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia would demonstrate that even countries with similar political structures would considerably differ from each other in their political experiences, and that generalizations do not always reflect realities.

CHAPTER 2

**POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN THE ARAB, GULF MONARCHIES:
AN OVERVIEW**

2.1. Theoretical Approach to Political Liberalization in the Arab, Gulf Monarchies

In order to examine political liberalization in the Arab Gulf monarchies, particular attention should be paid to the definition of political liberalization. What does political liberalization mean? What distinguishes the process of political liberalization from the process of democratization? These questions are useful to guide one through the right definition of political liberalization. But first of all, it would be appropriate to distinguish between the two concepts, 'political liberalization' and 'democratization', as these concepts are easily mixed up from time to time.

Several scholars have made distinction between these two concepts in their works. According to Holger and Schlumberger, political liberalization differs from democratization, in terms of its 'end result'. They think that whereas, democratization is a process to lead to democracy, which is a clear 'end result', political liberalization does not necessarily lead to democracy. [1] Another distinction between these two concepts is made by Pool. Pool on the one hand, describes political liberalization as the introduction of some democratic principles, in addition to a shift away from an authoritarian system. On the other hand, Pool differentiates democratization from liberalization through emphasizing that the former is the

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[1] Holger Albrecht and Oliver Schlumberger, "Waiting for Godot: Regime Change Without Democratization in the Middle East," *International Political Science Review* 25 (2004): 375.

extension of the liberalization process through a "more stable and rooted political order." [2]

Monshipouri views the distinction between political liberalization and democratization from a different perspective, as he examines these concepts within the context of third world countries. Monshipouri focuses on the fact that political liberalization extends the survival of the authoritarian regimes, taking into account the impact of the liberalization process on solving the problems and reducing the tensions in the short run. Therefore, from Monshipouri's point of view, democratization will not automatically follow political liberalization in every case. [3] Nevertheless, Monshipouri thinks that a gradual political liberalization is better than an abrupt democratization for overcoming the socio-economic problems of the third world countries and preparing these societies for democracy in the long run. [4]

Given the above-mentioned approaches to the distinction between political liberalization and democratization, it can be said that although these two terms are closely connected, political liberalization differs from democratization, as it refers to an opening in the political system without any certain rules and procedures to end up in a democracy. Unlike political liberalization, democratization is about the procedures and a clear set of institutional arrangements whose implementation would provide a transition to democracy. Political reforms in the Arab, Gulf monarchies, in general, do not have any systematic roots and they do not follow a stable path. That is why, it would be more appropriate to call the openings in the political systems of the Arab, Gulf monarchies under the title of political liberalization rather than democratization. Here it would be also meaningful to give place to the definition of democracy by Saad Eddin Ibrahim. He says: "Democracy,

[2] David Pool, "Staying at home with the wife: democratization and its limits in the Middle East," in Democracy and Democratization, ed. G. Parry and M. Moran (London: Routledge, 1994), 197.

[3] Mahmood Monshipouri, Democratization, Liberalization and Human Rights in the Third World (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 8.

[4] Monshipouri, 11.

after all, is a set of rules and institutions designed to enable governance through the peaceful management of competing groups and/or conflicting interests." [5]

Having distinguished between the processes of political liberalization and democratization, further elaboration of the concept of political liberalization should be made. According to a variety of scholars, political liberalization means "the expansion of public space" and it is achieved as a result of "the recognition and protection of civil and political liberties". [6] To put it differently, political liberalization is argued to be an idea to make the society more free to prepare it for a departure from the authoritarian order. [7] Overall, this approach defines political liberalization as: "Opening up the system and providing clear opportunities for individual expression, social mobility and political participation." [8] In fact, two additions to this definition can be made in order to clarify the notion of political liberalization within the context of the Arab, Gulf monarchies. The first point is that the speed and the scope of political liberalization in a given Arab Gulf state changes, in accordance with the historical background, in addition to the specific political and socio-economic conditions of that state. Secondly, the international context and the reactions showed to the changing conditions in this context by a given Arab Gulf state is also very significant to understand the framework of political liberalization in that particular state.

After this conceptual overview of political liberalization, it would be appropriate to have a look at political liberalization in the Arab Gulf monarchies from a general perspective. In fact, the Arab states of the Middle East region is

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[5] Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: An Overview," in Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, eds. R. Brynen, B. Korany and P. Noble (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 30.

[6] Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble (eds.), Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World (Vol. I) (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 3.

[7] Monshipouri, 12.

[8] See James A. Bill and Robert Springborg, Politics in the Middle East (New York: Longman, 2000), 301.

widely accepted by the scholars as exceptional in terms of their approach to political liberalization, democratization and democracy. In other words, scholars have found, in general, the Arab states ignorant and resistant to political reform. John Waterbury expresses his idea about this issue as: "For the sake of argument, I am taking at face the claim that the Middle East, or, more specifically, the Arab Middle East is exceptional in its resistance to political liberalization." [9] Without any doubt, Arab Gulf monarchies are also included within this argument. But why the Arab Middle East is said to be more immune to political liberalization? According to an argument, it is directly related with the domination of the economies by the ruling regimes as the states in this particular region use economic wealth in return for political loyalty. It is further argued that "substitution of material benefits for political liberalization" is widespread in the Gulf states, where the regimes have more access to valuable resources. [10]

It appears from this argument that the resistance of the Arab, Gulf monarchies to political reform is linked closely to the economic wealth possessed by the ruling regime and the ability of the regimes to use this wealth to buy the loyalty of the people. Nevertheless, economic wealth alone would not be enough to explain the behavior of the Arab Gulf monarchies towards political liberalization. Therefore, the factors, which have made the scholars to think that these monarchies are likely to be immune to political liberalization, will be analyzed in details in the forthcoming parts of this chapter. In addition, the developments, which may prevent one to think about the Arab, Gulf monarchies as fully alien to political liberalization, due to fact that these developments had an encouraging impact regarding political reforms will also be examined. But, first the focus will be on what political representation and the institutions of political representation refer to.

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[9] John Waterbury, "Democracy Without Democrats?: the potential for political liberalization in the Middle East," in Democracy without Democrats?: The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World, ed. Ghassan Salame (London: I.B Tauris Publishers, 1994), 23.

[10] Robert L. Rothstein, "Democracy in the Third World: Definitional Dilemmas," in Democracy, War and Peace in the Middle East, ed. David Garnham and Mark Tessler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 77.

2.1.1. Political Representation as a Unit of Analysis

In this study, political representation and the institutions of political representation are chosen as units of analysis to evaluate the process of political liberalization in the Arab Gulf monarchies. Firstly, emphasis will be on the concept of political representation, and its significance for political liberalization. What does political representation mean? In its narrowest sense, political representation is the state of being represented in the political system. In fact, political representation is closely related with the political participation, which refers to participation of the people in the elections both to choose their representatives to represent their interests, and to stand in as candidates to become representatives. Certainly, it is very difficult to think about one of these concepts without the other. In other words, these concepts are interrelated, as political representation would only be fully achieved through political participation of the people to the political system through their votes. J. E. Peterson defines political participation as "a process whereby individuals engage in activity that impinges directly upon the national power and authority structure of the society." [11] In keeping with Peterson's view, it should be emphasized that an electoral process, which is based on universal suffrage is significant for both political participation and the political representation. As it is indicated, "elections have been the most common way of expanding political participation in government decision-making around the world."[12]

The concept of political representation is an important component of any strategy to measure political liberalization in a given state. In addition, it is directly linked to the accountability towards the people in that given state and, therefore it is a clear indication of the legitimacy of any regime. Political representation has always been problematic within the context of the Arab Gulf monarchies. There are serious deficiencies in the system of political representation in these monarchies, let

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[11] John E. Peterson, The Arab Gulf States: Steps Toward Political Participation (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 12.

alone the absence of political participation of women and the minorities. Regarding this issue, Lisa Anderson points out the fact that these regimes have "half-hearted commitment to egalitarian values" and there is "ambiguous or nonexistent reference to popular sovereignty in the legal or theoretical foundations of these regimes". [13] In fact, Peterson mentions that initially the ruler and the people had direct and personal relationship in these Arab, Gulf states. [14] But, once the state has grown and the population has increased rapidly, then the accountability of the rulers has almost disappeared. Another perspective about the problem of accountability is offered by Byman and Green. According to them, decision making process in the Arab Gulf states is "dominated by a few individuals privileged by birth, not by merit" and this causes the lack of government accountability, in addition to the abuse of power and corruption in these states. [15] This observation of Byman and Green reflects political representation in these states because of various reasons. First of all, the members of the ruling families dominate almost all the significant positions in these states. Secondly, political opposition is not allowed to function or where it is allowed, it has a very limited role. Lastly, let alone the absence of universal suffrage in these states, these political systems does not have any real representative institutions as it will be explained in the next section.

2.1.2 Institutions of Political Representation as a Unit of Analysis

Having analyzed the concepts of political representation and political participation let me focus on the institutions of political representation. Representative institutions are relevant for any political reform because the encouragement of change without the necessary institutions would be risky and it would have unpredictable results. Moreover, representative institutions mainly the

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[12] Brynen, Korany and Noble (Vol. I), 4.

[13] Lisa Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East," Political Science Quarterly 106 (1991): 15.

[14] Peterson, The Arab Gulf States: Steps Toward Political Participation, 14-15.

[15] Daniel L. Byman and Jerrold D. Green, "The Enigma of Political Stability in the Persian Gulf Monarchies," in Middle East Review of International Affairs September 1999 Vol.3 No.3, <http://meria.idc.ac.il>

parliaments are vital instruments for the legitimacy of the regimes. As Elie Kedouri notes, "parliamentary institutions represent the people and give public assent in recognized, proper and regular forms to laws and to the acts of government." [16]

Despite of its limited role, national assembly or in other words, the national council is the main representative institution in the Arab Gulf states except for the Saudi Arabia. According to Peterson national councils are necessary and functional institutions in the Gulf States because of the fact, that "while traditional aspects of Gulf societies and politics remain strong, modifications in the political structure require the reformulations of the bases of legitimacy." [17] The naming of the national council or the national assembly varies among the states. Mostly the term, 'majlis' is used to define the limited representative institution in the Arab Gulf states.

In fact, majlis in these states have functioned as semi-elected or appointed parliament-like bodies or as advisory councils. As a result, the representation of the people cannot be fully realized. In order for the people to be represented, all the deputies in the majlis should pass from an electoral process, in which every single mature individual have an access to vote regardless of gender, religion or ethnicity. At this point, Peterson argues that popular vote was not apparent in these bodies. For him, "representation by popular vote has succeeded only in voluntary associations, such as clubs and professional societies, which are not subject to government intervention". [18] Although electoral process is used by some of the Arab Gulf states to a limited extent, mostly ruling regime have the right to appoint the members of the representative institutions. Therefore, majlises are not solely the representatives of the people, as they are in most cases dominated by the appointed members, whom the ruling regimes have chosen to control these

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[16] Elie Kedouri, Democracy and Arab Political Culture (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1994), 4.

[17] Peterson, The Arab Gulf States: Steps Toward Political Participation, 118.

[18] Peterson, The Arab Gulf States: Steps Toward Political Participation, 20.

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institutions from inside. Central authorities also, dissolve these bodies when there are any criticisms to the regime or when there are tensions over an issue or decision.

As it was already mentioned earlier, representative organs are significant for the legitimacy of the regimes. These organs are also significant, as they include the people within the system and therefore instrumental in preventing the political alienation to a certain extent. According to Byman and Green, the inclusion of the people into the system through representative institutions "undermines violence generated by political alienation". [19] Another argument of Byman and Green is that "the local gatherings, informal talks and weak legislatures bolster the regimes' claims that they respect, and listen to the voices of the citizenry." [20] Without any doubt, despite they are informal, traditional gatherings are still very important instruments among the ruler and the ruled in these societies, where the people inform the ruler or ministers from the ruling family about their demands. However, today access to these gatherings is not as easy as it had been once and, therefore these gatherings are mostly the places where the demands of the elites are discussed.

Overall, institutions, especially the representative ones are the keys to understand the scope of political liberalization in a given country. Marsha P. Posusney points out, "Institutions are invoked to explain why the political openings in the Middle East have not evolved into genuine transitions". [21] Posusney's argument is applicable in the context of the Arab Gulf states because representative institutions are significant tools to raise the demands of the people towards political liberalization. Therefore, some of the ruling regimes should end their continued suspension of the national assemblies while the others should transform these

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[19] Byman and Green, "The Enigma of Political Stability in the Persian Gulf Monarchies."

[20] Byman and Green, "The Enigma of Political Stability in the Persian Gulf Monarchies."

[21] Marsha P. Posusney, "Enduring Authoritarianism: Middle East Lessons for Comparative Theory," Comparative Politics 36 (2004): 131.

institutions from consultative councils to national assemblies, in order to open the way for political liberalization.

2.2. Obstacles to Political Liberalization in the Arab Gulf

Obstacles to political liberalization in the Arab Gulf will be analyzed under four classifications including the political culture, impact of the British control, 'rentier-state' experience and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

2.2.1 Components of Political Culture

2.2.1.1. Tribalism

Although the Arab Gulf monarchies are no longer purely tribal societies in today's world, the way the regimes govern their societies still includes various traditional aspects, which take their roots from the tribal social behavior of these societies. The impact of tribalism, and its reflection on the Arab Gulf politics in the forms of informality, personalism, patrimonialism and patron-client relationship form an obstacle to political liberalism in the region. In order to analyze tribalism as an obstacle to political liberalism in the region, we have to first explore the relationship between the tribes and the politics in the Gulf and question why the ruling elites favor these traditional institutions. There are mainly three reasons to explain the importance of tribalism in Arab Gulf politics.

First of all, there is a strong historical reference to tribes, as the support of the individual tribes was absolutely essential for the ruling elites in the formation of these states. The early leaders did not have any armies and, in order to obtain armed forces to unite various social groups and to establish their rule above them, they asked for the support of tribal shaykhs. F. Gregory Gause III defines this situation as: "With no standing armies, the early leaders had to negotiate with tribal shaykhs to raise fighting forces." [22] Secondly, rulers of these regimes have used

tribalism as a legitimizing tool. Peterson points out that the legitimacy of the ruling family in the Gulf was based on "reference to an idealized notion of traditional power-sharing in tribal society."[23] The central argument here is related with the mechanism of an ordinary tribe, which involves people, who have faith to the shaykh of the tribe and feel themselves responsible to him. Accordingly, the rulers of Arab Gulf monarchies have described themselves to these people as the main shaykh of all the tribes in the country. Lastly, the access to tribal connections is not only significant for a ruling family to establish its rule but also it is significant for the further survival of that ruling family. Gause points out the significance of tribal connections with these words: "In one way or another, all the ruling families of the Arab Gulf relied upon tribal political connections and military strength to come to power."[24]

Today, though to a lesser extent, the tribes are still important components of the political structure of the Arab Gulf monarchies, and this forms an obstacle to political liberalization in the region, due to mainly two points. One of the points is that the ruling elite has continued to favor traditional tribal institutions and practices, in spite of the modern, rational institutions. Without any doubt, tribal institutions and practices are not sufficient enough to cope with the problems of modernization. In reality, ruling elites have supported tribal institutions, in order both to have an eye on them and to provide political loyalty. In this support, interests of the ruling elites have been relevant, as Gause states, that the ruling regimes depend on tribal support when it is necessary but, when they are able to establish their rule then they try to weaken the autonomy of the tribes.[25] Gause

[22] F. Gregory Gause III, Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1993), 18.

[23] Peterson, The Arab Gulf States: Steps Toward Political Participation, 8.

[24] Gause III, Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States, 17.

[25] F. Gregory Gause III, "The Persistence of Monarchy in the Arabian Peninsula: A Comparative Analysis," in Middle East Monarchies: the Challenge of Modernity, ed. Joseph Kostiner (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 174.

also mentions that in exchange of benefits, the ruling regimes have "provided financial support and an honored social place to tribal sheikhs". [26]

Another point regarding tribalism as an obstacle is that the tribal identity imposed in the Gulf region is contradictory with the notion of citizenship. The tribe, which you belong to and your position in that tribe still influences your access to decision-making process. This brings informality and personalism to politics and it is against the nature of political liberalism as on the one hand, tribal social structure is argued to be inhospitable to democratization, and hostile to liberalization. [27] On the other, tribal social structures are thought to hinder the development of democratic values, and institutions. [28]

2.2.1.2. Islam

Islam has also always been an important component to influence the politics in the Arab Gulf monarchies with various means. First of all, for the ruling regimes of the Arab Gulf, Islam has been a vital tool to unite divergent tribes together, in other words, Islam has been the common denominator of numerous different tribes. Secondly, the Islamic institutions provide the leaders with a set of institutions to depend on, especially in the formative stage of their states. The rulers have made the Islamic institutions such as mosques, Islamic schools and Islamic courts as a part of their states. Gause III notes: "The taming of religious institutions has been a major part of state building in the Arab Gulf monarchies, but, once the secular authority's supremacy was established, rulers sought to make Islamic institutions into agencies of the state." [29] In reality, by giving the Islamic institutions a role in

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[26] Gause, "The Persistence of Monarchy in the Arabian Peninsula: A Comparative Analysis," 175.

[27] Rothstein, 79.

[28] Lisa Anderson, "Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach," in Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, eds. Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 81.

[29] Gause III, Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States, 14.

the system, rulers have aimed to take these institutions under control and to earn their loyalty in order to prevent the formation of any possible opposition.

Lastly, as it also occurs with tribalism, the rulers use Islam as a legitimizing force as Bill and Springborg note: "Islam provided the patrimonial leader with an ideology that buttressed the political patterns by which he ruled." [30] In other words, Islam has provided political leaders with a rationalization and justification for their positions. Among the six Arab Gulf monarchies, probably Saudi Arabia is the one to use Islam as a legitimizing tool the most. Saudi regime frequently emphasizes its faith to the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, which is a strict kind of adopting Islamic principles. Furthermore, Saudi regime claims itself as the guardian of the holy places in Mecca and Medina. In keeping with this perspective, Gause III points out that the relationship between Islamic institutions and political authority in Saudi Arabia has been closer than in the other monarchies. [31]

Having analyzed the relationship between Islam and politics in the Arab Gulf states, now the focus will be on why Islam is an obstacle to political liberalization in the region. One of the arguments put forward by various scholars is that Islam is not compatible with democracy. This argument most probably arises from the nature of Islam, which addresses both material and spiritual aspects of life. Harari explains this situation as: "Islam is not merely a religion, it is a political, social, and legal way of life. Religion and state are so intertwined in classical Islam that it is impossible to appreciate one without understanding the other." [32] Harari also emphasizes the fact that divine law is the real source of authority in a Muslim state and the main aim of the state is the enforcement of that law. [33] While Islam is not only a religious system, Quran is not also simply a religious book, as it offers

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[30] Bill and Springborg, 127.

[31] Gause III, Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States, 12.

[32] Maurice Harari, Government and Politics of the Middle East (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1962), 1.

references to social, political and legal components of a state system. According to Ghassan Salame, "Since the Prophet revealed a religion and founded a state at the same time, his successors are unable to isolate these two elements without betraying his message." [34]

Another argument put forward by some scholars is that political traditions of Islam are incompatible with the principles of political liberalization. Elie Kedourie points out that political traditions of Islam are unfamiliar to the "organizing ideas of constitutional and representative government." [35] He further argues: "The notion of popular sovereignty as the foundation of governmental legitimacy, the idea of representation, of elections, of popular suffrage, of political institutions being regulated by laws laid down by a parliamentary assembly are profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition." [36]

Islam is also found contradictory to political liberalization by some scholars, due to its approach to women and non-muslim minorities. For some scholars, like Anderson, this approach is related with the authoritarian politics which is "very often attributed to Islam". [37] Accordingly, Anderson thinks that the discriminatory treatment of women and non-Muslim minorities in Islamic states is inconsistent with democratic politics. [38] Harari also indicates the unequal treatment of the non-Muslims in Islamic societies by stating that the most important dichotomy in the Muslim world is the schism between those who believe in Islam and those who do not. [39]

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[33] Harari, 9.

[34] Ghassan Salame (ed.), Democracy without Democrats?: the Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World (London: I.B Tauris Publishers, 1994), 3.

[35] Kedouri, 5.

[36] Kedourie, 5-6.

[37] Anderson, "Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach," 86.

[38] Anderson, "Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach," 87.

Moreover, the existence of Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab Gulf monarchies forms an obstacle to political liberalization in the region. Regarding the Islamic fundamentalists, Arab Gulf states face a great dilemma. In reality, Islamic fundamentalists see political liberalization, as a means to reach their aims. They advocate political liberalization in general to have an access to power. If the ruling regimes chose to implement political liberalization regarding the elections and the establishment of the political parties, then they would automatically open the way for a strong Islamic opposition, which would become a major threat to the authority of these regimes. In addition, there are doubts about whether the Islamic fundamentalists will continue their approach to political liberalization or not, when they have the opportunity to gain power through elections. Hussein A. Hassouna supports this view with his words: "Islamic fundamentalism is another factor that has created constraints on the progress of democracy." [40] Nevertheless, we have to wait and see the approach of the Islamists to political liberalization in the Gulf as Pool suggests: "The current phase of political liberalization, during which Islamic movements have emerged as the dominant force within oppositions, provides a testing ground for the compatibility of particular Islamic movements with a process of political liberalization rather than the broader compatibility of Islam and democracy". [41]

Nonetheless, there are also counter-arguments, which suggest that Islam and democracy are compatible. For instance, in an interview which took place in 1992, Tunisian Islamist leader Rashid Ghanoushi argued:

> *If by democracy is meant the liberal model of government prevailing in the West, a system under which the people freely choose their representatives and leaders, in which there is an alternation of power, as well as all freedoms and human rights for the public, then Muslims will find nothing in their religion to*

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[39] Harari, 1.

[40] Hussein A. Hassouna, "Arab Democracy: The Hope," World Policy Journal 18 (2001): 51.

[41] Pool, 198.

oppose democracy, and it is not in their interests to do so. [42]

From John Esposito's point of view, roots of discussion for political participation and democratization in the Muslim societies lie not in religion, but in political culture and education. [43] Likewise, Fred Halliday thinks that obstacles to democracy in a range of Islamic countries has nothing to do with Islam itself, as there are certain other social and political features that their societies share. [44] In fact, let alone perceiving Islam as an obstacle to political liberalization, there are many Islamic intellectuals and groups to argue that traditional concepts of Islam such as 'shura' (consultation), 'ijma' (consensus), and 'ijtihad' (reinterpretation) include components of popular participation and political liberalization. [45] Overall, the debate about the compatibility of Islam and democracy is not a simple and clear-cut one, as neither Muslim countries nor the Arab Gulf states are ideologically monolithic.

2.2.1.3. Patterns of Leadership

Patterns of leadership in the Arab, Gulf monarchies also form an obstacle to political liberalization, due to various reasons. One of the reasons is that the leaders have authoritarian and patrimonial characteristics and informality is widespread in politics. According to Jamal Al-Suwaidi, authoritarian regimes of the Gulf states have "traditionally hindered political reform in the region." [46] In terms of informality, the leaders are "not bound by formal contracts or limited by institutional constraints", let alone their ignorance regarding the "establishment of

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[42] This statement of Rashid Ghanoushi is quoted in John Esposito and John O. Voll, "Islam and Democracy", Humanities 22 (Nov./Dec. 2001): 22-26.

[43] John Esposito, "Political Islam and the West," JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly 24 (Spring 2000): 49-55.

[44] Fred Halliday, Islam and the Myth of Confrontation (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995), 116.

[45] Esposito, 53.

formal political institutions such as parliaments and parties." [47] "As a rule, relations between Gulf rulers, governments and people were conducted along informal, personal lines with only minimal reference to institutions." [48] The absence of political parties and parliaments give the leaders opportunity to act upon their own will, and without any doubt, their will is not in favor of reform in most of the time.

Secondly, in order to succeed in political liberalization, it is necessary for the leaders to be eager to realize political reforms. In fact, political liberalization threatens the privileged positions of the ruling families in the Arab Gulf and that is why the rulers mostly favor the status quo over reform. [49] Members of the ruling families in each of these states dominate the significant positions such as the ministries of defense, interior, and foreign affairs, and therefore political participation of the people and the establishment of representative institutions through political representation would end their occupation of such important positions. [50] Nevertheless, despite the ruler's favor of the status quo, the rulers can not be completely ignorant to reform. Why is it so? According to Mainuddin, the Gulf rulers face a dilemma. If they offer reform, their power would be weakened; if they resist to reform they would face political upheaval. [51]

The last point regarding the patterns of leadership in the Arab Gulf as an obstacle to political liberalization is that the right to rule does not depend on democratic procedures, but on the process of succession in the Arab Gulf. The right

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[46] Jamal Al-Suwaidi, "Arab and Western Conceptions of Democracy," in Democracy, War and Peace in the Middle East, ed. David Garnham and Mark Tessler (Bloomington: Indiana University Pres, 1995), 84.

[47] For more details, see Bill and Springborg, 121-122.

[48] Roger Owen, State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East (London: Routledge, 2000), 59.

[49] See Rolin G. Mainuddin, "Democratization, Liberalization, and Human Rights: Challenges Facing the Gulf Cooperation Council," in Middle East and North Africa: Governance, Democratization, Human Rights, ed. Paul J. Magnarella (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1999), 127.

[50] Micheal Herb, "Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf," Journal of Democracy 13 (2002): 41.

of the Arab Gulf leaders to rule is depended upon the acceptance of hereditary distinctions and / or religious grace. [52] Once a member of the ruling family is given the right to rule through succession then it mostly continues for a life time. This is problematic as Lisa Anderson points out that these people are unlikely to any change as they age and for that reason Anderson argues that succession process prevents political liberalization because the old rulers in the region do not favor any change. [53] Progress in political liberalization requires effective leadership, and effective leadership comes with the selection of a qualified person for the leadership position. For Peterson, selection of a competent ruler is not always easy in a hereditary system. [54] Peterson also finds the process of succession "disturbing as the mechanisms for the transfer of power remain disconcertingly vague and ambiguous." [55] At this point, it can be argued that the effectiveness of leadership may change from one succession to another and this would influence the possible political reforms in a given state negatively. John S. Tures mentions about the process of succession in Bahrain. [56] In Bahrain, the new emir, King Hamad came to power, when the expectations of the people were high, due to the previous effective leadership, but Hamad has seemed to be unable to respond these demands unlike the previous leader. [57]

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[51] Mainuddin, 139-140.

[52] Lisa Anderson, "Dynasts and Nationalists: Why Monarchies Survive," in Middle East Monarchies: the Challenge of Modernity, ed. Joseph Kostiner (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 58.

[53] Lisa Anderson, "Arab Democracy: Dismal Prospects," World Policy Journal 18 (2001): 57.

[54] John E. Peterson, "The Nature of Succession in the Gulf," The Middle East Journal 55 (2001): 599.

[55] Peterson, "The Nature of Succession in the Gulf," 599.

[56] See John S. Tures, "Will New Blood in the Leadership Produce New Blood on the Battlefield? The Impact of Regime Changes on Middle East Military Rivalries," The Middle East Journal 58 (2004): 613-614.

[57] See Tures, 625.

2.2.2. Influence of the British Colonialism

Although the Arab Gulf monarchies had not been formal colonies of Britain, they had experienced the foreign control of Britain through various treaties in the interwar period, except for Saudi Arabia. "By and large, both the existence and the character of the monarchies of the Middle East reflect imperial policy in the region." [58] The control of Britain over these monarchies was influential in the creation of the essential features of these states, some of which can also be regarded as obstacles to political liberalization in the Arab Gulf today. [59] The legacy of British control has had a negative impact on the political liberalization in the region mainly because of two reasons.

First of all, Britain justified its colonial rule with a reference to helping these newly established political entities with their state-formation process and prepare them for independence. According to Hasan Khaldoun Al-Naqeeb, "The purpose of the grand imperial design was not at all to give the area self-rule or constitutional government or unification in any form as political structures to be treated on an equal footing as independent states." [60] In reality, having control over the Arab Gulf States, was relevant to Britain, due to strategic and security reasons, and therefore, as Anderson notes: "Monarchies were installed, retained, and refurbished because to a greater or lesser degree they served European imperial purposes." [61] Britain paid particular attention to security issues in these states and as Roger Owen mentions that the budget of these states under British control mostly used for security, while little money was left for education. [62]

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[58] Anderson, Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East, 4.

[59] For more details, see Owen, State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East, 11.

[60] Hasan Khaldoun Al-Naqeeb, Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula (London: Routledge, 1990), 68.

[61] Anderson, Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East, 4.

[62] Owen, State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East, 14.

Secondly, during the time of British control, Britain failed to create any representative institutions in these states. Instead, Britain created monarchial systems because "a king was seen as a vital support for the British position, since he could always be used to dismiss any popularly elected government of nationalists that threatened to tear up or amend the arrangements defining Britain's rights". [63] According to Hussein A. Hassouna, the colonial powers relied on the leaders in the Middle East region, in general, to maintain their power in this strategically important region. [64] He also indicates that as these colonial powers neglected the need for the establishment of representative institutions in the region, "many newly independent Arab states had to develop their own political culture before laying the foundation for successful democratic institutions." [65] A final viewpoint about the discussion belongs to Tareq Y. Ismail. From Ismail's point of view, Britain had exploited the historical tribal relations in the region by transforming the Gulf's ruling families into royal dynasties. [66] Furthermore, Ismail puts forward that Britain had given the power in the hands of a ruler who favors Britain, limits the succession within that ruler's family and guaranteed the authority of that ruling family in return for its loyalty to Britain. [67]

2.2.3. 'Rentier State' Experience

The 'rentier state' experience arising from the discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf monarchies and the influx of huge oil revenues after the oil boom of 1973, has impeded the process of political liberalization in these states, in a negative way. The negative contributions of the 'rentier state' model to the process of political liberalization in these states have been threefold. Before analyzing them

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[63] Owen, State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East, 19.

[64] Hassouna, 50.

[65] Hassouna, 50.

[66] Tareq Y. Ismail, Middle East Politics Today: Government and Civil Society (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2001), 345.

[67] Tareq, 345.

individually, it would be appropriate to focus on the concept of a 'rentier state'. What does a 'rentier state' mean? According to Posusney, rentier state is the one, where there is an access to a nonproductive source of income, and this makes the ruling regime "less reliant on extraction of wealth from their populations to finance the state." [68] In this context, a 'rentier state' state does not need to tax its population regularly. In keeping with this discussion, John Waterbury emphasizes the significance of the process of taxation with these words:

Political theory, and sometimes practice, has posited that taxes constitute the implementation of a contract between citizens and their government... Democratic theory suggests that the most efficient way to monitor the implementation of the contract is through elected representatives of the taxpayers. Hence 'no taxation without representation'... Some social scientists, perhaps especially those who have studied the rentier state phenomenon in the Middle East, have come to the conclusion that external rents impede accountability, and that only when states have to extract their revenues from their own citizens will the demand for accountability rise. [69]

Regarding the above-mentioned analysis regarding the process of taxation, it would be correct to conclude that the relationship between state and society in the Arab Gulf is different from the models in the West. As Gause mentions in West, taxation and government have gone hand in hand; and adds that you can not have government without taxation." [70]

As it has been mentioned before, there are three consequences of the 'rentier state' experience of the Arab Gulf monarchies, which impede the political liberalization in the region. First consequence is that the influx of huge oil revenues has caused the ruling regimes of the Arab Gulf to become the dominant actors in

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[68] Posusney, 130.

[69] John Waterbury, "From Social Contracts To Extraction Contracts: The Political Economy of Authoritarianism and Democracy," in Islam, Democracy and State in North Africa, ed. John P. Entelis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 149-150.

their local economies and benefiting from this dominance they legitimize themselves. How have these ruling regimes used the oil revenues as a means of legitimization? Without any doubt, the oil rents have given the ruling regimes the opportunity to provide their citizens with a wide range of services, including free education, health care and housing. This has contributed to the initiation of a patron-client relationship among the rulers and the people. Moreover, oil rents have allowed the Arab Gulf regimes to build up large government institutions and to offer numerous employment opportunities to their citizens. As a result, "political legitimacy, was rooted not in approbation through the ballot box but in the ability of the regime to meet its welfare commitments." [71] According to Saad Eddin Ibrahim, this was the implementation of a social contract where the citizens were provided with their basic needs in return for the citizens not insisting for 'liberal participatory politics'. [72]

Secondly, the rentier character of these states, has weakened the political power of various groups which has once formed a potential opposition to the state, especially the merchants and tribal shaykhs. From Gause's point of view, "those groups that in the past did have substantial political role, like merchants and tribal shaykhs, 'trade in' their political power for a share of the state's newfound wealth".[73] For instance, in Kuwait and Qatar the ruling regimes were having coalitions with the merchants, whom they depend on for revenues from pearl distraction from the Gulf. With the influx of the oil revenues, ruling regimes in Kuwait and Qatar in a way, paid lip services to the merchants through oil rents and ended their coalitions with the merchants, as they were no more in need of the revenues by the merchants. [74] Likewise, Jill Crystal argues that the oil revenues

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[70] Gause III, Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States, 42.

[71] Waterbury, 142.

[72] Ibrahim, Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: An Overview, 36.

[73] Gause, Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States, 80.

[74] For more details, see Jill Crystal, "Coalitions in Oil Monarchies: Kuwait and Qatar," Comparative Politics 1 (1989): 429-430.

have allowed the state to weaken the civil society by preventing the functioning of existing social groups in the society. [75]

Finally, the concentration of large resources in the hands of these states, have increased the authoritarian nature of these regimes. According to Al-Naqeeb: "The historical outcome of the rentier state experience in the 1950s and 1960s was the appearance of what we term the phenomenon of the authoritarian state." [76] For Pool when the state revenue is achieved from external resources rather than the domestic ones then the state becomes autonomous from the society and this certainly limits the democratic development in that state. [77] To sum up, Giacomo Luciani puts forward that the state's need to tax its citizens form the basis of the democratic institutions, but it is "unlikely to develop under authoritarian rule." [78]

2.2.4 Arab-Israeli Conflict:

Arab-Israeli conflict is the last obstacle to political liberalization in the Arab Gulf monarchies, which will be analyzed. According to Hassouna, the Arab-Israeli conflict being "one of the longest and bitterly emotional conflict of the twentieth century and now of the new century" has influenced the process of democratization in the region in a negative way. [79] Why does this conflict have a negative influence on the realization of political reforms? First of all, the issue of security has become the primary issue as a result of this conflict, and it has given the ruling regimes of the Arab Gulf region an excuse for their ignorance of the need for any political reform. Secondly, these states have spent great amount of money for their armies

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[75] Jill Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arab Gulf States," in Toward Civil Society in the Middle East? ed. Jillian Schwedler (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 61.

[76] Al-Naqeeb, 93.

[77] Pool, 200.

[78] Giacomo Luciani, "The Oil Rent, the Fiscal Crisis of the State and Democratization," in Democracy without Democrats?: The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World, ed. Ghassan Salame (London: I.B Tauris Publishers, 1994), 132.

[79] Hassouna, 50.

and weapons; leaving very little money for education and as Gause III suggests: "There are a number of reasons, why a state that is engaged in war and/or that places a heavy emphasis on war preparation might be less likely to democratize." [80]

Finally, this conflict has increased the authoritarian character of the ruling regimes in these monarchies. According to Eva Bellin, "the existence of a credible threat" was commonly used to explain "the robustness of the coercive apparatus in many Middle Eastern countries". [81] She further mentions about the viewpoints of some analysts regarding their argument about the close relationship between the robustness of the region's authoritarianism and the existential threat posed by Israel to its Arab neighbors together with the construction of large militaries by many Arab states. [82] Overall, while the peaceful solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict would not cause a perfect political liberalization in the Arab Gulf in the short-run, certainly it would have a serious positive impact on the encouragement of political reform in the region in the long-run.

2.3 Reasons of Shift Towards Political Reform

In spite of all these handicaps and impediments, there has been an inclination towards political liberalization starting with early 1980s. There are a number of developments, which have encouraged political reform in the Arab Gulf monarchies. Iranian revolution of 1979 signified the initiation of change in the region to be followed by several other factors to promote political openings in the Arab Gulf that can be said to mark new additional influences, in a sequence of almost a decade period intervals. These factors include; ending of the Cold War, 1990-1991 Gulf War, impact of globalization and socio-economic factors and the pressure of the West especially in the aftermath of the September the 11th. Al-

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[80] F. Gregory Gause III, "Regional Influences on Experiments in Political Liberalization in the Arab World," in Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, eds. Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 285-286.

[81] Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," Comparative Politics 36 (2004): 151.

Suwaidi points out that political participation have become one of the major topics in world politics after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Gulf war. [83] He notes: "The changing international and regional scene including the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the global role of the United States, and the worldwide movement toward democratization, are exerting pressure on the traditional monarchies of the Gulf to move toward democratic reform." [84] Despite there have been divergent encouraging developments, the shift towards political reform in the Arab, Gulf regarding the issues of representation and the institutions of representation have remained limited with the exception of Kuwait. Yet, the progress in Kuwaiti politics can also be regarded as limited, due to the fact that women and 'naturalized citizens' are excluded from the electoral process.

2.3.1 Iranian Revolution of 1979: A New Model in the Neighborhood

This revolution in the neighborhood was a challenge to Arab Gulf states as a whole, in terms of encouraging political reform, due to several reasons. Firstly, Iran exhibits a model of a mass-movement by the people to topple the Shah, who is representing a monarchy. According to Bill and Springborg, the Iranian revolution of 1979 had appeared as an appeal to the lower and middle classes of the traditional Gulf countries because of the fact that "in Iran the masses of people rose successfully and overthrew a venal and repressive traditional patrimonial regime dominated by the Pahlavi family." [85] Secondly, after the toppling of the Shah, Iranian politics witnessed open public debates and such pluralistic features, by which it increasingly influenced the people of the Arab Gulf towards the necessity of political reforms. Here, Ehteshami evaluates this situation as: "Far from exporting its Islamic revolution, Tehran was now increasingly leading by example in the arena of political reform." [86]

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[82] Bellin, 151.

[83] Al-Suwaidi, 82.

[84] Al-Suwaidi, 83.

[85] Bill and Springborg, 292.

Thirdly, the questioning of the legitimacy of the ruling regimes in the Arab, Gulf region increased. İhsan Dağı points to the discourse of Khomeinie, who had frequently questioned the legitimacy of the Arab Gulf regimes; while Shi'a radicals had formed a serious threat to these regimes by challenging them both ideologically and demographically. [87] Likewise, Mehran Kamrava mentions about the increasing Shi'a-Sunni tensions following the Iranian revolution and the political repression used against the Shi'a populations, especially in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. [88] This has certainly caused reactions against the ruling regime by the Shi'a population, particularly in Bahrain, where the Shi'a population constitutes the majority of the total population. Overall, "the Iranian revolution, by its very existence, loomed as a persisting threat to the vulnerable traditional regimes in the region." [89]

Lastly, because the ruling regimes of the Arab Gulf monarchies perceived the developments in their neighbor Iran as a serious threat for their existence and security, they sought for allies in the West. The cooperation with the Western powers was, however influential in the creation of pressures towards the ruling regimes in favor of political reform in these states. Mainuddin explains the situation briefly with these words:

> *The GCC countries are not immune to global democratic and religious trends. Faced with ambitious regional Muslim neighbors, the ruling elite is forced to enter into security cooperation with major Western powers. With bilateral military arrangements with the West, the Gulf Sheikhdoms face demands for domestic political changes. Western public opinion wants a transition to democracy in the Gulf monarchies, and human rights organizations criticize the Gulf sheikhdoms. These put pressure on*

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[86] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Reform From Above: the Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," International Affairs 79 (2003): 60-61.

[87] Ihsan D. Dagi, Ortadoguda Islam ve Siyaset (Istanbul: Boyut Kitaplari, 2002), 96.

[88] Mehran Kamrava, "Non-Democratic States and Political Liberalisation in the Middle East: A Structural Analysis," Third World Quarterly 19 (1998): 66.

[89] Bill and Springborg, 292.

Western governments to support and urge political change in the region. [90]

2.3.2. Ending of the Cold War

Another development impacting on a shift towards political liberalization in the Arab, Gulf monarchies was the ending of the Cold War. Why was the collapse of the Soviet Union, significant in terms of encouraging reform in the Arab Gulf? This event was relevant for the promotion of political opening, as it exhibited the clear victory of liberal democracy to whole world and it caused pressures against the authoritarian regimes of the world. Political reform was then on the agenda, and the ruling regimes could not remain completely unresponsive to these pressures. According to Ehteshami with the end of the cold war, "new forces of political reform were pushing outwards from Eastern Europe, meeting and fostering the mood for change increasingly prevalent among Arab citizens across the region". [91]

Actually, there are two theses to claim positive impact of the Cold War on promoting political liberalization in the world. One of these theses is Francis Fukuyama's "the End of History". Fukuyama argued that the collapse of the Soviet Union proved that liberal democracy was the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution", the "final form of human government, and therefore it represented the "End of History." [92] For him, liberal democracy was the ideal type of governance due to the fact that the world's most developed countries were also its most successful democracies, whereas governments with un-democratic practices "whether they be of the military-authoritarian right, or the communist-totalitarian left" had remained undeveloped. [93] The other thesis is the "Third Wave of Democratization", which belongs Samuel Huntington. Huntington argued that in

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[90] Mainuddin, 138.

[91] Ehteshami, Reform From Above: the Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies, 60.

[92] Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York: The Free Press, 1992), xi.

[93] Fukuyama, xiii-xv.

the late twenty century, "one obstacle to democratization was likely to disappear" in a variety of countries because "some form of leadership change within the authoritarian system had to precede movement toward democracy." [94] He further emphasized that liberalization was under way in the Soviet Union and that it was possible to lead a third wave of democratization in other parts of the world. [95]

2.3.3. 1990-1991 Gulf War

The 1990-1991 Gulf War was one of the most significant factors to encourage political reform in the Arab Gulf monarchies. In fact, the costs of this war to the ruling regimes in the Arab Gulf region were two-fold. In addition to its heavy economic costs, the ruling regimes of these states faced political crisis, which will be explained in details. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has mainly two consequences, which are influential in the shift towards change. One is that it became more difficult for the ruling regimes to legitimize themselves, particularly in the aftermath of the invasion of Kuwait by its neighbor, Iraq. In fact, none of the ruling regimes in the Arab Gulf could provide protection for their populations in the Gulf crisis, and as a result Western military help was sought. This certainly made the people to question the legitimacy of their rulers and the policies of these rulers. Gause III notes: "The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait challenged the legitimacy not just of the Kuwaiti regime, but of all Kuwait's GCC allies, as the presence of American troops raised questions among citizens about the ability of their governments to defend them, even after billions of dollars of oil wealth had been spent on defense".[96]

More or less, all the Arab Gulf ruling regimes were affected negatively from the Gulf crisis, but particularly the examples of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were striking. In Kuwait the emir left his country with the Iraqi invasion and this was a

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[94] Samuel Huntington, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 296.

[95] Huntington, 295-297.

signal that the legitimacy of the Kuwaiti emir could never be the same. "The emir could never go back to his old authority and privilege; indeed, a struggle over issues of political pluralism and democratic expression has already begun and threatens Kuwait with chaos." [97] Ehteshami points out the Saudi example with regard to the consequences of the Gulf war, emphasizing the fact that the arrival of western troops in Saudi Arabia in 1990, irritated and made anxious both the conservative and the liberal forces in the kingdom. [98] As a result, people have become more critical about their rulers and the way they are ruled. Ismail mentions that with the Gulf crisis people have been calling for more participation in politics and for a more accountable leadership and this have resulted in the introduction of some form of political liberalization. Saad Eddin Ibrahim evaluates the impact of the Gulf crisis as: "One positive development among the many negative aspects of the Gulf crisis has been the unprecedented political mobilization of the Arab masses." [99]

The second consequence of the 1990-1991 Gulf war regarding encouraging political liberalization in the Arab, Gulf is that the existence of both the Western security forces and the Western media in the region meant that the region had become more open to foreign influence, as on the one hand the world was watching the developments in the region. On the other hand, patrimonial nature of Saudi society was weakened with the image U.S. women from coalition forces, defending Saudi territory, which houses the most holy sites of Islam. [100] In addition, the image was incompatible with the reality that the Kingdom's women could not travel between cities without permission. In fact, Western powers along with the leadership of the United States were concerned in liberating Kuwait, mainly to

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[96] Gause, Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States, 89.

[97] Graham E. Fuller, "Respecting Regional Realities," Foreign Policy 83 (1991): 40-41.

[98] Ehteshami, Reform From Above: the Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies, 59.

[99] Ibrahim, Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: An Overview, 44.

[100] Neil Quilliam and Maggie Kamel, "Modernising Legitimacy: Saudi Strategies," Alternatives 2 (Summer 2003): 26.

make sure a constant supply of oil from Kuwait's Rumalia oil field. [101] Nonetheless, Western public opinion was uncomfortable about the option of being engaged in an armed dispute in the Gulf simply to bring an amir back to power. In this regard, Western powers exerted pressure on amir for promising to implement political reform, as soon as his state would be liberated, in return for defending his country. Mainuddin evaluates the presence of Western protection in the aftermath of the Gulf crisis as:

> *Western security protection carries with it the expectation of a transition to democracy. But, as Western democratic values are embraced by the Gulf population, they threaten the very institution of monarchy in the GCC countries... With the continued American presence, through troop rotation and joint exercises, liberal forces within the sheikdoms are likely to be more stalwart in pressing for political change.* [102]

2.3.4. Impact of Globalization and Socio-Economic Factors

The impact of globalization and the socio-economic factors have been two other reasons of shift towards political liberalization in the Arab, Gulf monarchies. Firstly, the influence of globalization over these states regarding change will be analyzed and then the focus will be on the impact of socio-economic factors, in terms of encouraging political reform.

Without any doubt, the impact of globalization, in addition to the communication technology of the late 20th century have played their roles as actors to influence demands towards political liberalization in the Arab Gulf and, therefore affected the politics of the Arab Gulf monarchies to a large extent. The widespread use of satellite television, fax machine and internet has made it available for the people of the Arab Gulf to reach information, which is not under the strict control of the state. Globalization has also influenced the opening up the world economy

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[101] For more details see, Mainuddin, 127 and Abir 211.

[102] Mainuddin, 127.

through a great economic transformation, by which states have no longer been "closed units" as the "word economy has been more interdependent than ever, with trade and finances ever expanding". [103] In this regard, a deep crisis of modernization emerged in Arab Gulf societies. Moreover, globalization had an influence on the spread of Western cultural values as the "forces that have been globalized were conveniently those found in the Western world". [104] Doubtlessly, this has created social alienation in the Muslim societies including Arab Gulf societies, and therefore it has contributed to the acceleration of Islamic fundamentalism to challenge Arab Gulf ruling regimes. Eventually, globalization has shaped the Arab Gulf civil society groups both as so far "transworld problems have started to be addressed" and use of the means of globalization such as computer networks and global laws has become widespread by these civil society groups. [105] Besides, since late 1990s major global governance agencies have become more powerful in advising official institutions of Arab Gulf states through preparing reports [106] and policy recommendations. Now, despite the weakness of the representative institutions, the people of the Arab Gulf are much more conscious in questioning the policies of their ruling regimes than it was a decade or two decades before. Indeed, they have had the opportunity to compare their ruling regimes with the governments of the developed Western states through media, civil society and they are much more successful in raising their demands.

Socio-economic factors have also been influential in encouraging reform in the Arab, Gulf monarchies. These states have experienced a rapid modernization especially, since the early 1970s with the influx of huge oil revenues. However, the scope of development has been uneven, due to the fluctuations in oil prices. On

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[103] For more details, see John Baylis and Steve Smith, The Globalization of World Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9.

[104] Baylis and Smith, 10.

[105] Baylis and Smith, 26-27.

[106] Reports of the United Nations Development Program focus on how to improve development in the Arab World.

one hand, as the people have become more educated, their expectations from their states have increased. On the other hand, there have been rapid population growth and decrease in oil revenues by the late 1980s, a combination, which Byman and Green define as "potentially-explosive". [107] Additionally, the Arab Gulf states have established a huge state apparatus, which has been wasteful and the state-planning for the socio-economic needs of their societies have been inefficient.

The weight of socio-economic factors over political liberalization is interpreted from parallel perspectives by various scholars. According to one view, there is a close link between the socio-economic problems in a given third world society and political change in that society. [108] In this regard, it is argued that the states in the third world have viewed political reform, as a response to the existence of major economic and social problems in their societies. [109] Another similar viewpoint is, that "in view of the grave economic difficulties and social tensions that confront them, the GCC rulers have had little choice, but to consider the introduction of economic and political reforms." [110] Likewise, it is also claimed that the relatively low price of oil in international markets, large currency devaluations, and general economic stagnation were influential in aiding the process of political reform in the early 1990s, from Oman and Qatar, to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. [111] Eventually, the last argument is that the scarcity or the abundance of the resources possessed by a given state is a significant variable to direct political change in that state, as the scarcer the sources become, the greater the likelihood of

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[107] Byman and Green.

[108] See Roger Owen, "The Practice of Electoral Democracy in the Arab East and North Africa," in Rules and Rights in the Middle East: Democracy, Law and Society, eds. Ellis Goldberg, Resat Kasaba and Joel Migdal (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 25.

[109] Owen, The Practice of Electoral Democracy in the Arab East and North Africa, 35-36.

[110] Ehteshami, Reform From Above: the Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies, 54.

[111] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Is the Middle East Democratizing?," British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 26 (1999): 212.

political change becomes. [112] This assumption may be applicable to the Arab, Gulf monarchies because when there is abundance of the resources in these states in times of oil boom then political change is less likely to occur. On the other hand, when there is the scarcity of the resources in times of oil bust then political change is more likely to occur in these monarchies.

2.3.5. Pressure of the West: September 11 and Its Aftermath

Finally, the terrorist attacks of September the 11th have contributed to pressures to Arab Gulf monarchies for political reforms from the West, more specifically the United States. This attack to the heart of the United States caused the United States to become aware that the instability in the Middle East region had prepared a fertile ground for the emergence of terrorist networks such as Al Qaeda. In addition, the common Arab origin of the attackers directed the attention to the Arab Middle East. In fact, existence of authoritarian regimes in the region was one of the reasons for the emergence of terrorist networks, and it became clear that there was need for reforms in the field of political liberalization to have stability in the region and to prevent the threat of terrorism. Hence, the frequent pronunciation of the "Greater Middle Eastern Initiative" by the president of the United States, George W. Bush has marked the determination of the United States to promote change in the region, in order to maintain stability in the region to secure the flow of oil to world markets at reasonable price and to prevent the threat of terrorism. President George W. Bush has repeatedly mentioned that he viewed democratic reform in the Middle East as a key part of the war on terrorism. [113] "George W. Bush called for widespread democratization in the Middle East region in November 2003, at a speech in the 20th anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy." [114] Moreover, in his speech, Bush also addressed the Arab Gulf

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[112] Albrecht and Schlumberger, 372.

[113] "Mid-East reform plan faces dilution," in BBC News, 9 June 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (13 April 2004)

monarchies and said, "Several governments of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members were beginning to see the need for change". [115]

In fact, prior to the September 11th the terrorist attack the Western states, especially the United States had close relations with the ruling families of the Arab, Gulf monarchies. The origins of this warm relationship went back to the mutual security concerns of the Cold war period and the commercial treaties between the Western oil companies and these monarchies. There are various approaches to the relationship between the Western powers and the Arab, Gulf states before the September 11th. According to Ismail: "Being under the umbrella of the defense apparatus of the only remaining superpower, the United States, has been reassuring to these royal families in the face of vocal demands for democratization." [116] For Anderson the United States and some other Western states supported the "autocratic but compliant friends" because of their interests in the region in return for "West's blind eye to domestic tyranny." [117] Lastly, the West supported these states because they gave priority to western security concerns such as assuring oil and gas supplies to the West and containing Islamic threat. [118]

Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11th to the United States there have been external attempts to encourage reform in the Arab Middle East, particularly by the United States. US administration for the first time presented the draft of the "Greater Middle East Initiative" to the G8 countries in early 2004. On the one hand, the first draft for the initiative was strongly criticized by the Arab countries because it was prepared without any consultation. On the other hand, European Union was doubtful about the initiative, as it had already

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[114] Joseph A. Kechichian, "Democratization in Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC," Middle East Policy 11 (2004): 37.

[115] Kechichian, 37.

[116] Ismail, 345.

[117] Anderson, Arab Democracy: Dismal Prospects, 59.

[118] Bellin, 148-149.

adopted an initiative of its own in Barcelona in 1995, which based on "country by country agreements to encourage reform" and it was an "encouraging approach", in comparison with the "critical approach" of the United States. [119] United States, then reformulated the initiative as the "Broader Middle East Initiative" after consulting European states and some Arab leaders, and it was finally adopted by the G-8 summit in June 2004. Yet, "many within the Middle East responded with skepticism to what they saw as the prospect of unwelcome interference from the United States". [120] In the meanwhile, debates and criticisms about the initiative have been going on. In fact, the "Broader Middle East Initiative" has several shortcomings. One of them is that the methods to promote reform and the funding to realize the project were not openly defined. Another critical approach to initiative has been that external imposition of reform with an aggressive approach would complicate the process because with the US-led invasion of Iraq, the reaction of the Middle Eastern people to the concept of Western intervention has strengthened. Munther S. Dajani argues that "reform should not be an American or a European demand, instead it should spring from a genuine desire on the part of the Arab states to initiate the required changes in order to join the 21st century". [121] Overall, September 11 attack is not only significant for the West regarding security concerns but it is also threatening the power and prestige of the West. Therefore, the West mainly the United States has given priority to encouraging political reform in the region.

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[119] "US softens Middle East reform plans," in BBC News, 7 June 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (13 April 2004)

[120] "Mid-East reform plan faces dilution," in BBC News, 9 June 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (13 April 2004)

[121] Munther S. Dajani, "The Greater Middle East Initiative and the Arab Culture of Rejection," Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics 11 (2004): 159.

CHAPTER 3

THE KUWAITI EXPERIENCE OF POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

3.1. Historical Background of Kuwait's Parliamentary Experience

Kuwait differs from other Arab Gulf monarchies in terms of its performance in taking steps towards political liberalization. Kuwait is the first Arab Gulf monarchy to have an elected national assembly and up to now this assembly has experienced ten terms although it had also experienced three dissolution periods. According to Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg: "By all accounts, Kuwait has been one of the most politically open and tolerant polities in the Arab world." [122] How had the way Kuwait emerged as a political entity contribute to the relatively open political system in Kuwait? When did Kuwait's first parliamentary experience take its roots? In what sense, did the discovery of oil influence politics in Kuwait? In this section, these questions will be answered.

3.1.1. The Political Structure Prior to Independence

Kuwait as a political entity was born in the early eighteenth century, as a result of an agreement made between the Al-Sabah family and several other merchant families, all of which migrated from the centre of the Arabian Peninsula.[123] According to this agreement, a member of the Al-Sabah family was chosen as the leader of this political entity to deal with daily affairs of the society, in return for the financial support of the other people. Here, the agreement also emphasized that the major decisions regarding the community had to be taken by

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[122] Abdo Baaklini, Guilain Denoeux and Robert Springborg, The Resurgence of Democratic Institutions (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 170.

[123] See, Jill Crystal and Abdallah Al-Shayeji, "The Pro-Democratic Agenda in Kuwait: Structures and Context," in Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: Vol. 2, eds. B. Korany, R. Brynen and P. Noble (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 102 and Ghanim Al-Najjar, "The Challenges Facing Kuwaiti Democracy," The Middle East Journal 54 (2000): 243.

the consultation of the whole community. According to Ghanim al-Najjar there was a complete interdependence between the ruler and the ruled at that time, and the Sabah family depended on the financial power of the other merchant families. [124] It means that the authority of the Sabah family was limited as viewpoints of the people in the community were taken into account in the decision-making process. In other words, there was an informal system of checks and balances within this political entity.

The situation in the political system did not change, when this political entity became a British protectorate in 1899. In fact, Kuwait's parliamentary experience took its roots when it was under British control although it had nothing to do with any British initiative. The informality in checking the ruling family ended with establishment of an elected fourteen-member Legislative Council [125] in 1938, following the establishment of the Shura Council in 1921. [126] Without any doubt, the increased pressure of the merchant families in 1920s and 1930s was influential in the establishment of the Legislative Council. [127] Why had the pressure of the merchant families increased? The major reason for the increase in the demands of the merchant families for a formal representative institution was the economic hardship, which had arisen from to the collapse of the pearling industry in Kuwait and the Saudi embargo arising from a trade dispute. [128] Pearling industry was the main source of revenue for the merchant families in Kuwait and the economic anxieties directed the attention of the merchant families towards politics in order to find solution to their problems.

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[124] Al-Najjar, 243.

[125] This Legislative Council was originally called as 'Majlis al-Umma al-Tashri'i'.

[126] Al-Najjar, 243.

[127] The reaction of the merchant families was also called the 1938 Majlis Movement.

[128] Rosemarie Said Zahlan, The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Amirates and Oman (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1989), 27.

Unfortunately, the Legislative Council was short lived because the amir closed it six months later. Nevertheless, its establishment was an example to further initiatives. Jill Crystal and Abdallah Al-Shayeji view this Legislative Council, as "Kuwait's first pro-democracy movement, one that emphasized consultation and consensus as well as political participation." [129] Following the same perspective, Abdo Baaklini, Guilain Denoeux and Robert Springborg note: "Although the Legislative Council was short lived as the amir disbanded it six months after its establishment, its memory inspired an entire generation of Kuwaiti reformers during the 1940's and 1950's." [130]

3.1.2. Political Practices of an Independent State

The British control in Kuwait ended on 19 June 1961. As soon as Kuwait gained independence, its neighbor Iraq claimed sovereignty over Kuwait, leading to a crisis in Kuwait. The threat was a significant one and Amir Abdallah al-Salim Al Sabah responded this threat by announcing Kuwait as a constitutional monarchy, in order to share his responsibility with some representative institutions. In year 1962, a constitution was drafted with the initiative of the Amir and it became effective in the same year. The constitution included articles for the establishment of a legislative body, the fifty member National Assembly [131] and an executive body, the Council of Ministers. [132] In addition, the constitution made it clear that the ruler of Kuwait should be a male member of the Al-Sabah family and he would not be accountable to any elected body. [133] One year later, in 1963 the first parliamentary election took place in Kuwait. As it was determined by the constitution, only male citizens over 21 years of age who could prove Kuwaiti ancestry prior to 1920 had

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[129] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 102.

[130] Baaklini, Denouux and Springborg, 169.

[131] Kuwaiti National Assembly is originally called as 'Majlis Al-Umma'.

[132] Heather Deegan, The Middle East and Problems of Democracy (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 35-36.

[133] Baaklini, Denouux and Springborg, 169.

the right to vote in the election to choose deputies for the National Assembly. [134]
In addition, according to the constitution political parties were illegal but without
any doubt people voted for the candidates whose political preferences were similar
to theirs.

The establishment of the National Assembly was important, as it provided
some control over the Amir and the council of ministers, despite the fact that it did
not have any role in choosing the Amir or any member of the council of ministers.
Nevertheless, from the viewpoints of Crystal and Al-Shayeji, although the powers
of the Kuwaiti National Assembly were limited, "it did function as an important
forum for public debate and was always a source of criticism of the government on
important policy issues." [135] Also, the Kuwaiti National Assembly was influential
in legitimizing the authority and the policies of both the Al-Sabah family and the
Council of Ministers, which largely consisted up of the members of the Al-Sabah
family. [136]

In fact, it was not easy for the Kuwaiti National Assembly to function
properly as it has faced various challenges. The first challenge came in 1964, when
the Kuwaiti prime minister of the time (brother of the Amir) requested Amir
Abdallah to close the assembly, due to the fact that it brought down the newly
formed government. The Amir, who was in favor of the parliamentary system, did
not accept the request of his brother, but as Amir Abdallah died in 1965 the
assembly became less defensive against the threats. According Zahlan: "After the
accession of Shaikh al-Salim (1965-77), the earlier balance achieved between the Al
Sabah and the Assembly was no longer as evident." [137]

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[134] Deegan, 36.

[135] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 104.

[136] Baaklini, Denouux and Springborg, 179-180.

[137] Zahlan, 40-41.

Within this atmosphere, the following elections for the National Assembly were held in years 1967 and 1971. The period of early 1970s witnessed a significant change in the structure of the Kuwaiti politics. The balance among the state, society and the National Assembly differed from the previous period to a large extent. What caused the change in the sensitive balance of power between the state and the society in early 1970s? The discovery of oil in Kuwait was almost two decades earlier but the oil boom in 1973 and as a result of the influx of huge oil revenues the state became more independent from its society in the early 1970s. In this regard, the oil revenues had injured the interdependence among the ruling family and the merchant families because merchant families were financial supporters of the Amir. [138] Crystal notes: "The immediate consequence of the oil revenues was the breakdown of the economic basis of the historical governing coalition between the ruling family and the trading families." [139]

> *The historical transformation that has been most central to shaping Kuwaiti politics in the twentieth century has been the breakdown of the ruling coalition binding the ruler and the trading families and the relegation of the trading families to a bounded, primarily economic role in the private sector, leaving the political arena to the ruler, the ruling family, and shifting allies.* [140]

Therefore, the coincidence of the oil boom in 1973 with the dissolution of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, one year after the 1975 election was meaningful. The result of the 1975 elections was also problematic. Before the elections, Amir arranged the electoral districts in such an order, so that it was more likely the candidates loyal to the ruling regime would be chosen rather than the candidates defined within the opposition. [141] Despite the arrangements in the 1975 elections,

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[138] Crystal, "Coalitions in Oil Monarchies: Kuwait and Qatar," 429.

[139] Crystal, "Coalitions in Oil Monarchies: Kuwait and Qatar," 430.

[140] Jill Crystal, Oil and Politics in the Gulf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, 1990), 109.

[141] The arrangement of an electoral district in such a way to influence the result of an election is called gerrymandering. For more details regarding this arrangement of the electoral districts by the Amir, see Zahlan, 42.

Amir suspended the National Assembly in 1976, claiming that the parliament had abused its authority due to various reasons. [142] The suspension of the National Assembly had continued for four years and then it was allowed to function with the 1981 elections. The opening of the assembly in 1981 was not without any cause or by chance. In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Khomeinie threatened Kuwait of exporting revolution. Considering the Shiite minority in Kuwait, Amir had become anxious and needed the support of the Kuwaiti society. The support of the people could only be possible through representative institutions such as Kuwaiti National Assembly and Amir had no choice but to open the assembly in such a critical time.

However, Amir had also taken some cautions prior to the 1981 elections. "To ensure an outcome favorable to the regime, the government passed a new electoral law that involved substantial gerrymandering." [143] What the Amir had done in practice was to divide the country into ten electoral districts, each of which could send 5 members to the assembly and where the support for the ruling regime was thought to be stronger. As a result, the candidates who were close to the ruling regime had dominated the assembly. Therefore the fifth assembly functioned without much tension with the Amir and the Council of Ministers. This would not be the case with the sixth assembly, which was formed with the elections that took place in 1985. Despite the electoral law, which was passed prior to the 1981 elections, the candidates who had liberal preferences dominated the assembly in the 1985 elections. What were the reasons behind this pro-liberal tendency in the sixth Kuwaiti Assembly? The main reason was that the Kuwait was having a serious economic crisis due to the collapse of the Suq al-Manakh [144] and the decline of the oil prices. [145] Another reason is that, there was a war between Iran and Iraq and this

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[142] Reasons included the assembly being too slow in acting on important pieces of legislation, the interrogation of the ministers and passing of motions of no-confidence in the ministers as it is indicated in Baaklini, Denoeux and Sprinborg, 180.

[143] Baaklini, Denoeux and Sprinborg, 182.

[144] Suq al-Manakh is Kuwait's illegal stock market.

had strengthened the security concerns among the society. The policies followed by the cabinet (consisted of members of the ruling family) in the aftermath of the collapse of the Suq al-Manakh in 1982 were widely criticized by the opposition candidates in the elections campaign for the 1985 elections, as these policies along with the decrease in oil prices led to a severe financial crisis that influenced many Kuwaiti businessmen and banks. In particular, throughout the elections campaign opposition candidates "held the al-Sabah family responsible for the economic decline," due to the fact that some members of the ruling family has benefited from the Fund for the Relief of Small Investors, [146] including the son of the minister of justice, who was classified as a 'small investor'. [147] Moreover, the opposition blamed the cabinet for inadequate security at the oil fields with respect to bomb attacks on oil installations which hurt country's oil industry and economy.

It was the sixth Kuwaiti National Assembly, which demanded the resignation of the Council of Ministers due to reasons of corruption, incorrect economic policies and inadequate security. In the end, the Kuwaiti Prime Minister presented the amir the resignation of his cabinet on July 1, 1986, claiming that it was difficult for the cabinet to function, as the ministers were subjected to National Assembly's harsh attacks. [148] Two days after the resignation of the Council of Ministers, amir suspended the National Assembly for the second time and he also suspended some constitutional provisions. This time amir accused the assembly of creating tensions at a time when the country was facing economic and security challenges. Nevertheless, the amir appointed four members of the sixth National Assembly for the new Council of Ministers, in order not to end up the dialogue with

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[145] For more details on the consequences of the economic crises in Kuwait in mid 1980s see, Zahlan, 43.

[146] This fund was set up to support small investors who had losses in the collapse of Suq al-Manakh in 1982.

[147] For more details, see Uzi Rabi, "The Kuwaiti Royal Family in the Postliberation Period: Reinstitutionalizing the 'First Among Equals' System in Kuwait," in Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity, ed. Joseph Kostiner (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000),155 and Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 183.

[148] Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 183.

the opposition groups. [149]   With the suspension of the assembly in 1986, the opposition leaders from divergent groups were united under the umbrella of resistance movement [150] and they called for the "restoration of the assembly and the constitution." [151]

This movement then turned into a mass movement as the people voiced their demands for the reopening of the National Assembly in the streets. On the one hand, the amir was not willing to reopen the assembly, on the other, it would not be easy to calm the people in the street. This time the Amir found a new formula which proposed the establishment of an advisory National Council[152] instead of the reopening of the National Assembly. In fact, advisory National Council was apparently quite different from the National Assembly in terms of both its role and the selection of its members. Unlike the assembly, National Council was a consultative institution whose one third of the total members were appointed by the Amir, whereas only two thirds of the total members were to be chosen through elections. In this regard, "The ruling family hoped to create a body over which it would exercise more control than it had over the National Assembly." [153] As Uzi Rabi's points out, "Clearly, the regime and the opposition were pursuing two different policies. The Al-Sabahs wanted to ensure ex ante that they would retain power over a new assembly, whereas the opposition insisted on the reinstitution of the National Assembly prior to any changes". [154]

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[149] Zahlan, 44.

[150] This resistance movement is called as Constitutionalist Movement of 1989-1990 in various resources.

[151] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 105.

[152] The original name for the National Council was 'Majlis al-Watani'.

[153] Neil Hicks and Ghanim Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait," in Civil Society in the Middle East, ed. A. R. Norton (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 194.

[154] Rabi, 157.

In June 1990, elections for the National Council were held. But, surely the National Council could not replace the National Assembly with regard to its representative role. In fact, the existence and the functioning of the National Assembly had some positive feedback on the policies of the Amir and his government. According to Hicks and Al-Najjar: "The absence of the assembly left the government with no outlet to obtain popular feedback on its policies." [155] Moreover, Hicks and Al-Najjar calimed that "The absence of the National Assembly and the polarization between the government and those calling for the reconvening of the Assembly, contributed to the policy mistakes that brought about the disaster of Iraqi occupation in August 1990." [156]

3.2. Political Awakening Since the End of the Cold War

With the end of the Cold War, Kuwait has entered a new period, which witnessed various developments to influence the process of political liberalization in Kuwait. In this section of the study, the developments in Kuwaiti political arena since the early 1990s will be analyzed. Particular attention will be paid to Kuwait's most significant representative institution, the National Assembly, and there will be focus on issues such as the elections for the National Assembly, the performance of this institution and its relations with the Amir and the Council of Ministers.

3.2.1. A Turning Point in Kuwaiti Politics: The Impact of Iraqi Invasion

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait certainly had a great impact on Kuwaiti politics. The occupation made it clear that the power of ruling family was insufficient to defend the Kuwaiti people against any threat coming from outside, let alone the protection of the family itself. Almost all the members of the ruling family fled the country with the invasion, leaving the country without any authority. This behavior of the ruling family had created a strong disappointment among the Kuwaiti people and changed their approach to the ruling family in a negative way.

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[155] Neil Hicks and Ghanim Al-Najjar, "Civil Society in Kuwait," in Toward Civil Society in the Middle East? ed. Jillian Schwedler (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 59.

Mary Ann Tetreault points out, that "from the perspective of most Kuwaitis, the actions of their government were primarily responsible, both for the invasion itself and for the complete unreadiness of the population and most of its putative defenders to protect themselves against it." [157] In addition to the criticisms made against the ruling family by the people, the people became aware that there was no need to afraid from the ruling family and follow its policies unconditionally. Indeed, the occupation was significant to teach lessons to the Kuwaiti people. One of these lessons was that the people who remained in their country during the invasion became less intimidated by their ruling regime than they did before "as so many of them put it: 'We aren't afraid of the Sabah. We survived Saddam Hussein'." [158]

3.2.1.1 The Jiddah Conference

The politics in exile was an important component of the Kuwaiti politics during the Iraqi occupation, as not only the ruling family had left the country but also a big number of the opposition members belonging to various social groups had to leave the country. They all continued their activities to a large extent outside the Kuwait. Although the exiled Kuwaitis had divergent political views and they went to different locations, they continued to inform the government in exile about their demands. These demands mostly took the shape of criticisms towards the ruling regime in exile. When it comes to the people who stayed in Kuwait during the occupation, they had managed their affairs in such a smooth way in the absence of any government that the Amir felt himself excluded and called for a meeting in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, where most of the members of the ruling family were residing at the time. [159]

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[156] Hicks and Al-Najjar, "Civil Society in Kuwait," 60.

[157] Mary Ann Tetreault, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 77.

[158] Tetreault, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait, 98.

[159] Tetreault, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait, 85.

In fact, the Jiddah conference was organized to remind the opposition about the authority of the ruling family and to discuss about the future of Kuwait. The ruling family was under great pressure, as the opposition was insisting on political reforms in a post-occupation Kuwait. [160] The conference took place in October 1990 and it had lasted for three days. "It brought together some twelve hundred representatives of all major Kuwaiti political groupings, including key opposition figures that had long been at odds with the Al-Sabah." [161] At the end of the conference a deal was made between the opposition groups and the ruling family. According to this deal, the opposition groups would remain loyal to the Amir and the Al-Sabah family, and support their policies, when the occupation of Kuwait came to an end. In return, the Amir and the ruling family would realize various political reforms including the reopening of the National Assembly.

According to Tetreault "the Jiddah meeting was a political gamble for the government which it paid off" because at the end of the meeting the two sides reached to an agreement and it helped the United States to overcome its concerns about the future politics in Kuwait. [162] Despite the promises made by the Amir regarding political reforms, the ruling regime was acting reluctant to discuss any further details and there were widespread rumors that as soon as the invasion ended martial law was to be applied by the ruling regime.

3.2.1.2. Post-Invasion Politics

Rumors had become realities with the declaration of martial law by the Amir in the aftermath of the invasion. The politics in exile was transferred to Kuwait with its all actors and continued from where it had remained. At first glance, it could easily be observed that a serious change occurred in the attitudes of the Kuwaiti people towards their ruler. As Uzi Rabi notes: "The Al-Sabah rulers'

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[160] Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 187.

[161] Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 187-188.

qualifications to guide Kuwait's defense and economic policy were widely questioned, leading to growing popular protest against the rulers' lack of accountability to the Kuwaiti public and to demands for wider political participation." [163]

The Kuwaiti people became unified against the threat coming from Saddam Hussein during the invasion. This had certainly strengthened the feeling of national identity among the Kuwaiti people and caused them to act together in the post-invasion period in exerting pressure on the ruling regime, in terms of realizing political reforms. The concentrated pressure of the people, regarding the restoration of the National Assembly started to influence the Amir, "who seemed in no particular hurry to revive just prior to the invasion." [164] One of the most significant attempts to persuade the Amir to fulfill his promises was a declaration which was submitted to Amir by eighty-nine notables. [165] The aim of these notables was to inform the Amir about their concerns due to the suspension of the National Assembly since 1986. In addition, these notables wanted the Amir to know their disturbance regarding the failure of the ruling regime to defend Kuwait during the Iraqi occupation.

A useful consequence of the Iraqi invasion for the process of political liberalization in Kuwait was the existence of the coalition troops in the country with the leadership of the United States. According to a Kuwaiti political scientist, Shafeeq N. Ghabra the contact of the Kuwaiti people with U.S army both during the invasion and in the immediate post-invasion period was significant for political liberalization in the country as "many young Kuwaitis looked toward the United States as a model for creating a new way of life" and that "their contact with the

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[162] Tetreault, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait, 86.

[163] Rabi, 159.

[164] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 114.

[165] Rabi, 158.

U.S. army created among them a respect and fondness for Americans". [166] However, despite the presence of some scholars to view the American presence in Kuwait as an advantageous situation for the development of political reform in Kuwait, there are some other scholars to have a contrary view about the issue. Actually, a number of scholars evaluated the situation as an "opportunity lost" because of the reality that the U.S government was ignorant about the need for political reform in Kuwait at the time and continued to support the ruling elite who had anti-democratic practices. [167] In this connection, "the nature of postwar reconstruction certainly put the United States in a position to influence political events in a pro-democratic way, but in fact it was very reluctant to do so." [168]

Lastly, the post-invasion period witnessed the formation of two divergent groups of people which may well be due to the different experiences of exiles. On one hand, there were the liberals, who had lived in democratic states during the period of invasion and they had the opportunity to compare the democratic practices in these states with the practices in Kuwait. This group of people may have possibly become aware of the need for change in Kuwait. On the other hand, there was a group of people who lived during the invasion in Saudi Arabia, which is one of the most conservative states in the region. In contrast to the first group of people, the people who went to Saudi Arabia at the time of occupation may have been affected from the religiosity of the Saudi people and would like to see a similar order in their own state.

3.2.2. The 1992 Elections and the 7th National Assembly

The restoration of the Kuwaiti National Assembly and the elections for the assembly did not take place immediately after the Iraqi invasion came to an end. In fact, it took almost a year after the occupation for the elections to be held. In

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[166] Shafeeq N. Ghabra, "Balancing State and Society: The Islamic Movement in Kuwait," Middle East Policy 5 (1997): 63.

[167] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 114.

summer 1991, the Amir declared that he would abandon the National Council and the elections for the National Assembly would be held in fall 1992 but he refrained from giving an exact date for the elections. [169]

The campaigns prior to the 1992 elections were active and various issues were discussed in the meetings. The candidates mostly focus on the security issues and the members of the opposition wanted an investigation to find out the responsible people, who could not take any measures against the threat coming from the neighbor. Another issue the opposition emphasized through the campaign was about the number of the assembly members to be chosen for the Council of Ministers. In general, two or three members of the assembly were chosen to take part in the cabinet. "During the 1992 campaign, the opposition had repeatedly demanded that more National Assembly members be selected for cabinet positions." [170]

Overall, the campaigns for the 1992 elections were significant to show the strong demand of the Kuwaiti people in favor of political liberalization. The discussions made it clear that on the one hand, people want a more effective and transparent government, on the other they voiced their concern "for an expansion and protection of political and civil rights, including some discussion of women's suffrage and of lowering the voting age to 18. [171] A final point about the campaigns was that despite political parties were not allowed, the candidates belonged to three main categories as: former Arab nationalists, reformists, and Islamists. [172]

The elections for the National Assembly took place in October 1992. Despite the attempts of the Al-Sabah leaders to buy off votes through material

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[168] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 114.
[169] For more details see, Tetreault, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait, 101 and Hicks and Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait," 202.

[170] Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 191.

[171] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 115.

benefits, the electorates voted consciously and the elections passed in a fair atmosphere. [173] Among the fifty deputies chosen for the assembly, thirty-six of them were in opposition position to government. Some of these elected members of the assembly, who were in opposition to the government, had Islamic tendencies, whereas some others in this opposition position had pro-democracy tendencies. [174] The results of the 1992 elections were positive for a more open political structure in Kuwait, but it was interpreted by the ruling elite as an unpleasant development. Until the 1992 elections, the majority of the National Assembly consisted of the deputies who were in favor of the ruling regime and gave full support to the government. This time the situation had really changed. The thing, which remained unchanged was the domination of the cabinet's significant positions such as the ministries of defense, foreign affairs, interior and information by the members of the ruling family. [175]

In the aftermath of the 1992 elections the assembly started to experience its 7th term. In this political setting, the Al-Sabah leaders would like to continue their advocating the status quo, which was a kind of governance through patron-client contacts and tribal connections. [176] However, this was no longer easy with the opposition in the National Assembly. In fact, the ruling regime tried to create divisions in the assembly by using tribal identifications but this attempt failed. [177] Most of the deputies in the new assembly did not hesitate to criticize the government. Six years had passed after the closure of the assembly and there were many things to be discussed in the assembly. Except for the few supporters of the

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[172] Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 188.

[173] See, Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 190.

[174] Both the liberals and the Islamists have been in favor of political reform in the fields of more accountability and transparency. However, when the issues of religion and political rights of the women are concerned, Islamists are against reform, whereas liberals support reform also in this field.

[175] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 119.

[176] Rabi, 160.

[177] Tetreault, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait, 115-116.

ruling regime, there was a general agreement in the assembly on the need for political reform.

Nevertheless, the weight of the deputies with Islamist inclination was also heavily felt in the 7th assembly. Although these deputies were in favor of political reform with respect to more accountability and transparency in the system, they were against openness when religion and women were taken into account. For instance, Islamist deputies had presented a proposal in January 1993 that suggested allowing the female medical students to wear veils in their clinical and laboratory sessions. [178] Nevertheless, the proposal did not pass, due to the counter attempts of the liberals in the assembly to avoid this initiative of the Islamists. Another attempt of the Islamist parliamentarians was to vote for the segregation of education among the male and female students at the Kuwait University and the law for this segregation passed in the National Assembly. Lastly, the Islamist parliamentarians signed and sent a proposal to Amir in late 1994, which involved a change in the second article of the constitution to make Sharia as 'the main source of legislation' instead of the Sharia as 'a main source of legislation'. [179] On this issue Shafeeq N. Ghabra points out: "In fact, all elected members of the parliament signed the petition, with the exception of six liberals, who became the objects of accusations."[180]

Except for the initiatives of the Islamist deputies, the 7th assembly performed well in economic issues such as controlling "the use of public funds and the management of the country's overseas investments". [181] In addition, the assembly had widened the limits of the criteria to vote. In terms of the voting criteria, the assembly approved two laws. One of these laws granted the children of the

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[178] Tetreault, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait, 163.

[179] See, Ghabra, 66 and Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 195.

[180] Ghabra, 66.

[181] Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 192.

naturalized citizens [182] to vote. The other law granted the naturalized citizens to vote after 20 years of earning their citizenship, which previously required 30 years of time in order to be legally able to vote. Without any doubt, the approval of these two laws was a significant step towards an opening in the Kuwaiti electoral system. As Ghabra mentions: "These measures mean opening the way, with the approval of government, for further electoral reform." [183]

Throughout the period of the 7th National Assembly, the efforts of the Al-Sabah family to take the deputies of the assembly under control did not succeed. Therefore, this time the family directed its attention to another institution of public political participation; the diwaniyyas [184] and tried to control their activities. Nevertheless, Rabi puts forward that although the Al-Sabah regime monitored the important opposition diwaniyyas, it refrained from interfering into the activities of these diwaniyyas. [185]

The last detail regarding the period of the 7th National Assembly was that the Amir initially allocated six ministerial positions in the Council of Ministers to deputies, who were elected by the 1992 elections. These positions included the ministries of oil, justice, commerce and industry, education, Islamic affairs, labor and social affairs. [186] However, in year 1994 three of the deputies who took place in the cabinet were dismissed due to disagreements among the elected ministers and the appointed ministers. Then one independent elected deputy was appointed for

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[182] Naturalized citizens are the children of the Kuwaitis, who gained their citizenship prior to the birth of their children.

[183] Ghabra, 69.

[184] "The term diwaniyya is used for a room in the house, where family and friends meet regularly for discussing social and political issues. The gathering itself is also called a diwaniyya." As it is indicated in Rabi, 165.

[185] Rabi, 162.

[186] Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 192.

the cabinet and, overall the number of the elected deputies in the cabinet overall reduced from six to four. [187]

3.2.3. The 1996 Elections and the 8th National Assembly

The 1996 Elections were not given place by the scholars in their works, as wide as their analysis of the 1992 elections. This may be due to the fact that the 1992 elections were held in a critical time, because both the suspension of the assembly had continued for six years and almost a year had passed after the Iraqi occupation. Nonetheless, 1996 elections were also important as they indicated the continuation of the electoral process for Kuwaiti National Assembly. The elections for the 8th National Assembly were held on October 7, 1996. Prior to the elections, there were various public demonstrations by the Kuwaiti women to voice their demands, in terms of participating to the elections through the electoral process. [188] Similar to the campaigns for the 1992 elections, the campaigns for the 1996 elections passed in a lively atmosphere through the discussions took place both in the diwaniyyas and in the press.

The participation to the 1996 elections was high among the men, who were eligible to vote. Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg note: "In a clear indication of the interest generated by the elections, more than 80 percent of the 107,000 men eligible to vote showed up at the polls." [189] The scholars, in general, agreed that the electoral process in 1996 passed in a democratic atmosphere. Without any doubt, the lively election campaign and the desire of the eligible people to participate into the elections were influential in this agreement. From the viewpoints of Crystal and Al-Shayeji, the 1996 elections in Kuwait illustrated the continuing commitment to the democratic experiment. [190]

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[187] Tetreault, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait, 164.

[188] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 120.

[189] Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 195.

[190] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 121.

With the 1996 elections, there was a change in the share of the seats in the National Assembly. Nearly half of the deputies in the seventh assembly were not reelected so that the assembly had to welcome many newcomers. In the eighth National Assembly the Islamic representation continued to be significant but not as strong as the seventh assembly, as the Islamists lost several seats in the 1996 elections. In contrast, pro-government candidates and liberal candidates gained more seats in the eighth assembly in comparison with the seventh assembly. According to Crystal and Al-Shayeji explain the reason of this change with these words: "Behind this shift lay a consolidation of the alliance between liberals and pro-government forces. Even before the elections, liberals were able to prevent Islamist initiatives in the 1992 assembly only by turning to the government for support." [191]

To sum up, in terms of the allocation of the seats, the deputies with moderate tendencies in the new assembly were more than the ones with Islamist tendencies. However, despite the increase in the number of moderates in the eighth assembly, this was not encouraging for the political liberalization because among the moderates pro-government deputies formed the majority who were in favor of the status quo rather than change. In other words, they seemed to represent the Al-Sabah family other than the Kuwaiti people. The new combination of the representatives in the assembly caused an increase in the division among the moderates and the Islamists over divergent issues in the eighth assembly. [192] Nevertheless, despite the division among the deputies, the eighth assembly was able to issue a law, which banned primary elections [193] and, therefore encouraged political liberalization in the field of electoral process. Primary elections were under the influence of the tribal authority in the majority of the electoral districts and

[191] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 121.

[192] Ghabra, 67.

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"most tribal candidates who won primaries then won comfortably in the general elections". [194]   The Kuwaiti government was in favor of the primary elections because tribal candidates were in general loyal to the Al-Sabah family.   The prohibition of the primary elections was a positive step, in terms of political reform as these elections were un-democratic in their nature due to the unfair competition in the general elections. [195]

3.2.4. The 3rd Suspension of the National Assembly and the 1999 Elections

The Amir suspended the eighth assembly on May 1999, which was the third time in Kuwaiti electoral history since independence, that the Kuwaiti National Assembly was dissolved by the Amir. [196] The main reason behind this action of the Amir dated back to 1998, when the Islamist deputies in the assembly opposed strongly to a publication which the interior minister of the time, had allowed to be published. [197]   According to the Islamists in the assembly the publication was in conflict with the Islamic values and traditions in Kuwaiti society, and therefore they accused the interior minister of acting against the constitution.   It was the first time that a minister in the Kuwaiti assembly was facing such a rough reaction from the assembly.   The prime minister of the time, who was the head of the cabinet decided that the whole cabinet would resign.   As Ehteshami points out: "While it was the assembly, which forced the issue, it was the cabinet which found a way out of the crisis: it chose to resign en masse rather than have one of its members thrown into the lion's den." [198]   For Amir it would be better to overcome the crisis by suspending the assembly, so he simply dissolved it accusing the assembly of

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[193] Primary election is the kind of election, which is held in an electoral district to determine the candidates for the general election.

[194] Al-Najjar, 245-246.

[195] Al-Najjar, 246.

[196] Al-Najjar, 245.

[197] Ehteshami, "Reform From Above: The Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," 63.

[198] Ehteshami, "Reform From Above: The Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," 63.

preventing the working of the government in an efficient way. From Ehteshami's point of view, "this time round, the Amir's action seems to be deeply embedded in a set of political calculations designed to bolster the hand of the government against an increasingly vocal and unruly parliament." [199]

As soon as the assembly was dissolved, the Amir announced the date for the forthcoming elections. In fact, the suspension of the assembly differed from the previous ones which took place in 1976 and 1986 because of the divergence in the intention of the Amir. The aim of the Amir this time was not to destroy the assembly but to get rid of the representatives in the assembly, who were not in favor of the government, and to have a more supportive assembly. [200] The elections for the ninth assembly were scheduled for 3 July 1999 and accordingly the election campaign took a start. Prior to the electoral process, the Amir declared his sympathy for giving women full political rights. From Al-Najjar's point of view, this declaration of the Amir became a major issue to be discussed in the election campaign and it further inflamed an already tense campaign. [201] The Islamist candidates and the people around them strongly opposed to the intention of the Amir arguing that it was incompatible with the Islamic principles.

Another issue to be discussed widely in the 1999 election campaign was prohibition of the primary elections by the eighth assembly. As Al-Najjar notes: "The issue of tribal primaries became another major theme in the 1999 election campaign because two tribes publicly announced their intentions to hold tribal primaries and the government took action against the organizers." [202] There were also criticisms raised by different groups against the government throughout the campaign. These criticisms included a claim about the financial support of the government for the candidates, who were loyal to the government. The

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[199] Ehteshami, "Is the Middle East Democratizing?," 209.

[200] Ehteshami, "Is the Middle East Democratizing?" 209.

[201] Al-Najjar, 245.

government did not remain silent to these criticisms and reacted by taking legal actions against several candidates.

The elections for the ninth assembly were held in July 1999. The results of the election put forward that the Kuwaiti people were not happy with the eighth assembly, as the combination of the assembly changed to a large extent. According to Al-Najjar, the results of the 1999 elections were the clear signal of the future disagreements between the assembly and the cabinet as "the government lost 11 of its valued supporters from the previous parliament." [203] Al-Najjar says: "If we credit the notion that the government created the political crisis which led to the Parliament's dissolution, hoping to increase the number of its supporters in the legislature, then the calculation backfired." [204] In the ninth assembly there was a significant increase in the number of the liberal representatives, and overall the liberal representatives gained nearly the same number of seats as did the Islamist representatives.

The major event to mark the period of the ninth assembly was the rejection of the Amir's proposal regarding granting the women the right to vote in the elections. In terms of political liberalization here we face a dilemma as on the one hand, the ruling family which was generally in favor of the status quo demanded the political reform, whereas on the other, the representative institution that would be expected to be pro-reform, rejected the political reform. On this issue, Micheal Herb points out:

> *On issues related to religion or to the role of women, the ruling families are still generally more liberal than many of those who are or might be elected to the parliament. All of this prompts further skepticism about parliaments, and gives grounds to wonder if there is a serious disconnect between democracy and liberalism in the Gulf.* [205]

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[202] Al-Najjar, 246.

[203] Al-Najjar 246.

[204] Al-Najjar, 246.

Nevertheless, there were also some positive developments in terms of political reform, which the ruling family and the National Assembly had reached to an agreement. These positive acts included the reform of the press law, freedom of association and debate. [206]

3.2.5. Civil Society in Kuwait

Kuwait has always been several steps forward in comparison with the other Arab Gulf states, in terms of its civil society. There was a much more fertile ground for the civil society to emerge earlier in Kuwait due to a number of reasons. First of all, "toleration of oppositional views and the creation of institutions with real powers to hold the government accountable have been a feature of Kuwait's history since independence, setting it apart neighboring Gulf states." [207] To put it differently, it can be suggested that Kuwait's rulers have been aware of the need for a civil society, in order to increase the legitimacy of the government's rule among the Kuwaiti people. Hence, Kuwaiti ruling family had continued to allow the functioning of civil society to some extent, even in the aftermath of the flux of huge oil revenues, whereas others Arab Gulf states chose to impose their absolute power over their societies. Secondly, "civil society is likely to emerge in Arab countries, which have favored private business groups in countries such as Kuwait." [208] Kuwaiti Merchant class has been able to preserve its power, despite the attempts of the ruling family to have control over this class. Eventually, Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 led to strengthening of the civil society in Kuwait as the people, who stayed in their state acted in unity to overcome the difficulties of the invasion.

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[205] Herb, "Amirs and Parliaments in the Gulf," 42.

[206] Ehteshami, "Reform From Above: The Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," 63.

[207] Hicks and Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait,"188.

[208] Mustapha Kamel al-Sayyid, "The Concept of Civil Society and the Arab World," in Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, eds. R. Brynen, B. Korany and P. Noble (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 138.

There are mainly three main components of the Kuwaiti civil society. One of them are the associations including various social, cultural, professional, voluntary and labor associations. Although associations are the key components of the Kuwaiti civil society, they are not fully autonomous as they are not only regulated by the state and depend on state for a significant portion of their budgets, but also from time to time they are subjected to various constraints by the state such as limitations on their activities and even closure.[209] Interestingly, "the position of associations has tended to improve during periods of parliamentary rule", whereas they were being suppressed by the state when the National Assembly was dissolved.[210] Yet, despite these limitations, associations in Kuwait have been able to advocate political liberalization and to support the return of the National Assembly. Moreover, political opposition has been able to express itself through associations in Kuwait. Likewise, political competition in Kuwait has taken place between divergent associations but under strict control of the state in order to limit political debate.

Another component of Kuwaiti civil society is the diwaniyya. The term diwaniyya is used for "a room in the house where family and friends meet regularly to talk about business and politics among other activities".[211] Normally, public gatherings require state permission in Kuwait, however the diwaniyya is relatively free from state intervention, it provides people with an alternative opportunity for the discussion of politics. Since, the 1992 elections for the National Assembly diwaniyyas have become places where candidates organize election campaigns and to persuade people about their eligibility. Overall, Crystal points out the significance of diwaniyya in Kuwait:

In Kuwait, the diwaniyya was the institutional framework for the prewar pro-

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[209] Mary Ann Tetreault, the "Civil Society in Kuwait: Protected Spaces and Women's Rights," Middle East Journal 47 (Spring 1993): 276.

[210] Hicks and Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait," 195.

[211] Tetreault, "Civil Society in Kuwait: Protected Spaces and Women's Rights," 279.

democracy movement. During elections, diwaniyya has been a primary campaign forum. In the postwar period, National Assembly members sustain support through constituent services provided through diwaniyyas. [212]

The last components of Kuwaiti civil society to be analyzed are cooperative societies. Cooperative societies exist in all over Kuwait, which have over 170,000 subscribers and their major function is the purchase and distribution through retail outlets of foodstuffs and household goods. [213] Cooperative societies became strengthened during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, as they played an important role in the Kuwaiti resistance to Iraqi invasion through distributing food and goods to people, who were in need, free of charge. Moreover, they provided money for the resistance. Today, subscribers of the cooperative societies have share of the cooperative society's annual profit, have the right to vote, and to stand as a candidate in the annual election for the board of the cooperative societies. [214] The pro-democratic structure of the cooperative societies have made them places, where members of the board can campaign for election to the National Assembly and prepare themselves for political careers.

3.2.6. Media in Kuwait

Media is also a representative structure to reflect the people in a given state and to influence the level of political liberalization in that particular state. In the field of media, Kuwaitis have not "succeeded in freeing themselves completely of the intrusive attentions of a state bolstered by its control of immense oil-revenues, and the attendant powers of patronage…" [215] With the influx of massive oil revenues in early 1970s, Kuwaiti state used its oil wealth to build a huge communications infrastructure. The main aim of the state was to demonstrate its ability to respond people's needs and to show its intention for the well-being of the

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[212] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 267.

[213] Hicks and Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait," 200.

[214] Hicks and Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait," 200.

[215] Hicks and Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait," 209.

people. In this regard, liberties granted to media organs have either increased or decreased with respect to the need of the Kuwaiti ruling regime for popular support.

Nevertheless, particularly the press has been able to reflect a variety of opinions in the Kuwaiti society. Despite the limitations of the Kuwaiti state, the press has played an important role in shaping the political decision-making process. Doubtlessly, privately owned press has been relatively more independent than the state owned press in Kuwait. [216] News from the Kuwaiti National Assembly has formed the major section in the newspapers, as the assembly's weekly session has been published in full, and occupied three to five pages. [217] Hence, any action taken against the assembly by the Kuwaiti state has had a parallel impact on the press. For instance, in 1976 with the same decree both the assembly was dissolved and the press law was amended in favor of tolerating the Minister of Information to close any newspaper through an administrative order. Another example to demonstrate the parallel treatment of the Kuwaiti state with regard to the assembly and the press was that when the assembly was dissolved in 1987, at the same time, a pre-censorship law was introduced. [218]

Censorship had been one of the elements of state protection in Kuwait until the Iraqi invasion of 1990. The Ministry of Information played a major role in providing protection through reviewing every single video for rent in an official shop, to check whether the video was in line with local cultural values and Kuwaiti government regulations or not. [219] Upon the review, a video had either been approved or banned. In fact, Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a turning point for the Kuwaiti media. Before the Iraqi invasion, there was "a chain of command"

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[216] Al-Qabas is one of the leading independent Kuwaiti dailies, which has been privately owned by five merchant families.

[217] Al-Najjar, 255.

[218] Al-Najjar, 255.

[219] Deborah Wheeler, "New Media, Globalization and Kuwaiti National Identity," Middle East Journal 54 (Summer 2000): 438.

regarding the media, and "it ended at the palace." [220]   During the invasion, Iraqi forces systematically destroyed the television and radio stations along with cutting international phone lines. As the editor in chief of Kuwaiti daily Al-Qabas notes: "the Iraqis took everything; the mainframe computer, the furniture, the typesetting, everything. We need at least ten years to recover." [221]   The goal of the Saddam regime was to prevent Kuwaitis from communicating with the world and to weaken the Kuwaiti resistance.   Despite these efforts of the Saddam regime, Kuwaiti resistance movement established new means of communication.   Overall, in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion, liberties granted to media have accelerated due to the fact that Al-Sabah family lost an important portion of its legitimacy during the occupation and that there was desperate need to regain its legitimacy through increasing public support.   In this connection, pre-censorship law was completely lifted on December 1991. Al-Najjar points out, that today the Kuwaiti press plays a key role in "supporting democratic principles," along with emphasizing that the press accommodates "strong opinions critical of the government. [222]

Eventually, despite the Kuwaiti state still maintains control over some components of media, like television and radio, the expansion of satellite television, and the Internet challenge state control. [223]   The expansion of these new media technologies has provided the people with uncensored information. Internet has even been more effective in linking Kuwaiti people to world preventing state control.

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[220] Hisham Milhem, Joe Stork and Sally Ethelston, "Politics and Media in the Arab World: An Interview with Hisham Milhem," *Middle East Report* 180 (Jan./Feb. 1993): 16.

[221] Muhammad Al-Saqr, "Muhammad Al-Saqr on Kuwait's Press," *Middle East Report* 180 (Jan./Feb. 1993): 20.

[222] Al-Najjar, 255.

[223] Wheeler, 437.

3.2.7. Socio-Economic Factors and Demands for Political Liberalization

Changes in the socio-economic environment have certainly influenced the extent of demands for political liberalization in Kuwait. In this regard, fluctuations in the price of oil, and in return increases and decreases in the welfare standards of Kuwaiti people were closely related. Influx of oil revenues changed the historical relationship between state and society in Kuwait. Prior to early 1970s, Kuwaiti ruling family had depended on economic elites for revenues. In return, contributions of economic elites to politics were welcomed by the ruling elites. With the oil boom of 1973, Kuwaiti ruling elites did not have to worry about the economic elites pressuring them for accountability, demanding to know how the revenues were spent, or "demanding something in return for their economic contribution to the state." [224] Nevertheless, although the merchants were encouraged to withdraw from politics the potential have always remained for their return to politics as neither economic elites were destroyed nor their corporate identity disappeared. When socio-economic circumstances changed, mostly due to changes in oil revenues then the merchants have organized systematically and reentered politics.

Kuwait experienced mainly two periods of serious socio-economic crises. One of these crises took place in mid-1980s, due to decline in oil revenues along with the collapse of Kuwaiti stock market Suq al-Manakh. This crisis caused the return of the economic elites to political life, "whose political silence oil revenues had once brought" and an increase in the demands of the others "whose depoliticization had been contingent on a continuing supply of money from the rulers". [225] Despite the crisis and the increase in the demands of the people for political reform, there was not any concrete response of the Kuwaiti state to these demands. However, the ruling elites were becoming more uncomfortable against the demands.

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[224] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 108-109.

[225] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 110 and Crystal, "Oil and Politics in the Gulf," 195.

The other socio-economic crisis occurred in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. After suffering from a long-term decline in crude oil prices from the middle of the 1980s, Kuwaiti economy was already under great fiscal pressure. Weak economy combined with the heavy costs of dealing with the Iraqi invasion limited the ability of Kuwaiti ruling regime to protect their populations from the costs of the invasion. [226] Hence, Kuwaiti people began to ask questions about the absence of political participation and transparency in the political system. As Eteshami points out: "In Kuwait, the population was more adamant than ever that from that point on it should be involved in the shaping of the country's future. The Kuwaiti public wanted the unconditional reinstatement of the national assembly." [227] At first, the amir tried to placate demands through economic means. Although, the economy was not in good shape, it was announced that the Kuwaitis would be paid consumer loans, car loans and mortgage loans. But it was impossible for the Kuwaiti ruling regime to realize what was promised by the announcement, as "the revenues were too dear, the need too great". [228] Finally, the ruling elites understood that there was no solution other than opening the Kuwaiti National Assembly to have popular support. So the amir, opened the National Assembly because it was cheaper way of gaining support.

3.4. Challenges to Political Liberalization in Kuwait

There are mainly five challenges to the process of political liberalization in Kuwait. These challenges include the absence of political parties, limited electoral base, structure of the government, imbalance in the distribution of powers within the political system and the Islamist perception of political liberalization. To be sure, in comparison with the other Arab Gulf monarchies Kuwait has always been a step forward because of several reasons, which will be examined in the next section.

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[226] Ehteshami, "Reform From Above: The Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," 60.

[227] Ehteshami, "Reform From Above: The Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," 60.

[228] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 111.

Nevertheless, for performing better the focus should be on how to cope with the challenges in an effective way.

Absence of political parties is one of the challenges to political liberalization in Kuwait. Though it is not openly indicated in the Kuwaiti constitution, formation of political parties is recognized as illegal. [229] This creates an uneven position in the National Assembly, where the government acts as a united body, whereas the elected deputies act as individually. "As a result, the government enjoys a stronger position in lobbying on key issues." [230] On the other hand, the absence of political parties has a direct influence on the lack of common purpose among even small groups of deputies as there are no party programs, agendas or projects to unite them. There are intense debates even on insignificant matters and this makes the process of decision-making much more difficult. Micheal Herb also mentions about the negative influence of political disagreements on the issue of political liberalization in Kuwait telling that the issue of political reform "gets lost in the political shuffle".[231]

The second challenge to limit political liberalization in Kuwait was the limited electoral base. Until very recently, according to the Kuwaiti election law, only Kuwaiti males who were over 21 years of age were eligible to vote if they could prove the settlement of their ancestries in Kuwait since prior to 1921's. The election law did not allow the women, a segment of the 'bidun jinsiyyah' [232] and the members of the security service including the members of the army and the police to take place in the electoral process. [233] Granting women the right to vote became a frequently discussed issue both in the electoral campaigns and in the assembly

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[229] Al-Najjar, 247.

[230] Al-Najjar, 247.

[231] Herb, "Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf," 44.

[232] 'Bidun jinsiyyah' is the name given to those without nationality. In Arabic the word 'bidun' means without and the word 'jinsiyyah' means nationality.

[233] Al-Najjar, 248.

sessions particularly in late 1990's and eventually the Kuwaiti women were granted full political rights on 16 May 2005. The decision to provide Kuwaiti women with the right to vote and to be elected to public office was adopted by the Kuwaiti National Assembly with "25 votes for 23 opposition, while one parliamentarian abstained from voting." [234]   In this connection, Kuwaiti women will be able to participate to next parliamentary elections which will be held in 2007, both as voters and candidates.

From Joseph A. Kechichian's point of view, the situation the bidun jinsiyyah face was much more complicated as these Arabs were denied Kuwaiti citizenship because despite they were born in Kuwait they could not prove their ancestral residency in Kuwait. [235]   Nevertheless, since 1996, the Arabs who were born in Kuwait and have lived in Kuwait for 30 year have also been recognized as eligible to vote. However, until very recently the electoral base was very narrow in Kuwait, as before granting full political rights to women, only approximately 10% of the Kuwaiti population could participate into the electoral process. This means that the majority of the Kuwaiti population was not represented in the tenth National Assembly and therefore, "it raises questions about Parliament's claim to be the legitimate representative of the people". [236]

The third challenge to political liberalization in Kuwait stems from the structure of the government. The Amir appoints the prime minister, and in return the prime minister appoints the ministers in the cabinet. "In Kuwait, as in the other Gulf monarchies, members of the ruling family hold the portfolios of Defense, Foreign Affairs, Interior, as well as the post of Prime Minister." [237]   This means that

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[234] "Historic vote: Kuwaiti women get full political rights," in Arabic News, 17 May 2005, <http://arabicnews.com> (19 May 2005)

[235] Joseph A. Kechichian, "Democratization in the Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC," Middle East Policy 11 (2004): 42.

[236] Al-Najjar, 248.

[237] Micheal Herb, "Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World," The Middle East Journal 58 (2004): 376.

the key positions in the Kuwaiti political system are dominated by non-elected people, who do not necessarily have the required qualifications but the surname, Al-Sabah. According to Herb, the ruling family will unlikely to give up its domination in the cabinet. [238] Therefore, the will for political liberalization in Kuwait has been and will be closely related with the intention of the Al-Sabah family. Nevertheless, the government is not completely an autonomous structure as the government should have the approval of the assembly in order to start functioning. Also, the assembly has the right to question the confidence of the ministers in the cabinet through vote of confidence, which will be examined in the next paragraph. Another impressive detail in terms of the Kuwaiti government is that it almost constitutes one-third of the National Assembly and can vote on a variety of issues except for the vote of confidence. On this issue Al-Najjar notes: "The presence of this large number of appointed members in what is supposedly an elected body, weakens the democratic process." [239]

Another challenge to the process of political reform in Kuwait is the imbalance in the distribution of powers within the political system. It would be appropriate to emphasize that there is not a system of balance of power in the Kuwaiti political system. On one hand, there are the elected representatives of the assembly and on the other hand there are the appointed members of the cabinet to govern the ministries, in addition to their equal powers in the assembly with the elected representatives, except for the vote of confidence. However, it should be also noted that the majority of the elected deputies in the assembly can remove the confidence in individual ministers through vote of confidence. [240] Moreover, the majority of the National Assembly can also declare that they do not want to work with the Prime Minister. Nonetheless, in the latter case the Amir can intervene into the process and dismiss either the government or the assembly. To be sure, it has always been the assembly to be dismissed by the Amir in such a situation. The

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[238] Herb, "Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf," 44.

[239] Al-Najjar, 249.

Kuwaiti National Assembly was suspended for three times by the Amir since Kuwait's independence: for the first time in 1976, for the second time in 1986 and for the third time in 1999.

The last challenge to political opening in Kuwait is the perception of political liberalization by the Islamists. What is significant here is how the Islamists see and approach to the issue of political opening. Do the Islamists view political liberalization as their target or as a means to reach their target? This is a very complex question to be answered simply. In fact, there is not a single stable approach of the Islamists to the issues, which constitute the process of political liberalization. They follow a liberal approach, when their participation and representation in the political system is concerned. However, when it comes to issues such as granting women the right to vote, they become strong supporters of the status quo, ironically against the Amir, who is in favor of giving such rights to women. Another example in terms of the contradictory approach of Islamists to political liberalization is that in 2002, the Islamists in the assembly initiated the removal of confidence from the minister of finance, who was successful in his work but a respected liberal. [241]

3.5. Kuwait: On the Road to Political Liberalization?

Having analyzed the development of political liberalization in Kuwait up to early 2000s together with its challenges, now the recent developments will be examined. Before, examining the recent developments, the focus will be on the recent political groupings in the National Assembly, which are relevant in putting pressure to the ruling regime in terms of political change. The representatives with Islamic tendencies form the largest bloc in the assembly. Though to a lesser extent, the liberals, independents and tribal deputies continue to raise their voices in the parliament. Besides these existing groupings, a group called popular bloc has been formed which has a populist tendency. What is impressive about this bloc is that it

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[240] Herb, "Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf," 43.

[241] Herb, "Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf," 44.

really concerns with challenging the ruling family whereas Islamists and the liberals spend much more time in challenging one another. [242] Thus it is not enough for the ruling regime to play Islamist and the liberals, one against the other, in order to have support.

The last elections for the National Assembly were held on 6 July 2003. The participation to the elections was high among the eligible voters. Unfortunately, when the excluded population of approximately 898,000 is taken into consideration, the number 136,715 referring to the eligible voters, who participated into the elections is not that impressive at all. [243] The result of the 2003 elections was shocking for the liberals as they could only gain three seats. In contrast, the result was pleasing for the Islamists as they gained 21 out of 50 seats in the National Assembly. The other seats were divided among the government supporters and the independents.

In the meantime, a significant development was taking place in the neighboring Iraq. The Saddam regime was toppled by the United States, which caused the ruling regime in Kuwait to take a deep breath due to the threat coming from the Saddam regime. Ironically, the Iraqi threat has always been a tool in the hand of the ruling regime for legitimization although this tool had taken a deep blow in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. With the toppling of the authoritarian Saddam regime, the demand of the Kuwaitis in terms of political reform gained momentum. As it is indicated in the Arabic News dated back to 12 December 2003: "The Kuwaitis, following the collapse of the regime of Saddam Hussein which ever threatened their country, are seeking to work strongly to make deep political changes to establish democracy in this country." [244] Following the rise in the demand of the Kuwaiti people, the deputies in the National Assembly started a

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[242] Herb, "Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World," 375.

[243] Kechichian, "Democratization in the Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC," 52.

campaign in order to make changes in the electoral law to increase the number of the eligible voters and therefore to increase the amount of representation in the National Assembly. The priorities of this campaign were to grant the military men the right to vote, reduce the age of eligibility for voting from 21 to 18, and change the way of the division of the electoral district to prevent political corruption. [245]

Despite the inclination of a few deputies to make several amendments in the electoral law, the issue of granting women the right to vote have until very recently remained to be out of question for the majority of the deputies in the assembly. Ironically, the issue of women empowerment was brought to the assembly for discussion both by the Amir and the cabinet, but it was refused by the assembly for several times. "In May 2003, the Kuwaiti cabinet issued an amendment on the municipal council law providing for giving the woman her rights to be a candidate and elect members of the council..." [246] This amendment was only recently approved by the National Assembly, granting Kuwaiti women full political rights. Both the United States and the United Nations have welcomed Kuwait's decision to give full political rights to women as "an important advance". The US state department said that the change to election law would help not only women but the whole of Kuwaiti society. [247]

Overall, the process of political liberalization in Kuwait has taken a long way since the independence. The major reason for this improvement stems from the functioning of an elected representative as the Kuwaiti National Assembly though its functions are limited when compared with parliaments of the Western states and that it was suspended for three times. The ruling regime has also

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[244] "Kuwaitis ask for reform to establish democracy," in Arabic News, 12 December 2003, <arabicnews.com> (07 January 2005)

[245] Arabic News, 12 December 2003.

[246] "Kuwait proceeds towards realizing women's political rights," in Arabic News, 03 January 2004, <arabicnews.com> (10 January 2005)

[247] "Leaders hail Kuwait women's votes," in BBC News, 17 May 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (19 May 2005)

understood the importance of the assembly through time, as the existence of such an institution to share the responsibility of the government has without any doubt legitimized the ruling regime. A recent example to emphasize the harmonious relationship between the government and the assembly is that in March 2004, when a considerable number of deputies in the assembly voted for confidence of the Minister of Finance, "the Prime Minister responded by saying that this was a natural part of Kuwaiti political life". [248]

The change in the view of the ruling family has not only been limited in terms of the National Assembly. There have been frequent references to the need for political reform by the members of the ruling family. In his speech dated back to 26 October 2004, the Kuwaiti prime minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said that "the government's main policy for 2005 is to implement urgent political reforms and work for issuing a law allowing women the right to elect, vote for the Ummah council". [249] He also added: "It was natural for the state of Kuwait following the collapse of the toppled regime in Iraq and security conditions inclination to stability that a new phase of openness and modernization to be introduced at different levels." [250]

In the meantime, there have been several political formations in Kuwaiti political scene. In Fall 2004, a new political movement called 'al-Adala Wal-Tanmiyah'[251] has been formed by a group of young media people and academics.[252] The intention of this new movement is to improve the political system in Kuwait

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[248] Al-Rai al-Am, 9 March 2004 quoted in Herb, "Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World," 375.

[249] "Amir of Kuwait opens Ummah council session: political rights for the woman; economic reforms," in Arabic News, 27 October 2004, <arabicnews.com> (10 January 2005)

[250] Arabic News, 27 October 2004.

[251] The name of the party, 'al-Adala Wal-Tanmiyah' means justice and development.

[252] "New political movement formed in Kuwait calls for pluralism, authority transfer," in Arabic News, 20 December 2004, <arabicnews.com> (11 January 2005)

with a particular emphasis on political pluralism and authority transfer. [253] Another political movement was initiated by the Islamists. In fact, the Islamists have forced the limits of the Kuwaiti political system as they declared that they have established the first political party in the Arab Gulf States, called 'al-Ummah' party. [254] They have really forced the limits because the formation of political parties is regarded as illegal in Kuwait, due to the fact that there is not any single law to refer to political parties in Kuwait. The members of the 'al-Ummah' sent letters to Kuwaiti prime minister, the speaker of the parliament and lawmakers to convince them in favor of allowing the political parties. [255] The response of the government to the act of the Islamists was to call in the members of the so-called 'al-Ummah' party for questioning at the police station. [256]

In conclusion, despite the several continuing weaknesses of the Kuwaiti political system, Kuwait has come a long way, in terms of political liberalization. There are two major factors, which make the Kuwaiti performance outstanding and more impressive, that the other Arab, Gulf Monarchies. One of them is that the participatory politics in Kuwait has a long historical tradition, which goes back to the emergence of Kuwait as a political entity. The other factor is that although the parliamentary experience in Kuwait faced three interruptions, it is the only one in the Arab Gulf region to continue its existence for such a long time. The next elections for the National Assembly will be held in 2007 for the first time including Kuwaiti women. By the time, the next elections are held in 2007, the Kuwaiti National Assembly will be witnessing its 11th term. To sum up, despite the limitations in various issues, Kuwait has a promising future when the political reform is concerned.

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[253] Arabic News, 20 December 2004.

[254] "First political party to be established in Kuwait," in Arabic News, 31 January 2005, <arabicnews.com> (07 February 2005)

[255] "Kuwait to investigate founders of first political party," in Middle East Times, 04 February 2005, <metimes.com> (07 February 2005)

[256] Middle East Times, 04 February 2005.

CHAPTER 4

THE SAUDI EXPERIENCE OF POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

4.1. Historical Background of the Saudi Political System

Although the Saudi state does not have any concrete historical experience with any representative institutions, it would be appropriate to analyze historical background of the Saudi political system, in order to understand the dimensions of political liberalization in Saudi Arabia, since the end of the Cold War. It can be said that Saudi Arabia had been an absolutist monarchy, where King had full authority to rule his country without any formal laws or legally-recognized political opposition to form a counter-weight to the ruler. Yet, King had always been inferior to God and Sharia, and this enabled religious authorities to become actors in the political system through giving advices to King. In addition, as the rulership was hereditary and belonged to al-Saudi family, members of the al-Saud family were all privileged and more or less male members of the royal family played their roles in the political system, especially following the death of Ibn Saud, the founder of the Kingdom.

4.1.1. Establishment of the Saudi State

The key figure in the establishment of the Saudi State was Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud, who conquered Riyadh in the early twentieth century. [257] On September 18, 1932 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was officially founded by Ibn Saud and named after him, who became the King. Ibn Saud struggled hard to control different tribes in the region, and in order to unite these tribes he used religion as a unifying force. Wahhabi teaching [258] was commonly used by Ibn Saud to "overcome the country's

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[257] Ghassan Salame, "Political Power and the Saudi State", in *The Modern Middle East: A Reader*, ed. A. Hourani, P. S. Khoury, and M. C. Wilson (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers, 1993), 579.

religious and cultural heterogeneity". [259] Ibn Saud had a close connection with the Wahhabi teaching, and this was influential in preserving the power of the al-Saud family. In other words, the Saudi King was not only the political leader of the Saudi Arabia, but also he was "the leader, the imam of the Saudi-Wahhabi community of believers." [260]

Religion has always been a tool for legitimization since the establishment of the Saudi state. Quran and Sunna [261] were the so-called constitution of Saudi Arabia and King was the central actor in the political system. He was only subordinate to God and the law of God, the Sharia. In addition, he had absolute power to issue decrees to cover those situations, which had not been stated by the Sharia." [262] The Ulama was also given a significant position in the Saudi political system as interpreters of the Sharia and advisers of policy. With the initiative of the ulama, the Committees of Public Morality (religious police) were founded to check the Saudi people, whether they follow the acceptable standards of morality or not. The role of the ulama in the Saudi political system declined to some extent in the 1950s. "With the advent of measurable oil revenues in the 1950s, the Al Saud gained the means to develop the country and to fulfill the material demands of the population." [263] Access to oil revenues, in addition to the access to revenues from Mecca pilgrimage made the al-Saud family act more independently from the Ulama.

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[258] Wahhabi teaching is a strict interpretation of Islam.

[259] Iris Glosemeyer, "Saudi Arabia: Dynamism Uncovered," in *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change*, ed. V. Perthes (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 142.

[260] Joseph Kostiner and Joshua Teitelbaum, "State Formation and the Saudi Monarchy," *in Middle East Monarchies: the Challenge of Modernity*, ed. J. Kostiner (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 131.

[261] Practices of the Prophet Muhammad.

[262] Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 1998), 436.

4.1.2. Political Practices in the Cold War Period

The administrative system of the Saudi Arabia became more sophisticated starting from early 1950s. Until a few weeks before his death in 1953, King Ibn Saud had exercised an absolute power in Saudi politics. When he realized his weakening physical health, he decided to establish a Council of Ministers. [264] "The main motivating factor was that Ibn Saud did not want to transmit to only one of his 37 sons a power as absolute as that which he himself had exercised." [265] Instead, he thought that division of power and responsibility among his sons would lead to a more efficient way of governing the Saudi state after his death. The first meeting of the Council of Ministers took place in 1954, including the ministers of defense, foreign affairs, finance, interior, education, agriculture, health, industry, commerce and information. However, it was not until 1958, functions and powers of the Council of Ministers were clarified. With a royal decree in 1958, it was laid down that the head of the Council is the King, who was also the prime minister, and the ministers were to be appointed by the King. [266] It was also laid down that the authority of the Council remained limited to the budget and internal areas, whereas "only the King can legislate and issue laws, treaties and concessions". [267]

With the death of Ibn Saud, at first his eldest son Sa'ud succeeded his father until 1964. The succession procedure had also become clear as the royal family chose the heir to the Saudi throne from qualified male members of al-Saud family. The chosen person was called the crown prince, who also became the vice prime minister in the Council of Ministers until he became the King. [268] Sa'ud had issued a decree in 1963 about organization of the regional administrative system.

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[263] Glosemeyer, 142.

[264] Council of Ministers was originally called as Majlis al-Wukala.

[265] Salame, "Political Power and the Saudi State", 582.

[266] Vassiliev, 445.

[267] Salame, "Political Power and the Saudi State", 583.

[268] Nimrod Raphaeli, "Saudi Arabia: A Brief Guide to its Politics and Problems," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 7 (September 2003) <http://meria.idc.ac.il> (23 September 2004)

According to this decree, the Kingdom was divided into six provinces and for each of these provinces a governor was appointed together with a 30 member provincial council to assist him. [269] Sa'ud was succeeded by his half brother Faisal, in 1964. Faisal declared a new state order, which provided the establishment of twenty government ministries. The aim of Faisal's order was to widen the checks and balances in the Saudi political system without giving up the primacy of the al-Saud family. [270] Upon the assassination of Faisal in 1975, another son of the Ibn Saud, Khalid came to power. In the meanwhile; on one hand, with the influx of oil revenues, education had spread among the Saudi people and there was rapid modernization. On the other hand, the state was having problems in the utilization of oil revenues and it had become more difficult to meet expectations of a growing population. [271] In addition, people started to question both priorities and privileges of the members of royal family. It did not take long for some to demonstrate their discontent. In fact, the seizure of the Great Mosque in Mecca in autumn 1979 was a concrete example to show the discontent of the some regarding the royal family.

Finally, with the death of Khalid, Fahd became the King and the prime minister in 1982 "on the basis of the consensus of the most important princes, he appointed Prince Abdallah, his half brother as crown prince and first deputy minister." [272] There were hopes among people that Fahd would enact some political reforms, for he was known as a liberal member of the al-Saud family. A parallel development was the decline in the price of oil and its negative influence on the Saudi economy. According to Wilson and Graham, Saudi people believed that oil wealth was a gift given them by God for their religiosity and conversely, there was a widespread belief among the Saudi people that the oil bust of the early 1980s was

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[269] Salame, "Political Power and the Saudi State", 583.

[270] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, 135.

[271] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, 135.

[272] Vassiliev, 466.

a punishment by God, due to their moving away from the right path. [273] Without any doubt, continuing luxurious life of the royal family in the middle of an economic crisis was creating displeasure among the people. King Fahd made promises for political reform; however he then forgot his promises. Instead, he looked for a method to increase his religious legitimacy. As Kramer notes: "The search for a religious role was expressed differently when, in 1986, King Fahd assumed the title of 'custodian of the two holy shrines'." [274]

In conclusion, the King and to a lesser extent, the Council of Ministers were in the focus of the Saudi political system prior to the end of the Cold War. Let alone any sign of political representation there was merely an economic connection between the royal family and Saudi people. From Raphaeli's point of view, al-Saud family approached the Saudi people "as subjects merely deserving of royal charity rather than as the true owners of the country". [275] For this reason, royal grants had always been a more preferable option for the ruling family to have the support of the people rather than addressing the social problems or developing sound policies. Throughout the rule of King Fahd his six full brothers [276] were also influential in the decision-making process. However, the title 'crown prince' was not given to any one of Fahd full brothers but a half brother, Abdallah was found favorable within the royal family.

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[273] Peter W. Wilson and Douglas F. Graham, *Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 60.

[274] Gudrun Kramer, "Good Counsel to the King: The Islamist Opposition in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco," *in Middle East Monarchies: the Challenge of Modernity*, ed. J. Kostiner (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 260. The original title for the 'custodian of the two holy shrines' is 'Khadim al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn'.

[275] Raphaeli, "Saudi Arabia: A Brief Guide to its Politics and Problems."

4.2. Political Liberalization in Saudi Arabia Since the End of the Cold War

4.2.1. Gulf Crisis: The Peak of Security Concerns of the Saudi Regime

Gulf war of 1990-1991 was a turning point for Saudi Arabia to demonstrate the inadequacy of the royal family against various challenges. First of all, the threat coming from Iraq could not be perceived on time. Secondly, despite spending a huge amount of money on defense, Saudi Arabia had to rely on foreign forces. Lastly, the ruling family had not been able to cope with the economic crisis which occurred with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. On August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. In a speech just a few months before the invasion, Saudi defense minister had proudly told that there were no foreign troops in the Kingdom. [277] Ironically, four days after the invasion, US Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney, was in Saudi Arabia persuading King Fahd to accept US troops in his Kingdom. [278] It had not been difficult to persuade King Fahd regarding this issue because of his security concerns. [279]

As soon as King Fahd accepted the offer, US led coalition forces started to enter into the Kingdom. On the one hand, stationing of foreign troops in such a conservative society like the Saudi Arabia was problematic for the Saudi people due to two reasons. Firstly, "many Islamists felt humiliated at being defended by Christian powers." [280] Secondly, the destruction of an Arab-Iraqi army by non-Muslim coalition forces 'brought back the bitter memory of the Six Day war with

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[276] 'Sudairi seven' which comprise King Fahd and six of his brothers, whose mother was Hassa bint Ahmad al-Sudairi. Crown Prince Abdallah is a half-brother to the seven whose mother was al-Fadha bint Asi al-Shuraim. Source: Raphaeli.

[277] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, 141.

[278] Daryl Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 217-218.

[279] "The presence of a large Iraqi army on the Kingdom's northern border represented a major threat to the Kingdom." Source: Richard Dekmejian, "The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia," *The Middle East Journal* 57 (Summer 2003): 403.

Israel'. [281] On the other hand, the decision of the King represented an opening in the Saudi society to outside world and this openness provided strengthening of liberal trend in the Kingdom. [282]

In conclusion, demand for change and political reform among the Saudi people was accelerated with the Gulf war of 1990-1991. King Fahd was unable to defend his unpreparedness against the Iraqi threat. The tolerance of the people for insufficient policies of the royal family was weakening. Bearing in mind the situation in the Kingdom, King Fahd had no choice but to promise for political reform once the Iraqi threat came to an end. [283]

4.2.2. Demands for Political Reform in the Aftermath of the Gulf War

As it has already been mentioned in the previous section, there was a direct relationship between the Gulf crisis of 1990-1991 and the growing demand for political reform, especially in terms of political participation. There were serious criticisms raised by the people against King Fahd's policies. One of the criticisms was about the weakness of the Saudi military to defend the Kingdom without any foreign support, despite the Kingdom's high military expenditures. Another criticism was about the attitude of King Fahd and the al-Saud family. Neither the King nor any single member of the royal family had given any information to their people about to what extent the Kingdom was threatened by the crisis and why there was an urgent need to have outside assistance. "Instead, Fahd sought to downplay the crisis so as not to alarm his subjects." [284]

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[280] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, 141.

[281] Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 186.

[282] Dekmeijan, "The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia," 403.

[283] Wilson and Graham, 62.

[284] Wilson and Graham, 63.

Questions followed other questions to such an extent that soon Saudis started question the political structure of Saudi Arabia. Here, the developments taking place at the Kuwaiti side was also influential to intensify this questioning. In late 1990, Kuwaiti notables and members of the al-Sabah family came together in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, where the Kuwaiti ruling family promised free elections and restoration of the parliament. [285] The Kuwaiti example influenced both the Islamists and the liberals in the Kingdom as they wondered whether such practices would also take place in Saudi Arabia or not. Not surprisingly, King Fahd had already forgotten his promises even for limited reform, let alone any free elections or a representative institution. Nonetheless, Saudi people were annoyed and demands for political reform were renewed through petitions presented to King by the liberals in December 1990, and by the Islamists firstly in May 1991 and secondly in late 1991.

> *Lest the King forget his promises regarding political reform, both Saudi progressives and fundamentalists presented petitions to the monarch in the spring of 1990. To ensure that their demands would be considered and not brushed aside, both groups took the highly unusual step of leaking the contents of their petitions to the Egyptian press, which readily published them.* [286]

A significant detail about these petitions was that the given reaction was not familiar to any previous experiences. This time, the criticisms directed against the al-Saud Family, particularly by the Islamists, was more open and public than any other time. [287]

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[285] Wilson and Graham, 64.

[286] Wilson and Graham, 68.

[287] F. Gregory Gause III, "The Gulf Conundrum: Economic Change, Population Growth, and Political Stability in the GCC States," Washington Quarterly 20 (Winter 1997): 146.

4.2.2.1. Liberals' Petition in 1990

The first petition to the King came from the liberal front. In December 1990, forty-three liberals including intellectuals, businessman and government officials wrote an open letter to the King. In their letter, they asked the King to revise Kingdom's political and legal institutions. [288] The petition did not state any displeasure with the existing ruling system. Nevertheless, it emphasized the need for declaration of a government order and asked for the establishment of national consultative council and provincial consultative councils. The petition did not have rebellious nature to challenge the authority of either the King or the royal family. As Abir mentions; "The petition does not dare mention a fundamental law that will curb the authority of the ruler and the ulama or challenge the position of the Sharia as the Kingdom's fundamental law." [289]

4.2.2.2. Islamists' Petition in 1991

A second criticism to the royal family came from the Islamist front in the form of another petition in May 1991. The petition was signed by 400 ulama, who belonged to different ranks. Similar to liberals' petition, one of the priorities in the Islamists' petition was the establishment of a consultative council. Likewise, the Islamists demanded a reform both in the political and in the legal system. What distinguished the Islamists' petition from the liberals' petition was its boldness in several issues. One of these issues was about the economic monopoly of the royal family and other elite families. The letter openly asked for an end to this economic monopoly. Secondly, nepotism and favoritism in government appointments were criticized. The issue, which disturbed members of the royal family the most, was the criticism about government policies being un-Islamic. "Moreover, these fundamentalists attacked the royal family for personal deportment not in line with

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[288] For more details see Kramer, 263 and Abir, 188.

[289] Abir, 189.

the Sharia and hence engaging in immoral behavior." [290] Thus, the letter openly called for the strict application of Islamic norms and values by the royal family.

Islamists' petition was challenging to the authority of the royal family in comparison with the softer tone of liberals' petition. According to Abir, ulama's petition shook the al-Saud family because there was a strong coalition among ulamas from different ranks and it, in a way "represented a departure from the traditional alliance between state and church." [291] From Kramer's point of view, the significance of Islamists' petition "lay not so much in the fact that there was criticism at all but that it was made public and the code of silence was broken." [292] One other interpretation of the Islamists' petition was that it was a reaction of the ulama to their decline of power in the Kingdom. [293]

Once, royal family had digested the first shock, they took some measure against the signatories of the petition. Repressive measures such as harassment and imprisonment were taken against the most active signatories. [294] In addition, Senior Ulama Council was forced to publish a condemnation which emphasized that petitioning Kings was un-Islamic. [295] Nevertheless, the condemnation stated that giving advices to Kings, privately, would be acceptable.   In the meanwhile, the senior ulama who had their signatures under the petition apologized to the King and as a result, "the cleavage between the older generation and the militant younger ulama again surfaced." [296]

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[290] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, 142.

[291] Abir, 191.

[292] Kramer, 264.

[293] Abir, 190.

[294] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform, 223.*

[295] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, 142.

4.2.2.3. 'Memorandum of Advice' by Islamists

The petition of 1991 was followed by a Memorandum of Advice [297] to the Saudi government by more than 100 religious scholars and officials. Consisting of 46 pages, the Memorandum was "a document unprecedented in the bluntness of its tone, the specificity of its criticisms and suggestions, and the public nature of its dissemination in the Kingdom." [298] Just like the two petitions mentioned-above, Memorandum of Advice called for reform both in the political and economic structure of the Kingdom. Similar to the Islamists' petition, it asked for the establishment of a consultative council and the strict application of the Sharia. Moreover, practices such as corruption, nepotism, favoritism and the absence of accountability were attacked widely. [299] Surprisingly, activities of the morality police were also criticized in the Memorandum. In fact, morality police had been established with the initiative of the ulama. However, intervention of the morality police into public and private life had increased to such an extent that even Islamists became disturbed.

Nonetheless, despite the similarities in its content with the Islamists' petition, tone of the Memorandum was quite different. There was not any vocabulary in the memorandum to be regarded as radical or militant. "Instead, its authors used the sober vocabulary of Islamic theology and jurisprudence which emphasize the joint responsibility of the ruler and the ulama to establish and maintain Islamic order." [300] Lastly, the Memorandum underlined the fact that it did not aim to criticize the government, but only to give advices. In reality, with the

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[296] Abir, 194.

[297] This document was originally called as 'Mudhakkirat al-Nasiha'.

[298] Gause III, "The Gulf Conundrum: Economic Change, Population Growth, and Political Stability in the GCC States," 146.

[299] For more details see Kramer, 264 and Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform, 225.*

[300] Kramer, 265.

Memorandum of Advice, ulama attempted to erase the challenging tone of the previous petition from royal family's mind. [301]

4.2.3. King Fahd's Reform Initiative

King Fahd could not remain ignorant to general desire for political reform in the aftermath of the two petitions and the Memorandum of Advice. Interestingly, demand for reform was coming from two different circles; Islamists and liberals. On one hand, King Fahd had to satisfy the demands of both sides while on the other hand, he also had to consider the priorities of the royal family. Gause notes: "While attempting to appeal to both liberal and Islamist currents in Saudi society, these changes were also meant to reassure members of the ruling family that their position was not being challenged." [302]

At first, King Fahd stated his intention to carry out political reforms such as the formation of a Basic Order of Government, establishment of a Consultative Council and organization of the provincial administration in a speech to Saudi people on Saudi television on 15 November 1991. [303] Then, in March 1992 King Fahd issued three royal decrees regarding significant changes in the Saudi political system. One of the decrees was about the formation of a Basic Order of Government, a constitution-like document. The two other decrees included the establishment of a Consultative Council and an administrative system for Kingdom's fourteen provinces. In August 1992, King Fahd announced four more decrees to clarify the details of his first three decrees. [304]

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[301] Abir, 193.

[302] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* 110-111.

[303] Abir, 196.

[304] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* 106.

4.2.3.1 Basic Statute of Government

With Basic Statute of Government [305], King Fahd had for the first time defined the rules and the functioning of the Saudi government. Nevertheless, the statute had also "confirmed the monarchial system, strengthened the power of the King, and continued to deny the citizens the freedoms of information, expression and association." [306] King was given enormous powers, as the King was also the prime minister and was authorized to appoint and remove ministers in the Council of Ministers. Ironically, while Basic Statute of Government was a constitution-like document, it was strongly emphasized in the statute that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had no need for a formal constitution because it was an Islamic state to depend on the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. [307] Thereby, significance of Sharia in the Saudi political system was underlined openly and consequently this stressed the Islamic character of the Kingdom and meant that ulama was still an important component of the system. In conclusion, on one hand the statute was satisfactory for the ulama as it paid a particular attention to Islamic nature of the Saudi state. However, on the other hand, there was not any limitation on the power of the King. Wilson and Graham express their view about the issue with these words: "Subsequent articles reaffirmed that Islam and the Sharia remained the backbone of the country's political system, while others stressed the absolutism of the Saudi monarchy." [308]

4.2.3.2. The Statute of the Consultative Council and Evolution of Consultative Council through Time

The Statute of the Consultative Council [309] issued by King Fahd, had laid down the procedure regarding the establishment of a national Consultative Council.

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[305] This document was originally called as al-Nizam al-Asasi lil-Hukm.

[306] Kramer, 266.

[307] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* 106.

[308] Wilson and Graham, 71.

[309] This institution is originally called as Majlis al-Shura.

According to the Statute of the Consultative Council, the council was to be consisted of sixty members and a chairman, all of whom were to be appointed by the King. From King Fahd's point of view elections for the Consultative Council was out of the question, as elections was a part of Western political tradition, and therefore it was not suitable for Saudi Arabia. [310] It was stated in the Statute of the Consultative Council that only Saudi men over the age of thirty were to be appointed for membership to the Council according to their abilities and experiences. Their appointment was to be for four-year terms and "at least one-half of the membership of every council must be composed of new members". [311] Neither members of the government nor any other members from the royal family were to be appointed to the Consultative Council.

The main responsibility of the Consultative Council was to comment on various fields and to provide King with advices. These fields included the general plan for economic and social development, international treaties and concessions; and administrative regulations and rules. [312] If the comments and advices of the Consultative Council were found appropriate by the government then these suggestions would be adopted. Otherwise, King was the supreme authority to decide upon which policies to be adopted. "It is clear what the council is not: it is not an elected representative body; it is not a legislative body; it has no powers other than those of recommendation." [313]

Members of the first Consultative Council were appointed by Fahd in August 1993. The members were representing the Saudi elite with more than half of them holding doctoral decrees. All the members seemed to be loyal to the King and it was unlikely that they would form any opposition to the al-Saud family.

[310] Wilson and Graham, 73.

[311] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* 108.

[312] For more details see Abir 201-202 and Richard H. Dekmeijan, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council," *Middle East Journal* 52 (Spring 1998): 206.

There had not been any concrete change in the Saudi political system with the formation of the Consultative Council as its powers remained limited. Yet, it represented the institutionalism of rule in the Kingdom and brought the possibility that "over time its members would become bolder and that issues debated would leak out and increase the scope of participatory discourse in Saudi Arabia."[314]

In fact, the existence and functioning of such a council was in favor of the Saudi government, due to several reasons. First of all, the Consultative Council enabled some people from the Saudi population to participate into decision-making process in the Kingdom. Therefore, it provided the support of the people for the Saudi regime. Secondly, the Council played a mediating role between the Saudi regime and the people.[315] This role of the Council intensified with the establishment of a Committee of Petitions in 1995 within the Council to receive complaints and suggestions from the people. Lastly, although women were not allowed to be members in the council, the council was able to bring together people from divergent tribes, regions and political interests.[316]

Through time, there had been several changes in the number of members of the Consultative Council. In July 1997, the number of the Council members increased from 60 to 90, although its powers remained the same.[317] Appointment of the second council in 1997 and the increase in the number of its membership were significant because on one hand there was determination of the King to continue with a representative institution, and on the other hand, there were more people with more ideas to influence the Saudi government. In May 2001, the

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[313] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* 109.

[314] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, 146.

[315] Dekmeijan, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council," 207.

[316] Dekmeijan, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council," 216.

[317] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 290 and Daryl Champion, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Elements of Instability within Stability," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 3 (December 1999), <http://meria.idc.ac.il> (4 January 2005)

number of the Council members increased from 90 to 120 and its meetings were started to be "widely reported in the local press and on television". [318]   Again, despite the increase in the number of Council members, functions of the Council remained limited.

In conclusion, today Saudi Consultative Council differs from a real parliament mainly because its members are not elected by popular vote, and that its powers have remained limited with consultation. Moreover, the Saudi Consultative Council lacks any binding power to control the Saudi government such as withdrawing confidence from the government.   Nonetheless, as Glosemeyer mentions:

> *Discussions within the CC improved the flow of information from bottom to top and   kept   the core elite   informed   about   the   concerns   of   potential challengers. Hence, the core elite was enabled to influence public discourse through the Consultative Council, in addition to the state-run media and newspapers owned by members of the royal family. [319]*

Without any doubt, the Consultative Council does not have any direct impact on the decision-making process in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Yet, the suggestions of the Consultative Council have more or less provided the ruling elites with some feedback in the decision-making process.

4.2.3.3. The Statute of the Provinces

The third statue issued by King Fahd was about organization of the system of regional governance [320] which aimed to bring more efficient administration to Kingdom's fourteen provinces. In fact, the Statute of the Provinces "defined the

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[318] Jean-François Seznec, "Stirrings in Saudi Arabia," *Journal of Democracy* 13 (October 2002): 38.

[319] Glosemeyer, 160.

[320] This statute is originally called as Nizam al-Muqata'at.

duties and rights of provincial governors," for the first time. [321] The highest authority in each province was a provincial governor, who was a member of the royal family to be appointed by the King. These provincial governors were responsible for the administration of their own provinces and they had to give regular reports to the minister of interior. [322]

The Statute of the Provinces gave greater powers to provincial governors, in terms of spending and development projects in their provinces. Moreover, the Statute also required the establishment of provincial Consultative Councils, just like the newly established national Consultative Council. Provincial Consultative Council was to consist of a provincial governor, who acted as the council president, a vice president and members to be appointed by the king. The number of the members to be charged for councils varied according to the size and importance of the provinces. For major cities such as Riyadh, Mecca and Medina the council ought to have twenty members whereas, for other regions the number of the council members was to be fifteen. [323] To sum up, the Statute of the Provinces was an effort by the King to decentralize authority in the Kingdom as it gave more authority to provincial governors and provided the establishment of provincial Consultative Councils. [324]

4.2.4. Civil Society in Saudi Arabia

Although Saudi regime has in general been intolerant and prejudiced towards the components of civil society, some traditional political features of the Saudi society have given Saudi people opportunity to discuss on a variety of issues or tell their views within a certain framework. In this respect, in Saudi Arabia membership to non-economically based social groups, such as tribes or sects have

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[321] Wilson and Graham, 72.

[322] Raphaeli, "Saudi Arabia: A Brief Guide to its Politics and Problems".

[323] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* 110.

[324] Abir, 202.

been relevant as components of civil society and to gain access to the rulers. Tribal and sectarian divisions have been important sources of social identity in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, tribes and sects have had a number of political functions, "from aggregating demands to serving as a buffer against state power". [325] In this connection, the extended family has been the basic unit of civil society in the kingdom. Interestingly, political calculations have also been made on family, secterian or tribal basis in Saudi Arabia. For instance, a particular tribe would support one of its members for candidacy to provincial consultative council, or use equal amount of its resources for encouraging two of its members to join different political organizations to make sure that one way or another, its interests would be satisfied. To put it differently, tribes in Saudi Arabia have provided "the informal links that keep otherwise different groups, with potentially different interests, working together" along with preventing "sharp polarization along other lines of stratification". [326]

In Saudi Arabia, religious institutions such as mosques and religious study groups have also been powerful social institutions. These institutions have remained as important elements of Saudi civil society that can be transformed into political power, due to their availability for mass political mobilization. Other than tribal, sectarian and religious institutions, it would be appropriate to define the civil society in Saudi Arabia as highly weak. Today, freedom of association is still not recognized by the Saudi regime be it in the form of a political party, a professional association or a trade union. Even, the Saudi regime has developed various means to control voluntary groups or organizations to check whether they are in line with the Saudi order or not. Accordingly, Saudi regime has prevented the functioning of any group if they are seemed to be a challenge to Saudi authority. For instance, Saudi regime perceived the establishment of the Committee to Defend Legitimate

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[325] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 266.

[326] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 266.

Rights (CDLR) as a challenge to its rule and banned the organization along with arresting some of its members.

4.2.5. Media in Saudi Arabia

As far as the media in Saudi Arabia is concerned, Saudi ruling family have exercised strong control over the media organs. In order to have an eye on the media, the Saudi regime established the Ministry of Information in early 1960s and this ministry was given the right to close newspapers and to choose editors for the publications. Censorship has been widely used by the state and criticism of the ruling family was restricted. As Champion points out:

> *The Al Saud attitude toward unbiased news, analysis and criticism is one of extreme intolerance, and reflects insecurities as to their image and legitimacy. The Saudi royal family simply cannot bestow the luxury of liberal expression upon its captive population because to do so would unleash political forces which would soon coalesce and apply even more pressure for political reform than has been thus far in the post-Gulf War period.* [327]

An example to demonstrate active censorship in Saudi Arabia was that the Saudi regime became very uncomfortable, when on 12 May 1997 edition of the London-based daily newspaper Al-Hayat gave place to an interview with Osama bin Laden. The reaction of the Saudi ruling regime was to seize all the copies of the newspaper prior to their distribution to news stands. [328] Saudi people working at media organs have also been closely followed, and they were given instructions on what to print or forecast. That is why, both comments have been scarce, and sensitive issues along with serious news have rarely taken place in the Saudi media.

Control over the media has not been limited only dominating the newspapers, magazines and radio in Saudi Arabia or in the Arab world, but also units of technologically complex satellite media have been controlled to some

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[327] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 261.

[328] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 266-267.

extent. Nevertheless, with the introduction internet in early 1999, it has become much more difficult for the ruling regime to control the flow of information. In fact, it became impossible for the regime to delay internet access as "thousands of Saudis were already connecting to Internet Service Providers in Bahrain and the UAE after the Internet was introduced in those countries from 1995." [329] What the Saudi regime has tried to do with respect to domestic internet access was to make sure that politically risky material would not be available on-line. Ironically, while the technological development has provided Saudi people with access to globalised information, it has also provided the Saudi regime with new alternatives of developed censorship.

Despite the repressive policies of the Saudi regime towards media organs, state approach to media has become relatively more tolerant starting with early 2000s. With the new press and publication law of spring 2001 freedom of expression and printing of foreign papers were allowed with the condition of their being in line with the limits determined by the ruling regime. Another positive development was that since early 2004, journalists have been able to attend the sessions of the Saudi Consultative Council and to broadcast some of its discussions. According to Ehteshami, "these developments should be seen in a wider context as part and parcel of the elite's drive towards accountability and transparency". [330]

4.2.6. Municipal Elections of 2005: First Elections in Saudi History

The announcement of the first municipal elections by Saudi authorities in 2003, to be held in 2005 was regarded as an important step towards political reform because Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, where the issue of elections had been out of the question since its creation in 1932. [331] According to the Saudi authorities the elections were to be held in three rounds and these elections were

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[329] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 275.

[330] Ehteshami, "Reform from Above: the Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies." 68.

only to choose half of the provincial Consultative Council members. Although, the intention of Saudi authorities was found insufficient to meet the demands of the Saudi people for full elections to determine the members of the national Consultative Council, it was still appreciated by the world media. In fact, Saudi Arabia had long been under pressure from both inside and outside to improve its political institutions. However, it was not until recently, Saudi authorities have responded this pressure with a concrete political reform. How has the Saudi authorities been convinced to allow municipal elections? There are two main reasons which will be analyzed subsequently, in details. One of the reasons is that foreign pressure on Saudi government to have political reform has intensified since the involvement of Saudi citizens in the September 11 attacks on the United States. The other reason is that, Saudi Arabia has increasingly been witnessing suicide bombings, which represent anger of the radical opposition groups to Saudi regime.

Male citizens over 21 years of age were eligible to vote, while military personnel were not allowed to vote. Women, who made up approximately one half of the Saudi population, were also excluded from this first electoral experience. Prior to the first round of municipal elections, "Saudi women have called on the government to appoint women at the Saudi municipal councils, which half of its members will be elected." [332] Demand of the Saudi women was rejected. In fact, with the introduction of first elections in Saudi history, Saudi people have also experienced the first elections campaign. Despite, the candidates were not allowed to campaign through television and radio, they were allowed to campaign for themselves in the press and to have campaigning offices. [333] First phase of the elections was held on February 10th in Riyadh, and its neighboring provinces. Elections campaign in Riyadh passed in a lively atmosphere. "Everywhere, large

[331] "Saudis announce first elections," in BBC News, 13 October 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (10 November 2004)

[332] "Saudi women ask for half seats of the municipal councils," in Arabic News, 05 January 2005, <http://arabicnews.com> (10 January 2005)

[333] "The first elections campaign in the history of Saudi Arabia launched," in Arabic News, 31 January 2005, <http://arabicnews.com> (03 February 2005)

Bedouin tents were put up, sometimes in the shadow of the capital's skyscrapers."[334]

Despite the active election campaign, only about 25 percent of eligible voters registered for first round of the municipal elections. Nevertheless, among the registered voters, participation to the first round elections was 82 percent. [335] Results of first round of municipal elections indicated that Islamist backed candidates had wide support among the registered eligible voters. [336] First round of the municipal elections was evaluated by the American authorities, as a positive step towards change and political reform. "The spokesman for the US Department of State said that these elections constitute an important development and that Saudi Arabia is not outside the frame of reforms taking place in the area." [337]

Second and third phases of the municipal elections were carried out in a parallel atmosphere to that of the first round of elections. Second phase of the municipal elections was held in early March for the southern and eastern provinces of the Kingdom, [338] whereas third phase of the elections was carried out in late April for the northern and western provinces of the Kingdom including Mecca and Medina.

In conclusion, although the powers of the municipal councils are not clear and half of the council members will still be appointed by the king, first municipal

[334] "Saudis' first exercise in democracy," in BBC News, 10 February 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (12 February 2005)

[335] "Saudi voters turn out in huge numbers," in Middle East Times, 11 February 2005, <http://metimes.com> (13 February 2005)

[336] "Islamist win in key Saudi poll," in BBC News, 11 February 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (12 February 2005)

[337] "For first time in their history, Saudis vote in municipal elections," in Arabic News, 11 February 2005, <http://arabicnews.com> (12 February 2005)

[338] "Second phase of Saudi municipal elections started," in Arabic News, 04 March 2005, <http://arabicnews.com> (06 March 2005)

elections in Saudi Arabia would be regarded as a turning point in Saudi political system, as it has been a sign that Saudi Arabia is not immune to political reform. In addition, these first elections are promising, in terms of a similar process for the national Consultative Council in the future. Saudi authorities could no longer be ignorant to pressure coming from both outside and inside. Despite being reluctant, the first step to share some of its absolute power was taken by the al-Saud family. Salhani points out: "The royal House of Saud came to understand that if they did not bring about change, they could end up facing a fate similar to that which befell Iran's Pahlavi dynasty." [339] According to Salhani, change has become a necessity for the Saudi regime, in order to placate the Kingdom's growing unemployed young population, which form a potential for Islamist terrorism. [340]

4.3. Factors to Influence Political Reform in the Kingdom

There are various factors to influence the process of political reform in Saudi Arabia. These factors include foreign pressures on authorities, issue of succession, security concerns, socio-economic conditions, strength of the opposition and growing liberal tendency. The al-Saud family has always exercised absolute power and political reform means a change in the status quo. Nevertheless, "all indications are that most of the Saudi people and the main social groups including even some circles within the royal family would like more liberalization and participation." [341] What has caused the inclination towards political change? How has the royal family accepted to give a very small portion of their authority to their subjects? Answers to these above-mentioned questions will take place in explanation of each factor to influence political reform in the Kingdom.

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[339] Claude Salhani, "Analysis: Saudi Arabia not absolute enough," in Middle East Times, 11 February 2005, <http://metimes.com> (13 February 2005)

[340] Salhani, "Analysis: Saudi Arabia not absolute enough".

4.3.1. Foreign Pressures on Saudi Authorities

Foreign pressures, more specifically the American pressure on Saudi authorities to reform their political system and institutions have intensified particularly in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States. Until September 11, United States was tolerant to Saudi Arabia as long as the royal family "paid its huge arms bills, purchased Boeing aircraft, kept the price of oil within reasonable bounds, and allowed the United States to use Saudi air bases to enforce the southern no-fly zone over Iraq and launch occasional military strikes to contain Saddam Hussein." [342] Moreover, Saudi Arabia was one of United States' closest allies in the Middle East throughout the Cold War and this alliance strengthened with the Gulf War of 1990-1991.

Then came the terrorist attacks of September 11 on the United States. Investigations made it clear that 15 of the 19 suicide-hijackers were Saudi citizens and again a Saudi, Usame bin Laden and his jihadi network, al Qaeda were responsible from these terrorist attacks. [343] The origins of the suicide-hijackers created suspicion and criticism against Saudi Arabia in the United States. American authorities started to ask questions about why did the majority of the hijackers and the leader of al Qaeda come from Saudi Arabia, which was an ally of the United States. According to Indyk, main target of the al Qaeda network was to overthrow the Saudi regime but with the support given to Saudi regime by the United States it became more difficult for bin Laden to reach this target. [344] For this reason, al Qaeda would have decided to attack the United States as he mentions, "The United States was protecting the terrorists' main target, Saudi Arabia, so it became enemy number one." [345]

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[341] Seznec, 39.

[342] Martin Indyk, "Back to the Bazaar," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (Jan/Feb 2002): 78.

[343] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 242 and Joseph A. Kechichian, "Testing the Saudi Will to Power: Challenges Confronting Prince Abdallah," *Middle East Policy* 10 (Winter 2003): 100.

[344] Indyk, 80.

Nevertheless, the United States was deeply wounded with terrorist attacks and indifference of the Saudi regime to change and political reform was one of the reasons in the formation of radical organizations such as al Qaeda network. Therefore, the United States would no longer allow Saudi Arabia to postpone political reform. It was time for the Saudi regime to face the realities and respond to widespread demands for change. In fact, opening in the Saudi political system such as creating public place for the civil society would also help the Saudi regime to legitimize itself. Crown Prince Abdallah was the one who relaxed some control over public discourse which has provided some space for discussions among various intellectuals. Dekmeijan states: "The idea of permitting public dialogue was sound policy for Crown Prince Abdallah, because it would further his reformist agenda, provide a venue for the expression of social discontent, while demonstrating to a critical world his commitment to greater openness in Saudi society." [346]

In conclusion, foreign pressure has been an important factor to influence implementation of political reform in the Kingdom. George W. Bush's administration frequently emphasizes the need for political reform in the Middle East region with a particular attention paid for the Saudi Arabia. In a speech dated back to February 2005, George W. Bush requested Saudi regime to accelerate political reform and he also underlined that the commitment of every ruler and every country to democracy "would be a test of their relations with the United States." [347] To sum up, the commitment of Saudi regime to political liberalization will also be a determinant in US-Saudi relations. Therefore, even the Saudi regime implements political reform to gain the support of the United States, Saudi Arabia would advance in political liberalization in the end.

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[345] Indyk, 81.

[346] Dekmejian, "The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia," 404.

[347] "Bush presses Saudi Arabia, Egypt on democracy," in Middle East Times, 04 February 2005, <http://metimes.com> (07 February 2005)

4.3.2 Issue of Succession: Crown Prince Abdallah vs. Prince Nayef

The issue of who will succeed King Fahd is also a critical factor to determine the future of political liberalization in Saudi Arabia. When King Fahd had a stroke in December 1995, his half brother Crown Prince Abdallah has become de facto leader of Saudi Arabia and the transfer of authority was formalized with the royal court announcement on 1 January 1996. [348] Today, King Fahd is only the symbolic leader of Saudi Arabia, as Crown Prince Abdallah runs the affairs of state. But, once King Fahd dies then there will be the problem of succession to the throne and it is a "core issue for the stability of the regime". [349] In Saudi Arabia, King has to come from al-Saud family and he is elected by the members of the royal family according to his abilities. In general, the one who assumes the title "Crown Prince" is also likely to be chosen as the King but it is not definite. On the other hand, the royal family is very large now and there is a keen competition for power. [350]

A significant figure in Saudi politics to be a rival to Crown Prince Abdallah in terms of candidacy to be Kingdom's next King is Defense Minister Prince Nayef, who is a full brother of King Fahd. Prince Nayef is a very conservative person, he controls the religious police and he has the support of several of his full brothers. (Sudairi brothers) The relations between Crown Prince Abdallah and Prince Nayef are tense mainly due their divergent approaches to different issues. Crown Prince Abdallah is a liberal person, who takes Western states as models for political development, whereas Prince Nayef devotes himself to Wahhabi ideology and takes Islam's golden age as a model. According to Doran, "Abdallah tilts toward the liberal reformers and seeks a rapprochement with the United States, whereas Nayef

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[348] Kostiner and Teitelbaum, 139 and Kechichian, 103.

[349] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 292.

[350] Seznec, 34.

sides with clerics and takes direction from anti-American religious establishment that shares many goals with al Qaeda." [351]

In fact, the political division between Crown Prince Abdallah and Prince Nayef comes from their adoption of two different principles. On one hand, Prince Nayef is in favor of the principle of 'Tawhid' which is not just an intolerant religious doctrine to other religions, but also a political principle that legitimizes the repressiveness of the Saudi state. [352] On the other hand, Crown Prince Abdallah supports the doctrine of 'Taqarub', which approaches non-Muslims with tolerance and "promotes the notion of peaceful coexistence with nonbelievers. [353] Therefore, while Crown Prince Abdallah advocates political reform and supports close relations with the West, Prince Nayef denies pluralism, and he even encourages jihad.

In conclusion, answer to the question of, 'who will hold the leadership in the future' carries great significance. If Crown Prince Abdallah becomes the King, then it is expected that political reform will accelerate in the Kingdom. Otherwise, with the leadership of Prince Nayef it is unlikely that popular demands for change would be satisfied. In the meanwhile, even Abdallah becomes the King, there will still be obstacles to change, due to the opposing views of Nayef and his conservative Sudairi brothers. Dekmeijan's points out that initiatives of Crown Prince Abdallah for political reform and open society have had "limited impact because of opposition from the conservative branches of the family." [354] Dekmeijan also emphasizes that timing and rate of implementation are important regarding political reform and that it would be better for Crown Prince Abdallah to have a gradualist

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[351] Michael S. Doran, "The Saudi Paradox," *Foreign Affairs* 83 (Jan/Feb 2004): 36.

[352] Doran, 37.

[353] Doran, 38.

[354] Dekmeijan, "The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia," 410.

approach in keeping with Saudi tradition. [355] Nonetheless, despite the opposition of his conservative half-brother Nayef, Abdallah had supported relaxing restrictions on public debate. Moreover, in 2003 he organized an open 'national dialogue' with liberals from different segments of Saudi society. Two different petitions were presented to Prince Abdallah during the 'national dialogue' by the liberals. One of them was the 'National Reform Document', which included policy recommendations for achieving democracy, and the other was a document to ask for greater freedoms for the "oppressed Shi'ite community". [356] Overall, success of the new King to introduce political reform will, without any doubt, influence the process of political liberalization in Saudi Arabia.

4.3.3. Security Concerns

Following September 11 terrorist attacks and the US led war against terrorism, Saudi Arabia witnessed several terrorist attacks targeting Western people in Riyadh and Khobar. The common characteristic of these attacks was that the victims were all civilians. Among these attacks, two were particularly significant, in terms of the damage they created. One of them took place on May 12, 2003 in Riyadh, where three foreign compounds were subjected to suicide bombings, which killed 34 people including 8 Americans and 9 attackers and wounded 194 people.[357] The other attack took place in early November 2003, again in Riyadh, leaving 17 people dead and 122 people wounded, while this time, the target was a foreign residential compound. [358] These attacks seriously damaged the Saudi sense of security.

There were two main reasons behind these attacks to Western people in Saudi Arabia. First of all, US led war against terrorism was carried out in the

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[355] Dekmejian, "The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia," 412.

[356] Doran, 38.

[357] Kechichian, 102.

[358] Doran, 35.

Muslim territories. This created anti-Americanism mainly among Islamist groups and radicalized their religious feelings. [359] That is why targets of the attacks were particularly Americans. Secondly, the target was the Saudi regime and its close relations with the United States. As the opposition groups were not allowed to participate into the politics, social foundation of these groups would weaken. In this regard, it has been likely that some of these groups may become radicalized and may choose violent means to lessen the legitimacy of the ruling regime. Moreover, some Islamist groups could not digest the continuing dialogue between Saudi Arabia and the United States. Doran explains the aim of these attacks as; "The politics surrounding the suicide bombing and the Saudi religious establishment overlap. Working together, they managed to turn a terrorist attack on Americans into a political coup against Americanizers." [360]

Feeling uneasy with these attacks, Saudi regime tried to take the extremists under control. Saudi security forces clashed with militants, and arrested many of them. In the meantime, some ulama called on the Saudi people not to help Saudi security forces, claiming that supporting security forces would also mean supporting the United States in its war against Islam. [361] In fact, aim of the activists to weaken the relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States did not work. The operations of Saudi security forces against activists strengthened the relationship between these two states. Moreover, these terrorist attacks urged the royal family to think seriously about implementation of political reform. [362]

4.3.4. Socio-Economic Conditions

Changes in social and economic conditions have always had an impact on the implementation of political reform in Saudi Arabia. In the context of the Saudi

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[359] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 248.

[360] Doran, 43.

[361] Doran, 44.

[362] Sami Kohen, "Ortadoğu'da Seçim. Ve değişim," *Milliyet*, 11 February 2005.

society, there is a close link between socio-economic conditions, and demands for change and political reform. In this regard, demands for political reform in Saudi Arabia have increased particularly, when the oil revenues were low and the Saudi state was relatively unable to meet socio-economic needs of the Saudi people when compared with the times of Saudi economy being fed by huge oil revenues. Ibn Saud had two choices in the early years of the Saudi Kingdom. On one hand, he could have established a representative political system, but this way his absolute authority would weaken, and even it would have disappeared. On the other hand, he would have his authority unchallenged through exchanging the silence of the people with material benefits. [363] Ibn Saud preferred the second choice and the influx of huge oil revenues with the oil boom of 1973, helped Saudi regime to strengthen its legitimacy through offering various services and opportunities to Saudi people.

It would be appropriate to define Saudi Arabia as a rentier state in 1970's with its wide resources for a small population. Nonetheless, the situation had changed with fluctuations in the price of oil and the change in the Saudi social context. When we came to early 1980s; there was a decline in oil revenues due to the oil bust. Moreover, there had been rapid population growth, intensified urbanization, declining living standards, growing social disparities and corruption.[364] The welfare state of 1970s had created a middle class through widespread education and employment opportunities. Therefore, the youth was much more educated and outspoken than their parents, they had higher expectations. However, there were not enough employment opportunities and this caused many young people to join Islamist protest and activities. All these socio-economic conditions intensified pressure for change and political reform starting with early 1990s.

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[363] Seznec, 35.

The Saudi economy started suffering from high budget deficits in 1990s. In 1996 and 1997, Saudi economy improved to some extent with the increase in oil prices but when the oil prices declined in 1998, Saudi economy was in a disaster. [365] Today, Saudi economy still depends very much on oil revenues, as oil sector forms one third of total Saudi GDP. Relying on one source with poor fiscal planning influences both the social and the political life in Saudi Arabia. According to Champion socio-economic weaknesses in Saudi Arabia have the potential to topple the ruling regime and in order to survive; Saudi regime has to continue with implementing reforms. [366] He also emphasizes that the Saudi regime has to address the "dichotomy between economic and social changes and lagging political development" because "socioeconomic expectations of the Saudi people may result in increased pressure on the government to provide some form of compensation in greater political participation." [367]

4.3.5. Fragmented Opposition

The opposition in Saudi Arabia has always been fragmented, due to repressive character of the Saudi state and the absence of any organized political opposition. An organized political opposition would have been much more effective in persuading the regime to implement political reform. In Saudi Arabia, opposition to Saudi regime occurred, when the King allowed the stationing of Western troops in Kingdom's territories during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. In May 1993, six Saudi Islamic activists established the Committee to Defend Legitimate Rights (CDLR) and they called on people to inform the committee about any complaints, in terms of injustices. [368] It was the first attempt

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[364] For more details see Gause III, "The Gulf Conundrum: Economic Change, Population Growth, and Political Stability in the GCC States," 146 and Kramer, 263.

[365] Champion, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Elements of Instability within Stability".

[366] Champion, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Elements of Instability within Stability".

[367] Champion, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Elements of Instability within Stability".

[368] Gause III, "The Gulf Conundrum: Economic Change, Population Growth, and Political Stability in the GCC States," 146.

to organize an opposition in Saudi Arabia. In return, the initial response of the Saudi regime was to force the Council of Senior Ulama to declare a condemnation about this organization. [369]

Afterwards, the committee's members and several of its supporters were either arrested or lost their governmental posts. As soon as they were released, some of them went to London and established an office there in 1994 with the leadership of the committee's spokesman Muhammad al-Mas'ari, a physics professor from King Saud University in Riyadh. [370] The committee continued to annoy the Saudi regime with its activities through faxes, e-mails, toll-free telephones and press releases. According to Champion, CDLR represented the two things the Saudi regime feared; organized opposition and publicity as CDLR was able to move socio-political and economic information both into and out of the Kingdom by various means. [371] Therefore, Saudi regime tried to convince the British government to prevent the activities of CDLR, however efforts of the Saudi regime failed, due to media pressure and legal procedures in Britain.

The opposition to Saudi regime had remained non-violent until 1995. In November 1995, three months after the execution of a CDRL related dissident, US-run Saudi National Guard installation in Riyadh was bombed, killing seven people five of which were Americans. The bombing was mainly retaliation to the repressive treatment of the Saudi regime against any opposition. In addition, the regime's relationship with the United States was targeted. On 31 May 1996, four people were executed who had been accused of being responsible for the 1995 Riyadh bombing. "Only a few weeks later, on 25 June 1996, a massive truck bomb was detonated next to a US Air Force barracks at Khobar, near the eastern city of

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[369] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 226.

[370] Gause III, "The Gulf Conundrum: Economic Change, Population Growth, and Political Stability in the GCC States," 147.

[371] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 227.

Dhahran, killing 19 USAF personnel and wounding more than 300 others, many seriously." [372]

In the meantime, CDRL was split into two groups due to a debate among two principal members of the committee Muhammad al-Mas'ari and Saad al-Fagih about the how the organization should act. Until this split, CDRL was a well-organized political opposition group in Saudi Arabia. After the split, Mas'ari continued with the CDRL whereas Fagih established a new organization in London, named the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia. (MIRA) Neither of these groups would demonstrate any active opposition to Saudi regime. Likewise, there were divisions among less moderate opposition groups, due to both the heterogeneity of the Saudi society and the use of 'divide and rule' policy by the ruling regime. For instance, the Saudi regime used 'divide and rule' policies against the Shi'a groups, which already had social divisions through making different deals with each of the group and granting political concession, in return for ending anti-Saudi propaganda. [373]

In conclusion, efforts of the Saudi regime to silence any political opposition through repression had worked in the short-run. There has not been any organized political opposition within the Kingdom. However, in the long-run, some opposition groups may become violent as they have not been given any opportunity to express their ideas in the public. In fact, existence of an organized political opposition may exert pressure on the Saudi regime to implement political reform. On the other hand, violent fragmented opposition may strengthen the repressive nature of the Saudi regime. Nevertheless, it can also be concluded that when frequency and amount of the violence used by opposition groups intensified as it happened in early 2000s, security concerns of the Saudi regime increased and hence, Crown Prince Abdallah has started to think seriously about implementing political reform.

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[372] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 235.

[373] Champion, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Elements of Instability within Stability".

4.3.6. Growing Liberal Tendency

Without any doubt, due to Islamic and traditional nature of Saudi Kingdom, dissatisfied people of the Saudi population have mostly chosen to voice their difficulties and problems within the Islamic framework. Nevertheless, there have also been some Saudi people with liberal tendencies, who preferred to express themselves in the light of an alternative vision rather than Islamic vision. Groups with non-Islamist, liberal agendas have increased especially after September 11, "providing the liberals greater margin to argue their case and to criticize the Islamists for bringing harm to the Kingdom by their support of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda." [374] In reality, liberals had been marginalized until 1990s with the dominance of the Islamists. Gulf War of 1990-1991 led to the emergence of liberal groups and following September 11 together with the US led war on terrorism, the number Saudi liberals has increased, so as their initiatives to persuade the King for implementation of reform.

In January 2003, 104 professors, intellectuals and former officials with liberal inclination signed, and sent a document to Crown Prince Abdallah, entitled 'Strategic Vision for the Present and the Future', which explained the reasons and details of extensive program of reform. [375] The language used in the document was moderate, unchallenging and underlined the support given to the Crown Prince Abdallah. The authors of the document particularly emphasized that they were being encouraged by Crown Prince Abdallah's reformist policies to prepare such a document. 'Strategic Vision for the Present and the Future' mainly focused on the need to institutionalize the Saudi state through establishment of constitutional institutions in order to provide the citizens political participation, equality and justice. [376] Furthermore, it asked for the separation of powers between the

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[374] Dekmejian, "The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia," 409.

[375] Dekmejian, "The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia," 404.

[376] Dekmejian, "The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia," 405.

executive, judicial and legislative branches of the Saudi state, election of the Consultative Council members and formation of civil society.

In conclusion, growing liberal tendency in the Kingdom carries importance to persuade Saudi regime in favor of political liberalization. Liberals have been much more careful in addressing the problems, and the tone they have used in their documents have been non-confrontational in comparison with the Islamists. Above all, they do not attempt to use violent means as do some radical Islamists. Therefore, it can be said that demands of the liberals are more likely to be taken into account by the Saudi regime as they avoid to provoke the ruling family.

4.4. Conclusion

Each day, it becomes more difficult for the al-Saud family to preserve its absolute power in the face of increasing demands for change and for greater political participation. Yet, from its establishment in 1932 to today, al-Saud family has succeeded to legitimize its power, due to a number of factors. First of all, thanks to the traditional and religious character of the tribes to be united under the roof of Saudi Kingdom. Al-Saud family has used both Wahhabi teaching and pilgrimage revenues in an effective way to strengthen its authority. Secondly, oil revenues have enabled the al-Saud family to satisfy its subjects without sharing its power to a large extent. Thirdly, political opposition in Saudi Arabia has always been fragmented and there has not been any alternative power to al-Saud family. Lastly, Saudi regime has been repressive and it has not abstained from using violent means to suppress the ones, who rebel. [377]

Nevertheless, in the post Cold War period Saudi regime has faced significant challenges. One of these challenges was the legitimacy crisis the Saudi ruling elites faced during the Gulf crisis of 1990-1991. In order to overcome this legitimacy crisis, King Fahd had to introduce several official political reforms such as the declaration of the Basic Statute of Government, establishment of the Consultative

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[377] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 304.

Council and organization of the provincial administration. Another challenge to Saudi rule has been the dependence on oil revenues and financial crises occurred as outcome of the fluctuations in the price of oil. In the meanwhile, there has been rising unemployment, growing population, falling living standards, increasing poverty and the decline in the distribution of social services and benefits. Under these circumstances, the attitude of Saudi regime in terms of not allowing any concrete political participation to Saudi people was also a challenge to Saudi rule. As Champion mentions: "An increasing pool of educated, unemployed youth with no political voice can only add to the ranks of the discontented as the forces of social transformation gather momentum." [378] Moreover, in late 1990s security concerns related with violent political opposition confronted the Saudi regime. These security concerns have accelerated with the increase of terrorist attacks to Kingdom in the aftermath of September 11 and the US led war on terrorism. Finally, toppling of the Saddam regime in Iraq has caused self-questioning for regimes that have problems of legitimacy such as the Saudi regime. What if Saudi regime faces a similar situation with the Saddam regime that was also suffering from legitimacy crisis? What if Saudi people will not defend the Saudi regime, in case of an outside attack as it was the case with Iraqi people?

All these challenges have contributed to the implementation of political reform in Saudi Arabia to a limited extent. From time to time, the Saudi regime shows some willingness to include Saudi people into the decision-making process such as the recent realization of first municipal elections for provincial Consultative Councils. However, such concessions provide no real input for political development as women population are being excluded from electoral process, half of the Council members are still being appointed by the King and ruling family continues to rule in a system which lacks any checks and balances. Nonetheless, municipal elections can also be regarded an initial step for further political liberalization in the Kingdom. According to Gause III, "an immediate move to an

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[378] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 306.

elected parliament would do more harm than good" in the context of Saudi Arabia, as Islamist activists would gain enormous support in the elections, which would complicate the process of political liberalization. [379] Instead, a gradual transformation would be more efficient for Saudi Arabia from Gause's point of view. For him, the very next step to be taken by the Saudi regime is to allow elections for all the seats in the municipal councils, together with giving these councils "genuine power on municipal issues and a real budget." [380] Overall, it has to be taken into account that "the reformist call is in the air everywhere in the Arab world, and the Kingdom is no exception" and sooner or later this "would bring the political elites face-to-face with the imperative to institute reforms, if only to sustain their own legitimacy." [381]

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[379] F. Gregory Gause III, "Memorandum: How to Reform Saudi Arabia Without Handling It to Extremists," *Foreign Policy*. No. 144. (Sept/Oct 2004): 67.

[380] Gause III, "Memorandum: How to Reform Saudi Arabia Without Handling It to Extremists," 67.

[381] Dekmejian, "The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia," 411.

CHAPTER 5

**COMPARISON OF THE EXPERIENCES OF KUWAIT AND SAUDI
ARABIA IN THE FIELD OF POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION**

5.1. Actors

There are two major actors to shape the process of political liberalization in both of these Arab Gulf Monarchies. One of these actors is the ruled, whereas the other actor is the ruler. In liberal democracies, there is interdependence among these two actors resulting from the constant interaction between the ruler and the ruled. In such a system, the ruler legitimizes his/her rule through representing the will of the ruled in return for the internalization of his/her policies and regulations by the ruled. To put it differently, the government has to take into consideration the demands of the masses in a representative system. Otherwise, masses would become alienated from their government, as it occurs in countries where there is either weak representative democracy or no representative system at all.

In Arab Gulf Monarchies, the ruling elite have in general preferred to act independently from their people and for this reason they have developed various means to legitimize their rule. Nonetheless, from time to time changing circumstances have encouraged the masses to raise their voices in favor of political reform. The same changing circumstances have also persuaded the ruling elite to take step forward through initiating various representative means. Jill Crystal points out: "The openings that have occurred in each state came about as a result both of the pressure from below and as a calculated reaction to that pressure from above. The Gulf regimes' responses to these increasing pressures have varied." [382] In Kuwait, the ruling elite have responded to demands of the people more effectively in comparison with the Saudi ruling elite. Therefore, in Kuwait the gap

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[382] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 278.

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between the masses and the ruling elite is less than the gap among the Saudi rulers and the masses. In addition, as it will be analyzed in the proceeding parts of this chapter, Kuwaiti people are less isolated from the political system when compared with the Saudi people.

5.1.1. The Ruled: Pressures from Below

The ruled has surely played a role in the process of political liberalization both in Kuwait and in Saudi Arabia through exerting pressure on the ruling elite to perform political reform. In each state, various social and economic groups have tried to increase their influence in the political system though achieving a greater degree of participation into the decision-making process. However, the amount and the efficacy of the pressure exerted by the ruled in Kuwait were stronger than the pressure exerted by the ruled in Saudi Arabia. There are several reasons for the pressures coming from below to be stronger in Kuwait than in Saudi Arabia. According to Crystal, although the ruled has aimed to obtain greater openness in both of these states, the process has varied due to differences in the social structure and history with consultative institutions. [383] She briefly mentions the reasons of concrete progress in Kuwait with these words: "The process has gone furthest, in Kuwait, with relatively fewer class and sectarian divisions and a history of pre-oil consultative institutions." [384]

It can be said that fewer class and sectarian divisions lead to cooperation among people and it has a positive impact on persuading the ruling elite. Here, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia differ from each other as Kuwait was formed as a result of an agreement among similar merchant tribes, whereas Saudi Arabia was formed through conquest and the bringing of different tribes together by force. In this connection, Kuwait has a less fragmented society in comparison with the Saudi society and this has enabled Kuwaiti people to act in a much more unified way when compared with the Saudi people. Likewise, the quantity of population also

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[383] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 278.

[384] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 278.

influences the feasibility of political liberalization to some extent as Salame argues that political liberalization in small states is feasible because "in the absence of influential democratic forces and a political culture generally favorable to the development of democracy, it may be easier to organize consociations in units of small dimensions".[385] Further, Salame explains the advantages of a small state in terms of its people acting in unity:

> *Power-sharing between segments of society, and attempts by one segment or another to rise to power, occur in a climate of relative familiarity where stakes are obvious and limited. On the one hand, people know and recognize each other easily, while on the other the small size of the territory naturally eliminates tendencies to separatism as a permanent menace if the consensus should be broken.[386]*

Finally, 1990-1991 Gulf War was a turning point both for the Kuwaiti people and the Saudi people to accelerate their demands for political reform, particularly in terms of political participation. Neither the Kuwaitis nor the Saudis were happy with the policies followed by the ruling elites during the 1990-1991 Gulf War. Nevertheless, as Kuwaitis were the ones to be subjected to direct invasion by Iraqi forces, popular protest against the rulers was much more intense in Kuwait than in Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the invasion. In fact, the Iraqi invasion provided unification among Kuwaitis through strengthening Kuwaiti national identity and hence caused them to become more conscious about their own power. The Saudi ruling elite's lack of accountability to Saudi public also caused Saudi people to exert pressure on the ruling regime to realize political reform, but the pressure of the Saudi people was weaker in comparison with the pressure of the Kuwaiti people. Thus, attempts of the Kuwaiti public to convince the ruling elite about need for reform found stronger response in Kuwait than in Saudi Arabia.

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[385] Ghassan Salame, "Small is Pluralistic: democracy as an instrument of civil peace," in Democracy without Democrats?: The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World, ed. Ghassan Salame (London: I.B Tauris Publishers, 1994), 109.

[386] Salame, "Small is Pluralistic: democracy as an instrument of civil peace," 109.

5.1.2. The Ruler: Responses from Above

Rulers of the Arab Gulf Monarchies, in general, faced a dilemma when the pressures from the below have increased considerably in the aftermath of Cold War period. On one hand, if they accept the demands of the people in favor of more openness, they would loose their unconditional control of power. On the other, if they resist to pressures, then there would be political upheavals to challenge the legitimacy of the ruling regimes. The attitudes of the ruling elites in responding to pressures from below look like, as if they are similar in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia at first glance. The common attitude was to allow limited openings in the political system without completely abandoning resistance. Neither Kuwaiti ruling elite nor the Saudi ruling elite could remain indifferent to the pressures from below. Nonetheless, in fact the extent of responses given by these two groups of ruling elites, particularly in terms of expanding the representation of their people varies quite a bit. The resistance of the Saudi rulers to change has always been stronger than the resistance of the Kuwaiti rulers to change.

From Ehteshami's point of view there are two different approaches to the process of reform by the Arab Gulf rulers as one of them is the introduction of major reforms and clearing the way for the establishment of constitutional democratic monarchies, while the other is a much more cautious approach which focuses "on the opening up of political space within the bounds of the existing political system." [387] It can be derived from Ehteshami's argument that Kuwaiti rulers have chosen to follow the first approach, whereas Saudi rulers have mostly preferred to follow the second approach when the issue of reform is concerned. As a result, in Kuwait, improvement regarding political opening has been very noticeable, when it is compared with the Saudi Arabia. For instance, despite interruptions, elected Kuwaiti National Assembly has been functioning since 1963. However, when it comes to Saudi Arabia, the ruling elite have just recently allowed

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[387] Ehteshami, "Reform from Above: the Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," 71.

the materialization of a municipal electoral process in order to determine only half of the Provincial Council members.

The methods used by the Saudi ruling elites also differ from the method used by the Kuwaiti ruling elites to a large extent, in terms of responding to pressures from below. Whereas, in Kuwait ruling family allows various forms of political expression, Saudi ruling family has not hesitated to suppress most forms of political expression. Champion underlines this manner of the Saudi ruling family in his work: "Particularly, in Saudi Arabia, even oppositionists seeking fairly benign reforms, such as greater respect for civil liberties and more government accountability, are subject to potentially brutal regime countermeasures." [388]

In fact, there are two types of strategies Arab Gulf rulers can apply to respond to the demands of the masses. One of these strategies is about using the economic power of the state to silence demands of especially the potential opposition groups. This strategy includes providing employment opportunities to make people part of the state bureaucracy and providing welfare services such as health facilities and education possibilities. The other strategy is about using political power either for representation of the people or the repression of them. The success of the Arab Gulf rulers in performing political liberalization has mostly depended on the strategy they have chosen to deal with demands. Economic strategy has widely been used by both Kuwaiti rulers and Saudi rulers to varying degrees, when the price of oil in the international market is high. But oil is a commodity to be subjected to price fluctuations and at those times political strategy has frequently been used by Kuwaiti and Saudi rulers. Not surprisingly, at this point Kuwaiti ruling elite have often chosen to expand representation of the people going the furthest among Arab Gulf monarchies in permitting the functioning of various political groups, while Saudi ruling elite have preferred to suppress political dissent through coercion and repression. To put it differently, let alone any

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[388]Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform,* 283-284.

toleration, Saudi ruling elites have ruled autocratically and have even killed opponents whereas "Kuwait has clean hands in this regard." [389]

Finally, Saudi rulers have given greater importance to security services in comparison with the Kuwaiti rulers. Byman and Green compare the attention paid to security forces by the ruling regimes in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in their work and they conclude that Saudi security services closely monitor both organizations and intellectuals in the Kingdom, while security service in Kuwait is less active than Saudi security forces. [390] In Saudi Arabia, ruling elites apply an active security service such as the police, religious police, national guard, and various other domestic security intelligence organizations in order keep any potential opposition in check and methods like execution, detention and arrest are widely used by these security forces. [391]

5.2. Representative Dynamics

Without any doubt, representative dynamics such as parliamentary institutions, civil society and media have always been significant to influence the degree of political liberalization in a given state. In other words, representative institutions have, more or less, provided the people with access to decision-making process, and therefore provided transparency and opening in the political system. Not surprisingly, Arab Gulf states do not have a bright record for accommodating representative dynamics. However, it should not be ignored that the extent to which representative dynamics have existed and functioned varies from one Arab Gulf monarchy to another one. In this sense, Kuwait has been the most successful performer among the others to include representative dynamics. Saudi Arabia, on

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[389] Fred Halliday, "Monarchies in the Middle East: A Concluding Appraisal," *in Middle East Monarchies: the Challenge of Modernity*, ed. J. Kostiner (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 299.

[390] Byman and Green, "The Enigma of Political Stability in the Persian Gulf Monarchies."

[391] For more details, see Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*, 278-282.

the other hand, has been the least successful performer among the Arab Gulf monarchies to accommodate elements of representative institutions.

Ironically, presence of representative institutions has also carried importance for the survival of ruling regimes in the context of the Arab Gulf Monarchies, as they reduce the sense of political alienation of the masses from the ruling elites through giving the people chance to have their voice heard. In this respect, Kuwaiti people have more political freedom than do the Saudi people because the relative abundance of representative institutions in Kuwait has given people a wider room for discussion. Herb underlines the difference of Kuwait from Saudi Arabia in this respect: "Kuwait's system of government is far more transparent than that of, say, Saudi Arabia. Citizens (or some of them) have a voice in how they are governed. Liberals and other non-Islamists have a public platform from which they can set out their views, something Saudi liberals lack." [392]

Eventually, representative institutions in the Arab Gulf monarchies have served as safety valves against popular uprisings. For instance, in Kuwait, National Assembly has served as legitimate forum, in which Kuwaiti people have been able to express themselves individually or through their votes. [393] Likewise, National Assembly deputies in Kuwait have investigated "corruption and oversaw some government spending, thus reducing charges of a lack of accountability so common elsewhere in the Gulf." [394] Unlike Saudi Arabia, Kuwait has accommodated various political associations and organizations and this has eliminated or reduced political violence created by political alienation.

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[392] Herb, "Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf," 42.

[393] Until May 2005, only Kuwaiti males who are over 21 years of age are eligible to vote if they can prove the settlement of their ancestries in Kuwait since prior to 1921s.

5.2.1. Parliamentary Institutions

Although parliamentary developments under Arab Gulf monarchies have not been impressive at all when compared with democratic Western parliaments, it should not be ignored that the level of progress achieved for parliamentarism has varied from one Arab Gulf Monarchy to another. Among them, experiences of Kuwait on the one hand, and experience of Saudi Arabia on the other, have taken part in two opposite edges, in terms of parliamentary progress. In the case of Kuwait, parliamentary politics function but within certain limits, whereas in the case of Saudi Arabia, there has not been any real parliamentary institution other than an advisory body. The differences among the Kuwaiti National Assembly and the Saudi Consultative Council are more than small details. Therefore, these differences will be evaluated step by step in the following paragraphs.

First of all, experiences of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the field of parliamentary progress have differed due to Kuwait's long historical tradition with a parliamentary body versus Saudi Arabia's accommodation of an advisory body only since early 1990s. In fact, under British rule did Kuwait for the first time get acquainted with an elected representative council. Although it was not long-lived, this representative council had formed a model for the following parliamentary institutions in Kuwait. After Kuwait gained its independence in 1961, the amir established Kuwaiti National Assembly, and first elections for the assembly were held in 1963. Unlike Kuwaiti National Assembly, Saudi Consultative Council was established in 1993 upon a royal decree, which came as a response to public pressures political reform and it dated back to 1992. Kuwait's noticeably longer experience with parliamentary tradition has certainly played an important role in this country's progress in political liberalization when compared with Saudi Arabia.

Secondly, procedures of selecting representatives to Kuwaiti National Assembly and Saudi Consultative Council have been very different. In Kuwait, deputies for the National Assembly have been determined through an electoral

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[394] Byman and Green, "The Enigma of Political Stability in the Persian Gulf Monarchies.

process, whereas in Saudi Arabia all members of the Consultative Council have been appointed by the King. The election of the National Assembly members directly by universal suffrage was also clearly indicated in the 1962 Kuwaiti Constitution. In contrast to this indication, the Statute of the Consultative Council which was issued by King Fahd, laid down that members were to be appointed by the King. In this connection, composition of the Kuwaiti National Assembly has reflected voters' intentions to a large extent, whereas composition of the Saudi Consultative Council has reflected intentions of the King and the al-Saud family. In his work, Mainuddin also underlines the divergence among Kuwaiti and Saudi parliamentary experiences on this dimension: "…only the al-Sabah family in Kuwait has gone so far as to allow parliamentary elections. The ruling family in Saudi Arabia has refused to move beyond appointing consultative bodies". [395]

Thirdly, roles and responsibilities of the members in Kuwaiti National Assembly and Saudi Consultative Council have largely differed. Kuwaiti constitution of 1962 gave assembly deputies the right to vote on various issues including 'vote of confidence' to question the confidence of the ministers in the cabinet. In addition, Kuwaiti government should have the approval of the assembly to operate. Furthermore, despite the Kuwaiti National Assembly was suspended by Amir for three times, it has so far experienced 10 elections along with 10 terms and has been more or less able to provide input for the decision-making process in Kuwait since 1963. In contrast, Saudi Consultative Council has been far from providing real input for Saudi decision-making, as it was given only an advisory role to give the King and the Council of Ministers recommendations on a particular issue. Moreover, Saudi Consultative Council was given the right to review national policy and again to give advices about it. In fact, once established Saudi Consultative Council like Kuwaiti National Assembly, but to a less degree has started to raise criticisms against policies of the government. That is why; King Fahd had been reluctant to establish such a representative body for a long time. [396]

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[395] Mainuddin, 139.

[396] For more details see, Wilson and Graham, 77 and Abir, 224-225.

Nevertheless, in both cases, although the ruler shares some of his responsibility with representative institution, neither Kuwaiti Amir nor the Saudi King has been accountable to these representative institutions. Likewise, neither of these institutions have had any role in choosing the ruler or the members of the council of ministers. What is more, in cases of disagreement between the representative body and the cabinet, the Amir or the King has been the one to give the ultimate decision in both of these monarchies.

Eventually, there is difference among Kuwaiti National Assembly and Saudi Consultative Council, in terms of the composition of their members. In Kuwait, all cabinet members have also been given seats in the National Assembly together with right to vote on a variety of issues except for the 'vote of confidence'. Granting appointed cabinet members [397] the same rights with the elected deputies except for the 'vote of confidence' has been a challenge to representative nature of the assembly and therefore it has also been a challenge to political liberalization in Kuwait. Nonetheless, four elected members of the National Assembly were allowed to take place in the cabinet which has been fruitful to increase the representativeness of the cabinet. Surprisingly, Saudi Consultative Council has not included any members of the cabinet and "from the composition of the first council it has become clear that ruling family members would not be appointed for the council." [398] However, in contrast to Kuwait, none of the Saudi Consultative Council members have been allowed to take part in the Saudi cabinet.

When the issue of the formation of political parties has been concerned, all the Arab Gulf monarchies have shared the same fate including Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Despite the fact that Kuwaiti political life has been more participatory than the other Arab Gulf monarchies, Kuwait has not been an exception as the formation

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[397] As it has already been mentioned in chapter three, majority of the cabinet members are appointed from male members of the Al-Sabah family.

[398] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* 108.

of political parties have been prohibited in all Arab Gulf monarchies. [399] Here, it can be argued that "the reigning dynasties are not comfortable with Western procedural democracy" as even in Kuwait with longest parliamentary tradition among other Arab Gulf monarchies, political parties are still forbidden. [400] Furthermore, neither Saudi political system nor Kuwaiti political system has been able to separate the powers between the executive and legislative branches of government, in the real sense.   Another common weakness of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait has been that only adult male citizens have been given right for political participation until now.

In conclusion, parliamentary developments in Kuwait have been much more impressive than the developments in Saudi Arabia in the same field.   Kuwait's longer historical tradition with a parliamentary institution, using universal suffrage to determine the members of that parliamentary body, and granting wider roles and responsibilities to these representatives are the main things, which differentiate Kuwaiti parliamentary life from that of Saudi and makes it more distinguished. Therefore, Kuwaiti parliamentary experience offers Saudi Arabia a model for further improvements in Saudi parliamentary experience.   Nevertheless, there are further political reforms to be implemented also in the case of Kuwait in terms of improving parliamentary system. The threat of suspension along with several other barriers has surely limited the functioning of National Assembly in Kuwait.

5.2.2. Civil Society Profiles

Civil society has played a significant role in Western democracies for the promotion of more accountability and transparency in the political system. Some components of civil society have also existed in the Arab Gulf monarchies, but they have either been very unevenly developed or remained under strict control of the authoritarian ruling regimes.   In general, Arab Gulf rulers have perceived

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[399] This is highlighted in the Arab Human Development Report 2004 by United Nations Development Program. April 5, 2005 <http://www.undp.org > (10 April 2005)

components of civil society as threats to their autonomy and this suspicion have led them to prevent numerous organizations and associations from functioning. Besides, they have banned many forms of public life; and restricted parties, public meetings and access to direct information. [401] Nevertheless, although Arab Gulf rulers have not, in general, view favorably the elements of civil society, some traditional political features of the Arab Gulf monarchies have given Arab Gulf people opportunity to discuss on a variety of issues or tell their views within a certain framework. Some of these traditional political features have included 'diwan', the formal meeting place of the leading families, where one can be invited to participate in a discussion, or attend to an open meeting in majlis, where senior members of the royal family came together. [402]

In fact, Arab Gulf monarchies have also differed with respect to the degree to which the components of civil society in their countries have got evolved. According to al-Sayyid, there are two categories to differentiate Arab, Gulf monarchies, in terms of their civil societies. The first category only includes Kuwait, where a reasonable measure of freedom of association has been allowed and "the establishment of various types of professional associations, class-based organizations, and private societies" has been permitted. [403] The second category includes Saudi Arabia along with the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council members, [404] where "freedom of association is not recognized, whether for political parties, professional associations, or trade unions". [405] As far as, classification of the Arab Gulf monarchies is concerned in terms of their civil societies, Kuwait has

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[400] Mainuddin, 139.

[401] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 281.

[402] Ehteshami, "Reform from Above: the Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," 72.

[403] Al-Sayyid, 141.

[404] Gulf Cooperation Council was set up in 1981 to strengthen cooperation in areas such as security, trade, agriculture and investment among its six members: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

[405] Al-Sayyid, 141.

presented stronger signs regarding the existence of a civil society in comparison with the Saudi Arabia.

The main reason for the relative progress in Kuwait regarding civil society is that Kuwaiti constitution has supported basic freedoms of association, assembly and expression. In addition, it has allowed the establishment of various institutions which have been essential for the existence of civil society. For instance, professional associations were, for the first time, formed in Kuwait in 1960s, whereas in Saudi Arabia the establishment of such institutions is still not allowed today. In Kuwait, the traditional institution of diwaniyya [406] have been more often used for discussing political issues when compared with Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, in Saudi Arabia petitioning the king or the crown prince and attending majlis meetings have been more common. Another difference between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in terms of civil society is that in Kuwait, women's associations have emerged in 1960s, whereas in Saudi Arabia, women's associations began forming only in 1983. [407] Since the Gulf war of 1990-1991, [408] women's organizations [409] have became more active and strongly demanded political equality in Kuwait. In contrast, women associations in Saudi Arabia could not exhibited a strong performance due to Saudi state's highly religious character.

Despite divergences among Kuwaiti and Saudi civil societies, the thing they have shared in common has been that when presence of a group or organization threatened the monopoly of the ruling elites over decision-making process then ruling elite have used various means to control them or prevent their functioning. For instance, in Kuwait foreign nationals have not been allowed to take place in an

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[406] Diwaniyya refer to family-based social gatherings.

[407] Ismail, 342-343.

[408] Importance of the Kuwaiti women both as economical and social forces was discovered during the Iraqi invasion.

[409] One of these women's organizations is Young Women's Club, "Nadi al-Fatat", a more activist, politically aware group from the upper classes established by the mid-1970s.

association. An impressive example from Saudi Arabia was that Saudi authorities reacted very harshly to the announcement that a Committee to Defend Legitimate Rights (CDLR) [410] had started its activities. Not only did the Saudi regime ban this committee but also arrested some of its founders while dismissing some others from their governmental posts. Moreover, Council of Senior Ulama was forced to declare a condemnation about this committee. In this regard, none of the Arab Gulf monarchies, even Kuwait, has been able to include genuine civil society with reference to Western liberal standards. To put it differently, civil society in its real sense is about "a political order respecting the civil and political rights of citizens, leaving free space for a wide variety of their activities, and responding to their deeply held wishes and aspirations for personal dignity and decent living". [411] Therefore, as long as, Arab Gulf monarchies lack this kind of a political order, the attempts to have functioning civil societies will face regular interruptions.

In conclusion, civil society is an efficient way to establish closer link between the rulers and the society. Therefore, components of civil society are significant, in order to include masses in the decision-making process and to satisfy the needs of people regarding political representation. In this connection, it clearly demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between the level of development in terms of civil society in a given state and the steps taken forward with regard to political liberalization in that given state. The extent to which civil society has evolved in Kuwait been certainly greater than the level of development in Saudi civil society. Nevertheless, it would not be appropriate to claim that a civil society in real sense has existed in any of the Arab Gulf states including Kuwait, which has been relatively superior to the others in this field. More or less, all the Arab Gulf leaders have tried to introduce restrictive measures on components of civil society, particularly when their interests were in danger. From Crystal's point of view, the policy of the Arab Gulf leaders to constrain civil society may work in the short run,

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[410] CDLR was established by six Islamist activists in May 1993.

[411] Al-Sayyid, 140-141.

but for her, in the long-run this policy would backfire as those repressed organizations would continue to work deeply underground and threaten the hegemony of the ruling regimes violently. [412]

5.2.3. Media

Media is the third representative dynamic, which is significant to influence the degree of political liberalization in a given state. With regard to their media, Arab Gulf monarchies have been underlined to have poor record, due to frequent state intervention into different branches of media through strict censorship, prohibiting numerous publications and monitoring television programs. Likewise, governments of the Arab Gulf have also closed down numerous papers and even sponsored a group of people to keep an eye on the media. Despite the Kuwaiti state has granted relatively more freedom to media institutions in comparison with the Saudi state, it is difficult to call the media in both of these states, as wholly independent.

In fact, on the one hand Kuwaiti constitution has allowed for free press and the basic freedoms of expression, on the other, criticism of the Amir or the ruling family was regarded as a punishable offense by the Kuwaiti press laws. [413] Nonetheless, since the reconvening of National Assembly in 1992, the press has become free to "report fully on parliamentary debates in which previously taboo subjects were aired" and the press has been much more able to report on controversial issues. [414] In contrast, the censorship employed by the Saudi regime to ensure its absolute power was more intensive than the censorship employed by the Kuwaiti regime. Ministry of Information was established in early 1960s by the Saudi regime to control the media officially. According to Saudi National Press Establishment Law, the right to start a periodical was restricted, and "the Ministry

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[412] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 281.

[413] Hicks and Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait," 189-190.

[414] Hicks and Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait," 190.

of Information was given the right to shut down newspapers and veto editorial candidates or demand their resignation". [415] Moreover, the credibility of news and information in Saudi media has been low due to direct control of Saudi state over all domestic radio and television stations. Interestingly, the influence of Saudi state over media has extended beyond the borders of the Kingdom because, particularly Arab publications have avoided offending the Saudi ruling family, in order not to be banned within the kingdom and to loose any advertising. [416]

Despite, the authoritarian attitude of the Saudi state towards the media, it is also important to mention about two reforms in the Saudi media. One of these reforms was the introduction of a new press and publication law in spring 2001 which has guaranteed freedom of expression to be in line with existing rules, printing of foreign newspapers in the kingdom, and surprisingly criticism on condition to be constructive and within a framework defined by the regime. Ehteshami believes that the introduction of this press and publication law by the Saudi regime has included a message:

> *The new press law by itself may not have impressed many outside observers, but in the Saudi context it reinforces the message being sent to society that the states is becoming more tolerant of alternative views and welcomes wider discussion of issues affecting the kingdom.* [417]

The other reform was that, since spring 2004 journalists have been allowed to attend the sessions of the Saudi Consultative Council and to broadcast two hours of its weekly discussions.

In conclusion, although the steps taken by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to liberalize their media institutions have not been very impressive in comparison with

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[415] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*, 261.

[416] Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*, 267.

[417] Ehteshami, "Reform from Above: the Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," 68.

the liberal institutions of Western media, these steps have been noteworthy in the context of the Arab Gulf monarchies. Without any doubt, changes in the international context, establishment of alternative media networks, easier access of people to direct information and expanding of the satellite broadcasting have been influential in the loosening state-sponsored media protections. Especially, establishment of Al Jazeera [418] in 1996 has been one of the most significant alternative networks to sponsor change in the institutions of the Arab Gulf media. Al Jazeera has not hesitated to address critical issues such as corruption, political will, thorny religious questions, parliamentary institutions and the most taboo social issues imaginable in the context of the Arab Gulf monarchies. [419] As it was expected, the initial reactions of both the Kuwaiti and the Saudi regimes were harsh including the closing Al Jazeera's local offices, expelling its reporters and criticizing Qatar for tolerating the station. Nonetheless, when they understood that imposing restrictions were not enough to prevent their populations from achieving information due to developed technology, they have reluctantly accepted the presence of alternative media networks such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiyya. In his article, Kechichian evaluates the approach of Arab Gulf regimes to alternative media networks: "Today few deny the contributions made by these networks, especially in compelling traditional channels to professionalize and more important, in providing Gulf leaders with rare insights into their own societies." [420]

5.3. Origins, Contexts, Motives and Challenges

In order to understand the divergences among Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in terms of their political liberalization processes; origins, contexts, motives and challenges to shape the development of reforms in these two states should be separately analyzed. Firstly, the origins of state formation in these two states and how has it affected the flourishing of political reform in different ways will be

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[418] Al Jazeera is a Qatar based satellite television channel.

[419] Kechichian, "Democratization in the Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC," 44.

[420] Kechichian, "Democratization in the Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC," 45.

discussed. Then, influences of both the international context and domestic political context in the evolution of liberal change will be explained in two different sections. Finally, the motives and the challenges to have impact on the process of political liberalization in these two states will be examined in details.

5.3.1. Origins of State Formation and Political Liberalization

The roots of state formation process in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had differed to a large extent. Kuwaiti state took its roots from an agreement made in early eighteenth century between the representatives of uniform merchant families, who emigrated to Kuwait from central Arabian Peninsula. Representatives of those families elected one of themselves, Sabah bin Jabir al-Udhbi to be the administrator of order, in return for the financial support of the others. In fact, there were not any noticeable differences between the representatives of those families, as none of the representatives had any legitimate family claim to this leadership role. [421] The process of election took place in a democratic setting along with a special emphasis on the agreement that major decisions had to be taken by the consultation of the whole community.

In contrast, Saudi state was established as a result of power struggle of Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud to take numerous heterogeneous tribes under control, in the early twentieth century. There was widespread violence throughout the Arabian Peninsula arising from this power struggle of Ibn Saud. Therefore, establishment of the Saudi state was marked by use of physical force and power hegemony, whereas establishment of the Kuwaiti state was marked by a reasonable agreement to have an egalitarian base. As Halliday, points out: "Saudi Arabia is a product of tribal conquest, whereas the smaller Gulf states are towns that became states thanks to colonial initiative and oil." [422] Hence use of different means in the establishment of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, have been influential in varying degrees of political

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[421] For more details, see Salame, "Small is Pluralistic: democracy as an instrument of civil peace," 91.

[422] Halliday, 295-296.

liberalization in these states. As leadership was given to Al-Sabah family through agreement, ruling regime in Kuwait gave relatively greater importance to the ideas of Kuwaiti population. In contrast, Al-Saud family gained rulership through use of force and thus preferred to impose rules with repressive policies, especially religious ones.

Another difference between processes of state-formation in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia was that Kuwait has experienced British rule, whereas Saudi Arabia was never been subjected to any colonial rule. For this reason, Kuwait had a better chance to take British representative political system as a model and soon after Kuwait gained its independence in 1961, a constitution was adopted in 1962 which included the establishment of National Assembly. Saudi Arabia was lacking a constitution and any representative institutions in 1932 when the Saudi state was officially founded. Even under British rule, Kuwait had an elected Legislative Council. As Salame points out: "Kuwait distinguished itself from its neighbors by establishing a partially elected parliament and a written constitution guaranteeing human rights." [423] In this regard, Kuwait had been more advantageous to perform better in terms of political liberalization when compared with Saudi Arabia, due to its relatively pro-democracy political culture which had longer past. Crystal and Al-Shayeji underline the reasons for Kuwait's better performance with these words: "Kuwait's longer history as an independent political entity and its relatively small size and homogeneity have all been factors in consolidating a more homogenous pro-democratic national culture." [424]

In fact, the constitutional differences between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are also significant to establish a link with the process of political liberalization, as constitution is the main system of laws upon which the state is based. Kuwaiti constitution of 1962, has emphasized various Western principle including "sovereignty residing in the people, the separation of powers between the branches

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[423] Salame, "Small is Pluralistic: democracy as an instrument of civil peace," 95.

[424] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 113.

of government, and some degree of legislative power-sharing between the ruler and national councils", along with a number of Islamic principles. [425] Unlike Kuwait, Saudi Arabia has assumed Sharia as its constitution other than a legal document. Only in the Basic Statute of Government, which was issued by King Fahd in 1992, the rules and the functioning of the Saudi government had been, for the first time defined. Sharia has also been applied in Kuwait mostly for governing personal matters such as marriage and divorce, but when international practices have been concerned laws other than Sharia have been taken into account. [426] To put it differently, Sharia has been the only source of legislation in Saudi Arabia whereas, in Kuwait Sharia has been one of the sources of legislation. Without any doubt, constitutional flexibility has given Kuwait the advantage to adopt political reform easier in comparison with Saudi Arabia, as it has responded the demands of people regarding representation and participation in a better way.

In conclusion, origins of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have been different and effects of this difference have surely been reflected in the divergent policies applied by the ruling elites in these two states to respond demands for political reform. According to Brumberg, there are two types of Arab Gulf monarchies, indicated as total autocracy and liberalized autocracy regarding the origins and regime characteristics of these monarchies. [427] For Brumberg, Saudi Arabia is a total autocracy whose endurance is closely related with 'harmonic foundation of legitimacy' and 'the hegemonic reach of state institutions', whereas Kuwait is a liberalized autocracy that allow a measure of openness along with leaving 'room for competitive politics' and within limits permitting contending groups and ideas. [428] Not surprisingly, divergences in the nature of politics in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia

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[425] Peterson, The Arab Gulf States: Steps Toward Political Participation, 9.

[426] Ghabra, 64.

[427] Brumberg, 56-68.

[428] Brumberg, 58-61.

have greatly influenced the process of political liberalization in these two states to varying degrees.

5.3.2. International Context

Despite the existence of widespread views about immunity of Arab Gulf states to political reform, in reality, ruling regimes of the Arab Gulf could not remain ignorant to changes in the international context and growing global pro-democratic trends. When the Arab Gulf regimes faced with ambitious Muslim neighbors, "the ruling elite was forced to enter into security cooperation with major Western powers". [429] For instance, reconvening of the Kuwaiti National Assembly in 1981 in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was noticeable, as Kuwaiti Amir was in need of popular support, due to Khomeinie's threat of exporting revolution. Likewise, Iranian revolution had also caused the Saudi regimes to become anxious and to have bilateral military agreements with the West.

In fact, impact of the international context on the process of political liberalization in Kuwait has been much more intense when compared with the Saudi Arabia. Certainly, since its independence, Kuwait has been a vulnerable state in the international scene and this "played a role in prompting Kuwait's rulers to create the assembly and to use it to obtain explicit popular support." [430] The main reason behind Kuwait's vulnerability is that Kuwait is a "Kuwait is a small wealthy country with a predatory neighbor Iraq, and potential threats to its sovereignty from Iran and Saudi Arabia." [431] Thus, unlike Saudi ruling regime, Kuwaiti ruling regime had no choice but to share responsibility of the state with its population through representative institutions. To put it differently, limited representative institutions have been safety valves to Kuwaiti government especially, when a contention occurred between Kuwait and a neighboring state. Not surprisingly, on

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[429] Mainuddin, 138.

[430] Crystal and Al-Shayeji, 113.

[431] Hicks and Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait,"191-192.

the one hand, when the eventual decision about the contention was displeasing for the neighbor, Kuwaiti ruling regime has referred to National Assembly, on the other National Assembly could be blamed when the eventual decision was displeasing for Kuwait. [432]

Interestingly, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had also reciprocally influenced each other in two different ways regarding the process of political liberalization. Unlike Saudi Arabia's longer resistance to political reform, Kuwait has earlier moved forward with political reforms. For various reasons, Saudi Arabia has feared from the Kuwait's moves forward with political reform and been alarmed by the democratic developments in Kuwait such as parliamentary openings. [433] Thus, Saudi ruling regime acted in a hostile manner towards openings in the Kuwaiti political system and had frictions with the Kuwaiti regime, when limited electoral process was allowed in Kuwait for National Assembly. Moreover, Saudi regime has openly criticized political reform in Kuwait and tried to persuade Kuwaiti regime to abandon its toleration towards increasing demands for change by Kuwaiti population. However, when the Saudi ruling elites understood that they could not prevent political reform in Kuwait, they hoped that Kuwaiti elections would prove ephemeral and lead nowhere. [434] These hopes were backfired with Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, as with the Jiddah meeting. [435] Kuwaiti Amir promised to reopen the National Assembly and to realize various political reforms as soon as the Iraqi invasion came to an end. Both the Saudi regime and the Saudi public had the opportunity to closely follow the Jiddah meeting for it was held in Saudi Arabia. In fact, Jiddah meeting was a model to encourage Saudi people to exert similar pressure on the Saudi ruling regime and demands of the Saudi public had found a response in 1992 with the establishment of Saudi Consultative Council.

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[432] Hicks and Al-Najjar, "The Utility of Tradition: Civil Society in Kuwait,"192.

[433] Halliday, 290.

[434] Salame, "Small is Pluralistic: democracy as an instrument of civil peace," 107.

In the meantime, the expansion of political participation in the Russia and Eastern Europe since the ending of the Cold War was more or less followed by Kuwaiti and Saudi media and helped Kuwaiti and Saudi populations to question their own political systems. Nonetheless, the support given by the United States to both Saudi ruling regime and Kuwaiti ruling regime did not disappear with the end of the Cold War. Yet, following September 11 terrorist attacks Western governments began to support and urge political change in the Arab Gulf monarchies, due to increasing security threats coming from Islamic terrorist networks, growing Western public opinion for a transition to democracy in the Arab Gulf monarchies, and accelerating criticisms of Western human rights organizations regarding the Gulf Sheikhdoms. [436] In this connection, pressure of the West for political reform was much more intense towards Saudi Arabia than Kuwait because majority of the suicide-hijackers in September 11 attacks were Saudi citizens and the Saudi regime had obviously been more resistant to any opening in its political system.

5.3.3. Domestic Political Context

In terms of their domestic political contexts, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have had both similarities and differences. When the executive institutions have been concerned, Kuwaiti and Saudi political systems have had almost parallel Councils of Ministers regarding their compositions and functions. In both of these states, significant positions in the Council of Ministers such as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Interior or Minister of Defense have all been occupied by members of the ruling families. To put it differently, ruling families dominates the key cadres of administration, while other positions in the cabinets have been allocated to those, who were close to the ruling families except for four elected members from the National Assembly in Kuwait political system. Besides, all the members of the

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[435] Jiddah conference took place in October 1990, in Saudi Arabia and brought together members of the Al Sabah family and representatives of Kuwaiti opposition groups.

[436] Mainuddin, 138.

Council of Ministers have gained their positions though the process of appointment other than any electoral process. Additionally, checks on the authority of the cabinet have been either weak or non-existent. In Kuwait, National Assembly has checked the Council of Ministers to some extent through vote of confidence or giving approving a newly formed government, whereas in Saudi Arabia, Consultative Council have lacked a genuine control mechanism other than giving policy advices. The structure and the functioning of cabinets in these two states have complicated the process of political liberalization. Particularly, Saudi cabinet has reflected only elite opinion and it has not been able to "satisfy popular desires for a true voice in government". [437]

Another comparison is to be made between habits preferred by Kuwaiti and Saudi ruling elites in dealing with the Islamic resurgence. In Kuwait, relative openness of political life has both allowed Islamic groups to play a major role in the political area and allowed presence of some other social groups and institutions that have "prevented the Islamists from monopolizing the political field". [438] Therefore, Islamic groups in Kuwait have had to be in a permanent dialogue not only with the Kuwaiti government but also with other social groups and institutions to realize their political goals. In contrast, limited nature of Saudi political life has not allowed either the organization of Islamic groups or other social groups and institutions. As a result of repressive government policies of Saudi government and its banning open political organizations, Islamic groups have organized behind closed door without any need to engage in dialogue with other social organizations. Gause explains the consequence of Saudi government's repressive policies with these words:

> *By refusing to countenance more open political activity, Islamist or otherwise,*
> *the Saudi government also encourages a blurring of distinctions within the*
> *Islamic current generally, giving the most radical elements a disproportionate*

[437] Byman and Green, "The Enigma of Political Stability in the Persian Gulf Monarchies.

[438] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* 158.

amount of influence and encouraging a government versus Islamist polarization of public opinion. [439]

As, this comparison demonstrated, divergences in the attitudes of the ruling elites in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have influenced the development of Islamic movements in their countries in different ways. In this regard, preference to depend on repression on the one hand and preference for relatively greater political openness, on the other, have without any doubt affected political liberalization differently in these two states. Whereas in Kuwait Islamist forces have used the electoral process to gain access to system, in Saudi Arabia Islamist forces have had no choice but to have an underground organization which has sometimes tended towards violence.

5.3.4. Motives for and Challenges to Political Liberalization

Although Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have shared various motives for and challenges to political liberalization in common, as they were mentioned in details in the second chapter, the impact of these motives and challenges on each state had differed. Throughout this chapter, components of motives for and challenges to political liberalization have been more or less compared and contrasted. Thus, in this section missing comparisons will be given place.   Regarding motives for political liberalization, impacts of the 1990-1991 Gulf war on these two states will be compared, whereas in terms of challenges influence of oil revenues and political role of women will be discussed.

One of the most important motives to promote change in these states was the 1990-1991 Gulf war. Despite Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a factor to encourage reform in both of these states, its influences on Kuwait was considerably greater as Kuwaiti people were the ones to be subjected to direct invasion by the Saddam regime. Kuwaiti people, who stayed in Kuwait during the occupation, were even more enthusiastic in the broadening of political opening, as soon as the invasion came to an end. The occupation experience bolstered a widespread yearning for

more political freedom and rights among Kuwaiti people because weak stance of the Al-Sabah family both prior to Iraqi threat and during the invasion created enormous disappointment among the Kuwaiti people. Moreover, Kuwaiti people understood that there was no reason to be afraid from Al-Sabah family and to obey its authority as members of the ruling family left Kuwait immediately, when Iraqi troops had started entering the country without making any explanation to their people. Impact of the Gulf war on the changing approach of Saudi people to their ruling regime was also significant but to smaller extent in comparison with the Kuwaiti people. Saudi people had the chance to witness the inadequency of the Saudi regime to external challenges and its reliance on foreign troops for defense. Saudi people could not tolerate the insufficient policies of the royal family and this initiated a series of petitions that were presented to King Fahd from different segments of the Saudi society such as liberals' petition of 1990, Islamists' petition of 1991 and Memorandum of Advice by Islamists.

The consequences of the Gulf war in terms of political liberalization were more impressive in the Kuwaiti context than the Saudi context. In the Saudi context, it led to a broad reform initiative by King Fahd including the Basic Statute of Government, the Statute of the Consultative Council and the Statute of the Provinces. Nevertheless, the opening in the political system did not include areas like civil society, media or women rights. Political opening that took place in Kuwait was much more comprehensive than that of Saudi Arabia as it included developments in various fields. Not only, were elections for the Kuwaiti National Assembly held in the aftermath of the Gulf war for its reconvention but also campaigns prior to the election had turned into a public show for Kuwaiti people to voice their demands for more effective and transparent government along with the expansion and protection of political and civil rights. It was also noteworthy that there was remarkable increase in the popular support for extending the public role of the Kuwaiti women including their participation in politics. The role of Iraqi invasion was great in this increase of the popular support for women rights because

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[439] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*,159.

"during the occupation, women were prominent among activists in the resistance and in the diaspora." [440]

Dependence on oil revenues, particularly since early 1970s have been a strong challenge to political liberalization in all Arab Gulf monarchies including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as "rulers in the Gulf do not seek financial support as desperately as leaders elsewhere". [441] Until 1970s, the rulers of the Arab Gulf monarchies had more or less depended on merchants for state revenues and each Arab Gulf state had a different merchant class built in the pre-oil period. In Kuwait the merchant class was more powerful than that of Saudi Arabia because they had higher degree of social cohesion and their "pre-oil politicization made them unusually conscious of their class interests." [442] To put it differently, there has been interdependence among the ruling elites and the merchants prior to huge oil revenues especially in Kuwait, where there was an historical governing coalition between the Al Sabah family and merchant families. With the flux of massive oil revenues in the early 1970s, the interdependence between the ruling elites and other classes of the society particularly merchant class was broken. [443] In fact, oil revenues allowed both the Kuwaiti state and the Saudi state to weaken the merchant classes and other existing social groups. Moreover, ruling elites in the Arab Gulf, in general, had been intolerant to social groups, which did not have any political intentions. Even in Saudi Arabia, oil revenues allowed the Saudi state to block the formation of any new social groups. In Kuwait, the merchants have maintained the most class continuity, as they were able to reenter politics collectively with the fall in oil prices in 1980s. [444] Unlike Kuwait, in Saudi Arabia ruling elites used oil revenues to marginalize the old merchant class and created a new loyal business

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[440] Tetreault, "Civil Society in Kuwait: Protected Spaces and Women's Rights," 277.

[441] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 276.

[442] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 260.

[443] Dissolution of the Kuwaiti National Assembly in 1976, in the aftermath of the 1973 oil boom was more than just a coincidence.

[444] Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," 262.

class. Therefore, the old merchant class became fragmented and they could not demonstrate any political significance in the oil bust of 1980s. Overall, oil revenues more or less had allowed both the Saudi and Kuwaiti ruling regimes to weaken the components of civil society in their societies.

Dependency on oil revenues have also contributed to corruption both in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia at the state level. [445] As the ruling regimes have had the control of the exogenous revenues, they have decided on how to spend the oil revenues and this has made ruling elites central actors in the political system. Governments in these states have acted as main providers of goods, services and employment, in return for no taxes or irrelevant amount of taxes. In this regard, the need of regimes to respond the demands for political reform from their populations has automatically been reduced. As Gause III notes: "Since the regimes are not as reliant on domestic bargains to fund the state budget as they would be without exogenous revenues, they can more easily ignore calls for broadened political participation." [446] Therefore, demands for more responsible and representative governments have, by and large, emerged or intensified during times of oil crisis.

Role of the women in the society and political life is also closely linked with political liberalization in a given state because women form almost half of the population and inclusion of them in the political system is relevant for political liberalization. Gender injustice had been a key concern in the context of Arab Gulf monarchies until mid 1990s, as both the Saudi state and the Kuwaiti state had excluded women from political life. This means that half of the Kuwaiti and Saudi populations were not represented and their ideas were not taken into account. In addition, the role women could play economically and socially was limited by law and tradition, when compared with the roles played by the Western women. Nevertheless, there have been differences among approaches of Kuwaiti state and

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[445] It was also highlighted in the Arab Human Development Report of 2004 by United Nations Development Program. April 5, 2005 <http://www.undp.org > (10 April 2005)

Saudi state towards women's issues in 1990s. There were intensive debates during the election campaigns in Kuwait about giving women political rights in the aftermath of the Gulf war. Interestingly, the Kuwaiti cabinet brought the issue of women empowerment to the assembly for discussion, but it was refused by the National Assembly a number of times. For instance, Kuwaiti Amir issued a decree in 1999 which proposed granting women full political rights but ironically it was rejected by the National Assembly. Tetreault points out:

> *The ruling family of Kuwait is the most prominent public institution calling for political rights for women. Numerou s statements by the amir and the crown prince have put the family on the right, or pro-democracy, side of the issue, implicitly putting the National Assembly on the wrong side, given the vote against women's rights by the 1981 parliament.* [447]

Nonetheless, Kuwaiti women were granted full political rights at last on May 16, 2005 after powerful struggles of Kuwaiti women for years. The amendment in the electoral law, which favored granting Kuwaiti women to vote and stand in elections was passed in the National Assembly with the positive vote of 35 deputies including 14 ministers. [448] This has been both a victory for the representation and participation of Kuwaiti women in the political system and a victory for further political liberalization in Kuwait.

In contrast to recent promising developments in Kuwait on the issue of women empowerment, Saudi Arabia has lacked any genuine improvement in this field. During the Gulf crisis, approximately forty Saudi women drove their cars through the streets of Riyadh although women were not allowed to drive car in Saudi Arabia. The act of the women was seen as a challenge by the Saudi regime to its authority, and the women who took part in the action were punished either

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[446] Gause III, "Regional Influences on Experiments in Political Liberalization in the Arab World," 292.

[447] Tetreault, "Civil Society in Kuwait: Protected Spaces and Women's Rights," 289.

[448] "Women get the vote in Kuwait," in Middle East Times, 17 May 2005, <http://metimes.com> (19 May 2005)

having their passports confiscated or having experienced house arrest for months.[449] Saudi women were given separate independent identification cards with unveiled photographs of the face in early 2000s by the Saudi Interior Ministry 'to combat terror and forgery'. [450]   In other words, issuing women identity card was a precaution for the Saudi regime to combat increasing security threat other than an initiation for further reforms with regards to women. An example to demonstrate that Saudi regime was not ready to grant women any political rights was that even Saudi men were very recently given right to vote for the first time. First elections to choose half of the provincial council members was for the first time held in Saudi Arabia in early 2005, but women were excluded from the electoral process. Surely, the issue of women empowerment will continue to be a great challenge to political liberalization in Saudi Arabia.

5.4. Overall Performance in Terms of Political Consequences

When the overall performance in terms of political consequences is concerned, Kuwait in particular stands out in comparison with both Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf monarchies. However, the distinction between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia with regard to their experiences in the field of political liberalization has been immense. "Kuwait is the freest of the Arab Gulf states, and it has the most transparent government among them." [451]   In contrast, Saudi Arabia has been the most conservative and Saudi ruling regime has been the most reluctant to allow any political opening among the Arab, Gulf monarchies. There are numerous factors to influence the development of political liberalization to varying degrees in these two states, which have been examined in details throughout the chapter. For this reason, in this section the emphasis will be on the overall comparison of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia with the help of concrete political consequences.

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[449] Gause III, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* 162.

[450] Kechichian, "Democratization in the Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC," 48.

[451] Herb, "Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf," 47.

One of the significant differences between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia is that Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy which has accommodated components of representative democracy, whereas Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy where the ruler has the power to rule his country almost freely with no laws. The main reason of this diverse categorization in terms of monarchy types lies in the constitutional structure of these states. Saudi Arabia does not have any legal, written constitution and it is governed according to Sharia (Islamic law). Saudi government's rights and responsibilities were for the first time introduced with the Basic Statute of Government in 1993. Although, the Basic Statute of Government was a constitution-like document, it was separately pointed out in the Statute that Saudi Arabia was not in need of a constitution, as it depended on Sharia. In contrast to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait had its constitution approved and promulgated on November 1962, which had included an article for the establishment of an elected National Assembly. In Kuwait, with the legally recognized constitution a compromise was made between the people and the ruling elite, whereas in Saudi Arabia although some religious authority or members of the Consultative Council have been able to recommend the King on certain issues, the final decision has belonged the King in the absence of any formal constitution. Without any doubt, from the very beginning this divergence caused Kuwait to be always several steps forward in the implementation of political reforms.

Another difference between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia is about the titles and sharing out roles among the ruling elites. In both of these states rulership is hereditary, and in Saudi Arabia the king is chosen among the qualified male members of the Al-Saud family by the members of the royal family according to his abilities, whereas in Kuwait the amir is chosen among the male members of the Al-Sabah family by the members of the ruling family with regard to his capabilities. In Saudi Arabia, the king is both the monarch and the head of state along with assuming the title of the prime minister to chair the cabinet. In Saudi Arabia Fahd bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud has been both the King and the Prime Minister since 13 June 1982. Saudi Council of Ministers is appointed by the monarch and includes

many royal family members. The crown prince comes after the king in the Saudi political system, the title of the crown prince is granted to a male member of the royal family who will likely to be chosen as the king in the future and the crown prince is also the First Deputy Minister. Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud is the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and the First Deputy Minister since 13 June 1982, he has also been de facto ruler since early 1996 due to significant health problems of King Fahd. On the other hand, while there is a similar process to choose the amir and the crown prince, the titles of the prime minister and the deputy prime minister have been assumed by male members of the Al-Sabah family other than the amir and the crown prince. In Kuwait Jabir al-Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah is the Amir and symbolic head of the executive branch since 31 December 1977, whereas Saad al-Abdullah al-Salim Al Sabah is the Crown Prince and Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah is the Prime Minister since 13 July 2003. Unlike Saudi cabinet, Kuwaiti Council of Ministers appointed by the Prime Minister and approved by the monarch. Allocation of the top level administrative roles among more people in Kuwait is certainly more favorable to bring more ideas for discussion, breaking down the monopoly of one man over the whole political system and to develop a mechanism of checks and balances to some extent when compared with the Saudi Arabia. In this regard, allocation of top-level administrative roles among more people in Kuwait is more beneficial to provide input for political reform than Saudi Arabia.

Depending on universal suffrage to determine the members of a representative institution is also an indicator of the ability of state to further achieve a more accountable and more transparent government. At this point, there is a relevant different among the approaches of Kuwaiti and Saudi states to electoral process. In Kuwait, first elections to choose the members of the National Assembly was held in 1963 and from then on, Kuwaiti politics witnessed 10 elections for the National Assembly, 4 of which were held in the post Gulf War period. The last elections for the Kuwaiti National Assembly were held on 6 July 2003 and it means that Kuwaiti people have experienced living with an elected representative body for

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more than 40 years. In fact, Kuwait is first one to have an elected national assembly among other Arab Gulf monarchies and although it had experienced three dissolution periods, "it enjoys a substantial degree of legitimacy among the citizen population". [452] In contrast, Saudi Arabia along with the United Arab Emirates are the only ones among the whole Arab world to lack even partially elected parliaments. [453] Saudi state has recently allowed electoral process including male Saudi citizens for the selection of only half of the representatives in the municipal councils in early 2005. To put it differently, male Saudi citizens have for the first time experienced voting in 2005, 42 years after the male Kuwaiti citizens had such an experience for the first time. Moreover, Kuwaitis have been granted to choose all the representatives in the National Assembly, let alone the Saudi Consultative Council, Saudis have been granted only to elect half of the municipal council members while the other half will be appointed by the royal family. Visibly longer experience with the electoral process and an elected representative institution undoubtedly make Kuwaiti experience of political representation more successful and more promising than that of Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, another important detail is that in the next Kuwaiti National Assembly elections to be held in 2007, Kuwaiti women will both vote and stand in elections. With an amendment in the electoral law which passed in the Kuwaiti Assembly on 16 May 2005, Kuwaiti women have been granted the full political rights. "The amendment will increase the number of eligible voters in Kuwait from the current 145,000 males to more that 350,000 people, or 37 percent of Kuwait's native population of 956,000." [454] This amendment in the Kuwaiti electoral law has been welcomed both by the United States and the United Nations as an important advance and moreover they evaluated the development as a historic step for Kuwait

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[452] Herb, "Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World," 384.

[453] This detail is strongly highlighted in the Arab Human Development Report of 2004 by United Nations Development Program. April 5, 2005 <http://www.undp.org > (10 April 2005)

[454] "Women get the vote in Kuwait," in Middle East Times, 17 May 2005, <http://metimes.com> (19 May 2005)

to help not only Kuwaiti women but the whole of the Kuwaiti society. [455] Despite the electoral process in Saudi Arabia is only for the selection of half of the deputies in the municipal councils, women are strictly excluded from political participation and representation in Saudi Arabia. In other words, while in Saudi Arabia views of half of the population are not taken into consideration, views of the other half are only partially taken into consideration and for only municipal matters. This demonstrates the hesitation of Saudi regime to open up its political system versus the ongoing liberalization experiment in Kuwait.

In conclusion, "Kuwait went the furthest of the Gulf monarchies to respond to popular demands for representative institutions", whereas Saudi Arabia remains much more behind other Arab Gulf monarchies such as Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, but more specifically the Kuwait. [456] Nevertheless, even in the most conservative Arab Gulf monarchy, the Saudi Arabia inclination towards change and political reform increasingly observed. In this inclination, the role of Crown Prince Abdallah should not be ignored as Abdallah has been much more tolerant to the demands of the Saudi people from different segments of the society. For instance, in 2004, there were numerous civil initiatives by the Saudi government due to a number of petitions and documents which were addressed to the Crown Prince, containing demands for political openness, improvements on the status of women and a constitutional monarchy. [457]

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[455] "Leaders hail Kuwait women's votes," in BBC News, 17 May 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (19 May 2005)
[456] Gause III, "The Gulf Conundrum: Economic Change, Population Growth, and Political Stability in the GCC States," 149.

[457] Arab Human Development Report 2004 by United Nations Development Program. April 5, 2005 <http://www.undp.org > (10 April 2005)

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Arab Gulf Monarchies, including the constitutional monarchies of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman; and the absolutist monarchies of the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in general, have a poor record of political liberalization. Until early 1990s, there had been several attempts to implement political reforms, however even limited political reforms were temporary. Nevertheless, two significant developments, the Gulf war of 1990-1991 and the September 11 terrorist attacks to the United States have accelerated further efforts for political liberalization in the Arab Gulf Monarchies. With the first development, the ruling regimes acted towards political reform, due to pressures from their societies; whereas, with the second development external actors, mainly the United States has put pressure to these regimes for performing political reforms.

Obviously, there are various components both to shape the political structure in these monarchies and to determine the strength of the efforts towards political liberalization. What are these components to shape the politics in the Arab Gulf Monarchies? Are Arab Gulf Monarchies exceptional with respect to political liberalization? What are the steps taken by these monarchies towards political liberalization, until now? In order to find appropriate answers to these questions, the steps taken by two particular states, Kuwait and the Saudi Arabia, towards political liberalization are examined in this study with a special emphasis on the development of representative institutions. First of all, both the internal and the external components of the political structure in the Arab Gulf Monarchies are clarified including political culture, political economy, historical background and

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the international context. Then, individual experiences of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the field of political liberalization are studied. Eventually, similarities and differences with respect to overall performances of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are discussed.

Without any doubt, the roads, the Kuwait and the Saudi Arabia have taken towards political liberalization differ both in quality and quantity; but what is known is that the extent of political liberalization that has taken place in these monarchies is very different in comparison with the developed democracies of the Western States.   In fact, despite the differences among these two monarchies with respect to their abilities to perform political reforms, they have shared common political aspects to a large extent. What are these common political aspects? One of them is that in both of these Arab Gulf Monarchies, leadership is hereditary and the executive institution is dominated by the members of the ruling family. Secondly, despite there are minor divergences in the amount of power the ruler possesses in these monarchies, the ruler generally exhibits an authoritarian character and he largely controls all the political institutions within the system. Thirdly, the substantial oil wealth has given the ruling regimes in these monarchies the ability to suppress the demands for political participation and accountability. Lastly, the rulers in these monarchies, one way or another, have used tribalism and Islam as tools for legitimizing themselves.

There are mainly two conclusions to be drawn from this study. Firstly, the examination of the experiences of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the field of political liberalization have made certain that Kuwait has been noticeably more successful than Saudi Arabia with regard to the steps taken towards political liberalization. In reality, Kuwait has not only been more successful than Saudi Arabia but also Kuwait has been the most successful performer of political reforms among the Arab Gulf Monarchies. As Salame points out: "Kuwait has been practically the only Arab Gulf monarchy to hold legislative elections, in which genuine competition

between candidates could be discerned, despite some tough limitations and more or less justified accusations of malpractice." [458]

Despite interruptions, elected Kuwaiti National Assembly has been active since 1963, and the Kuwaiti parliamentary experience is more than 40 years old. In contrast, Saudi ruling elites have recently allowed for the first partial electoral process in Saudi history, by which only half of the Municipal Council members were chosen by the people. Besides, for the first time, Kuwaiti women will be able to attend parliamentary elections in 2007 both as candidates and voters, whereas in Saudi Arabia still women are not allowed to drive cars, let alone any political rights. Other than progress in parliamentary experience, Kuwait has been undoubtedly more tolerant than Saudi Arabia, when the issues of media and civil society are concerned. In Kuwait both the media and the civil society have been relatively free in the sense that individuals and/ or groups can express opinions to a reasonable extent, in contrast to far-reaching government control over media and civil society in Saudi Arabia. Overall, as Herb puts it:

> *Full parliamentary democracy in Kuwait will not be achieved any time soon. But the parliamentary life that is underway in Kuwait, should not be dismissed lightly… The presence of active parliaments can lay the foundation for further democratization, especially to the degree that a tradition of free elections continues.* [459]

Secondly, although parliamentary developments in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have not been impressive at all, when compared with democratic Western parliaments, it should not be ignored that the level of progress achieved for parliamentarism has been noteworthy in the context of the Arab Gulf Monarchies. Materialization of a number of political reforms in the Arab Gulf Monarchies since the ending of the Cold War is an indication that although progress in this particular region has been painfully slow, Arab states are not exceptional with respect to political liberalization and change. Tetreault argues that Kuwaiti experience of

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[458] Salame, "Small is Pluralistic: democracy as an instrument of civil peace," 84.

political liberalization is a refutation of the claim of Arab exceptionalism, in terms of democratization. She notes: "The example of Kuwait is a constant challenge to the myths of Arab and Muslim exceptionalism…Kuwaiti democracy, though imperfectly realized and seriously flawed, is a direct refutation of these myths." [460]

Indeed, winds of change are felt throughout the Arab Gulf Monarchies including even the most conservative one, the Saudi Arabia. Arab Human Development Report of 2004, which is prepared by the United Nations Development Program puts forward that pressure for political change, has considerably increased within the Arab society for some time, and that "it has led to some genuine advances". [461] It is argued in the same report that the role of independent political and civil forces in the Arab world has been important in the "struggle for political reform in Arab countries, resulting in some notable successes." [462] Arab Gulf Monarchies are no exceptions and they have had their share from the winds of change. Recent developments in the political contexts of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are evidences for progress in these states such as the materialization of first municipal elections in Saudi Arabia and granting women full political rights in Kuwait. According to Kechichian, there is every reason to believe that the reform process will continue in the Arab Gulf states to empower Arab Gulf citizens to assume a greater share of both political participation and political representation. [463] As Ehteshami points out: "What we can glean from the range of political activities in the oil monarchies is that most Arab Gulf leaders are now convinced of the virtues of widening participation. They are doing so at different rates and with different intensity, however." [464]

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[459] Herb, "Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf," 47.

[460] Tetreault, Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait, 237.

[461] Arab Human Development Report 2004 by United Nations Development Program. April 5, 2005 <http://www.undp.org > (10 April 2005)

[462] Arab Human Development Report 2004 by United Nations Development Program. April 5, 2005 <http://www.undp.org > (10 April 2005)

[463] Kechichian, "Democratization in Gulf Monarchies: A New Challenge to the GCC," 53.

[464] Ehteshami, "Reform from Above: the Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," 71.

Refuting the claim of Arab exceptionalism in the context of the Arab Gulf states with regard to democratization would be long-lasting and stronger only if comprehensive political reforms are to be applied other than partial reforms. For this purpose, political change should continue in these states with further intensification and reforms should be internalized rather than remaining as window-dressing. "The way to achieve good governance in the Arab region is through fundamental reform of its political architecture." [465] This means in particular, granting wider roles to representative institutions, ending the monopoly of the executive branch's power, improving uneven women empowerment and reducing the influence of tribalism and religion in the political system. Political liberalization is based on effective popular participation and representation of the populations to larger extent.

As, this thesis also puts forward there is a close link between representative institutions and the extent of political liberalization in a given state. Openings in the political systems would turn into real political transitions through representative institutions as representative dynamics such as parliamentary institutions, civil society and media have more or less, provided transparency and accountability of states to their citizens. In fact, these institutions are the mediators in transmitting demands of the people to ruling elites and in return providing inclusion of the people in the political system. In a representative system, the government has to take into consideration the demands of the masses. Otherwise, sense of alienation would occur among the masses. To sum up, changes in both external dynamics such as 1990-1991 Gulf War, pressure of the West in the aftermath of September 11 and internal dynamics such as domestic political context along with civil society and media profiles have encouraged the masses to raise their voices in favor of political reform in the Arab Gulf Monarchies and representative institutions have provided people with opportunity to have their voice heard. In return, ruling elites

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[465] Arab Human Development Report 2004 by United Nations Development Program. April 5, 2005 <http://www.undp.org > (10 April 2005)

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have responded to these pressures from below to varying degrees and it has ended up with the openings in the political system.

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