

كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking_The_Mold

Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Country: **Kuwait**

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Country Background

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BACKGROUND

Since independence, civil society and opposition activists in Kuwait have successfully advocated for an expansion of civil and political rights, safeguarded the country's historical partly-free press, and participated in over a dozen semi-competitive national elections. In a sense, Kuwait has been both a bellwether and an outlier among the Arab Gulf States. Despite brief interregnums from 1976 to 1981 and 1986 to 1992, Kuwait has the longest tradition of contentious parliamentary politics in the Gulf region and, arguably, the most institutionalized legislature in the Arab world. Success stories from Kuwaiti civil society activists can inform similar struggles not just in the Gulf region, but across many contemporary hybrid regimes in the late developing world.

Kuwait is an electoral autocracy: the ruling Al-Sabah family has maintained direct control over most government institutions since independence. Since 1963, Kuwait has held competitive elections to a 50-member legislature, the Kuwait National Assembly (KNA). Members are elected across five ten-member districts under a single non-transferable vote (SNTV) electoral system. The Emir of Kuwait appoints a prime minister, who selects a cabinet (Council of Ministers) which comprises up to 16 ministers. Ministers serve as appointed members of the KNA with almost full voting rights. Legislators are relatively independent, but the influence of political money, vote buying, and corruption remain persistent obstacles to political reform."

Since the restoration of the Kuwaiti parliament in 1992 following the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait, the KNA has been a source of great pride for Kuwaitis. However, in recent years, a series of crises have threatened to undermine parliamentary pluralism. Although tribal, sectarian, and other familial ties remain important, new cleavages have emboldened various oppositional forces. At times, Kuwait's relative openness has encouraged the collaboration of particularly youth-led political associations, groups, and movements.

The following case studies trace the evolution of these various civil movements—and the patterns of contentious politics they have produced—since 2005. First, we focus on the 2005 Nabihah Khamsa movement, which successfully advocated for the reform of Kuwait's longstanding electoral law. Second, we analyze the events of the 'Arab Spring' and Kuwait's Irhal movement, which led to the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah in 2011. A third case analyzes the Kuwaiti government's attempts to revoke Kuwaitis' citizenship, largely for political purposes. Fourth, we analyze the recent passage of a mental health law and civil society's role in advancing the legislation. Last, we analyze the political and social impacts of Article 198 of the penal code, which criminalizes and bans the imitation of the opposite sex.



BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid-2018, the “Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World” program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project “Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making”. This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project’s goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media’s expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.

THE ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB Policy Institute) is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. Inaugurated in 2006, the Institute aims to harness, develop, and initiate policy relevant research in the Arab region. We are committed to expanding and deepening policy-relevant knowledge production in and about the Arab region; and to creating a space for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, civil society and policy-makers.

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