

A comparative perspective on Gulf elections

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Role of elections in democratization in the rest of the world

- Democracy defined: leaders of the executive and legislative branches are elected
- Most countries are republics
- Almost all republics have elections for president & legislature
- In democracies, the elections are fair
- Authoritarian leaders steal elections

Monarchies

- Monarchs are not elected.
- If the monarch controls the executive branch, elections to parliament can be free and fair without a transition to democracy
- Elections necessary for democracy, but not sufficient

What do monarchies need to democratize?

1. Free and fair elections to parliament
2. Parliamentarism: Blocs or parties in the parliament select the prime minister and the rest of the government

Historical examples

- Not many
- Britain, Sweden, the Netherlands, other European countries
- Probably Kuwait

Paths to democracy in monarchies, in history

Absolutism (no parliament)

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Constitutional monarchy (elected parliament,
monarch appoints ministers)

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Democracy

Parliament appoints prime minister

- Constitution is critical
- Constitution **does not** need to say that parliamentary parties select prime minister
- Constitution **does** need to give **elected majority** in parliament some power

Parliamentary powers

- Power to pass and block legislation
- Power to remove confidence in ministers
- الاستجواب و طرح الثقة

Kuwait

- Elected majority in parliament, under 1962 constitution, can remove confidence in ministers
- A number of ministers have resigned under threat of a vote of confidence
- Ministers cannot stay in office against opposition of parliamentary majority
- Part democratic, but part not democratic
- Doesn't work very well

Bahrain

- Before 2002, constitution modeled on Kuwait's
- After 2002, 2/3 majority required in elected lower house to vote no confidence in a minister
- Joint votes of the two houses on legislation
- Malapportioned electoral districts

Qatar

- No elections to a national legislature yet (municipal council elections have been held)
- Under the constitution, 30 elected members of majlis ash-shura, 15 appointed by the Emir. A 2/3 majority required to remove confidence in a minister.

Oman

- Relatively free and fair elections, though limits on campaigning
- Majlis ash-shura has only advisory powers

Saudi Arabia

- No elections to majlis ash-shura
- Majlis has no power to withdraw confidence, pass or block legislation.

Prospects for democracy

- Balance of power between ruling families and citizens
- Desire for democracy: Kuwaiti model vs. Dubai model