Polity IV Country Report 2010: Kuwait

Score:	2009	2010	Change
Polity:	-7	-7	0
Democ:	0	0	0
Autoc:	7	7	0
Durable:		46	
Tentative:		No	

Authority Trends, 1963-2010: Kuwait

SCODE	**KUW**	CCODE	**690**	Date of Report	**1 June 2011**

Polity IV Component Variables					
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP
3	1	2	3	4	2

Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)			
End Date	10 June 1990	Begin Date	6 November 1992

Polity Fragmentation: No

Constitution	11 October 1962
Executive(s)	Emir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah; ascended to the monarchy, 29 January 2006 Prime Minister Nasir Muhammad al-Ahmad al-Sabah; appointed by Emir, 7 February 2006; re-appointed 6 March 2007

Legislature	Unicameral:
	National Assembly (50 seats; directly elected, no political parties, all members are "independents"; note – all cabinet ministers are also *ex officio* members of the assembly; most recent elections, 16 May 2009)
	     Islamic Bloc (Sunni) (incl. Hadas): 13
	     Shia and Popular Action Bloc (opposition): 6
	     Liberals and Allies: 7
	     Popular Bloc: 3
	     Non-partisans: 21

Judiciary	High Court of Appeal

Narrative Description:[1]

Executive Recruitment: *Dual Executive: Ascription + Designation* **(2)**

Kuwait is a hereditary monarchy with a designated prime minister. Emirs from the al-Sabah family have ruled Kuwait for over two hundred years. Emir Sheikh Jabir, who has ruled since 1977, handpicks his prime minister. Up until 2003, the prime minister was also the crown prince. However, in July 2003 the Emir appointed his brother, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, to the post of prime minister. This marked

the first time since independence that the prime minister has not been the crown prince. Despite this formal transfer of power, for all practical purposes Sheikh Sabah, the former foreign minister, had been the country's de facto leader for years, as both the emir and the crown prince, Sheikh Saad al-Abdullah al-Sabah, had been in poor health for some time. Political observers note that this transfer of power may open the way to the appointment of prime ministers from outside the royal family in the future; separation of the royal family from the post of prime minister has been a key demand of political reformers inside Kuwait for years. Sheikh Jabir Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah died on 15 January 2006. He was succeeded by the Crown Prince, Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah. However, Sheikh Saad's poor health led to his simultaneous abdication and deposition by the Parliament. He was succeeded by Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir al-Sabah, the half-brother of the previous Emir, Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, who was sworn into office on 29 January 2006. Sheikh Sabah appointed Nasir Muhammad al-Ahmad al-Sabah, a member of the ruling family, to the post of prime minister on 7 February 2006.

Executive Constraints: *Slight to Moderate Limitations* **(3)**
The 1962 constitution provides for an elected legislative branch, however, it also permits the Emir to dissolve this body and rule by decree. On numerous occasions since independence (1976-81, 1986-92, and again briefly in 1999) the Emir has used his constitutional powers to disband the National Assembly. However, when the National Assembly is in session it actively debates and influences public policy, albeit under the close supervision of the Emir. The constitution empowers the National Assembly to overturn any emiri decrees made during periods of its dissolution. The National Assembly has used this power on numerous occasions. This power has been demonstrated most recently when the National Assembly rejected the Emir's decree (made during 1999 when he dissolved the legislative body) to allow women to vote and run for office. Thus, while the conservative-dominated National Assembly is largely a rubber stamp body, it is able to challenge executive authority from time-to-time. The judiciary remains strongly influenced by the executive branch but has some autonomy. In April 2001 the Constitutional Court dismissed a petition to grant full political rights to women despite efforts by the Emir to enact this reform. Despite the hopes of reformers, the leadership transition in 2006 did not result in a non-royal prime minister, and there have been no substantive changes in executive constraints.

Political Participation: *Restricted Competition* **(2)**
Kuwait is the only Arab state in the Persian Gulf with an elected legislature. While the 1999 legislative elections were relatively free in conduct, nevertheless, eighty-five percent of the population of Kuwait, including women, continues to be disenfranchised from the electoral process. Moreover, political parties remain banned and press censorship continues to be a problem. While no political parties are allowed in Kuwait, there are unofficial groups – "moderates" and "conservatives" – within the National Assembly. In legislative elections held in July 2003, the moderate reformers were dealt a significant blow when Islamists and conservatives gained a significant number of seats at their expense. Between 2003 and 2005 the issue of providing political rights to women was actively debated in the National Assembly between these two informal blocks. In May 2005, Kuwait approved a constitutional amendment that gives women full political rights. In June, Massouma al-Mubarak became the first female cabinet minister, taking control of the planning and administrative development portfolios. However, while fifty-seven percent of Kuwait's 340,000 registered voters are women, female turnout at the June 2006 parliamentary elections was estimated at a mere thirty-five percent. In those elections, however, members of the reformist bloc garnered an unprecedented victory, taking two-thirds of the National Assembly seats. Friction between the reformist parliament and the government, however, continued to increase until the government resigned on 17 March 2008, citing "obstructism." Sheikh Sabah dissolved parliament on March 19 and new parliamentary elections were held on 17 May 2008 in which Islamists made strong gains. Nasir Muhammad al-Ahmad al-Sabah was again appointed prime minister on May 28. Early elections to the National Assembly were held again on 16 May 2009 after the Emir had dissolved the Assembly on March 18 due to a standoff between the legislature and the executive over the latter's response to the global economic crisis. The 2009 elections were the third in less than three years. There are no officially recognized parties in Kuwait; candidates belong to political groups or lists, run as independents, or stand as representatives of their tribes. For the first time, (four) women were elected to the assembly.

In early Juanuary 2011 the prime minister survived a vote of no-confidence. This was the second time in a year that the Prime Minister survived such a vote in the Assembly. The opposition MPs that proposed the vote were angry over the decision of the government to violently crackdown on an anti-

government rally on 8 December 2010. Twenty-three MPs voted in favor of the motion while twenty-two voted against and one abstained. Twenty-five votes were needed for the motion to pass. The opposition has accused the government of suppressing freedom and seeking to limit the constitutional powers of the legislature.