

**“KUWAIT ELECTIONS:
A CHANCE FOR REAL CHANGE?”
SUMMARY OF A ‘GULF INTERNATIONAL FORUM’ WEBINAR**



20 SEPTEMBER 2022



OVERVIEW

The Gulf International Forum (GIF) held a webinar with a number of selected speakers to address the issue and circumstances of the upcoming Kuwaiti elections planned for 28 September 2022. The panel of speakers in this webinar consisted of the following:

1. **DR. GHANIM AL-NAJJAR** (*Professor of Political Science, Kuwait University; President, Alsalam Centre for Strategic and Development Studies*)
2. **DR. DANIEL L. TAVANA** (*Research Fellow, Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse (IAST) at Université Toulouse 1 Capitole*)
3. **MOHAMMAD KHULAIF ALTHUNAYYAN** (*Founder and President of Torous Center for Middle East Studies*)
4. **DR. COURTNEY FREER** (*Provost’s Postdoctoral Fellow, Emory University; Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Gulf International Forum*)

Previously, the Amir of Kuwait had announced an Amiri decree to dissolve the country’s parliament, indicating that it would be resumed after early elections. The Amiri decree to dissolve parliament and hold new elections was due mainly to enduring tensions between the legislative and executive branches, similar in many ways to previous political clashes that hindered the country’s political life and undermined its public functions.

The latest decree marks the tenth time that the Kuwaiti leader has dissolved parliament since the country’s first elections. Nonetheless, many Kuwaitis are hopeful that the upcoming elections will bring a serious change and lead to better collaboration between the parliament and the government.

Several recent government decisions have led to optimism in this regard, including the appointment of a new prime minister, Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf al-Sabah, government efforts to end “tribal primaries” that unfairly allow

tribes to coordinate their votes, and efforts to balance the relationship between the executive and legislative branches.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMENTS¹

Although the speakers were generally of the view that there would be no government interference in the course of the elections (as well as that of the next Speaker and other key parliamentarians) – something that had been explicitly promised by the Crown Prince in July, it was not thought likely that any serious change in any event would take place. This was due to the fact that quite apart from much needed reforms in the judiciary and the legal system, the current huge bureaucracy that very powerful was unlikely to easily concede on some of its privileges.

It was noted however that some important changes in terms of easing or facilitating voter registration had taken place, which in turn would probably increase the number of eligible voters by some 25%, thereby making early predictions about the final outcome more difficult. Nonetheless, it was thought that at the end of the day, some 3 or 4 women might be elected to the new parliament.

Reference was also made by the speakers to the new ‘Values Document’ released by Islamist forces seeking to impose (if they can) new laws governing social behaviour and conditions that would inevitably lead to great polarization between them and the more liberal/secularist quarters in Kuwait.



¹ The webinar was very unspecific in addressing matters and only skirted around a number of issues without providing an in-depth understanding.