

## Kuwait

Kuwait is a constitutional, hereditary emirate ruled by the Al-Sabah family. The 1962 constitution grants the emir executive authority. The emir shares legislative authority with the elected National Assembly, which can propose legislation independently and must ratify all laws promulgated in the country. The assembly also appoints a prime minister, who then proposes candidates for ministerial positions subject to approval by the emir. The constitution permits dissolution of the elected National Assembly by emiri decree, although it also stipulates that new elections must be held within 60 days of any such dissolution. The emir exercised his constitutional right to dissolve parliament on May 21, and elections were held on June 29. The National Assembly passed a law in 2005 granting women the right to vote and run for office. Women exercised these rights for the first time on April 4 in a race for a vacant seat on the Municipal Council, and again during the June parliamentary elections. Most members of the military and police do not have the right to vote. While not strictly illegal, political parties were effectively banned by the government. Despite the lack of political parties and some reports of vote-buying by both the government and certain candidates, the year's elections were considered generally free and fair by local observers and the press. The National Assembly is able to influence or overturn government decisions. One example was its passage of a major parliamentary redistricting law in July that the government had originally opposed. Kuwaiti law provides for an independent judiciary and the right to a fair trial; however, the emir appoints all judges, and the Ministry of Justice must approve the renewal of most judicial appointments. Civilian authorities maintained effective control of the security forces. A new press law passed in March enabled the licensing of new daily newspapers for the first time in decades. Freedom of worship was protected, although Shi'a Muslims and Christian groups faced difficulties in obtaining permission to build adequate places for worship. Expatriate laborers continued to face significant violations of their human rights due to the country's labor laws and practices. Trafficking in persons and forced labor continued to be a significant human rights issue in the country.

The U.S. strategy for promoting human rights and democracy in the country was multifaceted, involving study tours to the United States, U.S. government outreach, and digital video conferences between Kuwaiti and American students, journalists, subject experts, and government officials. The United States worked to instill the values of democracy and participatory civil society, especially among youth and women, through support of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), participation in the International Visitor Leadership Programs, and educational and training programs. A major focus of the U.S. government's activities during the year was raising awareness about human trafficking in society and among government officials.

During the year the United States took a number of diplomatic and programmatic steps to promote democracy. Three participants went to the United States on a U.S. Government-funded program that helped emerging leaders gain a better understanding of and appreciation for the democratic political process. The program taught young people about American social and political values through a combination of academic study, meetings, lectures, and roundtable discussions with American civic leaders and academics. Students also learned about civic participation through experiential learning, community service, and meeting and engaging with American citizens. A similar program based in the country exposed young Kuwaitis to

transparent systems of commerce, rule of law, and participatory governance. English language microscholarship grants were awarded to 115 high school students and helped to instill the values of democracy and civic participation through in-class elections and community service projects.

During the year women voted and ran for office for the first time in the country's history. The United States, in cooperation with nongovernmental partners, provided training to women and men on campaign strategies, including platform development, working with the media, and advocacy. A U.S.-funded program allowed female candidates to have individual sessions with political campaign experts to plan their campaigns. The training also brought a female parliamentarian from another Arab country to share her experiences with Kuwaiti women running for office for the first time. The United States supported the production of nonpartisan radio and television spots and printed materials encouraging women to vote. Approximately 58 percent of eligible female voters voted, but no female candidates won their races. U.S. funding was used during the year to conduct follow-up polling on what contributed to voters' decisions and to see how political views were evolving, which will be a valuable tool for candidates who wish to run issues-based campaigns in future elections.

The U.S. Government engaged in ongoing and frequent discussions with Kuwaiti parliamentarians and government officials to encourage further progress in the development of democracy in the country.

The U.S. strategy to encourage media freedom has been to implement programs that increase reporters' exposure to U.S. counterparts and encourage objective reporting on people, policies, and events. During the year the U.S. Government arranged for two female reporters, one from the state news agency and one from an Arabic-language daily, to participate in a program that explored the role of a free press in democracy and investigated how the media and other entities influence the crafting of foreign policy in the United States.

Another U.S. objective was to support the Kuwaiti Journalists Association's efforts to improve its capacity to provide training for journalists and become a more effective advocate for the profession of journalism. During the country's election season, the United States arranged for an American journalism professor to conduct a two-day workshop on accurate and fair coverage of election campaigns. Twenty-seven print and broadcast journalists attended and learned about ethics, responsibility to the public, how to conduct an interview, and how to present both sides of an issue. Follow-up workshops were conducted later in the year that emphasized basic reporting skills, the role of the media in a democracy, and effective coverage of the parliament. A separate workshop on the role of the media in a democracy was conducted for reporters of the state news agency. These workshops gave journalists and editors tools for better reporting and also helped bring to light the limits imposed on journalists in the country by the new press and publication law's broadly worded restrictions on reporting certain issues.

NGOs in the country operate in a difficult environment, since they are prohibited by law from engaging in overt political behavior. To strengthen the country's NGO community, the United States funded a number of programs through small grants. In one project, a local NGO carried out a study on how the government's budgeting affects women. Another NGO conducted a survey that measured support for

women's political rights. In the interest of strengthening civil society, the United States awarded a grant to a local group to produce a series of civic-minded films by young filmmakers. Another U.S.-funded NGO created a summer entrepreneurial and civic action training program for youth.

Several U.S.-funded projects supported the rule of law in the country through International Visitor Leadership Program exchanges. The United States hosted a legal counselor who specializes in women's and human rights issues to learn about the U.S. legal system and to observe it in practice. The program stressed legal frameworks to safeguard the rule of law and fundamental human rights and promoted judicial reform. Another program provided young women in business and law the skills and experience needed to help them grow as professionals and advocate for legal reforms.

The United States promoted religious freedom and tolerance through diplomacy and exchange programs. U.S. officials met with government officials and various religious groups to encourage the government to allow religious groups to establish places of worship adequate to serve their expanding congregations. U.S. officials also worked with the government to send a Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs official to five representative cities in the United States on an International Visitors Leadership Program entitled "Promoting Interfaith Dialogue." The project showed the scope of religious freedom in the United States and encouraged the promotion of tolerance and interreligious understanding. The participant met with counterparts of different religious backgrounds and discussed issues related to their vocation.

Expatriate laborers, who form the majority of the country's labor force, face significant problems, particularly household workers, since they are not covered by labor laws. U.S. officials made public addresses concerning the need for the country to address the problems domestic workers face. The United States implemented a program to raise awareness among foreign workers of their rights and duties. U.S. officials worked closely with labor-sending countries to compose text for a nine-language brochure and print media campaign publicizing information to help expatriate workers avoid some of the common problems that befall them. The United States engaged in ongoing and frequent discussions with high-ranking and working-level government officials, in addition to conducting outreach with media outlets to raise awareness of the problems faced by foreign workers in the country.