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## Kuwait and the art of survival in the era of post-Arab Spring fragility

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### Extended Abstract

The impact of the Arab Spring on the dynamics of political society in the Arab world created a two-fold pattern of transformations: states undergoing structural transformations (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, Syria) and societies witnessing limited transformations (Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Algeria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman). These events not only transformed the regional power architecture, but also had far-reaching geopolitical consequences, and the origins of these transformations, which were rooted in Arab structural crises, reflected the dialectical interaction of local grievances and transnational dynamics. This research seeks to answer the important question of why protest movements in Kuwait were ineffective in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Therefore, within the framework of the theoretical foundations of social constructionism, it must be acknowledged that although

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endogenous variables of sectarian conflicts, the bio-legal crisis of the Bedoons, the political hybrid structure, and exogenous factors of waves of regional unrest caused the emergence of synergistic mechanisms of protests in Kuwait, and although internal variables provided the basis for disharmony; transnational components played a decisive role in shaping the process of protest actions and the direction of revolutionary discourses and failed to bring about a revolution in Kuwait. This research, which was developed based on the descriptive-analytical method and the use of library and document collection tools, indicates that although Kuwait's foreign policy was somewhat neutral; It benefits from the importance of working with the United States to ensure the stability of the region and protect it from any potential security threats, whether from regional conflicts or foreign interventions, as the United States has focused on strengthening its relations with the Gulf states, including Kuwait, through security and diplomatic cooperation and supporting regional defense against any threat.

The Arab Spring was a wave of protests and uprisings in late 2010 that spread across the Muslim world, challenging long-standing authoritarian regimes. The movement began with widespread dissatisfaction with political repression, corruption, and economic problems, particularly high unemployment and declining living standards. Kuwait, meanwhile, was affected by these developments and experienced significant political unrest during the Arab Spring, accompanied by widespread protests and demands for a process of government reform. These movements occurred mainly in 2011-2012 and were rooted in public dissatisfaction with corruption, lack of political accountability, and demands for constitutional reform. Among the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, Kuwait has a remarkable history of political liberalization and a gradual transition to democracy, which began in the 1990s and has had a relatively stable process, but it faces serious structural obstacles. Kuwait was the first country in the region to have an elected and appointed parliament and a constitution stipulating certain freedoms and civil rights after gaining independence in the early 1960s.

Constructivism: emerged as an important theoretical approach in international relations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly after the Cold War. This theory argues that many aspects of international relations are constructed through shared ideas, norms, and identities rather than being determined solely by material forces. The identities and interests of states and other actors are not fixed, but are shaped through social interactions. This view challenges traditional theories such as realism

and liberalism, which often view state behavior as driven by material interests or power dynamics.

This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method and using library resources, official documents, and field data. Data collection tools include:

- Content analysis of diplomatic documents
- Interviews with experts in international relations
- An examination of the political and social conditions in Kuwait during and after the Arab Spring.

Political reforms in Kuwait over the past 14 years have played a dual role in stabilizing the state, amid a constant tension between parliamentary constitutionalism and traditional dynastic authority. On the one hand, measures such as increasing the share of women in parliament (to 6 seats in 2022) and strengthening oversight institutions have strengthened the legitimacy of the system. By attracting the support of the urban middle class and educated elite, these reforms contained the instability caused by the Arab Spring; Kuwait was the only Gulf state to continue holding regular elections during this period. However, the showy nature of some reforms, especially after 2014, has deepened structural crises. The repeated suspension of parliament (11 times from 2006 to 2023) on security or legal grounds has not only created legislative deadlock but also exacerbated the discursive gap between the government and civil society. Kuwait's most important challenges after the Arab Spring: The community of al-Badun, Communications and media - organizing protesters and conveying messages, Widespread structural corruption, The role of social movements in Kuwait since 2006, The anti-oppression Islamist discourse of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Socialization of Arab people from each other and regional influences, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as an opportunity for democracy, The impact of the Arab Spring revolutions on Kuwait's national security.

The findings show that:

### **Domestic factors**

**Economic discontent:** Economic problems and corruption fueled public protests, using economic demands as a pretext for demonstrations.

**Political movements:** The unification of various parties against the government and calls for the prime minister's removal represented a broad political movement.

Disputes in governance: Internal tensions among the political elite and family disputes within the ruling family led to political instability.

Electoral changes: Reforms in electoral districts, which protesters believed were a threat to democracy, increased tensions.

Support for democracy: Kuwaitis are proud of their democratic institutions and see corruption as a threat to these institutions, a sentiment that has united the opposition.

### **External factors**

Presence of youth: Educated and active youth on social media played a key role in organizing protests in the region and in Kuwait.

Role of global powers: Western countries, especially the United States, supported authoritarian regimes instead of effectively supporting democracy, which contributed to the failure of the movements.

Political and economic impacts: Inefficient political management and economic inequalities in various countries exacerbated dissatisfaction and, as a result, the emergence of uprisings.

Israel had a significant influence on the decisions of Western countries to support authoritarian regimes in the region and prevent democratic developments.

In Kuwait, popular demonstrations due to dissatisfaction with the government were suppressed, and the United States, instead of directly intervening, supported the governments to prevent fundamental changes. These policies increased tensions and public dissatisfaction. US cooperation with Kuwait during the Arab Spring did not have much impact on political changes in the country. Kuwait, as one of the relatively free states in the Persian Gulf, attempted to avoid unrest by adopting a neutral approach and maintaining stability. The United States focused on protecting its own interests rather than directly intervening. As a result, political changes in Kuwait were largely driven by domestic pressures and social discontent rather than external influences.

**Key words:** Post-Arab Spring, Political Developments, Peace and Stability, Kuwait.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.