

CHANGING A SYSTEM FROM WITHIN:
APPLYING THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL
POLICY CHANGES IN KUWAIT

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ABSTRACT

Political legitimacy is a fundamental problem in the modern state. According to Habermas (1973), current legitimation methods are losing the sufficiency needed to support political systems and decisions. In response, Habermas (1987) developed the theory of communicative action as a new method for establishing political legitimacy. The current study applies the communicative action theory to Kuwait's current political transformation. This study addresses the nature of the foundation of Kuwait, the regional situation, the internal political context, and the current economic challenges. The specific political transformation examined in this study is a national development project known as *Vision of 2035* supported by the Amir as the head of the state. The project aims to develop a third of Kuwait's land and five islands as special economic zones (SEZ). The project requires new legislation that would fundamentally change the political and economic identity of the country. The study applies the communicative action theory in order to achieve a mutual understanding between different groups in Kuwait regarding the project's features and the legislation required to achieve them.

للحالمين قبل النوم ... العاملين بعده

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research is primarily guided by the theory of communicative action, devised by the German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas. This study aims to examine the aforementioned theory as a new method for gaining political legitimacy in favor of fundamental policy change. One of the main purposes of this research, therefore, is to test the principles of the theory and measure its effectiveness not only in normal policy-making, but also in the foundational sociopolitical shifts that occur in governmental systems, all from the perspective of legitimacy.

Geographically, this study limits its scope to Kuwait, where the political system is hybrid in nature and complicated to the level that small changes have become very difficult, even for the Amir of Kuwait, who holds the highest position in the political and social systems (Ross, 2012). The political system of Kuwait is partially democratic and partially monarchic, or a *Sheikhdom*.

Its economy had fallen victim to aimless capitalist and socialist legislation (Al Sabah, 2013). This loss of political and economic identity has negatively impacted the citizens' perception of the legislative model and its magnitude (Al Sabah, 2013; Herb, 2014). As a result, Kuwait's political model has been perceived as deficient (Hertog, 2010, p. 278).

Recently, the government has decided to initiate a strategic planning phase to reinvigorate the Kuwaiti commercial environment, inspired by the Amir's vision to develop a commercial-free zone(s) in five of the Kuwaiti Islands that make up one-third of total size of the country. This project proposes for the islands to be exempt from

governmental laws and control as a free economic zone. The proposal calls for an independent authority to manage and develop its own regulations based on the need for a new international region, similar to Hong Kong or Singapore. The new transformation is facing many challenges politically, economically, and culturally. The study devised the principles that are essential to achieving the goals of the new plan in Kuwait. These principles were identified through interviews with the decision-makers who are responsible for the project. These principles constitute the main features of the project, without which the project cannot be implemented. Moreover, the identified principles are expected to cause a major political conflict. The expected conflict is not motivated by the project itself. However, the project recalls many historical incidents that challenge its implementation.

Research Problem

The Arabian Peninsula has historically been known as a static, high context, and conservative culture (Hall, 1977). Moreover, between the 1920s and early 1970s, the region was transformed from a number of poor and dependent British protectorates and colonies to one of the wealthiest sovereign nations without civil and democratic foundations (Alyousifi, 2014a; Herb, 2014; Yom, 2016)

Kuwait, however, is partially exceptional because of the nature of its establishment in addition to the early educational and civic movements influenced by Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon. This advancement was also underlined by the highly commercial influence on the political decision-making process, carried out by economic figures who sought to exclude the younger nouveau riche members of the ruling family from commercial competition. All of these factors combined gave birth to the

constitutional Kuwaiti model. Looking over the long term, the fact that the local constitutional dimensions emerged from sociopolitical and economic friction to begin with has resulted in the current problem of legitimacy in Kuwait.

Kuwait's current political system is based on a constitution instituted in 1961 that should have been reviewed after three years for more democratic gains, as stipulated by the constitution (Alyousifi, 2014a; Herb, 2001). However, the constitution has yet to be reviewed. The reason for this is that the constitution requires the Amir's approval for any constitutional changes, a condition that has blocked any hopes for change (Alyousifi, 2014b). The constitutional status, political conflict, and cultural context have all collectively conceived the current political system in Kuwait. The resultant system is a hybrid of democratic principles and monarchic control, but not an efficient one, straddling a confusing line that causes it to be civic but not liberal, and constitutional but not democratic (Alsabah, 2013; Herb, 2001; Ross, 2012).

As a result, many substantial flaws have emerged that cannot be remedied by politicians from within the system. In fact, improvements to any aspect of public life are almost impossible without corruption or foreign pressure. For example, basic rights such as a bill establishing women's political rights failed to pass several times from 1973 until 2005, when a bill was finally passed. The day prior to the vote, it did not seem as though the bill would pass; however, many conservative members of the National Assembly who announced their rejection of the bill changed their minds about the bill on voting day (Alawneh, 2005). This incident, and many other incidents, was perceived as a sign of the corruption in the political system. Public discussion about corruption has become commonplace.

In short, Kuwait is not an absolute monarchy—however, it is also not an authentic democracy. Kuwaitis have in general enjoyed a good margin of freedom and political participation, especially in comparison with their neighbors. In order to solve the problem of a lack of decision-making for the public benefit, we either have to move towards a constitutional monarchy where the political power would be dissolved from the ruling family, or to take a step back and be an absolute monarchy where all decisions can be made by one man in accordance with Kuwait's neighbors, or at least create our own efficient system that can be described as democratic. Currently, all options are facing many challenges due to numerous reasons that shall be elaborated upon later.

Taking all this into consideration, the goal of this research is to apply the communicative action theory of Habermas to the Kuwaiti case, where legitimacy is needed for fundamental political decisions that cannot be made under the current system. Communicative action goes beyond social contracts, votes, and legal complications and ventures into a discussion that achieves mutual understanding. This, in turn, would deem the theory compatible with the socially tight culture, in which problems could be solved socio-politically, outside of the official political system.

Thus far, recent research on legitimacy has focused on the perceived legitimacy of decisions and policies that already have been established (Habermas, 1979; Chang, Jacobson & Zhang, 2013). However, this research aims to address the problem of legitimacy of a potential decision, by offering pre-decision discussion to achieve a mutual understanding about a new policy without making any major alterations to the new policy. Thus, the research will attempt to solve an actual problem in addition to testing the theory, as well as to provide a new sub-model for the theory.

My own personal position in Kuwait supported my role as a mediator in this research. I belong to a middle-class family that arrived to Kuwait with the early settlers. I have very good relationships with most Kuwaiti politicians and decision makers. These positive relationships with myriad groups are a result of my previous job as journalist and my interests as a social activist. Up until the time of this dissertation, I have had no affiliation with any political party in Kuwait, and I have had very limited professional relationships with a few members of the ruling family. Therefore, I believe that my moderate socio-political position was an advantage in this study.

Limitations

This research focuses on a development project that would fundamentally change and challenge the traditional approach of governmental policy making in Kuwait. In addition, the project might include some features that could challenge cultural religious norms. Applying the principles of communicative action theory, this project promotes equal discussion based on facts, rightfulness that depends on agreement and trustworthiness (Habermas, 1975), as the theory suggests. In addition, the proposed project involves three different layers of the population: the public, the political body –members of the National Assembly and political parties– and decision makers such as non-elected official, ministers, and advisors. These three layers represent different levels of perception that could be significantly influential in the decision-making process. For instance, the public might perceive the new policy as a governmental plan to privatize the public sector or sell public assets, while the politicians in return might perceive the policy as a corrupt project or as intimidation due to its potential to decentralize their control and management. Similarly, the decision makers could perceive any rejection or major

alteration as a challenge to their vision that can threaten the economy. Immediate change of such perceptions could prove difficult.

Theoretical Framework

The notion of the political system as an authority is inspired by the role of the “royal judge” (Habermas, 1976, p. 179), in which norms are recognized as the legal reference (Habermas, 1976). Within this concept, a society empowers an authoritative body to intervene by exercising its power whenever the integrity or normative determined identity of the society is threatened. Thus, legitimacy is a universally necessary condition for political institutions in order to practice their power and gain obedience (Simmons, 2001). The concept of legitimacy is not related to legal domination (Habermas, 1984); however, it is effective in highlighting the recognition potential and validity of the political order. The worthiness of a political order gains its value from the citizens’ perception that the political order represents the just and the right (Easton 1979; Habermas, 1975). Since legitimacy is not related to legal domination, it is also not limited to modern states. Historically, legitimacy has been gained in many different forms, whether theocratically or civilly. In other words, legitimacy has existed for as long as we as human beings have interacted with, managed, and practiced power.

Communicative action theory

Communicative action theory was developed in effort to solve what Habermas (1973) called the legitimation crisis, particularly in the modern state. His theoretical evaluation of the legitimation grounds supported his argument about a conflict in the structure of the modern state between social welfare responsibilities of mass democracies and the nature of the capitalist economy. Habermas aimed to provide alternative grounds

of legitimacy that rely on language as the nucleus for cognition, understanding, consensus, and reaching an agreement (Austin, 1975; Bühler, 2011; Habermas, 1984; Habermas, 1975). In his early work, *Communication and The Evolution of Society*, Habermas (1979) addressed communicative action theory as universal pragmatics that “identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding” (p. 1).

Moreover, Habermas integrated Bühler’s theory of language functions with the methods of the analytic theory of meaning as the centerpiece of communicative action theory. Habermas (1979) argued that if we could generalize the concept of validity beyond the truth of propositions and identify validity on the pragmatic level of utterances, we could achieve understanding. Moreover, Habermas (1984) dissected the concept of “one world” into an “external world” and “an internal world” (p. 51). While the external world contains the objective or material reality, social worlds or the internal world is the inner perception of the external world that differs from one person to another (Habermas, 1987, p 127). Thus, the concept of external and internal worlds would allow me to integrate and understand, in addition to facts and figures, the different perceptions about cultural and historical perspectives as vital aspects of the discussion.

Therefore, the corresponding validity claim that consists of truth, rightness, and sincerity would serve as guidance to distinguish the speech acts that include theoretical perspectives, modes of language, and functions of language (Habermas, 1975; Habermas, 1984). For instance, the function of speech acts is to establish interpersonal relations, specifically those in reference to something in the common social world (Habermas, 1990; Searle, 1969). In addition to language and the social world, Habermas (1987) and

Luhmann (1979) rely on the situational context of the life-world that identifies system integration, social integration, and the connections between them.

Research concept

As mentioned earlier, the general impression is that the political system in Kuwait is no longer sufficient (Herb, 2014; Ross, 2012), from the perspectives of all involved: the major players in the ruling family AlSabah, the elite such as merchants and politicians, and the populace. However, the unknown element is to what extent and in which direction should political reform be taken. Hypothetically, many voices are calling for a democratic transformation, which could be challenging (Herb, 2014). Moreover, it is not yet known what the people want nor what the gap is between the desires of the citizens and that of the authority, nor the achievement potential of either.

It also seems that addressing the political system as a whole in Kuwait might not be feasible. Therefore, I decided to limit the scope of this research to a single project that has received unanimous attention locally, but one that is also problematic in nature. This national project will contextualize the larger local problem regarding political legitimacy. In other words, it is evident that agreeing on the existence of an economic and political problem does not necessarily equate to agreeing on the solution. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation, is to apply Habermas' theory of communicative action to the case of Kuwait's 2035 development vision that concerns the developing of the five islands that make up one-third of the local land mass, by applying the communicative orientation to reach an understanding in the following order.

1. Adopting McKnight and Chervany's (2001) conceptualization and sub-categories of trust, are there doubts about trustworthiness of the political system in Kuwait? What

are the trusted and distrusted aspects of the political system among the Kuwaiti people? For example, is there distrust about the very structure of the political system? Is there an institutional-based distrust—that is, no structural assurance for positive outcomes? Is the distrust inherent to the historical experience of competence and integrity? Or, is there a combination of all types of distrust to different degrees? Exploring the aspect of trust is similar to taking an x-ray that shows the broken bones in the system. If people perceive that the structure of the political system is causing most of the problems, then the dialog should be narrowed to achieve a mutual understanding of the structure rather than any other aspect.

2. What is the scope of political reform that people seek? Is it a fundamental sort of reform? If so, are they able to digest fundamental changes if there is a feeling of distrust? And, if the Kuwaiti public is principally resistant to fundamental reform, will the alternative of partial reform be satisfactory, at least on temporary terms?
3. With awareness of the fact that the current situation is indeed taxing for all parties, one needs to ask: to what length are all parties willing to commit to achieve mutual understanding? To answer this question, I investigate what is preventing them from currently achieving mutual understanding. Is it a deeply rooted sense of distrust, or an issue regarding the details of the proposed policies?
4. If this triangle of distrust, economic deficiency, and political impotence is as impactful as speculated in this study, then one should ask: can communicative action provide new grounds to achieve an agreement about the proposed solution?

5. How do different groups perceive the proposed project? This question is important to investigate whether or not the acceptance of the project is related to a general tendency toward acceptance or rejection, or about the details of the project. Such investigation is critical because if I am dealing with tendency of rejection, the discussion should focus on the rejection itself rather than negotiating technical details of the project.
6. To what degree is Habermas's concept of mutual understanding applicable to mediating these kinds of discussions? Habermas conceptualized mutual understanding according to three main principles: assuring truthfulness in terms of intentions, addressing the true presuppositions in terms of the normative context, and choosing the right speech acts in order to avoid misunderstanding (Habermas, 1976, 1984). Therefore, as I am testing the theory, I must consider to what level these principles are applicable. In addition, what challenges might the mediator and the different parties face when trying to apply those principles?

CHAPTER 2

KUWAIT

The State of Kuwait is a country located on the northwestern side of the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia borders Kuwait to the south and the west, Iraq to the north, and the Persian/Arabian Gulf and Iran to the east. The AlSabah family has ruled the country since its establishment as a Sheikhdome State in 1752 (Casey, 2007, p. 29). The term *Sheikh* is used to represent a high social status such as tribal leadership or wealthy merchants. After the emergence of the modern states in the Arabian Peninsula, the Sheikh title became limited to the members of the ruling families as a political status. When a member of the ruling family becomes the head of the state his official title is *Amir*.

Kuwait has a hybrid political system. It is not fully a Sheikhdome state and not completely democratic. Kuwait political system consisted of the *Amir* –ruler from AlSabah family, *Wali-Alahd*, –the crown prince, *Majlis Alummah* –the National Assembly, and the government. The Amir has to choose the crown prince during the first year of his rule. Beside the legislative duties, the members of National Assembly homage the crown prince by voting for trust or they vote for one of three nominees if they reject the Amir’s first candidate. The Amir is recognized as the father of all authorities. The Amir hires the cabinet, diplomats, and judges. More details about the political system will be discussed in the following chapter.

Kuwait’s constitution insisted clearly that Islam is the State’s religion and it is considered as “a main source of legislation” (Constitute, (n.d.), pp. 2). Therefore, many laws in Kuwait are associated with the Islamic laws and principles. For instance, courts in

Kuwait are adopting the Islamic laws for personal status law and family law. Alcohol, gambling, and promiscuous relationships are prohibited.

Kuwait, slightly larger than Hawaii, has been known as a trade harbor that links East Asia with the Middle East and Europe since the 18th century (Alrushaid, 1926, 1978). The total population of Kuwait is around 4.5 million people, 1.3 million of whom are Kuwaitis and 3.1 million are non-Kuwaitis (Public Authority for Civil Information, 2017). According to the United States Department of State (2007), the majority of Kuwaitis are Muslim Sunni, while Muslim Shi'a make up approximately 25% of the population, and about 350 Kuwaitis are Christians. Women in Kuwait enjoy equal rights in most sectors of public life. In 2006, women gained political rights, and in 2009 Kuwait swore in the first batch of policewomen. However, Kuwaiti women are still fighting for housing and citizenship rights because these privileges are exclusively given to men as paterfamilias. Even if women have the right to participate in political life and the workforce, the number of women activists is much lower than men involved in the public life.

There are around 100,000 stateless individuals living in Kuwait. The stateless issue is cumulating since 1965 where groups from Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Jordan hid their identification documents in order to be registered as Kuwaitis (Alhajeri, 2014). Kuwait government insisted that only Kuwaitis were in 1965 census deserve the citizenships therefore, all undocumented people recognized as stateless and have no right to obtain citizenship (Alhajeri, 2014).

The Establishment

The aim of the following section is to conceptualize the connection between the current socio-political context of Kuwait and the circumstances of its establishment by reviewing specific historical incidents that impacted current political life.

The nature of the global economy before the invention of railroads and airplanes was dependent on two main elements: having access to natural resources by controlling as much land as possible around the world and controlling trade routes to secure the transportation of the natural resources (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alyousifi, 2014a; Alqasimi, 2004). *Utub* or *Alutub* is an alliance that was formed in the early 14th century and consists of the four main tribes of the Arabian Peninsula; the current ruling family of Kuwait, or the *Alsabah*; the current ruling family in Bahrain, or the *Al-Khalifa*; the *Al-jalahma*, the *Al-Bin Ali*, and other families. The *Alutub* migrated from their homeland *Najd* in the middle of the Arabian Peninsula in an attempt to find a new home (Alrushaid, 1926, 1978; Alyousifi, 2014a; Alqasimi, 2004). During that time, a select few Arab tribes and families, as well as the Ottoman Empire, controlled the eastern and western sides of the Persian Gulf for trade purposes. Most of the conflicts, battles, and migration of the area were related to diving for pearls, trading with India and Africa, and controlling customs and transportation (Alazami, 1991; Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alsabah, 1989; Alyousifi, 2014a).

After a lengthy journey of around 120 years, the *Alutub*'s migration concluded at the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula, currently known as the west coast of Iran. Here, trade routes were controlled by native Arab settlers, the *Alhoula*, who also lived on the Persian side of the Gulf. After many bloody battles between the *Alutub* and *Alhoula*,

towards the end of the 14th century the *Alutub* decided to emigrate from the eastern side of the Persian Gulf as a result of an alliance that had emerged between the Arab *Alhoula* and Persian forces against the new settlers (Alansari, 2010; Alyousifi, 2014a; Alqasimi, 2004). This alliance was stamped with sectarian and racial undertones as it was seen as the Persian Shi'a versus the Arab Sunni tribes. The *Alutub* escaped to *Basra*, the famous city at the top of the Persian Gulf that was under the Ottoman Empire at that time (Alsabah, 1989).

After a few months, the Ottoman governor in *Basra* received a letter from the Ottoman magistrate in Istanbul asking him to reject the *Alutub's* request to settle in *Basra* due the existing conflict between the Persian and Ottoman Empire on the one side, and the British and the Dutch on the other side. The Ottomans did not want to escalate this conflict by hosteling the Persians' enemy (Alansari, 2010; Alyousifi, 2014a; Alqasimi, 2004). However, the Ottomans suggested that the *Alutub* settle in a town called *Um-Qasr*, located on the southern side of *Basra* and not under control of the Ottoman Empire. This was the beginning of the establishment of the State of Kuwait in 1613 (Alazami, 1991; Khazaal, 1962).

After settling in *Um-Qasr* on the north side of Kuwait, the four tribes agreed that *Sabah Bin Abdullah Alsabah* and his family would act as the political ruler of the new state (Alsabah, 1989; Alyousifi, 2014a; Alqasimi, 2004; Tétreault, 1995). The other tribes were to be responsible for trade and business development under one condition: that *Alsabah* must consult all the state matters with them following the Islamic principle of *Shura* (Alyousifi, 2014a; Yanai, 2014). That is, the ruler cannot make any decision without consulting with merchants, notables, scholars, and religious figures. Soon after,

Al-khalifah moved to Qatar and then to Bahrain, establishing each as its own state, though power was still mainly under Alsabah family and Kuwaiti merchant control (Alsabah, 1984; Alqasimi, 2004; Yanai, 2014).

A narration of the establishment of the State of Kuwait is important to my research because it influences the current social, political, and foreign affairs in many ways. For instance, in terms of social relationships, most of the *Alutub*'s families belong to the tribe *Eniza*, and the Alutub is considered as one of the most notable families of the same tribe (Alsabah, 1989). The historical familial and political connections between the Alsabah family and the *Al-khalifah* of Bahrain and *AL-Saud* of Saudi Arabia have impacted the current political landscape in a way that will be clarified later.

However, the fact that Kuwait was established as a center point for global trade routes meant it was able to communicate with other cultures, thereby reshaping Kuwait's lore to be more progressive compared to its neighbors. The British author and traveler James Silk Buckingham visited Kuwait in 1816. He insisted that Graine or Kooete (former names of present-day Kuwait), was an independent state by that time while other neighborhood states were under foreign control, he said:

It seems always to have preserved its independence too, even at the time when Ormuz, Muscat, Bahrein, Lahsa, and even Kateef and Bussorah, which two last were garrisoned by Turks, were assailed by the Portuguese arms, and they still bear the reputation of being the freest and the bravest people throughout the gulf (Buckingham, 1830, p. 314-315).

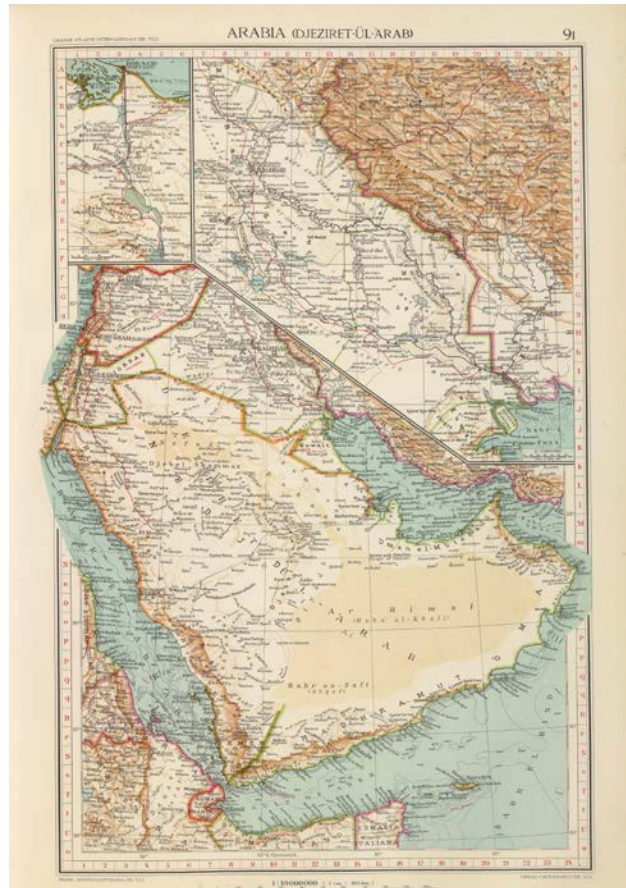


Figure 1. A map from David Rumsey Historical Map Collection (1929). Because it shows Jordan's and Iraq's borders and kept Kuwait's old borders, I believe it was drawn between 1900 and 1921, during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and before the Al-Aqeer.

The uniqueness of Kuwaiti culture can be attributed to the fact that it is highly influenced by Indian, Persian, and British cultures, reflected in its food, vocabulary, and folklore. Saudi Arabia, in contrast, is marked by a ruling political group and capital city located in the middle of the desert with a very limited access to foreign cultures.

Furthermore, the Al-Sabah family gained their legitimacy by being chosen by the community rather than fighting the local tribes for power. In addition, the agreement that the Al-Sabah be in charge of politics and national security while the merchants are responsible for improving the economy and the state budget distributed the power between several groups rather than monopolizing the power in the hands of one family

(Casey, 2007). The third element contributing to the legitimacy of the Alsabah family was that their rule was foundationally based on deliberation with the community. In contrast, the ruling families in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Qatar mounted the throne after bloody battles with the past rulers, tribes, and the communities (Alrasheed, 1997). Thus, Kuwait, since its establishment, has always been a unique case compared to its neighbors (Tétreault, 1995). However, this uniqueness was not always advantageous. Many crises and conflicts, for example, have emerged with the Wahhabis, the radical religious group that has a pact with Al-Saud in Saudi Arabia to unite the Arabian Peninsula, the Ottoman Empire, and Iraq.

Kuwait and its Neighbors

In this section, I will limit my narration to the historical relationships between Kuwait and its three neighbors—Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran—as each country interacts with Kuwait from a different perspective. For instance, Kuwait’s political openness might concern Saudi Arabia, while its political independence has been a concern for many Iraqi regimes. Iran, on the other hand, perceives Kuwait’s democracy as a tool and Kuwait as central point from which to expand its power in the region. Thus, I will describe Kuwait’s relationships with its neighbors and how that might impact local policy-making.

Saudi Arabia

Prior to 1740, the Arabian Peninsula had two internationally recognized states, Kuwait and Oman (Abu-Hakma, 1984). The remainder of the lands were controlled by tribes and families, and ruling families changed rapidly due to continuous battles (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alyousifi, 2014a). In early 1740, Mohamad bin Saud allied with the

famous radical figure Mohammad bin Abdulwahab, who Wahhabism referred to his movement (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alyousifi 2014a).

Although Bin Saud belonged to a quite powerful family, he was also supported by Great Britain at that time as a new alliance against the Ottoman Empire (Alyousifi, 2014a). Britain's goal was to empower Bin Saud to control the holy cities of Makkah and Medina, allowing him to gain a religious honor that the Ottoman Empire would lose if it lost control over the two holy cities. The Ottoman Empire eventually collapsed—due to many reasons, but one of them being that it was minimized to be perceived as Turkish rather than the Islamic Empire.

During the period from 1800-1900, Kuwait improved its relationships with tribes in order to secure the trade routes. Kuwait benefited from the crises and battles in the region as they allowed it to be the most secure point for trading and transportation (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alyousifi, 2014a). The fourth ruler of Kuwait Sabah Bin Jaber AlSabah (1859-1866) stated this clearly in his testament to his son, Sabah saying,

There will be no fortune left for you when I die. However, I made a lot of good and honest friends that you should rely on them ... look at all states around us in the Gulf, you saw and you will see them collapse because of injustice and mismanagement however, my power is always grow and strengthen. Stand firm my policy even if you are in the desert and dealing with tribes that they use to be our enemies and they still in unstable status or uncivilized, you will see your nation flourish. (Alyousifi, 2014a, p. 48)

The previous passage depicts the mentality of the rulers and policy-makers of Kuwait—both then and now—in their quest to maintain the state's security and stability (Kostiner, 1997).

Qatar and Bahrain, and Alqasimi family in the UAE were obligated to follow the Wahhabis ideology –the religious group under Bin Saud alliance (Alyousifi, 2014a), and

thus, they indirectly became under Bin Saud's rule (Abu-Hakma, 1984, pp. 108) The growth of Kuwait and its independence from the Ottoman Empire attracted Bin Saud's attention as well as that of his conservative alliance, and Kuwait experienced many military attacks from 1793 to 1797 (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alrushaid, 1926, 1987). However, in 1808 Bin Saud ordered Kuwait to pay the *Jezia*, or the Islamic concept of taxation for non-Muslims. When the ruler Alsabab refused and Bin Saud's military attacked, their attack was ultimately a failure due to Kuwait's powerful navy Kuwait (Alyousifi, 2014a; Alsabab, 1989). By that time, Kuwait had built the first mud wall around the center city from sea to sea and enhanced their navy (figure 2), thereby becoming the only state independent of Bin Saud's power in the Arabian Peninsula (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alsabab, 1989; Alyousifi, 2014a).

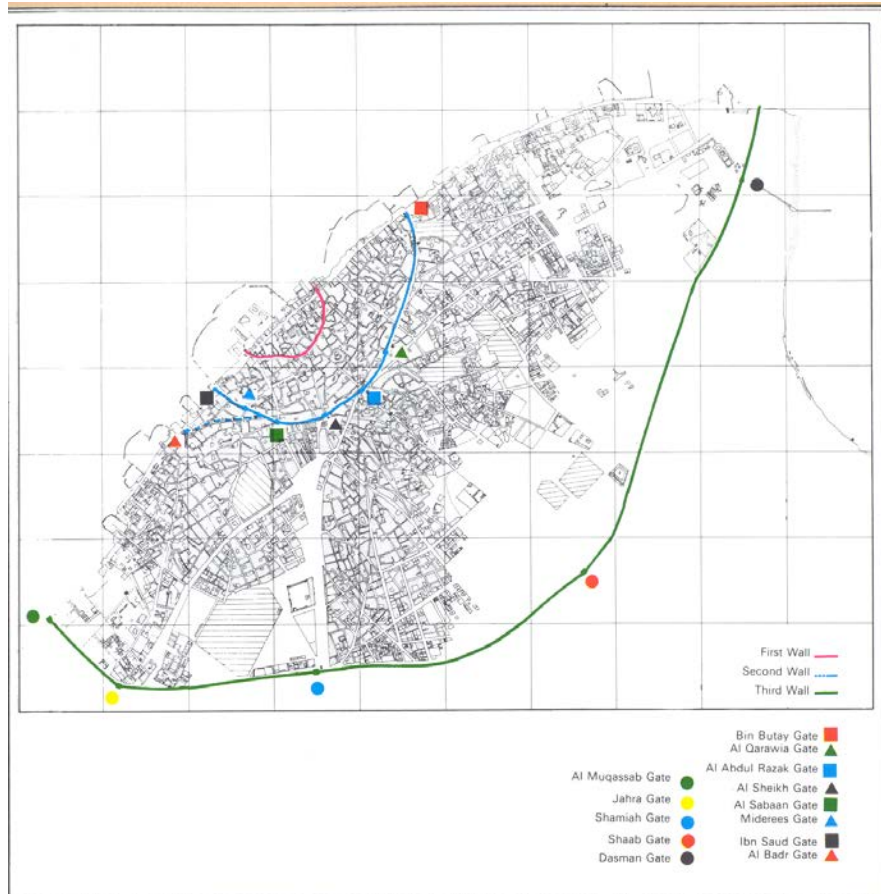


Figure 2. A map shows the expansion of the three mud walls around the center of Kuwait, which now acts as the current capital of Kuwait (Mahgoub, 2009). The walls were demolished in favor of the expansion of Kuwait; however, the gates are still maintained.

The expansion of Bin Saud’s territory provoked the Ottomans, and in 1818 Kuwait supported the Ottomans against Abdullah bin Saud, the last ruler of the first Saudi State, who was killed in Istanbul in public.

This marked the end of the first Saudi State (Abdulraheem, 1983; “First Saudi State,” n.d.). As a result of the collapse of Bin Saud’s Kingdom, all states formerly under Bin Saud’s rule were required to sign a bill that gave their loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, except for Kuwait—as it was argued that Kuwait had never been Bin Saud territory (Abu-Hakma, 1984).

The British perceived the relationship between Kuwait and the Ottoman Empire negatively (Abu-Hakma, 1984). In 1839, a British mission was sent to Kuwait to convince the ruler Jaber Alsabah to raise the Great Britain flag instead of the Ottoman flag and allow the British to launch a diplomatic presence there (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alrushaid, 1926, 1987; Alyousifi, 2014a). Their requests were rejected, with Alsabah's reasoning that the Ottomans were their neighbor and Kuwait had so many common interests with them. Great Britain pointed out that they could cut the trade route to Kuwait from India because India was under British sovereignty. This was a real threat to Kuwait because historically, India was the most important resource for most of Kuwait's goods. However, Alsabah ignored this because he knew that Kuwait was the only and the most efficient harbor that Britain could use to transport goods from India to Europe. When the British asked Sheikh Jaber Alsabah if he would reject the Ottomans' request to have a diplomatic presence as Alsabah did, he answered, only if not doing so will harm us (Abu-Hakma, 1984, p. 230; Alyousifi, 2014a, p. 46).

On May 8, 1896, Sheikh Mubarak Alsabah, also known as Mubarak the great, was named as the seventh ruler of Kuwait after he murdered his two brothers. Today, all rulers of Kuwait are his descendants via the 1961 constitution (Constitute, (n.d.), pp. 3). Mubarak feared that the Ottomans would attack him in order to take back power in favor of a new ally from the Alsabah family, compelling him court Great Britain seeking their protection (Alqasimi, 2004; Alrushaid, 1926, 1987). The alliance between Germany, the Ottomans, and Russia's construction of a railroad that stopped in Kuwait motivated the British to sign a secret treaty on January 21, 1899. The treaty allowed Great Britain to control Kuwait's foreign affairs in return for protecting Kuwait (Alsabah, 1989). This

treaty shifted the relationship between Alsabah family and Bin Saud family because they both became allies of Great Britain. The ultimate goal of Great Britain was to dismantle the Ottoman Empire, and that goal was achievable by supporting tribes to establish new states in the Arabian Peninsula (Alyousifi, 2014a; Peters, 1994, p 380).

Regardless of the wisdom behind Mubarak's decision about his alliance with the British, he had firmly established his principles of ruling within the region by that time. First, he distinguished between his faith as a Muslim and the faith of his political allies. Second, he did whatever necessary to protect his state, regardless of any historical incidents—for example, his support of Bin Saud to unite the lands and establish his kingdom despite the historical conflicts between the two families. Furthermore, Mubarak was pragmatic in that he never relied on or connected himself with any given ally, especially compared to other leaders such as Bin Rushaid. This pragmatism was not a nature of the Arabian personality. As Hall (1977) explained, Arab peoples spend time and effort to know as much as possible about a person in order to build a relationship. Thus, this amount of investment in gathering information makes it difficult for Arab persons to disconnect from or end a relationship. As an example, a planned marriage between two tribes or ruling families is one way such ties are built in Arab politics. The marriage is an unbreakable tie in this culture.

Thus, despite that Mubarak Alsabah murdered his two brothers, when his nephews returned to Kuwait after many years, the three families were bound together by marriages so that no one could seek revenge. Such cultural ties might help explain the stability of Kuwait since 1613, especially when considering that each of its neighbors—such as Iraq, Iran, and Saudi states—have since collapsed even when most of these

countries share political marriage culture. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, Bin Rushaid, the former ruler of Najd—or Al-Riyadh, the current capital of Saudi Arabia and center of the Arabian Peninsula, was also a powerful ruler and competitor who established alliances through marriages before Bin Saud. Therefore, the absence of competitors against Alsabab ruling in Kuwait was an advantage to form such alliances.

Since the establishment of the third kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1922, Kuwait has had a stable relationship with the kingdom despite there still being some unresolved issues related to boundaries, oil fields, and other cases.

Contemporary Saudi Arabia.

After King Salman came to power in 2015, a dramatic shift occurred in Saudi foreign and internal policy. King Salman's youngest son, the crown prince Mahammad Bin Salman, has taken over power to the level that he is known as the ruling King, due to his father's trust and health issues ("Saudi Prince Mohammed," 2017). The crown prince Mohammad, who was bestowed his title at the age of 31, represents the third generation of the family. Many countries have started questioning whether they can rely on Saudi Arabia as a trusted ally, especially since the crown prince's actions seem to be irrational and unpredictable (Dyer, 2017; Law, 2016). For instance, in 2015 Mohammad Bin Salman decided to initiate a war against Yemen without consulting with their most important ally, the United States, and some Gulf and Arab countries found themselves obligated to support him while other allies, such as Pakistan, decided not to become involved (Althaqel, 2017; Ritzinger, 2015).

Moreover, without prior warning, the Gulf awoke on the morning of June 5, 2017 to a political crisis between Qatar on one side, and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United

Arab Emirates on the other side. The three latter countries shut down their borders, blocked their airspace, and initiated a boycott against Qatar, the only country that has land access through Saudi Arabia to transport goods and passengers (“Qatar crisis,” 2017). Further, the three countries started unusual media campaigns against Qatar to the level that they were inciting Qataris to revolt against the regime (Abu-Nasr, 2017).

The reason behind this crisis was that Qatar was on different path of respecting the Arab Spring and it supported the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria (Abu-Nasr, 2017). That is, the other three countries were suspicious of the Arab Spring and concerned that its success might lead to revolutions within their own regimes, especially if the new governments succeeded in fulfilling peoples’ aspirations (Jones, 2011). Thus, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates supported the bloody military coup against the first elected president in the history of Egypt, as well as the military leader Haftar in Libya, and so on (Kamrava, 2011; “UAE officials,” 2017). The general claim in this crisis is that Qatar was supporting terrorism, because the three countries categorized the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group that seeks power (Abu-Nasr, 2017). In addition, one of the 13 preconditions to reestablish diplomatic relations and end the blockade that the three countries imposed was to shut down the Aljazeera media network that is funded and based in Qatar (“Qatar crisis,” 2017).

The recent crisis in the Gulf seemed to be irrational and unpredictable. Kuwait had received several indirect messages that it would be the next target if it did not follow the three countries’ agenda, specifically blocking the Muslim Brotherhood group—one of the most powerful social and political groups that is part of the government and National Assembly of Kuwait (Al-Rashed, 2017; “Saudis media figures,” 2017). Gassebner,

Lamla, and Vreeland (2013) showed that having democratic and non-democratic neighbors is an influential aspect of political transformation. In short, there is a menace to any move towards democracy and increasing public participation in political life in the Gulf region and in the Middle East in general. Therefore, Kuwait can resist but cannot challenge the authoritarian regimes in the anarchic region within which it is situated. Thus, this context is one aspect that impacts the development of policy-making in Kuwait, especially when such policies are related to increasing public participation or political reform.

Iraq

Iraq was not known as a single political entity until 1930 (Salama, Almutairi, Aldaihani, & Dashti, 2003). Historically, within the region Iraq was known as the land in between the two rivers Euphrates and Tigris, or *Mesopotamia* (Alghunaim, 1997). Current-day Iraq used to be recognized as three main territories (Helen, 1988): Basra, or the southern territory with Arab Shi'a as the majority; Baghdad, or the famous capital with Arab Sunni as the majority; and Mosul, or the territory with Kurdish Sunni as the majority (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). The uniqueness of Iraq compared to the other countries of the region lies in the diversity of peoples' roots and faiths.

Historians have explained that Iraq's diversity has been always due to battles and settlements, because the two rivers are a source of water surrounded by dry deserts and its strategic location (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). For instance, Iraq as a region was conquered by Achaemenid Persian in 539 BC, then later was under Parthian and Roman rule, then was part of the Sassanid Empire, and then was part of the Muslim conquest from 622 until the end of the Ottoman Empire. Historically, Iraq has experienced the

bloodiest wars and military attacks, such as the Mongol invasions in 1257 and 1401, an invasion that set Baghdad on fire and destroyed the largest library in the world (Frazier, 2005). After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Iraq was under the British mandate until the British established most of the current kingdoms in the region (Salama et al., 2003). The importance of recalling the history of Iraq is to insist that the north side of Kuwait has historically been the fulcrum of Iraqi claims against Kuwait independence.

The relationship between Kuwait and Iraq in the contemporary era can be traced back to the establishment of Kuwait and the Ottomans as the rulers of Basra. Even though Kuwait had raised the Ottoman flag on many occasions, Kuwait had never been under the Ottomans' control or relied on its power and allies to protect its sovereignty. Raising an Ottoman or British flag is a sign of alliance with one of the poles of power (Alsabah, 1989; Alyousifi, 2014a). However, in 1896 the Ottomans threatened Kuwait that they would be invaded by Bin Rasheed, the Ottoman ruler of Najd—now known as Saudi Arabia—as a reaction to the British influence in the region before the first world war (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Sluglett, 2002). Kuwait supported Bin Saud against Bin Rasheed and at the same time signed a secrecy treaty with Great Britain that prevented Kuwait from dealing with any foreign country without Britain's pre-approval. In return, the British were obligated to protect Kuwait and its allies (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alrushaid, 1926, 1978).

In 1901, the Ottomans occupied the Kuwaiti Island *Boubyan*, the largest island in the Gulf, even larger than the kingdom of Bahrain, as well as Um Qasr and Safwan towns, located on the north side of Kuwait (Abu-Hakma, 1984). In 1915, Great Britain occupied Iraq, and in 1922, during the Al-Aqeer convention held in Saudi Arabia to

determine the boundaries of the region with consideration for the British plan for the new Middle East (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alyousifi, 2014a).

The 1922 Al-Aqeer convention outcomes have had a strong impact on the Kuwaiti people because they caused a tremendous loss. That is, 300 years of protecting their lands, natural resources, and sovereignty were disregarded to satisfy Bin Saud for the sake of Britain. According to Alyousifi (2014a), during the Al-Aqeer convention, a conflict lasted for six days between Bin Saud and the representative of Iraq, Sabeeh Nash'at, regarding the new borderlines. As a result, Percy Cox, the High Commissioner of Great Britain who was also representing Kuwait based on the 1896 treaty that gave the British the control over Kuwait's foreign affairs, cut two-thirds of Kuwait's land and gave it to Bin Saud to settle the issue. The former Kuwaiti land that was given to Saudi Arabia was land that has oil wells and is located on the eastern side of Saudi Arabia to Bahrain (Khazaal, 1962; Sluglett, 2002).

Cox commented on what he had done, saying, "I don't know how Bin Sabah will handle the shock" (Alyousifi, 2014a, p. 184). Cox justified his decision to the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Ahmad AlSabah, stating "that Bin Saud is a powerful man and I protected your state from any future wars with him" (Alyousifi, 2014a, p. 184). AlSabah replied, so how do you claim that Britain joined wars to protect powerless people? (Khazaal, 1962, p. 146). In addition, the boundary deal created a conflict between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia about the common oil wells between the borders and the maritime boundary that still exists ("As glut persists," 2016). In 1922, however, Kuwait and its neighbors had an official documented boundary for the first time, and boundaries placement is what Kuwait officials count on to stabilize the region.

Contrariwise, the claims about Kuwait's dependence arose again, threatening Kuwait's sovereignty. In 1938, King Ghazi claimed that Kuwait was part of Iraq and it must conjoin back to its origin (Alyousifi, 2014a; Goodwin, 1991). This claim was motivated by the oil wells between the two countries, and the Iraqi need for better access to the Arabian Gulf (Sluglett, 2002). In 1958, Iraq proposed to Britain to conjoin Kuwait, Iraq, and Jordan into one kingdom. Kuwait rejected the proposal and it died with the falling of the Iraqi Kingdom due to a coup and the establishment of the republic of Iraq (Alsabah, 1989; Alyousifi, 2014a). In 1960, Kuwait tried to negotiate the boundary issue with the new president of Iraq, Abdul-Kareem Qassim. However, all Kuwaiti missives were ignored (Salama et al., 2003).

On June 19, 1961, after the announcement of Kuwait's independence, Iraq rejected the announcement and revived the claim that Kuwait is part of Iraq. Six days after the announcement of Kuwait's independence, Iraq began a propaganda campaign to occupy Kuwait; however, Great Britain and Saudi Arabia sent troops and marine forces to support Kuwait against Iraq (Abu-Hakma, 1984; Alyousifi, 2014b). In 1963, another Iraqi coup brought a new president, and the new regime admitted the sovereignty of Kuwait and the boundaries based on 1930 treaty. However, in March 1973, Iraq attacked the borders and were able to occupy a northern district in Kuwait for a month before they stepped back after international movement to support Kuwait (Alyousifi, 2014b). The borders were closed after this incident, to only be reopened in 1977 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Meanwhile, in 1975 Iraq officially requested that Kuwait abdicate Warbah Island and lease Boubyan Island for 99 years. As might be expected, this request was rejected (Sluglett, 2002).

The Gulf War I.

On December 21, 1980, the Gulf War started after the Islamic revolution in Iran. All of the controversial issues between Gulf monarchies and Iraq were on hold, and Iraq received boundless financial, military, and logistical support in its war (Lewental, 2014). The main driving force of the Gulf War was a new regime on the Persian side of the Gulf announced its intention to expand its influence and export the revolution to neighboring countries (Helen, 1988). The revolution was seen as Persian—which has a negative history with Arab peoples—as well as sectarian based on its conservative view of the Shi'a (Helen, 1988). Iraq, as secular and authoritarian regime in a country with a Shi'a majority, found itself on the spot (Woods, Murray, Nathan, Sabara, & Venegas, 2011). Thus, Saddam Hussain announced that he would be the guard of the eastern gate, and the Iraqi and media subsequently began a massive propaganda campaign that promoted Hussain as the national Arab hero (Woods et al., 2009).

This was an additional long-term risk to Kuwait beyond its conflict with Iraq and political issues with Saudi Arabia. After eight years, in 1988, the Gulf War ended with around one million casualties and transformed Iraq from one of the wealthiest countries into destitution (Potter & Sick, 2004). Kuwait hoped that its support for Iraq during the war would help to end the conflict over the boundary. However, Iraq recalled the historical claim that Kuwait is a branch of Iraq and that it must be returned. In addition, they raised claims that Kuwait and United Arab Emirates intentionally raised their oil production to weaken Iraq (Alyousifi, 2014b).

Gulf War II.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait without preliminaries. Within two hours, Kuwaitis found themselves refugees on the borders. The Amir was moved out of Kuwait to Saudi Arabia, and his brother Shaikh Fahad AlSabah was murdered in front of Alseef Palace, the house of the presidency. According to a report from the United States Environmental Protection Agency to Congress (1992), the Iraqi troops set 1,073 oil wells on fire, making the event the worst environmental catastrophe in history. The Kuwait desert was left uninhabitable, and the sea was polluted with oil. It took eight months to free Kuwait. Thousands of civilians were killed or displaced, and 386 billion dollars were spent by Kuwaiti government and its alliances on aid and war. Most importantly, and trust between Kuwaitis and many Arab countries was severely impacted.

The negative consequences of the invasion not only impacted the political and social ties between the two countries, but also led Kuwaitis to start to question the efficacy of their regime or at least their government in protecting national security. The concerns about the political strata had already been building because of many local incidents prior to the Iraqi invasion, which will be explained in the following section.

Lastly, a recent threat geographically related to Iraq is ISIS and the Shi'a's militias, both of whom perceive Kuwait negatively based on Kuwait's alliance with the United States as well as the ideological impact of Iran over the Shias' militias. Both groups have threatened Kuwait on many occasions, in which Shias recall the historical boundary issues and claim that Kuwait will be their coming target or ISIS's next province. These threats are taken seriously based on the notion that they are both supported and representing larger groups or countries.

Iran

I will focus on the Kuwait-Iran relationship since 1979 because the Islamic revolution in Iran established a new political ideology that completely changed Iran's perspective in its relationships with its neighbors and the world. Many conflicts occurred between the Shah's regime and the Gulf States such as the occupation of two of Emirate's islands, the claim that Bahrain was part of Iran, and the oil well issue in Kuwait (Farhod, 2008). However, because of its strong ties with the west, and the absence of any threats against Kuwait's stability, Kuwait perceived the Shah as a stabilizer in the region acting as a counterbalance to Iraq (Herb, 1999). The Islamic revolution sparked concerns, the first of which was that its success might act as inspiration for liberty in a region that was ruled by dictators and authoritarian regimes. Many regimes were blamed for continuous failure in the conflict between Arabs and Israel. Marches transpired in the regions with all different groups to support the liberation from despotism; however, Shi'a minorities in other countries such as Kuwait perceived the Islamic revolution in Iran through a sectarian lens (Almudairis, 1999).

Before describing the historical relationship between Kuwait and Iran, it is vital to overture briefly about the ideological background of the Islamic revolution in Iran that led to the current regime. *Twelver Shia* Muslims believe that there are 12 Imams that they must follow in life. All of the 12 infallible Imams are from the prophet Mohammad's daughter's ancestry and are the political and religious leaders in life. However, *Al-Mahdi*, the last Imam of the 12, intentionally disappeared himself, and according to their narration he will return to spread justice and peace (Faksh, 1988). His return is conditional on the efforts of his followers to spread and establish Islamic rule on earth

before his arrival (Calder, 1982). Thus, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shiite scholar, formed the basis for Islamic rule based on his theory *Vilayet AL-faqih*, or The Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist. The guardianship, or Faqih, serves as the supreme leader of political life, institutions, religion, and the government (Arjomand,1989; Calder, 1982). According to the constitution of Iran, the Faqih –the supreme jurist according to the theory of Khomeini– practices the guardianship by appointing the highest judicial authority, holding supreme command over the armed forces, inaugurating the president and dismissing him, granting amnesty, etc. (Arjomand,1989).

As a result, the new regime in Iran served as religious leader for Shia around the world, mostly for those who believe in the theory of guardianship, as well as the political patron for Shiite minorities around the world (Almudairis, 1999). At the same time, after the Islamic revolution, Iran had seized the Shia leadership from Iraq as the center of the Shia world because of the holy sites in Karbala’ and Najaf in Iraq (Farhod, 2008). Therefore, a racial concern arose that the leadership was taken from the Arab Shia’, especially in Iraq, as they were historically recognized as the capital of the Shia until the Islamic revolution in Iran (Potter & Sick, 2004). The Persians overtook the lead from Arabs based only on political power rather than religious position.

The success of the Islamic revolution in Iran raised many concerns among the Sunni populations around the world, including politicians. For instance, how far did they believe that they could spread the revolution? What would come of the relationships between the Arab Shia in other countries and the regime in Iran? To whom would Kuwaiti Shias be loyal—their country, Kuwait, or their religious chief, Faqih in Iran? An additional concern was what the common ground could be between nations and

politicians that could lead to discussion with Iran, especially if they depart from religious beliefs (Almudairis, 1999; Alyousifi, 2014b). Many of these concerns have been answered practically through several historical events. I will address the most relevant events for this study.

It was not expected that a group of Kuwaiti Shias led by the religious figure Abbas Almuhi would go to Iran to congratulate them on the revolution succeeding, but they did (Almudairis, 1999; Alyousifi, 2014b). Six months after their visit, Ahmad Almuhi, Abbas' son, who was a political activist, announced at a sectarian congress for Kuwaiti that Kuwaiti Shia deserve more rights and fair treatment (Alkhamar, 2011). This movement was perceived by Kuwait as a political threat, and the government arrested Ahmad Almuhi and banned any gathering of more than 20 people (Almudairis, 1999; Alyousifi, 2014b). However, Iran interfered in the conflict, and named Almuhi as an official representative of the Iranian leader Ayatollah Alkhumaini in Kuwait (Almudairis, 1999, pp. 27). Kuwait reacted by revoking the citizenship of 18 people of the Almuhi family before they left for Iran—this lasted until 1991 when the Kuwaiti government gave them back their citizenship and Mohamad Almuhi, Abbas's son, was recognized as the representative of the Shia references, a Shiite religious position where a person represents religious scholars (Almudairis, 1999). Ahmad Almuhi decided not to return to Kuwait and left for the United Kingdom.

At the beginning of the first Gulf War between Iran and Iraq in 1980, Kuwait declared neutrality (Alyousifi, 2014b; Farhod, 2008). However, Iran attacked Kuwait oil tankers, and there were a number of Shia bombings and Hezbollah activity. Relations were tense.

Throughout 1980, Iran penetrated Kuwaiti airspace several times and in 1981, an Iranian rocket attacked a Kuwaiti radio transmitting station (Alseyassa, 2015; Alyousifi, 2014b). During that time, Sheikh Sabah Alahmad AlSabah, the minister of foreign affairs and the current Amir of Kuwait, announced the need to establish the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) as a unity that could face Iranian ambitions (Alyousifi, 2014b). After the establishment of the GCC, tensions increased gradually, and between 1981 and 1985 Iran attacked 47 Kuwaiti oil tankers and threatened to block the Strait of Hormuz—the only sea passage through which the Arabian Gulf countries can transfer oil and goods to the rest of the world (Almudairis, 1999; Alseyassa, 2015; Alyousifi, 2014b). As a reaction, Kuwait, in collaboration with the United States, registered its oil tankers as U.S. oil tankers (Alyousifi, 2014b).

A series of bombings took place in Kuwait between 1983 and 1988. The attacks targeted very important sites such as; embassies (Wright, 2001), oil refineries (Alyousifi, 2014b), an attempt to murder the Amir Jaber AlSabah (Farhod, 2008; United Press International, 1985), and public attractions (Almudairis, 1999; Alseyassa, 2015) In addition, Kuwait Airlines plane was hijacked by Hezbollah. All attacks were attributed to Iranian and Shia Kuwaitis terrorists. The attacks were considered as a remarkable sign of the lack of loyalty of Shias of Kuwait and the Iranian violent way of solving conflicts.

Since Kuwait's liberation from the Iraqi invasion after the second Gulf War in 1991, the Kuwait-Iran relationship had been stable. However, Kuwaiti-Shia groups were more active in Kuwait after Kuwait's liberation for two main reasons. First, Kuwait's strategy in dealing with minorities such as the Shia changed to be more open minded. The increase in the number of Shia joining the military and diplomatic sectors is very

noticeable, with Shias now being almost equal to other groups (Herb, 1999). Prior to this change, these fields had very strict acceptance policies for the Shia, especially during the war in the 1980s. Second, Iran also changed its strategy regarding interfering in Kuwaiti politics, mainly through Kuwaiti groups who are affiliated with Iran (Almudairis, 1999). For instance, The National Islamic Alliance party is one of the main Shia groups that is recognized as Hezbollah of Kuwait (Almudairis, 1999, p. 40). This group has between 3 to 5 members in the National Assembly of Kuwait.

After 2006, the new prime minister, Sheikh Nasser Muhamad Alsabah, was accused of being affiliated with Iran and it was speculated that Iran supported him becoming the upcoming crown prince (Alqallaf, 2014) These socio-political accusations were based on his close circle and their affiliation with Iran. As well as the negative political positions of his government in many incidents that were thought of as leaning toward Iran and against the GCC countries that were recognized as strategic allies (Ghasemilee, 2011). Because of the sensitivity of Nasser Alsabah's position as a member of the royal family, these accusations were not officially investigated. That is, as a prime minister, Nasser Alsabah represented the Amir policies. Therefore, his conviction might be reflected negatively on the Amir's reputation. The prime minister, Nasser M. Alsabah, was forced to resign in November 2011 after months of continuous demonstrations against him due the corruption of his administration ("Kuwait PM resigns after protests", 2011).

His resignation was the first resignation for a prime minister in the history of Kuwait. The former prime ministers were also holding the position of crown princes. That is, they only left the cabinet when they took the throne as Amir.

After Sheikh Nasser's M. Alsabah resignation, a group of Shia members in the National Assembly promoted the idea that he was to be the upcoming Amir. The former Shi'i member of the National Assembly, Sayed Hussain Alqallaf, said in a televised interview, "Al-diwan Al-Amiri [The House of the Amir] warned me after my statement that Sheikh Nasser Alsabah is coming back with higher position than the prime minister ... my statement was based on what I have been told" (Alqallaf, 2014). The importance of this era is that Shia groups were Nasser Alsabah's main supporters in the community and in political institutions—this era is recognized as the golden age of Shia in Kuwait.

A dramatic transition in the Iranian-Kuwaiti relationship occurred in 2010 when Kuwait announced that it had arrested an Iranian spying network. In 2013, seven people were accused, including two Kuwaitis, and many Iranian diplomats were asked to leave the country due to their relationships with the spy network (Alsaidi, 2008).

The last incident that caused considerable damage to the Kuwaiti-Iranian diplomatic relationship was the arrest of a military cell in Kuwait in August of 2015 (Cafiero, 2017). The cell was receiving direct support from the Iranian Embassy and was also in contact with Hezbollah in Lebanon and other countries where they were trained (Westall, 2017). The cell consisted of 26 Kuwaiti citizens and one Iranian ("No Kuwaiti MP," 2015). During the arrest, 144 kilos of explosives, 68 weapons, 19,000 kilos of munitions, 204 grenades, and 56 RPJ rockets were seized ("Kuwait breaks up", 2015). The amount of contraband seized was terrifying, and people by default connected this incident with what was happening in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq—assuming that Iran was interfering with the public life of citizens who had become loyal to ideology rather than the nation (Cafiero, 2017; Westall, 2016). Kuwaiti citizens perceived this incident as a

sign of being a target sooner or later because the investigation proved that the weapons have been imported and stored continuously over a long period (Martin, 2017; Westall, 2016). In addition, the socio-political impact of this incident questioned Shia's loyalty. Questioning Shia loyalty is a very sensitive topic in Kuwait because it has been used, mainly by the authority or their alliances, to threaten different political and social groups in order to minimize their influence.

The Shia's defense—that they were saving these weapons for emergency matters to defend themselves and the country—bears similarity to the Iraqi invasion and preparing for an ISIS attack upon Kuwait (Cafiero, 2017; Martin, 2017; Westall, 2016). Although the court did not take this argument seriously, this argument was still used because their defense knew that there is a general fear about national security among citizens (“Kuwait sentences,” 2016; Martin, 2017). This incident caused serious damage to Kuwait's social ties and increased citizens' doubts about a faction that comprises roughly one-third of the Kuwaiti population. Therefore, the historical experience of Iran interfering in Kuwait's security added another concern about the direction of policy-making, especially when such policy-making aims to increase public participation in Kuwait politics. For example, negative experiences with a specific population in Kuwait—whether it be Shias or merchants—could lead other groups to be less motivated to increase their participation level the in political system due to distrust.

CHAPTER 3

KUWAIT FROM INSIDE

The discussion of the Hezbollah and the Kuwaiti-Iranian cell moves the study to an overview the socio-political map of Kuwait. I will focus in this overview mainly on political and economic events that have impacted today's political life. Discussing past events is important because I argue that most of the current political issues are connected or evaluated based on historical incidents. This argument relies on the concept of high context culture, where people evaluate the entire circumstances, history, personal history, emotions, and anything that helps form new opinions or strengthen their existing views (Hall, 1977). This intensive evaluation of events, people, culture etc. is motivated by the continuous interaction among groups of people for a long period of time (Hall, 1977). In a published interview, Edward Hall explained Arabs' culture:

The basic difference is that Arabs are highly "contexted". They examine the entire circumstance in which events are happening in order to understand them. Everyone is aware there is a relationship between the context of a statement and its meaning . . . in low-context culture you get down to business very quickly. The high-context culture takes considerably longer, and that's simply because the people have developed a need to know more about you before a relationship can develop. (Friedman, 1996, p.17)

In addition, the collective memory of a population plays a vital role in the present, and according to Pennebaker and Banasik (2013), "individuals invent or redefine the past to fit the present" (p. 6). The role of distrust and collective memory will be discussed in detail later.

As I began with the nature of the how the State of Kuwait was established, and its unique structure compared to its neighbors, I explained that Kuwait's political structure

since its establishment relies on the Alsabah family, merchants, and international alliances. However, since the discovery of oil, another political power has emerged—the middle and lower classes of society, who have historically been absent from political participation (Alkhateeb, 2007). These social classes emerged with new political movements and ideologies that flourished after the oil discovery in the 1930s as well as after the establishment of educational missions that granted Kuwaiti students scholarships to continue their education around the world (Aldyeen, 2012).

In addition, the spread of radio, newspapers, and later television connected society with the larger group that they belong to, by which I specifically mean their Arab counterparts (Alghazali, 2007). Many Arab countries by that time, between 1930 and 1971, were involved either in liberation fights against colonialists, such as Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia, or the continuous conflict between the Arabs and Israelis in Palestine. For instance, today, there are still Kuwaitis who believe in communism because they support the Egyptian president Jamal Abdul-Nasser, who was president of Egypt between 1956 and 1970, not because they believe that communism is good but rather that communism led him to fight the three powerful countries of France, Britain, and Israel in what was known as the Tripartite Aggression or Suez Crisis (Aldyeen, 2012; Alghazali, 2007). The influence of regional conflicts on Kuwait's internal policy led to a new political atmosphere and created new players in the political system. Thus, I focused on the main political and ideological groups in Kuwait and the nature of their roles.

Pre-oil Political Economy

Kuwait's political decision-making has been shared by the Alsabah family and the merchant class since the country's establishment in the 1700s. In 1921, a group of 12

dignitaries announced the establishment of the Shura Council; the term Shura is the Islamic version of advice or consultation (Alkhateeb, 2007; Alyousifi, 2014b). The purpose of that council was to participate in choosing the Amir instead of it being a solo decision limited to the family (Aldyeen, 2012; Khazaal, 1962). Many historians see the five clauses of this council as the first written constitution of Kuwait (Aldyeen, 2012). However, this council was not elected—rather, the selection of its members was through nomination limited to a specific social class (Alghazali, 2007).

Nevertheless, after the oil discovery in early 1930s, the scale of power changed and the family did find another source of income other than pearling, trade, and taxation (Aldyeen, 2012). Subsequently, the voices to establish an elected parliament were elevated so that merchants could maintain their influence and participation in political life and decision-making. In 1938, after many skirmishes, Kuwaiti merchants and notables formed a legislative council that tried to challenge the ruling family (Aldyeen, 2012; Alghazali, 2007; Alotaibi, 2013). This council was elected and wrote the second constitution that was more progressive than the 1921 constitution (Alyousifi, 2014b). The council was also perceived as the nucleus of the existing National Assembly, which was announced based on the 1962 constitution.

Between 1938 and 1962, Kuwait changed dramatically. Education and the wage improvement due to oil income had empowered the middle and lower-classes to engage in political life. While political decision making was limited to the Alsabah family, merchants, and a few other families, new ideologies were added to political life. Political ideologies were not part of the Kuwaiti culture until the Kuwaiti populace became more involved and influenced by regional conflicts, the rise of threats from Iraq, and

educational missions. Thus, political life after 1921 could be characterized as a contest between the Alsabah family, merchants and nobles, activists, and external threats (Ghabra, 1997; Herb 2014). These four elements encouraged the ruler Abdullah Alsalem Alsabah, considered the father of the constitution, to announce his desire to amend the constitution and the National Assembly in favor of moving towards a modern state (Aldyeen, 2012; Alghazali, 2007; Alkhateeb, 2007).

Another important aspect that must be mentioned is that the Amir Abdullah Alsabah was passionate about the constitution and the movement toward democracy for four main reasons. First, he wanted to limit his family's power over political life, especially since oil income made them less dependent on the merchants (Alnajjar, 2000; Herb, 2014). Second, his progressive ideas marginalized him from the family during his predecessor's period, to the level that he left Kuwait to live in Lebanon (Herb, 2014). Third, it was a good time to give new players access to entering political life that would limit or at least challenge the merchants' power (Ghabra, 1997). Fourth, Iraqi threats motivated the family to increase their participation in political life, which gave the Alsabah a powerful way to defend its rule to international society (Ghabra, 1997; Herb, 2014). Moreover, in 1938 some Kuwaitis appealed to the King of Iraq to invade Kuwait as a reaction to the Amir Ahmad J. Alsabah's suppression of the 1938 elected council (Alyousifi, 2014b). People also later argued that the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was influenced by the Amir's –Jaber Alsabah–suppression of the National Assembly in 1986 (Alnajjar, 2000). Thus, the existence of democratic life in Kuwait was perceived as a cornerstone for national security.

Even though the constitution does not ban or allow political parties, Kuwait political life still consists of ideologies that are usually represented within political parties (Alsabaghah, 2014). Besides ideologies, candidates represent their tribes, families, social groups, or economic lobbies (Alghazali, 2007; Ghabra, 1997). For instance, Islamism is represented by the Muslim brotherhood, Salafi, and other independents. Shi'as are represented by the Islamic National Alliance, Justice and Peace League, and other independents. Socialists are represented by the Popular Action Bloc. Leftist nationalists are represented by the Kuwait Democratic Forum. Liberals and merchants are represented by the National Democratic Alliance (Alghazali, 2007).

It is important to mention that the concept of political parties has been imported to Kuwait and did not emerge or be shaped by its political practices. For instance, the Muslim Brotherhood political party is an extension of the global Muslim Brotherhood groups. Similarly, the Arab Nationalists are an extension of the same movements in Egypt and Lebanon (Alghazali, 2007). Thus, the power of political parties is strongly linked to the personal reputations of their candidates rather than the parties' agendas or ideologies. Many Kuwaitis and politicians prefer to represent themselves as independents, and many people prefer to support independent politicians rather than parties (Alyousifi, 2014d). Moreover, another obstacle that would prevent people from caring about political ideologies is the limited influence of the political parties within the elected National Assembly. The reason is that political parties do not constitute the government so they cannot implement their agendas. However, the cabinet is hired by the Amir. Therefore, ideologies are not impacting in a noticeable way in the government's agenda.

There are two main aspects that influence the individualistic political participation in Kuwait. First, independence means that a candidate is free of any ideology that might contradict national interest. Second, the concept of political parties recalls the bloody conflicts between parties in Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, and other countries, in addition to the high level of corruption those countries (Alsaudi & Taher, 2011). Thus, even when political parties exist in Kuwait, those parties practice politics in a more traditional way that promotes figures rather than ideologies or agendas.

For instance, in the 2006 election, the Islamic Connotational Movement HADAS succeeded in securing six of the 50 seats in the parliament, one of the largest numbers in the history of Kuwaiti elections for one party. However, in 2008, only three of the six members were reelected. One of the mistakes they had made is that they ran the campaign as a professional party following Western models of elections. They spent considerable revenue on advertising, and they unified all of their candidates' advertisements, rather than the typical strategy of each candidate running his or her own campaign based on his district. Following the election, in May 16, 2008, the head of the Hadas party, Dr. Bader Alnashi, and its media representative Musaad Aldhafiri insisted on Alwatan Television that their media strategy affected their election outcomes negatively. The party tried to push the limits of political campaign practices, comparable to strategies in developed democratic countries. However, the campaign's professionalism was viewed as suspicious, and people thought it resembled a campaign in a Western country. Thus, people began to question the campaign's funding origins. The absence of legislation that organizes political parties caused this kind of disruption. The

interview was removed from YouTube, so I requested a copy from Hadas. However, they responded that they could not find it in their archive.

Faith in Democracy

As mentioned previously, not all of Alsabah family in 1961, and maybe still today, had faith in democracy. In addition, there are Kuwaitis who also believe that democracy does not suit their society or culture and that the educational level and awareness of the citizens is not yet ready for more political participation and open debates. Professor of political science at Kuwait University Shfееq Ghabra's (1997) explanation of the nature of the political parties might refute some of these thoughts. He said, "Political organizations and parties in Kuwait have traditionally built their power bases on religious, ethnic, and tribal identification and social position" (Ghabra, 1997, p. 359). Herb (2014) and Ross (2012) argued that the absence of a diverse economy and the dependence on a state's wealth rather than a capitalist economy is an important factor behind the emergence of ideological agendas among political parties.

Moreover, it was obvious to the founders of the constitution of Kuwait that society is in the process of transformation to another level of political life. For that reason, clause 174 of the 1962 constitution stated that the constitution could be reviewed after five years, and the following clause 175 insists that any revision must aim for more freedom and equality (Kuwait National Assembly, 1962). Therefore, scholars have argued that these two clauses clearly indicate that the constitution represents the minimum, and revision is needed to rebalance the current hybrid-presidential system (Alsabaghah, 2014).

In addition, there are four main reasons why some influential members of the Alsbah family do not have faith in democracy and many Kuwaitis share similar views. First, they believe that democracy is a Western concept that does not suit the culture, in which emotions, family ties, tribe-based elections, sectarian, and other irrational aspects are present that would guide saboteurs in democratic practices (Aleid, 2001; Alsbah, 2012). Second, some people believe that Kuwait can adopt democracy only when the society is ready for it (Aldaihani, 2017).

So, when will Kuwaiti people be ready for democracy? This is continuous debate. A third line of thought argues that Kuwait should start to move towards a democratic system now and people will learn from their mistakes (Alotaibi, 2013). However, other groups believe the cost of those mistakes might be destructive, especially considering that most, if not all, of the democratic attempts in the region have failed (Alotaibi, 2013). Fourth, the enduring regional conflicts and Kuwait's dependency on its successful foreign affairs makes it dangerous to hand over the government and foreign affairs to those whom the Alsbah family consider to be amateurs in international policy (Alsbah, 2012). Moreover, we should take into consideration that some political parties might be or already have been penetrated, or affiliated with foreign powers as mentioned earlier (Alotaibi, 2013, p. 71).

Furthermore, the aftermath of the Arab Spring showed that Kuwait's neighbors are not willing to see any democratic transformation in the region (Jones, 2011). These neighboring countries are already unhappy with the high level of freedom of speech, compared to their own, and of the active political life in Kuwait (Alrasheed, 2015). After 2011, the division among Arab countries in response to the Arab Spring revolutions

revealed the “zero-sum” (Brams, 2004, p.2) mentality towards democratic movements. That is, any public demand in any Middle Eastern country for more democratic practices is perceived as a threat to the monarchies of the Middle East. As an indicator of this, when the Arab Spring started in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates took direct action to undermine those revolutions. On July 3, 2013, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia supported the military coup in Egypt against the first elected president in the history of that nation (Ragab, 2017). The perceived the success of any fundamental transformation toward democracy as a threat to the existing non-democratic regimes.

Moreover, many members of the AlSabah family believe that they should follow the Saudi and the Emirati model of government (Aldyeen, 2012). There are three main aspects behind this argument. First, the family will be the only party that would gather all parties because of its role is a mediator rather than a competitor—a kind of paternalism. Second, having one party that has all the authority will make the process of developing the nation much easier, as in the Qatari and Emirati models (Herb, 2014; Ross, 2012). Third, the AlSabah family wants to maintain or even increase its power and influence in society (Aldyeen, 2012). An official British document reported a discussion with Sheikh Jaber Al-Ali AlSabah, the deputy prime minister at that time and one of three nominees for crown prince, in which he summarized to a British diplomat what he believed to be the four threats over the democracy and the family rule in Kuwait (Alkhamar, 2011):

- 1- The Muslim brotherhood gaining acceptance from people who are confused between the right and left.

- 2- Shia's clear plan to control the decision-making in the government, diplomatic affairs, and expanding their schools and religious places.
- 3- Leftists not caring about local problems more than they care about importing ideologies from outside their culture, as well as trying to convince the lower class to achieve their goals through them.
- 4- Businessmen and Bedouins only caring about increasing their wealth and gains, regardless of the harm this could cause the country.

Regardless of the accuracy of Jaber AlSabah's ideas, they reflect a deep fear about the structure of society after the oil and constitution periods. However, Kuwait cannot simply exclude these four groups from public life or turn the political system into an authoritarian regime under the excuse of national security. At the same time, the path to democracy could be a tool that locals and foreigners exploit to achieve their goals. The question then becomes, why are large groups of Kuwaitis, if Jaber AlSabah's thoughts are true, having negative role in their country?

Alfaili (2013), professor of constitutional law at Kuwait University, illustrated the complication of the political situation in Kuwait by arguing that there are many challenges facing the political transformation of the country. First, the political ideology of the state is totalitarian—that is, for instance, rulers do the best based on their knowledge about a situation. Second, the paternalist nature of the political system means that all people and institutions are connected to the ruler. Therefore, political parties will change direction and become a mediator between citizens and the ruler. Alfaili (2013) argued that the current legal and political situation impacted by past conflicts over power and the current constitution are eligible to be improved through political discussion.

The failure of balancing democratic status and national security is not only due to foreign powers. The AlSabah family is responsible for misgoverning because the constitution gives them more power to govern than any other group (Aldyeen, 2012; Ghabra, 1993). For example, it is true that the Shia were perceived as second-class citizens based on racial and sectarian factors (Almudairis, 2007; Alyousifi, 2014b). In addition, the family did not bear the ideological transformation carried by the educational missions. For instance, Abdullah Alsalem AlSabah wondered if Kuwaitis are loyal to Kuwait when they praised the Arab Nationalist Egyptian leader Jamal Abdunnasser (Alyousifi, 2014b, pp. 289). Abdullah AlSabah's reaction was an indicator that the family did not recognize the impact of the education that young Kuwaitis were receiving abroad.

Moreover, the Bedouins were invited from the deserts to urban centers between the 1960s and 1980s. This invitation was extended without a plan to integrate them into the political community (Alyousifi 2014c). That is, the Bedouins have been brought as new alliances against the merchants and political activists in social political life. The merchants have always been appeased by projects to preserve the historical alliance with them (Herb, 2014). That is, these problems have not occurred naturally; however, the situation has been aggravated based on the government's behavior over the long term.

As a consequence, Kuwait after the Abdullah Alsalem AlSabah period (1950-1965) experienced many political and economic crises. Most of these crises were based on the imbalance between the political power and the AlSabah rulers (Ross, 2012). The imbalance was not caused by only the variance in views, but rather the political system is not capable of handling and providing a platform to solve problems (AlSabah, 2013; Herb, 2014, Ross, 2012). Dr. Ahmad Alkhateeb—the notable Kuwaiti politician who

participated in forming the constitution and surrounding debates (1961-1962)—explained the political life in that period in his published memoir. For instance, during the first election after the period of Abdullah AlSabah in 1967, a group of leftists, independent merchants, and other independents organized themselves to form an electoral alliance of 35 candidates for 50 available seats in the 10 constituencies (Alkhateeb, 2007). This organized movement created fear in the AlSabah family, it was more than they could handle in the parliament. Thus, the government manipulated the election, which resulted only two winning candidates from the 35 allies (Alkhateeb, 2007). The opposition, civic institutions, and many independents signed a letter that protested the election fraud, and the two winners resigned from the National Assembly in a protest (Alkhateeb, 2007).

This incident remains in the socio-political memory of the people as evidence of the disbelief in democracy, based on the opposition's point of view. Or, it is at least a sign of deficiency rooted in the political system.

During the summer of 1967, the Amir of Kuwait suspended the constitution and dismissed the National Assembly. There was no major conflict at the time that could explain the action. However, politicians think it was related to a conflict inside the AlSabah family regarding the upcoming crown prince, especially because the Amir at that time, Sabah Alsaleem AlSabah, was sick (Alkhateeb, 2007; Alyousifi, 2014c). The connection between the family conflict and the National Assembly is that Jaber Ali AlSabah, the deputy prime minister, wanted to promote himself as an upcoming, powerful crown prince because of his alliances with the tribes. In addition, many members of the National Assembly were under his control, most of whom belonged to Bedouin tribes (Aldyeen, 2012). In order for Jaber Ali AlSabah to strengthen his chances for being crown

prince, he brought large groups of Bedouins from Kuwait and Saudi deserts and granted them citizenship. In return, leaders of those Bedouin tribes became his allies (Aldyeen, 2012; Alyousifi, 2014c). Therefore, many of them became members of the National Assembly who could reject or approve the upcoming crown prince based on their tribal votes.

Thus, the crown prince and prime minister at that time, Jaber Alahmad Alsabah, was waylaid for his cousin's ambition through suspending the constitution. This action by default dismisses the National Assembly (Alyousifi, 2014c). After the Amir Sabah Alsalem passed away, Jaber Ali Alsabah was one of three candidates for the crown prince position. One of the candidates, Sabah Alahmad Alsabah, the current Amir, stepped down in favor of his cousin Saad Alsabah—the second candidate—so Jaber Ali Alsabah lost his candidacy. Had the National Assembly been active by that time, they might have voted to reject Alsabah's family candidate for the crown prince position in favor of Jaber Ali Alsabah, and the Amir would, by law, have had to choose three candidates. The National Assembly would vote for one of them.

As a result, Kuwait was ruled under martial law until 1980 when the new Amir, Jaber Alsabah, who was the prime minister and the crown prince for Sabah Alsalem Alsabah, recognized that new regional challenges such as the Islamic revolution in Iran and local incidents discussed earlier could not be handled without the support of the National Assembly. The Amir called for an election in 1981 as a sign of resuming democracy. However, this agreement did not last long. The National Assembly of 1985 was much stronger than the government could handle. After many attempts by politicians targeting numerous ministers due to corruption related to members of the Alsabah family

(Alkhateeb, 2007), the government resigned in 1986 and the Amir dismissed the National Assembly and suspended some of the constitutional clauses that related to the election. In addition, freedom of the press was constricted, and public meetings were banned to undermine the opposition (Alkhateeb, 2007; Alyousifi, 2014c).

The Amir argued that the opposition groups were not acting responsibly and were causing anarchy in the economy, a threat to national security (Alyousifi, 2014c). This incident caused the establishment of one of the largest protests in the nation's history until the Iraqi invasion in 1990 (Aldyeen, 2007). During the invasion, the political powers and family decided to resume the National Assembly due to its importance and in appreciation of the political leaders who supported and confirmed the rule of the family during the invasion (Alkhateeb, 2007).

In sum, I argue that the political instability in Kuwait could be due to deficiency in the system if I am taking all the previous aspects into consideration. This approach is consistent with Habermas' concept of understanding the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987) and supported by diffusion theories that democratic life consists of culture, politics, economy, and the regions where transformation happens in waves rather than individualistic transitions to democracy (Gleditsch, 2002). Therefore, there are democratic regions, such as Europe; transitioning regions, such as Latin America; and dictatorship regions, such as the Middle East (Gassebner et al., 2013; Gleditsch, 2002).

In the following chapter, I will explain in more detail the political and legal systems that impact the decision-making process in Kuwait and how this contributes to the current economic and political status of Kuwait.

The Political Economy of Kuwait

In this chapter I explain the decision-making process in Kuwait, the structure of the legal system, and political practices. This chapter also provides an overview of the nature of the labor and market that emerged after the oil discovery and how it is influencing the decision-making process and political practices. Lastly, I will provide examples of past reform efforts. The examples will shed light on the economic situation, reform attempts, and why it remains unresolved.

Resource Curse

The term *resource curse* was first used by Auty (1993, p. 1), and most recently it has been defined as “the adverse effects of a country’s natural resource wealth on its economic, social, or political well-being” (Ross, 2015, p. 240). The scholars of resource curse have examined its effects in the Gulf countries in many ways. Kuwait has been a valuable case for resource curse literature. Studies by Ross (2012), Herb (2014), and Dr. Mishaal Alsabah (2013), who is now the director general for Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KPIDA), examined closely the case of Kuwait and the correlation between natural resources, politics, and economics within the frame of resource curse.

The concept of natural resources in resource curse studies has been identified in many ways. In general, there are three components that could help identify a natural resource: first, the type of resource; second, the quality of the resource compared to other resources in terms of how profitable it is; and third, the contribution weight of the natural resource in the economy (Ross, 2015). Oil as a natural resource is the cornerstone for the study of resource curse. Ross (2015) argued:

Only one type of resource has been consistently correlated with less democracy and worse institutions: petroleum, which is the key variable in the vast majority of

the studies that identify some type of curse. A wider range of resources including petroleum, gemstones, and other types of high-value minerals—have been linked to civil conflict. (p. 242-243)

Huntington (1986) insists that to achieve economic development, political development is required in order to have a sustainable democracy. However, the emergence of the resource curse challenges Huntington's hypothesis (Gassebner, Lamla, & Vreeland, 2013). In natural resource-rich countries such as those in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), economic development, as indicated by GDP, shows that high gross domestic products (GDP) is not concurrent with democratic development (Gassebner et al., 2013). In addition to what I have discussed about the challenges of democratic transition in the previous chapter, scholars also argue that natural resource wealth may also lead to political dysfunction (Alsabab, 2013; Herb, 2014; Ross, 2015). Therefore, I am addressing Ross' (2015) question: "Does natural resource wealth lead to political dysfunction?" as an additional lens for viewing the political economy of Kuwait after the oil discovery (p. 240). This concept of natural resource wealth and democracy or political dysfunction is studied within the literature of resource curse.

A study by Gassebner et al., (2013) found that a strong economy and economic growth support the survival of democratic regimes; however, they also reduce the chance of democratic development in dictatorships. In other words, wealth tends to support the status quo. Also, countries that have previously politically transitioned, such as Kuwait, are more likely to move toward democracy—however, the probability of success is dependent on other aspects. For instance, being surrounded by democratic neighbors motivates democratic transition and vice versa. Several studies support two possibilities regarding oil wealth and democracy (Gassebner et al., 2013; Ross, 2015). First, oil

supports authoritarian regimes and resists the transition to democracy, exemplified by cases of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Second, oil wealth weakens democratic regimes and pushes them towards authoritarian regimes, such as the Kuwaiti case during multiple historical incidents. A third additional opinion that has been argued is that oil can be characterized as pro-regime stability (Smith, 2014; Yom, 2011). For example, the use of oil revenues to empower the ruling family in Kuwait as a rentier state created what Yom (2011) called “durable autocracy”. According to Alsabah (2013), the “paradox of plenty” (Karl, 1997, p. 242) emerges when a country is highly endowed in natural resources yet simultaneously struggles with numerous political, economic, and social conflicts (Karl, 1997). Thus, the abundance of wealth develops the curse effect that encourages conflicts.

Studies about political resource curses show that wealth based on natural resources tends to negatively affect governance (Alsabah, 2013; Auty, 2001; Ross, 2015). The negative effect can strengthen authoritarian regimes, increase corruption, and escalate conflict to violence in low- and middle-class societies.

However, there is debate about the conditions and the mechanism of the effect (Dunning, 2005). Therefore, recent studies have aimed to explain the variation in different populations, which might help explain the conditions of the first stage of the effect. However, the resource curse literature lacks solutions (Ross, 2015). Some researchers, such as Alsabah (2013) propose innovations, like creativity, as resource curse reductions. In addition, oil wealth countries are connected to the decline of the competitiveness of other sectors, the dispersal of the natural resources revenues due to the

dependency of the global market, and governmental mismanagement and corruption (Alsabah, 2013).

Consequently, countries with fewer natural resources tend to have higher economic growth and better development outcomes (Alsabah, 2013). According to Alsabah (2013) and Auty and Gelb (2004), Kuwait as a benevolent state tends to increase its social welfare over time. The benevolent state has “an accountable executive, an efficient civil service, adhere to the rule of law, allows the participation of civil society in policy making” (Alsabah, 2013, p. 29). However, from an economic perspective, countries that are dependent on natural resources should inevitably switch to a knowledge, skills, capital, or technology based economy (Alsabah, 2013). This transition may be challenged by mismanagement, corruption, policy-making processes, and cultural components.

Policy Making in Kuwait

In this section, I describe the legal structure of the political system in Kuwait. This description is built mainly on the constitution’s articles as the legal foundation of political life and the foundation of many political and economic debates. For this discussion, I use the English translation of the Kuwaiti Constitution from the Constitute Project website, which was developed by the founders of the Comparative Constitutions Project at the University of Texas at Austin and is run by scholars in cooperation with other non-profit organizations (Constitute, n.d. About, para 9).

The National Assembly in Kuwait consists of 50 elected members. In addition, the cabinet is recognized as part of the National Assembly, and the 16 ministers’ votes are also counted in the National Assembly, in addition to the Assembly’s 49 votes

(Constitute, n.d., p. 80). The National Assembly has 49 votes instead of 50 because the cabinet must include at least one elected minister from the National Assembly in order to get the trust (Constitute, n.d., p. 56). The second article of the constitution of Kuwait states that Islam is the religion of Kuwait and Islamic law is a main source of the legislation (Constitute, n.d., p. 3).

Before explaining the consequences of the second article, it might be important to mention the debate that occurred during the formation of the constitution about this article. Vigorous debate emerged regarding whether Islamic law is *the* main source or *a* main source (Alyousifi, 2014b). Those opposed to giving Islamic law the status of being the main source of legislation argued that in the future, legislators might face challenges when they want to establish a law that has no basis in Islamic law (Alkhateeb, 2007; Alyousifi, 2014b). Therefore, they argued, it is better to have multiple sources for laws and maintain Islamic law as a main source (Alkhateeb, 2007). Moreover, the nature of the debate at that time took the shape of a habitual matter that relates to the majority as Muslims without political intentions. However, after Islamist political movements emerged, the demand to change the second article was a main headline in political campaigns until late 2000 (Okruhlik, 2016).

The consequence of these proclamations was that the government, in order to reduce political and social tension, turned a blind eye to many laws that Islamized the state. For instance, in 1996 the National Assembly passed legislation that segregates genders in colleges in Kuwait. Kuwait had never experienced gender segregation in any public place prior to this law. These types of legislation are widely recognized as an alternative strategy, instead of changing the second article—which requires the Amir's

approval—to Islamize Kuwait’s laws. The economic impact of the segregation legislation was an increase in costs due to having to build new buildings and facilities in the new campus of Kuwait University (Kahlifa, 2015). Since the National Assembly passed the law, Kuwait University and other colleges have not been able to fully apply the law due to logistical challenges in addition to the negative financial consequences—and therefore roughly only 40% of the campus is segregated by gender.

Article six of the constitution states, “Kuwait's system of government is democratic; sovereignty is vested in the Nation as the source of all authority; and the exercise of that sovereignty shall be as set out in this Constitution” (Constitute, n.d., p. 4). This article clearly states the political system’s ideology and the position of the nation as opposite of the Amir. However, Article 51 states, “in conformity with the constitution legislative power shall be vested in the Amir and the National Assembly” (Constitute, n.d., p. 9). Thus, the Amir has equal or even more power than the National Assembly. Article 51, for example, gives the Amir the authority to block the Islamist agenda to change the second article, as I discussed earlier. Many politicians believe that this article contradicts the sixth article (Sabr, 2012), which recognizes the nation as the source of all authority.

Moreover, Article 52 states, “executive power shall be vested in the Amir, the cabinet and the ministers in the manner specified in the constitution” (Constitute, n.d., p. 9). That is, the Amir practices executive power through the cabinet, similar to the American presidential system. Furthermore, Article 53 states, “within the limits of the constitution judicial power shall be vested in the courts in the Amir’s name” (Constitute, n.d., p. 10). This article gives the Amir control over naming the Supreme Court judges

and the right to approve judges in the judicial system. As a result, Kuwait's political system is a hybrid and consists of three types of systems: traditional, where legitimacy is gained from the social and historical aspects that characterize it as a paternalistic authority; presidential, or that the president practices authority through the cabinet; and parliamentary, where citizens directly choose their representative without having any interference from the executive power.

A powerful tool of the National Assembly is the right to interrogate the cabinet members. Interrogation is a formal process that allows members of the National Assembly to summon ministers or the prime minister, and this process can lead to a vote to withdraw confidence from the ministers and the prime minister. By law, withdrawing confidence means a forced resignation of the minister, which deprives them from holding any public position for the rest of their life. Moreover, because Kuwait is a very small and close-knit society, the interrogation of any member of the cabinet has a serious impact on the personal and social life of the targeted minister and his family. To avoid political and social consequences, the government and members of the AlSabah family always try to avoid interrogation. Therefore, because the National Assembly has limited administrative power, the only ways to practice their power and gain public support are to interrogate the cabinet constantly, as a means to represent the people's discontent, and to pass communal legislation to embarrass the government and gain public support.

The Impact of the Legislative System

The primary challenges that face Kuwait are how to maintain political participation and improve the economy. Abdulwahab Al-Haroun, a former deputy of the

National Assembly and former Minister of Planning and Development Affairs made a descriptive statement about the current role of the National Assembly:

There are no accomplishments [of the national assembly in promoting the private sector] because of a great imbalance lying in the nature of those who vote in elections. A majority of them are employees of the state or its enterprises . . . The role of the deputy changes . . . to a role resembling that of a member of a union of government employees, and the National Assembly gradually becomes a large union of the employees of the government and its enterprises. (cited in Herb, 2014, p. 1)

The vital factor that makes Kuwait's economy less developed compared to its neighbors is the decision-making process, which is heavily dependent on political stability (Herb, 2014; Ross, 2012). That is, the absence of political institutions in the other Gulf monarchies places the responsibility of decision making on one person rather than multiple institutions. The continuous competition between the National Assembly and the ruling family over the government has upended the country's priorities.

Gulf monarchies have benefited from the negative impact of the political practices in Kuwait to promote the fear of democracy. Olayan (2009) reported on the feedback of public figures in the GCC, such as Yaser Hareb, a public figure and an Emirati author, who wrote an article entitled "Circus of the Nation." Hareb said,

As GCC citizens we have to say that we lost the hope for democratic practices in the region because it becomes like a circus ... most of discussions of the National Assembly of Kuwait are about clearing personal issues between individuals ... and they claim that they discuss public matters. (Olayan, 2009, para. 3)

All of the feedback, without exception, is negative and suggests fear about adopting democracy in their states. It is important to understand, also, that all Gulf states' media are government owned, either directly or indirectly, and they all are subject to pre-broadcasting and print censorship.

The Role of Labor and Market

One of the major challenges that faces Kuwait today is the nature of wealth distribution. The strategy that has been adopted since the oil discovery relies on distributing the oil income to the citizens. The distribution of wealth takes different forms such as jobs, scholarships, subsidies, and government projects for merchants. Mahdavy (1970) called such states “Rentier States” (p. 430). He defined the term saying, “Those countries that receive on a regular basis substantial amounts of external rent. External rent is defined as rent paid by foreign individuals, concerns, or governments to individuals, concerns or governments of a given foreign country” (Mahdavy 1970, p. 430).

Thus, the distribution of wealth serves as class conflict reduction, a source of legitimacy, and maintaining the role of paternal state. Moreover, the National Assembly has reinforced this strategy due to its political benefits, regardless of its long- and short-term consequences on the economy. However, even if they are aware of the negative consequences –such as masked employment, low productivity, inflation in public wages in the state’s budget, and a weakened private sector– elites and merchants have remained silent or only given quiet warnings about this policy. This is likely because they also benefit from the monopoly of the government’s biddings that most of their wealth comes from. Oil income accounts for 88.1% of the state’s income, or about 30 billion dollars for year 2014-2015. In that year, Kuwait faced budget deficits of about 15.3 billion dollars, according to the Ministry of Finance (MOF, 2016). Kuwait, as a rentier state that is concerned about wealth distribution and low productivity motivated by high income that is generated mainly from oil revenues (Delacroix, 1980, Smith, 2004), spends 28.1%, or

around 16 billion dollars, of the state budget on a job security policy that mandates the state must secure the weakness of the private sector and offer enough jobs for citizens (MOF, 2016). Moreover, about 40% or 20 billion dollars of the annual state's budget goes to subsidies, such as social security, health care, primary and higher education, real estate loans, fuel, and others (MOF, 2016). Each Kuwaiti citizen's share of the annual subsidies is about \$5,000, regardless of their financial status (MOF, 2016).

One of the consequences of Kuwait's dependency on oil wealth is the creation of a vast majority of public sector jobs filled by employees who work for wages. This is especially true because the constitution of Kuwait forces the government to offer work for every citizen as a requirement for dignity and public welfare (Constitute, n.d., p. 8). Therefore, citizens rely on oil for their paychecks rather than on tax that emerges from private sectors as a rentier state. Shambayati (1994) argued that the absence of real, diverse production eliminates the role of economic pressure groups and cultivates ideological groups that believe the economy is not a priority in their agendas. That is, the current oil production is not reflected on citizens' economic activities. Rather, it is an asset that is controlled by the state, and the wealth gets distributed without actual efforts from the people.

Delacroix (1980), from a Marxist point of view, explained the relationships between the society's model of production, such as oil, economic life, and social relations. He argued that we cannot isolate the local economy from the worldwide division of wealth. Therefore, as Kuwait relies mainly on oil production and income, the vast majority of the society will be dependent upon oil revenue rather than other economic sectors. That is, if the economy relies on a single revenue such as oil, public

wages, the private sector, and all other economic activities will be reliant upon the oil revenues too. This would explain the conflict between capitalists and labor political agendas in the Kuwait National Assembly, in which each group is trying to secure its share of the revenues. For instance, merchants are asking for more governmental projects to operate their companies. Middle class employees are fighting against privatization so they can avoid work environments that are harsher than public sector jobs.

Moreover, in order to achieve political development, the state must solve the current political class conflict by creating new revenue in the economy (Delacroix, 1980). The linkages and nature of dependency on the world system determine the nature of transition from a chiefdom state to what Delacroix (1980) called “pristine” state (p. 9). The phrase “*pristine state*”, coined by anthropologist Service Elman, describes a state in the process of transitioning from a chiefdom state to a more balanced in power and wealth distribution (1975, p. 19). That is, Kuwait’s economy relies heavily on oil—however, it also relies on international power for national security. This could explain the uniqueness of the Kuwait political model that emerged from its internal political situation and its ties with and dependency on the international powers that protect its sovereignty.

Dunning’s (2008) analysis showed that rent countries are less likely to democratize. However, he argued, in some cases rent wealth could lead to democracy because it would help to redistribute the wealth because of class conflict. The monopoly of wealth in non-democratic regimes could lead to class conflict, in which disadvantaged classes might seek democracy as a result of the unfair distribution of wealth. This could be applicable to the situation in Kuwait, considering the National Assembly and merchants’ conflicts as well as the Assembly’s conflict over power with the Alsabab

family. Therefore, the current study might show a lower tendency towards democracy in merchants and elites. On the other hand, democracy might be less favorable for middle and lower-class citizens if it leads to subsidies reduction (Herb, 2014). The model of Boix (2003) is more conservative. He predicted that countries with high income from natural resources have no chance to move toward democracy. His argument is based on the claim that authorities will sabotage any democratic movement to avoid wealth redistribution.

The question that raises concerns in Kuwait's situation is how long Kuwait can remain dependent on oil as a main source of wealth. Threats to oil as a source of wealth are already emerging from many directions. For instance, since 2014 the price of oil dropped from more than a hundred dollars to forty dollars per barrel. Also, there are an increased number of public sector employees that are known to mask unemployment. The employment policy devours around 40% of Kuwait's budget every year in addition to its negative consequences on productivity and work ethic (Herb, 2014). These factors, in addition to the growth of population, global economic challenges, and local and regional conflicts, form an existential threat to Kuwait.

Past Reform Efforts

Here, I will focus on recent efforts to achieve economic reform and policy development in Kuwait. For Kuwaitis, the most popular attempt at economic reform was the joint venture between Kuwait Petroleum Company (KPC) and Dow Chemical in 2008. Under the deal, Kuwait aimed to invest about 7.5 billion dollars to establish a 50-50 split in the K-Dow Company with Dow Chemical (Izzak, 2008). However, Dow's share was paid as assets such as factories, ownership rights, and research centers around the world (Izzak, 2008, para. 6). A resulting conflict between the National Assembly and

the cabinet was based on two factors. First, the members of the National Assembly believed that Dow was getting rid of outdated assets by giving them to Kuwait. Second, after the global economic crisis of 2008, members of the National Assembly believed that the value of the deal did not reflect the actual value of Dow's assets in favor of Dow (Izzak, 2008). After threats to interrogate the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Mohamad Alsabah, the prime minister scrapped K-Dow mega deal to save his position.

This incident cost Kuwait a 2.5 billion-dollar penalty. The minister of Oil, Mohammad Alolaim, who is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood Party, resigned and the party shifted to the opposition, forming one of the strongest oppositions in the history of Kuwait (Alyousife, 2014c; Izzak, 2008). Alolaim insisted that the deal would help Kuwait to own 40% of the petrochemical plants and other supportive services. His party declared that the cabinet sacrificed Alolaim and left him without support in order to protect the prime minister (Alyousife, 2014c). The opposition escalated their claims, supported by corruption accusations, to become a national movement against the cabinet (Alyousifi, 2014c).

The movement lasted for three years, and around 70,000 people marched several times against the government, with violent incidents occurring between special forces and protesters. These events happened during the Arab Spring, the revolutionary movements against many regimes in the Middle East. The Amir, as a result, dismissed the prime minister—a first occurrence in Kuwait's political history. Many pro-government citizens perceived this incident as a major threat to the Amir's social and political status (Alyousifi, 2014c, p. 218).

It is important to mention that the political conflicts in Kuwait are inseparable from the distrust that permeates Kuwait. I argue that historical incidents, as mentioned in the first part of the study, and the current economic and political situation are reflected in continuous political conflicts (Farah & Al-Salem, 1977; “Kuwait emir reiterates,” 2014; Worth, 2008). The Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2012) declared their fear in a statement, stating that Kuwait’s challenges will not be solved through politics due the withdrawal of trust.

As a reflection of the country’s economic failure, Kuwait capitalists have avoided investing their money in Kuwait. Local investors tend to view the investment environment negatively. According to the U.S. State Department (2016), Kuwait ranked 102 out of 190 in ease of doing business, 55 of 175 on the corruption index, and 77 of 141 on the global innovation index. Therefore, the concept of distrust in the political system is another aspect to be investigated in this study.

CHAPTER 4

THE ISSUE OF TRUST IN POLITICAL LIFE IN KUWAIT

For any discussion to succeed, contributors must form a rational base and valid contributions (Habermas, 1984). Therefore, understanding the nature of resistance that could occur is vital in order to achieve mutual understanding. My aim is to analyze the concept of trust and distrust. This examination would help gain an understanding of the base that people depart from in their discussions about political life in Kuwait. In addition, understanding the different aspects of distrust is key to guiding the interviews conducted as part of the study.

Many rulers of Kuwait have expressed their concerns about the loyalty of some politicians (Alghazali, 2007; Alyousifi, 2014a). However, the ability of the Alsabah family to value political life was also questioned (Alghazali, 2007). Ghabra (1993) argued, “the constant bickering and the lack of trust between the parties and the government had led to political stalemate” (p. 111). Distrust is thought to be limited between the public and institutions. However, people think that corruption is no longer limited to the authority. Distrust has penetrated the political parties to the point where supporters do not trust their politicians anymore (Ghabra, 1997). Therefore, I argue that the phenomenon of distrust in Kuwait is a cumulative situation. Historical events—both internal and external—and the current failure to satisfy peoples’ expectations have increased the distrust in leadership and institutions (Alsabah 2013).

The continuous feeling of distrust has transferred to acting as a belief that provides prior judgments that could challenge any political transformation. Bromiley and Cummings (1995) discuss the negative impact of prior judgements on political life. This

situation is affecting the political and economic transformation in Kuwait, where the continuous feeling of distrust is impeding any progress to achieve agreement. Therefore, starting a discussion about public policy or political transformation without understanding these prior judgments might cause the discussion to look irrational.

Conceptualizing Trust and Distrust

Trust is one of the most complicated concepts in social science. McKnight and Chervany (2001) describe it as a large elephant, one that you cannot get your arms around. They argue that each discipline describes trust based on its interest. McKnight and Chervany (2001) claim that trust is “like the story of the six blind men, who each described the elephant based on the portion of the elephant’s body they touched” (p. 20). Even though the concepts of trust and distrust have been recognized as important in many fields, this widely shared interest in the concept has led researchers to define it in many ways (Hosmer, 1995). As a result, confusion has surrounded the term, particularly due to the multiple lenses that researchers from different fields look through when discussing the concept (Bigley & Pearce, 1998). A study by McKnight and Chervany (2001) found that 65 peer-reviewed articles discussed trust and distrust in different disciplines. For instance, 23 articles in the field of psychology have analyzed characters and personalities. Twenty-three were conducted in communication studies and management, and 19 typologies were spread across sociological studies that examined the social structure aspects and economic studies that looked at rational choice (McKnight, & Chervany, 2001).

Rotter (1980), as one example of a definition, defines trust as "a generalized expectancy held by an individual that the word, promise, oral or written statement of

another individual or group can be relied upon" (p. 1). His view of trust relies on the unfamiliarity between two individuals. In contrast, Gambetta (1988) argues that trust and distrust are outcomes of personal experiences. Gambetta insisted that trust is built based on the absence of negative evidence. However, distrust is a cumulative experience that is hard to solve. He said,

Once distrust has set in it soon becomes impossible to know if it was ever in fact justified, for it has the capacity to be self-fulfilling, to generate a reality consistent with itself. It then becomes individually 'rational' to behave accordingly, even for those previously prepared to act on more optimistic expectation. (Gambetta. 1988, p. 234)

That is, Gambetta is arguing that we should “trust trust” and “distrust distrust” (p. 234). Gambetta’s argument is consonant with the selective attention literature that explains the way people look for information that supports their existing views (Fischer, 2011).

Dunn (1988) conceptualizes trust in politics as an agency. He proposed two main concepts: trust in intentions that are based on emotions, and trust in the whole system. Dunn (1988) argues that in politics it not sensible to trust intentions, to trust leaders when the system is not efficient. Alternatively, Zucker (1986) and (Barber, 1983) argue that trust is an unconscious expectation.

Yamagishi & Yamagishi (1994) describe trust as an “elusive concept” (p. 131) that is perceived differently between different languages. Based on social uncertainty, the Japanese, for example, perceive trust as commitment, whereas Americans perceive trust in relation to honesty (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Lewis and Weigert, (1985) argue that trust is steeped in conceptual confusion because it is loaded with emotions and

cognitive perceptions that form a mechanism to understand social orders. Barber (1983) explains the role of trust as a method to secure expectations in social interactions.

Moreover, the multiple meanings of trust cause multiple synonyms. Therefore, recognizing expectations, obligations, and responsibilities might be problematic interculturally and even between representatives of the same culture (Barber, 1983). For instance, McKnight and Chervany (2001) argue, “trust has been defined as both a noun and a verb” (p. 2). It is an interpersonal attribute generalized to comprise social values (Rotter, 1971) and a belief that helps avoid conflict (Lindsfold, 1978). Trust maintains an impersonal agency relationship within the social structure (Shapiro, 1987), and it is an actor that enhances behavior toward mutual benefit (Currall & Judge, 1995; Scanzoni, 1979). That is, interpersonal trust is a state of mind that interacts with social actors. Thus, trust in institutions and authority is built upon the interpersonal trust between individuals.

Shapiro (1987) defines trust as an agency that serves as a bridge in humans’ relationships. When comparing the dictionary definition of trust with other terms, such as cooperation or confidence, an analysis shows that on in average, trust has 17 definitions, compared to similar conceptual terms that have an average of 4.7 definitions (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

The previous definitions exemplify the complexity in defining trust. Therefore, Hosmer (1995) suggests that the definition of trust should be conceptualized around “the result of right, just, and fair behavior” (p.399). However, a group of studies have modified the definition of trust according to how it forms. For example, Zucker (1986) suggests “process-based, characteristic-based, and institutional-based trust and distrust” (p. 307). Shapiro, Sheppard, and Cheraskin (1992) propose “deterrence-based,

knowledge-based, and identification-based trust” trust (p. 374). McKnight and Chervany (2001) argue, and I agree, that these forms may help to conceptualize trust; however, they still lack an explanation of what trust means, in addition to what its bases are. McKnight and Chervany (2001) added, “still, they improve our understanding of trust, just as did definitions of the bases of power in the early power literature” (p. 28).

Trust and Distrust

The concept of distrust has been studied less than trust. Just as trust, distrust has been defined in such a way that it has too many meanings. The most critical decision that research has taken on in the trust literature is whether trust and distrust are bipolar concepts or each term is a separate construct that exists simultaneously (McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

As mentioned previously, the conceptualization of trust and distrust have varied from “a personality construct, rational choice, an interpersonal relationship, to a social structure construct” (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 30) driven from psychology, sociology, economics, and other disciplines. However, I can summarize the minimum standards that most definitions in general and trust definition in specific should have. First, it should be inclusive, so that it can include most of the conceptual connotations of the term in order to make scientific research on trust grounded in practice (Barber, 1983; Luhmann, 1988). Inclusivity is important to any definition so it does not lose what Kelley (1992) called “common-sense” (p. 2). That is, the term keeps its socially-constructed meaning. Second, the definition should be simple so that it does not draw out beyond its conceptual borders towards ambiguity (Osigweh, 1989). Third, it should be consensual,

so it has the ability to transport prior concepts as a way of generating knowledge (McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

Furthermore, in order to satisfy the previous criteria, I would have to avoid the unitary approach or even adopt a singular discipline's, such as psychological, sociobiological or even social psychological concepts in my research. My approach has been supported by many scholars (Kee & Knox, 1970; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Thus, I treated trust and distrust as the following:

- 1- The trust concept is constructed to serve a set of aspects. That is, trust is considered a multilevel concept that correlates with individuals, groups, and intuitions (Rousseau, et al., 1998). Therefore, trust must be considered as multidisciplinary.
- 2- Trust can be treated as an input, mediator, and a product (Rousseau, et al., 1998). For instance, trust can play different roles in the research: as outcomes of the historical incidents and as a mediator of the decision-making and judgment processes.
- 3- a specific construct within a concept that meets one criteria and does not stretch (Mayer, et al., 1995).
- 4- and a trust construct that can be measured (Mayer, et al., 1995),

McKnight and Chervany (2001) commented on the strategy of studying trust, saying, "We propose researchers use the divide and conquer approach to define the mammoth we call trust: *how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time*" (p. 30). Many concepts are challenging to define. Moreover, in many disciplines, a concept could be defined by identifying its characteristics. Therefore, many scholars argued that trust could be treated

as a referent that derives its characteristics, such as integrity, risk-taking, ability, etc. (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 714; McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 31).

Typology and conceptual definition of trust

Mayer et al. (1995) provided a comprehensive explanation of the trustee and trustor's characteristics, and McKnight and Chervany's (2000) study analyzed those characteristics to reflect specific conceptual constructs. The characteristics were categorized according to their logical grouping (McKnight & Chervany, 2001), creating four categories:

- 1- *Benevolence*: caring and being motivated to act in one's interest rather than acting opportunistically (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 31). This construct was adopted from Holmes (1989).
- 2- *Integrity*: the expectations about truthfulness, upholding promises, and achieving decent "faith agreements" (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 36). Originally from Bromiley and Cummings (1995).
- 3- *Competence*: the feeling that trustees have "the ability or power to do for one what one needs done" (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 31). The construct originally was proposed by Barber (1983).
- 4- *Predictability*: the idea that trustees' actions and behaviors are predictable regardless of goodness (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 31). Originally from Gabarro (1978).

McKnight and Chervany (2001) mapped the literature of trust definitions and characteristics by creating multi-conceptual types and comparing them to trustee characteristic referents (Figure 3), where each X in the Figure indicates a definition.

Trustee Characteristic / Referent	Conceptual Types					
	Disposition	Structural	Affect / Attitude	Belief / Expectancy	Intention	Behavior
Competence			x	XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX		XXXX
Benevolence			XXXXXXXXX XXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XX	XXX	XXXXX
Integrity			XXXXXXXXX X	XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXX	X	XXXXXX
Predictability			x	XXXXXXXXXXXX		x
Other characteristic				XXXXXXXX		x
Other Referent	XXXXX	XXXXXX	XXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXX	XXXXXXXXXX XXXXXX

Figure 3. Mapping trust definitions (McKnight and Chervany, 2001, p. 32).

From the mapping (Figure 3) and an analysis of how trust concepts and definitions are connected (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998), an interdisciplinary concept of types of trust was created by McKnight and Chervany (2001), as can be seen in Figure 4.

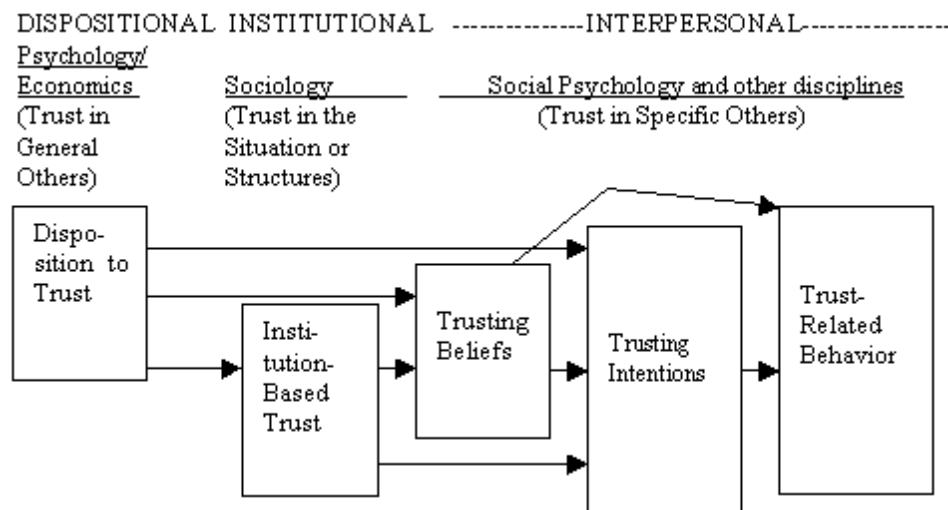


Figure 4. Interdisciplinary model of trust constructs (McKnight and Chervany, 2000, p. 829)

Thus, this study adopted McKnight and Chervany's (2001) trust mapping and conceptual definitions because their study provided a comprehensive analysis for what has been done about trust. In addition, their syntheses of trust constructs support this research with the required tools to study trust in Kuwait.

Trusting intentions: Many researchers have created the intentional construct in the trust literature (Currall & Judge, 1995; Scanzoni, 1979). McKnight and Chervany (2001) defined it as, "One is willing to depend, or intends to depend, on the other party with a feeling of relative security, in spite of lack of control over that party, and even though negative consequences are possible" (p. 34). The most important element in the definition is that it makes clear the distinction between the *person* and the *situation*, where the trustee or *person* in the definition is the object of the trust concept. Thus, trust-as-situation should be considered with different conceptualizing and indicators. Trusting intentions embed two sub-constructs: the "willingness to depend and subjective probability of depending" (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 34). These mean that one is willing to make himself open to rely on the other person with a feeling of security, and this willingness is predictable (Currall & Judge, 1995; Mayer et al., 1995).

Trust-related behavior: This construct "means that a person voluntarily *depends* on another person with a feeling of relative security, even though negative consequences are possible" (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 35).

The main difference between trust-related behavior and trusting intentions is that the term "depends" points to a behavioral action (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 35), as a number of trust literature have conceptualized trust as a behavior (Baier, 1986; Bonoma, 1976; Giffin, 1967; Riker, 1971). In other words, it means the trustor gives the

trustee full confidence (Barber, 1983) despite knowledge of the risk (Mayer et al., 1995). Moreover, McKnight and Chervany (2001) added that the trust-related behavior construct represents the relationship between trust and power. The rationale behind their argument is that “dependence is the obverse of power” (p. 35). However, they insist that trust and power have not been linked by definition yet. Riker (1971) argued that trust and power are the two methods that one can use to make other one achieves the desired goal. Riker made his statement about the nature of trust by saying “trust is, in some sense, an alternative to power” (p.63).

Disposition to trust: This means that the trustor prefers to trust others in general, regardless of the person or the situation (McKnight & Chervany. 2001; Rotter, 1971; Sato, 1988).

Trust and Distrust: differ in degree or kind?

I am adopting the concept of a multidimensional relationship between trust and distrust rather than the bipolar continuum. The reason is that the two constructs can exist simultaneously with the possibility of a natural status in between because it is a matter of degree (Hardin, 2004). This concept was suggested by Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998). They argue that the traditional view of trust and distrust suggests that the two exist at opposite ends of a single sequence and, therefore, do not exist simultaneously (Lewicki et al., 1998, p. 440). Low trust, for example, was perceived as an indicator of a high level of distrust. In addition, trust was viewed as “good,” while distrust was viewed as “bad” and a psychological disorder that requires attention to be corrected (Erikson, 1963; Hardin, 2004).

Recent research on trust argues that trust and distrust are a matter of degree (Hardin, 2004). For instance, I may distrust X in some cases more than I distrust Y. Thus, trust and distrust status depend on the specific grounds the person is standing for (Larson, 2004). Karmer (2004) and Larson (2004) argue that in many cases, for example, in international relations, X country distrusts Y country to the level that X could put themselves at risk if they cooperate with Y. However, X sometimes found themselves with no choice except to collaborate with Y. The latest nuclear agreement between the United States and Iran is a good example of this scenario, regardless of who is X and who is Y, they both have agreed to collaborate even though they both distrust each other. This collaboration with distrust could be achieved, as Larson (2004) argued, when the parties provide incentives to create grounds to be trustworthy about a specific issue. Returning to our example, Iran might have provided the United States incentives about their ability to control the political parties in Iraq as well as their willingness to collaborate on fighting against terrorist groups in some regions. McKnight and Chervany (2001) called it “high negative/positive affectivity” (p. 43), where *happy* and *active*, are not antonyms for high negative affectivity, such as *sad* and *sleepy*.

This study employs McKnight and Chervany’s (2001) typology of distrust. They divide distrust into four main constructs, as the following:

- 1- “***Distrusting intentions***”: the unwillingness to rely on another party regardless of the consequences (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 43).
- 2- “***Distrusting beliefs***”: the idea that the other party is not qualified for trust (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 44).

- 3- **“Institution-based distrust”**: the idea that there is a potential for a risk due to lack of success conditions and abnormal situations within a specific group (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 45).
- 4- **“Disposition to distrust”**: the trustor’s general preference not to trust others as a state of mind, regardless of the person or the situation (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 45).

Potential Conceptualization and Constructs

This research applied McKnight and Chervany’s (2001) trusting beliefs and institution-based trust constructs as the primary concepts of trust to explore the nature of trust in Kuwait among citizens. Because McKnight and Chervany (2001) define distrust and trust as opposites of each other, in this section, whenever *trust* is mentioned it means trust and distrust as opposites. The authors stated, “We felt secure in forming distrust definitions that are the mirror image of our trust definitions” (McKnight & Chervany, 2001, p. 43). However, it should be noted that they never defined trust as a single concept with one definition; instead, they define the four constructs of trust and distrust to solve the dilemma of defining trust as one concept. That is, trust is not opposite of distrust. However, the subconstructs of trust and distrust are defined as opposites. For example, institutional based trust is an opposite – in definition– of the institutional based distrust. The rationale is to have common ground to investigate trust and distrust within the same division.

In order to explain the rationale behind selecting the trusting beliefs and institution-based constructs, I will clarify why other constructs are not appropriate for this research.

The trusting intention construct was developed to expand the psychological study of trust. McKnight and Chervany (2001) defined it as, “One is willing to depend on, or intends to depend, on the other party with a feeling of relative security, in spite of lack of control over that party, and even though negative consequences are possible” (p. 34). The construct focuses on persons rather than situations. Furthermore, the sub-constructs of trusting intention work as indicators of a person’s disposition to depend on and the likelihood of depending (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). The core of the trusting intention construct is to understand the personalities more than to explain the trust of a situation as a multidimensional case (Currall & Judge, 1995; Mayer et al., 1995).

The trust-related behavior construct examines trust as a behavioral action (Lewis & Weigert, 1985), and a number of trust studies have conceptualized trust as a behavior (Baier, 1986; Bonoma, 1976; Giffin, 1967; Riker, 1971). The construct looks at trust as a power generator to the trustee. It is true that part of this study might show how authority is powerless when distrust is present. However, the sub-constructs of trust-related behavior are less helpful to the research goal. For instance, cooperation and information sharing are not optional behaviors in official environments, and the construct addresses them as indicators of dependency.

The disposition to trust construct examines a trustor’s general tendency to trust others as a state of mind, regardless of the person or the situation (Rotter, 1971; Sato, 1988; Van Dyne, Vandewalle, Kostova, Latham, & Cummings, 2000). This construct would only be helpful if the research was interested in investigating general trust tendencies among the targeted groups.

Trusting beliefs and Institution-based trust

Trusting beliefs: according to McKnight and Chervany (2001), This is a construct that is conceptualized based on the “cognitive perceptions” (p. 36) about the trustee. It is important to differentiate between trust as a belief and as a behavior (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). That is, a behavior could be influenced by many aspects regardless the cognitive position that a person reserves. Good (2000) supported that claim saying, “cooperative behaviour by itself is not, of course, necessarily a sign of a cooperative mentality. It could cooperative by chance rather than design” (p. 33).

Trusting beliefs is the first construct used for this research. Studies show that trusting beliefs are conceptualized around the trustee’s behavior and characteristics that shape cognitive perceptions and expectations in the trustor’s mind (Bromiley & Cummings, 1995; Gabarro, 1978; Good, 2000; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). However, these characteristics are insuperable of the political judgment. My alteration of McKnight and Chervany’s (2001) trusting beliefs construct is grounded by Bromiley and Cummings (1995), who argued that trusting beliefs can be perceived as individual’s beliefs or common beliefs within a group. This is an important alteration because this research is focusing on both individuals—such as decision-makers—and the general populace, despite that both can be viewed as individuals’ perceptions, as I might find, and there are widely shared beliefs among large groups. In addition, each sub-construct of trusting beliefs is vital for my research model. There are four sub-constructs of trusting beliefs developed by McKnight and Chervany (2001):

1. "Trusting belief-competence" (p. 36) is the belief that the trustee has the required skills and knowledge and the influence or the authority to accomplish a trustor’s

need. This sub-construct is important to explore whether people think that officials and institutions are having the ability, organizational structure, skilled individuals, or the power to improve the political life and economy. This sub-construct could be used to examine the role of the historical events within the organization that affected and built this belief among people.

2.” Trusting belief-benevolence” (McKnight and Chervany, 2001, p. 36). The belief investigates the perception about the inner intentions of the trustee and how they truly act to achieve the public welfare.

3.” Trusting belief-integrity” (McKnight and Chervany, 2001, p. 36). This belief aims to explore the perceived truthfulness of the trustee. Therefore, perceived truthfulness could impact any kind of agreement between the trustee and the trustor (Bromiley & Cummings, 1995). For example, do people really believe that the government won’t be able to pay peoples’ stipends within the few coming years? If officials confirm this as a fact during the interviews and people reject it, this means that there is a big gap between what officials see and what people believe.

4. “Trusting belief-predictability” McKnight and Chervany, 2001, p. 36). I believe that this sub-construct is vital to this research for exploring the relationships among officials, as trust is important within the organizational context, especially in political organizations. For example, how can a politician or political party trust the prime minister in a specific situation if they think that their decision, attitude, or alliance could change at any time? Gabarro (1978) insisted that the “consistency of behavior” (p. 296) is vital to build reliability. Moreover, in many cases, people might prefer to rely on a negative expectation rather than the unknown. For example, in this study, people might

prefer to support the current economic status even with the realization that it is not driving their country to a positive end rather than supporting a mega project with outcomes that they cannot predict, especially if they do not trust the government's released information. Therefore, this sub-construct would help me to explore if political decisions are perceived as inconsistent or are causing confusion regardless of their outputs.

Institution-based trust: In this construct, the trustor believes that prime, satisfactory conditions lead to success (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Shapiro, 1987; Zucker, 1986). This construct is guided by sociology literature, where trustors can rely on structures and roles that can assure that things will run in their interests (Baier, 1986; Fox, 1974; Garfinkel, 1963). Institution-based trust has two sub-constructs (McKnight & Chervany, 2001): “structural assurance and situational normality” (p. 37). Structural assurance is the perception that the institutional structure that includes all required procedures and regulations could lead to success (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; Shapiro, 1987; Williamson, 1993; Zucker, 1986). On the other hand, situational normality reflects the trustor's perception that things in a situation are normal (Barber, 1983; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Garfinkel (1963) found that people lose their trust when they perceive a situation as abnormal. The institution-based trust concept will be implemented to explore the general thoughts about the trust in political institutions. Where the trustor believes that prime, satisfactory conditions lead to success (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Shapiro, 1987; Zucker, 1986). Here, trustors rely on their judgment regarding structures and roles that can assure that things will run in their interests (Baier, 1986; Fox, 1974; Garfinkel, 1963).

The review of trust has provided a detailed description of the concept of trust from a sociological perspective. However, it has not considered the context of the trust study. Therefore, in the following section, I will discuss trust as a political attribute that impacts legitimacy.

Trust and Legitimacy

Trust has been studied with additional lenses in legitimacy research. The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1979; 1988) and the American political psychologist Robert Lane (1962) set the foundation between trust and legitimacy in their early work. Therefore, in this section, I introduce the connection between trust and legitimacy in order to introduce the theory of communicative action. The problem of legitimacy is proposed on three levels: perceived legitimacy of policies, procedures, and the social system. In addition, there is a need to provide indicators that measure each perception. My aim is to employ the concept of trust in order to study legitimacy within the framework of Habermas's communicative action. Lewis and Weigert (1985) described trust as a "property of collective units" (p. 986), where trust investigates the relationships of ongoing dyads of groups and collectivities rather than of individuals. Moreover, trust has been described as a functional prerequisite—a mutual faithfulness—of any society to depend on in order to avoid chaos and fear (Lehmann, 1979; Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Cheema (2010) described trust as multifaceted concept, referring to trust as "citizens'" expectations of the type of government that they should have, how government should operate and interact with other social and economic institutions and citizenry, and the behavior of political leaders, civil servants" (p. 4).

According to Cheema (2010), there are five dimensions of trust in government: moral trust, economic trust, political trust, social trust, and technological trust. In addition, Cheema (2010) added four sub-dimensions to evaluate trust in government: goodwill, competency, procedural, and performance. Moreover, the definition of distrust varies based on its constructs. The fundamental aspects of every distrust definition, however, are uncertainty and risk. Earle and Cvetkovich (1995) defined trust as, “A simplifying strategy that enables individuals to adapt to complex social environment, and thereby benefit from increased opportunities” (p. 38). Gambetta (1988) defined trust by stating, “Trust is particularly relevant in conditions of ignorance or uncertainty with respect to unknown or unknowable actions of others” (p. 218). Sztompka (1999) argued that trust should consist of two main aspects: beliefs and commitment. Thus, he defined trust as “a bet about the future contingent actions of others” (Sztompka, 1999, p. 25).

Moreover, Gamson (1968) and Luhmann (1979) asserted that trust is the creator of power in a political system, as authorities have no effective power to achieve collective goals without the trust of the public. However, this process of gathering and analyzing information is typically very complicated (Gamson, 1968), and it is not always the case that a person has the time and effort available to devote to such a difficult mental process. Thus, trust can act as the shortcut to making a decision. Lewis and Weigert (1985) said, “Trust is a functional alternative to rational prediction for the reduction of complexity” (p. 969). Luhmann (1979) established a new perspective of viewing trust as a self-evident fact. His argument departed from the view that there is no complete absence of trust because that prevents us as humans from performing our basic daily functions.

Gamson (1968) provided a specific construct for political trust. The first element of his political trust concept is *confidence*. He defined this concept by saying, “Confidence in authorities means that they are perceived as the group’s agents, that the group members identify with them” (Gamson, 1968, p.54). The second element is *neutrality*, which means when an authority is making a decision, it rationally represents or takes into account the interests of the general public rather than a specific group or ideology (Gamson, 1968, p.55). The third element is *alienation*, wherein authorities are perceived as inefficient, biased, corrupt, and unable to achieve the collective goals (Gamson, 1968, p.56).

Barbalet (1996) summarized the orientation of human action by saying, “All human action occurs in time, drawing upon a past which cannot be undone and facing a future which cannot be known” (p. 82). The concept of trust in sociology focuses on the impact of past events on the current individual as well as on collective behaviors toward expected future events. Moreover, the goal of human behavior in the present is to minimize the uncertainty and risk about another human’s behavior in the future (Sztompka, 1999). Neumann (1957) characterized political alienation as levels of rejection of a political system (p. 290). Based on Neumann’s conception of political alienation, Lane (1962) formed three types of attitudes that identify the level of public perception of political legitimacy:

“1- I am the object, not the subject of political life. I have no influence and do not participate. Politically, I speak in the passive voice.

2- The government is not run in my interest; they do not care about me; in this sense, it is not my government.

3- I do not approve of the way decisions are made; the rules of the game are unfair, loaded, and illegitimate; the constitution is, in some sense, fraudulent” (Lane, 1962, p. 162).

Lastly, adopting the concept of trust and Lane’s (1962) differentiation of political alienation levels could help to distinguish different aspects of legitimacy and to propose different kinds of solutions, as Habermas (1979) argued for.

Communication, Legitimacy and Distrust

Communication is more than a tool to transfer information. According to Luhmann (1979) complexity in social and political systems catalyzes the dependency on trust as a complexity reduction strategy and increases the need for communication forms that engage the populace in the life-world. Following the same conception, Luhmann (1979) made a connection between the world’s complexity and media and communications. He argued that when people were relying on religious explanations for most of their concerns about the world, there was no need for media or external communication because religious assumptions under the authority of god(s) were trusted sources. With the expansion of social orders, the minimization of religious assumptions, and increased dependence on human-based knowledge, the world became more complex, and an individual did not have the capacity to solve every complex issue due to its limitations (Luhmann, 1979).

This high complexity motivates people to communicate where available sources and information are selected and linked together to produce a judgment that reduces complexity. Luhmann (1979) explained this communication saying, “there are intrinsic connections between the complexity of the world on the one hand and the socially

regulated processes for differentiating and connecting multiple selections on the other” (p. 48). Habermas (1975, 1987), in contrast, insisted that the problem of norms and action for legitimacy has become too complicated to be solved in terms of sociological means. However, it can be recognized from a communication perspective. Therefore, I argue that the need to make judgment about such a complex subject like political legitimacy, trusted or not, requires a form of communication that can simplify, clarify, and help to achieve mutual understanding.

CHAPTER 5

LEGITIMACY, FOUNDATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

The study of legitimacy has been embraced by the philosophy of justice in political science and sociology (Peter, 2010; Weber, 1922/1962). Besides political science and sociology, legitimacy has been studied in many disciplines such as, psychology (Bobocel & Kay, 2009), law (Thakur, 2010), public health (Anand, Peter & Sen, 2004), communication (Habermas, 1979; Chang, Jacobson & Zhang, 2013), and economics (Dryzek, 2001; Weber, 1915/2012).

Legitimacy is crucial not only for political institutions and decision makers, however. Legitimacy is the cornerstone for stable economies, stable societies, and security (Habermas, 1975; Habermas, 1979; Peter, 2010). Research on legitimacy in social science aims to answer three main questions: What is legitimacy? What is legitimate order? What are the dimensions of legitimacy? To answer these questions, scholars have taken two paths in identifying legitimacy, descriptive and normative legitimacy. Other scholars have developed a third concept of legitimacy that combines the descriptive and normative concepts (Habermas, 1979; Beetham, 1991). I will briefly discuss the descriptive and normative concepts of legitimacy in order to start my discussion and definition of legitimacy from Habermas's perspective.

Legitimacy in descriptive, empiricist interpretation, is associated with Max Weber, who defined legitimacy as people's beliefs about authority and obligation (Weber, 1915/2012). He argued, "the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of

which persons exercising authority are lent prestige” (Weber, 1915/2012, p. 382). The validity of legitimate authority in Weberian tradition is gained from three main categories:

- 1- Traditional authority, relying on the notion of long-established sanctity, “which has always existed is valid” (Weber, 1962, p. 81).
- 2- Charismatic authority, depending on the perceived exceptional sanctity of the leader who represents the authority (Weber, 1915/2012).
- 3- Rational authority, gaining the obedience from the belief in the “legality of patterns of normative rules that give the right of those elevated to authority” (Weber, 1915/2012, p. 328).

In response to critiques about the validity of these categories, Weber (1915/2012) insisted that there is no sharp borderline that distinguishes each type of authority. However, an authority might combine more than one characteristic on a different level. John Rawls defended the normative concept of legitimacy, arguing that it should represent the justifications of the political power rather than legitimating grounds (Peter, 2010; Rawls, 1971). The normative, moral concept of legitimacy relies on two main principles:

- 1- The justifications of the permission to use such a power by a particular entity.
- 2- The justifications of moral duty to obey commands from the authority.

Thus, the legitimacy of normative concept is concerned with moral justification rather than the creation of political power (Peter, 2010). Hence, a political body can practice its power without being legitimate as long as the claims to rule and to obligate

are sufficient (Peter, 2010; Rawls, 1971). However, Simmon (2001) argued that it is true that an authority can be justified but not legitimate. Nevertheless, only legitimate authority generates obligations.

Principles to be Considered

The differences between concepts of legitimacy are not arbitrary. Hence, I found it necessary to illustrate the core of the modern philosophy of legitimacy before viewing Habermas's critique and development. Therefore, I am focusing on traditions of two main philosophers: John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The reason for narrowing my focus on them is that their works, natural rights and social contracts are recognized as the foundations of modern politics and legitimation, and Habermas's criticism is constructed based on their philosophy.

Locke (1689/1986) departed from what he called the natural rights of humans, which is based on four principles. First, Adam had not inherited or requested to have any kind of domination or authority over his progeny or the world, nor was he guided to have domination over these things (Locke, 1689/1986, p. 7). Second, if we accept the assumption that Adam had been given the authority, Locke argued that this right is nontransferable to Adam's heirs. Third, if Adam's heirs had inherited his rights, we are facing the problem of determining which of us is the right heir to follow. Fourth, even if we can determine such leadership, how can we know which line of Adam's posterity to follow or which of us would have the rights of inheritance? (Locke, 1689/1986, p. 7). The core idea in the previous principles is intended to distinguish political power principles from other kinds of power such as the power of parents over their children. Locke (1689/1986) defined power as:

A right of making laws, with penalties of death, and consequently all less penalties for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community in the execution of such laws, and in the defense of the commonwealth from foreign injury, and all this only for the public good. (Locke, 1689/1986, p. 8)

What makes Locke, Weber, and Rousseau rely on human judgment and rationality is their belief that Adam was created perfectly in respect to his mind and body and that he had the ability to make the right decisions by relying on reason to govern (Locke, 1689/1986; Rousseau, 1762/2003; Simmon, 2001; Gauthier, 1977; Weber, 1915/1962). However, the exercise of reason and commonwealth requires people to create communities, and with the creation of community the social contract take its place (Locke, 1689/1986). This contract between an individual and his society cannot be reverted as long as the society lasts to achieve the commonwealth and to protect the original agreement (Heath, 2001; Locke, 1689/1986; Simmon, 2001). These principles are the cornerstones for the constitutions of modern states because the methods of generating legitimacy have been developed throughout history and into the era of rationality and reason (Habermas, 1984; Heath, 2001). In addition, notions of natural rights have been so tightly bound to the principle of justice that debate about such notions seems like a challenge to human justice (Habermas, 1975, p. 123; Rawls, 1971, p. 506).

Until this stage of the discussion, everything I have addressed is related to justification of the state's legitimacy rather than an authority or government. A state is recognized as a society whose members are bound by a kind of agreement that has justified the society's legitimacy (Locke, 1689/1986; Simmon, 2001). However, Simmon (2001) argued, "a legitimate state might have an illegitimate government" (p. 130) where the state in this case practices power through force instead of *trust*. Hence, an illegitimate

state, in the case of social revolution, cannot have a legitimate government because that state does not have the right to transfer people's trust and power to the government (Habermas, 1979; Locke, 1689/1986; Simmon, 2001). Therefore, the concept of legitimacy is discussed in two dimensions, the legitimacy of the social system and the legitimacy of authority or government as conceptualized in terms of (dis)trust.

The Mechanism of Crisis

Crises, from the system's theoretic approach, arise when there are too few opportunities to solve problems in the structure of "social systems" (Luhmann, 1995, p. 2), which compromises the survival of the system (Habermas, 1975; Luhmann, 1995). Furthermore, crises do not occur accidentally due to changes in the social system. Rather, crises are produced through the interference between incompatible system imperatives that cannot be integrated in the social structure (Habermas, 1975; Luhmann, 1995). Not every alteration in the social system counts as a crisis, however. Crisis is recognized when members of a society believe that the existed cultural alterations are threatening their social identity and threatening their existence (Habermas, 1975).

Specifically, to study crisis, we need to identify system integration, social integration, and the connections between them. System integration represents the systems of institutions that refer to internal action that is coordinated systematically through the influence of media, money and power. Social integration represents the symbolic structure of the life-world that refers to external views achieved by consensus that goes beyond action orientation (Habermas, 1975, 1978; Lockwood, 1987). The relationship between social integration and system integration is maintained by the social system that masters boundaries, complexities, and inconsistent situations (Habermas, 1975, 1987;

Giddens, 1984; Lockwood, 1987; Luhmann, 1995; Mouzelis, 1997). Therefore, to simplify, if there is a gap between social integration and system integration it is caused by the systematic mechanism of a system that disregards the normatively reached agreement or what Habermas (1984) called mutual understanding (Habermas, 1975; Mouzelis, 1997). The discussion of historical events, the nature of society, and current trust issues in this study is an attempt to unveil the social integration that has emerged historically. At the same time, I aim to investigate its correlation with the system's integration. A deficiency in the correlation, if I find any, is what communicative action theory aims to solve.

Legitimation Debates

Habermas, in agreement with Freud, Durkheim, and Mead started from the presupposition that truth is what motivates values and norms (Habermas, 1975, 1990, 1996). Even if Habermas blamed the capitalist system for causing the disintegrations in the social system, his aim was to provide a social system with a new legitimation method. From this standpoint, Habermas criticized Max Weber's concept of legitimation that relies on rationality and is validated by procedural regulation (Habermas, 1984; Weber 1915/1962). Weber insisted the truth-dependency legitimation is not recognized in his perspective. He said:

Experience shows that in no instance does domination voluntarily limit itself to the appeal to material or affectual or ideal motives as a basis for its continuance. In addition, every such system attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy. (Weber, 1922/1978, p. 213)

Habermas criticized Weber's concept of legitimation because it relies on psychological implication and depends on self-justification "without an immanent

relation to truth” (Habermas, 1975, p. 97). That is, from a rational perspective, for an authority to be perceived as legitimate it must fulfill two conditions: first, the positive normative order and second, a people’s belief in its legality followed by a formal procedure to create laws and practice power. Hence, the belief in legitimacy will shrink to the belief of legality (Habermas, 1975). On the other hand, from a truth-dependency perspective, the state maintains a monopoly on regulations and procedures that pressure legitimacy (Habermas, 1975, 1987). Hence, Weber’s formal rationality is not a sufficient foundation for legitimacy.

The belief in legality does not necessarily lead to legitimization. In this sense, Beetham (1991) insists a “power relationship is not legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy, but because it can be justified in terms of their beliefs” (p. 11). That is, any belief in legitimacy should be based on a valid rationale rather than relying on belief-based justification. For example, a person believing that their traditional type of authority is legitimate does not justify its legitimacy. Habermas (1975) argued, that there is a need to establish consensus that relies on rational orientation to values. He argued, “legality can create legitimation when, and only when, grounds can be provided to show that certain formal procedures fulfill material claims to justice under certain institutional boundary conditions” (p. 99). The procedural type of legitimacy outlined by Rousseau relies on the notion that every individual gives himself and his natural rights over to the community to generate the common interests and the general will (Morris, 1999; Rousseau, 1762/2003). The rationale here suggests that when one gives himself over completely, the situation is the same for all, and if the situation is the same for all, no one has an interest in making it difficult for others (Habermas, 1979).

Habermas argued that the procedural type of legitimacy is only a definition of a level of justification. That is, it is not a new principle, but rather a new proposal for institutionalizing a just rule. The “general will” was supposed to mark a place of sovereignty in addition to explicate grounds of validity (Rousseau, 1762/2003, p. 20). Habermas (1979) argued, “now only the procedures and presuppositions of agreement enjoy unconditional validity, an agreement counts as rational, that is, as an expression of a general interest, if it only has to pass under the ideal conditions that alone create legitimacy” (p.187).

Many scholars believe that Habermas takes a middle position between Rawls and Locke, Rousseau, Kant and Weber (Peter, 2010), a position that preserves the principle of natural law and social contract. However, Habermas (1988) departed from the perceptions of justice in terms of social norms and values. Rawls (1971) argued that the social contract, or any form of legal procedure, should be influence by the natural law. He said:

. . . [W]e are not to think of the original contract as one to enter a particular society or to set up a form of government. Rather, the guiding idea is that the principle of justice for the basic structures of society are the objects of the original contract. (Rawls, 1971, p. 10)

Therefore, to some extent, is it true that Weber’s concept of legitimacy legalizes the status quo or *what is* by fair procedures and Rawls’ concept of legitimacy defends *what ought* by natural law as principle, but Habermas tends to take a different position, and his aim is to maintain the social orders from a communicative perspective. He explained, “the fundamental function of world-maintain interpretive systems is the avoidance of chaos, that is, overcoming of contingency” (Habermas, 1975, p. 118). For

example, the achievements of science during the past century have separated scientific views of the world from non-scientific views to such a degree that contradictions in perception are avoidable. Therefore, Habermas is arguing that the fair procedure or legalizing status quo does not solve the problem of legitimacy as it is a matter of perception. Thus, his approach is neither about justice nor legislation, but rather about perception.

Legitimation Problem

Historically, in early nations, grounds for legitimacy were first served as justifications of myths of origin as gods or representing gods (Habermas, 1979, 1984). Then, nations developed and the need for justification of the rulers arose. This was the era of religions and philosophers where justifications relied on dogmatic knowledge that was based on narratives that unified the principles to integrate the social and political systems (Habermas, 1979, 1996). However, in the modern states and as a result of the science revolution, the ultimate grounds became problematic (Blau, 1964; Habermas, 1979; Simmon, 2001). Thus, the emergence of the natural laws legitimized the modern state independently of ontologies guided by Rousseau and Kant's principle of reason that replaced principles attached to religious or spiritual ideologies (Habermas, 1979). Therefore, because formal grounds were no longer adequate, Habermas (1979) argued, the procedures and presuppositions of rational agreement themselves become principles (p. 184).

Socially, the relationship between political orders and legitimacy gains its validity from the role of the "royal judge," which is recognized as the base of conflict solving according the legal norms (Habermas, 1979, p. 179). The role of the royal judge

represents the nucleus of the intervention of a legal power whenever a society's members believe their integrity is threatened in some way. Thus, the practice of state power is attached to the principle of retaining society in its normative-determined identity to avoid any kind of disintegration, and legitimacy can be measured based on this (Habermas, 1979).

Legitimacy has become a permanent problem because the system of modern constitutional states has been built to institutionalize the opposition (Habermas, 1979). Habermas departed from the notion that legitimacy is a "contestable validity claim" (p. 178). He said, "Legitimacy means there are good arguments for a political order's claim to be recognized as just and right" (Habermas, 1979, p. 178). From that sense, the concept of legitimation is only applicable to political orders. The legitimation problem arises when there is disintegration between the state systems and the nation social system. In this sense, it is important to mention that the legitimacy problem is not limited to the modern state. This problem also appeared in all older civilizations (Habermas, 1975, 1979). That is, when a political system does not recognize changes in social norms and develop the political system according to it, disintegration occurs and we speak in terms of revolution. Habermas (1979) argued:

By legitimacy I understand the worthiness of a political order to be recognized. The claim to legitimacy is related to the social-integrative preservation of a normatively determined social identity. Legitimations serve to make good this claim, that is, to show how and why existing institutions are fit to employ political power in such a way that the values constitutive for the identity of the society will be realized. (p. 182)

Therefore, the problem of Rousseau's (1762/2003) concept of social contract that solves the problem of justification, specifically, is that it recognized a level of

justification rather than a principle of legitimation (Habermas, 1979). The levels of justification are just a reflection of what people agreed to be fair procedure. So, its validity depends on the majority agreement that could shift at any time and under any circumstances. However, according to Habermas, what should count as grounds for legitimation should be unconditionally valid (Habermas, 1979, 1987).

The Features of the Modern State

In order to analyze and describe the legitimacy problem in the modern state, I start with an overview of the features and functions of the modern states from Habermas's perspective. Internally, the modern state decentralized the economic system that controls the production process of the market without any political interference. This model is ideally applied to capitalist economies rather than mixed and socialists' states. The state role is to set the conditions that allow people to act as private persons in order to compete and practice their rights of ownership and production. The state does not practice any kind of market production except in cases of necessary, unprofitable products. Habermas (1979) described this as "the state develop[ing] and guarantee[ing] bourgeois civil law, the monetary mechanism, and certain infrastructures, overall the prerequisites for the continued existence of a depoliticized economic process set free from moral norms and orientations to use value" (p. 189).

Therefore, according to Habermas, the modern state handles most of the resources for the capitalist enterprise and then relies on taxation. Consequently, because the modern state is dependent on capitalist production, it is compulsory to create, increasingly, the conditions and presuppositions that protect the production process from any shortage of material, social instabilities, or chaos that could affect the capitalist process (Habermas,

1979; Blau, 1964). At the same time, the modern state is responsible for protecting the society's integration.

Externally, Habermas claims that the modern state has become a part of a system of states where the cultures have been homogenized, and spiritual authority has been replaced with secularism. Hence, the system of the modern states also has been connected by the market value and power has been recognized as relations of exchange. The importance of explaining the structure of the modern state internally and externally demands an understanding that the process of state building has been disassociated with nation building (Habermas, 1979). Based on external and internal features, we can distinguish five complexities of the modern state (Habermas, 1979):

- 1- Secularization: a level of justification where the political state of power detached from traditional justification.
- 2- Rational law: another level of justification that aims to solve the procedural type of legitimation.
- 3- Abstract right and capitalist exchange.
- 4- Sovereignty: sovereignty of people, so that the external sovereignty of the state could be unified with political democracy.
- 5- Nation: usually based on a common language, lately independent movements.

Many features of the modern state, according to Habermas, are limited to capitalistic political systems. However, the problem of legitimacy is not limited to only a capitalistic economy. For instance, as an opposite to capitalist principles, political interference in Kuwait's institutions is causing major problems (Herb, 2014; Ross, 2012). These problems are reflected in the country's financial performance, management

leverages, and public discontent. Therefore, the concept of state-owned enterprises has emerged to solve the issue (Hertog, 2010). Thus, political systems might face similar problems but be influenced by different causes.

The Emergence of the Legitimacy Crisis

Achieving the goal of social welfare in the modern state there requires discussion and negotiation between what are recognized as labor movements and the capitalist economy (Habermas, 1979). However, the role of labor movements has been reduced by regulating competition between political parties, and thus, institutionalization of opposition has generated enduring legitimation and re-conceptualized withdrawal of legitimacy by replacing the regime (Habermas, 1979; 1987). At the same time, a legitimacy crisis can be avoided only if the authorities can present themselves as the social welfare advocate, which contradicts a capitalist economy. That is, the state would have to interfere with the system of social security and regulate equal opportunity for education and ensure a free-distribution economy (Habermas, 1979; 1984;1987).

In this sense, Habermas (1979) argued, “in mass democracies, fulfilling this social welfare state program is, if not the foundation, at least a necessary condition of legitimacy” (p. 194) Wherefore, the problem is that in a modern state that the authority should, (a) maintain economic growth, (b) protect the balance between demand and production, (c) solve the problem of social inequality (Habermas, 1979, p. 194). The challenge to the modern state, as Habermas argued, is to achieve the previous three responsibilities without violating what Habermas called “the functional conditions of a capitalist economy” (p.195) or, without interfering in the economic system.

Even though Habermas sharply criticized the capitalist function of the modern state as a self-contradicting system, he did not provide any ideological proposals and even rejected the Marxism view of the problem. He argued, “the legitimation problem of the state today is not how to conceal the functional relations between state activity and the capitalist economy in favor of ideological definitions of the public welfare. This is no longer possible” (Habermas, 1979, p. 196). From this standpoint, Habermas proposed the theory of communicative action or, universal pragmatics, to act as the ground of legitimacy based on mutual understanding.

Communicative Action

Communicative action theory developed to solve what Habermas (1973) called legitimation crisis. His theoretical evaluation of the legitimation grounds supported his argument about the conflict in the structure of the modern state between social welfare responsibilities of mass democracies and the nature of the capitalist economy. Habermas aimed to provide an alternative ground of legitimacy that relies on language as the nucleus for cognition, understanding, consensus and reaching an agreement (Habermas, 1996). In his early work *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Habermas (1979) addressed the communicative action theory as universal pragmatics that “identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding” (p. 1).

The concept of communicative action comes from the need for coordinated action to satisfy needs in society. The coordinated actions require certain types of communication to coordinate action effectively.

Communicative Action and Language

The theory of communicative action relies on the analytic philosophy, and theory of meaning. That is, the foundation of the communicative action theory is understanding coordinating action from principle of language (Habermas, 1984, 1987a). Thus, the theory of communicative action in its core departs from the structure of linguistic expression rather than the intention of the speaker. The rationale of relying on language, as Heath (2003) argued, is that language delivered by utterance plays the role of agent to the cognitive to provide resources to solve the problem of order.

The theory of communicative action adopts Bühler's (1934/2011) organon model which offers a mechanism of reaching understanding by connecting several actors to one another by meaning and interacting with social spaces and historical times. Bühler starts from the semiotic model of a linguistic sign used by a speaker, with the goal of achieving mutual understanding with a listener about an object and states of affairs. Bühler offers three different use of signs: first, the cognitive function of demonstrating a state of affairs; second, the expressive function of constructing acknowledged experiences of the speaker; third, the appellative purpose of directing requests to addressees. In Bühler's approach, linguistics plays a vital role in constructing meanings by connecting the objects, situation, and the source.

Theory of meaning and validity

From theory of meaning and semantic theory, Habermas adopted Wittgenstein (1958), Davidson (1984/2001), and Dummett's (1976) development of *truth semantics*. That is, the meaning of the sentence is determined by its truth conditions. Austin (1975) and Searle (1971) extended the formal semantics of sentences to speech acts. In sum,

Habermas (1979, 1984) integrated Bühler's (1934/2011) theory of language functions with the method of the analytic theory of meaning as a centerpiece of the communicative action theory. Moreover, Habermas differentiates the notion of one world from external and internal worlds. The external world contains the objective and social world where the internal world is introduced as a complementary concept to the external world. For instance, according to Habermas (1976), the function of "regulative speech acts" (p. 55) is to establish interpersonal relations referring to something in the common social world. Habermas (1976, 1979, 1984) relies on situational context of the life-world of the interaction among participants, adopting Austin's (1975) clarification of "illocutionary and perlocutionary acts" (p. 95) in order to distinguish the action oriented to understanding and actions oriented to achieve success.

Theory of action

Max Weber (1915/2012) offered four ideal types of social action: "traditional . . . purposive-rational . . . value-rational . . . affectual" (pp. 59-61). These four types rely on the rational degree of social action rather than social relationship. A second version of Weber's typology constructed types of social actions based on normative agreement and interest position, coordination, and the degree of rationality of action. However, Habermas (1984) argues that Weber's framework of social action is limited to the aspect of purposive rationality. He states, "Weber was not able to make his unofficial typology of action fruitful for the problem of societal rationalization" (Habermas, 1984, p. 284). Thus, drawing upon speech act theory, Habermas expanded the aspects of rationality of action by perceiving participants' orientations primarily to achieve an end.

Accordingly, he distinguished two action orientations; orientation to success and orientation to reaching understanding. These correspond to Weber's coordination of action through interest and action through normative agreement in social and nonsocial situations. However, Habermas distinguishes between two actions that are oriented to success; instrumental and strategic (Habermas, 1976, 1984). Instrumental action considers following technical rules and strategic action considers following rules of rational choice that influences decisions through social interaction. Thus, strategic action is social action by its nature. Even though Habermas perceives communication action as social action, distinguishing between strategic and communicative action is the orientation of reaching understanding.

Orientation to success and orientation to reaching understanding

Habermas (1979, 1984, 1987a) describes the orientation to reaching understanding and the orientation to success as attitudes that can be identified by intuitive knowledge. In consequence, the conceptual analysis of the attitudes cannot be recognized from a psychological perspective. Therefore, Habermas aimed to identify structural properties of processes of reaching understanding in order to originate general pragmatic presuppositions of communicative action. Reaching understanding, from Habermas's perspective is, "a process of reaching agreement among speaking and acting subjects" (Habermas, 1984, pp.287).

Mutual understanding is achievable by following three main principles: it cannot be guided by outside influence; it has to be presupposed or accepted as valid by the contributors; the achieved agreement should have a rational base. Habermas relies on Searle's (1969) model of speech acts in his theory because he believes that reaching

understanding is the intrinsic ultimate goal of human speech. Thus, we only can explain reaching understanding if we understand what it means to use sentences with a communicative purpose (Habermas, 1984). That is, the study of the attitude that is oriented to reaching understanding and its connection with the model of the attitude of participants in communication is understood through what Habermas called the “universal pragmatic” (Habermas, 1976, p. 5), or the necessary condition of reaching understanding.

In this stage, the communicative action theory is not ready yet. Habermas raises two challenges preventing the theory’s validation. First, we don’t want the concept of reaching understanding to be another strategic tool to achieve success. Second, using linguistically mediated interaction does not mean understanding will be reached. That is, there are countless situations in which indirect understanding will get participants to form certain desired opinions or actions (Habermas, 1984). These challenges decrease the worthiness of speech acts as a model for action oriented to reaching understanding.

Habermas adopted the concept of Locutionary, Illocutionary, perlocutionary acts by Austin (1975). In short, Austin argued in his book; *How to Do Things With Words* that language has the power to perform actions in addition to delivering meanings. Austin distinguishes between the language that aims to influence participants in order to achieve success and the language that is used to achieve mutual understanding. The implementation of speech acts in the communicative action theory is embodied in the principles of the absence of power and validity claims. Therefore, discussing Austin’s theory in detail is not vital in this study.

Meaning and validity

Habermas (1984) explicated the conditions that speech acts couldn't carry power to coordinate interactions or use social force of norms. He recognized, three levels of reaction when the hearer correctly perceives a speech act:

- 1- Understanding the utterance
- 2- Taking a decision
- 3- The action taken according to decision taken (Habermas, 1984, p. 297).

Moreover, formal pragmatics considers that what an utterance delivers as a meaning does not deviate from the literal meaning of the sentence (Habermas, 1979). Thus, Habermas developed the condition of acceptability for utterance from a performative attitude of the participants in communication rather than from speaker or observer objectivistic sense. The acceptability of a speech act relies on the necessary conditions that allow the hearer to take a “yes” position. However, the “yes” position must not be satisfied by one side of the communication. The position on the claim that is raised by speaker should satisfy the subjective recognition of the linguistic claim. In other words, the claim raised by the speaker should satisfy the condition that allows the hearer to adopt it as if it is his own claim.

According to Habermas, the acceptability conditions should be restricted in the narrower sense. For instance, imperative utterance could be misunderstood as it is usually formulated in perlocutionary act. However, if the hearer understands the illocutionary meaning—which uses softer language than perlocutionary—of an imperative request, he could successfully interpret the propositional content of the request with the context of the situation (Habermas, 1984). Thus, Habermas (1976, 1979, 1984) argues that

participants must know the truth conditions of the proposition to be understood in order for the imperative to count as satisfied. Furthermore, *conditions of satisfaction* that allow the hearer to know what to do to take the desired state are not sufficient. However, conditions of satisfaction should be supported by conditions of sanction that will externally connect with the speech act to satisfy the condition of acceptability.

In sum: first, the hearer should be able to understand the imperative request, for instance, driving within the speed limit. Second, there should exist a good reason to expect the hearer to fulfill his request (to avoid a fine), and if the speaker has considerable reasons to use an imperative expression, a normative validity claim should be satisfied. Thus, by knowing and understanding these conditions, participants recognize what makes the utterance acceptable.

Lastly, reaching understanding as Habermas defined it, "... that at least two speaking and acting subjects understand a linguistic expression in the same way" (Habermas, 1984, p. 307). This agreement is achieved concurrently at three levels. Besides using understandable language, Habermas (1976, 1984) argued that the speaker should be committed to:

- 1- Selecting a speech act that is *right* according to the assumed normative context.
- 2- Making *true*, correct presuppositions or statements so that the hearer can accept and share the same knowledge.
- 3- Expressing *truthfully* his intentions, beliefs, feelings etc. to gain credibility.

Hence, achieved understanding, that is, communicative agreement is measured against the previous three validity claims. Habermas (1976, 1984, 1987a) argues that the

rejection of any comprehensible speech acts means that the hearer has an issue with at least one of the validity claims.

In the end, communicative action theory promises to set the foundation for new interpretative approaches to understanding the interaction between humans, the objective world, the subjective social world, and language. This integration deserves to be examined in many aspects, one of which is to put the theory in a real-life situation and apply its principles.

CHAPTER 6

THE CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Silk City (French Press, 2017), Continental Link Project (Kuwait News Agency [Kuna], 2004), and the Islands Projects (Mark, 2016) are different names for one dream in Kuwait. For many decades, numerous Kuwaiti leaders have announced the importance of developing the north side of the country, which comprises a portion of the mainland and five islands. The project was well-known as Silk City, which is the capital of that new city, as well as the Silk Road, which is the project in the Boubyan Island to build a major port and railroad (Kuwait News Agency [Kuna], 2004). Boubyan Island is the heart of the project: it is the biggest island in the Gulf at around 900 km², and the island is three times larger than the Kingdom of Bahrain. The project is historically linked to the Silk Road as a major port of the trade route (BBC, 2014).

China is revitalizing the Silk Road project that connects Asia to Europe through the Middle East. The Silk Road project is designed with multiple routes that pass through many regions and cover as much land as possible. Kuwait is located at the boundary of the Persian Gulf. The importance of Kuwait's location to China and other countries is that it is more financially profitable than other Gulf States' ports. If a shipment arrives in Dubai, it has to pass through Saudi Arabia to reach the north, where the land route is more expensive than sea routes. However, Kuwait is located on the northern side of the Gulf and shipments could be transferred directly to Iran, Iraq, the largest market in the region, and other Gulf States. Recently, China offered to invest, design, and operate the project due to its importance (Mengjie, 2017).

The Silk Road project should help Kuwait restore its position as the logistics hub of the Middle East, which will affect the development of all other commercial and financial related services in Kuwait. Kuwait’s ultimate goal is to find an alternative source of income besides oil. An official said to me while working on this study, “our addiction to oil must end.”



Figure 5. The route of the Silk Road shows Kuwait as a meeting point (L. Alneamah, personal communication, June, 2017)

Currently, the project was named as the Amir’s vision of 2035. The project revolutionizes the current political and legal systems (Kuwait Times, 2016), and stands to fundamentally change Kuwait’s economy and potentially improve its political system. The project’s aim is connecting the economy with security—this is the headline of every official statement about the project (Abduljawad, 2016). H. E. Sheikh Nasser Sabah

Alsabah, the minister of Aldiwan al-Amiri Affairs and the deputy of the Supreme Counsel of Planning is leading this project. According to an official release, the project is considered as a special economic zone (SEZ) to be disassociated from the motherland's laws and regulations (Abduljawad, 2016).

The project's importance derives from three main aspects. First, economically, the project is expected to bring in 35 billion dollars annually to Kuwait in addition to 2 billion dollars of investment every year. Moreover, 400,000 settlers are expected, 80% of whom are likely to be foreigners (Abduljawad, 2016). Kuwait is relying on the investors and settlers to make the region more safe and secure. Silk City and the five islands count as 1200 km² total. Boubyan Island will be the trading hub, international railroad, seaport, airport, and logistic services.

In addition, about half of the island is registered as a nature reserve. Failaka Island is an island that has been abandoned since the Iraqi invasion. Failaka holds the antiques of many civilizations since 2000 B.C. (Hannestad, 1983). Silk City is the land in the north east of Kuwait and on the west side of Boubyan Island, known now as *Alssabiya*. Silk City is supposed to be the financial center of the project, with its skyscrapers (Goldschein, 2011). The overall view of the project is to create more than what Dubai accomplished in terms of infrastructure and financial impact.

Since the 1980s, the project of developing the northern part of Kuwait has faced major challenges causing it to remain in the planning stages. Three successive Amirs of Kuwait tried to implement the project until 2016, when H. H. Sheikh Sabah Alsabah announced that everyone should now consider the project to have officially started

(Kuwait Times, 2016). However, the project is still on paper only, and is currently facing socio-political challenges. I will summarize the challenges as the following:

Cultural challenges: One of the cultural challenges is that the project presents a liberal way of life. Liberalism—in the local mindset—has more to do with degeneracy rather than openness. Liberalism is equated with alcohol consumption, gambling, bars, night clubs, or even prostitution, all of which are illegal in Kuwait. The reason is that political and economic influencers have failed to address liberalism as a way of life, one that includes politics, economic, and culture. In this case, liberalism only means cultural liberalism and not democratic liberalism or the free market arrangement of economic liberalism, both of which have their own particular history within Kuwait.

In the GCC region, political liberalism is challenged by the power of the ruling families. Additionally, economic liberalism is challenged by the power of the local merchants. Hence, the most influential method for fighting political and economic liberalism has been to stigmatize it as degeneracy. Therefore, religion and culture have been used as tools against political and economic liberalism.

During the preparation of this study, officials argued that if we want foreigners to live in Kuwait, we must offer them what they want. Alcohol is, in many cultures, a part of daily life that is difficult to completely eschew for many people. The project would make alcohol available to many Kuwaitis who consume alcohol secretly in Kuwait or by traveling to nearby countries. However, politicians find this point culturally and religiously sensitive to defend even if they agree that the officials' point of view is correct.

At the time of this study, there had been no official statements about allowing these cultural changes. However, officials who are involved in the project have already announced its possibility in unofficial discussions.

Legal challenge: The other main challenge is that the project introduces a free zone or special economic zone (SEZ) that requires special legislation to pass. However, many people and some politicians perceive this as an aim to separate a piece of land to be operated independently of the current legal and political system for a suspicious reason, such as corruption, that permits whatever is forbidden in the mainland. Therefore, this brings all of the historical incidents of corruption, failure, and political conflicts to the stage.

Merchants' resistance: Sheikh Nasser Alsabah announced on different occasions that a board of trustees consisting of 80% non-Kuwaitis will be in charge of managing the project. Influential local merchants will not be happy to see the project pass because they have lived off the governments' tenders and projects for many years. Therefore, giving the board of trustees their independence and having it be made up of a majority of non-Kuwaitis will reduce the merchants' influence over the board. In addition, they will no longer enjoy their monopoly and will have to compete with foreign investors. The mindset of many influential merchants is that they are receiving their portion of the wealth as their families always have—it is their right rather than being catered to. Thus, this project, regardless of its benefit to the economy, has raised a red flag about the future of local merchants and their influence.

Alsabah Family: It is not a secret that the competition over the throne is at an apex. There are many candidates who perceive Sheikh Nasser Alsabah's project as a way

to prove his eligibility for the throne. Therefore, if Sheikh Nasser succeeds in implementing the project on the ground, that means he is qualified to deal with the National Assembly, merchants, and the public as many have failed to before. In addition, this project is a game changer for the economy and culture—it would not be easy to pass up the person who succeeds at this project.

Public resistance: Regardless of what is at stake in the economy, citizens still receive their wages from working in the public sector. Life, for the majority, is still comfortable. Therefore, if we consider the problems of trust and past political conflicts, people might not be motivated to support the project as it seems to be a jump into the unknown. Many people believe it is too risky, for them, to put their future in the hands of the government and the National Assembly, both of which they believe are not to be trusted.

CHAPTER 7

METHOD

Kuwait's history, trust attitudes, the theme of legitimacy, and communicative action come together in this research, which poses questions about trustworthiness and efficacy of the political system in Kuwait to solve the country's challenges. Therefore, the research addressed five main questions to investigate the following aspects: trust attitude and its influence over the political system; the scope of political and economic reform; the perceptions of the proposed development project within the attitude of trust and the current political situation; people's willingness to achieve mutual understanding; and the ability of communicative action theory to provide new grounds to achieve mutual understanding. Based on the outcomes of the previous aspects, the ability of Habermas's concept of mutual understanding to mediate these kinds of political discussions was evaluated.

Recently, the theory of communicative action has been tested by evaluating peoples' perceptions of the legitimacy of past legislation or decisions based on communicative orientation (Barry, Stevenson, Britten, Barber, & Bradley, 2001; Chang, Jacobson & Zhang, 2013; Stiles, 2014). In contrast, this study aims to test the theory in future policy making to strengthen legitimacy as well as to study the communicative orientation of past political events.

This research implemented Habermas' (1979) concept of "universal pragmatics" (p. 1), the universal conditions to achieve understanding. The implementation of the universal pragmatics aimed to test the theory of communicative action within the context of Kuwait's political situation that was described in previous chapters. I conducted two

waves of interviews with decision makers and politicians, and one wave with members of the populace in focus group discussions, in addition to two follow up phone interviews with decision makers. A supportive letter was issued by the Minister of Al-Diwan Al-Amiri Sheikh Nasser Sabah Alsbah, which granted me access to all officials and information. The IRB approved the study as exempt.

The goal for interviewing decision makers, politicians, and populace was to achieve understanding about the outlines of the proposed development project from the government. Due to the difficulty of gathering all of the targeted groups for discussion in order to achieve mutual understanding, I played the role of the mediator, in which I gathered information, insights, and thoughts from the targeted groups through indirect discussion.

The interviews and focus groups were conducted and organized within the three main populations in two waves in addition to follow-up interviews, following the grounded theory approach. The rationale is that in-depth interviews were needed for detailed description about past incidents, the current situation, and the perceptions of the future. For an outsider or even an insider, in order to form a discussion and achieve mutual understanding, I wanted to develop detailed knowledge about the phenomenon other than what I could simply observe about the current political status and possibly past incidents (Dexter, 1970; Weiss, 1995).

In order to achieve mutual understanding, the researcher must gather multiple perspectives: In many cases, an interview, one single observer, or even a group, is not sufficient (Dexter, 1970; Weiss, 1995). Furthermore, there was a need to describe processes. As a researcher, I needed to know how things happen (Weiss, 1995).

Moreover, there was a need to develop a holistic description. I needed to understand how the policy makers see the political system working in Kuwait. Describing a process or a sequence is like telling a story about how an event occurs. On the other hand, I also needed to understand how the opposing politicians believe the political system works.

In sum, I perceive the political system as an organized process that I needed to obtain a holistic view about by gathering information through interviewing the people who are involved in that process or affected by it (Weiss, 1995). As well, I needed to learn about interpretation. In many cases, researchers need to understand the interpretation of specific events among specific groups (Dexter, 1970).

Therefore, I gathered the interviews in two waves and follow-up interviews. The first wave aimed to gather the primary data, mainly from the decision makers. The primary data determined the most essential aspects that the project relied on. These aspects constituted the discussion and negotiations between the three groups. Also, in the first wave, I investigated the role of political trust in the discussion, past incidents in participants' perceptions of the proposed project. In the second wave, I narrowed the discussion with decision makers and politicians, and focused the discussions on the controversial aspects of the project in order to achieve mutual understanding. The follow-up interviews were conducted by phone and counted as a third round of discussion with two decision makers to finalize a few aspects.

Female participation in the study was limited to the focus groups discussions. The reason for this is that the number of women in high positions is very limited. For instance, there was only one elected female member of the National Assembly during the data gathering portion of this study, who unfortunately was not available for a meeting.

Also, among 16 seats in the cabinet, there are only two female ministers in the government. Moreover, two women who were in professional positions at the time of the study refused to be interviewed because they did not want to release any information about the project. However, it is important to mention that I do not expect the lack of female representation in the study to impact the outcomes. Men are more active in public life in Kuwait, and therefore, it would make sense that men had more interest in participating and influencing the project. Also, gender did not impact the type of information that I was seeking.

In general, the interviews and focus groups represented the active population in the political life rather than the general population of Kuwait. Different social and political groups were represented and no active group was absent. I have chosen not to provide a breakdown of the specific composition of the groups and participants in order to protect their identities.

In the focus groups discussions, I relied on a Kuwaiti concept of social gathering called *Diwaniya*. The *Diwaniya* is a traditional gathering and reception hall where a man hosts friends, colleagues, family members, and public figures, usually on a weekly basis in an annex that is typically attached to the house but has a private entrance (Segal, 2012). Visiting and hosting *Diwaniya* is a unique feature of Kuwaiti social life where discussions and sharing news about politics, social events, and issues of the day occur so that they can be addressed in a friendly environment.



Figure 6. Formal type of Kuwaiti Diwaniya (Behbehani, 2018).

The Diwaniya has played a vital role in Kuwait's political life over the past 300 years as the place where communication and general consciousness mature (Segal, 2012). There are many types of Diwaniya. The first type, formal, is a public gathering for everyone to attend where guests come for a short time wearing formal clothes with semi-serious discussions. The casual type is usually friends and colleagues who meet wearing casual or comfortable clothing with social and open discussions. In this study, the Diwaniyas were chosen based on socio-demographical aspects so the sample would represent diverse social and political groups.

Participants: In-Depth Interviews

The method was designed based on prior knowledge about the team behind Kuwait's 2035 Vision. During several unofficial discussions with team members and politicians, I was able to identify the main players who are influential in implementing or

rejecting the project. Therefore, I categorized the populations of the study according to three main groups: decision makers, politicians, and populace.

Decision makers, in this study, were chosen based on three criteria: official and direct role in the project, official and direct role in the decision-making process such as ministers and advisors, unofficial role but influential in the decision-making process such as senior members of Alsabah family. In addition, the three types of decision makers are not elected.

In addition to identifying the decision makers myself, many decision makers were identified through snowball sampling. The snowball sampling was an important aspect to the sampling method for a reason. Many decision makers are not politicians; therefore, they are not famous figures that I can identify easily. Many of them are involved in the technical part of the project so they can answer questions and concerns that other political decision makers could not address. For example, to achieve Habermas' validity claim, some aspects of the project, such as applying international laws in the new cities, should have non-politicized expert opinions.

Eight decision makers were individually interviewed for the study. Two additional decision makers agreed to meet after two months of requesting the appointments but by that time I was not in Kuwait. Four of the eight decision makers were interviewed twice. The time spent with each decision maker varied from 40 minutes to two hours and 30 minutes. Only two decision makers invited me to their offices. The other six decision makers preferred to meet outside their offices, and I preferred that too. The reason is that I wanted them to speak without the restrictions of the location, surroundings, or even work stress. All participants signed consent forms.

All politicians in this study were members of the National Assembly. Politicians in Kuwait are not part of the government. The ministers of government are not perceived as politicians because they practice executive duties based on the Amir's hiring rather than elected politicians. There were two types of politicians: politicians who are members of political parties and independent politicians. Politicians who are members of political parties represent their political agenda, ideologies, the overall view of the party, and their voters' interests. Independent politicians mainly focus on representing their own views and the voters' interest. However, being an independent politician does not mean having no affiliations. That is, independent politicians could have social and economic ties that influence their agendas and views.

Politicians were contacted based on personal connections and office visits asking for appointments. After the first few interviews, I asked some politicians to issue me a permit, so I could access the building of the National Assembly. The permit allowed me to visit the offices of the members of the National Assembly to introduce myself and the study, and it allowed me to ask for appointments. This method worked very well. Only two members whose offices I visited did not reply to my request. Two members accepted my requests. One member invited me to his house to talk, and another member invited me in their party's offices. Thirteen politicians participated. They represent 26 percent of the members of the National Assembly. The time spent interviewing each politician was between 45 minutes and an hour. All participants signed consent forms.

Focus Groups

Populace views were gathered through focus groups. Five focus groups were conducted in the first wave. The number of participants in each focus group was between

seven and 13. The total number of participants was 47. The average time for each focus group was about 45 minutes. Two of the focus groups were conducted in a family setup that included males and females. Another two focus groups were conducted in Diwaniyas included only males. All four Diwaniyas consisted of a mixture of social groups, financial statuses, ages, political views, and educational levels. One focus group was gathered in a public place with a friend group. This group consisted of males from 26 to 33 years old. This group had a notable political awareness and their accuracy of information and views were higher than that of the other focus groups.

All interviews are reported with inconsistent pseudonyms in order to protect confidentiality. In addition, I avoided describing some of the interviews' details, such as location, office, unique attitude, or any aspect that could lead to identification. Any important details were reported in the description above.

2.5 Waves of Data Gathering

Populace: In the first round of data-gathering, I investigated whether the populace trusts its leaders, the level of political and policy changes they seek in order to improve national growth, and how they perceive the proposed new policy. The sample only consisted of Kuwaiti citizens because political participation is limited to citizens only. The sample was reached mainly by attending the Diwaniyas.

In some families, there is a gender-mixed form of Diwaniya known as Zuwara. Zuwaras in many families is a gender-mixed gathering that meets on a weekly basis and lasts from noon until sunset or from early evening until midnight on weekends. Some families segregate the genders into two living rooms at the same house due to either the large number of people attending or to some conservative views. Zuwaras are usually

hosted in grandparents' houses or the house of a senior member of the family. One Zuwara was attended to organize a focus group for only family members. I asked the host of the family gathering, a grandfather, for permission, and then I asked each family member if they wanted to participate in the focus group. For all focus groups, I explained their participation and confidentiality rights. I also explained that the only restriction that they should be careful about is criticizing the Amir because it is prohibited by the law. Also, as it is a public discussion I could not guarantee that nobody would report their criticism. In general, people in Kuwait feel comfortable talking in public and they understand the social and legal rights and restrictions.

Political body

The political body in this research consists of only elected politicians in the National Assembly. The reason for this, as described earlier, is that they could afford more accurate representation of the public interests at the higher level of the political institution. Also, they are the main key factor needed to pass, by procedure, and to give legitimacy to, by political support, for any decision. The discussion with the politicians was concerned with the following topics: What are the concerns of the politicians and political parties in terms of the current political system, and how do they believe they could implement new development plans successfully? How do they perceive their relationship with the decision makers and the populace, especially in terms of trustworthiness? Finally, what are their impressions of the newly proposed project?

Decision makers

This group mainly consists of the cabinet members, secretaries, and undersecretaries, as well as members of Supreme Councils and other non-elected

influential personnel. The discussions were focused on their perceptions and concerns about the current economic system and how, in turn, they perceive the newly proposed policy. The decision makers groups sat the guidelines of the proposed project of developing the northern side of Kuwait. Their guidelines represented what they think are the most vital factors to get the project on track.

Data analysis

After the first wave, I gathered and analyzed the insights and thoughts from the three groups. I proposed an outline of solutions and counterarguments based on the perspectives of all three groups following Habermas' guidelines. That is, I informed each interviewee that in order to address any argument in the discussion with other parties it must have three features. First, it must be free of any kind of coercive force. The coercion could take the shape of influential language. Second, it has to be validated or accepted as valid by other contributors. Third, it must have a rational base. The three features represent Habermas' principles of reaching a mutual understanding (1984). All of the interviewees respected the three principles and followed them during the discussions.

In the second wave, I presented the outline of the proposal to two groups, politicians and decision makers, and evaluated their acceptance or rejection and concerns of the proposal. The aim of the interviews was to achieve three main goals: first, explore the type and level of trust; second, explore the level and type of political alienation as indicators of legitimacy; and third, achieve an agreement and form a mutual understanding about the core principles of the development project in Kuwait.

Three discussion guides were developed to support the discussion and analysis. Some sections of the three discussion guides are overlapped in order to analyze the

perspectives of each group regarding the same construct (see appendices, a, b, c). The discussion guides address the most important aspects according the concept of trust, political attitude and legitimacy, and the perceptions of the proposed project.

After the first wave of interviews, all feedback was organized based on the research questions. Then, the answers were categorized to represent the position of each interviewee on the addressed question. The third step involved analyzing the patterns found in the responses. Thus, the outcomes of the first wave of interviews directed the second wave.

The answer to the question of whether Habermas's concept of mutual understanding is applicable to solve these kinds of political issues in order to gain legitimacy is determined by mutual understanding achieved in the research. It is important to note the mutual understanding is not an end line that needs to be reached. However, the mutual understanding, in this case, is determined by all groups' acceptance of the proposed project without altering its essential features. Furthermore, the decision-makers had the chance to decide to modify the essential features of the project based on the feedback from the first and second waves of discussions. The alteration will be explained in the following section. The achieved mutual understanding is evaluated by comparing the first wave outcomes and the final wave outcomes.

CHAPTER 8

FINDINGS: TRUST AND SCOPE OF CHANGE

The Need for A Blank Check

In order for an authority to act efficiently, there is a need for the freedom to act independently without prior consent (Parson, 1961, p. 52). As a consequence, this means that the core power that any authority has is the ability to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty (Gamson, 1968). Therefore, the importance of trust in political life appears in practice when the authority needs to use what Gamson (1968) called the “blank check” (p. 43) in order to achieve collective goals. The spending of the blank check would be unwise as it would result in the loss of the public’s trust and, by default, the loss of the power of the system (Gamson, 1968).

This research questioned the current situation of political trust in Kuwait. In the first wave of interviews and focus groups, the questions were addressed to the political body and populace, investigating their beliefs about the competence, benevolence, integrity, and predictability of political institutions and officials. In addition, the research questioned trust in the entire political life including the system and the normality of the political situation.

The system and institutions.

The government and its entities’ ability to achieve the public’s interests was one of the main indicators of trust in its competence (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). In general, the outcomes of the interviews and focus groups indicate that there is a very strong belief among different groups that the government does not have the ability to achieve the public interest. One way politicians respond to this belief is by blaming the

constitution. In addition, when all parties who are responsible for making the necessary changes to the constitution are afraid of the impacts of a change in their level of power, any hope or aims to make any real changes will be demolished or not even addressed. As a result, Ali, a member of National Assembly explained, “The unwilling attitude to change from both the politicians and the government makes the public feel that both parties have no interest in achieving the public interest.” The issue of trust is rooted in the political system, where many rulers of Kuwait have expressed their concerns about the loyalty of some politicians. Sami, a Member of the National Assembly insisted,

The family doesn't understand yet that there is public agreement about their rule. The family still feels that there is an intention to take over their position. Therefore, they are not willing to support any movement to change the system to be more sufficient. And the public, including politicians, are not willing to take any serious action so they won't be seen as traitors who want to overcome the family. They both don't want to harm the other; however, they are both afraid to take any action that could lead to themselves being destroyed.

Another important comment was from Abdulaziz, a member of the National Assembly. He claims that the system was built based on single player rather than collective performance. Therefore, besides the international reports and indicators, there are no tools to evaluate the government's performance. In addition, what makes this problem more complicated is that change must be led by the Amir or it will not happen.

This notion takes the discussion back to what Alfai (2013), a professor of constitutional law at Kuwait University, insisted complicates the political issue in Kuwait—that there are many challenges facing the political transformation of the country. First, the political ideology of the state is totalitarian. That is, rulers do the best based on their knowledge about a situation. Second, the paternalist nature of the political system means that all people and institutions are connected to the ruler. Therefore,

political parties will change direction and become a mediator between citizens and the ruler rather than being another authority besides the authority of the government. Alfai (2013) argued that the current legal and political situation impacted by past conflicts over power and the current constitution are eligible to be improved through political discussion.

The vision of the state is seen as a victim of the individualistic approach. In an interview with Waleed, a member of the National Assembly, he said, “Unfortunately, the problem is that the government’s performance is highly related to the personality of the leadership. We don’t have an institutional plan or identity that protects the institution’s vision.” Another member of the National Assembly, Jassim, argued that the problem centered around our social contract, as it was designed in an era where social welfare was perceived as sharing wealth within the socialist model. Jassim insisted that we need to redefine what the founders of the constitution wanted when they formed the constitution. Therefore, Jassim argued that the new economic transmission aims to change the mechanism of achieving social welfare.

The conflict now is escalated as what Michael Ross (2012) described as 70% of the citizens who enjoy “masked employment” by receiving their wages from the public sector as a way of sharing wealth will resist the transition to market-based welfare. And because of the high number of public-sector employees, the National Assembly members will find themselves committed to support “masked employment”.

Sami, a member of the National Assembly, confirms that both the government and the National Assembly want to achieve the public interest; however, each of them departs from different grounds. The government thinks that taxation and reducing

subsidies are essential for economic reform. However, taxation and increasing fees for public services are taboo in the politicians' agendas—at least not before achieving some political reform because as elected politicians they reflect peoples' needs. I asked Sami why some politicians focus on economic reform if that is not what helps them be reelected. Sami said,

Our mission as politicians is to act as statesmen. That is, even if the government is acting in the wrong direction to achieve the public interest, we have to take the lead even if what we are doing is not what will make people vote for us.

However, Sami's view is not shared by many of the National Assembly members. Ali argued that politicians and the family are losing their reputations because they look like they are not solving peoples' problems. Therefore, it is not worth it to lose extra credit by doing the government's job to look like a statesman. Ali, another member of the National Assembly, argued that the ruling family needs to understand that their "toy" (the political system) is broken stating,

I alone can freeze the whole system by interrogating one minister at any time for any case, and the whole country will be unsettled. This is how they understand that their toy is broken and how I will win the next election.

The public trust.

People who I met in the focus groups expressed their opinions about trust, saying the government has no ability to solve the current problems or achieve the public interest. However, they believe the government's inability is related to the government itself—not the state. That is, the country has more than enough wealth, human resources, and international relations to empower the government, but the current government does not use the available tools.

The low trust also transfers to the decision makers and officials. Mohamad argued, “The officials are hired mainly for reasons that are not related to the public interest but rather personal relations.” Fatima insisted that officials are busy benefiting each other. Therefore, the interests of the officials are to please those who hired them rather than achieving the public interest.

As a result, the public as represented in my focus groups perceives the elected politicians as their only representative. The representations of the public voice do not equate to trust, however, it means the only access that the public has to delivering their voices. Lulwa argued that she does not trust 80% of the politicians in the National Assembly.

During the focus group discussions, people started to blame each other for the outcome of the last election. Ahmed blamed a senior family member for voting for a corrupt politician and ignoring Ahmed’s recommendation. On the other hand, some people believe that the politicians become heavily loaded with public agendas that are not related to any kind of reforms. Salman insisted, “We do have a problem of public awareness about the public interest; everyone is concerned about their own business regardless of how it will affect the public.”

Fouad added a new perspective about the projects that were accomplished by Al-Diwan Al-Amiri. But before addressing Fouad’s point, I need to explain the case. Around 10 years ago, Al-Diwan Al-Amiri, or the Amir’s house, started playing a direct role in the state by implementing projects directly instead of through the government. For example, they built two mega hospitals, a large park in Kuwait City, and an Opera House and other

cultural centers. The projects were done within a very short timeframe in excellent quality.

Fouad, argued that when the decision makers wanted to get something done we see their efforts, as with the Al-Diwan Al-Amiri projects. However, Fouad argued, “Why did they care about building parks and a race track but not houses?” This opened a debate about the social classes, with Khaled arguing that people who make decisions and plans in Kuwait are from a class that has different needs than the vast majority of the people. Therefore, when they decided to build something to achieve the public interest, they built an Opera House and a nice park in Kuwait City. This point took the discussion to public participation in decision-making, which some of the politicians argued increases their stress.

Thus, in a simple form, I can describe the circle of the situation of representation in this way: lack of trust makes people think that the government does not represent them or their needs, which creates public demand for opposing the government. Therefore, politicians find themselves obligated to follow the public demand for opposition, leading to repetitive conflicts.

There was a contradiction in the views about who is actually trying to achieve the public interest, the National Assembly or the government. In a focus group discussion, Munera argued that when the government decides to achieve a specific goal, they make good efforts to achieve it. She argued, “There are many good people in the government, but the politicians do not let them work.” There is the belief that if we choose the right people with a supportive team—that is, governmental support and supporting legislation—they will be able to achieve the public interest.

Another important aspect that lowers trust in the government is hesitation in decision-making. Fawaz said,

When an undersecretary of the Ministry of the Interior decided to tow away cars if the driver is using a cell phone or not wearing a seatbelt, the Minister suspended the decision after two days. This weakens our trust in the government.

Adel insisted that sometimes even if the government makes a wrong decision, it might need to stand by it afterwards to show its ability to lead. The receding of decisions increases the notion that the government's decisions are poorly thought-out. Therefore, the public is motivated to resist any decisions made in the future because there is a chance that the government might rescind them.

In general, the feedback from all focus groups showed that the people who I met do not expect positive outcomes for the current political institutions. In a general discussion of the government's priorities, one participant argued that in the last year, the government has attempted to solve the sport suspension case with the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) while we have one of the worst educational systems in the world. In other words, even when the government is trying to accomplish something, solving the country's problems is still not considered to be a real priority of the government.

In addition to distrust about politicians and political institutions, focus group participants showed doubt about the trustworthiness of the political system in Kuwait. The doubt is mainly caused by what is perceived as the historical failure of the state and current political practices. Politicians are primarily divided into two groups: one that is asking for constitutional political reform and claiming that the current legal and political systems are not efficient anymore, and one that is asking for practice improvements,

creative solutions, and a unified agenda. However, both groups agreed that the Amir or his representative in the government is the person who is responsible for leading the change because of dominance he has over political institutions.

In sum, the interviews with politicians and focus groups with members of the populace revealed a strong tendency to distrust political life in general. Competence of the government was perceived negatively because of mismanagement of the resources not lack of resources. Benevolence of the political system was perceived negatively because of the unfair employment in high public positions. The integrity of the political system, as a result, was negatively affected by the perception of unfair employment in high public positions where people believed that the unfair hiring in leading positions were for personal interests. Therefore, the predictability of the outcomes of political life was perceived negatively and the whole political situation was perceived as abnormal among the participants in the focus groups.

The second research question will focus on the scope of political reform.

Evolution of Institutions or Revolution Against the System

The second area of discussion in the first wave of data gathering focused on the type and level of political reform. The questions were discussed with all three groups: decision makers, politicians, and the populace. The points of view were divided between revolutionary views, which seek fundamental changes in the constitution, and mixed views, which focused on practice improvements, vision development, legislation, and ethical considerations.

The Constitution from a Revolutionary View.

The group of decision makers agreed that the core of the political problems is caused by the current constitution. The main counterargument to this, however, is that Kuwait was developed under the same constitution between 1962 and 1975, and the constitution did not cause problems at that time.

Decision makers.

The difference between the 1960s and contemporary Kuwait is that the efficiency of the constitution is highly dependent on coincidence. Specifically, the constitution depends on having a visionary Amir who has a good relationship with all political parties as well as stable internal and external situations. However, if this coincidence does not form, there will be too much power under one person. Ahmad, a decision maker, argued in his interview that “having the right people could help; the charisma and personal relationships would definitely help, but the current political system gives so much power to the individuals who are in charge.” The social history of Kuwait is reflected in the decision makers’ perception of the scope of reform. Another decision maker, Jassim, argued that the constitution built some unhealthy social and pragmatic ties between the ruler and the merchants. He believes that the relationship between the state and the merchants must be redefined via two strategies: constitutionalizing the state and returning the merchants to a market-based economy instead of a government tenders-based economy.

Hamed, a decision maker, insisted that the constitutional and legal system is not sufficient for decision-making. He continued, “It was designed to be an individualistic system and with a tribal flavor.” Hamed argued, therefore, that if you wanted to make a

decision in an authoritarian way, you would be blocked by the constitution. Also, if you wanted to follow a democratic way of making decision, the process would be very slow and chaotic because Kuwait does not have the appropriate legal and constitutional infrastructure for democratic practices.

In another interview, Ali as a decision maker represents a revolutionary point of view of the political reform. He argued that there is a need for an explicit constitution that solves the deficiencies of the current constitution. The new constitution, as Ali describes it, should provide more freedom, increase public participation in the political system, and improve transparency. On a practical level, Ali insisted that the power relationship between the government and the National Assembly should be balanced. That is, the government should have more independence in their decisions, with more power given to the parliament. Ali's argument about the balanced power between the two main authorities is in agreement with what Lane (1969) argued regarding the blank check. However, Ali insisted that political reform is not easy to achieve within the current political status. He argued,

We should consider the circumstances of political reform. The current political status is not healthy for reform. That's due to so much power that the current group has after the failure of the demonstrations led by the opposition in the past few years. Therefore, it is difficult to get everybody together.

Politicians.

I met Omar, a member of the National Assembly, in a small, private den inside his office in the National Assembly. Inviting me to talk in the den was a positive sign that Omar wanted to talk freely and without any distractions. We both took off the ghutra, the traditional head cover. Taking off the head cover is a sign of informal settings, just like

untying a tie. Omar argued that conflicts in politics are normal, yet what is happening in Kuwaiti politics is abnormal. He supported his point of view saying, “It is abnormal because the conflicts always transfer from the politicians to the public. The reason is because when politicians have no way to solve conflicts, they would have to transfer it to the public to get their support. Therefore, in Kuwait, everyone is talking politics.” I asked Omar about what is preventing him and politicians from addressing the political reform issue in the National Assembly as an official agenda. Omar argued that politicians are flooded with old problems that we should also discuss.

The continuous conflicts are creating endless problems that need to be solved urgently. For example, there is a lawsuit from the government against 70 politicians and activists dating back to 2011 when a group of protesters entered the National Assembly building. The lawsuit threatens more than 70 families, including three current members of the National Assembly. The lower court cleared the 70 activists of all charges. However, on appeal, the higher court overturned the lower court and sentenced the activists to two to nine years for political reasons. The activists were sentenced to jail two weeks before the interview, and they were temporarily released on the 19th of February 2018 after 84 days in jail where they awaited the highest court’s decision. Ali argued that while there are 70 people in jail for political reasons, it is impossible to collaborate or negotiate any plans for reform with the government.

The need to move to what Omar called “the third state” cannot be achieved without an agreement with the Amir. Otherwise, politicians will continue to focus on electoral practices to save their seats and the ruling family’s reputation will suffer. Fahad, a member of the National Assembly, shared a similar point of view to Omar. However,

he insisted that the political reform must increase public participation in policy making. That is, we need to move to a collective mentality rather than a one-man rule. Lastly, National Assembly member Waleed insisted that we do not have real problems that threaten the existence of the state; however, we have problems that increase the discontent among the people. He argued, historically, real political changes, or reform, happened when there were real, external threats to Kuwait and he did not want to wait until a new threat arose.

Visionary leadership

The belief that we need to review the constitution for more balanced relationships between authorities is widely growing among different populations. However, because of many challenges that would face the constitutional reform, some decision makers, politicians, and people who I met addressed the political reform from other perspectives than constitutional reform. Because all of the other perspectives of political reform were not related to fundamental changes such as constitutional reform, I am combining all views in this section.

Decision makers.

One group of decision makers believes that Kuwait's political problems are related to the people who run the system rather than the system itself. Regardless of the current challenges, they believe that the legal system in Kuwait is trustworthy. Some of the decision makers that I met with avoided blaming people who are in leadership positions because of hierarchy and other social and political ties. However, they pointed clearly to the problem of having unqualified people in leadership positions. Saud argued,

Our political and legal systems are transparent. I mean that we have specific procedures to make changes. What we need is tuning these procedures to be more practical in terms of the time that takes to form any change and shorten processes.

Faisal insisted on the need for open political discussion about the future of Kuwait after oil. The reason being, Faisal argued, is that every leader has his own vision about political and economic reform in Kuwait yet none of them have been institutionalized.

There is a need to have a clear national vision about Kuwait's future. Faisal said,

If the government has a clear vision, we might be able to collaborate with the opposition and reformist politicians. However, with the current situation and past experiences, only corrupt politicians will support us based on the benefits they are getting from us.

Therefore, having a national vision will prevent the government from holding the reform if the oil price increases again as it did before.

Politicians.

Politicians started from different grounds about their understanding of how the current political problem should be solved. Unlike the fundamental point of view of the desire to achieve constitutional changes, one group of politicians was less passionate about constitutional changes. At the same time, a group of politicians had many views about the alternatives of constitutional reform. In this section, I address their views from the first wave of interviews.

A major perspective that many of the politicians started from is the fear of initiating a fundamental change. The situation of distrust has had its effect among politicians in that they do not trust each other's intentions.

Who is making the change?

Ahmad argued, “I am not passionate about constitutional changes because it might be the beginning of continuous changes that we might not be able to control.” Sami shared his fear about the domination of a specific party over political life, stating, “If we change the constitution for more public participation, who do you think is going to take the lead? There is only one organized party that will take the lead.” Sami meant the Muslim Brotherhood political party ‘Hadas.’ Mohamad asked, “How can we trust members who have been accused of millions of Dinars of bribes—and people still re-elected them—to change the constitution?” In other words, if those corrupt members in the National Assembly accepted bribes in numerous political instances, they would not reject a larger bribe for a major case such as constitutional changes.

Culture and norms.

Sami explained the problem in the current political system before he explained his own proposal to solve the conflict. He argued that the problem with the current system is that it is based on four coincidences: having a good prime minister who can select good ministers, having a good head of the National Assembly because he is responsible for the relationship between the government and the National Assembly, having a majority of trustworthy members of the national assembly, and a synergy between the first three coincidences. These coincidences do not typically occur in a traditional type of regime, as Sami argued. However, moving toward an institutional system is closely related to public awareness and culture. Sami’s view about culture is one that is popular in the Arab world: people are not ready for democracy and people should be educated about democracy before they are allowed to practice it (Diamond, 2013). This notion is widely debated,

thus establishing a foundation for dictatorships in many countries in the region. Tareq agreed that the system is flawed—however, that does not mean that we cannot implement a change. He argued,

Theoretically, our democratic system is flawed. However, to apply the true democratic system we have to understand our regional aspects. Our neighbors won't like to deal with a democratic regime with collective decision-making entities. They prefer to deal with one person who controls everything.

Mohamad argued that the current system is based on a paternal authority and was built upon faithful intentions. He stated that the founders built the constitution according to ethics and norms that are now absent. He argued, “When Kuwait was established it lacked every important asset for human living: no water, no agriculture, and no food. However, their hard work, smart planning and faithful intentions and the cultural values and norms provides protection for their plans.” The degradation of the values and norms, as Mohamad believes, caused the current problems. Fawaz shared a similar view, stating that the problem is that our norms have changed and therefore no laws or regulation could help until we restore our values. He argued,

The problem is the Kuwaiti personality has changed. It used to be when someone offered food he refused saying that he's not hungry because people had bashfulness. Now people take the food from your mouth. The corrupt people have become noble in Kuwaiti culture nowadays.

Individualistic proposals.

It is important to mention that all of the interviewees agreed that the Amir must be engaged and give blessings for any proposed solution. Constitutionally and practically, no solution can be implemented without the Amir's approval.

A number of politicians supported the idea of having a prime minister who is not from the Mubarak AlSabah successors—the ruling branch in the AlSabah family. The prime minister position has been considered as a transition phase toward the throne. Therefore, instead of focusing on achieving the public interest, the prime minister focuses on strengthening his status. As a result, government performance declines, public institutions fail to solve problems or implement plans, and public discontent increases. The oppositionists find themselves either forced to raise the bar for opposition—interrogating the prime minister, for example, was taboo before 2006, now it has become a typical practice. The family perceives the growth of the opposition against the government as a threat to the throne. Therefore, this group of politicians believes that if they can segregate the throne from the government or at least the prime ministry, this will solve the problem in the short run.

Sami argued, “Currently, the National Assembly votes to give trust to the crown prince before the inauguration, so how can we choose the crown prince but not the prime minister? This idea –voting to give trust to the government– won’t change the system but will fix many things.” Ahmad proposed a similar idea, but he suggested that the Amir choose three candidates for prime ministry and the National Assembly vote for the best government proposal rather than only voting for the name. He agreed that this idea might not solve the corruption issue because candidates can be bribed for votes. However, he believes that corruption will be there anyway but at least people can witness an improvement and agenda-based government.

Mohamad argued that selecting trusted people and then having a marketing strategy for the public agenda will be vital to gain legitimacy and public support. He

thinks the first way to improve public life is by selecting qualified people and then having good management. He insisted that the government does not do its job to communicate with people and convince them of their plans. Therefore, that reflects on politicians in that they cannot support the government that did not convince the public.

Populace.

In this section I am combining the perceptions of the five focus groups regarding political reform. The reason for this is their perceptions of the political reform were widely varied. The age group, education, and social circle influence the perceptions. Moreover, the level of political participation was the main influencer on the variation of the perception of the political reform. That is, the more the people were active and participated in political life, the more accurate description of the political situation they made. I evaluate the accuracy of their opinion by assessing the reliability of the foundation they rely on in their opinion. For example, a few participants argued that Kuwaitis do not deserve democracy and the constitution was a gift from Sheikh Abdullah Alsalem Alsabah, who was a true believer in democracy. This opinion is simply incorrect, as Kuwait had a long history of political movements toward democracy. The movements were marked by bloody confrontations and activists were jailed. Therefore, it is important to mention that public opinion about the scope of political reform will vary widely. I will discuss its overall impact on the research in the discussion chapter.

There was agreement among the populace, as represented by focus group participants, that the current political and legal system are not able to solve the political problem. The simple expression of this idea was presented by Shaikha when she said, “I

do not know if legislation should be changed or how, but I am sure there is something wrong.”

The indicator of abnormality of the political conflict in Kuwait is perceived by the problem-solving dilemma. Hussain argued, “Political conflicts in every country are part of the system and political practices; however, once political conflicts paralyze the state it means that it is abnormal.” The political democratic practices were stigmatized with failure because democracy in Kuwait did not achieve its goals such as, improving public life, preventing corruption, or solving people’s problems. Since the establishment of democratic practices, Fatima argued, “the only benefit we gain out of it is the high margin of freedom of speech.”

In response to my question about if we choose the most qualified people to lead the government if this would lead to success, the majority of the populace participants argued that even if we hired the best executive person to be the head of the government, he would not be able to achieve the public interest because there is no supportive system that leads to success. Lulwa stated, “I want to vote for the prime minister every four years and give him trust. At least let the Amir nominate four candidates and we choose one of them.” She insisted that what is happening in Kuwait is abnormal, and Kuwait is not achieving anything. Salem argued, “As far as I know, tuning the constitution would help to solve our problems. I would never support an elected government.” After Salem’s argument in that focus group, a fervent debate started about an elected government. The main point in the discussion was regarding peoples’ willingness or ability to choose the right people if the cabinet is elected.

Some participants argued that when you know that your choice will affect your life and future, you will force yourself to choose the right people. However, the counterargument was that the actual practices in most of the elections in Kuwait show the opposite. Salim argued, "If Ali is a candidate, you will vote for him because he is your cousin, and everyone will do the same." The debate continued and participants were evaluating people's principles that lead them to choose their candidates and whether people can ignore the cultural impact and social ties that they may have on their selection.

Kuwait's decision-making process was perceived as unfair, primarily because the government changes its decisions, which indicates to the populace that they are not making decisions in the appropriate way. Most participants believe their voices are not heard or have no bearing on the decision-making process. Some participants think that sometimes, some politicians can deliver their voices, but it not sufficient. However, Khaled argued that the government really cares about peoples' opinion. He argued, "The citizens are the government's concern." He insisted that when the government leaks some information about any new decision to measure public opinion and feedback, this is an indicator that they care about the citizens' voices. However, Abdullah argued in return, "So why does the constitution give the power to the family not the citizens?"

The interviews with politicians, decision makers, and populace in the five focus groups showed that all groups lost their trust in the political system. Decision makers were asking for a political system that empowers them through minimizing political interference in their daily work and offers public support for the political institutions. On the other hand, politicians wanted to put an end to their passive role in the decision-making process because of the imbalanced distribution of power between the National

Assembly and the Amir. Politicians were perceived as the only outlet for the people's voice. However, the only solution they can afford is to incapacitate the government power rather than participating in the governmental decision-making process to solve the problems.

The opinions of the scope of change varied. Politicians who seek fundamental changes have wanted to do what they think is the right and the best solution. And politicians who preferred minor political changes were considering the cultural and regional circumstances. Thus, deciding the scope of political change requires additional discussions within better political circumstances.

CHAPTER 9

FINDINGS: OPINIONS ABOUT KUWAIT'S 2035 VISION

In this research, the communicative action theory's principles were applied to the project known as the Kuwait 2035 Vision. The most important aspect of why I chose this project is that there is an agreement about its importance to the economy and political life. However, because of many reasons that I will discuss later, the project needs an alternative method rather than the "fair procedure," or the voting method, to be considered as legitimate. A new method is needed because, first, the vision addresses economic reform in a new way the current political system cannot absorb. More specifically, the constitution banned landownership for non-Kuwaitis, yet this aspect is vital for foreign investors. Second, the project proposes that the areas of the development will be considered as an independent entity, such as an international zone, from the motherland in terms of legislation and management. Third, the project faces cultural resistance because it addresses freedom in a western model. That is, alcohol trading and consumption and all related activities will be allowed, freedom of practicing religion and establishing religious entities will be permitted, and LGBT rights will be instituted.

In the first wave of interviews and focus groups, I gathered general perspectives about the project. Officials, politicians, and members of the populace participated. The questions were altered after each interview to add more perspectives in order to gather a holistic point of view. The officials that I interviewed have had a direct role in the economic public institutions and policy development. All of the decision makers in this research have direct or indirect roles in the proposed project. Therefore, their views are vital because of the amount of information and experience they have regarding the

project and the economy. However, unexpectedly, the decision makers' points of view were inconsistent, and therefore, in the following section, I divided their views into two categories: cautious and progressive.

Decision Makers

Cautious scope of change.

Jamal argued that the overall goal of having special economic zones (SEZ) is to minimize the negative impact of the local legislation on the foreign investors. However, Kuwait has already passed legislation that could achieve a similar goal without having SEZ. For instance, he argued, the whole idea of the SEZ is taxation initiatives and ownership regulations, and we already solved those issues. That is, having sufficient laws is more doable than fighting to establish SEZ. He added, "Many companies already moved out of the current free zone in Kuwait and preferred to work within the current local legal system." Jamal's point of view relies on the previous attempt to pass progressive legislation, and he insisted that trying to pass the free zone or SEZ legislation will end up having a shapeless legislation because of the too many modifications that will be done to form an agreement. He said, "It is very costly, politically and practically." In short, Jamal was arguing that the economic reform should be addressed in a simple forum and that all we need is to map several laws together to form a political and economic cure.

Nabil argued about the difficulties convincing people about a new concept within the current political conflicts. Nabil noted that the concept of the islands and SEZ does not currently exist in Kuwait and therefore, people will have difficulty supporting it. He argued, "People in Kuwait need to see it, seeing is believing; they want to see direct

impact and be exposed to successful stories.” In addition, Nabil thinks that what makes Kuwait different than other competitors and should be focused on is the geographic location rather than the initiatives that can be afforded. Nasser had a moderate opinion about the legal structure of the project. He argued that a middle ground system that protects the investors and the State could be achieved.

Nabil and Jamal agreed that the project should be ruled by a “Kuwaiti independent entity” or what is known as a state-owned entity. However, in a previous interview with a decision maker, I was told there is a lack of experience among Kuwaitis in running this kind of project. Another decision maker, Hadi, insisted that we do not currently have “Freezoners,” experts in managing free zones, in Kuwait to manage the project. Jamal argued that Kuwait’s human resources is an added value to the regional market. Many of the foreign investors, after hiring Kuwaitis in Kuwait, have offered them positions in head offices. Jamal and other decision makers insisted that there are many Kuwaitis who are qualified to play vital roles in the project, and many of them already work overseas with multinational corporations.

Lastly, there was a disagreement about having what is considered a liberal identity in the project’s location, mainly the islands. From a practical point of view, many decision makers who I met argued that alcohol is not vital to attracting foreign investors. However, having a profitable environment is what attracts investors. Nabil said, “From my experience, about 5% of the foreign investors questioned the availability of alcohol. I don’t think it is crucial to the project.” However, Nabil added that maybe other investors just did not ask.

In sum, decision makers with cautious opinions preferred to implement the new project, Vision 2035, within the current legal system with some alterations. Their main argument is that the proposed legal system, SEZ or international zone, will not offer much more than what the current legal system, with some modifications, can offer. In addition, this group of decision makers prefer not to propose the new project as a liberal way of life as they think it is not vital for the project and they want to avoid the public negative reaction.

Progressive scope of change.

The main disagreement between the cautious and progressive views is the legal relationship between the motherland laws and the new project. In addition, this is reflected in the concept of the project's identity and the future legislation about alcohol and its related activities.

Jarrah argued that to protect the wealth and economy, we must apply the concept of international zones in Kuwait. Because the geopolitical situation is very critical, Jarrah argued that Kuwait wants to gather international interests in the country. The terminology of *international* means that the area of the project will be under international law. However, Jarrah argued that it is not wise to make these areas directly an international zone. He proposed that the government should instead implement special economic zones or free zones. Each island would be a free zone as a transition to an international zone. However, Jarrah added, "I would not call it a free zone; I would call it an economic zone without adding the term [international] to avoid being under international law. I prefer it, but it is not doable; it contradicts the constitution."

In response to the argument that the government should change the local legislation to create a free zone in the motherland, Jarrah replied, “It is not the free zone we want.” Jarrah made a connection between the rejection of the concept of international zones and Kuwaiti culture, stating, “at the end of the day, we are Bedouins as a mentality; we are not risk takers—we test before we hunt or settle. And because of that, we are survivors because we are living the organic evolution.” Although Jarrah stated earlier that the project should be implemented in an International zone, in this passage he was describing the cultural history and mentality of the people and what could lead them to reject the concept of international zone.

Bader defended the concept of the project in a different way. I asked Bader why the government does not take the lead to develop the project. He answered that there are two models of modern fast development; the first model is present in Singapore, Dubai, and Malaysia. The second model is what is known as “let the market lead,” like in America, Hong Kong, etc., where the state’s role is to regulate only. Bader insisted that the second model, the market-based model, suits Kuwait more because Kuwait already has established a private sector that has proved its efficiency. In addition, Bader noted that the state-owned companies, proposed by other interviewees, historically proved their failure in Kuwait due to many interventions. Thus, there was an agreement that the governor board should be a multinational board consisting of the stakeholders for three reasons: giving the investor access to govern, eliminating the political and cultural interventions, and solving the lack of local experience.

I raised the counterargument of instead starting from the point of Kuwait as it currently is. Bader answered, “It is a valid question; however, it is a different approach.”

It is a widely shared notion among the decision makers that current situation does not help to reform the economy in the motherland within the timeframe and existing efforts. Hamed insisted that the islands would be a success story for the mainland, just like Hong Kong is for China. I asked Bader about his concerns about the timeframe of the reform, and why it should not be reformed gradually. Bader argued,

We still can solve our problem and improve the economy without having any negative impact on the middle class. It is not true what the current government announced that the economic reform will affect everybody negatively. However, if we wait, the challenge to compete with our neighbors will increase and the risk of losing more financial reserves will be reflected in the middle class.

I asked Hamed whether local companies will be harmed if international corporations entered the market due to differing level of abilities of local versus international corporations. He answered that it is not true that the private sector is not able to compete and the current limitations of the private sector exist because of the control of the state over many sectors. For example, when the banking and financial sector are not state-controlled –banks in Kuwait are owned and run by investors even if the state owns some shares– the financial services that Kuwait established have exceeded those in the region.

Progressive opinions of decision makers in the first wave of interviews tended to follow what they think is the best implementation of the project. Unlike the cautious decision makers, this group of decision makers believed that the legal structure is crucial for the success of the project. Further discussions were conducted about the legal structure in the second and follow-up interviews.

The project's identity.

The understanding of the project's identity varied. Among decision makers, different arguments were addressed about alcohol and LGBT rights. Supportive and non-supportive views among decision makers were not concerned with the identity of the project from an ideological point of view. However, the decision makers' views were based on what they thought was the best identity for the project to succeed. There is an important differentiation between decision makers' views about the identity of the project and the politicians' views.

Jarrah, a decision maker, insisted that the idea of having alcohol is about maintaining a market. He commented that he does not think that it is important to address the alcohol issue in the project because investors and foreigners can acquire liquor through their embassies. He also argued that some politicians are addressing the alcohol aspect as a way to fight the project because they cannot discuss the idea that the new area will be open to multiple religions, ethnicities, and LGBT rights.

Jaber argued that Kuwait is the only civic country that bans alcohol. He added that in the official communication and marketing plans of the project, we should target the coming generations who will move to the new city seeking jobs—not the current generation who might reflect past incidents in the future plans.

Concerns.

Even though the idea of international zones seems to be favorable among this group of decision makers, there are serious concerns that must be discussed. The main concern is regarding the sovereignty of the new developed area. Hadi gave Hong Kong as a negative example of international zones in terms of sovereignty. In 1997, China was

supposed to restore its sovereignty over Hong Kong after 156 years of being under the British colonial rule. However, Hong Kong became a special administrative region with an independent administration and currency (Gargan, 1997). This explains the fear that the new project might have negative consequences on Kuwait's sovereignty over the developed area if it is ruled under international law. However, Hadi agreed that Hong Kong is part of China's success. Therefore, what is dangerous in the proposed concept is the call for potential independence in the future. Jaber insisted that the project must describe a mechanism to solve any conflicts or mechanism of governance in the future between the country and the governing board of the zone.

Another concern addressed is the potential of the international zone to cause Kuwait to lose its sovereignty and identity, therefore negatively impacting public support. Thus, to minimize the impact of foreign power, Hadi insisted that there not be a single country of investor controls in the new zone, although it has been discussed to give the lead to China. He argued, "It should be a real international zone." Another concern is that that this type of zone attracts mafias involved in money laundering, drug trafficking, and other illegal activities. The mechanism of handling these illegal activities should be clear and discussed in advance.

There was agreement among the interviewees about missing details. That is, there are too many questions and details that have not been discussed or addressed yet. In addition, there is an absence of the process of the project. Everyone has an idea about how the project should be managed, but nobody knows how it actually will be managed. Hadi argued that these concerns are true, but we should start with the McKinsey study. McKinsey is an international consulting firm that was hired by the government of Kuwait

for the project. Hadi insisted that the government could modify the studies that were already done in collaboration with research firms later if needed.

In sum, decision makers who had progressive views believed that despite cultural challenges, the government should fight to apply what is the best for the project in terms of its identity. In addition, even if progressive views of decision makers seemed to be passionate about the international zone, they addressed several concerns about preserving the sovereignty of the developed land. They insisted that the government must prepare a mechanism to solve any conflict that could arise between the government and the entity that will manage the new zones.

Politicians

Background

Politicians' perceptions about the project varied in many aspects; however, they were in accord in a few cases such as regarding the project's identity. The major issue I found was that the politicians blamed the government for the lack of information about the project. Therefore, their responses were mainly based on the information I provided. I followed Habermas' principles about the information I provided that it must be true, right, and free of power. Politicians' feedbacks were consistent with their current political position. The politicians were interviewed individually.

Misinformation is a major problem that the politicians faced. Sami argued that he would support any attempts to improve the economy, but he had not received any information about the project. Because there were no official written statements on basic information about the project, news pieces are laying out aspects of the project based on personal communications or public events held by Sheikh Nasser S. Alsabah. Fahad, a

member of the National Assembly, said, “I have heard from the media that the cost will be \$450 billion and the income is projected to be about \$6 billion. If these numbers are right, I have many concerns about it.”

Ali stated that he feels suspicious about this project even though he does not have enough information about it: “My experience with the government’s projects is that they are not real, or the project is designed to be corrupted. I cannot ignore this feeling; it is rooted in me.” Ali replied my question about what could make him support the project by stating that the first thing that would motivate him to support the project is being convinced that it is not another corrupt project. He insisted that this could be achieved through following transparent procedures. Second, he has no trust in the ability of the government to implement the project; therefore, they must show how they will be able to implement it. Third, the project is conceptualized around attracting foreign investments; however, he does not think Kuwait is an attractive destination for foreign investment yet. Thus, they also need to prove why and how Kuwait would be an attractive to investors. He added, “for the previous reasons, I would not support this project if it came to vote today.”

In the same vein, Fahad argued that there is a lack of information about the project. Fahad struggled to find answers to basic questions, such as why the foreign investors are willing to invest, what initiatives we are going to offer, if we will offer land ownership, and how Kuwait will benefit directly. Fahad insisted that he needs to know more about the project so he can take a position founded on a solid base. He specified some aspects saying, “I want to know about the land ownership; I reject the idea of land ownership. It is a larger land than current Kuwait—how will I give it up?”

Abdullah explained that this misinformation is misleading the politicians. He said that all that he knows about the project is that it was about the Mubarak port, then it became about Boubyan Island, sometime later they added Silk City as part of it, and now it is the five Islands. He argued, “The vision is vague and all we see are visuals made for marketing purposes.” Abdullah explained that the draft of the law that was recently received in the financial committee of the National Assembly was withdrawn by the new cabinet. He insisted, “I have said, the vision changed when people changed.”

Yousef commented on the historical evolution of the project in a sarcastic way, “I know that this is an old project around since the 1980s and it develops like bacteria, every ten years with different headlines.” He insisted that if people in the streets talk about the project, they will laugh about it—a sign that people have lost their trust in the government. He argued that “if I am responsible about this kind of projects, the first thing I will do is to rebuild peoples’ trust in the state.”

Hussain had some information about the project. He explained to me that the proposed project was presented to him as a governmental entity under the prime ministry supervision. He argued, “This is not acceptable. It was presented to get rejected, that was my understanding.” The presentation was presented by another team than the team under Sheikh Nasser S. Alsabah. It was part of the conflict over the project between in the government. The point that Hussain tried to deliver is that he supports the idea that mega projects should be run by independent entities. He called this “mobilizing the mega projects.”

The concept

Bader's perceptions were directly pointing to the constitution. He argued that any project not in accordance with the constitution is not acceptable. This reflects his position about the international zone, and he insisted that it must be studied well and how it will be done within the current constitution. On other hand, I asked Ali about his perception of what he thinks the project should focus on, and his answer was in agreement with decision makers. The aspects he most supports are attracting foreign investments and being a logistic hub. Fahad insisted that he will support any kind of idea or concept that will improve the economy; however, to him, it is all about the details. Sami, on the other hand, refused the idea that the government invests in the project; he believed that this is the private sector's job.

Fahad seemed to be more open to the idea of an international zone in Kuwait. He stated, "I have no problem with an international zone if its law is clear. The concept of international zones is a successful concept; however, I will judge the law that will conceptualize the concept in Kuwait." Sami argued that Kuwait is also still in question about human rights issues. Therefore, he wondered how it will convince foreigners to live and invest in a country with a negative reputation in human rights.

Ali's thoughts about the legal structure were unexpected. He stated clearly that he is willing to paralyze political life by interrogating the prime minister if the prime minister will pass the project during the current political conflicts. However, he stated that he supports the idea of having different laws if this is the final way to solve our economic problems. The main point that Ali made is that any concept depends on the needs of the investors, not the needs of the government—even if government wants to

implement the project in the motherland. He thinks the project should be established with international experience and multinational leadership to avoid transferring the conflict of the motherland to the new land. “At least at the beginning,” Ali said. He also stated that he will be flexible about the structure of the entity that will manage the new project: for instance, presidential, local government, etc. However, his flexibility to negotiate the international zone is conditional. Ali argued,

We are a very small country, I will not accept any negotiation about sovereignty. Our weakness now is related to our small size. Why do you think I will put my small country at risk to lose more land? If losing sovereignty is a possible risk, losing the profit of the project would be also possible.

The Kurdish case was an example that Ali used to support his point of view. He argued that the Kurds in Iraq had just voted for independence from Iraq, and the same thing could happen in Kuwait with the new immigrants who will be settled in the new developed areas. Fahad shared similar views, and he addressed concerns about foreign powers who might benefit from international law in the sake of their political agendas.

Sulaiman added that all he knew about the project was that the project is proposed as a separate entity from the motherland. He insisted, “This is not acceptable.” Sulaiman was more conservative about the legal structure than Fahad and Ali, as he believed that the constitution does not allow a piece of land separate from the motherland to have an independent legal system. Furthermore, Sulaiman insisted that the National Assembly should supervise the new entity that will be responsible for handling the project. Sulaiman’s rationale for being conservative about the legal structure is that he does not believe that the current legal system prevents the investment except for alcohol consumption. He argued, “I tend to choose the right people; change the local laws and depart from there.”

Abdullah added a new aspect to the idea of developing a new area in Kuwait. He believes that Kuwait should invest in developing the current Kuwait—its infrastructure, the existing industrial areas, the ports, and the airport—rather than escaping to build a new city. He explained his point by saying, “I would imagine the new project is like a husband who failed in his first marriage and wants to escape from his failure to establish a new family, leaving his first family behind.”

Abdullah argued that the government has the ability to be successful in its current plans instead of taking Kuwait into an unknown project that might face many regional challenges. Abdullah expanded his rejection, saying, “I don’t think it is a priority, I think it is a way to distract the public from other important things. Just like what the Romans leaders did in the public wrestling games to distract their people.”

Abdullah insisted that managing the project should be done through a governmental entity. In addition, the majority of the board of trustees should consist of Kuwaitis. This way, the public would be their priority. Thus, the mechanism of solving problems must be through the local legal system. He argued, “IBM and Huawei are now in Kuwait as local companies working within the local laws.”

Land ownership was also a concern to many politicians. Bader, Fahad, and Yousef, for instance, insisted that it is prohibited by the constitution to sell land to foreigners. Bader argued that any public asset, such as land or an island, cannot be sold. It is unconstitutional to offer any natural resource for sale. Yousef added, “If it is long-term renting, I might be able to talk about it.”

Hussain added another controversial aspect. He insisted that the local merchants—though he rejects the term ‘merchants’ and used the term ‘investors’—

should have a hand in the project. He argued, “Let them have a zone.” This idea is quite suspicious to many politicians and decision makers. Some decision makers believe that local merchants’ power should be minimized or at least they should compete equally with the foreign investors. Hussain had a clear opinion about the legal structure. He preferred international law because it offers and protects tourism. Moreover, in response to my question about developing populated cities, he argued that it does not matter if we develop the motherland at the same time as developing another part of Kuwait.

Many politicians questioned the issues of having a mechanism of solving any conflict in the future between the motherland and the developed area. Also, they are asking for an evaluation of expected threats, and the authority that Kuwait has over the new area.

Identity.

The cultural aspect of the project is very challenging for the politicians. Sometimes they have to choose between the best thing to do for the sake of the public good and the best thing to choose to win the next election. In addition, rejection of alcohol among politicians was not limited to conservatives or Islamists.

Bader argued saying, “When a decision maker says this must be done in order for the project to succeed, I feel suspicious.” Bader insisted that he personally will not support alcohol permission. However, it depends on the majority: “I reject it but it is the peoples’ choice.” Abdullah argued that the current cultural situation is progressive, open, liberal, and provides freedom for everybody. He believes that rules and regulations are implemented in every culture to protect their identity. Therefore, the call to supersede our current identity and culture by allowing alcohol and LGBT rights is suspicious to him.

Yousef does not believe investors will be concerned about alcohol. The core, Yousef thinks, is about how much they will make back when they invest in this area. Therefore, according to Yousef, there is no relationship between what is proposed as an economic concept and alcohol. He concluded his opinion saying, “I will not accept alcohol consumption or prostitution or anything that culturally is considered unacceptable.”

Fahad insisted that Kuwait is a conservative society. He described alcohol saying, “Alcohol is a vice and that is constant in our religion and there is no doubt about its prohibition.” He argued that wealth and economic development are not contingent upon allowing alcohol. However, Fahad insisted that Kuwait should develop its own concept of development. Fahad made a clear statement about his decision-making perception and its connection with his own beliefs. He said,

Personally, I cannot support allowing alcohol. In this matter, I start from a religious position. I will be participating in the decision-making process that might change the region, society, and people’s lives. Regardless of how beneficial the new alcohol policy is for the people, in the day of judgment people will not stand for me. I should act based on what would benefit me in the day of judgement.

That is, Fahad was arguing that even if studies would support that alcohol permission is important for the project, and that would be reflected in the quality of people’s lives, he will not support it. Fahad’s sentimental argument was hard to refute because it is rooted in his personal beliefs where numbers and data would not satisfy him.

Fahad is not recognized as conservative or Islamist. Rather, his political views are progressive. However, when I probed his political decision regarding alcohol’s role in the project, he recalled some religious aspects. The idea that a person would act individually

based on his beliefs is a very desirable attitude that would make the person proud of himself, especially when they face religious challenges.

This is one of the challenges in applying the theory of communicative action where validity claims are hard to implement. Religion and culture in a high context society are rooted in peoples' perceptions. The validity claims –right, true, and truthfulness– were hard to evaluate in these kinds of arguments. Especially, verifying what is right when religion is considered in the political decision –someone could argue that it is mentioned in the constitution– is challenging. And according to Habermas (1976), true is when both hearer and speaker agree about its truthfulness, however, Habermas rejects the cultural aspects and values to be valid claims (Habermas, 1984, p. 42).

Ali argued that in general, Kuwait can create its own culture. He said, “You don't have to attract all people from everywhere in one place.” Ali's feedback about the government's claim that alcohol is important for the success of the project was less steady than others. He said, “I can argue back, none of us has evidence. I mean, I can argue that [clean tourism] is also in high demand.”

Sulaiman argued that Kuwait would never be an attractive area for people to live in. He supported his point of view citing the Palm Island in Dubai, which was built for the same reasons that Kuwait wants to develop the new areas and with similar government initiatives for foreigners, including giving free houses for celebrities to live there. The project, however, had failed. The main reason, as Sulaiman thought, is that our hot climate, which reaches 125 degrees Fahrenheit in summer, does not help. Therefore, Sulaiman insisted that attracting foreigners to live in Kuwait in the long term is not

doable. And consequently, allowing alcohol is not a priority. Sulaiman concluded his interview making a clear statement about the identity of the project: “I refuse to allow anything prohibited in our religion like alcohol or gambling in Kuwait, and I am willing to interrogate the prime minister for that. This is not negotiable.”

Sami supported keeping the current local penal code. He believed that not doing this would allow alcohol, gambling, and other things that people do not want. Sami argued that the politicians do not prevent development; for example, he argued, “we never banned building the biggest mall in the MENA –Middle East and North Africa region– [the Avenues Mall in Kuwait]; however, it is not acceptable that the Avenues Mall has independent law.” He insisted, “any other legal independence than the penal code is negotiable.”

Abdullah added another concern to the previously noted issues:

First of all, I reject the idea of settling foreigners in Kuwait. This idea contradicts the beliefs of the conservatives in Kuwait. In addition, the government currently declares the problem of an unbalanced population, so how are they planning to settle more foreigners in Kuwait?

He continued by explaining what he thinks is the contradiction between the government’s vision and the current situation. Abdullah asked, if Kuwait is suffering from unemployment, how is the government planning to bring in more employees from other countries? Based on this, Abdullah rejected the idea that alcohol is an important aspect for the project in order for foreigners to live in Kuwait. Believing this is an invalid argument, he concluded saying that security is achieved by attracting investment—not cultures and peoples. Dubai followed a model of attracting foreigners and it is now threatening Dubai’s sovereignty.

Another aspect, Abdullah added, is that the current legislation in Kuwait regarding alcohol does not ban the consumption of alcohol. However, it prohibits consuming alcohol in public and trading alcohol. Therefore, bringing alcohol for personal consumption within the borders is not prohibited by law. In addition, Abdullah added that alcohol is a vice in all religions, and nations are suffering from the impact of alcohol consumption.

On the opposite side, Husain argued that the first Dubai hotel in the 1970s failed because it did not provide alcohol. He said, “This is a fact. Alcohol is part of the success.” He believes that a new alcohol policy needs a decision from the highest authority in the country rather than convincing the public. It will be very challenging to convince people to accept any new move to change, as Hussain thinks. In order to validate Husain’s arguments based on Habermas’ conditions of validity claims (Habermas, 1984), I addressed some counterarguments to Hussain regarding alcohol, and he replied saying,

I do not think that having access to alcohol would increase local consumption; it is a personal choice. However, from a political perspective, yes, it is difficult to address and convince people about alcohol. The timing is not appropriate.

Many of the people who reject permitting alcohol addressed “clean tourism.” Clean tourism is the idea that having tourism areas without allowing any services that contradict the religion or the culture. People think that families in the region are seeking this kind of tourism. Hussain responded that if clean tourism is more profitable than “open tourism,” “let’s do it.” However, he also suggested that Kuwait should collaborate with Iraq to build a new town out on the borders of Kuwait and implement international law, so that if someone wants to drink they can go there.

Populace

The public has a very vague background about the project. The shortage of information and the linkage between the project and the personality of Sheikh Nasser S. Alsabah makes it seem like a personal interest rather than an official state vision. It is widely discussed whether this project is a stepping stone for Sheikh Nasser to the throne more than a true project. In this section, I will discuss the focus groups that gathered for both waves of the discussions. The reason for combining them into one discussion is that the populace focus groups' outputs did not change significantly in the second wave. I will explain this matter in more detail in the discussion chapter.

To solve the issue of a lack of knowledge, I made sure to explain the three suggested concepts of the legal structure for the project: governmental entity, special economic zone, and international zone. The information provided was based on the information gained from the decision makers who explained each concept. I also explained the strengths and weaknesses of each concept. I as a mediator presented all arguments as if I were the decision maker or the politician who addressed those arguments and counterarguments. My goal was to build circumstances similar to those that Habermas called for as if all groups were sitting together in a discussion.

In addition, I explained the importance of permitting alcohol for the project as argued by many of the decision makers. I also provided the counterarguments that I gathered from decision makers and political leaders about the legal structure and alcohol permitting. For instance, alcohol would increase the margin of profit from tourism and alcohol trading. Also, alcohol could be a comparison aspect between Kuwait and its neighbors and therefore, Kuwait will lose points if it does not offer alcohol.

My arguments were basically conceptualized around what decision makers had said about the importance of offering a similar quality of life for the foreigners who consume alcohol as part of daily life where it is perceived as a cultural aspect rather than vice. In most interviews, I had to explain the arguments that support allowing alcohol in the new project because of the participants in the focus groups were against the new alcohol policy. However, I only had to explain the non-supportive arguments for allowing alcohol for only five people –in different groups– who were supporting alcohol permission.

The importance of providing the basic knowledge for the populace is to enhance the quality of counterarguments or to convince them in order to achieve mutual understanding.

Background.

At the beginning of the five focus groups comprising 47 total participants, I asked some general questions about the project to see how much the public was informed and what their existing views were about it. Jamel said that theoretically, the project looks great and it will improve Kuwait's security, strengthen the economy, etc. However, it will not be implemented, or it will be implemented over a very long period and we will not witness it.

Ahmad thinks that the project is aiming to enhance the commercial activities of Kuwait, while Tareq thinks that it is the next corrupt project to steal more assets. Fahad believes that the project will not be implemented even by 2050. Other participants disagreed with Fahad saying that if Al-diwan Al-Amiri is handling the project it could happen within the promised timeframe.

Abdullah said that all he knew was that the islands will be free zones. I asked him what that means, and he said, “night clubs and alcohol.” Ali argued, “If, and I meant if, the project is implemented as promised it will improve the economy, such as the port and logistics.”

Farouq mentioned the twitter account ‘@Durarkw’ who announced that they are working on the project. He was shocked that they posted surveys about the project asking people what kinds of projects they want in the Islands: “Are they serious! They are asking us what we want—is it about what the people want or what is the best for the country? What is the vision?”.

Ahmad added another perspective, stating that he rejects the idea of the project because as the drawings show, it will destroy the natural life of the islands. In addition, he argued that we have a huge land in the motherland, so, he did not understand why they do not apply the concepts in Kuwait.

The discussion expanded to figure out what might be the alternatives. Jassim asked why the government does not invest in the oil derivatives. He added, “Why do we focus on tourism where Kuwait burns the natural gas and instead of selling it?” Jassim’s argument was related to the deal between Kuwait and Qatar. The deal was that Kuwait burns the natural gas that comes out of the oil wells in favor of Qatar. Qatar relies mainly on exporting natural gas and Kuwait will harm Qatar’s economy if the two countries compete against each other. Thus, Jassim is arguing that the natural gas that Kuwait is burning is worth more than tourism. It is important to note that while there is no official news about the Qatari/Kuwaiti deal, it is a very popular topic in Kuwait. It is possible that both governments protect the confidentiality about such negotiations.

The legal aspect.

The views expressed in focus groups about the legal structure were not clear, as there is a lack of knowledge about the different types of entities. Ali thinks that it should be a company where the government owns the majority shares. After I provided a brief description of the concept of international zones, it was widely rejected because of the fear of violating the culture and norms. Jamel argued, “I think the government should have some power over the entity.”

Abdulaziz thinks that the main point behind having an SEZ or international zone in the islands is to have a place where the government can establish different kinds of activities that it cannot do under the supervision of the National Assembly or the public. He said, “If it is in the islands, who will go there and care about what happens?”

Hassan argued that there are types of activities such as logistics, tourism, and industry, that have failed in the motherland. Therefore, if the government wants to permit alcohol and other activities to attract foreigners, let them do it far away in the islands. Saleh insisted that it is a good idea to have free zones, as it will improve tourism. Othman intervened, “But we feel suspicious of the government; they have never achieved something after they announce it.” This discussion from one focus group was an example of how low trust in government intervened people’s perceptions about the government abilities to achieve its plans.

I asked if they knew what a free zone or SEZ means, and Khaled said, “I think it is like a place where it has more freedom from the local legislation such as taxes and alcohol.” However, he insisted that he is not sure what is the best legal concept to handle the project, though he believed it should not be through the government. In another

indicator of low trust, he stated that his experience with any government-owned company is negative. Khaled said, “I do not mind that the project is managed by internationals; we have even more concerns about the Kuwaitis.” Hessa insisted, “If they use the local laws, they will not be able to implement the project.”

These were another two indicators of low trust in the local laws – what McKnight and Chervany (2001) called “the structural assurance” (p. 37) – and low trust in what McKnight and Chervany (2001) called “trusting intentions” (p. 34) in the Kuwaiti people who work in the public sector.

There are some individual perspectives that were addressed off topic. However, those perspectives are important to mention because they represent some of peoples’ concerns and understanding. For example, Waled insisted that the project must be controlled by one man who is responsible for the project rather than dividing the responsibility between many institutions. Also, empowering the Kuwaitis to work on the project was another notion that was addressed. Moreover, Salem said that he supports the project because it will change the identity of the economy. Abdulrahman argued that it is not acceptable that the government controls all of the production component. He said, “The government owns the land, makes bread, builds houses, and builds sports clubs, but they said that we are not socialists.”

There was no consensus about the qualifications of Kuwaitis to lead the project. Some people believe that we do not have enough qualified Kuwaitis; however, others think that we do, especially considering those who studied abroad. There was also a discussion about the influence of culture and social ties on the Kuwaitis’ performance.

Noura thinks non-Kuwaitis are hard workers for many reasons. The middle ground of the debate was that Kuwaitis should be involved heavily in later stages.

The points of view about the management varied. Some people support non-Kuwaitis to minimize corruption and interventions, and others support Kuwaitis to empower them. Lulwa argued that creating jobs for Kuwaitis is one of the most important aspects of the project.

The identity.

A majority of the people who participated in the focus group discussions rejected the idea of permitting alcohol. That was the core of the debate about the identity of the project. Four participants in all five focus groups had the courage to address their views about allowing alcohol. Their views were based on the economic benefits rather than liberal ideology. I am combining the five arguments in this section even if I met each of them in different focus groups in order to protect the participants' confidentiality.

Nouf insisted that she believes that the legislation should be different than the local law, but it should respect the culture. Abdullah argued, "I do not think that alcohol permission should be announced; let them do it silently."

Dhari recalled the town Rumaila in Kuwait history. Rumaila was a small town outside old Kuwait City, where bawdy houses were built by people who wanted to drink alcohol. Prostitution was also available there. It was considered a shame to be there and people used to go there secretly. Dhari suggested, "I do not mind if it looks like 'Rumaila,' where anyone who comes out drunk gets punished." The point is to keep it outside the existing Kuwait and closed to specific people rather than open to everyone.

Abdulaziz argued that embassies are already permitted to bring alcohol, so there are at least some kind of regulations and rules for importing and consuming now. He continued that if there will be alcohol, it should be regulated clearly after an open discussion.

The alcohol permit was widely rejected in that discussion except by Muhamad, who argued that alcohol is already available illegally and everybody can access it. However, he added, “If it is already available, why should not we regulate it and to improve our economy?”

Haya rejected the idea from a cross-cultural perspective. She said, “I refuse to permit alcohol, because when we go to other countries we respect their culture and norms and if they want to live here they should respect ours, too.” Fatima supported Haya saying that even if Kuwait will benefit from permitting alcohol, she does not support it.

Abdulrahman supported permitting alcohol, stating that we will face many threats that require us to strengthen the international presence in Kuwait and that requires permitting alcohol. Basel intervened saying of Abdulrahman’s argument, “This is defeatism.”

The first wave of interviews with politicians, decision makers, and populace showed different views about the scope of political reform in Kuwait. A group of politicians, decision makers, and populace believed that the only exit from the current political conflicts is through constitutional changes. The argument about fundamental legal changes was based on the low trust in the current political and legal structure.

Another group of politicians, decision makers, and populace, believed that the existing legal structure –with minor modifications– is capable of solving the current

political conflicts. This group believed that it would be challenging to perform any fundamental changes in the political system without supportive bases locally –such as culture– and regionally.

The opinions about the cultural identity of the proposed project were varied. Decision makers' views divided into two groups. Each group of decision makers was trying to prove the importance, or unimportance for more cultural freedom such as allowing alcohol in the proposed project. The politicians were united in opinion about their rejection of any cultural openness. The lack of information about the project motivated a number of politicians to have a strict opinion about the cultural aspect because as they argued, there is no proof that alcohol, for example, is important for the success of the project.

The populace who participated in the focus groups were also conservative about the cultural identity of the project. However, three of the participants expressed their acceptance about allowing alcohol. Also, five participants supported allowing alcohol with some restrictions. In sum, the populace showed flexibility about the cultural identity.

CHAPTER 10

WAVE 2.5 OF DATA GATHERING

The first wave of interviews and focus groups revealed many aspects that should be considered. However, my criteria in the second wave for identifying important aspects were the following: first, it is widely shared by the interviewees. Second, it is influential in the decision-making process. Third, it is vital for the project. In addition, I conducted follow-up discussions by phone via an in-depth interview format with two decision makers. This discussion resembles a third round of interviews—however, because it only focused on decision makers, I call it a half wave of interviews.

In wave 2.5, I collected data from two interviews with decision makers and one roundtable discussion with two decision makers. In addition, follow-up interviews were conducted by phone with two decision makers to discuss new questions and finalize the discussions. Thus, a total of six decision makers were interviewed in wave 2.5: two of them for the first time, and another two in the round table for the second time, and two in the follow-up interview for the second time.

After analyzing all first wave interviews, I found three main areas to discuss in terms of applying Habermas concept of reaching mutual understanding. First was the idea of establishing an independent legal entity, whether it is an international zone or a modified concept that passes over constitutional restrictions, such as land ownership, or local legal restrictions, such as alcohol, gambling, and other activities.

Second was the liberal identity of the project, such as permitting alcohol and LGBT rights. Because there is a concern about legitimacy, the alcohol issue must be addressed from a cultural perspective. Even if the government succeeds in gathering the

majority political and legal support for alcohol and its related activities, this will not be enough to gain legitimacy. That is, having a majority does not mean having legitimacy, which is Habermas' core argument of the communicative action theory.

Third was the distrust issue among different groups. Much of the feedback relied on past experiences with the political system, more specifically the government. These cumulative negative experiences strengthened the negative perception about the new project (McEvily, Weber, Bicchieri, & Ho, 2006). Selective exposure (Fischer, 2011) and collective behavior (Smelser, 1963) theories explain how people will look for information and opinions that support their feelings and judgments. The focus group discussions indicated that presenting the project to the public in an attractive way will not prevent people from resisting it. However, doing so might lead to amplifying the search for negative information to avoid the uncomfortable feeling that is motivated by the contradiction between what they believe and what they are receiving.

In the second wave, I focused my attention toward the decision makers, with the rationale that decision makers need to counterargue, modify their plans, or change their views in accordance with Habermas' concept of mutual understanding. Moreover, I was not concerned with politicians' opinions in the second wave because during the first wave of interviews most of them had argued that the only way they will reconsider their points of view is when official information and studies are released.

Attached or Detached?

I brought up to Hamad, a decision maker, the concern about the relationship between the motherland and the new area. Hamad explained that even if the legal structure between the two is not connected, the success of the new project is highly

dependent on the original economy [current Kuwait] and part of its success will be based on a successful connection with the original economy. He insisted, “You create the attachment with the creation of the detachment.” Hamad meant that even if the new project was proposed as an independent entity from the mainland, there would be a positive relationship with Kuwait’s existing economy. Hamad’s concern with the current system is that the current system is preventing any attempts to create opportunities and alternatives. Therefore, the project’s aim is to create an alternative rather than escaping from the current situation.

I asked Ali why we do not change the current legislation to make all of Kuwait a free zone. He said, “That is another approach; however, which approach has a higher chance of success?” From practical and economic perspectives, Ali argued that the Islands are a blank area and easy to develop. That is, there is no need to purchase properties or move people out of their residences. He continued, “It is not an easy job to change the current laws; it will be a very long journey and the time is very limited.” Ali gave an example of how the legal structure is crucial for the project. He argued,

Think about if City Bank would have to establish one headquarters in the region: it should be in Kuwait or Dubai or Saudi Arabia. Our location is not vital for their activities, so, they probably will choose Dubai because of many reasons—one of them is the legal structure.

Mohamad’s input in the discussion was focused on the strategic vision of being a destination for international corporation. Mohamad argued that Kuwait’s society consists of four categories: Sheikhs, notables, merchants, and populace. Mohamad explained the importance of what he called the “international players” in Kuwait, who he thinks will change the negative role of each category in the Kuwaiti society. He insisted that we need

the international players as corporations to change the rules and mentality of the local merchants. He said, “Our merchants are basically lenders, real estate owners, and monopolists. Our local merchants are not operators.” Therefore, when international merchants are involved in the economy, the local merchants will no longer be able to keep their ties with politicians because they will no longer be controlling the market. Historically, Mohamad explained, Kuwaiti merchants were competing with all regional markets because they were only dependent on the market rather than the government’s projects. Moreover, the constitution built unhealthy ties that need to be broken through different strategies, one of which is to bring in international players, as does this project of the Islands. This idea is only achievable through international law so the international players can act as local merchant. Mohamad said, “When a huge guy is threatening you, bring him another bigger guy to beat him.”

Another aspect that influences the current situation, according to Mohamad, is the social relationships in society. Mohamad argued, “People here meet a lot and talk a lot.” Because people rely on masked employment as a way to share oil revenues for their living, they do not care about the economy. The amount of time people spend actually working in the public sector, Mohamad states, is less than two hours per day. The rest of the day is spent socializing. He said, “In Kuwait, we have a million experts in the oil industry, a million experts in economic development, a million experts in everything—and two million politicians.” Mohamad insisted that the new social and economic situation would “expel these parasites who think that they can talk about everything they want” and thereby enhance the rule of real experts in the public life.

Mohamad argued that the strong social ties that have formed as a result of social gatherings are mainly beneficial to people who are recognized as elite due to their position in the social hierarchy. Therefore, dependency on the private sector for wages will make people busier, focusing on their own businesses. They will socialize less, and will talk less, and when they talk they will focus on what will help their professional life rather than talking about random things. And more importantly, Mohamad argued, “Elites will lose their influence in the public life.”

The third aspect that Mohamad discussed was implementing what he called “a melting pot policy.” Mohamad insisted that having foreigners from different cultures living in the middle of Kuwaitis’ neighborhood is an important value that the project will add to the country. He argued that Kuwait had done this before when the housing policy blinded people from different social groups in the same towns. Mohamad explained,

If you go to Bayan—a town that was built in the late 1970s—you will see Shia, Sunni, Bedouin, and all different groups from different social and financial statuses in the same area. This policy motivates the liberal way of thinking among society and accepting others. You cannot leave our differences to nature.

According to Mohamad, if Kuwait can apply these three strategies within the project, it will have a busy and socially liberal society that will let the government achieve its policies. I asked Mohamad if this is what is called “the distraction strategy.” He answered that it is not a distraction strategy, but rather a way to minimize the micro groups and strong social ties to let the state become the stronger.

In a follow-up interview, I asked another decision maker about the sensitivity of the international law perspective. I explained the concerns regarding its reflection on sovereignty, landownership, and constitutional contradiction. Bassam insisted that the government wants to achieve maximum independence from the mainland but still

maintain sovereignty. The balance between what they want and what is doable is under test. He argued, “We do not have a borderline yet.”

Cultural Challenges

I discussed with Fahad, a decision maker, the concerns about permitting alcohol and how the first wave of interviews showed that alcohol is culturally unacceptable. However, Fahad argued that this is not true. He explained the historical incident that caused alcohol prohibition. He said,

The reason for banning alcohol was not religious or cultural. It was a conflict between two merchants about the distribution rights of Johnny Walker; the merchant who lost the deal started a campaign in 1963 against alcohol. That campaign embarrassed many members in the National Assembly, and so they passed a law that bans alcohol.

Therefore, Fahad does not think that Kuwaitis have become more conservative. However, he believed that prohibition was a political decision that could be changed through another political decision.

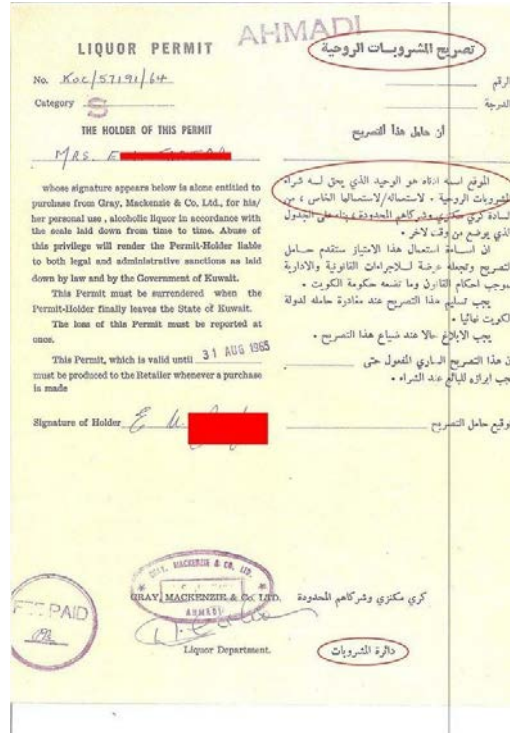


Figure 7. A liquor permit issued for non-Muslims in Kuwait that allows them to purchase liquor from the local market (Personal communication, February 2018)

Hamad commented that investors do value their investments and their human resources. That is, when an investor has to choose between several locations, elements such as freedom, alcohol, and human rights are considered in their decision. For example, Hamad argued that alcohol, gambling, and LGBT rights are all components that should attract investors to invest and to live.

Ali argued that the whole region is growing and each country is trying to improve the role of the private sector by attracting foreign investments. Ali said,

I see it as a spectrum: the far right is total freedom and openness, and the far left is the conservative economy. Therefore, the more we are to the right, the more attractive we would be to the foreign investors because you give them more of what they want. Thus, if you compromise too much from this point and go backward in the spectrum, you will fail. If we say that we want to be above Dubai, but then our compromises put us below Dubai, it is done! Do not bother yourself.

Ali noted that studies show CEOs' wives play a major role in choosing the location of businesses' headquarters because they compare and search for the best place to live. Therefore, it is not only about business legislation, but also life and quality of living. Lastly, Ali argued, "We all witnessed the failure of King's Abdullah Economic City in Saudi Arabia and we do not want to fall in the same trap."

In the follow-up interviews, I tried to be clearer about the issue of permitting alcohol. My aim was to figure out the decision makers' flexibility to negotiate. Rashed agreed that government has two approaches on the table in this matter. The first approach is to start based on whatever is acceptable, such as no alcohol, and then change the legislation. He argued, "It will be at least three years until the first hotel operates in that area, and nobody knows what will happen." This approach is acceptable to many officials who prefer to avoid conflicts in dealing with the National Assembly. The second approach is to change the legislation right from the beginning. This argument is based on the current situation and numbers. The numbers show that other countries are already ahead of us and there is no reason to start behind them when we can start ahead of them. However, Rashed insisted, "Is there room to compromise? Maybe." One solution that Saudi Arabia used for their project NEOM was to open the borders to Egypt and Jordan for people who want to consume alcohol. However, Rashed thinks that by the time the project is ready, alcohol will already be permitted.

I also explained to Rashed that the concept of 'clean tourism' would be a valid argument against the proposed project. People would argue over whether the government should have clean tourism instead of open tourism. Rashed stated that this concept was addressed in Bahrain a few years ago. According to Rashed, Bahrain tried to reduce the

number of places that offer alcohol and other related activities, but did not succeed. Rashed argued, “We do not have museums, we do not have clear beaches, and our weather is a critical aspect for tourism.” He questioned the reason behind having 20 flights to Dubai daily from Kuwait: “What do you think people are doing there?” He added that Dubai decided to minimize the negative impact of the liberal way of life and issued legislation that prevented any person from hosting a non-relative person in their hotel room. The result was that the occupancy rate decreased. Rashed argued that Kuwait can offer ‘dry hotels’ for people who want a place without alcohol or gambling. However, he insisted that we cannot make our own roles in a giant market, as social and political freedom have become a part of market evaluation. He said, “We came very late to the game.”

Passing the Past

I addressed the low trust issue that I found in the focus groups with the decision makers to see whether they were aware of it and to investigate their plan to deal with it. Ali agreed, saying that besides having a clear vision, the government needs to convince and talk to the people. For instance, they should discuss with the public how Kuwait is going to look, what the government’s role is, how peoples’ lives will change, and how the government will continue to offer wealth for everyone. He argued, “People need to know why Aljazeera, the 10-year-old airline, is profitable without any government support, and Kuwait Airways, the state-owned airline since 1955, is not making any profit with all of the support it receives.”

Ali added that Kuwait’s track record of executing mega projects is zero. He said, “The executing is huge.” He insisted that in the next five years, we will be facing

financial problems that might challenge the funding of the project. So, by the time we need to write checks for the project, we might find the government prefers to spend money on its existing bills. He argued, if we all agree that the current project does not really solve our problems, people's trust will be even lower when they know that we do not have enough funds for the project that should solve the country's problems.

Hamad insisted that the project is an alternative to the current development plans that are causing the low trust. Slow-growing mega projects are not helpful for solving the issue of distrust and the economy. Moreover, it is true that the typical model of developing land is to let it grow naturally by offering supportive legislation and infrastructure. However, building a whole new city from scratch is a new model that appeared with the growth of Dubai. So, we are not following the usual method of development; however, the new model—the Dubai model—is not necessarily wrong. He argued that when people see a new city, large projects, and direct economic impact, that would help solve the trust problem. In addition, a new element that the project is adding is development of the economic zones as civic areas where people can live and work, which will help people to live the success themselves.

Hamad confirmed the other decision makers' views that the current efforts are not enough for the project, and the current political situation is not ideal for studying the project. His main concern was that the government is moving towards the project without having enough details or knowledge of the expected threats.

Moreover, I suggested to Rashed that the lack of information is adding more pressure on the politicians to resist the project. He insisted that the current team is debating about when to offer information and what kind of information. He said, "I know

that this is very crucial. We are still debating about it. A group of decision makers prefer to prepare some information for the public and the other group prefers to wait until all studies are ready.”

Rashed responded to my concern about their strategy to deal with the expected conflict with the political body by saying that they do not have a strategy yet, as it depends in the timing. He argued, “The politics here changes from day to day. There are too many elements that influence our strategy to implement the project.”

CHAPTER 11

DISCUSSION

This study primarily aims to test the communicative action theory and the methods through applying its principles to the Kuwait 2035 vision. What differentiates this study from other communicative action studies is that this study was applied to the pre-decision process to achieve mutual understanding. Previous studies aimed to test the impact of discussion on legitimacy after a decision is made. However, this study tested mutual understanding as an indicator of the expected legitimacy before the decision making, as an alternative method for decision-making. I begin my discussion by answering the research questions according the interview outputs.

The Trustworthiness of the Political System

The investigation into trust is an investigation of the role of history in the present and how it influences the future. The study examined the trustworthiness of the political system according to two main constructs: people's trusting beliefs and institution-based trust. Each construct has sub-constructs adopted from McKnight and Chervany's (2001) study (see appendices, a, b, c). The research questions were addressed to politicians and the populace in the first wave. Some decision makers expressed their opinions about the political system during the discussions.

Politicians.

Politicians in general had very low trusting beliefs in the government and its entities' abilities and power to achieve the public interest, including the proposed project. One group of politicians believed that the low trust in the political institutions as a system that does not help any official entity to function. This group of politicians insisted that the

only sufficient solution is to make fundamental changes to the political system, even if that causes constitutional changes. This group of politicians was more passionate toward institutionalizing political life. That is, it is no longer a matter of the prime minister of the Amir's vision, it is about the vision of the political institutions—as they believe. Politicians who belonged to or represented youth groups and the middle class tended to adopt these opinions.

Another group of politicians also shared low trusting beliefs about the ability of government and its entities to achieve the public interest of the proposed project. Even though some of them expressed their opinion that the system needs modifications, they however believe that having a vision, trusted officials, and plans would be sufficient enough to solve most of the current problems. This group of politicians has a fear of constitutional change for many reasons. Some of them stated that they do not want a specific group to have any kind of power over political institutions. In specific, they mean the Muslim Brotherhood party because, as they thought, they are the only well-organized political party and can easily control political life. In addition, other social and political groups believe that with all the negative consequences of the control of the AlSabah family, AlSabah family was perceived as the safety valve to the country. The reason is that AlSabah family considered as the only political group –in comparison with our political players– that enjoys unquestionable political legitimacy. The legitimacy of AlSabah family is related to the traditional type of authority where legitimacy is gained from the social and historical aspects (Weber, 1962, p. 81). In addition, the authority in Kuwait is –presented in the ruling family– characterized as a paternalistic authority

which political obedience is highly tied with social norms. That is, the ruling family perceived as a reference to all political groups just like fathers and sons.

Another important aspect that influences this opinion is the group's social class. There were unspoken feelings that might influence their positions. These unspoken feelings can be traced by mapping the social classes to which the interviewed politicians belonged. For instance, politicians who belong to a higher social class have some unofficial privileges and tend to prefer the current situation with moderate modifications. In contrast, a politician who belongs to the middle or lower class tends to support more progressive political changes. Exceptions were found when a politician personally benefits from the status quo regardless of the social class that he belongs to.

Some social groups believe that if political life will be institutionalized, where the ruling family has less control and the voting system is the major player, larger social groups such as the Bedouins control the political life because they are the majority. It is common in the current elections that each tribe organizes an unofficial internal election to choose their representative, so that all tribe members will only vote for the winner(s) of the internal election so that they guarantee seat(s). Current legislation prohibits internal elections; however, the government turns a blind eye intentionally and sometimes unintentionally.

Moreover, other groups, such as people who belong to certain tribes and middle-lower classes, believe that institutionalizing the political institution means increasing the influence of merchants and noble families. This perception is based on the belief that the historical alliances between the state, merchants, and some families will remain. In addition, the current monopolism of the political institutions will only help strengthen the

same group's control. Lastly, a few politicians do not trust the political body, including other politicians, to participate in the constitutional changes. The low trusting beliefs about politicians' integrity were based on that many politicians have been accused of bribes, and therefore other politicians question if those people can be trusted with constitutional reform.

Although there is much distrust that controls the political institutions, many politicians still believe that the government and its entities have trusted people working there. Waleed, a member of the National Assembly, insisted, "I think that most of the people in the public positions are faithful in terms of their intentions. However, they don't have the tools to achieve the goals." This differentiation between the government and its officials was mainly about the professional officials who are in high non-political positions. That is, despite the low trusting beliefs in the government, the interviews showed that the respected experts in the government were perceived as victims of the flabby government because they are losing their reputations due to the continuous failures and conflicts. Anas, a member of the National Assembly, agreed saying, "We are all busy focusing on the short-term agendas to secure our seats in the next election because we expect that the Amir could call for early election at any time because of the continuous political conflict."

The interviews with politicians showed that their judgments differentiated between the government as a political institution and the officials who work in the government. This differentiation could also be a sign of the interference of the social culture on the political practices in Kuwait. That is, with all criticism to the government and its entities, politicians avoided blaming the officials for continuous failure.

Populace.

There was a disparity in the populace's perceptions of different types of trust. Trust, to most of the people I met with, means a single attitude. If they have low trust in politicians, for example, that means they have low trust in all sub-constructs of trust. The majority of people found it hard to distinguish between trust in the system, institutions, and politicians. For them, all three are one unit called politics. Therefore, this was reflected in their perceptions of the scope of reform, as I will explain in the following section.

It is important to mention that peoples' feedback was highly different based on the group. For example, a group of politically active youth who have some interest in public life had more detailed answers, more accurate descriptions, and a clearer vision for what kind of reform they seek. Thus, I will discuss the focus groups' outputs after combining all responses into two categories: first is youth who are active and with moderate awareness about political life. Second is a mixed-age group who are less informed and with modest interest in political life.

The active groups have more concrete opinions about the trustworthiness of the political system and its institutions. They distinguished, in their opinion, between trusting the National Assembly and trusting the government. For instance, even if many members of the National Assembly are perceived as corrupt and the National Assembly as ineffectual, many people think that the National Assembly is a gateway for them. People still feel that they can influence agendas, they can communicate easily with the members, and at least the National Assembly can paralyze the government when discontent is elevated. I asked one focus group who they believe represents their interests, the

government or the National Assembly. A participant said, “It is the National Assembly”. Another participant interfered, “At least the members of the National Assembly visit our Diwanias and listen to us ... The political system does not allow members of the cabinet to see your problems without being mediated by a member of the National Assembly.”

Moreover, this group had the lowest trust in the political system. Their discontent has been transferred toward the system rather than the politicians. The reason for this is that in the past fifteen years, Kuwaitis have experienced many different political phases and in each phase people tried different political orientations to solve their problems. For example, many felt reform would take place when the former prime minister Sh. Nasser Mohamad Alsabab included opposition politicians among his cabinet hires. However, during his six years in office, Kuwait experienced the most powerful opposition movements in its history. The political movements were mainly arising against the spread of corruption and were motivated by the conflict inside the ruling family. That is, those in the ruling family who were competing for the throne motivated the oppositions or partisans to support or stand against the cabinet to achieve personal success related to secure their chances of taking the throne. As explained earlier, the prime ministry is perceived as an important phase before the crown prince position.

Most importantly, many politicians have changed their political positions either under the influence of social pressure, corruption, or electoral agendas. It was during this era of political anarchy that people, especially activists, started recognizing the true political practices of Kuwait. I argue, as a result of that era, the political attitude of the populace has become sharper and the trust level in the political system has decreased in a

noticeable way. Therefore, the groups who witnessed and were active in this era have a rich experience that they can rely on in forming their opinions.

It is valid to ask whether this is matter of age or a matter of an emerging new political generation. That is, it is unclear whether mixed-age groups, which included elderly people, have less knowledge about political life or if their past experiences taught them to act in this way. If the latter is true, the youth will one day become similar to the mixed-age group that I will discuss in the following section.

Three focus groups included people from both genders and ages ranged from 18 to 68. Education levels varied from less than a high school diploma to higher than a master's degree, and different financial statuses were also present. Most importantly, most of these groups are not consistent in their political backgrounds. Such groups are mostly found in family gatherings and large Diwanias where people attend based on social relations more than friendships.

Social relations is a broader concept than friendships. In a high context culture, like Kuwait, people tend to maintain different kind of relationships by visiting Diwanias for social purposes. For example, when a person visits a Diwaniya of a senior business man, that does not mean they are friends; rather they might have met once and they want to maintain this relationship. This is what Mohamad, a decision maker, insisted in an interview when he said, "People here meet a lot and talk a lot." And he argued that the new project would improve the job market by empowering the private sector and people will be busy and "They will socialize less, and will talk less".

Though the level of trust and categories varied, the normality of a situation, or what McKnight and Chervany (2001) call "situational normality" (p. 37), was the center

point for most of the groups' discussions. For instance, there were debates about the government's abilities. Many participants argued that the government has the ability to lead and achieve the public interest but it does not have the supportive environment. Many examples were provided to support this point, such as the recent success that was achieved in improving the infrastructure, especially new highways and high bridges. The non-supportive environment includes laws, collaboration, and political support. That is, it represents the normal political situation that should exist for the authorities to govern.

In one focus group, a participant argued, "It is true that development stopped for many years, but in the last four years construction has taken place along roads, high bridges, Alshaheed Park, and other projects." On the other hand, news and information about corruption and failures in other subjects caused contradictions in their views. In the same focus group, a participant argued back, "But how much money do you think was stolen from those projects?" The other participant insisted, "It is not about the honesty. [he meant it is about the ability]. Yes, we have corruption."

It is important to mention that the distance between the average person and official institutions might influence their views about its efficacies. In short, the most common type of distrust among the general participants is about the abnormality of the political situation. That is, people believe what is happening in Kuwaiti political life is abnormal. The distrust in the institutions and officials depends on personal experience, political activity, and social group.

The types of distrust that were found gives flexibility for the decision makers and politicians to choose the way of reform. That is, if the majority believed that the problem was centered in the institutions or the constitution, political reform would be limited to

these options or politicians and decision makers would have to deal with people's discontent. The situation normality type of distrust means that people want to solve the abnormal political situation without prior conditions. Therefore, whatever agreement is achieved, people can be easily convinced about it.

Mutual understanding could be achieved through a reform that would solve the abnormal political situation. The populace who I met in the focus group are not concerned about specific type of reform which gives flexibility for politicians and decision makers to find a middle ground. What is considered as a risk to achieve mutual understanding is when the populace unites around specific reform claims such as constitutional changes. That is, politicians and decision makers would have limited options to negotiate.

The Scope of Political Reform.

Decision Makers.

In general, decision makers seek political and practical supports. The interviews revealed that decision makers' views are in agreement. The majority argued for the need for constitutional reform. The call for political reform among the decision makers might seem to be similar to what one group of politicians were asking for. However, asking for a 'balanced' relationship between the political institutions could be understood in three different ways. First, a group of decision makers prefers to minimize the power of the National Assembly. Historically, this view has been widely shared among a group of officials because they think the National Assembly is the major institution that blocks reforms and development; and in addition, the Assembly has been suspended unconstitutionally before (Yom, 2011). Second, a group of decision makers want to solve

the imbalance in power between the elected National Assembly and the non-elected government entities. Third, a group of decision makers wants to prevent political intervention in their institutions and decisions. The difference between the group that wants to prevent political intervention and the other two groups is that they are not seeking a specific political alteration. Rather, they wish to achieve independence in their technical decisions.

The call for constitutional reform among decision makers seems to be more united than the call for the same demand among politicians. The reason for this is likely that non-political decision makers, such as professionals who work in oil, investment, or planning sectors, feel frustrated from the political interventions that slow or in many cases suspend their work. At the same time, the decision makers are blamed by the public for their productivity and solving the state's problems. That is, decision makers wanted to make sure that any reform would guarantee the supportive environment that allows them to achieve the goals.

Politicians.

Politicians were divided into two main groups regarding political reform. One group believed that the only exit for the political conflict is by constitutional reform to solve the core of the problem. This group of politicians was younger in age compared to the average age among the members of the National Assembly. They also tended to be more courageous in taking political action to challenge the government and the family. This group of young politicians seems to represent a new generation of politicians that has a different agenda and values.

By comparison, the senior members of the National Assembly reject any alteration to the constitution as they feel suspicious about the influence of the ruling family in the process of the constitutional reform. Senior politicians' low trust against the intentions of AlSabah family was based on the historical negative role of the ruling family against the democratic life in Kuwait. The reason is that the senior politicians have experienced the era where political conflicts were between two main groups: constitutional activists and the AlSabah family. The conflict at that time, between the 1920s and 1980s, was centered on who has the most power in the state. The senior politicians who fought for the constitution perceive the current constitution as a safeguard for the citizens against the authoritarian family. Therefore, they feel the constitution, which is perceived as an attainment, should not be touched in this confused circumstance.

My perception of the senior politicians' attitude is that the feeling of distrust that was strengthened by their historical experiences makes it hard for them to believe that the ruling family has faithful intentions to the constitution, and that the current politicians can be trusted to fight for democracy and handle negotiations.

The Missing Blank Check

A blank check, as Gamson (1968) insisted, will allow the government to practice its power; this seems to be missing in Kuwait. The unwise use of power, the blank check, makes it challenging to issue a new check for the political institutions. The call for institutional reform could be one of the lifelines for the political institution to rebuild its legitimacy.

However, the way for political reform, as it should transform Kuwait to be more democratic, will not be easily accepted by Kuwait's neighbors. The historical review

showed that Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Egypt are not welcoming any regional movement toward democracy. Moreover, research shows that democratic transformations happen collectively in waves rather than by an independent decision by one country (Gassebner et al., 2013; Gleditsch, 2002). That is, in the unstable region with young and impulsive leaders, Kuwait might be threatened if it, for any reason, embarrasses its neighbors with any progressive change. It is important to remind the reader that all of Kuwait's neighbors have, at some point, threatened Kuwait's sovereignty.

Therefore, the attempt to reform is challenging for both sides, activists –including politicians, and the ruling family. There are three possible scenarios for political reform as the data shows: achieving constitutional reform toward democracy and handling the expected conflict with neighbors, achieving minor reform by increasing the public trust through having trusted leadership and supportive laws, and maintaining the status quo and hoping and waiting for local and regional changes that would guide local reform.

The Perception of the Proposed Project

Unexpected findings were uncovered regarding the decision makers' positions related to the proposed project. Even though the major part of the project, Boubyan Island and Mubarak Port, was historically known as the dream of Kuwait's leadership, decision makers were divided in their stance towards the core of the project. Before I started interviewing decision makers, I expected to find concrete understanding about the project and its details, a unified vision about the future of the project, and well-informed officials. However, most decision makers were not passionate about supporting the project for two reasons: first, it is Sheikh Nasser's vision and not theirs, and second, they disagreed with many aspects of the project.

Other groups' distrust is strengthened by a non-passionate team who is leading the country towards a new phase. In a high context culture (Hall, 1977), it is common for politicians to seek additional information about any case from officials in a non-official way. For instance, an official who is directly involved in the project told me that he does not believe that Boubyan Island could be an urban city. He insisted that the muddy layers of the island's ground will make development impossible. At the same time, he was working on the concept of the island that conceptualized the island as an urban city just like Dubai. Therefore, I do not expect this decision maker to defend the project in front of politicians or a group of people, as he did not defend the project to me. The fragmented team is an internal weakness that the project is facing.

The disagreement about the identity of the project is a branch of the overall disagreement among the decision makers. However, the disagreement about the identity among decision makers is crucial to the success of the vision socially and technically. That is, many decision makers believe that permitting alcohol is not an important factor for the success of the project. This argument will establish a serious debate about two main aspects: first, whether there are hidden agendas behind the project, and therefore people will not only seek information about alcohol, but also concerns will be distributed to every aspect of the project. Second is whether the studies conducted as research for the project have been manipulated to show that alcohol and LGBT rights, for example, are important for the success of the project. The need for blank check appears in this kind of situations where there is no way to test people's intentions. The low trust in this case is damaging the core of the political legitimacy by preventing the authority from practicing its power.

This is not an imaginary scenario or an exaggeration of what could happen. In 2008, the mega joint venture between Kuwait and DOW Chemicals mentioned earlier was canceled, and the cancellation cost Kuwait about \$2.2 billion in penalties. A conflict was sparked when Andrew Liveris, the CEO of Dow, laughed when a TV host asked him if he was selling a third of the company for half of the market price of Dow. He said, “It is quarter of our business; would you sell a quarter of your business for half of your market cap? Yes sir, just leave it there [laughter]” (CNBC, 2008). This video drove the public and the politicians to start campaigning against the project. All efforts from officials to prove the accuracy of the studies conducted to show the joint venture would benefit the country failed. The prime minister at that time, Nasser Mohamad AlSabah, acquiesced to the calls to interrogate him and canceled the project to save his position.

The case of the DOW Chemicals and Kuwait joint venture is an example of how peoples’ political perceptions can be easily manipulated using distrust. It might be true that the interview of DOW’s CEO was not positive to Kuwaitis. However, the politicians in Kuwait did not trust their positive figures and experts’ opinions about the project. The whole political conflict over the project was based on the CEO’s one sentence about the market value of the company.

Politicians.

The politicians interviewed –except one– showed extreme resistance to the concept of the project. The tone of voice and the language used did not deliver a message of collaboration. The rejection of the concept of the project is conceptualized around four main issues: trust, information, the current political situation, and technical aspects of the project.

The trust aspect was a major challenge for two reasons. Politicians see the future through the eyes of the past. That is, there is no evidence that the government will succeed in this project. Evidence shows that most likely, the government will lose control when they start implementing the project, as has happened with many projects in the past. Therefore, it will be very challenging for the government to prove that they have the ability, integrity, and public support to implement the project. That reflects on the second aspect: information. It is true that the government does not have enough research to support their views and start implementing the project. However, the real challenge is when the politicians and the public institutions ask for an astronomical amount of detailed information to satisfy their feelings of distrust. Some of the information might not be possible to provide by nature. For instance, many people questioned whether the government studied the concept of clean tourism as an alternative to the open tourism that is proposed in the project. Decision makers argued that numerous trials failed in Dubai, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. However, anyone can argue that this is not enough proof that it will not work in Kuwait or that it is less profitable. In short, providing information to satisfy the demand for more information might lead to a continuous demand for information.

The third aspect is the current political situation. The abnormality of the current political situation would make any normal attempt for reform look suspicious. For example, many politicians who I spoke with believe that the conflict over the throne is the true reason behind the project. They think that Sheikh Nasser S. Alsabah is using the project as a tool to promote his name as a visionary leader. At the time of this study, Sheikh Nasser S. Alsabah was chosen to be the minister of defense and the first deputy

prime minister after he was the minister of Al-diwan Al-Amiri for around 12 years. Sheikh Nasser announced the project in early 2017, a few months before his new position began. His transition to the new position was not at all expected because it was widely known that he was in disagreement with the policy of his father, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah the Amir of Kuwait. Therefore, the circumstances of Sheikh Nasser's transition support the theory that the project is just a step to the throne for him. Sheikh Nasser's disagreement with his father's ruling style supported his reputation. However, many politicians that I met still considered him as part of the ruling family that does not have faith in democracy –as they think– which could lower their trust in his intentions.

In addition, the conflict between the merchant groups with Sheikh Nasser about their role in the project is an important aspect. It was said by a decision maker that a specific group is controlling the battlefield right now and that does not help the attempts for political or economic reform. The merchants will not accept any efforts to minimize their powerful role in economic and political life. Ali, a decision maker, announced that the international corporations will be the 'big guy' brought to fight the 'local big guy' in Kuwait. Socio-economic conflict is not an easy journey for the government. As stated earlier, the merchants in the 1920s fought the AlSabah family to maintain their power in the decision-making process in Kuwait, and they won.

The last aspect of the attitude of rejection among politicians is related to the actual technical disagreement about the project. Mainly, the concept of an international zone or the idea of having independence from the mainland, as well as alcohol, LGBT, and land ownership rights. These challenges can be managed by alterations and negotiation. However, the tactic that will probably be used by some politicians and

people who reject the project is to employ these aspects –alcohol, LGBT rights, freedom of religious practices—as tools to avoid discussing the actual details and impact of the project.

Populace.

The lack of information about the project was reflected in the populace's views. For example, there were no specific aspects that they supported in the project. They have general concerns about the jobs that the project will create, cultural issues, and some other concerns such as the environmental impact. However, as reflected in the focus group, the populace seemed to have a positive tendency toward supporting any attempt to improve quality of life and solve their problems.

Some views about permitting alcohol seemed to be very solid. However, these views might not be as influential to society as they seem. That is, the nature of social life and the current comfortable lifestyle do not motivate people to advance toward what they reject in the political life. For instance, will people leave their homes to protest in the hot summer with an average temperature of 120 degrees Fahrenheit against a decision that will not affect their life directly? Are they willing to risk facing the special force command in the streets and spend a few days in jail? Professor Abdullah Alnifisi, a former member of the National Assembly and a well-known activist, scholar, and politician, explained the reaction of the public when he was arrested in the front of the people. He said,

We spent two years [from 1986-1988] convincing people the unconstitutional suspension was a threat to their life and violation to their rights ... Then we established 'Dawaween Alathnen' [a gathering every Monday in Diwanias in different areas in Kuwait to discuss political issues]. I was hosted in Jassim Alqetami's Diwaniya to talk to around 700 people. Suddenly, an officer shouted to me to stop talking. I replied that I am a guest in Jassim Alqetami's house, and

he is the only one who can ask me to stop my talk. Then, the officer walked toward me, passing 700 people, some of whom opened the way for him to get to me, and he arrested me and Jassim in front of them. On our way out, I heard someone asking the teaboy for more sugar for his tea. No one said a word! (Alnifisi, 2010)

Alnifisi (2010) argued that our society is sleepy when one policeman can arrest hundreds of people just by asking them to get into the bus. However, Alnifisi's opinion might contradict the latest political movements by Kuwaiti activists. It is true that in the last few years Kuwait has experienced several political movements, protests, and demonstrations. Those movements were against corruption cases and supported and enhanced by the conflict in AlSabah family and political parties. In addition, the government demolished the movements by using a few select weapons, such as revoking citizenship of many activists, especially those who belong to the tribes, for reasons such as dual citizenship and obtaining citizenship by fraud. Other activists and politicians were jailed or at least exhausted with many trial cases.

Therefore, I argue that social resistance should not be overestimated. However, what the government should care about is the public's discontent rather than resistance. I would distinguish between the thought that this project is vital for the country, has been studied well, and is handled by trusted people though some might disagree with aspects of it. On the other hand, there is some feeling that the whole project is worthless and is another attempt to steal the country's assets. In other words, having an inactive, desperate, and discontented society might not be a healthy sign for the project.

Communicative Action Theory in Practice

In this section I will discuss the rest of the research questions in addition to my reflection on communicative action theory in practice. I investigated to what degree

Habermas' concept of mutual understanding is applicable to mediate pre-decision-making political discussions, and what challenges I faced as the mediator with the different parties when trying to apply the theory's principles. I also asked to what degree all parties were willing to commit to achieving mutual understanding. Lastly, I investigate whether communicative action was able to provide a new ground to achieve an agreement about the proposed solution.

The application

It is important to discuss whether it was the right decision to apply the theory to Kuwait's vision 2035 before I start discussing the outcomes of the method and theory.

Kuwait 2035 was an ideal case for the theory for many reasons. First, it was an actual major political case that would fundamentally affect the political life in an influential country of the MENA region. Second, the case was loaded with multiple aspects: historical, psychological perceptions, collective political attitudes, economic, social, and political challenges. The value of having multiple aspects was that the project represented an actual political case for the application of the theory. Third, the existing fair procedure method or voting system in Kuwait is not sufficient for this project to be legitimate according to all parties who participated in the study.

The theory is proposed as an alternative method to common methods for gaining political legitimacy—and this is one of the main arguments in the theory of communicative action. Fourth, there were real disagreements about fundamental aspects of political life, the project, and how it should be resolved. Fifth, this project is vital for all participants. That is, the royal family wants to protect their throne and power, decision makers needed to gain the necessary power to implement the plans, politicians wanted to

strengthen their positions and find solutions for peoples' problems, and the public wants their problems such as jobs and housing to be solved. Sixth, the study was supported by the highest political entity in Kuwait, which granted the researcher access to all information and officials. Therefore, there were reasons that all participants in this study wanted to achieve a mutual understanding and agreement.

Mutual understanding vs. Agreement

One of the most important outcomes of this project is that it sheds light on distinguishing between achieving agreement and achieving mutual understanding. By reviewing the interviews, readers will notice that most of the decision makers and politicians had problems preventing them from achieving mutual understanding. Moreover, even when understanding was achieved, political support remained absent. At least superficially, all parties showed a kind of resistance in their language, though some of them reconsidered their perspectives. Therefore, a reader might ask, why did they join the discussions if they have no commitment to achieving mutual understanding? This is a major issue that I faced with the theory in practice. Habermas insisted that all parties should have faithful intentions to achieve mutual understanding. However, how can a participant prove their faithful intentions? Or, does this mean that they must reach a mutual understanding?

It was unclear whether faithful intention is equivalent to commitment, and therefore, the difference between commitment to achieve mutual understanding and commitment to achieve or accept an agreement, commitment to accept the voting outcomes, was also unclear. In practice, there is no way to assure that a party will formulate an understanding, even when they join a discussion with faithful intentions.

Moreover, mutual understanding does not necessarily transfer to acceptance. For instance, many politicians and the public agreed that the project might require legalizing alcohol. However, they refused to support any kind of legislation that allows alcohol in Kuwait. Thus, if acceptance is not required or guaranteed even after achieving mutual understanding, what does the theory offer then what the voting procedure does not?

Role of power.

The theory of communicative action states clearly that power should not play any role in the discussion. Habermas (1984) argued, “Only the truth of propositions and the rightness of moral norms and the comprehensibility or well-formedness of symbolic expressions are, by their very meaning, universal validity claims that can be tested in discourse” (p. 42). Historian Ian McNeeley (2003) described Habermas’ absence of power as “an unrealistic ideal of power-free communication” (p. 3).

In political practice, the absence of power is not guaranteed. One could argue that the mediator, my role in the study, should minimize the role of power during the discussion. However, in practice, the only way to minimize the tone of power is to have power over the participants, and this is practically not possible and theoretically contradicts with the principle of the absence of power. For instance, when a decision maker says that he can dissolve the National Assembly if the government’s plan to implement the project is blocked, there is no way for the mediator or the participants to challenge his authority. Politicians, for example, expressed their attitude toward several elements of the project saying that they would use their authority to interrogate the prime minister if he insists on permitting alcohol. It is part of their character and role as politicians to speak in this tone, and it is their right to express their actions against what

they believe violates their agendas. Mcneely (2003) criticized the absence of power approach saying, “This method threatens to dissolve individuals in all-powerful ‘discourses,’ treating their resistance as a residual, often bodily, reflex: it renders the intellect, with its power to question and to critique, effectively mute” (p. 3).

The role of personal experience

This research addressed the role of past incidents as collective experiences that influence perceptions of the future. The nature of the establishment, the development of the political system, and the historical threats to the state influenced most of the participants’ concerns. Moreover, the negative experiences among politicians with the state, represented by the government, were implicit in most answers.

The importance of addressing the role of experience that was conceptualized around the attitude of trust is to test the theory in different circumstances. Most politicians’ comments indicated that they have no trust in the system or institutions. Moreover, politicians not only deal with apparent information but also often search for hidden information behind any case they discuss. For instance, many politicians considered the project as a step to the throne for Sheikh Nasser S. Alsbah. Therefore, their perception of the rejection or acceptance or even negotiating the project is as part of the throne game.

The participants’ views were mainly concerned with protecting constitutional political life; what they consider as their culture, norms, values, and ethics; and reforming the political life and economy within these concerns. Regardless, the variant in the participants’ views about what Habermas called their lifeworld, or their collective opinions that construct the collective identity, should be respected. Habermas insisted

that legitimacy is recognized when political practices prevent social identity from fragmentation. He said,

The exercise of state power is tied to the claim of maintaining society in its normatively determined identity. The legitimacy of state power is then measured against this; and it must be recognized as legitimate if it is to last. (Habermas, 1976, p. 180).

Moreover, Habermas' criticism of the fair procedure by Rousseau relies on the rejection of the procedure of considering the validity claim. He said, "Now only the procedures and presuppositions of agreement enjoy unconditional validity; an agreement counts as rationale ... if it could only have come to pass under the ideal conditions that alone create legitimacy" (Habermas, 1976, p. 187). The ideal conditions that Habermas proposed create a fake neutrality, or what is known as the *view from nowhere* (Kompridis, 2014). That is, it snatches the meanings and values gained from personal and collective experiences when trying to eliminate the natural role of personal experience in a discourse. Nikolas Kompridis, a political theorist and a former student of Habermas, criticized the impact of Habermas' procedural presupposes, stating,

Worry arises only because of a very limited conception of change, a conception that can conceive of only one kind of change, one kind of perspectival shift, one kind of self-decentering. But this is not the only kind of change and decentering available to us, not the only kind we can facilitate and endorse, and most certainly not the only kind we need. (Kompridis, 2014, p. 215)

Therefore, I argue that personal cognitive perceptions are an added value to any discourse. They make the discourse thoughtful, complex, and comprehensive. The true challenge, as Kompridis (2014) argued, is to self-decenter, where a person challenges the 'self' to be open for change. The willingness to be open to other perspectives is an uncomfortable cognitive practice that we usually tend to resist (Kompridis, 2014). That

is, self-decentering is another valuable approach to achieving mutual understanding that is practiced voluntarily, unconditioned, absorbs the natural complexity of life, and embeds true change.

Habermas also distinguishes between practical and theoretical argumentation, where the ultimate grounds for legitimacy become problematic between the two approaches. Therefore, Habermas criticized the current legitimation practices saying,

With Rousseau and Kant this development led to the conclusion that the formal principle of reason replaced material principles like Nature or God in practical questions ... since the ultimate grounds can no longer be made plausible, the formal conditions of justification themselves obtain legitimating force. (Habermas, 1976, p.184).

Habermas' basic argument insisted that the original role of authority is to achieve social welfare. In addition, in order for a political authority to practice its power, it has to maintain the legitimacy of its rule and decisions. Wherefore, what comes first? We have experienced examples of authorities that achieved social welfare without the conditions of legitimacy according to western standards of political legitimacy, such as the regime in Singapore. The question then becomes, in Kuwait's case, what happens if achieving social welfare is blocked by the legitimation practices according to Habermas' criteria. I argue that the only solution is to resort to the fair procedure, or the voting method. That is, the definition of rational argument that Habermas proposes becomes problematic on more than the ultimate grounds. Therefore, it is true that the formal conditions of justification, such as the voting method, became the legitimating force—however, it is a necessary practice when the ultimate grounds are missing.

The role of trust shift

Kuwait was recognized as an institutional state after founding the current constitution in 1962. The main reason for establishing the constitutional political life was to restore trust in the political life by maintaining the balance in power between the ruling family and elites. Therefore, political power is distributed to political institutions.

Since the foundation of the constitution, Kuwait has experienced many political and economic crises. These failures are perceived in two different ways: from a political point of view and a constitutional point of view. People who believe that the ruling family have no faith in democracy perceive the continuous failures as proof of willful attempts by the AlSabah family to dismantle democracy. These crises are perceived as intentional attempts by the AlSabah, the ruling family, to prove that democratic practices are not efficient methods to solve people's problems. On the other hand, the continuous crises, for many people, are perceived as proof of the failure of the political system—and constitution—as a whole.

In sum, the AlSabah family do not trust democracy to preserve their power, and politicians do not trust the AlSabah family to maintain democracy. As result, continuous conflicts have led the populace to lose their trust in decision makers: the AlSabah family, politicians, and the political system.

More importantly, the conflict over power arose after the discovery of oil. That is, before oil discovery, the relationship between social actors was balanced. AlSabah, as the ruling family, relied on merchants for the state's income, and in return, AlSabah's role was to protect the state and its trading routes. The oil discovery gave AlSabah independence from Kuwaiti merchants because oil income was sufficient to form new

alliance with the populace rather than the merchants. Therefore, transferring Kuwait from a capitalist state that relied on taxation to a rentier state that distributes oil-wealth in order to gain legitimacy was an attempt to gain people's trust against the merchants. In short, when the alliance between AlSabah and the merchants existed, there was no need to gain trust and legitimacy from the populace. However, the conflict over power between merchants and AlSabah gave the populace an advantage in political life.

A decision maker stated as such clearly in an interview: "If the polls show that people support the project, I am willing to dissolve the National Assembly and issue an executive order to start the project." Thus, I argue that the need for public support, for the ruling family in general and for the proposed project, could be a chance to form a new, stable alliance. This alliance is based on a new trust relationship between the family and the public that increases public participation in the decision-making process. The historical alliance between the merchants and AlSabah family has become expensive for the country. This is because the social and political life has been shifting toward a modern state, whereas the political alliance remains traditional.

Limitations

This study was conducted within a very challenging context. Kuwait's political life is institutionalized and decision-making processes can be identified. However, there are powerful players inside and outside the political institutions. Those players are individuals and institutions who have more power than the people who are part of the official decision-making process. It is part of the hybrid system in a socially-tied culture, where the challenge is to identify all of the real powerful players in the political life of Kuwait. For instance, after some interviews, I noticed that some decision makers who

have official minister status were less influential in their decision-making process than a committee member in one of the governmental committees. In addition, beside the unclear official hierarchy, the social hierarchy plays a vital role in official institutions. For instance, a decision maker avoided answering specific questions or answered with very general answers because of their fear that a senior relative might be unhappy with the real answer.

In the second wave and the follow-up half wave of data gathering, I tried to set up roundtables where decision makers and politicians could gather in a non-political climate to discuss their previous insights in more detail. Some decision makers refused the invitation because their social status might be harmed if knowledge of the discussion went public. Other decision makers rejected to meet with certain politicians because they perceived them as flippant. One decision maker said, “He is disrespectful to officials in his comments and I cannot match his language.” In addition, most importantly, many decision makers were afraid that that discussion might be made public by the politicians. One of the decision makers said, “I trust your intentions but what if he went to the podium after our meeting and told the people all what we have said?”

One of the most prevalent weaknesses that I had to deal with is that the proposed project for Kuwait’s Vision 2035 has not had official information released to the politicians. That is, I had to provide all information, arguments, and explanations to all parties during the interviews. In addition, the lack of information negatively impacted the participants’ feedback, as many of them provided basic answers and insisted that they could not provide more information or take a position without more detailed information from official sources.

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSION

By relying on historical analysis of the political life in Kuwait, this study investigated the doubts about trustworthiness of the political system in Kuwait in the first research question. The participants in this study from all groups shared low trust in political life in Kuwait. They were in agreement about the need for political reform. However, the views about the scope of change varied. The second research question investigated the scope of reform that could enhance the trust in the political system. Participants' views varied from minor changes such as having visionary leaders to progressive views that seek constitutional changes. The third research question aimed to test whether all groups were willing to achieve mutual understanding. The outcomes of the interviews and focus groups showed that achieving mutual understanding was challenged by low trust in intentions. In addition, even if mutual understanding was achieved in a specific topic, that does not mean an agreement was achieved.

The fourth research question was about the ability of communicative action theory to provide new grounds to achieve an agreement about the proposed project. The findings showed that the theory's principles were not able to mediate the discussions in order to achieve an agreement. The fifth research question revealed participants' perceptions from all groups about the proposed project. The interviews and focus groups discussions showed that there was an agreement about the importance of this kind of projects to improve the economy and to solve many issues. However, the lack of official information and details increased the doubts about the project. In addition, the existing

attitude of distrust toward political life made the negotiations about the project very complicated.

The Exit

My evaluation of the potential political and economic reform based on this study's outcomes would be divided into two main perspectives: a reform is needed that is related to the proposed project—Vision of 2035—and a reform is needed that aims to solve the overall political and economic dilemma.

The research unveils that any new legislation related to the new project would face many challenges. These challenges are mainly related to the distrust of the government's intentions; the ability of the project to succeed; and the integrity of the merchants, politicians, and decision makers. Therefore, in order to pass any legislation through the normal procedure, the involved parties might have to use unethical and illegal methods to convince the politicians—which takes Kuwait back to the first stage—or they have to have the willingness to negotiate and compromise the details of the proposed project. The second option —negotiation and compromising— seems to be the ideal situation in any civil democratic system.

However, as many decision makers argue, too many compromises will produce a shapeless policy that will not be able to provide the assurance needed to compete with other countries. Moreover, the historical experience with political compromises in Kuwait is that politicians focus on aspects that place more restrictions because of the feeling of distrust, which is the opposite of what decision makers are seeking in the proposed project. Thus, I would not expect outcomes of positive compromises in this case.

Therefore, if it is true and accurate that the project is necessary and vital for Kuwait and the timing is crucial, I believe that a royal fiat from the Amir is important to ease the process of passing the needed legislation. The royal fiat could be practiced through his legal right to issue an executive order to pass a special legislation or through his social position in society by communicating with different political players to achieve mutual understanding that leads to an agreement. Such a proposed solution could lead the reader to ask whether this royal fiat is acceptable within the political system in Kuwait and the principles of communicative action theory. Legally, the constitution gives the right to the Amir to propose a legislation to the National Assembly and then the legislation must go through the same procedure as any legislation.

The other option is to issue an executive order. The executive order is a legal right of the Amir to issue any legislation or decision during the absence of the National Assembly. The absence of the National Assembly could be during election time or if the Amir dissolves the National Assembly and calls for an early election. The executive order is permitted to act in the case of emergency where the National Assembly is not on duty. However, the definition of what is considered an emergency depends on the Amir's evaluation, according to a Constitutional Court ruling in 2013 (Westall & Harby, 2013). It is important to mention that the National Assembly would have to vote on all executive orders issued by the Amir in the first congress of the National Assembly or they will be null and void

Politically, using executive orders combined with dissolving the National Assembly is not an easy decision, as it widely depends on the overall political tone. In general, the public, as research shows, is not concerned with the method of reform as

much as they are with the outcomes of the reform. Therefore, in order to gain public support for such a sensitive decision, the government should act to solve the distrust issue concurrently with an executive order. Solving the distrust issue should consider dealing with the trusting beliefs dimensions (competence, benevolence, integrity, and predictability) and the dimensions of the institutional-based trust (structural assurance and situation normality), as noted by McKnight and Chervany (2001). That is, the government should show seriousness by prioritizing the issue of trust with the public. These actions would ease the public pressure on politicians to oppose the government, or at least against the proposed project.

The second aspect of reform is political and economic reform to improve the public life in general in Kuwait. This kind of reform might require constitutional and fundamental changes that would not be achievable without a collective agreement. However, as the constitution gives most of the power to the Amir, this research shows that all political groups agree that any political reform should be supported and blessed by the Amir. The royal fiat in this case should invest the paternal authority that the Amir enjoys as the father of all people. The blessing of the mediating role of the Amir is the key to achieving mutual understanding based on Habermas' principles. That is, in this case, all groups have equal right to discuss and deliberate without the fear that a specific group would enjoy the outcomes of any reform more, such as the Muslim brotherhood.

This takes me to Habermas' principles of communicative action and their ability to afford a common ground in the Kuwaiti context. This research clearly shows that communicative action principles failed when confronted with other aspects such as personal experience, culture, and religion. That is, the more complicated the case, the less

effective the theory is. The reason for this is that Habermas' theory was built based on Euro-centric norms that developed after decades of evaluating the role of religion and social norms in political practices. In addition, the European constitutions are much more advanced in identifying the process of decision making and the mechanisms of solving conflicts. The transparency of political institutions, including the judicial system, also help to recuperate the feelings of trust after any political crisis.

One way, however, that the communicative action theory could help in the Kuwaiti context is for fundamental reform guided by the Amir. The Amir's presence secures the involvement and commitment of all the political institutions under his supervision.

I decided intentionally to title this dissertation project *Changing a System from Within*. The concept of crises, political and social, in social science is concerned about the ability of the existing system(s) to provide a mechanism of conflict solving (Habermas, 1975, p. 2). The more options a system can provide for conflict solving, the higher the chances are that the system is efficient. Based on Habermas's (1975) argument that conflicts are cumulatively produced, rather than accidentally, I configured a holistic understanding of the current political crisis in Kuwait.

The holistic configuration of the crisis was based on history, nature of establishment, internal and external politics, and socio-economic aspects. Therefore, in this study, I tested the ability of the system to solve an existing crisis within the system using a new theory that should enhance the system's efficacy.

However, the attempt to solve the crisis is not limited yet to the theory. The failure or success of the theory to solve the crisis is just an indicator of the capacity of the

system to adopt new methods and another indicator of the theory's efficacy. Thus, in this attempt, the theory of communicative action in Kuwait's specific circumstances was not able to solve the crisis as expected. Or, the theory might only apply under specific conditions that need to be investigated in future studies.

In this research project, I tried to apply a theory that has been discussed at length. Habermas provided an in-depth philosophical analysis of what has been established in philosophy about politics and the social world. Regardless of the result of this study, I believe that Habermas' analysis of the legitimation crisis is still valid. However, the concept of universal pragmatics that the theory of communicative action proposes was not an ideal alternative for the Kuwaiti case. That is, this study indicates that Habermas' technocratic assumptions about removing personal interests, power, and any sort of influence from the political system failed. More importantly, Habermas' claim that culture and values are limited to the context of a particular form of life was not a valid claim in this case (Habermas, 1984, p. 42).

That is, Habermas aimed to minimize the role of culture and norms to enhance the rationality for better arguments. He argued "cultural values do not count as universal" (Habermas, 1984, p. 42). At the same time, Habermas relied on Blau's (1964) argument that state is responsible for protecting the society's integration (Habermas, 1979). According to Blau (1964), people of a society invest in their cultural norms and values to enhance social transactions. Blau (1964) argued that these social transactions are more important than the social contract itself. Therefore, the state's violation of the society's integration is a violation of the role of justice. Blau insisted that, "People whose standards of justice are violated feel angry as well as dissatisfied and give vent to their

anger through disapproval of and sometimes hostility and hatred against those who caused it” (Blau, 1964, p. 199).

By relying on Blau’s (1964) description of the role of the state in terms of maintaining social norms, Habermas wanted to prevent the state from interfering and reshaping the social norms. However, the role of social norms cannot be prevented in political discourse as Blau explained that social norms could be more important than the social contract itself. This research indicates that the restrictions that Habermas applied by excluding social norms and values from what he considered valid claims and rationale argument compromise the implementation of the theory.

Lastly, I noticed that decision makers, in general, had an advantage that preserved their power and control during the interviews by being the references for any information related to the project. This position alone gave them an advantage over the politicians, whose concerns were mostly refutable. This is one of the disadvantage of the current political system, where the monopoly of political power –by Alsbah family and their close team– produces the monopoly of information which produces more power. Even if this counted as an advantage, it could build a hierarchy in the power relations of society and political life.

Foucault’s (1980) explanation of the relationship between knowledge and power as an interrelation entity describes my observation, where each of them produces the other. Foucault insisted, “The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 52). That is, access to important information was limited to a small group of decision makers, giving them an advantage in the discussions. For instance, in an interview, a decision

maker insisted that the current time is very good for Kuwait to implement the project because many countries in the region were having financial issues. The financial troubles of other countries were caused by their political and military activities in the region, while Kuwait's neutral foreign policy helped to preserve its reserves. The interviewee had this important information based on personal connections that could not exist without his lengthy position in power.

Habermas' test for truth, rightness, and symbolic expression in a discourse as the only propositions that construct the universal validity claim was challenging. The relativity of truth and rightness according to the participants' perceptions make validity claims indemonstrable. This means, for complicated cases, trust is a very difficult condition to maintain in the face of questions about the legitimate exercise of power.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. DECISION MAKERS' DISCUSSION GUIDE

Research questions	Construct	Perspective	Insights	Questions
<p>(RQ1) What is the scope of political reform that decision makers seek?</p> <p>Is it about the institutions or the structure?</p>	<p>Trust</p>	<p>Institution-based trust: the trustor believes that prime, satisfactory conditions lead to success.</p>	<p>1- The structure of the political life and institutions: The decision makers' perceptions about the sufficiency of the regulations, laws, and procedures to protect and lead to success.</p> <p>2- The current situation: Whether the decision makers perceive the current situation as normal or abnormal.</p>	<p>1- Do you think our problems will be solved if we choose the right people in the political system? 2- Do you think the current legal and political system is sufficient to help achieve your interests?</p> <p>3- Do you think what is happening in Kuwait is expected and part of "normal" political practices (i.e. nothing serious to worry about)?</p>
<p>(RQ 2) How do decision makers</p>	<p>Proposed project</p>	<p>The general concept</p>	<p>Expected perceptions:</p> <p>1- It is an attempt to promote</p>	<p>1- What do you know about the Island development project?</p>

<p>perceive the proposed project?</p>			<p>specific people for political purposes.</p> <p>2- It is another project that will benefit the merchants and members of the family only.</p> <p>3- It is an attempt to damage the society by allowing alcohol and night clubs in the country.</p> <p>4- It is a positive attempt to solve the problems of the country.</p>	<p>2- What do you think about the Island development project?</p> <p>3- Do you think this project can solve many of the problems in Kuwait?</p> <p>4- What is the most important fact that you support in this project?</p>
<p>(RQ3) To what length are all parties willing to commit to achieve mutual understanding?</p>		<p>The idea of SEZ</p>	<p>I need to know whether decision makers share the same idea about the economic design of the project or if some of them have different ideas that</p>	<p>1- What do you know about the concept of special economic zones?</p> <p>2- Do you think this concept can be applied in Kuwait?</p> <p>3- Do you support the idea that the nation's</p>

			might influence their agreement.	future project should be free of the motherland's laws?
(RQ4) Will communicative action be able to provide new grounds to achieve an agreement about the proposed solution?		The liberal Identity and Other concerns	This part is important to see if there is a gap between the identity that decision makers want and the identity that the people expect. Also, it will help determine whether or not decision makers themselves are in agreement about the identity.	1- Do you have any concerns about the project? 2- If the project is addressed with a liberal identity, for example, allowing alcohol consumption in the islands—would that be fine? 3- Who do you think would be the best to manage this project in terms of, nationality, entity, foreign corporations, etc.? 4- Do you have any concerns that you think it should be addressed?

APPENDIX B. POLITICIANS’ DISCUSSION GUIDE

Research questions	Construct	Perspective	Insights	Questions
(RQ1) Are there doubts about trustworthiness of the political system in Kuwait?	Trust	Trusting beliefs: cognitive perceptions about the trustee.	<p>1- Competence: Whether the political body of Kuwait believes the government and its entities have the ability and the power to accomplish the proposed project.</p> <p>2- Benevolence: The political body believes the government and its entities care about the public interest and will act to achieve it.</p> <p>3- Integrity: The political body believes the government and its entities tell the truth, make good</p>	<p>1- Do you think that the government and its entities have the abilities to achieve the public interest?</p> <p>2- What do you think about the people who work in higher positions in the public sector?</p> <p>3- Do you think that the government and the National Assembly are acting in your interest?</p> <p>4- What do you think about the data about the economy that the government announced?</p> <p>5- Who do you trust in fulfilling your interests: the government or the National</p>

			<p>and trustful agreements, and fulfill promises.</p> <p>4- Predictability: the political body believes the government and its entities' actions, behavior, or decisions are predictable and consistent enough to be forecasted.</p>	<p>Assembly? Or neither or both?</p> <p>6- What do you think are the overall outcomes of the current National Assembly and the government?</p>
<p>(RQ2) What is the scope of political reform that people seek? Is it about the people, institutions, or the structure?</p>	Trust	<p>Institution-based trust: the trustor believes that prime, satisfactory conditions lead to success</p>	<p>1- The structure of political life and institutions: the political body's perceptions about the sufficiency of regulations, laws, and procedures to protect and lead to success.</p> <p>2- The current situation: whether the political body</p>	<p>1- Do you think our problems will be solved if we choose the right people in the political system? 2- Do you think the current legal and political system is sufficient to help achieve your interests?</p> <p>3- Do you think what is happening in Kuwait is expected and part of "normal" political practices (i.e. nothing serious to</p>

			perceives the current situation as normal or abnormal.	worry about)?
(RQ3) How do different groups perceive the proposed project?	Proposed project	The general concept	Investigate their general understanding of the project.	<p>1- What do you know about the Island development project?</p> <p>2- What do you think about the Island development project?</p> <p>3- Do you think this project can solve many of the problems in Kuwait?</p> <p>4- What is the most important fact that you support in this project?</p>
(RQ4) To what length are all parties willing to commit to achieve mutual understanding?		The idea of SEZ	Their knowledge of this type of economic design, legal requirements, and concerns.	<p>1- What do you know about the concept of special economic zones?</p> <p>2- Do you think this concept can be applied in Kuwait?</p> <p>3- Do you support the idea that the future nation's project should be free of the</p>

				motherland's laws?
(RQ5) Will communicative action be able to provide new grounds to achieve an agreement about the proposed solution?		The liberal Identity and Other concerns	Politicians' cultural and religious perspectives about the project's identity, flexibility and other concerns.	1- Do you have any concerns about the project? 2- If the project is addressed with a liberal identity, for example, allowing alcohol consumption in the islands—would that be fine? 3- Who do you think would be the best to manage this project in terms of, nationality, entity, foreign corporations, etc.?

APPENDIX C. POPULACE'S DISCUSSION GUIDE

Research questions	Construct	Perspective	Insights	Questions
<p>(RQ1) Are there doubts about trustworthiness of the political system in Kuwait?</p>	<p>Trust</p>	<p>Trusting beliefs: cognitive perceptions about the trustee.</p>	<p>1- Competence: Whether people believe that the government and its entities have the ability and the power to accomplish the proposed project.</p> <p>2- Benevolence: The people believe the government and its entities care about the public interest and will act to achieve it.</p> <p>3- Integrity: The people believe the government and its entities tell the truth, make good and</p>	<p>1- Do you think that the government and its entities have the abilities to achieve the public interest?</p> <p>2- What do you think about the people who work in higher positions in the public sector?</p> <p>3- Do you think that the government and the National Assembly are acting in your interest?</p> <p>4- What do you think about the data about the economy that the government announced?</p> <p>5- Who do you trust in fulfilling your interests: the government or the National</p>

			<p>trustful agreements, and fulfill promises.</p> <p>4- Predictability: the people believe the government and its entities' actions, behavior, or decisions are predictable and consistent enough to be forecasted.</p>	<p>Assembly? Or neither or both?</p> <p>6- What do you think are the overall outcomes of the current National Assembly and the government?</p>
<p>(RQ2) What is the scope of political reform that people seek? Is it about the people, institutions, or the structure?</p>	<p>Trust</p>	<p>Institution-based trust: the trustor believes that prime, satisfactory conditions lead to success.</p>	<p>1- The structure of political life and institutions: the political body's perceptions about the sufficiency of regulations, laws, and procedures to protect and lead to success.</p> <p>2- The current situation: whether the political body</p>	<p>1- Do you think our problems will be solved if we choose the right people in the political system? 2- Do you think the current legal and political system is sufficient to help achieve your interests?</p> <p>3- Do you think what is happening in Kuwait is expected and part of "normal" political practices (i.e. nothing serious to</p>

			perceives the current situation as normal or abnormal.	worry about)?
(RQ3) How do people perceive themselves within the political system?	Political attitude	Negative	The perception of being the target of political practices rather than the center of political life. Lack of participation is caused by the perception of no influence.	Do you think that your voice as a citizen influences decision making?
		Opposition	The perception that the government and political institutions are not serving the public interests and they do not consider the citizens' needs in their calculations. Therefore, people do not think political institutions represent them.	1- Do you believe that the government and the National Assembly are trying to reflect your interests in their decisions? 2- Do you think the government and National Assembly care about you?

		Illegitimate	Rejection of the current method of decision making, the feeling of unfairness, the perception that rules, regulations, and constitutions are manipulated.	<p>1- What do you think about entire political life in Kuwait?</p> <p>2- Do you think the way the decisions are made is fair enough?</p> <p>3- Do you think you can rely on institutions to protect your interests?</p>
(RQ 4) How different groups perceive the proposed project?	Proposed project	The general concept	The general awareness about the project and its importance.	<p>1- What do you know about the Island development project?</p> <p>2- What do you think about the Island development project?</p> <p>3- Do you think this project can solve many of the problems in Kuwait?</p> <p>4- What is the most important fact that you support in this project?</p>
(RQ 5) To what length are all parties		The idea of SEZ	People's perceptions about the SEZ concept within the context	1- What do you know about the concept of special economic zones?

<p>willing to commit to achieve mutual understanding?</p>			<p>of political life in Kuwait. People's attitudes toward having different laws and regulations in parts of Kuwait.</p>	<p>2- Do you think this concept can be applied in Kuwait? 3- Do you support the idea that the future nation's project should be free of the motherland laws?</p>
<p>(RQ 6) Will communicative action be able to provide new grounds to achieve an agreement about the proposed solution?</p>		<p>The liberal Identity and Other concerns</p>	<p>People's attitudes toward the expected identity of the Islands within their cultural and religious context. People's perceptions of having settlers and a majority of non-Kuwaitis in parts of their land.</p>	<p>1- do you have any concerns about the project? 2- If the project is addressed with a liberal identity, for example, allowing alcohol consumption in the islands—would that be fine? 3- Who do you think would be the best to manage this project in terms of, nationality, entity, foreign corporations, etc.?</p>

