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Will Kuwait's Parliamentary Democracy Be Restored, Reformed, or Repudiated?

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Contents

Introduction

Kuwaitis are accustomed to a domestic political scene that sometimes resembles a soap opera with shifting characters and much melodrama but no resolution. For over a generation, fiercely contested parliamentary elections have consistently produced fractured parliaments that clash with individual ministers, leading to confrontation, parliamentary grilling, and dissolutions of cabinets and parliaments that are replaced by new bodies that merely resume the tussle.

But on May 10, 2024, the soap opera abruptly came to an end. Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad, the newly enthroned emir, not only dissolved the recently elected parliament but also suspended the body indefinitely, promising a four-year process of constitutional revision. While the step was dramatic, the extent and nature of further change remains unclear. The suspension is forcing all Kuwaiti political actors to direct their attention to portentous long-term issues rather than more ephemeral short-term drama, but so far there is little indication of how the issues will be resolved.

The drama of daily crises has often obscured far more significant evolutionary trends. Over the six decades of its existence, the Kuwaiti constitution's text has not changed, but the way key institutions operate (parliament in particular) and the way they interact (especially cabinet-parliamentary relations) have changed significantly. The suspension of parliament came largely in response to ruler frustrations with this dichotomy and the feeling that parliaments lead to gridlock, grandstanding, and corruption.

Has a governing system that seemed to offer so much noise and motion but little movement come to a full stop? Will Kuwait rejoin its neighbors and abandon its experiment with powerful parliaments? Other parliamentary bodies on the Arabian Peninsula are generally

more limited in their prerogatives, and elections are either avoided or constrained; notably, Qatar abandoned elections in favor of an appointed assembly six months after the Kuwaiti parliamentary suspension.

Or will Kuwait instead simply revert back to its old system after a cooling-off period or in response to popular pressure (as happened twice in the past)? At this point, it is uncertain whether Kuwait's style of parliamentary democracy will be restored, reformed, or repudiated. Still, the fallout from the emir's action has deeply affected the rhythm of Kuwaiti politics (and silenced some of the loudest public discussions) without determining the country's fundamental direction.

The path of full autocracy remains open, and the promise of a committee to reform the constitution and pave the way for parliamentary restoration has been ignored to date. But this inaction does not necessarily imply an intention to permanently abolish parliament; rather, it may suggest that reform or restoration is more likely. Regardless, there are currently no clear indications of what changes might be made. So, while the potential for dramatic change exists, Kuwait's leaders may have simply bought themselves a respite rather than a resolution.

Important Kuwaiti political actors seem to be working out their strategies very slowly, meaning that questions will be answered over years, not weeks or months. But in the meantime, the flavor of Kuwaiti politics is shifting in ways that are often unannounced but very consequential for a society accustomed to a feisty and active political life.

Halfway Between a Constitutional and Absolute Monarchy

Kuwait's constitution dates back to the country's independence in 1961 and came into full operation in 1962. The document was drafted by an assembly—two-thirds of whose members were elected and one-third were from the ruling family—and promulgated by the emir. It provided for an elected parliament with significant prerogatives over legislation, oversight of ministers, and even approval of the crown prince. But it also left much authority in the hands of the emir, including, most notably, to appoint ministers and dissolve the parliament. The monarchy was certainly not absolute, but neither was it a constitutional monarchy (in the full sense of a monarch ruling through ministers that are only politically accountable to parliament). How each actor would use its constitutional prerogatives depended in part on several factors: the emir himself (with some emirs more willing to work with parliament than others), the attitude of leading members of the ruling family (some of whom occupied senior cabinet positions and one of whom generally served as both prime minister and crown prince until recently), the composition of parliament, and norms and traditions.

And those latter two factors changed considerably over time. Regarding the composition of parliament, Kuwaiti society gradually grew more diverse and new groups of citizens (and eventually women) gained the right to vote; new political actors (such as Islamists) joined the fray; and older actors (most notably large tribes) found new ways to gain influence. At times, it seemed that the ruling family was deliberately reaching out to new constituencies as older ones became more demanding, making for a more complex body.

The resulting fracturing led parliamentarians to be more protective of their legal prerogatives but less able to use them coherently in pursuit of a common agenda. The parliament as a body seemed to have a strong sense that its mission was to represent Kuwaiti society forcefully and unapologetically. But that society is fragmented in a variety of ways—and so was the parliament. Some tensions and divisions in Kuwait were clearly politicized (with Islamists and liberals, for instance, organizing clear blocs). Others were borne in Kuwaiti society and certainly fueled parliamentary rivalries but were only obliquely discussed in public (most notably rivalries between those considering themselves *hadar*, or urbanites, and those seeing themselves as *bedu*, or from bedouin stock).

Norms and traditions also came under strain. A ruling family that was at first respectful of parliamentary elections began to tinker with electoral rules, and in recent decades, individual members have reputedly funneled support to particular favorite candidates. As early as the 1970s, some parliamentarians began efforts to bring ministers who were senior members of the ruling family under parliamentary grilling; in 2006, the parliament was involved in a succession crisis. If there ever was a spirit of deference between parliament and the ruling family, in which neither trespassed into the other's domain, that has long come to an end.

While the constitution has never been amended, several important structural changes in leadership have occurred over time. Most remarkable, perhaps, was the separation of the positions of crown prince and prime minister two decades ago. Previously, the posts were combined, thereby placing the head of government a bit outside of effective parliamentary oversight.

Gridlock and Crisis

Although the constitution has not changed, it has been executed differently over time. In recent decades, it has provided the framework for much contestation and argument, but it has also operated in a way that has earned the country a reputation for gridlock.

Since Kuwait's independence, the ruling family has addressed political, social, and economic issues primarily through the parliamentary process, but with some notable exceptions. On two occasions in the late twentieth century, Kuwaiti emirs charged parliament with breaking the country's political norms and reacted by breaking or suspending the parts of the constitutional text providing for an elected parliament. In both cases, the suspensions were not

met with any immediate resistance and therefore were fully enforced. While both the emirs issued pledges to restore the constitution eventually after first amending it in an unspecified manner, the amendment processes never began and the parliaments were restored.

The first occasion occurred in 1978, when Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem was ill and rumors of a conflict emerged regarding the nomination of the crown prince. Sheikh Jaber Al-Ali, supported by a majority in parliament, was in contention with Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah, who had the backing of then crown prince Jaber Al-Ahmad. This conflict resulted in the suspension of the parliament and the appointment of Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah as crown prince.

The second occasion took place in 1986, following increasing public criticism over the Kuwait Souk Al-Manakh stock market disaster in 1982. Allegations of corruption involving members of the ruling family further fueled the crisis. Parliament was suspended just as it was preparing to initiate an investigation into the matter. But this time, the suspension eventually provoked countermobilization and confrontation. The rulers' desire to move beyond suspension and convene an alternative assembly was rejected by many in Kuwaiti society and provoked numerous dismissed parliamentarians to rally around a protest movement. The brewing confrontation was interrupted by the Iraqi occupation of 1990. Meeting in exile, members of the ruling family agreed with leading Kuwaiti figures (including those from the opposition) to restore the constitution fully after liberation—a pledge cemented by pressure from the United States, which had provided instrumental assistance in reversing Iraq's annexation of the country.

The reconvened parliament proved livelier but also more divided on ideological, social, tribal, and geographic lines. Over the next three decades, the parliament became especially fragmented. Having such a feisty but fractured parliament impeded key decisionmaking. But on the other hand, it brought some social issues and corruption out into the open, allowed freer political debate than virtually anywhere else in the region, and cultivated a sense of citizenship that is also unrivalled. The aftermath of the war underscored the parliament's position in raising and debating public issues and channeling demands. While the country's rulers voiced frustration with the system, they did not move against it. To be sure, their commitment to parliament's enhanced role was tested by a series of political movements in Kuwait, such as one in 2011 that called for the resignation of the powerful prime minister, Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed. In response, the emir acknowledged the protesters' demands and accepted the prime minister's resignation. While respecting the constitution, rulers often reacted to various clashes with parliament by calling for new elections. The threat of a third suspension, while not explicit, was always there but seemed a bridge too far for Kuwait's emirs.

This is until Sheikh Meshal assumed the position of emir in December 2023. With less governance experience than many of his predecessors, he seemed to acquiesce to those members of the ruling family less patient with criticism and democratic debate. After less than five months, he took drastic action—not only suspending the parliament as had been done on the previous two occasions but also repeating the precise language of those suspensions to highlight similar accusations against members of the parliament.

Yet even half a year after his move, there has been no clear reaction from key Kuwaiti political actors and no sure indication of the country's political path toward renewed democracy, entrenched autocracy, or some kind of reform.

Politics Without Parliament

Although the 2024 suspension of parliament is not unprecedented, it is unique and radical in the political context in which it has taken place. Following the two previous suspensions, there were significant shifts in the relationship between the emir and the ruling family and in the channels of political communication between the government and the public. During that time, the constitutional text did not change, but parliaments became noisier, far more active, and less coherent. The recent bypassing of parliament—and thus the noisy public debate—has enabled a short-term consolidation of power. But there are more subtle changes than simply the elimination of the role of elected parliamentarians. The suspension has been accompanied by other changes in the way central officials and the ruling family operate; it has also initiated a shifting conception of Kuwaiti citizenship.

Most obviously, the emir consolidated his power by appointing a crown prince without the constitutionally required parliamentary vetting. He appointed Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid in June 2024, only about a month after the suspension.

Less obviously, but quite significantly, his designation of senior government officials is forcing all actors to navigate their own individual paths to influence government policies, secure economic benefits, and serve their social groups. And while these actions appear to have empowered the ruling family, many family members have actually lost influence, including those who have sought to become crown prince or secure key positions within the family and government, such as Ahmed Al-Nawaf, the son of the late emir, and Ahmed Al-Fahd, among others. Thus, while the suspension of parliament might appear to signal increased power for the ruling family, it actually highlights a consolidation of power by the emir over parliament, civil society, and even the ruling family itself.

This dynamic can be observed through examining recent government cabinet nominations. Previously, cabinet appointments served as a power-signaling mechanism, with the prime minister traditionally holding the most powerful position, followed by the ministers of defense and interior. However, those who held these positions prior to the suspension of parliament have now been removed from all government roles under various circumstances. For example, the former minister of interior and defense, Talal Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, was tried and imprisoned.

Since the suspension, Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmed Al-Abdullah has retained his position; Fahd Al-Yousef now holds the interior ministry position; and in February 2025 Abdullah Ali Al-Sabah took office as minister of defense. It is important to note that Fahd Al-Yousef is not

a descendant of Mubarak Al-Sabah, the founder of the state, which excludes him from eligibility to become crown prince. Furthermore, while the cabinet was once the primary arena for signaling power and influence within the ruling family, no members of the family have been appointed to cabinet positions since the suspension other than Abdullah Ali Al-Sabah. In his speech announcing the suspension of parliament, the emir emphasized the corruption allegedly conducted by the previous government and parliament, which he claimed harmed the state and its institutions, particularly concerning citizenship and national identity.

It is not merely the position of the ruling family that is being rearranged: Since the suspension of parliament, the government has seemingly been changing the nature of Kuwaiti citizenship in a systematic manner that would have been unthinkable in the presence of a resistant parliament. Over the past months, the government withdrew citizenship from over 40,000 people across three categories: those accused of forging family relationships to obtain citizenship; women who have been naturalized through marriage; and artists, singers, and other cultural figures who obtained citizenship under the pretext of noble works. These measures have been discussed in a recent interview with the interior minister, Fahad Al-Yousef, and in other press videos featuring officers from the Interior Ministry.

This withdrawal is supported by a court decision to classify nationality issues as sovereign acts—that is, acts not subject to judicial oversight. While this issue remains a primary focus of the government, as emphasized in the emir's speech and directives, it has also become a source of significant criticism and fear among the public. The citizenship withdrawals have been a dominant topic in the news since the suspension, drawing increasing criticism from former members of parliament (MPs) from different ideological and social backgrounds.

In particular, the targeting of women who obtained their citizenship under Article 8 of the Citizenship Law has dramatically increased public outcry. Former MPs such as Mohammed Al-Sager, Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi, Saleh Al-Mullah, Saud Al-Asfoor, Khalid Al-Otaibi, and others, along with political organizations such as Hadas (the Muslim Brotherhood), Hashed, and Kuwait Progressive Movement, represent diverse and often opposing ideological and social backgrounds but have all expressed concerns over this issue.

Revocation of citizenship is not new, but the scale and categorical nature of the recent moves are unprecedented. For instance, in 2014, the measure was used as a tool to repress and target political figures. Now the campaign is much broader. Initially, the emir and government officials focused on addressing cases of forgery. However, the unexpected focus on targeting women who obtained citizenship legally through marriage—leading to a significantly higher number of weekly withdrawals—does not align with this agenda. This approach has already, and will likely continue to, unite political factions against these measures, threatening the continuation of the state of fear and silence that has prevailed since the suspension of parliament.

While the emir's continued consolidation of power relies on preventing or blocking any potential collective action by the public, the revocation of citizenship appears to be the issue most likely to lead ideological rivals to overcome their collective action problem and mobilize public opposition.

Parliamentary Debate Replaced by Private Chatter

Whatever their formal powers, parliaments often serve as a critical channel of communication between senior officials and citizens. In Kuwait, prior to 2024, this often took the form of airing rumors and public concerns about government policies. For instance, when a rumor spread about a potential policy change, MPs would submit parliamentary questions, compelling the relevant minister to provide an official response. Parliament played a significant role in mitigating public fears, grievances, and suspicions that rumors provoked.

Since the suspension of parliament, these channels of communication have disappeared, forcing the government to address these challenges directly. This has limited the government's usual maneuvering capacity. In the past, the government could test public opinion by allowing rumors to spread and then either denying or addressing them depending on the public's reaction. Without the parliament as an intermediary, the government now faces direct pressure, as the public struggles to distinguish between genuine rumors and those potentially disseminated by the government.

Two prominent channels have emerged as alternative forms of communication between the leadership and the public. The first is the emir's informal meetings with prominent families, which are often announced publicly. While these meetings are not a new phenomenon, they have increasingly served as a platform for the emir to share his thoughts and visions with attendees while allowing these select individuals to convey grievances and hopes on behalf of their social segments. The second channel is Al-Yousef's ongoing visits to *diwaniyas* (traditional social gatherings). Unlike the emir's meetings, Al-Yousef's visits appear to target broader and less privileged groups, representing segments of society that are less likely to gain direct access to the emir or be represented by elite families.

However, these new dynamics are fraught with significant weaknesses. Neither channel has been effective in airing the full spectrum of public views, concerns, and grievances. The emir's informal meetings primarily reflect the perspectives of socially advantaged groups, such as wealthy families or high-profile groups (for example, the Al-Mutawa family), leaving many other voices unheard. While Al-Yousef's outreach appears to address this imbalance, his efforts remain limited in scope and lack the inclusivity necessary to represent a diverse public. Furthermore, these channels have failed to resolve the government's long-standing communication problem. Rather than reducing public uncertainty, the absence of press conferences, live media coverage, or systematic engagement has allowed rumors to proliferate, further undermining trust.

The case of the rumored changes to the retirement age and pensions for public workers perhaps best illustrate these dynamics. Following a rumor suggesting an increase in the retirement age and a reduction in pensions, over 2,300 teachers applied for early retirement. This reaction occurred before the government's spokesperson eventually addressed the rumor,

denying any such policy. This delayed response underscored the government's difficulties in managing public sentiment without the mediation of parliament. Notably, the spokesperson resigned shortly afterward, further emphasizing the challenges government officials face in navigating such situations.

The government has yet to address its communication problem, continuing to rely on outdated channels such as announcing the cabinet's weekly meeting discussions through textual statements, without holding press conferences or live media coverage. This approach lacks engagement with public grievances, as these channels follow a top-down model that does not allow the public to voice concerns or ask questions that the government may prefer to avoid or has not considered.

Thinking About and Preparing for the Future

Since the suspension of parliament, many politicians, scholars, and intellectuals have speculated about Kuwait's future. These speculations can be summarized into three main perspectives. The most extreme one envisions Kuwait adopting a new path similar to other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, where development and economic progress take precedence over political freedoms and Kuwait's unique political identity.

The second perspective predicts that parliament will be restored after constitutional amendments that could either weaken its authority or address its problematic areas.

The third one sees this as an exceptional period that will eventually pass, with the previous system returning intact—along with its advantages and disadvantages—without any meaningful changes.

Kuwaitis are divided not merely about the likelihood of each scenario but also about their relative desirability. Many believe that parliament itself was part of the problem. But even those who feel frustration at the years of gridlock disagree about the future of parliament: While some radically oppose its return, others hope for its reform and continuation.

Without elections and with constrained public debate, there is no easy way to discern public opinion. Nor have Kuwaitis yet forged a way to translate private opinions into public action. But in Kuwait, private opinions are widely shared, and it is easy to detect that Kuwaitis are increasingly turning against the current situation. The return of parliament is increasingly being seen more favorably, as the lack of communication, the withdrawal of citizenships, and the failure to deliver on development promises have become major sources of disappointment.

And that disappointment can matter. Frustration over gridlock and paralysis provided the political space to make the suspension of parliament and the promise of reform attractive even to many Kuwaitis who prided themselves on the openness of their society. But maintaining political closure without an improvement in decisiveness and performance may ultimately spark a reaction.

Popular frustration is particularly directed at the government for its failure to fulfill the country's development agenda. The government has yet to present its yearly plan as required by the constitution; meanwhile, neighboring governments are actively delivering on their development goals, holding conferences, organizing events, and announcing projects across various sectors, such as tourism and entertainment. For instance, Saudi Arabia recently secured the nomination to host the FIFA World Cup in 2034. Meanwhile, Kuwait's government has primarily focused more modestly and inwardly on citizenship issues and hosting the Arabian Gulf Cup, highlighting a significant gap between Kuwait's efforts and the ambitious projects undertaken by other GCC states.

Politically, many citizens were initially reassured by the emir's promise to appoint a committee to review and propose constitutional amendments within a six-month period, with the amendments to be decided through either a referendum or a vote by an elected parliament. Therefore, the failure thus far to honor this pledge has increased distrust between the public and the government. Many believe that attention has shifted away from addressing Kuwait's critical problems, such as constitutional reform and government efficiency, further deepening public skepticism.

But will private unease translate into any form of public action? There are some initial signs that it may do so soon.

Public anger toward parliamentarians seems to be shifting to the government, with increasing calls for action that former MPs speak up. MPs were initially cautious not to oppose the measures taken against parliament—given public frustration and the emir's strong promise to address major issues—and instead chose to step back and wait for the right moment. But recently, parliamentarians such as Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi, Saud Al-Asfoor, Khalid Al-Otaibi, and Muhannad Al-Sayer, all members of the suspended parliament, have begun publishing articles and social media posts. They have also increased their visits to diwaniyas, which serve as important spaces to evaluate and understand public opinion on recent political developments.

However, the efforts so far have been limited in scope and carried out quietly. This is partly because the MPs, along with other political figures and organizations, have yet to resolve their collective action problem. The popular perception that the government's new path is insufficient is still being overshadowed by a reluctance to revert to the status quo before the suspension, characterized by inefficiency and parliamentary gridlock.

Besides traditional rivalries, there are also different strategic calculations at play. Among the MPs who oppose the suspension and advocate parliament's return, two main arguments have emerged.

First, some believe that the crown prince, once he becomes emir, will restore adherence to the constitution due to his personality and extensive experience with Kuwait's parliamentary dynamics since 2003. The current emir is seen as an outsider to the political establishment, having never served as a minister or in civil service, while the crown prince is viewed as more aligned with the system. The current emir's background is rooted in security services, agencies with a primarily internal focus and a history of maintaining political control domestically, which has shaped his approach and explains his frustration with the political system.

Second, some MPs argue that increasing public pressure will eventually spark widespread criticism of the government. They believe this criticism will challenge perceptions of the ruling family's qualifications and question whether the state's structure and legacy can sustain the absence of a functioning parliament for an extended period. Rather than lead an immediate charge, they think it might be better to wait until the shortcomings of the new system are more widely felt.

A potential third argument, rarely explicitly mentioned, is that neighboring regimes view Kuwait's openness with annoyance. While there is public silence on the topic, there is clearly strong regional support for autocratization in Kuwait. This may support the autocratization process in various ways, such as technical assistance in the best practices in control, including advanced tech tools, telecommunications monitoring, and other technological advancements that facilitate autocratization.

Whatever the short-term reasons for the government's inertness, they will not increase the likelihood of long-term stability. The failure of the current system to deliver better policy performance or even decisiveness on many key issues may eventually take its toll. And if that happens, public demands may find a less cohesive regime and ruling family than initially appears to be the case now. The emir's rearrangement of the ruling family has strengthened his position but has also risked isolating him. While the governance framework of Kuwait and GCC states suggests that the ruling family play a significant role in politics, the emir's new measures represent a break away from this framework and introduce a new path where his role is emphasized without the ruling family's support. Kuwait scholar Michael Herb's book *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (1999) suggests that ruling families without defined succession (such as with primogeniture) can be especially stable because leading figures are rewarded with senior positions and potential rivals are also potential successors. In recent years, some GCC monarchies have seen power flow from the ruling family toward the king (or in Saudi Arabia, the crown prince) and succession become narrowed or defined (as in Bahrain). And Kuwait may be following a similar path, leading to the possibility of a future emir governing without broad support or significant representation from different family members and factions. Since the suspension of parliament, the government has been almost entirely devoid of sheikhs from Mubarak Al-Sabah's line, with the notable exception of the current prime minister and the recent appointment of the defense minister. The recent appointment supports the argument about the difficulties of governing without the support of the ruling family.

While the current emir may be managing the tensions, they may become far more severe in the event of succession. He is eighty-four years old, and when he passes away, his crown prince, likely still Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid, will assume the role of emir. If the current situation continues unchanged, the challenges awaiting the next emir will be immense. Chief among these challenges is the delicate task of appointing a crown prince without risking significant loss of support within the ruling family.

Any successor will face these pressures without organized public support. The current crown prince will inherit a legacy of distrust and growing opposition, which will likely intensify demands for the restoration of parliament. The narrative that parliamentary gridlock undermines government efficiency and hinders development will increasingly fail to convince the public that the status quo is preferable, as ruling family fissures are proving to be just as strong as parliamentary rivalries.

Thus, the measures taken in 2024 and presented as temporary may be even less long-lasting than anticipated. There are other ways of handling succession issues, such as the internal family election-like process of the Saudi Allegiance Council (Hay'at al-Bay'ah). But reinstating parliament would provide the emir with a degree of separation from any internal rivalries or competition over the crown prince position. Is a restoration likely? Perhaps, but it is not clear when the reinstatement would take place or how.

Can the Successor Succeed?

When he does come to the throne, the crown prince's options to address these challenges will be limited and can be narrowed to the three scenarios of restoration, reform, and repudiation. The first scenario is to immediately restore parliament, as was done following the 1978 suspension, which allowed Emir Jaber Al-Ahmad to secure the crown prince position. However, this approach risks forfeiting the advantages gained from the current suspension of parliament, as it would reduce the emir's ability to address fundamental constitutional issues. Having summoned parliament back, the option to suspend it once again would likely become less feasible, at least over the short term.

The second scenario is to convene a national conference, similar to Emir Nawaf Al-Ahmad's initiative in 2021, where opposition figures, elites, and representatives of the emir could negotiate solutions to political challenges. This approach could garner substantial public support and provide the emir with political space to navigate competing interests. In this scenario, the emir would have the opportunity to pursue fundamental changes to the parliamentary structure and the constitution, addressing issues such as the process of appointing the crown prince, parliamentary interpellations and questions, the number of ministers, and other constitutional matters. A generation ago, an attempt to convene a substitute body for

parliament proved clumsy and sparked strong opposition (and was ultimately abandoned in the wake of the Iraqi invasion in 1990). But a more convincing and truly participatory path might be able to pull in potential critics.

The third and most challenging scenario is to deepen the autocratization process, supported by regional political, diplomatic, and technological resources. This option would aim to radically transform Kuwait's political system, benefiting elites and select segments of the population. However, it carries significant risks, including undermining Kuwait's sovereignty, weakening the ruling family's authority by increasing the emir's power, and potentially triggering public unrest similar to the events of 1988 or the 2011–2014 political movements. While each scenario poses challenges, the third presents the greatest threat to Kuwait's stability and the ruling family's position.

Although these scenarios primarily focus on the next emir, they remain theoretically available to the current emir as well. However, achieving any of them would require a radical shift in his approach, so any significant movement will likely not happen until there is a new emir. To move before succession would probably provoke increased opposition within the ruling family; increased criticism from the public, former MPs, and politicians; and perhaps the alienation of Kuwait's economic and socially elite classes.

While the first two scenarios would ensure parliament's return, the last one would not. However, that third, autocratic path—a radical shift toward the GCC states' model—appears increasingly less feasible, as the ruling family does not seem to have sufficient support or even unity within its own ranks. If more family members start to be granted ministerial positions, that may be a sign that the third path is being explored. But the opportunity of showing the payoff of decisive, if autocratic, political action seems to be passing. The idea that discarding a parliament will make Kuwaitis more prosperous and the government more efficient is losing credibility. First, there is still a heavy dependence on oil revenues, which account for over 80 percent of total government's revenue, combined with low capital expenditures, which represent less than 10 percent of the budget. Second, the bureaucracy remains inefficient, further exacerbated by the fact that 80 percent of Kuwaiti employees work in the public sector. Third, despite about six months having passed since the suspension of parliament, no critical issues have been addressed, and no plans have been proposed to resolve them. This makes a shift toward the GCC states' model increasingly unrealistic and leaves the ruling family with two peaceful and low-cost scenarios that assure the return of parliament.

Doubts about Kuwait's political future have grown since the suspension of parliament. The emir and his project do not appear to be signaling a transformative shift away from Kuwait's parliamentary legacy. Former MPs have been among those skeptical about the possibility of Kuwait returning to a functioning parliament. However, since the government has not initiated significant structural reforms yet, hopes for the return of parliament have increased. Former MPs and politicians are now counting the days until a political spark reignites momentum for change.

Whether or not parliament is reinstated, Kuwait's political gridlock remains deeply entrenched. So far, the suspension of parliament is not helping to remove the causes of immobility but rather shifting them to private discussions and creating the potential for aggravated rivalries within the ruling family. But restoring parliament will not resolve the causes either. While a restoration of parliament in some form still seems likely, the cure for immobility will have to be found in forms that are less blunt and more consensual and that avoid democratic parliamentary grandstanding or autocratic high-handedness.

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