EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE FIELD GUIDE

KUWAIT

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success (Photo: US Navy and Kuwaiti Army explosive ordnance disposal technicians participate in bilateral exercise).

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 "Culture General" provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Arab Gulf States.

NOTE: While the term Persian Gulf is common in the US, this guide uses the name preferred in the region, the Arabian Gulf.

Part 2 "Culture Specific" describes unique cultural features of Kuwaiti society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training (Photo: US and Kuwaiti soldiers fire artillery rockets during a joint live-fire exercise).

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value - - freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity (Photo: US and Royal Oman Air Force personnel following a training flight).

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories—what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains–which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page)—as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture (Photo: Muslim pilgrims visit Ka'aba, Islam's holiest site, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia).

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

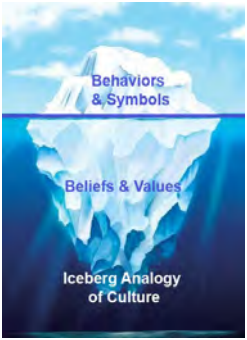
This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It

helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are

not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success (Photo: US and Kuwait Navy personnel).

As you travel through the Arab Gulf States, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

The Arab Gulf States comprise 7 countries that border the Arabian Gulf: Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman. Scientists believe that the southern Gulf region was once home to early humans who established permanent settlements as many as 125,000 years ago. In the region's north, the favorable soil and climate

conditions of Mesopotamia (present day Syria and Iraq) allowed people to settle, farm the land, create irrigation systems, build structures, and establish towns beginning around 6200 BC (Photo: Mask from an ancient Mesopotamian civilization).

A unique culture emerged between 3000 and 2500 BC at Dilmun in present-day Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. As a regional hub, Dilmun played an important role in trade between the Arabian Peninsula and the Indus River valley (located in present-day Pakistan and India) as well as along longer routes to East Africa, Southeast Asia, and China. While the Arab Gulf was an important trading hub for centuries, the region never saw the birth of its own empire nor were its inhabitants ever united under a single local power. Instead, each of the region's port cities was autonomous, with its own local economy and social organization. The cities' dispersed power prevented their unification and also made the region a target for incursions from beyond the Gulf.

The first external force to exert power and influence over the region was the Achaemenid Empire (pictured) which controlled parts of the Gulf starting in 550 BC from its center in Pasargadae (Iran). It was followed by the Parthian (140 BC) and Sassanian (226 AD) Empires centered in Iran and the Umayyad Caliphate (661 AD) centered in Syria and Turkey. The period marked by the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (570 AD) in present-day Saudi Arabia and the subsequent emergence and establishment of Islam as the region's predominant religion was a defining era in the Gulf's history.

The Persian Empire
Parthia
Media
Sogdiana
Bactria
Arabia
Persia
Susiana
Babylonia
Gedrosia
Scythia
Sacaea
Massagetae
Sarmatia
Pontus
Cappadocia
Cilicia
Phoenicia
Judea
Nubia
Ethiopia
Libya
Egypt
Cyrenaica
Thrace
Macedonia
Epirus
Thessaly
Sicily
Sardinia
Corsica
Gaul
Germania
Britannia
Hibernia
Iberia
Lusitania
Mauretania
Numidia
Carthage
Italia
Pannonia
Dacia
Sarmatia
Scythia
Colchis
Iberia
Albania
Armenia
Media
Parthia
Hyrcania
Bactria
Sogdiana
Margiana
Arachosia
Paropamisus
Gedrosia
Susiana
Babylonia
Persia
Arabia
Phoenicia
Judea
Cilicia
Cappadocia
Pontus

In the 16th century, Portugal established control over Bahrain and parts of the southern Gulf, a move that ushered in an era of European struggle for supremacy in the region. In the late 16th century, the Safavid Dynasty of Iran allied with England to expel Portugal. At the same time, Iraq came under control of the Ottoman Empire (centered in present-day Istanbul) whose rule lasted until World War I, when the British assumed control.

England became active in the southern Gulf in the late 18th century then solidified its dominance in the 19th century through agreements with local rulers in present-day Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the UAE. Unlike in Africa and Asia, the British never established formal colonies in the region and left local ruling families largely in place.

The discovery of oil in the 1930s had a profound impact on the Gulf States' economies and politics. While English and US companies initially owned and managed the Gulf oil industry, local rulers confirmed their control of the industry following their countries' full independence (Saudi Arabia, 1932; Oman, 1951, Kuwait, 1961; then Bahrain, Qatar, and UAE in 1971). Iraq, like Saudi Arabia, achieved independence in 1932 but was occupied by Britain during World War II. Following the monarchy's overthrow in 1958, Iraq became a republic (Photo: Kuwaiti troops commemorate the First Gulf War in 2011).

Under the leadership of royal dynasties since independence, 6 of the Gulf States have remained stable. By contrast, Iraq has been enmeshed in several conflicts that have contributed to regional instability. Under the autocratic rule of Saddam Hussein, Iraq engaged in the bloody Iran-Iraq War from 1980-1986, then invaded and annexed neighboring Kuwait 4 years later, inciting the First Gulf War. Since its 2003 invasion of Iraq and subsequent collapse of the Hussein regime, the US has engaged in security cooperation activities in Iraq. In reaction to the 2011 Arab Spring, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait have suppressed protests and calls for reform.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

The Arab Gulf's position at a crossroads for international trade has greatly influenced its ethnic makeup, politics, and social structures. The diversity of people passing through and residing in the region as part of its trade-based economy persists today – foreign non-citizen workers make up sizable portions of the populations in each of the Gulf States with the exception of Iraq (Photo: An Iraqi voter in 2005).

Today, the Gulf States minus Iraq are governed by monarchy, though several have introduced political and institutional reforms since independence. While Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar have each adopted a constitution, the Saudi Arabian government considers the Qur'an, the primary religious text of Islam, its constitution. In 1996, Oman established the Basic Law of the State, which introduced a new system of government that includes a 2-chamber legislature that meets at the request of the sultan (ruler). The 2005 Iraqi constitution established an Islamic, democratic, federal parliamentary republic led by an elected Prime Minister, President, and legislature. Unlike the region's other monarchies, the UAE's government is comprised of the hereditary leaders of each of its 7 emirates.

While the legal systems of the Gulf States have incorporated many aspects of English, French, and Egyptian law, ***Sharia*** (Islamic) law continues to play a central role, particularly in criminal and family matters. In recent years, the Gulf States have undertaken efforts to create formalized legal systems that combine *Sharia* and civil systems.

Despite some political tensions, relations among most of the Gulf States are largely amicable. Their good relations are primarily a result of their participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – a political, economic, and military alliance uniting Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. Since the organization's inception in 1981, member states have undertaken efforts to integrate their economies, militaries, and other social and political structures (Photo: Former US Secretary of State Kerry and GCC leaders in Saudi Arabia in 2014).

Iraq's role in fomenting regional instability has affected its relations with the other Gulf States. While the UAE, Qatar, and Oman have strong trade and diplomatic relations with Iraq, Saudi Arabia and its close ally Bahrain frequently clash with Iraq. Disagreements center on Iran's role in the region fueled by ideological differences between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain's Sunni Islam leadership and Iran's Shiite Islam leadership. While Iraq and Kuwait have taken steps to repair their relationship, tensions continue to linger from Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Due to their significant sizes, populations, and resources, Iraq and Iran compete for influence in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia with its large oil reserves is also a powerful regional player even though its military forces are significantly smaller than those of either Iraq or Iran.

Most of the Gulf States rely on the US to augment their military capabilities. With some 45,000-65,000 US troops stationed at several military installations throughout the region, the US has entered into agreements to sell or transfer arms and defense services to most of the States. The US remains in Iraq to train, support, and advise Iraqi security forces. Bahrain is the site of the longest-serving permanent US military presence in the Gulf, while Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar also host large numbers of US military personnel.

While Gulf States citizens are predominantly Arabs, the region is also home to several ethnic minorities – Persians in the UAE and Kuwait; Palestinians in Qatar; and Baloch and Persians in Oman. In Iraq, strong tensions exist between the country's 2 primary ethnic groups, the Arabs and the Kurds. In each of the States, except Iraq, significant portions of the population are foreign non-citizens – about 37% in Saudi Arabia, 50 in Bahrain and Oman, 79 in Kuwait, 88 in the UAE, and 88 in Qatar.

The Gulf's tribal networks were historically a fundamental element of social relations. While the region's governments have attempted to supplant tribal allegiances with national identity in recent decades, the tribe continues to play an important role in social life in most States.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Early regional inhabitants worshipped various gods and objects, such as the sun, moon, animals, and tribal heroes. Between 500 BC and the 5th century, Zoroastrianism, one of the world's first monotheistic religions, gained followers in the region. Although Christianity arrived in the Arab Gulf in the 1st century, most of the region's Christians fled or converted following the arrival of Islam.

In 610 AD, a merchant from Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia), Muhammad ibn Abdullah, began preaching the worship of 1 God, Allah, marking the founding of Islam. Through conquest and proselytization Muhammad and his followers had united the entire Arabian Peninsula under Islam by the time of his death in 632 AD (Painting: A 1307 depiction of Muhammad receiving his first revelation from the angel Gabriel).

Without a chosen successor to Muhammad, his death ushered in an era of infighting that eventually split Islam into 2 sects, Shias and Sunnis. This divide persists and occasionally causes conflict in the region today. Sunni Muslims began moving beyond Arabia shortly after Muhammad's death, making their way to Iraq in 638.

Since its introduction, Islam has been a defining factor in shaping the region's cultures, societies, and political systems. Today, Islam is the official religion of each of the Gulf States. Further, the majority of the region's non-citizen residents are also Muslim. While the Arab Gulf is also home to some religious minorities – primarily Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is – these non-Muslims are largely non-citizen foreign residents.

The Gulf States governments exhibit varying levels of religious freedom. For example, Saudi Arabian law does not recognize or protect religious freedom. While conversion from Islam is punishable by death, Saudi courts rarely inflict this sentence and instead issue lengthy prison sentences and lashings as punishment. Although the Iraqi constitution guarantees religious freedom, the government has been unable to stop recent acts of violence against Shia Muslims, Christians, and others (Photo: The Prophet Muhammad's burial site at Al-Masjid an-Nabawi in Saudi Arabia).

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

A fundamental element of Gulf society, family may refer to a person's household and extended family, clan (a group of families), or tribe. Family, clan, and tribal connections typically play an important role in an individual's life—they may determine a person's social status, potential marriage partners, business

opportunities, and inheritance rights. While residence patterns differ slightly among the States, multiple generations typically reside together in 1 household (Photo: Iraqi mother with her children).

Historically, marriage was an arranged union intended to bring both families social and economic advantages. Although arranged marriages are still common across the region, many regional residents now choose their own spouse, particularly in urban areas. Married couples typically live with the man's family. While divorce was traditionally uncommon in the Gulf States, divorce rates have increased in some of the Gulf States yet remained steady in others. Of note, polygyny, the practice of a man having multiple wives, is legal in the Gulf States.

The urbanization of Gulf society has changed family life in recent years. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available primarily in urban areas, family structures have become much more diverse.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Arab Gulf States' cultures and religions (primarily Islam) traditionally privilege the male's role as leader and provider. For example, Sharia law grants men privileges in inheritance and other family matters. While most of the region's inhabitants continue to adhere to traditional gender roles—men as breadwinners and guardians and women as mothers and companions—recent influences from external and internal sources have introduced some changes.

Women, like most men, were largely uneducated for much of the Gulf's history. In recent decades, literacy rates for women have increased significantly across the Gulf. Further, women now make up more than 50% of the university student population in all States, although they often face challenges to getting their education. For example, women are often encouraged to pursue traditional "female" disciplines such as education and healthcare. In Kuwait, they are required to score higher than men on entrance exams for traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering.

Because the Gulf States' legal systems permit gender-based discrimination, women are far less likely to participate in politics than men. Some progress has occurred: Saudi Arabia became the last Arab Gulf State to extend the right to vote to women in 2015. Although women may serve in prominent diplomatic and judicial posts, the number of women serving in elected political office across the region remains very low (Photo: US Department of Commerce officials with students from Sultan Qaboos University in Oman and the University of Bahrain).

Historically, Gulf women rarely worked outside the home, a tradition that has changed over the past decades. For example, female participation in the workforce has increased 3-fold in Qatar and nearly 4 times in the UAE since 2003. Despite steps towards gender equality, women still face barriers to their full participation in society. For example, it remains traditional for male guardians to accompany women to events outside of the home, while many workplaces and schools continue to practice gender segregation.

Homosexuality is illegal in all of the Gulf States except Iraq, where it was decriminalized in 2003. Most Gulf residents consider homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender issues inappropriate topics of conversation.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

Arabic is the official language of each of the Arab Gulf States. Most residents regularly use 2 Arabic varieties—Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), derived from the classical Arabic of the Qur'an and used in school, the media, and in official government proceedings, and Gulf Arabic or Khaleeji Arabic, a widely spoken dialect. The residents of some States speak additional languages and dialects. For example, Iraq names Kurdish as its 2nd official language, and most Iraqis speak a unique dialect of Arabic called Mesopotamian Arabic. Some residents of Oman speak other Arabic dialects.

The Arab Gulf nations are also home to millions of non-citizens who speak their own native languages. These include Farsi (spoken in Iran); Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Balochi, Bengali, Pashto, and Urdu (spoken in South Asia); African languages such as Somali and Swahili; and Asian languages such as Thai, Tagalog, and Korean. English is also widely spoken in business and by the expatriate communities of the Gulf (Photo: Computer keyboard with Arabic script).

Generally, Gulf residents demonstrate respect, generosity, and hospitality in their communication practices. Residents tend to share information about themselves and expect Westerners to do the same: they may ask personal questions about salary, marital status (particularly of unmarried people of a certain age), and family. Regional residents commonly use gestures when they speak, particularly if they are passionate about the topic of conversation.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Prior to the 20th century, formal education in most Arab Gulf States was limited to ***madrasas***, religious schools that taught memorization of Qur'anic verses and the fundamentals of Islamic beliefs and practice, primarily to males. Following the 20th-century discovery of oil, educational opportunities expanded greatly. Bahrain became the first Gulf State to establish a public educational system in 1932. In the mid-1950s, governments began to establish departments of education and allocate funds for schools and other resources. An exception was Oman, where educational offerings until 1970 consisted solely of 3 primary schools reserved for 900 boys hand-selected by the Omani sultan (Photo: Al-Hidaya Al-Khalifia Boys school, the first public school in Bahrain).

Today, most of the Gulf States invest heavily in education, often at rates higher than many other developed nations. Consequently, adult literacy is over 93% in all States except Iraq where it is a low 86%. Further, the past several decades have witnessed a significant growth in the number of higher education institutions across the region.

Due to years of conflict, Iraq continues to have inadequate education facilities and a shortage of teachers and resources. Because many students are displaced, their education is often incomplete.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. By contrast, in the Arab Gulf States, establishing and maintaining relationships with others often takes precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner.

As in other Islamic societies, men and women in the Arab Gulf region often interact differently than Americans are used to. For example, in many parts of the Gulf unrelated women and men seldom interact, and when they do, it is only in group settings.

Concepts of personal space also differ from those in the US. For example, Gulf State residents of the same sex commonly sit and stand closer to each other than Westerners do. They may also touch more often during conversations than Westerners (Photo: Former US President George W. Bush and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia holding hands, a sign of close friendship among men).

Residents of the Arab Gulf States also tend to manage time differently. While residents typically agree in advance on scheduled start times, meetings frequently begin late. Further, Gulf residents may prefer to deliberate for an extended period before making final decisions.

The Arab Gulf States use both the Islamic and Western calendars. Because Friday is considered a holy day in Islam, most Arab Gulf States observe a Sunday-Thursday workweek, except for Oman, which observes a Saturday-Wednesday workweek.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of the Arab Gulf's forms of artistic expression, including its art, architecture, dance, music, and theater, reflect the region's Arabic and Islamic influences. Gulf artists historically favored geometric designs and patterns to depict plants, flowers, and animals on buildings, jewelry, and household items.

Due to historic trade relationships and intermingling of cultures, music and dance in the Arab Gulf States reflect Persian, Indian, and east African influences. Popular throughout the region, Khaleeji music combines local Bedouin (Arab seminomadic group) music with styles from Africa, India, and Iran.

For some regional residents, dance forms are an integral part of Islamic worship. Others perform dances only in same-sex settings. Many of the region's dances are done in line, circle, square, or semicircle formations with participants moving in tandem. Dances in the Arab Gulf are generally grouped by type, including warfare, work-related, "foreign," women's, weddings, healing, and Sufi religious dances (Photo: Iraqi National Folk Dance Troupe performs a traditional dance).

Regional residents practice a variety of arts and crafts including weaving (typically using camel or goat hair) and calligraphy – the art of handwriting in which artists transform letters and words into intricate designs. While soccer is the most widely followed sport in the region, wealthier residents also enjoy falconry, horse racing, and camel racing.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease

and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

While cuisine varies across the region, residents throughout the Arab Gulf use many common staple ingredients and spices such as mutton, lamb, and fish prepared with cardamom, turmeric, saffron, and dried limes. Fruits, yogurt, various salads, and rice are common accompaniments to meals. The most popular drink, tea is served sweetened and prepared either with or without milk. Observant Muslims in the Arab Gulf consume neither pork nor alcohol.

Health in most of the Arab Gulf countries has improved significantly in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant and maternal mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Most residents in all States except Iraq have access to quality healthcare that is largely subsidized by governments (Photo: Machbūs, a spiced meat dish enjoyed throughout the Gulf).

Years of conflict and the Saddam regime's defunding of public healthcare by 90% created significant problems in the Iraqi healthcare system. In 2009, with funding from the World Health Organization, the Iraqi Ministry of Health introduced a plan to reform and decentralize the country's healthcare system. Additionally, international humanitarian organizations have expanded their efforts in Iraq to provide healthcare to both the local population as well as those fleeing conflict areas.

The region's healthcare systems face several challenges, particularly rapidly growing healthcare expenditures associated with a large, aging population and lifestyle changes that have negative health implications. For example, fewer residents adhere to the region's traditional diet and instead have increased their consumption of pre-packaged and fast foods. Simultaneously, rapid urbanization, the increased use of

mechanized transportation, and a lack of dedicated green spaces for physical activities have led to an increasingly sedentary lifestyle for many residents. As a result, obesity rates have increased and non-communicable diseases (such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease) now cause more than 69% of all deaths in all of the Arab Gulf States, except Iraq (Photo: King Saud Medical Complex, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia).

Communicable diseases remain a concern in Iraq, where contaminated water supplies, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygienic practices contribute to the spread of typhoid, cholera, and tuberculosis.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Besides fishing and agriculture, the Gulf States' economies have been enmeshed with local and international trade since ancient times. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Arab Gulf's port cities were integral elements of the trade routes connecting India, Europe, and East Africa.

In the late 19th century, the region began exporting dates and pearls to new markets in Europe and North America. After global demand for pearls grew significantly around the turn of the 20th century, pearl diving became a major contributor to the economies of the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain before the industry collapsed in the 1930s. The region then entered a period of socioeconomic hardship until the discovery of oil.

The growth of the oil industry in in the 1950s-60s significantly changed the region. Within a few decades the States had transformed from some of the world's poorest countries to some of the wealthiest. This wealth has facilitated investment in infrastructure, enhanced the quality of life, and encouraged rapid urbanization throughout the region with the exception of Iraq.

Prior to 1980, Iraq had one of the most advanced economies of all Arab Gulf States. Years of conflict, however, have had a profound effect on Iraq's economy. In late 2015, Iraq implemented an economic reform proposal intended to cut excess government spending and crackdown on corruption (Photo: The Abraj Al Bait Towers complex in Mecca, Saudi Arabia).

Oil remains an important part of the region's economies today—in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, oil exports make up over 90% of government revenues. Over the past several decades, the Gulf States collectively have taken steps to reduce their economic dependence on oil through diversification efforts. For example, Bahrain has worked to develop its banking sector; Kuwait produces cement and ships and specializes in food-processing; Qatar is expanding its agricultural sector; and the UAE is investing in tourism, airport and aviation services, and facilities management services.

Despite these efforts, the region remains dependent on oil: all of the region's economies were adversely affected by the decline in oil prices and a reduced demand for oil during the 2008 global financial crisis. The States are currently exploring ways to adapt to the decline in oil prices that began in 2015.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology.

Most of the Arab Gulf States have invested heavily into extensive road networks. The governments of Oman and Saudi Arabia, for example, have put significant sums of funding towards building large freeways and roads that extend to remote areas. Despite years of conflict, Iraq's 37,000 miles of roads remain in relatively good condition. Six of the region's

governments allocated $250 billion for the construction of a regional rail network which will link Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar when completed in 2021.

Information technology is spreading rapidly throughout the Arab Gulf. Between 2000 and 2017, Internet usage grew from between 2 and 23 users per 100 people to between 80 and 100 users. The exception is Iraq where just 49 out of every 100 people are Internet users. Cell phones are extremely popular – the States report between 95 and 326 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people (Photo: Freeway in Dubai, UAE).

As the destination of 9% of all GCC exports, the European Union (EU) is the region's largest trading partner. The EU and the GCC States (with the exception of Iraq) are pursuing a free trade agreement. The Gulf States also maintain important trade relationships with several Asian nations. For example, China depends on the Arab Gulf for 43% of its oil imports, India for 38%, and South Korea and Japan for 83%.

The Arab Gulf faces challenges in meeting its growing energy needs. As a result of the region's rapid urbanization and population growth, the Gulf States are shifting from being energy suppliers to major energy consumers. Energy consumption grew by about 8% annually since 1972 (compared to 2% globally). While the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have less than 1% of the world's population, these countries now use more than 8% of the world's oil. Iraq has had difficulty meeting its own power needs, relying on imported electricity and petroleum products.

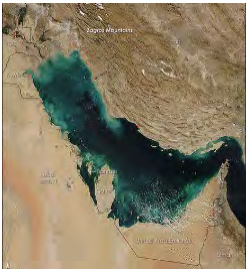
Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Arab Gulf society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Kuwait.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Ruled by the Al Sabah family since the mid-18th century, Kuwait has experienced tremendous societal and economic changes since its discovery of oil in 1938. After World War II, oil revenues were used to improve healthcare, education, and the nation's infrastructure, and with some 7% of the world's oil reserves, Kuwait became 1 of the world's richest countries. Iraq's 1990 invasion was quickly reversed by a US-led coalition but temporarily devastated the oil industry. Since then, Kuwait has recovered, and despite some political turmoil, remains a largely stable oasis of peace within a volatile region.



NOTE: While readers may know the body of water to Kuwait's south by its more common name, the Persian Gulf, this guide uses the name preferred in the region, the Arabian Gulf (Photo: Satellite photo of the Arabian Gulf).

Early History

Archaeological finds suggest that humans have inhabited the Arabian Gulf region for millennia. Evidence from the area of modern-day Kuwait includes stone tools and pottery fragments dating as early as 4,500 BC. Some artifacts suggest regional inhabitants had trade links with the civilizations of Mesopotamia centered in present-day Iraq.

Around 2,000 BC, the Kuwaiti island of Failaka became an outpost of Dilmun, a civilization centered on the Gulf island of Bahrain that traded with Babylonia (in present-day Iraq) and the Indus Valley (in present-day Pakistan and India). Roughly around that time, Gulf inhabitants domesticated the camel, first

to provide milk and then as a beast of burden. Nomadic pastoralists herding camels, sheep, and goats likely visited Kuwait from central Arabia. Between the 3rd-1st centuries BC, Failaka thrived as a Greek settlement called Ikaros before the Persian Parthians conquered the region in the 1st century AD. Through subsequent centuries, a series of Persian empires controlled the Gulf region.

The Spread of Islam

Following the Prophet Muhammad's 632 death, Islam (see p. 2-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) spread rapidly through the entire Gulf region as a result of proselytization and military invasion. Over the next 900 years, the Gulf region as a whole experienced social and political upheaval as Islamic dynasties and sects competed for supremacy. Meanwhile, Kuwait experienced periods of control by the Persian Buyid dynasty, the Seljuk Turks, and the Mongols (Illustration: A 1595 depiction of Muhammad leading his army).

Struggle for Control of the Gulf

Beginning in the early 1500s, the Arabian Gulf's lucrative trade in luxury items like spices, silk, and pearls gained the attention of various foreign powers. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to enter the Arabian Gulf, capturing some regional port cities and establishing forts. Portuguese activities attracted the attention of several other powers, including the Ottomans (centered in present-day Turkey), who managed to eject the Portuguese from Qatar in 1538. Seeking to rid the Gulf of the Portuguese entirely, the Persians then allied with the Dutch and English. By 1622, the Persians and British had driven the Portuguese from the Gulf, beginning centuries of British influence in, if not formal control of, the region.

The Founding of Kuwait

Meanwhile, ***bedu*** (Bedouin) nomads from Arabia continued to travel the region. Around 1672, nomadic families from the Bani Utub tribe of central Arabia erected a small fort at the site of modern-day Kuwait City. The name "Kuwait" derives from the

Arabic diminutive for the word ***kut***, meaning fortress. The site was an ideal port, and in subsequent decades, became a permanent settlement of merchants, traders, craftsmen, boatbuilders, and pearl divers. It also became an important center of trade both overland to the Mediterranean and central Arabia and overseas within the Gulf and to India (Illustration: Late 17th-century map showing Kuwait as a part of Persia).

The Arrival of the Al Sabah:

This period also saw the arrival of the ancestors of Kuwait's modern-day ruling family. After migrating from central Arabia by way of Qatar, the Al Sabah clan of the Bani Utub tribe gradually achieved prominence. In 1756, the Al Sabah ***sheikh*** (Arab tribal leader – see p. 5 of *Language and Communication*) became ***amir*** (leader – spelled ***emir*** in other Gulf regions) of Kuwait. Since then, all subsequent rulers have come from the Al Sabah family. Other members of the Bani Utub tribe left Kuwait for Qatar and Bahrain in the 1760s, where they founded successful pearling communities. Eventually, the Al Khalifa branch consolidated control of Bahrain, which they continue to rule today.

The Struggle for the Gulf Continues

During this period, the Gulf as a whole experienced turmoil, as various foreign empires such as the Persians, British, Ottomans, and Omanis struggled to expand their control and influence. Meanwhile, the Al Sabah also faced continued challenges to their hold on Kuwait from rival Arab tribes.

In the mid-18th century, Islamic reformer Muhammad ibn Abd Al Wahhab (founder of Wahhabism, the dominant Islamic ideology in Saudi Arabia today) joined forces with Muhammad bin Saud (founder of Saudi Arabia's present-day royal family) in an attempt to conquer Arabia. They also set their sights on Kuwait, compelling the Kuwaiti amir to seek and receive protection from the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, such rival Arab groups continued to periodically attack Kuwait for decades. Meanwhile,

the British viewed the Gulf as a vital conduit to their holdings in India. Facing attacks from Arabs and Persians on their trading posts in the Gulf and in Iraq, the British temporarily moved the operations of their East India Company to Kuwait in the 1770s, laying the groundwork for future British-Kuwaiti partnerships.

Pearls and Trade

In the 19th century, the Al Sabah rulers successfully kept the Ottomans, rival Arabs, and British at a distance, thus maintaining Kuwait's independence. A thriving pearl market and robust overland and sea trade supported an expanding economy, and at mid-century, the British opened steamship and postal services in Kuwait, further spurring growth. In the late 19th century, Amir Sheikh Abdullah II Al Sabah shifted away from neutrality in favor of closer ties with the Ottoman Empire, even adopting the title of a provincial Ottoman governor in 1871. However, the title was largely a formality and the Ottomans rarely interfered in Kuwaiti affairs.

Mubarak the Great and British Protection

Some members of the Al Sabah ruling family distrusted the Ottomans, suspecting they planned to annex Kuwait. In 1896, Sheikh Mubarak bin Sabah Al Sabah assassinated the Kuwaiti amir (his brother) and installed himself as ruler, while reversing his predecessor's pro-Ottoman stance. Subsequently known as Mubarak the Great (r. 1896-1915), he pursued an alliance with the British, signing an agreement in 1899 that granted Britain control of Kuwait's foreign affairs in exchange for protection by the British navy.

Although the Ottoman Empire continued to assert sovereignty over Kuwait for several decades, it was in no position to press this claim due to its ever-weakening state (Photo: Sheikh Mubarak, left, with Sheikh Khaz'al ibn Jaber in the early 20th century).

Mubarak brought significant changes to Kuwait that laid the foundation for the modern state. He improved the education and healthcare systems, established telegraph and water purification services, and reformed

government administration. Kuwait City saw significant growth: by the 1910s, some 500 shops and 3 schools served a population of about 35,000. However, many Kuwaiti men spent part of the year away from home, either on pearling boats or following their herds, reducing the permanent population to around 3,000.

After Mubarak's 1915 death, Kuwait was ruled by 2 of his sons: Jabir Al Sabah (r. 1915-17) and Salem Al Sabah (r. 1917-21). Since then, only descendants of these 2 sons have ruled Kuwait, splitting the ruling family into 2 competing factions (see p. 5-6 of *Political and Social Relations*).

The Decline of the Pearling Industry

In 1912, Kuwait's pearling industry comprised some 700 pearl diving boats employing some 10,000 men. By the 1930s, the Gulf region's economy began a notable shift. Not only did the worldwide Great Depression significantly reduce demand for pearls, the Japanese developed a cheaper way to breed oysters and make "cultured" pearls. These events resulted in a significant economic loss to the region. By 1945, just 5 pearl diving boats were operating in Kuwait. The industry eventually faded almost completely in the late 1940s, when newly-independent India imposed a heavy tax on pearls from the Arabian Gulf (Photo: Early 20th-century pearl divers in the Arabian Gulf).

Arabia Threatens

Meanwhile, the Al Saud family in neighboring Arabia continued its effort to consolidate power and spread Wahhabism. Led by Abd al-Aziz Al Saud, founder of the present-day Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, warriors from central Arabia called the ***Ikhwan*** (brotherhood) attacked Kuwait sporadically beginning in 1919. In 1920, some 3,000 *Ikhwan* stormed Kuwait's Red Fort. Outnumbered, the Kuwaitis were able to resist the attack, giving the amir time to request help from the British. The subsequent appearance of British planes and ships convinced the *Ikhwan* to

withdraw. Exercising its right to control Kuwait's foreign affairs, Britain excluded Kuwait from negotiations that drew new borders for Kuwait, Iraq, and what would become Saudi Arabia. In the process, Kuwait loss some 2/3 of its territory to Saudi Arabia, provoking significant resentment of the British. The new boundaries included a largely uninhabited Saudi-Kuwaiti "neutral zone," which the 2 countries pledged to share (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*). Later, Saudi Arabia initiated a trade embargo against Kuwait which had severe economic impacts (Photo: British military in Kuwait in 1928).

The Discovery of Oil

About the same time as the pearl industry's decline, Western oil companies began surveying for oil in the Gulf. In 1934, US and British firms joined to form the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) and by 1938, Kuwait's oil-producing potential was confirmed, though World War II (WWII) delayed exports.

Meanwhile, due to the Great Depression, the decline of the pearling industry, and Saudi Arabia's trade embargo, Kuwait was suffering a serious recession. Anticipating future oil income, several leading merchant families began petitioning for government reforms, notably the reduction of the ruling family's power.

In mid-1938, the members of this ***Majlis*** Movement elected a legislative assembly, which began debating numerous issues, most notably the use of future oil revenues. Meanwhile, the British were fearful of losing their access to Kuwait's oil and encouraged the amir to dissolve the assembly, which he did some months later after the assembly demanded control of future oil profits. While it was ultimately unsuccessful, this first pro-democracy movement planted the seed of popular representation in government among populations across the Gulf region.

Iraq Threatens: Sensing the potential for profits in Kuwait following the discovery of oil, neighboring Iraq made its first claim to Kuwaiti territory. Hoping to provoke an uprising, Iraq also verbally supported the 1938 *Majlis* Movement. Even after the movement's suppression, Iraq continued to press its claim, particularly for the strategic islands of Bubiyan and Warbah, located at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab river (Photo: Celebration for Amir Sheikh Ahmad al-Jaber Al Sabah, r. 1921-50, at Kuwait City's Al-Seif Palace in 1944).

Economic and Social Changes

With the end of WWII, oil exports finally began, bringing in much-needed revenue that would transform Kuwait's economy and society. By 1953, Kuwait was the Gulf's largest oil producer, though the oil firms were still largely foreign-owned. The oil industry's growth initiated the influx of non-citizen workers to perform unskilled work and fill professional and management positions. Consequently, Kuwait's population doubled between 949-57 and became 45% non-citizen. Further, Amir Sheikh Abdullah al-Salem Al Sabah (r. 1950-65) distributed oil revenues directly to certain members of the ruling family but also to the Kuwaiti population as a whole by implementing a range of social services, significantly improving the standard of living.

With its increasing wealth and vast oil reserves, Kuwait's standing in the international community increased. In 1960, Kuwait became a founding member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC – see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*), a group of oil-producing countries that has significant influence over the global oil market. It also founded the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC), a government majority-owned oil refining company that became part of the wholly government-owned Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC – see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*) in 1980.

Independence

In the late 1950s, Britain began reducing its oversight of Kuwait's foreign affairs. In mid-1961, Britain formally dissolved the 1899 agreement, ending its protection of Kuwait, and on June 19, 1961, Kuwait became fully independent. Just 6 days later, Iraq renewed its claims to Kuwaiti territory, though British and later Arab League (an association of regional Arab countries) forces rebuffed these efforts. In 1963, a new Iraqi regime formally recognized Kuwait's independence, though it continued to lobby for access to the 2 islands it had claimed in 1938.

At independence, Kuwait's population of around 200,000 was about evenly divided between Kuwaitis and non-citizens. With Britain's encouragement, Sheikh Abdullah expanded political participation beyond the ruling family, holding elections in 1963 for a National Assembly which subsequently drafted a constitution (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*). From the beginning, the National Assembly and the ruling family experienced tensions and power struggles. Factions disagreed on the pace of change and use of oil revenues, especially after the transfer of the majority of the foreign-owned KOC's concessions to the government-owned KNPC in 1962 (Photo: from left to right, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Sabah, and Abd al-Rahman Arif of Iraq attend the 1967 Arab League Summit).

Growth and Change

The oil industry continued to grow rapidly. By the mid-1960s, Kuwait had negotiated a revenue-sharing agreement with Saudi Arabia for oil pumped from their shared "neutral zone." Gradually, Kuwait expanded into oil refining, distribution, and other related industries. Meanwhile, Iraq continued to press its claims for Bubiyan and Warbah islands and even briefly occupied northern Kuwait in the early 1970s. In 1976, Amir Sheikh Sabah III al-Salem Al Sabah (r. 1965-77) suspended the constitution and dissolved the National Assembly.

Despite ever-growing oil revenues, the rising costs of associated benefits such as subsidized education, healthcare, and housing made it increasingly important to limit those benefits solely to Kuwaiti citizens. A pre-independence law granted citizenship only to those who could document their family's residence in Kuwait at least to 1920, an impossible task for many residents. This policy created a population of internal stateless people called ***bidoon*** ("without"), who continue to be denied Kuwaiti citizenship and associated rights to this day (see p. 13-14 of *Political and Social Relations*). Further, the government severely limited the path to citizenship of its non-citizen workers. Nevertheless, temporary migrants continued to stream in, comprising 60% of the population by 1985.

Iran-Iraq War

In 1980, war broke out between Kuwait's neighbors, Iran and Iraq, presenting a serious security threat to Kuwait. Fearing the intentions of post-revolutionary Iran, Kuwait sided with Iraq. Seeing the need for mutual support, Kuwait joined Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates to form the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981 to provide for regional defense and to coordinate policy on trade and economic issues (see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*).

During the 8-year war, Kuwait provided financial and logistical support to Iraq while enduring Iranian strikes on Kuwaiti oil facilities and tankers. In 1983, the US embassy in Kuwait was bombed, followed by an assassination attempt on Amir Sheikh Jabir III al-Ahmad Al Sabah (r. 1977-2006) in 1985. Although he had restored the National Assembly in 1981, Sheikh Jabir III responded to these increasing societal tensions by suspending the constitution and dissolving the National Assembly in 1986. He also introduced new measures to limit civil and political rights, prompting significant opposition and demonstrations in 1989-90 (Photo: A US Navy convoy protects a Kuwaiti tanker in 1987).

The Gulf War

Despite Kuwait's support to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, relations between the 2 deteriorated after the war's end in 1988. Disputes centered on Iraq's continuing claim to Kuwaiti territory, Iraq's rights to oil fields straddling their border, and Kuwait's insistence that Iraq repay debt incurred during the war. On August 2, 1990, Iraq under Saddam Hussein unexpectedly invaded Kuwait, quickly overrunning Kuwait's small military force and starting the Gulf War (also known as the Persian Gulf War). By the next day, Iraqi troops patrolled Kuwait City, and about half of the population fled, notably including Amir Sheikh Jabir III and most of the ruling family. The United Nations (UN) immediately demanded that Iraq withdraw, and when it refused, called for a worldwide ban on trade with Iraq. In response, Iraq formally annexed Kuwait as its 19th province.

Operation Desert Storm: Fearing that Iraq would next invade Saudi Arabia, the US immediately sent troops to the region. Within Kuwait, the Iraqi occupiers terrorized the Kuwaiti population, torturing and executing those who resisted, while plundering and looting businesses, government facilities, and private homes. Tensions mounted as the economic embargo showed little effect, and Iraq ignored additional demands to leave Kuwait. In response, the US, Saudi Arabia, and other allies under the authority of the UN began a 5-week bombing campaign in mid-January 1991.

The air campaign devastated the Iraqi forces, and on February 24, the US and its allies, some 500,000 in all, began a ground assault, entering both Kuwait and southern Iraq. Within 2 days, the allied troops liberated and reoccupied Kuwait City, where they were greeted with jubilation. On February 28, Iraq agreed to a cease-fire. As they retreated, the Iraqis destroyed much of Kuwait's oil industry infrastructure and set fire to 2/3 of its oil wells, many of which continued to burn for months. During the conflict, some 1,200 Kuwaitis died or were missing (Photo: US Air Force aircraft fly over Kuwaiti oil-well fires in 1991).

The Aftermath of the War

By mid-1991, many Kuwaitis who had fled began returning to find their homes damaged or looted. Residents suffered from insufficient food, water, healthcare, and shelter; important infrastructure was destroyed or inoperable; and smoke from the burning wells caused significant pollution. Further, societal tensions increased. Resentment rose against Kuwaitis, who had fled (including the ruling family), but also against those who remained, particularly non-citizens who were accused of collaboration with the Iraqis. Palestinian non-citizens in particular were suspects, and many were expelled despite their value as a highly skilled and educated workforce.

Upon his return, Amir Sheikh Jabir III instituted martial law, but as reconstruction proceeded, his grip loosened. Consequently, he allowed elections for the National Assembly in 1992 in which some opposition candidates emerged victorious. Suspicious of the loyalties of non-citizens, the government allowed only a minority of the non-citizens who had fled to return: while non-citizens comprised some 63% of the population just before the 1990 invasion, that number dropped to 47% in 1992 (Photo: Then-US Secretary of Defense Cohen, far left, meets with Amir Sheikh Jabir III, far right, in 1998).

Despite Iraq's defeat in Operation Desert Storm, Saddam Hussein remained in power for the next decade, provoking fears in Kuwait of another invasion. In 2003, US and British forces launched an invasion of Iraq with the aim of overthrowing Saddam Hussein. Kuwait acted as the staging ground for this invasion, known as Operation Iraqi Freedom, and provided important logistical support. The success of the operation brought relief in Kuwait, though the US' subsequent occupation of Iraq provoked some tensions. Since then, Kuwait has continued to host US troops deploying to both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Contemporary Kuwait

After suffering a stroke in 2001, Amir Sheikh Jabir III largely retreated from public life. Following his 2006 death, his cousin, Crown Prince Sheikh Sa'ad bin Abdullah Al Sabah, became amir. However, many Al Sabah family members considered Sheikh Sa'ad too ill to rule and pressed him to abdicate. He initially refused, sparking a political crisis among rival Al Sabah family members that was resolved only after the National Assembly voted to remove Sheikh Sa'ad from office, forcing him to step down. Consequently, former Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah and youngest brother of Sheikh Jabir III became the new amir. This development broke the long-standing agreement to alternate succession between the 2 branches of the ruling family (Photo: US President Trump welcomes Sheikh Sabah to the White House in 2018).

Over the next decade, disputes between the Al Sabah ruling family and oppositionists in the National Assembly (Kuwait has no political parties, just informal factions – see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) led to political deadlock and economic stagnation. Disagreements over the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches led the amir to dissolve the National Assembly and call for new elections in 2006, 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2016. Nevertheless, the period saw some notable political reforms. For example, Kuwaiti women won the right to vote and run for office for the first time in 2005, though no women were elected until 2009 (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*).

Diplomatic relations between Kuwait and Iraq were restored in 2010. During the 2011 "Arab Spring," when pro-democracy movements swept the Middle East and North Africa, opposition to the ruling family also flared. Youth activists outraged by political corruption joined with stateless *bidoon* pressing for citizenship and its associated benefits to demand political change. Concurrently, disputes between Shi'a and Sunni Muslim (see p. 2 and 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) factions caused

tensions. Protests peaked when oppositionists stormed the National Assembly in November 2011, forcing the Council of Ministers (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*) to resign. In response, Amir Sheikh Sabah dissolved the National Assembly.

The next year saw significant political turmoil. Faced with the likelihood that oppositionists would dominate the elections for a new National Assembly, the government initiated electoral reforms in late 2012 to ensure a pro-government outcome. In response, thousands of Kuwaitis gathered in large street demonstrations, which the police dispersed with tear gas and grenades. In response, most oppositionists boycotted the December 2012 elections, leading to a voter turnout of 40%, the lowest in decades. Consequently, the new National Assembly was heavily pro-government (Photo: Kuwaitis celebrate the “50/20” parade in 2011 honoring 50 years of independence and 20 years since Operation Desert Storm and Liberation).

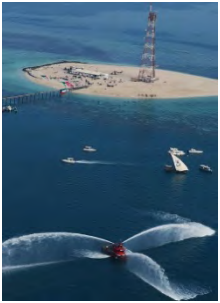
Nevertheless, political stability was elusive, and the amir ordered new elections in mid-2013, which many oppositionists again boycotted. Yet both the National Assembly and the Council of Ministers gradually became more representative of diverse factions. Following a 2015 terrorist attack (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*) and the threat to security caused by regional conflicts, the amir dissolved the National Assembly in 2016. An earlier drop in oil prices and decreased income had forced the government to reduce electricity, water, and fuel subsidies, causing consumer prices to rise and provoking hostility and opposition.

Consequently, the main oppositionists participated in the subsequent November elections, resulting in a voter turnout of 70% and producing a National Assembly roughly split between government supporters and oppositionists (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*). As of mid-2019, Amir Sheikh Sabah is 90 years old. He remains actively involved in governance amid discussions about succession within the Al Sabah family.

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Story-telling historically played a very important role among Arab tribespeople. Many stories tell of the exploits of heroes who are charitable, clever, loyal, and honorable, providing models of proper behavior. Others tell of evil spirits or relate the adventures of mystical creatures (Photo: A camel in front of a US military vehicle in Kuwait).

Several Kuwaiti folktales tell of "boogeymen," who use cunning and deceit to kidnap, harm, or eat children. For example, ***Hemarat Al-Gayla*** ("afternoon donkey") is a terrifying half-woman, half-donkey creature that seeks to capture children when the sun is high. By contrast, ***Tantal*** is a 10 ft-tall man with disheveled hair, who roams the night carrying a large cane to strike children. Other tales warn of the dangers of the sea. In particular, ***Bu Darya*** is a human/fish creature that appears at night to sailors. When the sailors try to rescue it, the *Bu Darya* drowns them.



Scholars suggest that such stories illustrate how difficult life was and continues to be for both desert dwellers and those who make their living from the sea. Further, they show how uncertain existence is and how quickly one's fate can change. While many tales instruct children to avoid the deadly mid-day temperatures, they all tend to emphasize that survival depends on rejecting the unfamiliar and unknown and adhering to tribal and family rules and habits (Photo: Celebrations in 2011 commemorated the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Qurah Island during the Gulf War).

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

State of Kuwait
Dawlat al Kuwayt
دولة الكويت (Arabic)

Political Borders

Iraq: 158 mi
Saudi Arabia: 137 mi
Coastline: 310 mi

Capital

Kuwait City

Demographics

Kuwait's population of about 4.42 million is growing at a rate of 1.27% per year, which is below both neighboring Saudi Arabia's (1.6%) and Iraq's (2.16%). Since 1993, Kuwait's population has tripled due largely to a large influx of foreign workers. Today, these non-citizen workers make up the majority of the population (70%), while Kuwaiti citizens constitute the minority (30%). Nearly all of Kuwait's residents live in urban areas in or around the capital city of Kuwait City.

Flag

Officially adopted in 1961, Kuwait's flag consists of 3 equal horizontal stripes of green, white, and black, with a black trapezoid to the left of the stripes. The design and colors represent the Arab Revolt flag of World War I. The red band stands for the blood spilled by swords, green symbolizes fertile fields, white denotes purity, and black symbolizes the defeat of the enemy.

Geography

A small nation situated at the northwestern tip of the Arabian Gulf, Kuwait borders Iraq to the west and north, Saudi Arabia to the south, and the Arabian Gulf to the east. Kuwait's territory includes 9 islands, the largest being Bubiyan, Warbah, and Failaka. Kuwait's total land area is about 6,880 sq mi, making it slightly smaller than New Jersey. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia share a 2,200 sq mi neutral zone that traces to a 1922 treaty (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). Since 1969, the 2 countries recognize a border within the neutral zone, though they continue to share oil revenues from the entire area.

The southern coastline features long stretches of sandy beaches, while muddy flats (***sabkha***) extend along the northern coast. The shoreline's most prominent feature is Kuwait Bay, a deep-water harbor, which Kuwait City has grown around. Kuwait's interior is characterized by mostly flat, barren desert interspersed with expanses of dry valleys (***wadis***) and small hills. Notably, the Jal al-Zour ridge overlooking Kuwait Bay reaches over 475 ft, while the country's highest point, Al-Shiqaya peak, is over 950 ft. The desert contains oases such as the Al Jahra at the end of Kuwait Bay (Photo: Kuwait's desert).

Climate

Located in an arid zone that stretches from North Africa to East Asia, Kuwait experiences a subtropical desert climate that divides into 4 seasons: hot summers, cool winters, and moderate fall and spring seasons. Summer occurs between May-September and is extremely hot and dry. Temperatures often exceed 100°F in inland desert areas and sometimes reaches as high as 130°F during the summer's hottest months. The months of October-April are characterized by more moderate temperatures, which range between 50°-86°F. Heavy rains from sudden cloudbursts occur during the winter months, sometimes bringing more than 2 in of rain per day. Dry, desert winds sweeping from the north and northwest generate powerful sand-laden storms (***shamal***) throughout the year (see "Natural Hazards" below).

Natural Hazards

Kuwait is vulnerable to relatively few natural hazards. Apart from a harsh climate and occasional flash flooding, Kuwait's most significant hazard includes *shamal* windstorms, which intermittently blanket portions of the country with thick, rolling clouds of dust and sand. At their worst, moving sandstorm walls may last for hours and reach over 1,000 ft, severely reducing visibility, forcing city closures, and generating dangerous driving conditions. Prolonged *shamal* winds sometimes also kill exposed livestock and contribute to various health complications, particularly respiratory diseases.

Environmental Issues

Kuwait's most pressing environmental issue is a lack of natural freshwater sources. With some of the world's highest water consumption levels, Kuwait relies on seawater desalination and non-renewable groundwater for its freshwater supply. Water reservoirs are stored in striped mushroom-shaped towers (pictured). Despite improvements in wastewater treatment and other initiatives, pollution remains a problem. Oil spills, sewage runoff, and other activity create marine and coastal pollution, while urban areas suffer from air and noise pollution. Notably, climate-change scientists recently predicted that the region is expected to experience temperature levels intolerable to humans by 2100.

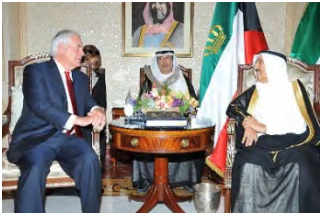
Government

Kuwait is a patriarchal constitutional monarchy controlled by a hereditary ruler, the Amir (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). Adopted in 1962, the constitution guarantees freedom, equality, and justice for all Kuwaiti citizens. Kuwait divides into 6 governorates (***muhafazah***), each led by a governor.

Executive Branch

Executive and many legislative powers such as the authority to ratify federal laws and decrees are vested in the Amir who acts

as head-of-state. Upon assuming office, the Amir appoints a Prime Minister (PM), who serves as head-of-government and leads a Council of Ministers (CM), composed largely of the Amir's family members. The CM oversees state institutions and presides over government policy, with each minister responsible for his own Ministry. Both the PM and CM are accountable to the Amir and the National Assembly (see "Legislative Branch" below). Prior to 2003, the Crown Prince, the Amir's designated successor, also served as the country's PM.



Kuwait's current Amir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir Al Sabah (pictured with then-US Secretary of State Tillerson in 2017), came to power in 2006 following the death of his brother Sheikh Jabir III al-Ahmad Al Sabah and the abdication of his cousin, Crown Prince Sheikh Sa'ad bin Abdullah Al Sabah (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*) less than 2 weeks later. He is the 15th consecutive member of the Al Sabah family to rule Kuwait. The current PM, Sheikh Jabir al-Mubarak Al Sabah, took office in 2011.

Legislative Branch

Kuwait's legislature is a single-chamber body called the National Assembly (***Majlis al-Umma***), an advisory body of up to 65 members. According to the constitution, 50 seats are elected by popular vote to renewable 4-year terms, while the PM may designate up to 15 seats to members of the CM. Kuwait's National Assembly is both the oldest elected legislative body among the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC – a regional economic and political union – see "Foreign Relations" below) and 1 of the region's more powerful. The National Assembly drafts and passes legislation and can hold votes of no confidence in members of the government. Further, it plays a key role in choosing the Crown Prince. The Amir has frequently dissolved the National Assembly over the last decades (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*). Elections for the National Assembly were last held in 2016, with the next elections due in 2020.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary primarily adheres to a system of ***sharia*** (Islamic) law, though it also observes elements of both common and civil law. As the highest courts, the Supreme Court (also called Court of Cassation) and Constitutional Court handle legislative and constitutional matters. A Supreme Judiciary Council composed of judges and Ministry of Justice officials recommends both Supreme and Constitutional Court justices, who are then appointed by the Amir. Other courts include the High Court of Appeal, the Court of First Instance, and a Summary Court.

Political Climate

Kuwait has a closed political system in which formal political parties are not recognized. Instead, informal political factions competing in the National Assembly elections divide largely into 2 groups: the ruling family's supporters and their critics, also called oppositionists (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*). Supporters generally include women, Shi'a Muslims (see p. 1-2 and 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) organized into the National Islamic Alliance, and less-educated Kuwaitis often called "tribalists." Critics and oppositionists, whose political platforms and ideologies vary widely, include Sunni (see p. 1-2 and 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) Islamists, youth groups, and highly educated and secular elites usually referred to as "liberals" (Photo: US President Trump and Sheikh Sabah at the White House in 2017).

Overall, the political arena is dominated by the large and influential royal family, the Al Sabah, which has ruled Kuwait since the 1750s (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). Members of the Al Sabah kin group occupy the majority of high-level government positions and consequently retain significant control over Kuwait's political environment. Conflict occasionally erupts between the 2 branches of the Al Sabah family, the Jaber and the Salem. Disputes often center on succession issues, as the office of Amir historically alternates between the 2 branches (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). Notably, this tradition was suspended in 2006

when Sheikh Sabah became Amir (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). Further, he has also disregarded this tradition by appointing his half-brother as Crown Prince.

Public and frequent disputes also arise between the Al Sabah family and the National Assembly, which the Amir frequently ends by dissolving the legislative body, the last time in 2016 (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). Kuwaitis have voiced dissatisfaction with the recurring political deadlock, which has notably stalled economic reform (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*) (Photo: US Army and Kuwaiti partners at a ribbon cutting ceremony at Khabari Crossing on the Iraq-Kuwait border in 2019).

Limited reforms have expanded political participation and introduced some democratic elements into the political system over the last decades. Since 1990, for example, the government has extended the right to vote to Kuwaitis who have been naturalized for at least 20 years and to the sons of naturalized Kuwaitis. Since 2005, women may compete and vote in National Assembly elections (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*). International observers considered the 2016 National Assembly elections generally free and fair. While oppositionists won nearly half of the seats, they rarely collaborate and instead are increasingly factionalized (Photo: A Kuwaiti soldier during joint training with US soldiers).

Defense

Kuwait's Armed Forces (KAF) is a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches with a joint strength of 17,500 active duty troops and 23,700 reserve

personnel. While the KAF is primarily tasked with protecting national sovereignty, it also participates in regional counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief efforts. Due to its small size, the KAF relies on the US, the GCC, and other international allies to defend against large external threats.

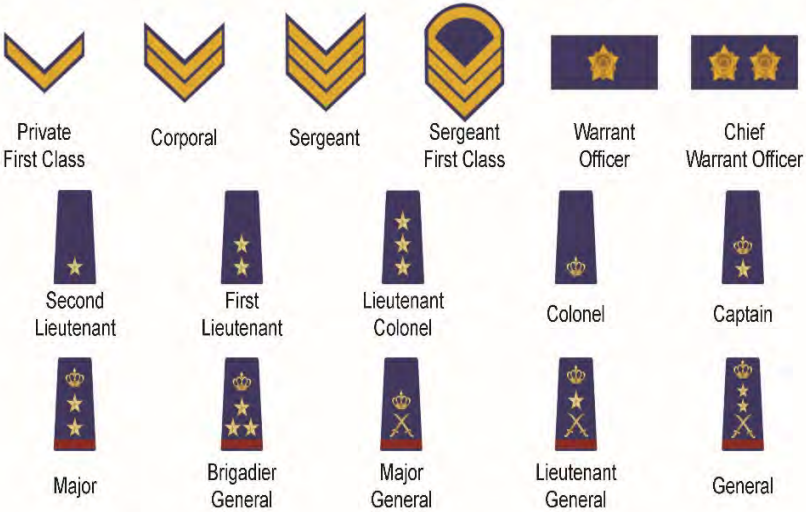
Army: This component is composed of 13,000 active-duty troops divided into a Special Forces unit, 8 maneuver brigades and battalions (including reconnaissance, armored, mechanized, light, among others), 3 combat support brigades and battalions, and 2 combat service support groups and field hospitals (Photo: Kuwaiti soldiers and medical personnel treat a simulated casualty alongside US soldiers during a 2019 training exercise).

Navy: Consisting of 2,000 active-duty personnel, Kuwait's Navy is a well-equipped force organized into 20 patrol and coastal combatants and a logistics and support vessel (Photo: Kuwaiti Naval Force members secure the beach during a beach assault exercise at a military demonstration in 2011).

Air Force: Composed of 2,500 active-duty personnel, Kuwait's Air Force divides into 2 fighter/ground attack squadrons, a transport squadron, a training unit, 2 attack helicopter squadrons, and a transport helicopter squadron. These components are equipped with 66 combat capable aircraft, 42 helicopters, and air-launched missiles.

Paramilitary: Kuwait's Paramilitary is composed of 7,100 active-duty personnel who divide into 6,600 National Guard and 500 Coast Guard members.

Kuwait Air Force Rank Insignia



Security Issues

Kuwait's security environment is dominated by the volatility of the Gulf region and associated threat of domestic terrorism inspired by the activities of regional militant Islamist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as Daesh, ISIL, and IS – a notoriously brutal militant Islamist group that recently has controlled large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria). To improve its counterterrorism initiatives, Kuwait partners with international allies, the US included. While Kuwait has been successful in preventing most attacks, a 2015 ISIS bombing of a Kuwait City mosque killed 27 people. Since then, Kuwait has focused on strengthening its border and control mechanisms, among other efforts.

Regional Tensions: In June 2017, Egypt and a Saudi Arabia-led bloc of several GCC members (notably not Kuwait) accused Qatar of financially supporting Islamist extremists and severed diplomatic and trade ties. The tension primarily stems from Qatar's relations with regional rival Iran and Qatar's longstanding support of the Brotherhood, a group that Egypt classifies a terrorist organization. Similarly, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia view the Brotherhood as a regional threat, and the US has recently considered labeling it a terrorist organization.

While somewhat tempered by Kuwait's attempts at mediating the conflict, tensions continued to escalate throughout 2017, with several other countries joining the Saudi-led movement to isolate Qatar. Some observers fear the deteriorating relations may lead to military escalation, though both Kuwaiti and Qatari leaders affirm their commitment to resolve the crisis through political dialogue and mediation. In late 2018, Kuwait hosted the military leaders of GCC member states, Egypt, Jordan, and the US to engage in a dialogue in support of a resolution of the rift (Photo: US Secretary of State Pompeo with Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Khalid al-Hamad Al Sabah in 2019).

Foreign Relations

Seeking to promote a cooperative political, social, and economic model for the Islamic world, Kuwait strives to cultivate and balance regional relations, notably prioritizing mediation and the peaceful resolution of conflict over the use of military force. For example, Kuwait has provided relief for victims of the Syrian conflict, humanitarian assistance to Iraqis affected by terrorism, and aid to Jordanians facing economic hardship. Notably, Kuwait is the second-largest provider of aid to Syrian and Iraqi victims of terrorism behind the US, providing over $9 billion in assistance since 2014.

Besides strengthening political and economic integration with its neighbors, Kuwait also seeks to expand its economy and the effectiveness of its armed forces through ties with the West. Kuwait is a member of numerous international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), World Bank, World Trade Organization, and Arab League, among others. Kuwait also participates in the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, a 57-member pan-Islamic organization seeking to improve the image of Muslims, promote peaceful conflict resolution, and counter Islamist extremism.

GCC: Kuwait participates in the GCC, an economic and political union that also includes Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. A significant regional force, the GCC strengthens the security of partner countries and promotes military and economic cooperation. Kuwait is an active GCC member and works to deepen cooperation among GCC countries (Photo: Medical officers from the Kuwait Land Forces and US Army watch as a Kuwaiti helicopter lands).

Relations with Qatar: While Qatar's independent stance in foreign policy causes some strain with Kuwait, the other GCC members take a stronger stance, viewing Qatar's involvement as dangerously destabilizing to the region. Kuwait remains reluctant to adopt the other GCC members' hardline policies

toward Qatar, choosing instead to maintain cordial bilateral diplomatic ties.

Relations with Saudi Arabia: Despite a history of conflict and disputes (see p. 5-6 of *History and Myth*), Kuwait and Saudi Arabia currently have close relations. Saudi Arabia played a significant role in reversing Iraq's invasion of Kuwait during the Gulf War (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). Moreover, Kuwait is currently participating in a Saudi-led military operation to suppress a rebel movement in Yemen, Saudi Arabia's neighbor. While Kuwait's neutral stance over the ongoing intra-GCC rift with Qatar somewhat clouds relations, bilateral ties generally remain strong.

Relations with Iraq: Kuwait shares a historically contentious relationship with Iraq, heightened by Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). In recent years, Kuwait has sought to stabilize relations in order to promote regional peace and reduce the likelihood of another Iraqi attack. Moreover, Kuwait provided some $550 million in aid to Iraq between 2003-11, and in 2018, hosted a conference that raised $30 billion to help Iraq respond to the destabilizing activities of terrorist groups (Photo: Kuwaiti guards at a roadside checkpoint after the withdrawal of Iraqi forces in 1991).

Relations with Iran: Kuwait views Iran's religious fundamentalism and suppression of protest movements as threats to the entire Arabian Gulf region. While Kuwait has partnered with the US and GCC allies to counter Iranian influence, it tends to favor a diplomatic approach over open hostility. Consequently, Kuwait engages with Iranian leaders, hosting, for example, Iran's President in 2017 in an attempt to establish a broader Iran-GCC dialogue on regional economic and security issues. As a result, the 2 nations share close bilateral ties that contrast sharply with the largely contentious relations between Iran and most other Gulf states.

Relations with the US: Kuwait first established diplomatic relations with the US following its 1961 independence (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). Over the next decades, the 2 countries forged strong bilateral economic, military, and political ties, with relations deepening considerably after the US, along with a multinational coalition, ended Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1991 (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). Kuwait has since become an important strategic defense partner to the US, working jointly with US forces to promote regional peace and security. Kuwait also provided a staging ground and logistical support during the US' Operation Iraqi Freedom (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: US Army BG Walker greets Kuwaiti Army Maj Gen Alameeri).

Today, the 2 nations participate in a formal Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), which facilitates cooperation on a range of issues, most notably counterterrorism and non-proliferation, affecting regional stability. The DCA allows the US to position military equipment in Kuwait, helping it project power in the region and enabling tactical and logistical support for various US operations. Moreover, Kuwait hosts some 13,500 US military personnel in several facilities located across the country – the 4th largest concentration of US troops stationed in a foreign country after Germany, Japan, and South Korea. To promote regional security, Kuwait assists the US in blocking the financing of various terrorist groups, supports intelligence gathering, and aids in US operations against ISIS. Kuwait notably hosts the operational command center for Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), the US-led military campaign against ISIS. In return, the US provides significant defense assistance to help insulate Kuwait from large, external threats and bolster Kuwait's military capacity and interoperability with US and other allied forces.

Ethnic Groups

Before the 1990 Iraqi invasion, non-citizens comprised some 63% of population. Government policies following the Gulf War (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*) reduced the size of Kuwait's

foreign workforce so that non-citizens comprised less than 50% of the population. However, this shift was temporary, with the non-citizen proportion growing rapidly in the last decades to reach 70% today. The presence of these non-citizen workers makes Kuwait's population quite diverse.

While Kuwait attracts workers from all over the world, most originate from South and Southeast Asia (40% of the population), a significant shift since before the Gulf War. Today, Asian non-citizens include Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, and Filipinos. Around 27% of the population are Arabs from other Middle East regions. Historically, Palestinians were the largest non-Kuwaiti Arab group until government policies following the Gulf War significantly reduced their presence (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*) Today, non-Kuwaiti Arab non-citizens include Egyptians, Iraqis, Saudi Arabians, Yemenis, Omani, Lebanese, Syrians, and Jordanians. Some 1% of the population originates from Africa, while Europeans, North Americans, South Americans, and Australians together comprise slightly less than 1%. Other non-Arab residents include Iranians, while around 100,000 stateless ***bidoon*** ("without" – see p. 9 of *History and Myth*) also reside in Kuwait. Meanwhile, Kuwaiti citizens make up a minority (about 30%) of the population. Nearly all Kuwaiti citizens descend from Arabian tribes (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: US soldiers pose with staff at a Kuwaiti children's hospital).

Social Relations

Kuwaiti society is organized according to kinship. Kuwaitis identify first with their family, which typically aligns to a group of families (a clan), which in turn belongs to a tribe. Family connections are the primary governing principles of Kuwaiti society and consequently influence almost all social, political, and economic interactions. The largest and most powerful family in Kuwait is the Al Sabah (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), although members of other families also hold important positions in the

government and economy, notably the historically powerful merchant families (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*).

The chief of a tribe is typically a ***sheikh*** (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). Succession does not always pass from a generation to the next. Instead, it can pass laterally to a brother, nephew, uncle or cousin. A sheikh wields his power through his ***wasta*** – connections, clout, and influence. Instead of issuing decrees or laws, a sheikh traditionally mediates between conflicting interests. To justify his claim to rule, a sheikh is bound to demonstrate deep generosity, both to his family members and society at large (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*).

The separation between citizen and non-citizen is Kuwait's most significant social division. Foreign workers exist outside the Kuwaiti kinship system and have little power in society. They are subject to strict labor laws that grant them few protections and have restricted access to healthcare, education, and housing. Despite recent reforms, observers note that employers still retain significant control over workers' residency status and freedom of movement (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*) (Photo: Kuwaiti and Filipino representatives sign an agreement on the employment of Filipino domestic workers in Kuwait in 2018).

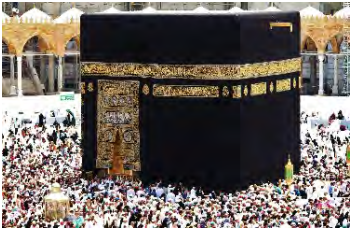
Kuwait's *bidoon* (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*) are in a particularly precarious position given their stateless status. The UN estimates that some 43,000 *bidoon* have a legitimate claim to Kuwaiti citizenship, but the government rarely recognizes their petitions and even denies them identification cards. Consequently, *bidoon* face difficulties finding employment and receiving services such as educational benefits (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*). The government did not meet its self-imposed deadline of 2017 to resolve the status of Kuwait's *bidoon*.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

According to government accounts, all Kuwaiti citizens are Muslim. While exact numbers are unavailable, most estimates suggest some 70% are Sunni Muslim, while the remaining 30% are Shi'a. Most of Kuwait's non-citizen residents are also Muslim: the government estimates that 63% of non-citizens are Muslim, 27% Christian, and 10% adhere to other faiths, most prominently Hinduism and Buddhism but also Sikhism and the Baha'i faith, among others.

Kuwait's constitution establishes Islam as the country's official religion but guarantees freedom for individuals to observe and practice other traditions that do not disturb public order or conflict with basic morals. Besides Islam, the constitution officially recognizes Christianity and Judaism and permits their followers to worship in public, though Kuwait has no Jewish synagogues. Followers of unrecognized religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism have no authorized places of worship and only conduct worship in private, typically in homes or rented spaces (Photo: The Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia).



Kuwait automatically classifies its citizens as Muslim and effectively denies them the freedom to change religion. Further, the law forbids proselytization by non-Muslims. Kuwait primarily adheres to ***sharia*** (Islamic) law, while recognizing separate courts for Shi'a and Sunni Muslims.

Early Spiritual Landscape

Many early regional inhabitants followed an indigenous faith characterized by the worship of multiple gods, as well as natural phenomena, such as the sun, moon, and animals. Further, important trial heroes were revered and often depicted as idols.

Other groups practiced animism, the belief that the spirit of life or consciousness resides in all objects, both animate and inanimate.

Between 500 BC and the 5th century, Zoroastrianism gained popularity in the Gulf region. Founded by Persian (Iranian) prophet Zarathustra between 1500-1200 BC, Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion that focuses on the divide between good and evil and uses fire as a form of worship. Although Christianity arrived in the region around the 1st century, following the spread of Islam in the 7th century, most members of Christian communities fled or converted to Islam.

Islam

Origins of Islam

Muhammad, who Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in 570 in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their values (Photo: Late 7th century Arabian Qur'an).

Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into 2 sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (***Caliph***) of the Muslim community (***Ummah***) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

Five Pillars of Islam

There are 5 basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray 5 times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship (Photo: US Marine at the Ka'aba in 2012).

- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.

Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the Book," referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in 1 God.

Abraham: All 3 faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

Scriptures: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

Jesus: The 3 religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for

the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

View of Death: Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven (Photo: US Army chaplain Shabazz speaks with Professor Al-Rasheedi of Kuwait University).

Concept of Jihad

The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

Ramadan

Observed during the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*), Ramadan is a month-long period for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life. Kuwaiti law requires Muslims and non-Muslims to refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking in public during daylight at this time, with infractions punishable by fines or imprisonment. Kuwait's Muslims typically break their daily fast at sunset with a meal known as ***iftar***. Ramadan includes several holidays:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** This "Night of Power" marks Muhammad's receipt of the first verses of the Qur'an.
- **Eid al-Fitr:** This "Festival of Fast-Breaking" celebrates Ramadan's end and is a national holiday in Kuwait.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the Hajj ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha:** This "Festival of Sacrifice" commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God. *Eid al-Adha* is also a national holiday in Kuwait.

The Arrival of Islam in Kuwait

Kuwait's proximity to Islam's birthplace in the Arabian Peninsula led to its early exposure to the new religion (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). By the time of Muhammad's death in 632, he and his followers had united the entire Arabian Peninsula, likely including the area of present-day Kuwait, under Islam through conquest and proselytization (Photo: Former US Secretary of State Kerry visits the Dar al-Athar Islamic Cultural Center in Kuwait City).

Religion Today

Islam

The Islamic faith features prominently in Kuwaiti society and is an important part of most Kuwaitis' identity. Islamic traditions inform socially acceptable public behavior for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, influence ethics and culture, and frame day-to-day living. For example, Islam's calls to prayer shape the daily rhythm, while the routine use of the phrase ***insha'allah*** ("if God wills") reveals the popular belief that God directly and ultimately controls all events. Children learn Qur'anic verses from an early age and receive compulsory Islamic instruction in public schools (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Sunni Islam: Most of Kuwait's citizens are Sunni Muslims, including the country's ruling family (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), and Sunni Islam enjoys the official support of the government. Further, 2 government ministries monitor and fund Sunni religious institutions. Oversight functions include approving the construction of mosques, guiding clerical affairs, and managing Islamic education, among others. The

government also appoints Sunni ***imams*** (worship leaders) and reviews and approves their sermons, censoring any inflammatory language that might incite sectarian violence.

Shi'a Islam: Around 1/3 of Kuwaiti citizens are Shi'a Muslims. The government provides no financial support to the community and even prevents the establishment of Shi'a religious training institutions in the country. Further, the government regularly denies or delays the construction of new Shi'a mosques, causing a lack of Shi'a worship facilities. By contrast to Sunni *imams*, the activities of Shi'a *imams* are largely exempt from government oversight. Shi'a mosques may choose their own *imams*, who compose their own sermons, as long as they avoid inciting sectarianism (Photo: US and Kuwaiti Army personnel participate in an exercise near a Kuwaiti mosque).

Christianity

The government recognizes 7 officially registered and licensed Christian churches: National Evangelical (Protestant), Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, and Anglican. The authorities prohibit churches from displaying exterior signs and symbols of the faith, as well as the congregation's name.

Religion and Society

Ruling family members and high-ranking government officials promote Sunni Islam in daily life. By contrast, members of Kuwait's Shi'a community tend to experience discrimination and other unfair treatment. Besides lacking religious training institutions and worship facilities, Shi'a Muslims rarely attain leadership positions in public sector organizations such as the police and military, and they remain significantly underrepresented in all levels of government. Further, a lack of Shi'a *imams* causes a backlog and shortage of staff in the Shi'a court system.

Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti government generally demonstrates respect of civil and religious liberties, recognizing several religions besides Islam and allowing adherents of those religions to worship relatively freely. Moreover, while it restricts public worship for some religious minorities, the government does not explicitly ban any religious groups, allowing unrecognized religious minorities to worship in private with limited government interference. Notably, the government is more likely to raid and close unlicensed mosques than unregistered non-Muslim gatherings. Citing security concerns since a 2015 mosque bombing (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*), the government bans all outdoor religious observances, while providing security for all licensed places of worship (Photo: US military members gather with Kuwaitis to celebrate Eid al-Fitr).

Unlike other Gulf countries, conversion from Islam is not illegal, but the government refuses to issue documents acknowledging a change in religion for its citizens. Further, unlike other Gulf countries, Kuwait allows non-Muslim religious groups to import religious literature for their own private use, though such literature is not be displayed in public or sold.

Nevertheless, laws ensure the predominance of Islam in society. For example, all students must attend Sunni Islamic instruction in public schools (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*). While laws forbid marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men, a Muslim man may marry a Christian or Jewish woman, though their offspring must be raised Muslim (see p. 5 of *Family and Kinship*). Because their religions are not recognized by the authorities, followers of any faith other than Islam, Christianity, and Judaism is not allowed to wed in Kuwait. Further, *sharia*-based rulings and penalties generally apply to non-Muslim residents, notably also in the cases of alcohol consumption (see p. 2 of *Sustenance and Health*), illicit sexual relations (see p. 5 of *Sex and Gender*), and inheritance (see p. 2-3 of *Sex and Gender*).

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

While urbanization and decreasing birthrates have altered housing patterns and family structures in recent decades, family loyalty, respect for tradition, and reverence for elders remain the foundation of Kuwaiti society.

Residence

Almost all of Kuwait's residents live in urban areas around Kuwait City. The government provides interest-free home loans and access to subsidized housing projects to Kuwaiti citizens. Consequently, they typically live in more spacious accommodations than non-citizens, primarily in neighborhoods around Kuwait City's downtown. These homes are typically rectangular, 2-3 story structures with a flat roof and central courtyard surrounded by walls for privacy and shade.

Most dwellings house multiple generations of a family and are often painted white, grey, or other colors that evoke the sky or desert, with many exteriors featuring marble facades. Although many villas feature modern, Western-style architectural elements, traditional interior designs remain common. For example, homes often include a separate ***majlis*** (living room) for entertaining guests or hosting weekly ***diwaniyah*** gatherings (see "Family Structure" below). These rooms typically feature thick carpets, coffee tables, and plush sofas (Photo: A villa in Kuwait City).

A home may provide separate quarters for staff and servants, usually non-citizens. Alternatively, non-citizen workers live in dormitories or apartments that are often crowded and of poor quality, usually in higher-density downtown areas or apartment block developments that radiate out from Kuwait City along major highways. Many ***bidoon*** (see p. 13-14 of *Political and Social Relations*) live in slum-like conditions on urban outskirts.

Some Kuwaitis retreat to weekend residences in the desert. Historically portable tents made of goat hair, today's desert dwellings are typically canvas tents with modern amenities like air conditioning and color TV. Tents traditionally open on 1 side and divide into a ***haram*** (forbidden area) reserved for women and a separate "public" section for men, where the family also receives guests.

Islamic Tradition and Physical Space

With the intention of protecting the chastity, purity, and honor of women, Islamic societies tend to limit interaction between unrelated members of the opposite sex by physically separating women and men during social gatherings.

Traditionally, Kuwaiti society also follows these conventions. Consequently, many Kuwaiti homes include separate dining and sitting areas, as well as separate bathrooms for men and women. While small families may dine together, large families commonly segregate by gender for social gatherings, especially when guests are present. Further, houses and compounds are typically surrounded by tall walls, meant to further shield women from public view.

Family Structure

Familial relationships are an integral aspect of Kuwaiti social organization (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*) and daily life. Generally, extended family members help each other, avoid actions that may bring shame to the family, and value the needs of the family over individual desires. Family structures are patrilineal, which means both ancestry and inheritance pass through the male bloodline. Children typically remain in the family residence as young adults and move into their own quarters after marriage. Kuwaitis deeply respect their elders, with children typically caring for their parents as they get older. Nursing homes are uncommon and are generally reserved for the ailing or those without close kin.

Male elders traditionally make most family decisions, often in consultation with other relatives during weekly *diwaniyah* meetings. These gatherings also serve as a time for male friends and family to enjoy refreshments, play games, and discuss business and politics in addition to family matters. Traditionally, Kuwaiti women manage all domestic affairs such as setting household budgets and supervising servants, typically non-citizens. Accordingly, women often have significant influence in the household. Today, some women hold their own separate *diwaniyah* meetings.

Polygyny: This term refers to the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. In accordance with ***sharia*** (Islamic) law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*), Kuwaiti men are allowed to have up to 4 wives if they have the means to treat all the wives equally. In practice, very few Kuwaiti men have more than 1 wife.

Children

Traditionally, families had as many as 10 children, who helped to fulfill household labor needs. Today, Kuwaiti women have far fewer children (see p. 5 of *Sex and Gender*). Extended family members help raise children, serving as mentors and supporting the parents as needed. Early in life, children are socialized within their respective gender groups, with boys often joining their fathers for *diwaniyah* meetings and girls helping their mothers with domestic tasks (Photo: A US Army Col talks with students at a high school in Kuwait City).

Allowed by *sharia* law, physical discipline or corporal punishment for disobedience is common. Although there are few accurate statistics on child abuse, government officials state that cases have continued to rise yearly but often are underreported due to unclear bureaucratic processes, cultural taboos, and a lack of properly trained support professionals.

Birth: In the Islamic tradition, the father whispers the ***adhan*** (call to prayer) into a baby's right ear and the profession of faith in his left immediately following the birth. Some parents celebrate a

birth by hosting a small gathering with relatives and friends and presenting them with boxed sweets. A week after the birth, the parents name the child, often after revered figures in Islam, senior family members, or positive character traits. During the first 40 days after birth, the mother and child share an intensive time resting together, typically separated from the rest of the family. During this period, many newborns wear amulets to protect them from evil spirits.

Circumcision: Kuwaiti boys traditionally underwent circumcision sometime between the ages of 2-12, signifying their membership in the Islamic community. Today, most newborn males are circumcised at the hospital immediately following birth (Photo: A US Army Maj plays with a child at a Kuwait hospital).

Marriage

Marriage in Kuwait is a significant rite that grants prestige, social status, and greater economic opportunity to both spouses. Traditionally, a marriage was an arranged union among families, typically between cousins or other distant relatives. It was often used to strengthen and extend alliances among the region's prominent families.

Today, arranged marriages among families of similar social status are still common, with some families hiring a matchmaker to assist in finding a suitable candidate. When selecting a potential spouse, families consider education, social status, religion, character, and wealth. Families generally do not force arranged matches, and either marriage candidate can reject a proposed mate. An increasing number of Kuwaitis choose their own spouse based on mutual attraction. While casual dating rarely occurs, Kuwaiti youth regularly meet through school, work, or social media.

The minimum age for marriage is 17 for males and 15 for females. Marriage rates have decreased over the last decade, with a 5% drop between 2016-17. Further, Kuwaitis tend to

marry later in life, with the average age of brides rising from 25 to 27 between 2006-18.

While some marriages between citizens and non-citizens are allowed, various laws discourage and regulate the practice. For example, the law forbids marriage between a Muslim woman (technically all Kuwaiti female citizens) and a non-Muslim man. While Muslim men may marry a Jewish or Christian non-citizen, the law considers all offspring of such unions to be Muslim. Marriages between Kuwaiti men and foreign women have become more common, reaching 25% of all unions in 2015. Marriage to a Muslim citizen of another Gulf nation is more acceptable than marriage to any other foreigner. To encourage marriage between citizens, the government offers cash incentives.

Bridewealth: Upon marriage, Kuwaiti men traditionally pay ***mahr*** or a so-called bridewealth to the bride, which becomes her sole property. A legal requirement for Islamic marriages, the *mahr* symbolizes the bride's financial independence. Further, some women rely on the payment in the event of a husband's death or after divorce. The *mahr* is subject to negotiation between the couple's families, and some opt for deferred payment over time to ease the financial burden.

Weddings: Typically segregated by gender, wedding festivities often last up to a week and consist of a series of family-sponsored celebrations. For example, at the ***Laylat al Henna*** (henna party), the bride and her female relatives and friends receive intricate temporary tattoos from henna (a plant dye – pictured). By contrast, some men's festivities occur outdoors such as the traditional lantern procession by the groom and his male relatives to the bride's home. Today, many Kuwaitis prefer to make this procession in a motorcade, often flashing their headlights in celebration.

The actual wedding occurs on the last night of celebrations and occurs at either family's home, a hotel, or a banquet hall. To

officially seal the marriage, couples sign a ***nikah*** (wedding contract). Afterwards, feasting and dancing are held for hundreds of family and friends, with men and women often performing traditional dances in gender-segregated groups in separate locales (see p. 4 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). The festivities historically concluded when the bride was carried on a throne to the groom. Today, the groom typically joins his bride briefly at the wedding venue, then the couple depart together.

Newlyweds traditionally spent a week with the bride's family before moving into the husband's family's house. Today, many couples leave immediately for a honeymoon then move into their own house upon their return. Kuwaitis may spend over $100,000 on the celebrations, often importing lavish food and decorations. To relieve the financial burden, the government provides loans for grooms, while some Kuwaitis divide the costs by holding group weddings of several couples.

Divorce: Although reliable statistics are unavailable, Kuwait has 1 of the highest divorce rates of Arab Gulf states, with a government reports suggesting that some 60% of marriages in 2017 ended within 1 year.

Death

According to Islamic tradition, Kuwaitis bury their loved ones as soon as possible after death, usually within 24 hours. The deceased is bathed, perfumed, and wrapped in a ***kafan*** (clean white cloth). Male relatives and friends transport the deceased to a mosque where a cleric offers prayers. Next, relatives deliver the deceased to a cemetery where the body is buried, usually with a simple stone or clay grave marker. Family members and friends gather for the graveside funeral service, during which they pray for the deceased and offer condolences to the family. For 3 days following the funeral, the family receives mourners, who offer further condolences and read prayers from the Qur'an. Following their husbands' death, widows traditionally observe a period of mourning called ***idda***, lasting some 4 months. Afterwards, they may remarry (Photo: Uqba ibn Nafi mosque).

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Although Kuwaiti society historically privileged men over women, this tradition is slowly changing. Taking advantage of enhanced educational and professional opportunities, Kuwaiti women participate in the workforce at high rates and make up the majority of university students. Despite these advances, legal and institutional discrimination plus certain cultural norms limit women's roles in society.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Women traditionally hold responsibility for childcare, cooking, and cleaning. Although many Kuwaiti women work outside the home, they remain responsible for all household affairs. Further, women often manage the family budget and oversee the household duties of domestic servants (Photo: US Marines train with members of the Kuwait Ministry of the Interior VIP Protection Unit, Female Division).

Labor Force: In 2019, about 50% of Kuwaiti women worked outside the home, a lower rate than in Gulf neighbor Qatar (57%), the United Arab Emirates (52%), and the US (56%) but higher than many other regional neighbors, such as Saudi Arabia (22%). Notably, Kuwaiti women comprise the majority of university graduates (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*) and hold some 55% of public sector jobs, primarily limited to education and healthcare positions. Women also hold positions in Kuwait's police and security forces and are represented in the private sector, notably also as managers and owners of large companies. As of 2016, women held 18% of seats on the boards of large companies, significantly higher than rates in Saudi Arabia (5%) and Qatar (7%) but on par with UAE (16%). Nevertheless, men typically receive preferential job placement and earn higher wages than women with equal qualifications.

Further, sexual harassment in the workplace is widespread and largely unreported.

Women make up some 40% of Kuwait's non-citizen workforce and typically hold domestic service jobs, often working extremely long hours and are sometimes subject to physical or sexual abuse (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources* and "Gender Based Violence" below).

Gender and the Law

Although Kuwait's constitution guarantees gender equality and prohibits discrimination based on sex, women face unequal treatment before the law. Judges frequently implement ***Sharia*** (Islamic) law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*), which tends to be discriminatory against women especially regarding citizenship, marriage, child custody, inheritance, and freedom of movement. Policies sometimes differ according to the specific school of Islamic jurisprudence followed (Sunni or Shi'a – see p. 1-2 and 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) (Photo: Kuwaiti and US women play soccer at Camp Arifjan).

Kuwaiti citizenship derives solely from the father. A Kuwaiti woman married to a non-citizen maintains her own Kuwaiti citizenship but is not allowed to sponsor her husband's citizenship nor pass it on to any children born to the couple. Male citizens married to female non-citizens face no such discrimination. Further, the law forbids Kuwaiti women from marrying a non-Muslim (see p. 5 of *Family and Kinship*). In the case of divorce, only men may unilaterally initiate and finalize a divorce. Woman may petition the court for divorce only in cases of harm or desertion. If a divorced Kuwaiti woman remarries, custody of her children automatically passes to their father or grandmother.

Further, under *sharia,* a woman's testimony in court is worth just half that of a man, though there are reports that Kuwaiti courts are increasingly disregarding this tradition. Unequal treatment also applies to matters of inheritance, with daughters entitled to

receive just half the amount that sons receive. A husband can forbid his wife from working outside the home if he deems it has a negative impact on “family interests.”

In addition to these legal restrictions, examples of unequal treatment are often rooted in tradition. While men and women may equally control and own land and other assets, women tend to be treated as dependents of men in social security and housing assistance matters. By contrast, men are typically considered the head of the household and directly receive and control generous government allowances and subsidies (Photo: US military personnel pose with a Kuwaiti woman during a Ramadan celebration).

Gender and Politics

Women gained the right to vote and run for seats in the National Assembly in 2005, yet no women won election until 2009, when 4 female candidates won seats, marking a high of female representation. Of the 454 total candidates in the 2016 elections, just 15 were women, and only 1 woman, Safa al-Hashem, emerged victorious. However, 3 women serve on the Council of Ministers (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*) and also participate in the National Assembly in an appointed capacity (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*). Some observers credit the low rate of women’s political participation and representation to Kuwait’s lack of political parties (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) and associated discriminatory candidate selection process within the informal political factions.

Nevertheless, Kuwaiti women today are registered to vote at a higher rate than men. Further, Kuwaiti women are represented in other important government offices. For example, the first group of female public prosecutors was hired in 2015. In 2020, this group will become eligible for judgeships, ending male dominance of the judiciary. Further, Kuwaiti women have served as diplomats and in ministerial positions. Women’s affairs offices

in several ministries work to boost gender equality, and the government's latest long-term strategic plan includes programs to prepare women for government leadership positions.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Rape is a criminal offense that carries a maximum penalty of death if committed by a relative, guardian, or against a minor under 16. Nevertheless, victims often fail to report rape due to the severe social stigma attached to the crime combined with their lack of trust in the authorities to protect them.

No specific law criminalizes domestic violence. While exact statistics are unavailable, a 2018 Kuwait University study estimates that 53% of Kuwaiti women have been victims of domestic violence. Authorities often fail to take reports of violence seriously and subsequently release victims back to their male guardians, who are sometimes their abusers. Even if crimes are reported and investigated, perpetrators often receive no or little punishment. For example, judges frequently prioritize family reconciliation over victim protection, and a rapist may avoid a prison sentence if he marries the victim with her legal guardian's consent. Kuwait currently has no shelters specifically for victims of GBV (Photo: A Kuwaiti woman listens to a speech by former US President George W. Bush).

Excluded from many legal protections and often denied any recourse, Kuwait's non-citizen female workforce is especially vulnerable to GBV. Employers often misuse the ***kafala*** labor sponsorship system (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*), preventing non-citizen workers' escape from abusive situations. Further, non-citizen domestic workers usually live secluded in their employers' homes and therefore rarely report abuse for fear of losing their employment and housing. Countries such as the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Indonesia have intervened to help Kuwaiti authorities regulate their citizens' employment after accusations of abuse.

Sex and Procreation

Kuwaitis consider sexual intimacy a private matter. Public displays of affection such as kissing and holding hands are socially unacceptable and even criminalized. Further, sexual relations outside of marriage are illegal. For example, to receive maternity care, a pregnant woman must present a certificate of marriage. A pregnant woman unable to produce a certificate are subject to prosecution, imprisonment, or other punishment. All such laws apply to citizens and non-citizens alike.

The birthrate in Kuwait has dropped considerably in recent decades from 7.2 children per woman in 1960 to 2.26 in 2020, higher than in neighboring Saudi Arabia (1.95) and Qatar (1.88), and higher than the US (1.84). This drop is partly due to the large influx of non-citizens during recent decades, who tend to not have children while living temporarily in Kuwait. Meanwhile, the decrease in birth rates among Kuwaiti citizens is primarily due to changes in women's place in society. As more Kuwaiti women become better educated, work outside the home, and marry later, they have fewer children (Photo: US Airmen receive a tour of the Kuwait Air Force Museum).

Homosexuality

Kuwaiti law criminalizes sexual contact between men, with punishments ranging from 7-10 years in prison. In 2017, some 76 men were deported on suspicion of homosexuality. While the law does not explicitly prohibit the same between women, some women have been targeted and charged with other offenses as part of so-called "morality campaigns." In addition, the law also prohibits "imitating the opposite sex," with punishment up to 3 years in prison. The Kuwaiti government censors or blocks LGBTQ material on the Internet (see p. 2-3 of *Technology and Material*) and does not allow the formal registration of LGBTQ organizations.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

The official language of Kuwait is Arabic, the native language of Kuwaiti citizens. Due to the influx of foreign workers from a variety of countries over the past few decades (see p. 7-9 of *History and Myth* and p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*), many other languages such as English, Arabic dialects, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Southeast Asian varieties are spoken.

Arabic

Most Kuwaitis speak a local dialect of Arabic known as Gulf Arabic or ***Khaleeji*** as their first language. The Kuwaiti variant of Khaleeji is called ***Hadari***. In school, Kuwaitis learn to read and write Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a standardized variety used across Arabic-speaking countries. Kuwaitis use MSA for writing, formal discussions, speeches, and in many national news broadcasts. With a 28-character alphabet, Arabic is written horizontally from right to left (Photo: The Kuwaiti Ali Al Salem Air Base sign in Arabic and English).

Khaleeji and MSA differ in vocabulary and pronunciation. For example, Khaleeji speakers may replace a “q” sound with a “g” or “j” sound. Similarly, they may replace the “k” sound with a “ch” sound, pronouncing the word ***kalb*** (“dog”) like “chalb”. Further, Khaleeji speakers often pronounce a “j” sound as “y.” Khaleeji is mutually intelligible with most other regional Arabic dialects except for certain local varieties from Iraq and North Africa.

Among Kuwait’s non-citizens, about 860,000 people speak dialects of Arabic such as Najdi (from Saudi Arabia), South Levantine (from Syria and Jordan), and Egyptian, all of which differ in notable ways from the Gulf Arabic of Kuwait.

English

English often serves as a common language among citizens and non-citizens. English is currently an important part of the national education curriculum and has been taught alongside Arabic in primary schools since the 1990s (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Several private schools and universities offer courses of study in English. Kuwaitis' English skills are often dependent on a speaker's age. In general, younger Kuwaitis in urban areas are much more likely to speak English than older Kuwaitis. Many foreign companies do business in English. Similarly, many non-citizen employees, regardless of their native language, conduct business dealings and negotiations in English (Photo: Kuwaiti license plate).

Other Languages

While exact numbers of speakers are unknown due to constant fluctuation in the foreign worker population, Kuwait is home to around 1.3 million speakers of South Asian languages, primarily Hindi (an official language of India) and Urdu (Pakistan's national language). In addition, at least 175,000 non-citizens speak Tagalog (the official language of the Philippines). Moreover, some 53,000 non-citizens speak Persian (the official language of Iran), while 27,000 speak Mehri (a south Arabian language spoken primarily in Oman and Yemen), and 24,000 speak Indonesian (the official language of Indonesia).

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Kuwait requires not only knowledge of Arabic, but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Kuwaitis' communication patterns reflect their regard for politeness, generosity, hospitality and respect for tradition. Accordingly, Kuwaitis devote significant time to greetings and other formalities such as inquiring about one's family and health in detail (Photo: US and Kuwait Army officers discuss an exercise).

In their interactions, Kuwaitis strive to emphasize respect for their conversation partners and their social status, while avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others, particularly in business meetings and in interactions with elders or social superiors (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*). The emphasis Kuwaitis place on politeness is evident in a widely-held preference for indirect or non-specific answers. For example, Kuwaitis tend to deliver bad news in a roundabout manner and often preface requests of elders or superiors with significant formalities.

Additionally, politeness demands that Kuwaitis express goodwill instead of criticizing another person's ideas. Consequently, a foreign national should avoid giving direct criticism, especially in public. Instead, he should combine indirect criticism with praise for any positive points, while reassuring the individual of his high regard for him personally (Photo: US and Kuwaiti dignitaries attend a commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait).

Further, Kuwaitis tend to provide a positive response to most requests, usually accompanied by the phrase ***insha'allah*** ("if God wills" – see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). However, this "yes" answer is not

necessarily a promise of action. Similarly, foreign nationals should not interpret a noncommittal answer to a request as neutral. Instead, such an answer might actually be negative.

In relaxed social situations among family and friends, Kuwaitis tend to be talkative, often repeating themselves to make a point or shouting when excited. Kuwaitis also tend to punctuate their speech with oaths to emphasize their point and exaggerate for effect. They tend to be tolerant of interruptions during discussions and several people speaking at once. Kuwaitis consider the display of emotions during discussions to be indicative of deep and sincere concern for the subject.

Greetings

Kuwaitis typically extend greetings with great care and respect. Upon entering a room, Kuwaitis say ***Salaam Aleikum*** ("peace be upon you"), and all present respond ***Wa Aleikum as-Salaam*** ("and upon you be peace"). Following this verbal exchange, men may shake hands lightly, exchange kisses on the cheek, or touch noses, depending on their status or nature of the relationship. To indicate deep respect and sincerity, men may place their right hands to their hearts after shaking hands.

Kuwaiti women commonly exchange cheek kisses when greeting, though women who are not well acquainted may only shake hands. Kuwaitis of the opposite sex typically do not touch when greeting. Men usually greet women verbally or with a nod, though some women may extend their hands for a handshake with foreign men. Foreign nationals should wait for members of the opposite sex to initiate the greeting (Photo: Then US Secretary of State Kerry greets Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sabah al-Khalid Al Sabah in 2016).

Names

Arab names for both genders reflect the genealogy of the father's side. The full name consists of a first (given) name, the

person's father's (first) name, sometimes the paternal grandfather's (first) name, a family name, and sometimes a tribal name. Some Kuwaitis include the term ***bin*** (son of) or ***bint*** (daughter of) between a person's given name and his/her father's name. Further, family names frequently begin with ***al-***, the article meaning "the." A*l-* differs from ***Āl*,** a prefix used to indicate a tribal name. A Kuwaiti's family or tribal name typically indicates membership in an extended family, a relationship with a tribal ancestor, or origins in a particular geographic location. Traditionally, a Kuwaiti woman does not take her husband's name upon marriage.

Forms of Address

Kuwaiti friends and relatives of the same sex usually address each another by first name. Honorifics such as military ranks and professional or personal titles (Dr., Engineer, Mr. or Mrs.) are often combined with the person's first name (e.g. Dr. Bill, Engineer Sarah). Children refer to their mother as ***um*** and their father as ***abu***. Kuwaitis address members of the nation's ruling family with the titles ***Sheikh*** (for males) and ***Sheikha*** (for females) (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*).

Conversational Topics

Polite conversation typically involves a series of elaborate and repetitive inquiries about the general well-being of each other and the extended family. For example, Kuwaitis may inquire ***Kayf halak*** (m)***/halik*** (f) ("How is your condition?") or ***Sho akhbarak*** (m)/***akhbarik*** (f) ("What is your news?"), among other queries. Male Kuwaitis usually avoid inquiring about another man's female relations, and male foreign nationals should do the same (Photo: US Army Maj Gen Walker converses with Kuwait Army Maj Gen Ali Al-Shanfa).

While Kuwaitis have a high regard for familial privacy, they are nevertheless often eager to share information about their family's economic status and social connections.

Likewise, they may feel comfortable questioning a foreign national about similar matters. As is common in other Arab countries, some Kuwaitis feel uncomfortable talking about unfortunate occurrences. Consequently, they may avoid speaking directly about topics such as illness and death. When confronted with a sensitive topic, foreign nationals should endeavor to change the subject rather than refuse to discuss the matter outright.

Additionally, foreign nationals should avoid certain general topics such as politics, religion (see p. 2 of *Technology and Materials)*, and regional conflicts, particularly those between Kuwait and its neighbors (see p. 9-11 of *Political and Social Relations*). Foreign nationals should avoid cursing, as it is deeply offensive to Kuwaitis.

Gestures

Kuwaitis often use gestures to augment and sometimes replace spoken words. To point, Kuwaitis use the entire hand (pictured). To beckon someone, Kuwaitis wave the fingers with the palm facing down. Holding the right hand out, palm upward, then touching the thumb and tips of the fingers together and slowly moving the hand up and down means “calm down,” “be patient,” or “slowly.” Holding the right forefinger up and moving it from left to right quickly several times means “no, never.” Kuwaitis consider the US “OK” sign offensive. Foreign nationals should avoid using the left hand when gesturing (see p. 3-4 of *Time and Space*) and avoid showing the soles of feet or shoes to Kuwaitis. Lastly, they should avoid walking in front of someone praying.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on “Resources” for access to language training and other resources.

Arabic Pronunciation and Transliteration

Transliteration is the process of spelling out Arabic words using the Roman (Latin) alphabet. The table below shows sounds or letters having no English equivalent or that vary from MSA pronunciations. When texting or writing informally online in Romanized Arabic, Kuwaitis frequently replace certain Arabic letters with numbers, also depicted below.

Arabic Letter	Transliteration and Description	Number (if applicable)	Example
أ	a	2	**A**frica
ع	‘a or aa	3	sound from deep in the throat as in the name **‘A**li or the instrument **‘ou**d
خ	kh; strong “h”	5	lo**ch** (as pronounced in Scotland)
ط	ṭ or t	6	**t**ar
ح	ḥ or h; whispered “h”	7	**h**oot
ق	g	8	**g**olf (pronounced like **cou**gh; transliterated q in MSA)
ص	ṣ or s	9	**sa**w
غ	gh; like the guttural French “r”		Paris (as pronounced by a French person)
ذ	dH; Soft “th”		**th**is
ء	’ (glottal stop)		pause in the middle of “uh-oh”
ج	y (or j)		**y**es
ك	ch (or k)		**ch**in

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Arabic (Romanized)
Hello (May peace be upon you)	Salaam Aleikum
Response: And upon you be peace	Wa Aleikum as-Salaam
How are you?	Kaifa haloka (haloki for female)
Hi	Marhaba
Good morning	Sabah el kheer
Good afternoon/evening	Masaa el kheer
My name is...	Esmee…
Yes	N'em
No	La
Please	Men fedlek
Thank you	Shukran
You're welcome	'Afwan
Good night (when leaving)	Tosbeho (tosbeheena for female) 'ala khair
Where are you from?	Men ayna anta (anti? for female)
Where do you live?	Ayna taskun? (Ayna taskuneen? for female)
I am American	Ana amreeki (amrekiah for female)
Do you speak (English/Arabic)?	Hal tatakallamo alloghah al enjleziah/alarabiah?
Today/Now	Alyawm/Al aan
Tomorrow	Ghadan
Yesterday	Albareha
The meal was very good	Alwajba tayba waayed
Look!	Onzor (Onzori! for female)
Excuse me	A 'ederney
Pardon?	Al 'efew?
I don't understand you	Ana la afhem 'eleyk
What?	Shoo?
Where?	Ayn?
How?	Kaif?
Me/you	Ana/anta/anti (you for female)
Him/her	Houwa/hiya
What time is it now?	Kam assa'a al aan?

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 96.1%
- Male: 96.7%
- Female: 94.9% (2018 estimate)

Early Education

Before the arrival of Islam (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*), inhabitants of the region's desert and coastal communities informally transmitted values, skills, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations. With the spread of Islam, more formal methods of education developed in which instructors gave lessons in Qur'anic verses, Islamic rituals and duties, and Arabic calligraphy to the children of elite families. An early form was the ***kuttab***, where students received instruction in arithmetic, science, and Arabic in addition to Qur'anic lessons in a mosque or in the home of an educator. Students typically were segregated by sex, and education for girls was primarily limited to religious studies.

In 1911, Kuwait's first formal private school opened, offering courses in bookkeeping, writing, history, and geography. Within a decade, 2 other private schools opened, marking the beginning of the development of formal education in Kuwait. Nevertheless, many wealthy families opted to send their children abroad for schooling (Photo: Kuwait's National Library in the 1960s; the site of Kuwait's first private school).

The Expansion of Educational Options

The 1936 creation of the Council of Education marked the first attempt to develop a state education system. With the influx of oil revenues after World War II (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), the government began allocating significant resources to expand educational opportunities, developing a system of kindergarten, primary, intermediary, and secondary schools. By

the 1960s, some 45,000 children were attending school, of which 40% were female.

The 1961 creation of the Ministry of Education (MoE) ushered in an era of centralized government control over education. The 1962 constitution provided for free education, including books, meals, uniforms, and transportation for all citizens, and by 1965, the government strictly enforced compulsory education for children aged 6-14. Around the same time, a network of private schools grew to serve the needs of the growing non-citizen population (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), though they remained under the supervision of the MoE. Between 1961-90, the number of schools in Kuwait increased from 140 to 640, while the number of teachers within the system increased 9-fold. By the end of the 1990s, educational spending accounted for some 18% of total government expenditure. From the beginning, the school system relied on foreign teachers, a condition that current employment policies seek to change (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*).

Modern Public Education System

Kuwait has maintained notable investment in education in recent decades. In 2015, the government allocated some 15% of its budget to education, slightly lower than the 17.5% average spent across the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC – see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*). However, Kuwait spends $14,300 per student, compared to the GCC average of $11,000 and US rate of $12,000. These efforts have largely been successful: since 1985, the literacy rate has improved from about 75% to almost 96% (Photo: US Embassy employee speaks with the principal of Kuwait City's Masoud Bin Sinan Boys Middle School).

School is mandatory for all Kuwaiti children from grades 1-9 and free from pre-school through post-secondary. In addition, Kuwaitis receive school-day meals, textbooks, and

uniforms at no cost. By contrast, education is neither compulsory nor free for non-citizens (see “Private Education” below).

The government closely oversees all aspects of public education. Students, segregated by sex, begin every day singing the national anthem, raising the national flag, and hailing the amir before reading an excerpt from the Qur’an. Further, the law requires Sunni (see p. 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) Islamic religious instruction in public schools, while prohibiting religious education in faiths other than Islam, notably also banning instruction about other faiths’ holidays. Further, the MoE bans the use of any works that refer to the Holocaust or Israel in instructional settings.

Kuwait has partnered with the World Bank to implement the 2011-19 Integrated Education Reform Program, a comprehensive transformation of the education system focused on modernizing curricula. In addition, the MoE launched the 2014 Schools Development Program, a partnership between private investors and the government aimed at increasing access to education, while improving facilities. Finally, the Kuwait Vision 2035 Development Plan (see p. 1-2 of *Economics and Resources*) highlights the importance of human capital and aims to develop a highly skilled citizen workforce through education.

Despite these and other reforms, plus continued high funding, educational outcomes are deficient. In international assessments in subjects like science and math, Kuwaiti students perform significantly lower than students in countries with similar income levels (Photo: A US Navy corpsman demonstrates how to treat an injury at a Kuwaiti middle school).

Pre-Primary: Some 62% of Kuwaitis of the appropriate age were enrolled in non-compulsory pre-primary programs in 2018. While public kindergarten is free for Kuwaitis aged 4-5, non-citizen students may only attend tuition-based private kindergartens and nurseries.

Primary: Primary school consists of grades 1-5. The standard national curriculum focuses on Qur'anic studies, Islamic education, Arabic, English, mathematics, science, social studies, information and communication technology, art, music, and physical education. In 2018, 88% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled (Photo: Americans and Kuwaitis enjoy a basketball game in Kuwait).

Intermediary: Comprising grades 6-9, intermediary school builds on the fundamentals of primary school. It adds subjects such as practical studies and social studies to the primary school curriculum, as well as home economics for girls. Upon successful completion of a year-end evaluation, students move on to secondary school.

Secondary: Non-compulsory secondary school consists of grades 10-12. After 1 year of the general curriculum, general secondary students choose between 2 tracks: sciences (math, biology, geology, physics, and chemistry), or humanities/arts (social studies, history, geography, economics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, sciences, French, and math). Students earning a General Secondary School Certificate are eligible for advancement to post-secondary school. Alternatives to general secondary school include specialized schools focusing on information technology, art, science, commercial and industrial studies, and foreign languages. In 2015, some 86% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary school.

Post-Secondary: Education in public post-secondary institutions is also gender segregated. Kuwait's flagship public university, Kuwait University, was founded in 1964 and enrolls some 37,000 students today, primarily Kuwaiti citizens. A new campus for Kuwait University is currently under construction. Called Sabah Al-Salem Kuwait University City, this new campus will be among the world's largest and serve some 40,000 students across 13 faculties. While construction was expected to end in early 2019, its opening has stalled.

The MoE offers higher education in technical and professional fields through the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. Kuwait is also home to a number of private universities, such as the American University of Kuwait, the Gulf University for Science and Technology, and the Australian College of Kuwait.

Kuwait's post-secondary enrollment rate (27%) is low compared to those of regional neighbors Saudi Arabia (61%) and Bahrain (37%). Notably, women make up some 60% of students. To encourage greater male participation, the government has lowered entrance requirements for men. Thousands of Kuwaiti students complete their post-secondary studies abroad, many through Kuwaiti government scholarships. Critics note that many post-secondary graduates are ill-prepared for the workforce. Educational reforms like Kuwait Vision 2035 attempt to overcome this mismatch between skillsets and job requirements and support the employment of Kuwaitis over non-citizens in both the public and private sectors (see p. 2-3 of *Economics and Resources*) (Photo: A US Army soldier watches a Kuwaiti paint).

Private Schools

Founded primarily to serve the needs of Kuwait's non-citizen population, private schools offer fee-based education that usually follows American or European co-educational curricula. The MoE licenses and inspects all private schools, which comprise some 40% of all K-12 educational institutions.

Education for the *Bidoon*

Due to their stateless status, ***bidoon*** (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*) children were long ineligible to enroll in public schools. While the government has not implemented a 2011 decree extending educational benefits to the group, it did permit 5,000 *bidoon* children to attend public school and allocated some 150 seats for *bidoon* at Kuwait University in 2015.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Kuwaitis believe that trust, respect, and consensus are fundamental to establishing both personal and business relationships. In general, public displays of affection are inappropriate and even unlawful, although social touching between friends of the same gender is common.

Time and Work

The Kuwaiti work week runs from Sunday-Thursday, and business hours vary by establishment type. While public sector employees generally work from 7:30am-2:30pm, private businesses typically open from 8am-5pm. Some businesses and shops close for a midday break from 1pm-4pm and consequently open earlier or extend the workday to 8pm. During Ramadan (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*), the work day is typically shorter (Photo: Interior of Souq Al Mubarakeya, one of Kuwait's oldest markets).

While some shops are open 8:30am-12:30pm and from 4pm-7pm, others are open all day. Most large shopping centers are open 9am-10pm or later. Many shops have limited hours on Fridays, the Muslim holy day. Most banks are open 8am-2pm or 3pm, Sunday-Thursday.

Working Environment: Labor laws limit the work week to 48 hours, with an 8-hour day/6-day week. Additional work requires overtime pay. Despite these laws, Kuwait's non-citizen workers are often exempt from protections and laws are underenforced, resulting in conditions of forced labor and lack of legal recourse for victims. For example, employers often abuse the ***kafala*** employee sponsorship system (a system of contracting and monitoring migrant labor — see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*), confiscating passports and withholding salaries, even though a 2015 law outlaws such practices.

Time Zone: Kuwait adheres to Arabia Standard Time (AST), which is 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Kuwait does not observe daylight savings time.

Lunar Calendar: Kuwaitis use the ***Hijri*** (Islamic) calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- February 25: National Day
- February 26: Liberation Day

These holidays occur on variable dates according to the lunar calendar:

- ***Eid al-Fitr***: End of Ramadan
- ***Eid al-Adha***: Festival of Sacrifice
- ***Mawlid al-Nabi***: Birth of the Prophet Muhammad
- ***Lailat al-Miraj***: The Ascension of Muhammad
- ***Arafat (Haj) Day***: Second day of the Haj pilgrimage (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*)
- ***Ra's al-Sana***: Islamic New Year

Time and Business

Kuwaitis tend to have a relaxed approach to time, considering schedules and deadlines less important than relationships and social obligations. Consequently, lengthy introductions and small talk may delay the start or progress of a business meeting. Further, Kuwaitis may interrupt meetings to take phone calls, confer with colleagues, and engage in prayer (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Kuwaitis may schedule multiple meetings simultaneously and receive several visitors at once.

Public Space

Kuwait maintains gender segregation in many public spaces. For example, restaurants often have separate eating areas, with men only in 1 section and mixed groups or families in another. Some stores, public parks, and entertainment venues offer special "family days," whereby men are permitted to enter only with their wives and children. Some pools and gyms maintain gender-segregated hours of operation, banks and grocery stores often have separate lines for men and women, and in the home, men and women typically have separate spaces for entertaining (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*). Further, all levels of public-school instruction, from pre-primary to post-secondary, are segregated by gender (see p. 3-4 of *Learning and Knowledge*) (Photo: A US Air Force SSgt converses with a Kuwaiti business owner).

Personal Space

In Kuwait, personal space depends on the context and nature of the relationship. In general, Kuwaitis maintain slightly more than an arm's length when conversing with strangers but stand much closer to family and friends. Friends of the same gender may maintain very little personal space when interacting.

Touch: Close friends and family members commonly touch each another while interacting, and friends of the same gender may hold hands in public (Photo: US Army Sgt with a Kuwaiti military liaison).

Displays of affection between members of the opposite sex are considered inappropriate (see p. 5 of *Sex and Gender*), which means that unrelated Kuwaitis of the opposite sex do not typically touch. Kuwaitis use only the right hand when eating, gesturing, passing and accepting items,

and shaking hands because traditionally the left hand is used for personal hygiene and considered unclean. Foreign nationals should adhere to this custom to avoid offense.

Eye Contact: Kuwaitis generally consider direct eye contact during greetings a demonstration of sincerity and tend to interpret shifts in eye contact as a sign of dishonesty. Men typically avoid extended eye contact when interacting with unrelated women.

Photographs

Mosques, airports, shopping centers, government offices, oil fields, and military installations may prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should always obtain permission before photographing a Kuwaiti, especially a woman or group of women. Because some Kuwaiti women (or their male companions) are offended by the request, foreign nationals should seek advice from their Kuwaiti counterparts before initiating such a request (Photo: US and Kuwaiti women play basketball at Camp Arifjan).

Driving

Like Americans, Kuwaitis drive on the right side of the road. Roads are generally well maintained with signage in Arabic and English. However, traffic is heavy in urban areas where speeding, poor lane discipline, and aggressive driving are common. Along desert highways, camels and livestock present hazards. In 2016, Kuwait's rate of traffic-related deaths was 17.6 per 100,000 people, higher than the US rate (12.4) yet significantly lower than Saudi Arabia's (28.8). Although laws mandate seatbelt use, Kuwait lacks a national road safety strategy and has taken few measures to reduce road fatalities (Photo: US Air Force security forces herd a camel along the perimeter of Kuwait's Ali Al Salem Air Base).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Kuwait's clothing, sport, music, and art reflect its Arab and Islamic traditions, as well as the country's place in the modern global economy.

Dress and Appearance

Standards of dress in Kuwait tend to be conservative for both Western and traditional attire. Both male and female visitors to Kuwait should also dress conservatively, avoiding shorts, mini-skirts, and sleeveless tops, except while visiting private beaches or pools.

Men: Kuwaiti men traditionally wear a ***dishdasha***, a collared, loose white robe designed to keep the wearer cool. This garment is complemented by a small ***gahfiyah*** (skullcap) worn underneath a white or red/white checked ***gatra*** (headscarf) that is secured in place by an ***agal*** (a braided, black cord). While white is the most common *dishdasha* color, other shades such as beige, grey, and navy blue are popular in the winter months. For special occasions, men often wear a dark-colored outer robe called a ***bisht*** or ***farwah*** that is trimmed with gold embroidery. Leather sandals are common year-round. Some Kuwaiti men prefer Western-style suits or casual business outfits, especially if they work in the private sector or when traveling abroad (Photo: Members of Kuwait's Criminal Investigation Division speak with US service members at Camp Arifjan).

Women: While many Kuwaiti women wear modest Western clothing such as loose blouses with long skirts or trousers, traditional women's wear includes the ***abaya***, a loose black robe that covers most of the body, accompanied by a ***hijab*** (headscarf). Women from very religious families tend to wear a ***niqab*** (face veil) that reveals only the eyes, or a ***burqa*** (full face mask). Under the *abaya*, women typically wear long skirts with

blouses, though young women may prefer Western-style clothing such as jeans, colorful designer dresses, and high heels. On festive occasions, some women wear the ***dara'a***, a long-sleeved, ankle-length dress. Typically more colorful and fitted than the *abaya*, the *dara'a* often features embroidery, sequins, or gold trim.

Children: Children and youth typically wear Western-style pants, shirts, and dresses on a daily basis, reserving traditional clothing for formal occasions. All public and most private schools require children to wear uniforms.

Recreation and Leisure

Kuwaitis tend to spend their leisure time with friends and family, often during regular ***diwaniyah*** gatherings (see p. 1 and 3 of *Family and Kinship*) or over meals to celebrate weddings, birthdays, and religious holidays. Kuwaitis also enjoy dining, shopping, and socializing at shopping malls and traditional covered markets (***souqs***) and visiting movie theatres, culture and recreation centers, museums, and parks. During the cooler months, many families enjoy excursions to the desert (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*) (Photo: A woman waves Kuwaiti flags during a Liberation Day parade).

Festivals: Kuwait hosts a series of fairs and festivals to attract international visitors. Notable events include the Hala February Festival, a month-long celebration of spring; the Al-Qurain Cultural Festival, featuring theater, poetry, and music; the International Music Festival, showcasing Kuwaiti musical traditions alongside acts from around the world; and the Pearl Diving Festival, celebrating the ancient traditions of pearl diving (see p. 2-5 of *History and Myth*).

Sports and Games

Soccer: Known as "football" in the region, soccer is the most popular sport in Kuwait. Ten teams compete in Kuwait's

domestic Premier League, and the men's national team competes regularly in the Asian Cup. Basketball is also popular, with Kuwait's national team qualifying more than any other Arab Gulf State for the FIBA Asia Cup, although it has yet to win a championship. At the Olympics, Kuwaitis have medaled in shooting. Kuwait was banned from all international sports competition from 2015-17 due to government interference in the country's sports governing bodies. Other popular sports include field and ice hockey, handball, and swimming. Kuwaitis also enjoy several water sports and activities such as sailing and motorboating, scuba diving, and jet skiing.

Traditional Sports: For centuries, regional desert-dwellers raced camels across the desert for sport. Today, Kuwait is home to several sporting clubs and tracks, which host weekend camel races often broadcast over TV and radio. During the race, owners and trainers drive alongside the track, following the camels that are jockeyed by remote-controlled robots.

Falconry is another popular pastime. For centuries, Kuwaiti men trapped peregrine falcons and trained them to hunt and return prey such as other birds and hares. Today, some Kuwaiti men practice the sport on weeks-long hunting trips, usually in Afghanistan or Pakistan. Prized birds can cost up to $100,000, and some trainers use drone technology for training (Photo: A trainer feeds his falcon after demonstrating the sport to US service members at Camp Arifjan).

Music

Traditional: Like other Arab Gulf residents, Kuwaitis historically composed music to accompany certain tasks. For example, captains of pearling ships would hire a ***nahham*** (professional singer) to lead songs as their ships sailed into the Gulf. Other traditional music began as vocal poetry with clapping accompaniment (***tasfiq***) that was later combined with drums and melodic instruments. Today, traditional music is often performed at family gatherings, *diwaniyas*, or during cultural celebrations.

Traditional instruments include varieties of hand drums, the ***surnay*** (flute), ***rababa*** (1 or 2-stringed fiddle), ***'oud*** (pear-shaped, fretless, stringed lute), and ***tamboura*** (6-stringed lyre, similar to a harp). Kuwait is 1 of the birthplaces of ***sawt*** ("voice") music, which has been compared to American "blues" due to its emotional and informal lyrics. Songs are typically performed by a lead singer playing an *'oud* accompanied by musicians on violins and small drums called ***marwas***. With its distinctive 5-tone scale and 6/8 waltz-like rhythms, ***Khaleeji*** music is a form that unites regional Gulf Arabic styles with traditions from Africa, India, and Iran. *Khaleeji* music typically features the *'oud*, while drums and clapping mark the rhythm.

Modern: Many Kuwaitis enjoy a modern pop version of *Khaleeji* music, though radio stations also broadcast Western and other Arab music genres. Popular musicians often incorporate Arab instruments with Western pop styles, with some composing in English. Despite censorship and restriction on some music sales and performances, Kuwait has underground rock, rap, and reggae scenes.

Dance

Dance has been an important part of Kuwaiti culture for centuries. Perhaps the most famous dance, the ***al-arda al-barriya*** (pictured) involves a circle of men waving swords and rotating in rhythm with drums to depict mock battles. By contrast, the African influenced ***leywa*** is often performed with drum accompaniment and features dancers, who swirl in a circle while gradually increasing their pace and intensity. Other dances were traditionally performed by and for women, such as the ***samri***, which involves a woman covering her face with a long garment sleeve, while performing steps meant to resemble a camel's walking gait. The ***baddawi,*** an energetic courtship dance, features women waving their hands in different motions to signify their marital status.

Literature

Kuwait has a rich tradition of poetry and storytelling. For centuries, men from isolated communities met to exchange news, tell stories, and recite poetry, often while sitting around a desert campfire. Some stories taught moral lessons, while others reflected the principles of Islam, defined tribal identities, or promoted certain values such as hospitality, generosity, and endurance (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*).

There are 2 types of Kuwaiti poetry: classical, based on verses and stories from the Qur'an and written in Modern Standard Arabic, and ***al-nabati***, written in *Khaleeji* Arabic (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*) and centering on topics from daily life. Kuwaiti prose authors in recent years have focused on the tensions between modernity and tradition, sectarian strife, and the status of the *bidoon* (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*), among other themes. Kuwaiti authorities have banned thousands of works by domestic and foreign authors it deems offensive to Islam or public morality, provoking significant protest and some demonstrations.

Folk Arts and Crafts

Traditionally, certain Sunni Islamic teachings (see p. 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) have prohibited the lifelike portrayal of humans and animals. Instead, traditional Kuwaiti visual artists have used geometric designs, repetitive patterns, and calligraphy to produce complex decorative motifs. Kuwaiti women traditionally used looms to weave camel and goat hair to make tents, camel bags, carpets, and other functional textiles. Other crafts include jewelry made from gold, silver, and pearls, model ships, and ceramics. To preserve its folk arts and crafts, the Kuwaiti government sponsors classes and festivals which showcase and teach traditional arts. Several museums and cultural centers focus on folk art, such as Sadu House, featuring traditional textiles, and the Tareq Rajab Museum, focusing on calligraphy (Photo: A US Army chaplain admires a large copy of the Qur'an on display at a Kuwaiti museum).

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social events in Kuwait. Friends and families frequently gather in the home or meet in cafes. Traditional Kuwaiti dishes tend to incorporate fresh, local ingredients, richly flavored with aromatic spices, often purchased from ***souqs*** (markets) or large supermarkets.

Dining Customs

Kuwaitis typically eat 3 daily meals and snack throughout the day. In more traditional households, female and male family members eat separately (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*), though this practice is changing among younger Kuwaitis. Even in households where male and female family members typically eat together, women and children usually decline to join a meal when unrelated male guests are present. To begin a meal, the host gives thanks to ***Allah*** (God) by saying "***Bismillah***" ("In the name of God"), then ends the meal by saying "***Al-hamdu lillah***" ("Praise be to God") (Photo: ***Shawarma*** – meat grilled on a rotating spit, sliced, and wrapped in flat bread with yogurt and vegetables).

Traditionally, Kuwaitis sat on carpeted floors and pillows during meals. Today, most Kuwaitis dine at Western-style tables and chairs. Before and after dining, hosts may provide a dish of scented water for diners to rinse their hands. Families typically share large, centrally-placed dishes, using their right hands to scoop food. Because they consider the left hand unclean, most Kuwaitis do not use it to eat (see p. 3-4 of *Time and Space*). A meal typically begins with a collection of starters (***mezze***) served with flat bread, followed by a main course. At large gatherings, food is typically served buffet style.

Diet

Prepared in a variety of ways, rice is Kuwait's most common staple and is served at almost every meal. Besides rice, most dishes include an animal protein such as lamb, chicken, or goat. Kuwaitis also consume many varieties of fish and other seafood typically grilled, fried, or dried. Most dishes incorporate a wide variety of spices such as turmeric, cinnamon, cumin, cardamom, and saffron.

Bread (***khobz***) is served alongside most dishes and comes in several varieties. A common form is a flat, unleavened disk about the size of a plate that diners tear into pieces to pinch up morsels of food in place of utensils. Bread may also be fried and seasoned with various toppings such as ***zataar***, a spread of sesame seeds, dried thyme, and olive oil. Fresh fruit is a common snack. Although dates are the most popular, other common fruits include mango, pomegranate, and mangosteen (a small, purple fruit with a white edible interior that has a sweet-tart flavor) (Photo: A Kuwaiti Army Col serves food to a US Army Maj Gen).

Observant Muslims consume neither pork nor alcohol. In addition, they adhere to particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is ***halal***, allowed by Islamic law. Unlike some other Gulf countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, alcohol is unavailable, even to non-Muslims. By law, it is illegal to import or possess alcohol and pork products, with infractions punishable by fines and up to 10 years imprisonment. Evidence of alcohol consumption such as public drunkenness is also punishable.

Meals and Popular Dishes

For breakfast, Kuwaitis often pair eggs with bread, salty cheese, ***labneh*** (thick, creamy yogurt garnished with olive oil or served strained with diced cucumber, fresh mint, and crushed garlic), olives, and jam. While lunch is traditionally the largest meal, dinner may also comprise multiple courses. Following *mezze*, a

typical main course consists of rice flavored with cardamom, saffron, and raisins served with seasoned chicken, lamb, or fish. A lighter meal may consist of bread, ***tabbouleh*** (a salad of cracked wheat, parsley, mint, onions, shallots, and tomatoes dressed with lemon juice and olive oil), and fruit.

Popular dishes include ***machboos***, a spiced meat and rice dish; ***khouzi***, baked lamb stuffed with rice; ***harees,*** slow-cooked lamb and ground wheat stew; ***margooga***, meat cooked with fresh vegetables and served with flat bread; and ***mutabbaq samak***, spiced fish over rice. Many Kuwaiti meals are prepared using the ***tabeekh*** method in which all components of the dish are placed in a single container for cooking.

Common snacks, also often served with coffee during a ***diwaniyah*** gathering (see p. 1 and 3 of *Family and Kinship*), include ***kibbe*** (fried balls of cracked wheat stuffed with minced meat); ***fatayer*** (fried pastries with various fillings); and ***warak enab*** (grape leaves stuffed with rice, meat, and onion). For dessert or a sweet snack, Kuwaitis enjoy ***baklava*** (a pastry of layered filo dough, nuts, and honey) and ***umm ali*** (a type of pudding). Dates are also a common treat, consumed dried, raw, or baked into various confections.

Beverages

Kuwaitis drink tea, heavily laden with sugar, and traditional Arabian coffee (***kahwa***), served black and spiced with cardamom, cloves, or saffron, throughout the day. Hosts or servers continuously provide refills until the guest gently rotates his cup to indicate he has had enough. Kuwaitis also enjoy fresh-squeezed juices such as pomegranate, mango, hibiscus, avocado, mint, and lemon (Photo: US military members enjoy Kuwaiti coffee and tea heated over hot coals).

Eating Out

Restaurants and cafes are popular sites for socializing with friends and families. Coffee shops offering ***shisha*** (flavored tobacco smoked through a water pipe) are also common gathering spots. Street stalls offer casual fare and snacks such

as slices of fresh fruit, ***falafel*** (fried balls of ground chickpeas), ***kebabs*** (skewers of meat), and *shawarma*. Restaurants serving Western-style fast food and other international fare are common. Restaurants commonly add a 10% service charge to bills; additional tips are neither required nor expected.

Health Overview

Kuwaitis' health has improved significantly over the last decades, largely due to substantial improvements to the healthcare system. Kuwaitis' life expectancy at birth increased from 66 to 78.6 years from 1970-2020, exceeding the global average of 74. Similarly, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) dropped from 53 deaths per 1,000 live births to 6.5 – 1 of the Arabian Gulf's lowest rates and similar to the US rate (5.3). Maternal mortality is 12 deaths per 100,000 live births, lower than the US rate of 19 in 2017.

Today, all Kuwaiti citizens have access to free public healthcare. By contrast, non-citizens (see p. 13-14 of *Political and Social Relations*) are ineligible for free healthcare and must pay an annual fee to access public healthcare services, which notably increased substantially in 2017. Further, special procedures incur additional costs

(Photo: US and Kuwaiti military personnel participate in medical training).

Traditional Medicine

This method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Kuwaiti medicine relies on herbal treatments to identify and cure the causes of illness, both physical and spiritual. Besides herbal remedies, common treatment methods include acupuncture (a process in which a practitioner inserts very thin needles into various parts of a patient's skin), bloodletting (the removal of blood from a patient for therapeutic purposes), and ***hijama*** (also known as wet cupping, the process of applying heated cups to the skin to

extract toxins from the body, improve blood flow, and alleviate pain).

Traditional medicine has received considerable official support in recent decades. Founded in 1984, the Natural Medicine and Rehabilitation Hospital offers many types of traditional and alternative medicine and is expanding its Chinese medicine capabilities. Further, the Islamic Medicine Center offers herbal remedies for a number of illnesses and has been a regional leader in establishing herbal medicinal standards.

Modern Healthcare System

The healthcare system offers free services at general hospitals, maternity hospitals, clinics, and specialized health centers to all Kuwaiti citizens. Further, citizens are eligible for free healthcare abroad if their medical needs are not met by Kuwait's facilities. In addition, numerous private hospitals and clinics offer high quality fee-based services (Photo: US and Kuwaiti military personnel participate in a medical training exercise).

Kuwait's government has recently increased investment in the healthcare system, allocating some 10% of its budget to the Ministry of Health (MoH) in 2016 and launching a variety of reform programs. For example, the National Program for Healthy Living (2013–17) promoted healthy eating habits and physical exercise, and healthcare was 1 of 7 key areas of reform targeted by the Kuwait Vision 2035 Development Plan (see p. 1-2 of *Economics and Resources*). Under the plan, the government intends to improve healthcare infrastructure by modernizing outdated and constructing new facilities such as the $1 billion Sheikh Jaber Hospital which opened in Kuwait City in late 2018.

Despite this progress, some Kuwaiti residents lack access to adequate care, with notable disparities between healthcare options for citizens and non-citizens. Prioritizing the needs of citizens, some public hospitals have banned non-citizens from

their facilities during certain times of the day. Further, the new Sheikh Jaber Hospital only treats citizens.

Kuwait's public facilities are generally well-equipped with the most up-to-date resources, yet overwhelming demand sometimes causes overcrowding and results in long wait times. Private hospitals and clinics address gaps in healthcare service and generally offer exceptional and timely care but are too expensive for many residents, particularly non-citizens.

Health Challenges

Despite significant government investment in immunization and post-exposure treatments, communicable and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, measles, and malaria accounted for 15% of all deaths in 2016, higher than in other Gulf countries. Communicable diseases disproportionately affect low-income non-citizen workers, many of whom live in crowded, sometimes unsanitary conditions (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*).

The social and economic changes of recent decades have caused an increase in chronic and non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases that are now the leading causes of death and accounted for about 72% of all deaths in 2016. While cardiovascular diseases contributed to about 41% of all deaths, other prominent causes included cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases. Notably, preventable "external causes," such as accidents, suicides, drug use, and smoking result in a significantly high rate of death, causing 13% of all deaths in 2016 compared to the US rate of 7%.

Obesity: An increasingly sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy eating habits have led to a surge in obesity over the last few decades. In 2016, about 74% of Kuwaitis were overweight, while 38% were obese, compared to the world's averages of 39% and 13%, respectively. Moreover, some 40% of Kuwaiti children are overweight. Increased obesity has resulted in the growth of associated diseases like diabetes, with some 15% of Kuwaitis suffering from the disease (Photo: Kuwaitis enjoy fast food).

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

Prior to the discovery of oil in 1938, Kuwait's economy centered on trading, fishing, and a declining pearl industry (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). Commercial export of crude oil began in 1946, and large-scale oil exploitation beginning in the 1970s brought significant economic growth. By the 1980s, Kuwait was refining 4/5 of its oil domestically. To meet the industry's growing labor needs, Kuwait began recruiting large numbers of foreign workers. A decline in oil prices in the 1980s caused the economy to suffer, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreasing by 21%. The 1990 Iraqi invasion and aftermath (see p. 10-11 of *History and Myth*) devastated the economy, costing Kuwait an estimated $5 billion. Nevertheless, pre-war oil production levels were restored by 1993.

As of 2019, Kuwait has the fourth largest economy of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, trailing Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar. Further, Kuwait's GDP per capita makes it the world's eighth and the Arab Gulf's third richest country, behind Qatar and the UAE. Average economic growth between 2006-17 was a healthy 2.14%, despite an economic contraction of -7% during the 2008-09 global financial crisis and a drop of -3.5% in GDP in 2017 due to oil production cuts by OPEC (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). Experts predict the economy will grow by 3.1% in 2020 (Photo: US military members conduct oil spill training exercises in Kuwait).

With some 55% of GDP and over 90% of exports related to oil and gas (commonly called "hydrocarbons"), Kuwait has sought to diversify its economy and thereby reduce its dependence on these products. In 2017, the government initiated the Kuwait Vision 2035 Development Plan, a sweeping, long-term reform strategy to stimulate the economy by expanding the private sector and concurrently reducing the government's role in the

national economy. Further, the plan seeks to attract foreign direct investment and grow tourism through an initiative dubbed "Silk City," a new free-trade zone slated to open within 2 decades consisting of skyscrapers, transportation infrastructure, residences, and business and sports complexes.

Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti economy remains heavily dependent on foreign workers. Of a workforce of about 2.75 million people, some 82% are non-citizens who mostly work in the private sector, sometimes in dangerous, unhealthy conditions and often without proper compensation. Kuwait continues to use the controversial ***kafala*** system, a sponsorship program that ties workers to their employers and facilitates serious human rights violations.

In 2015 and 2016, the government announced reforms expanding migrant workers' rights, though it has failed to strictly enforce them. Human rights violations attracted international attention in 2018, when a Filipino domestic worker was killed by her Kuwaiti employers. Subsequently, the Filipino President initiated a temporary ban on Filipinos' work in Kuwait until Kuwait agreed to improve migrant workers' conditions (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) (Photo: A member of the Kuwait Camel Racing Club introduces the sport).

Some 80% of working Kuwaitis are employed in the public sector, which offers higher salaries, better benefits, job security, and shorter working hours than the private sector. To encourage more Kuwaitis to enter the workforce, the government is pursuing a "Kuwaitization" program that gives citizens priority for hire into vacant positions. Aiming to replace all foreigners working in the public sector by 2023, the government has earmarked some 45,000 non-citizen employees for termination, though it is unclear whether that goal is achievable.

Meanwhile, Kuwaitis remain underrepresented in the private sector for several reasons. These include prevailing cultural and religious norms that discourage some women from seeking work

despite their significant educational attainment (see p. 1-2 of *Sex and Gender*) and a skills mismatch between Kuwaiti job-seekers and employers (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Challenges to Kuwait's future economic viability include its continuing dependence on hydrocarbon exports (especially given the recent slump in oil and natural gas prices) and its reliance on a non-citizen workforce. Further, long-term political gridlock (see p. 11-13 of *History and Myth*) has constrained economic growth and prevented Kuwait from reaching the higher levels of income available in both Qatar and the UAE. Finally, public sector employment is extremely expensive to the government, regularly making up 1/2 of Kuwait's total budget and consequently preventing investment in other areas (Photo: GCC and US Special Operations forces respond to a simulated hijacking of a Kuwaiti oil tanker).

Industry

Industrial activity accounts for almost 60% of GDP but employs less than 25% of the labor force as of 2018. Most activity involves the extraction, processing, and export of hydrocarbons by the state-owned Kuwait Petroleum Company (KPC).

Oil: Kuwait was the world's ninth largest crude oil producer in 2018 and, with 102 billion barrels of proven reserves, holds some 6% of the world's oil reserves. At its current rate of production of 2.5-3 million barrels per day, these reserves are expected to last over 100 years. The KPC planned to increase production to 4 million barrels per day by 2020.

Natural Gas: With 1.78 trillion cubic m of natural gas in 2018, Kuwait has the Middle East's seventh largest proven reserves. However, Kuwait's domestic demand outweighs production. Consequently, Kuwait imported 5.125 billion cubic m of natural gas in 2017. Natural gas is primarily used in oil production, to generate electricity, and to produce petrochemicals and fertilizers.

Manufacturing: Kuwait's manufacturing sector is responsible for approximately 7% of GDP and focuses on hydrocarbons and petrochemical products such as fertilizers, as well as textiles, metals, and chemicals.

Construction: With a $124 billion investment between 2015-20, Kuwait's infrastructure is experiencing significant growth. Major projects include a railway and metro system, the Sheikh Jaber Causeway, airport renovations, 45,000 housing units, and a number of oil-related facilities. Many of these projects are related to the Silk City initiative.

Services

The services sector comprised 40% of GDP in 2018 and employed about 72% of the labor force. Key subsectors include tourism and financial services.

Tourism: To establish the country as both a destination and transit point for international travelers, Kuwait has invested heavily in the tourism industry, which represents some 5.3% of GDP. Popular attractions include the Kuwait Towers (pictured above), the Hala February and other festivals (see p. 2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), resorts, museums, shopping malls, parks, and restaurants (Photo: Kuwait City's Al Qurain Martyrs Museum commemorates the site of a bloody showdown between Iraqi invaders and Kuwaiti resistance in 1990 – see p. 10 of *History and Myth*).

Agriculture

With an arid climate, limited freshwater resources, and little arable land (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*), Kuwait

has a very small agricultural sector, comprising just 0.4% of GDP and 2% of the labor force as of 2018. Consequently, Kuwait must import 98% of its food products.

Currency

Kuwait's currency (pictured) is the ***dinar*** (KD or دينار in Arabic), issued in 6 banknote values (1/4, 1/2, 1, 5, 10, 20) and subdivided into 1,000 ***fils***, which are issued in 6 coin values (1, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100). The dinar is pegged to an undisclosed combination of the currencies of Kuwait's major trading partners. As of mid-2019, 1 KD is worth around $3.29.

Foreign Trade

Kuwait's imports, totaling $33.6 billion in 2018, primarily consist of food, construction materials, vehicles and parts, and clothing. They were purchased primarily from China (17%), the US (9%), the UAE (9 %), Japan (6%), Germany (6%), Saudi Arabia (6%), India (5%), and Italy (4%). In the same year, Kuwait's exports totaled $71.9 billion and comprised primarily oil and refined hydrocarbon products and fertilizers destined for India (2%), China (1%), the UAE (1%), Iraq (1%), and Saudi Arabia (1%).

Foreign Aid

Kuwait contributes far more foreign aid than it receives. In 2015-16, the US provided just $58,000 to train Kuwaitis in nuclear security issues and $3,000 for the country's counternarcotic effort. Kuwait is a major donor, contributing some 2.1% of its GDP to foreign aid, 3 times the UN Official Development Assistance target of 0.7%. For example, the country has provided over $9 billion to support civilian victims in Syria and Iraq, and in 2018, joined Saudi Arabia and the UAE to donate $2.5 billion to Jordan to host Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Further, through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, Kuwait contributed some $304 million in 2015 to Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, Egypt, and Pakistan.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Kuwait has struggled to keep its physical infrastructure in step with its economic development, yet major projects currently in progress should improve services. Kuwait's residents have access to an advanced telecommunications network, although the government imposes restrictions on the Internet and media.

Transportation

Most Kuwaitis and some non-citizens have at least 1 privately-owned vehicle (POV) and usually travel within the country by POV or taxi. Some residents rely on Kuwait City's extensive bus system, operated primarily by the Kuwait Public Transport Company. Long distance buses provide service to locations beyond Kuwait City. Buses typically have a section at the front reserved for families and women. Ferries link the outer Kuwaiti islands to the mainland, as well as to international destinations like Bahrain and Iran (Photo: A street sign in Arabic and English in Kuwait City).

Roadways: Kuwait has a modern road system, with more than 4,600 mi of roadways, most of which are paved. Highways link urban areas and connect Kuwait to neighboring countries. The country's recent investments in public infrastructure aim to increase the length and reach of motorways. Significant projects include updating the Jahra Road, a central motorway passing from Kuwait City through the northern regions of the country, and the constructing of the Sheikh Jaber Causeway, 1 of the world's longest bridges linking Kuwait City and the Silk City development project (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*).

Railways: While no metro system currently exists, the government approved a $7 billion investment for a Kuwait City metro in 2017. The planned metro will span 100 miles over 68 stations and was projected to be complete by the end of 2019,

though it has experienced delays. Kuwait's national railway system, intended to provide both cargo and passenger service, is currently under construction. The first line, connecting Kuwait City with Saudi Arabia and the planned Mubarak Al Kabeer Port, is set to open by 2023. Further lines spanning a total of 350 mi will eventually link Kuwait City with the planned Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC – see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*) railway network and with Iraq.

Ports and Waterways: Kuwait's major ports are Shuwaikh, Doha, and Shuaiba. Mubarak Al Kabeer Port is presently under construction on Bubiyan Island. With a projected completion date sometime in 2019, the port aims to serve the Iraqi market, though Iraq has been somewhat hostile to the plans.

Airways: Kuwait has 7 airports, 4 with paved runways. Kuwait International Airport is home to Kuwait Airways, the state-owned national carrier, and Jazeera Airlines, a privately-held, low-cost carrier. Aiming to increase capacity from 7 to 25 million passengers by 2022, Kuwait International opened a new terminal in 2018 and has plans further expansion (Photo: Kuwait Airways plane).

Energy

As the world's 9th largest producer of petroleum products, Kuwait generated 100% of its electricity from fossil fuels in 2016. Until 2009, Kuwait met its own energy needs, but today, imports natural gas to meet domestic demand. As part of the Kuwait Vision 2035 plan (see p. 1-2 of *Economics and Resources*), Kuwait is investing in renewable energy to lessen dependence on oil, aiming to generate 15% of electricity with renewable energy by 2030.

Media

Although Kuwait's constitution guarantees freedom of expression and many observers consider Kuwait the Gulf's least repressive state, the media face significant restrictions. Laws make it illegal to insult Islam, Judaism, and Christianity; criticize the amir or the government; and disclose private information.

The government censors or even blocks certain media outlet websites, while a broadly-written cybercrime law restricts online freedom of expression (see “Internet” below). In 2015, the government banned *Al Watan TV* for “anti-government” comments, and in early 2018, sentenced a blogger to 25 years imprisonment for “insulting” Kuwait’s allies. Consequently, journalists often practice self-censorship, particularly on sensitive social, economic, and political matters. By contrast, foreign publishers and broadcasters face fewer restrictions

(Photo: Maen Al Rasheed speaks about Kuwait’s 1991 liberation from Iraq).

TV and Radio: Government-run Kuwaiti TV operates 8 different channels, while Radio Kuwait broadcasts on 9 channels, offering traditional and popular music as well as religious content. Residents may also access several private radio stations and television channels, also through satellite services.

Telecommunications

Kuwait has an advanced telecommunications infrastructure, with 18 fixed-line telephone subscriptions and 243 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people in 2018. The government partially owns 2 main providers of telecommunications services, Zain and VIVA (Kuwait Telecom Company).

Internet: Some100% of Kuwait’s population had Internet access in 2018, with 2.51 fixed broadband subscriptions and 130 mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 people. The government monitors the Internet, regularly censoring or blocking certain sites deemed offensive or indecent. A 2016 cybercrime law serves to restrict freedom of expression on the Internet by criminalizing criticism of the amir, religious figures, the judicial system, and Kuwait’s relations with other countries. Punishment ranges from fines to imprisonment. All Internet media outlets must obtain a government license, revocable if the outlet violates the rigid cybercrime law.

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