The Challenges of the Elections Systems of Persian Gulf Arab Countries

Omeh Leila Enayati [*]

Department of Political Science & International Relations, South Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract:

This article intends to clarify views regarding important challenges that have originated from the political, social, cultural and geopolitical structures in the elections systems of Persian Gulf Arab countries. Challenges that determine the compatibility levels of elections systems of these countries with the world's democratic systems. An efficient elections system is the prerequisite for the realization of democracy in political structures. Therefore satisfaction level is one of the examples of an efficient elections system. Fundamentally, it clarifies the democracy realization level in political systems.

This article attempts to review the elections systems of Persian Gulf Arab countries and the latest development in these systems, answering the following question: what level of democracy do the elections systems of these countries experience? And have the elections systems fundamentally shaped in the political structures of these countries or not?

This article with the aim of determining the benefit levels of elections systems in Persian Gulf Arab countries, the indexes of elections systems of the democratic world, presents, initially, a definition of democratic elections system, importance, formation of factors, elements and various systems, and then elections systems and recent developments of these systems in each of the Persian Gulf Arab countries is explained. At the end of the article while dealing with the elections systems challenges in these countries, summation and conclusions are presented.

Keywords: Elections System, Democracy, Persian Gulf Arab Countries, Challenge.

Introduction

If we deem democracy as an abstract concept, from which numerous interpretations are suggested, therefore the presentation of a firm and specific definition will be difficult, but some democracy characteristics in all systems and countries are the same and similar, including free elections, the rule of law,

[*]Corresponding Author's Email: Leila.enayatii@gmail.com

respect of the fundamental rights and free-doms of citizens, provision of justice and the separation and independence of branches of power. Meanwhile, the existence of an elections system and free elections is the most important characteristic and pillar of an excellent democracy, which fundamentally is the most important channel for the exercise of democracy and a criteria for the evaluation of the status and the role playing of the people in today's political systems (Bozorg-mehri, 2006: 5) and the legitimacy of these systems among their citizens.

In a sense, elections are the tools for the presence of the people and appearance of their will in determining political institutions and determining the custodians of power (Abbasi, 2011: 115). Through the elections channel and their elected leaders, the people can play a role in the decision making and executive arenas and monitor the running of the country (Kazemi Dinan, 2009).

In most democratic systems of the world, popular votes are used to elect leaders and representatives in important sectors such as parliament, presidency, city councils, munic-ipalities etc (Kazemi Dinan, 2009). But what is observed as the elections system in Persian Gulf Arab countries, are models unique to the region's culture and geopolitics, which in continuation have been described separately, and clearly show the conformity levels of these systems with examples and indexes of democratic elections.

What is a democratic elections system?
Elections or voting system in general is a method by which, the voters choose from the options, which is done through an elections and or through a referendum on an overall policy.

Good elections systems in fact guarantee the holding of in way credible elections, and determine how the ballots are collected and counted. These systems are important from the aspect that they are crucial institutions of a democracy, and they play a key role in de-termining the nature of a democratic system.

The most important formation factors of elections systems are: the development and democracy levels, political, cultural and eco-nomic effects, the size of the country and population, and also historic factors such as colonialism, popular revolutions and etc.

The type of an elections system is deter-mined from elements that include the voting structure, the polling station structure and the voting formula (Lundell, 2010, p.31). Some of the elections systems include: the majority system, proportionate representation system and combined system (Panahi, 2003: 2).

The characteristics of a an efficient elections system
Human sciences experts have categorized the characteristics that a satisfactory elections system must have to answer people's de-mands in a democratic system, and they agree on some of these characteristics. And they are:

1 – An elections system must have all es-tablishment and creation of national unity components in a country despite having eth-nic, religious and racial differences, and its outcome be the strengthening of national governance and provide today's recognized rights and freedoms of the people.

2 – A good elections system must be or-ganized in a way that it is recognizable, un-derstood and efficient for the people of the country in view of the social-cultural fabric of society.

3 – Strong, efficient and coherent political parties and groups of a country, fair and just competition between them are some of the most pivotal factors in the strengthening and effectiveness of an elections system.

4 – A good elections system must be flexible and show a positive and suitable reaction in proportion with political, social and cultural change of conditions of a society and the demands of political activists.

5 – A good elections system must designed and organized towards the sustainable development components of a country (Soltanifar, 2007:124).

Among these characteristics, political parties have special importance. In fact, political parties are a prerequisite for an efficient and democratic elections system, which decide the political participation fate of the people, and is an index for the democratic levels of political and elections systems of countries.

This index will be very helpful in recognizing the existence or nonexistence of efficient elections systems in the Persian Gulf Arab countries and or the efficiency levels of these systems.

Elections system in the United Emirates (UAE)

The UAE is a country situated in south-eastern part of Asia, in the Arabian Peninsula. It has a population of approximately 8,106,000 people, only 19 percent of which are ethnic Emiratis, 23 percent from other Arab countries and Iran, and approximately 50 percent from South Asian countries. The country is a federation of seven emirates, and was established on 2 December 1971. The constituent emirates are Abu Dhabi (which serves as the capital), Ajman, Dubai, and Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al-Quwain. Each emirate is governed by an absolute monarch; together, they jointly form the Federal Supreme Council. One of the monarchs is selected as the President of the United Arab Emirates (Bahmani, 2008: 64).

The UAE has one of the most undemocratic elections systems in the world. There is no right to public vote. The only elections that take place are the Federal Supreme Council elections which have four seats. Prior to the amendment to the constitution, all the members of the Council were chosen by the seven Emirates. Following the amendment, 20 members are elected by the emirs of the seven Emirates, and 20 elected by the people. It must be said that the citizens who take part for the election of the 20 seats are also vetted by the emirs. The members sit a two year term in the Council. The first elections based on the new constitution took place in 2006 (Ibid, 2008:65).

The emirs select a group of individuals (approximately 10 percent of the population) as "elections committees" and only these individuals can cast votes, and elect the rest of the Council members "from themselves".

The Federal Supreme Council has legislative duties, but in practice only consultative role is observed. The Council amends laws, approves the government's annual budget and at times questions the performance of cabinet members but only the emir can dismiss cabinet members (Rasekhoon, 2011).

One of the strangest parliamentary elections of the world is seen in the UAE; because not only the qualifications of the candidates must be approved, but also the electors or voters are also selected. In other words, the only people who can vote are those that are accepted by the rulers of the country (Asre Iran, 2011).

In the recent months, with the sweeping wave of democracy seeking in Arab countries, in an open letter to their leaders, Emirati citizens called for the suspension of the

voters vetting system so that all citizens can have the right to vote. In response the Emirates rulers called this action, act against national security and sent a number of signatories of the letter to court on charges of insulting the officials and acting against national security.

The most important thing the country's rulers have done with regards to increasing people's participation is to as it were respond to democratic demands by increasing the number of people eligible to vote!

For example for the 2011 elections, Emirati officials increased the number of people eligible to cast parliamentary votes from 80 to 129 thousand. This figure represents approximately 12 percent of the country's population (Asre Iran, 2011).

Another measure taken to respond to democratic demands of the people was to hold the elections electronically.

Adopting a new policy the Federal Supreme Council banned many citizens from political activities and voting and announced that by entering their name and national insurance number on a given website they could be notified if they are banned from political activities or not. The National Committee of the Council in the 2011 elections announced the names of individuals that included deceased people, mental health patients and very old senior citizens as eligible to vote, a measure that became the laughing stock of the country. Towards the undemocratic policies of the Emirates in the country's elections system, term "banned from participation" included many of the opposition inside and outside the country, and even some individuals with close ties to the current rulers. The reason for this has solely been because individuals had called for an election

where all the people can participate, so that the National Council can form with all monitoring and legislative powers (Shia News, 2015).

Another important point regarding elections in the Emirates is the activities ban on political parties of the country. Thus, only "independent individuals" are permitted to register for the National Council elections. In other words political parties do not exist in this country as a prerequisite for healthy elections.

Elections system in Bahrain
Bahrain is an island in the Persian Gulf with an approximate 700 thousand population, with a Shia majority, it is a constitutional monarchy ruled by the Sunni al Khalifa. The country gained its independence in 1971.

According to the constitution of the country, in appearance the three branches of power are independent, but in practice all the three powers are controlled by the emir. The emir has the power to select and deselect the crown prince, the prime minister, cabinet members, and appointment and dismiss any official of the country. Of course according to the constitution, members of parliament are elected by the people for a four year term (Rouhani, 2011, p.24).

In Bahrain, the elections are kangaroo elections and the parliament is just for show and has no power. The parliament has two houses, the lower house (elected representatives) with 40 members who are elected by the people to serve a four year term, and the upper house (appointed members) also with 40 members for a four year term who are appointed by the emir. Apart from legislation and setting the annual budget, the parliament has no monitoring duties, and has limited powers. The emir has the power, the royal

family and the upper house, which have the power to veto (Tabyin, 2014).

From 1971 to 1999 the conditions were very repressive and protests were harshly cracked down, and the brunt of the crackdowns targeted the Shia who are both majority population of the country and also impoverished. This situation was supported by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Jafari, 2014: 28).

In 1999 the new emir, Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the continuation of this situation which had resulted in the Shia majority to have no access to power, might soon result in regime change. For this reason, reforms and elimination of discrimination were promised, of these promises were only in words and did not satisfy the revolutionaries. Therefore another policy was adopted against the Shia. The "changing of the population demography" policy pursued a policy to give foreign residents Bahraini citizenships, thus more votes became available for elections. The demographics turned the population into 80 percent Bahraini citizens and 20 percent foreign nationals; 70 percent of the participants in elections were foreigners. This caused the people's disapproval and showed that any law that does not have the will of the people will face popular protests.

In 2001, the National Reconciliation Charter referendum was held, to which 98.4 percent of the voters voted yes. The Charter promised the independence of the judiciary, separation of powers, and the forming of an elected parliament, protection of the political rights of women and civil liberties. The people expected a new Bahrain after this referendum (Jafari, 2014: 29). And with the change in the constitution in 2002, the position of emir changed to king.

According to the new law, it was decided for a new parliament to be formed with the two houses of representatives and consultative. The consultative house had the power to approve or reject all legislations, and the right to amend the constitution was with the emir himself. In October 2002, the elections for the first parliament were held, where most of the members were appointed by the government and the royal family for this reason the elections were extensively boycotted by parties and Shia groups. The parliament was dominated by Sunni parties, made up of Manbar-ol-Eslmieh Party (Bahraini Muslim Brotherhood) and Salafis.

The second parliamentary elections were held in 2006. In total, the Al-Wefaq Party with the leadership of Sheikh Ali Salman won 17 seats, the Sunni parties, Islamic Tribune Party (Manbar-ol-Eslmieh) and Salafis won 13 seats and 10 seats were won by independent Sunnis who had special close relations with the government and the royal family.

The third elections were held in 2010, and because of extensive pressures of the government on the Shia, street protests and government accusations against some Shia groups, the majority of the Shia boycotted the elections. But the Al-Wefaq Party continued to show its presence. The 80 percent participation of the Shia was in respect to the Al-Wefaq Party. Of course, just as in 2006, the campaign slogans of this party were not extreme. They were not demands such as reforms to the political structure and resistance towards the demographic changes (giving foreigners Bahraini citizenship), but they things like fight against economic corruption, and more welfare. One year after the start of the 14 February, Al-Wefaq pulled its fraction from the parliament in protest against the crackdowns. In 2011 by-elections were held to fill in the empty seats, but none of the opposition participated. Despite the lack of executive power of the parliament, Al-Khalifa

feared a Shia win this is why some parts of the elections were split where Al-Khalifa supporters had 22 seats and the opposition 18 seats, and in 2014 this number dropped to 16 due to the new elections law (Jafari, 2014: 32).

The fourth parliamentary elections were held in 2014. This round had fundamental differences with the three previous rounds. Before, as the biggest Shia party, Al-Wefaq supported participation in elections and change through political participation. But in 2014, following a long period, the party joined opponents of the elections. Before this, Shia groups different policies on whether to hold talks with Al-Khalifa or not. But in this round of elections, they unanimously agreed on boycotting the elections. Domestically by conducting polls and extensive propaganda, the government tried to portray the elections as successful. But internationally, the legitimacy of the elections was put to question. Al-Wefaq, at one point was willing to hold talks with the Al-Khalifa, but failed. But against this, revolutionary movements had fundamentally rejected interaction and dialogue and did not see the foundation of the government as legitimate. In 2014, these two groups adopted a common stance in boycotting the elections.

Ultimately, the opponents of the show elections, held a two day survey, entitled "survey to review determining fate", and people voted for the form of future political system. The question of the survey was: "Do you want to choose your fate by choosing a new political system in Bahrain under the supervision of the UN? (Jafari, 2014)" The reply for this survey which was with the aim of increasing international supervision of Bahraini elections, and all individuals over 17 took part, 99.1 percent voted in favour.

With regards to political parties in Bahrain, the 1988 law banned political parties, but the law was reviewed in 1995. Currently political parties in Bahrain are still banned from activities, and there are no legal parties, but political groups have been recognised (Mojtahedzadeh, 1996). Some Shia fundamentalist groups and communists and leftists are active underground and illegally.

Elections system in Iraq

With a population of approximately 32,585,692, Iraq is the 40th most populated country in the world, and approximately 65 percent of its population are Shia. The country gained independence in 1932 and in 1958 the monarchy was overthrown and the Republic of Iraq was founded.

From 1968 till 2003 the country was run by the Baath socialist party. Following the US invasion of Iraq, the Baathist rule came to an end and a multi-party parliamentary system was established. The Americans ended their occupation of the country in 2011. But terror groups continued to fight. With the spilling over of the Syrian civil war into Iraq, these conflicts escalated.

The elections history of the country dates back to the country becoming a republic. Before that the parliament was founded in 1925 which tried to play a monitoring role, but in many periods, particularly during the Baathist rule, it only put the seal of approval on the party leader's decisions. The parliament to an extent continued its work until the 1958 coup. In also in a coup in1962 the Baath party overthrew the ruling system.

The first attempt for holding elections took place with the overthrow of Malek Feisal II and General Abdolkarim Ghasem's coup-de-tat (the changing of the monarchy

system to a republic). It took place in the presidential council in 1958. The duty of the council was the facilitation of presidential elections, but not even a year had past since the setting up of this council, when by removing the president of the council, Abdolkarim Ghasem in practice dissolved the council and became president.

In a coordinated operation between the Baath Party and the CIA Abdolkarim Ghasem was overthrown. Following that three more presidents came to power who were overthrown either via a coup or assassination. Ultimately Saddam Hussein came to power without the vote of the people. From here on in the Baathist Party became a totalitarian ruler taking over all matters of the country.

Following the fall of the Iraqi dictator, the people finally cast their votes on 30 January 2005, and the members of the transitional parliament or council were elected. The duty of this council was to draft the constitution. Due to the elections being held in very bad security conditions, there were calls for the postponement of the elections. But the request was not accepted and the elections went ahead. The elections were in the form of closed ballot and single circle (Ettelaat, 2014).

The people did not vote for individual candidates, but voted for their political parties or political coalitions. They voted for a list of individuals with similar beliefs, unless in some cases they wanted to vote for independent candidates. This method was useful for those candidates who feared assassination. But for the people who did not know their candidates, it brought nothing but confusion. Many people did not know who they had voted for even after the elections, which was very widespread in Sunni majority regions which had high security problems (Basirat, 2014).

From 2005 to 2014 two amendments were made in the Iraqi elections laws, which in comparison to other Persian Gulf Arab countries to an extent showed signs of democracy in the elections system of the country.

The first amendment in the elections law: this first amendment was made following allegations that the existing elections laws did not take into consideration the rights of the Sunnis. The issue was settled following an addendum in the laws that allowed Iraqis abroad to cast votes in provinces they previously lived in. the number of seats for the provinces increased by 8.2 percent compared to 2005. The next dispute was with regards to the open and closed list and the conflict in Kirkuk. Ultimately it was decided that the elections would be in the form of open ballet with multi-circles, and Kirkuk was considered as a single electoral district like the rest of the country's provinces.

The participation ban of Baathist candidates was proposed and approved by the Accountability and Justice Committee (de-Baathification in other words). This caused the protests of extremist Sunni groups. People like Tariq Al-Hashemi the government wanted to marginalise the Sunnis with this act. In spite all the debates and arguments in 2010 the elections law was voted in, following its first amendment. Also the parliament seats increased from 275 to 325.

The second amendment to the election law: the disagreements between political parties in sharing of parliamentary seats, the share of religious and ethnic minorities, the drawing of the constituencies, and disputes in how the elections should be held in the open ballot form, again resulted in the amendment of the law. The new law was adopted in 2013 to pave the way for the recent elections.

According to this new law, the participation method for candidates of the parliamen-

tary elections for 2014 would be based on an elections list and participation of individual candidates. On this basis a political party could even nominate one individual as its candidate and also independent individuals could become candidates. The participation was in the form of a list or coalitions, based on the open ballot principle. The 2014 parliamentary elections were held in the form of constituencies by which each province of Iraq had been allocated a specific number of seats on the basis of the elections law and their population. The number of seats too increased from 325 to 328.

The political parties debate; in the 2014 elections, 227 political parties or institutions took part in the form of 41 coalitions, or independently to gain one of the 328 parliamentary seats. Of course political parties in elections systems do not become meaningful with a high participation of political parties and political movements. But it is the high number of involved movements shows a sort of immaturity in the party system of a country. According to the democratic systems' indexes, political parties have a meaning when a few parties representing various groups of society, under a healthy competition and on the basis of democratic laws that enter the elections arena.

Although over these year great efforts were made in Iraq so that the elections law to include the demands of all groups of people, but the elections system in Iraq still suffers from one problem, and that is the ethnic and tribal configuration of elections. Still tribal interests are constituents of political criteria and personal merits, and in this direction, the Iraqi society has a long way to go for the democratisation of its elections system.

Elections system in Saudi Arabia

As the biggest Arab country in West Asia, Saudi Arabia has a population of approximately 31 million, only 16 million of which are Saudis and the rest are foreigners. Islam is greatly influenced by Wahabism in the country. The tribal culture is dominant in this country. The political system of Saudi Arabia is absolute monarchy and the country gained its independence in 1960.

The absolute monarchy was founded in 1932, in which religion has been the most powerful institution in society. The justice system is part of the government and the police force (Sharteh) has the duty to implement "calling people to goodness, and rejection of indecent acts" laws. The royal family continuously wants full political domination. The king has total power in the country. The head of the central government is the king, who is also the head of the judiciary, which is one of the main branches of power in the country. The control levels of the central government on all of the country are equal because Saudi princes govern the provinces. Political opponents are prevented from campaigning. The press is in full control of the government, and in fact is a mouthpiece for the dominant ideology and politics of the country, and is a messenger of the government policies. The royal family as at the top of the political system, whose status became very highlighted following the coming to power of Malek Feisal.

The Islamic religious leaders play a very important role in the country and have limitless political power. The Grand Ulama Council has to power to remove or install the king, which holds a regular weekly meeting with the king.

Three main groups in Saudi Arabia want to grab power. The first is the Fahd family, the second is Malek Salman the current ruling king, and the third group are the children of Malek Feisal who do not have any political groups (Rohani, 2009).

There are no elections, political parties or a parliament in Saudi Arabia. Also it does not have a constitutional law, and the rulers of the country claim that Islamic laws are their constitutional law. There are no three branches of power. The legislations of the cabinet, whose head is the king (also holds the title of prime minister) are implemented as the law (Ranjbar Shirazi, 1995). Political parties, groups and other political groups is prohibited. There are no governmental or official parties, and any form of political movement is met by strong reaction. There are no elections in the country, and all the press is strictly controlled by the government.

According to the mainly Salafi view which as well as has influence on the religious governance of the people, the political actions of the country, it deems the ruling king as the ruler and any form of violations against that is deemed as cardinal sin, and deserves the death sentence. The king's words are final on the country's affairs, from religious, political, social and economic aspects.

This mentality has resulted in no political groups or parties to be established, and any ideology contrary to the ruling council's ideologies is severely cracked down. This is why since its independence, only a single voice of the extreme traditional kind has been dominant and through the severe repression in the country, it does not seem pluralism will form any time soon (Kargozaran Newspaper, 2007).

It can be said that the biggest opposition and resistance wave in Saudi Arabia rose in 1961. An active nationalist organization called Itihadieh Khalgh Jazira Al-Arab (the Popular Union of the Arab Island) took up armed resistance (Zera'at pishe, 2003). This group introduced itself as the representative of all sectors and in the years 1961 to 67 planted 30 bombs in important economic, security and governmental centres. With the close cooperation of the United States and the Saudi rulers, the individuals were identified and with the execution of 17 of their members in March 1967, followed by the defeat in the '67 Arab-Israel 6 Day War, the movement weakened. The country deems any form of association as a basis for the wakening and movement of the people, and the rulers are concerned that these types of movements will target the autocracy and the extensive corruption of the rulers and cause the awakening of the nation. Therefore any type of political party activity is banned in the country. Nonetheless several groups are secretly active on the underground.

Therefore it can understand that political parties do not freely exist in the country, and the political structure of power does not allow the appearance of the necessary basic prerequisites for an efficient elections system.

Overall a closed system based on tribal laws is dominant in the country. In the power structure, individuals and groups who are not in any way linked to the Saudi royals have no place among Arabs. All the strategic positions belong to this family. The princes make all the security, political and economic decisions.

To use other existing groups in society, the Saudi family has established unconventional links and with the help of the vast economic resources and their cooperation seeking mechanisms, it has marginalised them. Meanwhile, only a few political activists

know that the ruling institutions oppress and crackdown them through security reactions and putting of political pressure that is dictatorial and also applying intimidation against them.

One Salafi mufti through issuance of a fatwa declared the elections system a corrupt system, the holding of which does not have religious and logical basis in some Islamic countries. Abdolrahman Al-Barak deems the participation of women as haram and believes that the holding of elections will turn this Islamic country into an infidel country. While it must be mentioned that in a country where its leaders are elected through elections system, there is a danger of falling towards the buying of votes and payment of bribes.

Elections system in Oman

With a population of over 2,577,000 people, Oman gained its independence in 1951. This country has an absolute monarchy political system, but its parliament has some legislative and monitoring role also.

In October 1981, in response to Sultan Ghaboos' remarks on being uninformed of public opinion the Governmental Consultative Council (Majlis Estishari ol-Doleh) was set up in extraordinary measures, the members of which were appointees. The role of this Council was with regards to economic and political developments and the presentation of future policy recommendations. In 1992, Sultan Ghaboos ordered for a new Consultative Council to be set up made up of regional representatives and to replace the current Council so that all Omani citizens can extensively take part in national responsibilities and duties. This Council was made up of 59 elected members, the speaker of which

was appointed by the government. The replacement Council had more influence than its predecessor, and could impeach ministers with regards to economic and social policies. For the first time in 1995 women were allowed to become candidates and take part in the elections. Subsequently two women managed to win seats in the Council. The number of seats increased from 59 to 80, in such way that each governorship with a population of over 30,000 could have two seats at the Council. The constitution called for the setting up of a second consultative council, to complete the current Consultative Council, and in this regard Sultan Ghaboos announced for a governmental council to form in order to work with the Council. The Consultative Council is one of the most important and powerful institutions of the country the members of which are elected every four years directly by the ballot of the people.

The first session of the Consultative Council took part in 1991, with the participation of 5900 citizens to elect 59 members. In 2015, for the eighth session, there were more than 600 thousand votes cast to elect 85 seats.

Digital voting was used for the 20th session of the parliament which was a focal point in the democratic history of Oman and also Arabic and regional countries.

Political parties' activities are prohibited in Oman just as in other Persian Gulf Arab countries, and there is no significant political movement in the country. If a movement or protest is formed, it is spontaneous and without organizational order and discipline. Therefore it can be said that the elections system of country has a long way to reach democracy.

Elections system in Qatar

Qatar has a population of approximately 1.5 million, more than half of which are foreign migrant workers.

The country gained its independence in 1971 following the departure of British forces from the region. Like other sheikhdoms of the region, its system is similar to a monarchy. The Al-Sani family rules the peninsula which it has done more or less for the last 150 years.

From the outset, the monarchy has not been from father to son, but the emir is determined by the decision of the elders of the family. But the previous emir Sheikh Khalifa Al-Sani appointed his son Sheikh Hamd Bin Khalifa as crown prince. After his succession, Sheikh Hamd Bin Khalifa in an edict declared the ruling system of Qatar as hereditary and reserved to the Al-Sani family, with the transfer of power from father to son, and in the event of no sons, the emir will pick an individual from the Al-Sani family as crown prince (Shia News, 2013). At the age of 61 and after ruling the country, on 25 July 2013 Sheikh Hamd Bin Khalifa, handed power to his son Sheikh Tamim. He was a 33 year old young man educated in Britain and fluent in English and French. This sudden move brought astonishments, on the basis of a turn of a single individual and dictatorial system to a more free system, to which some believed it was a fear of a coup or uprising following the Arab Spring in some of the Middle East and North African countries that prompted this move.

The emir of Qatar is the highest decision maker of the country. As well as having vast powers in accordance to the law, he has higher power in relation to other institutions that are not directly under his rule.

The clause to article 17 of the Qatari constitution, gives the emir the power to edicts on the recommendations of the Ministers' Council and talks with the Consultative Council. Article 18 also gives executive powers to the emir with the assistance of the Ministers' Council. Therefore, with the help of the Ministers' Council and the Consultative Council the legislative and executive powers are in control of the emir.

There is no free and public elections system in Qatar. The parliament members are appointed by the emir. In January 1992, in a letter to the emir, 50 intellectuals called for the forming of a Consultative Council with legislative powers, and expressed concern over the exploitation of power by the emir, and called for reforms in the education and economic systems, and called for the holding of free elections. But nothing came of these demands.

The first constitution was written in 2003 through a referendum. Approximately 13 percent of the population took part and the constitutional monarchy system was ratified. According to this same constitution, the formation of political parties was prohibited. Also article 148 specified that the constitution could not be amended.

In May 2008, the 35 members of the Consultative Council passed a bill which paved the way for the holding of Council elections. It was determined that city council and parliamentary elections be held and a constitutional law court be set up according to this law, two-thirds of the Council members would be elected through elections and one-third by the emir (Safavi, 2015: 24).

Elections were supposed to take place in 2007 and 2010, but nothing happened. It hung in the air until the Arab Spring in 2011 when fearing the regional revolutions, Hamd Bin Khlifa Al-Sani promised to hold Council elections in the second half of 2013. Following that he handed power over to his son Bin

Hamd Bin Khalifa Al-Sani and the holding of elections were cancelled due to the handover of power. Therefore to-date no full or even partial parliamentary elections have taken place in the country.

The subject of political parties: the forming of political parties and labour unions is prohibited. Only, in the 1970s two groups called the "Qatar National Liberation Front" and "National Battle" organization and a number of other political groups believed in pan-Arabism, socialism, nationalism and the Baath were active in the country (Naji rad, 2008).

Currently there are no specific political groups in Qatar, but there are influential groups who are mainly made up of wealthy sheikhs and businessmen. Although recently a group of Qatari intellectuals and journalists have formed groups and the government is closely monitoring them (Shia News, 2013).

Elections system in Kuwait

The emirate of Kuwait with a population of approximately 4.1 million (including 1.2 million nationals and 2.8 million foreigners) gained its independence in July 1961. The majority of the population is Muslim which includes 70 percent Sunni and 30 percent Shia (US Department of State, 2004). According to the constitution the monarchy of the Aal Sabah is hereditary, and the three branches of power are independent of each other.

Its political structure is closer to the western political democracies. The people have good awareness and political maturity and knowledge levels compared to other regional countries. There are no official or unofficial political parties in the country. Political and religious societies conduct political activities under the cover of religious and social issues.

The separation of powers is officially recognised but the lack of political parties, elections restrictions and interferences of the emir have caused difficulties in reaching democracy.

A Consultative Council cooperates with the emir in national affairs (Rezvani, 2008).

The elections system in Kuwait was formed in 1961. The first elections were held in December the same year for the establishment of the Constituent Assembly, whose main task was to review and ratify the constitution. Following that, in July 1963 the National Assembly was held, which was made up of 50 members. To-date several rounds of parliamentary elections have been held in the country. But due to legal restrictions and elections law, and the extent of the emir's powers in important decision makings, the elections system of the country is a long distance away from democracy. A look at the various rounds of elections in the country shows that over time, positive developments such as women's rights to vote, and the existence of government and ruling family opposition groups have made an appearance in the elections system. But the wasteful interferences of the emir and his extensive powers have subsequently resulted in the dissolving of the Council, which have made these developments face a dead end.

Two points are important in the elections system of Kuwait. First, in practice the Council does not have a direct influence in the policy setting process. The conditions following the liberation of Kuwait (from Saddam Hussein), the basis for the presence of the opposition and participation in elections, entry into the Council, criticism of the government and monitoring its activities and influencing the decision making process did

not exist, but the power limits of the emir did not allow for the appearance of the examples of a democratic elections system. Second: Council members in the country are not the representatives of all the people. According to the constitution and elections law restrictions, the majority of Kuwait's population do not have the right to vote (from 18 to 21 year olds/second class citizens/their children are deprived). For example in the 1992 elections, out of a population of 850 thousand only 81,440 (around 10 percent) were eligible to vote (International Peace Studies Centre, 2012).

The political parties' debate: the Kuwaiti government has accepted to provide a more open political space for parties, and currently is moving the political wheels of society towards modernisation and democracy. Nonetheless, the majority of active political parties in Kuwait are active with three viewpoints.

These viewpoints are: Islamists or Islamist parties who follow the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood doctrine, and even call themselves Islamic Brotherhood of Kuwait, and have managed to gain the support of a notable section of society. The second viewpoint belongs to political groups that support the government, who mainly try to implement the demands of the rulers of the country. And the third are the Shia parties who considering are not majority in Kuwait, but nevertheless they have representatives in the Consultative Council (Kargozaran, 2007).

Overall, the elections system of Kuwait has a lot of problems and challenges because of the extensive powers and interference of the emir in the elections process and subsequently the dissolving of the Council. Although from the democratic aspects, Kuwait experiences a better condition than other Persian Gulf Arab countries.

The challenges of the elections systems in the Persian Gulf Arab countries

The description of the political and elections systems of Persian Gulf Arab countries clearly indicates the fact that these countries are faced with deep challenges in their elections systems, which is an obstacle in the way of these countries to have an efficient and democratic elections system; challenges that arise from culture, social and political structures, and the geopolitical structure of these countries.

Political structure

In most of these countries as stated, the political structures are based on absolute dictatorial hereditary monarchies with the kings or emirs having extensive powers, which have secured authoritarianism in the form of the governments of these countries. In these systems, decision making is done by an individual, and is made by the king or emir, and no individual or group outside of the ruling family are allowed to interfere in the decision making process. Even if sometimes democratic measures are taken and or promised, they are solely done as a result of fear of people's awakening and with the aim of the preservation of power.

Absolute totalitarianism and fear of citizens' interference in decision makings in these systems prevent the formation of political parties as a prerequisite for a democratic elections system in these countries. Efficient and popular political parties who compete in the elections arena, and provide the participation of citizens environment in determination of their political fate do not exist in these countries.

In these types of political systems, democratisation seems to be a fundamental tool for the expansion of the participation of citizens in decision making process seems very necessary. This will result in the creation of

structures such as elections systems which while present the right to interfere in determining their future; it also promotes the accountability of the rulers.

Tribal and nomadic culture

For centuries the people of the Persian Gulf Arab countries have experienced tribal and nomadic living, and the colonial and autocratic history of these countries has secured the acceptance of authoritarianism culture. The people of these lands are used to and believe in decision making by a king, sheikh, emir or sultan, and do not show much effort in changing the focus of power from the rulers to the citizens and expansion of their own participation.

Social structure

Persian Gulf Arab countries face similar social challenges which are directly influenced by their elections systems, such as lack of legal political equality of men and women, lack of political participation of the people, lack of efficient political parties and institutions, lack of the rule of law and press and media freedoms, unequal demographics, and etc. For example since a notable portion of the population of these countries are not ethnic and are foreign migrant work force, this has on one hand resulted in the lack of the formation of a unison social identity for unison demands in elections systems, such as Qatar, and on the other hand it has become a tool for the rulers to interfere in elections, such as what took place in Bahrain under the heading of change in demographics policy.

Geopolitical structure

Having an important geopolitical position of the region's countries has resulted in gov-ernments to have a major role in the economy of the countries and due to getting direct revenue from oil exports they become very wealthy and powerful and have the ability to buy support for their political legitimacy. Therefore they do not need to be legitimised by the people and an elections process. In facing the democratic demands of the people they satisfy their citizens through economic measures.

Conclusion

In view of what this article said about the characteristics of an efficient elections system, and description of the each of the Persian Gulf Arab countries, the question at the beginning of this article can clearly be answered: since an efficient elections system is a system which results in national unity of a country, its outcome is the strengthening of national governance and provision of today's people's rights and freedoms, for all the people of the country to be identifiable, comprehensible and practical, create an arena of transparent and fair competition for political parties and influential social groups, be flexible and in proportion with changes of conditions and show suitable reaction towards the demands of political activists and be designed and organized towards the growth of sustainable development headings. It can be said that Persian Gulf Arab countries fundamentally lack elections systems.

The thing that is observed in the Persian Gulf Arab countries is a process which not only lacks examples of democracy, but even lack signs of democracy too. In other words in these countries due to structural, geopolitical, cultural and governing characteristics, the elections system has not taken up a meaning as the fundamental pillar for the realisa-

tion of democracy. And sometimes arriving at this concept in the political systems structures of these countries is to an extent difficult and unimaginable due to the deep challenges that they are faced with.

The elections systems of the Persian Gulf Arab countries are models unique to the culture and geopolitics of the region, which clearly shows the gap between these systems with examples and indicators of democracy.

Political parties in democratic elections systems play a key and pivotal role in the participation and self determination of their political fate, and campaigns and competition among parties, determine the way power is distributed in the political structure of governments. This is while the authoritarian rulers of Arab countries, do not have any loyalties to political parties or the participation of the people. Therefore with certainty call the elections systems of these countries full of challenges and undemocratic, who have a long way to reach minimum democracy.

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