

New system to combat tribalism, vote buying and nepotism in Kuwait

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Upcoming parliamentary polls are set to be held on the basis of five constituencies, a new electoral system intended to reduce voting irregularities, including voting along tribal or sectarian lines. The previous division of the constituencies revealed certain negative manifestations, such as the voting on tribal, sectarian, and factional considerations that undermined national unity and sound parliamentary representation. The old system had also resulted in manipulation of electoral lists, registration, forms of nepotism, vote purchase, and a wide margin in the number of the voters in the 25 constituencies, according to an official memo.

The new system became law August 1, 2006, when His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah issued Law Number 42, cutting the number of electoral constituencies from 25 to five. The law stipulates a voter, in the constituency where his (her) name is registered, has the right to cast four ballot papers, that any additional vote will be considered null, and that the new system will be effective as of the 12th legislative term due May 17.

An affiliate memorandum of clarification, issued by the state, said in part that the new system was established to tackle various flaws in previous legislative polls, and that a new system was necessary to address these negative aspects, enhance the parliamentary practice, and realize the aspired national objectives.

As to allowing four votes per citizen, the memo says the new system is intended to serve higher national interests, give the chance to various segments of the society to have parliamentary representation, and limit tribal monopoly in the constituencies. Law No 42 is also intended to broaden the electoral base in all the electoral districts, enforce the principle of justice in representation and equality among all voters, promote the democratic and constitutional concepts, and limit the negative consequences resulting from the small number of the voters in a single constituency.

Furthermore, the new division encourages the nominees to think in a broader and more national manner. The new system divides the constituencies as following: The first constituency comprises 18 districts, the second 13 districts, the third 15, the fourth 19 and the fifth 23. The electorate is made up to 361,000 people, 200,000 women and 161,000 men.

Constituency division dates back to 1961, when authorities established the constituent assembly comprising 20 constituencies, with a single MP elected from each. This system was amended in 1961, with establishment of 10 constituencies with two MPs representing each. In 1966, the 10-constituency system was restored, with five to be elected from each. It was retained in the elections held in 1967, 1971, and 1975. But in 1980 it was changed to comprise 25 constituencies, with two MPs elected for each. This was applied in 1981, 1985, 1992, 1996, 1981, 1985, 1992, 1996, 1999, 2003, and 2006.