

Voters shun women in Oman council poll

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None of the 21 women competing for election to Oman's consultative council won positions on the 84-seat body, state media reported on Sunday.

Two women were elected to the government advisory body in the conservative Gulf sultanate following the last elections in 2003, but this year all the new members were men.

However one of the defeated women candidates, Camilia al-Busaidi, declined to be downcast. "What's happened is not a disaster and it was a helpful experience for me," she told AFP.

The advisory council, which was created in 1991 and has a four-year term, questions ministers and advises government on socio-economic issues but has no legislative power or role in defence, internal security or foreign policy. Political parties remain banned.

A total of 388,683 citizens registered to vote in Saturday's polls out of a population of around 2.3 million.

Thirty-eight candidates were re-elected to the body, with 46 newly chosen.

No official turnout figures were released but Interior Minister Saud bin Ibrahim al-Busaidi told reporters the level of participation was "very good".

Oman was the first Gulf Arab state to give women the right to vote and stand for public office in 1994.

Elections are becoming more frequent in the Gulf, as Arab monarchies take tentative steps towards meeting demands for reform.

But only Kuwait and Bahrain have elected parliaments and in the latter the elected chamber shares legislative power with an appointed upper house.