



RESEARCH PAPER

Political, Economic, Educational, and Social Reforms in the Arab Gulf States: Various Aspects of American Governmental Democracy Promotion

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research study is to explore the measures implemented by the American government in the wake of 9/11 events to foster democratic reforms in the political, economic, and educational domains, and how the U.S. pursued its goal of promoting democracy in the Arab Gulf states. An urgency was felt in the United States to push the democratic reforms in the Arab World, including the Gulf states, after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 to ward off any future security threats. The research study utilizes both primary and secondary sources of information. The primary objective of the U.S. Administration remained the enhancement of the role of parliaments and consultative councils in legislation and governance within the Gulf. Promoters of democracy in developing nations like Pakistan might also broaden their strategies, as this paper discusses.

KEYWORDS Civil Society, Democracy Promotion, Education, Gulf States, Media Freedom, Women Rights

Introduction

In the wake of 9/11 events, the American government was compelled to reassess its security policies, leading the Bush Administration to link American security with the promotion of freedom in the Arab countries. Condoleezza Rice remarked that for sixty years, the United States had prioritized stability in the region at the expense of democratic change, yet achieved neither. Rice revealed that America had embarked on a new course, committed to supporting the universal right to democracy. A 2003 fact sheet further emphasized that American policy was grounded in core principles of human rights protection through democracy and the rule of law (The White House, 2003). In pursuit of this revised approach, structures underpinning American democracy promotion were reconfigured. While some of the American initiatives primarily focused on economic reform and democracy assistance, some others concentrated on political and educational reforms, as well as women's empowerment (Wittes & Yerkes, 2006, p. 6). However, although MEPI and DRL were active in the Gulf region, USAID played a less prominent role.

This research aims to explore the measures taken by Gulf governments to enact democratic reforms in the political, economic, and educational spheres, and to evaluate how the U.S. administration pursued its objective of promoting democracy in the Arab Gulf states. Additionally, the study examines efforts to strengthen civil society, enhance media freedom, improve human rights, and empower women. It assesses the participation of various sectors and regions in exchange programs and initiatives, while offering a critical analysis of U.S. policy towards the Gulf states post-9/11 and its perceived contribution to advancing democratic principles.

Literature Review

Academics and practitioners have extensively analyzed various aspects of the United States' efforts to implement the Freedom Agenda in the Arab world, including the Gulf States, following the events of September 11, 2001. These studies highlight the challenges faced by advocates of reform and democracy in the region. Sheely (2003) offers an overview of Islamic opposition parties in Arab countries, while Ibrahim (2007) argues that the Arab world presents the greatest obstacles to democratization. Murphy (2007) finds that the majority of Muslims support democratic principles and reject undemocratic forces. Ottaway and Carothers (2004) contend that the success of democracy in the Middle East will depend on Islamist parties, which many today view as the principal barriers to change, rather than on liberal activists or their Western supporters. Ottaway (2003) provides further clarification on the role of Islamist movements and America's involvement in democratizing the region.

Issawi (1956) delivers important insights into the state of democracy in the region during the mid-20th century, while Menotti (2006) discusses the European Union's contributions to the Middle East's democratic transition. Youngs (2005) examines the West's role in promoting democracy, and Whitehead (2003) explores the impact of American foreign policy on democratization alongside other relevant factors. Page and Bouton (2006) delve into the relationship between American foreign policy and democracy, while Brands (1999) provides historical context regarding U.S. support for democracy as a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Clinton (1996) underscores the significance of American leadership in promoting global freedom and democracy, and Cox, Ikenberry, and Inoguchi (2000) evaluate U.S. democracy promotion policies and practices.

Several scholars have focused specifically on the Bush Administration's approach to democratization in the Middle East. Hayajneh (2004) examines the effects of the Bush Administration's "forward strategy" on the political actions of Arab governments. Zakheim (2005) points out that certain political actors, unwelcome in the U.S., gained legitimacy through the democratic electoral process. Silverstein (2007) observes that Bush's announcement of the "forward strategy of freedom" led to significant setbacks for regional democratization initiatives. Chaulia (2007) discusses the influence of Shiism on the development of democracy in the Middle East, further expanding the discourse on religious and political dynamics in the region.

Material and Methods

The research study utilizes both primary and secondary sources of information. Among the primary sources are interviews and official government records, which were instrumental in evaluating the efforts made by the US government for democratic reforms in social, political, economic and educational sectors in the Arab Gulf States. By analyzing these official documents, an understanding of the political landscape in the region was achieved. Secondary sources, including books, scholarly articles, handouts, and websites featuring relevant content from newspapers, periodicals, and academic journals, also played a critical role in supporting the research. Drawing upon both primary and secondary data, the study examines the concrete actions undertaken by U.S. federal agencies to promote democratic reforms in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

American democracy promotion in the Gulf

The following sections analyze the efforts of American governmental institutions to advance reforms across a range of sectors, including politics, the economy, education, civil society, the media, human rights, and the empowerment of women.

Politics

The authoritarian regimes in the Gulf were not directly challenged by the United States government, which instead relied on a discreet strategy of gradual reform. To support electoral politics and strengthen parliamentary procedures across the region, the U.S. implemented various measures, including training programs, exchange initiatives, and the provision of technical assistance. Political reform gained increasing significance in U.S. funding priorities, with the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) allocating resources accordingly (Wittes & Yerkes, 2006, p. 18). Programs aimed at enhancing the institutional capacities of parliaments and consultative councils were supported, and members of the Majlis al-Shura received technical assistance and training.

An American-funded non-governmental organization (NGO) established a training program for Bahraini political societies and lawmakers. In Oman, members and staff of the Majlis al-Shura, as well as the administrative personnel of the Central Municipal Council and the Advisory Council in Qatar, received training from U.S.-funded implementing partners to reinforce parliamentary politics. U.S. representatives continued to press the United Arab Emirates to expand elections for the Federal National Council (FNC), as well as for student councils and municipal elections. As part of these efforts, two Bahraini MPs were invited to the United States to meet with state legislatures and Congress. American officials also attended some public sessions hosted by Bahraini lawmakers for their constituents. In Bahrain, a U.S. government program introduced modern voting equipment and trained local election officials to ensure the transparency of electoral processes. Additionally, a U.S.-supported initiative facilitated discussions between Omani Majlis al-Shura members and the public on environmental issues.

In Qatar, U.S. officials conducted roundtable discussions with potential candidates. During Qatar's third Central Municipal Council elections in 2007, the Permanent Election Committee received training and voter awareness support from an implementing partner. In preparation for Kuwait's 2008 elections, a voter education initiative was funded, and candidates received assistance in organizing and managing their political campaigns. U.S. officials in Kuwait conducted numerous activities in connection with the elections, which coincided with the U.S. presidential election. These included video discussions between American scholars and Kuwaiti students at two universities, covering both countries' electoral processes in detail. A Q&A session was held at the American University of Kuwait, and following the U.S. election, the U.S. embassy hosted an "election watch" breakfast, attended by 300 people. Arabic-language lectures on the U.S. elections were also delivered to Kuwaiti students.

Local institutions, such as municipal councils and labor unions, received attention alongside national parliaments, central councils, and Majlis al-Shuras. Through U.S. government-funded initiatives, members of Saudi Arabia's 178 municipal councils were provided with technical assistance and training, while labor unions in Oman benefited from similar programs. One such initiative introduced union officials to international best practices for election procedures. Exchange programs were organized in nearly all six Gulf countries. In Qatar, one program familiarized election officials with the U.S. electoral system, while another introduced Qatari lawyers to American democratic legal frameworks. Kuwaitis participated in numerous International Visitor Leadership Programs (IVLP) to foster civic engagement in the country. In Bahrain, U.S.-funded programs promoted political participation and the rule of law, trained journalists on

issues related to democracy, elections, and parliamentary functions, and facilitated partnerships with local non-governmental organizations.

Economics

Capitalism and democracy are often regarded as complementary systems, with the principles of capitalism believed to promote and facilitate the development of democratic societies. A free market economy and unrestricted commerce are seen as essential to enabling freedom across political, cultural, social, and behavioral domains. Consequently, efforts to democratize a society cannot overlook the economic dimension. In this context, the United States government initiated a series of economic reforms across the Gulf and broader Middle Eastern region. Among these, the establishment of the Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) stands out as a significant milestone in the U.S. strategy.

Similar to the fields of awareness and education, various actions were undertaken in the economic sphere, employing a range of instruments and strategies. The American and Arab business communities collaborated through meetings, trade missions, and business exchanges. Entrepreneurial training was organized, technical assistance provided, and free trade agreements negotiated. These efforts aimed to advance free trade and support the growth of small enterprises. Key organizations, such as the U.S.-Saudi Arabian Business Council (USSABC), MEPI, and MEFTA, played pivotal roles in executing these initiatives. Notably, MEPI programs included entrepreneurship training as a core element, with a strong emphasis on promoting U.S.-Arab trade and supporting small enterprises within the Arab world (Wittes & Yerkes, 2006, p. 17). Certain projects and activities appear unrelated to direct democracy promotion. Some initiatives focus on enhancing community involvement and self-management. Nonetheless, political aid often underpins these initiatives, which, while primarily aimed at fostering business, environmental, and cultural cooperation, also serve to raise public awareness of political issues (Youngs, 2005, p. 36).

The MEFTA project, launched by President Bush, sought to negotiate free trade agreements (FTAs) between the United States and Middle Eastern nations. Bahrain and Oman successfully completed FTA negotiations, and in 2005, the U.S. signed the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with Kuwait. That same year, negotiations commenced with the United Arab Emirates, and since 2007, trade and investment have been strengthened under the TIFA-Plus framework. MEFTA ("Middle East Free Trade Area Initiative" 2003) identifies TIFAs as critical steps toward the creation of FTAs. The agreements with Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates are seen as instrumental in driving the economic reforms necessary to lay the foundation for democratic societies, incorporating provisions on labor standards, governance, and transparency. Through MEPI, the U.S. government assisted Gulf nations in aligning their trade policies with World Trade Organization (WTO) standards and other international trade laws (Wittes & Yerkes, 2006, pp. 7, 16).

The Forum for the Future, held annually, brought together business leaders and civil society activists from the Middle East and G8 countries. The second Forum took place in 2005 in Manama, Bahrain, further fostering collaboration between these key stakeholders. The USSABC played an active role in promoting international business and economic exchanges. It organized a six-day Business Development Mission to Saudi Arabia in March 2007. Thirty companies from twelve states participated, sending forty delegates, including the Director General and Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Hernandez. The delegation visited the Eastern Province, Jeddah, and Riyadh (*U.S.-Saudi Business Council*, n.d.).

Earlier, in 2002, the USSABC and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) facilitated a trade mission to Virginia, welcoming Saudi business delegates. In 2007, a four-day business development visit was organized in collaboration with VEDP, during which seven Virginian companies traveled to Dammam, Riyadh, and Jeddah. These missions allowed business leaders from both nations to engage, explore the business and economic landscape, and assess investment opportunities in Saudi Arabia (*U.S.-Saudi Business Council, n.d.*). Such missions provided valuable networking opportunities for participants.

Education

A range of activities were implemented in the field of education, including the provision of scholarships and the establishment of student discussion groups. Exchange programs were organized, and various training initiatives were launched. MEPI worked not only with individuals who benefited from exchange and training programs, including those focused on political training, but also in collaboration with governments in the Gulf region. These efforts contributed to the rapid expansion of the MEPI Alumni Network, which, in turn, has engaged in discussions and exchanges supporting democracy promotion initiatives. Public universities offered degree and diploma programs, facilitating coeducational learning and introducing curriculum reform. Additionally, online clubs were created. One notable aspect of the MEPI programs was the focus on student exchanges. MEPI was tasked with providing new resources to enhance curricula and civic education. Under its projects, children's storybooks were translated into Arabic for use in classroom libraries (Wittes & Yerkes, 2006, pp. 16, 21). American officials also engaged the public through training sessions and discussion forums on good governance. Workshops provided students from schools, colleges, and universities with ideas and skills related to democracy. Scholarships were also available for studying and teaching English, and American Corners, which serve as community-based outreach centers, were established throughout the Gulf (*Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, n.d.*).

In 2007, USAID funded the MENA Peace Scholarship Program through its Office of Middle East Programs (OMEP) for nine Arab countries in the Gulf, including Oman. Each year, 75 Kuwaiti high school students received microscholarships for English language courses. These programs integrated community service initiatives and in-class elections, which were designed to instill the values of civic engagement and democratic attitudes. In 2007, approximately 200 Kuwaiti high school students benefited from the microscholarships. That same year, 16 Kuwaiti high school students participated in a U.S.-based exchange and study program. In February 2008, an American cultural ambassador visited Kuwait to teach high school students how to write and perform plays aimed at raising political awareness. That same year, U.S. officials invited an award-winning female recording artist to Kuwait, where she conducted acting workshops for high school girls, helping them express their concerns about discrimination against various social groups.

In Qatar, an American partner provided technical assistance to Qatar University College of Law for curriculum development, while another partner supported the Supreme Education Council in reforming middle school curricula and developing legal and civic education programs. The University of Washington (UW), in partnership with the UAE Academy, launched certificate programs in Abu Dhabi. Under the University of Washington Educational Outreach (UWEO) initiative, the project primarily targeted young people seeking employment, with over 80% of participants being female. Women were given a unique opportunity to participate in graduate-level programs and learn in

a public setting. While women in the Gulf region tend to outnumber men in higher education institutions, they are far less likely to travel abroad or attend Western universities. In this context, the liberal values and culture introduced by American universities like UW proved highly beneficial to the Gulf populations (“University of Washington Educational Outreach,” n.d.).

The University of Washington’s certificate programs served multiple objectives related to democratic advancement. These coeducational programs offered boys and girls the rare opportunity to interact without the usual restrictions, while the curriculum was identical to that of the main campus in Seattle. A portion of the faculty was directly affiliated with UW, and the remainder were either approved or trained by the university. In contrast to many educational institutions in the Emirates, which traditionally place less emphasis on critical thinking and teamwork, the UW programs focused on cultivating these skills. Marisa Nickle, the UWEO program manager, noted that the interaction between men and women was fascinating to observe, as the program was preparing them for coed workplaces. Initially, participants were unsure of how to behave, but Nickle highlighted how these initiatives were instrumental in reshaping societal dynamics. She recounted how participants entered with preconceived notions – two veiled women wearing gloves and two bearded men in short robes – but all four conducted themselves professionally and engaged with members of both genders. This experience, according to Nickle, was a powerful stereotype breaker (“University of Washington Educational Outreach,” n.d.).

Vice Provost Dave Szatmary of UWEO expressed his belief that such programs could inspire the creation of additional exchange opportunities, fostering cross-cultural understanding. He emphasized that the University of Washington’s initiative might serve as a springboard for future projects in the region (“University of Washington Educational Outreach,” n.d.). Similarly, Michigan State University (MSU) launched undergraduate and graduate degree programs in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Kim Wilcox, the provost of MSU, assured that the university would maintain control over the quality of its programs and courses. MSU also engaged in research activities, with its president, Simon, emphasizing that for meaningful change to occur in the region, there needed to be a strong presence of Western educators in the education sector. He stressed that collaborative efforts could yield long-term, positive outcomes for the region.

Increasing numbers of Arab students were being encouraged to attend American universities or their regional affiliates (“Middle East Students Learn about America in the Mid-West,” 2004). A key goal of student exchange programs was to stimulate discussions on political freedoms for those living under authoritarian regimes. One of the primary objectives of curriculum enhancement was to promote dialogue on democracy and encourage people to contemplate and demand participatory governance in the future. Local universities began to introduce student council elections, which were seen as a way to empower young people in decision-making processes. These elections not only provided students with a sense of political involvement but also helped them understand the benefits of political engagement and the democratic process (*Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*, n.d.).

Civil Society

A vital prerequisite for the democratization of any society is the existence of a robust civil society. Recognizing this, the United States government integrated the promotion of civil society as a central element of its strategy for advancing democracy in the Gulf region. Programs and strategies were tailored to align with the unique sociocultural dynamics of the Gulf. However, the legal frameworks in most Gulf states

prohibit the formation of independent civil society organizations, and where such organizations exist, they are often constrained by stringent regulations. Despite these limitations, the U.S. government undertook various initiatives to raise public awareness about the importance of a strong civil society in fostering social and political movements. This objective was pursued through the provision of technical, financial, moral, and diplomatic support.

Over time, similar to its focus on political reform, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) shifted its attention increasingly towards the civil society sector (*Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*, n.d.). In Bahrain, for instance, support was provided to a project aimed at reforming the country's civil society law. In January 2008, the U.S. sponsored a civic education program in Bahrain that trained 56 teachers. In Kuwait, small grants were extended to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to facilitate their growth. Additionally, the American embassy in Kuwait initiated informal biweekly sessions in 2007, bringing together diplomats and NGO representatives. In Oman, the U.S. ambassador encouraged civil society activists and reformers by inviting them to participate in diplomatic events, while in Qatar, U.S. officials conducted informal roundtable discussions highlighting the importance of civic engagement. Sponsored exchange programs were also offered to aspiring NGO leaders and social activists in Qatar.

In Saudi Arabia, the U.S. partnered with local civil society organizations to sponsor events featuring American speakers as part of efforts to promote the development of civil society. The growing emphasis on civic education and civil society became a cornerstone of U.S. democracy promotion in the region. By 1997, one-third of U.S. democracy funds were allocated to support civil society, and this share increased to 48 percent by 2002 (Youngs, 2005, p. 38).

Media

As with other sectors, the media in the Gulf is tightly controlled, with severe limitations on freedom of expression. In most Gulf nations, political discourse and criticism of the hereditary authoritarian regimes are strictly prohibited. As a result, journalists and media organizations often resort to self-censorship, fearing reprisals from the authorities. In response, the United States government extended financial and technical support to media associations and journalists across the Gulf, aiming to promote media independence and freedom of speech. Scholarships, training programs, and media exchanges were organized as part of this effort, with the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) playing a significant role in both planning and funding many of these initiatives.

However, internet censorship remains a significant challenge in the Gulf, with some governments actively restricting online platforms. One critical measure to counter this issue, particularly in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, was the passage of the Global Online Freedom Act by the U.S. government in 2007. This legislation was designed to bolster freedom of expression on the internet and urged American companies to refrain from engaging with governments that enforce internet censorship ("Center for Democracy and Human Rights in Saudi Arabia," n.d.).

In 2007, as part of a media exchange program, two Kuwaiti journalists were sent to study at American journalism schools and institutes to gain direct exposure to U.S. journalism practices. That same year, the Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA) received funding to help draft revisions to the country's press law. In addition, eight non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and journalists in Kuwait were trained in

producing public service television announcements under a U.S. government grant. Throughout 2008, the American ambassador to Kuwait convened roundtable discussions with regional media representatives. Further support for media development in the region was provided through U.S.-funded programs in Qatar in 2007, which trained journalists in election coverage. Scholarships were awarded to two journalists, and the following year, funding was allocated for the professional development of an editor-in-chief and a political cartoonist. These initiatives aimed to enhance journalism standards and media professionalism in Qatar.

In March 2008, a media exchange program involving Saudi television and radio talk show hosts was launched, with the dual goals of improving professional skills and promoting democratic principles. U.S. government funds were also used to train Bahraini journalists on reporting human trafficking issues. Furthermore, in 2006, when media law specialists and journalists in the United Arab Emirates sought assistance in drafting revisions to press laws, the American embassy provided crucial support to facilitate these reforms.

Human Rights

The Gulf region faces significant challenges concerning human rights, with severe abuses persisting to this day. The underlying cause of the human rights situation in this area lies in the structures and practices of the regional governments. The United States government also considered strategies to address this issue, establishing both short- and long-term objectives and implementing corresponding plans. Notably, after the events of September 11, 2001, the United States began to promote human rights in the Middle East more actively than before (Youngs, 2005, p. 157).

The Human Rights Commission and the National Society for Human Rights engaged with American ambassadors in Saudi Arabia, where the Saudi military received training on international human rights standards. In 2008, the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) facilitated the participation of Saudi government and civil society representatives in seminars across the United States, focusing on themes such as participatory democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. First Lady Laura Bush also championed women's rights during her visit to Saudi Arabia.

A critical issue in the context of human rights abuses in the Gulf is human trafficking. American representatives in the region endeavored to raise awareness about this problem, particularly among laborers. In Bahrain, U.S. officials screened videos that highlighted the issue of human trafficking, followed by discussions after the presentations. U.S. embassies in the Gulf region worked to combat human trafficking and fostered collaboration with the nations that sent workers to the area. They also assisted international employees in Qatar in connecting with non-governmental organizations in their home countries. In 2008, the United States government provided expertise to draft anti-trafficking legislation in Oman, where labor inspectors received training on identifying instances of human trafficking.

Moreover, U.S.-funded initiatives in Bahrain trained judges, lawyers, and law enforcement officials to enforce anti-trafficking laws effectively. Additional efforts in Bahrain aimed to enhance labor rights and capabilities. To increase awareness of the plight of foreign workers, American officials established an online forum within the country. In 2008, during a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister of Kuwait, the U.S. ambassador addressed the deportation of Bangladeshi workers who were protesting, discussing human trafficking at a subsequent news roundtable. The American embassy also published a pamphlet outlining the rights of foreign workers. Furthermore, the

Oqsim campaign focused on the rights of Kuwaiti children, managed by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)-sponsored Zawaya. As part of this campaign, young people participated in workshops designed to educate them about their rights (Khalid, 2009).

Women Empowerment

Similar to many regions in the Global South, the Gulf area is characterized by a patriarchal societal structure, where women often lack fundamental rights and are systematically marginalized across various facets of life. The protection of women's rights is essential for the establishment of authentic democracy in the region. Without increased female participation and influence, meaningful progress towards democratization is unlikely. The United States government recognized this imperative and took steps to enhance the status and empowerment of women.

In 2008, President George W. Bush convened a roundtable discussion in Kuwait focused on women's rights and democracy, which included female activists and government officials. During this same year, an American diplomat engaged in discussions with eight female activists in Kuwait. Additionally, a speaker delivered talks on women's rights during a four-day national tour, further raising awareness on the issue. A meeting between the U.S. ambassador to Kuwait and the minister of housing also took place in May 2008 to address housing rights for women married to non-Kuwaiti nationals.

The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) facilitated internships for Arab businesswomen in American companies and promoted educational opportunities for women (Wittes & Yerkes, 2006, p. 17). MEPI established a public-private partnership aimed at improving the status of women in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. The Bahrain Forum for Public-Private Partnership was created in 2007 with support from Vital Voices and MEPI, incorporating both commercial and civil society organizations. Its primary objective was to foster collaboration and organize discussions between women's non-governmental organizations in Bahrain and the private sector.

Another notable initiative is the Middle East and North Africa Businesswomen's Network (MENA BWN), which comprises partnerships among MEPI, Vital Voices Global Partnership, and regional businesswomen's organizations. This initiative prioritizes the empowerment of women in business, economic, and social spheres, aiming to cultivate a culture of female entrepreneurship. Founded in 2008, the MENA BWN included three original members from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries: the Kuwait Economic Society, the Dubai Business Women's Council, and the Bahrain Businesswomen's Society. The Qatari Business Women Forum joined the network in 2008. The network seeks to promote an entrepreneurial spirit among women in the region ("Vital Voices," n.d.). The Network Hubs organized various events throughout the Gulf, including a seminar on effective leadership in Kuwait. In 2008, the MENA Businesswomen's Network Corporate Ambassadors Program expanded, bringing American women CEOs to participate in advocacy training and workshops. A dedicated website (www.menabwn.org) was launched in January 2008 to provide resources and information on issues pertinent to businesswomen in the region ("Vital Voices," n.d.).

In 2009, women constituted at least half of the participants in most public diplomacy exchange programs organized by the U.S. government in Oman. That same year, a Kuwaiti student was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study the intersection of Islam and women. A U.S.-funded initiative aimed at educating Omani women about their rights through technology training was also initiated in 2008. Furthermore, a

program in Qatar focused on enhancing the skills of female journalists to improve women's representation in local media. In Saudi Arabia, funding was provided for election training programs to encourage women to engage in politics.

Conclusion

The United States government implemented various measures to support electoral politics and strengthen parliamentary processes throughout the Gulf region. These initiatives included the introduction of training and exchange programs, as well as the provision of technical assistance. Funding for political reform became increasingly significant over time. Programs were initiated to bolster the institutional capacities of these consultative bodies, and members of the Majlis al-Shura received targeted technical support and training. In addition to efforts in political awareness and education, a variety of initiatives were undertaken in the economic sector, employing diverse tools and strategies. Events such as meetings, trade missions, and business exchanges were organized by American and Arab business communities. These efforts included technical assistance and organized entrepreneurship training, alongside the establishment of free trade agreements, all aimed at promoting free trade and supporting small enterprises.

Key organizations such as the U.S.-Saudi Arabian Business Council, MEPI, and the Middle East Free Trade Agreement (MEFTA) played critical roles in these initiatives, with MEPI programs specifically focusing on entrepreneurship training for small businesses in Arab countries and enhancing trade relations between the United States and the Arab world. Some projects and activities did not appear directly related to the promotion of democracy; instead, they aimed to enhance community engagement and self-governance. Such initiatives often centered on fostering corporate, environmental, and cultural cooperation, supported by political assistance that simultaneously raised political awareness.

In the field of education, a range of activities was implemented, including the provision of scholarships, the establishment of student discussion groups, and the organization of student exchanges and training programs. MEPI collaborated with individuals, as well as Gulf governments, to facilitate exchange and training programs that included political training. These initiatives contributed to the rapid growth of the MEPI Alumni Network, which actively engaged in dialogues and exchanges that supported democratic advancement. Public universities expanded their degree and diploma offerings, implemented coeducational programs, and undertook curriculum reforms. Online clubs were also established, and MEPI was tasked with providing new resources to enhance curricula and civic education. Under MEPI projects, children's storybooks were translated into Arabic for classroom libraries. American officials actively engaged the public in discussions about good governance through training sessions and forums, where students across various educational levels were introduced to democratic principles and practices. Scholarships for studying and teaching English were also made available. American Corners were established as community-based information and outreach centers in several Gulf states.

Over time, MEPI increasingly focused on the civil society sector. A U.S.-supported civic education program trained 56 teachers in January 2008. Small grants were allocated to non-governmental organizations in Kuwait to facilitate their development. In 2007, the American embassy in Kuwait began hosting informal biweekly meetings attended by diplomats and NGO representatives. Sponsored exchange programs were made available for aspiring NGO leaders and social activists in Qatar. To further promote civil society development, the United States collaborated with regional organizations in Saudi Arabia to sponsor events featuring American speakers.

The United States government provided financial and technical assistance to media organizations and journalists throughout the Gulf to foster media independence and freedom of expression. Scholarships were offered, and various media training and exchange programs were organized, with MEPI playing a significant role in their planning and funding. Notably, some Gulf states impose censorship on internet content. In response, the U.S. government enacted the Global Online Freedom Act in 2007, aiming to enhance freedom of expression online by urging American companies to refrain from operating in countries that enforce internet censorship.

Short- and long-term objectives and executing plans were established to address human rights issues. The Human Rights Commission and the National Society for Human Rights engaged with American ambassadors in Saudi Arabia, where members of the Saudi military received training on international human rights standards. In 2008, the International Visitor Leadership Program funded Saudi government and civil society representatives to attend seminars in the United States focused on participatory democracy.

During his visit to Kuwait in 2008, President Bush convened a roundtable discussion on women's rights and democracy with female activists. Roundtable discussions organized by the U.S. embassy in Kuwait included government officials and female activists, and an American diplomat held a conversation with eight female activists in the same year. A speaker delivered a series of talks on women's rights during a four-day national tour.

Recommendations

As this paper discusses, advocates of democracy in developing nations like Pakistan may also diversify their strategies. In order to lay a strong basis for a stable democracy, changing the political culture at the society level is just as crucial, if not more so, than establishing governmental institutions like parliaments and consultative councils. The international community must focus more on this facet of democratisation since effective improvements to the situation of human rights can only come about through a shift in public opinion.

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