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Islamists Win 24 of 50 Seats in Parliament of Kuwait

By [ROBERT F. WORTH](#)

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Islamist candidates won 24 of 50 seats in [Kuwait](#)'s parliamentary elections on Saturday, a gain of two seats over their total in the last round of elections there two years ago, according to official results released Sunday.

Liberal candidates and their allies won seven seats, one fewer than in the last round. None of the 27 women who ran won in what was the second election since women were granted the right to vote and run for office in 2005.

Economic issues dominated the monthlong election campaign, and it was not clear how the Islamists' greater share of power would affect the Kuwaiti Parliament, one of the most powerful and active legislatures in the Arab world. There are no legally recognized political parties in Kuwait, and affiliation is flexible.

"It's a sign of a more conservative mood in the society," said Nasser al-Sane, an Islamist candidate who won a seat. "But to have a conservative color does not mean that we are against economic reform."

Tribally oriented candidates, who, like Islamists, tend to be conservative on social issues, also did well, Mr. Sane added.

Kuwait's emir, Sheik Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah, dissolved the Parliament in March after cabinet ministers resigned, saying they were frustrated by repeated confrontations with lawmakers.

The election campaign itself was a striking departure from the past because of a new election law that reduced the number of districts to 5 from 25, forcing candidates to take their messages to many more constituents. Lawmakers fought for the change in 2006, arguing that the smaller districts allowed candidates to buy votes more easily. Voters chose up to four candidates in their respective districts.

The campaign relied heavily on the media, with new newspapers and satellite TV stations carrying election coverage intensively. In the past, candidates depended mostly on personal ties with voters at diwanis, traditional evening social gatherings.

Candidates from Kuwait's minority Shiite community won five seats, one more than the last round. They were energized by a dispute in February when the authorities questioned former Shiite members of the Kuwaiti Parliament who had sent condolences to the militant Shiite group [Hezbollah](#) after the assassination of [Imad Mugniyah](#), one of its top commanders.

Economic reform was an important issue for many voters. Despite its vast oil wealth, Kuwait has let hospitals, schools and roads crumble, and some citizens would like to emulate the more vibrant private sectors of Persian Gulf neighbors like the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

About 360,000 people were eligible to vote of a population of 2.6 million. Foreigners — more than a third of the population — cannot vote.

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