

Drivers and Future Prospects of Political Reform in the Arab Gulf: A Study in the Phase of Regional and International Transformations

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Abstract. This study analyzes the issue of political reform in the Arab Gulf states amid accelerated regional and international transformations, particularly following the Arab Spring and the ensuing internal and external pressures on regional political systems. It proceeds from the hypothesis that political stagnation and the absence of effective popular participation constitute one of the primary causes of internal crises, placing regimes before challenges related to legitimacy, stability, and responsiveness to citizens' demands. The study discusses the evolution of the concept of political reform—from being perceived as a tool of foreign intervention or international conspiracy to an urgent internal necessity imposed by shifts in the international environment and its conflicts, including proxy wars. It highlights the specificity of Gulf governance systems, which rely on traditional loyalties, while raising questions about these regimes' capacity to adapt to current transformations. The study concludes by forecasting two main scenarios for the region's future: either the resilience of regimes through genuine gradual reforms, or entry into paths of disintegration should the trust gap between rulers and ruled persist.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political reform processes, as mechanisms of change, are practiced continuously and with full conviction in democratic states, primarily because they aim to involve the largest possible number of citizens in the political process and to address the weaknesses and dysfunctions inherent in the political system, thereby enhancing its efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling its fundamental duties and responsibilities. In contrast, states governed by dictatorial regimes are characterized by political stagnation, due to the suppression of popular will—one of the key internal drivers of revolutions—and they accord little attention to political reform except in very late stages, under intense popular or external pressures that threaten the regime's survival. Consequently, the natural outcome of such political stagnation is complete or near-complete paralysis across all social spheres. When the political system's effectiveness dissipates, this often leads to the emergence of numerous internal crises and an inability to resolve them, potentially rendering the state a failed or near-failed state.

The issue of political reform ranks among the most prominent topics on the international and regional agendas since the onset of what is known as the Arab Spring, as an inevitable outcome shaped by transformations in the international environment, marked by an ideological conflict often described as "proxy wars."

Historically, political reform in the Third World and the Arab world was frequently viewed through the lens of conspiracy theory and foreign intervention in its various forms and methods (international financial institutions, multinational corporations, and the protection of individual human rights and freedoms). Today, however, political reform in these states has become an inevitable consequence of internal and external pressures on ruling political systems that have demonstrated complete failure in responding to their peoples' demands and adapting to changes in the international environment. In other words, political reform has evolved into an internal demand and an urgent necessity with its own justifications, amid the emergence of a new wave of international policies.

This article sheds light on a topic that has recently become the primary concern of political regimes—both monarchical and republican alike. The specific focus on the Arab Gulf region is justified by several essential factors, foremost among them the strategic geographical location of the Arab Gulf, which lies at the heart of tension hotspots in the Arab world. Furthermore, the Gulf ruling systems have historically derived—and continue to derive—their survival and continuity from popular allegiance and loyalty. However, the foundations of this loyalty and allegiance may now be in their final stages, due to the contagion effect of the Arab Spring on one hand, and international, regional, and even domestic tensions on the other.

It has therefore become necessary, even if only theoretically at this stage, to discuss the imperative of political reform in the Arab Gulf—meaning that change must originate from the genuine will of both rulers and peoples, rather than being imposed externally and thus doomed to failure, as observed in well-known Arab experiences. The primary error in those cases was the profound gap between rulers and the ruled. The central question arising in this context is: What are the drivers and future prospects of political reform in the Arab Gulf following regional and international changes? Accordingly, this article addresses two main axes: the first, titled "Political Reform in the Arab Gulf: Drivers, Justifications, and Objectives"; and the second, "Scenarios of Change in the Arab Gulf after Regional and International Transformations: Prospects of Disintegration and Resilience."

1.1. The Concept of Reform and Political Reform

1.1.1. The Concept of Reform

Linguistically, the term "reform" (iṣlāḥ) derives from the verb "aṣlaḥa" (to reform or amend), meaning to remove corruption among people and to reconcile them. It is the antonym of corruption. Reform thus entails changing a situation toward uprightness

in accordance with wisdom. This definition indicates that "reform" applies to both material and moral dimensions: linguistically, it signifies transitioning or changing from one state to a better one, or shifting from something to something superior.

Terminologically, the Oxford Dictionary defines reform as "a change or amendment for the better in the condition of things that are defective, especially in corrupt or unjust political institutions and practices, removing some abuse or error." Reform aligns with the notion of progress and inherently involves change toward improvement, particularly change that is more suitable for achieving objective goals set by decision-makers in a given field of human activity. Webster's Dictionary of Political Terms (1988) defines political reform as "improving the political system to eliminate corruption and despotism."

Thus, reform constitutes change or adjustment toward the better in an anomalous or deteriorating situation. Consequently, the concept of reform refers to implementing certain modifications in the political, economic, or social domains of the state—typically when frustrations with the existing situation intensify and escaping it becomes essential for achieving stability.

Reform also encompasses a set of practices aimed at modernizing the state's performance in areas experiencing crisis, thereby placing the political system in a legitimacy predicament across its various dimensions.

From these definitions, it is evident that reform requires the existence of a crisis-ridden situation or what may be termed a driving environment or circumstances for the reform process—representing a danger or challenge to the existing system. This necessitates decisive reforms and decisions to confront challenges, whether arising from internal factors (such as deteriorating economic conditions or loss of legitimacy in the governing system, i.e., political instability) or external sources threatening the state's security and existence.

Burhan Ghalioun defines reform as: "Reform means nothing other than returning to the application of the rule of law, abolishing privileges and favoritism, generalizing the principles of transparency, efficiency, and accountability, respecting individuals, and encouraging them to bear responsibility without threatening the foundations upon which [the system] rests." He also describes it as: "Reform means changing traditional values and behavioral patterns, expanding the scope of loyalty to encompass the nation, rationalizing public life, rationalizing structures of power, strengthening specialized organizations, and adopting criteria of competence."

Others have noted that reform is a process requiring reconsideration and revision of prevailing political principles and values due to their incompatibility with societal aspirations or their unsuitability, and the adoption of alternative principles and values to transition from non-democratic systems to democratic ones, as expressed by thinker Samuel Huntington.

What is notable in these definitions is their emphasis on the core idea in the concept of reform: change and adjustment toward the better to realize societal ambitions and goals, thereby consolidating democratic governance based on the following principles:

- Establishing the rule of law.
- Rationalizing public life and ensuring equitable distribution of wealth.
- Replacing loyalty criteria with competence standards.
- Strengthening the role of specialized organizations and rationalizing power structures.

Consequently, reform usually serves as a logical response to confronting various difficult circumstances that challenge the existing system across different domains, through peaceful and gradual means. Reform is generally a gradual and slow process, unlike revolution, which is characterized by its violent nature and radical transformative character.

In this regard, the Encyclopedia of Political Sciences defines reform as: "a non-radical adjustment and development in the form of governance or social relations without affecting their foundations. Reform, unlike revolution, is merely an improvement in the existing political and social system without touching its foundations."

Reform is thus a gradual, peaceful process of change and adjustment toward the better to address various deficiencies and gaps in society and its institutions in all their forms.

Political reform constitutes a fundamental pillar of good governance. Its manifestations include the rule of law, transparency, popular participation in decision-making, justice, effective performance, administrative efficiency, accountability, answerability, and strategic vision. It represents a renewal of political life, a correction of its paths and constitutional and legal frameworks, ensuring general constitutional harmony, the supremacy of law, separation of powers, and delineation of relations among them—this being the definition adopted by the United Nations Programme on Governance in the Arab States. The Political Encyclopedia describes it as "a non-radical amendment or development in the form of governance or social relations without infringing upon their foundations; unlike revolution, it is merely an improvement in the existing political and social system without affecting its foundations. It resembles reinforcing the supports of a building to prevent its collapse, and is often employed to prevent or delay the outbreak of revolution."

The term "reform" is not novel in Arab political thought; it appears several times in the Holy Quran. Before becoming an independent and widely circulated concept in modern political literature, its political, economic, and social dimensions were embedded in many prevalent concepts such as political development, modernization, political change, transition, or change in general. These concepts are largely associated with the Third World, including the Arab world, and possess multiple, precise, and clear definitions. However, the concept of reform remains somewhat ambiguous due to its overlap with these preceding notions.ⁱ

1.1.2. The Process of Reform

The process of reform does not occur in a vacuum, nor does it arise merely from a desire for change. Rather, it requires the presence of a conducive environment or objective circumstances that propel it forward, in order to avert the negative consequences of maintaining the status quo—namely, inertia and stagnation. To examine these circumstances, the mechanisms through which the reform process unfolds, and the scope or degree of reform required, it is essential to highlight the following realities:

- **Reform Typically Occurs in the Context of Crisis** The starting point is invariably a crisis that poses a danger or challenge to the existing system, necessitating decisive decisions and potentially radical reforms to address it. The crisis may be external, threatening the security, stability, or very existence of the state ⁱⁱ, or it may stem from internal factors such as deteriorating economic conditions, political instability, or loss of legitimacy in the governing regime—or a combination thereof. In such cases, reform represents the rational response to confronting these arduous conditions.
- **Advocates of Reform Usually Draw on an Ideological or Intellectual Doctrine** Proponents of reform typically base their calls for change on an ideological framework (ideology) that helps justify and defend their reformist ideas.
- **Reform Initiated from Above by the Leader and the Ruling Elite** When reform originates from the leader and those around him—the ruling elite ("reform from above")—it must necessarily promote the expansion of political participation ⁱⁱⁱ. This

involves creating elements and groups that benefit from the reform process, thereby ensuring its success and sustainability—i.e., forging a broad reform coalition. The wider the base of participation in the reform process, the greater its legitimacy. Reforms undertaken for the sake of people's freedoms, interests, and future will undoubtedly motivate them to uphold and protect them against attempts to obstruct or undermine them. Consequently, reform must generate social dynamism and foster a collective societal will. In other words, top-down reform initiatives must be accompanied by gradual bottom-up reform ("reform from below"). Otherwise, reforms remain partial and inconsequential, easily reversible due to the absence of mass constituencies capable of defending and adhering to them.

1.1.3. The Outcomes and Effects of Reform

The effects and outcomes of reforms vary depending on the circumstances under which they are implemented, as well as the objectives and goals pursued by reformist movements and leaders. It is inherently difficult to fully grasp the effects and outcomes of reform while the process remains ongoing ("in process"), rendering premature judgments inappropriate; history alone may ultimately hold the authority to judge and evaluate.

Just as new ideas and reformist changes are typically met with initial resistance from certain societal segments, they also elicit enthusiasm and support from others^{iv}. However, reforms that achieve success and continuity are those that succeed in creating beneficiary groups and supporters who cling to their achievements, defend them, and struggle to ensure their irreversibility ("irreversible reform"). These forces have a vested interest in preserving and sustaining the reform. Fruitful reforms are those that broaden popular participation and strengthen and activate civil society institutions—such as political parties, trade unions, and others—which serve as a robust line of defense against forces opposed to change and reform^v.

Thus, political reform embodies the idea of political modernization, the building of democracy, and disciplined change at the political, institutional, and cultural levels. It involves developing the constitutional organization of state powers, realizing the principle of accountability and strengthening its mechanisms, emphasizing popular participation at all levels, ensuring the independence of state administrative apparatuses, and safeguarding public rights and freedoms^{vi}.

1.1.4. Political Development and Political Culture as Entry Points to the Political Reform Process

Political development is a concept that overlaps significantly with similar notions—whether in context or meaning—such as political modernization, political openness, political reform, political transition, or democracy. Political development refers to the system's capacity to interact with its internal and external environments, and to the ability of the ruling elite to achieve comprehensive development. As one facet of political reform, the meaning of political development rests on entrenching equality and engaging in the spirit of democratic values. To achieve this, it is essential to establish a culture of mutual trust and dialogue between the political system and citizens. For practical application, taking the cultural structure into serious consideration is of utmost importance when studying any political system.

American political scientist Gabriel Almond^{vii} is credited as the first to introduce the term "political culture," defining it as "a system of political values, attitudes, and beliefs." The establishment of a political culture framework relies on criteria drawn from history, economics, society, and politics.

The culture of dialogue plays a crucial role in the political reform process, as dialogue builds trust between individuals and the political system. Democratic systems are fundamentally based on free popular consent toward the political system, achieved by granting individuals their full rights. Under this mutual trust between the political system and the core elements constituting the citizenry—particularly civil society institutions such as parties and trade unions—and the democratic images these institutions create in society (when properly utilized^{viii}), genuine progress becomes possible.

Moreover, human societies, for numerous reasons, constantly require legislation and a constitution to regulate their various affairs, delineate responsibilities, and subject all state institutions to these constitutional laws. The exacerbation of political authoritarianism and monopolization of opinion in many states stems from the absence of constitutional institutions tasked with curbing tendencies toward autocracy, arrogance, and absolute rule. Political reform cannot be achieved merely through declarations or tactically acceptable popular steps; it requires a constitution that translates the will for reform and aligns state institutions with the general will of the nation. Political reform invariably needs a legal foundation—this being the national constitution that organizes relations and defines responsibilities. Law serves as the sole reference for addressing all problems and crises, and all state apparatuses and institutions must submit to the requirements of law and constitutional provisions.

Consequently, any political reform project necessitates a constitutional reference, transparency in performance and policies, and the subjection of all societal forces and power centers within state institutions to law and the constitution. True political reform cannot be imagined without a constitution and a legal system that guarantees freedoms, protects rights, preserves gains, and regulates competition and conflict. The constitution serves as both a safeguard and a profound national demand, harmonizing with the imperatives of the modern era and the authenticity of society^{ix}.

1.2. Drivers of Reform in the Arab Gulf States

It is no secret that, until relatively recently, the Arab Gulf states experienced somewhat challenging economic and social conditions compared to the profound transformation that entered the life of the individual Gulf citizen thanks to the discovery of oil. Oil exploration began in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait, followed subsequently by the United Arab Emirates and Oman. The "black gold" became the primary and decisive force in reshaping the economies of the Gulf states. Undoubtedly, economic development or growth is inevitably accompanied by growth and advancement in various closely related and dependent fields.

This immense development in the Gulf states should not lead us to overlook the fact that these countries have assumed the character of rentier states—those heavily reliant on the inputs and outputs of oil—which has created near-total dependence on external markets. It is observable that the Gulf states have entered a phase of anomie in both economic and social terms. One cannot ignore that they are societies with tribal or clan-based social structures, a characteristic that may clash with economic openness, which casts its shadow over class diversification. This has given rise to affluent classes and those of high status who play significant roles in political spheres, thereby rendering Gulf society subordinate to the rentier state authority that monopolizes resources itself and dominates the engines of the country^x.

All this discussion leads to the conclusion that oil discoveries plunged the Gulf region abruptly into global capitalism, giving

birth to a new and distinct system that combines immense economic wealth with political and social backwardness.

At the governance level, tribal families have dominated power and adopted the principle of hereditary succession, enabling them to control both civilian and military institutions—a logical measure to avoid internal tensions. They have oriented toward establishing alliances with commercial entities and transforming civilian institutions into solidarity organizations within the state structure. The ruling families in the Gulf perform multifaceted political roles; they constitute socio-political institutions and central authorities in society, deriving their strength from multiple sources (economic, social, intellectual, and even religious).

All these internal factors, combined with regional and international transformations following the end of the Cold War, the fall of dictatorial regimes in developing countries, the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent pressures on Gulf regimes to pursue democratic transformation, have led the Arab Gulf region to witness a series of shifts in political participation and the establishment of representative councils in general. These transformations arose from internal and external pressures. Consequently, ruling elites have begun confronting various forces attempting to impose modern ideologies. Global events have induced radical changes in political and social thought, with these shifts premised on priorities such as localizing democracy, human rights, opening space for political pluralism, reforming the Gulf system, and eliminating any blemishes in the executive and legislative apparatuses of the state. Change and reform have become an inevitable international imperative.

This is because the repercussions of what is termed the Arab Spring were not confined to the directly affected countries but extended to neighboring regional and even international states. Since 2011, the most pressing question for observers of events in the Arab Gulf region has been the position and status of the Gulf—whether as an institution represented by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) or as individual Gulf states—vis-à-vis all these developments ^{xi}.

1.2.1. With Regard to the Gulf Cooperation Council

Discussions of political reform within the GCC are closely linked to political reform in the governing systems of its member states. The GCC mirrors the Arab League in many respects, incorporating the same political and unificationist objectives as the League's charter. The GCC's Basic Statute reflects the political systems of its member states. Therefore, it is impossible to address political reform in the GCC without discussing political reform in the ruling systems of its member countries. Many researchers and specialists have called for the establishment of a Gulf parliament within the GCC framework, one that would be freely and directly elected by the people in each member state. This parliament would assume the advisory role of the Supreme Council's Consultative Commission, established in December 1996 by a decision of the Supreme Council.

Beyond this, comprehensive political reform in the GCC requires integrated political reform in the GCC states themselves. Among the prerequisites for such reform in the member states is the adoption of constitutional democratic governance systems based on the practical (not merely theoretical) separation and cooperation of the three powers, recognition of popular sovereignty as the source of all authority, and the formation of an independent legislative body directly elected by the people. This could follow the model of constitutional democratic governance established by the Kuwaiti Constitution of 1962 and the Bahraini Constitution of 1973.

What casts a shadow over the future of this institution is the political and diplomatic tensions that could reach the point of final rupture—particularly between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—due to proxy competition over disputed regions, especially Yemen.

1.2.2. With Regard to the Gulf States Individually

Despite the economic development and varying degrees of social transformation experienced by most Gulf states, these have not been matched by structural political changes. Consequently, citizens in these Gulf states sense the meaning or bond of citizenship primarily through affiliation with broad tribal alliances, in what is known as the prolonged "labor" from tribe to state—a condition prone to producing protracted conflict if separatist tendencies emerge among marginalized groups allied with ruling factions. Although resolving such conflict would be difficult—whether through revolution, regime change, or even internal reform—the prospects of disintegration remain due to the absence of an organic bond among citizens, pointing to an identity crisis in some states, such as the UAE and Bahrain.

Loyalties still reside within primary relations: the Bahraini, Saudi, or Emirati individual's ties to tribe, clan, and sect precede citizenship. The relative recency of Gulf state formation (ranging from four to five decades) indicates that these states did not emerge from calculations of national independence or liberation from foreign colonialism. This has led heads of state, kings, or emirs to instrumentalize religious dimensions or tribal identities to bolster internal legitimacy. These sub-state identities have weakened national cohesion. Furthermore, a trust gap exists between rulers and political opposition; one reason compelling Gulf regimes to review themselves is this trust deficit between governing systems and opposition. In Bahrain, for example, the Shiite opposition—representing the societal majority according to much of the literature—comprises 60–70% of the population. Bahrain's situation is not dissimilar from other Arab cases, as the successive waves of Arab revolutions cannot be explained independently of the acute crisis of trust between Arab peoples and their ruling regimes, and the latter's loss of credibility.

Without overlooking ethnic minorities, government policies toward Shiite demands—continuously expressed as the "Shiite dilemma" in the three Gulf cases (Bahrain, Kuwait, and eastern Saudi Arabia)—form part of a broader problem: the citizenship crisis. Sectarian discrimination is one element of this crisis, which manifests in numerous ways but is intrinsically linked to the stability and territorial unity of Gulf states.

Narratives persist that monarchies are stable and that their past flexibility implies future flexibility. Nevertheless, a more precise approach is needed to understand the potentials for political transformation, which should not be conflated with street protests or elite changes. True transformation entails institutional, social normative, attitudinal, and ideational shifts. In some respects, this is already occurring in the Gulf. Intense pressures do not necessarily lead to revolution, but if Gulf rulers fail to absorb changing public expectations, more revolutionary movements may emerge in coming years. Revolutions may not succeed given the tools and resources available to Gulf governments for power maintenance. However, struggles over power and wealth can polarize social, ethnic, or religious groups; opposition movements may become more radical and fragmented; and major regional and international powers may exploit unresolved political vulnerabilities ^{xii}.

1.3. Political Reform in the Arab Gulf States: Obstacles and Future Prospects

1.3.1. Obstacles to Political Reform in the Arab Gulf States

The term "obstacles to reform" refers to the set of factors that may impede, delay, or even prevent the trajectory—or more precisely, the project—of political reform in the Arab Gulf states.

- **Civil Society Institutions** One of the obstacles that may slow the implementation of political reforms is the absence of robust civil society institutions capable of exerting pressure on ruling authorities. In this context, official statistics indicate that civil society organizations in the Gulf states are largely confined to development centers, social service providers, social welfare centers, and charitable associations. Virtually no professional unions, trade unions, or political associations have been registered. Nevertheless, greater attention to the issue of civil society institutions in the Gulf states, alongside the modernization policies of political regimes, would significantly aid in absorbing and managing the political evolution of these societies.
- **The Tribal Background of Gulf Societies** Among the most significant objective obstacles preventing political reform as desired in the Gulf states is the persistence—and indeed deliberate reinforcement—of tribal and clan structures in their influence and roles, even within urban and civic realities. These structures continue to perceive reality through a tribal cultural lens. Many view the Gulf state as essentially a broad tribal alliance in which loyalty is directed toward the sheikh. Consequently, political transformations in Gulf societies remain fundamentally tied to this tribal system. A primary reason for this phenomenon is the lack of a comprehensive project to develop national culture and belonging. The root causes lie in a primitive perception of authority and governance.
- **The Rentier State Policy** The economic system in the Arab Gulf has given rise to the rentier state model, defined as a state whose economy relies heavily on externally sourced revenues. Political change becomes feasible only when the state begins transitioning from a rent-dependent entity to one supported by diversified sources.
- **Demographic Imbalance** The demographic issue ranks among the most critical challenges facing Gulf states. It raises questions about the nature of changes induced by the presence of Asian and foreign labor on the population composition in these countries, and the potential future transformations or risks that may affect national identity or pose threats to security and economic stability ^{xiii}.

1.3.2. The Future of Political Reform in the Arab Gulf States

Authentic reform movements represent an opportunity and an asset for governments to engage with constructively—particularly because the majority of opposition figures are not revolutionaries. Only a small minority in the Gulf supports political violence. To develop more inclusive participatory scenarios, local policymakers need to listen to reformist movements, local academics, and civil society organizations that have repeatedly called for greater checks and balances on government, meaningful parliamentary elections, expanded freedom of expression ^{xiv}, and serious anti-corruption efforts.

Despite this, current indicators suggest that a benign, voluntary reform scenario is unlikely. Gulf policymakers recognize that long-term social and economic transformations are ongoing and frequently express a desire for reform aligned with local values and norms. However, rulers resist ceding power and rely on repressive policies, including the imprisonment of opponents, revocation of citizenship as punishment for peaceful dissent, and tightened restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly through new anti-terrorism legislation. By threatening peaceful reformers, GCC governments are squandering the opportunity for gradual change. The dangers of suppressing peaceful political opposition are evident in other regional countries, notably Iraq and Syria. Building strong institutions over the long term remains essential for fostering trust between rulers and the ruled.

In the context of the Arab Spring and its accompanying regional and international changes across all levels, more than a decade after the Arab peoples' uprisings, the Arab Gulf states face a genuine political maelstrom. The hostility toward Iran, the stance toward Israel, and the strategy of remaining in the camp of "reliable" states distant from the epicenter of conflict may now require urgent review. The overall situation in the Arab region today is highly dynamic, difficult to fully comprehend or manage. This implies new readings and shifts in priorities regarding relations with the United States and the West—in terms of policies and external influences. These intense pressures do not necessarily lead to revolution, but if Gulf rulers fail to accommodate changing public expectations, more revolutionary movements may emerge in the coming years. Revolutions may not succeed given the tools ^{xv} and resources available to Gulf governments for maintaining power. Nevertheless, struggles over power and wealth can polarize social, ethnic, or religious groups; opposition movements may become more radical and fragmented; and major regional and international powers may exploit unresolved political vulnerabilities.

2. CONCLUSION

To avoid the Arab revolutions—which were launched but have yet to reach a clear outcome—due to the fact that the reform process in those cases did not stem from the genuine will of rulers, governments, or even the Arab peoples themselves (who were not following an organized revolutionary agenda but rather internal and external directives aimed at reaching specific points within political systems and their symbols), the Gulf states must undertake a series of political reforms. These have become an unavoidable necessity; otherwise, Gulf states will face choices whose least bitter option remains harsh. The most important political reforms that Gulf states could proactively pursue are summarized in the following points:

- Adopting long-term economic diversification plans alongside serious long-term political development strategies to manage the impact of political transformations on the state's economic role.
- Developing stronger, more transparent institutional mechanisms—parliaments, judicial bodies, and ministries—to manage competing interests that naturally arise in any society.
- Refraining from criminalizing peaceful opposition activities, ranging from calls for constitutional monarchy or elected parliaments to criticism of rulers over their policies.
- Prioritizing transparency and openness in governance.
- Ensuring social and economic integration as a valuable counterweight against sectarian or ethnic identities.
- Implementing meaningful and sustainable reforms that require changes not only in laws and formal institutions but also in informal institutions, modes of operation, and ways of thinking within ruling structures.

- Transforming the concept of political reform into an integral part of Gulf political culture.
- Enhancing the capabilities of representative and consultative councils and granting them greater freedom and transparency.

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ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Martin Griffiths and Terry O'Callaghan, *Key Concepts in International Relations* (Gulf Research Center).

^{iv} Al-Jassour, *Encyclopedia of Political Science*, op. cit.

^v Griffiths and O'Callaghan, *Key Concepts in International Relations*, op. cit.

^{vi} Muhammad Jawad Rida, *The Conflict between State and Tribe in the Gulf: Development Crises and the Crises of Development* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1992).

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