**PAPER TITLE:** The Kuwaiti Diwaniyya: From Shareecha to Mshtaricha

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**ABSTRACT:**

The *diwaniyya* is the Kuwaiti man’s realm. It's where he does business, discusses politics and spends leisure time with his friends. It's also his escape. Men devote so much time to these traditional gatherings that Kuwaiti wives jokingly refer to it as the "shareecha," or second wife.

Prominent in the Arabian Peninsula for centuries, the *diwaniyya*, or "majlis" as it is often referred to in other Gulf states, has been a crucial and perpetual institution. Particularly prevalent in Kuwait the *diwaniyya* has always been politically relevant, especially since the period immediately preceding the Gulf War.

*Diwaniyas* are held inside homes, but universally understood to be public institutions as there are no invitations and they are "open" to anyone who walks up. Certainly it has also been culturally understood that no female would ever just stroll in. However new social and civic realities, which have made women a necessary component of Kuwaiti politics, have challenged the once essential "publicness" of this institution. In the past decade it has been necessary for the *diwaniyya* to either become gendered and expand to incorporate women (and also a quasi-private framework), or remain unchanged and sacrifice its relevance. And like any good "traditional" fixture of society, it has accommodated to remain relevant.

In this paper I will discuss the gendered evolution of the *diwaniyya* in Kuwaiti politics by analyzing the recent forked development of the institution as both a public and private institution. I will argue why the extension of suffrage to women was paramount to this division and explain why it was necessary for the *diwaniyya* to expand its role by manifesting itself to varying degrees as a public and private institution. Finally I will enumerate some potential societal consequences as a result of the expansion of the *diwaniyya* and threats to its continued political prosperity.