A STEP TOWARDS DEMOCRACY?
2005 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA

A THESIS SUBMITTED
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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the first public election in the history of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which are the municipal elections that were conducted in three phases between 10 February 2005 and 21 April 2005. The outcome of the elections showed that only a small proportion (17 %) of the 4.5 million eligible voters among the Saudi citizens chose to vote. To examine the reasons behind that low level of participation among citizens, a multi-method approach was adapted in this study, which included using quantitative (survey questionnaires and newspaper content analysis) and qualitative (interviews) methods. As a result, 60 semi-structured interviews were conducted with officials in the government and the private sector, journalists, winning and losing candidates and members of the public. 1591 completed questionnaires were collected from a sample of the Saudi citizens. Further, a content analysis was undertaken of 754 items from four Saudi national newspapers that covered a six-month period (November 2004 to April 2005).

This research found that Saudis were apathetic for a variety of different reasons, but the main factors that might have contributed to the citizens' low level of participation were the following three factors. First, the lack of political awareness among a considerable number of citizens was the main reason for their political disengagement. Specifically, their understanding of the importance of the elections in general, and the role of the municipal elections in particular. Secondly, the ineffectiveness of the government's awareness media campaign before and during the elections might have failed to educate people about the importance and regulations of the electoral process, and the campaign's failure to persuade them to participate in it. Thirdly, the ineffectiveness of the candidates' electoral campaigns may have reduced citizens' enthusiasm towards municipal elections. Moreover, the findings of this study showed that the factors that contributed to non-participation in Saudi elections resemble those in other democratic countries around the world, despite the fact that Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, and a strongly religious and tribal society. Finally, the study found that Saudi citizens, candidates and voters, as well as other people who were involved in the election, had different opinions about that process, but the Saudi mass media coverage did not reflect any of that diversity.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION



(Participate in the decision-making)

2005 municipal elections in Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with the first public elections in the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These were the municipal elections to elect half the municipal council members in the country in 2005 under the slogan: 'Participate in the decision-making'. Only a small number (17 %) of Saudi citizens participated in those elections out of 4.5 million eligible voters (Menoret, 2006). Many factors might have contributed to the citizens' high level of apathy, but I argue in this study that there were three main reasons for that phenomenon. First, the lack of political awareness among a large number of Saudi citizens. Second, the ineffectiveness of the government's awareness media campaign before and during the elections, which I believe did not have an influential role in educating people about the electoral process or in highlighting its importance and urging citizens to participate. Third, the ineffectiveness of the candidates' electoral campaigns, which may have reduced citizens' enthusiasm towards those municipal elections. Furthermore, the country experienced the same factors that led to apathy as many democratic nations on top of Saudi Arabia's own religious, cultural, social and political characteristics.

I chose to investigate this issue because public communication campaigns is an area that I have always wanted to explore. I am fascinated by communication strategies and tactics used in such campaigns and believe that campaigning strategies can be used in many public or political issues locally or internationally. When introduced to public relations as an undergraduate, I learned that it is both an art and a science. It is an area defined by precise rules and principles, and yet there is a tremendous scope for self-expression in the form of interpretation and analysis. This feature of public communication intrigued me very much, and I decided to pursue further studies in effective public communication campaigns. After completing my Master's programme in 2001, I went back to my country where I was director of Public Relations Administration at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. I was very eager to see how one might use communication skills to tackle real life issues.

According to Weiss and Tschirhart (1994) public communication campaigns are 'attempts to shape behaviour toward desirable social outcomes' (p. 35). The authors explained that among the campaigns' goals are specific policy results that lead to better outcomes for individuals, families, or communities. Thus, when the King of Saudi Arabia decided to select half of the municipal councils members in the country through elections, it was considered a

revolutionary move in Saudi society because it was the first step towards reform, whether it was an 'administrative' reform, as it was called at home, or 'a shift towards democracy' as it can be seen from abroad. But the low turnout for the municipal elections raised many questions about the effectiveness of the government's election campaign and drew my attention to this issue. Thus, I found it interesting to study the goals, strategies and tactics of the election process to know more about what actually happened in those elections.

Furthermore, municipal elections were the first political experience of its kind and size in an absolute monarchy, where political parties, political associations or unions are not allowed as well as the country did not experience such general elections before (Long, 1997, Rugh, 2004).

Municipal elections were to be held in a very religious and conservative society, where some of its members consider the elections to be a foreign phenomenon not suitable for their society. Therefore, some of them did not participate because they believed the elections were incompatible with Islam and were imposed from Western states on many countries, Saudi Arabia being one of them (Henderson, 2005). Meanwhile, some citizens welcomed the move as a first step towards democracy and further political reforms in the Kingdom.

Saudi municipal elections took place in a traditional society, where tribal, familial ties and customs have a more significant impact than any other affiliation (Gazzaz, 2006, Al Moaither, 2001, Khan, 2005). So as we shall see throughout this thesis, the voices of the tribe or family played major roles in the victory of some candidates, especially in rural areas around the country (Al Ghamdi, 2006).

Moreover, the municipal elections outcome sparked a debate inside and outside the country. Some observers in the West feared that the elections would provide an opportunity for Islamists to dominate councils in all regions of the country, and endanger any further moves towards democracy (Gause, 2005, *New York Times*, 4 April 2005), But others thought that even in a Muslim country like Saudi Arabia, citizens would choose the candidates they trusted and who had contributed to society, for example, by working in the voluntary sector for a long time before the elections.

Also, the municipal election process excluded women from participating. Many Western observers looked at this factor as one of the drawbacks of the process (Hamzawy, 2005, BBC, 11 October 2004), but the defenders of the government's decision to exclude women in the

first round of the elections felt that although the first experiment might have some shortcomings, this could benefit the organising committees and give them more experience in the second round of the elections (*Arab News*, 2 October 2004). At the same time, the government approved the participation of women in the second round of the municipal elections in September 2011 (*Al-Quds Al- Arabi*, 7 November 2010).

However, despite the high and diverse expectations, the outcome of those elections which showed a low level of participation among Saudi citizens is the main cause of interest is this case study. The low turnout in those elections has raised many questions among observers about the reasons that might have stopped the majority of the Saudi electorate (83 %) from participating in that political process. As elections are going to be held again in 29 September 2011, I feel that researching the previous elections is timely and very important, as it might perhaps enable academics, the government and media strategists to learn more from the past campaign.

This study examines the views and perceptions of many people in the country through semi-structured interviews and the use of questionnaires. Those questioned were officials and members of elections committees from the government side and the private sector as well as journalists, citizens and candidates. The study also looked at the coverage patterns of the daily press during the elections through a content analysis of four daily national newspapers. The Saudi Government, citizens, candidates and media have dealt with a unique event that happened for the first time in the history of the country and it is interesting to see how all of these four parties treated an event of this size and shape. I would like this thesis to be a documentation, not only of an important national political event, but as a part of the modern history of Saudi Arabia.

No doubt there were varied and complex factors that might have prevented the majority of citizens from participating in the Saudi elections and it will be impossible to study them all in one research project. Thus, this study examines the political awareness among Saudi citizens, effectiveness of the elections media campaign and the implementation of the majority of the candidates' campaigns as three main reasons that might have contributed to the citizens' limited participation in municipal elections.

Chapter Two lays down the theoretical framework of this study, which looks at ideal forms of democracy. Habermas' concept of the 'public sphere' will help towards an understanding of the formation of democracy in Western society and based on that, an understanding of the

ideal democracy, and in that light the Saudi situation will be examined. In contrasting the theory of the public sphere with political reform in Saudi Arabia, the chapter will try to answer some important questions. These are: What is the meaning of democracy in Saudi Arabia? Were there any attempts to establish democracy in the past? What is the shape of future democratic reform in the country? Why does this process matter to the Saudi Government and people? Can a democracy be created without the structures that Habermas deems necessary for creation?

In some ways, perhaps, this study is a test of Habermas' theory. If a true 'public sphere' does not exist grounded in a society, can the basis for a democracy be imposed? The chapter argues that democratic reform in Saudi Arabia is required, but imposing ready-made models incompatible with the Islamic religion or a conservative tribal society might not be successful in Saudi Arabia. Thus, creating a free Saudi 'public sphere', similar to Habermas' proposal, would perhaps help define and introduce more reform to the Kingdom. That democratically-desired reform would undoubtedly have an Islamic frame of reference because Saudi Arabia is a deeply religious and conservative Muslim society. However, the new wave of democracy sweeping the Middle East will have a huge influence on the political situation in Saudi Arabia. As we have seen recently the Youth revolutions forced two presidents (to this date) to step down: the Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Bin Ali and the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who spent 23 and 30 years in power, respectively. Also, the sudden revolution in Libya might succeed in throwing Muammer Gaddafi out of office after 40 years as a leader of the country. The continuous uprisings in neighbouring countries such as Yemen, Bahrain and Oman could have enormous political effects on Saudi Arabia and may speed up any political reform.

Chapter Three examines voters' apathy towards elections. The argument in this chapter is that political apathy is the major factor behind the low turnout in many elections. The chapter examines the meaning, danger and disadvantages of political apathy in national, local and parliamentary elections in many countries around the world. The chapter also discusses various factors behind people's political apathy. These are the nature of the political system in the country, voters' personal characteristics, ineffectiveness of the election campaigns, ineffectiveness of the mass media, as well as the effects of the population size and the environment. Furthermore, the chapter will draw out the conceptual framework of this

phenomenon from different democratic and non-democratic societies to analyse the Saudi situation.

Chapter Four explains the research methods used to answer the study questions and the necessary procedure adopted for collecting the primary data during the fieldwork. A multi-method approach had been used in this study to accomplish the goals of this research project. These methods are semi structured interview as a qualitative method with officials responsible for municipal election campaign strategies and implementation in the government and private sector, and a sample of the candidates, journalists and the general public. Also undertaken was a quantitative method using questionnaire techniques to collect data from a large group of Saudi people, where 1592 completed questionnaires were collected via this process. Content analysis approach is the third quantitative method that has been used in this research project. Analysing the coverage of four main Saudi newspapers (*Al Jazirah*, *Al Watan*, *Okaz* and *Al Yaum*) for six months from November 2004 to April 2005 resulted in 754 items for analysis that would show how the Saudi print media framed the election process in their daily coverage. The argument here is that the multi-method approach which combines quantitative and qualitative methods enriches the research project and allows for the triangulation of the study findings (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000).

To understand more about the municipal elections campaign, it is important to point out the uniqueness of Saudi Arabia, and set the scene for the conduct of the elections. Thus, Chapter Five is going to provide an overview of Saudi Arabia. It discusses the geographical, historical, social, economic, cultural and political conditions that shaped the emergence of Saudi Arabia as a modem state. Also, the social structure of Saudi society and how the Saudi mass media work within it will be examined. Special attention will be given to the role of Islam and the existence of the two Holy mosques in the political, cultural and social life in Saudi Arabia. The chapter will give an idea of how Islam, as a religion, has coloured all aspects of life in the country.

Chapter Six is going to examine the cultural and political background to the Saudi municipal election process. The chapter is going to reveal how the Saudi Government, citizens and the media regarded the elections as new phenomenon in the society. It gives a brief history of the elections, women's participation in the elections, the Ministry's of Municipal and Rural Affairs' and other ministries' preparations for the elections, the election media campaign, and the tactics and programmes of the candidates' electoral campaigns. This chapter is going to

show how the local and international media covered that event and its controversial outcome, as well as the low level of participation among citizens.

The seventh chapter sheds more light on the first factor that might have increased Saudi citizens' non-participation in 2005 municipal elections. I argue in the chapter that the lack of political awareness among a significant proportion of citizens might have decreased their participation in 2005 municipal elections. By lack of political awareness, I mean those citizens who were not interested in municipal elections and who did not understand their importance or conduct. However, non participation for some citizens does not necessarily mean lack of political interest or knowledge, as will looked at later in this chapter. Thus, this chapter is going to find answers to some major questions such as: How interested were citizens in the 2005 municipal elections? Did they register in those elections? If so, did they vote? What stopped people from voting? And what are the general public's perceptions of the elections objectives, strategies, tactics and implementation? This chapter will draw a picture of the Saudis' understanding and their participation in the election process based on the discussion of some sub-variables. These are: interest in the elections, registration in the elections, discussion with friends, citizens' reasons not to participation in the elections and people's perceptions of the elections conduct.

Chapter Eight examines the effectiveness of the municipal elections media campaign. I argue that the ineffectiveness of the elections media campaign might have contributed to citizens' non-participation in elections. The Municipal elections media campaign might have failed to attract people's attention to the elections and did not provide sufficient information to them about the national political process. Also, the effect of the media campaign on citizens' attitudes towards their participation (registration or voting) in the elections was minimal or very limited. In other words, the municipal election media campaign failed to create awareness among Saudi citizens that the municipal election was a part of a political process that would benefit them and their country. Also, the campaign was not successful in showing citizens how the elections were relevant to their present and future. Thus, the outcome of the election showed that Saudi people were driven to the elections by other social powers and that religious, tribal and familial ties had the upper hands in people's voting decisions.

The ninth chapter discusses the poor implementation of the Saudi candidates' electoral campaigns as the final factor that might have increased citizens' disengagement towards municipal elections . I argue in this chapter that the majority of the candidates' electoral

campaigns were ineffective in attracting citizens to vote for those candidates. In other words, candidates' promotional campaigns lacked professional implementation and their programmes, strategies and tactics were not attractive and too similar to each other (Alkhudairi, 2007(a), Al Dakheel, 2005). This chapter is going to answer these two main questions: What were the objectives, strategies and tactics of the candidates' promotional campaigns? And what were the Saudis' perceptions of the effectiveness of those campaigns? To answer these questions, the chapter discusses some sub-variables including: campaign length, the candidates' limited access to the mass media, candidates' promises, and candidates' manipulation of the religious factor, as well as the role of the candidates' characteristics in their wining.

Chapter Ten examines the Saudi print media's representation of the 2005 municipal elections. Surface manifest content analysis was used to answer the last question of my research. How did the Saudi newspapers cover the municipal election process? In other words, how did newspapers set their agendas during the municipal election process and how did they frame the municipal election process to the Saudi public? This chapter presents findings from a systematic analysis of national print media coverage between November 2004 and April 2005 from four national Saudi newspapers. These are *Al Jazirah, Al Watan, Okaz* and *Al Yaum* newspapers. The chapter focuses on five major categories that the print media covered. These are the newspapers' representation of the municipal election process, representation of citizens' understanding of the election process, the citizens' political apathy, the candidates' campaigns and the effectiveness of the municipal elections media campaign. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the coverage patterns of the newspapers and compare its findings (triangulation) to the findings of the other two methods (survey and interviews) employed in this research project. So the findings of this chapter would support or contradict the other findings and show to what extent the print media managed to set its agenda, if any, during the municipal elections period.

I argue in this thesis that the lack of political awareness among the majority of Saudi citizens, the ineffectiveness of the elections media campaign and the primitive conduct of the majority of candidates' campaigns might have decreased Saudi citizens' participation in the 2005 municipal elections. Furthermore, the country experienced the same factors that led to similar disinterest as in many democratic nations, on top of Saudi Arabia's own religious, cultural, social and political characteristics. Thus, more research is needed to explain why such a

similar result was reached in spite of the fact that supposedly democratic societies and absolute monarchies are completely different from each other.

CHAPTER TWO

DEMOCRACY AND SAUDI ARABIA

DEMOCRACY AND SAUDI ARABIA

Introduction

Although Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy with no political parties and no previous political representation, the Kingdom had the municipal elections as the first public elections in its history. It might be true that what happened in the country is not a complete democratic reform, but as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the Saudi election process followed some democratic strategies and tactics adopted by many nations in the developed world. Thus, looking at what happened in other parts of the world may add more insight to our understanding and evaluation of the Saudi reform. From this perspective, democracy is a significant concept and its practices and theories are considered to be the fundamental bases for this research. This chapter will briefly discuss the history of democracy throughout Greece, Rome, the French Revolution and the American Revolution to the present time. Then, three models of democracy will be examined. These are liberal democracy, deliberative democracy and participatory democracy. The meaning and critics of Habermas's concept of the public sphere and its connections with the previous models of democracy as well as its existence in non-democratic countries will be discussed. Then a brief look at the role of the mass media in modern democracies will be undertaken. This chapter is also going to discuss democracy in the Arab world before an analysis of the meaning of democracy, and the recent and future political situation in Saudi Arabia.

By doing this I will lay down the theoretical framework of this study, which looks at ideal forms of democracy. Theories of democracy, specifically, Habermas' concept of the public sphere, are going to help produce an understanding of the formation of democracy, and based on that understanding of the ideal democracy, the Saudi situation will be analysed. As stated in the introduction, it is also important to examine Habermas' theory if, as suggested earlier, his theories on the establishment of a public sphere, and the ramifications for democracy are still seen to be applicable even to a country very dissimilar to the Western countries in which he based his theory. In contrasting the theory of the public sphere with the political reform in Saudi Arabia, this chapter will try to answer some important questions. These are: What is the meaning of democracy in Saudi Arabia? Is there a form of Saudi democracy which has an Islamic reference? Were there any attempts to establish democracy in the past? What is the

shape of future democratic reform in the country? And why does this process matter to the Saudi Government and people?

What is democracy?

Hansen (1999) stated that 'democracy' derives from the Greek words 'demos' meaning people and 'kratos' meaning power, and is defined as 'government or the political system in which the people have the ultimate power of governance' (p. 1). Dahl (1989) also noted that the word 'democracy' – rule by the people – became the most appropriate name of the new system during the first half of the fifth century, when 'the people' (the demos) had gradually gained acceptance as the legitimate authority in ruling (Dahl 1989, p. 14).

Touraine (1997) argued that democracy is a necessary form of modern political organisation. He pointed out: 'There is indeed no democracy unless the ruled are free to choose their rulers, but we cannot speak of democracy if the voters' only choice is between two factions of the oligarchy, the army, or the state apparatus' (p. 7). However, O'Loughlin, et al. (1998) concluded that although democracy may be a word familiar to most people, 'it is a concept still misunderstood and misused by dictators, single-party regimes, and military coup leaders who assert popular support by claiming the mantle of democracy' (p. 574).

The history of democracy

Having looked at the meaning of democracy, it is essential to shed some light on the history of democracy. According to Dahl (1989), modern democracy found its roots among the ancient Greeks and Romans: 'during the first half of the fifth century, a transition took place in political ideas and institutions among Greeks and Romans that was comparable to the historical invention of the wheel or the discovery of the new world. The change reflected a new understanding of the world and its possibilities' (p. 13). Held (1996) wrote that the history of democracy is confusing because it is an active history (p. 3). He stated that modern democracy has four historical sources: the direct democracy in ancient Greece, the republicanism of Roman and Italian city-states in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the theory and practice of representative government, and the idea of political equality (ibid. p. 29).

Democracy began as citizen assemblies in small towns and cities where free adult males could come together to make decisions, it was a 'democracy of the patriarchs' (ibid. p. 23). In Athens, Held wrote, 'it was the conjunction of the emergence of an economically and military

independent citizenry that nurtured a democratic way of life' (p. 15). Sheehan (2001) stated that the Athenian model is probably the ideal, where decrees passed by popular assemblies often began with the words, 'the demos has decided', but from the beginning, this form of democracy has been associated with rule 'by the mob'(p. 3409).

Dahl (1989) argued that many of the concepts inspired by the Athenian city state were also fundamental to the republican Roman democracy, for example, that the individual has both social and political interest and should be a good citizen, where the good political organisation is made up of good citizens: 'The good polity, therefore, is one that reflects and promotes the virtue of its citizens' (p. 24). It is interesting to note that one of the reasons for apathy given by Haya Almonea, a Saudi columnist at *Riyadh* newspaper, was that the concept of the 'public good' was not understood by some of the Saudi electorate (*Riyadh*, 6 February 2005).

Held (2006) stated that the establishment of Christianity and feudalism in Europe saw the end of Roman democracy, but the rise of the Italian city states from the end of the twelfth century inspired democratic movements later in history. It is doubtful that the government can be called democratic 'as it was made of a group of distinguished men'. But Held argued that their importance lies in their institutional innovations, and in the thinking which arose from them about the importance of the citizen and rule by the people (p. 42).

Barr et al. (2010) stated that European countries developed different forms of government, but the 'Great Charter' of England has its importance in the history of democracy. In 1215 AD, nobles forced King John to sign the Magna Carta that created the English 'Parliament', or law-making body, which stated that written laws held a higher power than the king and/or the power of the royal family, giving some of that power to the people. Later, the Petition of Right (1628) stated that the king could no longer tax without parliament's permission and the Bill of Rights (1689) provided freedom of speech and banned cruel or unusual punishment (p. 8).

According to Sheehan (2001), from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century Europe was split between the 'absolute' monarchies of France, Prussia, Austria, Spain and Russia and the 'constitutional' monarchies and republics of England and Holland. Nevertheless, it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the republican tradition was reformulated, refreshed and reinterpreted (p. 3409).

Wiebe (1995) stated that the American Revolution is another important event in the history of democracy, where the struggle for independence from colonial rule was carried out in the name of 'the people's right to self-government (p. 61). The first step in America's pursuit of democracy was the Declaration of Independence in 1776. In this important document, written by Thomas Jefferson, it was stated that all men are created equal, and Jefferson altered the right to life, liberty and property to 'the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'. Jefferson went ever further when he wrote that all men should have the right to take up arms against the government if it did not respect these rights (The Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies, 4 July 1776).

Barr, et al. (2010) also argued that an important development in the history of democracy was the French Revolution where the people of France overthrew the king, and established the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man,' which asks for the right to 'liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression'. The author added that these ideas might represent a partially democratic system where the powers of the king are limited and the people have some say in their government (p. 8).

Finally, Sheehan (2001) stated that with the growing success of democracy in the United States and other countries throughout the world, democracy became more and more widespread. At the end of the First World War in 1917 the United States president, Woodrow Wilson, stated that the purpose of the war was to make 'a world safe for democracy'. However, the author shows that in the 1920's and 30's parliamentary democracy collapsed in much of Europe, but the situation improved after the Second World War when almost all of the regimes that emerged declared themselves to be democratic. In the 1950's, almost every independent country on the planet had a government based on some of the democratic principles (pp. 3411-3412). Unfortunately, Dahl (1989) concluded that in most of Europe's former colonies – with the exception of India, the world's largest democracy – real democracy remains unachieved, and it can be argued that even in the West true democracy still does not exist (p. 31). Needless to say, the Arab world is among those regions that do not yet enjoy the essence of democracy.

The above literature, which deals with the meaning and the history of democracy, is going to help us understanding the meaning and the nature of Saudi reform, and where it stands in relation to the ideal form of democracy. Further, because the municipal elections are the first experience of politics in Saudi Arabia, there has been no scholarship particularly relevant to

that situation. So looking at some elements of three models of democracy might help us to evaluate the Saudi political situation. These are liberal democracy, deliberative democracy and participatory democracy. I will start with the first model of democracy which is most widely established.

Liberal democracy

Wolff (1998) defined liberal democracy as a 'system in which a correct balance is struck between the two ideas of majority rule and the protection of the minority' (p. 123). Held (1996) also defined liberal democracy as a system of rule where elected officers undertake to 'represent' the interests and/or views of citizens within the framework of 'the rule of law' (p. 6). He argued that the development of liberal democracy is due to the growth of the state because the increase in administration means the state becomes more dependent on cooperation and agreement between people, which in itself leads to more bureaucracy. Also, this kind of democracy is influenced by the development of liberalism and the rise of the concept of the person as individual, individual rights and the mechanisms of representation. Moreover, Held thought that the writings of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704) were integral to the development of liberal democracy which contributed to the changing nature of European politics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (p. 72). Hobbes thought that people had to surrender their rights of governance to an authority which would act on their behalf: 'The sovereign's subjects would have a duty to obey the sovereign, but his authority is given by the people' (ibid. p. 72). However, Locke objected to the idea that individuals should hand over their liberty to such an authority and believed that sovereign power remains ultimately with the people, that 'the government exists to safeguard the rights and liberties of citizens who are ultimately the best judges of their own interests' (ibid. p. 81).

According to Held (1996), Baron de Montesquieu also had a significant influence on the innovations necessary for the achievement of representative government. He argued that liberty could only be based on an institutionalised separation of the powers of the state. Where the three branches of powers endorse the laws (Judicial, Legislative and Executive) absolute power could not be conducted by one body (*The Spirit of Laws,* p. 70). However, Held argued that it was not until the writings of James Madison (1751-1836) and Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) that the protection of the liberty of individuals from the actions of the state was taken into account. So procedures like the secret ballot, regular voting and

competition between potential representatives were introduced: 'It was through these mechanisms and the freedom of the press, freedom of speech and public association that the interests of the community in general could be sustained' (Held 1996, p. 88).

Furthermore, Urbinati (2002) stated that John Stuart Mill also influenced modern liberal democratic thoughts. His work *On Liberty* looked to determine the limits of power over the individual. In that work, Mill wrote 'that the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others' (cited on Urbinati, 2002, p. 28). Mill, according to Urbinati, provided a guide for separation between the people and the power of government and criticised the autocratic use of power which he argued, was not practical in the long run, and undermines the 'basis of human dignity, threatens social justice and denies the best circumstances for human to enjoy the greatest amount of beneficial consequences deriving from their activities' (Urbinati, 2002, p. 28).

However, Urbinati noted that Mill rejected the idea of the ancient Greek form of democracy, because of the growth of society and the implications of the huge numbers of people involved and the different levels of skills required. Thus, Mill suggested a form of representative democracy with the freedom of speech and the press. Mill also believed that 'a complete equality between men and women in all legal, political and social arrangements can create the proper conditions for human freedom and a democratic way of life' (ibid. pp. 29-35).

Finally, Held concluded that liberal democracy is a product of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when some democratic rights and principles such as 'realisation of individualism', the free market regulations, the fear of 'mass' and the need for the state's powers of regulation were adopted in some countries. Thus liberal democracy is 'about protecting the citizen from themselves through legal means, where 'good government' is achieved through the sanction of loss of office, and it became the world's dominant political ideology' (p. 115).

In the light of the previous literature, it is difficult to see the Saudi municipal elections as a full representation of liberal democracy, but it might be an encouraging start for the long way ahead towards real democracy. It might perhaps be a sign of the acknowledgement of the importance of the individual to a society or a quest for legitimacy of government, or a sign to the West that these democratic ideals are being considered.

The second model which also contributed to the modern liberal democracy is deliberative democracy. Its importance comes from the fact that the characteristic of this model contributes to the formation of the public sphere which is fundamental to this research, as will be examined in this chapter.

Deliberative democracy

Dryzek (2000) argued that deliberative democracy seeks to 'transcend self-interest as the sole ground for politics and replace it with inclusive public reason' (p. 72). McAfee (2004) noted that 'public deliberations usually spend a great deal of time developing a public picture of what a problem is' (p. 53). The author thought that the continuation of deliberative democracy is impossible without citizens' understanding of their positions and interests. Smith (2003) argued that people should have adequate information about an issue because without it there can be no proper deliberation: 'It is only through deliberation that we hear the views of others and therefore make the kind of contingent decisions that in aggregate make for consensus' (p. 8).

It can also be argued (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004) that deliberation is a means of encouraging citizens and their representatives to 'invoke substantive standards to understand, revise and resolve moral conflicts in politics' (p. 161). Dryzek (2002) suggested that this is a deliberation through persuasion rather than 'manipulation, or deception' (p. 1). Habermas (1975) argued that deliberation, therefore, has direct implications on the ability of the public to reason, on their freedom to be able to speak freely so that all arguments can be heard and 'no force except that of the better argument is exercised' (p. 108). Cohen (1989) also stated that every person can 'put issues on the agenda, propose solutions, and offer reasons in support of, or in criticism to the proposal... and has an equal voice in the decision' (p. 74).

Theorists of deliberative democracy such as Dryzek (2000), Fraser (1992) and Habermas (1989) emphasised the deliberation of citizens in the public sphere. Also, they looked at how public opinion and civil society can influence the practice of the state on policy which is important to any discussion of deliberative democracy. Dryzek (2000) argued that deliberation also takes place in the institutions of the liberal state, in constitutional assemblies, legislatures, courts and public hearings (p. 81). Therefore, the author thought that both areas of deliberation (public and state) as well as people's participation in these arenas should be taken into consideration when we examine the development of this form of democracy. Dryzek argued that people's deliberation should take place for a genuine, not a

symbolic, democracy to emerge, because from history, 'the pressures for greater democracy comes from the civil society rather than from the state, which is also a democratic loss in terms of a less discursively vital society' (p. 86). This movement is opposite to the situation in Saudi Arabia, where it is a top down movement because it is the state that has called for democratisation to include the public in the state system (Farazmand, 2002).

Selznick (1996) thought that, in some cases, deliberation might be seen as a policy by government to include potential opposition, and 'certainly seen as an idea of co-option where such absorption comes without any real power-sharing' (cited in Dryzek 2000, p. 88). On the other hand, Walzer (1994) argued that there is a civil society external to the state apparatus where debate and people's deliberation can take place and may affect the state, such as women's movements and NGO groups. However, when the state overcomes civil society, democracy will be in a difficult situation (p. 186). Dryzek (2000) mentioned the case of Mexico, where a strong state dominated a weak civil society and included successive waves of potential troublemakers: 'a truly inclusive state would corrode the discursive vitality of civil society and so undermine the conditions for further democratization' (p. 114). It might also be argued that where there is no 'discursive vital society' the pressure for democratisation is limited, so it is not surprising that there was so little engagement with the 2005 municipal elections in Saudi Arabia.

Like the previous models of democracy, participatory democracy has aspects of citizen participation, but its importance comes from its emphasis on people's participation at the local level, which might explain more about the Saudi political situation.

Participatory democracy

According to Hendriks (2010), participatory democracy is a 'self government by citizens, it is carried out through institutions designed to facilitate ongoing civic participation in agenda-setting, deliberation, legislation and policy implementation' (p. 107). Held (1996) defined it as 'a system of decision-making about public affairs in which citizens are directly involved' (p. 6). Dahl (1956) wrote that it does enable all active and legitimate groups to be heard at some stage in the decision-making process and that it is a 'relatively efficient system for reinforcing agreement, encouraging moderation and maintaining social peace' (pp. 149-151). However, this type of democracy attracts criticism. Schumpeter (1943) stated that liberal and classical democracy is in practice a representative democracy where representatives of the people are chosen, thus their participation in this kind of democracy has a very narrow

function, which is limited to their ability to choose their representatives. Also, Pateman (1970) argued that modern democracies usually experience apathy felt by citizens towards the political process. He thought that this problem comes because of their lack of participation in the political matter, but he thought that participatory democracy is a beneficial practice for citizens . Pateman wrote:

> Participatory democracy fosters human development, enhances a sense of political efficacy, reduces a sense of estrangement from power centres, nurtures a concern for collective problems and contributes to the formation of an active and knowledgeable citizenry capable of taking a more acute interest in government affairs (p. 20).

Thus, participatory democracy is an interactive one. Citizens' participation in the political process enriches its outcomes and make them representatives of all groups in society and enables them to take an active part in the decision-making process.

According to Pateman (1970), Rousseau stressed the importance of individual participation in political decision-making. He stated that 'it is the individual who participates in the political decision-making and this participation has an educational and psychological effect on the individual, and thus on society' (cited in Pateman, 1970, p. 22). Furthermore, Pateman stated that Mill also saw an active public engagement being developed and sustained by the participatory institutions the citizen involved with 'It is at the local level that the real educative effect of participation occurs' (Ibid, p. 31). Here, it is clear that local elections are means of representative democracy and have a significant educational role in people's political participation. However, the outcome of the Saudi elections showed that only 17 per cent of the public (excluding women and the military workforce) participated in those elections, which means that the educational effects for those elections, were minimal or missing.

Because citizens' apathy towards politics is a major problem facing modern societies (as will be illustrated in Chapter Three), it could be argued that there might be increased interest in this form of democracy as an alternative to more distancing representative democratic practices. Pateman (1970) argued that the theory of participatory democracy assumes that individuals and their institutions should interact together to form a unique sphere for more deliberation, participation and decision-making. Thus, these public spheres that emerged might offer opportunities for learning and participation whether at local or national level. Also, the involvement and learning gained at local levels would make the citizen more aware

of what is going on nationally and be more willing to participate in political institutions or any other political activities (pp. 42-43).

To sum up this section, one might conclude that liberal democracy seeks to ensure that the citizen has the right to express himself, his views and interests and protect him from himself and from the power of polity through the three branches of government. Also, deliberative democracy encourages citizens to participate effectively in the political process, to communicate through their representatives and debate with them about sensitive issues of concern and to reach important decisions in the interest of the country. Participatory democracy gives the opportunity for citizens to become directly involved in politics. Such participation will usually energise a spirit of participation among citizens, educate them about politics and involve them psychologically with their communities.

It is clear that the political situation in Saudi Arabia cannot be compared to previous models. In spite of the conduct of the municipal elections, the path to a complete modern democracy in the country is still very long. All the three models require an active, informed, participative citizenry. Therefore, citizens should have knowledge and interest about issues of concern to participate fully and help democratic practice flourish in the country. So without that vital engagement, a complete democratic process will not be achieved and people's apathy might be the real problem that modern societies have to face. In all these models, a democratic system must be in place to guarantee citizens' freedom of choice, thoughts, expression and association. There must also be a free mass media to inform and educate people about issues of interest and work as a watchdog over government acts. The latter aspect will be examined in more detail.

The media and democracy

McGraw and Holbrook (2004) argued that the mass media play a central role in modern democracy, where true and unbiased information is vital to the health of the democratic state. They wrote:

> In contemporary democracies, it is rare for politicians and citizens to directly communicate with each other. Rather, the mass-communications media are the principle mechanism through which information is disseminated and learned, as well as the means by which politicians and citizens communicate with each other (p. 399).

McNair (1999) stated that Edmund Burke described the developing media of the late eighteenth century as the 'Fourth Estate' – as an addition to the three arms of the modern

democratic state which are executive, legislative and judiciary. McNair pointed out: 'the media represent an independent source of knowledge, not only informing people about politics, but also protecting them from the abuses of power' (p. 48).

McNair suggested five functions of the communication media in 'ideal type' democratic societies, as follows:

1- They must inform citizens of what is happening around them.
2- They must educate the public about the meaning and significance of the facts.
3- The media must provide a platform for public political discourse, facilitating the formation of 'public opinion' and disseminating that opinion back to the public.
4- The media should give publicity to governmental and political institutions – or the 'watch dog' role of journalism.
5- The media must work as a channel for advocacy and persuasive means of political viewpoints and be equally open for all (p. 21-22).

Easton (1997) thought that the media form one of the core pillars of society. The media act as a transmitter of information from the public to the government and vice versa. The media act as a bridge between civil society's institutions, the rest of society and the government. Here, 'messages from the civil society to the government take the form of demands, which they expect the government to respond to and convert into output' (p. 14). Furthermore, Kimball (2004) argued that in the area of politics, the media evaluate government officials and they use the media to tell others about their policy objectives (p. 543).

Unfortunately, in the Arab world and according to Abu Jaber (2003), the mass media, which should deepen and expand people's political awareness, have become a handy tool for governments to expand their own power (p. 131).

The importance of the mass media comes also from their daily function as providers of information to the public in the time of political transition. O'Neil (1998) assumed that the media can often play a significant role in shaping the course of democratic political transition. He argued that mass media contributes to the transition process and that 'democratisation depends on the form and function of the media in a given society, shaped by cultural, socioeconomic, and political forces' (p. 7). O'Neil explained that for any successful democratic transition, three factors must be examined: the type of mass media that have been used, degree and form of state control, and the media ownership. First, O'Neil noted that where there are high rates of illiteracy, radio and television become important means to spread information and make democratic transition flourish. Also, transition can be

encouraged by specialised print media such as underground publications. Second, a temporary form of censorship might be retained until 'a model for media pluralisation' is achieved, supposedly to guard against elements hostile to democracy'(p. 8) Finally, the author thought that once the political transition happens and democratic elections are held, the economic aspects of media reform become essential. To do that, some important questions must be answered. How are media assets to be pluralised, especially if they are in private hands? If the media are run by the state, should these assets be privatised, or become public service institutions? And if private money is there, will state involvement affect media independence? (pp. 10-11).

In Saudi Arabia, the government monitors mass media and the privately owned media has to follow the government's Information Policy. Norris (2004) noted these regulations in her study, which covered 135 countries across the world. She stated that governments vary in their control of information, but most states control mass media particularly through state regulation and ownership of radio and television broadcasting and newspapers. She wrote:

> Governments in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, among others, commonly place serious restrictions on press freedom through official regulations, legal restrictions, and censorship. This practice remains more difficult in cyberspace, but state-controlled monopolies exert control over access and content through providing the only internet services in some nations (cited in Esser and Pfetsch, 2004, p. 120).

It is clear that the Saudi Government's monitoring of the mass media means that they are not able to function as a 'fourth state' or as a watch dog for the citizens. Consequently, one of the pillars of democracy (free mass media) that exists in the West may not exist in the country.

Having examined the role of the mass media in contemporary democracy, it is worth considering Habermas' theoretical concept of the public sphere. Habermas' concept may help to explain the limited participation of the Saudi citizens in the municipal elections because he looked at the principles and the mechanisms of an ideal democracy in society. By studying this theory carefully and comparing it to the situation in Saudi Arabia, one might understand why there was a low level of participation in the first political process in the country and might also discover the factors that hindered more democratic practice in the country. Thus, the next section is trying to answer some questions about Habermas' concept of the public sphere. These questions are: What is the public sphere? What are the conditions for the formation of the public sphere? What is necessary for democracy? What are some criticisms

of the public sphere? Further considerations should be whether there was such a Saudi public sphere in the time of the municipal elections; if not, why not, and how much has that influenced the outcome of the elections? Also I will examine to what extent a Saudi 'public sphere' is vital for the country's future political reform.

Habermas and the public sphere

Durham and Kellner (2002) argued that Habermas represents the second generation of the 1930s' Frankfurt School (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research) after Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin. Habermas and the Frankfurt School are heavily influenced by the period they lived in, and particularly their experience of the Fascists' use of the media in the 1930's. The School led studies that showed how groups who used the media to further their own interests and domination controlled the media. In the United States, they also investigated how the dominant capitalist economic interests controlled the culture industry, and it was this industry which functioned to reproduce the established democratic politics and market society. The mass media greatly influenced the dominant social culture, 'media culture simply reproduced the existing society and manipulated mass audience into obedience' (Durham and Kellner 2002, p. 9). Calhoun (1992) thus thought that Habermas 'held little hope of being able to identify a political philosophy that could resolve the consequence of capitalism or state control' (p. 4).

In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (first translated in 1989), Habermas described his ideal model or what he called the 'bourgeois public sphere', then analysed its degeneration in the twentieth century 'our investigation presents a stylised picture of the liberal elements of the bourgeois public sphere and of their transformation in the social-welfare state' (p. xix). Habermas went on to describe that ideal public sphere as follows:

> By 'the public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body... Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion/that is, with the guarantee of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions/about matters of general interest. In a large public body this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it... Although state authority is, so to speak, the executer of the political public sphere, it is not a part of it. To be sure, state authority is usually considered 'public authority', but

> it derives its task of caring for the well-being of all citizens primarily for this aspect of public sphere (ibid. p. 102).

Here, Habermas' concept of the public sphere is concerned with the institutions where individuals are free to assemble, discuss, debate and freely criticise the state. The mass media help citizens by providing them with information they need and publishing their opinions and ideas, as well as by watching government acts.

Wahl-Jorgensen (2006) argued that Habermas' 'bourgeois public sphere' serves both as a historical tale and as a normative ideal of public participation in politics' (p. 198). She stated that public sphere institutions included face-to-face settings such as coffee houses and pubs in England, literary salons in France, and regular discussion groups or 'table societies' in Germany. In addition, the public sphere relied on print publications, such as pamphlets, newsletters and newspapers to facilitate a shared discussion among groups of people in different locales (p. 198).

Calhoun (1992) argued that Habermas reveals how the classical bourgeois public sphere of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was built upon rational critical arguments, which are the factors that lead to democracy (p. 2). This view is echoed in the work of Charney (1998) who stated that theorists of democracy stress the importance of a public sphere, which is 'distinct from the influence of the state and that citizens can freely associate, deliberate, and engage in collective will formation' (p. 97). Habermas stated that there was no such ideal public sphere before the seventeenth century in European societies. The power of the feudal lord was presented publicly. That time was known as the era of 'representative publicity', where the lords presented themselves 'not for', but 'before' the people (Habermas, 1989, p.103). Later on, bourgeois society was developed and produced a form of public sphere. That ideal sphere was built throughout citizens' debates and discussions in their coffee houses, salons and other meeting places. Calhoun (1992) stated that London had 3000 coffee houses by the first decade of the eighteenth century (Calhoun 1992, p. 12). These coffee houses, as social institutions, formed the civil society that was connected to the economy and where 'the genuine domain of private autonomy stood opposed to the state' (Habermas, 1989, p. 12), but the growth of the print media was the main factor that contributed to the source of 'significant public information' in that society (Calhoun 1992, p. 8).

The importance of the transformation of the economy was stressed by Habermas who drew attention to the relationship between the traffic in commodities and news (Habermas, 1989, p.

15). Merchants connected with long distance trade needed to supply more accurate information about their commodities, 'so traffic in news coincided with traffic in commodities', but later on, this information was expanded to include other kinds of news (Ibid, p. 15).

In this regard, Fraser (1992) thought that Habermas' public sphere formed a democratic space between private civil society and the state in which public opinion was discussed and formed. She wrote:

> The public sphere in Habermas' sense is... conceptually distinct from the official economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations; a theatre for debating and deliberation rather than for buying and selling. Thus, this concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions among state apparatuses, economic markets and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory (p. 111).

Here, a democratic atmosphere was initiated in the bourgeois public sphere. Saco (2002) argued that the major contribution of the bourgeois public sphere to the political sphere was the development of institutional bases. These range from meeting places to journals to the networks of social interaction. The conversations that usually happen in these places cover many areas such as local affairs to state administration and politics. Saco (2002) added that through those institutions, a certain educated elite came to think that they represented the public, and they were opponents of political authority: 'the critical judgement of a public making use of its reason' (Habermas, 1989, p. 24). Saco concluded that the bourgeois public sphere for Habermas, institutionalised 'a set of interests and an opposition between state and society and a practice of rational critical debates' (Saco 2002, p. 65).

Furthermore, in the eighteenth century, news and newspapers changed into carriers and leaders of public opinion. Habermas (1989) described the characteristics of this development as follows:

> The press remained an institution of the public itself, effective in the manner of a mediator and intensifier of public discussion, no longer a mere organ for the spreading of news, not yet the medium of a consumer culture (p. 105).

Downey and Fenton (2003) stated that from the 1830s onwards, commercial profit overtook the intellectual press in England, France, and the United States and the public sphere was transformed by new waves of private interest. Thus, Habermas argued that the public sphere has been transformed by the increase of mass media and the 'growing rationalisation of societies' through the twentieth century (Downey and Fenton, 2003, p. 186). Kellner (1999)

suggested that Habermas' public sphere was 'colonized by big media' which came to dominate public life and recast the public sphere from a place of information and debate to a site of manipulation by corporate power. Also, Curran (1996) summarised Habermas' criticism of the new role of the media: 'instead of providing a conduit for rational-critical debate, the media manipulated mass opinion. It defined politics as spectacle, offered pre-digested, convenience thinking and conditioned the public in the role of passive consumers' (p. 82).

Criticism of Habermas' concept of the public sphere

Habermas' theory of the public sphere has been subjected to intense critical argument. Garnham (1992) stated that Habermas did not consider a public sphere informed by the working classes and made up of different institutions (such as trade unions) based on different values (such as solidarity, as opposed to competitive individualism), but he idealizes the bourgeois public sphere. Newspapers and printers were controlled by a competitive market that was driven by profits rather than discussion based on 'freely discoursing intellectuals' (p. 359). Further, the rationalist public sphere that Habermas proposed left him unable to theorise a pluralist public sphere and compromise between political positions. Finally, Garnham thought that Habermas' reliance on Adorno for the final part of his book meant that he inherited Adorno's 'cultural elitism', an exaggeration of the powers of the controllers of cultural industries and a neglect of the possibilities of state-intervention and public broadcasting (Garnham, 1992, pp. 359-360).

Calhoun (1992) argued that the main weakness lies in Habermas' failure to account symmetrically between the 'classical' bourgeois public sphere and the 'post transformation' public sphere of organised or late capitalism (p. 33). Calhoun commented 'Habermas' account of the twentieth century does not include the sort of intellectual history [or]... attempt to take leading thinkers seriously and recover the truth from their ideologically distorted writing' (p. 34).

The criticism of Habermas' idealism of the 'freely discoursing intellectuals', that is criticism of those actually involved in the debate, is added to by Affaiah (1998) who argued that Habermas public sphere was not one of 'universal access', therefore valid only for 'high educated and land/property owners' (p. 100). Fraser (1999) argued that Habermas' approach did not treat societies as stratified and equally multicultural, so it reflects very little of a democratic political environment. She stated that societies are made up of combinations of unequal social groups, where full equality of participation in public debate and deliberation is

not easily realised: 'the subordinate groups have less chances of meeting places to communicate their needs, objectives, or, they will be under the supervision of other dominant groups' (p. 109). Therefore, their voices and thoughts would vanish, and they would not be able to defend their interests. Fraser concluded that Habermas tried to present the public sphere as a place of debate and knowledge-exchange where the participants' status should not be a factor in its character or success, but that a 'public realm or government, which pays attention to all these diverse voices, has never existed' (p. 53). Kluge (1996) argued that although Habermas' concept of the public sphere and democracy assume a liberal celebration of diversity, tolerance, debate, and consensus, the fact is, the bourgeois public sphere was dominated by white, property-owning males (cited in Kellner, 1999, p. 7). Further, Zinn (1995) criticised Habermas' neglect of civil rights and social movements, which contributed to the public sphere in the 1960s and into the 1970s. Finally, Ryan (1992) argued that Habermas' public sphere excluded influential women's groups. She noted that not only did Habermas ignore women's public spheres, but that he 'marks the decline of the public sphere specifically at the moment when women were beginning to get political power and become actors' (p. 259).

Kellner (1999) criticised the subject of the debate advocated by Habermas. He thought that democratic politics are rarely stimulated by rationality, 'politics was and still is a subject of various interests and powers as well as discussion and debate' (p. 7). Kellner also argued that the public sphere itself changes with the existence of new social or political movements, new technologies and new spaces of public interaction in modern societies in the twentieth century. The author noted that 'the public sphere of cyberspace could perhaps not have been foreseen by Habermas, but it has a crucial role to play in the formation of a modern public sphere (p. 8). However, Garnham (1992) stated that the strength of Habermas' characterisation of the public sphere comes from its focus on the relationship between the media and democratic politics (p. 359) or as Fraser (1999) noted, 'as a site in which public discourse is produced and circulated' (p.111). It might be argued though, that Habermas' analysis of the public sphere provides a conceptual viewpoint of how the public sphere functions as a medium in which we can find the possibilities of democracy not only in democratic countries, but also in non-democratic ones.

Public sphere in non-democratic countries

Habermas (1997) stated that the concept of the public sphere is closely tied to civil society, although they are not synonymous. Civil society organisations act and can gain a voice and

influence in the public sphere, thereby exerting influence over official authorities through public opinion (p. 360). Odugbemi (2008) argued that: 'it is in the free and open public sphere that social movements acquire a public voice, fight for recognition, assert themselves, seek to shape public opinion, influence leaders and policy makers, and bring about change' (p. 28). Therefore, the public sphere is a participatory space where citizens' voices are amplified. Fraser (1992) argued that there are public arenas where people, who find it hard to participate in the liberal public sphere, conduct debates and express opinions in their own way. Fraser called these public spheres 'counter public spheres'. She wrote:

> On the contrary, virtually contemporaneous with the bourgeois public there arose a host of competing counter publics, including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics, and working-class publics. Thus, there were competing publics from the start, not just in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Habermas implies (p. 116).

The author noted also that government ruling parties and large businesses monopolise mass media such as newspapers, radio and television that serve as their propaganda organs. It might be argued though, that in many democratic and non-democratic countries, counter-public spheres, which are given very limited opportunities to appear in the mass media, organise their efforts, disseminate their statements and compete with governments or parties via the Internet, cassette tapes, videos and public sermons. For example, Gilroy (1987) studied the counter-public sphere of the African immigrant society in London and showed the African people's methods of expressing discourses by means of slang, music, and dance in carnivals, clubs and other mediums. Shiozaki (2010) also argued that Muslim societies had spheres for discussion based on Islamic logic. Such spheres were organised by *ulama,* 'Islamic clerics' and *tariqa,* 'Islamic order of mystics'. Buildings established through *waqf,* 'religious endowment, including mosques and religious schools, also provided such spheres for discussion (p. 98). The author went on to explain:

> Modern Muslim society resembles society in the West in the sense that there are counter-public spheres for discussion that are marginalised from the exclusive mass media. Moreover, many contemporary Islamist movements promote public participation and are often proactive in creating civil society and public spheres (p. 107).

Eickelman and Anderson (2003) argued that Muslim public spheres are emerging throughout Muslim-majority states and Muslim communities elsewhere, and are formulated outside formal state control at the intersections of religious, political, and social life (p. 4). Muslim

public spheres have access to contemporary forms of communication that range from the press and broadcast media to fax machines and audio and video cassettes, and from the telephone to the Internet (p. 6). Asad (1993) examined the public spheres in Saudi Arabia and found that there are powerful social groups that form the public spheres. He concluded that in Saudi Arabia, where freedom of speech is limited, discourses circulating by way of *Ulamas'* mosque sermons, cassette tapes, and other forms of media could give voice to a powerful criticism of the government (p. 16). This might explain the results of this research project, which showed that the majority of the winning candidates of the municipal elections were moderate Islamists, as, will be highlighted in Chapter Six.

However, Alsoufi (2005) argued that civil society is playing an increasingly important role in policy making at the local, national and global level in democratic and non-democratic countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Also, civil society organisations are necessary and their existence and work must be constitutionally guaranteed, whether under democratic or authoritarian systems. Woods (1992) argued that a public sphere is developing in some African countries. He stated that the absence of improvement plans shifted attention away from states and governing elites towards social actors who work for economic development and social welfare. Ghaus-Pasha (2004) argued that developing countries' organisations that work as public spheres include traditional organisations (e.g. religious organisations and modern groups and organisations, mass movements and action groups, political parties, trade and professional associations, non-commercial organisations and community based organisations). These organisations play a leading role in activating citizen participation in socio-economic development and politics. They also help in shaping or influencing policy, identifying unaddressed problems and bringing them to public attention, and protecting basic human rights, giving voice to a wide range of political, environmental, social and community interests and concerns. Further, they are providing the vehicle through which artistic, spiritual, cultural, ethnic, occupational, social and recreational sentiments find expression. Finally, in non-democratic governments, such organisations work to organise, mobilise, and act against state repression and force political/social reforms from within civil society organisations. Opera companies, soccer clubs, book clubs, places of worship, professional associations are examples of such organisations (pp. 1-18).

It might be argued that the previous work of civil society organisations resembles, to some extent, the notion of the public sphere that was proposed by Habermas. In other words, in

many non democratic societies, citizens have to find organisations where they can assemble and express their views. Thus, civil society organisations could be the only way for some unfortunate citizens to express their issues or concerns. Fraser (1992) argued that Habermas' analysis of the public sphere provides a conceptual viewpoint of how the public sphere functions as a medium of democracy. In other words, 'the public sphere constructed by Habermas is to be promoted as a site in which public discourse is produced and circulated, and in which one can be critical of the state' (p. 111). Hacker and van Dijk (2000), in partial agreement with Habermas's public sphere, suggest that the Internet technology is a public sphere that has the potential to enhance democracy (p. 3).

Coleman and Blumler (2009) argued that beyond the realm of official politics, there is a vast sphere of independent interaction taking place on line. The authors explained that although the Internet might not qualify as a public sphere in the Habermasian sense, 'it does provide particular opportunities for citizens to interact beyond, around and across institutionally controlled communication methods' (p. 117). Rash (1997) stated that the Internet is cheap, easily accessible, offers infinite channels and overcomes barriers of time and space. Thus, it offers the potential for a renewal of direct democracy (p. 28). Soon and Kluver, (2007) also pointed out that the Internet has benefited a range of citizen-activists, including protesters against corrupt and dictatorial regimes, traditionally marginalised, excluded or stigmatised communities, trans-national social movements, electoral underdogs and alternative media producers. So 'though diverse in their political objectives, these networks share a number of characteristics which define them as exercise in e-democracy from below' (p. 117). Jones (1997) stated that cyberspace would be constructed as a 'new public space', constituted by people, and that the nature of online forums especially provides hope for enhancing political discussions (p. 22). Sassi (2000) believed that a sense of commonality has grown in the Net world. He wrote:

> Based on the dialogical function of the Internet...the 'Net' public sphere can alternately operate... [and] this environment can produce conditions for a public to be born (Ibid, 95).

Bearing in mind the previous literature and despite numerous efforts by Arab governments to limit Internet access, especially new social networks, and censor all media, the spread of satellite TV and the Internet have transformed the media landscape in the Arab and Muslim worlds. As we have seen lately, revolutionary protests by Tunisians led to the ousting of

President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who maintained strict media censorship for 23 years in power and fled Tunisia on 14 January 2011. Similarly, the Egyptian people forced President Hosni Mubarak who remained in power for 30 years, to resign on 11 February 2001. The oppression of free speech and democratic political participation have galvanised both Tunisians and Egyptians into unprecedented acts of revolt toward the goal of democratic political change.

Observers attributed the success of the recent Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions (so far) to the use of new media, especially the social networking sites Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. However, these websites might not have caused the new revolutions in these two countries, but they speeded up the process by helping to organise the revolutionaries, transmit their message to the world and galvanise international support. For example, one of the Egyptian demonstrators said:

> Facebook definitely had a role in organising this revolution. It acts like an accelerant to conditions, which already exist in the country. Twitter and YouTube serve as amplification for what is happening on the ground and they directly affect Western media coverage (Gustin, 2011).

Moreover, Wael Ghonim, the young Google executive who has became a symbol of Egypt's pro-democracy uprising after he launched the original Facebook page credited with sparking the initial protest, called it 'Kuluna Khalid Saeed', 'We Are All Khalid Saeed. Khalid Saeed was killed by the police on 7 June 2010; his page now has 881,806 fans and 28,409 pictures and is considered to be the main page for movements and news of the protesters throughout Egypt (Kuluna Khalid Saeed. 'We Are All Khalid Saeed', Facebook, 2011).

> 'If you want to liberate a country, give them the internet. This is the Internet revolution, Ghonim said.',Asked by CNN host Wolf Blitzer what repressive Middle Eastern state would be the next to fall, the young activist replied: 'Ask Facebook' (CNN, 11 February 2011).

In Saudi Arabia, the Internet has also been used as a public sphere. In a recent case in Jeddah, the second biggest city in Saudi Arabia, massive floods literally paralysed most parts of the city on 28 January 2011. City municipality and other governmental organisations did not expect so much damage so hundreds of people were stranded in their workplaces and tens were trapped in their cars for many hours. Volunteers decided to help the city and its people. Micro-blogging participants used Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as a communicative platform to discuss and forward instant messages about assisting the affected areas. One page

established on Facebook, called 'All for Jeddah', gained 64,540 members in two days. So volunteers using the Internet as a public sphere during the disaster functioned amazingly well. It might be argued, though, that because of the limited freedom of speech and the missing role of civil society organisations in the country, Saudi citizens use the Internet for information about sensitive-nature issues that the mass media does not usually discuss. Political reform, governmental matters and corruption are among these issues. Thus, the Internet may be the 'public sphere' that has a crucial role in any future reform in Saudi society.

In the light of the previous literature, one may conclude this section by noting that the presence of a democratic public sphere is an argument that has a particular relevance to this research. The political situation in Saudi Arabia might have failed to take account of the democratic public sphere and the manner in which public opinion is formed. The absence of an ideal public sphere, where citizens can get together, express and publish their opinions and engage in debates about issues of their concern might have hindered their participation in the 2005 municipal elections. Furthermore, the absence of free mass media accessible to all might have contributed to people's misunderstanding of the election process and decreased their participation in it. Therefore, the absence of such a public sphere may reveal the extent of the 'democracy deficit' and might explain why only a small number of the eligible Saudi voters cast their votes in the 2005 municipal elections.

From this perspective, democracy is a relative concept and its practices form the fundamental bases for this research as Gillwald (1993) put it: 'The character of a democracy is dependent on the flow of public information. This will determine to what degree the citizenry can take actions based on informed decisions and make government accountable' (p. 70). Thus, it is important to analyse the political situation in Saudi Arabia and look at how the country perceives 'democracy'. But before doing that, a brief discussion of the democracy in the Arab world with which Saudi Arabia shares common aspects and governance traditions will be undertaken.

Democracy in the Arab world

The Arab world has been suffering from a lack of democracy for many decades. Cox and Marks (2006) quoted the Arab Human Development Report 2002 that was published by the

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) regarding the absence of freedom and democracy in Arab countries:

> There is a substantial lag between Arab countries and other regions in terms of participatory governance. The wave of democracy that transformed governance in most Latin America and East Asia in 1980s, Eastern Europe, and much of Central Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s has barely reached the Arab States. This freedom deficit undermines human development and is one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development. While *de jure* acceptance of democracy and human rights is enshrined in constitutions, legal codes and government pronouncement, *de facto* implementation is often neglected and, in some cases deliberately disregarded. In most cases, the governance pattern is characterized by a powerful executive branch that exerts significant control over all other branches of the state, being in some cases free from institutional checks and balances. Representative democracy is not always genuine and sometimes absent. Freedom of expression and association are frequently curtailed. Obsolete norms of legitimacy prevail (Cox and Marks, 2006, p. 47).

This is an official recognition of the human suffering of the Arab people due to denial of political rights and restrictions of civil liberties by many Arab governing regimes, which are blamed for their failures to achieve sustainable economic and social developments in that part of the world.

Abu Jaber (2003) argued that because of societal and historical circumstances in the Arab world, the term 'democratisation' does not necessarily imply what it means in the Western world. He stated that throughout the Arab region, a country is identified with the ruler, rather than the other way around (p. 127). Also, the degree of 'liberalisation and relaxation' that may exist depends on the leader's personality, the circumstances, and the feeling of legitimacy that a regime may have or thinks it has. Traditional regimes often advance dynastic and religious foundations for legitimacy. 'Progressive' and 'revolutionary' regimes, sometimes dominated by a single party, claim legitimacy in the name of the masses and their revolution. In the past 50 years, all Arab regimes have continued to expand their legitimacy through economic development, in the hope of 'steering citizens' attention away from politics and the authoritarian nature of the regime' (p. 128). Abu Jaber (2003) also thought that modern Arab states inherited their political legacy from the traditional-state style of governance (Ottoman Empire), which has always been 'distant, authoritarian, and an object of fear' (p. 128). In that legacy, citizens were expected to obey, not to question or participate in the decision-making process. However, this is not the case anymore in the Arab world. As we have seen recently, the international media has depicted the wave of revolutions sweeping

North Africa and the Middle East as a spontaneous home-grown reaction to dictatorship and repression. Until now, that wave forced the Tunisian and Egyptian presidents to leave power and may yet throw Gaddafi of Libya and Saleh of Yemen out of power. In spite of this, Shaw (2011) argued that the smooth transition in these two countries does not mean that democracy will be achieved soon. He wrote: 'it is too early to say whether the changes in Tunisia and Egypt (and the results elsewhere) will lead to the creation of recognisably democratic states'. The author thought that the main problem facing the new revolutions in the Arab world is that rulers, whether old ones under new democratic labels, or new ones thrown up by street protest, will still try to 'cling' to power by authoritarian means, not least by 'rigging elections'. Furthermore, free speech and fair elections remain compelling aspirations for much of the world, but they are only the beginnings of change. More is needed to guarantee 'democratic accountability', and major inequalities in a country make 'social democracy essential for political democracy' (Open Democracy, 9 March 2011).

It can thus be argued that until recently, in most Arab countries, where there is a complete absence of democracy or freedom of expression, citizens will not be able to express their views and have to do what the government says. In Saudi Arabia, the political situation is still similar to that in other Arab states, but unlike them it enjoys a level of economic prosperity. Cleveland (2004) stated that Saudi citizens were excluded from political participation. He pointed out:

> Saudi Arabia's rapid modernization created a new indigenous middle-class elite of teachers, civil servants, private businessmen and military officers. Despite this elite's education and its growing responsibility in managing the machinery of government, its members were excluded from participation in political life (p. 460).

So excluding a large segment of the educated citizens from politics may have a significant impact in the long run and might delay the introduction of more reforms in the country. However, immediately after the liberation of Kuwait in 1990, there was a noticeable increase in media freedom in the Arab world, accompanied by citizens' hopes and more democratic reform would follow. After a short period, the situation went back to the usual patterns and the people's dreams vanished. Zakaria (2003) observed that in 2003 none of the 22 countries in the Arab League had elected governments. He gave three main reasons for the democratic shortage in the Arab world. Arab leaders, or the 'heroic leaders', enjoy a place in Arab political discourse as sustainers and protectors of their countries. Western countries help Arab leaders because the alternative to such 'pro-Western dictatorships' is 'anti-Western

fundamentalism'. Finally, the existence of the Palestinian and Israeli conflict has deflected the attention of the population from the problems of their own society (p. 23).

Despite the absence of real democracy, some Arab countries were affected, to some extent, by the global trends towards democracy associated with the rise of the American democratisation policy announced by the Bush administration. After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, some Arab states had some degree of political liberalisation or some form of democratisation such as Kuwait, Morocco and Jordan. Furthermore, although it is still under foreign occupation, the Iraqi 2005 and 2010 general elections might be a good sign for a new democratic wave in the Arab world. However, Cleveland (2004) thought that the Gulf Arab states are not willing to have political reform. He wrote:

> Some observers suggested that the proliferation of volunteer organisations in several Arab States during the early 1990s was a sign of approaching political liberation; the evidence does not support this contention. The continued suppression of personal freedoms and political liberalities by ossified regimes does not hold the promise of a peaceful transition of power in such states as Egypt and the Gulf states (p. 538)

Despite the two recent revolutions– on 17 December 2010 in Tunisia and 25 January 2011 in Egypt –the Arab world has suffered from a democratic deficit for many decades. Saudi Arabia, as an integral part of that world, inherited a situation where the lack of democracy as well as other factors might explain why only 17 per cent of the Saudi eligible citizens voted in 2005 municipal elections. Therefore, it is important for the purpose of this study to understand how the Saudi citizens perceive democracy and the election as one its practices.

The meaning of democracy in Saudi society

As will be discussed in Chapter Five, Saudi Arabia is regarded as the birthplace of Islam and the custodian of the two most important religious sites for Muslims. The basis of the constitution in Saudi Arabia is the *Sharia* 'Islamic law' (Amin, 1985). So Islamic laws dominate Saudi society and the citizens' beliefs and behaviours. Huntington (1996) argued that Islam and democracy are incompatible because the Koran (Quran) rejects the distinction between religious and political authority. In addition, Kedourie (1994) thought that voting, elections, and representation are 'profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition' (p. 22). However, others disagree. Al Ajleh (1997) argued that Islam is not, and never has been only a religion; it is rather a complete way of life: 'Religion has an integral and organic relationship with politics and society' (p. 119). Filali-Ansary (2003) went even further, claiming that democracy, normally identified as a Western concept, originated in the Islamic East (p. 53).

Furthermore, Esposito and O. Voll (2001) argued that the Muslim world presents a broad spectrum of perspectives ranging from the extremes of those who deny a connection between Islam and democracy to those who argue that Islam requires a democratic system. In between the extremes, in a number of countries where Muslims are a majority like Indonesia and Turkey, many Muslims believe that Islam is a support for democracy even though their particular political system is not explicitly defined as Islamic (p. 1).

Esposito and O. Voll (2001) explained that some of the Islamic revival groups in the late twentieth, and beginning of the twenty-first century believe that 'democracy' is a foreign concept that has been imposed by Westerners and secular reformers upon Muslim societies. People holding these views are less likely to participate in elections. Also, some other groups that identify themselves explicitly as Islamic attempted to participate directly in the democratic processes as regimes were overthrown in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. People who believe that secular approaches and a separation of religion and politics are an essential part of democracy argue that Islamist groups only advocate democracy as a tactic to gain political power. The final group is the Muslims who are not activist Islamists, may live in democratic non-Islamic countries and have participated in electoral processes who bring a 'growing sense of the need for morality and Islamic awareness' to the political arena. Esposito and O. Voll (2001) stated that famous Islamic intellectuals and groups argue that under the conditions of the contemporary world, democracy can be considered a requirement of Islam. They quoted the Tunisian Islamist scholar Rashid Ghanoushi who told *London Observer,* in 1992 that: 'if by democracy is meant the liberal model of government prevailing in the West, a system under which the people freely choose their representatives and leaders, in which there is an alternation of power, as well as all freedoms and human rights for the public, then Muslims will find nothing in their religion to oppose democracy, and it is not in their interests to do so' (Cited in Esposito and O. Voll, 2001). Thus, Ghanoushi and many other Muslims view democracy as an appropriate way to fulfil certain obligations of the faith in the contemporary world.

Finally, Esposito and O. Voll (2001) concluded that it is clear that Islam is not inherently incompatible with democracy. They argue that 'Political Islam' is sometimes a programme for religious democracy and not primarily an 'agenda of democratic Islam' (p. 3). In other words, some groups use Islam as a political ideology only to achieve their political gains, which in fact do not reflect the real values and norms of Islam.

Bearing this in mind, Saudi citizens could be divided into four groups concerning their reaction to the municipal election process. The first group looked at the election process as a Western process imposed by the West, and chose not to participate in that process. According to Henderson (2005), on 16 December 2004 some Islamic figures released a statement on some websites criticising the municipal elections, noting 'it is Haram 'forbidden' to participate in legislative bodies... because Allah is the only lawgiver.' (Policy Watch, 937, 3 January 2005). The other group is the moderate Islamists of citizens, who were hesitant to participate in the elections in the beginning, but finally organised themselves and managed to sweep the elections outcome: 'They searched the legality of the elections until several *Fatwas* 'legal decisions' called for participation and voting (Al Ghamdi, 2005, p. 29). This group of citizens felt that the election process was a competition between the Islamists and the liberals and they had to win those elections (*Al Hayat* newspaper, 12 February 2005). The third group was the liberals who perceived the election process as the first step towards democracy and the final group is the rest of the citizens who participated in those elections on the basis that they had to take part in a new experience. Nevertheless, the number of people who participated in those elections was small, which raises questions about people's understanding of democracy as well as the election process and its objectives. It also questions the role of the Saudi mass media at the time of the municipal elections and how they portrayed the election process to the Saudi public. It could be argued that a lack of engagement with the process led to non-participation in the elections. These and other questions about the effectiveness of the candidates' campaigns will be answered in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

In the light of the previous literature, it can be seen that there are different views about democracy among Saudi citizens. This understanding would undoubtedly shape, to some extent, the future of the political reform in the country.

The future of democracy (political reform) in Saudi Arabia

As will be illustrated in Chapter Five, Saudi Arabia has experienced various kinds of 'administrative' reform in recent years. The Saudi Government continued the National Dialogue Programme and allowed elections to take place in non-governmental bodies such as sports federations and scientific and vocational associations as well as in the Saudi chambers of commerce and industry (Khan, 2005). In addition, the government conducted the long

awaited landmark municipal elections in 2005 and recently started the preparations for the second round of the municipal elections which will be held in 29 September this year (*Al Hayat,* 22 September 2010). This might be an inconsequential example of democracy as it is experienced in the West, but is a sign of participatory democracy, where citizens have the opportunity to become involved in some form of politics.

Although the municipal election process was less of a political reform than many observers were hoping for, Kapiszewski (2006) stated that 'establishing municipal election was a significant change for the deeply conservative country used to a tribal and extended-family system of politics' (p. 470). Thus, one might argue that the challenge is what kind of reform Saudi Arabia will experience in the future. Kapiszewski thought that major factors can enhance more democratisation and political representation in Saudi Arabia. He argued that the widespread public support for the current king might help to introduce further reforms. For example, many observers called King Abdullah a reformer: *The New York Times* described him as 'a reform-oriented king trying to push in the direction of reform, but the country has a non-reform-oriented structure that is close to impossible to change,' (*The New York Times,* 19 May 2009). BBC News wrote: 'King Abdullah, who came to power in 2005, has for a long time had the reputation of a reformer' (BBC News, 14 February 2009). Further, the prosperous economic situation in the country could have a significant impact on the democratisation process. High oil prices have increased revenues in the Kingdom from $150 billion in 2005 to $283 billion in 2008 (Emirates Business, 11 January 2010). Moreover, the changing Saudi society can speed up the reform process. Kapiszewski (2006) showed that in an independent opinion poll conducted in 2003, 85 per cent of respondents thought that political reform would be beneficial for the country and 90 per cent wanted to grant more rights to women. Changes in Saudi society itself may create changes in the country because people are becoming more literate, better educated and urban – the characteristics that usually lead to democratisation. Finally, events in neighbouring states – Jordan, Iran, Yemen, and the new Iraq – which all have more political representation of citizens in their governance and which conduct general elections, indirectly influence citizens' thinking across the borders of Saudi Arabia (Kapiszewski, 2006, p. 778). Moreover, the recent political revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in January 2011, and the uprisings in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and some Gulf states such as Oman will definitely have a direct influence on citizens' political awareness and behaviours and might speed up the political reform in the country.

In addition to that, Echagüe (2009) argued that reform in Saudi Arabia would undoubtedly have an 'Islamist frame of reference' and, in this sense, perhaps will not be compatible with the Western liberal democratic expectations. She wrote:

> In any case, most local calls for reform do not seek Western liberal democracy; in fact, there is widespread suspicion of democratisation and the imposition from abroad of foreign concepts. Calls for reform emphasise the need for a fair society, which respects equality, personal freedoms, accountability and a fair distribution of wealth. Reformers speak of change from within and in accord with Saudi Arabia's circumstances (Policy Brief, p. 5).

Thus, the future of the political reform in Saudi Arabia remains undefined. There are major key players in the Saudi arena that might determine and sustain the shape and extent of future political reform. Those are the government, the conservative society and international interests. The low level of citizens' participation in the first municipal elections in Saudi Arabia where only 17 percent of the citizens voted in the elections might indicate that there were significant challenges facing any political reform in the country. Needless to say, any successful future reform in Saudi Arabia will have to take into consideration the religious, cultural, social and political characteristics of Saudi society.

Conclusion

The current forms of democratic government in the modern world did not come about suddenly, but over several millennia of struggle. From Athens, Greece to Rome, Italy, from the French revolution to the American revolutions, the liberal democratic systems are ideal forms of governance that can be applied to many countries around the world. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the Arab world, where foreign colonisation and the aftermath of wars in the region have significantly delayed any democratic reforms. Also, authoritarian and military regimes continue to resist, until this moment, any genuine democratic change. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is no real elected democratic government in any country in the Arab world, so far (El Badawi and Makdisi, 2006, Zakaria, 2003). Also, the new revolutions in many countries in the Middle East do not guarantee a complete transition to democratic systems of governance in these states.

However, some leaders and citizens in the Middle East think that the Western democratic system of governance might not consider the values or traditions of religious societies, where it is impossible to separate religion from the governing system, as is the case of Saudi Arabia.

Saudi officials, for example, argue that Sharia 'Islamic law' has been the pillar and source of Saudi Arabia's basic system of government where the leader, with the support of religious scholars, has the right to choose the person they see fit for a public office. This Islamic point of view may collide with the basic principles of Western democracy and might upset many people inside and outside the country.

In spite of its limited democratic practices, Saudi Arabia has experienced various kinds of administrative reforms in recent years. The government's conduct of the municipal elections in 2005, the approval of the second round of the municipal elections that will be held in 29 September 2011, the continuation of the National Dialogue Programme, as well as other recent reforms indicate the government's intention for more changes. Although municipal elections were held for the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia, 83 per cent of the Saudi eligible citizens decided not to participate in those elections as will be illustrated in municipal elections background chapter . This high level of disengagement was an alarming one and might show how Saudi society perceived democracy and elections. This raises the question that it is not just an increase in mass communication which is necessary for a successful campaign, but a more strategic and tactical campaign which addresses the problems of the citizens' political awareness and their understanding of the election process. Bothe of which take into account the role of the mass media, as well as the effectiveness of the candidates' campaigns. Most of those questions and concerns will be discussed and answered in chapter 7, 8 , 9 and 10.

However, many observers argue that democratic reform in Saudi Arabia is unavoidable, but imposing ready-made models incompatible with the Islamic religion or the conservative tribal society might not be successful in Saudi Arabia. It might be wise to say that the first step to democracy is to open up the space for association and for freedom of expression in the country. Creating a free Saudi 'public sphere', similar to what Habermas explained, might be a crucial first step for more reform because it could sustain a debate which would help define a more cohesive approach to reform.

In that public sphere, Saudi citizens would have the opportunity to assemble, express and publish their opinions and be able to debate on any issue of their interest. Mass media would also flourish in that society and work as representatives of the people opinions towards government. That reform would undoubtedly have an Islamic frame of reference because

Saudi Arabia is a deeply religious and conservative society and, in this sense, perhaps it might fall short of Western liberal expectations which are themselves open to debate.

Because only a small number of Saudi citizens (17 %) participated in the 2005 municipal elections, the next chapter examines the issue of citizens' apathy towards the election with some emphasis on the Saudi situation. The chapter explains the meaning of political apathy and discusses the reasons behind this phenomenon, which endangers democracy or the transition to political reform in many countries around the world.

CHAPTER THREE

CITIZENS' APATHY TOWARDS ELECTIONS

CITIZENS' APATHY TOWARDS ELECTIONS

Introduction

This chapter examines voters' apathy towards election. I argue here that political disengagement is a phenomenon that increases gradually in nearly every election although turnout is considered to be high in many democratic countries. As this chapter illustrates different factors might contribute to people's non-participation in democratic and non-democratic countries, and there are underlying conditions integral to democracy, and the lack of those conditions may also be a factors in decreasing turnout. Although Saudi Arabia is not a democratic country, it took the first step towards people's representation by conducting municipal elections in 2005, where only a small number (17 %) of Saudi citizens voted in those elections. It is therefore important to investigate the reasons for that low turnout to help future political reform in the country. By looking at the literature below on political apathy and its reasons, I consider how non-participation might have had a major impact on the elections in Saudi Arabia. Needless to say, non-participation does not necessarily mean lack of interest or knowledge among Saudi citizens and their decisions towards those elections. Also, it is worth noting that because the municipal elections were the first experience of their kind in Saudi Arabia, there is no major body of literature on this subject. Therefore, I draw out the conceptual framework of this phenomenon from other democratic and non-democratic societies to analyse the Saudi situation.

The chapter starts by focusing on the meaning and danger of political apathy and then discusses some academic findings relating to the level of political participation in national, local and parliamentary elections in the United States, Europe, Canada, China and other parts of the developing world, in order to shed more light on this issue. The chapter will also discuss various factors behind people's political apathy. These are related to the level of trust in the political system, including powerlessness towards the political system and remoteness of the political system. In addition, some reasons related to voters' personal characteristics (lack of resources, lack of political awareness, lack of interest and motivation, lack of political knowledge and lack of efficacy). Ineffectiveness of the election's campaigns, specifically the lack of mobilising and the environment in which the elections take place, such as climate and location will be examined. The population size and density as well as the ineffectiveness of the mass media will be discussed. The final section will look at some reasons behind political apathy in developing countries. Some of these factors might not be

applicable to the Saudi situation, but as a conceptual framework of this study, they are worth examining. Specific reasons for apathy relevant to Saudi Arabia will be discussed in more depth.

What is political apathy?

Bennett (2004) defined political apathy as the lack of interest in politics, and contends that the interested citizen is more politically knowledgeable and active than the apathetic one. The author argued that apathy plays a significant role in theories of democracy that stress citizens' involvement in public affairs and is used as an indicator of declining 'social engagement', and of 'cognitive mobilisation' in Western societies (p. 579). According to Bennett, research in the US and Europe showed that, except in periods of national emergency, most citizens are not very attentive to public affairs, which is 'worrisome to politicians, journalists, and academics' (p. 580). In Saudi society, social engagement was demonstrated at a time of emergency (Gulf Wars) when thousands of citizens made themselves available for recruitment in armed forces, but as stated here, elections are a new political experience in Saudi Arabia and there have not been major studies on political engagement and mobilisation of citizens. Bennett (1986) also suggested that political apathy is 'an important indicator of an individual's potential for political activity' and is a 'useful device for estimating the degree to which citizens are psychologically 'engaged' in the political process' (p. 37). Thus, it is important for the purpose of this study, which aims to understand Saudi citizens' low level of engagement in municipal elections, to see why citizens lack interest in politics and did not engage heavily in that political process.

Dye and Zeigler (2008) stated that apathy is a characteristic of mass politics in the United States since a large number of eligible voters tend to stay away from any sort of political activity. Dye and Zeigler (2008) wrote:

> Less than 1 per cent of the American adult population ever run for public office. Only about 5 per cent ever actively participate in parties and campaigns, and only about 10 per cent ever make financial contributions. About 15 per cent wear political buttons or display bumper stickers. Less than 20 per cent ever write their congress member or contact any other public official. Only about one third of the population belongs to organisations that could be classified as interest groups, and only a few try to convince their friends to vote for a certain candidate (p. 113).

It is clear that the majority of the American people, according to Dye and Ziegler, tend to be unconcerned about politics and do not bother to participate in any political activity, whether it

be voting in elections or helping with campaign activities. Consequently, political disengagement may be considered a danger for democratic societies.

The danger of apathy

Apathy, according to the scholars above, threatens the functions of elections and undermines the essence of the democratic values of modern societies. Katz (1997) identified the functions of elections as the 'installation and selection of officials, the establishment of representation and the provision of an occasion for popular involvement in politics' (p. 12). Wood (2002) contended that elections are at the core of the American political system and, for most Americans voting is the only form of political participation. Thus, apathy or non-voting is harmful for democracy and makes it difficult to hold elected officials accountable for their decisions and behaviours when in office. Wood (2002) went on to explain:

> Higher voter turnout confers legitimacy for the elected official, provides a mandate for decision-making and policy-making, and is an indication that voters are connected with their community and government. Conversely, low voter turnout connotes apathy, frustration, anger, disengagement, alienation, and/or lack of a sense of efficacy and confidence in government. Low voter turnout is perceived to be a threat and danger to our democratic way of life (p. 209).

Hence, citizens' non-participation is an indication of alienation from civic engagement and undermines the democratic aspects of modern societies. Neimi and Junn (1998) argued that voters' apathy should be considered a problem because 'democratic citizens should have a minimum understanding of the political system in which they express preferences and elect representatives' (p. 1).

Apathy could also harm the legitimacy of some political bodies. Scully et al. (2004) stated that lower turnout has the direct consequence of 'rendering' political institutions less 'representative' of the population, and might encourage policy makers to neglect the interests of social groups among whom electoral participation is lowest (p. 519). Morgan and Streb (2001) have found that although it is important for citizens to pay special attention to and be active in their government, most Americans fall short on both accounts: 'The public's level of political interest is therefore low, and the rate of voting in elections is on the decline' (p. 154).

Citizens' non-participation may encourage politicians to serve their own interests. Hilliard and Kemp (1999) argued that when citizens avoid political participation and allow officials and public representatives to set their own agendas, the administrators and rulers may regard

this as an open invitation to act on their own initiative, sometimes irresponsibly, which leads to the failure of democracy. Therefore, the authors encouraged public participation in all spheres of government to restrain uncontrolled power (p. 45). Hilliard and Kemp (1999) wrote:

> Every citizen is indirectly 'responsible' for the manner in which a country is run. In addition, people generally get the government they deserve - good or bad. Without strong public participation, good, 'clean' government and administration may not materialise and politicians may be tempted to pursue their own interests instead of the public interest. This could spell doom for the future of democracy (p. 45).

Here, the practice of good government, which makes democracy attractive for most citizens, might be impossible to obtain, but the desire for legitimacy means that citizens must participate in the political process.

In Saudi Arabia, only a small number of eligible voters cast their vote, which means that the majority of citizens chose not to participate in the 2005 municipal elections. Thus, one may argue that the low level of participation among Saudi citizens might have endangered the idea behind that political experiment, which is the citizens' participation in the decision-making process. It is also a sign of civic disengagement, or might be an indication of misunderstanding of the whole process. It might be argued that the questioning of the legitimacy of the political system and the politicians' interest mentioned in the literature above are not directly relevant to the Saudi situation because the country is not a democratic one. Nevertheless, municipal elections are the first elections in the country and all factors should be considered if Saudi Arabia is to continue its political reform.

Having discussed the meaning and disadvantages of apathy in the above academic literature, the next section will focus on the decline of citizens' political participation in nations throughout the world. The discussion reveals the decline in citizens' voting in national, parliament and local elections, with some emphasis on municipal elections.

Decline of citizens' political participation

Although academics and politicians in democratic nations expressed concern, citizens' disengagement in politics is not a phenomenon that happens only in those countries, but it is the dilemma that faces all nations around the world. I have touched on the fears facing American academics above (Wood, 2002 and Katz, 1997), but I will now consider the situation in America in more detail. Morgan and Streb (2001) described the American

public's interest in government as disappointing. They stated that: 'whereas about 63 per cent of the electorate voted in the presidential election of 1960, the voting rate had declined to about 50 per cent in the 1996 presidential election' (p. 156) Further, Gimpel and Schuknecht (2003) argued that many in the US never bother to go to the polls. In the 1996 election, only 49 per cent of eligible citizens voted whereas about 51 per cent voted in 2000. In their view: 'this is a potentially serious problem because if so few people vote, policy outcomes may not be representative of the preferences of the broader community, thereby causing conflict and raising questions about the legitimacy of the political system' (p. 471). Similar observations were noted by Dye and Zeigler (2008) and Hajnal and Lewis (2003), the latter expressing concern about low voter participation in federal elections in America: 'almost half of all eligible voters do not vote in federal elections, which are cited repeatedly as evidence of an ongoing crisis in American democracy' (p. 645).

Concerning Britain, Keaney and Rogers (2006) indicated that turnout in both national and local elections has fallen dramatically in the last decade in the country. The 2001 and 2005 elections recorded the lowest turnout, 59 and 61 per cent, respectively (p. 5). Moreover, turnout at local elections had fallen by around a tenth since the 1980s, with the result that little more than a third of registered electors turn out to vote in most local elections (pp. 5-8). More evidence of low citizen participation in elections was noted by Denver and Hands (1997) who pointed out that British voters also have apathetic attitudes towards politics. They wrote:

> From about the 1970s onwards, British voters have become less strongly committed to parties and more unstable in their voting behaviour. Thus, the parties have been forced to give more thought and direct more efforts to persuasion rather than relying on more traditional techniques of mobilising supporters (p. 21).

Similarly, Wahl-Jorgensen (2002) who studied the 2001 British general elections concluded that people tend to be apathetic towards politics. Wahl-Jorgensen (2002) wrote:

> As election statistics show, local elections got much lower turnout than national ones, and citizens are much less interested in them... On elections day itself, the British local and national press published more than 400 articles on voter apathy. Despite the alarmist tone of these articles, talk of alienation was by no means a phenomenon unique to this election, but rather constitutes a vocabulary of political discourse that has been widely rehearsed, especially in recent years, in the UK, the US and elsewhere (p. 99).

It can be seen that there is a gradual decline of the people's political participation over time in Britain. To make the situation worse, British voters tend to be more apathetic towards local

elections than national elections, which may affect the democratic process in Britain in the long run.

In their study examining election turnout, Lutz and March (2007) found that countries like Switzerland had turnout rates below 50 per cent in national elections, but in recent years low turnout in national elections has become much more widespread (p. 539). The authors concluded that as turnout falls, concerns about the functioning of democracy are rising and low turnout is seen as a serious democratic problem or, democracy's 'unresolved dilemma' (p. 539).

Canada has also been experiencing a decline in voter turnout for the past decade or longer according to Rubenson, et al. (2007). They stated that turnout in Canadian federal elections 'has dropped steadily since 1988, having averaged around 75 per cent after the Second World War'. In 1993, federal election turnout fell to 70 per cent, to 67 per cent in 1997, and in 2000, slightly more than 61 per cent of registered voters went to the polls (p. 589). The authors noted that media, academics and politicians in Canada express concern over this lack of civic participation.

Voting decline is also a major problem in European parliament elections. Steinbrecher and Huber (2006) stated that in recent years, turnout in European parliament elections has been very low in some member countries of the EU like the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany compared to that in national parliament elections. The authors wrote:

> Turnout in European Elections has been declining continuously since the first election in 1979. After a rather small decrease from 63.0 per cent to 58.8 per cent between 1979 and 1994, the decline intensified in the last two elections. With an electoral participation of 49.8 per cent in 1999 and 45.7 per cent in 2004, not even half of the eligible voters in Europe participated in the European elections (p. 15).

Voters' non-participation is not only a phenomenon in the national elections. According to Scheufele et al. (2002), research has revealed public apathy towards community level politics in America 'While half of eligible voters turn out for most national elections, only a third shows up for local elections' (p. 427). The authors noted that the limited involvement in local politics raises concern that the 'role of public consensus in political decision-making is being replaced by a professional bureaucracy and special interest groups' (p. 428). Moreover, in their study focusing on the National Assembly for Wales (NAW), although the election for the Assembly was technically for a national government, Scully et al. (2004) argued that the high level of voter abstention can be considered problematic when it 'undermines the

existence of some political institutions that are being elected' (p. 520). The authors stated 'the Assembly election was, for the most part, the victim of a much wider public apathy towards the political process.' (p. 520). Another explanation for the low turnout was the limited power that the Assembly was granted compared to the Scottish Parliament. One might argue, here, that the undefined role of the municipal councils in Saudi Arabia, the limited powers for elected candidates and the lack of political platform might have increased citizens' non-participation in the elections.

Low turnout is also a noticeable problem facing municipal elections. Dye and Zeigler (2008) stated that city or county elections usually produce turnouts of 20 to 15 per cent of eligible voters when they are held separately from state or national elections (p. 113). Also, Hajnal and Lewis (2003) stated that although low voter turnout in national elections has generated considerable attention and concern, the much lower turnout in municipal elections 'has often been largely ignored' and could be seen as one of the worst problems in democratic nations (p. 645). The authors argued that voter turnout in local elections is declining rapidly as it is in national elections. Hajnal and Lewis (2003) wrote:

> At the local level where policies are most likely to be implemented and where a majority of the nation's civic leaders are being elected; important public policy decisions are being made without the input of most of the affected residents (p. 645).

It might perhaps be argued, that turnout at the municipal level means that Saudis miss the chance to elect the representatives who are going to take decisions on issues that may affect citizens' daily life. Surprisingly, the previous figures are similar to the Saudi municipal elections low turnout rate (17 %), which confirms that citizens' non-participation in municipal elections could be a problem whether those elections are held in democratic or non-democratic countries.

Furthermore, Oliver (2001) indicated that low participation in local elections raises serious concerns. One concern is that the voice of the people in municipal elections is likely 'to be severely distorted' (p. 11). The actions of local government can affect citizens in profound ways (in terms of public safety, infrastructure, and land-use decision). Another concern is that with no participation at the local level, citizens lose out on an easy opportunity to learn about and become engaged in democracy. Local governments and their small size make it easier for citizens to learn crucial democratic skills and become familiar with the public interest at the local level. Oliver (2001) argued that local politics could be the training ground of a democratic citizenry for a larger democratic process and the place where citizens begin to

gain trust in government and a belief in their own political efficacy. The author stated that 'the fact that so few citizens participate in local elections is likely to be at least a contributor to the decreasing levels of trust in government, political efficacy, and sense of civic duty' (p. 12). In contrast, Incioglu (2002) stated that the importance of local elections in Turkish politics has increased significantly since the 1970s due largely to 'the rapid growth of urbanisation that has radically transformed the social, economic, and political landscape of the country's major cities' (p. 72). According to Incioglu (2002), political parties and voters in Turkey assign greater importance to municipal elections than the elections for other levels of local administration (precincts, villages, and provincial administrations). Thus, electoral politics in the 1999s showed that the municipal elections acted as the most 'significant indicators of the emerging trends in voting patterns among different levels of local politics' (p. 73).

With reference to the above, one might conclude that citizens' low political participation all around the globe threatens the functions of election, which are the core of contemporary democracy. Elections, in general, work as tools for the legitimisation of the political system, the selection of officials and the establishment of representation in politics (Schuknecht, 2003). Local elections, mainly municipal elections, are a very important part in that process, since these elections can be a training ground of a democratic citizenry for a larger democratic process (Dye and Zeigler, 2008, Oliver, 2001). In Saudi Arabia, citizens were given the chance to participate in municipal elections, but the outcome of the elections shows that only a small number of them chose to participate. Such an outcome indicates that the majority of Saudi citizens ignored the chance to learn from the first political opportunity in the country. In other words, they missed any democratic lessons that they might have gained from that process, missed the chance to participate in decision-making and lost the chance to choose their representatives in the municipal councils.

Reasons behind citizens' apathy

Although political disengagement is a crucial issue in any election around the globe, there are different reasons for its occurrence. These reasons are related to the level of trust in the political system, the voters' personal characteristics, the strategies and tactics of the electoral campaigns and the environment in which the elections take place. Also, some reasons are linked to the population size and density as well as the effectiveness of the mass media. The final section will look at some reasons behind the low political participation in developing

countries. Some of these factors might not be relevant to the Saudi situation, but they might help to explain why 82 per cent of Saudi citizens did not participate in the 2005 municipal elections. Reasons relevant to Saudi Arabia will be discussed in more detail.

Low trust in the political system

The low level of trust in the political system in different countries is one major factor behind citizens' apathy. Ulbig (2008) stated that citizens are not likely to trust a government that ignores their needs and they will not be satisfied with policies that appear to have taken 'their input lightly' (p. 536). Miller and Grofman (1999) also stated that a lack of trust in government in general and a disassociation from the main political parties are factors contributing to voter apathy in America in recent decades (p. 114). Hetherington (2005) indicated that political trust consists of citizens' expectation that no party in the 'democratic exchange' (including politicians, parties, and other institutions such as government, the Senate, or the Supreme Court) will exploit citizens' 'vulnerability' (p. 8). However, Hetherington (2005) expressed concern about the continuous decline of the public's trust in those modern political institutions as follows:

> Political trust decline over time has been substantial. Between 1964 and 1994, public trust had dropped by more than 30 per cent. This provides some evidence that the change in trust has been large enough to effect fundamental change in public policy outcomes between the 1960s and 1990 (p. 35).

This shows how quickly a decline in political trust can affect people's participation over time, which is a potential worry in any democratic system.

Similar to what has been discussed about political trust, Wong (1970) argued that ever since the urban council elections were started in 1952 in Hong Kong, the rate of registration for elections as compared to the total population (2,250,000) has never exceeded 1 per cent. Also, from the 30-40 per cent who register, only about 0.59 per cent or less of the total population turn up to vote. The author argued that the political apathy of the local population must be explained within the context of the electoral system at that time. Wong pointed out that 'before we accuse the people of Hong Kong of political apathy, let us reflect for one moment on the role that our registered or potential voters are allowed to play in the local political arena' (p. 20). Wong contended that when the majority of people are barred from participation in government affairs for a long period, they become disinterested, isolated and powerless in the face of the government (British Government at that time). Because of their

alienation from the political system and the government's ignorance of their problems , they found it meaningless to vote in the urban council elections.

Powerlessness towards political systems

The feeling of powerlessness among citizens towards the political system might hinder their political participation. Bennett (2004) argued that several elements influence citizens' low level of participation in politics, among them the decline of 'political dispositions such as partisanship, political efficacy, and the decline of the sense of civic duty to vote among citizens' (p. 579). Hague and Loader (1999) stated that because of the failure of democracy, citizens have become so 'frustrated' with the political process that they have become apathetic (p. 102). The authors pointed out that scholars, politicians and public administrators routinely notice declining voter turnout and lack of attendance at public meetings, especially at local level. Critical theorists, according to Hague and Loader, have suggested that citizens' apathy comes as a result of a shift in focus and power away from communities: 'people are apathetic because they are powerless, not powerless because they are apathetic' (p. 103). Furthermore, Keaney and Rogers (2006) investigated the reasons behind the decline in turnout in recent elections in Britain and identified a range of reasons which included a decline in the voters' beliefs in their political efficacy, a gradual decline in the view that it is every citizen's duty to vote, a decline in political bodies' canvassing activities, and a decline of voting norms in some deprived areas (p. 8).

The previous studies stress that when voters feel that they are unable to make changes in politics or they believe that they will not affect any outcome they take no interest and do not participate in any political activities such as voting, registering, canvassing or attending political rallies. One may argue that because Saudi citizens were barred from political matters for many years, the majority of them might have had an apathetic feeling that the elections, as a new practice, would not add much to their present or future. Thus, they chose not to participate in that national process.

Remoteness of the political system

Moreover, the remoteness of the political system may lead to people's non-participation in politics. Palma (1970) argued that political participation in the United States is a function of the individual's position in society and his attitudes towards the polity (p. 3). He concluded that the feelings of personal 'political competence', 'civic responsibility' and trust and 'identification with politics' and its institutions favour participation. However, 'cynicism' and

'suspiciousness', and feelings that politics are remote, threatening, corrupt or ineffective lead to political apathy (pp. 3-4).

Taking into account the previous views, and as will be discussed in Chapter Five and Six, Saudi Arabia has often been characterised as an absolute monarchy with no public participation .Thus, one may argue that the feeling of alienation or remoteness from the political system among Saudi citizens might have affected their participation in the municipal elections. Furthermore, low turnout among Saudis could be a result of their low political interest in politics in general, and specifically, municipal elections, which might have contributed to their absence in the three election days.

Voters' Characteristics

Voters' characteristics have an important effect on political behaviour. Thus, it is necessary to examine some of these elements and their impact on the people's voting behaviour. Socio-demographic characteristics, lack of resources, lack of political awareness, lack of interest and motivation, the lack of political knowledge and the lack of efficacy are among voters' personal characteristics that might increase their apathy.

Socio-demographic factors

Socio-demographic reasons could hinder voters' participation in politics. Rosema (2007) stated that voter's characteristics such as his or her age, education, income, interest in the political process and strength of party attachment influence political behaviour (p. 614). Rosenstone and Hansen (1993, p. 227) and Gerber et al. (2003, p. 540) found that turnout in elections has been shown to vary according to factors such as where people live, their gender, ethnicity, social class, education and age. Thus, disadvantaged segments of the population tend to vote significantly less regularly than others in national contests. In addition, the well educated are more likely to vote than the less educated, but past voting experience exceeds the effects of age and education.

Furthermore, in their analysis of the Canadian election studies carried out between 1968 and 2000, Blais et al. (2004) found that the propensity to vote had declined marginally (by about three percentage points) in all demographic groups. The authors identified several socio-demographic sources of that decline. The younger generations are less likely to vote because they pay less attention to politics and less educated voters are less willing to vote than well-

educated citizens are. Voting tendency is also higher among those with higher incomes, married and more religious (pp. 221-236).

The findings above on the effect of religion on voting help to explain the Saudi citizens' political behaviour towards the 2005 municipal elections. Because Saudi society is deeply religious, the majority of the winning candidates were elected for religious and traditional reasons. The *New York Times* described the Saudi electoral results: 'candidates backed by conservative clerics dominated the final stage of Saudi Arabia's landmark municipal elections... Many Islamists won seats in earlier municipal council polling elsewhere' (*The New York Times*, 24 April 2005). So the religious factor might have encouraged some Saudi religious voters to choose those candidates, hence the number of those voters was limited. More on this factor will be illustrated in Chapter Nine.

Lack of resources

It is not just what people believe which influences their political behaviour, but physical causes may also contribute to their apathy. Scheufele et al. (2002) emphasised the importance of resources (available time and money) for people's participation in politics as well as their 'civic skills', motivations and opportunities to participate (p. 428). The authors cited Verba et al. (1971), who described the outcome of the combined role of these resources as follows: 'when inputs of time and money are coupled to civic skills, citizens become not only more likely to participate but also more likely to be effective when they do' (cited in Scheufele, at al. 2002, p. 428). Also, Lutz and March (2007) thought that the lack of voters' ability or motivation can affect their decision to vote: 'Citizens do not vote either because they cannot (they lack the resources or capacity), or because they do not want to (they lack motivation) or because nobody asked them to participate (mobilisation)' (p. 540). Thus, the amount of money and time available for voters as well as motivations are to be considered among the main factors that might activate their political participation in politics.

Lack of political awareness

The low level of political awareness among citizens can be another determinant of people's apathy towards political participation. Political awareness, according to Delli Carpini and Ketter (1996) comes as a result of individual and environmental factors. It requires ability (e.g. cognitive skills), motivation (e.g. political interest), and opportunity (e.g. depth of media coverage) (p. 89). The authors pointed out that although scholars typically focus on

individual factors, the political environment also plays a vital role in shaping political awareness.

Saudi citizens' lack of political awareness might be one of the reasons behind their apathetic attitudes towards municipal elections. As will be discussed in the next chapters, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia does not have political parties and has never experienced political reform. Therefore, in such an environment, it will not be surprising to find that a considerable proportion of the population are not politically aware or did not understand or participate in the municipal elections. This factor, as well as other reasons, that might have contributed to the Saudi citizens' low level of participation, will be examined throughout this thesis.

Psychological involvement

Psychological reasons may also influence voter apathy. Lee (2003) argued that the individual has to be psychologically involved with politics to participate fully in any electoral activity. Psychological involvement could include voter's political awareness, sense of political outcomes, and interest in political matters. The author pointed out that several political scientists (such as Almond and Verba, 1965, Hagner and Pierce, 1982, Verba et al., 1971) have found that 'the higher the psychological involvement in politics, the greater the likelihood that an individual will participate in politics' (p. 95). Moreover, Fisher et al. (2008) found that voters who are less knowledgeable, less interested in politics or lack a strong internal motivation to vote are less likely to participate in politics (p. 90). Miller and Shanks (1996) argued that 'it is not hard to understand why most non-voters don't vote: they are uninterested, uninformed and uninvolved' (p. 39). Similarly, Saudi media attributed psychological reasons to citizens' apathy. It stated that at the time of the municipal elections, some citizens were not interested in the elections because the election was a new experience in the country (*Al Yaum,* 9 December 2004) or that the citizens were not informed about that political process (*Al Watan*, 27 November & 20 December 2004, *Al Madinah*, 16 February 2005). Finally, Arafah (2005) thought that some citizens were reluctant to participate in the municipal elections because they thought that the elections came as a direct result of a Western political pressure on the Saudi Government to have some kind of political reform (Islam on line, 19 February 2005).

Lack of political knowledge

Lack of political knowledge is a crucial factor in citizens' apathy towards politics. Larcinese (2007) pointed out that the lack of political knowledge is an integral part of people's political

disengagement. In his analysis of the 1997 British general election, the author found that information is a good predictor of turnout and raises voter participation in election: 'a person with maximum knowledge can be almost one-third more likely to vote than a person at the bottom of the knowledge distribution' (p. 409). Further, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) indicated that better informed citizens are more likely to vote. Luskin (1990) stated that political knowledge depends on three sets of factors: capability, motivation and opportunity. The first two are characteristics of the individual citizen, 'whilst opportunity is largely a matter of the information environment, which is, in turn, dependent on characteristics of the media system and of the political context' (p. 331). However, McCann and Lawson (2006) suggested that there is a political knowledge gap among citizens in democratic countries since many lack basic information about politics. These people are ignorant of fundamental civic facts, such as 'how laws are made; the identities of major political actors in the policy-making process; and what positions these actors hold' (p. 18). The authors concluded that because knowledge is essential in political engagement and the quality of citizen judgements, the widespread ignorance about politics is problematic for democracy (p. 18).

Lack of efficacy

The feeling of efficacy among citizens towards politics might affect their political participation. According to Baker et al. (1981), political efficacy rests on an individual's belief that ordinary people have some influence and control over what the government does: 'It does not refer to actual attempts at influencing government but rather to the feeling that one can have some impact if one wants to' (p. 27). Thus, this kind of feeling is extremely important in a democracy. Balch also pointed out that 'the citizen who has a high sense of political efficacy is... politically active, supportive, informed, interested, loyal and satisfied' (cited in Baker et al. 1981, p. 28). Baker also noted that strong feelings of political efficacy indicate more than mere support for political systems, 'they also suggest that the norms and behaviours expected of a citizen in a democracy have been learned and internalised' (p. 28). However, Dahl et al. (2003) argued that there is a positive correlation between apathy and low feeling of political efficacy and low social status (p. 43). Huston (2001), in his study on the political participation in South Africa, found that apathy and perception of lack of political efficacy have their strongest impact on the level of public participation of some race groups and by respondents in certain disadvantaged provinces (p. 285).

The situation in South Africa possibly has strong parallels with Saudi Arabia. It is true that the Saudi Government did not have political reform for many years, but the municipal election process was the first step towards that reform. This reform was described by *The New York Times*, as 'not exactly a democratic revolution,' but 'still, Saudi Arabia embarked on its first nationwide voting, and the exercise may end up being more than symbolic' (*The New York Times*, 10 February 2005). Thus, after a long period, the Saudi citizens were expecting elections to be held in other higher governmental bodies, which have more power and influence on their lives than municipal councils do. Consequently, they may have been apathetic because they felt that after the long wait they should have greater involvement in their country's affairs and not just be limited to the local municipal councils. To add to this, most citizens had no idea about the functions or role of the municipal councils, which might have increased their feeling of alienation and apathy towards the 2005 municipal elections.

In the light of the literature above, it is clear that there are many crucial elements which contribute to voters' political apathy. The lack of personal physical ability, lack of money and time, and low level of education could negatively affect people's political participation. Finally, the lack of citizens' political knowledge, awareness, interest, lack of efficacy and involvement in politics all might decrease voters' participation in politics. The majority of the Saudi public suffered from similar conditions that might have contributed to their limited political participation in municipal elections, as will be discussed in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine.

Ineffectiveness of the election campaigns – lack of mobilisation

The ineffectiveness of the election campaigns might be a significant factor that leads to citizens' apathy. In her study of the American elections from 1952 to 2000, Norris (2002), found that the interest in the election campaigns was slightly stronger among voters in successive elections from 1952 to 1976, and fell to a lower level from 1978 to 2000, with the exception of the 1992 elections, where attention rose again. According to Norris, Americans have become increasingly bored with government and turned-off from public affairs in recent years because of changes in party campaigning and negative coverage in the news media (p. 138). Fisher et al. (2008) argued that the limited strategies of mobilisation (motivating the voters to participate) are among the reasons that might influence voting behaviour (p. 90). The author found that voters who are 'less knowledgeable' about politics, with weaker 'motivations', 'most marginalised', with little interest in politics or lack of a 'strong internal

motivation' to vote are less likely to participate in politics. Therefore, those voters need more effort to be made by governments, parties or candidates: 'any system that provides relatively weak mobilisation is likely to produce particularly low turnout amongst the least knowledgeable voters' (p. 90). Thus, Arceneaux (2006) assumed that political campaigns have to provide voters with the information necessary to attract them to the political process. He wrote:

> By increasing the information available to voters, campaigns help them to update their beliefs regarding fundamental variables and to accord them weight in their voting decision. Months before the election, the average voter may have little sense of how fundamental variables relate to their vote preference. Over the course of a campaign, voters learn more about fundamental variables and, more importantly, their political relevance (p. 161).

Here, it is important that the electoral campaigns are effective to educate people about the political process. Part of campaigning is the mobilisation of citizens. If the citizens do not know where, how, or why to vote, they are unlikely to become involved in the process.

Goldstein and Ridout (2002) in their study on declining voter turnout in the United States over the past 40 years, indicated that political mobilisation, 'variously labelled voter contact, get-out-the-vote (GOTV), or voter canvass, can influence citizens' political participation. The authors found that a decrease in the quality of mobilisation activity was the main reason for the declining turnout in the United States over the aforementioned period. In addition, they stated that mobilisation in the past succeeded when friends, neighbours, and committed volunteers canvassed a citizen, in person. In contrast, in recent years, voter contact operations are in the hands of consultants and phone banks, which are less effective for mobilising voters. Goldstein and Ridout (2002) wrote:

> If we believe that the power of parties and the quality of civic life have decayed over the last 40 years, it is possible that the quality of mobilisation has decreased, even as its quantity has remained steady or even risen... Mobilisation efforts by candidates, parties, and other organisations are needed to spur those on to the cause of turning out to vote. Yet, such potential voters are likely to be weak partisans with a short paper trail in terms of past voting behaviour. Thus, they are precisely the types of voters whom parties will shy away from contacting (p. 23).

Thus, the aim of mobilisation is to activate personal contact with voters in order to encourage those on the marginal side of politics to participate heavily in politics. People tend to respond effectively to face-to-face communication more than other techniques of canvassing. Personal contact is one of the successful techniques that was used by candidates and parties for a long

period, but recently, has been replaced by other ineffective tactics by campaigning professionals. Except using newspapers and the internet, Saudi candidates' mobilisation efforts were limited within their camps' borders because election regulations did not allow them to conduct any electoral activities further than one mile from their headquarters (camps). Despite such laws, some candidates managed to personally contact voters. In some cases, candidates maintained personal contact with citizens in their houses, farms and shopping malls (*Riyadh*, 6 February 2005, Interviewee No. 27). Furthermore, the government launched a media campaign under the slogan 'Participate in the decision-making' to inform citizens about the municipal elections regulations and encourage them to vote in that process. However, the effectiveness of that campaign was limited or minimal as will be illustrated in Chapter Nine.

Environment

People's political disengagement in many countries does appear to increase as a result of some seasonal factors. Rallings and Thrasher (1997) suggested that declining electoral turnout in both Britain and elsewhere in the world decreases in certain months in the year when electors appear more disinclined to vote (p. 65). The authors stated that during the summer months, March through June, when there is daylight throughout the hours of polling, the level of turnout will be higher than average. However, conducting elections in the winter months, November through January, when it is dark for half of the voting time, turnout will probably be lower. Furthermore, seasonal factors can take different forms. Severe weather patterns and holidays are also likely to affect turnout. At holiday periods, individuals engage in activities (recreation or shopping) which can be seen as more important than voting (p. 66).

At the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, all the election days for the three phases of the elections were on weekends and the weather in those months (February-April 2005) was good. In similar conditions, a large proportion of citizens tend to spend weekends outside their cities and enjoy the weather. Therefore, the choice to have fun on a day off rather than vote might have contributed to the low level of participation in the municipal elections.

Other environmental factors to explain people's apathy include the location and accessibility of the polling station. Gimpel and Schuknecht (2003) found that accessibility to polling stations as well as other personal factors can determine whether voters participate or not in the election process. The authors wrote:

> Although a lack of voter motivation may be the major hindrance, we are suggesting that if polling places were more accessible, at least some of those voters of marginal interest and motivation would turn out to vote upon realising that they might not have to fight the usual nettlesome obstacles on their way. Making voting more convenient involves more than just easing registration laws (p. 474).

Accessibility could mean special pathways for wheel chairs, signs to direct people to polling stations, easy to reach locations such as sport, leisure and community centres and schools. If voters, especially those who have disabilities or special needs find it hard to reach polling stations, they might choose not vote. In Saudi Arabia, sports, leisure centres and schools were used as polling stations in municipal elections because they were located in known locations in neighbourhoods and easy to reach for most residents (Riyadh municipal elections encyclopaedia, 2005). One may argue that environmental factors during the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia did not work against the wishes of the municipal elections organisers. However, although the election days were over weekends, the weather was good (spring) and the polling stations were accessible, the number of voters was limited. This indicates that there were other reasons that might have contributed to the citizens' high level of apathy, which this thesis is trying to investigate.

Population

The population size and its density may also increase people's apathy. Rallings and Thrasher (1997) argued that turnout decline in many democratic industrial countries is linked to 'population size and density; economic development; degree of illiteracy; the presence or absence of compulsory voting; voting age; the electoral system; the closeness of the campaign to the election and the number of parties in the country' (p. 44). Geys (2006), in his analysis of 83 studies of voter turnout or absenteeism, found that population size and electoral closeness both affect the outcome of the election. He concluded that 'turnout is higher when the population is smaller and the election closer. A more stable population also appears to positively affect turnout rates due to higher social pressure and lower information costs' (p. 653). Keaney and Rogers (2006) stated that 'people are much more likely to vote if they live in a place where other people vote and expect them to vote' (p. 8).

These studies suggest that the social environment may encourage citizens to make up their mind and vote. The pressure of friends, family members and other members of society may indirectly influence people's political behaviour. However, in the absence of such an encouraging political environment, citizens' disengagement will be the result. In the Saudi

context, in spite of the fact that the number who voted was small, some of the citizens made their decisions regarding municipal elections on their trusted clans', scholars' or friends' advice (Al Ghamdi, 2005, p. 58). According to Menoret (2005), 793,432 citizens registered in the municipal elections from a total of 4.5 million eligible voters, among an entire population of 16,529,302 (2004 census). This means that almost 17 per cent of the Saudi people participated in those elections and the majority of the citizens were not willing to vote in spite of the fact that the population of the Kingdom is small and relatively homogeneous.

Mass media ineffectiveness

Mass media ineffectiveness can also be blamed for citizens' political apathy. Croteau and Hoynes (2006) stated that although American society is swamped by mass media, it suffers from low voter turnout, limited knowledge of public affairs and general disengagement from civic activity. Moreover, the media's inattention to its public interest has contributed to citizens' cynicism and alienation. Croteau and Hoynes (2006) pointed out:

> The news media cannot be solely or even primarily blamed for the discouraging state of civic engagement today, but news has too often been part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Furthermore, the changing business of media has exacerbated these deleterious aspects of the news media's influence on political life (p. 221).

However, Forrest and Marks (1999) in their study on the 1990 Australian federal election campaign, found that the influence of the mass media on voter behaviour, and therefore on election outcomes, was small compared with the influences of partisanship, issues and candidates. Nevertheless, the authors pointed out that media effects were larger among particular groups of voters (lightly interested voters). In addition, the effects of the mass media were likely to differ according to the type of 'political stimuli' (paid or unpaid), the medium through which it is communicated (television, the press or radio) and the particular form of communication (debate, party launches and opinion polls) (p. 103).

Luskin (1990) argued that the media system and the political context affect citizens' political participation (p. 331). He concluded that citizen's information depends on: (a) the information offered by the mass media, as the main source of information for the majority of the citizens; and (b) the simplicity and/or clarity of the political choices presented by the political candidates.

In Saudi Arabia, and according to the municipal elections regulations, candidates were allowed only to use newspapers and the internet as mass media to contact voters. That situation made it difficult for some candidates to get their messages through to the public, which might have contributed to the low level of knowledge among voters regarding the political process and negatively affected their voting decisions. Moreover, government media has been accused of failing to educate the public about the importance and regulations of the municipal election process as a new democratic reform in the country. Al Ganri in *Okaz* newspaper wrote the 'Municipal elections needed more awareness information to the Saudi citizens' (*Okaz*, 22 July 2006). The effectiveness of the municipal elections media campaign will be further examined in Chapter Eight.

Political apathy in developing countries

Reasons for political disengagement are perhaps not the same in every country. Factors that trigger citizens' political apathy in developed countries differ from those in developing countries. Kila (2006) argued that most eligible voters in Western Europe and North America have a tendency towards political apathy because they do not trust their politicians since their promises usually mean more expenses and taxes or a reduction in some public services. Kila also stated that when there is peace in these countries, infrastructures are not threatened, people continue to work, own and increase their assets, and are free to say what they wish, they therefore, tend to care little about politics or they 'suspend their activism and revert to a season of political apathy' (Kila, 2006). In contrast, in Africa and in most developing countries the reason for citizens' apathy arises from the fact that the economic, educational, health, security and political situations are in very poor condition and people are 'poverty-stricken' and do not trust or respect their rulers. 'Frustration' with the existing situation is the main reason for citizens' apathy. Kila (2006) wrote:

> While those in the West are apathetic because they are more or less satisfied and do not expect a lot more from politics, Africans, especially Nigerians, tend to sink into apathy due to frustration. It is a psychological and social shell of protection for people who have been disappointed, cheated and humiliated; it is a shell from where they judge political ideas and politicians with suspicion and cynicism... decades of arbitrary regimentation, years of political uncertainty, fear of reprisal against the lives and properties of those who dissent or point out some basic facts when faced with an array of socio-political injustice and a hypertrophy of clearly wrong legislations and nominations — all have forced and fooled people into believing that the best they can do is to find a way to survive, manage the manageable, mind their own shed while the

> whole market is being ravished, and just pray and hope, because there is little else they can do (Nigerian Village Square, 2006).

However, Sagas (1999) identified other reasons for citizens' high level of apathy and electorate abstention in the 1998 mid-term congressional and municipal elections in the Dominican Republic. The Dominican electors were unfamiliar with the concept of mid-term elections, were turned off by the lack of appealing candidates, the absence of well-known candidates, and the awkward voting system. The elections in the Republic were 'expensive', 'traumatic', 'carnival events' in the weeks prior to Election Day and almost 'paralysed economic activities' in the country (p. 289).

During the elections in Saudi Arabia, the candidates' campaigns were perceived to be expensive and the estimated cost was £40 million (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 10 February 2005). Al Dakheel (2005) thought that the reasons for most voters' abstention were candidates' excessive spending on their campaigns and the ceremonial nature of their electoral programmes (alarabiya.net, 9 February 2005). As Sagas (1999) previously argued, in Saudi Arabia, there were festive activities around the country before the election days, which disrupted the normal life of the people.

Finally, Chen and Zhong (1999), in their study of Chinese political attitudes, found that those who feel incapable of affecting public affairs and who are dissatisfied with government performance are most likely to be apathetic (p. 299). In addition, the authors found that while residents in the major cities are highly motivated to participate in politics, they might be unable to act politically due to 'oppressive institutional and socioeconomic constraints'. As for the relationship between political status and apathy, their findings indicated that non-Communist Party members are more than likely not to be interested in politics and public issues because they already 'feel they are not connected to the polity' (p. 300).

The findings of Chen and Zhong (1999) in China echo those of Hague and Loader (1999) in the United States in that the feeling of 'alienation' and 'frustration' from politics among voters may lead to their apathy with the political process. The situation in Saudi Arabia might be similar, to some extent, to what those scholars have found. Because Saudi citizens did not have any previous political experience for a long period, their awareness of the advantages of the elections and the importance of their participation in that process might be limited. Thus, one may conclude that low levels of political awareness and the feeling of alienation among

Saudi citizens might have contributed to their limited participation in 2005 municipal elections.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated voters' apathy towards elections. Throughout this chapter, it has been shown that the low level of political participation is a common problem in elections, whether national, parliamentary, district, city or municipal, in most nations around the world. Scholars, politicians, policymakers and journalists warn that, in recent years, the level of political participation worldwide is decreasing, which endangers democracy. On the other hand, other scholars argue that although there is a level of disengagement among citizens around the globe, turnout is considered to be high in most democratic countries and concerns about turnout in those countries may be different from concerns in countries like Saudi Arabia, where there is little or no democracy or democratic institutions. Also, most of those scholars see certain underlying factors such as – freedom of speech, media, assembly, participation in politics and the existence of political parties – as integral to democracy, and the lack of those conditions may also be a factor in decreasing turnout. Moreover, those factors include the level of trust in the political system and the feeling of remoteness and powerlessness towards the political system in place. Other aspects are related to the voters themselves, such as socio-demographic, psychological, and physical characteristics that could influence their intention to vote. The low level of interest in politics, limited political knowledge and resources in respect of money and time are some of those elements. Furthermore, the ineffectiveness of the election campaigns might hinder people's political participation. Environmental factors such as geographical and seasonal elements as well as the population size and density could also influence citizens' political behaviour. This chapter examined the role of the mass media and found that the ineffectiveness of the mass media at the time of the election might increase the level of apathy among voters. As discussed earlier, elections legitimise the political system and help citizens to choose their leaders and representatives. People's failure to participate in elections may threaten those functions and corrupt the democratic representation in the country. Local elections, especially municipal ones, have similar functions to national elections and are considered an appropriate ground for voter training at the higher level of democratic representation. Electing local government members might offer a great deal of experience to voters, which they need when they elect officials for higher positions. Also, municipal elections campaigns deal with subjects of a

local nature, such as services provided within the district or city, and it is important for voters to have their opinions expressed on many issues that affect their daily lives. Further, citizens' disengagement may give an opportunity for some politicians or candidates to fulfil their own interests instead of local people's interests. Therefore, citizens' limited participation in local elections is a significant loss for them and the nation.

As the literature showed (Oliver, 2001, Fisher et al., 2008, Hajnal and Lewis, 2003, Hilliard and Kemp, 1999, Neimi and Junn, 1998, Carpini et al., 1996 and others), democratic citizens should have a minimum understanding of the political system, knowledge, interest in the elections, an adequate level of motivation and mobilisation as well as enough information and sources to be able to participate or express preferences and elect their representatives. However, in Saudi Arabia, almost 83 per cent of the eligible citizens did not participate in municipal elections, which indicates that the majority of citizens lacked one or more of the previous aspects and missed a unique opportunity to learn from and practice their right to choose their representatives in municipal councils around the country. Thus, throughout this thesis, questions are raised about the effectiveness of the activities of the four main players of the municipal election process – the government, voters, candidates and the mass media – because citizens' disengagement might have been a result of inadequate efforts by one or all of those parties. Answers for most of those questions will explain why only 17 per cent of Saudi voters did participate in the 2005 municipal elections, despite their being the first general elections in the history of Saudi Arabia.

Chapter Four is going to explain the three research methods (questionnaire, interview and content analysis) that were used to collect the primary data of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the multiple research methods employed to generate data, to achieve the study objectives and to explain the necessary processes adopted for collecting data during the field study. Three different methods were used to gather the primary data essential for this research project. This chapter first discusses the in-depth interviews which were used for data investigation. Next, it will look at the questionnaire with a semi-structured question format specifically developed for this study. There will be an analysis of the content of four major Saudi Arabic newspapers which covered the elections throughout the period from November 2004 to April 2005. The research population will be studied, their location and the sample size will be described in detail. This chapter also includes a description of other field study procedures such as the pilot study, methods of data administration and collection. Finally, the difficulties experienced during the field study in Saudi Arabia will be mentioned.

The choice of research methods is important, as the correct method is vital to the success of any study. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2000), the research method should be one that extracts information appropriate to the research questions, and gives a thorough examination of all conditions outlined within the literature review. The research method should minimise any bias in information given and be reliable. That is, the results should be repeatable if someone else were to use the same method amongst the same demographics.

A multi-method approach has been used in this study to be able to triangulate its findings. To triangulate, means to check the information I have received from all players around the election process. I have distributed questionnaires, conducted interviews and undertaken a content analysis of four newspapers for six-months to explore how they looked at the process and produced their news. It is a crosscheck or assessment of a variety of evidences, so what the officials, candidates, general public and newspapers are saying about the municipal election process is checked through the other methods I have used in this research. I was reminded of Kitzinger and Miller's (1998) notion of 'production intention and reception' in their study on the role of the media in Britain in struggles over AIDS campaigns in 1986. The authors argued that that there is a full circuit of mass communication that needs to be explored to understand what is going on. They wrote about their study:

> It examines the development of campaign material, the planning and execution of strategies for media influence, the content of press and television coverage and, finally, the impact of media coverage on public understanding and policy and other outcome (p. 2).

Thus, how the news about the municipal elections is produced by officials, journalists, candidates and the general public is examined throughout using three mentioned research methods. Saunders et al. (2000) also argued that multi-method 'is usual for a single study to combine quantitative and qualitative methods and to use primary and secondary data' (p. 98). This study employs such a combination. However, Sarantakos (1998) explained that the choice of methodology is not left up to the personal preference of the researcher or methodological convenience, but rather is based on various factors such as the nature of the research topic, the structure of the population, the type of information sought, the perception of reality and the availability of resources (p. 124).

This study is concerned with the first public elections in the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that were organised by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs under the slogan 'Participate in the decision-making' in 2005. I spent four-and-a-half months on a field trip to four main regions in Saudi Arabia between 6 April 2008 and 25 August 2008 to collect the essential data for this research project.

The choice of methodological approaches adopted was influenced by the kind of data needed to answer the research questions outlined below. This involved interviewing officials responsible for election conduct and implementation who were considered sources of data, and their understanding and evaluation of the municipal campaign are therefore very important. This approach also required interviewing individuals such as candidates, journalists and members of the public. Data was collected from other groups using quantitative approaches that involved looking at the degree of satisfaction among citizens and the printed media involved with the municipal election process. In other words, this study is trying to explore the ways the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and other government and private sector institutions planned, designed, implemented and evaluated the municipal election process. In addition, this study tries to reveal how the Saudi people and the print media perceived such political reform in relation to the concept and practice of Western democracy.

Research questions

Using a multi-method approach, this study is going to address the main research question which is:

> Why and how did the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs conduct the municipal elections and what were the outcomes?

From this general question, many sub-questions arise as follows:

1. What were the planners and implementers' perceptions of the objectives, strategies, messages and evaluation of the municipal election campaign?
2. What were the journalists' and candidates' perceptions of the objectives and messages, and how did they evaluate the municipal election process?
3. What were citizens' perceptions of the objectives, strategies and tactics and how did they evaluate the election process?
4. What were citizens' perceptions of the objectives, strategies and tactics and how did they evaluate the election media campaigns?
5. What were citizens' perceptions of the objectives, strategies and tactics and how did they evaluate the candidates' electoral campaigns?
6. What were citizens' perceptions of democracy and Saudi political reform in this concept?
7. How did the sample Saudi newspapers (*Al Jazirah*, *Al Watan*, *Okaz* and *Al Yaum*) portray the municipal election process?

Population

The population to be investigated in this study includes all citizens in four main regions in Saudi Arabia. There were many important reasons for choosing four main regions in Saudi Arabia (Makkah, Riyadh, Asir and the Eastern Province) to be included in this study. The first reason is that those regions are the most populated areas of the country. According to the 2004 census report, there were 3,725,557 people in Riyadh, 3,584,628 in Makkah, 2,555,502 in the Eastern Province and 1,434,842 in Asir, the total Saudi population being 16,527,340 (Central Department of Statistics and Information Report, 2004, p. 39). Those regions contain most of the country's centres of employment and education and are considered to be the homelands of industrialism in the country, which of course relates to some extent to the oil industry. Further, the regions house most of the country's media outlets, which consist of TV and radio stations, and every region has one or more major newspapers, four of which are included in this study. Finally, most of the senior government officials who worked in the

field before and during the municipal elections live in those areas. Nine cities were selected for the administration of the questionnaire and interviews. These cities were Riyadh and Alkharj in Riyadh Region, Makkah and Jeddah in Makkah Region, Dammam, Dhahran and Khubar in the Eastern Region and Abha and Khamis Mushayt in Asir Region. I travelled to each of these cities to administer the questionnaires and conduct the interviews between April 2008 and August 2008. I stayed in each city for nearly two weeks while the questionnaires were administered, interviews conducted and the newspaper samples collected. It was felt that by choosing these different regions the sample population would represent a better cross section of the overall population, geographically and demographically.

Archival research

Defining the research questions and population led to the second stage of this study, reviewing the literature in the area and defining what the study intends to focus on and what gaps exist in the literature. Schensul et al. (1999) defined archival and secondary data as qualitative or quantitative data collected for governmental, research, education, or service purposes and available to researchers in usable raw forms and formats. The term raw refers to the fact that these data sets or sources are available in their unanalyzed and uninterrupted formats (case records, questionnaires, applications, forms, or numerical or text data coded and formatted into computer-readable data sets). They are organized and stored in their original sampling frames and units (e.g., cases of individuals, households, classrooms, communities, and countries). Moreover, the authors distinguish archival data as materials collected for bureaucratic service, or administrative purposes and transformed into research data. In the meantime, secondary data is data collected by other researchers for their own research purpose that ethnographers can obtain either through public access or personal negotiation (pp. 203-204). Moreover, Fox explained that there are two kinds of literature which should be reviewed points out:

> The first is conceptual literature. This is written by authorities on the subject you have in mind, giving opinions, ideas, theories, or experience and published in the form of books, articles, and papers. The second is research literature which gives account and results of research which has been undertaken in the subjects, often presented in the form of papers and reports ((quoted in Walliman, 2001, p.25).

Thus, for the purpose of this study, I have used both the raw materials and the academic literature to construct my own research materials. Looking at previous studies in books, theses, conference papers, newspapers' and journals' articles or other recent studies on

municipal elections, I explored the field and form a solid ground to build the arguments of this study. In addition, reports, flyers, posters, recordings, images, advertisements or statistics or any other materials that the Ministry of Rural and Municipal Affairs and other government's institutions and candidates have produced regarding the municipal elections, enriched the topic and contributed to the information in chapters 5 and 6.

In-depth interviews

Defining the research questions leads to the second stage of this study, which is explaining the primary data collection methods. The first main method was in-depth interviewing. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews on the subject and tactics of the municipal elections were carried out with people who were in positions of authority in the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and other government institutions, the private sector, candidates, journalists and the general public. Those people were: (1) officials in the government's institutions (the campaign planners), (2) officials in the private sector (the campaign implementers), (3) non-government organisations, (4) winning and losing candidates, (5) journalists and (6) members of the public.

The interview can be described as a qualitative method of data collection. Berger (2000) identified four kinds of interviews. The informal interview, the unstructured interview, the structured interview and the semi-structured interview. The latter, which was adopted in this study, where the interviewer has a written list of questions and tries to maintain the casual quality found in unstructured interview, should yield more information and internal insights that might not be part of questions originally put by the researcher. This kind of interview is considered most appropriate for this study because the interviewees will mostly be planners and strategy makers, implementers of the campaign and some candidates and members of the general public in Saudi Arabia. Those people, I assume, had access to the kind of information that is very important for this research.

This study used in-depth interviews with a semi-structured question format. The approach involves a direct interaction between myself and a respondent or group. It differs from a structured question approach, such as a questionnaire, in several important factors. First, I had some initial guiding questions or core concepts to ask about, with a semi-formal structured instrument or protocol. Second, I was free to move the conversation in any useful

direction. Consequently, the semi-structured question approach was particularly useful for exploring the municipal election process broadly.

Berger (2000) argued that in-depth interviews help researchers collect huge amounts of information and it lasts for a longer period, ranging from one to two hours or more. In in-depth interviews, the researcher enjoys a good deal of liberty and flexibility, where he can ask different questions, depending on the different answers of the interviewees. Success in the interview depends on finding a harmonious relationship between the researcher and the researched (p. 119).

According to Tayie (2001), the study that adopts an in-depth approach should focus on a small number of interviewees and allow substantial time for these interviews with the emphasis on quality rather than quantity of information. Using this tactic is appropriate for this study. So a small number of people directly responsible for planning, formulating and implementing municipal elections in Saudi Arabia were interviewed.

One important advantage of in-depth interviews is getting a huge amount of accurate and sensitive information that cannot be obtained in other ways. The good relationship that arises between the researcher and the researched provides the opportunity to get that sensitive information. Besides, the interview can be the only way for the researcher to get information from certain groups, such as top professionals or officials from whom information can be difficult to obtain by indirect methods (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000, p. 163, Deacon et al. 1999, pp. 79-80, Tayie, 2001, p. 65). This is particularly relevant in Saudi Arabia because of the system of government, which privileges a few people in some government institutions responsible for policy formulation and implementation of the municipal election process, such as the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Riyadh Municipality.

However, the main disadvantage of this tactic is the amount of time needed to collect and analyse the responses: 'open-ended responses require that interviewers spend time analysing answers... Because there are so many types of responses, content analysis of each open-ended question must be completed to produce data that can be tabulated' (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000, p. 163).

Despite the time concern, I thought that the advantages of in-depth interviews were more important than their disadvantages and the rich information about municipal elections in

Saudi Arabia from officials and professionals in the field made it worth the investment of time.

Interview questions contained a range of variables, which are clustered in five major areas: (1) demographic, (2) attitude towards municipal elections, (3) attitude towards democracy and Saudi political reform, (4) respondent's assessment of the effectiveness of the election media campaign and (5) respondent's assessment of the effectiveness of the candidates' promotional campaigns.

Interview sample size

Interview sample size was chosen according to the need and nature of this study. Respondents were in nine cities in four major regions of the country; Makkah and Jeddah in Makkah Region; Riyadh and Alkharj in the centre; Dammam and Dhahran Al Khobar in the Eastern Region and Abha and Khamis Mushayt in the Assir Region in the southern part of the country. Those interviewees were:

1. Seven officials of the campaign's planning team, of which three were officials in the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and four were officials in city municipalities and councils in Riyadh Region and the Eastern Province.
2. Two observers of the Saudi National Committee of Human Rights and Saudi Administration Association, non-government organisations. Those members had participated with other association members in monitoring the municipal elections.
3. Three directors of the campaign's implementation in the private sector. First, the head of Attarig Agency for Communication and Public Relations who was responsible for the election media campaign. Second, the head of Gray Worldwide for Advertising who was responsible for advertisement production during the election campaign. Finally, the head of Al Gasabi Public Relations Company, who was in charge of one winning candidate's campaign.
4. Nine winning candidates.
5. Nine losing candidates.
6. Fifteen journalists (Both male and female) in the major Saudi newspapers.
7. Fifteen members of the public (Both male and female).

I purposely chose the campaign's planners and implementers in the government and private sector as well as the observers because they were the people who were directly responsible for the campaign in those institutions. Winning and losing candidates were chosen randomly.

To choose those candidates, I visited the city municipality in every city and asked for the names and phone numbers of the winning and losing candidates there, mixed them together in a hat and chose three people in every city, in case one of them refused to meet me. Moreover, in the case of the general public, I depended on the respondents' answers to the last question of the questionnaire, which asked respondents if they would like to be interviewed afterwards. More than 45 respondents agreed to be interviewed and wrote their contact numbers or e-mails. Thus, I mixed their names and randomly chose 15 male and female respondents, called them back and interviewed them. Finally, the journalists were chosen according to the recommendations of the Editors in Chief of each of the four newspapers that I visited. Those journalists were responsible for the coverage of the municipal elections. Choosing this sample could result in a bias towards people who chose to be interviewed, which may not represent the whole population of the country. Thus, the result of this method is considered a heuristic one and opinions collated about the municipal election process will not be applied in general to all Saudi citizens. Because of this limitation, 'convenience samples are not useful for explanation or even for description beyond the sample surveyed. They are often useful as explorations upon which future research may be based' (Dantzker and Hunter, 2006, p. 131).

Interview data collection

In Riyadh city, I translated the questions from English to Arabic and followed many steps to get letters of permission needed for interviews from officials in the government and private sector and other institutions all over the four main areas in Saudi Arabia.

During the period 20 April 2008 to 20 August 2008, I managed to interview 60 people in all four regions that I visited. The lengths of the interviews ranged between 30 and 75 minutes. Most interviews were recorded, but in some cases when an interviewee refused to be recorded I had to take notes instead. Furthermore, due to the conservative nature of the Saudi society, I had to carry out a few interviews with women over the phone. All in all, I managed to interview the 60 people I had aimed for. All those recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis.

The interview data raised different kinds of challenges that were taken into consideration in the analysis of the findings in subsequent chapters. As mentioned earlier, I transcribed the interviews and stored them for analysis. As pointed out by Berger (2000):

> After getting all the materials transcribed, the next step is to make sense of the materials. One way of doing this is to classify and categorise the material. It is also possible to look at how interviews categorise things by looking at patterns and themes prevalent in the interview. The purpose of looking for classifications and categories used by interviewees is to get a sense of how their minds work, how they make sense of the world (p. 120).

I thus identified the patterns and themes prevalent in the views expressed by the Saudi interviewees and joined them to the main variables that this study discusses.

Questionnaire

The second method of collecting primary data from a large sample of the Saudi public is using a questionnaire. The main objective of using this quantitative method is to identify their opinions and understand their evaluations of the municipal election process.

Coolican described questionnaires as beneficial tools when seeking information about what people think, or their beliefs, or explanations for their attitudes and individual perceptions (Coolican, 1995, p. 64). Gunter (2000) added that they 'are one of the measurement devices frequently used by researchers who need reliable quantitative data about audiences on a large scale in a systematic way' (Gunter, 2000, p. 23).

Survey questionnaires are used in many walks of life and for a variety of research purposes. Denscombe (1998) argued that questionnaires are considered appropriate when used with large number of respondents in many locations, when fairly straightforward and uncontroversial information is needed or when the respondents are able to read and understand the questions (Denscombe, 1998). Tayie (2001) stated that survey questionnaires are cheaper than other methods because they obtain a huge amount of data and enable the researcher to study a number of variables in one study (p. 38).

On the other hand, questionnaires have some drawbacks. For instance, pre-coded questions can be frustrating for respondents and, thus, deter them from answering. In respect to questionnaires that are administered by post, there is little opportunity for the researcher to check the truthfulness of the answers given by the respondents. Also, the questionnaire usually does not allow probing, prompting and clarification of questions, does not offer opportunities to motivate the respondent to continue answering the questions and the conditions under which the questionnaire is answered are not known. Moreover, researchers are not sure whether the right person has answered the questions, it is not possible to check

whether the question order was followed and it does not provide an opportunity to collect additional information (Oppenheim, 1992, Denscombe, 1998, Sarantakos, 1998).

The biggest drawback of the questionnaire for this study was not being able to put the questions in a way that would bring out the required information from the Saudi respondents, because political reforms or election are considered sensitive issues in Saudi Arabia. On this point, Tayie (2001) suggested that the formulation of language may not be good enough, which may make it difficult to understand or it may lead to some sort of bias that forces the researcher to select particular responses to a question (p. 92). However, this study paid a great deal of attention to these limitations in the design of the questionnaire.

Using a questionnaire in the municipal elections study is important for the advantages mentioned above. In spite of its limitations, it is the cheapest method for collecting data from a large number of people. Also, because this study was trying to answer some questions about the political reforms in the country, which is a sensitive issue in Saudi Arabia and difficult for many people to answer in interviews, this method gave the respondents the chance to answer them anonymously at their convenience, far away from the presence or attitude of the researcher.

Questionnaire design

Throughout February 2008, before going to Saudi Arabia, I conducted a pilot study in Cardiff city to test the research questionnaire. The findings of the pilot study added valuable information towards the design of the questionnaire. The questionnaire contains a range of dependent and independent variables, which are clustered in six major sections: (1) demographic, (2) national attitude towards elections, (3) attitude towards democracy and Saudi political reform, (4) respondent's assessment of the effectiveness of the election media campaign, (5) respondent's assessment of the effectiveness of the candidates' promotional campaigns and (6) respondent's media use. Due to narrowing the focus of this research, the latter variable was excluded from analysis in this study.

Content validity of the questionnaire was established in two stages (for more details look at the pilot study report - Appendix 4). Stage one represents a non-systematic snapshot approach in order to get a feel for how the questionnaire was perceived by others. However, stage two was a more systematic process involving professionals in the field who acted as judges and

rated the questionnaire according to four attributes: linguistics, clarity, completeness and scaling.

Questionnaire sample

Deciding the sample size for a research project is an important task. Burton (2000) argued that if time and resources are constraints, researchers should keep the sample to a manageable size. The author explained that the larger the sample, the greater the degree of accuracy, so the sampling error can be reduced by increasing the sample size. Finally, the researchers need to think about the non-response rate and adjust his samples accordingly. If non-response rates are high, the researcher needs to increase the size of the sample to compensate (Burton, 2000, p. 319).

Wimmer and Dominick (2000) and Sarantakos (1998) argued that large samples do not always guarantee a higher degree of precision and validity or a general success in a research study. They thought that the quality of results depended on several factors and the sample size was only one of them. The authors suggested a few general principles in determining an acceptable sample size. These suggestions are not based on mathematical or statistical theory, but they provide a starting point for this study.

1. If the population is homogenous with respect to the study object, a small sample may suffice; if it is found (e.g. through an exploratory study) to be heterogeneous, a large sample may be required.
2. If a high degree of accuracy is required, a large sample must be collected.
3. If the approach is qualitative, the sample size will be relatively small. The intensity for research employed in qualitative research, the type of questions it explores, the purpose it pursues and the method and techniques it employs make the choice for small samples inevitable.
4. In quantitative studies, if the resources are sufficient and if adequate personnel are available, a large sample can be considered.
5. Finally, if time is not a problem and the research units are not widely spread, the sample can be large.

A guideline provided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), is also useful in the process of determining the sample size of this study. The authors suggested taking 384 as a sample size if the total population is one million (p. 608).

Based on the guidelines provided by these scholars, I thought that collecting a large number of questionnaires for the municipal election campaign would be within the acceptable range. I wanted to get a high degree of accuracy for the research sample. Also, especially in the first days of the field trip, I expected a high non-response rate due to the sensitivity of the election issue in Saudi society and the nature of the questions asked about reforms. So I increased the number of questionnaires distributed around the country and a large number of usable questionnaires were collected. Further, the nature of the study, which has specific types of questions to explore and a couple of variables to measure makes the choice of a large sample inevitable. An important factor is that I have the full support of my employers at King Saud University. They helped me hire the personnel who assisted me in distributing and collecting a large number of questionnaires in the four main regions of the country. Finally, time was not a critical issue for me because I spent four and a half months in the country which was sufficient to secure such a large sample.

Taking into consideration factors like reading ability and the legal age of the respondents in the time of the municipal elections in 2005, I limited the study to a specific age group. It was important that the person who filled in the questionnaire was at least 24 years old, in other words, the participant had to be 21 in 2005, which was the legal age for voting when the municipal election was conducted.

To encourage people to fill in the questionnaire, I attached a note to every single copy of the questionnaire explaining that the respondent's anonymity would be respected and that their answers would be used only for the purpose of this study. Wimmer and Dominick (2003) argued that anonymity is one of the ways of guaranteeing privacy in a survey: 'A promise of anonymity is a guarantee that a given respondent cannot possibly be linked to any particular response. This encourages respondents to be honest and candid in their answers' (p. 74). The promise of anonymity is particularly relevant in Saudi Arabia because 'culturally, people do not normally reveal much about themselves' (Gazzaz, p. 120).

Women and military personnel

In spite of the fact that women and military men were excluded from participation in the municipal elections and that their exclusion might have negatively affected their views about the elections, I thought that it would be a significant addition to the study findings if their views were included. In Saudi society, women and the military have a role like other citizens and they also benefit from the same municipal services provided by the municipality in society. Further, business women fought in the elections and got elected to the Chamber of Commerce in three main cities in Saudi Arabia. Also, thousands of Saudi women are professors in universities, doctors in hospitals, teachers in schools, as well as working as journalists and writers. I thought that their views about the election process or the effectiveness of the election media campaign or candidates' electoral campaign would enrich the findings of this research. Thus, I distributed the questionnaire to samples of women in all institutions in the regions that I visited. In the majority of institutions, I had to send a couple of questionnaires to male respondents who then transferred those questionnaires to the women. This also applied to the personal interviews that were held in those regions, which enabled me to conduct some lengthy interviews with business women, female journalists and members of the public.

Questionnaire distribution

In Riyadh city, I translated the questions from English to Arabic and sought help from a professional translator to make the translation as near to the original as possible. After the translation, 3500 copies of the questionnaire were available for distribution.

In the first two weeks in Riyadh city, about 200 copies were distributed in some schools and administrations at King Saud University. Although I did the same in every city visited, my aim was not to conduct the study exclusively to university staff or students. Hence, when the questionnaires were distributed no distinction of a person's profession was made. The response from the participants at King Saud University was disappointing because only 25 completed questionnaires returned and I had to think about other options for tackling that problem.

Since the subject of this study is a sensitive issue in Saudi Arabia, the survey sampling units were organisations or institutions rather than individuals, which means the questionnaire was distributed to people within the organisation such as ministries, schools, banks or companies. To do that, a number of questionnaires accompanied by official letters were sent to the public

relations departments of those institutions asking them to help the researcher to distribute these questionnaires to their employees. If an individual was identified by his/her name and asked to give his/her real view about a sensitive subject like election, political reform or democracy in Saudi Arabia, he or she might not have felt able to be honest or give their real opinion. Moreover, a considerable proportion of Saudi citizens do not value scientific research (Gazzaz, p. 120, Al Ajleh, 1997, p. 110, Al Bogami, 2003, 159). Thus, unlike in many democratic countries, in Saudi Arabia, researchers need official permits to allow them to distribute any form of questionnaire anywhere in the country, and it is not a common practice for the researcher to stand in a shopping mall and distributing them independently. Al Bogami (2003) faced similar problems and wrote:

> Many people in Saudi Arabia are not as familiar with research as in other societies and some of them do not realise the importance of research and its impact on their lives. Even some of the governmental institutions' officials such as the Ministry of Information were hesitant and sometimes not very helpful in providing help or data related to the subject to be investigated. Therefore, the researcher used his personal relationship with some of them in order to obtain the necessary material needed. Also, one official in the Ministry of Planning refused to provide the researcher with some statistics about Saudi Arabia; hence the researcher had to use a personal relationship with one of the high ranking officials in order to obtain such statistics (p. 159).

The difficulties that Al Bogami mentioned still exist and I had to follow the same tactics that Al Bogami used in his field work. The lack of understanding among the majority of the Saudi public of the importance of academic research made it difficult for me to gain access to most of the institutions. After consultation with my colleagues in the Mass Media Department at King Saud University, a new strategy was followed. The new strategy was to attach a detailed official letter explaining the aim of the research and information about the researcher to every single copy of the questionnaire which was then sent to the targeted institutions. Official letters from the director of King Saud University, Vice Director for Research and Postgraduate Studies, the dean of the school and the head of the department accompanied every single copy of the questionnaire. Those letters were sent to their counterpart officials in universities, government ministries and organisations, private organisations and newspapers outlining the research topic and seeking their assistance to encourage people to participate and provide the data needed for the study.

I looked to my colleagues and friends and their friends for help. Also, I assigned four assistants to distribute and collect questionnaires from different institutions around the country. Snowball sampling was adopted in distributing the questionnaire. Dantzker and

Hunter (2006) and Lindlof (1995) stated that snowball sampling is frequently used in field research when the researcher must rely on introductions from group members in order to access other group members. In other words, when a participant refers the researcher to another person who can provide information and this person, in turn, mentions another, and so forth (Dantzker and Hunter, 2006, p. 131, Lindlof, 1995, cited in Wimmer and Dominick, 2000, p. 115). Liamputtong (2007) noted that the snowball method is 'extensively adopted in researching potential participants when the research issues are more sensitive or threatening' (p. 49). Dantzker and Hunter (2006) concluded that this method would be acceptable if it answer the research question. He wrote:

> The snowball method may lead to an elite sample that has no representative or generalisable attributes, but if the data address the research question, then these shortcomings are acceptable' (p. 131).

Based on the circumstances and difficulties mentioned, I had to use this technique, realising that the result of this method of sampling would not be representative of all Saudi citizens, but would preliminarily explore the field of municipal elections and open the door to further studies. Therefore, with the help of others, the questionnaire's distribution began again in Riyadh city, King Saud University, Imam University, the Prince Sultan University and some ministries such as The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, Information, Transportation, Agriculture and Education. In addition, the questionnaire was distributed in the Institute of Public Administration, the Chamber of Commerce, banks, and in a number of state-owned companies such as Saudi Arabian Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) as well as private companies. It was also distributed to teachers and staff at some public and private schools around the cities. A number of questionnaires were distributed in Riyadh Municipality and municipal councils around the regions. Two weeks later, I started to receive a significant number of completed questionnaires. Snowballing strategy was successfully adopted in subsequent regions that I visited.

After going through all the necessary steps mentioned above, I distributed 3500 copies of the questionnaire and got back almost 2000 copies from nine cities in the four main regions of Saudi Arabia. The outcome of this process was satisfactory and I ended up with 1591 usable questionnaires for analysis, of which 184 were responses from women and 111 from military men. The data obtained from the questionnaires was transferred into numerical values and fed into the computer using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and results were then interpreted statistically.

Content analysis

The third method of collecting primary data was the content analysis. The main goal of using this quantitative method was to collect data from a random sample of four major Saudi Arabic speaking daily newspapers for six months, to cover the period before, during and after the three days of the municipal elections. Those newspapers were; *Al-Jazirah* newspaper from Riyadh Region, *Al Yaum* newspaper from the Eastern Region, *Okaz* newspaper from Makkah Region and *Al Watan* newspaper from the Asir Region. The aim was to investigate the coverage patterns or frames of the newspapers' representation of the municipal election process, representation of the citizens' understanding of the election process and the representation of the citizens' political apathy. Also, the content analysis aimed to include the newspapers' representation of the candidates' campaigns and the representation of the effectiveness of the municipal election media campaign.

According to Abdulhamid (2004), content analysis is a significant research tool used to determine the existence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers calculate and analyse the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part. The author identified that texts here can be defined broadly as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, advertising, theatre, informal conversation, or really any occurrence of communicative language (p. 216).

Deacon, et al. (1999) argued that content analysis helps researchers establish patterns of representation in the media over a given period of time: 'it establishes a procedure to find what is relatively constant and what might change over time' (p. 133). This is useful for this research project, which examines what representation in press coverage over the six-month period of the municipal election process.

There are some advantages and disadvantages of content analysis. Wimmer and Dominick (2000) stated that content analysis looks directly at communication via texts or transcripts to get at the central aspect of social interaction and provide valuable historical or cultural insights over time through analysis of texts. Further, it allows close reading to interpret texts through specific categories or relationships and provide insight into complex models of human thought and language use. However, the authors noted that content analysis can be extremely time consuming and subject to increased error. Also, it is often devoid of a

theoretical basis and attempts to draw meaningful inferences about relationships and impacts implied in a study (pp. 137-139).

Despite the limitations of the content analysis method, it is thought useful for studying the municipal election process. This method helped me to reduce the large amount of data that the newspapers circulated to relevant themes and features. It also provided insights into writers' and citizens' thoughts, and the language used by the print media in Saudi Arabia in its coverage of the municipal election process.

For the proposed content analysis, I chose to limit the study to four Saudi Arabian daily newspapers. Factors like popularity or circulation and availability of the required data were taken in consideration. According to Bait-Almal and Al Tayash (2003), in a study that surveyed 452 Saudis about their readership with Saudi newspapers, the four newspapers chosen in this study were among the leading and most popular newspapers in the country.

Thus, I decided to choose one major newspaper in each of the regions to see how the municipal election process was covered. Since the four newspapers were national and read in all areas of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, they were among the most popular daily newspapers and were thought likely to contain the material necessary for analysis. These four newspapers are not the only popular newspapers in Saudi Arabia, but to study all of them would be very difficult in terms of the work of a single researcher.

The newspaper coding sheet (Appendix 3) was developed to be the basis of the analysis of the Saudi newspapers' coverage of the municipal election process. The coding sheet contains a range of dependent and independent variables, which are clustered in six major sections: (a) item information; (b) representation of the municipal elections; (c) representation of the municipal election media campaign; (d) representation of the candidates' electoral campaigns; (e) representation of the Saudi citizens' understanding of the election process and (f) the representation of the citizens' political apathy towards elections. Every main variable has its own sub-variables.

I had to limit the sample to meet the demand of this study due to the amount of coverage that the municipal elections received during the six-month period (November 2004 to April 2005). A systematic technique was used to choose all issues needed. The decision was taken to examine only one issue of each newspaper per week. This tactic continued in the subsequent months. To cover the whole month, I chose newspapers issued on the first day of

the month in the first week, the second day of the second week, the third day of the third week and the fourth day of the fourth week. Furthermore, to ensure that the sample would have maximum coverage of the election process, the three elections days (10/2/2005, 3/3/2005 and 21/4/2005) and the three days directly following them were included in those samples. Consequently, I managed to collect 754 items. All those items were stored in the computer and analysed using the SPSS, the findings of which will be discussed in Chapter Ten.

Research limitations and difficulties

This research project has some limitations. Saudi academic literature in this area is not prolific so I was forced to draw some concepts and supporting theories from Western sources which might not have been entirely applicable to the Saudi situation. Also, the findings of the study survey might not be applicable to the whole population because the sampling procedure (snowballing) was not representative of all the people of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, survey sampling units were organised as organisations or institutions rather than individuals, which means the questionnaire was distributed to people within their organisations.

There were significant difficulties that I had to face during my fieldwork in Saudi Arabia. Elections are considered to be one of the sensitive issues in Saudi society. Some interviewees ended the interview after ten minutes so they could not answer questions of a political nature. Also, some organisations, in spite of the fact that they received supporting official letters, refused to distribute or allow the researcher to distribute the questionnaire on their premises. They claimed that the questionnaire discussed a sensitive political issue.

In addition, more than 300 official letters had to be sent to the afore mentioned organisations to allow me to distribute or interview respondents in those positions around the country. In those institutions, a copy of an approval letter, usually from the head of that institution, had to accompany every single copy of the questionnaire. The study questionnaire was too long (10 pages) for respondents to complete and some respondents commented that they had to answer the questions on separate occasions. Others filled only half of the questionnaire while some filled only the first page. Some interviews with women had to be made over the phone and some interviewees refused to be recorded, which made it difficult for me to write down every point they made. Finally, some of the municipality members and citizens promised to meet for interviews, but did not show up at the meeting.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the steps followed for collecting primary data about the first municipal elections that were conducted in Saudi Arabia in 2005. The choice of research methods here is important, as the correct method is vital to the success of any study. As Berger (2000) stated, the research methods should be ones that enable appropriate information to be extracted to answer the research questions. The approaches used in this study are a combination of quantitative (questionnaire and newspaper content analysis) and qualitative (interviews) methods. This multi-method approach is a vital technique which allows me to triangulate the findings of these three methods. In other words, it is a process of crosschecking and assessment of the Saudi citizens' perceptions and the sample newspapers' coverage of the municipal election process.

With respect to Saudi Arabia, it is considered useful to examine the views of Saudis in discussing the strategies and tactics of the municipal election process, the election media campaign and candidates' electoral campaigns. Also, focusing on Saudi people's understanding of democracy, the study explores their perception of political reform in the country. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the role of the print media and how they covered that political process.

The choice of methodological approaches adopted is influenced by the kind data needed to answer the research questions outlined in the beginning of this chapter. This involves looking at the bigger picture at the level of policy making. Consequently, the officials responsible for municipal election campaign strategies and implementation are considered sources of data. They also represent the government and private sector dimensions of the research questions and a qualitative approach (in-depth interviews) was adopted to collect data from this group. In addition, qualitative interviews with smaller sample of the candidates, journalists and the general public were carried out to enrich this part of the study. This approach also involved looking at the other side of the picture at the level of voters of the general public. Data was collected from a large group of Saudi people using the quantitative approach, or in other words the questionnaire technique. Finally, content analysis is the third quantitative approach that has been used in this research project. Analyzing the coverage of four main Saudi newspapers for a long period of time (six months) completes the picture of the municipal election process.

To understand more about the environment that the municipal elections took place in, Chapter Five is going to provide an overview of the geographical, historical, social, economic, cultural and political conditions that shaped the emergence of Saudi Arabia as a modern state.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of Saudi Arabia. It discusses the geographical, historical, social, economic, cultural and political conditions that shaped the emergence of Saudi Arabia as a modern state. Special attention to the effect of oil revenue and the role of Islam on Saudi society will be illustrated. In addition, the ruling traditions, political conditions and recent reforms in the country, which include the landmark municipal elections, will be discussed. Further, this chapter will briefly look at the Saudi mass media outlets and how they work within the government's information policy. As my research looks in detail at the municipal elections, it is necessary to provide this background to develop an understanding of how and why the elections were seen as both a political reform and an imposition by conservative Saudi society.

Geography and people

Saudi Arabia is located in the south-western part of Asia, being strategically and centrally situated between Asia, Africa, and Europe, having access to the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Arabian Gulf. Saudi Arabia is bordered by the Red Sea to the west, the Arabian Gulf, the States of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman to the east, Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait to the north, and the Republic of Yemen to the south (Picture No. 4.1).

Saudi Arabia lies between the lines 16' and 32'S and 35' and 55'N, occupying an area of about 2.25 million square kilometres (865,000 square miles), making up nearly 80 per cent of the Arabian Peninsula (Al Farsy, 2003). Despite its massive size, less than 2 per cent of this area is cultivated, the rest being mainly desert dotted with small areas suitable for occasional grazing. As the large parts of the country are uninhabitable, most population concentration is in the coastal regions, mountains, and oases. The settlements, many grown into cities, were mainly founded with great effort to settle the Bedouin in the Arabian Peninsula during the first quarter of the last century (Ministry of Culture and Information, 2010).

The latest estimates put the population of the Kingdom at 27,136,977 among them 18,707,576 Saudis. The male population of Saudi nationals is 9,527,173 or 50.9 per cent of the total Saudi population compared to 9,180,403 or 49.1 per cent Saudi females. Almost

39.92 per cent of the population are under 15 years of age and almost two thirds of the population dwell in the cities. Recent figures indicated that the average annual income per capita is approximately £15,000. Non-Saudi residents are 8,429,401 or 27.1 per cent of the total population (5,932,974) or 70.4 per cent are male and (2,496,427) 29.6 per cent are female (Population and Housing Census, 2010).



Picture 4.1
Saudi Arabia Map
(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Saudi_Arabia_map.png)

Saudi Arabia is widely regarded as the birthplace of Islam and the custodian of the two most important religious sites for Muslims, the Holy Mosque in Makkah, which Muslims face five times a day in prayers, and the Prophet Mohammed's (Peace be upon him) mosque in Al Madinah city. Arabic is the official language in Saudi Arabia and it exists in two forms: classical and informal. Classical Arabic is the language of the Holy Book (Quran) and the means of formal communication, literary expression, poetry and speech. Giddens (1990) argued that the preservation of linguistic homogeneity in any country is essential to maintaining cultural and social identity (p. 23). Braibanti (1980) also argued that Saudi

Arabia has never been colonised and that is the main reason why the country has been able to maintain its linguistic homogeneity. Braibanti wrote:

> Saudi Arabia's cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic homogeneity is unmatched by other systems. The political system of Saudi Arabia has emerged in about half a century without the disabilities of strong colonial traditions (Braibanti quoted in Al Farsy, 1986, p. 42).

Although there are shia citizens in the Eastern Province, some cultural differences among regions such as Hijaz and Najd or tribes and there are about 8 million foreign workers in the country, Saudi Arabia managed to sustain its unity, Arabic language and a dominant form of Islam, which will be examined later in this chapter.

Saudi Arabia is located in one of the world's most unstable regions, the Middle East. The Kingdom has large oil resources and its neighbouring countries have either internal or external conflicts. Since its foundation, the Kingdom has enjoyed relative peace and security compared to its neighbours such as Iraq and Yemen. In addition to rich oil reserves, Saudi Arabia is the home of Islam's most holy places, where millions of pilgrims visit the country every year as part of their annual pilgrimage. Hence, combined with its geography, rich oil reserves and holy places, 'Saudi Arabia is considered to be one of the most influential countries in the world' (Gazzaz, 2006, p. 64).

History

Saudi Arabia emerged as a modern state in 1932 with the unification of Najd and Hejaz provinces by King Abdulaziz Al Saud. Before the unification, Saudi Arabia existed as a group of self-directed tribes and big families patched together in many regions. Therefore, before 1932, there was no sense of a state or a separate Saudi identity, but the dominant identity is that of Islam as expressed within tribal and family circles (Vassiliev, 2000, Long 1997, Al Farsy, 2003).

Before the formation of Saudi Arabia, 'the Arabian Peninsula was politically unstable and in a state of chaos' (Vassiliev, 2000, p. 15). Saudi Arabia, which derived its name from the Al-Saud family, came into being when the Al-Saud family united the country and maintained a state of order in the land. A brief history of the political structure of the area by Vassiliev (2000) described the region as 'the centre of anti-Ottoman sentiments' during World War I. The founder of Saudi Arabia, Abdulaziz Al-Saud controlled the centre and north, while the Hashemite Sherif of Makkah controls the west coast. However large areas of the west coast

were held together under the control of various local sheikhs (Vassiliev, 2000). Although Bin Saud never achieved his ultimate goal of unifying all Arab nations under one umbrella, he emerged as the undisputed ruler in the east, while Sherif Hussein ruled in the western areas (Pushed to Jordan). When Hussein declared himself Caliph (successor to the Prophet Mohammed as the spiritual leader of Islam) following the deposition of the Ottoman Sultan, Bin Saud responded with a successful challenge, achieving control of the western kingdom in 1926 and integrating the two kingdoms into today's Saudi Arabia in 1932 (Gazzaz, 2006).

Prior to its unification, Saudi Arabia was divided into numerous tribes with diverse customs and traditions. Al Farsy (2003) noted that the first task of King Abdulaziz, the founder of the nation, was the unification of those tribes, each with its own special culture and way of life, in one state. Thus, Islam was the key factor in King Abdulaziz's policy to unify the Arabian Peninsula's tribes into one cohesive nation. The author suggests that in spite of the differences, the population of Saudi Arabia is homogeneous and the people share the same religion, the same heritage, speak the same language and practice almost identical traditions. This does not mean that there have been no changes. Kurian (1987) stated that there has been a dramatic transformation in the nomadic way of life of Bedouin Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula. The government's extensive development plans have concentrated on the settlement of the Bedouin as well as the agricultural settlements, which help to integrate those people into the community: 'It is estimated that the Bedouin population was possibly less than 5 per cent, that they have moved from a nomadic population through semi-nomadic stages and then settlement' (Kurian, 1987, p. 32).

The emergence of Saudi Arabia as a state marked the beginning of the development of another identity, the Saudi identity that is separate from the tribal and family identities that were in existence before the unification. Although Islam still provides the overall source of identity, it became more pronounced after the unification because the founding of Saudi Arabia was based on the religious justification provided by the Islamic scholar Muhammad Bin Abdulwahab and King Abdulaziz, who led the war for the union of the country (Yamani, 2000). Therefore, Saudi Arabia has two sets of identities. The first set of identities are those that existed pre-unification such as regional identity, tribal identity and family identity. The second set came after the establishment of the Saudi state, which included the Saudi national identity and reassertions of tribal and family identities in the context of the Saudi state (Al Farsy, 2003).

Moreover, the political and economic foundation of modern Saudi Arabia came into existence during King Abdulaziz's era. When King Abdulaziz was crowned in 1932, he pursued a culturally oriented policy and maintained religion as the backbone of both the society and the state. King Saud was the first to succeed his father and ruled from 1953 to 1964 and his second successor son, King Faisal, ruled from 1964 to 1975. King Faisal's time in power brought enormous developments to the country (Vassiliev, 2000). During Faisal's period, improvements were achieved in business, health and education services. Also a policy was adopted for balancing the socio-economic and technological changes that the country was experiencing as well as reinforcing the traditional values of the society in accordance with the Islamic code. An elaborate welfare system was introduced, guaranteeing free health insurance and free education to Saudi citizens, especially to support people who did not benefit from business opportunities and social change. Therefore, cultural and religious norms strongly shape the essence of government in Saudi Arabia, more so than in other countries in the region (Al Farsy, 2003, Vassiliev, 2000, Kostiner, 1997).

The developments initiated by Faisal were continued by his successor, King Khalid, who ruled from 1975 to 1982. Following the death of King Khalid, King Fahd was sworn in as the new king on 13 June 1982. King Fahd pioneered a number of developments in Saudi Arabia. Among these were the restructuring of the system of government, such as the introduction of a regional administration, new larger Shura 'consultant council', a council of ministers with limited term in office and the election of half the municipal council members. Similarly, a massive programme of internal development to bring health, education and communications to all and a multi-billion dollar extension and renovation project to the two holy mosques was embarked upon (Al Farsy, 2003, Yamani, 2000, Ministry of Culture and Information, 2009). Following the death of King Fahd (1982-2005), King Abdullah (the current king) continued what his brother had initiated. King Abdullah presents himself as a sponsor of reformed Islam (BBC News, 4 June 2009). Arab News, a Saudi English language newspaper, said that the king brought gradual change to many government institutions (*Arab News*, 4 August 2005).

Oil and transformation in Saudi Arabia

While discussing the drivers of change in Saudi Arabia, Obaid (2001) argued that oil formed a bridge between traditional Saudi Arabia and the industrial world. Thus, Saudi Arabia could be said to occupy an important place in the world because it serves as the gateway between the Islamic world (being the birthplace of Islam) and the industrialised world, due to its

control of a significant amount of the world's oil reserve. Obaid (2001) stated that Saudi Arabia is the world's largest producer and exporter of crude oil, which is the main driving force of the Saudi economy. Oil wealth transformed many traditional Saudi cities into modern ones with excellent infrastructures and also brought about massive rural to urban migration.

The percentage of the urban population grew rapidly in Saudi Arabia. It stood at 48.7 per cent in 1970, 65.9 per cent in 1980, 78.2 per cent in 1990 and 88.5 per cent in 2005. Modern towns have been transformed to industrial, administrative and cultural centres. The area of Riyadh, for example, increased from some 110 sq. km in 1968 to 1600 sq. km by 1992 and 1800 sq km in 2007. Its population rose from 160,000 to 2 million by 1992 and to more than 5 million people in 2009 (Vassiliev, 2000, Saudi Statistical Yearbook, 2009).

In addition, educational infrastructure has increased and a 2009 estimate showed that there were more than 19,000 primary, intermediate and secondary schools in the Kingdom, teaching 6,1461,694 students. A total of 600,000 male and female students attend 21 universities in the Kingdom. These universities provide nearly 210 schools of religious, artistic, social, scientific, medical and economic studies, in addition to a number of colleges for teachers, health and technology (Saudi Statistical Yearbook, 2009).

Role of Islam

Historically, Saudi Arabia has occupied a special place in the Islamic world because it has the most holy shrines for all Muslims, the Ka'abah (located in the Holy Mosque in Makkah), which they turn towards in their prayers every day and aim, at least once in their lives, to visit in the Hajj 'pilgrimage to the holy places in Makkah'. Also, the Prophet Mohammed's (Peace be upon him) mosque is in Al Madinah city (Al Farsy, 2003). Therefore, an overview of the role of Islam is essential for a genuine understanding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its Islamic heritage and its leading role in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Islam has also influenced, in a significant way, the history and development of the Arabian Peninsula and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in particular. In the eighteenth century, a religious scholar of the Najd, the central region of Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhab, joined forces with Muhammad Bin Saud, the ruler of the town of Diriyah, to bring the Najd and the rest of Arabia back to the original form of Islam. Thus, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the heartland of Islam and the birthplace of its history (Gazzaz, 2006).

The basis of the constitution in Saudi Arabia is the Sharia 'Islamic law'. The presence of Sharia also necessitates a class of people called 'Ulema', or religious scholars, who are responsible for the implementation of religious laws in every aspect of life in Saudi Arabia. Amin (1985) defined the Ulema as follows:

> The Ulema can be defined as a religious and conservative group, traditionally conceived of by the government as the guardian of Islam orthodoxy in governmental political decisions (Amin, 1985, p. 34).

The Ulema may thus be considered the guardians of the Islamic Holy Law of *Sharia* against political authoritarian decisions. Approval or disapproval of political acts of the state is expressed through the issuance of a fatwa or legal decision by the Ulema (Lenzowski, 1967). Furthermore, Vogel (2000) stated that the Ulema have considerable power over day-to-day decisions and long-term policy making (Vogel 2000). The religious scholars hold weekly meetings with the king and are in charge of setting and implementing moral standards across the Kingdom. Therefore, it could be argued that in Saudi Arabia, Islamic culture provides the basis for governance (Al Muaither, 2001).

Cultural and social structure

Cultural values in Saudi Arabia are influenced by Islam. As stressed by Vassiliev (2000), culture here refers to the whole complex of material and non-material things that explain the specific way of life in a country. Although the rapid growth of modernisation and economic development visibly accelerated the decline of a number of traditional social structures, Saudi Arabia has managed to preserve its traditional way of life: 'In Saudi society, family values, respect for elders, supporting family members are very much valued' (Vassiliev, 2000, p. 40).

Al Beayeyz (1989) argued that nomadic culture is one of the main sources of the present Saudi culture, and the family is a recognised social unit in society whereby people are identified with tribes in which the Sheikh is the head. The family is the strongest unit of the tribe where child socialisations, traditions, values and education take place. Age is the basis of respect and power within the family. The senior male is the carer, and women are subordinate to him and ties of kinship are still very strong: 'Usually each individual in the family has to consult his father or eldest brother about important decisions' (Al Beayeyz, 1989, p. 76).

Modernisation brought noticeable physical changes to Saudi Arabia in recent years. Al Harithi (1983) pointed out that the discovery of oil, which forced closer contact with foreign

cultures, and huge oil profits are the two main factors that have accelerated the social and cultural transformation process in Saudi Arabia. As a result, the independence of rural kin groups has declined, and the wealth of individuals has increased. Furthermore, Al Farsy (2003) noted that oil wealth has led not only to physical changes in Saudi Arabia, it has also brought with it changes in social values. For instance, the family size has decreased and approaches to professions and jobs have been different. Individuals travel more, which has brought about improved road networks and income. The importance of education is emphasised and the number of students within society increased. Al Farsy (2003) also stated that it has been a great challenge, therefore, for the government and the society to maintain the culture while fostering economic and technological change (p. 21).

Furthermore, Al Muaither (2001) argued that although family ties remain strong, most Saudi Arabian social values, customs, traditions, and behaviours have changed. The author thought that the influence of modern education has speeded up the change in society as well as the foreign media programmes that brought foreign ideas, which influenced Saudis, especially the new generation. Al Harithi (1983) argued that many factors have led to socio-economic change, resulting in comprehensive 'social disruptions' in the country. Al Harithi wrote:

> A variety of factors such as oil wealth, education, travel, trade, and the mass media has brought to the country foreign ideas and influences, which are completely alien to its society, and its history (quoted in Al Muaither, 2001, p. 71).

However, Al Muaither (2001) argued that even though challenges to the traditional values of Saudi Arabia prove to be unavoidable, it is not the case in every part of the country. In spite of moving to the cities, members of Saudi extended families still tend to live close to each other whenever possible and some of them retain homes in their hometowns as well as where they work.

Politics

This section is going to shed more light on the political situation in the country based on some variables. These are the ruling traditions, political structure, recent reform and the history of elections in Saudi Arabia.

Ruling traditions

As indicated earlier, the system of government in Saudi Arabia is completely influenced by Islamic religion. The constitution of the country is based on the 'Sharia', the Islamic legal

system. There was no written constitution in Saudi Arabia until March 1992. Saudi religious law was embodied in Sharia as well as Bedouin customs which were used as an actual constitution. The written constitution in 1992 emphasised the system of government (Amin, 1985). Al Muaither (2001) stated that, as outlined in the constitution, all the power is in the hand of the king as long as the king takes Sharia and the tribal customs into consideration when ruling. As a result, the legitimacy of traditional ruling in Saudi Arabia is based on the following three factors: the King, his Council of Ministers, and the Ulema, 'the religious scholars' (p. 84).

The King

The King is the head of state, the Prime Minister and the General Commander in Chief of the army. Assisted by the Committee of Consultation and the Council of Ministers, the King is the centre of all political activities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Executive and legislative functions ultimately derive their authority from the King who also exercises judicial authority on occasion. It is to the King that all foreign representatives are accredited, and it is the King who appoints ambassadors and other envoys sent abroad. He names all ministers, other senior government officials, principles of municipalities, governors of provinces, Shura 'Consultation council' members, and also selects all military officers above the rank of colonel. All the legislation or decree law is either by royal decree or by ministerial decree sanctioned by the King. The King is the highest court of appeal and has the power of pardon (Long, 1997, Al Othaimain, 1998, Al Muaither, 2001).

The Council of Ministers

The next most powerful commission to the King is the Council of Ministers. This administrative body activates government offices throughout the country. According to tradition, the Prime Minister of the Council is the King himself, his Deputy Prime Ministers are the next two Crown Princes, and members of the council must be appointed by the King. In 1975, King Khalid made a major change to the body of ministers and the way the Council is administered. The Council was made up of King Khalid as the Prime Minister, Crown Prince Fahd as the First Deputy Minister, and Prince Abdullah (President of the National Guard), as the Second Deputy Minister. The number of cabinet ministers was increased to 33 members (ibid.).

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The Ulema

The Ulema, religious scholars, influence the history of Saudi Arabia and this body dates back to 1747 when the House of Saud welcomed the doctrine of Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahhab, after whom the Wahhabi religious movement was named (Antonius, 1989). Since that time, the Ulema have acted as the advocates of the religious holy aw of Islam, the Sharia. The Ulema also functioned as the principal religious consultants to the King. Approval or disapproval of any political act of state is expressed through the issuance of a 'fatwa' or legal decision by the Ulema (Lenzowski, 1967). There are four religious departments which serve as major government commissions to regulate all religious issues in the country. They are: The Ministry of Justice, The Judiciary Council, the House of Legal Fatwa, Research, and Preaching, and the Secretary General of Public Morality. All these governmental offices are composed of leading members of the Ulema who take responsibility for enforcing Islamic law (Gazzaz, 2006).

Political structure

According to Long (1997), Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy with no public participation in the political process. The constitutional system of Saudi Arabia is based on Islamic law and the consultative nature of decision-making, which dates back to the political process in seventh-century Arabia, at the dawn of Islam. Under such a system, tribes were led by a chief (Sheikh) who was selected by a consensus of his peers who were the heads of leading clans or families. These elders formed a Majlis (advisory council) within which the tribal chief exercised his leadership and authority. Thus, 'Saudi Arabia has a system whereby the patriarch of an extended royal family rul[es] with the consensus of leading members of a nation of extended families' (Long. 1997, p. 41). Consequently, the Kingdom is divided into 13 provinces governed by royals, or close relatives of the royal family, who are appointed by a royal decree.

Gazzaz (2006) argued that the system of government in Saudi Arabia has been fairly stable for nearly one hundred years. Since the establishment of the Kingdom, four main opposition movements have been mounted against the government. Those groups are: the opposition for religious reforms; the sectarian opposition, especially from the Shia minorities in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia; the power-seeking princes; and the political reformists (pp. 70-78).

Furthermore, Al Zubaidi (2004) noted that between the mid-sixties and the end of the seventies of the last century, Saudi Arabia, as in all Arab and Muslim countries, witnessed a

growth in Islamic movements. Those movements belong to several schools and trends such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi, Moderate, Radical, Traditional and Reformist movements. For historical and political reasons, the Salafi Islamic movement was the strongest and most influential in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States (Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and The United Arab Emirates, p. 270). Al Zubaidi explained that since the early eighties, the Saudi government strengthened the religious movements in the country to counter the expansion of the communist ideology in Afghanistan and to face the influence of Islamic revolution in Iran. The government also supported secret Shiite religious organisations in the Gulf region, specifically in Saudi Arabia, such as Hezbollah of Saudi Arabia and the Organisation of the Islamic Revolution. The author concluded that the transformation of Saudi society into a one-dimensional religious vision (Wahabbi or Salafi) made the state and the community work together and led to the spread of religious societies all over the country in order to challenge competitors from other religious and political factions (Al Zubaidi, 2004, pp. 291-396).

Despite the Saudi Government's regulations that prohibit establishing political parties or movements, Hamzawi (2006) divided the current Saudi political or Islamic movements into three groups. The first group is the Religious Establishment, which observes public and private morality, education, and the justice system. The second group is the Moderate Islamists. This group agrees with liberal reformists on the need to press for reform, but they have a different destination. Moderate Sunni Islamists, mostly religious scholars critical of the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, place more emphasis on reforming the religious establishment. The final group is the Liberal Reformists who are mostly secular-minded lawyers, university professors, intellectuals, political activists, and journalists.

Lakruis (2005) divided the political/religious movements in Saudi society into three main groups. The first group is the Sunni Islamic awakening group with its three sub-groups. These are the prominent members of the Islamic awakening movement, who decided to stay away from domestic political issues, and restrict their activities to the field of religion. In addition, this group includes the radical Islamists (who adopt the global 'Jihadist' call and participate in armed violence in the country) and the middle ground, or people who work between the two previous factions. The second main group is the Shia Islamic group, which includes the fundamentalist and moderate Shia groups. The final main group is the Liberal group, which wants a separation of state and religion. They include the ideas of the communists, nationalists and Arab Baathists (Lakruis, 2005).

However, all these Islamic or political movements did not have officially registered members or known headquarters, due to the government regulations that ban political parties and, to a great extent, limit the right to assemble freely as non-governmental organisations.

Recent reforms

The Government of Saudi Arabia initiated some reforms in recent years. On 1 March 1992, the late King Fahd issued several decrees outlining the basic statutes of government. Those include the Basic Law of Governance, the Provincial Council Law, and the Consultation Council (Majlis Ash-Shura) Law. In September 1993, the King's political reform programme also provided for the establishment of a National Consultative Council 'Shura', with appointed members having advisory powers to review and give advice on issues of public interest. It also outlined a framework for councils at the provincial or emirate level. In July 1997, the membership of the Council was expanded from 60 to 90 members, and again in May 2001 from 90 to 120 members. In 2005, membership increased to 150 members. The role of the council is gradually expanding as it gains experience (Consultation Council website, 2010).

In September 1993, King Fahd issued additional reform decrees, appointing the members of 13 provincial councils and outlining the councils' operating regulations. One year later, in October 1994, the King announced the establishment of a Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (al-Majlis al-A'la lil-Shu'un al-Islamiyya), the Council for Islamic Call and Guidance (al-Majlis lil-Da'wa wal-Irshad) and the Religious Guidance and Endowments. These two new bodies were made responsible for guiding moral behaviour and proper conduct of mosque functionaries, and activities at home (Gazzaz, 2006, Kostiner, 1997). In 2003, King Fahd announced that half of the municipal council members would be elected through elections. Consequently, in February, March, and April 2005, Saudis voted in the country's first ever municipal elections (municipal elections website, 2007).

After King Fahd's death on 1 August 2005, his brother King Abdullah (the current king) continued his reforms. Thus, he supported the National Dialogue Conferences, a government initiative that began in 2003 and consisted of regular meetings of diverse groups to discuss political reform issues. This, I would argue, has been instrumental in expanding the Saudi public sphere. Also, in November 2006, the King announced the formation of an Allegiance Commission which, in the future, will select the Crown Prince. Many observers thought that

the establishment of the Allegiance Commission indicated that the Saudi royal family had begun to address important issues of heredity and governance, as it prepares to pass political power from the founder's sons to his grandsons. Furthermore, the expansion of civil society has taken place through the legalisation of various human rights organisations such as the National Human Rights Committee in 2004 and the Government Administration for Human Rights in 2005, which presents an opening for underprivileged groups such as women and minorities. In 2009, King Abdullah announced new laws to improve the Judiciary system and appointed his first ever female minister, for women's education (Hamzawy, 2006, Keshk, 2009, Al Balawi, 2009).

However, Butt (2004) thought that King Abdullah needed gradual change in a conservative society like Saudi Arabia. He wrote:

> Change is likely to be slow. Compared with all other Arab states, Saudi Arabia is inherently conservative. Crown Prince Abdullah knows that he will be unable to introduce overnight reforms to the political system, school curricula or other sensitive areas. Instead, he is using these preliminary stages of the debate to test the water and see how far he can push things (BBC News, 7 June 2004).

History of election

When the late King Abdulaziz, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, entered Makkah city on 16 October 1924, he ordered a 12 member people's council to be selected by the citizens of Makkah, seeking their assistance in the administration of the affairs of the Holy Capital. This council turned out to be for the whole Hejaz Region, the western part of the Kingdom. The idea of the people's council extended to include regions of Madina, Jeddah, Taif, Yanbu and other cities in the Eastern Region. Members of these councils were the elite of society: scientists, intellectuals, writers and businessmen. These people's councils became the basis for the civil councils. In the Kingdom's central region, the a limited municipal elections were organised in Riyadh city in 1964, and Riyadh's municipal council was reinstated in 1967 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010, municipal elections website, 2010). However, Hamzawy (2006) noted that the election process was halted after 1967, which was a surprising turn of events at the time and has never been documented or justified by official sources. Al Shayeb (2005) thought that 'ultraconservative religious leaders supporting the Saudi regime deemed the idea of elections unlawful' (p. 1). He added that in an effort to strengthen central government, the elected councils were dissolved and replaced with appointed district and

provincial councils. Also, the decision to re-establish municipal councils was technically taken in 1977, but implemented only in 2005.

In addition, Khan (2005) stated that the Saudi Government allowed more elections to take place in non-governmental bodies. In November 2004, the government allowed women to participate in elections for the first time in Saudi chambers of commerce and industry and, in 2005, two women were elected to Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Furthermore, the government allowed elections to be held in sports federations and other scientific and vocational associations. In December 2004, journalists around the country elected their representatives in the Saudi Journalists Association. Similarly, members of other scientific associations have the freedom to elect their steering committees such as the Saudi Association for Media and Communication, the Saudi Association of Administration amongst others (*Arab News*, 7 September 2005).

Various reasons have been put forward for the absence of political reform in the Kingdom. Al Aqaili (2004) blamed the unstable political conditions in the Arab world during the last fifty years for the absence of real democratic reform. He explained that there were conflicts in the Arab world in the 1960s, which culminated in the 'Nasserist' (Arab-socialist) military and ideological threat to the Kingdoms and Emirates of the Arabian Peninsula. That was followed by the Arab-Israeli war in October 1973, the Iranian revolution in 1979, the 1980 Iraq-Iran war that lasted for eight years, the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 by Iraq and the liberation of Kuwait war in 1991. Under those conditions, he argued, a democratic election process could not be possible. On the other hand, in 2003, after the tragic attacks of 11 September 2001, the American policy in the region, what the American President George W. Bush called 'Democratization of the Middle East' encouraged some countries in the Arabian Gulf, among them, Saudi Arabia, to undertake more political reform. As result, in February 2005, Saudi Arabia held its first ever public municipal elections. Al Agaili concludes that 'the political factors that halted municipal elections in the 1960s are the very same ones that are resurrecting them recently, with the differences in the nature of circumstances between then and now' (*Saudi Gazette*, 28 November 2004).

However, Chomsky (2011) doubted that Western foreign policy actually encouraged or imposed democracy in the Gulf States. He argued that history suggests that the West is more comfortable with undemocratic regimes since democracy may endanger their profitable gain.

While the West may want a limited political reform there is less evidence they actually want real democracy in the region. Chomsky wrote:

> The U.S. and its allies will do anything they can to prevent authentic democracy in the Arab world. The reason is very simple. Across the region, an overwhelming majority of the population regards the United States as the main threat to their interests.... the U.S. and its allies are not going to want governments which are responsive to the will of the people. If that happens, not only will the U.S. not control the region, but it will be thrown out. So that's obviously an intolerable result (Democracynow.org, 11 May 2011).

In spite of such an argument, one may argue that basic institutional changes are being made in Saudi Arabia which could perhaps be considered the foundations for a democracy of some sort, or perhaps a testing of the waters for a later attempt to widen the democratic process in the country. In the West, part of this process is the establishment and growth of the media.

Saudi mass media

According to Gazzaz (2006), the history of the mass media in Saudi Arabia is relatively new with the exception of the newspapers, which date back to Ottoman rule (p. 80). To understand how the mass media in the Kingdom was established, a quick look at every medium will be carried out.

Newspapers

The first newspaper was *Al Hejaz* which started in 1908 during the reign of the Ottomans. Up to World War II a few other papers appeared, including *Umm al Qura*, the official government newspaper, *Sawt al Hijaz*, and *Madinah Al Manawarah*. In the late 1940s, *Sawt al Hijaz* was published under the new name of *Al Bilad* (*The Country*). Nowadays, there are 13 dailies being published in English and Arabic as well as approximately 200 non-dailies. Although few other newspapers were published, the survival of those newspapers could not be maintained for long due to their heavy dependence on subscriptions, coupled with low circulation. Therefore, the print media was always dependent on subscription sales and government subsides although this has been decreasing since the newspapers now receive most of their revenues from advertisement. Incidentally, in Saudi Arabia, the biggest subscriber is the state, as some of the employees in many governmental institutions receive their daily newspapers for free (Al Muaither, 2001, Gazzaz, 2006).

Al Farsy (2003) argued that since the unification of Saudi Arabia, the print media flourished because of political stability and the discovery of oil which provided extra resources for the

state to fight illiteracy. Thus, several daily newspapers appeared and their circulation increased in the Kingdom. Published in both Arabic and English, the total circulation volume of these dailies reached 573,000, according to 1992 statistics. In other words, there were 45 dailies per 10,000 inhabitants (p. 76). However, Press Reference (2005) estimated the circulation of the main Saudi daily newspapers as follows: *Arab News* 51,481, *Al Bilad* (*The Country*) 60,200, *Al Eqtisadiah* 76,928, *Al Hayat* 168,250, *Al Jazirah* (*The Peninsula*) 93,000, *Al Madina Al Munawara* (*Medina – The Enlightened City*) 46,370, *Al Watan* 95,620, *An Nadwah* (*The Council*) 35,000, *Okaz* 107,614, *Al Riyadh,* 91,000, *Saudi Gazette* 60,000, *Al Yaum* (*Today*) 34,000. As a result, the overall average circulation for the country is listed as around 59 per 1000 people (Press Reference, 2005).

Television

In 1962 His Royal Highness Prince Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz, Crown Prince and Prime Minister at the time, announced the government's intention to introduce television broadcasting to the country. In the spring of 1965 Saudi TV began broadcasting from two stations in Riyadh and Jeddah in black-and-white. In the following years the government established many stations in different cities around the country. There are nine Saudi TV channels as follows: Channel One, which is dedicated to general, new entertainment and local events. The Second Channel is an English speaking channel. Al Ekhbariah is the news channel, which is dedicated to news, talk shows, political analysis and documentaries. The fourth channel is the Sports Channel, which targets young people and encourages them to participate in sports competitions, cultural, scientific and entertainment activities. Other channels are Children's, Cultural, Holy Quran, 'Sunnah' (Prophet's speeches) and Economy Channels (Ministry of Culture and Information, 2010).

Radio

Radio in Saudi Arabia experienced several developments after the unification of the Kingdom in 1932, when the first private radio system was founded to provide the King with information from towns and cities throughout the Kingdom, and external news about current events. On 18 July 1949, King Abdulaziz, issued a royal decree to establish national radio and ordered his deputy in the Hejaz, Prince Faisal to supervise it. On 20 September 1949, the Saudi Radio aired the first programmes from Radio Jeddah. Three month later, the radio broadcast the King's speech to the pilgrims which was delivered by his son, Prince Faisal.

More radio stations were set up in other Saudi cities afterwards (Ministry of Culture and Information, 2010).

Saudi radio seeks to achieve its objectives within the scope of information policy through specialised radio stations in their respective fields, namely: Call of Islam Radio started in 1961 aimed at identifying the principles of Islam and spreading Islamic awareness among people. Radio Quran was established in 1972 to teach the Quran, for the interpretation of signs and to offer local and international competitions for the conservation and recital of the Quran. General Programme Radio was established in 1964 and the Second Programme Radio was established in 1979 from Riyadh and Jeddah, respectively. Further, European Programme Radio broadcast in English and French. This radio station aims to disseminate Islamic religious principles, highlighting the beauty of Islam. Moreover, the government has Targeted Programme Stations to be used on some occasions such as during the Hajj pilgrimage (Ministry of Culture and Information, 2010).

Internet

According to the Internet Service Unit (2010), the internet was first introduced in Saudi Arabia in 1994, for educational research institutions and some other governmental bodies, and the Royal Decree number 163 in March 1997 recognised the service. Two years later, in 1999, Saudi citizens were able to access the internet. Since then, the number of users rapidly increased and reached seven million subscribers in 2009, which represents 25 per cent of the population. The internet administration in Saudi Arabia started as an independent unit under the supervision of King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST), but most of the internet services were transferred to the Communication and Information Technology Commission in 2004 (Internet Services Unit, KACST, 2010). However, Gazzaz (2006) described how the Internet in Saudi Arabia works.

> All Internet users in Saudi Arabia shall refrain from publishing or accessing data containing anything contravening a fundamental principle or legislation, or infringing the sanctity of Islam or breaching public decency... anything contrary to the state or its system... reports or news damaging to the Saudi armed forces without the approval of the competent authorities... publication of official state laws, agreements or statements before they are officially made public (p. 5).

Thus, as the aim to protect Saudi society, the Internet is closely monitored and there are websites that users cannot access. And if they try to violate that, a warning screen appears telling the user that he/she won't be able to access that page and an application form appears

that he or she might fill out if that site is important for him/her. However, in recent years, the level of freedom for internet users has increased and the speed of the service has improved dramatically.

Media regulation policy

Gazzaz (2006) stated that the Saudi Government monitors mass media outlets, whether they are newspapers, TV, radio or the internet. The first Saudi information policy was issued by royal decree by King Abdulaziz, following the introduction of radio broadcast to the Kingdom in 1949. Gazzaz argued that the policy is a most comprehensive one that provides general guidelines and frameworks for media operations in Saudi Arabia. The current policy was formulated in 1982 by the Supreme Council of Mass Communication, a task force committee consisting of academics and top officials at the Ministry of Culture and Information, chaired by the Interior Minister (Gazzaz, 2006, p. 98).

Despite the involvement of several government departments in the censorship of the media, ultimately, it is the Ministry of Culture and Information that has control over the monitoring of the national news agency, radio and television broadcasting and internet. Thus, media policy cuts across all mass media, bans all scenes, programmes or materials that contain any description or allusion to drinking alcohol or taking illegal substances. In addition, the policy includes banning nudity, sexual encounters and anything that is purportedly un-Islamic or aimed at promoting other religions. Dancing is also prohibited unless it is national or traditional and the performers, who are male, must be appropriately dressed. Finally, the policy forbids the transmission of any messages that oppose or criticise Saudi rulers, the government and its principles and national policy (Media policy, Ministry of Culture and Information, 2010).

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the location, geography, politics and people of Saudi Arabia, as well as the relationship between traditional values and the forces of modernisation. The background summary thus establishes the rapid growth of Saudi society, in numbers, economy and media technology. However, what is clear is that the society itself is moving slowly towards reform based on the specific nature of the ruling system and that religion is a paramount influence in all ways of life, from the establishment of the Kingdom to the present day.

Thus, any steps towards reform are couched in terms of religion, the role of the family and tribal values as well as the foreign interest because of the huge oil reserve – all of which are still of primary importance despite the rapid move towards modernisation. However, it is in this very traditional and religious, although to some extent 'modern' society which has all the technology and media and is subjected to the Western interests, that the elections were conducted. From this setting that this thesis explains what happened in the first municipal elections ever held in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter Six is going to examine the cultural and political background of the municipal election process.

CHAPTER SIX

2005 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS



Picture 6.1

Enthusiastic citizens casting their vote in the first public election ever in Saudi Arabia
(Alkhudairi, 2007(b))

2005 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Introduction

This chapter examines the cultural and political background of the municipal elections as the first public elections in the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that were conducted in 2005 under the slogan 'Participate in the decision-making'. In looking at the elections as a whole and at what contributed to the low level of participation of the electorate, my thesis examines the campaign, the behaviours of candidates and voters and the results of the elections. To present a full account of these issues, and thus to be able to consider whether and how these issues themselves might have affected the limited participation of the electorate, I will consider the background of the rules of the elections, the preparations for the elections, the election media campaign, and women's participation in the municipal elections. Also, I will illustrate the programmes, tactics and spending of the candidates' campaigns, the outcome of the elections and the media's reaction to the election process.

Municipal election background

On 10 October 2003, the late King Fahd Bin Abdulaziz decided to put half of all municipal council seats to the vote 'within a year'. The Saudi Arabian Cabinet issued decision No. 224 to confirm and widen the participation of the citizens in running local affairs and decision-making. The decree reads: 'Citizens' participation in running the local affairs shall be widened through elections; this shall be done through Municipal Councils according to rural and municipal laws and that half of the members of each municipality shall be appointed.' The Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs announced electoral rules in August and approved a timetable in October 2004 as the first elections ever to a government body in Saudi Arabia. Starting from January 2005, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs planned, supervised and directed the municipal elections, which were divided into three phases in the thirteen provinces around the country (*Riyadh*, 18 May 2003, *Arab News*, 14 March 2004, Riyadh municipal elections encyclopaedia, 2005, p. 23).

The Saudi municipal elections were conducted in three stages from 10 February to 21 April 2005 in thirteen regions around the country. 793,432 citizens registered in those elections from a total Saudi population of 16,529,302 (according to the 2004 census). 607 members were elected among 9330, which represented half of the members of 179 municipal councils in a process where women, military men and those under 21 were excluded from registration

or voting. This result revealed that almost 17 per cent of the Saudi people participated in those elections among 4.5 million Saudis eligible to vote (Menoret, 2006, *Riyadh*, 22 April 2003)

The first phase of the elections was carried out in the Riyadh Region on 10 February 2005. 1800 candidates competed for 38 seats in the municipal councils, including 646 candidates who competed for the seats in the capital, which counted only seven seats. The estimated number of those eligible to vote reached 550,000 in Riyadh city. The actual number for those who registered was only 140,000 which equalled 30 per cent of those eligible to vote. The moderate religious group (current) won the majority of seats in the Riyadh Municipal Council and its provinces. In Riyadh city alone, six moderate Islamists won six of the seven seats of the council. (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 12 February 2005, *Al Hayat*, 12 February 2005, *Al Jazirah*, 12 February 2005, BBC News, 11 February 2005).



Picture 6.2
Citizens stand in line to cast their votes (*Al Jazirah*, 12 February 2005).

The second phase was conducted on 3 March 2005 in five regions: the Eastern Region, Asir, Najran, Al Baha and Jizan. Nearly 325,000 voters were registered in the five regions. In Al Baha, clan elders won the majority of the seats in the municipal council, beating youthful candidates. In cities such as Dammam in the Eastern Region, moderate Islamists won most of the seats and in Najran, academics (which consisted of cultural and educational elites) won over the tribal candidates. (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 4 & 5 March 2005, *Al Yaum*, 5 March 2005, BBC News, 3 March 2005, *Al Jazirah*, 12 March 2005).

The final phase of the municipal elections was conducted on 21 April 2005. It included the following regions: Jeddah, Makkah, Madenah, Taif, Qassiam, Hail, Tabook and Al Joff. Almost 333,000 voters were registered and 70 per cent of those chose 244 members for the municipal council out of 4600 candidates. There were 258 polling stations supervised by 700

observers. Official results showed the majority of winning candidates were moderate Islamists, but there were some secular candidates (*Riyadh*, 22 April 2003, BBC News, 21 April 2005, *Al Hayat*, 22 & 24 April 2005, *Al Jazirah*, 23 April 2005).

Preparations for the elections

As Saudi Arabia did not have any previous experience of elections, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs invited experts from the United Nations and some democratic countries to help in establishing the rules and regulations of the electoral process and to train the election committee members, employees, and the workers in the field (Interviewee No. 36). About 10,000 people, including university professors, teachers and municipal officials, were hired for the elections. An independent committee was formed (National Council to Monitor the Elections) from several civil associations to monitor the elections around the country. According to the Council's final report on the municipal elections, 1446 volunteer observers reported their observations immediately after the voting process and the boxes were closed in 644 polling stations in thirteen regions in Saudi Arabia (The Council's 2008 Report, *Al Jazirah*, 17 March 2005, Riyadh municipal elections encyclopaedia, 2005, pp. 29-43, Interviewee No. 38, Interviewee No. 37).

Election media campaign

The media campaign was a major element of the municipal election process. In mid-September 2004, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs launched a media campaign to inform the Saudi public about the start, regulations and procedures of the municipal elections. The campaign began almost four months before the first election day and relied on electronic and print media and focused on the Riyadh Region, where the first phase of the municipal elections took place (*Arab News*, 13 August 2004).

The General Committee of the Elections assigned a specialist company in media and public relations, 'Dar Tariq for Publishing and Advertising', to prepare and implement the media campaign and oversee the media centre at the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affaires' headquarters. The media campaign's plan included a range of activities such as the establishment of the main media centre at the ministry headquarter and the official website of the elections on the internet 'alriyadh.gov.sa/election' (Picture No. 6.3). It also handled the preparation and distribution of election publications such as voter guides, candidate guides, and the guide to polling station locations. The campaign's plan included the production of a

ten-minute awareness film about the municipal elections that was distributed in some major polling stations and on national television channels, and announcements of the election logo, 'Participate in the decision-making' throughout mass media channels. (Interviewee No. 42, *Al Yaum*, 25 November 2004).



Picture 6.3
Riyadh Municipality Website
(www. alriyadh.gov.sa/election)

Two main messages for the municipal campaign were presented to people inside and outside the country. The first message targeted Saudi citizens via TV and radio programmes and advertisements, newspapers editorials and articles, flyers and posters, leaflets with information about the role of the elections in society and the task of citizens in that political process (Pictures 6.4 and 6.4.). Also, that message also carried essential information regarding the rules and regulations of the elections. The second message was aimed at the entire world, especially the Western allies in America and Europe, to indicate that the Saudi Government was moving towards democracy and political reform (Interviewee No. 42).

Some media networks reported that the campaign failed to grab people's attention to register or vote. According to the BBC, there was media criticism of the campaign which of course resulted in 'citizens' apathy'. The criticism was aimed at phase one, at electoral registration which they said was 'sluggish', with the media blaming apathy on a 'lack of awareness' (BBC News, 23 December 2004, BBC News, 9 February 2005). Some Saudi newspapers also

confirmed a similar attitude among voters regarding the ineffectiveness of the election media campaign. The Saudi English language newspaper, *Arab News*, wrote under a big headline: 'Voters Want More Information' and explained that 'Some say it's the government's fault; some say it's television's,' and added 'Whoever is at fault, Saudi men are contending that they weren't given enough information about the municipal elections. Of course there are some who say it's their own fault' (*Arab News*, 9 March 2005).

Moreover, *Al Watan,* another Saudi newspaper reported in December 2004, ten weeks before the first election day, that there was a shortage of information about the election process among Saudis. The newspaper wrote that '4000 citizens in Al-Harisah, a small town, do not know anything about the municipal elections' (*Al Watan*, 23 December 2004). *Riyadh* newspaper also quoted one citizen as blaming the media for not giving the right information about the elections to the public: 'I think that the media didn't inform the public about it as they should have. They dealt with it as if it was a regular annual event. So many people, and I am one of them, don't even know the role of someone who's elected' (*Riyadh*, 10 March 2005).



Picture 6.4 **Picture 6.5**

Election posters on street advertisement signs
(Alkhudairi, 2007(b))

In addition, the Saudi Columnist Gainan Al Ghamdi in *Al Watan* newspaper blamed a 'brief public-awareness campaign' for the poor response to the registration drive (*Al Watan*, 20 December 2004). Finally, Dr Ali Al Garni, an associate professor at King Saudi University, told *Okaz* newspaper that the election media campaign failed to provide Saudi citizens with the necessary information about the election process and its objectives. He went on to explain:

> Media should have explained why we needed elections in our country. In other words, none of the mass media outlets wrote, spoke, explained or interpreted the philosophy of the elections. What were the social assumptions that underlined the election? What were the social values that elections produced at the individual level, organisational, and society?... It was noted that all the published materials and media news, which appeared during the past months has focused on the processes and its procedures without looking at the philosophies and goals of the elections... Where it is widely known that the election process is the procedural concept of democracy... the concept of pluralism... and other major concepts in the management of modern societies (*Okaz*, 22 July 2006).

In the light of this literature, one could conclude that there was a shortage of information to the Saudi citizens regarding the importance and the meaning of the elections and the idea behind it. In other words, the election media campaign might have failed to educate Saudi citizens about the election process, which might have contributed to their disengagement towards registration and voting in those elections.

Women's participation in the elections

One of the crucial issues that faced the election process was the exclusion of women from nomination or voting in the municipal elections. In fact, this issue generated a significant debate among officials, writers, journalists and citizens in the country. The majority of them were in favour of giving Saudi women the right to vote, though not to be elected. Some newspapers conducted polls, which reflected that a large percentage of the citizens supported the women's right to vote in elections (*Al Watan*, 15 March 2005, and *Al Hayat*, 15 April 2005).

The Minister of the Interior, Prince Nayef Bin Abdulaziz, in the first statement from a Saudi official on this issue, on 10 October 2004, said that the participation of women in the first municipal elections in Saudi Arabia would not be possible (BBC News, 11 October 2004, *Arab News*, 13 October 2004, *Asharq Al-Awsat* 11 October 2004). That decision was explained by Prince Mansour Bin Mutaib, the Chairman of the General Committee of the

Municipal Elections: 'The government intended to go with the elections without the involvement of women due to the lack of trained women and the lack of infrastructure needed for the establishment of segregated women's ballot centres in the Kingdom'. He explained the special nature of Saudi society as a very conservative one: 'In Saudi Arabia we have to have separated centres for women due to social aspects,' he then pointed out that 'due to the lack of time, which was one year set by the King, it was difficult for the government to employ women in cities and rural areas to receive women voters.' (*Arab News*, 19 September 2004, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 13 October 2004, *Al Watan*, 13 October 2004, *Riyadh*, 24 November 2004).

At the meantime, four months before the elections, a group of Saudi women (Nadia Boukrgi, Faten Bundagji and Fatima Khuraiji) had nominated themselves as candidates in the forthcoming municipal elections. They asked to participate in the electoral process, especially as the electoral system regulations did not exclude women from participation. In a letter to Prince Mansour, the Chairman of the General Committee of the elections, they requested that he gave women half the seats so they could be appointed to the municipal councils, and insisted that they would not withdraw their nominations till they were officially asked to do so (*Elaph*, 19 October 2004, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 2 March 2005, *Arab News*, 29 September and 13 October 2004, BBC Radio 4, 7 October 2004).

Following that, the Minister of the Municipal and Rural Affairs Prince Mutaib Bin Abdulaziz said that women were excluded not by the system, but by 'time constraints' and declared that they could vote and run in 2009 (delayed until 2011) (*Al Jazirah*, 11 July 2004). After the first phase of the elections in Riyadh Region had ended, the minister said that 'The leadership is considering the representation of women in following elections' (*Okaz*, 11 February 2005). Recently, Prince Mansour Bin Mutaib, the new Mistier of Municipality and Rural Affairs, announced that he did not object to women's participation in the 2011 municipal elections (*Al-Guds Al-Arabi*, 28 October 2010).

Women's exclusion from the municipal elections was a critical issue that got some media attention. For example, in September 2004, the BBC reported that 'The country denied the women the right to vote' (BBC News, 11 October 2004). Also, a Saudi journalist in *Arab News,* Abeer Mishkhas, objected to such a decision and stated 'prisoners were to be given the right to vote and stand in the elections. If imprisoned law-breakers are given the right to vote, shouldn't law-abiding women have the same right?' (*Arab News*, 13 February 2004). Mody

Al-Khalaf, wrote in the same newspaper that the Kingdom could have postponed the elections until all facilities were ready for both men and women to vote because 'Half of the nation is certainly worth it' (*Arab News,* 19 February 2004).

Candidates' electoral campaigns

Examining candidates' electoral campaigns is an integral part of the municipal election process picture. Thus, looking at the conduct, tactics, programmes and spending of those campaigns is going to enrich the findings of this study and might explain the factors that contributed to the low level of participation among Saudi citizens in 2005 municipal elections.

When the door opened for nomination, a number of citizens rushed to register their names as candidates. Their enthusiasm for the nomination seemed to exceed their enthusiasm to register as voters (Al Gifari, 2005). For example, more than 646 candidates registered for seven seats in the municipal council in Riyadh city and more than 520 candidates for seven seats in Jeddah city (Riyadh municipal elections encyclopaedia, 2005, p. 293, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 24 March 2005). Moreover, Alkhudairi (2007) noted that those who applied for the nomination were from all levels of educational, cultural and professional backgrounds. Some of those candidates who did not have an academic degree or did not have professional or managerial experience did not hesitate to stand for the elections to serve the city and its citizens. Unfortunately, not all of those candidates were aware of the electoral process or the functions of the municipal council. This was illustrated by two sentences that a candidate wrote on the application form for his candidacy to the municipal council – that he would provide specific services to the city or citizens such as electricity or employment, that are not part of the municipal council functions (Interview with the author, 15 May 2008).

In the early preparations for their electoral campaigns, some wealthy candidates had attended advanced courses in campaign management on how to create a political image. Another group of candidates hired experts in political campaign management to help them run their campaigns. Among those experts were Mohammed Dallal from Kuwait, Mr. Walid Hajras, a municipal council member from Bahrain and Dr Salah Ali, a member of the House of Representatives in Bahrain, as well as other experts from Yemen who gave courses in Riyadh, Dammam and Jeddah. Furthermore, in Jeddah, Harvey Thomas who led the election

campaign of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, was invited to give lectures about political campaigning (Al Ghamdi, 2005, p. 40).

Some citizens got round the rule which did not allow any propaganda activity prior to the start date by distributing free copies of their books and academic work or holding free lectures and training courses for citizens. For example, Engineer Tariq Algasabi, a winning candidate in Riyadh, distributed news releases talking about his activities in Dallah Health Company, highlighting his interviews with officials and attaching posters about the election process, how to vote and a map of polling places. He also put his picture and address in the profile to show his interest in serving the local community. Further, he participated in a programme about the new state budget on national TV (Channel One) (*Al Jazirah*, 4 February 2005, Interviewee No. 27). In Jeddah city, a group of high profile citizens and businessmen formed the Local Council to support the municipal elections. In Medina city, Dr Mohammed Al-Mahgamsi, in his early preparation for his campaign, distributed health-education leaflets to the public showing his position as a director of the Children Hospital. Also, in Qatif Region, a number of Shia citizens formed Election Coordination Committees in the cities and villages of the region. The committees held joint meetings under the theme 'together to support the municipal elections', aiming to raise the level of awareness and participation of the public in the municipal elections in the area (*Al Yaum*, 27 February 2005, *Riyadh*, 7 February 2005, *Okaz*, 5 February 2005).

After the approval of candidates by the elections committees, some wealthy candidates used all available propaganda means, including newspapers, but not TV and radio which were prohibited by the election regulations, in order to attract voters. They set up electoral headquarters in tents or camps throughout the ten-day period (29 January 2005 to 9 February 2005) of the first phase of the elections in Riyadh Region. These headquarters were set up in banquet halls, guest houses, hotels, or in huge tents in prominent places in their neighbourhoods (Pictures 6.6, 6.7, 6.12 and 6.18). Those camps were equipped with audio and photographic presentation tools, in addition to food courts. Some of the candidates signed contracts with agencies to service the attendees and assist in organising and arranging the place. During those ten days, there was a major economic boost around the country where newspapers, hotels, banquet halls, cafeterias, restaurants, advertising agencies and calligraphers were given an unprecedented load of work (Riyadh municipal elections encyclopaedia, 2005, pp. 314-320 & p. 410, *Riyadh,* 30 January 2005, *Al Jazirah*, 19 March

2005, *Al Yaum,* 25 February). It should be noted, however, that the traditions of feeding and hospitality which might be interpreted perhaps as a form of bribery in the West, are part of the cultural traditions of Saudi Arabia.



Picture 6.6
Luxury banquet hall full of attendees with candidate's picture prominent in background
(Alkhudairi, 2007(b))

Candidates' electoral tactics

Having looked at how the candidates prepared their campaigns, it is worth looking at their campaigning tactics. Electoral campaign organisers thought that the intensity of the camp's attendees would be evidence of the success of the campaign, which would increase their candidates chances of winning, so they followed tactics listed below to attract the public to those camps.

The first of those tactics were the lectures that were delivered by well-known preachers in the country. The lectures were diversified between religious, scientific, literary, cultural and economic development, and addressed the subjects of public service, honesty, the importance and legality of the election process, as well as the media's duty towards this political process. One of the famous preachers was Sheikh Ayed Al-Qarni who visited some of the candidates'

camps in Riyadh and gave various lectures, including a lecture entitled 'Yes to elections' (Picture No. 6.8) (*Al Jazirah*, 4 February 2005, saudielections.com).



Picture 6.7
Festivities at a candidate's tented head quarter in the Eastern Province
(*Al Yaum*, 25 February 2005)

Some candidates gave speeches in their camps to attract people. While some of these lectures were appropriate for the event, others were not. Those lectures dealt with the torment of the grave, the horrors of hellfire, marriage, health and the prevention of diseases, and the dangers of smoking, obesity, losing weight, the risk of radiation on wildlife, and the interpretation of dreams. Critics considered these topics were not relevant to the subject of municipal elections (*Riyadh*, 6 & 16 February 2005, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 8 February 2005, *Elaph*, 24 February 2005).

Other candidates hosted actors, artists and football players, poets, folk performers and traditional singers (using a traditional musical instrument called 'Rababa') and paid them large sums of money, sometimes not less than 10,000 riyals per night (£1500) (alarabia.net, Pictures No. 6.9 and No. 6.10).

Some of the well-known people in this field were the folklore narrator Mohammed Alsherhan and the poet, Dr Abdul Rahman Al-Ashmawi, both of whom made their contributions in many candidates' camps in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam. Moreover, camps were full of recreational activities such as competitions, puzzles, religious poetry, and sometimes followed by awards or donations of valuable gifts. Another kind of activity was made by a candidate in Dammam: Khalifa Al Dossari, organised and funded a wedding ceremony for ten young grooms and gave pocket money for every one of them (Picture No. 6.11, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 30 January 2005 & 2 February 2005, *Al Yaum*, 21 February 2005 & 25 February 2005, *Al Watan*, 3 February 2005, *Riyadh*, 16 February 2005, *Al Hayat*, 28 February 2005, *Al Madinah*, 9 January 2005, *Okaz*, 5 February 2005 & 18 April 2005).



Picture 6.8
Poster of Sheikh Al-Qarni lecture held in a candidates' camp



Picture 6.9
Poster of a programme for children in one of the candidates' camps



Picture 6.10
Poster as invitation to poets perform at a candidates' camps
(Alkhudairi, 2007(b)

According to *Al Hayat* newspaper, these tactics attracted a large number of people to those electoral camps, but the majority of those audiences were not interested in the electoral process or the candidates' electoral programmes. They were there to listen to the poetry or have good meals. The event was considered to be pure entertainment, rather than part of an electoral campaign. Evidence of this can perhaps be taken from the fact that all the candidates

who used the method of putting on popular poetry to bring voters to their headquarters were at the bottom of the electoral results lists (*Al Hayat*, 12 February 2005).

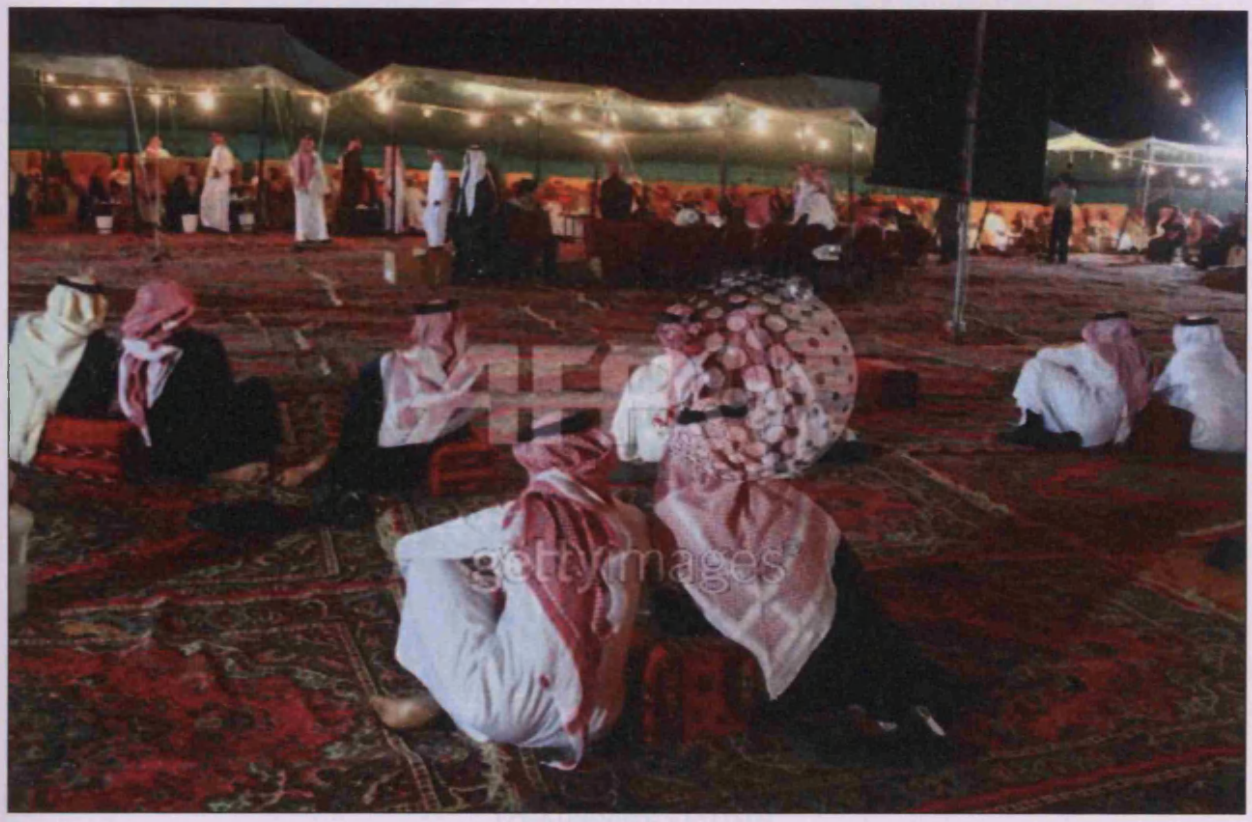


Picture 6.11
Wedding ceremony for ten grooms funded by candidate Khalifa Al Dossari
(*Al Yaum*, 21 February 2005)

Most of the well-known candidates spent generously on their newspaper advertisements. Their pictures in colour and programmes appeared on the whole of a front page or one or more interior pages in several national newspapers for several days. The cost of the entire page ranged from 50,000-70,000 riyals (£7,000-£11,000). This led some members of the community to question the value of that huge spending (*Al Hayat*, 11 February 2005, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 12 February 2005). However, other unfortunate candidates limited themselves to one single black and white advertisement in a single newspaper or did not have any at all.

Yasser Al-Yami, the Marketing Manager of *Okaz* newspaper, told *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper that his newspaper had followed the same policy as other Saudi newspapers at the time of the municipal elections. The proportion of candidate advertising jumped to 90 per cent of the published advertising in the newspaper, which was no more than 40 per cent at other times, adding that the number of pages of the newspaper reached 58 pages from 30

pages before the election season, and they had to issue a special supplement for the electoral advertisements and candidates' news (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 17 February 2005).



Picture 6. 12
Attendees relax at one the candidates' tented camps/ headquarters
(Alkhudairi, 2007 (b)

Different candidates' images appeared in different sizes and various positions in some of the newspapers. One of the candidates in Riyadh City, for example, tried to imitate the Western style and presented himself as a family man by picturing himself sitting among his sons, but most people did not understand the significance of it or the aim behind that picture (Al Ghamdi, 2005, p. 46, Picture No. 6.13). Another candidate appeared in a newspaper advertisement wearing an orange uniform and carrying a broom (as a garbage collecting man) to clean the streets (Picture No. 6.14). In addition, some of the well educated candidates established websites on the Internet and put up their curriculum vitas, highlighted by their scientific or academic experiences, their electoral programmes and contact numbers (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 16 February 2005, *Riyadh*, 6 February 2005).



Picture 6.13
A candidate as a family man
(Alkhudairi, 2007(b)

Family support was one of the tactics used in campaigning. The wives of some candidates supported their husbands through publicity among neighbours, relatives and work colleagues. Some of them helped in the preparation of their electoral programmes, or even supported them financially (*Al Jazirah*, 7 March 2005, *Riyadh*, 19 February 2005, *Al Yaum*, 15 February 2005).

A final tactic was alliances with journalists. Some candidates benefited from a friendship with some journalists or local news reporter by getting them to cover their electoral activities (Al Ghamdi, 2005, p. 52, Interviewee No. 7). However, Dr Ahmed Rashid, a professor of political communication at King Saud University, told *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper that there were a number of journalists who did not discuss the candidates' positions on some important social issues in depth, and did not carry out evaluations or analysis of their promises to the voters. The reason for this lack of interaction was not ulterior motives, but due to the inexperience and lack of knowledge of the journalists on how to report on such a campaign (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 17 February 2005).



Picture 6.14
A candidate dressed as a garbage collector man
(Alkhudairi, 2007(b))

Candidates' electoral programmes

In addition to the campaigning tactics, candidates' electoral programmes differed from one candidate to another. Depending on their financial, educational or social background, candidates tried to present their views or solutions for the issues they assumed would interest the voters. However, the electoral impact of such programmes was limited despite the attention that had been paid to some of those programmes and the amount of money that had been spent on them (Al Ghamdi, 2005, p. 48, *Riyadh*, 7 February 2005, *Al Yaum*, 2 March 2005, Picture No. 6.15). Some electoral programmes met the expectations of voters who expressed their views about the duty of the municipal council members and their work for the community. Those were the candidates of the Islamic groups (trend) reported by *Al Hayat* newspaper, who did well because they were more interactive and communicated with the social and religious needs of the community (*Al Hayat*, 12 February 2005).



Picture 6. 15
Newspaper caricaturing candidates' awareness as the speech is upside down
Al Yaum, 28 February 2005

At the same time, some candidates exaggerated and gave promises that fell outside the functions of the municipal council. For example, Dr Badr Bin Saidan, a famous real estate businessman in Riyadh, used a logo which said: 'Your voice = adequate house + clean environment' (Picture No. 6.16) and the young estate agent Hassan Mehdi promised voters that he would transform the Saudi citizen from a tenant of his house to an owner of it (Picture No. 6.17). Another candidate promised to make Riyadh city the best place for medical treatment with 'universal medicine'. Other liberal candidates promised to allow women to vote in elections, and give them the right to drive, to establish social clubs for them, and eliminate unemployment. Such exaggerations of the candidates' electoral programmes appeared in every phase of elections around the country (*Al Yaum*, 27 February 2005, *Al Jazirah*, 4 February 2005 and 11 February 2005, *Al Watan*, 29 & 30 January 2005, *Riyadh*, 2 February 2005 and *Okaz*, 17 April 2005). Thus, Nasser Al-Rashid, one of the candidates, told *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper that the electoral arena was filled with programmes that were not realistic and were closer to fiction, pointing out that some candidates needed 'magic sticks' to achieve their promises. He advised voters to distinguish between fantasy and real programmes and choose the right candidate, based on his efficiency, competence, integrity and sincerity (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 9 February 2005).



Picture 6.16
Candidates' full-page newspaper advertisements (Alkhudairi, 2007(b)



Picture 6.17
Candidates' full-page newspaper advertisements (Alkhudairi, 2007(b)

Candidates' excessive spending

An additional aspect was the excessive spending on some campaigns. The cost of the candidates' campaigns varied from one campaign to another depending on the amount of money the candidate had, the length of the campaign, the kind of activities going on inside the headquarter (tent/camp), the size of the camp, the kind of services provided to the public and the expense of the newspaper advertisements (Pictures No. 6.6, 6.12 and 6.18).

However, the cost of the electoral camps in the big cities ranged between 60,000 riyals to 400,000 riyals (£10,000-£70,000). For example, newspapers reported that the expenditures of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Suwailem in Riyadh City reached 100,000 riyals (£67,000), and Dr Ibrahim Algoaied said that his campaign cost 270,000 riyals (£45,000). In Jeddah, Hassan Al-Zahrani's campaign cost 153,000 riyals (£25,500), and Dr Abdul Rahman Yamani campaign's cost 150,000 riyals (£25,000). In Medina, Dr Hamza Hafiz's campaign cost 57,000 riyals (£9,500), the campaign of Dr Mohammed Al Maghamsi reached 73,000 riyals (£12,166), and the Engineer Abdul Aziz Alloukisi spent 136,000 riyals on his campaign (£22,666). Moreover, Algasabi, a winning candidate in Riyadh city, told the researcher that he spent about one million riyals on his campaign (£166,000, *Okaz*, 5 &17 February 2005, *Al Watan*, 2 March 2005, *Al Yaum*, 15 & 28 February 2005, Interviewee No. 27).



Picture 6.18
Crowded camp in the Southern Province
(*Al Jazirah,* 1 March 2005)

Signs of luxury were evident in some of the candidates' electoral camps or tents, where different kinds of food were served in a luxurious open buffet style in addition to the traditional way. One newspaper reported that a candidate in Hafr Albaten, a small town 600 km north of the capital, had spent 70,000 riyals (£11,000) on a lavish dinner to voters (*Al Yaum*, 28 February 2005). That excessive spending became a subject of criticism and even humour among citizens and media reporters (Picture No. 6.19). Tourkey Al Dakheel wrote on the Alarabiya TV website:

> The pictures and commercials of some candidates match the number of the population in Riyadh, about four million people. The electoral headquarters, mostly mobile tents, were provided with different temptations to entice a greater number of voters which would be clearly seen by others. Food options were there from the traditionally cooked lamb (Mufatah), where the whole lamb was placed in a large dish surrounded by different types of rice and bread, to modern round tables based near buffet lines. Photos of voters were not limited to billboards, advertising banners and newspaper pages, but included photos of candidates printed on the water bottles and distributed among their headquarters' attendees. These kind of electoral headquarters were full of thousands of people, compared to tens in some neighbourhoods who did not have food or money (alarabiya.net, 9 February 2005).

On the other hand, those candidates who had little money rented small tents or halls for some days, especially at the end of the first week, or in the final days of the campaigning period. In their camps, only tea, coffee, dates, sweets, and soft drinks were served for voters (*Al Watan*, 14 February 2005).



Picture 6.19
Newspaper caricature criticises candidates' food strategy
Al Watan, 8 February 2005

Thus, large sums of money were spent in the Saudi elections. According to *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper, candidates spent nearly a quarter of a billion riyals (£40 million) up to 32.5 million riyals (£5 million) was spent on commissions for institutions and intermediary propaganda agencies between the candidates and the media. Riyadh City spent 40 per cent on advertising spending, or 100 million riyals (£17 million). In Jeddah city, the second biggest city in the country, the amount of spending on electoral campaigns was more than 150 million riyals (£25 million)(*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 10 February 2005).

In the light of the previous literature it could be asserted that the way the majority of the candidates' electoral campaigns were conducted could not be described as professional. Some campaign strategies and tactics were primitive and too similar. Consequently, they failed to convince attendees to vote for specific candidates or distinguish one from another. However, some well-implemented electoral campaigns attracted voters and achieved their objectives.

Municipal elections in the media

Having looked at some aspects of the municipal elections, it is also important to look at how the media portrayed the election process. Saudi elections triggered, from the first day of the King's decree, a wave of debate among journalists, writers and observers. The Saudi media, which is controlled by the government, responded to the royal decree as a 'giant step' as the Saudi newspapers *Arab News* and *Al Watan* described it (*Arab News*, 14 October 2003, *Al Watan*, 1 December 2004). A large proportion of writers welcomed this decision and considered it an important step towards real reform and participation in governance. They asked the Saudi Government to take further decisions to allow people to elect the entire municipal council and other governmental bodies such as the district council and Shura (consultation) council.

Al Khuthailah (2005), a Saudi academic and weekly columnist for *Al Jazirah Newspaper*, defended the first Saudi democratic move and asserted that, even with its limitations, democracy remained a civilized option to express political participation, which can be developed over time. She wrote:

> The political leadership in the Kingdom is quite aware of the requirements at this stage. It is convinced of reform as the only way to bring political deadlock out of the bottleneck. It is equally convinced of the necessity of the participation of women in every effort that supports this tendency towards reform. This is evident in the fact that government and work regulations do not discriminate between men and women in terms of job opportunities, rights, and duties. The point is the political leadership has

> its own vision with regard to delaying women's participation. (American Behavioural Scientist, 5 February 2005).

Another well known writer, Turki Al-Hamad, wrote in *Asharq Al-Awsat* Newspaper about the importance of the King's decision:

> This sort of beginning is a distinguished jump by the political system in Saudi Arabia. The political circumstances surrounding the Gulf area require the renewal, reform and restoration of the vitality of the state. I consider it a strategic decision (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 20 October 2003).

Furthermore, a columnist in *Al Watan* newspaper felt that the King's decision was the beginning of change and reconstruction, and was similar to the analogy of the Perestroika announced by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989 (*Al Watan*, 22 October 2004).

On the other hand, there were writers who thought that the decision was a small step, but that gradual reform was required. They thought the government's move inadequate, after the long wait for public participation, and that municipal councils did not deserve such efforts because only half of the members would be elected. Al Ghamdi (2005) stated that when the decision was taken to elect half of the members of the municipal councils it was ignored by the majority of the public and the media writers because the present generation did not understand the term the 'Municipal Council' and did not realise the significance of the elections. But after almost a year, people started discussing the elections and nomination and mass media and column writers started analysing and praising that decision (p. 26). One columnist doubted the aim behind the elections and talked about some of the violent and failed experiences of neighbouring countries. Al Khushiban in *Al Watan* newspaper thought that the elections were a double-edged sword, and could be followed by the presence of politicisation, partisanship and the revival of tribal conflict, regionalism and sectarianism. He warned the government that raising people's awareness regarding the importance of elections would lead to the restructuring of tribalism, and regionalism would come back again (*Al Watan*, 17 October 2003). However, Alhilwa in *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper wrote: 'there is no fear of partisanship. It is the nature of elections and democratic choices'. The writer felt that the 'local elections will strengthen the national unity, through melding all citizens' demands, with different religious interests or social backgrounds, into one national interest' (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 16 October 2005).

For most of the Islamist writers, there was hesitation in welcoming the King's decision to hold the elections, but eventually they realised the importance of participating in the process,

so as not to let other challenging groups or factions take advantage of such an important opportunity. They examined the 'legality of the elections and several Fatwas (legal decisions) called for participation and some saw the elections as an intervention from the West which had no role in Islam' (Al Ghamdi, 2005, p. 29).

It is important to note that the conduct of the first phase of the municipal elections coincided with the beginning of the International Conference on Terrorism Warfare, which was called for by Saudi Arabia and took place in Riyadh from 5-8 February 2005 and was opened by Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz (the current King). The conference was attended by high profile delegations from many countries and attracted the coverage of the global media. Also, it was an opportunity for international mass media correspondents to convey to their people a detailed picture of the Saudi elections (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 3 February 2005).

However, foreign media networks differed in their coverage of the municipal elections. Some networks described the decision to introduce elections as a hasty one that was taken under pressure from home and abroad, and claimed that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had edged towards reform, but others saw the Saudi elections as the right first move towards political reform and real democracy. The BBC reported in the first phase of the elections that 'many members of the public responded with a cautious welcome and opposition groups saw the move as merely a token gesture' (BBC News, 4 February and 21 April 2005). But the BBC also quoted the British ambassador to the Kingdom saying, 'the Saudis are doing in fifty years what took us in Western Europe five hundred years, so they ought to be helped and encouraged' (BBC Monitoring, 11 February 2005). *Voice of America Radio* was enthusiastic about the elections and described it as an opportunity for Saudis to choose: 'it is the first time Saudis will have a voice in their government – even though women, who represent half of the country's population, are not eligible to vote. However, voter interest has been low, with less than a quarter of eligible voters registering in the Riyadh Region' (VOA, 10 February 2005). Also, the radio reported in March 2005, that many Saudis said they were participating in the elections in the hopes that their voices would be heard (VOA, 3 March 2005).

Some networks looked at the elections as a democratic reform. The BBC described the municipal elections as one step toward democracy: 'Saudis vote on Thursday in phase one of their first ever municipal elections, seen as a bid to answer calls for greater democracy.' Also, 'Saudi Arabia is holding its first nationwide municipal elections, as the government aims to introduce elements of democracy in the desert kingdom' (BBC News, 10 February 2005).

Star Tribune, an American newspaper, described the Saudi elections as a 'hint of democracy' and reported in detail how the Saudis dealt with this event:

> When Saudis in the Riyadh Region vote today in the country's first nationwide elections, they will have registration cards, vote behind privacy curtains, drop ballots in boxes designed according to international standards and choose among candidates who ran Western-style campaigns, including posters, phone text messages and newspaper ads (*Star Tribune*, 10 February 2005).

However, *The New York Times* expressed its uncertainty towards the Saudi elections and described it as 'not exactly a democratic revolution' and expected that the elections would end up being more than a 'symbolic'. The newspaper wrote:

> The elections on Thursday were for only half the members of municipal councils and women were not allowed to vote. Still, Saudi Arabia embarked on its first nationwide voting, and the exercise may end up being more than symbolic (*The New York Times*, 10 February 2005).

Thus, it is clear from the previous literature that the Saudi election process was a controversial issue and there were different opinions about its importance, conduct and future.

Election outcome

As stated earlier, almost 17 per cent of the Saudi citizens participated in those elections among 4.5 million Saudis eligible to vote. Islamic groups achieved a massive victory over all other factions, including the liberals, businessmen and even tribes and clans. The Islamists were superior in management and had great potential in using all conditions for the success of their campaigns. Despite this, the Saudi municipal elections were considered an important step towards political reform and openness in Saudi Arabia (Menoret, 2006, Al Ghamdi, 2005, p. 55).

The election outcome triggered a deep concern, not only inside the country but also in the West, when media networks reported that Islamists took over the Saudi municipal elections. The *New York Times* described the electoral result as a process that was dominated by Islamist clerics, 'Clerics Sway Saudi Vote: Candidates backed by conservative clerics dominated the final stage of Saudi Arabia's landmark municipal elections, according to results announced Saturday...Many Islamists won seats in earlier municipal council polling elsewhere' (*The New York Times*, 24 April 2005).



Picture 6.20
A disabled citizen votes in the first election day in Riyadh city
Al Jazirah, 4 March 2005

This result might have upset some writers in the West, as George Gause (2005) argued in his article *Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?* He argued that a democratic process in the Middle East would probably result in Islamist governments unwilling to cooperate with Washington. He wrote:

> Administration officials, including President Bush, have often stated that the transition to democracy in the Arab world will be difficult and that Americans should not expect quick results. Yet whenever the Bush administration publicly defends democratization, it cites a familiar litany of Muslim-world elections – those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Saudi Arabia – as evidence that the policy is working. It will take years, however, for non-Islamist political forces to be ready to compete for power in these elections, and it is doubtful that this or any other U.S. administration will have the patience to see the process through. If it cannot show that patience, Washington must realise that its democratization policy will lead to Islamist domination of Arab politics. It is not only the focus on elections that is troubling in the administration's democracy initiative in the Arab world. Also problematic is the unjustified confidence that Washington has in its ability to predict, and even direct, the course of politics in other countries (Council of Foreign Affairs, 2005).

Here, the author thought that democracy will not be achievable in the Arab world in the short run and suggested that the United States must focus on pushing governments to make political space for non-Islamist parties to set down roots and mobilise voters.

Al Rasheed (2006) also in *Al-Quds Al-Aarabi*, an Arabic newspaper based in London, aggressively criticised the Saudi elections and described it as a means for the 'authoritarian

regime' to achieve its objectives. (*Al-Quds Al-Aarabi*, 15 May 2006). Further, Hamzawy (2005) expressed his negative expectations about the municipal elections as follows:

> Exclusion of women, low level of citizens' participations, trivial competences assigned to elected local councillors who are kept away from high politics and the dominance of tribal loyalties and religious inclinations in determining voters' preferences are some of the election characteristics. These elements dismiss any positive expectations about the impacts of the elections (Qantara, 2005).

Furthermore, some of the Saudi newspapers and internet websites reported that there were lists of names for specific candidates or what they called 'Golden Lists' which were sent to thousands of people in most cities around the country via the internet or text messages. Those lists had a major effect on citizens' decisions to vote for 'Islamic Candidates'. Saleh Al Khathlan, the Head of the political science department at King Saud University, told *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper that ideological currents played a role in the candidates' selection in the municipal election days in major cities across coalitions-named Golden Lists. He added 'the social networks facilitate the winning of some candidates in the counties and small villages' (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 14 June 2008). Steve Coll, a columnist at *Washington Post*, reported that in Jeddah elections, the Golden List of religiously approved candidates started as anonymously dispatched text messages on thousands of cell phones. He went on to explain:

> The spammed messages were sometimes accompanied by a religious homily or endorsement. The candidates were then backed in speeches and media interviews by religious scholars... For some of the businessmen, tribal leaders, lawyers, professors and independents who sought to compete with the Golden List slate, the last phase of the campaign became a struggle to defend their city's tradition of trade and tolerance against rivals who were better organized, in touch with ordinary voters (*Washington Post*, 24 April 2005).

Shaheen (2005) also in *Alkhaleej*, an Emirates newspaper, wrote that the candidates whose names appeared on Golden Lists, which were rumoured to be backed by religious scholars and sheikhs, had won most of the council seats in Riyadh and Jeddah. Surprisingly, they won only four of the eleven seats in Al Qassim Region, which historically is the main stronghold of the 'Mutawa' Islamists (*Alkhaleej*, 24 April 2005). By 'Mutawa' the writer referred to the conservative religious person.

However, the final report of the non-governmental board, the National Council for Election Monitoring, which is an independent council was formed of many scientific associations' elected members in many universities around the country, revealed that the government in Saudi Arabia did not intervene, directly or indirectly in the electoral process, including any

impact on the integrity, transparency and validity of the elections. Also, the council did not observe any intervention in the conduct of that electoral process, which could be attributed to the formal authority (Final report of the municipal elections monitoring, p. 35). In addition, Al Ghamdi (2005) stated that the municipal election process had a great deal of integrity and transparency despite the press rumours that some businessmen bought votes. He concluded that there was not any kind of fraud or manipulation in the results and there were no incidents of violence during the elections, as is common in Arab countries' elections (p. 65). Hanley (2005), in her article for the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* stated that the elections showed the maturity of voters who were unswayed by money, extremist agenda or tribal affiliations:

> They ignored candidates who made unrealistic promises or had no platform, even if they poured millions of riyals into campaigning. Of the seven winners in the city of Riyadh, five have doctorate degrees and four are Western-educated. Those who won knew their neighbourhoods well and had been involved in charities or community work before the elections were even on the horizon (*Washington Report on Middle East Affairs,* April 2005).

Batarfi (2005), a columnist for the *Arab News*, stated that the winners are 'well-educated, smart and have integrity. They are not rich, but they have rich records of public service... Tribal and family prestige and connections were not factors' (*Arab News*, 15 April 2005). A similar opinion was expressed by Hezam (2005) who wrote on the Alarabia TV website that some Saudi liberals admitted that it's not a surprise to see such results, since this is the first election of its kind in an Islamic country. The writer gave more weight to the efficiency and organisational capacity shown by the Islamist candidates (Alarabiya TV, 25 February 2005).

Despite the criticism of the municipal election outcome, political bodies and figures praised the government's move towards political reform. The U.S. President George W. Bush praised the Saudi elections during a telephone conversation with Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz (the current king), an American newspaper reported: 'Bush's praise for municipal elections in Saudi Arabia' (*Boston Globe*, 20 September 2006). The British Government welcomed the elections; Foreign Secretary Jack Straw saying in February 2005, 'they [are] an important step in the growing involvement of the people in political decision-making. I look forward to the development of this process; and I particularly welcome the Government of Saudi Arabia's commitment to extend it to women (BBC News, 10 March 2005).

Furthermore, The French Foreign Ministry commended the elections in Saudi Arabia, describing it as 'a positive development' and referred to the process as 'a stage of reform and opening in the Kingdom' (*Al Hayat*, 12 February 2005). Also, Mustafa Bin Almaleeh, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programmes and the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in the Kingdom said, 'The United Nations has supported the organisation of elections in the Kingdom that was held for the first time by bringing experts in the elections.' He added that he sent reports to the United Nations about the election process, describing it as a 'Public democratic work'. Finally, United Nation's expert on elections Dr Ali Aljarbawi praised the 'progress of the ongoing phase one of Saudi's first comprehensive municipal elections' (*Almoslim.net*, 13 December 2004, *Riyadh*, 26 November 2004, *Al Hayat*, 14 February 2005).

Citizens' non-participation in the media

Despite the enthusiastic efforts by the government, candidates and the media, the election process suffered from a high level of non-participation among citizens (BBC News, 23 December 2004). Although the outcome of the elections showed that only 17 per cent of the eligible Saudi voters cast their votes in the 2005 municipal elections, citizen non-participation was expected even before the elections. In an internet poll conducted by *Okaz* newspaper in November 2004, a Saudi newspaper revealed that many Saudis did not plan to vote in the municipal elections because they were sceptical about the municipal council's role. According to *Okaz*'s poll, 56 per cent of the 554 polled participants said they would not vote, while 34 per cent said they would. The majority of the participants, 65 per cent, said they did not think the municipal councils would have a big role in serving society, perhaps reflecting a lack of understanding of the elections and the authority of the council (*Okaz*, 1 November 2004). BBC monitoring picked up a report from a disappointed reform advocate and journalist, Mansur Al-Nugaidan who stated that analysts blamed the non-participation on the lack of information about municipal councils: 'Some also believe it [the election] is an overdue step which does not match the aspirations for wider reforms' (BBC Monitoring, 23 December 2004). That might be true, the channel commented, because many people expected to have elections in other important bodies of the government such as ministries, universities and *Shura* consultant council. BBC News also described the municipal elections as a democratic event with a small number of voters: 'The polls mark a milestone for the absolute

monarchy, but only a small proportion of eligible voters took part in this first limited exercise in democracy' (BBC News, 23 April 2005).

Some Saudi intellectuals stated that there was an apathetic attitude among citizens towards elections. Abdulrahman Al-Humaidi, Associate Professor, King Saud University, one of the losing candidates in Riyadh city, praised the government's efforts and blamed the people's interest for the low turnout. He wrote:

> It may not be unreasonable to say that the leadership of Saudi Arabia is more ambitious than the citizens in launching reform programmes, originating national participation in the decision-making and accelerating social mobility, leading to civil society. The evidence for that is the lack of people's enthusiasm to register in the election, to be able to nominate themselves or elect their candidates to the municipal councils. Citizens' apathy was clear despite the government's huge efforts (*Riyadh*, 1 December 2004).

Al Ghamdi (2005) pointed out that the voting rate in the Saudi municipal elections was below the universal standard, which usually ranges between 35 per cent and 50 per cent among those eligible to vote. In the last municipal elections that took place in Kuwait on 2 June 2005, for example, people's participation did not exceed 50 per cent (p. 37). Al Ghamdi mentioned a couple of reasons that might have stopped citizens from casting their votes. Those were the lack of political experience among Saudi citizens who were not used to such practice, the unseen role of the municipal councils in people's lives and the limited role of the elected members. The ineffectiveness of the election media campaign and the phenomenon that in some rural or tribal areas some young citizens did not register themselves to stand against their high profile relatives, tribal leaders and clans might also have contributed to the apathy (p. 37). The spokesperson of the Local Elections Committee in Jeddah Province said that the weak demand for registration in the elections was due to the lack of political experience among citizens in Saudi Arabia. People did not have experience of elections, as such an experience was stopped at the municipal council level a long time ago and did not continue in other governmental bodies until now (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 15 March 2005, Picture No. **6**.21).

The absence of election culture was mentioned by Abdullah Dahlan (2009), a columnist at *Al Watan* newspaper, who said that the frustration and lack of optimism regarding the work of the municipal councils also resulted from the people's past experiences, which might have increased their reluctance to participate in municipal elections (*Al Watan*, 4 January 2009).



Picture 6.21
Newspaper caricature criticises voter lack of political experience
Thank you for the food. I will vote for you.
What do you mean? This a wedding ceremony and this is the "groom"!
(*Al Jazirah*, 10 February2005)

In addition, Haya Almonea thought that the missing concept of the 'common good' among Saudis was the main reason for people's apathy, and added:

> Sure we do not have an electoral culture and I'm not ashamed to admit it. Some people did not believe that the municipal councils represent any actual importance, especially in decision-making… Some of us do not see the importance of participating in planting trees or gardens or follow up the cleaning of the neighbourhood. The problem is that some of us do not care about public matters; they focus only on their personal interest (Riyadh, 5 February 2005).

Al Nabulsi (2005) explained in his article on *Middle East Transparent* that the Saudi people were not interested in the political event itself and thought that the reason could be explained as being deeply embedded in the cultural structure of the Saudi society. He wrote:

> The registration turnout was very low in spite of the fact that the elections were well organised, their procedures were easy, there were no state candidates, as well as the fact that it was a beautiful spring… The number of those who voted in all cities of the Kingdom was half a million voters. They represent two and a half per cent of the population of twenty million people. While the demand for shares in 'Albelad' new bank was about forty per cent (8.2 million subscribers)… The reason for the political reform delay in Saudi Arabia is the social structure and religious extremism (Metransparent, 21 May 2005).

Finally, Menoret (2006) confirmed some of the reasons that the previous authors mentioned and thought that the short period of the registration process was among those main reasons that might have increased Saudis' non-participation in the municipal elections. She wrote:

> Given the limited authority and prerogatives of future municipal councils, the exclusion of women as well as the scheme of electing half of the municipal council

> members while the other half would still be appointed, many Saudi citizens took a sceptical or apathetic view of the elections. People were reluctant to register and vote... It is true that the first elections to take place after many long years of governmental authority are not, in general, occasions for strong political mobilisation since electoral habits are not yet firmly rooted in political practice. In addition, potential voters were deflected from voting by the short time period for registration – just one month between November and December 2004. The time period between registration and the elections did not encourage a large voter turnout, either (arab-reform.net, 27 December 2006).

In the light of the previous literature, one might conclude that the reasons that could have contributed to the Saudis' non-participation were related to the Saudi voters' personal characteristics (political awareness, knowledge, interest and previous experience), social circumstances (social values and norms) and the conduct of the election process (strategies, procedures and regulations).

Conclusion

As a result of many political circumstances in the Middle East, such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the complex situation that resulted afterwards, with the imposition of American 'democratisation' in the area, Saudi Arabia found it wise to take more steps towards political reform (VOA, 3 March 2005, Al Rasheed, 2006, Al Agaili, 2004). So the late King Fahd (died in 2005) decided in 2003 that citizens would have the chance to elect half of the members of the municipal councils around the country through elections.

Some writers, journalists and citizens speculated that the real objectives of the elections were only to please the Western allies and there would not be a true political reform. Those observers claimed that the King's decision to have the first municipal elections within one year was rushed and did not anticipate the country's ability to organise such an important national event. In addition, that political reform made it easy for Islamists to take over the municipal councils, which was not a good sign for similar future practices, in spite of the fact that a large number of Saudis believed that there were only limited roles for those elected members. Moreover, a large proportion of those observers thought that there was a shortage of information regarding the importance and roles of the municipal councils, the duties of the candidates and what advantages the public would gain from the election process. The electoral outcomes also confirmed the political control held by the traditional and tribal candidates in some rural areas of the country, as well as only a small number of citizens who participated in those elections.

On the other hand, people noted that the Saudi elections were a successful event for many reasons. The municipal election process was transparent without any kind of fraud, manipulation or violence. That event educated Saudi citizens about a new democratic practice and showed their readiness to participate and succeed in any future elections. Furthermore, the elections showed the government's ability to organise similar national events in the future and the rich experience gained by all organisers might be used in upcoming elections.

However, as we have seen, only a small proportion of Saudi voters participated in those elections and there were some factors that scholars, writers and journalists thought may have increased citizens' non-participation in those elections. Also, the outcome raised many questions about citizens' political awareness, interest and understanding of the elections, as well the effectiveness of the election process strategies and tactics. Thus, this study is going to examine some of the major aspects of the election process and look closely at factors that stopped citizens from participating in those first public elections in Saudi Arabia.

One might conclude that the Saudi municipal elections was one of the most significant events that Saudi Arabia has experienced in its history. Municipal elections had become a controversial issue and generated extensive debates inside and outside the country. I hope that by discussing these aspects and the factors that might have led to the Saudis' non-participation in 2005 municipal elections, this study will provide insight and lessons for the second round of the municipal elections that will be held in 29 September 2011.

Chapter Seven will investigate whether a lack of political awareness was one of the main factors that contributed to Saudi citizens' limited participation in 2005 municipal elections

CHAPTER SEVEN

CITIZENS' LACK OF POLITICAL AWARENESS

CITIZENS' LACK OF POLITICAL AWARENESS

Introduction

This chapter is going to investigate the first factor that might have increased Saudi citizens' non-participation in 2005 municipal elections. The lack of political awareness among a significant proportion of the citizens might have contributed to their high low level of participation in that political process. The lack of political awareness, as I argue in this chapter, is taken to be the lack of understanding of the electoral process in terms of its importance and conduct as well as the low level of interest among those citizens during the elections. This chapter is going to analyse respondents' perceptions through a number of questions that they were asked about their interest, understanding and evaluation of the municipal election process. This chapter reveals findings based on the discussion of some sub-variables that draws a picture of Saudis' understanding and participation in the municipal elections. These sub-variables are: interest in the elections, discussion with friends, registration and voting in the elections, people's reasons not to participate in the elections and people's perceptions of how the elections were conducted.

Before discussing the study findings, a brief look at the academic literature on the role of political awareness and knowledge and on people's political interest and behaviour will be carried out to highlight the conceptual framework of this chapter.

Nicholson et al. (2006) argued that the validity of democracy depends on the quality of its citizens, especially the amount of knowledge they have about politics. That is because without an adequate understanding of politics, 'citizens are less capable of voting in a way that furthers political representation and political participation' (p. 124). Scheufele et al. (2002) also argued that any form of democracy is 'grounded on the premise that the members of the public actively participate in the political process, and that decision-making of the public is based on well-informed and sophisticated political reasoning' (p. 428). The authors noted that there is a widespread political ignorance and lack of issue-awareness among the mass public. More importantly, a 'considerable proportion of the citizenry has no particular opinions at all, or neutral opinions at best, on specific policy issues' (p. 428).

Bartle (1997) argued that one particularly important source of different voting behaviour among people arises from differences in their political awareness (p. 1). Gagel (2007) defined political awareness as a critical awareness, independent judgement and political engagement.

He stated that political awareness is formed through the 'recognition of one's own interests' and experience of 'social concepts' and 'relationship of governance' and the politically aware and informed person should not be a 'passive object' of politics (Gagel, citied in Byram, p. 163). Moreover, Zaller (1992) stated that there are many uses of the phrase 'political awareness' that 'muddies' research in the political arena. It has been used to refer to voters' awareness of their 'real material interests', interest in politics and to the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics and understands what they have encountered (p. 21). Zaller also noted that scholars have used a wide variety of concepts and measures to capture 'political awareness' such as political expertise, cognitive complexity, political involvement, attentiveness, sophistication, and political perception. The author aded that the term 'political awareness', better than the others, 'seems to capture the key processes, in which an individual reception and comprehension of communications [is gleaned] from the political environment' (p. 21). Zaller examined the effects of political awareness on voting and belief systems, as measured by education, political participation, information, media exposure and self-described interest in politics. The author found that political awareness is best measured by how much factual information the person has about politics, which in turn, is critical for intellectual engagement with politics (p. 22).

In addition, Nicholson (2003) argued that political awareness requires ability (e.g. cognitive skills), motivation (e.g. political interest), and opportunity (e.g. depth of media coverage). The author explained that environment plays a vital role. Thus, the opportunity for political learning 'depends on the amount and type of information available in the political environment, which may powerfully shape electoral behaviour and opinions' (p. 260). Bennett (1994) also stated that there are some factors which may influence the individual's political awareness. These are: age, race, gender, intelligence, education, occupation, family income, strength of partisanship, attention paid to the campaigns, general political interest and reliance on mass media for political information as well as participation in the campaigns. Bennett concluded that, 'political awareness and participation are probably mutually reinforcing, even the simple act of voting can apparently heighten political awareness' (p. 3).

Another aspect of political awareness was investigated by Lee (2003) who argued that the individual should be psychologically involved with politics to participate fully in any electoral activity. Lee explained that psychological involvement refers to the attitudinal

orientations of an individual citizen, including his/her political awareness, his/her sense of political outcomes, and his/her interest in political matters. The author stated that several political scientists (such as Almond and Verba, 1965, Hagner and Pierce, 1982 and Verba et al., 1971) have found that the higher the psychological involvement in politics is, the greater the likelihood that an individual will have a better understanding of politics and become politically engaged (p. 93).

It has been argued that political knowledge is an integral part of the people's political awareness. Gronlund and Milner (2004) stated that the political knowledge gap is likely to be pronounced in many transitional democracies, where the 'level of civic engagement tends to be low, inequalities of all kinds exist and the overall quality of political representation in serious doubt' (p. 390). Larcinese (2007) argued that political salience and the coverage given by mass media play a very important role in increasing voters' knowledge of political matters, in spite of the media-negligible direct impact on turnout. The author stated that political knowledge relies crucially on the supply of information: 'the availability of political information increases voters' political knowledge and, in this way, increases informed turnout' (p. 406). This process, according to Larcinese, improves the quality of democratic governance, which consists of 'an informed public opinion and an accurate transmission of information from the mass media' (p. 406).

The media working environment could increase people's political knowledge, which of course increases political awareness. Leeson (2008), in his study in thirteen central and eastern European countries examined the relationships between citizens' political knowledge, political participation, voting turnout and media freedom. Leeson found that where a government owns a large share of media outlets and infrastructure, regulates the media industry and does more to control the content of news, citizens are more politically ignorant and apathetic. But where the media are less regulated and there is greater private ownership in the media industry, citizens are more politically knowledgeable and active (p. 155). Leeson's findings are crucial here because, as we have seen in Chapter Five, the Saudi Government monitors mass media, which might have adversely affected citizens' political awareness and decreased their participation in the municipal elections.

However, McCann and Lawson (2006) argued that there is a political knowledge-gap among citizens in democratic countries, where some citizens lack basic information about politics. Many people are ignorant of fundamental civic facts, such as 'how laws are made, the

identities of major political actors in the policymaking process, and what positions these actors hold' (p. 14). The authors explained that people with fewer resources such as income and education tend to be less informed about politics and they are less likely to be politically engaged and effective. Thus, McCann and Lawson (2006) suggest that reducing the 'knowledge gap' lies in the hands of political players (governments, parties and candidates). They wrote:

> In the weeks leading up to a major national election, candidates and party officials work tirelessly to draw people's attention to the race. Speeches and commercials are designed to reduce complex political matters to easy-to-digest messages, while broadcasters raise the salience and approachability of electoral politics by devoting more time to the campaign and to candidate debates (p. 18).

In Saudi Arabia, the situation was different at the time of the municipal elections. Despite the fact that the government launched an awareness media campaign, the effect of that campaign was very limited. Citizens were asking for more information about the election process and its procedures (*Okaz*, 22 July 2006, *Al Watan*, 20 & 23 December 2004, *Riyadh*, 10 March 2005). In addition, the majority of the candidates' campaigns were ineffective (Alkhudairi, 2007 (a), *Al Jazirah*, 11 February and 1 March 2005). The media campaign's messages and programmes were not successful in reaching the mainstream of the Saudi public. More detail on this issue will be discussed in the following chapter.

Having discussed the meaning, formation and importance of political awareness and its effects on people's voting behaviours, the findings of this study regarding Saudi citizens' political awareness and their participation in the municipal elections will be illustrated. As an integral part of their political awareness, citizens' interest in 2005 municipal elections will be discussed first.

Interest in the elections

As we have seen in the previous literature, interest in the election is one element of the political awareness component. The work of Nicholson (2003), Lee (2003) and Zaller (1992) showed that the individual citizen, to be politically aware, must be interested in politics. In line with this literature, one might assume that the lack of political interest among some Saudis could have contributed to their lack of political awareness which might have led to their low turnout . To test their interest in the municipal elections, participants were asked whether they were interested in the 2005 municipal elections or not. Their interest is measured on a five point scale as to how interested the individual was in the municipal

elections: very interested, somewhat interested, neutral, not interested and not at all interested. Their answers are given in Table 7.1 below:

Table 7.1

Respondents' interest in the elections	
	Percentage
Not at all interested	17.4
Not interested	23.0
Neutral	22.6
Somewhat interested	20.1
Very interested	16.4
Total	99.5
System missing	0.5
Total	100.0

The table above shows that more than one third of the respondents (36.5%) were interested in the municipal elections, while less than a half of the sample (40.4 %) was not interested in the elections and 22.6 per cent were neutral. This result shows that a majority of respondents (64.0 %) were either not interested in or neutral to the municipal elections[1]. In other words, a considerable proportion of the Saudi voters were not interested in the 2005 municipal elections because they might not be politically aware.

Moreover, when interviewees were asked about their evaluation of the citizens' interest in municipal elections, the majority of them agreed that there was a low level of awareness and interest in the elections among a considerable proportion of the citizens. That limited interest might have come as a result of the absence of crucial political knowledge about that political event.

One citizen, when asked about the reason for the low interest in the municipal elections among Saudis, said:

> In my opinion, a lack of political awareness among the majority of citizens is behind their low participation. Even those small numbers who voted had only a little

[1] A cross tabulation between people's interest and voting shows that 31.6 per cent of the respondents

> awareness about the elections. The people who did not vote were not interested in the elections, because they were more interested in business and stock markets than the municipal elections. Two additional factors influenced the elections: the religion and the tribe. At the time of the elections, if you were a candidate, whatever your financial or scientific status was, it was difficult for you to succeed without support from religious or tribal groups (Interviewee No. 54).

This view shows that there is a lack of political awareness among some Saudi citizens. Many of them chose not to vote in the elections because they might not have realised or understood the importance of the elections. They were more driven by socio-economic factors (religion, tribe, and business interest) than by their belief in the elections being a democratic process. As previously discussed in Chapter Five, Saudi Arabia is a conservative Islamic tribal country and there are various social norms and values that control society. In such a society, having public elections for the first time, it could be accepted that many citizens were ignorant about contemporary democratic practices. In the absence of political reform, people tended to fall back on more traditional religious and tribal values.

People's lack of interest in elections is a subject of significant research. Norris (2002) found that there is a decline in people's interest in election campaigns worldwide. The decline in political interest could be attributed to increasingly negative and insignificant coverage in the news media, or to changes in party campaigning (p. 138). Wolak (2006) argued that interest in the elections is up to the personal characteristics of the individual, but could be increased by encouraging political campaigns. Wolak wrote:

> The degree to which one enjoys following politics is in part an individual trait, but the desire to keep up with politics also can rise or fall depending on events in the political world. Here, the factors that explain interest are largely individually based, or if influenced by campaigns, driven by national themes such as the state of the nation or the personalities of the candidates, not candidate efforts on the campaign trail (p. 354).

Thus, one might assume that the lack of political knowledge among a considerable proportion of Saudi voters might have been an important factor behind their lack of understanding and interest in the municipal elections that resulted in their low participation in those elections.

Discussing the election process with friends

It has been argued that political conversations may stimulate participation by activating political awareness among citizens (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002). The degree to which people discuss elections with friends at the time of the elections could be another indicator of their political awareness or knowledge about politics, which of course affects their voting behaviour. According to Farrell and Schmitt-Beck (2002), personal discussion networks influence voting behaviour, independent of candidate evaluations and partisanship and shape the kinds of political messages received (p. 313). The authors also stated that friends, co-workers, fellow church members or neighbours have the potential for significant influence when they share information, spread the effects of their own campaign activation, and engage in conversation or debate about campaign issues. Farrell and Schmitt-Beck concluded that: 'while people often tend to talk about politics with those like-minded in political preferences, the election time represents a more heterogeneous environment for discussion and debate' (p. 314).

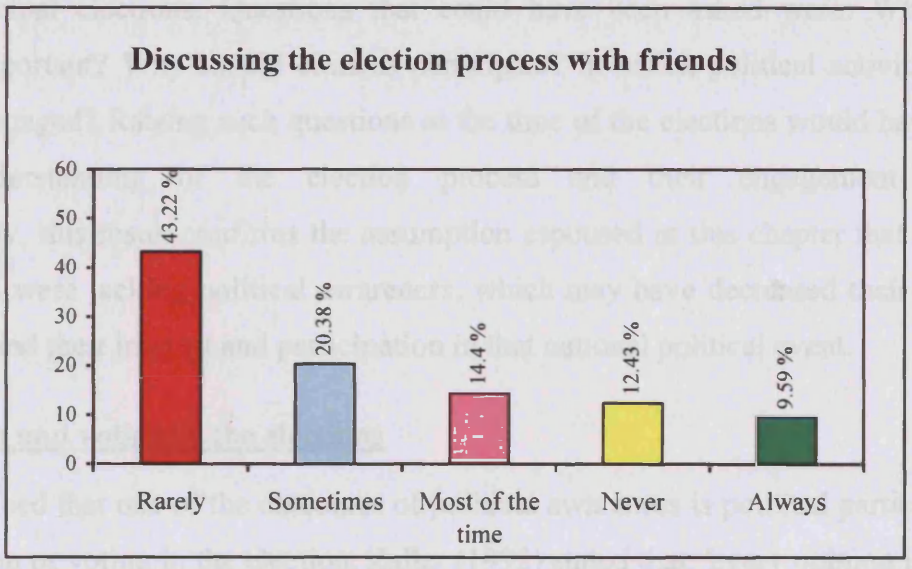
Moreover, Gamson (1992) argued that through informal discussion, friends provide information about important issues that produces a 'significant action' (p. 175). McKenzie (2004) noted that the effects on consciousness of social networks' interaction are evident in other studies of political behaviour. In his study of the African American social networks in churches he stated: 'black people use their interactions with one another to develop collective understandings of their political interests. These understandings constitute ideological stances, which inform strategic thinking about the political and social world' (p. 623).

Discussion with friends or colleagues about elections is not the only source of information that voters have. Farrell and Schmitt-Beck (2002) argued that the information used by electors when deciding how to vote could come from their everyday life experiences or their social environment. The mass media can give information to the public, but the author warned that television 'must never be overlooked as a dominant source of political information in modern democracy' (p. 183). In Saudi Arabia, the resources of information about elections were diverse and information about the elections was available in many forms. Publications from the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs were distributed in every polling centre around the country. With regard to the mass media, newspapers played a noticeable role in informing people about the election process and candidates more than TV

and radio. Shortage of budget and constraints of time were among the reasons for that problem (Interviewee No. 42).

In the light of the previous literature and to find out about the impact of Saudi social networks on voters' awareness, interest and voting behaviour in the municipal elections, I examined the effect of the election campaign context on political conversations by measuring how frequently citizens discussed politics with friends. I assumed that the frequency of discussion indicates the degree of interest among respondents in the elections, which shows how politically aware the person was. Respondents were asked how often they discuss elections with friends during the election period. Their answers were illustrated in Chart 7.1.

Chart 7.1



Bar Chart 7.1 shows that almost half of the respondents (43.22 %) rarely discussed the elections and one fifth of the respondents (20.38 %) sometimes discussed the elections. Also, more than one tenth (12.43 %) of the respondents stated that they never discussed elections with their friends. However, only 14.4 per cent of respondents discussed the elections most of the time and 9.59 per cent always discussed this issue with their friends. It is clear from the chart that a large number of Saudi voters did not discuss municipal elections with their friends because 55.65 per cent either discussed elections rarely or never discussed them with their friends[2].

[2] A cross tabulation between people's discussion of the elections and voting behaviour shows that 56.7 per cent of non-voters discussed elections with their friends comparing to 42.2 per cent of respondents

The previous results confirm that the effect of social networks on Saudi voters' understanding and interest in the municipal elections was limited. That is because only a small proportion of Saudi voters frequently discussed the election with their friends. This result echoes the work of Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) who argued that gathering information about governmental policies and political leaders requires a combination of money, time, skill, knowledge, social interaction and self-confidence from citizens. More importantly, because involvement in governmental affairs was not a routine practice for most voters, some citizens may have thought that their participation in government would be unlikely to affect political outcomes. As a result, some of them chose to remain rationally ignorant and did not participate (p. 12). Drawing on this fact, I argue that the limited political conversations among Saudis during the municipal elections season might have minimised the amount of information that they had about municipal elections. Questions that could have been asked were: Why were the elections important? Why should citizens participate? In which political activities should a person be engaged? Raising such questions at the time of the elections would have enhanced Saudis' understanding of the election process and their engagement afterwards. Unfortunately, this result confirms the assumption espoused in this chapter that some of the Saudi voters were lacking political awareness, which may have decreased their interactions with others and their interest and participation in that national political event.

Registration and voting in the elections

It can be argued that one of the outcomes of political awareness is political participation such as registration or voting in the election. Zaller (1992) stated that: 'every opinion is a marriage of information and predisposition, where information creates a picture of a given issue and predisposition motivates some conclusions about it' (p. 6). Furthermore, Larcinese (2007) argued that in democracy, public decisions are based on the preferences and the opinions of all the members of a polity. In addition, electoral participation is regarded as a measure of the quality of democratic governance and low turnout is seen as a symptom of limited attachment

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who discussed the elections and voted in the municipal elections. Also, a correlation between these two variables indicates that there is a significant negative relationship (sig. = -476) among them, which could mean that where discussion increased among people, the voting decreased. In other words, the effect of the discussion of the election process among Saudi voters on their decisions towards the elections was limited. However, discussing elections doesn't mean that citizens were politically aware. It might indicate that they were asking for more information about the election process or its procedures, as will be illustrated in Chart 7.2.

to public affairs. However, 'high participation is not always evidence of healthy democratic governance, because many dictatorial systems show extremely high turnout rates' (p. 387). That is because in such systems, people are usually forced to participate in any governmental political activities. Cohen (1983) argued that dictators see elections as a tool to control the population. For example, Milton Obote, a former Ugandan president, stated that elections are a way of controlling the people rather than being a means through which they could control him (p. 76). Also, Wanyande (2000) in his study of African authoritarian regimes stated that: 'it is more useful to see elections in African dictatorships as a means for recruiting the political elite or as ceremonial performances that help enforce citizen obedience, induce complicity, and socialise the electorate' (p. 110).

The role of political knowledge on voting behaviours was also examined by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) who stated that: 'knowledge is an instrumental good that helps to enlighten one's self-interest and to translate it into effective political action' (p. 218). The authors explained that political knowledge promotes political tolerance and active participation and helps citizens construct consistent opinions on different topics. Further, it helps citizens identify their true interests and link their attitudes with their participation. Delli Carpini and Keeter concluded that better informed citizens are more likely to vote where broader participation increases the legitimacy of the government to act on behalf of the society (p. 219). This idea was also examined by Lutz and March (2007) who stated that political participation is very important for the legitimacy of democracy, which will be affected by low turnout. They wrote:

> political participation is essential for democracy and there is a general feeling among many politicians and political commentators that high turnout is important for democracies. It is suggested that the legitimacy of democracy in general and the outcomes of elections in particular are undermined when many citizens do not participate (p. 539).

The authors' view stresses one of the fundamentals of democracy which is the participation of the people. When only a small number of people participate in elections, the outcome will not be truly representative of the will of the whole country, but only of the minority that will have the final word on important issues related to citizens' daily life. This situation contradicts the quality of democracy and its function in society. Moreover, Ikeda, et al. (2008) argued that there are some benefits voters can gain from their participation. Participation enables citizens to have more trust in the democratic system, generates greater

public satisfaction with democracy and enables citizens to understand the mechanisms of democracy better, and to be more aware of the players who are involved in democratic processes (p. 78).

As discussed above, the literature stresses the importance of people's political participation in elections and looks at that participation as an integral part of the health and legitimacy of contemporary democracy. Furthermore, citizens' political knowledge is a crucial factor in the decision-making processes. In other words, Political knowledge enhances people's interests in political matters, which most likely increases their political participation. Thus, when people participate, they not only legitimise the polity but will also be more knowledgeable and feel more satisfied about their own role within the governmental system.

Bearing these factors in mind, Saudi voters' turnout in the 2005 municipal elections could be looked at in two ways. Firstly, it is going to be an indication of the amount of information that the Saudi public received during the municipal election campaign. Secondly, it will be an important sign of the Saudi voters' interest in the municipal elections. All the findings draw a picture of the citizens' political awareness during that political process. To estimate this aspect, respondents were asked about their registration or voting in the municipal elections. Their answers are illustrated in Table 7.2 below.

Table 7.2

Did you register in the 2005 municipal elections?	
Yes	No
40.3 %	59.7 %

Table 7.2 shows that 40.3 per cent of the respondents were registered, whereas 59.7 per cent did not bother to register in the municipal elections[3]. Also, the study findings show that only 38.5 per cent of the respondents voted in the elections. It can be seen that there were more respondents who did not register or vote than who did and there was a number of respondents who registered but chose not to vote in the elections. This result confirms that there was an

[3] A cross tabulation between registration and people who did not vote shows that 11.7 per cent of them were women and 6.0 per cent were military personnel.

obvious disengagement among Saudi voters in the election process. This result echoes what Franklin (2004) pointed out:

> Low turnout appears to be seen as calling into question the civic-mindedness of a country's citizens and their commitment to democratic norms and duties. Indeed, falling turnout is often seen as a mark of disengagement, if not of actual disaffection (p. 2).

In addition to that, in the vast majority of interviews, respondents stressed the importance of political knowledge for citizens and blamed weak awareness campaigns for the low turnout. One winning candidate expressed his position as follows:

> I actually think that the participation ratio is low. Many people were not sure about the benefits of those elections. Other people did not understand that an election is the surest way for the true implementation of reform. Further, the media awareness campaign was weak and very short. I think we needed a period of six months to educate people and introduce them to that new political process (Interviewee No. 33).

Another interviewee thought that Saudi voters were driven by their ideological concepts and not by their understanding of the elections:

> I personally do not think that the people who voted in those elections were convinced of the importance of the elections. I think that there was a battle or competition between the liberal and Islamic currents in society. Most voters involved in that competition intended to support the religious group. Only a small number of voters who cast their vote really believed in the importance of the election and reform (Interviewee No. 9).

These views regarding the importance of political knowledge echo in the work of Freie (1997), who argued that through participation individuals acquire self-knowledge, become more tolerant, develop more positive feelings about themselves, their community and society (p. 102). However, Goldstein and Ridout (2002) and Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) thought that political participation rises or falls with the levels of mobilisation. Rosenstone and Hansen put it this way:

> The level of electoral participation in the United States waxes and wanes in response to the political mobilization. People participate in electoral politics in all its forms when they are mobilized to do so. When political mobilisation falls, so does the tendency of people to take part (p. 227).

It can be seen that low turnout is a sign of political disengagement and that lack of political information and mobilisation among voters might affect their knowledge, which may result in their apathetic attitudes towards political participation. Thus, the lack of political knowledge among some Saudi citizens might have affected their decisions to vote in the municipal

elections. Political knowledge relies crucially on the supply of information, where an unavailability of information decreases political knowledge and, in that way, limits voting behaviour. In that process, the political knowledge gap might have affected the political awareness of some Saudi citizens, which could have resulted in their apathetic attitude towards the 2005 municipal elections.

Non-voters' reasons for non-participation in elections

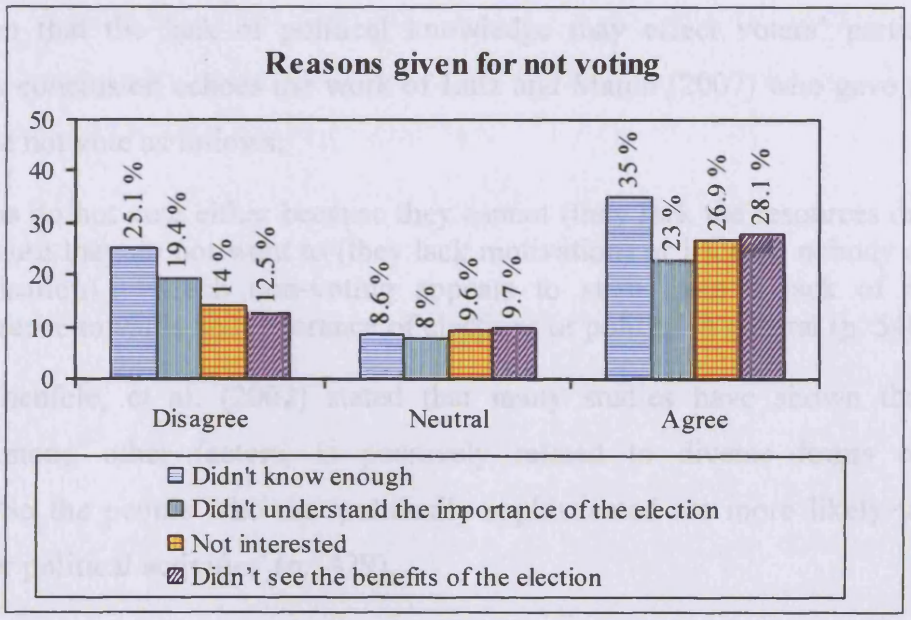
A lack of political knowledge and interest in the elections were among the factors that stopped some Saudi citizens from voting in the municipal elections. A lack of political knowledge among some non-voters might have hindered their political awareness and consequent participation. Gimpel and Schuknecht (2003) argued that although voting has been an easy form of participation, many in the US never bother to vote. For example, in the 1996 election, only 49 per cent of eligible voters cast their ballots and in 2000 turnout was about 51 per cent. The authors noted that this low turnout is a serious problem because if so few people vote, policy outcomes may not be representative of the preferences of the broader community (p. 472). Moreover, Fisher, et al. (2008) stated that when turnout is lower, it is the voters who are less knowledgeable about politics that are least likely to participate (p. 89).

Moreover, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) found that among the causes for low turnout are low personal motivation and interest, ignorance and lack of awareness, restrictions on registration, the absence of serious mobilisation efforts by political bodies and the location of polling centres (p. 227). In Saudi Arabia, as was explained earlier in Chapter Six, almost 17 per cent of Saudi citizens participated in municipal elections among 4.5 million Saudis eligible to vote (Menoret 2006). Thus, the lack of political awareness, as I assume in this chapter, might be among the reasons for the Saudis' apathetic attitudes towards those elections. Ineffectiveness of the election media campaign and the poor implementation of the candidates' electoral campaigns are the reasons that will be examined in the next two chapters.

For those Saudi citizens who did not register or vote in the municipal elections, a lack of political knowledge and a low degree of interest might be among the reasons for their lack of political awareness, which might have decreased their participation in the elections. Respondents were asked to give their reasons not to vote in the elections. The bar chart below (7.2) shows their answers. The chart shows that there were major reasons that stopped

non-voter respondents from registration or voting in the municipal elections. More than one third (35.0 %) of the people did not know enough about the elections. More than one quarter of the respondents (28.1 %) did not see the benefits of the elections and almost one quarter of the people (26.9 %) stated that they were not interested in the municipal elections. Finally, 23.0 per cent of the people stated that they did not understand the importance of the elections. These results suggest that there are four common reasons that prevented citizens from participating in the municipal elections. In other words, respondents did not have enough information about the municipal election process to prompt their interest, help them understand the importance or see the benefits of the elections. All these reasons show that the lack of political knowledge among respondents might have led to their lack of political participation. One may argue that those respondents did not register or vote in the elections because they were not politically aware about the municipal elections. All those reasons indicate clearly that the majority of non-voting Saudis might have been ignorant about the election process. In other words, the limited political knowledge of those respondents might have been the main cause for their lack of understanding and interest, which might have led to their lack of participation in those elections.

Chart 7.2



The lack of political knowledge among some citizens was expressed by one interviewee. His answer shows that he did not have the necessary information about the election process. He stated that when he got the election card he did not realise the meaning of the elections:

> I did not know anything about the elections or what to do with that card. I asked the staff in the registration centre what the electoral vote was all about. What were the elections going to do for the country and me? Who would be in the elections? What was the nomination procedure? I took the card, but did not know what the election was (Interviewee No. 45).

Another non-voter interviewee expressed a similar opinion about the election process and the candidates as follows:

> Low turnout is an evidence of the absence of the concept of elections among people. I did not participate because I was not convinced of the importance of the elections and the efficiency of the candidates. Their election programmes were not realistic and I knew that they would not be able to fulfil their promises (Interviewee No. 58).

A winning candidate expressed a positive opinion about the municipal elections as follows:

> Many people thought that the municipal elections were only a cosmetic and not genuine, therefore, they did not participate. The people who voted were looking for real reform and shared an important historic moment because it was the first public elections to be held in the Kingdom (Interviewee No. 27B).

However, a losing candidate thought that the aim behind people's participation was personal gain:

> Looking for position, money and fame were the reasons to participate in elections. Many people did not believe that it was a real change and considered it a farcical practice (Interviewee No. 18).

It can be seen that the lack of political knowledge may affect voters' participation in elections. This conclusion echoes the work of Lutz and March (2007) who gave reasons for people who did not vote as follows:

> Citizens do not vote either because they cannot (they lack the resources or capacity), or because they do not want to (they lack motivation) or because nobody asked them (mobilisation)... Much non-voting appears to stem from a lack of interest in, indifference towards and ignorance of elections or politics in general (p. 540).

Moreover, Scheufele, et al. (2002) stated that many studies have shown that political knowledge, among other factors, is positively related to diverse forms of political participation. So the people who are 'politically sophisticated are more likely to vote and engage in other political activities' (p. 429).

It can be argued that all reasons mentioned for non-voting in the elections revolve around the lack of political awareness among citizens. Thus, the limited political awareness among a considerable proportion of Saudi non-voters may be among the main reasons behind their apathetic attitudes towards municipal elections. It might be true that the lack of information

about the importance and implementation of the municipal elections as well as the limited or missing mobilisation (by the government and candidates) might have resulted in citizens' low interest and lack of understanding of that process. Thus, one may conclude that because of their lack of political awareness, citizens might have chosen not to participate in those elections.

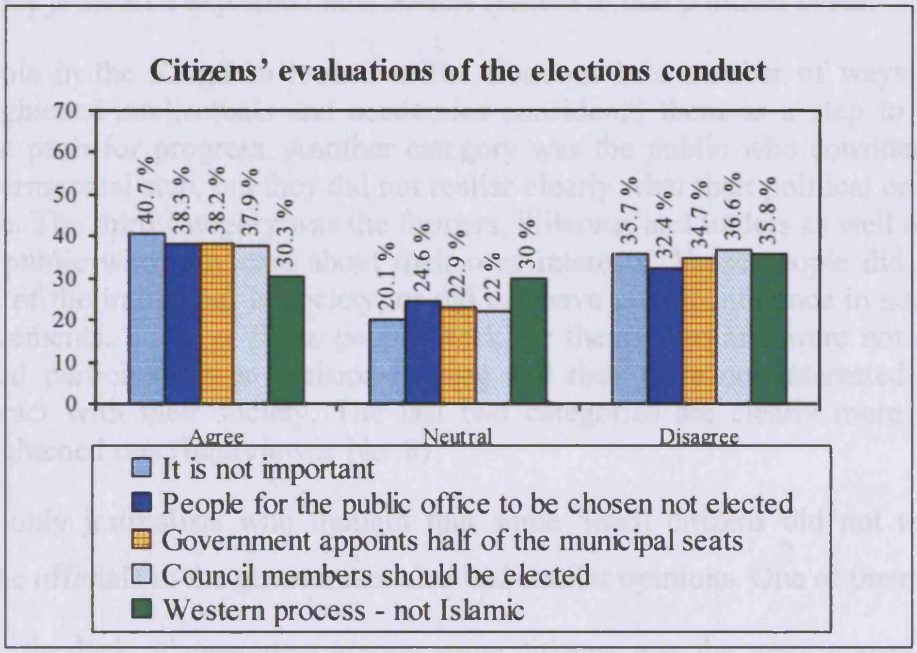
Election conduct

The level of political awareness is essential for people's understanding of the election conduct. I argue that the citizens' perception of the importance of the municipal elections conduct is an integral part of their political understanding of this process as a democratic practice. In other words, their understanding of this process is going to show how much political awareness they had. In order to investigate this aspect, it is important to look at the functions of the elections. Katz (1997) identified a variety of functions, such as legitimating the political system, installation and selection of officials, establishment of representation and the provision of an occasion for popular involvement in politics. Banducci and Karp (2003) argued that elections can be viewed as an opportunity for citizens to influence political leaders, but they also serve as means by which governments, parties and candidates can mobilise support for democratic processes. Thus, elections can serve as an important function in the process of building and maintaining support for the political system: 'democratic elections should make citizens feel better about the institutions and the political process' (p. 443). Finally, Wood (2002) stressed the importance of the elections and voting: 'voting is the most powerful voice a citizen has to hold elected officials accountable for their decisions and behaviour in office' (p. 209).

Bearing this in mind, it is essential to know the Saudi citizens' perceptions towards the conduct of the municipal elections. Thus, respondents were asked some questions about their evaluation of the municipal election importance and conduct. Their answers are presented in the bar chart (7.3). The chart shows that less than half of the respondents (40.7 %) thought that the municipal elections were not important, but 35.7 per cent thought that it was important to have them and 20.1 per cent were neutral. The chart also shows that more than one third of the respondents (38.3 %) thought that the people elected to public office should be chosen not elected, but 32.4 per cent of the respondents disagreed. Furthermore, 38.2 per cent of the respondents thought that it was good that the government would appoint half of the municipal councils' members, but less than that number (34.7 %) did not agree that the

government appointing them. In addition, more than one third of the respondents (37.9 %) thought that the council members should be elected, but nearly a similar number (36.8 %) disagreed. Finally, 30.3 per cent of the sample thought that the municipal elections was a Western process and was not Islamic, but more than one third (35.8 %) did not look at the elections that way and 30.1 per cent were neutral.

Chart 7.3



These results show that a considerable proportion of Saudi citizens were not politically aware of the importance and conduct of the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia. It might be that he lack of essential political information among citizens might have created their weak political awareness towards that process. As we have seen, a large segment of them (40.7 %) thought that the municipal elections were not important. Also, 38.3 per cent of the respondents thought that the people in public office should be chosen by the government and 38.2 per cent of the respondents thought that appointing people instead of electing them was the right way for the government to fill the municipal council seats. Finally, more than one third of the respondents (36.6 %) thought that the council members should not be elected and less than that number (30.3 %) stated that the municipal election was a Western process and not Islamic.

The previous findings might indicate that a significant number of Saudi citizens did not understand the meaning of democracy and the role of the elections as one of its tools. The absence of such political knowledge among citizens, which builds their political awareness,

did not help them to value correctly the importance, conduct and procedures of the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia. One could argue that as a result of their lack of political awareness, the majority of Saudi citizens were apathetic towards those municipal elections and did not participate in them.

In addition to that, the majority of the interviewees stated that there was a very low level of understanding among a considerable proportion of the Saudi citizens towards the municipal elections. One journalist explained how Saudis reacted to that political event:

> People in the Kingdom looked at the elections in a number of ways. Some of the enlightened intellectuals and academics considered them as a step to reform and a huge push for progress. Another category was the public who considered them as a governmental step, but they did not realise clearly what their political or social aspects were. The third category was the farmers, illiterate, and traders as well as members of the public who only care about their own interests. Those people did not know the role of the individual in society, or did not have great confidence in such democratic movements. Some of those people work for themselves and were not motivated for social participation or decision-making and they were not interested or willing to interact with their society. The last two categories are clearly more than the first enlightened one (Interviewee No. 8).

It was not only journalists who thought that some Saudi citizens did not understand the elections, the officials in the government also had similar opinions. One of them stated:

> Yes, the lack of awareness among some citizens was the main reason for their low turnout, but also the awareness campaign was short. We were surprised to see, on Election Day, how few came to register (Interviewee No. 40).

Another government official agreed that some citizens had a low level of political awareness towards municipal elections and thought that the ambiguous role of the municipal council could be another reason for the people's low participation. He said:

> For the first elections to be held in the country, I think the election participation rate was acceptable, even though it was low. It is true that most of the citizens did not know what the idea behind the elections was and what the returns from their participation would be. Another reason could be that the people did not know or experience the role of the municipal council before, which in my opinion was the case here. How do you expect people to vote for something that they did not know about (Interviewee No. 38)?

A losing candidate thought that citizens did not understand the municipal election process, which was in his view a tactic by the government to fulfil an international obligation:

> I think it is an exaggeration to say it was a democratic process. The government carried out the elections to meet an international obligation in order to turn from the

> traditional pattern of recruitment to electoral practices. I think it is a good step for the government to give its people a chance to have that political experience. Because people's background on this subject is very weak they did not understand the deep meaning of democracy (Interviewee No. 17).

The lack of understanding among Saudi citizens of the election process was expressed by another respondent, as follows:

> Citizens have gained a new experience that was absent for many years. For myself, I was not aware enough of all aspects of this process such as the participation and nomination procedures or the electoral programmes. Citizens were in a great need for educational and awareness campaigns about the election process a long time before its start (Interviewee No. 16).

These findings and views show that the majority of Saudi citizens lacked political knowledge about the election process. This also support the assumption of this chapter that the lack of political awareness and political knowledge among some Saudi citizens were among the factors that might have decreased their participation in the 2005 municipal elections. In other words, the majority of Saudi citizens might have been the least knowledgeable about the municipal elections. The importance of political knowledge echoes the work of Freie (1997) and Scheufele, et al. (2002), Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) who argued that political knowledge promotes an understanding of why politics is relevant. Citizens who are relatively knowledgeable about politics are more likely to have (or construct) opinions on a wide array of subjects, but less likely to offer their views on issues about which they feel under-informed. Thus, political knowledge has a more direct impact on participation by providing the specific facts necessary to make citizens rationally participate.

One might conclude that a large proportion of Saudi citizens lacked political awareness about democracy in general and that the election was one of the practices of democracy. They were not sufficiently politically sophisticated to participate in the first general elections in Saudi Arabia. Those citizens chose not to participate because they did not understand the election process, its importance for Saudi society, and its procedures and regulations. In other words, those citizens were not well motivated or mobilised about the municipal elections and might have decided not to participate in them.

Conclusion

This chapter examines Saudi citizens' understanding of the municipal election process. The main argument of this chapter is that the low level of political awareness among a large proportion of Saudi citizens might have contributed to their disengagement towards

municipal elections. To investigate this argument, this chapter looked at the work of Bartle (1997), Gagel (2007), Nicholson (2003), Zaller (1992) Bennett (1994) and other scholars who explained that politically aware citizens are more likely to register or vote in the elections. Therefore, the Saudis' political awareness is linked to their understanding of the municipal elections, their personal interest, engagement with friends and participation in that national political event.

The results show that the majority of citizens were not politically aware about the election process. The lack of understanding among citizens of the election process, in terms of its importance and conduct as well as their low interest in the process may have decreased their participation in those elections. As has been discussed throughout this chapter, a considerable proportion of the study sample was not interested in the municipal elections due to the fact that they were not politically aware. Moreover, a large segment of Saudi citizens were not willing to discuss municipal elections with their friends frequently. So at the time of the elections, the social networks' effect on Saudi voters' understanding and interest in the elections was limited or missing.

Furthermore, this chapter addressed the importance of political knowledge on people's political behaviour as has been discussed in the work of Larcinese (2007) and Bennett (1994). Therefore, the study findings showed that the citizens' lack of information about the election process may have affected their political knowledge and decreased their participation in the elections afterwards.

This chapter also looked at the Saudi citizens' participation in the municipal elections in the light of the work of Nicholson et al. (2006), Scheufele et al. and (2002) Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) who argued that without an adequate understanding of politics, citizens are less capable of voting in an informed manner. Here, the study findings showed that a large number of Saudi citizens did not register or vote in the municipal elections, which confirms the notion that there was a disconnection among Saudi voters with the election process. The study findings showed that a significant number of citizens did not understand the regulations and the procedures of the elections, which might have decreased their participation and stopped them from voting. For non-voting citizens, the study results suggested that there were four common reasons that stopped them from participating in the elections: they did not have enough information about the process, did not see the benefit of elections, were not interested and did not understand the importance of the municipal elections. Again, these findings

indicated that a lack of political knowledge might have prevented a large number of citizens from registering or voting in the elections.

Finally, most of the interviewees stressed that the lack of political knowledge among citizens might have been a significant factor in their lack of political awareness, which might have contributed to their low level of participation in municipal elections in Saudi Arabia. The majority of citizens did not realise clearly what the political or social aspects of the election were. At the time of the elections, many people were not sure about the importance or the benefits of those elections to Saudi society. Some voters considered the election process to be a competition between two main factions in the country: religious and tribal, and believed they had to support one of them. However, the findings showed that only a small number of the intellectuals and academics were politically aware enough to look at the elections as a significant move for more political representation in the country. Indeed, the data suggested that well educated non-voters were more likely to discuss the elections and understand their objectives and weaknesses, which is different from findings in democratic countries. In other words, those respondents who thought that municipal elections were only a very limited move towards democracy might have decided not to participate in it. Although this finding is of some significance, it represents a very small percentage (20 %) of my overall sample. It is worth investigating this result in future studies.

Chapter Eight is going to investigate the ineffectiveness of the election media campaign as another reason for Saudi citizens' limited participation in 2005 municipal elections.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTION MEDIA CAMAPAIGN

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTION MEDIA CAMAPAIGN

Introduction

This chapter discusses the second reason that might have contributed to Saudi citizens' disengagement towards 2005 municipal elections. I argue that the ineffectiveness of the election media campaign, which was launched by the elections organising committee, might have affected people's participation in those elections. In other words, the municipal election media campaign might have failed to present the election process to the Saudi citizens and educate them about its importance, regulations and procedures. Also, the campaign may not have succeeded in positively affecting public attitudes in order to increase participation in the elections. Throughout this chapter, a set of questions was asked to respondents about their perceptions of how the election media campaign was conducted, its messages and effects on people's attitudes towards their registration and voting in those elections. Their answers are important because only 17 per cent of eligible voters voted in the 2005 municipal elections, which shows that there was a high degree of non-participation among them. That low level of participation, as this chapter assumes, may have come as a result of many reasons, one of those reasons is the media campaign's failure to provide citizens with the information they needed about that political process before and during the elections.

Before discussing the study findings, a quick look at some literature about the effect of the mass media campaigns will be carried out to highlight the conceptual framework of this chapter.

McQuail (1979) argued that much of what has been written about the effects or effectiveness of the mass media has been taken either from research on campaigns or from predictions about hypothetical campaign situations. He explained that these kinds of media practices include political and election campaigns, public information campaigns, commercial and public service advertising, and some forms of education. The campaign, according to McQuail, has some specific characteristics. It has specific aims and is planned to achieve them; it has a definite time-span, usually short, and aims at an intensive and wide coverage. Also, the campaign usually has authoritative sponsorship, it is not necessarily popular with its audience and has to be 'sold' to them, and it is usually based on a framework of shared values. Further, the campaign generally works to achieve non-controversial objectives such as voting, giving to charity, buying goods, education, health, safety, and so on (p. 12). However,

the author suggested three main factors to be examined when evaluating a media campaign. These factors have to do with the audience, the message and the source or system of distribution. Following the approach suggested by McQuail, the Saudi election media campaign has many such characteristics. Its aims were to inform citizens about the municipal elections and convince them to vote. It was started four months before the elections, which is considered to be a short period according to some citizens and observers, as will be illustrated later in this chapter. Also, the campaign utilised the mass media to reach the public and it was sponsored by the Saudi Government. Taking these factors into account, Saudi citizens were asked questions about their perceptions of the objectives, conduct and political messages of the campaign, to see how much they affected citizens' understanding of that political process and their voting behaviours.

Miller (1991) argued that voters seek out campaign information based on factors such as partisanship, prior knowledge, beliefs and needs to help them decide how to vote. He put it this way:

> The whole question of media influence should be studied in the broader context of citizens' relationship to the politics. Some are extreme partisans... For them, the main purpose of reading the papers and watching television may be to find arguments to support their own party's case, to seek reinforcement rather than guidance. Others have weak or nonexistent party ties... they may read the papers and watch television news primarily in order to help them decide how to cast their vote – that is, they may consciously seek guidance. Yet others may be simply uninterested in politics, with neither a strong sense of party loyalty nor any great motivation to judge the claims of rival parties... they may seek information or even entertainment rather than guidance or reinforcement (p. 3).

There is a variety of voter motivation towards media exposure and those motivations condition the messages they receive. The same article or programme can affect different people in different ways. Readers or viewers can use the same media for their own purposes. Using this approach to analyse the Saudi situation, I found that citizens were attracted by different motivations. Those were not political or party motivations because there were no political parties to vote for in the country, but people were loyal to religious, tribal and familial affiliations.

Dautrich and Hartley (1999) argued that the media campaign's role is important because citizens' knowledge of and participation in elections are necessary to the success of democratic governments. The authors explained that the amount and quality of information that the media supply voters during an election campaign influence what they know and how

they participate. Thus, voters' assessment of the news media may impact upon their confidence in the news media and the likelihood that they will continue to use the news media as a source of information. Aitkin (1980) also argued that the idea of selective exposure, 'the uses and gratification' or consumer model of media influence, has been developed to understand the mass media's role during election campaigns in a variety of ways. Those are the strengthening of weak predispositions, guiding decision-making, providing entertainment and simply informing voters of significant events (p. 287). This approach, according to Aitkin, leads to the possibility that at particular elections, the mass media will have a substantial influence on the result of that election.

Another dimension of the effect of the media is presented by Klarevas (2003) who stressed that the media have psychological effects on people, which lead them to act in a specific way. Klarevas stated:

> When we speak about media effect, the emphasis is on how mass media psychologically influence members of society into perceiving things in certain ways (p. 275).

The effect of the media here could be indirect, so people are driven to behave in a way without intending to do so. Therefore, in Saudi Arabia, citizens who voted in the municipal elections were small in numbers, which could mean, according to Klarevas's approach, that the media had a minimal psychological effect on the Saudi people or they did not have any effect at all.

On the other hand, election media campaigns are thought to be ineffective. Jennings (1992) argued that although voters hear about parties, issues and candidates through the media, the influence of the mass media on voting is weak compared with the impact of partisanship, other issues and candidates' evaluations (cited in Forrest and Marks, 1999, p. 100). Furthermore, Hillygus (2005) found in his study about the 2000 American presidential campaign that despite the enormous amount of money, attention, and information associated with presidential media campaigns, their effects on voter behaviours was believed to be minimal (p. 51).

Although these authors may have used similar approaches to assess the effects of the election media campaigns and the voters' motivations, their conclusions are different. Thus, looking at these approaches might help to understand the Saudi citizens' evaluation of the municipal election media campaign. The quoted academic work is based on the idea that Western

democratic voters tend to be drawn to a specific party or candidate based on some predispositions or motivations as well as on the campaign activities, in spite of the fact that some campaigns have a limited effect on people's political behaviours. As mentioned above, there are no political bodies such as parties or unions in Saudi Arabia. Thus, people had different motivations, other than the campaign, relating to tribes, religion and family when they voted. Some of the Saudi candidates realised the importance of such motivations and used them in their campaigns, as will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

The effectiveness of the municipal election media campaign

To investigate the effectiveness of the municipal election media campaign, respondents were asked about their perceptions of the efficiency of the campaign as a source of information about the election process. That is because the ineffectiveness of the media campaign might have been among the main reasons behind citizens' high level of non-participation in 2005 municipal elections.

The people whose views are reported in this study are the respondents of the study survey and the participants of the semi-structured interviews. Generally, there is a variety of views among those people regarding the reasons behind citizens' disengagement towards municipal elections, but the majority of them blamed the ineffectiveness of the election media campaign as the main factor that might have led to the Saudis' low turnout in the municipal elections.

Officials in the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs were the only respondents who thought the election media campaign had met with a degree of success and thought that the campaign had played a noticeable role in reshaping the opinions of Saudis regarding elections. This is understandable as it is those people who represent the government's side of this story and it is not common to find a government official or even a citizen who criticises the government in public in an absolute monarchy like Saudi Arabia. Nearly all the government officials that were interviewed did not directly criticise the implementation of the campaign, but they mentioned other factors such as time constraints and the budgetary shortage that might have stopped some of the campaign's messages reaching citizens. Thus, two different views about the campaign were mentioned. One optimistic respondent of the supreme steering committee of the elections thought that the campaign was successful:

> Undoubtedly, the campaign was good and timely. The national campaign was successful and the information was everywhere, it was on TV, newspapers, Internet and in pamphlets (Interviewee No. 37).

Another interviewee from the Ministry of the Municipal and Rural Affairs viewed the election campaign as partially successful based on the conditions at that time:

> In general, it achieved part of its objectives. It helped people to take decisions regarding elections, but we needed more time and more messages to reach all targeted citizens (Interviewee No. 40).

Those interviewees expressed their positive views about the effectiveness of the media campaign, which were predictable as they were members of the steering committees and they might have found it difficult to admit that the campaign was not successful. However, their judgments rest on personal impressions not on academic research or evaluation, as they mentioned to the interviewer.

In addition to the government officials, one optimistic winning candidate thought that the municipal election media campaign was a success:

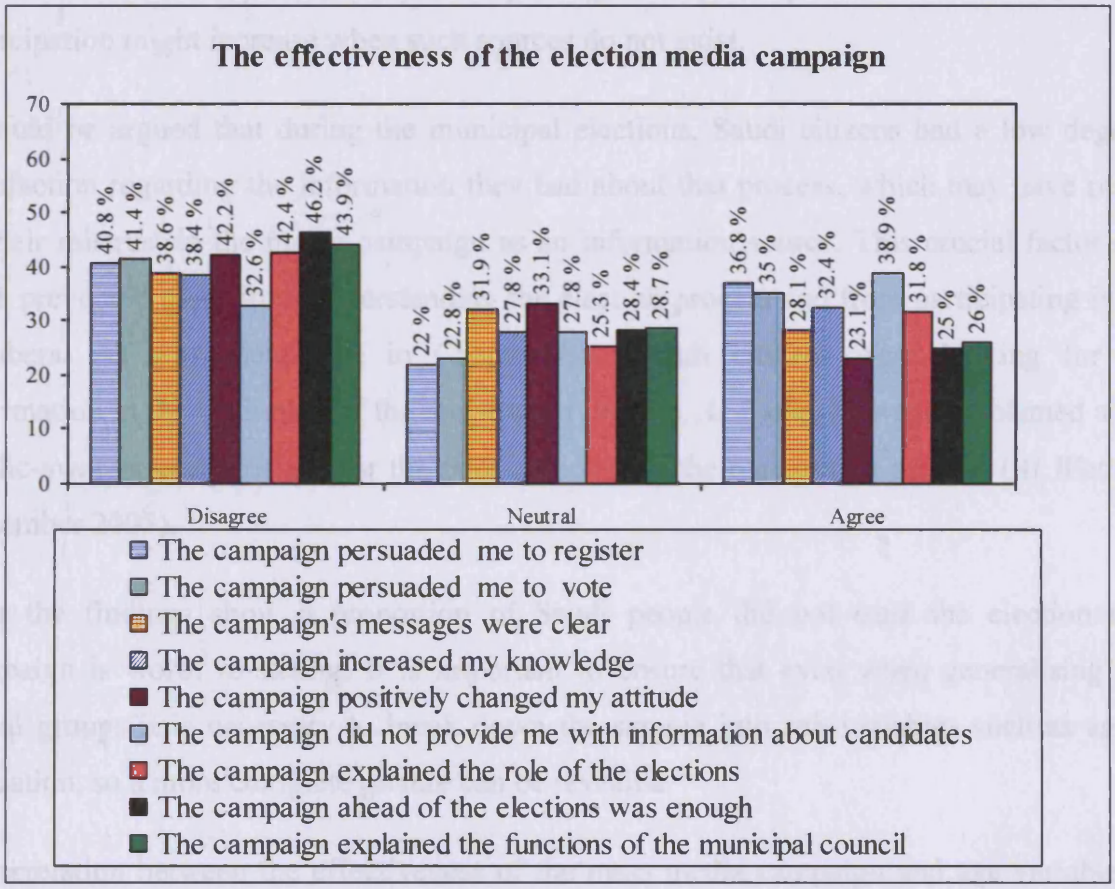
> Excellent campaign and its achievements were great. That is to say, many people became aware of some aspects of the elections, such as registration, voting, campaigning and so on. In the past, none of these words were clear, but nowadays, the situation is different as a result of that campaign (Interviewee No. 27).

However, a considerable proportion of the survey's respondents did not agree with what the previous respondents had to say about the effectiveness of the elections mass media campaign. The bar chart below (8.1) illustrates their answers. The chart shows that respondents give a negative evaluation of the election media campaign. Less than half of the respondents (46.2 %) thought that the election media campaign was not long enough for people to have the necessary information about the municipal election process. Also, more than one third (38.6 %) of respondents thought that the campaign's messages were not clear and understandable for them and 38.4 per cent thought that the campaign did not increase their knowledge regarding municipal elections.

Moreover, almost half of the sample (42.2 %) thought that the campaign did not positively change their attitude towards registration in the elections. Also, 40.8 per cent thought that the campaign did not persuade them to register in the election and 41.4 per cent of the citizens stated that the campaign did not persuade them to vote. Less than half of the sample (42.4 %) thought that the campaign did not explain the role of the elections in Saudi society. Less than

half of the respondents (45.6 %) thought that the campaign failed to explain the procedures and regulations of the elections for the Saudis. Finally, 43.9 per cent thought that the campaign did not explain the functions of the municipal councils in the country and more than one third of the Saudis (38.9 %) thought that the municipal election media campaign did not provide them with any information about candidates.

Chart 8.1



These results suggest that there was a considerable number of Saudi citizens who gave a negative evaluation of the election media campaign. This negative evaluation might have contributed to the citizens' limited participation in municipal elections.

Saudis' disengagement in municipal elections might be a direct result of their lack of information about this political process and their mistrust in the media campaign. Ansolabehere, et al. (1997) stated that 'the typical voter lacks even the most elementary level of knowledge about the candidates and campaign issues' (p. 152). Therefore, Dautrich and Hartley (1999) argued that when trust in the media declines, negative consequences might result. They wrote:

> Without a trustworthy source of information, the public is left without the ability to determine the important public issues of the day, the differences between candidates in elections and whether what the candidates and advertisers are telling them is accurate. A public that does not know which candidate stands for what may be less likely to vote and more likely to become cynical regarding elections (p. 15).

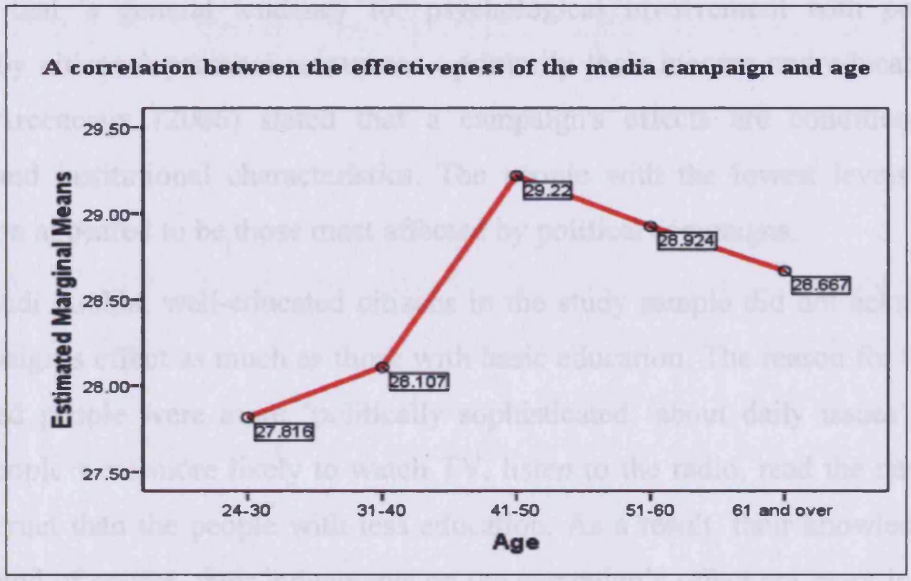
It is important to have credible and trusted sources that provide voters with the information they need about the main issues or the contestants during the election race. In this way, citizens can take informed decisions regarding their participation in that election. Non-participation might increase when such sources do not exist.

It could be argued that during the municipal elections, Saudi citizens had a low degree of satisfaction regarding the information they had about that process, which may have resulted in their mistrust in the media campaign as an information source. This crucial factor might have prevented them from understanding the election process and from participating in great numbers. As was mentioned in Chapter Six, Saudi citizens were looking for more information in the beginning of the registration process. *Al Watan* Newspaper blamed a 'brief public-awareness campaign' for the poor response to the registration process (*Al Watan*, 20 December 2005).

That the findings show a proportion of Saudi people did not trust the election media campaign is worth re-stating. It is important to ensure that even when generalising about social groups it is necessary to break down the sample into sub-variables such as age and education, so a more complete picture can be revealed.

A correlation between the effectiveness of the mass media campaign and age variables, for example, reveals that the age factor is significant. As Chart 8.2 shows, the agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of the mass media campaign increases with age. The chart shows that the younger age group (24-30) is less in favour of the mass media campaign, but that attitude positively increases among the other groups (31-40, 41-50 and 51-60). This result shows that the age factor is significant with this variable. This means that the young Saudi generation of the sample did not consider the election media campaign to be as effective as did the old generation.

Chart 8.2



According to Putnam (2000), voter turnout across many Western democracies has been steadily decreasing in the latter part of the last century. He thought that democratic citizenship is at crisis point because young people have shifted away from politics due to their lack of knowledge about politics and public affairs. Putnam (2000) wrote:

> Daily newspaper readership among young people under 35 dropped from two-thirds in 1965 to one-third in 1990, at the same time that TV news viewership in this same age group fell from 52 percent to 41 percent. Today's under-thirties pay less attention to the news and know less about current affairs than their elders do today or than people their age did two or three decades ago (p. 36).

In this account, young people are seen as failing to fulfil their democratic duties. It could be argued that if young citizens' disengagement is happening in Western democratic countries, the same phenomenon might happen in Saudi Arabia, which held elections for the first time in its history.

Furthermore, a correlation between this variable and education reveals that there are clear differences among respondents depending on their educational levels. The respondents who had high school education mark the largest education group who think that the election media campaign has an effect followed by primary school graduates. Intermediate school graduates come third and then bachelor degree graduates. Postgraduates score the lowest among all education groups.

This result shows that the education factor is significant here, which echoes Miller (1991) who noted that 'a general tendency for psychological involvement with politics to be influenced by citizens' personal resources – primarily their income and education' (p. 10). However, Arceneaux (2006) stated that a campaign's effects are conditioned by both individual and institutional characteristics. The people with the lowest levels of political sophistication appeared to be those most affected by political campaigns.

Thus, in Saudi Arabia, well-educated citizens in the study sample did not acknowledge the media campaign's effect as much as those with basic education. The reason for this could be that educated people were more 'politically sophisticated' about daily issues than others. Educated people were more likely to watch TV, listen to the radio, read the newspaper and surf the internet than the people with less education. As a result, their knowledge, political awareness, and of course, their judgements on the campaign's effect are more informed than the less educated citizens.

For further examination of the effectivness of the media campaign, the private sector officials who were interviewed expressed a negative perception towards the municipal election media campaign. They did not deny the importance of the campaign's programmes, but they felt they were insufficient, and that mass media channels had yet to perform to their fullest capacity. Those officials felt that the mass media campaign was not only uninformative, but also not educational, which they thought might have led to people's low level of participation in municipal elections. Because of this, they felt the usefulness of the campaign was very limited. One of the respondents thought that responsibility lay with the organising committee in the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs because:

> They are the organisation which is supposed to search for solutions and remedies. It is their duty to use every available means to attain those objectives. Among other things they are expected to utilise the mass media for educational purposes and to ensure they have a positive impact on the public, especially if it is properly planned and well organised (Interviewee No. 42).

This interviewee stated that the role of the mass media campaign was minimal. He thought the organisers should have had an important role to play a long time before the municipal elections. He felt that the Ministry should have worked properly with the mass media to educate Saudi citizens about this political process to ensure that the public understood the regulations of the elections and how to vote. In this regard, Khan (2007) stressed the importance of the educational role of the mass media as follows:

> Ultimately, media education provides the critical knowledge and the analytical tools that will empower media consumers to function as autonomous and rational citizens, enabling them to critically make use of the media. Media education helps to make people well-informed and responsible citizens, who will be able to take certain decisions (p. 15).

Along these lines, it is clear that the municipal election media campaign might have failed to reach the Saudi public. The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs should have conducted the mass media campaign a long time before the municipal elections to educate Saudi citizens about the new political process. At the same time, there should have been a regular evaluation of the impact of the media campaign on people's perceptions and attitudes to ensure that its messages reached the target audiences. Based on the low turnout it is apparent that none of the previous tactics was made in time for the elections. However, money and time might have been issues facing the municipal election media campaign as a private sector respondent stated:

> The number of people who voted in the municipal elections was very small and I think one major reason for that was the minimal effect of the election media campaign. As a person who worked closely with the elections committees, I think that the shortage of budget and time constraint were behind that pathetic campaign, which failed to convince more people to participate in the elections (Interviewee No. 43).

The limited financial resources and the short period of the campaign are crucial factors that may have resulted in the ineffectiveness of the municipal election media campaign, which the organisers should have taken into consideration before the election. Stevenson and Vavreck (2000) stated that it is vital for voters to have the information they need to decide which candidate to vote for, therefore, financial resources for and adequate length of the media campaign are crucial if the campaign's organisers are to get their messages out. Stevenson and Vavreck (2000) wrote:

> The period of the campaign is needed so that voters can be exposed to a large sample of campaign messages from which they can accurately estimate the true positions of candidates on important issues... In the age of mass enfranchisement, this probably means campaigns must be able to access the mass media either directly (advertisements) or indirectly (news coverage) (pp. 220-221).

It can be seen that at the time of the municipal elections, the short period of the campaign and the shortage of financial resources were among the issues that faced the election campaigns. Those issues might have influenced the effectiveness of the campaign which might have contributed to the citizens' low level of participation in that political process.

The journalist interviewees did not see the media campaign as playing an important role in educating the public about the importance of the elections and the role of the municipal council. One of the journalists thought the election campaign failed to get its messages out about these two concepts to the public:

> The media campaign failed miserably in conveying the concept of election to the citizens and failed to explain the importance and the role of the municipal council in society. In my opinion, the reason for that was the absence of coverage of the concepts of election and municipal council culture. So we ended up facing a complicated problem; we did not know the role of the municipal council or the meaning of the election. I think that many citizens who cast their votes were driven by tribal tendencies, special interests or ideology. Therefore, apathy among citizens would be a normal result for such an environment (Interviewee No. 11).

This journalist stressed that most Saudis lacked political awareness (as has been discussed in Chapter Seven) regarding the importance of the elections and the role of the municipal councils in society. Because of the absence of political knowledge among those citizens and the ineffectiveness of the media campaign, which failed to address these crucial issues, the majority of citizens found themselves moving with the dominant forces of society, which were the tribes and ideological groups. The blame here can be linked to the weak media campaign for failing to raise the public's political awareness of the importance of the municipal elections in society, the political future of the country, and on what criteria candidates should have been chosen.

Political awareness, according to Delli Carpini and Keeter (2004), comes as a result of individual factors. He argues that 'greater exposure to political information in the media can increase political awareness and engagement, but the more politically engaged are also more likely than others to seek out political information in the media' (p. 418). Thus, the opportunity for political learning depends on the amount and type of information available in the media, which may powerfully shape electoral behaviour and opinions.

One may argue that the limited amount of information that the municipal election media campaign delivered to the Saudi public did not raise their awareness of that political process and might have contributed to their disengagement.

Also, it seems that there was a lack of motivation for citizens in the election campaign. Surprisingly, advertisements swept the newspapers but there was an absence of TV and radio coverage of the election according to a journalist who stated:

> Unfortunately, for newspapers, the campaign was purchased and advertising was the master of the situation. That means the enlightenment role about the elections was missing in those newspapers. The radio and television coverage did not give enough space for that new process. Their coverage was weak and below the level of that national event (Interviewee No. 1).

The journalist's view is that newspapers were dominated by the political nature of the advertising, but the government TV and radio channels did not show a similar interest. So there wasn't enough information for the public about the electoral process to rely on.

Despite the information shortage at the time of the municipal elections, political advertising is considered to be crucial to a campaign. Forrest and Marks (1999) explained that election campaign messages come in two main forms, in the 'paid media' as political advertising bought by the political bodies or candidates and in the 'unpaid media' as news and media events during the election campaigns (p. 101). Norris (1997) added that campaign communications occur through advertising and the news media, but also through candidate debates (p. 11). Furthermore, Kaid (1999) stated that political advertising is a major tool in political marketing and it is commonly used to communicate between politicians and the public: 'most often, political advertising is used by political parties, political candidates, interest groups or individuals seeking to influence electoral decisions or public opinion on issues of national concern' (p. 423). However, Forrest and Marks argued that unpaid media tends to attract more attention than paid advertising, especially among frequent readers and listeners. Also, campaign advertising has a reinforcing rather than a persuading role for stable voters but a persuading or at least guiding role for the undecided voters (p. 101).

During the three phases of the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, most national newspapers were steeped in candidates' advertisements and the election campaign's advertisements. Also, following the election regulations, the government-controlled TV and radio channels did not air any of the candidates' advertisements (Interviewee No. 43). Furthermore, the mass media, as discussed, failed to present this event properly to the public in the form of daily news. So the large proportion of citizens who tend not to read the newspaper and usually get their information from the government-owned TV and radio stations were ignorant about that national event. The lack of information about elections among those people may have contributed to their non-participation in elections.

The lack of an educational role by the election media campaign was noted by one journalist who also made comparisons between various campaigns as follows:

> No doubt information is an effective way of enlightenment. In my opinion the mass media has succeeded in combating drug abuse and was also successful in promoting the national water conservation campaigns. As for elections, the media are negligent. The public is not enlightened as to the scope nor to the advantages of such political practice (Interviewee No. 5).

The enlightening (educational) role of the media campaign in the time of the elections is an important one. Arceneaux (2006) argued that voters' enlightenment comes by providing them with the information they need to be able to take correct decisions. He went on to explain:

> By increasing the information available to voters, campaigns help them update their beliefs regarding fundamental variables accurately and accord them weight in their voting decision. Months before the election, the average voter may have little sense of how fundamental variables relate to her vote preference. Over the course of a campaign, voters learn more about fundamental variables and, more importantly, their political relevance (p. 161).

It might be argued, though, that Saudi voters' enlightenment was one of the essential missing tasks of the municipal election mass media campaign. Saudis were asking for information about the new political process and its advantages for them and the country which was not forthcoming. Consequently, the majority of them may have chosen not to vote in those elections.

To conclude this section, the municipal election media campaign was not effective in providing citizens with the information they needed about the election process, in terms of its importance, regulations and procedures. Furthermore, insufficient consideration of the social traditions and predispositions of voters by the organisers of the election campaign might have affected its ability to inform. As was discussed in Chapters Five and Six, Saudi Arabia is a religious and conservative society, and traditional and social norms control it. Therefore, at the time of the municipal elections, citizens may have had other social and traditional factors that influenced them more than the election campaign. Those factors relate to the structure of Saudi society which values religious, tribal and family ties over anything else, and which might have been ignored by the organisers of the media campaign.

The effects of the media campaign on people's attitudes towards election

Having discussed the ineffectiveness of the election media campaign, it is essential to examine the campaign's effect on people's attitudes towards their participation in the elections. The aim here is to investigate further this chapter's argument that the minimal role of the election media campaign may have decreased Saudis' participation in the 2005

municipal elections. Before we explain this factor, a brief look at some relevant literature will be carried out.

Stevenson and Vavreck (2000) argued that even though the study of a campaign's effects has recently come to the forefront of work on voting behaviour, the results of current research do not contradict findings from the original campaign studies of the 1940s. They stated that the works of Finkel (1992) and Holbrook (1996) reached similar conclusions about the limited effect of the political campaigns on people's attitudes. They wrote:

> Consider Finkel's finding that even though people do change their attitudes during campaigns, the changes are consistent with pre-existing proclivities and are rarely large enough to matter. Holbrook's conclusions are similar – campaign events do influence public opinion, but these changes are either cancelled out through competition or too small in magnitude to overpower the effects from national economic conditions or presidential popularity. It seems that even though campaigns are costly and they predominantly set out to increase information to voters, the effects are not as striking as the candidates and consultants believe (p. 219).

Moreover, Hillygus (2005) differentiated between two kinds of voters and thought that exposure to campaign advertising and other campaign activities increases mobilisation among those previously not planning to vote, but has no influence on intended voters. In contrast, party or interest group contact increases the probability that an intended voter remains a voter, but has no effect for intended non-voters. Lutz (2007) in his findings about the outcomes of 144 popular votes between 1981 and 1999 in Switzerland noted that it is difficult to enhance information levels among voters and it is impossible to make 'getting informed' compulsory and force voters to obtain more information. Lutz (2007) explained that:

> Information is usually available to people at a relatively low cost in terms of time and effort. Print and electronic media cover political issues but voters often engage with this information very selectively. Better and more comprehensive campaigns that enhance the level of information would surely not go amiss, but it would be unrealistic to suggest that there is more than a limited scope for improvements (p. 632).

This confirms the idea that most election campaigns really have a minimal effect on attitudes towards elections. For those campaigns to have the maximum desired effect, important factors should be reconsidered such as the campaign motivation tactics that have been used or the candidate's characteristics or predispositions.

To investigate the media campaign's effect on Saudi citizens' attitudes, Saudi respondents were asked to what extent they thought the election media campaign made a difference to

people's attitudes towards the municipal elections. The bar chart below (Chart 8.3) illustrates their answers. Again, this question is intended to shed more light on the effect of the media campaign on Saudis' perceptions of the importance of their participation in the municipal elections and their subsequent decisions. The hypothesis behind this question is to confirm this chapter's assumption that the limited or ineffective role of the election media campaign might have failed to persuade a large number of Saudi people to participate in the municipal elections.

Chart 8.3

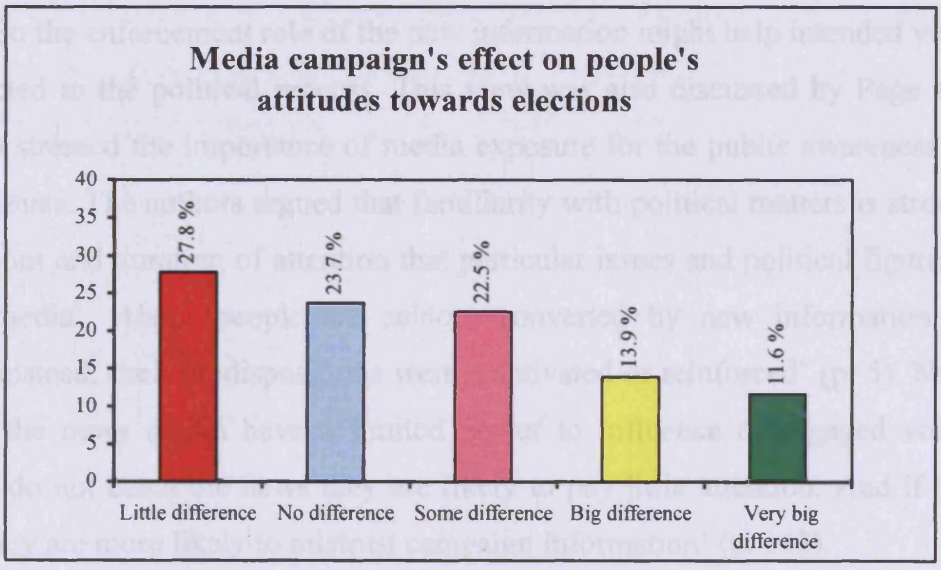


Chart 8.3 shows that almost one third of respondents (27.8 %) thought that the media campaign made a little difference to people's attitude towards elections. Further, less than one quarter of the sample (22.5 %) thought that there was some difference and only one quarter (25.60 %) of the sample thought that there was a big difference made to people's towards elections because of the media campaign.

It can be seen from the findings that a large number of respondents (50.3 %) thought that there was little difference in people's attitudes towards the municipal election as a result of the mass media campaign and 23.7 per cent thought that there was no difference at all. Thus, one may conclude that the effect of the election media campaign on people's attitudes towards municipal elections might have been very limited.

These findings are echoed in the work of Weaver (1996) who argued that the media are less likely to directly change attitudes or voting behaviour. He wrote:

> The media are somewhat less likely to teach some specific information on the issue positions of candidates and parties, even less likely to directly teach attitudes and opinions, and least likely to directly influence behaviour such as campaigning or voting... Awareness and more detailed information can help form or reinforce attitude and behaviour, but sometime previous attitude and patterns of behaviour lead to the learning of certain information... By making some information more salient and thus more easily accessible, news reports can influence voter opinions and evaluation indirectly (pp. 46-47).

The author thought that the mass media have very limited effects on people's political behaviour. Also, as mentioned earlier, voters' existing attitudes and predispositions might encourage them to vote if they are motivated by new information about the issue or candidate. So the enforcement role of the new information might help intended voters only to stay connected to the political process. This view was also discussed by Page and Shapiro (1992) who stressed the importance of media exposure for the public awareness of political figures or issues. The authors argued that familiarity with political matters is strongly related to 'the amount and duration of attention that particular issues and political figures receive in the mass media'. Also, 'people are seldom converted by new information during the campaign; instead, their predispositions were reactivated or reinforced' (p. 5). Norris (2002) stated that the news media have a limited power to influence disengaged voters: 'If the disengaged do not catch the news they are likely to pay little attention. And if they do pay attention, they are more likely to mistrust campaign information' (p. 143).

Such literature reinforces the notion that mass media in general, and specifically, media campaigns, do not create new attitudes or behaviour, but can enforce old ones if they deliver adequate information to the public. Along these lines, and based on the survey findings, the municipal election media campaign failed to present enough information about the municipal election process and candidates to the citizens at the time of the elections. That being the case, the majority of Saudis were not fully aware of the importance of that political process and their participation in it. The media campaign was not successful in creating a positive attitude among Saudis regarding the municipal elections, therefore only small numbers of them (17 %) made up their minds and voted in those elections. In other words, the lack of knowledge about the elections among some Saudis, as a result of the ineffectiveness of the media campaign, might have contributed to their limited participation in municipal elections.

The ineffectiveness of the media campaign on people's voting behaviours was noted by nearly all citizens who were interviewed in this research. They criticised the media campaign

and stated that there was a shortage of information regarding election issues. Most of them blamed the mass media, which are controlled by the government, for their short-comings and mistiming of programmes. Informational campaigns were needed continuously, they thought, a long time before the elections, to communicate all the required messages. One citizen stated that:

> The election media campaign was not successful at conveying enlightening messages to the public. As a citizen, I believe that I have got very little information from government media about the election process, the role of the municipal council and my role as a citizen in that process (Interviewee No. 2).

The election media campaign failed to attract Saudis to register or vote, as another citizen stated. He concentrated on participation statistics as a measure of the success or failure of the municipal election media campaign:

> I think that the campaign was not effective. If we go through the final statistics, we observe that only small numbers of people voted in the elections. It is clear from what we have seen that there must be something wrong in our performance as a whole. If the campaign was successful, we would have seen something positive in those statistics (Interviewee No. 58).

This citizen thought that people's non-participation in municipal elections was a direct result of the remoteness of the media campaign from the citizens' informational demands at the time of the elections. This voter was well informed about the importance of the municipal elections and speaks about the relation between politics and the lives of the people in the country. This voter expressed what Wahl-Jorgensen (2002) called, in her study about the 2001 British general elections, 'discourse of relevance' where some citizens stated that the media failed to discuss their issues and concentrated on politicians personalities instead (p. 78).

The lack of experience among organisers could be a reason behind the weakness of the municipal election media campaign, as another citizen put it:

> The media campaign was too weak to attract many people to participate in that electoral process, due to the lack of experience of those who were behind it. In my opinion, it was their first experience of this process in Saudi Arabia and this might give them an excuse (Interviewee No. 46).

The losing candidates who were interviewed also thought that the role of the election media campaign in the sphere of election was limited. One interviewee thought that what was

shown in the media was merely what the official circles thought was appropriate. As regards the level of success of the media campaign, the interviewee remained sceptical:

> Yes, the campaign was very weak and failed to deliver the general concepts and objectives of the election process and the role of the municipal council to the people. I may give them an excuse because it was the first political practice in the Kingdom. Nevertheless, my fear is that the municipal election was just a cosmetic operation or a political movement with specific objectives. Therefore, there was no need to give it enough publicity. I hope this is not the case (Interviewee No. 47).

Some other interviewees expressed this sceptical thought about the ideas behind the municipal elections. The little information that citizens did received from the media campaign about the election process may have created a degree of mistrust among them towards that political process, contributing to their low level of participation.

It can be seen that Saudi citizens were asking for more information about the meaning of the elections in Saudi society, the importance of their participation and the role of the municipal council in the country. People should have been given the information they needed at the time of the municipal elections to build their trust in that political process and participate in it. Ulbig (2008) argued that reforms made in the hope of increasing satisfaction with policy outputs and trust in governmental bodies. So governments must take into account the importance of citizen's voices because, 'citizens do not trust a government that ignores their input and they will not be satisfied with policies that do not take their needs into consideration' (p. 536). The author suggested that if governments wish to improve their relationship with voters or raise the level of trust between them and their citizens, they must provide them with more information and opportunities to voice their concerns. This will lead to greater satisfaction with the political process and greater acceptance and compliance with laws generated by that process.

In line with Ulbig's views, the absence of adequate information about the idea behind the election process, its laws and regulations may have resulted in citizens becoming suspicious about the causes behind the governments' decision to hold elections. That feeling among some citizens might have decreased their participation in those elections.

The ineffectiveness of the media campaign might also have been a result of the absence of a clear campaign strategy prior to the elections, as another losing candidate stated:

> The election media campaign was not successful. From the beginning it seemed that there was no clear vision or strategy about the election process. Terms and requirements of the municipal council, for instance, only appeared shortly before the

> elections. In spite of the efforts that had been made, rules or regulations were unclear to many people even after the end of the election process (Interviewee No. 17).

For this respondent, the media campaign was of limited use. It is clear, therefore, that the campaign methods adopted at the election time were misguided. Insufficient activities were carried out for too short period of time and, as a result, the benefits were quite limited.

Most of the winning candidates criticised the election media campaign for being inadequate and ineffectual. The majority believed that the campaign had a minimal effect on the public because of the lack of effective strategy and the poor tactics. One of the respondents added:

> The campaign was very short and weak. Its strategies, tactics and messages were very poor. I do not see a problem with having an election awareness campaign for six months before election day. Why didn't we use popular mass media to reach people, especially television and radio, which are in every house and can carry daily messages to citizens, focusing on election issues? That would have benefited the country and encouraged more people to the elections (Interviewee No. 30).

Furthermore, the campaign's messages were not clear to another winning candidate who stated:

> Because it was short, the media campaign failed to explain the importance of the elections for the public. Further, it did not convey clear messages regarding the municipal council and its function in the society and the role of the citizen towards it (Interviewee No. 26).

For this respondent, the length and messages of the media campaign were essential for voters to have the information they needed regarding the main issue of the elections. Gelman and King (2002) divided the length of campaign into 'long' and 'short' and assumed that individuals learn more information in a long campaign. For them, learning begins to increase rapidly about six weeks before the election: 'Voters appear to have less information the further away the election is, but their knowledge increases as the campaign continues (p. 430). In line with Gelman and King's assumption, because the election media campaign was short, it seems that Saudi citizens did not learn much about the election's main issues, the importance of the elections, the role of the municipal councils and the importance of the citizens' participation in those elections. Their limited participation in municipal elections could be a result of such circumstances.

One may conclude this section by stating that in the light of previous literature, media campaigns have minimal effects on people's attitudes towards elections. In general, they do not create new attitudes or behaviours, but can enforce old attitudes regarding particular

issues or candidates. The empirical evidence suggests that the election media campaign was not successful in attracting a large number of Saudi citizens to participate in those elections or creating a positive attitude among them regarding those elections. The campaign did not familiarise citizens with that political process because the election process did not occupy the attention it deserved in the mass media. Also, the campaign did not show citizens how those elections were relevant to them or what positive effects they might have added to their lives. The absence of information about the importance of the municipal elections, their laws and regulations and how they were going to help citizens participate in decision-making process may have resulted in citizens becoming suspicious about the government's motives behind those elections which may have driven a large number of them away from elections.

Conclusion

There are several conclusions which can be drawn, but the fact remains that there are some different interpretations about the influence of mass media campaigns on voter behaviour and therefore on election outcomes (McQuail, 1979, Miller, 1991). Generally, the effect of media campaigns is small compared with the major influences of partisanship, issues and candidates (Stevenson and Vavreck, 2000, Aitkin, 1980, Jennings 1992, Hillygus, 2005). However, effects are larger among particular groups of voters, which may be crucial to the final result (Klarevas 2003, Weaver, 1996, Arceneaux, 2006, Hillygus, 2005, Carpini, et al. 1996). Furthermore, the effects of the mass media campaign are likely to differ according to the type of political stimuli (Kaid, 1999), the medium through which it is conveyed (Dautrich and Hartley, 1999), and the particular form of communication (Forrest and Marks, 1999, Norris, 1997). Finally, the effects of the mass media campaign also depend on the length and the strategies of the campaign itself (Gelman and King, 2002).

Thus, in the light of the previous literature, this chapter investigated the ineffectiveness of the 2005 Saudi municipal election media campaign based on the assessment of two main factors. These are the effectiveness of the election media campaign as a communication tool and its effects on Saudi citizens' attitudes towards their participation in the elections. This chapter shows that the municipal election media campaign, as academic literature has found in other democratic societies, had an inadequate effect on Saudis' perceptions towards elections, which might have contributed to their low level of participation towards registration and voting in those elections. The majority of respondents thought that the campaign failed to attract people's attention to the elections and did not provide enough information about that

national political process. In addition, the effect of the mass media campaign on citizens' attitudes towards their participation in the elections was minimal or very limited. In other words, the Saudi media campaign failed the Saudi voters as much as Dautrich and Hartley (1999) stated that the new media 'failed American voters' (p. 132).

Some factors can be seen to have contributed to the limited effect of the municipal election media campaign. The campaign did not consider the social traditions that control Saudi society as well as citizens' predispositions towards elections. Consequently, people were driven by social powers and norms and the outcome of the election showed that religion, tribe or family values and ties had the loudest voice in people's voting decisions (discussed in Chapter Six).

The election media campaign failed to inform Saudi citizens that the municipal elections were part of a political process which would benefit the people and the country. In other words, the campaign was not successful in showing citizens how the elections were relevant to their present and future. Thus, the role of the media campaign, whether it was informational or educational about the election process, was very limited and the majority of the study respondents were critical with what had been offered by the Saudi mass media.

A shortage of money and time and immature strategies and tactics used in the campaign's implementation were among the factors that might also have contributed to the ineffectiveness of the campaign. Moreover, the lack of specialised experts involved in planning, designing and implementing an effective election communication campaign characterised the campaign. The majority of respondents held the election organising committees and the Saudi mass media to be directly responsible for shortcomings in the information that Saudi public needed at the time of the elections, which might have contributed to citizens' limited participation in 2005 municipal elections.

However, the fact that this was Saudi Arabia's first experience of electoral politics might be a possible reason for the failure of the election media campaign to encourage more Saudis to participate in those elections. Finally, the previous findings serve also to confirm that the ineffectiveness of the election media campaign is not and will not be a purely Saudi case; it is a universal phenomenon in most elections around the world, as the cited scholars have found.

Chapter Nine will discuss the third factor that might decrease people's participation in the municipal elections, which is the poor implementation of the candidates' promotional campaigns.

CHAPTER NINE

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CANDIDATES' CAMPAIGNS

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CANDIDATES' CAMPAIGNS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the third factor that might have contributed to the Saudi citizens' disengagement towards the 2005 municipal elections. I argue that the poor implementation of the candidates' promotional campaigns might have decreased the citizens' participation in those elections. As discussed in Chapter Six, the municipal elections regulations gave candidates in each phase of the three phases of the municipal elections only ten days to publicise themselves. In that ten-day period, candidates had to use only newspapers and the internet as mass media to reach the public. Furthermore, they were allowed to set up street signs within half a mile from their camps and distribute brochures and flyers about themselves and their programmes in their camps (tents).

This chapter is based on an analysis of the survey and interview questions which aim to investigate the effectiveness of those campaigns and to understand the Saudis' perceptions towards them. Respondents were asked various questions assessing their evaluations of the candidates' campaigns. Those questions include: What were the objectives, strategies and tactics of the candidates' promotional campaigns? What were the citizens' perceptions of the effectiveness of the candidates' promotional campaigns? This chapter will reveal the findings of this study based on the discussion of some sub-variables that will draw a clear picture of the candidates' campaigns and the citizens' evaluation of those campaigns. These sub-variables are: the candidates' campaign length, the candidates' limited access to the mass media, the candidates' vague promises, candidates' manipulation of the religious factor and the role of the candidates' characteristics in their wining. The analysis of the study findings indicated that those factors were crucial elements that might have prevented more citizens from voting in the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia. Alkhudairi (2007) (a), who argued that among 698 candidates in Riyadh city only six to ten candidates conducted acceptable and somewhat professional electoral campaigns (p. 136), confirms this result. The findings also show that some Saudi voters were attracted more by the candidates' characteristics than by their campaign activities.

To highlight the conceptual framework of this chapter, a brief examination of some literature about the history, function and characteristic of electoral campaigns will be carried out.

Thurber (1996) noted that according to Webster, the word 'campaign' comes from a military vocabulary that means 'a connected series of military operations forming a distinct phase of a war' or a 'connected series designed to bring about a particular result'. Thus, winning an election is like winning a war to those who establish 'war rooms' and manage campaigns. Thurber defined campaigns as follows:

> Campaigns are competitions over ideas. Candidates and campaign organisations are attempting to capture government through the democratic process and to advance policies. Campaigns are battles to define public problems and to develop public policy solutions to those problems. Elections campaigns are combat over ideas and ways to persuade groups of voters to support those ideas (p. 3).

In addition, Bratton (2008) stated that in a democracy, the election campaign is supposed to be a peaceful and open discourse of persuasion where candidates have to persuade the electorate why they are most qualified to be voted into office by use of 'reasoned arguments'. Denver and Hands (1997) argued that the main target of election campaigning is to win votes and they divide these campaigns into the local and the national:

> While there have been changes in the local-national balance and in the style and mechanics of electioneering, campaigning has always had the same ostensible overriding purpose – to win votes. Whatever the detailed methods used, central to the very result – which will usually mean getting the best possible – for the party or candidate concerned (p. 18).

Denver and Hands stated that there are four aims of any campaign. Campaigns usually seek to inform, to persuade, to reinforce and to mobilise the electorate (p. 18). The authors also distinguished four phases of election campaign development in Britain. The period before 1884, the period from 1885 to 1918, the period until the mid 1950s and the period from 1959 till today. The authors argued that the devolvement of the two-level (local and national) campaign is a recent phenomenon, but local constituency campaigning in general elections is a traditional and familiar aspect of the electoral process. Some of the old tactics used in those campaigns according to Denver and Hands (1997) were as follows:

> The earliest references to the practice of candidates' treating electors providing them with alcohol and other forms of largesse in order to secure their support was in 1467, while the first authenticated case of outright electorate bribery occurred in the reign of Elizabeth I (p. 5).

Surprisingly, some Saudi candidates used these tactics during the campaigning days of the 2005 municipal elections to attract voters as illustrated in Chapter Six. However, Denver and Hands (1997) stated that highly organised national campaigns have developed only during the

past fifty to sixty years because of changes in the legal framework within which elections are conducted, the growth in the size of constituency electorates and the development of the mass media (p. 5).

Norris (1997) distinguished three phases in the development of campaigning: pre-modern, modern and post-modern: 'pre-modern or traditional campaigning was low budget, *ad hoc,* local and decentralized and was characterized by 'direct communications between citizens and their representatives, but this declined after 1945 to be replaced by modern campaigning' (p. 76). This might resemble the situation in Saudi Arabia where candidates had to keep close contact with voters. Furthermore, the author explained that modern campaigning in Britain involved a longer time for campaigning dominated by television, opinion polls and daily press conferences that was coordinated by specialists and professionals. But, by the 1990's, campaigning began to move into a 'post-modern' phase that was characterised by 'specialized narrowcasting leading to a greater fragmentation of media outlets, message and audiences' (p. 77). Norris stated that national campaigning has become 'highly professional' and the parties or candidates employ professional experts to develop a 'media strategy', to give advice on how to improve the candidate's image, 'including how they should dress, speak and have their hair cut' (p. 85). Those experts also design posters and logos, devise slogans, suggest who should or should not appear on television and which policies should be stressed. Moreover, post-modern campaign broadcasts are made by professional film directors, press conferences are carefully managed and other campaign events planned to ensure the best possible media coverage. The author concluded that 'compared with the 1960s, it would be fair to say that national level campaigning has been revolutionised' (p. 88).

Following these points regarding the distinction between local and national electoral campaigns, and based on the municipal elections regulations, it is clear that the Saudi municipal elections were local elections. Saudi candidates had to nominate themselves in specific constituencies where they had lived for a number of years. Consequently, voters had the chance to elect a number of candidates in many constituencies in the same city. For example, in Riyadh city, voters had to elect up to only seven candidates of 698 who nominated themselves to the city municipal council. The government assigned the other seven members of the council (Riyadh municipal elections encyclopaedia, 2005, p. 33). Moreover, although Saudi candidates followed many traditional tactics that had been used in local elections to attract voters, some of them adopted tactics and strategies that had been

used in modern campaigning and assigned political campaigning experts to help them in their campaigns.

Other academic literature discusses the best strategies and tactics used by candidates to get their messages out and attract more voters. The work of Benoit, et al. (2003), explained the functional theory, which is based on several assumptions. First, it argues that 'voting is a comparative act', which means that a candidate needs to persuade voters that he or she is better than his or her opponents. Second, 'candidates must distinguish themselves from opponents'; therefore, voters must see clear differences in the candidates so they can choose one rather than the other. Third, 'political campaign messages are important vehicles for distinguishing between candidates'. A fourth assumption of functional theory is that 'candidates establish prefer-ability through acclaiming, attacking and defending' (p. 4); therefore, candidates can make themselves appear worthy of receiving a citizen's vote by using these three tactics. In other words, functional theory indicates that candidates have three means to persuade voters that they are a better choice than their opponents through acclaiming (that is to portray the candidate in a favourable light), attacking (to portray the opposing candidate in an unfavourable light), and defending (attempting to repair the candidate's reputation from attacks by the opposition) (pp. 2-7). In Saudi Arabia, the election regulations did not allow any candidate to attack another candidate or his strategies or programmes. So candidates had to use only the 'acclaiming tactic' to create a favourable images for themselves among voters, but they were unable or allowed to attack other candidates or defend themselves against them.

The candidate's image was another component of his success in the elections. King (2002) argued that in our media-saturated society, candidates seeking public office must create a strong image which they think will persuade voters and they communicate that image by means such as speeches, debates, radio and television spots, letters to the editors, yard signs, and informal contacts with potential voters. Furthermore, candidates for local level political office should distribute written materials because they, unlike their counterparts for state and national offices, seldom have the resources to flood the voting public with radio and TV spots. Finally, King noted that the mix of approaches that candidates usually use in their campaigns probably depends on the personality of the candidate, the type of election, the nature of the opposition, and the political culture of the community (pp. 31-41). In Saudi Arabia, as my findings showed that the candidate's image is very important in his success in

the elections and some of the factors that King (2002) explained are relevant to the strategies adopted by Saudi candidates. Furthermore, Brooks and Farmer (2009) found that personal contact was the most powerful method of gaining votes. In their long-term study which looked at city council primary races in Akron, Ohio, they found that candidates knocked on around 1/3 of voters' doors in one race and around 2/3 of doors in another. Also, public appearances by candidates, calling voters by phone, sending campaign representatives to canvas door-to-door and using direct mail seemed to be effective techniques (pp. 1-8).

During the municipal election campaign, most of the candidates used yard and street advertising signs. Personal contacts were also seen to be effective, although according to the election regulations, candidates had to concentrate their electoral activities in their own camps. However, some of them did violate those rules by visiting groups of voters in the cities.

Dalager (1996) warned that a typical political campaign takes place simultaneously with dozens of other campaigns, all of them competing for voter attention. Thus, a mass of political and non-political information swamps the voters. Also, every political campaign has its own characteristics that may affect the level and quality of information available to voters. So if the process of communication between candidates and voters fails at any point during the campaign, it would be difficult for the message to get through and for the voters to vote (p. 487). However, Dalager explained three main elements that should be examined by campaigners for any successful campaign communication. Those factors are the campaign's characteristics, voters' personal characteristics and the electoral district's characteristics. Campaign characteristics include paid political advertising in the mass media, free media coverage through the broadcast or printing of news or feature stories, distribution of campaign literature through direct mail or volunteer delivery, and personal contact with voters through speeches, meetings, and other public events. A voter's characteristics include their political sophistication and knowledge, years of education, level of political interest, strength of partisanship, exposure to the mass media, political socialisation processes as well as their subsequent voting decisions. Finally, the location, geography and size of an electoral district may affect voter communication. For example, in a large district with numerous population centres, candidates need to rely on a number of different media channels to reach the voters, while in a smaller district with a single population centre and a centralised media, candidates can reach voters through fewer channels (pp. 486-515). Here, Dalager's findings

are very relevant to the Saudi situation as it is clear that candidates' characteristics, location, geography and the size of the electoral district did have an impact on the Saudi electoral process as this study will show. Even though the societies are different, the means and process of the electoral campaigning are similar.

Finally, in Juholin's (2001) study about the presidential election campaign in Finland she examined reasons why Elisabeth Rehn – labelled by the media as the queen of the polls – lost her lead position a month before the presidential election. The author found that the main internal weaknesses of Rehn's campaign involved four factors: the weakness of the campaign's organisation, its lack of resources, issues about the candidate's credibility and a mismatch in the chosen themes of the campaign. What did affect the voting were the personalities of the candidates, that is, two strong right-wing female candidates, and the overwhelming resources of the competitive organisations (p. 125). Thus, the personalities and wealth of candidates are among the important factors to be considered in establishing the effectiveness of a campaign, whether in Europe or Saudi Arabia.

At the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, as mentioned in Chapter Six, candidates used some of the strategies and tactics described above. Despite the fact that the Saudi elections were local elections and most candidates did not have sufficient financial resources or free access to the mass media (which was prohibited by the election regulations), some of them used the newspapers and the internet to reach a large number of voters. Because all the newspapers in the Saudi Arabia are national newspapers, candidates for the local municipal councils had to compete locally, but advertise nationally. That situation was prohibitive for those candidates who did not have enough money, but affordable for wealthy and educated candidates and profitable for newspapers. In addition to advertising, some academic candidates assigned special committees in their teams to canvassing supporters. One of the winning candidates stated that 'those new supporters helped us with our daily activities in our headquarters as well as helping us to convince or attract their friends, relatives and colleagues to do the same' (Interviewee No. 27). Also, other candidates participated in television and radio shows, visited local malls and schools, attended local activities and gave speeches and delivered presentations about their activities. Moreover, candidates had their pictures, programmes or camps' daily activities on yard signs (street signs) within half a mile of their camps as the elections regulations ordered. Finally, nearly all candidates distributed

brochures and flyers around the city or the region they lived in. The assessment of the effectiveness of those techniques is the aim of this chapter.

Having looked closely at the functions and characteristics of electoral campaigns, I now turn to look at some aspects of the Saudi candidates' campaigns that might have affected the Saudi citizens' perceptions towards those campaigns and decreased their participation in the 2005 municipal elections. The length of the Saudi candidates' electoral campaigns in the municipal elections is the first factor that will be discussed in this chapter.

The length of the candidates' campaigns

The length of the campaigns is a vital element of the candidates' success. As we have seen, the municipal elections regulations allowed candidates to conduct their promotional campaigns in just the ten days prior to Election Day. Candidates had to work hard during that short period under enormous pressure to reach voters through advertisements in the newspapers, the internet, text messages or through face-to-face activities in their camps (headquarters). Therefore, the length of the campaign was a crucial issue for many of the candidates concerned. Stevenson and Vavreck (2000) argued that a campaign's length gives voters more time to absorb more of the campaign information. Voters must collect sufficient information about the candidate and his programmes to reach what Stevenson and Vavreck called 'enlightenment'. They wrote:

> The period of the campaign is needed so that voters can be exposed to a large sample of campaign messages from which they can accurately estimate the true positions of candidates on important issues... 'enlightenment' usually is less successful in very short election campaigns than it is in campaigns of sufficient length. Consequently, the systematic effect of the fundamental variables of vote choice should be less apparent in elections following short campaigns (p. 223).

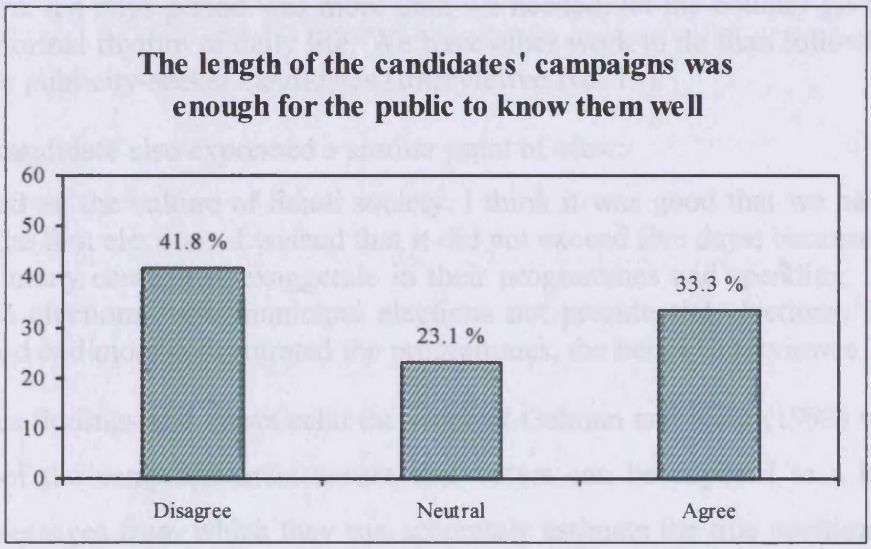
Following this idea about the importance of a campaign's length, it is essential here to know the Saudi citizens' perceptions of the ten-day period that was allowed for candidates to present themselves to the public. Respondents were asked to evaluate the length of the candidates' campaigns. Their answers are presented in the bar chart 9.1. The chart shows that a considerable proportion of the respondents, 41.8 per cent, thought that the candidate campaign's length (ten days) was not enough for the public to know them well4. However,

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[4] A cross tabulation between campaign length and voting behaviour shows that there were more non-

one third of the citizens (33.3 %) thought it was, and almost one quarter of the sample (23.1 %) was neutral. This result shows that more respondents thought that the candidates needed more time to help the Saudi public know them better. In other words, the ten-day period that was determined by the municipal elections committee for candidates to expose themselves to the public was very short or not enough for the citizens to know them well. This might have negatively affected citizens' knowledge about candidates and driven them away from participation in the municipal elections.

Chart 9.1



Nearly all interviewees thought that the period of ten days, assigned by the elections committee, was very short and was not sufficient for candidates to reach most of their target voters. A member of the municipal elections committee thought that more than a month would be appropriate:

> That period would be sufficient if there was a high level of political awareness among people. Citizens wanted information about the candidates, the role of the municipal council and who was going to head the council. Candidates needed more than a month to sell themselves to voters (Interviewee No. 5).

This statement confirms that the campaigning period was short, which is crucial here because this respondent is a member of the elections committee, and his opinion might be considered more credible than others. He lived that political experience and knew exactly what went wrong.

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voter respondents (55.4 %) than voters (41.8 %) who thought that the campaigns' length was enough.

A female respondent thought that one month would be enough for candidates' campaigns. She said:

> Ten days was not enough, but one month might be appropriate. The government had to create an election culture among citizens for a sufficient time before the beginning of those electoral campaigns. Elections were new in our community so we needed to educate our people about it extensively before starting those campaigns (Interviewee No. 2).

However, one journalist expressed another point of view and thought that five days would have been more than we needed. He went on to explain:

> I think ten days period was more than we needed, let the country go back quickly to the normal rhythm of daily life. We have other work to do than following the news of those publicity-seeker candidates (Interviewee No. 15).

A winning candidate also expressed a similar point of view:

> Based on the culture of Saudi society, I think it was good that we had only ten days for the first elections. I wished that it did not exceed five days, because in ten days we saw many candidates exaggerate in their programmes and spending. The fact is that those elections were municipal elections not presidential elections. The shorter the period and more concentrated the programmes, the better (Interviewee No. 28).

The previous findings and views echo the work of Gelman and King (1993) who argued that the period of the campaign must ensure that voters can be exposed to a large sample of campaign messages from which they can accurately estimate the true positions of candidates on important issues. The authors provided some evidence that a campaign of about six weeks may be adequate. Specifically, Gelman and King showed that voters pay little attention to campaigns earlier than 200 days prior to the election. However, they thought that six weeks before the election, 'voters seem to accelerate their learning and quickly gain information about the candidates and the policies they stand for' (p. 450). This suggests that in campaigns shorter than six weeks people might not be able to have all the necessary information about the candidates and their programmes.

Here, the findings and views confirm that the period of ten days for candidates' promotional campaigns was not enough for the Saudi citizens to know them well. The short period assigned by the elections committee made it difficult for voters to know the candidates or understand their messages. In addition, the large number of candidates in every city around the country (698 in Riyadh city alone) meant that more time was needed for voters to attend the candidates' camps (headquarters) or study their electoral messages. The majority of interviewees thought that a period of four to six weeks might have been appropriate for

candidates to get their messages across and voters to understand them and behave accordingly. So one may conclude that the short period of campaigning during the 2005 municipal elections might have contributed to the Saudi citizens' ignorance of the elections and may have decreased their participation in that process.

Candidates' limited access to the mass media

Candidates' campaigns also suffered from limited access to the mass media. According to the election regulations, candidates could only use newspapers and the internet, although they were allowed to use mobile text messages or distribute flyers and brochures inside their camps to get their messages to the public. Using mass media channels such as television and radio were prohibited for candidates during the elections. Gelman and King (1993) argued that election campaigns should be informative and competitive where they convey information about very important issues to voters, because without true competition between media outlets in a campaign, the truth may be successfully hidden and electoral outcomes may not reflect the importance of those issues. In other words, the competitive nature of the campaign attracts the media which ensures that the voters receive different views about issues or candidates. The authors explained that there are two conditions for competitiveness, which are 'symmetry and pervasiveness'. The idea of symmetry is simply that the resources available to different candidates (or parties) in a campaign should be equal. Without that resource, wealthy candidates can dominate the information that is disseminated to voters which might mislead them. Also, pervasiveness means that campaigns must be able to reach most of the electorate. In other words, the campaign must be able to access the mass media either directly (advertisements) or indirectly (news coverage) (pp. 32-34).

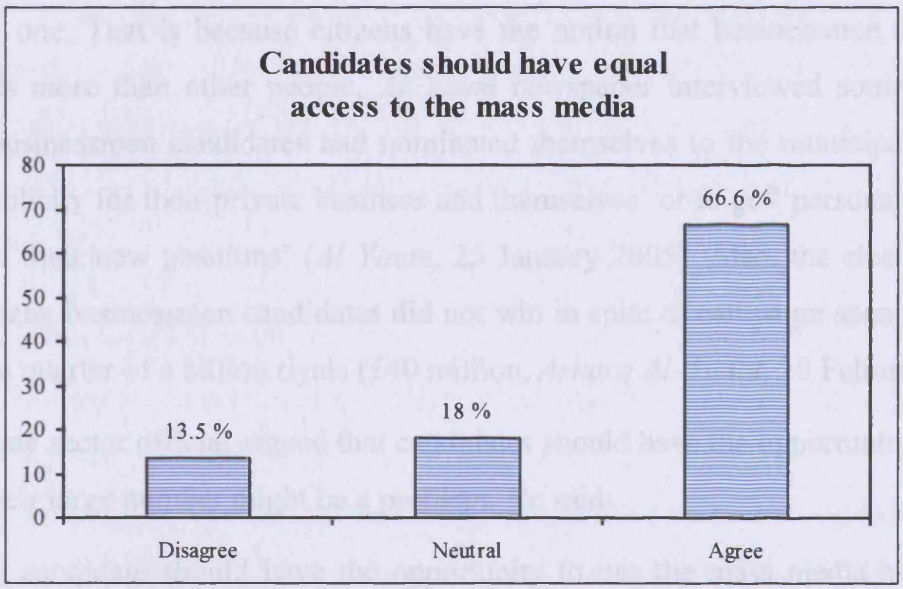
Moreover, Temin and Smith (2002) argued that the role of the media, both state-owned and private, is important in both local and national elections, particularly those occurring in developing countries, where the mass media can play a formative role in shaping the public perception about political issues (p. 86). The author stated that the media need exciting political campaigns in order to market their product and sell advertising and candidates need the media for publicity purposes.

However, Temin and Smith (2002) found, in their study on the 2000 presidential elections in Ghana, that the law gives the right for all politicians to have equal access to the mass media,

including those of the government, as stated clearly in Article 55 of the 1992 constitution (p. 588).

It is clear that candidate access to the mass media is a crucial issue in any political campaign and therefore is a relevant matter when examining the municipal election process in Saudi Arabia. Thus, Saudi respondents were asked to give their opinions about the candidates' rights to equal access to the Saudi mass media during the 2005 municipal elections. Their answers are presented in the bar chart (9.2) below.

Chart 9.2



The bar chart above shows that the majority of respondents (66.6 %) agreed that candidates should have equal access to the mass media[5], whereas only 13.5 per cent of the sample disagreed and less than one fifth of respondents (18 %) did not express an opinion.

This result suggests that the majority of the citizens thought that the candidates should have equal access to the mass media to have their messages heard. Further, this result confirms what has been discussed in the background chapter that the candidates were instructed to use only newspapers and the internet as mass media to reach the voters.

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[5] A cross tabulation between candidates' access to the mass media and voting behaviour shows that non-voter respondents (55.2 %) were more than voters (42.0 %), who thought candidates should have an equal access to the mass media.

Moreover, when interviewees were asked about this variable, the vast majority of them stressed the importance of all candidates using mass media equally. One supportive journalist expressed his position as follows:

> I am for full access to the mass media for all candidates. We need influential candidates who can serve the community. Business men have the power because they have the money. Let them win the elections. Businessmen have more effect in society than ideologists or academics who do nothing but theorise things. I think businessmen will be more committed to what they have said than anybody else and if are denied access to the mass media, they are able to find or buy other channels (Interviewee No. 14).

The idea that business men are more committed to their promises than other candidates is a controversial one. That is because citizens have the notion that businessmen tend to serve their interests more than other people. *Al Yaum* newspaper interviewed some voters who feared that businessmen candidates had nominated themselves to the municipal councils to 'get more publicity for their private business and themselves' or to get 'personal gain' and to 'benefit from their new positions' (*Al Yaum*, 25 January 2005). Also, the election outcome shows that many businessmen candidates did not win in spite of campaign spending that was estimated at a quarter of a billion riyals (£40 million, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 10 February 2005).

Another private sector official argued that candidates should have the opportunity to use mass media, but their large number might be a problem. He said:

> Every candidate should have the opportunity to use the mass media available. The only thing that worries me about this issue is the huge number of candidates. It was not possible for the government or the commercial mass media to allow thousands of candidates to use them in that ten day period. Riyadh city alone, not Riyadh Region, had 698 candidates. It would have been very difficult to do that (Interviewee No. 42).

However, a losing candidate said that mass media was not suitable for the municipal elections. He said:

> At the municipal elections, controlled mass media such as radio and television could serve the candidate to some extent. I think non-governmental commercial satellite TV channels or radio might create racism among tribes or areas, which in this case would not serve the candidate, but may harm him (Interviewee No. 47).

Another journalist expressed a similar point of view. She said:

> Television and radio have an enormous impact on people. Therefore, there is considerable danger in only allowing a person who has the money to use such mediums and affect the outcome of the elections, especially in the presence of the commercial channels which will dominate the public sphere. I'm a supporter of using

> such mediums to educate people about the importance of the elections and teaching them about the best methods to elect or evaluate candidates (Interviewee No. 6).

Despite the disagreement among those interviewees about candidates' rights to equal access to the mass media, much scholarly work has explained that laws in many democratic states around the world protect this right. For example, Wattenberg (1990) argued that a campaign organisation must have sufficient access to voters to inform them where the candidate stands on issues in the elections. Also, the author noted that contemporary campaigns must be conducted by professionals who are trained to use the mass media effectively to inform the electorate about candidates and their issues (p. 25).

Drawing on this, I argue that the Saudi candidates' limited access to the mass media might have prevented them from getting their message out and persuading a large number of voters to vote for them. Consequently, voters did not have enough information about candidates, which might have discouraged them from choosing their candidates or participating in the municipal elections.

Manipulation of the religious factor

In addition to limited access to the mass media, which negatively affected the implementation of the candidates' campaigns, manipulative tactics such as using religion to attract voters probably had a similar effect. As has been discussed in Chapter Six, some candidates used direct religious verses from the Holly Quran and the Prophet Mohammed's (Peace be upon him) speeches in their logos, advertisements, programmes, brochures, flyers and yard signs to show voters that those candidates worked and behaved according to religious tenets. Page (1978) defined manipulation as the influencing of beliefs or preferences by false or misleading information. He wrote:

> Manipulation of the public involves providing false or misleading information, which changes preferences or beliefs, and diverts voters from their interest. Since there is often room for real doubt about what the truth is, we cannot always identify misinformation; nor can we always tell what effects misinformation actually has on the voters. But we can be certain that falsehood is not uncommon in election campaigns, and that misleading statements are legion (p. 274)

Here, Page argued that manipulation is a known phenomenon in the political arena and might change citizens' beliefs and interests. In addition, Page mentioned a number of ways in which citizens might be manipulated within the electoral process. Candidates could and would appear to have incentives to misrepresent opponents' policy stand by using known symbols or

expressions to appeal to some members of the public while misrepresenting their own stands to the public. Candidates could present a false image of their own personal characteristics or depict their opponents in a bad light. They could try to deceive voters about whether the present situation was good or bad by misstating facts or about how, if they were voted into power, they could improve things (p. 268). Furthermore, Jacoby (2009), in his study of ideology and voter choice in the 2004 American election, defined ideology as a set of 'capping abstractions' which can serve to organise separate beliefs and attitudes about the various elements of the political world into 'coherent and consistent psychological structures'. Thus, some 'people organise their attitudes and behaviour along ideological lines while others do not' (p. 585). Zubaida (2007) argued that Salafism, one of the widespread forms of expanding Sunni Islamic religious assertion, aims precisely at making religion public, often as the 'moralisation of individual conduct as well as of public space'. Also, the author stated that strident Shi'ism does the same thing, where the violent enforcement of 'moral' conduct on a terrified population by the Mahdi army and other militias in Iraq are examples of this ideological strategy (Open Democracy, 15 January 2010). In Saudi Arabia, as this chapter illustrates, a large number of candidates used religious verses and symbols in their logos, speeches and electoral programmes to send messages to voters that they were religious candidates behaving and working according to the Islamic creed.

Green (2007) argued that affiliation with a religious community matters in politics. He explained that in the 2004 presidential elections, Bush received strong support from members of conservative religious groups, some of them 'religious fundamentalists' because:

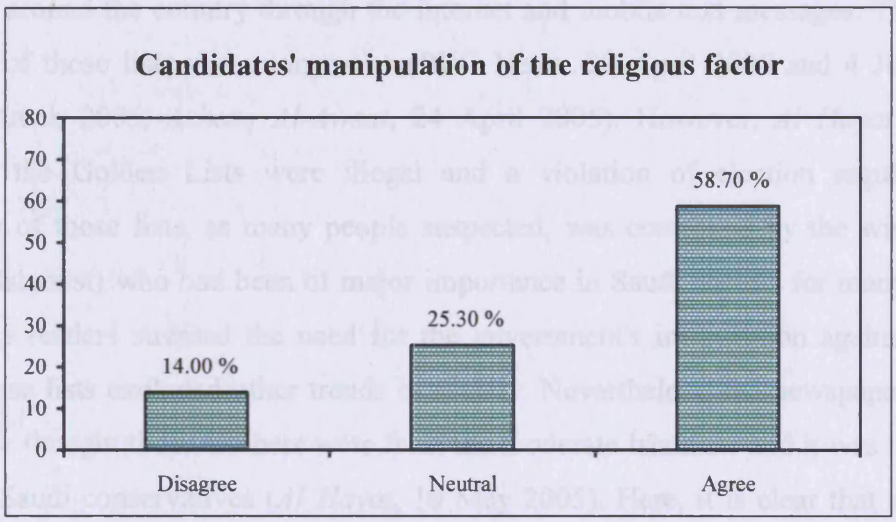
> The presidential candidates and their allies used extensive religious appeals to mobilise voters. In fact, much of the commentary and coverage of the campaign recognised the crucial links between religion and politics (p. 1).

Green quoted one headline which proclaimed 'Religious Voters Go Own Way: Many Christians Vote by Ideology, Not Denomination' (p. 3). Also, he gave an example of criticism by Thomas Friedman, *New York Times* columnist, who criticised Bush's approach as follows:

> My problem with the Christian fundamentalists supporting Mr. Bush is not their spiritual energy or the fact that I am of a different faith. It is the way in which he and they have used that religious energy to promote divisions and intolerance at home and abroad (cited in Green, 2007, p. 2).

In line with these thoughts and to find out about the Saudi candidates' use of political ideology in their electoral campaigns, respondents were asked whether they thought some candidates had used religious verses and symbols as misleading tactics in their promotional campaigns to attract voters or not. I assumed that the high level of understanding among Saudi citizens of the manipulation made by some candidates at the municipal elections might have led to their disengagement towards those elections. The following bar chart (9.3) shows their answers.

Chart 9.3



The bar chart above reveals that more than half of the respondents (58.7 %) thought that some candidates had manipulated the religious factor in their campaigns[6]. However, a small number of the citizens (14.0 %) disagreed and nearly one quarter of the sample (25.3 %) was neutral. This result shows that the majority of the sample agreed that some candidates had used the religious factor in their messages to mislead voters.

The majority of interviewees agreed that most of the candidates used religious phrases and expressions in their campaigns to mislead voters. One observer said:

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[6] A cross tabulation between candidates' manipulation of the religious factor and voting behaviour shows that non-voter respondents (55.1 %) were more than voters (42.0 %) who thought some candidates had manipulated the religious factor in their campaigns. Also, a correlation between these two variables indicates that there is a significant negative relationship among them (sig. = - .257), which means that non-voters tended to believe that most candidates used religion as a tactic to attract voters more than the people who voted. This might support my claim that manipulation of religion might have increased citizens' non-participation in elections.

> As an observer of the elections, it was true that some candidates used the religious factor to reach people. There was a circulation of the Golden Lists in Riyadh and Jeddah Regions as well as other regions around the country. In Riyadh, for instance, the people whose names were mentioned in those lists won the elections. It was clear that there was a strong faction that pushed voters to vote for specific candidates, I mean, lobbying. Also, the internet heavily circulated those Golden Lists that were supported by religious scholars around the country (Interviewee No. 35).

The issue of the 'Golden Lists' was one of the crucial issues in the municipal elections. Citizens, newspapers and internet websites reported that there were lists of names for specific candidates, or what they called 'Golden Lists' that were dispatched to thousands of people in most cities around the country through the internet and mobile text messages. The source or the sender of those lists was anonymous (BBC News, 23 April 2005 and 4 July 2005, *Al Yaum,* 2 March 2005, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 24 April 2005). However, *Al Hayat* Newspaper wrote that the Golden Lists were illegal and a violation of election regulations. The distribution of those lists, as many people suspected, was controlled by the winning group (moderate Islamist) who had been of major importance in Saudi society for many years. The newspaper's readers stressed the need for the government's intervention against that trend because those lists excluded other trends in society. Nevertheless, the newspaper wrote that other people thought those winners were from the moderate Islamists and it was normal to be elected by Saudi conservatives (*Al Hayat*, 10 May 2005). Here, it is clear that the religious trend was the only winner of such tactics that swept the three phases of the municipal elections. Ghattas (2005) wrote about those results: 'in a country that is still deeply traditional and religious, the results are hardly surprising' (BBC News, 23 April 2005).

In addition, a losing candidate expressed a similar opinion about the role of religion in the municipal elections as follows:

> Five thousand voted for me and the difference between me and the winner of my constituency is only 600 votes. Unfortunately, he was not known in the area and did not distribute any brochure about himself or set up a camp or even did any kind of publicity. The Golden List is what brought him to the council. The religious current in the community created that environment for him, and others like him, to win those elections without any real effort from those candidates (Interviewee No. 24).

Another losing candidate saw the elections as a competition among religious and liberal candidates and argued that the religious candidates used religion in their favour:

> I'm sure that the majority of candidates used religion to win. They specifically used verses from the Holy Quran in their ads, brochures and flyers, and used the mosques in an indirect way to support each other. There were a few open-minded candidates in

> the community who, in the final days of the elections, decided to imitate the same tactic as the religious current, but it was too late for them. I think that the elections were a competition between religious and liberal groups (Interviewee No. 25)

However, a citizen described the use of religious expressions by some candidates as a normal tactic in Saudi Arabia. He said:

> It is normal in a religious society like Saudi to use that tactic. Candidates have used what they thought would make them win those elections. What is better than religion to attract religious citizens? I can't ever think about a more persuasive and effective approach than religion in Saudi Arabia. Our culture and social life are dominated by religious values (Interviewee No. 46).

Almost all interviewees agreed that a large number of candidates used religion only to attract voters. Religion is an important factor in a strongly religious society like Saudi Arabia and it is the most effective ideology in the society. At the same time, some voters knew that many candidates had used this ideology only to attract people to vote for them.

The findings here are consistent with the work of Arceneaux (2005) who argued that the effect of ideology on voters is significant. He stated that campaigns appear to generate learning about ideology among those with the least information or the lowest levels of political sophistication. Individuals with high levels of political sophistication are more aware of the parties' ideologies or candidates' stances before the campaign begins (pp. 168-172). In addition, Al Khuwilidi (2005) wrote that some candidates included religious aspects in their programmes. They used religious phrases in their advertisements and publications and invited religious scholars to their camps. Some of these phrases are direct quotes from the Holy Quran such as 'fairness', 'serious work', 'the loyal work', 'the truthful desire', 'determination of the believer', 'observe the God in my deeds', and 'the best people are those who serve other people' (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 22 February 2005).

Bearing in mind the effect of religion in the above literature, one may conclude that Saudi Arabia is a religious and conservative society, which means that religion (Islam) dominates and affects all aspects of citizens' daily life. Also, the majority of the Saudi people are less politically aware because they have never experienced general elections before. Therefore, some Saudi candidates realised the importance of religion in society and used that factor to attract voters. On the other hand, the findings of this section show that a considerable proportion of Saudi citizens recognised those misleading tactics by some candidates which might have made them chose not to participate in the municipal elections. This, of course,

was not the only reason for citizens' non-participation in municipal elections, but it could be one of the crucial elements.

Candidates' promises

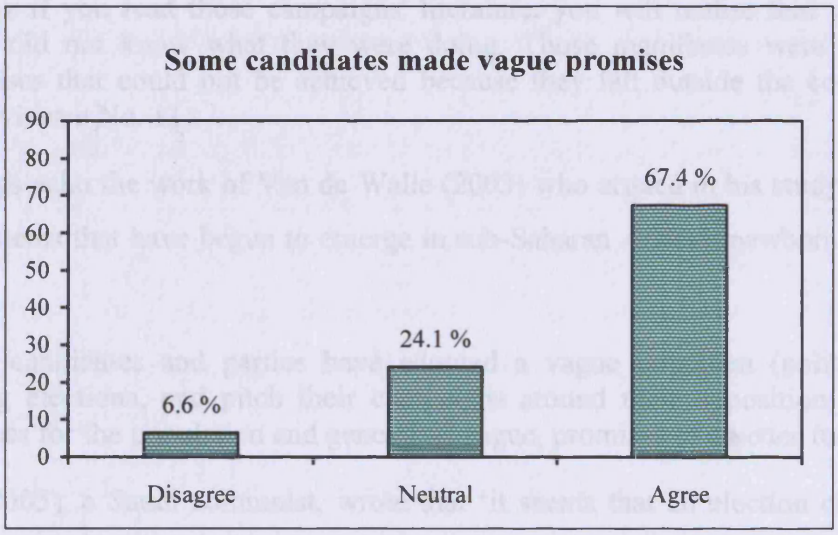
Having discussed the manipulation tactic that shaped most of the candidates' electoral campaigns, it is important for this research to look at another factor that might have led to citizens' non-participation in municipal elections. This factor is the promises that candidates gave to attract voters. As illustrated in Chapter Six, a large number of Saudi candidates had given vague promises to attract voters. Many of those promises were difficult to fulfil or not related to the work of the municipal council. Benoit and Cho (2005) analysed news releases for six candidates in the 2004 American democratic presidential primary campaign and found that individual candidates implemented different forms of campaigning that included false promises. For example, although Kucinich and Dean frequently discussed past deeds, Clark, Kerry and Edwards stressed future plans. The authors noted that future plans may be a good choice for candidates because they were offering more specifics and some vague promises (p. 182). Moreover, Konitzer-Smirnov (2005) stated that giving vague promises is a known tactic, especially for politicians in some emerging democracies. Prior to the 1999 presidential election, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma faced a lack of party support in the country and was forced to rely on his regional appointees to organise campaigns and mobilise voters. Kuchma and his supporters hoped to maintain support (at least until the next round of elections) amongst subordinate regional executives by giving them vague promises of future rewards (p. 8).

Thus, to learn about citizens' perceptions of the Saudi candidates' promises, respondents were asked to give their opinions about the candidates' promises and, whether they felt that promises were true or fell outside the functions of the municipal councils. Their answers are presented in the bar chart (9.4). The chart shows that a large proportion of the sample (67.4 %) thought that candidates gave vague promises that fell outside the municipal council's functions and that the candidates would not be able to fulfil them[7]. However, only a small

[7] A cross tabulation between candidates' vague promises and voting behaviour shows that non-voter respondents (55.4 %) were more than voters (41.8 %) who thought some candidates had given vague promises. Also, a correlation between these two variables indicates that there is a significant negative relationship among them (sig. = -.120), which means that non-voter respondents noticed that candidates had given false promises more than voters.

number (6.6 %) of the respondents thought that candidates did not give such promises. At the same time, almost one quarter of the sample (24.1 %) was neutral. This result shows that the majority of the sample agreed that candidates gave vague promises to attract voters.

Chart 9.4



Furthermore, almost all interviewees shared the opinion that the majority of the candidates had lied in their advertisements, speeches and other electoral programmes to attract voters. Those candidates gave inaccurate information or promises about their future plans in the municipal councils.

One citizen expressed a critical point of view towards some candidates:

> There were a large number of candidates who talked about huge projects that were not achievable or did not fall under the responsibilities of the municipal council. They wanted to make everybody came to their camps happy by providing them with free food and entertainment. Fortunately, despite all sorts of tricky tactics used by those candidates, many voters were clever, they attended those shows but did not show up on Election Day (Interviewee No. 53).

Here, the citizen was aware that some candidates hoped to attract voters to their camps by providing food or other entertainment activities and understood that their promises were unachievable. Because of this understanding, they chose not to vote for such candidates.

Furthermore, a journalist suggested that emotional exploitation was another tactic used by some candidates:

> If we look back to the electoral programmes, we will find that voters were drowned by false promises of a better future. Surprisingly, there were a number of candidates who were well-educated and intellectual, but they did not have an effective role in that electoral chaos (Interviewee No. 2).

However, another journalist distinguished two groups of candidates. He said:

> I think if you read those campaigns' literature, you will realise that whoever wrote them did not know what they were doing. Those manifestos were no more than promises that could not be achieved because they fall outside the council's powers (Interviewee No. 11).

These findings echo the work of Van de Walle (2003) who argued in his study on the parties and party systems that have begun to emerge in sub-Saharan Africa's newborn party systems that:

> Most candidates and parties have adopted a vague populism (political ideology) during elections, and pitch their campaigns around their opposition to corruption, services for the population and general, if vague, promises of a better future (p. 304).

Al Angari (2005), a Saudi columnist, wrote that 'it seems that an election culture remains absent for most of the candidates for municipal elections. The limited understanding of the elections made the main target of the candidate to get a seat in the municipal council. He had to get that seat by canvassing voters, whether they were from his relatives, clans or tribe, or unknown, by giving them incorrect and misleading information, but in most cases false promises' (*Al Yamamah* Magazine, 5 February 2005). Furthermore, as discussed in the background chapter, some candidates exaggerated and gave promises to voters that fell outside the functions of the municipal council. For example, a real estate businessman in Riyadh, said in his logo 'Your voice = adequate house + clean environment' and a young candidate promised voters that he would transform the Saudi citizen from a tenant of the house to an owner of it. Another candidate promised to make Riyadh city the capital of universal medicine and a liberal candidate promised to allow women to vote in elections, and give them the right to drive, to establish social clubs for them, and that he would eliminate unemployment. Such exaggerations appeared in every phase of the elections around the country (*Al Yaum*, 27 February 2005, *Al Jazirah*, 4 February 2005 and 11 February 2005, *Al Watan*, 29 & 30 January 2005, *Riyadh*, 2 February 2005 and *Okaz*, 17 April 2005, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 9 February 2005).

It can be seen that giving false promises is widespread for politicians and election campaigns. The work of Benoit and Cho (2005), Konitzer-Smirnov (2005), Van de Walle (2003) and Al

Angari (2005) only serves to confirm the findings of this study that candidates often make false promises to attract voters. This might have been one of the reasons that could have prevented a large number of the Saudi citizens from participating in the elections.

Candidate's personal characteristics

The final aspect of the candidates' campaigns that will be discussed in this chapter is the effect of candidates' personal characteristics on their campaigns. During the municipal elections, some candidates depended heavily on their status, reputation and role in society in addition to their promotional campaigns' tactics to win the elections. Furthermore, some of these winning candidates did not conduct any electoral propaganda or set up camps, distribute brochures or take out newspaper advertisements. I thus argue that candidates' personal characteristics, not their campaign's strategies or tactics, were vital elements in their winning in the municipal elections.

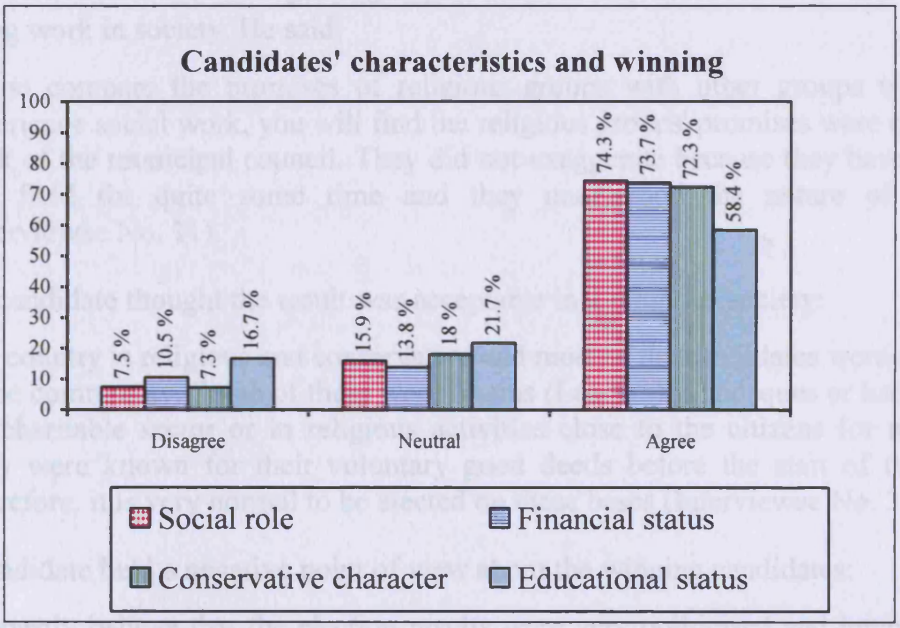
King (2002) pointed out that characteristics such as previous political experience, professional background and celebrity status are very important factors in generating votes (p. 39). Moreover, Squire (1995) argued that some people have the political skills and personal appeal to attract voters to them, while other people do not possess such qualities or characteristics and are not as popular at the polls. Thus, some higher quality candidates can run competitive races while others cannot because they lack political qualifications. This might include physical attractiveness, organisational skills, charisma or previous political experience. In addition, Squire noted that the candidates without these qualities sometimes win by accident (pp. 891-893). Moreover, Arceneaux (2005) argued that party-list systems place the party at the centre of the voting decision by specifically asking individuals to choose a party rather than a candidate. On the other hand, candidate-based electoral institutions concentrate on the candidates' characteristics, allowing the qualification of the candidates rather than their parties. Consequently, campaigns in candidate-based systems may aid voters in learning more about candidates' qualifications and their stands on many issues important for those voters (p. 163).

However, Hayes (2009) noted that the personality of politicians affects voting behaviour (p. 231). The author explained that television has 'personalised' voting behaviour in American elections by encouraging citizens to cast ballots based on 'candidate image and personality'. Hayes concluded that people's voting behaviours are not only dependent on exposure to

television or the level of political awareness that the person might have, but also are connected to their 'perceptions of the candidate's image' (p. 231). Saudi candidates' personal characteristics had influenced, to some extent, citizens' decisions, as this sections illustrates.

To assess the citizens' evaluations of the candidate's characteristics, respondents were asked their opinions about the importance of candidates' social role, financial status, educational status and conservative character in their wining. Bar chart 9.5 shows their answers.

Chart 9.5



The bar chart above shows that there was a strong agreement among respondents that the personal characteristics of the candidate played a major role in his success. The chart reveals that the social role (74.3 %) of the candidate was the major factor which attracted people to vote for the candidate. The financial status (73.7 %) of the candidate came second and the conservative character (72.3 %) came in third position. Surprisingly, the educational status (58.4 %) came in last position. These findings reveal that the respondents thought that the success of the candidate heavily depended on his social role or voluntary work in the society undertaken a long time before the municipal elections, as well as his financial status and conservative (religious) character. Thus, the educational experience, coming in last position was not regarded as having the same importance as other factors.

Most interviewees expressed the idea that the candidate's characteristics were more likely to have an effect on his success. A journalist described how some candidates were known because of their voluntary work in society years before the elections. He went on to explain:

> It is normal in a religious community that people are biased towards a person of good morals who has integrity. People automatically elect those who they think represent their views and serve them. Based on their experience, citizens found that Muslim Brotherhood members of the community were those who had served the country honestly a long time before the elections (Interviewee No. 9).

Another journalist stated that religious groups were more successful than others because of their existing work in society. He said:

> If you compare the promises of religious groups with other groups who did not experience social work, you will find the religious groups' promises were closer to the work of the municipal council. They did not exaggerate because they have worked in that field for quite some time and they understood the nature of that stage (Interviewee No. 11).

A winning candidate thought the result was acceptable in a religious society:

> Our country is religious and conservative and most of the candidates were well known in the community. Some of them were Imams (Leaders) in mosques or had worked in the charitable sector or in religious activities close to the citizens for many years. They were known for their voluntary good deeds before the start of the election. Therefore, it is very normal to be elected on these bases (Interviewee No. 31)

A losing candidate held a negative point of view about the winning candidates:

> I honestly believe that the election results were very politicised and intended for the West with a clear message: 'if you want more elections, this is what you will get.' It was clear that the religious establishment had adopted this process, but I can't say whether the government supported them or not. Eighty to ninety per cent of those who came to the municipal councils were from the religious current. The whole process was not about qualification, it was about a hidden agenda (Interviewee No. 47).

The previous views serve to confirm that there were social and religious values and norms surrounding the election process. At the same time, the strategies and tactics used by some candidates in society followed the modern, Western style of lobbying to present themselves to the voters.

The previous results and views echo the work of Page (1978) who argued that knowledge, experience, competence, warmth, activity, strength, honesty, dignity, stability and religion are among the characteristics that attract people to vote for a candidate. Furthermore, Squire (1995), stressed the importance of the candidate's personal characteristics as well as his/her previous experience and success in political campaigns.

In line with these views, one may conclude that some Saudi candidates had specific characteristics that might have contributed to their success in the municipal elections. Those characteristics were not related directly to their promotional campaign tactics. Some candidates were known for their work in the community a long time before the elections. Therefore, a candidate's social role, conservative character, financial and educational statuses were among other personal characteristics that might have attracted voters to vote for one candidate rather than the other.

However, not every candidate who had those essential characteristics won the elections. Some of them won the elections without any effort or, as Squire (1995) describes, 'Only by accident'. Those candidates might have won the elections as a result of hidden ideological support from specific groups. These results indicate that Saudi society is a conservative one and there are fundamental social and religious values and norms that control it, which of course dominated the election process. In addition, the success of the candidate in the municipal elections might have been a result of his personal characteristics and his role in society more than the tactics of his campaign, or the two factors together. Yet the number of those voters who cast their vote in the municipal elections was small (17 %) among 4.5 million eligible voters, which might question the effectiveness of the candidates' campaigns.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the final factor which might have contributed to the Saudi citizens' low level of participation in 2005 municipal elections. This chapter looked at the effectiveness of the candidates' electoral campaigns, assuming that the majority of the candidates' promotional campaigns were not effective and the poor implementation of those campaigns might have failed to attract more citizens to participate in those elections (Alkhudairi, 2007). To highlight the conceptual framework of this chapter, I explored some literature about the history, functions and characteristics of the electoral campaigns as well as the distinction between local and national campaigns. I then discussed some factors that might have contributed to the limited effect of those campaigns.

The study findings showed that the short (ten day) period of campaigning that was assigned by the elections committee for the candidates' campaigns was not enough for the public to know those candidates well and understand their messages. Moreover, the candidates' limited access to the mass media might have stopped their messages from getting through and might

have affected the citizens' understanding or participation in the municipal elections. Also, because Saudi Arabia is a religious conservative country, some candidates realised the importance of religion in society and used it as a political ideology in their campaigns' logos and messages to attract conservative voters. Despite the partial success of this technique, some other voters recognised this as a misleading technique and may have chosen not to participate in those elections. The findings also confirmed that Saudi society is conservative and religious values and social norms control it, which also affected the outcome of the municipal election process. Furthermore, this chapter showed that a large segment of the candidates made false and unachievable promises that fell outside the municipal council functions. I found that most voters rejected such promises and knew that most candidates used them only to attract voters. Because of such understanding, a considerable number of voters might have decided not to vote in those elections. Finally, the study findings showed that the success of some candidates heavily depended on their social role, financial status, conservative character and voluntary work – characteristics that were in place a long time before the elections and were perhaps more effective than their campaign tactics. These findings might explain the success of some candidates who did not do any kind of promotional activities during the municipal election process.

Although the municipal elections were local elections, Saudi candidates used a mix of very old and modern campaigning tactics. Most of the candidates used some undemocratic fifteenth century tactics that were used in Britain to attract voters when they provided voters with food and other forms of largesse in order to secure their support (Denver and Hands, p. 5). However, some candidates employed modern techniques such as using newspapers and the internet, in spite of their limitations, to reach their target voters.

Overall, electoral campaigning in Saudi Arabia was a new experience for the government, candidates, voters and mass media. The lack of previous political experience among those four pillars of the election process might have contributed to the unclear election regulations, missing professional implementation of the candidates' campaigns and to the citizens' apathetic attitude towards the 2005 municipal elections.

Chapter Ten is going to examine the Saudi newspapers' coverage of the municipal election process.

CHAPTER TEN

SAUDI NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

SAUDI NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Introduction

This chapter examines print media representations of the 2005 municipal elections in Saudi Arabia. Manifest surface content analysis has been used to explore the final question of my research: How did the Saudi newspapers cover the municipal election process? This chapter presents findings from a systematic analysis of national print media coverage between November 2004 and April 2005. The sample for the content analysis was gathered from four national Saudi newspapers: *Al Jazirah, Al Watan*, *Okaz* and *Al Yaum.*

The chapter focuses on five major categories that the print media covered. These are the newspapers' representation of the municipal election process, representation of the citizens' understanding of the election process, the representation of the citizens' political apathy, the representation of the candidates' campaigns and the representation of the effectiveness of the municipal election media campaign. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the coverage patterns or frames of those five factors and compare them (triangulation) to the findings of the other two methods (survey and interviews) employed in this research project. So the findings of this chapter will support or contradict the previous findings and show to what extent the print media managed to set its agenda during the municipal elections.

Content analysis methods revealed that the Saudi print media had looked positively at the municipal election process and the citizens' understanding and interest in the elections. On the other hand, they neglected major aspects of the elections such as the effectiveness of the media campaign, the effectiveness of the candidates' campaigns and the low level of citizens' participation that the elections suffered from. In other words, the Saudi print media praised the elections, did not criticise the weakness of the media campaign and did not mention people's low participation in the elections, showing instead that citizens were very interested and willing to participate in that process. The 'loyal role' of the media might have made it difficult for the state monitored print media to criticise the first national political event. The findings of this chapter do bear this out in contrast to the findings of the previous chapters, where survey and interview findings show that citizens were not fully informed and aware of the election process, but they were apathetic towards that electoral process. This chapter will attempt to examine these discoveries further.

To understand the nature of newspaper coverage and to highlight the conceptual framework of this chapter, a brief look at the role of the print media, the press freedom, and the effect of the political system on the newspapers' role will be carried out. In order to help explain some of the findings, the situation of the press in some democratic and non-democratic countries, including Saudi Arabia, will be examined. Moreover, newspaper agenda setting and news framing or coverage patterns will be looked at.

Print media

It can be argued that the media plays a different role in democratic and non-democratic countries, but what is not contested is that they play an important role in both political systems. The print media are just one site of representation through which ideas about municipal elections in Saudi Arabia were constructed, but I would contend that it is an important one. According to Kosicki (2001), 'print journalism has an important determining role in circulating news and agenda-setting practices' (p. 65). Davis (2003) stated that print media serve as a 'forum for communication' between political and other elites in ways that 'potentially influence the political and policy agenda' (p. 669). Van Dijk argued that journalism seeks to persuade its audience that a 'particular version of events' is the most meaningful or 'true', including expressions of opinion which are 'embedded in argumentation that makes them more or less defensible, reasonable, justifiable or legitimate as conclusions' (cited in Richardson, 2004, p. 227). Anderson and Ward (2007) stated that in modern democracies, journalism works as a watchdog and a provider of the information necessary for effective democratic participation and 'as an educator and enabler of the citizenry' (p. 37). Lichtenberg (1990) argued that the print media should be free of abuse. She wrote:

> The highly exacting creed of democracy expects print media to act as 'watchdog' by guarding against abuses of power by office holders and providing an uninhibited forum of ideas where opposing views may meet and compete (p. 20).

Thus, press freedom is a crucial factor that influences newspapers coverage. Libelling argued that 'freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one' (cited in Lichtenberg, 1990, p. 102). Lichtenberg (1990) also argued that nothing guarantees that all valuable information will be published and stated that 'which views get covered, and in what way, depend mainly on the economic and political structure and context of press institutions, and on the characteristics of the media themselves' (pp. 102-103).

The lack of press freedom in non-democratic systems is apparent. Berger (1995) noted that 'the press mirrors the political system of a society' (p. 54). In China, Cao (2010) argued 'print media systems are ultimately shaped by the political and economic institutions of society, not the other way around' (p. 145). Therefore, in Chinese society, journalism is seen as 'a political tool for the government' (p. 139). Similarly, Shirazi, et al. (2010) concluded that in the Soviet era, newspapers were strictly controlled as an 'instrument of the state'. They 'propagated the Communist Party's official ideology' and journalists were educated on the 'Marxist–Leninist theories and on the policies of the Communist Party' (p. 22). In The Bahamas, Brown (1995), in his study about the newspapers' coverage of the 1992 general elections, noted that 'the ideological systems and editors' pressure frame stories according to 'favoured scenarios and the news values' of each newspaper. Subsequently, newspapers 'fell short of the democratic ideals they claim to serve' (p. 76). In Azerbaijan, Ergun (2009), who investigated the 2008 presidential election, argued that the print media coverage was dominated by 'extensive reporting of the president and the ruling elite' (p. 5).

The situation of press freedom in the Arab world is similar, to some extent, to that in these non-democratic states. Rugh (2004) stated that the print media in the Arab world constitutes a 'loyalist press', and is always 'supportive' of the regime in power despite the fact that they are privately owned. The tone and style of the loyalist press tends to be 'passive' and avoids critical issues, and reacts slowly to them. Furthermore, editors admit that they support the 'official line' and the head of government on all 'essential matters' (p. 59). Rugh (2004) went on to explain:

> The loyalist papers are much more unlikely to criticize government services that the general public finds deficient and print stories which put specific government officials in a negative light. This does not happen every day, and the criticism is gentle by Western standards, not in any case casting doubt on the top leadership (p. 66).

In Saudi Arabia, as discussed in the country profile chapter, the Basic Law and other laws limit freedom of mass and publishing media in the country. The government directly or indirectly censors media content through the Law of Printed Materials and Publication. However, Rugh (2004) stated that 'in Saudi Arabia the print media are by law in private ownership' (p. 63). The author noted that in the late 1990s, the Saudi Government announced a new press law, but the press still were not able to criticise 'the fundamental local and foreign policies of the country'(p. 67). However, foreign and local journalists regularly practice self-censorship and editorials sometimes criticise some economic policies or

corruption of some government officials 'in an indirect way'. Thus, 'there is more transparency in government than there used to be in the past' (ibid. p. 67, MCI, and Human Rights Report, 2009).

In the light of the above literature, it can be argued that Saudi journalists did not operate in a cultural and political vacuum. They functioned within and made sense of the municipal election process through existing frameworks of understanding or regulations. Journalists may have had more influence than ordinary people upon a dominant public discourse which presented the 2005 municipal elections and their roles in the Saudi society. Nonetheless, they remained controlled by it, as well as by the professional, institutional and political structures within which they worked. Rugh (2004) stated that: 'the amounts of freedom Saudi editors have depends on their perceptions of their role and how much they want to criticize' (p. 67). These perceptions or understandings might explain some of the findings of this chapter that contradict those of the survey and interviews of this research project.

Setting the agenda

Having looked at the role of the print media, the press freedom, and the effect of the political system on the newspapers' role as well as the Saudi print media situation, it is essential for this research to look in depth at the ways the newspapers presented the municipal elections to the Saudi public. It is in the agenda setting that the influence of the government on the print media can be best demonstrated. This function of newspapers in the public domain in democratic and non-democratic societies is of importance, both during an election and at other times. McCombs (2004) stated that the 'agenda-setting role of the media may become evident in public policy and decision-making during political elections' (p. 24). Druckman (2004) argued that media coverage 'can impact voters at the polls by priming issues deemed significant to one's vote choice' (p. 577). Miller and Peake (2008) argued that media are important 'linkage institutions', 'their ability to link citizens to government during elections campaign is very important' since voters obtain most of their campaign-related information from the media (p. 11). Coxall (1989) stated that 'when one story dominates another, it is said to be communicated more intensely to the audience' (p. 310). Also, regular repetition of messages over a period of time may 'make an impact on the political climate' (p. 312). The author stated that 61 per cent of lead stories in the British national press in the three weeks before polling day in 1970 were about the elections and affected the key issues during the election period (p. 318). The coverage of local elections has its significance too. Borquez and

Wasserman (2006) argued that news coverage of local elections can have critical political implications as coverage of national elections because 'local elections often revolve around issues that are directly relevant to people's lives, such as schools, neighbourhoods, crime, and jobs' (p. 376). This resembles the situation of the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, which were local elections for electing the members of the local municipality.

Thus, looking at the Saudi newspapers' coverage of the municipal elections is going to explain how these newspapers managed to set their agenda and how the main local or national issues were framed and discussed during the elections period.

News framing

Part of agenda setting is the framing of news stories which are an essential issue in any political campaign. Callaghan and Schnell (2005) noted that 'it is widely accepted that the framing of political phenomena gives media power' (p. 29). Kumar and Valkenburg (1999) stated that media allow audiences to make sense of events by 'framing issues in different ways, helping the reader or the viewer organise reality and interpret issues' (p. 630). Price, et al. (1997), noted that 'by activating some ideas, feelings and values rather than others, the news can encourage particular trains of thought about political phenomena and lead audience members to arrive at more or less predictable conclusions' (p. 483). Iyengar (1991) stated that news framing is the result of various factors: the political system and its configuration and separation of power, the cultural understandings and values, the frames put forward by powerful elites and the commercial competitiveness (p. 35). Iyengar and Kinder (1997) argued that media have four major roles. These are news media as informers, news media as agenda-setters, news media as persuaders and news media as framers (p. 212). Thus, 'media framing is the subtle selection of certain aspects of an issue by the media to make them more important and thus to emphasize a particular cause of some phenomenon' (p. 214). Riemer and Simon (1997) argued that print media help governments or candidates to send special messages. They wrote:

> Through editorials, feature columns, the print media may also, directly or indirectly, express judgments on public priorities and build public support on behalf of policies or candidates (p. 254).

Chouliaraki (2005) noted that the media: 'filter and frame everyday realities through their singular and multiple representations, producing touchstones, references for the conduct of

everyday life, for the production and maintenance of common sense' (p. 5). Callaghan and Schnell (2005) argued that news framing is one effective tool of political elites:

> Certain political players will continue to dominate the framing process. And of course, frames will continue to be a potent tool for persuasion and attitude change (p. 189).

So the way that the Saudi newspapers framed citizens' understanding of the election process through their editorials, news and columns and how they portrayed people's interest in the elections could have helped the Saudi Government set its agenda in the time of the elections.

There are different kinds of news frames, however. Entman (2004) made a distinction between 'substantive and procedural' frames. Callaghan and Schnell (2005) distinguished between 'issue-specific frames and generic frames' and 'episodic versus thematic frames' (p. 4). Cappella and Jamieson (1997) argued that the U.S. media tend to frame politics 'as a strategic game, or a horse race, but also they encourage political cynicism among citizens' (p. 79). Similarly, Benoit et al. (2005) argued that, in the press, the 'horse race frame presents politics as a competition, a race, a game of winners and losers' (p. 370). Borquez and Wasserman (2006) found that the newspapers' coverage of mayoral elections in Detroit and Los Angeles in 1997 and 2001 focused on several major story themes. Those were the horse race, policy issues, and candidate qualities (p. 380). Borquez and Wasserman found that the press coverage in both cities had a large amount of issue-based reporting. The absence of a horse race in 1997 gave space for coverage of policy. By contrast, the 2001 mayoral campaigns were highly competitive open races and the horse race was the dominant frame in press coverage in both cities. Also, press coverage patterns of these mayoral elections conformed to similar patterns typically found in national elections (p. 390). So are there any such frames in the Saudi newspapers' coverage of the municipal election process? The rest of this chapter is going to answer this question. However, Entman, (2004) stressed the importance of the news frames being culturally and politically accepted in society. He wrote:

> The most inherently powerful frames are those fully congruent with schemas habitually used by most members of society... Frames that are culturally congruent are frames that seem natural or self-evident, thus, there is no cognitive or affective need to question them (p. 14).

This could be very important in a strongly religious society like Saudi society. News frames must follow the norms and values that most people believe and accept. In this regard, Rhee (1997) argued that in every news organisation there are guidelines along with journalists'

frames that identify and interpret news. These guidelines are described as 'integral framework of categories, concept and relevancies grounded in a particular framework, which articulates the ideological system by which media systems operate' (p. 11). Martin and Hiebert (1990) stated that mass media ownership and control do provide political, economic, and social power by 'enabling the owner/controller to control large number of people or to rally them to join action' (p. 3). Thus, looking at how the Saudi print media framed the news of the municipal election process may help us to understand what regulations or constraints the Saudi newspapers and journalists had to face or comply with during the elections period.

It can be seen from the previous literature that the newspapers' framing of political news seem to be informed by the media system, the journalistic norms and the strength and character of the political system in the country. Therefore, framing the election news is vital when looking at the newspapers' coverage of the municipal elections. The elections in Saudi Arabia were slightly different from those mentioned above as the candidates were not covered extensively by government-controlled media. In that coverage, there were not many personal details about the candidates themselves, families, hobbies or personal beliefs. As discussed in previous chapters, the candidates had to buy media space (advertisements) to sell themselves to the voters. Consequently, the strong, competitive nature of the horse race was not covered in the same way as in Western countries. In Saudi Arabia, newspapers agenda setting of the municipal elections was to the event as a process rather than issues or policies as the previous literature pointed out. In other words, the Saudi newspapers covered the municipal elections as a sequence of events rather than specific issues arising from the elections. For example, the municipal elections issues spanned local municipality services, rather than issues discussed in the West such as democracy, freedom of speech and human rights.

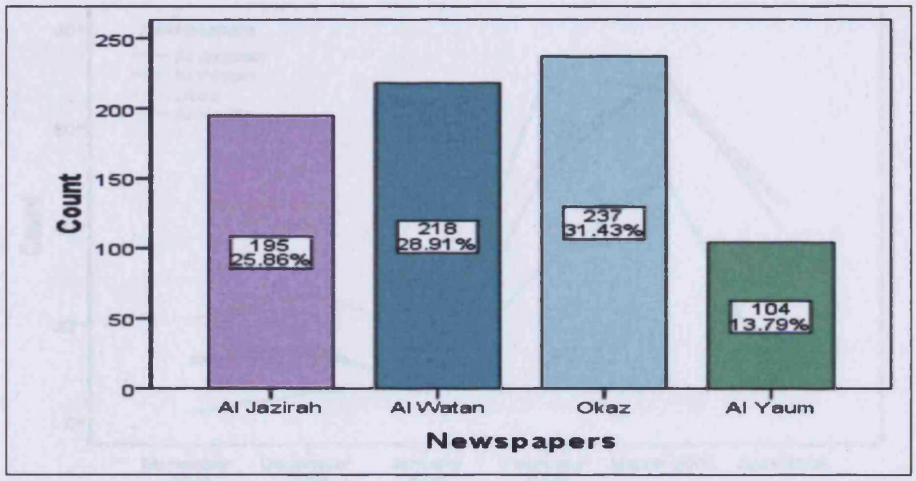
Background

Before discussing the chapter findings, the volume of coverage of each newspaper, the coverage months, genre and resources will be explained. As discussed above, the print media have an important role in setting the agenda during an election. Brosius and Kepplinger's study demonstrated that when news coverage of an issue is intense, agenda-setting effects are more likely to occur (cited in Kosicki, 1993, p. 101). Thus, it is important to get an idea of how much coverage the newspapers decide to give to an event such as the municipal

elections by looking at the frequency of the coverage, where it is placed in the newspaper and who is chosen to speak about the event. Chart 10.1 shows the frequency of the coverage.

Chart 10.1

Sample newspapers' coverage by title



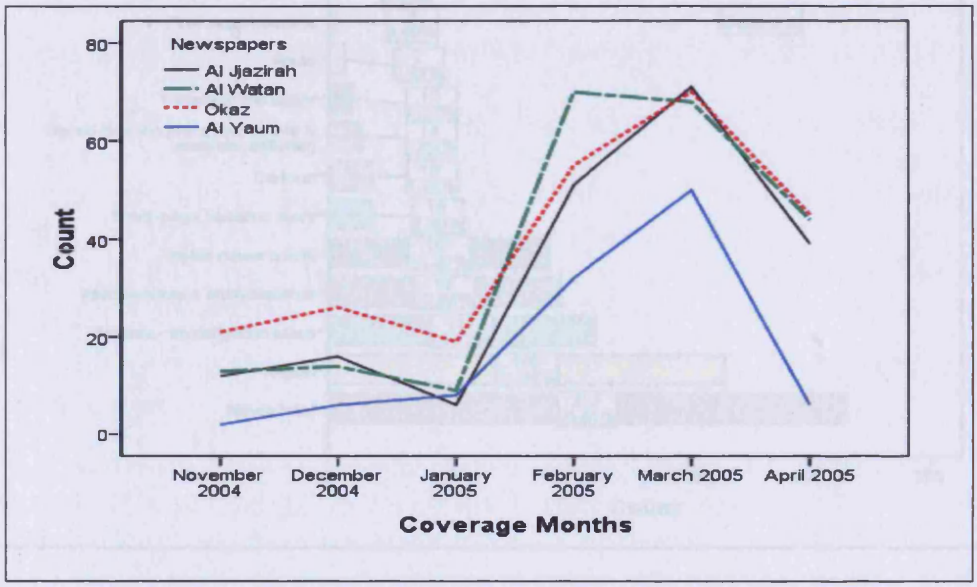
Bar chart 10.1 shows that *Okaz* newspaper had the most municipal election articles with 237 (or 31.43% of the total articles). In descending order, from the highest to the lowest number, the remaining newspapers were *Al Watan* with 218 articles (28.91% of the total articles), *Al Jazirah* with 195 (25.86 %), and *Al Yaum* with 104 articles (13.79 %). These results show that there was a coverage variation among the four newspapers in spite of the fact that those newspapers are national and work under the supervision of the government. This could be explained by Rugh (2004) who stated that the Saudi daily newspapers 'differ in content from each other in the amount of space they give to secondary stories and non political items, but they are slightly dissimilar in the amount of attention they give to particular subjects' (p. 67).

To demonstrate the months covered, the line chart (10.2) below shows that November 2004 (in this research sample) was the starting point of an increased focus on the elections, and although coverage in February 2005 fell back a little, coverage in March 2005 appears to be nearly six times higher than in November 2004.

Although nobody was aware of the official start of the media campaign, one official told me that the first announcement was made in the middle of September 2004, but intense coverage began in November 2004. By December 2004, the print media focused on matters of greater news value such as the Hajj season (Pilgrims visiting the holy places in Saudi Arabia during December 2004 and January 2005) and terrorist attacks in some Saudi cities. However, by the middle of January 2005, newspapers shifted back to the election campaign that had been

going on throughout this period. By now, it was only six weeks until the election day for the first phase.

Chart 10.2
Election coverage by newspaper type
November 2004-April 2005

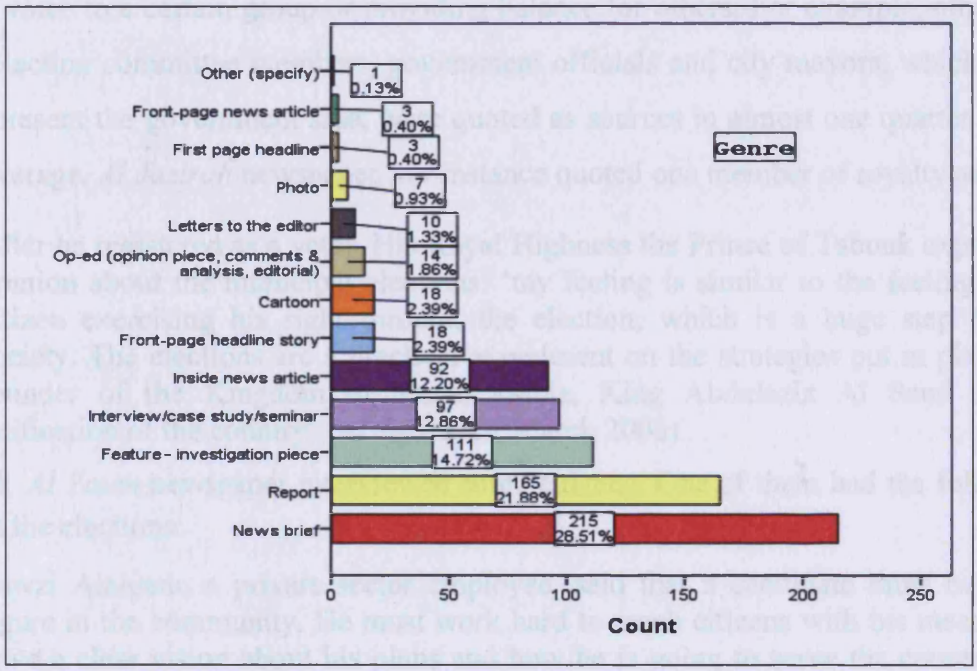


In the media's impact on public consciousness, it is not only the frequency of the subject of the elections mentioned that is important, but the placing of the item within the newspaper. Thus, format is important because it determines where the newspapers believe newsworthy items should be placed and that affects the agenda setting. Luttbeg (1988) argued that 'editorial decisions and patterns of news coverage can affect electoral outcome' (p. 881). The chart below (10.3) shows the kind and prominence of news item about municipal elections across the four national Saudi newspapers.

The chart (10.3) illustrates that news briefs appear to the greatest extent with 28.51 per cent of the coverage, with reports coming next at 21.88 per cent, features coming third at 14.72 per cent, interviews falling forth at 12.86 per cent and inside news articles at 12.20 per cent. Surprisingly, front-page stories were only 2.39 per cent and op-eds were 1.86 per cent of the whole coverage. These findings indicate that the municipal elections were unlikely to gain frequent front page or editorial coverage in the newspapers during the studied months.

Chart 10.3

Election coverage by editorial format



It is important to investigate the types of people used as sources when looking at coverage, because they would have an effect on the credential of what is reported and also help to identify what reaction to the election specific people may have. In coverage of municipal elections, I quantified every source used to inform stories. It is argued that the sources are important in representing a particular ideology and beliefs (Bazzi, 2009). Thus, the more the sources are representative of government institutions, the more the story will reflect the government point of view. The criteria here reflect both the elites and the possibility of different voices. While more than one third of the news items examined did not have a source because they were briefs, I found 484 sources quoted across this research sample. Table 10.1 illustrates those sources.

The table below shows that 35.81 per cent of the articles mention no source in their stories. Members of the public are referenced 13.93 per cent of the time and candidates are given as sources 13.66 per cent of the time. Election committee members are sources in 8.75 per cent, government officials in 6.10 per cent, royalty 5.97 per cent and city mayors in 3.32 per cent of occurrences. Local media and academics are among the least used sources. The use of members of the public as sources might be to add colour to the story in the 'vox pop' or voice of the people tradition. Lewis et al. (2005) have documented the degree to which the 'vox

pop' is used in contemporary news, their findings suggesting that there are more than 20 'vox pops' for every one opinion poll. But this finding does not assume that the Saudi newspaper is giving voice to a certain group or providing balance for others. For example, other groups such as election committee members, government officials and city mayors, which together might represent the government side, were quoted as sources in almost one quarter (24.2 %) of the coverage. *Al Jazirah* newspaper, for instance quoted one member of royalty as follows:

> After he registered as a voter, His Royal Highness the Prince of Tabouk expressed his opinion about the municipal elections: 'my feeling is similar to the feeling of every citizen exercising his right through the election, which is a huge step for Saudi society. The elections are a practical experiment on the strategies put in place by the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz Al Saud since the unification of the country' (*Al Jazirah*, 1 March 2005).

Moreover, *Al Yaum* newspaper interviewed some citizens. One of them had the following to say about the elections:

> Fawzi Alalgam, a private sector employee, said that a candidate must be an ideal figure in the community. He must work hard to reach citizens with his messages that have a clear vision about his plans and how he is going to serve the country and its people. Fawzi said that he would elect the candidate that has realistic objectives and achievable goals (*Al Yaum*, 22 February 2005).

Table 10.1

Journalists' uses of resources in electoral news

Sources quoted in articles	Number	Per cent
None	270	35.8
Member of the public	105	13.9
Candidate	103	13.7
Election Committee member	66	8.8
Government official	46	6.1
Royalty	45	6.0
City Mayor	25	3.3
Voter	19	2.5
Election Committee spokesperson	11	1.5
Businessman	9	1.2
Saudi NGO member	9	1.2
Foreign media	7	0.9
Minster of Municipality and Rural Affairs	5	0.7
Other	5	0.7

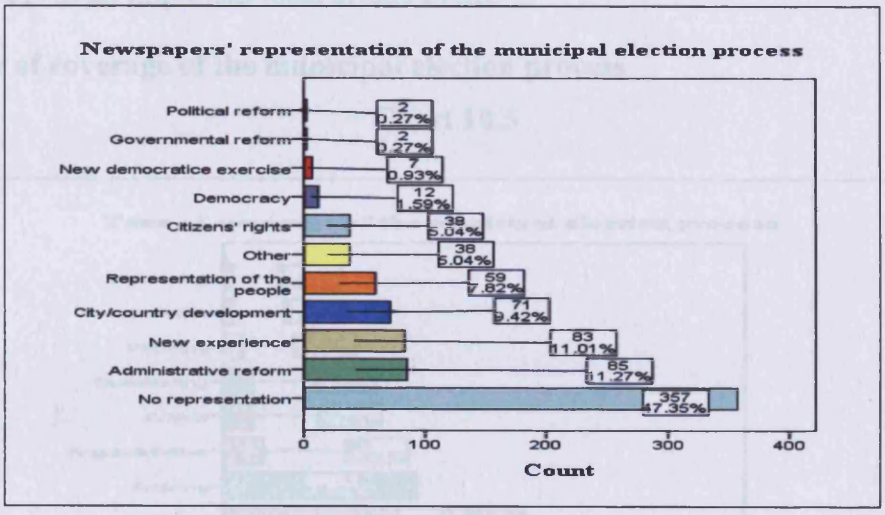
Foreign politician	5	0.7
Religious scholar	5	0.7
Local media	4	0.5
Tribesman	4	0.5
Govt. minister	4	0.5
Academic	4	0.5
Unknown	3	0.4
Total	754	100.0

Municipal election process

Having looked at the volume, type, format and sources of the coverage of the newspapers, the first main category that will be discussed in this chapter is how the Saudi newspapers framed the municipal election process to the Saudi public. Graber (2009) argued that 'election campaigns remain one of the most common themes in published journal articles' (p. 87). Thus, to understand how the Saudi print media framed the election process, three sub-variables will be examined. These are the print media representation of the election process, the tone of coverage and evaluation of that national event.

A. Representation of municipal election process

Chart 10.4



The bar chart above (10.4) shows that there is no representation of the election process in nearly half of the newspaper coverage. The election process was not framed as 'democratisation' or political reform, but the emphasis was mainly on the election process as

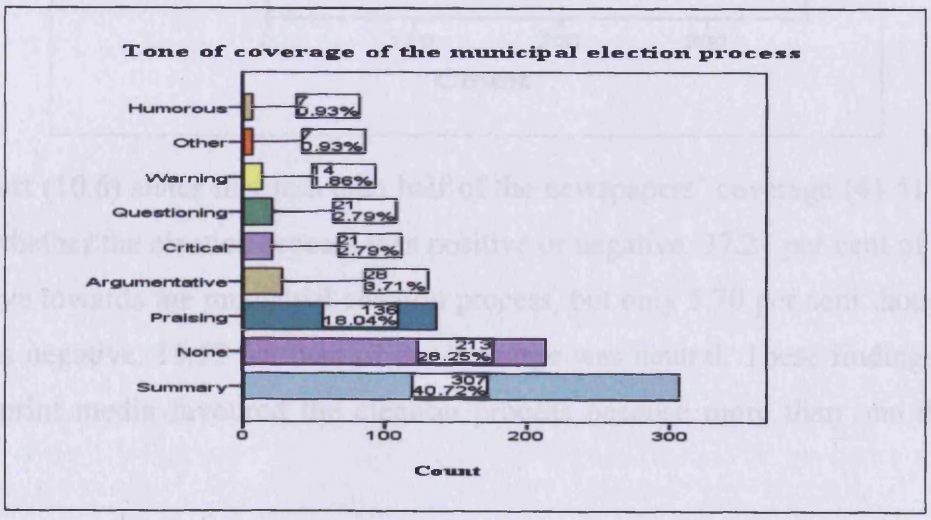
a novelty, or administrative reform. The municipal elections were referred to as 'administrative reform' in 11.27 per cent of the material, a 'new experience' in 11.01 per cent and 'city/country development' in 9.42 per cent of the articles. Further, the process was referred to as 'representation of the people' in 7.82 per cent and 'citizens' rights' in 5.04 per cent of the total items. Meanwhile, 'democracy' was only alluded to in 1.59 per cent of the items, 'new democratic exercise' in 0.93 per cent, 'governmental' and 'political reform' were each mentioned in only 0.27 per cent of the sample. *Okaz* newspaper, for example, thought that citizens' participation was important to fulfil their rights:

> The municipal elections revealed the state's willingness to involve citizens in decision-making, indicated the citizen's right, and desire to be a full partner in that process. With such genuine and mutual desire, a partnership of shaping the future is built (*Okaz*, 13 February 2005).

It is clear that the Saudi print media were sensitive to words such as 'democracy', 'governmental reform' and 'political reform', therefore such phrases were barely mentioned to describe the election process. This result is similar to the findings of Dunleavy and Husband (1985) who stated that 'the press defines what is to count as acceptable political views', which in our case were the government's preferences. The authors noted that newspaper editors make judgments on news priorities and the judgment of one editor influences the views of others and the result is 'a media consensus which affects the public's sense of the importance of various issues' (p. 222). Thus, Saudi newspapers framed the election process as an important local affairs event.

B. Tone of coverage of the municipal election process

Chart 10.5

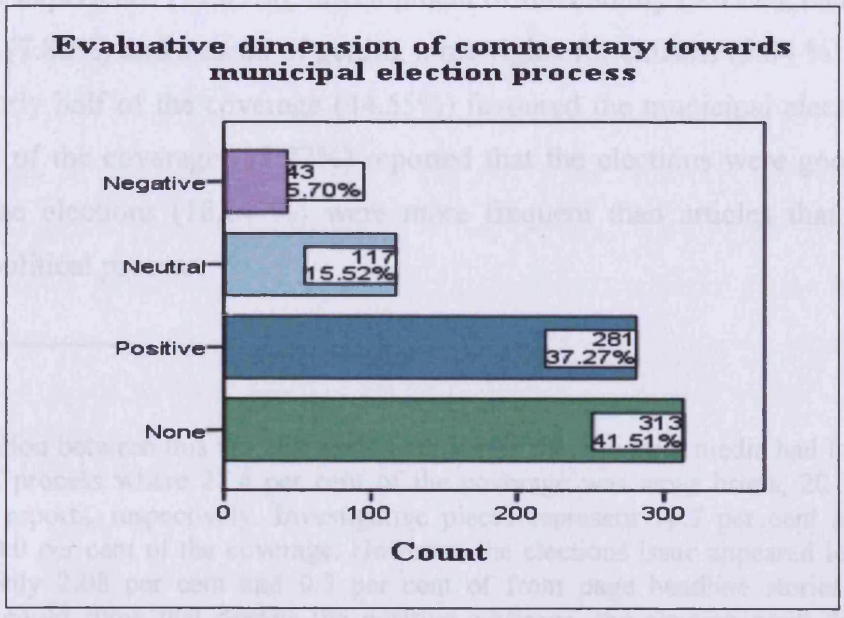


It can be seen from the bar chart above (10.5) that the coverage of the elections was mostly summed up in a 'positive' style. Nearly half of the coverage (40.72 %) was a summary of the election news. 28.25 per cent of the coverage seemingly took no stance, but 18.04 per cent praised the municipal elections. In addition, 3.71 per cent of the articles were argumentative. In other words, offering different opinions about some aspects of the elections, 2.79 per cent were critical and questioning, respectively, and 1.86 per cent flagged up possible difficulties in the campaign. Less than 1.0 per cent was humorous. This shows that coverage tended to be objective towards the municipal election process. For example, *Al Yaum* newspaper thought that the elections gave a new experience to Saudi citizens:

> The first experience of municipal elections is a strong dose of the electoral culture for Saudi citizens (*Al Yaum*, 17 March 2005).

C. Evaluative dimension of commentary towards municipal election process

Chart 10.6



The bar chart (10.6) states that less than half of the newspapers' coverage (41.51%) took no stance on whether the election process was positive or negative. 37.27 per cent of the articles were positive towards the municipal election process, but only 5.70 per cent thought that the process was negative. 15.52 per cent of the coverage was neutral. These findings show that the Saudi print media favoured the election process because more than one third of the

coverage looked positively at that political event.[8] It was framed as a success. *Okaz* newspaper praised the municipal election process and thought that it was a success story:

> Municipal elections process was a remarkable success. That success is down to the citizens who turned out for elections and cast their ballots, realising the value of their participation and having confidence in their role in building the future. Success can also be counted for officials who stood behind the strict organisation of those elections (*Okaz*, 13 February 2005).

Al Jazirah newspaper thought that the election process showed the government's determination to involve citizens in the decision-making.

> Municipal election in the Kingdom is a contemporary cultural phenomenon aiming to attract the interest of the citizens. The government endorsed these elections for the benefit of the citizens to participate in the decision-making process (*Al Jazirah*, 25 November 2004).

In the light of the previous findings, the Saudi print media looked positively at the municipal election process. The newspapers presented the election process as an administrative reform (11.27%), new experience (11.01%), development of the country (9.41%), chance for citizen representation (7.82%) and a mean of getting more rights for citizens (5.04 %). These figures reveal that nearly half of the coverage (44.55%) favoured the municipal elections and more than one third of the coverage (37.27%) reported that the elections were good. Also, items that praised the elections (18.04 %) were more frequent than articles that questioned or attacked that political process.

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[8] A cross tabulation between this variable and genre shows that the print media had looked positively at the election process where 27.4 per cent of the coverage was news briefs, 20.3 per cent were interviews and reports, respectively. Investigative pieces represent 16.7 per cent and inside news articles were 10.0 per cent of the coverage. However, the elections issue appeared less frequently in op-ed, where only 2.08 per cent and 0.7 per cent of front page headline stories mentioned the elections. This could show that despite the positive coverage, the election news did not regularly appear on front pages or occupy the place they deserved with daily coverage by the Saudi newspapers.

Moreover, a cross tabulation between this variable and news sources shows that 8.1 per cent of items praising the election process were without sources, which may directly represent the newspapers' point of view about the municipal elections. Members of the public represented 6.6 per cent of the sources, candidates were 6.5 per cent, government officials were 3.3 per cent and election committee members were sources in 2.4 per cent of positive articles. However, for the negative coverage, 3.3 per cent were without sources, followed by members of the public who represented only 1.1 per cent and candidates with only 0.4 per cent. This confirms that the newspapers' coverage tended to be positive about the election process. Also, that the newspapers did not favour any one group of sources over another.

These results echo the findings of the final report of the Sudan Media and Elections Consortium on the 2010 Sudanese presidential elections. In Sudan, which arguably is an undemocratic state, the study reported that during the election campaign period 'press did not have a negative coverage. Newspapers' coverage was positive and neutral tones were dominant'. The report went on to explain that the editorial lines of the media outlets were strictly related to their geographical targets. It reads: 'newspapers based in the north were loyal to the ruling party and devoted the highest amount of space to the NCP (the ruling party in the north) and publications based in the south devoted most of their coverage to the SPLM (the main opposition party in the south)' (Sudan Media and Elections Consortium, Final Report, 2010, pp.17-19).

One might conclude that the positive tone of the coverage towards the municipal election process in Saudi Arabia confirms Rugh's (2004) description of the Saudi print media as a 'loyalist press', where the newspapers' coverage was 'supportive' of the electoral process and avoided being critical of its procedures or regulations.

People's understanding of the election process

How the Saudi print media portrayed the citizens' understanding of the electoral process is another category that will be looked at in this chapter. Some articles in the newspapers show that the people's political awareness, interest in and understanding of the process motivated their political participation, which contradicts the findings of the previous chapters. I argue here that the newspapers' coverage of this issue might be another piece of evidence of the newspapers' inability to be 'free' and a confirmation of their role as a 'loyal' press.

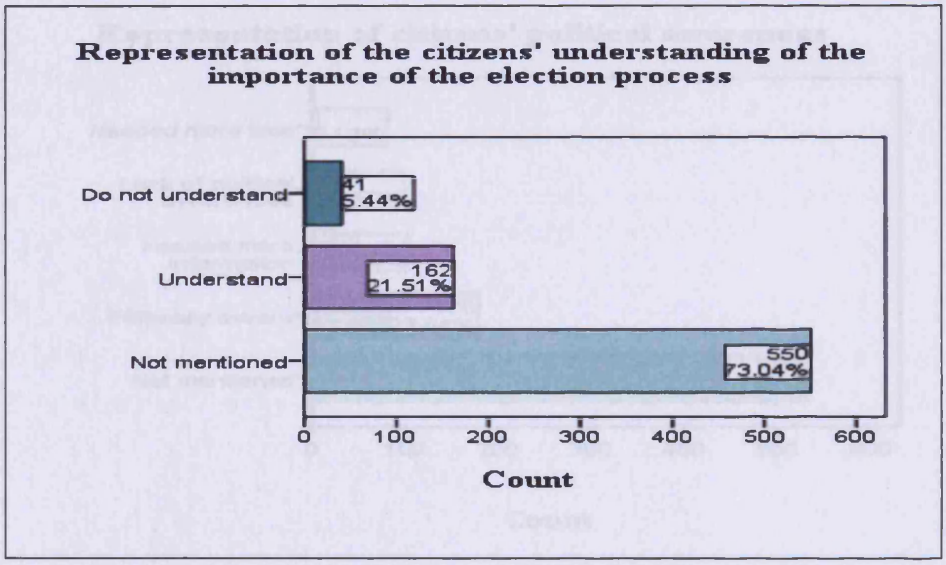
To see how the Saudi newspapers managed to frame citizens' understanding of the election process and thus, how they set the agenda of the election, it is worth looking at some sub-categories covered in the press reporting of the elections. These include the representation of citizens' understanding of the importance of the election process, citizens' interest in the election and citizens' political awareness. Other sub-categories in this section include the tone and evaluation of the coverage of the citizens' understanding of the election process.

A. Representation of the citizens' understanding of the importance of the election process

The bar chart below (10.7) shows that much of the print media coverage (73.04 %) did not consider whether citizens had understood the importance of the election process. 21.51 per

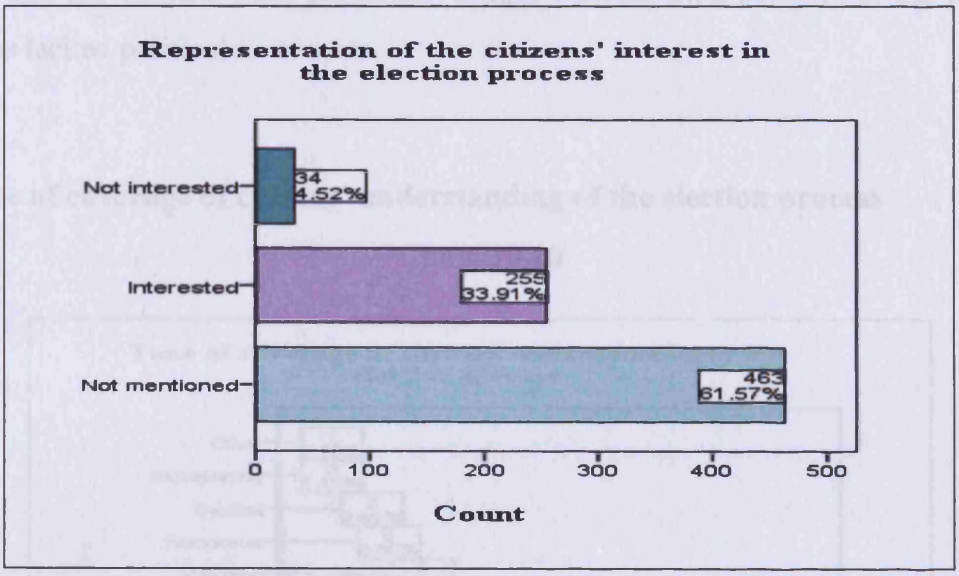
cent of the papers commented that people did understand the process, and only 5.44 per cent of the press said the people did not.

Chart 10.7



B. Representation of the citizens' interest in the election process

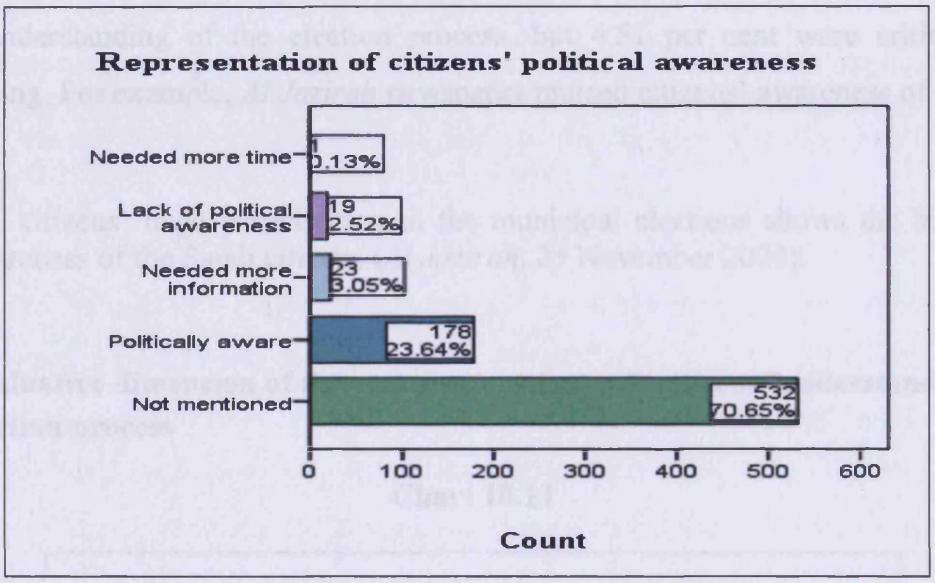
Chart 10.8



The bar chart (10.8) shows that half of the papers' coverage (61.57 %) made no mention of the citizens' interest in the election process. One third of the items (33.91 %) stated that citizens were interested, whereas only 4.52 per cent reported that citizens were not interested in the municipal elections.

C: Representation of citizens' political awareness

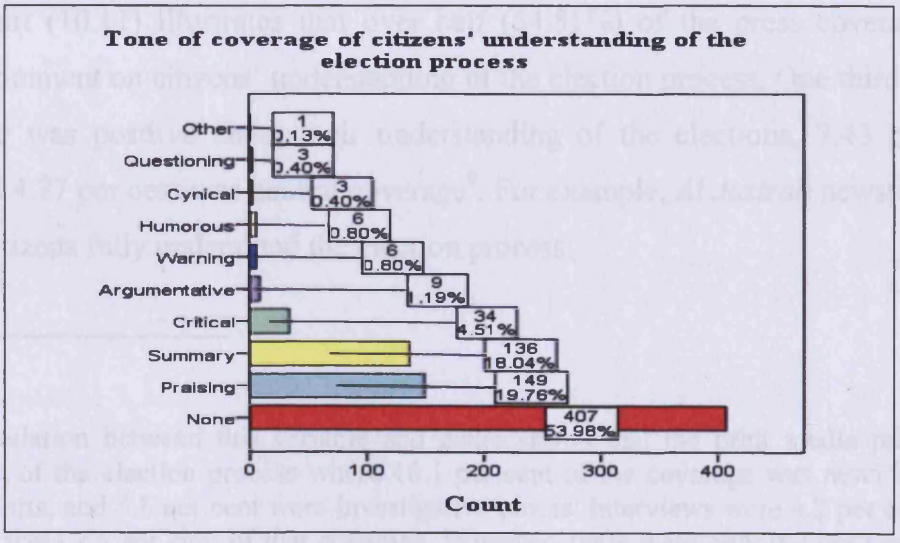
Chart 10.9



The bar chart above (10.9) indicates that little mention was made of citizens' political awareness in the papers. Almost one quarter of the coverage (23.64 %) of the papers alluded to the fact that the citizens were politically aware, whereas 2.52 per cent of the press stated that citizens lacked political awareness.

D: Tone of coverage of citizens' understanding of the election process

Chart 10.10

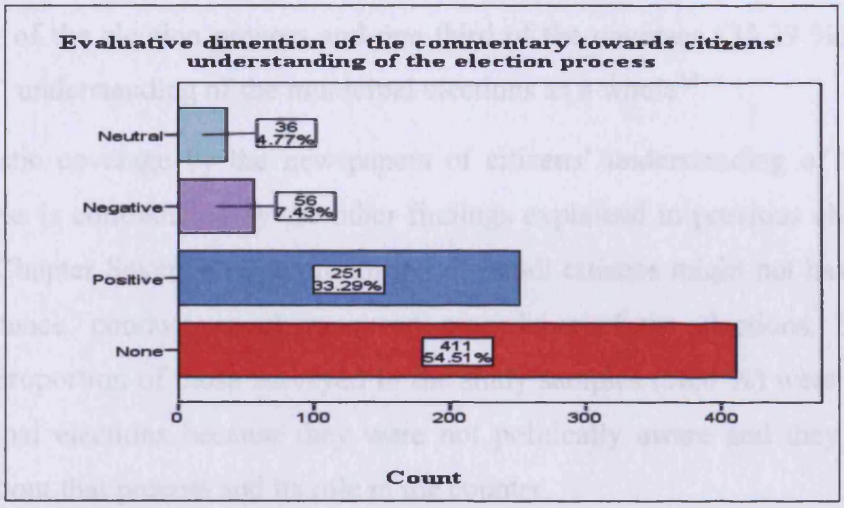


The bar chart (10.10) illustrates that over half (53.98 %) of the papers studied did not comment on the Saudi citizens' understanding of the election process, which might imply the 'loyalty' of the Saudi newspapers. 19.76 per cent of the newspapers' coverage praised citizens' understanding of the election process, but 4.51 per cent were critical of their understanding. For example, *Al Jazirah* newspaper praised citizens' awareness of the election process:

> The citizens' huge participation in the municipal elections shows the high level of awareness of the Saudi citizens (*Al Jazirah*, 25 November 2004).

E. Evaluative dimension of the commentary towards citizens' understanding of the election process

Chart 10.11



This bar chart (10.11) illustrates that over half (54.51%) of the press coverage made no evaluative comment on citizens' understanding of the election process. One third (33.29%) of the coverage was positive about their understanding of the elections, 7.43 per cent was negative and 4.77 per cent was neutral coverage[9]. For example, *Al Jazirah* newspaper thought that Saudi citizens fully understood the election process:

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[9] A cross tabulation between this variable and genre shows that the print media praised citizens' understanding of the election process where 10.1 per cent of the coverage was news briefs, 8.9 per cent were reports, and 5.8 per cent were investigative pieces. Interviews were 4.2 per cent and inside news articles were 2.5 per cent of that coverage. However, there were only 0.7 per cent op-eds and 0.5 per cent front page headline stories about this issue. Citizens' understanding of the election issue

> The active and large participation of citizens in municipal elections is a reflection of people's deep understanding of the meaning and importance of the elections in its first step in Saudi Arabia (*Al Jazirah*, 17 March 2005).

Okaz newspaper also thought that citizens were aware of the electoral process:

> An increased number of registered voters in small towns is due to the homogeneity of the population of those cities. Also, it is a sign of citizens' awareness of the importance of the electoral process and an indication of the high level of electoral culture in those cities (*Okaz,* 12 January 2005).

In the light of the previous results, one can see that although much of the newspapers' coverage (73.4 %) did not mention the citizens' understanding of the importance of the election process, less than one quarter (21. 51 %) of the coverage reported that people did understand the election process. Also, one third (33.82 %) of the coverage noted that citizens were interested in the elections and nearly one quarter of the coverage (23.64 %) stated that citizens were politically aware. 19.76 per cent of the newspapers' coverage praised citizens' understanding of the election process and one third of the coverage (33.29 %) was positive about citizens' understanding of the municipal elections as a whole[10].

This enthusiastic coverage by the newspapers of citizens' understanding of the municipal election process is contradicted by the other findings explained in previous chapters. As we have seen in Chapter Seven, a large proportion of Saudi citizens might not have been aware of the importance, conduct, regulations and procedures of the elections. In addition, a considerable proportion of those surveyed in the study samples (58.0 %) were not interested in the municipal elections because they were not politically aware and they needed more information about that process and its role in the country.

These results echo what Fourie (2007) called 'authoritarian theory', where in non-democratic societies, there is no press freedom, the only function of the press is to 'publicise' and to 'propagandise' the government's ideology and actions. The press is an 'instrument and

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did not appear in any of the first page headlines or front page news articles. Thus, again, newspapers' coverage of this variable did not get to the first pages or receive the attention required, which is the same as the other aspects of the election process.

[10] A cross tabulation between this variable and news sources shows that 9.4 per cent of items positively mentioning citizens' understanding of the election process were without sources, which could be the newspapers' opinions. Members of the public represented 6.8 per cent of the sources, followed by candidates with 4.0 per cent, election committee members with 2.4 per cent, government officials with 2.4 per cent and voters with 1.7 per cent of the items. These figures show that the newspapers' sources were varied and appeared to represent all groups relevant to the election process.

mouthpiece of government' (p. 270). Riemer and Simon (1997) argued that in such political systems, the media have generally functioned as organs of the party or government to test party and governmental 'priorities, legitimise policies, and enhance the government's effectiveness' (p. 254). The authors concluded that newspapers do not generally function as watchdogs in the Western democratic sense, but they instead 'inform people of the party line, reprimand those who deviate from this line, and exhort the people to support party and government' (p. 254).

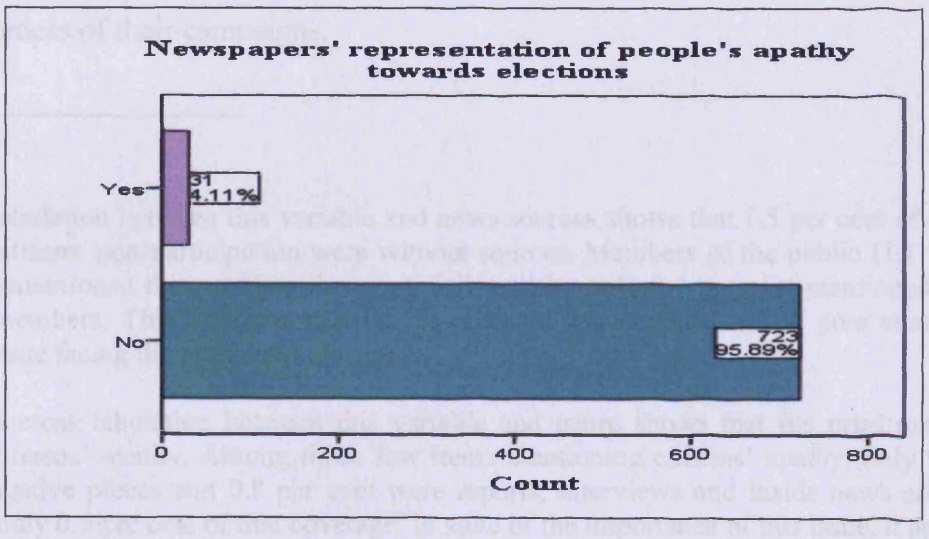
Thus, one might conclude that the Saudi print media was 'loyal' to the country and worked as a governmental organisation in the time of the municipal elections, when it was difficult to criticise any aspects of the election process.

Citizens' apathy towards elections

Saudi newspapers' coverage of the citizens' limited participation in municipal elections is another category that this chapter is going to look at. In other words, was people's apathy towards elections mentioned in the newspapers as one of the main difficulties that faced the election process?

My aim is to show how the Saudi print media framed this critical issue, with only 17 per cent of eligible voters participating in the municipal elections. The absence of the issue of voter turnout in the newspaper headlines and editorials might be explained by the 'loyal role' of the national newspapers during the municipal elections.

Chart 10.12



The bar chart (10.12) reveals that most of the articles (95.89 %) did not refer to people's apathy towards elections. Only 4.11 per cent of the sample talked about this issue[11]. Despite the fact that the majority of the eligible Saudi citizens (82 %) did not participate in those elections, the print media was not able or willing to report that result.

However, one of the few articles that mentioned this issue appeared in *Okaz* newspaper saying that citizens' apathy was to be expected:

> Low turnout in the municipal elections, as was the case in Riyadh, is the phenomenon that was expected. Despite the government's encouragement, people to participate in those elections and the involvement of some senior officials in the registration process, citizens' indifference to participation was evident (*Okaz*, 11 December 2004).

One may conclude that the Saudi newspapers purposely ignored the citizens' non-participation in municipal elections. The reluctant position of the national press was mentioned by Rugh (2004) who argued that the most important factor behind the status of the press in Arab countries is that the political environment in which the press function 'has been conducive to non-diverse, relatively passive and politically conformist newspapers' (p. 78). In such political systems, 'neither the establishment nor the general public insist on the right to free public debate of politically important issues, so there is no such debate in the press' (p. 79). Thus, the Saudi newspapers' framing of the issue of citizens' disengagement was a part of the media's framing of the municipal elections as a 'perfect process'.

It might be argued that an election campaign is only as good as the people who fight it, so it is also important to look at the print media's coverage of the candidates themselves, and at the effectiveness of their campaigns.

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[11] A cross tabulation between this variable and news sources shows that 1.5 per cent of items which mentioned citizens' non-participation were without sources. Members of the public (1.1 %) were the sources that mentioned this problem the most, followed by only 0.4 per cent mentioned by election committee members. This confirms that the newspapers were careful not to give attention to this significant issue facing the municipal elections.

Moreover, a cross tabulation between this variable and genre shows that the print media avoided discussing citizens' apathy. Among those few items mentioning citizens' apathy, only 0.9 per cent were investigative pieces and 0.8 per cent were reports, interviews and inside news articles. News briefs were only 0.5 per cent of that coverage. In spite of the importance of this issue, it appeared only once as a front page headline story. One might conclude that the loyal Saudi print media might have deliberatively ignored such critical issues happening in the elections.

Candidates' electoral campaigns

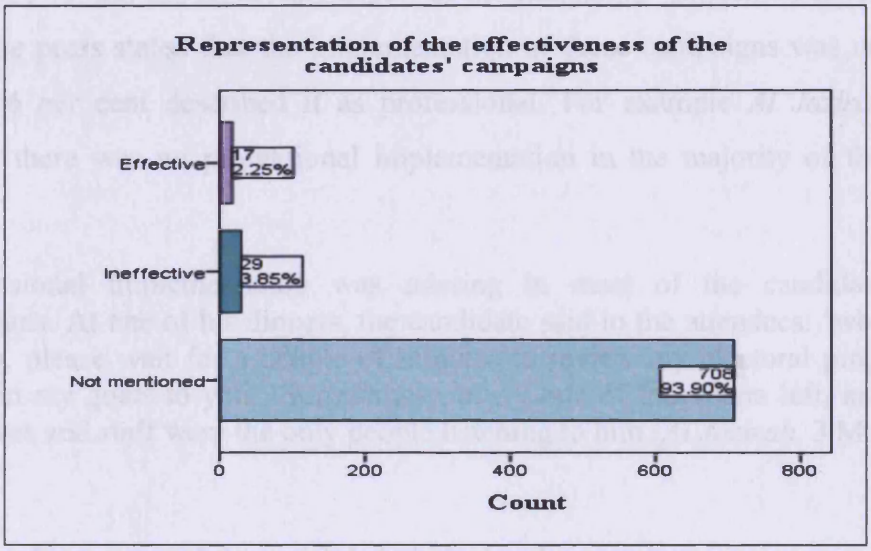
How the newspapers covered the candidates' electoral campaigns is another category that this chapter is going to discuss. My aim here is to look at how the national press framed the effectiveness of the candidates' campaigns and to compare these findings with the results of the previous chapters that reveal that the candidates' campaigns were ineffective. Lupia and McCubbins (1988) argued that citizens get their information about candidates during a campaign from news coverage, campaign advertisements, and discussions with friends and family, and they make their choices based on that information (p. 11). Borquez and Wasserman (2006), who studied the mayoral campaigns in Detroit and Los Angeles in 1997 and 2001, concluded that the 'intensity of the campaigns' generates greater coverage. McCleneghan and Ragland (2002) argued that the influence of newspaper endorsements is greatest at the local level and progressively declines at the state and national level. Shaw (1997) stated that if a newspaper endorsement is to have any effect on voting behaviour, that effect will be greatest in races of 'low visibility, for local, nonpartisan office, in campaigns with few issues and little controversy' (p. 73).

However, Ekstrom et al. (2010) stated that local political news was not regarded as interesting or worthwhile in comparison with national and international news, although recent decades have witnessed a growing attention to local news (p. 257). Franklin (2006) also concluded that local journalism has lost considerable control over the news agenda, 'effectively transforming the role of watchdog into lapdog' (p. 260).

In Saudi Arabia, in spite of the fact that the municipal elections were local elections, those elections were non-partisan elections and only to elect half of the municipal seats in 179 municipalities across the country. Furthermore, because most of the newspapers are national in Saudi Arabia, candidates had to work locally, but they had to advertise their programmes nationally. Thus, a candidate based in the southern part of the country who had to advertise in the national newspaper would not be of interest to a voter in the northern part of the country or even the next city. This might have contributed to the low level of participation among citizens. Therefore, it is of interest to examine issues such as the effectiveness of the candidates' campaigns, their implementation, tone of coverage and how the print media evaluated those campaigns.

A. Representation of the effectiveness of the candidates' campaigns

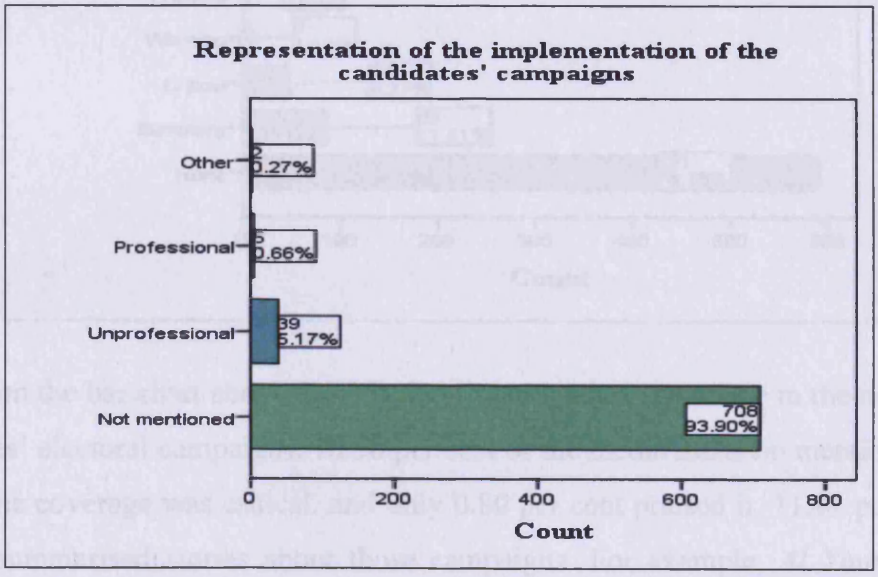
Chart 10.13



The bar chart above (10.13) shows that the media coverage overall did not mention the effectiveness of the candidates' campaigns. 93.90 per cent of the coverage did not discuss this issue, but only 3.85 per cent referred to those campaigns as ineffective and 2.25 per cent reported that the candidate' campaigns were effective.

B. Representation of the implementation of the candidates' campaigns

Chart 10.14

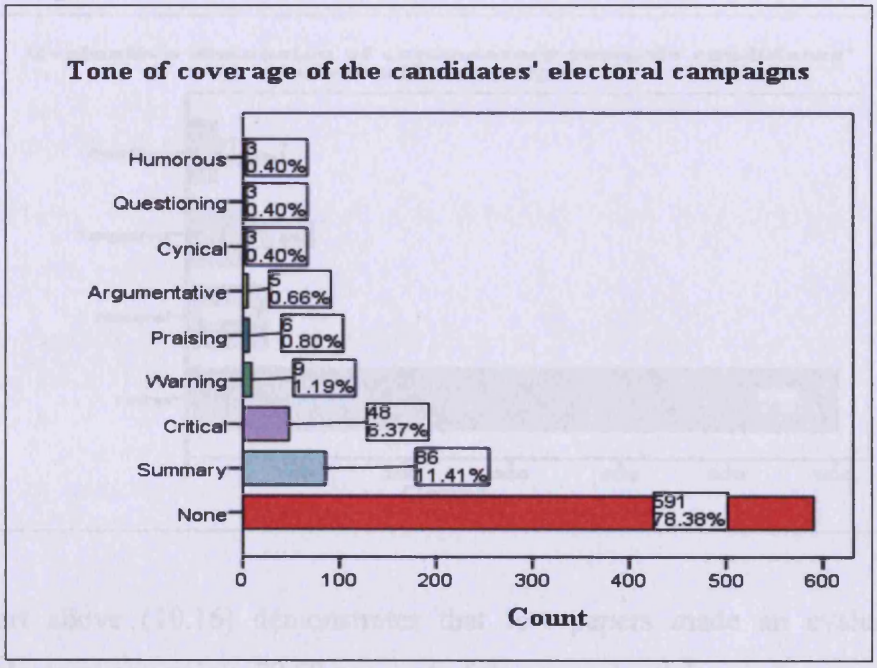


In the bar chart above (10.14), similar to the allusion to the effectiveness of the candidates' campaigns, hardly any of the coverage mentions its implementation. The majority of the coverage (93.90 %) did not report any aspect of the campaigns' implementation. Less than 6 per cent of the press stated that the implementation of those campaigns was unprofessional and only 0.66 per cent described it as professional. For example *Al Jazirah* newspaper reported that there was no professional implementation in the majority of the candidates' campaigns:

> Professional implementation was missing in most of the candidates' electoral programs. At one of his dinners, the candidate said to the attendees: 'when you finish eating, please wait for a couple of minutes to review my electoral programmes and explain my goals to you.' Surprisingly, every one of the voters left, and candidates' relatives and staff were the only people listening to him (*Al Jazirah*, 3 March 2005).

C. Tone of coverage of the candidates' electoral campaigns

Chart 10.15



It is clear from the bar chart above (10.15) that little mention was made in the newspapers of the candidates' electoral campaigns. 78.38 per cent of the media made no mention at all, 6.37 per cent of the coverage was critical, and only 0.80 per cent praised it. 11.41 per cent of the items were summarised stories about those campaigns. For example, *Al Yaum* newspaper described some candidates' camps (headquarters) as restaurants:

> Programmes and election slogans launched by some candidates match in form and content the popular restaurants. Some of the candidates who turned their camps (headquarters) into charity camps full of good food received favourable responses from all of their hungry visitors (*Al Yaum*, 1 March 2005).

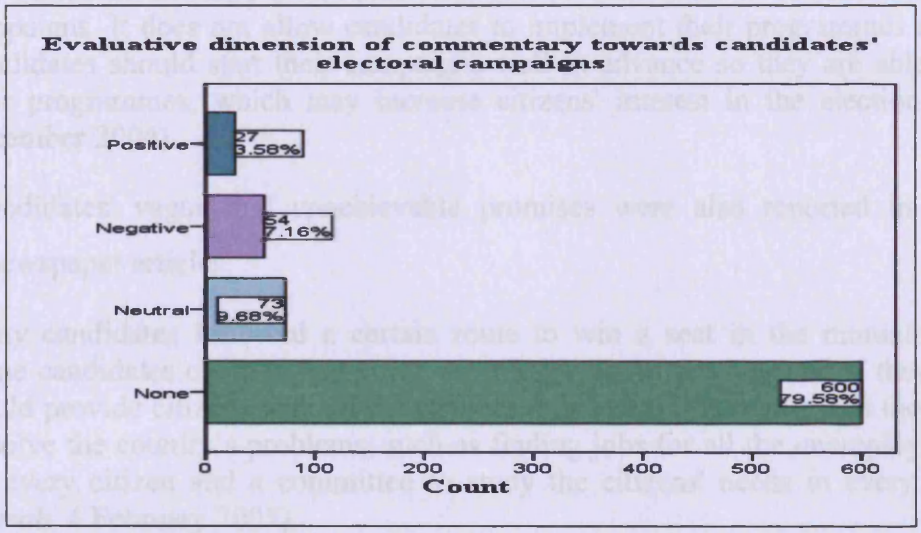
Okaz newspaper also noted that the majority of the candidates who used the food strategy did not win the elections:

> Few candidates from the owners of banquets succeeded in this race, but the majority failed where they bet on the impact of 'meat and fat' food to attract voters (Okaz, 13 February 2005).

This is to emphasise one of the social traditional customs common in Saudi society, where the presentation of food (especially meat and rice) to a guest is one of the most appreciative things to do. Chapter Six explained how some of the candidates used this strategy to attract voters.

D. Evaluative dimension of commentary towards candidates' campaigns

Chart 10.16



The bar chart above (10.16) demonstrates that few papers made an evaluation of the candidates' electoral campaign. 79.58 per cent of the papers' articles made no comment. 7.16 per cent of the coverage was negative, 9.68 per cent was neutral, but only 3.58 per cent of the stories were positive. The following examples illustrate these findings. *Al Watan* newspaper described the first Election Day in Riyadh as follows:

> Today in Riyadh city, banquets, advertisements and carnivals ended up electing 128 and failing 1690 candidates (*Al Watan*, 10 February 2005).

Moreover, the newspaper explained how some candidates tried to attract voters to vote for them by using all the means they knew.

> Some of the candidates called upon things that are not relevant to society and included some ideas that do not fall within the scope of the municipal councils. It seems that some candidates wanted to attract voters to their electoral camps and choose some attractive issues to make voters talk about them (Al Watan, 10 February 2005).

Al Jazirah newspaper reported that the majority of candidates lacked the necessary experience for the municipal elections:

> The majority of candidates did not have the qualifications, skills or even proper strategies to attract voters. Few candidates hired experienced campaign managers from Kuwait and Bahrain to administer their electoral campaigns (*Al Jazirah*, 3 March 2005).

Okaz newspaper thought that the reason behind the ineffectiveness of the candidates' campaigns was the short period of campaigning (10 days) that was assigned by the election committee:

> The period of ten days is not sufficient for the candidates to conduct their electoral campaigns. It does not allow candidates to implement their programmes as required. Candidates should start their campaigns well in advance so they are able to present their programmes, which may increase citizens' interest in the election (*Okaz*. 27 December 2004).

Finally, candidates' vague and unachievable promises were also reported in one of *Al Jazirah's* newspaper articles:

> Many candidates followed a certain route to win a seat in the municipal council. Some candidates claimed that cities were left without services and if they won, they would provide citizens with all the services they need. Others said that they had plans to solve the country's problems, such as finding jobs for all the unemployed, a house for every citizen and a committee to study the citizens' needs in every village (*Al Jazirah*, 4 February 2005).

It can be seen that the majority of newspaper coverage did not mention the effectiveness, implementation or even the length of the candidates' electoral campaigns. Only a few articles (5.17 %) stated that the campaigns' implementation was unprofessional and very few articles (0.80 %) praised those campaigns, while 7.16 per cent of the coverage was negative and only 3.58 per cent of the stories were positive[12].

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[12] A cross tabulation between this variable and news sources shows that 4.8 per cent of items that

These findings indicate that the Saudi print media to some extent neglected or did not favour the candidates' electoral campaigns.

This result echoes the work of Chan and Suen (2009) who argued that in an environment in which voters have little motivation to collect information about public policies, the media offers two types of news that help voters make informed decisions. The first type of news is the direct reporting of policies proposed by political bodies or parties. The second type ranges from the analysis of background news, to critical commentary on public policies, to endorsement of campaign candidates. The authors concluded that 'electoral competition is ineffective when the media only provide the first type of news' (p. 812). Thus, one may argue that the political environment in the country, which allowed only a few political activities and limited press freedom, might have hindered the competitive role of the press regarding candidates' campaigns.

The previous findings also duplicate the survey and interview outcomes which show that the majority of the candidates' promotional campaigns were not effective. In other words, the poor implementation of those campaigns might have failed to generate coverage in the Saudi print media or attract more citizens to support those campaigns or candidates. So the loyalty of the print media assisted the government's efforts but not the candidates', who had to depend upon their own approaches to the media.

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mentioned candidates' campaigns were without sources, which could represent newspaper opinion. Members of the public (0.9 %) were the most cited sources that thought those candidates' campaigns were ineffective, followed by candidates in only 0.4 per cent of the coverage. Government officials, voters and religious scholars represented equally 0.3 per cent of the news sources. However, a few items (2.0 %), where candidates were the sources, were positive about this issue. This result shows that the Saudi print media did not give much attention to the candidates' electoral campaigns.

In addition to that, a cross tabulation between this variable and genre shows that very little coverage was given to the candidates' campaigns. Only 2.09 per cent of inside news articles, 1.3 per cent of features, 0.9 per cent of reports and news briefs, 0.5 per cent of interviews and 0.4 per cent of cartoons were negative. At the same time, only 0.6 per cent of the features and 0.9 per cent of reports and news briefs were negative. Implementation or effectiveness of the candidates' campaigns did not appear in any of the front page news articles or first page headlines.

Election media campaign

The final category of this chapter discusses how the Saudi newspapers portrayed the municipal election media campaign. The previous chapters' findings clearly demonstrate that the campaign was ineffective in providing Saudi citizens with enough information about the election process. So the findings of this section would support or contradict those findings and show whether or not the newspapers managed to set up their own 'loyal' agenda during the municipal elections.

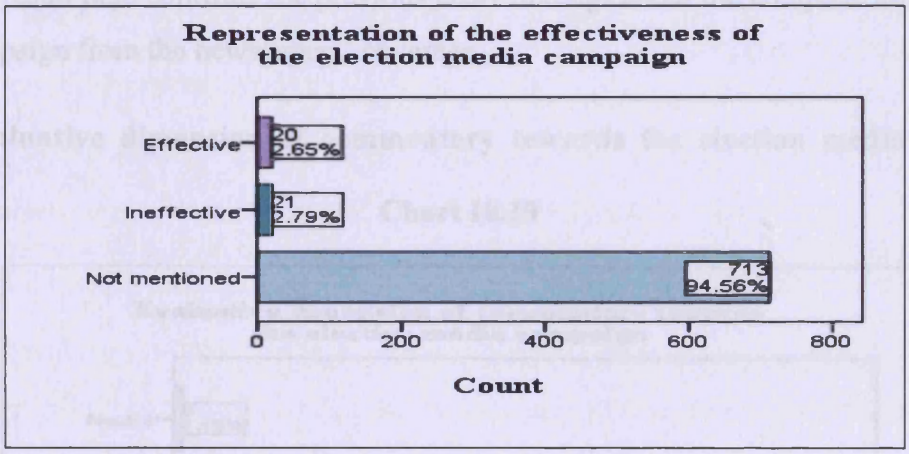
As already discussed, the press in both democratic and non-democratic societies has a powerful influence in presenting which issues will be looked at during an election. Brynin and Newton (2003) stated that 'media attention or lack therefore, in the early stages of election campaigns has a significant effect on the electoral process' (p. 75). Lichtenberg (1990) argued that the media's agenda-setting function is powerful: 'it can determine the significance attached by voters to various issues in the campaign' (p. 284). Wanta (1988) noted that press coverage increases public concern: 'when a person is involved in an issue that is high in the public sphere of concern, press coverage can create an even higher public concern' (p. 108). Moreover, the influence of coverage fluctuates based upon the audience's personal involvement or interest in a specific issue. Schaffner (2006) argued that the elections are useful instruments for citizens when they have the essential information about candidates and elected officials running in those contests. Consequently, 'elections are only useful as their campaigns are visible to the public' (p. 776). In other words, if citizens are not presented with a sufficient amount of information about the electoral process and candidates, they may be less able to evaluate these candidates and to make reasonable choices. Schudson (2002) argued that the job of the press is to: 'produce a more informed electorate, where informed citizenry will create a better and fuller democracy' (p. 250).

The cited literature states the importance of the press' ability to inform the electorate of the elections process, which include the elections media campaign. So an investigation into the representation of the effectiveness of the municipal election media campaign will shed more light on the role of the Saudi press and highlight the question of apathy. It could be argued that the attention that the Saudi print media gave to the election media campaign might have affected the citizens' perceptions and understanding of the election process and thus the outcome of the elections. Therefore, this section will discuss how the Saudi newspapers

represented the media campaign's effectiveness, the tone of coverage towards the media campaign and how they evaluated it.

A. Representation of the effectiveness of the election media campaign

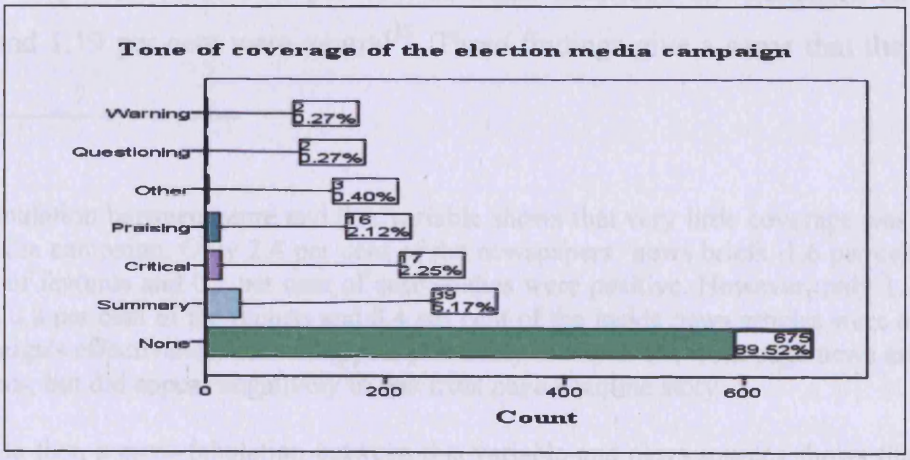
Chart 10.17



The bar chart (10.17) reveals that, on the whole, the papers did not mention whether the election media campaign was effective or ineffective. This is because the vast majority of the coverage (94.56 %) did not discuss this issue. Only 2.79 per cent of the items reported that the campaign was ineffective and 2.65 per cent described the campaign as an effective one. That the Saudi newspapers mostly did not mention the election media campaign or its effectiveness is a significant result which confirms the argument of this section that the media campaign was set apart from the election process.

B. Tone of coverage of the election media campaign

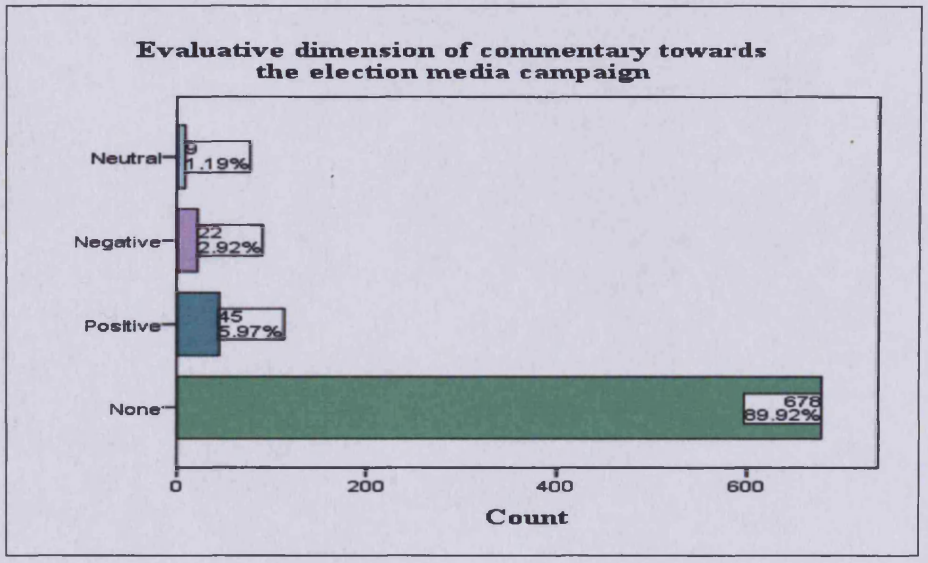
Chart 10.18



The bar chart above (10.18) reveals that little comment was made about the media campaign by the Saudi studied newspapers. Only 2.25 per cent of coverage was critical of the campaign and 2.12 per cent praised it, but 89.52 per cent made no mention at all. A small amount of coverage (5.17 %) talked briefly about the campaign's activities, but did not evaluate them. Again, the result here confirms the previous chart findings about the complete absence of the media campaign from the newspapers' coverage.

C. Evaluative dimension of commentary towards the election media campaign

Chart 10.19



The bar chart above (10.19) demonstrates that most newspaper coverage made no evaluation of the election media campaign. In other words, the vast majority of the coverage (89.92 %) did not discuss the election media campaign. Only 5.97 per cent of articles stated that the campaign was positive, but 2.92 per cent of items described the campaign as a negative campaign and 1.19 per cent were neutral[13]. These findings give a sense that the Saudi print

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[13] A cross tabulation between genre and this variable shows that very little coverage was given to the elections media campaign. Only 2.4 per cent of the newspapers' news briefs, 1.6 per cent of reports, 0.8 per cent of features and 0.7 per cent of case studies were positive. However, only 1.2 per cent of the features, 0.8 per cent of the reports and 0.4 per cent of the inside news articles were negative. The media campaign's effectiveness did not appear positively in any of the front page news articles or first page headlines, but did appear negatively in one front page headline story.

In addition to that, a cross tabulation between this variable and news sources shows that there were some sources that were positive about the media campaign. 1.7 per cent of the items were without

media did not discuss or evaluate the municipal election campaign in any way. Among the small number of articles that mentioned the election media campaign, some directly criticised the campaign, such as one journalist at *Al Watan* newspaper who reported that the media campaign was weak and failed to explain the role of the municipal councils to the public:

> The major weakness of the information campaign is the fact that it did not give enough information to the citizens about the importance of the municipal councils (*Al Watan*, 9 November 2004).

In addition, *Okaz* newspaper criticised the absence of television coverage from the campaign:

> I think it was necessary for the mass media, especially television, to focus more on election news and produce awareness-raising programmes to illustrate the importance of the national electoral process to Saudi citizens (*Okaz*, 27 December 2004).

Bearing in mind the previous findings, one may conclude that the Saudi newspapers to some extent neglected the municipal election media campaign. 94.56 per cent of all paper coverage made no judgment as to whether the election media campaign was effective or ineffective. Also, the vast majority of the coverage (89.92 %) did not evaluate the media campaign. In other words, the media campaign was rarely mentioned or not mentioned at all in the four newspapers during the elections period.

This result resembles the findings of the final report on the 2005 Palestinian Presidential Elections, produced by the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, which reported that there was a clear lack of critical coverage of the elections in the newspapers in terms of editorial policy:

> The lack of editorial coverage that engaged in election issues more broadly was an important gap that should have been filled by all media outlets (PIPGDD, Final report, February 2005).

Moreover, a similar tone was reported among the British tabloid newspapers towards the 2010 general elections. BBC *Channel 4 News* presenter Jon Snow said at a Westminster Media Forum seminar on the future of news media that the tabloid press had poor election

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sources and the same percentage represents the number of election committee members who appeared as sources. Government officials represent 0.9 per cent, members of the public 0.5 per cent and city mayors were sources in 0.3 per cent of the coverage. However, for the negative coverage, members of the public were sources in 1.1 per cent of items, and elections committee members were sources in 0.5 per cent of the newspapers' coverage. These results show that the Saudi print media did not give the election media campaign the appropriate attention.

coverage of the 2010 general election in Britain. He stated that those papers devoted pages of coverage to the leaders' TV debates but ignored the results and claimed their favoured candidates won the elections. Snow criticised the tabloid press for its election coverage: 'What a poor election the tabloids had. There was nothing to report' (*Guardian,* 20 May 2010). However, Dunaway (2007) found that both the institutional characteristics of newspaper outlets and the political environment in which they operate affect their political campaign coverage: 'in markets where political preferences are more homogeneous, newspapers try to work with the dominant political preference in the market and offer campaign coverage slanted toward the preferences of the majority' (p. 1). Rugh (2004) also stated that governments in the Arab World 'expect any public comment, including all treatment in the press, to be favourable' (p. 79). Rugh (2004) described the 'loyal' Saudi print media as follows:

> The most common mechanism ensuring newspaper loyalty to the basic policies of the regime and to its top leadership is anticipatory self-censorship based on sensitivity to the political environment. The editors and other journalists usually know, without any specific guidance, what the regime expects them to say in their newspapers and they usually comply for it. The regime makes known, through public acts such as statements of policy or appointments of personnel, what is important to it and what the official line is (p. 82).

This might explain the Saudi newspapers' framing of the municipal election media campaign and how they were cautious not to criticise or report its weakness. This result supports the findings of the survey and interviews that there was a very limited effect of the election media campaign on Saudis' perceptions towards the elections, which might have contributed to their limited participation in those elections. In survey and interviews, as we have seen in previous chapters, the majority of the respondents thought that the media campaign failed to attract people's attention to the elections and did not provide enough information about that national political process.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated the Saudi newspapers' coverage of the 2005 municipal election process based on five main variables. It looked at how the newspapers set their agendas during the municipal election process and how they framed the municipal election process, citizens' understanding of the elections, the citizen non-participation issue, the candidates' electoral campaigns and the effectiveness of the election media campaign.

Newspapers' coverage of the municipal elections positively framed the election process as an administrative reform, a new experience for Saudis, and a development for the country, but the newspapers were cautious to describe the election process as a democratic, political or governmental reform. Moreover, the newspapers paid very little attention to the election media campaign or the candidates' electoral campaigns . These findings confirm the findings of other chapters that the effects of those campaigns were very limited in drawing the media or the people's attention to the elections.

However, most of the newspaper coverage did not mention the citizens' disengagement towards municipal elections and tended to praise the citizens' understanding of the election process. Also, papers reported that citizens were interested in that election process and politically aware. This conclusion contradicts what other methods in this research have found, which showed that a considerable proportion of the Saudi citizens were not interested in the elections because they were not informed and not politically aware. Also, the conclusion contrasts with the actual outcome of the elections which indicated that only 17 per cent of eligible citizens cast their votes in the three phases of the municipal elections.

The previous findings help to confirm that the limited freedom of press in the country might have made it difficult for the newspapers to criticise directly some aspects of shortage in the election process, including the media campaign, candidates' campaigns and people's understanding of that process. The Saudi print media failed to criticise or extensively report the reasons or obstacles behind the low turnout in such a national political event.

In short, the Saudi print media did not work during the municipal election as 'a watchdog... a provider of the information... an educator and enabler of the citizenry' (Anderson and Ward, 2007), but rather as a 'loyalist' press (Rugh, 2004) which 'mirrors the political system' (Berger, 1995). The Saudi newspapers managed to set their agenda, which was an integral part of the country's news agenda (Media Regulation Policy), and framed the elections news accordingly.

The final chapter is going to summarise the findings of this research project and suggest some directions for future research.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the unique experiment of setting democracy in Saudi Arabia. Municipal elections in Saudi Arabia were the first public elections in the history of the country. The long awaited landmark process was conducted in 2005 by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and other governmental ministries and organisations under the slogan 'Participate in the decision-making'. Unfortunately, the outcome of the elections showed that only a small number (17 %) of Saudi citizens participated in those elections out of 4.5 million eligible voters. Therefore, this research project examined some factors that might have contributed to the low level of political participation in those elections. These factors were the lack of political awareness among Saudi citizens, the ineffectiveness of the election media campaign and the poor implementation of the candidates' electoral campaigns. Surprisingly, the findings of this study showed that the factors that caused non-participation in Saudi Arabia resemble those in other democratic countries around the globe, despite the specificity of Saudi society. However, the specificity of Saudi society resulted in the fact that a small percentage of well educated participants in this study might not have participated in the elections because they thought the process was limited despite their political awareness.

The municipal election process was an important democratic experience which made it possible for Saudi citizens to elect their representatives in local municipalities for the first time ever in Saudi Arabia. Although there was a very low turnout, the municipal election process was a revolutionary event in an absolute monarchy where political representation and media freedom are limited. In addition, Saudi Arabia is a conservative society, where Islam is the dominant religion that shapes traditional, cultural and political values in the country. The Sharia 'Islamic law' dominant all aspects of life in Saudi society. Thus, the governing system, mass media, economic, educational and social aspects of the country are obliged to follow the regulations of Islam. In addition to the religion, traditional, tribal and familial ties and values direct people's behaviour (Gazzaz, 2006). All these factors together might explain the outcome of the municipal elections, where many observers noted that Islamists won the majority of the municipal seats around the country (Guse, 2005), and where tribal and familial ties contributed to the victory of some candidates in rural areas (Al Ghamdi, 2005).

Under these circumstances came the municipal elections, with Western strategies and tactics that were new and strange for most Saudi citizens. Therefore, municipal elections could be

considered revolutionary political reform in this community, whether called 'administrative reform', as outlined by the King, or 'democratic reform', according to the standards of the West.

The wave of optimism that engulfed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the announcement of the municipal elections in 2003 and their implementation in 2005, turned into uncertainty and pessimism when the results revealed that only a small proportion (17 %) of citizens participated. Those disappointing results raised questions among officials, citizens and observers about the real reasons for the unexpectedly poor turnout.

As the literature illustrated, political apathy is a common problem in elections, whether national, parliamentary, district, city or municipal, in many nations around the world (Oliver, 2001, Fisher et al., 2008, Hajnal and Lewis, 2003, Hilliard and Kemp, 1999, Neimi and Junn, 1998, Carpini et al., 1996). In Saudi Arabia, I found that people were apathetic for a variety of different reasons, which for some citizens do not necessarily mean lack of political interest or knowledge, and their limited participation was caused by the same factors which cause apathy in the Western democratic countries. Interestingly, citizens, candidates and voters, as well as other people who were involved in those elections, responded to the election process differently. The responses were varied, but the Saudi media, especially newspapers, did not reflect that diversity in its daily coverage of the elections. Therefore, questions were raised about the role and effect of the main players in the election process – that is, the Saudi Government, voters, candidates and the mass media – the main question being, 'was it insufficient activity by one or all of these players that resulted in the low level people's participation?'

Three research methods were used together to collect primary data about the municipal election process. This approach included a combination of quantitative (questionnaire and newspaper content analysis) and qualitative (interview) methods. The choice of methodological approach adopted was influenced by the specific kinds of data needed to answer the research questions (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000). This involved looking at the policy level, where the officials responsible for municipal election campaign strategy and implementation were considered sources of data. They also represented the government and private sector dimensions of the research questions, and a qualitative approach (in-depth interview) was adopted to collect data from this group to answer this question:

1. What were the planners and implementers' perceptions of the objectives, strategies, messages and evaluation of the municipal election process?

In addition, qualitative interviews with a smaller sample of the journalists, candidates and the general public were carried out to enrich this part of the study and answer the second question of my research, which was:

2. What were the journalists' candidates' and the general public' perceptions of the objectives and messages, and how did they evaluate the municipal election process?

This approach also involved looking at the large scale response of voters and the rest of the general public. Data was collected from a large group of Saudi people using the questionnaire technique to answer the other main questions of this research, which included the following:

3. What were citizens' perceptions of the objectives, strategies and tactics and how did they evaluate the election process?
4. What were citizens' perceptions of the objectives, strategies and tactics and how did they evaluate the election media campaign?
5. What were citizens' perceptions of the objectives, strategies and tactics and how did they evaluate the candidates' electoral campaigns?
6. What were citizens' perceptions of democracy and Saudi political reform in this concept?

Content analysis was the third quantitative approach used in this research project. Analysing the coverage patterns of four national Saudi newspapers for six months (November 2004 to April 2005) completed the picture of the municipal election process. The main question in this section was:

7. How did the sample Saudi newspapers (*Al Jazirah*, *Al Watan*, *Okaz* and *Al Yaum*) portray the municipal election process?

To answer this question, the study looked at how the newspapers had set their agendas during the municipal election process and how they framed five major aspects of the elections. Those were the election process, citizens' understanding of the election, citizens' apathy, the effectiveness of the candidates' electoral campaigns as well as the effectiveness of the election media campaign.

As previously stated, the actual outcome of the municipal elections showed that the majority of Saudi citizens (83 %) did not participate in that process and there were some major factors that might have stopped them from casting their vote. Among those factors this study has investigated were the lack of political awareness among citizens, the ineffectiveness of the election mass media campaign and the poor implementation of the candidates' electoral campaigns. Needless to say, those factors were not the only reasons that might have caused people's low level of participation in 2005 municipal elections in Saudi Arabia.

Lack of political awareness among citizens

As part of my conclusion, I argued that the low level of political awareness among a large proportion of Saudi citizens might have contributed to their limited participation in the municipal elections. By political awareness, I mean that citizens have the ability to make rational judgements that allows them to take the right political decisions (Gagel, 2007 and Bartle, 1997). Thus, I examined Saudi citizens' political awareness and perceptions of the importance and conduct of the municipal election process and found that many citizens did not participate in those elections because they were not politically aware.

As noted by Nicholson (2003) and Zaller (1992), political awareness requires ability (e.g. cognitive skills), motivation (e.g. political interest), and opportunity (e.g. depth of media coverage). My findings showed that a considerable number of citizens were less interested in and less informed about the 2005 municipal elections. Thus, the lack of information, interest, and attention that Saudi citizens had in the municipal elections may indicate that they were not politically aware, which might have decreased their participation in that national political event.

Examining the effect of the media on people's political awareness was a significant aspect of this study. Mass media coverage of elections plays a very important role in increasing political awareness and participation (Larcinese, 2007 and Bennett, 1994). However, this was not the case in Saudi Arabia. I found that the majority of Saudi citizens lacked the necessary political information about the importance and regulations of the municipal elections. That is partly because the media failed to raise citizens' political awareness and educate them about that important event, which might have contributed to their ignorance of the elections and their limited participation afterwards.

I also looked at political knowledge as a crucial factor in citizens' political behaviour. It was seen that without knowledge and adequate understanding of politics, citizens are less capable of voting in an informed manner (Nicholson, 2003, Nicholson et al., 2006 and Grönlund and Milner (2004). Also, the decision-making of the public is based on well-informed and sophisticated political reasoning (Scheufele et al., 2002) because knowledgeable citizens participate in politics more than less knowledgeable ones (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). This was reflected in my findings. I found that more Saudi citizens did not register or vote as a result of their lack of information about the elections, lack of interest and lack of political knowledge. Thus, the lack of political knowledge among those citizens might have hindered their participation in the municipal elections.

My study also looked at crucial mobilisation efforts (voter contact or voter canvassing) by the election committees and candidates because political participation rises or falls according to the effort that has gone into mobilisation (Goldstein and Ridout, 2002 and Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). My findings came to the same conclusion regarding mobilisation. They showed that limited mobilisation efforts by the organising committees or candidates might have contributed to the voters' limited understanding of the elections and their subsequent voting decisions.

Furthermore, but it has been shown that media in non-democratic societies functions as organs of the ruling party or government (Riemer and Simon, 1997). My findings showed that the studied newspaper coverage praised the citizens' understanding of the municipal election process. In addition, newspapers 'publicise' and 'propagandise' the government's ideology and actions (Fourie, 2007). My findings echo this. The Saudi print media was 'loyal' to the country and worked as a governmental organisation at the time of the municipal elections, where it was difficult to criticise any aspect of the election process, including public understanding of the elections.

Finally, the literature showed that the political environment can increase or decrease people's political awareness and participation. As has been found in other societies, when the government owns a large share of media outlets and infrastructure, regulates the media industry and controls the content of news, citizens are usually politically ignorant and apathetic (Leeson, 2008). My findings echo this. As noted, in Saudi Arabia mass media outlets are monitored and censored which might have negatively affected the citizens'

political awareness and their knowledge regarding the importance of the municipal elections or their participation in those elections.

On the other hand, some of my findings suggest that non-participation does not necessarily mean lack of interest or knowledge. That is because low participation may, for some of my sample (well educated participants), have been a response to the limits of the exercise. Indeed, where the data suggests well educated non-voters were more likely to discuss the elections and understand their objectives and weaknesses, which is strikingly different from findings in countries like the US. In other words, those respondents might have felt disengagement from the process and thought that the municipal elections were only a shallow move to democracy and decided not to participate in it. This result from small segment of the my respondents might indicate that non- participation wasn't a problem of communication but of disengagement with the municipal elections process. This fact suggests that this problem that faced the elections organising committee could not simply be fixed by a better media campaign.

Ineffectiveness of the municipal election media campaign

Ineffectiveness of the 2005 Saudi municipal election media campaign is another factor that I argued might have contributed to the citizens' low level of participation in the elections. This study has investigated the effectiveness of the media campaign based on the assessment of two main elements. The first was an assessment of the effectiveness of the campaign as a communication tool intended to provide citizens with election news, regulations and procedures. The second assessment was related to the effects of the campaign on Saudi attitudes towards registration or voting.

As the literature illustrated, media campaigns did not change attitudes or enhance information levels among voters, but they merely reinforced already established loyalties and ties (Weaver, 1996, Page and Shapiro, 1999). In addition, it has been discovered in many other campaigns in the world that the campaign had minimal effects on voters' political behaviour (Lutz, 2007, Stevenson and Vavreck, 2000, Jennings, 1992, Hillygus 2005, Norris, 2002). However, the short period of a campaign, limited financial resources and inadequate strategies (Gelman and King, 2002) may affect its success. Furthermore, studies which looked at patterns of newspaper coverage of elections revealed that newspapers work with the dominant political preference in the country (Dunaway, 2007) and governments in the Arab

world expect all treatment in the press to be favourable (Rugh, 2004). My findings reflected this and showed that the election media campaign had a very limited effect on Saudi citizens' knowledge about the election process. The campaign also did not take into consideration Saudi social traditions such as religious, tribal, and familial ties and values. My findings showed that the sample Saudi newspaper coverage neglected the media campaign, whether it was rarely mentioned or overtly criticised during the period examined.

It can be argued that a major reason for people's low level of participation is that the campaign failed to persuade Saudi citizens that the municipal elections were part of a political process that would benefit them and their country. In other words, the campaign was not successful in showing citizens how the elections could have been relevant to their present and future. Consequently, people were driven by other social and traditional values, where religion, tribe or family ties had louder voices in shaping voting decisions. This result, I argue, might have negatively affected Saudis' perceptions of elections and contributed to their disengagement towards that process.

Ineffectiveness of the candidates' electoral campaigns

The poor implementation of the majority of the candidates' electoral campaigns was another contributor to citizens' non-participation during municipal elections. As noted by Alkhudairi (2007,(a)), only between six and ten candidates among 698 in Riyadh city conducted professional campaigns. When I investigated citizens' perceptions of the objectives, strategies, tactics and effectiveness of the candidates' promotional campaigns, my findings came to a similar conclusion.

However, among the main factors that might have increased voter non-participation was the short time span of electoral campaigns (Stevenson and Vavreck, 2000), Gelman and King, 1993). My findings confirmed this. In the light of other studies (Gelman and King, 1993, Temin and Smith, 2002 and Wattenberg, 1990), I looked at the question of access to the mass media and found that because candidates were not able to access all forms of media, especially television and radio, their messages could not reach a large number of citizens. This might have limited voters' knowledge about candidates' characteristics or programmes and increased their apathy.

Furthermore, the importance of ideological belief and the way religion was used to attract specific voters cannot be underestimated in this election (Page, 1978, Jacoby, 2009, Zubaida,

2007, Green, 2007, Arceneux, 2005, and Al Khuwilidi, 2005). It is crucial to point out that a considerable proportion of Saudi voters who chose not to vote were aware of such manipulation tactics by some candidates. Also, I found that a large proportion of the candidates gave vague and unachievable promises that fell outside the municipal council functions, but most voters rejected such promises and were put off voting as a result of them. Again, this disparity between candidates and the electorate has been commented on in other studies around the world (Benoit and Cho, 2005, Van de Walle, 2003, Konitzer-Smirnov, 2005 and Al Angari, 2005).

Although my study showed that the poor implementation of the candidates' campaigns had a marked effect on voting behaviour, I also found that, as in other studies (Squire, 1995, Hayes, 2009, Arceneaux, 2005), the success of some candidates depended on their social role, financial status and professional backgrounds, rather than on their campaigns. Therefore, success seems to have been deeply connected to personal characteristics, more so than the promotional activities used in a campaign, which may explain why some candidates won even though they did not publicise themselves during the elections. One might say that the poor implementation of the candidates' electoral campaigns led voters to fall back on prior knowledge of the candidates when they voted, and rely more on traditional social behaviour than on the influence of any campaign activities.

Finally, various authors have found that ineffective electoral campaigns do not usually attract much newspaper coverage (Borquez and Wasserman, 2006 and Ekstrom, 2010). My findings reflected this and showed that the majority of the studied Saudi newspaper coverage did not favour the candidates' electoral campaigns. In other words, the immature execution of those campaigns might have failed to generate more coverage in the print media or to attract more citizens to support those campaigns or candidates.

Having examined the reasons for Saudi citizens' non-participation in the municipal elections, it is worth briefly mentioning other major findings of this study, as this will clarify any differences between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world. Political apathy is a phenomenon that happens in most nations around the world (Denver and Hands, 1997, Katz, 1997, Oliver, 2001, Morgan and Streb, 2001, Scheufele et al., 2002, Wood, 2002, Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002, Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2003, Keaney and Rogers, 2006, Huber, 2006, Rubenson et al., 2007, Dye and Zeigler, 2008).

Scholarly research showed that there are different reasons behind this problem which endangers democracy. It has been found that the feeling of powerlessness among citizens towards political systems can hinder their political participation. In addition, feelings that politics are remote, threatening, corrupt or ineffective could lead to political apathy (Palma, 1970, Hetherington, 2005, Ulbig, 2008, Miller and Grofman, 1999, Bennett, 2004, Hague and Loader, 1999, Keaney and Rogers, 2006).

Other studies argued that turnout varies according to voter characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, social class, age, education, income, interest in the political process and strength of party attachment. These studies showed that disadvantaged segments of the population tend to vote significantly less regularly than others (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993, Rosema, 2007, Gerber et al., 2003). Therefore, voting is higher among those who are more religious, married, well-educated and those with higher incomes (Blais et al., 2004, Miller, 1991, Verba et al., 1971, Scheufele et al., 2002, Lutz and March, 2007). At the same time, voters who are less knowledgeable, less interested in politics or lack a strong internal motivation (less psychologically involved) are less likely to participate in politics (Lee, 2003, Almond and Verba, 1965, Hagner and Pierce, 1982, Carpini et al., 1996, Fisher et al., 2008, Putnam, 2000, Larcinese, 2007, Luskin, 1990, McCann and Lawson, 2006).

The literature also illustrated that the ineffectiveness of the election campaign is a significant factor that leads to citizen apathy (Norris, 2002, Fisher et al., 2008). Further, a lack of political mobilisation activities by governments, parties or candidates negatively influences citizens' political participation (Arceneaux, 2006, Goldstein and Ridout, 2002).

Some literature showed that mass media ineffectiveness could be blamed for political apathy. Mass media inattention to public interest has contributed to citizens' cynicism and political alienation (Croteau, and Hoynes, 2006, Luskin, 1990, Forrest and Marks, 1999, Kaid, 1999).

Other studies also showed that in most developing countries, 'frustration' with the existing situation in the country is the main reason for citizens' apathy (Kila, 2006). The lack of appealing or well-known candidates, the awkward voting system, as well as the high cost of the elections which could harm the country's unstable economy may increase citizens' apathy (Sagas, 1999). Feelings of efficacy, or when citizens feel incapable of affecting public affairs are other factors that may increase apathy (Chen and Zhong, 1999, Hague and Loader, 1999).

It can be seen that many of the reasons for non-participation investigated by scholars in other parts of the world might also be applicable to the situation in Saudi Arabia. These are the belief that elections would affect the future political situation, the election procedures, the demographics of the electorate, the effectiveness and timing of the campaign and media coverage. However, the main factors that contributed to Saudi citizens' apathy, as have been examined earlier, are the lack of citizens' political awareness, ineffectiveness of the media campaign, and the unprofessional implementation of the electoral candidates' campaigns. Thus, despite Saudi Arabia being an absolute monarchy and a very religious society, citizens limited participation in municipal elections was caused by many of the same reasons that cause political apathy in Western democratic countries. These findings are important as they show that despite huge differences between nations regarding political systems and social and cultural values, the reasons for political apathy, to a great extent, remain the same.

As well as the afore mentioned factors, we might consider that the municipal election process was not presented effectively to the Saudi society. The strategies, tactics and procedures of the municipal election process, as well as the media strategies that were adopted during the conduct of the elections were not sufficient (Al Garni, 2006, Al Ghamdi, 2005, Khan, 2007, Vavreck, 2000, Finkel, 1992 and Holbrook, 1996). Perhaps one reason for the low level of participation was that Saudis could not see how elections would affect their society or be relevant to their lives because the media campaign did not link the elections to many aspects which were important to the society, such as social, religious, tribal and family traditions and values (*Okaz,* 1 November 2004, Al Rasheed, 2006, Hamzawy, 2005, Al-Humaidi, 2004, Al-Nugaidan, 2004, Menoret, 2006 and Ulbig, 2008). Thus, when the imposed campaigning techniques failed, voters clearly fell back on traditional methods of social organisation. This behaviour is a pattern which could be noted by future election campaigners. These findings, therefore, point to further areas of study, such as researching future elections in Saudi Arabia to see whether there is a maturing of democracy in the country or whether patterns are repeated. By looking at the same reasons that affected the outcome of the first round of the elections, the future research might or might not replicate what I have found in this study, but it is going to contribute to the field of political communication. Other research could be done on citizens' use of the media and what the most effective mediums are that could carry election messages in Saudi Arabia. It would be interesting to see whether more interest shown by the media in their election messages could be more effective and understandable to all strata of society. Future research is recommendable because the 'administrative' reform,

as it was called in the country, or the democratic transformation, as it might be called outside the country, is a valuable commodity for the government, citizens and the media.

Indeed, the 2005 municipal elections process was a unique political event in a non-democratic environment. It was a revolutionary first step in the million-mile journey to democracy, despite the low level of turnout. However, there are significantly encouraging factors that could speed up any successful democratic transformation in Saudi Arabia. These are the widespread public support for the current king (King Abdullah), the changing Saudi society, the fact that the Saudi population is becoming more literate, better educated and more urban, and that the political representation of citizens in their governance and the conduct of general elections in neighboring states indirectly influence Saudi citizens' thinking (Kapiszewski, 2006). The latter factor is very important because of what is happening in the Middle East, especially, in Tunisia and Egypt, where successful youth revolutions in these states forced their presidents to step down after 23 and 30 years in office, respectively. These events will have a huge effect on politics in the Arab world. In addition, what is going on in Libya, with the potential removal of Gaddafi after 40 years of dictatorship, is another strong indication of a new wave of democratisation in the region. The most significant political events to impact upon the Saudi situation are those happening near the Saudi borders, such as the demonstrations in Bahrain, Oman and Yemen. There is little doubt protesters' demands for political and economic reform in those countries might speed up political reform in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, giving more freedom and rights to the people, and more freedom to the mass media may cool the situation in the country. Allowing elections to be held in some governmental bodies, such as the Ministers Council, Regional Councils and Consultation Council, conducting the second round of the municipal elections, as well as introducing more economic reforms might be a successful strategies for the government to take. These might convince citizens that the government is serious about reform and prevent any unrest from arising. In this regard, Franklin (2011) argued that 'In countries where you shut people out, eventually, they just push the door open. By opening the door slightly with these elections, you can have all sorts of conciliatory effect in terms of quieting the popular and pulling the fuse on of lots of dissent activities' (Interview, 26 January 2011). As a response to the recent situation in the region, on 23 February 2011, upon his return from a three-month medical treatment trip, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz announced a SR135 billion (£22 billion) welfare package, which aimed at expanding the economy, lowering unemployment, and increasing

home ownership. The package also included pardoning some Saudi nationals who had been jailed for failing to meet debt obligations and paying their debt, paying aid for unemployed young people, paying tuition fees for young unemployed people so they could study abroad, funding literary clubs and social security funds (*Okaz*, 24 February 2011). However, some observers think that the effort was an attempt to safeguard political stability, as much of the Middle East's political turmoil was driven by economic pain (Gordon and Katulis, 2011).

Obviously, there are many different readings of the present situation in the Middle East and its impact on Saudi Arabia. However, as in this work I have been turning to Habermas and his writings on democracy and the public sphere, I will invoke him again, and point out that political reform seems to be the main target here. Thus, as Habermas proposed in his concept of the 'public sphere', citizens should have their own space to deliberate, discuss, express their opinion and choices without the interference of the government. In that sphere, mass media should support people and transfer their voices and demands to the government (Habermas, 1989). Consequently, Saudi citizens should have their own free public sphere, similar to that which Habermas proposed. In the Saudi public sphere citizens should have the opportunity to assemble or form political groups or parties, express and publish their opinions and be able to debate any issue of their interest. Using Habermas' argument, a free mass media would support that society, help it to flourish and work as a watchdog that helps citizens, not a lapdog for the government.

It is clear that democratic reform in Saudi Arabia is desirable and unavoidable. Nevertheless, imposing ready-made models incompatible with Sharia law or the conservative society's tribal and familial norms and values might not be successful in Saudi Arabia. As mentioned above, the desired reform or coming elections should undoubtedly have an Islamic frame of reference because Saudi Arabia is a deeply religious and conservative Muslim country.

Recommendations for the second round of the municipal elections

Having closely examined the previous political experiment, one might conclude that the whole process of municipal elections in Saudi Arabia is about political learning. What is clear is that there was a lack of understanding of conduct among the main players of the election process (organisers, citizens, candidates and mass media) because only a small number of citizens (17 %) voted in those elections. So the following recommendations are suggested as possible ways to enhance the second round of municipal elections. It has been argued that no

campaign is strong without a good plan, and no plan is strong without a good message (Garech, 2011). Thus, organisers of the second round that will be held in 29 September 2011 (*Al Hayat,* 22 September 2010) may take some of the following steps that I believe are crucial for the success of another election.

First, municipal election campaign must have clear and achievable goals. Organisers should pinpoint very specifically the actions they want people to take and the awareness they want the target audience to have.

Second, organisers should assign sufficient resources to the electoral process. A successful municipal election campaign will undoubtedly require a huge sum of money and a large number of trained people.

Third, organisers should work hard to ensure the effectiveness of the election media campaign. They must work with the Ministry of Culture and Information and carefully plan and implement the media campaign in order to further enhance the visibility and impact of the campaign. Furthermore, organisers should allow for a longer time span for the campaign. Establishing the awareness campaign at least six months before the start of the elections would help educate voters about the importance, regulations and procedures of the election process. It is vital to increase collaboration with writers, journalists and opinion leaders, community and tribal leaders or sheikhs to discuss the election issue. This will enhance the overall impact of the municipal election campaign, and convince more voters to participate.

Fourth, organisers have to determine their target audience for the election campaign. Targeting population by category will increase understanding of each group's attitude and behaviour. Knowing citizens' views and their sources of information will play an important part in determining which media channels are appropriate for the delivery of election messages. However, voters are not the only citizens the campaign should reach. Family members, friends and election workers have a considerable effect on people's thinking and behaviours, and they must be identified.

Fifth, organisers have to choose the most effective messages for the election campaign. The root message should come from quality discussion and brainstorming about the election through interviews, surveys, focus groups and piloting materials with the target audiences. Election messages should present the main goals of the process in unique and appealing

ways. Messages should be varied so as not to become stale. Suggested messages may include: delivering the election process is part of an ongoing reform process that will change the society for the better; the municipal election does not contradict the principles of Islam, but it is a fulfilment of one of its practices; the candidates' selection is based on their qualifications and ability to do the job, not on religious, tribal or familial ties as happened in the first round of the election. Other messages may discuss the functions of the municipal council, which directly affect the people's daily services, and explain the election regulations that citizens must know or adopt.

Sixth, organisers have to choose the most efficient and cost-effective media channels to carry the campaign's messages. There are several categories of mass media. News media include television, radio, newspapers and magazines. Advertising and public service announcements may involve print, radio, television, bus boards, billboards and street advertising boards. Public affairs events may include rallies, conferences, and speeches. Internet, especially social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, may extend the frontiers to reach young generations more than other media. Privately owned channels (Satellite TV and radio) might give more space for the electoral process. To help inform the decision of which types of media to use, organisers should be aware of where the target audiences get their information, which channels are most or least respected, what is the available budget and what will provide adequate 'dosage' of the messages on a regular basis. However, it seems likely that, in Saudi Arabia, television might be the main medium for people's information, followed by newspapers, internet, radio and street advertising boards.

Seventh, continuous evaluation of the conduct and progress of the election campaign is a crucial strategy for its success. There are two common evaluation techniques to consider: process and outcome. A process evaluation will ask questions such as 'how is the implementation going?' An outcome evaluation will focus more on the number of people reached, or how behaviours have changed. Through ongoing evaluation measures, the organisers will be able to know: whether the campaign's messages and supporting materials are being seen; whether the campaign's messages are perceived to be credible and plausible; whether the campaign's messages are affecting citizens' registrations or voting and whether the campaign's length was enough for citizens' learning process. Moreover, it is recommended that organisers document comments and anecdotes about what people are

feeling regarding the campaign. By doing this, the organisers will be aware of influences that may alter the meaning of the messages or that may cast suspicion on the election campaign.

Finally, candidates should have equal access to the government's mass media. This will make it easy for voters to know the candidates and the issues that they stand for. Also, candidates should have more time for campaigning (one month instead of the ten days assigned in the last election) to publicise themselves and their programmes. This is important for voters who want to know more about the large number of candidates in their cities (for example, 646 candidates in Riyadh city alone in the last elections). Furthermore, candidates should have effective strategies for reaching the Saudi public. It is crucial that they know the difference between message and strategy, because they are often confused. For example, a message answers the question, 'Why am I running for office?' while strategy answers the question, 'How am I going to win?' Thus, candidates must decide what they want to say before they decide how they are going to say it. Moreover, candidates need to have clear and strong issues to support or work for, and they need to watch out for their weaknesses while emphasising their strengths. However, providing voters with food and drinks in the camps (Food Strategy) as happened in the last election does not ensure that voters will vote for them. Spending more money does not mean winning more votes. Candidates should have strong programmes that discuss issues important for local communities, and they must show citizens why they are the best men for the job. If candidates do not have the expertise necessary for electoral campaigning, they have to get help from professionals to run their electoral campaigns.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX ONE: ENGLISH QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX TWO: ARABIC QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX THREE: CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING SHEET

APPENDIX FOUR: PILOT STUDY REPORT

APPENDIX ONE

ENGLISH QUESTIONNAIRE

2005 Saudi Municipal Elections – Questionnaire

Demographic Information

1. What is your gender?

Male		Female	

2. What is your marital status?

Single		Married		Divorced		Widowed	

3. What is your age?

24 to 30	
31 to 40	
41 to 50	
51 to 60	
61 and older	

4. Which of the following best describes the highest level of education you have achieved?

Primary school	
Intermediate school	
High school	
Bachelor's degree	
Postgraduate degree	

5. Are you currently employed?

Work for the government	
Military	
Work for the private sector	
Run my own business	
Retired	
Student	
Not employed	
Housewife	

6. What is your total monthly income?

Less than 3000 SR	
3001 to 6000 SR	
6001 to 9000 SR	
9001 SR and over	

Attitudes Towards Elections

7. How interested were you in the 2005 municipal elections?

Very interested	Somewhat interested	Interested	Not interested	Not at all interested

8. During the election period, how often did you discuss the municipal elections with friends?

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never

9. Did you register in the 2005 elections?

Yes		No	

10. How long ago did you decide you would definitely register to vote? Please choose one answer.

A long time before the election media campaign	
During the election media campaign, but before the registration stage	
At the beginning of the registration process	
In the last days of the registration process	
Never did make up my mind	

11. Did you vote in the 2005 elections?

Yes		No	

(If yes go to Question 12, if no go to Question 13)

Participation in the Election

12. If yes, for each of the following reasons to vote, please rate the extent of your agreement or disagreement. (1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree). Please answer all questions.

Reason	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
National duty					
Bring prosperity to the country					
Choose qualified men for the public offices					
Practice my right					
The candidate is a member of my tribe/family/relatives/friends					

Apathy Towards Elections

13. If not, for each of the following reasons not to vote, please rate the extent of your agreement or disagreement (1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree). Please answer all questions.

Reason	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Didn't know enough					
Didn't understand the importance of the election					
Not interested					
Didn't see the benefits of the election					
No right to vote (women, military, under 21)					
Personal (too old, sick, etc)					
Outside the country					

The National Mood

Saudi Arabia and Political Reform

14. How much attention do you generally pay to politics?

5 Pay a great deal of attention	4	3	2	1 Pay no attention

15. Do you think you will vote in the upcoming elections in 2009 (if any)?

Yes		No		Don't know	

16. Generally speaking, with municipal elections, do you think reform in Saudi Arabia today is going in the right direction?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

17. In your opinion, to what extent have the following improved in Saudi Arabia in recent years?

	Very considerably	Considerably	Average	Little	Very little
Economic reform					
Political reform					
Social reform					
Government reform					

18. Did people feel free to express their opinions about elections in the area where you live?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

19. Do you think that voting rights should be only for men or should women also have the same rights?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Men					
Both men and women					

The Importance of the Election (Election Conduct)

20. How do you think the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs has handled the municipal election process?

Very well	Fairly well	Neither well nor badly	Fairly badly	Very badly

21. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the conduct of the municipal elections?

Election conduct	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Municipal elections came as a result of the government will to expand public participation in local government					
Municipal elections came as a result of the government will to initiate political and administrative reform					
I trust the government to do what is right most of the time					
It is good that the government appoints half of the seats in the municipal councils					
It is good that all the municipal council members be elected					
Municipal elections came as a result of external pressure on the Saudi Government					
People should be chosen for public offices not elected					
Election is a Western process and is not Islamic					
It is not important to have such elections					

Election Tactics

22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the tactics of the municipal elections?

Election tactics	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My understanding of the election regulations helped me to participate in the election					
Election procedures were flexible and understandable					
21 is the ideal age for voters					
25 is an ideal age for candidates					
The election campaign was long enough to understand this process					
Excluding military men from voting was a good decision					
Excluding women from voting was a good decision					
Candidate media campaigns were long enough					

Candidates' Campaigns

23. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about candidates' campaigns?

Candidates' campaigns	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Candidates' media campaigns were long enough for the public to know them well					
Some candidates gave promises that fell outside the role of the municipal councils					
Candidates should have equal accesses to mass media					
Most of the candidates' campaigns were similar to each other					
Higher financial status of the candidate played a vital role in the success of his campaign					
The conservative character of the candidate played a fatal role in the success of his campaign					
The social role of the candidate played a fatal role in the success of his campaign					
The educational status of the candidate played an important role in the success of his campaign					
Some candidates manipulated the religious factor in their campaigns					

Election Outcome

24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the municipal election outcome?

Election outcome	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Municipal election outcome was real					
Municipal election outcome minimises the wave of criticism towards Saudi Arabia regarding political reform					
Municipal election outcome created some kind of prejudice for tribes or groups					
Municipal election outcome revealed the attitude of the Saudi conservative society					

Voting rate of 30 % in municipal elections is very realistic					
Municipal elections revealed that the Saudi society engaged effectively with political reform					

Satisfaction With Elections

25. To what extent are you satisfied with the municipal election process?

Satisfaction with elections	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Municipal elections have been a success and we should do it again					
Municipal elections created an 'election culture' among Saudis					
I'm strongly persuaded of the importance of the municipal elections					
Municipal election is a new democratic addition to the Saudi society					
My vote really counts in the municipal elections					

Municipal Election Media Campaign

26. To what extent do you think the municipal election media campaign made a difference to people's attitudes towards the municipal elections?

Very big difference	Big difference	Some difference	Little difference	No difference

Information Resources About the Municipal Elections

27. How important for your information about the municipal election process are the following resources? (1 = Not at all important and 5 = Very important)

Medium	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not at all important
Family					
Radio					
Mosques					
Magazines					
Booklets					
Public meetings					
Press conferences					
Universities					
Schools					

Newspapers					
Pamphlets					
Internet					
Posters					
Friends					
TV					
Mobile text messages					
Billboards					
Street signs					

Election Process in the Media

28. Do you agree or disagree with these statements about the media discussion of the election process?

Election process in the media	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Media discussions of the municipal election process confirmed my views about the elections					
Media discussions of the municipal election process changed my views about the elections					
Media discussions of the municipal election process convinced me to register in the elections					
There was no effect of mass media discussion on my views towards the municipal elections process					

The Effectiveness of the Media Campaign

29. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements about the effectiveness of the municipal election media campaign?

Media campaign effectiveness	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Municipal election media campaign persuaded me to register in the election					
Municipal election media campaign persuaded me to vote					
Municipal election media campaign messages were clear and understandable					
Municipal election media campaign increased my knowledge regarding municipal elections					
Municipal election media campaign positively changed my attitude toward registration					

Municipal election media campaign did not provide me with any information about candidates					
Municipal election media campaign explained the role of the elections in Saudi society well					
Municipal election media campaign was long enough ahead of the elections for people to have the necessary information about municipal elections					
Municipal election media campaign explained the functions of the municipal councils in the country well					
Municipal election media campaign explained the procedures and regulations of the elections well.					

Media Campaign Tactic

30. How much do you agree or disagree with these statements about the municipal election media campaign tactics?

Media campaign tactic	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Street signs were successfully used in the campaign					
Billboards were successfully used in the campaign					
Different message formats attracted people's attention					
TV and radio programmes were successfully used in the campaign					
Using more than one channel (mass media) to carry the same message helps Saudis to understand the campaign messages better					
Posters, fliers, booklets and pamphlets were successfully used in the campaign.					
Using mosques was one of the most effective tactics of the campaign.					
Election media campaign messages reached all groups of Saudi society					
Municipal election media campaign tactics were successful					

31. In general, how well do you think the municipal election media campaign was carried out by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs?

Very well	Fairly well	Neither well nor badly	Fairly badly	Very badly	Don't know

Media Use

32. How important are the following mass media in terms of the information they tell you about the country? (1 = Not at all important and 5 = Very important)

Medium	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not at all important
TV					
Radio					
Newspapers					
Internet					
Magazines					

33. How much time do you spend on an AVERAGE WEEKDAY, with each of the following media?

Medium	1 hour	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours	5 hours	I don't
TV						
Radio						
Newspapers						
Magazines						
Internet						

34. How important for your information about the country are the following TV stations? (1 = Not at all important and 5 = Very important)

Saudi TV Stations	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not at all important
Saudi TV 1					
Saudi TV 2					
Saudi Sports (Al Riyadiah TV)					
Al Ekhbariya					

35. How important for your information about the country are the following radio stations? (1 = Not at all important and 5 = Very important)

Saudi Radio Stations	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not at all important
Programme 1					
Programme 2					
The Holy Quran					
MBC – FM					
Panorama FM					

36. How important for your information about the country are the following Satellite TV stations? (1 = Not at all important and 5 = Very important)

Satellite TV Stations	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not at all important
MBC					
Al Arabiya					
Al Majd					

Al Jazeera					
Igraa					
Other, please specify					

37. How important for your information about the country are the following newspapers? (1 = Not at all important and 5 = Very important)

Newspaper	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not at all important
Riyadh					
Al Watan					
Al Jazirah					
Okaz					
Al Yaum					
Al Bilad					
Al Madina					
Al Nadwah					
Asharq Al-Awsat					
Al Hayat					
Arryadhiyah					
Arab News					
Saudi Gazette					
Other, please specify					

38. Do you ever read any of these newspapers online? If yes, how often?

Newspaper	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Riyadh						
Al Watan						
Al Jazirah						
Okaz						
Al Yaum						
Al Bilad						
Al Madina						
Al Nadwah						
Asharq Al-Awsat						
Al Hayat						
Arryadhiyah						
Arab News						
Saudi Gazette						

39. How important for your information about the country are the following magazines? (1 = Not at all important and 5 = Very important)

Saudi Magazine	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not at all important
Al Yamamah					
Igraa					
Al Sharg					
Al Majallah					
Sayidaty					

Other, please specify					

40. How important for your information about the country are the following electronic journals? (1 = Not at all important and 5 = Very important)

E Journal	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not at all important
Saudi Times					
Elaf					
Sabg					
Other, please specify					

41. How important for your information about the municipal elections are the following websites? (1 = Not at all important and 5 = Very important)

Website	Very important	Important	Neutral	Not important	Not at all important
www.saudielection.com					
www.saudivoters.com.sa					
www.alriyadh.gov.sa/election					
Other, please specify					

42. Later on, we hope to do more research that will involve interviewing people who answer this questionnaire in person. Are you willing to be contacted for a personal interview?
    - Yes – please write your contact number ( ).
    - No
    - Don't know

Thank you so much for your participation in this study.

APPENDIX TWO

ARABIC QUESTIONNAIRE

المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم العالي
جامعة الملك سعود
كلية الآداب

الرقم:
التاريخ: / / ١٤هـ
المرفقات:

الموضوع:

١٣٧٧ - ١٤٢٧ هـ

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
استبانة بحثية لدراسة
الانتخابات البلدية لعام ١٤٢٦هـ
في المملكة العربية السعودية

الأخ العزيز / الأخت العزيزة

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

اهدي لكم أطيب التحيات وأفيدكم بأنني بصدد إجراء دراسة مسحية لتقييم أول تجربة انتخابية في تاريخ المملكة العربية السعودية ممثلة في الانتخابات البلدية لانتخاب نصف أعضاء المجالس البلدية بعد أن وافق خادم الحرمين الشريفين الملك فهد بن عبد العزيز رحمه الله على ذلك في كلمته التي ألقاها أمام مجلس الشورى في مساء يوم الأحد ١٦ربيع الأول لعام ١٤٢٤ هـ والتي جاء فيها:

"وأحب أن أؤكد لكم أننا سنستمر في طريق الإصلاح السياسي والإداري، وسنعمل على مراجعة الأنظمة والتعليمات ، وإحكام الرقابة على أداء الاجهزة الحكومية وتوسيع نطاق المشاركة الشعبية."

وما تلا ذلك من من إقرار مجلس الوزراء في جلسته رقم ٢٢٤ بتاريخ ١٧ شعبان ١٤٢٤هـ برئاسة خادم الحرمين الشريفين الملك فهد بن عبدالعزيز توسيع مشاركة المواطنين في إدارة الشؤون المحلية عن طريق الانتخاب وذلك بتفعيل المجالس البلدية وفقا لنظام البلديات والقرى على أن يكون نصف أعضاء المجلس البلدي منتخبا.

وتأتي هذه الدراسة ضمن متطلبات أطروحة درجة الدكتوراه التي أعدها في جامعة كارديف ببريطانيا حول هذا الموضوع لمعرفة مدى تفاعل المواطنين السعوديين مع هذه التجربة الانتخابية وحجم مشاركتهم فيها وتقييمهم لها كأول تجربة تجرى في هذا المجال في جميع مناطق المملكة.

وحيث تم اختياركم ضمن أفراد عينة الدراسة لتعبئة هذه الإستبانة والتي سيتم توزيعها على عينة ممثلة لفئات المجتمع السعودي ممن تجاوزت أعمارهم أربعا وعشرين سنة ، وتحتاج ما بين عشر دقائق إلى خمس عشرة دقيقة لإنهائها، فإنني آمل منكم الإجابة على جميع الأسئلة بكل موضوعية وحيادية ، وأؤكد لكم أن جميع الإجابات المقدمة هذا ستستخدم للأغراض العلمية البحتة وتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، كما أؤكد على السرية التامة لتلك الإجابات وعلى عدم الحاجة لذكر اسم المبحوث.

شاكراً ومقدراً لكم تعاونكم ، والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته.

الباحث
سعيد بن صالح الغامدي
المبتعث إلى جامعة كارديف
كارديف - بريطانيا

عنوان الباحث في المملكة
جامعة الملك سعود
كلية الآداب - قسم الإعلام
ص ب ٢٤٥٦ الرياض ١١٤٥١
هاتف ٤٦٧٥٢٩١
جوال ٠٥٠٨٨٩٠٩٦٠

جامعة الملك سعود
كلية الآداب
مكتب الوكيل

P.O.Box 2456 Riyadh 11451 ☎ 4675389 Fax:4678528 ص.ب ٢٤٥٦ الرياض ١١٤٥١ - ☎ ٤٦٧٥٣٨٩ - فاكس: ٤٦٧٨٥٢٨

الرجاء وضع إشارة (√) أمام الإجابة أو الرأي الذي يعكس وجهة نظرك.

الجزء الأول: يتضمن هذا الجزء التعرف على بعض المعلومات الشخصية عنك / عنكِ

1. الجنس

ذكر		أنثى	

2. الحالة الاجتماعية

أعزب/عزباء		متزوج/ متزوجة		مطلق/ مطلقة		أرمل/ أرملة	

3. العمر

بين 24 عاما إلى 30 عاما	بين 31 عاما إلى 40 عاما	بين 41 عاما إلى 50 عاما	بين 51 عاما إلى 60 عاما	61 عاما وأكبر

4. المستوى التعليمي

المرحلة الابتدائية	المرحلة المتوسطة	المرحلة الثانوية	الشهادة الجامعية	دراسات عليا

5. العمل الحالي

موظف حكومي مدني	عسكري	موظف بالقطاع الخاص	أعمل لحسابي الخاص	متقاعد	طالب	ليس لدي عمل	ربة منزل

6. متوسط الدخل الشهري

أقل من 3000 ريال	بين 3001 إلى 6000 ريال	بين 6001 إلى 9000 ريال	اكثر من 9001 ريال

الجزء الثاني: يتعلق هذا الجزء بمعرفة مدى اهتمامك ومشاركتك في الانتخابات البلدية

7. إلى أي مدى كنت مهتما بالانتخابات البلدية التي جرت في المملكة في عام 1426هـ؟

5 مهتم جدا	مهتم الى حد ما	مهتم	لست مهتما	1 لست مهتما على الإطلاق

8. في فترة الإنتخابات البلدية ، هل يمكن القول انك كنت تناقش الانتخابات البلدية مع الأصدقاء؟

دائماً	معظم الوقت	أحياناً	نادراً	أبداً

9. هل سجلت في الإنتخابات البلدية في العام 1426هـ؟

نعم		لا	

10. متى قررت بشكل نهائي التسجيل في الانتخابات البلدية؟ الرجاء اختيار جواب واحد فقط.

قبل بداية الحملة الإعلامية الخاصة بالإنتخابات البلدية بوقت طويل	

خلال الحملة الإعلامية المصاحبة للانتخابات البلدية ولكن قبل بداية التسجيل	
عند بداية التسجيل للانتخابات	
خلال أيام التسجيل الأخيرة	
لم اقرر أبداً	

11. هل أدليت بصوتك في الانتخابات البلدية في العام 1426هـ ؟

نعم		لا	

12. إذا كان الجواب بنعم على السؤال السابق (11)، فإلى أي مدى توافق على الأسباب التالية التي دعتك إلى التسجيل والتصويت في الانتخابات البلدية؟ الرجاء الإجابة على جميع الأسباب.

السبب	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
واجب وطني					
الإنتخابات البلدية تساهم في نماء وتطور البلد					
المساهمة في اختيار الشخص الكفء للوظيفة الحكومية					
أمارس أحد حقوقي الوطنية					
المرشح أحد افراد (عائلتي ، قبيلتي ، منطقتي ، أصدقائي)					

13. إذا كان الجواب بلا على السؤال رقم (11)، فإلى أي مدى توافق على الأسباب التالية التي دعتك إلى عدم التصويت؟ الرجاء تحديد رأيك أمام كل سبب من الأسباب.

أسباب عدم التصويت	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
لم أعرف الكثير عن الانتخابات					
لم أفهم أهمية الانتخابات					
لم أهتم بالانتخابات					
لم أر جدوى للانتخابات					
لم يكن لي حق في التسجيل أو التصويت (عسكري، أقل من 21 عاما ، ،امرأة)					
أسباب شخصية (كبير في السن ، مريض ، أخرى)					
كنت خارج الوطن					

14. كم من الاهتمام توليه للشأن السياسي ؟

مهتم تماماً	مهتم	محايد	غير مهتم	غير مهتم تماماً

15. هل تنوي التصويت في الانتخابات البلدية القادمة (1430هـ) إذا أقيمت؟

نعم		لا		لا أدري	

16. بشكل عام ، ونتيجة لإقامة الانتخابات البلدية ، هل ترى أن مسيرة الإصلاح في المملكة العربية السعودية تسير نحو الأفضل ؟

موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً

17. كيف ترى مستوى التطور في الجوانب التالية في المملكة العربية السعودية في السنوات الأخيرة ؟

المجال	كبير جداً	كبير	متوسط	ضعيف	ضعيف جداً
الإصلاح الإقتصادي					
الإصلاح السياسي					
الإصلاح الاجتماعي					
الإصلاح الحكومي					

18. هل تعتقد أن الناس في منطقتك الانتخابية قد عبروا عن أرائهم حول الانتخابات البلدية بحرية ؟

موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً

19. هل ترى أن حق التصويت في الانتخابات البلدية يجب أن يبقى للرجال فقط أم أن للنساء الحق في ذلك أيضا؟

	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
للرجال فقط					
للرجال والنساء					

20. كيف ترى جهود وزارة الشؤون البلدية والقروية في إعداد وتنظيم الانتخابات البلدية في المملكة؟

ناجحة جدا	ناجحة	متوسطة	ضعيفة	ضعيفة جدا	

21. ما مدى موافقتك على الآراء التالية حول إقامة الإنتخابات البلدية؟

إقامة الانتخابات البلدية	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
الإنتخابات البلدية جاءت نتيجة لرغبة الحكومة في توسيع نطاق المشاركة الشعبية في إدارة الشئون المحلية					
الإنتخابات البلدية جاءت نتيجة لرغبة الحكومة في الإصلاح السياسي والإداري					
أنا أثق في الحكومة للقيام بكل ما هو مفيد في كل وقت					
من الأفضل أن تعين وزارة الشؤون البلدية والقروية نصف أعضاء المجالس البلدية					
من الأفضل أن ينتخب جميع أعضاء المجلس البلدي					
الانتخابات البلدية جاءت نتيجة لضغوط خارجية على المملكة					
يجب اختيار الاشخاص للوظائف الحكومية وليس انتخابهم					
الانتخابات صناعة غربية وليست إسلامية					
لا أهمية لإقامة انتخابات مماثلة					

22. ما مدى موافقتك على الآراء التالية حول إجراءات الإنتخابات البلدية؟

إجراءات الانتخابات البلدية	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
فهمي لقوانين الانتخابات البلدية ساعدني على المشاركة فيها					
إجراءات الانتخابات البلدية كانت مرنه ومفهومة لي					
21 عاما هو السن المثالي للناخب					
25 عاما هو السن المثالي للمرشح					
المدة الزمنية للانتخابات البلدية كانت كافية لفهما					
عدم تمكين العسكريين من التصويت في الانتخابات البلدية كان قرارا صائبا					
عدم تمكين النساء من التصويت في الانتخابات البلدية كان قراراً صائبا					
المدة الزمنية للحملات الإعلامية للمرشحين كانت كافية					

23. ما مدى موافقتك على الآراء التالية حول الحملات الدعائية للمرشحين؟

الحملات الدعائية للمرشحين	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
المدة الزمنية للحملات الدعائية للمرشحين كانت كافية للتعريف بهم					
بعض الحملات الدعائية للمرشحين تضمنت وعودا تخرج عن مهام عضو المجلس البلدي					
أرى أن يمكن المرشح من استخدام وسائل الإعلام المرئية والمسموعة في حملته الدعائية					
هناك تشابه كبير بين حملات المرشحين					
المستوى المادي للمرشح كان له درو كبير في نجاح حملته					
شخصية المرشح المحافظة كان لها دور كبير في نجاح حملته					
المكانة الاجتماعية للمرشح كان لها دور كبيرفي نجاح حملته					
المستوى التعليمي للمرشح كان له درو كبير في نجاح حملته					
بعض المرشحين استثمر العامل الديني في حملته الدعائية					

24. ما مدى موافقتك على الآراء التالية حول نتائج الإنتخابات البلدية؟

نتائج الانتخابات	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
نتائج الانتخابات البلدية كانت طبيعية					
الانتخابات البلدية ساهمت في تخفيف حدة النقد العالمي للمملكة في مجال الإصلاح السياسي					
الإنتخابات البلدية اثارت بعض التحزبات غير المعلنة سواء لجماعة أو قبيلة					
نتائج الانتخابات البلدية أكدت هوية المجتمع السعودي المحافظ					
نسبة التصويت(15%) في الانتخابات البلدية كانت واقعية تماماً					
نتائج الإنتخابات البلدية أوضحت أن المجتمع السعودي تفاعل بوعي مع الإصلاح السياسي					

25. ما مدى رضاك عن الانتخابات البلدية؟

الرضا عن الانتخابات	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
الإنتخابات البلدية كانت عملية ناجحة وأرى تكرارها					
الانتخابات البلدية أوجدت ثقافة الانتخاب لدى المواطنين					
أنا مقتنع تماما بأهمية الانتخابات البلدية					
تعتبر الانتخابات البلدية إضافة ديمقراطية جديدة للشعب السعودي					
لقد كان لصوتي الانتخابي دور في اختيار المرشحين المناسبين في المجالس البلدية					

الجزء الثالث:

يسعى هذا الجزء للتعرف على تقييمك للحملة الإعلامية الحكومية التي نُفذت للتعريف بالإنتخابات البلدية في جميع أنحاء المملكة

26. في رأيك ، مامدى التأثير الذي صنعته الحملة الإعلامية الحكومية للإنتخابات البلدية في توجهات الناس نحو المشاركة في الانتخابات البلدية في المملكة؟

تأثير كبير جداً	تأثير كبير	تأثير متوسط	تاثير ضعيف	تاثير ضعيف جدا

27. إلى أي مدى ترى أهمية المصادر التالية كمصادر رئيسية لمعلوماتك عن الإنتخابات البلدية تحديداً؟

الوسيلة	مهمة جداً 5	مهم 4	محايد 3	غير مهمة 2	غير مهمة جداً 1
العائلة					
الإذاعة					
المساجد					
المجلات					
نشرات					
الاجتماعات العامة					
المؤتمرات الصحفية					
الجامعات					
المدارس					
الصحف					
مطويات					
الإنترنت					
ملصقات					
الأصدقاء					
التلفزيون					
رسائل الجوال					
اللوحات الإعلانية على الطرق السريعة					
اللوحات الإعلانية في الشوارع الداخلية					

28. ما مدى موافقتك على الآراء التالية حول مناقشة وسائل الإعلام للانتخابات البلدية؟

الرأي المطروح	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
مناقشة وسائل الإعلام للانتخابات البلدية عززت آرائي حيال الانتخابات البلدية					
مناقشة وسائل الإعلام للانتخابات البلدية غيرت آرائي حيال الانتخابات البلدية					
مناقشة وسائل الإعلام للانتخابات البلدية أقنعتني بالتسجيل في الانتخابات البلدية					
لم يكن لوسائل الإعلام أي تأثير في آرائي أو توجهاتي حيال الانتخابات البلدية					

29. ما مدى موافقتك على الآراء التالية حول فعالية الحملة الإعلامية الحكومية المصاحبة للإنتخابات البلدية؟

فعالية الحملة الإعلامية	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
الحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية أقنعتني بالتسجيل في الانتخابات البلدية					
الحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية أقنعتني بالتصويت في الإنتخابات البلدية					
رسائل الحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية كانت واضحة ومفهومة تماما لي					
الحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية زادت معرفتي بالانتخابات البلدية					
الحملة الإعلامية لانتخابات البلدية غيرت بشكل إيجابي توجهي نحو التسجيل في الانتخابات البلدية					
الحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية لم تزودني باي معلومات عن المرشحين					
الحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية نجحت في شرح أهمية الانتخابات للمجتمع السعودي					
المدة الزمنية للحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية كانت كافية لإيصال المعلومات الضرورية عن الانتخابات إلى المواطنين					
الحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية شرحت وظائف المجالس البلدية ودورها في المجتمع بشكل واف					
الحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية أوضحت إجراءات وقوانين الانتخابات شكل واف					

30. ما مدى موافقتك على الآراء التالية حول الخطوات التنفيذية للحملة الإعلامية الحكومية للانتخابات البلدية؟

الخطوات التنفيذية للحملة الإعلامية	موافق تماماً	موافق	محايد	غير موافق	غير موافق تماماً
لوحات الشوارع الإعلانية استخدمت بنجاح في الحملة الإعلامية					
لوحات الطرق السريعة الإعلانية استخدمت بنجاح في ايصال رسائل حملة الإنتخابات البلدية					

تنوع رسائل الحملة الانتخابية جذب اهتمام المواطنين					
عدد من برامج التلفزيون والإذاعة استخدمت بنجاح في الحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية					
استخدام اكثر من وسيلة إعلامية لحمل نفس الرسالة ساعد السعوديين على فهم رسائل الحملة الانتخابية بشكل أفضل					
الملصقات والمطويان والنشرات استخدمت بنجاح في الحملة الإعلامية للإنتخابات البلدية					
استخدام المساجد لإيصال رسائل الحملة كان من أكثر الأساليب المتبعة تأثيرا في الحملة الإعلامية للإنتخابات البلدية					
رسائل الحملة الإعلامية للإنتخابات البلدية وصلت الى جميع فئات المجتمع					
الخطوات الاجرائية للحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية كانت ناجحة					

31. بشكل عام ، كيف ترى جهود وزارة الشؤون البلدية والقروية في تنفيذ الحملة الإعلامية للانتخابات البلدية في المملكة ؟

ناجحة جدا	ناجحة	عادية	ضعيفة	ضعيفة جداً

الجزء الرابع:

يسعى هذا الجزء إلى التعرف على عاداتك في متابعة وسائل الإعلام وأهمية كل وسيلة منها لك.

32. على مقياس من خمس درجات حيث (5) مهم جداً و(1) غير مهم جداً، إلى أي مدى ترى أهمية وسائل الإعلام التالية كمصادر رئيسية لمعلوماتك عما يحدث في المملكة بشكل عام؟

الوسيلة الإعلامية	مهمة جداً 5	مهمة 4	محايد 3	غير مهمة 2	غير مهمة جداً 1
التلفزيون					
الإذاعة					
الصحف					
المجلات					
الإنترنت					

33. كم من الوقت عادةً تقضيه يوميا أمام كل وسيلة من وسائل الإعلام التالية؟

الوسيلة الإعلامية	ساعة	ساعتان	ثلاث ساعات	أربع ساعات	خمس ساعات وأكثر	لا أتابعها إطلاقا
التلفزيون						
الإذاعة						
الصحف						
المجلات						
الانترنت						

34. إلى أي مدى ترى أهمية قنوات التلفزيون السعودي التالية كمصادر رئيسية لمعلوماتك؟

القناة التلفزيونية	مهمة جداً 5	4	3	2	غير مهمة جداً 1
قناة التلفزيون السعودي الأولى					
قناة التلفزيون السعودي الثانية					
قناة التلفزيون					

السعودي الرياضية					
قناة التلفزيون السعودي الإخبارية					

35. إلى أي مدى ترى أهمية القنوات الإذاعية السعودية التالية كمصادر لمعلوماتك؟

القناة الإذاعية	مهمة جداً 5	4	3	2	غير مهمة جداً 1
إذاعة البرنامج العام من الرياض					
إذاعة البرنامج الثاني من جدة					
إذاعة القرآن الكريم					
ام بي سي اف ام					
بانوراما اف ام					

36. إلى أي مدى ترى أهمية القنوات الفضائية التلفزيونية التالية كمصادر رئيسية لمعلوماتك ؟

القناة التلفزيونية الفضائية	مهمة جداً 5	4	3	2	غير مهمة جداً 1
ام بي سي					
العربية					
المجد					
الجزيرة					
إقرأ					
أخرى					

37. إلى أي مدى ترى أهمية الصحف اليومية التالية كمصادر لمعلوماتك؟

الصحيفة	مهمة جدا 5	4	3	2	غير مهمة جدا 1
صحيفة الرياض					
صحيفة الوطن					
صحيفة الجزيرة					
صحيفة عكاظ					
صحيفة اليوم					
صحيفة البلاد					
صحيفة المدينة					
صحيفة الندوة					
صحيفة الشرق الأوسط					
صحيفة الحياة					
صحيفة الرياضية					
صحيفة عرب نيوز					
صحيفة سعودي جازيت					
أخرى					

38. ما مدى اطلاعك على الصحف التالية عبر مواقعها على الانترنت؟

الصحيفة	دائماً	أغلب الوقت	أحياناً	نادراً	لا اطلع عليها
صحيفة الرياض					
صحيفة الوطن					
صحيفة الجزيرة					

صحيفة عكاظ					
صحيفة اليوم					
صحيفة البلاد					
صحيفة المدينة					
صحيفة الندوة					
صحيفة الشرق الأوسط					
صحيفة الحياة					
صحيفة الرياضية					
صحيفة عرب نيوز					
صحيفة سعودي جازيت					

39. إلى أي مدى ترى أهمية المجلات التالية كمصادر لمعلوماتك؟

المجلة	مهمة جدا 5	4	3	2	غير مهمة جدا 1
مجلة اليمامة					
مجلة اقرأ					
مجلة الشرق					
مجلة المجلة					
مجلة سيدتي					
أخر ى					

40. إلى أي مدى ترى أهمية الصحف الإلكترونية التالية كمصادر لمعلوماتك؟

الصحف الإلكترونية	مهمة جدا 5	4	3	2	غير مهمة جدا 1
صحيفة سعودي تايمز					
صحيفة إيلاف					
صحيفة سبق					
أخرى					

41. إلى أي مدى ترى أهمية مواقع الانتخابات التالية على الإنترنت كمصادر لمعلوماتك؟

	مهم جدا 5	4	3	2	غير مهم جدا 1
انتخاب كوم www.saudielection.com					
الناخبون السعوديون www.saudivoters.com.sa					
موقع أمانة مدينة الرياض www.alriyadh.gov.sa/election					
أخرى					

42. وأخيراً ،،،،، يأمل الباحث أن يجري مزيدا من البحث وذلك بإجراء بعض اللقاءات مع بعض من تكرم مشكوراً بالإجابة على هذه الاستبانة ، فهل لديك الاستعداد للمشاركة في ذلك مستقبلا؟

نعم ..... الرجاء كتابة رقم الهاتف أو الجوال أو بريدك الإلكتروني للاتصال بك من خلاله	لا

شكرا لك على تكرمك باستقطاع جزء من وقتك للإجابة على أسئلة هذه الاستبانة.

APPENDIX THREE

CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING SHEET

CONTENT ANALYSIS CODING SHEET

1) **Newspaper**

1. Al Jazirah ____ 2. Al Watan____ 3. Okaz____4. Al Yaum____

2) **Date of item:** Day _____ Month _____ Year _____

3) **Byline** **1. Yes _____ 2. No. _____**

4) **Genre of item:**

1. Front-page headline story ____ 2. Front-page news article____ 3. Inside news article ____ 4. Feature-investigation piece ____ 5. Op-ed (opinion piece, comments & analysis, editorial) ____ 6. Letters to the editor ____ 7. Interview/case/ study/seminar____ 8. News brief ___ 9. Report ____ 10. Photo ____ 11. Cartoon ___ 12. Other (specify) ____

5) **Section**:

1. Main/news ___ 2. Supplement (edition) ___3. News review (weekly) ___

4. Other (specify) ___

6) **News source (e.g. interviewee, commentator) in the item:**

1. Royalty____ 2. Minster of Municipality and Rural Affairs___3. Govt. Minister____ 4. City Mayor ____ 5. Election Committee spokesperson ____ 6. Election Committee member ___ 7. Foreign Politician____ 8. Academic __ 9. Religious scholar ___10. Police/Law enforcement____11. Local media ____ 12. Foreign media ____13. Businessman ____ 14. Tribesman ____ 15. Saudi NGO member____16. Voter ____ 17. Candidate ___18. Member of the public ____19. Unknown ___20. None ____21. Other____22. Government Official___

7) **Reference to municipal elections in the headline of item:**

1. Yes _____ 2. No _____ 3. N/A ____

8) **Representation of municipal election process in item:**

1. Governmental reform ____ 2. Political reform ____ 3. Administrative reform ____ 4. Representation of people _____ 5. Citizens' rights ___6. New democratic exercise ____ 7. Democracy ____8. No representation ____9. Other ___10. City/ country development_____ 11. New experience _____

9) **Is people's apathy towards elections mentioned in item?**

1. Yes _____ 2. No _____

10) **Coverage tone of municipal elections in item:**

1. Critical ___2. 'Humorous' ___3. Cynical __4. Argumentative ____

5. Summary ___6. Questioning____7. Warning ___8.None___9. Other___10.Praiseing___

11) **Evaluative dimension of commentary towards municipal elections in item:**

1. Negative _____ 2. Positive _____ 3. Neutral _____4. None____

Election Media Campaign

12) Representation of the municipal election media campaign's effectiveness in item:

1. Effective ___ 2. Ineffective _____ 3. Not mentioned ____4. Other____

13) Representation of the election media campaign's length in item:

1. Short ___ 2. Long _____3. Enogh ____4. Not Enough ____5. Not mentioned ____6. Other____

14) Coverage tone on election media campaign in item:

1. Critical ___2. 'Humorous' ___3. Cynical __4. Argumentative ____ 5. Summary-___ 6. Questioning____7. Warning ___8. None___9. Other___10. Praising___

15) Evaluative dimension of commentary towards election media campaign in item:

1. Negative _____ 2. Positive _____ 3. Neutral _____4. None____

Candidates' electoral campaigns

16) Representation of the candidates' campaigns effectiveness in item:

1. Effective ___ 2. Ineffective _____ 3. Not mentioned ____4. Other____

17) Representation of the candidates' campaigns implementation in item:

1. Professional ____2. Unprofessional ____3. Not mentioned ____4. Other____

18) Representation of the candidates' campaigns length in item:

1. Short ___ 2. Long _____3. Enough ____4. Not Enough ____5. Not mentioned ____6. Other____

19) Coverage tone on candidates' electoral campaign in item:

1. Critical ___2. 'Humorous' ___3. Cynical __4. Argumentative ____ 5. Summary-___ 6. Questioning____7. Warning ___8. None___9. Other___ 10. Praising___

20) Evaluative dimension of commentary towards candidates' electoral campaign in item:

1. Negative _____ 2. Positive _____ 3. Neutral _____4. None____

Peoples' understanding of the election process

21) Representation of the citizens' understanding of the importance of the election process in item:

1. Understand ___2. Do not understand ___3. Not mentioned ____4. Other _____

22) Representation of the citizens' interest in the election process in item:

1. Interested ____2. Not Interested _____ 3. Not mentioned____4. Other _____

23) Representation of the citizens' political awareness in item:

1. Lack of political awareness ___2. Politically aware ___3. Needed more information ____4. Needed more time ___ 5. Not mentioned ____6. Other ____

24) Coverage tone on the citizens' understanding of the election process in item:

1. Critical ___2. 'Humorous' ___3. Cynical __4. Argumentative ____ 5. Summary-___ 6. Questioning____7. Warning ___8. None___9. Other___10. Praising___

25) Evaluation of the commentary towards citizens' understanding of the election process in item:

1. Negative _____ 2. Positive _____ 3. Neutral _____4. None____

26) Picture accompanies item:

1. Yes _____ 2. No _____ 3. N/A____

27) Who is in the picture?

1. Government official____ 2. Politician____3. Candidate ____ 4. Celebrity/leader____ 5. Academic expert____ 6. Media ____ 7. Citizen___8. Candidte's camp (Headquarters) ____9. Polling Station___10. Ballet Box____11. Group of citizens____12.Citizen/Citizens casting their votes ____13. Other_____14. N/A____

APPENDIX FOUR

PILOT STUDY REPORT

PILOT STUDY REPORT

This section describes the pilot study that was conducted to test the research questionnaire, which was designed as a self-administrated tool for examining Saudis' understanding and evaluation of the first municipal elections in Saudi Arabia. The questionnaire contains a range of dependent and independent variables, which are clustered in five main sections: (a) demographic; (b) respondent's media uses; (c) national attitude towards elections; (d) attitude towards democracy or political reform; (e) respondent's assessment of the effectiveness of the election media campaign. Since the questionnaire formed a major source of data for the thesis, it was important for the researcher to conduct this pilot study to ensure that the questionnaire was (a) clearly worded and free of ambiguities; (b) as brief as possible to ensure maximum response; (c) addressing only those questions which would deliver information central to the thesis concerns before it was distributed to the public.

The researcher conducted the pilot study throughout February 2008 with the cooperation of members of the Saudi Students' Society in Cardiff city, United Kingdom. As noted, a key concern about this research tool and a central reason informing the pilot study, was to make sure that questions were clearly worded and readily understood by respondents. Sudman and Bradburn (1982) identify the main advantage of conducting a pilot study as follows:

> The pilot study can be used to indicate questions that need revision because they are difficult to understand, and it can also indicate questions that may be eliminated (p. 284).

The first draft of the questionnaire was agreed following extensive and multiple design and discussion sessions with the researcher's supervisors who suggested substantive revisions and corrections on successive drafts, and a translated Arabic copy of the final draft was produced. Burton (2000) encourages researchers to seek help from various sources when they design survey questions. They can get a wealth of information from their supervisors. Burton puts it this way:

> Drafting a set of questions to facilitate feedback from fellow academics and supervisor(s) is an important starting point. It is essential that supervisors take a look at potential questions for they will have in-depth knowledge of your particular research area and therefore be able to make a judgment about whether the questions you have constructed adequately address the important debates (pp. 343-344).

Fellow students are another useful source of help. It is often a useful exercise, especially in the case of self-administrated questionnaires, if the researcher asks his/her colleagues to complete one. Thus, the researcher relied on Saudi students, male and female, and other non-Saudi students in Cardiff city to assess the research questionnaire. Burton (2000) adds that although the students might be unable to answer some of the questions they will be able to comment on whether they could navigate their way around the questionnaire easily.

Pilot studies are useful for a number of reasons. By way of a checklist researchers need to determine the adequacy of their sampling frame, assess non-response rates, evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of the data collection method they have chosen, and establish the adequacy of the questions. The pilot study is also the place to judge respondent's interest and attention (Burton, 2000, p. 245). Hence, the study questionnaire passed through several stages before the final distribution in order to test the language clarity, scaling and completeness of the questions.

Sample of the pilot study

According to Rea (2005), a pilot study is a small-scale replica of the main study and the question arises of how many respondents should be included in the pilot, although there is no 'magic' number which resolves the many possibilities here. Notwithstanding the importance of the sample size, the authors state that the priority is with the quality of the questionnaire's construction not the size of the sample.

> The sample size for the pre-test is generally in the range of twenty to forty respondents; however for very large sample surveys it is not uncommon for a pre-test to contain a larger sample... The researcher will select respondents from among the working population but need not be concerned about selecting through a random sampling procedure (p. 32).

However, Oppenheim (1992) stresses that the pilot study sample should resemble the real population of the study. Oppenheim goes on to say:

> respondents in the pilot study should be as similar as possible to those in the main enquiry, that is they should be a judgement sample (p. 62).

Distribution of the actual questionnaire to a random sample of respondents is not the only strategy used in the pilot stage. Interviewing knowledgeable people in the field is considered an essential tool to assess questionnaires. A pilot study, according to Miller and Brewer (2003), is a mini-project in which the researcher also tests his procedures and interviews a small number of subjects. Thus, the researcher can learn whether the planned procedures will work before efforts are expended on the full-blown study. The authors go on to explain:

> The initial retesting work may include conducting some in-depth interviews and may involve testing and revising attitudinal scales. The 'grand finale' of the pretesting stage will be a *pilot* – carrying out a miniature version of the whole survey by administering the final draft questionnaire or interview schedule to a small number of respondents (p. 252).

The researcher selected the Saudi Society in Cardiff city as the focus for the pilot study because it is similar to the intended population of the research study in key respects. The population of the pilot study consisted of 40 students, 35 males and 5 females; all of them were students coming from various military and civil institutions in Saudi Arabia.

Questionnaire content validity

Questionnaire content validity examines the suitability of the emphasis and focus of the questionnaire for the intended population and the intended measurement. Furthermore, this process also ensures that questionnaire items are free from ambiguity and unlikely to cause misunderstanding.

Content validity of the questionnaire was established in two stages. Stage one represents a non-systematic snapshot approach in order to get a feel for how it was perceived by others. However, stage two was a more systematic process involving professionals in the field as judges who rated the questionnaire items according to four attributes: linguistic, clarity, completeness and scaling.

Stage one

In the first stage, the researcher undertook a pilot study with a group of respondents to check the clarity of the items, instructions and the time required to complete the Arabic version of the questionnaire. The group involved 35 students, 30 male and 5 female in the Saudi Society in Cardiff city. All of them were students completing BAs, MAs and PhDs in various fields of knowledge in different English language institutes and universities in the Cardiff area. There were three non-Saudi students among the respondents, emanating from the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. Those three students have experienced elections in their countries, thus their comments were important in this regard. Respondents were advised that they were participating in a pilot study, they were given instructions about how best to complete the questionnaire but were also encouraged to be highly critical and reflective, and to ask about anything which they did not understand in order to help the researcher design a better question schedule. It took an average of 20-30 minutes to answer all of the items on the questionnaire schedule. Analysis of the questionnaires showed that 30 were completed and

usable, while five were excluded due to incomplete data, leaving the sample with 30 usable questionnaires.

Stage two – Interviews

In the second stage, the researcher held interviews with five postgraduate students who were in the writing-up stage of their theses at Cardiff University, Glamorgan University and Sussex University. Three of them were writing their PhDs in the field of journalism, with others working in linguistics and business studies. They were asked first to read through the questionnaire as if they were actual respondents and advised to look for inconsistencies, lack of flow and fitness of the response options to the questionnaire items. Second, they were asked to give their comments and suggestions regarding the content, focus and layout of the questionnaire. In addition to that, one of the experts helped the researcher to use the SPSS software to test some of the questionnaire's dependant and independent variables. As a result, major changes were made to the structure and scale of the items. Such knowledge, according to Mouly (1978), is important because it provides objectivity and reveals flaws that the investigator is invariably too close to see (p. 1978).

Pilot study result

As a result of the pilot study, the respondents suggested certain changes and general comments, which were incorporated into the questionnaire design. Moreover, to meet the comments of the interviewed experts, considerable revisions were introduced into the questionnaire to improve linguistic clarity and facilitate completeness, relevance and scaling. The focus of variables, as well as the length of the questionnaire, and the proposed modifications to items that needed to be amended and standardised for fieldwork application were also taken in consideration. Thus, the distributed draft questionnaire was amended as a result of the pilot study.

