

# استكشاف بناء الهوية والتحوّل من الفردية إلى الجماعية - انتخابات مجلس الأمة الكويتي 2016 أنموذجاً

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## الملخص

يحقق البحث في كيفية استخدام المرشحين السياسيين للشعارات والملصقات السياسية لتقديم أنفسهم في انتخابات مجلس الأمة الكويتي عام 2016. وللبحث في هذا الأمر، استخدمت المنهجية في هذا البحث نظرية تحديد المواقع التي وضعها (بامبرج) فيما يتعلق ببناء الهوية. تتألف مجموعة البيانات من عشرة ملصقات سياسية أُخترت عشوائياً وأُستخدمت في الحملة الانتخابية لعام 2016. ومع استخدام نظرية تموضع (بامبرج) للتحقيق في الشعار النصي للملصقات، طبقت نموذج (كريس وفان ليوين) على العناصر متعددة الوسائط الموجودة في الملصقات. تظهر نتائج البحث كيف قام تحوّل المرشحين إلى الوضع العام للتأكيد على مبدأ التعاون؛ مما يدلّ على ميلان المرشحين إلى الاحتكام إلى القيم المشتركة وبناء الهويات الوطنية، وهذا الأسلوب يشكّل التقارب مع الناخب وتعزيز التضامن. وتظهر النتائج السياسيين الكويتيين أنفسهم بوصفهم أعضاء وممثلين لمجتمع. وبالتالي، تختار الجهات الفاعلة الاجتماعية بناء نفسها بأسلوب جماعي مع الناخبين لإقناعهم بالتصويت. سيوضح هذا كيف تسمح اللغة بإعادة إنتاج الحقائق الاجتماعية لملاحظة علاقات القوة وارتباطها بكيفية استخدامهم للغة. ويعدّ دور اللغة في إعادة إنتاج الحقائق الاجتماعية مهماً في عرض ارتباط السلطة المتداخل مع الاختيارات اللغوية الواردة في الملصقات السياسية. فضلاً عن ذلك، يبين البحث أن استخدام الملصقات السياسية، وخصوصاً في الكويت، لا يؤثر فعلياً على اختيار المرشح بسبب العلاقات الاجتماعية والقبلية الأقوى؛ ومع ذلك، فإن استخدام الملصقات والشعارات السياسية في الكويت يعدّ أمراً جوهرياً ومهماً في تشكيل السياسيين ووضعهم في موقف يسمح لهم بفهم ذواتهم. وأخيراً، تشكّل الشعارات السياسية الأداة المهيمنة في الحملات الانتخابية. ويعدّ الاستخدام المتنوع للغة والخصائص البصرية واللغوية في الملصقات السياسية التي يستخدمها المرشحون مثلاً مهماً في النص السياسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: انتخابات الكويت، التمثيل المجتمعي، الهوية/الهويات، الشعارات السياسية.

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# Exploring the Construction and Shift from Individualism to Collectivism: A Case Study of the 2016 Elections in Kuwait

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate how political slogans and posters were used by political candidates to present themselves in the 2016 Kuwaiti National Assembly elections. To explore this, the researcher employed Bamberg's positioning theory regarding identity construction. The dataset consisted of ten randomly chosen political posters used in the electoral campaign in 2016. Besides employing Bamberg's positioning theory to investigate the textual slogan of the posters, the Kress and van Leeuwen model was applied to the multimodal items found in the posters. The findings revealed how candidates shifted to the public mode to emphasize cooperation; that is, candidates tended to appeal to shared values and construct national identity(ies), creating momentum and promoting solidarity. In addition, the findings also showed that Kuwaiti politicians positioned themselves as agentive group members. Thus, social actors chose to construct themselves collectively with voters to persuade them to vote. This also showed how language allowed the reproduction of social realities to observe power relations and its connection to how they used language. In other words, the role of language in reproducing social realities was pivotal in highlighting the power dynamics embedded within the linguistic choices presented in the political posters. Additionally, the study revealed that while the use of political posters in Kuwait has a limited impact on voter decisions due to prevailing social and tribal affiliations, these posters and slogans nonetheless play a crucial role in shaping and positioning politicians' identities, enabling them to articulate and construct their sense of self.

**Keywords:** positioning, Kuwait elections, identity/ies, political slogans.

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## 1. Introduction

Barry defined a political slogan as "a catchword or rallying motto distinctly associated with a political party or other group." (161) He further explained that "(al)though a slogan generally originates with the president or a member of the administration, its effectiveness depends on acceptance and use by the public" (ibid). The aim of this paper is to analyze the political posters that were used by the candidates for the parliamentary elections of the Kuwait National Assembly during the election campaign 2016. It is a crucial piece of research considering the assumptions that have been made about the relationship between politics and language. It is only by understanding its multimodality that it is possible to comprehend how agencies and identities are constructed through political posters in election campaigns. The paper examines a few posters that were used to express the candidates' beliefs, feelings, and intentions for the 2016 elections. There were numerous posters, but only 10 were randomly selected for analysis. The way the candidates represented themselves in the political posters allows a researcher to meticulously look at the linguistic and visual constructions. Moreover, analyzing the linguistic and visual posters helps in developing an understanding of how these candidates used language and postures to persuade the voters and therefore how powerfully the political posters affected the audience. This in turn showed how language allows reproducing social realities to observe power relations and its connection to how language was used. Political posters are perceived as a powerful means of communication in election campaigns. Thus, this paper attempts to fill the gap created by the lack of studies that look at Kuwaiti politics from a linguistic perspective.

The role of discourse in politics is critical as political posters are used to politically advertise a candidate (Kaid and Holtz-Bach 390). To study the function and strategies behind political poster advertising, it is necessary to elucidate the importance of the content within these posters (Johnston 2006). The use of the positioning framework in this study will assist in analyzing how the political candidates interact with their voters and how the texts (i.e., the slogans used) in these posters speak about the intentions of the candidates and construct their identity(ies).

Popova asserted that political posters are used for the purpose of propaganda and persuasion of the electorate. Propaganda is defined as the "deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" Jowett and O'Donnell (2006 7). Herman and Chomsky (2) investigated propaganda critically. They concluded that "money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their message across the public" (cited in Maasri). Jowett and O'Donnell proposed a "free" form of communication, a non-propagandistic communication that is distinguished from propaganda, and

one which provides a free and open exchange of ideas: "They claimed that because so many factors determine the formation of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, the propagandist has to gather a great deal of information about the intended audience." (16) Indeed, political candidates construct certain behaviors and beliefs for their audience; thus, by using these political posters with slogans, they are manipulating their audience. Given this, the voter's job is to deconstruct what the texts and images mean. As Aulich and Sylvestrova (12) put it, "Political posters are part of a fluctuating discursive structure, situated within the contexts of its exercises, as audiences and designers alike position themselves in relation to the official culture."

Following Foucault's concept of discourse and the politics of representation, Hall (3) confirmed that meanings are constructed through a representational system, along language and visuals, which function only through culturally coded signs. Thus, representation is only a discursive practice.

Wodak also indicated that "politics" is action. Therefore, speakers "do" politics. Doing politics, from a linguistics point of view, therefore, means the use of verbs, which indexes a physical process (Halliday). "Doing politics" implies that political actors (speakers) enact political processes by language. Political speeches and slogans consist of "a rhetorical and argumentative structure that is typical for visionary, official and formal speeches, with persuasive textual, pragmatic and lexical items" (Wodak 1). This means that when applied to political speeches and slogans, this perspective implies that language is not merely a passive tool for communication but an active instrument through which political actors shape, influence, and perform political actions.

Arab Spring has affected many countries, including Kuwait. During 2011–2012, a series of protest demonstrations were staged that called for governmental reform. Since then, the National Assembly elections were boycotted by many Kuwaitis. From 2012 to the present time, all the National Assembly elections (02/2012, 12/2012, 08/2013, 12/2020, 09/2022, 06/2023, 4/2024) were annulled, made void, or both. Consequently, in the past decade, the 2016 election was the only one that completed its full term of four years from 2016 to 2020. The reason for focusing on the 2016 election is not only that this election was not annulled but also that it witnessed noticeable increase in boycotters' participation of previous elections.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the political posters using the positioning theory proposed by Bamberg to explore how politicians present themselves to their audiences. It is crucial for these politicians to select specific discourses that will effectively persuade voters to elect them for the parliament. Therefore, the research questions are:

RQ1: How do Kuwaiti politicians construct their identities in political posters?

RQ2: What types of discourses are employed to convince their voters to vote for them?

RQ3: What kinds of multimodal semiotics, if any, are used in the poster that help them create meaning and position themselves in a particular way?

Before delving into the present investigation, the next section discusses the existing body of literature in the field of linguistics related to political studies. This introductory overview aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of prior research and scholarly discourses that have contributed to the broader context of political analysis within the realm of language studies. Section 2 serves as a crucial foundation for assessing the research questions, identifying gaps in knowledge, and reviewing the theoretical frameworks that underpin these studies.

## 2. Previous Studies on Linguistic Aspects in the Political Arena

An immense body of research investigated language in the political arena. Political discourse is largely influenced by power dynamics, and a shift in political discourse is inevitable. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), Gowhary explored the significant events surrounding the presidential election in Iran and the Middle East in 2013. The focus of the study was on the speeches delivered by the nominees. The findings showed contrasting perspectives adopted by the two nominees regarding the same events, exhibiting how language became a tool for advancing their social, political, and personal interests. Thus, political discourse serves as a potent method to engage in a power struggle. Another study by Lahlali showed how political slogans during the Arab Spring in Egypt reflected dramatic social changes in Egypt over only a short period. The political discourse in Egypt shifted rapidly from "Long Live Sir" to "Down with the Dictator." Other discourses used to label the president included tyrant, thief, and corrupt, which caused a complete change in the local political narrative.

Other studies have looked at political slogans from another perspective. In a 2012 study, Ibrahim (401) investigated the political slogans that were used in the 2011 Egyptian revolution. She found that the colloquial variety of "Egyptian Arabic" (EA) rather than Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) was largely used in the posters. Ibrahim stressed that this choice was evidence that EA is more expressive in times of political distress. During this complex and multifaceted situation that can arise due to a range of factors—including political, social, economic, or ideological grievances against the government's conduct during a conflict—language becomes a source of power. This language choice is perceived as relatable, appealing to inclusivity and diversity, and creates approachability and authenticity. Al-Azzam et al. investigated the Jordanian electoral slogans from cultural, political, social, and translational perspectives and found that these slogans chiefly manifest male superiority in society in which the female role is limited primarily to being a housewife and a mother. Indeed, slogans are perceived as "sensitive indicators of political environments" (Saduov 8).

Slogans have been used for persuasion and promotion of ideas and ideologies in political spheres. The aim is not only to convince the audience but also to reflect the current social concerns of society. In other words, slogans "have a direct link to

social or individual action" (Effi 700). Saduov investigated the political slogans used in Slovakia during the 2016 elections. The findings of this study showed that slogans included a promise to provide more jobs and to improve the social welfare situation. Other slogans emphasized patriotism, honesty, and justice. From a grammatical perspective and similarly to the current study, even the politicians in Slovakia tended to use the collective pronoun "we" rather than "I." This is because employing the first-person plural signals an in-group construct.

Slogans, whether used in politics or marketing, have great influence. In a 2023 study conducted on the slogans used in 2019–2020 in Hong Kong, the findings confirmed that slogans helped rectify political issues. Leung (647) stated that "the slogan as a whole refers to a need to rectify a problem and to return to the original, a more desirable state of affairs for Hong Kong, without specifying what problem there is and what the desirable state of affairs looks like."

### 3. Kuwait: Sociopolitical Background

In Kuwait, social class is dependent on family name and wealth. According to Al-Nakib, the highest social stratum, which is also the smallest, consists of notable merchant families. These merchant families contain both ethnic groups: Kuwaitis who come from Iran and Saudi Arabia. According to Al-Nakib (28), the townspeople worked as sailors, pearl divers, and trading merchants. Others worked as porters and construction workers. the social stratum relies on the merchant elite. In what follows, the following section provides a detailed discussion of social class in Kuwait. Unlike the social class construct in the West, it is somewhat blurred in Kuwait. It is not based on income nor on profession but rather on rank, power, and connection with the ruling family. First, there is the ruling family (Sheikhs/Shyookhs), who are called the upper class, being the dominant power, with full control over governance and the state. It should be noted that all these divisions of social class in Kuwait include both Sunni and Shiite families, except for the ruling family (AlSabah), who are completely Sunni. Next come the upper middle class, who are the merchants in control of financial capital and constitute what in other countries would be called the bourgeoisie. The members of this class comprise the leading influential families who have good connections with the ruling family. Third, the middle class consists of the top real estate owners as well as the bureaucratic bourgeoisie (the most powerful state employees), who enjoy social and material privileges that enrich them in a variety of ways. Al-Munais (177) stated that this class consists of the families who can obtain a good education and those who can be employed in civil service jobs at high levels.

The last class, according to the Kuwait Progressive Movement, is the working class, which was formed within the context of the capitalist development of the state. Considered by many as subordinate and parasitic, the working class has grown and crystallized into an economic social class. This class represents the largest social

group, who are deeply affected by the existing approach to governance and thus have a real interest in change and improving its fortune. The greater part of the working class in Kuwait is composed of expatriate workers, who have been marginalized by virtue of their status and are exposed to a significant portion of the working class in Kuwait consists of expatriate workers, whose legal and social status often places them in a position of vulnerability. Many experience limited rights protections, and face forms of class-based inequality that reflect broader structural challenges within the labor system. The laws impose undemocratic and inhuman restrictions that prevent them from the right to participate in life in Kuwait, including their right to participate in unionized labor. These restrictions also apply to Kuwaiti stateless workers, who are deprived of the most basic rights. The working class also includes a large portion of stateless Kuwaitis, who are not paid the same salaries as Kuwaiti employees working in the public sector as civil servants or those in the private sector.

In terms of other identified groups, there are intellectuals and professional women, some of whom are discriminated against, alongside young people and students, who are inclined to embrace ideas of progress, equality, and change. Gender, age, conflict with the old, and anxiety about the future are burning issues in today's Kuwait. Patai (14) put this stratification in his study "The Middle East as a Culture Area" as follows:

The presence of social classes is characteristic of Middle Eastern towns only, not of villages and nomadic tribes. The class structure shows a great vertical nobility. By far the numerical majority of the townspeople belong to the lower class, comprising such occupations as small shopkeepers, porters, people employed in services, loafers, beggars, etc. The slim but growing middle class is made up of master craftsmen, merchants and others who 'do not belong' to the 'great families', lower officials, small house-owners and other people of moderate means.

He elaborated upon this in the following excerpt:

The very thin, but extremely powerful upper class, consists of a few of the 'great families', whose members are sometimes referred to as 'notables'. They occupy key positions in many fields and are the mainstay of the feudal oligarchy. They were, as a rule, the leaders of society, the owners of economic, financial, industrial enterprises and the top figures in political life.

All in all, researchers (see Freeth; Al-Shamlan; Al-Munais) working on social class in the Middle East in general, and in the Gulf specifically, agreed that there are three to four main social groups in society, but sometimes named differently, with varying titles (1) the sheikhs or "shyookhs," who are referred to as the "ruling family; (2) merchants or leading families, who are referred to as the upper middle class; (3)

middle class, who are also called commoners; and finally, (4) the working class, who are mostly expats and Kuwaitis with low incomes.

### 3.1. Kuwait Electoral System

Kuwait's political landscape is often described as 'tense,' reflecting the complex relationship between the elected parliament and a government fully controlled by the Amir and the royal family. The Amir appoints both the prime minister and members of the government, independent of the parliamentary composition. However, the 1962 constitution grants the parliament significant powers: it can block legislation and has the authority to question ministers on matters within its jurisdiction. The parliament also serves as a platform for various social forces to voice their demands, thereby exerting considerable influence over the political agenda. Parliamentary elections were first introduced in Kuwait in 1963, with the electoral system characterized by a non-proportional, plurality-based block vote. In this system, voters select their preferred candidates within multimember electoral districts.

In 2006, activists—mainly the opposition bloc (anti-government)—succeeded in reducing the electoral districts from 25 to 5 under the campaign "nabeeha khams" characterized in orange, meaning we want it to be five. This means that instead of a two-member district, the new system has 10 members per district for a total of 50 parliament members. In the old system, each elector was granted 2 votes, whereas the new 2006 system granted the elector 4 votes under the partial block (limited) system.

From 2006 to February 2012, the four-votes system was applied. These elections resulted in short-lived assemblies in which the opposition bloc outnumbered in the assembly becoming the majority. Following the Arab Spring uprising, in 2012, an Amiri decree announced that the voting system was being changed from four votes to one vote for each elector. This change caused a large reduction in the opposition bloc. According to AlJeri (M. AlJeri, personal communication, November, 20th 2020), in the political context, the opposition members in elected parliaments are usually the minority; however, in the Kuwaiti political system, the opposition bloc is considered the majority bloc "Kutlat Al-Aghlabiyya." With this new Amiri decree of having a single non-transferable vote (SNTV) electoral system, the opposition's ability to succeed is now limited because of this change to the dynamics of the electoral contest after the Arab Spring. Consequently, the opposition bloc organized a protest, which is considered one of the biggest in Kuwait history "Karamat Watan" (Dignity of the Nation) in October 2012. The protest was peaceful and dominated by the majority bloc. It was mainly held at Sahat al-Erada (The Will Square). The protesters mostly used white Kuwait flags and nonbelligerent, colorful posters (a combination of orange and mustard colors that became the primary protest colors).

## 4. Theoretical Frameworks

### a. Positioning Theory

The concept of positioning revives the notion of "subject positions" developed by Foucault in the 1960s. According to him, discourses position subjects depend on several matters, such as power relations, legitimate knowledge, and the practices and social status by which they perform (Foucault 5). Thus, they are "determining the interpretation of self, (social) world, and others."

Davies and Harré were the pioneers who presented this concept, stressing the fact that individual positionings are "located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines" (Davies and Harré 48).

Michael Bamberg provides a more concrete understanding of the concept by proposing an interactional notion of positioning to capture how identity work is performed by the speaker. Bamberg (337) distinguishes three levels of positioning.

- 1 - **LEVEL 1:** This is positioning at the level of the story, and it attempts to answer the question, "How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events?"

This level focuses on how characters (speakers) are positioned in relation to each other within the reported events of a story; in other words, how speakers posit themselves within the narrative told. This level explores the dynamics of narrative construction and how the roles of characters are shaped within the unfolding events.

- 2 - **LEVEL 2:** This positioning is at the level of the interaction, and it aims to answer the question, "How do speakers position themselves to the audience?"

This level examines how speakers position themselves in relation to the audience during the act of communication. It investigates the interactive dimension, exploring how speakers present themselves to the listeners and shape their identities within the context of communication. This includes linguistic choices such as pronouns; language; code switching; and voice, tone, and pitch in conversations.

- 3 - **LEVEL 3:** This is positioning at the level of the master narrative and is aimed at answering the questions "Who am I?" and "How do speakers position themselves to themselves?"

Here, speakers not only talk about characters in the story world but also present these stories to a specific audience in the present context (here and now).

This level has been redefined by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou. They added that at this level, both Level 1 and 2 come together; speakers talk about characters in

the story world (Level 1) and tell these stories to a particular audience in the here and now context (Level 2). By doing so, a speaker constructs a particular kind of person in relation to themselves as a subtle entity, which holds far beyond the setting of the discourse (De Fina and Georgakopoulou).

This simultaneous engagement at Levels 1 and 2 allows speakers to construct an identity that extends beyond the immediate setting of the discourse. This intertwined connection of Levels 1 and 2 helps answer the Level 3 question on "Who am I?" This will construct the speaker's wish to be viewed according to the master narrative.

## b. Kress and van Leeuwen Model

In the realm of political studies, linguists and researchers interested in political slogans and posters may use the Kress and van Leeuwen model for analysis of visual materials. This is accomplished by examining the visual grammar and resources employed in these materials. The model helps in gaining insights into the semiotic strategies used to convey political messages, ideologies, and power relations. The model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay between language and visuals in political communication.

Kress and van Leeuwen stressed on meaning-making. Meanings are interconnected to one's culture, not specific semiotic modes. In other words, "the way meanings are mapped across different semiotic modes, the way some things can, for instance, be 'said' either visually or verbally, others only visually, again others only verbally, is also culturally and historically specific" (2). Indeed, their influential model has inspired a few disciplines in which it has been used in educational setting, society, and politics (Bowden et al.; Lirola). The combination of both text and visuals in any kind of campaigns assist in achieving meaning-making. The significance in employing Kress and van Leeuwen Model is that it involves the following aspects:

## 5. Methodology

This paper examines the slogans featured on political posters used during the 2016 National Assembly elections in Kuwait. To analyze how the political candidates portrayed themselves, the study employs two key frameworks: (1) Positioning Theory, which helps elucidate the various levels at which candidates construct their identities, and (2) the influential model developed by Kress and van Leeuwen, which offers insights into how participants are depicted with a generalized, stable, and timeless essence, thereby creating connections between people within the imagery (Jewitt and Oyama).

## 5.1. Data Collection

Slogans that spanned the streets during the 2016 election campaign were gathered. To ensure poster clarity, these slogans were predominantly acquired through digital platforms such as Twitter (currently X) and WhatsApp and extracted from online newspaper accounts available on Instagram.

The visual composition of each poster was analyzed noting its information value, salience, and framing. The analysis of the written language and visuals was done to observe how the different modes express meaning.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Candidates Based on Districts**

District No.	Male	Female	Total
1	24	3	27
2	17	1	18
3	29	1	30
4	35	0	35
5	42	0	42
			152

Table 1 shows the district-wise total number of candidates. As can be seen, districts 4 and 5 both have no women candidates. This can be attributed to the fact that it is mostly tribes who inhabit these districts, as such, it is very difficult for tribal women living there to even exercise their franchise, let alone nominate themselves for the National Assembly. The number of candidates is also relatively low because a considerable number of Kuwaitis have already boycotted the elections after the Amiri decree reduced the number of votes to one.

In total, 60 posters were collected. However, for the purpose of this paper, the focus was only on 10 posters that were randomly chosen from the 60 posters. It is important to mention that all these posters use the Arabic language, which is the official language of Kuwait. Using English, specifically in elections, would have only caused ridicule. The texts were then translated to English. An optimal method was used for the translations to ensure that the original meaning was not lost in translation, especially for those texts that have cultural or religious implications. Arabic is a diglossic language where two varieties of the same language coexist. The posters analyzed used both varieties, and it is shown how such variety has its own indexicality.

## 6. Analysis and Findings of the Corpus

A multidirectional mode was used in this study by analyzing the posters in accordance with Bamberg's three levels, in addition to the multimodal framework proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen, and it is hoped that the combined use of these two frameworks will yield useful results. The three levels will show how slogan texts shape meaning and how the image helps reflect a sense of self. Levels 1 and 2 are used to analyze the posters from the linguistics perspective (pronouns) and Level 3 to analyze the master narrative (circulating discourses).

Level 1 investigates shared narratives; how pronominal choices are used (i.e., the use of "I" and "We"). Level 2 looks at the interactional strategies used by speakers. At this level, the study focuses on how politicians address their audience (i.e., the type of discourse strategies to communicate their positions such as titles, for example, and their political ideas to convince their voters).

The analysis here is not only texts but also the actions around the posters' texts. Analyzing images, particularly, the politicians' pictures, on the posters include mediated actions in which agency is practiced through. These include the posture of the candidate, hand gesture (if applicable), and even eye contact. The Kress and van Leeuwen's model (2) investigates the interpretation of nonlinguistic features as follows:

Like linguistic structures, visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction. To some degree these can also be expressed linguistically. Meanings belong to culture, rather than to specific semiotic modes. And the way meanings are mapped across different semiotic modes, the way some things can, for instance, be 'said' either visually or verbally, others only visually, again others only verbally, is also culturally and historically specific.

All posters used in the elections consist of five mandatory parts: (1) an image of the candidate, (2) the number of the district to which the candidate belongs, (3) the profession of the candidate (lawyer, engineer, doctor, etc.), (4) the candidate's name, and (5) a slogan that is used to attract the public. Other information might be found on the slogans, for example, the logo of the National Assembly and the candidate's phone numbers and X/Instagram account details. Including social media account information is very important in modern political sphere because candidates use social media to share their views, opinions, and campaign news. This provides direct communication with the audience. It also offers an online visibility of the candidate that enables real-time engagement. The use of social media offers vast resources for interactive campaign and is necessary to engage with the younger generation.

### 6.1. Translation of the Political Slogans

Before discussing and analyzing the slogans, it is important to show how they were translated; the slogans were originally composed in Arabic to address the Kuwaiti

public during the election campaign, so it is crucial to translate them for the purpose of this study. This will allow readers to comprehend the complex relationship among language, culture, and politics; it provides a valuable lens to analyze the nuances of political discourse and communication strategies across diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes.

**Table 2**  
**Outline of the Slogans and Their Translation**

Logo in Arabic Script	Literal Translation	Final Translation	Translation Process
ويستمر العطاء	And the contribution continues.		The literal rendering suffices.
عزوتها انتو	You are its power.	You are the backbone of the country.	The strategy of addition exemplifies the intended meaning of backbone in Arabic.
وقفوهم إنهم مسؤولون	Stop them; indeed, they (are) to be questioned -a verse from the Qur'an.	You reap what you sow.	In this instance, the Qur'anic idiom is translated into an English proverb to keep the element of fixed phrases intact.
ستعود كما عهدناك يا وطن النهار		You will be back on track, glorious homeland.	An idiomatic translation is crucial here to maintain the impact of the source text figurative image.
لنعيده وطنًا للجميع		Let us bring it back a home for all.	Although this may appear as a quasi-literal rendering, it encapsulates the pragmatic meaning because the intended political slogan is preserved.
فكر جديد لمجلس جديد		A new ideology for a new parliament.	The semi-literal translation works best here given that the word (فكر) has several translation equivalents, such as thought, thinking, process, mindset, and ideology. The word ideology fits due to its denotative political sense.
لأجلها		For the sake of the country.	Using the addition strategy to amplify the missing words in the target text.
لن نخذلكم	We will not disappoint you.		The literal translation achieves its purpose.
حماية وطن	Protecting a homeland.		The literal translation achieves the purpose.
أنتم البداية	You are the beginning.	You are the beginning of change.	The strategy of addition was faithfully preserved because the literal translation will not suffice. The slogan implies that the voters are the ones who can change the political landscape.

## 6.2. The Corpus

The corpus involved 60 posters but, for the purpose of this study, only 10 were analyzed. The following section displays the features and characteristics of the collected posters and is followed by an analysis of the posters according to Bamberg's positioning theory and Kress and van Leeuwen's model.

**Table 3**  
**Features and Characteristics of the Collected Posters**

Poster number	Looking at the public	Hand gesture use	Kuwaiti Arabic	Modern Standard Arabic	Title use	Contact information	Kuwaiti flag/ National Assembly logo	Hashtag use
1	Yes	No	No	Yes	Lawyer	Yes	Yes	No
2	Yes	No	Yes	No	Lawyer	Yes	Yes	No
3	No	Yes	No	Yes	Lawyer	No	Yes	No
4	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
5	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
6	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
7	Yes	No	No	Yes	Doctor	Yes	No	No
8	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
9	Yes	No	No	Yes	Engineer	Yes	Yes	No
10	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No

### Poster #1



**Fig 1. Poster for District "3"**

The above poster comes from a candidate in the third district. The district number is significant part of the election posters in Kuwait because it positions a candidate to a specific district. Using Bamberg's Level 1 positioning, this comes as part of constructing a belonging self in a particular place within the first level of the narrative. Here, the

candidate positions himself as an implicit entity. Instead of using the first-person voice "My contribution continues," the slogan says "And the contribution continues" to express constructing a narrative that tells the public about an experience; this is another way designed to persuade the electorate. The candidate uses of the conjunction "and" here to index continuity of giving, which also indicates an experience in contribution. By emphasizing the continuity of contribution, the candidate aims to convince the public of their dedication and ongoing service, aligning with Bamberg's understanding of positioning as a persuasive act. Within Level 2, the phrase "And the contribution continues" posits the speaker within a social practice of making contributions. The word "contribution" is likely embedded in societal discourses that are related to civic engagement, public service, or community involvement within the political sphere.

According to Parris (30), a significant factor in any successful political speech is managing audience expectations. The impact of a speech is assessed in relation to the larger sociopolitical context. Parris states:

Beyond realising that what a person says matters, the audience actually hears – or thinks it does – exceptional eloquence, fluency and rhetorical command, because we are unconsciously persuaded that the speaker is exceptional. Or we actually hear a stumbling performance because we have decided that the performer is stumbling in other ways.

Using Kress and van Leeuwen model, the candidate uses red, green, and black with a white background, which are the colors of the Kuwaiti national flag, to emphasize nationalism. Before the name, the candidate uses his title "lawyer" because it cannot be overemphasized that titles play a significant role in Kuwait in exerting power. This also could be a mode of persuading the audience. Thus, the phrase draws on discursive resources related to public service and civic responsibility. Here, the word "contribution" indexes positive connotations, and the use of "continues" suggests an adherence to established norms of sustained engagement.

## Poster #2



Fig 2. Poster for District "3"

The slogan reads "You [plural] are the backbone of the country." Analyzing this phrase through Level 2 of Bamberg's theory involves investigating how language positions an audience within social practices, discourses, and normative expectations. The use backbone employs empowering language that positions the voters as active agents. The term backbone here suggests influence and control, aligning with societal discourses around civic engagement and the impact of individual participation. The use of the second person pronoun you engages voters within the social practice of democratic participation, emphasizing their central role in the political process. In other words, voters collectively have the power to influencing and determining the political landscape, reinforcing their importance within this social category.

Within Level 2 positioning, the candidate positions the voters (in plural) in a controlling position; this is shown by describing the voters as the backbone, which consequently gives them the power in this election to vote and to exercise their rights. This slogan is basically a call (by an interrogator) to a tribe. This slogan culturally constructs a belonging to the tribe. The Arabic text uses Ruqaa font, which is one of the Arabic calligraphies that is one of the Islamic arts. It is closely related to the Qur'an. Ruqaa font is easy to write, alongside its durability and clarity. Unlike other types of Arabic fonts, the Ruqaa is written above the lines and therefore this poster exhibits the line under the text. The font is orange in color to make a stance. The candidate is obviously from the opposition bloc. According to the Kress and Van Leeuwen model, the text on the image is clearly emphasized involving more than only language. Spoken language is emphasized by tone and facial expression, while written text is "influenced by aesthetic, psychological, pragmatic and other considerations" (Kress and van Leeuwen 41).

In this poster, the candidate, who belongs to the third district, positions the number of the district at the bottom left of the poster, using the three main colors of the Kuwaiti flag. While Poster #1 does not use any coloring, frames, or lighting, it is found that this one involves multiple colors (white, mustard, and dark ombré grey). Like the candidate in Poster #1, this candidate too is a lawyer and uses the title "lawyer" before his name. Professional titles such as lawyer, doctor, or engineer can contribute to building trust among voters. This trust is a crucial factor, especially in political campaigns. This use highlights the candidate's professional background that will help create a positive perception of reliability and integrity. In addition, by employing professional titles, candidates aim to establish themselves as credible and qualified individuals capable of making informed decisions. This poster shows democratic norms, values, and expectations, highlighting how it empowers and aligns voters with the central role they play in the political process.

### Poster #3



Fig 3. Poster for District "5"

This poster from the fifth district is also by a "lawyer." The candidate's profession precedes the name. Using the Kress and van Leeuwen's framework, the poster uses the district number in mustard color, and the watermarks of a Kuwaiti cityscape and flag are in the background. Unlike the previous two examples, this candidate does not look straight into the camera lens (public), and he is rather looking away and "pointing" his right-hand finger at the public. This poster is quite interesting not only because of the hand gesture but also because of the use of a Qur'anic verse in the slogan.

The verse can be translated as "You reap what you sow." The verse, unlike the other slogans in the dataset, can be distinguished with the use of quotation marks, and the enunciation of the Arabic letters, which is clearly from the Qur'an (AlSaffat: Those who set the ranks). If Bamberg's Level 1 framework is used, it shows that the verse establishes a temporal positioning that suggests a cause-and-effect relationship. By doing so, the phrase constructs a narrative about consequences based on one's actions. One can claim that the use of the Qur'anic verse indexes moral and ethical dimensions.

Looking from the perspective of Level 2 of Bamberg's positioning theory, the slogan posits the voters within a moral accountability narrative. This verse appeals to social practice, which stresses responsibility of the voters. Moreover, the use of the second person pronoun plural 'you' addresses (interacting with) the voters. The pronoun here has an ethical perception; the voters have the responsibility to stop and demand action. This will position these individuals within a narrative that includes shared concerns about accountability. The verse also suggests a need for intervention to prevent negative consequences that aligns with societal norms and collective responsibility. In other words, the politician here would not be successful, and he would have to create coalition that "requires him to build factions and lines of

allegiance and opposition which is realised through discursive means" (Wodak 198). Wodak adds that "by constructing an other through discursive strategies of positive self- and negative other representation, by sharing knowledge . . . and shared values, . . . and by providing a plausible argumentative chain" (198). With Level 3 of Bamberg's theory, it can be concluded that there are circulating discourses behind this statement, and it can be said that it is corruption that this candidate is referring to when asking the public to "stop." Thus, the slogan aims to position people as responsible for stopping the corrupt candidates. This entails that the election process is a collective one that requires two parties: the candidate and the voter. Using a Qur'anic verse in a political electoral campaign symbolizes integrity and morality, connecting with the religious community, establishing trust and credibility, and providing moral guidance. By doing all this, the candidate is appealing to emotions.

#### Poster #4



Fig 4. Poster for District "3"

This is the first poster that represents a female candidate. It is not only different in terms of gender but also in terms of the whole mode and technique that makes the poster distinguished. Analyzing this using the Kress and van Leeuwen framework, the female candidate has a bright wide smile for the public. The picture is presented in a large frontal and eye level, with the district number in a red circle below the slogan. There is no sign of any National Assembly logo, the Kuwaiti flag, or the colors of the flag on the district number. The slogan, using a Naskh font, states "You will be back on track as we know you, glorious homeland." The use of Naskh script here could indicate a sense of sophistication that might elevate the perception of this message. In addition, the use of a script that is elegant and aesthetically pleasing enhances the visual appeal to the audience. The slogan, unlike the previous examples, speaks to Kuwait personified rather than the people. It employs a temporal positioning to imply future trajectories. From Bamberg's Level 1 positioning, this narrative constructs a bright future for the nation to indicate a positive change in vision. With the use of

definite promise "You will be back on track, glorious homeland." This explains a master narrative (Level 3) as in Poster #3 wherein it is implied that corruption has wrecked the country. The use of "glorious homeland" in this slogan indexes a patriotic perception. Indeed, the candidate here aligns herself with a social category that is associated with patriotism and national connection.

In addition, looking at the second part of the slogan used in this poster, "as we knew you," the candidate constructs a collective identity using the pronominal pronoun "we". This use, it is claimed in this study, is to establish a sense of inclusivity that suggests close connection to the public by positioning herself as one who cares about the situation of the state. The slogan also indexes a nostalgic identity to the bright past of Kuwait "You will be back on track," which is a promise for a better future. Finally, this acknowledges the audience's knowledge of the glorious homeland, and this indirectly stresses civic responsibility of the voters. The appeal to the collective identity in this slogan is related to social practices to civic responsibility, national pride, and a sense of shared knowledge.

## Poster #5



Fig 5. Poster for District "3"

The candidate in this poster belongs to the third district; however, unlike the others, he uses the word three instead of using the numeral 3. This comes on the left of a small map of Kuwait and the National Assembly election 2016. A sketch of the Kuwaiti cityscape at the bottom of the poster can also be noted in this poster. Then, on the bottom right, the Twitter account of the candidate is provided. As mentioned before, this convenience of providing information on social media account allows the candidate to communicate directly with their audience. As in Poster #4, the candidate positions himself collectively in this slogan, "Let us bring it back: a home for all." This slogan uses the collective us, which, as per Levels 1 and 2, is a sign of positioning the self in public. The use of let us here involves the audience who are positioned as active agentive forces in the process of bringing change. This also appeals to the social practice of

collective engagement. When the phrase "a home for all" in this slogan is considered, it can be noted that this stresses inclusivity. In other words, the slogan calls for diversity, belonging, and a shared community. It is also an indication of shared responsibility and collaboration that would posit this candidate as a leader who encourages collective action. Moreover, this aligns with Level 3 that posits the candidate in social categories addressing the community issues. The use of inclusive language by the candidate suggests positioning all interlocutors within the master narrative and the circulating discourses about diversity. This means that bringing back a better nation is not a one person's job but rather a collective one that includes the public being addressed; the candidate implies that Kuwait will be a better and more diverse place for all if everyone works hand in hand. Wodak (199) states that politicians use technical language that substantiates "the group bonding process." Indeed, this candidate embeds the collective "us" in group bonding.

## Poster #6



Fig 6. Poster for District "4"

The candidate in this poster presents himself in a serious pose. He belongs to the fourth district, which is clearly shown at the bottom of the poster with the accompanying statement "The capital's candidate." Although the fourth district is not the capital district, this candidate still claims it in his poster. This could be attributed to an attempt by the candidate to elicit a broader appeal, aim at strategic communication, or gain a competitive advantage over the other candidates. The poster includes the contact details and social media accounts of the candidate at the bottom of the poster. The use of a hashtag on the top of the poster is also noted. Hashtags have a significant role in grouping and labeling texts on social media to identify digital content on a specific topic, especially on Instagram and X platform. Here, the hashtag states, "the citizen's life comes first." While hashtags are basically used in computer-mediated communication, the candidate uses the hashtag in his poster to represent a stance.

As such, this statement needs as much attention as the main slogan itself. Positioning the citizen as a priority and the central and foremost concern is an attempt at claiming a commitment to prioritize people's lives, their interests, their needs, and their safety. This slogan implies valuing human life as a priority. According to this candidate, this will only be accomplished when "A new ideology for a new parliament" is proposed by the new National Assembly members. This is the main slogan of this candidate and is written using a bigger font than the hashtag on top. Like the candidates in previous posters, this candidate too promises a better assembly, a better future, and a better and fresh mindset. This propaganda, according to Huang et al., is used to influencing the attitude of a community. Using Level 1, the candidate posits himself as an advocate for change and a proponent of a clear new perspective that signals a departure from old ideologies. Looking at it from Level 2, the candidate positions the voters as stakeholders of this new parliament and implies that they should be receptive to the suggested new ideology. As per Level 3, the "new parliament" is posited as an entity that requires change. This ideological change suggested is a transformation to a new parliamentary system.

## Poster #7



Fig 7. Poster for District "2"

This poster has the shortest slogan of all the slogans in the dataset. The candidate faces forward, constructing a calm position with serious eye contact. On top, the social media accounts, the year of the election, and the district number in a dark background can be noted. The candidate uses a small font for his title (doctor) followed by a bigger font for his name. The slogan "For the sake of the country" suggests a futuristic perspective. According to Level 1 positioning, the candidate is positioning himself in a collective identity with voters to imply a sense of unity and shared national community. As per Level 2, the voters in this slogan are the stakeholders who are committed

to public and governance services for the benefit of the nation. Finally, the Level 3 positioning intertwines these practices and emphasizes the positions of the candidate and voters. This is accomplished through the framing of the candidate as a benefactor and the audience as active participants in the process of voting that will collectively benefit the nation.

It is worth mentioning here that this candidate is one of the members of the opposition bloc, which boycotted the election since 2012. The opposition bloc has refused the one-vote-per voter system because they will lose most parliament seats. However, this candidate chose to participate and nominate himself in the 2016 elections. By using the slogan "For the sake of the country," the candidate hopes to evoke patriotism, which he hopes will persuade the opposition voters to vote for him.

The poster uses a dark background that significantly conveys a sense of seriousness. This dark background constructs a strong contrast with the other elements in the poster. This will assist in contributing to create a particular tone that will be interactive with the audience. Another implication of the dark background is that it creates a persuasive message. This shows how modality, representation, and interactive dimensions intertwine to deliver a specific message.

## Poster #8



Fig 8. Poster for District "4"

According to this poster, the candidate belongs to District 4. He has the Kuwaiti flag on top of the slogan that says, "We will not disappoint you." From Level 1, the politician here uses the collective we to position himself not with the public but rather with the other candidates of the National Assembly. This positionality is used to indicate that the election process produces powerful relations (and competitions) between the candidates. Politicians use different linguistic and rhetorical devices that build their

self-representation in elections. Beard states that the pronoun "we" found in British slogans is ambiguous. The slogan "Yes, We Can" does not distinguish whether the plural "we" refers to a party or to everybody together. Another temporal positioning in this slogan is found in the future tense used. This future positioning displays an implicit promise and reassurance to voters and establishes a sense of accountability. Voting is a social practice that requires the stakeholders to commit to choosing the best candidate. Therefore, the candidate is positioning the voters as the core of this political narrative; the use of the second pronoun you addresses the empowered stakeholders who are assured in this slogan that they will not be disappointed. This use indicates support, trust, and a commitment to fulfill this promise. Connecting both levels, the candidate posits himself as reliable and trustworthy and someone who is empowered by the audience.

The candidate image contributes to this promise. Choosing not to smile and looking straight at the camera establish direct connection with the voters. His image can also be interpreted as an authentic representation of commitment and seriousness in the political agenda.

## Poster #9



Fig 9. Poster for District "4"

The candidate in Poster #9 is from District 4. As per the practice followed by most candidates, this is shown in a small logo which is usually placed on top or bottom of the poster. The posture of the candidate is formal, with a small, vague smile. The slogan reads *Himayat Wattan*, which can be translated as "Homeland Protection" or "Protecting a Homeland." It is noteworthy that there is no self-positioning in this slogan, and this may suggest a commitment on the part of the candidate to protect the homeland. The use of the word "homeland" in this slogan is central. Analyzing this according to Level 1, the candidate is implicitly positioned in dedicating himself to homeland safety. As per Level 2, the audience is also implicitly positioned in this social practice. This engages the audience assuring them with safety and security. Level 3 serves to categorize this candidate as a protector of the people and nation. The speaker is aligned with the ideological stance that homeland protection is a collective duty that upholds and preserves shared ideology, national identity, values, and principles of the nation.

This discourse is supported by the candidate's mention of his title. The candidate chooses to construct and display his position by adding his job title to his name: "Your nominee Engineer Abdullah Fahad Alenezi." Professional titles like doctor, engineer, and lawyer are mostly used in election campaigns in Kuwait. According to Ballantine and Roberts, being a professional in a field indicates a high level of autonomy in making decisions and strong commitment to serve their clients. According to Tolbert and Hall, professionals have power, authority, and control because they have mastery and expertise within their fields. Therefore, the candidates in Kuwait feel that mentioning their profession in the posters will lead to persuading the voter for voting because they are more qualified.

## Poster #10



Fig 10. Poster for District "2"

Poster #10 is the last poster in the dataset and involves the second female candidate. The candidate addresses the public and positions them as the priority with her slogan, "You are the beginning." As per Level 1, this indicates a starting point and is significant for the time when the statement was made. In this slogan, "you" is a plural pronoun used to address the people. Pronoun references are always significant because they give an immediate sense of political persuasion. Beard (24) states that politicians tend to start their texts, writings, and speeches with the second person pronoun "you" to "show that voters are already agreeing with them." The voters here are positioned in the authoritative mode because the slogan "You are the beginning" places on them the responsibility to vote, change, and fight corruption. Unlike in the English language, Arabic pronouns have distinctive features from singular to plural. Therefore, the employment of the second person pronoun you is empowering, positioning the voters as active participants who have the opportunity to influence and maybe change the current political narrative in Kuwait (Level 2).

From a master narrative perspective (Level 3), the slogan suggests that voters have the power and the potential to bring change. They are posited as the social actors in the political sphere collectively with the candidate.

All candidates presented themselves with close connection to people by positioning themselves collectively with them; providing them the power to choose the right candidate

in the district. All the candidates constructed a political leader identity by their poses in the images (e.g., seriousness, smirk, or holding one finger up showing authority as in Poster #3). In other words, these hand gestures are chiefly interactive in the sense of approaching the audience, communicating, and connecting with them. Eye contact in election campaign posters has a significant meaning. By looking directly at the camera lens, the candidate invites the public to socially interact with them, using the slogans within the poster to establish a dialogue and achieving communicative goals. Most posters include the Kuwaiti flag, image of Kuwait, or simply the colors of the flag, signifying nationalism. Stated differently, the candidates aim to construct Kuwaitiness through their political posters. There were only two female candidates in this dataset.

In general, these political campaigns are constructed as a type of warfare in which each candidate sets a discursive slogan, including pronouns or metaphors, that will help them win the campaign battle.

## 7. Conclusions

This paper analyzed the candidates participating in the 2016 Kuwaiti Parliament elections and showed how the candidates were represented in their political posters used in their election campaigns. Bamberg's positioning theory was used to investigate how the candidates constructed themselves in the posters, to the public, and to themselves. The paper also used Kress and van Leeuwen model to decode the visual items of the posters. Using both frameworks, the analysis showed that all candidates represented themselves in a positive way, active agents of the social communication, and collectively associated and connected to the audience. The theory showed how candidates shifted to the public mode to emphasize cooperation; they tend to appeal to shared values and constructing national identity(ies), creating momentum and promoting solidarity. All images of the candidates appear to construct a formal personality holding power, which is used to convince the public to vote.

Boycotting the election and changing the vote system have mainly affected the Kuwaiti public, especially the opposition bloc. As such, all the slogans in the included posters indicate a "promise" to a "better" and "bright" future. The text of any political poster is short with deep rich meaning that will persuade voters. The use of positive discourses, specifically adjectives such as "bright," "new," "priority," "build," and "truth," will impact voters, and maybe impact others who decided to boycott this election.

The study also showed that political posters are a great resource for multimodal data that cannot be underestimated. These posters are dominant devices that political social actors use to represent their agentive selves and construct positions. The paper showed that the study of political slogans contributed not only to the linguistic field but also to the political science field. Nevertheless, the study confirmed that in Kuwait, political slogans hardly affect the people's choice of candidates and their attitudes

toward voting. Slogans are significant in any electoral campaign; yet the candidates in Kuwait already hold distinct positions and have their own supporters. Factors such as social relations and tribal relations have direct and more powerful positions in guiding the attitudes of Kuwaiti voters (M. AlJeri, personal communication, November 20, 2020). Finally, as mentioned elsewhere (2020), slogans and posters of past Kuwaiti elections were limited to the candidates' names. This confirms that social relations have a greater role in the political context in Kuwait. From a linguistic perspective, the posters were used not only as a dominant tool in the election campaign but also as a great example of multimodal text occurring in the political genre using diverse language, visual and linguistic characteristics.

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