



Empowering Kuwaiti women: Political and social challenges and future leadership opportunities

Marzouqah Q. Alazmi⁽¹⁾

Abstract

Objectives: This study examines how political empowerment and social empowerment shape Kuwaiti women's prospects for attaining leadership positions, while identifying the structural and cultural constraints that continue to limit equitable participation. Although the study uses the term empowerment, it is interpreted through a gender equality and social-justice lens that foregrounds power relations and institutional gatekeeping. **Method:** A descriptive survey design was employed. An online questionnaire comprising three dimensions (29 items) was distributed to a public sample in the State of Kuwait (N = 376), drawn from multiple governorates and educational backgrounds; the inclusion of both women and men was intentional to capture prevailing societal norms that shape women's leadership opportunities. **Results:** Respondents reported a moderate overall effect of political and social empowerment on women's leadership attainment ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.44$). Perceived challenges, especially legal constraints, unequal access to advancement opportunities, and persistent cultural expectations regarding gender roles were rated high ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.70$). **Conclusion:** The findings indicate that progress in women's participation is moderated by interacting cultural and legal-institutional barriers. Therefore, policy reform, transparent selection procedures, capacity building, and initiatives aimed at changing social norms are jointly required to expand women's leadership pathways in Kuwait.

Keywords: Kuwaiti women, leadership positions, political empowerment, gender equality, social empowerment

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تمكين المرأة الكويتية: التحديات السياسية والاجتماعية وفرص القيادة المستقبلية

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ملخص

الأهداف: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تعرّف تأثير التمكين السياسي والاجتماعي على قدرة المرأة الكويتية على تولي مناصب قيادية، مع تسليط الضوء على التحديات التي تواجهها واقتراح إستراتيجيات مستقبلية للتغيير، ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة؛ أخذت عينة، قوامها 376 فرداً من عامة الجمهور من مختلف الخلفيات الأكاديمية والمحافظات في دولة الكويت. المنهج: اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي، واستخدم الباحث استبانة مكونة من ثلاثة محاور، تضمنت 9 عبارة لقياس مدى تمكين المرأة الكويتية على الصعيدين الاجتماعي والسياسي. النتائج: توصلت الدراسة إلى عدة نتائج، أبرزها أن التمكين السياسي والاجتماعي له تأثير متوسط على تولي المرأة مناصب قيادية، بمتوسط حسابي 3.33، وانحراف معياري 0.44. أما التحديات، بما في ذلك العقوبات القانونية، وصعوبة الحصول على التعليم والتقدم المهني، والتقاليد الثقافية التي تحد من الأدوار الاجتماعية التي يمكن للمرأة المشاركة فيها؛ فقد حصلت على درجة استجابة عالية، بمتوسط حسابي 3.62، وانحراف معياري 0.70. الخاتمة: استناداً إلى النتائج أوصت الدراسة بتعزيز الوعي الثقافي، وتحسين فرص التعليم والتدريب، وتنفيذ حملات توعية اجتماعية لتغيير المفاهيم التقليدية وتعزيز المساواة بين الجنسين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المرأة الكويتية، التمكين السياسي، التمكين الاجتماعي، المناصب القيادية، المساواة بين الجنسين

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Introduction

In contemporary societies, gender equality in public life is increasingly treated as both a human rights imperative and a development requirement, especially where leadership opportunities remain unevenly distributed (World Economic Forum, 2024; Sundström et al., 2017). Within this debate, women's empowerment is commonly used as an umbrella term for expanding women's access to resources, voice, and decision-making; however, empowerment is not merely a technical policy label—it is contested and often reflects underlying assumptions about power, justice, and institutional accountability (UN Women, 2017; UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, 2017). Accordingly, this study operationalizes empowerment in its political and social dimensions, while interpreting it critically as a pathway toward gender equality and social justice rather than as a neutral slogan (Chompa, 2022; Hamed, 2022). In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) context, the expansion of women's participation has accelerated in education, employment, and public visibility, yet leadership pipelines remain constrained by interacting cultural norms and formal institutional rules (Aref & Fallentine, 2024; Gulf Research Center, 2023). In Kuwait, national reform agendas—including New Kuwait 2035 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—articulate commitments to broaden women's participation, but persistent legal, organizational, and sociocultural barriers continue to shape who can access leadership and how that access is evaluated (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2025; Al-Mutairi et al., 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Women's growing visibility in public life across GCC states is often framed through modernization and gender inclusion; yet these

narratives do not reliably translate into equitable leadership access because institutional gatekeeping and social expectations remain influential (Müller & Camia, 2023; Gulf Research Center, 2023). In Kuwait, an empirically grounded account is needed to distinguish political empowerment (voice, representation, and formal participation) from social empowerment (norms, status, and social capital) and assess how each relates to women's leadership attainment.

Despite sustained debate on women's rights, empirical studies that quantify the relative contribution of social versus political empowerment to leadership outcomes are limited, fragmented, or focus primarily on descriptive indicators rather than pathways to leadership (Ali, 2019; Alzuabi, 2016). National indices likewise provide only partial visibility into the mechanisms that reproduce inequality, limiting their usefulness for actionable organizational and community reform (Kuwait Public Policy Centre, 2022).

This study addresses this gap by conceptualizing empowerment as a multilayered construct shaped by legal and institutional rules, organizational practices, and sociocultural expectations that frame leadership as gendered (Middle East Centre, 2021; Alzuabi, 2016). It treats progress as partial and contested and foregrounds accountable actors (state institutions, elected bodies, and organizational decision-makers) whose choices shape access to leadership.

Prior scholarship indicates that cultural practices and contested religious interpretations can constrain women's political participation and normalize male dominance in selection processes (Al Ajmi, 2017). Kuwaiti evidence also suggests a "conversion problem" in which educational and professional gains do not consistently yield leadership representation (Ali, 2019; Alzuabi, 2016). The study therefore examines public perceptions of empowerment and how they relate to evaluations of women's leadership opportunities, combining a

governorate-level quantitative assessment with empirically grounded reform priorities (Kuwait Public Policy Centre, 2022).

RQ1: What is the perceived level of Kuwaiti women's political and social empowerment, and to what extent are these perceptions associated with women's access to leadership positions and their attainment?

RQ2: Which legal–institutional, organizational, and sociocultural constraints are perceived as most strongly limiting Kuwaiti women's political and social empowerment, and how do these constraints shape women's leadership opportunities and advancement?

RQ3: What future-oriented reforms and institutional practices are perceived as most effective for enhancing Kuwaiti women's political and social empowerment and expanding women's pathways to leadership in Kuwait?

Significance of the Study

Kuwaiti women's political and social empowerment—and its impact on leadership access—remains underexamined. Kuwait's conservative context has historically constrained women's rights and limited their pathways to leadership across social, private, and civil spheres. Tracking women's efforts to challenge stereotypes and expand representation matters not only for national reform but also for international comparisons of gender equality. In general, higher social and economic development is associated with greater women's participation in political and social life; examining Kuwait's persistent gaps can therefore clarify which discriminatory practices, stereotypes, and gender norms continue to restrict leadership opportunities and require targeted change.

The study uses an integrative framework combining (a) critical feminist perspectives on power and gendered institutions, (b) critical

social theory's emphasis on structural constraints and policy accountability, and (c) social role theory's account of culturally shared expectations that align leadership with men and caregiving and support roles with women. Together, these lenses conceptualize empowerment as a contested concept rather than merely a measurable construct, enabling survey results to be interpreted through the mechanisms that reproduce—or disrupt—gendered leadership inequalities (Turner & Maschi, 2015; Nkansah, 2023).

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study treats women's empowerment as the pathway through which political and social empowerment translate into leadership access and attainment. The “empowerment-to-leadership process” is defined as the interaction among (a) individual capabilities and resources, (b) organizational opportunity structures, and (c) legal–institutional and sociocultural norms that can enable—or block—progression. Empowerment is therefore modeled as multi-dimensional (political, social, and, where relevant, economic), since these dimensions can advance unevenly and shape leadership outcomes differently (Shamlawi & Saqfalthait, 2016; Sheikh, 2022).

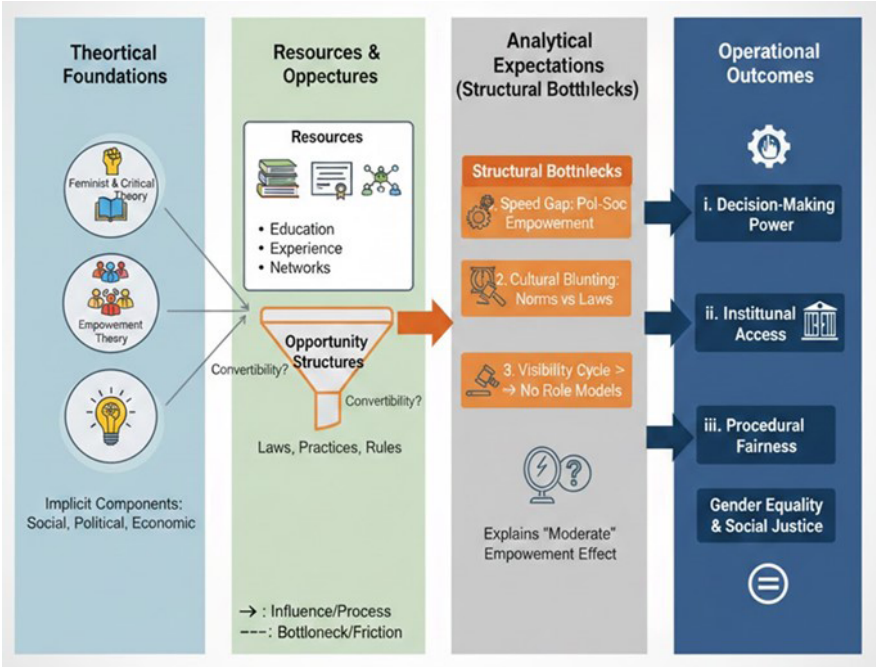
The interpretive framework draws on feminism's commitment to equal rights and opportunities, alongside sociological accounts of gender that foreground how social arrangements can sustain inequality despite apparent advances (Turner & Maschi, 2015; Hjelmström, 2017). It anticipates that (a) political and social empowerment may progress at different rates, (b) cultural expectations may blunt legal reforms, and (c) legal–institutional gaps can reinforce resistance by limiting visible role models—helping explain why respondents may report only “moderate” empowerment-to-leadership effects while perceiving “high” barriers (Middle East Centre, 2021; Müller & Camia, 2023).

Beyond norms, leadership attainment depends on the availability and convertibility of resources such as education, experience, networks, and institutional support. Where resources exist but do not convert into leadership opportunities, the constraint lies in opportunity structures—laws, organizational practices, and representation rules—rather than in women’s capabilities per se (Al-Qahtani et al., 2020; Alzuabi, 2016). Social role theory further explains how repeated cultural scripts associate leadership with men and frame women’s public authority as conditional; accordingly, public perceptions measured in the survey can legitimize women’s leadership or sustain resistance through expectations about “appropriate” female roles (Okuboyejo & Sepeng, 2023).

Critical feminist and critical social perspectives highlight how formal rights can coexist with informal constraints (gatekeeping networks, stereotypes, and legitimacy tests) and insist on institutional accountability. Accordingly, the analysis does not portray empowerment as “achieved” while documenting persistent structural barriers (Turner & Maschi, 2015; Nkansah, 2023). Consistent with major development frameworks, empowerment is used as the principal operational construct. Within the model’s Operational Outcomes pillar (Figure 1), it is treated as an institutional and normative pathway toward gender equality and social justice, not a depoliticized slogan. Progress is assessed through (i) expanded decision-making power, (ii) widened access to positions, networks, and arenas of influence, and (iii) the integrity of selection environments (fairness, transparency, and procedural consistency) governing recruitment and advancement (UN Women, 2017). Anchored in Figure 1, moderate perceived effects are interpreted as a conversion gap: capabilities and resources exist, yet their translation into substantive leadership authority is constrained by systemic bottlenecks in opportunity, legitimacy, and access.

Figure 1

Integrated Model of Women's Empowerment and Leadership



Literature Review

1. Kuwait and the GCC Context: Empowerment Gains and Leadership Conversion Constraints

Across Kuwait and the wider Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), women's educational participation and professional visibility have expanded in ways that signal important social change. Yet access to political representation and senior decision-making positions continues to display marked sectoral unevenness, suggesting that advances in participation do not necessarily translate into equivalent advances in authority. Empirical work on Kuwait consistently highlights this "conversion" problem: women may enter public and professional

domains in growing numbers while remaining underrepresented in high-impact leadership roles where agenda-setting and resource allocation occur (Ali, 2019; Middle East Centre, 2021).

Sector-focused studies further indicate that leadership access is shaped not only by formal policies, but also by informal gatekeeping practices, legitimacy tests, and network dynamics that operate alongside (and sometimes despite) equality provisions (Dashti et al., 2023; Müller & Camia, 2023). At the regional level, scholarship on empowerment in GCC settings emphasizes that labor-market inclusion and managerial advancement depend on the interaction between institutional policy design (e.g., recruitment systems, promotion criteria, and representation rules) and the pace of normative change in public attitudes toward women's authority (Gulf Research Center, 2023; Aref & Fallentine, 2024). This interaction is particularly salient in contexts where legal reforms may signal inclusion while organizational practices and social expectations continue to regulate who is perceived as a legitimate leader.

2. Conceptualizing Women's Empowerment: From Participation to Substantive Authority

Women's empowerment in development and gender scholarship is commonly framed as multidimensional—political, social, and often economic. Recent definitions emphasize that empowerment is not simply numerical participation or symbolic inclusion; it concerns women's capacity to exercise influence, make consequential choices, and reshape the constraints that limit those choices. Accordingly, empowerment can be understood as the set of capabilities and opportunities that enable women to convert resources into agency, and agency into outcomes (Shamlawi & Saqfalhait, 2016; Sheikh, 2022).

This capability-oriented lens is central to leadership. When women's education, employment, and public participation rise without parallel gains in leadership authority, the focus shifts from individual "readiness" to opportunity structures: how institutions distribute authority, how organizations operationalize merit and advancement, and how social norms grant legitimacy to men and women in public roles (Al-Qahtani et al., 2020; Alzuabi, 2016). This distinction prevents empowerment from being treated as a personal trait and instead foregrounds the structural mechanisms that enable—or block—conversion into leadership positions.

3. Theoretical Approaches: How Empowerment Becomes (or Fails to Become) Leadership

This study combines complementary lenses to explain why empowerment can advance unevenly across domains and why leadership conversion may remain limited even within reform-oriented narratives.

Feminist and critical perspectives foreground the gap between formal rights and lived access. They show how inequality is sustained through institutional design and informal norms, producing forms of inclusion that may be conditional, symbolic, or concentrated in lower-authority arenas. Critical social approaches further emphasize institutional accountability, locating persistent barriers in decision-making systems, gatekeeping networks, and uneven legitimacy regimes rather than in individual deficits (Turner & Maschi, 2015; Nkansah, 2023).

Social role theory explains leadership as culturally gendered. Repeated social scripts associate authority and public decision-making with men and cast women's leadership as exceptional or conditional. These expectations shape evaluation, promotion, and pub-

lic acceptance—particularly where leadership is socially coded as masculine—so public perceptions become part of the mechanism through which leadership is legitimized or resisted (Okuboyejo & Sepeng, 2023).

Taken together, these theories suggest that leadership outcomes are jointly shaped by formal structures (laws, organizational procedures) and informal structures (normative expectations, legitimacy judgments), and that change in one domain does not automatically generate change in the other.

4. Women's Political Empowerment: Representation, Influence, and Institutional Rules

Women's political empowerment is often framed as a cornerstone of gender equality because it concerns voice, representation, and influence over public policy. A substantial body of research treats political representation not only as a democratic indicator but also as a mechanism that shapes policy agendas, allocative decisions, and the visibility of women as legitimate political actors (Japaridze, 2021; Fellegi et al., 2023). Related scholarship distinguishes among the actors and arenas through which political empowerment is expressed: elites who hold office, challengers and advocacy actors who contest elite control, and citizens who engage formal institutions and public deliberation (Alexander et al., 2017).

Despite incremental progress in women's political inclusion globally, gendered political influence remains unequal in many settings, including parts of the Arab Gulf. Research suggests that political empowerment is commonly constrained by interacting factors: institutional rules that structure candidacy and competition, organizational and party dynamics (where applicable), and sociocultural expectations about gendered legitimacy in public authority (Mahbub,

2021; Dauletova et al., 2022). Where political participation imposes high material and symbolic costs, women's access can be curtailed even when formal rights exist. Consequently, political empowerment cannot be inferred from legal eligibility alone; it also depends on opportunity structures that shape candidacy viability, public trust, and sustained authority.

5. Women's Social Empowerment: Agency, Legitimacy, and Participation Climates

Social empowerment refers to women's autonomy, self-efficacy, and capacity to participate meaningfully in social institutions and everyday decision-making. However, social empowerment is not merely an individual psychological state; it is also produced by participation climates—workplace norms, community expectations, family-role scripts, and institutional supports that enable women to exercise agency without disproportionate reputational or practical costs (Chandio & Ali, 2021).

Research across MENA contexts identifies recurring constraints on social empowerment, including patriarchal hierarchies, unequal distribution of care burdens, limited childcare and social safety nets, barriers to decent work, and differential access to networks that enable mobility and recognition (Njoya, 2021; Dauletova et al., 2022). Importantly, the GCC reform landscape often displays a dual pattern: high-level commitment to women's inclusion alongside persistent normative barriers that regulate women's authority and constrain the convertibility of education and employment into leadership outcomes (Gulf Research Center, 2023). This duality suggests that social empowerment is likely to be experienced unevenly—potentially improving in education and employment while remaining constrained in authority-bearing leadership settings.

6. Women and Leadership: Why Representation Does Not Equal Authority

Leadership literature increasingly recognizes that gender diversity in leadership can strengthen decision quality, governance, and organizational performance. Yet the central question in Kuwait and similar contexts is not whether women can lead, but how leadership systems distribute opportunity and legitimacy. When women remain underrepresented in senior roles despite demonstrated competence and growing participation, structural explanations become necessary. These include selection and promotion procedures, informal sponsorship, network access, and the gendered evaluation of “fit” and authority. Empirical research frequently shows that women face credibility burdens and higher legitimacy thresholds, especially in public-facing or high-power leadership roles (Alzuabi, 2016; Thelma & Ngulube, 2024).

Accordingly, leadership attainment is best analyzed as a conversion outcome: it depends on whether institutional access, procedural fairness, and social legitimacy align sufficiently to allow women’s resources (education, experience, and networks) to become leadership authority.

7. Kuwait’s Experience: Milestones, Reform Signals, and Persistent Constraints

Kuwait’s trajectory includes important legal and political milestones, notably the expansion of women’s civil rights and suffrage in the early twenty-first century, followed by women’s entry into parliamentary and public roles that reshaped visibility and expectations (Middle East Centre, 2021; Ali, 2019). At the same time, scholarship on Kuwait indicates that progress has often been uneven, with women encountering intensified legitimacy tests, higher performance expectations, and persistent cultural scrutiny when occupying leader-

ship roles (Dashti et al., 2023). National initiatives that foreground women's leadership reflect an institutional recognition of women's developmental role; however, policy signals alone may not remove the structural and normative bottlenecks that limit conversion into high-impact leadership positions (Gulf Research Center, 2023).

This combination—reform narratives alongside persistent constraints—makes Kuwait an analytically important site for examining how empowerment is perceived, what constraints are most salient, and which reforms appear most plausible for widening leadership pathways.

8. Integrative Synthesis: Toward an Empowerment-to-Leadership Interpretation

In combination, the literature suggests that women's empowerment in Kuwait and the GCC is best interpreted through an empowerment-to-leadership lens that distinguishes participation from authority. Political and social empowerment may advance at different speeds, and formal reforms may be moderated by cultural scripts and organizational opportunity structures. The empirical record also indicates that informal constraints—networks, legitimacy tests, and procedural gatekeeping—can shape leadership outcomes even where women's participation is rising. These insights motivate an integrated approach in which empowerment, constraints, and leadership attainment are treated as connected elements of a single conceptual pathway rather than as separate topics.

Field Research Procedures

Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design. As defined by Darwish (2018, p. 118), the descriptive method systematically examines a phenomenon as it exists within a specific group, in a particular

setting, and at a given point in time, with the aim of producing an organized analysis and interpretation that serves clearly stated research objectives. In the present study, this approach was appropriate because the goal was not to manipulate variables or test an intervention but rather to document and quantify public perceptions of Kuwaiti women's political and social empowerment, identify the most salient perceived constraints, and examine respondents' perceptions of future reform priorities using structured questionnaire data.

Research Population and Sample

The study population comprised adult members of the public in the State of Kuwait. An a priori target sample size was estimated using Bazaraa's (2001) sample-size formula for large populations, and data collection continued until the target was reached. Sampling was nonprobabilistic in implementation: the study applied a stratified quota approach (by governorate and key demographic groups) and recruited participants through convenience sampling within each quota using an online survey link, to approximate broad coverage across Kuwait's governorates and educational backgrounds. A total of 384 questionnaires were received; after screening for completeness, 376 responses were retained for analysis (a 97% usable-response rate). Both women and men were included because societal norms and gatekeeping attitudes are formed and reproduced at the community level; capturing perceptions across genders is therefore necessary for interpreting women's leadership pathways (Middle East Centre, 2021).

Methodological limitations are acknowledged. Because recruitment relied on quota-based convenience participation rather than a full probability sample, the results should be interpreted as reflective of the surveyed public rather than as strictly nationally rep-

representative. In addition, self-report survey data may be affected by response tendencies (including social desirability bias) and by the limits of respondents' knowledge about institutional processes. These limitations were mitigated by distributing the survey across multiple governorates and demographic groups and by applying established reliability and internal-consistency checks reported in the instrument validation section.

Respondents Characteristics

The respondent profile in Table 1 shows a broadly distributed sample across core demographics. The sample was nearly gender-balanced (male: $n = 189$; 50.3%, female: $n = 187$; 49.7%), supporting interpretation of community-level attitudes rather than a single-gender viewpoint. Age was concentrated in the 30–45 group ($n = 209$; 55.6%), followed by under 30 ($n = 109$; 29.0%), with 45+ the smallest category ($n = 58$; 15.4%). Marital status was led by single respondents ($n = 189$; 50.3%), then married ($n = 112$; 29.8%), and divorced ($n = 75$; 19.9%).

Geographic coverage included all six governorates, with the highest shares from Hawalli (18.9%) and the Capital (18.4%), followed by Al Farwaniyah (17.3%), Jahra (16.8%), Mubarak Al-Kabeer (16.0%), and Ahmadi (12.8%), suggesting perceptions are not confined to one locality. Educational attainment was primarily bachelor's ($n = 261$; 69.4%), with master's ($n = 93$; 24.7%) and Ph.D. ($n = 22$; 5.9%) respondents. Finally, self-reported economic level was mainly high ($n = 243$; 64.6%), then moderate ($n = 111$; 29.5%), with low ($n = 22$; 5.9%) least represented—an interpretive point when discussing perceived opportunities and institutional support.

Table 1*Distribution of Sample Members according to Their Characteristics*

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	189	50.3%
Female	187	49.7%
Total	376	100%
Age	Frequency	%
Less than 30 years	109	29.0%
30 to 45 years	209	55.6%
45 years and above	58	15.4%
Total	376	100%
Marital Status	Frequency	%
Single	189	50.3%
Married	112	29.8%
Divorced	75	19.9%
Total	376	100%
Governorate	Frequency	%
Capital	69	18.4%
Hawalli	71	18.9%
Al Farwaniyah	65	17.3%
Mubarak Al-Kabeer	60	16.0%
Ahmadi	48	12.8%
Jahra	63	16.8%
Total	376	100%
Educational Level	Frequency"	%
Bachelor's	261	69.4%

Cont. Table 1

Distribution of Sample Members according to Their Characteristics

Gender	Frequency	%
Master's	93	24.7%
Ph.D.	22	5.9%
Total	376	100%

Economic Level	Frequency	%
Moderate	111	29.5%
Low	22	5.9%
High	243	64.6%
Total	376	100%

Sample Profile (Demographics)

As shown in the descriptive statistics, the sample was nearly gender-balanced: males constituted 50.3% and females 49.7%. Regarding age, the largest proportion of respondents (55.6%) was between 30 and 45 years, followed by those under 30 years (29.0%), while respondents aged 45 years and above represented the smallest proportion (15.4%). In terms of marital status, single respondents accounted for the highest proportion (50.3%), followed by married respondents (29.8%), whereas divorced respondents constituted the smallest category (19.9%). By governorate, representation was distributed across all six governorates, with the highest share from Hawalli (18.9%), followed by the Capital (18.4%), Al Farwaniyah (17.3%), Jahra (16.8%), Mubarak Al-Kabeer (16.0%), and the lowest share from Ahmadi (12.8%). Educational attainment was concentrated at the bachelor's level (69.4%), followed by master's (24.7%), with Ph.D. holders comprising 5.9% of the sample. Finally, self-reported economic level was predominantly high (64.6%), followed by moderate (29.5%), while low economic level was least frequent (5.9%).

Research Instrument and Procedures for Establishing Validity and Reliability

To meet the study objectives, a structured questionnaire was designed to assess perceptions of Kuwaiti women's political and social empowerment, their implications for leadership attainment, and perceived constraints and reform priorities. The instrument was administered electronically via an online survey link distributed to the targeted strata across Kuwait's governorates. Data were collected during a defined fieldwork period, after which responses were screened for completeness and retained for analysis in line with the study's inclusion criteria.

Questionnaire Structure

The final instrument consisted of two parts:

- Part 1 (Demographic information): Items capturing key participant characteristics (gender, age, marital status, governorate, educational level, and economic level).
- Part 2 (Core constructs): Twenty-nine items organized into three thematic axes as follows:
 - 1 - Axis 1: Perceived impact of political and social empowerment on women's attainment of leadership positions (15 items; two dimensions).
 - 2 - Axis 2: Perceived challenges constraining political and social empowerment and women's access to leadership (items 16–22).
 - 3 - Axis 3: Future-oriented vision (reforms and institutional practices) for strengthening political and social empowerment and widening leadership pathways (items 23–29).

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale: Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Somewhat agree (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5).

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument Expert (Content and Face) Validity

Content and face validity were established through expert review by subject-matter specialists and research-methods experts. Reviewers assessed item clarity, construct relevance, linguistic precision, and alignment with the intended axis. Based on this evaluation, items judged ambiguous, redundant, or weakly aligned with the target construct were revised, consolidated, or removed, resulting in the final 29-item questionnaire across three axes. Subsequently, internal-consistency evidence (item–total correlations) and reliability estimates (Cronbach’s alpha [α]) were computed and are reported in Tables 2–8.

Internal-Consistency Evidence (Axis Level)

For Axis 1 (Perceived Impact of Political and Social Empowerment on Women’s Leadership Attainment), internal consistency was examined using Pearson’s correlation coefficients by correlating each item score with the total score of its corresponding axis. This procedure provides evidence that the items function coherently as indicators of the intended construct. The results are reported below.

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Coefficients between the Scores of Each Statement and the Total Score of the First Axis

Item No.	<i>r</i>	Item No.	<i>r</i>	Item No.	<i>r</i>
The First Dimension: Political Empowerment					
1	.901**	2	.838**	3	.767**
4	.832**	5	.654**	6	.742**
7	.673**	8	.691**		

Cont. Table 2

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between the Scores of Each Statement and the Total Score of the First Axis

Item No.	<i>r</i>	Item No.	<i>r</i>	Item No.	<i>r</i>
The Second Dimension: Social Empowerment					
9	.708**	10	.858**	11	.892**
12	.911**	13	.942**	14	.888**
15	.834**				

**Statistically indicative at the 0.01

The preceding data revealed that the item–total correlation coefficients for the statements within the first dimension were all statistically significant at the .01 level ($p < .01$). For the first dimension (Political Empowerment), the item–total correlation coefficients ranged from .654 to .901, while for the second dimension (Social Empowerment) they ranged from .708 to .942. These results indicate a strong degree of internal consistency among the items within each dimension.

General Construct Validity for the First Dimension

Construct validity” for the first dimension was verified by estimating the “correlation coefficients,” which were used to compare the values of each dimension and the “overall mean” for the first dimension, which yielded the following findings:

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients between the Total Score for Each Dimension and the Overall Mean Score for the First Dimension

Ser.	Dimensions	<i>r</i>
1	The first dimension: Political empowerment	.960**
2	The second dimension: Social empowerment	.962**

** Statistically indicative at (0.01).

- The internal-consistency results indicated that the correlation coefficients for the two dimensions of Axis 1 were very high, ranging from .960 to .962, and all correlations were statistically significant at the .01 level ($p < .01$). These findings provide strong evidence of construct coherence for Axis 1, indicating that its dimensions are closely aligned with the underlying construct being measured.
- Cronbach's alpha for Axis 1. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for each dimension of Axis 1 as well as for the overall Axis 1 score (i.e., the combined scale). The resulting coefficients are reported below.

Table 4

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for the Dimensions of the First Axis and the Overall Mean

Ser.	Dimensions	Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient
1	The first dimension: Political empowerment	.898
2	The second dimension: Social empowerment	.942
	Total	.910

The reliability estimates for Axis 1 were high. Cronbach's alpha values for the two dimensions ranged from .898 to .942, and the overall alpha for Axis 1 reached .910. These coefficients indicate strong internal consistency, supporting the reliability of Axis 1 and suggesting that its scores are sufficiently stable for analytical interpretation.

Axis 2: Perceived challenges constraining political and social empowerment and women's access to leadership. Internal-consistency evidence for Axis 2 was examined using Pearson's item-total correlations, calculated by correlating each item score with the total Axis 2 score (excluding the item, where applicable). This procedure evaluates the extent to which each statement functions as a coherent indicator of the Axis 2 construct. The results are presented below.

Table 5

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between the Scores of Each Statement and the Total Score for the Second Axis

Item No.	<i>r</i>	Item No.	<i>r</i>	Item No.	<i>r</i>
16	.785**	17	.840**	18	.790**
19	.791**	20	.811**	21	.772**
22	.765**				

** Statistically indicative at (0.01).

The item-total correlation analysis showed that all statements in Axis 2 were significantly correlated with the total Axis 2 score at the .01 level ($p < .01$). The correlation coefficients were consistently high, ranging from .765 to .840, which providing strong evidence of internal consistency for the Axis 2 items and indicates that they function cohesively in measuring the intended construct.

Cronbach's alpha for Axis 2. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha for the Axis 2 scale (and, where applicable, for its item set in aggregate), based on the overall mean/total score. The resulting coefficients are reported below.

Table 6
Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for the Second Axis Statements and the Overall Mean

No.	Statements	Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient
16	The existence of cultural legacies that hinder women's participation in politics and society.	.887
17	Higher unemployment rates among women compared to men.	.879
18	Insufficient funding and financial support for "Women's empowerment" projects and programs.	.887
19	Workplace discrimination and bias hinder women's advancement.	.889
20	Familial and societal challenges that limit women's freedom and independence.	.884
21	Some laws and regulations may be inadequate or unfair in supporting women's rights.	.889
22	Establishment of support networks for women across various sectors to exchange experiences and provide mutual support.	.891
Total		.901

Axis 2 demonstrated strong reliability: Cronbach's alpha ranged from .884 to .891 across the item set, with an overall alpha of .901, indicating high internal consistency and stable measurement for analysis.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether perceived challenges (Axis 2) differed by educational level (Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D.). The results revealed a significant effect, $F(2, 373) = 13.12$, $p = .001$, with a small-to-moderate effect size ($\eta^2 \approx .066$), meaning education explains about 6.6% of the variance. Post hoc tests are needed to identify which groups differ.

Table 7

One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Axis 2 (Perceived Challenges)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	12.45	2	6.225	13.12	.001
Within groups	177.12	373	0.475	—	—
Total	189.57	375	—	—	—

Note. DV = Axis 2 (Perceived Challenges). Effect size: $\eta^2 = SS_between / SS_total = 12.45 / 189.57 \approx .066$.

The one-way ANOVA shows that educational level is linked to statistically significant differences in how respondents rate the challenges constraining Kuwaiti women's empowerment and leadership access (Axis 2), $F(2, 373) = 13.12$, $p = .001$. The effect is small-to-moderate ($\eta^2 \approx .066$), indicating that education explains about 6.6% of the variance in perceived constraint severity. Interpreted within the study's framework, educational capital likely shapes how respondents recognize legal–institutional bottlenecks and informal gatekeeping (e.g., networks, sponsorship, bias), so perceived barriers are not uniform across groups. Practically, this suggests reform messaging and capacity-building be tailored to different educational publics rather than assuming a single shared view of constraints.

Axis 3: Future vision (reforms and institutional practices) to strengthen political and social empowerment and expand leadership pathways. Internal consistency for Axis 3 was assessed using Pearson's item-total correlations, Each item was correlated with the total Axis 3 score to determine whether the items coherently measure the future-oriented reform construct. Results are presented below.

Table 8

Pearson Correlation Coefficients between the Scores of Each Statement and the Total Score for the Third Axis

Item No.	<i>r</i>	Item No.	<i>r</i>	Item No.	<i>r</i>
23	.943**	24	.825**	25	.793**
26	.902**	27	.840**	28	.890**
29	.813**				

** Statistically indicative at (0.01).

Item-total correlations indicated that all Axis 3 items were significantly associated with the total Axis 3 score at the .01 level ($p < .01$). Coefficients were high (.793–.902), supporting strong internal consistency and showing that the items coherently measure the intended future-oriented reform construct.

Axis 3 reliability was also evaluated using Cronbach's alpha for the full item set (based on the overall total/mean score), with the resulting coefficient(s) reported below.

Table 9

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient for the Third Axis Statements and the Overall Mean

No.	Statements	Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient
23	Developing online educational platforms that offer training and awareness programs for women.	.920
24	Launching incentive programs to encourage women to run for political and leadership positions.	.934
25	Establishing international partnerships to support empowerment programs and exchange expertise and resources.	.939
26	Amending laws to ensure the protection and empowerment of women in various fields.	.925
27	Using modern media channels to raise awareness about the importance of women's political empowerment and promote female leadership.	.932
28	Strengthening cooperation with civil society organizations to support "Women's empowerment" programs and enhance their impact in the political arena.	.926
29	Launching motivational campaigns to encourage women to run for political and leadership positions.	.936
Total		.940

The reliability analysis for Axis 3 indicated excellent internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values for the Axis 3 items ranged from .920 to .939, and the overall alpha reached .940. These coefficients demonstrate a high degree of scale reliability, supporting the use of Axis 3 scores for subsequent statistical analysis and interpretation.

Statistical Methods

All analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The study employed Pearson's correlation coefficients (for item–total correlations and internal-consistency evi-

dence), Cronbach’s alpha (for reliability estimation), and descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations).

To interpret mean scores, a response-level classification was derived from the five-point Likert scale. Accordingly, mean values were categorized into five interpretive levels: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high (corresponding to 1–5). The cut-off points for each level were computed using the range formula, and the verification level for each dimension was determined based on the resulting intervals, as shown below.

$$\text{Class Width} = \frac{\text{Upper limit} - \text{lower limit}}{\text{levels number}} = \frac{5 - 1}{5} = 0.80$$

Demonstration, Explanation, and Reviewal of Research Results
Results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 examined public perceptions of Kuwaiti women’s political and social empowerment and their perceived relationship to women’s attainment of leadership positions. To address it, means and standard deviations were calculated for all Axis 1 items (Perceived impact of political and social empowerment on leadership attainment), then ranked in descending order to identify the highest- and lowest-rated perceptions. The results are presented below.

Table 10
Means and SDs for Axis 1: Impact of Political and Social Empowerment on Kuwaiti Women’s Leadership Attainment

Ser.	Dimensions	M	SD	Rank	Response Degree
1	The first dimension: Political empowerment	3.36	.587	1	Moderate
2	The second dimension: Social empowerment	3.30	.538	2	Moderate
The overall Mean		3.33	.439	Moderate	

Descriptively, Axis 1 produced an overall mean of 3.33 (SD = 0.44), indicating a moderate level of agreement. At the dimension level, political empowerment ranked highest (M = 3.36, SD = 0.587; moderate), followed by social empowerment (M = 3.30, SD = 0.538; moderate).

Substantively, these moderate ratings reflect qualified support for empowerment as a facilitator of leadership, alongside doubts about its consistent conversion into substantive authority. Respondents' views suggest that gendered leadership norms and structural bottlenecks still matter—such as limited affirmative measures, residual legal–procedural gaps, and comparatively weak representation in elected bodies. Perceived shortfalls in partisan and popular support were also seen as reducing women's competitiveness for high-impact roles, with appointment-based inclusion sometimes compensating for broader electoral legitimacy. Overall, women's educational and professional gains may be increasingly visible, yet leadership access is still perceived as uneven and shaped by institutional and socio-cultural filters—consistent with scholarship showing that customary expectations can blunt empowerment trajectories and slow progress toward gender equality in public leadership.

The Dimensions Are Discussed in Detail Below:

First Dimension: Political Empowerment

The “means and standard deviations” were estimated for the statements of “the first dimension, political empowerment”, and they were then ranked in a decremental arrangement based on the “mean” of each statement, shown as follows:

Table 11

Means and Standard Deviations of the Responses of the Sample Members to the Statements of the First Dimension: Political Empowerment

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank	Response Degree
1	Efforts are being made to increase the percentage of women elected to parliament to ensure better representation of their rights. Currently, there are no parliamentary elections.	3.50	1.422	3	High
2	Government support is provided for training and development programs for women interested in entering the political field.	3.52	1.333	2	High
3	Collaboration with international organizations has been established to strengthen political empowerment programs for women in Kuwait.	3.32	1.353	4	Moderate
4	Training programs in political science are offered specifically for women.	3.36	1.270	3	Moderate
5	Financial and technical resources are available to women who wish to run for political office.	3.08	1.201	6	Moderate
6	Both moral and material support are provided for emerging female leaders, along with strengthened support networks among women in politics.	3.16	1.233	5	Moderate
7	Women's political empowerment topics are included in educational curricula to raise awareness from a young age.	3.27	1.236	4	Moderate
8	Scholarships and training programs in political science and public administration are offered to young women.	3.70	1.258	1	High
The Overall mean		3.36	.587	Moderate	

The political empowerment dimension yielded a mean of 3.36 ($SD = 0.587$), reflecting moderate agreement.

This indicates perceived progress; moreover, political empowerment remains incomplete and uneven. Respondents' ratings suggest that legislative or reform narratives have not consistently translated into sustained political influence, especially where policy design and implementation leave residual gaps in participation and leadership access. Limited civic awareness of the value of women's involvement in high-stakes decision-making may also dampen electoral support and public endorsement of women candidates.

Perceptions further imply that sociocultural scripts continue to shape political legitimacy by coding politics as a predominantly male domain in some circles. These expectations can function as informal constraints on women's candidacy, campaign viability, and constituency mobilization. In addition, weak representation in formal political structures and the relative scarcity of systematic initiatives to develop and sponsor women's political participation may reinforce women's peripheral positioning in the political field.

These constraints affect leadership attainment directly: when political empowerment is only moderate, women's access to authority-bearing roles becomes more contingent and fragile, limiting their influence over policy priorities and the institutionalization of agendas responsive to women's interests and broader societal needs. This reading aligns with regional scholarship that treats women's political underrepresentation as a persistent challenge in GCC contexts despite formal equality commitments.

Second Dimension: Social Empowerment

To examine the social empowerment dimension (Axis 1, Dimension 2), descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated for all associated items. The items were subsequently ranked in descending order according to their mean scores to identify

the strongest and weakest areas of perceived social empowerment, as presented below.

Table 12

Means and Standard Deviations of the Responses of the Sample Members to the Statements of the Second Dimension: Social Empowerment

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank	Response Degree
9	Policies are implemented to protect women's rights in the workplace and ensure equal opportunities and compensation.	3.17	1.209	5	Moderate
10	Financial and technical support is provided to women who want to start businesses and achieve financial independence.	3.31	1.560	4	Moderate
11	Women are encouraged to actively participate in community and cultural activities to enhance their societal role.	3.12	1.440	6	Moderate
12	The importance of NGOs in providing support and advice to women and empowering them socially is emphasized.	3.41	1.406	3	High
13	Equal educational opportunities are provided for women and girls at all levels of education.	3.47	1.638	2	High
14	Awareness campaigns are organized to change negative social perceptions about women's roles and to promote respect for their rights.	3.49	1.654	1	High
15	Current female leaders are encouraged to be role models and examples for future generations.	3.09	1.254	7	Moderate
The overall mean		3.30	.538	Moderate	

The social empowerment dimension recorded a mean of 3.30 (SD = 0.538), indicating moderate level of agreement. This suggests that social empowerment is viewed as present but bounded—supported

in some areas while constrained by persistent normative and institutional barriers that regulate women's authority and public participation.

Ratings reflect the continuing influence of role expectations that prioritize women's family and care responsibilities, limiting time, mobility, and perceived "fit" for authority-bearing roles. In line with social role theory, these gendered scripts can reduce organizational support for women's advancement and sustain underrepresentation in decision-making, positioning women's leadership as conditional or exceptional.

Findings also imply constraints in opportunity structures, including limited access to structured professional development, mentoring, and sponsorship (e.g., supervisory support and leadership-track training). When such mechanisms are weak, competence does not translate into promotion and leadership authority at the same pace as it does for men. Overall, the results indicate that constraints on social empowerment are not only attitudinal, but also organizational, embedded in advancement pathways and institutional practices—consistent with research showing that gendered norms and structural arrangements can preserve male dominance even as women's participation increases.

Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 examines perceived challenges constraining Kuwaiti women's political and social empowerment and how these constraints affect leadership attainment. To address it, means and standard deviations were calculated for all Axis 2 items (Perceived challenges constraining empowerment and access to leadership) and ranked in descending order to identify the most salient constraints, as presented below.

Table 13

Means and Standard Deviations of the Responses of the Sample Members to the Statements of the Second Axis: Actual Challenges Facing “Political and Social Empowerment” for Kuwaiti Women in Assuming Leadership Positions

No.	Statement	M	SD	Rank	Response Degree
16	The existence of cultural legacies that hinder women’s participation in politics and society.	3.72	1.204	2	High
17	Higher unemployment rates among women compared to men.	3.58	1.385	5	High
18	Insufficient funding and financial support for “Women’s empowerment” projects and programs.	3.70	1.367	3	High
19	Workplace discrimination and bias hinder women’s advancement.	3.70	1.609	4	High
20	Familial and societal challenges that limit women’s freedom and independence.	3.33	1.554	6	Moderate
	Some laws and regulations may be inadequate or unfair in supporting women’s rights.	3.20	1.601	7	Moderate
21	Establishment of support networks for women across various sectors to exchange experiences and provide mutual support.	4.10	1.188	1	High
The Overall mean		3.62	.698		High

Axis 2 (perceived challenges) produced an overall mean of 3.62 ($SD = 0.70$), indicating a high level of agreement. This shows that respondents viewed constraints on Kuwaiti women’s political and social empowerment—and on leadership access—as substantial rather than marginal.

Substantively, the high score aligns with structural and feminist accounts that frame gender inequality as sustained through interacting legal, institutional, and sociocultural mechanisms. Respondents’

perceptions suggest that legal–institutional arrangements may still narrow women’s political and leadership space by limiting participation, political engagement, and the practical viability of candidacy and advancement. These constraints may operate through formal regulations and through organizational practices that shape recruitment, promotion, and appointment.

Results for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 examines the future-oriented reforms and institutional practices perceived as most promising for strengthening Kuwaiti women’s political and social empowerment and widening leadership pathways.

To address this question, means and standard deviations were computed for all items in Axis 3 (Future Vision: Reforms and Institutional Practices for Enhancing Political and Social Empowerment and Expanding leadership Access). Items were then ranked in descending order according to their mean scores to identify the most strongly endorsed reform priorities, as presented below.

Table 14

Means and Standard Deviations for Responses to Axis 3 Items (Future Visions to Enhance Kuwaiti Women’s Political and Social Empowerment and Expand Leadership Attainment)

No.	Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	Response Degree
23	Developing online educational platforms that offer training and awareness programs for women.	4.06	1.428	4	High
24	Launching incentive programs to encourage women to run for political and leadership positions.	4.15	1.079	3	High

Cont. Table 14

Means and Standard Deviations for Responses to Axis 3 Items (Future Visions to Enhance Kuwaiti Women's Political and Social Empowerment and Expand Leadership Attainment)

No.	Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	Response Degree
25	Establishing international partnerships to support empowerment programs and exchange expertise and resources.	4.47	1.093	1	Very high
26	Amending laws to ensure the protection and empowerment of women in various fields.	4.30	1.140	2	Very high
27	Using modern media channels to raise awareness about the importance of women's political empowerment and promote female leadership.	3.86	1.359	5	High
28	Strengthening cooperation with civil society organizations to support "Women's empowerment" programs and enhance their impact in the political arena.	3.69	1.381	6	High
29	Launching motivational campaigns to encourage women to run for political and leadership positions.	3.33	1.408	7	Moderate
The Overall Mean		3.98	.501		High

The descriptive results indicated that Axis 3 yielded an overall mean of 3.98 ($SD = 0.501$), reflecting a high level of agreement. This suggests strong endorsement for future-oriented reforms and institutional practices aimed at strengthening Kuwaiti women's political and social empowerment and expanding leadership pathways.

Substantively, the high means indicate that respondents view change as both necessary and feasible, particularly through a combined strategy that addresses norms and institutions simultaneously.

Normative change was implicitly linked to sustained public education, structured social dialogue, and awareness initiatives that reposition women's leadership as consistent with national development priorities and shared societal values. At the same time, respondents' perceptions point to the importance of institutional reform—strengthening legal frameworks, expanding leadership development infrastructures, and embedding gender-inclusive governance practices—so that women's educational and professional gains convert more reliably into authority-bearing roles. The rising visibility of highly educated Kuwaiti women and their demonstrated competence across sectors was also perceived as reinforcing social confidence in women's leadership and increasing openness to reform-oriented best practices.

Summary of Findings

The results show a three-part pattern in public perceptions of Kuwaiti women's empowerment and leadership access. First, respondents rated the impact of political and social empowerment on leadership attainment as moderate (Axis 1: $M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.44$), indicating qualified agreement that empowerment matters but is not consistently realized in practice.

Second, perceived challenges were rated high (Axis 2: $M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.70$), suggesting that legal–institutional arrangements, organizational gatekeeping, and sociocultural expectations remain substantial constraints even when women have relevant qualifications. These perceptions also differed significantly by educational level, $F(2, 373) = 13.12$, $p = .001$, implying that educational capital shapes how respondents recognize and judge the severity of barriers.

Third, respondents strongly endorsed future-oriented reforms (Axis 3: $M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.501$), signaling broad belief that change is necessary and feasible—especially through reforms that address institutions and norms together.

Overall, the findings point to a conversion gap: empowerment is recognized as important, yet structural and normative bottlenecks—experienced and interpreted differently across educational groups—continue to limit its translation into authority-bearing leadership roles.

Discussion

RQ1. Perceived empowerment and its relationship to leadership attainment

Respondents rated empowerment's contribution to leadership attainment as moderate (Axis 1: $M = 3.33$), which aligns with Kuwait- and GCC-focused scholarship describing progress in women's education, employment, and visibility without proportional expansion in high-impact decision-making authority (Ali, 2019; LSE Middle East Centre, 2021; Alzuabi, 2016). The results support empowerment-to-leadership interpretation: empowerment may increase participation, but leadership attainment depends on whether institutions and organizations allow women's resources (skills, experience, and networks) to convert into authority.

RQ2. Constraints shaping empowerment and leadership pathways

Axis 2 showed high perceived constraints ($M = 3.62$), corroborating feminist and critical accounts that gender inequality persists through interacting sociocultural, organizational, and legal-institutional mechanisms (Turner & Maschi, 2015; Nkansah, 2023). Respondents' high ratings suggest that barriers are systemic: they include legitimacy burdens, reputational risk, gatekeeping networks, unequal access to advancement infrastructures, and procedural constraints that shape recruitment, promotion, and political viability. This is consistent with work emphasizing that public narratives and

institutional arrangements can jointly restrict women's leadership pathways even under reform-oriented discourse (Müller & Camia, 2023; Dashti et al., 2023; Kaya, 2021).

In relation to RQ2, the results show that perceived constraints on women's empowerment and leadership access are not only rated as high at the aggregate level (Axis 2: $M = 3.62$), but also vary significantly by educational level ($F(2, 373) = 13.12, p = .001$). This pattern suggests that perceptions of structural and sociocultural barriers are socially patterned rather than uniform, consistent with critical and social role frameworks in which opportunity structures and legitimacy regimes are interpreted differently across groups with differing educational exposure, institutional literacy, and labor-market proximity. Substantively, these differences help contextualize why the empowerment-to-leadership pathway was judged only "moderate" in Axis 1: even where empowerment indicators are perceived to exist, high—and unevenly perceived—constraints may limit the convertibility of women's capabilities into authority-bearing leadership roles.

RQ3. Reform priorities and future visions

Axis 3 yielded high endorsement for future reforms ($M = 3.98$), indicating strong perceived feasibility for change through combined strategies—legal reform, institutional capacity-building, and norm-change initiatives. This matches the literature's emphasis that lasting empowerment outcomes require both structural reform and cultural change, rather than isolated interventions (Aref & Fallentine, 2024; Gulf Research Center, 2023; UN Women, 2017). The results suggest support for reforms that improve institutional integrity—fairness, transparency, and accountability—so that women's qualifications translate more reliably into leadership authority.

Integrated Interpretation

The combined pattern (moderate empowerment effect + high challenges + high reform endorsement) provides a coherent explanation: empowerment gains are perceived as real but partial, while leadership outcomes remain constrained by opportunity-structure bottlenecks and gendered legitimacy regimes. This reinforces the study's central contribution—identifying empowerment as a pathway whose effectiveness depends on whether institutions and norms enable or block conversion into leadership.

Implications and Recommendations

Practical Implications

The findings indicate that reducing women's leadership constraints requires interventions that address both procedural bottlenecks (institutional rules and organizational systems) and normative legitimacy barriers (cultural expectations and reputational constraints). Policy reforms should therefore (a) strengthen the legal-regulatory environment that shapes women's participation and leadership access; (b) institutionalize transparent and gender-fair recruitment, promotion, and appointment procedures; and (c) expand pipeline mechanisms (mentoring, sponsorship, leadership development) that reduce dependence on informal gatekeeping. Organizationally, the results imply the need for enforceable equal-opportunity systems and anti-harassment mechanisms that protect women's participation climates and reduce the costs of visibility. Socially, the findings support community-facing dialogue and public education that connects women's leadership to national development priorities and shared values, while partnerships with international organizations can strengthen benchmarking, capacity-building, and institutional learning.

Study Contributions

This study provides a Kuwait-specific account of how empowerment, constraints, and reform priorities connect within an empowerment-to-leadership pathway, moving beyond broad Gulf generalizations. By foregrounding empirically grounded public perceptions, it clarifies how structural barriers and legitimacy regimes restrict the convertibility of women's competencies into authority-bearing leadership positions. The study also strengthens the literature by drawing perspectives across diverse backgrounds and governorates, ensuring the analysis remains locally situated and policy-relevant.

Recommendations

- Implementing sustained awareness and educational initiatives that challenge gendered leadership stereotypes and recalibrate public expectations about women's authority and decision-making.
- Strengthening and updating laws and regulatory policies to expand women's rights and ensure enforceable protection across employment, education, and political participation.
- Institutionalizing leadership pipeline pathways through training, mentoring, sponsorship, and continuous professional education to support progression into senior managerial and public leadership roles.
- Enhancing transparency, procedural fairness, and accountability in selection and promotion systems, and embedding good-governance standards to reduce informal gatekeeping.
- Strengthening cross-sector coordination among government, private institutions, and civil society to deliver integrated empowerment interventions rather than fragmented initiatives.

- Expanding economic autonomy by improving access to resources through tailored financing (e.g., low-barrier loans, enterprise support) to support leadership readiness.
- Promoting systematic media representation of successful Kuwaiti women leaders and considering time-bound affirmative mechanisms (e.g., targeted quotas or parity benchmarks) where executive and political underrepresentation persists.

Future Research Directions

- Examining how digital transformation and platform-mediated participation (online civic engagement, digital campaigning, and social media visibility) reshape empowerment and leadership trajectories in Kuwait.
- Developing and validating an integrated framework specifying political and social empowerment requirements that predict leadership attainment, including institutional, organizational, and sociocultural mediators.
- Conducting comparative analyses of Kuwait's legal frameworks, public acceptance patterns, and women's political representation relative to other GCC/Arab contexts to identify transferable reforms and context-specific constraints.
- Investigating enablers and inhibitors of women's entrepreneurship and leadership in the GCC, focusing on advisory ecosystems, institutional support, organizational culture, and access to finance and sponsorship networks.

Conclusion

This study shows that public perceptions in Kuwait not only recognize empowerment as an important condition for women's lead-

ership attainment, but also view the pathway as constrained by significant structural and sociocultural barriers. The moderate perceived empowerment effect (Axis 1) alongside high perceived challenges (Axis 2) indicates that progress in participation does not automatically translate into authority. At the same time, strong endorsement of future reforms (Axis 3) suggests a high level of public readiness for change through combined institutional and normative strategies. Accordingly, expanding women's leadership pathways in Kuwait requires integrated action: enforceable legal and procedural reforms, transparent leadership selection systems, institutionalized mentoring and sponsorship pipelines, protective workplace governance, and sustained norm-change initiatives. Future research should deepen this model by examining mediators and testing how institutional reforms and digital participation reshape leadership conversion over time.

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