

# Cooptation in Practice: Measuring Legislative Opposition in an Authoritarian Regime

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## Abstract

Canonical theories of legislative institutions in authoritarian regimes highlight the role of oppositions in legitimizing non-democratic rule, shaping the autocrat’s policy agenda, and extracting concessions. Despite recent advances in understanding how oppositions shape larger, macro-level outcomes, surprisingly little attention has been given to the question of how legislators behave in office and how the regime manages potential opposition. In this paper, we construct a novel dataset of roll call vote records spanning the entirety of Kuwaiti legislative history—more than 150,000 votes over 53 years. We use this to develop a new method for measuring legislative opposition to and cooperation with an authoritarian regime on substantive policy issues. We then test the effectiveness of regime strategies—rents and policy concessions—for coopting potential opposition and examine the circumstances under which these strategies are used. We find that both mechanisms are effective in soliciting policy cooperation, though they have very different normative implications.<sup>1</sup>

Keywords: authoritarian regimes; roll call voting; Middle East; Kuwait; opposition; legislature; cooptation

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# 1 Introduction

Foundational work in comparative politics considers the central political conflict in autocracy to be one between a small group of autocratic elites (the ruling coalition) and the much larger population over which it rules. Autocrats endeavor to solve this dilemma—what Svoboda (2012) describes as “the problem of authoritarian control”—in one of two ways. They may rely on repression, or “the actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization” (Davenport 2007). Alternatively, they may rely on cooptation, a process through which incumbents induce conformity toward the consensus of the ruling coalition (Stacher 2012).

The proliferation of legislatures across autocracies provides incumbent autocrats and their ruling coalitions with the ability to institutionalize this process and strengthen the credibility of their commitments to those outside the ruling coalition. In other words, legislatures allow these actors to manage “potential” opposition, or a broader class of actors outside the ruling coalition whose conformity sustains authoritarian rule. Cooptation provides autocrats and their ruling coalitions with a powerful and resilient solution to the problem of authoritarian control.

Research on legislatures in these contexts has generated a number of plausible explanations for how the establishment of legislative institutions facilitates cooptation and induces the conformity incumbent autocrats require to control the subjects over which they rule. In particular, the logic of cooptation theory emphasizes forms of limited and controlled political competition that present opportunities for incumbent autocrats to exert less coercive forms of control. Cooptation works because it allows incumbent autocrats and their ruling coalitions to manage outside actors’ access to the state and create regular expectations about the benefits of this access. Today, most authoritarian regimes host elected legislatures with lawmaking power. These legislatures are structured similarly to their democratic counterparts—though they typically possess reduced political authority and autonomy.

Despite the ubiquity of legislatures in autocracies, there is much that is poorly understood about the mechanisms that facilitate cooptation *within* these institutions. A key puzzle remains: once it has established a legislature and granted it law-making power, how does an autocrat and his ruling coalition ensure that those elected will cooperate with its policy agenda? In a seminal paper, Gandhi & Przeworski (2006) outline two regime strategies for soliciting cooperation: economic rents

and policy concessions. Though they offer theoretically robust explanations for the use of these two strategies, a strong empirical test of their arguments has not been conducted. This is due primarily to data limitations, the inherent difficulty in measuring cooperation, and the private nature of elite exchange in authoritarian contexts.

Broadly, cooptation refers to processes that induce conformity among a broader class of actors outside the ruling coalition. In this paper, we use the above strategic mechanisms—economic rents and policy concessions—to provide greater theoretical clarity on processes of *legislative* cooptation, specifically. Previous attempts to evaluate this form of cooptation have assumed that the mere presence of legislatures or political parties outside the ruling coalition is evidence—albeit indirect—of cooptation (Gandhi & Przeworski 2006; Gandhi 2008; Jensen et al. 2014; Frantz & Kendall-Taylor 2014). By focusing on *legislative* cooptation, or what happens after legislators are elected and within the legislature itself, we provide a more fine-grained test of existing assumptions about cooptation. To date, theorizing at this level of analysis has been far more limited.

We present a novel set of comprehensive historical data on legislator behavior in the Kuwait National Assembly (KNA) in order to more rigorously evaluate these assumptions and better understand the micrologic of legislative cooptation. We collect roll call votes on all successfully passed legislation in Kuwaiti history, totaling more than 150,000 individual votes across over 3,000 laws passed from 1963 to 2016. These data cover fifteen legislative terms and represent the most comprehensive dataset of this kind from within an autocracy. We exploit a unique feature of the KNA: the presence of members of the ruling coalition (the Council of Ministers, or cabinet) as *ex officio*, voting members of the legislature. We use this feature of the KNA to identify the regime’s preference on each policy and create a novel measure of policy cooperation: whether legislators vote with or against the ruling coalition.

We next use this to conduct tests of our theorized principles of legislative cooptation. Do long-standing strategic mechanisms common in cooptation theory—economic rents and policy concessions—effectively induce cooperation with the ruling coalition? To what extent are these strategic mechanisms substitutable? The granular nature of these data allow us to observe whether or not elected legislators cooperate with unelected representatives of the ruling coalition in the KNA. We use exogenous fluctuations in oil prices (as well as government revenues) to assess whether or not economic rents predict cooperation with the ruling coalition on individual legislation within each of

the KNA’s 15 legislative terms since 1963. We also use the appointment of members of ideological groups to the Council of Ministers as evidence of policy concessions and assess whether or not the provision of these concessions predict cooperation with the ruling coalition among elected legislators representing these ideological groups. We then turn our attention to the regime’s strategic behavior, examining when it is more likely to use economic rents versus policy concessions, and which actors these strategic mechanisms can be deployed to effectively coopt.

We find evidence that both rents and policy concessions are effective in facilitating legislative cooptation. A standard increase in oil revenues increases policy voting cooperation by 1.5 percentage points; a single ministry appointment has a roughly equivalent effect among deputies affiliated with ideological groups. And there are signs that the regime uses these actions strategically, particularly ministry appointments. The Kuwaiti cabinet has incorporated an increasingly diverse set of ideological factions, despite the lack of requirement that it be representative of the legislature.

This research adds to a growing body of work investigating the inner workings of authoritarian legislatures, particularly as new sources of data emerge from within these regimes (Gandhi et al. 2020). Though previous scholarship often describes these institutions as “rubber stamp” bodies that serve the personal whims of incumbents (Brancati 2014), researchers are increasingly recognizing the importance of these institutions in responding to citizen needs (Distelhorst & Hou 2017), representing citizen interests on non-sensitive issues (Truex 2016), and moderating protest and dissent (Reuter & Robertson 2015). Yet the particular dynamic we study here—substantive cooperation with the ruling coalition’s policy agenda—is novel both for the comprehensiveness of the data used, covering the entirety of Kuwaiti legislative history, and the unique level of insight our empirical strategy provides into the micrologic of *legislative* cooptation. This offers a new and vastly more precise look into the internal workings of legislatures in authoritarian contexts.

We also provide evidence of a possible mechanism linking oil wealth and the durability of autocratic regimes (Ross 2012). Other studies have argued that resource wealth allows regimes to provide patronage and public goods without the citizen demands for accountability incurred by taxation (Crystal 1995; Ross 2001). Here, we suggest rents facilitate the cooperation not only of the public, but also of those elected to represent their interests—the political elite. The finding that legislative support varies with the amount of oil revenues also reveals the limitations of a rentier state based on such a volatile commodity.

## 2 Cooptation Theory and Strategic Mechanisms

In response to the growing number of hybrid regimes globally, scholars have generated several explanations for why autocrats establish legislative institutions. These include arguments that such institutions allow autocrats to share power among members of the ruling coalition (Boix & Svobik 2013), “rubber stamp” initiatives that provide domestic and international legitimacy, and coopt members of the potential opposition. Most prominent among these arguments is the last: cooptation theory. Broadly, cooptation is a process through which incumbent autocrats induce conformity toward the consensus of a ruling coalition’s executive elites (Stacher 2012, pp. 112). In the remainder of this section, we review the literature on cooptation theory, address a key shortcoming of existing studies, and present a set of hypotheses subsequent sections will evaluate.

Legislative institutions in autocracies allow autocrats to share power and credibly commit to rule jointly with existing allies and potential opposition. But once incumbent autocrats establish these institutions, another problem emerges: how do autocrats ensure elected legislators cooperate with the ruling coalition and support its policy agenda? We build on cooptation theory to develop a research design that allows us to evaluate how autocrats secure cooperation through *legislative* cooptation. In a seminal study, Gandhi & Przeworski (2006) propose two distinct mechanisms through which cooptation induces cooperation: rents (direct payments to rival elites) and policy concessions. Though they offer clear theoretical predictions, Gandhi & Przeworski lack a strong empirical test of their argument. In particular, they treat the mere existence of political parties in legislatures as evidence of cooptation.<sup>2</sup> The presence of elected legislators from political parties outside the ruling coalition provides sufficient—though indirect—evidence of cooptation. It may be the case that these particular legislators outside the ruling coalition can be controlled once in the legislature. But we do not know specifically why, or how, these particular legislators are coopted once they are elected and acquire the policy-making authorities of their office. More specifically, there is far less clarity on the conditions under which cooptation takes place.

We propose a more fine-grained approach to understanding cooptation. We acknowledge that the representation of political parties outside the ruling coalition in the legislature is plausible

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<sup>2</sup>Other subsequent studies make a similar assumption. For example, Gandhi (2008, pp. 92), Jensen et al. (2014), and Frantz & Kendall-Taylor (2014) measures the degree of cooptation by counting the number of political parties that exist in a given legislature.

evidence of cooptation. But it is *within* these institutions—in exchanges between the regime and individual legislators—where the more narrowly defined process of *legislative* cooptation takes place. That is to say, first, a regime establishes legislative institutions and holds elections. Then, it engages in legislative cooptation with these elected legislators by exchanging rents and policy concessions for their cooperation in the policy-making process. Our aim is to better understand the conditions of these exchanges between the regime and these individual legislators.

We propose that the regime offers both rents and policy concessions in exchange for cooperation, conditional on its own preferences and those of elected legislators. We are not the first to point out that rents are distributed to legislators; as others argue, candidates in autocratic elections compete for access to a variety of perks exclusive to elected positions, including business opportunities and personal payments (Blaydes 2011; Reuter & Robertson 2015). But these are not the only benefits of office, and candidates differ in how they value these opportunities. Some candidates may be office-seeking, interested merely in the personal perks that come from their closeness to the ruling coalition. Others seek election because they value opportunities to extract policy concessions from the ruling coalition.<sup>3</sup> The distribution of candidates (who runs) will in general be endogenous to the institutional setting and the goods available. For example, in polities where the legislature has comparatively less political authority, we might expect fewer candidates to prioritize policy concessions, since these are harder to extract in these settings.<sup>4</sup> In the context we examine here, both rents and policy concessions are plausible benefits of office and both candidate types are represented in the Kuwait National Assembly, as evidenced by the participation of members of ideological blocs (see section 4.3) in addition to regime insiders such as former oil executives.

Recent studies have uncovered the “micrologic” of cooptation by evaluating the nature of legislator behavior in these contexts and uncovering the mechanisms that generate cooperation with the ruling coalition. But these studies have tended to focus on less costly mechanisms of legislator influence, such as amendments (Noble 2018), query sessions (Malesky & Schuler 2010), and committee assignments (Reuter & Robertson 2015).

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<sup>3</sup>We intend for the “office-seeking” and “policy-seeking” labels to refer to archetypes along a spectrum. In practice, individual politicians value both types of concessions and the degree to which they are more or less policy-seeking is a matter of the relative weight they apply to each type.

<sup>4</sup>The Egyptian legislature that Blaydes (2011) characterizes may be one example of a legislative body where there are few opportunities for policy-seeking actors and where we would correspondingly expect comparatively fewer of them to seek office.

## 2.1 The logic of legislative cooptation

Electoral malfeasance is a common feature of contemporary autocracies. Efforts to undermine elections include the restriction of certain candidates, gerrymandering and the manipulation of district boundaries, and vote buying, among others. These measures ensure that elected legislators are as friendly as possible to the ruling coalition. But once elections have been held at the beginning of a legislative term, the set of players in the legislative bargaining game is fixed and legislator behavior is less predictable. At this point, the ruling coalition must find a way to induce cooperation among legislators present in the legislature.

The logic and dynamics of cooptation can be extended to a range of settings in autocracies: before and during elections, within and between political parties, and in society at large (such as the cooptation of various sectoral or social interest groups). Our aim in this paper is to focus exclusively on *legislative* cooptation, which we define as the intentional exchange of economic rents or policy concessions to legislators in exchange for compliance with the autocrat’s policy agenda.<sup>5</sup> This definition is consistent with broader conceptualizations of cooptation, which focus on how incumbents induce conformity toward the consensus of the ruling coalition. But we focus solely on how incumbent autocrats induce this conformity *within* the legislature itself, after its members have been elected.

Legislatures contain a diverse set of legislators with varying demand for the different perks that the ruling coalition is equipped to provide (economic rents and policy concessions). Though the balance of power in these settings is skewed in favor of the ruling coalition, the fact that legislative approval is required to pass new laws gives individual legislators some bargaining power. As a result, the ruling coalition requires the cooperation of legislators *within* the legislature—in voting in alignment with its preferences—to ensure its policy agenda is enacted. Some elected legislators are more amenable to this exchange than others, and their cooperation may be cheaper (or costless) to obtain.

The regime has both carrots and sticks at its disposal to induce conformity with its policy agenda vis-a-vis the legislature. Among the latter, we would include executive authorities such as

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<sup>5</sup>We borrow here from Frantz & Kendall-Taylor (2014, pp. 333), who define cooptation as “the intentional extension of benefits to potential challengers to the regime in exchange for their loyalty” (pp. 333). In addition, we borrow from (Gandhi & Przeworski 2006, pp. 2) who argue that autocrats have “two instruments to mobilize cooperation and to prevent rebellion: policy concessions and distribution of rents.”

the ability to dissolve a legislature or declare a state of emergency as well as vetoes and executive orders that may supersede laws passed. But in practice, these ‘sticks’ are costly and risky to employ. If overly public or repressive, they may threaten regime legitimacy both domestically and internationally. In such cases, it may be preferable to the regime use carrots: the economic rents and policy concessions that, if cleverly deployed, ensure that the legislature cooperates with the ruling coalition.<sup>6</sup>

In the real world of authoritarian policymaking, it is difficult to assess the centrality of economic rents and policy concessions to cooptation for several reasons. First, data from these legislatures is rarely made public and almost always difficult to obtain. Few autocracies publish data on the activities of individual legislators and their voting behavior in office. Even where data on legislator behavior is available, there is a second challenge to the empirical assessment of cooptation: uncertainty about the underlying preferences of legislators and the absence of visibility into offers (economic rents or policy concessions) from the ruling coalition. Due to the sensitive nature of these exchanges, both autocrats and legislators have incentives to conceal their preferences and the nature of their interactions from the public. Legislators and autocrats do not publicly disclose when rents or concessions have been exchanged for cooperation. In practice, we may only observe whether a legislator supports the regime agenda (successful cooptation) or opposes it (cooptation failure).

Though we cannot observe legislators’ private preferences or the processes that precede their public behaviors, we instead propose that changes in the ruling coalition’s use of economic rents and policy concessions provides an opportunity to empirically assess the efficacy of legislative cooptation. To do so, we focus on the use and effect of these mechanisms on legislator cooperation with the ruling coalition within a legislature. Our first two hypotheses spell out the purported efficacy of these two mechanisms. First, we consider the effect of economic rents on cooperation with the autocrat’s policy agenda. Here, we focus on the marginal value of cash to the regime, rather than the actual distribution or provision of economic rents to individual legislators:

*H<sub>1</sub>: More rents available to the regime will be associated with greater cooperation with the autocrat and ruling coalition’s policy agenda.*

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<sup>6</sup>Even in cases where policies are not at risk of failure to pass, there is reason to expect the regime to obtain added support so as to give its policies a stronger mandate in the public eye. In other words, while the regime may require majority support to minimally satisfy its policy objectives, its utility may be increasing in the level of support.



Second, we consider the effect of policy concessions on cooperation:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Evidence of policy concessions granted to legislators will be associated with greater cooperation with the autocrat and ruling coalition’s policy agenda.*

These two hypotheses link mechanisms of legislative cooptation to voting behavior in office. We further argue that legislator ‘type’ influences the marginal effectiveness of these strategies. That is to say, these two strategic mechanisms will be differentially effective in inducing cooperation among different types of legislators because legislators place different weights on both economic rents and policy concessions. For rent-seeking legislators, we expect that policy concessions are of little interest.<sup>7</sup> Correspondingly, we expect that for policy-seeking legislators, rents are of lower marginal utility. We thus expect policy-seeking legislators to exhibit greater levels of cooperation when the ruling coalition makes greater use of policy concessions vis-a-vis economic rents (and vice versa).

*H<sub>3</sub>: When more (fewer) rents are available, less (more) ideological politicians will be most likely to be coopted.*

### 3 Context

#### 3.1 Background: Kuwait National Assembly

Scholars of the Middle East view the Kuwait National Assembly (KNA) as the strongest legislative institution among the autocratic Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, if not the entire Arab World (Zaccara 2013; Shalaby 2015; Freer 2018).<sup>8</sup> The 1962 Constitution establishes a political system described as “a hereditary Emirate held in succession in the descendants of Mubarak Al-Sabah,” (Article 4) with a “separation and cooperation of powers” between the executive and legislative branches (Article 50). Executive power is vested in the Emir, who appoints a prime minister and approves his Council of Ministers (cabinet). Legislative power is vested in both the

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<sup>7</sup>However, it is difficult to identify true rent-seeking legislatures. In this case, we are only able to distinguish between those with clear policy-seeking preferences and those whose policy preferences are unknown. We are thus limited in our ability to test this prediction empirically.

<sup>8</sup>The causal origin of legislative strength in Kuwait is the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Explanations include the existence of a politically assertive merchant class before the discovery of oil (Crystal 1995; Salih 1992; Al-Nakib 2014); the geopolitical tension created by the recurrent threat of Iraqi annexation (Smith 1999; Herb 2016); and on more equitable indigenous institutions, particularly the historical role of the Emir as *primus inter pares* [first among equals] (Zahlan 1998; Longva 1999).

Emir and the National Assembly (Article 51). Kuwait resembles other hybrid regimes with elected legislatures and unelected, or hereditary, executives, with one key exception. After the investiture of a new Emir, the National Assembly must, by majority vote, approve his choice of Crown Prince. Kuwait epitomizes constitutional monarchism, with the exception that the Emir—rather than the legislature—retains the right to appoint the prime minister and Council of Ministers (cabinet). In this sense, Kuwait is “neither an archetypal hereditary emirate nor a full-fledged pluralistic polity” (Ulrichsen 2014, pp. 229).

The KNA is a unicameral body with fifty members elected by secret ballot every four years across five electoral districts. In addition to the fifty legislators, ministers (members of the Council of Ministers) serve as *ex officio*, voting members of the legislature. Ministers may include members of the ruling Al-Sabah family, elected members of the KNA, and others outside government. The total number of ministers may not exceed one-third the number of elected members of the KNA, or sixteen.<sup>9</sup> After appointing a prime minister, the Emir retains discretionary power to appoint ministers and relieve them of their posts. At any time, the Emir can dissolve the Assembly, provided new elections are held within 60 days. Since the restoration of the Assembly in 1992, only two assemblies have run out their full four-year terms. In the past two decades, there have been nine elections.

### 3.2 Political Cleavages in Kuwait

Kuwait is a communally diverse autocracy, and electoral competition occurs between discrete groups. Group membership is defined by sect (*Sunni* and *Shia*) and origin. The salience of origin is rooted in the patterns of migration that contributed to the city’s rise as a thriving commercial settlement. Kuwait City was established in the 18th century, when a group of families known collectively as the Bani ʿUtub migrated from Najd, in present-day Saudi Arabia, to Kuwait. Over time, these families were joined by other migrant families from Iran, Iraq, and elsewhere in Saudi Arabia and along the Gulf littoral. Continuous immigration was key to Kuwait’s growth and expansion: “the more inhabitants there were, the larger was the labor force, and the more Kuwaiti vessels could participate in trading, shipping, and pearling” (Al-Nakib 2016, pp. 27). These families gradually

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<sup>9</sup>The size of the cabinet is up to the emir, but in practice, it is typically composed of exactly sixteen ministers—the maximum number allowed—and has never been smaller than twelve ministers (on one occasion in 1971 and another in 1996).

urbanized and integrated themselves into the local economy.

Beginning in the 1960s, the leaders of the newly independent state began settling sedentarizing Bedouin (*badu*) who lived in shantytowns throughout the city's environs. These tribespeople were largely relegated to new, large housing projects outside the city. At the same time, the ruling family moved to provide *badu* with citizenship and access to the state: from 1960 to 1980, hundreds of thousands of tribespeople were naturalized, nearly tripling the citizen population from 200,000 to 600,000 (Assiri 1990; Ghabra 1997b; Beaugrand 2017). Like those who migrated to Kuwait, these tribes were not “native” to Kuwait City: they could trace their lineage back to various Northern and Southern Arabian tribes. These social cleavages combine to divide the country into discrete groups defined by origin and sect—and these group affiliations persist to this day.

Religion and origin shape the communal attachments that organize both social and electoral life in Kuwait. But so, too, do various ideological forces. National-liberal and Islamist political associations proliferated in Kuwait even before independence. In many ways, the strength and resilience of the KNA is itself a product of the diversity of civic and associational life. As a result, Kuwait boasts “the most vociferous and powerful system of political participation among the six Gulf States” (Baaklini et al. 1999, pp. 216). Despite the diversity of civic and associational life, institutionalized political parties do not exist: though these ideological groups have developed into what Kraetzschmar (2018) describes as “proto-parties” that participate in elections and win seats in the KNA.

Table 1: MP and Minister Characteristics, 1963-2016

	Elected Legislators	Ministers
<i>Age (mean)</i>	46.5	49.1
<i>Female</i>	0.01	0.04
<i>Education: Known</i>	0.72	0.82
<i>Secondary</i>	0.26	0.19
<i>Bachelor</i>	0.46	0.47
<i>Post-graduate</i>	0.28	0.34
<i>Ideological Affiliation</i>		
<i>None</i>	0.62	0.79
<i>National Liberal</i>	0.14	0.07
<i>Left-Populist</i>	0.03	0.00
<i>Muslim Brotherhood</i>	0.05	0.07
<i>Salafi</i>	0.05	0.03
<i>Ind. Islamist</i>	0.07	0.03
<i>Shia Islamist</i>	0.04	0.01
<i>Tribal Affiliation</i>	0.48	0.13
<i>Shia</i>	0.14	0.08
<i>Al-Sabah</i>	0	0.32
<b>Observations</b>	<b>786</b>	<b>331</b>

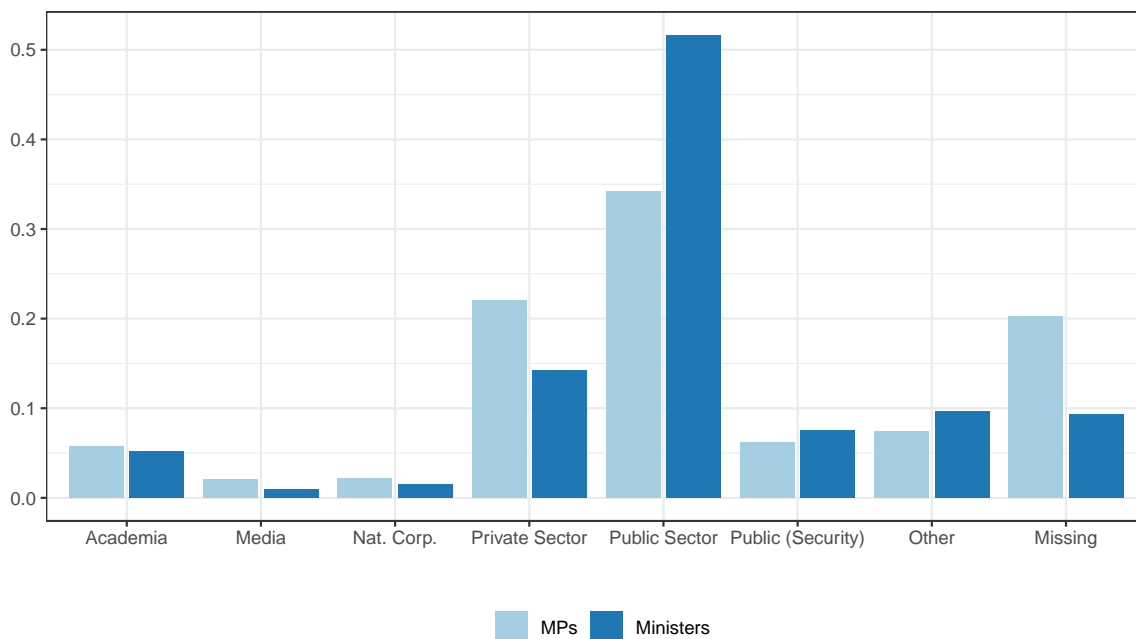
*Note:* Table compares demographic attributes of legislators and ministers represented in the KNA through 2016. The unit of analysis is the individual-term level (meaning legislators elected to multiple terms appear multiple times in the dataset). Age is represented as a numeric mean based on the individual’s age at the time he took office; all other attributes are represented in proportional terms. Al-Sabah indicates a member of the ruling family. Source: *Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes (KNA-RCV)* dataset.

In general, the KNA includes a diverse (though not necessarily representative) range of individuals. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on elected legislators and appointed ministers from 1963 to 2016. Both legislators and ministers are relatively well-educated with a majority attaining undergraduate or post-graduate degrees, many from western universities. The KNA also includes Kuwait’s social and political groups; notably, ideological groups are better represented in the KNA than among cabinet ministers. Women, on the other hand, are nearly absent from both bodies.<sup>10</sup> Both legislators and ministers represent a diverse set of occupational backgrounds (Figure 1). Unsurprisingly given Kuwaiti employment patterns, public sector careers are the most common. Yet around half of elected legislators were otherwise employed, coming to the KNA from the private sector, academia, or other careers including medicine and media. Collectively, these statistics con-

<sup>10</sup>Women were not given the right to vote or run for office until 2005.

firm that the KNA is a relatively diverse institution incorporating ideologically-oriented individuals as well as a range of other business and occupational sectors.

Figure 1: Occupational Backgrounds of Kuwaiti Ministers and Legislators



*Note:* Primary occupational background of ministers and legislators represented in the KNA or Council of Ministers between 1963 and 2016. Proportions are calculated at the individual-term level (N of 786 legislators and 331 ministers). National corporation category includes the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and Kuwait Airways. Source: *Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes (KNA-RCV)* dataset.

### 3.3 Legislative Procedure and Policymaking in the KNA

Scholars of Kuwaiti politics view the KNA as providing input into an Al-Sabah-dominated policy process in two important ways. First, the ruling family can use the panoply of social and ideological forces in the KNA against each other in an effort to ensure balance. This prevents any one group from obtaining too much power and threatening the regime itself—effectively a divide-and-rule strategy designed to ensure social peace (Azoulay 2015; Allarakia 2016) and similar to the strategies of autocrats in other contexts. Second, the KNA encourages an indigenous spirit of consultation underwritten by the constitutional requirement that all laws and decrees must be approved by the body (Khalaf 1984; Tetreault 1991). This is not to suggest that there is no conflict in the KNA—there is. But legislators and ministers must work together in order to approve legislation.

As described above, the most unique feature of the legislative process is the presence of ministers (members of the Council of Ministers, or cabinet) as *ex officio*, voting members in the KNA. The legislative prerogatives of the Council of Ministers shape legislative activity and compel ministers to work with elected legislators in an effort to pass legislation. Members of the Council of Ministers—regardless of their status as members of the ruling family, elected legislators, or others—tend to vote as a distinct bloc. This feature of the KNA provides analysts and observers of Kuwaiti politics with tremendous insight into how the Council of Ministers (and by extension, the Emir) feel about a particular piece of legislation.

## 4 Data and Approach

To test our hypotheses about strategies of cooptation and their effectiveness, we develop a dataset of historical roll call voting in the KNA. The Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes dataset includes individual roll call votes for successful legislation passed by the KNA from 1963 to 2016. To collect these data, we first downloaded digitized .pdf files of legislative transcripts from the Kuwait National Assembly Archive.<sup>11</sup> A total of 3,595 laws were passed by the KNA from 1963 to 2016. With significant support from a team of research assistants, we then identified the roll call voting record for a given law in the transcripts and hand coded each minister and elected legislator’s vote. We successfully identified records for 3,337 laws (0.928 percent). We describe the data collection process in greater detail in Section S.1 in the Supplementary Materials appendix.

We limit our focus to successful legislation for both practical and substantive reasons. First, record-keeping in the KNA makes it logistically impossible to track a single piece of legislation through all stages of the legislative process: bills are not assigned unique identifiers, and, for laws that pass, only the date of the final vote is documented. Additionally, there are substantive reasons to focus on final votes (“second deliberations”, described in greater detail in Section S.1) rather than including all procedural and amendment votes, for which legislator behavior may be driven by a wider range of concerns (such as the timing of a vote or an objection to ending deliberation). Within this category, we might seek to broaden our focus to examine all second deliberations,

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<sup>11</sup>These legislative transcripts are colloquially referred to as “minutes” (*maḍbaṭa*, pl. *maḍābiṭ*) in Kuwait. The full archive consists of 551,605 pages across 2,294 .pdf files (2,188 unique meeting days).

including on legislation that failed to pass,<sup>12</sup> but even such an approach includes a strong selection effect. It is relatively rare for a final vote to fail; as in other legislative institutions, the decision to initiate a final vote is discretionary, and in most cases, the government will avoid the public embarrassment associated with a failed vote by never bringing such a bill to the floor.

Does our ability to measure only final votes on ultimately successful legislation impede our ability to test the hypotheses spelled out in section 2.1? In this paper, we seek to examine and test mechanisms of cooptation rather than the ruling coalition's overall ability to pass legislation that it wants. Our focus is thus on cooptative action taken by the regime and legislator behavior in response. We would expect patterns of cooptation to generalize throughout the legislative process: if the regime is in fact offering economic rents and policy concessions in exchange for cooperation, it likely does so in preceding deliberations, as well. Our focus on final votes allows us to examine the extent of cooperation at a point when decisions are most substantively and directly impactful.

Table 2 displays basic descriptive statistics in voting patterns, summarizing the number of yes, no, and abstain votes by legislators and ministers. In total, the dataset includes 168,474 observations. At first glance, a few patterns are clear. First, absences are relatively common, and ministers are absent more often than elected legislators (45% of the time compared to 31%). We interpret legislator absences as evidence of shirking duty rather than as a form of protest; we find that low attendance rates are negatively correlated with other confrontational actions such as minister queries (Malesky & Schuler 2010) and interpellations. Minister attendance, in contrast, is likely at least in part a strategic action related to the competitiveness of a given vote. A closer vote margin among legislators is associated with a higher number of ministers present, suggesting the regime deploys ministers when it needs the additional votes to ensure legislation is successful.

Second, in contrast to more democratic contexts, the legislature demonstrates a great deal of consensus: the vast majority of votes submitted are in favor of legislation.<sup>13</sup> Noes and abstentions constitute only 7% of total votes cast. And yet, as we will show, there is substantial variation in these quantities at both the term and legislator level. Notably, legislators are significantly more likely than ministers to register a vote of no or abstain. In the next section, we examine voting

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<sup>12</sup>This would also entail insurmountable logistical hurdles given the lack of documentation and identifiers as well as variations in procedure across terms.

<sup>13</sup>There is, of course, a selection effect here in that we are examining only successful legislation, so we derive stronger inference from the comparison between legislator and minister behavior.

patterns among ministers more closely and define our primary outcome variable.

Table 2: Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes dataset, 1963-2016

	<i>N</i>	Mean
Legislator votes		
<i>Yes</i>	84,053	0.63
<i>No</i>	4,082	0.03
<i>Abstain</i>	4,452	0.03
<i>Absent</i>	41,781	0.31
Total Legislator votes	134,368	1.00
Minister votes		
<i>Yes</i>	22,761	0.54
<i>No</i>	204	0.00
<i>Abstain</i>	226	0.01
<i>Absent</i>	18,740	0.45
Total Minister votes	41,931	1.00

*Note:* Table displays the number of yes, no, abstain, and absent votes among legislators and ministers. The total number of roll call votes in the dataset is 168,474. This number does not equal the sum of legislator and minister roll call votes separately, as elected legislators can serve as ministers as well. Source: *Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes (KNA-RCV)* dataset.

#### 4.1 Dependent Variable: Voting with Ministers

To test  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ , we seek to identify whether an elected legislator votes with or against the Council of Ministers (cabinet), or ruling coalition, on each piece of legislation under review. In general, one might identify the regime’s position on a given policy in a number of different ways: by examining the origin of the legislation, through media reporting, or through the votes of elected representatives close to the ruling coalition. Here, we take advantage of the distinctive institutional feature outlined above: the ability of ministers appointed by and accountable to the Emir to vote alongside elected legislators. As in many autocracies, ministerial appointments are at the head of state’s sole discretion. He may remove or replace a minister for any reason and does so with relative frequency; the average term saw five cabinet changes, typically involving the replacement of a single minister.<sup>14</sup> Ministers’ ability to vote on legislation thus provides the ruling coalition

<sup>14</sup>Ministers can also be removed through legislative consensus (an interpellation followed by a vote of no confidence). This is relatively unusual—though, the threat of a successful interpellation and minister removal can compel the regime to take preventative action. And, importantly, though the legislature can in theory force the removal of an unpopular minister, they cannot separately impact the selection of her replacement. In practice, such confrontations sometimes lead instead to the dissolution of the legislature and new elections.



with a way to keep a sometimes truculent legislature in check.<sup>15</sup>

As a result, we expect ministerial votes to reflect the Emir and ruling coalition’s policy preferences, as the Emir could immediately remove and replace a minister that refused to support his preferred policies within the legislature. Consistent with this expectation, analysts have noted that Kuwaiti ministers generally vote as a bloc (i.e. without opposing votes between ministers) on important or high-profile pieces of legislation. We use the KNA-RCV dataset to examine this anticipated voting cohesion across the entire history of successful legislation and find that it is very much the rule: across the 2,693 unique final votes in our dataset, there were only five instances in which active ministers submitted both yes and no votes on a single law. All of these instances took place in 1963—the very first year of KNA history. Since then, there has not been a single instance of vote-splitting among the Council of Ministers (cabinet) on these final votes.

This near-perfect voting cohesion corroborates our expectation that ministers are bound in practice to uphold the position of the Emir and ruling coalition on a given piece of legislation—or at least not openly oppose it.<sup>16</sup> We therefore use minister votes to benchmark the regime and ruling coalition’s preference on a policy, assuming that the regime supports the passage of a piece of legislation if at least one minister votes in favor and none vote against, and opposes it if at least one minister votes against and none vote in favor.<sup>17</sup> The outcome described in  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ —cooperation with the regime—is therefore operationalized as *Cooperation* (voting with the Council of Ministers, or ruling coalition), defined as 1 if an elected legislator votes yes on a policy ministers support or no on a policy they oppose, and 0 otherwise.

## 4.2 Independent Variable: Oil Rents

In  $H_1$ , we predict that more economic rents available to the regime will be associated with increased cooperation with the regime’s policy agenda. We seek to test this on a within-law basis, using oil

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<sup>15</sup>Though we utilize this distinctive feature of the KNA to develop our outcome variable, this is not a scope condition for the argument we develop. We expect the same dynamics in regimes without voting ministers; it may, however, be harder for researchers to ascertain the regime’s true preferences in such cases.

<sup>16</sup>In many cases, ministers are absent during the final vote (see Table 2), and, when present, they occasionally opt to abstain from voting on a particular law. We do see evidence that the number of ministers present correlates with the competitiveness of a law, as measured by the vote margin among MPs. In a small set of cases (30 votes), all ministers present opted to abstain during the final vote. Additionally, there are a handful of cases (eight total votes) in which some of the ministers present cast a valid vote on legislation while others chose to abstain. In all other laws in our dataset, the ministers present were unanimous in support or opposition to the legislation being voted on.

<sup>17</sup>For this analysis, we drop the five cases with mixed voting and the 30 cases in which all ministers present opted to abstain (1% of final votes in our dataset).

prices and revenues at the time of the vote as a proxy for regime funds. Though an ideal measure would directly capture financial transfers and perks transmitted directly to active elected legislators, such financial data are not available in this context.<sup>18</sup> Yet there is reason to expect that they occur regularly outside of public view. A majority of Kuwaitis (64%) believe that there is corruption within state agencies and institutions.<sup>19</sup> In 2011, the revelation that millions of dollars had been transferred into the bank accounts of two elected legislators (and the subsequent investigation into the finances of an additional seven legislators) led to broad public outrage and contributed to the dissolution of the 2009 assembly.<sup>20</sup> So, while it is not possible to identify and track these illicit bank transfers, business dealings, and other off-the-books “perks” distributed to elected legislators, there is ample reason to believe they occur in this context.

And Kuwaiti oil rents plausibly serve as a measure of the revenues available to the regime. Kuwait has the fourth largest oil reserves in the world and derives the majority of its wealth from this resource. There is a long history of oil revenues funding the ruling family, beginning with the remittances received from the newly formed Kuwait Oil Company in 1935 (Crystal 1992, p. 18) and continuing more directly when that company was nationalized in 1976, with the effect that oil revenues now “go directly to the state” (Crystal 1992, p. 102). Despite government efforts to diversify its income, it remains heavily dependent on oil: between 1993 and 2015, oil rents comprised, on average, a whopping 91% of total government revenues.<sup>21</sup>

Oil has made Kuwait a wealthy nation. But wealth based on a single rentier commodity is not without its challenges (Ross 2012). Oil is one of the most volatile commodities in existence (see Figure 2, left panel).<sup>22</sup> Kuwait has some influence over oil prices due to its high total output (roughly 6% of global production) and membership in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which has sought to control prices through production scaling over the past half century with mixed results. But to a large degree, government revenues are dependent on

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<sup>18</sup>Though this type of corruption is believed to exist across a wide range of regimes, it is rare to find direct measures of its presence. See McMillan & Zoido (2004) and Szakonyi (2018) for direct and indirect evidence of such transfers in the Peruvian and Russian contexts, respectively.

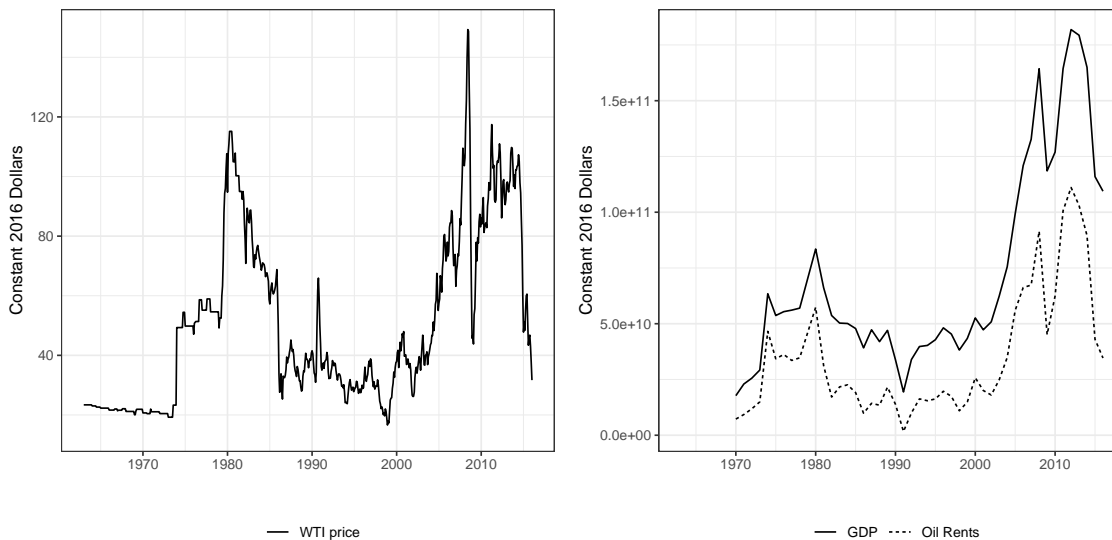
<sup>19</sup>Estimated using survey data from the Arab Barometer collected in 2014.

<sup>20</sup>The legislators in question were never publicly named. For an English-language account of the scandal, see Stack, Liam. (2011, September 21). “Corruption inquiry rocks Kuwait.” *New York Times*.

<sup>21</sup>Central Bank of Kuwait. The bank does not report government revenues for earlier periods, but this is consistent with analyses of preceding time periods (Eltony & Al-Awadi 2001).

<sup>22</sup>Using historical price data, Regnier (2007) found that oil and natural gas prices were more volatile than those of 95% of other products sold in the US.

Figure 2: Oil prices and Kuwaiti oil rents over time



*Note:* Left panel plots changing oil prices from 1963-2016, estimated using monthly spot crude oil prices for West Texas Intermediate and shown in constant 2016 USD. Right panel plots annual Kuwait GDP (solid line) and oil rents (dotted line) from 1970-2016, estimated using data from the World Bank and shown in constant 2016 USD.

and thus vulnerable to global demand for this critical commodity. As a result, Kuwaiti government revenues—tied directly to prices following the nationalization of the oil industry—go through abrupt, largely exogenous boom and bust periods.<sup>23</sup> Between 2014 and 2015, for example, Kuwaiti oil revenues fell by nearly half from 26.5 billion to 13.6 billion dinars—and, correspondingly, government revenues dropped from 29 billion to 15.1 billion dinars.<sup>24</sup>

In theory, the government could mitigate the high risk of its oil-based portfolio by carefully managing expenditures and banking the surplus for future periods of revenue uncertainty. In practice, there is evidence that Kuwait has not been entirely successful in this approach. Like other Gulf states, Kuwait has constructed a welfare state in which the government is responsible for a vast amount of social programming directed at citizens (El-Katiri et al. 2013). This spending closely tracks income: Eltony & Al-Awadi (2001) and Burney et al. (2018) find evidence that government expenditures are a function of oil revenues. From 1993-2015, annual government expenditures averaged 84% of oil revenues in a given year. Finally, some aspects of government spending—

<sup>23</sup>The one clear instance of domestic events affecting international oil prices was the spike in 1990 following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (Figure 2). Yet, notably, this was during a period of legislative dissolution and is therefore outside the scope of our dataset (Figure A.3).

<sup>24</sup>Central Bank of Kuwait.

particularly the vast array of consumer subsidies—have produced a sustained strain on accounts. In 2014, the IMF reported that Kuwait could run a budget deficit as early as 2017 under the weight of its subsidies; this actually occurred two years ahead of schedule following the 2015 drop in oil prices.<sup>25</sup>

We therefore use oil as our primary measure of available rents—essentially as a proxy for the marginal value of cash to the regime. We measure this in two ways: first, through monthly crude oil prices in constant dollars (*WTI Price*),<sup>26</sup> and second, by calculating oil revenues on a monthly basis using the price of oil and Kuwait’s estimated daily production (*Oil Revenues*).<sup>27</sup> The direct state ownership of Kuwaiti oil reserves and production mean that we are able to obtain a more precise metric of government resource revenues than in many contexts (Ross 2015). The former metric has the advantage of a wider data range, covering the entirety of KNA history, and a greater claim to exogeneity, as the Kuwaiti government has a more limited ability to influence global prices. The latter is somewhat endogenous to government decision-making (the regime might, for example, increase production to help offset losses from falling oil prices or when it faces more parliamentary opposition) but more directly captures the rents available to the regime in a given period. We lag each measure by one month to account for time delays between oil sales and government access to (and ability to disburse) the resulting funds. We standardize these continuous variables in the regression models that follow for ease of interpretation of the resulting coefficients.

### 4.3 Independent Variable: Cabinet Positions

We next operationalize policy concessions granted to elected legislators. Again, this poses measurement challenges: identifying specific modifications to proposed laws and the legislators that would benefit from them is extremely challenging in this context. Even if we could track the individual concessions included in each law, we have no way of establishing a basis for comparison to the regime’s ideal policy.<sup>28</sup> We instead use an indicator of policy influence in parliamentary settings:

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<sup>25</sup>Oil prices have only fallen further since then, but the Central Bank of Kuwait has not published information on government expenditures since 2015.

<sup>26</sup>We use spot crude oil prices for West Texas Intermediate (WTI) as our primary measure of oil price due to its long history in the global market.

<sup>27</sup>We access historical data dating back to 1973 on Kuwaiti oil production via YCharts, a widely used investment research platform.

<sup>28</sup>This is a problem that other scholars have dealt with in other contexts. Reuter & Robertson (2015) use committee leadership positions as a measure of cooptative concessions in Russian subnational legislatures. In Kuwait, the regime does not have a direct role in committee appointments: membership is voted on in the entire legislature and leadership

the appointment of ideological faction members to cabinet positions.

As in other parliamentary systems, most laws in Kuwait originate within and are initiated by the Council of Ministers (cabinet). As a result, ministers are not just responsible for the effective functioning of their bureaucratic portfolio: they actively design and shape draft legislation, giving them the opportunity to influence policy before it hits the legislative floor—a distinct bargaining advantage (Baron & Ferejohn 1989; Laver & Shepsle 1990). For legislators representing ideological groups, having a compatriot in the Council of Ministers means that key bills such as the annual budget are more likely to preemptively incorporate their political and ideological interests. In the Kuwaiti context, discretion over ministerial appointments gives the regime the opportunity to confer recognition and legitimacy to some groups at the expense of others. If a particular group refuses to participate in a particular cabinet, another group with different priorities, preferences, and policy goals could be offered the position. Because the government requires some modicum of legislative support, it appeals to these groups in order to advance its own, broader political agenda. Consistent with  $H_2$ , we predict that when the ruling coalition provides these groups with representation on the Council of Ministers, elected legislators belonging to these groups will be more likely to vote with the Council of Ministers—effectively because they have already had an opportunity to extract policy concessions on a given piece of legislation. Simply put, the draft policy that emerges from a cabinet with ideological group representation is likely to represent the result of preemptive deliberative bargaining between that ideological group and the regime.

The Emir has historically distributed cabinet appointments across a range of ideological groups. Figure 3 depicts cabinet composition over time with respect to the six proto-parties as well as the participation of the Al-Sabah family.<sup>29</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, national-liberal and Muslim Brotherhood affiliates were given key ministerial portfolios on the Council of Ministers. The ruling family discontinued this practice in 1981 and throughout the 1980s. But when the National Assembly was restored following the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait, ideological appointments were revived. After the 1992 election, for example, six elected legislators representing these movements were given ministerial portfolios on the Council of Ministers. According to Ghabra (1993, pp. 19), “The *raison d’être* of the opposition members of the government was the initiation of reform pro-

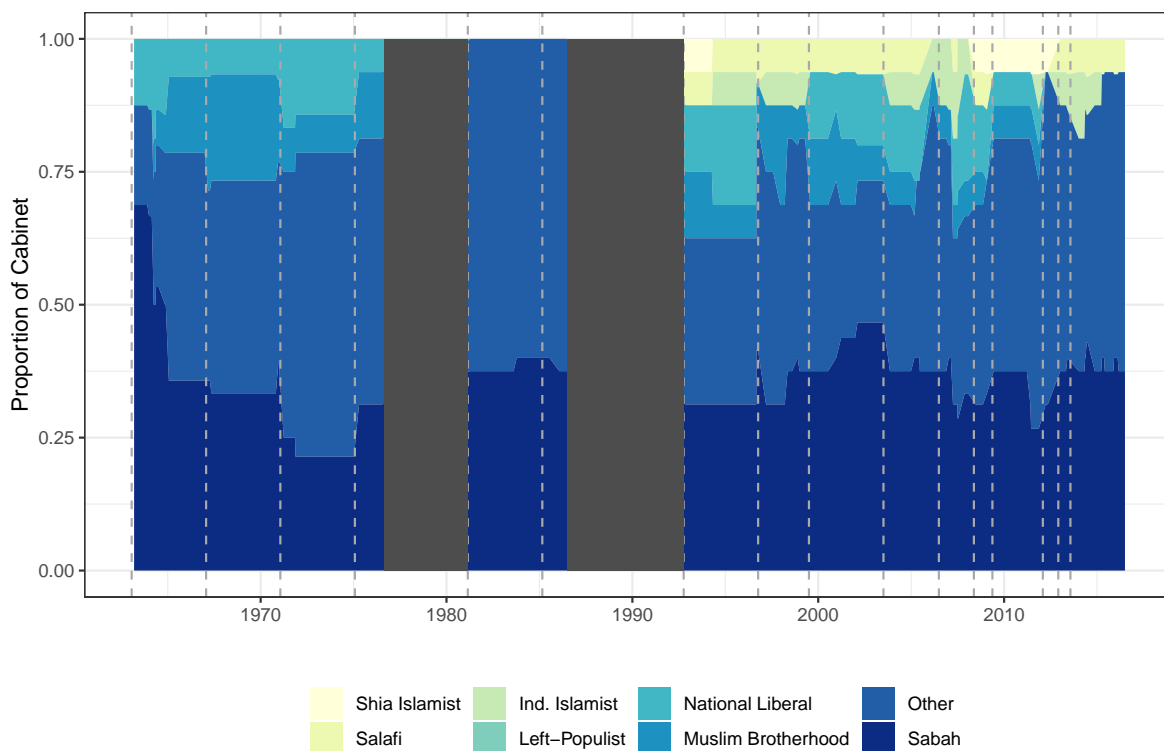
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appointments are determined by vote within committees (meaning ministers cannot participate).

<sup>29</sup>The ‘other’ category in this figure simply indicates a minister with neither an ideological or Al-Sabah identity, and may include individuals with tribal affiliations, members of the Sunni or Shia sect, and non-political technocrats.

grams in and through their ministries, to put into practice the ideals and slogans of the campaign.”

Figure 3: Cabinet composition over time



*Note:* Figure depicts the historical proportion of cabinet members representing different groups, including the ruling Al-Sabah family as well as six ideological proto-parties. Dotted lines indicate the start of a new term (when a cabinet is formed), and dark gray space represents time when the legislature was dissolved for an extended period.

These groups have occasionally used their control over ministerial portfolios to design and implement these limited reforms. But more publicly, these groups have also used their influence on the Council of Ministers to pass policy-focused legislation important to their constituents. For example, in 1996, Islamist political groups in the legislature worked with the Council of Ministers to pass a law ending coeducation at Kuwait University. Though the government had repeatedly opposed efforts to enforce gender segregation, it eventually caved. Similarly, in 2008, the government appointed a member of the National Islamic Coalition, a Shia Islamist group, as Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs. Analysts and observers speculated that the appointment would allow the new minister to expand permits and licenses for *hussainiyat*, or congregation halls for Shia religious ceremonies. In exchange, the group’s elected legislators were expected to support the Council of Ministers in the legislature. We discuss these groups in

greater detail and provide additional examples of these policy concessions in Section S.3 in the Supplementary Materials appendix.

To capture these affiliations and policy influence, we code whether a given elected legislator has one or more ideological affiliates on the Council of Ministers at the time of a roll call vote. We create *Cabinet Affiliate*, a discrete variable measuring the number of acting ministers affiliated with a deputy’s ideological group at the time of each vote.<sup>30</sup> We also code a dummy variable for whether or not the legislator in question is a member of an ideological bloc (that is, whether or not he or she is eligible for this treatment). Among all votes of elected legislators in our dataset, 20% were registered while the legislator in question had an ideological representative on the cabinet. A total of 53% of votes were cast by elected legislators with an ideological affiliation.

#### 4.4 Approach

We first seek to understand the extent to which observable measures of cooptation (oil rents and ministerial appointments) are linked to the actual voting behavior of elected legislators ( $H_1$  and  $H_2$ ). We therefore model cooperation with ministers as a function of these independent variables (*WTI Price/Oil Revenues* and *Cabinet Affiliate*).

There are, of course, a number of potential confounders in establishing a linkage between economic rents and policy concessions and legislator behavior. Specifically, the ruling coalition’s use of these two mechanisms is likely the result of a strategic interaction between elected legislators and the Council of Ministers itself. For example, we might expect the regime to make greater use of its cooptative mechanisms in terms when the assembly contains more legislators predisposed to oppose the regime—which would depress the observed effect on voting with cabinet members. To account for this, we include term fixed effects in all models to account for specific circumstances associated with each term. Additionally, we expect the regime to respond to the specific legislators elected—ideological or not—and their interest in different types of concessions. We thus estimate models with controls for legislator characteristics (including demographics such as age, gender, and education as well as occupational categories, sect, and tribal affiliation) or with legislator fixed

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<sup>30</sup>For example, for a legislator affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, this variable would be coded 1 for all votes when exactly one concurrent cabinet member was also a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Results are very similar when we construct a binary measure of cabinet affiliation, coded as 1 for votes where at least one minister was an ideological affiliate.

effects.

We also expect legislator behavior to vary with the content of enacted legislation. We undertake preliminary coding to identify the subject matter of each law in our dataset. We expect that some areas of legislation, such as international treaty agreements, are unlikely to elicit much opposition within the legislature, while others, such as laws dealing with electoral rules, will prove more controversial.<sup>31</sup> We therefore include dummy variables for four topics in each model of legislator behavior: budgets and other fiscal legislation, treaties, oil, and elections.

Finally, to test our hypothesis that rents are more effective at buying off non-ideological legislators ( $H_3$ ), we look for separate effects of oil prices and revenues on legislators with and without an ideological affiliation. We drop legislator fixed effects in this analysis, since this is typically a fixed attribute for elected legislators.

## 5 Results

We begin by presenting descriptive analysis of our data and primary dependent variable before turning to more direct tests of our hypotheses.

First, we look at general patterns of legislator cooperation in the KNA. Though legislators vote with the regime in the vast majority of cases (92% of votes cast by MPs aligned with the minister bloc), this belies considerable variation on a per law and per legislator basis. Figure 4 plots our primary outcome variable over time, grouped into quarterly intervals. It is interesting to note that cooperation with the regime was often at its lowest level toward the end of a term; in some cases, a decline in cooperation directly preceded an early dissolution of the assembly by the Emir—evidence that in some cases, the regime fails to effectively coopt elected legislators.

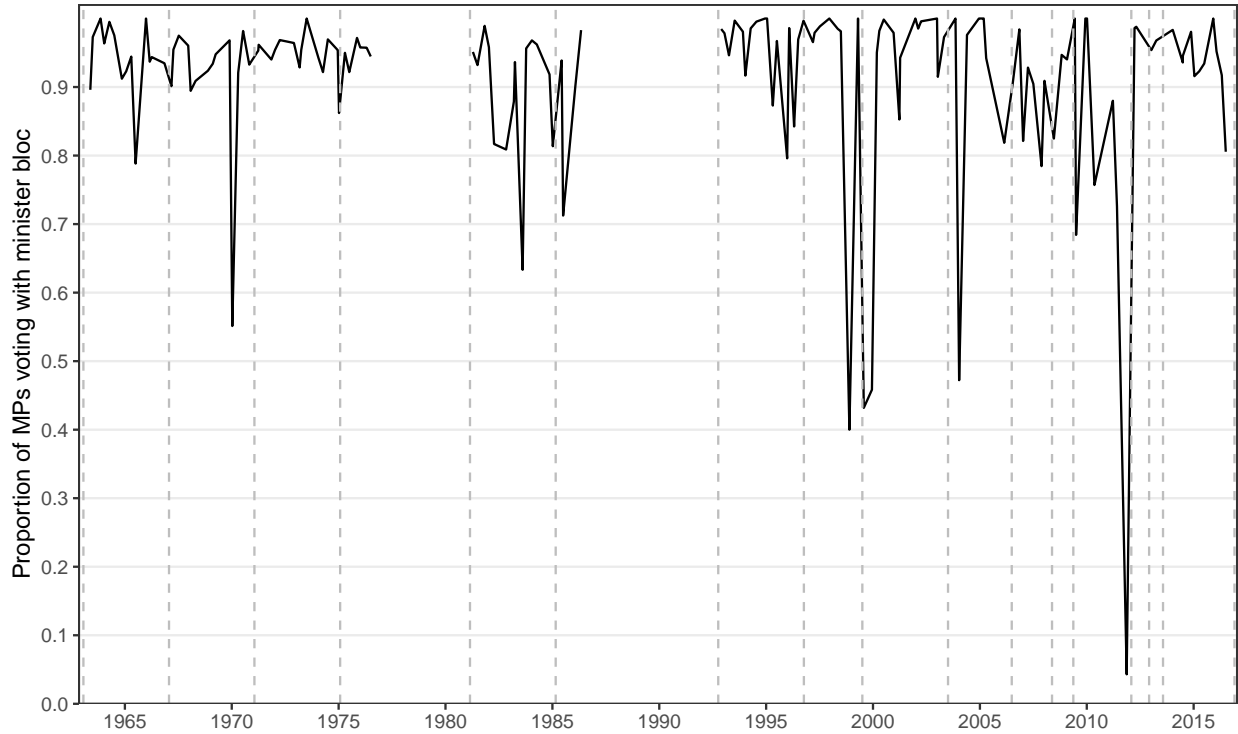
In Figure 5, we plot the distribution of regime support at the law (second deliberation) level (left panel) and the legislator-term level (right panel). Most laws voted in the KNA pass by a wide margin: 30% were enacted unanimously, and three-quarters achieved 90% cooperation from elected legislators. Yet there is evidence of substantial opposition in the remaining 25% of votes. Over the history of the KNA, a handful of laws were passed despite minister opposition—that is,

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<sup>31</sup>We find that this is in fact the case, though there is considerable variation in support within topics (see Figure A.4 in the Supplementary Materials appendix).



Figure 4: Cooperation in the Kuwait National Assembly, 1963-2016



*Note:* Plot displays the average rate of elected legislators with the cabinet bloc in the Kuwait National Assembly in quarterly intervals. Line indicates the average proportion of roll call votes in support of the minister consensus across laws passed in the interval. Dashed vertical lines signify elections. The legislature was suspended during two periods (1976-1981 and 1986-1992). Source: *Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes (KNA-RCV)* dataset.

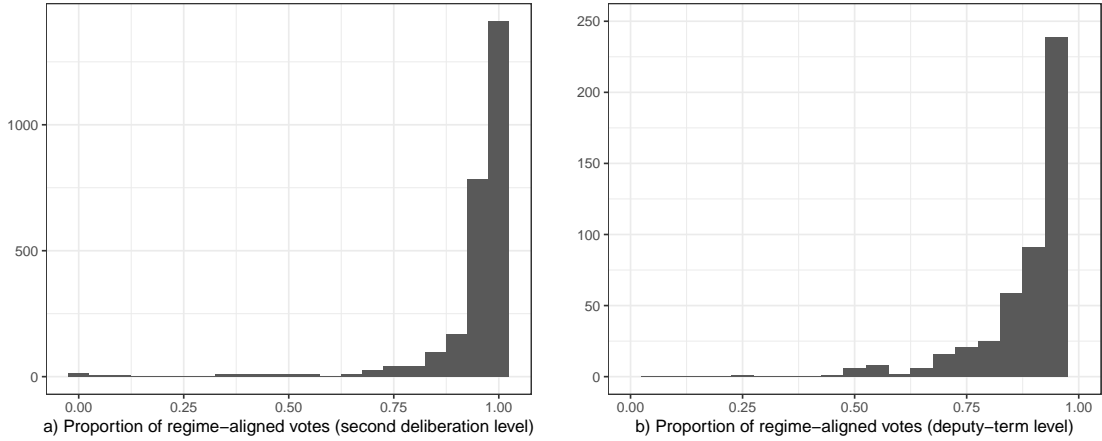
the presumed regime preference was explicitly overruled in exactly 28 cases (1% of our dataset).<sup>32</sup> In a number of other cases, a sizable bloc of legislators voted against the Council of Ministers. In other words, some laws were only successful because of the regime’s built-in advantage.<sup>33</sup>

The distribution of legislator behavior also reveals considerable variation. While 14% of legislators voted with ministers on every single final vote, another 11% only cooperated 75% of the time. The median legislator supported the Council of Ministers on 93% of votes—evidence of considerable allegiance, but not total sycophancy. It is important to keep in mind that voting against the

<sup>32</sup>These cases are distributed widely across terms and most legislatures had at least one law pass despite minister opposition. The topics of these laws vary widely but include issues related to the civil service or individual compensation (seven laws), one issue related to the election law, and one issue related to criminal proceedings against ministers.

<sup>33</sup>This is most obvious in the 36 laws where a majority of elected legislators voted against: these passed only because the Council of Ministers was able to overcome the vote margin. Note that there are likely additional deliberations where minister support was insufficient to overcome legislator opposition; because we collect data on successful legislation, we do not explicitly examine the frequency of such events.

Figure 5: Voting with ministers



*Note:* Figure plots the distribution of cooperation (voting with the minister bloc) at the law level (left panel,  $n = 2658$ ) and legislator-term level (right panel,  $n = 800$ ).

regime on a final deliberation has significant policy relevance and can therefore be distinguished from other, more performative legislative actions. Such votes may lead to repercussions for both deputies and the regime and are thus costly actions for legislators to take.

## 5.1 Rents, Policy Concessions, and Cooperation

We next turn to our proxies for cooptation and examine whether they predict legislator behavior. Table 3 reports outputs from OLS models at the legislator-vote level of voting with the Council of Ministers.<sup>34</sup> We first consider whether oil prices (models 1 and 2) and government revenues (models 3 and 4) are instruments of legislative cooptation. We find that both are positively associated with cooperation in comparable ways: a standard deviation increase in either variable is associated with an expected 1.5 percentage point increase in voting with the regime. These effects are significant at the  $\alpha = 0.001$  level and effect sizes are largely unchanged with the inclusion of legislator fixed effects.

Each model also includes our measure of cabinet affiliation. As predicted, we find that legislators with an ideological affiliation increase their level of cooperation when there are one or more active ministers with the same affiliation. Interestingly, such legislators are in general less likely to support the Council of Ministers, consistent with the idea that participation in a political bloc is a signal

<sup>34</sup>In section A.2 we report output from equivalent probit specifications; results are largely consistent with the OLS output.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Voting with regime			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
WTI Price	0.015*** (0.002)	0.016*** (0.002)		
Oil Revenues			0.015*** (0.002)	0.017*** (0.002)
Cabinet Affiliate	0.014*** (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)	0.014*** (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)
Ideology Dummy	-0.039*** (0.003)	-0.038*** (0.007)	-0.039*** (0.003)	-0.027*** (0.008)
Term FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
MP FEs		✓		✓
MP controls	✓		✓	
Topic controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	82,209	82,209	70,294	70,294
R <sup>2</sup>	0.034	0.097	0.040	0.113

*Note:*

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Table 3: Cooptation strategy and voting with the regime. Table reports coefficients from OLS models of voting consistent with the minister bloc at the legislator-vote level. All models include term fixed effects and indicators for law topic (budget/fiscal, treaty, oil-related, or electoral). Models alternately include controls for legislator attributes (age, gender, education, sect, occupation, and tribal affiliation) or legislator fixed effects. WTI price and oil revenues are standardized continuous variables.

that an individual opposes the status quo policy advanced by the ruling coalition. The coefficient on cabinet affiliation is more sensitive to the inclusion of legislator fixed effects, which substantially reduce the total variation in the sample,<sup>35</sup> but remain significant in both specifications.<sup>36</sup> In the specification with legislator controls, we find that the addition of one affiliated cabinet member is associated with an expected 1.4 percentage point increase in cooperation with the Council of Ministers—substantively, very similar to the effect of standard increases in oil rents and government revenues.

<sup>35</sup>This is the result of the fact that there is relatively little within-term variation in ideological cabinet appointments.

<sup>36</sup>This is the result of two features: first, ideological affiliation is typically a constant attribute for legislators, and second, cabinet changes in the middle of the term occur sporadically. As a result, the inclusion of both term and legislator fixed effects absorbs a majority of the variation in the cabinet affiliation variable.

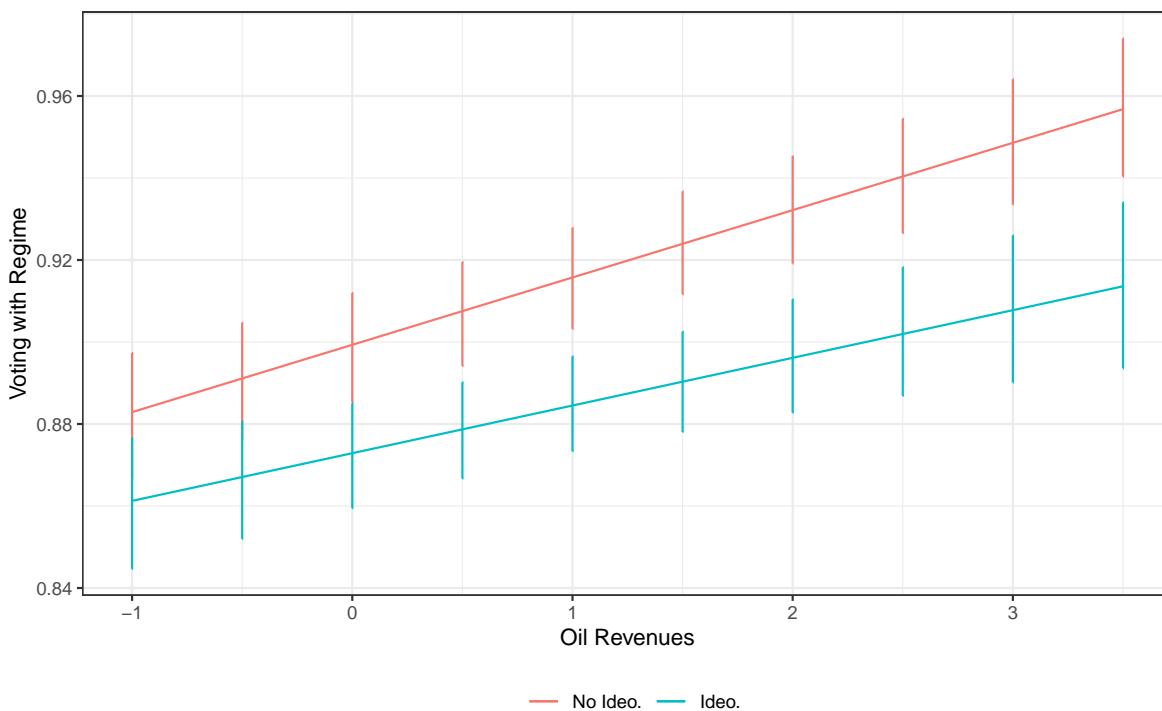
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Voting with regime	
	(1)	(2)
WTI Price	0.016*** (0.002)	
Oil Revenues		0.016*** (0.002)
Ideology Dummy	-0.024*** (0.002)	-0.026*** (0.002)
WTI x Ideo	-0.0005 (0.002)	
Oil x Ideo		-0.005* (0.002)
Term FEs	✓	✓
Topic controls	✓	✓
Observations	82,209	70,294
R <sup>2</sup>	0.030	0.034
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001	

Table 4: Table reports coefficients from OLS models of voting consistent with the minister bloc at the legislator-vote level. Models include fixed effects and indicators for law topic (budget/fiscal, treaty, oil-related, or electoral) as indicated.

We next turn to empirical tests of  $H_3$ . We consider whether the positive impact of oil prices on cooperation with the Council of Ministers is specific to legislator type. In particular, we predict that because ideologically-oriented legislators prefer policy concessions to rents, they will not be as responsive to increased rents. In Table 4, we interact oil metrics with a measure of legislator ideology. The interaction coefficient is negative in both specifications, though it is substantively larger and significant in the specification including Kuwaiti oil revenues. Figure 6 plots predicted values from model 2 to offer a visualization of how oil revenues predict voting behavior from legislators with and without ideological affiliations. There are limitations to this test—primarily because it likely that ideological affiliation is only one measure of a legislator’s relative interest in policy concessions. However, we interpret this as evidence that policy-oriented legislators (defined

as those with an affiliation to an ideological bloc) are less moved by oil rents than other legislators.

Figure 6: Oil revenues, ideology, and voting behavior.



*Note:* Figure depicts predicted values from model 2 in Table 4 as a function of MP ideology and oil revenues. Predicted values are for a male, Sunni deputy aged 45, with a bachelor’s degree and without tribal affiliation, voting on budget legislation in the 2006 term. Standard errors are estimated using bootstrapping.

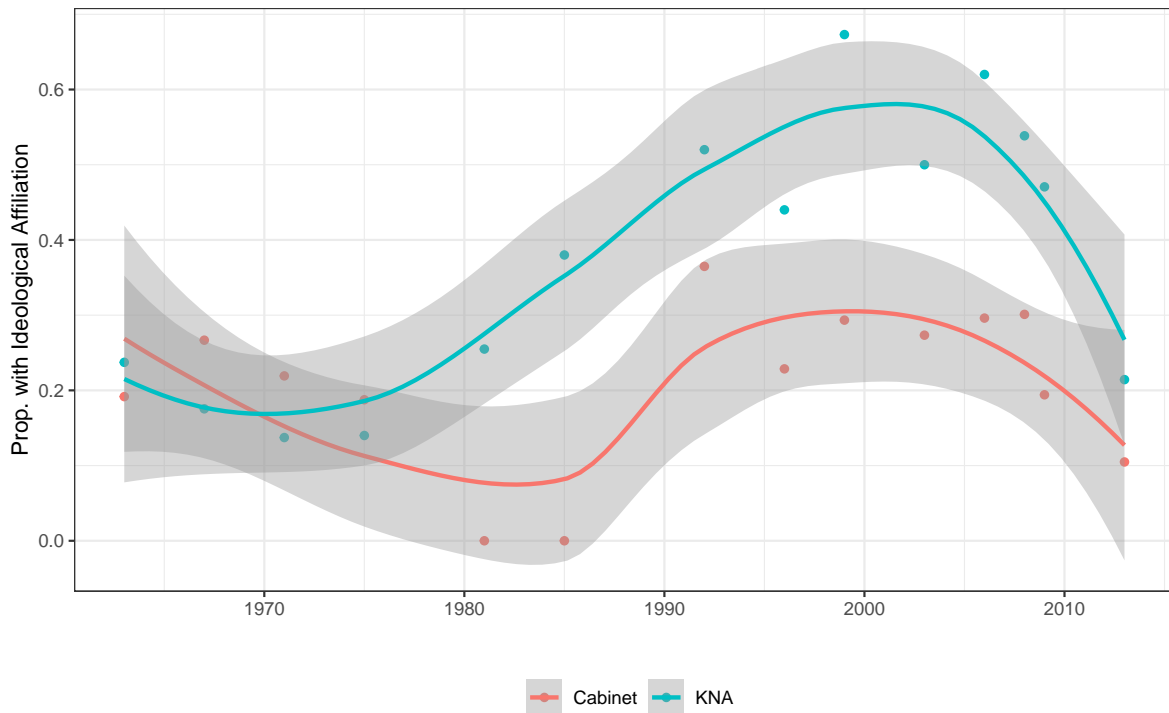
## 5.2 Regime Strategic Considerations

Thus far we have presented evidence that both of our proposed mechanisms of legislative cooptation are effective in inducing cooperation for the ruling coalition’s policy agenda. While this offers some confirmation of our theoretical expectations, it leads to additional questions about the strategic interaction between the ruling coalition and elected legislators. One follow-on question of particular interest is under what conditions will the ruling coalition deploy these two mechanisms—that is, what determines the specific strategy selection of how much economics rents and how many policy concessions to employ?

We expect that the regime’s use of legislative cooptation will vary in response to a range of environmental and policy-oriented factors. For example, the regime might offer more rents or policy

concessions when it is trying to pass important or potentially controversial legislation, in order to ensure success or to demonstrate a show of strength with supermajority support. Similarly, the conditions at the beginning of a term may condition government behavior. If a majority of elected legislators are policy-seeking (i.e. belong to an ideological group), the regime cannot efficiently buy them off using rents alone.<sup>37</sup> Instead, it may generate more cooperative behavior by offering policy concessions in the form of cabinet positions. We expect that the result will be a cabinet that roughly reflects the ideological composition of the legislature.

Figure 7: Ideological Representation in the Kuwaiti Cabinet and National Assembly.



Note: Plot depicts the proportion of KNA legislators (blue) and cabinet members (red) with ideological affiliations by term, 1963-2013 (excludes the two short-lived assemblies elected in 2012). Source: *Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes (KNA-RCV)* dataset.

Figure 7 plots the proportion, by term, of ideological legislators and cabinet members. The two measures are relatively well-correlated ( $r = 0.5$ ). In a democratic system with parliamentary institutions, this result would be wholly unremarkable: the government formed is generally expected to reflect the characteristics of the elected legislature. Yet in a system like Kuwait, this relationship

<sup>37</sup>This follows from the lower marginal returns on oil rents for such legislators.

is not so obvious. The Emir has sole discretion over cabinet appointments; he is in no way bound to select ministers based on the outcome of national elections. The observation that the proportion of ideologically-linked cabinet ministers is correlated with ideological representation in the legislature is an intriguing sign of responsiveness to electoral outcomes. This does not follow from institutional rules; we therefore propose that it demonstrates strategic behavior by the regime.

## 6 Conclusion

This article presents findings from a new dataset of roll call votes spanning the entire legislative history of Kuwait, an electoral authoritarian regime with a longstanding history of political opposition. Substantively, we find that 8 percent of roll call votes on passed laws involve elected legislators in the Kuwait National Assembly voting against the regime. We then use these data to empirically test our theory of *legislative cooptation*, which we define as the intentional exchange of economic rents or policy concessions to rival elites for compliance with the autocrat's policy agenda. We find that a standard deviation increase in the availability of economic rents is associated with a 1.5 percentage point increase in cooperation with the regime. We also find that the addition of an affiliated cabinet member is associated with an expected 1.4 percentage point increase in cooperation with the regime.

Though these findings suggest both economic rents and policy concessions facilitate cooperation with the regime, there are distinct normative implications for the two mechanisms. The former mechanism demonstrates how resource wealth allows leaders to buy off the political elite (Ross 2015), potentially subverting the representative nature of the legislature in this context. The latter, on the other hand, along with the data on cabinet composition over time, evokes a political environment that functions in a manner closer to democratic polities: ideological groups attract votes, succeed to office, and are granted policy influence commensurate with their popular support. The distinction is that this cabinet influence occurs not because of institutional rules, but because the regime is incentivized to offer it. That both such mechanisms function within the same autocratic institution is informative, and raises questions about what might occur in other regimes. Resource-poor states or those facing economic contraction may be forced to offer more policy concessions, for example, while those with high economic control and limited legislative autonomy may

have more discretion over cooptation strategy.

This article is not the first to explore the inner workings of legislatures in authoritarian contexts. Existing research has found that these institutions can respond to citizen needs (Distelhorst & Hou 2017), reflect citizen interests on non-sensitive issues (Truex 2016), and moderate protest and dissent (Reuter & Robertson 2015). But despite these important advances, less attention has been given to the question of how legislators behave in office and how the regime manages potential opposition. Data availability has long hampered efforts to study the internal operation of these bodies. With this project, we bring a rich new data source to bear on the question of legislator behavior in authoritarian regimes. Our findings underscore that this behavior is not entirely sycophantic. In addition to showing that a subset of laws pass in these contexts despite regime opposition, we find substantial variation in voting patterns at the individual level. Most importantly, we find evidence that proposed regime strategies of cooptation are effective in buying support from elected representatives on its policy agenda.

We see two promising pathways for further study that can build on these findings. First, a critical debate among scholars of authoritarian institutions revolves around whether these institutions function analogously to their democratic counterparts or whether they represent a wholly different form of politics (Gandhi et al. 2020). Our findings suggest that both conceptions can be true within the same body. We find that executive coalition-building and related policy inclusion leads political outsiders to cooperate on policy: exactly the kind of compromise we would expect in a robust, representative legislature. Yet we also find evidence that the regime uses less above-board means—its vast fiscal resources—to generate the same cooperative spirit. This latter activity (with its presumed dependence on individual transfers in exchange for support) is wholly distinct from normative conceptions of democratic representation. If representation in these contexts is a real possibility, future research can aim to evaluate both its limits and the conditions under which authoritarian regimes will tolerate it.

Second, it remains an open question whether legislative opposition actually matters in authoritarian regimes with permissive institutions with law-making authority. In our study, we use a novel measure of opposition to provide evidence that it does: autocrats go to great (and costly) lengths to minimize its public presence in the legislature. Our findings indicate that positive inducements such as economic rents and policy concessions can facilitate the legislative cooperation autocrats



require to achieve their policy goals. But more work is needed to understand the reverse, or the kinds of inducements that can effectively counter these tactics and encourage the development of more robust opposition.

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## 7 Supplementary Materials

The Supplementary Materials appendix includes the following items:

1. S.1: Data Collection
  - (a) Figure A.1: Sample transcript
  - (b) Figure A.2: Qualtrics screenshot
  - (c) Table A.1: Data collection and coding summary
2. S.2: Descriptive Statistics
  - (a) Figure A.4: Cooperation by law topic
3. S.3: Policy Concessions
4. S.4: Additional Analysis

## S.1 Data Collection

The Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes dataset includes recorded roll call votes for each law passed by the KNA from 1963 to 2016. In this section, we describe the procedures we used to collect these data in detail.

The Kuwait National Assembly Online Archive includes a list of each law passed by the Kuwait National Assembly (KNA) since 1963. The online archive makes public a searchable list of these laws, which include supplemental data describing the date and legislative term in which the law was passed. The Archive also includes digitized .pdf files of legislative transcripts that include the minutes of meeting of the KNA since 1963. These legislative transcripts are colloquially referred to as “minutes” (*maḍbaṭa*, pl. *maḍābit*) in Kuwait. The full archive consists of 551,605 .pdf pages across 2,294 .pdf files. There have been 2,188 unique days when the KNA has met. Because the .pdf files are often quite large, some are broken up into multiple files. In sum, the KNA has passed 3,595 laws 1963 to 2016.

Using data on laws and when they were passed, we were able to locate the point of final deliberation and voting for each law within the set of legislative transcripts. These legislative transcripts record roll call votes for each “second deliberation,” or final vote on a law or group of laws, including the vote choice of all legislators and ministers present. Figure A.1 shows sample pages from one of these transcripts, including the final vote record. In order to code each of these votes, we hired a team of research assistants to search the KNA transcripts to find the exact location of each roll call vote. We identified complete roll call votes for 3,337 laws (93 percent). As groups of laws can be voted on concurrently, the full dataset includes includes 2,693 “second deliberation” votes.



Figure A.1: Sample transcript

- ٨٤ - (١٣١٧/خاصة أ)		- ٨٣ - (١٣١٧/خاصة أ)
<p>السيد العضو سيف مطلق العازمي السيد العضو عادل مساعـد الجارالله السيد عبدالعزيز عبداللطيف الابراهيم السيد عثمان سيد عبدالصمد السيد د. علي صالح العويـر السيد العضو فيصل فهد الشابيـع السيد الشيخ محمد عبدالله الصبـاح السيد ياسر حسن أبـبل السيد العضو د. يوسف سيد حسن الزلزلة</p>	<p>السيد العضو صباح خالد الصبـاح السيد العضو د. عبدالرحمن صباح الجبران السيد العضو عبدالله إبراهيم التميمي السيد د. علي سعد العبيـدي السيد العضو فارس سعد العتيبي السيد العضو كامل محمود العوضي السيد العضو محمد ناصر الجبري السيد العضو يعقوب عبدالمحسن الصانع السيد مرزوق علي الفختم</p>	<p>السيد الرئيس: موافقة ، أقرأ المادة بعد التعديل .</p> <p>السيد فيصل الشابيـع عن (المقـرر ) دون الإخلال بالفقرة ( الأولى ) و ( الثانية ) من المادة المسبقة من هذا القانون للجنة العليا بناء على اقتراح مسبق من الهيئة أن تستبعد من نطاق هذا القانون عقود حق الانتفاع بأرض الدولة والإجراءات التي أبرمت قبل سريان القانون رقم (٢٠٠٨/٧) ، وتم تجديدها باعتبارها عقود بناء ، وتشغيل ، وتحويل بحيث أخضعت لأحكامها ، متى تبين لها انعقاد هذه العقود لخصائص نظام الشراكة وعلى اللجنة أن تبين في قرارها النظام القانوني المناسب الذي سينطبق على العقد عند نهاية مدته والباقي كما هي .</p>
<p>عدم موافقة : السيد العضو جمال حسين العيـر السيد العضو حمد سيف الهرشالي السيد العضو سعود تميمي الحرجسي السيد العضو د. عبدالله محمد الطريجي السيد العضو د. عوده عوده الرويعي السيد العضو ماجد موسى المطيري السيد العضو مبارك بنيسه الخريـج السيد العضو محمد طنـا السيد العضو د. محمد هادي الحويـلة</p>	<p>السيد العضو د. أحمد مطيع العازمي السيد العضو حمدان سالم العازمي السيد العضو سعد علي الرشيد السيد العضو سلطان جدعان الشمري السيد العضو عسكر عويـد العززي السيد العضو فيصل سعود الدويـسان السيد العضو ماضي محمد الهاجري السيد العضو مبارك سالم الحويـص السيد العضو محمد مروي الهديـة</p>	<p>السيد الرئيس: موافقة ؟ ( موافقة عامة ) السيد الرئيس: موافقة ، حسب المادة (١٠٤) من اللائحة الداخلية للمجلس تم مناقشة التعديلات المقترحة على المشروع الذي أقره المجلس في المداولة الأولى والآن يجري التصويت تداء بالإسم لإنهاء للمداولة الثانية ، تفضل الأمين العام . ( جرى التصويت بالتداء بالإسم على النحو التالي :</p>
<p>امتـاع : السيد العضو عبدالله يوسف المعويـف</p> <p>السيد الرئيس: الحضور (٤٨) ، موافقة (٢٩) ، عدم موافقة (١٧) ، امتناع (٢) إذن موافقة على المشروع وبحال إلى الحكومة ، الفقرة التالية .</p>	<p>السيد العضو صالح أحمد عائـسور السيد العضو أحمد خالد الصبـاح السيد العضو خالد الجراح الصبـاح السيد العضو خليل إبراهيم الصالـح السيد العضو ركان يوسف التصـف السيد العضو سلمان صباح الصبـاح</p>	<p>السيد العضو أحمد حاجـمي لاري السيد العضو حمود محمد الحمـدان السيد العضو خلف دميشير العـززي السيد العضو د. خليل عبدالله عـلبي السيد العضو سعدون حماد العتيبي</p>

Note: The above transcript includes the roll call votes recorded on June 30, 2014, for Law No. 116 of 2014 on Public-Private Partnerships (*Qānūn Raqm 116 li-Sana 2014 fi sha'n Al-Shirāka bayn Al-Qaṭā'ain Al-ʿām w-l-Khaṣ*). Source: *Kuwait National Assembly Archive*.

We then hired a team of research assistants to assist with the coding of each law. To do this, we created a unique qualtrics form for each of the 16 legislative terms included in our analysis. The platform asked the coders to find the pages where the roll call vote appear, describe the vote in some detail, and identify whether a minister voted yes, no, or abstain for the law. Often in the transcripts, once a law is passed, the speaker of the KNA describes the total number of individuals who voted yes, no, or abstain. The speaker also announces the number of individuals present and absent. Coders were asked to record these numbers where they appeared. A partial screenshot of one of the forms we used is shown in Figure A.2.

Figure A.2: Qualtrics screenshot

**Legislative transcript**

Please enter the alphanumeric code used to name the .pdf document. For example, if the filename is 1299-a.pdf, please enter 1299-a.



---

**Law code**

Please enter the unique code used to identify this law. Please note that in some cases, the KNA votes on two or more laws (as a group) at the same time. Before continuing, please review the transcript pages and see if this is the case. If more than one law is recorded at the same time, please indicate so with a semicolon (i.e., 2008052901; 2008052902; 2008052902).



---

Before continuing, please make sure the filename and the first page of the transcript .pdf match. For example: (1/1/1999) on the first page of the transcript .pdf should correspond with the filename 1299-a.pdf.

Please also make sure that there are no pages missing from the "table of contents," which begin on the second page of each transcript.

If there are pages missing AND you cannot find the recorded vote in the table of contents, please contact the administrator.

---

**Date of Vote (yyyy/mm/dd)**

Please enter the date in the correct format (year/month/day). Entering the day and month incorrectly may cause problems.



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**Page Start**

This is the first page where the vote you are recording can be found. Please use the number found at the top of the page, in Arabic (i.e., not the page number of the .pdf file).



---

**Page End**

This is the last page where the vote you are recording can be found. Please use the number found at the top of the page, in Arabic (i.e., not the page number of the .pdf file).



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**Issue Description**

Please indicate, in 4-5 sentences, what this vote is about. Please be clear and specific, and enter as much information as possible.

**Votes**

When you reach the .pdf page in the transcript where the roll call votes are listed, please read the names listed on the .pdf first. The process will take longer if you read the form first, and then try to find the names on the .pdf. As you see each name on the .pdf, find them listed (in alphabetical order) on the form below and click "yes," "no," or "abstain."

Generally, names are listed in both the .pdf and the form in alphabetical order by first name. This may not always be the case.

If, for some reason, you come across a name in the .pdf that is not listed in this form, please enter that name in the Notes section, as well as the individual's vote (i.e., "yes," "no," "abstain").

Ministers have been highlighted in gray. MPs selected as Ministers have not been highlighted.

If for some reason the names of individual MPs and Ministers were not recorded for this vote, please mention this in the Notes section.

Please also describe exactly how many individuals voted "yes," "no," or "abstain." This will usually appear immediately after the votes are recorded. All proposals to be considered as laws are recorded by roll call, meaning that every law in the laws spreadsheet should have a corresponding roll call vote.

	yes	no	abstain
الشيخ احمد العمود الجابر -- و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
احمد خالد الكتيب -- 10/و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
د. احمد عبدالله الربيعي -- 8/و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
د. احمد محمد الخطوب -- 9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
احمد محمد صالح العنساكي -- و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
احمد محمد النصار -- 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
احمد ناصر الشريوعان -- 19	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
احمد يعقوب باقر -- 5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
د. اسماعيل خضر الشطي -- 8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
تركي محمد العازمي -- 24	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
جاسم حمد الصقر -- 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
جاسم محمد العون -- 7/و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
جمال احمد الكندري -- 13	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
جمعان فالح العازمي -- 23/و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
حبيب جوهري حبات -- و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
حمد عبدالله الجوعان -- 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
حمود ناصر الجبري -- 14	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
خالد سالم عدوه -- 21	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
خلف دميثير العززي -- 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
رائد سلمان الهبيدة -- 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
سالم عبدالله الحماد -- 12	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
سمو الشيخ سعد العبدالله السالم الصباح -- و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
سعد بلقيع العازمي -- 25	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
الشيخ سعود ناصر الصباح -- و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
شارع ناصر العجمي -- 21	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
صالح يوسف الفضالة -- 10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
الشيخ صباح الاحمد الجابر -- و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ضاري عبدالله العثمان -- و	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note: The above Qualtrics screenshot is a partial depiction of the platform used by coders to record roll call votes in the seventh legislative term (1992-1996).

Table 2 summarizes the data we collected for each legislative term. Each legislative term from 1963 to 2016 is included in the database. Because two of these terms were declared "void" (2012\_1

and 2012\_2), they are not assigned numbers by the Kuwait National Assembly. The coding process began on 22 January 2019 and ended on 23 February 2020.

Table A.1: Data collection and coding summary

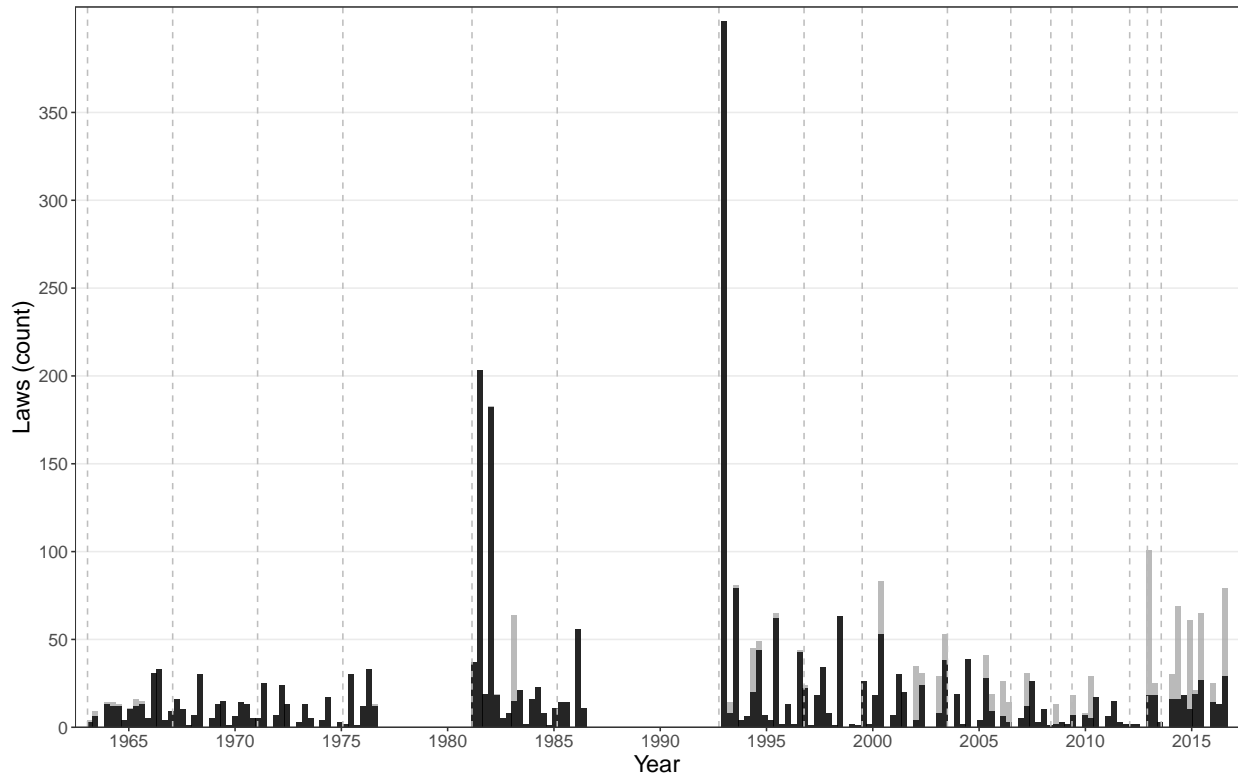
Term	Years	Votes	Laws	Missing	Transcripts	Start	End
1	1963-1966	10,213	195	16 (0.08)	228	2019-11-04	2020-01-20
2	1967-1970	8,663	170	26 (0.15)	203	2019-12-30	2020-01-16
3	1971-1975	7,011	132	18 (0.14)	237	2020-01-20	2020-02-04
4	1975-1976	5,760	98	7 (0.07)	107	2020-02-06	2020-02-23
5	1981-1985	36,908	703	83 (0.12)	219	2019-09-09	2019-10-14
6	1985-1986	6,052	103	0 (0.00)	92	2019-02-13	2019-03-13
7	1992-1996	43,295	820	66 (0.08)	243	2019-07-01	2019-09-10
8	1996-1999	8,001	128	0 (0.00)	181	2019-04-03	2019-05-08
9	1999-2003	14,459	335	1 (0.00)	218	2019-05-28	2019-07-01
10	2003-2006	6,925	166	16 (0.10)	158	2019-06-09	2019-06-19
11	2006-2008	3,753	97	7 (0.07)	69	2019-04-23	2019-05-13
12	2008-2009	516	20	2 (0.10)	35	2019-10-17	2019-10-17
13	2009-2011	4,013	105	7 (0.07)	118	2019-04-08	2019-05-17
2012_1	2012-2012	260	4	0 (0.00)	29	2019-10-16	2019-10-16
2012_2	2012-2013	2,532	129	0 (0.00)	35	2019-03-18	2019-03-21
14	2013-2016	10,113	390	9 (0.02)	122	2019-01-22	2019-02-21
<b>Total</b>	1963-2016	168,474	3,595	258 (0.07)	2,294	2019-01-22	2020-02-23

*Note:* Table displays the total number of laws passed by the KNA in each legislative term. *Missing* denotes the number of laws (and the percent of the total) that were not found in the transcripts in each term. *Transcripts* denotes the number of legislative transcripts (.pdf files) archived by the Kuwait National Assembly Online Archive in each legislative term. *Start* and *End* refer to the start and end dates of the coding process for each term, respectively. Source: *Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes (KNA-RCV)* dataset.

Because Kuwaiti procedure allows the legislature to bundle multiple laws into a single final vote, our full dataset includes 2,693 “second deliberation” votes. We do not disaggregate these unique laws: when a second deliberation vote is held on multiple laws, they are included as a single event in the dataset. Figure A.3 displays the distribution of these 3,337 laws and 2,693 second deliberation votes from 1963 to 2016. Notably, voting concurrently on multiple laws has become more prevalent in recent terms, though the majority of laws (78%) are voted on individually. Laws that are bundled into a single vote are typically substantively linked or cover related topics. For example, one second deliberation vote in 2013 covered 14 different international agreements, including bilateral treaties, Arab League charters, and other international conventions. The total number of laws passed per term has also increased over time: the earliest assemblies passed fewer than 200 laws, while the 2013 assembly passed nearly 400.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup>The spikes in activity at the beginning of the 1981 and 1992 terms can be attributed primarily to a large backlog

Figure A.3: Legislative activity in the Kuwait National Assembly, 1963-2016



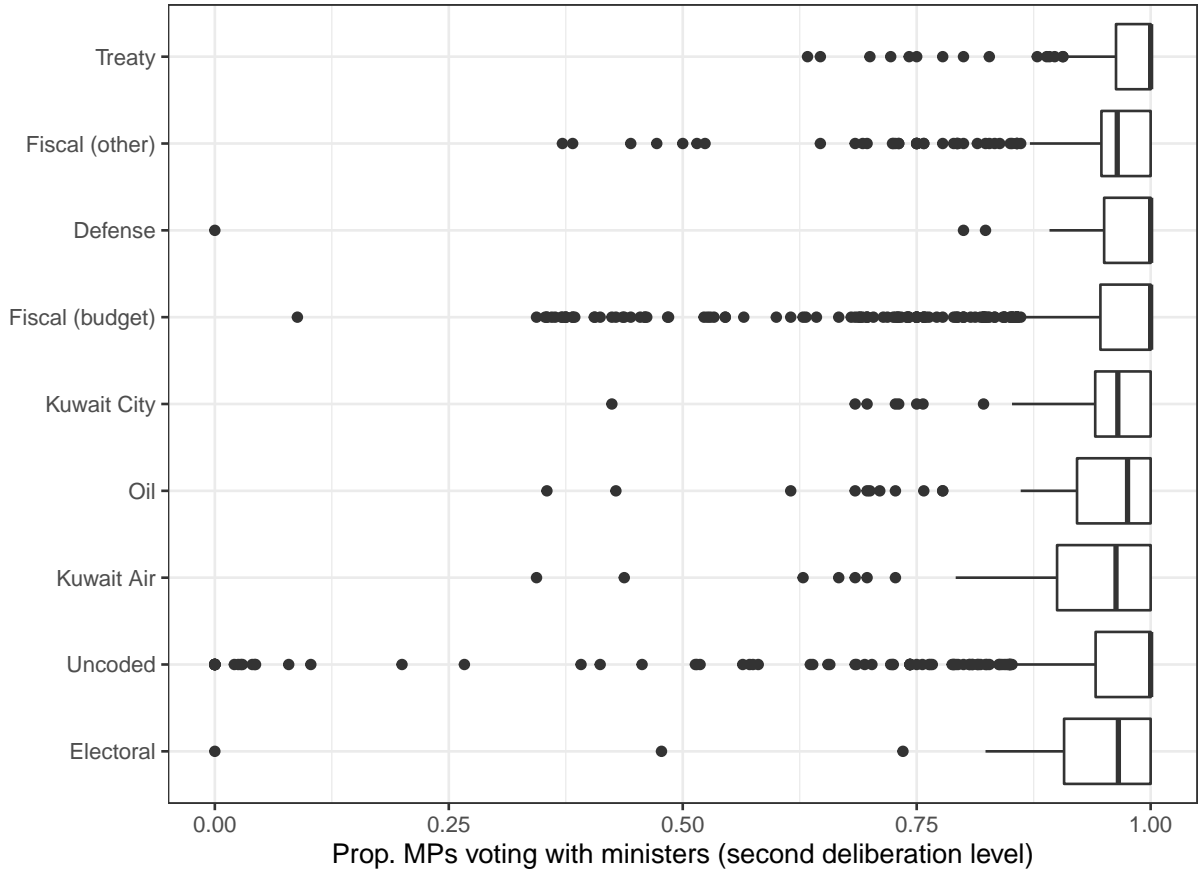
Note: Laws passed ( $N = 3,337$ ) and unique “second deliberation” votes ( $N = 2,693$ ) in the Kuwait National Assembly (KNA). Gray lines count unique laws; black lines count unique “second deliberation” votes. Dashed vertical lines signify elections and the start of a new term. In the post-liberation period, the KNA began voting on multiple laws concurrently with greater frequency. Source: *Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes (KNA-RCV)* dataset.

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of legislation initiated by the emir during the preceding years when no assembly was in place and, in the case of the 1992 term, to an additional rush of post-conflict legislation following the Iraqi invasion.

## S.2 Descriptive Statistics

Figure A.4: Cooperation by law topic



*Note:* Figure plots the proportion of legislators voting with ministers by law topic. Topics are listed in descending order of average cooperation. The unit of analysis is the second deliberation vote.

### **S.3 Policy Concessions**

Much of the existing literature on cooptation has shown that the incorporation of political parties in autocratic legislatures makes the exchange of concessions more credible, reducing incentives to rebel and extending the survival of incumbent autocrats (Gandhi & Przeworski 2006; Gandhi 2008; Frantz & Kendall-Taylor 2014). Though formal political parties do not exist in the Kuwait context, since 1963, elected legislators have tended to affiliate with one of six political factions, or “proto-parties”: the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis, independent Islamists, National-liberals, Shia Islamists, and left-populists. In this section, we briefly describe each of these groups and provide several examples of the types of concessions these groups advocate for.

#### **S.3.1 Muslim Brotherhood**

Kuwait is home to the oldest and most organized Muslim Brotherhood branch among the Arab Gulf states. The Kuwait branch emerged in 1951, a full decade before independence. Like its counterpart in Egypt, the Brotherhood initially sought the “Islamization” of society and focused its work on reforming the education sector and expanding its charitable activities. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Brotherhood members served as ministers of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Justice, and Oil. Throughout this period, the ruling family provided limited concessions to the Muslim Brotherhood in an effort to weaken the appeal of Arab Nationalists in the National Assembly. The Brotherhood used its influence to pressure the ruling family to implement sharia, or Islamic, law with varying degrees of success. Specifically, the Brotherhood unsuccessfully argued for an amendment to Article 2 of the Constitution that would proclaim sharia “the” rather than “a” primary source of legislation (Freer 2018, pp. 53).

In the 1980s, the Brotherhood sought to ban Christmas celebrations and succeeded in limiting nationality to Muslims and banning the consumption or sale of alcohol in embassies. During this period, the Brotherhood consolidated control over several government financial institutions: the World Islamic Charity Body, Zakat House, and Kuwait Finance House (Freer 2018, pp. 75). After the liberation of Kuwait, the Muslim Brotherhood announced the creation of a political organization, the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), that continued to advocate for shariah. When women were granted the right to vote in 2005 (against the wishes of ICM-affiliated elected

legislators), the organization pushed to ensure the measure complied with the principles of shariah by creating separate polling locations for women.<sup>39</sup>

### **S.3.2 Salafis**

Salafism emerged in Kuwait in the 1960s with the arrival of several Saudi-trained preachers who began working with the Muslim Brotherhood. By the 1970s, Salafis left the Brotherhood and began forming their own, smaller organizations due to ideological and doctrinal disagreements (Pall 2020). The ruling family capitalized on this rift and provided Salafis with financial support to create a charity similar to the Muslim Brotherhood. Salafis used their growing support in the National Assembly to advocate for a variety of Islamist-inspired policies. Following the 1992 election, for example, several elected legislators unsuccessfully sought to establish an “authority to direct the public to do good and refrain from evil,” which would effectively function as an Islamic religious police (Al-Shayegi 1994; Ghabra 1997a). When a reformed press law was passed in 2006, Salafis forced the inclusion of a prohibition on directly insulting God, the prophets, and Islam (Freer 2018, pp. 110).

Though Salafis were not as cohesively organized as the Brotherhood, their political organization—the Popular Islamic Gathering—sought to challenge the Brotherhood’s control over the Islamic sector. This was particularly the case as Salafis sought greater control over the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, especially after the events of the Arab Spring. In 2014, a prominent Salafi elected legislator was given ministerial control over the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Oil. For example, during this period, Salafi influence over the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs allowed it to channel funds to Cambodian and Indonesian Salafis with ties to Kuwaiti Salafis (Pall 2020, pp. 23).

### **S.3.3 Independent Islamists**

The rise of Islamism in the 1980s resulted in the emergence of a new class of Islamist actors unaffiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood or the Salafis. In the Kuwait context, these Islamists are referred to as “independent Islamists.” These Islamists do not operate under the direction of or with support from a political or party-like organization. Electorally, these Islamists do at times

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<sup>39</sup>See: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/21635>.

coordinate with both Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi competitors in an effort to limit vote-splitting. In the National Assembly, however, these Islamist legislators do coordinate and have in the past joined broader Islamist voting blocs in the legislature. These elected legislators also support efforts to implement shariah-compliant legislation. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, independent Islamists periodically controlled the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs.

### **S.3.4 National-liberal**

National-liberals trace their origins to the Kuwait branch of the Movement of Arab Nationalists, led by Dr. Ahmad Khatib: the leader of Kuwait's first "opposition." Much of the success of Arab Nationalism can be attributed to the rise of Nasserism and anti-colonial sentiment in Kuwait before independence (Takriti 2018). When the National Assembly first convened in 1963, Arab Nationalists were most interested in using the National Assembly to vocalize support for transnational causes important to the larger movement. But they also used the National Assembly to limit the ruling family's absolute control over the newly independent state bureaucracy. In 1964, Arab Nationalists successfully objected to the appointment of six prominent merchants to the Council of Ministers, on the grounds that merchant inclusion in the cabinet constituted a conflict of interest. In 1965, the Council of Ministers introduced restrictive laws allowing the Minister of Information to close publications and monitor civil associations and clubs. In response, eight elected legislators close to the movement resigned (Crystal 1995, pp. 87-88). From 1973 to 1975, the movement was critical to the successful nationalization of Kuwait's oil industry (Baaklini & Abdul-Wahab 1979).

With waning support for Arab Nationalism across the region, the movement reconstituted itself in the 1980s and 1990s under the auspices of a broader liberal agenda. This agenda centered on the expansion and protection of civil and political rights (Al-Ghazali 2007). These efforts included support for women's rights, particularly the right to vote and run in National Assembly elections. In 2006, liberals (as well as Islamists) successfully advocated for a reform to Kuwait's longstanding electoral law, resulting in a change from 25 electoral districts to five.

### **S.3.5 Leftist-populist**

In 1999, a left-leaning coalition of several liberal, tribal, and Shia elected legislators announced the creation of the Popular Action Bloc. Broadly, leftist-populists in the Kuwait context have advocated



for policies and legislation focused on social justice, economic equality, and national independence (Kraetzschmar 2018). Though the group emerged from within the National Assembly as a distinct voting bloc, it participated in subsequent elections as an electoral front with a diverse following. Because the Popular Action Bloc cast itself as “true” parliamentary opposition, from 1999 to 2008, its members refused to join the Council of Ministers. The group introduced and advocated for legislation that resonated with traditional liberal causes, such as the protection of press freedoms and the expansion of laws protecting the right to assemble (Al-Ghazali 2007). In 2001, for example, the group advocated for a “freedoms session” in the National Assembly. Fearing the session would be used to create a formal political parties law, the government boycotted the session.<sup>40</sup> On other occasions, these legislators have also advocated for various populist causes, such as the cancelation of interest on bank loans.<sup>41</sup>

### **S.3.6 Shia Islamists**

Shia comprise roughly 25% of the citizen population of Kuwait. Historically, Kuwaiti Shia have been divided along ethnic lines: Arab Shia are those whose ancestors migrated from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and, to a lesser extent, southern Iraq. Iranian Shia are those who migrated to Kuwait in the nineteenth century from Southern Iran (Jamal 2005; al Mdaires 2010; Louër 2011). Since the 1980s, various Shia Islamist groups have participated in National Assembly elections. Though not explicitly ethno-sectarian, these groups have run under associational labels that signal their connection to various Shia clerics in Iraq, Lebanon, and Iran. These groups have occasionally allied with Sunni Islamist groups (such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salaf) on issues related to sharia law (Al-Madaires 1999). But, more broadly, their advocacy has focused more directly on expanding protections for Kuwait’s Shia minority. Since their rise in the 1980s, these groups have used the National Assembly to institutionalize these protections in legislation and through legislative advocacy. These include recognition of independent personal status courts, an expansion of the number of Shia places of worship (such as *hussainiyat*, or congregation halls for Shia religious ceremonies), permits for Shia newspapers, recognition of Ashura as a national holiday, and the naming of schools and other public buildings with the names of Shia leaders (Al-Ghazali 2007).

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<sup>40</sup>See: <https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/2001-04-09-1.1172346>.

<sup>41</sup>See: [https://riskandforecast.com/post/kuwait/drama-in-kuwaiti-parliament\\_532.html](https://riskandforecast.com/post/kuwait/drama-in-kuwaiti-parliament_532.html).

## S.4 Additional Analyses

### S.4.1 Probit Specifications

Here we report output from probit specifications of the models in Table 3 testing  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ .

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Voting with regime			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
WTI Price	0.126*** (0.018)	0.151*** (0.020)		
Oil Revenues			0.123*** (0.020)	0.158*** (0.022)
Cabinet Affiliate	0.104*** (0.015)	0.036 (0.022)	0.103*** (0.016)	0.015 (0.023)
Ideology Dummy	-0.313*** (0.022)	-0.111 (0.057)	-0.303*** (0.023)	0.025 (0.069)
Term FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
MP FEs		✓		✓
MP controls	✓		✓	
Topic controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	82,209	82,209	70,294	70,294

*Note:* \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Table A.2: Cooptation strategy and voting with the regime. Table reports coefficients from probit models of voting consistent with the minister bloc at the legislator-vote level. All models include term fixed effects and indicators for law topic (budget/fiscal, treaty, oil-related, or electoral). Models alternately include controls for legislator attributes (age, gender, education, sect, occupation, and tribal affiliation) or legislator fixed effects. WTI price and oil revenues are standardized continuous variables.

### S.4.2 Specifications with Cabinet Affiliate Dummy

Here we report output from OLS specifications of the models in Table 3 using a binary variable measuring cabinet affiliation (coded as 0 for deputy-votes with no affiliated cabinet members, and 1 for deputy-votes with one or more affiliated cabinet members).

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Voting with regime			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
WTI Price	0.015*** (0.002)	0.016*** (0.002)		
Oil Revenues			0.015*** (0.002)	0.017*** (0.002)
Cabinet Affiliate (Dummy)	0.018*** (0.003)	-0.001 (0.004)	0.020*** (0.003)	-0.004 (0.004)
Ideology Dummy	-0.038*** (0.003)	-0.035*** (0.007)	-0.038*** (0.003)	-0.025** (0.008)
Term FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
MP FEs		✓		✓
MP controls	✓		✓	
Topic controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	82,209	82,209	70,294	70,294
R <sup>2</sup>	0.034	0.097	0.039	0.113

*Note:*

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Table A.3: Cooptation strategy and voting with the regime – Cabinet Affiliate Dummy. Table reports coefficients from OLS models of voting consistent with the minister bloc at the legislator-vote level