

*In The Name of Allah*



**The National Society for Human Rights**  
**Report on**  
**Observation of the Third Phase of the Municipal**  
**Elections in Saudi Arabia**  
**12/12/2015**



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**Preface:**

Given the commitment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to activate the participation of citizens in public affairs, and to promote active citizenship and belonging to the Kingdom on the part of the Saudi citizen, and given the Kingdom's keenness to keep up the process of comprehensive and sustainable development initiated by the country since the era of the founder, King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, the Kingdom has been keen to develop local development policies. In doing so, the Kingdom embarked on the development of the structure and powers of the municipal councils; the promotion of the participation of the various segments of society to elect their representatives in the councils; and building an active community partnership supportive for development. Developments in the three phases of municipal elections represents an important step in the process of construction and development in the Kingdom. The third phase was marked by the participation of women as voters and candidates.

As for the Saudi National Society for Human Rights, it has been keen to contribute to and support the community participation in public affairs, through the observation of the first and third phases of the municipal elections. The Society has been keen for its observation to be impartial and balanced, and to refer to the pros and cons to be either enhanced or avoided and processed respectively.

Like the previous report, this one serves as monitoring and conveying the reality as it occurred, as well as including some proposals and recommendations, which the Society hopes will be utilized by the relevant authorities in the field of municipal elections, taking into consideration the fact that the municipal councils play an important role in local development.

### Timeline of the Third Phase of the Municipal Elections (1436/1437 A.H) (2014/2015)

Stage Items	Date		Time Period	Notes
	Hjri (A.H)	Gregorian (A.D)		
Registration of candidates and update of previous databases1	Saturday 07/11/1436 Monday 01/12/2015	22/08/2015 14/9/2015	21 days excluding Fridays, 5 hours per day	
Announcement of preliminary Lists of Voters	Tuesday 16/12/1436	29/09/2015		
Announcement of final lists of voters	Monday 27/01/1437	9/11/2015		
Registration of candidates2	Sunday 15/11/1436 Thursday 04/12/1436	30/08/2015 17/09/2015	17 days	
Announcement of preliminary lists of candidates	Wednesday 17/12/1436	30/09/2015		
Deadline for Candidates to Submit Withdrawal Applications	Thursday 07/02/1437	19/11/2015	82 days	From the date of registration of candidates (15/11/1436 A.H – 7/02/1437 A.H)
Announcement of final lists of candidates	Sunday 17/2/1437	29/11/2015		
Candidates' advertising campaigns	Sunday 17/2/1437 Thursday 28/02/1437	29/11/2015 10/12/2015	12 days ending on Thursday at 12:00 AM	
Polling day	Saturday 01/03/1437	12/12/2015	From 8:00 AM until 5:00 PM	
Announcement of Results	Sunday 03/03/1437	13/12/2015		

- Voters' Registration Procedures Stage
- Candidates' Registration Procedures Stage
- Polling Day
- Announcement of Results



## **Introduction:**

### **Summary on the role of the National Society for Human Rights in observing the municipal elections**

Being aware of its duty and commitment to the community, and in support to development efforts in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the National Society has participated in the observation of the first phase of the municipal elections, which was held in the period from 1 Muharram to 12 RabieAl-Awwal of the year 1426H corresponding to the period from 10 February to 21 April, 2005. For this purpose, and in participation with several bodies of civil society, the Society has founded the National Council for Monitoring Elections. Those elections were held through three stages, where the first included Riyadh region; the second included the Eastern Region, Baha, Asir, Jizan and Najran; and the third included Makkah, Qassim, Al-Jawf, Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah, Hail, Tabuk, and Northern region borders.

The team of observers and coordinators has been formed of enough number to represent all the participants, a large proportion of whom were volunteers. The observation process came out as a distinguished experience in the field of community participation in general, and political participation in particular. Those observers have been trained through organizing a large number of workshops on how to carry out the process of election monitoring, and how to make sure that the procedures in the various polling stations follow the election system and regulations approved by the Count Center (the General Committee of Elections). For this purpose, the Society has designed a certain form that included the elements of observation based on guide books issued by international institutions, including the European Security and Cooperation Organization.

This was followed by the Society issuing several bulletins and state-

ments on the processes of observation immediately after the elections. The Society then concluded its efforts by issuing and publishing the Final Report on the Observation of Elections, which included the following points:

- 1-The various procedures to prepare for the process of observation;
- 2-Phases of elections;
- 3- The most important results of the observation of elections, which included several focal points as follows:

- Environment outside the polling station;
- Voting procedures;
- Conduct of those in charge of elections;
- Polling materials; and
- Behavior of voters.

The report has introduced the following set of recommendations to improve the electoral process:

- Educating voters and candidates on the procedures and regulations of all stages of the electoral process;
- Improving the administrative performance of the polling stations;
- Voting procedures;
- Expansion of electronic voting;
- Development of advertising practices of the candidates;
- Improving performance of the media in raising awareness of the importance of the municipal elections.

The Society has showed in the final report the neutrality of government agencies in the electoral process, where there is no interference on the part of any of the government agencies whether directly or indirectly in the electoral process.

### **- Role of the Society during the second phase of municipal elections**

The National Society for Human Rights did not participate in the observation of the second phase of the municipal elections for such reasons it communicated to those concerned in due course. These elections were held in 1432H, wherein 5324 candidates competed for 1056 seats in municipal councils.

Based on the results of the first phase, as well as the performance of the municipal councils and their value and relevance to the citizen, the Society has put forward several proposals to improve the experience of municipal elections in the Kingdom. The results of the second phase of elections have been expected in terms of low voter turnout and attitudes and motivations behind voting, which requires the authorities concerned with elections to work to develop legislative and regulatory rules and procedures, and to introduce new mechanisms to overcome certain difficulties. Thus, the Society has introduced several proposals, most important of which are as follows: 1- The need to increase the powers of the municipal councils so that they can achieve their objectives; and 2- allowing women to participate as voters and candidates. Meeting these demands has contributed in encouraging the Society to participate in monitoring the municipal elections in its third phase that was held in 1437H, corresponding to 2015G.

This report on monitoring the third phase of the municipal elections by the Society consists of several focal themes, as follows:

#### **The first focal theme: the legislative and procedural developments in the third phase of the municipal elections:**

There were a number of developments in the third phase of municipal elections for the year 1437H, including:

### **First: The amendments to the municipal system:**

The third phase of Municipal elections have witnessed several important developments that encouraged the Society to participate therein. Such developments are as follows:

1-Allowing Saudi women to participate in municipal elections, where the system stipulated the right of every citizen (male or female) to vote and run in elections according to the issued regulations of Shariah, which is promulgated by the Royal Decree No. 9893 dated 16-3-1435H.

2- Reducing the voting age to 18 years.

3- Election of two-thirds, rather than half, of the members of each municipal council.

4- Increasing the number of constituencies and electoral commissions, according to the breadth and population of every region, as follows:

- Riyadh Municipality includes (10) constituencies, from each constituency two members are to be elected; rather than previously (7) constituencies, from each constituency one member was to be elected.

- Holy Makkah Municipality (10) constituencies, from each constituency two members are to be elected; rather than previously (7) constituencies, from each constituency one member was to be elected.

- Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah Municipality (10) constituencies, from each constituency two members are to be elected; rather than previously (7) constituencies, from each constituency one member was to be elected.

- Jeddah Municipality (10) constituencies, from each constituency two members are to be elected; rather than previously (7) constituencies, from each constituency one member was to be elected.

- The Eastern Province (Dammam Metropolitan) Municipality (10) constituencies, from each constituency two members are to be elected;

rather than previously (7) constituencies, from each constituency one member was to be elected.

- Taif Municipality (8) constituencies, from each constituency two members are to be elected; rather than previously (6) constituencies, from each constituency one member was to be elected.

- Ahsa Municipality (8) constituencies, from each constituency two members are to be elected; rather than previously (6) constituencies, from each constituency one member was to be elected.

5-Expansion and inclusion in the terms of reference and powers of municipal councils in the municipal affairs both with regard to the Declaratory and regulatory terms of reference according to the amendments of the year 1435H; to support its role as a participant in the making of local development policies, and the representation of citizens and expressing their problems better, which gives more importance to the role of municipal councils and the development of their functions, and hence citizens recognize the importance of electing their representatives in the municipal councils, such as, for example:

(A) the adoption of municipal plans, programs and projects that fall within the jurisdiction of the municipality, both in the areas of operation and maintenance, and all programs and projects which fall within the jurisdiction of the municipality.

(B) Expansion of the regulatory powers of municipal councils to activate their powers in controlling the performance of municipalities, and the services they provide, through various means such as municipal reports on their work, the progress of projects, revenue collection, municipal investments, reviewing the procedures of land distribution, and procedures for allocating residential pieces of land to ascertain the validity and soundness of the measures taken.

- Examining the notes and complaints delivered to the Council regarding any of the municipal services.

- Discussing field visits reports prepared by specialized committees formed by the Council –based on a resolution made by the Council or at the request of one of its members –to have access to examine municipal projects.

- Emphasizing the role of municipal councils in the adoption of the municipal budget prior to submission, in accordance with the statutory procedures, as well as the adoption of the final account of the municipality. These are important regulatory instruments.

C - Expansion of the independence of the municipal councils, and activation of their regulatory powers, through preventing the secretaries of municipalities from taking of the municipal presidency of municipal councils, and providing municipal councils with human, technical, and finance resources, which help them to carry out their functions.

(D) Increasing the effectiveness of the role of the councils through the formation of permanent or temporary committees to study various topics, and requiring the councils to raise annual reports on their work to the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs.

**- The terms of reference of municipalities and functions of municipal councils:**

Municipalities carry out many regulatory functions; they follow up local services and facilities; determine the investment of local territories, management of local financial resources, and local fees in accordance with the system; secure the lives of citizens against health and security hazards; and improve environmental issues. The municipal councils follow up those tasks and functions.

In addition to the above, Municipality councils -according to the municipal system issued on 04-10-1435H-carry out specific tasks of approving the following municipal plans and programs:

- 1-Implementation of municipal projects approved in the budget.
- 2- Implementation of the operation and maintenance projects.
- 3- Implementation of the development and investment projects.
- 4-Municipal services programs and projects.

- Municipal councils also study issues and introduce the results to the concerned parties, such as:

- 1-Structural, organizational, and residential draft charts.
- 2-Municipal services projects.
- 3-Expropriation for public interest projects.
- 4- Establishment of subsidiary municipalities and services offices.

### **Second: Procedural developments in the third phase of the municipal elections:**

The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs has carried out a set of actions which represented a development in the administration of local elections, as follows:

1- Strengthening the role of the Count Center (the General Committee of Elections), and giving it the legal powers and support necessary for it to carry out the task of elections management, and coordination with the sub-committees all over the Kingdom.

2- Coordination with relevant ministries, especially the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education, to organize the electoral process.

3- Opening the way for concerned NGOs to observe elections, as stipulated in the Municipal system.

4-Preparing and training cadres working in the municipal elections to manage that process.

5-Exerting efforts to clean voter registers in the various regions of the Kingdom, and to register new voters, especially women and youth.

6-The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs has early launched on its portal a special website on elections, (<http://www.intekhab.gov.sa>). The site contains numerous declarations, resolutions and regulations for all aspects and stages of the election process, as well as the rules for the enrollment of voters, and registration of candidates, and a window for data and statistics, and answers to frequently asked questions about the elections. The site also includes a video film illustrating all the stages which voters should go through to participate in voting inside the polling station.

### **Third: Legal framework regulating the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia:**

HE Engineer Abdul Latif bin Abdul Malik AlAl-Sheikh, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs, issued -based on the powers conferred upon him, and upon Article sixty six of the Municipal Councils Law promulgated by Royal Decree No. (M / 61), and dated 04-10-1435H on the issuance of the necessary regulations to implement the Law- the regulation on the election of members of municipal councils, which included several focal points as follows:

- Formation of the General and Local Election Committees and management of their meetings and work.

- Procedural and temporal stages for preparing for elections, and division and distribution of electoral constituencies, as well as procedures and measures for monitoring elections.



- Measures and procedures for voter registration.
- The rules governing the registration of candidates, groups that may not be registered, and regulations of announcing candidates.
- Organizing the voting process procedures and timing, the measures for the management of polling stations, the rules of the counting process, and the adoption and announcement of the results.
- Informing the public and raising their awareness about the local elections in coordination with the Ministry of Culture and Information.
- The General Secretariat of the affairs of the municipal councils issued a regulation on the measures and rules governing election campaigns, which included the establishment of offices offering services in support of elections, measures for granting campaigning licenses, the authorized methods and instruments of propaganda, and morals and behaviors that must be observed in the electoral campaign management in accordance with the ethical rules the country is keen on applying in its statute, and the various laws and policies, and so as to maintain social peace. The regulation also entail observance of neutrality on the part of state institutions towards all candidates, and banning the use of government institutions or instruments to support any candidate.
- The Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs has issued a list of irregularities and the regulation of electoral appeals, which included the procedures and mechanisms to be followed in case of monitoring election irregularities or challenging the decisions of the electoral commissions.

### **The second focal theme: The Society's working plan in monitoring the third phase of the municipal elections**

In what follows we shall discuss the major axes of work of the Na-

tional Society for Human Rights in the completion of the municipal election monitoring tasks in the third phase, namely:

**First, the objectives of the election monitoring process:**

The Society sought to put several goals for its mission to monitor the third phase of municipal elections, as follows:

1-Ensuring the nature of the role of the executive branch, and its relationship with voters and candidates during the different stages of the election process.

2- Ensuring that the rules, regulations and procedures for the management of the electoral process are observed by government agencies, the candidates, and the voters; and recording abuses, if any.

3-Evaluation of the electoral process, to assess the positive aspects and shortcomings, and make recommendations to help promote the success of the electoral experience in the Kingdom.

4- Encouraging acceptance of the election results through monitoring the electoral process.

5-Encouraging participation and promoting building voter confidence in the electoral process through neutral observation of elections.

6-Evaluatingto what extent the various human rights are protected during the election period.

7- Contributing to the resolution of differences with regard to issues related to the electoral process through the monitoring of the various stages in the municipal elections.

8-Offering indirect support for national education and building civil society through monitoring elections by the Society.

## **Second: Principles and foundations of work**

The Society adopted several basic premises and principles of the monitoring process, including:

1-Priority of citizens and their rights: In monitoring elections, the Society builds on the fact that participation is one of the fundamental human rights of priority concern, which the Society supports enhancing them in Saudi society.

2-Comprehensiveness: This means that monitoring includes all stages of the electoral process, from registration, enrollment, run, propaganda and media campaigns, to the process of voting, counting and announcement of results.

3-Regulatory and legal review: The monitoring process including legal review of the electoral law and regulations, and to what extent they are complied with and applied during the various stages of the electoral process, including:

- The regulation governing the election of members of municipal councils, which included the rights of voters and candidates, the formation of electoral commissions, the procedures for the voting process, and the preparation of the electoral headquarters.

- The regulation governing election campaigns.

- The regulation determining irregularities and electoral appeals.

In addition to some of the decisions related to the organization of the electoral process, such as voters and candidates registration, and the terms of reference of the municipal councils.

4-Participation: It is built on the fact that the monitoring process is a national duty for everyone, and thus it is achieved in collaboration with all partners, both governmental and non-governmental organizations.

5. Transparency: It is achieved through making a careful inventory of the pros and cons, and declaring it to the public opinion, so as to develop the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, which promotes local development, and achieves comprehensive and continuous development.

6-Efficiency and effectiveness: They are achieved through the training and qualification of the participants in the local election monitoring, and providing technical and material resources as much as possible.

The Society is keen on carrying out the process of monitoring perfectly in proportion with the available technical, human, and material capabilities. Thus, it has been agreed that the monitoring process should include all the different stages, where a sample of the committees should be monitored in the various administrative regions of the Kingdom, in such a manner which we will refer to later.

### **Third: Planning and preparing for monitoring**

The National Society for Human Rights has performed several activities to develop a complete plan for the process of monitoring the elections; most important of the activities in this area are:

#### **1-Developing mechanisms for monitoring**

The Society is keen to follow several steps to put the election monitoring mechanism in place, including:

- Coordination with relevant government institutions, particularly the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, and the Count Center (the General Committee of Elections).The President of the Society, Dr. Mufleh bin Rabiean Qahtani talked to and –accompanied by Vice-President of the Society, Dr. Saleh Khathlan, and in the presence of a number of members of the Society- met with His Excellency the Minister of Municipal and Rural Af-

fairs, the Head of the General Committee of Elections, Engineer Abdullatif bin Abdulmalik Al Al-Sheikh. During the meeting, they discussed election monitoring mechanisms, and how to facilitate the mission of the Society monitors to carry out their role in this regard. His Excellency the Minister has expressed his full support for the regulatory mission of the Society. Another meeting was held with the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the municipal elections Engineer Gudaie Al-Qahtani; to learn about the efforts made by the Executive Committee and to identify what facilities can be provided by this Committee for the observers of the Society. The Ministry has informed all the General Committee of Elections, the Executive Committee, the different Municipalities, and the regulatory, technical, financial, legal, informational teams participating in the elections, that the Society shoulders monitoring the third phase of municipal elections, and that it is obligatory for them to facilitate its mission in this regard.

- Having examined the subject of monitoring, the Executive Council of the Society issued its approval decision, and allocated a budget for the monitoring process. Following, the Supreme Committee for Monitoring Elections was formed, to be headed by the President of the Society, and have for its membership the Vice President and the Secretary General of the Society.

- Internally, there have been multiple workshops and meetings held with the managers of the Society branches in the different areas, and the working committees, to familiarize them with the functions and roles they should carry out in monitoring the elections.

- The supervisors of branches have organized meetings with the secretaries some areas and the heads of local electoral committees in order to arrange for the monitoring process.

- There have been 35 training workshops and meetings held with the observers, as follows:

Areas	Riyadh	Jeddah	Jizan	Asir	Makkah	Al-Ma- dinah	Jawf	Eastern Region
Workshops & meetings	3	4	6	2	6	5	5	4

- Developing a comprehensive guide on the mechanisms and measures used in the observation of elections, both with regard to monitoring procedures, ensuring impartiality and integrity, and the application of rules and procedures governing the voting process. At the same time, the observer –whether male or female–should not bypass their role in the polling stations for men or women, nor perform any conduct inconsistent with neutrality, or their commitment to efficiency and effectiveness in carrying out the process of observation, and recording all their remarks on the task at hand.

## 2- Observers

The Society has been keen on selecting and training the observers. The number of the core team totaled 110 male and female observers, who were joined by other groups of collaborators and volunteers. They have been deployed to areas as follows:

Areas	Riyadh	Jeddah	Jizan	Asir	Makkah	Al-Ma- dinah	Jawf	Eastern Region
Number of observers	35	9	19	13	12	8	6	8

- In performing the observation process, the Society has also utilized modern means of communication, which allows the monitoring team to

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have a permanent liaison, and instant and full knowledge of what is happening in any region of the Kingdom; increasing the effectiveness of the monitoring process of the municipal elections in the Kingdom.

### **3- Monitoring instruments**

The Society developed an integrated guide for participants in the local election monitoring and drafted it into two data forms; the first of which has to do with the pre-polling and pre-counting stage, where it included:

- Questions about the impartiality of government institutions.
- Following the regulations and procedures governing enrollment and registration, and propaganda and electoral campaigns.
- How helpful the responsible bodies are and to what extent officials are efficient in the process of enrollment and registration of candidates and voters.

#### **The second form included indicators on:**

- The degree of preparedness of the polling stations, and their readiness to receive voters, and ensuring the impartiality and integrity.
- The environment surrounding the election process.
- Applying voting procedures in an efficient and impartial manner.
- Applying the counting procedures in a transparent and impartial manner.

This can be measured through a set of indicators that are included as closed questions, as well as some of the observations the observer wants to add in those forms.

- The Society held several workshops on coordination and training, so as to follow the different stages of elections, which are as follows:

- A- Registration and enrollment processes;
- B- Advertising and public information about elections;
- C- Propaganda and electoral campaigns by the candidates;
- D- Observations on the surrounding environment of the electoral commissions;
- E- The practices of voting process in committees;

- Sending letters to supervisors on the branches of the Society in the various regions of the Kingdom and the main center in Riyadh, including the following obligatory measures:

A- Coordination with the local committee for the municipal elections in the working area of the Branch, so as to coordinate the election monitoring process, and to exchange information and data about the polling stations, and to agree on procedures.

B- Visiting the headquarters of the local election committees to identify their procedures and the extent of readiness.

C- Holding meetings and workshops with observers to discuss:

(1) Procedures and measures governing their work;

(2) training them to fill forms of observation;

(3) Regulations and values governing observation of elections, and the rights and duties of the observers.

(4) Identifying constituencies and stations that will be monitored, through selecting random samples that meet to give a comprehensive concept about the electoral process and its integrity.

(5) Arranging for paying unexpected visits to constituencies and polling stations to have complete access to the conditions in these centers.

(D) Putting a link on the website of the Society to receive any com-

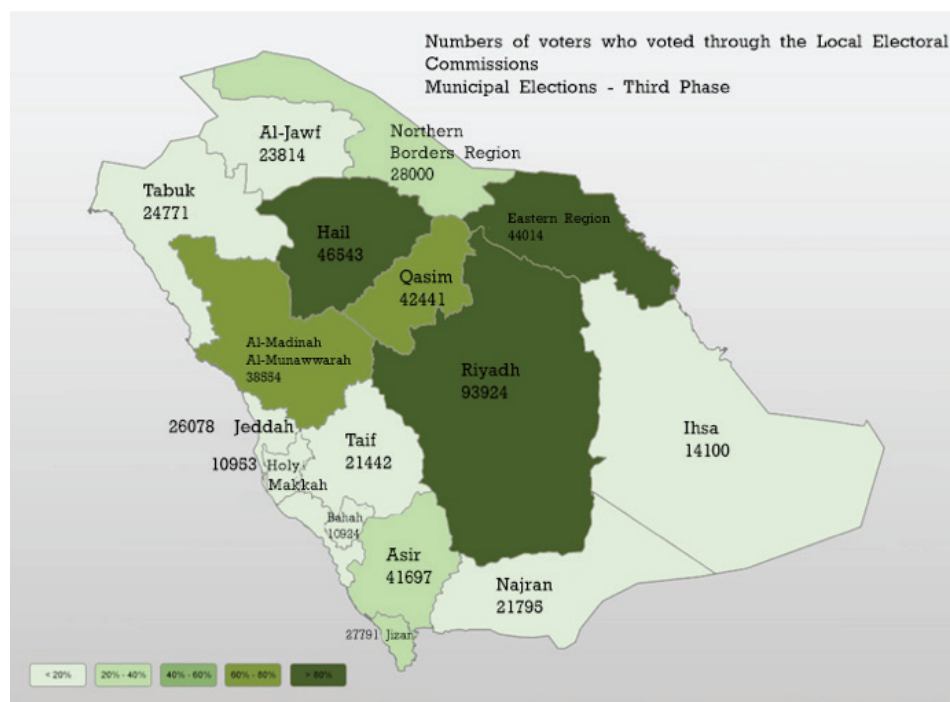


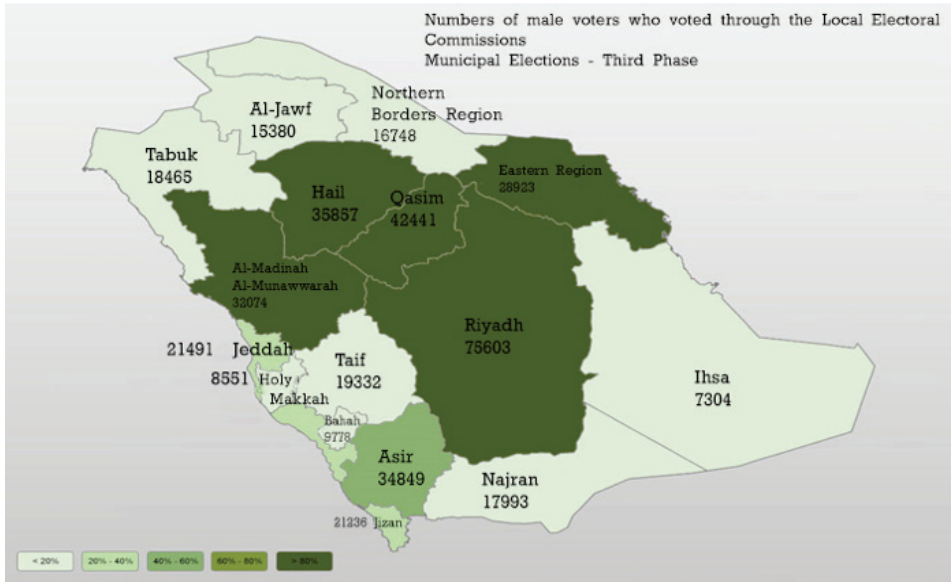
plaints from candidates or voters that may have an effect on the process or results of elections.

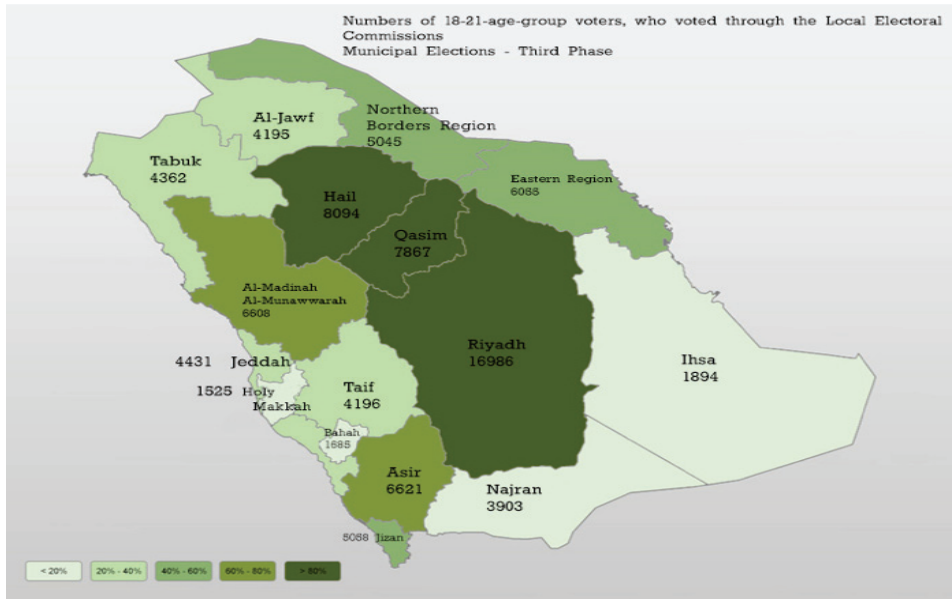
(E) Urging voters and candidates to communicate with the Society through its phones and e-mail upon monitoring any irregularities or abuses.

#### Fourth, constituencies, voters and candidates in the third phase of municipal elections

The following maps show the total voters registered in the third phase of the local elections in the Kingdom in accordance with the data of the General Committee of Elections:







The following figure shows the distribution of the municipal councils and number of their members in the regions of the Kingdom

**Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs**  
**General Secretariat of Municipal Councils Affairs**

Statement of the municipal councils and number of each council's members (for the third phase) depending on the scope of each secretariat

No.	Secretariat of	Number of Municipal Councils	Number of Members
1	Riyadh	48	558
2	Holy Makkah	4	57
3	Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah	19	216
4	Jeddah	16	180
5	Eastern Region	21	252
6	Qasim	28	303
7	Asir	34	366
8	Hail	18	180
9	Bahah	12	132
10	Tabuk	13	147
11	Jizan	26	267
12	Najran	10	105
13	Al-Jawf	10	114
14	Northern Borders Region	10	108
15	Taif	11	123
16	Ihsa	4	51
	Total	284	3159

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**Focal theme III: Results of observation of the phases of the third phase of the municipal elections:**

The National Society for Human Rights has been keen on monitoring all the different stages of municipal elections; to ensure the integrity and transparency of the electoral process and the application of the relevant procedures and regulations. This was done through the Headquarters of the Society in Riyadh and its branches throughout the Kingdom. The number of polling stations was (1263), distributed on (284) secretariat and municipality. The Society has checked all the procedures leading up to the polling and counting day to be held on 01/03/1437H corresponding to 12/12/2015G, to ensure the integrity of the proceedings during the following stages: 1) at the stage of registration of voters, who numbered (1.486.477) voters, of whom (1.355.840) were (males) and (130.637) were (females); 2) at the stage of registration of candidates who numbered at the beginning of registration (6917) candidates, of whom (5938) were (men) and (979) were (women); and 3) during the election campaigns of candidates. 277.761 male and female voters have been eliminated from the three election cycles due to their not meeting conditions, where (51,230) were eliminated due to their occupying military positions; (30,086) names were eliminated due to their being deceased; and (171.684) voters were eliminated due to their duplicate names. Moreover, (24,761) male and female voters were eliminated due to their not fulfilling other conditions, including voters under the legal age, or were eliminated by a decision issued by the local Committees and the Committee of appeals. The final number of candidates who fought the municipal elections has reached (5323) male and female candidates.

- Some notices were observed regarding the municipal elections 1437 A.H. on several axes. Some of such axes are general and the others are special for each phase of the elections, according to the following:

### **Section I: General Remarks on the third phase of the Municipal Elections**

There are some positive and negative remarks made by National Society for Human Rights observers, which are the following:

First: Positive Remarks:

The most prominent of these remarks are manifest in the following:

- Governmental Institutions are in compliance with complete neutrality throughout all phases of electoral process, and stand at the same distance from all candidates, either through declared public attitude, or through constant alert to its employees.

- Electoral committees and staff working at voting locations, in addition to all participants in various local elections processes have received training.

- Distribution of electoral constituencies in compliance with specific and announced controls has been carried out fairly and professionally. Thus, this has positively contributed in promoting fairness and equality among various regions of the Kingdom, as well as between the candidates.

- Attention was paid to the aspects of awareness and information about elections, whether for nationals in general who are entitled to vote or run for elections in particular, via different methods whether through advertisements in streets and public squares, or election's website, along with uploading all matters related to elections to the website.

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- Issuance of many rules and regulations, which regulate all phases of the electoral process, and announce the same properly.

- Transparency of all electoral tables in all regions of the Kingdom. Thus, this has increased elections' credibility. Procedures related to registration of voters and candidates have been verified well.

- The elections have witnessed cooperation and coordination between all Governmental organizations, specifically Ministries of Municipal and Rural Affairs, Interior and Education, and various local authorities.

- Special attention was paid to increase benefiting from technology, to connect and exchange directives between the general Committees and the sub-committees of elections within different regions.

- Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs was keen on transparency, which is embodied in cooperation with the National Society for Human Rights regarding supervising municipal elections in all phases thereof. In addition, it gave the chance to civil society organizations to monitor elections.

- Increasing percentage of electoral participation in the light of novelty of such experience within the kingdom, as 702,542 voters formed participation percentage of 47.4 %. Such percentage increased up to more than 60 % within some regions such as Najran, Hail and Al-Jawf and reached 74 % within Northern Borders Region. Which is due to the desire to participate in the electoral experience, as well as confidence in transparency and fairness of elections, in spite of the novelty of the experience.

- Voting stations were prepared and equipped for the electoral process, and well organized in most of its parts.

- Voting stations supervisors never directed voters to vote for a particular candidate or influenced the progress of the election process.

- Start and end times of voting were respected in general, in most of the voting stations in the Kingdom.
- Voting and election process took place in a quiet and orderly atmosphere, and was transparent and impartial. Counting of votes was made transparently and openly.
- It has been observed that the handicapped, seniors and illiterate people were handled with special care and were enabled to perform their election duty easily.
- It has been observed that election stations security personnel have been neutral and cooperative in facilitating the voting and the counting processes.
- Equal and fair opportunities were open for both voters and candidates, males and females, within the scope of the regulatory rules, throughout the registration process of voters or candidates, elections advertising, or voting. In addition, delegates have been appointed to both voters and candidates at the voting stations, and during the counting process.

### **Second: Negative Remarks:**

There are some negative remarks, which come as follows:

- Some candidates were disqualified at late time for reasons that may go to nonexistence of some conditions in regard thereof. Decisions were issued regarding some of them from challenge committees. However, they had to refer to the Board of Grievances (the Administrative Judicial Authority) to cause such decisions to be final.
- Although reaching most electoral stations was easy, some others were difficult to reach.
- Some issues were observed regarding fairness of the terms of the election campaigns, and the licenses needed in this regard, despite the ef-



forts of the General Commission for Elections that were made to facilitate them.

- It has been observed that female voters faced some difficulties in connection with proving their identity or residency. The Society observed that the entities supervising the elections worked on facilitating such matter through following some means mitigating the impact of the same on women's exercising of their right to vote.

- It has been observed that some candidates' campaigns continued to exist via SMSs up to the polling day.

- Some candidates were inciting voters to vote for them on a tribal basis or based on religious motivation, not on the basis of the strength of candidate's program.

- Candidates' representatives, allowed to supervise the election process, were absent from most electoral stations, which is due to failure from candidates' side regarding their readiness for the elections, or their confidence in the integrity of the process of voting, counting and announcement of the results.

- Some voters, residing in remote areas, especially those areas that have not been provided with electricity services yet, faced some difficulties in proving their residency or identity.

- Some female workers hesitated in facilitating the mission of the Society's female observers in some cases.

- When it came to expenses on election campaigns, candidates were not bound by a maximum limit of electoral expenses, or by opening accounts for such expenses; these accounts would facilitate supervision on the expenses of each campaign, and ensure that competitiveness conditions are observed.

- Some candidates complained that they were not authorized to ex-

pand their use of means of communication for their electoral programs, and were not allowed to use virtual advertising and signage, which would be fit enough such event, under the pretext of maintaining good appearance of the areas. In addition, some advertising companies, licensed to participate in the elections advertisement, offered but exaggerated prices for advertising signage.

- Some female candidates complained that they were faced by blocs, which contributed in limiting the number of votes for such female candidates, and led to their failure to gain more seats in the municipal councils. However, this could be explained in that female candidates are still novice to the elections experience.

Moreover, social customs and traditions limit women's opportunity to reach the seats of the municipal council. On top of that, the voting system in the municipal elections adopted the one vote system, which decreased alliances against some male or female candidates.

### **Third: Detailed Remarks in the Phases of Municipal Elections:**

The Society, with all eight branches thereof, was keen to observe all phases of the elections process preparing reports about such process. The most important remarks for these phases have been as follows:

- Preparation Phase for the Elections, Registration of Voters and Registration of Candidates:

The phase of dividing constituencies, preparing and dividing electoral stations is considered an important phase in the elections. Regions indicators have varied when it came to the elections preparation phase and the registration of candidates. The most prominent observations made for such phase are as follows:

- Pros such as:

- Officials responsible for the elections process have handled the process well.
- Media has followed up well everything related to the voters and the candidates of the media committee in some areas.
- Modern technology has been employed to the work of the committees.
- Governmental Institutions, as well as general and public electoral committees have been neutral.
- Auditing has been effected well to the revision of voters' rolls, and registration of new voters, as well as with respect to the registration of candidates.
- Besides, reports have indicated some cons, including:
  - Failure by governmental organizations in some areas from raising sufficient public media awareness, despite the efforts referred to above, when it with the importance of local elections for nationals, specifically after increase of the powers of such local elections manifest in setting and supervising local development polices. This has also appeared clearly in raising awareness about women candidacy for the membership of such Councils for the first time, which has contributed to reducing women's demand for enrollment.
  - Delay in the announcement of the final rolls of candidates, which has contributed to reducing readiness to contest the election.
  - Some centers for voters' registration were overcrowded and were poorly equipped with modern technology that would assist in finalizing the registration procedures easily and smoothly.
  - Voters were hardly familiar with the registration procedures and the required documents due to lack of awareness, despite the novelty of the

experience, and despite the efforts of General Elections Commission, and the Executive Committee in this regard.

- Lack of proper division of some elections stations. Some constituencies are near, while some others are far, under disparity of population density.

- Voting stations within the Kingdom needed to be fully linked to one another. In addition, paper work needed to be minimized and applying modern technologies in organizing the elections process needed to be increased.

- Some mayors in some places did not set a time schedule for their attendance, which would facilitate the process of proving residency as a requirement for voters' registration.

- Existence of some difficulty in proving women's residency, as well as the persons who have no deeds for their houses, and those who have no lease contracts.

A Schedule Showing the Final Numbers of Candidates Running for the Municipal Elections

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of candidates</b>
Riyadh	907
The Holy capital	144
Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah	360
Jeddah	344
Eastern Region	321
Qasim	460
Asir	671
Hail	350
Bahah	259
Tabuk	248
Jizan	458
Najran	161
Al-Jawf	213
Northern Borders Region	122
Taif	216
Ihsa	89
Total candidates	5323

Source: a compilation gathered from the data of the Regional Secretariats and the statistics of the Local Election Committees by the teamwork of this report.

## 2-Electoral Advertising

Electoral campaigns are considered one of the key factors determining participation levels of participation within elections. They demonstrate how far candidates have electoral programs, as well as their readiness to contest. Moreover, electoral campaigns are deemed as principal in recognizing some competitiveness indicators between candidates. There are some basic notes in this regard:

### **Some are pros, including:**

- Compliance with the regulating rules and restrictions set by various governmental authorities.
- Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs has enacted regulations governing electoral campaigns and advertising. In addition, official procedures for issuance of licenses has been established. All these rules and restrictions have been published on government portal for the elections.
- Government authorities, as well as local and general committees have demonstrated neutrality and have followed up the campaigns.

### **Some others are cons, including:**

- Candidates' advertising campaigns have been characterized with extreme weakness as well as absence of effective presentation of electoral programs by candidates, which resulted in some negative impacts on citizens' attendance to the elections, and contributed in limiting preference criteria between candidates.
- The regulations on the electoral and media advertising appeared ambiguous regarding some means of advertising, specifically means of social media, which led to candidates unawareness of the rules and restrictions, the available means for use as well as the means restricted from use. Such means are important means, especially after decreasing the re-

quired age for registration and voting to include the youth segment, which is considered the segment using more modern means of communication and electoral advertising.

Announcing the final list of candidates was delayed, which led to weak electoral and promotional campaigns. This has posed difficulties specifically before women in their first experience as candidates in local elections.

- Existence of some difficulties regarding means of electoral campaigns, prohibition of some such as cloth advertising panels, or using of some means of social media. Prohibition of some advertisements is justified by maintaining general appearance of the regions, and maintaining citizens' privacy regarding means of social media.

- Female candidates faced some difficulties because the community has not been made aware of their candidacy to these elections. In addition, means available for promoting their candidacy were few, not to mention that they were still novice at running for the local elections.

- Weakness or absence of electoral programs announced by candidates; this has adversely limited the chances to compare and favor candidates over the others, as well as to raise voters' public and political awareness.

### **3.Voting, counting and results' announcement:**

We must not overlook the fact that public participation has become higher, if compared with the novelty of the electoral experience in Saudi Arabia, and the weakness of Saudi citizen's culture of participation in public affairs, specifically after inactive local councils' experiences during the first and the second phases, from citizens point of view, which was demonstrated clearly through the results of the second phase. H.E. Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs, Head of the General Committee of the Municipal Elections, has announced the results of the municipal elections

in its third phase, one day after the polling day, which was conducted in (1296) centers. His Excellency has indicated participation of (702,542) male and female voters, rating 47.4 % of the total enrolled voters. (2106) male and female candidates won the membership of municipal councils. In the following table, it is indicated that participation rates have increased in governorates and provinces, compared to major cities in KSA, which is consistent with the results reached by the Society while monitoring the electoral process.

The following table shows the different percentages and numbers of participation throughout the different regions of KSA:

Local Committee at Riyadh			Local Committee at Holy Makkah			Local Committee at Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah			Local Committee at Jeddah		
Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %
47417	31424	66.3%	48131	3546	74.3%	59050	27467	46.5%	81540	21612	26.5%

Local Committee at Eastern Region			Local Committee at Qasim			Local Committee at Asir			Local Committee Hail		
Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %
222778	91679	41.2%	104156	59408	57%	106969	54105	50.6%	85729	57685	67.3%

Local Committee at Bahah			Local Committee at Tabuk			Local Committee at Jizan			Local Committee Najran		
Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %
26586	14281	53.8%	54064	29791	55.1%	83175	37505	45.1%	42970	25869	60.2%

Local Committee at Al-Jawf			Local Committee at Northern Borders Region			Local Committee at Taif Governorate			Local Committee Ihsa		
Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %	Voters	Electors	Election %
47417	31424	66.3%	48131	35746	74.3%	59050	27467	46.5%	81540	21612	26.5%

Source: website of Supreme Committee for municipal elections

<http://www.intekhab.gov.sa/Arabic/Pages/statistics.aspx>



**Pros of Voting, Counting and Results' Announcement Processes:**

- Clear transparency and neutrality in voting, counting and results' announcement process, providing opportunity for candidates' representatives to follow such process.

- Providing various equipment at voting stations, whether by papers, stationary, voters' screens or otherwise.

- Clear cooperation between the authorities participating in the management of the voting process, specifically the Ministry of Interiors and Ministry of Education, which assisted Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, in the voting process.

- Voting stations personnel have been aware of the rules and regulations organizing the voting process, and have been competent to perform mostly tasks in this regard. In addition, they have responded to voters' inquiries.

- The Higher Committee of Elections has prepared illustrative programs regarding how to vote, and has featured the same on the committee's website. In addition, setting guiding signs inside the stations have doubtfully contributed in facilitating and clearing the voting process.

- Granting equal and fair opportunities, whether for the voters or candidates in voting processes. In addition, appointment of representatives thereof within the committees, and development of general organizational rules for all candidates.

- Voters and candidates' rolls in most regions have been announced, and each person, who is entitled to vote, has been empowered to do so.

- Voters' data have been accurately revised, and their identities have been checked and verified. Moreover, rules of granting and stamping voting cards have been implemented.

- Opening and closing times of voting stations have been observed

in most electoral stations in the Kingdom.

- Cons of Voting, Counting and Results' Announcement Processes:
- Some voting stations are faraway, which made it difficult to participate in the elections in some areas.
- Some candidates incited voters to vote on personal or social basis or based on a tribal or religious basis more than merit and worthiness considerations, such as electoral programs and previous experience.
- Lack of guidelines in some voting stations, lack of some voters' understanding of the rules and regulations of the elections process, despite that they have been published on the website of the municipal elections.
- It has been observed that female voters faced some difficulties in connection with proving their identity or residency. The Society observed that the entities supervising the elections worked on facilitating such matter through following some means mitigating the impact of the same on women's exercising of their right to vote.
- It has been observed that some candidates' campaigns continued to exist via SMSs up to the polling day.
- Candidates' representatives, allowed to supervise the election process, were absent from most electoral stations.

#### **Fourth: Overall Assessment of Municipal Elections**

Election process passed easily, and was characterized by transparency and integrity. The indicated negative observations do not affect elections' process in general nor results thereof. Such observations are considered limited in the light of the novelty of the Saudi experience in electing municipal councils, compared to municipal elections in most countries of the world.

#### **Section II: Recommendations and Proposals**

The third phase of the local elections have surpassed the second undoubtedly, since it has scored in increase in participation rates from 39 % (the participation rates of the second phase) to 47.4% as per the statistics of the General Committee of Municipal Elections. This is a positive sign, given that participation is the basis of comprehensive and sustainable development in the various countries of the world. To achieve development's goals in the kingdom, suggestions could be offered to support citizen's role in development, through activation of participation in the municipal elections. Among these suggestion are the following:

- Increasing interest in media, and raising public awareness via media on municipal councils and their missions, as well as on the importance of participation in electing their members.
  
- Enhancing cooperation between the various ministries and the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs. Through ministries activities in cooperation with Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, citizens can be educated the importance of the elections and can participate in them as either candidates or voters.
  
- Facilitating the registration procedures for voters and candidates.

- Announcing the final lists of the candidates leaving sufficient time before the elections.
- Making clarifications of the rules and regulations of the electoral campaigns in more details, and facilitating them as much as possible.
- Setting a maximum limit of expenditures by candidates on the election process; provisions should be enacted in this regard in order to promote equality and equal opportunities between candidates. A separate bank account should be opened to facilitate following up such expenditures. In addition, research should be conducted on mechanisms aiming to support female candidates.
- Holding training programs on how to manage elections should be held for those who would like to be candidates, whether males or females, specifically for women of the next election phases. Moreover, studies should be conducted on how to foster candidates' capabilities during the elections, whether by private centers, as per standards developed by the authorities supervising the elections, or by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs' adoption of a program preparing candidates, for those who would like to make use of it.
- Paying attention to public awareness of the importance of women's participation in and running for the elections. In addition, workshops should be held with female candidates to recognize challenges of their first experience and the means of facing them in the future in order to activate women's participation in local and comprehensive participation in the Kingdom.
- Introducing measures and methods for promoting campaigns processes, and providing candidates with more space regarding advertising in public places.

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- The authority supervising elections should obligate candidates to provide their *curricula vitae* and electoral programs, and should make them available to all candidates.

- Reconsidering the conditions of opening electoral stations for candidates, which have become an obstacle, in some candidates' point of view, so that they could be able to promote for themselves.

- Increasing the number of voting stations, and redistributing some others.

- Extending the working hours of voting stations until eight PM in order to facilitate the voting process, especially when voters are present.

- Developing the voting process, through expansion of the application of the electronic voting, in order to facilitate for voters especially when considering that many government services are provided electronically. This could increase voting rates significantly, and assist in overcoming disparity of voters' abilities to read and write. Experiences of countries such as India can be useful in this regard.

- Extending the use of technology to all voting stations, and increasing electronic linkage between them.

- Introducing the appeals panel, as well as its missions and procedures, and disseminating its decisions and judgments on a large scale.

- Inflicting the severest penalties on candidates' violations, whether in relation to advertising or the polling day with immediate effect.

- Announcing and following up local councils' activities in their third phase, to maintain the success achieved in the previous phases. In addition, public demand for candidacy and voting should be increased in the upcoming phases. Moreover, training courses should be organized for new members to activate role and performance thereof in the upcoming municipal councils, and to resolve any differences within such councils

quickly, to ensure such differences do not affect the reputation the councils in providing services to the citizens.

- Taking into account increasing the numbers of female and young appointed members, so that the new generations could broaden their experience in the membership of municipal councils, identify their needs and empower them politically. Female candidates have won only 18 seats in the municipal elections, and 15 women have been appointed only. Thus, percentage of female appointed members has become as of the third phase 1% of the total percentage of members. The Society was hoping that percentage of the appointed female members would be more than the said percentage, especially within municipal councils; however, only one female candidate won.

- Extending the powers granted to municipal councils in the Executive Regulations of the new Municipal Councils' Regulations.

- Enhancing coordination between the municipal councils on different levels: the emirate, provinces, and other levels, in order to coordinate and integrate activities among them, serve local development in KSA and increase the effectiveness of such councils.

- Working on finding solutions to the overlap of functions between district councils and municipal councils, in order to ensure that municipal councils carry out their missions and district councils benefit from the work of the municipal councils.