

SESRI Policy Brief

Views of the Gulf Cooperation Council among Qatari and Other Gulf Nationals

Gauging popular support for the GCC and its initiatives

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Here we examine the orientations of Qatari citizens toward the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as revealed in a pan-GCC survey conducted in 2016. We assess general attitudes toward the Council as an institution, toward recent GCC regional initiatives and interventions, and toward the larger ongoing process of Gulf regional integration. We also compare Qataris' views to those of other GCC citizens, and investigate the individual-level determinants of citizen attitudes in a multivariate model. Overall, the results show that Qataris are very positively oriented toward the GCC and toward the idea of regional integration—more so than other Gulf nationals surveyed. Yet, unexpectedly perhaps, support for the GCC is highest among younger, less educated, less affluent, more religious, and more politically efficacious citizens, posing interesting questions about the individual motivations of support for the Council and for closer integration among the Arab Gulf states.

With uncertainty and even unrest in many parts of the Arab world, the nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) stand out as a region of order and stability. The region is not without challenges, however, and the GCC is designed to play an important role in confronting these challenges.

Against this background, it is important to ask what the citizens of member states know and think about the GCC. To help answer this question, SESRI is conducting surveys across the region. These surveys, which ask questions both about the Council and its work and about relations among member states, have thus far been carried out in Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman. Surveys in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain will be completed in the coming months.

Support for the GCC in Qatar

As shown in Figure 1, the vast majority of Qataris, fully 89%, have either a very positive or a somewhat positive view of

the GCC. Only 2% have a very negative view. An even higher proportion, 94%, feels a personal connection to the GCC. Most of these men and women, 71% of all Qatari citizens, say they not only have a sense of belonging but actually have a “strong” sense of belonging to the GCC. Again, only 2% say they have no sense of belonging.

The same pattern is reflected in judgments about the accomplishments of the GCC. Three-quarters of Qataris agree that “what the GCC has accomplished to date is satisfactory and meets the ambitions and expectations of Gulf citizens.” Although a slightly higher proportion somewhat agrees than fully agrees with this idea, only 9% fully disagree.

At the same time that Figure 1 makes clear that Qatari judgments about the GCC are very favorable, it also shows that these judgments are not shared to

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the same extent in Kuwait and Oman, the two other countries in which the SESRI surveys have thus far been conducted. With respect both to overall views of the GCC and to judgments about the Council's accomplishments, opinions are least favorable in Kuwait, with Oman occupying a middle position. With respect to personal connections and a sense of belonging, the distribution of views is similar in Oman and Kuwait but less favorable than in Qatar.

But this does not mean that Omani and Kuwait attitudes toward the GCC are negative. On the contrary, 82% of Omanis and 67% of Kuwaitis have a positive overall assessment of the GCC; and 77% of Omanis and 76% of Kuwaitis feel a personal connection to the Council. It is only in Kuwait that positive judgments about the Council's accomplishments are expressed by less than half of those surveyed. Only 47% of Kuwaitis give high marks to the GCC on this dimension.

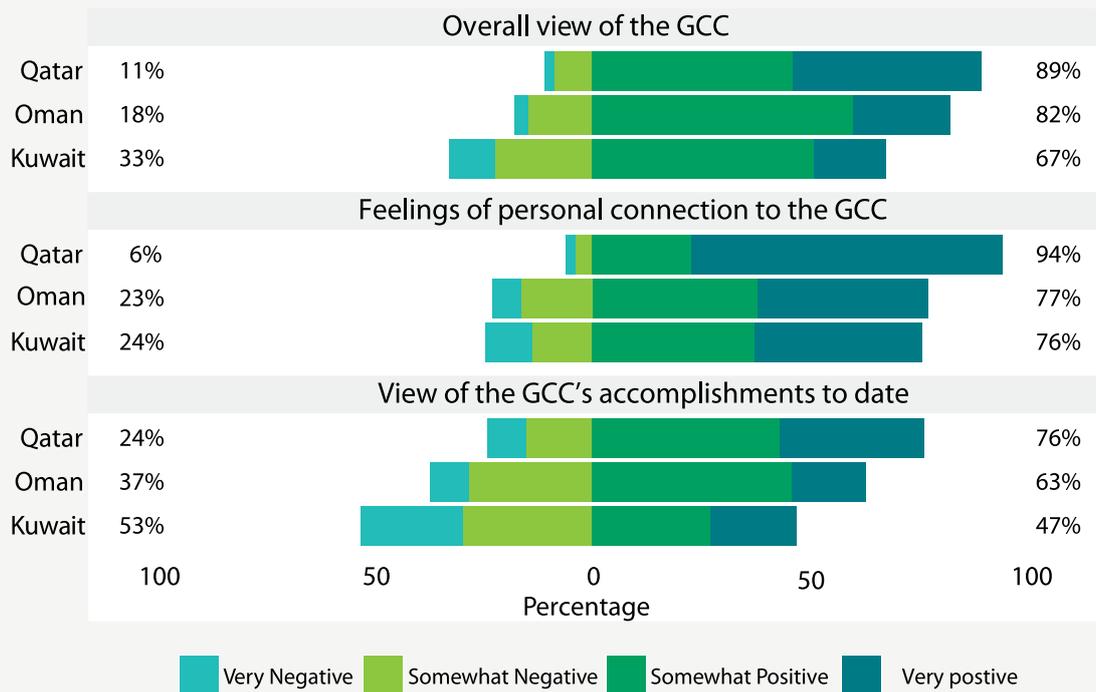
What Kind of GCC

Gulf citizens not only have positive views of the GCC, they also favor a Council that is closely integrated and activist in its foreign policy. These views are particularly pronounced in Qatar. As shown in Figure 2, a very large majority of Qataris favor both a GCC currency union and wholesale political union, and most also want the GCC to intervene in regional crises. These views are held, respectively, by 89%, 88%, and 92% of the Qataris interviewed. Further, on all three issues, as Figure 2 indicates, Qatari respondents are more likely to express "strong" support than only moderate support. Very few Qataris strongly oppose, or even somewhat oppose, a currency union, a political union, or GCC intervention in external conflicts.

Although less pronounced than in Qatar, the pattern is similar in Kuwait. Substantial majorities favor a currency union, a political union, and external intervention. To an extent, these are the views of Omanis as well, although the Omani population is more evenly divided

9 out of 10 Qataris have an overall positive view of the GCC

FIGURE 1



on all three issues. In Oman, 43% either somewhat oppose or strongly oppose a currency union, 45% either somewhat oppose or strongly oppose a political union, and 45% either somewhat or strongly oppose GCC intervention in regional crises.

Despite these differing tendencies across the three GCC countries surveyed to date, and despite a greater division of opinion within Oman and, to some extent, Kuwait, the broad overall conclusion to be drawn from the surveys is that most Gulf citizens want a Council that is vibrant and plays an important role in regional affairs.

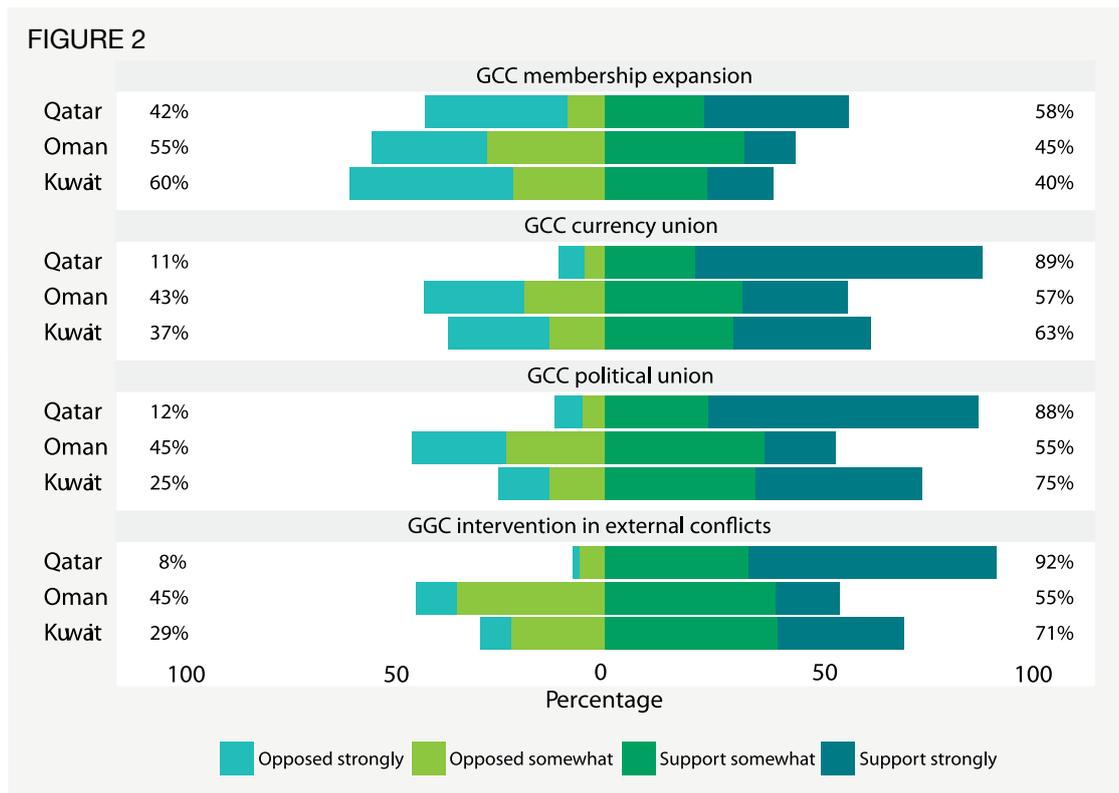
Drivers of Support among Qataris

Although Qatari views are, overall, heavily skewed in a positive direction, there is nonetheless a distinction to be noted between those whose views are very favorable and those whose views are only somewhat favorable. As shown in Figure 1, there is also a small proportion of Qatari nationals whose views are either somewhat or very negative. Figure 3 identifies some of the factors that help to account for this attitudinal variation.

The graph in Figure 3 is based on a multivariate regression model in which the outcome variable is an index constructed by combining responses to the three assessments about the GCC reported in Figure 1. Independent variables are a series of demographic attributes and political predispositions that are here standardized to enable more direct comparison of effects. Figure 3 displays, graphically, the effect of these possible drivers on the composite index measuring overall orientations toward the GCC.

As seen in Figure 3, Qatari men and women do not have differing views about the GCC. The distributions given in Figure 1 characterize both sexes. By contrast, both education and income are associated with views toward the GCC. More specifically, and perhaps surprisingly, both lower levels of education and lower levels of income are associated with more favorable assessments of the GCC and its accomplishments.

Age and religiosity also have some effect



Qatari citizens are more supportive of GCC integration and intervention than Kuwaitis or Omanis

on judgments about the GCC, although in neither case is the effect as strong as that of education and income. There is some tendency, albeit a modest one, for more favorable judgments about the GCC and its accomplishments to be inversely related to age and positively related to religiosity. Very positive views, in other words, are at least somewhat more likely among younger Qataris and more religious Qataris.

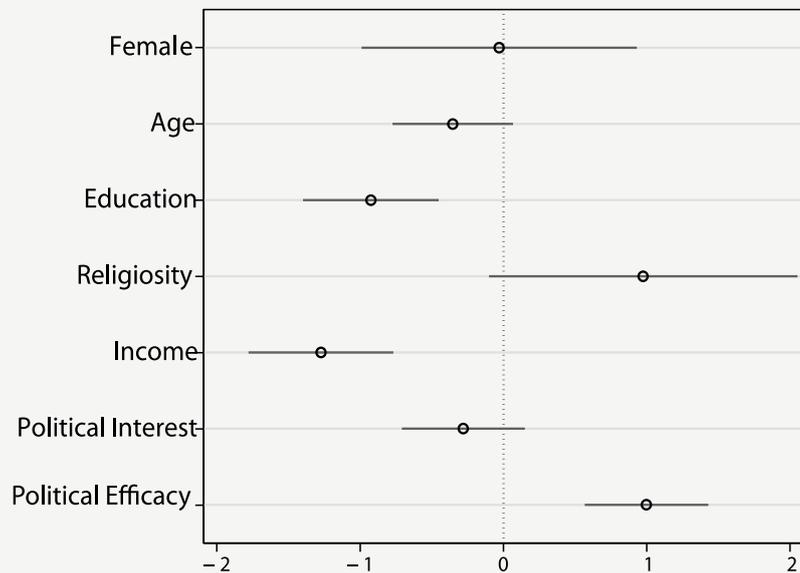
Figure 3 also shows the effect on views of two political orientations: political interest and political efficacy. Political efficacy is measured by a survey item that asks respondents how much influence they feel they have in getting the state to address issues that are important to them.

toward the GCC. To the extent that there is at least a weak relationship, it is in a direction that differs from what might have been expected: views of the GCC are slightly more favorable among Qataris with lowest levels of interest in politics.

By contrast, there is a very strong and positive relationship between political efficacy and favorable judgments about the GCC. Qataris who believe they have more influence in getting the state to address issues they care about — those who are high in political efficacy — are much more likely than Qataris who believe they do not have much influence to hold favorable views about the GCC, to feel a strong personal connection to the union, and to express satisfaction with the Council's accomplishments.

There is only a weak association between political interest and attitudes

FIGURE 3
Determinants of support for the GCC among Qatari citizens



Policy Summary

It remains to be seen whether the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council will form a more tightly knit and integrated union in the years ahead, or whether the GCC itself will become more actively involved in regional crises. Movement in this direction is not entirely absent at present, of course. But should such movement accelerate, the survey findings examined here suggest that this is likely to find support among significant majorities of the citizens of the countries included in the study mainly, Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait.

Support for the GCC among Qataris is highest among younger, less educated, poorer, more religious, and more politically efficacious citizens