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# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SECTARIANISM IN THE GULF

Justin Gengler

AUGUST 2016



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## About the Author

**Justin Gengler** is research program manager at the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University, where he heads the SESRI Policy Unit. He received his PhD in political science in 2011 from the University of Michigan. Gengler's research focuses on mass attitudes, political behavior, and group conflict in the Arab Gulf states. He is the author most recently of *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State* (Indiana University Press, 2015), and he publishes regularly in both scholarly and policy publications on topics related to sectarian politics, Arab Gulf public opinion, and survey methodology in the Middle East.



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## Summary

Arab Gulf rulers face incentives to develop non-economic sources of legitimacy to maintain popular support while maximizing scarce resource revenues. By sowing communal distrust, highlighting threats, and emphasizing their ability to guarantee security, regimes can reinforce domestic backing and dampen pressure for reform more cheaply than by distributing welfare benefits. Survey data from four Gulf states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar) demonstrate that governments can effectively cow populations into political inaction even as the economic benefits citizens receive are dwindling.

### Key Themes

- Gulf regimes establish electoral and legislative rules that institutionalize cleavages based on identity politics.
- Official national narratives in the Gulf are frequently exclusive, highlighting differences among citizens and privileging certain population segments over others.
- Gulf regimes increasingly treat even peaceful opposition and dissent as veritable threats to national security, rather than as ordinary political challenges.
- Some Gulf Cooperation Council states have conducted an assertive, adventurist foreign policy that has contributed to regional instability and promoted a militaristic nationalism.
- Feelings of insecurity are heightened by government promises of radical economic reorganization in the face of dwindling oil and gas revenues.

### Findings

- Analysis of survey data from the region reveals that more security-minded Gulf citizens are willing to accept lower levels of economic performance by a government in return for stability. For them, the state's provision of security represents a substitute for the financial benefits expected by citizens in oil-rich states.
- In this way, Gulf governments can capitalize on the security concerns of citizens to purchase popular political support more cheaply than through the standard distribution of material benefits.

- Gulf regimes thus have economic and political incentives to embellish or manufacture domestic and external threats, in order to heighten popular concerns over security and so lower the cost of accruing political support.
- Gulf rulers are often unable to manage social tensions once unleashed, and some have ended up stoking the very dissent they wished to suppress. This is a precarious strategy that carries serious risks to citizen welfare and the long-term survival of regimes.

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## Introduction

In January 2016, authorities in Saudi Arabia unexpectedly and unceremoniously put to death dissident Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, a perennial antigovernment firebrand and leader of Arab Spring protests in the kingdom's Shia-dominated Eastern Province. Executed alongside 46 other individuals convicted mainly of association with al-Qaeda and its affiliates, al-Nimr was portrayed as just another “terrorist” threatening the nation's stability and security.<sup>1</sup>

The public response was swift and predictable. While Western missions protested against the political nature of the charges against al-Nimr—which included “disobeying the ruler,” “inciting sectarian strife,” and “encouraging, leading and participating in demonstrations”<sup>2</sup>—the move was cheered by many ordinary Saudi Sunnis, for whom the cleric's calls for greater recognition and empowerment of Shia represented at once religious and political heresy.

Further afield, the execution sparked popular protests in Bahrain, in Iraq, and in Iran, where demonstrators overran Saudi Arabia's consulate in Mashhad and set fire to its embassy in Tehran. The attacks prompted a formal severing of diplomatic ties between the two regional rivals, with the Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warning that Saudi Arabia would face “divine revenge” for its killing of the “oppressed scholar” and “martyr.”<sup>3</sup>

## Strategic Sectarianism

Yet, behind this latest outward manifestation of sectarian-based conflict between citizens and governments in the Middle East, most Gulf observers were quick to identify a more mundane cause. A week before al-Nimr's execution, Saudi Arabia announced a 40 percent increase in the price of fuel as well as sweeping cuts to subsidies for electricity, water, and other goods. This came on the back of an expected \$98 billion budget shortfall for 2016—equal to 60 percent of projected state revenues.<sup>4</sup> Amid depressed oil prices and expectations of a weak market for years to come, the Saudi state, like the other five members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC),<sup>5</sup> can no longer afford to underwrite the onerous social and economic benefits provided for decades to citizens, and faces an uphill battle in selling unwelcome and painful economic reforms without offering corresponding concessions in the political realm.<sup>6</sup> The execution of al-Nimr, then, with the resulting escalation in domestic and regional tension, was seen as a well-timed distraction from the

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**The Saudi state and other Gulf Cooperation Council countries can no longer afford to underwrite the onerous social and economic benefits provided for decades to citizens.**

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kingdom's new fiscal reality, and the dubious policies—including a costly, disastrous war in Yemen—that helped usher it in. It was, in the words of one Gulf scholar, “red meat to the sectarian radicals.”<sup>7</sup>

It was also one episode in a larger pattern of political instrumentalization of sectarian and other group divisions that has become a defining feature of the Middle East, and to a lesser extent North Africa, since the beginning of the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011.<sup>8</sup> As nondemocratic regimes have come under pressure to reform or relinquish power altogether, rulers have hit back most often by positioning themselves as the defenders of a core group of (often co-sectarian) constituents under purported threat from foreign actors or the illiberal demands of fellow citizens.

The force of these appeals has been bolstered by a heightened sense of insecurity among Middle Eastern publics in light of widespread civil war and disorder, the increased capabilities and reach of terrorist organizations, shifting geopolitical alliances, concerns over Iran's nuclear program, and perceptions that the United States is withdrawing militarily and diplomatically from the region. The result is that a substantial proportion of citizens who might agree in principle with the need for change are expected to choose nonetheless to abstain from opposition, or even stand against those engaged in opposition politics, because of uncertainty over the eventual outcome of popular mobilization. In short, challenged rulers can capitalize on the fears of more risk-averse individuals and members of sectarian, ethnic, or other groups whose political or economic preferences would likely be overturned in the event of revolution or fundamental reform.

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This strategy of autocratic self-preservation, sometimes likened to “protection-racket politics,” is not limited to the post-2011 period, nor is it specific to the Arab world.<sup>9</sup> But its seeming ubiquity and success in thwarting opposition movements in this context has begotten something of a conventional wisdom: that fear-mongering and timely activation of sectarian and other latent social divisions offer beleaguered Arab governments a critical pressure-relief valve helping to perpetuate their authoritarian rule.

As al-Nimr's execution demonstrates, there appears to be strong anecdotal evidence to support such a conclusion. Yet, until now it has never been put to the test empirically by examining individual political behavior. In other words, is it really true that Arab citizens who prioritize stability over other aims tend to be more supportive of incumbent regimes as guarantors of the status quo? If so, does such a relationship hold universally or only for some categories of citizens or countries? Moreover, what impact does the prioritization of stability have on the normal link between the performance of, and popular support for, governments? Are status quo-oriented citizens more forgiving than others of

poor economic and political performance, or are their expectations similar to those with different individual priorities?

This essay attempts to answer these questions by examining mostly original public opinion survey data collected in four Arab Gulf countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar—between 2013 and 2016. This diverse sample of cases includes societies that witnessed major political upheaval (Bahrain), limited protests (Kuwait and Oman), and virtually no popular reform demands (Qatar) during and after the Arab Spring.

In investigating the political attitudes of ordinary men and women in the region, the analysis shows that there is substance to the notion that Gulf governments can effectively scare their citizens into acceptance of the political status quo. It demonstrates that under conditions of insecurity, a majority of Gulf Arabs prefer a less than ideal situation with which they are familiar over a push for fundamental change that, while it may potentially bring improvement, also carries real risks of uncertainty and instability. This reality sheds light on the political economy of sectarianism in the Middle East, and especially the Arab Gulf region, revealing the strong incentives rulers have to cultivate non-economic sources of legitimacy in order to maintain the necessary preponderance of political support while maximizing scarce resource revenues. The exploitation of latent social tensions affords one such source.

## The Logic and Drivers of Sectarianism

Writing in 1974, an economic adviser at Kuwait's state-run development fund helped launch the rentier state paradigm when he observed that the capacity to meet citizens' material needs without extracting taxes "helps to explain why the government of an oil-rich country . . . can enjoy a degree of stability which is not explicable in terms of its domestic economic or political performance."<sup>10</sup> That is to say, oil-rich Gulf governments can maintain the otherwise dubious political support of citizens through the generous distribution of resource revenues.

While the basic tenets of the theory remain valid today,<sup>11</sup> almost half a century later political scientists and other scholars have come to recognize the diverse nonmaterial bases of authority and stability in the Arab world generally and in the Arab Gulf region particularly. These include the very institutions of monarchism,<sup>12</sup> Islam,<sup>13</sup> and the ruling family;<sup>14</sup> traditional forms of political consultation rooted in tribal custom;<sup>15</sup> stewardship of the arts, culture, and higher education;<sup>16</sup> international prestige;<sup>17</sup> and, increasingly since 2011, the provision of security and order in the face of real and imagined adversaries.

The provision of security, which is the focus here, comprises two distinct elements: the state's ability to protect citizens at a time when the suffering of their

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Arab neighbors is on constant display, and the foreignness of the threat facing the nation, whether from a geographical or an ideological standpoint. The first exerts an attractive force, bolstering support for the status quo among more security-minded citizens. The latter acts as a reinforcing negative influence by encouraging rejection of what is branded as alien—alien countries (Iran, the West), alien political ideas (the Muslim Brotherhood, Western liberal democracy, the Islamic State), and alien religious interpretations (Shiism).

Beyond their main effect of dampening popular appetite for dissent, these threat perceptions have also helped feed the rise of a previously unknown nationalism in those places where they have been most actively cultivated, namely

Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. In all Arab Gulf countries, however, leaders have benefited from a visceral sense of insecurity, inexplicable forces spurring regional change, and a future replete with unknowns.

This one might call the political economy of sectarianism, the latter understood broadly as the politicization of ascriptive group identities—that is, those established by birth. Public uncertainty surrounding the interests and intentions of different groups in society earns Gulf leaders a political subsidy by decoupling support among certain factions and individuals from actual political and economic performance. For these supporters, the state's provision of stability—whether as a good as such or as protection of entrenched interests—serves as an effective substitute for the public and private benefits otherwise expected of governments and duly expected by other, less status quo-oriented members of society.

Such dynamics are doubly enabling for regimes because, at the same time as they enhance legitimacy, they also free up resources that might otherwise have been spent buying support. By feeding intercommunal distrust, sowing fear of external threats, and emphasizing their unique ability to guarantee security, ruling elites can reinforce backing among loyalists and dampen incentives for protest among reformists more cheaply than through the standard provision of material benefits. A sectarian strategy thus carries the prospect of significant political as well as economic payoffs when compared to a traditional system of direct patronage. It is at once an allegiance-building and cost-saving measure.

Although the origin and extent of competition among sectarian and other social groups varies widely across the Arab Gulf countries, still one can identify a set of mechanisms that today contribute to polarization either directly or indirectly by heightening overall feelings of insecurity. Some purposeful and some less deliberate, these mechanisms include:

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- electoral and legislative rules that institutionalize descent-based cleavages rather than crosscutting programmatic coalitions;

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- exclusionary national narratives that highlight differences among citizens;
- the securitization of opposition, especially among Gulf Arab Shia populations seen as presumed sympathizers with Iran;
- an emboldened GCC foreign policy that has contributed directly to regional instability and promoted a militaristic nationalism in some Gulf states; and
- the specter of radical economic reorganization in the face of dwindling oil and gas revenues.

### **Institutionalizing Group Conflict**

Arab Gulf societies feature a natural tendency toward political groupings based on ascriptive affiliation. This owes, first, to the region's political environment, which is largely devoid of open media, political parties, or an independent civil society that might transmit information about the attitudes and preferences of fellow citizens. At the same time, the rentier system privileges individual rather than group competition over private economic benefits conferred by the state, which works against the formation of programmatic or class-based coalitions. The latter factor reduces incentives for joint political action among citizens who have shared economic or normative interests, while the low-information nature of the political environment limits the ability of like-minded citizens to identify each other and coordinate politically, even if they so desire.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than implement measures to counteract this predisposition for descent-based conflict, most Gulf states have actively sought to enhance sectarian, tribal, and other group cleavages in order to avoid the emergence of a more dangerous category of actor: socially crosscutting factions with broad bases of support capable of exerting effective political pressure.

A primary weapon in this battle is governments' design of formal representative institutions. Although Gulf legislatures wield no effective power outside of Kuwait and to a lesser extent Bahrain, still the rules governing their election and functions offer insights into the way that states structure political competition in a manner conducive to preserving the status quo. And, universally, these institutions have had the intended consequence of deepening and indeed institutionalizing group competition behind a veneer of modern democratic politics.

In Bahrain, electoral districts gerrymandered along sectarian lines undermine the electoral prospects of populist and secular candidates. The result is a lower house of parliament permanently divided among Sunni Islamists, loyalist tribal "independents," and—when it chooses to participate in elections—an opposition Shia bloc.

Elites in Kuwait use similar measures. The GCC's oldest and most influential legislature, the Kuwait National Assembly, is subject to an ever-changing set of rules governing voter eligibility, the number and shape of electoral districts, and the voting system that are crafted to suit the political circumstances

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of the day. To counter the strong influence of Arab nationalism in the decades after independence in 1961, Kuwait naturalized more than 200,000 Bedouin to serve as a reliable pro-government bloc in parliament. When the Iranian Revolution later shifted concern to Kuwait's large Shia minority, the state redrew and expanded the number of electoral districts, with tribal areas and urban merchant elites disproportionately represented. More recently, a shift toward opposition among tribal factions necessitated yet another change.

Following four parliamentary dissolutions in four years, in 2012 Kuwait reverted to a five-district system while also doubling the number of candidates a voter could select. The hope was that larger districts and greater choice would hamper tribal coordination of voting via informal primary elections, in which tribal blocs unify behind a single candidate or list.<sup>19</sup>

Similar if less consequential manipulations can be observed even where elected deliberative bodies enjoy a purely advisory role. For its municipal council elections,

Saudi Arabia employs an electoral system seen nowhere else in the world, in which voters are able to cast ballots in all districts of their municipality. This undercuts localized bases of support, ensuring, among other things, that minority Shia candidates are unlikely to succeed outside of the Shia-dominated Eastern Province.

In the United Arab Emirates, voter franchise is limited to a handpicked electoral college that included less than 1 percent of Emirati citizens in the first Federal National Council elections of 2006.<sup>20</sup> The electorate was later expanded to allow the participation of around 12 percent of nationals in 2011, and expanded again to roughly 20 percent of citizens, or around 225,000 eligible voters, in 2015.<sup>21</sup> There, as in Oman and Qatar, electoral results tend to follow patterns of family and tribal settlement owing to districting and voting rules. For instance, a study of Qatar's 2015 municipal council elections found that the single greatest determinant of both voter registration and the act of voting itself was the number of candidates from the same family or tribe running in an individual's district.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, the experience of Gulf legislatures shows how regimes have generally succeeded in structuring acceptable avenues of political participation around existing social fault lines, rather than in a way that encourages citizens to overcome narrow group identities.

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## Selective National Narratives

A second direct contributor to the social fragmentation of Gulf citizenries is the explicit ascriptive-based distinctions between citizens that are ingrained in the very histories propagated and celebrated by Gulf countries. Crafted in the images of ruling families, official narratives reflect the ideal of the Sunni Arab tribesman and even of specific schools of Islamic jurisprudence—Hanbali in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Ibadi in Oman, Maliki in Bahrain and Kuwait, and a more Sufi orientation in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

Necessarily excluded from these supposedly national portrayals are citizens of nontribal origin; non-Arabs, including notably those of Persian ancestry; citizens who ascribe to a different Sunni tradition; and of course Shia Muslims. Additional distinctions, especially prominent in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, separate native citizens from latecomers who gained citizenship after some legally defined cutoff date. Except in Bahrain, where new arrivals receive preferential treatment as an incentive to immigrate,<sup>23</sup> naturalized citizens are seen by more established families as dissipating state resources and thus the welfare benefits to which the latter are entitled by birth. Consequently, naturalized citizens are generally afforded fewer political and economic rights. There also remain substantial populations, in Qatar and especially in Kuwait, that have been denied citizenship altogether despite the long-term residence of their families and tribes, again so as not to dilute the state-provided benefits enjoyed by others.<sup>24</sup>

This pyramid of citizenship and belonging in Gulf states—codified both in law and in the public imagination through media, school curricula, art and architecture, and everyday life—makes clear society's descent-based dividing lines and also, critically, who stands to lose and gain from a fundamental change in political organization. The open differentiation of social groupings means not simply that some citizens have a greater personal interest in maintaining the prevailing system, but also that the relative incentives of all groups to support the state as ultimate benefactor are understood by all—it is, in the language of political science, “common knowledge.”<sup>25</sup>

Gulf states feature in this way an inherent social tension whereby advantaged groups recognize the disproportionate propensity for opposition among disadvantaged groups, while second- and third-tier citizens understand, similarly, that members of advantaged groups are more likely to support the regime. And since the line between advantaged and disadvantaged is determined largely by ascriptive criteria—accent, dress, skin color, given or family name, and so on—outward markers of group affiliation communicate information not simply about social affiliation, but about presumed political allegiance. Daily social interaction among Gulf citizens thus entails a constant sizing up and interpretation of visible cues so as to allow the placement of others on a mental pyramid of citizenship, and their evaluation as likely allies or rivals.

### **Opposition as a Threat to National Security**

The securitization of opposition is a third source of group fractionalization in the Arab Gulf states. This notion refers to the growing conception and treatment of dissent as a veritable national security threat, to be addressed within a law-enforcement framework, rather than as an ordinary political challenge.<sup>26</sup> It represents the delegitimization of political disagreement itself. Specific targets are dictated by domestic politics, but include Shia activists and organizations, the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafist groups, and even individual online critics of Gulf regimes.

The post-2011 trend toward securitization has increased social polarization directly by promoting an us-versus-them dichotomy that paints fundamentally political actors, along with their real and imagined supporters, as threats to the general welfare. In publically demonizing their opponents, Gulf states such as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have also linked domestic actors to transnational movements and rival governments, painting dissenters as foreign-inspired—even foreign-backed—traitors.

In addition to ostracizing major segments of Gulf populations, the redefinition of opposition as a state security problem also fosters group competition indirectly by raising society's overall threat-perception level. Rather than view fellow citizens as competitors for resources within a normal political framework, individuals are encouraged instead to fear partisans of rival groups and ideologies as potential terrorists. The effect is to magnify existing apprehensions over widespread regional instability and civil strife and, moreover, to make external conflicts seem closer to home, by linking them to groups and individuals operating domestically. In this way, even citizens of apparently stable Gulf countries may come to see themselves as but a few steps removed from a fateful breakdown in law and order, and ruling families as alone equipped to protect against such a possibility.

### **GCC Activism and Nationalism**

Another reason for heightened feelings of insecurity among Gulf publics is the newfound foreign policy activism of GCC governments themselves. Excepting Oman, which maintains a stubborn neutrality to the annoyance of other Gulf countries, and to a large extent Kuwait, which has offered mostly token participation in GCC initiatives, the Gulf states have shown an unprecedented willingness to act militarily to counter the perceived expansion of influence by challengers to their religious and political authority—whether Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood, or the Islamic State.

Beginning with the GCC's Peninsula Shield force dispatched to quell mass demonstrations in Bahrain in March 2011, the alliance has undertaken a string of interventions spanning the breadth of the Arab world. Led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, it has carried out air strikes and supplied weapons to combatants in Libya and Syria, financed an embattled regime in

Egypt, and embarked on a full-scale invasion of Yemen. That Gulf citizens feel more vulnerable amid a neighborhood descended into chaos, then, owes in no small part to the deliberate foreign policy choices of their own leaders, whose involvement in what began as domestic political conflicts has likely increased the duration and, in the case of Yemen, the brutality of these Arab wars.

Five years of participation in armed conflict has also given rise to what Saudi scholar Madawi al-Rasheed has called a “militarized hypernationalism” in those countries most heavily involved, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>27</sup> There and elsewhere in the GCC, claims that countries must be protected in the face of aggressive Iranian and Shia expansionism have been transformed from the stuff of official news agencies into a general political mantra demanding action and sacrifice by ordinary citizens and rulers alike. Since 2014, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have all introduced compulsory military service for male citizens, and the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia has called for his country to adopt a similar policy to help in the fight “against the enemies of religion and the nation.”<sup>28</sup> At the same time, senior Gulf royals have also been active—and highly conspicuous—participants in the Yemen war. This includes numerous Saudi princes, the eldest son of Dubai’s ruler, the son of Abu Dhabi’s crown prince, two sons of the Bahraini king, and the son of the ruler of the emirate of Ras al-Khaimah, who was seriously injured in a missile strike.<sup>29</sup>

More than simply to drum up popular support for a costly and largely unsuccessful military campaign in Yemen, the GCC’s engineered patriotism is intended, as al-Rasheed writes, to “perform the miracle of homogenizing . . . subjects and molding them into one entity.”<sup>30</sup> But this larger instrumental value also means that Gulf rulers face the perverse incentive to sustain rather than curb their engagement in external conflicts, as a temporary antidote to social fragmentation and a weak sense of national belonging. Leaders in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and elsewhere thus emerge as both a primary source of, and self-styled solution to, the sectarian-based insecurity facing their nations. In that way, they draw closer to them those citizens who accept the premise of an existential threat posed by Iran and officially unsanctioned Islamic movements, while further alienating those domestic groups identified as potential sympathizers.

### **The Specter of Economic Upheaval**

A final major source of uncertainty for Gulf publics is the process of fundamental economic transformation now being embarked upon to a greater or lesser extent by all GCC countries as a result of diminishing revenues from oil and gas. Except for Kuwait, all Gulf governments have moved to shore up enormous budget deficits by curtailing expensive subsidies on fuel, electricity, and other commodities, while at the same time investigating new sources of revenue through the once-unthinkable means of raising taxes and privatizing

core state assets.<sup>31</sup> At the regional level, all six GCC countries have agreed to implement a region-wide value-added tax of 5 percent by as early as 2018, and Saudi Arabia has publicly indicated a willingness to impose excise taxes as well.<sup>32</sup> Rather than these being temporary measures to solve a short-term fiscal challenge, Gulf leaders have made it clear to their citizens that the changes being studied will herald a fundamental break with the traditional Gulf rentier model in place for generations. This message was aptly summarized in a November 2015 speech by the emir of Qatar, steward of the region's most

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**The extreme sense of anxiety permeating the Gulf region means that governments enjoy a reservoir of popular support and legitimacy simply for their provision of security in an insecure region.**

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extensive welfare system, in which he warned Qataris in unusually blunt terms that the state could no longer afford “to provide for everything.”<sup>33</sup>

Thus, at a time when political anarchy lies at the doorstep of the Gulf nations, and enemies seem intent on exploiting any weaknesses, GCC citizens are facing a simultaneous unraveling of the one thing upon which they could always depend: the generous financial support of the state. Such timing, one expects, is not a coincidence. The

extreme sense of anxiety permeating the Gulf region means that governments enjoy a reservoir of popular support and legitimacy simply for their provision of security in an insecure region, affording them the freedom to renegotiate their tacit social contracts with citizens more or less unilaterally.

In the end, a less generous but stable state is preferable to the state of nature. And, indeed, it is precisely this argument that is being articulated by Gulf rulers themselves, alongside their partners in global financial institutions: that serious reforms are needed to avoid eventual economic collapse—to guarantee the continued security and prosperity of Gulf societies.<sup>34</sup>

## How Gulf Citizens' Preferences Enable Gulf Regimes

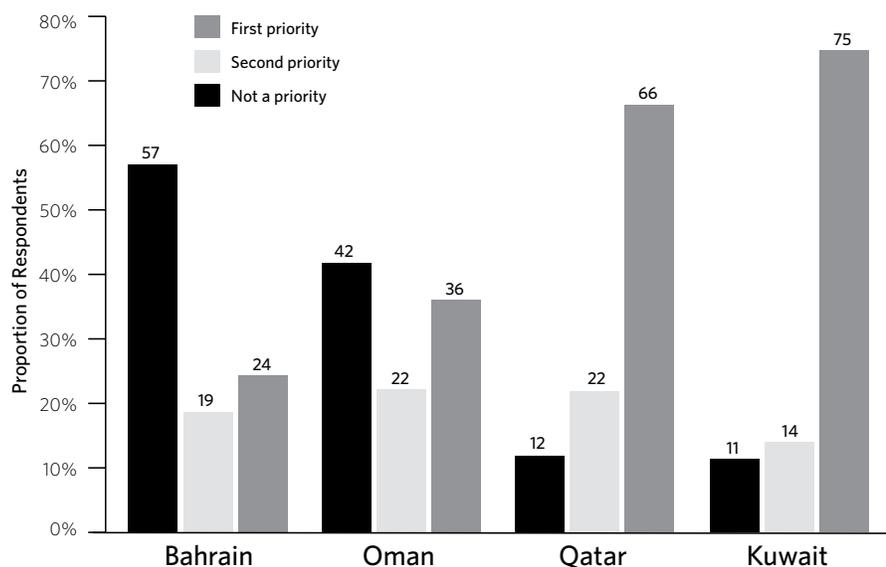
These conclusions find support in public opinion data collected in the region. When Arab Gulf citizens are asked about their views on stability, government performance, and loyalty to their leaders, the patterns that emerge give strong empirical evidence of a link between popular feelings of insecurity and increased political deference.<sup>35</sup> Gulf citizens who are more worried about security are less concerned about their governments' actual economic and political performance. This means that, for the same objective level of performance, the ruler of a fearful population can expect a higher degree of acquiescence as compared to the ruler of a population that is less preoccupied with the maintenance of law and order.

In surveys conducted in 2013 and 2016, citizens of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar were asked to identify their first and second most important priorities from among competing national goals. These goals included “boosting

economic development,” “maintaining the country’s security and stability,” “giving people more say over important state decisions,” and “preserving the identity and culture of the country.”<sup>36</sup> Notably, despite similar exposure to regional sources of insecurity, the data reveal wide cross-national variation in the prioritization of stability among Gulf nationals.

As shown in figure 1, the resulting pattern suggests at first glance an unexpected relationship: prioritization of stability seems to be highest in those places where stability already prevails. A full two-thirds of Qataris and three-quarters of Kuwaitis, for instance, identify stability as their top priority, compared to a mere quarter of Bahrainis. Indeed, a majority of citizens in Bahrain and a plurality of those in Oman do not rank stability even among their top two national goals.

**Figure 1. How Gulf Citizens Prioritize Stability**



Source: 2013 Bahrain World Values Survey and a 2015 survey conducted by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University

What accounts for this variation among Gulf countries? One might speculate that this pattern exists because those countries that have witnessed more substantial post-2011 unrest, such as Bahrain, have experienced protests and violence precisely due to citizens’ being relatively less concerned about stability compared to other political and economic objectives. However, this explanation cannot account for the divergent cases of Kuwait and Oman. Both countries have seen low to moderate levels of protest in the post-2011 period, yet their citizens have very different priorities in regard to stability. A full three-quarters of Kuwaitis name stability as their top national goal, for example, compared to just one-third of Omanis. The mechanisms underlying these popular preferences seem, therefore, to defy easy explanation: it is neither true that

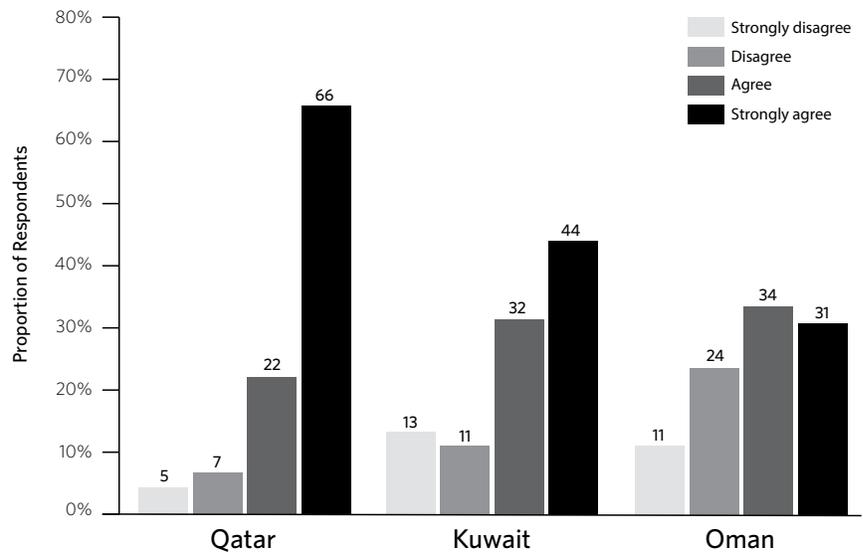
Gulf citizens crave stability when they lack it, nor that they take it for granted when they enjoy it.

### The Link Between Stability and Political Deference

For present purposes, however, the more important question is how this variation in stability prioritization relates to the degree of political deference that citizens display. To measure deference to political authority, survey respondents were asked the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the statement that “citizens should always support the decisions of the state, even if they disagree with those decisions.” This item comes from the Arab Barometer survey that has been conducted throughout the Middle East and North Africa since 2006;<sup>37</sup> however, it is not included in the Bahrain survey. For Bahrain, therefore, I measured popular orientations toward the state here more broadly using the survey question, “How much trust do you have in government institutions?” The distribution of responses to the first question is given in figure 2.

**Figure 2. Political Deference Among Gulf Citizens**

QUESTION: Citizens should always support the decisions of the state, even if they disagree with those decisions.



Source: 2015 Qatar University SESRI survey

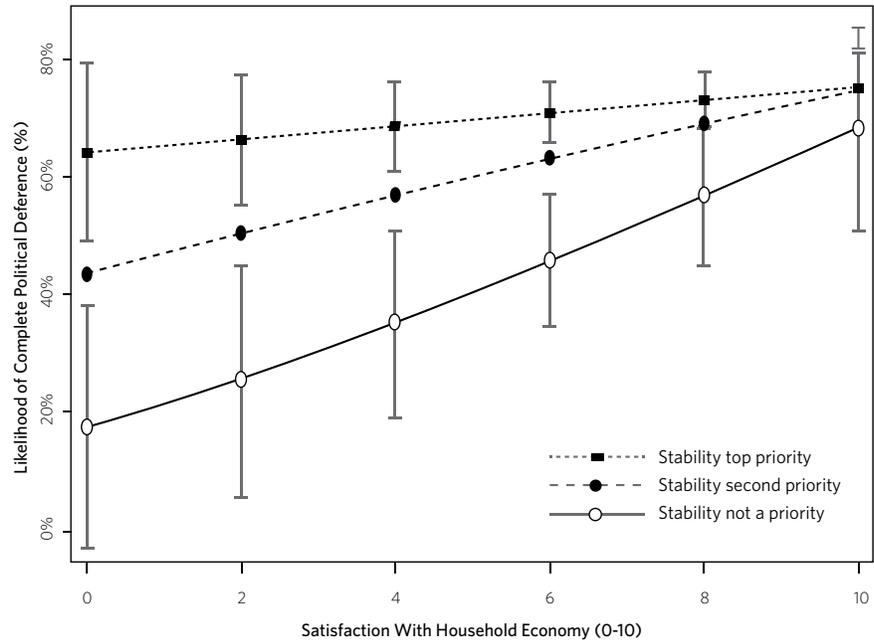
As with preferences for stability, the survey data reveal considerable cross-societal differences in Gulf nationals' political deference, with Qataris demonstrating the highest levels of deference and Omanis the lowest. The responses in the Bahraini survey (the results of which are not shown here) are not directly comparable, but nearly three-quarters of Bahraini citizens reported either a "very high" (24 percent) or "high" (48 percent) level of trust, while only 7 percent said they had "no trust at all" in state institutions.<sup>38</sup>

Digging deeper to study the factors accounting for individual differences in political orientations,<sup>39</sup> one encounters once again mostly inconsistent findings across the four countries surveyed. In Oman, female citizens are associated with lower levels of political deference, while in Bahrain females are linked to more positive orientations toward the government. Age is a significant positive predictor of deference only in Oman, and education level a negative predictor only in Qatar. Regarding the independent variable of most interest, the extent of one's prioritization of stability is a strong positive predictor of deference in Qatar, while in Bahrain those who cite stability as their top priority are, all else equal, more *negatively* oriented toward the state.

The sole common thread across three of the four societies—Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar—is a positive link between economic satisfaction and political deference. Thus, based on these initial findings, one is tempted to conclude that the only compelling explanation of why individuals tend to support or oppose governments is the long-standing maxim of rentier state theory: materially satisfied Gulf citizens make politically quiescent Gulf citizens. In other words, nationals will remain loyal to a regime insofar as it lives up to its half of the implicit social contract governing state-society relations in the GCC.

However, this story changes dramatically when one examines the way in which stability preferences alter the relationship between economic and political satisfaction. Take, for instance, the case of Qatar. Figure 3 shows the individual-level link between economic satisfaction and political deference among Qataris, depending upon how a respondent prioritizes stability versus other national aims. Each line in the figure corresponds to a different group of Qatari citizens: the uppermost dotted line to those who cite stability as their top priority, the middle dashed line to those Qataris for whom it is a second priority, and the bottom solid line represents those who do not mention stability at all.<sup>40</sup>

**Figure 3. How Stability Preferences Condition the Rentier Bargain in Qatar**



Source: 2015 Qatar University SESRI survey

The figure shows clearly that the extent to which economic satisfaction leads to political deference among Qatari nationals depends critically on how much an individual prioritizes security and stability. Among the most stability-conscious, there is no relationship at all between economic conditions and willingness to defer to government decisions. For this group, the predicted likelihood of complete political deference—that is, “strong agreement” with the statement that citizens should always support the decisions of the government—is 64 percent among individuals who are least satisfied with their economic situation, and a similar 75 percent among those whose satisfaction is rated at 10 out of 10. In other words, deference among security-minded Qataris is statistically unconnected to their level of economic satisfaction.

By contrast, among citizens who prioritize national goals other than stability, economic satisfaction is a strong predictor of political deference, as indicated by the sharply upward sloping solid line. For this group, a person of “low” economic satisfaction (defined as one standard deviation below the mean) is 39 percent likely to report total political deference, compared to an estimated 62 percent among citizens of “high” satisfaction (one standard deviation above the mean).<sup>41</sup>

What is more, this political subsidy enjoyed by the Qatari state due to public concerns over stability—the distance between the top line and the bottom line in figure 3—increases as economic satisfaction declines. Less financially

satisfied citizens, in other words, are much more likely to remain politically supportive if they are stability-oriented. A Qatari of average satisfaction, for instance, is an estimated 70 percent likely to be deferential if stability is his or her top priority, compared to only 50 percent among those who do not mention stability—a gap of 20 percent. But the corresponding proportions for a Qatari with “low” economic satisfaction are even farther apart, at 68 percent and 38 percent, respectively. For a Qatari in the lowest possible satisfaction category, finally, this discrepancy grows larger still, with a 64 percent likelihood of total deference estimated among stability-oriented citizens, compared to a mere 18 percent likelihood among those unconcerned about stability. This difference attributable to stability preferences is significant at a high level of statistical confidence for all but the top two categories of economic satisfaction.

In conclusion, except for those at the very highest levels of economic satisfaction, concern for the maintenance of public order makes Qatari citizens willing to accept fewer economic benefits in return for the same level of political acquiescence.<sup>42</sup>

Summarized in table 1 are the corresponding results for Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman. Rows indicate the boost in political deference owing to economic satisfaction conditional on stability preferences. For each of the three possible orientations—top priority, second priority, and not a priority—the table shows the difference in political support between economically dissatisfied versus economically satisfied citizens. To offer a real-world test of significance, marginal effects here are evaluated as the difference between an individual of lower than average versus higher than average satisfaction (as opposed to minimum versus maximum), operationalized as one standard deviation below and above, respectively, the country-specific means.

**Table 1. How Stability Preferences Subsidize GCC States**

Stability	Bahrain		Kuwait		Oman		Qatar	
	effect	<i>P</i>	effect	<i>P</i>	effect	<i>P</i>	effect	<i>P</i>
First priority	-	0.600	+24%	0.005	-	0.628	-	0.327
Second priority	-	0.953	+29%	0.072	-	0.376	-	0.154
<b>Not a priority</b>	<b>+49%</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>+80%</b>	<b>0.000</b>	-	<b>0.404</b>	<b>+55%</b>	<b>0.027</b>

Notes: Percent changes are calculated as differences in predicted likelihoods evaluated at country-specific “low” (minus one standard deviation) versus “high” (plus one standard deviation) economic satisfaction. Predictions are estimated by ordered logit with usual controls for age, gender, and education level. *P*-values report the significance of Wald tests carried out using Stata’s post-estimation function.

The upper-left cells, for example, give the relationship between economic satisfaction and deference for Bahrainis who cite stability as their top concern. In this case, there is no statistical link ( $p = 0.60$ ) between these two variables when the stability condition is imposed. As in the case of Qatar, in Bahrain economic satisfaction relates to political orientations only among individuals who prioritize national aims other than stability. Specifically, having a high versus a low level of economic satisfaction boosts the likelihood of political deference by 49 percent among this group of citizens, who, per figure 1, represent more than half of all Bahrainis.

The findings from Kuwait are somewhat different but substantively consistent with those from Bahrain and Qatar. Here the relationship between economic satisfaction and political deference is statistically significant across all stability preference groups; however, the *magnitude* of the effect is almost three times as large among citizens who do not prioritize stability (an estimated 80 percent increase in the likelihood of political deference) compared with those who do (less than a 30 percent increase). The former effect also is associated with a higher degree of statistical confidence. So, while the rentier link does operate among Kuwaitis independently of how they prioritize stability, the data show that this relationship is attenuated among more stability-concerned citizens. Even in Kuwait, therefore, the state earns a subsidy due to popular risk aversion, and it is able to buy and preserve the political support of status quo-oriented citizens more cheaply than that of others.

One arrives, finally, at the deviant case of Oman, where an individual's satisfaction with his or her household financial situation is never a predictor of political acquiescence. Indeed, very little—only gender and potentially age—seems to account for variation in Omanis' propensities to defer to political authority. Whether it's satisfaction, stability preferences, or the interaction between the two, all fail to explain why some citizens reserve their right to dissent from government decisions, while others feel they must remain supportive of policies with which they personally disagree.

One might speculate that in Oman deference to the state is inextricably tied to the person of Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said, ruler since 1970 and widely credited with modernizing the once underdeveloped and internationally isolated country. It might be that Omanis' orientations toward the prevailing regime are shaped above all by views of the broader social and economic progress spearheaded by the sultan over five decades, rather than individual outcomes in the areas of economic well-being and political efficacy. Whatever the case, it is clear that Oman does not follow the pattern observed in the three other Gulf countries considered here.

## The Benefits and Risks of Manipulating Identity Politics

The notion that Gulf governments ultimately benefit from the heightened politicization of sectarian and other group identities is often taken as a given. Yet, investigating the empirical connection between threat perceptions and the appetite for dissent among GCC citizens reveals a more complex story than the one usually articulated. Concerns over stability do not impact political orientations directly by reducing citizens' willingness to take a position opposed to regimes. Rather, they do so indirectly, by severing or attenuating the normal link between the performance of Gulf governments and the support (or lack thereof) this performance engenders.

For more stability-minded citizens, the state's provision of security is in effect a substitute for the private financial benefits otherwise expected by Gulf citizens, an intangible benefit that enables states to purchase political loyalty at a reduced cost compared to what they would spend through the direct patronage of citizens. In Qatar, for instance, political deference among security-oriented citizens at the lowest level of economic satisfaction remains higher than that among the most economically satisfied citizens who do not prioritize security. The positive boost from the state's safeguarding of law and order, in other words, utterly outweighs the negative impact of poor economic delivery for more stability-minded citizens.

The obvious upshot is that Gulf governments have a direct economic and political incentive to augment as far as possible the share of citizens who prize stability over other societal aims, including through the embellishment or manufacturing of domestic and external threats to security, as well as the exacerbation of social tensions.

In practice, however, this incentive is tempered by states' countervailing concern that their stoking of public fear and distrust may yield a cure worse than the disease. Indeed, such was the experience of Bahrain's rulers in the aftermath of the Shia-led uprising of February 2011. To stymie the momentum of the protest movement, Bahrain's rulers used the specter of Shia empowerment and Iranian intervention to rouse ordinary Sunnis from their traditional political slumber. Sunnis soon responded by organizing their own mass demonstrations in support of the ruling Al Khalifa family.

Yet, having convinced Sunnis of the existential threat posed by Iran and its Shia agents in Bahrain, the authorities found it impossible to quiet their own supporters, who began pressing for an even harsher security response to continued protests, thus quickening the spiral of violence and repression that has characterized the post-2011 period. Some Sunni activists even dared to criticize senior royals, including King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa himself, for their perceived weakness.<sup>43</sup> By the time parliamentary elections took place in 2014, the new Sunni movements appeared poised to capitalize on their grassroots appeal,

and it was only through last-minute gerrymandering of electoral districts that the regime was able to stuff the proverbial genie back into the bottle.

There exists, then, a fine line between a regime's emphasizing its protection of citizens against mostly hypothetical dangers, and the inadvertent creation of *actual* breakdowns in security and order through policies that incite social hatred and uncontrollable public hysteria. Still, on balance one is forced to conclude that the ruling strategy pursued by Bahrain and other Gulf governments remains, regrettably, highly successful.<sup>44</sup> Some indication of this can be gleaned by comparing public reactions to fiscal austerity measures taken or proposed by GCC countries since 2015. In principle, the retrenchment of state welfare benefits along with the promise of various forms of new taxation is an issue that should unite Gulf citizens from across the social spectrum, since reforms apply equally to, and are equally unwelcome to, members of all confessional, tribal, and other groupings. In reality, however, one observes stark differences in popular responses to announced economic changes that defy simple structural or institutional explanations, pointing instead to the power of some states' sectarian narratives.

Comparing the recent political experiences of Bahrain and Kuwait illustrates this well. Though distinguished by Kuwait's relative wealth, the two countries share much in common. They feature the region's most robust and long-standing formal representative institutions, both have active and largely progressive

civil societies, and they are not dissimilar in terms of social group composition and cleavages. Yet public reactions to fiscal austerity could not be more divergent—and in the opposite way than one would have expected.<sup>45</sup>

In Bahrain, where the curtailing of government subsidies and benefits entails real economic pain for a citizenry largely impoverished by Gulf standards, protest by citizens

was limited to complaints on social media. In Kuwait, by contrast, the state's repeated attempts at spending reductions and revenue generation were met with stiff resistance in parliament and, in April 2016, precipitated a three-day strike by oil workers, the first in twenty years. What is it that allowed workers in Kuwait to come together for political action, while in Bahrain citizens remained politically quiescent, despite being objectively more affected by state-imposed austerity?

In short, Bahrain remains stuck in the cycle of political stagnation and repression brought on by the 2011 uprising. Having spent the past five years fighting on either side of a conflict over the rightful division of political and economic resources, Bahrainis continue to view fiscal austerity through the same lens of communal interests, security, and regional geopolitics—with the state as ultimate beneficiary. For Shia and other citizens inclined toward opposition to the regime, activism has proven both futile and dangerous, and the risks of detention, imprisonment, or revocation of citizenship far outweigh the expected impact on government policy.

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**Bahrain remains stuck in the cycle of political stagnation and repression brought on by the 2011 uprising.**

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For Sunnis, the calculations are more complicated. On the one hand, as the ruling family's core support base, the community receives a disproportionate share of state largesse and thus stands to lose the most from cuts to public-sector salaries and other benefits. Its voice is also potentially more influential in that opposition among Sunnis would raise the possibility of cross-sectarian political coordination. But in the post-2011 landscape, dissent has been made synonymous with Shia activism and is tantamount to treason, and Sunnis are loath to oppose even those policies that negatively affect their own community. Tellingly, rather than blame Bahrain's fiscal woes on economic mismanagement or corruption, many Sunnis have found ways of faulting the usual suspects by blaming Bahraini Shia and even Iran. Were it not for the economic destruction and increased security spending necessitated by the uprising, their reasoning goes, as well as Iran's deliberate flooding of the oil market, Bahrain would not have found itself in its current financial predicament in the first place.<sup>46</sup>

The inability of Bahrainis to overcome sectarian cleavages has meant that the state, far from offering political concessions in return for welfare reduction, in fact has taken the opportunity to further consolidate its grip on power. In January 2016, parliamentarians moved to quiz the finance minister after the government bypassed the legislature to enact a 60-percent hike in fuel prices with a mere nine hours' notice. Shortly before the vote to allow the questioning, Bahrain's interior minister paid a visit to legislators, expressing his astonishment that parliamentarians, being keenly aware of the country's fiscal crisis, were nonetheless putting up more of an obstacle to needed change than regular citizens.<sup>47</sup> Soon thereafter, the parliament altered its own rules to require a three-quarters majority in order to interrogate ministers, effectively forfeiting enhanced legislative oversight included in limited post-2011 reforms.

At the same time, Bahrain has aggressively stamped out what remains of its opposition, including through the revocation of citizenship, unprecedented disqualification of religious leaders from politics,<sup>48</sup> the dissolution of the main Shia opposition bloc al-Wifaq, and prosecution of critics of the ruling family, government institutions, and even Bahrain's military involvement in Yemen. The state's rationale in the case of the Yemen war was aptly paraphrased in a report carried by the official *Bahrain News Agency*, which echoed the security mantra that today dominates public discourse in the Gulf states:

In light of the delicate situation in the region . . . the Interior Ministry . . . warned against any attempt to exploit the situation through division or sedition, or issuance of statements against the approach Bahrain has taken [in the Yemen conflict].

The Interior Ministry said it would take appropriate steps against individuals that put the safety and security of the country at risk.

The Ministry stressed that the situation required strong national unity, general order and stability.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

For most of the past half century, the states of the Arab Gulf have been defined by their unique combination of economic generosity and political parsimony—a system preserved by vast resource wealth and traditional institutions of governance that have managed to retain a preponderance of legitimacy. Yet, fifty years on from the establishment of the rentier system, one is tempted to say of the Gulf monarchies that it is their adept management of social group cleavages and identities, rather than economic distribution per se, that has powered their continued longevity. The GCC may be rich, but one does not remain rich by spending all of one's money. Instead, both out of fiscal necessity and a desire to maximize private consumption, Gulf rulers seek to buy popular loyalty as cheaply as possible, deploying resources strategically while also cultivating intangible sources of legitimacy so as to lessen the need for financial patronage.

In elucidating the link between political loyalty and individual preferences for stability, the foregoing analysis has lent empirical substance to the notion, frequently articulated but never before systematically tested, that Gulf governments can frighten their populations into accepting the political status quo. Faced with uncertainty and insecurity, a majority of Gulf Arabs would rather defend a system that is less than ideal than push for a new and potentially better political order, the transition to which risks going very wrong. Fortunately for Gulf rulers, and unfortunately for Gulf nationals, the post-2011 Middle East and North Africa offers plenty of examples of the latter, but few if any success stories.

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## Appendix I: Methodology

The aim of the survey data analysis is to understand how popular preferences for stability shape political attitudes and behavior among individual Gulf citizens, and how this link varies across different Gulf societies. The analysis began by investigating the direct (bivariate) relationship between stability preferences and political deference, evaluating to what extent the data support the notion that more stability-oriented citizens are also more likely to remain supportive of Gulf governments even when they disagree with their policies.

The next step was to assess the *conditioning* effect of individual preferences for stability on other important processes through which citizens might come to assume a more oppositional or deferential political stance. Specifically, the analysis considered the moderating effect of stability preferences on the expected link between economic satisfaction and political satisfaction. The finding that this basic rentier relationship operates more weakly and/or not at all among those citizens who emphasize stability over other societal aims is evidence of the hypothesized political subsidy enjoyed by Gulf rulers as a result of popular concerns over security. Alternatively, if the data were to have shown that economically less satisfied nationals tend to exhibit less deference toward the state irrespective of their security orientation, then this would have been strong evidence against this hypothesis.

To study these empirical relationships, I relied on a standard ordered logistic regression model estimated separately for each of the four countries. The model tested the effects of the independent variables of interest—economic satisfaction and concern for stability—while holding constant a number of potentially confounding social and economic factors.<sup>50</sup> These control variables included a respondent's gender (coded 1 for females), years of age, and educational level (primary or below, high school graduate, some technical/college, university graduate). Economic satisfaction was measured by a respondent's self-reported satisfaction with "the overall economic situation" of his or her household (rated on an ascending 0 to 10 scale). Prioritization of stability was coded categorically (first priority, second priority, not a priority). To reduce the number of parameters in the model, age and education were estimated as continuous measures, while stability was estimated as a factor variable. Due to a relatively high rate of missing data, household income was not included as a control.

Finally, to test the conditioning influence of stability preferences on the relationship between economic satisfaction and political deference, a multiplicative interaction term was added between the stability and economic satisfaction variables. All models utilized robust standard errors and, where available, sampling weights to account for survey design effects.

## Notes

1. According to the Saudi Ministry of Interior, as quoted in *Al-Jazeera English*. “Saudi Arabia Executes 47 on Terrorism Charges,” *Al-Jazeera English*, January 2, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/01/saudi-announces-execution-47-terrorists-160102072458873.html>.
2. “Saudi Arabia: Appalling Death Sentence Against Shi’a Cleric Must Be Quashed,” Amnesty International, October 15, 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/10/saudi-arabia-appalling-death-sentence-against-shi-cleric-must-be-quashed/>.
3. As quoted in *BBC*. “Iran: Saudis Face ‘Divine Revenge’ for Executing al-Nimr,” *BBC News*, January 3, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35216694>.
4. “Saudi Arabia Hikes Petrol Prices by 40% at the Pump,” *Al-Jazeera English*, December 28, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/saudi-arabia-hikes-petrol-prices-40-pump-151228154350415.html>.
5. The GCC consists of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.
6. Justin Gengler and Laurent A. Lambert, “Renegotiating the Ruling Bargain: Selling Fiscal Reform in the GCC,” *Middle East Journal*, vol. 70, no. 2 (2016): 321–329.
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10. Galal Amin, *The Modernization of Poverty: A Study in the Political Economy of Growth in Nine Arab Countries, 1945–70* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 49–50. As quoted in Dirk Vandewalle, “The Rentier State in the Arab World,” in *The Rentier State: Nation, State and Integration in the Arab World, Vol. 2*, edited by Giacomo Luciani (London: Routledge, 1987).
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  15. Katja Niethammer, "Persian Gulf States," in *The Middle East*, edited by Ellen Lust, 717–45. 13th ed. Los Angeles: CQ Press. See also, for example, the arguments of former Qatari prime minister Sheik Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani reported in Habib Toumi, "Reforms Best Way to Avoid Uprisings, Qatar Premier Says," *Gulf News*, November 11, 2011.
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  18. Justin Gengler, "Understanding Sectarianism in the Persian Gulf," in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, edited by Lawrence G. Potter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
  19. In this sense, the electoral reforms that took effect in 2012 can be seen as aiming, ironically, to encourage rather than stifle the emergence of programmatic coalitions—at least in tribal-dominated districts. Kuwait's earlier parliamentary engineering worked only too well.
  20. The United Arab Emirates electoral college had 6,689 members for the 2006 election, which roughly corresponded to about 0.8 percent of an estimated 825,000 nationals that year. Please see "United Arab Emirates Majlis Watani Itihadi (Federal National Council): Elections in 2006," Inter-Parliamentary Union, [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2333\\_06.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2333_06.htm).
  21. The United Arab Emirates National Bureau of Statistics estimated that the country had approximately 948,000 citizens in mid-2010. The percentages listed here assume a total number of 1,000,000 citizens to account for post-2010 population growth. Please see the following sources for further details. "Methodology of Estimating the Population in UAE," United Arab Emirates National Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.fcsa.gov.ae/ReportPDF/Population%20Estimates%202006%20-%202010.pdf>; "United Arab Emirates Majlis Watani Itihadi (Federal National Council): Elections in 2011," Inter-Parliamentary Union, [http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2333\\_11.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2333_11.htm); "United Arab Emirates Majlis Watani Itihadi (Federal National Council): Last Elections," Inter-Parliamentary Union, [http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2333\\_E.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2333_E.htm).
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28. Habib Toumi, "Saudi Mufti Calls for Mandatory Military Service," *GulfNews*, April 11, 2015, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-mufti-calls-for-mandatory-military-service-1.1489839>.
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30. Rasheed, "How United Is the GCC?"
31. Gengler and Lambert, "Renegotiating the Ruling Bargain."
32. "Transcript: Interview With Muhammad bin Salman," *Economist*, January 6, 2016, [http://www.economist.com/saudi\\_interview](http://www.economist.com/saudi_interview).
33. As quoted in Gengler and Lambert, "Renegotiating the Ruling Bargain."
34. Adam Bouyamourn, "Get Ready for Taxes, Christine Lagarde Tells UAE and Other Gulf Nations," *National*, February 22, 2016, <http://www.thenational.ae/business/economy/get-ready-for-taxes-christine-lagarde-tells-uae-and-other-gulf-nations>.
35. The Bahrain data, collected in 2013, come from the widely used World Values Survey, while the data for the latter three countries were collected in an original 2015 survey of GCC nationals designed and implemented by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute at Qatar University. All surveys consist of large and nationally representative samples of adult citizens interviewed in person at their places of residence. The data include a total of 1,200 interviews conducted in Bahrain, 1,022 in Kuwait, 852 in Oman, and 793 in Qatar. Additional details are reported in the appendix. The SESRI surveys were made possible by a grant (NPRP 6-636-5-064) from the Qatar National Research Fund (a member of Qatar Foundation). The statements herein are solely the responsibility of the author.
36. In the Kuwait and Qatar surveys, the order of these response options was randomized to avoid ordering effects. The Oman survey was administered by paper and pencil and thus could not implement randomization.
37. Mark Tessler, Amaney Jamal, Abdallah Bedaida, Mhammed Abderebbi, Khalil Shikaki, Fares Braizat, Justin Gengler, and Michael Robbins, *Arab Barometer: Public Opinion Survey Conducted in Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, and Bahrain 2006-2009*, ICPSR26581-v4 (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2016 [distributor]). Data available at <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/26581>.
38. Please see note 35 for more information about the 2013 Bahrain World Values Survey.
39. That is, via multivariate regression. See the appendix for a full methodological summary.
40. Note that the 95-percent confidence bars for the middle line are omitted for clarity.
41. The mean satisfaction value in the Qatar survey is 7.25, with a standard deviation of 2.11. The value of -1 standard deviation is 5.14 and the respective value for +1 standard deviation is 9.36.
42. One might wonder whether this result is partially or mainly an artifact of a selection effect whereby respondents who cite stability as their top national goal are disproportionately well-off economically, since poorer and/or less economically satisfied citizens naturally will be more likely to choose "boosting economic development." In fact, however, the highest correlation between stability preferences and economic status (as measured by reported household income) is a mere 0.08, in the case of Kuwait.
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44. Justin Gengler, "Sectarian Backfire? Assessing Gulf Political Strategy Five Years After the Arab Uprisings," Middle East Institute, November 17, 2015.
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50. Data on sectarian affiliation and other ascriptive demographics were not available in the surveys.



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