



A Preliminary Comparative Study of Policy Making in Two GCC Countries—Qatar and Kuwait: Processes, Politics, and Participants

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Drawing from extensive fieldwork and a rich literature on policy dynamics, I offer a preliminary comparative analysis of the policy process in Qatar and Kuwait focusing mainly on the participants. I assess the broad outlines of politics and power in decision-making processes in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) while suggesting means of making them more efficient, representative, and responsive to the needs of citizens. This is the first academic article investigating similarities and differences through a systematic analysis of the policy participants in these two countries and their role in the policy-making process; few studies analyze comparatively the dynamics of policy making in the GCC. Considering the emerging need for governments to develop and implement better processes and increase public participation in government decisions as the result of the Arab revolutions, this article provides recommendations for Qatar and Kuwait, with potential application in the region.

Keywords: Participants in Policy Making, Qatar, Kuwait, Arab Gulf, Gulf States, Arab Spring, International Comparative Policy, Comparative Politics, Tribalism, Rentierism, Rentier States.

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Partiendo de una abundante literatura en la dinámica de las políticas públicas y un extenso trabajo de campo, ofrezco un análisis comparativo preliminar del proceso de política pública en Qatar y Kuwait enfocándome principalmente en los participantes. Evalúo las líneas generales de la política y el poder en los procesos de toma de decisiones del Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo (GCC por sus siglas en inglés), y al mismo tiempo ofrezco formas de hacer estos procesos más eficientes, representativos y con una mayor respuesta a la necesidad de sus ciudadanos. Este es el primer estudio académico que investiga las diferencias y similitudes entre estos dos países a través de un análisis sistemático de los participantes en el proceso de política pública y toma de decisiones, muy pocos estudios analizan de forma comparativa las dinámicas de la creación de política pública en el GCC. Considerando la creciente necesidad de los gobiernos para desarrollar e implementar mejores procesos y aumentar la participación pública en las decisiones del gobierno como resultado de las revoluciones árabes, este estudio ofrece recomendaciones para Qatar y Kuwait, con aplicación potencial en la región.

Despite the growing importance of the Gulf, the policy-making process of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states has tended to escape international scrutiny. Royal families are assumed to make all policy decisions, with little input from citizens. Such assumptions are both unfounded and misleading. As this article shows, nonroyals and even noncitizens are increasingly playing an informal, yet often crucial, role in influencing policy. Indeed, policy making often occurs outside of the procedural framework of government. Facing revolutionary contagion, the GCC countries are seriously questioning their next steps, including the contested relationship between the citizen and the state.

Since political life in these countries remains underinstitutionalized, it is difficult to assess how the process of policy formulation actually takes place and, importantly, how it might be reformed. In Bahrain, the *Shi'a* majority is demanding increased access to the policy-making process by calling for a

constitutional monarchy with an elected prime minister and cabinet. Such demands have remained limited in Kuwait and Qatar. From a regime standpoint, however, there is a strong case for “preemptive” political reform, minimizing popular demands by absorbing them. If regimes, on the other hand, reluctantly reform only in the face of mass protests, they run the risk of doing too little, too late. This, of course, is precisely what happened in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen.

With popular uprisings spreading across the Middle East amid demands for more representative government, understanding the nature and process of policy making in the region is as urgent as ever. This article attempts to address this urgent task by providing a detailed comparative review of the principal actors in the policy process, both within and outside contemporary government procedures in Qatar and Kuwait. It provides a detailed overview of the national context of both countries. It sheds light on policy dynamics in the small GCC states¹ by examining the policy determinants—that both drive and constrain the development of certain policies—specific to these countries because of their unique political nature and social quilt. The article also sees the current climate as an opportunity for “preemptive” reform in Qatar and Kuwait’s next steps, and provides some preliminary recommendations accordingly.

Public policy is traditionally defined as “what governments choose to do or not to do” (Dye 1987, 1). The process through which governments opt for certain policies over others, however, is more difficult to define. In democratic systems, the mechanisms through which governments ascertain their citizens’ needs are institutionalized. In authoritarian settings, determining what the public needs is more complicated. Actually, as demonstrated by recent upheavals in the Arab world, although citizens’ needs were not always accurately perceived in such closed systems, the citizens are insisting more on participating in the formulation and administration of policies.

While this article examines two different policy-making models, it focuses mainly on the participants and their role rather than the process in two members of the GCC. Qatar and Kuwait were selected as both countries have common long-standing cultural and historical traditions and religious ties. These countries have similar economic resources and share a number of other similarities—including their “rentier” nature and the importance of the tribe and family politics in their policy decisions. Also, the two nations have, so far, remained relatively unaffected by the ongoing Arab revolts.

Specifically, this research aims to fill a gap in the current public policy literature on the type of participants in policy formulation in less

¹ This process is dramatically different when compared to the U.S. policy-making process where not only does the U.S. Congress which has two chambers that actually vote on legislation and set the budget, but where an executive branch with millions of employees, led by the president, implements it; this is in addition to the various governmental and nongovernmental actors, in policy communities or outside these communities, which generally play a significant role in advancing ideas and pushing or blocking policy proposals.

institutionalized political systems in general, by asking *which participants have decision power in Qatar and Kuwait? And to what extent?* It identifies these participants and considers their importance, resources available to them, and the influence they have in the policy process and outcomes. It also briefly takes into account the unique public policy issues emerging in Qatar and Kuwait. The article ultimately aims to gain a preliminary understanding of the nature of policy making in the Gulf region: is it evidence-based or interactive? Is it centralized or inclusive? What are the mechanisms through which citizens participate in this process? How can the process be improved to allow for more input from citizens? The answers to these questions provide important insights into how to make the process more efficient and more responsive to the needs of citizens. Moreover, key stakeholders will be better able to anticipate opportunities and obstacles to the introduction and implementation of new or existing policies. This, in turn, can contribute to more effective political processes and the institutionalization of policies in the two countries under study and more broadly throughout the GCC.

This article does not offer a comprehensive study of the policy-making process, let alone in any policy sector in particular. Given the dearth of the literature in the area, I hope to provide an important first investigative step; the result is a preliminary analysis of the dynamics of policy-making process in two of the GCC countries, which is unique in terms of content, implication, and utility. As such, this article informs the ongoing research agenda to assess public policy making in each of the member states of the GCC. The underlying purpose is not simply to describe the practice of policy making, but also to place policy making at the center of political reform in these countries, rather than as a separate marginal public process.

The article is organized as follows. The second section reviews the scholarly literature and presents two relevant theoretical frameworks: Kingdon's (2010) multiple streams framework, focusing on its analysis of the policy participants; and Berry and Berry's (2007) policy innovation and diffusion framework. Drawing on the literature on policy determinants, this section discusses the implications of the "rentier effect" on politics and policy, as well as the politics of tribes and family surrounding policy decisions in the GCC region in general. This is followed by an outline of the methodology.

In the third section, I provide a brief overview of the GCC context followed by a descriptive comparative account of the two countries. The fourth section presents the article's findings, identifying the main participants, evaluating their resources and importance, and evaluating the inhibitors and triggers of policy making in each country. The fifth section offers a discussion and a summary of the major findings of the comparative analysis as well as an assessment of the main threats and opportunities for policy making in the light of the Arab Uprisings. Finally, preliminary policy recommendations and suggestions for further studies are given.

Theory, Data, and Methodology

There is a noted shift in the policy literature, in terms of focus as well as data collection and analysis, toward a more cross-national and international perspective. However, drawing on existing theoretical frameworks designed with a Western system of democracy in mind, particularly that of the United States, proves to be rather limited. This is due to both the uniqueness of the policy-making process as well as the nature of the political system in the GCC. Existing Western-oriented frameworks cannot account for various country-specific factors, making them difficult to apply to such countries—some of which are party-less or nondemocratic in nature. Certain elements can nevertheless provide a starting point. I employ some of the components of Kingdon's (2010) "Multiple Streams" theoretical framework to identify the key policy participants and their roles. This framework, however, is less suited to explaining the patterns in policy design or describe the process in the two countries. To do this, the research draws on the "Policy Diffusion Framework" advanced by Berry and Berry (2007) as a better ground for explaining policy diffusion among GCC members. A region/country-specific conceptual model is developed to provide a more complete account of the participants and the role they play in the process as well as the policy dynamics of the two countries. As such, this article can offer only a preliminary sketch of policy making in two of the GCC members. But this could be conceivably used as basis for future studies and critical discussion.

Scholars of policy and politics have described the behavior of actors involved in the formation and implementation of public policy. For Kingdon (2010), what issues get on the policy agenda or not in the public policy-making process is determined by two factors: (1) the participants inside and outside the government (their resources, importance, and the way they are important); and (2) the process, which is composed of three streams of actors and processes: the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream. These streams create policy windows, which are opportune times for introducing new policies. The framework helps systematically separate the various influences on public policy to allow for a better analysis of the process and its complexity, as well as its key participants.

Kingdon (2010) groups these participants into two clusters: (1) inside the government including the administration, the civil servants, and the legislators; and (2) outside the government such as interest groups, researchers, academics, consultants and think tanks, media, elections-related participants, and public opinion. The latter is considered important mostly in democratic settings. Each participant has certain resources that make them influential. For instance, the president can single handedly set agendas through these resources: institutional veto and hiring/firing, organizational, command of public attention, partisan element of a nondivided congress, and his involvement that constitutes the amount of the president's impact. Kingdon (2010) finds that Capitol Hill has an

impact on both agenda and alternatives, and possesses the following resources: the legal authority, formidable publicity, blended information, and longevity. Dye (1987) offers a different perspective by adopting the “elite theory,” suggesting that the public is less interested and ill-informed concerning public policy. He asserts that the elite shape mass opinion and that most policies reflect the interests and the values of the elite.

Other than the participants’ influence on policy process and outcomes, policy adoption is also a function of both the characteristics of the specific systems and a variety of diffusion processes. Walker (1969) argues that states, in an attempt to simplify complex decisions to resolve complicated problems, borrow policy innovations implemented in other states when these policies or programs were considered successful. The policy innovation and diffusion framework was thus developed to explain variation in adoption of specific policy innovations across a large number of states/countries/localities.

The pressure on the state to conform to nationally or regionally accepted standards is an additional reason underscoring a policy diffusion approach. Here geographic proximity is seen as a crucial factor for regional diffusion (Berry and Berry 2007). The closer the state, the higher the probability of adoption; and the probability that a state will adopt a policy is positively related to the number of bordering states that have already adopted that policy (Mintrom 1997). Proximate states tend to have comparable economic aspects and common social problems, which often lead to similar policy actions (Mooney and Lee 1995).

Diffusion of policies among Gulf nations is also important, as it suggests that the study of one GCC state’s policies will be relevant to another country’s. As Ehteshami (2003, 64) notes, “[o]ne can envisage a situation in which a ‘bandwagon’ effect arises as the Gulf emirates emulate one another, each adopting some of the features of the others’ participatory mechanisms.” Ehteshami cites the example of Qatar establishing its first directly elected chamber in 1999 after Bahrain introduced similar reforms. The more recent spread of popular uprisings across borders is another example of regional diffusion on a wider scale. States not only learn from each other, but also compete with each other. They also tend to emulate policies to achieve an economic advantage over other states or avoid being disadvantaged. As Walker (1969) also explains, policies are often adopted when decision makers feel their state is relatively deprived, or that some need exists to which other states in their “league” have already responded. These feelings of deprivation and fears of falling behind other states thus often lead to policy innovations.

It has also been recognized that the government type and nature of the political system, as well as the nature of societal composition, influence the policy process and choices, and determine the participants. The “rentier effect” on politics and policy is a clear example of such determinants. The impact of natural resource dependence and the relation between oil and politics have generated much intellectual debate. Referred to as “rentierism,” the framework

has produced a number of propositions concerning the nature of the development and policy-making process in rentier states. Some have found that oil has been robustly associated with regime durability while others have found it to undermine it. Ross (2001) argues that not only “oil impedes democracy,” but also that simply “oil and democracy do not mix.” Others have contended that the financial autonomy of oil states grants them immunity from social pressures while others have stated the abundance of exports do not necessarily translate into a politically “quiescent” population (see Okruhlik 1999).

Although rentierism enhances state autonomy by eliminating economically motivated pressure groups, it can sometimes lead to the emergence of culturally and ideologically based groups such as Islamist movements, for whom economic issues are of secondary importance (Shambayati 1994). Furthermore, the rentier effect varies according to state strategies for revenues as well as expenditures and their political consequences for particular groups in the society. The first is the large-scale distributive state, in which the government spends revenues on large-scale distributive policies to ensure the regime’s stability (Basedau and Lacher 2006). Governments of the Gulf have benefited from the enormous profits from vast hydrocarbon resources and have invested revenues from oil and natural gas in the creation of large bureaucracies and generous welfare states (Beblawi and Luciani 1987), providing citizens with free education, health care, public utilities, and widely available employment opportunities in the vast public sector. The second involves a patronage-based system more commonly linked with the occurrence of violence. Qatar and Kuwait fall under the former (Basedau and Lacher 2006).

While citizens in resource-rich nations may want to participate in the political process, they stand to lose the benefits of the rentier system if they do. Indeed, rentier governments spend much of their budgets on welfare while requiring little-to-no taxation, thus making people less likely to press for inclusion in the political system. Stated more simply, this is what may be called “no representation without taxation.” Citizens in resource-rich states may want democracy in terms of participation in the decision-making process as much as citizens elsewhere, but abundant resources may permit their governments to spend more on internal security and hinder democratic aspirations: the “repression effect” (Ross 2001). High spending on welfare and a low taxation system dampen public pressures for inclusion in the policy process in particular and for democracy in general: the “rentier effect.” Finally, the failure of the population to move into industrial and service job sectors renders them less likely to push for democratic values and practices: the “modernization effect.” These three effects may interact in a pernicious way, creating what Ross (2001) has called a “resource trap.”

Another system characterizing these countries that is also difficult to dismantle is tribalism: the historically long-standing system of allegiance and power found within Arabian societies pre-oil wealth and premonarchical system

(see e.g., Commins 2012; Crystal 1995, 2007; Peterson 2001; Zahlan 1998). Tribal politics continue to exist in the region, and family descent still plays a significant role. In fact, many Gulf monarchies (including Oman, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates [UAE]) have incorporated tribal systems into their rule to establish greater legitimacy and derive authority. Ehteshami and Wright (2007) note that tribal nobility has been an important source of political control, often because of police and military support of their faction, and suppresses groups or movements attempting to question their position.

Each country in the Gulf has a unique relationship between tribal groups and their respective governments, although certain norms, such as appeasement or symbiosis, can be traced between many of them. Heard-Bey (2005) states that the UAE is special in its devolution of power to rulers of each emirate. This led to the development of separate identities that further empowered the leaders of each region when traditionally tribal people “looked to its leaders for jurisdiction, economic support, or moral guidance in times of peace and expected military bravado and inspired negotiating skills in times of strife” (Heard-Bey 2005, 360).

The tribal/familial power in relation to a Gulf state is reflected in the relationship between the Wahhab family and the Saud family in Saudi Arabia. Bligh (1985) notes that while the house of Saud provides the kingdom with its strength and maintains continuity, the al-Shaykh family holds the religious-moral authority legitimizing the government. Kuwait has demonstrated the role of tribal nobility in its parliamentary elections. In 1999, tribal elites who believe in the authority of the monarchy acquired a significant 14 spots in the parliament, showing that many citizens of Kuwait support the monarchy through their tribal groups (Ehteshami 2003). In Qatar, tribal and familial elites enjoy significant power and are major parts of the Qatari government, specifically in the country’s legislative assembly, where their policy decisions reinforce their strength in the political system (Kamrava 2009, 418). It is often the case that power can be concentrated in one or a handful of tribal groups in a country with a select few individuals making decisions and wielding influence for the support of a regime or specific politician. They can affect the regional goals of a state (Sayigh 1991, 489). This could prove problematic by alienating other tribal groups as a whole and threatening a balance of power systems found even in small tribal entities in Gulf states.

Tribal groups are not only involved in the political scene. They are also major players in economic policies of the Gulf states. Internally powerful tribal groups are intimately connected to the enterprise sector of the state, controlling various aspects of the economy (Murphy 2006). Also, the tribe and tribal elites facilitate regimes in the Gulf to be able to reach their constituents through a channel of relatable ties (Snider 1988, 466). Yet with a norm there is always an exception. Peterson (2001) notes that it is not always the case this pattern of tribal leaders makes a significant political contribution. In Oman, for example, the Sultan can make primary decisions as to who stays and who goes when it

comes to leading specific tribes; he thus wields great power in influencing tribal politics and influence in the country. Additionally, it should be clarified that some roles previously giving tribal leaders more power have now waned with the formation of modern, powerful, and systematic states in the Gulf. Kechichian (1985) remarks that prior to the newfound wealth of the Gulf states, elder tribal members would solve problems arising from conflicts regarding boundaries, but after the oil discovery, tribe elites and semipowerful families did not have the educational credentials to make policy decisions, especially those that could greatly affect the economies of their states.

This article uses a qualitative approach in which two complementary types of data sources are employed. The first dataset is based on extensive fieldwork in the region over a three-year period (2010-12), including interviews, visits to government ministries, administrative and legislative agencies, quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (quangos), civil society groups, academic institutions, and political coalitions. Informal salon gatherings, *majalis* in Qatar and *diwaniyat* in Kuwait,² were also valuable data resources for information on citizens' public policy preferences and provided detailed insights on the policy process. In all, more than 85 in-depth interviews were conducted with key actors in both countries.

This article also utilized other sources including official and unofficial policy documents, commentaries, and interviews reported in the major newspaper in both countries, as well as other media outlets (TV talk shows, Internet blogs, and websites), institutional publications or documents, local meetings in both countries, and policy-makers' public statements. Semistructured interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate method. The approach allows respondents to answer questions in detail and on their own terms, something often restricted in a structured interview or questionnaire survey (Babbie 2004). Interviewee selection was based on the initial overview of the institutional and political structures and the main policy actors in both countries. Every attempt was made to include representatives from the different establishments in both the private and public sectors. When this was not possible, a thorough review of documents generated by the establishment was conducted. Once these institutions had been identified, interviewees were chosen by selecting important stakeholders or those who have had an impact on policy outcomes. The aim was to provide reliable findings by generating a sample that is closely representative of key policy makers. Most interviews were conducted in the participant's office and were either taped or written and later transcribed.

Data were analyzed using an iterative thematic analysis and findings served to illustrate the theoretical perspectives in the prevailing relevant literature on policy making. A content analysis consisting of a systematic examination of the

² These terms in Arabic mean a place of sitting and are used to describe various types of traditional gatherings in the Arab Gulf countries.

data accompanied with a basic coding system helped in identifying and grouping themes, coding, classifying, and developing categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The emergent ideas, explanations, and relationships were tested by returning to the data and theoretical frameworks. The process continued until the author felt that saturation was reached.

A conventional research instrument divided into two sections was used, involving a standardized schedule with the use of associated prompts. The first part attempted to elicit information concerning the general context in terms of the policy process, the actors (shakers and makers), and the policy drivers. To acquire this information, the following questions were asked: (1) How can the policy-making process be described? (2) Which individuals have significant influence over the policy process and outcomes? (3) What are the political, social, and economic factors/drivers that influence the decision of key policy makers? What motivates government to create, reform, and terminate certain policies? In the second part of each interview, the interviewees were asked to (1) discuss the implications that the Arab Spring had, or would have, on the policy-making process and participants; and to (2) offer recommendations they might have to improve the process.

Setting the Context

The GCC

The six nations of the GCC countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—have a per capita gross domestic product similar to those of North American and European countries (see IMF 2010). They also have approximately 40 percent of total verified oil reserves as well as 23 percent of the world's gas reserves. The combined effects of British colonization and the discovery of oil and gas have led to a unique geopolitical composition and a distinctive regional state structure. The GCC was founded as a regional free trade area to achieve coordination, cooperation, and integration in all fields. Table 1 provides general comparison data between these members.

The six nations of the GCC are commonly described as “rentier” states because of their massive wealth from hydrocarbons. In a rentier state, the government is the principal recipient of the external rent in the economy. In fact, the “economic power” thus bestowed upon the few would allow them to seize “political power” as well as protect them from political and social pressures, or else induce the political elite to take over the external rent from them without major political disruption (Beblawi and Luciani 1987).

Comparative Overview of Qatar and Kuwait

Although they have developed independently, Qatar and Kuwait share a number of similarities. As Muslim states that gained independence only in the second half of the twentieth century, the two countries have common cultural,

Table 1. Comparison Data between Member States in the GCC

Country	Total Population	Population of Nonnationals	GDP (PPP) (\$ billion)	GDP Per Capita (PPP)	Land Mass (sq. km)
Bahrain	1,281,332	235,108	33.63	29,200	760
Kuwait	2,695,316	1,291,354	153.4	40,500	17,818
Oman	3,154,134	577,293	91.54	29,600	309,500
Qatar	2,042,444	1,360,000	191	103,900	11,586
KSA	26,939,583	5,576,076	921.7	31,800	2,149,690
UAE	5,473,972	3,279,164	275.8	49,800	83,600

Source: CIA World Factbook (2013).

Notes: GCC, Gulf Cooperation Council; GDP, gross domestic product; KSA, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; PPP, public-private partnership; UAE, United Arab Emirates.

historic, and religious ties. Tribal affiliations remain strong in the two countries. The notion of national identity is complicated, however, as Qataris and Kuwaitis are minorities in their own countries. As their governments have tried to diversify their economies away from hydrocarbons, expatriate workers play critical roles. In Kuwait, expatriates account for 47.9 percent of the country's population; meanwhile, in Qatar, nationals account for a mere 15 percent of the population (CIA World Factbook 2013), leading to a degree of frustration concerning priority granted to skilled expatriate workers (Slackman 2010). Although it is virtually impossible for foreigners to become Qatari or Kuwaiti citizens, many highly educated nonnationals work in government and influence the policy-making process. Some—usually Arab or Western experts and consultants—are regularly invited to attend the *majalis* or *diwaniyat* of prominent individuals and, in some instances, have considerable access to members of the royal family. In Kuwait, where the role of parliament is more central, only those who have been citizens for 20 years can vote, thus excluding expatriates from the formal political process.

As in other Gulf monarchies, a public set of officials and ruling family councils govern Qatar and Kuwait. The “Emiri Diwan” is a symbol of the power of the ruling family. The emir, the executive leader of the state, appoints the prime minister and is perceived as being above politics. Kuwait, although ruled by an emir, has moved toward a parliamentary constitutional system, with an increasingly active and independent-minded National Assembly.

The pace of political liberalization in Qatar has been comparatively slower. The Shura Council includes 35 appointed advisors with consultative power. The body was once elected, yet the last election was held in 1970 (Kamrava 2009). The Shura Council is, however, researching the means of introducing an elected parliament, which would then require a new constitution (Ehteshami 2003). Elections were to be called originally in 2008, but were delayed to 2010 and most recently until 2013 by emiri decree, to allow the legal framework for parliament

to be established. According to the constitution approved by referendum in 2003, the legislature will have three primary responsibilities: to approve the national budget, to oversee ministers' performance and check their power through votes of no confidence and interpellation, and to write, discuss, and vote on legislation, which can then become law through a two-thirds vote and with the emir's approval.

After Hamad Al-Thani became emir, he established the 29-member Central Municipal Council (CMC), a directly elected body, which includes female representatives. The committee's responsibilities include ensuring the implementation of laws relating to urban planning and infrastructure, as well as ensuring the administrative and fiscal management of agriculture and municipal affairs. Four relatively open and free elections for the council took place in 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011. Although voter turnout reached 80 percent in the first election, it dropped to around 40 percent in the next two elections, suggesting that Qatari citizens do not consider the body to have a great deal of political power or jurisdiction. Furthermore, in 2011, there were only 32,000 registered voters in Qatar from a pool of 250,000 nationals (Toumi 2011). According to the one female member of the Council, "the CMC doesn't enjoy much power; however, we hope that more qualified citizens and women, especially, would enter the electoral fray in the future" (Toumi 2011).

The latest CMC elections took place in May 2011 as the pro-democracy revolts stirred throughout the Arab world. Although the elections have been held every four years since 1999 and were due for this year, the 2011 polling received much more media attention than past elections. In particular, the inclusion of females on the CMC ballot was publicized, as the elections took place at a time when Saudi Arabia was handling registration for municipal council elections, which exclude female voters. Although the CMC is a small body that handles primarily administrative issues and only a small percentage of Qataris votes, the election was covered worldwide as evidence of democratic process under way in Qatar. The Minister of Municipality and Urban Planning then considered that the newly elected body represented "true democracy." Table 2 summarizes the main indicators in both Qatar and Kuwait in terms of geographical location, population, politics, policy, resources, economy, and some social context.

Key Policy Issues

Public policy concerns differ in both visibility and intensity in Qatar and Kuwait. Common to both countries are issues related to labor policies, economic diversification, as well as educational and health-care reforms. Rapid population growth, primarily due to an influx of expatriate workers, has resulted in rising underemployment among national populations, especially the young. With growing local and expatriate populations, Qatar and Kuwait may face problems of unemployment in the near future—Qatar's population, for instance, is expected to double by 2026 (General Secretariat for Development

Table 2. Summary of Main Indicators in Qatar and Kuwait: Geography, Politics, Policy, Natural Resources, Economy, and Social Context

Variable		Qatar	Kuwait
Geography	Regional affiliation	GCC/MENA	GCC/MENA
	Population	Total 1,663,351 Nonnationals 1,291,354 (46.29%)	2,789,132 1,296,345 (77.93%)
Politics	Government type	Monarchy/emirate	Monarchy/constitutional emirate
	Executive branch	All ministers are appointed by the emir. The emir is hereditary	Council of Ministers is appointed by the prime minister and approved by the emir. The emir is hereditary; the emir appoints the prime minister and deputy prime ministers
	Legislative branch	Unicameral Advisory Council or "Majlis al-Shura" (35 seats; members appointed)	Unicameral National Assembly or "Majlis al-Umma" (members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms; all cabinet ministers are also ex officio voting members)
	Judicial branch	Courts of First Instance, Appeal, and Cassation; an Administrative Court and a Constitutional Court were established in 2007	High Court of Appeal
Political stability	Democracy index	Generally stable 3.18 (authoritarian), 138 out of 167 countries (Economist Intelligence Unit 2012)	Relatively stable 3.78 (authoritarian), 119 out of 167 countries (Economist Intelligence Unit 2012)
	Freedom index (political rights/civil liberties)	6/5 (not free)	4/4 (partly free)
	Policy	Process	Centralized and closed system
Participants	Royal family	Royal family	Royal family
	Ministries	Ministries	Ministries
Resources	Natural resources	Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura)	National Assembly (Majlis al-Umma)
		Lack of political parties/interest groups Lack of civil society—quangos Prominence of expatriates	Multiple political coalitions—no political parties Tribes Growing and active civil society/NGOs Foreign experts
Economic indicators	Natural resources	Resource-rich nation Petroleum, natural gas, fish Oil and gas account for over 50% of Qatar's GDP, 85% of export earnings, and 70% of government revenues	Resource-rich nation Petroleum, fish, shrimp, natural gas Oil accounts for almost 50% of Kuwait's GDP, 95% of export revenues, and 95% of government income.
	GDP/capita (PPP)	121,700	54,100
Social context	UN Human Development Index	33 (very high human development index) out of 182 countries	31 (very high human development index) out of 182 countries
	Unemployment rate	0.5% (2009 est.)	2.2% (2004 est.)
Religion	Religion	Muslim 77.5%, Christian 8.5%, other 14% (CIA World Factbook 2013)	Muslim 85% (Sunni 70%, Shia 30%), other (includes Christian, Hindu, and Parsi) 15% (CIA World Factbook 2013)
	Ethnicity	Arab 40%, Indian 18%, Pakistani 18%, Iranian 10%, other 14% (CIA World Factbook 2013)	Kuwaiti 45%, other Arab 35%, South Asian 9%, Iranian 4%, other 7% (CIA World Factbook 2013)

Source: CIA World Fact Book (2013).

Notes: GCC, Gulf Cooperation Council; GDP, gross domestic product; MENA, Middle East and North Africa; NGO, nongovernmental organization; PPP, public-private partnership.

Planning 2011). Until around 1990, unemployed recent Qatari graduates received salaries from the government until they found work (*The Peninsula* 2010). There has been some disappointment concerning the discontinuation of this policy. Nonetheless, all Qatari high school and university graduates are assured positions in the nation's civil service. Such issues are forcing governments to reevaluate their labor policies. Qatarization, an initiative launched by the country's leadership in 2000, is intended to build local capacity by increasing the number of Qatari nationals in all joint venture industries and government departments. The target is 50 percent of the workforce in the industrial and energy sector. The government hopes to achieve this through scholarships, internships, and training programs.³

Similarly, in 1999, the Kuwaiti government launched "Kuwaitization," encouraging citizens to work in the private sector by subsidizing salaries and motivating Kuwaitis to take up jobs previously held only by expatriates. In May 2009, the Kuwaiti government issued new ratios to ensure that nationals are employed in the private sector (Kuwait Times 2009). To ensure that these regulations are followed, Cabinet Resolution Number 1104 prohibits governmental directories from signing contracts with any company that does not abide by the new law, and companies face fines for noncompliance. The presence of a large number of expatriates in the workforces of both Qatar and Kuwait may lead to long-term problems. These laborers, most of whom are of South Asian decent, work under poor conditions and are often mistreated and abused (U.S. Department of State 2001). When, and if, their situation is not carefully considered, they could become a political threat. Although still rare and not an immediate threat to regime security, small-scale demonstrations by workers have occurred sporadically in Kuwait.

In Kuwait, the focus remains more on the development of policies to solve the issue of the *bedoun*⁴ and reduce corruption. However, some "other core issues," notes one Qatari analyst, "are not taken as rapidly as they should" (Interview 1 2010). These include the inflation of rents, unemployment among nationals, males dropping out of school, and gender inequality. Issues of national employment and developing local human capacity therefore remain at the forefront of policy-making discussions in both states. While some policy concerns are widely discussed in Qatar, others are primarily debated privately. In a newly created, first female *majlis*,⁵ young professional women, many educated abroad, discuss issues ranging from marriage to poverty; they even

³ Growing numbers of foreign-educated Qataris, including many educated in the United States, are returning home to assume key positions formerly occupied by expatriates.

⁴ The group known as the *bedoun* in Kuwait (literally "those without") refers to those residents in the country who have no legal status or citizenship. As of July 2009, however, several proposals have been drafted to address the issue (see Casey 2007).

⁵ As mentioned previously, this term in Arabic means a place of sitting and is used to describe various types of traditional gatherings in the Gulf.

question various governmental decisions. They also took up the topic of increasing donations abroad rather than assisting local neighborhoods in need of development. In Kuwait, similar informal gatherings take place in the form of *diwaniyat*, which involve groups of professionals voicing their opinions on policy and current events. Although the forums are similar, Qataris seem to be more selective in what they say and how and when they say it. Kuwaitis tend to be more critical of government officials and even members of the ruling family, with the exception of the person of the emir (*Al-zat al-amiriyya*).

Public Policy Making: Participants and Policy Determinants

In democratic states, the policy-making process tends to be highly complicated, involving a wide variety of organizations and individuals, many of whom are elected and must serve different constituencies. In states like Qatar and Kuwait, however, it is more difficult to determine how exactly policies are formulated, although the process through which they are made tends to be simpler than in democracies. In most contexts, the availability of state revenues presents a major limitation on policy formulation; yet in Qatar and Kuwait the relative lack of financial constraints allows for best practices to be adopted. Even technical knowledge can be (and often is) purchased, so proposals that are, or appear to be, difficult to implement can survive the selection process. For example, such a lack of immediate policy concerns has allowed Qatar to pursue larger goals, like launching Al Jazeera and winning the 2022 World Cup bid. Since Qatar and Kuwait are able to provide their citizens with generous welfare systems, public dissatisfaction is more limited than might otherwise be the case. The education and health-care sectors are often undergoing major reforms to address perceptions of inefficiency. Such reforms are regularly announced and heavily publicized; they therefore largely preempt any major public outcry.

The pressure to conform to international standards is another policy determinant, particularly because Qatar and Kuwait do not face significant domestic pressures for wide-ranging reform. Related to this are elements of national pride and prestige. In the context of regional competition, each nation hopes to be perceived as a leader in policy innovation and also to gain first mover advantage. On many policies, including those related to human rights, governments have introduced measures to improve their global reputations.

Who Makes Policy?

The political leadership, consisting of the emir and a small circle around him, including advisors, ministers, and foreign experts, has considerable autonomy and dominates the policy-making process in both Qatar and Kuwait. This elite group attempts to understand citizens' needs, articulates a national

vision, sets the near-term political agenda, and oversees policy implementation and evaluation.

The Emir. The emir benefits from constitutional power in addition to holding command of public attention and trust. Unlike their republican counterparts, the monarchs of the region enjoy various degrees of religious and historical legitimacy. In Qatar, the emir's role is influenced by continuing traditions of consultation, rule by consensus, and the citizen's right to appeal personally to the emir. While the Qatari emir traditionally held two *majalis* weekly (Tuesdays and Sundays) in his own home, this has changed in recent times. Nonetheless, citizens are still able to appeal to the emir by filing a complaint through a written letter referred to as a *kitab*, which is submitted to the Emiri Diwan or within a *majlis*. Women and expatriates are also able to raise concerns using this mechanism, but they rarely do as noted by many nationals during several of the interviews conducted by the author.

Similarly, Kuwait's emir is seen as above politics and has the power to appoint the nation's prime minister and deputy prime ministers. The prime minister, in turn, who is also the crown prince, selects the other ministers. This cabinet is composed of members of the Al-Sabah ruling family, while others are appointed after wide consultations with various groups and individuals throughout Kuwaiti society to ensure that political forces in parliament are balanced (Herb 2002). This cabinet's and the prime minister's power is checked through parliamentary votes of no confidence. When the National Assembly approves a no confidence vote, it can then question cabinet ministers or the prime minister, which can lead to impeachments, resignations, and even the dissolution of cabinet. Parliament has questioned over 30 ministers with this mechanism. The current prime minister has survived three such no confidence votes since November 2008, with the most recent taking place in January 2011 (Toumi 2011).

In Qatar, the emir can issue decrees with the force of law even when the legislative body is not in session and may call for referenda on important issues (Tétreault 2000). Article 75 of the Qatari constitution states that "the Emir shall seek citizens' opinions on important issues pertaining to the interests of the country, and the subject of the referendum shall be deemed acceptable if it is approved by the majority of voters." The results of the referenda are binding. Qatar has had only one referendum in April 2003 to approve a draft of the Permanent Constitution. Nearly 69,000 people voted, resulting in 96 percent approval; Kuwait, however, does not hold referenda, notes a member of parliament (MP) (Interview 2 2010).

Emiri decrees allow the emir to take full control of policy making and to pass urgent legislation. In Qatar, the emiri decree is used to appoint cabinet ministers, administrators, department chairs, chief executive officers, supreme council members, as well as to establish universities, ministries, autonomous

authorities, and even banks.⁶ In 2002, an emiri decree was issued to impose curbs on smoking and the import, sale, and circulation of tobacco products. The latest emiri decree (No. 65) was issued in 2010 to extend the current Advisory Council for three additional years, delaying legislative elections. In Kuwait, emiri decrees are not subject to modifications; the parliament either accepts or rejects them, a relationship between parliament and government outlined in 1990. In addition, the emiri decree has been used five times to dissolve parliament, most recently in March 2008. The primary difference between the emiri decrees in the two countries is that the organized opposition in Kuwait often views the decrees as a challenge to parliamentary authority, while they tend to be more popularly accepted in Qatar.

The Royal Family/Tribes and the Circle of Elites. Although their power has gradually devolved, members of the royal family continue to influence policy creation and development. It is important to note, as one scholar said, that the ruling family “does not speak with one voice anymore” (Interview 3 2010). The Al-Thani family has ruled Qatar since the mid-1800s, and a number of royals are part of the Council of Ministers, which advises the emir and supervises the implementation of new laws. It also has the task of drafting the state budget, overseeing the civil service, and proposing draft legislation that is passed to the Shura Council for discussion before being presented to the emir. Different branches of the royal family have determined jurisdiction over certain policy areas and in different sectors of the government. Sheikha Mozah, the emir’s second wife, is one of the most visible members of the royal family, as founder and chairperson of Qatar Foundation under which Education City has been established. She plays a significant role in education policy. Meanwhile, in Kuwait, royal family members also play a significant role in political life. Members of the Al-Sabah family occupy key cabinet posts, including defense, the interior, foreign affairs, and oil.

The decision-making power exercised by members of the royal family is also shared with other individuals who have different ties to the rulers. Often, a small number of individuals recognize a certain need, then develop ideas and solutions, and bring them to the rulers. These individuals are in the ruler’s circle of trusted advisors, giving them access to the ruling family, a vested interest in the government, and “exposure to the outside world,” as one respondent described (Interview 4 2010). Many of these trusted advisors are nationals, although in Qatar, many more are expatriate subject matter experts.

⁶ Such as the establishment of the University of Qatar (1973), Middle East Center for Water Desalination Research (2008), Labor and Social affairs Ministry (2007), Ashghal (2004), Qatar News Agency (1975), Qatar Tourism Authority (2000), Silatak Corporation (2008), and Qatar Development Bank (1997). See <http://portal.www.gov.qa/wps/portal/about-qatar/Government-Legislatives>

The presence of a small political elite is common to both countries. However, variation exists at the next level of decision making. Political actors—and the arenas in which they operate—differ. In Qatar, the linkages between the public and participants in the policy-making process are largely informal, where in Kuwait the channels tend to be more institutionalized as the president of a university argues (Interview 5 2010).

The Legislative Branch. Because Qatar's legislature is not currently in session, the impact of the legislative branch on policy making is relevant only in Kuwait at the present time. There, members of the National Assembly include secular-liberal opposition coalitions, Islamist movements, merchants, tribal groups, *Shi'ite* activists, and pro-government deputies. These groups' influence on policy is evident, although constrained and inconsistent. Although parliament is, as one academic puts it, "an important body that puts things in and puts things out" (Interview 3 2010), it seems to have minimal control over the government's agenda. Opposition groups in parliament exercise more control in the selection of alternative policies when, and if, they are presented and debated during a parliamentary session. An MP argues that the prime minister and his cabinet remain the power players, while the parliament plays a supporting role in the policy-making process (Interview 7 2010). Kuwait's parliament, however, adds an element of uncertainty to Kuwaiti politics. Six cabinets have resigned while parliament has been dissolved three times since early 2006, demonstrating that greater political institutionalization does not necessarily translate into political stability. The most recent example was in May 2011 when parliament was suspended until the end of the month because of a fistfight that emerged between MPs over the status of detainees in Guantanamo Bay.

Private Sector Actors and External Experts. In market economies, important public tasks are delegated to individuals in the business sector, such as corporate managers, sometimes referred to as the second set of public officials (see Lindblom 1993). In resource-rich societies that are working toward becoming more market oriented, this group also includes management consultants, subject matter experts, and policy entrepreneurs. The relationship between these communities of experts and local policy makers is one of mutual influence and benefit. Decision makers set the goals, while policy experts possess the technical know-how for implementation; therefore, they become part of the second, larger policy-making circle beyond the elite.

Scientific expertise, whether solicited or independently generated, is particularly beneficial to government officials in the initial stages of the policy-making process, helping them set the agenda and choose among different proposed alternatives. In developing countries, the substantial gap between policy makers and experts, as well as the underfunding of research and development (RAND), has generally rendered the use of research in policy

formulation difficult (see Young 2005). Unlike the rest of the Arab world, however, in the two countries examined here, particularly Qatar, researchers do not have to promote their expertise or market their ideas. Instead, subject matter experts are recruited, often from abroad, to inform policy formulation. These intellectual elites exercise significant influence over policy development in Qatar and Kuwait. Their expertise and technical knowledge becomes the basis for the institutionalization and the enactment of policy initiatives. The Tony Blair Associates consultancy firm, which moved to Kuwait in 2003 to advise the royal family, as well as the large number of international consultancy firms in Qatar are examples of this trend.⁷

In Kuwait, a burgeoning independent civil society is producing unsolicited policy input and expertise. The Kuwait Transparency Society (2013), for instance, has affected public policies by promoting transparency and combating corruption in government. It developed a “Reform Perception Index” to evaluate the level of different variables in government entities.⁸ In Qatar, however, this type of two-way flow of ideas between the local community and independent research institutions has yet to develop to the same extent.

Compared with the United States and other Western democracies, policy entrepreneurs—advocates who are willing to invest their resources in promoting or blocking a policy initiative—exist in the GCC in relatively small numbers and have different reasons for participating. Some are expatriates who have been recruited by the country’s leadership to formulate and even implement policy proposals. These experts, usually in economically relevant fields such as petrochemical engineering and telecommunications, receive considerable financial compensation.

Generally, policy entrepreneurs wait for the appropriate policy window, which provides an opportunity to pursue their political goals. In the United States, such windows usually open as a result of focused events and crises. In the Gulf, windows for major policy changes are opened by the country’s leaderships. Other times, policy proposals are presented in response to situations on the ground. For example, a scholar argues that it was yearly reports from humanitarian organizations concerning human trafficking in the Gulf states that led to the elimination in 2004 of a long-standing practice of using child jockeys in camel racing (Interview 9 2010). The implementation of this policy represents a bottom-up process in the region. Notably, however, international human rights organizations, rather than domestic civil society institutions, forced this policy proposal.

⁷The author attended some sessions where proposals for research were presented by major international consultancy firms to ministries and major governmental entities. These meetings were also attended by academics and policy and research specialists who were invited to give their opinions and share their expertise.

⁸Indicators include transparency, disinterest, accounting, respect for law, justice, equal opportunities, effectiveness, and competition. The results are then published in a report (the first issue was in 2008) and then distributed to the participating organizations (Interview 8 2010).

Civil Society and Nonstate Actors. In Qatar, NGOs have limited influence on policy and public debates. In fact, most local NGOs in Qatar are quangos that receive government funding and include members of the royal family. In this way, they have managed to shape policy. Reach Out to Asia (ROTA 2014) and Qatar Charity (2014; see also Qatar Foundation 2014), for example, are organizations involved primarily in human development, which recommended the establishment of a foreign aid budget, thus leading to the creation of the Ministry of International Development according to a government advisor and director of a research center (Interview 10 2010). Although such groups help foster a culture of civic participation and benefit from privileged access to political leadership, they do not help promote the emergence of independent, nongovernmental institutions. Indeed, it is telling that the 2004 ban on using children as jockeys in camel racing (see France-Press 2004) was initiated not by a *local* NGO, but by one based in Pakistan, which collaborated with social activists and human rights organizations. An analysis of media coverage (*Khaleej Times* 2005; Lewis 2005; *Mail & Guardian* 2004) suggests that the ban was the result of protests from Asian countries concerning the use of jockeys, mainly from their countries, as well as increased criticisms from the U.S. State Department and international human rights groups (see Anti-Slavery 2004).

In 2004, the Qatari government legally permitted the establishment of professional organizations and labor unions, yet none have been formed (Fakhro 2005). This new law was issued as part of the overall objective of the country's leadership to encourage development of the civil society sector. However, the legislation makes registering such organizations extremely difficult by imposing prohibitive capital requirements. Qatar has also seen the creation of a number of academic and research institutions in the past ten years. Their establishment suggests that the discussion of policy will move into the nongovernmental sector in an effort to engage a larger portion of the Qatari population in the country's politics.

Kuwait has one of the oldest civil society movements in the Gulf, dating back to the first half of the twentieth century (Al Qassemi 2011). Although the impact of NGOs is more visible than in Qatar, their development is still at an early stage. Despite their large numbers,⁹ the vast majority of these organizations has not had formal power to pressure policy makers until recently. Because there are no formal political parties in Kuwait, NGOs often grant citizens a forum for political action despite the fact that they are technically prohibited from political activity. According to Freedom House (2009), NGOs are controlled and funded by the state [and] do not operate freely.

⁹ According to the United Nations Development Programme, the majority of NGOs in Kuwait is associations for the collective benefit (70), followed by the cooperative sector (47), workers' syndicates and federations (41), philanthropic organizations and charitable institutions (29), sports clubs and Olympics committees (28), professional groups and unions (18), and political groups and organizations (15) (NGO Regulation Network, n.d.).

Nonetheless, some NGOs, such as the Kuwait Transparency Society (2013), which has been influential in anti-corruption policy, have played a more oppositional role. In 2003 and 2004, think tanks, such as the Center for Strategic and Future Studies, were approached by the government to conduct research on the election districts in the country, which changed in 2005 according to a board member of the Center of the Young Arab Leaders NGO and researcher at Kuwait University.

Academic and Research Institutions. Academics and research institutions are usually counted as among the other players that influence policy making. In 2008, the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) was established at Qatar University, with the goal of engaging in survey research on issues related to the development and welfare of Qatari society, including the social, economic, and cultural areas. Data generated by SESRI are meant to be used to help guide policy makers and are collected on a variety of topics, such as satisfaction with education in Qatar and the profile of migrant workers in the country (Social and Economic Survey Research Institute 2011). In the past decade, the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown-Qatar, the RAND-Qatar Policy Institute, the Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies, and the Brookings Doha Center opened offices in Qatar. Education City, which hosts five U.S. universities, was created to improve education and research in Qatar and enhance its development as a knowledge economy (see Coughlan 2012). By promoting free-thinking and in-depth research, such new institutions may help promote awareness of and dialogue concerning public policy. Also, through exchanges with other universities, students can learn concerning best practices and experiences of other political systems. Sheikha Moza (2004) considers education to be critically tied to political liberalization. She views education as a key support pillar for democracy, particularly because it can promote capacity building for citizenry. Kuwait has four state-supported and three private universities. Despite a growing number of affiliations with American universities in the country, the Private Universities Council, headed by the Minister of Education, retains control over the types of partnerships and suitable partnering institutions. Most major academic decisions must be approved by the Council, thus limiting the amount of independence universities can have from the government (Mills 2009).

The Media. The role media outlets play in influencing policy making differs in scope and nature in both Qatar and Kuwait. Both countries' constitutions provide for freedoms of speech and press. Nonetheless, journalists face restrictions. According to the Doha Center for Media Freedom, the environment in Qatar encourages self-censorship and makes it difficult to criticize the government (Hagey 2009). In fact, only a handful of reporters are Qataris, suggesting they may be hesitant to share their views publicly says a

newspaper reporter (Interview 15 2010). Currently, aside from a popular morning radio talk show,¹⁰ a small number of television programs,¹¹ unsigned newspaper editorials, opinion pieces by a handful of outspoken reporters,¹² and some newly established blogs, the traditional *majlis* remains the primary venue for citizens to communicate concerns regarding political issues in Qatar.

The Kuwaiti media, by contrast, seems to have the ability to affect policy, particularly in the domestic arena. According to one researcher, “an MP mentions in the media a situation where corruption is evident, and the project stops” (Interview 11 2010). More than 100 reporters and specialists work in the parliament’s Department of Press and Publications, demonstrating the perceived importance of the media’s role. These individuals report on sessions and give parliamentarians information on public sentiment, thus institutionalizing press contact with the government and allowing the media to reach the political leadership.

Most Kuwaiti press outlets do not hesitate to criticize government policies. Major opinion pieces and editorials regularly address government conduct, including exposing corruption. In Qatar, when a problem is highlighted in the national press, a solution, such as the creation of a council or the formation of a workshop or forum, often follows. This type of reporting generates the notion that the Qatari government is constantly working to improve the lives of its citizens; however, it also prevents the type of policy debates that exist in Kuwait from surfacing. Media outlets tend to highlight the merits of a new policy, praise the achievements of an old one, and describe the need of a proposed one. In that sense, media seems to reflect policy in Qatar; in Kuwait, however, it has the power to change policy.

The Public. Kuwait’s history suggests that public participation has long played in a critical role in the country’s politics. According to a senior government official and political activist, the *esnaniyat* of 1989-90 were considered on the “biggest populist movements in the history of Kuwait that brought together two sides—the Islamic and national coalitions” (Interview 12 2010). Their emergence occurred in the absence of parliament when citizens demanded a venue to voice their opinions. During this time, groups appealed to the government to fully abide by the provisions of the 1962 Constitution. It organized seminars in the Monday *diwaniyat*, which later spread to other sectors of society and proved an

¹⁰ The radio show is called *Watani Al Habib: Sabah Al Khayr*, meaning My Dear Country: Good Morning.

¹¹ *Lakoum Al Qarar* (The Decision is Yours) and *Al Dar* (The Home) are TV news shows providing coverage of what is happening in Qatar.

¹² Examples include Miriam Al-Saad from *Al Raya* newspaper, who is known to “cross the boundaries” (Interview 6 2010); Miriam Al-Khater who writes for *Al Qatan*; and Miriam Al-Maliki, director general of Qatar Foundation for Combating Human Trafficking, who writes periodically for different newspapers.

effective means of influencing the course of Kuwaiti politics. Kuwait's *diwaniyat* are "a unique model for civil society," as they are more institutionalized than the *majlis* elsewhere (Al Qassemi 2011). Overall, popular participation in policy making is considerably more pronounced in Kuwait than in other Gulf states. Kuwait's parliament provides a public and institutionalized venue through which Kuwaitis can express opinions and form coalitions to oppose or promote certain policies.

In October 2009, Kuwaitis joined together to oppose a bill proposed by parliament that would approve the government's use of interest from hydrocarbon revenues to pay off citizens' loans. The citizens in opposition, calling themselves Group 26, launched an awareness campaign related to the squandering public funds while suggesting better ways to use them. This initiative aimed at stopping corruption and assisting in the country's economic and political development (Interview 13 2010). Another campaign, the Orange Movement of 2006, which mobilized young people in Kuwait, led to the reduction of the number of electoral districts from 25 to five in an effort to diminish the prevalence of patronage (see Hasan 2005). A series of high-profile protests by the Orange Movement gave momentum to the parliamentary opposition and led to the early elections.

In Qatar, collective political action has been harder to come by. Educational reforms may change this by creating a new, more politically vocal generation of Qataris. Young Qataris are getting more involved by establishing volunteer-based organizations through which they can influence policy. These youth organizations¹³ are still new, so their influence is yet to be seen. Also, although there are no programs or policies that specifically foster volunteerism, some founders of these organizations have pointed out that they were approached by the administration and were offered both financial and moral support for their projects (Interview 14 2010).

Although the institution of the *majlis* was once considered a form of direct democracy, it is no longer seen in this light, as participants no longer have access to top officials. In recent decades, the *majlis* has become "more of a simple social gathering or informal business meeting than an earnest consultation," as one journalist commented (*The National* 2010). Several Qataris interviewed said that they do not see the *majlis* primarily as a forum for expressing grievances and voicing opinions, as was once the case.¹⁴ Some have attributed this new perception to the general public satisfaction with governmental performance. Others argued this shift could be the result of gradual changes in the functions of the *majlis*. Although they were once an institutionalized mode of regular

¹³ Such as "The Changers" and "Top Chabab."

¹⁴ General conclusions from interviews conducted during my many visits to Doha with different Qataris with whom I met in social circles.

communication with the emir, they have become more informal discussions with less connection to the government.

While Qatar's *majlis* undoubtedly provide important forums for public engagement in politics, they are not as institutionalized as Kuwait's *diwaniyat*. The convener of a *majlis* might initiate a certain issue for discussion, but it is uncertain whether grievances are communicated to the government; attendees may simply be venting, and individuals close to the political elite often respond without discussing the merits of the government's policy. Each *majlis* varies depending on the attendees and organizers. Generally, in Qatar, *majlis* usually fall into one of four general categories: business, family, technocratic, and intellectual.

Comparative Discussion

The cultural, economic, political, and institutional factors discussed in this article have influenced the policy-making process and types of participants in Qatar and Kuwait, and help explain the differences across the two countries. Much of the variation in the policy-making process is related to the political dynamics and unique institutional arrangements that allocate power and resources in distinctly different patterns in each country. Nevertheless, many similarities are the result of the rentier nature of these countries and the tribal elements embedded in these societies. These countries are also inclined to look at one another's efforts at policy changes because of the economic and social similarities and ties that often exist among them.

Both the similarities and differences have produced a set of participants that differ in terms of the resources available to each of them, the roles they play, and the influence they have in each of Qatar and Kuwait. In addition, these policy participants differ in their numbers and diversity in each of the main stages of the commonly used five-stage model that includes: agenda setting, policy formulation, decision making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. The agenda-setting stage is restricted to the emir and the royal family with the close circles of consultants around them in both countries. Once the policy problem reaches the active political agenda, the number of participants begins to slightly increase. At the decision-making stage, given the role of the legislative branch in Kuwait, we find a difference in the number of government actors especially with an increasingly active national assembly in Kuwait as government decision makers outline the new policy or ratify the existing one.

Problems in policy implementation are evident in both countries, although to a lesser extent in Qatar. The implementation process in both countries involves more participants especially expatriates. In both Qatar and Kuwait, implementation is carried out by bureaucratic agencies. Often, individuals and agencies involved in policy formulation are not active in the implementation phase. According to one policy analyst, "that is exactly where things go wrong" (Interview 14 2010).

Finally, at the policy evaluation stage, the number of participants gets thinner as a close circle of government officials commission certain groups of consultants to evaluate the policies, while the legislative branch and other varieties of forces from outside the government are less involved. The systematic reviews and evaluation of existing policies and agencies are routinely commissioned by the leadership and are performed by the same people. Nationals are usually not involved in that stage of the policy process. These evaluations form the context in which subsequent agenda setting takes place as the policy-making process continues. Table 3 provides a comparative summary of this study's findings.

In Qatar, the policy model is more centralized and is based largely on policy transfer, while Kuwait's model is characterized by a managed process based on a specific type of policy network. In Qatar, the cycle begins at the center with the emir. Historically, policy developments have not been initiated by ministers, as in other countries, but have often come in the form of an emiri decree. The general policy agenda is set by the emir, in the form of a general national vision, and by family members who have traditionally been involved in the policy-making process. To choose among different alternatives, elite experts, most of whom are expatriates, are called upon. These people not only have privileged access to the elites, but also become included in the circle of political elites as well. Expatriate experts are instrumental in transferring best practices from other countries to the new environment. Once the knowledge transfer occurs, the policies are implemented.

In the absence of an active legislature, there are limited institutionalized channels of communication between citizens and the government, and, as a result, public officials do not appear to possess formal means of detecting the national mood or policy preferences of their citizens. Rather, public preferences are expressed informally. Nonetheless, the leadership appears to be sensitive to public grievances through experts or the *majalis*. Even at these informal meetings, however, the general public is not admitted, and participation may be by invitation only.

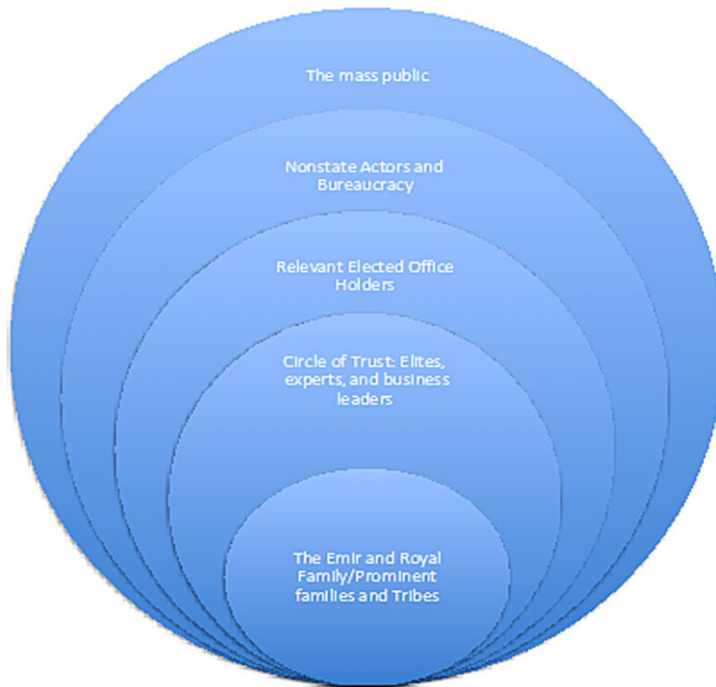
Kuwait is moving toward a less centralized policy-making process, in which new groups of decision makers exist alongside the central political elite surrounding the emir. Current policy actors include the emir, prominent members of the ruling family, tribal leaders, members of parliament, policy experts, and nonstate actors from the growing civil society sector and media networks. The degree to which various nongovernmental actors affect policy making also varies depending on the policy area in question. Overall, however, the political process in Kuwait is far more institutionalized than in Qatar. The existence of a parliament, for example, enables the public to have formal input in policy making, yet this legislative body often holds up decision making, as it decentralizes political power. By granting the National Assembly—a body of 50 members—a voice in policy making, the Kuwaiti government has given the opposition a place in the formal political process. This allows opposition

Table 3. Comparison of Policy Participants in Qatar and Kuwait

	Qatar			Kuwait		
Policy participants	Resources	Role	Influence ^a	Resources	Role	Influence
The emir	Traditional power Historical legitimacy Institutional Emiri decree Command of public attention and trust	Agenda setting	High	Traditional power Historical legitimacy Institutional Emiri decree Command of public attention and trust	Agenda setting	High
The royal family/tribes and circle of elites	Traditional power Cultural organizational Legal authority Organizational	Agenda setting and policy alternatives Inactive	High	Traditional power Cultural organizational Legal authority Organizational Publicity	Agenda setting and policy alternatives Policy alternatives	High
The legislative branch			Minimal			High
Private sector and external experts	Expertise and knowledge Legitimacy Trust	Agenda setting, policy development, and implementation	High	Expertise and knowledge Legitimacy Trust	Agenda setting, policy development, and implementation	Moderate
Civil society	Nonexistent (Only <i>qangos</i> are currently existing)	Absent	None	Allowed to exist	Recently evolving and active in policy alternatives	Low
Academic and research institutions	Research centers and institutions Research output	Policy development	Minimal	Research centers and institutions	Policy development	Minimal
The media	Financial	Absent	None	Relative press freedom	Policy alternatives	Moderate to high
The public	Access to the political elites <i>Majalis</i>	Absent	None to minimal	Public participation Engaged and dynamic public <i>Dhawayiyat</i>	Policy alternatives	Moderate

Notes: ^a The influence ranges from none, through minimal, low, and moderate, to high.

Figure 1.
The Policy-Making Model and Participants in Qatar and Kuwait



members to take measures such as no confidence votes, which may lead to the dissolution of parliament or the reshuffling of cabinet, actions that harm the government's continuity and its ability to introduce policies in a timely way. Indeed, a major criticism of the Kuwaiti system is that its democratic nature has made it inefficient.

Although the specific details differ in Qatar and Kuwait, the countries share a general elite-driven process-based model. Policy making begins with a leadership vision, and general policies become a part of this vision. Decisions are made, and policies are formulated, adopted, implemented, and often evaluated. Because so much of the policy-making process is not institutionalized in Qatar and Kuwait, avenues for changing policy are more difficult to determine and often must involve the royal family or elites with access to senior officials. As a result, these systems remain, at their core, centralized, making them faster and more streamlined than those in other countries. Figure 1 presents a model of policy making in both countries in terms of participants.

Threats and Opportunities for Policy Making in Light of the Arab Uprisings

The uprisings in the Arab world, arguably the most dramatic political event since the fall of the Berlin Wall, surprised Arab reformers and autocrats alike. While the revolts are opening the door for substantive political reform in numerous countries, it remains unclear how they will shift the policy-making calculus of Gulf leaders. Will they expand the circle of political decision making or restrict it? The GCC countries, with the notable exception of Bahrain, have largely escaped large-scale protests.

Nonetheless, democratic rumblings have been heard throughout the Gulf. In Oman, protesters demanded more representative government and economic improvements. In Muscat, Sohar, and Salalah, protesters refused to back down until their demands were answered, and two protesters were killed. Ultimately, the protests led Sultan Qaboos to grant the Majlis Oman legislative and audit powers to restructure the Council of Ministers, to assign two new ministers, and to order the creation of 50,000 additional jobs for citizens (Kechichian 2011). In Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah faces the challenge of balancing reform with his strategic alliance with conservative Wahhabi religious leaders in the context of sectarian protest among the Eastern Province's *Shi'ite* population. With its announcement of municipal elections, the establishment of an anti-corruption body, and creation of 60,000 new jobs in the interior ministry, the regime appears willing to engage in at least limited reforms (Nolan 2011). These reforms, however, are taking place in the context of a state that remains highly sensitive to change and possesses a strong internal security force. Indeed, the arrest of Manal al-Sharif in May 2011 for driving, which is illegal for women in the Kingdom, brought international attention to Saudi Arabia and gave momentum to a movement of women in support of the right to drive (MacFarqhar 2011).

While Oman and Saudi Arabia have shown some willingness to reform, the UAE, which has thus far not seen any protests, appears to be clamping down on dissent. Prominent blogger Ahmed Mansour's arrest in April 2011 (see Front Line 2011) led to the arrest of four other pro-democracy advocates and signaled the Emirati regime's unwillingness to allow even verbal dissent. Mansour had become well known for circulating a petition to allow for direct election of the UAE's Federal National Council, as well as an expansion of the body's legislative powers (The Petition). A director at Human Rights Watch (2011) described the situation: "We believe the detention of Ahmed Mansour is aimed at scaring and intimidating others in the UAE who may wish to make public their demands for democratic reforms." In June 2011, the government again showed its willingness to clamp down on dissent when Dubai's Gulf Research Center announced that it would move to Geneva, after Dubai's Department of Economic Development refused to renew the organization's professional license because of "objections by the Dubai government to various aspects of the GRC's work" (Al Lawati 2011).

It remains to be seen whether protests in Bahrain, the largest and most violent in the Gulf, will result in democratic reforms or another violent crackdown, similar to what took place in March when the king announced the end of the state of emergency in the country. He voiced the government's willingness to engage opposition groups in dialogue without conditions. Nonetheless, the GCC's Peninsula Shield forces remain in the country, and reports of crackdowns on protesters calling for a constitutional monarchy continued. The protests in Bahrain have the potential to unlock regional instability, as the Bahraini rulers continue dismissing the *Shi'ite* population's protests as meddling from Iran.

The current situation will likely intensify the usual whispers among some Qataris questioning the status of the Shura Council and complaining concerning the unkept promises of reform and the unfair distribution of wealth. Having won the 2022 World Cup bid, Qatar will face increasing international scrutiny. The arrest of blogger Sultan Khalifa al-Khalaifi in March attracted limited attention, yet the country has for the most part avoided negative press concerning cracking down on dissent. Although a "day of rage" was planned in the country in March 2012, it never materialized. In Kuwait, limited protests often take place among the population of *bedoun*, those who live in the country but do not benefit from the advantages that citizens receive. In May 2011, limited protests took place in Kuwait City, when citizens demanded the resignation of embattled prime minister who has been accused of misusing public funds and has refused to come under questioning in parliament.

These intermittent widespread calls for democratic reform are forcing Gulf rulers to reassess their approach to policy making. So far, Qatar has been generally insulated from any political instability internally. However, its foreign policy has occasionally raised concerns¹⁵ and has drawn the country in the region's major conflicts. Kamrava (2013) argues Qatar has had an outsized influence on regional and international affairs. Despite the recent appointment of the emir's son as the country's emir in June 2013, and the cabinet reshuffling as well as the creation of new ministries that have resulted, no major changes in policy direction are expected (Wright 2013).

Also, while social media has been an important part of the Arab uprisings throughout the Middle East, it is becoming increasingly important in the Gulf. Websites, such as Twitter and Facebook, provide citizens in the Gulf with access to government officials that do not exist in an institutionalized way in those countries (Al Qassem 2011). In Kuwait, the government is taking advantage of this means of connecting with citizens, with a number of MPs communicating with their constituents on Twitter. Other Gulf governments are using pseudonyms to gain access to ongoing Twitter debates among their citizens.

¹⁵ For instance, over its intervention in Libya and its support to Egypt and to the Syrian opposition.

Although monitoring public opinion in this way helps inform the policy-making process, reforms need to be institutionalized in the Gulf to ensure that they are enacted efficiently and uniformly.

Policy Recommendations

In addition to their ability to resist democratization, states with considerable resources appear to have similar economic and political trajectories. However, despite the fact that most rentier states tend to be, more often than not, politically stable, political outcomes of reforms, once they happen, may be dramatically different. This variance depends on the local political coalitions, the social context, and the institutional structures that have determined them. In fact, although Kuwait has a deeply fractious polity, it is also characterized by a dynamic and engaged public and a well-established national assembly. This combination might continue to refuel the intermittent drive to search for political reform in the country. In Qatar, the dynamics are quite different. The general political stability of the country combined with the existing typical features of a rentier state leaves little room for political reform at this time.

Interactive and inclusive policy making reflects a genuine aspiration by governments to generate positive policy outcomes and ensure public buy-in. However, realities differ greatly from aspirations; even in the most successful democracies, policy making has its deficiencies and falls short of popular expectations. To enhance the process in the GCC, however, stakeholders should promote a new culture of popular participation, in which policy making is not the responsibility of only the elites, but also that of the broader public, including citizens, expatriates, and nongovernmental institutions. This comparative review indicates the relative power of the participants in Qatar and Kuwait, and can be used as a guideline for initiatives that seek to improve the process with a view to fostering more academic discussion, deeper analysis, public debate, and the development of more sustainable policies. The recommendations below form some preliminary reflections meant to advise both local policy makers and the international community, and are mostly based on suggestions made by the participants in this article.

- *Fund programs to encourage and foster a culture of research* that develop initiatives and programs prompting the elaboration of a research culture in Gulf societies. Social scientists, in particular, should strive to increase their political influence by conducting more policy-oriented research and finding ways to disseminate their findings and reach the policy community. Making use of existing centers to collect and interpret data and disseminate findings will help spur additional research. As part of this culture, questioning government decisions must be allowed and even encouraged, particularly through a freer media. By hosting conferences and other public events, Qatar and Kuwait can

make people aware of issues facing their nations and highlight the importance of allowing public debate and engagement. Local institutions or partnerships should be started to allow democracy advocates to operate on the ground in a more permanent capacity.

- *Develop nationwide training programs* providing plans for personal development through specialized professional seminars and peer training programs. A training program such as that instituted within the College of the North Atlantic to promote Qatarization provides a model in which students are trained for specific vocations. Such training ensures that nationals will garner the skills needed in various aspects of the policy-making process and also in the broader functioning of the state. In this way, the problem of expatriates exerting excessive influence in the process and leading to nationals' resentment can be remedied.
- *Enhance public-private partnerships (PPPs).*¹⁶ These can be an effective means of expanding the private sector into domains traditionally dominated by the government, which, in turn, can help enhance the connection between the government and private sector, expanding the private sector without threatening the government's control. In the case of the Gulf, expanding partnerships between the public sector and local private companies in the oil, gas, and petrochemicals industries could help promote the private sector and reduce the size of the growing public sector. This may well allow the government to focus on targeted policy making rather than extending itself into a variety of economic areas.
- *Monitor public opinion on a regular basis.* Detecting changes in the public mood is an important component of an intelligent policy-making process.¹⁷ Conducting relevant surveys by government agencies and polls by known research and polling companies, such as Gallup, is one way to determine where the public stands on certain policy issues; polls alone cannot be relied upon to detect the national mood, yet can be a helpful starting point from which policy makers can formulate new and innovative solutions to national problems.
- *Build up the government's existing institutional capabilities.* In the Gulf where policy processes can become highly complicated because of a lack of institutionalized structures, policy makers should establish a local independent policy institute that oversees, monitors, and evaluates the policy-making process and its outcomes. This institute would not only promote the development and improvement of evidence-based policy, but also inform and

¹⁶ A recently popular alternative to clean-cut outsourcing is PPPs, which are more frequently used in the area of RAND. While traditionally the administration practices of public agencies have hindered the interaction between the public and private sector, the PPP literature on this subject points to the positive implications that this institutional learning and experimentation have for policy and administrative reforms. The reforms of the new public management have also introduced administrative and organizational innovations.

¹⁷ Becoming aware of a change of views among the public on a policy as well as its adherence to it through time can help policy makers decide on their direction of their reactions to the public demand or pressures. It is argued that when policy makers are convinced of the fluctuating nature of public attitudes on a specific policy, they are less likely to respond to public pressure.

stimulate public debates on local emerging issues. It also would be the catalyst to create a network of all the policy research centers already existing in the country.

- *Encourage educational and business partnerships with Qatar and Kuwait.* Through initiatives like establishing campuses in Qatar and Kuwait, the international community can help these nations not only build up cultures of research and participation, but also contribute to the training of citizens for their nations' labor forces. Similarly, exchanges such as the U.S. Fulbright program, which currently has no student program in either country, should be increased in the Gulf. This would initiate the production of more original research on these nations, and more nationals may become involved in projects that consider wide-ranging political topics.
- *Increase funding of programs like the Middle East Partnership Initiative* in Qatar and Kuwait that will help build civil society and promote local capacity building. The Gulf has largely been ignored by the international aid and development community because of its vast oil wealth, yet this should not exclude it from receiving other types of aid for development. Such programs can help to expand popular participation through grants for civil society organizations and various initiatives to make citizens aware of their rights and political issues.
- *Continue rhetorical support for more representative government.* The United States and the international community at large need to be steadfast in their support for governments that give voice to the needs of their people. Recent revolutions in the Middle East demonstrate the need for governments to be more responsive to their citizens' needs. The international community must voice the importance of these governments reforming to better voice and represent their citizens' concerns.

The Gulf, as the rest of the Middle East, faces the challenge to enact democratic reforms in the face of popular demands. Understanding how these states formulate their political decisions is a critical part of determining their path forward. Qatar and Kuwait have thus far escaped large-scale protests that challenge regimes across the region. Although these countries' political processes may be more or less democratic than previously thought, there is certainly room for improvement. The connection between citizen and state in the GCC remains a complicated economic and political relationship. Because these states' wealth from hydrocarbons has granted them freedom to formulate their policies without consulting their citizens, they face a unique set of political challenges. Indeed, the rentier effect continues to reinforce the political passivity of nationals who are economically and politically comfortable. The assumption that the rentier effect sums up the entire policy-making process in GCC states, such as Qatar and Kuwait, is a mistake, and could lead to the implementation of inappropriate policies in these countries. As discussed above, individuals and organizations within Qatar and Kuwait, as well as other Gulf countries, are demanding greater political freedoms. The governments have the responsibility to respond to such calls for change before it is too late. Further, the United

States and the international community have a crucial role to play in encouraging reforms to these systems to make them more institutionalized and representative and country specific as one size does not fit all.

Conclusion

This article offers a better understating of some of the key facets of policy making in Qatar and Kuwait by identifying the key participants (their resources, role, and influence) and highlighting the policy determinants and emphasizing the political nature of policy choices made by government officials. It offers a set of preliminary findings that can be used to better understand the dynamics of policy making in the GCC in general. While these findings can be used as building blocks for a theoretical model that describes and explains the different stages of the process, more case studies are necessary to generate conceptual tools for the study of policy making in the GCC. A comparative examination of policy making in relation to several major national issues and across policy area within a single country would enrich our understanding of the process and increase our capacity to conduct political analysis. In analyzing those policy areas, policy determinants and drivers can be identified. Further explanatory studies that examine policy dynamics in each of the stages of the policy-making process using the five-stage model in addition to comparative studies that identify cross-regional trends in policy choices and policy outcomes are needed.

About the Author

Hiba Khodr is an assistant professor of public policy and public management at the American University of Beirut. Her research interests include policy making in the MENA region in general and the GCC in particular in terms of process, participants, and drivers. She has conducted work on energy policy addressing the utilization of scientific evidence in public policy making in Lebanon. Her recent work is on both policy innovation and diffusion, and the dynamics of policy and politics. She is also interested in changes in foreign policy post-Arab uprisings. She has contributed to *Politics & Policy* (2013), *Energy Policy* (2012), *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* (2012), the *Digest of Middle East Studies* (2012), and the *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* (2011).

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