

Trusted News Sources' Measures and their Relationships to Social and Public Attitudes: An Analysis of the First Annual Omnibus Survey of Life in Qatar

Robert Meeds, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Mass Communication
Qatar University
robert.meeds@qu.edu.qa

Darwish Abdulrahman Al-Emadi, Ph.D.
Director of Social and Economic Survey Research Institute
Qatar University,
dalemadi@qu.edu.qa

Abdoulaye Diop, Ph.D.
Head of Research,
Social and Economic Survey Research Institute
Qatar University
adiop@qu.edu.qa

Abstract

An overwhelming majority (77 percent) of Qatari Nationals reported television as their most trusted local news source (87 percent for Arab/regional news and 89 percent for international news), and 80 percent rated the state-owned Aljazeera Network as “very objective” in its news coverage. With such a broad appeal, television news has the potential to shape the social, political and economic beliefs of Qatari citizens.

Using data from the first Omnibus Survey of Life in Qatar, this study examined the most and least trusted news sources among Qataris as well as the country’s resident expatriates. The relationship between preferred news sources and attitudes toward social and public issues are explored, and the implications of television as a trusted news source is discussed.

Keywords: trusted news source, Aljazeera, Qatar public opinion, priming, media framing, omnibus survey

Introduction

This study will present findings related to media consumption from the first annual (2010) omnibus survey on life in Qatar, which was conducted by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University. Its purpose is to highlight the potential for using reliable social survey data to track media use patterns and public attitudes over time in a region where large-scale scientific surveys have historically been underutilized. Recent populist and political events in multiple Middle Eastern and North African countries highlight the differences between how public perceptions of quality of life and attitudes on public issues are presented in mainstream news media and how they are reported by citizen journalists using blogs and social media. These events also point to the need for reliable and ongoing measurement of public opinion conducted by independent scholarly organizations, which can then make their data available to the scholarly community and to the public. National omnibus social surveys, such as the General Social Survey in the United States that has been conducted annually since 1972, are not sufficient in isolation to help researchers understand complex social attitudes. However, they can be useful tools to gain empirically objective snapshots of general attitudes within a society and to track changes in those attitudes over time.

Scholars have long recognized how the mass media's depiction of political, civic and social issues can shape public opinion. Although most of this research has involved studies of western media operations, the mainstream media in many countries follow similar journalistic practices, albeit often with more government influence over content (Martin and Chaudhary, 1983). Since people rely on mass media for information about most national and international issues, accessibility to such information is determined in part by which stories the media decide to cover and to what extent.

Agenda-setting, priming and framing

In a seminal study on the agenda-setting role of the mass media, McCombs and Shaw (1972), measured television viewers' perceived importance of issues. Later studies replaced perceptions of importance with terms such as 'salience,' 'awareness,' 'attention,' or 'concern' (Edelstein,

1993). Agenda-setting studies typically measure the transfer of salience or perceived importance of newsworthy topics from specific mass media outlets to their known audiences. One of the advantages of the agenda-setting approach is that it can provide a direct effect measure by correlating a rank-order listing of the media outlet's most important news topics in a specific period of time with a corresponding list of the audience's rank-ordered most important topics, with higher correlations suggesting stronger media effects.

As an extension of agenda setting, the concept of 'priming' demonstrates how media attention to an issue can affect public opinion. "There are similarities and connections between agenda setting, priming and framing, but they are not identical approaches" (Weaver, 2007, p. 146). Though closely related, audiences' agendas are functions of the "salience or accessibility of certain issues in a person's memory" while priming focuses more on the criteria people use to evaluate those issues (Scheufele, 2000, p. 302). For example, in a study on voters' perceptions political candidates, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) showed how increased coverage of an issue can "prime" viewers, essentially rendering the issue more salient than others when they made judgments about a candidate and his or her political positions. However, other scholars argue that both agenda-setting effects and priming effects are accessibility effects, thereby increasing the ease and likelihood of audiences remembering issues covered in the news (Price and Tewksbury, 1997). Though their conceptual independence (or interdependence) is still debated, "the alliance of priming and agenda-setting has strengthened the theoretical base of agenda-setting effects" (Weaver, 2007, p. 145).

Framing is another subtle influencer of public perception, and one that centers on the effects of content rather than the amount of coverage (Gamson, 1992; Gamson and Lasch, 1983; Gamson and Modigliani, 1987, 1989; Iyengar 1991). As defined by Gamson (1992), framing is a "storyline" that sets the scene for a particular issue to be interpreted in more than one way. Framing affects the way people form judgments, recognize problems and identify solutions (Gamson, 1992). Some scholars have argued that framing works because issues featured recently or repetitively in the news will be relatively accessible to users and therefore more likely to influence opinions (Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar and Kinder 1997; Jacobs and Shapiro, 1994; Kinder and Sanders, 1996; Zaller, 1992). In contrast, Nelson *et al.*, (1997) suggested media frames

influence opinions by stressing specific values, facts or views – thus increasing the importance they receive relative to other frames. By placing news stories in a value-laden context, framing can be used to create a bias; for example Kaid *et al.* (1994) found a positive bias toward United States military actions in the U.S. cable news channel CNN's coverage of the first Gulf War. Similarly, Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern's study (2007, p. 162) comparing framing of the Iraq War by online news sites from coalition and Arab countries found that Al Jazeera "contained predominantly negative coverage and tended to incorporate a large number of negative moral terms to condemn the war." In another study, Messaris and Abraham (2001) showed "subtle racism," in the selection of images of African Americans used in news stories.

Where agenda-setting and priming deal with issue accessibility, framing deals with applicability—or how the issues are interpreted by both the news media and their audiences (Scheufele, 2000). The subtleties of frames and the variety of levels at which frames can function are part of its appeal to researchers, making it, according to some estimates, the most common research approach in communication (Bryant & Myron, 2004). Framing research cuts across epistemological and ontological perspectives as well, with researchers who follow a constructivist approach tending to view frames as "tools accessible to social actors, whereas the critical perspective has regarded frames as controlling, hegemonic and tied to larger elite structures" (Reese, 2007, p.149). "Frames are often unnoticed, and their impact is by stealth" (Van Gorp, 2007, p. 63). As a construct, however, framing research has been frequently criticized for lack of consistent definitions and conceptual precision (e.g., Entman, 1993; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007).

Media framing tendencies

According to Iyengar (1991), television news is routinely reported in an episodic manner, while news from other sources tends to be thematic. Episodic-framed stories tend to put the responsibility or blame for problems on individuals but thematic-framed stories tend to place the responsibility for problems at the social or political level. People who seek news from online sources, for example, have an increased opportunity to encounter more thematic frames –

perhaps leading to a more holistic perspective. They can also—if they are willing or interested to search—get more in-depth information about an issue (Kovarick 2002). Since users can navigate through various news sites and articles, information on the Internet is controlled by the individual, who can navigate according to his or her own interests. Although online editors control the content and links in any given article on their site, the user is not forced to click on the links or consume the information within them – he or she is in charge of his or her own journey (Eveland and Dunwoody 2001; Peng *et al.*, 1999). And, since online sources might be local, national or international, it is possible to reach beyond the political, economic, and social constraints of the broader systems in which the media operations exist (de Beer and Merrill 2004).

General social surveys are not designed to provide the same level of measurement specificity that agenda-setting studies provide in terms of: a systematic analysis of news content to infer what the media outlets' agendas are; a matched list of news topics between the audience and the medium; or the temporal specificity to isolate media outlets' and audiences' changes in perceived importance over time. Strictly interpreted, then, this study is not an agenda-setting study. But the tenets of the agenda-setting model, which broadly focus on the relationship between what audiences think is important and the news media they choose to consume is applicable as a conceptual framework. Similarly, framing and priming also do not represent an ideal fit for a study containing general media consumption and social issues questions. The point here is not to reify or test models within these related theoretical areas. However, the concepts related to agenda-setting, priming and framing do provide a useful lens, albeit a loose fit, through which to view the analyses conducted in this study. Given the potential effects of media usage on opinions about social and public issues, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What types of media do Qatari nationals and expatriate residents trust most for local, regional and international news?

RQ2: Do Qatari nationals and expatriate residents differ in the news media they trust for local, regional and international news?

RQ3: Are Qatari nationals and expatriate residents' news media preferences associated with their attitudes about life in Qatar?

Method

Interviews for the 2010 Omnibus Survey in Qatar were conducted from May 18 to June 20, 2010. Trained interviewers used Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology. A total of 2139 interviews were completed, of which 689 were Qatari nationals, 768 were resident expatriates, and 682 were labor migrants. The three subsamples were operationalized as follows: Qatari national participants were people who were Qatari citizens by birth and comprise approximately 15 percent of the population in Qatar (U.S. Department of State, 2010); resident expatriates were people who live and work in Qatar, maintain private households, with a head-of-household working primarily in professional and service occupations; labor migrants were people who work as laborers and mostly live in communal housing. In terms of gender, 50 percent of the Qatari participants were females, 49 percent of the resident expatriate participants were females and 5 percent of the labor migrant participants were females (females, however, represent a very small proportion of the overall labor migrant population). All Qatari participants listed their religion as Islam. Of the non-Qataris 90.2 percent identified themselves as Islamic, followed by Hindu (5.2 percent), and Christian (4.1 percent). The most common non-Qatari nationalities were Indian (7.1 percent of total), Egyptian (7.0 percent), Sudanese (5.4 percent), Jordanian (4.1 percent), and Palestinian (3.7 percent). The response rates and survey-wide maximum sampling error estimates among the subsamples were 94 percent for the Qatari sample (sampling error \pm 4.2 percent), 94 percent for the resident expatriate sample (\pm 3.7 percent) and 89 percent (\pm 6.9 percent) for the labor migrant sample. The high response rates were likely aided by the personal interviewing approach; by comparison, the U.S. General Social Survey response rates average around 70 percent, but most of the interviews in years achieving these response rates are conducted by phone.

When the survey instrument was pre-tested, it was found that local newspaper readership was almost nonexistent among the migrant laborers and most of them did not watch much

television in their living quarters. As a result, participants from the labor migrant sample were not asked any of the media use questions and, as such, their data are not included in the subsequent analyses.

The primary utility company in Qatar (Qatar General Electricity & Water Company) provided the sampling frame that included all known households in Qatar. The survey sampling design used stratified systematic samples based on the estimated population proportions for each of the three subsamples. In addition to stratifying based on residence type (Qatari national, resident expatriate, and labor migrants), the sample was also stratified at the municipality, and zone, and was clustered at the city block level.

The questionnaire included eight sections, although not all modules in each section were administered to all subsamples (i.e., some groups of questions were not asked of all residence types). The eight interview sections were: economic status; marriage, family and gender roles; expatriate life and working conditions; expatriates' perceptions of Qatar and Qatari nationals; education; contributions to charitable organizations; political attitudes; and the media. The media questions were given to the Qatari nationals and expatriates, but not to the labor migrants. The section on media began with three questions about which media participants trusted most for news (one question each for local, regional and international news). The next set of questions asked which Arabic and English local newspapers participants read, and included *Al Sharq*, *Al Watan*, *Al Raya*, *Al Arab*, *Peninsula*, *Gulf Times*, and *Qatar Tribune*. The last set of media questions asked participants to rate how objective (on a scale of 1 to 4) they thought the following Arabic language news networks were. The networks were *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiyya*, *Al Hurra*, *Russia Today*, *BBC Arabic*, *France 24*, *Al Alam*, and *CCTV Arabic*. These questions also included an option for participants to say they had "never heard of it." The top four most familiar networks (based on fewest number of "never heard of it" responses) were retained for analyses. These were *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiyya*, *Al Hurra*, and *BBC Arabic*. Of these networks, both *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiyya* are included in basic cable subscriptions in Qatar, while *BBC Arabic* is available as part of a premium cable package. *Al Hurra* is not available through cable subscription but, like the other three networks, is available to satellite subscribers and through live streaming on the Internet. The survey questions did not ask participants how much they

watched the various television networks, nor are network subscription or ratings figures available for the Qatar market.

Interviews were conducted in-person using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology, and were done in Arabic or English, depending on the preference of the participant. Participants' level of fluency in either Arabic or English was not gauged, so the extent to which each participant understood each question cannot be determined. However, all interviews were fluent in both Arabic and English and were instructed to help participants if some questions posed difficulty in comprehension.

The survey was written and administered by researchers at the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University. All data were weighted prior to analysis using a weighting variable based on known population parameters. The weighting variable took into account estimated sampling error for the survey strata to adjust for the probability of selection and non-response. Funding for the survey was provided to SESRI by the Qatar Foundation, a quasi-governmental foundation charged with funding projects "to prepare the people of Qatar and the region meet the challenges of an ever-changing world, and to make Qatar a leader in innovative education and research" (Qatar Foundation, 2012). Actual survey questions and a more detailed description of its methodology are available from SESRI at: <http://www.qu.edu.qa/sesri/>.

Results

The first research question asked what types of media do Qatari nationals and expatriate residents trust most for local, regional and international news. Three questions measured respondents' most trusted news sources. This set of questions was given to the Qatari nationals and expatriate residents, but not to the labor migrants. The first was "which ONE of the following do you trust most for local news?" and the response options were television, radio, daily newspapers (electronic or printed), magazines/weekly papers/monthly papers, internet, SMS, and majalis/friends. The second question was "which ONE of the following do you trust most for Arab/regional news?" and included the same response options. The third question was

“which ONE of the following do you trust most for international news?” (same response options).

Television was the dominant news source, with more than two-thirds (68.1 percent) of all respondents naming television as their most trusted local news source. Daily newspapers were second with 20.8 percent, followed by the Internet (5.4 percent), radio (3.7 percent), and majalis/friends (2.0 percent).

The responses were similar when respondents were asked to name their most trusted source for Arab/regional news, but with an even stronger preference for television. Four out of five respondents (80.8 percent) named television as their most trusted source for Arab/regional news. Daily newspapers were second with 10.4 percent, followed by the Internet (4.4 percent), radio (2.9 percent), and majalis/friends (1.5 percent).

The respondents were also asked to name their most trusted source for international news. The results showed an even stronger dependence on television for international news, with 83.6 percent of the respondents naming television as their most trusted source for this type of news. Daily newspapers were again second, but with a lower percentage of 6.6 percent, followed by the Internet (6.2 percent), radio (2.6 percent), and majalis/friends (1.0 percent). Thus, though the percentages varied for local news, regional news and international news, television was clearly the most trusted news medium, with newspapers running a distant second.

The second research question asked if Qatari nationals and expatriate residents differed in the news media they trust for local, regional and international news. Crosstabs were run to see if there were any differences among the most trusted news sources between Qatari nationals and expatriates. Overall, Qatari nationals represented 47.4 percent of the participants receiving this question set while expatriates represented 52.6 percent. Qataris were more likely than expatriates to choose TV for local news (53.6 percent versus 46.4 percent) and Majalis/Friends (63.0 percent versus 37.0 percent), but less likely than expatriates to choose radio (39.2 percent versus 60.8 percent), newspaper (32.9 percent versus 67.1 percent) or Internet (24.3 percent versus 75.7 percent) ($X^2_{(4)} = 58.14$, $p < .001$). Overall, 77.1 percent of the Qatari respondents picked TV as their most trusted local news source, compared to 60.0 percent of the expatriates. Television,

then, was clearly the most trusted local news source for both groups in the sample, but for more than three-quarters of the Qatari respondents.

Table 1 : Crosstabulation of most trusted source for local news by residence type

	Qatari (row %)	Expatriate (row %)	Total (col %)
TV	498 (53.6%)	431 (46.4%)	929 (68.1%)
Radio	20 (39.2%)	31 (60.8%)	51 (3.7%)
Newspaper	93 (32.9%)	190 (67.1%)	283 (20.7%)
Internet	18 (24.3%)	56 (75.7%)	74 (5.4%)
Majalis/Friends	17 (63.0%)	10 (37.0%)	27 (2.0%)
Total	646 (47.4%)	718 (52.6%)	1364 (100%)

$X^2_{(4)} = 58.14, p < .001$

For most trusted media for Arab/regional news, Qatari nationals represented 47.7 percent of the participants receiving this question set while expatriates represented 52.2 percent, which was nearly an identical proportion to the responses about local news media preferences. Qataris were again more likely than expatriates to choose TV (51.5 percent versus 48.5 percent) and Majalis/Friends (60.0 percent versus 40.0 percent), but less likely than expatriates to choose radio (31.6 percent versus 68.4 percent), newspaper (34.1 percent versus 65.9 percent) or Internet (18.6 percent versus 81.4 percent) ($X^2_{(4)} = 41.61, p < .001$). Overall, 87.1 percent of the Qatari respondents picked TV as their most trusted source, compared to 75.0 percent of the expatriates. Television, then, was an even more trusted source Arab/regional news than it was for local news for both groups in the sample.

Table 2 : Crosstabulation of most trusted source for Arab/regional news by residence type

	Qatari (row %)	Expatriate (row %)	Total (col %)
TV	552 (51.5%)	520 (48.5%)	1072 (80.8%)
Radio	12 (31.6%)	26 (68.4%)	38 (2.9%)
Newspaper	47 (34.1%)	91 (65.9%)	138 (10.4%)
Internet	11 (18.6%)	48 (81.4%)	59 (4.4%)
Majalis/Friends	12 (60.0%)	8 (40.0%)	20 (1.5%)

Total	634 (47.8%)	693 (52.2%)	1327 (100%)
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$X^2_{(4)} = 41.61, p < .001$

For international news, Qatari nationals represented 46.8 percent of the participants receiving this question set while expatriates represented 53.2 percent. Compared to these sample percentages, Qataris were slightly more likely than expatriates to choose TV (49.7 percent versus 50.3 percent) and Majalis/Friends (57.1 percent versus 42.9 percent), but less likely than expatriates to choose radio (37.1 percent versus 62.9 percent), newspaper (38.2 percent versus 61.8 percent) or Internet (17.9 percent versus 82.1 percent) ($X^2_{(4)} = 36.75, p < .001$). Overall, 89.0 percent of the Qatari respondents picked TV as their most trusted source for international news, compared to 78.9 percent of the expatriates. Television, then, was also the most dominant source for international news and respondents were even more dependent on this single medium than they were for local or regional news.

Table 3 : Crosstabulation of most trusted source for international news by residence type

	Qatari (row %)	Expatriate (row %)	Total (col %)
TV	564 (49.7%)	570 (50.3%)	1134 (83.6%)
Radio	13 (37.1%)	22 (62.9%)	35 (2.6%)
Newspaper	34 (38.2%)	55 (61.8%)	89 (6.6%)
Internet	15 (17.9%)	69 (82.1%)	84 (6.2%)
Majalis/Friends	8 (57.1%)	6 (42.9%)	14 (1.0%)
Total	634 (46.8%)	722 (53.2%)	1356 (100%)

$X^2_{(4)} = 36.75, p < .001$

To examine more specifically how people in Qatar view the television news networks that are their most dominant source of news information, we next looked at the perceived objectivity of TV news networks. As with the most trusted media questions, this set of questions was given to the Qatari nationals and expatriate residents, but not to the labor migrants. When asked if Al Jazeera was “very objective,” “somewhat objective,” “somewhat not objective,” or “not objective at all,” 81.0 percent of the Qatari respondents and 70.1 percent of the expatriate respondent replied that Al Jazeera was “very objective.” This rating was substantially higher than

Al Arabiyya, which had the next highest perceptions of being very objective (51.0 percent Qatari, 39.5 expatriate). The third most objective network in the survey was BBC Arabia, with 37.0 percent of Qataris and 33.3 percent of expatriates saying it was very objective. The least most objective network was Al Hurra, with 18.6 percent of Qataris and 10.2 percent of expatriates saying it was very objective. In contrast to the fairly high ratings for TV news networks being very objective, participants were reluctant to label the same networks as being “not at all objective.” Only 11.9 percent of Qataris and 14.7 percent of expatriates considered Al Hurra to be not objective, and the non-objective ratings were even lower for BBC Arabia (4.9 percent Qatari, 2.8 percent expatriate), Al Arabiyya (2.6 percent Qatari, 4.5 percent expatriate) and Al Jazeera (0.2 percent Qatari, 1.0 percent expatriate).

In examining the differences between Qataris and expatriate residents’ perceptions of objectivity among the news networks, a few patterns emerged. For Al Jazeera, expatriates were more likely to view Al Jazeera as being “somewhat not objective” (71.4 percent of the respondents giving this rating were expatriates) or “not objective at all” (83.3 percent), although the total numbers of participants giving these ratings were low overall.

Table 4 : Crosstabulation of perceived objectivity of Al Jazeera by residence type

	Qatari (row %)	Expatriate (row %)	Total (col %)
Very objective	502 (59.3%)	345 (40.7%)	847 (76.2%)
Somewhat objective	113 (46.1%)	132 (53.9%)	245 (22.0%)
Somewhat not objective	4 (28.6%)	10 (71.4%)	14 (1.3%)
Not objective at all	1 (16.7%)	5 (83.3%)	6 (0.5%)
Total	620 (55.8%)	492 (44.2%)	1112 (100%)

$X^2_{(3)} = 21.36, p < .001$

A similar pattern was found with Al Arabiyya. Although only 43.4 percent of the participants were expatriates, they accounted for 54.2 percent of the “somewhat not objective” responses and 57.1 percent of the “not objective at all” responses.

Table 5: Crosstabulation of perceived objectivity of Al Arabiyya by residence type

	Qatari (row %)	Expatriate (row %)	Total (col %)
Very objective	297 (62.8%)	176 (37.2%)	473 (46.0%)
Somewhat objective	237 (52.9%)	211 (47.1%)	448 (43.6%)
Somewhat not objective	33 (45.8%)	39 (54.2%)	72 (7.0%)
Not objective at all	15 (42.9%)	20 (57.1%)	35 (3.4%)
Total	582 (56.6%)	446 (43.4%)	1028 (100%)

$$X^2_{(3)} = 15.96, p < .001$$

For Al Hurra, the main difference was that 68.6 percent of the respondents who thought it was “very objective” were Qatari nationals.

Table 6: Crosstabulation of perceived objectivity of Al Hurra by residence type

	Qatari (row %)	Expatriate (row %)	Total (col %)
Very objective	70 (68.6%)	32 (31.4%)	102 (14.8%)
Somewhat objective	182 (51.9%)	169 (48.1%)	351 (50.9%)
Somewhat not objective	80 (54.8%)	66 (45.2%)	146 (21.2%)
Not objective at all	45 (49.5%)	46 (50.5%)	91 (13.2%)
Total	377 (54.6%)	313 (45.4%)	690 (100%)

$$X^2_{(3)} = 10.14, p < .01$$

For BBC Arabia, there were no significant differences in perceived objectivity by residence type.

Table 7: Crosstabulation of perceived objectivity of BBC Arabia by residence type

	Qatari (row %)	Expatriate (row %)	Total (col %)
Very objective	150 (55.4%)	121 (44.6%)	271 (35.3%)
Somewhat objective	201 (49.8%)	203 (50.2%)	404 (52.6%)
Somewhat not objective	34 (54.0%)	29 (46.0%)	63 (8.2%)
Not objective at all	20 (66.7%)	10 (33.3%)	30 (3.9%)
Total	405 (52.7%)	363 (47.3%)	768 (100%)

$$X^2_{(3)} = 4.56, p = .21 \text{ (n.s.)}$$

The third research question asked whether there were differences in attitudes about quality of life in Qatar between nationals and residents, and whether those differences were related to media consumption.

To test the perceptions on quality of life in Qatar, three hierarchical regressions were run. For the first regression, the dependent variable was “using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 represents the worst possible place to live and 10 represents the best possible place to live, where on that scale would you rate Qatar as a place to live?” The mean rating was 8.17/10.00 (s.d. = 1.84), indicating that participants overall reported having a very positive outlook on the current quality of life in Qatar. The dependent variables for the other two questions used similar wording, but one asked respondents to rate the quality of life in Qatar two years ago (mean = 7.69, s.d. = 2.03), and the other asked them to rate the quality of life they would expect to see in Qatar two years in the future (mean = 8.79, s.d. = 1.80). For the independent variables in the regressions, block one consisted of demographics (household type, gender, age, education level, income and marital status), and block two consisted of dummy coded variables for television, radio, newspaper, internet and majalis/friends as the preferred medium of choice for local news (local news was chosen over regional or international news because there was more variance in the local news preferences).

Household type, education and income were significant predictors of perceptions of the current quality of life in Qatar. Qatari nationals gave higher ratings to current quality of life in Qatar than did expatriates ($\beta = .73, t < .01$). Education was negatively associated with current

quality of life ($\beta = -.12, t < .01$), meaning that people with lower levels of education gave higher ratings to the current quality of life in Qatar. Income was positively associated with current quality of life ($\beta = .14, t < .01$). None of the news media preferences were significant predictors of perceived current quality of life in Qatar.

For perceived quality of life in Qatar two years ago, household type, gender and education were significant demographic predictors. Here, Qatari nationals also thought life was better in Qatar two years ago than did the expatriates ($\beta = .50, t < .01$). For gender, women thought the quality of life in Qatar was better two years ago than men did ($\beta = .37, t < .05$). As with the previous model, education was again negatively associated with perceived quality of life two years ago ($\beta = -.09, t < .05$). None of the news media preferences were significant predictors of perceived current quality of life in Qatar two years ago.

For expected quality of life in Qatar two years from now, household type and education level were the only significant demographic predictors. Qataris were more optimistic about quality of life in the future than were expatriates ($\beta = .51, t < .01$), and education had a negative association ($\beta = -.17, t < .001$). For the media variables, Internet use was a marginally significant predictor ($\beta = -.80, t = .06$), meaning that people who most trusted the Internet as their source for local news were somewhat more pessimistic about what they expected for quality of life in Qatar in the future.

The last section of questions analyzed whether demographics and media preferences affected Qatari nationals' perceptions about expatriates and migrant workers. There were seven related questions in this set, with a multiple choice response set of one ("very false"), two ("somewhat false"), three ("somewhat true"), and four ("very true"). Hierarchical regressions were also run to test these questions with demographics as the first block of independent variables and media preferences as the second block.

For the first attitude question "expatriates and migrant workers strengthen our country because they work hard," participants tended to somewhat disagree (mean = 2.01, s.d. = 1.25). There were no significant predictors in the model. For the second attitude question, and "expatriates and migrant workers strengthen our country because they bring talent," participants

also somewhat disagreed (mean = 2.07, s.d. = 1.10). People with higher levels of education were more likely to disagree with the statement ($\beta = -.05, t < .05$), as were people who rated the Internet their most trustworthy local news source ($\beta = -.527, t = .06$), although this latter result failed to reach statistical significance. For the question “expatriates and migrant workers weaken our country because they take our resources,” the general disagreement was a little stronger (mean = 2.07, s.d. = 1.10). Qataris who were married were more likely to agree with the statement, however ($\beta = .85, t < .05$). The next question asked if Qataris agreed with the statement “the number of expatriates/migrant workers puts a strain on the country’s health services.” Here, the mean was 1.86 (s.d. = 1.50), indicating the average Qatari somewhat disagreed with the statement. Again, married respondents were more likely to agree with the statement ($\beta = .80, t < .05$). For the statement, “expatriates/migrant workers in Qatar help to build the country’s economy,” the mean was 2.15 (s.d. = 1.50). The only significant predictor was age, with older Qataris being slightly more likely to agree with the statement ($\beta = .01, t < .05$). For the statement “expatriates/migrant workers increase traffic congestion in Qatar,” Qataris tended to agree (mean = 2.58, s.d. = 0.97). None of the demographic variables or media use variables were significantly associated with this question, however. For the last statement, “expatriates/migrant workers make Qatar open to new cultures,” the mean was 2.07 (s.d. = 1.23). Qataris with higher income were more likely to disagree with the statement ($\beta = -.09, t < .01$), while Qataris who were married ($\beta = .77, t < .05$), or single ($\beta = -.88, t < .05$) were more likely to agree with the statement than Qataris who were divorced. There were no significant media predictors for any of the seven questions regarding attitudes about expatriates and migrant workers in Qatar.

Discussion

Residents of Qatar (both Qatari nationals and expatriates) were highly dependent on television as a news source. An overwhelming majority (77 percent) of Qatari Nationals report television as their most trusted news source, and 80 percent rate the state-owned Aljazeera Network as “very objective” in its news coverage. Such high levels of reported trust are intriguing and almost unheard of in surveys of western societies. For example, a February 2011 Gallup poll showed

that only 44 percent of Americans reported “fair” or “high” levels of trust in American news media (Morales, 2011). Similarly, while television remains the dominant news source for about two-thirds of U.S. consumers, the Internet is becoming a more popular source for national and international news while reliance on newspapers for local news remains strong (Pew Research Center, 2011). The high levels of perceived objectivity for Aljazeera may be due in part to an affinity resulting from it being headquartered in Qatar, but this perception was not limited to Qatari nationals; expatriate residents whose nationalities lie elsewhere also rated Aljazeera’s objectivity very high. Granted, Aljazeera’s ubiquity in the region is not limited to Qatar, as some studies have estimated that as many as 70 percent of Arabs with satellite TV access rely on Aljazeera (e.g. El-Nawawy & Iskander, 2002). But the high rankings for television as a trustworthy news medium and for Aljazeera as a provider of objective coverage suggest a rare faith indeed to a medium and an institution compared to western media.

With such a broad appeal, television news has the potential to shape the social, political and economic beliefs of Qatari citizens. On the other hand, reliance upon a single medium (and one specific provider within that medium), could also inhibit a diversity of viewpoints in a society if that dominant medium does not offer a wide range of content and viewpoints. Perhaps, though, Aljazeera’s wide range of content contributes to its popularity among Qatari nationals and expatriate residents. “Two features make Aljazeera stand out: its extensive news coverage in Arabic by reporters who know what the public wants, and its political discussion programs that deal with controversial subjects” (Rugh, 2004, p. 229).

Additionally, the survey questions asked which medium was the most trusted news source for local news, Arab/regional news, and international news. It should be noted that, as a concept, “trusted” may not be consistent with traditional social science views of the construct implying that one believes the trusted source to be honest or benevolent. Though the questionnaires used the word “trusted” in English and its counterpart *الموثوق* (*almouthouk*) in Arabic, it is possible that respondents based their answers on media outlets that were perceived to be more popular or well known rather than trusted. The pervasiveness of television as a news medium in the region, and the fact that Al Jazeera -- the most widely watched news source in the

region -- is headquartered in Qatar and represents a key source of national pride, may have also influenced responses.

Still, the dominance of television as a trusted news source raises a few implications. The immediacy of television in general, and Al Jazeera's coverage of important Middle East events in particular, may contribute to Qatar society's dependence on television. Similarly, some participants simply may not have been as favorable toward Al Arabiya, a longer established network out of Saudi Arabia that was often criticized by Arabs for its coverage of the Iraq War (Al-Saggaf, 2006). The relatively dimmer perceptions of Al Hurra cannot be explained by the data. The survey questions were not specific enough to determine whether most participants were aware that Al Hurra receives financial support from the U.S. Congress, whether they were less aware of the network, or if they simply did not find its news coverage to their liking.

However, respondents still rated television as their most trusted news source even for local news, which is not the primary emphasis of either Al Jazeera or Al Arabiyya, the two most popular networks among the respondents. It appears that the dependence on television for news content holds strong as a main effect, regardless of whether Qatar residents are seeking news about local, regional or international affairs. In the sheer dominance of television as a relied upon news source, the lack of reliance on other media is also worth noting. In particular, the low usage of the Internet as a medium to supply news information is curious in a society where 53 percent of the residents have completed at least some post-secondary education and which was one of only 58 countries in the world with an Internet penetration rate of 50 percent in 2009 (Internet World Stats, 2011). Additionally, on each of the three most trusted news source measures (local, regional and international), Qatari nationals reported trusting television more than did the expatriate residents.

Although there was a clear preference for television as a news source among both Qatari nationals and expatriate residents, media preferences in general had minimal measurable effects on their attitudes about life in Qatar. None of the trusted media sources were significant predictors of perceived quality of life in Qatar currently or their perceptions of life in Qatar two years ago, while respondents who preferred the Internet as a trusted news source were slightly less positive than other respondents about the quality of life they would expect to see in Qatar

two years from now. For the attitude questions about expatriates and migrant workers (these questions were asked to Qatari nationals only), there were no significant media predictors. In all, the lack of significant media effects is the most notable result of this study. Typically, social surveys in western societies show small, but stable media effects in their shaping of social attitudes. The results from the first social survey in Qatar showed a different profile. Although Qatari nationals and expatriate residents showed clear preferences for television as a news source and showed moderate levels of media consumption in general, the effects of that media consumption did not manifest themselves in their responses to this survey.

The data do not suggest why residents of Qatar do not exhibit a more complex array of news media preferences, nor do they offer a clear explanation for the lack of media effects in shaping social attitudes. Indeed, in the key survey question areas examined in this study, the descriptive statistics point to a lack of variance overall. For example, when more than three-quarters of the sample chooses the same response for their most trusted news medium, the statistical power to isolate significant associations with other variables is reduced. Similarly, the three questions about quality of life in Qatar all exhibited moderate-to-high levels of negative skewness (from -0.78 to -1.75) and positive kurtosis (from 0.52 to 3.35). The responses to these three questions indicate a high degree of optimism about life in Qatar, but the homogeneity of responses may also have created a ceiling effect that restricted the variance and masked small media effects.

Because this was the first survey of its kind in Qatar, it is possible that the public's lack of familiarity with public opinion surveys also influenced some participants' responses. Even though interviewers sought to reassure participants that their anonymity would be maintained, it is possible that some participants were only comfortable giving favorable responses. There could be a cultural effect here as well, with some participants believing that politeness was more important than candidness in their responses.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the sampling and survey questionnaire construction techniques employed in this social survey are strengths and result in a rich data resource for scholarly use, some limitations are inherent in a secondary analysis such as this study. First, both the media usage questions and the attitudes about life in Qatar questions were general. It is not possible to correlate attitudes about specific news topics with the ways in which those topics have been covered in various news outlets. Second, while the attitudes and opinions being measured in omnibus surveys are generally reliable and accurate snapshots of public views at a certain point in time, explaining why the public holds these views or how they developed is a complex process that is better left to smaller scale studies designed to address narrower research questions.

It will be important to continue to analyze these data in future years of this survey to see if these patterns continue or if news media preferences become more divergent and subsequent media effects become more apparent. Additionally, future annual deployments of the survey could consider adding questions asking participants what are the most important issues facing the country. If these measures could be added, then researchers could conduct content analyses of the news media in Qatar in the months preceding the survey to gauge what issues were featured most prominently in specific news outlets, which would allow for a more direct test of agenda-setting effects.

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