

SESRI Policy Brief

Citizen and Resident Satisfaction with Public Services in Qatar

And the impact on quality of life

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Here we explore satisfaction with public services among citizens and residents of Qatar. We examine both the extent and drivers of satisfaction as well as its impact on overall quality of life ratings. In general, utilities and administration tend to receive the highest ratings while infrastructure and education receive the lowest. The data show that Qatari nationals tend to be less satisfied than white-collar expatriates, but this is due largely to high satisfaction among Arab expatriates in particular. On the other hand, residents' quality of life ratings are far more sensitive to public service satisfaction than those of Qatari citizens.

An efficient public sector lies at the heart of a citizen- and resident-centric approach to service delivery and is a crucial indicator of overall state performance. Equally important, it has been shown that experience with public services strongly impacts how people evaluate their overall quality of life.¹ Thus, the type of public services available in a society, and the standard at which they are delivered, can have a direct and significant impact on the general well-being of the population.

The role of satisfaction surveys

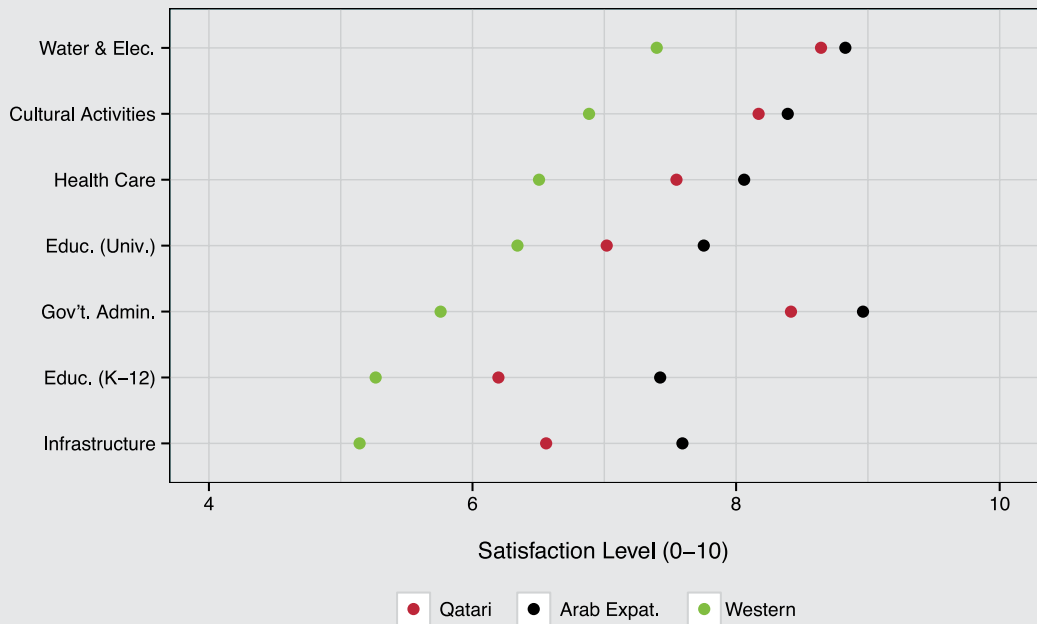
Qatar's National Vision 2030 stresses the need for "effective public institutions,"² and the past decade has seen increased investment in and structural reorganization of a number of important public services – including in the areas of health, education, and e-government – aimed at enhancing government services to citizens, residents, and businesses. To date, however, there has been to our knowledge no systematic assessment of citizens' and residents' actual experiences and satisfaction with public services in the State of Qatar.

Conducting opinion surveys has become a common method of aiding governments in evaluating the services they provide to citizens and residents.³ Surveys provide an external measure of service effectiveness and can reveal satisfaction with overall service quality and/or specific service dimensions such as timeliness, competence, and courtesy.⁴ They can be utilized by policymakers to measure and track satisfaction levels across sectors or entities; across cities, districts, and municipalities; and among different population segments. The data can also be used to prioritize and (re)allocate public spending. Finally, regular opinion surveys can be a productive means of incorporating the public into priority-setting.⁵

An initial look at satisfaction

Here we offer an initial investigation into citizen and resident satisfaction across key public services based on SESRI data collected in September 2015. The survey, administered to nationally representative samples of 769 Qataris and 762 non-Qataris, respectively, asked respondents

FIGURE 1
Satisfaction with public services, by nationality group



about their use and perceptions of seven different services. These are: healthcare, K-12 education, university education, roads and infrastructure, electricity and water, cultural activities, and government administration. Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with each service on a scale from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest); their frequency of use; and a summary measure that compared overall performance with their prior expectations.

Figure 1 offers a summary of satisfaction by service. Overall, utilities and public administration earn the highest ratings, while K-12 education and infrastructure/roads are rated the lowest. However, there exist sizable differences across respondent nationality groups. In particular, non-Qatari Arab expatriates tend to evaluate services more positively than other groups of respondents, whereas residents from Western countries tend to rate them lower. Satisfaction among Qatari nationals lies between these two groups (though is generally closer to Arab expatriates), and

other respondents – including those from South Asia, East Asia, and Latin America – do not offer ratings that are significantly different from those of Qataris, on average.

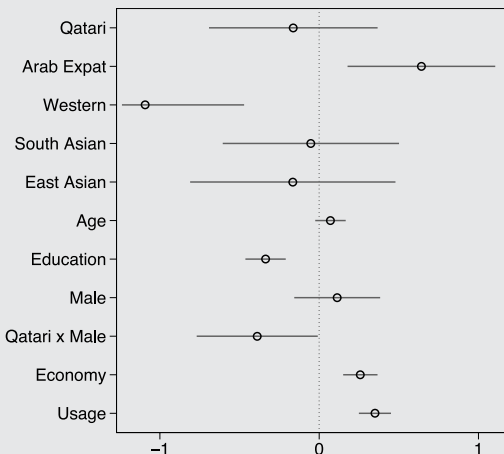
The drivers of satisfaction

We also examine the question of what drives satisfaction among Qatari citizens and residents. Estimating a multivariate regression model, we test the effect of basic demographic and socio-economic indicators on a composite index of satisfaction across all services. The results of this regression are summarized in Figure 2, which reports the estimated coefficients of each explanatory variable.

Among both Qataris and high-income expatriates, higher education is associated with more negative ratings of services, and Qatari females are found to be more satisfied with public services than males. Conversely, we find only weak evidence that age and income influence public service satisfaction among either group of respondents. These results are consistent

Sizable differences in satisfaction exist across respondent nationality groups

FIGURE 2
The determinants of satisfaction



with previous findings from Qatar in the field of healthcare.⁶

Finally, the results also indicate a positive link between usage of and satisfaction with public services among both Qataris and non-Qataris. Yet the direction of this effect is ambiguous. It might be, for instance, that increased experience with services boosts satisfaction, or alternatively that those who already hold more positive

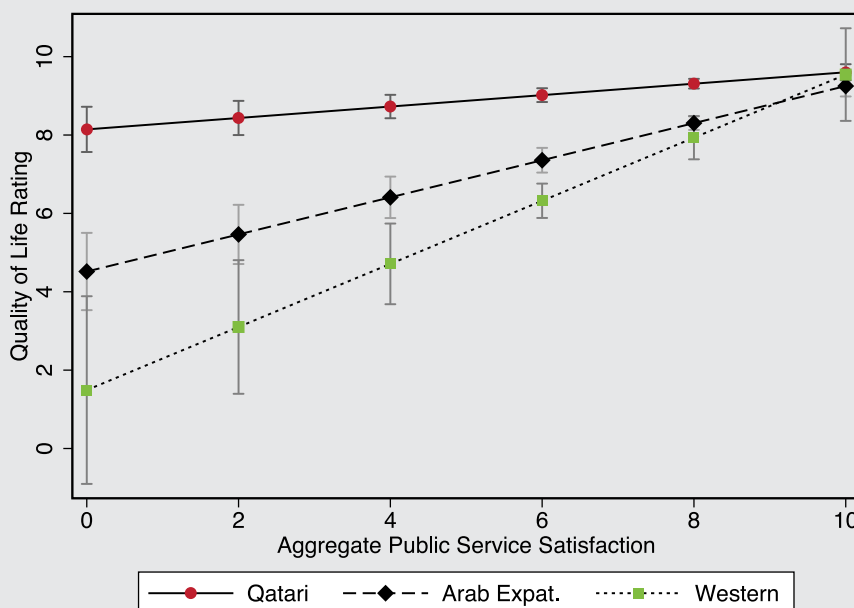
views of services are also more likely to utilize them (in the case of health services or cultural activities, for example).

Public services and quality of life

As noted already, public satisfaction with community resources such as schools, medical care, and government services has been shown to predict individuals' general satisfaction with their quality of life. In this survey, respondents were posed several questions related to their quality of life in Qatar, which they rated on an ascending scale from 1 to 10.

As expected, the data reveal a statistically significant positive relationship between overall satisfaction with public services and quality of life ratings, as depicted in Figure 3. Notably, however, the magnitude of this relationship is much stronger among non-national respondents, particularly those from Western nations, compared to Qatari citizens. Non-Qataris, that is, are far more sensitive to public service satisfaction in terms of how they evaluate their overall satisfaction with Qatar as a place to live.

FIGURE 3
Satisfaction with public services and quality of life



Greater satisfaction with public services is linked with more positive evaluations of overall quality of life in Qatar

As shown in Figure 3, the predicted quality of life rating for a resident who is entirely dissatisfied with public services (i.e., an aggregate score of 0) is a mere 4 out of 10, compared to almost 9 out of 10 for a non-citizen who is totally satisfied with public services – representing an increase of more than 100%. By contrast, the average quality of life evaluation for a Qatari who is totally dissatisfied with public services remains very high, at 8 out of 10. Among Qataris, then, how individuals view state services is largely disconnected from their overall satisfaction with life.

The future of the public sector

The tightening financial resources of Qatar and other Gulf Cooperation Council states gives new impetus to improvements in the efficiency and quality of public services. To this end, opinion surveys can offer a dual advantage in both providing reliable information about user satisfaction that can be used to help prioritize efforts and resources, while also demonstrating state interest in understanding the concerns and experiences of ordinary citizens and residents. Qatar would therefore do well to expand efforts to measure, track, and publicize satisfaction with state services.

Policy summary

In Qatar notable differences in public service satisfaction exist across individual state services, across nationality groupings, and across demographic categories. Among all citizens and residents, however, there is an empirical link between satisfaction with state services and overall perceptions of quality of life. Policymakers should thus study efforts to collect regular and systematic data on the performance of key public institutions, including through the collection of consumer feedback. Efforts to solicit user feedback could be expanded via automated requests sent via text message as already implemented by some companies in Qatar (e.g., Ooredoo). Survey and non-survey based evaluations could then be used to construct a summary rating – in the manner of the American Consumer Satisfaction Index or the French Public Services Barometer – that is advertised publicly in order both to showcase high-performing institutions and to encourage improved service among lower-performing entities.

Notes

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2. Webb, K., & Hatry, H. P. (1973). *Obtaining Citizen Feedback: The Application of Citizen Surveys to Local Governments*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.
3. Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, State of Qatar, *Qatar National Vision 2030*, p. 22.
4. Kelly, J. M., & Swindell, D. (2002). "A Multiple-Indicator Approach to Municipal Service Evaluation: Correlating Performance Measurement and Citizen Satisfaction across Jurisdictions." *Public Administration Review* 62(5): 610-621.
5. Watson, D. J., Juster, R. J., & Johnson, G. W. (1991). "Institutionalized use of citizen surveys in the budgetary and policy-making processes: A small city case study." *Public Administration Review*: 232-239.
6. Aday, L. A., & Walker Jr, G. M. (1996). *Patient satisfaction in government health facilities in the state of Qatar*. *Journal of Community Health* 21(5): 349-358; McGivern, S. (1999). "Patient satisfaction with quality of care in a hospital system in Qatar." *Journal for Healthcare Quality* 21(1): 28-41; Ali, F. M. H., Nikoloski, Z., & Reka, H. (2015). "Satisfaction and responsiveness with health-care services in Qatar—evidence from a survey." *Health Policy*, 119(11): 1499-1505.)

Quality of life ratings among white-collar expatriates are much more sensitive to public service satisfaction than among Qataris