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## **Quality of Life and Satisfaction with Public Services in Qatar: Qataris versus Expatriates' Perspectives**

**A Research Note by Nada Abdelkader Benmansour**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*How to explain a negative relation between satisfaction with life and satisfaction about public service delivery? In Qatar, non-citizens are much more positive about public service delivery than citizens, but citizens are more satisfied about life in general than non-citizens. This article assesses the level of satisfaction with public services and life satisfaction in Qatar for citizens and non-citizens and empirically investigates the associated factors.*

*Dissatisfaction with basic public services, such as health, education, transport, electricity and other types of government services, grew in many MENA countries in the years prior to the Arab Spring. In these countries, life satisfaction was very low, and people in Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen were among the least happy people in the world.*

*Living in Qatar, a country with one of the world's highest per capita incomes, does not secure life satisfaction, as the relation between income and life satisfaction is more complex than it seems. Qatar has a high rate of population growth and a high migrant population.*

## INTRODUCTION

Experience with public services influences how citizens evaluate their own quality of life in the sense that high-quality public services drive a high quality-of-life rating. Rose and Newton (2010) show how a person's quality of life, as well as how she perceives her own quality of life, is shaped, among other things, by the public services available and the standard in which they are delivered. If provision of public services is of a high standard, quality of life is improved and positively perceived by citizens.

Research on citizen satisfaction has explained the variance in evaluations of public services by some non-service-related factors such as socio-economic and socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (Brown and Coulter, 1983; Stipak, 1977).

Qatar has one of the fastest growing and highest migrant populations in the world (World Bank, 2014). More than 80 per cent of the population consists of non-nationals (Gulf Migration, 2010–15), and in 2013, 31.2 per cent of foreign workers in Qatar were from India, 23.5% from Nepal, 11.4 per cent from Philippines and 10.1 per cent from Arab countries (De Bel-Air, 2014). How satisfied is the general population with the public services? What are the public services people are most/least satisfied with? And what are the drivers of satisfaction for the general population and for the different subgroups of the population, citizens and non-citizens?

We use Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) data to answer these questions, assess the factors of satisfaction in Qatar and compare satisfaction rates of citizens and non-citizens.<sup>1</sup> The results show that utilities and administration are the public services people are most satisfied with, whereas roads and education are found to be the least satisfying. There also seems to be a discrepancy in rates of satisfaction between citizens and non-citizens, with the latter being overall more satisfied with public services than are citizens. Interestingly, though they are

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<sup>1</sup> 'Citizen and Resident Satisfaction with Public Services in Qatar', SESRI, Qatar University.

less satisfied with public services, citizens still tend to be more satisfied than non-citizens with the quality of life in Qatar.

## SATISFACTION WITH PUBLIC SERVICES

The literature shows that citizens' attitudes are affected by some non-service-related factors such as the socio-economic characteristics of the respondent. The most significant effects are those generated by race, age and socio-economic status (Brown and Coulter, 1983; Stipak, 1977). Many studies in American cities, involving different municipal services, show a lower satisfaction rate among African Americans and Hispanics compared to Anglo-Americans. Less consistently, age has been correlated to findings, in that younger respondents are more critical of municipal services. Socio-economic status, defined by education and income, has not produced any statistically significant effect (Brown and Coulter, 1983). A few studies examined the relationship between objective service conditions and the level of citizens' satisfaction with municipal services, with fewer notable results (Stipak, 1974; Carroll, 1978). In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, studies focused on satisfaction with one specific public sector rather than general satisfaction with public services (Aday and Walker, 1996; Shafi and Weerakkody, 2009; Ali, Nikoloski and Reka, 2015). Nationality (citizens vs non-citizens), socio-economic and socio-demographic characteristics are found to be significant determinants of satisfaction. McGivern (1999) and Ali, Nikoloski and Reka (2015) found an important difference between citizens and non-citizens regarding the quality of the healthcare system in Qatar, with non-citizens being significantly more satisfied.

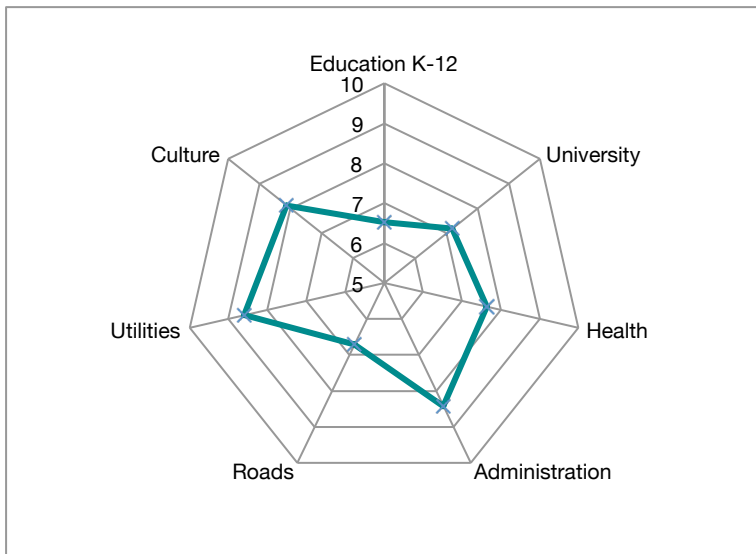
We asked a representative sample of citizens and non-citizens<sup>2</sup> about their level of satisfaction with K-12 education, university education, healthcare services, administration, infrastructure/roads, utilities and cultural services. In particular, three questions were asked relating to (i)

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<sup>2</sup> Respondents are expatriates (or spouses) earning QR4000 or more per month.

overall satisfaction with services, (ii) frequency of use and (iii) expectations towards the services. We asked respondents to rate public services on a 10-point scale, with 0 denoting the lowest rating and 10 the highest (French 'Kit de Satisfaction' from the Government Modernization; Van Ryzin, 2004). We use SESRI data collected through a telephone survey in September 2015. The survey employs a scientifically grounded sampling of 1485 citizens and non-citizens 18 years of age and older, living throughout the country. Figure 1 shows the overall satisfaction with public services for the general population in Qatar. There seems to be general consensus from the population that the most satisfying public services are utilities (electricity and water) and public administration (public service agencies, municipalities, etc.), while the least satisfying are roads and K-12 education.

**Figure 1 – Average satisfaction with public services.**



Previous studies related to healthcare services in GCC countries found a consistent variance in satisfaction among citizens and non-citizens (Ali,

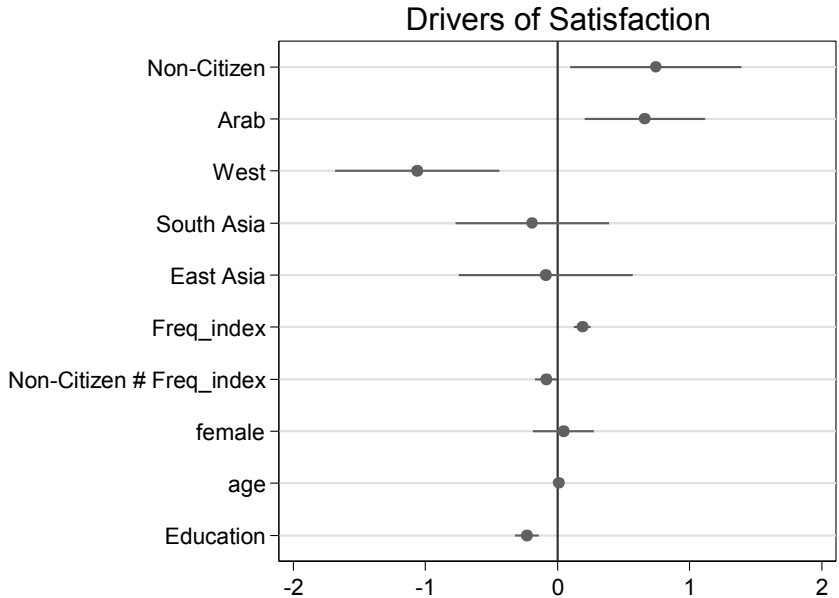
Nikoloski and Reka, 2015). In general, according to our sample, Qataris tend to be less satisfied than Arab expatriates, but more satisfied than Western expatriates.

To understand the variance in satisfaction between citizens and non-citizens, we assessed the influence of the socio-economic and demographic characteristics on satisfaction, using a regression model.<sup>3</sup> Results of the regression are presented in Figure 2 and show a statistically significant effect of citizen satisfaction with public services: citizens tend to be less satisfied than non-citizens. Also, when looking at differences between nationalities, we observe a significant difference between Qataris, Arabs and Western expatriates. Arabs are the most satisfied and Westerners the least satisfied. Age and education are found to be predictors of satisfaction, with younger and more educated respondents being less satisfied with public services. We asked respondents about their frequency of using public services and found a positive correlation between usage and satisfaction. But when we compare citizens to non-citizens, we discovered a negative relationship between usage and satisfaction for non-citizens. We find only weak evidence that income explains satisfaction with public services. In general, these results are consistent, in terms of significance, with the main studies related to satisfaction in Qatar (Ali, Nikoloski and Reka, 2015; Aday and Walker, 1996; McGivern, 1999).

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<sup>3</sup> 'Citizen and Resident Satisfaction with Public Services in Qatar', SESRI, Qatar University.

**Figure 2 – Drivers of satisfaction for Qataris and expatriates**



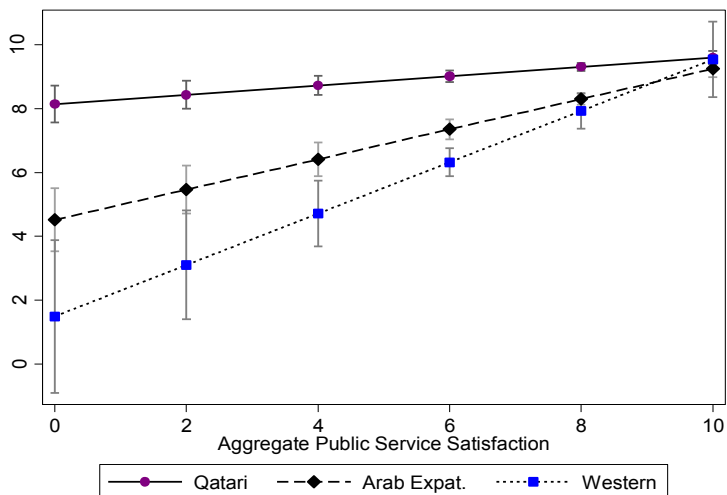
## QUALITY OF LIFE IN MENA COUNTRIES

It is argued that life satisfaction is related to evaluation of individual life concerns. The greater the satisfaction with such life concerns, the greater the satisfaction with life in general. Indeed, the surrounding environment and quality of public services have a strong influence on how people evaluate their own quality of life. The idea is that effective and quality public services will have a positive impact on citizens' overall quality of life (Rose and Newton, 2010). Indeed, satisfaction with community resources such as public schools, medical care and government services is assumed to be predictive of the general satisfaction of the quality of life (Sirgy, Rahtz, Cicic and Underwood, 2000).

In this survey, we asked respondents several question related to their quality of life in Qatar. We asked them to rate the State of Qatar as a place to live, on a 1–10 scale, where 1 is ‘very bad’ and 10 is ‘the best place’.

We observe that, in general, citizens and non-citizens tend be more satisfied with the quality of life in Qatar if they are satisfied with the quality of public services, consistent with previous studies (Rose and Newton, 2010). But because Qatar’s population is very heterogenic due to the high influx of migrant workers, we assume different trends among non-citizens. Indeed, we observe the strongest effect for Westerners, who seem to be the most sensitive to life satisfaction. On the other hand, the effect is weakest for citizens, as there seems to be no relationship between their satisfaction with public services and their life satisfaction. This can be explained by a patriotic feeling on the part of citizens and a more critical view by Western non-citizens, who might be more concerned with interesting professional and financial opportunities than with the quality of life.

**Figure 3 – Levels of satisfaction with public services and quality of life.**



## POLICY IMPLICATION

Analysis of satisfaction with public services and life satisfaction in Qatar, a country with one of the world's highest per capita incomes, shows that high income does not necessarily indicate life satisfaction. Analysis reveals lower satisfaction with public services, but a higher life satisfaction for citizens compared to non-citizens. Also, it shows significant discrepancy among non-citizens, with Arabs tending to be more satisfied than Westerners.

In this context, a deeper analysis of the most and least satisfying public services is required to discern factors associated with (dis)satisfaction. Further analysis of citizens' and non-citizens' needs and expectations vis-à-vis public services will help policymakers design satisfying public services, thus ensuring they are of high quality and efficient, and will help towards achieving Qatar National Vision 2030 'for social progress, human development, a sound and diversified economy and a sustainable environment'.

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Dr. Nada Abdelkader Benmansour received her PhD in economics from the University of Paris 1 La Sorbonne in 2008. Her research areas are Economics of Public Services, New Public Management, Public Services, Quality, Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). Before joining the SESRI, Dr. Benmansour was involved in a NPRP project entitled "Qatarization, the Human Resource Challenge" as project manager and research associate. She was lecturer in economics and management in Tunisia.