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Qatari Public Supports Compromise on GCC Rift, but Even More Like Turkey; Split on Israel, Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and Iran

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Brief Analysis

While recent polling reveals that the Qatari public has been supportive of compromises to ease the Arab Quartet's blockade, real differences in public opinion on foreign policy issues remain between the countries.

The announcement of a breakthrough in Kuwaiti-mediated talks ending the Arab Quartet's (the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Bahrain) longstanding blockade of Qatar suggests that these countries are listening to their publics; at the popular level, solid majorities in all of these countries want compromise rather than continued estrangement. Even more surprising, Qatar's roughly 300,000 citizens voice around the same 40% level of support for the new Arab peace accords with Israel. At the same time, this public opinion poll completed in November 2020 by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy finds that the Qatari public's support still exceeds that of other countries polled regarding Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and Iran.

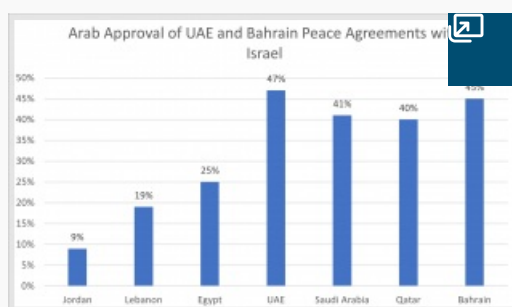
Qataris Show Support for Compromise with Arab Quartet, Although Differences Remain

Qataris and other Arab publics concerned demonstrate a similar rate of agreement with the idea that their intra-Arab rift should end through compromise on both sides; 61% of Qataris agree with that assertion. Of the Arab Quartet countries, none differed with Qatari opinion on this question by more than ten percentage points.

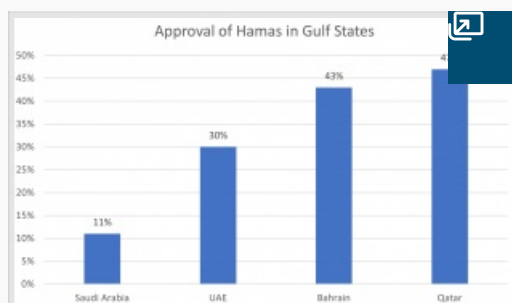
This data reveals that Qatar's rupture with other Arab countries has been unpopular in all countries involved. But on closer examination, as discussed below, its underlying causes are nevertheless rooted in real differences of popular opinion. If Arab Quartet leaders are genuinely worried about Turkish and Muslim Brotherhood influence, then they have fair cause to be concerned about the Qatari public.

Forty Percent Back the Abraham Accords with Israel, While Half Back Hamas

Qatar has a somewhat lower approval rating of the UAE and Bahrain peace agreements with Israel (40%)—and of business or sports ties with Israelis (30%)—than the other Gulf states polled ([Saudi Arabia](#), the [UAE](#), and [Bahrain](#)). But even this level of popular support for normalization with Israel is notable, given [Turkey](#) and the [Muslim Brotherhood's](#) harsh condemnation of the development.



At the same time, Qataris demonstrate an approval rating for Hamas higher than that of any country polled except [Lebanon](#). Qataris are thus sharply divided, with similar proportions showing support for the UAE and Bahrain peace agreements with Israel (40%) and for Hamas (47%), which rejects peace with Israel. This relatively high level of Qatari popular support for Hamas is not surprising, considering the [group's origins](#) in the Muslim Brotherhood and the Qatari government's continued provision of [foreign aid](#) to the Gaza Strip, which Hamas controls.



As in all seven Arab countries polled, there was almost no generational divide on these issues within Qatar. Qataris over thirty years of age were a bit more inclined to support Hamas, but generational differences on UAE and Bahraini peace agreements with Israel were not statistically significant.

Qataris Show Greatest Support for Turkey Among Seven Arab States Polled

Qatari respondents particularly diverged from those of other Gulf states in their views of Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Hamas. The policy differences are unsurprising given Qatar’s sustained relations with all three entities, but these results show the divergences persist at the popular as well as the official level.

Qatar’s ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and Turkey are key elements in the rift between Qatar and the Arab Quartet. Quartet countries have all publicly characterized the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization and face tensions with Turkey on a range of issues, from its open support for the Brotherhood to its pursuit of [natural gas in the East Mediterranean](#), though there are signs of [a thaw](#) between Saudi Arabia and Turkey. As such, the closure of a minuscule Turkish military base in Qatar and the severance of Qatari ties with the Muslim Brotherhood are two of the [thirteen](#) conditions set forth by the Arab Quartet in 2017 for the renewal of relations with Qatar.

Nonetheless, Qataris place much higher importance on their relations with Turkey (80%) than respondents in any other Arab country polled. Qatar’s relations with Turkey are, after all, quite strong—this year, official Qatari entities have [invested heavily](#) in Turkish enterprises while also [supporting](#) Turkish intervention in Libya.

But Just One-Third of Qataris Now Support the Muslim Brotherhood

In sharp contrast, and surprisingly at odds with official policy, the majority of Qataris express at least a “somewhat” negative view of the Muslim Brotherhood. Still, Qatari approval for this transnational Islamist group (36%) remains greater than that of any other Arab society polled. For context, Qatar openly supported the Muslim Brotherhood-aligned Morsi government in Egypt in 2012-2013 and is home to [several influential](#) Brotherhood affiliates.

Surprisingly Little Popular Support for Iran or Its Regional Allies

Most Qataris express a dim view of the end of the UN arms embargo on Iran in October, with 63% calling that at least “somewhat” negative. The country’s tiny Shia minority does not differ from Sunni respondents on this issue, and there likewise is no significant generational difference. Qatar’s citizens show a similarly negative view of overall relations with Iran, with 72% saying the relationship is not important. Again, Shia respondents place only slightly more importance on the relationship than Sunnis, and there is no significant generational difference.

Moreover, Qataris show exceedingly low approval ratings of Iranian proxies Hezbollah (5%) and the Houthis (6%). As in the other three Gulf countries polled, Qatari Shia express somewhat greater—though still just minority—approval of these groups: 29% for Hezbollah, 17% for the Houthis. Notably, however, Qataris accord more importance to their relationship with Iran than do respondents from any other Arab country polled except Lebanon. Qatari ties with Iran are another sticking point in the Arab Quartet rift, as Qatar continues to cooperate with Iran on [energy and trade](#) matters.

Most Qataris Disapprove of Trump, but Nearly Half Value U.S. Ties; Palestine Is Low Priority

Qataris put about the same importance on relations with the United States (44%) as the publics in most other Arab countries polled. Yet like the others, significantly, Qataris now place an equal importance on their relationship with China. Also like respondents in other countries, Qataris mostly express a negative view of President Donald Trump, with 80% disagreeing that his reelection would have been good for their country.

On specific policy priorities for the United States, Qatari views divide fairly evenly among the four choices offered. “Pushing for a solution to the Palestinian problem” rates just 23% top billing, around the same as “working to

contain Iran’s influence and activities” or “finding a diplomatic settlement for the wars in Yemen and Libya.” Qatar’s comparatively affluent citizens rank “providing more economic aid and investment to Arab countries” lowest among the possible options—quite unlike their counterparts in oil- and gas-poor Egypt or [Jordan](#).

Few Generational Divides on Social Issues

Qataris voice a positive view of recent social reforms in Saudi Arabia, including the opening of movie theaters and concerts and the advent of female drivers. Notably, responses from both age groups (under/above thirty years of age) are almost identical on this question. Qataris likewise show practically no generational divide in their view that COVID-19 is “something our foreign enemies deliberately started” (52%).

Qataris do, however, show a modest generational divide on recent anti-corruption protests in Lebanon and Iraq. While Qataris generally approve of the protests, the approval rate from respondents over thirty years of age is ten points lower than that of younger respondents.

Methodological Note

This analysis is based on findings from a survey conducted October 17-November 9, 2020, among a representative national sample of 1,000 Qatari citizens. The fieldwork was done by a highly credible, independent, and apolitical regional commercial survey firm. Respondents were interviewed at home in person, and were selected based on standard geographic probability procedures, in line with the highest international professional standards. These included strict quality controls, health and safety protocols, and assurances of confidentiality.

The comparisons made here are with parallel surveys conducted during the same timeframe in six other Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. The statistical margin of error for surveys of this size and nature is approximately 3%. Full methodological details, including sampling procedures, complete questionnaire, and other relevant information, are readily available upon request. ❖



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