

Policy Report

Central Municipal Council Elections in Qatar: Public Engagement, Knowledge, and Perceptions

Final Report

March 5th 2020

The Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI), a social scientific survey research initiative of Qatar University, was established in October 2008 with enthusiastic support from the leadership of Qatar University. SESRI's mission is to provide sound and reliable data to guide policy formulation, priority-setting, and evidence-based planning in the social and economic sectors.

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Executive Summary

The Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University has conducted nationally representative public opinion surveys of Qatari nationals immediately prior to the previous two elections of the Central Municipal Council (CMC) that took place in 2015 and 2019, respectively. A total of 848 citizens were interviewed in the first survey and 1,033 in the second. These data offer the first empirical-based insights into Qatari attitudes toward the CMC, citizen participation in the registration and voting process, and wider political orientations. This report presents the results of these two important studies in four sections, concluding with policy recommendations. Key findings include the following:

- Citizens who register to vote are disproportionately older (above 30) and male.
- Most citizens who register for the election go on to cast a vote.
- The most common reason for not voting is lack of time and the CMC's lack of authority.
- Many citizens decide which candidate to vote for prior to the registration period.
- Citizens with a family relation to one or more candidate are much more likely to vote.
- Many citizens report being unaware of election winners and even elections themselves.
- Citizen discussion of elections and participation in election events is low, declining further between 2015 and 2019.
- Candidate contact with potential voters also declined between 2015 and 2019.
- Public knowledge of the CMC as an institution increased slightly between 2015 and 2019 but remains low.
- Greater knowledge of the CMC is associated with lower satisfaction with the Council.
- Very few citizens have contact with their CMC member outside of elections.

- CMC members are generally able to assist citizens with problems when asked to help.
- One-quarter of citizens mistakenly believe that the CMC, rather than the Ministry of Municipalities and Environment, has primary responsibility for providing local services.
- Perceptions of CMC authority and overall satisfaction with the CMC have slightly increased between 2015 and 2019.
- Greater satisfaction with the CMC is associated with greater interest in participating in potential future elections for the Shura Council.

Introduction: Public Opinion and the Central Municipal Council in Qatar

In April 2019, Qatar held elections for the Central Municipal Council (CMC). The elections were the sixth since the establishment of the CMC in 1999, and the first since the June 2017 blockade of Qatar. Following initially high participation, citizen involvement in the CMC elections has steadily declined. Official figures show that the number of citizens who voted declined by 9% compared to the last election in 2015, from 14,670 to only 13,334—or roughly 1 in 13 Qatari adults—in 2019. The continued decline in interest in the CMC elections since 1999 has led to discussion in the media and in Qatari society about the low voter registration rate, and opened wider conversations about the role of the CMC and its ability to address citizen concerns. However, to date, little is known about the views of ordinary Qataris toward the CMC, which is the only elected deliberative body in Qatar and is thus directly linked to public opinion.

To fill this gap, the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University has conducted nationally representative public opinion surveys of Qatari nationals immediately prior to the last two CMC elections in 2015 and 2019, respectively. The resulting data offer the first empirical-based insights into Qatari attitudes toward the CMC, citizen participation in the registration and voting process, and wider political orientations. This report presents the results of these two important studies in four sections. First, it examines political behavior and participation in elections through registering to vote, campaigning, and voting. Second, it analyzes citizen connections with the CMC outside of elections, including contact with CMC members, and knowledge about the functions of the Council as an institution. A third section examines Qatari evaluations of the CMC, the drivers and correlates of these evaluations, and the implications of these evaluations for other deliberative institutions in Qatar such as the Shura Council. The report culminates in a fourth section that offers policy recommendations to inform practitioners and encourage better governance.

Section 1: Popular Engagement in the Electoral Process

Voting Registration

Qatari nationals had the opportunity to register to vote in the 2019 CMC elections in their district of residence from January 13th, with the voter lists being finalized on February 14th.¹ According to the SESRI survey, which was conducted in April 2019, just less than one quarter of eligible respondents, or 22 percent, reported being registered to vote in the elections for the Central Municipal Council, while the remainder did not register or indicated that they were ineligible. (Police and military personnel are not allowed to participate.) It is difficult to know how these percentages compare to actual registration rates for the 2019 elections, because estimates of the number of eligible voters are not available. However, it is clear that many Qatari nationals are not engaged in the process of the CMC elections even at the early stage of voter registration.

More male (25%) than female (19%) respondents reported registering to vote in the 2019 election, showing a slight gender gap in participation in our sample ($p = 0.022$). A moderate gender gap existed in the number of voters in previous elections. Election results provided by the Ministry of Interior (MOI), which organizes the CMC elections, show that fewer females voted than males in both the 2007 and 2011 CMC elections in which the ratios of female to male voters were 95.4 percent and 81.8 percent, respectively.² Notably, the number of male voters increased between 2007 and 2011, while the number of female voters decreased. The survey findings suggest that the gender gap observed in previous elections may exist at the registration stage of participation.

Additionally, of those who reported being registered in the survey, respondents above 30 constituted about 77 percent, while those 30 and under represented only about 23 percent. The relationship between age and registration is statistically significant at a high level of confidence ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that youth

¹ Qatar Ministry of Interior. Election timetable available at: <https://portal.moi.gov.qa/wps/portal/MOIIInternet/departmentcommittees/elections>

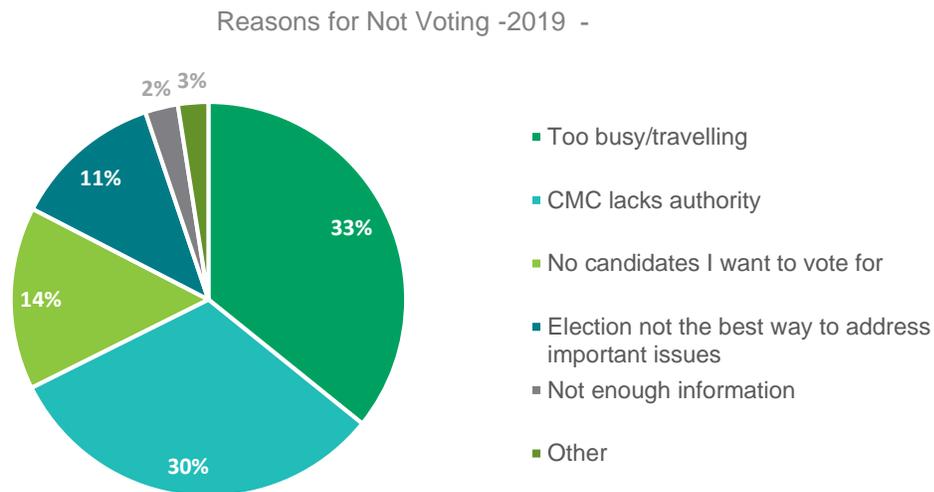
² Figures for the 2015 elections are not available.

engagement may be lacking for these elections. Certainly it is not uncommon even in established electoral systems for older people to be more attuned to voting. However, the involvement of young adults in politics is important because it ensures the continuation of political participation into future generations.

Respondents who said they did not register to vote in 2019 were asked a follow up question about why they did not vote. As shown in Figure 1, lack of time to register and vote was the most frequently cited reason (33 percent), and was selected by almost a third of nonparticipants. The second most cited reason was the belief that the CMC lacks the ability to make substantial changes (30 percent). Not having a candidate that they would like to vote for was mentioned by 14 percent, while only 11 percent expressed the idea that voting and elections are not the best way to address important issues. Only 2 percent of nonparticipants said they lacked knowledge about the registration or voting procedures.

The most common response that citizens did not have time to register and vote suggests that perhaps voter registration periods could be extended to reach more voters. Additionally, concerns about the institutional authority of the CMC imply that the institutional weakness of the Council could lead to voter disenchantment. Finally, the number of ineligible voters in the survey is notable, since it means that a substantial subsection of the population (especially members of the police and military) is underrepresented and may therefore disengage from politics entirely.

Figure 1. Reasons for Not Voting in 2019 CMC Elections



Candidate Selection

Since very little is known about voting behavior in Qatar's CMC elections, respondents in the 2015 survey were asked when they decided who they would vote for. Interestingly, a full 65 percent of respondents reported that they already knew they were going to vote for at the time they registered, while the remainder planned to decide between candidates later (that is, after they registered or during the campaign). According to the Ministry of Interior website, official candidate inscription does not start until voter registers are finalized, meaning that respondents could not have been thinking of official candidates. It seems that many people who participate in the elections are aware of a group of potential candidates who voiced their intention to run for office prior to the formal voter registration period.

Family networks are a logical basis for campaigning within Qatari society. Potential candidates likely voice their intentions to their family members before officially declaring their candidacy. In fact, there is a relationship between when a respondent decided whom to vote for and the number of family members the respondent had running in the election in 2015. Among those who did not report having a family member in the 2015 CMC election, 58 percent said they already knew who they wanted to vote for, while 76 percent of the respondents who had one candidate from their family

or tribe already knew the candidate they were going to vote for when they registered. Those who had more than one candidate from their family also reported early decisions more frequently (67 percent) than those who had no one from their family running, but less frequently than those with only one family member. The findings are consistent with the idea that family connections operate as information shortcuts that helps voters choose among candidates, so that having only one family member candidate in the election actually simplifies the decision-making process for some participants.

The Campaign Process

Campaign Awareness and Media Coverage

Although many Qataris said they did not participate, around 80 percent reported being either “somewhat” or “very aware” of the May 2015 CMC elections. Perhaps expectedly, respondents who were more aware of the elections also reported registering to vote more frequently. About 35 percent of respondents who were very aware of the elections registered to vote, while only 18 percent of those who were somewhat aware did so.

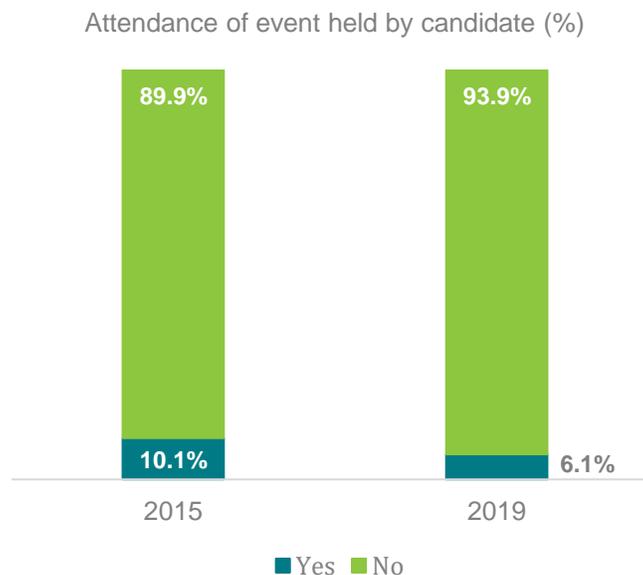
Male respondents said they were very aware of the elections more frequently (55 percent) than female respondents (43 percent). However, more females reported being somewhat aware of the elections (37 percent) than males (25 percent). Combining the “very” and “somewhat aware” categories shows that there is no statistical difference between male (about 80 percent) and female (about 80 percent) awareness. This finding implies that women are generally aware of politics about as often as men, but that they might not be engaged at a similar level or intensity. This is not surprising given the lack of female representation on the Council and the fact that politics in Qatar has traditionally been thought of as a sphere that is more appropriate for men than for women.

In line with previous findings about voter registration, older respondents reported greater awareness of the May 2015 elections as compared to Qatari youth, with about 85 percent of those over 30 years old saying they were either “very” or “somewhat aware” of the elections, whereas only 73 percent of younger citizens did so. Strategies for youth and female engagement should be carefully considered in future elections.

Respondents were also asked to compare media coverage (via outlets such as radio, TV, and newspapers) of the May 2015 election with coverage of previous elections. Almost half of respondents (42 percent) reported that coverage was much greater during the 2015 election cycle than in previous years, while another 18 percent said that coverage was slightly greater. Thus 60 percent of participants indicated that media coverage of the 2015 election was more vigorous than before. Perhaps this was due to the redistricting process, which created new electoral matchups between candidates that would have previously been in separate districts, and placed some voters in new districts.

Whatever the case, respondents indicated that the media gave more attention to the local elections in 2015 than previously. This is interesting because in 2019 members of the Central Municipal Council observed anecdotally that press coverage of CMC activity had waned compared to previous years, with less attention being given to Council activities, meetings, and proposals than in the past. Perhaps the real need is for members of the news media to continue to engage with the CMC after the election period, so they can provide information to the voters on a regular basis rather than concentrating their efforts during the election session.

Figure 2. Attendance at Campaign Events, 2015 vs. 2019



Campaign Discussion and Event Attendance

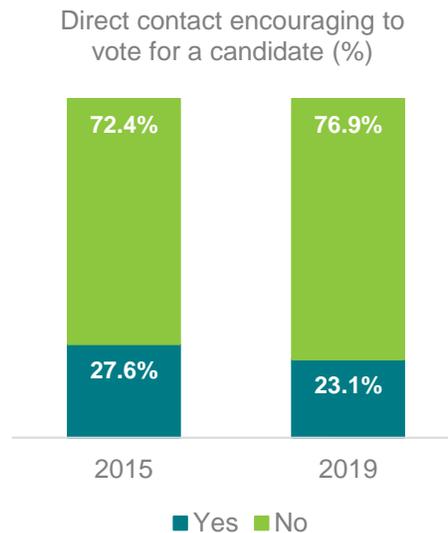
Results of the survey show that discussion about both the 2015 and 2019 elections among Qataris was fairly uncommon. In both years, only around a third of respondents indicates that they had spoken with fellow citizens about the CMC vote “very often” or “sometimes.” However, election discussions were much more common among those who were registered to vote. Just over half (about 54 percent) of respondents who registered to vote also reported discussing the elections either “very often” or “sometimes.” This link between voter registration and discussion of the elections is significant at a high level of statistical confidence ($p < 0.001$).

Similarly, participation in election-related events is quite low. As depicted in Figure 2, only 10 percent of Qataris reported attending a campaign event in 2015, and this declined even further to 6 percent in 2019. However, the proportion increases to 22 percent among those who were registered to vote ($p < 0.001$). This finding confirms that those who engage with the democratic process in its early stages through voter registration, are much more likely to pay attention to the election, talk about the election, and attend election-related events. Those who do not take part in this first stage, for whatever reason, are largely absent from the rest of the political dialogue related to the elections.

Candidate Contact during the Campaign

Respondents in the survey were also asked, “Apart from campaign signs, did you receive any direct communication urging you to vote for a particular candidate (e.g., a phone call, a text message, word of mouth)?” In 2015, less than one-third (28 percent) of respondents reported being contacted directly, and this declined to 23 percent in 2019. Of those who were contacted, 51 percent received direct contact from a candidate, 41 percent from a family member, 42 percent from a colleague, and 22 and 17 percent reported contact from a friend or someone else in 2019. These results emphasize the importance of personal networks during the campaign process.

Figure 3. Contact by CMC Candidate, 2015 vs. 2019



Of those people who reported campaign contact in 2019, more than half (53 percent) said they were contacted by only one of these sources (family members, friends, etc.), while another 24 percent reported contact from two different groups. About 15 percent received contact from three different sources, and being contacted via four or five different groups about the campaign was much less common. Thus the majority of potential voters were not contacted at all during the campaign. Among those who were directly contacted, family and personal connections with the candidate were the most frequent sources of communication, with very few people receiving messages from more than two such sources.

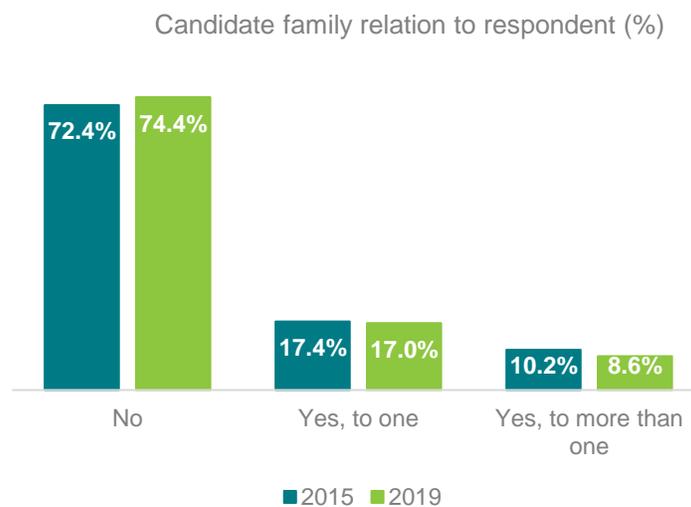
Candidates and Family Relation

Around three-quarters of citizens reported having no family or tribal affiliation to a CMC candidate in his/her district in 2015 and 2019, while the remainder said they had at least one tribal or family member running. This result is shown in Figure 4. Notably, those had at least one family member candidate reported registering to vote at higher rates than those that did not. In both election years, only 19 percent of respondents with no family members running registered to vote. By contrast, in 2019, 26 percent of respondents with one candidate from their family registered, and 30 percent of those with more than one family candidate did so. In 2015, these latter two proportions were

even higher, at 39 percent and 40 percent, respectively. Thus, the presence of candidates from one’s family is strongly related to voter registration, although this influence appears weaker in 2019 as compared to 2015.

Moreover, bivariate regression analysis of campaign awareness shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between having a family member running in the CMC elections and the respondent’s level of awareness in 2015 ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that political awareness is linked to the political engagement of one’s family, creating circularity in the campaign and election process, such that respondents from active families disproportionately receive campaign messages and participate in elections, while individuals from less active families are much less likely to be either aware or engaged.

Figure 4. Respondent Relation to Candidates, 2015 vs. 2019



Voting

Prevalence of Voting among Registered Citizens

In June 2015, SESRI conducted a post-election survey to understand the relationship between voter registration and actual voting. Among citizens who said they were registered to vote in the 2015 CMC elections, 85 percent reported actually voting. The MOI reported that turnout ranged from 51 to 87 percent, depending on the district. Although it is well known in survey research that respondents have a tendency to

overstate their participation with regard to voting in elections, our sample estimate lies within the range of possible voter turnouts according to official figures. The survey indicates that registering to vote is a crucial step in the political process, and one in which the majority of citizens do not engage. Once registered to vote, a large majority of nationals will also vote in the elections.

Reasons for Voting among Registered Citizens

Respondents who reported voting the elections were asked a follow-up about why they decided to vote. The survey shows that 60 percent of voters did so because they consider it their civic duty, and 16 percent reported voting because of the belief that voting and elections is the best way to deal with important issues. Meanwhile only 11 percent said they voted because of their desire to support a specific candidate who was not part of their family, and the same amount said they voted to support a specific candidate who was related to them. Overall, participants expressed stronger support for voting as a diffuse democratic obligation rather than a means to back a specific candidate. However, this seems contradictory to other findings that point to the importance of tribal and family connections for encouraging voter registration.

Reasons for Not Voting among Registered Citizens

Some respondents who were registered to vote did not ultimately vote in the election in May 2015. These nonparticipants most frequently cited not having enough time to do so (35 percent), or lacking a candidate that they were inclined to vote for (24 percent). Another 8 percent reported that they were traveling outside Qatar at the time of the elections, and 33 percent offered personal experiences and explanations that did not fit into any particular category.

Section 2: After the Elections: Knowledge and Contact with the Central Municipal Council

Political Knowledge

Knowledge of Election Results

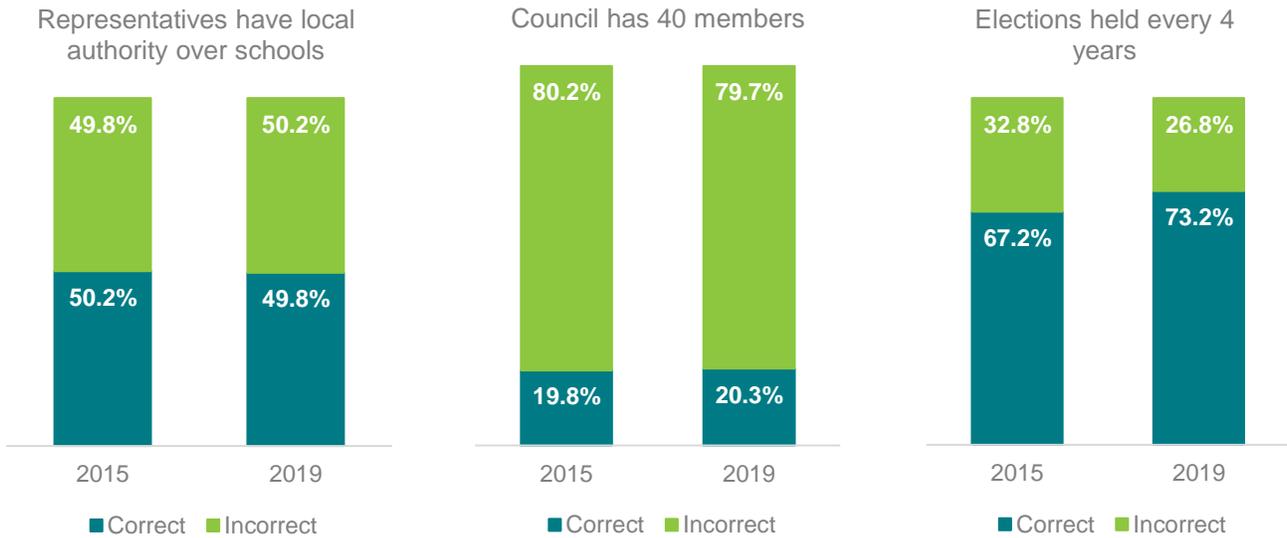
Following an election, the political process shifts as the winning candidates take office and have the opportunity to work for their constituents and address the issues that were highlighted during the campaign. This relationship between constituents and members begins with simple awareness of which candidate was victorious in the elections and now represents the neighborhood for the next four years. In the SESRI follow-up survey conducted in June 2015 after the elections concluded and the results were announced, over half of all citizens (53 percent) reported being unaware of which candidate had won in their district several weeks after the elections.

Additionally, around 20 percent of the respondents who voted said they had not heard who had won in their district, even though the official Qatar News Agency had announced the winners both online and in newspapers shortly after the election, and voters could also have learned about the winner through word of mouth. This finding is part of a more general trend of post-electoral disengagement that begins with some voters lacking basic awareness of the identity of their CMC member.

Public Knowledge about the CMC as an Institution

Both the 2015 and 2019 waves of the SESRI CMC Elections Survey asked respondents to answer a set of three true or false questions designed to test knowledge about the CMC as an institution. The first statement, “The CMC elections are held every four years,” where the correct answer is “true,” received the most correct responses in both pre-and post-election waves of the survey. The percentage of respondents who offered the correct answer increased slightly from 67 percent in 2015 to 73 percent in 2019. The second statement, “The CMC has authority

Figure 5. Public Knowledge about the CMC, 2015 vs. 2019



over local schools,” is false, and just over half of respondents were able to identify it as such. In both 2015 and 2019, 50 percent of citizens were able to give the correct answer, demonstrating no change in knowledge between the surveys. The third and final statement, “The CMC is composed of 40 members,” which is also false as the CMC has 29 members, received the least amount of correct responses. Once again, the proportion of responses able to provide the correct answer did not change in the four years between 2015 and 2019, with only 20 percent of citizens providing the correct answer. These results are shown in Figure 5.

Finally, the percentage of respondents who correctly answered all three questions correctly is modest at best, amounting to 13 percent in 2015 and 11 percent in 2019. More respondents were able to answer at least two questions correctly, at 34 percent in 2015 and 37 percent in 2019. About another third of respondents gave only one correct answer (34 percent and 37 percent for the 2015 and 2019 surveys, respectively), and the remaining respondents (20 percent and 15 percent, respectively) gave no correct answers. Overall, the number of questions a respondent answered accurately increased slightly between 2015 and 2019, from an average of 1.3 questions to 1.4 in 2019, indicating that institutional knowledge may have increased slightly but, if so, is improving quite slowly.

Finally, overall levels of knowledge about the CMC as an institution are lower among females than among males. This is true in both the 2015 and 2019 surveys. In 2019, for example, only 13 percent of males failed to answer any of the three questions correct, compared to 18 of females. Similarly, 52 percent of males could answer at least 2 questions correctly, compared to only 44 of females. This gender-based discrepancy in knowledge of the CMC is significant at a high degree of statistical confidence ($p = 0.009$), and is consistent with results elsewhere in this report that indicate weaker engagement with the CMC—both before and after elections—among female Qataris as compared to male citizens.

Contact with Council Member

In 2015 and again in 2019, survey respondents were asked if, aside from during the elections, they had ever interacted with their CMC member. As illustrated in Figure 6, only 11 percent reported having had a personal interaction with their representative outside of election season in 2015, with this proportion increasing only slightly to 14 percent in 2019. In general, this constitutes a very low level of member-constituent interaction.

Those respondents who did contact their Council member were asked two follow-up questions: first, whether they had ever appealed to him or her for help regarding a problem or issue; and, second, the degree to which the member had been able to resolve the issue. In all, the proportion of Qataris who said they had appealed to their CMC member for help with an issue decreased slightly between 2015 and 2019, from 40 percent to 37 percent, respectively, of those who reported non-election contact. Finally, in 2015, 42 percent reported that the issue was fully resolved, and another 31 percent said it was partially resolved. The remaining respondents said

that the issue was either not entirely (7 percent) or not at all resolved (20 percent). These percentages, presented in Figure 7, did not change significantly in 2019.

Figure 6. Interaction with CMC Member, 2015 vs. 2019

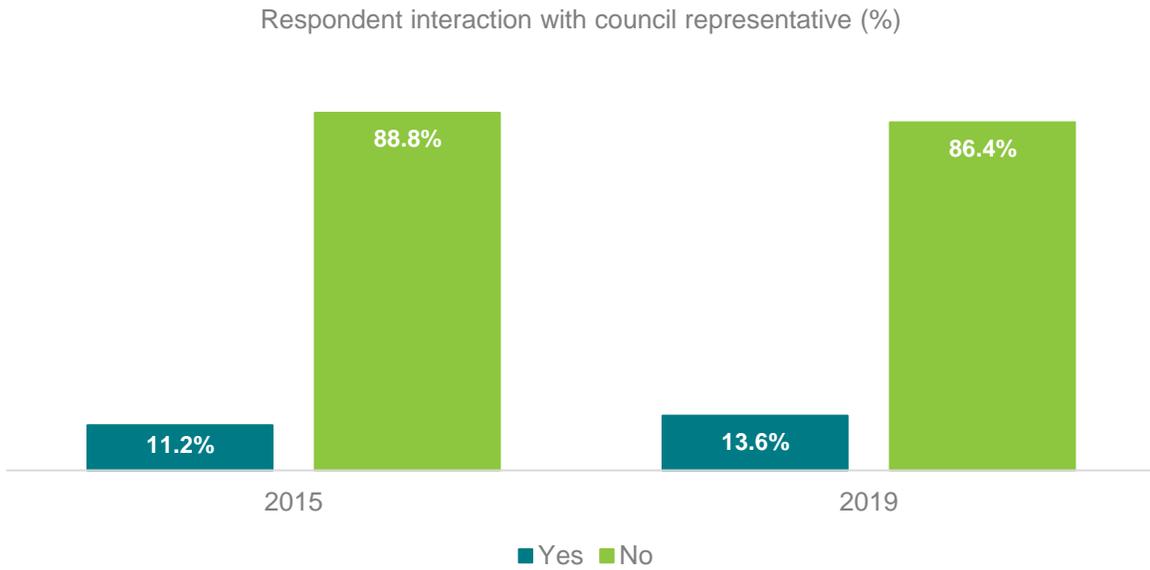
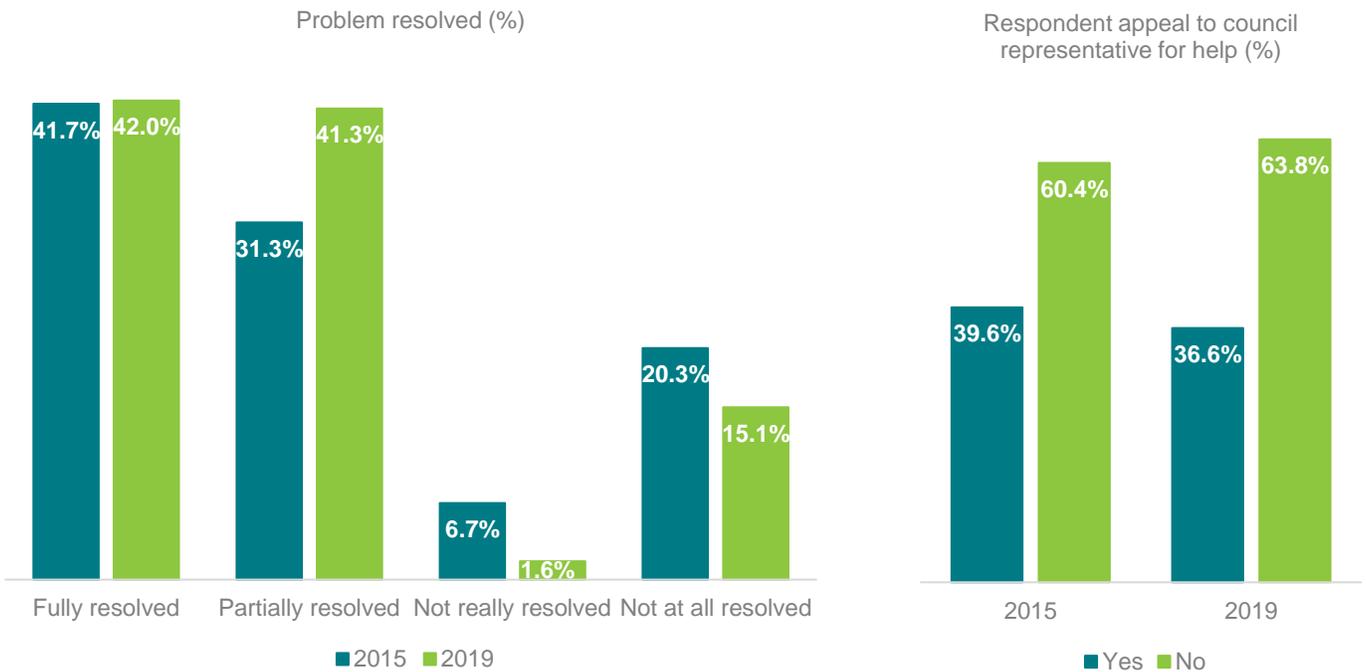


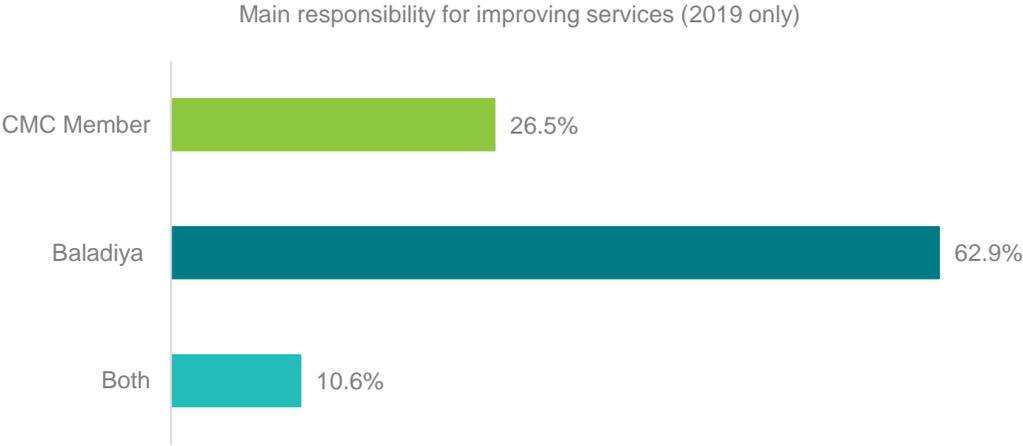
Figure 7. Appeal to CMC Member for Assistance with an Issue/Problem, 2015 vs. 2019



These results show that most—almost three-quarters—of the problems that are brought to the CMC are at least partially resolved from the citizen’s perspective. This demonstrates that the CMC is able to use its limited administrative powers to provide some services and assistance to constituents. However, both the restrictions on CMC authority and the low rates of interaction between Council members and constituents may prevent important issues from being brought to the attention of the Council and/or being adequately addressed.

A separate consideration is that many Qataris hold CMC members responsible for the provision of services that in reality are not within the Council’s authority to provide. Indeed, as shown in Figure 8, more than a quarter of Qatari citizens in the 2019 survey said that their CMC member bears the main responsibility for the provision of public services in their district, whereas in fact this is the legal responsibility of the Ministry of Municipality and Environment. This mismatch between citizen expectations and CMC capabilities may contribute to lower satisfaction with the Council and ultimately reduced electoral interest and participation.

Figure 8. CMC as Primary Service Provider (2019)



Interacting with a member of the CMC may show that the respondent is attentive to political life in general, leading to an increased likelihood of participation in future electoral events. In fact, almost one-third of respondents (29 percent) who had previous interaction with the CMC outside of the election cycle registered to vote in 2019, while

only 9 percent of respondent who had not interacted did so. This relationship, which also exists in the 2015 survey, is statistically significant with a high degree of confidence ($p < 0.001$). Thus, the subset of politically active Qataris can be identified by both electoral participation and continued awareness and interaction with the CMC outside of the election season that occurs only once every four years.

Section 3: Popular Perceptions of the Central Municipal Council

Institutional Authority

Citizens were asked questions related to their general perceptions of the CMC as an institution. When queried regarding the authority of the CMC (“How much influence would you say the CMC has over important local issues that concern you?”), respondents in both survey waves answered similarly. Responses were recorded on a 0 to 10 scale, with 0 denoting “no influence/authority” and 10 meaning “total influence/authority.” As shown in Figure 9, the average response saw a slight increase between 2015 and 2019, from 4.5 to 5.0—a relative change of 10 percent. This limited increase over time is perhaps to be expected, as the institutional powers of the CMC themselves did not change. In both waves, the majority of respondents expressed beliefs that the CMC has limited authority, which is consistent with the current state of the institution.

Respondents were further asked to rate their satisfaction with the CMC’s performance, separate from their opinion about their individual member. Responses were collected on the same scale as the authority question (0-10). Zero and five are again the more frequently selected

Figure 9. Evaluation of CMC Authority, 2015 vs. 2019

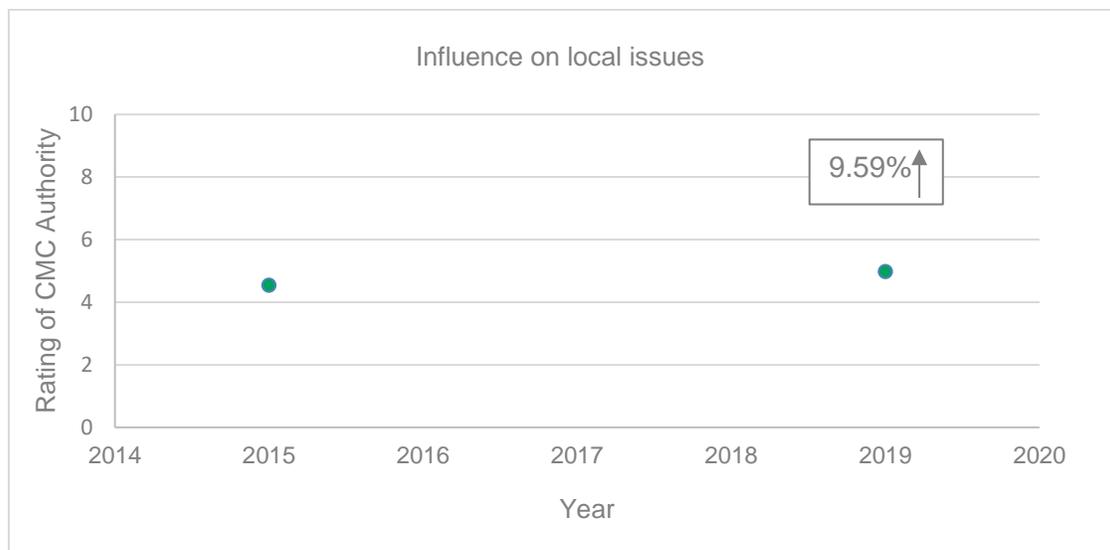
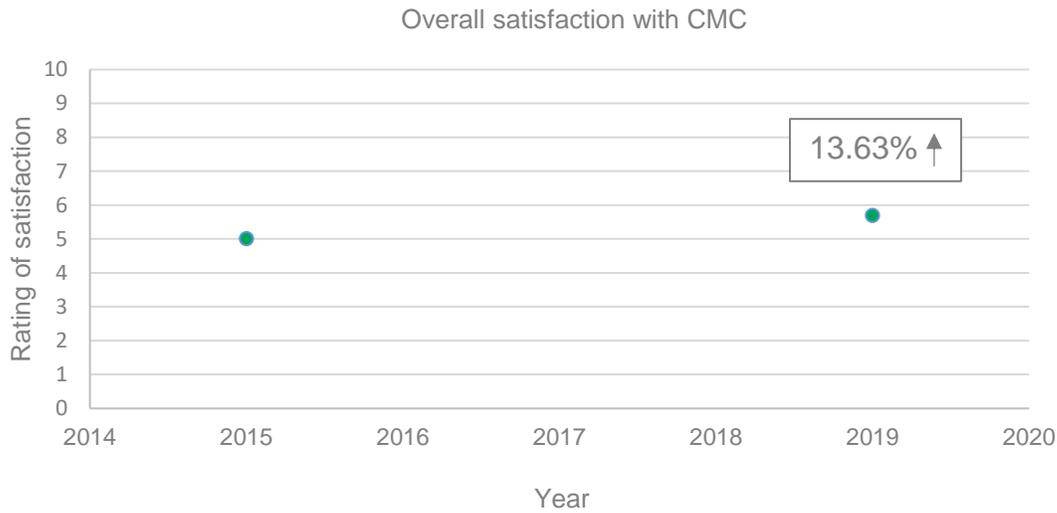


Figure 10. Overall Satisfaction with CMC, 2015 vs 2019



options, but the average responses are slightly higher than for the authority questions (5.0 and 5.7 in 2015 and 2019, respectively). Satisfaction saw a similar increase from 2015 to 2019 as seen already in the case of perceived authority, with satisfaction rising by 14 percent in relative terms between the two elections. What is more, satisfaction is strongly and significantly correlated with opinions about authority: Qataris who believe that the CMC has little authority are likely to be dissatisfied with its overall performance ($r \approx 0.70$). However, it seems that some citizens express satisfaction with the CMC despite being aware of its limited authority.

The Link between CMC Knowledge and Satisfaction

There is a significant and negative relationship between satisfaction with the performance of the CMC and knowledge about the institution. In both the 2015 and 2019 surveys, Qataris who have more knowledge about the CMC—defined as giving correct answers to the three questions discussed previously—also tend to be less satisfied with its performance. Familiarity with the limitations of the CMC’s authority could lead to dissatisfaction with what it has accomplished so far in light of what it could ideally have accomplished. The difference between expectations and output manifests as dissatisfaction. In this case, the source of the dissatisfaction seems to be the limited institutional authority of the CMC, which cannot be rectified simply by electing more adept

Council members. Rather, legal and institutional changes are needed to convince citizens that the CMC is a body worthy of their investments with respect to time and participation.

The Central Municipal Council and Political Efficacy

The 2015 survey asked respondents to assess their level of political efficacy—that is, how much they feel that they are able to influence state decisions that affect them. A large majority (67 percent) agreed either strongly or somewhat with the statement “Ordinary citizens have the ability to influence the policies and activities of the state.” Furthermore, 88 percent agreed that “Qatar cares about what people like me think.” Also, when asked if they would like a greater say in what happens in their neighborhood, 40 percent of respondents preferred having more say rather than leaving affairs up to the concerned authorities (60 percent). Thus, citizens are generally confident that their opinion matters to the state, and some desire a more active role in local decision-making. In fact, the CMC could act as a channel through which Qataris both express their opinions and play an active role in neighborhood decision-making, but the previous analysis has shown that it has not lived up to expectations in this regard. Changes to the electoral framework for selecting CMC members, and to the administrative competencies of the Council, are likely necessary to help Qatar’s only elected deliberative body reach its potential.

Previous results have shown that Qataris who feel that the state cares about what they think are more likely to have confidence in the CMC as an institution. In fact, expressions of efficacy—feeling that one’s opinion matters—are positively, and significantly, related to belief in the CMC’s authority. In other words, those citizens who perceive that the CMC has little authority to make changes regarding important issues also express less confidence that their opinion matters to the government or that they can influence state decision-making.

Views toward the CMC and Shura Council Elections

Finally, given their focus on elections, the SESRI surveys also measured public interest in possible elections for Qatar’s national-level Advisory, or Shura, Council. Respondents in both the 2015 and 2019 were asked to rate their level of interest in

participating in Shura Council elections if they were to occur. Several findings are worth examining in this regard.

First, comparison of pre-election and post-election data collected in 2015 indicated a decrease in interest in the Shura Council in the wake of the 2015 CMC elections. Before the 2015 CMC election, 41 percent of Qataris reported being very interested and 14 percent said they were not interested at all in elections for the Shura Council. After the elections, 32 percent were very interested and 23 percent were not interested at all. This would not seem to support the idea that popular interest in elections for a national body receives a boost from local elections. If one of the purposes of the CMC is to prepare citizens for participation in future elections, it seems to fall short of its goal. However, there are more nuances to this story to examine.

There is a positive and significant relationship between interest in potential Shura Council elections in Qatar and satisfaction with the Central Municipal Council. In general, Qataris who are satisfied with the municipal council are also more interested in participating in possible Shura Council elections. Thus, strengthening the CMC's credibility as an institution could help support interest in other types of elections, such as for the Shura Council.

Additionally, there is a positive relationship between registering to vote in CMC elections and interest in potential Shura Council elections. Among Qataris who registered in 2019, for instance, 63 percent reported being very interested and another 28 percent said they were somewhat interested in participating in possible Shura Council elections (totaling 90 percent). On the other hand, only 40 percent of those who did not register to vote in 2015 reported being interested in the Shura Council elections, and 36 percent said they were somewhat interested (totaling 76 percent).

As expected, participation in one type of elections (local) is related to interest in participating in another type of election (national). Thus, the issue is not that local council elections in Qatar lack the ability to prepare citizens for additional forms of political participation and representative, but rather that the majority of the population does not engage with local elections and does not reap any benefit thereby. Among those who participate in CMC elections and who are satisfied with the work of the Council, support for Shura Council elections is high. This supports the conclusion that

those citizens who are engaged in politics desire more avenues for their views and preferences to be heard, while those who do not remain indifferent.

Section 4: Policy Recommendations

Increasing Participation

Voter registration and electoral participation tend to be affairs for relatively few Qataris and their disproportionately politically active families. Voter registration drives and efforts to increase participation should target families that are not yet active in local politics. This will help nationals who have limited political connections as well as encourage all Qataris to have a voice in decision-making. Similar efforts should be targeted at young adults who are becoming eligible to vote for the first time and have little experience or interest in political matters themselves, regardless of their families' level of engagement. Creative advocacy for engagement could use social media outlets both to communicate about the election procedures and update residents about the work of the CMC outside of election time.

Further, registering to vote is a process that happens once every four years. However, SESRI's survey results indicate that public attention to the Council lags between elections. Elements that promote continuous dialogue about local affairs could help boost participation during elections. For example, registration rolls could be updated continuously such that citizens can notify the concerned authorities immediately following any change in their voting status, such as moving residences, becoming eligible to participate for the first time, or joining the military or police (or otherwise becoming ineligible). Thus citizens can register their voter information in the appropriate district promptly rather than having to wait several years, in some cases, to do so. Also, if citizens have the option of updating their voting status and details in an ongoing manner, then if they are traveling, sick, or otherwise occupied during the registration drives, they will still be able to participate in an election.

Increasing Voter Turnout

Fortunately, voter turnout among Qataris registered for CMC elections is already quite high. Strategies for improvement should take an approach similar to that recommended for voter registration. Additionally, strengthening the reputation of the

Council for effective monitoring and problem-solving may bolster its credibility and help to convince citizens that it is worth their time and effort to participate.

Improving Representation and Accountability

The findings presented here have demonstrated that popular perceptions of the CMC's institutional authority are related to voter registration, and satisfaction with the CMC is linked to voter turnout. Accordingly, these attitudes are important predictors of engagement, and attention should be given to their improvement. As previously mentioned, these two variables are highly correlated, such that satisfaction with the Council is closely tied to evaluations of its authority. Moreover, there is a negative relationship between satisfaction with the Council and knowledge about it as an institution, indicating that more knowledgeable citizens are also more dissatisfied.

Ideally, knowledge about the Council should encourage positive views. However, constituents may be critical of the CMC when they view it as irrelevant to their lives or lacking in authority to address their concerns. The precise authorities and responsibilities of the Council should be clarified so that voters can communicate with the correct government entity regarding their concerns and issues, and thereafter hold it accountable for the quality of service provision. Understanding the role of the CMC will also help citizens to manage their expectations about what it can accomplish, and perhaps lead to less disappointment. Common misunderstanding about the relative responsibilities of the CMC and Ministry of Municipality and Environment in providing citizens with local services is a particular problem that should be addressed.

Raising Visibility of CMC Activities and Successes

The media plays a crucial role in providing Qataris with information about the Council. Reporting positive information about the successes of the CMC could serve to counteract negative perceptions about its performance, authority, and relevance, and thereby increase citizen satisfaction. Furthermore, the media can do more than just highlight the successes of the Council; they can also improve accountability through accurately reporting the efforts of the CMC, including both its proposals and its successes. Potential voters need to see tangible results, and the media can help them

identify specific public service projects and campaigns that came about as a result of the work of the Council. In addition to media coverage, physical markers of attribution could be placed in public spaces such as parks to remind voters of the joint work of the CMC and relevant governmental institutions.

Individual Council members can also work to make people in their district more aware of their activities through social media. Posting pictures of works projects both in progress and at their completion could be helpful in this regard. Some members of the Council publish brochures during the election season that highlight their accomplishments. Dissemination of such information is useful, and should be more broadly practiced. The CMC as an institution could consider publishing an annual review of the reforms and projects that they have promoted in a format that is easy for constituents to read and understand. Distribution of this annual review should be broad enough to reach all citizens rather than only the groups that typically engage in political activities.

Enhancing Linkages between CMC Members and Districts

Local elected institutions are at their best when they both communicate transparently and listen and respond to the concerns of constituents. Citizens and Council members must engage in inclusive and sustained political dialogues about the important issues of their community throughout the four-year term and not just during elections. Inclusive communication means that a Council member can be approached by nationals of every gender, family, and economic status, who should be heard and treated fairly. Members can also consider using a variety of communication channels to reach out to their constituents such as home visits, telephone calls, text messages, and social media interactions, which may be preferred by certain social groups, such as women or young adults.

Finally, the CMC could also consider holding regular community meetings to address issues where differences of opinion might arise. These meetings would invite citizens to express their opinions and concerns to the Council and representatives from other appropriate civic and corporate stakeholders. Creating a public space for

discussion may lead to more satisfaction with the subsequent efforts of the Council, since citizens will have had the opportunity to directly voice their opinions and concerns.

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