Political Segmentation and Diversification in the Rentier Arab Gulf

Paper to be presented at the Fourth Gulf Research Meeting (GRM), Cambridge,
1 - 5 July 2013, organized by the Gulf Research Center Cambridge (GRCC)
at the University of Cambridge.

Workshop No. 5

The Rentier State at 25: Dismissed, Revised, Upheld?

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ABSTRACT

A curious fact about the proposition that economic satisfaction breeds political indifference in resource-dependent states—about this "rentier state" thesis—is that for a conceptual framework first proposed some three decades ago and popular ever since, it has yet to be put to the test empirically. Certainly, some of its corollaries have invited quantitative research, most notably its implication that, at the country level, the extent of a country's reliance upon resource rents should tend to be inversely-related to its democraticness, since more rents means more citizens content to relinquish their political prerogative in exchange for material benefits. Other studies proceed one step further to associate democracy with rates of taxation and government-sector employment.

Yet, for all their effort, these analyses cannot bring us closer to demonstrating the individual-level link between material contentment and political apathy that is the explicit theoretical mechanism underlying the rentier framework, precisely because such analyses do not operate on the individual level. That the regimes of the Arab Gulf are both autocratic and resource-dependent does nothing to show that, in early 2013 in the United Arab Emirates, or in Kuwait, individual citizens who are satisfied with their economic situation also tend to be satisfied with their country's political situation—or, at the least, uninterested in changing it. Equally, that Saudi Arabia and Qatar maintain high government employment rates and do not impose income taxes cannot directly connect the individual-level economic outcomes of these policies to citizens' political orientations. In short, extant empirical evaluation of the rentier hypothesis has been limited to tests of the very observations that gave rise to the theory in the first place, while its own proposed causal logic remains unexamined.

Using original and previously-unavailable survey data from Bahrain and Qatar, this paper aims to interrogate the underlying causal mechanisms of rentier state theory by exploring the determinants of political opinion and behavior among ordinary Gulf citizens. In short, it seeks to discover whether individuals' normative political attitudes toward their

governments and the political actions they take for or against them are influenced foremost by material well-being or, alternatively, by non-economic factors, including sectarian affiliation, religious orientations, and intangible sources of political satisfaction and legitimacy in line with states' efforts at political diversification. Qatar and Bahrain representing as they do the most and least quintessential rentier economies of the Gulf, respectively, such a cross-country analysis will offer results that are not only internally valid but generalizable to the larger category of the rentier state.

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A curious fact about the proposition that economic satisfaction breeds political indifference in resource-dependent states—about this "rentier state" thesis—is that for a conceptual framework first proposed some three decades ago and popular ever since, it has yet to be put to the test empirically. Certainly, some of its corollaries have invited quantitative research, most notably its implication that, at the country level, the extent of a country's reliance upon resource rents should tend to be inversely-related to its democraticness, since more rents means more citizens content to relinquish their political prerogative in exchange for material benefits. Other studies proceed one step further to associate democracy with rates of taxation and government-sector employment.

Yet, for all their effort, these analyses cannot bring us closer to demonstrating the individual-level link between material contentment and political apathy that is the explicit theoretical mechanism underlying the rentier framework, precisely because such analyses do not operate on the individual level. That the regimes of the Arab Gulf are both autocratic and resource-dependent does nothing to show that, in early 2013 in the United Arab Emirates, or in Kuwait, individual citizens who are satisfied with their economic situation also tend to be satisfied with their country's political situation—or, at the least, uninterested in changing it. Equally, that Saudi Arabia and Qatar maintain high government employment rates and do not impose income taxes cannot directly connect the individual-level economic outcomes of these policies to citizens' political orientations. In short, extant empirical evaluation of the rentier hypothesis has been limited to tests of the very observations that gave rise to the theory in the first place, while its own proposed causal logic remains unexamined.

For, at its core, the rentier state thesis is less a story about the political machinations of greedy governments than it is about human nature and its impact on individual political behavior under particular conditions. Indeed, the most provocative claim of rentier theory is exactly this, that it purports to understand the very political motivations of individual citizens such as those of the Arab Gulf: *why* it is that people become involved in, or alternatively shrink from, politics; *what* it is that leads them to support or oppose a government. Economics, it suggests, is king; competing factors, it implies by omission, take a back seat. From here is it plain that any proper assessment of the rentier framework must investigate what the latter professes already to know: the individual-level determinants of political orientation in highly-clientelistic, rent-based societies. And as it was the Gulf region itself that served as archetype for rentier theory, it is perhaps only fitting that its first real test should be conducted there.

The contemporary record of Gulf politics would seem to indicate that some citizens and governments long ago reneged on their wealth-for-acquiescence agreements. In fact, one need not even reference the empirical failures of the rentier state model to understand why such an open-ended bargain never existed at all. In the first place, as opposition activists across the region today attest, not all citizens will be persuaded to forfeit their political prerogative by the promise of material wealth—or, for that matter, by the promise of violence. Certainly, one can imagine myriad sources of political motivation independent of economic concerns: perceptions of societal discrimination and inequality; sectarian religious orientations; adherence to revolutionary ideologies such as Arab nationalism or, more commonly today, transnational Shiʻism, Salafism, or the Muslim Brotherhood; a desire for representative and democratic governance as a *bonum per se*; and so on.

Moreover, and more fundamentally, even if the state *could* buy the unanimous support of citizens, it need not even attempt to do so, for it requires only a minimum coalition of supporters with the physical (military) preponderance sufficient to protect it from potential challengers. Indeed, why waste limited resources chasing citizens opposed to the status quo when they might be used to reward those who already have a material stake in its preservation? Rather than deploy limited resources inefficiently upon the whole of society, therefore, rulers of distributive states such as those of the Gulf generally seek to maximize their own share by rewarding disproportionately a finite category of citizens whose support is sufficient to keep them in power, while the remaining population is comparatively excluded from the private rentier benefits of citizenship. This incentive for targeted distribution is especially great in countries where a large population (e.g., Saudi Arabia) and/or low per capita resource revenues (Bahrain) would limit the political utility of a more egalitarian allocation. Yet, even states unconstrained by such factors (Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates) have sought to segment their political markets, erecting tiers of citizenship that confer discrete levels of benefits, and that engender in turn varying levels of political satisfaction.

Finally, beyond the diverse non-material concerns of citizens and state incentives for unequal distribution, yet another process working to undermine the individual-level link between economic and political satisfaction in the rentier Arab Gulf is the ongoing effort by Gulf governments to diversify their sources of political legitimacy. Whereas much analytic focus continues to be directed at the problem of *economic* diversification away from reliance upon resource rents and sprawling public sectors, far less examined has been the parallel effort by Gulf rulers—one they have arguably approached with much more seriousness than the former question—to undertake *political* diversification away from purely economic bases of legitimacy. Such a strategy has assumed various forms across the region, but commonalities include a focus on "national" culture and heritage nurtured and protected by the ruler; opportunities for higher education and personal self-fulfillment often supplied by Western institutions; appeals to religious or tribal legitimacy; the pursuit of international prominence and prestige; and the provision of (and the highlighting of the provision of) other intangible benefits such as political *stability* over against political accountability.

This latter argument has acquired particular force in the wake of the Arab uprisings begun in 2010, not, paradoxically, because the Gulf states largely escaped the upheaval witnessed elsewhere, but precisely because many, or indeed most, did not. Ruling families in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and most recently the United Arab Emirates have pointed to the chaos abroad to explain and justify the need for measured reform at home, and to mobilize popular support against those who would dare to upset the comfortable if perhaps non-democratic political status quo. The Shi‘a of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the mainly Sunni tribal opposition in Kuwait, and members of the Muslim Brotherhood in the UAE—

such groups represent at once political scourge and political boon: the potential or actual basis of organized opposition, but also a bogeyman with which to rally the rest of society or, at the least, frighten it into inaction. Especially in the post-2010 period, then, those Gulf states in which political boundaries follow religious or other ascriptive group lines have hit on a powerful if perilous new source of non-economic legitimacy: not simply the provision of stability in a region gripped by chaos, but the veritable protection of citizens—loyal citizens—from enemies abroad and their subversive domestic agents. Heightening tension between the Sunni Arab monarchies and Shiʻa-led regimes in Iran, Iraq, and Syria has only reinforced this narrative.

Using original and previously-unavailable survey data from Bahrain and Qatar, this paper aims to interrogate the underlying causal mechanisms of rentier state theory by exploring the determinants of political opinion and behavior among ordinary Gulf citizens. In short, it seeks to discover whether individuals' normative political attitudes toward their governments and the political actions they take for or against them are influenced foremost by material well-being or, alternatively, by non-economic factors, including sectarian affiliation, religious orientations, and intangible sources of political satisfaction and legitimacy in line with states' efforts at political diversification. Qatar and Bahrain representing as they do the most and least quintessential rentier economies of the Gulf, respectively, such a cross-country analysis will offer results that are not only internally valid but generalizable to the larger category of the rentier state.

Testing the Rentier State

Extant empirical evaluations of the rentier framework suffer from basic theoretical and methodological limitations such that one might say the theory has yet to be tested at all. For, rather than evaluate the central rentier hypothesis, the proposition that material satisfaction breeds popular political apathy and thus political stability in a particular class of state, contemporary scholars instead have used the macro-level causal mechanisms identified in the foundational rentier literature—resource revenues, government expenditures, and taxation rates—to explain an altogether different phenomenon. Beblawi and Luciani propose cogently that the rentier hypothesis "helps explain why the government of an oil-rich country … can enjoy a degree of stability which is not explicable in terms of its domestic economic or political performance."[1] Yet in place of state *stability*, the political outcome of principal interest to the early framers, contemporary theorists have inserted their own modern preoccupation with *democracy*.[2]

Indeed, beginning with Ross's landmark 2001 article *Does Oil Hinder Democracy?*, which provoked at least a dozen follow-up studies,[3] quantitative tests of the link between resource rents and democracy have dominated the rentier literature. What is more, almost all of these works has utilized exactly the same dependent variable: the ubiquitous Polity IV –10 to 10 scale of regime type.[4] The difficulty with this procedure is that, since there is understandably little within- or between-country variation in this measure among the rentier states—Saudi Arabia and Qatar are rated –10 for each year of their existence; the UAE is a perennial –8; modern Oman ranges between –10 and –8; and Bahrain and Kuwait from –10 to –7[5]—and because the fuel rents of the six Gulf states exceed the rest of the world by two orders of magnitude—according to Ross's own replication data for his 2008 article on oil and gender equality,[6] the mean per-capita fuel rents among GCC states is $11,339, compared to $270 for the other 163 countries in the sample—for these two reasons most of the variation in "democracy" attributed to "oil" should in truth be attributed to the Gulf only. In which case we find ourselves in the same position in which we began, namely faced with the question of how to understand the unique political economy of a finite category of states.

A simple plot of these two variables for the full sample of 170 countries clearly reveals the methodological issue underlying attempts to associate resource rents with democracy in the customary manner. Depicted in *Figure 1* is the relationship between a nation's 2007 Polity IV score and Ross's 2008 fuel rents per capita measure[7] using data obtained from the latter author for purposes of statistical replication. The first thing one notices is that only a small proportion of the countries are identifiable due to the large cluster of observations hovering at the far end of the *x*-axis. Of those that do stand out, moreover, six are the GCC states, highlighted in red for ease of identification; the two other influential cases are Brunei ("BRN") and Libya ("LBY"). One sees therefore how, despite standardization of the rents per capita measure, the extreme between-country variation in rent-generation noted above—that is to say, the vast difference separating rentier and non-rentier economies—obscures the true system-level relationship between resource rents and democracy. Indeed, it is evident that the bivariate least-squares regression line describing this relationship, which purports to show an immensely significant negative association between a country's per capita rents and polity score, is almost entirely dictated by the small number of outlying observations comprised of the rentier economies of the Arab Gulf along with Libya and Brunei.

[Figure 1 approximately here.]

When we omit these eight outliers we find that the picture, though more in focus, is still far from clear. *Figure 2* illustrates the results of this exclusion. Although the bivariate least-squares regression line describing the estimated relationship between fuel rents and regime type remains apparently negative, its coefficient (slope) is no longer statistically significant (different from zero). In fact, as indicated by the dotted upper and lower bands of the 95% confidence interval, one is unable to rule out the possibility even that the true relationship is positive (upward-sloping) rather than negative. It might therefore be said that the most common application of the rentier state framework in political science today, as an explanation for the lack of democracy in resource-rich nations, not only errs in its choice of dependent variable but, in doing so, paradoxically draws one back to the original task of rentier theorists: understanding the political ramifications of a mode of economy unique to a finite group of nations. At bottom, *Figures 1* and *2* demonstrate how the category "rentier" exists as a class of state of which one either is or is not a member, as per Luciani's dichotomy of allocative (rentier) versus productive (non-rentier) states.[8] The mystery, accordingly, is not whether an additional dollar of oil profits begets some marginal shift towards authoritarianism in Denmark or New Zealand, but whether it indeed is true that in a handful of rentier states, six of which are the Arab Gulf monarchies, politics operates qualitatively differently than it does elsewhere.

[Figure 2 approximately here.]

The foregoing discussion also suggests the more fundamental, theoretical problem affecting extant attempts to demonstrate the empirical validity of the rentier state model.

Simply stated, previous studies have failed to test the actual individual-level causal processes that the theory posits. It is, after all, explicit in claiming that the reason countries with sizable external rents tend to be stable (and authoritarian) is because ordinary citizens, when satisfied economically, are content to concede the realm of politics to their benefactors. Rather than evaluate this specific causal hypothesis, however, investigators have sought to link country-level economic variables such as resource rents, taxation rates, and government spending to country-level political outcomes like regime type or democratization. Yet such studies can, at best, only confirm the existence of these macro associations; absent a new theory that ties the latter together directly without recourse to the individual level of analysis, they bring one no closer to knowing whether the rentier model is correct in its account of what underlies these links. For the theory's boldest statement is not what it says about rent-dependent states themselves but what it assumes about their citizens: that it understands the drivers of popular interest and participation in politics; what it is that inclines ordinary citizens to seek an active role in political life or, alternatively, to shrink from it. These are no small claims.

Of course, the form of previous empirical testing was determined in no small part by the nature of available data. And such data, owing to numerous practical hurdles, have not been informed by mass surveys of the political attitudes of ordinary Arabs—to say nothing of those of Gulf Arabs—until very recently, and even then on a limited and sporadic basis. Thus, the failure of prior studies to test the individual-level causal story underlying the rentier framework is not simply a product of theoretical or methodological oversight. With the completion in 2008 of the first wave of the Arab Democracy Barometer (AB) survey project, however, as well as subsequent mass surveys administered in Bahrain and Qatar, further neglect of this inquiry now that such an opportunity presents itself would represent continuation down a path that is incapable, ultimately, of answering the most elemental questions to which we seek answers: What causes individuals to incline toward, or abstain from, politics in the rentier states?—indeed, in the most emblematic and, in practical political terms, the most important of all rentier states: those of the Arab Gulf? Is the prevailing explanation correct in identifying material well-being as the dominant factor determining such an outcome? If so, is this relationship between personal economy and personal politicality a universal one, or does it obtain only under certain conditions? in certain countries? or for certain individuals?

Thus one might dare to say that the theoretical architecture of the rentier state first described in the 1970s and repeated until today—the wealth-for-silence bargain extended to citizens of rent-based regimes—in fact has never actually been evaluated empirically. For all the studies that have since purported to do so, insofar as these have examined associations between country-level phenomena rather than analyze the link between material well-being and political involvement among individuals, like the science of gravity these have tested only the observable outward effects of rentier state theory rather than its internal causal processes. And, to be sure, the difference is not inconsequential. Not all states have been equally successful at converting external rents into domestic stability, there being important cross-country variation within the Arab Gulf that one cannot explain without a clearer understanding of how interceding variables—at both the country- and individual-level—serve to condition the relationship between politics and economics in rent-reliant states.

In sum, our current comprehension of politics in the rentier states, of which the six Arab Gulf nations represent the archetypal examples, suffers from two critical flaws that the present study aims to remedy. First, the rentier framework posits an unconditional (that is, a generally-applicable) relationship between external rents, political buyoff, and ultimately regime stability that is supported neither quantitatively nor by causal observation of domestic political opposition across the Gulf states, which in its relative strength and composition varies of course dramatically. While it is therefore correct in predicting the superior political performance of rent-based countries over against their non-rentier counterparts in absolute terms, the framework is unable to account for relative differences among the rentier states themselves, which for one interested in knowing how politics operates in the region is precisely the most important bit. Second, notwithstanding the vigorous research agenda that has surrounded the rentier state, in fact we still know quite little about the causal processes that underlie this category, particularly if one's question does not concern these regimes' relative lack of democracy but rather their unforeseen longevity and the persistence of their ostensibly obsolete modes of rulership and citizenship, the latter inquiries being of foremost interest to early rentier theorists. And such limitations will remain until the fundamental suppositions of the rentier framework are investigated as originally formulated rather than mere proxies.

Rethinking the Rentier State

The very nature of the rentier state, in which the creation of and control over vast immobile wealth is limited to a small minority of society, suggests an inherent instability: why do the citizens or residents of these states not simply confiscate the rent-generating resource from its physical owners? The latter, after all, are hopelessly outnumbered. Since the earliest statements of the rentier state framework, theorists have posited that the resource-controlling parties within rentier states can, in short, buy off would-be domestic challengers through judicious economic policy. The form of such policy is both positive (rent-controllers offer citizens a portion of their wealth as public and private goods) and negative (they agree to not expropriate from citizens as they otherwise would like to).

In practical terms, these avenues of popular co-optation correspond to two complementary mechanisms by which modern Gulf regimes are said to use their positions as economic hegemon to elicit political acquiescence. First, they employ those who need employment. "Every citizen" of a rent-based economy, tells Beblawi "has a legitimate aspiration to be a government employee; in most cases this aspiration is fulfilled."[9] Second, governments abstain from levying taxes "on the basis," in Vandewalle's formulation, "of the reverse principle of no representation without taxation."[10] Together these incentives foster a rent-induced consensus that "helps explain why the government of an oil-rich country … can enjoy a degree of stability which is not explicable in terms of its domestic economic or political performance."[11] Ayubi summarizes,

> The taxation function is thus reversed in the oil state: instead of the usual situation, where the state taxes the citizen in return for services, here the citizen taxes the state—by acquiring a government payment [i.e., a salary]—in return for staying quiet, for not invoking tribal rivalries and for not challenging the ruling family's position.[12]

Yet the contemporary political record would seem to demand a basic reevaluation of this rentier bargain—this oft-cited "social contract"—between Gulf rulers and their citizens-cum-clients. For not only have the Arab Gulf states failed to purchase political autonomy from their citizenries, but, empirical discrepancies aside, it is clear that such an open-ended wealth-for-silence agreement never operated in the first place. Rather than deploy limited resources inefficiently upon the whole of society, the controllers of rentier states instead seek to maximize their own consumption of the material benefits of rulership, by offering citizens only the minimum allocation necessary to ensure a winning coalition of supporters. Indeed, to what purpose power if one must trade away its earthly rewards? To recognize this incentive, on clear display in the colossal (and secret) discretionary budgets of Gulf ruling families, is to recognize that the primary task of rentier governments is not the distribution of resource wealth to the population merely, but doing so as cheaply as possible.

Accordingly, the most elementary question concerning the rulers of rentier societies is how to achieve the optimal balance between economic and political autonomy—that is, how to maximize simultaneously private enjoyment and discretionary employment of directly-accruing resource wealth; and freedom from popular accountability through economic appeasement via distribution. Err on the side of the former, and one risks losing the support of society; on the side of the latter, and one both squanders scarce resources and risks losing the support of one's family, whose members must also be rewarded.[13] This implicit political negotiation is thus not unlike the "ultimatum game" of experimental economics, wherein one player offers a portion of a divisible prize to a second, who can accept or reject the proposed allocation. If the offer is accepted, both players are better off, even if (depending on the proposal) one relatively more so than the other. But if the allocation is rejected as unfair, neither receives anything.

[Figure 3 approximately here.]

The possible solutions to this rentier dilemma are various and can be grouped into at least four distinct strategies. A first, which one might call *liberality*, would consciously overpay society at the expense of elite consumption, sacrificing a portion of rulers' private enjoyment of rents in order to ensure widespread popular support and political autonomy. A second strategy, which one might call *political segmentation*, would discriminate a country's political markets, disproportionately rewarding a class of citizen supporters and disproportionately excluding the remainder from the rentier benefits of citizenship. Here material benefits are not dissipated across the whole of society but concentrated on a finite constituency whose support is sufficient to ensure the continuity of the regime. A third, *economic diversification*, would seek to reduce the burden of distribution by augmenting or replacing state-provided benefits with benefits provided by private firms. A final strategy, *political diversification*, would likewise seek to reduce dependence upon distribution, yet not through privatization but by expanding and deepening the bases of political legitimacy away from simple material benefaction. This final strategy would seek to move beyond the traditional rentier citizen-state relationship, augmenting or replacing economic benefits with intangible goods such as the safeguarding of local culture and religion, knowledge and education, and political *stability* over against political accountability.

Of course, the appropriateness and effectiveness of each strategy will vary across societies, being largely dependent upon structural variables such as the magnitude of external rents, the size and geographical dispersion of the citizen population,[14] and the level of unity among the ruling elite. A strategy of liberality, for example, requires a degree of resources out of reach even to most rentier states. As of 2012, Bahrain's resource revenues amounted to less than \$6,500 per citizen,[15] Oman's only slightly more at around \$7,000,[16] and Saudi Arabia's about \$13,000. In Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, by contrast, this ratio was \$49,000, \$84,000, and a whopping \$164,000, respectively.[17] Even with outside aid, such as the wealthier Gulf nations provided Bahrain and Oman in the aftermath of their popular uprisings begun in 2011, the former category of states simply lack the funds to buy widespread political support through direct distribution. A country like Qatar, on the other hand, with some \$40 billion in annual rents to be shared among a mere 250,000 nationals, may offer a quite generous and relatively egalitarian distribution of citizen benefits without bankrupting the state or limiting the discretionary spending of the ruling family. The latter condition is not to be overlooked, since a policy of liberality, *ceteris paribus*, should tend to increase the likelihood of internal dissent among members of the ruling family, who may not share a leader's risk aversion or economic moderation.

A strategy of political segmentation entails a different set of dangers. Although it minimizes the cost of distribution and cultivates a core constituency of supporters invested in the politico-economic status quo, the systematic differentiation of citizens requires a precarious political balancing act susceptible to precisely that outcome meant to be avoided in the first place, namely political dissent and instability. At the same time that the state garners the support of one class of citizen—most often defined by shared ethnic, religious, or regional affiliation[18]—it earns the dissatisfaction and enmity of many others, in addition to a society divided along group lines. A state may overestimate the relative strength of its core constituency or underestimate the power of those disproportionately excluded. Moreover, even if the latter lacks the numbers or arms to pose an existential threat, it may serve to dampen economic production through debilitating protest action or organized opposition, raise regional tensions, or damage a state's international image.

Diversification, finally, while popular in principle, has proven difficult to achieve in practice. Certainly much of this, particularly on the economic side, owes to the inherent difficulty of altering deeply-entrenched socioeconomic structures and incentives: dependence upon migrant labor, public-private sector wage and productivity imbalances, low female workforce participation, and so on. Yet equally intractable has been the problem of retrenchment, the relaxation of policy and reshuffling of priorities in times of perceived political vulnerability. In the wake of Bahrain's popular uprising of February 2011, for instance, the state offered in lieu of political change promises of new economic benefits meant to appease both ordinary citizens and elites. For the former, it announced a generous social welfare package including increased salaries, a cost-of-living stipend, and plans for new subsidized housing. For the latter, it suspended an innovative yet (among business owners) highly unpopular tax on foreign labor meant to incentivize the hiring of citizens and so reduce dependence on foreign labor.[19] Other Gulf governments would follow suit, undermining long-standing efforts to promote national employment in the private sector and, more fundamentally, the notion that their connection to citizens extends beyond the economic.[20] Indeed, even Qatar, the one country spared by the Arab uprisings, opted for short-term political expediency over long-term economic sustainability. In September 2011, absent any discernable popular pressure, the state unveiled a preemptive 60% increase in salary for Qataris working in the public sector, doubled to 120% for those in the police and military.

In practice, however, these four rentier strategies are rarely pursued in isolation, and several are inherently complementary. Segmentation, for example, in structuring society into rentier winners and losers, naturally promotes the cause of political diversification. By engineering the rise of systematic dissatisfaction and controlled, group-based opposition, the state renders itself not only economically indispensible to its supporters, but politically indispensible in the face of an organized minority—or, in a case like Bahrain, majority—of disenfranchised citizens eager to rewrite the entire system. The state, in other words, becomes guarantor not simply of the politico-economic status quo, but of an entire faction of society against its real or engineered rivals. Under such circumstances, fear displaces distribution as the primary mechanism bonding citizen to state.

Similarly, the formidable task of economic and/or political diversification may be pursued most seriously and confidently when it exists as a complement—as a fallback—to the more proven strategy of liberality. For while the potential benefits of diversification are high, so too are the financial costs and political risks. Economic diversification entails, inter alia, considerable investment in education as well as possible capital flight as a result of unwelcome labor market regulations (for example, legal quotas for nationals in the private sector). Efforts at political diversification, on the other hand, might be associated with even more spending, particularly on physical infrastructure: on mosques, museums, monuments, malls, *sūq*s, and cultural-economic mega-projects such as Qatar's Katara and Education City, Saudi Arabia's planned King Abdullah Economic City, and the UAE's planned Dubailand, Masdar City, and Mohammad Bin Rashid City.[21]

Yet this investment in long-term political stability (and to a lesser extent economic stimulus and diversification) must come at the cost of short-term stability, inasmuch as these same funds could have been distributed directly to citizens with some marginal political gain. For states that enjoy the resources to be generous to individual citizens even as they spend billions of dollars on legitimacy-enhancing initiatives, this opportunity cost may be small or imperceptible. But for poorer states, the risk that public goods will not be accepted in lieu of private benefits is not trivial. Hence, experimentation with alternative economic and political models—whether weaning citizens off public-sector life-support or winning their loyalty through appeals to culture, religion, and other intangible sources of legitimacy—is most likely among those rentier states that already are able to appease most citizens through liberal distribution.

The nature and strength of the individual-level link between economic satisfaction and political quiescence in rent-based economies will thus depend necessarily on the strategy of rule adopted by the state in question. If the relationship between citizen and government is rooted wholly in economic patronage, and if the latter is extended universally, then the case may be similar to that described in the foundational rentier state literature, with citizens' political orientations and behavior determined primarily by their relative satisfaction with state benefits. If, however, economic distribution is only a part of a state's wider political legitimization strategy, or is limited disproportionately to a certain subset of the population, then one should have different theoretical expectations. In the former case of diversification, one should expect material satisfaction to compete with other, intangible factors in predicting citizens' political views and actions. In the latter case of segmentation, one should expect the individual-level relationship between economic and political satisfaction to operate among some citizens—i.e., members of the economic-*cum*-political in-group[22]—but weakly or not at all among others.[23]

Qatar and Bahrain: The Alpha and Omega of Rentierism

With the ongoing (if slow) extension of social science survey research to the Arab Gulf, such observations represent not simply a theoretical critique but specific propositions that can be interrogated empirically and at the appropriate level of analysis. Using previously-unavailable survey data from Bahrain and Qatar, the remainder of this paper tests these hypotheses by exploring the determinants of political opinion and behavior among ordinary Gulf citizens. Qatar and Bahrain representing respectively the most and least quintessential rentier economies of the Gulf, and employing as they do vastly different strategies of rule, such a cross-country analysis will offer results that are not only internally valid but generally representative of the larger category of the rentier state.

The data for this analysis originate from two nationally-representative surveys of citizens in Qatar and Bahrain administered in early 2013 and 2009, respectively. The Bahrain survey, carried out by the author, forms part of the Arab Democracy Barometer survey project founded by scholars at the University of Michigan and Princeton University. Since its inception in 2006, the Arab Barometer has been administered 17 times in 12 different Arab countries, recording the social, religious, and political values of more than

20,000 respondents.[24] The Bahrain survey was administered to a random sample of 500 households, achieving 435 completed interviews.[25] The Qatar survey was conducted in January 2013 by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) of Qatar University. A total of 798 interviews were completed from a random sample of 1,985 households.[26] The research was made possible by a UREP award from the Qatar National Research Fund (a member of the Qatar Foundation)[27] and additional financial support from Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar.

In contrast to extant empirical tests of the rentier state framework such as that examined above already, the individual-level nature of these survey data allow one to study not the country-level manifestations of rentierism but the actual causal processes underlying this category. In lieu of proxy measures—rates of taxation or resource rents per capita for "economic satisfaction," for example; and the persistence of authoritarianism for "political satisfaction"—with survey data one can look directly at the relationships and hypotheses of interest. In short, one can ask precisely the question the rentier state literature claims to understand: what is it that drives popular political attitudes and behavior in rent-based societies such as those of the Arab Gulf? Is it indeed true that citizens' normative views toward their governments and the actions they take for or against them are influenced foremost by material well-being? Or, alternatively, are these orientations also shaped by non-economic factors, including group affiliation, religious ideology, and intangible sources of political satisfaction and legitimacy in line with states' efforts at diversification? Under which conditions will the former, material-based motivations tend to dominate, and when will they take a back seat? These are the questions to which we now turn.

For several reasons Bahrain and Qatar represent appropriate—even ideal—cases for the present inquiry. In the first place, the requisite data is largely unavailable elsewhere, partly for practical reasons but owing mainly to the political sensitivity of such research. Indeed, it is notable that despite the temporal and geographical breadth of the Arab Barometer project, apart from Bahrain the survey has been fielded in only one other GCC state: Saudi Arabia in 2011.[28] (The data from this effort are not yet publically available.) Yet, even if data were available from elsewhere, Bahrain and Qatar would likely remain the most important cases theoretically. Similarities in geography and citizen population (around 600,000 and 250,000, respectively) stand in stark contrast to their divergent political and economic fortunes. Not only, as seen already, are they the poorest and richest of the Gulf economies, but their experiences fall on the opposite poles of the spectrum of political stability. While the Bahraini government faces an organized opposition led by its indigenous Shi‘a population, Qatar enjoys a far more homogenous and inactive citizenry that, even if it has been willing to challenge the state on core social and cultural issues, is generally content to play little direct role in political life.

Underlying this divergence are vastly different strategies of rule. Blessed with enough natural gas to earn twice the resource rents per citizen of the next wealthiest Gulf state, Qatar has distributed its windfall widely and liberally, both as private and public goods. In addition to generous salaries and near-guaranteed work in the public sector, where some 90% of Qataris are employed, the state provides an array of material benefits to citizens: land allotment, no-interest loans for home construction, free health care and education, a marriage allowance to help with the cost of a wedding and dowry, a "social allowance," and free utility and phone service.[29] Although a legal distinction is made between citizens from families settled in Qatar before and after 1930,[30] and while the former group does qualify for some relatively more generous benefits including a larger housing allotment, still there is no systematic discrimination or segmentation in benefits such as to give rise to clear political winners and losers at the group level.

Attending this policy of liberal distribution is a complementary effort at political diversification. Even as it augments its indulgence of citizens, the Qatari state has been aggressive in pursuing additional sources of legitimacy that go beyond direct patronage. A continuous deluge of cultural projects—a refurbished *Sūq Wāqif*, Katara Cultural Village, the Museum of Islamic Art, a redesigned Qatar National Museum—are meant to demonstrate the state's commitment to upholding Qatari and Arab culture. The Imam Shaikh Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab state mosque, designed in traditional Qatari architecture, reassures citizens that the modernity thrust abruptly upon society over the previous two decades has not come at the expense of religion, and more broadly suggests a more friendly alternative to the austere Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia. (Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab was, the state is quick to point out, descended from the Al Tamimi, a tribal lineage shared by the ruling Al Thani family.) Education City, a 14-squarekilometer campus with branches of six prestigious American universities, promises the benefits of Western education without ever leaving home. In early 2013, the state moved to take more explicit cultural ownership of the institution, subsuming the several branch campuses under the nominal appellation Hamad bin Khalifa University, in honor of the emir. Sponsorship of high-profile international events—from United Nations conferences to the 2022 World Cup to the Doha-Tribeca Film Festival—offers not only diversion but global recognition and appreciation of the country and its citizens, these already bolstered by Qatar's trademark activist foreign policy.

The state's activities as part of this strategy are not limited to investments in physical infrastructure and events, however. Decisionmaking across a broad range of policy areas is undertaken with a view toward bolstering the leadership's claim to protect the interests and values of ordinary citizens, many of whom feel under cultural threat by their extreme minority demographic status.[31] In December 2011, following rumors of an incident involving public drunkenness, alcohol was banned at a luxury island development popular among expatriates. A month later, Qatar University was ordered to reverse a controversial English-language instruction policy instituted in 2005, over complaints that it discriminated against nationals and created, as described in one of a series of scathing editorials in a local Arabic daily, a "devastating war" between Qatari students and "the favored sons of expats."[32] Over the next six months, Qatar would host no fewer than three symposia on Arabic language and culture, one organized by the university itself. Similar misgivings about labor market inequality have helped fuel increases in Qatari salaries and benefits. Indeed, the aforementioned public-sector salary hikes announced in September 2012 were welcomed by citizens not primarily on economic grounds, but for rectifying a perceived disparity in the value attached to Qataris and expatriates.

The state also takes seriously concerns that Western expatriates are transgressing established boundaries of Qatari culture. Public dress codes have proliferated, having been instituted (if not necessarily enforced) within a short period at the national Qatar University, at shopping centers, and at parks. The new code of conduct at Qatar University, whose campus remains segregated by gender, proscribes among other things "unconventional" hair cuts and "tattoos or body art which defies cultural norms." Neither are younger students exempt. In 2009, the state mandated that secondary school students wear Qatari national dress: a black ‘*abaya* for girls and white *thawb* and *gutra* for boys.[33] Yet it would appear that the effort at cultural preservation extends even to younger ages. The author was recently advised by nursery school administrators that the classroom of his two year-old daughter was recently inspected by a state agency in order to remove dolls featuring anatomically correct genitalia.

In light of this wide-ranging project to diversify the sources of political legitimacy in Qatar away from mere economics, one’s expectations about the individual-level drivers of attitudes and behavior toward the state are far more ambiguous than the straightforward theoretical predictions embodied in the foundational rentier state literature. While certainly one should expect that, *ceteris paribus*, greater economic satisfaction among Qataris should be associated with more favorable views of the state and dampened demand for political involvement, the question remains what is the relative importance of this factor in substantive terms as compared to other, non-material determinants. What, in other words, is the relative impact of citizens’ satisfaction with the *intangible* benefits the state purports to provide?: goods such as protection of culture and religion, fairness and equality, policies in line with citizens’ own preferences, and political *stability* if not political accountability. This is the puzzle to which we shall turn shortly.

The case of Bahrain also represents a fundamental deviation from the standard rentier model, if for the opposite reasons as its more fortunate neighbor to the southeast. The tiny island kingdom has gone farther than any other Gulf country in segmenting its political market, mainly on the basis of sectarian religious affiliation but to a lesser extent along the lines of tribal and non-tribal.[34] Despite limited political liberalizations introduced after the 1999 succession of current King Hamad bin ‘Isa Al Khalifa, the state has worked systematically to dilute the political influence of Bahraini Shi‘a, which comprise an estimated 52 to 62% of the citizen population.[35] Bahrain’s voting districts are gerrymandered utterly along Sunni-Shi‘a lines, precluding an opposition majority in the elected but toothless parliament. Ostensibly for fear of their ties to Iran and transnational religious movements, Shi‘a are also disproportionately excluded from power ministries and altogether disqualified from police and military service. This relative exclusion from government employment also limits access to other state benefits such as public housing, priority for which is given to new foreign recruits for the army and security services: Sunnis from Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, and elsewhere.

From the perspective of Bahrain's rulers, then, the state is struck in a veritable catch-22, wherein the very attempt to purchase political stability in fact serves only to open the door to increased instability. Specifically, the more Bahrain would seek to buy the political loyalty of opponents and would-be opponents using the most comprehensive clientelistic tool available to it *qua* rentier economy—private benefits conferred through employment in the public sector—the more it exposes itself to exactly that danger meant to be relieved in the first place, by inviting those citizens deemed most dangerous to walk in, so to speak, through the front door. As a result, government agencies deemed politically or militarily sensitive are made off limits to those outwardly identifiable as potential regime opponents, begetting a situation in which state employment is no longer an effective measure by which to procure political loyalty, but demonstrable political loyalty—in effect, the right family name—a prerequisite for most forms of state employment.

This two-tiered system of rentier benefits, including police and armed forces that would prefer to employ Sunni non-nationals than take a chance with Bahraini Shi'a subservient to their co-sectarians in Iran, works only to divide society further between those with a private stake in the state and those who feel not only unfairly excluded from it, but indeed unwelcome in it. The upshot is a group-based politics marked by two broadly-defined classes of citizens competing not merely over relative benefit allocations but over the very character of the nation itself: its history and cultural identity; the bases of citizenship; and the conditions for inclusion in public service. Under such conditions, political involvement is not motivated simply by the acquisition of tangible benefits but is influenced crucially by the pursuit of intangible goods tied to one's group: its relative status in society, its relative power as enshrined in state institutions, and its relative access to the ruling elite.

Accordingly, to the extent that economic satisfaction is a systematic determinant of political views and behavior in Bahrain, one should expect it to be so only among members of the Sunni in-group, and in any case to be overshadowed by competing factors such as sectarian affiliation and orientation. Even among Sunnis, moreover, one might expect that the community's relatively stronger support for the state stems not primarily from the material rewards it delivers (or promises) but from the more crucial intangible benefit it provides: stability and security in the face of an emboldened domestic opposition with feared links to enemies abroad. As Justice Minister Khalid bin 'Ali Al Khalifa explained to *The Economist* during pre-election turmoil in 2010, Bahrain's family conceives itself as "'a buffer zone' between Sunni and Shia."[36] Such a message is delivered not only to foreign audiences.

(Actually) Testing the Rentier State

These *a priori* predictions about the drivers of political behavior in Bahrain and Qatar find clear evidence in individual-level survey data. In Bahrain, one discovers, the political attitudes and behavior of ordinary citizens depend utterly upon sectarian group membership and identity.[37] Across a wide range of normative and behavioral indicators, Bahraini Shi'a consistently report more critical political opinions and more frequent political protest actions. Moreover, these negative views and actions are further augmented among those who report a strong communal identity as measured by personal religiosity.[38] That is to say, Shi'is who identify themselves as religious individuals tend systematically to be even more critical and more active than those who are not religious. Among Sunnis, this effect is reversed: more religious Sunnis report even more favorable views of the state and of the political status quo than those of non-religious individuals. Like Shi'a, however, Bahrain's Sunnis exhibit greater political engagement and interest as their group identification increases. Among Shi'a, this energy is directed against the state; among Sunnis, against the Shi'a *qua* competitor for state resources and potentially destabilizing political force.

[Figure 4 approximately here.]

Consider, for instance, the most direct and general political question of the entire Bahrain survey, appearing very early in the interview: "In general, how would you rate the present political situation in the country?" The response categories descend in the standard manner from "very good," "good," "bad," to "very bad." Depicted above in *Figure 4* is the dramatic between-group difference in response: whereas a majority (a combined 56%) of Sunni respondents report that Bahrain's present political situation is "good" or "very good," Shi'is are tilted even more in the opposite direction, with a full 71% of respondents describing the political situation as "bad" or "very bad." Indeed, some Shi'a even preferred in lieu of "very bad" to give still more emphatic responses such as "دمار" ("[in] ruin") or "ما في سياسة في البحرين"—literally, "there is no politics in Bahrain," implying a total domination of political decision-making by the ruling family.

[Figure 5 approximately here.]

A similar result obtains when Bahrainis are asked to rate their satisfaction with overall government performance. Respondents were asked to indicate on a ten-point scale their level of satisfaction with overall "government performance." The distribution of these responses is given above in *Figure 5*. A telling picture indeed, the near total sectarian polarization depicted here requires little by way of explanation. Whereas some 90% of Sunnis report being more satisfied than unsatisfied (i.e., report a score of 5 or above), an almost equal proportion (82%) of Shi'a express exactly the reverse opinion, with a full 36% replying that they are "not at all satisfied." Thus, at the same time that a clear one-third of Bahraini Shi'a assign the government the lowest possible grade of overall satisfaction—with a few memorable respondents going even further to offer such responses as "0," "–1," "تحت الأرض" ("below the ground"; that is, less than 0), and, most humorous of all, "Is there any choice lower than '1?'"—at the same time, less than one in ten Sunnis supplies anything more negative than a neutral evaluation of government performance. Whatever the additional influence of economic well-being, then, it is apparent already that it will be difficult to match the immense impact of confessional group membership.

As it turns out, not only is the impact of economic satisfaction not as strong as that of group membership and identity, but in fact this variable is both a relatively weak and unreliable predictor of Bahrainis' political orientations even in absolute terms. Consider, for instance, the case of Bahrainis' participation in political demonstrations. According to the results of a multivariate regression analysis,[39] the predicted likelihood that a non-religious Sunni respondent will have reported taking part in a demonstration is only around 4%, compared to 10% for a religious Sunni. For Shi'is, religiosity increases this probability from an estimated 39% to 54%. Thus, while the absolute change effected among Sunnis is perhaps smaller in magnitude, the relative influence of religiosity is indeed greater among this group than among Shi‘a, for whom the baseline likelihood of participation is much higher owing to the effect of confessional group membership. All in all, being a religious person makes it 38% more likely that a Shi‘i respondent, and 150% more likely that a Sunni respondent, will have participated in a demonstration in Bahrain. Notwithstanding the mobilizing effect of religiosity among Sunni and Shi‘i citizens alike, therefore, still sectarian affiliation continues to play the most decisive role in determining individual political behavior.

[Figure 6 approximately here.]

By contrast, variation in the likelihood of demonstration participation among Bahraini citizens is related to material wellbeing only among Sunni respondents, having no impact at all among Shi‘is. The estimated likelihood of demonstration participation for a Sunni of “very good” household economy is 7%, all else being equal, of “good” economy 16%, of “poor” economy 29%, and of “very poor” economy 45%. Among Shi‘is, by contrast, the estimated probability of demonstration increases only from 48% among those who report “very good” economy to 51% among those with “very bad,” a change that in any case is not statistically distinguishable from zero. Poorer Bahraini Shi‘a, it turns out, are no more likely to demonstrate than are any other Shi‘a: when the basis of political conflict is not economics but group identity, a wealthier opposition does not make for a more mollified opposition. Instead, one sees that Bahrain’s Sunnis tend to remain ideologically-supportive of the government as perceived protector of the status quo even as they register their political grievances about economic conditions. Shi‘a, on the other hand, remain opposed to the political status quo on principle, a position perhaps bolstered by but in the end independent of material circumstances.

The survey data from Qatar similarly reveal a more complex matrix of individual-level political motivations than is typically assumed of this “quintessential” rentier state. Here, of course, the question turns not around the distortionary effects of group-based politics, but the relative success of the state’s attempts at converting religious, cultural, and other intangible sources of legitimacy into political legitimacy. The task, then, is to evaluate the extent to which Qataris are indeed invested in the state for reasons other than the considerable material benefits it deploys, and, if they are, to measure the relative substantive impact of the former effect versus the latter.

Fortunately, aiming as it did to answer precisely these questions, the Qatar survey instrument included numerous measures of citizens' views toward the cultural and religious projects sponsored by the state, as well as their larger political priorities and orientations. Beyond Qataris' economic satisfaction, therefore, the survey data offer valid and reliable measures of four other possible intangible sources of political legitimacy: (1) the degree to which one views the state as representing one's values; (2) the degree to which the state is perceived as guarantor of a fair and just society; (3) the degree to which one understands the state as sharing one's actual policy priorities; and (4) the degree to which one prioritizes political *stability* over against political *accountability*.

The first independent variable is measured in a straightforward manner: a standard Likert scale measuring the extent of a respondent's agreement that "the state represents my values." The second measures one's response to the following vignette: "Imagine there is an open position at a major company in Qatar. In your view, if a Qatari and a Western expatriate of equal qualifications were to apply for the position, do you think it's more likely that the Qatari or the Western expatriate would be hired for the position?" The third variable is measured according to a respondent's answers to two questions about political priorities. The first asks the respondent's top two priorities among five distinct options; a second asks the respondent to estimate the *state's* top two priorities. The resulting variable measures the extent of the agreement between the two—that is, two priorities in common, one, or none. The fourth variable is coded dichotomously, taking a value of 1 when a respondent identifies "preserving safety and security" as his top political priority. (Note that "promoting free speech and individual rights" is a competing option.) Finally, material satisfaction is measured in a straightforward manner: "Taking all things together, how satisfied would you say you are with the overall economic situation of your family?"

In order to gauge the determinants not only of Qataris' overall orientations toward the state but also their views towards concrete policy questions, these five indicators are used to estimate four different dependent variables. The first of the two general variables is a straightforward measure of a respondent's "confidence in government institutions." The second is preceded in the survey by a list of a dozen notable social and cultural changes in Qatari society witnessed over the past decade. After being asked to say whether each change has been "positive" or "negative," the respondent is posed the following question: "Overall, would you say the positive changes outweigh the negative changes, or the negative changes outweigh the positive changes?" The answers to this latter question form the second dependent variable. The two policy-specific variables address an issue treated above at length, namely education reform. This choice is doubly appropriate in that, apart from being the preeminent policy issue in Qatar today, education reform is of such public concern precisely for its connection to the larger issue of cultural preservation in the face of sustained immigration and Westernization. One dependent variable asks simply, "Overall, how satisfied are you with the current K-12 education system?" A second moves beyond opinion toward the sphere of political action. A vignette asks a respondent to choose:

> There have been a lot of changes in the K-12 education system in the past few years. Some people feel that they would like greater say in the process. Others feel that it is something that should be left up to the concerned authorities. Which comes closer to your view?

The results of these four model estimations are given below in *Tables 1* and *2*. One sees that, in the first place, economic satisfaction is indeed a strong statistical predictor of Qataris' political attitudes in three of the four models, including both models meant to capture overall orientations towards the state and the societal status quo. Qataris who report greater satisfaction with their overall household economy tend to report higher confidence in the government; are more likely to rate the changes of the previous decade as positive rather than negative; and are less likely to desire a greater say over changes in the education system. Moreover, that material concerns are found not to be a significant determinant of Qataris' satisfaction with the education system is perhaps to be expected, unless one would ascribe to the rentier state a near-boundless capacity to appease. Overall, then, the regression analysis would seem to give support to the notion that greater economic satisfaction is in fact associated with greater political satisfaction in Qatar; or, in the more modest formulation of Luciani, that "states that perform a useful economic function will be more easily accepted in the specific form and configuration that they take."[40]

[Tables 1 and 2 approximately here.]

Yet the real question remains: what is the relative impact of this mollifying effect of material distribution compared to those of our other independent variables?—compared, that is, to the *intangible* sources of state legitimacy consciously cultivated in Qatar and in other Gulf rentier societies? This result is reported in *Table 3*, which gives the directly-comparable substantive impacts of our five independent variables of interest (along with those of the demographic control variables). These marginal effects are expressed as percentage changes in the likelihood of observing a positive versus negative outcome associated with a one standard deviation change in an independent variable. In the case of economic satisfaction, for example, the statistic of +21.7% reported for *Model 1* means that a one-standard deviation increase in economic satisfaction—in effect, an increase from "low" to "high" satisfaction—is associated with an estimated 22% increase in the likelihood that a respondent will report that positive changes have outweighed negative changes in Qatar, *ceteris paribus*. In the case of *Model 2*, which employs an ordinal dependent variable and so is estimated by ordered logistic regression, the reported +22.5% means that a one-standard deviation increase in economic satisfaction is associated with an estimated 23% increase in the likelihood that a respondent will report greater than the median level of confidence in government institutions—i.e., "high" versus "medium" or "low" confidence.

[Table 3 approximately here.]

As such, it is plain that the impact of economic satisfaction on Qataris' political orientations, while *statistically* significant, is consistently weaker *substantively* than those of the other, non-economic factors: perceptions of fairness and state values, actual policy agreement, and concern for stability. Across all four models, only the final variable—concern for stability—is consistently exceeded in substantive impact by the effect of economic satisfaction. Indeed, in what is probably the most general model, *Model 2* that estimates confidence in government institutions, the influence of citizens' perceptions of the state's values and fairness eclipse that of economic satisfaction by some two times, at estimated increases of around 44% and 39%, respectively, compared to just 23%. And since each effect is expressed in standard deviation terms, this outcome is not a mere artifact of differences in measurement or coding. Rather, the results demonstrate that the bases of Qataris' confidence in the state, their satisfaction with its policies, and their desire for greater say in shaping those policies are determined not simply—and not even foremost—by economics but, crucially, by non-material sources of state legitimacy.

Of course, one might object that most of these efforts at political diversification, whether in Qatar or elsewhere, entail consider economic capital, and so represent but another type of distribution made possible only by rentier states' vast external rents. Yet, in the first place, of the four intangible sources of legitimacy examined in the survey analysis, most are far removed from state spending per se. The question of societal fairness, for instance, reflects feelings of cultural invasion and workplace inequality, these influenced primarily by immigration and labor market policy. Similarly, policy agreement measures the correspondence between what concerns Qataris and what, in Qataris' estimation, concerns the state. So too is citizens' prioritization of stability independent of government spending. One might say this preference is even self-reinforcing and requires perhaps only sustained television coverage of destruction elsewhere in the Arab world in the aftermath of popular uprisings: the more citizens worry over and appreciate the benefits of political stability, the more they are likely to abstain from activity that might jeopardize it, and so reinforce it. Finally, while it is true that Qataris' perceptions of the state's values are influenced partly by the physical infrastructure they see being erected (or resurrected)—museums, mosques, *sūq*s, and other cultural and religious landmarks—still here too state policy plays an equally or even more significant role. It is one thing to build a mosque in honor of the founder of Wahhabism; banning public alcohol consumption and reinstating Arabic-language instruction in education is quite another.

More fundamentally, such an objection speaks exactly to the larger shortcoming of extant empirical treatments of the rentier state: this tendency to prefer crude systemic relationships—country-level associations between macroeconomic and macro-political indicators—to a nuanced understanding of the relationship between citizen and government in the finite number of nations that may rightly be called rentier states. If one knows that Qatar is both immensely rich and also apparently immensely stable, by this view, what purpose investigating the precise causal pathways that make it so? Similarly, what matter if Bahrain segments its political market and so does not enjoy the stability seen elsewhere in the region? So long as the regime survives, chalk another one up for the rentier state.

Conclusion: Toward a New Rentier State Research Agenda

This current theoretical preoccupation with aggregate political outcomes invites changes to the present social science research agenda dominating studies of Arab Gulf politics, a paradigm whose narrow focus on macro-level outcomes—in particular, the region's lack of democracy and of armed civil conflict—misses much of the politics in between, or rather gives the distinct impression of a want of political life altogether apart from top-down decisions of resource allocation made by calculating, interest-maximizing rulers whose only concern is the continued co-option of elite competitors via rent-funded patronage. Conspicuously absent from this prevailing model of the Arab Gulf, then, are the vast majority of ordinary Gulf Arabs, an odd fact for a theory that purports to understand the bases of individual political behavior in rent-based regimes.

Not only have previous quantitative studies operated at the incorrect level of analysis, moreover, but, in so doing, they have relied upon an elastic notion of rentierism that has served to draw attention away from the Arab Gulf states as a particular class of regime. In seeking to find universal relationships between macro-level political outcomes and various aspects of rentierism, that is, such studies imply that every country is to some degree a rentier state; that some marginal increase in Luxembourg's oil production would lead to a marginal decrease in its political accountability. Yet the very data they employ suggest the opposite. As examined already, the authoritative measure developed by Ross shows that the average per-capita fuel rents among GCC states is $11,339, compared to just $270 for the other 163 countries included in his sample. In fact, then, nearly all of the variation in country-level political outcomes attributed so far to "oil" should be attributed more simply to the distinct character of the Arab Gulf. As one either is or is not pregnant, so too is rentierism a dichotomous state, one whose representatives are clustered disproportionately in one peculiar corner of the globe, toward which scholars seeking to understand its political effects would do well to direct their attention.

Dictating this research agenda in no small part has been a lack of requisite data, helped by a regional political environment generally hostile to public opinion research, and particularly hostile to survey research that would elucidate popular political opinions and even group demographics. Given this scarcity of individual-level data about the political views and activities of ordinary citizens of the Arab Gulf, to say nothing of their ethno-religious characteristics, it is little surprising that the behavioral assumptions of rentier theory have for so long escaped systematic empirical examination. At the same time, however, if the national surveys treated here—one of which was undertaken amid a security crackdown in Bahrain—if such efforts remain possible, then so too are other studies.

Having been now sufficiently reminded through the thirty-year ascendancy of rentier theory about the importance of economic organization in determining the political character of Arab states, students of Middle East and Gulf politics should begin to proceed back in the other direction, to reevaluate the received stereotype of the economically- and politically-satiated "oil sheikh" in light of evolving domestic and regional conditions, including Shi'a populations increasingly insistent in their demands for political authority and influence, growing securitization of the region's government sectors, and the GCC's open political and ideological competition with a resurgent Iran. Such a reassessment of the continued efficacy of the rentier paradigm demands, in the first place, a thorough interrogation of its conceptual underpinnings, which implies a return to the individual citizen as the primary unit of analysis, be it quantitative or qualitative. In order to understand the unforeseen longevity of the monarchies of the Arab Gulf, one must first understand the actual processes by which they earn and preserve the political favor of ordinary Gulf Arabs.

Appendix: Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Fuel Rents per Capita and Democracy (from Ross 2008)

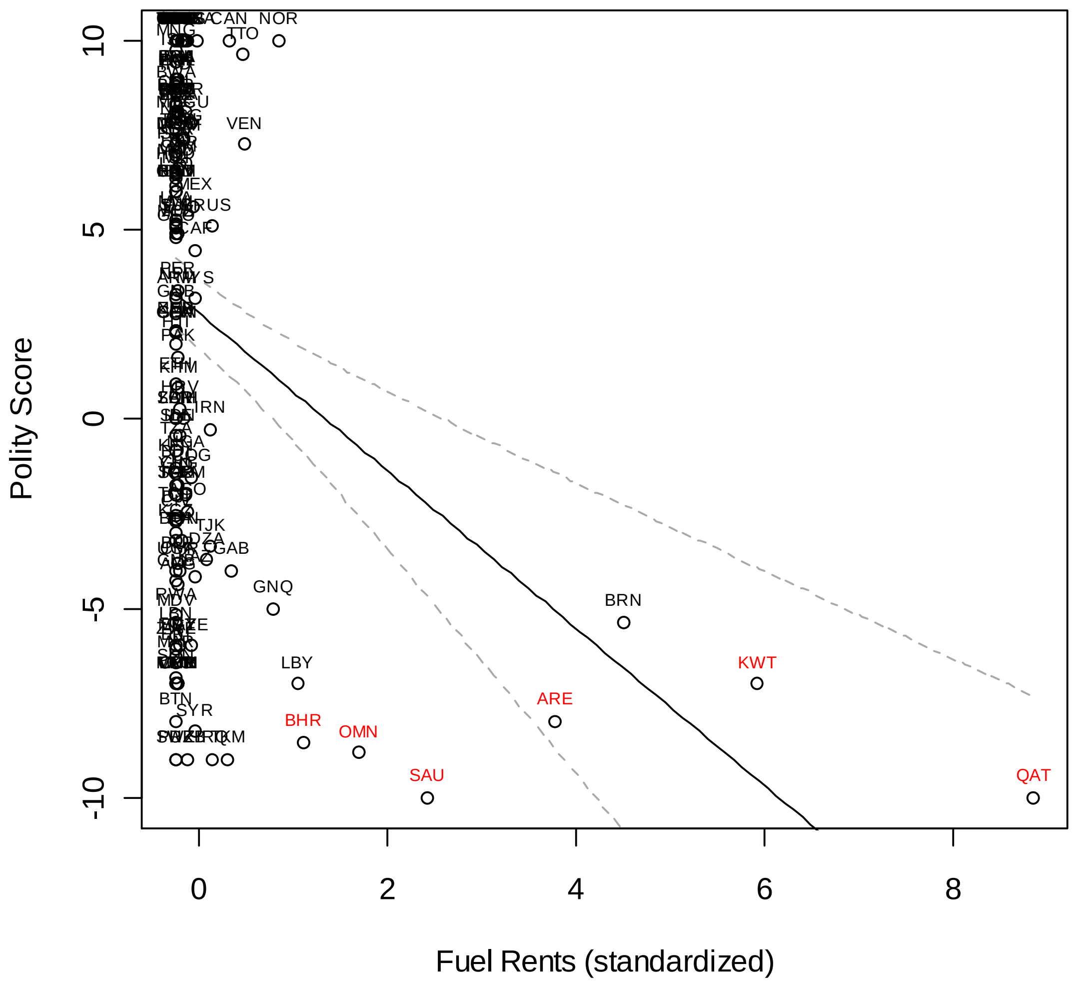

Figure 2. Fuel Rents and Democracy, excluding the Rentier States

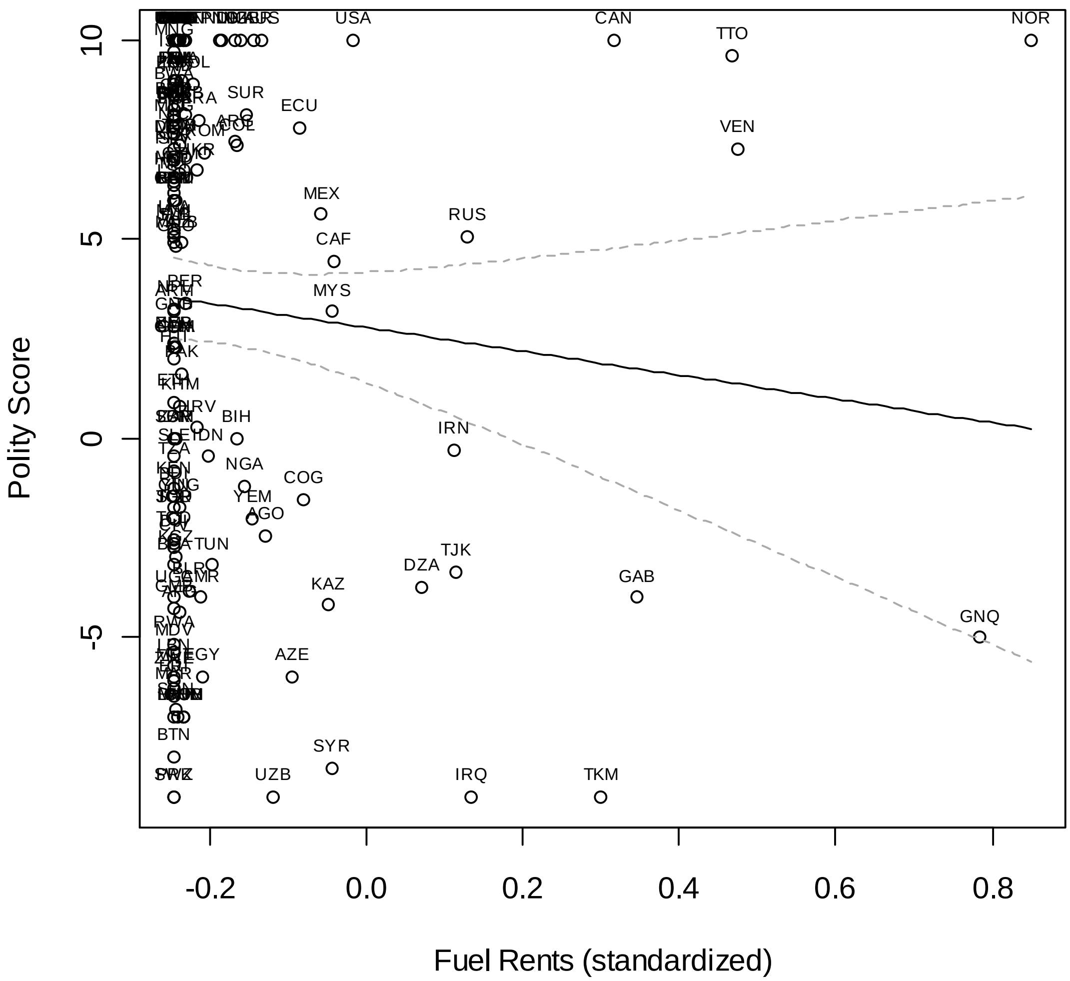

Figure 3. The rentier trade-off

Economic autonomy	**Political autonomy**
Enjoyment of rents	Distribution of rents

Figure 4. Opinion of the Overall Political Situation in Bahrain

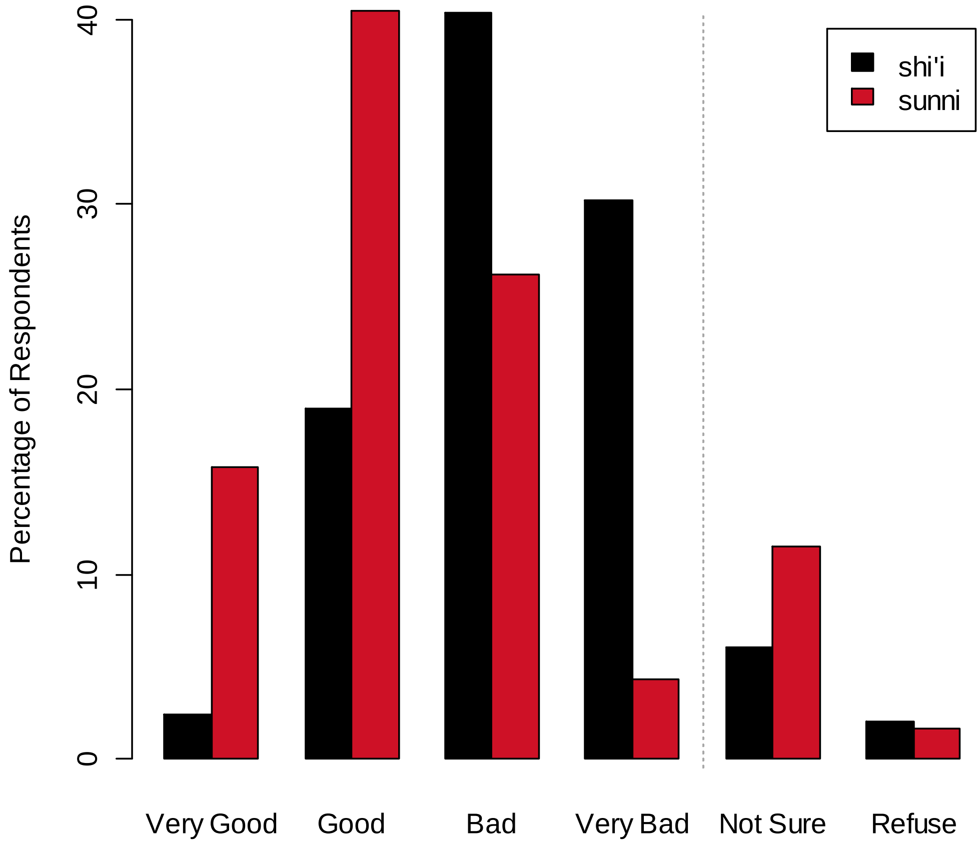

Figure 5. Overall Satisfaction with Government Performance

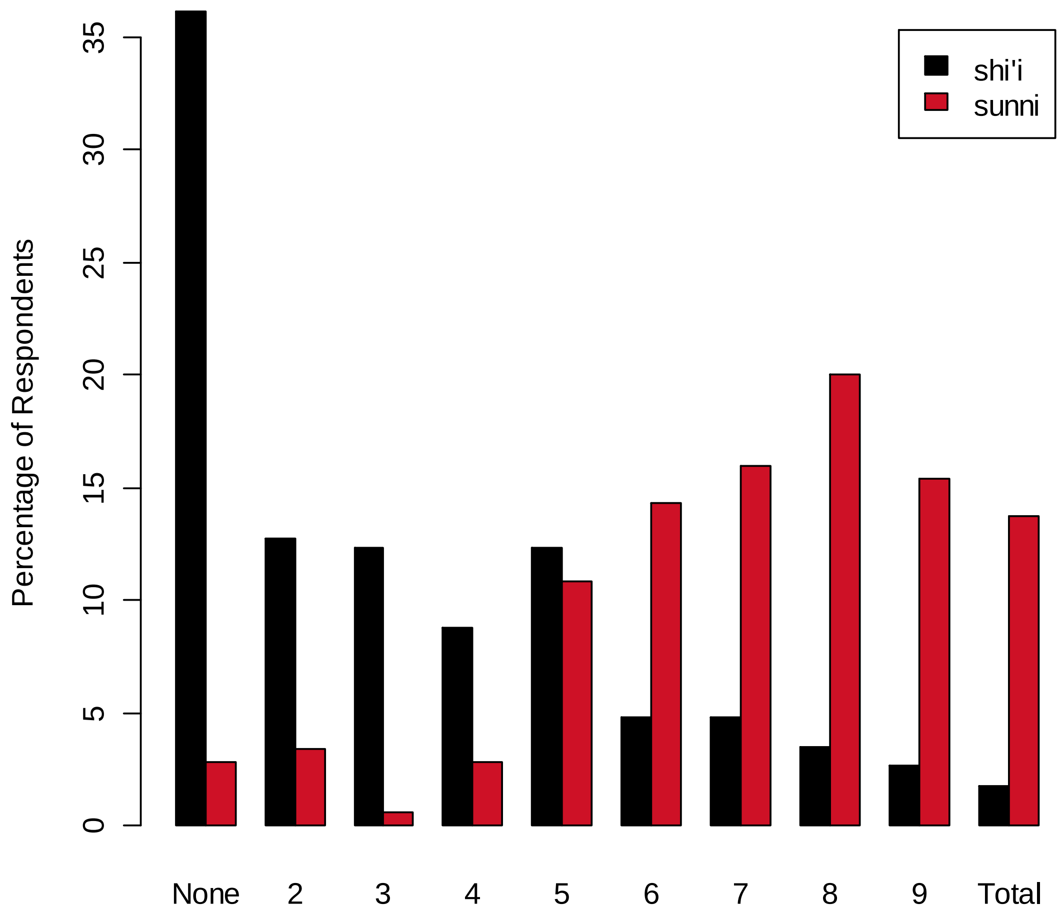

Figure 6. Predicted Probability of Demonstration Participation

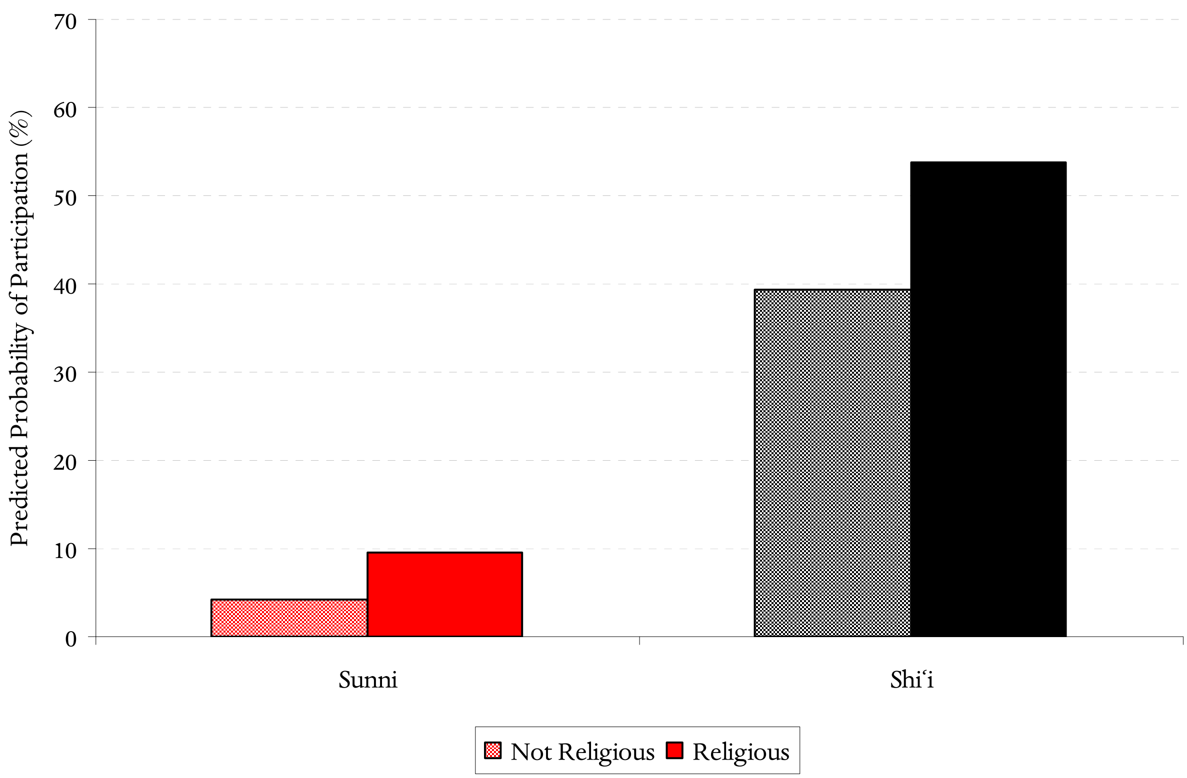

Table 1. The Determinants of Political Orientation among Qataris

Variables	Model 1 (logistic regression)			Model 2 (OLS regression)		
	"Positives outweigh Negatives"			**Confidence in "State Institutions"**		
	B	s_b	$p >\|z\|$	*B*	s_b	$p >\|t\|$
econ. satisfaction	0.276	0.134	0.039	0.207	0.0770	0.007
represents values	0.418	0.167	0.012	0.436	0.0940	0.000
policy agreement	0.292	0.119	0.014	0.182	0.0667	0.006
societal fairness	0.268	0.110	0.015	0.244	0.060	0.000
prioritize stability	—	—	—	0.270	0.119	0.023
age	-0.0359	0.0477	0.451	-0.0554	0.0190	0.004
age^2	0.000607	0.000611	0.321	0.000606	0.000228	0.008
education	0.0614	0.0863	0.477	-0.180	0.0492	0.000
income	0.0238	0.0400	0.553	-0.0471	0.0217	0.031
female	0.438	0.202	0.031	-0.0905	0.110	0.411
Constant	-1.574	1.046	0.133	2.875	0.530	0.000
N	627			604		
Prob. > F (χ^2)	0.0003			0.0000		
(Pseudo) R^2	0.0509			0.1793		

Note: Robust standard errors reported for all models; sampling weights utilized

Table 2. *Determinants of Qatari Attitudes toward Education Reform*

Variables	Model 3 (OLS regression)			Model 4 (logistic regression)		
	Satisfaction with Education System			**Desire More Say in Education Policy**		
	B	s_b	$p >\|t\|$	*B*	s_b	$p >\|z\|$
econ. satisfaction	0.0858	0.106	0.417	-0.353	0.134	0.009
represents values	0.338	0.111	0.002	0.0212	0.143	0.988
policy agreement	0.0461	0.0779	0.554	-0.308	0.107	0.004
societal fairness	0.306	0.0707	0.000	-0.214	0.0966	0.027
prioritize stability	0.239	0.137	0.081	-0.354	0.193	0.067
age	0.00549	0.0242	0.821	0.0679	0.0353	0.055
age^2	-0.000106	0.000286	0.712	-0.000795	0.000434	0.067
education	-0.0868	0.0560	0.122	0.151	0.0783	0.053
income	-0.0375	0.0267	0.160	0.0345	0.0357	0.333
female	-0.482	0.132	0.000	1.132	0.180	0.000
Constant	3.887	0.665	0.000	0.00959	0.924	0.992
N	579			622		
Prob. > F (χ^2)	0.0000			0.0000		
(Pseudo) R^2	0.0993			0.1042		

Note: Robust standard errors reported for all models; sampling weights utilized

Table 3. Substantive Marginal Effects of Explanatory Variables, Models 1-4

Independent Variable	Model 1 **Positive vs. Negative Change**	Model 2 **Confidence in State**	Model 3 **Education Satisfaction**	Model 4 **More Say in Education**
economic satisfaction	+21.7%	+22.5%	(*not sig.*)	+22.2%
state represents values	+28.3%	+43.5%	+27.5%	(*not sig.*)
policy agreement	+27.5%	+23.1%	(*not sig.*)	+22.6%
societal fairness	+28.3%	+38.8%	+37.6%	+18.1%
prioritize stability	—	+19.1%	+13.1%	+14.9%
Control Variable				
education	(*not sig.*)	–20.7%	–11.3%[a]	+22.0%
income	(*not sig.*)	–7.3%	–13.2%[a]	(*not sig.*)
female	+24.5%	(*not sig.*)	–23.2%	+76.2%

Note: All cells represent percentage changes in odds of an outcome of 1 vs. 0 (in Models 1 and 4) or (in Models 2 and 3) of >m vs. <=m. They are calculated using `listcoef` in Stata.
[a] Strictly speaking, these effects are not significant at the standard level of confidence.

References

[1] Giacomo Luciani, 1987, "Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework," in Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, eds., *The Rentier State: Nation, State and Integration in the Arab World*, Vol. 2, London: Croom Helm, p. 10.

[2] Of course, as Luciani asserts quite unequivocally, "Democracy is not a problem for allocation [rentier] states. … [T]he patrimonial form of government is very well adapted to the specific character of allocation states and vice versa" [*Ibid.*, 74, 77-78].

[3] According to his own summation in Michael Ross, 2009, "Oil and Democracy Revisited," unpublished manuscript, available at http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/ross/Oil and Democracy Revisited.pdf.

[4] This popular variable from Gurr's Polity IV dataset places states on a scale from full autocracy (–10) to full democracy (10) for the years 1800-2008. See http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm.

[5] Libya, if one wished to include it, is a perennial –7.

[6] A paper, incidentally, that won the 2009 award for best article in the *American Political Science Review.*

[7] An upgrade over the standard "oil exports-over-GDP" operationalization of rent-dependence, oil rents per capita is defined as the total value of a state's yearly oil and gas production minus country-specific extraction costs, including the cost of capital. The new measure is more precise for its inclusion of domestically-consumed oil and gas and, Ross adds, it also "avoids endogeneity problems that come from measuring exports instead of production, and from using GDP to normalize oil wealth" [Michael Ross, 2008, "Oil, Islam, and Women," *American Political Science Review* 102(1): 111-112.]

[8] Giacomo Luciani, 1987, "Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework," p. 63.

[9] Hazem Beblawi, 1990, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," in Giacomo Luciani, ed., *The Rentier State: Nation, State and Integration in the Arab World*, Vol. 2, London: Routledge, p. 91.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

[11] Giacomo Luciani, 1987, "Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework," p. 10.

[12] Hazem Beblawi, 1990, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," p. 144.

[13] This latter question of gaining and consolidating family support through economic largesse is largely ignored in the rentier state literature, wherein the citizen-state relationship is paramount. Yet, particularly in instances of succession or potentially painful political transformation, one observes no little resources spent attempting to secure the support of the ruling family itself. Such was the case, for instance, following the 1999 succession of Bahrain's King Hamad bin 'Isa Al Khalifa upon the sudden death of his father. The new king's munificence was soon spread among royals and ordinary citizens alike. Citizens saw housing grants and loan forgiveness amounting to more than half a billion dollars, while members of the Al Khalifa saw increases in their monthly stipends as well as their representation in senior government positions. See, e.g., Abdulhadi Khalaf, 2007, "Al Khalifa, Hamad bin Isa (1950–)", in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa* (2007); Justin Gengler, 2013, "Royal Factionalism and the Securitization of Bahrain's 'Shi'a Problem,'" *Journal of Arabian Studies* 3(1).

[14] Of course, population size and makeup may be altered to suit a particular strategy, most often political segmentation. Consider, e.g., the cases of Kuwait and Bahrain in Justin Gengler, 2013, "Understanding Sectarianism in the Persian Gulf," in Lawrence Potter, ed., *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, forthcoming.

[15] At approximately $6,200 per citizen, this ratio is almost exactly that of Libya. Brunei, the only other rentier state of similar magnitude, has a ratio of around $28,000. It should be noted that a majority of Bahrain's government revenue (an estimated 70-80%) comes from oil and gas supplied via a direct subsidy by Saudi Arabia, its longtime political-economic patron. See, e.g, Jane Kinninmont, 2012, "Bahrain: Beyond the Impasse", The Royal Institute for International Affairs, p. 22.

[16] Faisal Hasan and Turki O. AlYaqout, 2011, "Oman Economic Update," *Global Investment House*. Available at: <http://www.menafn.com/updates/research_center/Oman/Economic/oab190111e.pdf>.

[17] Data from Bahrain come from the CIA World Factsheet. All other data comes from "OPEC REVENUES FACT SHEET," 2012, U.S. Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy. Available at: <http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=OPEC>.

[18] This tendency toward political coalition-building on the basis of outwardly-observable, ascriptive group categories is explained in detail in Justin Gengler, 2013, "Understanding Sectarianism in the Persian Gulf."

[19] Justin Gengler, 2011, "How Radical Are Bahrain's Shia?," *Foreign Affairs*, May 15.

[20] Several of these initial efforts are summarized in Thomas Fuller, 2011, "Bahrain's Promised Spending Fails to Quell Dissent," *The New York Times*, March 6.

[21] The latter, announced in November 2012, will include "the world's biggest shopping mall, a Universal family theme park and a park that is a third bigger than Hyde Park in London." See Andy Sambidge, 2012, "Dubai ruler announces new mega city project," *Arabian Business*, November 24. Available at: <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/dubai-ruler-announces-new-mega-city-project-480598.html>.

[22] It is also possible that the political effects of segmentation override the economic; that members of the in-group become linked to the state not as economic patron but as protector of the political status quo and of the prevailing balance of power among social groups. This is arguably the case today in Bahrain. See, e.g., Justin Gengler, 2011, "Ethnic Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf"; Justin Gengler, 2012, "Bahrain's Sunni Awakening," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, January 17.

[23] There is of course a final, demand-side factor limiting the societal reach of the rentier bargain. This is the likelihood that not all citizens will be persuaded to forfeit their political prerogative by the promise of material wealth—or, for that matter, by the promise of violence. Certainly, one can imagine myriad sources of political motivation independent of economic concerns: perceptions of societal discrimination and inequality; sectarian religious orientations; adherence to revolutionary ideologies such as Arab nationalism or, more commonly today, transnational Shi'ism, Salafism, or the Muslim Brotherhood; a desire for representative and democratic governance as a good in itself; and so on.

[24] Additional information about the Arab Barometer is available at the project's website: www.arabbarometer.org.

[25] Details about the sampling procedure and survey methodology generally are discussed extensively in Justin Gengler, 2011, "Ethnic Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf," Ch. 4.

[26] Households for the Qatar survey were selected by proportional stratified sampling utilizing the country's administrative zones as strata, while individual respondents were chosen by a computer-assisted random selection procedure.

[27] UREP No. 12-016-5-007, "Qatar and the World Values Survey: Ensuring Conceptual Validity and Cross-Cultural Comparability," Jocelyn Sage Mitchell, Justin Gengler, Sean Burns, and Mary Dedinsky.

[28] Other large-scale projects such as the World Values Survey (WVS), which has been implemented in nearly 100 countries, have had similarly poor luck in the Gulf states. Apart from Qatar, only Saudi Arabia has fielded the WVS, and even then most items dealing with politics were omitted.

[29] A forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation by Jocelyn Mitchell, "Beyond Allocation: The Politics of Legitimacy in Qatar" (Georgetown University), provides a full description of these benefits.

[30] On the basis of the revised Qatari Citizenship Act (No. 28 of 2005).

[31] As of 2013, Qatari citizens amounted to only around 250,000 (or about 13%) of a total resident population of more than 1.9 million.

[32] Quoted in Justin Gengler, 2012, "The Political Costs of Qatar's Western Orientation," *Middle East Policy* 19(4): 71.

[33] "SEC Chairperson Issues Decree on School Discipline and Morals," 2008, Supreme Education Council of the State of Qatar, January 28. Available at: <http://www.sec.gov.qa/En/Media/News/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?NewsID=2600>.

[34] The 1783 conquest of the island by the ruling Al Khalifa family was assisted by numerous allied tribes, most of which were rewarded with gifts of land and control over feudal estates. This close political alliance has persisted to the present.

[35] This range represents the 95% confidence internal for a mean estimate of 57.6%, which is the percentage of Shi'a respondents in the Bahrain survey.

[36] Quoted in "Bahrain's pre-election jitters," 2010, *The Economist*, October 14. Available at: <http://www.economist.com/node/17254432>.

[37] At least as of early 2009—that is, two years prior to the February 2011 uprising that even further polarized society on the basis of sectarian religious membership. One suspects that the empirical findings here would be even more robust if a new survey were conducted.

[38] For details on the operationalization of this religiosity measure, as well as on the specifics of the multivariate regression analysis to follow, see the comprehensive treatment in Justin Gengler, 2011, "Ethnic Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf," Chs. 4-5.

[39] Cf. note 38.

[40] Giacomo Luciani, 1987, "Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework," p. 65.