



Image credit: Sahan Nuhoglu/shutterstock.com

AGENTS OF CHANGE YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

November 2023

Public Perceptions on Climate Change in Qatar

By Neeshad Shafi

Climate change is a complex, multifaceted problem involving various interacting systems and actors. Therefore, the intensities, locations, and timeframes of its consequences are hard to predict and create uncertainties. Climate Action require both government and public sees climate change as a serious issue and makes it a priority for action.¹ Many studies shows that climate change concern influences support for climate policies as well as public understanding of the issues to make necessary changes to address climate change.²

These studies have looked at the factors shaping public concern with climate change

at national levels in the State of Qatar, a small Persian Gulf country which is located in a region that is warming more rapidly than anywhere else on earth other than the Arctic. Qatar also is one of the driest countries on the planet with average rainfall of 80 mm annually, making it particularly vulnerable to water scarcity. Indeed, it must desalinate most of its drinking water, which in turn requires an enormous amount of energy.³ Qatar is highly vulnerable to sea level rise with adverse impacts on the 97% of the population living in urban areas along the coast and the country experiences long summers characterized by intense dry heat, with temperatures rising above 45°C.⁴

Yet Qatar also is one of the world's wealthiest nations per capita, and in recent years, it has inched forward in making climate pledges. At the 2015 Paris climate talks, Qatar did not commit to reducing emissions,⁵ but instead set a goal six years later in 2021 to cut emissions by 25% by 2030. Recently, the country also connected a solar power plant to its electric grid that could power 10% of the nation's energy needs at total capacity.⁶

As one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1996,⁷ Qatar has a long-standing commitment to addressing global environmental challenges. Today, protecting the environment and supporting sustainable development are at the forefront of Qatar's priorities. As a part of Qatar National Vision 2030,⁸ and in alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Qatar is committed to continuing to address climate change. Environmental Development is one of the four core pillars of the document. This objective will be achieved by diversifying the economy, developing capabilities, and making the best use of natural resources. Further in the updated National Determined Contribution in 2021 Qatar plan to lay the foundation for the sustainability of the local ecosystem, a judicious use of natural resources, and a minimization of waste, outlining more than 35 measures and over 300 adaptation initiatives focused on mitigation to establish national climate targets and enhance climate resilience.⁹

Climate change and its consequences in Qatar can only be tackled with public support for sustainable policies. Thus, public attitudes

towards climate change matter. While decades of climate change opinion research by various researchers and institutions have provided with a wealth of information for policymakers, little is still known about how the public perceives the scientific uncertainty surrounding climate change and how it relates to their concern about climate impacts in Qatar. Most available studies have been conducted with limited or no local support.

This paper examines an online survey of 150 people in Qatar from different nationalities and age groups to understand whether those surveyed understand the impacts of climate change, as well as the policies and actions taken for local climate action. The survey also examined how these perceptions related to people's overall concern about climate change, trust in governance, and knowledge about climate change.

Any effective national climate and environmental strategy in Qatar must consider the public's beliefs and attitudes about climate change, risk perceptions, and other environmental responses (e.g., behavior). The people of Qatar may also play a crucial role in the success of this strategy through their actions as citizens, consumers, and communities. Understanding how people in Qatar respond to climate change and environmental problems—including what they know, understand, and believe, as well as what they misunderstand, disbelieve, or oppose—has important implications in educating and communicating with the public to build more support for climate policy.

Background and Methodology for the Survey

This environmental survey was conducted to gather current attitudes towards Qatar's environment and related issues.

Assessing the level of environmental awareness among citizens and residents is an essential precursor to obtain the accurate data needed for future research, as well as comparative analysis with neighboring countries and global studies. Another purpose of the survey is to aid in the development and refinement of policies—and potentially help create new initiatives and programs to promote an environmentally conscious society.

THE MAIN GOALS OF THIS SURVEY WERE TO:

- Gather detailed information on the environmental perception, attitudes, and behaviors of citizens and residents.
- Provide policy recommendations based on public opinion.
- Establish a new research agenda aimed at understanding the interaction between citizens and residents and their local environment.

The sociodemographic variables used in the survey are similar to those of a national census questionnaire—except for the age category. The total number of respondents in the survey was 150. All respondents were over the age of 15.

This study was conducted via an online survey in both Arabic and English language over the course of a months in 2023. Researchers reached out to almost 150 people in Qatar from different nationalities and age groups, targeting a diverse representation of the population

through various social media channels and online groups which specifically aimed at reaching the local Qatari and Non-Qatari (residents) population. A comprehensive social media video and news on print media also was issued to familiarize the objectives of the survey and the importance of accurate data collection.

The survey gauged public awareness and concern regarding climate change, as well as related behavior in response to climate concerns. All surveys were completed anonymously online by participants, and the research team has no access to participant names or contact information.

THE SURVEY WAS DIVIDED INTO 3 SECTIONS:

- **Climate change literacy and awareness:** this section aimed to understand the literacy, awareness and perceptions of Qatari nationals and residents in relating to climate change.
- **Behavioral responses:** this section aimed to understand how Qataris and residents respond to climate change in their daily routine and lifestyle in terms of purchasing and consumption, energy and fuel usage, and waste management.
- **Climate change and policy in Qatar:** this section aims to gauge Qatari's and residents understanding and awareness of the Qatar National Vision, Qatar National Climate Change Action Plan and what is currently happening related to climate change in Qatar.

This study employs a quantitative methodology focusing on the statistical analysis of data to explain and characterize a situation. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze each question.

Key Answers in the Survey

While the entire survey elicited a broad range of information, for the purposes of this analysis, we will examine answers to three specific questions and how they reflect climate change awareness and beliefs.

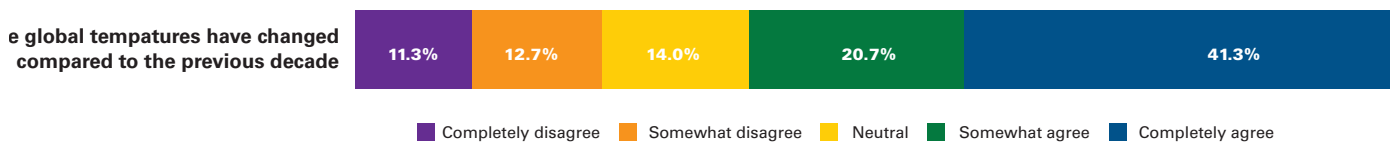
1. GIVEN A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE, MOST PEOPLE IN QATAR THINK IT IS HAPPENING.

After being asked to register their own belief about whether climate change is happening in Qatar, a majority of survey respondents (68.7%) “completely agree” that it is happening. A further 15.3% of those surveyed “somewhat agree.” By contrast, only 6.7% of those who responded “completely disagree,” while a further 1.3% “somewhat disagree” with the statement. An additional 8% of those who were surveyed were neutral.



2. MANY PEOPLE ARE WORRIED AND BELIEVE THAT GLOBAL TEMPERATURES HAVE CHANGED.

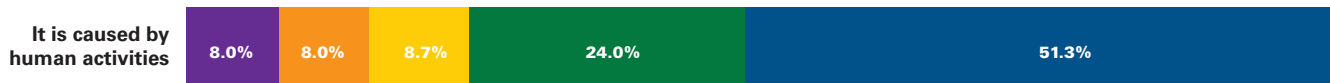
Just over third of people surveyed (41.3%) say that they “completely agree” that global temperatures have change and that they are worried about it. A further 20.7% say they “somewhat agree” that temperatures have changed compared to the previous decade. About 11.3% “completely disagree” that global temperatures have changed, whereas 12.7% “somewhat disagree” and another 14.0% stayed neutral on the question.



3. ABOUT FIVE IN TEN PEOPLE IN QATAR WHO THINK CLIMATE CHANGE IS HAPPENING BELIEVE THAT IT IS CAUSED PRIMARILY BY HUMANS.

Survey respondents who indicated that they thought global warming was happening were also asked what they think causes global warming. Of the (84%) of people who responded “somewhat agree” and “completely agree” to that question, 51% of them also “completely agree” that it is caused by human activities. By contrast, only 8% think global warming is happening but “completely disagree” it is caused humans and another 8% “somewhat disagree” human activities are the cause for climate change.

Of course, the fact that 51% of people surveyed completely agree that climate change is happening and is caused by human activities underscores why this survey is so essential. Climate change is acknowledged by scientists and experts to be among the most challenging and troubling issues of our times, and this is a challenge about which the Qatari public broadly claims to be aware. But despite an overwhelming scientific consensus about climate change's causes and consequences, this survey indicates that Qataris and residents remain divided over whether the problem even exists—and, moreover, what should be done to fix it.



Key Takeaways and Recommendations:

The survey on public perspectives on climate change in Qatar has a number of significant and highly beneficial lessons to the local governments and communities:

- The study will help gauge public support for various climate policies in the country. This knowledge will help policymakers to develop strategies and legislation which are more likely to gain public support. This can lead to more effective and sustainable climate policies.
- The survey reveals the level of knowledge and concern among the public regarding climate change. Its data collection and information will be useful in designing targeted environmental educational campaigns to increase awareness and engagement within the community.
- The diversity of perspectives obtained from various Qatari and other nationalities, communities, ages groups and economic status offer behavioral insights that reveal the public's willingness to change behaviors that contribute to climate change. This information can help in the creation of programs that encourage sustainable practices, such as recycling or using public transportation.
- This survey will aid businesses in understanding public perspectives on climate change. This knowledge can inform product development and marketing strategies providing opportunities to create a sustainability agenda and market research for companies to align their offerings with consumer demand for sustainable and eco-friendly products.
- Repeating this sort of survey across different countries in the Gulf region can provide a window into regional trends and perspective on climate change knowledge, behaviors and attitudes, as well as new policy development initiatives to be conducted. These insights would capture any changes in public sentiment in Qatar as well, since it is a rapidly developing country.

Conclusions

Perhaps the key finding from this study is that while the relationship between public survey and climate opinion can be intuitive, it often requires a deeper understanding of the context which underlies the debate.

As demonstrated in the section on key take-aways, there are many potential applications of these results. We believe one of the most promising uses of the insights generated by such surveys is a deeper understanding of the level of public support for various climate policies. For example, should sustainability-motivated policies be introduced at a national level?

Further and repeated surveys would track changes in public opinion, providing insights into how effective communication and policy strategies have been in shifting public attitudes and behaviors, especially across various nationalities, age groups, educational background and others. Also, to conduct more national and regional level interventions on climate change at a population level in Qatar, for instance, policy makers, NGOs and governments in and outside of Qatar might find it helpful to build on our baseline work in Qatar—and tailor their communication messages using the mass and social media we have outlined.

Endnotes

- 1 Konisky DM, Hughes L and Kaylor CH (2016) Extreme weather events and climate change concern. *Climatic Change* 134(4)
- 2 Leiserowitz AA (2005) American risk perceptions: Is climate change dangerous? *Risk Analysis* 25(6): 1433–1442
- 3 Mohamed Alhaja, Sayeed Mohammedb, Mohamed Darwishc, Ashraf Hassanc, *,Sami G. Al-Ghamdia (2017). A review of Qatar’s water resources, consumption and virtual water trade. *Desalination and Water Treatment*, 70–85.
- 4 World Bank Group, Climate Change Knowledge Portal, (n.d.), retrieved January 2, 2024
- 5 UNFCCC, Ministry of Environment, the State of Qatar, Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) report, November 2015.
- 6 UNFCCC, National Determined Contribution (NDC), August 2021, Ministry of Municipality and Environment.
- 7 United Nations Treaty Collection, (n.d.) retrieved January 2, 2024
- 8 Government Communications Office (GCO), Qatar’s National Vision (n.d) retrieved on January 2, 2024
- 9 UNFCCC, National Determined Contribution (NDC), August 2021, Ministry of Municipality and Environment. [same as vi]

References:

- 1 Konisky DM, Hughes L and Kaylor CH (2016) Extreme weather events and climate change concern. *Climatic Change* 134(4)
- 2 Leiserowitz AA (2005) American risk perceptions: Is climate change dangerous? *Risk Analysis* 25(6): 1433–1442
- 3 Mohamed Alhaja, Sayeed Mohammedb, Mohamed Darwishc, Ashraf Hassanc, *,Sami G. Al-Ghamdia (2017). A review of Qatar’s water resources, consumption and virtual water trade. *Desalination and Water Treatment*, 70–85.
- 4 World Bank Group, Climate Change Knowledge Portal, (n.d.), retrieved January 2, 2024
- 5 NFCCC, Ministry of Environment, the State of Qatar, Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) report, November 2015.
- 6 UNFCCC, National Determined Contribution (NDC), August 2021, Ministry of Municipality and Environment.
- 7 United Nations Treaty Collection, (n.d.) retrieved January 2, 2024
- 8 Government Communications Office (GCO), Qatar’s National Vision (n.d) retrieved on January 2, 2024

About the Author







Neeshad is an environmentalist and a policy-oriented social change advocate, best known for his work on the youth climate movement, and environmental and climate policies in the Middle East. Since 2015, he has been a prominent presence at international climate summits—especially the UN Climate Summit (COPs)—participating in various capacities. He holds a master’s degree in Environmental Engineering and is based in Doha, Qatar. He was named in the Apolitical’s List of the 100 Most Influential People in Climate Policy in 2019 and 2022 respectively. Neeshad is currently the

Co-founder & Executive Director at the Arab Youth Climate Movement Qatar, the first registered youth lead non-profit association in the State of Qatar.

© 2024, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004-3027

The Wilson Center

 wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/WoodrowWilsonCenter
 [@TheWilsonCenter](https://twitter.com/TheWilsonCenter)
 202.691.4000

The Middle East Program

Merissa Khurma | Director

 wilsoncenter.org/program/middle-east-program
 mep@wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/WilsonCenterMEP
 [@WilsonCenterMEP](https://twitter.com/WilsonCenterMEP)
 202.691.4160

Environmental Change and Security Program

 wilsoncenter.org/ecsp
 ecsp@wilsoncenter.org
 facebook.com/ecspwwc
 [@NewSecurityBeat](https://twitter.com/NewSecurityBeat)
 202.691.4000