

BEYOND ALLOCATION:
THE POLITICS OF LEGITIMACY IN QATAR

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By

Jocelyn Sage Mitchell, M.A.

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Jocelyn Sage Mitchell, M.A.

Dissertation Advisor: Stephen J. King, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that in order to explain the political stability of Qatar amid the region-wide tumult of the Arab Spring, we must go beyond classic rentier state explanations of economic buyoff of the citizenry. Qatar, an extremely resource-rich country with no obvious characteristics of instability, should be a crucial case study for rentier state theory. Instead, however, we see clear evidence that a significant portion of the Qatari population is dissatisfied with the economic allocations offered by the state. Further, there appears to be little correlation between economic satisfaction and political acquiescence, with even those who are satisfied still desiring more say in government decisions and public life. Even more importantly, we see the state acting and reacting in ways that are antithetical to the classic theory—such as spending time, money, and energy promoting legitimacy in noneconomic ways, and reversing state-led policies in the face of societal backlash—which depicts a society with significantly more agency and influence on the state than previously theorized.

By using an in-depth study of Qatar, this dissertation shows that economic allocation is a necessary but not sufficient condition of a rentier state's political legitimacy formula. Insights from the literatures on political legitimacy and the limited state point to the importance of looking at three components of state legitimacy: legality, justification, and consent. I expand the classic rentier explanation of stability to take into account noneconomic legitimization strategies of the state, which create a fuller picture of the justification aspect of Qatar's political legitimacy,

as well as state tolerance of public debate and state response to issues of concern, which depict the pursuit of societal consent to bolster the state's legitimacy. This dissertation inserts Qatar into the ongoing debate of how best to understand the domestic politics of rentier states in the twenty-first century. Besides providing a fuller explanation of an understudied but crucially important Gulf state, this dissertation also aims to improve our understanding of state-society relations in the modern Arab Gulf.

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