Politicization Of Migrant Communities In The GCC As Seen On Twitter

Migrants constitute nearly half of the population of the six Gulf Corporation Council states (GCC). In some of these states, including Qatar, this ratio is even higher. The small local population could not meet the increasing demand for workforce with the booming development of the GCC after the discovery of oil. With the advent of the Gulf-oil economy in the 1950s, GCC states largely sought to import labor from neighboring Arab states such as Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, and some Levant countries, as their shared linguistic, cultural and religious affinities posed geographic and socio-cultural synergies. However, by the 1980s, the composition of the migrant population shifted demographically. The proportion of non-Arab Asian migrants increased vastly exceeding Arab migrants by 1995. While this shift is due to a range of economic, political and socio-cultural considerations, migration scholarship on the GCC has consistently attributed it to the GCC states’ perception of Arab migrants as a more politicized presence -in comparison to Asian and also Western counterparts- that poses a potential disruptive threat to the political and social order of the region. More specifically, it is assumed that Arab migrants are more likely to introduce externally driven politically, socially and religiously salient ideologies in the Gulf States due to their linked identity with the Gulf nationals and their inherent embeddedness in the geo-political atmosphere of the Middle East. This claim, as well as the domestic political engagement and politicization of the general migrant population in the GCC, however, have largely gone unstudied and unproven in the scholarship.

Today, although dominated by Asians, the migrant community in the GCC states includes various nationalities of Arabs and non-Arabs who immigrated for work or study purposes. This study assesses the politicization and political engagement of different migrant communities in three GCC states: Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. By identifying a series of economically, politically and socially salient topics pertaining to each of these Gulf states, we use public Twitter data for users from these three states to identify users’ nationality group and assess their engagement (or lack thereof) in these prominent domestic discourses in an attempt to unravel the assumption of the link between political engagement and nationality and to offer a more nuanced and data-informed conclusion.

The study found lower levels of politicization among all nationalities in Qatar than Bahrain and Saudi. The study also found that Gulf nationals, in the three GCC states, are the most politicized among the nationality groups. Finally, the study found that some nationality groups generate more original political tweets, while other nationalities tend to retweet political tweets more.

This study could be extended to study the link between politicization and specific nationalities rather than nationality groups, the link between politicization and occupation, and the socio-cultural integration of different migrant communities in the local society.

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Abstract

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