

Teim



TEIM Election Watch Analysis

ELECTION REPORT:

QATAR/Central Municipal Council
10 May 2011

Luciano Zaccara

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Background to the elections:

The elections of the members of Qatar's Central Municipal Council (CMC) that took place on 10 May, are the fourth such to be held since the council was first elected in 1999. The CMC is, furthermore, the only Qatari institution whose members are elected by Qatari citizens. Having said that, although elections for the National Consultative Council (whose members are currently designated by the Emir) have been announced on numerous occasions since 2003, when the country's new constitution was promulgated, these have never actually taken place, nor are they likely to do so in the short or medium term, despite the growing media pressure that is sweeping the Arab world since January 2011.

Despite it having purely local authority, the CMC is a single body at national level, made up of 29 members who have no executive powers and whose role is limited to advising the Ministry of Municipal Affairs on problems that arise between the ten municipalities that make up the country. Despite the interest shown by the Qatari authorities in putting on exemplary elections on all four occasions (1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011), the interest shown by citizens has not been comparable, with a very low rate both of registration on the electoral roll and voter turnout.

Political parties are still illegal despite the fact that the constitution establishes the right of association and a 2004 law enshrines the right to create trade unions and professional associations. Foreign workers, the absolute majority of the population of Qatar (80%, 2010 census), are still not represented either as candidates or as voters. The presence of women among voters and candidates has been maintained since the first elections; this year saw the highest female participation so far, with 4 candidates in total.

The events that took place in Tunisia in January 2011 and that then spread to the Arabian Peninsula, severely affecting Yemen, Bahrain and Oman, as well as to a lesser degree Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, do not seem to have affected Qatar significantly, except for certain calls for change made by intellectuals and university activists via social networks such as Facebook. There have been no demonstrations or repression of opposition movements, at least not up to the writing of this report.

Quantitative indices of democracy:

Qatar was classified in the following democratic performance rankings just before these elections:

Measurement	Name and year of report or database	Institution	Index	Points, ranking and classification
Political rights and freedom	Freedom House Report 2011	Freedom House	PR: political rights CL: civil liberties	PR: 6, CL: 5 (Scale of 1, free to 7, not free) Classification: Not free
Degree of democracy of earlier elections	Polyarchy 2.0 2003	Peace Research Institute of Oslo and Tatu Vanhanen	ID: Synthetic democracy index, Part: participation, Comp: competition	Not evaluated
Consolidation of authoritarian and democratic institutions	Polity IV 2009	Center for International Development and Conflict Management, Univ. of Maryland	Democracy: consolidation of democratic institutions Autocracy: authoritarian consolidation Polity: synthesis of both	Democracy: 0 Autocracy: 10 Polity: - 10 (Scale of +10, very democratic to -10, very authoritarian) Classification: High authoritarian consolidation
Perception of corruption	Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2011	Transparency International (TI)	TICPI: corruption perceptions index	TICPI: 7.7/10 , (Scale of 1, very corrupt to 10, not at all corrupt) Rank: 19 out of 180 countries
Management of political and economic change	Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2010	Bertelsmann Foundation	MI: Management Index, quality of transformation management	MI: 5,59/10, Ranking: 50 out of 126 countries Classification: Management with moderate success
Democracy, including press status and corruption	World Democracy Audit 2010	World Audit	World Democracy Rank: political freedom (FH) + press and corruption (TI)	World Democracy Ranking: Not evaluated

Quantitative analysis of electoral democracy:

This indicator cannot be calculated given that political parties do not exist and because it would be practically impossible to define the different blocks of opposition and loyalists that have made up the different elected municipal councils since 1999.

Definition of the political system:

An absolute monarchy with a centralized government, Qatar also has a consultative assembly made up of 35 members appointed by the current head of state, the Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani. As previously commented, elections to pick 30 members of this council – whose membership would rise to 45 – have been due to take place since 2007, but have until now been postponed on numerous occasions. The Emir also appoints the prime minister and the cabinet (although the prime minister does propose its members).

Definition of the electoral system and parties:

Political parties are prohibited. Independent candidates (men and women over 30 years old) present their candidacies in the Ministry of Interior and, just as voters do, have to register in the constituency they reside in. Every Qatari citizen (men and women) over 18 years old and holding citizenship for more than 15 years may vote. Each voter chooses one candidate in their uninominal constituency. There are 29 uninominal constituencies, in which the 29 ministers are elected by a simple majority of votes (first-past-the-post electoral system). Voting is voluntary, it being necessary to have previously registered on the electoral roll to do so.

Impact of the electoral system and size of the constituency on the elections:

The geographical boundaries of the twenty-nine single-member constituencies are decided on the basis of the number of registered voters and do not therefore coincide, either with the number or the boundaries of the existing ten municipalities. This is unnecessary in any case, given that the municipal council is one single central institution.

Results:

- Registered voters:	32,622
- Voters able to vote on 10 May:	31,399
- Votes cast:	13,606
- Participation:	43.3%

The difference of 1,223 voters between the number of voters registered and the number actually able to participate stems from the fact in two constituencies, Musay'id and Al Shahaniyah, the sole candidates competing were proclaimed winners without needing a vote. For this reason, the number of voters enrolled in those two constituencies is subtracted from the total.

Of the 29 winning candidates, 16 were reelected, including the only successful female candidate, who was elected to serve a third term with more votes than any other candidate, 803.

# Dist.	Electoral district	Winning candidate	# of votes
1	Al Jisrah	Tarek Saif al-Maliki	193
2	Nueva Doha	Jassim Abdullah Jassim al-Maliki	206
3	Al Markhiyah	Mohammed Jassim Nasser Al Muslimani	146
4	Khalifeh Norte	Khalid Hamad Khalifa Al Kubaisi	121
5	Khalifeh Sur	Mohammed Shaheen Rashid Al Dosari	135
6	Ibn Imran	Ali Sahin Al Kuwari	135
7	Nueva Al Jadidah	Abdullah Saeed Abdullah Al-Sulaiti	267
8	Al Hilal	Hassan Mohamed Meshal Al Dahnim	177
9	Aeropuerto	Sheikha Yousef Hassan Jufairi	803
10	al Wakrah	Hassan Abbas Hassan Abd Al-Rahim	318
11	Musay'id	Saeed Ali Hamad Al-Marri	N/C
12	Abu Hamour	Saleh Jaber Saleh al-Marri	331
13	Nueva Al Ghanim	Ahmed Hamad Al-Khaled Al-Ghanim	252
14	Al Murrah	Saleh Rashed Hamad Masoud Jarallah	136
15	Mu'ayzer	Mohamed Ali Mohamed Al Azbeh	553
16	Marrikh	Mohammed Salem Mohammed Gamra	192
17	Mu'ayzer norte	Abdullah Hamad Saud Henzab	429
18	Nueva Al Rayyan	Mohammed Hamoud Al Shafi	464
19	Antigua Al Rayyan	Hamad Saleh Hamad Al-Hol	145
20	Al Nasiriyah	Mohamed Saleh Rashid Al-Hajri	182
21	Al Gharafah	Mubarak Fareesh Saleh	158
22	Umm Sallal Ali	Ahmed Ibrahim Sultan Al Sheeb	221
23	Al Khuraytiyat	Hadi Hamad Al-Hamad Al-Marri	177
24	Al Shahaniyah	Mohammed Zafar Mohammed Al-Hajri	N/C
25	Dukhan	Mohammed Faisal Mubarak Shahwani	100
26	Al Khour	Saqr Saeed Salem Al Mohannadi	178
27	Al Thakirah	Hamad Ali Lahdan Al Mohannadi	199
28	Al Madinah Norte	Saad Ali Hassan al-Naimi	157
29	Al Ghwayriyah	Saeed Mubarak Saeed Al-Rashidi	90
Total votes obtained by winning candidates			6.465

Note: N/C, candidate automatically declared winner as no competitors in constituency.

Source: Interior Ministry

Qualitative analysis of the elections:

Participation:

The exact number of Qatari citizens allowed to vote has not been provided officially by the Ministry of Interior authorities. What is known is that 32 622 citizens registered voluntarily to vote via the Ministry's application. According to 2010 census data¹, the country's total population is 1 699 435 people, of which 1 357 563 are non-citizens, leaving no more than 341 872 Qatari citizens. This fact means that real voter turnout is extremely low, with only 3.9% of Qatari nationals actually turning out to vote. Leaving aside the actual number of citizens entitled to vote (those over 18 years old, the legal age of suffrage), the fact is that enrolled voters represent less than 10% of the Qatari national population (9.5% exactly). Keeping this important consideration in mind, the official registered voter turnout was 43.3%, which is the number of actual voters divided by those registered to do so. This reflects the low interest among Qataris in their municipal elections.

¹ The official 2010 census is available at the government official site:
<http://www.qsa.gov.qa/QatarCensus/Populations.aspx>, consulted 7th May 2011

Competition:

The total number of candidates added up to 101, among which there 4 women, 2 of whom competed on their own for the 9th circumscription, Airport, thereby ensuring that at least one woman would be represented in the council. In this constituency, participation was higher than average (53.3%) and the winning candidate Sheikha Yousef Hassan al-Jufairi, got 92.5% of the votes cast. In two electoral districts there was only one candidate, thus Saeed Ali Hamed al-Meri and Mohammed Zafer al-Hajri were proclaimed winners without the need for elections. There was no information regarding rejected candidatures, but there was about some candidates who withdrew during the registration process and even on the very day of the elections.

Transparency:

These elections were technically impeccable. The candidates and voter registration processes have not been criticized, apart from some mistakes made with some voters who were not registered in the correct constituency. The right to vote was correctly exercised in the polling stations that this observer visited during his mission; checking that the authorities gave the appropriate guarantees for a free and fair vote to those who turned up at the polls. Identification of voters was assisted by an online computer register, after they showed their identity card and voting card. Candidates were clearly identified with their names and pictures on the ballots. The voting process was supervised in every constituency by the candidates themselves or their representatives who also remained for the counting of the votes at the end of the day. The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) established a roster for monitoring the elections with 20 observers. No report has been published yet, but the coordinator of project² informed us that no relevant event had taken place; nor were there complaints by voters or candidates.

Party representation and debate during the election:

Due to the lack of political parties and clear tendencies expressed in the programmes of the different candidates, it is hard to conclude that the candidates represent all political ideas and tendencies that exist in Qatar. Considering that only registered nationals could vote and stand for election, at barely 2.4% of the total population of the country (both nationals and non-nationals), the candidates are far from being highly representative.

Openness:

The list of winning candidates shows that 16 members of the former CMC retained their seats. This trend has continued over the course of previous elections (13 councillors were re-elected in both the second and third CMC elections). The number of voters and candidates has also remained steady, making last minute surprises unlikely.

Significance:

The limited powers given to the CMC, the role of which is reduced to one of advising and lobbying different ministries, makes the relevance of these elections almost zero. Members of the CMC consulted by this observer lament the CMC's lack of executive powers, warning that this will be the cause of the

² Interview with Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Kuwairi at the Ministry for the Environment, Doha, on 11 May 2011.

definitive lack of interest among the population in future elections that could take place in the country, both municipal or legislative.

Consequences and impact on the political system:

As a result of the lack of direct consequences on executive policy, there is no impact on the political system, unless the electoral experience is considered as an “apprenticeship” for the oft-announced and postponed legislative elections.

International political response:

The international media and the governments of other countries both in and outside the region did not make special reference or a specific assessment of the elections, which went unnoticed among the large amount of more relevant political events taking place in neighbouring countries.

Conclusions

These technically flawless municipal elections show that the Qatari authorities take interest in carrying out elections which conform to international standards. However, the real question regarding these elections is: why vote? On account of its little executive authority and the fact that it does not represent almost 80% of Qatari residents, or grant them the right to vote, the Central Municipal Council (CMC) is neither plural nor efficient in its duty. Unfortunately, the much promised and postponed legislative elections run the risk of following the same path. Maybe the feebleness of popular pressure to date in this sense has been critical. Indeed, the Qatari government has been the least affected by the wave of protests throughout the Arab world, giving the impression that the calls for greater participation in decision-making, will only appear gradually.