

The Public Opinion Orientations in Kuwait towards the Performance of the Government in Dealing with the Coronavirus Crisis

A Field Study

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Introduction

In early 2020 a virus appeared in Wuhan, China, known as the "new coronavirus", a.k.a SARS-CoV-2. This virus causes health complications and respiratory problems that may lead to death. The infected cases in China continued to increase in a short time period at a high rate causing terror at the international level. The virus soon moved out of China and started to spread in all countries of the world leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to classify it as a pandemic.

As all other countries in the world, the State of Kuwait was also affected by the pandemic. The first cases of infection appeared in Kuwait in February 2020 when two Kuwaitis returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and soon the number of cases began to increase rapidly. This prompted the government of Kuwait to take a set of measures including preventive ones in order to protect the citizens and residents of the country. The most important measures were a hold on granting entry visa for those who wanted to enter Kuwait from the countries that were hit hard by the virus; stopping all flights from and to the infected countries with the virus; the obligatory institutional quarantine for arrivals from all countries for a period of 14 days; the cancelation of congregational prayers and people gathering of all kinds; and the closure of schools, colleges, universities, ministries and public institutions as well as of commercial centers.

The Study

The Center of Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies (CGAPS) at the University of Kuwait is continuously monitoring and measuring the Kuwaiti public opinion's orientations towards various issues of concern to Kuwait and the Gulf region. It conducted a field study in the period from 9-11 March 2020 that aimed to examine the orientations of the Kuwaiti people towards the performance of their government during the emergence of the coronavirus crisis.

The study relied on the descriptive analytical method and its population consisted of all the Kuwaiti people. The study's sample was chosen intentionally to cover the demographic and geographic variations of Kuwait. The sample size was 1090 individuals of which three were excluded because their answers on the form of the study did not meet the scientific requirements. This decreased the sample number to 1087 individuals: 602 males and 485 females.

For collecting the information to the study, we used the questionnaire technique because it is the most appropriate tool to gather data related to the subject of the survey. The questionnaire was designed to measure the orientations of the Kuwaiti's public opinion towards the performance of the government in dealing with the crisis of COVID-19.

The study sample comprised the following demographic variables:

- › Gender: Male/ Female.

- › Age range: less than 18, from 18-30, from 31- 40, from 41- 50, and over 50.
- › Educational level: postgraduate, university, diploma, secondary, and less than secondary.
- › Residential Governorate: the capital, Hawalli, Farwaniya, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Al-Ahmadi, and Al-Jahraa.

The survey included one statement:

The government of the State of Kuwait has dealt with the emerging Coronavirus crisis in the required manner

The questionnaire used the Likert scale quintet weights to measure the responses of the participants. The scale consists of five grades, as follows: strongly agree (5 points), agree (4 points), neutral (3 points), disagree (2 points), strongly disagree (1 point).

To statically analyse the collected data in the survey, the study used the SPSS program, which is mostly used for such studies in social sciences.

The overall results of the study revealed that 33.61% of the study sample strongly agree that the government of Kuwait has dealt with the required manner in the face of the evolving crisis of COVID-19 and that 31.13% of respondents said that they agree with the statement. The study also revealed that 19.38% of respondents “do not agree that the government of Kuwait has dealt in the required form with the crisis” and that 9.73% of the respondents “do strongly disagree.” Those who maintained neutral position on this issue were 6.15% of respondents.

According to the demographic variables of the members of the study sample (age, gender, educational level, place of residence), the study showed that the females in the sample agreed more than the males that the government had dealt in the crisis with the required form.

Age wise, the members of the sample from the age group of less than 18 years were the most amicable to the government's performance in the crisis, while the members of the sample from the older age group, the one over 50 years, were the least to approve the government's performance in the crisis.

The study also showed that less educated people in the sample were more in favor to the government's performance in the crisis while more educated people, those who are in the graduate studies, were the least to approve the government's performance.

The study also revealed that the members of the sample from Al-Jahraa's governorate were the most supportive of the government's measures in dealing with the crisis, compared to the residents of the capital who were the least likely to agree with the way the government has dealt with the crisis.

Analysis of the results

In general, the study indicated that there was a great degree of satisfaction of Kuwaiti citizens towards the government's performance during crisis as it showed that about 64% of the citizens had a positive orientation in respect to how the government dealt with this crisis. This is a fairly large percentage and a satisfactory one for the government.

This result can be explained by the fact that this public opinion's poll has been conducted at the beginning of the crisis (at the beginning of March 2020). At the time, the government's performance in dealing with the crisis was largely successful as it dealt with limited cases of infections and before the development of the crisis in the following months, which witnessed an increased number of cases in the community among the citizens and residents. Therefore, the public opinion poll does not capture the orientation of people when the

government was forced to impose a curfew that was partial at the beginning and then turned into a total ban of movement that lasted for three weeks.

In fact, when the crisis developed, some of the political activists started on social media to criticize some of the government's practices in dealing with the crisis. Some of these critics went so far to claim that there were suspicions of financial corruption related to some deals concluded by the government to import medical masks; claims that had not been supported by any evidence. Furthermore, using social media, some doctors within the health institutions have started publicly to criticize the practices of the Ministry of Health in dealing with the crisis. Additionally, the people have begun to notice the extent of government's shortages in dealing with this crisis, which is most likely related to the extent of pressure on the government's institutions as a result of the prolonged period of the crisis and the significant increase in the number of infected cases that overwhelmed the healthcare system.

Accordingly, it is important to say that if this poll was conducted in a later period of time, it might have produced different results. The poll also coincided with an intensive government media campaign that underlined the role of the government in facing the spread of the coronavirus and promoted its success in a way that greatly contributed to influence public opinion. All of this happened at time when parliament, civil society organizations, and the modern media was absent, possibly as a result of a societal shock and fear of at the onset of the crisis, which in turn led to a wide support for the government in order to counter the epidemic and to prevent its spread in society.

One of the important observations of the results of the study is that it indicates that the higher the educational level of the people, the less they are satisfied with the government's performance in the crisis. This can be explained by the fact that individuals with lower education are more likely to be affected easier by the media, while the individuals with higher educational level are more capable of observing the shortages in the government's performance. Perhaps also, they are more informed by the experiences of other countries and/or of the medical, scientific and economic reports about this crisis.

Another observation is related to the fact that they were more supportive to the government's performance in the study among the females than the males. This is most likely because the government, through its official media, portrayed the crisis as an existential threat to Kuwait, which is to a large extent true. As a result, the "females" seem to have sympathized more with the government than males and accepted and supported its measures.

The study also revealed that older individuals were less satisfied with the government's performance in dealing with the crisis. This is logical as the older the individuals, the greater the degree of their awareness to the facts and of their independence in the evaluation of the government's performance away from media's influences that can affect the orientation of the younger generation who have less life experienced.

Finally, the greater support of the government's performance in Al-Jahraa governorate than any other governorate is simply because Al-Jahraa witnessed the lowest percentage of cases compared to the rest of the country. Therefore, its members were the least affected directly by the spread of the virus.

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