

Desire for Cultural Preservation as a Predictor of Support for Entertainment Media Censorship in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates

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This article examines support for cultural preservation as a predictor of support for censorship of entertainment media in three Arab Gulf countries: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates ($N = 3,017$; $n > 1,000$ in each country). Greater support for cultural preservation was positively associated with support for censorship; a belief that more should be done to preserve cultural traditions (Qatar, United Arab Emirates) and a desire for more entertainment that reflects one's culture and history (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) were positively associated with support for censorship in two of the three countries. The belief that Hollywood films are harmful to morality was the only variable associated with stronger censorship support in all countries.

Keywords: censorship, cultural preservation, Arab region, Middle East, Arab Gulf, entertainment, Media Use in the Middle East survey

When censorship of entertainment media in the Arab world is discussed or derided by observers from Europe or North America, it is often assumed that heavy-handed Middle Eastern governments keep audiences from experiencing a healthy range of artistic expression, and that speech is abridged against the will of entertainment audiences. However, just as research shows considerable public support for some kinds of censorship in the West, even among millennials (Pew Research Center, 2015), laypersons in the Arab world, particularly the conservative Arab Gulf, may support government abridgment of some kinds of speech, especially speech that, as in the United States, is believed to adversely affect some vulnerable members of the public.

Censorship and prior restraint in the Arab world are discussed frequently by human rights organizations and subsequently covered by global news media (see Freedom House, 2014), but less research exists on attitudes toward censorship and their predictors in Arab countries. Arab families and communities tend to be more collectivist and less individualistic than many communities in the West (Nydell, 2012), a characteristic associated in other parts of the world with a lower likelihood to tolerate

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individual expression found offensive by members of one's community. Greater concern for the potentially negative effect of media on certain members of a community may heighten the third-person effect (see Hoffner et al., 1999; Salwen, 1998) and, subsequently, willingness to censor media content.

Media consumers—and perhaps parents or guardians of children in particular—often express support for censorship of certain entertainment content, such as gratuitous violence or sordid sexual material. In some Western countries, support for censorship of violent material tends to be greater than support for abridgment of sexual material (see Fisher, Cook, & Shirkey, 1994), although approval of censorship of dissident speech exists as well. A 2012 survey found that nearly one in five respondents among a nationally representative sample in the United States expressed support for direct government censorship of “politically damaging news” (Rodriguez, 2013).

The nations in this study have conservative roots stress-tested by rapid globalization and, as such, this study both assessed attitudes toward censorship in three Arab Gulf countries and tested the hypothesis that a stronger desire for cultural preservation is associated with support for entertainment censorship. The dependent variable in the study was an index of four items, measuring support for censorship of violent content, romantic content, deletion of entertainment scenes some people may find offensive, and banning entire films or programs some people may find offensive. Support for abridgment of entertainment media content was chosen as the dependent variable over, say, support for censorship of political speech, because there seems to be more variance among attitudes toward censoring violent and sexual content than political dissidence. If the objective is to gauge someone's support of principles of free expression, better than asking whether, say, newspapers should enjoy freedom is to assess their support for freedom of speech they loathe: “freedom for the thought that we hate,” to use the title of one of Anthony Lewis' (2010) final books.

Predictors of Attitudes Toward Censorship

When asked their attitudes on freedom of expression, publics often greatly support freedom in the abstract, but are willing to accept censorship of specific content they find harmful or distasteful. For example, in a 2013 Northwestern University in Qatar survey (Dennis, Martin & Wood, 2013) comprising more than 10,000 respondents in eight Arab countries—including the three countries in the current study—60% of respondents agreed that “[i]t is OK for people to express their ideas on the Internet, even if they are unpopular” (p. 57), whereas just 12% disagreed. At the same time, 50% of respondents felt “the Internet *in my country* [emphasis added] should be more tightly regulated than it is now” (p. 57). Thus, the notion of free speech online is broadly supported, but respondents also favor more Internet regulation in their own countries. A 2012 Pew Research Center survey in Tunisia found greater support for free speech broadly (64%) than the more narrow “uncensored access to the Internet” (45%; p. 32).

Similarly, although people in the United States often endorse the general values of free expression and free media, and have attributed the lack of such freedoms in certain countries to authoritarian regimes saddling unhappy citizens with speech regulations (Gunther & Hwa, 1996), public support for free speech is highly dependent on the kind of content on trial (see Paek, Lambe, & McLeod, 2008). In the United States, the legal test for obscenity established in *Miller v. California* (1973) permits

ensorship of expression likely to be found obscene by a "reasonable person," a standard echoed in many Arab constitutions and speech codes that prohibit offending sensibilities of the community, such as Qatar's constitutional proscription against anything "causing offense to the public morals" (M. J. Duffy, 2013, p. 50).

A well-documented predictor of censorship is the *third-person perception*, the disparity between the extents to which a person believes media content adversely affects oneself as compared with others, and it has been shown to predict support for censorship of televised violence and pornography (Rojas, Shah, & Faber, 1996), violent and misogynic rap music (McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997), political advertising (Salwen, 1998), televised aggression (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002), and pornography (Lee & Tamborini, 2005).

Arab countries have been accused of lacking freedom of speech, despite great political and legal variance in policing expression across the region. "The dominant trend that has emerged [in Arab countries]," reported UNESCO's 2014 *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*, "indicates ongoing restrictions on freedom of expression, opinion and the press even amid increasing pressure for liberalization" (Radsch, 2014, p. 7). The extents of these restrictions vary significantly across Arab states. Regarding Internet regulation, for example, Warf and Vincent (2007) wrote that whereas certain Arab states such as Lebanon and Kuwait do not heavily regulate online information, Saudi Arabia has firewalls that afford the government more control over accessibility of content.

Saudi Arabia's censorship of entertainment media is discussed often, given blanket restrictions such as those banning public cinemas since the 1980s through late 2014 and the confiscation of more than 10,000 books from a Riyadh book fair last year for allegedly blasphemous content (Flood, 2014). Although Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are typically considered less restrictive, movies containing sexual content are typically permitted in the cinema only after intimate scenes have been removed, whereas violent content is mostly unmonitored. Censorship of romantic content in Qatar and the UAE includes literature deemed inappropriate by government-appointed censors (Flood, 2009).

Among cultural predictors of support for censorship, respondents' perception of their own conservatism is a positive predictor of support for censorship (Fisher et al., 1994; Ho, Detenber, Malik, & Neo, 2012; Lambe, 2004, 2008; Rojas et al., 1996). Hense and Wright (1992) found respondents' religiosity to be a positive predictor of support for censorship of violent and sexual content. Meanwhile, education and the amount of exposure to the kind of content under potential abridgment negatively predict support for censorship (Fisher et al., 1994; Ho et al., 2012; Hoffner et al., 1999; Salwen, 1998).

Cultural Preservation in the Arab Gulf

Cultural tensions are often cited in Arab Gulf states because of large numbers of expatriates in these countries. In Saudi Arabia, where unemployment is a growing problem, 90% of private sector jobs are held by foreigners (Murphy, 2013). The population of more than 2.2 million in Qatar features fewer than 300,000 citizens (Qatar Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, 2015), and the nation has become a modern city-state at racing speed, transformed from a near-lifeless desert outpost in the mid-

1990s to a busy metropolis by the early 2000s (Ulrichsen, 2014). Nationals in the UAE are also outnumbered five to one (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). In many parts of the world, modernity in general may be seen as the primary cause for loss of a society's cultural traditions, and the economic and demographic contexts of the Arab Gulf render globalization even more salient. That is, the Arab Gulf is faced not only with cultural preservation or adaptation vis-à-vis forces of modernity at play within its own culture—an issue facing all nations—but also the unusual challenge of its citizenries being minorities in their own countries (or in Saudi Arabia, in key employment sectors), demographically overwhelmed by different and distinct national and cultural groups parachuted in from elsewhere. Although traditional culture in the Arab Gulf has not been eradicated by globalization and labor migration, something shown in research on the influence of national culture on business management practices in Arab Gulf states (e.g., Naoum, Alyousif, & Atkinson, 2013), indigenous culture in the Arab peninsula has been, and is, nonetheless stress-tested by the push of modernity.

In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which, although a recent pact, was the result of nearly 30 years of multinational negotiations (Alivizatou, 2012). This reflects pervasive concern for the endurance of culture and tradition, which public opinion research suggests likewise exists in Arab countries. Polls conducted in the Arab world show considerable ambivalence toward globalization, with considerable concern about the threat posed to Arab culture and traditions, especially from the West; yet, demand for Western entertainment is high. In the Arab Public Opinion Poll, Shibley Telhami (2013) found unfavorable ratings of the United States by Arabs to be consistently more than 70% from 2002 to 2010; yet, in his 2009 poll, more than 70% also said they watched Western movies, shows, or music videos.

In 2005, Fauzi Najjar identified three distinct attitudes toward globalization: rejecting it as an existential threat to Arab culture, embracing globalization as a positive source of modernity and opportunity that does not require compromising Arab culture, and “pragmatically” accepting globalization's inevitability but advocating a form of globalization compatible with cultural and national interests of local people. In the Arab Gulf, the large but economically necessary foreign population, the relatively recent formation of the modern states (Ulrichsen, 2014), and the pace of social and economic development make the implications of the divide between these competing perspectives and approaches especially immediate and important.

If popular culture, as embodied in entertainment media, is a driver of cultural change, then the demographic challenges to traditional culture are compounded by the historically low proportion of mainstream film, television, music, and digital content produced in or about the Arab Gulf (Shafik, 2007). Cinemas are largely banned in Saudi Arabia, but in Qatar and the UAE, mainstream cinemas screen far more films from Hollywood, Bollywood, or other foreign sources than they do Arab films: Gulf Films, the dominant distributor of films to regional Arab cinemas with more than 50% market share, deals almost exclusively in non-Arab films, reflected in CEO Selim El Azar's comment that “whatever works in the United States works here” (Kamin, 2014, para. 7). In 2015 in the UAE, the Middle East's largest cinema market, Arabic-language films accounted for only 8% of all titles screened and 3% of box office revenues (Schoenbach, Wood, & Saeed, 2016). Arabic films that do make it to the cineplexes of the region are mostly from Egypt or Lebanon (Mellor, 2011).

Digital content, taken as a whole, is also disproportionately “foreign”; according to Google linguistic data, Arabic, including regional dialects, comprises just 3% of total content on the Internet, compared with the approximately 4.5% of people in the world who are Arabic speakers (Ethnologue, 2015). The cultural and economic value of increasing locally produced content is recognized by Arab governments, which have funded large-scale initiatives aimed at catalyzing indigenous entertainment production, such as Abu Dhabi’s TwoFour54 (Hercules, 2009). This is not necessarily a new realization; Habeeb (1985) wrote that the use of classical Arabic in Saudi state broadcasting played a role in preserving elements of culture indigenous to the Arab peninsula, but only in roughly the last five to 10 years has there been a widespread effort to produce mainstream entertainment in, by, and for the people of the Arab Gulf.

Based on such entertainment media trends in Arab Gulf countries, this study used variables that assessed a desire for cultural preservation in general, as well as preferences for entertainment based on one’s own culture, society, and history. The belief that more should be done to preserve cultural traditions and a preference for films that portray one’s culture, for example, were among the independent variables employed. The belief that one’s culture is under threat may be correlated with a willingness to censor extant media content that is not, or at least less, proximate to one’s own culture and values.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

- RQ1: What levels of support exist for censorship of potentially sensitive entertainment media content among respondents in the Arab Gulf countries of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE?*
- RQ2: What levels of support for cultural preservation do residents in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE express?*
- H1: Desires for greater cultural preservation will be significantly and positively associated with greater support for censorship among respondents in the three Arab Gulf countries of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE.*

Method

Survey Data Collection

This study is a secondary analysis of data from the 2014 Entertainment Media Use in the Middle East survey (Dennis, Martin, & Wood, 2014), which was created and commissioned by Northwestern University in Qatar in partnership with Doha Film Institute. Fieldwork was completed by the Nielsen Company/Harris Poll in all countries except Qatar, where data were collected by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute at Qatar University. Researchers used multistage random probability sampling of households to conduct face-to-face interviews within the general populations, nationals as well as expatriates, 18 years and older, in six Arab countries: Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Tunisia, and Lebanon. The latter three countries, outside the Arab Gulf, were not included in the analyses of this current study. One thousand respondents or more in each Arab Gulf country completed the questionnaire

($N = 3,017$). The sampling method did not include several subgroups in the populations, including visitors with no residence permit; farmers; the mentally disabled; and those in army barracks, hospitals, university dormitories, prisons, or labor camps.

The survey was administered in all countries between January and March 2014. Response rates in the three countries—percentage of participants approached who completed the full questionnaire—were robust: 52% in Qatar ($n = 1,003$), 78% in Saudi Arabia ($n = 1,009$), and 82% in the UAE ($n = 1,005$). The percentages of surveyed citizens, versus expatriates, in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE were, respectively, 68%, 27%, and 22%, figures that vary because of the differences in expatriate presence in the countries. The percentages of expatriates as a share of the total population in each country were as follows: Arab expatriates, Saudi Arabia = 15.8%, Qatar = 27.4%, UAE = 25.2%; Asian expatriates, Saudi Arabia = 13.2%, Qatar = 26.1%, UAE = 36.5%; Western expatriates, Saudi Arabia = 8.4%, Qatar = 3.4%, UAE = 12.7%.

In-person interviews in Saudi Arabia and the UAE were conducted at regular intervals (of four domiciles) following the randomization as follows: The interviewer was directed to the geographic starting point in a given neighborhood initially defined by the researchers. The interviewer skipped a number of homes equal to the sample interval (four houses) and conducted one interview in the next selected household. The interviewer asked for a list of the household members who were 18 years and older, starting with the eldest to the youngest member, and used a random numbers table (or Kish grid) to select the prospective respondent for the interview. The counting of households was continuous, uninterrupted starting from the top floor, clockwise in descending order, from one building to the next following a random path indicated in advance, while documenting passage through the block in a detailed Fieldwork Register.

Surveys in Qatar were conducted face-to-face among people who lived in residential housing units. The sampling frame used lists of all housing units in Qatar with information about the address to identify whether the housing units were households or labor camps. Excluded from the survey were those living in labor camps, army barracks, hospitals, dormitories, and prisons.

Qatar is divided into seven administrative municipalities. Each municipality contains a number of zones, and each zone is divided into several blocks. In the frame, there are 72 zones and 320 blocks. In this survey, housing units in each municipality were ordered by geographic location to permit well-distributed sampling of housing units in different areas. A systematic sampling was then constructed.

The questionnaire was available in English or Arabic, depending on respondent preference, although illiteracy was not a barrier to participation, as questionnaires were administered orally. Weighting was applied in each country to ensure representativeness by age, gender, ethnicity, and geographic region. The margins of sampling error in Saudi Arabia were $\pm 3.2\%$ using a 95% confidence interval, and $\pm 3.8\%$ and $\pm 3.1\%$ in Qatar and the UAE, respectively.

Measurement

Dependent variable. The dependent variable, support for censorship, was an index of four items—5-point Likert items with the following prompts: (1) “Films or other entertainment programs should be banned if some people find them offensive”; (2) “It is appropriate to delete scenes some people may find offensive”; (3) “Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for violent content”; and (4) “Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for romantic content.” Cronbach’s alpha for the four censorship items was .78, and the coefficient did not change appreciably upward when any one of the items was removed from the scale.

These four variables were developed by researchers at Northwestern University in Qatar, in partnership with industry experts at Doha Film Institute. The questionnaire also drew on language from the World Internet Project (Cole et al., 2013) in its longitudinal surveys of Internet use in dozens of countries. For example, the item “Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for romantic content” uses language of a longstanding World Internet Project item “The Internet in my country should be more tightly regulated.”

The four censorship variables were included in a single index for several reasons. First, authors wanted to examine both support for banning entire sensitive entertainment entities (films, other programs)—a rather extreme form of censorship—and also support for removing sensitive scenes from entertainment, a lighter form of abridgment. An individual may not support banning an entire film, but may abide the excising of specific scenes. However, reliability analyses indicated that respondents in the three Arab countries in this study who agreed with one of these items tended to agree with the other.

In addition, two items were included assessing support for censorship of specific content: violent and romantic (euphemism for sexual). Although it is possible that *romantic* could be understood by respondents as meaning something other than *sexual*, interviewers were able to explain to respondents who asked about the meaning that *romantic* was meant to indicate content of a sexual nature. Interviewers traversed neighborhoods in multigender teams, so that female interviewers could interview women and male interviewers men, which was helpful with regard to response rates on content of a sexual nature, particularly in the largely culturally conservative Arab Gulf. Some prior research has shown that nonresponse—don’t know or refusal—to sensitive survey questions is actually higher in online surveys than when the same questions are asked in face-to-face surveys (B. Duffy, Smith, Terhanian, & Bremer, 2005).

Independent variables. The primary independent variables in the study were six items assessing support for cultural preservation in several different forms. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree on a 5-point scale with the following statements: (1) “More should be done to preserve cultural traditions”; (2) “More entertainment media should be based on my culture, history”; (3) “I prefer to watch films that portray my own culture”; (4) “It is possible for a culture to preserve its heritage in the 21st century”; (5) “My culture should do more to integrate with modern society”; and (6) “Hollywood films are good for morality.” The five possible responses to these items ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

With the aim of contextualizing the framework of H1, it is useful to consider the milieu in which the cultural preservation questions were asked. When questions arose about what interviewers meant in terms of “my own culture” or “my history,” for example, respondents were told to conceptualize what this best meant to them. For instance, interviewers did not tell respondents to think of one’s own history in terms of, say, national borders and sovereignty or in terms of family history, but rather to answer the question using what best came to mind. However, given these items were asked in a questionnaire focusing on entertainment media use and related attitudes, and, moreover, some of the items assessing support for cultural preservation mentioned entertainment explicitly, it is in the context of mass media that these questions were asked and answered.

Media use and other behavioral variables. This secondary analysis of the Entertainment Media Use in the Middle East survey data used certain media use patterns and other behaviors available in the findings that might be associated with support for censorship in Arab Gulf countries rather than just a desire for cultural preservation alone. These variables were (1) enjoyment of films from the Arab world, scored on a 6-point scale: a sum of six parts of the Arab world from which respondents enjoy films (the Maghreb, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Arab Gulf); (2) enjoyment of Western films—coded binarily yes or no based on whether respondents said they watch films from either the United States or Europe, or both; (3) time spent socializing face-to-face with friends/family: sum of hours spent socializing with both friends and family in a typical week; (4) whether respondents cite horror or romance, or both, among their favorite genres (coded binarily); (5) whether the respondent is an Internet user (yes or no); (6) frequency of attendance of religious services, measured on an 8-point scale ranging from *never* to *several times a week*; (7) importance of in-person/phone conversations in making entertainment selections—that is, they heed personal recommendations for entertainment, which may represent greater social cohesion than respondents who get entertainment referrals from critical reviews or online ratings (scored on a 5-point scale ranging from *not important at all* to *very important*); and (8) whether respondent listens to Western pop/dance music (scored yes or no), this variable includes respondents who listen to either Western pop or dance music, or both.

Demographic predictors. Demographic variables used in the regression models were age, gender, nationality, the presence of child(ren) under age 18 in the respondent’s household (scored yes or no), education (coded on a scale of 1 to 8: 1 = *no primary education*, 8 = *master’s degree or more*), and household income (measured on a scale of 1 to 12: 1 = *less than \$9,800/year*, 12 = *more than \$148,000/year*). Age was recorded on an interval/ratio scale. All remaining variables were coded as binary dummy variables.

Analysis

Multiple linear regression models report the associations between the cultural attitude variables and the support-for-censorship index, while controlling for other various attitudinal and behavioral predictors and demographic variables, for each of the three countries. In other words, one multiple linear regression model was run for each Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. Multicollinearity tolerance was set at .20, and no independent variables had to be removed for violating this threshold. In each of the three

multiple linear regression models, a pairwise exclusion of cases was used if there were missing values for any one or more of the independent or control variables.

Results

Support for Censorship

RQ1 asked about levels of support for censorship of entertainment media content among residents of the Arab Gulf countries of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. Support was strong in these countries for censorship of entertainment content (see Table 1). Three in four respondents in Saudi Arabia (76%) felt films or other entertainment programs should be banned if deemed offensive by some people (72% in Qatar and 68% in the UAE). Solid majorities in all countries also expressed support for deleting offensive scenes in entertainment media (76% Saudi Arabia, 80% Qatar, and 70% UAE). Eighty-two percent of respondents in Saudi Arabia (80% in Qatar and 74% in the UAE) supported greater regulation of violent entertainment content, and slightly less support existed for more closely regulating romantic content in two of the countries: 73% in Qatar and 69% in the UAE. Support for censorship of romantic content in Saudi Arabia was the same as that for violence: 82%. These figures are reported here for all respondents in each country, but percentages of agreement for nationals and expatriates are also provided in the Appendix. Researchers at Northwestern University in Qatar coded nationality using four categories: national, Arab expatriate, Asian expatriate, and Western expatriate, and the denomination of figures in the Appendix uses the same taxonomy. Nationality was included in the regression models as a control variable and therefore other betas are reported while nationality was held constant.

Table 1. Support for Censorship; Dependent Variable Index (% Strongly Agree/Agree Somewhat).

Statement	Saudi Arabia (minimal $n = 998$)			Qatar (minimal $n = 983$)			United Arab Emirates (minimal $n = 997$)		
	Agree (%)	M	SD	Agree (%)	M	SD	Agree (%)	M	SD
Films or other entertainment programs should be banned if some people find them offensive	76.2	4.13	0.922	71.9	3.96	1.36	68.1	3.88	0.954
It is appropriate to delete scenes some people may find offensive	76.0	4.07	0.869	79.7	4.24	1.11	69.7	3.89	0.927
Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for violent content	81.8	4.15	0.945	79.8	4.19	1.17	74.0	4.00	0.933
Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for romantic content	81.9	4.17	0.918	72.6	4.04	1.263	69.3	3.89	0.877
Mean on four-item censorship index		16.52	2.95		16.49	3.71		15.66	2.83

Support for Cultural Preservation

RQ2 asked about levels of support for cultural preservation in the three Arab Gulf countries. Initial results suggest that support for both cultural preservation and entertainment censorship was strong among respondents in the three countries: Ninety percent of all respondents in Qatar (82% in Saudi Arabia, 80% in the UAE), for example, felt "more should be done to preserve cultural traditions," and two thirds or more of respondents in each country believed that entire films/entertainment programs should be banned if some people find them objectionable (see Table 2). Sizeable majorities in all countries also desired more entertainment reflective of their cultures and histories (78% in Saudi Arabia, 70% in Qatar, and 63% in the UAE). At least 65% of respondents in the three Arab Gulf countries also preferred to watch films that portray their own cultures, and 75% or more of respondents in all countries felt that it is possible for a culture in the 21st century to preserve its heritage.

Table 2. Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations of the Independent Variables.

Variable	Saudi Arabia			Qatar			United Arab Emirates		
Demographics									
Mean (<i>SD</i>) age (years)	33.64 (10.98)			38.83 (12.40)			35.28 (11.19)		
Gender, % female	46.8			47.7			46.8		
Mean (<i>SD</i>) household income ^a	4.74 (1.878)			6.20 (3.31)			5.96 (2.38)		
Nationals, %	68.0			27.0			22.0		
Households with at least one child under 18 years of age, %	71.3			72.1			55.4		
Education, % completed college	45.0			51.3			64.0		
Mean (<i>SD</i>) education ^b	6.17 (1.24)			6.42 (1.47)			6.7 (0.80)		
	Agree (%)			Agree (%)			Agree (%)		
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cultural attitudes									
More should be done to preserve cultural traditions	81.8	4.05	0.85	90.2	4.43	0.776	80.2	4.27	0.85
More entertainment media should be based on my culture, history	77.5	4.01	0.825	69.8	3.92	1.17	62.8	3.77	0.847
Prefer to watch films that portray my own culture	74.8	3.94	0.802	64.8	3.76	1.22	70.0	3.86	0.841
Possible for a culture to preserve its heritage in the 21 st century	80.9	4.11	0.877	79.8	4.10	0.976	74.8	4.15	0.911

My culture should do more to integrate with modern society	78.7	4.09	0.91	75.8	4.00	1.13	64.2	3.88	1.04
Hollywood films are good for morality	33.4	2.94	1.24	22.3	2.67	1.18	38.4	3.27	1.25
Behaviors									
Enjoy Arab TV/film from one or more parts of Arab world, %	82.5			66.0			49.1		
Mean (SD) enjoy Arab TV/film from one or more parts of Arab world ^c	3.52 (1.89)			1.79 (1.257)			2.21 (1.54)		
Use Internet, %	86.8			85.3			96.0		
Attend religious services at least twice per month, %	42.9			49.6			60.1		
Mean (SD) attend religious services at least twice per month ^d	4.63 (2.46)			5.10 (2.37)			5.72 (1.97)		
Watch films from United States/Europe, %	62.8			64.0			64.5		
List romance or horror among favorite genres, %	34.0			34.5			51.0		
Listen to Western music, %	31.3			13.4			30.7		
Median time socializing in person with friends/family (hours/week)	33.0			50.0			58.0		
In-person/phone conversations important for entertainment decisions, %	61.1			72.7			56.0		
Mean (SD) in-person/phone conversations important for entertainment decisions ^e	3.64 (1.11)			3.88 (1.2)			3.63 (0.894)		

^aMeasured on a scale of 1 to 12: 1 = *less than \$9,800/year*, 12 = *more than \$148,000/year*. ^bMeasured on a scale of 1 to 8: 1 = *no primary education*, 8 = *master's degree or more*. ^cMeasured on a 6-point scale: a sum of six parts of the Arab world from which respondents enjoy films (the Maghreb, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Arab Gulf). ^dMeasured on an 8-point scale ranging from *never* to *several times a week*. ^eMeasured on a 5-point scale ranging from *not important at all* to *very important*.

Predictors of Support for Censorship

Cultural attitudes. H1 predicted that desires for greater cultural preservation would be significantly and positively associated with greater support for censorship among respondents in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. This hypothesis was supported. Of the primary variables of interest involving support for cultural preservation, the strongest predictors of support for censorship were beliefs that Hollywood films are harmful to morality, that more should be done to preserve cultural traditions, and a feeling that more entertainment media should be based on one's own culture and history. See Table 3 for standardized betas for all independent and control variables. A belief that Hollywood films are bad for morality was the only predictor associated with censorship support in all three countries in this study. Positively associated with support for censorship in Saudi Arabia only was a preference for films that reflect one's own culture. The linear regression models explained 33% of the variance of support for entertainment censorship in Saudi Arabia, 25% in Qatar, and 32% in the UAE.

Overview of Censorship Predictors by Country

Saudi Arabia. The only country in which a desire for preserving cultural traditions in general was not associated with support for censorship was Saudi Arabia, although beliefs that more entertainment media should be based on one's own culture, a desire for more films that portray one's culture, and the belief that Hollywood films harm morality were all predictive of increased support for censorship. Regarding behaviors among respondents in Saudi Arabia, Internet users were less supportive of entertainment censorship, and enjoying Arab films was associated with a stronger desire for censorship. Also, frequency of attending religious services was associated with less support for censorship, a relationship not observed in the other two countries.

Qatar. Citizens in Qatar were more supportive of entertainment media censorship than expatriates, as were respondents with one or more children in the home, the latter of which was not a significant correlate in the other two countries. By far the strongest predictor of support for censorship in Qatar was a belief that more should be done to preserve cultural traditions. The belief that Hollywood films harm morality was also associated with increased support for censorship. The remaining predictors of censorship support in Qatar were behavioral: Listening to Western music and reliance on in-person/phone conversations for entertainment recommendations were associated with reduced support for censorship, and censorship support was greater among those claiming romance or horror films among their favorite film genres.

The UAE. The belief that more should be done to preserve culture and a desire for entertainment media more reflective of one's culture both predicted greater support for censorship in the UAE. As in the other two countries, believing Hollywood films are harmful to morality was associated with greater support for censorship. Two media behaviors in the UAE were associated with attitudes toward censorship: enjoying Arab films (positive) and a preference for romance/horror films (negative).

Table 3. Correlates of Support for Censorship (Standardized Betas).

Variable	Saudi Arabia (minimal <i>n</i> = 771)	Qatar (minimal <i>n</i> = 578)	United Arab Emirates (minimal <i>n</i> = 803)
Demographics			
Age	.088**	-.022	-.001
Gender (female)	-.049	-.008	.02
Household income	.058	-.061	.01
Nationals	.10**	.097*	.026
Child(ren) under 18 years of age in home	-.036	.097**	-.021
Education	-.042	-.066*	.045
Cultural attitudes			
More should be done to preserve cultural traditions	.056	.281***	.262***
More entertainment media should be based on my culture, history	.285***	.010	.166***
Prefer to watch films that portray my own culture	.145***	.079	.059~
Possible for a culture to preserve heritage in 21 st century	.070~	.000	.055
My culture should do more to integrate with modern society	.001	-.020	-.038
Hollywood films are good for morality	-.213***	-.135**	-.182**
Behaviors			
Enjoy Arab TV/films	.192***	.074~	.121**
Use Internet	-.108**	-.006	-.046
Attend religious services	-.118**	-.018	.055~
Enjoy Western films (U.S./Europe)	.046	-.023	-.026
List romance or horror among favorite genres	.025	.148***	-.084**
Listen to Western music	-.056~	-.152***	-.052

Time spent socializing face-to-face with friends/family	-.011	.034	-.024
Make entertainment choices based on in-person or phone conversations	.053	-.089*	.011
Adjusted R^2	.326	.253	.350

Bold type indicates statistically significant betas.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion and Conclusions

Societies in the Arab Gulf must deal with a rush of modern, and sometimes culturally divergent, entertainment media content. This study found, first, that both the desire to preserve one's culture and support for entertainment media censorship were strong in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. More important, however, results suggest that desire to preserve culture and moral suspicion of Hollywood films are significantly and positively associated with support for censorship in the three countries, more than other predictor or control variables in the study. This study suggests cultural attitudes, more so than media use patterns or demographic variables such as income, education, and living with children, are associated with attitudes about censorship in Arab Gulf countries.

Although some readers may be tempted to criticize citizens in these countries for their willingness to censor and even outright ban entertainment content, most expatriates in all three countries were also willing to censor entertainment media. The reported betas do show some increased willingness among nationals than expatriates to censor entertainment, but support for censorship was nonetheless high across all three countries and among both citizens and expatriates alike. Support for censorship was greatest in Saudi Arabia, the most conservative of the three countries, and where movie theaters and most public entertainment are illegal outside foreign worker compounds (Krieger, 2007).

Respondents in the UAE, considered one of the most liberal Arab Gulf countries (Nasr, 2009), were least supportive of entertainment censorship. Qatar was, mostly, in between the other two countries on the support-for-censorship measures. Levels of support for banning entire films/programs and banning selected scenes did not differ. Respondents in Qatar and the UAE tended to be more supportive of censorship of violence than abridgment of romantic content, a finding that counters some research highlighting a supposed contradiction in Arab countries that tolerate gratuitous media violence while heavily censoring sexual content (Martin, 2013).

Several variables assessing desire for cultural preservation stood out as correlates of support for censorship. In both Qatar and the UAE, the feeling that cultural traditions should be better preserved was the strongest single predictor of censorship support in those countries. These countries, with larger expatriate-to-citizen ratios than Saudi Arabia and a greater tolerance of some cultural "taboos" such as alcohol, have undergone more rapid and facial globalization. The most consistent predictor of attitudes toward censorship—the only correlate significant in all three countries—was the belief that Hollywood films

harm morality. Even when controlling for other variables plausibly related to both feelings about Hollywood content and censorship—religiosity, having children in the home, education, and enjoyment of films from the Arab world, for example—suspicion of Hollywood films still stood as a significant, positive predictor of censorship support. In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but not Qatar (where respondents were less eager for more entertainment based on their own culture), the desire for more entertainment reflecting one's history and culture was positively associated with support for censorship. Likewise, the more respondents in Saudi Arabia and the UAE enjoyed films from the Arab world, a variable measured on a 6-point scale, the more support they expressed for censoring entertainment media.

Satellite television is ubiquitous in Saudi Arabia (Murphy, 2013), but the country generates little popular cinematic or televised fiction of its own and, it appears, those in Saudi Arabia willing to censor contemporary entertainment are also those who lament the relative lack of entertainment depicting their own culture. A preference among respondents in Saudi Arabia for films that portray one's culture also positively predicted support for censorship. The UAE produces a growing body of entertainment media content in Arabic and reflecting Arab and Gulf traditions, and also generates much foreign media content, playing host to large international media corporations in Dubai's Media City (Nasr, 2009), and respondents in that country who support greater entertainment censorship are also, to an extent, in agreement that more entertainment options should reflect their communities.

Two other predictors were correlates of support for censorship in two of the three countries: nationality and watching horror or romance films. Nationals in Qatar and Saudi Arabia expressed modestly higher levels of censorship support. A taste for horror or romance films was a negative predictor of support for censorship in the UAE, and it may make intuitive sense that people who watch edgier content would express less of a desire to censor it, but the opposite relationship was found in Qatar: Respondents who watch horror/romance films were more accepting of entertainment censorship. In Qatar, then, many respondents are willing to accept censorship of some of the same content they themselves enjoy. Although the questionnaire from the 2014 Entertainment Media Use in the Middle East survey did not measure the third-person effect, perhaps it might in future iterations (see future research below); a particularly high third-person bias in Qatar might explain why people who enjoy potentially edgy films expressed a greater desire to censor such content. However, there was a negative association in Qatar between listening to Western music and support for censorship. So, the third-person perception may help explain the relationship between horror/romance films and censorship support in Qatar, or it may be an anomaly (the beta for this variable was comparatively small).

A scattering of other variables were predictive of censorship in just one of the countries, mostly Saudi Arabia. Age was positively associated with support for censorship in Saudi Arabia, a correlation that may make sense given that country's unprecedented youth bulge, a digitally native cohort connected to the outside world to an extent unlike that of any prior Saudi generation (Murphy, 2013). Despite a common perception in the West that Islamic piety in Saudi Arabia drives the country's conservative beliefs and practices, religiosity in that country was associated with considerably less support for entertainment censorship. Some research has discussed mosques as public forums that foster debate of liberal ideas antithetical to the rule of Arab regimes (Fathi, 1979) and, at least in Saudi Arabia, more frequent mosque attendance was associated with less support for abridgment of entertainment media.

Internet users in Saudi Arabia were also less supportive of censorship, although the practical significance of this finding is limited by the fact that 87% of respondents in Saudi Arabia are Internet users, and the figure is likely to rise. In Qatar alone, a reliance on social connections, via in-person or telephone conversations, for entertainment recommendations was associated with reduced support for censorship. Although we did not pose a specific hypothesis for this predictor variable, we did privately suspect, wrongly, that relying on friends and family for entertainment referrals, rather than, say, online ratings or critical reviews, might be associated with greater support for censorship, as it might indicate greater social or familial cohesion. Listening to Western music was a substantial predictor of censorship attitudes in Qatar, although this was not found in the other two countries. The reason for this relationship in Qatar alone may have to do with the amount of Western music in Qatar compared with the other two countries; it may be the case that Western music, broadcast openly on Qatar's radio spectrum, is less common in conservative Saudi Arabia, whereas Western songs are most common in the UAE. Perhaps in Qatar, then, there is enough Western music to share an association with attitudes toward censorship, unlike Saudi Arabia, but not so much that Western music is hard to avoid and therefore washed of a discriminant influence (unlike, perhaps, the UAE). Also in Qatar, lower education levels and having children in the home were modestly associated with increased support for censorship.

Considering the correlates of censorship attitudes more closely by country, a few interesting observations can be made. In Qatar, the strongest predictor of support for censorship was a desire to preserve culture, and this was the only measure assessing cultural preservation in Qatar associated with the dependent variable, other than wariness of Hollywood films. It could be that residents of Qatar do, indeed, desire greater preservation of their culture(s), but they do not fault contemporary entertainment for eroding culture as much as some respondents in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The strongest single predictor of support for censorship among any of the variables in any of the countries was the belief in Saudi Arabia that more entertainment should be based on one's own culture and history. That Saudi Arabia has been a sovereign country for longer than the other two nations, is the largest country among this study's three, has perhaps the strongest sense of national identity, and is the birthplace of Islam may help explain why a desire for more indigenous entertainment media in that country correlates with greater support for censoring contemporary entertainment.

Not a single demographic variable was predictive of attitudes toward censorship in the UAE, where significant correlates of acceptance of censorship were media behaviors and cultural attitudes alone, mostly the latter. Dubai and Abu Dhabi are large melting pots, and in those emirates and the United Arab Emirates, those who feel their culture needs to be better protected and more frequently depicted in entertainment content support entertainment censorship broadly.

Although we believe the data examined in this study stand as representative of much of the Arab Gulf, the study nonetheless includes only three of the six countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (absent are Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman), which is an admitted limitation. It is possible, therefore, that there are systematic differences in the rest of the Arab Gulf states in how desires for cultural preservation associate with support for censorship. A second limitation in the study involves the wording in one of the variables

in the dependent variable index: support for romantic censorship. To not tempt the specter of censorship of the questionnaire in Qatar, where government approval of survey protocols is required for fieldwork, and also to not encourage participant attrition among more conservative respondents in the samples, *romantic* was used as a euphemism for *sexual*. This could, certainly, have affected some respondents' answers to one item in the dependent variable.

Another limitation of this research involves the exclusion from the sampling of some migrant laborers in the three countries. In most cases, those living in work camps had a zero probability of inclusion in the sample. Still, given that the surveys were conducted in face-to-face interviews, we believe the methodology afforded many strengths of representativeness—highly robust response rates, for one—not typically achieved through either telephone sampling or online surveys. Northwestern University in Qatar and Doha Film Institute replicated the 2014 entertainment media survey in all six countries in 2016, and so we were able to conduct a follow-up secondary analysis and examine any changes in these years in desire for cultural preservation, support for censorship, and associations between the two.

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Appendix
Dependent Variables and Independent Variables by Nationality Status

Qatar	Nationals (%)	Arab expatriates (%)	Asian expatriates (%)	Western expatriates (%)
Dependent variables				
Films or other entertainment programs should be banned if some people find them offensive	89	80	55	33
It is appropriate to delete scenes some people may find offensive	91	85	69	48
Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for violent content	85	87	73	51
Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for romantic content	84	79	63	29
Independent variables				
More should be done to preserve cultural traditions	94	93	86	73
More entertainment media should be based on my culture, history	83	82	52	42
Prefer to watch films that portray my own culture	78	76	50	32
Possible for a culture to preserve its heritage in the 21st century	85	77	78	73
My culture should do more to integrate with modern society	80	84	68	48
Hollywood films are good for morality	6	14	39	39

Saudi Arabia	Nationals (%)	Arab expatriates (%)	Asian expatriates (%)	Western expatriates (%)
Dependent variables				
Films or other entertainment programs should be banned if some people find them offensive	80	79	53	77
It is appropriate to delete scenes some people may find offensive	78	83	53	83
Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for violent content	87	87	54	67
Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for romantic content	87	87	58	67
Independent variables				
More should be done to preserve cultural traditions	86	77	75	71
More entertainment media should be based on my culture, history	81	80	60	74
Prefer to watch films that portray my own culture	76	80	64	79
Possible for a culture to preserve its heritage in the 21 st century	84	78	75	70
My culture should do more to integrate with modern society	81	76	71	74
Hollywood films are good for morality	28	26	37	80

United Arab Emirates	Nationals (%)	Arab expatriates (%)	Asian expatriates (%)	Western expatriates (%)
Dependent variables				
Films or other entertainment programs should be banned if some people find them offensive	83	81	52	57
It is appropriate to delete scenes some people may find offensive	79	76	62	63
Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for violent content	81	82	66	68
Entertainment content in the region should be more tightly regulated for romantic content	80	86	53	60
Independent variables				
More should be done to preserve cultural traditions	85	88	70	82
More entertainment media should be based on my culture, history	73	74	50	53
Prefer to watch films that portray my own culture	81	74	61	64
Possible for a culture to preserve its heritage in the 21 st century	84	84	60	78
My culture should do more to integrate with modern society	68	60	59	81
Hollywood films are good for morality	13	14	57	90