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# The Impact of Energy Security on Inter-Relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries

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## KEYWORDS

Energy security,  
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sustainability

## ABSTRACT

*The concept of energy security in the Arabian Gulf region refers to the ability to meet the energy needs of countries in the region without interruption in a way that guarantees the economic, social, and political stability of these countries. The concept of energy security in the Arabian Gulf includes several aspects: Ensuring strategic supplies. This relates to ensuring the continuous availability of oil and gas to producing and consuming countries in the region and beyond, avoiding any disturbances in the global market, and ensuring price stability. Energy diversification means diversifying energy sources and relying on them. Diverse energy, such as renewable energy, reduces total dependence on oil and gas and provides future economic opportunities. Strengthening energy independence: This includes developing national capabilities in the energy sectors, including developing the infrastructure and technologies necessary to extract and refine oil and gas and generate renewable energy. Achieving environmental sustainability: This requires achieving a balance between meeting energy needs, protecting the environment, and reducing harmful emissions. Regional and international cooperation Energy security also consists of enhancing cooperation between countries in the region and other countries in the field of energy, whether in exchanging knowledge and technology or in developing joint projects for generating and transmitting energy. This paper adopts a comparative methodology between Gulf countries to measure their ability to confront energy security in light of climate change. This paper reaches the most prominent conclusion, which is that the Gulf countries' varying capabilities in achieving future energy security will play a major role in reshaping the inter-relations between the Gulf countries.*

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## Introduction

Energy security within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is a central concern due to the region's significant reliance on hydrocarbons for economic and social stability. The GCC states, comprising Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain, possess substantial hydrocarbon reserves that have historically underpinned their economies and funded public welfare and infrastructure. The oil and gas sectors contribute notably to national revenues, making these economies susceptible to global energy market fluctuations and geopolitical

pressures. In light of increased volatility in oil prices, shifting climate policies, and advancing renewable technologies, the GCC countries have initiated efforts to reassess their long-term energy security and economic diversification strategies. Energy diversification, particularly through the integration of renewable energy, has become an essential pillar in these national strategies. Initiatives such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's Energy Strategy 2050 reflect efforts to diversify energy sources, primarily through solar, wind, and nuclear projects, thereby reducing dependency on fossil fuels. These initiatives also represent broader commitments to global sustainability goals, recognising the economic and environmental risks associated with a continued reliance on hydrocarbons. By investing in renewable energy, the GCC countries aim to enhance economic resilience, promote sustainable growth, and adapt to the increasing global demand for greener energy solutions (Cherp, 2012).

The GCC countries' varying approaches to energy diversification, influenced by distinct national priorities and resource capacities, raise questions about the interconnected nature of energy security and regional dynamics. Differences in each country's energy policies impact their ability to collaborate on regional energy security initiatives while also introducing competitive elements that shape economic and political relations within the GCC (Mouraviev & Koulouri, 2018). Examining these diverse strategies provides insight into the ways energy security and policy interdependence influence the GCC's internal stability and international standing.

This study examines how differing energy security strategies within the GCC impact inter-relations among member countries, focusing on both collaborative and competitive dynamics that emerge from these policies. Specifically, it seeks to identify the comparative strengths and weaknesses within the energy sectors of each GCC state, with an emphasis on how varied levels of energy diversification and sustainability initiatives affect their respective roles and alignments within the region. By addressing these aspects, the study aims to clarify the ways in which energy security policies shape not only the stability and economic resilience of individual countries but also the broader relationships and policy alignments within the GCC.

## Literature Review

Energy security is a critical and multifaceted concept that has been defined and refined over decades. At its core, energy security refers to the availability of energy at all times in various forms, in sufficient quantities, and at affordable prices. However, this definition expands considerably when considering geopolitical, economic, and environmental dimensions (Cherp, 2012). Initially, the focus was on the uninterrupted supply of energy, particularly oil, especially during times of geopolitical conflict or economic instability, as seen during the oil crises of the 1970s. Modern theoretical frameworks now emphasise four major components often referred to as the "Four As" of energy security: availability, accessibility, affordability, and acceptability (Cherp, 2014). Availability refers to the physical supply of energy resources; accessibility involves the geopolitical and economic ease of acquiring energy; affordability focuses on the cost of energy to consumers and economies; and acceptability pertains to the environmental and societal impacts of energy use. As the global energy landscape changes, these components help evaluate how secure a nation's energy framework is (Ciută, 2010).

In recent years, the shift towards renewable energy sources has added another layer of complexity to energy security. Traditional energy sources like oil and gas are finite, and their extraction and use contribute to environmental degradation. As a result, renewable energy alternatives such as wind, solar, and nuclear are gaining traction, but these sources present their own set of challenges in terms of reliability and infrastructure (Florini & Sovacool, 2009). This transition complicates the task of ensuring stable and affordable energy supplies, especially in regions heavily reliant on hydrocarbons for economic security, such as the GCC. In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, energy

security has long been associated with the ability to maintain stable oil exports. The GCC countries Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain are rich in hydrocarbon reserves and have built their economies around the extraction and export of oil and gas. However, the volatile nature of the global oil market and the growing shift towards renewable energy have forced the GCC countries to rethink their energy security strategies. For the GCC, energy security is not just about ensuring a domestic supply but also about safeguarding export routes and maintaining political stability in a region prone to conflict (Goldthau, 2010). Given the reliance on energy exports for economic survival, the traditional interpretation of energy security in the region has focused primarily on availability and accessibility. The physical presence of vast oil and gas reserves ensures availability, while geopolitical relationships, particularly with major global powers such as the United States and China, ensure accessibility.

However, the GCC countries face increasing pressure to diversify their energy sources, not only to meet global sustainability goals but also to mitigate the risks associated with over-reliance on oil exports (Florini & Sovacool, 2009). Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's investment in nuclear and solar energy are examples of efforts to broaden their energy portfolios and enhance long-term energy security. These initiatives reflect a shift towards considering affordability and acceptability, ensuring that energy remains affordable while minimising environmental impacts. The region's geopolitical context also plays a significant role in shaping its approach to energy security. The vulnerability of energy infrastructure to attacks, such as the 2019 strikes on Saudi Aramco facilities, underscores the importance of securing energy supply chains against both physical and cyber threats. Furthermore, regional conflicts and tensions, including those between Iran and Saudi Arabia, heighten the risks to the region's energy exports and overall stability. Climate change is another growing concern for the GCC, as rising temperatures and water scarcity could disrupt traditional energy production and consumption patterns. The transition to renewable energy, while necessary, presents its own set of challenges, particularly in terms of infrastructure and technological development (Goldthau, 2010). Nevertheless, the shift is essential for the region to maintain its energy security in the long term.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have been progressively integrating renewable energy as a strategy to diversify their energy resources. Historically reliant on hydrocarbons, these countries recognise the economic and environmental risks of depending solely on fossil fuels. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's Energy Strategy 2050 are examples of long-term plans aiming to increase the share of renewable energy in their national grids, particularly through solar and wind projects. Solar energy, due to the region's high solar irradiance, has gained momentum, especially in projects like the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park in Dubai (Reiche, 2021). The benefits of energy diversification in the Gulf are clear: reduced dependency on fluctuating oil markets, enhanced energy security, and a more sustainable environmental footprint.

However, despite the abundant potential for renewable energy, challenges remain. For example, Qatar's energy diversification has been slower due to its reliance on natural gas, and Oman's renewable initiatives face governance and financial constraints (MEI, 2021). Overall, the push for renewable energy in the GCC is part of a larger global trend of reducing carbon emissions and aligning with sustainability goals. Research indicates that the GCC countries' push towards sustainability is increasingly evident in their energy policies. A report by the Middle East Institute highlighted that sustainability has become a key priority, particularly as nations seek to reduce carbon emissions and align with global agreements like the Paris Agreement. In Saudi Arabia, renewable energy plays a central role in Vision 2030, which seeks to achieve 50% renewable energy generation by 2030. This is not just about energy security but also about reducing the nation's carbon footprint and ensuring long-term economic stability in a decarbonising world (REN21, 2021).



The UAE has been particularly successful in integrating sustainability into its energy policies. Its 2050 energy strategy aims to produce 44% of energy from clean sources by mid-century. Early investments in solar energy, driven by both environmental concerns and energy security needs, have positioned the UAE as a leader in the region's renewable energy space. These efforts have led to substantial investments in solar power infrastructure and the promotion of public-private partnerships to further enhance renewable energy adoption (MEI, 2021). Overall, the role of sustainability in energy policies across the GCC is becoming increasingly prominent, with clear goals set for renewable energy penetration. However, as multiple studies have shown, achieving these ambitious goals will require continued investment in infrastructure, stronger governance, and regional collaboration. The energy policies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain have undergone significant transformations in recent years as they shift towards more sustainable practices. Saudi Arabia, with its Vision 2030, leads the region in efforts to diversify its energy sources. The country aims to derive 50% of its energy from renewable sources by 2030, focusing heavily on solar energy through large-scale projects like the Sakaka solar plant. Similarly, the UAE's Energy Strategy 2050 outlines a target of 44% clean energy, with solar playing a prominent role. The UAE has been a pioneer in deploying solar energy technologies, including the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park, one of the world's largest solar projects.

Qatar's energy policy is also influenced by its natural gas reserves, though the country has set renewable energy targets, such as aiming for 20% of its electricity to come from renewables by 2030. While Kuwait and Oman have been slower in adopting renewable energy initiatives, both have announced plans to increase renewable energy in their national grids. Kuwait, for instance, has set targets to produce 15% of its energy from renewables by 2030 (IMF, 2023). Oman aims for 30% by the same year, focusing on solar and wind projects (World Bank, 2023). Bahrain has also launched renewable energy programs, though at a smaller scale compared to its neighbours, aiming for 5% renewable energy by 2025 (Reiche, 2021).

### **Key Studies Comparing Gulf Energy Infrastructure and National Policies**

Research comparing the energy policies and infrastructure across the GCC reveals key differences and shared challenges. Saudi Arabia and the UAE lead the region in renewable energy investments, largely driven by long-term national strategies and substantial financial commitments. Both countries have made significant strides in building solar and wind power infrastructure, with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's Energy Strategy 2050 setting the pace for regional energy transitions (MEI, 2021). These nations have also established state-owned entities like Masdar in the UAE and ACWA Power in Saudi Arabia to spearhead renewable energy projects at home and abroad (Reiche, 2021).

In contrast, Qatar's energy policy remains largely centred around natural gas, although it has started investing in solar energy as part of its National Vision 2030. The country's focus on liquefied natural gas (LNG) has positioned it as a global leader in gas exports, but this reliance on hydrocarbons presents challenges as global markets shift toward renewables (World Bank, 2023). Studies indicate that Qatar is taking a cautious approach to renewable energy integration, prioritising its gas revenues while gradually investing in solar technologies (IMF, 2023).

Kuwait and Oman, though lagging behind Saudi Arabia and the UAE in renewable energy deployment, have shown a commitment to diversifying their energy sources. Oman's Renewable Energy Development Plan outlines targets for solar and wind power, while Kuwait's Shagaya Renewable Energy Park is the country's primary renewable energy project (World Bank, 2023). Both countries face challenges related to governance and financing, but studies suggest that regional cooperation and knowledge sharing could accelerate progress.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries play an unparalleled role in global energy markets due to their large reserves of oil and natural gas. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE are among the world's top exporters of hydrocarbons, making them crucial for maintaining global energy supply stability (Cordesman, 2017). The Gulf region controls key oil routes, such as the Strait of Hormuz, through which approximately 20% of the world's oil passes, adding to its strategic importance (Hammad et al., 2021). Historically, the Gulf's role in energy has gone beyond mere exports. These countries have used their energy dominance to establish sovereign wealth funds and economic security. However, the volatility of oil prices and the growing global transition toward renewable energy presents both challenges and opportunities for the region. As global economies push for decarbonisation, GCC states must rethink their energy strategies to remain relevant in a more diverse and sustainable energy market. Energy independence in the GCC is a complex and evolving concept. Traditionally, these countries have been energy-independent in terms of their reliance on hydrocarbons for domestic consumption and export. However, with the increasing push toward renewable energy and a potential decrease in global demand for oil, energy independence now extends to ensuring a sustainable and diversified energy portfolio. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's Energy Strategy 2050 are key examples of national efforts to diversify their energy sources. Saudi Arabia aims to have 50% of its energy come from renewable sources, primarily solar, by 2030 (Bahgat, 2015). Similarly, the UAE is focusing on solar and nuclear power, aiming to produce 44% of its energy from clean sources by 2050 (Bahgat, 2015). The implications of this shift are significant. Economically, diversification will reduce the GCC's dependence on oil exports, making their economies less vulnerable to oil price shocks. Environmentally, it will help the region contribute to global sustainability goals by reducing carbon emissions. Politically, reducing reliance on hydrocarbons will allow GCC countries to maintain their geopolitical influence even as global energy dynamics change. However, achieving these goals will require large investments in infrastructure and technology (Hammad et al., 2021).

Oil and gas have been the backbone of the global energy system for decades, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, where economies heavily rely on hydrocarbon exports. Despite the growing push for renewable energy, oil and gas remain integral to global energy security due to their reliability, infrastructure, and economic importance. Even as many countries, including those in the GCC, move toward decarbonisation, natural gas, in particular, is seen as a "bridge fuel" in the transition to cleaner energy, providing stability during periods of fluctuating renewable energy production (IEA, 2021). The oil and gas industry faces increasing pressure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate goals, such as those outlined in the Paris Agreement. Some major oil companies are making strides toward lowering their carbon footprint through technological innovations like carbon capture and storage (CCS) and increasing investments in cleaner energy technologies (McKinsey, 2023). However, these efforts are still nascent compared to the overall contribution of fossil fuels to global energy production. As of 2021, the majority of energy consumption worldwide was still derived from oil and gas (IEA, 2021). Countries within the GCC have adopted different approaches to energy diversification in response to the global energy transition. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, for example, have been at the forefront of renewable energy development, with large-scale investments in solar and wind power. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 aims to diversify its energy mix, reducing reliance on oil by integrating renewable energy, with a target of generating 50% of its energy from renewables by 2030 (Blazquez et al., 2017). The UAE's Energy Strategy 2050 similarly focuses on generating 44% of its energy from clean sources by mid-century, leveraging its geographical advantage in solar energy (Reiche, 2021). In contrast, countries like Qatar, which is highly dependent on natural gas, are taking a more gradual approach. Qatar remains focused on maximising its natural gas production, particularly liquefied natural gas (LNG), while gradually incorporating solar energy projects into its energy mix. This strategy allows Qatar to maintain its economic reliance on hydrocarbons while also beginning the shift toward cleaner energy (IEA, 2021). Other GCC countries, such as Kuwait and Oman, are still in the early stages of energy diversification. Oman has announced plans to develop solar and wind projects, aiming for 30% of its

energy to come from renewables by 2030. Kuwait, on the other hand, has set a more modest target of 15% renewable energy by the same year, focusing on the Shagaya Renewable Energy Park to lead this effort (World Bank, 2023).

### ***Importance of Environmental Sustainability in the Region***

Environmental sustainability has become a critical priority for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, especially given their historical dependence on oil and gas, which has significantly contributed to global carbon emissions. Countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have been under increasing scrutiny due to their high per capita emissions, and there is a growing recognition within the region of the need to shift toward more sustainable energy practices (Middle East Institute, 2021). Sustainability in the GCC is not only about reducing emissions but also about securing long-term economic stability as the global energy market transitions towards cleaner sources. Environmental sustainability initiatives in the region include large-scale investments in renewable energy projects such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's Energy Strategy 2050, which both focus on decreasing dependence on hydrocarbons and increasing the share of solar and wind energy (MEI, 2023). These projects are part of broader strategies to align with international agreements like the Paris Climate Accord, signalling the GCC's commitment to reducing their carbon footprints. Climate change poses a significant threat to the energy security of the GCC, as the region is already experiencing rising temperatures, more frequent heat waves, and increased water scarcity. These environmental changes affect not only the domestic energy systems but also the broader geopolitical dynamics of the region. For instance, the reliance on desalination plants for water, which are energy-intensive, underscores the region's vulnerability to disruptions in energy supplies. The intersection of water security and energy demands makes climate adaptation critical for the survival of key sectors in the region. The shift towards renewable energy is also seen as a means to enhance regional energy security by reducing dependence on fossil fuel exports. By investing in clean energy technologies, the GCC countries aim to diversify their economies and build resilience against fluctuating oil prices, which have long been a destabilising factor (Middle East Institute, 2021). Moreover, climate change mitigation initiatives, such as carbon capture and storage (CCS), are expected to play an increasingly important role in maintaining energy security while contributing to global emissions reduction goals (MEI, 2023). The broader implications of climate change on international relations are also becoming evident. As GCC countries transition to renewable energy, there is potential for both cooperation and competition within the region. Countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are leading in solar and hydrogen projects, may develop new alliances based on energy exports while also facing challenges from traditional hydrocarbon-based economies like Kuwait and Oman, which are slower in adopting clean energy solutions (MEI, 2021).

### **Role of Regional Cooperation in Promoting Energy Security**

Regional cooperation plays a crucial role in promoting energy security within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. One of the key aspects of regional cooperation is the development of integrated energy strategies aimed at reducing dependency on external energy markets while optimising shared resources. The GCC countries have established joint initiatives, such as the GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA), which connects the power grids of member states, allowing for efficient energy exchange and enhanced energy security across the region (Albudaiwi, 2023). By sharing electricity generated from renewable sources like solar and wind, GCC nations can reduce their dependency on imported energy and stabilise their power supplies. Additionally, collective efforts towards renewable energy development and technological innovation have been a priority for the GCC. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman are investing in joint research and development projects, fostering collaboration in areas like hydrogen production and carbon capture technology. This collective regional effort is crucial for addressing the growing demands for sustainable energy while mitigating the risks posed by fluctuating oil prices (Middle East Institute, 2021). International

partnerships have also had a significant impact on the GCC's energy sector. The region has increasingly engaged with global powers like China, the European Union, and the United States, forming strategic alliances that facilitate the transfer of technology, capital, and expertise. For instance, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has deepened its ties with the Gulf, focusing on energy investments that contribute to both the development of the region's energy infrastructure and China's energy security. International collaborations extend beyond traditional oil and gas sectors, increasingly incorporating renewable energy projects. For example, the UAE has collaborated with European partners to develop large-scale solar and wind farms, demonstrating the region's commitment to the global energy transition. These partnerships also ensure that the GCC remains a key player in global energy markets, even as the world shifts towards decarbonisation and renewable energy.

### ***Comparative Analysis of GCC Energy Strategies and Interconnected Profiles***

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain each pursue unique strategies for energy security and diversification, shaped by their respective natural resources, economic goals, and climate commitments. However, these individual strategies also highlight significant interdependencies and shared challenges across the region, including reliance on oil and gas exports, initiatives to reduce carbon emissions, and efforts to integrate renewable energy. This comparative analysis focuses on their interconnected profiles by categorising the GCC countries' approaches into core themes: *Leading Diversification Initiatives*, *Natural Gas Reliance and Limited Diversification*, and *Emerging Diversification and Dependency*, exploring how these categories reflect both individual and collective goals.

Saudi Arabia's energy policy is largely guided by its Vision 2030, a comprehensive initiative aimed at reducing dependency on oil revenues and diversifying its economic base. Saudi Arabia controls approximately 17% of the world's proven oil reserves, and its energy policy has historically been tied to its role in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), where it plays a significant role in global oil price stabilisation (IEA, 2021). However, the volatility of oil markets and global pressure to reduce carbon emissions have driven the country's shift toward renewable energy. Under the National Renewable Energy Program (NREP), Saudi Arabia aims to generate 50% of its energy from renewables by 2030, with a focus on solar and hydrogen (Al-Sulami et al., 2022). This initiative includes the development of projects like the Sakaka solar plant and ambitious targets for green hydrogen, which is expected to position Saudi Arabia as a global leader in the production and export of hydrogen energy (Al-Fattah & Reiche, 2022). The UAE, similarly committed to economic diversification, has made considerable strides in renewable energy through its Energy Strategy 2050, which targets 44% of energy generation from clean sources by mid-century. The UAE's investments in solar energy, including the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park, one of the largest solar facilities in the world, underscore its leadership in renewable energy in the region. Nuclear energy is also a significant component of the UAE's strategy, with the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant providing an additional 25% of the country's electricity needs, positioning the UAE as a pioneer in nuclear energy among GCC countries (Al-Monitor, 2023; World Nuclear Association, 2022). This dual focus on nuclear and solar energy aligns with the UAE's commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and enhances energy security by reducing reliance on imported natural gas. Saudi Arabia and the UAE's leadership in renewable energy investments has not only positioned them at the forefront of regional diversification efforts but has also set a benchmark for other GCC countries. Their large-scale renewable projects contribute to the broader regional sustainability goals, such as those outlined by the GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA), which supports energy exchange among member states to enhance energy stability and security (Reiche, 2021). By advancing renewable projects and reducing dependency on fossil fuels, both countries contribute to a more resilient GCC

energy market and foster regional cooperation by sharing expertise and resources in sustainable energy development.

In contrast to the ambitious diversification programs of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Qatar and Oman continue to rely significantly on natural gas, albeit with efforts toward gradual integration of renewable energy. Qatar's energy policy is anchored in its vast natural gas reserves, which have positioned it as the world's leading exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Qatar's North Field Expansion project, expected to increase LNG production to 126 million tons annually by 2027, highlights the country's commitment to maximising its natural gas assets (Oxford Business Group, 2022). While LNG remains a primary energy source for Qatar, the government has outlined diversification goals within the Qatar National Vision 2030, aiming for a 20% contribution from solar energy by the end of the decade. This shift reflects Qatar's cautious approach to renewable energy, where it leverages its natural gas revenues to gradually invest in cleaner energy sources without disrupting its economic stability (The Peninsula, 2024). Similarly, Oman's energy sector is heavily dependent on natural gas, although the country has begun investing in renewable energy as part of its Vision 2040. With plans to generate 30% of electricity from renewable sources by 2030, Oman is developing solar and wind projects like the Ibri II Solar Project and the Duqm Wind Power Project (Oman Observer, 2024). These renewable energy initiatives are bolstered by Oman's strategic location and wind resources, which support the potential for future green hydrogen production. Oman's use of natural gas as a bridge fuel allows it to pursue a measured transition toward renewables while strengthening its economic base through foreign investments in the energy sector (Oxford Business Group, 2023). The reliance on natural gas as a transition resource in Qatar and Oman illustrates the flexibility within the GCC's collective energy strategy. Both countries contribute to regional energy stability by maintaining a steady supply of natural gas, which supports energy demands across the GCC and serves as a foundation for incremental renewable integration. By balancing natural gas reliance with renewable initiatives, Qatar and Oman demonstrate a complementary approach to Saudi Arabia and the UAE's aggressive diversification strategies. This balance reinforces the region's overall resilience to global energy market fluctuations and strengthens the interconnectedness of GCC energy strategies.

Kuwait and Bahrain, while not as advanced in renewable energy as Saudi Arabia or the UAE, have taken steps toward diversification amid challenges related to governance, financing, and resource constraints. Kuwait's energy policy remains heavily reliant on oil, with more than 90% of its export revenue stemming from hydrocarbons. However, political challenges and delays have impeded the country's renewable energy projects, leaving less than 1% of Kuwait's power generation from renewables as of 2023 (Oxford Business Group, 2022). Efforts such as the Kuwait National Energy Outlook, which aims to reduce reliance on oil through energy efficiency and renewable integration, reflect the country's recognition of the need for diversification (SEI, 2020). Kuwait's participation in the GCCIA, which enables power sharing among GCC countries, is also critical for addressing domestic energy demands, especially during periods of high consumption. Bahrain faces similar challenges, with limited natural resources and a reliance on imported crude oil, particularly from Saudi Arabia. The country has focused on international partnerships to facilitate its energy transition, such as collaborations with Yellow Door Energy for solar power projects and strategic alliances with China to enhance renewable energy capabilities. Bahrain's National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP) aims to meet 5% of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2025, demonstrating a commitment to reducing its carbon footprint despite its limited domestic resources (IRENA, 2023). Through participation in the GCCIA and modernisation initiatives like the Bapco Refinery, Bahrain bolsters its energy security and contributes to the GCC's collective energy stability (Oxford Business Group, 2023). Kuwait and Bahrain's emerging diversification strategies underscore the importance of regional cooperation within the GCC, particularly as these countries rely on shared infrastructure and energy support from neighbours like Saudi Arabia. The interconnected grid provided by the GCCIA is vital for Kuwait and Bahrain, allowing them to stabilise

their power supplies and manage peak demands without excessive reliance on foreign energy imports. This interdependence is critical for the GCC's energy security, as it reinforces economic stability across member states and reduces vulnerability to external shocks.

Climate change poses a significant threat to the GCC, with rising temperatures and water scarcity adding to the urgency of sustainable energy policies. To address these issues, GCC countries have committed to global climate goals under the Paris Agreement, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE setting ambitious targets for carbon neutrality by 2060 and 2050, respectively. The Circular Carbon Economy (CCE) framework adopted by Saudi Arabia and Qatar's investments in carbon capture and storage (CCS) reflects a shared regional effort to mitigate emissions while balancing economic interests in hydrocarbons (Middle East Institute, 2021). The collective climate initiatives within the GCC emphasise sustainability as a core component of regional energy policy. Through investments in solar energy, green hydrogen, and nuclear energy, the GCC countries aim to create a diversified energy landscape that aligns with their economic and environmental objectives. This cooperative approach extends to international partnerships, with the UAE hosting the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) in Abu Dhabi and participating in initiatives with global leaders like South Korea to advance nuclear and solar technologies (World Nuclear Association, 2022).

The GCC's integrated approach to energy security, shaped by both individual country strategies and regional collaboration, underscores the region's collective resilience in the face of economic and environmental challenges as Saudi Arabia and the UAE spearhead renewable energy development, Qatar and Oman's reliance on natural gas provides a balanced approach to the GCC's transition toward sustainable energy. Meanwhile, Kuwait and Bahrain's participation in shared infrastructure initiatives like the GCCIA highlights the importance of interconnected resources for regional energy stability.

### **Climate Change Challenges in the GCC and Strategic Adaptations**

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries face pronounced vulnerabilities to climate change impacts. Rising temperatures, frequent heatwaves, and water scarcity pose substantial risks in this arid region. Projections from the Middle East Institute (2021) indicate that GCC countries could experience temperature increases of up to 4°C by the century's end if global carbon emissions are not controlled. This scenario exacerbates critical concerns, such as diminished agricultural yields, heightened demand for cooling, and significant risks to both human health and infrastructure resilience. Water security remains a particularly pressing issue. As freshwater resources are scarce, the GCC relies heavily on energy-intensive desalination processes. Climate change threatens these plants, elevating energy costs and worsening environmental degradation, thus affecting both water and energy security (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024). Additionally, rising sea levels jeopardise key coastal infrastructures, notably in Dubai, Doha, and Manama, where critical economic and financial centres are situated. In response, GCC countries are revising energy policies with a focus on sustainability and renewable energy. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 includes substantial investments in solar and wind power, which is integral to the kingdom's strategy to diversify its energy mix and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Middle East Institute, 2021). Parallel initiatives in the UAE, including the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park and Oman's exploration of hydrogen production, underscore a region-wide shift towards renewables (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024). Notably, Qatar is advancing its leadership in carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology, with an aim to capture 7 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually by 2030, marking a significant move to balance hydrocarbon dependence with emission reduction (Middle East Institute, 2021).

As signatories to the Paris Agreement, GCC countries are committed to the global goal of limiting temperature increases to below 2°C. This commitment has catalysed changes in national energy

policies, with each country introducing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Saudi Arabia has pledged to reach net-zero emissions by 2060, while the UAE aims for the same target by 2050. These commitments have accelerated the GCC's shift toward renewable energy, providing a dual benefit of sustaining energy security while contributing to climate goals (Middle East Institute, 2021). Sustainability has become a cornerstone of the GCC's energy strategies, motivated by global climate obligations and an awareness of the need for economic diversification. By 2050, the UAE aims to derive 44% of its energy from renewables, while Saudi Arabia's Circular Carbon Economy (CCE) initiative advocates for carbon reduction, recycling, and storage to mitigate emissions (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024). Such initiatives underscore a long-term vision of sustainability woven into energy policies, reinforcing resilience in the face of climate-related threats. Renewable energy projects across the GCC not only reduce emissions but also enhance energy security by lowering dependency on imported natural gas. This is especially relevant for countries like Kuwait and Oman, which still rely on external sources (Middle East Institute, 2021). These renewable projects reflect each country's strategic efforts to address environmental concerns without compromising energy availability and security.

The GCC's energy security and regional relations will likely experience lasting effects from climate change. As the world transitions from hydrocarbons to cleaner energy, GCC leaders, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who are investing heavily in renewables, are poised to assume dominant roles. This shift is expected to redefine regional influence, promoting energy cooperation yet introducing competition among member states. Smaller countries like Bahrain and Oman, with limited resources for renewable investments, may depend increasingly on regional partnerships to achieve sustainable energy security. The GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA), which supports electricity sharing, is anticipated to play a growing role in maintaining grid stability, enabling each country to optimise energy sources efficiently and reduce vulnerabilities (Middle East Institute, 2021). Water scarcity and extreme weather events associated with climate change are likely to drive GCC countries toward collaborative adaptation strategies, including shared desalination facilities and comprehensive water management initiatives. These projects, coordinated by institutions like the GCCIA, facilitate resource-sharing, which strengthens each country's climate resilience and mitigates the potential for resource-based tensions (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024).

### **Dynamics of Cooperation and Competition in GCC Energy Markets**

Energy security remains a pivotal concern in the GCC, shaping both cooperation and competition among member states. Collaborative initiatives, such as the GCCIA, have proven valuable in stabilising regional energy supply, allowing member countries to manage demand effectively during peak periods. For example, countries like Kuwait and Bahrain benefit from being able to draw electricity from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, ensuring stability during shortages (Baker Institute, 2023). However, competition arises as GCC members vie to become leaders in emerging renewable markets. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, for example, are advancing ambitious renewable energy goals, aiming to establish themselves as global pioneers in solar and wind technology. This rivalry fosters technological advancements and attracts foreign investments, but it also underscores regional competition for dominance in clean energy (Middle East Institute, 2021). Despite competitive dynamics, joint energy projects remain central to regional strategy, as evidenced by the GCC-Iraq Electrical Interconnection Project. This project not only supports Iraq's energy stability but also deepens GCC integration with neighbouring states, highlighting the potential for cooperation to support broader energy security objectives (Gulf International Forum, 2023).

Energy security has profound implications for political cohesion within the GCC. For instance, Qatar's reliance on LNG has facilitated alliances with key Asian and European markets, yet its

independent energy strategy has, at times, strained intra-GCC relations, as seen during the 2017-2021 Gulf diplomatic crisis. Renewed alliances post-crisis demonstrate an awareness within the GCC of energy security's role in fostering political unity (Gulf International Forum, 2023). Economic interdependence within the GCC is rooted in shared energy resources, with smaller states like Kuwait and Bahrain reliant on energy imports and cooperative projects led by wealthier neighbours. The GCCIA exemplifies this interdependence, providing a framework for smaller states to access electricity from more resource-abundant members like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Strategic collaborations with major global powers, including China and the United States, further reinforce these connections, positioning GCC countries as essential energy players while bolstering mutual security (Baker Institute, 2023). Energy security fosters stability in the geopolitically sensitive Gulf region. Through joint energy ventures, GCC countries can bolster peaceful relations, reducing the likelihood of resource-based conflicts. The GCC-Iraq Electrical Interconnection Project demonstrates how energy cooperation can extend beyond the GCC to support stability in nearby regions. This project not only stabilises Iraq's energy grid but also decreases its dependence on sensitive imports, contributing to a balanced regional energy landscape (Gulf International Forum, 2023) as the region pivots toward renewables, shared ambitions for sustainable energy transition are likely to serve as a foundation for continued cooperation, underscoring the role of energy security in reinforcing peacebuilding efforts (Middle East Institute, 2021).

## Conclusion

This study has examined the intricate dynamics of energy security in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, emphasising the dual forces of cooperation and competition that shape the region's energy landscape. Energy security acts as a central driver of regional cohesion, exemplified by collaborative ventures like the GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA), which facilitates resilience and resource-sharing among member states. However, competition is also a defining factor, particularly in the renewable energy sector, where Saudi Arabia and the UAE are positioning themselves as regional leaders. Additionally, the implications of energy security extend to political alignments and economic interdependencies within the GCC, influencing both intra-regional relations and strategic engagements with global powers. The collective shift towards renewable energy fueled by climate commitments and the need for economic diversification presents an array of challenges and prospects for the GCC. While certain member states demonstrate notable advancements in renewable initiatives, others encounter structural obstacles, underscoring the need for more synchronised regional energy strategies. Ultimately, energy security remains not only essential to the economic sustainability of the Gulf but also pivotal to its broader geopolitical standing.

## Policy Recommendations

1. *Enhance Regional Energy Cooperation:* To optimize regional energy resilience, policymakers should broaden initiatives under the GCCIA, deepening grid interconnectivity and energy-sharing frameworks. These mechanisms can bolster collective energy security by mitigating shortages and diversifying supply sources, thereby reducing the vulnerability of any single member state to external disruptions.
2. *Accelerate Renewable Energy Investments:* Expanding renewable energy projects, particularly in the solar and hydrogen sectors, is crucial. Policymakers are encouraged to cultivate a supportive environment for public-private partnerships and international collaborations, establishing clear regulatory frameworks and incentivizing foreign investment to bolster long-term sustainability.



3. *Prioritize Energy Source Diversification:* Reducing reliance on oil and gas is essential for economic and environmental resilience. Policymakers should pursue diversification strategies that incorporate renewables alongside advanced technologies such as carbon capture and storage (CCS) and green hydrogen. This diversification will help stabilise GCC economies amid fluctuating oil prices and strengthen alignment with international climate objectives.
4. *Integrate Climate Resilience into Energy Policies:* The GCC's energy security is increasingly interconnected with climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Policymakers should integrate these strategies into national energy agendas, aligning with frameworks such as the Paris Agreement. Such integration is vital for ensuring a sustainable, low-carbon economic future while retaining the GCC's competitive standing in global energy markets.
5. *Promote Regional Stability through Energy Diplomacy:* Energy diplomacy can be a strategic instrument for peace and stability. Collaborative energy projects, like the GCC-Iraq Electrical Interconnection Project, exemplify how shared energy interests can reinforce economic and geopolitical stability within and beyond the GCC. By diversifying energy supply partnerships, GCC countries can enhance both energy security and diplomatic leverage, supporting a stable regional order.

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