



EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE **FIELD GUIDE**

Qatar



U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.



The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 “Culture General” provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the

Arab Gulf States.

NOTE: While the term Persian Gulf is common in the US, this guide uses the name preferred in the region, the Arabian Gulf.

Part 2 “Culture Specific” describes unique cultural features of Kuwaiti society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training.

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/> or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.



Disclaimer: All text is the property of the AFCLC and may not be modified by a change in title, content, or labeling. It may be reproduced in its current format with the express permission of the AFCLC. All photography is provided as a courtesy of the US government, Wikimedia, and other sources. [Please scroll over images to view captions.](#)

PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual



symbol of a core American value -- freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner

that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories—what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains”—in order to better understand the primary

values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains—which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page)—as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.



Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are “people like me” or “people not like me.” Usually, we assume that those in the “like me” category share our perspectives and values.

12 Domains of Culture



AFCLC

This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It

helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

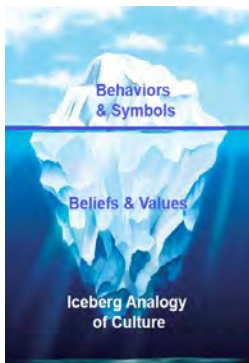
Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true — regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is



important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a

culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.



As you travel through the Arab Gulf States, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

The Arab Gulf States comprise 7 countries that border the Arabian Gulf: Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman. Scientists believe that the southern Gulf region was once home to early humans who

established permanent settlements as many as 125,000 years ago. In the region's north, the favorable soil and climate conditions of Mesopotamia (present day Syria and Iraq) allowed people to settle, farm the land, create irrigation systems, build structures, and establish towns beginning around 6200 BC.

A unique culture emerged between 3000 and 2500 BC at Dilmun in present-day Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. As a regional hub, Dilmun played an important role in trade between the Arabian Peninsula and the Indus River valley (located in present-day Pakistan and India) as well as along longer routes to East Africa, Southeast Asia, and China. While the Arab Gulf was an important trading hub for centuries, the region never saw the birth of its own empire nor were its inhabitants ever united under a single local power. Instead, each of the region's port cities was autonomous, with its own local economy and social organization. The cities' dispersed power prevented their unification and also made the region a target for incursions from beyond the Gulf.



The first external force to exert power and influence over the region was the Achaemenid Empire which controlled parts of the Gulf starting in 550 BC from its center in Pasargadae (Iran). It was followed by the Parthian (140 BC) and Sassanian (226 AD) Empires centered in Iran and the Umayyad Caliphate (661 AD) centered in Syria and Turkey. The period marked by the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (570 AD) in present-day Saudi Arabia and the subsequent emergence and establishment of Islam as the region's predominant religion was a defining era in the Gulf's history.



In the 16th century, Portugal established control over Bahrain and parts of the southern Gulf, a move that ushered in an era of European struggle for supremacy in the region. In the late 16th century, the Safavid Dynasty of Iran allied with England to expel Portugal. At the same time, Iraq came under control of the Ottoman Empire (centered in present-day Istanbul) whose rule lasted until World War I, when the British assumed control.

England became active in the southern Gulf in the late 18th century then solidified its dominance in the 19th century through agreements with local rulers in present-day Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the UAE. Unlike in Africa and Asia, the British never established formal colonies in the region and left local ruling families largely in place.



The discovery of oil in the 1930s had a profound impact on the Gulf States' economies and politics. While English and US companies initially owned and managed the Gulf oil industry, local rulers confirmed their control of the industry following their countries' full independence (Saudi Arabia, 1932; Oman, 1951, Kuwait, 1961; then Bahrain, Qatar, and UAE in 1971). Iraq, like Saudi Arabia, achieved independence in 1932 but was occupied by Britain during World War II. Following the monarchy's overthrow in 1958, Iraq became a republic.

Under the leadership of royal dynasties since independence, 6 of the Gulf States have remained stable. By contrast, Iraq has been enmeshed in several conflicts that have contributed to regional instability. Under the autocratic rule of Saddam Hussein, Iraq engaged in the bloody Iran-Iraq War from 1980-1986, then invaded and annexed neighboring Kuwait 4 years later, inciting the First Gulf War. Since its 2003 invasion of Iraq and subsequent collapse of the Hussein regime, the US has engaged in security cooperation activities in Iraq. In reaction to the 2011 Arab Spring, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait have suppressed protests and calls for reform.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

The Arab Gulf's position at a crossroads for international trade has greatly influenced its ethnic makeup, politics, and social structures. The diversity of people passing through and residing in the region as part of its trade-based economy persists today



– foreign non-citizen workers make up sizable portions of the populations in each of the Gulf States with the exception of Iraq.

Today, the Gulf States minus Iraq are governed by

monarchy, though several have introduced political and institutional reforms since independence. While Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar have each adopted a constitution, the Saudi Arabian government considers the Qur'an, the primary religious text of Islam, its constitution. In 1996, Oman established the Basic Law of the State, which introduced a new system of government that includes a 2-chamber legislature that meets at the request of the sultan (ruler). The 2005 Iraqi constitution established an Islamic, democratic, federal parliamentary republic led by an elected Prime Minister, President, and legislature. Unlike the region's other monarchies, the UAE's government is comprised of the hereditary leaders of each of its 7 emirates.

While the legal systems of the Gulf States have incorporated many aspects of English, French, and Egyptian law, **Sharia** (Islamic) law continues to play a central role, particularly in criminal and family matters. In recent years, the Gulf States have undertaken efforts to create formalized legal systems that combine *Sharia* and civil systems.

Despite some political tensions, relations among most of the Gulf States are largely amicable. Their good relations are primarily a result of their participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – a political, economic, and military alliance uniting Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. Since the organization's inception in 1981, member states have undertaken efforts to integrate their economies, militaries, and other social and political structures.



Iraq's role in fomenting regional instability has affected its relations with the other Gulf States. While the UAE, Qatar, and Oman have strong trade and diplomatic relations with Iraq, Saudi Arabia and its close ally Bahrain frequently clash with Iraq. Disagreements center on Iran's role in the region fueled by ideological differences between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain's Sunni Islam leadership and Iran's Shiite Islam leadership. While Iraq and Kuwait have taken steps to repair their relationship, tensions continue to linger from Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Due to their significant sizes, populations, and resources, Iraq and Iran compete for influence in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia with its large oil reserves is also a powerful regional player even though its military forces are significantly smaller than those of either Iraq or Iran.

Most of the Gulf States rely on the US to augment their military capabilities. With over 30,000 US troops stationed at several military installations throughout the region, the US has entered into agreements to sell or transfer arms and defense services to most of the States. The US remains in Iraq to train, support, and advise Iraqi security forces. Bahrain is the site of the longest-serving permanent US military presence in the Gulf, while Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar also host large numbers of US military personnel.

While Gulf States citizens are predominantly Arabs, the region is also home to several ethnic minorities – Persians in the UAE and Kuwait; Palestinians in Qatar; and Baloch and Persians in Oman. In Iraq, strong tensions exist between the country's 2 primary ethnic groups, the Arabs and the Kurds. In each of the States, except Iraq, significant portions of the population are foreign non-citizens – about 42% in Saudi Arabia, 54% in Bahrain, 41% in Oman, 75% in Kuwait, 88% in the UAE and Qatar.

The Gulf's tribal networks were historically a fundamental element of social relations. While the region's governments have attempted to supplant tribal allegiances with national identity in recent decades, the tribe continues to play an important role in social life in most States.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Early regional inhabitants worshipped various gods and objects, such as the sun, moon, animals, and tribal heroes. Between 500 BC and the 5th century, Zoroastrianism, one of the world's first monotheistic religions, gained followers in the region. Although

Christianity arrived in the Arab Gulf in the 1st century, most of the region's Christians fled or converted following the arrival of Islam.

In 610 AD, a merchant from Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia), Muhammad ibn Abdullah, began

preaching the worship of 1 God, Allah, marking the founding of Islam. Through conquest and proselytization Muhammad and his followers had united the entire Arabian Peninsula under Islam by the time of his death in 632 AD.



Without a chosen successor to Muhammad, his death ushered in an era of infighting that eventually split Islam into 2 sects, Shias and Sunnis. This divide persists and occasionally causes conflict in the region today. Sunni Muslims began moving beyond Arabia shortly after Muhammad's death, making their way to Iraq in 638.

Since its introduction, Islam has been a defining factor in shaping the region's cultures, societies, and political systems. Today, Islam is the official religion of each of the Gulf States. Further, the majority of the region's non-citizen residents are also Muslim. While the Arab Gulf is also home to some religious minorities – primarily Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is – these non-Muslims are largely non-citizen foreign residents.



The Gulf States governments exhibit varying levels of religious freedom. For example, Saudi Arabian law does not recognize or protect religious freedom. While conversion from Islam is punishable by death, Saudi courts rarely inflict this sentence and instead issue lengthy prison sentences and lashings as punishment. Although the Iraqi constitution guarantees religious freedom, the government has been unable to stop recent acts of violence against Shia Muslims, Christians, and others.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called “fictive kin”).

A fundamental element of Gulf society, family may refer to a person's household and extended family, clan (a group of families), or tribe. Family, clan, and tribal connections typically play an important role in an individual's life—they may determine a person's social status, potential marriage partners, business opportunities, and inheritance rights. While residence patterns

differ slightly among the States, multiple generations typically reside together in 1 household.



Historically, marriage was an arranged union intended to bring both families social and economic advantages. Although arranged marriages are still common across the region, many regional residents now choose their own spouse,

particularly in urban areas. Married couples typically live with the man's family. While divorce was traditionally uncommon in the Gulf States, divorce rates have increased in some of the Gulf States yet remained steady in others. Of note, polygyny, the practice of a man having multiple wives, is legal in the Gulf States.

The urbanization of Gulf society has changed family life in recent years. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available primarily in urban areas, family structures have become much more diverse.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Arab Gulf States' cultures and religions (primarily Islam) traditionally privilege the male's role as leader and provider. For example, Sharia law grants men privileges in inheritance and other family matters. While most of the region's inhabitants continue to adhere to traditional gender roles—men as breadwinners and guardians and women as mothers and companions—recent influences from external and internal sources have introduced some changes.

Women, like most men, were largely uneducated for much of the Gulf's history. In recent decades, literacy rates for women have increased significantly across the Gulf. Further, women now

make up more than 50% of the university student population in all States, although they often face challenges to getting their education. For example, women are often encouraged to pursue traditional “female” disciplines such as education and healthcare. In Kuwait, they are required to score higher than men on entrance exams for traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering.

Because the Gulf States’ legal systems permit gender-based discrimination, women are far less likely to participate in politics than men. Some progress has occurred: Saudi Arabia became the last Arab Gulf State to extend the right to vote to women in 2015. Although women may serve in prominent diplomatic and judicial posts, the number of women serving in elected political office across the region remains very low.



Historically, Gulf women rarely worked outside the home, a tradition that has changed over the past decades. For example, female participation in the workforce has increased 7% in Qatar and 18% in the UAE between 2000-2022. Despite steps towards gender equality, women still face barriers to their full participation in society. For example, it remains traditional for male guardians to accompany women to events outside of the home, while many workplaces and schools continue to practice gender segregation.

Homosexuality is illegal in all of the Gulf States except Bahrain, where it was decriminalized in 1976. Most Gulf residents consider issues regarding homosexuality as inappropriate topics of conversation.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

Arabic is the official language of each of the Arab Gulf States. Most residents regularly use 2 Arabic varieties—Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), derived from the classical Arabic of the Qur'an and used in school, the media, and in official government proceedings, and Gulf Arabic or Khaleeji Arabic, a widely spoken dialect. The residents of some States speak additional languages and dialects. For example, Iraq names Kurdish as its 2nd official language, and most Iraqis speak a unique dialect of Arabic called Mesopotamian Arabic. Some residents of Oman speak other Arabic dialects.



The Arab Gulf nations are also home to millions of non-citizens who speak their own native languages. These include Farsi (spoken in Iran); Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Balochi, Bengali, Pashto, and Urdu (spoken in South Asia); African

languages such as Somali and Swahili; and Asian languages such as Thai, Tagalog, and Korean. English is also widely spoken in business and by the expatriate communities of the Gulf.

Generally, Gulf residents demonstrate respect, generosity, and hospitality in their communication practices. Residents tend to share information about themselves and expect Westerners to do the same: they may ask personal questions about salary, marital status (particularly of unmarried people of a certain age), and family. Regional residents commonly use gestures when they speak, particularly if they are passionate about the topic of conversation.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized

systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Prior to the 20th century, formal education in most Arab Gulf States was limited to **madrasas**, religious schools that taught memorization of Qur'anic verses and the fundamentals of Islamic beliefs and practice, primarily to males. Following the 20th-century discovery of oil, educational opportunities expanded greatly.

Bahrain became the first Gulf State to establish a public educational system in 1932. In the mid-1950s, governments began to establish departments of education and



allocate funds for schools and other resources. An exception was Oman, where educational offerings until 1970 consisted solely of 3 primary schools reserved for 900 boys hand-selected by the Omani sultan.

Today, most of the Gulf States invest heavily in education, often at rates higher than many other developed nations. Consequently, adult literacy is over 96% in all States except Iraq where it is a low 86%. Further, the past several decades have witnessed a significant growth in the number of higher education institutions across the region.

Due to years of conflict, Iraq continues to have inadequate education facilities and a shortage of teachers and resources. Because many students are displaced, their education is often incomplete.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. By contrast, in the Arab Gulf States, establishing and maintaining relationships with

others often takes precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner.

As in other Islamic societies, men and women in the Arab Gulf region often interact differently than Americans are used to. For example, in many parts of the Gulf unrelated women and men seldom interact, and when they do, it is only in group settings.

Concepts of personal space also differ from those in the US. For example, Gulf State residents of the same sex commonly sit and stand closer to each other than Westerners do. They may also touch more often during conversations than Westerners.



Residents of the Arab Gulf States also tend to manage time differently. While residents typically agree in advance on scheduled start times, meetings frequently begin late. Further, Gulf residents may prefer to deliberate for an extended period before making final decisions.

The Arab Gulf States use both the Islamic and Western calendars. Because Friday is considered a holy day in Islam,

most Arab Gulf States observe a Sunday-Thursday workweek, except for Oman, which observes a Saturday-Wednesday workweek.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of the Arab Gulf's forms of artistic expression, including its art, architecture, dance, music, and theater, reflect the region's Arabic and Islamic influences. Gulf artists historically favored geometric designs and patterns to depict plants, flowers, and animals on buildings, jewelry, and household items.

Due to historic trade relationships and intermingling of cultures, music and dance in the Arab Gulf States reflect Persian, Indian, and east African influences. Popular throughout the region, Khaleeji music combines local Bedouin (Arab seminomadic group) music with styles from Africa, India, and Iran.

For some regional residents, dance forms are an integral part of Islamic worship. Others perform dances only in same-sex settings. Many of the region's dances are done in line, circle, square, or semicircle formations with participants moving in tandem. Dances in the Arab Gulf are generally grouped by type, including warfare, work-related, "foreign," women's, weddings, healing, and Sufi religious dances.

Regional residents practice a variety of arts and crafts including weaving (typically using camel or goat hair) and calligraphy – the art of handwriting in



which artists transform letters and words into intricate designs. While soccer is the most widely followed sport in the region, wealthier residents also enjoy falconry, horse racing, and camel racing.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

While cuisine varies across the region, residents throughout the Arab Gulf use many common staple ingredients and spices such as mutton, lamb, and fish prepared with cardamom, turmeric, saffron, and dried limes. Fruits, yogurt, various salads, and rice are common accompaniments to meals. The most popular drink, tea is served sweetened and prepared either with or without

milk. Observant Muslims in the Arab Gulf consume neither pork nor alcohol.

Health in most of the Arab Gulf countries has improved significantly in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant and maternal mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Most residents in all States except Iraq have access to quality healthcare that is largely subsidized by governments.

Years of conflict and the Saddam regime's defunding of public healthcare by 90% created significant problems in the Iraqi healthcare system. In 2009, with funding from the World Health Organization, the Iraqi Ministry of Health introduced a plan to reform and decentralize the country's healthcare system. Additionally, international humanitarian organizations have expanded their efforts in Iraq to provide healthcare to both the local population as well as those fleeing conflict areas.

The region's healthcare systems face several challenges, particularly rapidly growing healthcare expenditures associated with a large, aging population and lifestyle changes that have negative health implications. For example, fewer residents adhere to the region's traditional diet and instead have increased



their consumption of pre-packaged and fast foods. Simultaneously, rapid urbanization, the increased use of mechanized transportation, and a lack of dedicated green spaces for physical activities have led to an increasingly sedentary lifestyle for many

residents. As a result, obesity rates have increased and non-communicable diseases (such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease) now cause more than 69-83% of all deaths in all of the Arab Gulf States, except Iraq.

Communicable diseases remain a concern in Iraq, where contaminated water supplies, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygienic practices contribute to the spread of typhoid, cholera, and tuberculosis.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Besides fishing and agriculture, the Gulf States' economies have been enmeshed with local and international trade since ancient times. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Arab Gulf's port cities were integral elements of the trade routes connecting India, Europe, and East Africa.

In the late 19th century, the region began exporting dates and pearls to new markets in Europe and North America. After global demand for pearls grew significantly around the turn of the 20th century, pearl diving became a major contributor to the economies of the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain before the industry collapsed in the 1930s. The region then entered a period of socioeconomic hardship until the discovery of oil.

The growth of the oil industry in the 1950s-60s significantly changed the region. Within a few decades the States had transformed from some of the world's poorest countries to some of the wealthiest. This wealth has facilitated investment in infrastructure, enhanced the quality of life, and encouraged rapid urbanization throughout the region with the exception of Iraq.

Prior to 1980, Iraq had one of the most advanced economies of all Arab Gulf States. Years of conflict, however, have had a profound effect on Iraq's economy. In late 2015, Iraq implemented an economic reform proposal intended to cut excess government spending and crackdown on corruption.



Oil remains an important part of the region's economies today—in Iraq, Qatar, and Kuwait, oil exports make up over 80% of government revenues. Over the past several decades, the Gulf States collectively have taken steps to reduce their economic dependence on oil through diversification efforts. For example, Bahrain has worked to develop its banking sector; Kuwait produces cement and ships and specializes in food-processing; Qatar is expanding its agricultural sector; and the UAE is investing in tourism, airport and aviation services, and facilities management services.

Despite these efforts, the region remains dependent on oil: all of the region's economies were adversely affected by the decline in oil prices and a reduced demand for oil during the 2008 global financial crisis. The States are currently exploring ways to adapt to the fluctuating oil prices that began in 2019.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology.

Most of the Arab Gulf States have invested heavily into



extensive road networks. The governments of Oman and Saudi Arabia, for example, have put significant sums of funding towards building large freeways and roads that extend to remote areas. Despite years of conflict, Iraq's 36,000 miles of roads remain in relatively good condition. Six of the region's governments allocated \$250 billion for the construction of a regional rail network which will link Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar after many delays the Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC) is estimating a now 2030 completion date.

Information technology is spreading rapidly throughout the Arab Gulf. Between 2000 and 2022, Internet usage grew from between 0 and 24% of population to between 99% and 100% of population. The exception is Iraq where just 79% of population are Internet users. Cell phones are extremely popular –the States report between 98 and 212 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people.

As the destination of 7% of all GCC exports, the European Union (EU) is the region's 4th largest trading partner. The EU and the GCC States (with the exception of Iraq) are pursuing a free trade agreement. The Gulf States also maintain important trade relationships with several Asian nations.

For example, China depends on the Arab Gulf for 41% of its oil imports, India for 35%, South Korea for 70%, and Japan for over 91%.

The Arab Gulf faces challenges in meeting its growing energy needs. As a result of the region's rapid urbanization and population growth, the Gulf States are shifting from being energy suppliers to major energy consumers. Energy consumption grew by about 5%

annually since 1972 (compared to 2% globally). While the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have less than 1% of the world's population, these countries now use more than 8% of the world's



oil. Iraq has had difficulty meeting its own power needs, relying on imported electricity and petroleum products.

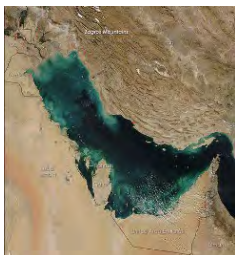
Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Arab Gulf society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Qatar.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Ruled by the same family since the late 19th century, Qatar nevertheless has experienced tremendous societal and economic changes since its first oil exports in 1949. While oil and gas revenues improved healthcare, education, and the nation's infrastructure, economic growth required a large influx of foreign workers who now make up a majority of the population. Qatar's large reserves of oil and especially natural gas have made it one of the world's richest countries, giving it significant global influence. Nevertheless, independent policies have injured its relations with several neighbors, resulting in serious regional tensions. Qatar today is a blend of ancient traditions and modern technology, and of conservatism and tolerance.



NOTE: While readers may know the body of water surrounding Qatar by its more common name, the Persian Gulf, this guide uses the name preferred in the region, the Arabian Gulf.

Early History

Archaeological finds suggest that humans have inhabited the Qatari peninsula for millennia. Evidence includes stone tools that date as early as 5600 BC and pottery sherds from around 5000 BC. These artifacts also suggest regional inhabitants had trade links with advanced civilizations in Mesopotamia (present-day Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait). Pottery findings also indicate links with Dilmun, a peaceful trading civilization centered in the neighboring island of Bahrain from 2450-1700 BC. Dilmun's ships carried silver, textiles, oil, and precious resins between Babylonia (in present-day Iraq) and the Indus Valley (in present-day Pakistan and India).

Roughly around this time, Gulf inhabitants domesticated the camel, first to provide milk and then as a beast of burden. Nomadic pastoralists herding camels, sheep, and goats likely visited the Qatari peninsula from central Arabia. Archaeological findings dating to around 1750 BC suggest inhabitants of an island off the coast of Qatar produced a purple dye from a marine snail possibly for trade with Babylonia, where the color was a symbol of political and religious power.

While much of the Gulf region was under the domination of various foreign empires through subsequent centuries, the region of present-day Qatar remained largely isolated due primarily to its lack of water and small population. Nevertheless, archaeological evidence, such as burial mounds dating to 326 BC and settlement remains from around the 2nd century AD, indicate that some residents may have engaged in economic activities beyond basic subsistence. Of note, famed Alexandrian astronomer Ptolemy's 2nd-century AD map of the Arabian Peninsula refers to "Catara" as a settlement in approximately the same area as modern-day Qatar.

During this period, **bedu** (Bedouin – see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) and other Arab nomads from Arabia likely traveled to Qatar in rhythm with the seasons. Over the next several centuries, a handful of small permanent settlements likely arose.

The Spread of Islam

According to Qatari tradition, an envoy from the prophet Muhammad traveled to Qatar and Bahrain in 628 bringing a new religion, Islam (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*), which spread rapidly among Qatari residents.

The Gulf region as a whole experienced social and political upheaval as Islamic dynasties and sects competed for supremacy over the next 900 years. As a frontier zone with few resources, the Qatari Peninsula remained largely uninvolved in those power struggles. Instead, most residents continued to



engage in nomadic pastoralism, though a handful of small settlements centered on trade and pearling arose on Qatar's coast.

The Activities of Foreign Powers

Beginning in the early 1500s, Gulf frontiers like the Qatari Peninsula caught the attention of certain foreign powers. These powers competed for strategic ports and settlements in the Arabian Gulf in order to attain a share or even outright control of Gulf trade in luxury items like spices, silk, and pearls. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to enter the region, capturing some regional port cities and establishing forts. Their activities attracted the attention of several other powers, such as the Ottomans (centered in present-day Turkey) who



managed to eject the Portuguese from the area around Qatar in 1538. Seeking to rid the Gulf of the Portuguese entirely, the Persians (in present-day Iran) then allied with the Dutch and English. By 1622, the Persians and British had driven the Portuguese from the Gulf, beginning centuries

of British influence, if not control, of the region.

Pearling Settlements and Nomads

At the beginning of the 18th century, Persia controlled the pearling industry in the Gulf, though its influence was weakening due to inefficient leadership and continuing pressures from European powers. At the same time, increasing European demand for pearls prompted some Arab tribes to establish competing pearling settlements across the region.

During this period, nomads continued their activities. One group, the Al Naim, crossed the sea between Qatar and the neighboring island of Bahrain on a seasonal basis. Other groups moved into the region from central Arabia. Besides herding their animals, these and other nomadic tribes provided protection for pearling settlements and lent military support to

powerful sheikhs (Arab tribal leaders) as they jockeyed for power and control of land and resources.

The Emergence of Regional Ruling Families: The 1700s also saw the arrival of the ancestors of 2 groups who would become modern-day regional rulers: the Al Khalifa clan of the Bani Utub tribe (in Bahrain) and the Al Thani clan of the Bani Tamim tribe (in Qatar). Migrating from Najd in central Arabia, the ancestors of the Al Thani settled mainly on Qatar's eastern coast where they engaged in fishing, pearling, date palm cultivation, and trade.

By contrast, the Bani Utub tribe moved from central Arabia to Qatar for just a short period before continuing to the region of present-day Kuwait, where it grew wealthy through pearl trading. Eventually, the Al Khalifa branch decided to return to the Qatari peninsula, founding the pearling community of Al Zubarah on the northwest coast in the 1760s.

Situated just across the Gulf of Bahrain from the island of Bahrain, Al Zubarah quickly became a prosperous commercial center with a prominent fort. The Al Khalifa maintained trade links with their tribesmen in Kuwait and soon came into competition with Bahrain, itself a successful pearling and trading center. The growing rivalry prompted Bahrain to attack Al Zubarah in 1783. With the support of Bedouin tribes, the Al Khalifa repulsed the



attack, then invaded and conquered Bahrain. As the Al Khalifa sheikh became the ruler of Bahrain, most of his tribe relocated to the island, though a few remained in Qatar to maintain a claim to Al Zubarah. The Al Khalifa sheikhdom in Bahrain survives to this day.

Piracy and Tribal Rivalries

Following the conquest of Bahrain, another branch of the Bani Utub tribe, the Al Jalahimah, came into conflict with the Al Khalifa over the distribution of spoils and profits. Led by Rahmah bin Jabir Al Jalahimah, the Al Jalahimah relocated

north of Al Zubarah and took up piracy against the Al Khalifa.



Despite the presence of passing British merchant ships loaded with luxury goods, the Al Jalahimah tended to avoid them so as to evade unwanted attention from the British Empire. Nevertheless, the attacks of other regional pirates against their ships during this period prompted the British to call the area as a whole the “Pirate Coast”.

With the departure of most of the Al Khalifa to Bahrain and following a devastating attack by Omanis, Al Zubarah lost its trade connections to Kuwait and went into decline. Without a dominant ruling sheikh, tribal rivalries in Qatar flared, leading to conflict and insecurity on the peninsula.

The Trucial System

Meanwhile, the British continued to face piracy and local commercial competitors. Using various military tactics, particularly against tribes based in the present-day United Arab Emirates (UAE), the British sought to protect their trade interests and exclude rival European powers from the Gulf. However, they did not want to politically administer the region or rule its inhabitants. Instead, they constructed a network of alliances by signing a series of treaties and truces with local tribal rulers who remained in power. This system was called the “Trucial System,” and the area as a whole became known as the “Trucial Coast.”

In 1820, the British and several sheikhs from the present-day UAE and the Al Khalifa of Bahrain signed a treaty which required the Arabs to refrain from piracy and register their ships with British authorities. At the time, Britain considered Qatar a dependency of Bahrain, though in reality Bahrain had only nominal control of the Qatari peninsula. Eventually, the Trucial System weakened the position of notorious pirate Rahmah bin Jabir Al Jalahimah, who died fighting the Al Khalifa’s Bahraini

fleet in 1826, signaling the end of the Al Jalahimah as a dominant force.

Few in Qatar were informed of the treaty with Britain. Consequently, they were shocked when a British ship bombarded and destroyed the east coast settlement of Doha (Qatar's present-day capital) as punishment for alleged piracy in 1821. Following discussions with the British, several Qatari groups, notably the Al Thani, agreed to respect the treaty, laying the foundation for Britain's involvement in Qatari affairs for the next 150 years.

The Rise of the Al Thani

Although the Al Khalifa maintained nominal control of the Qatari peninsula in the first half of the 19th century, their interest remained largely centered on Al Zubarah. Consequently, Qatar was the site of intermittent conflict between competing Arab tribes, Bahraini forces, and Bedouin groups. Territories constantly shifted as most groups were highly mobile and often relocated their settlements.

In 1847, the leader of the Al Thani clan of the Bani Tamim tribe, Sheikh Muhammad bin Thani, moved his family to Doha. After cementing strategic alliances, Sheikh Muhammad became the region's dominant leader, providing a relatively stable guiding presence. In 1867, Bahrain sought to reassert control of Qatar and attacked Doha, largely destroying the city. A year later, Sheikh Muhammad retaliated, attacking Bahrain.



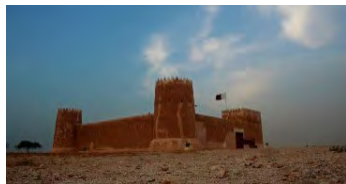
With no clear victor, these events attracted the attention of the British, who considered the activities of both sides as treaty breaches. A British representative dispatched to salvage the situation was particularly harsh towards the Bahrainis, forcing the Al Khalifa sheikh to abdicate, destroying his fortress, and burning his fleet. In Qatar, the British envoy met with Sheikh Muhammad, who agreed to sign an agreement guaranteeing that Qatar would refrain from war at sea. Until this time, the

British considered Qatar a dependency of Bahrain, and the Al Thani were simply one family among many. However, with this agreement, Britain implicitly recognized Qatar as an entity separate from Bahrain with the Al Thani as its legitimate rulers. While other sheikhs regarded Sheikh Muhammad bin Thani as a first among equals, the British now regarded him as responsible for order on the peninsula, setting the course for Qatar's future independence.

Ottoman Nominal Control

To counter British regional ambitions and secure its foothold in the area, the Ottoman Empire (from its base in Turkey) expanded into eastern Arabia in 1871 and threatened Qatar. While Sheikh Muhammad opposed the Ottomans, preferring the British, his son Jassim accepted Ottoman sovereignty in 1872, using his designation as Qatar's regional governor to protect and strengthen his own position. Although father and son represented rival empires, they coexisted peacefully until Muhammad's 1878 death.

The Al Thani Solidify Control: As Al Thani leader, Sheikh Jassim hoped the Ottomans would support the Al Thani in their ongoing conflicts with the Al Khalifa of Bahrain and Al Zubarah. In 1878, the Al Naim, a Bedouin tribe aligned with the Al



Khalifa, attacked Qatari ships. In support, the Al Khalifa sent reinforcements to Al Zubarah. Responding to the perceived act of piracy by the Al Naim, Sheikh Jassim attacked

Al Zubarah, destroying it and the Bahraini forces. With this victory, the Al Thani controlled the territory of the entire Qatari peninsula for the first time.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Jassim sought to conspire with the Ottomans to overthrow the Al Khalifa in Bahrain and requested their help in other disputes. Nevertheless, Sheikh Jassim's relations with the Ottomans eventually deteriorated, and when the Ottomans sought to increase the number of troops stationed in Qatar in 1893, Sheikh Jassim refused. When the

Ottomans dispatched a military force to Doha to arrest Sheikh Jassim, armed conflict ensued. In the subsequent battle at Al Waqbah, remembered today as the most important battle in Qatari history, Sheikh Jassim's supporters defeated the Ottomans. Although the Ottoman Empire continued to claim Qatar for about 2 more decades, this victory largely secured Al Thani authority on the peninsula.

Soon after his battlefield victory, Sheikh Jassim resigned from direct leadership, deputizing first his brother and later his son, Abdullah, to handle general affairs. Jassim then focused his attention on overseeing the construction of roads and establishing religious schools (see p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Upon Sheikh Jassim's 1913 death, Abdullah became the Al Thani leader. Despite both internal and external threats to his leadership over the years, Sheikh Abdullah remained ruler until 1949.



British Protectorate

In 1913, a declining Ottoman Empire formally renounced its claims to Qatar, though it aligned with the Saud clan in neighboring Arabia a year later. This alliance posed a threat to a vulnerable Qatar, which also faced opposition from disgruntled tribes, Bahrain's continued claim to regions of the peninsula (see p. 11-12 of *Political and Social Relations*), and the expansionist Saudis. The Saudis even plotted with Abdullah's brother and cousins to overthrow him.

When World War I broke out in Europe in 1914, Britain and the Ottoman Empire fought on opposing sides, spurring the British to further prioritize Qatar's security. In 1916, Qatar and Britain signed a landmark treaty that brought Qatar fully into the Trucial System as a British protectorate. Under the agreement, Qatar ceded all control of its foreign affairs to Britain. In return, Britain provided full protection to Qatar and its seafaring ships and offered assistance to the Al Thani against internal and external land-based threats.

The treaty also called for Qatar to abolish slavery (see below) and, crucially, made the Al Thani the sole arms distributor in Qatar, significantly shoring up Sheikh Abdullah's power against other sheikhs. Despite the treaty, Saudi interest in controlling the Qatari peninsula continued.

Slavery in Qatar

It is likely that some residents of Qatar held East African slaves beginning in ancient times. The 19th century agreements between the British and Arabian Gulf sheikhs forbade the trade in slaves, though the British rarely enforced such bans. The 1916 treaty that outlined Qatar's status as a British protectorate required the abolishment of slavery. Nevertheless, British authorities showed little interest in interfering in the internal affairs of the sheikhs and tolerated the practice. Well into the 20th century, a few Qatari sheikhs used African slaves for armed protection and support. These slaves typically adopted their owners' tribal identities and names. Qatar's slaves were freed officially in the 1950s. Shortly thereafter, the exploitation of Qatar's newly-found oil initiated the influx of non-citizen workers that continues today. Of note, some observers, even former Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, have condemned Qatar's treatment of its non-citizen workforce as "slavery," though recent reforms have sought to improve workers' plight (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources* and p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*).

The Decline of the Pearl Industry

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the pearling industry provided employment and income to many of the peninsula's inhabitants (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). By the 1930s, the Gulf region's economy began a dramatic shift. Not only did the worldwide Great Depression significantly reduce demand for pearls, the Japanese

developed a cheaper way to breed oysters and make “cultured” pearls.

These events signaled the beginning of the end of the Gulf’s pearl industry and resulted in a significant loss to the region. For example, while the industry employed some 60,000 Qataris in 1924, that number had fallen to 6,000 some 20 years later. The industry eventually faded almost completely in the 1940s, when newly-independent India imposed a heavy tax on pearls from the Arabian Gulf.

The Discovery of Oil

About the same time the pearl industry was beginning to decline, Western oil companies began surveying for oil in the region. While no oil had yet been discovered, Qatar signed its 1st concession with the British-held Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) in 1926. Sheikh Abdullah then sought better



arrangements by encouraging competition between major oil companies, notably APOC and the US’s Standard Oil. Nevertheless, facing mounting debt and British threats to withdraw protection, Sheikh Abdullah signed another concession with APOC in

1935 in exchange for British promises of additional assistance. The concession also included British recognition of Abdullah’s son, Hamad bin Abdullah Al Thani, as his heir apparent, meaning he was next in line for leadership.

Initial exploration was conducted by a subsidiary of APOC that would eventually become Qatar Petroleum Company, Qatar’s national oil company (see p. 2-3 of *Economics and Resources*). Although oil was discovered in 1939, World War II delayed the start of oil exports. With the pearling industry failing and no oil income yet, Qatar experienced serious economic hardship in the 1930s-40s. Poverty and food shortages led some Qataris to

emigrate, causing the peninsula's population to drop from 27,000 in 1907 to 16,000 in the early 1940s.

Territorial Disputes

The discovery of oil in the Gulf region as a whole raised the stakes in territorial disputes. First, the newly-founded country of Saudi Arabia attempted to claim parts of the Qatari hinterlands. In 1936, Bahrain claimed the Hawar Islands just off Qatar's west coast. Despite Sheikh Abdullah's vocal objections, Britain sided with Bahrain, initiating a dispute between Qatar and Bahrain that would continue until the early 2000s (see p. 11-12 of *Political and Social Relations*).



In 1937, Bahrain renewed its claim to the town of Al Zubarah, which was once again occupied by its allies, the Al Naim. Sheikh Abdullah dispatched a large military force to Al Zubarah and defeated the Al Naim. Warned by the British to abandon its plans for military reprisals, Bahrain imposed an embargo on trade and travel to Qatar that was particularly damaging in the harsh economic environment. (Of note, Bahrain and its neighbors revived such an embargo tactic during the 2017 regional tensions – see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Sheikh Abdullah Abdicates

In 1948, Sheikh Hamad, Sheikh Abdullah's designated heir, died. This event sparked a minor revolt within the Al Thani, with members feuding over succession and demanding an increased share of projected oil revenues. Seeking stability, Sheikh Abdullah negotiated British recognition of his son Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah Al Thani as ruler in exchange for his own abdication. The agreement also stipulated the fulfillment of previous treaty commitments to end slavery (see textbox above) and an official British presence in Qatar along with the establishment of a governmental administration.

Economic and Social Changes

In 1949, oil exports finally began, bringing in much-needed revenue that would transform Qatar's economy and society,

while generating domestic disputes and affecting foreign relations.

Since the 1870s, political power in the peninsula had increasingly centered on the Al Thani family. As the new ruler, Sheikh Ali was reluctant to relinquish any power to a British administration. Nevertheless, increasing financial difficulties, Qatari worker strikes, and the designs of rival sheikhs, compelled Sheikh Ali to allow the British to develop a national budget and establish a bureaucracy. The British-led government began to establish public services, including the first telephone exchange in 1953, a desalinization plant in 1954, and a power plant in 1957, and by 1954 the government had 42 employees. A 1956 demonstration against both the British and Sheikh Ali prompted the establishment of a British-run police force.

Family Obligations

Oil revenues boomed, rising from \$1 million in 1950 to \$25 million in 1954. Custom demanded that the Al Thani leaders pass on a large portion of these revenues in the traditional way – as gifts to their tribesmen. In the 1950s, Sheikh Ali used oil revenues to fund outright grants or “allowances” to some 150



Al Thani men, with rates determined by seniority and family relationship. He also provided sheikhs of other prominent families with land and government positions. Members of the Al Thani remained content as long as oil revenues increased. Sheikh Ali himself lived extravagantly, spending time at a villa in Switzerland and hunting in Pakistan.

In the late 1950s, however, oil revenues began to decline. Sheikh Ali's extravagant lifestyle fueled discontent, especially among non-Al Thani Qataris. Amidst mounting pressures from family and non-family alike, Sheikh Ali abdicated in 1960.

Dual Leadership

Disregarding family plans to pass leadership to his nephew, Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, Sheikh Ali designated his son, Ahmad bin Ali Al Thani as the next ruler. In honor of family wishes, Sheikh Ahmad named his cousin, Sheikh Khalifa, his designated heir, granting Khalifa significant administrative responsibilities.

Like his father, Sheikh Ahmad lived an extravagant lifestyle funded by the 25% of oil revenues that he received for his



personal use. Further, Sheikh Ahmad had little interest in his new responsibilities, preferring extended stays at his Swiss villa. To ease family tensions, Sheikh Ahmad gave certain Al Thani family members government positions and increased

allowances, which he offset with decreased funding to development projects and social services.

All these actions stoked significant resentment among many groups, such as low-ranking Al Thani, leaders of non-Al Thani families, and Qatari oil workers. In 1963, these groups formed an organization called the National Unity Front, went on strike, and demanded a reduction of Sheikh Ahmad's privileges. It also called for an increase in social services and recognition of trade unions. In response, Sheikh Ahmad jailed or exiled many of the Front's leaders, ending the movement. Nevertheless, Sheikh Ahmad also instituted some reforms, one of which became the home loan program Qataris enjoy today (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*).

By contrast, Sheikh Khalifa proved an adept leader, supporting infrastructure projects, the growth of the government administration, and attempts to diversify the economy. He also recognized the need for labor force growth, leading to a large influx of foreign workers that started in the late 1960s and continues today (see p. 1-2 of *Economics and Resources*).

The British Announce Plans to Withdraw

In 1968, fearing that continued support to the states of the Trucial System would severely tax its overextended military, Britain suddenly announced that in 3 years it would discontinue its protectorate commitments on the Trucial Coast, including in Qatar. The rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai (in the present-day UAE) invited 5 other local rulers plus the leaders of Bahrain and Qatar to join them in a confederation of Arab emirates (principalities).

Despite disagreements on the details, including the location of the capital of the proposed federation and the content of its constitution, the rulers initially accepted the proposal. Eventually unable to resolve certain issues, Bahrain and Qatar withdrew from negotiations, each declaring independence in late summer 1971. Abu Dhabi and Dubai, along with the 5 other emirates, would form the UAE several months later.



Independence

When Britain made its 1968 announcement, conflict between Sheikh Ahmad and Sheikh Khalifa immediately flared. While Sheikh Ahmad supported joining the planned federation, Sheikh Khalifa opposed it, primarily due to Bahrain's efforts to lead the federation.

While still publicly supporting the federation, Sheikh Ahmad established a provisional constitution in April 1970, declaring Qatar an independent Arab and Islamic state while officially instituting **sharia** (Islamic law – see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations* and p. 9 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In May, Sheikh Ahmad became Emir (ruler of the Qatari emirate – see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*) as Sheikh Khalifa became Prime Minister. Following Qatar's withdrawal from federation negotiations that summer, Qatar declared its independence on September 3, 1971. Sheikh Ahmad made the declaration from his villa in Switzerland, provoking significant ridicule and resentment.

The “Father of the Nation” Takes Power

Following lengthy discussions, the Al Thani family decided that Sheikh Ahmad must be replaced. On February 22, 1972, with the tacit support of the Al Thani, Saudi Arabia, and Britain, Sheikh Khalifa peacefully deposed Sheikh Ahmad while he was in Iran hunting with his falcons (see p. 3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Widely considered the “Father of the Nation,” Sheikh Khalifa would rule for the next 23 years. In 1977, Sheikh Khalifa appointed his son, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani as his heir apparent and minister of defense.

As Emir, Sheikh Khalifa moved quickly to consolidate his position, placing many close relatives in the highest government offices. However, he also reduced family allowances and the practice of directing 1/4 of all oil revenues directly to Qatar’s ruler in favor of funding social programs in housing, health, and education. Rapid economic development plus the provision of free healthcare and education to Qatari citizens transformed the new country, though non-citizen workers without such rights and privileges continued to flow in.

Emir Khalifa promised political reform, yet after coming to power he undertook no steps towards democratization. While he continued efforts to diversify the economy, petroleum products remained Qatar’s primary export and source of revenue (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*).

Gulf Cooperation

Council: In 1981, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to provide for regional defense and to coordinate policy on

trade and economic issues (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*).



Following the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Qatar and other GCC states entered into a closer security relationship with the US (see p. 12-13 of *Political and Social Relations*). Qatari troops participated in battles during the Persian Gulf War, and

Doha served as the base for US-led offensive strikes against Iraq.

Another Leadership Change

Meanwhile, Sheikh Khalifa's son and heir, Sheikh Hamad, had developed his own political base, portraying himself as an advocate of modernization, innovation, and women's equality (see p. 2-3 of *Sex and Gender*). Focusing on petrochemical industry development, he led the Supreme Planning Council in the 1980s. As supreme military commander, he established loyal contacts in the Qatari armed forces. Further, Qataris considered him a military hero for his actions during the Persian Gulf War.

Disagreements concerning the distribution of oil revenues flared again in the mid-1990s, though it is likely there were also other causes of the family friction. Sheikh Hamad took advantage of his father's visit to Switzerland in 1995 to remove him from power in a bloodless coup. Encouraged by Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Hamad successfully suppressed a counter coup led by his father's supporters the next year. Nevertheless, tensions remained between father and son until a lawsuit over the rightful ownership of billions in oil revenue was settled out of court in the mid-2000s.

Modernization and Limited Democratization

Under Sheikh Hamad's rule, Qatar modernized and undertook some reforms. Throughout the 1990s-2000s, he and his wife Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*)



pursued initiatives to cultivate a reputation for openness and political independence. For example, Sheikh Hamad sponsored the 1996 founding of Al-Jazeera, now the most prominent media outlet in the Middle East (see p. 3 of

Technology and Materials), and Sheikha Mozah was a driving force behind Education City (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Under Sheikh Hamad's guidance, Qatar invested in the liquified natural gas (LNG) industry, becoming the world's

largest exporter and propelling the country into greater regional prominence (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*).

Sheikh Hamad also oversaw modest democratic reforms. In 1999, Qatar held its first elections, selecting members of the Central Municipal Council (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*). Sheikh Hamad continually postponed those scheduled elections after a new constitution ratified in 2004 called for a national advisory legislature composed partly of elected members (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Sheikh Hamad strived to enhance Qatar's role on the world stage. Unlike most other nations, Qatar pursued cordial ties with a range of countries and groups, even regional rivals such as Iran and Saudi Arabia and both secular governments and Islamist opposition groups (see p. 9-10 of *Political and Social Relations*). With its reputation for impartiality, Qatar pursued opportunities to serve as a mediator, hosting several high-profile peace negotiations such as the 2003 Libya, Britain, and US negotiations that led to the dismantling of Libya's nuclear program. Sheikh Hamad also resisted domination by Saudi Arabia, de facto leader of the GCC.

During the 2011 "Arab Spring," when pro-democracy movements swept the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Qatar saw no internal unrest. Accordingly, it was able to take an active role on 2 fronts, providing weapons and funds to rebels against Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi and significant support to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*).



Contemporary Qatar

Recognizing the need for a new generation of leaders, Sheikh Hamad stepped down in mid-2013, peacefully transitioning leadership to his son, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

Unlike his father, Sheikh Tamim did schedule the very first constitutionally-mandated national legislative elections in 2021

(see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*). The 2021 legislative elections saw a 63.5% voter turnout, suggesting that Qataris may have increased confidence regarding the effectiveness of their involvement in civic affairs.

Under Sheikh Tamim, Qatar has continued its independent foreign policy, supporting Islamist fighters in Syria, Libya, and elsewhere in the region and contributing to tensions. Qatar's continuing support to the Muslim Brotherhood strained regional relations in 2014, causing Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain to withdraw their ambassadors from Doha for several months. Tensions eased when Qatar committed to noninterference in the affairs of other GCC states and refrain from supporting any Muslim Brotherhood-linked organizations.

Tensions flared again in mid-2017, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and several other Muslim-majority countries accused Qatar of supporting terrorist groups and Iran's regional interventions. They all severed diplomatic relations with Qatar and limited transit of Qatari citizens and vessels in their territories (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*). The diplomatic crisis resolved in January 2021 with the signing of the Al-Ula Declaration.

Unlike some other GCC countries, Qatar has seen few demonstrations against the government in recent years. Nevertheless, beneath Qatar's political calm and economic success lie potential causes of instability. These include lax



immigration and financial controls that enable trafficking and forced labor, regional terrorist activity, and the economy's reliance on non-citizen foreign workers who now make up some 88% of the total population (see p. 1 and

14-15 of *Political and Social Relations*) and 95% of Qatar's labor force (see p. 1-2 of *Economics and Resources*). Since the 2011 Arab Spring, Qatar has issued new laws restricting freedom of expression and increasing penalties for criticizing the government (see p. 2-3 of *Technology and Material*).

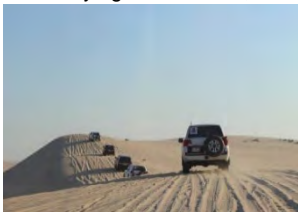
Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity.

Story-telling historically played an important role among Arab tribespeople. Many stories tell of the exploits of heroes who are particularly charitable, clever, loyal, and honorable, providing models of proper behavior. Others tell of evil spirits or relate the adventures of mystical creatures. Because most stories were passed orally through the generations, some have been lost. Recently, scholars have documented such tales, using them to develop films or comic strips set in a modern context.

Um Homar

Um Homar ("Donkey Lady") is a terrifying half-woman, half-donkey creature who uses cunning and deceit to seek out and eat children. She is most active when the sun is high and Qataris are enjoying an afternoon nap after a long morning's work. Parents warn their children from venturing outside or



opening the door to strangers during this time of day, knowing that Um Homar might be lurking in the neighborhood. Making her presence known through the sound of her hooves, Um Homar approaches homes and cries out to children for help, often requesting food or water, then banging on the door if no one answers. Other versions give Um Homar special abilities. In modern adaptations, Um Homar is a hitchhiker in the desert who preys on teen drivers.

Scholars suggest that such stories illustrate how difficult life was and continues to be for desert dwellers. Further, they show how existence is uncertain and how quickly one's fate can change. The story of Um Homar teaches that survival in the desert depends on avoiding the unfamiliar and unknown, while adhering to tribal and family rules and habits.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

State of Qatar

Dawlat Qatar

قطر دولة (Arabic)

Political Borders

Saudi Arabia: 54 mi

Coastline: 350 mi

Capital

Doha

Demographics

Qatar's population of about 2.55 million is growing at a rate of 0.8% per year, lower than in neighboring Bahrain (0.9%), and United Arab Emirates (0.8%), but higher than in the US (0.5%). Since 1980, Qatar's population has grown by over 1100% due to a large influx of migrant workers. Today, non-citizen foreign workers make up the majority of the population (89%) while Qatari citizens constitute the minority (11%). Most non-citizens are from South Asia yet significant numbers also come from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Over 99% of residents live in urban areas, with most of the population clustered in or around the capital city of Doha. Qatar is about 72% male and 28% female.



Qatar's flag consists of a maroon background with a white, serrated 9-point band situated on the left. The maroon portion symbolizes blood spilled during Qatari conflicts, while the white band stands for peace. The 9 white serrated edges represent

Flag

Adopted in 1971,

the 9 emirates of the Arabian Gulf, Qatar, Bahrain plus the 7 emirates comprising UAE.

Geography

Qatar is a small, peninsular nation jutting north into the Arabian Gulf from the eastern shore of the Arabian Peninsula. The Arabian Gulf surrounds the nation on the North, East, and West, while Qatar's only land border, shared with Saudi Arabia, lies to the South. Qatar's total land area is about 4,500 sq mi, making it slightly smaller than Connecticut.

Coastal plains, rolling sand dunes, beaches, and occasional mangrove woodlands extend along Qatar's long coastline. Qatar's populous eastern shores lie at sea level, while terrain along the western coast rises slightly and prominently features limestone pinnacles sculpted by millennia of water and wind erosion. Just 1% of Qatar's territory comprises arable land, with the rest of the nation's interior characterized by mostly flat, barren desert interspersed with expanses of salt flats (**sabkha**). The desert also contains intermittent date palm oases which support small herds of camels, sheep, and goats.



While Qatar has no permanent rivers, dry riverbeds (**wadis**) occasionally fill with water following winter rains.

Climate

Located in an arid zone that stretches from North Africa to East Asia, Qatar experiences a subtropical desert climate that divides into 2 seasons: a summer or hot season and a winter or cool season. Summer occurs between May-September and is extremely hot and dry. Temperatures often exceed 100°F in inland desert areas and may reach as high as 122°F during the summer's hottest months of July and August. Winter months of October-April are characterized by more moderate temperatures, which average around 75°F during the day and 55°F at night. While humidity can be heavy near the coast,

rains are infrequent and occur only in the winter. Dry, desert winds sweeping from the North and Northwest generate powerful sand-laden storms (***shamal***) throughout the year (see “Natural Hazards” below).

Natural Hazards

Qatar is vulnerable to relatively few natural hazards. Apart from a harsh summer climate, Qatar’s most significant hazard includes *shamal* wind storms which intermittently blanket portions of the country with thick, rolling clouds of dust and sand. At their worst, moving sandstorm walls may last for days and reach over 1,000 ft, severely reducing visibility, forcing city closures, and generating dangerous driving conditions. Prolonged *shamal* winds may also kill exposed livestock and contribute to various health complications, particularly respiratory diseases.

Environmental Issues

Qatar’s most pressing environmental issue is a lack of natural freshwater resources. While it relies on 2 freshwater aquifers to sustain its limited agricultural production,



Qatar increasingly depends on large-scale, energy-intensive desalination facilities to process seawater to meet the needs of its growing population. Along the coasts, oil, gas, and hazardous chemical spills, sewage runoff, and pollution from desalination facilities threaten marine ecosystems. Despite improvements to wastewater treatment programs and other protective government initiatives, coastal pollution remains a problem, particularly in Doha. Further, large urban areas along Qatar’s east coast suffer from air and noise pollution. Climate-change scientists recently predicted that the region may suffer temperature levels intolerable to humans by 2100.

Government

Qatar is a patriarchal constitutional monarchy controlled by a hereditary ruler. Amended in 2003, approved by public referendum a year later, and effective in 2005, the constitution promises freedom and equality for all Qatari citizens. It also

provides for a national advisory legislature which consults with the executive branch on matters of defense, foreign affairs, and national economic policy. Qatar divides into 8 municipalities (**baladiyat**) which subdivide into 87 administrative zones.

Executive Branch

As a monarchy, both executive and legislative powers, including the authority to ratify federal laws and decrees, are vested in the Emir – a hereditary ruler who acts as head-of-state. Upon assuming office, the Emir appoints a Council of Ministers (CM) led by a Prime Minister (PM) who serves as head-of-government. The CM supports the Emir in running the nation's day-to-day affairs of drafting and voting on proposed laws after consulting with the advisory council (see “Legislative Branch” below), overseeing the implementation of new and existing laws, preparing the national budget, and otherwise guiding the nation in domestic and foreign policy.

Qatar's current Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, came to power in 2013 following the peaceful abdication of his father, Sheikh Hamad (see p. 17 of *History and Myth*). The current PM, Muhammad bin Abd al-Rahman Al Thani, assumed office in 2023.



Legislative Branch

Qatar's legislature is a 1-chamber body called the Consultative (or Advisory) Council (**Majlis al-Shura**), an advisory body of 45 members. According to the constitution, the Emir appoints 15 Council members to serve unlimited terms, while the remaining 30 are directly elected by popular vote to serve renewable 4-year terms. Since the constitution's ratification in 2004, legislative elections had yet to take place. Postponed by former Sheikh Hamad several times (see p. 17 of *History and Myth*), the latest elections were scheduled and held in October 2021. Currently, the parliament is comprised of 45 members, 30

elected members and 15 appointed by the monarch. Because it cannot enact or veto legislation, the Council's primary function is to advise the Emir, review constitutional amendments, aid in drafting new legislation, and appraise national budgets.

A secondary legislative body, the 29-seat Central Municipal Council (CMC), also holds consultative powers and is tasked with promoting the interests of Qatar's 8 municipalities. Members of the CMC are elected by popular vote to serve unlimited 4-year terms.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary adheres to a dual system of **sharia** (Islamic) and **adaliyya** (civil) law. As the highest courts, the Supreme Court (also called Court of Cassation) and Supreme Constitutional Court handle legislative and constitutional matters and serve as

the final courts of appeal. A 9-member Supreme Judiciary Council, hand-picked by the Emir, nominates both Supreme and Constitutional Court justices.

Other courts include Courts of Appeal, an Administrative Court,

Courts of First Instance, and Courts of Justice. The judiciary applies **sharia** to adjudicate criminal and family matters and **adaliyya** to handle administrative, commercial, and civil disputes. About 1/4 of judiciary members are non-citizens.

Political Climate

Qatar has a closed political system that outlaws political parties. Instead, the political arena is dominated by the large and influential royal family, the Al Thani. Controlling Qatar since the 1870s (see p. 4-8 of *History and Myth*), members of the Al Thani kin group occupy the majority of high-level government positions and consequently retain significant control over Qatar's political environment. Occasionally, disputes or divisions among Al Thani family members influence political decisions and at times escalate to bloodless coups, the latest occurring in 1995 (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*).



While Qatar remains a monarchy, recent reforms have expanded political participation and introduced some democratic elements into the political system. Since 1999, for example, the government has held free, nation-wide elections to fill seats in the CMC (see p. 17 of *History and Myth*). Moreover, in 2003, Qatar adopted a constitution that established a national advisory legislature having a membership in part determined by popular vote (see “Legislative Branch” above). While Qatar has only recently held its 1st national legislative elections, regular CMC elections provide a channel for Qataris to voice concerns at the local level. These elections draw both male and female voters, though often at low levels of participation (see p. 18 of *History and Myth*).

The 8th consecutive member of the Al Thani family to rule Qatar, Sheikh Tamim has expanded his father's policies of economic diversification and social liberalization, while also prioritizing the domestic welfare of Qataris. Despite lower oil prices and subsequent budget cuts since 2014, the government has continued to invest heavily in various social welfare programs, healthcare and education systems, and national infrastructure. While observers note that some members of the Al Thani family question Sheikh Tamim's leadership, most are dissidents linked to former or ousted Qatari rulers and pose little threat to the current Emir. Instead, Sheikh Tamim enjoys a reputation as a widely respected, progressive leader who faces little serious or organized challenge to his rule.

Defense

The Qatar Armed Forces (QAF) is a unified federal military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches. Although the QAF is primarily tasked with protecting national sovereignty, it also participates in regional counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief efforts. The QAF is among the smaller militaries of the region with just 16,500 active duty



troops and no reserve personnel. As a result, Qatar relies heavily on the US and other international allies to defend against external, state-level threats.

In recent years, Qatar has accelerated efforts to modernize and expand its military capacity. In 2014, for example, the government introduced conscription to encourage military participation by Qataris. In addition, the government has increasingly invested in infrastructure, maintenance, and training, and in 2016, negotiated multiple high-quality

equipment procurement deals with the US, Turkey, and Italy to significantly augment the military strength of all 3 QAF components.

Army: Qatar's Army is composed of 12,000 active-duty troops and has 11 maneuver

divisions and brigades (including armored, mechanized, and light) and 2 combat support battalions.

Navy: Consisting of 2,500 active-duty personnel, Qatar's Navy is a well-equipped force organized into 24 patrol and coastal combatants, 4 frigates, and 4 amphibious ship and landing craft. The Navy also includes a Coast Guard, organized into 28 patrol and coastal combatants, and a Coastal Defense battery.

Air Force:
Composed of 2,000 active-duty

personnel, Qatar's Air Force divides into 48 fixed wing squadrons (143 aircraft), and 53 Rotary squadrons (64 aircraft).



Qatari Air Force Rank Insignia



General



Lieutenant
General



Major
General



Brigadier
General



Colonel



Lieutenant
Colonel



Major



Captain



First
Lieutenant



Second
Lieutenant



Warrant
Officer
Class I



Warrant
Officer
Class II



Staff
Sergeant



Sergeant



Corporal



Lance
Corporal

Security Issues

Although Qatar has not experienced acts of domestic terrorism since 2005, the volatility of the Gulf region and the activities of regional militant Islamist groups concern its government. As a result, Qatar has increasingly pursued regional peace through mediation (see “Foreign Relations” below), attempting to facilitate a dialogue between numerous opposing groups active in the area. As



part of this policy, Qatar has controversially engaged with leaders of various Islamist groups in recent years, including the Muslim Brotherhood (“the Brotherhood” –an Islamist group based in Egypt), Hamas (a Muslim Brotherhood faction currently controlling the Gaza Strip), and the Taliban (a fundamentalist Islamist group based in Afghanistan).

By negotiating with all parties, Qatar seeks to foster communication, engage in preventative diplomacy, and consequently avoid further conflict. This independent and at times divisive policy draws significant criticism from Qatar’s Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) allies (see p. 15 of *History and Myth* and “Foreign Relations” below).

Regional Tensions: In June 2017, Egypt and the 3 GCC states of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain accused Qatar of financially supporting Islamist extremists and severed diplomatic and trade ties. The tension primarily stems from Qatar’s warm relations with regional rival Iran (see “Foreign Relations” below) and Qatar’s longstanding support of the Brotherhood. Egypt classifies this group a terrorist organization and the UAE and Saudi Arabia view as a regional threat, although the US has not labeled it as a terrorist organization. Qatar, by contrast, staunchly asserts that the Brotherhood is not a threat to the Arabian Gulf but is instead a non-violent, moderate political movement that, as an ally, can help foster regional stability.

Tensions continued to escalate throughout the latter half of 2017 as the Saudi-led movement sought to isolate Qatar by cutting diplomatic and economic ties. While some observers feared the deteriorating relations and growing friction would lead to military escalation, Qatari leaders reaffirmed their commitment to resolve the crisis through an agreement signed

in January 2021. As of mid-2024, Qatar is still working to de-escalate regional tension.



Foreign Relations

The following factors shape Qatar's activist foreign policy: a need to augment the limited strength of its armed

forces through diplomatic ties; a desire for industrial and economic diversification; and a wish to promote a cooperative political, social, and economic model for the Islamic world. Consequently, since the mid-1990s, Qatar has strengthened its political and economic integration with the West, while also attempting to cultivate and balance regional relations. In doing so, Qatar often develops bilateral ties with nations that benefit Qatar's political and economic interests yet are adversarial with one another.

In recent years, Qatar has also emerged as a key mediator in regional conflicts. For example, in 2008, Qatar helped mediate Lebanon's internal political crisis in a settlement often referred to as the "Doha Agreement." In 2010, Qatar facilitated peace talks to address the long-running Darfur conflict in Sudan, and since 2013, Qatar has hosted multiple dialogues among the US, the Taliban, and the government of Afghanistan.

Qatar is a member of numerous international organizations, including the United Nations, World Bank, World Trade Organization, and Arab League. Qatar also participates in the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, a 57-member pan-Islamic organization seeking to improve the image of Muslims, promote peaceful conflict resolution, and counter rising Islamic extremism.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Qatar is an active member of the GCC – an economic and political union that aims to strengthen the security of partner countries and promote military and economic cooperation. Nevertheless, the government's independent stance in foreign policy often creates tension with other GCC members (see p.15 of *History and Myth*).

For example, Qatar played an active role during the “Arab Spring” protests that took place across the Middle East in 2011, supporting rebels in Libya, helping to broker a peace agreement in Syria, and financing a temporary government led by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Qatar's support of these democratic revolutions significantly strained relations with Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, which viewed Qatar's involvement as destabilizing to the region. Relations had warmed by 2014, partly due to Qatar's willingness to somewhat distance itself from the Muslim Brotherhood and efforts to reconcile with the new Egyptian government, although regional frictions later resurfaced (see “Security Issues” above).

Relations with Saudi Arabia:

Despite maintaining strong trade and political ties, skirmishes between Qatari armed forces and Saudi border guards along the short but ill-defined border occasionally



cloud relations between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. In 2017, Saudi Arabia led the movement to politically and economically isolate Qatar (see “Security Issues” above), severely straining relations.

Relations with Bahrain: Historically, Qatar had a contentious relationship with Bahrain, characterized primarily by a territorial dispute dating to the 18th century over the sovereignty of the Hawar Islands off Qatar's western coast and Al Zubarah (see p. 4 and 10 of *History and Myth*). Following the dispute's 2001

resolution that awarded the islands to Bahrain and Al Zubarah to Qatar, relations improved significantly. While membership in



the GCC linked both nations economically and politically for nearly 3 decades, in 2017 Bahrain joined the Saudi-led bloc of Arab nations to sever diplomatic ties with Qatar.

Relations with Iran:

Qatar views Iran's

ongoing religious fundamentalism and suppression of protest movements as threats to the entire Arabian Gulf region and has historically worked closely with the US and GCC allies to counter Iranian power and capabilities. Unlike other GCC members, however, Qatar has promoted a diplomatic approach rather than open hostility towards Iran. Moreover, Qatar and Iran share a large natural gas field in the Arabian Gulf that is integral to Qatar's economy (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*). As a result, the 2 nations share relatively warm bilateral relations that contrast sharply to the largely contentious ties Iran shares with other Gulf States.

Following the 2017 rift between Qatar and its GCC allies, Iran extended political and financial support to Qatar, offering to compensate for the economic sanctions imposed by the Saudi-led coalition. In return, Qatar formally restored full diplomatic ties with Iran in August 2017, after having severed them in early 2016 following Iranian attacks on several Saudi diplomatic facilities.

Relations with the US: Qatar first established diplomatic relations with the US in 1972, soon after Qatar's independence (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*). Over the next 4 decades, the 2 countries forged strong bilateral ties, cooperating on a range of issues, such as counterterrorism, trade, non-proliferation, and energy policy. Over the last several decades, Qatar has served as an important strategic defense partner to the US, working jointly with US forces to promote regional peace and security in

the Middle East. In 2022, Qatar was designated a major non-NATO ally.

For example, Qatar served as the US Central Command's headquarters during the Iraq War (2003-11) and today supports US operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as Daesh, ISIL, and IS), a notoriously brutal militant Islamist group currently controlling territory in Iraq and Syria.

Qatar maintains that sustained US military involvement is vital to its national and regional security. Qatar hosts the largest US military base in the Middle East, Al Udeid Air Base, which provides a major staging ground for air operations against terrorist groups in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Al Udeid also enables tactical and logistical support for US operations elsewhere in the Arabian Gulf. About 10,000 US military personnel are currently stationed at various facilities in Qatar.

In the wake of the 2017 intra-GCC rift, the US and Qatar temporarily suffered some bilateral friction. Following the initial accusations, several US leaders also criticized Qatar for shortcomings in its counterterrorism posture. However, in subsequent months, the US government officially reaffirmed US-Qatar security cooperation, highlighting Qatar's significant



role as a partner to the US in combating terrorism and promoting peace in the region. In return, Qatar outlined new, more stringent measures to prevent terrorism financing and disable potential flows of funds to terrorist groups.

Qatar's robust trade relationship with the US significantly supports relations amid the occasional political friction. The US is Qatar's largest single source of imports and supplies much of the equipment for its immense oil and gas industry (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*). Moreover in 2016, Qatar announced plans to invest \$45 billion of its state-owned investment fund into US assets over the next 5 years, while the

US agreed to sell Qatar \$21 billion in military equipment and \$18 billion in commercial airline jets.

Ethnic Groups

Because of the large presence of non-citizen foreign workers, Qatar's population is quite diverse. While Qatar attracts workers from all over the world, the largest groups are from India (24% of Qatar's total population), followed by Nepal (16%), and Filipino (11%). Meanwhile, Qatari citizens make up a minority (about 11%) of the population. While nearly all Qatari citizens descend from Arabian tribes, several groups distinguish themselves by their ancestry. The primary distinction lies between the **hadar**, descendants of settled villagers, and the **bedu**, descendants of Bedouin tribes whose members traditionally lived in the desert as nomadic herders.

Although few modern Qataris follow a nomadic lifestyle today, the **Bedu** identity remains strong. A relatively small 3rd group, the **abd**, comprises the descendants of East African slaves who assumed the



tribal affiliations of their masters when Qatar abolished slavery (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). Lastly, the **ajam** are descendants of Persian (Iranian) merchants or craftsman.

Social Relations

Qatari society is organized according to kinship. Qataris identify first with their family, which aligns to a clan (group of families), which in turn belongs to a tribe. Clan and family connections are the primary governing principles of Qatari society and consequently influence almost all social, political, and economic interactions. The largest and most powerful clan in Qatar is the Al Thani (see p. 4-7 of *History and Myth* and "Political Climate" above), although members of other clans hold important positions in the government and economy.

The chief of a tribe is typically a sheikh (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), who derives his authority from the power and connections of his extended family. Succession within the tribe does not always pass from a generation to the next. Instead, it often passes laterally to a brother, nephew, uncle or cousin. Significantly, a sheikh exercises his power through his **wasta**, or connections, clout, and influence. Instead of issuing decrees or laws, a sheikh traditionally mediates between conflicting interests within the tribe. Further, to justify his claim to rule, a sheikh is bound to demonstrate deep generosity to tribal members (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*).

With its vast oil and natural gas reserves, Qatar developed a unique economy (see p. 1-2 of *Economics and Resources*). Fulfilling their roles as just leaders, the Al Thani sheikhs have distributed oil and gas revenues, providing direct allowances to



family members and developing social services such as health care and educations for all citizens (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*).

The separation between citizen and non-citizen is Qatar's most

significant social division. Foreign workers exist outside the tribal system and have little power in Qatari society. They are subject to strict labor laws that leave them few protections and have unequal access to the education system (see p. 2-3 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Despite some recent reforms (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*), observers note that employers still retain significant control over workers' residency status and freedom of movement. Nevertheless, foreign workers are covered under the Qatari public healthcare system (see p. 4 of *Sustenance and Health*) and are allowed to dress and worship in accordance with their own cultures and beliefs, at least in private (see p. 1 and 7-8 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

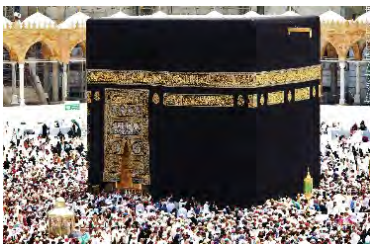
3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

According to US government estimates, almost all Qatari citizens are Muslims. While exact numbers are unavailable, most estimates suggest an overwhelming majority (over 90%) are Sunni Muslims, while between 5-10% are Shi'a. Most of Qatar's non-citizen residents are also Muslim: a 2020 estimate reports that 65% of the total population (both citizens and non-citizens) are Muslim, 14% Christian, 16% Hindu, and 4% Buddhist. Followers of other traditions such as Judaism, the Baha'i faith, and traditional indigenous religions comprise less than 1% of the population.

Qatar's constitution establishes Islam as the country's official religion but

guarantees freedom for individuals to observe and practice other traditions that do not infringe upon public order and common moral boundaries. The legal code also outlaws



discrimination based on religion. Besides Islam, the constitution officially recognizes Christianity and Judaism, though it allows only Christians to worship in public. Consequently, Jews and followers of any other unrecognized religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism are legally forbidden to construct public places of worship.

Qatar automatically classifies its citizens as Muslim and denies them the freedom to change religion. In fact, Qatar considers conversion to another religion from Islam a capital offense and consequently forbids proselytization by non-Muslims. While Qatar adheres in part to a secular legal system, *sharia* or Islamic law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) significantly influences the country's legal code, particularly regarding family-related matters.

Most Qataris subscribe to Wahhabism, a conservative and strict Islamic tradition predominant in Saudi Arabia (see “The Arrival of Islam in Qatar” below). The government publicly condemns violent extremism as anti-Islamic and promotes a more tolerant version of Wahhabism than that found in Saudi Arabia.

Early Spiritual Landscape

Many early regional inhabitants followed an indigenous faith characterized by the worship of multiple gods and natural phenomena such as the sun, moon, and animals. Further, important tribal heroes were revered and often depicted as idols. Other groups practiced animism, the belief that the spirit of life or consciousness resides in all objects, both animate and inanimate.

Between 500 BC-the 5th century, Zoroastrianism gained popularity on the Arabian Peninsula. Founded by Persian (Iranian) prophet Zarathustra between 1500-1200 BC, Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion that focuses on the divide between good and evil and uses fire as a form of worship. Although Christianity arrived in the region around the 1st century, following the spread of Islam in the 7th century, most members of Christian communities fled or converted to Islam.

Islam

Origins of Islam

Muhammad, who Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in 570 in what is today Saudi Arabia.



Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or “Holy Book,” to guide their everyday lives and shape their values.

Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is “a person who submits to God.”

Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into 2 sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

Five Pillars of Islam

There are 5 basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray 5 times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.
- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (*The Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.



Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the Book," referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in one God.

Abraham: All 3 faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

Scriptures: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

Jesus: The 3 religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

View of Death: Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.



event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

Concept of Jihad

The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam.

Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

Ramadan

Observed during the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*), Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life.

During Ramadan, Qatari leaders may forgive some debts and pardon criminals. Qatari law requires Muslims and non-Muslims to refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking in public during daylight at this time.

Qatar's Muslims typically break their daily fast at sunset with a meal known as **iftar**. Ramadan includes several holidays:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** This “Night of Power” marks Muhammad’s receipt of the first verses of the Qur’an.
- **Eid al-Fitr:** This “Festival of Fast-Breaking” celebrates Ramadan’s end and is a national holiday in Qatar.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the Hajj ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha:** This “Festival of Sacrifice” commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God. *Eid al-Adha* is also a national holiday in Qatar.

The Arrival of Islam in Qatar

Qatar’s proximity to Islam’s birthplace in the Arabian Peninsula led to its early exposure to the new religion (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). By the time of Muhammad’s death in 632, he and his followers had united the entire Arabian Peninsula, including the area of present-day Qatar, under Islam through conquest and proselytization.



In the mid-18th century, Islamic scholar Muhammad ibn Abd Al Wahhab began to proselytize a conservative form of Islam, known as Wahhabism, in the heart of present-day Saudi Arabia. Al Wahhab claimed that Islam had become damaged by non-traditional elements such as icon worship and mysticism, calling instead for a return to Islam’s true, unadulterated form. Adopted by the royal family of Saudi Arabia, the Wahhabi movement spread rapidly across the

Arabian Peninsula, reaching Qatar by the beginning of the 19th century.

While the Wahhabi movement initially encountered resistance from the local population, several prominent Qatari tribes eventually adopted the new ideology. Among them was Qatar's historically dominant Al Thani family (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), which descends from the Bani Tamim tribe of central Arabia – the same tribe as Wahhabism's founder. After political developments in the late 19th century decisively established the Al Thani family as Qatar's dominant clan (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*), Qatar became the world's only nation other than Saudi Arabia to embrace Wahhabism as its dominant ideology.

Religion Today

Islam

The Islamic faith features prominently in Qatari society and is an important part of most Qataris' identity. Islamic traditions inform socially acceptable



public behavior for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, influence ethics and culture, and frame day-to-day living. For example, Islam's frequent calls to prayer shape the daily rhythm, while the routine use of the phrase ***insha'allah*** ("if God wills") reveals the popular belief that God directly and ultimately controls all events. As of 2021, there were approximately 2,300 mosques in Qatar.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs carefully monitors religious institutions across the country. The Ministry's functions include controlling the construction of mosques, guiding clerical affairs, and managing Islamic education, among others. The government also appoints most ***imams*** (worship leaders) and reviews sermons for inflammatory language that might incite religious violence. Children learn Qur'anic verses from an early age and receive compulsory Islamic instruction in public schools (see p. 2-5 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Sunni Islam: Most of Qatar's Sunni Muslims, including the country's leadership, adhere to Wahhabi ideology – a fundamentalist and conservative form of Islamic thought that preaches a strict interpretation of the Qur'an.



Shi'a	Islam:
Popular among Qatar's non-citizens, mostly those from Iran, Shi'a Islam comprises only a small percentage of Qatari citizens. In	

Qatar, Shi'a Muslims may practice freely both in public and private. Since 2005, Qatari courts have included a separate judicial panel that is staffed with Shi'a justices to apply Shi'a-specific interpretations of *sharia* when adjudicating cases relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other domestic matters for members of this community.

Christianity

There are 8 registered Christian denominations in the country as of 2022. Qatar's Christian belief systems include Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Coptic Orthodox, among others. Christians typically come from many different parts of the world, notably India, the Philippines, Europe, Africa, and the US. Roman Catholics comprise the majority (88%) of Qatar's Christian population, followed by Anglicans (11%), Egyptian Copts (1%), and small numbers of Greek and other Eastern Orthodox Christians.

In 2004, for the 1st time since the 7th century, a Catholic church opened in Doha. Since then, the government has allowed 8 registered Christian denominations to build their own churches in an area known as the Mesaymir Religious Complex (also referred to as "Church City"), located just outside of Doha. In addition to the 8 registered denominations, Church City today houses multiple Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal congregations, where prayers, worship, and Bible studies are conducted in a variety of languages to accommodate Qatar's growing non-citizen Christian population.

Hinduism

Based on ancient scriptures, Hindu worship focuses on a Supreme Being having various forms and natures such as Brahma, the creator; Shiva, the destroyer; and Vishnu, the preserver. Qatar's Hindu population is almost exclusively from India and Nepal. Hindus living in Qatar typically hold their religious activities in homes or rented spaces.

Buddhism

Although Buddhism is based on a voluminous set of scriptures, it does not focus on the worship of a god or gods. Instead, it emphasizes ethical and moral instruction to help people follow a spiritual path. Buddhists in Qatar, who are primarily from South, Southeast, and East Asia, tend to follow either the Theravada school common in Southeast Asia or Mahayana school popular in East Asia based on their nationality. Buddhist typically conduct meditation and observances in private homes.

Religion and Society

Qatar is largely free of sectarian violence and religious-based conflict, at least partly due to the fact the majority of Qataris are Sunni Muslims who adhere to the Wahhabi ideology. Wahhabism also permeates political life: every member of the ruling Al Thani family and virtually all government officials subscribe to Wahhabism. Vocal proponents of the Islamic faith, royal family members and high-ranking government officials promote Islam in daily life. The Emir, for example, participates in public prayers during Islamic holidays and finances the *Hajj* for Muslims who cannot afford the pilgrimage to Mecca, both citizens and non-citizens alike.

Despite this widespread adherence to Wahhabism, an ideology associated with a strict interpretation of Islam, Qatar's society is generally tolerant. Unlike Saudi Arabia, which does not recognize or protect religious freedom, Qatar's government exhibits a higher level of civil and religious liberties, recognizing several religions



besides Islam and allowing adherents of those religions to worship relatively freely. International observers note that overt religious discrimination or government and societal harassment of minority religious groups is rare. Moreover, while it restricts public worship for some religious minorities, the government does not explicitly ban any religious groups, allowing unrecognized religious minorities to worship in private with limited government interference.

Further, while conversion from Islam is technically punishable by death and proselytizing any religion other than Islam carries a lengthy prison term, Qatari courts have not inflicted such sentences since the laws' inception in the early 1970s. Instead, to deter proselytization efforts by non-Muslims, the government prohibits the distribution of non-Islamic religious literature and deports persons suspected of proselytization.

Qatar generally avoids *sharia*-based criminal penalties except in certain cases when punishments also apply to non-Muslims, such as in the cases of alcohol consumption (see p. 3 of



Sustenance and Health) and illicit sexual relations (see p. 4-5 of *Sex and Gender*). Other laws ensure the predominance of Islam in society. For example, non-Muslims must attend Islamic instruction in public schools (see p. 4 of

Learning and Knowledge), and marriage laws require that a non-Muslim man who wants to marry a Muslim woman converts to Islam. Others ensure that offspring of mixed marriages are Muslim (see p. 5 of *Family and Kinship*). Generally, the government expects non-Muslims to respect Islamic sensibilities, though it does not subject them to all Islamic laws and regulations.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

While urbanization and a decrease in birthrates have altered housing patterns and family structures in recent decades, large extended families remain the foundation of Qatari society.

Residence

Qatar is primarily an urban society (see p.1 of *Political and Social Relations*), where its citizens enjoy access to interest-free home loans provided by the government. Consequently, they typically live in more spacious accommodations than non-citizens, often large homes in high-walled compounds housing multiple generations of an extended family. While such arrangements are still common, the cost and space constraints associated with urbanization have supported a trend toward more single-family homes.

Many Qatari residences include traditional architectural features, such as the so-called “wind towers.” Historically used as means of cooling desert residences before air conditioning,

non-functional recreations of “wind towers” are often added to modern homes as a celebrated symbol of the past. Other common traditional architectural features include courtyards and balconies. Homes



usually have at least one **majlis** (living room) used for entertaining guests. Such rooms are typically decorated in the traditional style with thick carpets, plush floor cushions, and embroidered silk or woven floor and wall coverings.

A home or compound may provide separate quarters for staff and servants, usually non-citizens. Alternatively, non-citizen workers may live in dormitories or apartments that are typically crowded and of poor quality (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*).

Rural: Some Qataris maintain weekend residences in the desert as a means of connecting with their nomadic history (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). These desert homes are characteristic of Bedouin lifestyles of the past yet provide modern amenities. A typical residence is comprised of several large tents constructed of strips of woven black goat hair combined with ropes and poles. The moveable dwelling typically features curtains that divide the space into rooms.

Islamic Tradition and Physical Space

With the intention of protecting the chastity, purity, and honor of women, Islamic societies tend to limit interaction between unrelated members of the opposite sex, such as physically separating women and men during social gatherings.

Consequently, most Qatari homes include separate dining and sitting areas, as well as separate bathrooms for men and women. While small families may dine together, large families commonly are segregated by gender during social gatherings, especially when guests are present. Houses and compounds are often surrounded by tall walls, meant to further shield women from public view.

Family Structure

Qatar's family structure is patriarchal and patrilineal, which means authority, lineage, and inheritance occur through the male bloodline.

Familial relationships are an integral aspect of Qatari social organization and daily life. Generally, extended family members expect to help each other, avoid actions that may bring shame to the family, and value the needs of the family over individual desires.

Children typically remain in the family residence as young adults and move into their own quarters after marriage. Qataris highly respect their elders, with children typically caring for their

parents as they get older. Nursing homes are uncommon and are generally reserved for the ailing or those without close kin.

Many Qatari families employ domestic servants to perform daily household chores, while married women commonly hire a nurse or nanny to help in child rearing. Traditionally, Qatari women manage all domestic affairs, such as household budgets and supervising servants (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*).

Polygyny: Polygyny is the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. In accordance with **sharia** law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*), Qatari men may have up to 4 wives if they can financially support them all. The practice is most common among members of the ruling Al Thani and other upper-class families.

Children

Traditionally, families in the region had as many as 12 children and relied on their offspring to fulfill household labor needs. Today, Qatari women have far fewer children (see p. 5 of *Sex and Gender*). Extended family members help raise children, serving as mentors and supporting the parents as needed.



Allowed by *sharia* law, physical discipline or corporal punishment for disobedience is common, in 2023 an estimated 42% of Qatari youth faced abuse either in the home or school. The abuse is rarely reported because of unclear bureaucratic processes, cultural taboos, and a lack of properly trained support professionals. Qatar's National Development Strategy for 2011-2016 recognized the severity of the problem and aimed to create a comprehensive medical and legal framework for detection of abuse and prosecution of offenders.

Birth: In the Islamic tradition, the father whispers the **adhan** (call to prayer) into a baby's right ear and the profession of faith

in his left immediately following the birth. A week after the birth, the parents hold a naming ceremony before friends and family. During the first 40 days after birth, the mother and child share an intensive time together separated from the rest of the family. They receive special therapies and sometimes wear amulets to protect them from evil spirits. At the end of this period, the baby is integrated into the rest of the extended family.

Circumcision: Qatari boys traditionally underwent circumcision between ages 5-6, signifying their passage into adulthood and membership in the Islamic community. Today, most newborn males are circumcised at the hospital immediately following birth.

Marriage

Marriage is an important rite that grants prestige, social status, and greater economic opportunity to both spouses. Traditionally, a marriage was an arranged union among families, often between first cousins



or more distant relatives. It was often used to strengthen and extend alliances among the region's leading families and ruling tribes (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*).

While arranged marriages among families of similar social classes are still the norm, some Qataris choose their own spouse based upon mutual attraction. While casual dating is socially unacceptable, Qatari youth regularly interact at educational gatherings, through social media, or by phone and may encourage family members to contact potential mates on their behalf. In judging a suitable spouse, families consider education, social status, religion, character, and wealth. Families generally do not force arranged matches, and either marriage prospect can reject a proposed mate.

The government sets the legal minimum age for marriage at 18 for males and 16 for females. While marriage between citizens

and non-citizens is allowed, various laws discourage the practice. For example, a citizen must receive official consent from the government to marry a non-citizen, and female citizens who marry non-citizens may be forced to forfeit their housing subsidies or other government benefits. While a non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage with a Muslim man, the law considers all her offspring by default to be Muslim.

Generally, marriage to a Muslim citizen of another Gulf nation is more acceptable than marriage to any other foreigner. The tradition of cousin marriage has resulted in government-mandated genetic testing for couples applying for a marriage license, though a license is approved regardless of the results.

Bridewealth: Upon marriage, Qatari men traditionally pay *mahr* or a so-called bridewealth to the bride which becomes her sole property. A legal requirement for Islamic marriages, the *mahr* symbolizes the bride's financial independence. Further, some women may rely on the payment in the event of a husband's death or after divorce.

Weddings: Qatari weddings are segregated by gender. The women's festivities are typically extravagant social occasions held in upscale venues. Over several days, the bride and her female relatives and friends enjoy a series of celebrations, such as the **Laylat al Henna** (henna party), when the bride

receives intricate temporary henna tattoos made from a reddish-brown dye extracted from the henna plant.



By contrast, the men's festivities are usually held in outdoor tents or

wedding halls. The actual wedding occurs on the last night of celebrations and is usually held at a hall or hotel. To officially seal the marriage, couples sign a **nikah** (wedding contract). Afterwards, feasting and dancing are held for hundreds of family and friends.

Following the reception, the groom's relatives carry the bride into a designated room in the groom's parents' home called the **al-khalla** where the couple spends their first night together. The following morning, the bride awakens to gold or money left under her pillow by her new husband.

While the families typically split the high wedding costs, this financial burden combined with a growing desire among young Qataris of both sexes to pursue higher education (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*) compels many young couples to delay marriage. Consequently, most Qataris today marry much later in life than their parents did.

Divorce: While exact statistics are unavailable, a Qatari government report suggests that divorce among citizens increased 71% between 2000-2015. Further, research suggests that the divorce rate among first cousins was just 19%, yet the rate was 64% among non-cousins. Experts suggest increased divorce rates are largely due to changing expectations of married life and financial strain.

Death

According to Islamic tradition, Qataris bury their deceased as soon as possible after death, usually within 24 hours. The deceased is bathed, dried, perfumed, and wrapped in a **kafan** (clean white cloth). Male relatives and friends transport the deceased to a mosque where a cleric offers prayers. Relatives then carry the deceased to a cemetery where the body is buried.



Family members and friends gather for the graveside funeral service, during which they pray for the deceased and offer condolences to the family. For 3 days following the funeral, the family receives mourners who offer further condolences and read prayers from the Qur'an in gender-separate *majlis* within the family residence.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Although traditional Qatari society privileged men over women, this trend is slowly changing. Taking advantage of enhanced educational and professional opportunities, Qatari women participate in the workforce at one of the Middle East's highest rates and make up 75% of university students. Despite these advances, legal and institutional discrimination plus certain cultural norms limit women's full participation in society.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Labor: Although many Qatari women work outside the home, most continue to hold responsibility for household affairs. Women often manage the family budget and oversee the household duties of domestic servants (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*).



Labor Force: In 2023, about 64% of Qatari women worked outside the home, a significantly higher rate than neighbors Saudi Arabia (35%) and Bahrain (44%), and slightly higher than the US (57%). Some Qatari women are highly educated and hold positions in government and business. Nevertheless, most Qatari women work in traditional “female” roles in healthcare, clerical work, and education.

In 2022, Qatari women comprised 43% of the overall citizen workforce while female foreigners represented some 14% of the non-citizen workforce. Despite women's growing participation in the labor market, men typically receive preferential job placement and earn higher wages than women. High-level positions in both government and business are typically dominated by men, and the number of female

managers in both the public and private sectors actually decreased between 2010 and 2014. Non-citizen women typically hold domestic service jobs where they must work extremely long hours and are sometimes subject to physical abuse (see “Gender Based Violence” below).

Gender and the Law

Although Qatar’s constitution guarantees women equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on sex, women face persistent disadvantages in government policies and receive unequal treatment before the law. Unlike her male counterparts, a woman’s marriage status can limit her access to government entitlements. For example, a divorced woman



must wait 5 years before becoming eligible for housing benefits (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*), and a woman married to a non-citizen must live in the country with her spouse for 5 years before becoming eligible.

While a Qatari woman married to a non-citizen maintains her own Qatari citizenship, she may not sponsor her husband’s citizenship nor pass it on to any children born to the couple.

Inequality in government policies is compounded by judges’ ability to apply **sharia** (Islamic) law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) in ways that disadvantage women. For example, under *sharia* a woman’s testimony is worth just half that of a man. Following a man’s death, his wife may inherit just 1/3 of the estate, while daughters receive half the amount that sons receive. In the case of divorce, children remain with the mother until puberty when custody automatically shifts to the father. While both men and women can divorce a spouse under Islamic law, a woman must officially petition the court while a man can simply state his wish in front of his wife and a witness.

Although women may drive and work outside the home, their ability to travel unaccompanied can be restricted. Specifically, a man may secure a court order prohibiting an adult female relative from leaving the country, though there have been very few cases reported. Other examples of unequal treatment are rooted in tradition. For example, many families do not allow unmarried daughters to leave the privacy of the home unless they are accompanied by a male relative.

Gender and Politics

Women have participated in Qatari political life since the country's first elections in 1999 (see p. 17 in *History and Myth*). In 2003, Sheikha Yousuf Hasan Al Jefairia won a seat on the Central Municipal Council (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*), becoming the Arabian Gulf's first woman to win a municipal election. She retained her seat in 2007 and 2011, and in 2015, an additional woman joined her on the Council.



In 2016, a woman served as the Minister of Public Health, and women also held positions as representatives to the United Nations, judges of the Court of First Instance (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*), and as ambassadors to 2 countries. Although women's share of government positions rose only marginally from 12.8% in 2010 to 14.5% in 2014, Qatar's National Vision for 2030 and its National Development Strategy for 2018-2022 support women's empowerment so that they can become active members of their communities.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Rape is a criminal offense, with life imprisonment as the mandatory minimum sentence and the death penalty if the perpetrator is a relative, teacher, or caregiver of the victim. Nevertheless, few victims report the offense due to the severe social stigma attached to the crime, combined with their lack of trust in the authorities to protect them.

No specific law criminalizes domestic violence. A 2012 government study found that some 18% of men aged 20-24 believed a husband was justified in beating his wife for any reason. While the police have a female-only division to investigate GBV, their abilities to investigate are often limited because the male head of household can deny them entry to the home. If a victim does report GBV, the police may decline to press charges, instead requiring her to accept a written

promise from the accused that he will refrain from further abusive activities in the future.



Excluded from legal protection and often denied any legal recourse, Qatar's non-citizen female workforce are especially

vulnerable to GBV. Because they usually live secluded in their employers' homes, non-citizen domestic workers rarely report abuse for fear of losing their employment and housing. Resources for victims are severely lacking: Qatar maintains just 1 shelter for GBV victims that accommodates 45 cases at a time.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Commonly referred to as female circumcision, FGM is intended to modify the sex organ in order to decrease sexual desire and promote virginity. While no specific law criminalizes FGM in Qatar, the Ministry of Health disallows the practice in government hospitals. No sources provide accurate estimates of FGM's prevalence.

Sex and Procreation

Qataris consider sexual intimacy a private matter. Public displays of affection, such as kissing and holding hands, are socially unacceptable. Though not explicitly banned, authorities may interpret vaguely-worded laws prohibiting obscene acts or indecent gestures to encompass these actions. Further, all sexual relations outside marriage are illegal. For example, to receive maternity care, a pregnant woman must present a certificate of marriage. A pregnant woman unable to produce such a certificate may be prosecuted and subject to

imprisonment or other punishment. All such laws apply to all residents and visitors.

The birthrate in Qatar has dropped dramatically in recent decades from 7.0 children per woman in 1960 to 1.9 in 2023, similar to Saudi Arabia (1.89) but higher than Bahrain (1.66) and the US (1.84). This drop is likely due to the large influx of non-citizens during recent decades, who do not have children while living temporarily in Qatar (see p. 1 and 15 of *Political and Social Relations*). Nevertheless, the decrease in birth rates among Qatari citizens has been significant and is primarily due to changes in women's place in society. As more Qatari women become better educated, work outside the home, and marry later, they have fewer children.

Homosexuality

Qatari law prohibits homosexual acts between men but does not explicitly prohibit the same between women. Conviction carries a minimum 7-year prison sentence, though it is unknown how many such cases are brought to court each year.



There are no specific organizations or advocacy events, and most gay individuals conceal their sexuality to avoid discrimination and persecution. In 2016, authorities recorded no reports of violence against homosexuals nor evidence of discrimination in employment, occupation, or housing. Experts suggest that victims are unlikely to come forward given the potential for further harassment or discrimination. The Internet news site *Doha News* was censored by the government in 2016 for its reporting on social topics such as homosexual rights. Despite the government's denial that its blockage of the site was related to coverage of such topics, international human rights organizations condemned the act (see p. 3 of *Technology and Material*). At this time, the US State Department does not have a Status of Forces Agreement in place for Qatar. Service members will be subject to local laws with regards to this topic.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

The official language of Qatar is Arabic, which is the native tongue of Qatari citizens. Due to the influx of foreign workers from a variety of countries over the last 50 years (see p. 13 of *History and Myth* and p. 1 of *Political and Social Relations*), other languages such as English; dialects of Arabic; and Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Southeast Asian languages are spoken.

Arabic

Most Qataris speak a local dialect of Arabic known as Gulf Arabic or **Khaleeji** as their first language. In school, Qataris learn to read and write Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a standardized variety used across Arabic-speaking countries. Qataris use MSA for writing, formal discussions, speeches, and in various national news broadcasts. With a 28-character alphabet, Arabic is written horizontally from right to left. Low proficiency in MSA among young Qataris and increasing use of English in many spheres led the government to approve the 2016 “Protection of the Arabic Language” law. This statute mandates that ministries, official organizations, and public schools conduct all business in MSA (see p. 3-4 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Khaleeji and MSA differ in vocabulary and pronunciation.

For example, Khaleeji speakers may replace a “q” sound with a “g” or “j.” Similarly, they may replace the “k” sound with a “ch,” pronouncing the word **kalb** (“dog”) like “chalb.” Further, Khaleeji speakers often pronounce a “j” sound as “y.” Khaleeji is mutually intelligible with most other regional Arabic dialects except for certain local varieties from Iraq and North Africa.



Among Qatar's non-citizens, about 600,000 people speak dialects of Arabic such as Najdi (from Saudi Arabia), Levantine (from Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan), Sudanese, and Egyptian, all of which may differ from the Gulf Arabic of Qatar.

English

English often serves as a common language between citizens and non-citizens. English has played a role in the region since the formation of the Trucial System under the protection of the British in the 19th century (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). English is currently an important part of the national education curriculum, with instruction beginning in primary school and continuing through all 12 years (see p. 2-4 of *Learning and Knowledge*). English also plays a significant role in post-



secondary education, especially in Qatar's numerous foreign universities (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Qataris' English skills are often dependent on a speaker's age. In general, younger

Qataris are much more likely to speak English than older ones. Although some younger Qataris alternate between Arabic and English with ease, most Qataris are not proficient in English.

Other Languages

While exact numbers of speakers are unknown due to constant fluctuation in the foreign worker population, the most prevalent other languages are Farsi, the national language of Iran; Urdu, the national language of Pakistan; Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines; Malayalam, an official language of India; Sinhala, one of Sri Lanka's official languages; Baluchi, also spoken in Iran and Pakistan; and Tamil, an official language in both Sri Lanka and India.

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Qatar requires not only knowledge of Arabic, but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes

paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Qataris often consider the style of a statement as important as the message. Their communication patterns reflect their regard for politeness, generosity, hospitality, and respect for protocol and tradition. They consider eloquent or flowery speech a sign of education and refinement and often recite poetry, ancient proverbs, and excerpts from the Qur'an during conversations.



In their interactions, Qataris strive to emphasize respect for their conversation partners, particularly those of a higher social status, while avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others. This tendency is especially true in business meetings and interactions with elders or social superiors (see p. 2-3 of *Time and Space*). The emphasis Qataris place on politeness is evident in a widely-held preference for indirect or non-specific answers. Further, Qataris tend to deliver bad news in a roundabout manner, and they often preface requests of elders or superiors with significant formalities.

In relaxed social situations, such as among family and friends, Qataris tend to be talkative, often repeating themselves to make a point or shouting when excited. Qataris may also punctuate their speech with oaths to emphasize their point and exaggerate for effect. They tend to be tolerant of interruptions during discussions and of several people speaking at once. Qataris in general consider the display of emotions during discussions indicative of deep and genuine concern for the subject.

Greetings

Qataris typically extend greetings with great care and respect. Upon entering a room, Qataris say **Salaam Aleikum** (“peace be upon you”), and all present respond **Wa Aleikum as-Salaam** (“and upon you be peace”). Qataris typically perform this greeting, even if it interrupts conversations or negotiations.

Following this verbal exchange, men may shake hands lightly, exchange kisses on the cheek, or touch noses, depending on the status of their relationship. To indicate deep respect and sincerity, men may place their right hands to their hearts after shaking hands. Qatari women commonly exchange cheek kisses when they greet each other. If the women are not well acquainted, they may only shake hands. Qataris of the opposite sex typically do not touch when greeting. Men usually greet women verbally or with a nod, though some women may extend their hands for a handshake with foreign men. Foreign nationals should wait for members of the opposite sex to initiate the greeting.

Names

Arab names for both genders reflect the genealogy of the father’s side. The full name consists of a first (given) name, the person’s father’s (first) name, sometimes the paternal grandfather’s (first) name, a family name, and sometimes a tribal name.

Qataris typically include the term **bin** (son of) or **bint** (daughter of) between a person’s given name and his or her father’s name. For example, the Emir’s name Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani indicates that he is the son of Hamad. A Qatari’s



family or tribal name typically indicates membership in an extended family, a relationship with a tribal ancestor, or origins in a particular geographic location. Qatari women do not take their husband’s name upon marriage.

Forms of Address

Qatari friends and relatives of the same sex usually address one another by first name. Honorifics such as military ranks and professional or personal titles (Dr., Engineer, Mr. or Mrs.) are often combined with the person's first name (e.g. Dr. Bill, Engineer Sarah). Qataris often refer to highly respected individuals as Doctor, even if they have not earned the degree.

Children refer to their mother as **um** and their father as **abu**, and some Qataris also use these titles when speaking with elders as a sign of respect.

Qataris address members of the nation's ruling family with the titles **Sheikh** (for males) and **Sheikha** (for females) (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*).



Conversational Topics

Polite conversation typically involves a series of elaborate and repetitive inquiries about the general well-being of each other and the extended family. For example, Qataris may inquire **Kayf halak** (m)/**halik** (f) ("How is your condition?") or **Sho akhbarak** (m)/**akhbarik** (f) ("What is your news?"), among others. Male Qataris usually avoid inquiring about details of another man's female relations, and male foreign nationals should do so as well.

While Qataris generally prefer family privacy, they are often eager to share information about their family's economic status and social connections. Likewise, they may feel comfortable questioning a foreign national about similar matters. Qataris do, however, tend to withhold less favorable information about their families, such as their humble origins or family discord. As is common in other Arab countries, some Qataris feel uncomfortable talking about unfortunate occurrences. Consequently, they may avoid speaking directly about topics like illness and death by using indirect expressions. When

confronted with a sensitive topic, foreign nationals should attempt to change the subject rather than refuse to discuss the matter outright.

Foreign nationals should also avoid certain general topics, such as politics and religion. For example, ongoing regional conflicts, particularly those between Qatar and its neighbors (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*), are sensitive topics. The law prohibits speaking ill of Islam or other “divine religions” such as Christianity and Judaism (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Foreign nationals should also avoid swearing in conversation, which is not only deeply offensive to Qataris but illegal if directed at another person and can be punished with fines or jail time.

Gestures

Qataris often use gestures to augment, and sometimes replace, spoken words. To point, Qataris use the entire hand. Holding the



palm upward, with the fingertips touching means “wait.” Qataris wave the fingers with the palm facing down to beckon someone. While a thumbs-up sign is offensive in some parts of the Middle East, some Qataris use it to mean “good.” By

contrast, Qataris consider the US “A-OK” sign highly offensive.

Furthermore, any hand gesture used in public in an insulting or aggressive manner could result in a fine or arrest. Foreign nationals should avoid showing the soles of feet or shoes to Qataris, nor should they walk in front of a someone praying.

Language and Training Sources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on “Resources” for access to language training and other resources.

Arabic Pronunciation and Transliteration

Transliteration is the process of spelling out Arabic words using the Roman (Latin) alphabet. The table below shows sounds or letters having no English equivalent or that vary from MSA pronunciations. When texting or writing informally online in Romanized Arabic, Qataris frequently replace certain Arabic letters with numbers, also depicted below.

Arabic Letter	Transliteration and Description	Number (if applicable)	Example
أ	a	2	Africa
ع	'a or aa	3	sound from deep in the throat as in the name 'Ali or the instrument 'oud
خ	kh; strong "h"	5	loch (as pronounced in Scotland)
ط	ṭ or t	6	tar
ح	ḥ or h; whispered "h"	7	hoot
ق	g	8	golf (pronounced like "cough"; transliterated q in MSA)
ص	ṣ or s	9	saw
غ	gh; like the guttural French "r"		Paris (as pronounced by a French person)
ذ	dH; Soft "th"		this
ء	' (glottal stop)		pause in the middle of "uh-oh"
ج	y (or j)		yes
ك	ch (or k)		chin

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Qatari Arabic (Romanized)
Hello (May peace be upon you)	Salaam Aleikum
Response: And upon you be peace	Wa Aleikum as-Salaam
Hi	Marhaba
Good morning	Sabah el kheer
Good afternoon/evening	Masaa el kheer
My name is...	Esmee...
Yes	N'em
No	La
Please	Men fedlek
Thank you	Shukran
You're welcome	'Afwan
Good night (when leaving)	Tosbeho (tosbeheena for female) 'ala khair
Where are you from?	Men ayna anta (anti? for female)
Where do you live?	Ayna taskun (Ayna taskuneen? for female)
I am American	Ana amreeki (amrekiah for female)
Do you speak (English/Arabic)?	Hal tatakallamo alloghah al enjlezhiah/alarabiah?
Today/Now	Alyawm/Al aan
Tomorrow	Ghadan
Yesterday	Albareha
The meal was very good	Alwajba tayba waayed
Look!	Onzor (Onzori! for female)
Excuse me	A 'ederney
Pardon?	Al 'efew?
I don't understand you	Ana la affhem 'eleyk
What?	Shoo?
Where?	Ayn?
How?	Kaif?
Me/you	Ana/anta/anti (you for female)
Him/her	Houwa/hiya
What time is it now?	Kam assa'a al aan?

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 94%
- Male: 92%
- Female: 95% (2017 estimate)

Early Education

Before the 7th-century arrival of Islam (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*), inhabitants of the region's desert and coastal communities informally transmitted values, skills, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations. With the spread of Islam, more formal methods of education developed. For example, instructors provided lessons in Qur'anic verses, Islamic rituals and duties, and Arabic calligraphy. The earliest form of instruction included the *kuttab*, where students received such lessons in a mosque or in the home of an educator. By the early 20th century, some 12 *katatib* (the plural form) offered such instruction in Qatar.

The Expansion of Educational Options

In 1948, Qatar's first secular school opened in Doha, offering arithmetic, geography, Arabic, and English in addition to Islamic studies. In 1951, the ruling Al Thani family (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*) began to support the school, making it the nation's first public school. Following the influx of oil revenues in the 1950s (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*), the government began to allocate resources to expand educational opportunities. By 1954, 4 public schools offered education for boys, and in 1956, the government converted a former girl's *kuttab* into Qatar's first public school for girls.



The 1956 creation of the Ministry of Education (MoE) ushered in an era of centralized government control over education. A

boom in oil revenues enabled a 25-fold increase in education funding between 1955-1960. Initially, Qatari schools were

forced to rely on textbooks and curricula from other Arab countries, but by 1965, Qatar began producing its own materials. Over the next decades, formal education expanded significantly. While the early years were marked by stark gender imbalances



favoring males, by the late 1970s boys and girls attended schools at equal rates. By 1980, 141 schools served approximately 40,000 students.

Modern Public Education System

Qatar has invested significantly in education in recent decades. Presently, the government allocates almost 9% of its budget to education, less than the US and those of regional neighbors like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. These efforts have largely been successful: since 1985 the literacy rate has improved from about 75% to 94%.

In 2001, Qatar implemented a comprehensive reform of the education system, creating the Supreme Education Council (SEC) a year later to set national education policy and establishing curriculum standards for 4 core subjects: Arabic, mathematics, science, and English. Despite these and other reforms plus continued high funding levels, educational outcomes have been lacking. In a 2022 international educational assessment of 77 countries, Qatari students ranked around 50th.

Public education at all levels is free for Qatari citizens, and government-funded schools historically accepted few non-citizen children. However, the expanding non-citizen population combined with a lack of private school alternatives (see “Private Schools” below) has forced the government to construct new schools in recent years as well as open the

system to some non-citizen children. Nevertheless, stringent regulations for non-citizen enrollment remain. Specifically, the children of non-citizens may attend public schools free of charge if their parents fulfill 1 of several criteria, such as holding citizenship in a country belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*); employment in the public sector or with certain non-profit entities; or having diplomatic status. The children of non-citizens who do not meet these criteria may attend public schools only if they pay registration fees and space is available.

School attendance is compulsory through the secondary level, and most public-school classes after kindergarten are segregated by sex, with boys receiving instruction from male teachers and girls from female. Certain primary schools called “model” schools are the exception to this pattern. First founded in the 1970s at least in part due to a lack of male instructors, these schools employ female teachers and administrators to work with male students and continue to be popular today.



While the Qatari government historically has depended on non-citizens to help staff its schools, it announced in 2017 plans for the “Qatarization” (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*) of the public-school system. Under the plan, terminated non-citizen teachers and administrations will be replaced with citizen recruits, and Qatari applicants will receive priority for vacant positions in new schools.

The 2016 “Protection of the Arabic Language” law mandates that all public education institutions use Arabic as the primary language for instruction and communication. Observers suggest that the law passed primarily in reaction to the growing dominance of English (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*) and a perceived lack of proficiency in Modern

Standard Arabic among young Qataris (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*). Islamic instruction is compulsory for all public-school students, whether Muslim or not.



such requirement, some do attend private kindergartens and nursery schools.

Primary: Primary school consists of grades 1-6. The standard national curriculum focuses on science, mathematics, English, and Arabic. Individual schools often design additional specialized course content within the framework of the national curriculum. In 2019 98% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in primary school.

Preparatory: Comprising grades 7-9, preparatory school builds on the fundamentals of primary school. Upon successful completion of a year-end examination, students move on to secondary school.

Secondary: Consisting of grades 10-12, secondary school provides specialized education in 1 of several tracks, such as literature/arts, science, commerce, technical/vocational studies, and religion. Students who pass the secondary exit exam may enter post-secondary educational institutions. In 2017, approximately 76% of youth of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary school. While the gross enrollment rate in 2020 for girls in secondary school is 107% (indicating that some of the students are outside the typical age range), the rate for boys is 109%.

Post-Secondary: Qatar's flagship public university and first institution of higher education, Qatar University, was founded in 1977 through the merger of male and female teacher colleges.

In 2010, a 2nd public institution, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, opened, graduating its first class in 2014.

Post-secondary education at both these public universities is free to all qualified citizens. Non-citizens may attend Qatar University, though they must pay tuition. Women make up 75% of Qatari university students (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). Despite the 2016 law mandating the use of Arabic in public education institutions, Qatar's public universities continue to offer some courses in English.

Since 1997, Education City, a district in Doha, has been the home of satellite campuses of several prominent foreign universities, including several from the US. These satellite campuses typically do not offer a full selection of academic programs, focusing instead on specific areas such as international relations or engineering.

Private Schools

Qatar's private schools largely serve the needs of its non-citizen population. Since granting the first private school license in 1980, the government today issues operating licenses to approved schools of 3 types. So-called "community" schools are typically sponsored by an embassy and follow the curriculum of the associated country. Similarly, "international" schools are independent institutions that follow foreign curricula. Both types enroll Qataris and non-citizens. The 3rd type, "private Arabic" schools, follow the Qatari national curriculum and typically enroll Qataris and non-citizens from other Arab states.

In contrast to most public schools, many private schools offer a co-educational arrangement with boys and girls in the same classroom. The Qatari government closely regulates private education, requiring all secular private schools to offer optional Islamic instruction, while instilling respect for Qatari and Islamic values in all students.



8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Qataris believe that trust and respect are fundamental to building strong personal and business relationships. In general, public displays of affection are considered inappropriate and unlawful, although social touching between people of the same sex is more common than in the US.

Time and Work

The Qatari work week runs from Sunday-Thursday. While public sector employees generally work from early morning to mid-afternoon (usually 7:00am-3:30pm), private businesses typically open from 9:00am-5:30pm. Some businesses may close for a mid-day break from 1:00pm-4:00pm and consequently open earlier or extend the workday to 7:00pm. During Ramadan (see p. 4-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*), the work day is 2 hours shorter.

While some shops are open 9:00am-1:00pm and 4:00pm-9:00pm, others are open all day. Most shopping centers are open 10:00am-10:00pm or later, though grocery stores usually open earlier. Some



shops have limited opening hours on Fridays, the Muslim holy day. Most banks are open 7:00am-1:00pm Sunday-Thursday.

Working Conditions: Labor laws established in 2014 limit a workday to 8 hours, and a workweek typically does not exceed 48 hours. This law excluded the domestic workers that make up a large part of Qatar's non-citizen labor force (see p. 1 and 15 of *Political and Social Relations*). To rectify this oversight, legislation passed in 2017 limits a domestic worker's day to 10 hours. Nevertheless, inconsistent enforcement of this and other labor laws pertaining to the non-citizen workforce sometimes results in human rights violations (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*).

Time Zone and Date Notation: Qatar adheres to Arabia Standard Time (AST), which is 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Qatar does not observe daylight savings time.

Lunar Calendar: Qataris use the *Hijri* (Islamic) lunar calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

National Holidays

- 2nd Tuesday in February: National Sports Day
- September 3: Independence Day
- December 18: National Day

These holidays occur on variable dates according to the lunar calendar:

- ***Eid al-Fitr***: End of Ramadan
- ***Eid al-Adha***: Festival of Sacrifice
- ***Mawlid al-Nabi***: Birth of the Prophet Muhammad
- ***Lailat al-Miraj***: The Ascension of Muhammad
- ***Arafat (Haj) Day***: Second day of the Haj pilgrimage (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*)
- ***Ra's al-Sana***: Islamic New Year

Time and Business

Qataris view effective business exchanges as dependent on establishment of personal relationships. Accordingly, small talk about health, family, and other friendly topics is central to building trust in Qatari business meetings, although male Qataris generally avoid inquiring about another man's female relations (see p. 5 of *Language and Communication*). Nevertheless,

lengthy introductions and small talk may delay the start or progress of a business meeting. Qataris generally value punctuality and consider tardiness rude. During meetings, Qataris may interrupt proceedings without apology.

At work, Qataris tend to formally and intentionally greet everyone both when they arrive in the morning and leave in the afternoon. Superiors often give direct, explicit praise of good performance to employees but typically soften reprimands with constructive feedback and assurances of good performance in other areas. Supervisors typically deliver criticism only indirectly and in private.

Public Space

Qatar maintains gender separation in most public spaces. For example, restaurants often have separate eating areas for men and women, and some stores and public parks offer special “family days” where men are permitted to enter only with their wives and children. Pools and gyms typically maintain gender-segregated hours of operation, banks have separate lines for men and women, and in the home, men and women typically have separate spaces for entertaining guests (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*). Cars often have tinted windows to shield women from public view. Further, most public school children receive instruction in gender-segregated classrooms (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Qatar depends on the nature of the relationship. In general, Qataris maintain less personal space than Westerners, especially when interacting with friends of the same gender.



Touch: Close friends and family members commonly touch one another while interacting. For example, friends of the same gender may hold hands in public, signaling their deep platonic

friendship, or they may emphasize conversation points with arm and shoulder touches or hair stroking.

Public displays of affection between members of the opposite sex are considered inappropriate and sometimes unlawful (see p. 4-5 of *Sex and Gender*). Similarly, unrelated Qataris of the opposite sex do not typically touch, even during greetings (see p. 4 of *Language and Communication*).

Qataris use only the right hand when eating, gesturing, passing and accepting items, and shaking hands because traditionally the left hand is used for personal hygiene and considered unclean. Foreign nationals should adhere to this custom to avoid offense.

Eye Contact: Qataris generally consider direct eye contact during greetings a demonstration of sincerity and credibility and may interpret rapid or constant shifts in eye contact as a sign of dishonesty. Nonetheless, men typically avoid extended eye contact when interacting with unrelated women.

Photographs

Foreign nationals should obtain permission before photographing a Qatari. This custom is especially important when taking a photo of a woman or group of women. Mosques, airports, government offices, and military or industrial areas may prohibit photography.



Driving

Like Americans, Qataris drive on the right side of the road. All road signs are typically written in both Arabic and English. Traffic is heavy in the densely populated areas around Doha, where tailgating, speeding, and poor lane discipline are common behaviors. In 2020, Qatar's rate of traffic-related deaths was 9 per 100,000 people, lower than the US rate of 11. Drivers making rude gestures or using speech in an aggressive manner against other drivers are subject to arrest and imprisonment.

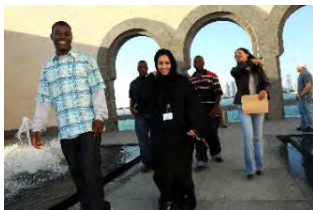
9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Qataris' clothing, sports, music and arts reflect pride in their Arab and Islamic traditions and their country's place in the modern global economy.

Dress and Appearance

Standards of dress in Qatar tend to be conservative. Both male and female visitors to Qatar should dress conservatively, avoiding shorts, mini-skirts, and sleeveless tops, except while visiting private beaches or pools.



Men: Qatari men traditionally wear a **thobe** (also known as a **dishdashi** or **kandurah**), a collared, loose white robe designed to keep the wearer cool. This attire is complemented by a small **kaffiyeh** (cap) worn underneath a white or red/white checked **guthra** (headscarf) that is secured in place by an **agal** (black cord). *Guthra* styles vary by wearer's status, tribe, or age. Sheikhs (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*) and other high-status men often wear a finely-embroidered robe called a **bisht** or **mislah** for important events or celebrations. Qatari men sometimes wear Western-style suits for business meetings.

Women: Qatari women traditionally wear an **abaya**, a loose black robe that covers much of the body, accompanied by a **shayla** (headscarf). Some women prefer an almost sheer **abaya** or one that opens in the front. Women from very religious families may wear a **niqab** (face veil) that reveals only the eyes, a **burqa** (full face mask), or a **batoula**, a mask made of soft leather that covers the nose and cheeks. Under the **abaya**, women traditionally wore a long tunic over loose, flowing trousers (**sirwal**), but women today tend to wear a variety of styles, such as long skirts or jeans with blouses, colorful designer dresses and high heels, comfortable sweatpants, or even pajamas. Qatari women tend to favor gold jewelry and cloth embroidered with gold thread and often

decorate their hands with intricate temporary henna tattoos for special occasions (see p. 5 of *Family and Kinship*).

Children: Young children typically wear Western-style pants, shirts, and dresses. Older children begin to wear traditional adult clothing around puberty, about the time they enter secondary school and when the sexes are segregated in traditional households (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*).

Recreation and Leisure

Qataris enjoy spending their leisure time with family and friends, gathering to celebrate weddings, birthdays, and religious holidays (see p. 4-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In urban areas, Qataris enjoy socializing at both modern shopping malls and Doha's traditional **souq** (covered open air market) and coffee houses. Some Doha residents maintain second homes in the desert where they retreat for weekend leisure activities (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*).

Festivals: Qatar hosts a series of fairs and festivals that also attract international visitors. Notable events include the Doha Cultural Festival, the Doha International Trade Fair, the Doha International Book Fair, and the Doha Film Institute's Ajyal Youth Film Festival.

Sports and Games

Soccer: 'Football,' as it is known in the region, is the most popular sport in Qatar. Besides following various European leagues, Qataris enjoy their own domestic leagues. Part of the Asian Football Confederation, the Qatar men's national team won the Gulf Cup of Nations in 2004 and 2014, though it has never qualified for a World Cup. While few Qatari women traditionally participated in sports after primary school, this custom has changed somewhat in recent years. In 2010, Qatar founded its first national women's soccer



team, and in 2012, a domestic women's soccer league was created.

Traditional Sports: For centuries, desert-dwelling Bedouin (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) raced camels across the desert for sport. Today, Qataris attend regularly-scheduled events at a racetrack west of Doha. Qataris typically view the races from a grandstand that provides a view of the racing animals jockeyed by remote-controlled robots. Other Qataris prefer to race alongside the camels in 4-wheel-drive vehicles. Owners and trainers typically follow their racing camels in pick-up trucks, often beating drums to encourage the animals.



For centuries, Qatari men trapped peregrine falcons and trained them to hunt and return prey such as other birds, hares, and gazelles. Today, some Qatari men practice falconry during a season that lasts from October-March, even traveling with their falcons to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to hunt.



Other Sports: These include rugby, sailing in traditional **dhow** sailboats, tennis, basketball, golf, cricket, and water sports, as well as outdoor adventure and motorsports. Qatar aims to become a hub

for sports-related tourism and hosts various international events. For example, it hosted the 2006 Asian Games and 2011 Pan Arab Games, among others, and its world-class facilities regularly host competitions in motorsports, tennis, golf, track and field, and horseracing. In 2022, Qatar hosted the FIFA World Cup international soccer competition. According to

FIFA there were 3.4 million people in attendance, with Argentina winning the men's World Cup.

Music

Traditional: Like other Gulf residents, Qataris historically composed music to accompany certain tasks. For example, captains of pearling ships would hire a **naham** (professional singer) to lead **fidjeri** (songs) as their ships sailed into the Gulf. Traditional instruments include drums, **nayy** (flute), **rababa** (1 or 2-stringed fiddle), **'oud** (pear-shaped, fretless, stringed lute), and **tamboura** (6-stringed lyre, similar to a harp). While this tradition virtually disappeared with the decline of the pearling industry (see p. 9-10 of *History and Myth*), the Qatari government has sought to collect and preserve these and other traditional songs.

With its distinctive 5-tone scale and 6/8 waltz-like rhythms, **Khaleeji** music is a form that unites regional Gulf Arabic styles with traditions from Africa, India, and Iran. **Khaleeji** music typically features the **'oud**, while drums and clapping mark the rhythm.



Modern: Many Qataris enjoy a modern pop version of **Khaleeji** music that uses non-traditional instruments such as synthesizers, though other Arabic and Western genres are also popular. Radio stations broadcast music in a variety of styles and languages.

Dance

Dance has been an important part of Qatari culture for centuries. Perhaps the most famous traditional dance, the **al-'ardha**, involves 2 rows of men waving sticks or swords as they dance. Traditionally connected to warfare, the dance is often performed at weddings or other special occasions today. Other traditional dances mimic the actions involved in work, such as farming or pearling. For example, some traditional dance moves reflect the pounding of wheat to make **harees** (see p. 2 of *Sustenance and Health*), while others symbolize raising a ship's anchor.

Certain dances are performed only by women. The **al-murada** dance involves 2 lines of women who hold hands and sing as they move forward then retreat. The **al-khamery** is popular at weddings, when a single, cloaked female dancer bends and straightens while shaking her shoulders and hair to the music.

Literature

Like other Gulf countries, Qatar has a rich tradition of poetry and storytelling. For centuries, men from isolated communities met to exchange news, tell stories, and recite poetry, often while sitting around a desert campfire. Some myths taught moral lessons (see p. 19 of *History and Myth*), while other stories reflected the principles of Islam, defined tribal identities, or promoted certain values such as hospitality, generosity, and endurance.

There are 2 styles of Qatari poetry: classical, based on verses and stories from the Qur'an and written in Modern Standard Arabic, and **al-nabati**, written in the *Khaleeji* Arabic dialect (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*). Meaning "vernacular" or "popular," *nabati* includes a wide range of themes.

Arts and Crafts

Traditionally, certain Sunni Islamic teachings (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) have prohibited the lifelike portrayal of humans and animals. Instead, traditional Qatari visual artists have used geometric designs, ornamental, repetitive patterns, and calligraphy to produce highly complex decorative motifs.

Qatari women traditionally used looms to weave camel and goat hair to make tents (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*), camel bags, carpets, and other functional textiles that featured simple patterns with elaborate borders. The Qatari government supports the preservation of traditional arts and crafts, such as weaving, metalwork, and pottery.



10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social events in Qatar. Friends and families frequently gather in the home, picnic in parks, or meet in cafes. Traditional Qatari dishes tend to incorporate fresh, local ingredients richly flavored with aromatic spices.

Dining Customs

Most Qataris eat 3 daily meals and snack throughout the day. In more traditional households, female and male family members eat separately (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*), though this habit is changing among younger Qataris. Even in households where male and female family members dine together, women and children may not join a meal if unrelated male guests are present.



While Qataris traditionally sit on carpeted floors and pillows during meals, some families increasingly use Western-style tables and chairs. Before and after meals, hosts provide a dish of scented water for

diners to rinse their hands. Families eat from large, centrally-placed shared dishes, using their right hand to scoop up food. Because they consider the left hand unclean, most Qataris do not use it to eat (see p. 4 of *Time and Space*). A meal typically begins with a collection of starters (*mezze*) served with flat bread, followed by a main course.

Diet

Qatari dishes tend to incorporate a wide variety of spices, such as turmeric, cinnamon, cumin, cardamom, and saffron which were introduced to the region by early traders (see p. 1-2 of *History and Myth*). Dishes also often feature nuts, dried fruits, and limes. Prepared in a variety of ways and served with almost every meal, rice is Qatar's most common staple.

Alongside rice, most dishes include an animal protein such as lamb, chicken, or goat along with fruits and vegetables. Qataris also consume many varieties of fish and other seafood, which is typically grilled, fried, or dried and served with rice, vegetables, and lemon. Bread is served with most dishes and comes in dozens of varieties. A common form is a flat, unleavened disk about the size of a plate that diners tear into pieces to pinch up morsels of food in place of utensils. Bread may also be fried and seasoned with various toppings, such as **zataar**, a spread of sesame seeds, dried thyme, and olive oil.



Fresh fruit is a popular snack throughout the day. Although dates are the most common, other popular fruits include mango, pomegranate, and mangosteen (a small, purple fruit with a white edible interior that has a sweet-tart flavor). Observant Muslims consume neither pork nor alcohol. In addition, they observe particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is **halal**, allowed by Islamic law.

Meals and Popular Dishes

For breakfast, Qataris often pair eggs with bread, salty cheese, **labneh** (thick, creamy yogurt garnished with olive oil or served strained with diced cucumber, fresh mint, and crushed garlic), olives, and jam. While lunch is traditionally the largest meal, either lunch or dinner today may be the main meal with multiple courses. Following *mezze*, a typical main course may include rice flavored with cardamom, saffron, and raisins and served with seasoned chicken, lamb, or fish. A lighter meal may consist of bread, **tabbouleh** (a salad of cracked wheat, parsley, mint, onions, shallots, and tomatoes dressed with lemon juice and olive oil), and fruit.

Besides **machboos**, other traditional Qatari dishes include **harees**, slow-cooked lamb and ground wheat stew; **margooga**, meat cooked with fresh vegetables and served with flat bread; **madhrooba**, chicken, vegetable, and rice stew; and **ghozi**,

whole lamb or goat stuffed with rice and served on holidays. Popular snacks include **kibbe** (fried balls of cracked wheat, stuffed with minced meat), **fatayer** (fried pastries with various fillings), and **warak enab** (grape leaves stuffed with rice, meat, and onion). For dessert, Qataris enjoy **baklava** (a pastry of layered filo dough, nuts, and honey). Dates are also a common treat, consumed dried, raw, or baked into various confections.

Beverages

Qataris commonly drink tea, heavily laden with sugar, and traditional Arabian coffee (**kahwa**), served black and spiced with cardamom, cloves, or saffron, throughout the day. Hosts or servers continuously provide refills until the guest gently swivels his cup to indicate he has had enough. Qataris also enjoy fresh-squeezed juices, such as pomegranate, mango, lemon with mint, avocado, strawberry, orange, and “cocktails” – a mix of several types. Not offered at most Muslim-owned



establishments, alcohol is available only in certain restaurants, hotel bars, and clubs, or to residents who purchase a liquor license from the government.

Eating Out

Qatari restaurants and cafes are popular sites for socializing with friends and families over a meal. Coffee shops offering **shisha** (flavored tobacco smoked through a water pipe) are also popular gathering spots. While men and women may eat together in large, modern restaurants and hotel bars, smaller eateries often divide into gender-specific dining rooms (see p. 3 of *Time and Space*). Popular across Qatar, street stalls offer casual fare and snacks, such as slices of fresh fruit, **falafel** (fried balls of ground chickpeas), and **shawarma** (sliced meat wrapped in flat bread with yogurt and vegetables). Restaurants serving Western-style fast food and other international fare are common. Restaurants rarely add a service charge or gratuity to the bill. A tip of 10% handed in cash to the waiter is appropriate, although not required or expected.

Health Overview

Qataris' overall health has improved over the last decades, largely due to notable enhancements to the healthcare system. Qataris' life expectancy at birth increased from 69 years in 1971 to 81 years in 2023, higher than the global average of 73. Similarly, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from 47 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1971 to just 6 deaths in 2023, one of the Arabian Gulf's lowest rates about equal to the US rate. Maternal mortality also dropped considerably, from 29 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 8 by 2020. Today, all Qatari residents, both citizens and non-citizens, have access to free, publicly-funded healthcare treatment in public hospitals and clinics. Some residents also have employer-provided health insurance, which allows them special access to private health facilities.

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Qatari medicine relies on herbal treatments, not surgical methods, to identify and cure physical and spiritual illness. Besides herbal remedies, common treatment methods include acupuncture (a process in which a practitioner inserts very thin needles into various parts of a patient's skin) and ***hijama*** (also known as wet cupping, the process of applying heated cups to the skin to extract toxins from the body, improve blood flow, and alleviate pain). Traditional medicine is especially popular among non-citizens who cannot afford modern treatments.



In 2016, Qatar legalized the use of certain alternative therapies by state-licensed practitioners in public hospitals. Among others, these procedures include ***Ayurvedic*** treatments (an ancient system of medicine from India that aims to stabilize and rejuvenate bodily energies through a variety of methods), homeopathy (a form of alternative medicine developed in 18th-

century Germany in which a patient ingests diluted plant, mineral, and animal substances to trigger the body's natural system of healing), acupuncture, and chiropractic treatments.

Modern Healthcare System

Since independence in 1971, Qatar has developed a universal healthcare system that provides free access to general and maternity hospitals, outpatient clinics, and specialized health centers to all residents of Qatar. Further, Qatari citizens are eligible for free healthcare abroad if their medical needs are not covered by Qatar's facilities. Hospitals and clinics offer high quality services, while mobile clinics deliver limited, specialized care for prevalent diseases like diabetes.



Qatar's government has recently stepped-up investment in the national healthcare system in a series of 6-year development plans known as the "National Health Strategy." First launched in 2011 and

renewed in 2017, these initiatives include educating local medical professionals, increasing pharmaceutical production, expanding Qataris' access to primary and preventative services, and investing in healthcare infrastructure to accommodate Qatar's growing population, among other improvements.

Despite significant progress, some residents of more remote areas still lack access to adequate care. Clinics in some rural areas and smaller towns remain outdated, understaffed, and ill-equipped. This lack of services forces some patients to travel long distances and wait for extended periods before receiving treatment.

Moreover, while all Qatari residents may seek free treatment at well-equipped, modern public facilities, overwhelming demand sometimes forces overcrowding and results in long wait times. While private hospitals and clinics address gaps in healthcare service and generally offer exceptional and timely care, they

are too expensive for many residents, particularly those without health insurance.

Health Challenges

The social and economic changes of recent decades (see p. 1-2 of *Economics and Resources*) have caused an increase in chronic and non-communicable

“lifestyle” diseases that are now the leading cause of death and account for about 62% of all deaths annually. While cardiovascular diseases contributed to about 29% of all



deaths in 2021, other prominent causes of death included cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases. Preventable “external causes,” such as accidents, suicides, drug use, and smoking result in a significantly high rate of death. For example, in 2021, external causes resulted in 15% of all deaths, considerably higher than the US rate of 4%. Traffic accidents alone contributed to 6% of deaths in 2020 (see p. 4 of *Time and Space*).

Due to significant government investment in immunization and post-exposure treatments, communicable and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, measles, and malaria now account for only about 5% of all deaths. Nevertheless, communicable diseases disproportionately affect low-income non-citizen workers, mostly those who live in crowded, unsanitary conditions.

Obesity: An increasingly sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy eating habits have led to a dramatic surge in obesity over the last 3 decades. In 2017, about 41% Qatari adults are living with obesity, almost three times the world average of 13% and greater than with the US rate of 37%. Moreover, experts suggest some 42% of children are overweight. Increased obesity has resulted in the growth of associated diseases like diabetes, with nearly 18% of Qataris suffering from the disease.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

Prior to the discovery of oil in 1939, Qatar's economy focused on fishing, livestock herding, and a declining pearl industry (see p. 9-10 of *History and Myth*). While the development of the oil industry in the 1950s brought significant economic growth, it was actually liquefied natural gas (LNG), first exported in 1997, that made Qatar a major regional power and one of the world's wealthiest nations. Today Qatar's economy is the Arab Gulf region's 4th largest, behind only Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with a GDP per capita that is the world's 4th highest in 2024 and double that of the US. Average economic growth between 2004-2022 was a healthy 3.9% despite a record economic contraction of 23.2% during the 2008 world financial crisis.



In recent decades, Qatar has sought to diversify its economy and reduce its dependence on oil and gas (commonly called "hydrocarbons"). Consequently, Qatar has invested heavily in its national carrier, Qatar Airways; overseen a booming construction sector; modernized and expanded its education system (see p. 2-3 of *Learning and Knowledge*); and built a strong financial services sector linked to its state-owned investment fund, the world's 9th largest. Further, to attract foreign investment, a 2016 law approved the creation of free trade zones. These diversification efforts have paid off: non-hydrocarbon goods and services now make up nearly 62% of Qatar's GDP. However, these sectors were also the hardest hit by the 2017 regional diplomatic crisis (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*), making it difficult to predict future economic performance difficult.

The Qatari economy remains heavily dependent on foreign labor. Of a population of about 2.5 million, some 2+ million are non-citizens, primarily men from South Asia (see p. 14-15 of

Political and Social Relations), and non-citizens make up about 95% of Qatar's total workforce.

Most non-citizens work in the private sector, sometimes in dangerous or unhealthy conditions and typically segregated from Qatari society. As of 2016, Qatar had modified the controversial **Kafala** system, a sponsorship program that tied workers to their employers, facilitating serious human rights violations. Further, several 2017 labor reforms aim to improve migrant workers' working conditions in various ways.



While exact statistics are unavailable, few Qataris traditionally work in the private sector, preferring the higher salaries, better benefits, job security, and shorter working hours in the public sector. One estimate suggests Qatari citizens hold just 1% of private sector jobs. To encourage more Qataris to enter the workforce, the government has pursued a "Qatarization" program since the 1960s that gives citizens priority for hire into vacant positions.

Nevertheless, the program has repeatedly missed its targets, and Qataris remain underrepresented in the private sector for several reasons. These include prevailing cultural and religious norms that discourage some women from seeking work despite their significant educational attainment (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*) and a skills mismatch between Qatari job-seekers and employers.

Challenges to Qatar's future economic viability include its continuing dependence on hydrocarbon exports (especially in view of the recent slump in oil and natural gas prices), its reliance on a non-citizen workforce, and the ongoing diplomatic rift with its neighbors (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Industry

Industrial activity accounts for about 66% of GDP and employs some 54% of the labor force. Most activity involves the

extraction, processing, and export of oil and natural gas carried out by the state-owned Qatar Petroleum Company.

Natural Gas: With 23.8 trillion cubic m of natural gas, Qatar has the world's 3rd largest proven reserves. Of the 166 billion cubic m Qatar extracts a year, it exports some 125 billion cubic m, making Qatar the world's 3rd largest exporter of natural gas and the 2nd largest exporter of LNG behind the US (2023). Qatar's natural gas comes from the massive offshore North Field, part of the North Dome/South Pars field which it shares with Iran. Qatar sends the gas to Ras Laffan, some 50 mi north of Doha and home of the world's largest LNG facility, where it is exported primarily to Japan, South Korea, and India. In 2017, Qatar



announced it would lift a self-imposed moratorium on development of the North Field, a move intended to increase overall production capacity by 30%.

Despite the 2017-2021 regional diplomatic crisis (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*), Qatar continues to sell significant amounts of natural gas to UAE at below-market prices, providing approximately 19.5 billion cubic m to the UAE in 2019.

Oil: Qatar has the world's 14th largest oil reserves or some 25.24 billion barrels. At its current rate of production of 1.9 million barrels per day, the reserves are expected to last 40 more years. Qatar's exports of both crude oil (477,300 barrels per day) and refined petroleum products (552,200 barrels per day) have decreased significantly since 2017.

Manufacturing: Qatar's manufacturing sector accounts for approximately 9% of its GDP and focuses on hydrocarbons and petrochemical products, such as fertilizers, as well as steel.

Construction: In recent decades, Qatar has experienced a construction boom, with the sub-sector now representing 15% of GDP. Major projects include the new Doha and Lusail Metros, long distance rail links, the expansion of Hamad International Airport, oil and natural gas facilities, and stadiums for the 2022

FIFA World Cup (see p. 3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). In 2023 the government estimated that the sub-sector employed about 54% of the labor force.

Services

The services sector comprises an increasingly important part of Qatar's GDP: 5% in 2023 while employing 45% of the labor force. Major subsectors include tourism and financial services.

Tourism: To establish the country as both a luxury destination and a major transit point for international travelers, Qatar has invested heavily in its tourism industry, which represents 3.5% of GDP. Major attractions include the Museum of Islamic Art, luxury hotels, shopping, restaurants, and international events and festivals (see p. 2-3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).



Agriculture

With an arid climate, limited freshwater resources, and very little arable land (see p. 2 of *Political and Social Relations*), Qatar has a very small agricultural sector, comprising just 0.3% of GDP. Consequently, Qatar must import 99% of its food. The regional diplomatic crisis has forced Qatar to airlift more foodstuffs to make up for the loss of imports from its neighbors (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*). The recent boycott has also compelled Qatar to develop the agriculture sector, such as developing a new livestock and dairy farm that aims to meet all of the country's domestic needs.

Fishing: Qatar has increased focus on food security, sustainability, and production. The Aquatic Fisheries Research Center (AFRC) was created in 2020. Qatar has a small artisanal fishing industry consisting of under 500 vessels, with an annual catch of some 15,000 tons, the vast majority for internal consumption.

Currency

Qatar's currency is the *riyal* (QR or ر.ق. in Arabic) issued in 6 banknote values (1, 5, 10, 50, 100, and 500) and subdivided into

100 **dirhams** which are issued in 5 coin values (1, 5, 10, 25, 50). The riyal has been pegged to the dollar at a rate of \$1 to 3.64 riyals since 2001, despite a slight deviation in 2017 due to the ongoing diplomatic crisis.



Foreign Trade

Qatar's imports, totaling \$33.4 billion in 2022, primarily consist of machinery and transport equipment, medicaments, and electronics. They were purchased primarily from China (16%), the US (15%), India (6%), Italy (6%), and Germany (5%). In the same year, Qatar's exports totaled \$130.9 billion and were comprised primarily of LNG, petroleum products, fertilizers, and steel destined for China (16%), India (12%), South Korea (11%), Japan (10%), and UK (7%).

Foreign Aid

As one of the world's wealthiest countries, Qatar does not receive any foreign development assistance from the US. Instead, Qatar is a major foreign aid donor, giving an estimated USD \$2.81 billion in assistance from 2015 to May 2021. In 2021 Qatar's official development assistance in the amount of \$1.13 million was allocated to the Middle East (65%), Africa (15%), and Asia (12%). The top recipients were the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Nigeria.

Qatar's foreign assistance has been cited by its Gulf neighbors as one of the reasons for the 2017-2021 diplomatic crisis (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*). Qatar provided \$1 billion in direct aid and another \$4 billion in loans to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood backed government from 2012-2013, angering Saudi Arabia and UAE. While Qatar no longer provides aid following the Egyptian leader's overthrow, its support of Hamas in the Gaza Strip continues to cause tensions with Egypt and the Gulf Arab states. Aside from its support to Arab countries, Qatar also donates to its strategic partners: in 2007, the Emir of Qatar donated \$100 million to New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Qatar has struggled to keep its physical infrastructure in step with its rapid economic development, yet major projects currently in progress should improve services. Qatar's residents enjoy access to an advanced telecommunications network, although the government imposes content restrictions on the Internet and media.

Transportation

Most Qatari citizens and some non-citizens have at least one privately-owned vehicle (POV). Government-operated taxis are a popular option, as are car-sharing services. Most non-citizens rely on Doha's extensive bus system, which runs from early in the morning to midnight. Long distance buses provide service to locations beyond Doha. Buses typically have a section at the front reserved for families and women.

Roadways: Qatar has more than 6,100 mi of roadways, most of which are paved. To alleviate traffic in Doha and environs, several large expressways have been built in recent years. Expressways also link Doha with other urban and industrial areas.



Railways: Qatar Rail is currently developing 3 large-scale rail projects. Having opened in 2020, the Doha Metro will service Doha and its suburbs with 186 miles of track and 107 stations, while the Lusail Tram will consist of 12 miles of track and 25 stations as well as connections to the Doha Metro.

The largest project is Qatar's Long Distance Rail, a system of passenger and freight lines that will connect Doha to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The system will also link Qatar to the planned Gulf Cooperation Council railway network connecting Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, with Qatar's portion complete by 2030.



Ports and Waterways:

Qatar's major ports are Doha, Ras Laffan, and Mesaieed. Ras Laffan is the world's largest LGN export facility. (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*).

Airways: Qatar has 8 airports, 4 of which have paved runways. After replacing Doha International Airport in 2014, Hamad International Airport is now Qatar's primary transit hub. Qatar Airways, the state-owned national carrier, flies to over 80 countries (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Energy

Qatar is the world's 60th largest producer and 59th largest consumer of energy. As a major producer of oil and natural gas, Qatar generates 99.7% of its electricity from fossil fuels. Qatar has recently begun investing in solar energy, with the goal of producing 20% of its electricity by that method by 2030.

Media

Although Qatar's constitution guarantees freedom of expression, the media face significant restrictions. Laws make it illegal to criticize Islam, the government, and the ruling Al Thani family. The government censors or even blocks certain media outlet websites, while broad cybercrime and antiterrorism laws make it unlawful to distribute "false" news, violate social values or principles, and behave in a manner that jeopardizes state security, all of which are punishable by fines and imprisonment. Consequently, journalists often practice self-censorship, particularly on sensitive social, economic, and political matters. Despite these restrictions, publishers print newspapers in Arabic, English, Malayalam (see p. 2 of *Language and Knowledge*), and other languages. Major English papers include *The Gulf Times* and *The Peninsula*.

While local news outlets face severe restrictions, the state-owned *Al Jazeera* network (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*) enjoys significant editorial freedom to report on international news, often publishing or broadcasting stories that are critical



of regional events and governments. Consequently, the countries involved in the current diplomatic standoff with Qatar (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*) have demanded the closure of the network, an action

that the Qatari government has rejected.

Government-run *Qatar TV* and *Al-Rayyan TV* provide local coverage. Several local radio stations tend to accommodate more criticism of government services and operations than local television broadcasts.

Telecommunications

Qatar has an advanced telecommunications infrastructure, with 19 per 100 inhabitants of fixed-line telephone subscriptions and 172 per 100 inhabitants of mobile phone subscriptions. The government partially owns the 2 main providers of telecommunications services, *Ooredoo* and *Vodafone*.

Internet: While some 100% of the population enjoys broadband Internet access, the high cost of in-home Internet service makes it prohibitively expensive for most non-citizens (see p. 14-15 of *Political and Social Relations*). Instead, non-citizens typically access the Internet through their mobile phones. The government often compels Internet service providers to censor content, even blocking access to material and sites deemed critical of the government, contrary to Qatari or Islamic values, or obscene. Restricted sites have included independent news outlets, dating services, and those with homosexually charged content (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*).



For more information on
the Air Force Culture and Language Center visit:
airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC

For more information on
United States Air Forces Central visit:
www.afcent.af.mil



CULTURE GUIDE

Access all of the AFCLC's expeditionary culture field
guides in our mobile app!



GET IT ON
Google Play



Available on the iPhone
App Store



DoD Enterprise Mobility
**Personal Use
Mobile Apps**