

Fostering Qatari Youth Civic Engagement and Empowerment

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Youth-focused governmental strategies are required to keep pace with the growing young population and rapid socioeconomic changes in Qatar. Access to education, health services, and employment opportunities are key factors that enable youth to participate in economic advancement and social development. Youth empowerment initiatives are vital and governments must undertake a gap analysis of the current condition of the youth and identify the shortcomings in the policies targeting youth, which ultimately ensure equitable access to civic activities and in the policymaking process. This policy brief presents the key factors necessary to foster civic engagement and empowerment among young Qatari citizens.

Empowering young Qatari is a crucial factor in policymaking processes, as their inclusion is essential at all levels to contribute to the country's prosperity and development. Qatari government entities, civil society institutions, and state agencies are working to integrate youth into the country's social, economic, and political mainstream. According to the Youth Development Index 2020¹, Qatar ranks second in the Arab world in terms of youth development, indicating significant progress. The Qatar National Vision (2030) highlights the necessity of engaging the youth in various sectors within the state and beyond. In terms of strategic steps, the election of the Youth Advisory Committee for the Ministry of Culture and Sports integrates the voice of youth in proposing and initiating of electoral practice².

Civic engagement is an important component of youth empowerment because it can help build human and social capital, and can help educate young people about their rights and responsibilities as citizens—a driving

force of community and national development.

The current study aimed to shed light on the state of youth political attitudes and empowerment in the Qatari context in order to identify gaps and suggest future policies that will promote the actual participation of young adults. Based on the views of 744 Qatari adult respondents, our study results indicate that limited civic engagement and minimal political participation might negatively affect youth empowerment. The findings presented in this brief can assist the government in addressing the factors that hinder youth empowerment and, eventually, in formulating programs, educational reforms, and appropriate policies for youth.

Youth Civic Engagement: Why It Is Important

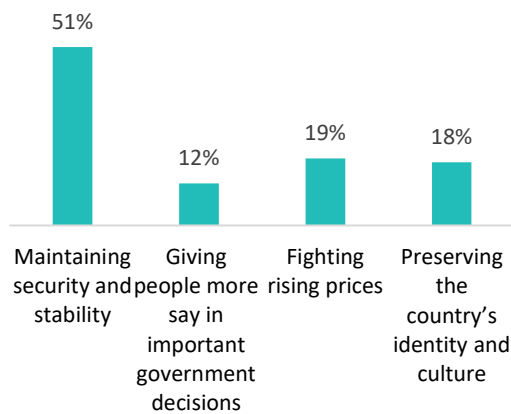
With youth being a key human resource for economic and social development, youth civic engagement activities are critical for empowering young people to develop healthy civic habits, skills, and

commitment while participating in political, economic, and social conversations. Civic engagement is best defined as “a process in which people take collective action to address issues of public concern”³. Therefore, youth civic engagement is a critical task in the effort to promote a more just and equitable society with increased access to decision-making processes and policy implementation at the local level⁴.

Civic Engagement Values and Activities

In the current study, respondents were asked to choose the civic engagement values and activities they consider to be the most important for Qatar.

Figure 1. Civic Engagement Values and Activities



Maintaining Security and Stability

Youth civic engagement activities contribute to enhancing political trust, tolerance, respect for pluralism and diversity; these, in turn, lead youth to highly value the maintenance of security and stability within the government system. The majority of the Qatari people (51%) who participated in this study

selected maintaining the country's security and stability as the most important value for Qatar.

Combating the Rising Cost of Living

The steadily rising costs have become a threat to the standard of living and prosperity of citizens. Youth must be involved in the efforts to promote policies that combat rising household costs, address the issue of inflation, mitigate consumption culture, regulate the market, and protect consumers. Fighting increasing prices, according to 19% of respondents, is the second most important priority for Qatar.

Preserving Cultural Identity

Youth are integral to their local communities. Accordingly, their civil, social and community engagement shape the culture and national identity, and increase the national, social and economic capital of the country by making communities stronger and more resilient. Around 18% of those interviewed believe that the third most important value for Qatar is preserving the country's identity and culture.

Promoting Inclusive Decision-Making

When young people participate in civic life and are given access to the decision-making process, policy formulation, and community development, they can influence governmental decisions regarding the education, health care, environment, housing, and foreign policy. According to 12% of those who responded, giving citizens more say in government decisions is the fourth most important value for Qatar. Moreover, 71% of the Qatari respondents believe that decision-makers should consider the

concerns of ordinary citizens when addressing significant issues. Regardless of their opinion, 73% of Qataris reported that they support the government's decisions.

Political Attitudes of Qatari Youth

Civic participation is highest among Arab youth who take an active interest in politics⁵. The participation of Qatari youth in political life became official with the enactment of Law No. 12 of year 1998, which organized the Central Municipal Council elections and gave young people the right to vote for a constituency representative. More recently, there have been major initiatives related to the social youth movement, including the election of the Youth Advisory Committee for the Minister of Culture and Sports, which represents the voice of youth and encouraging youth participation in all crucial events within the country, including the Shura Council elections², which indicates that young people are striving to create a space for social engagement and political innovation. According to the results, more than half of Qatari respondents (55%) were interested in politics.

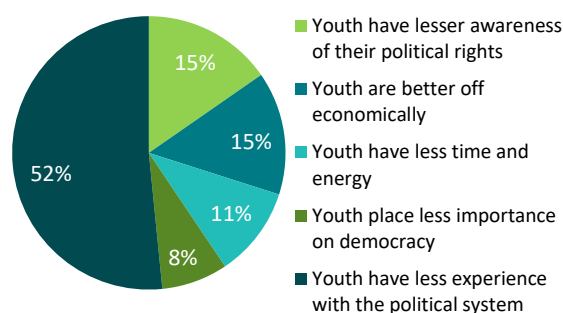
The level of political contestation and the dynamics of youth activism vary across the Gulf region; while the United Arab Emirates and Qatar — the Gulf's wealthiest states — have seen little oppositional political mobilization by youth, Kuwait and Bahrain — both states with parliamentary politics and a history of civil activism — have produced the most vigorous youth movements⁶. Thus, in wealthier countries such as Qatar, the

interest of young people in politics seems to be diminished. In trying to answer the question of how the political attitudes of youth differ from those of older people, we found that 63% of respondents believe that young people are less interested in politics than older people. This may result from young adults' varying conceptions of politics, as well as their differing awareness of what constitutes a political act or what it means to be politically engaged.

Obstacles to Youth Political Participation

Whether facing resource constraints, lack of adequate platforms or lack of motivation, energy, or time to participate in civic activities, youth disengagement may pose risks to the community and national development.

Figure 2. Obstacles to Youth Political Participation Compared to Older People



Being less knowledgeable about their political rights, formal political processes, and the complexities of democratic principles and the electoral process, makes it more difficult for youth to perceive political participation as a route through which to demand change. In addition, they may lack the capacity (e.g., time, skills, or resources) to engage

in public life. Respondents were asked to indicate the most important reason why young people are less involved politically than older people. Half of the respondents (52%) stated that the lack of experience with political system is the main barrier preventing young people from being involved. Additionally, 15% of respondents believe that the youth are unaware of their political rights, and another 15% attribute it to the good economic conditions of the youth. Around 11% think that youth do not have enough time and energy. Only 8% stated that the most important obstacle might be that youth do not see democracy as a priority.

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Policy Recommendations

1. **Develop a national framework for youth policies** through forming a policy-working group composed of experts, representatives from youth organizations, civil society organizations and academia. This group should identify obstacles to youth civic participation in social, economic and political aspects and provide regular initial indicators of the results on the implementation of these policies.
2. **Promote civic engagement programs** through government agencies that offer training courses designed to raise awareness among young people about the opportunities for civic engagement available to them and to enhance their ability to participate in political life and decision-making.
3. **Set portions for youth** to increase their political participation in decision making in the country. Work towards involving them in legislative bodies, government boards departments and youth councils. Provide opportunities for them to actively participate in decision-making processes.