



Identity between Challenges and Response in the State of Qatar

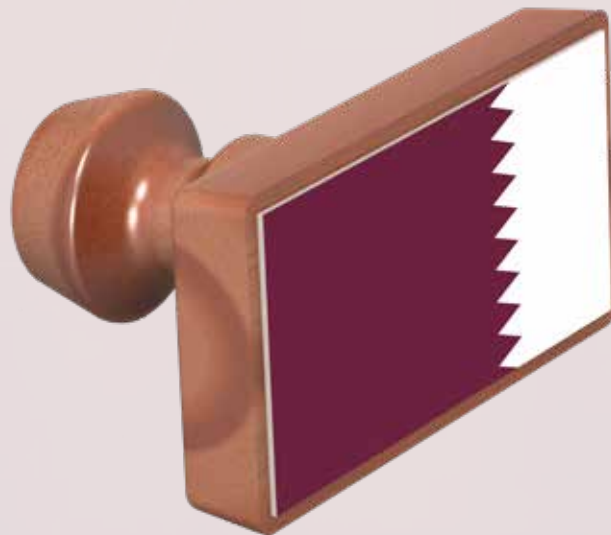
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The concept of identity is fundamental to understanding individuals and societies, as researchers continuously seek to answer the central question of: “Who are you? Or who are we?” From this starting point, individuals begin to express themselves within their communities, while groups define themselves in relation to other groups. Identity may therefore be acquired through living within a particular political or social community or inherited through ethnic or racial identities. Hence, identity today carries both a symbolic and a social significance. It has also become a major concern for governments and scholars alike because of its crucial role in social stability and human development. In this article, we explore the nature of the challenges facing Qatari identity, examining at the same time how the government is responding to these challenges.



Historical and Contemporary Challenges to Qatari Identity

Challenges to national identity in the Gulf region emerged as early as the 1950s and 1960s as part of the vast modernity wave caused by the discovery of oil. At that time, the challenges arose from the need to balance the initial development plans—aimed at forging a civic identity suited to massive transformation—and preserving social values and heritage amid rapid development. Governments seized the opportunities arising from oil wealth to respond to these challenges, focusing on nation-building by establishing national educational institutions that helped create a comprehensive cultural renaissance. These challenges quickly became more complex as local societies opened up to Western modernity, whether through media and culture or through direct contact when traveling abroad for study or for other reasons. Studies have noted conflict within the individual in the Gulf between the desire for openness and adoption of Western cultural and consumer concepts and the need to satisfy traditional social and family expectations. This conflict has produced a troubled or hybrid individual identity marked by tension between openness to the world and adherence to inherited values—a dynamic that has posed a threat to the individual’s acceptance of their own customs, traditions, and society. At the same time, new social circumstances have influenced identity transformations, perhaps most notably the acceleration and increasing complexity of lifestyles compared to traditional ways of life, whether in terms of women’s work or the nature of the school and workday. These lifestyle changes have had a significant impact on family cohesion and the role of the nuclear or extended family in shaping their children’s identity and sustaining inherited values and traditions. These challenges have recently become



more acute, and external culture has come to dominate local culture as a result of technological development and the growing forces of cultural interpenetration, whether through the dissemination of international education or technological connectivity. Studies also indicate that these active challenges have helped shape the linguistic and personal identity of the younger generation and have influenced their relationship with state-building projects and the concept of citizenship. In the same context, the dominance of consumer culture and its link to the spread of social media have influenced individuals’ future aspirations—both material and moral—as well as their capacity to assume responsibility, which is the most important requirement of responsible citizenship. From this standpoint, with the increasing complexity and intensity of pressures on national identity, the sustainability of values and traditions has become one of the state’s most significant challenges, especially as governments and societies alike address the demands of globalization and modernity.

Identity in Government Policies in Qatar

Qatar’s response to identity-related challenges has been largely positive and proactive. The state has

developed comprehensive legislative frameworks that address shifts in national identity and has formulated policies aimed at balancing both individual and collective identities within the country. As a result, national identity has become a central concern of governmental and legislative institutions at all levels, given its crucial role in shaping the state's direction, strategic policies, and national security.

The Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar outlines key components of national identity in its first Article, which states that “Qatar is an independent sovereign Arab State. Its religion is Islam, and Islamic Sharia is a principal source of its legislation. Its governing system is democratic, based on consultation, justice, and the rule of law, and its official language is Arabic. The people of Qatar are part of the Arab nation.”

Article 57 further underscores the importance of preserving traditions within the context of public rights and responsibilities, stating that “respecting the Constitution, obeying laws issued by public authority, adhering to public order and public morals, and observing national traditions and established customs are duties of all who reside in the State of Qatar or enter its territory.”

Qatar National Vision 2030 reaffirms this commitment to preserving identity, noting that one of the most important challenges facing the state is “modernization while preserving traditions.” The Human Development pillar stresses the importance of adopting an educational system that upholds Qatari social values and heritage, strengthens social cohesion, and fosters a spirit of belonging and citizenship. Meanwhile, the Social Development pillar emphasizes maintaining a sound social structure through policies that preserve national cultural heritage and reinforce Arab and Islamic values and identity, while also cultivating and developing a spirit of tolerance, constructive dialogue, and openness to others.

The state has also adopted these frameworks and

worked to provide a legislative environment that nurtures Qatari identity, whether through amending the Civil Human Resources Law or through the ministries that adopted visions that translate Qatari identity and values into practice through school curricula, social initiatives, or other measures. Public policies, here, have focused on creating long-term social and human development visions that prioritize the sustainability of the authentic values and characteristics of Qatari society, whether in terms of family cohesion or social harmony.

Conclusion

It is clear that preserving national identity is neither a temporary nor a marginal concern; rather, it remains a fundamental and enduring issue on the policy agenda, even as its form and intensity change over time. Individuals now often find themselves navigating between consumerist and Western cultural influences on one side and the expectations of family and society on the other. At the same time, communities face persistent value-based challenges as they work to preserve social cohesion, shared traditions, and cultural heritage while also meeting the demands of economic development and engagement.

These individual and social tensions have rapidly become a national priority—one that guides efforts to safeguard identity and serves as a central reference point for drafting legislation and shaping public policy in both the short and long term.

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