

## Transparency International Anti-Corruption Helpdesk Answer

# An overview of corruption and anti-corruption in Qatar

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While petty corruption in Qatar is not a widespread issue, the country has few checks and balances able to exercise oversight over the country's leadership. Power is heavily concentrated in the emir, and the ruling family has monopolised most important policy areas and posts in the country. At the top, there are few integrity mechanisms to ensure that narrow interests do not drive public policy or exert undue influence over state functions.

In practice, opaque budgeting processes allow state elites free reign to arbitrarily allocate state revenues off the budget, which creates a series of corruption risks. The use of personal, clientelistic networks to obtain rents or contracts from the state is also believed by analysts to be common practice. In addition, despite the fact that Qatar's wealth affords its citizens a relatively high quality of life, they enjoy only limited civic and political rights.

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# Query

Please provide an overview of corruption and anti-corruption in Qatar.

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## Caveat

Where systemic checks and balances in the form of transparent and accountable public institutions are absent, control of corruption is largely dependent on the political will of incumbent leaders. Literature reviews indicate that in environments with restricted civil and political rights such as Qatar, anti-corruption strategies are less sustainable as they are unable to draw on the full range of anti-corruption measures, many of which rely on the participation of non-state actors (Kukutschka 2018). As such, any improvements in reducing corruption in these settings are contingent on the caprice of a few individuals, meaning progress in clamping down on malfeasance is likely to prove fragmentary, short-lived and volatile (Transparency International 2019).

## Background

The State of Qatar is an absolute monarchy ruled by Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani (henceforth Sheikh Tamim) (CIA 2019). In just a few decades, natural resources have transformed Qatar from a

## Main points

- Qatar has comparatively low levels of corruption by regional standards. However, it is far from immune to corruption. Powerful patronage networks rooted in the royal family continue to wield control over state resources with little transparency or accountability.
- In recent years, the government of Qatar has introduced legislation to address many of the previous gaps. For instance, Qatar has taken steps to improve its public procurement practices, its money-laundering framework and has promised to reform the sponsorship system.
- Nonetheless, substantial issues remain. Few steps have been taken to limit discretionary spending, and national integrity systems do not operate independently of political interests.

small state at the periphery of the global marketplace into a wealthy country at the centre of the world economy.

One of the defining features of Qatar's rapid economic, political and societal transformation has been the burgeoning population of guest workers

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from across the globe. In 1950, Qatar was a country of 25,000 people, most of whom were employed in the pearl or fishing industries. Today, it has 300,000 citizens and more than 2.3 million residents.<sup>1</sup>

These socio-economic transformations have been accompanied by political developments. The first ministry in the country, the Ministry of Education, was founded in 1957, and throughout the 1960s Qatar established other government agencies (Tok et al. 2016). It was only in the latter half of the 1960s that the government of Qatar came to develop a comprehensive bureaucratic structure that resembled one seen in most other states (Tok et al. 2016).

The scale of political and social change has not always been straightforward for the country as modernisation has brought sharp contradictions between tradition and modernity to the surface, not least as Qatar has come to wield international influence disproportionate to its size (Tok et al. 2016).

After inheriting power in 2013, Sheikh Tamim has largely continued the policies of his father Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, though with a slightly more conservative emphasis. A key policy goal during both reigns has been diversifying the economy, moving from an almost entirely oil-based economy towards a more knowledge-based one with a larger role for services (BTI 2018; Tok et al. 2016). Despite this objective, Qatar's oil and natural gas still accounts for almost half of GDP and the country is likely to be dependent on this sector for the foreseeable future (CIA 2019).

Qatar is often referred to as a “rentier state” due to its reliance on oil (Tok et al 2016). The term refers to a country in which the government derives its revenues predominantly from the sale of its valuable resources to clients in other countries. Some social scientists argue that, since rentier states are not dependent on tax revenues for their survival, their accountability to their citizens is likely to be limited, which may lead to such countries being more tyrannical or corrupt than other governments (Gray 2018).

Qatar's leaders' international ambitions have led the country to play an increasingly important role in geopolitics in recent years, with Qatar acting as both mediator and as an active participant in a range of conflicts across the Arab world (Kamrava 2011). In addition, the small state, located in one of the Persian Gulf's most strategic areas, houses the largest American military base in the Middle East (Tok et al. 2016).

Given its relatively small size, soft power has become the chief source of Qatari influence (Roberts 2019). Al Jazeera, one of the most influential broadcasters in the Middle East and beyond, has permanently altered the media landscape of the region. In addition to Al Jazeera, Qatar also funds news networks across the region such as the Middle East Eye – an English-speaking website that provides news and analyses on events across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Times of Israel 2019).

Qatar's ambitions have, however, increasingly driven it to clash with other actors in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), who have accused Qatar of a range of misdeeds including terrorist

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<sup>1</sup> According to UN demographic data, available at: <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

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financing. In 2017, a number of regional states, led by the “quartet” (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain), severed diplomatic ties with Qatar, prevented the country from using their airspace and blockaded the country’s only land crossing.

Immediately following the embargo, the quartet presented Qatar with 13 sweeping demands to be met in just 10 days. These included cutting ties with Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, shutting down Al Jazeera and stopping the funding of other news networks such as the Middle East Eye, terminating military cooperation with Turkey and paying reparations for the damages that Qatar had allegedly generated in other countries in the region (Wintour 2017).

Qatar rejected the demands, and the embargo remains in place more than two years later. While the blockade has imposed a significant economic cost on the country, Qatar has managed to weather the storm. According to some observers, the embargo has in fact led to deeper ties with Iran and Turkey, while Al Jazeera continues to function, and relations between the Qatari state and its citizens have strengthened in the face of foreign hostility (Selmi 2019).

The multiple controversies around the decision to award the rights to host the FIFA 2022 World Cup in Qatar is another source of external scrutiny of the Qatari leadership’s probity. In addition to the allegations of bribery in the bidding process that have been all but confirmed (Gibson 2015; Ingle 2019), preparations for the competition have been subject to much criticism by international human rights organisations over the labour standards for the migrant workers, hundreds of whom have died toiling under high temperatures to ensure Qatar’s

infrastructure is ready for the World Cup (Kelly et al. 2019). According to observers, promised labour reforms are inadequate and poorly implemented (Kelly et al. 2019).

## Governance and control of corruption

Qatar is an absolute monarchy with most powers centralised around the Al Thani family. The emir serves as the head of state, the chief of the executive and of the armed forces. He is assisted by the council of ministers (Qatar’s cabinet), where the Al Thani family also controls key posts including prime minister, ministry of foreign affairs and the ministries of economy and interior. The emir has the right to create and ratify legislation, set the agenda for the council of ministers and enjoys a number of discretionary powers (Tok et al. 2016). The council of ministers exercises the right to propose and draft laws and oversee the management of the administration.

The legislative branch of Qatar’s government is the 45-member advisory council (Majlis as-Shura). The advisory council decides the general budget and supports legislation that has been proposed by the council of ministers. Thirty of its members are elected in a secret ballot, while the remaining third are directly appointed by the emir (Shura Council 2019).

There have been plans to hold nationwide democratic elections for the advisory council since 2004, but these elections have continually been postponed. While elections have not yet been held, the emir has created a committee tasked with organising the elections (Reuters 2019a). Nonetheless, the Shura Council currently cannot be said to perform the typical role of a legislative branch in a state with a clear separation of powers

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as it has no effective means of acting as a check on the executive (BTI 2018).

Though the constitution of Qatar guarantees the independence of the country's secular courts, court staffing is mostly determined by the emir. Plus, judicial rulings are invariably in line with the stance of the governing elite (BTI 2018; Freedom House 2019).

Qatar does not have a known opposition (BTI 2018). Independent civil society is virtually non-existent, and most of the country's associations are affiliated with powerful patrons in the government or with the state (BTI 2018). In practice, therefore, the emir and the Al Thani family run Qatar virtually unopposed (BTI 2018). There are nonetheless some consultative mechanisms through which citizens can voice their opinions, most notably the *majlis*, which operate as traditional councils hosted by tribal leaders (Khatib 2014). Policies such as the banning of alcohol in some locations have been implemented at least in part due to demands from conservative parts of society while reforms to labour regulation have been postponed multiple times due to resistance from Qatari businesses (BTI 2018). Due to the existence of these channels, Qatar's political system has been described by some analysts as a "pluralised autocracy" (Tok et al. 2016).

There are a number of factors that increase the risk of corruption in an authoritarian monarchy. These include opacity in government operations and the lack of systemic checks and balances in the form of transparent and accountable public institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> There is an extensive system of cash handouts to citizens, who in addition to a stipend of around US\$7,000 a

Rulers in Qatar have extensive monopolistic and discretionary powers as well as vast access to material resources through oil rents (Kukutschka 2018). However, there have been some efforts to curb corruption over the past 25 years. The bloodless coup that brought Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani to power in 1995 was reportedly motivated at least in part by concerns over governance issues (Khatib 2014).

Following the coup, Hamad bin Khalifa initiated a series of socio-economic reforms aimed at building regime legitimacy among the populace to ensure political stability (Kukutschka 2018; Khatib 2014). First and foremost, these measures aimed to improve the social welfare system, which today is one of the most generous in the world.<sup>2</sup>

While this system, along with efforts to improve administrative efficiencies, is believed to have had some success in terms of reducing petty bribery, Qatar still lacks a number of conventional accountability mechanisms (Gray 2018). This ensures that the control of corruption remains largely dependent on the political will of incumbent leaders, some of whom are reportedly engaged in "rampant" corruption (Khatib 2014).

## Extent of corruption

With a score of 62 out of 100, Qatar is ranked 30 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). This makes Qatar among the best scoring countries in the MENA region, second only to the United Arab Emirates. Since a significant drop in 2015, the country's score has remained relatively stable.

month also have access to free healthcare and education (Kukutschka 2018)

Composite indicator	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Corruption Perceptions Index	71	61	63	62	62

The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) by the World Bank (2019) accord the following scores in percentile rank<sup>3</sup> to the country:

WGI indicator	2015	2016	2017	2018
Control of corruption	78.4	79.8	76.4	77.4
Government effectiveness	77.4	74.5	74.5	74.5
Political stability and absence of violence/terrorism	84.3	76.7	69.5	69.1
Regulatory quality	73.1	74.0	67.8	70.7
Rule of law	76.0	76.9	76.4	75.5
Voice and accountability	16.8	16.3	15.3	14.3

In absolute terms, Qatar's score for control of corruption on a scale of -2.5 to + 2.5 has declined from 0.89 in 2015 to 0.72 in 2018 (World Bank 2019). Equally, the consistently low (and deteriorating) percentile ranks for voice and accountability indicate the highly restrictive environment for independent journalists, opposition figures and critics.

While Qatar performs better than some consolidated democracies on international

corruption indices, if one compares Qatar to other top 20 countries in terms of GDP per capita, Qatar fares rather poorly.

Khatib (2014) emphasises that both the World Bank and Transparency International indices do not fully capture the extent of neopatrimonialism and particularistic forms of governance in the country. Indeed, as described in subsequent sections, while rates of petty corruption are very low, the use of patronage networks and personal connections is common practice to find jobs and obtain public services, licences or permits that would otherwise be out of reach or would take time or effort to secure.

While Khatib (2014) in her study of corruption in Qatar defines the practice as the “particular (non-universal) allocation of public goods due to abuse of influence”, she notes that many Qataris do not consider the use of social connections to access special privileges to be corrupt.

## Forms of corruption

### Neopatrimonialism

The process of reconfiguring networks of tribal authority to facilitate state building was key to the centralisation of political power in Qatar throughout the latter half of the 20th century (Crystal 2016). During this period, a compromise was forged between tribes and the state, according to which the tribes would continue to wield influence and assert their stake over state resources and rents. Such influence is exercised in the form of political appointments and via informal channels of influence (Crystal 2016).

*corresponding to lowest rank, and 100 to highest rank (World Bank 2019).*

<sup>3</sup> Percentile rank indicates the country's rank among all countries covered by the aggregate indicator, with 0

The inclusion of tribal patronage networks has been credited as a central factor contributing to regime resilience in Qatar (Crystal 2016). Indeed, according to the CIA World Factbook, one of the key reasons that Qatar did not witness significant unrest during the 2011 tumult across the region was due to its extensive patronage network (CIA 2019).

At the same time, this tacit agreement has also allowed informal networks to permeate state institutions (Gray 2018). In fact, regime resilience is possible chiefly because these patron-client networks are strong enough to keep elites sated and society well-serviced. Gray (2018) posits that Qatar simply generates so much rent from natural resources that it can purchase the quiescence of all sectors of society, even though it distributes rents unevenly. Rents are sufficiently large and stable enough to keep salaries high, which reduces incentives for petty corruption (Gray 2018).

Paradoxically, therefore, Qatar's political economy and resource wealth has both nurtured neo-patrimonial systems of governance while simultaneously reducing incentives for petty bribery (Khatib 2014; Gray 2018). While well-connected clients are able to leverage their network to obtain special privileges, wealth is still extensive enough to benefit all Qatari citizens, though this rarely trickles down to resident foreign workers (Gray 2018).

## *Wasta*

The practice of *wasta* can be defined as “the intervention of a patron in favour of a client in an attempt to obtain privileges or resources through a third party” (Mohamed and Mohamad 2011). As in

other countries across the Middle East and North Africa, the use of *wasta* can be instrumental in securing access to privileges, ensuring permits or winning contracts (Gray 2018, see also Global Corruption Barometer 2019).

Combined with limited budgeting accountability and opportunities for discretionary spending, *wasta* is often associated with embezzlement and the diversion of public funds, and can be a major factor in deciding institutional outcomes (Gray 2018).

The fact that the Al Thani family and a set of tribal allies and clients control many of the state's political and economic decisions significantly expands the scope for corruption in the country by allowing well-connected individuals to act as powerful brokers to key decision-makers (Gray 2018).

## Grand and political corruption

It is believed to be fairly common for high-ranking Qatari officials to have private financial interests related to various commercial activities (BTI 2018). The Al Thani family, for instance, have extensive business ties and is engaged in a range of ventures (Khatib 2014).

The royal family also wields extensive influence over the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), a sovereign wealth fund chaired by Sheikh Temim (Khatib 2014). It is not clear whether the private investments of the royal family are made under the umbrella of the QIA, but in any case the authority does not operate independently of the personal interests of Qatar's political elites (Khatib 2014).

Mediators and local fixers are reportedly important for foreign firms looking to invest in the country or gain access to Qatari markets. These brokers are

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typically well-networked individuals in the royal family (Kukutschka 2018).

Recent years have seen a number of scandals in the small country, illustrating the close intersection between political and economic interests. In 2018, for instance, a French magazine exposed a significant amount of unexplained wealth held by Qatar's attorney general, Ali Bin Fetais Al Marri, who also serves as the chair of the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption Center. Al Marri owns a series of luxury estates in Paris, Geneva and other places in Europe that cannot be explained by his official salary (Gulf News 2018).

In addition, two individuals working for the Qatar Foundation, the largest non-profit association in the country, have been sentenced by Qatari courts for extracting bribes from an insurance company in exchange for renewing contracts with the foundation (BTI 2018).

## Sectors vulnerable to corruption

### Public financial management

Public financial management has long been a complicated issue in Qatar. Embezzlement and misallocation of state revenue used to be a chronic problem; in 1970, an astonishing 33 per cent of Qatar's entire budget was allocated to the different members of the royal family (Kukutschka 2018). While that figure is reportedly much lower today, it is difficult to ascertain accurately as the Qatari budgeting process is completely opaque. In the

Open Budget Index (International Budget Partnership 2017a)<sup>4</sup>, Qatar ranks as the least open country in terms of budget transparency in the world, together with Somalia, Venezuela, Niger, Equatorial Guinea and Yemen, all of whom score 0 out 100.

There is evidence to believe that a significant amount of oil revenues are not declared and are channelled into private hands or used to finance secretive government transactions (Al Shebabi 2017). This off-budget spending is believed to consist primarily of transfers to foreign actors, military spending and allocations to royal and tribal families (Al Shebabi 2017).

Not all members of the Shura Council are entitled to inspect the detailed state budget (Al Shebabi 2017). Only the ministerial council is entitled to see the numbers for royal stipends and certain forms of military spending (Al Shebabi 2017).

While Qatar does have a national audit institution, the State Audit Bureau, this offers only limited transparency to the public and cannot be considered politically dependent (Al Shebabi 2017). The Open Budget Survey's country paper on Qatar finds that there is virtually no oversight of the budget in the country, and the State Audit Bureau has not published any fiscal or audit reports (International Budget Partnership 2017b).

Exactly how much of Qatar's oil revenues is not declared is unknown. However, somewhat dated numbers show that the Institute of International Finance's (IIF) figures for Qatari oil and gas

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<sup>4</sup> "Launched in 2006, the Open Budget Survey (OBS) is the world's only independent, comparative assessment of the three pillars of public budget accountability: transparency, oversight and public participation. The sixth round of this

biennial assessment, the 2017 survey evaluated 115 countries across six continents, adding 13 new countries to the survey since the last round in 2015." (Open Budget Index 2017)

exports are much higher than its declared revenues. In 2011, for instance, the IIF estimated that Qatari oil exports stood at US\$108 billion, whereas the officially declared revenues were US\$42.1 billion (Al Shebabi 2017). Previous years show a similar tendency. Indeed, while these figures may be somewhat inaccurate, they can be seen as an indication of the large gap between declared and real revenue.

## Procurement

In the past, Qatar has been criticised for applying public procurement regulations in an inconsistent manner, partly due to an inadequate legal framework. The previous tendering law (Law 26 of 2005, articles 6 and 7) left considerable loopholes for procuring agencies to avoid competitive tendering processes. For instance, there was no need for an open competition where a case was deemed to be “urgent” or where a direct agreement between the procurement committee and the supplier existed. In practice, this led to the extensive use of *wasta* to rig tenders to ensure that personal relationships and networks trumped proper procedure (Khatib 2014).

There were limited ways for unsuccessful bidders to dispute or complain about a lost tender, even in instances where there were clear indications that the process was not conducted fairly (Khatib 2014). Foreign companies in particular are known to complain about the lack of justification where they are disqualified from a procurement processes (GAN Business Anti-Corruption Portal 2016).

To account for these shortcomings, Qatar introduced the Regulations of Tenders and Auctions Law in 2015 (State of Qatar 2015). This was intended to address some of the concerns

over *wasta* by allowing each government entity to form its own tendering committees and abolishing the Central Tendering Committee.

According to some observers, the new law should reduce corruption risks as decentralised tender committees are believed to be more knowledgeable about the technical qualities of the different bids (GAN Business Anti-Corruption Portal 2016). Despite this, there is still a moderate risk of corruption for companies engaging in public procurement processes in Qatar (GAN Business Anti-Corruption Portal 2016).

## Checkbook diplomacy and terrorist financing

Since the advent of oil, the rich GCC states have used their vast wealth to spread their influence across much of the world as part of what is often referred to as checkbook diplomacy. These fund transfers can be channelled in many ways, for instance, through the national development agency, though as noted above, a significant amount of the discretionary spending to advance foreign policy objectives is off-budget and is not accounted for (Al Shebabi 2017).

While not assessed as a high-risk jurisdiction with strategic deficiencies by the Financial Action Task Force, the country still faces some significant issues, particularly with regards to terrorist financing (MENAFATF 2008). The politicisation of these concerns has been a central element in the GCC split that led to the current embargo of Qatar.

Qatar has been accused of sponsoring Jabhat Al-Nusra as well as the broader Al Qaeda network, and various lesser known militias operating in the conflicts in Libya and Syria (see Reuters 2017; Al

Shebabi 2017). In addition, Qatar reportedly supports a range of hardline Islamists in Tunisia, Algeria, Mali and Afghanistan (Roberts 2019). Qatar has been a particularly avid sponsor of the deposed Muslim Brotherhood of President Mohamed Morsi, supporting his regime with US\$7.5 billion (Al Shebabi 2017).

A 2018 study on the political economy of Gulf investments in the Horn of Africa describes how Qatar's sovereign wealth fund was used to directly support incumbents in the Somali elections, and, in general, much Gulf investment in the region seems driven largely by geostrategic objectives (Meester et al. 2018).

In addition, large charities such as the Sheikh Eid Bin Mohammad Al Thani Charitable Foundation and Qatar Charity are of concern to some observers (Shideler, Froehlke and Fischer 2017). These organisations conduct humanitarian work in areas controlled by violent extremist groups and there are claims that these two charities have supported terrorist organisations under the guise of humanitarianism, claims that Qatar rejects (Shideler, Froehlke and Fischer 2017; Gartenstein-Ross and Zelin 2013; Al Jazeera 2017).

In 2019, Qatar introduced new anti-money laundering and terrorist financing laws to tackle some of the outstanding gaps highlighted in the 2010 FATF Mutual Evaluation Report (Reuters 2019b). The new legislation sets out regulations that require charities and financial institutions to cooperate with Qatar's Central Bank on anti-money laundering and terrorist financing issues. These measures, which were accompanied by a memorandum of understanding with the United States, are also intended to strengthen international cooperation and the sharing of

financial information with foreign countries (The Peninsula Qatar 2019).

## Security sector

Qatar's defence sector is at "critical" risk of corruption, according to Transparency International's Government Defence Integrity Index (TI Security and Defence 2019). There is little oversight of Qatar's large defence budget and correspondingly little accountability (Al Shebabi 2017). The highest risk areas within Qatar's defence sector are judged to be within procurement as well as the policy sphere and financial environment (asset disposal, links to business, secret budgets) (TI Security and Defence 2019).

Procurement decisions in the defence sector are heavily influenced by powerful individuals, while procurement decisions are almost never subject to a competitive tendering process (TI Security and Defence 2019). Many high-ranking officials, including the defence minister, have conflicts of interests as they act as key players in key arms consortia and are heavily influential in the state's procurement decisions (TI Security and Defence 2019). Al Attiyah Group, Qatar's largest conglomerate active across several sectors, has close ties with the defence ministry (TI Security and Defence 2019). Military procurement is highly secretive and decisions and data on purchases are rarely shared with the state auditor (TI Security and Defence 2019). TI Security and Defence has not been able to find any evidence of internal auditing either (TI Security and Defence 2019).

Finally, there is little public discussion around defence and foreign policy in Qatar, and the

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legislative has no real say in defence decisions (TI Security and Defence 2019).

## Construction

The successful bid for the World Cup in 2022 has brought with it US\$220 billion worth of investments in infrastructure, predominantly in Doha (Tok et al. 2016). The preparations for the World Cup have magnified concerns among labour and human rights defenders about the potential for corruption created by the system of sponsorship (*kafala*) employed in Qatar, whereby the legal status of a worker depends on the employer (BTI 2018; Freedom House 2019). The system permits employers the opportunity to confiscate passports and deny workers the right to exit the country or leave their job.

*Kafala* is believed to contribute to a culture of corruption as rules can change instantly and unscrupulous managers can use a number of ploys to extort as much money and value from migrant workers (James 2015). Contracts are often subject to sudden and unlawful changes<sup>5</sup> that leave migrant workers vulnerable to deductions in salary (James 2015).

Additional fees can be demanded by middle managers or HR staff who demand facilitation payments to allow paperwork to proceed (James 2015). Workers who protest are often taken by the police and extorted for the money (James). There are numerous cases where contracts have expired but workers are coerced to keep working to pay off the “debt” they have incurred for various reasons such as travel expenses that were supposed to be

covered by the employer (James 2015; Amnesty International 2019). Such unpaid labour after the contract period has run out has, in many cases, gone on for months (Amnesty International 2019).

There have been some modest reforms in the residency policies of Qatar, though other government attempts to overhaul the *kafala* system have met with fierce resistance from Qatari businesses (BTI 2018). Nonetheless, in 2019 Qatar promised to attempt reforms of the *kafala* system to end the abuse and corruption that currently characterises the labour market of Qatar’s construction sector (Conn 2019). The new laws, if implemented, will allow workers to change jobs and leave Qatar without seeking a certificate from employers. In addition, Qatar will institute a minimum wage (Conn 2019; UN News 2019).

## World Cup 2022

Qatar’s bid for the 2022 FIFA World Cup has been plagued by irregularities and claims of corruption both at senior levels of FIFA and Qatar. Indeed, it was the decision to award the competition to Qatar that set in motion investigations into FIFA that have become one of the largest event scandals in sport (Gibson 2015). Various allegations have painted a picture of an outright “machine” of corruption that was in operation to ensure Qatar’s bid won (Gibson 2015).

During the last couple of years, a number of leaks have exposed the level of corruption involved in the nomination process, particularly at FIFA’s executive committee. By 2015, the vast majority of the executive committee that helped ensure

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<sup>5</sup> These include the sudden removal of reimbursement of travel expenses or health insurance as well as incurring exorbitant “security costs” that were not previously agreed.

Qatar's successful bid have been suspended due to corruption or complicity in Qatari bribery (RTE 2015).

## Anti-corruption framework

Qatar ratified the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2007, and, in 2010, Qatar signed the Arab Convention to Fight Corruption. As such, Qatar has formally committed to counter bribery, money laundering, embezzlement, abuse of office and other forms of corruption, such as obstruction of justice, and to establish specialised institutions to enhance corruption prevention.

In the years following Qatar's accession into UNCAC, it has taken a number of steps to meet its commitments, particularly through strengthening its institutional anti-corruption framework.

### Institutional anti-corruption framework

#### **The Administrative Control and Transparency Authority (ACTA)**

(<https://www.acta.gov.qa/>)

ACTA was founded by the emir in 2015. ACTA's mission is to advocate for integrity and transparency across Qatar's public institutions and contribute to the prevention of corruption. It is mandated to develop and oversee the implementation of Qatar's national strategy for preventing corruption. As such, it is also responsible for implementing the principles of UNCAC and other relevant conventions such as the Arab Anti-Corruption Convention.

ACTA can review and propose legislation and internal integrity systems in various public bodies across Qatar. It also undertakes a range of educational and capacity building activities for anti-

corruption purposes. Moreover, ACTA receives and helps verify complaints of corruption that concern ministries and public administrations in Qatar.

#### **The State Audit Bureau**

(<https://sab.gov.qa/en>)

The State Audit Bureau functions as the supreme audit institution of Qatar. Originally founded in 1973, it was strengthened in 2016 and is now more financially and politically independent than previously. Nonetheless, while the bureau stresses its administrative independence, its current head, Sheikh Bandar bin Mohammed Al Thani, was appointed by the emir and is a member of the Al Thani family. Moreover it rarely publishes findings or audit reports (Khatib 2014). While it does not appear to lack capacity, in practice it is difficult to find substantive evidence that it operates independently of the ruling elite.

#### **The Qatar Financial Information Unit**

(<http://www.qfiu.gov.qa/>)

The Qatar Financial Information Unit is the financial intelligence unit (FIU) of Qatar, mandated to collect and analyse money laundering and/or terrorist financing transactions. It can issue directives and guidelines for financial institutions and charities and request information from relevant bodies. It works closely with law enforcement and prosecutors. Qatar's FIU is a member of the Egmont Group and FATF.

#### **The Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption Centre**

(<https://www.rolacc.ch/>)

ROLACC is an international anti-corruption think tank with headquarters in Doha and Geneva. Originally founded in Qatar by Emir Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, ROLACC implements training

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courses and conducts research on corruption issues in cooperation with the University of Sussex. It also helps various private sector companies and state-owned enterprises to implement anti-corruption systems.

ROLACC has been embroiled in significant controversy due to highly irregular practices. The most significant case is that of self-enrichment by the head of ROLACC, Mr Marri, who personally owns ROLACC's office buildings in Geneva as well as a series of luxury estates in Switzerland and France (Gulf News 2018). ROLACC also stands accused of attempting to bribe individuals from other anti-corruption agencies, including the head of France's FIU who declined luxury watches from ROLACC (Davies 2018).

According to Petite (2017), ROLACC has largely ignored corruption allegations levelled at Qatari officials, and critics have argued that it may be little more than a means for Qatar to whitewash its own reputation.

## Other stakeholders

### Civil society

Citizens and residents in Qatar enjoy limited civil liberties. Qatar is ranked "not free" by Freedom House (2019) with a score of 25/100. The government of Qatar does not allow the formation of independent political parties, and in the municipal elections only independent individuals are allowed to run (Freedom House 2019). There are no known Qatari human rights or anti-corruption NGOs operating independently of the state (Freedom House 2019). Organisations who advocate for increased rights in Qatar (such as the

Gulf Centre for Human Rights) are generally based outside of the Gulf region.

The right to organise for women, minorities, non-Islamic religious associations, labour unions and other groups are heavily restricted (Freedom House 2019). Freedom of expression is also limited and residents, and citizens in Qatar face penalties for expressing sensitive opinions in public spaces or on social media.

Nonetheless, since the 2017 embargo, Qatari citizens have been observed as becoming more engaged in political discussions and public debate and is judged by Freedom House (2019) to have become a bit more open.

### Media

The space for media to engage in critical discussion and to expose corruption is heavily restricted in Qatar. While no journalists have been killed in the country in the last two decades (Committee to Protect Journalists 2019), Qatar ranks 128 out of 180 countries on the 2019 Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index. Qatar's position on the index has fallen in recent years, in particular due to the controversial 2014 Cybercrimes Law that criminalised news that is either "false" or could upset the "general order" (Freedom House 2019; Reporters Without Borders 2019).

State censorship is widely applied, and the state has, in the past, shut down media outlets. Reporting on the royal family remains risky and is virtually never done (Reporters Without Border 2019). In 2016, Doha News, an English-speaking news website, lost its permit to act as a news source (Freedom House 2019).

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There are no fully independent media outlets inside Qatar. Though Al Jazeera is privately owned, it receives support from the Qatari government and is subject to the same censorship criteria as all other outlets (Freedom House 2019). Indeed, while Al Jazeera continues to cover events across the MENA region, it often ignores or trivialises issues inside of Qatar (Reporters Without Borders 2019).

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