

# A Critical evaluation of the impacts of “Wasta” on employees and organizations in Qatar

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## ABSTRACT

Wasta is an Arabic word (واسطة), with a similar meaning to nepotism in English, which means using someone’s connections or influence to achieve multiple benefits, for example securing a job, speeding up access to government services, gaining exemption from taxes, pushing for fees reduction, favoring transfers and promotions of public servants, and even waiving of traffic fines. It has become deeply rooted in the Middle East culture, especially in Qatar. This study argues that wasta has become a cultural paradox that intersects with classes as a social construction, reinforcing racism, class privilege, and social inequalities among employees in Qatar. This paper is critical as it addresses this threatening issue that has severe consequences on the country’s progress, highlights its root cause, and examines the impact of this social phenomenon. This paper is the first step forward to face the wasta phenomenon in Qatar.

**Keywords:** Wasta, corruption, Qatar, discrimination, social inequalities, employees, development

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Wasta is a well-known Arabic word (واسطة), meaning “nepotism” in English, which is ingrained in the culture of the Middle East. It has been the de facto way of using someone’s connections or influence to get things done for decades, for example securing a job, getting a quick service in a government office, such as fast renewal of a passport, and even waiving of traffic fines. Another definition of Wasta is “an implicit social contract, typically within a tribal group, which obliges those within the group to provide assistance (favorable treatment) to others within the group. Members of the group have a largely unqualified obligation to provide assistance when asked, and those who ask for assistance have no obligation to provide direct compensation for assistance provided”.<sup>1</sup>

According to the aforementioned definitions, wasta is related to connections and favoritism. This research examines the historical evolution of wasta and how it has become a corrupt act. Wasta was a known practice in the past for resolving tribal disputes or conflicts.<sup>2</sup> It served as an important component of the social system used in a positive way in Arab society for helping relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

However, with the development of the state and the emergence of the concept of government, the concept of wasta has also shifted from a positive practice to a negative practice. In the contemporary society, wasta constitutes an encroachment on the rights of others and the rights of the state, for example, by becoming a part of administrative corruption to obtain services from the government or being considered as corruption when individuals are promoted to positions of power or new jobs or accepted in a university because of their tribal or social ties, despite their weak technical and educational qualifications.

1 Andy Barnett, Bruce Yandle & George Naufal, *Regulation, trust, and cronyism in Middle Eastern societies: The simple economics of “wasta”*, 44 *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 41–46 (2013).

Wasta is a social phenomenon in most societies, which proportionally varies between developed and developing societies. The problem lies in the Arab perspective of viewing wasta as a useful tool rather than a corrupt act, which John Hooker (as cited in Oksana Tashakova) attributes to cultural differences; in other words, what is considered to be corruption in one country may be considered useful in another.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, this cultural perception is still prevalent in Qatari modern society. A study conducted by Buttorff and Welborne showed that wasta has become an important factor to gain job opportunities and to survive in job environments in Qatar. Moreover, a Qatari female participant added that “You need education, experience and skills, but they do not guarantee you a good position: you also need advocates!”<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, in Qatar, wasta has become an effective means of obtaining multiple benefits, such as easy access to government services, exemption from taxes or fees, admission acceptance to a public university, or transfers and promotions of public servants. All these practices have negative effects on government performance, community values, organizational justice, and the quality of public or educational services.

Therefore, this research used a mixed methodology of both qualitative and quantitative methods, to present a more in-depth analysis of how wasta had an impact on Qatari employees and organizations. For this purpose, we interviewed eight experienced people holding key positions in both private and public Qatari institutions.

In addition, we analyzed five cartoons published recently in two leading Qatari newspapers: Al-Raya and Al-Watan. These cartoons were created by two prominent Qatari artists: Mohammed Abdullatif, a caricature painter for Al-Raya, who is seen as a prominent public figure because of his outspoken drawings and whose Twitter account is followed by 137,000 individuals, and Saad Al Mohannadi, a caricature painter for Al-Watan, who is also considered a prominent figure in social media and is followed by 22,000 Twitter users.

Moreover, this study used a survey conducted by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute in Qatar, in order to examine the influence of wasta on employees and organizations. Based on these analyses as well as academic literature, government reports, and books, the results showed that wasta influences employees' performance and found a relationship between wasta and psychological stress that causes discrimination and social inequalities among Qatari employees. This research first explains the construction of Qatari society, and then explains how wasta became a social constructive norm among Qataris. Furthermore, it examines the impacts of wasta on employees and organizations in Qatar. Finally, it argues that wasta has become a cultural paradox that intersects with classes as a social construction that reinforces discrimination and social inequalities.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last few years, scholars have presented and discussed wasta several times in the academic literature from different points of view due to its different concepts and cultures. In addition, numerous studies have focused on this social issue to examine the different aspects of wasta, such as the types of wasta, its meaning, its connection to corruption, and its impact on development. However, they have not addressed the connection between wasta and racial discrimination and how it creates social inequalities. Therefore, these aspects are explored and discussed in this study.

First of all, the subject of wasta has become controversial and attracted the focus of many Western scholars. Many works in the literature have tried to explain the reasons that have driven Western scholars towards wasta and why they have addressed this in their studies. For example, in his study, Doughan argues that it is the causes and consequences of the Arab Spring from 2011 to 2012 that have attracted the attention of the West. Many Arab activists opposed wasta as one of the forms of social injustice as well as corruption.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Weir et al. argue that it is the attacks of September 11, 2001 that has increased the West's interest in studying the issue of wasta. This had led to their increased focus on geopolitical issues and support for the “War on Terror”, however, this did not prevent Western scholars from realizing the importance of the Arab economic world and the investment opportunities it offered to Western interests.<sup>6</sup> Both of the arguments are convincing and fairly correct, although the Middle East and its corruption issues have always been the focus of the West, not only because of the events of September 11 or the Arab Spring. In fact, the reason for the modernity of wasta studies on the Middle East is that the literature that deals with the corruption issues is relatively new. In addition, since the inception of the subject of corruption in the literature in the early 1990s, it has become one of the most researched and discussed topics.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the subject of wasta as a form of corruption has become the focus of many scholars, both in the West and the Middle East.

### 2.1. The Definition of Wasta

As some people view wasta as a form of corruption, a couple of questions arise: what exactly does the word wasta mean? And how has it evolved to become one of the forms of corruption? There has been an intense debate about the definition of wasta, where many researchers have defined it according to their academic and personal backgrounds. Makhoul and Harrison simplified the meaning of wasta as an Arabic word exclusive to Arab countries, which can be translated into English as “network”.<sup>8</sup> However, wasta cannot be so easily simplified, because it is a very complex term with different meanings and forms. According to the paper, entitled “Wasta: The Hidden Force in Middle Eastern Society”, by Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993), wasta can be divided into two different forms, either “mediation” or

2 Oksana Tashakova, *Nepotism versus wasta in business globalisation*, Khaleej Times, 2015, at 1, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/business/nepotism-versus-wasta-in-business-globalisation> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

3 Oksana Tashakova, *Nepotism versus wasta in business globalisation*, Khaleej Times, 2015, at 2, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/business/nepotism-versus-wasta-in-business-globalisation> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

4 Gail Buttorff & Bozena Welborne, *Working Those Connections: Exploring Arab Women's Differential Access to Opportunity in the Middle East and North Africa* 4–5 (2015), <http://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/women-and-wasta-clout-mideast/> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

5 Yazan Doughan, *Corruption in the Middle East and the Limits of Conventional Approaches* 2 (5 ed. 2017), <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/53438> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

6 David Weir, Nabil Sultan & Sylvia Bunt, *Wasta: A Scourge or a Useful Management and Business Practice?*, in *The Political Economy of Wasta: Use and Abuse of Social Capital Networking* 21 (Mohamed Ramady 1 ed. 2016).

7 Vito Tanzi, *Corruption Around the World: Causes, Consequences, Scope, and Cures*, 45 SSRN Electronic Journal 560 (1998).

8 Jihad Makhoul & Lindsey Harrison, *Intercossory wasta and village development in Lebanon*, 26 Pluto 25 (2004).

“intercession”, which represent the person who mediates or intercedes, as well as the act of mediation or intercession.<sup>9</sup> Al-Saleh added a new development to Cunningham and Sarayrah’s differentiation of the two forms of *wasta*: “traditional” *wasta*, which was practiced from 3500 BC to encourage peace and mediate between tribal disputes, and “modern” *wasta*, which has been practiced since the 20th century, whose purpose is to seek advantage and gain illegal benefits.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Al-Saleh, Doughan argues that both forms of *wasta*, the old and the new, are still practiced in the Arab world. He explains that both types have deep roots in tribal chieftainship and have played an important role in organizing relations and running businesses before the establishment of the modern state. Even after the establishment of the state, the first type is still practiced to resolve social conflicts through the leader of the tribe in many Arab societies, whereas “intercessory” *wasta* is less often practiced as a tribal virtue and moral obligation and is more about the instrumental giving of favors in expectation of reciprocation.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2. Is *Wasta* a Form of Corruption?

Several studies have focused only on the “intercessory” form of *wasta* and how it has become a form of corruption. For example, Hutchings and Weir explain that *wasta* is a social network rooted in family relationships, as well as includes influence, the exercise of power, and the sharing of information through social, political, and business networks.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, Loewe et al. define *wasta* as “favoritism”, and its widespread acceptance in Arab countries indicates that “doing things by *wasta*” involves “asking for and/or benefiting from preferential treatment instead of going through official channels”.<sup>13</sup> All of these definitions show that there is a relationship between *wasta* and corruption, in which *wasta* involves asking a relative or friend for private benefits. Similar to the definition of corruption, *wasta* is defined in most of the literature as “the abuse of public office for private benefit”.<sup>14</sup> Jones (2016) reported that a 2015 World Bank declared that *wasta* is a form of corruption, and, in fact, emphasized the criminalization of those who use *wasta* arbitrarily and unfairly to hinder the development and provide poor public services.<sup>15</sup> In addition, modern *wasta* shares many similarities with corruption, in that both follow almost the same procedures. First, Senior explains the definition of corruption and how to determine the act of corruption through five stages, which “[occur] when a corruptor (1) covertly asks (2) a favor to a corrupter or to a nominee to influence (3) action(s) that (4) benefit the corruptor or nominee, and for which the corrupter has (5) authority”.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, *wasta* can be determined through three stages explained by Portes’s theory of social capital in the paper entitled “Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology”. Portes explains the importance

of distinguishing between recipients and donors in terms of exchanges mediated by social capital as follows:

“Important is the distinction between the motivations of recipients and of donors in exchanges mediated by social capital. Recipients desire to gain access to valuable assets is readily understandable. More complex are the motivations of the donors, who are requested to make these assets available without any immediate return. Such motivations are plural and deserve analysis because they are the core processes that the concept of social capital seeks to capture. Thus, a systematic treatment of the concept must distinguish among: (a) the possessors of social capital (those making claims); (b) the sources of social capital (those agreeing to these demands); (c) the resources themselves”.<sup>17</sup>

*Wasta* can be divided into three stages using Portes’s distinction: (a) the possessors of social capital, indicating the people who demand *wasta*; (b) the sources of social capital, indicating those who hold *wasta* (power); (c) the resources themselves, indicating the granted claims. By means of these three stages, *wasta*’s workings can be understood better and show its relationship to corruption. Therefore, *wasta* and corruption are two faces of the same coin, and it is difficult to find a universal definition for both of them due to cultural and perception differences.

## 2.3. *Wasta* in Different Cultures

What is perceived as corruption and *wasta* in one country may be considered a norm in another country. *Wasta* is a well-known practice in the Middle East, but it is not exclusive to this region; norms similar to *wasta* also exist in other cultures. These practices are known in the literature as “social capital”, which can be defined as a “commodity or process by which individuals, communities, and developing nations improve their economic and social positions through the exchanges of knowledge, resources, and assistance”.<sup>18</sup>

This “assistance” can take a wrong direction, such as *wasta*, and become an act of corruption. Many academics have often addressed the subject of social capital by shedding light on norms and practices in different settings, such as *wasta* in the Arab world, *guanxi* in China, and *jeitinho* in Brazil. An important example is the study by Sefiani et al., in which they compared the famous practice of *guanxi* in Chinese society to its Arabic equivalent “*wasta*”, and defined it as a relationship similar to *wasta*, in that both rely on social networks, personal relationships, as well as family and kinship ties. However, they argued that, unlike *wasta*, the use of *guanxi* had declined due to globalization.<sup>19</sup>

Similar to *wasta*, *guanxi* has always been the subject of controversy and debate among researchers, in that some scholars, such as Xin and Pearce (1996), view it as a factor of success for

9 Robert B Cunningham & Yasin K Sarayrah, *Wasta* 29 (1 ed. 1993).

10 Mohammed Al-Saleh, *When Anti-Corruption Initiatives Meet the Culture of Wasta: The Case of Public Sector Reforms in Jordan* (2016).

11 Yazan Doughan, *Corruption in the Middle East and the Limits of Conventional Approaches* 2 (5 ed. 2017), <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/53438> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

12 Kate Hutchings & David Weir, *Guanxi and Wasta: A comparison*, 48 *Thunderbird International Business Review* 143 (2005), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/tie.20090> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

13 Markus Loewe et al., *The Impact of Favouritism on the Business Climate: A Study on Wasta in Jordan* SSRN (2013), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2218821](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2218821) (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

14 Xizi Liu, *A Literature Review on the Definition of Corruption and Factors Affecting the Risk of Corruption*, 04 *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 172 (2016), <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=67745> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

15 Douglas Jones, *Vitamin or poison?: Wasta and politics in Jordan* (2016).

16 Ian Senior, *Corruption – the world’s big C*, SSRN Electronic Journal (2006).

17 Alejandro Portes, *Social Capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology*, 24 *Annual Review of Sociology* 1–24 (1998).

18 Deborah Bailey, *Women and Wasta: The Use of Focus Groups for Understanding Social Capital and Middle Eastern Women*, 17 *The Qualitative Report* 1 (2015).

19 Yassine Sefiani et al., *Performance of SMEs in Tangier: The interface of networking and Wasta*, 13 *EUROMED Journal of Business* 30 (2018).

Chinese economic growth and career progress, while other researchers.<sup>20</sup> Such as Dunfee and Warren (2001), consider guanxi as a form of nepotism and corruption.<sup>21</sup> Another well-known practice always mentioned with *wasta* is that of *jeitinho*, which means “little way out” or “adroitness”, in Brazilian society. This concept refers to a short-term solution to issues. However, its similarity to *wasta* includes different ways of circumventing bureaucratic rules or handling potential difficulties with superiors in a strongly hierarchical context. Furthermore, it often involves conducting work or solving problems through personal contacts such as friends or relatives. Similar to *wasta* and *guanxi*, *jeitinho* is viewed both negatively and positively. The positive way concerns its method of forming close relationships with those who need help, but in the negative sense, it is considered as corruption, because it involves circumventing procedures.<sup>22</sup> As all of these practices share the same qualities, it cannot be said that *wasta* is exclusive to the Arab world. There are many practices in different cultures which resemble *wasta* as a form of corruption. Thus, this proves that *wasta* exists everywhere despite different cultures; however, this calls into question the reason for the existence of *wasta*.

#### 2.4. Why does *wasta* exist?

Globalization is not the only reason for the emergence of *wasta*. In fact, there are many other factors and reasons that led to its emergence as an illegal means to obtain benefits. According to Loewe et al., *wasta* exists due to the lack of awareness. The authors shed light on the practice of *wasta* in Jordan, and through empirical evidence found that even though they were aware of the fact that *wasta* had a negative impact, many Jordanians were unaware that *wasta* was not needed for interactions with the state.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike Loewe et al., Adi points out that *wasta* exists not due to the lack of awareness but rather because of the lack of transparency, accountability, or credibility, which leads to corrupt systems based on *wasta* rather than merit. She adds that Arab societies use *wasta* because of three main factors, namely “social/cultural”, “political”, and “economic”. The first factor, “social/cultural”, indicates that tribes and the family are the most important components in Arab societies, which means cooperation is essential to maintain good relationships. This has made *wasta* take deep root in the norms and values of these societies. The second factor, “political”, works in most Arab countries where political systems are corrupt, particularly where the ruler acts as a patron to provide *wasta* to his clientele in exchange for loyalty and support. The last factor, “economic”, arises from Arab countries that are suffering from high rates of unemployment and poverty, leading the people to use *wasta* to get jobs.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Whitaker argues that Arab societies view *wasta* as a benevolent savior which poor people use as a weapon to pursue fair treatment in the absence of a justice system.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, a 2015 World Bank report on the Middle East and North Africa

(MENA) agrees with the scholars’ theories about *wasta* and its causes, illustrating that:

“Weak accountability as well as low satisfaction with public services negatively affects citizens’ trust in the state. Low trust in public institutions explains in part why citizens seldom engage with the state and service providers through formal channels, relying instead on *wasta*”.<sup>26</sup>

All of these factors facilitate the use of *wasta*; however, previous studies have ignored the major differences between Arab cultures, especially in social and economic terms. For example, Qatar does not suffer from poverty but nevertheless uses *wasta* for reasons that differ from those believed in Egypt, Jordan, and other poor Arab countries. On the contrary, Barnett et al. explain that *wasta* can be viewed as a constructive theory, which describes it as a long-standing social tradition developed in Arab societies as well as a social construct to give better solutions to the social problem of the community than services provided by state institutions.<sup>27</sup>

To summarize, many points can be deduced from previous studies. First, *wasta* is difficult to define in a universally accepted manner, because some view it as a help, while others consider it as corruption. However, in this paper, it will be discussed as a kind of corruption. Second, *wasta* is a social practice that exists in different cultures under different names, and this practice has evolved over time to become a norm whose impacts cannot be ignored. In this study, both the social construct of *wasta* in Qatari society and its impacts on employees and organizations will be carefully discussed. Another important point is that in the previous literature, the emphasis was on the phenomenon of *wasta* in the Middle East as a whole, which was treated as an unchanging element, but, in fact, *wasta* varies from country to country and this study will shed light on this phenomenon in Qatari society.

Finally, there is a lack of studies on the relationship between *wasta* and discrimination and social inequalities. This study argues that *wasta* causes discrimination among employees in Qatari organizations, and this factor is measured by analyzing interviews along with cartoons published in Qatari local newspapers, government reports, and statistics performed by official organizations, academic journals, and books.

### 3. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF WASTA

To explain *wasta* and its impact in Qatar, we must first understand its historical roots and evolution. Many researchers have tried to explain the historical evolution of *wasta* in the Middle East in order to find better explanation of *wasta*, and how it has become a form of corruption. It is very challenging to define or determine the evolution of *wasta*. Unfortunately, there is a lack of literature on the historical evolution of *wasta*, although it has long existed in cultures organized by tribes, such as Jordan and the Gulf countries. This does not mean that *wasta* is non-existent in other Arab countries, but rather that it has a greater influence on tribal

20 Katherine K. Xin & Jone L. Pearce, *Guanxi: Connections As Substitutes for Formal Institutional Support*, 39 *Academy of Management Journal* 1641-1658 (1996).

21 Thomas Dunfee & Danielle Warren, *Is Guanxi Ethical? A Normative Analysis of Doing Business in China*, 32 *Journal of Business Ethics* 191-204 (2001).

22 Peter B Smith et al., *How distinctive are indigenous ways of achieving influence? A comparative study of guanxi, wasta, jeitinho, and “pulling strings”*, 43 *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 139 (2011).

23 Markus Loewe et al., *The Impact of Favouritism on the Business Climate: A Study on Wasta in Jordan* SSRN (2013), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2218821](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2218821) (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

24 Rasha Adi, “Wasta” An Arabic version of Corruption *Academia.edu* (2014), [https://www.academia.edu/8336200/\\_Wasta\\_An\\_Arabic\\_version\\_of\\_Corruption](https://www.academia.edu/8336200/_Wasta_An_Arabic_version_of_Corruption) (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

25 Brian Whitaker, *What’s really wrong with the Middle East* (1 ed. 2011).

26 Hana Bixi, Ellen Lust & Michael Woolcock, *Trust, Voice, and Incentives: Learning from Local Success Stories in Service Delivery in the Middle East and North Africa The Digital Regulation Platform* (2015), <https://digitalregulation.org/wp-content/uploads/Trust-Voice-Incentives-Learning-from-Local-Success-Stories-in-Service-Delivery-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa.pdf> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

27 Andy Barnett, Thomas Yandle & George Sami Naufal, *Regulation, Trust, and Cronyism in Middle Eastern Societies: The Simple Economics of ‘Wasta’*, 44 *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2013).

societies than on other groups. A study conducted by Cunningham and Sarayrah claims that the meaning and use of *wasta* has changed over time from its original conception. The concept of *wasta* has evolved from its original purpose for resolving inter-tribal conflicts to its current perception as a form of corruption.<sup>28</sup> Although the authors tried to explain the history of *wasta* and its origin, they oversimplified the concept and neglected the differences between Arab countries by focusing only on Jordan's tribal system and how *wasta* evolved within that society. Al-Enzi was one of the few scholars who tried to explain the evolution of *wasta* by pointing out that scholars should recognize the different meanings of *wasta*, which varies from culture to culture, and that it evolved over time. She argued that even though *wasta* was a method used in the past to solve conflicts between a family and a tribe by the sheikh (the head of the tribe) who acted as a *waseet* (i.e., "middleman" or "mediator"), *wasta* has developed into a form of corruption, and nowadays *wasta* has become an illegal practice in many countries. In addition, she clarified the evolution of *wasta* by summarizing the differences between the "old" and the "new" *wasta* in three points. First, historically, the motivation for the old *wasta* was respect, whereas the new *wasta* involves illegal gain. Second, the old *wasta* needed a mediator and worked from top to bottom, whereas the new *wasta* works from bottom to top, which means there is no need for the head of the family to play the mediator's role, but involves only a relationship between two persons, in which an individual asks one of his relatives or friends who are in power for an illegal service. Third, "traditionally, few people had *wasta*. Today, its practice has become more common since everyone is believed to have some sort of *wasta*".<sup>29</sup>

However, there are several fallacies in the Al-Enzi study, for example, which claim that traditional *wasta* is no longer practiced in Arab societies. In fact, Qatari society and many other Arab societies still practice traditional *wasta* with mediators, especially in social issues, such as divorce, and inheritance issues. Another fallacy in that study is that the motivation for traditional *wasta* is not only respect, but also the social system that achieves justice between tribe members similar to the rule of law that people should obey and follow.

While Al-Enzi set a point to explain the history of *wasta*, Barnett et al. argued that *wasta* evolved as a means of intercession and has changed its role from helping groups to helping individuals and promoting their interests. They added that the culture of individual benefit led to the development of the concept of *wasta* in Arab societies from its older form to the current form, and raised an interesting theory about the emergence of this culture in Arab societies because of globalization and the pressures of work and competition in these societies.<sup>30</sup> This paper agrees with the authors in this regard, where it can be concluded that the Arab society has become more focused on individuals in the absence of collective interests and roles for the tribe.

#### 4. STRUCTURE OF QATARI SOCIETY

To better understand *wasta* as a norm and an influence in Qatar, we must first briefly address the background of Qatar as a state and a society. First of all, Qatar is an Arab country located in the east of the Arabian Peninsula in southwest Asia overlooking the Arabian Gulf. It shares its land border with Saudi Arabia to the south and a maritime border with the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Following the Ottoman rule, Qatar became a British protectorate in the early 20th century. Sheikh Mohammed bin Thani signed an agreement with British authorities in the Gulf, in which Qatar was recognized as an independent political entity and Britain undertook to protect Qatar from any external aggression. This protectorate lasted until Qatar gained independence in 1971.

Qatar has been ruled by the Al Thani family since the mid-19th century, shortly after returning from the Ashgir province in Najd, what is now the region of Saudi Arabia. The system of government in Qatar is a constitutional hereditary emirate, and the current ruler of the state is Emir Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. Qatar is a high-income country and the world's third largest producer of natural gas and oil reserves. According to the latest statistics released by the Planning and Statistic Authority in 2019, Qatar has a population of about 2.5 million (including Qatari and non-Qatari residents). However, since this study focuses primarily on *wasta* as an Arab cultural phenomenon, it will consider only the Qatari population.

Qatar consists of tribes similar to other Arab countries, including the Gulf countries. In fact, the tribe is considered the most important social structure in the Gulf countries and played in a role similar to that of a modern government before the development of the state, regulating the affairs of the people and considering their cases in matters of dispute.<sup>31</sup> There are many explanations for the meaning of tribalism and the reason why it emerged. Tribalism in the Gulf is best exemplified by the Bedouin, who have long inhabited the region and organized themselves into groups linked by blood ties. The goal of such organizations is to produce and survive. Tribes consist of a hierarchy that begins with the nuclear family followed by the extended family, and these families are conceptualized as part of a lineage following the roots of the genealogy going back four generations.<sup>32</sup> Godelier and Blohm (1973) point out that over the decades the tribalism has been replaced by the state to manage people's affair. Although most of the Arab countries developed their regime to a state system several generations ago, tribalism still exists and their norms and practices are still followed by the majority until the present day.<sup>33</sup>

The same applies to contemporary Qatar, in which the tribe is a social fact with its own customs, practices, and respects. The power of tribes in Qatar can be inferred from Qatar's annual National Day, during which tents are set up for each tribe (e.g., Al-

28 Robert B Cunningham & Yasin K Sarayrah, *Wasta* 209 (1 ed. 1993).

29 Abrar Al-Enzi, *The influence of Wasta on employees and organisations in Kuwait: Exploring the impact on human resource management, knowledge sharing, innovation and organisational commitment* (2017).

30 Andy Barnett, Bruce Yandle & George Naufal, *Regulation, trust, and cronyism in Middle Eastern societies: The simple economics of "wasta"*, 44 *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 8 (2013).

31 A Hadi Alshawi & Andrew Gardner, *Tribalism, Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Qatar*, 8 *Anthropology of the Middle East* 48 (2013), <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/ame/8/2/ameo80204.xml> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

32 A Hadi Alshawi & Andrew Gardner, *Tribalism, Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Qatar*, 8 *Anthropology of the Middle East* 49 (2013), <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/ame/8/2/ameo80204.xml> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

33 Maurice Godelier & R. Blohm, *The Concept of Tribe: Crisis of a Concept or Crisis of the Empirical Foundations of Anthropology?* 21 *Diogenes* 1-25 (1973).

Marra tribe, one of the largest in the country). The tribe has a large tent for all its members and organizes several activities to celebrate the National Day, such as poetry, dance, and patriotic speeches. These tribes express their love and patriotism for the country, and the Emir of Qatar visits each tribe's tent individually as an endorsement of his rule. This way of celebration shows how important the tribe is in Qatar and how it is part of the state's identity.<sup>34</sup>

As mentioned earlier, these tribes have their own practices and norms, with *wasta* being one among them; and through this practice the tribe members help each other. An important study by Alshawi explains the construction of Qatari society and how *wasta* is used. It took two years of observation and surveys to study the nature of tribalism, in which over 800 participants of both genders in age groups between 18 and 25 years took part. Many questions were highlighted in that study, but the most important one was regarding the municipal elections.<sup>35</sup>

For example, subjects were asked about "their vote in the most recent municipal elections" in one of the following terms: "voted for a candidate who was a member of my tribe, voted for a candidate from a different tribe, voted for a candidate who was not associated with any tribe, or did not vote at all". The result of the survey was remarkable: approximately 78.3% of the participants answered that they voted for the candidate who was a member of their own tribe, while only 3% voted for a candidate from a different tribe. Moreover, only 1.8% voted for non-tribal candidates, and 14.1% preferred not to vote.<sup>36</sup>

These findings illustrate how *wasta* plays a crucial role and is part of the culture in Qatar. The candidates were selected not because of their competence but because of their relations and family ties. From the above results, it can be concluded that Qatari society is a tribal society based on customs and traditions, such as *wasta*, despite the development of the State of Qatar. Furthermore, *wasta* is an important element that has the ability to recruit unqualified persons to jobs and regulate many rules in Qatari society.

## 5. DEVELOPMENT OF WASTA AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVE NORM IN QATAR

As discussed earlier, *wasta* is a social norm and widely practiced within the tribal society. But what does the term "social norm" mean, and how has *wasta* become a constructive norm in Qatar? First, Ostrom explains that a "social norm" is the common beliefs and perceptions about actions allowed or prohibited within the society.<sup>37</sup> Fehr and Fischbacher define the term in more detail as standards of behavior that are founded on shared beliefs about how individual group members should behave in a given situation.<sup>38</sup> According to the psychology theory, social norms are

divided into two norms: "injunctive" and "descriptive". "Injunctive" norms are the perceptions of whether a behavior is moral or not, that is, what one "ought to do". In other words, how individuals determine social behavior by what is considered to be acceptable and unacceptable.<sup>39</sup> For example, to explain the injunctive norm better, when someone is driving his car and passes through a school area, this person may slow down, but why? Because this is, what he "should" do when he drives through a school zone. This is referred to as an "injunctive" norm.

Meanwhile, "descriptive" norms are more to do with the individual's perceptions and beliefs about how other people behave or act in different situations. For example, when someone attends a concert and the bands stop playing, the person applauds because this is what everyone else is doing.

Both injunctive and descriptive social norms are acquired through socialization. The maintenance of these norms can be understood through the social learning theory, which explains that human behavior is acquired through observation or modeling.<sup>40</sup>

In this sense, *wasta* can be viewed as a social injunctive norm, where *wasta* in the past was a common moral social practice to solve issues within the group, family, or tribe, but this injunctive norm has evolved into corruption over time. Kobis et al. clarified how injunctive norms functioned in this process of corruption, leading to an understanding of why some types of injunctive norms changed in that way. They summarized the explanation into two of the most essential facets of the evolutionary psychology of injunctive norms connected to corruption, which are "parochial altruism" and "direct reciprocity". Parochial altruism refers to the notion that most of evolutionary moral psychology has developed to allow the cooperation across the lines of family ties, setting the ability to cooperate on a large scale with genetically unrelated individuals. This collaboration enabled humans to live together in complex societies. Reproductive benefits were created during this evolutionary process, favoring those who belong to one's in-group.<sup>41</sup> This explanation can be applied to *wasta*, as injunctive norms developed over time in Qatari society due to parochial altruism, and this ensured cooperation and ties within the tribe, in which the individual became bound to the tribe and practiced *wasta* (in the sense of "nepotism") when a tribe member needed his help.

The second facet is "direct reciprocity", which like parochial altruism encourages cooperation. However, "evolved norms of direct reciprocity, a sort of 'tit for tat', can ensure cooperation both over longer time-spans and in one-time interactions, even with relative strangers".<sup>42</sup> Thus, *wasta* can be understood as a social constructive norm in Qatar through the psychological theory, where it is characterized as an injunctive norm. Injunctive norms usually mean moral norms, but these can change to corruption due to parochial altruism and direct reciprocity. In short, *wasta* was

34 Id. at 55.

35 A Hadi Alshawi & Andrew Gardner, *Tribalism, Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Qatar*, 8 *Anthropology of the Middle East* 53–54 (2013), <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/ame/8/2/ameo80204.xml> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

36 Id.

37 Elinor Ostrom, *Collective Action and the Evolution of Social Norms*, 14 *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 143–144 (2000), <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.14.3.137> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

38 Ernst Fehr & Urs Fischbacher, *Social norms and human cooperation*, 8 *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 185 (2004), <https://www.elsevier.com/en-xm> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

39 Nils Kobis, Christopher Starke & Daniel Carter, *A Social Psychological View on the Social Norms of Corruption*, in *Corruption and Norms* 32 (Ina Kubbe Kubbe & Annika Engelbert 1 ed. 2018), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322026158\\_A\\_Social\\_Psychological\\_View\\_on\\_the\\_Social\\_Norms\\_of\\_Corruption](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322026158_A_Social_Psychological_View_on_the_Social_Norms_of_Corruption) (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

40 Nils Kobis, Christopher Starke & Daniel Carter, *A Social Psychological View on the Social Norms of Corruption*, in *Corruption and Norms* 36 (Ina Kubbe Kubbe & Annika Engelbert 1 ed. 2018), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322026158\\_A\\_Social\\_Psychological\\_View\\_on\\_the\\_Social\\_Norms\\_of\\_Corruption](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322026158_A_Social_Psychological_View_on_the_Social_Norms_of_Corruption) (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

41 Id. at 37.

42 Nils Kobis, Christopher Starke & Daniel Carter, *A Social Psychological View on the Social Norms of Corruption*, in *Corruption and Norms* 38 (Ina Kubbe Kubbe & Annika Engelbert 1 ed. 2018), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322026158\\_A\\_Social\\_Psychological\\_View\\_on\\_the\\_Social\\_Norms\\_of\\_Corruption](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322026158_A_Social_Psychological_View_on_the_Social_Norms_of_Corruption) (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

an injunctive norm to help individuals in Qatari tribes, but it has evolved over time to become a corruption norm.

## 6. REGULATION AGAINST WASTA IN QATAR

As wasta is a kind of corruption, the Qatari government has taken several steps to combat corruption of all kinds, including the practice of wasta in institutions and workplaces. The state's efforts went beyond even that by establishing regulations and laws to reduce the practices of corruption in public and private enterprises. These laws were enacted by the State of Qatar in 2007, which can be summarized in several stages. The first stage can be called the "foundation stage", when Qatar signed the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2007, which provides for the establishment of an independent body.<sup>43</sup> Following that in the same year, the state established the National Committee for Integrity and Transparency, which includes representatives from Qatar Central Bank, the Public Prosecution, the Ministries of Economy, Trade and Foreign Affairs, and Qatar Petroleum.

The second stage took place from 2011 to 2014, for the establishment of independent bodies and institutions, such as the Administrative Control and Transparency Authority, the Rule of Law and the Anti-Corruption Center in partnership with the United Nations. On April 24, 2012, Qatar signed an agreement with the United Nations to activate a Memorandum of Understanding. In 2013, Emiri Decree No. 94 approved the establishment of the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption Center (ROLACC). On September 9 of the same year, Qatar participated in the 52nd session of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization in New Delhi.

Finally, in 2014, Qatar topped the Arab countries and ranked first in the index of perceptions of corruption issued by Transparency International, which includes 68 countries. This led to the third stage involving international participation and efforts to fight corruption. This phase was characterized by Qatar's role at the international level and its international counter-corruption efforts. These international efforts were undertaken by the ROLACC, which has been fighting this phenomenon by observing World Anti-Corruption Day, and launched the Sheikh Tamim Award for Excellence in Fighting Corruption. This award is supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which was inaugurated at the opening session, in a special ceremony held in Vienna, Austria in 2016. This award was presented to people who have contributed to the global campaign against corruption, which also recognizes individuals and institutions who have been dedicated to this field in terms of certain standards and qualities.<sup>44</sup>

In May 2016, the General Assembly of the International Association of Anti-Corruption Bodies, which comprises more than 140 countries, elected Qatar's Attorney General, Dr. Ali Bin Fetais Al Marri as its President. This election proves Qatar's international participation. In addition, Dr. Ali Bin Fetais Al Marri signed a partnership agreement between the United Nations Institute for

Training and Research (UNITAR) and the ROLACC. This agreement aims to make Qatar an anti-corruption training center, providing advanced training to more than 1,200 trainees from all countries.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, part of these efforts is His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of Qatar, who said "we will not tolerate financial and administrative corruption, the use of public office for private purposes, or the abandonment of professional standards for a personal interest"; this was part of the speech to the Shura Council at the opening of the 44th session of the Council.<sup>46</sup> In that speech His Highness addressed the wasta issue and confirmed that it is a serious problem, and that new laws have been added in recent years.

Yusuf Ahmad al-Zaman, lawyer and former vice president of the Court of Appeal, emphasized that members of the Qatari society should work to combat wasta and other aspects of administrative corruption. Al-Zaman explained that the Qatari Penal Code criminalized acts of trafficking in business, particularly the crime of bribery. Qatari law allows for penalties of up to 10 years of imprisonment for administrative corruption cases, not to mention large fines amounting to the full amount received by the employee in bribes, in addition to dismissal from the job.<sup>47</sup> It cannot be denied that the rules and the efforts of the Qatari government against corruption have been somewhat effective; however, the government must adopt alternative strategies to combat the incentives and norms, such as wasta, and address social corruption practices; for example, by examining the laws against corruption in Qatar. As there is no specific law that criminalizes wasta and favoritism, wasta is still practiced largely in Qatari institutions.

In view of the laws mentioned above, Al-Zaman added that in some institutions, people who are not the best secure the job, but wasta and nepotism play a role in the assumption of these functions, which directly affects the benefit of work.<sup>48</sup> Another strategy is public opinion, which plays a key role in addressing corruption cases. Dr. Mohammed Bozber, representative of the General Authority for Combating Corruption in Kuwait, explained at the symposium held in Qatar, which was organized by the Administrative Control Authority, that there is a need to direct public opinion towards issues of integrity and transparency to unite anti-corruption. He added that media is a "fourth authority" with a historical responsibility to fight corruption. Wasta can be seen as an issue that needs to direct public opinion, change people's perceptions about wasta, and limit its use. Further methods should be well thought out by the Qatari government in the independent press.

In the same symposium, the Qatari journalist Abdul Aziz Al-Ishaq clarified that it is very important to direct the media, especially social media, to raise awareness of the dangers of corruption and its forms as well as the ways to combat it.<sup>49</sup> Al-Ishaq made an interesting point about investigative journalism, which is largely absent from Qatar's media. In fact, these kinds of journalism

الميزان | البوابة القانونية القطرية :: اتفاقية الأمم المتحدة لمكافحة الفساد, الميزان | البوابة القانونية القطرية (2022). (<https://www.ameezan.qa/AgreementsPage.>). 43  
aspx?id=1187&language=ar (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

قطر مركز عالمي موثوق لمكافحة الفساد, الرأية (2019). 44

قطر مركز عالمي موثوق لمكافحة الفساد, الرأية (2019). 45

46 Id.

47 Hamd Sulaiman, *Wasta and favoritism are cancer! Reporting irregularities is required*, Alarab, 2015, at 18 <https://www.alarab.qa/content/pdf/11201515300.pdf> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

48 Hamd Sulaiman, *Wasta and favoritism are cancer! Reporting irregularities is required*, Alarab, 2015, at 18 <https://www.alarab.qa/content/pdf/11201515300.pdf> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

49 M Abbas, *Qatar ranks internationally in the fight against corruption*, Raya, 10 (2019), <https://www.raya.com/File/Get/82943734-6eb9-4eb8-9ec4-a747dafobfd#pagemode=thumbs> (last visited Jul 29, 2019).

are responsible for exposing corruption and supporting institutions and organizations that are fair and transparent, which will be an effective tool to fight against *wasta*. In 2017, the OECD conducted a questionnaire survey on the “The Role of the Media and Investigative Journalism in Combating Corruption”, in which 48 countries were covered and 101 individuals answered the questionnaire. When asked about “how important do you consider a constructive relationship between law enforcement and the media in achieving justice in corruption cases?”, 59% answered that it was “very important”, while 10% answered “not very important”.<sup>50</sup> This number shows how justice can be achieved through independent journalism and its importance in reporting corruption acts.

Another question that was asked to the participants was “What are your first sources of information when reporting on corruption?” 35% of participants replied that whistleblowers will be their choice.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, the whistleblower culture is missing in the Qatari society. Because Qatar is a tribal society, the culture of whistleblowers is seen as a form of betrayal against the tribe. However, this whistleblower culture can be a very useful tool to combat *wasta* in Qatari society. Consequently, many laws and efforts have been made by the State of Qatar in the fight against corruption, but these efforts are not effective on the subject of *wasta*. Therefore, the government should develop laws that address this custom. Furthermore, many effective methods such as public opinion orientation and investigative journalism can be used, and the most important method is to promote a whistleblower culture.

## 7. IMPACT OF WASTA ON EMPLOYEES AND ORGANIZATIONS

This section analyzes the impact of *wasta* on employees and organizations in Qatar, which is the most important topic in this study. This topic is divided into two sections. The first section presents the qualitative results and the examination of exploratory interviews with eight people, who hold important positions and have at least four years of work experience in Qatari private and public companies. In the private sector, we interviewed employees from Qatar Petroleum, Qatar Gas, Shafallah Center for Persons with Disabilities, and Al Noor Institute for the Blind. In the public sector, we interviewed employees from the Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Municipality and Environment, and the Ministry of Justice. The second section illustrates the cartoons that were published in two dominant newspapers in Qatar, namely Al-Raya and Al-Watan. These cartoons were drawn by two public figures, Mohammed Abdullatif and Saad Al Mohannadi.

In addition to these interviews and cartoons analyses, the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) in Qatar conducted an analysis of academic articles, government reports, books, newspaper articles, and surveys. In fact, combining both

qualitative and quantitative methods is important for in-depth analysis, as well as results in pragmatic research that offers many advantages to this study, in that qualitative research informs the quantitative portion of research studies and vice versa.

For example, the inclusion of quantitative data can help compensate for the fact that qualitative data typically cannot be generalized. Furthermore, the inclusion of qualitative data can help explain relationships discovered by quantitative data.<sup>52</sup>

The *wasta* issue in Qatar has become a threat to the extinction of talents and competencies. There is a network of complex relationships that pay the unworthy at the expense of others, and efficiency and social justice have become obsolete concepts that do not currently fit the law on *wasta*.

Dr. Al Ansari, Professor of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University, argues that unlike bribery, which is a criminal offense in which a payment is made for this offense or for refraining from a job required by a duty, *wasta* is a social bribery, although it is not criminalized because it is paid for nothing. He adds that *wasta* has disastrous consequences, especially for young people in Qatar, who become desperate and indignant at the community when they see those who are less efficient getting opportunities and positions without right.<sup>53</sup> Bodomi states that, despite a strong control system and strict laws to combat all manifestations of the abuse of power and profit-making at the expense of the job, the *wasta* phenomenon is still the back door to administrative corruption, which wastes the principle of equal opportunities.<sup>54</sup>

The aforementioned issues are some of the consequences of *wasta* in Qatari society; however, in order to measure the real impacts of *wasta*, it is necessary to evaluate the existence of *wasta* and Qatari perceptions about this phenomenon. A well-known survey conducted by the SESRI in 2010 determined and highlighted the changes in Qatari actions and beliefs regarding different aspects, and *wasta* was included in the survey. A total of 1,060 interviews of men and women from 18 years of age and above were conducted to reach a conclusion. One of the most important questions that was asked to the participants was “What helps most to bring success: hard work, or luck and *wasta*?” Overall, 44% of Qataris associated success in life with *wasta* and personal relationships in exchange for hard work, while 59% of Japanese citizens and 63% of Germans saw hard work as the key to real success.<sup>55</sup>

A separate question was asked to the Qataris to determine their level of trust in various categories of people. The results showed that Qatari participants had greater confidence in the people they knew: 91% of the Qatari respondents expressed full confidence in their families, 43% in people they knew personally, 35% in their neighbors, and 8% in other nationalities. Moreover, Qataris were more confident than their Western counterparts such as Germans, Canadians, and Americans.<sup>56</sup>

These numbers determine several facts about Qataris. First of all, almost half of Qataris (44%) believe that *wasta* and luck play

50 *The role of media and investigative journalism in combating corruption*, OECD, Oecd.org 8 (2018), <https://www.oecd.org/corruption/the-role-of-media-and-investigative-journalism-in-combating-corruption.htm> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

51 Id. at 4.

52 Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie & Nancy L. Leech, *On Becoming a Pragmatic Researcher: The Importance of Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methodologies*, 8 International Journal of Social Research Methodology 383 (2005), <https://www.informa.com/> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

53 Ibrahim Badawi, *Wasta is Crime without Punishment*, Raya, 2012, at 20–22, <https://www.raya.com/File/Get/e64db889-5d8d-4e67-aa03-ddaf9f165df9#pagemode=thumbs> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

54 Mustafa Bodomi, *Wasta reveals the corruption of managers*, Raya, 2014, at 1 <https://www.raya.com/File/Get/3e890595-777f-4a0b-b123-a75f220c3c6a#pagemode=thumbs> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

55 Qatar World Values Survey 16 (2014).

56 Id. at 12.



major roles in meeting their needs. This means that *wasta* culture is widespread in Qatari society, which they often use for employment. In fact, we interviewed eight participants in order to know how they were hired. Of these, four participants answered that they were appointed by means of their personal relationships (*wasta*). This confirms the validity of the survey figures, which show that almost half of Qatari people resort to or use *wasta* and not diligence. Moreover, Dr. Moza Al-Malki, a psychotherapist, confirms that the phenomenon of *wasta* has become a prevailing custom, which has led with the usual repetition to reach the stage of conviction and commitment as well as has become the easiest and fastest way to get a job opportunity or to secure the termination of service of interest.<sup>57</sup>

Another fact is trust, in which the survey results show that 91% of Qataris trust their family. This remarkable number demonstrates the importance of family and tribe in Qatari society. This affiliation or confidence leads to the commitment of the individual to the tribe, in which an individual must provide endeavors to the members of his tribe, either by helping them in employment or by voting for tribe members in municipal elections, as explained by the study of Ali Alshawi<sup>58</sup>. Mustafa Bodomi stated that Saud Al-Kuwari says it results from a commitment of the individual to the family or tribe, which is a blatant override and a kind of administrative corruption for managers who distribute jobs to undeserving relatives and acquaintances at the expense of other competent people, leading to a waste of the principle of equal opportunity, a waste of young competencies, and the granting of unqualified functional powers.<sup>59</sup>

Apart from these consequences of *wasta*, it also has an impact on the organizations in Qatar, whether they are public or private. In the interview, we asked the participants the following questions: "Do you think *wasta* impacts organizations in Qatar?" and "Can you please provide any personal experience?" All of the eight participants answered "Yes". To illustrate, a CFO with a broad experience over 22 years, said:

*"Yes, it impacts us negatively if you hired people not qualified for their roles. I faced it many times, and they impact negatively their organizations objectives and employees under them"*

In addition, Saeed Khalil al-Absi, an economic and financial analyst, emphasized the influence of *wasta* on the performance of institutions in Qatar, in which one of the drawbacks is the administrative slack, which means the presence of inflation in the number of employees to perform a particular job. Thus, these employees receive salaries and allowances without making any efforts towards the institution or administration in which they work because they were not selected based on their actual competencies and experience. This phenomenon has high risks to the progress and development of the institution/department or employer in which or for whom they work because any development or progress depends on creativity in work and not on the factors of kinship and personal benefits. Finally, Jamal Lotfi, warns about a waste of economic resources because the payment of salaries and

benefits to those selected by *wasta* leads to high costs, whether for products or services.<sup>60</sup>

*Wasta* not only negatively impacts organizations in Qatar, but can also cause many psychological damages to employees in Qatar. Although there is a lack of literature that discusses the experience of psychological stresses resulting from *wasta*, this is undeniable and these stresses were deduced from interviews. Two questions were asked about the psychological stress due to *wasta*. The first question that was asked to the participants was "Do you think that *wasta* promotes discrimination among employees?" The second question was "Have you ever felt discriminated against due to *wasta* or receiving unfair treatment or evaluation, or getting your promotion delayed because of the lack of *wasta*?" For the first question, all the participants believed that *wasta* creates discrimination in the workplace among employees. Meanwhile, for the second question, four out of the eight participants reported that they suffered from discrimination in the workplace because of *wasta*. An accountant with nine years of experience shared his personal story about *wasta* and said:

*"Yes, I didn't get promoted, and another employee was given the position because of his relationship to the manger, despite the lack of experience and qualifications."*

One participant, who was a public relations expert with 15 years of experience, gave an interesting answer that she never experienced any form of discriminations because she was a favored employee and had a close relationship with a higher administrative member in her organization, unlike her other colleagues who suffered.

In addition, a close analysis was conducted to measure the impacts of *wasta* on employees and organizations in Qatar using newspaper cartoons. Cartoons have always been one of the methods to express public opinion as well as to fight against corruption. They are classified under "political" cartoons, and their symbolic artistic sketches create a witty or humorous point containing comments on social issues, events or personalities, and most of the time combine satire and hyperbole to question authority and social mores. The political cartoon is defined as a "graphic presentation typically designed in a one-panel, non-continuing format to make an independent statement or observation on political events or social policy". In other words, the political cartoon can be used to highlight major social or political issues that society suffers from, thereby reflecting public opinion.<sup>61</sup>

The first cartoon was published in Al-Watan newspaper in 2010 which was drawn by Saad Al Mohannadi, who is one of the most influential figures in Qatari social media. He is specialized in cartooning and design and has worked as a painter since 2007. This cartoon (Figure 1) shows that even with the law regulating additional bonuses in the human resources in Qatari government organizations, there are still employees who do not get these bonuses because they lack *wasta*, which is a discriminatory act.

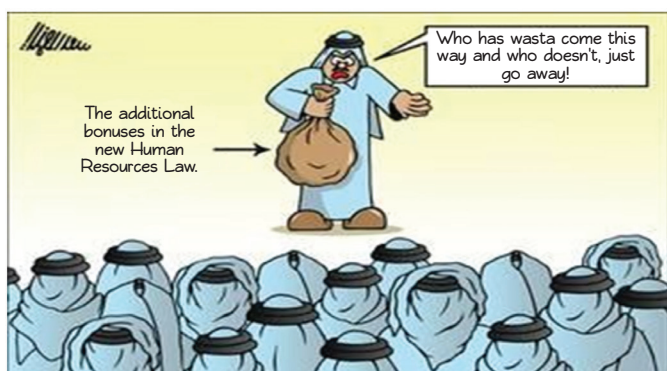
57 Ibrahim Badawi, *Wasta is Crime without Punishment*, Raya, 2012, at 21, <https://www.raya.com/File/Get/e64db889-5d8d-4e67-aa03-ddaf9f165df9#pagemode=thumbs> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

58 A Hadi Alshawi & Andrew Gardner, *Tribalism, Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Qatar*, 8 *Anthropology of the Middle East* 53–54 (2013), <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/ame/8/2/ameo80204.xml> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

59 Mustafa Bodomi, *Wasta reveals the corruption of managers*, Raya, 2014, at 1 <https://www.raya.com/File/Get/3e890595-777f-4a0b-b123-a75f220c3c6a#pagemode=thumbs> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

60 Jamal Lotfi, *Wasta and nepotism negatively impact public and private institutions*, Al-Sharq, 2017, at 1, <https://www.al-sharq.com/article/23/01/2017/> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

61 Samuel Mateus, *Political Cartoons as communicative weapons – the hypothesis of the "Double Standard Thesis" in three Portuguese cartoons*, *Estudos em Comunicação* 197 (2016), <https://publons.com/journal/37854/estudos-em-comunicacao/> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).



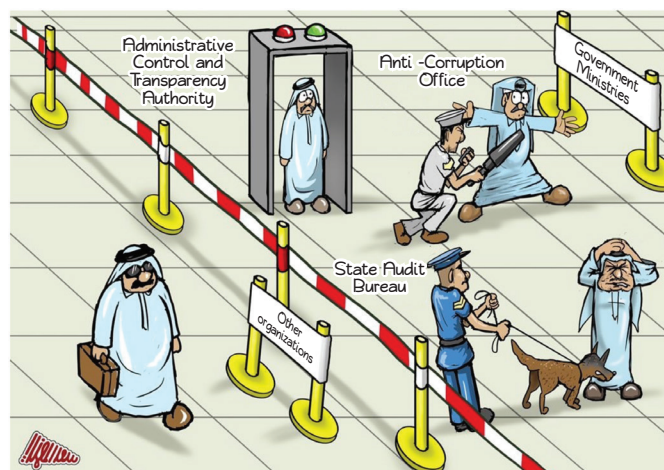
**Figure 1.** Making fun of the new regulations regarding bonuses and how bonuses are distributed based on wasta.<sup>62</sup>

Another cartoon by Al Mohannadi, which was published in 2013, highlights the irony behind the employment system in Qatari organizations and how high positions are usually granted on the basis of wasta and not hard work. The cartoon (Figure 2) shows a conversation between an employee and his manager.



**Figure 2.** Al Mohannadi highlights the irony behind recruitment process in Qatar, and how job positions are awarded by wasta not efficiency.<sup>63</sup>

The cartoon published in the Al-Wattan newspaper in 2017, which was by Al Mohannadi, is a critical one (Figure 3), which mocks the anti-corruption bodies and strategies of Qatar. This cartoon shows that these laws and bodies focus only on the government sector and organizations, neglecting other institutions because they are usually headed by powerful names that have wasta. The right-hand side of the cartoon shows how the anti-corruption bodies investigate and work in the public sector, whereas the left-hand side of the cartoon shows that private organizations can pass by these bodies without anybody questioning them.



**Figure 3.** Mocking the anti-corruption bodies and strategies of Qatar.<sup>64</sup>

Mohammed Abdullatif is another caricaturist who publishes his work in Al-Raya Newspaper. Like Al Muhannadi, Abdullatif is considered an influential public figure in social media, especially Twitter, where he sometimes publishes cartoons. In his cartoons, Abdullatif addresses wasta as one of the social issues. In 2013, he published a cartoon (Figure 4) that made fun of the wasta culture in Qatar in a funny and exaggerated way, showing that a person needs wasta even for ordering a falafel sandwich. Through this exaggeration, we can deduce the strength of the wasta culture, especially in the case of employment at Qatari institutions.



**Figure 4.** Abdullatif makes fun of wasta culture in Qatar in an exaggerated way and how it is rooted in the society and everywhere.<sup>65</sup>

The final cartoon in this paper was also created by Abdullatif, published in Al-Raya in 2012. In this cartoon (Figure 5), he makes fun of the annual Career Fair in Doha, the aim of which is to facilitate the job search process, but wasta plays a big role even in this exhibition. This cartoon shows that everyone is holding their CVs, but one person is holding his wasta embodied in one of his relatives or friends for speeding up the search to ensure employment.

62 Saad Al Mohannadi, *He make fun of the employment system new regulations and bonuses and how it distribute based by wasta* (2010), <https://www.al-watan.com/> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

63 Saad Al Mohannadi, *He highlights the irony behind recruitment process in Qatar, and how position assign by wasta not efficiency* (2013), <https://www.al-watan.com/> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

64 Saad Al Mohannadi, *He mocks from the anti-corruption bodies and strategies of Qatar* (2017), <https://www.al-watan.com/> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

65 Mohammed Abdullatif, *He makes fun of wasta culture in Qatar in exaggerated way and how its rooted in the society and everywhere* (2013), <https://www.raya.com/> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).



**Figure 5.** A cartoon showing how wasta can be used in a career fair instead of experience.<sup>66</sup>

Last but not least, previously, many scholars have argued that wasta is a form of corruption; however, no research has adequately highlighted the relationship between wasta and discrimination. Wasta is a form of discrimination, and to examine this phenomenon from a psychological point view in Qatari society, this study used a theoretical framework supported by both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the engagement of wasta and psychological stress.

Several findings have been inferred from interviews and caricature analysis. The first finding is that due to the wasta phenomenon, the recruitment process in Qatar is not ineffective, resulting in the appointment of inefficient persons in important administrative positions. This process greatly affects the outcomes of institutions in Qatar, whether they are private or public, evidenced by the interviews and analysis of cartoons. It can be observed that organizations are not performing well, because it is not filled on the basis of merit. Poor performance of organizations has a serious impact on the state's development. An important example is the incident that took place in Qatar in 2015 when the state experienced heavy rainfall. These rains exposed the corruption of institutions, for example structural defects appeared in some modern projects, which cost billions of riyals, rainwater leaked from the roofs of the buildings, and the rain flooded many major roads.<sup>67</sup> The reason for these problems was attributed to those who managed these projects, who were appointed via wasta and not through efficiency.

Moreover, wasta has created a new culture within Qatari organizations, which is an unhealthy culture characterized by intrigues.<sup>68</sup> Another finding shows that the culture of tribalism, its customs such as wasta, and the demand of tribesmen to apply wasta for helping each other are rooted in the Qatari society. This

process leads to the psychological frustration of an individual. Psychological pressures also result from this obligation, which the community imposes on the individual who plays the intermediary role and falls between two options, either refuse to perform wasta to anyone and bear the accusations of not serving the people or accept to perform wasta and promote discrimination and social inequalities between citizens.<sup>69</sup> As cited in Mustafa Bodomi (2022), Saad al-Kuwari said that wasta affects hard-working young individuals, who find it difficult to secure jobs, whatever may be their qualifications, thereby leading to widespread youth unemployment in Qatar.<sup>70</sup>

Finally and most importantly, based on the results of the interviews and cartoon analysis, we hypothesize that wasta does promote discrimination and social inequalities among employees, which somewhat impacts knowledge sharing and commitment. In fact, according to Alwerthan, wasta harms both those who use it and those who do not use it; those who do not use it become victims of discrimination, which is consistent with the results of the present study.<sup>71</sup>

There are many consequences of discrimination which Qatari employees experience in their workplace. One of these consequences is the absence of employee motivation in the workplace, which makes employees feel that they are unwanted in the organization. Dr. Batool Mohiuddin Khalifa, Professor of Mental Health at the Faculty of Education, Qatar University, points out that wasta leads employees to lose confidence in social values and ideals, such as diligence, perseverance, sincerity, educational attainment, and self-reliance, which in turn may disrupt productivity in society.<sup>72</sup> Another consequence of discrimination is the absence of job satisfaction, which can be defined as the worker's reactions when he or she has completed the work.<sup>73</sup> This feeling of satisfaction begins to disappear when employees are discriminated because of wasta, which will affect employee's performance and in turn affect the performance of organizations, because employees are the most essential source of benefits to the organizations.

Finally, according to Safina, nepotism or wasta affects the employees' sense of competition for promising projects or senior positions among coworkers.<sup>74</sup> Thus, wasta has become a social norm in Qatar, causing negative effects on both employees and organizations in Qatar.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This study shed light on different aspects of wasta in Qatar. Since wasta is considered to be a sensitive subject in Qatar, it is very difficult to measure its impacts. However, in this paper, we were able to measure a specific part of wasta and the extent of its impact on governmental and non-governmental institutions in

66 Mohammed Abdullatif, *He shows how wasta can be used in career fair instead of experience* (2012), <https://www.raya.com/> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

67 Heba Al-Bayah, *Rain reveals the corruption of new projects*, *Raya*, 2015, at 1 <https://www.raya.com/locals/2015/11/25/الأمطار-تكشف-فساد-المشروعات-الحدیثة> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

68 Dinara Safina, *Favouritism and Nepotism in an Organization: Causes and Effects*, 23 *Procedia Economics and Finance* 633 (2015), <https://www.elsevier.com/en-xm> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

69 Ibrahim Badawi, *Wasta is Crime without Punishment*, *Raya*, 2012, at 20, <https://www.raya.com/File/Get/e64db889-5d8d-4e67-aa03-ddaf9f165df9#pagemode=thumbs> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

70 Mustafa Bodomi, *Wasta reveals the corruption of managers*, *Raya*, 2014, at 1 <https://www.raya.com/File/Get/3e890595-777f-4a0b-b123-a75f220c3c6a#pagemode=thumbs> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

71 Tarik Alwerthan, *The consequences of wasta (favoritism and nepotism) on individuals' psychological well-being from educators' perspectives* (2016).

72 Mustafa Bodomi, *Wasta reveals the corruption of managers*, *Raya*, 2014, at 2 <https://www.raya.com/File/Get/3e890595-777f-4a0b-b123-a75f220c3c6a#pagemode=thumbs> (last visited Jan 17, 2022).

73 Muhammad Nadeem et al., *Favoritism, nepotism and cronyism as predictors of job satisfaction: Evidences from Pakistan*, 8 *Knowledge Journals* 225 (2015).

74 Dinara Safina, *Favouritism and Nepotism in an Organization: Causes and Effects*, 23 *Procedia Economics and Finance* 632 (2015), <https://www.elsevier.com/en-xm> (last visited Jan 18, 2022).

Qatar. In addition, we were able to build a self-determined framework and conduct eight interviews with key employees in Qatari private and public sector businesses, as well as analyze the cartoons published in two major newspapers in Qatar.

The findings show that *wasta* has several consequences on workers and organizations. However, the most important consequence is the relationship between *wasta* and discrimination and social inequalities. In fact, we were able to prove that *wasta* causes an intersectional cultural paradox, which, as a social construction, reinforces discrimination and privilege among employees in the workplace. All of these findings show that *wasta* contributes indirectly to widening the gap of inequality of opportunities, in light of the imbalance of demographics and the spread of discrimination among employees in Qatar.

From these results, we conclude that if *wasta* continues in Qatar; it will establish discrimination and classes between employees. Therefore, this research recommends different methods that the Qatari government can adopt to fight against

*wasta*. First, evaluation of services should be provided to people by institutions through the establishment of a comprehensive methodological assessment, including the progress of operations and procedures related to the provision of these services. Second, the values of fairness and integrity should be instilled among employees, which will encourage constructive positive behavior and outstanding performance among employees to involve them continuously in reviewing and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided to eliminate the phenomenon of *wasta* and its disadvantages. More importantly, officials have to adopt a policy of promoting radical solutions to address administrative problems related to the provision of *wasta*, by establishing a law that criminalizes those who practice *wasta*, working to identify changes necessary for improvement, studying the ability of service institutions to implement these changes in terms of financial and human resources, working to implement them, and demonstrating a commitment to transparency and clarity.