THE PRICE OF SILENCE

How Authoritarian Legal Systems Suppress Constitutional Accountability

Qatar as a Case Study



DAR AL THANI

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This publication is intended for academic, educational, and research purposes.

First edition.
Printed in United Kingdom.



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Abstract

This study examines how legal provisions and institutional arrangements in Qatar are used to shield those in power from accountability and restrict the scope for challenging their decisions. It argues that the constitutional recognition of rights and freedoms offers little effective protection when their exercise is constrained and the institutions entrusted with safeguarding them lack the independence and capacity to enforce them. Under these conditions, demanding accountability becomes a risk that may expose individuals to prosecution and punishment.

Chapter One examines the hollowing out of constitutional accountability by analysing the gap between proclaimed safeguards and the actual distribution of power, the implications of a fully appointed Shura Council for popular oversight, and the judiciary's limited capacity to subject decision-makers to the law and provide effective protection for rights. Chapter Two analyses the use of legislation to criminalise criticism and silence demands for accountability. It focuses on criminal provisions protecting the standing of political authority, broadly worded legal restrictions on expression, and constraints on the press, civic activity, and the exposure of abuses. It also explores how these restrictions make efforts to hold officials accountable a source of personal risk, encouraging self-censorship and withdrawal from public debate.

Chapter Three examines the price society pays for this silence, from declining trust in institutions and citizens' exclusion from public affairs to a diminished capacity to expose mismanagement, safeguard public funds, and

correct costly decisions. The study concludes with recommendations for establishing safeguards to restore accountability, including revising legislation that restricts peaceful criticism, strengthening judicial independence and the effectiveness of legislative oversight, and guaranteeing the right of access to information.

Introduction

Constitutional accountability becomes meaningful when citizens can ask questions, institutions have the power to investigate, and the judiciary can subject the exercise of authority to the rule of law. When questions are stifled, oversight is constrained, and challenging officials' decisions becomes a source of fear, the constitution loses its capacity to protect society from arbitrary power. Its guarantees become promises that rights-holders lack the means to enforce. This is where the price of silence begins: those in power gain greater latitude to make decisions, while society's capacity to scrutinise those decisions and hold their makers accountable diminishes.

The concentration of decision-making power in Qatar and the limited independence of its institutions raise fundamental questions about the effectiveness of constitutional rights and safeguards. The existence of a council with legislative and oversight powers, alongside provisions affirming judicial independence and freedom of expression, does not in itself establish that power is subject to accountability. The decisive test remains whether these institutions can challenge influential figures, expose abuses, and hold those responsible to account—and whether citizens can criticise policies and demand change without fear of prosecution or retaliation.

This situation becomes more serious when the law itself is used to restrict the space that accountability requires. Provisions granting broad criminal-law protection to political authority, together with vaguely worded restrictions on expression, raise questions that extend beyond the prescribed penalties to their impact on public

life. Citizens may refrain from asking legitimate questions, journalists may avoid investigating controversial decisions, and those with relevant information may hesitate to expose abuses because the boundary between permissible criticism and punishable expression is unclear or open to expansive interpretation. Legal restrictions thus affect even those whose cases never reach the courts, having already succeeded in silencing them.

The consequences of this silence extend beyond denying individuals the freedom to speak. Silence weakens society's ability to identify mistakes before they escalate and allows costly decisions to remain beyond public scrutiny. As independent oversight recedes, access to information becomes more difficult, opportunities to expose mismanagement and conflicts of interest diminish, and citizens bear the consequences of choices they have insufficient influence over and lack effective means to hold decision-makers accountable for. Presenting this closure of public debate as a guarantee of stability obscures the fact that suppressing dissent does not eliminate its causes, and that postponing accountability may compound the cost of failure.

Chapter One: Shielding Power and Hollowing Out Constitutional Accountability

1. The Subordination of Constitutional Rights to Political Authority

Constitutional rights in Qatar suffer from a structural imbalance in their place within the system of governance. They should serve as binding standards that define and constrain the powers of state institutions. Yet their effectiveness remains subject to arrangements that give those in power considerable latitude to control the conditions under which they may be exercised. The relationship between rights and political decision-making is thus reversed: citizens are expected to adapt their demands to the limits accepted by the authorities, rather than the authorities being required to align their decisions with constitutionally guaranteed rights.

The seriousness of this imbalance becomes apparent when the regulation of freedoms is left to ordinary legislation without strict limits on the scope of that regulation. The legislature's power to establish procedures for exercising a right does not authorise it to suspend that right or strip it of its substance. When conditions and exceptions accumulate to the point that exercising a right becomes difficult, the instrument entrusted with giving it effect becomes a means of curtailing it. Constitutional recognition then remains intact in wording but limited in the protection it provides.

This situation allows the Qatari authorities to invoke the existence of constitutional safeguards as evidence of respect for rights, while keeping the mechanisms for enforcing them subject to restrictions that weaken their binding force. The problem lies in the separation between proclaiming a right and enabling its holder to exercise it. Citizens need clear procedures, reasoned decisions, defined time limits, and effective avenues of redress to claim their rights as enforceable entitlements. When the exercise of a right instead depends on discretionary approvals and broad exceptions, it begins to resemble a privilege granted by the administration as it sees fit.

2. Undermining the Foundations of Popular Oversight

Even before the 2024 amendment to Article 77, the foundations of popular oversight in Qatar were weak and constrained, falling short of the requirements of effective constitutional accountability. Only thirty of the forty-five members of the Shura Council were elected, while the remaining third were appointed, and the mechanisms of oversight and accountability were themselves subject to restrictions. The amendment then dismantled the electoral basis of this oversight by abolishing citizens' ability to elect Council members and making its entire composition subject to appointment by the Emir. This closed the avenue for popular representation and further concentrated power in the executive leadership, which now controls the composition of the institution tasked with overseeing its government. In doing so, the Qatari authorities undermined the Council's independence at its

foundations and deprived citizens of the ability to choose their representatives and hold them accountable through elections. The Council retained oversight powers, but its dependence on the appointing authority limits the conditions necessary to exercise them independently.

This control over the Council's composition creates a structural impediment to independent oversight: a body whose members are all selected by the leadership is expected to scrutinise a government operating under that same leadership's authority. Full appointment has deprived the Council of an independent electoral mandate on which it could rely when confronting decision-makers. The limited scope of oversight is also evident in the distinction between questions and interpellations. Article 109 allows members to address questions to the Prime Minister and ministers, but permits only the member who raised the question to make a single follow-up intervention. Article 110, by contrast, limits interpellations to ministers and requires the approval of one-third of Council members before an interpellation may be initiated. The Constitution's Explanatory Memorandum confirms the Prime Minister's exclusion from interpellation, linking this exclusion to the absence of collective government responsibility before the Council. Scrutiny of the head of government thus remains confined to requests for clarification, without extending to an interpellation that could lead to a vote of no confidence. This limits the Council's capacity to hold the government's leadership accountable for its overall policy direction and results.

The no-confidence mechanism does have a substantive legal effect: Article 111 provides that a minister is deemed to have relinquished office from the date the resolution is adopted. Reaching that outcome, however, requires a

prior interpellation to have been debated, followed by a motion signed by fifteen members—unless the vote of confidence is requested by the minister—and approval by two-thirds of the Council's members. These conditions make accountability dependent on the ability to mobilise a substantial majority within an institution whose composition lacks an independent electoral basis. The mere existence of the power to withdraw confidence therefore does not establish the effectiveness of oversight. Its use and outcomes must also be examined, alongside members' ability to invoke it when responsibility concerns decisions supported by influential centres of power.

The imbalance is compounded by the Emir's retention, under amended Article 104, of the power to dissolve the Council and exercise legislative authority with the assistance of the Council of Ministers until a new Council is appointed within a period not exceeding six months. The oversight institution is thus constituted by appointment, can be dissolved by the same leadership, and can then be reconstituted through appointment once again. This entrenches the leadership's dominance over the Council and weakens its capacity to become an independent forum for scrutiny and challenge.

3. The Judiciary's Capacity to Subject Power to the Law

The rules governing judicial administration and the exceptions restricting challenges to public decisions reveal institutional and legislative constraints that weaken this capacity. Judicial protection is diminished

when courts have limited jurisdiction over decisions made by those in power, or when safeguards governing judges' professional status lack adequate mechanisms for independent review. This assessment begins with appointment, promotion, and career management. Judicial Authority Law No. 8 of 2023 provides for the appointment of the President of the Court of Cassation by Emiri Order, and of other judges by decree upon the proposal of the President of the Supreme Judicial Council. It also empowers the Council to give its opinion on judicial appointments, promotions, transfers, secondments, and retirement. Appointment by a political authority does not, in itself, establish a judge's subordination to that authority. It does, however, make the safeguards surrounding selection and career advancement decisive: the clarity of the criteria, the transparency of their application, and the protection afforded to judges whose rulings displease influential figures. Without effective safeguards in these areas, judicial independence remains vulnerable to the very power relations that the judiciary is expected to regulate.

The disciplinary system raises an even more serious concern. Although disciplinary proceedings are entrusted to a judicial council, and anyone who conducted the investigation is prohibited from adjudicating the case, the law makes disciplinary judgments final and excludes all avenues of appeal. The available sanctions include removal from office or transfer to a non-judicial position. Denying a right of appeal weakens a fundamental safeguard against error or abuse in professional disciplinary proceedings. Judges who are expected to review administrative decisions themselves need effective protection through the review of decisions that may end their judicial tenure. Closing off that avenue

undermines the balance between ensuring professional accountability and preserving judicial independence.

In relation to public decisions, the problem is particularly evident in the broad exceptions to the Administrative Circuit's jurisdiction. Article 3 of the Law on the Adjudication of Administrative Disputes excludes Emiri orders, decisions, and decrees from the scope of annulment proceedings before the Circuit, alongside categories of decisions concerning community protection, expatriate residence and deportation, associations, publications and publishing, newspaper licensing, and other matters. These areas affect fundamental freedoms and interests, making their exclusion from this judicial avenue a serious diminution of the protection available to individuals. The broader the exceptions, the less able an affected person is to compel the administration to justify its actions before a judge empowered to annul them. The gravity of these exclusions lies in the fact that the law itself restricts the scope of judicial scrutiny of power. A litigant may have substantial grounds for challenging a decision affecting their rights, yet encounter a jurisdictional bar excluding that category of decision from annulment proceedings before the court can examine its legality. In such cases, inadequate protection results from a legislative framework that shields certain decisions from this avenue of review.

In the field of constitutional review, the law establishing the Supreme Constitutional Court allows the constitutionality of laws and regulations to be challenged through judicial referral, or through a constitutional objection raised in pending proceedings if the court hearing the case considers it sufficiently substantiated, followed by the filing of a constitutional action within the

prescribed period, which may not exceed sixty days. An individual's access through this route therefore depends on the existence of ongoing litigation and satisfaction of this threshold, rather than on a generally available right to lodge a direct individual constitutional complaint. These conditions make access to justice and procedural fairness before the court hearing the underlying dispute decisive factors in securing effective constitutional protection.

Chapter Two: Criminalising Criticism and Using the Law to Silence Demands for Accountability

1. Protecting Political Authority and Restricting the Space for Criticism

Article 134 of the Qatari Penal Code grants political authority protection that extends beyond safeguarding personal dignity to restricting challenges to the exercise of public powers. It criminalises both insulting the Emir and challenging his exercise of his rights and powers, while extending this protection to the Deputy Emir and the Crown Prince. The fundamental flaw in combining these offences is that it subjects personal attacks and criticism of the exercise of power to the same punitive framework, despite their different nature and relationship to society's right to demand accountability. Decisions made in the exercise of public authority affect the public interest and must remain open to scrutiny and challenge, however senior the person making them.

The 2024 amendment to the article strengthened this protection by increasing the maximum term of imprisonment from five to seven years and replacing the requirement that the challenge be made through a public means of communication with wording encompassing any means. This amendment broadens the scope of criminalisation and increases the severity of punishment in an area directly connected to public discussion of the exercise of power. Criminal-law protection for holders of the highest offices has thus been reinforced, while the boundaries of permissible political criticism have become harder to define clearly.

Distinguishing personal abuse from criticism on matters of public interest requires separating attacks on private life or individual dignity from assessments of decisions, the exercise of powers, and their outcomes. Opposing a policy, questioning the value of public expenditure, or demanding an explanation for the use of a constitutional power concerns public responsibility. Such criticism may be forceful and express outright rejection, but causing an official discomfort or embarrassment is not sufficient to constitute a personal attack. Extending protection to the exercise of official powers threatens this distinction and makes political status a source of additional immunity from criticism.

The Qatari authorities bear responsibility for maintaining this conflation of respect for individuals with scrutiny of their performance. The broader an official's powers, the greater the need to subject their exercise to public debate, because the extent of responsibility corresponds to the impact of the decisions made. Surrounding the exercise of power with special criminal-law protection reverses this relationship, giving the officeholder a legal advantage over those who question how that power is used.

Protecting political authority in this manner undermines equality in the relationship between the state and society: citizens bear the consequences of decisions while facing stringent restrictions when challenging those who make them. Constitutional accountability requires resolving this contradiction and ensuring that public decisions remain legitimate subjects of criticism and evaluation. Any liability arising from expression must be defined by reference to precisely specified acts and demonstrable harm, without granting the exercise of

power immunity derived from the status of the person who holds it.

2. Vague Legal Provisions and the Expanding Scope of Criminalisation

Ambiguity in certain Qatari criminal provisions gives enforcement authorities considerable latitude to determine what falls within the scope of criminal liability. The danger of such wording lies in its weakening of individuals' ability to identify prohibited conduct in advance, making the distinction between lawful expression and an offence dependent on assessments that may vary across authorities and contexts. In criminal law, this deficiency undermines a fundamental safeguard: the requirement that the law be sufficiently clear to prevent punishment from being extended through interpretation.

This problem is evident in Article 136 of the Penal Code, which groups together rumours, false or malicious statements and news, and inflammatory propaganda, requiring that they be linked to an intent to harm national interests, stir public opinion, or undermine the social order or public order. Multiplying these descriptions does not make them precise. A factual claim whose accuracy can be verified differs from a judgment that content is malicious or inflammatory. Combining them broadens the assessment from the truth of the information to an interpretation of the publisher's purpose and manner of presentation. This makes it essential to distinguish news from opinion: news contains a factual claim whose supporting evidence can

be examined, whereas opinion may involve an assessment, inference, or prediction on which people may reasonably disagree. Subjecting both to the same standard risks treating a dissenting assessment as false information or a sharply worded conclusion as evidence of malicious intent. An error of fact does not, by itself, establish deliberate deception, nor does it dispense with the need to prove the elements of the offence and the intent required by the provision.

The inclusion of stirring public opinion raises a further concern, because drawing public attention to a problem and mobilising interest in it are functions of public debate. A distinction must therefore be drawn between the ordinary effects of publishing information of public importance and harm that justifies the intervention of criminal law. Controversy, official displeasure, or the widespread circulation of criticism does not, in itself, establish a threat to national interests or public order. Interpreting these connections broadly gives the authorities latitude to treat discomfort caused by information as evidence of its danger.

A similar problem arises under Article 8 of the Cybercrime Law, which criminalises infringements of social principles or values without precisely defining the acts covered by that description. This leaves considerable room for interpreting the scope of criminal liability and raises a fundamental question: when does discussing or criticising a social practice become an infringement warranting punishment? Leaving that determination to broad discretion risks giving a particular interpretation of values the force of criminal law, at the expense of the diversity of views and interpretations within society.

The Qatari system has thus made the boundaries of criminalisation susceptible to expansion by retaining insufficiently precise formulations of prohibited conduct, the harm envisaged, and the standards for proving it. In doing so, it has weakened the distinction between deliberate disinformation, error, opinion, and criticism, while expanding interpretive discretion at the expense of legal safeguards. Protecting society cannot justify ambiguity that turns criminal provisions into instruments for restricting expression and leaves individuals exposed to broad discretionary judgments, weakening their ability to understand the limits of liability and protect themselves against arbitrary enforcement.

3. Restricting the Media, Civil Society, and the Exposure of Abuses

Administrative control over media and civil society organisations in Qatar weakens the independence of bodies expected to expose abuses and pursue accountability. When the authorities exercise extensive influence over these organisations' establishment, continued operation, and management, their ability to investigate the performance of state bodies is constrained by an unequal relationship with the very authorities they scrutinise. The danger lies in making oversight subject to conditions set by those in power, limiting the emergence of independent institutions capable of pursuing sensitive cases through to their conclusion.

Publishing legislation reveals multiple avenues for administrative intervention. The Press and Publications Law subjects the ownership and management of printing presses to licensing, requires prior approval for printing publications covered by its provisions, and makes the import, export, and distribution of publications conditional on obtaining a licence. Administrative influence thus extends across the production and circulation of content, giving the competent authorities substantial control over its ability to reach the public. This framework weakens publishing independence, particularly when published material addresses the performance of official bodies or the interests of influential figures.

Practical restrictions also involve funding and editorial policy. Reporters Without Borders points to the difficulty of covering domestic political affairs in Qatar, the uniformity of coverage in the traditional press, and the influence of political and economic considerations on media content. This reveals a fundamental weakness in the professional environment: an organisation whose survival depends on parties that may be adversely affected by its investigations needs safeguards protecting its editorial decisions from pressure. An international media presence cannot compensate for the absence of such safeguards at home. The value of watchdog journalism remains tied to its ability to scrutinise domestic affairs and publish findings that may embarrass its funders or those who exert influence over it.

In the civic sphere, Decree-Law No. 21 of 2020 provides for the registration of an association by ministerial decision after submission to the Prime Minister. It sets the licence term at three years, renewable by ministerial

decision, and empowers the minister to dissolve an association in specified circumstances, including involvement in political matters, or to suspend its board and appoint an interim board under the conditions prescribed by law. Supervision therefore extends beyond verifying procedural and financial compliance to determining an organisation's continued existence and leadership, giving the administration extensive influence over the independence of associational activity.

This influence becomes particularly troubling when associations document problems connected to state performance, such as fairness in service provision, workers' rights, and the impacts of development projects. Addressing these issues seriously requires evaluating public policy or asking a government body to change a decision. Keeping associational activity under the pressure of restrictions on political involvement and administrative intervention risks confining it to services and activities that avoid the underlying problem and those responsible for it. In this way, the Qatari system diminishes civil society's capacity to represent affected individuals and turn their separate complaints into documented cases that demand a response.

Protecting information sources is essential to sustained professional documentation and independent verification. Such protection includes safeguarding sources' identities, securing documents and communications, establishing precise rules for any demand to disclose information, and providing remedies when sources, researchers, or journalists face retaliation. These safeguards must also cover professional and administrative harm, such as dismissal, the downgrading of responsibilities, or obstruction of access to services

and administrative procedures, because retaliation may take forms other than direct criminal punishment.

The Qatari system thus places the exposure of abuses within a sphere whose institutional and professional conditions are substantially controlled by the administration. Organisations need independence in their establishment, management, and publishing activities, while their sources need enforceable protection, if they are to investigate facts and establish responsibility. As these conditions weaken, influential actors become better able to evade scrutiny, and the prospects of turning information about abuses into published investigations and effective accountability diminish.

Chapter Three: The Cost of Silencing Society and Entrenching Impunity

1. Self-Censorship and Citizens' Exclusion from Public Affairs

Restrictions on expression have their most profound effects when citizens anticipate official intervention, deleting objections before publishing them, avoiding questions before asking them, and omitting anything from their conversations that might cause trouble. Censorship then becomes an everyday practice through which individuals regulate their speech, relationships, and participation. In the Qatari context examined in the preceding sections, legal and institutional restrictions help foster this behaviour: the assessment of personal consequences precedes consideration of a public issue's importance, and avoiding risk takes priority over asserting a right or exposing a failing.

The danger of self-censorship lies in the difficulty of measuring what it conceals. Opinions never published, complaints never submitted, and initiatives abandoned by their organisers do not appear in official records as instances of suppression, even though they may result from the fear of it. A low level of public dissent therefore cannot be taken as evidence of satisfaction. It may reflect a belief that speaking out is futile, fear of its consequences, or a sense that silence is safer. When the Qatari authorities disregard these possibilities and attend only to voices they find acceptable, they risk interpreting silence as support and assessing social conditions on the basis of an incomplete picture.

This withdrawal extends from individual expression to collective action. A civic initiative needs people willing to take responsibility for launching it and participants confident that associating their names with it will not harm their interests. When fear of repercussions prevails, individuals hesitate to endorse demands, sign complaints, or organise those affected. Legitimate initiatives are stifled before they take shape, and people with grievances remain divided despite their shared experiences. Problems requiring collective action thus become individual burdens, borne separately by each person affected, weakening their ability to secure a response and demand redress.

Public debate also suffers when individuals grow accustomed to expressing only the acceptable parts of their views while concealing what they actually believe. Institutions receive diluted feedback, officials hear statements that fail to convey the extent of dissatisfaction, and consultations lose part of their value because participants focus more on the limits of what is acceptable than on the substance of the problem.

This dynamic also undermines trust in institutions. Citizens need confidence that their objections will be examined fairly and that the relevant authority will address the substance of their complaints without treating them as objects of suspicion. Without that confidence, they become less willing to use official channels and may seek personal mediation or abandon their claims altogether. Institutions consequently lose standing as avenues open to everyone, while personal connections become a safer means of resolving problems. The sense of unequal access and unequal prospects of obtaining redress deepens.

2. The Absence of Criticism and the Cost of Policy Failures to Public Funds and the State's Future

When those in power restrict the space for criticism, they weaken society's ability to protect public funds from flawed decisions and conflicting interests. The danger lies in the relationship between concentrated decision-making and limited independent scrutiny. The more difficult it becomes to access and discuss information, the harder it is to establish why a project was selected, a contractor was preferred, or a long-term financial commitment was undertaken. Spending may then continue without the public having sufficient knowledge of its benefits, its risks, or who bears responsibility for its outcomes.

Exposing conflicts of interest requires information that makes it possible to trace relationships between decision-makers and beneficiaries, examine selection criteria, compare alternatives, and assess contractual terms. When this information is withheld or disclosed only selectively, it becomes harder to distinguish decisions serving the public interest from those in which private considerations intersect with official responsibilities. Inadequate information creates an environment in which corruption is difficult to detect and prove, while allowing mismanagement to persist with less scrutiny.

Disregarding warnings and objections also undermines early warning mechanisms. A problem may begin with an overly optimistic assumption, an inadequate cost estimate, or an ignored technical warning, then escalate because objections receive no serious consideration.

When a project's political standing outweighs its openness to evaluation, acknowledging mistakes becomes more difficult. Those responsible may insist on continued spending to justify earlier choices, despite signs that the project should be modified or halted. Costs that could initially have been contained thus become accumulating liabilities, while additional resources are used to postpone the exposure of failure rather than address its causes.

This failing becomes more serious when financial abundance is used to absorb the consequences of poor decisions without holding those responsible accountable. The ability to cover a loss or finance a budget overrun may avert an immediate crisis, but it does not justify the decision that caused it. Every sum spent remedying a failure carries an opportunity cost: a service, infrastructure improvement, or more beneficial investment forgone. Assessing the cost therefore requires considering the benefits society has lost as well as the amounts actually paid by the treasury. However substantial the wealth, it does not give those entrusted with managing it a mandate to squander opportunities to put it to better use.

The effects extend to institutional effectiveness when officials recognise that poor results will not necessarily trigger an independent assessment of their responsibility. Without accountability, professional standing becomes detached from performance, and defending previous choices takes precedence over correcting them. Incentives to provide realistic estimates or disclose problems early diminish, because projecting success brings more immediate rewards than acknowledging setbacks. Restrictions on criticism thus

distort administrative practice itself and weaken institutions' capacity to learn from their mistakes.

Future generations, meanwhile, bear the consequences of decisions whose effects outlast the tenure of those who make them. Long-term contractual commitments, operating and maintenance costs, resource depletion, and declining returns on public assets narrow the options available in the future. The responsibility is all the greater when such decisions are made without adequate disclosure or independent scrutiny: those who will later bear their costs had no part in approving them and inherit their consequences without an opportunity to hold those responsible to account.

Recommendations

1. **Decriminalise peaceful political criticism:** Review Article 134 of the Penal Code and broadly worded provisions restricting expression, ensuring a clear distinction between legitimate criticism and threats or incitement to violence, so that protecting political authority or public order does not become a means of silencing demands for accountability.
2. **Restore popular oversight and strengthen its powers:** Reinstate the election of Shura Council members, expand the Council's powers to conduct interpellations and investigations and hold the government's leadership accountable, and facilitate the use of accountability mechanisms so that failures and abuses carry meaningful consequences.
3. **Safeguard judicial independence and broaden judicial protection:** Adopt transparent criteria for judicial appointment, promotion, and discipline; allow appeals against disciplinary judgments concerning judges; review exceptions that shield public decisions from annulment proceedings; and facilitate individuals' access to constitutional justice.
4. **Guarantee the independence of the press and civil society and protect those who expose abuses:** Remove restrictions that permit unjustified administrative interference in the work of media organisations and associations, protect the confidentiality of sources, and provide effective safeguards for whistleblowers and witnesses against retaliation through employment measures, administrative action, or judicial proceedings.
5. **Ensure transparency and accountability in the management of public funds:** Publish information on expenditure, contracts, financial commitments, and risks; require public bodies to subject major projects and

decisions to independent evaluation; disclose conflicts of interest; and establish responsibility for losses and abuses, safeguarding the rights of society and future generations.

Conclusion

Society in Qatar pays the price of silence in the rights and dignity of its people and their ability to protect their future. Behind every complaint left unfiled lies a grievance awaiting redress; behind every suppressed warning, a mistake whose consequences continue to grow. When citizens weigh the cost of a question before asking it, and those who have suffered harm fear that asserting their rights will expose them to further injury, fear becomes a constraint woven into everyday life. People are left to bear the consequences of decisions while their avenues for challenging them and holding decision-makers accountable narrow. Perhaps the cruellest consequence is that people grow accustomed to surrendering their voices: they see a failing and look away, recognise a right and retreat from claiming it, and teach their children caution in speaking before teaching them confidence in institutions. These restrictions then erode citizens' sense of belonging and standing in their own country, leaving them to wonder whether they have a part in shaping their future or are merely expected to accept what others decide for them.

The Qatari authorities bear full responsibility for this imbalance. The power to make decisions carries an obligation to accept accountability for them, and respect for the constitution is tested when citizens invoke its guarantees against those with influence. Protection has little value if it recedes at the first disagreement with the authorities, and justice remains incomplete when the vulnerable find a swifter path to punishment than to redress. The narrower the avenues for dissent, the greater the country's need for reform that restores the force of rights, the independence of institutions, and

citizens' confidence that speaking out will not become a cause of suffering.

The people of Qatar deserve to speak about their country without fear, to know how their wealth is managed, and to find someone who will hear, protect, and secure redress for those who have been wronged. Their children deserve to inherit institutions capable of correcting mistakes, resources that have not been depleted by decisions shielded from scrutiny, and a public life that welcomes their differences and initiative. The price of silence will continue to rise for as long as those in power are better able to silence questions than to answer them. Breaking this cycle begins by restoring to the people the rights that belong to them: the rights to speak, participate, know, and demand accountability. A country's horizons narrow when its people fear defending their rights; it regains its strength when even its most vulnerable citizen can bring a grievance, confident that the law will offer protection, however powerful the person responsible for the injustice.

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Qatar as a Case Study

This book examines how legal provisions and institutional arrangements in Qatar are used to shield those in power from accountability and restrict the scope for challenging their decisions. It shows that, despite constitutional recognition of rights and freedoms, their practical exercise is constrained by concentrated authority, limited institutional independence, and laws that criminalise criticism and silence demands for accountability.

Through a legal and institutional analysis, the study explores the gap between constitutional safeguards and the actual distribution of power, the implications of a fully appointed Shura Council, and the judiciary's limited capacity to hold decision-makers to account. It also examines legislation that protects political authority, imposes broad restrictions on expression, and limits the work of the media and civil society, turning legitimate scrutiny into a source of personal risk and encouraging self-censorship.

The book further assesses the broader consequences of this silence for society, including declining trust in institutions, citizens' exclusion from public affairs, and a reduced ability to expose mismanagement and safeguard public funds. It concludes with practical recommendations to restore accountability, strengthen oversight, and guarantee the right of access to information.

KEY ISSUES EXPLORED

HOLLOW ACCOUNTABILITY

The gap between constitutional guarantees and the reality of power.

LAWS THAT SILENCE

Criminalisation of criticism and restrictions on expression.

THE COST TO SOCIETY

Erosion of trust, public exclusion and weaker oversight.

A PATH FOR REFORM

Legal and institutional safeguards to restore accountability and transparency.



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