

Population Growth and Government Modernisation Efforts

The Case of GCC countries

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Abstract— Because of the economic and job market requirements, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have acquired extremely high proportion of migrant workers in the world, and is considered as the third largest in the world after the European Union and North America. Supported by the expansion of the oil industry, the colossal influx of foreign residents and workforce led to the exacerbation of the demographic imbalance in the GCC countries. This had an enormous impact on the region's landscape both socially and economically. There are serious concerns among GCC countries about the stability of the national identity in light of the disproportionate population demographics. This paper touches upon the subject of the national identity in GCC countries, and present some recent statistics about the population demographics. It also presents one of the approaches followed by the GCC countries; namely, identity management systems, to allow their governments and policy makers develop and regulate their national identity strategies and the labour market.

Keywords-component; national identity, identity management.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the age of globalisation, the world is rapidly becoming a single place and closer to each other, as distance has become irrelevant. Amidst ruthless modernisations plans, governments have discovered some crucial implications of globalisation. From a socio-cultural perspective, globalisation exercised a permeating effect on forming the relationships between and among various locales, leading to the de-centering and dislocation of identities [1]. In fact, the world is moving towards a more complex, plural, interdependent identity structures [2]. Held [3] explains that “globalisation may be thought of initially as the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual”.

The social change as result introduces “significant alteration of social structures” where social structures means “patterns of social action and interaction” [4]. Globalisation has therefore created the need for identity. Many societies are attempting to rediscover and define their sense of self (often referred to as national identity) in a world that is rapidly producing cosmopolitan societies driven by economic powers. Therefore, national identity in many countries has been the object of governmental policies aimed at the restoration of

rooted tradition, religious fervour and/or commitment to ethnic or national identities [5].

This paper looks at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the Middle East; one of the most important and strategically vital regions in the world. GCC countries represent a unique phenomenon with regards to their population composition. Unlike many other countries in the world, nationals constitute a minority in four of the countries. GCC countries are occupied by one of the most diverse workforces in the world, who constitute 60 to 90% of the labour workforce. This had triggered some courses of actions in GCC countries to preserve national identity. One of the approaches adopted by the GCC countries is the development of contemporary identity management systems to provide them with modern enablers to authenticate the identities of their legitimised population both citizens and foreign residents.

The paper is structured as follows. A short background to GCC countries is provided which sheds light on its history and its development principles. Then, some recent data about GCC population and the changing patterns of their demographics are explored. The issue of identity in GCC countries is discussed to pinpoint the ideology of its collective identity structure shaping the 'Gulf Society'. Next, an overview of the national identity management approach adopted in GCC countries is provided which outlines its primary objectives and benefits, and the paper is concluded.

II. BACKGROUND TO GCC COUNTRIES



Figure 1. Middle East in the World Map.

The Gulf Cooperation Council, referred to as GCC, is a regional co-operation system between six of the southern Gulf

countries; Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The constitution which was formed in 1981, was based on the need to reconstruct identity, and on the principle of a single culture and nation. The geographical proximity, common religion, language and culture, and the similarity of their regulations and economic and social conditions were key factors that ameliorated the establishment.

In a total area of 2.55 Million Km², an estimated population of around 46.5 million lives in GCC countries. Albeit the positive growth rates in the non-oil sectors economies, oil has been the principal component of government revenues since the 1970's for all of the six countries, which also have around 45% of the world's proven oil reserves and 25% of crude oil exports.

GCC governments have made profound investments in the last few years in infrastructure development and other economical sources to recalibrate their economies. The vision of economical growth in these countries developed a cosmopolitan culture, and significantly impacted their population demographics. Due to lack of local expertise, GCC countries relied heavily on foreign knowledge and labour, which outnumbered the local population in some of the countries. The next sections will provide further details of the population demographics in GCC countries.

III. GCC POPULATION

Considered as one of the highest rates of population growth in the world [6], the GCC population has grown more than ten times during the last 50 years; from 4 million in 1950 to 46.5 million in 2010. Towards mid 2010, GCC countries were inhabited by 27 million foreigners, who constituted 59 percent of the total population. See also Figure 2.

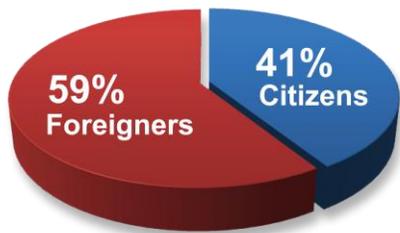


Figure 2. GCC citizens v.s foreign residents.

In UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain foreigners constituted a majority; in the United Arab Emirates alone foreigners accounted for over 88 percent of the population. Merely Oman and Saudi Arabia managed to maintain a relatively low proportion of foreigners: about 30 and 27 percent, respectively. See also Table 1.

The population growth in GCC countries is very much associated with the economic growth. For instance, in the UAE, one of the most dynamic economies in the region, foreign labour comprises an enormous portion of the population. According to the 2010 census, UAE population is counted to be 8.2 million, of which only around 950,000 are UAE nationals. The nationals were around 818,000 in 2005,

meaning a growth rate of around 3% each year over a period of 5 years.

TABLE I. GCC POPULATION

Foreigners Constitute majority in 4 states

Country	Population 2005	Population 2010	Citizens	%	Foreigners	%
UAE	4,106,427	8,190,000	950,000	12%	7,240,000	88%
Qatar	796,186	1,678,568	218,214	13%	1,460,354	87%
Kuwait	2,991,189	3,480,000	1,044,000	30%	2,436,000	70%
Bahrain	727,000	1,050,000	507,150	48%	542,850	52%
Oman	2,508,837	3,418,085	2,392,660	70%	1,025,426	30%
Saudi Arabia	22,673,538	28,686,633	20,941,242	73%	7,745,391	27%
GCC (Total)	33,803,177	46,503,286	19,058,559	41%	27,413,687	59%

On the other hand, the residents in the UAE have doubled from 3.3 million in 2005 to 7.2 million in 2010. It is predicted that the GCC national population compared to the total population would further drop in the following years, if appropriate correctional procedures and policies were not taken to address the issue. Indeed, such growth of both GCC nationals and expatriates is likely to lead to exacerbation of the demographic imbalance in the country.

According to a report issued by the Economist Intelligence Unit [7], the population in the Gulf region is predicted to continue rising by a third in the next decade, hitting 53.5 million by 2020. However, in light of our reading of the GCC 2010 census reports, our forecast of GCC population is likely to go beyond this number, and reach or exceed 60 million by 2020.

Perceived as a serious challenge to future development of the region, 24 percent of the GCC population according to the report will be under 25 year, rating second highest in the world, after Africa. Besides, this increase raises significant questions related to how GCC countries' labour and immigration policies would respond to address these sources of economic, cultural, and political instability. Before we attempt to address this area of concern, it is important to comprehend the evolving patterns of foreign workforce in GCC countries in the last 40 years, as the next section explains.

IV. THE CHANGE PATTERNS IN THE POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

As depicted in Figure 3, GCC countries relied immensely on foreign workers in the 1970's, which largely came from Arab Middle Eastern countries. Using the significant financial liquidity generated from the petroleum revenues, GCC countries followed a gradual development and modernisation pathway to pursue their economic and social transformation plans. Due to increased oil prices, which reached unprecedented levels between 1970s and 1990s, a large number of migrant workforce started to inflow the GCC countries. This workforce primarily participated in the following three strategic sectors:

- infrastructure development e.g., energy sources and improvement of governmental departments and services;
- development of the industrial and agricultural sectors;
- improvement of social services, e.g., health care, education systems, etc.

By the year 2000, the economic diversification and the expansion of the private sector's role were the key components of the GCC countries agenda to move towards post-oil economy. In light of the increasing foreign population as a result, the GCC countries adopted forceful policies to promote 'nationalisation' of various segments of the workforce both in the public and private sectors. However, this required extensive national workforce of a quality and quantity which could not be supplied by local sources primarily in the smaller countries.

This period also witnessed the development of growth-driven foreign workforce migration models in many of the GCC countries. The private sector remained heavily dependent on foreign labour, as it imported more workforces to source and execute their plans. This has created a deeper, regional labour market in the GCC countries.

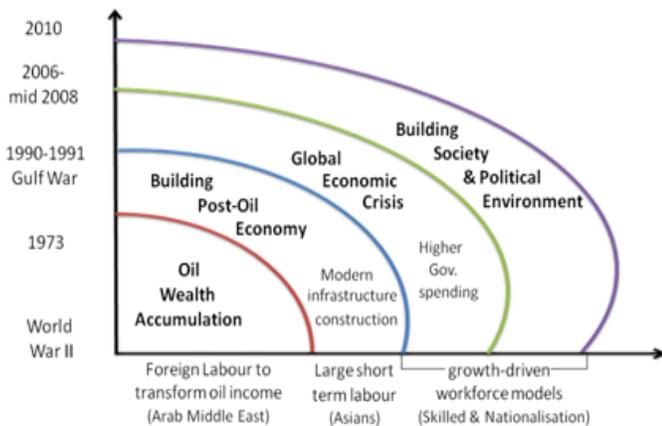


Figure 3. Workforce changing patterns.

A. The Economic Crisis

The global economic crisis did not have a great impact on the GCC countries workforce population. The GCC countries tackled the deteriorated oil prices and the consequences of the global crisis, with higher government spending, partly redirected to internal and Arab region and sectors such as education and energy. This kept the growth of the foreign workforce at almost the same levels as previous years. The 2010 GCC census shows a considerable increase in foreign population compared to previous years, as illustrated in the earlier section. The increase in population came despite the shrink of the countries real estate and construction sectors which suffered a slowdown.

GCC countries attracted in the past few years highly skilled workforce to execute its ambitious world class programs. But at the same time, it also created large numbers of short term foreign workforce, where Asians outnumbered Arab workers.

Today, GCC countries are recognised as the innovation hubs in a global environment characterised by strong demand for energy and increasing globalisation. GCC recent development efforts pay higher attention to constructing the society and the political environment. Equally, this is a daunting challenge.

B. Employment

Taking into consideration the growing foreign labour force in GCC countries, the foreign workforce is estimated at more than 60 percent of the working population, and as high as 90% in countries such as the UAE. It is notable that the employment distribution in GCC countries is quiet disproportionate, as only 1 % of the workforce is employed in the oil and gas sector which produces 47 % of GCC GDP. A large number of the workforce is employed in construction, utilities, government, and other service sectors. Government services alone constitute more than 20% of total GCC employment.

GCC countries have attempted in recent years to reform their labour markets through developing labour and immigration and employment policies to shift towards more proactive social and economic courses of actions in the development of human capital and meeting the increasing demand for employment among nationals (i.e., substituting expatriates with qualified national). The unemployment rates among nationals in GCC countries are floated between 5 and 15%. The extensive foreign workforce has exposed the GCC society to challenging consequences not only on the employment side, but also in terms of the stability of its national identity, as the next section will explain.

V. GCC IDENTITY

Castells [8] states that “the construction of identities is fundamental to the dynamic of societies” and that “cultural identity is the process by which social actors build their own meaning according to cultural attributes.” Perceptibly, scholars constructed the concept of identity across a range of disciplines both from individual and societal perspectives. The individual identity development has been observed as the central 'project' of humanity [9]. The societal identity is often viewed as one of the primary driving forces of the information or network era [8].

The founder of social identity theory, Tajfel [10] stated that, "any society which contains power, status, prestige and social group differentials (and they all do), places each of us in a number of social categories which become an integral part of our self-definition". Social identity (or national identity in our case) is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" [11].

Castells [2] divides the principal forms of collective identities into three types:

- Legitimising identities: a set of logic and meaning introduced and propagated by dominant institutions of society – notably political regimes in control of the

state apparatus and their followers – to rationalise, reproduce, and expand existing rule.

- Resistance identities: constructed by those who are being marginalised, devalued and/or stigmatised by the logic of domination in opposition to the ruling norm, leading to communes or communities of resistance.
- Project identities: go beyond resistance and attempt to create new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek to transform the overall social structure.

National identity is the most important component of the collective identity structure. The issue of national identity in GCC countries has featured prominently since their independence and has been an integral part of the psyche of the citizens. As a result, the sense of identity in the Gulf countries is very strong.

Although the elements illustrated in Table 2 explain to a large extent the common identity elements shaping the 'Gulf Society', some researchers attempted to create the definition of this identity by formulating its substantive content. They argue that mutual identity in GCC countries is evolving in the context of two paradoxical concepts; homogeneity of cultural and social, that is shared among the member of the society, besides,

the elements that make them different from members of other societies.

TABLE II. COMMON IDENTITY ELEMENTS SHAPING THE 'GULF SOCIETY'

Element	Description
Tribalism	People sharing common ancestry and kinship, and use their tribal affiliation as their last names.
Religion	Islam
Language	Arabic; created a linguistic culture that is specific to the Gulf population.
Dress Code	Gulf citizens wear traditional attire
Political System	the GCC formation led to cooperation and integration, in the fields of health, education, labour and social affairs, tourism, sports, etc.
Economy	Oil based, custom union, common exchange rate

Mapping to Castells [2] typology of identities, the identity of GCC countries evolved overtime as depicted in Figure 4 Their first identity was generated by "social actors" in the six countries to “move out of the trenches”. This phase witnessed nationalists in each of the six countries seeking self-affirmation in the process of “collective resistance against the territorial domination and cultural survival, which resulted in their independence and/or proclamation and recognition, as depicted in Figure 5.

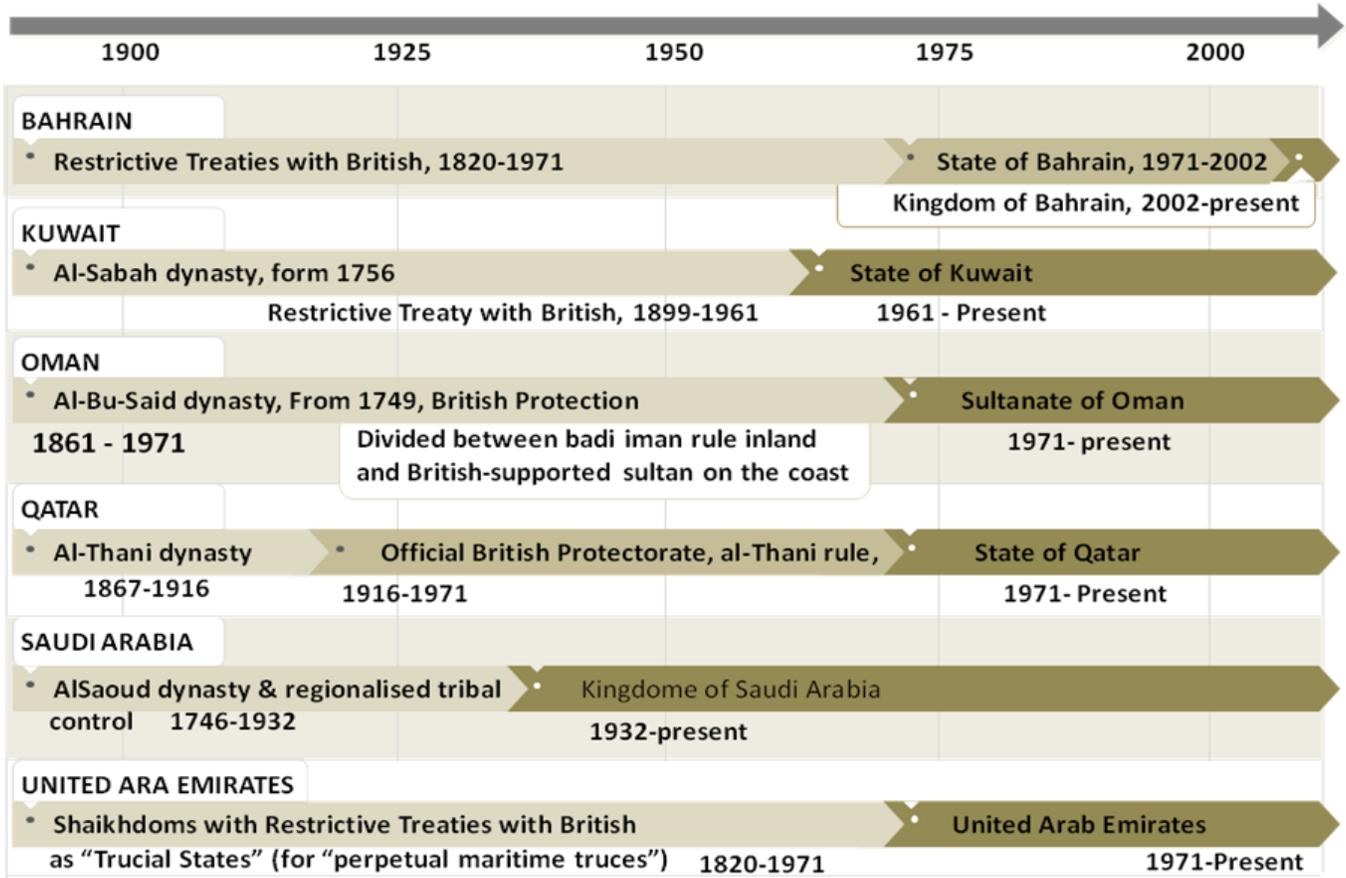


Figure 4. Historical development of GCC countries. [12]

To redefine their positions in the region, they moved from resistance to project identity, and succeeded to transform the entire social structure, which resulted in some countries, the restoration of fundamental cultural values and meanings with deep historical roots. They all acquired membership in the League of Arab States; which was found in 1945 by Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria to safeguard their independence and sovereignty (Kuwait joined in 1961, and the rest of the GCC countries in 1971). In an attempt to build stronger political Gulf-wide identity, the six countries formed the GCC council, utilising the common identity elements described earlier as principles to provide them with the required reference and identities of legitimisation.

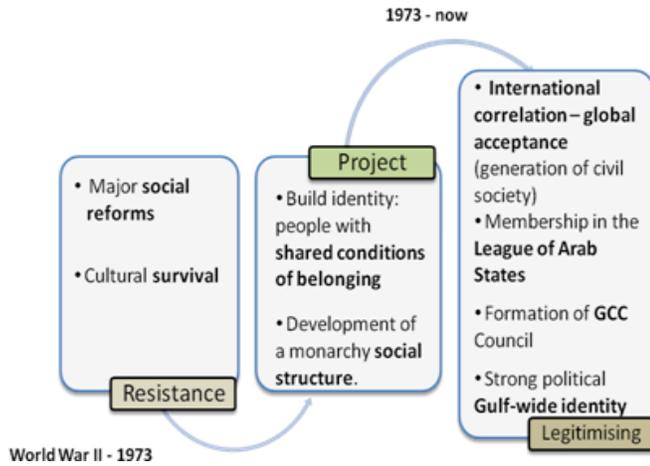


Figure 5. GCC countries identity development stages.

The specific content of national identity is based on the four foundations, land, people, time, and will to live together. These powerful symbolic links lays the foundations to connect and interact with each other to create national identity [13]. However, these elements may also cause at the same time dangerous 'seed' than can be cultivated to cause dissention, disruption of the social order and alienation (ibid).

For the past 30 years, the expansion of the oil industry has confronted the GCC countries, with changes and challenges that is observed to threaten the national identity of their native citizen populations. There are serious concerns among GCC citizens that this significant influx of foreign workers has somehow challenged and altered the national identity of the countries.

Coined with the modernisation agendas of the GCC governments, the colossal influx of foreign workers and their families, led to the coexistence of multiple (project) identities representing different groups in today's GCC society (see also Figure 6). Most of the foreign labours in GCC countries are considered to be unskilled workers, mainly in construction, and household personnel (maids, servants, drivers, gardeners, etc.).

The impact of such groups in the GCC countries is considered enormous. With more than 200 nationalities living in these countries, they brought various cultural backgrounds, articulated values and norms that constituted their own

identities. In fact, in the last 10 years, the foreign population living in the GCC countries exposed various traditional elements to often contradictorily opinions and viewpoints.

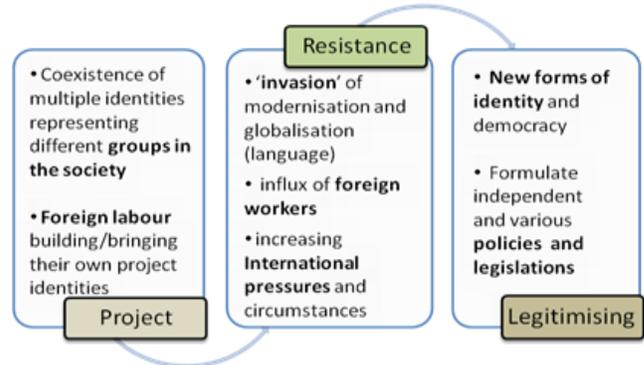


Figure 6. Emerging identities in 20th Century in GCC countries.

It is worth mentioning that GCC countries have also been under growing international pressure in the past few years to allow expatriates to settle down and be given equal rights. This has opened room for more liberty among foreigners and emphasised individual freedom.

GCC citizen population, on the other hand, perceived this as an invasion of their principles and traditional constituents. They find it difficult to accept that they are now national minorities and instigated to see this diversity as a threat to their traditional values and customs. Fear of cultural assimilation and insecurity about the future of their identity has created a source of public debate.

All this, has pushed the GCC countries, to construct new forms of legislative structures to preserve its identity. Labour and immigration policies were formulated to address a range of economic, cultural, and ethical issues. These developed policies were also aimed to limit the inflow of foreign labour, through limiting contractual duration of residencies. However, the GCC countries economy development plans which demanded further labour force made those policies result-less.

So apparently, we observe that GCC national identity has been superfluously vulnerable to pervasive influences by the various and complex ways in which local cultures in the GCC countries and multiple foreign cultures interact with each other. Amidst GCC plans to pursue economic growth and increase its vitality, the six countries have realised the need to establish a cohesive national identity strategy to address this challenge. This clearly requires delineated objectives and outcome expectations supported by the right mix of various approaches.

One recent approach the GCC countries have adopted in this regard is the development of contemporary identity management systems to provide them with more accurate information about their population i.e., national ID programs. Accurate information is viewed by GCC countries as a fundamental planning requirement to allow their governments and policy makers develop and regulate their national strategies (see also Figure 7). The next section explores on a high level, the scope of these programs in the GCC context.

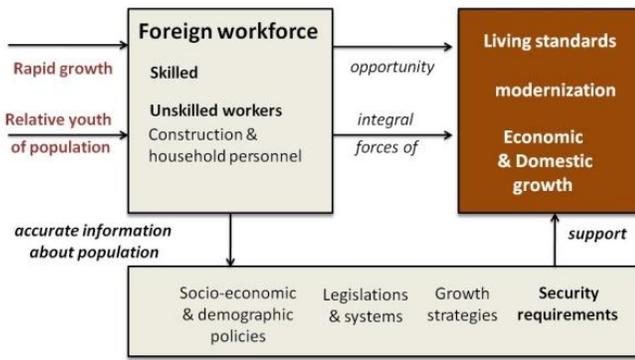


Figure 7: Economy driven population growth

In the age of globalisation, the world is rapidly becoming a single place and closer to each other, as distance has become irrelevant. Amidst ruthless modernisations

The ever-increasing socio-economic shapes of globalisation have driven many governments worldwide to invest in more secure forms of identification and improved identity management systems, in order to ascertain the true identities and legitimacy of their population i.e., of those who hold identification documents.

This need is considered a critical requirement for GCC countries in order to balance growth and against the consequent challenges of globalisation i.e., the swelling influx of foreign

residents and labour, threat of identity fraud, illegal immigration, international crime and global terrorism.

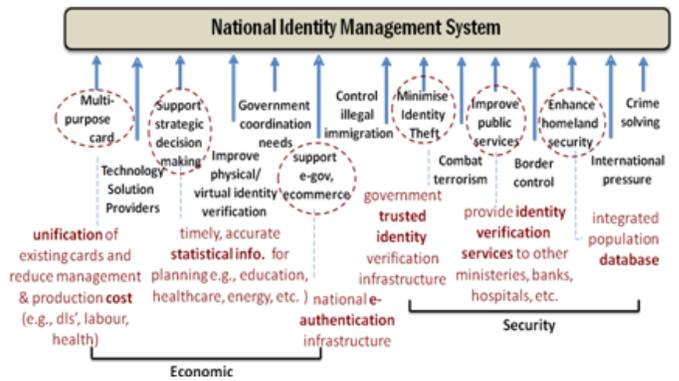
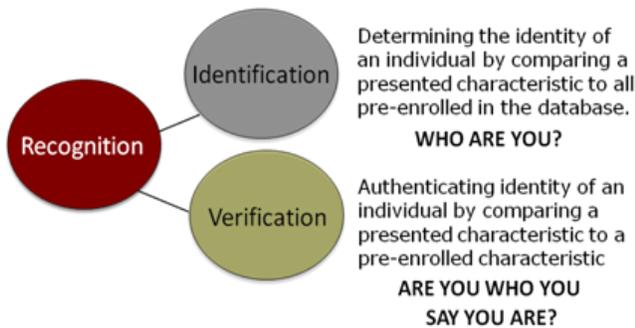


Figure 8. National identity management driving forces in GCC.

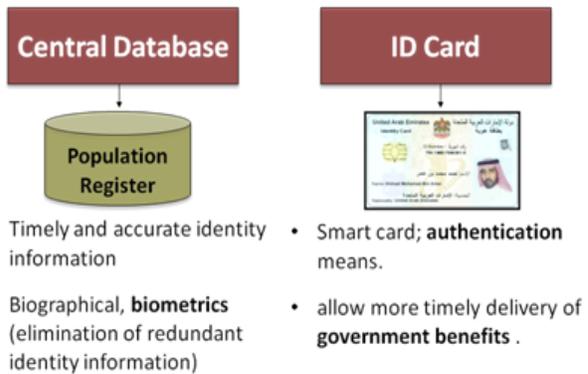
In a nutshell, the national ID card program in GCC countries has a comprehensive focus to achieve two prevailing objectives (See also Figure 8):

1. Security enhancement: focuses on reinforcing immigration control and increasing national security; and
2. Economic growth: enhance and expedite service delivery, and facilitate e-government.

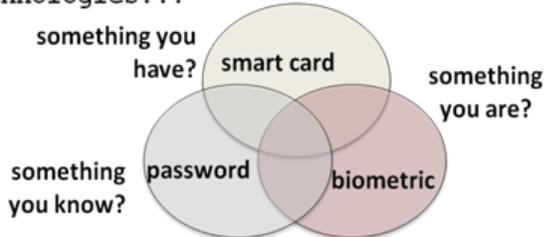
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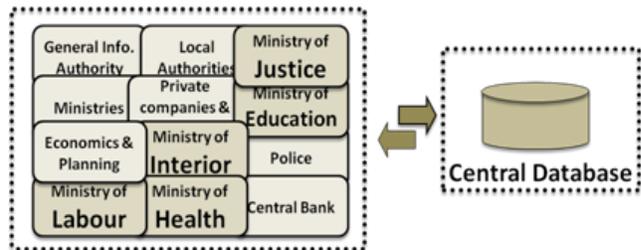
Components



a three factor authentication enabling technologies...



interoperability & integration with other systems



... facilitate communication among government, industry and society

Figure 9. Key features of national ID systems.

In principle, these systems are designed to improve identity recognition both in the form of identification (1-to-many) and verification (1-to-1). The primary components of these systems are:

- 1) Central population database: considered key to enable timely and accurate identity information, uses biometrics to eliminate redundant identity information,
- 2) ID card: smart card, that offers various approaches to authenticating individuals, allowing more timely delivery of government benefits.

Identity Management systems are envisaged to improve the services provided to nationals and residents in terms of both scope and responsiveness or, in government terms, "best value". It is also foreseen to provide continuous, state based identity verification and authentication of individual population, and to improve the security and integrity of both data and process. Figure 9 depicts the major components of national identity management systems in GCC countries.

With strong leadership and a long-term focus, these programs are designed to provide more reliable data about important demographics and socio-economic facets related to population, which should help in designing persistent legislative policies and systems. This should in turn, contribute to developing national human resources strategies in light of the growth strategies for all age groups and communities. National Identity Management systems are also expected to materialise 'identity-dependent' service models that form the basic foundation of identity management services provided to constituents both in public and private sectors.

VI. CONCLUSION

The impact of globalisation and thereafter the modernisation efforts in the GCC countries has resulted in numerous socio-cultural implications. The rapid growth and relative youth of the population allowed foreigners to dominate the workforce. While there is no doubt that migrant labourers have been integral forces behind the unprecedented pace of modernisation in the GCC countries, they have also been observed as a negative influence on the national cultures, identities and values as well as social structures. Undeniably, the GCC identity today faces primarily the challenge of finding a balance between their traditions and modern standards and practices. The living standards and highly paid wages compared to other countries in the region, is likely to result in more interested foreigners to work and settle in GCC countries.

Indeed, governments have an active role in shaping and stabilising collective identities of their societies. Realising this role, GCC governments have attempted in recent years to develop long-term structural changes and short and medium term needs of their continued rapid economic markets, that also address the sources of economic, cultural, and political instability. One important approach GCC countries followed in this regard is the development of contemporary identity management systems.

These initiatives have been backed by strong leadership to achieve two prevailing objectives: (1) homeland security

enhancement, and (2) enhancement and expedition of service delivery and support e-government. Certainly, an identity management system that provides reliable and accurate data source about the population demographics is a fundamental planning requirement and central to improving decision making. It should subsequently allow GCC governments and policy makers to examine, and hence develop and regulate their national (identity) strategies and labour markets in a more proactive manner.

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