Pre-election Analysis

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QATAR
The First Shura Council Elections

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The legal framework

On 2nd October 2021, the first-ever Qatar Shura Council elections will take place to appoint 30 members of the legislative chamber. According to article 76 of the Qatar Constitution of 2003, the Shura Council "shall assume legislative authority, approve the general policy of the government and the budget, and shall exercise control over the executive authority," the contrary of the current council, which only has advisory capacity. Besides, article 77 establishes that the Shura Council will count on 45 members, 30 elected by Qatari citizens, and 15 appointed by the Emir.

The most debated and crucial aspect of this first elections had to do with the eligibility to vote according to the criteria established by article 16 of the Nationality Law No. 38 of 2005, which limited the right to vote to original Qataris, following the definition of the same law, article 1:

> "Those residents of Qatar who have been resident in the country since 1930 and who maintained regular legal residence in the country until the enforcement date of the aforementioned Law No. 2 of 1961."

However, and despite the restrictive character of such definition, article 2 of the Electoral Law No. 7 of 29th July 2021 broadened that eligibility criteria as follows:

> "Anyone whose original citizenship is Qatari and above 18 enjoys the right to vote for the Shura Council candidates. The only exception to the original citizenship condition is anyone who was naturalized, provided that their grandfather is Qatari and was born in Qatar. (…)."

Nonetheless, the controversy popped up during the voters' registration process due to the many Qataris that, after applying, did not receive the expected phone text message confirming their registration and the allocated district to cast their vote. Up to date, no official figures were provided on registered voters and those excluded. While the most vocal in expressing their concerns about not having received the registration confirmation belonged to the Al Marri tribe, many more from other tribes were neither included in this first electoral roster.

The electoral districts

The second most debated issue was the district delimitation, which represented the main preoccupation for a government willing to guarantee a fair representation of all the tribes that inhabit the Qatari territory without provoking inequalities among them.

Therefore, article 4 defined the representation mechanism as well as the districts' delimitation as follows:

> "The voter cast their vote in the electoral district in which their permanent residency is located. By permanent residency, it is meant that a voter has a family or tribe residency, depending on the circumstances."

With this definition, the delimitation of the districts was based on historical residencies rather than actual ones, giving priority to the tribal representation to the detriment of territorial distribution, contrary to what is currently happening with the municipal council elections.

The candidates

The registration of candidates started after the voters' registration ended, from 22nd to 26th August. Unofficial figures referred to around 400 those who registered their candidacy, but official information published by the Ministry of Interior provided the initial figure of 294 candidates registered (265 men/29 women). After the appealing process, the final list of candidates released on 15th September dropped to 256 (236 men/20 women). Finally, one week before the elections, the last day to voluntarily drop candidacies, the final number was 227 (211 men/16 women).

As shown in the table below, there are big differences in the figures of candidates competing in every district, as well as their tribal affiliation. In district 5, Old Fareej Al Ghanim, there is only one candidate belonging to the Al Ghanim tribe running unopposed. Instead, in district 22, Al Ghariya, there are 19 candidates, 18 of them belonging to the Al Kuwari tribe. This feature, many competing candidates belonging to the same tribe, is also visible in several districts, like 29, Al Kharsaah, Ummahat Suwai, and Al Uwaynah, with nine candidates belonging from Al Hajri tribe; district 25, Al Jemail, with nine candidates from Al Kubaisi; 22, Al Mashra, with 7 Al Kaabi; 16, Al Saliya, with 7 Al Marri; or 8, Al Bidaa, with 6 Al Swaidi. On the other hand, many district will witness the competition between many candidates from different tribes. For instance, district 7, Al Jasra, with 13 candidates belonging to 10 different tribes; or district 11, Rawdat Al Khail, with ten candidates representing ten tribes.

With this picture, the impact of the tribal delimitation of districts will have a mixed impact on the electoral behavior of voters. Where the competition is between members of one same tribe, voters will have no other option than voting following tribal lines. On the other hand, voters in multi-tribal districts will have the chance to vote for candidates from another tribe. Whether the decision to vote for a different tribe will be based on family/tribal decision to support one specific candidate or the result of an individual choice will be difficult to determine.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations represented by the citizen and electoral laws, which created controversy among diverse sectors of the Qatari society, the first Shura Council elections represent a step forward towards the inclusion of citizens into the political process. It also represents the empowerment of civil society by entitling an elected institution to engage in the policy-making process.

However, the selection of the representation mechanism could reinforce tribalism and tribal identity rather than a national identity, depending on the voting patterns resulting from these first elections. A secondary effect of the reinforced tribalism will be the very limited –most likely non-existent- female representation within the 30 elected seats of the council.

Without having yet final figures of registered voters, the main challenge of these elections is whether the process will generate a big turnout, as expected by the authorities, or the interest would be similar to the one expressed at the municipal elections.

Table 1: Districts and Candidates, Shura Council elections 2021

#	District	Candidates	Women
1	Fereej Al Khulaifat	2	
2	Fereej Al Hitmi	2	
3	Fereej Al Salata	12	3
4	Al Murqab	3	
5	Old Fereej Al Ghanim	1	
6	Msheireb	3	
7	Al Jasra	13	
8	Al Bidaa	6	
9	Barahat Al Jufairi	10	
10	New Doha	6	
11	Rawdat Al Khail	10	1
12	Al Rumailah	12	
13	Fereej Al Najada	7	
14	Northern Al Wakrah	3	
15	Southern Al Wakrah	8	1
16	Al Sailiya	7	
17	Old Rayyan	12	
18	Al Kharaitiyat	3	
19	Al Daayen	8	1
20	Al Khor and Al Thakhira	13	1
21	Al Mashrab	7	
22	Al Ghariya	19	5
23	Al Ruwais	8	
24	Abu Dhalouf	8	1
25	Al Jemail	9	1
26	Al Ghuwairiyah	5	1
27	Al Nasraniya and Al Khurayb	4	1
28	Dukhan	8	
29	Al Kharsaah, Ummahat Suwai, and Al Uwaynah	9	
30	Rawdat Rashid	9	
	Total	227	16

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