

Qatar's pursuit of government excellence: promises and pitfalls

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As Qatar seeks to make the transition from a hydrocarbon-based economy to a diversified, knowledge-based economy, 'government excellence' has been identified as a key strategic objective. This column reports what government effectiveness means in terms of delivery of public services, digitalisation of services, and control of corruption – and outlines the progress made to date on these development priorities and what the country needs to do to meet its targets.

'Government excellence' is a key strategic objective in Qatar's efforts to make the transition from a hydrocarbon-based economy to a diversified, knowledge-based economy. Under its Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030 (NDS3), the country aims 'to become a world-class provider of government

In a nutshell

Qatar has identified 'government excellence' as a strategic objective and has set targets to meet by 2030. For example, it aims to be among the world's top 10% of countries on government effectiveness; to digitalise 90% of its services end-to-end; and to improve its score on perception of corruption.

In recent years, Qatar has made progress on several dimensions of government excellence. Between

services' and 'a top nation for effective, efficient, and transparent governance.'

In tracking its progress towards this goal, Qatar is relying on a combination of global indices, administrative data and customer surveys. Deciding what to track and how it should be tracked provides important information about the country's overall development priorities.

Where to focus

Governance refers to the institutional mechanisms used to manage a country's economy and economic resources, as well as the political mechanisms for deciding how such management decisions are made. As part of its national development strategy, Qatar has focused mainly on the economic dimensions of governance.

These priorities are reflected in the specific development targets included under the NDS3. Qatar aims to be among the top 10% of countries in the world on the World Bank's Government Effectiveness Index. It aims to have 90% of its services digitalised end-to-end. And it aims to achieve a score of higher than 70 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. (Qatar also aims to achieve a government services satisfaction rating of over 85%: this is not an objective target, as it can be met with the right survey design.)

Qatar's focus on the economic dimensions of governance aligns well with the country's overarching priority of making the transition from an economy that is dependent on oil and natural gas to a diversified, competitive economy.

Indeed, the focus on public service delivery reflects continuity in policy priorities and Qatar has made substantial progress on its economic governance indicators in recent decades. For example, the country is

2003 and 2023, its ranking on government effectiveness rose from the top 35% to the top 15% of countries. To improve further, it must develop and empower its policy setting and implementing institutions.

Qatar made progress in digitalizing public services between 2000 and 2014, but efforts since then have stalled. Qatar also ranks well on perceptions of corruption; but, its ranking has improved little in the past two decades. These are areas where Qatar needs stronger institutions to reenergize its efforts.

meeting most of its targets on Sustainable Development Goal 16, which includes effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. Furthermore, its governance targets under the NDS3 are all within reach.

Government effectiveness and service delivery

Government effectiveness refers to the quality of public services and the civil service in general, as well as the policy formulation and implementation process. Between 2003 and 2023, Qatar improved its global percentile ranking on government effectiveness from 65 to 86. Indeed, the country has done remarkably well in improving public service delivery. For example, it has developed a world-class health system, which was able to maintain one of the world's lowest fatality rates during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Qatar has also been working to improve the quality of policy formulation and implementation. It has developed a number of public institutions responsible for setting and implementing public policy. These include the Supreme Council for Economic Affairs and Investment (SCEAI) and the reformulated National Planning Council (NPC), which elevates the role of the Planning and Statistics Authority in establishing and monitoring national development plans and priorities.

But more work remains to empower these institutions and to define clearly the roles and responsibilities of each within the overall policy space.

Given its progress to date, reaching the top 10% of countries in terms of government effectiveness by 2030 is within reach. It requires that Qatar improve its overall global ranking by seven places. Using other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as a benchmark, Qatar currently ranks second in terms of government effectiveness after the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE in turn ranks among the top 5% of countries worldwide in terms of government effectiveness.

Digitalising service delivery

A key aspect of improved service delivery is digitalising processes. This can improve access and the speed of delivery of public services to citizens, residents and businesses. It can also make bureaucratic procedures more transparent and less arbitrary, improving equity and reducing citizen frustration.

Qatar digitalised a number of public service offerings in the early 2010s. But new offerings and platforms have since slowed, as the country focused its attention and resources on hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022.

Indeed, Qatar's global ranking on the United Nations' E-Government Development Index was 53rd in 2024. While this was a significant improvement from its 2022 ranking of 78th in the world, it was below its 2014 ranking of 44th. This drop and resurgence in rankings reflects the changing government priorities during this time.

It is worth noting that e-services were not reduced. Rather, e-government is an ever-changing, fast-moving target, with countries continuously improving their offerings. Qatar's overall score improved between 2014 and 2022, but not by as much as other countries, resulting in a slip the rankings.

The government's aim of digitalising 90% of its services end-to-end is not directly linked to a global index. Thus, the government must ensure that this target is well-defined and accurately reflects what it wants to track.

Furthermore, while this administrative target of digitalising services end-to-end allows Qatar to set its own benchmark, it can miss important developments at the global level, such as greater integration of artificial intelligence (AI) or the ability of its systems to handle non-standardised tasks.

Control of corruption

The final target for Qatar in terms of government excellence is control of corruption in public service delivery. According to the World Bank's Control of Corruption Index, Qatar ranked among the top 25% of countries worldwide in 2023. But unlike its ranking on the index of government effectiveness, this ranking has improved little since 2003 when it was at the 72nd percentile.

The NDS3 has opted to track corruption using Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. In 2023, Qatar ranked 40th in the world on this index with a score of 58. That represents a significant drop from 2010, when its ranking peaked at 19th worldwide.

To achieve a score of 70, the country will have to improve its global ranking to around 20, placing it on par with the UK. While this will be challenging, it is not out of reach: indeed, in 2023, the UAE enjoyed a

score of 68. But achieving the goal does require creating and empowering institutions that tackle corruption.

Qatar has an active citizenry that is quick to call out and comment on governance issues through social media and community gatherings, such as the majlis. That said, social platforms are subject to crowd psychology and manipulation.

Qatar needs objective institutions to identify, investigate and address issues of corruption and incompetence, if and when they occur. The country's Administrative Control and Transparency Authority (ACTA) has staked out a leadership role in this regard, both at a national and regional level. But effective and unbiased institutional oversight remains an area for further development.

Further reading

Kabbani, Nader (forthcoming) *Accelerating the Economic Transition of Qatar*, ERF Report.

Kaufmann, Daniel, and Aart Kraay (2023) *Worldwide Governance Indicators 2023*, World Bank.

National Planning Council (2025) *Third National Development Strategy 2024-2030: Building our sustainable future*.

Transparency International (2024) *Corruption Perceptions Index*.

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