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Sports Diplomacy in the GCC

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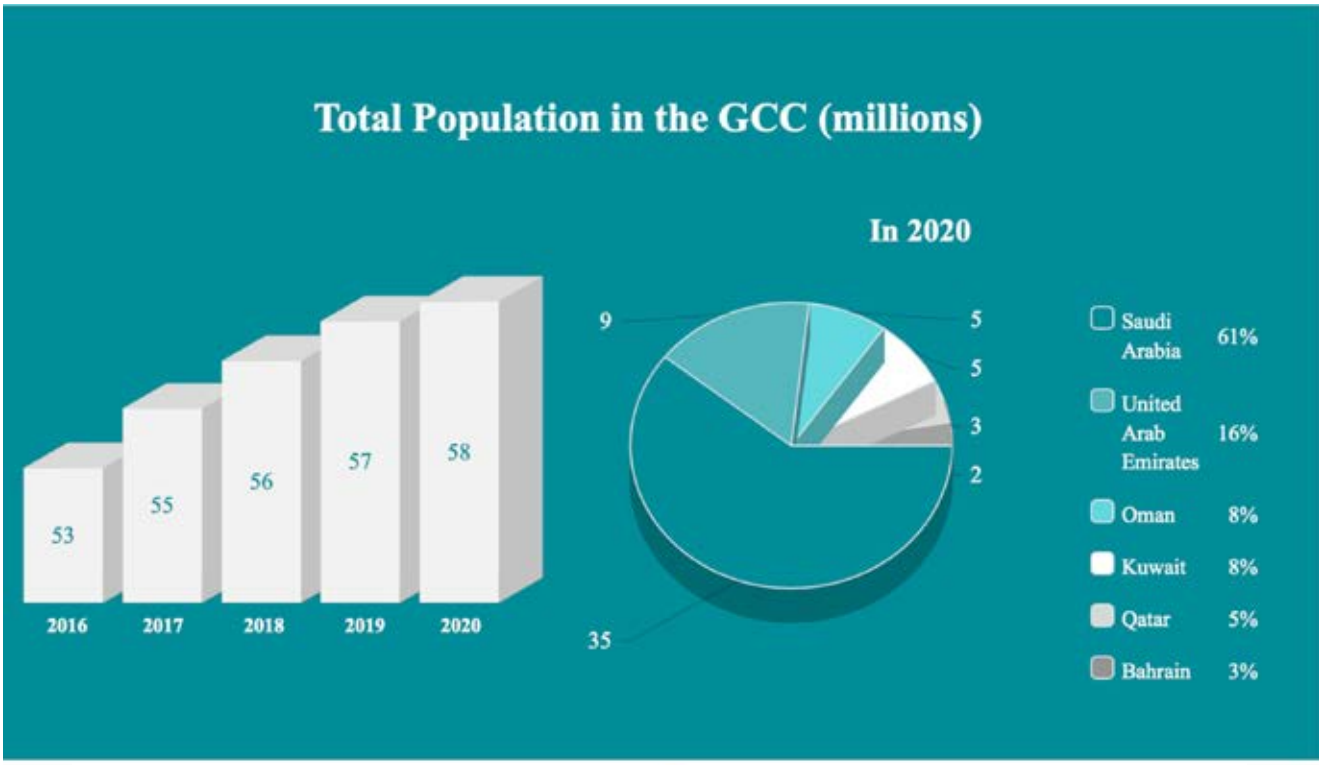
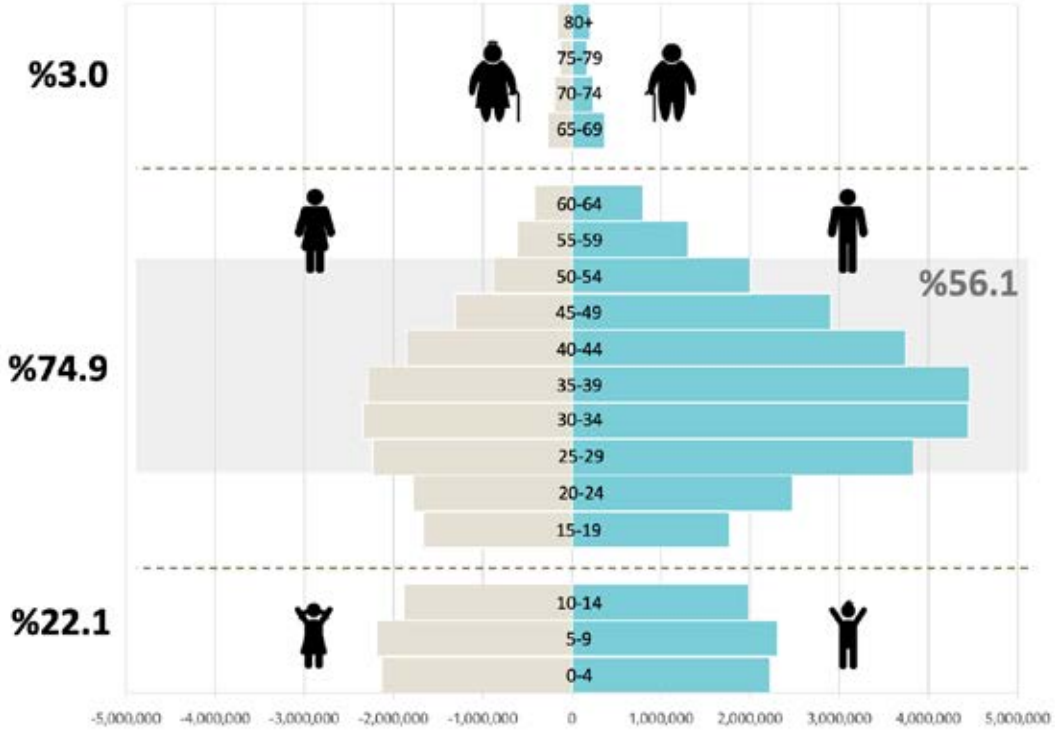
Introduction

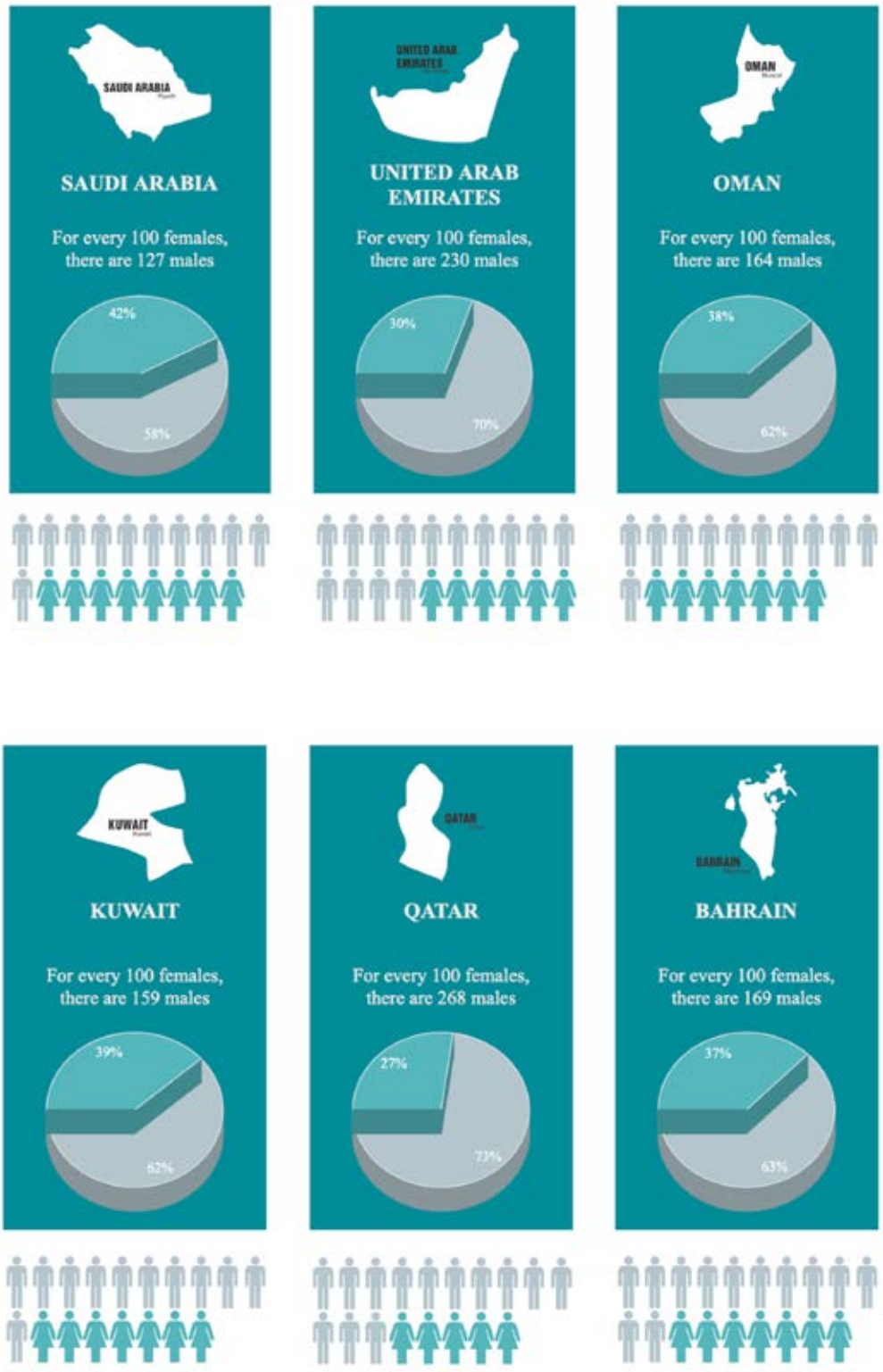
While the concept of sports diplomacy is nothing new, the research of sports as a tool of soft power both in the Gulf states and internationally remains exceedingly understudied. Realizing the importance of sports diplomacy and its effectiveness in image building, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have taken concrete steps in this regard. The GCC countries, primarily the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, and now Saudi Arabia, see sports as a means to diversify their oil-dependent economies, build social cohesion within the bloc, and as a means to promote soft power abroad. Indeed, sports and politics are interconnected. Sports operate within the larger socio-political context, especially regarding gender and youth and it has been used to influence diplomatic, social, and political ties.

Demographic Snapshot in the GCC





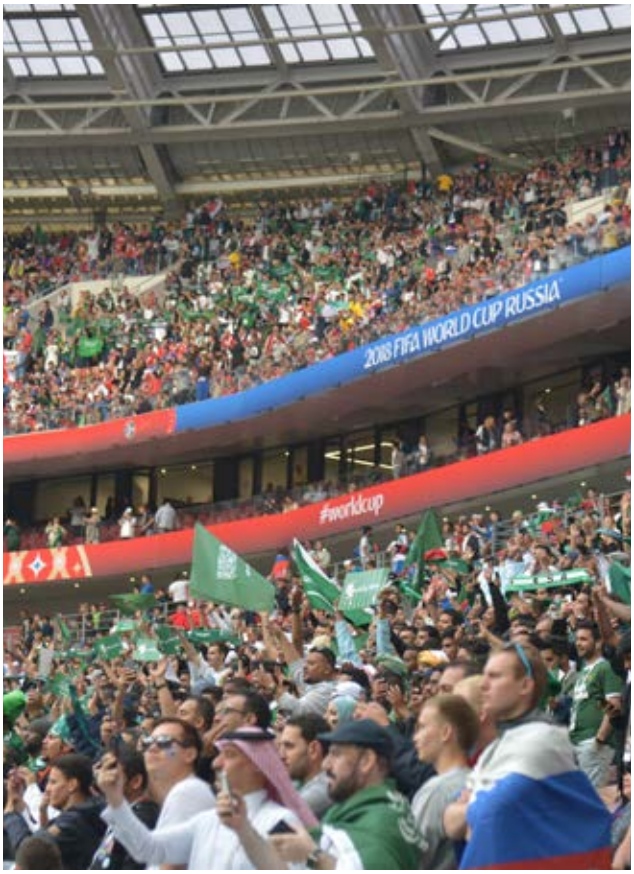
Gender Comparison in the GCC, 2020



SOURCE:
GCC STAT

Sports & Society

Sports not only transcend cultural differences but also helps bring people closer. Sports, particularly football, have always been more than just a sport in the GCC; it has been one of the most significant contributors that shaped national identities. Promoting unity and esteem, football has been regularly viewed as a means of national solidarity and a cultural bond within the bloc. For instance, the creation of the Arabian Gulf Cup in 1970, governed by the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation, demonstrates how sports are viewed as a mechanism of unity. Over the last few decades, the GCC states have generously supported the development of football, as well as other sports such as basketball, and volleyball. More recently, other sports have become part of the equation including tennis, golf and padel.



Due to the socioeconomic benefits of promoting sports and their increased relevance in the GCC countries' development plans, we have witnessed a newfound emphasis on promoting different sports with the development of sports facilities, stadiums, and sports cities such as Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah Sports City. Most of these world-class facilities are fully capable of hosting international competitions. In Saudi Arabia, there are 12 sport cities and 4 stadiums, according to the Saudi Ministry of Sports. As stated on the Saudi Ministry of Sports website, the Saudi Arabia Football Federation was one of the first federations established in the kingdom in 1956. In addition, Saudi Arabia has 26 other sports federations. In terms of competition, Saudi Arabia competed in 10 Summer Olympics and made its debut in the Winter Olympics in 2022, winning a total of 4 medals (2 silver and 2 bronze). In addition, women participated for the first time in the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia has also been successful in the Asian Games, winning a total of 61 medals since 1982 (25 gold, 13 silver, and 23 bronze). Saudi Arabia's Men's National Football Team has participated in the World Cup 6 times, the Asian Cup 10 times (winning the championship in 1984, 1988, and 1996), the Arab Cup 7 times (with wins in 1998 and 2002), the Arabian Gulf Cup 24 times (with wins in 1994, 2002, and 2003), the WAFF Championship 3 times, and the FIFA Confederations Cup 4 times. The Women's National Team has also been making headlines as they played their first international game in 2022 in the Maldives, winning 2-0 against Seychelles. Saudi Arabia's National Basketball Teams has competed internationally with the Men's Team winning a bronze medal in FIBA Asia Championship in 1999. The team is also qualified for the 2021 FIBA Asia Cup in Indonesia.

Similarly, the United Arab Emirates established 24 sports federations, according to the UAE Ministry of Sports. The UAE competed in 8 Summer Olympics, winning a total of 1 gold and 1 bronze medal. The UAE has also competed numerous times in the Asian Games since 1978, winning 4 gold, 11 silver, and 12 medals throughout the years. The UAE's Men's National Football Team participated once in the World Cup in 1990, 10 times in the Asian Cup (being the runners-up in 1996), twice in the Arab Cup, 24 times in the Arabian Gulf Cup (winning the championship in 2007 and 2013), as well as once in the FIFA Confederations Cup in 1997. The Women's National Football Team won first place twice in the WAFF Championship in 2010 and 2011.

There are 24 sports federations and 150 sports facilities in Qatar, most prominently the Khalifa Olympic City, according to Qatar's Ministry of Sports. Qatar has competed in 10 Summer Olympic Games, winning a total of 8 medals (2 gold, 2 silver, and 4 bronze) as well as 120 medals in the Asian Games (43 gold, 31 silver, and 46 bronze). Qatar's Men's National Basketball Team participated once in the FIBA World Cup in 2006 and 10 times in the FIBA Asia Cup, winning bronze in 2003 and 2005. Qatar's Men's National Football Team will make its World Cup debut in the current 2022 edition. Otherwise, they have participated 10 times in the Asian Cup (winning the championship in 2019), 3 times in the Arab Cup, once in the CONCACAF Gold Cup (reaching the semi-finals in 2021), and 24 times in the Arabian Gulf Cup (with wins in 1992, 2004, and 2014). Qatar's Men's National Volleyball Team also participated in both the World Championship and the Asian Championship.

> **"Over the last few decades, the GCC states have generously supported the development of football, as well as other sports such as basketball, and volleyball"**

According to the Bahrain Olympic Committee, there are 27 sports federations in Bahrain. Like the UAE, Bahrain also competed in 10 Summer Olympic Games, winning 2 gold and 2 silver medals. Bahrain also won big in the Asian Games, with a total of 84 medals (37 gold, 24 silver, and 23 bronze). The Men's National Basketball Team participated in 8 FIBA Asia Cups. Bahrain's Men's National Football Team participates 7 times in the Asian Cup, 6 times in the Arab Cup (runners-up in both 1985 and 2002), as well as the WAFF Championship and the Arabian Gulf Cup, where they won first place in both competitions in 2019. The Women's National Football Team played their first official international game in April 2007 in the Maldives and participated in the WAFF World Cup and Asian Cup.

Kuwait has 15 sports federations and 12 participations in the Summer Olympics Games with 3 bronze medals. In addition, Kuwait has participated in the Asian Games since 1974, winning 22 gold, 24 silver, and 34 bronze medals for a total of 80 medals. Kuwait's Men's National Basketball Team participated in 12 FIBA Asia Cups, while the Men's Football Team qualified for 1 World Cup. The Men's Football Team also participated in the Asian Cup 10 times and winning the championship in 1980, 8 times in the Arab cup and winning third place in 1964, 1992, and 1998, 4 times in the WAFF Championship (winning the championship in 2020), as well as 24 times in the Arabian Gulf Cup where they won the championship 10 times (1970, 1972, 1974, 1976, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1996, 1998, and 2010).

Oman has 15 sports federations, according to the Oman Olympic Committee. Oman participated in 8 Summer Olympics and 10 times in the Asian Games, winning gold in 1990 and bronze in 1986, 1998, and 2010. In addition, Oman's National Football team participated 4 times in both the Asian Cup and WAFF Championship, as well as 24 times in the Arabian Gulf Cup, where they won the championship in 2009 and 2017. Oman has yet to establish a Women's National Team. Table 1 below summarizes the GCC States' participations in international sport competitions.

Table 1: GCC States & International Sports Participations

	KSA	UAE	Qatar	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman
Number of Sport Federations	27	24	24	27	15	15
Summer Olympics Participations	10	8	10	10	12	8
Summer Olympics Medals	4	2	8	4	3	0
Winter Olympics Participations	1	0	0	0	0	0
Asian Games Medals	61	27	120	84	80	10
World Cup Participations	6	1	1	0	1	0
Asian Cup Participations	10	10	10	7	10	4
Arab Cup Participations	7	2	3	6	8	0
Arabian Gulf Cup Participations	24	23	24	1	24	24
WAFF Championship Participations	3	0	0	1	4	4

Sports & Women

Particular emphasis needs to be given to the development of sports for women. In 2000, Bahrain sent two female athletes, Mariam Mohamed Hadi Al Hilli and Fatema Hameed Gerashi, to the Sydney Summer Olympics. Their inclusion was the first among a Gulf state. Kuwait followed suit by sending its first female athlete, Danah Al-Nasrallah, to Athens in 2004. At the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, the United Arab Emirates and Oman sent female athletes for the first time: Latifah bint Ahmed Al Maktoum and Maitha Al Maktoum represented the UAE, while Buthaina Yaqoubi represented Oman. At the London 2012 Summer Olympics, Saudi Arabia and Qatar sent their first female athletes. Sarah Attar and Wojdan Shahrkhani represented Saudi Arabia, while Noor Al-Malki, Bahiya Al-Hamad, Nada Arkaji, and Aya Majdi represented Qatar. Additionally, Bahrain won its first-ever Olympic medal, a gold medal by Maryam Yusuf Jamal in athletics. Since then, Bahrain's other 3 medals were also won by female athletes: Ruth Jebet won gold, and Eunice Kirwa won silver in 2016, whereas Kalkidan Gezahegne won silver in 2020. Moreover, Saudi Arabia women made their first appearance in the Special Olympics World Games in the UAE in March 2019, with the basketball team winning gold.

Source: Special Olympics

Source: FIBA 3x3

The last few years have witnessed an increase in women's participation in all kinds of sports throughout the GCC. The trend is well supported by the GCC governments as a means to ensure female empowerment and boost gender equality. In Saudi Arabia, women competed in the kingdom's first motor event, Rally Jameel, 2022 Aramco Saudi Ladies International, the first Women's Football League, the first Women's Volleyball League, and the second Women's Basketball League. Moreover, Saudi team Jeddah United, established by Lina Almaeena, a Saudi pioneer in women's sports, one of Forbes' Most Powerful Arab Women in 2014, and a member of the Saudi Shura Council, won first place in the FIBA 3x3 National Cup in December 2021 during the 3x3 World Tour in Jeddah. Furthermore, the UAE participated in the Special Olympics Invitational Games Malta 2022 and will host the 9th edition of the Dubai Women's Run and the 5th Dubai Women's Triathlon. Female athletes from Bahrain also participated internationally in the 2021 IMMAF World Championships, whereas women from Qatar participated in the 2019 Asian Games in Jakarta, as well as in rowing at the 2020 Olympics in Japan for the first time. Moreover, Kuwait most recently made headlines for GCC women in sports by hosting the third edition of the GCC Games in 2022, a multi-sport regional event for the GCC countries, in which female athletes participated for the first time.

Women in the GCC are not only taking part in sports as athletes but also taking up leadership roles in sports federations. In 2016, Princess Reema bint Bandar Al-Saud, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States, was appointed the Vice President of Women's Affairs at the Saudi General Sports Authority. She later served as President of the Mass Participation Federation. Princess Reema is also a member of the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee, the International Olympic Committee's Women in Sports Commission and the World Bank's advisory council for the Women Entrepreneurs Finance (Arab News, 2020). A driving force in empowering women's sports in Saudi Arabia and globally, Princess Reema has been actively promoting and mobilizing women's sports since taking up these roles. Recently, Princess Reema was appointed a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Coordination Commission for Brisbane 2032, where she will continue to advance women's participation in sports. As Princess Reema stated, "the choices that women have today are greater than yesterday and every day they will grow more" (Buller, 2018).

Moreover, Sheikha Hayat Bint Abdul Aziz Al Khalifa, a Member of the Bahrain Women's Sports Committee, was recently elected as Chair of the Women and Sports Committee of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA). Following the GCC Games (also known as Kuwait 2022), Sheikha Hayat presented a proposal to the Gulf Cooperation Council executive board on May 23, 2022, pushing for the inclusion of all sports, particularly Olympic sports, for female athletes at future GCC Games. While Kuwait 2022 was a significant milestone, Sheikha Hayat acknowledged that "we have created history. But more needs to be done" (Olympic Council of Asia, 2022).

"The choices that women have today are greater than yesterday and every day they will grow more," -Princess Reema bint Bandar Al-Saud.

Sports & Youth

Not only have the GCC states expanded and developed women's participation in sports, but they also promoted local sports development and youth leagues. In March 2022, the Ministers of Youth and Sports at the Gulf Cooperation Council states held their 35th meeting under the presidency of the Vice Minister of Sports of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Chair Country, Bader bin Abdulrahman Al-Kadi (Saudi Press Agency, 2022). During the meeting, the ministers discussed developing the joint Gulf Youth Process, enhancing cooperation and social cohesion among the GCC states, as well as empowering youth in the GCC. Moreover, during the 95th meeting of the executive board of the GCC Olympic Committees in May 2022, the committee chose the United Arab Emirates as the host country for the first-ever GCC Youth Games that will take place next year (The Peninsula, 2022). The Union of Arab Football Associations, headquartered in Riyadh, also organizes two international football competitions for youth: the Arab Cup U-17 and the Arab Cup U-20. Saudi Arabia will host the sixth edition of the Arab Cup U-20, scheduled from July 20 to August 5, 2022. In addition, the Asian Football Confederation is also hosting youth leagues. These measures are serving several purposes in the region. Promoting sports is not only cementing ties and creating job opportunities, but it is also aimed at encouraging a healthier lifestyle.

In these ways, sports serve as a means to promote social cohesion within states and the Gulf region. The development of the sports sector has been a vehicle for many factors that build social cohesion, such as better mental and physical health, higher education, and more employment opportunities. Sports have also been attributed to forming stronger societal bonds as well as boosting self-esteem (Zafar and Medien, 2021). In addition, sports have also promoted social and religious acceptance in an international setting. One prominent example of this is what is known as the "Salah Effect," which refers to the reduction in hate crimes towards Muslims and anti-Muslim speech in Britain after Mohamed Salah joined the Liverpool Football Club. Consequently, Salah has been promoting acceptance of Islam in the United Kingdom, as "when Liverpool fans were reminded that Salah is an observant Muslim, they were significantly more likely to then say that Islam was compatible with British values" (Steimle, 2019). The Salah Effect demonstrates how sports, even in an apolitical setting, can be a powerful tool for enabling social and cultural acceptance as well as shifting perceptions.

Sports & Economics

As part of the Gulf Visions to diversify their economies, the GCC states have invested in sports to diversify away from the traditional oil and gas sector as well as complement the tourism sector. PwC Middle East's Sports Survey stated that the GCC states had spent more than $65 billion on sports development, as the regional sports industry is set to grow at the fastest rate in the world post-COVID-19 (PwC, 2021). The GCC states, mainly the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and most recently Saudi Arabia, have invested in different sports clubs by either sponsoring or buying teams. According to Deloitte Football Money League, in 2012, 5 of the 20 richest clubs in Europe were sponsored by a Gulf company. In addition to Barcelona sponsored by Qatar, Arsenal and AC Milan were sponsored by Dubai's Emirates, and Manchester City was sponsored by Abu Dhabi's Etihad (Deloitte, 2013). Recently, Saudi Arabia has invested in Newcastle United.

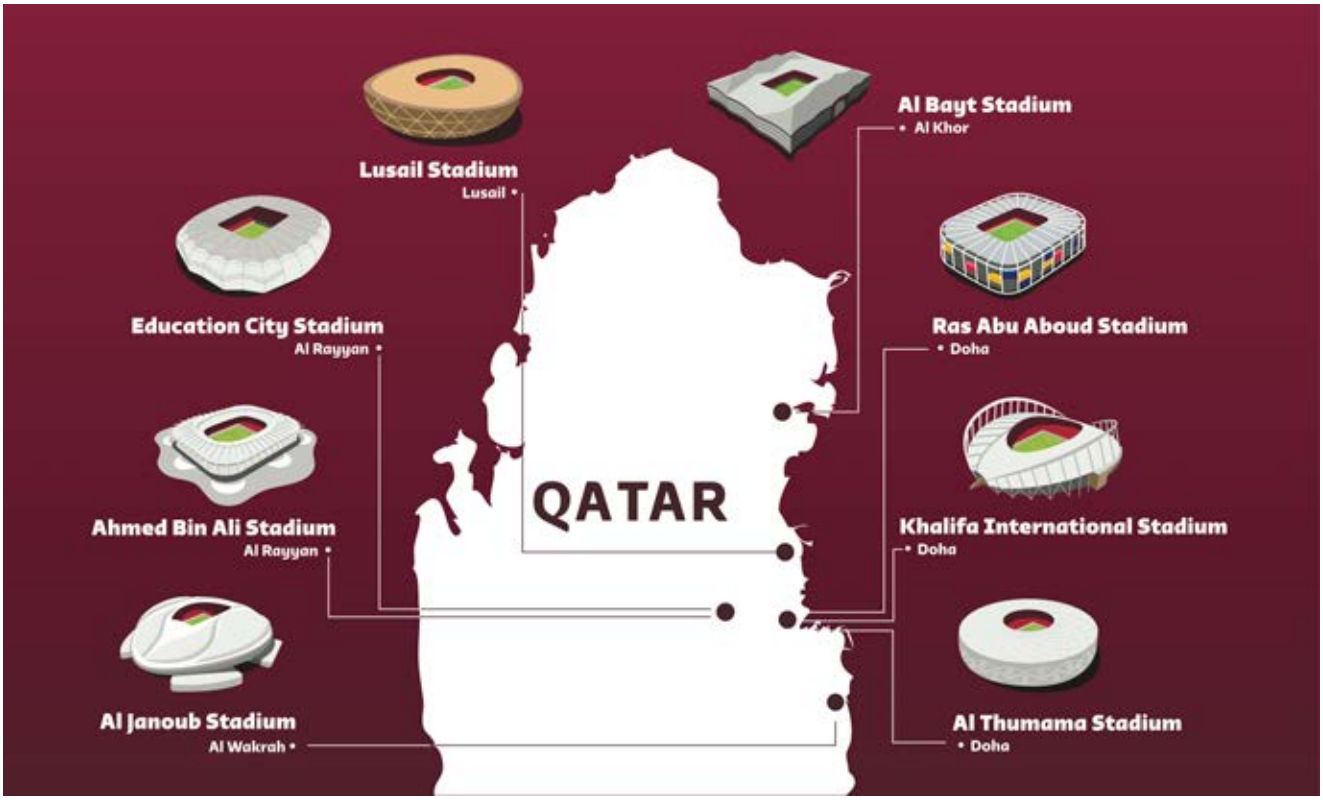
In September 2008, through the Abu Dhabi United Group, owned by Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi bought Manchester City for approximately $360m (Atkinson, 2013). Manchester City then went on to win their first Premier League title in 44 years in 2012. Since then, Manchester City has won five additional Premier League championships (2014, 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022). In 2022, Manchester City is regarded by Forbes as the sixth most valuable world football team in the world, valued at $4.25 billion with an operating income of $156 million (Ozanian & Teitelbaum, 2022). The Abu Dhabi United Group also invested in numerous other football teams around the world, such as New York City, Melbourne City, and Yokohama F. Marinos.

In addition, Dubai's Emirates is currently sponsoring Arsenal. In 2018, Emirates and the Premier League club agreed to a new five-year shirt sponsorship deal until the end of the 2023-2024 season, making Emirates the title shirt sponsor for Arsenal for approximately 18 years (The National News, 2018). After finalizing the agreement with Emirates president Tim Clark, Ivan Gazidis, Arsenal's chief executive, stated that the extension makes the deal the "longest-

running in the Premier League and one of the longest relationships in world sport" (The National News, 2018). Furthermore, as a goal to bring "the world together through sports," Emirates also sponsors other leagues and teams other than football, such as rugby, tennis, golf, and tennis.

The Qatar Foundation, founded in 1995 by Qatar's emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani to advance education, science, and development, reached a five-year agreement with Spanish league leader FC Barcelona valued at €150m ($157.9 million) (The Guardian, 2010). After Qatar Foundation, Qatar Airways sponsored the team for 4 years, which ended in 2016. Moreover, Qatar Sports Investments (QSI), a subsidiary of Qatar's state-run sovereign-wealth fund Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), bought Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) in 2011, one of the wealthiest football clubs in the world (White, 2022), Since the takeover in 2011, PSG's value has increased significantly. In fact, Forbes ranked PSG as the seventh most valuable world football team in the world in 2022, valued at $3.2 billion (Ozanian & Teitelbaum, 2022).

In April 2020, Saudi Arabia's sovereign-wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund (PIF) purchased a significant stake in the world's largest live-entertainment company, Live Nation Entertainment. The PIF owns a total of 12.3 million shares, valued at almost $500 million. As Live Nation's third-largest shareholder, the PIF owns a 5.7% stake in the entertainment company (Aswad & Littleton, 2020). Most recently, Saudi Arabia's PIF purchased the Premier League club Newcastle United in October 2021. Moreover, Argentinian football star Lionel Messi has been officially named Saudi Arabia's Tourism Authority brand ambassador. Saudi Arabia also sponsored the upcoming Golf LIV. Furthermore, in the summer of 2020, Bahrain bought a 20% stake in the French football club, Paris FC. According to the Ligue 2 team, the Bahraini fund will become the club's main sponsor with the aim of "increasing the image and reputation of Bahrain" (Ramsay, 2020).



In other words, the Gulf countries see concrete economic opportunities in investing in the sports sector. However, the results of these investments are mixed. Regarding some teams, such as Manchester City, Abu Dhabi's investments were directly profitable to the Abu Dhabi United Group. Others, such as PSG, the investments profited Qatar in different ways. In Qatar's case, one of QSI's objectives is to become a "globally recognized and leading sports and leisure investment company," according to their website. Investing in PSG, one of Europe's most elite football clubs, definitely boosted Qatar's brand value, particularly following its successful bid for the upcoming World Cup. Nicholas McGeehan, the director of Fair Square Projects, explained that the investment "is of enormous political benefit" and that "political capital will be soaring amongst the Qataris" (France 24, 2020). The Investment Promotion Agency Qatar (IPA Qatar) states that Burson Cohn & Wolfe's "Ranking of Sports Cities 2020" ranked Doha in the top 50 global cities based on cities' performance in hosting sports events, making it the first in the Arab World.

In addition, Qatar ranked among the top 20 countries worldwide in Sports Market Intelligence's company Sportcal's "Global Sports Impact (GSI) Nations Index." Fabian Blumberg, the Regional Representative to the Gulf States at Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), explains that "it is a strategic understanding of sport and science that guides Qatar… Both serve to expand Qatar's soft power and improve its image abroad" (Sanders IV, 2020). In addition, hosting the World Cup will have significant economic benefits. According to World Bank reports: "the economy is expected to expand by 3% over the medium term, helped by continued investments related to hosting the football WorldCup." According to IPA Qatar, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) has grown since winning its bid to host the World Cup, with an average growth of 4.5% over 11 years between 2010 to 2020 (The Investment Promotion Agency Qatar, 2022).

Hosting the 2022 World Cup will not only promote long-term tourism but also diversify Qatar's economy by creating more jobs. Qatar estimated that approximately 1.5 million new jobs were created for the World Cup, specifically in construction, tourism, and hospitality. The unemployment rate in Qatar has decreased significantly since it was 0.6% in 2011. The unemployment currently stands at 0.1% in 2020. In addition, staging the World Cup will extend Qatar's influence regionally and internationally. Nasser Al Khater, the CEO of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, explained that "the country's focus will shift from infrastructure development to tourism and will likely go in the direction of Russia post-World Cup 2018," where the tournament added $14 billion to the Russian economy (The Investment Promotion Agency Qatar, 2022). Tourism has also increased in Qatar from 1.5 million in 2009 to 2.9 million in 2016. The expected number of tourists is projected to reach 3.5 million in 2022 after the World Cup and 7.4 million by 2030. Moreover, Qatar predicts over one million visitors for the World Cup, generating approximately QAR 66 billion ($18.12 billion) by 2025 (Allison, Aswad, and Scott, 2018).

> **"As part of the Gulf Visions to diversify their economies, the GCC states have invested in sports to diversify away from the traditional oil and gas sector as well as complement the tourism sector."**

Sports & Politics

Sports are not only used to achieve social and economic goals, but also used to influence politics, diplomacy, and foreign relations with other countries. Serving as ministers and owners, the ruling families have been at the forefront of promoting sports in the region and internationally. Given the socioeconomic and political importance of sports, all of the GCC countries have made these activities a pillar in their respective development programs. For example, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 aims to improve citizens' and residents' quality of life by advancing the sports sector. Two of the program's key objectives are "promoting sports activities in the community" and "achieving excellence in several sports regionally and internationally" (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030). The Dubai Plan 2021 and Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 similarly launched plans to develop the sports sector and promote sports tourism. Specifically, Dubai announced in 2021 The Dubai Sports Sector Plan, a 10-year blueprint aimed at growing the GDP contributions of the sports sector in the city. Moreover, one of Oman's Vision 2040 objectives is to create "an environment and ecosystem conducive for sports to contribute to the economy and compete globally" (Oman's Vision 2040). Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 also strives to provide "more modern facilities that promote regular cultural and sports activities" (Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030). Qatar's National Vision 2030 and Kuwait's Vision 2035 also aims to improve the sports sector.

The GCC states have certainly also made use of sports to improve their international image. They have frequently done this by hosting notable games and tournaments both at a national and international level. Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup has not been without controversy. As FIFA President Sepp Blatter explained that there was "definitely direct political influence" on executive committee members from Europe to

vote for Qatar (Gibson, 2013). He stated that "European leaders recommended to its voting members to opt for Qatar, because of major economic interests in the country" (Gibson, 2013). Since winning the bid, however, Qatar had global coverage on numerous issues from international news outlets. In response, Hassan Al-Thawadi, the Secretary-General of the Qatar Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, stated that Qatar 2022 would be a "platform" that will open "up the gates of communication between east and west" (Jackson, 2010). Giving a speech at the United Nations in 2016, Secretary-General Hassan Al-Thawadi stated that "the 2022 FIFA World Cup would not be Qatar's World Cup but a World Cup for the entire Middle East" (Al-Thawadi, 2016). "The FIFA World Cup in 2022 is an opportunity first and foremost for the Arab World and the Middle East to showcase its true, peaceful nature to the rest of the world. It is an opportunity for the region to be in the headlines for reasons other than conflict. It is an opportunity for people to travel to the region and delve beyond the stereotypes that have been perpetrated for decades and centuries. The importance of people-to-people relations should not be underestimated and there is no more effective vehicle for this than football, and the World Cup," he continued (Al-Thawadi, 2016).

The GCC states have also relied on golf to promote their international standing. In the golf realm, one marketing strategy to promote the golf industry is offering appearance fees, particularly in tournaments on the European Tour. The GCC states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have used this marketing strategy in their promotion of major tournaments including the Saudi International and the Dubai Desert Classic, for example. The Saudi International, which took place in the King Abdullah Economic City in Jeddah in early 2022, featured 30 players from the PGA Tour, including elite stars Phil Mickelson, Dustin Johnson, and Bryson DeChambeau. While Mickelson received criticism, he defended his choice, tweeting that "after turning down opportunities to go to the Middle East for many years, I'm excited to

go play and see a place in the world I've never been. I understand those who are upset or disappointed. You'll be ok. I'm excited to experience this for the first time" (Harig, 2020). Tiger Woods, one of the greatest golf players of all time, defended the situation, saying, "I understand the politics behind it. But also the game of golf can help heal a lot of that, too. It can help grow it" (Harig, 2020). Woods also acknowledged how far the GCC has come regarding golf, stating, "I remember going to Dubai for my very first time and seeing maybe two or three buildings in the skyline. Now there is a New York City skyline. Again, golf has grown. There were only a few courses when I went to Dubai and now they're everywhere. Same with Abu Dhabi, and maybe eventually in Saudi Arabia" (Harig, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the GCC states are effectively using sports to bring about a positive change at different levels domestically and regionally. At the same time, sport is also used to redefine the GCC in a different way using soft power techniques. Indeed, the relationships between GCC states and the West are leaning more on soft power strategies such as hosting global and regional mega-sporting events. The GCC states will continue to host such events and develop the sports sector as a means to improve their country's quality of life domestically and reputation internationally. Jeddah, Bahrain, and Abu Dhabi will continue to host their respective Formula 1 Grand Prix. Jeddah and Abu Dhabi will host the FIBA 3x3 World Tour. NBA Games will finally take place in the region in Abu Dhabi. The region will continue to see sports as a venue to diversify their economy, build social cohesion within the GCC, and as a means of soft power in foreign policies.

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