



THE GENDER DIVIDE IN QATAR AND THE REGION

Analysis, Causes, and Effects

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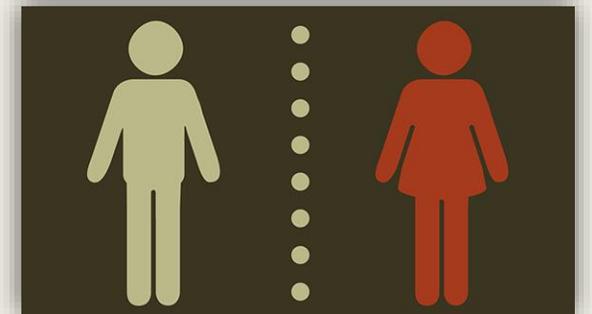


Purpose and Introduction

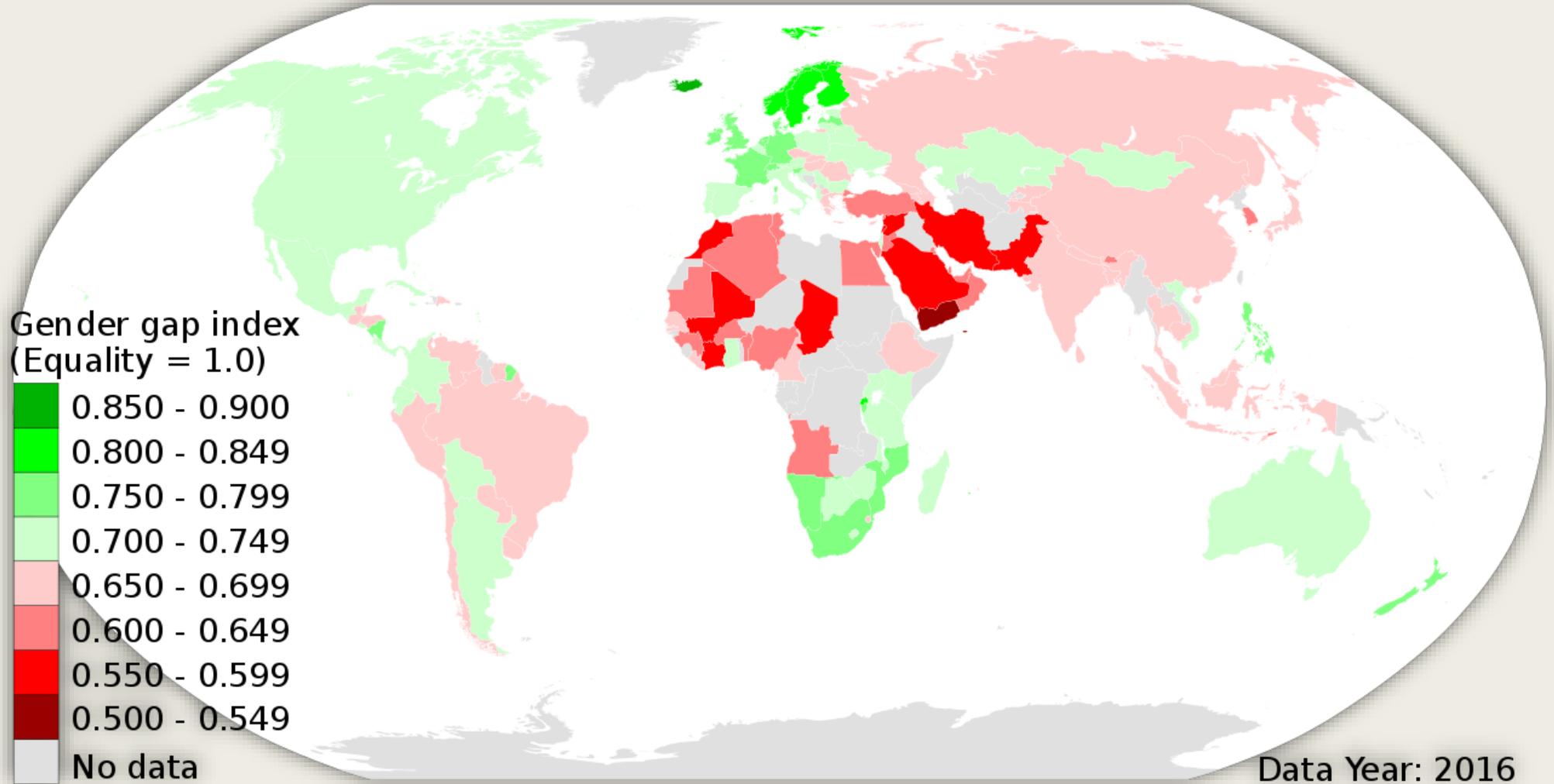
The paper discusses and analyses the causes and effects of the gender divide in Qatar.

Gender Divide:

- It is a global phenomenon present in all cultures and societies to varying degrees. In Qatar, the gender gap exists in both academic and professional sectors;
- The gender gap widened in some areas and shrunk in others as a result of Qatar's upgrade from being a pearl diving and fishing society to a developed modern state;



Worldwide Gender Gap Index Map



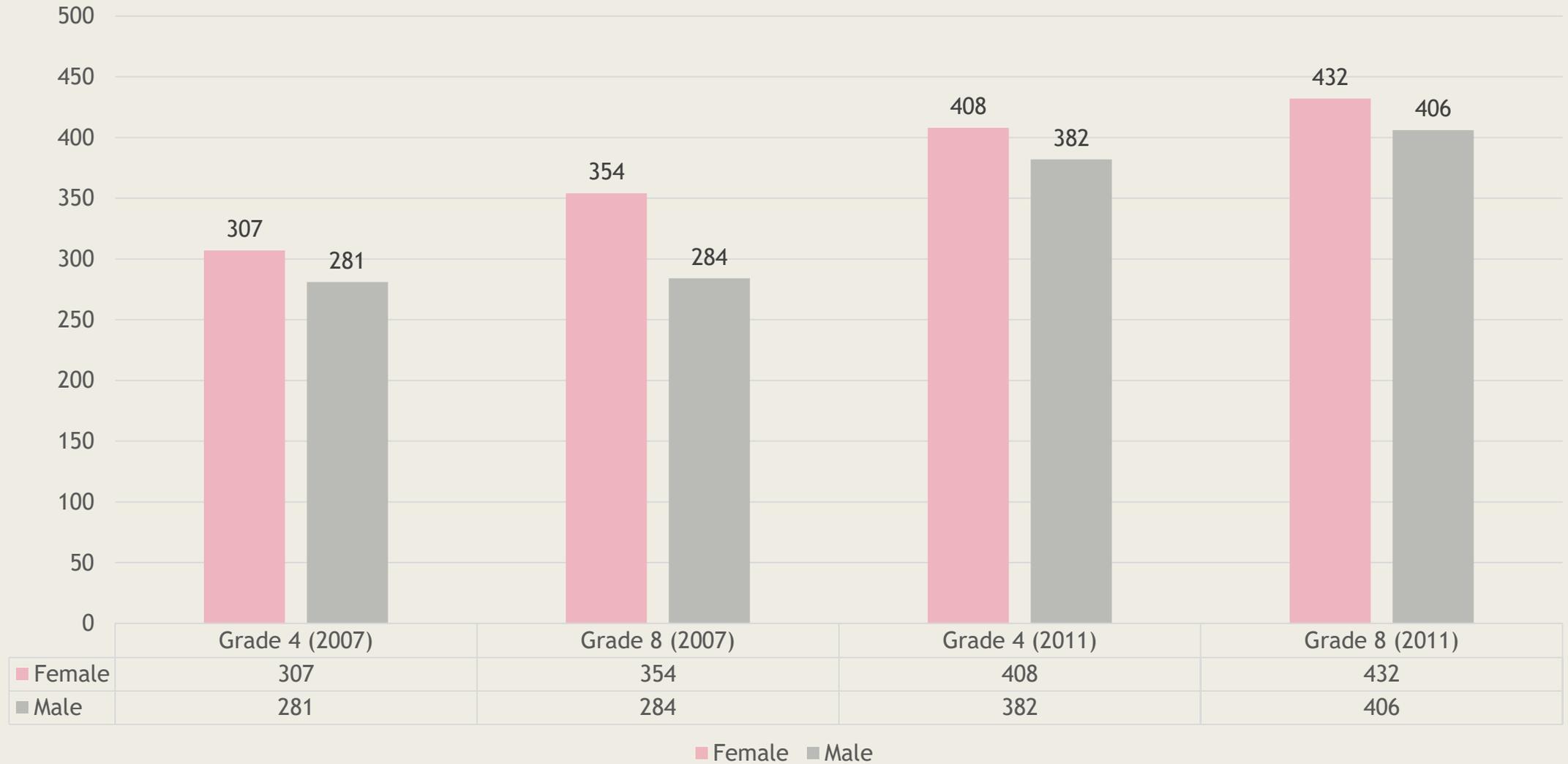
Source: World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index (2016)

Gender Divide in Academic Settings

Over time, Qatar evolved and thus the following changes took place:

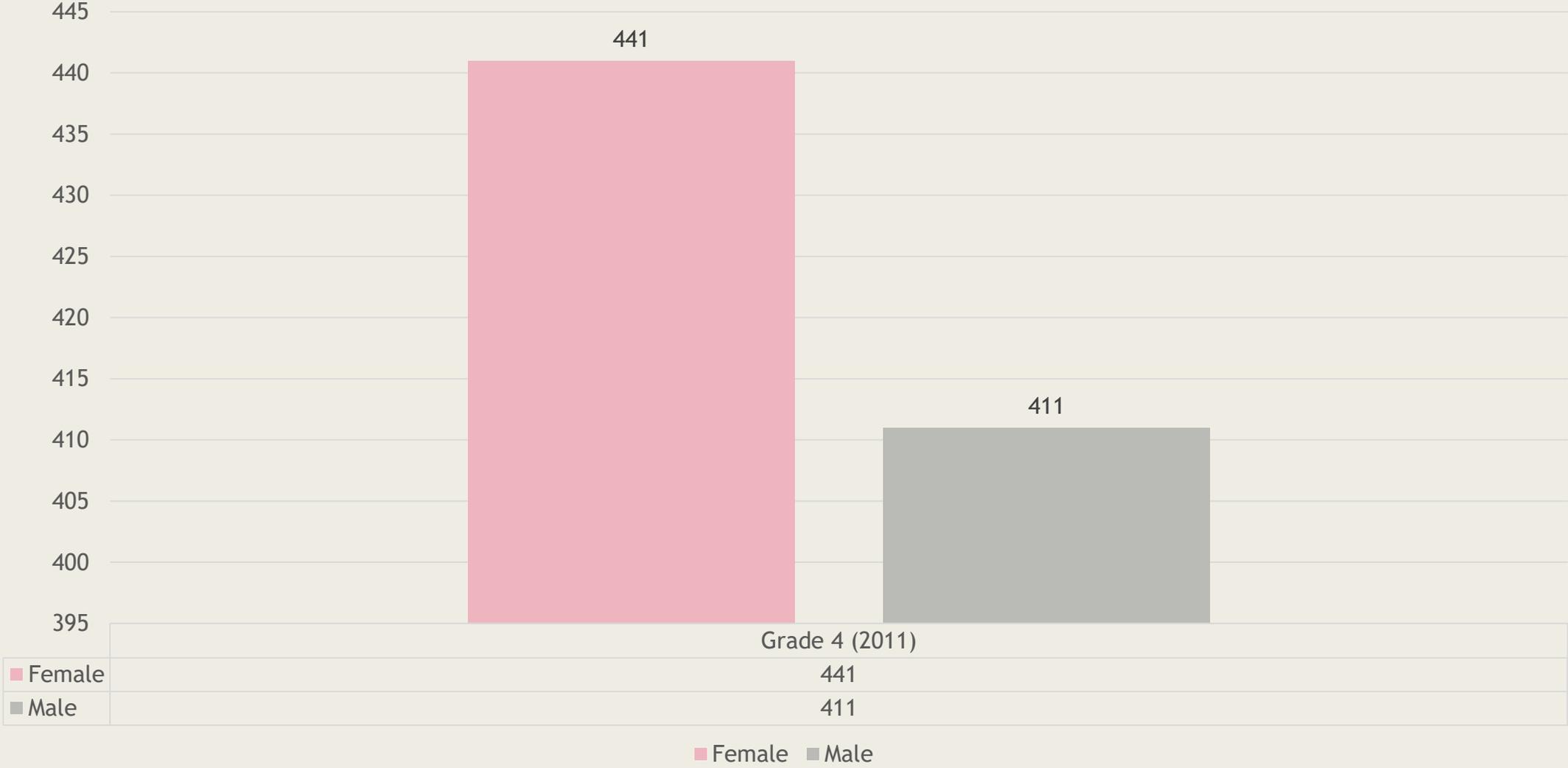
- In 1955, the first female schools opened under the rule of Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah al-Thani.
- In 1973, female students could enroll in Higher Education, which is the same year for male students.
- Female students excelled and outperformed their male counterparts ever since in all standardized high school tests with average grades being 5 to 10% higher than male students. (Ridge, 2014, page 84).

TIMMS Mean Scores in Science (QATAR)



Source: TIMSS Student Achievement in Science Reports

PIRLS Mean Scores (QATAR)



Source: PIRLS International Student Achievement in Reading Report

Gender Divide in Professional Settings

- Men tend to perform a lot better than women in this field despite lower academic performance.
- The gender gap in this field is not exclusive to the region or to Qatar.
- Multiple organizations and governments in the GCC are working towards achieving higher participation of women in the workforce.
- The salaries in Qatar still reflect gender gap, with women being paid 15 percent less than men on an average.
- Women also continue to be the minority in the workforce, accounting to only 14 percent of working population in Qatar. (*Qatar Statistics Authority Study*)

Reasons Behind the Divide

I. Culture, Religion, and Tradition

- Cultural attitudes in conservative regions dictate that men are expected to provide for their families while women take care of the home.
- Conservative cultures are more restrictive in terms of individual freedoms.
- In classical Islamic texts, it can be insinuated that inequality between men and women was the natural order of things” (Sonbol, 2012, p. 347)
- Barriers from both family and society restrict the growth of women’s participation in the job market, especially for technical or labor intensive positions.

II. Differences in Goal Perception

A study that compared goal perceptions in Qatar vs Denmark (Ottsen, 2016) had the following findings:

- Women in Qatar were found to have comparatively limited ambitions/goals as they are limited by the collective visions and barriers of society.
- “A cultural life script is a culturally shared cognitive representation of the expected order and timing of important life events in a prototypical life, such as graduation, marriage, and childbirth.”



However, in modern times, Qatar and the Arab region in general are becoming increasingly supportive of larger and more ambitious aspirations and goals set by women.

Conclusions

- Many complex factors influence and shape Qatar's current gender divide.
- In many ways, Qatar leads in terms of female participation in Higher Education in the region.
- Much work needs to be done towards female participation in the work force.
- Understanding the reasons and causes behind the gender gap is essential to face social challenges resulting from it.
- There needs to be more research in the area of cultural influence behind the gap in career expectations between genders in the Arab World. Current research is lacking.

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