

# The Qatari *Kafala* System & International Inaction

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## RESEARCH QUESTION

Why is Qatar able to maintain strong political and economic alliances with countries that claim to champion civil liberties and human rights while the *kafala* system persists?

## BACKGROUND

### What is the *kafala* system?

The *kafala* system is the legally mandated process through which Qatari nationals import foreign workers. The system allows for the enslavement and exploitation of migrants.

### Why focus on Qatar?

- One of the wealthiest countries in the world
- Strong political and economic alliances with powerful countries
- Hub for international business
- One of the worst civil liberties records of predominantly Muslim countries
- Host country for the 2022 FIFA World Cup

## HYPOTHESES

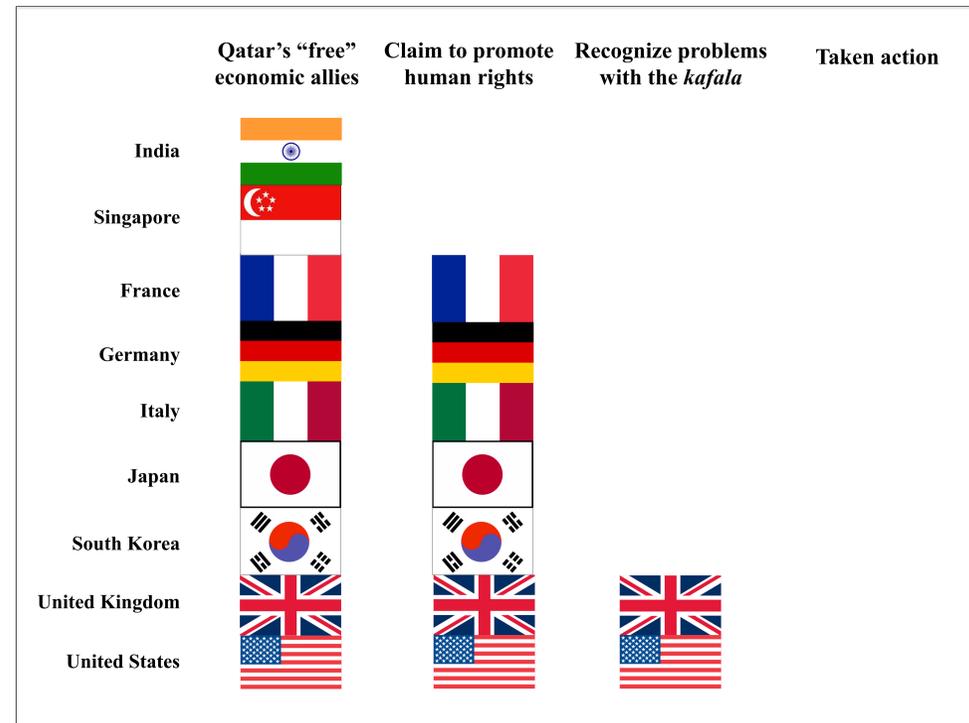
### Hypothesis 1

The Qatari government has been able to maintain the *kafala* system without negatively affecting bilateral relations because foreign leaders have ignored the system's abusive and exploitative qualities for reasons of economic self-interest.

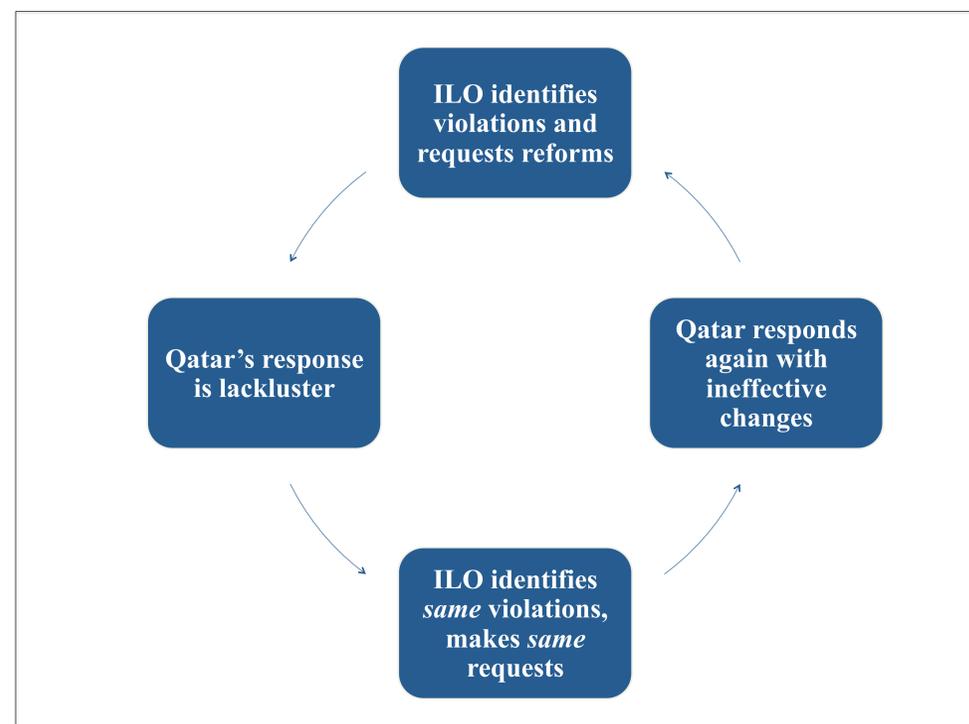
### Hypothesis 2

The Qatari government has not substantively reformed the *kafala* system because the international community has no leverage over the Qatari government.

## Hypothesis 1 Results



## Hypothesis 2 Results



## METHODOLOGY

### Hypothesis 1

1. Identify countries responsible for at least 3% of Qatar's international trade and that have a Freedom House score of 4 or below.
2. Does the foreign ministry of each country integrate support for human rights into its foreign policy goals?
3. Determine if foreign ministries/embassies have:
  - a. Recognized the dangers to foreigners seeking employment in Qatar
  - b. Requested reforms
  - c. Implemented or threatened sanctions.

### Hypothesis 2

- Review annual reports of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations from 2008-2016 to determine:
1. Has Qatar violated any ILO conventions?
  2. Does the *kafala* system result in violations?
  3. Does the Committee call on Qatar to act?
  4. Is the Committee satisfied with Qatar's response to requests for reforms?

## CONCLUSION

Qatar has been able to maintain the *kafala* system with few consequences because:

1. Qatar's allies are prioritizing their economic interests over their stated commitment to human rights and civil liberties.
2. The International Labour Organization lacks the power necessary to enforce accepted standards for labor practices and human rights.