



# The Family Book System: Sociocultural Impact on Emirati Family Dynamics

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## ABSTRACT

The United Arab Emirates' Family Book (Khulasat Al Qaid) is an advanced governmental documentation system that transcends simple civil registration by serving as a multidimensional tool for citizenship verification, national identity construction, and family legitimization. This analysis employs qualitative methods—policy document review, demographic data inspection, and sociological interpretation—to explore how the Family Book shapes family relationships, influences identity formation, and impacts diverse family structures within the UAE's unique demographic and cultural context. The system functions effectively as both an administrative mechanism and complex social technology, facilitating citizenship verification, benefit allocation, and national identity consolidation. Notably, the patrilineal transmission framework produces varied experiences, especially for mixed-nationality families. The UAE's 2021 reforms, allowing Emirati mothers to sponsor children's residence permits and expanding naturalization pathways, establish the country as the most progressive GCC nation in citizenship modernization. While the system enjoys cultural legitimacy and administrative effectiveness, ongoing refinement aligned with Vision 2021 goals of gender balance, family wellbeing, and social cohesion is recommended. This work, addressing this understudied field, contributes to policy discourse by illustrating the UAE's model of balancing progressive reform, cultural authenticity, and demographic sustainability while respecting its sovereign authority in citizenship policy design, bringing a new perspective to the gcc families

**Keywords:** Family Book, Khulasat Al Qaid, UAE citizenship, family dynamics, national identity, documentation systems, intergenerational relationships, mixed-nationality families

## 1. Introduction

The Family Book system must be understood within its cultural and historical context, where family cohesion (tamasuk al-usra), lineage preservation (nasab), and collective identity have historically formed the foundation of Emirati social organization (Heard-Bey, 2005). These values, deeply rooted in Arabian tribal traditions and Islamic principles emphasizing family unity, are not antiquated relics but living cultural priorities that continue to shape contemporary Emirati society. The documentation system reflects a sophisticated balance between honoring these foundational values and responding to the realities of a rapidly modernizing, demographically complex nation-state.

Rather than approaching this analysis through exclusively Western individualistic frameworks that may inadequately capture Gulf social dynamics, this research adopts a culturally informed perspective that recognizes the legitimacy of collectivist family structures while examining how documentation practices affect diverse family configurations in contemporary contexts (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). The analysis acknowledges that citizenship policies serve multiple legitimate objectives: preserving national identity in a context where citizens constitute a demographic minority, maintaining cultural authenticity amid rapid globalization, ensuring intergenerational transmission of cultural values, and managing demographic sustainability (Babar, 2015; Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011).

Importantly, the UAE has demonstrated remarkable leadership among Gulf Cooperation Council nations in progressively reforming citizenship policies to address emerging family needs while maintaining cultural foundations. The 2021 citizenship law amendments represent the most comprehensive GCC citizenship reform of the past decade, introducing unprecedented flexibility in naturalization pathways and significantly enhancing rights for Emirati mothers in mixed-nationality marriages (Federal Decree-Law No. 41 2024). This research examines the Family Book system in light of this progressive trajectory, offering constructive analysis that

respects the UAE's sovereignty and cultural autonomy while contributing to ongoing refinement processes.

Among the administrative instruments deployed for citizenship management, the Family Book (*Khulasat Al Qaid*) occupies a distinctive position. This governmental document, issued by the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship (ICA), transcends conventional civil registration functions by serving simultaneously as genealogical record, citizenship verification mechanism, and familial legitimization instrument. Each Family Book consolidates information regarding the family head (traditionally male), spouse(s), and dependent children, creating a documentary architecture that physically materializes kinship networks and citizenship status

Despite the Family Book's pervasive influence on Emirati social organization, scholarly investigation into its sociocultural ramifications remains conspicuously limited. Existing literature on UAE society predominantly addresses topics including gender dynamics (Bristol-Rhys, 2010), labor market segmentation (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011), educational transformation, and cultural preservation initiatives. Research examining citizenship policies typically focuses on naturalization restrictions, demographic imbalances, and Emiratization employment programs (Babar, 2015). However, the intersection between documentation systems and familial relationships—specifically how the Family Book architecture shapes intergenerational dynamics, marital decisions, gender configurations, and identity formation—has received minimal analytical attention.

This research addresses this critical lacuna by investigating: (1) How does the Family Book system structure family relationships and power distributions within Emirati households? (2) What implications does the documentation hierarchy generate for mixed-nationality families and children's citizenship experiences? (3) How do Emirati families navigate the intersection between traditional kinship structures and bureaucratic documentation requirements? (4) What tensions

emerge between the system's administrative efficiency objectives and its effects on family cohesion and individual identity formation?

### 1.1 Theoretical Framework

This investigation employs a theoretical synthesis incorporating documentation studies scholarship, citizenship theory, and family systems perspectives. Documentation regimes, as conceptualized by sociological research on bureaucratic practices, function not merely as neutral recording mechanisms but as active technologies of governance that produce social categories, hierarchies, and subjectivities (Torpey, 2000). The Family Book exemplifies what Foucauldian analysis would characterize as a governmental technology—a mechanism through which state power operates to render populations legible, manageable, and subject to administrative intervention.

Citizenship theory, particularly approaches examining citizenship as lived experience rather than solely juridical status (Isin, 2008), provides analytical tools for understanding how documentation systems translate abstract legal categories into tangible social realities. The differentiation between formal citizenship rights and substantive citizenship experiences becomes particularly relevant when examining how Family Book inclusion or exclusion patterns affect individuals' capacity to claim benefits, access services, and experience national belonging.

Family systems theory contributes understanding of how external institutional structures interact with internal family dynamics, influencing communication patterns, role distributions, and intergenerational relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecological systems perspective emphasizes that families exist within nested contextual layers, with macrosystem-level policies such as citizenship documentation architectures exerting influence on microsystem-level family interactions.

### 1.2 The Family Book System: Structural Characteristics

The Family Book system exhibits several distinctive structural features that differentiate it from civil registration approaches prevalent in other jurisdictions. First, the documentation architecture privileges patrilineal descent, with the family head typically designated as male. This configuration reflects broader GCC citizenship laws wherein nationality transmission occurs primarily through paternal lineage (Janardhan, 2015). Second, the system creates hierarchical inclusion patterns, whereby individuals' citizenship rights and access to benefits may vary based on their positioning within the Family Book structure. Third, the document serves multiple simultaneous functions—civil registration, citizenship verification, genealogical record, and administrative prerequisite—creating a convergence of bureaucratic requirements within a singular artifact.

The Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship maintains centralized oversight of Family Book issuance, with standardized formats employed across all seven Emirates (Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, 2023). Recent digitalization initiatives have introduced electronic versions accessible through governmental portals, though physical copies retain significance for various administrative procedures. The documentation system intersects with other governmental databases including the Population Register, Emirates Identity Card system, and various ministry-level service platforms, creating an integrated information infrastructure that positions the Family Book as a foundational element within broader e-government architectures.

## 2. Literature Review

The analysis draws upon multiple data categories, ensuring triangulation through diverse source integration.

**Primary sources** include governmental policy documents, legislative texts, and official statistics published by the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre (FCSC, 2023), the Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship (ICA, 2023), and relevant ministerial agencies including the

Ministry of Community Development and the Gender Balance Council. Legislative materials examined include Federal Law No. 17 of 1972 concerning Nationality and Passports and subsequent amendments, particularly the 2021, 2024 reforms (Federal Decree-Law No. 41 of 2024; UAE Government 2025).

**Secondary sources** encompass peer-reviewed scholarly articles published in internationally recognized academic journals including *Journal of Arabian Studies*, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *International Migration Review*, and *Middle East Journal*. Book-length scholarly monographs addressing Gulf citizenship, Emirati social transformation, and migration dynamics were systematically reviewed. Particular attention was directed toward publications by established Gulf studies scholars including Jane Bristol-Rhys, Neha Vora, Noora Lori, Zahra Babar, and Mehran Kamrava.

**Data collection procedures** involved systematic database searches using academic platforms including JSTOR, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis Online, and Cambridge Core. Search terms included combinations of "UAE citizenship," "Emirati families," "Gulf nationality law," "documentation systems," "national identity," and related concepts. Legislative and governmental documents were obtained through official UAE government portals including <https://u.ae> and <https://www.icp.gov.ae>. Demographic statistics were extracted from the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre's open data portal (<https://fcsc.gov.ae>).

The timeframe for literature review encompassed publications from 2000-2024, ensuring incorporation of contemporary scholarship while maintaining historical context regarding UAE social transformation. Inclusion criteria prioritized peer-reviewed academic publications, official governmental sources, and reports from internationally recognized organizations including the World Bank and United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This investigation employs a qualitative research design incorporating systematic policy document analysis, critical examination of demographic data, and comprehensive synthesis of existing scholarly literature on UAE family structures and citizenship policies. The methodological approach recognizes the challenges inherent in conducting empirical research on sensitive governmental systems and family dynamics within the UAE context, particularly regarding data accessibility and cultural considerations surrounding family privacy. Given the absence of existing empirical studies specifically addressing Family Book impacts on family dynamics, this research adopts an exploratory, theory-building approach that identifies patterns, proposes conceptual frameworks, and establishes foundations for future empirical investigation.

The study's qualitative orientation enables in-depth analysis of complex sociocultural phenomena that resist quantification, including identity formation processes, power dynamics, and symbolic meanings attached to documentation systems. This methodological choice aligns with interpretivist epistemological traditions emphasizing understanding of social phenomena through examination of meanings, contexts, and processes rather than solely through measurement and statistical analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

#### 3.2 Analytical Framework and Coding Procedures

The analytical process proceeded through several systematic stages incorporating principles from grounded theory methodology and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). **Initial document review** identified key structural characteristics of the Family Book system and its legal foundations through close reading of legislative texts and policy documents. Notes were systematically recorded regarding legal provisions, administrative procedures, and policy rationales articulated in governmental materials.

**Thematic coding** was employed to organize scholarly literature according to emergent

analytical categories including: (1) gender dimensions and citizenship asymmetries, (2) mixed-nationality family experiences, (3) intergenerational dynamics and authority structures, (4) national identity construction mechanisms, (5) comparative GCC perspectives, and (6) digitalization implications. Each coded segment was tagged with source information enabling traceability and citation accuracy.

**Demographic pattern analysis** examined citizenship statistics, family composition data, and population trends to contextualize the system's societal reach. Descriptive statistical examination identified proportions of mixed-nationality marriages, citizenship application rates, and demographic distributions relevant to understanding Family Book impacts. Data visualization was employed where appropriate to illustrate demographic patterns.

**Comparative analysis** explored parallels and divergences between the UAE's documentation approach and citizenship registration systems in other Gulf Cooperation Council nations including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. This comparative dimension illuminated unique features of the UAE system while identifying regional patterns reflecting shared cultural values and governmental priorities.

**Synthesized interpretation** integrated findings across all data sources to assess sociocultural implications across multiple dimensions including gender dynamics, generational relationships, mixed-nationality family experiences, and national identity formation. This interpretive synthesis identified patterns, tensions, and paradoxes characterizing the Family Book system's operation and effects.

### 3.3 Quality Assurance and Validation Procedures

Multiple strategies ensured research quality and analytical rigor. **Source triangulation** incorporated governmental documents, academic scholarship, and statistical data, enabling cross-verification of claims and identification of converging evidence patterns. **Peer debriefing** involved consultation with Gulf studies scholars to validate

interpretations and identify potential analytical blind spots.

### 3.4 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitivity surrounding citizenship documentation and family privacy, ethical considerations guided all research activities. No primary data collection involving human subjects was conducted, eliminating risks associated with interview-based or survey research. All analyzed materials consisted of publicly available documents, published scholarship, or aggregated statistical data containing no personally identifiable information.

The analysis maintains respectful engagement with Emirati cultural values, governmental policies, and family privacy norms while conducting critical scholarly examination. Interpretations acknowledge multiple stakeholder perspectives including governmental administrative priorities, family wellbeing considerations, and individual rights dimensions. The research aims to contribute constructively to policy discussions while respecting UAE sovereignty and cultural autonomy.

### 3.5 Methodological Justification: The Value of Exploratory Policy Analysis

The absence of primary empirical data collection warrants explicit methodological justification. This study adopts an exploratory, theory-building approach appropriate for investigating previously unstudied phenomena. When scholarly lacunae exist—as is the case regarding Family Book sociocultural impacts—preliminary conceptual analysis serves essential functions including: (1) identifying key dimensions requiring empirical investigation, (2) developing theoretical frameworks guiding future research, (3) synthesizing fragmentary knowledge across disciplines, and (4) generating hypotheses for empirical testing (Stebbins, 2001).

Policy document analysis and secondary source synthesis constitute legitimate and valuable research methodologies, particularly when investigating governmental systems where

primary data access faces constraints. Documentary research methods enable examination of institutional structures, legal frameworks, and policy rationales that shape lived experiences even when direct access to affected populations remains limited (Bowen, 2009). This approach aligns with established traditions in policy studies, legal sociology, and institutional analysis wherein researchers examine how governmental systems structure social relationships through analysis of policies, regulations, and administrative mechanisms (Hajer, 2006).

The culturally sensitive nature of family documentation and citizenship status creates legitimate ethical considerations affecting primary data collection feasibility. Research involving citizenship-related topics, particularly in contexts where documentation ambiguity affects legal status and benefit access, requires extensive ethical safeguards to prevent participant harm, ensure confidentiality, and avoid creating unrealistic expectations regarding policy interventions (Bloch & Chimienti, 2011). The preliminary analysis presented in this study establishes necessary conceptual foundations upon which future ethically-sound primary research can build.

Furthermore, the integration of psychological development theory, family systems perspectives, and comparative citizenship scholarship with UAE-specific policy analysis represents valuable theoretical synthesis not previously undertaken. This interdisciplinary integration offers novel interpretive frameworks for understanding documentation systems' impacts that transcend simple empirical description to provide theoretically-grounded explanation of mechanisms through which administrative systems shape family dynamics and individual development (Lamont & White, 2009).

### 3.6 Limitations

Direct family interviews or ethnographic observation, which could provide rich experiential data about lived experiences navigating the Family Book system, constitute critical needs for future

research. Primary qualitative research employing narrative inquiry, phenomenological interviews, or participatory action research methods would substantially enhance understanding of how families subjectively experience, interpret, and respond to documentation requirements.

Additionally, governmental statistics regarding citizenship applications, Family Book registrations, and related administrative data exhibit limited public accessibility, constraining quantitative analysis possibilities. More granular data regarding application approval rates, demographic characteristics of applicants, temporal trends in mixed-nationality marriages, and citizenship acquisition patterns would enable more precise empirical claims and facilitate identification of populations experiencing greatest challenges. If governmental agencies facilitate researcher access to anonymized administrative datasets, statistical analysis could provide robust empirical foundations for policy recommendations.

The absence of longitudinal data tracking individuals' citizenship experiences across developmental stages represents another significant limitation. Cross-sectional analysis cannot illuminate developmental trajectories or long-term impacts of citizenship ambiguity on life outcomes. Future longitudinal research following cohorts of children from birth through adulthood would provide invaluable insights regarding how documentation positioning affects educational achievement, psychological wellbeing, social integration, and ultimate citizenship acquisition.

## 4. The Family Book Within UAE Citizenship Architecture

### 4.1 Legislative Foundations and Citizenship Framework

The UAE citizenship framework originates from Federal Law No. 17 of 1972 concerning Nationality and Passports, subsequently amended through various legislative modifications including the significant 2021 amendments introducing selective naturalization pathways for exceptional talent (UAE Government 2025). The legislation

establishes stringent citizenship acquisition criteria, with nationality primarily transmitted through paternal lineage. Article 2 stipulates that individuals born to Emirati fathers automatically acquire citizenship, while those born to Emirati mothers and foreign fathers may apply for citizenship upon reaching legal majority, subject to governmental approval (Janardhan, 2015).

This asymmetrical transmission mechanism generates profound implications for family documentation. The Family Book system operationalizes these legal provisions by creating documentary hierarchies that reflect and reinforce the patrilineal citizenship architecture. Children registered under their Emirati father's Family Book automatically inherit citizenship status, accessing comprehensive governmental benefits including subsidized education, healthcare, housing support, and employment preferences (Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, 2023). Conversely, children of Emirati mothers married to non-citizens occupy an ambiguous documentary position, registered in their father's foreign documentation while holding potential eligibility for naturalization through maternal lineage.

#### 4.2 Administrative Functions and Service Integration

The Family Book serves as prerequisite documentation for numerous governmental services and administrative procedures. Birth registration, passport applications, educational institution enrollment, healthcare service access, marriage contract registration, and various subsidy programs require Family Book presentation for Emirati nationals (Lori, 2019). This pervasive integration throughout governmental service architecture positions the document as an essential citizenship verification instrument, effectively functioning as tangible proof of national belonging.

The Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship's digitalization initiatives have progressively integrated Family Book information within broader e-government platforms. However, this technological advancement enhances surveillance

capabilities and data integration, raising considerations regarding governmental visibility into family structures and individual mobility patterns (Vora, 2013).

#### 4.3 Demographic Context and Population Composition

Understanding the Family Book's sociocultural impact requires contextualizing UAE demographic patterns. According to Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre data, the UAE's total population exceeded 9.4 million in 2023, with Emirati nationals comprising approximately 11.5% of residents (FCSC, 2023). This demographic composition reflects deliberate governmental policies balancing economic development requirements necessitating foreign labor against concerns regarding national identity preservation and cultural authenticity maintenance (Babar, 2015).

Within the Emirati national population, family structures exhibit characteristics reflecting both traditional kinship patterns and modernization influences. Extended family networks retain significance, with grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins maintaining close social bonds (Khalaf, 2000). Simultaneously, nuclear family configurations have become increasingly prevalent, particularly among younger generations and urban populations. Marriage patterns demonstrate evolving trends, with average marriage ages rising and mixed-nationality unions becoming more common despite governmental discouragement initiatives (Bristol-Rhys, 2010).

#### 5. Discussions:

##### 5.1. UAE as Regional Pioneer in Maternal Citizenship Rights

The United Arab Emirates has emerged as the most progressive Gulf Cooperation Council nation in reforming citizenship policies to address gender-differentiated transmission frameworks while respecting cultural foundations. The UAE's comprehensive 2019-2021 reform package, which addressed women's rights across multiple

legislative domains, positioned the nation as the highest-ranked country in the MENA region according to the World Bank, (2021). These reforms reflect the UAE's distinctive approach to balancing cultural authenticity with responsive governance that addresses evolving family configurations.

The patrilineal citizenship transmission framework embedded within UAE nationality law reflects deeply rooted Arabian cultural values emphasizing lineage preservation (nasab) and collective family identity (Heard-Bey, 2005).

However, the UAE government has demonstrated responsiveness to the realities of modern family diversity while maintaining cultural coherence. The landmark 2021 citizenship law amendments represent the most comprehensive GCC citizenship reform of the past decade, introducing unprecedented provisions that significantly enhance rights for Emirati mothers in mixed-nationality marriages (Federal Decree-Law No. 41 2024). Since October 2017, Emirati mothers can confer nationality to their children once they reach six years of age, a significant advancement from the previous requirement to wait until age 18. The recent reforms enabled Emirati women to sponsor their children's residence permits independently, addressing a critical vulnerability that previously required foreign father sponsorship.

Comparative analysis reveals that Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Oman maintain more restrictive frameworks with less comprehensive reforms addressing maternal citizenship rights (Janardhan, 2015). Only Bahrain's 2012 reform enabling automatic maternal citizenship transmission exceeds the UAE's current framework, though Bahrain's smaller demographic scale and different national composition create distinct policy contexts.

### 5.1.1 The UAE's Balanced Reform Approach

This graduated approach demonstrates governmental wisdom in implementing reforms that advance rights while ensuring administrative sustainability and cultural acceptance. Rather

than characterizing this as inadequate relative to Western citizenship norms, the framework should be understood as culturally appropriate policy evolution responsive to Emirati social realities. The reforms acknowledge that family configurations have diversified due to globalization, increased female education and professional participation, and international mobility, while respecting traditional values emphasizing family unity and collective belonging (Bristol-Rhys, 2010).

### 5.1.2 Impact on Emirati Women's Family Formation Decisions

For Emirati women, the progressive reforms have enhanced autonomy in marital decision-making by reducing documentation-related vulnerabilities their children might face. While citizenship considerations remain one factor among many in partner selection—alongside emotional connection, educational compatibility, economic considerations, and family expectations—the reforms provide greater confidence that children will access citizenship rights and governmental benefits (Bristol-Rhys, 2010).

The governmental Marriage Fund, which provides financial support encouraging marriage to Emirati nationals, complements citizenship reforms by recognizing both the value of endogamous marriage for cultural continuity and families' economic realities., who reflects comprehensive policy thinking than simple regulatory imposition.

### 5.1.3 Continuing Evolution and Vision 2071 Alignment

The government's Vision 2071 explicitly emphasizes gender balance, family wellbeing, and social cohesion as national priorities (UAE Government, 2023). The citizenship reforms align with these aspirations by enhancing women's rights and family security while maintaining the distinctive Emirati national identity that citizens value. The reforms also acknowledge international human rights frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to which the UAE is party, while implementing changes in

culturally appropriate ways and timeframes (UNHCR, 2014).

Looking forward, the reform trajectory suggests continued governmental receptiveness to further refinements as social conditions evolve and implementation experiences accumulate. The UAE's approach to citizenship reform—introducing progressive changes while maintaining stability and cultural coherence—has positioned it as a regional model, with other GCC nations observing the UAE's reform experiences when considering their own policy evolution.

## 5. 2 Legislative Evolution and Continuing Challenges

The 2021 citizenship law amendments introduced provisions enabling Emirati mothers to sponsor their children's residence permits, addressing previous restrictions requiring foreign father sponsorship (Federal Decree-Law No. 41 2024). This modification represents significant progress in recognizing Emirati women's citizenship rights and reducing family vulnerabilities to father departure or death. However, the reforms maintain the fundamental patrilineal transmission framework, preserving documentary hierarchies that distinguish between children of Emirati fathers and those of Emirati mothers.

Comparative analysis with other Gulf Cooperation Council nations reveals varying approaches to maternal citizenship transmission. Kuwait and Qatar maintain similarly restrictive frameworks, while Bahrain enacted reforms enabling automatic citizenship transmission through maternal lineage in 2012 (Janardhan, 2015). These divergent policy trajectories reflect different governmental assessments regarding national identity preservation, demographic management, and women's citizenship equality.

## 5.3 Documentary Fragmentation and Family Cohesion

Mixed-nationality families, wherein one parent holds Emirati citizenship while the other maintains foreign nationality, encounter distinctive challenges stemming from

documentation system fragmentation. The requirement that children follow paternal lineage for nationality purposes creates situations wherein family members possess different citizenship statuses, carry distinct passport types, and access differentiated governmental benefit packages (Lori, 2019). This documentary fragmentation can generate practical complications affecting family mobility, residential security, and long-term planning.

When Emirati mothers marry foreign fathers, their children's documentation under the father's nationality can create psychological and social distancing from Emirati national identity despite maternal heritage. Children may experience ambiguous positioning within social contexts, simultaneously connected to Emirati culture through maternal family networks while bureaucratically classified as foreign nationals (Vora, 2013). This identity ambiguity can intensify during adolescence when peer group belonging and national identity assume heightened salience.

## 5.4 Residential Security and Visa Dependencies

Prior to recent legislative reforms, mixed-nationality families wherein Emirati mothers married foreign fathers faced residential insecurity stemming from visa sponsorship requirements. Children and wives required sponsorship from the foreign father, creating potential vulnerabilities in cases of marital dissolution, father's unemployment, or death (Jones, 2015). The inability of Emirati mothers to sponsor their own children represented a significant citizenship rights limitation, generating anxiety regarding potential family separation or deportation despite the mother's national status.

The reforms enabling Emirati women to sponsor their children's residence visas addressed this critical vulnerability, enhancing family security and recognizing women's citizenship rights more comprehensively. However, the reform's focus on residence sponsorship rather than citizenship transmission maintains the fundamental distinction between children who automatically acquire citizenship through fathers and those who

must apply through mothers upon reaching adulthood. This preservation of asymmetrical structures suggests governmental prioritization of demographic management over gender equality in citizenship rights.

### 5.5 Intergenerational Transmission of National Identity

The documentation fragmentation within mixed-nationality families influences intergenerational transmission of national identity and cultural practices. Children excluded from their Emirati mother's Family Book may experience attenuated connection to Emirati national identity despite participation in family cultural practices and social networks (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). The absence of formal citizenship recognition during formative developmental years can affect identity formation processes, potentially generating feelings of exclusion or ambiguous belonging.

Research on citizenship and identity formation emphasizes documentation's role in materializing abstract legal statuses and shaping individual self-understanding (Torpey, 2000). The physical presence or absence of one's name within a Family Book represents more than administrative notation; it constitutes symbolic recognition of membership within the national community. Children who must await legal majority to apply for citizenship experience prolonged periods wherein their national belonging remains contingent and unresolved, potentially affecting their sense of security and identity certainty.

### 5.6 Psychological Impact on Children: Identity Development and Emotional Wellbeing

The citizenship ambiguity experienced by children of Emirati mothers married to foreign fathers generates significant psychological ramifications during critical developmental periods. International research on childhood statelessness and citizenship insecurity demonstrates that documentation exclusion contributes to psychological distress, marginalization, and impaired identity development (UNHCR, 2014). Children experiencing ambiguous citizenship status report feelings of invisibility, social

exclusion, and limited future prospects (Bhabha, 2009).

Identity development theory emphasizes that pre-adolescence and adolescence constitute critical periods for identity exploration and consolidation (Erikson, 1968). During these developmental stages, children begin questioning "who am I?" and "where do I belong?" Documentation systems that provide clear answers to these existential questions facilitate secure identity formation, while ambiguous documentation status can generate identity confusion and belonging uncertainty (Moffitt et al., 2020). For children unable to fully claim Emirati national identity due to Family Book exclusion despite maternal heritage, this developmental task becomes significantly more complex.

Empirical research examining children with ambiguous citizenship status reveals elevated rates of anxiety, depression, and psychosocial difficulties compared to peers with secure citizenship (Schmidt, 2020). The prolonged uncertainty regarding ultimate citizenship status creates what researchers term "suspended identity"—a state wherein individuals cannot fully commit to identity consolidation because their legal status remains unresolved (Hasan, 2023). This suspension affects not only psychological wellbeing but also practical life planning, as children may feel uncertain about educational opportunities, career possibilities, and future residential security.

## 6. Intergenerational Dynamics:

### 6.1 Traditional Family Leadership and Documentary Structures

The Family Book system's designation of a male family head reflects longstanding Emirati and Arabian cultural norms emphasizing collective decision-making, elder respect, and hierarchies rooted in Islamic and tribal governance traditions (Khalaf, 2000; Heard-Bey, 2005). This role embodies responsibility and stewardship—providing for the family, representing it publicly, and ensuring wellbeing—rather than mere authority (Bristol-Rhys, 2010).

## Documentary Authority and Intrafamilial Dynamics

The family head holds key documentary authority, managing Family Book amendments, dependent registrations, and administrative procedures, centralizing contact and aligning with traditional family organization for administrative efficiency (Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, 2023). However, practical influence varies: some families adhere to patriarchal decision-making, while others adopt collaborative dynamics, reflecting generational and educational shifts towards egalitarianism despite formal designations (Khalaf, 2000).

## Evolving Family Structures and Generational Shifts

Increasing female education, professional activity, and global exposure drive more egalitarian family practices, with women influencing education, finances, and household management. The formal family head role coexists with diverse intrafamilial power distributions, shaped by personality, education, economic input, and negotiation, showing complexity beyond documentation labels (Bristol-Rhys, 2010).

## Cultural Legitimacy and Administrative Functionality

The Family Book's congruence with Emirati family values fosters cultural legitimacy and eases citizen-government interactions, minimizing friction between bureaucracy and lived social realities (Vora, 2013). Any reforms must carefully consider cultural values, social acceptance, and intergenerational fairness, following the UAE's gradual, consultative policy evolution approach (UAE Government, 2023).

## Balancing Tradition and Contemporary Realities

Traditional family head designations endure alongside evolving egalitarian intrafamily practices, embodying a pragmatic balance maintaining cultural continuity while accommodating modernity (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). The UAE's high female labor participation (57.5%

in 2020), gender-balanced higher education enrollment (women >70%), and growing leadership roles illustrate significant women's empowerment beyond formal documentation constraints. This reflects that documentary structures are not sole determinants of gender relations or women's opportunities. Multi-dimensional policies addressing employment discrimination, domestic violence, harassment, equal pay, and leadership representation complement family documentation reforms, illustrating the UAE's nuanced approach to gender equality.

## 6.2 Family Emotional Systems and Documentation Stress

Applying family systems theory to the Family Book context illuminates how documentation requirements interact with family emotional processes. Family systems theory conceptualizes families as interconnected emotional units wherein changes affecting one member generate reciprocal impacts on others (Bowen, 1978). The Family Book system, by creating differential citizenship statuses and benefit access patterns within families, introduces systemic stressors that affect entire family emotional systems.

When families encounter documentation-related challenges—such as citizenship application complications, benefit access denials, or documentation verification requirements—the resulting anxiety does not remain isolated to the directly affected individual but reverberates throughout the family system. Parents experiencing stress regarding their children's citizenship ambiguity may unconsciously transmit this anxiety to children through what family systems theory terms the "family projection process" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Children may absorb parental anxieties about documentation status, citizenship insecurity, and future prospects, potentially manifesting as behavioral difficulties, academic struggles, or emotional distress.

The concept of triangulation within family systems theory offers insight into how documentation stress affects family relationships.

Triangulation occurs when tension between two family members involves a third party to stabilize the relationship system (Bowen, 1978). In mixed-nationality families experiencing citizenship-related stress, marital tension between Emirati mothers and foreign fathers regarding children's documentation status may triangulate children into parental conflicts. Children may feel torn between parents, experience loyalty conflicts, or assume inappropriate responsibility for mediating parental disagreements about citizenship strategies.

Family cohesion, defined as the emotional bonding among family members, may be either strengthened or strained by documentation challenges (Olson, 2000). Some families experiencing external documentation stress may respond by increasing internal cohesion, drawing closer together to navigate bureaucratic challenges collectively. However, prolonged documentation stress can generate family fragmentation, particularly when different family members hold divergent citizenship statuses creating differential access to opportunities and benefits. This stratification within families can foster resentment, jealousy, or feelings of inequity that strain family relationships.

### 6.3 Intergenerational Communication Patterns and Documentation Silence

When families maintain silence surrounding citizenship ambiguity, children may fill information voids with imagination and assumption, potentially generating fears more severe than reality. Alternatively, children may internalize the message that citizenship status constitutes a shameful topic requiring concealment, potentially affecting their self-esteem and identity acceptance. Family systems approaches emphasize that open, age-appropriate communication about family challenges supports children's emotional adjustment and family cohesion (Walsh, 2016).

The intersection between documentation requirements and family life cycle transitions creates additional complexity. Major family transitions—such as children reaching legal

majority, preparing for higher education, or contemplating marriage—bring citizenship documentation issues into sharp relief. Families must navigate not only normative developmental transitions but also documentation-related complications that may affect transition possibilities. For instance, adolescents approaching age eighteen must confront citizenship application decisions, potentially generating family stress regarding application strategies, approval uncertainties, and contingency planning should applications be denied.

### 6.4 Extended Family Networks and Documentary Boundaries

Traditional Emirati kinship structures emphasize extended family networks, with multiple generations and collateral relatives maintaining close social, economic, and emotional bonds (Heard-Bey, 2005). The Family Book system, however, prioritizes nuclear family configurations, documenting only the family head, spouse(s), and dependent children. This documentary focus on nuclear units potentially creates tensions with lived kinship patterns that extend beyond nuclear household boundaries.

Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins who constitute integral components of Emirati family networks remain external to the Family Book documentation, despite their significance within family social structures. This documentary exclusion does not eliminate their social importance but creates administrative situations wherein official family recognition diverges from lived family realities. Extended family members' roles in childcare, financial support, decision-making, and emotional sustenance continue independent of documentary acknowledgment (Khalaf, 2000).

The multi generational transmission process, a key concept in family systems theory, operates independently of documentation systems but may intersect with them in complex ways. Family patterns, values, and relationship dynamics transmit across generations through emotional processes rather than legal documentation (Kerr

& Bowen, 1988). However, when documentation systems create differential citizenship experiences across generations—such as grandparents and parents holding automatic citizenship while grandchildren face citizenship ambiguity—these systemic patterns may disrupt intergenerational transmission processes and create generational rifts within families.

### 6.5 Generational Transitions and Family Head Succession

The Family Book system creates specific dynamics regarding generational transitions and family headship succession. Upon a family head's death, documentary restructuring becomes necessary, with adult sons establishing independent Family Books for their nuclear families while daughters may remain registered in their deceased father's book until marriage or establish independent documentation subject to governmental approval. This transition process reflects traditional inheritance and family structure patterns while simultaneously generating administrative requirements and potential complications.

Younger generations' progressive adoption of egalitarian family structures and gender role reconfigurations may create tensions with the Family Book system's traditional architecture (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). As Emirati women increasingly pursue higher education, professional careers, and delayed marriage, their positioning within documentation systems that prioritize male family heads and patrilineal descent may appear increasingly anachronistic. These generational shifts suggest potential future pressures for documentation system reforms aligning with evolving social structures.

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## 7. National Identity Construction: Documentation and Belonging

### 7.1 The Family Book as Symbol of National Belonging

Beyond its administrative functions, the Family Book operates symbolically as a material representation of national belonging and collective membership within the Emirati national community. Possession of a Family Book tangibly demonstrates citizenship status, providing psychological reassurance and social recognition of one's position within the nation (Vora, 2013). The document's presence within households, its deployment for various administrative purposes, and its integration within family documentation practices create continuous reinforcement of national identity.

The symbolic significance intensifies within the UAE's demographic context wherein Emirati nationals constitute a minority within their own territory. The necessity of clearly delineating citizenship boundaries and maintaining distinct national identity assumes particular urgency under conditions of demographic imbalance (Babar, 2015). The Family Book functions as a technology of differentiation, enabling clear distinction between citizens and non-citizens and materially manifesting otherwise abstract legal categories.

## 7.2 Exclusion Experiences and Identity Ambiguity

Conversely, exclusion from Family Book registration or ambiguous positioning within the documentation system can generate experiences of marginalization and identity uncertainty. Children of Emirati mothers married to foreign fathers, despite their maternal heritage and cultural participation, occupy liminal positions wherein their potential citizenship remains unrealized until legal majority (Jones, 2015). This extended ambiguity can affect identity formation processes, creating uncertainty regarding one's ultimate national belonging and future prospects.

Scholarly research examining citizenship's emotional dimensions emphasizes documentation's role in producing feelings of security, recognition, and belonging or, alternatively, vulnerability, exclusion, and precarity (Isin, 2008). The Family Book system's differential inclusion patterns create stratified citizenship experiences wherein individuals' sense of national belonging and security varies based on their documentary positioning. These experiential differences can generate social stratification within the national population, with documentation status influencing life opportunities, benefit access, and social recognition.

## 7.3 Collective Identity and Family Pride

The Family Book also functions within broader discourses of family pride, genealogical heritage, and collective identity. Emirati families' documented lineages, tribal affiliations, and generational continuities contribute to family prestige and social positioning (Khalaf, 2000). The Family Book's consolidation of familial information within governmental documentation creates official recognition of family identities, potentially enhancing collective pride and intergenerational continuity consciousness.

Traditional Emirati society places substantial emphasis on lineage (*nasab*) and tribal affiliation as foundations of social identity and status (Heard-Bey, 2005). The Family Book system's documentation of patrilineal descent aligns with

and reinforces these traditional values, translating genealogical consciousness into bureaucratic form.

## 8. Comparative Perspectives: GCC Documentation Systems

### 8.1 Regional Variations in Citizenship Documentation

Examining Family Book systems across Gulf Cooperation Council nations reveals both commonalities and variations reflecting different governmental approaches to citizenship management and family documentation. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman maintain comparable documentation systems emphasizing patrilineal descent and family unit registration, though specific administrative procedures, documentation formats, and service integration patterns differ (Janardhan, 2015).

Kuwait's family documentation system exhibits similarities to the UAE approach, with consolidated family registries maintained by the Public Authority for Civil Information and patrilineal citizenship transmission. Saudi Arabia's family registration system integrates with the national identity infrastructure and emphasizes tribal affiliation documentation alongside family unit information. Qatar's approach similarly prioritizes male family heads and patrilineal descent, while Bahrain's recent citizenship reforms enabling maternal transmission represent a significant departure from prevailing GCC patterns (Janardhan, 2015).

### 8.2 Citizenship Transmission Policies and Gender Dynamics

The comparative analysis reveals that patrilineal citizenship transmission predominates across GCC nations, reflecting shared cultural values, demographic concerns, and governmental priorities regarding national identity preservation. However, the degree of restriction and reform trajectories vary. Bahrain's 2012 reform granting automatic citizenship to children of Bahraini mothers represents the most progressive GCC

position, while Kuwait and Qatar maintain highly restrictive frameworks (Janardhan, 2015).

The UAE's intermediate position, granting application rights to children of Emirati mothers without automatic transmission, reflects balancing between conservative citizenship preservation and progressive reform pressures. This positioning suggests governmental responsiveness to women's rights advocacy while maintaining core demographic management priorities. The variation across GCC nations indicates that different assessments of national interest, women's citizenship equality, and demographic sustainability shape policy trajectories (Babar, 2015).

### 8.3 Demographic Pressures and Policy Evolution

All GCC nations confront demographic imbalances wherein foreign populations substantially exceed national citizens, creating shared pressures regarding citizenship policy management. These demographic realities influence governmental approaches to naturalization, citizenship transmission, and documentation systems (Lori, 2019). The tension between economic development requiring foreign labor and cultural preservation concerns shapes citizenship architectures throughout the region.

Documentation systems function as instruments for managing these tensions, enabling clear differentiation between citizens and non-citizens while facilitating benefit distribution restricted to national populations. The evolution of citizenship policies across the GCC, including recent UAE reforms expanding naturalization eligibility for exceptional talent, reflects ongoing governmental recalibration of demographic management strategies in response to changing economic and social conditions (Sophie, 2024).

## 9. Digital Transformation

### 9.1 Digitalization Initiatives and Service Streamlining

The UAE government's comprehensive digitalization strategy has progressively

integrated Family Book information within broader e-government platforms. The UAE Pass system consolidates multiple governmental services within a unified digital identity framework, incorporating Family Book data alongside Emirates ID information and enabling streamlined access to educational, healthcare, residential, and administrative services (Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, 2023).

This digital integration enhances administrative efficiency, reduces bureaucratic requirements, and facilitates service delivery. Citizens can access documentation electronically, submit applications remotely, and track administrative processes digitally. The technological transformation aligns with governmental objectives to position the UAE as a global leader in digital governance and smart city innovation (UAE Government, 2023).

### 9.2 Data Integration and Surveillance Capabilities

The comprehensive integration of Family Book information within interconnected governmental databases simultaneously enhances surveillance capabilities and data visibility across multiple agencies. Cross-referencing between population registers, identity systems, immigration databases, financial records, and service utilization patterns creates extensive governmental knowledge regarding population movements, family structures, and individual behaviors (Vora, 2013).

While technological integration facilitates service efficiency, it raises considerations regarding data privacy, governmental surveillance, and individual autonomy. The extent to which comprehensive data integration affects citizen-state relationships and individual freedoms constitutes an important area for ongoing analysis. International human rights frameworks emphasize privacy rights and data protection principles that may create tensions with expansive governmental surveillance capabilities (UNHCR, 2014).

### 9.3 Technological Access and Digital Divides

The progressive shift toward digital documentation and electronic service delivery

assumes technological literacy, internet access, and digital device availability. While the UAE exhibits high internet penetration rates and smartphone adoption, generational and socioeconomic variations in technological competence may create differential service access capabilities. Elderly citizens, individuals with limited educational backgrounds, or those in remote areas may encounter challenges navigating digital platforms (UAE Government, 2023).

Governmental commitments to inclusive service delivery necessitate maintaining physical documentation options and in-person assistance alongside digital alternatives. The balance between technological advancement and accessibility considerations influences whether digitalization enhances or constrains service access for diverse population segments.

## 10. Results and Future Trajectories

### 10.1 Balancing Administrative Efficiency and Family Dynamics

The Family Book system demonstrates both benefits and challenges regarding the intersection of governmental documentation requirements and family social dynamics. Administrative efficiency, citizenship verification capabilities, and service delivery streamlining constitute significant advantages supporting governmental objectives (Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, 2023). The consolidated documentation format facilitates benefit distribution, enables clear citizenship delineation, and integrates with broader e-government infrastructures.

However, these administrative benefits generate sociocultural consequences affecting gender equality, family cohesion, and individual identity formation (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). The patrilineal transmission framework embedded within the system reinforces traditional gender hierarchies and creates citizenship asymmetries affecting women and their children. Mixed-nationality families encounter documentation fragmentation that may complicate family unity and residential

security (Lori, 2019). Children of Emirati mothers experience extended periods of citizenship ambiguity affecting identity formation and national belonging (Jones, 2015).

### 10.2 Future Policy Considerations in Light of UAE's Reform Leadership

Building on Demonstrated Commitment to Progressive Governance

The UAE government's evidence-based, responsive policy record underpins potential improvements to the Family Book system and citizenship documentation. The 2019-2021 reforms positioned the UAE as the most progressive GCC nation on women's rights and top MENA country in the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law index, World Bank, 2021) demonstrating capacity for meaningful change while maintaining cultural and social stability.

Citizenship reforms—including maternal nationality conferral at age six, residence sponsorship rights, and naturalization pathways for exceptional talent—balance gender equality, family wellbeing, national identity, and demographic sustainability (Sophie 2024). This provides a model for additional refinements aligned with Vision 2071, respecting cultural values and administration.

#### 10.2.1 Vision 2071

Opportunities aligned with government priorities and Vision 2071 include:

#### Maternal Citizenship Transmission

Although improved from eighteen to six years, the waiting period for children's citizenship can complicate education, healthcare, and passports during early childhood (Jones, 2015). Automatic citizenship transmission via maternal lineage, like paternal rights, could enhance family security and gender equality, aligning with Vision 2071 with demographic safeguards (FCSC, 2023). Nationals constitute approximately 11.5% of residents, requiring careful balancing of social, demographic, and administrative factors.

## Documentation Flexibility for Family Configurations

The Family Book system emphasizes nuclear families, but Emirati families often include extended kin with important social, economic, and caregiving roles (Khalaf, 2000). Supplementary documentation for caregiving relatives could formally recognize contributions to child welfare and family cohesion, reducing administrative hurdles related to schooling, healthcare, and travel permissions.

### Transparency and Application Process

UAE Pass and electronic Family Book systems improve service delivery (Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, 2023). Enhanced transparency on application timelines, criteria, documentation, and appeals could reduce family anxiety and improve experiences, supported by a commitment to smart government and digital services.

### Impact Assessment and Evidence-Based Refinement

Systematic review of citizenship policies' effects across family structures, through data and feedback, could identify procedural improvements consistent with UAE's smart government goals and continuous quality enhancement.

### Regional Leadership and Knowledge Sharing

As the GCC leader in citizenship reform, the UAE can share experiences to support modernization while balancing culture, gender equality, and family wellbeing. Regional cooperation can address cross-border citizenship policy implications for families with multi-GCC connections.

### Acknowledging Sovereignty

These considerations respect UAE government sovereignty, recognizing citizenship policy serves multiple valid objectives: preserving national identity, cultural authenticity, intergenerational transmission, demographic sustainability, and

family wellbeing. Balancing these is an Emirati decision beyond external frameworks.

### 10.3 Research Directions and Knowledge Gaps

This investigation highlights substantial knowledge gaps warranting future empirical research. Direct engagement with Emirati families through interview-based studies, ethnographic observation, or survey methodologies could generate rich experiential data regarding how families navigate documentation requirements, experience citizenship differentiation, and understand national identity. Qualitative research employing narrative inquiry could capture personal stories revealing the lived experiences of children growing up with ambiguous citizenship status, women navigating marital decisions influenced by documentation concerns, and families managing documentary fragmentation across generations.

Gender-focused research specifically examining Emirati women's experiences navigating citizenship asymmetries, marital decision-making processes influenced by documentation concerns, and advocacy efforts promoting citizenship equality would contribute to scholarly understanding and policy development (Bristol-Rhys, 2010). The intersection between documentation systems and women's rights constitutes a critical area requiring sustained analytical attention, particularly given international human rights commitments to eliminate gender discrimination in nationality laws (UNHCR, 2014).

### 11. Conclusion

The UAE's Family Book system is a sophisticated documentation framework fulfilling administrative efficiency. It integrates with e-government platforms like UAE Pass, enhancing digital governance while respecting Emirati cultural values on family structure, lineage (nasab).

The UAE leads GCC reforms in citizenship, balancing gender equality, family wellbeing, and demographic sustainability. The 2019-2021

reforms, acknowledged in the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law report, include progressive citizenship provisions for children of Emirati mothers from age six, residence permits sponsorship, and expanded naturalization for exceptional talent. This progression harmonizes cultural traditions with contemporary rights expansion, serving as a model for similar societies. Bahrain's system surpasses it only in automatic maternal citizenship transmission under different demographics.

Family experiences vary under the patrilineal documentation framework, especially mixed-nationality families face administrative complexities affecting identity and belonging in development. These differences reflect the need to balance national identity preservation amid citizens being about 11.5% of residents. Vision 2071 explicitly guides future refinements prioritizing gender balance, family cohesion, quality of life, and social stability (UAE Government, 2023). Potential enhancements include maternal citizenship transmission conditions, documentation flexibility for diverse family forms, improved procedural transparency, and systematic policy impact assessment.

This work contributes to scholarship on citizenship documentation, family systems in modernization, and Gulf studies, filling gaps by highlighting how documentation shapes intimate family relations and identity beyond labor market and gender role analyses. Future research should use interviews, ethnography, surveys, and longitudinal studies on identity formation, especially focusing on Emirati women's navigation of citizenship policies, comparative family documentation laws, and collaboration between government, academia, and civil society.

The Family Book system embodies the challenge of balancing tradition, modernization, and family wellbeing. UAE's evidence-based, incremental reforms maintain cultural coherence and social stability while advancing rights and administrative efficiency. This approach offers valuable lessons for similar societies and supports the UAE's role as a regional model in GCC citizenship policy

development respecting sovereignty, cultural values, and complex demographic realities.

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## Data Availability Statement

This conceptual analysis is based on publicly available policy documents, government statistics, and published scholarly literature. All primary sources are accessible through official UAE government portals (<https://u.ae>, <https://icp.gov.ae>, <https://fcsc.gov.ae>) and international organizations (World Bank, UNHCR). Secondary sources include peer-reviewed academic publications available through standard academic databases (JSTOR, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis). Complete citations are provided in the references section. No primary empirical data involving human subjects was collected for this study.

## Author Contributions

As sole author, The author takes full responsibility for the content and conclusions presented in this research.

## Ethical Approval Statement

This study involved no primary data collection from human subjects. All analyzed materials consisted of publicly available documents.

published scholarship, and aggregated statistical data containing no personally identifiable information. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. The research was conducted in accordance with established standards for document analysis and secondary source synthesis in social science research.

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