



Exploring The Linguistic Landscape of Arabian Gulf Countries Through Analysis of Flag Designs: A Study of Language Use and Identity

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Abstract

Every country aspires to expand and achieve greater success. The flags serve as a symbol of national embelm as well as for international identity by other countries, The flags are a manifestation of a country's history and serve as a symbol of resilience and shared experience, uniting people under a common banner, that is why it is more than just a simple dyeing and printing job. The aim of this study is to close this gap by performing a semiotic analysis of the flags of Arabian Gulf Countries, with an emphasis on the function of multimodal discourse in creating connections and meanings. Research aims to investigate how different semiotic aspects are interlinked and mix in flags to create identity appeal and meaning, as well as how flags are important in defining a nation's identity. A range of qualitative research methods, such as comparative analysis and thematic analysis, are used in the study to draw patterns, themes, and insights from the data. For this study, samples of flags were chosen, including Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Iraq, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. Qualitative analysis techniques are employed to interpret the collected data. There are several themes that are discussed here which include importance of flags based on: the first one is Islamic Identity, the second is the cultural presentiveness, third is national identity, fourth is historical legacy, fifth is regional cooperation and lastly, political change. Create a flag that stands out/is unique and reflects the culture, history, values and is a proud symbol of national identity for its nation. By utilizing distinctive symbols, fonts, or design components, you may differentiate your flag from others and make it extremely easy to recognize. The flag design can be improved through iterative testing by considering responses from the real world. Create a flag that stands out/is unique and reflects the culture, history, values and is a proud symbol of national identity for its nation. By utilizing distinctive symbols, fonts, or design components, you may differentiate your flag from others and make it extremely easy to recognize. The flag design can be improved through iterative testing by considering the five themes that the researcher found from the findings. It is crucial to gather feedback from focus groups or target customers in order to assess the logo's effectiveness.

Keywords: flag, national identity, qualitative analysis, symbols, semiotic analysis, theme, comparison etc.



Introduction

The countries that make up the Arabian Gulf, which are also known as the countries that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), cover a region that has a thriving multicultural and multilingual population. The term "linguistic landscape" was first introduced by Landry & Bourhis (1997) in their seminal article, "Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality: An Empirical Study. This proposed study aims to explore this landscape through a unique lens: flag designs. By analyzing the use of language and symbols on the flags of countries in the region, we can gain valuable insights into national identity and representation, to see language use and prominence to see as to what extent Arabic language is being displayed on flags, and to see evolution and change with time. The visibility and predominance of languages in public settings, such as signage, marketing, and official symbols, is referred to as the linguistic landscape. This term provides useful insights about language use and identity. The examination of the connection that exists between language and identity in these nations presents us with a one-of-a-kind opportunity presented by flags, which are major national symbols. The purpose of this research is to investigate the linguistic landscape of countries located in the Arabian Gulf region through an exhaustive examination of flag designs. Specifically, the study concentrated on the linguistic components that are included in flag designs and the role that these components have in symbolizing national identity.

Problem Statement

The relevance of national flags as potent symbols of identity provides vital insights into language usage (Blommaert & Maly, 2018). The purpose of this study is to undertake a detailed examination of the linguistic features present in the flags of the countries that make up the Arabian Gulf to fill the research vacuum that currently exists. This research tries to uncover the function that language plays in forming and expressing national identities by analyzing the design components, such as scripts, colors, and symbols (Al-Sabbagh, 2018). The purpose of the study is to get an understanding of the symbolic meanings that are contained within the flags by conducting interviews with individuals who are aware of the cultural and historical settings. The proposed research contributed to the solution of the problem: By providing a holistic view of the linguistic landscape in the countries of the Arabian Gulf by integrating national flags as significant aspects of analysis. This represented a more complete comprehension of the situation. The hidden symbolic meanings and cultural linkages embedded in the linguistic aspects of flags can be unearthed, revealing the diverse identities and heritages that make up the region. Flags, with their vibrant colors and intricate symbols, often serve as powerful expressions of national identity. Yet, a deeper examination reveals that their linguistic aspects hold hidden symbolic meanings and cultural linkages, illuminating the myriad identities and heritages that weave the tapestry of the Arabian Gulf region (Al Qasimi, 2023). This fosters an understanding and appreciation for the rich linguistic diversity that exists within the region, paving the way for further research and discussion on language policy, preservation, and the enduring legacy of cultural heritage.



Research Objective

The objective of this study is to highlight the textual and semiotic elements present in the national flags of the Arabian Gulf Countries, identify the design elements that reflect linguistic and cultural characteristics in the flags of Arabian Gulf Countries and understand the geographical and historical context present in the national flags of the Arabian Gulf Countries.

Background of The Study

The Arabian Gulf region comprises nations with interconnected histories, linguistic heritage, and traditions, with Arabic serving as the primary language, acting as a unifying force. However, the diversified linguistic landscape of Arabian Gulf countries is also reflective of the historical and contemporary influences of international relations, colonialism, and globalization. This is particularly true of the Arabic languages spoken in these countries (Al-Sabbagh, 2018). The national flags of the Arabian Gulf countries hold significant symbolic meaning and serve as visual emblems of national identity, reflecting a nation's past, present, and future, often featuring design elements reflecting its cultural, historical, and linguistic qualities (Holes, 2004). Understanding language use and identity in the area may be gained via the application of a novel perspective that can be achieved by analyzing the linguistic landscape through the study of flag designs (Alghamdi & Zoghbor, 2021). The Arabian Gulf have been subjected to a variety of sociopolitical developments as well as cultural transformations, which have resulted in adjustments in language policy and preferences (Jinnah, 2015). Even though Arabic is still used as the official language in all these countries, English has become increasingly important as a lingua franca because of globalization, international trade, and educational institutions. In addition, the influence of expatriate communities and the diversification of economic sectors have brought a wide variety of languages and cultures to the region, which has resulted in a linguistic landscape that has a multitude of languages and civilizations (Al-Nasser, 2019).

Literary elements in flags, including slogans and country names, reveal linguistic usage and preferences. The choice of language and script, whether Arabic or English, can reflect various circumstances. These considerations may include historical ties, foreign influences, or the desire to portray an image that is contemporary and cosmopolitan (Stroud & Mpendukana, 2021). The placement of language aspects in flag design is crucial for effectively conveying linguistic and cultural significance (Stroud & Mpendukana, 2020). The promotion of linguistic diversity, the preservation of cultural legacy, and the development of inclusive national identities all require an understanding of the linguistic landscape of the countries that make up the Arabian Gulf. This project contributed to the knowledge on language use and identity in the Arabian Gulf region. It also offers insightful information to policymakers, educators, and scholars interested in sociolinguistics, cultural studies, and language planning (Shohamy, 2006).

Previous studies have established the importance of flags in conveying national identity. Research by Lynn (2005) and Crampton (1994) highlights how flags serve as visual representations of a nation's core values and aspirations. Entman (1993) and Shapiro (1999) delve deeper into the use of colors and symbols, demonstrating their significance in communicating



cultural heritage and religious beliefs. Focusing specifically on the Arabian Gulf region, several researchers have utilized different analytical approaches to explore the symbolism of the flags. El-Shaar (2017) employed thematic analysis to examine the languages and inscriptions present in the flags, revealing their connection to cultural identity. Firchow (1976) and Lynn (2005) conducted comparative studies, highlighting both shared elements and unique characteristics of the flags, offering insights into regional identity and historical influences. Some other works (Kaltiala-Heino, 2014, Mousa, 2019, Shahin, 2019) shed light on the significance of symbols, and signs of flags. Kaltiala-Heino (2014) focused on the use of language on the flags of Bahrain and its significance for national identity. The author analyzed the language used on the flag and its connection to historical and political contexts. Another study by Mousa (2019) focused on the Qatari flag and its use of Arabic calligraphy, colors, and symbols, and their significance for national identity and heritage. The study used visual analysis and interviews with Qatari citizens to understand the meaning and symbolism of the language used on the flag.

A study by Shahin (2019) focused on the flags of the United Arab Emirates and their use of Arabic calligraphy, colors, and symbols. A study by Zughoul and El-Khafaifi (2018) examined the use of Arabic and English in outdoor advertisements in Qatar, with a particular focus on the linguistic and cultural factors that influence language use in this context. Hamed and Alhareth (2018) analyzed the use of English in public signage in Saudi Arabia and its implications for language policy and planning. This project explores the sociolinguistic context and language dynamics in the Arabian Gulf region, focusing on the interaction between language, identity, and visual representations. Specifically, this study was focused on the Arabic language (Jinnah, 2015). The study explores the intricate relationship between language, identity, and linguistic landscape in Arabian Gulf countries, using historical, political, and cultural frameworks. Comparative flag examination reveals similarities and differences, providing insights into the region's linguistic diversity and cultural dynamics. This comprehensive analysis provides valuable insights into the region's linguistic landscape. This study aims to reveal patterns and language's role in national identities by evaluating design features and language use in Arabian Gulf countries' national flags. The study focuses on how linguistic and cultural characteristics are visually expressed and projected, analyzing colors, symbolism, and typography to understand their cultural and historical significance.

Research Methodology

The research design explains the investigation's framework and approach. This research benefits from a qualitative approach. It involves the purpose of comprehending the symbolic meanings, cultural nuances, and contextual elements related to flag representations, qualitative methodologies are appropriate research approaches (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). It also makes use of a linguistic landscape to investigate the parallels and dissimilarities that exist among the flags of the countries. The study employs qualitative research methods like thematic analysis, semiotic analysis, or comparative analysis to find patterns, themes, and insights in the data. The study used convenience and stratified sampling techniques to select flags from Arabian Gulf countries like Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Oman. The research tool used



logo photos and written explanations from books, papers, and official websites of the countries. The sample included widely recognized flags from Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Oman.

Semiotics can be used to examine and decipher language, visual pictures, and symbols. Qualitative analysis is used to interpret data. Qualitative analysis can incorporate visual and symbol theme analysis as well as comparative analysis. Qualitative comparative, thematic and semiotic analysis will be used for data analysis. "Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that focuses on identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data." (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, we know that the Arabian Gulf Countries are all based on Islamic Identity, then if we use it as one of our themes, we can say that most of the flags of Arab Gulf Countries comprise of Pan-Arab colors which represent Islamic theme (Red, Green, Black and White). The Green color, Shahada in Saudi Arabia represent Islam; crossed swords symbolize unity and defense. Comparative analysis is the process of identifying and analyzing points of comparison and contrast between two or more entities, focusing on both their similarities and differences." (Bryman, 2012, p. 178). For example, if we look at comparative analysis, several flags, like Qatar and Bahrain, show traces of British influence through their use of white and red stripes, reminiscent of the British maritime flag. Flags like UAE and Qatar use modern geometric shapes and bold colors to symbolize progress and advancement. Semiotic analysis techniques help interpret and decode communication in various contexts. For example, the Saudi Arabia Flag's green color scheme represents Islam, white purity and peace, and the central inscription emphasizes Islamic faith and state identity. The sword symbolizes power, strength, and defense of the faith.

Data Analysis

The data was collected through semiotic analysis, qualitative thematic, comparative, and semiotic analysis, focusing on linguistic choices, script preferences, and design characteristics. The stratified sampling technique was used to observe the data through various methods, combining techniques from comparative analysis, thematic analysis, and semiotic analysis for a comprehensive analysis. For performing semiotic analysis, color and shape symbolism, as well as relationship among elements were studied to note how these factors convey religious beliefs, historical events, and cultural values. For performing comparative analysis, following steps were followed: A careful selection of flags for comparison were used, identification of similarities and differences were categorized in accordance with the study, and the historical and cultural context of various Arabian-Gulf countries were listed out to better understand the specific meanings and messages embedded within the flag design. Lastly, for thematic analysis coding and identification of themes, development of a thematic framework, and interpretation of themes was followed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the respective flags symbolism and meaning. The study analyzed seven flags, each representing a symbol of national identity with a strong historical and cultural context. The research, driven by multimodal discourse principles, aimed to uncover the narratives within these flags and understand their contribution to the nation's identity and

cultural diversity. An examination of the development of the flags for Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait is presented here.

Qatar

Qatar's national flag was adopted after gaining independence in 1971. The flag is maroon with a distinctive serrated white border. This design is like Bahrain's flag, which is red with a white stripe, but Qatar's flag has a wider proportion and nine points on the white border instead of a stripe. Kharijite Muslims used a red banner, later updated with a white band, purple-red flag, diamonds, "Qatar" word, and jagged edge. Qatari flag features nine triangles, "Qatar maroon" in 1949, and similar horizontal stripes to Bahraini and UAE flags.



Figure 1: Flag of Qatar

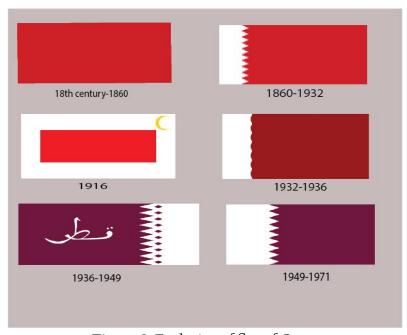


Figure 2: Evolution of flag of Qatar

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	Sign	Elements
	Symbol	A maroon with a white jagged band and nine white points like Bahrain's 3:5 proportion and red color, with a width double its height.
	Index	The word 'Qatar' in Urdu from 1936-1949. No index words now.

Semiotic Analysis	The maroon color represents courage, resilience, and struggle for
	independence. White color represents peace and purity. The nine indentations
	show nine historical emirates of Qatar.
Comparative	Qatar Flag is almost similar to Bahraini flag, and it also has similar horizontal
Analysis	stripes resembling to Bahrain and UAE flags. It also has a unique proportion
	(11:28) compared to others which tend to be closer 1:2 or 2:3 ratios.

Table 1: Qatar Flag History and Symbols

Kuwait

Kuwait's flag, accepted in 1961, was officially hoisted on November 24, 1961, and features Pan-Arabic colors with a black trapezoid on the left side. It was originally a red field with a crescent moon and five-pointed star and was expanded in 1909. Other interpretation based on the general Arabic poem says that green characterizes fertility, white peace, red chivalry, and black battleground or sand kicked up by the Kuwaiti provisos while aggressive for freedom. Formerly, Kuwait was a part of the Ottoman Empire, but later it gained independence and using the same flag.

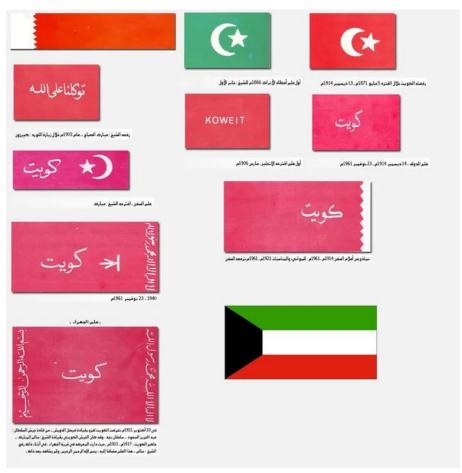


Figure 3: Evolution of flag of Kuwait



Figure 4: Flag of Kuwait

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Sign	Elements
Symbol	Features Pan-Arabic colors, three bands in black, white, and green,
	with a black trapezoid on the left side.
Semiotic Analysis	The color's castoff is red, white, green, and black, representing future,
	actions, pastures, struggles, fertility, peace, and chivalry.
Comparative	Kuwaiti as well as UAE both contain Pan-Arab colors. Here the Pan-
Analysis	Arab colors in both flags represent different meanings.

Table 2: Kuwait Flag History and Symbols

Iraq

After the 1958 Iraqi monarchy's conquest, a new flag was recognized on July 14, 1959, featuring a black-white-green vertical band and a yellow sun for Kurds.

The Iraqi flag, modified in 1991, features the Arabic caption "Allāhu akbar" between three stars honoring a 13th-century battle readiness. The original flag, used by the Arab Federation, had black, white, and green stripes.

Iraq adopted a new flag in 1959, featuring a vertical tricolor with an eight-pointed red star and yellow ring. It was the national flag until 1991 and was modified in 2004. The flag features the Arabic mien "God is great" in Kufic script.



Figure 5: Flag of Iraq

THE EVOLUTION OF THE IRAQI FLAG

Iraq's flag has undergone multiple changes with shifts in political power and has been a point of contention in the country for years

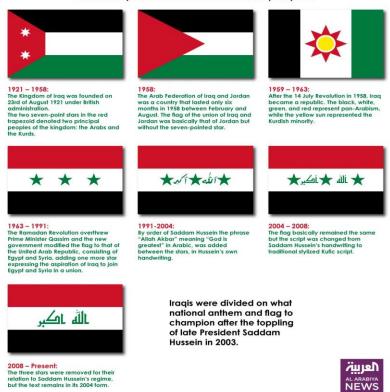


Figure 6: Evolution of flag of Iraq

Sign	Elements
Symbol	A vertical tricolor with an eight-pointed red star and yellow ring.
Index	The words ALLAH HU AKBAR.
Semiotic Analysis	Features a tricolor of red, white, and black, symbolizing the faith of
	Islam.
Comparative	Use of Pan-Arab colors like Kuwait and UAE flags. Black color
Analysis	represents the unity and strength same as the UAE flag. White color
	also represents peace like Kuwaiti flag.

Table 3: Iraqian Flag History and Symbol

Bahrain

The Bahrain flag features a red area with five triangles and a white band on the left, representing Islam's five pillars. The flag consists of two bands, with the white band covering two-thirds of

the background and the red band covering the remaining two-thirds. The flag was officially accepted on February 14, 2002.



Figure 7: Flag of Bahrain

The Bahranian flag, initially red, was enhanced in 1820 and 1932, remaining unchanged until 1971. Bahrani gained independence and joined the UN. In 2002, the Five Pillars of Islam were reduced to five. The Bahraini flag's design, featuring a white area (32.5%) and a red area (67.5%), symbolizes the early 1800s General Treaty of Peace between Arab nations and the United Kingdom, with the Islamic color of red already incorporated into the flag.

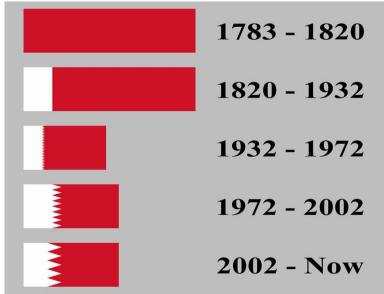


Figure 8: Evolution of flag of Bahrain

Sign	Elements
Symbol	Two bands, with the white band covering two-thirds of the
	background and the red band covering the remaining two-thirds.
Semiotic Analysis	These white triangles represent the five pillars of Islam, the five districts
	of Bahrain, or the five members of the ruling Al Khalifa family.
Comparative	Qatari Flag is very much like Bahraini Flag. Bahraini flag has fewer
Analysis	points, a 3:5 proportion. The color of Qatari flag is maroon and white
	whereas Bahraini flag is red and white.

Table 4: Bahraini Flag History and Symbols

United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates' flag, approved in 1971, features pan-Arabic colors, symbolizing unity. In 2008, minor changes allowed for red flag use with state flag in canton.

The UAE flag was designed by Mr. Abdulla Mohammed Al Ma'enah after winning a competition sponsored by Al Diwan Al Amiri Abu Dhabi, with 6 designs shortlisted for the final selection. The 1971 UAE flag, inspired by Arab dynasties, shared with Oman's flag, suggesting a connection to the wider Arab identity. It features red for resilience, optimism, wealth, white for honesty, and black for mental toughness, with colors removed from the original design.



Figure 9: Flag of UAE

The use of horizontal stripes is like Bahrain and Qatar, though the UAE flag has four vertical stripes. Unlike Qatar's unique serrated border and Bahrain's plain white stripe, the UAE flag uses distinct vertical stripes.

Sign	Elements
Symbol	The colors red, green, black, and white represent the Pan-Arab colors
	by using four vertical stripes.
Semiotic Analysis	Red symbolizes resilience, green love, optimism, wealth, white
	honesty, and black mental toughness. The colors were removed from
	the original design.
Comparative	Kuwaiti flag and UAE both contain Pan-Arab colors.
Analysis	

Table 5: UAE Flag History and Symbols

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's national flag features a green field with white for the sword emblem and Arabic inscription, symbolizing Islam and the color used in many Islamic countries.



Figure 10: Flag of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia uses a green flag with an Arabic inscription and white sword design, promoting the Islamic creed, shahada, and the message "There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of God".



Figure 11: Evolution of Saudi Arabia Flag

The Shahada, inscribed on the flag since the 18th century, was added by Abdulaziz Abdulrahman Al-Saud in 1902. The modern design, approved in 1973, features two swords guarding a palm tree representing the people, heritage, and history.



Figure 12: Embelm of Saudi Arabia Flag

The Saudi Arabian flag, featuring green as the color of Islam and a sword representing the nation's strict adherence to justice, symbolizes the country's history and ideals, highlighting its reverence for Muhammad.

Sign	Elements
Icon	A green field with white for the sword emblem and Arabic inscription,
	symbolizing Islam
Index	The words "There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of
	God" in Arabic script.
Semiotic Analysis	Green symbolizes the color of Islam and sword shows nation's
	adherence to justice.
Comparative	Green and white are commonly used colors in flags across the Arabian
Analysis	Gulf region. This suggests a shared Islamic heritage and connection to
	desert landscape.

Table 6: Saudi Arabia Flag History and Symbols

Oman

Oman's national flag features red, green, and white bands, with the national emblem displayed in the red bar. The flag was simplified until 1975, with green and white stripes added in 1970, symbolizing peace.

The Omani flag features a green border, swords, a dagger, and a gold-tinted charge, representing the country's northern mountains. The Sultan's standard has a red fly surrounded by a green border. The flag, originally red, was used since AD 750. The new national flag, approved in 1995, was introduced by Qābūs ibn Saʿīd after the 1970s.

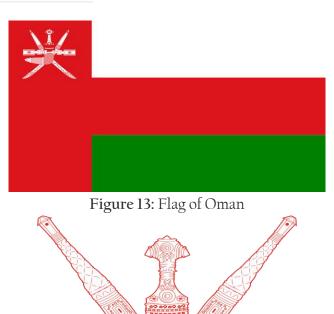


Figure 14: Embelm of Oman Flag

The flag features three-color bands: red, green, and white, with the nation's emblem

representing wealth, peace, and the struggle for defense against foreign invaders. The flag also represents the land's productivity and crossed swords above a dagger.

Sign	Elements
Icon	Flag features a green border, swords, a dagger, and a gold-tinted
	charge, representing the country's northern mountains.
Symbols	Flag features three-color bands: red, white, and green, with nation's
	embelm showing swords, a dagger, and a gold-tinted charge.
Semiotic Analysis	Red represents history, bloodshed in defense of a nation, green
	symbolizes Islam, peace, and fertility of land. White represents purity
	and peace.
Comparative	The flag shows absence of Pan-Arab colors unlike other Arabian
Analysis	counties shows casing unique identity. It also has a distinct embelm
	setting it apart from others.

Table 7: Saudi Arabia Flag History and Symbols



Results & Discussions

The flag of Saudi Arabia uses minimal elements with strong symbolic meanings, with green representing Islam, white indicating faith, and the sword representing strength and defense. The palm tree symbolizes resilience, and the sword represents historical conquest and unification, as highlighted by Sarah El-Shaar (A Case Study of Flags in the Arab World", 2017). The flag in Saudi Arabia has evolved over time, starting with the Shahada in the 18th century and adding a sword in 1902. The current design was officially accepted on March 15, 1973, marking a consistent use of the sword. Semiotic analysis studies signs and symbols in cultural settings. Oman's seven flags, from 1868 to 1995, have evolved over time. The white flag represents the religious leader, while the red banner represents indigenous people. The Sultan's modernization led to the unveiling of the new national flag in 1970.In 1980, William Crampton's "The National Flags of the Arabian Peninsula: A Vexillological Survey" reveals the evolution of flags, with the dominant red color remaining consistent but the white band's design changing over time. The Kuwaiti flag, designed in 1961, was a blend of Islamic identity, historical struggles, and aspirations for peace and prosperity. It was red and white, with green representing Islam and prosperity, white representing peace, red representing courage and sacrifice, and black representing the struggle for independence.

The flag's color scheme aligns with the regional scheme. The 1971 UAE flag symbolizes regional cooperation and unity among Arab nations, featuring Pan-Arab colors red, green, white, and black. In 2008, a minor change allowed merchant ships to fly a red flag alongside the state flag in the canton, while all countries use the federal flag interchangeably. Qatar's flag, initially red, was based on Kharijite Muslims' banner. The British added a white band in the 19th century, followed by a white and purple-red flag in 1932. In 1971, the flag was officially approved, symbolizing national identity and unity, as highlighted by Abdullah Al-Shammari. The Bahrain flag, which featured a white stripe since 1820, was separated from national flags in 1932. The flag's white points were reduced to five in 1972 and five in 2002, each representing one of the Five Pillars of Islam. The Iraqi flag consists of three horizontal stripes: black, white, and green, with three green stars representing the Abbasid Caliphate, peace, fertility, past struggles, hope, and unity among Arabs, Kurds, and Assyrians. Analyzing flags through a semiotic lens can provide a comprehensive narrative about the Arabian Gulf region, highlighting shared heritage, national identity, and historical experiences.

Conclusion:

Flag designs in Arabian Gulf countries reveal linguistic diversity, influenced by Arabic script and calligraphy, highlighting the interplay between language and national identity, symbolizing unity, and heritage. The study examines flag designs in Arabian Gulf Countries, revealing their influence on Islamic identity, cultural heritage, political changes, and regional cooperation, highlighting their potential for policymaking. Flag design in the Arabian Gulf can enhance policies, promote trust in international relations, and preserve cultural history, while also shaping national identity. Language shape national identity, promoting successful cross-cultural communication and



collaboration. Flags' linguistic features enhance unity and preserve rich cultural history in Arabian Gulf nations. Researching flag designs helps create visually appealing, deeply symbolic flags that inspire unity, represent identities, and effectively communicate messages, utilizing color theory, symbolism, iconography, and typography.

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