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REPORT

# Being and Belonging

## Sustaining National Identity in a Changing World

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# Executive Summary

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What does it mean in today's world to be Saudi or Emirati, Italian, American, or Malaysian? National identity is the invisible thread uniting individuals within a country, weaving together shared values, history, and cultural markers into a collective sense of belonging. It is also a powerful strategic asset that influences social cohesion, economic resilience, and global competitiveness.

Yet national identity is not static, and it is taking on renewed importance in today's interconnected world, at a time when shifting patterns of globalization and migration, projected population declines, and technological advances are challenging traditional boundaries. These forces are all influencing the way that citizens think about their identity and raising challenges for governments seeking ways to anchor a unifying set of norms.

This report seeks to contribute to the worldwide debate about national identity in two ways. First, it offers a framework for understanding the core elements of national identity, namely its distinctive characteristics, or markers, which are deeply rooted within each nation, as well as the way national identity is expressed; that is, how citizens engage with one another and the world. Second, the report offers policymakers an actionable roadmap to diagnose, define, sustain, and adapt national identity in the face of disruptive modern trends. The objective is to ensure that national identity remains a stabilizing force and a pillar of societal continuity and adaptability at a time of rapid change.





Ultimately, as nations expand their reach and influence, opportunity lies in crafting compelling, outward-facing national identity narratives that not only preserve heritage but also inspire and shape global perspectives. And these opportunities are arising at a time when, for many countries, sustaining and even redefining national identity has become an urgent priority.

## Section 1

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# Why National Identity Matters





Identity is a multilayered concept that has evolved significantly over time, shifting from fixed social roles toward a more dynamic and deeply personal understanding of the self. In premodern societies, identity was primarily ascribed: individuals were defined by lineage, tribe, religion, and social status—structures that offered continuity but left little room for personal autonomy.

A person's place in the world was determined largely by inherited position, and legitimacy stemmed from external recognition within the community or by authority.

The Enlightenment and the rise of individualism transformed this landscape. Identity increasingly centered on the notion of an inner, authentic self shaped by personal agency. Psychologist Erik Erikson later formalized identity as a developmental construct, emphasizing self-reflection and continuity of the self across time.<sup>1</sup>

Philosopher Charles Taylor advanced this perspective by arguing that identity is grounded in “horizons of significance”: the moral and cultural contexts that confer meaning and guide what individuals deem valuable.<sup>2</sup> Together, these thinkers reframed identity from something inherited to something constructed through experience, interpretation, and aspiration.

Francis Fukuyama extends this evolution into the political realm, defining modern

identity as the point at which an individual’s inner sense of dignity confronts society’s systems of recognition. Identity, in this view, is inseparable from the desire to be acknowledged by others. Misrecognition, or the belief that one’s worth is denied or diminished, fuels the collective quests for belonging, rights, and visibility that characterize identity politics today.

In our modern context, identity operates across multiple layers. Personal identity encompasses individual traits, beliefs, and aspirations. Social identity is shaped by group affiliations such as family or profession. And national identity emerges from shared histories, values, symbols, and narratives that bind individuals into a broader political community. Across time, identity has shifted from something ascribed to something achieved, yet its core purpose remains constant: to situate individuals within social worlds and provide meaning, belonging, and dignity.

As identity has expanded from inherited roles to complex personal, social, and political dimensions, national identity has emerged to become one of its most influential forms. Unlike individual or group identity, national identity operates at the societal level, transforming disparate experiences of belonging into a shared collective consciousness. It channels the universal human need for recognition into a unifying narrative—one that links people through common memory, mutual obligation, and a sense of “we.” In doing so, national identity becomes far more than an abstract idea; it is a lived social force that influences how nations cohere internally and position themselves in the world.

National identity is an intangible asset that plays a highly tangible role in shaping societies. It is a vital force underpinning a nation’s ability to unite its people, inspire collective action, and foster resilience in times of change. One

obvious example of national identity in action is how it is manifested through sports: teams come to embody the spirit of nations, and fans eagerly embrace them.

In this opening section, we describe three dimensions in which the influence of national identity is manifested. First, it enhances social cohesion and stability. Second, it drives economic competitiveness. Third, through sports and many other activities, it fosters international influence. These three dimensions are interconnected: by uniting societies and aligning individual actions with national interests, an effective national identity not only preserves culture and boosts well-being but also creates stronger, more resilient populations that actively contribute to their nation’s stability and progress. And internationally, it strengthens a country’s reputation and global influence, illuminating aspects of life from arts to sports that burnish a country’s image on the global stage.

National identity enhances social cohesion and stability, drives economic competitiveness, and fosters international influence.



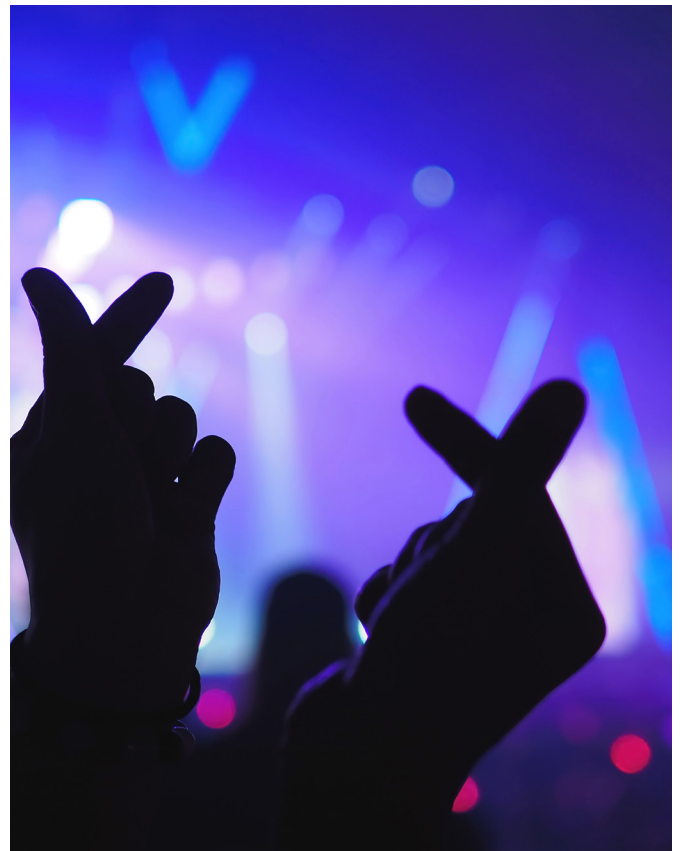
## Social Cohesion and Stability: Building Stronger Societies

National identity fosters social cohesion by uniting citizens around shared values. It transcends divisions based on ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status. When citizens feel connected to their shared history, language, and tradition, these connections create a collective identity that goes beyond individual differences. This sense of belonging promotes trust, which in turn creates other benefits. For example, it can lower crime rates<sup>3</sup> or, as has been seen in Scandinavian countries, improve public health.<sup>4</sup> It also enhances psychological well-being by providing citizens with a sense of belonging and purpose.

The act of preserving cultural heritage reinforces this connection, instilling pride in the uniqueness and resilience of a nation's identity. One example is France, which has policies to protect its language and cultural institutions<sup>5</sup>—policies that have historically served as pillars of national cohesion. At the same time, France's model highlights an important tension: while it offers structured pathways by which immigrants can integrate, it has also placed heavy emphasis on assimilation, raising questions about how fully it accommodates the belonging and aspirations of diverse communities.<sup>6,7</sup> This underscores a broader insight: strong national identity requires a balance between safeguarding cultural heritage and ensuring that all residents, whether native-born or newly arrived, can see themselves reflected in the national story. Similarly, nations like Denmark and New Zealand, where citizens share a strong sense of identity, consistently rank high in

global happiness indices, demonstrating how a positive national identity contributes to individual and collective well-being.<sup>8</sup>

This communal feeling is perhaps most apparent—and most valuable—in the way it unites citizens and mobilizes collective action in times of crisis. Emergencies demand that communities pull together to provide mutual support and foster compliance with government measures. For example, New Zealand had one of the world's most effective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic partly as a result of the country's high levels of public cooperation and trust.<sup>9</sup>



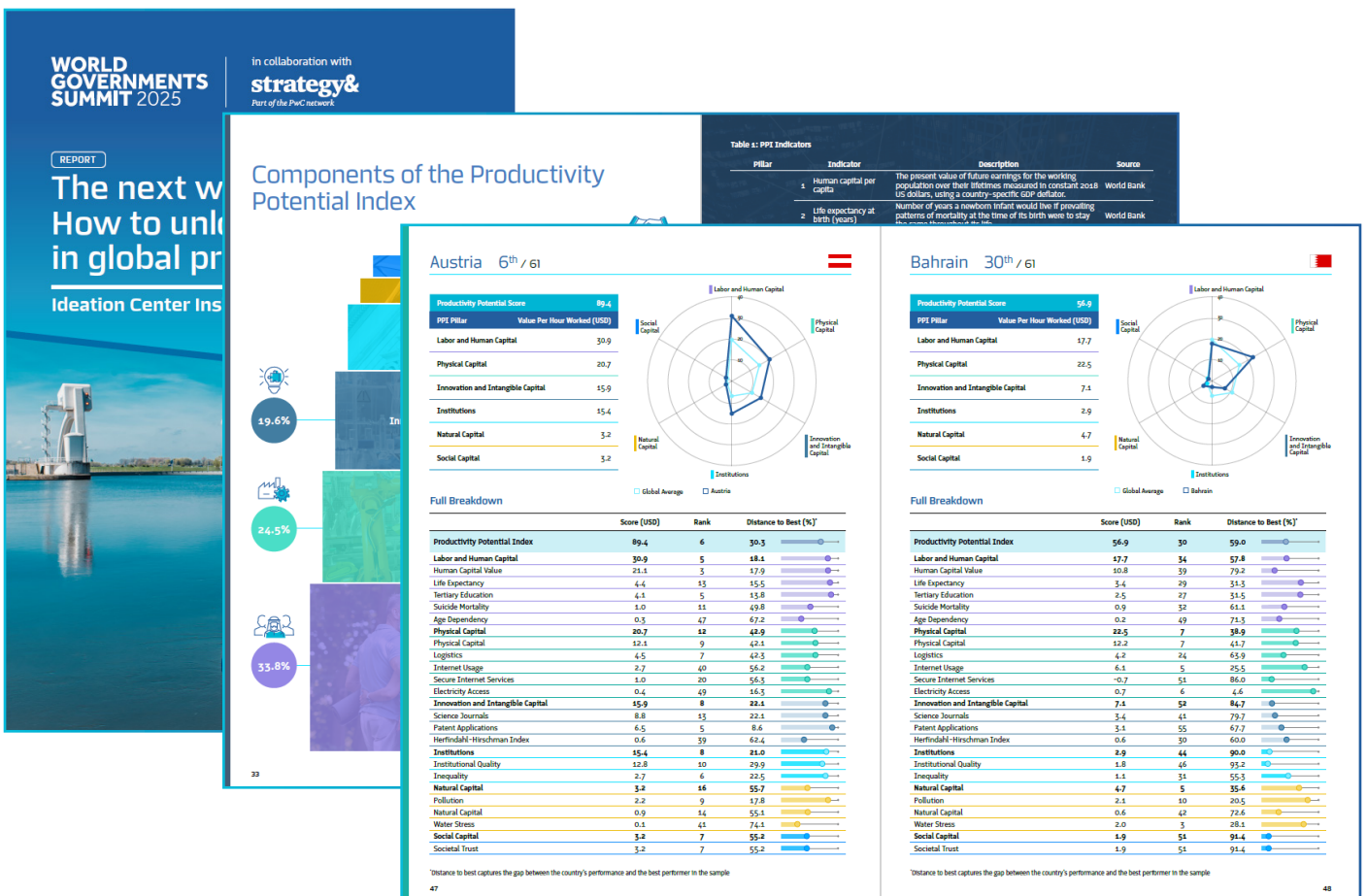
By uniting societies and aligning individual actions with national interests, a cohesive national identity not only preserves culture and boosts well-being but creates stronger, more resilient populations that actively contribute to their nation's stability and progress.

# Economic Competitiveness: Driving Growth and Resilience

National identity can be a spur to national competitiveness in several ways. Where it encourages citizens to buy products made in their community, it not only heightens a sense of belonging but can also drive economic growth by fostering social trust, economic resilience, and competitiveness. For instance, societies of the Nordic region exhibit exceptionally high levels of interpersonal and institutional trust. This “Nordic gold” of social trust has been identified as a key resource underpinning both strong governance and strong economic performance.<sup>10</sup> Trust is a key here: economic literature suggests that a 10% increase in the share of trusting individuals can raise the annual gross domestic product (GDP) per capita growth by about 0.5%.<sup>11</sup> In the same vein, Strategy&’s Productivity Potential Index found that countries with median levels of societal trust that move to being top-performing countries on the PPI can boost GDP by up to 7% over 10 years.<sup>12</sup> Trust fosters collaboration among citizens, businesses,

and governments, reducing transaction costs, improving compliance with regulations, and streamlining governance. For instance, it makes citizens more likely to pay taxes willingly, contributing to well-funded public services and welfare systems that, in turn, sustain economic stability. In Denmark and Sweden, citizens’ strong trust in government institutions leads to high voluntary tax compliance, reducing enforcement costs and supporting robust welfare systems.

Encouraging citizens to buy locally can also boost economic resilience. Citizens with pride in their national identity often prioritize domestic brands and industries, creating a multiplier effect on GDP by generating jobs and reducing reliance on imports. In fact, it often strengthens a country’s competitive position globally by giving local companies the scale, stability, and confidence needed to compete internationally. South Korea is one example: strong national pride not only contributed to the domestic rise of companies such as Samsung and Hyundai but also helped propel them onto the global stage, where they now compete as world-



leading brands. Canada offers another example: during trade disputes, the “Buy Canadian” movement leveraged national pride and trust in government messaging to encourage citizens and residents to support domestic products, strengthening local industries and enhancing economic resilience.

National identity can also play a role in attracting and retaining talent, thereby helping to bolster innovation and global competitiveness. Countries with inclusive and positive national images, such as Canada<sup>13</sup> and Switzerland,<sup>14</sup> attract skilled workers essential for sustaining high-growth industries. Talent can feel valued in an environment characterized by a cohesive national identity, and this, in turn, can drive long-term productivity and economic performance. National identity also encourages citizens who have left their homeland—often to develop skills on the global stage or to pursue otherwise unavailable opportunities—to return, driven by the desire to bring the best of the world back to the country they love.

Finally, national identity can foster innovation and economic competitiveness. This can happen inorganically, where government policy seeks to attract global talent to start businesses locally. It can also happen organically, where citizens are inspired to contribute to their country’s success.

## International Influence: The “Soft Power” of National Identity

Nations have “hard” power, usually defined as the size and performance of their military or their economic dominance, and “soft” power—their ability to persuade, attract, and co-opt rather than coerce. How a nation is perceived globally is a cornerstone of its soft power, shaping its international standing and its ability to influence others through shared principles and cultural appeal. Many elements contribute to soft power, including art, culture, food, and language. Soft power also encompasses values and international principles. Germany exemplifies this effect by using its identity as a champion of human rights and inclusive principles to strengthen its diplomatic influence within the European Union and beyond.

Soft power is not only about projecting a favorable image to the world; it can also have tangible economic consequences at home. Take France: its historical and cultural identity draws millions of tourists annually, contributing more than 8% of GDP and creating hundreds of thousands of jobs.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the UK leverages its cultural and historical identity to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and ranks second globally in attracting FDI. Its cultural sector alone generates more than £4 for every £1 spent on local arts, supporting key industries and creating jobs.<sup>16</sup>

By uniting citizens through trust, loyalty, and pride, national identity serves as a foundation for sustainable economic growth and resilience in a competitive global landscape.


By reinforcing trust, reputation, and alignment with core values, national identity becomes a powerful tool for enhancing a nation's soft power and global influence.



## Section 2

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# The Core Elements of National Identity



At its core, national identity is built on markers: distinctive characteristics deeply rooted within a nation’s fabric that provide continuity and a sense of belonging. These vary widely in nature, covering such elements as language, traditions, symbols, historical narratives, and sovereignty. Markers can be demographic (such as ethnicity or ancestry); cultural (including art and literature); economic (such as local resources or equity and opportunity); or civic (including political orientation or civic rights and freedoms). These markers alone do not define national identity. They must be actively lived and reinforced through expressions of national identity. Such expressions are manifested in how citizens engage with one another and the world, whether through civic belonging and participation, cultural practices, or symbolic acts that reflect shared values (for more, see sidebar, “The Importance of Values”).

In this section, we examine these two building blocks of national identity—markers and expressions—in greater depth and provide a framework to help track and understand them.

## The Importance Of Values

Values are both embedded within and shaped by national identity, yet they do not fit neatly into the definition of markers or expressions. Rather, they form a fluid foundation, influencing—and being influenced by—the very components that define a nation. Some markers, such as religion, ancestry, or the natural environment, inspire core values, shaping perspectives on community, governance, and cultural norms. Others, like language or traditions, serve as vehicles through which values are transmitted, reinforcing societal expectations and behaviors across generations.

Values do not remain static. They evolve alongside economic shifts, political ideologies, and societal transformations. In some cases, expressions of national identity such as civic participation, respect for authority, or hospitality become ingrained as national values in their own right. In others, the reinterpretation of historical narratives or changing governance models reshapes collective values, as seen in nations undergoing social reform or economic diversification. In many Western democracies, liberal values such as individual freedom, civil rights, and equality before the law have become deeply intertwined with national identity. The United States is a prominent example, where principles such as liberty and constitutional rights are not only political ideals, but defining features of how Americans understand and express their national identity.





Governments play a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing shared values, particularly when defining which aspects of national identity to promote and how to instill them effectively. The world's perception of France is rooted in the values of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* (liberty, equality, and fraternity).<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Singapore's "Our Shared Values" explicitly forge a Singaporean identity that seeks to link the nation's multicultural heritage with the attitudes and values that have contributed to Singapore's success.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the United States has historically relied on constitutional principles, national symbols, and civic rituals to transmit and reinforce its values across generations.<sup>49</sup>

Values serve as the foundation for policy decisions, educational curricula, cultural initiatives, and public discourse. They ensure that the national identity being fostered aligns with a country's long-term vision. Messages transmitted through education, media, and business consistently reinforce these values, ensuring their integration into daily life. Whether through civic engagement programs, national storytelling initiatives, or behavioral interventions, embedding shared values into national identity requires a strategic, multisectoral approach that aligns policies, institutions, and societal narratives. Ultimately, values underpin both markers and expressions, guiding how people perceive their national identity and how they choose to embody it. They are not just inherited; they are actively shaped, challenged, and redefined with each generation. This ensures that national identity remains not only a reflection of the past but also a vision for the future.

# MARKERS

## Understanding the Markers of National Identity

National identity markers serve as foundational elements or building blocks, providing continuity and anchoring national identity in shared history, values, and culture. They include demographic, cultural, economic, and civic markers. Collectively, they shape how a nation perceives itself and its place in the world (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. NATIONAL IDENTITY MARKERS.

|                           |                     |                                   |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| National Identity Markers | Demographic Markers | Ethnicity                         |
|                           |                     | Ancestry                          |
|                           |                     | Religion                          |
|                           | Cultural Markers    | Language                          |
|                           |                     | Natural environment               |
|                           |                     | Historical narrative              |
|                           |                     | Traditions and customs            |
|                           |                     | Symbols and icons                 |
|                           |                     | Art and literature                |
|                           | Economic Markers    | Economic stability and resilience |
|                           |                     | Economic equity and opportunity   |
|                           |                     | Local resources and products      |
|                           | Civic Markers       | Political ideology                |
|                           |                     | Political orientation             |
|                           |                     | Sovereignty                       |
|                           |                     | Government effectiveness          |
| Access to justice         |                     |                                   |
| Civic rights and freedom  |                     |                                   |

These markers of national identity are identifiable throughout countries:

**Demographic markers**, such as ethnicity, ancestry, and religion, connect individuals to a broader community through shared practices, heritage, and beliefs. For example, Saudi Arabia's national identity is deeply entwined with its role as the custodian of Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina; this unique responsibility positions the country as the

spiritual heart of the Islamic world, fostering a profound connection to Muslims globally. Similarly, its national identity is deeply rooted in its Bedouin ancestry, emphasizing resilience, resourcefulness, and a profound connection to the land. Events such as the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival celebrate Bedouin traditions, providing a platform through which to honor ancestral practices, embed them in local culture, and share them with the world.

|  |
|--|
| Shared practices often tied to a specific geographic region or historical homeland, which shape a collective identity distinct from others |
| Lineage or historical descent of a population  |
| Collective beliefs, practices, and rituals related to spirituality within a nation   |
| Primary means of communication and cultural expression within a nation   |
| The distinctive landscapes, ecosystems, and natural symbols of a nation  |
| Events and trajectories that shaped a nation's collective memory   |
| Established family roles, practices, and norms passed down through generations   |
| Visual and symbolic representations that embody national identity  |
| Evolution and documentation of creative expressions that reflect and shape a nation's cultural identity                                    |
| Ability of a nation to maintain economic health and recover from disruptions, and its global positioning                                   |
| Fairness and accessibility of economic resources and opportunities for all citizens  |
| Access to natural resources or locally grown developed products that drive the economy and boost exports                                   |
| Set of beliefs and values that guide a nation's political system   |
| General political direction or stance of a nation's government and populace, and relationship with the world                               |
| Authority and autonomy of a nation to govern itself  |
| Efficiency and competency of a nation's government in delivering services and upholding laws   |
| Availability and fairness of legal processes and protections for all citizens  |
| Rights and liberties guaranteed to citizens, including freedom of speech, assembly, and participation in governance                        |

**Cultural markers** capture a nation’s creative expressions, traditions, and symbols, preserving its heritage across generations. For instance, while English is widely used in the UAE for business and daily interactions, Arabic remains a cornerstone of national identity and helps preserve the cultural and national fabric of the Emirati people. Recognizing this, the government has taken significant steps to reinforce its presence, such as celebrating World Arabic Day, the promotion of Arabic across national media channels, and mandatory Arabic education in schools. The government also recently banned non-nationals from speaking the Emirati dialect on official media channels.<sup>20</sup> The UAE also emphasizes preserving local customs central to its national identity. This includes the tradition of firing the iftar cannon during Ramadan to signal the end of the daily fast, and the attachment to falconry, recognized by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage, which symbolizes the nation’s Bedouin roots and connection to the desert.

Saudi Arabia’s national identity is likewise shaped by its historical narratives. For example, the recently announced “In the Prophet’s Steps” project<sup>21</sup> recreates the historic migration route from Mecca to Medina with an immersive experience that connects visitors to the journey of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). By restoring

landmarks along this path and making much of it accessible to both Muslims and non-Muslims, Saudi Arabia reinforces its role as a steward of Islamic history while positioning its rich historical legacy as a pillar of cultural identity and national pride.

**Economic markers** shape how a country is perceived both domestically and globally, emerging when certain economic attributes (for example, natural resources such as oil, industries, or financial systems) become deeply entwined with a country’s brand, influencing its reputation and positioning in the world. In East Asia, these markers are especially visible. South Korea’s rise as a global innovation hub, driven by its electronics and automotive industries, has become a defining aspect of its national identity, symbolizing economic resilience and technological ambition.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Taiwan’s world-leading semiconductor sector has turned economic opportunity into a national marker, positioning the country as a critical player in global supply chains and reinforcing its identity as a highly skilled, technologically advanced economy.<sup>23</sup>

**Civic markers** encompass the principles and systems that guide a nation’s governance and civic life. This includes political ideology, sovereignty, and civic rights. Singapore



exemplifies how diversity can coexist with a strong national identity, forged through its commitment to multiculturalism, civic rights, and shared ideals. Its population, comprising Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Eurasian communities, features distinct cultural traditions, languages, and cuisines, enriching the nation's cultural fabric. Despite this diversity and freedom, Singaporeans share a collective identity grounded in principles like meritocracy, social harmony, and nation-building.



Markers serve as anchors for a nation's identity, yet their significance can vary widely across countries. In some cases, one or two markers may be largely identified with a nation, such as is the case with football in Brazil. In others, a sense of identity arises from a multiplicity of cultural, civic, demographic, and economic markers. When certain markers outweigh others, it can shape identity in distinct ways. For instance, those emphasizing cultural markers such as traditions and historical narratives may align more closely with heritage and the maintenance of continuity with the past. Furthermore, while markers are structured along themes, they do not exist in isolation but interact to shape the broader narrative of a nation's identity. For instance, in Japan, the cultural marker of *washoku* (traditional cuisine) not only sustains heritage but also reinforces economic markers by driving culinary tourism and exports, and it shapes the outward perception of the country (sidebar, "Case Study: National Identity in Japan").

Ultimately, the balance and interplay of markers, and harnessing the synergies among them, influence how a nation defines itself. They also influence its trajectory and how individuals see themselves within the broader national and social narrative. These markers frame the stories that people tell about their nation—its values, achievements, and challenges. At the same time, they shape how the nation is perceived externally, reinforcing its global reputation, cultural influence, and economic positioning. Whether intentionally crafted or organically formed, a nation's identity is continuously projected to the world, affecting its attractiveness as a partner, investment hub, or cultural reference point. By leveraging the right combination of markers, nations can ensure their identity not only reflects their unique heritage and aspirations but also strengthens their presence on the global stage.

# Expressions

## Bringing Markers to Life Through Expressions of National Identity

Meet Amira. She greets the Saudi Arabian dawn with devotion, finding solace in her morning prayers. Arab association and local origin intertwine harmoniously within her daily life, guiding her actions and decisions. As she prepares for work at an AI startup, Amira's surroundings reflect her deep connection to her culture. The scent of traditional spices wafts through her kitchen as she carefully prepares a breakfast feast of local delicacies, a cherished ritual she shares with her family each morning,

FIGURE 2. NATIONAL IDENTITY EXPRESSIONS.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Civic and Community Engagement                           | Civic engagement and participation        |
|  | Community service and volunteering        |
|  | Public celebrations and national holidays |
|  | Collective response to crises             |
| Traditions of Culture and Heritage                       | Social norms                              |
|  | Use and preservation of language          |
|  | Flag display and patriotism               |
|  | Cultural symbols and attire               |
|  | Celebration of festivals and rituals      |
|  | Traditional crafts                        |
|  | Local cuisine                             |
|  | Religious observance                      |
| Architecture   |   |
| National Pride in Local and International Representation | Participation in international events     |
|  | Expatriate community engagement           |
|  | Social media engagement                   |

gathering around the table to exchange stories and blessings for the day ahead. The intricacies of Arabic calligraphy adorn the walls of her home, showcasing the artistry and beauty of the written word. Amira's attire, a flowing abaya gracefully adorned with intricate embroidery, celebrates the traditions of her country. As she steps outside, the sound of the Adhan, the Islamic call to prayer, echoes through the air, part of the spiritual foundation that anchors her every day.

All of Amira's actions reflect expressions based on a strong national identity. Without even

realizing it, she is the living embodiment of her country. Expressions of Saudi Arabia's national identity transform foundational markers into her visible behaviors, attitudes, and practices. They reflect how individuals and communities embody their shared identity through actions that foster connection, pride, and unity. Whether through civic participation, cultural celebrations, or global representation, expressions serve as the bridge between a nation's foundational elements and its lived experiences (Figure 2).

|  |
|--|
| Active involvement in political processes, such as voting, demonstrating commitment to national values and governance                            |
| Participation in community-building activities that foster solidarity, mutual support, and a sense of shared responsibility                      |
| Active and proud celebrations and engagement of citizens to commemorate historical milestones, achievements, and cultural heritage               |
| Unified actions taken by citizens during crises, reflecting resilience, solidarity, and a strong national identity                               |
| Adherence to culturally specific behaviors and customs that reinforce a cohesive, respectful society   |
| Maintaining and promoting the national language as a key link to cultural identity, history, and heritage  |
| Visible support for the nation, such as the flag, anthem, and national songs, expressing loyalty and pride                                       |
| Use of traditional clothing and cultural symbols to express heritage and reinforce a shared identity   |
| Observance of cultural and social festivals that foster a collective sense of belonging and continuity   |
| Engagement with unique art forms and crafts that reflect cultural identity and heritage  |
| Reflecting identity through flavors, ingredients, and cooking techniques passed down through generations   |
| Practicing faith traditions that align with national identity and values   |
| Embracing architectural styles that symbolize cultural heritage or modern identity, often reflecting national values and history                 |
| Representing the nation on the global stage (e.g., sports, arts)   |
| Activities by expatriates (nationals living abroad) that promote and celebrate national identity abroad, maintaining cultural ties and influence |
| Using digital platforms to express national pride, engage with cultural heritage, and promote national identity                                  |

Here's how national identity can be expressed:

- **Civic and community engagement.** Citizens express their commitment to shared morals and responsibilities in ways that include civic participation, volunteering, and collective action in times of crisis. In doing so, they showcase a nation's cohesion and trust in its institutions. For example, voter turnout reflects trust in the democratic process. Collective responses to natural disasters, such as community-driven relief efforts, embody resilience and solidarity. These behaviors emphasize how deeply citizens are connected to their nation's civic and social markers. At the UAE's Union Day (Eid Al Etihad), for example, events such as parades, flag displays, and public gatherings showcase a vibrant expression of national pride, emphasizing shared values and the country's progress while fostering a sense of belonging among its diverse population.
- **Traditions of culture and heritage.** Many daily habits preserve and celebrate a nation's history, traditions, and creative identity, fostering continuity and pride across generations. For example, the kandura, worn by Emirati men, and the

abaya, worn by Emirati women, reflect a strong connection to the UAE's Bedouin heritage. These garments not only symbolize continuity and pride in Emirati identity but also adapt to modern times, with new designs and embroidery adding contemporary elements while preserving their cultural significance. Festivals and rituals that bring communities together are other ways to celebrate tradition. In the UAE, the Al Dhafra Festival, which highlights Bedouin traditions, and the Dubai Fitness Challenge (DXB 30x30), promoting health and wellness, reflect the country's ability to blend tradition with innovation. Saudi Arabia's annual Janadriyah National Festival reinforces a shared sense of pride and unity as it showcases traditional crafts, cuisine, music, and storytelling. The Ardah, a traditional sword dance, is performed during national celebrations and festivals, and symbolizes unity, strength, and pride in the nation's Bedouin and tribal traditions, serving as a living expression of Saudi identity and cultural continuity.

- **National pride in local and international representation.** Pride can stem from expressions of national identity, both big and small, including sports. For example,



in New Zealand, the All Blacks, renowned as one of the most successful rugby teams in sports history, symbolize excellence, unity, and cultural heritage through traditions such as performing the *haka*. The All Blacks not only unite New Zealanders but also project the nation's identity globally, enhancing its reputation for sportsmanship and cultural pride. And the tradition is kept alive through grassroots rugby programs, coupled with government and organizational support, which have ensured accessibility and inclusion, fostering a deep connection to the sport.

Understanding the visibility and depth of such expressions of national identity is a way to evaluate the overall health, strengths, and weaknesses of a nation's identity. These expressions can be tracked and measured using a variety of tools and research methods, including data collection on participation in cultural events, museum attendance, and popularity of civic activities. Online sentiment analysis on forums and social media platforms offers further insights into public engagement and perceptions, while primary research, capturing attitudes, preferences, expressions, and beliefs, provides a deeper understanding of how national identity resonates across different segments of society.

For instance, despite all the diversity in the United States, Americans are united around notions of innovation, a sense of achievement, and expressiveness. These behavioral attributes provide an indication of the primary drivers of the nation's people and how promoting a culture of innovation and achievement could maintain this alignment. Diversity and pluralism also function as powerful expressions of national identity in the

United States and other nations such as Brazil; heterogeneous populations are united not by a single cultural marker but through shared civic values, democratic participation, and national narratives that celebrate inclusion. These expressions illustrate that national identity can be cohesive even when built on pluralistic foundations.

In Saudi Arabia, expressions of national identity are more focused on community and loyalty, as evidenced by high scores on collective and relationship behaviors. These attributes reflect a culture in which collective welfare and long-term, trust-based relationships are prioritized over short-term transactions. This is evident in Saudi traditions such as *majlis* gatherings, where relationships are strengthened through open dialogue and mutual respect, and in the emphasis on family and community as pillars of society. In this context, the country could continue promoting initiatives that foster a sense of collective progress through policies that encourage trust-based business environments and long-term partnerships.

However, not all nations exhibit strong or cohesive expressions of national identity. In countries where national identity is weak or fragmented, expressions often reflect division rather than unity. For example, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to struggle with the competing ethnic identities of Bosniak, Croat, and Serb, resulting in parallel school curricula, segregated cultural celebrations, and limited shared civic engagement. These weak or divided expressions illustrate how the absence of a unifying identity framework can erode social cohesion and complicate nation-building.<sup>24</sup>

## Case Study

# National Identity in Japan

Japan's national identity is a fusion of ancient traditions and modern innovation, a dynamic construct that balances deep cultural roots with an openness to global influence. This identity is the result of deliberate preservation, strategic adaptation, and proactive government initiatives. Japan is thus an example of how a consistent national identity can unite a population, foster resilience, and be retained even in a nation that is globally connected.

At the heart of Japan's national identity lie its demographic and cultural markers. Ancestry plays a profound role, with Japanese citizens tracing their lineage through historical clans and families, embedding respect for elders and ancestors into their everyday lives.

Cultural markers further enrich this identity. The Japanese language is not merely a tool for communication but a reflection of societal values: honorifics and polite speech mirror the cultural emphasis on hierarchy and mutual respect. The natural environment, from the iconic Mount Fuji to the ephemeral beauty of cherry blossoms, is another defining marker. These symbols are woven into Japan's art, literature, and traditions, reinforcing a collective appreciation for impermanence and harmony with nature.

Japan's national identity truly comes alive through its vibrant expressions, which transform its foundational markers into visible behaviors and shared practices.





Ambition and dedication exemplify the attitude of the nation's workers who, in the decades after World War II, drove the growth of such innovative companies as Toyota, Sony, and Honda. Yet alongside this industriousness, community and civic engagement have remained cornerstones of Japanese life; from neighborhood cleanups to volunteer-led disaster preparedness, reflecting collective responsibility and respect for place.

Cultural expressions further showcase Japan's identity through rituals, festivals, and everyday practices. The kimono and yukata, worn during events such as Hanami (cherry blossom viewing) and traditional ceremonies, symbolize a connection to heritage that remains vibrant in modern times. Japanese cuisine, recognized as a UNESCO Intangible cultural heritage, reflects simplicity, seasonality, and respect for natural resources. Even in global exports such as anime and manga, Japan's creativity draws from its cultural ethos, introducing its tenets to international audiences.

On the international stage, Japan's ability to blend tradition with modernity was on display, among other places, at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, which served as a showcase for Japan's technological advancements, cultural richness, and national unity.

## A Government-led Success Story

Strategic government initiatives actively sustain and enhance Japan's national identity. The 1950 Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties<sup>25</sup> has been instrumental in safeguarding both tangible and intangible heritage, whether historic temples and shrines or traditional art forms like kabuki and Noh theater. By designating these cultural treasures as 'national properties,' Japan ensures their continuity and accessibility for future generations.

The Living National Treasures Program<sup>26</sup> builds on this preservation effort by recognizing and supporting master artisans and performers who excel in traditional crafts and arts. These individuals serve as custodians of cultural

knowledge, passing down skills that might otherwise fade in a rapidly modernizing society. In its quest to project national identity globally, Japan also launched the "Cool Japan" initiative in 2010, a campaign to promote its cultural exports, including anime, manga, fashion, and cuisine.

Environmental stewardship also plays a pivotal role in Japan's identity. The restoration of *satoyama* (rural landscapes) and *satoumi* (coastal ecosystems) reflects the nation's commitment to harmony with nature, a value deeply embedded in its traditions. The Furusato Nozei (hometown tax program) further reinforces this connection by allowing citizens to fund regional preservation projects, fostering pride in their local identities.



The fruit of these efforts is measurable in several global indices. Ranked fourth on the Global Soft Power Index (2025)<sup>27</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> on the Global Competitiveness Report (in the most recently published edition, in 2019),<sup>28</sup> Japan is recognized for its cultural influence, technological innovation, and diplomatic engagement. Its ranking at number 12 on the Global Peace Index (2025)<sup>29</sup> underscores its political stability and effective governance, while its ranking at number 27 on the

Environmental Performance Index (2024)<sup>30</sup> highlights its leadership in sustainability.

Culturally, Japan's 26 UNESCO World Heritage Sites<sup>31</sup> stand as a testament to its dedication to preserving both natural and historical treasures. Socially, high scores on the Gallup Global Emotions Report reflect the well-being of its citizens, bolstered by national pride and cohesion.

Japan's national identity can be summed up as a story of balancing the past and the future, tradition and innovation, local morals and global influence. Its markers and expressions, reinforced by tailored government policies and celebrated through cultural exports, create a cohesive narrative that resonates both at home and abroad. This identity is not only a source of pride but also a strategic asset, driving Japan's global reputation and societal resilience.

# Identity Under Pressure

Japan's historically unified identity is now intersecting with a rising right-leaning political discourse that prioritizes conservative values and restrictive immigration policies. The emergence of stronger nationalist rhetoric, including the new government's emphasis on self-reliance and limited inflows of foreign workers, has intensified debate over how Japan should address its aging population. These dynamics risk sharpening societal divides and may challenge the inclusiveness, adaptability, and global orientation of Japan's national identity in the years to come.





## Section 3

# National Identity in a Time of Transformation: The Urgency to Protect and Adapt





National identity is not static. While rooted in its foundational markers and expressed through shared behaviors, it is dynamic and continuously affected by external forces. As nations evolve, disruptors such as migration, globalization, and technological advancements challenge, and sometimes transform, traditional identity markers and expressions.

As nations evolve, disruptors such as migration, globalization, and technological advancements challenge, and sometimes transform, traditional identity markers and expressions.

These shifts can either strengthen or fragment national identity, depending on how they are managed. In this section, we examine some of the main trends and forces that have the potential to transform national identity and, in some cases, are already doing so.

## Migration and Multiculturalism

Migration brings cultural diversity and enriches societies, but it also challenges social cohesion. Without effective integration policies, societies risk fragmentation as cultural groups fail to align with a common narrative. The UN International Organization for Migration reports that 281 million people globally were international migrants in 2020,<sup>32</sup> a significant increase from previous decades. This surge has led to social tensions in several host countries: research shows that about 50% of citizens in high-migration nations perceive immigrants as wanting to be distinct from the host country's society,<sup>33</sup> contributing to societal divides. These dynamics are evident across Europe and the United States, where immigration has become a defining political issue. In many European countries, rapid demographic change and perceived pressures on social services have contributed to rising public anxiety, which in turn has fueled the growth of right-wing populist movements such as the National Rally in France and the Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands.<sup>34</sup> Similar trends have emerged in the United States, where segments of the majority White population report feeling culturally or economically displaced by immigration, shaping political discourse and policy debates. Research from the Migration Policy Institute and CEPR shows that in both regions, immigration-related concerns have been strongly correlated with support for right-wing parties and more restrictive immigration agendas, illustrating how unmanaged multicultural dynamics can strain social cohesion and national identity.<sup>35</sup> Such trends cannot be understood in isolation from wider pushback against hyper-globalization, which in many countries has fueled economic anxiety, cultural insecurity, and declining trust in institutions. As global integration accelerated, segments of the population, particularly

those who felt left behind economically or culturally, gravitated toward political narratives promising protection, restoration, or cultural homogeneity. This has contributed to the rise of narrow nationalism, often expressed through exclusionary rhetoric targeting minorities and recent immigrants, creating fertile ground for the politics of resentment. In such environments, national identity risks becoming a divisive tool rather than a unifying force.

## Connectivity and Exposure

Widespread internet access has opened new avenues for connectivity, exposing individuals, particularly younger generations, to global influences, trends, and ideologies. Fashion trends, for example, spread far faster today than in the past, while internet memes that originate in one country can go global instantly. While this fosters innovation and cross-cultural exchange, it can also weaken connections to local or national cultures, creating dissonance between global exposure and traditional principles. As of 2023, 68% of the world's population had access to the internet.<sup>36</sup> Among youth aged 15-24, the figure rises to 79%, with most consuming content that originates outside their home country, often shifting their cultural perceptions and preferences. While technological innovation has democratized access to cultural heritage through virtual museums and digital platforms, there is a risk of cultural commodification, where heritage becomes a commercial product stripped of its depth and meaning. Moreover, the digital realm fosters fragmented identities, allowing individuals to form affiliations beyond national boundaries. This creates 'digital sovereignty,' as cultural and political allegiances shift away from the nation-state, weakening the emotional connection to local identity markers.

## Economic Competition and Resilience

Being able to buy global brands at a local store is a relatively new phenomenon, and consumers often perceive it to be a boon. Yet global economic competition and economic globalization may strain national identity. They can affect loyalty to domestic industries that are essential to creating resilient economies and increase dependency on external forces. In addition, nations increasingly compete for human capital, a critical resource in the modern economy. A country's national identity and brand have the ability to attract skilled workers, although retention depends on lived experiences and the societal environment. As the global population growth rate declines, the fight for talent will intensify, making national identity essential to sustaining workforce competitiveness and long-term economic resilience. But the era of hyper-globalization has produced notable pushback in many countries. Rapid flows of goods, capital, and people have at times triggered anxieties about cultural dilution, loss of local industry, and perceived threats to jobs; these conditions have fueled the rise of narrow nationalism and the politics of resentment.<sup>37</sup> These dynamics often fall hardest on minority groups or recent immigrants, who may be portrayed as symbols of unwanted global change. In parallel, global mobility has shifted the meaning of nationality acquisition: individuals increasingly choose host countries not only for economic opportunity but for the promise of stability, inclusion, and a strong national brand.<sup>38</sup>

## Individualism and Fraying Support Networks

The growing emphasis on individual rights and self-care, particularly in Western societies, challenges collective norms. This shift risks weakening traditional social structures, such as family and community bonds, that have historically reinforced national identity.

## Social Conformity Pressure

Marginalized groups often feel excluded from national narratives, deepening divides and creating negative emotional landscapes. Inclusive identity frameworks reflecting the experiences of all citizens and residents are critical to bridging these divides.

## Political and Social Polarization

In a world that seems increasingly divided politically and ideologically, societies risk becoming more fragmented. Such divides erode trust in institutions, which are often perceived as partisan or unrepresentative, leading to weakened perceptions of systems designed to uphold fairness and resolve conflicts. These dynamics are visible today in several large democracies. In the United States, widening ideological and social divides have led to competing visions of national identity, with debates over who counts as a "real" American increasingly shaping political discourse, citizenship policy, and public trust in institutions.<sup>39</sup> India has likewise experienced rising polarization between majority and minority communities, with national identity

becoming a contested space where political narratives and cultural affiliation determine who is perceived as belonging to the nation.<sup>40</sup>

National identity serves as a bridge over this divide, providing common ground for constructive dialogue by emphasizing shared history and collective goals that transcend political and ideological differences. By rallying citizens around common symbols, traditions, and achievements, national identity can foster a sense of mutual purpose, reminding people of their collective stake in a nation's prosperity and stability. Without it, societies face greater fragmentation, eroding trust in institutions, and weakening social stability. Failing to act risks amplifying societal rifts, making unity and progress increasingly elusive.

The confluence of these trends and disruptors intensifies the gap between government-promoted narratives and the lived experiences of citizens. Without proactive intervention, national identity risks becoming fragmented, leaving nations vulnerable to polarization, social discord, and economic instability.

Governments have a range of options at their disposal to address these challenges, ensuring national identity evolves to remain inclusive, cohesive, and resilient in a changing global landscape. Acting now is not just a matter of preserving heritage but of securing the foundation for unity, trust, and progress in the future. In the following section, we outline our framework for action.



## Section 4

# Sustaining National Identity: A Framework for Action



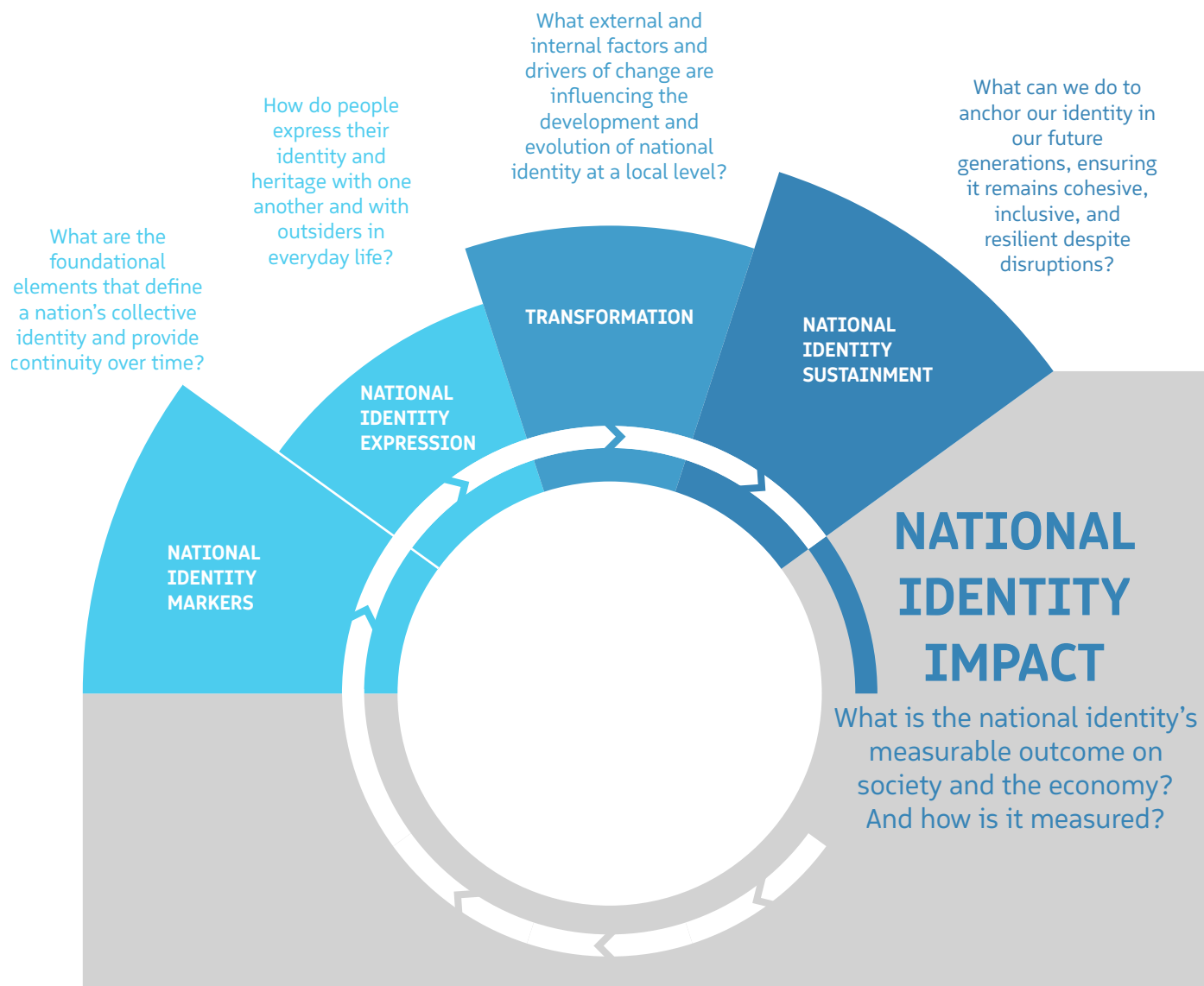


To sustain national identity in a rapidly changing world, policymakers need to tread a fine line between holding on to foundational markers and embracing modern realities. This journey begins with an understanding of which elements of national identity should be preserved, which need to be redefined, and how best to introduce new, inclusive elements that reflect a nation's evolving context. At its core, sustaining national identity is not about rigidly clinging to the past but crafting a national identity that is resilient, cohesive, and relevant for future generations.

National identity is a continuous cycle of evolution, and it requires a comprehensive approach to sustain it (Figure 3). Strategies to sustain national identity, whether through policy interventions, cultural initiatives, or behavioral reinforcement, do not merely

preserve identity but actively reshape it, feeding back into the evolution of markers and expressions. This cyclical process ensures that national identity remains resilient, inclusive, and adaptive.

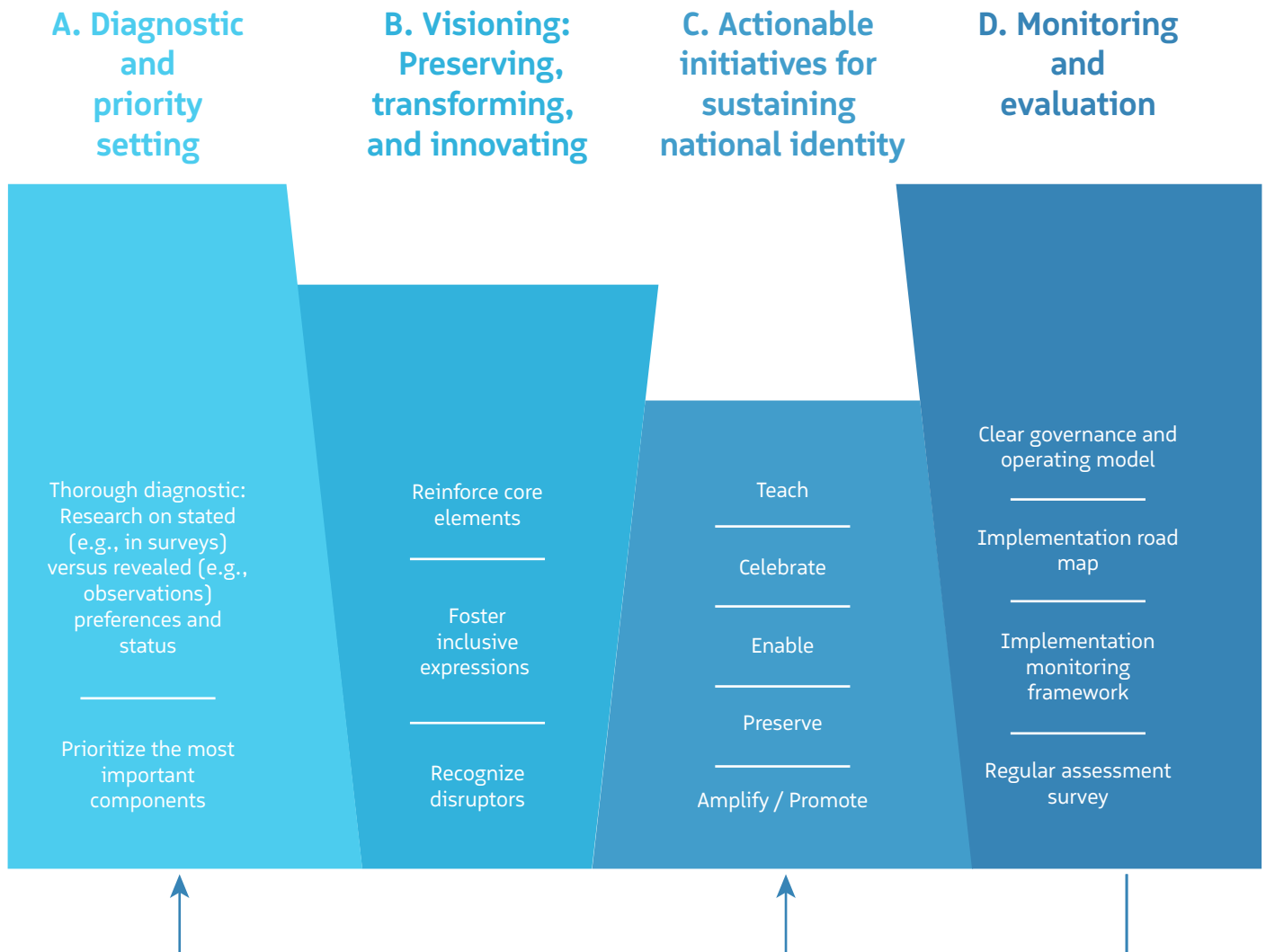
**FIGURE 3. A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO SUSTAINMENT AND IMPACT.**



In this section, we lay out a four-part framework for action to help achieve the goal of sustaining national identity. It starts with diagnostic and priority setting before moving on to visioning core elements and recognizing

disruptors. Some fundamental principles for policymaker action are described in the third part. Finally, proffer some suggestions for ways to monitor and evaluate those actions (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4. A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION.**



## A. Diagnostic and Priority Setting

When nations are faced with disruptive trends, which aspects of national identity are essential to preserve, and which ones can—or even should—be adapted? The key to answering that question passes through an understanding of the state of a nation’s identity markers and expressions. Various tools help capture this baseline by identifying the most significant elements, evaluating their current strengths, and measuring their adoption. Surveys can reveal stated preferences, while observations and other techniques can highlight revealed preferences. Such research methods provide insight into people’s perspectives, sentiments, and behaviors related to national identity. This diagnostic step includes assessing factors disrupting national identity within the local context and building awareness of potential future challenges.

When it comes to priority setting, policymakers play a vital role. They need to identify which markers and expressions to prioritize. For instance, a nation with a rich linguistic history might emphasize language preservation, while another with a strong multicultural ethos may focus on fostering inclusivity within its traditions. In other words, context is a critical factor. It needs to be taken into account for decisions that ensure national identity remains both cohesive and reflective of the nation’s unique character and aspirations. At the same time, relying solely on political leadership can be risky, especially when leaders are polarizing or promoting exclusionary narratives. To avoid national identity becoming a source of division, governments can establish dedicated national identity committees or departments with a cross-ministerial mandate. These bodies help ensure that priority-setting remains inclusive, evidence-based, and reflective of the nation as a whole rather than the preferences of any single political actor. These committees can also help capture the input for priority markers and expressions and pave the way for strengthening national identity accordingly.

# Policymakers need to identify which markers and expressions to prioritize

## B. Visioning: Preserving, Transforming, and Innovating

As noted above, the challenge of sustaining national identity lies in finding the right balance between preserving core elements, transforming markers to align with contemporary realities, and innovating new, inclusive expressions. This balance must reflect the specific context and aspirations of each nation.

- **Preserving core elements.** Core markers and expressions, such as traditions, symbols, and historical narratives, serve as anchors of stability. Yet what constitutes a core element depends on the nation’s context. Policymakers must ensure these markers and expressions remain strong while recognizing that no single marker or expression is universally central; its relevance depends on its resonance with the nation’s people.
- **Fostering inclusive expressions.** Markers and expressions must evolve to remain relevant. This does not mean discarding beliefs and customs but adapting them to reflect modern philosophies. For example, zakat, the giving of alms that is a key marker in Muslim-majority nations, can be expanded into a broader concept of charitable giving to make it inclusive of diverse populations without losing its essence. Similarly, festivals and rituals can incorporate contemporary themes while honoring their cultural origins.

- **Engaging with disruptors.** Globalization, migration, and technological advancements are among the factors transforming the way markers are expressed and understood. Proactively engaging with these disruptors can help national identity evolve while maintaining its relevance. For instance, digital heritage initiatives can preserve historical narratives in formats that resonate with younger generations, bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. That said, some disruptors may conflict with a nation's values or risk undermining foundational markers. In such cases, governments can find ways to diplomatically redirect or adapt these influences to ensure alignment with national identity while minimizing backlash or division. For example, France imposes language quotas for radio and television under the Toubon Law.<sup>41</sup> By mandating that 40% of music on French radio stations and a significant portion of television programming be in French, the government embraced the global influence of English while ensuring the French language and culture remained relevant and celebrated within its borders. This balanced approach preserved foundational markers without rejecting global trends.

Ensuring the right balance between preservation, adaptation, and innovation requires first defining a clear vision and setting objectives that align with the nation's unique context and aspirations.

Only then can policymakers identify and prioritize the actions to most effectively sustain and strengthen their national identity.

Effectively, the desired outcomes of the national-identity agenda can be defined and mapped to each key marker and onto a three-step "Know - Practice - Feel" ladder for citizens and long-term residents alike. "Know" expresses the cognitive goal (e.g., recognize and explain the marker). "Practice" is the behavioral goal (e.g., routinely use the language), while "Feel" is the emotional goal, the sensation of pride and attachment that accompanies the marker. For each of these three steps, there are both essential indicators and secondary indicators that are beneficial but not mission-critical. This structure pinpoints what a nation hopes people will know, do, and feel, and clarifies which measures are mandatory versus aspirational.

# National Identity Strategy Versus Codification

Developing a *national identity strategy* refers to the deliberate and structured approach to defining, strengthening, and evolving a nation's identity. It involves assessing the nation's foundational markers, shaping its expressions, and aligning national identity with broader socioeconomic and geopolitical goals. This strategy sets the vision and direction for how national identity should be sustained, adapted, and projected, ensuring cohesion, resilience, and relevance in an evolving world.

The *codification of national identity* is the process of embedding national identity systematically across sectors and institutions to ensure its long-term integration and coherence. It involves translating national identity strategy into policies, regulations, and initiatives that institutionalize identity markers and expressions across governance, education, tourism, economic frameworks, and cultural programs. Codification ensures national identity is not just aspirational but actively reinforced in societal structures, shaping how identity is lived, preserved, and projected for future generations.





In implementing both broad initiatives and tailored strategies, governments need to decide whether to mandate adoption or simply encourage it. Mandates are used whenever codifying national identity is to be enforced under a standardized official rhetoric or practice, where the government has the authority to influence and oversee adoption; the French language law for media is one example. A less forceful approach is to encourage adoption by incentivizing the use of national identity codes, which are especially relevant in creative industries where the exploration of identity cannot be forced.

## C. Actionable Initiatives for Sustaining National Identity

Sustaining national identity requires a combination of broad initiatives that apply across all markers and expressions, and specific actions tailored to particular elements of identity. While general initiatives provide a broad framework, tailored strategies allow policymakers to focus on what is most relevant to a nation's context, codifying and reinforcing identity in ways that resonate with their citizens.

### C1. Nurturing National Identity Through Education

The values, history, and cultural elements of national identity lend themselves to being integrated into education systems, workplaces, and integration programs to ensure transmission across generations and demographic groups.

Examples of this include curriculum integration, language programs, and immigration integration programs. Lessons on national history, cultural heritage, and civic values can be integrated into school curricula, using tools like experiential learning, gamified platforms, and augmented reality to engage students effectively. Strengthening civic education has also become increasingly important globally, helping students understand their rights, their responsibilities, and the principles that underpin national life. Effective civic curricula promote respect for diversity, democratic participation, and social responsibility.

Language programs can help sustain a native language through culturally rich content, ensuring it remains central to national identity. Public media initiatives, such as broadcasts or podcasts in local languages, further reinforce linguistic pride and visibility. For new residents and citizens, immigration integration programs that include language lessons, cultural orientation, and participation in national events can help align

diverse groups with the country's shared narrative. Together, these efforts ensure that national identity is not only preserved but made accessible and meaningful to all members of society, regardless of background. As countries rethink or redesign their national identity frameworks, civic education and inclusive citizenship have emerged as essential pillars, ensuring that shared values, rights, and responsibilities are understood and embraced by all.

## C2. Celebrating National Identity with Public Displays

Many opportunities can be created for shared experiences that honor cultural heritage, symbols, and achievements and strengthen pride and collective unity. Examples include national festivals and public holidays that showcase traditions, cuisine, and crafts through celebrations such as national day parades, food festivals, or cultural expos. These events can integrate modern themes while honoring historical origins. Cultural and religious observances such as key holidays, rituals, and regional festivals also preserve traditions and reinforce unity. Finally, awards and honors celebrating individuals or organizations that preserve and promote national identity, such as artisans, linguists, or historians, can recognize contributions to sustaining national identity.

## C3. Enabling National Identity Through Resources, Incentives, and Opportunities

Governments, businesses, and communities can all contribute to sustaining and evolving national identity. Examples include cultural grants and subsidies for artists, artisans, writers, and filmmakers who produce works celebrating national heritage, such as documentaries, literature, or cultural performances, as well as business incentives for companies prioritizing local production, integrating national identity elements into their branding, or contributing to the preservation of traditional crafts and symbols.

For individuals, volunteering platforms can digitally connect citizens with opportunities for community service, such as restoring heritage sites, ecological conservation projects, or mentoring programs to revive traditional skills.

These initiatives can be emphasized in the experience for tourists. For example, guided heritage tours, traditional craft workshops, or community-based eco-tourism can showcase cultural and identity elements. This both creates opportunities to preserve markers and expressions and generates economic benefits.

Finally, a national identity resource repository can serve as a valuable tool for sustaining national identity. This contains cultural assets such as traditional songs, visual motifs, historical quotes, symbols, patterns, and references that artists, designers, educators, and media professionals can use to authentically incorporate national identity into their work. A repository, complemented by access to national identity experts, ensures creative freedom while maintaining cultural authenticity and not imposing rigid codes.

## C4. Preserving National Identity

A range of preservation initiatives can help safeguard cultural, historical, and natural elements to ensure continuity across generations. They provide a foundation for identity markers such as historical narratives, language, and the natural environment to remain intact and accessible.

Examples of these initiatives include archiving and digitizing historical records, folklore, and artifacts to ensure their preservation and accessibility. For example, oral storytelling traditions can be recorded and archived for future generations. Laws and cultural protection policies can safeguard heritage sites, historical landmarks, and endangered practices or languages that are core components of national identity.

For natural heritage conservation, multiple initiatives can protect natural landmarks such as forests, mountains, and coastal areas as symbols of pride and identity, integrating them into campaigns or eco-tourism initiatives that highlight their cultural significance. Sustainable tourism initiatives that preserve natural and cultural heritage can be encouraged; these ensure that the heritage remains a source of pride while avoiding over-commercialization.

#### C4. Amplifying National Identity at Home and Internationally

Raising awareness, fostering pride, and amplifying a national identity's presence both domestically and internationally can ensure that shared values, cultural achievements, and markers such as symbols, traditions, local products, and historical narratives remain visible and relevant, and are exported when appropriate.

Domestic examples include national awareness campaigns highlighting cultural milestones, historical anniversaries, and national achievements such as the preservation of language or natural landmarks. With today's technology, some of this could take the form of multimedia displays and could complement storytelling initiatives in media, film, and advertising. These would reflect the contributions of various communities to national identity. For example, national storytelling campaigns can celebrate collective history while addressing underrepresented perspectives.

On the international stage, partnerships with global platforms such as museums, movie productions, or documentary producers can showcase elements of national identity such as cultural icons, traditions, and narratives to global audiences.

Figure 5 is an infographic of initiatives from around the world.

#### D. Monitoring and Evaluation: Tracking Progress

If initiatives to sustain national identity are to be effective and aligned with changing societal dynamics, they need to be regularly monitored and evaluated. Policymakers need to establish robust measuring systems to track progress and make adjustments as needed (see sidebar, "Sample Measurement Metrics").

Four sets of monitoring and evaluation tools can be relevant here. First, a clear governance and operating model defines the integrated structure of roles, rules, and processes and steers, coordinates, and delivers a nation's identity vision from high-level strategy to day-to-day implementation.

Second, implementation roadmaps define clear goals, timelines, and milestones for each initiative, ensuring accountability at every stage.

Third, monitoring frameworks use citizen and resident engagement platforms and regular surveys to assess attitudes, preferences, sentiment, and adoption of initiatives, and also measure their impact.

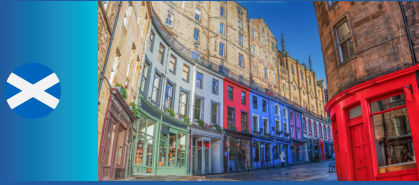
Finally, periodic assessments track outcomes such as social cohesion, cultural pride, and inclusion, providing actionable insights that can be used to refine strategies.

This iterative process ensures that initiatives designed to sustain national identity are adaptable, impactful, and reflective of the nation's evolving needs.

FIGURE 5. NATIONAL IDENTITY INITIATIVES FROM AROUND THE WORLD.



The UAE partnered with National Geographic to produce *The Emirates from Above*, a documentary showcasing the nation's rich heritage, natural landscapes, and cultural traditions through the lens of falconry, a deeply rooted symbol of Emirati identity.<sup>42</sup>



Scotland launched the Year of Stories 2022, celebrating the country's rich storytelling tradition. Diverse narratives were highlighted through events, festivals, and digital campaigns, reflecting Scotland's history, culture, and modern identity.<sup>43</sup>



Singapore established the National Integration Council to develop immigrant integration programs including mandatory language courses, cultural orientation sessions, and participation in country-wide events such as National Day. These initiatives align newcomers with Singapore's shared values of multicultural harmony and meritocracy.<sup>44</sup>



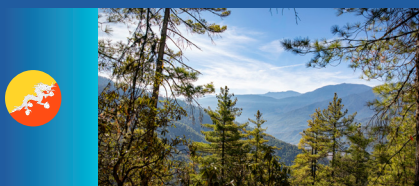
New Zealand integrated the Māori language (Te Reo Māori) into its national education system, making it a core part of the curriculum. The government also promoted public media in Māori, revitalizing a key marker of New Zealand's indigenous identity.<sup>45</sup>



Saudi Arabia's Riyadh Season is a large-scale cultural and entertainment festival that brings together local and international audiences. The event celebrates Saudi traditions, arts, and innovations, blending heritage with modern entertainment to reinforce national pride.<sup>46</sup>



Italy offers subsidies to protect artisanal industries such as Venetian glassmaking and Tuscan leatherwork. This ensures local craftsmanship remains economically viable and continues to symbolize Italian identity.<sup>47</sup>



Bhutan integrates its national identity with environmental stewardship. With more than 70% of its land under forest cover and protected by law, Bhutan promotes sustainable tourism and ecological conservation as symbols of its cultural and natural heritage.<sup>48</sup>



The UK's National Archives and digital storytelling platforms preserve historical records, folklore, and literature. Programs like Discovering Britain bring these archives to life through interactive, location-based heritage tours.<sup>49</sup>



South Korea has successfully exported its national identity through the global phenomenon known as the "Korean Wave" (Hallyu). By promoting K-pop as well as Korean dramas, cinema, and cuisine, South Korea turned its cultural products into a powerful soft power asset. This was enabled through government-backed initiatives such as the Korean Creative Content Agency (Kocca), which actively supports the global distribution of Korean cultural content.<sup>50</sup>

# Sample Measurement Metrics

While national identity is often expressed emotionally, its evolution culminates in its measurable impact on society and the economy. That allows governments to link national identity initiatives to tangible outcomes such as improved social cohesion, increased trust, and enhanced economic competitiveness. Knowing the effect of national identity efforts provides actionable insights for policymakers, helping them evaluate progress and refine their strategies.

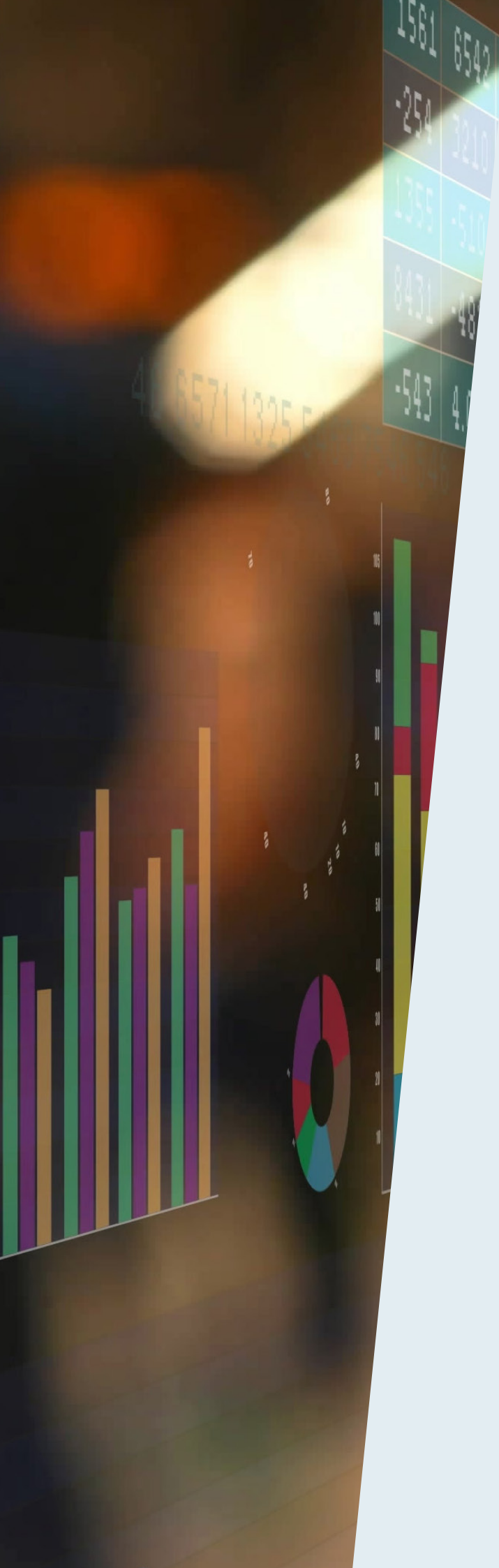


Figure 6 highlights suggested dimensions and metrics that align with key aspects of national identity, such as international soft power, civic participation, social cohesion, and economic growth. This list is not exhaustive, but it demonstrates how different global organizations measure components of national identity, offering a foundation for tracking outcomes. These indices are supplemented by tailored frameworks designed to meet the specific needs of each nation, ensuring measurements are relevant and actionable.

Regular surveys can further enhance this monitoring effort by capturing citizen sentiment toward national identity markers, expressions, and initiatives. Such surveys ensure that national identity strategies are aligned with citizens' lived experiences, bridging the gap between policy goals and societal realities. Additionally, targeted diagnostics can be deployed as needed to assess and address specific areas of national identity impact.

By combining global benchmarks with localized assessments, this approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of national identity's influence, empowering governments to sustain and adapt it in a rapidly evolving world.

**FIGURE 6. NATIONAL IDENTITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT MEASURES.**

|                                       |  | Rationale  |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>SOCIAL COHESION AND WELL-BEING</b> | <b>National Pride and Psychological Well-being</b>   | Pride in one’s national identity can enhance individual and collective well-being, fostering a sense of belonging  |  |
|                                       | <b>Cultural Preservation and Continuity</b>          | National identity supports the preservation of language, traditions, and heritage, ensuring that cultural practices endure                                       |  |
|                                       | <b>Social Cohesion</b>                               | A strong national identity promotes unity and reduces societal divisions, fostering a stable environment where people feel connected                             |  |
|                                       | <b>Inclusiveness</b>                                 | A cohesive national identity can support inclusiveness, promoting diversity and equal representation for all citizens  |  |
|                                       | <b>Youth Engagement</b>                              | Active engagement among youth ensures the long-term stability and adaptability of national identity  |  |
| <b>CIVIC PARTICIPATION</b>            | <b>Civic Engagement and Responsibility</b>           | National identity can encourage civic participation, fostering a sense of duty toward governance and social welfare  |  |
|                                       | <b>Social Resilience in Times of Crisis</b>          | National identity fosters resilience during crises, encouraging unity and a collective response  |  |
|                                       | <b>Voter Turnout</b>                                 | High turnout reflects a population’s commitment to national governance and shared civic values   |  |
|                                       | <b>Volunteering Rate</b>                             | Volunteerism reflects the level of community engagement and social responsibility within a nation  |  |
| <b>INTERNATIONAL SOFT POWER</b>       | <b>Conflict Resolution</b>                           | National identity can foster peaceful conflict resolution by promoting unity and minimizing internal divisions   |  |
|                                       | <b>International Reputation and Soft Power</b>       | A cohesive national identity enhances a country’s reputation on the global stage, projecting its values and culture internationally                              |  |
|                                       | <b>Political Stability and Trust in Institutions</b> | National identity can increase trust in government and institutions, contributing to political stability and effective governance                                |  |
|                                       | <b>Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability</b>  | National identity can inspire environmental responsibility, encouraging citizens to preserve their land and resources  |  |
|                                       | <b>Cultural Exports</b>                              | Strong cultural exports often correlate with enhanced international reputation and increased tourism   |  |
| <b>ECONOMIC GROWTH</b>                | <b>Innovation and National Competitiveness</b>       | National identity can inspire innovation and economic competitiveness, motivating citizens to contribute to national progress                                    |  |
|                                       | <b>Economic Loyalty and Consumer Behavior</b>        | National identity can influence economic behavior, encouraging a preference for domestic products and support for local industries                               |  |
|                                       | <b>Talent Retention</b>                              | A strong national identity plays a key role in fostering loyalty and pride among citizens, encouraging them to remain and invest their skills within the country |  |

## Sample Global Measurement

Gallup Global Emotions Report (Positive Experience Index)

UNESCO Culture Indicators  
UNESCO World Heritage List

The Social Cohesion Index  
World Values Survey

Social Progress Index (SPI)  
Inclusiveness Index

Youth Development Index (YDI); Commonwealth Secretariat

*Country-dependent (e.g., Varieties of Democracy [V-Dem] Index)*

Allianz Social Resilience Index

IDEA Voter Turnout Database (whenever relevant)

*Country-dependent (e.g., national volunteering rate)*

Global Peace Index (GPI)

The Good Country Index / Soft Power 30 Index

World Governance Indicators

Environmental Performance Index (EPI)

UNESCO Reshaping Policies for Creativity Report

Global Innovation Index

*Country-dependent (e.g., Nation Brands Index)*

Global Talent Competitiveness Index

# Conclusion

Every year, an estimated 1 billion people celebrate Diwali, the Hindu “Festival of Lights.” Originating in India more than 2,500 years ago, it can last as long as five days and brings together people throughout India, South Asia, and the diaspora in nations like the United States and the UAE to celebrate the victory of light over darkness. Diwali is a living example of how national identity binds people no matter where they may be. It fosters cohesion in diverse societies and creates a sense of belonging that transcends individual differences.

As the example of Diwali shows, a cohesive and inclusive national identity can serve as a unifying force, enabling societies to face challenges with strength and purpose while creating a shared vision for the future.

Of course, efforts to sustain or adapt to national identity can come with risks. Overly rigid or narrow narratives risk alienating minority groups or underrepresented communities. Conversely, resistance to change can arise when efforts to modernize or include new symbols and narratives are perceived as diluting cultural heritage. An overemphasis on nationalism can also have unintended consequences, fostering hostility toward outsiders and eroding principles of openness and inclusion. Commercialization of culture, while sometimes inevitable, can also reduce rich traditions and markers to mere commodities, stripping them of their depth and meaning. Policymakers thus need to approach issues relating to national identity with sensitivity, ensuring that efforts unite rather than divide and enrich rather than oversimplify.

Nonetheless, adapting, promoting, and integrating national identity into different aspects of the life of a country represents a big opportunity for governments. When nurtured carefully, national identity becomes a powerful force that unites, inspires, and drives collective progress toward the cornerstone of any nation’s future. That’s been the case throughout history, and nations have successfully projected their identity narratives through influential storytelling, intellectual and cultural production, and consumable exports that resonate beyond their borders. From literature and cinema to design and technology, these assets shape global perceptions and reinforce national branding.





Today, as global influence becomes more fluid, new source nodes of identity transmission are emerging. Nations that were once primarily consumers of cultural and ideological narratives, including those in the Middle East, are increasingly becoming producers of influence, shifting from inward-focused identity-building to engaging external audiences. This transformation is evident in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which have climbed significantly in recent years to rank 17th and 24th, respectively, on the Global Soft Power Index,<sup>51</sup> reflecting their growing role in shaping global discourse. As nations expand their reach and influence, opportunity lies in crafting compelling, outward-facing national identity narratives that not only preserve heritage but also inspire and shape global perspectives.

The challenge, and opportunity, for governments is to shape national identities that are resilient, inclusive, and adaptable, ensuring they not only unite citizens and residents within their borders but also inspire and influence generations at home and around the globe.

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