

Saudi Vision 2030: The new tool of authoritarianism

By Anastasia Roumpeka

31st October 2021

Contents

I.	The Resilience of Authoritative Regimes	3
i.	<i>Saudi Royal's Resilience</i>	4
ii.	<i>The Saudi response to the Arab uprisings</i>	4
II.	Women's Activism in Saudi Arabia	5
i.	<i>Setting the Context</i>	6
ii.	<i>Women's activism before the Arab Spring</i>	6
iii.	<i>Women's Activism During and After the Arab Spring</i>	7
III.	Upgrading Authoritarianism	8
V.	The Illusion of Reform.....	9
i.	<i>Guardianship system</i>	9
ii.	<i>The illusion of Driving</i>	10
iii.	<i>The illusion of Traveling</i>	10
VI.	'Saudi Vision 2030' and Nationalism.....	11
i.	<i>Saudi first Nationalism - Hazm</i>	11
ii.	<i>Hazm as a Tool</i>	12
VII.	Conclusion	12
VIII.	References.....	14

Nowadays, as we progress more into the idea of a globalised world, issues that involve human rights are the most crucial. Among these issues, the one most talked about and often proved through our everyday lives is gender inequality. Uneven access to education, job segregation, lack of legal protections, and lack of political representation are just a few causes of gender inequality. Worldwide, closing the gender gap will approximately take 135,6 years (WEF, 2021, p. 5). When reading the gender gap report, we can easily notice that among the last countries to be ranked with little to no change regarding the improvement of the gender gap, are mostly countries in the MENA region. Some of these countries are Yemen, Syria, Oman, Qatar, Morocco, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. The gender gap in the Middle East and North Africa alone will take 142.4 years to close.

This paper's main focus will be on Saudi Arabia concerning women's rights in relation to the 'Saudi Vision 2030'. Muhammad bin Salman, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, in 2016 announced his plan for transforming the country's oil-dependent economy into a post-oil economy (Hvidt, 2018, p. 1). He named this plan 'Saudi Vision 2030' and its purpose, according to its website (<https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/>), is divided into three themes: a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. The first theme is focused on giving the citizens of Saudi Arabia a safe environment to live with a strong health and social care system following the Islamic principle of moderation. The second theme is promising to provide new job opportunities in the private sector, diversifying and in the end growing the Saudi economy. Lastly, the third theme is to create an ambitious nation with an accountable, transparent, and responsible government.

Upon reading the government's website about the Vision2030, the mentioning of women's participation in it is limited. The program of the vision only states that since half of the graduates from Saudi universities are females, the government will invest in their productive capabilities and strengthen their future in the workforce of the country (p.37). That is without mentioning the ways in which it will be achieved. It is also expected to increase women's participation in the job market from 22% to 30% which surprisingly in 2020 was indeed achieved (p.39). This great achievement comes after the royal decree that King Salman issued back in 2017 which lifted the driving ban of women (Hvidt, 2018, p. 3).

Saudi Arabia's main interpretation of Islam derives from the Hanbali dogma, called Wahhabism and its legitimisation comes from divine sources and not human-made constructions of national identity (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 25). Its aim is unity, authenticity, and tradition. This particular school of Islam is also the one that most hold accountable for delaying

women's emancipation and imposing strict restrictions on them. Today, analysts argue that the religious hold on society was relaxed, such as female dress code and behaviour in the public sphere which is another cause for achieving greater women participation in the workforce (Hvidt, 2018, p. 5). While the Saudi Vision 2030 is aiming in re-introducing the role of women in society and is a vital part of the vision to succeed, one cannot help but wonder how the country is still listed among the last countries to close the gender gap.

The purpose of this paper is to question 'Saudi Vision 2030' and through a variety of scholarly books, journals, articles, and websites to prove that the vision is nothing more than a new tool of authoritarianism and pro-longed patriarchy. A tool used by Muhammad bin Salman, aiming to keep his authoritative control over the country by giving an illusion of reforms and rights to its citizens. Giving women the right to drive or travel should not be considered as royal favours and are, definitely, not making up for their freedom. This recent visibility only proves the economic interest behind it and the realisation of women's capacity to have an active role in society.

Firstly, the paper will attempt to describe the remarkable resilience of royals in Saudi Arabia concerning the Arab Spring. Secondly, women's activism in the country before, during, and after the Arab Spring, as an attempt to deny the claims of Saudi women being one homogenised individual with no interest in gender equality. Thirdly, the concept of upgrading authoritarianism will be introduced. Next, the paper dives deeper into the loopholes and illusions of women's rights that were issued. Lastly, before concluding, the paper introduces the nationalistic concept of 'Hazm' in relation to the Saudi Vision 2030 and its utilisation by Mohammed bin Salman.

I. The Resilience of Authoritative Regimes

While some support the notion that Islam, and the Middle East in general, are not compatible with democracy, recent developments have proved the opposite. First, to understand why Saudi Arabia has not been democratised and still has an authoritarian regime, we need to analyse the factors that made the royals resilient in the region. The regime proved especially resilient during the Arab uprisings by silencing the opposition and strengthening the authoritarian hold on the country.

i. Saudi Royal's Resilience

The authoritarian form of Saudi Arabia is named the rentier monarchy which combines its oil-rich economy with tribalism and religion (Hinnebusch, 2006, p. 383). Saudi Arabia has a rentier mono-producer economy that relies heavily on oil. Rentierism can provide explanations for the presence of authoritarian regimes since the two are closely related. There is an unwritten contract between the state and the rentiers stating that the latter in exchange for their silence will enjoy financial benefits. (El-Husseini, 2021). The state handles the rent income and has the authority to redistribute it among the population. Only a fraction of the society is directly engaged in the generation of wealth while the others are responsible for the distribution or utilisation of it (Beblawi, 1987, p. 385).

The key variable in the Saudi regime, and other similar monarchies, is rooted in its distribution of the state's offices among the reigning family as well as the oil revenues that are used to gain support from their subordinates (Michael, 1999, p. 242). It is argued that the cause of royal resilience lies in their internal distribution of power and organisation but not in the political or social structure, thus, keeping the state power in the family without democratisation in the way (Michael, 1999, p. 50). In addition, the royals can intervene and announce reforms that will neutralise any public discontent (Seal L. Yom, F. Gregory Gause III, 2012, p. 75). In the case of Saudi Arabia, such reforms have usually the support of the ulama that issue fatwas in support of the regime. While much of their resilience lies in their cabinet government and cross-cutting coalitions, it is also a matter of colonial machinations. Saudi Arabia has been enjoying aid from foreign patrons (U.S.A) that assist with various diplomatic assurances and economic grants (Seal L. Yom, F. Gregory Gause III, 2012, p. 76).

It is easy enough to observe the above causes in Saudi Arabia since the al-Saud family has allied with regional business captains, foreign patrons, and the conservative Wahhabi Islamic establishment (Seal L. Yom, F. Gregory Gause III, 2012, p. 81). Therefore, Saudi Arabia's royals have tied culture, religion, and economy in order to have full state-power.

ii. The Saudi response to the Arab uprisings

One of the main discussions surrounding the MENA region are the Arab uprisings that happened back in 2011. The uprisings happened all over the MENA region and brought together millions of people that demanded 'bread, liberty and social justice'. (Stephane

Lacroix, Jean-Pierre Filiu, 2019, p. 1). People from the region were demanding a change towards a more democratic setting, hoping to escape the authoritarian dominance of the region. The aftermath of the Arab uprisings was divided into two directions: either towards civil wars or the strengthening and re-emergence of authoritarianism (except Tunisia) (Stephane Lacroix, Jean-Pierre Filiu, 2019, p. 2).

It is also important to note the gendered aspect of the Arab Spring. Women during the uprisings challenged and transformed gender norms while pushing the boundaries of modesty and modernity. This resulted in opening up the space of transgression for women and showcased struggles such as women's citizenship rights, political participation, and, generally, their bodies (Pratt, 2020, p. 170). In an attempt to reclaim political power, rival political actors sought to limit the freedom of bodily integrity and regulate women in general (Pratt, 2020, p. 171).

Despite the Arab uprisings, Saudi Arabia's authoritarian regime has showcased a shocking degree of resilience. There were sporadic protests along the Shia regions of the country and demonstrations for the release of political prisoners (Madawi Al-Rasheed, 2018, p. 13). The regime at the time under King Abdullah suppressed the demonstrations by issuing a security alert around the country. The religious authority in the country also issued a fatwa deeming the demonstrations as 'Un-Islamic' and denounced those who opposed the Saudi king (Malmstrom, 2012, p. 17). The King offered several welfare benefits and rewarded the security forces and religious staff for being loyal while promising more employment opportunities to 'buy off' the opposed groups (Madawi Al-Rasheed, 2018, p. 13). The government introduced new anti-terrorist laws regarding the Shia population and imprisoned several human rights and civil society activists, practically silencing the voices that demanded political reforms (Madawi Al-Rasheed, 2018, p. 14). What the Saudi government did to limit the influence of the Arab uprisings was to combine an aggressive foreign policy to support other monarchies in the region (Bahrain) and silence as quickly as possible the domestic opposed reactions.

II. Women's Activism in Saudi Arabia

Being among the strictest countries in the world regarding women's rights, Saudi Arabia has been at the centre of heated debates concerning women's rights. In the last years, crown prince Mohammad bin Salman has declared the 'Saudi Vision 2030' plan to transform the country's current oil economy into a post-oil economy (Hvidt, 2018, p. 1). He has lifted the

driving ban against women and relaxed the religious control on society such as the female dress code, behaviour, and total gender segregation in some places (Hvidt, 2018, p. 5). By some, Mohammed bin Salman has been characterised as a modernist, reformist, and the greatest thing that happened to women (McGarry, 2019).

i. Setting the Context

When conducting gender analysis in the context of the Middle East, it is important to take into consideration the different settings that each country in the region has. It is of crucial importance to stop interpreting the region as one body with the same practices. Concerning the Saudi context, the western conception of the Saudi woman being one homogenised and a single person without agency is completely wrong. Another misconception is labelling women's activism as resistance or opposition. Most women that transgress the rules do not consider themselves rebellious and do not consider the state as oppressive (Renard, 2013, p. 120) (p.120). They are negotiating new norms with reforms and consumerist norms (Renard, 2013, p. 128). These transgressions are not seen as political acts of resistance, but rather as silent practices that question the interpretation of Islam promoted by the Committee of Higher Ulema (Renard, 2013, p. 120). Women's activism can be considered to resist and at the same time comply with the power structures of society since gender is also involved in the normalization and construction of power relations (Pratt, 2020, pp. 5-7). Women in Saudi Arabia engage with the state's female empowerment and follow religious interpretations that often excludes them from the public sphere, with the sole purpose of bargaining with the embedded patriarchy of the country and negotiating the boundaries (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 27).

ii. Women's activism before the Arab Spring

Saudi women have been questioning the regime's prohibitions long before the Arab Spring. In 1990, forty-seven women participated in a public demonstration demanding their right to drive. The protest came after Saudi Arabia invited American troops to support the country in a potential attack from Saddam Hussein, following his invasion of Kuwait (Hubbard, 2020, p. 173). Among the American troops were women who were driving military vehicles and were unveiled. The women who participated in the demonstration were later arrested by the police,

expelled from their jobs, and defamed in mosques since a fatwa was also issued re-confirming the prohibition of driving (Malmstrom, 2012, p. 17). Because of the lack of social media, this attempt of protesting was strongly criticized by society and rumours about the nature of it (Hubbard, 2020, p. 179). This was the beginning of the debate concerning women's role in Saudi Arabia (Marines, 2014, p. 12). Later on, a petition was signed and sent to King Abdullah for lifting the driving ban which he rejected.

iii. Women's Activism During and After the Arab Spring

While the Arab Spring and its influence were quickly silenced in Saudi Arabia, it did have some consequences regarding women's rights. During the Arab Spring, the demands of women were the right to vote and the right to drive. Women showed up at registration centres for candidates and were rejected as candidates for the Shura council. Then King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, in the end, issued a royal decree announcing that women would be legitimate to participate in Majlis al Shura and municipal councils in the next elections (Malmstrom, 2012, p. 18).

The right to drive demand was amplified with the use of social media with many women participating in Facebook groups and engaging in conversations on Twitter. In 2011, the Facebook group, 'Women2Drive', was the main campaign that inspired women to mobilize and drive their cars while filming themselves and posting it. Women were basing their demand to drive on Islamic scriptures that other Muslim countries were using in order to legitimise their demands (Marines, 2014, p. 23). It is noteworthy to observe how women were not opposing the King but instead questioning the religious interpretations to support the protest. Mohammed bin Salman ended up lifting the driving ban in 2017 and by 2018 the first driver licences for women were issued. Despite the positive outcome, the state never acknowledged or credited the women for endorsing and reviving the driving issue (Hubbard, 2020, p. 181).

The guardianship system in Saudi Arabia is the main source of inequality since it places women under a male relative that takes every decision for them. They are treated as legal minors and need to consult their guardian for critical decisions in their lives. The guardianship restricted women the ability to drive and travel and still restricts them from marrying, working, accessing medical care, and overall, actively participating in society (Weiner, 2020, p. 2).

In 2019, more reforms were announced. Women could now issue passports and travel without the permission of their guardians resulting in a huge blow to the guardianship system.

In addition, women now are also protected from employment discrimination by law and are able to register births and deaths as well as obtain family records that before the reforms were not allowed (Abdellatif, 2019). While women clearly obtained more rights during the years, can we still believe in a genuine social evolution? Is Saudi Arabia really changing and giving women control over their own selves?

III. Upgrading Authoritarianism

To answer the above question is necessary to explain the main theory behind the argument of the paper. Authoritarianism in the MENA region and its persistence is not an issue of culture or religion but an issue of a coercive apparatus capable enough to suppress any democratic demands coming from its society (Bellin, 2014, p. 128). As mentioned above, this paper is arguing that the SaudiVision2030 is a tool for Mohammed bin Salman to continue having control over the country. Upgrade authoritarianism is a theory that is discussed by scholars in relation to the MENA region and its authoritative resilience over the years.

The Arab regimes, in order to always have full state power and control, cannot always rely on cabinet governments and buy-out opportunities. Selective liberalisation, coercion, and repression are the keys to upgrading an authoritarian regime (Bellin, 2014, p. 127). The regimes have slowly adapted to the idea of globalisation by adjusting their regional, global, and domestic strategies to fit with the everchanging social, political, and economic conditions while not following the path to democracy (Heydemann, 2007, p. 1).

Some of these adjustments include the control of communication technologies, finding new international connections, and giving certain rights to satisfy opposition (Heydemann, 2007, p. 5). It is also, easily noticeable, that there is a division in Saudi society that further strengthens the authoritarian regime that manipulates symbols and religion to pacify the population (Al-Rasheed, 2016, p. 14). While the MENA region went through the Arab uprisings, Saudi Arabia was one of the countries that had minimal to no social mobilisations because of the quick actions taken by the regime (Bellin, 2014, p. 130).

Upgrading authoritarianism is a concept used by the regimes to continue having control over the state. The repressing of the opposition groups in Saudi society is done by granting rights to groups that expressed dissatisfaction with the way that the regime is handling matters, gender issues in particular, without genuine implementation of them. Moreover, what is often overlooked is the divisions that enhance the regime itself. The incapability to develop

grassroots solidarities that are sustainable in order to demand political reform. These divisions can be regional, tribal, and sectarian (Al-Rasheed, 2016, p. 13).

The common theme of these regimes that are upgrading their authoritarianism is the change from top to bottom. These changes are not intended to give more freedom to the society and opposition, but rather to silence them in order for the regime to continue its control over them.

V. The Illusion of Reform

While the recent women's rights endorsement is a major improvement in Saudi Arabia, there is still a long way ahead in achieving equality between genders. However, the right to drive, travel, and work is not an acknowledgment of women's freedom. Women in Saudi Arabia to this day require permission to leave prison, marry, divorce, or exit a domestic abuse shelter. Furthermore, women cannot pass on citizenship to their children or consent to their marriage which stays in their guardian's hands (Batrawy, 2019).

i. Guardianship system

The guardianship laws are still in full power, finding loopholes in order to limit women's mobility again. Specifically, two specific concepts of guardianship negatively affect Women's rights in Saudi Arabia; 'Parental Disobedience' ('uquq) and 'Absence from home'(taghayyub).

Regarding the first concept, disobedience against parents, a relative can file a complaint against his children at the Ministry of Justice. Consequences of such complaints vary from being sent home to imprisonment (Weiner, 2020, p. 4). On some occasions, children are also victims of domestic abuse. Filing such a complaint simply returns the victims to the same cycle of abuse that they tried to flee. This aspect of the law applies both to male and female relatives but based on recent statistics, women have been fleeing the country because of physical or mental abuse (R. Wali, 2020, p. 2). Large-scale research in Saudi Arabia with the existing limitations and strong government rules is practically impossible. However, research that was done in Jeddah proved that 33.24% of female patients admitted being victims of domestic violence (R. Wali, 2020, p. 4). Mental abuse was the most dominant.

Moving on to the second concept of guardianship, absence from home. This concept is used solely by men. Again, a male relative can file a complaint to the police or issue a court order in case a woman is not home. Consequently, the state will offer help to the male guardian and return the woman to her male's guardian home (Weiner, 2020, p. 4). This concept takes part in the continuation of denying a woman her rights for mobility and freedom. It also prevents women from freeing themselves in case of an abusive relationship.

ii. The illusion of Driving

Concerning the lifting of the driving ban, while it is a major improvement and a milestone for women's rights in the country, there are a lot of implications. Firstly, in 2018, the activists of 'Women2Drive' campaign were arrested and detained with the accusation of undermining Saudi's internal security (Al-Rasheed, 2019). Loujain al-Hathloul was among the activists that were imprisoned, and her family, later on, described her tortures in Saudi prison. She was beaten, sexually harassed, waterboarded, and given electric shocks while the government denied her claims (Hubbard, 2020, p. 259).

The long-awaited lifting of the driving ban was welcomed by foreign multi-million-dollar automobile companies that were eager to share new advertisements with women wearing abayas behind the wheel. Attracting foreign investors, capital, and companies along with a public relations boost of the country were some of the main ambitions of Mohammed bin Salman with his 'SaudiVision2030' plan (Hubbard, 2020, p. 181).

iii. The illusion of Traveling

Accompanied with more other reforms was the right to travel and obtain a passport without permission from their male guardian was another milestone for women's rights. It is again a right that can be overturned in the end. The 'absence of home' concept of guardianship still applies and can be implemented, practically used as a loophole for a male guardian to deny a woman's plan to travel with a court order.

Another controversial loophole is the online and mobile platform 'Absher.' Male Saudi citizens can log in to the platform and file a request or renewal of their passport. The guardians can also monitor their female relative's passport procedure. Additionally, the platform sends an alert to the guardian every time a woman presents her passport, enabling him to track and

control her movements (Leung, 2019). With the application, a guardian can evoke a woman's passport and regulate the length of her trip and the number of journeys she can take.

VI. 'Saudi Vision 2030' and Nationalism

As mentioned in the introduction, the plan for the 'Saudi Vision 2030' is to successfully shift the country's economy away from its dependence on oil. New gender-inclusive policies have been implemented in the kingdom making women visible, trying to change the misconception of them as second-class citizens (Bayat, 2007, p. 160). The oil-wealth of Saudi Arabia made it possible to exclude women from the labor force and inflict conservative regulations on them. Madawi Al-Rasheed, in one of her books, correctly guesses that when the country will move away from the oil-dependent economy, it will no longer be able to exclude women from the workforce (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 292). Consequently, by lifting the driving ban more women will be able to join the workforce and their husbands will no longer need to leave their job to drive their spouses somewhere else (Hvidt, 2018, p. 3).

While women are indeed looking for a change in gender discrimination in Saudi Arabia, the reality is that a change can only be implemented by a royal decree only if it's in the best interest of the royal family. The reforms and relaxing of the social restrictions on women are only limited in relation to the labor force and the outcomes that might benefit the Saudi economy (Stephen Grand, Katherine Wolff, 2020, p. 54). The recent rights that Mohammed bin Salman issued attracted a lot of foreign interest in the country's day-to-day life as well as opened new ways for foreign investors to enter the country's economy.

i. Saudi first Nationalism - Hazm

Saudi Arabia has been through immense changes in the religious sector. With the various reforms, Mohammed bin Salman has been trying to change the religious nationalism

based on Wahhabism that was strictly imposed in the country. The turn to a more moderate Islam and a Saudi first nationalism has been named ‘Hazm.’

Hazm changed the gendered constructs of both femininity and masculinity. Mainly because of the Islamophobia surrounding the world, the Saudi society’s increased masculinization and militarization meant that women would be promoted as symbols of this newly militant protection of the country (Madawi Al-Rasheed, 2018, p. 131). Saudi first nationalism has sought to decrease the unemployment rate by attracting more Saudi nationals rather than foreign workers.

ii. Hazm as a Tool

Taking advantage of the newly created nationalism idea, the Crown Prince has framed and thus, constructed a new image of women as the new labour force that will save the economy (Eum, 2019, p. 118). Hazm womanhood is being used as a tool to evoke the concept of citizenship and the duty it entails. The Crown prince with this sense of national pride has made widely accepted by women reforms, while not empowering them politically (Cerioli, 2019, p. 58).

VII. Conclusion

Giving the right to drive, is not making up for women’s freedom. The ‘Saudi Vision 2030’ and the reforms that come with it made women visible after many decades of having them contained in the private sphere of society. Women are only getting this recent visibility because of the economic interests and capacity that the King and his government have realised. Women in Saudi Arabia are an essential part of the country’s economy. By realising their importance, the country has seen a shift from emphasizing religious morality to economic prosperity (Eum, 2019, p. 126).

In the last few years, the Saudi government is trying to construct a new image for the new Saudi woman. The problematic discourse here is the notion that women are fulfilling their duty to the nation, based on the Saudi first nationalism idea that emerged with the SaudiVision2030. Meanwhile, women should not be considered as silenced actors in the country. Wahhabism and the authoritative regime cannot be the only causes of their inequality.

The lack of civil society and their inability to emerge as an autonomous pressure group are other added causes. The authoritative regime has been shutting down anyone opposing its opinion; therefore women have found other less risky ways to challenge their rights (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p. 28) The plan's future implications in Saudi society might pose a crucial reason to facilitate new social movements that may be successful and strive for changes not only in the gender arena but also in other aspects of society since the new generations are getting more demanding. Slowly but steadily, women in Saudi Arabia are starting to test the law's limitations. Already, women, especially young adults, under an authoritarian regime, consciously or not take part in transgressions by simply going through their everyday practices (Bayat, 2007, p. 161). These transgressions can vary from dress codes to behavior (Renard, 2013, pp. 112-113). For Amelie Le Renard, these transgressions make up the production of a new social group that tests the flexibility and shifting of the boundaries of male-written rules and are especially crucial due to their transformative nature (Renard, 2013, p. 116).

While many applaud Muhammad bin Salman for his initiatives and reforms, the facts only prove that the reforms he has issued are an economic necessity and an attempt on improving the country's external image (Moreno, 2018). Technology and social media in Saudi Arabia are regulated daily. Individuals that speak against the regime are hunted down and imprisoned, often tortured. While the new reforms shape a new way for women's rights there is still the matter of guardianship that can influence their decisions. While these reforms offer a sense of emancipation for women it is also a burden of what is expected of them. The newly constructed image of women and the new reforms can also be a new prison.

By granting women the right to drive, travel along with other reforms, Mohammed bin Salman has silenced the dissatisfied groups in the country, pleased the international community's claims for women's rights, and looked after the economic gains of his action. This upgrade in his authoritarianism will last for as long as the groups in society stay satisfied before implementing other reforms to again silence them only in his best interest. When women will stop seeking patronage from the state and form a solid coalition, Saudi Arabia might indeed have a genuine change towards gender equality.

VIII. References

- Abdellatif, R. (2019, October 28). *What you need to know: A timeline of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 reforms*. Retrieved from ALARABIYAnews: <https://english.alarabiya.net/business/economy/2019/10/28/What-you-need-to-know-A-timeline-of-Saudi-Arabia-s-key-Vision-2030-reforms>
- Al-Rasheed, M. (2013). *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, and Religion in Saudi Arabia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Rasheed, M. (2016). Saudi regime resilience after the 2011 Arab popular uprisings. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 13-26.
- Al-Rasheed, M. (2019, March 8). *Saudi men and women are now equal - when it comes to prison torture*. Retrieved from Middle East Eye: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/saudi-men-and-women-are-now-equal-when-it-comes-prison-torture>
- Batrawy, A. (2019, August 2). *Saudi Arabia allows women to travel without male consent*. Retrieved from AP NEWS: <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-ap-top-news-travel-religion-dubai-5addf375c2a34dc5bb7c82eeedef1529>
- Bayat, A. (2007). A Women's Non-Movement: What It Means to Be a Woman Activist in an Islamic State. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 160-172.
- Beblawi, H. (1987). The Rentier State in the Arab World. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 383-398.
- Bellin, E. (2004). The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective. *Comparative Politics*, 139-157.
- Bellin, E. (2014). Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Middle East. *Comparative Politics*, 127-149.
- Cerioli, L. (2019). Driving in the middle of the road: Paradoxes of women's role under the New Saudi Arabian Nationalism. *ex aequo*, 49-64.
- El-Husseini, Rola. 2021. 'Rentierism and the Regional Economy.' Lecture held on October 12, 2021, Lund University
- Eum, I. (2019). 'New Women for a New Saudi Arabia?' Gendered Analysis of Saudi Vision 2030 and Women's Reform Policies. *Asian Women*, 115-133.
- Heydemann, S. (2007). *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Hinnebusch, R. (2006). Authoritarian persistence, democratization theory and the Middle East: An overview and critique. *Democratization*, 373-395.
- Hubbard, B. (2020). *MBS - The rise to power of Mohammed Bin Salman*. New York, NY: Tim Duggan Books.
- Hvidt, M. (2018). The new role of women in the new Saudi Arabian economy. *Videnscenter om det moderne Mellemøsten*, 1-6.

- Leung, H. (2019, February 19). *What to Know About Absher, Saudi Arabia's Controversial 'Women Tracking' App*. Retrieved from TIME: <https://time.com/5532221/absher-saudi-arabia-what-to-know/>
- Madawi Al-Rasheed, F. G.-T. (2018). *Salman's Legacy - The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Malmstrom, M. F. (2012). Have the Arab Uprisings helped or harmed women's rights? Women and the Arab Revolutions: From Equality in Protest to Backlash in the Transition from Old Regimes to New Governments. *The Swedish Institute*, 16-18.
- Marines, A. G. (2014). Saudi Women under the Context of the Arab Spring . *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, 9-29.
- McGarry, M. (2019, June 25). *abcNEWS*. Retrieved from The journey to nowhere: Little hope for Saudi women since driving ban was lifted: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/journey-hope-saudi-women-driving-ban-lifted/story?id=63667888>
- Michael, H. (1999). *All in the family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Moreno, N. (2018, June 3). *Universidad de Navarra*. Retrieved from Women allowed to drive: Is Saudi Arabia really changing? Analysis: <https://www.unav.edu/en/web/global-affairs/detalle/-/blogs/women-allowed-to-drive-is-saudi-arabia-really-changing->
- Pratt, N. (2020). *Embodying Geopolitics: Generations of Women's Activism in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon*. Oakland, California : University of California Press .
- R. Wali, A. K. (2020). Prevalence and risk factors of domestic violence in women attending the National Guard Primary Health Care Centers in the Western Region, Saudi Arabia, 2018 . *BMC Public Health* , 1-9.
- Renard, A. L. (2013). Young Urban Saudi Women's Transgressions of Official Rules and the Productions of a New Social Group. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 108-135.
- Seal L. Yom, F. Gregory Gause III. (2012). Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang on. *Journal of Democracy*, 74-88.
- Specia, M. (2019, June 24). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from Saudi Arabia Granted Women the Right to Drive. A Year on, It's Still Complicated.: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/24/world/middleeast/saudi-driving-ban-anniversary.html>
- Stephane Lacroix, Jean-Pierre Filiu. (2019). *Revisiting the Arab Uprisings: The Politics of a Revolutionary Moment*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stephen Grand, Katherine Wolff. (2020). *Assessing Saudi Vision 2030: A 2020 Review*. Washington, DC: Atlantic Council.
- WEF, W. E. (2021). *Global Gender Gap Report 2021 - Insight Report*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Economic Forum.
- Weiner, S. (2020). *Guardianship, Women, and Religious Freedom in Saudi Arabia*. Washington, DC: USCIRF.