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Erhan Çakmak

Transformation of Social Structure in Saudi Arabia: From Chieftaincy to Modern State

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Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth
Faculté de droit et des sciences politiques
Institut des sciences politiques

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Importance of the topic

Changes and transformations in the social structure are not sufficiently included in the ongoing discussions on the political and economic changes in Saudi Arabia. The significance of this thesis is that it differs from other studies so far conducted on the KSA by its attempt to reveal current social changes in the framework of democracy and analyze the Saudi social structure in a socio-historical perspective by comparing the case of Saudi Arabia with Lebanon, and Iraq.

Firstly, I will identify interconnections between social structure, and regime;

Secondly, I will examine the social structure necessary for the establishment of democracy;

Thirdly, I will analyze changing social structure in the KSA;

Lastly, I will examine given hypotheses and approve or reject them.

1.2 Research question

To what extent can the social change in Saudi Arabia impact on the democratic development of the country or authoritarianism?

1.3 Hypotheses

The presence of an individualized middle class helps to foster a sustainable economy in the KSA.

Giving up the rentier economy liberties individuals in the KSA.

The social change prevents radicalism in the KSA.

The development and growth of the middle class can lead the birth of democracy in the KSA.

1.4 Methodology

The study employs qualitative methodologies. Qualitative approaches include content study of relevant articles, books, legal documents, and internet resources.

1.5 Limitations

I am aware that the thesis's focus on specific methods of determining the correlation between democracy and social structure may be a possible shortcomings or limitations. In addition, it could be criticized that wars, external factors, and international relations are not adequately addressed. By concentrating on changes in social structures, the thesis will attempt to make sense of political processes from a narrower context.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1.1 What defines democracy?

Democracy has an important place in political science, which has been debated since ancient Greece, both in theory and in practice. “*The term is derived from the Greek *dēmokratia*, which was coined from *dēmos* (“people”) and *kratos* (“rule”).*”¹ More simply, it can be called government by the people or rule by the people. It should not be forgotten that the concept of “the people” here, as a definition, corresponds to the citizens of the city. That is, it refers to a system governed by citizens. The concept of citizenship has been exposed to various transformations and has expanded from ancient Greece to the present. While the leader of the household, the father, had the right to be a citizen as a natural result of a patriarchal society in ancient Greece, today the concept has expanded to include all individuals who are subject to the state. Due to the fact that the ruling power of only a certain group in city-states has expanded to all adults today, democracy has changed its form, and it has been tried to be adapted to modern states with new methods and tools.

Democracy, which is a controversial concept, is applied in various forms in practice. From the re-emergence of democratic regimes from the 18th century until today, various experiences of democracy have been encountered. However, in this process, which started with the re-emergence of democratic regimes, has been widely confined to the understanding of representative democracy rather than direct participation in the ancient Greek. In addition, the understanding of representative democracy, which emerged as a result of the common will of the people in the 18th century and aimed at the common good, shifted its focus with the democracies of the 20th century. Schumpeter's definition of 20th century democracies shows how this shift took place. According to him, “*the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.*”² And this is an indication that there can be progress and regressions of democracy that cannot be confined to rigid patterns that are open to change and transformation. Moreover, Dahl's more idealistic answer to the question of what democracy is also shows us some important parameters. “*Democracy provides opportunities for: 1. Effective participation, 2. Equality in voting, 3. Gaining enlightened understanding, 4. Exercising final*

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/democracy>

² Schumpeter, J., A., (1994), *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Routledge, London, p.269

control over the agenda, 5. Inclusion of adult.”³ Building on the definitions of Schumpeter and Dahl, democracy can be more simply defined as an institutional mechanism by which people, through elections, hand over the power to rule to a group.

Since the focus of this thesis is the social conditions necessary for democracy, answering the question of what democracy is in a much narrower sense rather than how democracy works will help the study to emerge in a more meaningful way. Therefore, the definition of democracy should be simplified as much as possible. If a more general definition is to be made, a system in which every subject of the society has a say in the state administration, regardless of whether it is direct and representative, can be called democracy. With a more liberal understanding, it is the system in which each individual determines the executive power and controls it with various mechanisms. In other words, the regimes where the kingdom and feudal structures do not exist or remain on a symbolic level and a significant part of the administrative power is transferred to the society will be considered as democracy in this thesis.

2.1.2 Pre-conditions for democracy

In order for democratic regimes to be established, societies had to meet certain historical conditions and meanwhile, the social structure had to be ready for democracy. Otherwise, similar democratic regimes should have been encountered in every society in the 20th century. Contrary to Fukuyama's optimistic argument on liberal democracy, it is observed that in the 21st century societies have created alternatives other than liberal democracies and that non-democratic regimes still exist. It is difficult to talk about the existence and sustainability of democracy in societies where the social structure is not suitable for democracy.

To understand the importance of the social structure being ready for democracy could also benefit from the waves of democracy, which is one of the topics discussed in the political science literature. As can be seen in Huntington's book, *The Third Wave*, which is widely covered in the literature, the transition from non-democratic regimes to democratic regimes has occurred at similar time intervals in societies with a certain social and cultural structure. This is an indication that societies do not move from non-democratic to democratic regimes simultaneously. In addition, the existence of a fluctuation indicates that the democratic regime

³ Dahl, R., A., (1998), *On Democracy*, Yale University Press, New Haven. p.38

could not be established in a sustainable way, even if they were transferred to democratic regimes unless socio-cultural structure meets conditions for democracy. For example, the transition of Italy to a democratic regime with the first wave in the classification of Huntington and then the establishment of a non-democratic regime in the first reverse wave in 1922 points out that the Italian socio-cultural structure did not meet conditions for democracy. As a matter of fact, since the social transformation in countries such as France and the United Kingdom was completed, democratic institutions managed to survive in the first reverse wave.

Moore's assessment of the preconditions for democracy on case studies of individual countries in his book *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* brings more clarity to the subject. According to Moore, following five preconditions are essential for democracy:

- i. *development of a balance to avoid too strong a crown or too independent a landed aristocracy,*
- ii. *a turn toward an appropriate form of commercial agriculture*
- iii. *the political weakening of the landed aristocracy*
- iv. *the prevention of an aristocratic-bourgeois coalition against the peasants and worker*
- v. *a revolutionary break with the past*⁴

According to Moore, for the establishment of democracy, strong royal authority should be prevented, and the political power of aristocrats should be reduced. From this point of view, it emerges that the political power should no longer be in the hands of the feudal structures. It can be said that the bourgeoisie, which emerged as an alternative to feudalism, should dominate politics in the democratization process. On the other hand, in the economic field, some requirements must be fulfilled for the establishment of democracy. According to him, agricultural production should be developed with technology to meet the needs of the industry rather than the needs of those who produce on the land. The bourgeoisie must also be the driving force behind the destruction of the social structure in the past, which Moore refers to as the revolutionary break. On the towards to the modern world, Moore speaks of three routes, so three types of revolutionary break with the past: *“bourgeois revolutions culminating in the Western form of democracy, conservative revolutions from above ending in fascism, and peasant revolutions*

⁴ Femia, J., V., (1972), Barrington Moore and the Preconditions for Democracy, *British Journal of Political Science*, 2(1), pp.21–46, p. 22,23

leading to communism.”⁵ Although the idea of a capitalist society was at the forefront in the second type of revolution, like the first, the incompatibility of the social structure and the lack of sufficient social and political power of the bourgeoisie, which could force a social transformation, caused the establishment of non-democratic regimes in these societies. Even, in the early 20th century, these societies -Germany, Italy and Japan- had established democratic regimes, but democratic institutions did not survive long, and fascism emerged.

“*Marx emphasized that the bourgeoisie was the leading actor in establishing capitalist democracy; in contrast to the reactionary landed aristocracy.*”⁶ Moore benefits from the Marxist thesis and highlights that bourgeoisie “*has been an indispensable element in the growth of parliamentary democracy.*”⁷ Marx and Moore similarly divide society into three classes, but the concepts used have relatively different meanings. While Marx divides society into wage-labourers, capitalists, and landlords, Moore divides into the bourgeois, peasant, and landed upper class—the aristocracy-. The theoretical point that Moore differs in this classification is that Marx's classification is basically based on economic aspects, while Moore added both economic aspects and social structure to his theory. In addition to this theoretical differentiation, two important differences could be mentioned. Firstly, while Marx does not consider the peasantry as a class and as the driving force of a revolution, for Moore, the peasantry plays an important role in communist revolutions. Secondly, the notions of capitalist and bourgeoisie have a different meaning in both thinkers. Marx defines the capitalists or the bourgeoisie as owning the means of production in the capitalist world, while Moore defines the bourgeoisie as “*a vigorous and independent class of town dwellers*”⁸.

On the contrary to Marx and Moore, some argues that the bourgeoisie cannot be the driving force for democracy because they do not need democracy to protect their own interests. Rueschemeyer et al point out that “*the bourgeoisie is a much less consistently and radically anti-democratic force*”⁹. Therefore, a debate has been held as to whether other classes could be a

⁵ Moore, B., (1974), *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in The Making of The Modern World*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p.414

⁶ Lu, C., (2005), *Middle Class and Democracy: Structural Linkage*, *International Review of Modern Sociology*, 31(2), pp.157-178, p.158

⁷ Moore, B., (1974), *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in The Making of The Modern World*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p.418)

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.418

⁹ Rueschemeyer, D., et al., (1992), *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Univ. Of Chicago Press., Chicago, p.61

driving force for democracy as an alternative to the bourgeoisie. Based on the theses of Marx and Moore, it can be said that the driving force of democracy will not arise from the agricultural field or the landed groups. This is why the working class could be a driving force for democracy, but the debates show that the working class cannot be classified as a democratic force for several reasons. *“The working class was far too weak to achieve by itself democratic rights for the subordinate classes.”*¹⁰ This weakness appears in two important places; first, *“its relative weak presents a problem for the consolidation of democratic regimes,”*¹¹ and second, the class could be easily influenced by extreme ideologies. Lipset's thoughts of the working class in the West is noteworthy: *“even though the working class of the Western democracies is incorporated into the society, it still possesses authoritarian predispositions which, under certain conditions, appear in support of extremist political and religious movements”*¹². It may also be necessary to underline that *“in some cases, the working class was incorporated state-sponsored organizations linked directly to the state apparatus”*¹³. From this point of view, it can be said that the working-class lacks material and organizational resources to be a democratic force and may be affected by external factors due to the inadequacy of the organizational structure. Therefore, like the bourgeoisie, the working class could play a role in the establishment of non-democratic regimes.

The middle class emerged as an alternative in these debates. *“The urban and rural middle classes can take the lead in the struggle for democracy.”*¹⁴ *“The class balance yields a majority middle class, then the democracy will be stable and inclusive.”*¹⁵ The idea of a stable democracy in a middle-class society is based on Aristotle, as Glassman said in the book *The Middle Class and Democracy in Socio-Historical Perspective*. It is possible to talk about the applicability of this idea in the modern period as well. When the middle class is the majority in the society, they are inclined to establish democratic institutions against the dangers of the upper class or lower class in order to protect their political and economic interests. Moreover, the middle class is a driving force for democracy is that it is composed of various groups that also have conflicts of interest among themselves unlike classes such as the aristocracy, the peasantry or the working

¹⁰ Ibid. p.59

¹¹ Ibid. p.184

¹² Lipset. S., M., (1960). *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Doubleday Inc., Garden City, N.Y., p.93

¹³ Rueschemeyer, D., et al., (1992), *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Univ. Of Chicago Press., Chicago, p.184

¹⁴ Ibid. p.60

¹⁵ Glassman, R., M., (1995), *The Middle Class and Democracy in Socio-Historical Perspective*, E.J. Brill., Leiden; New York, p.4

class that contain similar groups within themselves. They have to bargain with each other to find a solution for these conflicting interests, so the middle class aims to establish and maintain rules to ensure their own continuity. These rules may also exist in non-democratic regimes, but it is inevitable that the middle class, which does not have political power, will be vulnerable to threats from outside. Therefore, they tend to establish a regime preventing a strong state power controlled the majority and by constitutional guarantees to protect its own interests.

2.1.3 Middle class and democracy

The middle class is the most important actor in the establishment of democracy, but the existence of the middle class cannot directly and naturally lead to the establishment of democracy in society. It is far from being the driving force of democracy when the middle class is few in number and the class structure is weak. As can be seen in some examples, the weak middle class could be articulated with these regimes instead of fighting against non-democratic regimes. *“It has to be numerous enough and prosperous enough to be in alliance with the poorer classes, so as to counterbalance the power of the rich democratic polity”*¹⁶

As seen above, it is necessary to underline that it is not sufficient for the establishment of democracy in the numerical majority, but also the necessity of the middle class to have a certain wealth. As Moore had previously pointed out, it was important for the middle class to have economic power for western democracies based on industrialization. Middle class which increased wealth along with industry had caused a social transformation for democracy. *“Increased wealth affects the political role of the middle class by changing the shape of the stratification structure from an elongated pyramid, with a large lower-class base, to a diamond with a growing middle class.”*¹⁷ This transformation does not only affect the lower classes that do not hold political and economic power, but also the production techniques and economic model developed with industrialization transform the classes that had strong positions in pre-industrial societies. *“The process of economic modernization may bring about certain large scale social changes like the transformation of tribal and agricultural societies into urban, educated, middle-*

¹⁶ Glassman, R. M. (1991), *China in Transition: Communism, Capitalism and Democracy*, p.4 cited by Lu, C., (2005), *Middle Class and Democracy: Structural Linkage*, *International Review of Modern Sociology*, 31(2), pp.157-178, p.161

¹⁷ Lipset, S., M., (1960). *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Doubleday Inc., Garden City, N.Y., p.66

class ones that in some way create the material conditions for democracy."¹⁸ It could be argued that with industrialization and modernization, it is possible to create an educated and urbanized middle class that cut from aristocratic ties.

However, the absence of industrialization leads to a weak middle class, and the high mobilization of the peasantry, as in Russia and China, may target the aristocracy and the middle class. The biggest reason for the emergence of a strong central authority in this type of society is the absence of aristocrats or bourgeois, who are likely to establish the balance between the society and central authority. The absence of a strong middle class is an obstacle to the establishment of democracy, while the existence of a weak middle class is a reason for the emergence of authoritarian regimes. "*A large middle class tempers conflict by rewarding moderate and democratic parties and penalizing extremist groups.*"¹⁹ "*It should be noted the fact that educated, middle-class people in the most advanced, industrialized countries by and large prefer liberal democracy over various forms of authoritarianism.*"²⁰

It should be noted that one of the biggest factors in the democracy of the middle class is that the class is not a closed structure. Since it has an open structure, transitions from the lower and upper classes to the middle class could be achieved easily, and those inclusive of the middle class could get their share of a fairer social distribution. It is not possible to say that socio-economic inequalities have completely disappeared in middle class societies, but the source of socio-economic inequalities in these societies is changing. It arises due to the education, experiences, and achievements of individuals rather than the equality created in hereditary ways as in a more closed society. "*Despite the disparities in income distribution that frequently arise in the early phases of industrialization, economic development ultimately tends to promote the broad equality of condition because it creates enormous demand for a large, educated work force.*"²¹ Based on Fukuyama's relationship with industry and education, it can be said that the middle class can expand more rapidly when education is one of the elements that make up the class. This increases the number of those who share in the socio-economic distribution. "*Open class system, economic wealth, equalitarian value system, capitalist economy, literacy and high*

¹⁸ Fukuyama, F., (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin, London, p.134

¹⁹ Lipset. S., M., (1960). *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Doubleday Inc., Garden City, N.Y., p.66

²⁰ Fukuyama, F., (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin, London, p.122

²¹ *Ibid.* p.116

participation in voluntary organizations”²² listed by Lipset as the conditions of democracy, can only emerge in societies where there is a strong middle class. On the one hand, the middle class expand numerously, on the other hand, strengthens its socio-economic and political positions with the new conditions.

It should be emphasized that Fukuyama's assessment of the future of liberal democracies establishes a linear proportion with the size of the middle class. In other words, as the size and structural strength of the middle class is important in the establishment of democracy, it should also remain strong and large-scale for the continuation of the existing democracy. What causes the emergence of a strong middle class is the increase in economic wealth and the protection of equal economic conditions and the distribution of equal socio-economic interests to a large scale of the society. It could be said that the most important change in the emergence of a strong middle class is industrialization. Based on both Moore's preconditions and Lipset's conditions for democracy, it should be noted that the capitalist economy is important in the establishment of democracies. In addition, as mentioned above, the emergence of the middle class alone is not enough, there must be important transformations in the social structure together with industrialization.

2.1.4 Transition from tribal and agricultural societies to industrial society

Industrialization has caused a revolutionary transformation in various fields such as economic, political, social and technology. Therefore, it is not surprising that some call it the industrial revolution while describing the history of industrialization. The fundamental transformation it caused in the social structure was the main factor in the change of the political order in the following years. The biggest transformation created in the context of the above discussion is the enrichment of the peasantry, who is hereditarily excluded from the sharing of wealth or who has a small share, by being included in mass production. It has also shifted the economic center from rural areas to urban centers. However, a large scale of the society living in rural areas had to migrate to the city due to economic reasons. and sometimes the changing economy models have excluded the peasantry from the rural areas. For example, the importance of wool production in England and the fact that landlords did not need labor in agricultural

²² Lipset, S., M., (1959), Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy, *The American Political Science Review*, 53(1), pp.69–105, p.105

production caused the peasantry to leave rural areas. Here, it could be mentioned that the deep effect of industrialization on society in both negative and positive senses. The fact that industrialization does not create economic wealth or that a large part of the society is excluded from the existing economic wealth could turn into a political and social problem that is difficult to manage. In societies that carry out this transformation in a controlled way, a strong and large middle class may emerge, which is determined as the prerequisite for democracy.

Moreover, industrialization has changed the understanding of nobility. It has transformed from feudal structures in which land ownership was important before, to a new social structure in which land ownership was insignificant. The change in the understanding of nobility caused great effects in the political arena. The fact that the right to speak in the political field, it depends on the criteria to be obtained later excluded the aristocracy, ceases to be a legacy, and is transferred to personal success, education, etc. Along with this change, power centers have also changed. While the military and economic power that was previously held by the feudal lords returned as political power, on the other hand, their economic and military powers decreased with industrialization caused the bourgeoisie or the middle class in a broad sense located in the center to gain political power together with economic power. As in the example of France, the Parisian bourgeoisie, located in the center, became very strong because it was close to the palace and because it dominated the economic area. In addition, this centralization in France destroyed the old form of nobility by causing a cultural and linguistic centralization. That is, as a result of Parisification, speaking Parisian dialect and mastering Paris culture was more important than having land-based nobility. *“Standard (Parisian) French and Paris were not only focal points of power; they were also magnets. The growth of markets, physical mobility, new careers, political patronage, public service, and a national educational system all meant that facility in French and connections to Paris were the paths of social advancement and material success.”*²³ Thanks to a common dialect or language, everyone is equalized by eliminating regional differences. In other words, giving up a dialect used by the upper classes or spreading it to the whole society weakens the aristocracy.

Another element is to provide taxation from the society at large. Tax and military conscription have been a source of power and nobility for western societies throughout history. Paying taxes is generally equated with being a citizen. However, the gradual weakening of

²³ Scott, J., C., (1998), *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale University Press, New Haven, p.73

aristocratic nobility and the strengthening of the bourgeoisie caused radical changes in the tax system. “*With reference to other European countries, has been suggested that in the nineteenth century the state became dependent on the capitalist bourgeoisie as a source of credit tax revenue, and in return granted businessmen greater political influence.*” (Clark, 1994, p.171) As a result, paying taxes ceased to be a privilege and became an obligation, paving the way for all individuals in society to become citizens. “*The society of what we call the modern age is characterized, above all in the West, by a certain level of monopolization. (...) the taxation of the property or income of individuals is concentrated in the hands of a central social authority.*”²⁴ With the taxation of the entire society, the responsibility of the tax collector expanded and the responsibility that was previously towards the local nobles spread throughout the society. Increasingly widespread taxation has led the tax collector political authority in the modern world to become familiar with concepts such as transparency, accountability and openness.

Industrialization also deeply affected the family structure. With industrialization, large traditional family structures were replaced by nuclear families. According to some scholars, “*the transition from patriarchal and stem families to unstable families was, a consequence of the fact that families had less capital to hand down from one generation to the next, due to the shift to wage labor*”²⁵. Also, the individual's desire to create oneself is effective in this. This new type of modern individual, who takes part in business life as a part of an active population and pays taxes in line with the gains they achieve, has played an important role in breaking traditional structures. As a result, industrialization has caused a comprehensive transformation that affects every aspect of society. While the spread of this social transformation to large masses led to democracy, when it existed in a fragmented manner with different economic activities, it led to fascism.

²⁴ Elias, N., & Mennell, S., (1998), *On Civilization, Power, and Knowledge Selected Writings*, Univ. Of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, p.139

²⁵ Puschmann, P., & Solli, A.,(2014), *Household and Family During Urbanization And Industrialization: Efforts to Shed New Light On An Old Debate*, *The History of the Family*, 19(1), pp. 1–12, p.2

3 CASE STUDY- SAUDI ARABIA

3.1 SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

3.1.1 History of Saudi Arabian Society

Until recently, the Arabian Peninsula, isolated from the world except for the coastal cities and holy cities, continued to exist in isolation under political control by the local powers. The central Arabia, called Najd, was being preferred by communities that were more adaptable to nomadic life rather than permanent sedentary communities but also there were settlements near water sources and in oases. It, however, was hardly possible to talk about the existence of a social or political unity between the nomads and the settlers. “*Arabia is destined by its pastoral and tribal organization to anarchy.*”²⁶ One of the biggest obstacles to the monopolization of political power in central Arabia for many years was the social structure that was completely fragmented and could not be integrated into each other. “*The dominant political, military, and economic forces in this area were the Bedouin tribes, who control led trade routes, provided*

²⁶ Philby, B., (1926), The Triumph of the Wahhabis, Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society, 13(4), pp.293–319, p.297

protection for allied settlements, and raided those of their rivals."²⁷ Due to the inadequacy of natural resources, an agriculture-based economy did not emerge in this region and the main sources of income of the Bedouins consisted of herd animals, dates grown and caravan trade. The inadequacy of production can be mentioned as another obstacle to the monopolization of political power. While these Bedouin tribes with a limited economic income struggled with each other in order not to lose this economic privilege they had, on the other hand, they could not allow the emergence of a political authority that would take them under its control. This, absent of political authority, allowed the tribes to practice their own laws and customs freely in their dominance but also it was a threaten to sedentary societies. As al Juhany highlighted, "*in Najd, where settlement activities had been declining since the eleventh century and no government authority existed to restrain the Bedouin, raiding and the exaction of protection money from the remaining sedentary inhabitants was the order of the day*"²⁸.

On the other hand, the central political authority was making its presence felt in western Arabia, called Hijaz, where the Holy cities -Mecca and Madina, and coastal cities such as Jidda were located. The source of the existence of the central authority is the prestige gained by owning the holy lands rather than the economic activity occurring here. Although the number of settled communities is more than the Najd region, there was not a great difference in economic activity. "*Most of the tribes were engaged in nomadic animal husbandry, principally the raising of camels, which provided milk and meat for the herders.*"²⁹ Similarly, the Bedouins in here focused on herd animals as a main economic activity instead of agricultural production. "*It is important to note the unique character of population in the province of Hijaz. Although this area hosted some large cities—Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah—these stand almost alone in a landscape dominated by pastoralism.*"³⁰ However, a different economic activity that diversifies the local economy arising from the pilgrimage should be mentioned. The existence of a central authority and a differentiated economy caused the Bedouins to be relatively more under control in this region and the dominant class in the society to be sedentary tribes. In order to maintain their existence and protect their economic income, they had to act in harmony within the system

²⁷ Bowen, W. H., (2008), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Greenwood, Westport, p.67

²⁸ al Juhany, U., M., (2002), *Najd Before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social, Political, and Religious Conditions During the Three Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*, Ithaca Press, Reading, p. 102-127, 145-147 cited by Franz, K., (2011), *The Bedouin in History or Bedouin History? Nomadic Peoples*, 15(1), 11–53, p.36

²⁹ Ochsenswald, W., (1984). *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz under Ottoman control, 1840-1908*, the Ohio State University Press, p.31)

³⁰ Reilly, B., (2015), *Slavery, Agriculture, and Malaria in the Arabian Peninsula*, The Ohio University Press. p.30

established by the central authority. On the one hand, the pilgrimage caused the Ottomans to pay the Bedouins protection money for the security of the pilgrimage routes and for the continuity of the public order, on the other hand, it caused them to get a share from the economy created by the pilgrims from various regions. However, neither the Bedouins nor the agricultural settlers had enough power to dominate the society. Society was dominated by those with political power in the cities or by those with privileges from the central authority. *“Because of the poor agriculture in the Hijaz, society was dominated by the sharifs, officeholders, large-scale importers of goods, pilgrim guides, and those receiving pensions from the Ottoman government.”*³¹

One of the two main features that separate Najd and Hijaz from each other was that the urban settlements are more concentrated in Hijaz, and the second is that the holy cities and port cities in the Hijaz were important for the central authority. Therefore, while the central authority controlled the region more effectively thanks to the urban settlements, the Bedouins make their presence felt more effectively in Najd region due to the reasons arising from the geographical disadvantages. *“Having almost no experience of direct political control by a centralized power, the region was no more than a vast desert plateau juxtaposing oases, pastureland, and water points held by Bedouin (badw) and sedentary (hadar) populations.”*³² The main reason for the late emergence of the idea of an effective political authority in the Najd region can be attributed to the powerful position of the Bedouins. While this powerful position of the Bedouins prevented a settled group from seizing the political power due to the economic and military threat it created on the settlers, the power struggle among themselves and the non- existence of a consensus prevented any Bedouin group from having a strong. As a matter of fact, a central political authority appears not from the nomadic tribes, but rather as an effort of the settled tribes.

In 18th century, al Saud family attempted to consolidate some sedentary groups under a central authority. *“The settlement recognised the authority of the Saudi Amir as a result of a combination of factors: his residence in the oasis and his ownership of cultivated land and wells around the settlement.”*³³ As a result of this effort, a change occurred in the relationship between the Bedouins and the settlers in the Najd region. Previously, the settled groups had to come to an agreement with some of these Bedouin groups in order to ensure their own security against the

³¹ Ochsenswald, W., (1984). Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz under Ottoman control, 1840-1908, the Ohio State University Press, p.92

³² Mouline, N., (2014), The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia. Translated by Ethan S Rundell, Yale University Press, New Haven, p.47

³³ Al- Rasheed, M., (2010), A History of Saudi Arabia, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.14

attacks of the other Bedouins. This was one of the main reasons that enabled the Bedouins to be the dominant power in the region. However, with the leadership that the Saud family tried to establish, the residents took a step to save themselves from the obligatory dependency with the Bedouins by establishing a military force against the Bedouins. The power struggle between the Bedouin and the settlers in the military, economic and political fields would shape the character of the central Arabia-centered state to be established in the future. However, economic inadequacy and the lack of an ideology to unite around would render the efforts of the sedentary group inadequate. “*With the exception of his ability to collect tribute, the executive authority of an oasis ruler was fairly weak*”³⁴

If ignoring the lack of the dominant economic power, “*the political fragmentation of Najd was due to the absence of two factors that Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) saw as indispensable to any political enterprise: ideology (da‘wa) and spirit of kinship (‘asabiyya)*”³⁵. As a matter of fact, although the Saud family tried to eliminate the disadvantage of lacking an identifiable tribal origin with various alliances, the Saud family felt the lack of an ideological discourse in an effort to increase its political power. Therefore, it was able to establish limited leadership among other sedentary groups with which it cooperates, rather than establishing a central authority in Najd. In a short time, Saud family would try to overcome this deficiency with a religious doctrine. “*The fortunes of the Al Saud began to change with their adoption of the Wahhabi movement.*”³⁶ With the acceptance of the Wahhabi understanding by the Saudi family in 1744, the Saudi family acquired an ideology that it would use against other tribes. This enabled the other tribes to gather around their own ideology and to form a union against the central powers, in a way that tolerated not having a strong asabiyyah, which is the disadvantage of the Saudi family. “*The new religious doctrine of the Wahhabi provided the Saudis with the energy, charisma, and religious legitimacy for a campaign of conquest, conversion, and assimilation.*”³⁷ Thanks to the Wahhabi understanding that excludes everyone who does not accept this doctrine and promotes the struggle against them, the Saud family found a source that justified every action they took. Along with this driving force, the Saud family made various attempts to bring the settled and nomadic

³⁴ Al-Juhany, U., M., (1983), *The History of Najd Prior to the Wahhabis*, University of Washington, p.179 cited by Al- Rasheed, M., (2010), *A History of Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.15

³⁵ Mouline, N., (2014), *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*. Translated by Ethan S Rundell, Yale University Press, New Haven, p.49

³⁶ Al- Rasheed, M., (2010), *A History of Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.15

³⁷ Bowen, W. H., (2008), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Greenwood, Westport, p.70

tribes under their domination in the Najd region. Although other tribes tried to oppose these expansionist policies of Saudis militarily and politically, the Wahhabi Saudi marriage reached its goal in a short time.

“By 1790, the Saudi-Wahhabi union had consolidated its political, military, and economic stranglehold over central Arabia, and had begun a major offensive into the Hasa.”³⁸ This consolidation of a single power in central Arabia would result in the emergence of a political structure that had not been experienced for a long time. “Since the end of the Middle Ages, several tribal confederations had tried to control Najd, but they did not have the human or symbolic resources necessary to succeed.”³⁹ It was here that the success of the Saudi family was revealed, they accepted the Wahhabi doctrine and found a symbolic resource for themselves, and with this symbolic resource, they included the human resources necessary for their empowerment more easily. This success reached in the 18th century did not ensure the existence of a permanent state, and although they succeeded in establishing a state again in 1824, they could not achieve more than a tribal chieftaincy. However, in the 20th century, with social structure becoming appropriate and the central authority reaching the competence of establishing a modern state, a new process in Arabia begun. The Saud family, which has the necessary resources to establish a central power, would deeply affect the social structure as well as the political structure in the region. The assimilation or exile of tribes on the one hand, and the resettlement policy of the Bedouins on the other hand, caused a comprehensive social transformation in central Arabia, including many changes such as religious, cultural, economic, and demographic changes. The most influential factor causing this transformation was the Wahhabi doctrine, and then the modern state building process emerged.

3.1.2 *Wahhabism As an Ideology and A Political System*

Wahhabism is not only considered as a sect, but also as an ideology and a political system. The Wahhabi ideology, which Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab* created by starting from a religious source, emerged as a political system because of the agreement made with the Saud

³⁸ Ibid. p.71

³⁹ Mouline, N., (2014), *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*. Translated by Ethan S Rundell, Yale University Press, New Haven, p.49

* (b. 1703, Uyaynah, Arabia [now in Saudi Arabia]—d. 1792, Al-Diriyyah), theologian and founder of the Wahhabi movement, which attempted a return to the principles of Islam as practiced by its early forebears (Salaf).

family. The reason why Wahhabism played an important role in the establishment of the Saudi state stems from the influence of this ideology on the mechanisms that ensure the formation and continuity of political power such as political institutions, law, and education. “*Wahhabi ideology had an unquestionable role in constructing Saudi society, establishing political unity and a strong army, and determining Saudi Arabia’s political boundaries and its international relations.*”⁴⁰

Furthermore, Wahhabism was an effective instrument for creating a collective identity and a common tradition. Considering the region where Wahhabism and Saudi dynasty emerged, this argument may be more understandable because the region of Najd was controlled under fragmented tribes which perpetuate their own tradition. A religio-political community was tried to be formed through a religious identity to control the fragmented, warring Bedouins and sedentary population. “*Wahhabism transformed and united the Bedouin tribes, and it functioned as the basic glue in the formation of the Saudi society.*”⁴¹ As can be seen, Wahhabism was an efficient instrument to shape both political and social life. In fact, this is not a characteristic of Wahhabism, but stems from the nature of Islam. “*Islam differs from other major religions in that its texts stipulate a form of politics whereby there exists no separation of state (dawla) from religion (din), nor is there a division of religious and political organization.*”⁴² The debates about church and state in pre-modern Europe did not find much response in Islamic societies because Islam, unlike Christianity, had founding power. In other words, unlike Christianity, Islam is integrated with the idea of establishing a state. In other words, when Christianity emerged, it did not have the ideal of establishing a state and did not oppose the existing political authority. The existence of a strong political authority in the region where it emerged might had been effective in this. However, in the Islamic state, which was founded with the desire of Islam to establish a state, the religious leader also emerged as a political leader, and a leadership that controlled both the private and public spheres was adopted. Therefore, it is not surprising that this new ideology arising from Islam aims to control both the private and public spaces.

⁴⁰ Özev, M., H., (2017), Saudi Society and the State: Ideational and Material Basis, Arab Studies Quarterly, 39(4), pp.996–1017, p.999

⁴¹ Ibid. p.1000

⁴² Mortimer, E., (1982), Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam, Random House, New York, cited by Baroni, S., (2006), Saudi Arabia and Expansionist Wahhabism, [Master’s Thesis], the Department of Political Science, the University of Central Florida, p.41

In addition, Wahhabism, and Islam show similarities in terms of the techniques used for building a state. One of the biggest obstacles to the emergence of the central authority in Arabia was tribal activism because “*strict tribal and/or clan loyalty was not conducive to the unification of multiple tribes under one leader or ruler*”⁴³. Therefore, Islam tried to reduce the tribal activism in order to establish a centralized state. In its early days, Islam used tribal armies of conquest to expand its borders, but during the transition from a tribal federation to a state form, a centralized army was needed to strengthen the hand of a religious leader who makes conquests in the name of Islam. The existence of a centralized army caused the leader of the religious community to emerge as a political leader who systematically attempts to conquer new regions. As a matter of fact, political efforts such as the strengthening of the central authority and power consolidation during the period of the first caliphs show anymore, the duty of the religious leader is not just to preach to the community or teach religion, but also to hold together the expanding society as a political whole. As Brown highlights that “*from its inception, the Islamic community became a religio-political community, by a series of conquests*”⁴⁴. The Wahhabi-Saudi understanding benefited from this experience in a very similar way. With the spread of the Wahhabi doctrine among the tribes, a Wahhabi religio-political community emerged under the Saudi family. “*The Wahhabi da’wa was the weapon and the ideological glue to overcome the social and political fragmentation of Najd, shifting from the concept of a limited loyalty based on tribal ‘asabiyya (tribal group solidarity) into a more universal and equal kind of loyalty to God through the Islamic concept of umma (Muslim community).*”⁴⁵ “*As imam the king is regarded as the leader of the Wahhabi community, which refers to the majority of the core of the Saudi Arabian population in Najd.*”⁴⁶

⁴³ Baroni, S., (2006), Saudi Arabia and Expansionist Wahhabism, [Master’s Thesis], the Department of Political Science, the University of Central Florida, p.44

⁴⁴ Brown, C., (2000), Religion and state: the Muslim Approach to Politics, Columbia University Press, New York, cited by Baroni, S., (2006), Saudi Arabia and Expansionist Wahhabism, [Master’s Thesis], the Department of Political Science, the University of Central Florida, p.45

⁴⁵ Christie, K., and Masad. M., (2013), State Formation and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa. Springer, p.88

⁴⁶ Kostiner, J., (2000), Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London& Colorado, p.133

* In Islam, zakat refers to the individual's obligation to donate a certain portion of his wealth to charity each year, and it is individual decision regarding Islamic principles. What is meant here is that this zakat, which is referred to as compulsory zakat, is collected as tax by the state. In other words, it is said that a religious obligation has come under state control.

Wahhabi ideology is not only a source of political power of the al Saud family, but also an effective instrument used to create economic resources for this political authority. In 18th century, in the Najd region, the unfavorable climatic conditions were hampering agricultural production and trade in this region. There were not sufficient economic resources for the centralization of a political power. In addition, taxation based on the individual observed in previous periods in the West was not possible due to the inadequacy of the socio-economic development of the region. However, the Wahhabi-Saudi cooperation solved this problem by a method originated from religion and established a centralized tax system. Making voluntary zakat compulsory* and giving it to political authorities, not individuals, created an economic resource. *“The imposition of the centralized tax system that mandatory zakat represented was a key innovation wrought by the Saudi-Wahhabi regime, which helped bring a semblance of order and organization to its Bedouin followers.”*⁴⁷ However, it is insufficient to describe this obligatory zakat system only as a religious duty performed by individuals in the name of Islam or the Wahhabi religio-political community. In addition to religious duty, an agreement on protection is reached between the group that pays zakat and the ruler. As mentioned above, there was a traditional form of payment for protection between the Bedouins and the settlements; in so, regarding the compulsory zakat, *“the concept of 'protection of those who pay' is strikingly similar to other forms of non-Islamic taxation such as the khuwa or 'brotherhood tax' found among the Bedouin tribal areas of the Arabian Peninsula”*⁴⁸. On the one hand, the strengthen of the central authority for the protection of the tribes gave the ruler political power; on the other hand, an economic resource was created for the central authority. *“The religious aim - the restoration of zakat - accorded perfectly with the needs of the Saudi state.”*⁴⁹ Furthermore, *“the al-Sa’ud used the Islamic tax-zakat to support a wide-ranging campaign of conquest.”*⁵⁰

The Wahhabi ideology did not only establish the centralized zakat for an economic resource for the conquests, but Wahhabism was also used successfully to create the military groups that would make these conquests and to create motivation for them. Financial source created by centralized and compulsory zakat was significant for warfare. This is true *“the greater*

⁴⁷ Wynbrandt, J., (2004), A Brief History of Saudi Arabia, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.123

⁴⁸ Helms, C., M., (2015). The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia: Evolution of Political Identity, Routledge, New York, p.155

⁴⁹ Vassiliev, A., (2000), The History of Saudi Arabia, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.116

⁵⁰ Baroni, S., (2006), Saudi Arabia and Expansionist Wahhabism, [Master’s Thesis], the Department of Political Science, the University of Central Florida, p79

part was spent for military purposes: salaries for the soldiers and garrisons, victuals, and maintaining the cavalry, i.e. the armed nobility".⁵¹ In Arabia, however, the establishment of a regular army was indeed difficult since *"in the Arabian deserts and mountains of the nineteenth century violence was at the disposal of any armed warrior; and nearly all adult males were armed"*⁵². *"For the Najdi tribesmen who engaged in tribal warfare as a way of life, Wahhabism gave traditional warfare a higher moral purpose and justification."*⁵³ These warring tribes had created an order of war or peace by following their traditional rules before Wahhabism. Wahhabism changed the character of the war and transformed the understanding warfare of the tribes who fought for economic or political reasons in a way that would enable the religious-political community to survive and expand. Thanks to the Saudi leaders considered as both religious and political leaders, their *"political and military projects were therefore considered acts of faith"*⁵⁴. *"Otherwise, there was no reason to put aside tribal traditions."*⁵⁵ Following the change in the character of the war, the central authority needed a more disciplined and organized military force rather than fragmented armed groups. As a result, the Ikhwan (the Brethren) that *"fight only when directed against the enemies of the Saudi dynasty, embracing holy war (jihad) under the guidelines of Wahhabi religious doctrine"*⁵⁶ was created in 1912. Here, the understanding of jihad put forward by Wahhabism gains importance because while jihad in Islam is a movement against non-Muslims, Wahhabism claimed that it could be also done against those who adopted the teaching of the Qur'an by revealing their own Muslim norms. Therefore, *"the Nadji ulema declared non-Wahhabi Moslems among the infidels"*⁵⁷ and ordered jihad to be made against them. *"In the absence of external enemies, the victims of the faithful were their own brethren or cousins who still preferred to remain in darkness."*⁵⁸ *"Military operations intended to*

⁵¹ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.122

⁵² Ochsenswald, W., (1984). *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia: The Hijaz under Ottoman control, 1840-1908*, the Ohio State University Press, p.34

⁵³ <https://www.mei.edu/publications/tawhid-or-jihad-what-wahhabism-and-not>

⁵⁴ Mouline, N., (2014), *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*. Translated by Ethan S Rundell, Yale University Press, New Haven, p.87

⁵⁵ Salamé, G., (1987), *Islam and Politics in Saudi Arabia*, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 9(3), pp. 306-326, p.311

⁵⁶ Bowen, W. H., (2008), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Greenwood, Westport, p.91

⁵⁷ Al-Ghafur, (1964) cited by Baroni, S., (2006), *Saudi Arabia and Expansionist Wahhabism*, [Master's Thesis], the Department of Political Science, the University of Central Florida, p.27

⁵⁸ Philby, B., (1926), *The Triumph of the Wahhabis*, *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 13(4), pp.293–319, p.299

bring Bedouin tribes under Saud authority were thus described as instances of jihad.”⁵⁹ “Both zakat and jihad were at the heart of the Wahhabi idea of the state and were considered crucial mechanisms for its consolidation.”⁶⁰

The Wahhabi doctrine, in addition to creating ideology, economic resources and an army for the Al Saud family to establish a state, also provided a legal system. The existence of geographical, social and economic divisions in the Arabian Peninsula inevitably led to a fragmented structure in the legal system of the unity that could not be established between tribes. This turned into a complex structure under the Saudi leadership, with the Saudi leadership gradually expanding its geographical borders and the inclusion of new tribes and institutions that adopted different legal systems and techniques. “*By the time King 'Abd al-'Aziz took control of the Hijaz in the early 1920s, he found him- self faced with the existence of three different, though not separate, judicial systems.*”⁶¹ The Hijaz legal system shaped by the Ottoman legal system, the legal system implemented by the settled Najdi rulers who accepted Wahhabi teachings, and a legal system where the nomads applied age-old customary tribal law constituted this complex structure. Inevitably, the Wahhabi-Saudi allegiance made efforts to unite this fragmented structure under the Wahhabi interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence. it should not be forgotten than “*the Wahhabism envisioned the establishment of a theocratic state in which the sharia would be strictly applied in all spheres of life and society and in relations with the outside world*”⁶². This required an intellectual struggle with both the old traditional law originating from the customs and traditions of the tribes and the shariah law applied in the Hijaz, which the Ottoman Empire created from different sources.

It is necessary to mention that there were two different sources feeding Wahhabi Sharia law to understand how shaped Saudi state and society. “*Wahhabi ideology is based on a blend of the jurisprudence of the Hanbali Islamic school, ideas presented by Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyyah* and Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab's own personal teachings.*”⁶³ The Hanbali

⁵⁹ Mouline, N., (2014), *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, Translated by Ethan S Rundell, Yale University Press, New Haven, p.87

⁶⁰ Al- Rasheed, M., (2010), *A History of Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.50

⁶¹ Solaim, S., A., (1971), *Saudi Arabia's Judicial System*, Middle East Journal, 25(3), pp. 403-407, p.403

⁶² Layish, A., (1987), *Saudi Arabian Legal Reform as a Mechanism to Moderate Wahhābī Doctrine*, Journal of the American Oriental Society, 107(2), pp.279-292, p.279

* a member of the Hanbalī school founded by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, sought the return of the Islamic religion to its sources: the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Ibn Taymiyyah recognized the legitimacy of the first four caliphs (the rāshidūn), but he rejected the necessity of having a single caliphate and allowed for the existence of many emirates. Within each emirate he demanded that the prince apply the religious law strictly and rely on it for his

jurisprudence shaped by ibn Taymiyyah provided that “*believers were to apply the Law in the familial and public spheres, in keeping with the duty to promote virtue and prevent vice while simultaneously respecting the prerogatives of the political authorities (who must never be publicly challenged or criticized)*”⁶⁴. In other words, this approach promised a judicial system that gave the ruler more say in public and private spheres. Another factor affecting the judicial system is Abdul Wahhab's desire for pure Islam and his call for a return to the period when Islam first emerged. “*Only the Qur’an, the Sunna, and the consensus of the first three generations of Muslims were thus considered legitimate sources of Muslim Law.*”⁶⁵ The fact that consensus is limited had caused the imam and political authority to have more room when faced with conflicting situations, since the efforts to resurface and implement archaic rules do not actually keep up with the change. As a result, the Saud family adopted a legal system with its own unique approach in the state-building process. What made this attractive was that there are elements that would increase the authority of the political leaders over the society and that it provided the opportunity to reorganize the societies included in it with the new legal system, which is an advantage for the Saudi leadership. However, it was inevitable that problems would arise in terms of applicability due to the lack of intellectual accumulation, the absence of a certain jurisprudence, and the fact that legal sources are limited to the Quran, Sunna and consensus. After the state building had taken a certain process, Ibn Saud did not aim to make the Shariah law systematic. “*In the wake of Ibn Saud's unsuccessful attempt to codify shariah law, six books by well-known Hanbali jurists were designated as authoritative sources to be relied on, in a certain order, in the shariah courts.*”⁶⁶

By providing both a political system, economic resources, a legal system and an ideology, Wahhabism made the desire to establish a Saudi state, which the Saud family had been trying for a long time, become more systematic as of the beginning of the 20th century, and state building

legal opinion, and Ibn Taymiyyah demanded from those under the prince's jurisdiction that they obey the established authority except where it required disobedience to God, every Muslim being required to “will the good and forbid the bad” for the benefit of the common welfare.

(see for details: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ibn-Taymiyyah>)

⁶³ Baroni, S., (2006), Saudi Arabia and Expansionist Wahhabism, [Master's Thesis], the Department of Political Science, the University of Central Florida, p.54

⁶⁴ Mouline, N., (2014), The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia. Translated by Ethan S Rundell, Yale University Press, New Haven, p.26

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 65

⁶⁶ Layish, A., (1987), Saudi Arabian Legal Reform as a Mechanism to Moderate Wahhābī Doctrine, Journal of the American Oriental Society, 107(2), pp.279-292, p.280

became faster with the influence of external factors as well as internal factors. It coincides with this period when Saud Family trying to centralize and took the necessary steps to end the struggle between the tribes and transition from the chieftaincy to a modern state.

3.1.3 *State- building*

As of the beginning of the 20th century, with the institutionalization of the above-mentioned religious-political authority, a process of establishing a Riyadh-centered state was started. In the 20th century, the concept of a centralized state in the Najd region marked a fresh departure from the centuries-long dominance of independent tribes and fragmented tribal confederations. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Saudis made two attempts to establish a centralized state in the Najd region, primarily through territorial conquest and political alliances. However, due to insufficient institutional capacities and some external factors, they could not establish a permanent Saudi authority. It should also be added that while previous attempts were mostly in the form of tribal organization, with the 20th century the idea of institutionalized central state came to the fore. *“The Saudi state (...) turned from a nascent, tribal chieftaincy, to a more organized, monarchical state, and finally into a wealthy, bureaucratized state.”*⁶⁷ This state-building process, which progressed towards a central and more organized state, started with Ibn Saud becoming a Saudi ruler. The process from 1902 to the establishment of the contemporary Saudi state was shaped by the policies put forward by Ibn Saud. As a matter of fact, these policies determined the character of the state and with some differences after its establishment, Ibn Saud's order lead to the emergence of a permanent central authority.

Here a modern conception of the state emerged, because now the Saudi-Wahhabi ideology aimed more than a sultanate or tribal chieftaincy, ongoing conquests were an indication of this. *“With the conquest of Hijaz, Ibn Saud was faced with governing a country that was far more developed than Najd or even al-Hasa.”*⁶⁸ It should be noted according to the Weberian definition of modern state, *“the modern state is an institutional form of rule that has successfully fought to create a monopoly of legitimate physical force as a means of government within a*

⁶⁷ Kostiner, J., (2000), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London& Colorado, p.131

⁶⁸ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.268

particular territory”⁶⁹. Regarding the particular territory, “*the state of Saudi Arabia is composed of four historically distinct regions: the central region of Najd, the eastern region of Ahsa, the western region of Hejaz, and the south-western region of Asir*”⁷⁰. An evaluation has been made above about the socio-economic history of the Najd and Hijaz region, which determines the character of the state to a great extent. Of course, being a Najd-centered state caused the socio-cultural and socio-political structure of this region to be more dominant in the new state structure. “*The institution of the monarchy in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has traditionally been regarded as fundamentally congruent with the kingdom’s basic sociocultural characteristics, in so doing, structured to befit the tribal formations that underpin Saudi society.*”⁷¹

“*Monopolisation of power in the Saudi state was facilitated by the existence of a cultural foundation composed of a tribal system with Islam as its religious value system.*”⁷² It can be said that the Saudi state originated from monarchy, tribal tradition, and religion. These three intertwined elements determined the character of the Saudi state-building. As Kostiner argues, “*the Saudi monarchy can be divided into three main functions: (1) as a ruling institution; (2) as the royal family; (3) as a religious mechanism*”⁷³. Wahhabism provided the symbolic source and legitimacy to consolidate this tripartite function of the monarchy. In addition, while the ruling and religious class was formed through alliances thanks to political marriage as a part of the tribal tradition, the tribes that were not connected to the monarchy by marriage provided human resources in the military sense.

Unlike Western states influenced by social contract theory and emphasizing individual rights and democratic participation, the Saudi state's unique blend of the three elements introduced a distinct relationship between the state and society. In other words, a social contract defines the duties and rights of each individual and rulers, sets forth social law and ensures that societies are governed as a state. So doing, a bargain was made between the state and individuals, and the boundary between the private and the public sphere was established. However, it was not possible to talk about a total bargain between the Saudi state and individuals; here bargaining

⁶⁹ Weber, M., et. al (2004), *The Vocation Lectures: Science as a Vocation, Politics as a Vocation*, Hackett Pub., Indianapolis, p.38

⁷⁰ Saouli, A., (2014), *The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation*. Routledge, New York, p.70

⁷¹ Kostiner, J., (2000), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London & Colorado, p.131)

⁷² Saouli, A., (2014), *The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation*. Routledge, New York, p.79

⁷³ Kostiner, J., (2000), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London & Colorado, p.132-133)

excluded each individual and caused a bargaining between groups and the state. *“In Saudi Arabia the social contract may be seen more as a set of multiple, implicit pacts made by the Al Saud with various constituencies -with the rest of the royal family, religious clerics, business elites, tribal leaders, and different social groups- rather than as a single deal that the state makes with citizens.”*⁷⁴

One of the reasons for this was that there was very strong kinship ties and the loyalty within the tribe was high. Therefore, members of every tribe who declare their loyalty to the royal family or agree on a bargain would also accept this loyalty and bargain. Also, it could be naturally acceptable that the tribes belonging to the royal family, which expanded and strengthened with political marriages, exclude individuality in order not to lose the powerful position they had acquired. Another reason is that the Saudi ruler was not only a political leader, but also a religious leader. Due to this dual character of the leader, a notion -bayaa- what early Islamic state experienced created a bond and loyalty between the state and other groups. *“After the foundation of the Islamic State, Prophet Muhammad made and encouraged bayaa of religio-political nature. the Prophet, while taking oath of allegiance from the leaders of different clans and tribes, used to lay the conditions that they would believe in the unity of Allah, Prophethood of Muhammad offer the prayers and pay Zakat.”*⁷⁵ A similar allegiance through oath between the state and groups, which was due to political and religious reasons legalized the right of the Saudis to rule.

In the Saudi version of this social contract, in which the royal family was strong, and the political power of the tribes increased, the distribution of wealth and administrative positions was arranged in favor of these groups. In the beginning of 21st century as Niblock highlights *“the royal family constitutes 7,000 princes dominating the major positions in security, military, and bureaucratic apparatuses”*⁷⁶. Not only did the Saudi family profit from this distribution, but also the religious clerks received an important proportion from this distribution. *“While the Saudis have concentrated their power in the spheres of politics, security and economics, the religious elite has focused on justice, education, and religious affairs.”*⁷⁷ The redistribution of wealth was

⁷⁴Kinninmont, J., (2017), Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's Social Contract: Austerity and Transformation. Chatham House Middle East and North Africa Programme, p.17

⁷⁵ Ka Ka Khel, M., N., (1981), Bay'a and Its Political Role in The Early Islamic State, Islamic Studies, 20(3), pp.227-238, p.229

⁷⁶ Saouli, A., (2014), The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation. Routledge, New York, p.80

⁷⁷ Saouli, A., (2014), The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation. Routledge, New York, p.83)

similarly in the hands of the royal family, and the wealth collected at the center was distributed as gifts to the tribes, continuing their previous tradition. Witnessed in the early days of Saudi society, the redistribution shaped by this understanding, “*wealth was redistributed within the ruling elite of al-Diriya in the form of gifts from the ruler to the nobility*”⁷⁸, was still the dominant understanding of redistribution in state-building that began with the 20th century. Thus, in order not to lose their economic and political power, the tribes were condemned to continue their loyalty to the royal family, while the institutions held by the religious clerks continued the legitimacy of the royal family with the assimilation of the tribes included in the religio-political Wahhabi community.

The distribution of wealth and administrative positions in this way shows that “*in contrast to Western experiences, which drew on mobile urban classes and class struggle as stimulants to centralized government, Saudi state bureaucracy resulted from the expedient practical calculations of the local leader*”⁷⁹. This was an indicator of how the Saudi version of the social contract described above shaped the state. This understanding was also applied in the same way in the creation of the consultative assembly. “*As a result of the conquest of al-Hijaz and concerned to apply the Principle of Counsel (al-Shura), King Abd al- Aziz established the Domestic Council (al-Majlis al-Ahli) on 19 December 1924, to help him deal with the affairs of al-Hijaz. This was the nucleus of the Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura) which was established on 13 January 1926.*”⁸⁰ The Saudi ruler did not neglect to honor the nobility tribes; in this way, he wanted to prevent a threat from local powers to the central authority. Following the Hijaz invasion, it could be said that Ibn Saud aimed to create a political Saudi Arabian community rather than expand religio-political Wahhabi community in the state. Therefore, although the Najdi Wahhabi nobility opposed, he “*took account of the interests of the Hijazi nobility and the majlis al-shura including representatives of the Hijazi nobility was created*”⁸¹. These two regions, which had two different socio-political structures, came under the control of a

⁷⁸ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.121

⁷⁹ Khoury, P., S., and Kostiner P., (1990), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p.233

⁸⁰ Al-Kahtani, M., Z., (2004), *The Foreign Policy of King Abdulaziz (1927- 1953) A Study in The International Relations of An Emerging State* [The Doctorate Thesis], Department of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Leeds, p.84

⁸¹ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.269

ruler in this way. Thus, “Ibn Saud emerged as a unifier of the main Saudi provinces -Najd and the Hijaz- by representing and balancing their interests one against the other”⁸².

The policy of balance and representation among the regions was another factor determining the character of the Saudi state. The kingdom was in the form of a system that united two different state structures rather than providing a whole regarding administrative, legal, and political terms. “*As for laws and the legal system, Najd and Hijaz are two independent kingdoms, which share only the common throne and the person who occupies it. There were substantial differences in the administration of Najd and Hijaz.*”⁸³ These two independent kingdom phenomena permanently continued for a long time; so that, “*the unification of the Saudi judicial system only took place in 1959*”⁸⁴. It could be seen some elements regarding Ibn Saud’s political agenda in dual legal system, “*King Abd al-Aziz insisted that the institutions of the Hijaz and its dependencies continue to function as before and autonomously, no doubt in the hope of extending this relatively modern system to the rest of the kingdom*”⁸⁵. However, although there are two different judicial systems, due to the excess of social capital of the Hijaz, “*in 1932 following the Kingdom’s unification, all legislation in force in the Hijaz was extended throughout Saudi Arabia*”⁸⁶ but by applying Hanbali jurisprudence. It was obvious “*after unification, it appears that the Hanbali School has become the predominant philosophy with the other schools serving as secondary philosophies when the Hanbali tradition can offer no guidance on a particular issue.*”⁸⁷ The inclusion of the Hijaz region in the Saudi state caused some changes in the economic field as well as the change in the political structure. “*After the conquest of Hijaz, the tax on pilgrims brought huge revenues to the state exchequer.*”⁸⁸ With the pilgrimage income, with the advantage of the trade and industrialization that developed in the Hijaz region, the economic center for the Saudi state shifted from the Najd to the Hijaz.

Regarding Weberian state definition, creating a monopoly of legitimate physical force is one another factor of building state. Ibn Saud noticed that the necessity of forming a regular

⁸² Kostiner, J., (2000), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London & Colorado, p.133

⁸³ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.293

⁸⁴ Mouline, N., (2014), *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*. Translated by Ethan S Rundell, Yale University Press, New Haven, p.139

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 139

⁸⁶ Baroni, S., (2006), *Saudi Arabia and Expansionist Wahhabism*, [Master’s Thesis], the Department of Political Science, the University of Central Florida, p.59

⁸⁷ <https://apps.law.wustl.edu/GSLR/CitationManual/countries/saudi-arabia.pdf>

⁸⁸ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, 305

army in order not to fall into the mistakes experienced in previous state-building processes. In a sense, it was a monopoly of physical force, because physical force consolidated in the hands of the central state meant eliminating the military effectiveness of the tribes, especially the Bedouin tribes. With the contribution of the Wahhabi ideology, political authority created an armed group, Ikhwan, for monopolizing of legitimate physical force. *“The Ikhwan provided him not only with an army but with a police force.”*⁸⁹ Also, *“the religious police, or mutawwa, was probably formed in 1903 and headed by one of the descendants of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, to enforce Wahhabi doctrines and modes of conduct in the newly conquered Saudi domains”*⁹⁰. This structure, which was based on a religious basis, took an active role in the implementation of the Wahhabi doctrine and Islamic rules in the Saudi society, however, the police force still did not have a modern structure; there was no police force that was not based rather on religious affiliation.

However, when the borders reached the limit of the contemporary Saudi state, Ikhwan became a threat. The first Ikhwan’s desire to continue the conquests with the understanding of jihad, the second, the attacks against different religious groups within the new borders were the indicators of this. Acting contrary to the policies of central authority, the Ikhwan stood as an obstacle to the monopolization of physical force. Thus, there was a *“dispute which prevailed during this period between the Saudi leader, Ibn Saud, and a collection of tribal groups, the Ikhwan, fiercely loyal to Islam but resistant to the Saudi state-building process”*⁹¹. Ibn Saud resorted to various ways to weaken the Ikhwan power and reduce its effectiveness. First, *“with the assistance of mutawwa (the League of Public Morality), the Ikhwan were debarred from supervising the observance of religious prescriptions. Tribal democracy in its religious form was sacrificed to the state apparatus of the centralized feudal kingdom.”*⁹² Then, *“the monarch defeated and repressed the Ikhwan in 1929”*⁹³, and established the Saudi National Guard. *“The Saudis have denied the tribes independent access to arms and channeled tribal military power*

⁸⁹ Helms, C., M., (2015). *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia: Evolution of Political Identity*, Routledge, New York, p.155

⁹⁰ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.261

⁹¹ Kostiner, J., (1996), *State, Islam, and Opposition in Saudi Arabia: The Post-Desert Storm Phase, Terrorism and Political Violence*, 8:2, pp.75-89, p.75

⁹² Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.271

⁹³ Bowen, W. H., (2008), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Greenwood, Westport, p.141

into the national guard, where units are organized along tribal lines but are under the control of the ruling family."⁹⁴

In Hijaz unlike Najd, *"as early as 1925 a general security board was formed in Mecca, and the general directorate of police emerged"*⁹⁵. This organization, which had a modern organizational structure, later expanded throughout the country, and became a police force. Subsequently, the religious police *"integrated into the police force before the foundation of the kingdom in 1932, turning them, like the ulama, into agents of the government"*⁹⁶. In this way, Ibn Saud monopolized the use of physical force and *"in the formative years the king formed the central figure within the monarchy, acting as imam, military commander, and supreme executive"*⁹⁷.

Apart from these, another element that had an important share in the Saudi state-building was the policy of sedentarising the Bedouins. As mentioned before, one of the biggest obstacles to the emergence of a central authority in the region was the strong position of the Bedouins in the region. That's why the Saudi family's policy against the Bedouins becomes more meaningful in the state building process. *"Saudi rule over Najd and adjacent territories, driven by Wahhabi doctrine, aimed at breaking Bedouin autonomy."*⁹⁸ One of the most effective ways to achieve this was sedentarising Bedouins, so that they will move away from the lifestyle they have created for centuries. *"The tribal organization of the Arabs had to be broken up before the virile qualities of the Badawin could be used effectively in the building up of a homogeneous and powerful state, and Ibn Sa'ud saw from the beginning that a policy of agricultural settlement afforded the only hope of success."*⁹⁹ In this way the Saudi rule would both take over the activities that give political and economic power to Bedouins, such as the control of caravan routes and the protection of the settlers and include the military power of the Bedouins in the central power.

The first settlement effort was an outcome of Ibn Saud's adherence to religion to induce Bedouin sedentarization. It could be said that Islamic values and Wahhabi ideology are the only rational means to give up this lifestyle for groups that have accepted the nomadic lifestyle. These

⁹⁴ Kostiner, J., (2000), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London & Colorado, p.174

⁹⁵ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.261

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.261

⁹⁷ Saouli, A., (2014), *The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation*. Routledge, New York, p.80

⁹⁸ Franz, K., (2011), *The Bedouin in History or Bedouin History? Nomadic Peoples*, 15(1), 11–53, p. 36

⁹⁹ Philby, B., (1926), *The Triumph of the Wahhabis*, *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 13(4), pp.293–319, p.299

groups, which had to be settled for the construction of a permanent central state, could only be successfully settled with lifestyle promoted by Islam. As a matter of fact, although Wahhabism spread rapidly among these groups, it was not observed that they have settled down at the same speed. Therefore, the political authority had to resort to a different method to settle the Bedouins, and this new method emerged with the establishment of the Ikhwan . *“They used to stress the message that Islam is a sedentary religion, and that they had to abandon their nomadic life because they lived in a condition of jahl, that is of ignorance of Islam. Then they were invited to build and settle in a new kind of agricultural community called hijra.”*¹⁰⁰ By referencing a pre-Islamic period, they promoted that the transition from the jahiliyyah period of the nomads to a new Islamic based enlightenment was possible only by transitioning to a settled life. Settlement of the Bedouins was such a comprehensive project that it would both eliminate the autonomy of the Bedouins and cause social and economic transformation. *“The settlers supposedly abandoned their traditional Bedouin lifestyle and their tribal loyalties, adapting to sedentarization, agriculture, and a strict puritan Wahhabi way of life.”*¹⁰¹

*“To sum up, the emergence of Saudi Arabia as a modern state began in January 1902 with the daring capture of Riyadh by Ibn Saud.”*¹⁰² In this process, which started in 1902, Ibn Saud tried to consolidate the central power, the necessity of the modern state, and aimed to reduce the social tension in the society. *“The creation of a centralized state corresponded to the overall interests of the feudal-tribal nobility, the merchants, and the majority of the population, ensuring security and putting an end to tribal feud.”*¹⁰³ Due to the inability to establish an individual-based state, the consolidation of power stemmed from tribal traditions. *“Its evolution into an organized state in the 1930s, with fixed international borders, a centralizing government and a policy geared toward economic development was balanced by the maintenance of personalized, informal decision-making at the top, contacts between the rulers and the lower ranks, intermarriage between princes and commoners and cultivation of the senior ulama’s position.”*¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Christie, K., and Masad. M., (2013), *State Formation and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa*. Springer, p.90

¹⁰¹Kostiner, J., (1993), *The making of Saudi Arabia, 1916-1936: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State*, Oxford University Press, New York, p.35

¹⁰² Hudson, M., C., (1977), *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, p. 171

¹⁰³ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.287

¹⁰⁴ Kostiner, J., (1996), *State, Islam, and Opposition in Saudi Arabia: The Post-Desert Storm Phase, Terrorism and Political Violence*, 8:2, pp.75-89, p.77

3.1.4 *Rentier system*

One of the biggest factors determining the character of the Saudi state is that it has a rentier economy based on oil revenues. The significant increase in oil revenues led to the strengthening of the bureaucracy and with it the increase in the central authority. “*Saudi Arabia had a somewhat history of sovereignty since the 1920s, but there, the modern state remained embryonic up to the 1960s.*”¹⁰⁵ As mentioned above, Arabia did not have sufficient economic resources for a centralized and modern state, but even if a central state was established with different means such as compulsory zakat introduced by the Saudi-Wahhabi ideology, it was not possible to talk about a fully strong centralized modern state. It could be argued that the availability of abundant oil revenues to the Saudi central government was a decisive factor in the establishment of a modern Saudi state.

Prior to the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia, the central government had limited resources to invest and that why the country was categorized underdeveloped state. However, the influx of oil revenue from the 1960s onwards allowed the Saudi government to invest heavily in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and other sectors. Due to the rapid and significant increase in oil revenues, Saudi Arabia experienced rapid economic and social transformation. This transformation deeply affected political life as well as socio-economic structure. Saudi Arabia used its oil revenues to establish a modern bureaucracy and build military and security apparatus. Although important steps were taken in the field of centralization and modernization thanks to the income obtained from oil, Saudi Arabia also encountered many of the problems faced by oil-based economies. What is important here is that the high effortless income in such countries is the main problem, rather than which goods constitute an economy. To understand such political and economic systems, the concepts of rentier state or rentier economy have been coined in the literature.

While many states receive rent income, the term "rentier state" is only used to describe a small number of states with particularly high levels of rent income. The reason for this is that rent incomes are deeply affected by the social, political, and economic structures of these states. Mahdavy coined the concept of rentier state, “*defined as those countries that receive on a*

¹⁰⁵ Hertog, S., (2016), *The Oil-Driven Nation-Building of The Gulf States After World War II*, in: Peterson, J. E., (ed.) *The Emergence of the Gulf States: Studies in Modern History*. Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 323-352, p.323

regular basis substantial amount of external rent”¹⁰⁶. Here, the most important element of rentier economy is the regular external rents from foreigners. “*The existence of an internal rent, even substantial, is not sufficient to characterize a rentier economy, though it could indicate the existence of a strong rentier class or group.*”¹⁰⁷ According to these definitions, to be classified as a rentier state, a state must meet some criteria. First, the state's rent income must be external and continuous. This means that the income must come from sources outside of the country, such as the export of natural resources or foreign investment. It also means that the income must be relatively stable and predictable. Then, the state's rent income must account for a significant share of its budget. This means that the state must rely heavily on rent income to fund its operations.

The concept of the rentier state is a useful tool for understanding not only the economic structure of a state, but also its sociopolitical and sociocultural structures. It is possible to see similarities in both economic structure and social structure in the states defined as rentier states in the literature. In this context, when looking at the literature scholars argue that “*Saudi Arabia is a classic rentier state*”¹⁰⁸. The definition of Saudi Arabia as a rentier state reveals some of its characteristics. Regarding to Saudi Arabia’s sociocultural structure, the existence of an understanding such as the provision of services such education, health, etc. as gifts and identifying the king as father may prevent the emergence of political demands. Since providing basic services as a gift and citizens not making any effort to access them causes citizens to be in a more passive position in political life. In addition, defining the owner of power as the father indicates the existence of a patrimonial relationship in state administration, and in traditional societies, opposing the father of the family or not fulfilling his wishes is considered a great disrespect. In other words, not every decision of the king is open to question. This can lead to a situation where citizens do not feel the need to hold the government accountable or to participate in the political process. It is sure to accept that the 'no taxation, no representation' understanding directly determines the political and social structure of the rentier states, but it should not be limited to only the economy-politics relationship. It should be added that also social relations support the structure arising from this economic-politics relationship. It is inevitable that political

¹⁰⁶ Mahdavy, H., (1970), The Pattern and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran, in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, M.A. Cook(ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.428.

¹⁰⁷ Beblawi, H., (1987), The Rentier State in the Arab World. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 9(4), pp.383–398, p.385

¹⁰⁸ Okruhlik, G., (1999), Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States. *Comparative Politics*, 31(3), pp.295–315, p.297

demands will decrease in societies where the relationship between the government and the people is shaped by emotional ties rather than rational preferences, as in the case of Saudi Arabia. This may cause that a weakened civil society and a population reluctant to participate in political processes as well as in the other rentier systems because “*non-governmental interests are usually organized around the state's allocation system*”¹⁰⁹.

Another discussion on rentier economy in Saudi Arabia is that Saudi Arabia has Mecca and Medina as religious cities. Some scholars argue that pilgrimage is a kind of rentier income while some denies and considers this as a tourist activity. So, pilgrimage is not effortless income and state needs to invest in these cities. This can be acceptable, but there are some similarities between pilgrimage income and rentier income. More accurately, pilgrimage income and rentier income affect societies in similar way. As mentioned above, pilgrimage provided Hijazi nobles an effortless income from the central government during Ottoman period. Therefore, most of tribes having effortless income or gift were not interested in production. In similar way, tribes benefiting from the distribution of rentier incomes are not interested in production. Rental incomes therefore have profound effects on productivity and Beblawi points out that the rentier economy creates “*a specific mentality: a rentier mentality. The basic assumption about the rentier mentality and that which distinguishes it from conventional economic behavior is that it embodies a break in the work-reward causation.*”¹¹⁰ The emergence of the rentier has created a break from an economic model plan that Ibn Saud aimed at in the early stages of state building, so, from agriculture. However, rentier sources made it impossible to create an economic model envisioned by Ibn Saud, aiming transformation from this unproductive method to agriculture-based productivity, in Saudi Arabia. In other words, the emergence of the oil-based economy has been an impediment to the change in economic behavior in Saudi Arabia. It can be said that Saudi Arabia's evolution into a structure that is far from a production economy and where the main actor of the economy is the state has come to a different point than it had imagined at the time of its establishment.

In addition to the rentier mentality, the rentier economic model also reveals other problems in the economic field. The rentier economic model is fully dependent on external factors, as evidenced by the fact that the state relies heavily on foreign income and is unable to

¹⁰⁹ Schwarz, R., (2008), The Political Economy of State-Formation in The Arab Middle East: Rentier States, Economic Reform, and Democratization, *Review of International Political Economy*, 15(4), pp.599-621, p. 610

¹¹⁰ Beblawi, H., (1987), The Rentier State in the Arab World, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 9(4), pp.383-398., p.385

develop its own agricultural and industrial sectors, making it dependent on imports to meet its needs. In contrast to the Protestant work ethic, which is said to have caused the spread of capitalism, the rentier economic model prioritizes spending over work. This lack of willingness to participate in production and external dependency with a willingness to spend cause both individual and government expenditures to be high. One of the main reasons why government expenditures are high in rentier states is the large size of the bureaucracy. However, “*they serve the function of an employer of last resort, and contrary to Europe not as an effective tool of state politics*”¹¹¹. “*There the share of nationals in public employment since the 1970s boom has been much higher than elsewhere in either the developed or developing world.*”¹¹² The other reason for high government expenditures is the making of spectacular projects. These two expenditure items show that in order for the legitimacy to continue, the public must have an opinion that a significant portion of their rent income is spent for the government's expenses. Otherwise, a request may arise for the reorganization of the rent allocation. In other words, the state uses bureaucracy as a job creation mechanism so that political demands do not arise and mobilizes the public's feelings with spectacular projects.

In addition to their common features, the issue worth discussing is the differences experienced by rentier states and capitalist states in the modernization process. The fact that the sources of income obtained by rentier states and capitalist states are different has caused the political economies and socio-cultural structures of these states to be clearly different. To understand these differences, in literature rentier state theory is developed. “*Rentier state theory starts from the claim that the influx of oil rent determines state-society relations.*”¹¹³ As Mahdavy points out in 60's, “*Saudi Arabia that pass quickly from being a traditional society to being a Rentier State may achieve fairly substantial average per capita incomes, without going through the organizational changes which are usually associated with the process of capitalistic (or socialistic) economic growth*”. Thus, the transformations that capitalist economic growth has caused in society have not been seen in rentier states. As noted above, capitalist growth created new classes such as the bourgeoisie and the middle class and followed by democratic political

¹¹¹ Schwarz, R., (2008), The Political Economy of State-Formation in The Arab Middle East: Rentier States, Economic Reform, and Democratization, *Review of International Political Economy*, 15(4), pp.599-621, p. 601.

¹¹² Hertog, S., (2016), The Oil-Driven Nation-Building of The Gulf States After World War II, in: Peterson, J. E., (ed.) *The Emergence of the Gulf States: Studies in Modern History*. Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 323-352, p.337

¹¹³ Baumann, H., (2019), The transformation of Saudi Arabia's rentier state and 'the international', *Globalizations*, 16(7), pp.1165-1183, p.1168

systems. However, although there is an increase in the incomes of individuals, the emergence of these classes as an important social actor is not observed in rentier states. “*Rentier states display a particular path to state-formation that by and large defies the European path of state-formation: natural resource dependence (mainly oil dependence) has created weak states that are autonomous from societal demands and that do not rely on domestic taxation.*”¹¹⁴ Also, in the case of Saudi Arabia, it should not be forgotten that the distribution of wealth is not based on the individual, but on the tribe and religious institute.

As Sachs and Warner (1999) point out “*resource booms lead to lower economic growth*”¹¹⁵. However, it can also be said that rentier economies are not stable due to high external dependence. This is different from the economic growth seen in capitalist states and when considered in the long term, we encounter a lower growth in rentier state. Lower economic growth may lead to bigger problems as the population reliant on rental income grows. As mentioned above, the unproductive lifestyle causes the government to provide employment opportunities to a large portion of the population to avoid high unemployment rates and other economic problems. As in the example of Saudi Arabia, the bureaucracy in rentier states is overly swollen because few people want to be employed in the private sector due to the rentier mentality.

3.1.5 Reforms

The concept of reform is equivalent to the order of the monarch in the Saudi state. That is, it is not possible to talk about a strategic reform sequence dominated by the state bureaucracy, but it could be said that after a prince became the Saudi king the reforms shaped by the personal character of the king were made to ensure his own legitimacy and preserve his central power. Due to the nature of the Saudi state, it could be said that a new order was introduced following each king change. Thus, it is possible to carry on a large-scale discussion under the title of reform in Saudi Arabia; however, talking about the reforms that cause transformation in social structures is a priority for a healthier discussion in this thesis. Therefore, in the following

¹¹⁴ Schwarz, R. (2008). The political economy of state-formation in the Arab Middle East: Rentier states, economic reform, and democratization, *Review of International Political Economy* 15(4), 599-621, p. 602-603

¹¹⁵ Baumann, H., (2019), The Transformation of Saudi Arabia's Rentier State and 'The International', *Globalizations*, 16(7), pp.1165-1183, p.1168

discussion, instead of mentioning each reform, it will be examined how the continuity and rupture of the reforms affected the Saudi Arabian society.

After unification was achieved in 1932 under the name of the kingdom, an independent Saudi state was established under the leadership of Ibn Saud. However, this state established its existence without modern bureaucratic institutions. As stated above, Ibn Saud's bureaucratic structure was shaped by personal connections and informal ways. Providing legitimacy through the social contract called bayaa necessitated the formation of a clientelistic network between the king and the tribe leaders. After Ibn Saud's death, his son, Crown Prince Saud bin Abdulaziz, was appointed king and proclaimed his intention to carry on the traditions and principles his father espoused. However, some of the decisions he took were important for the state to reach a modern structure. The first of these steps taken towards centralization was "*the establishment of a 'majlis al-wuzara', the council of ministers, for the whole kingdom by the decree of October 1953*"¹¹⁶. Following the establishment of the council of ministers, "*Saud established several new ministries: Ministry of Agriculture and Water, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Communication*"¹¹⁷. However, this effort for bureaucratic modernization did not find any response in King Saud's political understanding, and it is observed that the personal and informal administrative structure did not change. It is also observed that social inequalities increased in this period. Obtaining oil revenues harmed the economic activity of the producing segment of society. "*The opening up of the economy to imports, which so benefited the commercial establishment, virtually destroyed the handicrafts sector of the economy and seriously damaged the agricultural and pastoral sectors.*"¹¹⁸ Another factor that supports economic inequality is King Saud's spending from state property and treasury as a personal resource. "*the King's personal treasury; it was used by him on the royal palaces and establishments, and on providing subsidies and favours to other members of the Al Su'ud, the tribal leaders and some religious leaders.*"¹¹⁹ "*He was a spendthrift even before he became king, and this tendency became a more crucial issue when he controlled the kingdom's purse strings.*"¹²⁰ As observed during the Saud's reign, "*despite increasing income from oil, a deficit in the state budget remained, illiteracy and*

¹¹⁶ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.444

¹¹⁷ Wynbrandt, J., (2004), *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.210

¹¹⁸ Niblock, T., (2006), *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, Routledge, London; New York, p.31

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p.31

¹²⁰ Metz, H., C., (ed), (1993), *Saudi Arabia: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division; Library of Congress, Washington, p.28

*health problems proliferated, and new public construction hardly met demand. The patrimonial, minimalistic administration was obviously insufficient*¹²¹.

Problems such as increasing social inequality, impoverishment, budget deficit, and informal administrative structure brought the Saud regime into question and faced a crisis of legitimacy. A power struggle arose between King Saud, Prince Talal and Prince Faisal. Prince Talal sought to resolve the problems on a legal basis, he *“had proposed creating an advisory national council as a first step toward establishing a constitutional monarchy”*¹²². Prince Faisal believes that the solution to the problems was possible through the centralization of the economic-political system and economic and social reforms. It should be noted that King Saud's ministerial organization consisted of free structures and princes who acted independently of each other, lacking cooperation and communication. King Saud's efforts to remain in power were inadequate and *“in 1964 the royal family, with the consent of the ulama, or religious leaders, deposed Saud and made Faisal king”*¹²³. King Faisal's priority was to implement the reforms he proposed to solve the problems. *“In the very first year of his rule, Faisal decided that the king should be ex-officio prime minister, assumed real executive power, appointed, and dismissed ministers and approved their resignations. All ministers were directly subordinate to Faisal.”*¹²⁴ *“Faisal promoted more modern institutions of rule to boost his otherwise inferior standing, trying to curtail the royal budget and to enforce cabinet rule.”*¹²⁵ *“The first two years of Faisal's governmental authority saw little progress towards the coherent planning of economic and social development. The main focus was, necessarily, on austerity and retrenchment.”*¹²⁶

King Faisal's administrative modernization did not erode traditional structures, and he even took steps to enable Wahhabi institutions to take more part in the social and political arena, emphasizing that Wahhabi doctrine was important for social cohesion. Investing him as *“King and Imam of Saudi Arabia”*¹²⁷ was a factor that allowed him to grow under the control of the religious structure. *“Faysal wanted a dynamic, healthy, and modernized society that lived well,*

¹²¹ Khoury, P., S., and Kostiner P., (1990), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p.240

¹²² Wynbrandt, J., (2004), *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.220

¹²³ Metz, H., C., (ed), (1993), *Saudi Arabia: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division; Library of Congress, Washington, p. xxii

¹²⁴ Vassiliev, A., (2000), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Saqi Books Publishers, London, p.368

¹²⁵ Hertog, S., (2011), *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia*, Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell University Press, London, p.80

¹²⁶ Niblock, T., (2006), *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, Routledge, London; New York, p.34

¹²⁷ Knauerhase, R. (1975). *Saudi Arabia: A brief history*. *Current History*, 68(402), pp. 74-79, 82-83, 88, p.79

but he also wanted it to remain religiously conservative and socioculturally traditional. He maintained a strong Islamic establishment, backed by government authority, which promoted Wahhabi values through mosque preaching and the 'morals police'."¹²⁸ The increasing influence of the religious structure in the administrative and political fields, on the one hand, caused them to gain more power, and on the other hand, being under the control of King Faisal caused them to act together with the government. *"The king granted them extensive administrative power over education, judiciary, and the morality police as a quid pro quo in which they agreed to tolerate institutional and legal modernization in other areas, trends they had often tried to prevent."*¹²⁹ King Faisal took action both to bring the independent ministries of the previous period into a coordinated structure and to comprehensively advance modernization and institutionalization reforms. *"Under Faisal's direction the Central Planning Organization was established, and the first five-year plan unveiled in 1970, covering defense, education, transport, and utilities."*¹³⁰

Here, firstly it should be mentioned that the plans in the field of education because these plans included plans that would increase both the establishment of schools and the schooling rate. One of the radical changes for Saudi society was the introduction of the first program for girls' schooling. However, it should be considered that both the tribal rules and Wahhabi institutions constitute a major obstacle to the schooling of these girls. As a matter of fact, the schooling of girls did not bring about a social transformation and remained a step towards girls becoming literate at a low rate under the religious curriculum. Another radical change regarding these plans was the introduction of the welfare system in order to eliminate social inequality. The efficiency and income of the productive tribes and individuals was causing serious losses due to the increasing oil revenues in this period. *"The vestiges of the pastoral economy, which could have given them some economic autonomy, were largely destroyed through the importation of foreign products."*¹³¹ The King Faisal's welfare system to address these issues included *"no income tax, health services and education were free, and food, electricity, and water were heavily*

¹²⁸ Kostiner, J., (2000), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London&Colorado p.137

¹²⁹ Hertog, S., (2011), *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia*, Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell University Press, London, p.92

¹³⁰ Wynbrandt, J., (2004), *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.226

¹³¹ Hertog, S., (2011), *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia*, Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell University Press, London, p.94

*subsidized*¹³². On the other hand, as a result of the combination of the formation of an oil-based economy, which caused the restriction of job opportunities in the private sector, and the unproductive mentality created by this welfare system, the public sector turned into the main employment tool.

The expansion of administrative structures in the name of bureaucratic modernization was inevitable for centralization, but the lack of an accompanying private sector growth caused the society to become increasingly dependent on state subsidies. Another situation that accompanies this is the acceleration of settlement policies as a result of the damage to the pastoral economy. Sedentization, which was in Ibn Saud's political agenda, continued during the reign of King Saud and “*the transition from Bedouin society to a settled*”¹³³ was observed. During the reign of King Faisal, both within a plan and as a result of the newly emerging economic understanding, sedentization gained momentum and resulted in the settlement and urbanization of a large part of the tribes who adopted pastoral life. Tribe chiefs, who were now settled by urbanized and became closer to the palace, began to play an active role in the political arena. “*Tribal chiefs who acted as mediators between the central government and individual tribal members became large landowners and joined the upper class.*”¹³⁴ As a result, on the one hand, tribe leaders who gained political power increased their economic power by gaining more power from power sharing. On the other hand, tribe leaders who could not reach political power had to support government policies due to the dependence on governmental subsidies. In both, tribe leaders integrated into the government became supporting elements for the establishment of a modern state, and the chieftaincy was eroded.

As mentioned above, another group that increased its political power along with the tribal leaders was the Wahhabi institutions. It was obvious that they had increased their activities in many areas, from education to social life, from law to bureaucracy. One of the important points that created a breaking point in the Saudi state building was their increasing influence in the legal system. This inevitably led to the increasing influence of sharia in both civil law and administrative law. “*Since the 1960s, manifold quasi-judicial bodies have arisen in technocratic ministries to avoid commercial matters from falling into the hands of the ulama, progressively*

¹³² Kostiner, J., (2000), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London&Colorado p.137

¹³³ Knauerhase, R. (1975), *Saudi Arabia: A Brief History*. *Current History*, 68(402), pp. 74-79, 82-83, 88, p.79

¹³⁴ Khoury, P., S., and Kostiner J., (1990), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p.244

fragmenting jurisdictions.”¹³⁵ It should be underlined that, although the Wahhabi institutions were active in many areas and increased their socio-economic and socio-political power, they had to act under the control of the King. In other words, their dependence on King Faisal partially prevented these institutions from acting autonomously. However, their staffing in the bureaucracy and their becoming an important part of institutionalization would lead to deep social and political problems in the post-King Faisal period.

To sum, “*during King Faisal's reign, a new stage of state building emerged, focusing on the reforms introduced to remedy the shortcomings of the earlier state order.*”¹³⁶ “*Faysal's monarchical order provided a regime that defined royal functions, social welfare, and social cohesion.*”¹³⁷ While a modern state, on the one hand, tries to centralize by establishing new ministries and arranging their duties on behalf of the institution, on the other hand, it tries to prevent the budget deficit from being a chronic problem. In addition, he gave importance to the religious structure and did not hesitate to bear the title of imam, making the Wahhabi doctrine effectively felt in the administrative and social areas for social cohesion. Moreover, the welfare system and the fact that a large part of the society had become dependent on state subsidies had strengthened his legitimacy. Both piety and increasing the loyalty of the tribes formed the basis of his source of legitimacy. He instituted the state by ensuring a balance between modernization and tradition. Furthermore, the increase in bureaucracy and the educated class has led to a new middle class, on the other hand, it has deepened the existing social contract with oath loyalty and updated it with rentier income sharing. “*Social change in Saudi Arabia accelerated in the 1970s, and the Kingdom witnessed modernization along many of the standard criteria: higher incomes, vastly improved education, rapid urbanization, a larger middle class.*”¹³⁸ As can be seen, King Faisal's reforms both introduce the new and modify the old and ensure its continuation.

The order established by King Faisal to create his own regime was used as a guide to shape the Saudi state structure for a long time, and King Khalid and his successor King Fahd continued King Faisal's order without major changes. “*As king, Khalid continued Faisal's efforts*

¹³⁵ Hertog, S., (2011), *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia*, Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell University Press, London, p.93

¹³⁶ Kostiner, J., (1996), *State, Islam, and Opposition in Saudi Arabia: The Post-Desert Storm Phase, Terrorism and Political Violence*, 8:2, pp.75-89, p.77

¹³⁷ Kostiner, J., (2000), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London & Colorado p.137

¹³⁸ Hertog, S., (2011), *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia*, Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell University Press, London, p.133

to expand the economy, social programs, and educational system while also stressing orthodoxy and conservatism within society.”¹³⁹ It should be noted that King Fahd was one of the most influential princes of King Faisal's reign and was a supporter of King Faisal's reforms. It could be a reason why not a dramatic change in Faisal's Order during the reign of King Khalid as “*Fahd became the de facto head of government*”¹⁴⁰. The biggest factor that shaped the aftermath of King Faisal's reign was the legitimacy crisis experienced by the Saudi dynasty. Both Fahd's de facto leadership and the opposition of tribe leaders and Wahhabi institutions freed from Faisal control have caused the regime to be questioned. In addition, becoming dependent had created economic stagnation, and economic problems have deepened, especially in the periphery. In order to solve these problems, administrative, legal and economic reforms were planned.

Constitutional monarchy, a system defended by Prince Talal, which was also an issue during the reign of King Faisal, became an agenda item in this period as well. The riots and protests showed that the Saudi dynasty was losing its legitimacy day by day. The constitutional promise, which was on the agenda as the king strengthened his legal legitimacy through religious and socio-economic networks, emerged again as a tool put forward by the kingdom to seek a basis for legitimacy. “*King Khalid promised to promulgate a basic law and to establish a Consultative Council.*”¹⁴¹ Both kings used the idea of basic law, which would regulate both daily life and administrative structures. In addition, the idea of establishing a consultative council received opposition from some segments of the society, especially from the traditional elites involved in the decision-making mechanism. “*The ruling class still refuses to authorize such a concession fearing that such an institution would serve as a springboard to the new elite to advance their demand for participation in decision-making.*”¹⁴²

The emergence of the legitimacy crisis witnessed the uprising of some religious groups who were against modernization and the Saudi regime. “*Traditionalists, religious students, members of tribes that had been excluded from government largesse, affiliates of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood, and some members of the military, especially those descended from the purged Ikhwan military order, believed the monarchy had become too*

¹³⁹ Wynbrandt, J., (2004), *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.226

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p.226

¹⁴¹ Aba-Namay, R., (1993), *The Recent Constitutional Reforms in Saudi Arabia*. *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 42(2), pp. 295-331, p.297

¹⁴² Abir, M. (1987), *The Consolidation of the Ruling Class and the New Elites in Saudi Arabia*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 23(2), pp.150-171, p.166

decadent and pro-Western."¹⁴³ By 1979, with the influence of some events that took place in the international arena, such as the 1979 Iranian revolution and the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, "on 20 November 1979, a group of young Saudi Islamists led by Juhaiman al-Utaiba, who was a Wahhabi hardliner and who claimed that his companion, Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Qahtani, was the expected Mahdi, captured the Grand Mosque in Mecca and took hundreds of Muslim pilgrims as hostages"¹⁴⁴. The group, called the Movement of Muslim Revolutionaries of the Arabian Peninsula, "presented a list of demands, including the dismissal of some senior princes from their posts, the termination of oil sales to the West (which would have drastically reduced the kingdom's income), and a return to genuine Islam"¹⁴⁵. The Saudi government used military force to suppress this uprising by founding a basis for this military intervention thanks to the fatwas given by the ulama. The ulema's support and cooperation with the Saudi government against the radical movement made the existing alliance even stronger.

The riots that took place during this period were not limited to the Grand Mosque seizure; in addition, a number of groups that questioned the legitimacy of Saudi Arabia revolted in the region where the Shiites lived densely. One of the reasons for the Shiite uprising can be said to be the pressure exerted by the Wahhabi institutions on the Shiites. Also, "Shia themselves had been discriminated against as well, prohibited from attending educational institutions and from serving in the army or employment in several professions"¹⁴⁶. Both the Grand Mosque seizure and the unrest in the Eastern Province were suppressed using military force and the efforts of religious institutions. The impact of these unrests on Saudi politics and social life was inevitable. The suppression of the uprisings did not completely eliminate the Saudi legitimacy crisis, on the contrary it caused the extremists to gradually increase their activities and, on the other hand, the strengthening of Wahhabi institutions. "In the aftermath of the Grand Mosque episode, there were widespread manifestations of religious resurgence, particularly among youth, university students, and faculty."¹⁴⁷ The Saudi government has made various attempts to solve these emerging crises. "Just a few months after these two events, a new national regulation for the

¹⁴³ Bowen, W. H., (2008), *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Greenwood, Westport, p.119

¹⁴⁴ Saouli, A., (2014), *The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation*. Routledge, New York, p.84

¹⁴⁵ Wynbrandt, J., (2004), *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.241

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p.242

¹⁴⁷ Dekmejian, R., H., (1994), *The Rise of Political Islamism in Saudi Arabia*, *Middle East Journal*, 48(4), pp.627-643, p.628

*Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice was issued.*¹⁴⁸ With the new regulation, the pressure of Wahhabi institutions on social life increased. Also, “*extremists joined as volunteer the Committees for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prohibition of Vice in order to monitor public behavior. Unlike the older, state-sanctioned religious police (mutawwa'), the young activists had an agenda to transform social conduct by patrolling the shopping malls, spying on people, and raiding homes in search of 'un-Islamic' conduct.*”¹⁴⁹ “*The Basic Law also decreed the formation of the Consultative Council, which had been agreed upon in 1980 in response to the seizure of the Grand Mosque and unrest in the Eastern Province, but never implemented.*”¹⁵⁰ Thus, the rise of extremism and their infiltration into state-sponsored institutions caused increasing societal pressure, and gradually weakened central authority.

Another factor that deepened the Saudi legitimacy crisis was the early 80s, when oil revenues were not sufficient for public expenditures and budget deficits began to appear. In response, the Saudi government had planned steps to increase economic diversity. “*Much of the kingdom's attention in the late 1970s and early 1980s was focused on the construction of industrial complexes, to diversify the kingdom's industrial base.*”¹⁵¹ The construction of new industrial areas was important both for economic diversity and to prevent the concentration of the population in large cities. Because during the reign of King Faisal, they were faced with rapid urbanization and sedentization. However, the inadequacy of the economic opportunities and infrastructure that support this had become a problem for the Saudi government. “*The third five-year plan (1980-1985) was specifically designed to raise the rural living standard. The government actually wanted to reduce the pace of urbanization and reinforce the confidence of nomads and villagers.*”¹⁵² This was supported by policies supporting agricultural production and pastoral production. In this way, it was aimed to both reduce the number of people dependent on public subsidies and eliminate the budget deficit by creating economic diversity. Following the 3rd development plan, “*the fourth five-year development plan, covering the years 1985–89,*

¹⁴⁸ Mouline, N., (2014), *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, Translated by Ethan S Rundell, Yale University Press, New Haven, p.212

¹⁴⁹ Dekmejian, R., H., (1994), *The Rise of Political Islamism in Saudi Arabia*, *Middle East Journal*, 48(4), pp.627-643, p.629

¹⁵⁰ Wynbrandt, J., (2004). *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.262

¹⁵¹ Metz, H., C., (ed), (1993), *Saudi Arabia: A Country Study*, Washington, Federal Research Division; Library of Congress, p.39

¹⁵² Khoury, P., S., and Kostiner J., (1990), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p.248

*focused on economic and social programs rather than grand infrastructure and construction projects, as had previous plans.”*¹⁵³ During this period, similarly, programs were created to reduce the dependency population on subsidies, the most important of which was the introduction of the Saudization plan to increase the population working in the private sector.

*“Changing demographic conditions, a relative economic recession, the rise of a new, educated generation in Saudi Arabia and the country's aging and somewhat incompetent rulers all shook Faysal's order and exposed its deficiencies in the 1990s.”*¹⁵⁴ The new middle class, consisting of emerging technocrats, educated people and merchants, began to pressure the Saudi government to make more liberal reforms. *“These included establishing a Consultative Council (Majlis Shura) as a means of introducing a more representative government; the restoration of municipal councils; modernization of the judicial system; equality for all citizens; use of merit-based standards instead of family ties for government appointments; more freedom for the media; reforms for the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice; and a greater role for women in public life.”*¹⁵⁵ In order to meet these demands, the government announced a reform package on 1 March 1992. *“The reform package contained three separate documents and was enacted in three separate royal decrees. The first decree was a Basic System of Rules; the second was a statute calling for the establishment of a Consultative Council within six months; the third was a statute calling for the establishment of administrative devolution with regional assemblies within one year.”*¹⁵⁶ These reforms also made a regulation to solve the leadership and legitimacy crisis. *“The Basic Law (under Royal Decree A/90) identifies Saudi Arabia as an Arab Muslim state whose religion is Islam. The system of government is described as a monarchy, with the rulers being drawn from among the sons and descendants of King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Al Su‘ud. The King chooses the heir apparent by royal decree and can also relieve him of this position. On the death of the king, the heir apparent takes over, and citizens ‘shall give the pledge of allegiance (bay‘ah)’ to him, ‘professing loyalty in times of hardship as well as ease’.*

¹⁵³ Wynbrandt, J., (2004). A Brief History of Saudi Arabia, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.252

¹⁵⁴ Kostiner, J., (1996), State, Islam, and Opposition in Saudi Arabia: The Post-Desert Storm Phase, Terrorism and Political Violence, 8(2), pp.75-89, p.80

¹⁵⁵ Wynbrandt, J., (2004), A Brief History of Saudi Arabia, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.260

¹⁵⁶ Aba-Namay, R., (1998), The New Saudi Representative Assembly. Islamic Law and Society, 5(2), pp. 235-265, p.239

*The government derives its authority from the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (Peace be upon Him)."*¹⁵⁷

During this period, it was witnessed that the Fasial Order was eroded. The understanding of leadership in which the rentier distribution provided by patrimonial personal networks was shared among the society through the welfare system had gradually disappeared. During King Fahd still, *"the 'personal relationship' between the royal family and the tribal rural and newly urbanized population is maintained through the different levels of amirs and other traditional institution"*¹⁵⁸. This was an obstacle to the demands of the middle class being fully met. Although legal and economic reforms had been made, the decision-making mechanisms in the majlis were dominated by the group- traditional tribe chiefs-. However, the unsustainability of the Fasial's Order and the establishment of a legitimacy based on law as an alternative to it show that the rising voice of liberal reform in society is being considered. This was likely to be a starting point for future drastic reforms. The following can be said clearly for the 90s: *"the Saudi royal family faced two competing factions within the informal political establishment: on the one hand, the religious conservatives including the conservative ulama, who still adhere to the strict application of the Shar'iah; on the other, the secular liberal group of Saudi society."*¹⁵⁹ It was clear which group the kingdom sided with, shaping the future of Saudi Arabia. The answer to this emerged with the changing world order towards the 2000s.

*"In 1995 King Fahd suffered a stroke and Crown Prince Abdullah, his half brother, assumed day-to-day rule of the kingdom."*¹⁶⁰ With Prince Abdullah becoming the de facto ruler, the dynasty's position in the struggle between conservatives and secular liberals began to take shape. His de facto rulership after 1995 has an important place for the various reforms he made when he was appointed as king, from education to infrastructure, from the private sector to the bureaucracy. Various attempts were made during this period to change the socio-cultural and socio-economic structure. *"Early in his reign, King Abdullah promoted modernization of Saudi Arabia's state apparatus, making it more efficient and transparent; encouraged a modest public re-evaluation of the enforced subservient status of women and religious minorities; allowed*

¹⁵⁷ Niblock, T., (2006), *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, Routledge, London; New York, p.81

¹⁵⁸ Abir, M. (1987), *The Consolidation of the Ruling Class and the New Elites in Saudi Arabia*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 23(2), pp.150-171, p.164

¹⁵⁹ Aba-Namay, R. (1993), *The Recent Constitutional Reforms in Saudi Arabia*, *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 42(2), pp. 295-331, p.327

¹⁶⁰ Wynbrandt, J., (2004), *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.269

greater debate in the media; and promoted some degree of judicial fairness."¹⁶¹ The first of these: *"the 1995 budget introduced new measures to raise revenues and cut subsidies, with the raising of charges for visas, permits, petroleum products, water, electricity, air tickets and telephones"*¹⁶². Furthermore, more robust programs had begun to be implemented both to increase the share of the private sector in the budget and to employ the Saudi population in the private sector. To take serious attempts to address employing Saudis in the private sectors since *"the bureaucracy and private sector were unable to siphon off a swelling pool of university graduates, which was fed on the other end by one of the world's highest rates of population growth"*¹⁶³. *"In 1995 the cabinet issued the first comprehensive, target-based Saudization decree on the recommendation of the Manpower Council."*¹⁶⁴ Moreover, economic diversification which was main goal of the Fifth Development Plan (1990-95) became main political agenda under de facto ruler Abdullah. Regarding this economic aspect, *"the end of the decade saw recognition that privatization and globalization were two trends with which the country needed to align itself"*¹⁶⁵. *"In 1997, Council of Ministers issued a 'decision' identifying eight objectives for privatisation aimed at improving the efficiency of the national economy and enhancing its competitive ability."*¹⁶⁶ The reforms made in the economic field now mean that the Saudi government had adopted an approach that was gradually moving away from the state-controlled development that prioritizes the private sector economically, and aiming to increase working population, to try to establish itself in the international arena.

In addition to economic reforms, some efforts to reduce the influence of religious structures in society began in the 2000s. The main reason for this is the Saudi Dynasty's view of Wahhabi institutions as a threat and its stance against modernization moves. The weakening of Wahhabi institutions will both increase the rule of the Saudi dynasty and avoid strong opposition while responding to the demands of the secular liberal middle class. It should not be forgotten that Saudi Arabia also saw the increasing radical Islam as a threat. In this direction, educational

¹⁶¹ Saudi Arabia: King's Reform Agenda Unfulfilled, Human Rights Watch, 23 Jan. 2015, www.hrw.org/news/2015/01/23/saudi-arabia-kings-reform-agenda-unfulfilled

¹⁶² Niblock, T., (2006), *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, Routledge, London; New York, p.94

¹⁶³ Kostiner, J., (2000), *Middle East Monarchies: The Challenge of Modernity*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London & Colorado, p.140

¹⁶⁴ Hertog, S., (2011), *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia*, Ithaca, N.Y.; Cornell University Press, London, p.227

¹⁶⁵ Wynbrandt, J., (2004), *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.271

¹⁶⁶ Niblock, T., (2006), *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, Routledge, London; New York, p.95

reforms were initiated in order to weaken religious authority. It could be observed in criticism by both local actors and external actors, the “*curriculum of Saudi schools developed under the supervision and approval of the ulama, for its emphasis on inculcating Wahhabi doctrine*”¹⁶⁷. In the 30-year period following the education reforms that started during the reign of King Faisal, the focus was mainly on school construction, schooling and increasing the literacy rate, but the state bureaucracy was replaced by Wahhabi institutions regarding the curriculum. Both economic and political necessities arose during the reign of King Abdullah to purify the curriculum from Wahhabi influence. However, since the reforms to the curriculum were met with serious opposition, not all of these reforms could be implemented. As a solution to this, in the first year of his rule, King Abdullah sent students abroad and established scholarship programs to create a market-oriented educated class.

Another reform to reduce the effectiveness of Wahhabi institutions was carried out through Mutawwain. “*The government has taken steps to rein in the power of the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (Mutawwain), whose minister holds cabinet rank.*”¹⁶⁸ The group had the right to use violence in many areas of social life and force individuals to pray, force women to wear abaya, close shops during prayer times, etc. These religious police group, which had such coercive power, stood as an obstacle to social liberalization. Some regulations were made to reduce their impact on society, but the existence of mutawwain was a threat to social modernization. The restriction of mutawwain powers was especially important for the expansion of women's rights promised by King Abdullah. However, the granting of social liberal rights to women did not occur rapidly. There was still a strong traditional opposition. As a matter of fact, the granting of the promised rights waited until steps were taken to reduce the influence of the freedom movement in the Arab world on the Saudi state. Finally, “*in 2011, Abdullah decreed that women would have the right to vote and stand for office in the 2015 municipal elections. In 2013, he appointed 30 women to all male Shura Council. His reign saw other changes in women’s status as well, including their own national identity cards and the right of female lawyers to defend clients in all-male religious courts*”¹⁶⁹.

While it reduced the effectiveness of religious authority, on the other hand, the demand for the restoration of municipal councils, which the middle class had previously demanded, was

¹⁶⁷ Wynbrandt, J., (2004), *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, Infobase Publishing, New York, p.285

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p.287

¹⁶⁹ Ottaway, D., et al., (2015), *Saudi King Abdullah: An Assessment*, Wilson Center, Middle East Program,

met with the first-ever local elections in 2005. Local elections were “*issued by Royal Decree in 1977, and to ensure that one half of the members of all municipal councils would henceforth be elected*”¹⁷⁰. When came to 2005 Local Elections in Saudi Arabia, “*the scheme of electing half of the municipal council members while the other half would still be appointed*”¹⁷¹ was applied without change. “*For the first time since the founding of the state the male citizens at least were allowed to cast their ballots and elect someone to represent their interests.*”¹⁷² In 2011, King Abdullah announced that women would be included in the 2015 municipal elections to expand their rights. Politically, this reform was followed by phenomena such as national identity and national pride, in order to both strengthen the middle class and weaken traditional structures. The ideological origins of Saudi Nationalism were revealed by King Abdullah, and he made the national holiday, which was previously resisted by Wahhabi institutions, celebrated in 2005. In this struggle between conservatives and liberals, King Abdullah's political and social policies show that the kingdom sided with the liberals. However, the government avoided implementing serious policies against conservatives in case of deep unrest in society. “*The state still played its established role of balancing the two: it curbed some of the religious police’s powers while also briefly detaining women who campaigned to lift the ban on driving.*”¹⁷³

To sum, reforms in Saudi Arabia were put forward mostly for the survival of the regime and to overcome the legitimacy crises. Bureaucratic modernization, which started especially under the leadership of King Faisal, reformed the state administration, but it was still insufficient to meet the demands of the society. As a matter of fact, King Faisal's successors experienced legitimacy crises because their social demands were not met. In order to overcome this crisis, reforms were tried to be implemented within a narrow framework. Under the leadership of King Abdullah, the programs put forward to respond to similar legitimation crises revealed the necessity of addressing all the problems of the society together. In other words, it had revealed that increasing economic diversity or employment in the private sector could not be met with economic reforms alone, and that both social and educational reforms were necessary. In this respect, this approach offered a framework for future reforms.

¹⁷⁰ Ménoret, P., (2005), *The Municipal Elections in Saudi Arabia 2005: First Steps on a Democratic Path*. Arab Reform Initiative, p.1

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p.2

¹⁷² Wurm, I., (2008), *Transformation and Reforms, In Doubt for the Monarchy: Autocratic Modernization in Saudi-Arabia*, pp. 18-30 p. 30

¹⁷³ Alhussein, E., (2019), *Saudi First: How Hyper-Nationalism is Transforming Saudi Arabia*, European Council on Foreign Relations. p.4

Moreover, the necessity of changing the social contract molded by King Faisal was evident with a number of crises that had emerged since the early 80s. It was obvious that a welfare system dependent on rentier economy causes chronic budget deficits due to the decrease in oil revenues. Although King Faisal reduced public expenditures to solve the budget deficits during his predecessor's period, the increase in oil revenues enabled a large part of the society to be employed in the bureaucracy and benefit from the welfare system. This, in turn, caused economic contractions as increasing public supports were based on unstable oil revenues. In order to solve these problems during the reign of King Abdullah, there were both reductions in public supports and increased support for the private sector. In this respect, the path of future economic policies has been determined.

Another crucial element shaping Saudi Arabia's future was the ongoing effort to construct a unifying national identity, as tribal and religious-communal identities sometimes resurface, posing challenges to modernization attempts. The existence of a national identity that would encompass the entire society was also important for the middle class trying to be independent. In this way, direct communication could be established between the state and society. Although King Faisal's welfare system made the entire society a subject of the state, dependence on subsidies did not create a free middle class. As a result, the system in which King Faisal was a religious and political leader, tried to centralize with bureaucratic modernization, welfare system and Wahhabism for social cohesion, which won popular support, was deeply damaged by King Abdu

3.2 TRANSFORMATION OR CHANGE

3.2.1 *MBS and New Saudi Arabia*

Saudi Arabia finds itself at the beginning of a major transformation. Under the guidance of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the Kingdom has embarked on an ambitious modernization drive, charting a course towards a redefined social, economic, and cultural identity. This vision of MBS emerges clearly in a statement he made: "*We are trying to evolve using the potential of the Saudi people, the culture of Saudi Arabia, our history. We want to bring*

something new to the world."¹⁷⁴ MBS understands the need of retaining local culture and social ties in his attempts to reform Saudi society. He is aware that these components serve as the cornerstone of Saudi identity and offer Kingdom residents a feeling of identity. MBS prioritizes enhancing Saudi Arabia's rich cultural legacy over erasing it in its modernization strategy. He thinks that traditional values and practices may be respected while innovation is attained. Many Saudis, who value the attempt to maintain their cultural identity while accepting change, have embraced this strategy.

It should be mentioned that MBS's appointment as Crown Prince deeply affected the balance of power within the Saudi dynasty. The long-standing rivalry between MBS and Mohammed bin Nayef (MBN) eroded in favor of MBS with his appointment as crown prince. In general opinion, "*MBN was the highly respected interior minister, it looked that he was King Salman's heir apparent.*"¹⁷⁵ However, King Salman took some steps to change this situation and tried to cause MBN from losing its popularity. "*King Salman collapsed the crown prince's court into his own, depriving MBN of a major perk of his position and a platform to build ties with subjects.*"¹⁷⁶ MBN was popular both in the Saudi society and in the international arena and was seen as the next Saudi king, but these steps of King Salman weakened him politically. On the other hand, both MBS's involvement in charity organizations and his work for state security made MBS increasingly popular in society. While MBS was gaining popularity on the one hand, it was also working on reforms that could cause rapid change. "*By contrast, MBN seemed uninspired and uninspiring, offering no vision for a new Saudi Arabia.*"¹⁷⁷ Finally, "*King Salman had assembled members of the Allegiance Council, the body that would have to approve of MBN's removal and appointment of MBS as the new crown prince*"¹⁷⁸.

A turning point in the Kingdom's history was the rise to prominence of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) in the Saudi leadership. MBS's vision is not merely an abstract concept; it is intricately interwoven with the very fabric of his rise to legitimacy. In other words, with this modernization vision, it is not only aimed to transform the Saudi society, but it should

¹⁷⁴ "Mohammed bin Salman Saudi Arabia Palace Interview: Absolute Power. "The Atlantic, 3 March 2022, (www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/04/mohammed-bin-salman-saudi-arabia-palace-interview/622822/).

¹⁷⁵ Ottaway, D. (2021). *Mohammed Bin Salman*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, p.14

¹⁷⁶ Hubbard, B., (2020), *MBS: The Rise to Power of Mohammed Bin Salman*. New York, Tim Duggan Books, An Imprint of Random House, p.52

¹⁷⁷ Ottaway, D. (2021). *Mohammed Bin Salman*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, p.23

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p.25

also be considered as a tool that increases his popularity in the public sphere and provides legitimacy. The appointment of MBS as crown prince was an unprecedented event in the nearly 100-year-old Saudi Kingdom. While Saudi Arabia's history has seen transitions between brothers “*so-called tradition of lateral succession has prevailed*”¹⁷⁹ after Ibn Saud's death, with his son Saud eventually assuming the throne, the upcoming succession marks a noteworthy departure. For the second time in the Kingdom's history, power is poised to directly pass from father to son, replicating the earlier historical event when Saud bin Abdulaziz inherited the crown. Nevertheless, “*Saud was the oldest son, whereas MBS is among the youngest of King Salman's twelve sons*”¹⁸⁰. Since society had never seen this type of succession before, MBS may have had trouble establishing legitimacy. He made a relationship with the first King Ibn Saud as one of his strategies for resolving this issue. Here, he was highlighting something more than the grandfather-grandson bond that set him apart from other princes. He presents himself as the founder of the fourth Saudi kingdom because he thinks that the person who started the kingdom once again dwells within of him. A notable poster on the streets of Riyadh reveals this situation more clearly. Only three people are featured in this poster: Ibn Saud, King Salman, and crown prince MBS.

Establishing a relationship with himself and his grandfather in this way should be considered as a strategically necessary move, both to reactivate the founding motives and to find a source of his own legitimacy. It can also be said that the elements of the founding period have come to the fore again, both politically and economically. Roughly speaking, the period after Ibn Saud and before King Salman and MBS is a period in which the oil-based system dominated the economy and politics. In the section above on the establishment of the 3rd Kingdom, a similarity can be established between the transformation that Ibn Saud wanted to make in the economic field and the transformation that MBS wants to make. Both leaders set out with a plan based on production and employment of the population. The lack of a sufficient economy resources and the incomplete state structure during the period of Ibn Saud caused this transformation to remain an idea. However, as the state apparatus gained power in the 60s and became a centralized power, state construction took a certain process. But it should not be forgotten that King Faisal's modernization and bureaucratization efforts in the 60s were only realized with the significant increase in oil revenues. Both the reliance of the public budget on oil and the dominance of the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p.30

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p.30

oil-based industry caused a deviation from the production-based active society desired by Ibn Saud. Its increasing dependence on oil revenues has caused the Saudi state to become a classic rentier state. However, MBS is considering reintroducing the production-based society by changing and modernizing Ibn Saud's idea. Unlike Ibn Saud, it is obvious that MBS has sufficient economic resources. It should be considered that the transition to a production-based economy is not just an effort to address the problems brought by the rentier system, but is a move integrated with political transformation. As mentioned in SAMA* Working Paper, “*nearly 34.5% of all Saudi Arabian adult females and 5.9 % of Saudi Arabian adult males are unemployed. However, the highest levels of unemployment are found in youth populations where 40% of all citizens under the age of 35 have no stable form of employment*”¹⁸¹.

In other words, it can be said that the segment that will be most affected by the economic problems that will arise is the young population. It is possible to talk about other problems of the rentier system such as instability, high government spending, etc. These problems also show the necessity of this economic transformation. However, an economic transformation based on a young population is important to gain power for a political transformation by taking advantage of the dynamism of this population. It is not surprising that the study cited above primarily focuses on the young population. “*Seventy percent of the Saudi population is under 30, and honestly we will not spend the next 30 years of our lives dealing with destructive ideas. We will destroy them today and at once.*”¹⁸² Surely, here MBS is talking about modernization and bringing new ideas to Saudi Arabia. However, the emphasis it puts on the young population inevitably reveals that the biggest actors of this transformation are young people. For this reason, it is not possible for a transformation to be made in the economic field, to be independent of young people. As mentioned, economic and political transformation are intertwined, and similar actors and structures are part of this transformation. It is a matter of debate how this state, which wants to move away from the rentier system, will involve young people in economic activity. As mentioned above that Saudi Arabia, as a rentier state, uses bureaucracy as an employment tool. However, in a production-based economy, the bureaucracy becoming cumbersome, that is, employing more population than necessary, may cause the economic problems that arise to lead to deeper crises. It can be said that the public sector has ceased to be a convenient tool for

¹⁸¹ Alrasheedy, A., (2017), The Cost of Unemployment in Saudi Arabia, SAMA, p.3

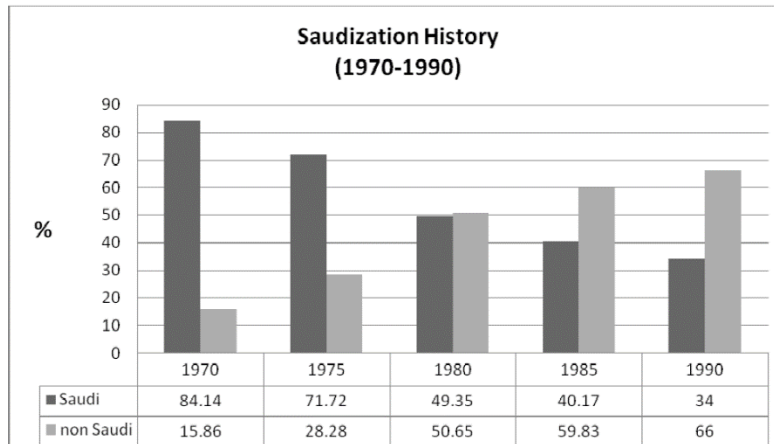
*The Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority

¹⁸² <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220928-mohammed-bin-salman-reformist-prince-shaking-up-saudi-arabia>

employment and the inclusion of young people in economic activity can only be achieved by creating employment in private sectors.

Encouraging the young population to work in the private sector causes a transformation in the economic field as well as in the political field. The plan to employ the local population in private sectors is not a new idea for Saudi Arabia. The kingdom has been making efforts in this direction for a long time. The effort to employ more Saudi population in this private sector, called Saudization, started in the early 70s. "*Article 45 of the Saudi Labor and Workmen Law, passed in 1969, declares at least 75% of a firm's workforce and 51% of its wage bill must be tied to Saudi employees.*"¹⁸³ With the adoption of this law, steps were included in the 5-year development plans to increase the participation of the Saudi population in the private sector, but these plans did not ensure the employment of local people in the private sector. The rapid growth of the Saudi economy based on oil has dealt a dramatic blow to the effectiveness of Saudi policies towards Saudization. As mentioned earlier, in response to the problem posed by increasing urbanization and the subsequent increasing the population subject to welfare system, some programs to encourage Saudis to work in the private sector were included in the development plans. However, as a result of the rapid increase in oil revenues, the Saudi population, which was getting more and more rent income, was caused to eliminate the desire to work in low-ranking jobs.

¹⁸³ Lopesciolo, M., Muhaj, D. and Pan C., (2021), The Quest for Increased Saudization: Labor Market Outcomes and the Shadow Price of Workforce Nationalization Policies, (Harvard University CID Research Fellow and Graduate Student Working Paper No. 132), p. 7

Figure 1 Saudi Population in Private Sectors

Source: Saudi Arabia Central Department of Statistic 2002¹⁸⁴

Despite the Saudi economy's remarkable growth over the past three decades, a disconnect exists between this progress and the participation of the working population in private sectors. This limited private sector engagement has two major consequences. First, it amplifies the economy's external dependence for dynamism, leaving it vulnerable to outside factors. Second, it fuels a surge in public sector and state-owned company employment, a seemingly attractive solution for rising unemployment but ultimately unsustainable. This economic instability is further exacerbated by social and political ramifications. The rentier economy fosters a culture of dependency, where citizens rely on the state, tribal leaders, and other institutions for a share of resources. This dependence extends to employment, with individuals often resorting to connections with powerful figures like family members, tribe leaders, or high-ranking officials to find a position and secure jobs in public sectors. It can be observed that the Saudi social contract, which has existed since the establishment of the Saudi state, has become stronger and more widespread with the rentier system. With this social contract established on mutual dependence, tribe leaders, princes and royal institutions were able to provide their legitimacy and increase their power.

With the development of bureaucracy in the 70s, it was possible to talk about the existence of a new middle class that obtained positions with personal qualifications, independent of kinship ties. The emergence of this new class caused some differences and social

¹⁸⁴ Fakeeh, M., S., (2009), *Saudization as a Solution for Unemployment: The Case of Jeddah Western Region*, [Doctoral Thesis], University of Glasgow, <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/1454/>, p.88

transformations in this period. In other words, the expanding bureaucracy for this period could be considered as a tool for a transformation in Saudi society, leading to the improvement of secular education, the change of family structures, etc. has caused some changes. However, the fact that family ties and traditional structures remained strong did not lead to a radical change in this period. It can be argued that the main reason for this is that the public jobs mentioned above have turned into a tool for gathering power. This system, also called "wasta", continues to exist in society in a different way in the context of cronyism-nepotism. As argued, “*the wasta situation unique is that while in other cronyistic systems obligations do not typically pass from one generation to the next, quid pro quo obligations under wasta are inherited*”¹⁸⁵. This reliance on patronage system created a cycle of dependence, hindering progress and perpetuating the status quo. Modernization efforts, more accurately modernize state, initially focused on expanding the bureaucracy and employing secularly educated individuals, ironically led to two unintended consequences. On the one hand, the bureaucracy became cumbersome and inefficient, hindering progress. On the other hand, leaders within the system gained more power, leading to a paradoxical situation where a central authority, expected to strengthen with a larger bureaucracy, became weaker instead. As scholars point out, this system, where the bureaucracy becomes a battleground for political power, can be likened to a 'state within a state'.¹⁸⁶

It seems that MBS explains the current situation well. As he said, “*the kingdom as 'a network of thousands of absolute monarchies,' starting with its tribes and reaching up to the national level*”¹⁸⁷. Shifting focus to the political implications of employing young people in the private sector, it could be observed that one of MBS's goals is to dismantle the "state within a state" phenomenon. It is not possible to talk about an absolute monarchy in the current system; It continues to have a fragmented monarchy. MBS's agenda prioritizes centralization, a pursuit that began with Ibn Saud and was attempted differently in the 70s. However, experiences with bureaucratic job creation in the public sector have deemed it an obstacle to centralization, and modernization, both politically and economically. This explains MBS's focus on entrepreneurship as a means of youth employment. The establishment of the Small and Medium

¹⁸⁵ Rahman, K.,(2020), An overview of corruption and anti-corruption in Saudi Arabia, Transparency International, p.8, <https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/helpdesk/saudi-arabia-an-overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption>

¹⁸⁶ Ramady, M., A., (2016), *The Political Economy of Wasta: Use and Abuse of Social Capital Networking*. Cham, Springer, p.19

¹⁸⁷ Ottawa, D. (2021). *Mohammed Bin Salman*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, p.78

Enterprises General Authority (Monsha'at) in 2016 further underscores this strategy. Mohammed Al-Belwe, Monsha'at vice governor, points clearly out effects of entrepreneurship on social and economic fields by giving a statement recently; "*an exciting new generation of entrepreneurs who are striking out on their own, and as the Kingdom's non-oil economy surges, the growth of SMEs will continue to kindle unprecedented private sector growth*"¹⁸⁸. The desire in the economic field is clear, the aim is to move away from an oil-based economy. Another striking point here is the effort of young people to start a business independently of their families. This is a step towards the elimination of the patrimonial system, which starts from the family and progresses to the top of the kingdom. In other words, a method is used to harm thousands of monarchies as MBS expresses. It cannot be said that the ultimate goal of MBS is to completely eliminate the patrimonial system, but he is aware of how these patrimonial relations weaken the central authority. As stated before, one of the titles of the king was father, that is, the head of the patriarchs. A useful system for the strengthening of the central authority or absolute monarchy. As a matter of fact, it is observed that Ibn Saud used it in the state building. However, providing social and economic independence to young people is a method used by MBS for centralization. With this method, he differs from his grandfather, with whom he sometimes draws similarities.

Another method used by MBS for centralization is to ensure greater participation of young people in the political and social sphere. This was to eliminate the *majlis*, which has an archaic structure where social and political demands are evaluated. "*The majlis had been replaced by electronic e-government in keeping with the crown prince's notion of modern-day governance.*"¹⁸⁹ Observing trends and discussions on social media has emerged as a new approach to addressing social and political issues. While its manipulation potential cannot be ignored, social media also facilitates direct interaction between the Kingdom and its citizens. Unlike the traditional *majlis* system, where intermediaries conveyed concerns, social media allows for faster identification of pressing issues through direct connections with the public. This has significantly eroded the political influence of intermediaries like tribal leaders, high-ranking officials, and religious institutions, who previously held the power to bring issues to light. In other words, this has eroded the reliance on these powerful figures to act as political mouthpieces for the lower and middle classes. As a result, the center has gained direct access to these

¹⁸⁸ Takla, R., and Walid, R., "Number of SMEs in Saudi Arabia Rises 4.8% in Q1, Exceeds 1.2m." *Arab News*, 31 May 2023, www.arabnews.com/node/2313516/business-economy.

¹⁸⁹ Ottaway, D. (2021). *Mohammed Bin Salman*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, p.17

previously unreachable societal layers, diminishing its image as an unapproachable power. Furthermore, social media's rise as an information source has not only exposed social issues but also challenged the unquestioned pronouncements of traditional institutions often reluctant to embrace reform. Notably, “*social media and the Internet broke the Saudi clerics’ monopoly on religious interpretation, allowing curious citizens to seek out the views of clerics from more open societies*”¹⁹⁰.

A key driver of MBS's enthusiasm for social media is its potential to boost his own popularity and consolidate central authority, potentially weakening institutions like religious authorities hesitant to embrace liberal interpretations or tribal leaders clinging to traditional power structures. However, beneath this charm lies a different dimension to MBS's tech embrace. He is acutely aware of technology's potential not just for engagement but also for control and observation. One of his megaprojects, Neom, demonstrates this point quite well. Its intended connection with social media platforms, together with its sophisticated surveillance technologies and vast data collecting infrastructure, have raised worries about possible governmental overreach. While the promise of a futuristic utopia remains a key selling point, Neom's technological underpinnings raise crucial questions about individual privacy and freedom within its walls. As declared, “*the project should be an automated city where we can watch everything ... where a computer can notify crimes without having to report them or where all citizens can be tracked*”¹⁹¹. This shows that he aims a technologically enhanced neo-authoritarian model of governance.

As mentioned, MBS presents himself as the architect of a new Saudi Arabia, the Fourth Kingdom. He envisions a centralized state modernized on his terms, and inevitably faces resistance from institutions like religious authorities with vested interests in maintaining the status quo. Just as ideology was crucial for Ibn Saud to unify disparate tribes and consolidate power, the need for a new unifying narrative or set of values becomes apparent in MBS's vision. His struggle with Wahhabism removes this ideology from being the founding element of the new kingdom. Therefore, the existence of a new ideology is inevitable both to establish his own kingdom and to mobilize the masses. MBS's chosen method is structuring national identity,

¹⁹⁰ Hubbard, B., (2020), *MBS: The Rise to Power of Mohammed Bin Salman*. New York, Tim Duggan Books, An Imprint of Random House, p.180

¹⁹¹James, L., (2022), *Iron Net: Digital Repression in the Middle East and North Africa*, European Council on Foreign Relations, p.12

elevating nationalism to a state policy and aiming for its widespread acceptance within the society. This approach poses potential challenges, requiring careful navigation of different cultural strands and ensuring inclusivity to garner genuine mass support. While promoting a national identity as an ideology clash with the universalist claims of Wahhabi Islam and community-based tribal structures, it fulfills a key need for unifying ideology within MBS's agenda. It could be observed that significant acceptance of national identity, particularly among the youth, indicating the effectiveness of this strategy. Moreover, this struggle has demonstrably bolstered MBS's popularity and solidified his legitimacy.

This transformation should be characterized not only as bestowing a new identity upon society but also as encompassing shifts in Saudi leadership, as well as changes in the regional and international policies pursued by the Saudi state. Within this new model of leadership, authority is grounded more in the leader's charisma rather than in conventional affiliations. The case of Muhammad bin Salman vividly illustrates this shift. Concurrently, it becomes evident that this leadership has reshaped the dynamics between society and its leader. The perpetuation of those in control of political power within rentier states like Saudi Arabia is primarily a result of the equitable allocation of wealth. Setting aside the economic reforms outlined in Vision 2030, the emerging leadership shaped by nationalism assumes a pivotal role in upholding political stability, even in cases where wealth distribution might falter. *“Overall, the leadership has broken from the old social contract by emphasising that Saudi Arabia has now entered a new era in which citizens must contribute to the good of the country, as opposed to simply receiving benefits as their forebears did.”*¹⁹²

MBS's ambitious social, political, and economic policies are profoundly shaking the existing social contract, which previously saw Ibn Saud, within the religio-political community he forged with Wahhabism, hold the titles of father, imam, and king, signifying his combined roles as spiritual leader, head of state, and patriarchal figure. This challenges traditional understandings of governance, the relationship between citizens and the state. As mentioned above, this old social contract, which emerged from an Islamic notion and was strengthened by the rentier system, was to be replaced by a modern social contract with the establishment of the new kingdom. A key demographic supporting the shift towards a new social contract is the young population, particularly urban youth with access to education and technology, who form the

¹⁹² Alhoussein, E., (2019). Saudi First: How Hyper-Nationalism is Transforming Saudi Arabia, European Council on Foreign Relations, p.6

foundation of MBS's strategy for establishing his vision of a modern and diversified Saudi Arabia. As points out, "*a new generation of technocrats drawn from the national workforce is supporting and participating in the nascent social contract*"¹⁹³.

As a result, in addition to being a tech-savvy communicator who interacts with people directly on social media, he is a centralizer of power, strengthening authority within himself and undermining established institutions. He introduces liberal reforms to improve the kingdom's image and attract talent, yet these changes spark tensions with the conservative, Wahhabi-influenced social fabric. The new social contract he seems to be forging, with the young population as its key base, holds potential for a transformed Saudi Arabia. However, this change will require managing an intricate framework of both internal and foreign forces, choosing a course that strikes a balance between ambition and realism, and, in the end, facing the central query of whether the kingdom can modernize to the fullest extent possible without sacrificing its essential character.

3.2.2 *Vision 2030*

Muhammad bin Salman's and Saudi Arabia's modernization policies are explicitly outlined as a central pillar of Saudi Vision 2030, a vision jointly launched on 25 January 2016 by King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to chart the future of the kingdom. "*Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is a transformative and ambitious blueprint to unlock the potential of its people and create a diversified, innovative, and world-leading nation.*"¹⁹⁴ Unlike the reforms mentioned above, Vision 2030 is more systematic and inclusive. It has been implemented not only to solve current problems or to modernize, but also to shape the future of the Saudi society. It can be said that the main feature that distinguishes it from previous reforms is that it aims at social transformation. So, "*these reform efforts led by the Crown Prince are more rigorous than any previous attempt at economic diversification made by the Saudis*"¹⁹⁵.

¹⁹³ Vakil, S., "Visions, Technocrats, and the Shifting Social Contract in the Gulf Countries." *ISPI*, 26 May 2022, www.ispionline.it/en/publication/visions-technocrats-and-shifting-social-contract-gulf-countries-35194. Accessed 15 Dec. 2023.

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/vision-2030/story-of-transformation/>

¹⁹⁵ Moshashai, D. et al. (2018): Saudi Arabia plans for its economic future: Vision 2030, the National Transformation Plan and Saudi fiscal reform, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, p. 2

Vision 2030 provides impressions of what the future Saudi society will be like under three main headings: a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation.

a) a thriving economy

The most important part of vision 2030 is the reforms planned in the economic field, because the transition from an oil-based economy to a production-based economy reveals the possibility of a wide transformation in society. Saudi aim is “*creating an environment that supports economic growth and job creation for all Saudis by leveraging our unique location and potential, attracting top talent, and increasing global investment*”¹⁹⁶.

Since the discovery of oil, Saudi Arabia's economy has become heavily reliant on this single resource, due to limited agricultural and industrial development. This dependence on a finite resource has become increasingly unsustainable, threatened by both declining reserves and the growing shift towards alternative energy sources. This vulnerability, inherent to economies like Saudi Arabia's that rely heavily on natural resources for their national income, underscores the urgency of Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to diversify the economy and reduce reliance on oil before it's too late. While vision 2030 promotes production economy in response to these problems, it also creates alternatives for government budget.

“*Vision 2030 are intended to produce major changes within Saudi society and its economy, the latter by empowering Saudi citizens to make up a greater part of the Kingdom's productive workforce, while diversifying the revenue streams of the government, delinking oil price fluctuations and the budget.*”¹⁹⁷ One of the biggest changes here is that a large part of the working population wants to be made up of Saudis. Saudization or localization, as a state policy dating back to the 70s, has recently found renewed focus under the ambitious 'Vision 2030' initiative. However, it should be mentioned that the most effective policy before the 2030 vision is the Nitaqat. The since 2011 when launched the Nitaqat till the Vision 2030, “*Saudization efforts mainly implemented through the Nitaqat program*”¹⁹⁸. Three different Nitaqat programs

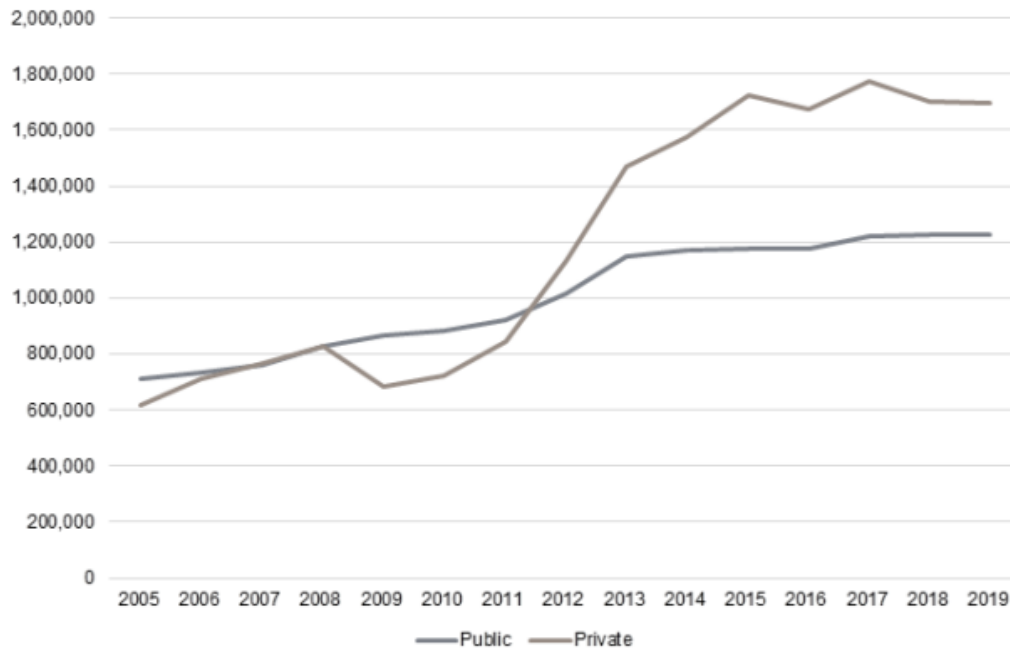
¹⁹⁶ <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/vision-2030/overview/a-thriving-economy/>

¹⁹⁷ Moshashai, D. et al. (2018): Saudi Arabia plans for its economic future: Vision 2030, the National Transformation Plan and Saudi fiscal reform, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, p. 9

¹⁹⁸ Lopesciolo, M., Muhaj, D. and Pan C., (2021), The Quest for Increased Saudization: Labor Market Outcomes and the Shadow Price of Workforce Nationalization Policies, (Harvard University CID Research Fellow and Graduate Student Working Paper No. 132), p. 1

were implemented between 2011 and 2014. Thanks to these programs, more than one million Saudi population was employed in the private sector by 2019.

Figure 2 Employment Saudi Population in Public and Private Sectors¹⁹⁹



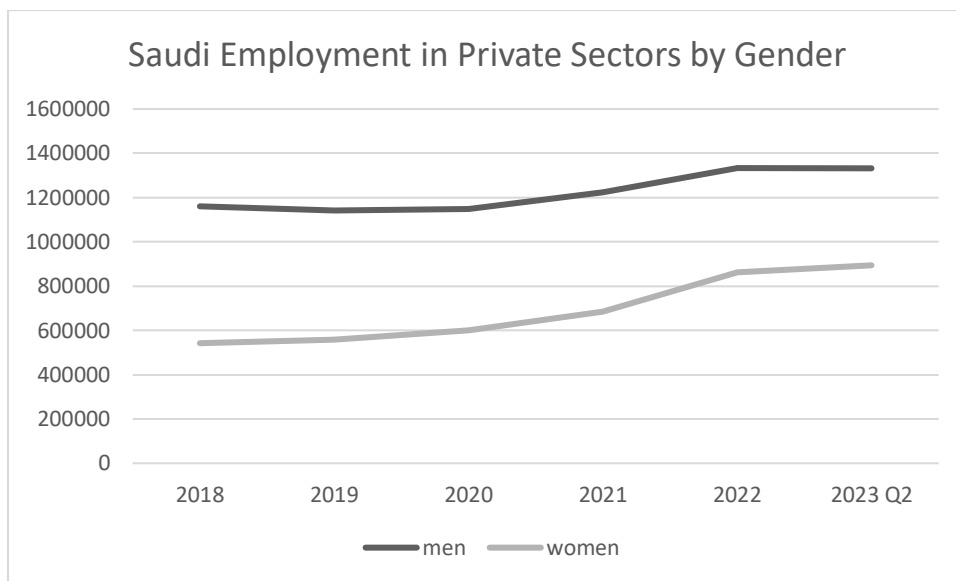
Source: SAMA Annual Statistics 2019. Government sector statistics based on the Ministry of Civil Service, and Ministry of Labor for private sector statistics.

The momentum of this program began to slow down at some point, and it is clear that the high rate of participation that started in 2011 did not continue at the same rate after 2019. (see figure:4). In response to the slowdown in employment in the private sector, the importance given to SMEs under Vision 2030 increased. As noted above, the establishment of Mons'ahat was a transformative step towards making SMEs an important actor in the Saudi Arabian economy. The importance of SMEs in the Saudi economy has increased every year. During this period, when steps were taken to transform the Saudi economy, the desired growth levels could not be achieved due to that the world encountered the pandemic. However, when the effects of the pandemic on the economy began to disappear, SMEs was able to gain momentum again. “*The growth of SMEs in 2022 was monumental, as the number of registered SMEs in Saudi Arabia hit*

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p.11

892,063 at the end of June, registering a 25.6 percent increase from the fourth quarter of 2021.”²⁰⁰ It was mentioned above that SMEs is used as a tool for the employment of the young population. The data presented by Mons'ahat shows that this tool is effective in the employment of both the young population and women. employment of the young population. The data presented by Mons'ahat shows that this tool is effective in the employment of both the young population and women. According to the report SME Monitor Q3 2023 by Monsha’at, “the number of SMEs in Saudi Arabia grew to nearly 1.27 million”²⁰¹. In the same report, it is seen that micro-sized enterprises exceed 1 million, meaning that enterprises employing 1-5 employees are the locomotive of this program. This increase in the number of micro-enterprises has resulted in the presence of women's enterprises in the economic field. In the report for the second quarter of 2022, “45 percent of SMEs are now headed by women”²⁰². As seen in the graph below, there is a correlation between the period when SMEs started to gain momentum and women's employment.

Figure 3 Saudi Employment in Private Sectors by Gender: from 2018 to 2023 Q2



²⁰⁰ Narayanan, N., “SMEs Are Saudi Arabia’s Driving Force for Economic Growth.” Arab News, 1 Jan. 2023, www.arabnews.com/node/2224911/business-economy

²⁰¹ “SME Monitor Monsha’at Quarterly Report Q3 2023.” The Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority: Monsha’at, 27 Nov. 2023, https://www.monshaat.gov.sa/sites/default/files/2023-11/EN%20Monsha%27at%20Q3%20SME%20Monitor_0.pdf

²⁰² Narayanan, N., “SMEs Are Saudi Arabia’s Driving Force for Economic Growth.” Arab News, 1 Jan. 2023, www.arabnews.com/node/2224911/business-economy

Source: General Authority for Statistics; Labor Force Surveys (2018-2023)²⁰³

While the Nitaqat program plays a crucial role in Saudization efforts, its stricter implementation is bound to face hurdles from reluctant businesses who rely on skilled expat labor at lower costs. Additionally, stringent localization measures could potentially harm Saudi Arabia's international image as an attractive investment destination. Recognizing these challenges, it could be said that Vision 2030 prioritizes nurturing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as a creative solution. By fostering a vibrant ecosystem of innovative startups and independent businesses, according to Vision 2030, it seems aiming to break the stereotypical structure of the Saudi economy and generate diverse, sustainable employment opportunities, ultimately achieving Saudization goals in a more flexible and impactful manner. SMEs are playing a crucial role in shattering traditional barriers in Saudi Arabia, as young people and women are increasingly finding their footing in non-traditional fields like engineering, design, and even the culinary arts, thanks to the innovative ventures supported by these smaller businesses. As Turfah Al-Mutairi, Founder & CEO Sondos Advanced Industry, highlights *“ten years ago, women were far rarer in the defense sector. But now, the opportunities feel endless.”*²⁰⁴

Significantly, SMEs offers employment opportunities and reduces unemployment. Furthermore, SMEs emerge as a key player in propelling Saudi Arabia's transition from an oil-reliant economy towards a diversified and productive one. By spearheading innovation in sectors like manufacturing, renewable energy, and technology, SMEs generate new revenue streams and reduce dependence on oil income. This active contribution aligns with the nation's broader vision of fostering a dynamic and sustainable developing economy, characterized by a diversified industrial base, technological prowess, and export-oriented growth. National Transformation Plan (NTP) under the Vision 2030 has an important role to increase diversity in the economy. *“From digitizing government services to save time and effort, to promoting an inclusive private sector which prioritizes your financial security, the Program is creating a diversified, innovative, and world-leading nation.”*²⁰⁵ NTP vision offers a framework for the transformations that 2030

²⁰³ <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/814>

²⁰⁴ “SME Monitor Monsha’at Quarterly Report Q3 2023.” The Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority: Monsha’at, 30 May 2023, https://monshaat.gov.sa/sites/default/files/2023-05/Monshaat%20Q1%2023%20_EN.pdf

²⁰⁵ <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/vision-2030/vrp/national-transformation-program/>

wants to realize. “Accompanied by ministry-specific implementation strategies that constitute the NTP, the economic goals under the Vision aim at increasing the share of non-oil exports to 50% of government revenues, growing the share of the private sector in the domestic economy from 40% to 65%, (...) by 2030.”²⁰⁶

The Saudi government's ambition extends beyond reducing oil-based revenues. It should be noted “core priorities (...) include reduced dependence on public spending (including by lowering spending on subsidies and salaries)”²⁰⁷. It is pursuing austerity measures by implementing targeted reductions in government subsidies across key areas like energy, water, and housing. This strategy aims to foster fiscal discipline, promote market-driven resource allocation, and ultimately contribute to the kingdom's economic diversification away from oil dependence. Austerity measures are inevitably necessary since overstuffed bureaucracy, public services seen as a gift, major projects, put forward to provide legitimacy, as mentioned, has caused deficits in the public budget. While increasing the private sector's share and employing the population there are crucial to generate new revenue, these efforts alone are insufficient to address the high government expenditures that contribute to the deficit.

In addition, taxation is becoming one of the methods of generating revenue for the Saudi economy. It is obvious that the Saudi society is not accustomed to paying taxes like other societies in the rentier system. Apart from the conversion of zakat into a type of tax as a resource, which Ibn Saud tried to implement during the establishment of the state, there was a functioning far from the taxation system of capital economies. This zakat type tax, which is collected from a certain group, constitutes direct taxation in economic terms. In other words, it is obvious that there is not sufficient taxation on products and services. According to World Bank, tax on goods and services are made up about 30%²⁰⁸ of revenues in OECD area. Interestingly, in the Saudi Arabia's Pre-Vision 2030, income from indirect taxes was insufficient, hovering between 3 and 5 percent. However, as Vision 2030's economic agenda prioritized diversification and fiscal sustainability, the tax rate on goods and services rose significantly, from 3-5% before 2017 to above 20%²⁰⁹ within a few years. This substantial increase serves as a key pillar of the kingdom's

²⁰⁶ Moshashai, D., et al. (2018) “Saudi Arabia Plans for Its Economic Future: Vision 2030, the National Transformation Plan and Saudi Fiscal Reform.” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 47(3), pp. 1–21, p.9

²⁰⁷ Kinninmont, J., (2017), *Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's Social Contract: Austerity and Transformation*. Chatham House Middle East and North Africa Programme, p. 10

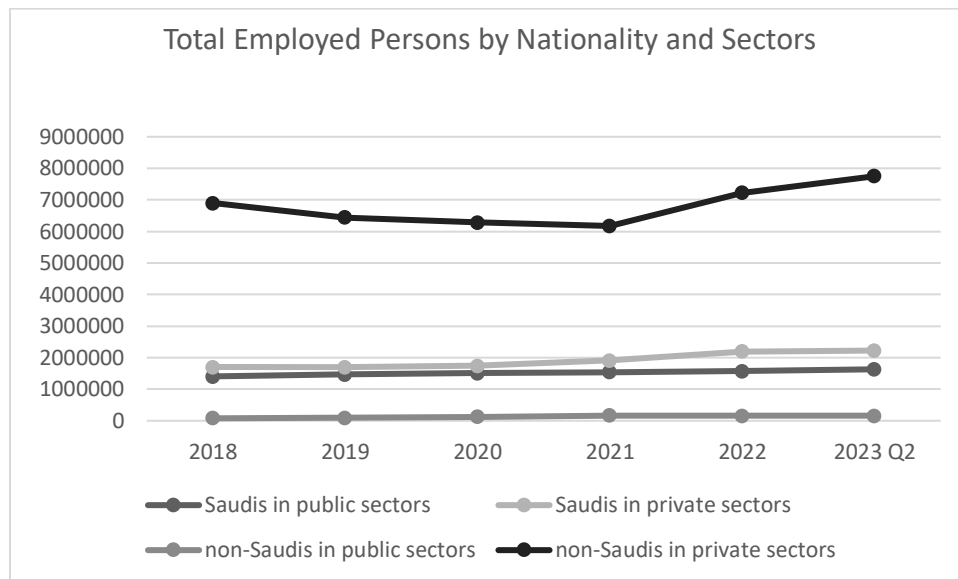
²⁰⁸ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GC.TAX.GSRV.RV.ZS>

²⁰⁹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GC.TAX.GSRV.RV.ZS?locations=SA>

revised revenue structure, demonstrating the transformational effect of Vision 2030 on Saudi Arabia's economic landscape.

*“Saudi Arabia is not only pivoting to reduce its heavy reliance on petroleum exports but also to restructure a domestic economy built on layers of generous subsidies, monopolies and patronage.”*²¹⁰ Therefore, on the one hand, it both encourages the population to work and provides the necessary support for the development of the private sector. Saudi Vision is aware to need to elimination of *“a rentier mentality (...) throughout a society in which income becomes synonymous with status and citizenship rather than work or risk-bearing”*²¹¹ to create a thriving economy. It is not a simple discourse to mention the competence, qualification and strong capability of the Saudi population in the rhetoric used in the interviews and in the messages given. Additionally, the definition of risk-bearing for entrepreneurs supports this rhetoric. The main purpose of this, of course, is to create a sense of pride and an improved culture of work and responsibility in the Saudi society, which has a rentier mentality that is far from working and taking risks. In this way, it provides the working population with a role and responsibility in the transformation and enables them to actively participate in strengthening the Saudi's economy.

Figure 4 Total Employed Persons in Public and Private Sectors by Nationality



²¹⁰ Fadlallah, T., “A Real Economic Transformation Is Underway in Saudi Arabia.” *Nikkei Asia*, 2 Oct. 2023, asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/A-real-economic-transformation-is-underway-in-Saudi-Arabia

²¹¹ Moshashai, D. et al. (2018), *Saudi Arabia Plans for Its Economic Future: Vision 2030, The National Transformation Plan and Saudi Fiscal Reform*, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, p. 20

Source: General Authority for Statistics; Labor Force Surveys (2018-2023)²¹²

b) a vibrant society

Regarding to Vision 2030, it could be argued that another important part of Vision 2030 is the efforts made to create a new Saudi society. On the one hand, promoting the Saudi-Islamic culture around the world and creating a national identity on the other side are among the most important elements of these efforts. The creation of its national identity will be an achievement that the Saudi society has never had.

While the Saudi state was being established, tribal, sectarian, ethnic, and regional ties were prioritized. For this reason, it was not possible to talk about the Saudi nation as a whole. More important than being a Saudi was belonging to a tribe and the social standing of a person has been influenced by how close their tribe is to the royal family. So, it was not a system where everyone as a whole was equal distance from the center. As mentioned above, the Saudi society contract provided for the existence of a state without the need for the creation of a nation or people. Along with tribal ties, Islam was also an important factor in the establishment of the state without forming a nation.

As nationalism surfaced in the Middle East, Muslim scholars introduced the concept of Umma in response to nationalists because Islam viewed nationalism as a threat to itself as a modern and secular movement. This view was also embraced by the Wahhabi ideology and simultaneous nation building process with the state building process in Saudi Arabia has not been witnessed. It did not seem possible to limit the concept of umma to the borders of a state and to create a nation from it. As Fandy highlights that “*using Islam as its source of legitimacy, the nation (umma) is more outside the state boundaries of Saudi Arabia than inside it*”²¹³. The concept of ummah does not align with the idea of a nation formed through cultural, linguistic, religious, and similar bonds that ensure the endurance of a state. Consequently, alternative methods are necessary to establish the continuity of the state. In the establishment period, this need was met with the Wahhabi ideology and with the rentier system created afterwards, the

²¹² <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/814>

²¹³ Nevo, J. (1998). Religion and National Identity in Saudi Arabia. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34(3), 34–53. p.35

loyalty between the state and the people was transferred from a spiritual plane to a material one. It soon became clear that these two mechanisms were insufficient for the stability and continuity of the Saudi state as both were subject to external variables independent beyond the control of the state. As a result, a fresh strategy emerged at the onset of the 21st century, culminating in Vision 2030. Presently, the Saudi state is making endeavors to foster a Saudi nation aligned with its own interests.

*“King Abdullah made the national day a public holiday in 2005”*²¹⁴ with a more symbolic and more visible step. This marked a pivotal juncture for Saudi society since the kingdom persisted in commemorating the national day although the observance of the national day was deemed inappropriate according to Wahhabi doctrine. Celebrating the national day can be considered as a historical awareness and a prelude to creating a nation. The state has created a value unique to the Saudi community, in other words a value that does not belong to the entire Ummah but only concerns the Saudi people. Furthermore, a shared value has been established that transcends individuals' ethnic, religious, origin, and similar differences. The national day was set up *“in order to strengthen national identity against the competing forces of transnational Islamism and subnational tribal identities.”*²¹⁵ The idea of creating a national identity put forward by King Abdullah continued under the rule of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Following King Abdullah's establishment of National Day, King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman introduced Foundation Day, commemorating the founding of the first Saudi state.

In 2022, *“Saudi Arabia celebrates first-ever ‘Founding Day’ holiday”*²¹⁶. It was created to celebrate the founding of the first Saudi state, established on February 22, 1727. In contrast to National Day, which celebrates the unification of the Kingdom on 23 September, Foundation Day commemorates the state established before the Wahhabi-Saudi alliance. In other words, the main difference that separates the two national days rhetorically reveals the identity debate between Wahhabi-Saudi. *“Mohammed bin Salman is attempting to reorient national identity*

²¹⁴ Alhusein, E., (2019). Saudi First: How Hyper-Nationalism is Transforming Saudi Arabia, European Council on Foreign Relations, p.4

²¹⁵ Kinninmont, J. (2017). Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's Social Contract: Austerity and Transformation. Chatham House Middle East and North Africa Programme. p. 23

²¹⁶ Ferrari, M., Saudi Arabia celebrates first-ever 'Founding Day' holiday, Al Arabiya English, 22 Feb. 2022, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2022/02/22/Saudi-Arabia-celebrates-first-ever-Founding-Day-holiday>

away from a sole emphasis on religion and toward a new idea of what it means to be 'Saudi'."²¹⁷ Therefore, it is important to refer to the pre-Wahhabist period and to build the Saudi identity as a national identity in the modern sense with the dynamism arising from there. Inevitably, "*the bluntest move that indicates the break with the powerful Wahhabi political narrative, or myth*"²¹⁸. In the new era, the nationalist discourse gained momentum and became the cornerstones of creating a new Saudi Arabia. It is clear that in this period, besides eliminating transnational Islamism and subnational tribal identities, Saudis also gave up on the regional gulf nationalism 'Khaleeji identity' that was tried to be established before. It can be said that a new national identity has been created by blending the upper identities such as Islam, Arab, Gulf, and sub-identities such as hijazi, najdi for the Saudi state.

The Saudi state wants to cultivate a potent strain of state-sponsored nationalism that transcends its reliance on religious authority derived from Wahhabism. This strategic shift aims to solidify the monarchy's long-term legitimacy and mitigate the potential for a legitimacy crisis, particularly as the internet erodes the unquestioning acceptance of Wahhabi doctrine. Recognizing the limitations of religious rhetoric, the state is adopting a more secularized approach, embracing an ideological understanding that resonates with a large segment of society. This new understanding may emphasize elements like national pride, economic prosperity, and a modern vision for the future, seeking to bind citizens together under a shared sense of Saudi identity rather than solely religious principles. By embracing a secular understanding of nationalism, the state weakens the influence of Wahhabi institutions and dismantles the old system where adherence to Wahhabi doctrine was a prerequisite for attaining social and political power. Historically, embracing Wahhabi doctrine was crucial for Ibn Saud to consolidate power and empower tribal leaders. This dismantling marks the beginning of a potentially transformative political shift for Saudi society, with profound effects on its social fabric.

The vision of national transformation, driven by a secular understanding of nationalism, incentivizes previously excluded groups, particularly sectarian minorities, to actively participate in shaping Saudi society. This inclusivity dismantles the historical dominance of Wahhabi-affiliated groups within the bureaucracy, allowing diverse voices and perspectives to contribute

²¹⁷ Hoffman, J., "The Arab Gulf's New Nationalism." *Foreign Policy*, 7 Aug. 2023, foreignpolicy.com/2023/08/07/saudi-arabia-uae-emirates-nationalism-mbs-mbz/

²¹⁸ Alamer, S., "The Saudi "Founding Day" and the Death of Wahhabism." *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, 23 Feb. 2022, agsiw.org/the-saudi-founding-day-and-the-death-of-wahhabism/

to the national fabric. Previously excluded groups, now proudly embracing their Saudi identity over sectarian affiliations, contribute to a new source of national pride, fostering a more cohesive and inclusive Saudi society. The religio-political community's acceptance of a nationalist movement with only secular discourses causes it to face some difficulties. It is likely to be both vulnerable to attack by Wahhabi institutions and unwelcome by a large segment of the population. That's why MBS discourse contains not only secular discourses but also uses religious rhetoric in moderation. It can be said that by questioning the absolute correctness of the Wahhabi understanding, he adopted a religious understanding that is inclusive of everyone. This purpose is clearly revealed in the following words in his interview: *“there are no fixed schools of thought and there is no infallible person”*²¹⁹. As mentioned above, the Wahhabi approach started with the claim that it was the only correct religious interpretation and called those who adopted any understanding including other Islamic interpretation other than Wahhabism as infidels. However, *“the crown prince’s view toward the concept of moderation and the religious discourse he wants to establish — a discourse based on ‘sectarian pluralism’ and respect for diverse Islamic communities”*²²⁰.

*“Nationalism today is a means to an end; it unites the population around the new leadership creates legitimacy for significant domestic reforms and regional confrontations that, in turn, further consolidate the power of the new system.”*²²¹ Nationalism, actively fostered by the state, emerges as an alternative to Wahhabism's influence within Saudi society. The legitimacy and stability derived from this shift towards national identity hold the potential to reshape the kingdom's social and political landscape. This transformation will undoubtedly ripple into the economic sphere, reshaping policies, and priorities, perhaps in favor of inward-looking strategies or prioritizing national self-sufficiency. Both to increase local production and to create new jobs, *“launched in 2021, Made in Saudi celebrates Saudi Arabia’s homegrown talent and innovation”*²²². By positioning locally-made products as symbols of national self-reliance, the Saudi government taps into the burgeoning sense of national pride and leverages a "buy national"

²¹⁹ Ottoway, D., “Saudi Crown Prince Lambasts His Kingdom’s Wahhabi Establishment | Wilson Center.” *Www.wilsoncenter.org*, 6 May 2021, www.wilsoncenter.org/article/saudi-crown-prince-lambasts-his-kingdoms-wahhabi-establishment

²²⁰ Al-Mustafa, H. “Vision 2030 Creating an Inclusive Saudi Identity.” *Arab News*, 3 May 2021, www.arabnews.com/node/1853086

²²¹ Alhussein, E., (2019). Saudi First: How Hyper-Nationalism is Transforming Saudi Arabia, European Council on Foreign Relations, p.16

²²² <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/projects/made-in-saudi/>

campaign, a tactic often employed by developing nations. This strategy incentivizes manufacturers to ramp up production and encourages consumers to prioritize local products, driving further demand and economic growth, ultimately providing a source of motivation to increase domestic production. The vision of the program points exactly to this: "*Making Saudi Arabia's products the preferred choice*"²²³. It should be highlighted that nationalism is not only promoted for political transformation as well as social transformation but also for economic transformation. The desire for a vibrant society that is proud of being Saudi, using Saudi products, and producing Saudi products is clear.

This understanding of nationalism, which wants to penetrate every cell of the society, is not limited to these areas only, but its effects are also seen in education as nationalism becomes a state ideology. In the foundation of Saudi state, "*for the most part the Saudi regime rejected Western concepts of secularism, nationalism, and education for women, (...). Instead, the government heavily emphasized Wahhabi and Salafi religious values in education*"²²⁴. Throughout the kingdom's history, several initiatives aimed to modernize and secularize education. However, limited progress was made in challenging Wahhabi dominance within the education system. Notably, women's entry into schools commenced roughly 30 years after the kingdom's establishment, highlighting the persistence of traditional religious influences in shaping educational policies. During the reign of King Faisal, "*in 1964 the first four government intermediate schools for girls were opened*"²²⁵. It could be argued that until the Vision 2030, "*the most far-reaching reform of Saudi education undertaken by Abdullah, however, came about in a different way—bypassing the system completely*"²²⁶. King Abdullah's approach was implemented through a scholarship program that encouraged Saudi students to pursue education abroad. While the scholarship program broadened young Saudis' horizons, it did not directly address the need for reforms within the Wahhabi curriculum, which remained largely unchanged. Since one of the methods the state used to impose nationalism was education, patriotism replaced the Wahhabi doctrine. It also led to the implementation of policies to increase the schooling rate of women and girls, due to the consideration of students and young people as a whole regardless sex.

²²³ <https://saudimade.sa/en/about-us/about-the-program>

²²⁴ William, O., The Transformation of Education in the Hijaz, 1925–1945, *Arabian Humanities* [Online], 12 | 2019, Online since 12 Mar. 2020, <http://journals.openedition.org/cy/4917>; <https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.4917>

²²⁵ Al Rawaf, H., S., and Simmons, C., (1991), The Education of Women in Saudi Arabia, *Comparative Education*, 27 (3), pp. 287–295, p.290

²²⁶ Ottaway, D., (2021), Mohammed Bin Salman, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, p.51

It is clear that mobilizing the society with nationalism alone is not enough to create a vibrant society in Saudi society. As mentioned above, nationalism strives to break the Wahhabi dominance and for women to take more part in education. It is clear that the empowerment of women has an important place in the transformation of Saudi society. This goal can be clearly expressed in Vision 2030, which was implemented to create a vibrant society: *“Women's empowerment and youth engagement are top priorities of social reform. Greater access to education and jobs are making the Kingdom a more inclusive society.”*²²⁷ While it was emphasized that MBS's target audience was young people, there was no distinction between men and women. As a matter of fact, Vision 2030 also alleges to address the young population in the same mentality and puts forward various policies to enable women to take more part in social and economic life. *“In 2019, Saudi Arabia introduced significant women's rights reforms, including lifting travel restrictions and allowing Saudi women to drive, register their children's birth, and providing new protections against employment discrimination and sexual harassment.”*²²⁸ They create safe environments to increase women's participation in both business and social life. As mentioned before, the Vision 2030 policies include comprehensive reforms that are intertwined with each other. In other words, the rights granted to women do not come from respect for women's rights; for a society based on production, some freedoms are granted for all individuals in the society to actively take part in production.

According to the Vision 2030's priorities, it could be argued that its main focus is on changing the mentality to create a vibrant society. In other words, various attempts are made to remove the dependence of the individual on the state, the dependence of women on men, and the dependence of the young on the elderly. Both the employment of young people and women in the private sector and the involvement of women in social life without male guardians clearly demonstrate the attempts made to change the mentality. Furthermore, nationalism plays a crucial role in breaking the dependence on tribal identities. By fostering a shared sense of national identity, it supplants tribal loyalties and promotes a unified sense of purpose, transcending the narrow confines of tribal affiliations. Similarly, nationalism challenges the rentier mentality, which fostered a system where individuals received essential services like health, education, and public services as gift, leading to a passive attitude. A vibrant society, in contrast, aims to

²²⁷ <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/progress/dynamic-society/>

²²⁸ Human Rights Watch. “Saudi Arabia: Proposed Reforms Neglect Basic Rights.” Human Rights Watch, 25 Feb. 2021, www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/25/saudi-arabia-proposed-reforms-neglect-basic-rights

empower individuals to actively participate in the economy and social life, securing access to these services through their contributions, fostering a sense of responsibility and self-reliance.

c) an ambitious nation

The last part of vision 2030 states that these reforms are not limited to the society and that the Saudi government also needs a transformation. Vision 2030 declares that “*a country that is effectively governed, transparent, and accountable, encouraging all of society – citizens, businesses, and non-profit organizations – to take the lead in identifying and pursuing opportunities to advance collective future*”²²⁹. Saudi Government is aware of that “*transparency and the disclosure of information are determinants of development and economic growth and without them economic progress cannot be sustained*”²³⁰. Therefore, enhancing transparency and information sharing is crucial for the Saudi state to rebuild trust with its citizens. Implementing effective anti-corruption measures, improving public access to government data, and engaging in open communication about economic decisions are essential steps. Unfortunately, the kingdom's image regarding these issues remains tarnished, plagued by opacity and a lack of public accountability. Moving forward, actively combating these concerns through concrete actions will be critical for the Saudi state to regain public trust and achieve its ambitious economic transformation goals.

One of the aims of the Fiscal Balance Program launched in line with Vision 2030 to implement fiscal reforms is to “*provide much more transparency around which segments of society are being supported by the government – in contrast to the existing subsidies*”. Enhancing accountability in the public sector is crucial for economic growth, on the one hand. A more responsible administration creates the conditions for steady and long-term economic growth by guaranteeing effective resource allocation, increasing investor trust, and reducing corruption. Moreover, the simple act of raising taxes naturally encourages transparency. More tax contributions from the public mean more accountability for the use of those funds. This can take the form of citizen oversight committees, public budget audits, and improved government transparency on spending choices, all of which can help to create a beneficial feedback

²²⁹ <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/vision-2030/overview/an-ambitious-nation/>

²³⁰ Al-habshan, K., S., (2017), Issues Involving Corporate Transparency in the Saudi Capital Market, Public Administration Research, 6(2), pp.21-44, p.21

mechanism between fiscal discipline and economic growth. Building on the historical principle of 'no tax, no representation,' the introduction of new taxes in Saudi society could inevitably spark a demand for increased citizen participation. As individuals contribute more financially to the state, the logic of having a greater say in how those resources are utilized and decisions are made gains traction. It is clear that democratic institutions will not emerge suddenly following this transformation. However, with the deterioration of this traditional structure between the state and the citizen, the decision-making mechanisms in the budgetary of the Saudi government have been also changing. “*By creating oversight organizations such as the Spending Rationalization Office, the Project Management Office, and the Public Management Delivery Unit, the NTP focuses on enhancing coordination amongst the evaluation of the government's ministries and agencies.*”²³¹ In this way, it is aimed to prevent arbitrary budgets that are far from effective and created by institutions and individuals that are a state within the state, in line with their own interests. Furthermore, it is aimed to both strengthen central institutions and increase the efficiency of public expenditure by creating a central budget.

Another element targeted under this heading is to change the communication method between the state and the citizens. MBS's abandonment of traditional majlis meetings and switching to a technology-based petition method, as stated above, has become a generally accepted action in all institutions of the state. In other words, e-governance is an important part of the Saudi vision by establishing a new government model by taking advantage of technology. They aim to both accelerate citizens' access to the state and provide information to citizens and the business world by taking advantage of the opportunities of technology in many areas. The change is undeniable: Vision 2030 has made accessing information easier than ever. From public forums and online data repositories to strengthened communication channels, citizens are empowered with greater knowledge and engagement opportunities.

Increased transparency, accountability, and information sharing are having a profound impact on the Saudi government. These efforts aim to cultivate greater trust and legitimacy with citizens by improving communication and responsiveness, while also potentially influencing internal dynamics and policy implementation. Moreover, the mechanism is used to strengthen the central government. However, these elements, which can be considered indispensable for democratic systems, do not indicate the existence of democratic institutions in Saudi society. It is

²³¹ Moshashai, D. et al. (2018): Saudi Arabia plans for its economic future: Vision 2030, the National Transformation Plan and Saudi fiscal reform, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, p. 13

important to note that while these elements are crucial for effective governance. “*The country’s rulers, the Al Saud, (...) seek to present themselves as an example of good governance without democracy – for instance, through the long-standing narrative around shura, or consultation, and the growing discourse about transparency.*”²³² As mentioned above, the proliferation and increased use of technology strengthens the tendency to establish a new technology-based authoritarian regime in Saudi society. The basis for this trend is that technology allows governments to exert greater control over citizens and suppress social dissent. However, it should not be forgotten that this trend is absolute and does not mean that the emergence of democratic institutions is impossible. Indeed, the widespread use and increased use of technology leads to significant changes in the social structure. These changes could pave the way for a more free and democratic society. As a result, the change in the form of government in Saudi society has the potential for both the strengthening of an authoritarian regime and the emergence of democratic institutions. How this potential will be shaped will depend on the future political and social developments of society. Therefore, the potential trajectory of Saudi governance rests not in the technology itself, but in the complex interplay between state and society.

Although many reforms and programs have been implemented to change the socio-economic and socio-cultural structure, the fact that a systematic structure has not been created in the legal system reveals the necessity of legal reforms that will ensure the survival of these reforms within the scope of Vision 2030. Legal reforms have remained a problem since the establishment of the Saudi state. Ibn Saud's desire to switch to a written legal system was not realized by his successors. By also benefiting from King Faisal's institutionalism movement, “*in 1970, a ministry of justice was first set up in Saudi Arabia*”²³³. By following this, “*in 1974 the shariah judicial system was thoroughly reorganized, on a Western model*”²³⁴. These reforms in the legal system were put forward to respond to the legitimacy crises of the Saudi Dynasty, rather than creating a comprehensive series of reforms for the modernization of the Saudi legal system. As mentioned earlier, with the emergence of the new middle class, the demand for a written basic law had increased. Although some of the demands were denigrated in the 90s, there was a judicial system in the 2000s that was devoid of a systematic written law and progressed with the

²³² Kinninmont, J., (2017), *Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia’s Social Contract: Austerity and Transformation*. Chatham House Middle East and North Africa Programme, p. 6

²³³ Layish, A., (1987), *Saudi Arabian Legal Reform as a Mechanism to Moderate Wahhābī Doctrine*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 107(2), pp.279-292, p.280

²³⁴ *Ibid.* p.280

jurisprudence of sharia. Recently the most important reform was made by King Abdullah, in 2007 and 2009 Saudi King Abdullah capped a decade of legal and judicial reforms in his country by reorganizing the judiciary and ordering that Saudi Arabia follow the step that virtually all other states in the region did long ago by codifying its laws - committing to paper a comprehensive compendium of the operative laws in the kingdom. As can be seen, although a period of approximately 80 years had passed since the establishment of the state, the absence of a written systematic law that could be applied throughout the country still continued. King Abdullah's promise would only begin to apply under the Vision 2030.

MBS explained once the current system “*the lack of clear legislation previously has led to a variation in legal provisions*”²³⁵. In order to solve this problem, judicial reforms were aimed to implemented and expand the Saudi legal framework. It was inevitable that the reforms to be put forward would be directly proportional to the goals of Vision 2030. this approach to reform legal framework was included in the NTP program in a way that would sustain economic development, protect to increased social freedoms, and increase the use of technology. In this direction, four new laws were announced to systematize legal systems. “*The four new laws include the Personal Status Law, the Civil Transactions Law, the Penal Code for Discretionary Sentences, and the Law of Evidence.*”²³⁶

Recently, “*Saudi Arabia passed its first Personal Status Law (PSL), which entered into force on 18 June 2022*”²³⁷. The new PSL aims to regulate personal issues and increase women’s rights related to some issues such as marriage, divorce, separation, lineage, guardianship and custody of children, wills, inheritance, and trusteeship. However, it should be noted that, as a Saudi scholar highlighted “*the Personal Status Law mainly standardizes the practiced law in Saudi Arabia. It reduces the differences between judges in application of the law but still maintains the judges’ authorities to decide on certain issues such as on the conditions to annul the marriage, or compatibility of the spouses or in relation to property rights ... judges still have discretionary power on issues that are not clearly defined in the law*”²³⁸. It should be emphasized that the Saudi PSL should not be considered as a law that accepts international standards, but

²³⁵ Naar, I., “Saudi Crown Prince Announces 4 New Laws to Reform Kingdom’s Judicial Institutions.” Al Arabiya English, 8 Feb. 2021, english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/02/08/Saudi-Vision-2030-Saudi-Crown-Prince-announces-reforms-to-improve-legislative-environment-.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ “Saudi Arabia: New Personal Status Law Codifies Discrimination against Women.” Amnesty International, 8 May 2023, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/6431/2023/en/, p.1

²³⁸ Ibid. p. 3

rather as a codification of Shariah law that is applied more heavily. It is undeniable that it has brought some innovations, but it still carries the discrimination of patrimonial shariah law regarding women's rights. Especially the male guardianship over women is still a big problem in PSL. Although some steps are taken to reduce male guardianship, such as lifting a driving ban in 2018, travel abroad without a male guardian's permission in 2019 even the PSL says that “Articles 13 and 15 require a male guardian to contract a woman into marriage, irrespective of her age or former marital status and Article 17 sets out the order of those who can act as a woman’s male guardian”²³⁹.

In addition to the new law regulating personal issues, another law that will deeply affect the Saudi judiciary system has also begun to be implemented. With the implementation of the new Law of Evidence, it introduced new methods and a systematic order in obtaining evidence regarding the crime. As a Saudi academician noted, “the more modern and developed the rules of evidence in a particular legal system, the more likely they are to enhance justice and protect the rights of all parties involved”²⁴⁰. “The law allows courts to use various scientific methods, including digital means, to elicit evidence.”²⁴¹ Moreover, “under the law, it is not permissible for the judge to issue a verdict on the basis of his personal knowledge, and that the evidence is to be presented by the plaintiff while the oath is to be taken by the defendant who denies the charges”²⁴². While this law limits the arbitrariness of the judge, the inclusion of digital tools both makes evidence collection effective and can restrict the freedom of individuals in the digital world. Especially under an authoritarian regime, digital evidence collection could transform to social media observation, internet history monitoring, etc. and may be violation of private space. However, it could be said that “the rules of evidence are the cornerstone of stability in civil and commercial transactions, especially with the economic growth witnessed”²⁴³. It should not be

²³⁹ “Saudi Arabia: Law Enshrines Male Guardianship.” Human Rights Watch, 8 Mar. 2023, www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/08/saudi-arabia-law-enshrines-male-guardianship#:~:text=Articles%2013%20and%2015%20require

²⁴⁰ Al Kinani, M., “New Law of Evidence: A Step to Reinforce Trust in Saudi Judiciary System.” Arab News, 29 Dec. 2021, www.arabnews.com/node/1995081/saudi-arabia.

²⁴¹ “Law of Evidence Allows Courts to Use Digital Means to Elicit Evidence.” Saudigazette, 30 Dec. 2021, saudigazette.com.sa/article/615327/SAUDI-ARABIA/Law-of-Evidence-allows-courts-to-nbspuse-digital-means-to-elicitevidence.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Al Kinani, M., “New Law of Evidence: A Step to Reinforce Trust in Saudi Judiciary System.” Arab News, 29 Dec. 2021, www.arabnews.com/node/1995081/saudi-arabia.

forgotten that the main theme of the Vision 2030 is economic development and that's why it and its programs mainly focus on creating a peaceful environment for economic growth.

Another new law, as announced, is the new Civil Transactions Law, which has been implemented recently. In the absence of a civil law in Saudi Arabia, the opinions of each judge determined how sharia-based norms and principles should be applied to civil matters. The implementation of a new civil law cannot be considered independent of Sharia, as a matter of fact, this new law has emerged as a codification of Sharia rules and practices. Clearly, it aims to establish a systematic and comprehensive legal framework for governing contract and property rights, tort, and other commercial and personal injury matters. A comment by a Saudi lawyer on the law shows obviously the main goal, *“it stabilizes transactions, reduces the causes of contract invalidation and termination, and expands contractual freedom. In addition, it speeds up the process of resolving disputes and reduces variation in judicial rulings”*²⁴⁴. It is clearly seen that the purpose of this law is to establish a modern legal system for domestic and foreign investors. The Saudi government is aware of the need for a consistently applied legal system for economic sustainability and is trying to develop civil law accordingly. In addition, various innovations such as the establishment of special courts for commercial matters are steps taken towards this goal.

Another promised law that is still not implemented is the Penal Code for Discretionary Sentences. A written criminal law is at least as important as the above-mentioned laws. Although the Saudi government wants to reduce the arbitrariness of judges and establish a systematic legal system, the lack of a written criminal law still causes judges to make arbitrary decisions. *“In the absence of a written penal code, some Saudi judges have set out to prove that a defendant had engaged in a certain act, which they then classify as a crime, rather than proving that the defendant had committed a specific crime set out in the law.”*²⁴⁵ This may both increase the pressure of judges on society and harm the principle of equality of everyone before the law. Actions such as applying different penalties to the same crimes and nepotism in law may cast a shadow on the transparency of the law. Therefore, a written criminal law in accordance with international standards is important to complete these legal reforms.

Along with legal reforms, various programs that will support the dynamic and growing economy targeted by Vision 2030 have been implemented. It can be said that under Vision 2030,

²⁴⁴ AlShammari, H., “Kingdom’s New Civil Law “a Quantum Leap” for Legal System.” Arab News, 17 Dec. 2023, www.arabnews.com/node/2427401/saudi-arabia. Accessed 25 Dec. 2023.

²⁴⁵ “Saudi Arabia: Forthcoming Penal Code Should Protect Rights.” Human Rights Watch, 29 Apr. 2022, www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/29/saudi-arabia-forthcoming-penal-code-should-protect-rights.

a significant amount of social and economic rights has been given to women. Women's rights, which were the subject of discussion in previous periods but could not be fulfilled, are being put into practice over time. For example, the protests made by women to gain the right to drive in the 90s only reached their conclusion after a period of 30 years. Similarly, the struggle against the obligation to wear abaya, hijab, also achieved its goal in this period. Of course, it may be necessary to discuss the pressure of religious authority rather than political authority here. As a matter of fact, while King Abdullah was trying to expand women's rights, the biggest opposition came from religious institutions. It can be said that the granting of more rights to women in this period was also a result of the power struggle over religious authority.

Weakening Mutawwin and eliminating their influence in social life, which was included in King Abdullah's political agenda, also emerged as an effort under the Vision 2030. The new Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice announced by the Council of Ministers shortly after the Vision 2030 announcement was a clear indicator of this. *“The council removed the authority of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, or religious police, to arrest, pursue, or request documents or ID cards from suspects.”*²⁴⁶ Taking these powers away from the Mutawwin was an important step for the reforms to be made in the name of social freedom that would be implemented later. It is not surprised that steps towards reducing religious authority in social life, such as granting certain rights to women and not regulating working hours in workplaces according to religious obligations, were taken after this regulation. Moreover, it should be considered as an important reform for Saudi modernization in order to monopolize pysical power. In this way, centralization efforts can progress together with the monopolization of both coercion and physical power.

In addition to these, a few important programs should be mentioned. For example, the Saudi government is making new breakthroughs in areas such as art, culture and sports. Various activities are carried out, such as hosting some international events. However, an important point here is the innovations made in the education system. While the Saudi government is renewing its curriculum in these fields, it also aims to enable Saudi youth to receive education abroad in these fields through scholarship programs. The addition of culture and art programs in addition to the market-oriented approach of this scholarship program, which was previously introduced

²⁴⁶ Saudi Arabia: A Move to Curb Religious Police Abuses | Human Rights Watch. 18 Apr. 2016, www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/18/saudi-arabia-move-curb-religious-police-abuses-0#:~:text=Saudi%20Arabia%E2%80%99s%20Council%20of%20Ministers%20issued%20a%20sweeping

by King Abdullah, is an important development. Of course, the main aim of these programs is to increase the economic contribution in these areas. Moreover, tourism investments also hold an important place for economic diversity. As mentioned above, the activation of the e-Governance method has enabled it to take various steps in this area, such as e-visa, to facilitate the visit of tourists.

It should be noted that The General Entertainment Authority (GEA), in line with the Vision 2030 and the efforts of the Saudi government to attract the attention of tourists and create a new tourist destination in the region, was established in 2016. *“The GEA was established to develop the entertainment sector in the Kingdom, which would help diversify the economy and grow small- and medium-sized businesses.”*²⁴⁷ Saudi Arabia is trying to organize many events, both regional and international, through the GEA investments. However, the GEA should not only be considered as an institution that makes investments to create economic diversity, but also as a tool in Saudi Arabian politics. The government is using the GEA as a tool to liberalize the country and introduce a moderate form of Islam. Thus, it is not surprising that most of the criticism against the GEA comes from the conservative side. As a matter of fact, *“a professor of Islamic law described the GEA’s actions as erasing the original identity of society”*²⁴⁸. Frankly, this criticism is relatively justified, because the Saudi government, which is trying to integrate into the global world, is trying to change its own image with tolerance and hospitality. Some scholars and human rights activists emphasize that this is image laundering. *“As Michael Page, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch points out so, when Hollywood A-listers, international athletes, and other global celebrities take government money to perform in Saudi Arabia while staying silent on the government’s atrocious rights record, they are boosting the kingdom’s strategy of whitewashing Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman’s abuses.”*²⁴⁹ On the other hand, these events enable MBS to gain popularity in domestic politics. These events, which arouse interest among young people and women, as well as the nationalist rhetoric used by the GEA, lead to an increase in support and loyalty to MBS.

²⁴⁷ Saudi Arabia’s General Entertainment Authority issues 4,500 licenses. (2023, September 6). Arab News. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2368296/saudi-arabia>

²⁴⁸ Saudi Scholar “Held” After Criticizing Entertainment Authority, (2019, Sep.11), Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/11/saudi-scholar-held-after-criticising-entertainment-authority>

²⁴⁹ Saudi Arabia: “Image Laundering” Conceals Abuses, (2020, Oct. 2), Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/02/saudi-arabia-image-laundering-conceals-abuses>

In summary, it could be argued that vision 2030 aims for a comprehensive social transformation. The main element of this transformation is the creation of economic diversity and the transition to a sustainable economic system. Additionally, Vision 2030 strives to create a new resource to provide long-term legitimacy to the Saudi leadership. It is obvious that the existence of the struggle between the new middle class and traditional structures that emerged after the 70s made it difficult for the Saudi dynasty to survive with a legitimacy fed by religious sources. As an alternative to this, it led to the emergence of nationalism as an ideological source, which was welcomed by the new generation and the new middle class. With the disappearance of King Faisal's Order and the efforts of King Abdullah, Vision 2030 has emerged today. The aim was to establish the Saudi modern state by a more comprehensive and systematic reform movement. Why these comprehensive reforms could be made after a long time after the camp between liberals and conservatives had been seriously debated since the 90s and became clear, can be explained by both the necessity of the age and the political leadership of MBS. Saudi reforms, which have long been shaped by a policy of balance, have taken a sharp place on the liberal side in this period.

3.2.3 Critics of MBS and Vision 2030

Although the implementation of Vision 2030 is important in responding to some social demands, it should not be forgotten that this is a top-down modernization initiative. As can be seen in many authoritarian regimes, Vision 2030 can perhaps be defined with the following slogan: for the people, despite the people. Surely, many groups in society support Vision 2030. It contains important elements, especially for groups that desire a liberal and secular modernization. However, it is obvious that these reforms have an attitude negative towards its old elites, religious leaders and tribe leaders and opposes the old traditional structures. The reform emerged with the change of each leader in the Saudi administration, and each leader made reforms to solve the legitimacy crisis and ensure the survival of the dynasty. That is why each king or de facto ruler is called a reformer. However, what distinguishes MBS from others is its attitude. As mentioned before, reforms were always implemented in a moderate manner by implementing a balance policy. From time to time, traditional structures came to the fore, and from time to time, liberal elements came to the fore. The Saudi leadership has taken a stance towards maintaining the existence of the dynasty and the kingdom without making a sharp

choice between both poles. As a matter of fact, these efforts have achieved their purpose. Until King Abdullah, it is impossible to talk about being openly on one side, and even though King Abdullah was surprisingly on the liberal side, he did not eliminate the element of balance. It can be said that only King Faisal's attitude was different from those mentioned above. As a matter of fact, King Faisal saw himself as the leader of the religio-political community and associated being a good administrator with being a good religious person. What distinguishes MBS is that he implements his policies more harshly rather than being a moderate reformer. Although this attitude is welcomed positively by his supporters and even his attitude towards Wahhabi institutions is seen as heroic, MBS is an authoritarian ruler.

MBS's inevitable challenge is navigating the sensitivities of Wahhabi institutions. His efforts to streamline religious authority, introduce social reforms that expand personal liberties, and reform the education system to adopt a less rigid interpretation of religious doctrine attract criticism from some elements within the religious establishment. In 90s, Steps to increase social freedoms and include women more in social life were criticized by Grand Mufti, highest position of religious authority. Similarly, The Grand Mufti criticized national day celebration by ruling “*that it was religiously prohibited as it was an imitation of Christians and infidels*”²⁵⁰. However, the reason why MBS is facing such a harsh attitude is the positive attitude of The Grand Mufti appointed in 1999 against MBS. “*Sheikh Abdulaziz al-Sheikh, Saudi Arabia’s grand mufti and a direct descendent of Ibn Wahhab, has been publicly supportive of MBS despite a series of reforms that significantly undermined his influence, the religious elite’s power, and his budget.*”²⁵¹ Although the current grand mufti also opposes some reforms, this does not reflect a very high level of opposition. For example, “*despite the Grand Mufti’s view that they could lead to immorality*”²⁵² against the opening of cinemas in 2018 and the removal of male guardianship in some matters, no serious opposition is observed. In fact, fatwas by untitled muftis criticizing reforms should not be accepted in society, and a statement stating that the reforms made are suitable for Islam. He said that “*we have useful initiatives and programs that tend to realize the goals set by the Islamic Shariah, and the Muslim community should adhere to it by taking fatwas*

²⁵⁰ Kinninmont, J. (2017). Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia’s Social Contract: Austerity and Transformation. Chatham House Middle East and North Africa Programme. p. 23

²⁵¹ London, D., (2022), Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s people. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/crown-prince-mohammed-bin-salmans-people>

²⁵² Kinninmont, J., (2018), Political Change in Saudi Arabia, IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2018, <https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Political-Change-in-Saudi-Arabia.pdf>

from their reliable sources”²⁵³. It is worth noting that it has become visible that the dependence to religious authorities among the young generation has decreased. According to a survey conducted in 2015, “*only one in three of these young Saudi respondents said that they regarded The Grand Mufti of their country as having the right to determine what is permissible and forbidden in Islam*”²⁵⁴.

Not only did he receive the support of The Grand Mufti, but he also tried to prevent the religious authority, as a state apparatus, from opposing the reforms by changing both the structure and members of some institutions. The state-sponsored institutions most affected by this change are the Council of Senior Scholars (Ulema) and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. “*In December 2016 King Salman slightly expanded the council of senior ulema to include two clerics seen as more moderate, in a step seen as likely to support the gradual social liberalization associated with Vision 2030.*”²⁵⁵ “*Salman continued Abdullah’s policy of including on the council scholars who adhere to the three non-Hanbali Sunni schools, broadening its composition in a limited way—while diluting its influence by asking for its advice less frequently.*”²⁵⁶ The reshaping of key religious institutions like the Council of Senior Scholars and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs reflects a conscious effort by MBS to reshape the landscape of religious authority in Saudi Arabia. By appointing "moderate" clerics and broadening the composition of these bodies, he aims to ensure compliance with his reform agenda while potentially diluting the influence of traditionalist voices. This approach raises questions about the future of religious autonomy and freedom of dissent within the kingdom, as well as the potential unintended consequences of altering the delicate balance between religious and secular spheres.

Moreover, MBS's aggressive attitude towards old established structures came to light shortly after he became de facto ruler. “*In early November 2017, nearly 400 of Saudi Arabia’s most powerful people, among them princes, tycoons and ministers, were rounded up and detained in the Ritz-Carlton hotel, in what became the biggest and most contentious purge in the*

²⁵³ <https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/637189>, 29 Oct. 2023

²⁵⁴ Kinninmont, J. (2017). Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia’s Social Contract: Austerity and Transformation. Chatham House Middle East and North Africa Programme. p. 21

²⁵⁵ Ibid. p.20

²⁵⁶ Farouk, Y., and Brown, N., J., (2021), Saudi Arabia’s Religious Reforms Are Touching Nothing but Changing Everything in Islamic Institutions in Arab States: Mapping the Dynamics of Control, Co-option, and Contention (ed. Frederic Wehrey), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p.13

modern kingdom's history."²⁵⁷ Determining the targets who are elites in the business world, officials in the ministry of economy, etc. was so-called a cleansing operation in the fight against corruption. "*The corruption crackdown was a populist move at a time of austerity, which also enabled MBS to send certain messages to the country's traditional elites.*"²⁵⁸ The message it gave was clear: the Saudi government has now banned these old structures, resulting from the previous social contract, from freely receiving a share of rentier income and from arbitrarily using public resources. "*Under the umbrella of the vision and the fight against corruption, Bin Salman detained princes in the Ritz-Carlton Hotel and removed them from important positions in order to concentrate power and influence in the King Salman branch of the family.*"²⁵⁹ It is obvious that there was a struggle against the structure that MBS previously called the network of thousands of monarchs. These arrests were used as an effective tool for centralization and power consolidation, and a harsh message was given to the princes. It can be said that in any struggle for the throne, MBS can eliminate his possible rivals by using this method again. For corrupted princes, such arrests with popular support can always be used as a threat to suppress them. Moreover, "*scores of academics, economists, writers and human rights activists have been arrested in recent years in an apparent bid to stamp out dissent and opposition to Prince Mohammed, who has consolidated power with a purported anti-corruption crackdown*"²⁶⁰.

MBS's aggressive attitude is evident in the planning of the NEOM project. Aside the problems it will create in the future- NEOM is, as mentioned before, a futuristic example of technology-based neo-authoritarianism- the attitude towards territorial rights during its construction is an indication that MBS's authoritarianism clearly uses physical power. As planning progressed, officials began registering and listing local properties in the area. "*On 12 April 2020 Abdul Rahim al-Huwaiti, a 43-year-old resident of al-Khuraiba village, government employee at the Ministry of Finance, and member of the Huwaitat tribe, refused to allow a land registry committee into his home. When the authorities arrived at his house, he filmed them and*

²⁵⁷ "Night of the Beating": Details Emerge of Riyadh Ritz-Carlton Purge – Al-Manar TV Lebanon. (2020, Nov. 20). <https://english.almanar.com.lb/1202863#:~:text=In%20early%20November%202017%2C%20nearly>

²⁵⁸ Kinninmont, J., (2018), Political Change in Saudi Arabia, European Institute of the Mediterranean, p.2 <https://www.iemed.org/publication/political-change-in-saudi-arabia/>.

²⁵⁹ Elbanna, A., (2023, July 15), Examining the Relationship between Economic Reform and Political Freedom: Vision 2030 and Democratic Transition in Saudi Arabia, ROWAQ ARABI, https://cihrs-rowaq.org/examining-the-relationship-between-economic-reform-and-political-freedom-vision-2030-and-democratic-transition-in-saudi-arabia/?lang=en#_edn67

²⁶⁰ Saudi scholar "held" after criticizing entertainment authority. (2019, September 11). Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/11/saudi-scholar-held-after-criticising-entertainment-authority>

*posted videos forced on social media, criticizing the eviction of his tribe and describing it as “state terrorism”. Early the following morning, on 13 April 2020, dozens of Special Forces surrounded his house, accompanied by several armored trucks, and he was killed.”*²⁶¹ The pressure against inhabitants who opposed the NEOM project did not end there. “In August 2022, the Specialised Criminal Court of Appeal had sentenced both Abdullah Rashid Ibrahim al-Huwaiti and Abdullah Dakhil Allah al-Huwaiti to 50 years in prison, followed by a 50-year travel ban, for supporting their family’s refusal to be forcibly evicted from their homes to make way for the Neom project.”²⁶² Also, “*Salma Al-Shehab, a Saudi woman was sentenced to 34 years imprisonment for tweets critical of the government.*”²⁶³

This harsh attitude towards the opposition is not new. It could be seen in another highly publicized event the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, “*a columnist for the Washington Post who wrote critical articles of the crown prince and his policies, was murdered by a team of Saudi agents in the kingdom’s consulate in Istanbul in October 2018*”²⁶⁴. Both his title and the fact that the murder took place in another country caused it to be on the international agenda. Also, this event affected relationships between Saudi Arabia and other countries. However, it should be said that the bilateral relationship between Saudi Arabia and the US was not affected much when the event happened since the US President Trump had close relationship with MBS. The arrival of President Biden, however, posed challenges to the previously close US-Saudi relationship forged under Trump's administration. Khashoggi's murder had repercussions in US domestic politics, and throughout the Biden election campaign, criticized Trump's attitude towards the murder and emphasized MBS's responsibility. “*In February 2021, a month after taking office, Biden did follow through on a campaign promise to release a long-delayed US intelligence report, which directly blamed Prince Mohammed for Khashoggi’s murder, noting that since 2017.*”²⁶⁵ However, this attitude of the Biden administration did not last long, and after a short time, in order to avoid damaging US-Saudi Arabia relations, “*The Biden administration has*

²⁶¹ The Dark Side of Neom: February 2023 Expropriation, Expulsion, and Prosecution of the Region’s Inhabitants, (2023), ALQST for Human Rights, p.7

²⁶² Ibid. p.13

²⁶³ Saudi Arabia: tribesmen jailed for refusing NEOM displacement. (2022, Sep. 14). Middle East Monitor. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20220914-saudi-arabia-tribesmen-jailed-for-refusing-neom-displacement/>

²⁶⁴ Timeline of the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. (2021, February 26). Wwww.aljazeera.com. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/26/timeline-of-the-murder-of-journalist-jamal-khashoggi>

²⁶⁵ Bazzi, M. (2023, Oct. 2). Khashoggi was killed five years ago. Thanks to Trump and Biden, Saudi Arabia is stronger than ever. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/02/five-years-after-killing-a-journalist-in-cold-blood-saudi-arabia-is-stronger-than-ever>

determined that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, should be granted immunity in a case brought against him"²⁶⁶. A similar process emerged in bilateral relations with Türkiye, where the incident took place. The murder was widely discussed in Turkish domestic politics and caused crises in Türkiye-Saudi relations. However, these tensions have recently given way to rapprochement as a result of increased collaborations.

As mentioned earlier, Vision 2030 prioritizes economic and social transformation while overlooking political change, upholding strict control over dissent and absolute monarchy. Scholars point to ongoing human rights violations, limitations on free speech and assembly, and a lack of genuine democratic engagement. This focus on modernization without political reform raises concerns about genuine progress. Additionally, critics raise concerns about the plan's economic sustainability. Its overreliance on oil is seen as a vulnerability, and advocacy for diversification beyond fossil fuels emerges as a crucial aspect of safeguarding the country's long-term stability.

Furthermore, worries exist that the plan's emphasis on foreign investment and privatization may exacerbate existing inequalities, benefiting the wealthy at the expense of marginalized communities. Environmental concerns also surface, with critics arguing that the focus on large-scale projects and industrial growth could come at the cost of environmental sustainability, potentially harming ecosystems and public health. It is not only limited to environmental, but also scholars worry that the influx of foreign labor and large-scale infrastructure projects could displace local residents and disrupt their traditional livelihoods. Concerns about preserving cultural heritage and community fabric rise in this context. While the urbanization of the population is already a problem, the migration of people living in rural areas to cities due to mega projects and the fact that the population that will work in these projects is foreign may seriously affect the demographic structure. Although one of the aims of Vision 2030 is to increase the working Saudi population, these jobs are basically to ensure that they have a certain status. Surely, as a result of the changing mentality, there is a working population of young Saudis in low-ranking jobs; gatekeeper, uber driver, cashier etc., but they are still not likely to doing these jobs easily due to both tribal ties and social status anxiety. In other words, people with strong tribe affiliation and a large tribe network are still not wanted to work in low-ranking jobs.

²⁶⁶ Marquardt, A., (2022, Nov. 18), <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/17/politics/saudi-crown-prince-immunity-state-department-jamal-khashoggi/index.html>

In addition to demography and rural cultural life, which are likely to change with mega projects, conservative groups oppose the plan's potential for social liberalization, fearing it would undermine their understanding of Saudi Arabia's identity and cultural norms. This clash between modernization and traditional values remains a critical point of contention. Some consider the increased personal freedoms indicated in the vision as progress, while others argue that they undermine morals and family structures. However, it should not be forgotten that the Saudi government still insists that the family is the atomic stone of its society. It is highly likely that Vision 2030 will cause a transition from traditional large families to nuclear families in Saudi society. The disruption of the traditional family structure may lead to the erosion of traditional norms, as conservatives claim. A rapid change may negatively affect social peace, and the nucleation of families may affect housing, education, infrastructure, health, etc. It may cause problems in many areas. Necessary investments and programs must be made in accordance with the increasing number of households.

Moreover, the very concept of a "modernized" Saudi Arabia raises questions about how to reconcile traditional values with a rapidly changing society. This includes discussions about preserving cultural heritage while embracing technological advances and adapting to a globalizing world. While modernization in Saudi Arabia has long been progressing with a policy of balance between tradition and modernity, although Vision 2030 promises to preserve cultural norms, a sharp globalization may cause a break with the past. Surely, another factor that will contribute to this is the impact that foreign investors will have on social dynamics as a result of economic diversification based on technology and knowledge. This raises concerns about the potential for erosion of traditional values due to increased cultural exchange and potential changes in social dynamics. Cultural exchange is an important element, and the Saudi society has strived to avoid this for a long time. As a matter of fact, this could be observed even in students who went abroad to study. They were trying to minimize cultural exchange by creating a closed community in the schools they attended. However, it is inevitable that the policy of opening up to the world will cause a rapid cultural exchange. This always creates a potential for erosion in Saudi culture.

To sum up, like past reformers Ibn Saud and King Faisal, MBS advocates for modernizing Saudi Arabia's economy, infrastructure, and social fabric. This includes fostering a diversified economy, embracing technological advancements, and introducing cultural reforms. He shares with Ibn Saud a focus on centralizing power, consolidating control within the royal

family and over political and economic levers. However, MBS's approach distinguishes itself by its unparalleled ambition and velocity. He implements changes at a rapid pace, encompassing wider economic, social, and cultural domains than his predecessors. Notably, in contrast to their cautious stance on media and technology, MBS readily embraces digital communication and entertainment sectors, granting Saudis greater access to information and cultural products. Furthermore, his social reforms, such as empowering women through initiatives like allowing them to drive and travel more freely, have generated significant domestic debate and international attention. Additionally, MBS pursues a more assertive foreign policy, projecting Saudi Arabia's influence on the world stage and forging new alliances, unlike the more guarded approach of earlier eras.

Despite these parallels and differences, assessing the long-term effectiveness and societal impact of MBS's reforms demands further observation and analysis. Human rights concerns and the centralization of power under his leadership remain crucial points of criticism. While sharing some goals and tendencies with past reformers, MBS's reign stands out for its rapid pace, broader scope of reforms, and openness to technological and media liberalization. However, questions regarding human rights, political accountability, and the long-term consequences of his policies persist.

3.3 THE CASE OF SAUDI ARABIA IN THE FRAMEWORK OF DIAMOND SOCIETY THEORY

3.3.1 *Diamond Society and Samples*

By 1932, the social structure necessary for the establishment of an authoritarian regime with a strong center under the royal authority had emerged. This social structure consisted primarily of a ruling family, Wahhabi institutions formed around this family, and other tribes affiliated with this family. The relationship of these three groups with each other was an indicator

of the foundations of the society. As a matter of fact, instead of an individual-based society contract prioritized by modern states, a society was established with a tribal-based contract away from individuality. In Saudi Arabia, a social contract was made over the concept of allegiance - bayaa-, which was left from the foundation of the Islamic state under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad and later used by the ruling elites to legalize themselves in the various state-building processes. As some thinkers have pointed out, Bayaa is essentially the Saudi version of the social contract.²⁶⁷ As a result of this social contract, which excludes individuality, it could be said that existing outside of the aforementioned structures leads to not getting a share from the political, social and economic power sharing. While it legalizes the ruling dynasty, it gives the right to take part in the public administration the structures that declare their loyalty by taking an oath, but it prevents individual participation in public administration. As a result, the society consists of the royal family, which holds the most power, then the Wahhabi institutions and the tribes that declare their loyalty to the kingdom, then the middle class which try to exist outside the tribal structure, and finally the peasants who have the least share of power sharing. (See table 1)

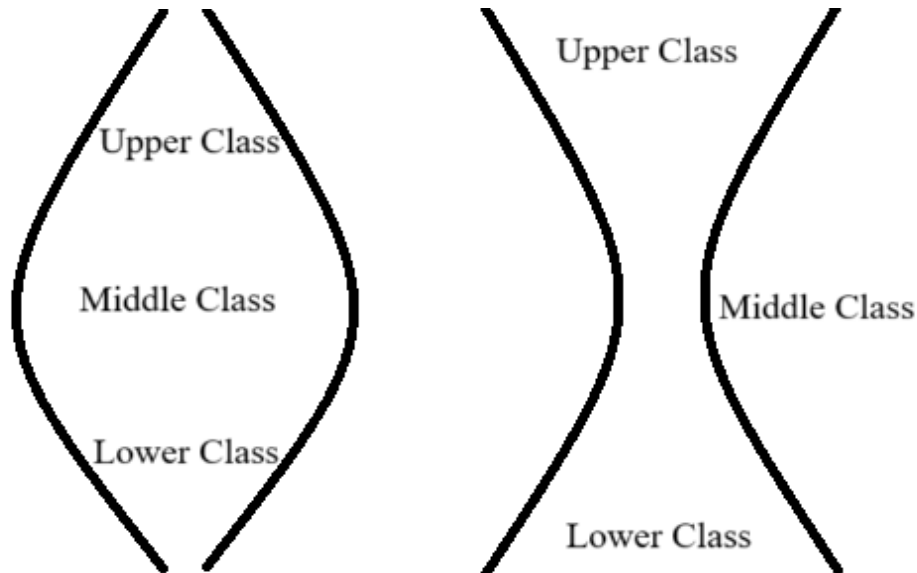
A unique social structure exists in Saudi Arabia, characterized by a downward cascade of power from the highest echelons to the broader citizenry. Due to this power sharing structure, a strong middle class necessary for democracy has not emerged. This ideal middle class would not be simply defined by income, but by characteristics like economic independence, political engagement, and a commitment to social mobility. It was mentioned that for the existence of democracy, there must be a strong middle class as an intermediary between the lower class and the upper class. In this way, both the unrest from the lower class will be prevented and the authoritarian pressure of the upper class on society will be reduced. The strengthening of the middle class, which Lipset²⁶⁸ and Moore²⁶⁹ consider one of the pre-conditions for democracy, reveals a power sharing structure shown below. In cases where the middle class did not emerge as an intermediary, increasing authoritarianism by the upper class and unrest in the lower class resulted in dictatorship in Moore's framework. It is observed that dictatorships were established as a result of the uprising of the peasants, who found ideological support in the examples of Russia and China given by Moore in this context.

²⁶⁷ See for instance Nazer, F. (2005), 'Time for a Saudi 'New Deal'', YaleGlobal Online, 27 September 2005, <https://archive-yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/time-saudi-new-deal>

²⁶⁸ Lipset S., M., (1960). *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Doubleday Inc., Garden City, N.Y., p.66

²⁶⁹ Moore, B., (1966), *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Boston, Beacon Press

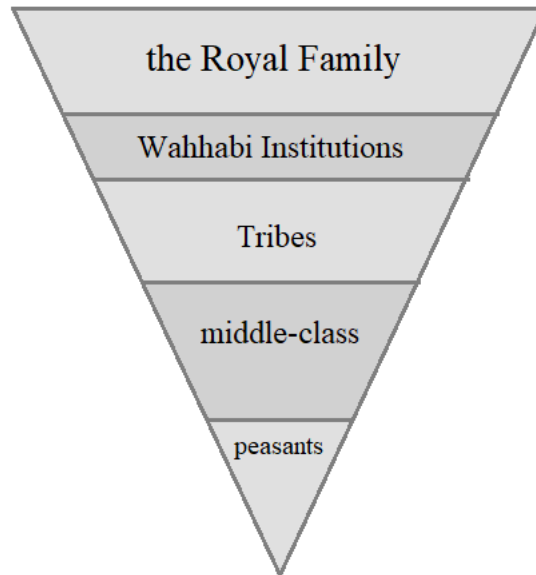
Figure 5 Social Structure Towards Democracy *Figure 6 Social Structure Towards Dictatorship*



However, in the case of Saudi Arabia, neither a peasant class existed due to the lack of agricultural production, nor a middle class emerged due to the lack of industrialization. In the transition from an agricultural society to an industrial society, emphasis was placed on the strengthening of the middle class and the emergence of democracy. In Italy, an example of which was given before, this transformation was inadequate and divided into agricultural and industrial society, and as a result, fascism emerged. In other words, neither industrialization for the birth of democracy nor a peasant class to oppose the authoritarian regime emerged in the Saudi society, and the absence of both did not allow another path for democracy, such as Italy. On the other hand, another reason was the realization of economic growth without achieving structural transformations in society due to the generation of rentier incomes, which prevent from the emergence of a middle class in the Saudi society. Rentier incomes generated by oil dependence hinder the development of a robust middle class and discourage the shift towards a production-based economy. This fuels dependency, particularly among the lower and middle classes, on the wealthy elite, weakening their political, social, and economic power. Consequently, power sharing has stagnated, concentrated within the upper echelons. Importantly, this phenomenon extends beyond Saudi Arabia; any society reliant on rent income and unable to foster a

production-based system faces similar challenges. Despite diverse government types, establishing a modern democracy in such contexts becomes an uphill battle due to these inherent inequalities.

Figure 7 Power Sharing in Saudi Society in pre-Vision 2030

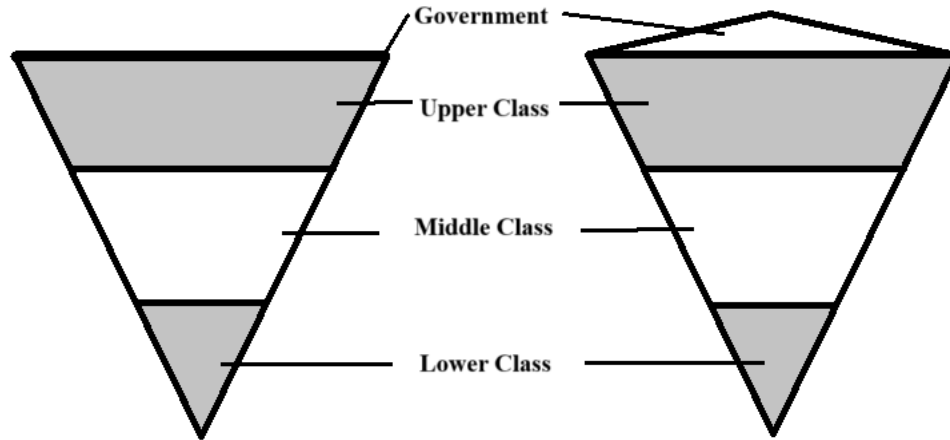


To categorize such societies, I suggest to coin "*diamond societies*" because of the shape the power sharing structure and the durability of the structure. I argue that there are two types of diamond societies. The first is the social structure in which the dominant power in the society is in the hands of a group - the Saudi family - as in the case of Saudi Arabia, and the power is shared with other stakeholders by the group (Diamond Society-a). The second is social structures, in which the power pyramid is nearly identical, but the administration of the state is given to a group that comes out of the society in a fragmented and limited way (Diamond Society-b).

Figure 8 Diamond Society Types

Diamond Society-a

Diamond Society-b



In the discourse democracy, the middle class is expected to hold the predominant share of power. However, in social structures where the middle class lacks sufficient influence in state administration, such setups could be analyzed in terms of authoritarianism or hybrid regimes. Within the framework of the diamond society-b model, wherein state administration is limited and fragmented, these societies tend towards hybrid regimes due to the absence of singular authority capable of assuming control. Obstacles are strategically placed to impede the rise of concentrated power. Nonetheless, the presence of a weakened middle class precludes the classification of these regimes within democratic contexts. Conversely, in societies falling under the a-type model, wherein political power is concentrated within a singular group, the notion of democratic order is not applicable. Saudi Arabia is often categorized as a monarchy or kingdom, although it's important to recognize that a single dominant power does not prevail. Instead, political authority is dispersed among a group of stakeholders. While labeling Saudi Arabia as an absolute monarchy might be challenging, the prevailing power is distributed among a specific group. Setting aside internal power dynamics within the royal family or between royal institutions, a particular family holds dominant authority over Saudi Arabia.

The absence of a strong middle class in both societies causes the lower strata of the society to become dependent on the upper strata. This dependency leads to an unnecessary escalation of political and social influence of the upper strata. Unlike the capitalist world, the upper stratum in the Arab world is composed of tribal leaders, religious figures, and Za'ims, rather than an independent bourgeoisie or traditional elites. Within the Arab context, the sources of political, social, and economic power, even within groups resembling the bourgeoisie, are fundamentally rooted in traditional values stemming from local identities and religious

privileges. Given the configuration of power in this manner, dynamic power-sharing or structural transformation appears elusive. Put differently, society forges its political structure with a steadfast power that resists alteration. This political structure is shared by the members of the aforementioned upper stratum and subsequently rendering it resistant to change. Even if political authority is ostensibly determined through electoral processes in such societies, those forming the political power do not want to break the anti-democratic ties with which facilitated their ascent to power. Consequently, a structure diverging from democratic principles emerges, irrespective of the electoral or non-electoral systems in place.

3.3.2 Comparative Analysis: Transformation of Saudi Social Structure

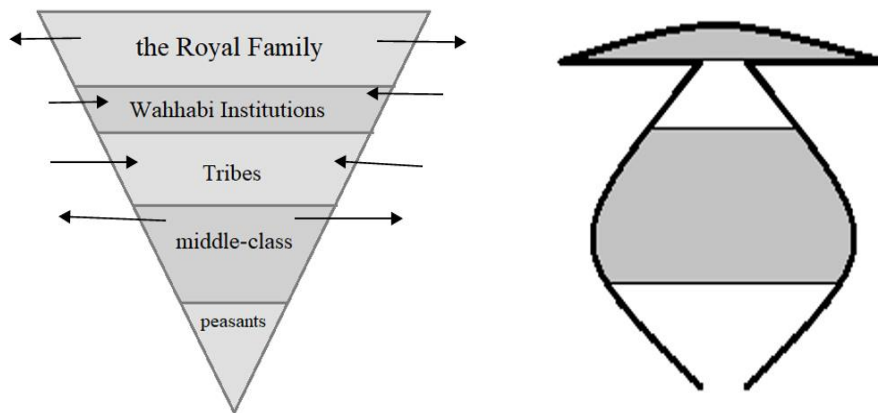
The impact of Vision 2030 reforms on Saudi society is evident in the emergence of structural changes. Primarily, these reforms have led to the formation of a novel middle class. It's important to emphasize that this new middle class comprises young, reform-oriented individuals engaged in the private sector and small business ownership, essentially involved in productive activities. This group also a patriotic group loyal to its leader with the spread of nationalism. Unlike prior groups, this class has not garnered substantial social or economic influence through the rentier bargain. Consequently, their association with tribal leadership is less pronounced. Given Saudi nationalism's objective of diminishing sub-identities, tribal identity holds less significance for this emerging middle class.

As the endeavor to transition employment from the public sector to the private sector progresses, it diminishes the influence of tribal leaders in the rentier bargain. Simultaneously, the socio-political clout of these leaders is further undermined by the prevalence of social media-based analyses, which have gradually supplanted the traditional majlis as the forum for discussions that historically were led by tribal leaders. Both the decline of their power in the rentier bargain and their diminished influence on government policy have led to the decline of the sociopolitical and socioeconomic power of the tribe leaders. Although not explicitly stated in Vision 2030, this transformation is a progressive step targeted by reformists. The decline in the influence of the tribe leaders, who acted as intermediaries between the royal family and the Saudi people, has increased the sociopolitical and socioeconomic power of both the royal family and the Saudi people to a certain extent. Now the Saudi family aims to be able to control or communicate directly with the people. As stated above, it is aimed to establish a bond not seen

before in the Saudi society between the younger generation and the royal family, and by this means, the royal family wants to increase its influence on society.

On the other hand, individuals who experience a relatively greater degree of liberation find expanded opportunities for advancement in both economic and social realms. However, this increased freedom does not translate to the political sphere due to the royal family's ambition to augment its political authority. Consequently, a novel governance model is emerging, one that wields direct control over society and asserts influence across all spheres. Yet, it is important to note that the middle and lower segments of society are now shared a more substantial share of power compared to before. This burgeoning middle class could potentially serve as a new intermediary between the royal family and the Saudi people, particularly as the influence of tribal leaders recedes. It is not only the decline of tribe leaders that has increased the power of the middle class and royal family, but the reduction of the influence of Wahhabi institutions, and particularly of the radical clergy, on politics creates new spaces for both to increase their power. The strengthening of the monarch and middle classes, and the weakening of the tribes and Wahhabi Institutions, has opened the way for an evolution in the Saudi power sharing structure such as the one shown below.

Figure 9 Transformation in Saudi Power-Sharing Structure



The Saudi power sharing structure will become similar to the current power sharing structure in democratic societies unless a dramatic event occurs in society, or reforms lose their dynamism. Although the presence of a strong monarch in the new structure is an obstacle to democracy, it is in a more advantageous position than diamond societies in terms of openness to change. In other words, the participation of the middle class in the state administration as a

political actor is not possible in line with the aim of the absolute monarchy in Saudi Arabia. However, the political, social, and economic demands of this group have become more taken into consideration by decision makers. As may remember, the importance given to SMEs as the new locomotive of the Saudi economy increased and enterprises began to have more than their economic share. Although the closure of Saudi businesses during prayer time as a rule for more than 40 years, had been a social debate for a long time, the dominance of Wahhabi institutions created resistance to address businesses' demands. Recently the Saudi government passed legislation to “*allow shops to remain open during prayer times*”²⁷⁰. As Ali Samir Shihabi, an author and commentator on Middle East politics and economics, highlighted, “*hugely symbolic and practical step to end the dominance of the religious class in daily life.*”²⁷¹

The democratic capitalist path, which coincides with Moore’s famous quote- “no bourgeoisie, no democracy”- needs to be updated again in contemporary social and economic world. As emphasized in the first part of the thesis, the middle class should be included in this equation instead of the bourgeoisie. The fact that the bourgeoisie is increasingly included in the political authorities and becomes a closed class makes the existence of the bourgeoisie no longer a necessary condition for democratization. One of Moore's preconditions for democracy was to prevent a coalition between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie against the workers and peasants. This should be modified with the possibility of a coalition between the political authority and the bourgeoisie against the workers and peasants. For this reason, "no middle class, no democracy" would be more appropriate. Today's middle class consists of technocrats, economically independent workers, and SMEs. As emphasised, “*SMEs are catalysts of democratization because the process of their development requires a cross-cutting strategy that encompasses many areas of society*”²⁷². As may remember, the supporters of the new Saudi social contract and the actors of the new middle class were the same. SMEs are both a part of this new Saudi middle class and the subject of the new social contract. It appears as a group that has adopted the Saudi identity, consisting mainly of young people and women, who support social transformation and demand reform. In order for this group to be the pioneers of Saudi democratization, it must

²⁷⁰ Al-Kinani, M. “Saudi Businesses to Remain Open during Prayer Times.” Arab News, 17 July 2021, www.arabnews.com/node/1895481/saudi-arabia.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Shim, K., “SMEs: The Intersection of Economic Development and Democratization.” Center for International Private Enterprise, 8 Dec. 2017, www.cipe.org/blog/2017/12/08/smes-the-intersection-of-economic-development-and-democratization/

inevitably be a strong class in economic and social terms, independent of political authority. Although it is difficult to make inferences about the future for this newly formed group, they should be taken into consideration as they are a part of the social formation.

The strengthening of the middle class inevitably reveals the weakening of the intermediaries between the political authority and society, that is, in the Saudi case, tribal leaders and Wahhabi institutions. Saudi policies already aim to weaken these structures in an intertwined manner. Both the middle class and the monarchy are positively affected by the weakening of these intermediaries. It is inevitable that a monarch will emerge who gains his own legitimacy with the popular support of a strong middle class by reducing the effectiveness of intermediaries. Gaining popular support is not only an important weapon against external obstacles, but also important for ending power struggles within the dynasty. Talking about a monarchy that continues its centralization efforts by both weakening external structures and eliminating internal rivals. It is debatable where this path, which begins with the idea of establishing an authoritarian absolute monarchy, will end. How long the middle class, which is getting stronger and gaining economic and social freedoms, will give up the old social contract and remain loyal to the leader-dependent social contract will determine the future of the Saudi society. However, it should be noted that examining the ever-changing social structure is useful for analyzing the Saudi future.

Table 2 Key Elements Transforming the Saudi Power-sharing Structure

| Initiative | Monarch | Tribes | Wahhabi Institution | Middle Class |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------|---------------------|--------------|
| Saudi National identity | Positive | Negative | Negative | Positive |
| non-employment through bureaucracy | Positive | negative | Negative | Positive |
| E-Governance | Positive | Negative | Negative | Positive |
| Economic diversity | Positive | Negative | Negative | Positive |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| elimination of The Mutawwa | Positive | Negative | Negative | Positive |
| legal reforms | Positive | Negative | Negative | Positive |
| Taxation | Positive | Negative | Negative | Positive |

3.3.3 Comparison of Diamond Society samples

While Saudi Arabia typically represents Diamond Societies type A, Iraq and Lebanon should be mentioned as examples of Diamond Societies type B. Both Lebanon and Iraq, divided societies seeking parliamentary democracies, opted for power-sharing systems. Whereas Lebanon's historical consociationalism, dating back to 19th Century Ottoman-era, underwent reformulation after independence, Iraq built its system from the ground up after the collapse of Saddam and subsequent sectarian conflicts. Notably, it should be noted that these states benefited from two different state regimes, Lebanon preferred centralized state structure, conversely; post-invasion Iraq applied decentralized model, influencing the implementation and dynamics of their respective systems. Segmented societies like Lebanon and Iraq often find consociational democracy a beneficial model for establishing sustainable governance. In these cases, distinct groups within the population, officially recognized by law or constitution (e.g., religious communities, ethnicities), form the basis for a power-sharing arrangement. This approach aims to reduce inter-group conflict and promote inclusivity by allocating political representation and resources proportionally among segmented groups.

Consociational democracy can be defined as systems in which all important segments are involved in the government, they benefit proportionately from the budget and public positions,

the segments are autonomous within themselves, and the segments have mutual veto rights to protect their own rights. As Lijphart highlights, first condition is that “*the leaders of all significant segments of the plural society corporate in governing the country*”²⁷³. In both the Iraqi and Lebanon examples, government positions are reserved for different segments in accordance with the power-sharing government principle. The reason why diamond society type b was established as a separate structure is actually here. The fact that the members of the parliament elected by the public share the government positions as a result of consensus and that it can be repeated periodically and that there is no inherited obligation has differentiated the Saudi society, although it has a similar social stratification with the Saudi society. While the tribe leaders in Saudi state building accepted the sole leadership of Ibn Saud for the establishment of the state, the elite groups (Za’ims, landed elites, religious leaders) in the Lebanese and Iraqi society were in favor of sharing power for the establishment of the state. The main reason for this is the lack of a dominant power to monopolize coercion and the deepening of social divisions resulting from ideological deprivation.

“*The inability of any one faction to monopolise power has led to the presence of a multitude of (sectarian) regimes – state-like entities that dominate the public institutions of the (formal) state.*”²⁷⁴ In other words, in Lebanon and post-invasion Iraq, quasi-states began to form within the state due to the lack of a dominant power to monopolize power. As may remember, MBS defined Saudi Arabia as a monarchy consisting of a network of thousands of monarchs. What distinguishes the Saudi Arabian example from others was that quasi-states occurred due to the struggles within the dynasty and the strengthening of the institutions added to the dynasty. However, it should be emphasized that in the diamond societies, the existence of a powerful group between the state and the society inevitably caused these groups to exist as a state within the state. On the one hand, it is essential to share the government on the basis of sectarian and ethnic identities, on the other hand, it turns out that under a monarchy, family members are actively involved in sharing the government. Another point that differentiates the government sharing is that in the examples of Iraq and Lebanon, this is an “*incomplete, informal, and increasingly voluntary power sharing*”²⁷⁵.

²⁷³ Lijphart, A., (1977), *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, p.25

²⁷⁴ Saouli, A., (2012), *The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation*. New York, Routledge, p.57

²⁷⁵ Bogaards, M., (2021) *Iraq’s Constitution of 2005: The Case Against Consociationalism ‘Light’, Ethnopolitics*, 20:2, 186-202, p. 187

Another element that ensures the existence of consociational democracy is the existence of the principle of proportionality. It means that the principle of proportional representation and distribution of civil service appointments among segments. Furthermore, public funds are allocated proportionally among segments, ensuring equitable distribution of resources.²⁷⁶ Proportional representation is an element that provides representation in the parliament formed by segments according to the weight and effectiveness of the segments in society. While it is set as a constitutional rule in the Lebanon²⁷⁷ example and it is regulated by a law²⁷⁸, it is regulated in the legal level in Iraq²⁷⁹. Similarly, this proportional distribution is arranged within administrative positions. In other words, employing in bureaucracy, it has revealed the necessity of the existence of sectarian and ethnic dependence instead of employing individuals with independent variables. Inevitably, this causes an increase in individuals' dependence on tribal leaders, Za'ims, and religious leaders, who are political actors, in order to obtain important positions, and makes it difficult to break away from sectarian and ethnic identities. A similar situation was also occurring in Saudi Arabia during the pre-Vision 2030 or pre-MBS period. Religious and tribal identities played an important role in recruitment in the bureaucracy. The point of difference is that while in the Lebanon and Iraq examples, a way was opened for the members of important segments in the society to exist in the bureaucracy in accordance with the principle of proportionality, in the Saudi example, there was no understanding that included all segments in the society since closeness to the dynasty and Wahhabi institutions was essential. Although there are differences in the examples, the inevitable result is that the lower and middle layers of society increase their dependence on leaders.

Regarding to allocation of public resources, In Lebanon, in contrast to the absence of a defined formula for allocating public resources, the constitution empowers the government to regulate, manage, and spend the general budget within established legal and procedural frameworks. This creates a dynamic where resource allocation remains susceptible to political influence while adhering to broader oversight mechanisms. In the case of Iraq, it is possible to talk about the principle of proportionality for the allocation of public resources at the constitutional level. However, it should be said that the proportional representation in the Iraqi system is insufficient, and the main actor in the allocation of public resources is the groups that

²⁷⁶ Lijphart, A., *Consociational Democracy: The Examples of Belgium and the Netherlands*, p.40

²⁷⁷ The Lebanese Constitution, Article 24

²⁷⁸ Law 44 on the Election of the Members of the Parliament, Appendix I

²⁷⁹ the Law for the Election of Iraq's Council of Representatives (CoR Election Law No. 9, Article 13/1)

control the government. *“Iraq’s consociational democracy centres on inclusive ethno-sectarian representation (distribution of posts) much more than on inclusive ethno-sectarian decision making (distribution of power)”*.²⁸⁰ Although these two systems are different, proximity to major actors becomes an important element for segments to benefit from public resource allocation. As a result, public investments are no longer aimed at vulnerable groups, social needs, and meeting basic services, but are turning into a tool to buy votes. It is not surprising that this situation, which can be seen in most incomplete democracies, becomes more exclusionary in divided societies and that sectarian ethnic identities have a share in this exclusionism. It should be said that there is a similar situation in the Saudi example. As a matter of fact, it is obvious that public investments and the sharing of public budgets were not made by considering all elements of society and that these resources are a tool to buy legitimacy. As a result, to protect the political and economic power they have in diamond societies, with or without the principle of proportionality, decision makers do not use the public budget in accordance with general standards and use it to make the society more dependent on them.

Another requirement for the existence of consociational democracies is mutual veto. Lijphart highlights that *“mutual veto should be added grand coalition principle and mutual veto can give each segment a complete guarantee of political protection”*²⁸¹. This method proves effective in protecting minorities in fragmented societies. In the cases of Iraq and Lebanon, while a mutual veto right is absent in constitutions, a de facto version fueled by various factors has emerged. However, it is debatable whether this informal method truly translates to reliable political protection. In the Lebanon example, it exists as a right granted to religious leaders to protect the rights and interests of their own sect, similar to the mutual veto. The Lebanese Constitution the Article 19 says that *“the officially recognized heads of religious communities the right to refer to this Council laws relating to personal status, the freedom of belief and religious practice, and the freedom of religious education”*²⁸². The power granted to religious leaders in Lebanon, potentially bolsters their importance and influence within the society. However, it is crucial to note the potential consequences of this development, including the possibility of heightened sectarianism or limitations on individual freedoms. In the Saudi example, the attitude of the religious authority towards political decisions and its effectiveness on the legal level

²⁸⁰ Ezzeddine, N., Noun B., Iraq and Lebanon’s Tortuous Paths to Reform, CRU Report, December 2020, p.11

²⁸¹ Ibid, p.36-37

²⁸² The Lebanese Constitution, Article 19

caused the strengthening of Wahhabi institutions and the restriction of individual freedoms. On the other hand, in both examples, the lack of an ideology that includes the whole society causes the regimes to be dependent on religious authorities. In other words, “*control over the religious establishment has been crucial for regime survival, (...) the Wahhabi establishment in Saudi Arabia, or with the different religious leaders in the fragmented sectarian and political order of Lebanon*”²⁸³. As a result, both society and regime depend on religious institutions, and religious authorities emerge as an intermediary layer between the regime and society. This is another example that shows how difficult social transformation is in diamond societies, that is, the indestructible of these social structures.

Regarding mutual veto as a political protection, neither the Lebanese nor Iraqi system offers constitutional guarantees in the form of mutual veto for segments, these groups need to explore additional avenues, such as informal alliances to safeguard their political interests. Implementation the decisions of the majority to protect the political rights of the minority through methods such as quorum and referendum is applied. This causes minorities to collaborate operate with major actors, that is, to become dependent. When major actors who dominate both political and religious authority collaborate with minorities, they not only increase their political power but also ensure that groups other than their own confessions become dependent on them. In the Saudi example, since there are no formal methods such as quorum or referendum, a group has to resort to a more informal method to protect its political rights. This means that depending on the relationship with the decision-making mechanisms, members can protect their political rights. These informal methods have been created without being bound by a written rule, such as relations with influential positions in majlis, closeness to the dynasty or Wahhabi institutions. The lack of an effective system to protect minorities causes the structures with political power to become stronger in such societies.

Another key element of consociational democracy is segmental autonomy, “*which entails minority rule: rule by the minority over itself in the area of the minority's exclusive concern*”²⁸⁴. While Lebanon offers confessional groups autonomy in personal status, religious matters, and education, as a non-territorial autonomy, Iraq's federal structure grants territorial autonomy alongside non-territorial autonomy for each confession. It should be noted that while Lebanon's non-territorial autonomy in personal laws and religious matters largely follows confessional

²⁸³ Saouli, A., (2012), *The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation*. New York, Routledge, p.23

²⁸⁴ Lijphart, A., (1977), *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, p.41

divisions, Iraq's system grants autonomy based on ethnic and linguistic demographics, impacting areas like education and cultural institutions. Furthermore, an ethno-sectarian approach primarily shapes confessional identities in Lebanon, Iraq's confessions owe their existence mainly to an ethno-linguistic dynamic. The ethno-sectarian approach causes fragmentation in Lebanon's personal status law. Non-territorial autonomy leads that 15 sects have the right to set up their religious court and apply their own personal status law. In the case of Iraq, there is a personal status law (No. 188) applied to Iraqi Muslims, shaped by sharia. “*Christians, Jews and other minorities are covered partly by the Personal Status Law, partly the Civil Law and partly their own personal status legal systems.*”²⁸⁵ In both systems, segmental autonomy to be perceived as protecting religious freedoms has caused increase the impact of religious authority on daily life and giving religious authorities the right to regulate personal relationships.

A similar situation exists in the Saudi example, where the dominance of Sharia law and the lack of a civil personal status law increased the influence of religious institutions in daily life due to their effectiveness in judicial decisions. Although Lebanese system presents citizens a civil personal status law as an alternative to religious personal laws, it has not yet made the whole society its subject due to reasons such as the existence of sectarian impulses in public positions, in the distribution of public budget, and in the political arena. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia aims to reduce the effectiveness of Wahhabi institutions by making a civil law that will cover all citizens in the light of Sharia principles. The codification of civil personal status law in Saudi Arabia aims to address limitations within certain established institutions' ability to handle personal status matters. This includes promoting greater consistency in judicial rulings on these issues by reducing the discretionary power of individual judges and establishing clearer legal guidelines.

In summary, there are various obstacles to the strengthening of the middle class in diamond societies, despite the differences in the political system, due to reasons such as the existence of established non-democratic institutions, the effectiveness of tribe leaders, the importance of tribal, sectarian, and ethnic identities. In post-colonization Lebanon and post-invasion Iraq, consociational democracies were allocated to build social peace and establish democratic institutions. Although the principles of consociational democracy have been implemented formally or informally, the developments expected in democratic societies, such as

²⁸⁵ Iraq Personal Status Law of 1959 and Amendments (English Translation), Peace Women, 8 Feb. 2015, www.peacewomen.org/node/89965#:~:text=The%201959%20Iraqi%20Law%20of.

middle-class development and increased personal freedoms, have not fully emerged. In fact, this system, which was thought to contribute to the democratization process, resulted in the strengthening of religious institutions, tribe leaders, sectarian authorities and Za'ims, instead of the strengthening of society. Therefore, it was concentrated in the upper class, while the lower and middle classes were weakened economically, politically, and socially. Although both are classified under democratic regimes, it is similar to authoritarian Saudi Arabia in terms of social power sharing.

While there are some efforts to transform this established social structure in Saudi society, it does not appear that the Lebanese and Iraqi political systems have made any efforts to ensure social transformation. The main reason for this is, of course, due to the differentiation in the classes that control the regime. While Saudi state-building took place with the monopolization of power, the state-building of Lebanon and Iraq has become fragmented due to the absence of a dominant power that would monopolize coercion. Another issue is that the Saudi regime can implement the Saudi identity, which includes the entire society, as a new ideological understanding, top-down, in order to survive. However, in the examples of Lebanon and Iraq, a national identity has not yet been created to replace sectarian and ethnic identities. As a matter of fact, this is an element that can only occur when power is monopolized. The failure to create a national identity or the failure of a subnational identity to become national by dominating the others maintains the ongoing sectarian and ethnic struggle.

As a result, regardless of the political system, changing this social structure in diamond societies faces some difficulties, but by deforming the diamond society structure, the middle class, including young people and women, can be strengthened. Otherwise, even if democratic institutions are established, the democratization process may be disrupted due to the weakness of the middle class. On the other hand, the elimination of this social structure may lead to democratization. However, it is too early to say that the Saudi social transformation will result in a political transformation and a democratic victory will be achieved. However, it is seen that in societies that have been trying to democratize for a long time, the existence of the diamond social structure is an obstacle to achieve a democratic victory, while in authoritarian societies, the effort to eliminate this structure provides social and economic freedoms to the society.

4 METHODOLOGY AND APPROACHES

This study draws on both primary and secondary sources, including theoretical texts and articles, books analyzing the subject, investigative newspaper articles, and documents examined from archives. This diverse range of materials provides both qualitative and quantitative data to comprehensively inform the research. This study investigates how social structures interact with political institutions, cultural norms, and other factors to influence democratic outcomes. It aims to identify specific mechanisms through which social structures can either promote or hinder democracy. By analyzing how different social structures vary in their impact on democracy, the study seeks to achieve a nuanced understanding and avoid overgeneralization.

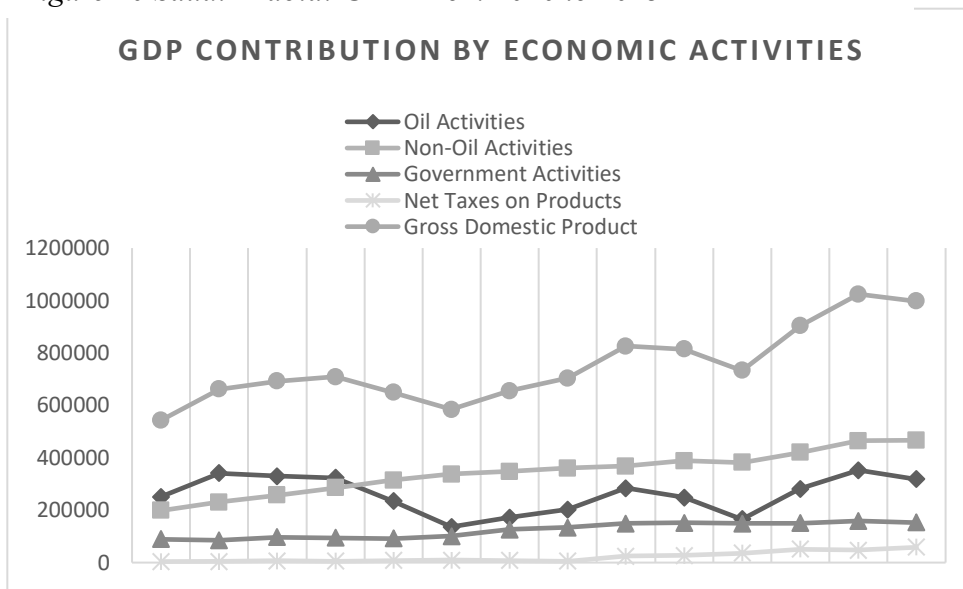
Structural transformation approaches were determined as the main approach in this study. According to this approach, instead of viewing democratization as the inevitable endpoint for all societies, structuralist explanations posit it as just one potential consequence of fundamental shifts in a society's class and power structures. Structuralist theories dissect the political interactions between rival social classes, such as landed elites and merchants, or industrialists and workers, analyzing how these groups, motivated by their distinct interests, maneuver within the existing distribution of power, and explore opportunities for alliances. Similarly, this study aims to analyze how the power struggle between social structures works and the power sharing that emerges from this power struggle, using the example of Saudi Arabia and compared the case of Saudi Arabia with some other cases. In the second chapter of the thesis, literature review is included in order to show the correlation between democracy and social structures. In the third chapter, the state structure and social structures of Saudi Arabia are explained in a historical process, and then the reasons, motivation, and possible consequences of the transformation in social structures observed recently are tried to be revealed. Along with the structural analysis of the social transformation taking place, the actors that affect the social transformation are also included in this study. In order to concretize the social transformation that took place at the end of the third chapter, an approach called "Diamond Society Theory" has been tried to show the differences between the old social structure and the changing social structure. In addition, the possible consequences of the changing social structure are revealed by comparing with other examples that are in line with the social power sharing structure claimed by this theory.

Finally, in this section, quantitative data will be used to test some hypotheses and all hypotheses will be analyzed with qualitative data. Quantitative data mainly consists of statistics published by the Saudi government. In addition, reports of international institutions and organizations on the subject will also be included.

Hypothesis 1: The presence of an individualized middle class helps to foster a sustainable economy in the KSA.

One of the biggest factors causing Saudi social transformation is the transition from an oil-based economy to a modern, diversified one. This shift is being driven by the implementation of a sustainable economic model, built with the contributions of active individuals striving to break free from the rentier model. As the revenue and GDP charts below reveal, this transformation is already underway.

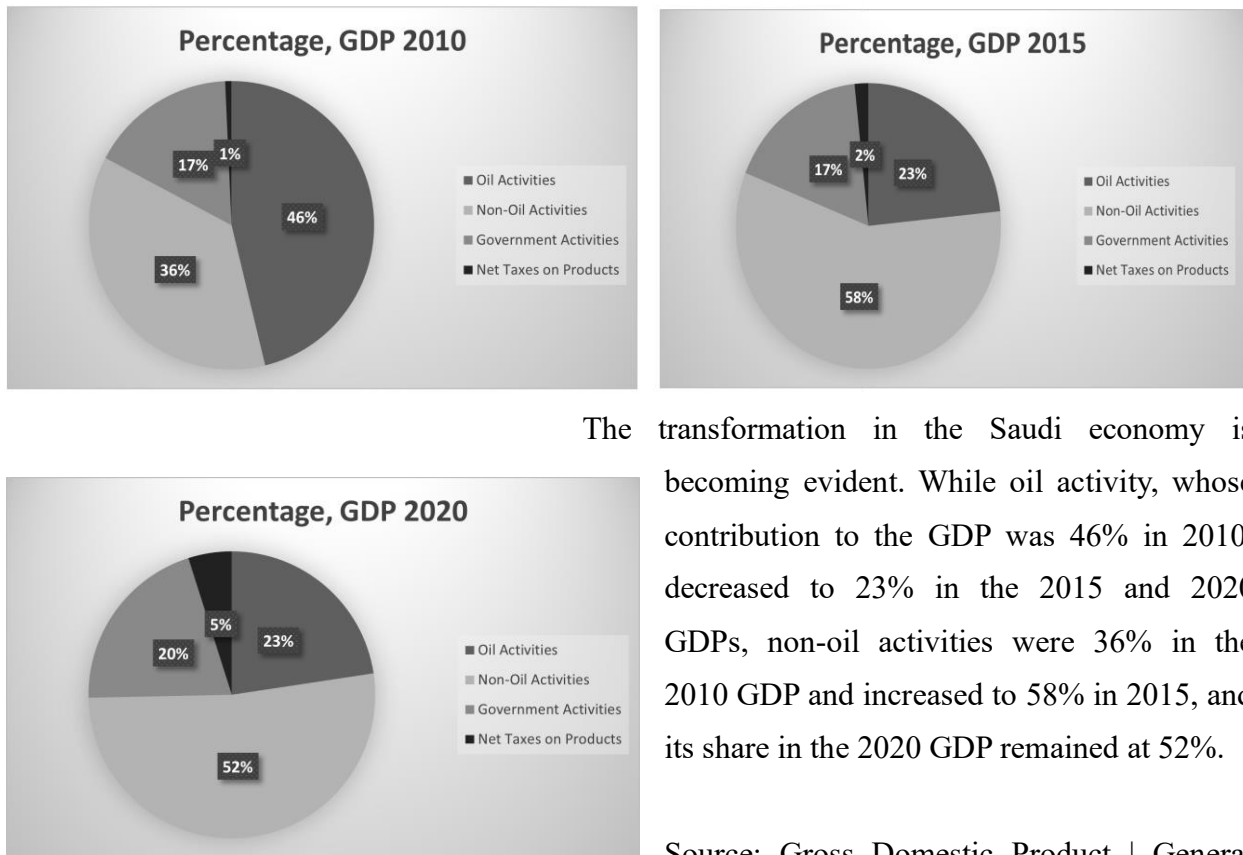
Figure 10 Saudi Arabia: GDP From 2010 to 2023



Source: Gross Domestic Product | General Authority for Statistics (stats.gov.sa)²⁸⁶

Figure 11 Percentage of activities in GDP: 2010, 2015, 2020

²⁸⁶ <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/823>

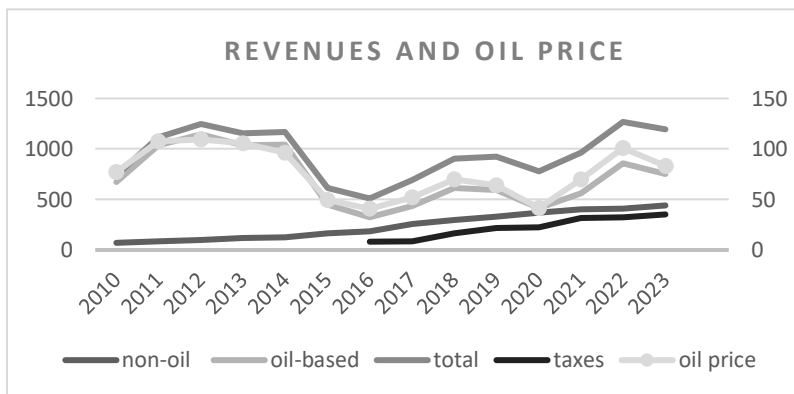


The transformation in the Saudi economy is becoming evident. While oil activity, whose contribution to the GDP was 46% in 2010, decreased to 23% in the 2015 and 2020 GDPs, non-oil activities were 36% in the 2010 GDP and increased to 58% in 2015, and its share in the 2020 GDP remained at 52%.

Source: Gross Domestic Product | General

Figure 12 Government Revenues and Oil Price From 2010 to 2023

Authority for Statistics (stats.gov.sa)²⁸⁷



Source: Ministry of Finance and OPEC²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/823>

While oil revenues remain crucial for the Saudi government budget, non-oil revenues, steadily increasing since 2010, are also playing a vital role, particularly since the momentum gained after 2016. The introduction of a more comprehensive tax system, including a value-added tax (VAT) and excise taxes on certain goods, has evidently created a significant new economic resource for the government.

It has been previously stated that the Saudi government has made reforms to employ the Saudi population in the private sector by reducing employment in the public sector. The outcome of these reforms is slowly emerging. These reforms serve as an important tool in both reducing the government's personnel expenses and reducing unemployment rates.

Figure 13 Unemployment Rates from 2016 to 2023 Q3



Source: Labor Market Survey:2016-2023| General Authority for Statistics, KSA²⁸⁹

The reforms implemented since 2016, particularly those emphasizing SME support and private sector incentives, have driven a significant improvement in women's employment, with the female unemployment rate dropping from 35% in 2016 to 16% in Q3 2023. Additionally, another effect of these reforms is that Saudization programs are observed to yield effective

²⁸⁸ <https://www.mof.gov.sa/en/budget/Pages/default.aspx>

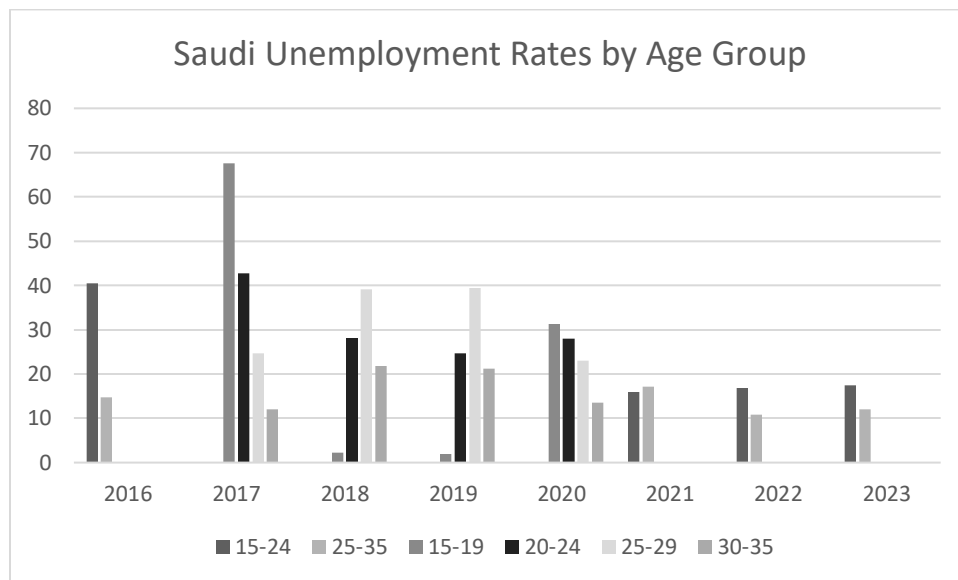
https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/data_graphs/40.html

²⁸⁹ <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/814>

results. Although there is no significant change in the total unemployment rate, the unemployment rate of the Saudi population has decreased significantly. This shows an active participation of the Saudi population in employment.

In addition, youth employment has made significant progress thanks to these reforms. As can be seen in the figure below, unemployment rates among the young population have showed a marked decline. The fact that the Saudi government changed the methodology in labor market research between 2016 and 2023 makes the figures a bit complicated. However, it can be clearly said that youth (15-24) unemployment, which was 40.5 percent in 2016, experienced a substantial drop to 17.4 percent in the third quarter of 2023. Schooling and university attendance may play a role in this decrease by removing some individuals from the workforce. However, it is also possible to say that the reforms are increasingly yielding positive results. For example, the unemployment rate in the 20-24 age group, which was 42.7 percent in 2017, declined steadily to 28 percent in 2020. Similarly, the unemployment rate in the 26-29 age group, which rose to 39.2 percent in 2018, saw a notable improvement, decreasing by 23 percent by 2020.

Figure 14 Saudi Unemployment Rates by Age Group from 2016 to 2023

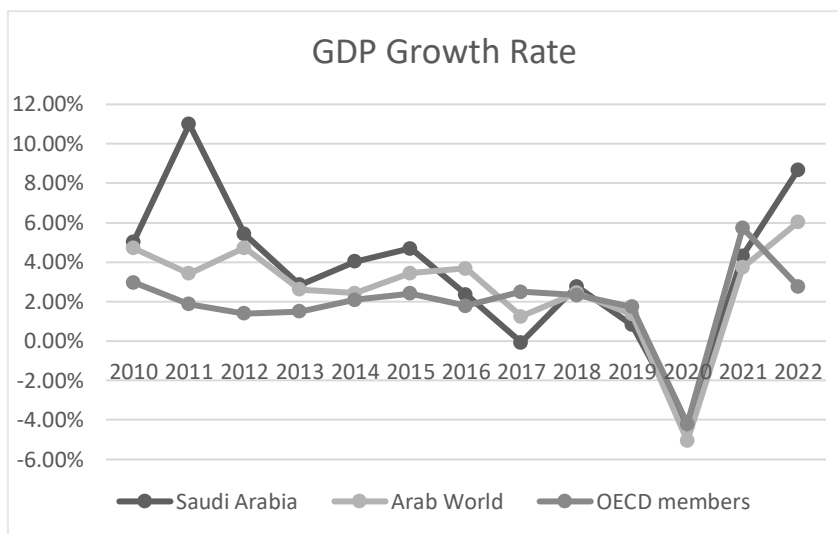


Source: Labor Market Survey:2016-2023| General Authority for Statistics, KSA²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/814>

To assess the economic impact of Vision 2030 reforms, examining Saudi Arabia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate is crucial. The figure below compares the annual GDP changes of Saudi Arabia, the Arab world, and OPEC member countries from 2010 to 2022. Notably, after 2020, a shift towards a more stable growth trajectory emerges in Saudi Arabia, distinct from both the Arab world and OPEC averages. It could be said that Vision 2030 diversification efforts which aims to increase investments in non-oil sectors, tourism, and technology might play an important role in achieving stable growth. Also, the potential correlation between increased SME investment starting in 2020 and the subsequent stable growth is intriguing. The GDP 2023 Q3 report prepared by the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) shows that the non-oil sector has a large share in this growth. According to this report, although “*real GDP decreased by 4.4% in Q3/2023 compared to the same quarter of 2022 (Q3/2022). Non-oil activities increased by 3.5% y-o-y while oil activities decreased by 17.0%*”²⁹¹. In other words, while oil-based activities decreased significantly, GDP growth was not affected in the same way and GDP continued to grow at a significant rate with the contribution of growth in other sectors.

Figure 15 GDP Growth Rate: Saudi Arabia, OPEC Members, Arab World From 2010 to 2022



Source: World Bank²⁹²

Vision 2030 reforms have significantly reduced unemployment, particularly among women and youth, increasing active participation in the workforce. Positive results have also

²⁹¹ https://www.stats.gov.sa/sites/default/files/GDP%20FQ32023E_2.pdf

²⁹² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?contextual=default>

emerged from private sector investments and economic diversification efforts, with an important share of Saudi Arabia's GDP now coming from non-oil sectors. However, it should be noted that a large proportion of Saudi government revenues are still provided by oil-based activities. This still causes the Saudi government's revenues to depend on external factors and be directly affected by oil prices. However, it is seen that steadily increasing non-oil-based activities and taxes are gradually widening the gap between total revenue and oil-based revenues. There is a dependence that decreased from around 90 percent between 2010 to 2015, to around 65 percent in 2022, despite the significant increase in oil prices in 2022. It should be highlights that economic diversification is important on reducing overdependence and paving the way for a more stable economic future. Moreover, the rise of a new middle class, formed thanks to these economic reforms, actively contributing to both production and tax revenue through their participation in the economy, is crucial for the future of Saudi Arabia. Increasing incentives for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is a clear example of this focus. It is no coincidence that the reforms to move away from the rentier model target the growth and empowerment of this vital segment of the population. It can obviously be said the presence of an individualized middle class helps to foster a sustainable economy in the KSA.

Hypothesis 2: Giving up the rentier economy liberties individuals in the KSA.

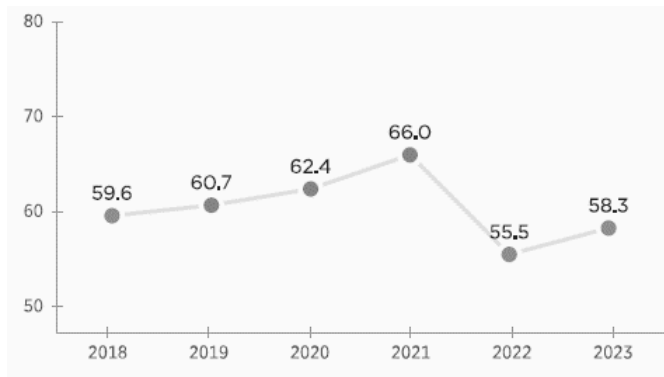
As can be seen in the figures above, the Saudi working population is gradually increasing under Vision 2030. The efforts of Saudi Arabia, which aims for a private sector-based economic growth, towards the employment of women and young people are obvious. In this regard, as mentioned before, various social reforms have been made for women to enable them to participate in working life. These reforms offer a promising path for women's empowerment, leading to increase both greater economic freedoms and social freedoms. However, it should not be forgotten that many elements that restrict women's social and economic freedoms are still present in Saudi society. The influence of both the Saudi traditional structure and the conservative social structure on women is clearly evident. However, the reforms may cause them to gain more freedom in the future.

Another group, young people, is also positively affected by these reforms. It is important for them to participate more in working life, like women, in terms of achieving their economic freedom. In addition, culture, tourism, and art-centered investments that emerge in line with

economic diversification may lead to an increase in the social freedoms of young people. The support given to Saudi-originated music, films and works of art offers important opportunities for this creative group. In addition, many activities such as opening cinemas and organizing festivals are factors that directly increase the social freedoms of young people.

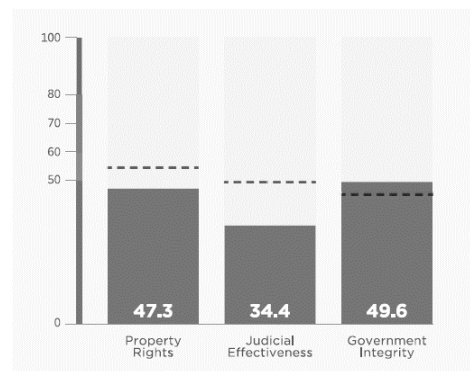
Businesses have an important place in the private sector-based growth. Thanks to Vision 2030, businesses have benefited from both economic and social freedoms. As mentioned before, this group, which was exposed to the pressures of the religious authority, has achieved significant gains. This group, which can both compete with foreign investors and increase its economic income, also benefits from the social and economic liberation of young people and women. The increased involvement of women and young people in social life offers new market opportunities for businesses and thus they may achieve sustainable economic growth. However, it is not yet possible to talk about a sufficient level of freedom for the business world. As seen in the figure below, although a significant increase was shown after Vision 2030, there was a significant decline in 2022. One of the biggest reasons for this is that the rule of law is weak in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 16 Economic Freedom in Saudi Arabia



Source: Index of Economic Freedom²⁹³

Figure 17 the Rule of Law in Saudi Arabia



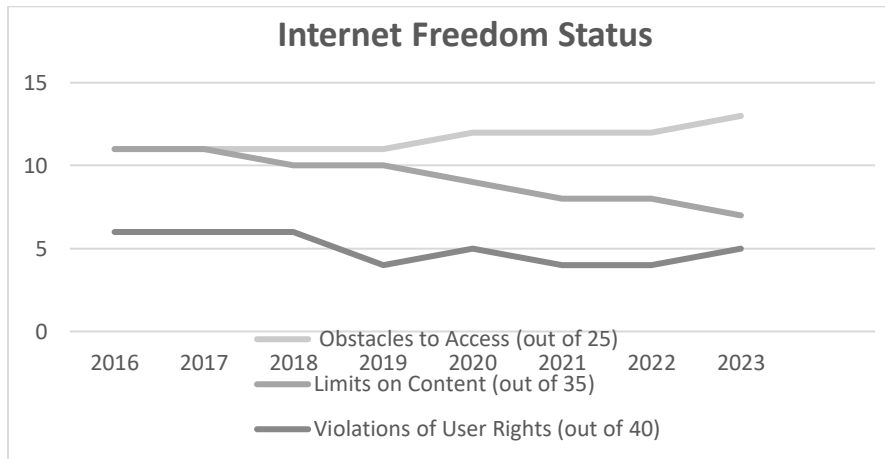
As can be seen in the figure above, legal qualifications are not suitable for the business world in Saudi Arabia. The most important factors of this are the failure to establish a systematic legal system for a long time and the fact that commercial and personal law operate in a fragmented manner from different sources. However, as a matter of fact, the recent legal reforms

²⁹³ <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/saudi-arabia>

are important for the further liberalization of the business world. It is likely that this will be seen clearly in studies in the coming years. As a result, it is possible to conclude that some reforms have been made for the development and liberation of the business world under Vision 2030.

While some progress in social and economic freedoms for Saudis, these advancements have not translated into complete societal liberation, yet. Although internet usage is significantly high, there is accompanied by significant restrictions as the provided figure below. The establishment of technology-based monitoring systems reinforces concerns about a new form of "authoritarianism" online. No doubly, the Saudi population currently faces restricted access to many websites and cannot freely express their views on social media. The ban on WhatsApp video calling and discussions around potentially banning TikTok further highlight the existence of virtual limitations within an increasingly digital landscape. Vision 2030's promise of technology-based economic growth has not yet been realized in a significant way in terms of individual freedoms on the Internet.

Figure 18 Internet Freedom in Saudi Arabia



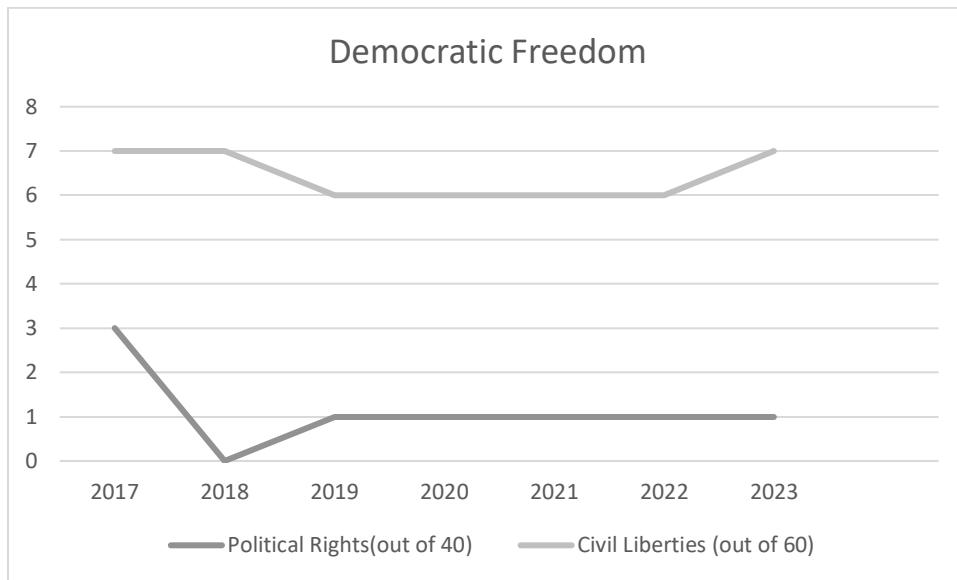
Source: Freedom House²⁹⁴: Country Report: Saudi Arabia (2016-2023)

In another case, as emphasized before, it can be seen in the figures below that Vision 2030 focuses on economic and social liberation without political liberation. The following figure of democratic freedom presented by Freedom House shows that there is no significant improvement in democratic participation. As stated, the Saudi government wants to establish an absolute monarchy, so it is not possible to talk about democratic participation through elections

²⁹⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-net/2023>

or openly democratic actions of individuals under Vision 2030. However, the municipal elections re-organized by King Abdullah and the Vision 2030 promoted civil society and non-governmental organization initiatives may bring about greater participation of the society in decision-making mechanisms within the monarchy in the future. It should not be forgotten that this survey of Freedom House includes many questions regarding the elections. This does not fully indicate the extent of participation in decision-making mechanisms in Saudi Arabia. As previously emphasized, the abolition of the majlis system and the collection of petitions through e governance show that the monarchy increasingly attaches more importance to individual opinions. It is a necessity to conduct various surveys in order to analyze the situation that arises with the new social structure.

Figure 19 Democratic Freedom in Saudi Arabia



Source: Freedom House²⁹⁵: Country Report: Saudi Arabia (2016-2023)

As a result, the reforms made under Vision 2030 to break away from the rentier economy have led to some social and economic freedoms being gained in society, especially women and young people. However, social and economic freedoms are still under threat from an authoritarian regime. The regime regulates these freedoms in line with its own interests and tends to restrict all kinds of freedoms that may pose a threat to itself. In this sense, the biggest obstacle

²⁹⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2023>

to political liberation and right to free speech is the authoritarianism of the regime. Nevertheless, in line with these reforms made for the break from the rentier economy, it can be said that giving up the rentier economy liberties individuals in the KSA.

Hypothesis 3: The social change prevents radicalism in the KSA.

The decrease in radicalism in Saudi Arabia can be attributed to various factors, including increasing social and economic freedoms, a changing social structure, and the implementation of targeted reforms through Vision 2030. Examples include improving educational curricula, strengthening law enforcement, and promoting moderate interpretations of Islam. These efforts are being waged across various sectors, from education and religious institutions to police force and social landscape.

Importantly, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has shifted away from supporting certain Islamic groups, aiming to further reduce the influence of radical ideologies within its borders. Additionally, a gradual rise in nationalist discourse and a focus on fostering national unity are contributing to a more inclusive social fabric. This approach, coupled with promoting a moderate understanding of Islam, can help prevent sectarian strife in the society, particularly considering the presence of a significant Shiite population and potential external influences.

In line with these objectives, it is crucial for the Saudi government to continue pursuing reforms that grant equal opportunities and participation to all citizens, including members of the Shiite community. Opening up influential positions in government and civil service, alongside upholding individual freedoms for all, are essential steps toward building a more cohesive and resilient society.

Nationalism and a moderate understanding of Islam, both central themes of Vision 2030, and ongoing reforms are contributing to a gradual decline in the influence of radical groups within Saudi society. Given the historical events of the 1979 Grand Mosque Seizure and the 1980 Shiite uprisings, it's clear that countering extremism across all religious groups is crucial for maintaining stability and social cohesion. It is obvious that preventing radicalism is essential to survive Saudi Regime. As a result, it can be said that the social change prevents radicalism in the KSA.

Hypothesis 4: The development and growth of the middle class leads the birth of democracy in the KSA.

The correlation between democracy and the middle class has been attempted to be established in the previous chapters. It is currently difficult to envision a scenario where a middle class in Saudi Arabia actively pushes for democratization. Increasing authoritarianism and the confident transition of the kingdom to absolute monarchy are sufficient to say that a democratic system may not be established in the near future.

However, the changing social structure shows that the biggest obstacle to democracy will be the Saudi monarchy. In other words, religious authorities and tribal leaders, who were previously obstacles to democratization, are gradually losing power. The possible outcome of the ongoing reforms means that a large middle class will be formed under the monarchy and these structures that serve as intermediaries will disappear. An attempt was made to show that these structures are obstacles in establishing a democratic state when compared to the examples of Lebanon and Iraq. Although the political systems of Iraq and Lebanon are called democracies, both currently should be categorized as incomplete democracies because of these structures.

One of Moore's preconditions for democracy was the political weakening of the landed aristocracy. The concept of landed aristocracy should be perceived in the Arab world in a way that corresponds to Za'ims and tribe leaders since it is not possible to talk about a western feudalism in this region. When we consider it in this way, Saudi Arabia weakens this group politically with its Vision 2030. Removing these leaders from decision-making mechanisms and reducing loyalty to tribe identities by creating national identity are some of the visible examples of this political weakening. However, the political power in Iraqi and Lebanese society is still in the hands of this group, and there is no event that will cause it to weaken in the near future.

Another precondition is the prevention of an aristocratic-bourgeois coalition against the peasants and worker. As mentioned above, tribe leaders are not only weakened politically, but also becoming increasingly weaker economically. Both it can be said that they receive a smaller share of rentier income sharing and their effectiveness decreases in bureaucratic positions. Furthermore, the Saudi government continues to use the war on corruption as a tool to undermine them, they will always be in danger as they strengthen economically. The same situation applies to the bourgeoisie. The 2016 Ritz-Carlton hotel incident is the harshest indicator of this. Although, in the name of the strengthening of the workers, the Saudi government does not

provide sufficient legal framework, it does not seem possible to establish a coalition against the workers and peasants between the weakened tribe leaders and the bourgeoisie.

Finally, one of Moore's preconditions comes to light in the Saudi society. Vision 2030 aims to turn toward a form of production-based economy. This economic model, which Moore mentioned as an appropriate model for commercial agriculture, can today be considered as a technology-based industrialization. The situation expressed by Moore was a model he emphasized for the transition from agricultural production to industrial production. To give an example, sheep breeding accelerated in Spain and England in a similar period. However, the two countries progressed in different directions, while England was one of the early examples of democracy, a process that resulted in fascism was experienced in Spain. While the basis of this was the development of wool workshops and textile industry accompanying sheep breeding in England, Spain was inadequate in manufacturing and only considered wool as an import item. That's why it is important to establish a production-based economy. The fact that this is one of the goals of Vision 2030 means that this precondition for democracy will be met in the near future.

However, it is not possible for the other two preconditions stated by Moore to come true in the near future. Moore highlights development of a balance to avoid too strong a crown but Saudi Arabia is witnessing an increasingly powerful crown. It was stated that MBS's ultimate goal was to establish an absolute monarchy by centralizing and consolidating power. For this purpose, he weakens the princes within the dynasty and the religious establishment and tribe leaders in order to increase his influence on the society. It is too early to draw any conclusions about the durability of MBS's absolute monarchy. MBS has not yet been able to confront a major event that threatened his legitimacy but surely, he has been increasing his political authority day by day. Finally, regarding to a revolutionary break from the past, it is not yet possible to talk about the existence or possibility of such a desire in the Saudi society.

As a result, the strengthening of the middle class fulfills some preconditions for democracy, but the existence of a powerful crown eliminates the possibility that a democracy can be established in the near future. To talk about democracy, the Saudi dynasty must lose its legitimacy. Looking at the path opened by Vision 2030, democracy debates may emerge more clearly in the Saudi society if the legitimacy crisis that will arise in the future cannot be answered. In addition, it is an important element for democracy that Vision 2030 weakens other structures in society that will take over the dynasty. A definitive conclusion could not be reached,

regarding the development and growth of the middle class leads the birth of democracy in the KSA.

5 CONCLUSION

Although democracy has transformed into different forms throughout history, it is still one of the most important discussion topics in political science. Nowadays, the number of countries that do not experience democracy is decreasing. One of the countries that does not currently have a democracy experience is Saudi Arabia. However, surprisingly, it was witnessed that the Majlis system in Saudi Arabia was called a desert democracy. This shows that societies' contact with democracy in some way is important for today.

Drawing on Moore's analysis in the first chapter, the thesis identified the preconditions for democracy, including weakened crown, commercial agriculture, a weakened aristocracy, and

a revolutionary break with the past. It should be emphasized that industrialization emerged as a vital force supporting the growth of a middle class to democracy. This class, with its open nature and diversity, has proven vital to the establishment and maintenance of democratic institutions. Additionally, the shift from rural to urban environments, combined with increased access to education, has further strengthened the middle class and solidified its role as a driving force of democracy. The absence of a strong middle class or its exclusion from economic interests can hinder democratization or even lead to the emergence of undemocratic regimes.

The thesis acknowledges that economic inequalities, the presence of a divided economic activities in society (see 19th century Italy) and the exclusion of active participation of individuals do not functionally fulfill democracy even if a democratic system is established and even lead to anti-democratic systems. That's why policies that encourage social mobility, reduce economic inequalities and aim for comprehensive economic growth are vital.

Then, a historical analysis of Saudi Arabia was made and the necessary preconditions for democracy were examined. Saudi Arabia was established in a region where the central authority had previously been unable to survive for long. As a result of both the structure of the state and social networks, the Saudi state has been classified as a chieftaincy in the beginning of 20th century. The reasons for this have been tried to be explained above. Both economic and social fragmentation have not been able to create a whole that acts together in the Arabian Peninsula. The importance of Wahhabism, which accompanies the Saudi state's efforts to establish a state, has also been stated above. Thanks to Wahhabism, an attempt was made to create a Saudi society on the basis of religious-political community, which found the ideological source and aimed at the same goal.

Modernization efforts in the Saudi state and efforts to establish a modern state from the chieftaincy began with the establishment of the 3rd Saudi state. These efforts, from Ibn Saud to King Faisal and from there to King Abdullah, come to light as a result of various reforms. However, these efforts showed that it was not possible to talk about comprehensive modernization. On the one hand, the reforms that supported the regime's survival were, on the other hand, providing piecemeal modernization. The main reason for this was to minimize the unrest that these top-down reforms would create in society. The basic theme of Saudi reforms is balance and moderation because they do not want to deepen the conservative-liberal polarization in society. In addition, acting in line with the wishes of one party could easily lead to legitimacy crises. Saudi leadership has always existed as an element of balance. As in these reform

processes, the Saudi leadership has always aimed to balance between conflicting tribes and conflicting social structures. The biggest factor in this is the difficulties experienced in establishing central authority. Although the Saudi authority has been centrally strengthened from time to time, the legitimacy crises experienced also show that centralization has not been achieved.

It must be said that a massive transformation has occurred recently. This process, which started with the coming to power of King Salman and Crown Prince MBS and was shaped by Vision 2030, enables witnessing both transformations in the Saudi social structure and transformation in Saudi leadership. In particular, MBS's separation from other reformers and his claim to establish the 4th kingdom led to the creation of a new path under Saudi leadership. Moreover, the Saudi Leadership has become more ambitious and tougher since MBS deeply commitment to reforms. The imaginative closeness that MBS established with Ibn Saud shows that MBS differs deeply from his predecessors. In addition, the experiences gained after nearly 80 years of government experience have helped MBS chart its route more clearly.

A bold and ambitious plan for Saudi Arabia's future, Vision 2030 seeks to develop a diverse, sustainable economy in favor of an oil-based economy. Without a doubt, this transition has impacted social structures, individual liberties, and even the possibility of political evolution in Saudi society. It is clear that the economy is changing away from being dependent on oil, as industries like tourism, technology, and SMEs continue to thrive. Positive effects of this diversification include a decline in unemployment, especially for young people and women. Nonetheless, the rentier model continues to have a considerable impact, and government revenue is still highly dependent on oil prices.

As mentioned above, certain categories within society have gained more influence as a result of economic changes and more possibilities, especially women and youth. Their access to social freedoms and involvement in the labor have gradually increased. But issues like restricted access to the internet, little political engagement, and the persistence of authoritarian rule still exist. Although there is a growing middle class, there are several obstacles in the way of this class's ability to advance democracy. The changes of Vision 2030 largely satisfy Moore's preconditions for democracy, which include a production-based economy and a diminished aristocracy-tribe leaders in the Saudi context. The monarchy's ability to consolidate power and the lack of revolutionary spirit among the populace, however, provide significant barriers.

In conclusion, Vision 2030 has undeniably triggered significant changes in Saudi Arabia. The economic diversification efforts show promise for a more sustainable future, while social reforms have expanded opportunities for certain groups. Yet, the political landscape remains dominated by an authoritarian monarchy, casting doubt on the near-term possibility of democratization. Future developments, particularly the ability of Vision 2030 to address the dependence on oil and the evolving relationship between the monarchy and the middle class, will be crucial in determining the ultimate trajectory of Saudi Arabia's social and political transformation. It is clear that vision 2030 provides a sustainable economy and more stable leadership. What results a middle class that actively contributes to the economy under an increasingly authoritarian regime will yield is a clear discussion point for future observations.

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