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Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia,^[c] officially the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**,^[d] is a country in Western Asia constituting the bulk of the Arabian Peninsula. With a land area of approximately 2,150,000 km² (830,000 sq mi), Saudi Arabia is geographically the largest sovereign state in Western Asia, the second-largest in the Arab world (after Algeria), the fifth-largest in Asia, and the 12th-largest in the world. Saudi Arabia is bordered by Jordan and Iraq to the north, Kuwait to the northeast, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates to the east, Oman to the southeast and Yemen to the south; it is separated from Israel and Egypt by the Gulf of Aqaba. It is the only nation with both a Red Sea coast and a Persian Gulf coast, and most of its terrain consists of arid desert, lowland and mountains. As of October 2018, the Saudi economy was the largest in the Middle East and the 18th largest in the world.^[9] Saudi Arabia also has one of the world's youngest populations; 50 percent of its 33.4 million people are under 25 years old.^[12]

The territory that now constitutes Saudi Arabia was the site of several ancient cultures and civilizations. The prehistory of Saudi Arabia shows some of the earliest traces of human activity in the world.^[13] The world's second-largest religion,^[14] Islam, emerged in modern-day Saudi Arabia. In the early 7th century, the Islamic prophet Muhammad united the population of Arabia and created a single Islamic religious polity.^[15] Following his death in 632, his followers rapidly expanded the territory under Muslim rule beyond Arabia, conquering huge and unprecedented swathes of territory (from the Iberian Peninsula in the West to modern-day Pakistan in the East) in a matter of decades. Arab dynasties originating from modern-day Saudi Arabia founded the Rashidun (632–661), Umayyad (661–750), Abbasid (750–1517) and Fatimid (909–1171) caliphates as well as numerous other dynasties in Asia, Africa and Europe.^{[16][17][18][19][20]}

The area of modern-day Saudi Arabia formerly consisted of mainly four distinct regions: Hejaz, Najd and parts of Eastern Arabia (Al-Ahsa) and Southern Arabia ('Asir).^[21] The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 by Ibn Saud. He united the four regions into a single state through a series of conquests beginning in 1902 with the capture of Riyadh, the ancestral home of his family, the House of Saud. Saudi Arabia has since been a totalitarian absolute monarchy, effectively a hereditary dictatorship governed along Islamist lines.^{[22][23][24][25]} The ultraconservative Wahhabi religious movement within Sunni Islam has been called "the predominant feature of Saudi culture", with its global spread largely financed by the oil and gas trade.^{[22][23]} Saudi Arabia is sometimes called "the Land of

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

المملكة العربية السعودية (Arabic)
al-Mamlakah al-ʿArabīyah as-Saʿūdīyah



Flag



Emblem

Motto: لا إله إلا الله، محمد رسول الله
'Lā ʾilāha ʾillā Llāh, Muḥammadan rasūlu Llāh'
"There is no god but God; Muhammad is the messenger of God."^{[1][a]}
(Shahada)

Anthem: النشيد الوطني السعودي
"an-Našīd al-Waṭanīy as-Saʿūdī"
"National Anthem of Saudi Arabia"

0:00

MENU



Capital and largest city	Riyadh 24°39′N 46°46′E
Official languages	Arabic ^[3]
Spoken languages	Arabic
Religion	Sunni Islam ^[4]
Demonym(s)	Saudi Arabian Saudi (informal)
Government	Unitary Islamic absolute monarchy under

the Two Holy Mosques" in reference to Al-Masjid al-Haram (in Mecca) and Al-Masjid an-Nabawi (in Medina), the two holiest places in Islam. The state's official language is Arabic.

Petroleum was discovered on 3 March 1938 and followed up by several other finds in the Eastern Province.^[26] Saudi Arabia has since become the world's second largest oil producer (behind the US) and the world's largest oil exporter, controlling the world's second largest oil reserves and the sixth largest gas reserves.^[27] The kingdom is categorized as a World Bank high-income economy with a high Human Development Index^[28] and is the only Arab country to be part of the G-20 major economies.^[29] The state has attracted criticism for a variety of reasons including: its treatment of women, its excessive and often extrajudicial use of capital punishment, state-sponsored discrimination against religious minorities and atheists, its role in the Yemeni Civil War, sponsorship of Islamic terrorists, and its strict interpretation of Sharia law.^{[30][31][32][33][34][35][36]} The kingdom has the world's third-highest military expenditure^{[37][38]} and, according to SIPRI, was the world's second largest arms importer from 2010 to 2014.^[39] Saudi Arabia is considered a regional and middle power.^[40] In addition to the GCC, it is an active member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and OPEC.^[41]

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	a totalitarian dictatorship ^{[5][6][7]}
<div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">King Crown Prince </div>	Salman <p>Mohammad</p>
Legislature	None ^[b]
Establishment	
<div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Kingdom founded Admitted to the United Nations Current constitution </div>	23 September 1932 <p>24 October 1945</p> <p>31 January 1992</p>
Area	
<div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Total Water (%) </div>	2,149,690 ^[3] km ² (830,000 sq mi) (12th) <p>0.7</p>
Population	
<div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">2019 estimate Density </div>	34,218,169 ^[8] (40th) <p>15/km² (38.8/sq mi) (174th)</p>
GDP (PPP)	2019 estimate
<div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Total Per capita </div>	\$1.924 trillion ^[9] (14th) <p>\$56,817^[9] (12th)</p>
GDP (nominal)	2019 estimate
<div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Total Per capita </div>	\$762.259 billion ^[9] (18th) <p>\$23,566^[9] (35th)</p>
Gini (2013)	45.9 ^[10] <p>medium</p>
HDI (2017)	▼ 0.853 ^[11] <p>very high · 38th</p>
Currency	Saudi riyal (SR) (SAR)
Time zone	UTC+3 (AST)
Date format	dd/mm/yyyy (AH)
Driving side	right
Calling code	+966
ISO 3166 code	SA
Internet TLD	.sa <p>السعودية.</p>

Religions

Foreigners

Monarchs (1932–present)

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Second Deputy Prime Minister/Second-in-line (1965–2011)

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Etymology

Following the amalgamation of the Kingdom of Hejaz and Nejd, the new state was named *al-Mamlakah al-ʿArabīyah as-Saʿūdīyah* (a transliteration of المملكة العربية السعودية in Arabic) by royal decree on 23 September 1932 by its founder, Abdulaziz bin Saud. Although this is normally translated as "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" in English,^[42] it literally means "the Saudi Arab kingdom",^[43] or "the Arab Saudi Kingdom".^[44]

The word "Saudi" is derived from the element *as-Saʿūdīyah* in the Arabic name of the country, which is a type of adjective known as a nisba, formed from the dynastic name of the Saudi royal family, the Al Saud (Arabic: آل سعود). Its inclusion expresses the view that the country is the personal possession of the royal family.^{[45][46]} *Al Saud* is an Arabic name formed by adding the word *Al*, meaning "family of" or "House of",^[47] to the personal name of an ancestor. In the case of the Al Saud, this is Saud ibn Muhammad ibn Muqrin, the father of the dynasty's 18th-century founder, Muhammad bin Saud.^[48]

History

Prehistory

There is evidence that human habitation in the Arabian Peninsula dates back to about 125,000 years ago.^[49] A 2011 study found that the first modern humans to spread east across Asia left Africa about 75,000 years ago across the Babel-Mandeb connecting the Horn of Africa and Arabia.^[50] The Arabian peninsula is regarded as a central figure in the understanding of hominin evolution and dispersals. Arabia underwent an extreme environmental fluctuation in the Quaternary that led to profound evolutionary and demographic changes. Arabia has a rich Lower Paleolithic record, and the quantity of Oldowan-like sites in the region indicate a significant role that Arabia had played in the early hominin colonization of Eurasia.^[51]

In the Neolithic period, prominent cultures such as al-Magar whose epicenter lay in modern-day southwestern Najd flourished. al-Magar could be considered as a "Neolithic Revolution" in human knowledge and handicraft skills.^[52] The culture is characterized as being one of the world's first to involve the widespread domestication of animals, particularly the horse, during the Neolithic period.^[53] Aside from horses, animals such as sheep, goats, dogs, in particular of the Saluki race, ostriches, falcons and fish were discovered in the form of stone statues and rock engravings. al-Magar statues were made from local stone, and it seems that the statues were fixed in a central building that might have had a significant role on the social and religious life of the inhabitants.

In November 2017, hunting scenes showing images of most likely domesticated dogs, resembling the Canaan dog, wearing leashes were discovered in Shuwaymis, a hilly region of northwestern Saudi Arabia. These rock engravings date back more than 8000 years, making them the earliest depictions of dogs in the world.^[54]

At the end of the 4th millennium BC, Arabia entered the Bronze Age after witnessing drastic transformations; metals were widely used, and the period was characterized by its 2 m high burials which was simultaneously followed by the existence of numerous temples, that included many free-standing sculptures originally painted with red colours.^[55]

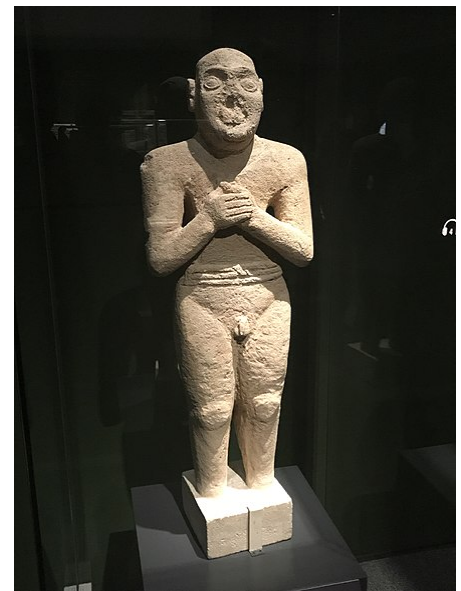
Pre-Islamic

The earliest sedentary culture in Saudi Arabia dates back to the Ubaid period, upon discovering various pottery sherds at Dosariyah. Initial analysis of the discovery concluded that the eastern province of Saudi Arabia was the homeland of the earliest settlers of Mesopotamia, and by extension, the likely origin of the Sumerians. However, experts such as Joan Oates had the opportunity to see the Ubaid period sherds in eastern Arabia and consequently conclude that the sherds dates to the last two phases of Ubaid period (period three and four), while handful examples could be classified roughly as either Ubaid 3 or Ubaid 2. Thus the idea that colonists from Saudi Arabia had emigrated to southern Mesopotamia and founded the region's first sedentary culture was abandoned.^[57]

Climatic change and the onset of aridity may have brought about the end of this phase of settlement, as little archaeological evidence exists from the succeeding millennium.^[58] The settlement of the region picks up again in the period of Dilmun in the early 3rd millennium. Known records from Uruk refer to a place called Dilmun, associated in several occasions with copper and in later period it was a source of imported woods in southern Mesopotamia. A number of scholars have suggested that Dilmun originally designated the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, notably linked with the major Dilmunite settlements of Umm an-Nussi and Umm ar-Ramadh in the interior and Tarout on the coast. It is likely that Tarout Island was the main port and the capital of Dilmun.^[56] Mesopotamian inscribed clay tablets suggests that, in the early period of Dilmun, a form of hierarchical organized political structure existed. In 1966 an earthworks in Tarout exposed ancient burial field that yielded a large impressive statue dating to the Dilmunite period (mid 3rd millennium BC). The statue was locally made under strong Mesopotamian influence on the artistic principle of Dilmun.^[56]



Anthropomorphic stela (4th millennium BC), sandstone, 57x27 cm, from El-Maakir-Qaryat al-Kaafa (National Museum, Riyadh)



The *Worshipping Servant* statue (2500 BC), above one metre in height, the statue is much taller than any possible Mesopotamian or Harappan models^[56]

By 2200 BC, the centre of Dilmun shifted for unknown reasons from Tarout and the Saudi Arabian mainland to the island of Bahrain, and a major developed settlements appeared in Bahrain for the first time, where a laborious temple complex and thousands of burial mounds that dates to this period were discovered.^[56]



Five kings of Midian slain by Israel (illustration from the 1728 *Figures de la Bible*)

By the Late Bronze Age, a historically recorded people and land (Median and the Medianites) in the north-western portion of Saudi Arabia are well-documented in the Bible. Centered in Tabouk, Median stretched from Wadi Arabah in the north to the area of al-Wejh in the south.^[59] The capital of Median was Qurayyah,^[60] it consists of a large fortified citadel encompassing 35 hectares and below it lies a walled settlement of 15 hectares. The city hosted as many as 10 to 12 thousand inhabitants.^[61] The Medianites were depicted in two major events in the Bible that recount Israel's two wars with Median, somewhere in the early 11th century BC. Politically, the Medianite were described as having decentralized structure headed by five kings (Evi, Rekem, Tsur, Hur and Reba), the names appears to be toponyms of important Medianite settlements.^[62] It is common view that Median designated a confederation of tribes, the sedentary element settled in the Hijaz while its nomadic affiliates pastured, and sometimes pillaged as far away land as Palestine.^[63] The nomadic Medianites were one of the earliest exploiters of the domestication of camels that enabled them to navigate through the harsh terrains of the region.^[63]

At the end of the 7th century BC, an emerging kingdom appeared on the historical theater of north-western

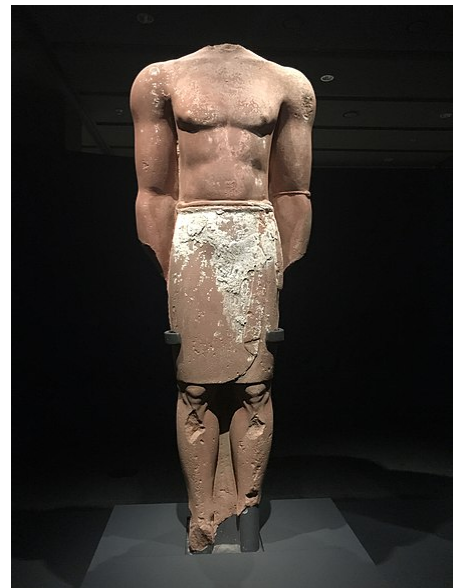
Arabia. It started as a Sheikdom of Dedan, which developed into the Kingdom of Lihyan tribe.^[64] The earliest attestation of state regality, King of Lihyan, was in the mid-sixth century BC.^[65] The second stage of the kingdom saw the transformation of Dedan from a mere city-state of which only influence they exerted was inside their city walls, to a kingdom that encompass much wider domain that marked the pinnacle of Lihyan civilization.^[64] The third state occurred during the early 3rd century BC with bursting economic activity between the south and north that made Lihyan acquire large influence suitable to its strategic position on the caravan road.^[66]

Lihyan was a powerful and highly organized ancient Arabian kingdom that played a vital cultural and economic role in the north-western region of the Arabian Peninsula.^[67] The Lihyanites ruled over large domain from Yathrib in the south and parts of the Levant in the north.^[68] In antiquity, Gulf of Aqaba used to be called Gulf of Lihyan. A testimony to the extensive influence that Lihyan acquired.^[69]

The Lihyanites fell into the hands of the Nabataeans around 65 BC upon their seizure of Hegra then marching to Tayma, and to their capital Dedan in 9 BC. The Nabataeans ruled large portions of north Arabia until their domain was annexed by the Roman Empire.

Middle Ages and rise of Islam

Shortly before the advent of Islam, apart from urban trading settlements (such as Mecca and Medina), much of what was to become Saudi Arabia was populated by nomadic pastoral tribal societies.^[72] The Islamic prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in about 571 CE. In the early 7th century, Muhammad united the various tribes of the peninsula and created a single Islamic religious polity.^[15] Following his death in 632, his followers rapidly expanded the territory



Colossal statue from al-Ula (6th–4th century BC), it followed the standardized artistic sculpting of the Lihyanite kingdom, the original statue was painted with white



At its greatest extent, the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750) covered 11,100,000 km² (4,300,000 sq mi)^[70] and 62 million people (29 percent of the world's population),^[71] making it one of the largest empires in history in both area and proportion of the world's population. It was also larger than any previous empire in history.

under Muslim rule beyond Arabia, conquering huge and unprecedented swathes of territory (from the Iberian Peninsula in west to modern day Pakistan in east) in a matter of decades. Arabia soon became a more politically peripheral region of the Muslim world as the focus shifted to the vast and newly conquered lands.^[15]

Arab dynasties, originating from modern-day Saudi Arabia, Hejaz in particular, founded the Rashidun (632–661), Umayyad (661–750), Abbasid (750–1517) and the Fatimid (909–1171) caliphates.^{[16][17][18][19][20]}

From the 10th century to the early 20th century, Mecca and Medina were under the control of a local Arab ruler known as the Sharif of Mecca, but at most times the Sharif owed allegiance to the ruler of one of the major Islamic empires based in Baghdad, Cairo or Istanbul. Most of the remainder of what became Saudi Arabia reverted to traditional tribal

rule.^{[73][74]}

For much of the 10th century, the Isma'ili-Shi'ite Qarmatians were the most powerful force in the Persian Gulf. In 930, the Qarmatians pillaged Mecca, outraging the Muslim world, particularly with their theft of the Black Stone.^[75] In 1077–1078, an Arab Sheikh named Abdullah bin Ali Al Uyuni defeated the Qarmatians in Bahrain and Al-Hasa with the help of the Great Seljuq Empire and founded the Uyunid dynasty.^{[76][77]} The Uyunid Emirate later underwent expansion with its territory stretching from Najd to the Syrian desert.^[78] They were overthrown by the Ufurids in 1253.^[79] Ufurid rule was weakened after Persian rulers of Hormuz captured Bahrain and Qatif in 1320.^[80] The vassals of Ormuz, the Shia Jarwanid dynasty came to rule eastern Arabia in the 14th century.^{[81][82]} The Jabrids took control of the region after overthrowing the Jarwanids in the 15th century and clashed with Hormuz for more than two decades over the region for its economic revenues, until finally agreeing to pay tribute in 1507.^[81] Al-Muntafiq tribe later took over the region and came under Ottoman suzerainty. The Bani Khalid tribe later revolted against them in 17th century and took control.^[83] Their rule extended from Iraq to Oman at its height and they too came under Ottoman suzerainty.^{[84][85]}



The Battle of Badr, 13 March 624 CE

Ottoman Hejaz

In the 16th century, the Ottomans added the Red Sea and Persian Gulf coast (the Hejaz, Asir and Al-Ahsa) to the Empire and claimed suzerainty over the interior. One reason was to thwart Portuguese attempts to attack the Red Sea (hence the Hejaz) and the Indian Ocean.^[86] Ottoman degree of control over these lands varied over the next four centuries with the fluctuating strength or weakness of the Empire's central authority.^{[87][88]} These changes contributed to later uncertainties, such as the dispute with Transjordan over the inclusion of the sanjak of Ma'an, including the cities of Ma'an and Aqaba.

Foundation of the Saud dynasty

The emergence of what was to become the Saudi royal family, known as the Al Saud, began in Nejd in central Arabia in 1744, when Muhammad bin Saud, founder of the dynasty, joined forces with the religious leader Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab,^[89] founder of the Wahhabi movement, a strict puritanical form of Sunni Islam.^[90] This alliance formed in the 18th century provided the ideological impetus to Saudi expansion and remains the basis of Saudi Arabian dynastic rule today.^[91]

The first "Saudi state" established in 1744 in the area around Riyadh, rapidly expanded and briefly controlled most of the present-day territory of Saudi Arabia,^[92] sacking Karbala in 1802 and capturing Mecca in 1803, but was destroyed by 1818 by the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, Mohammed Ali Pasha.^[93] A much smaller second "Saudi state", located mainly in Nejd, was established in 1824. Throughout the rest of the 19th century, the Al Saud contested control of the interior of what was to become Saudi Arabia with another Arabian ruling family, the Al Rashid, who ruled the Emirate of Jabal Shammar. By 1891, the Al Rashid were victorious and the Al Saud were driven into exile in Kuwait.^[73]

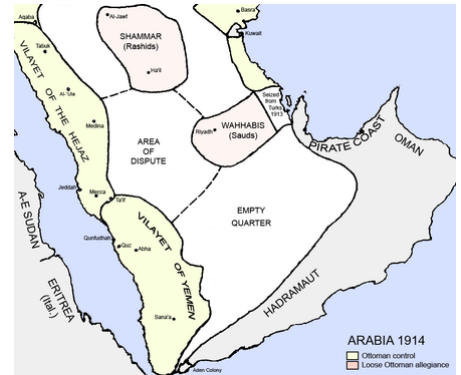
At the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire continued to control or have a suzerainty over most of the peninsula. Subject to this suzerainty, Arabia was ruled by a patchwork of tribal rulers,^{[94][95]} with the Sharif of Mecca having pre-eminence and ruling the Hejaz.^[96] In 1902, Abdul Rahman's son, Abdul Aziz—later to be known as Ibn Saud—recaptured control of Riyadh bringing the Al Saud back to Nejd, creating the third "Saudi state".^[73] Ibn Saud gained the support of the Ikhwan, a tribal army inspired by Wahhabism and led by Faisal Al-Dawish, and which had grown quickly after its foundation in 1912.^[97] With the aid of the Ikhwan, Ibn Saud captured Al-Ahsa from the Ottomans in 1913.

In 1916, with the encouragement and support of Britain (which was fighting the Ottomans in World War I), the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali, led a pan-Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire to create a united Arab state.^[98] Although the Arab Revolt of 1916 to 1918 failed in its objective, the Allied victory in World War I resulted in the end of Ottoman suzerainty and control in Arabia and Hussein bin Ali became King of Hejaz.^[99]

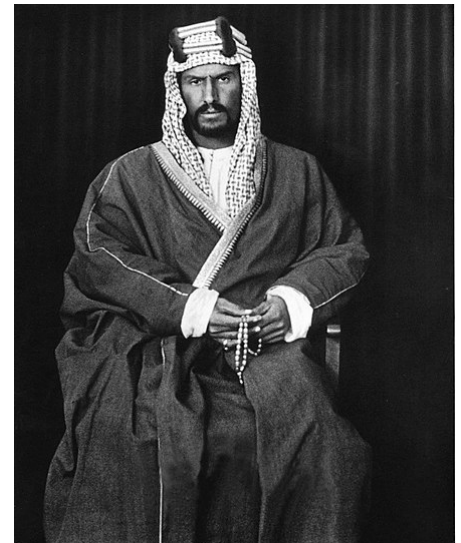
Ibn Saud avoided involvement in the Arab Revolt, and instead continued his struggle with the Al Rashid. Following the latter's final defeat, he took the title Sultan of Nejd in 1921. With the help of the Ikhwan, the Kingdom of Hejaz was conquered in 1924–25 and on 10 January 1926, Ibn Saud declared himself King of Hejaz.^[100] A year later, he added the title of King of Nejd. For the next five years, he administered the two parts of his dual kingdom as separate units.^[73]

After the conquest of the Hejaz, the Ikhwan leadership's objective switched to expansion of the Wahhabist realm into the British protectorates of Transjordan, Iraq and Kuwait, and began raiding those territories. This met with Ibn Saud's opposition, as he recognized the danger of a direct conflict with the British. At the same time, the Ikhwan became disenchanted with Ibn Saud's domestic policies which appeared to favor modernization and the increase in the number of non-Muslim foreigners in the country. As a result, they turned against Ibn Saud and, after a two-year struggle, were defeated in 1929 at the Battle of Sabilla, where their leaders were massacred.^[101] On 23 September 1932, the two kingdoms of the Hejaz and Nejd were united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,^[73] and that date is now a national holiday called Saudi National Day.^[102]

Post-unification



The Arabian Peninsula in 1914



Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, the founding father and first king of Saudi Arabia.

The new kingdom was reliant on limited agriculture and pilgrimage revenues.^[103] In 1938, vast reserves of oil were discovered in the Al-Ahsa region along the coast of the Persian Gulf, and full-scale development of the oil fields began in 1941 under the US-controlled Aramco (Arabian American Oil Company). Oil provided Saudi Arabia with economic prosperity and substantial political leverage internationally.^[73]

Cultural life rapidly developed, primarily in the Hejaz, which was the center for newspapers and radio. However, the large influx of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia in the oil industry increased the pre-existing propensity for xenophobia. At the same time, the government became increasingly wasteful and extravagant. By the 1950s this had led to large governmental deficits and excessive foreign borrowing.^[73]

In 1953, Saud of Saudi Arabia succeeded as the king of Saudi Arabia, on his father's death, until 1964 when he was deposed in favor of his half brother Faisal of Saudi Arabia, after an intense rivalry, fueled by doubts in the royal family over Saud's competence. In 1972, Saudi Arabia gained a 20 percent control in Aramco, thereby decreasing US control over Saudi oil.

In 1973, Saudi Arabia led an oil boycott against the Western countries that supported Israel in the Yom Kippur War against Egypt and Syria. Oil prices quadrupled.^[73] In 1975, Faisal was assassinated by his nephew, Prince Faisal bin Musaid and was succeeded by his half-brother King Khalid.^[104]



Saudi Arabia political map



Saudi Arabian administrative regions and roadways map

By 1976, Saudi Arabia had become the largest oil producer in the world.^[105] Khalid's reign saw economic and social development progress at an extremely rapid rate, transforming the infrastructure and educational system of the country;^[73] in foreign policy, close ties with the US were developed.^[104] In 1979, two events occurred which greatly concerned the government,^[106] and had a long-term influence on Saudi foreign and domestic policy. The first was the Iranian Islamic Revolution. It was feared that the country's Shi'ite minority in the Eastern Province (which is also the location of the oil fields) might rebel under the influence of their Iranian co-religionists. There were several anti-government uprisings in the region such as the 1979 Qatif Uprising.^[107]

The second event was the Grand Mosque Seizure in Mecca by Islamist extremists. The militants involved were in part angered by what they considered to be the corruption and un-Islamic nature of the Saudi government.^[107] The government regained control of the mosque after 10 days and those captured were executed. Part of the response of the royal family was to enforce a much stricter observance of traditional religious and social norms in the country (for example, the closure of cinemas) and to give the Ulema a greater role in government.^[108] Neither entirely succeeded as Islamism continued to grow in strength.^[109]

In 1980, Saudi Arabia bought out the American interests in Aramco.^[110]

King Khalid died of a heart attack in June 1982. He was succeeded by his brother, King Fahd, who added the title "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques" to his name in 1986 in response to considerable fundamentalist pressure to avoid use of "majesty" in association with anything except God. Fahd continued to develop close relations with the United States and increased the purchase of American and British military equipment.^[73]

The vast wealth generated by oil revenues was beginning to have an even greater impact on Saudi society. It led to rapid technological (but not cultural) modernisation, urbanization, mass public education and the creation of new media. This and the presence of increasingly large numbers of foreign workers greatly affected traditional Saudi norms and values. Although there was dramatic change in the social and economic life of the country, political power continued to be monopolized by the royal family^[73] leading to discontent among many Saudis who began to look for wider participation in government.^[111]

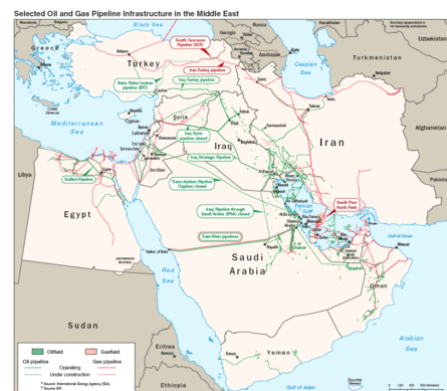
In the 1980s, Saudi Arabia spent \$25 billion in support of Saddam Hussein in the Iran–Iraq War.^[112] However, Saudi Arabia condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and asked the US to intervene.^[73] King Fahd allowed American and coalition troops to be stationed in Saudi Arabia. He invited the Kuwaiti government and many of its citizens to stay in Saudi Arabia, but expelled citizens of Yemen and Jordan because of their governments' support of Iraq. In 1991, Saudi Arabian forces were involved both in bombing raids on Iraq and in the land invasion that helped to liberate Kuwait.

Saudi Arabia's relations with the West began to cause growing concern among some of the ulema and students of sharia law and was one of the issues that led to an increase in Islamist terrorism in Saudi Arabia, as well as Islamist terrorist attacks in Western countries by Saudi nationals. Osama bin Laden was a Saudi citizen (until stripped of his citizenship in 1994) and was responsible for the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in East Africa and the 2000 USS Cole bombing near the port of Aden, Yemen. 15 of the 19 terrorists involved in September 11 attacks in New York City, Washington, D.C., and near Shanksville, Pennsylvania were Saudi nationals.^[113] Many Saudis who did not support the Islamist terrorists were nevertheless deeply unhappy with the government's policies.^[114]

Islamism was not the only source of hostility to the government. Although now extremely wealthy, Saudi Arabia's economy was near stagnant. High taxes and a growth in unemployment have contributed to discontent, and has been reflected in a rise in civil unrest, and discontent with the royal family. In response, a number of limited "reforms" were initiated by King Fahd. In March 1992, he introduced the "Basic Law", which emphasised the duties and responsibilities of a ruler. In December 1993, the Consultative Council was inaugurated. It is composed of a chairman and 60 members—all chosen by the King. The King's intent was to respond to dissent while making as few actual changes in the status quo as possible. Fahd made it clear that he did not have democracy in mind: "A system based on elections is not consistent with our Islamic creed, which [approves of] government by consultation [shūrā]."^[73]

In 1995, Fahd suffered a debilitating stroke, and the Crown Prince, Abdullah, assumed the role of *de facto* regent, taking on the day-to-day running of the country. However, his authority was hindered by conflict with Fahd's full brothers (known, with Fahd, as the "Sudairi Seven").^[115] From the 1990s, signs of discontent continued and included, in 2003 and 2004, a series of bombings and armed violence in Riyadh, Jeddah, Yanbu and Khobar.^[116] In February–April 2005, the first-ever nationwide municipal elections were held in Saudi Arabia. Women were not allowed to take part in the poll.^[73]

In 2005, King Fahd died and was succeeded by Abdullah, who continued the policy of minimum reform and clamping down on protests. The king introduced a number of economic reforms aimed at reducing the country's reliance on oil revenue: limited deregulation, encouragement of foreign investment, and privatization. In February 2009, Abdullah announced a series of governmental changes to the judiciary, armed forces, and various ministries to modernize these institutions including the replacement of senior appointees in the judiciary and the Mutaween (religious police) with more moderate individuals and the appointment of the country's first female deputy minister.^[73]



Oil and gas pipelines in the Middle-East

On 29 January 2011, hundreds of protesters gathered in the city of Jeddah in a rare display of criticism against the city's poor infrastructure after deadly floods swept through the city, killing 11 people.^[117] Police stopped the demonstration after about 15 minutes and arrested 30 to 50 people.^[118]

Since 2011, Saudi Arabia has been affected by its own Arab Spring protests.^[119] In response, King Abdullah announced on 22 February 2011 a series of benefits for citizens amounting to \$36 billion, of which \$10.7 billion was earmarked for housing.^[120] No political reforms were announced as part of the package, though some prisoners indicted for financial crimes were pardoned.^[121] On 18 March the same year, King Abdullah announced a package of \$93 billion, which included 500,000 new homes to a cost of \$67 billion, in addition to creating 60,000 new security jobs.^{[122][123]}

Although male-only municipal elections were held on 29 September 2011,^{[124][125]} Abdullah allowed women to vote and be elected in the 2015 municipal elections, and also to be nominated to the Shura Council.^[126]

Since 2001, Saudi Arabia has engaged in widespread internet censorship. Most online censorship generally falls into two categories: one based on censoring "immoral" (mostly pornographic and LGBT-supportive websites along with websites promoting any religious ideology other than Sunni Islam) and one based on a blacklist run by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Media, which primarily censors websites critical of the Saudi regime or associated with parties that are opposed to or opposed by Saudi Arabia.^{[127][128][129]}

Politics

	
Salman Al Saud King and Prime Minister	Mohammad bin Salman Crown Prince

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy.^[130] However, according to the Basic Law of Saudi Arabia adopted by royal decree in 1992, the king must comply with Sharia (Islamic law) and the Quran, while the Quran and the Sunnah (the traditions of Muhammad) are declared to be the country's constitution.^[131] No political parties or national elections are permitted.^[130] Critics regard it as a totalitarian dictatorship.^[132] *The Economist* rated the Saudi government as the fifth most authoritarian government out of 167 rated in its 2012 Democracy Index,^[25] and Freedom House gave it its lowest "Not Free" rating, 7.0 ("1=best, 7=worst") for 2019.^[133]

In the absence of national elections and political parties,^[130] politics in Saudi Arabia takes place in two distinct arenas: within the royal family, the Al Saud, and between the royal family and the rest of Saudi society.^[134] Outside of the Al-Saud, participation in the political process is limited to a relatively small segment of the population and takes the form of the royal family consulting with the ulema, tribal sheikhs and members of important commercial families on major decisions.^[135] This process is not reported by the Saudi media.^[136]

By custom, all males of full age have a right to petition the king directly through the traditional tribal meeting known as the *majlis*.^[137] In many ways the approach to government differs little from the traditional system of tribal rule. Tribal identity remains strong and, outside of the royal family, political influence is frequently determined by tribal affiliation, with tribal sheikhs maintaining a considerable degree of influence over local and national events.^[135] As mentioned earlier, in recent years there have been limited steps to widen political participation such as the establishment of the Consultative Council in the early 1990s and the National Dialogue Forum in 2003.^[138]

The rule of the Al Saud faces political opposition from four sources: Sunni Islamist activism; liberal critics; the Shi'ite minority—particularly in the Eastern Province; and long-standing tribal and regionalist particularistic opponents (for example in the Hejaz).^[139] Of these, the minority activists have been the most prominent threat to the government and have in recent years perpetrated a number of violent incidents in the country.^[116] However, open protest against the government, even if peaceful, is not tolerated.

Monarchy and royal family

The king combines legislative, executive, and judicial functions^[135] and royal decrees form the basis of the country's legislation.^[140] The king is also the prime minister, and presides over the Council of Ministers of Saudi Arabia and Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia.

The royal family dominates the political system. The family's vast numbers allow it to control most of the kingdom's important posts and to have an involvement and presence at all levels of government.^[141] The number of princes is estimated to be at least 7,000, with most power and influence being wielded by the 200 or so male descendants of Ibn Saud.^[142] The key ministries are generally reserved for the royal family,^[130] as are the 13 regional governorships.^[143]

Long term political and government appointments have resulted in the creation of "power fiefdoms" for senior princes,^[144] such as those of King Abdullah, who had been Commander of the National Guard since 1963 (until 2010, when he appointed his son to replace him),^[145] former Crown Prince Sultan, Minister of Defence and Aviation from 1962 to his death in 2011, former crown prince Prince Nayef who was the Minister of Interior from 1975 to his death in 2012, Prince Saud who had been Minister of Foreign Affairs since 1975^[146] and current King Salman, who was Minister of Defense and Aviation before he was crown prince and Governor of the Riyadh Province from 1962 to 2011.^[147] The current Minister of Defense is Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the son of King Salman and Crown Prince.^[148]

The royal family is politically divided by factions based on clan loyalties, personal ambitions and ideological differences.^[134] The most powerful clan faction is known as the 'Sudairi Seven', comprising the late King Fahd and his full brothers and their descendants.^[149] Ideological divisions include issues over the speed and direction of reform,^[150] and whether the role of the ulema should be increased or reduced. There were divisions within the family over who should succeed to the throne after the accession or earlier death of Prince Sultan.^{[149][151]} When prince Sultan died before ascending to the throne on 21 October 2011, King Abdullah appointed Prince Nayef as crown prince.^[152] The following year Prince Nayef also died before ascending to the throne.^[153]



As many as 500 princes, government ministers, and business people, including Prince Fahd bin Abdullah, were arrested by Saudi Arabian authorities as part of the 2017 Saudi Arabian purge.

with the company, by which it paid \$447 million in fines but did not admit to bribery.^[165]



King Fahd with US President Ronald Reagan and future US President Donald Trump in 1985. The US and Saudi Arabia supplied money and arms to the anti-Soviet *mujahideen* fighters in Afghanistan.

The Saudi government and the royal family have often, over many years, been accused of corruption.^[154] In a country that is said to "belong" to the royal family and is named for them,^[46] the lines between state assets and the personal wealth of senior princes are blurred.^[142] The extent of corruption has been described as systemic^[155] and endemic,^[156] and its existence was acknowledged^[157] and defended^[158] by Prince Bandar bin Sultan (a senior member of the royal family^[159]) in an interview in 2001.^[160]

Although corruption allegations have often been limited to broad undocumented accusations,^[161] specific allegations were made in 2007, when it was claimed that the British defence contractor BAE Systems had paid Prince Bandar US\$2 billion in bribes relating to the Al-Yamamah arms deal.^{[162][163]} Prince Bandar denied the allegations.^[164] Investigations by both US and UK authorities resulted, in 2010, in plea bargain agreements

Transparency International in its annual Corruption Perceptions Index for 2010 gave Saudi Arabia a score of 4.7 (on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is "highly corrupt" and 10 is "highly clean").^[166] Saudi Arabia has undergone a process of political and social reform, such as to increase public transparency and good governance. However, nepotism and patronage are widespread when doing business in the country. The enforcement of the anti-corruption laws is selective and public officials engage in corruption with impunity. A number of prominent Saudi Arabian princes, government ministers, and businesspeople, including Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, were arrested in Saudi Arabia in November 2017.^[167]

There has been mounting pressure to reform and modernize the royal family's rule, an agenda championed by King Abdullah both before and after his accession in 2005. The creation of the Consultative Council in the early 1990s did not satisfy demands for political participation, and, in 2003, an annual *National Dialogue Forum* was announced that would allow selected professionals and intellectuals to publicly debate current national issues, within certain prescribed parameters. In 2005, the first municipal elections were held. In 2007, the Allegiance Council was created to regulate the succession.^[138] In 2009, the king made significant personnel changes to the government by appointing reformers to key positions and the first woman to a ministerial post.^[168] However, these changes have been criticized as being too slow or merely cosmetic.^[169]

Al ash-Sheikh and role of the ulema

Saudi Arabia is almost unique in giving the ulema (the body of Islamic religious leaders and jurists) a direct role in government.^[170] The preferred ulema are of the Salafi persuasion. The ulema have also been a key influence in major government decisions, for example the imposition of the oil embargo in 1973 and the invitation to foreign troops to Saudi Arabia in 1990.^[171] In addition, they have had a major role in the judicial and education systems^[172] and a monopoly of authority in the sphere of religious and social morals.^[173]

By the 1970s, as a result of oil wealth and the modernization of the country initiated by King Faisal, important changes to Saudi society were under way and the power of the ulema was in decline.^[174] However, this changed following the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979 by Islamist radicals.^[175] The government's response to the crisis included strengthening the ulema's powers and increasing their financial support:^[108] in particular, they were given greater control over the education system^[175] and allowed to enforce stricter observance of Wahhabi rules of moral and social behaviour.^[108] After his accession to the throne in 2005, King Abdullah took steps to reduce the powers of the ulema, for instance transferring control over girls' education to the Ministry of Education.^[176]

The ulema have historically been led by the Al ash-Sheikh,^[177] the country's leading religious family.^[173] The Al ash-Sheikh are the descendants of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the 18th-century founder of the Wahhabi form of Sunni Islam which is today dominant in Saudi Arabia.^[178] The family is second in prestige only to the Al Saud (the royal family)^[179] with whom they formed a "mutual support pact"^[180] and power-sharing arrangement nearly 300 years ago.^[171] The pact, which persists to this day,^[180] is based on the Al Saud maintaining the Al ash-Sheikh's authority in religious matters and upholding and propagating Wahhabi doctrine. In return, the Al ash-Sheikh support the Al Saud's political authority^[181] thereby using its religious-moral authority to legitimize the royal family's rule.^[182] Although the Al ash-Sheikh's domination of the ulema has diminished in recent decades,^[183] they still hold the most important religious posts and are closely linked to the Al Saud by a high degree of intermarriage.^[173]

Legal system



Abdullah ibn Muhammad Al ash-Sheikh with Bogdan Borusewicz in the Polish Senate, 26 May 2014

The primary source of law is the Islamic Sharia derived from the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the traditions of the Prophet).^[140] Saudi Arabia is unique among modern Muslim states in that Sharia is not codified and there is no system of judicial precedent, giving judges the power to use independent legal reasoning to make a decision. Saudi judges tend to follow the principles of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence (or *fiqh*) found in pre-modern texts^[185] and noted for its literalist interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith.^[186]

Because the judge is empowered to disregard previous judgments (either his own or of other judges) and may apply his personal interpretation of Sharia to any particular case, divergent judgements arise even in apparently identical cases,^[187] making predictability of legal interpretation difficult.^[188] The Sharia court system constitutes the basic judiciary of Saudi Arabia and its judges (*qadi*) and lawyers form part of the *ulema*, the country's Islamic scholars.

Royal decrees are the other main source of law; but are referred to as *regulations* rather than *laws* because they are subordinate to the Sharia.^[140] Royal decrees supplement Sharia in areas such as labor, commercial and corporate law. Additionally, traditional tribal law and custom remain significant.^[189] Extra-Sharia government tribunals usually handle disputes relating to specific royal decrees.^[190] Final appeal from both Sharia courts and government tribunals is to the King and all courts and tribunals follow Sharia rules of evidence and procedure.^[191]

The Saudi system of justice has been criticized for its "ultra-puritanical judges", who are often harsh in their sentencing (with beheading for the crime of witchcraft), but also sometimes overly lenient (for cases of rape or wife-beating) and slow, for example leaving thousands of abandoned women unable to secure a divorce.^{[192][193]} The system has also been criticized for being arcane,^[194] lacking in some of the safeguards of justice, and unable to deal with the modern world.^[195] In 2007, King Abdullah issued royal decrees reforming the judiciary and creating a new court system,^[187] and, in 2009, the King made a number of significant changes to the judiciary's personnel at the most senior level by bringing in a younger generation.^[194]

Capital and physical punishments imposed by Saudi courts, such as beheading, stoning (to death), amputation, crucifixion and lashing, as well as the sheer number of executions have been strongly criticized.^[197] The death penalty can be imposed for a wide range of offences including murder, rape, armed robbery, repeated drug use, apostasy, adultery, witchcraft and sorcery and can be carried out by beheading with a sword, stoning or firing squad, followed by crucifixion.^{[198][199][200]} The 345 reported executions between 2007 and 2010 were all carried out by public beheading. The last reported execution for sorcery took place in September 2014.^[201]

Although repeated theft can be punishable by amputation of the right hand, only one instance of judicial amputation was reported between 2007 and 2010. Homosexual acts are punishable by flogging or death.^{[198][200][202]} Atheism or "calling into question the fundamentals of the Islamic religion on which this country is based" is considered a terrorist crime.^[203] Lashings are a common form of punishment^[204] and are often imposed for offences against religion and public morality such as drinking alcohol and neglect of prayer and fasting obligations.^[198]

Retaliatory punishments, or *Qisas*, are practised: for instance, an eye can be surgically removed at the insistence of a victim who lost his own eye.^[193] Families of someone unlawfully killed can choose between demanding the death penalty or granting clemency in return for a payment of *diyya* (blood money), by the perpetrator.^[205]



Verses from the Quran. The Quran is the official constitution of the country and a primary source of law. Saudi Arabia is unique in enshrining a religious text as a political document.^[184]



Deera Square, central Riyadh. Known locally as "Chop-chop square", it is the location of public beheadings.^[196]

Even after allowing women to drive and work, public places in Saudi Arabia are still gender-segregated and the kingdom has very strict laws on how unrelated men and women can dine together. In September 2018, a man was arrested by the Saudi authorities for appearing in a video with his female colleague while having breakfast at a hotel, where they both work.^[206]

Foreign relations



U.S. President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump with King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, 21 May 2017

Saudi Arabia joined the UN in 1945^{[42][207]} and is a founding member of the Arab League, Gulf Cooperation Council, Muslim World League, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (now the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation).^[208] It plays a prominent role in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and in 2005 joined the World Trade Organization.^[42] Saudi Arabia supports the intended formation of the Arab Customs Union in 2015 and an Arab common market^[209] by 2020, as announced at the 2009 Arab League summit.^[210]

Since 1960, as a founding member of OPEC, its oil pricing policy has been generally to stabilize the world oil market and try to moderate sharp price movements so as to not jeopardise the Western economies.^{[42][211]} In 1973, Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations imposed an oil embargo against the United States, United Kingdom, Japan and other Western nations which supported Israel in the Yom Kippur War of October 1973.^[212] The embargo caused an oil crisis with many short- and long-term effects on global politics and the global economy.^[213]

Between the mid-1970s and 2002 Saudi Arabia expended over \$70 billion in "overseas development aid". However, there is evidence that the vast majority was, in fact, spent on propagating and extending the influence of Wahhabism at the expense of other forms of Islam.^[214] There has been an intense debate over whether Saudi aid and Wahhabism has fomented extremism in recipient countries.^[215] The two main allegations are that, by its nature, Wahhabism encourages intolerance and promotes terrorism.^[216] Counting only the non-Muslim-majority countries, Saudi Arabia has paid for the construction of 1359 mosques, 210 Islamic centres, 202 colleges and 2000 schools.^[217]

Saudi Arabia and the United States are strategic allies,^{[218][219]} and since President Barack Obama took office in 2009, the US has sold \$110 billion in arms to Saudi Arabia.^{[220][221]} However, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States became strained and have witnessed major decline during the last years of the Obama administration,^{[222][223][224]} although Obama had authorized US forces to provide logistical and intelligence support to the Saudis in their military intervention in Yemen, establishing a joint coordination planning cell with the Saudi military that is helping manage the war,^{[225][226]} and CIA used Saudi bases for drone assassinations in Yemen.^{[227][228][229][230]} In the first decade of the 21st century the Saudi Arabia paid approximately \$100 million to American firms to lobby the U.S. government.^[231] On May 20, 2017, President Donald Trump and King Salman signed a series of letters of intent for Saudi Arabia to purchase arms from the United States totaling US\$110 billion immediately,^[232] and \$350 billion over 10 years.^[233]



U.S. President Barack Obama meets King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, July 2014

The relations with the U.S. became strained following 9/11.^[234] American politicians and media accused the Saudi government of supporting terrorism and tolerating a *jihadist* culture.^[235] Indeed, Osama bin Laden and 15 out of the 19 9/11 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia;^[236] in ISIL-occupied Raqqa, in mid-2014, all 12 judges were Saudi.^[237] The leaked US Department of State memo, dated 17 August 2014, says that "governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia...are

providing clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIS and other radical groups in the region."^[224] According to former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for al-Qaida, the Taliban, LeT and other terrorist groups... Donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide."^[238] Former CIA director James Woolsey described it as "the soil in which Al-Qaeda and its sister terrorist organizations are flourishing."^[239] The Saudi government denies these claims or that it exports religious or cultural extremism.^[240] In April 2016, Saudi Arabia has threatened to sell off \$750 billion in Treasury securities and other US assets if Congress passes a bill that would allow the Saudi government to be sued over 9/11.^[218] In September 2016, the Congress passed the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act that would allow relatives of victims of the September 11 attacks to sue Saudi Arabia for its government's alleged role in the attacks.^[241] Congress overwhelmingly rejected President Barack Obama's veto.^{[223][224]}



Faisal Mosque in Islamabad is named after a Saudi king. The kingdom is a strong ally of Pakistan. WikiLeaks claimed that Saudis are "long accustomed to having a significant role in Pakistan's affairs".^[242]

In the Arab and Muslim worlds, Saudi Arabia is considered to be pro-Western and pro-American,^[243] and it is certainly a long-term ally of the United States.^[244] However, this^[245] and Saudi Arabia's role in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, particularly the stationing of US troops on Saudi soil from 1991, prompted the development of a hostile Islamist response internally.^[246] As a result, Saudi Arabia has, to some extent, distanced itself from the US and, for example, refused to support or to participate in the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.^[135]

China and Saudi Arabia are major allies, with relationship between the two countries growing significantly in recent decades. Majority of Saudi Arabians also expressed a favorable view of China.^{[247][248][249][250][251][252]} In February 2019, Crown Prince Mohammad defended China's Xinjiang re-education camps for Uyghur Muslims,^{[253][254]} saying "China has the right to carry out anti-terrorism and de-extremisation work for its national security."^{[255][256]} In July 2019, UN ambassadors of 37 countries, including Saudi Arabia, have signed a

joint letter to the UNHRC defending China's treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslim minority groups in the Xinjiang region.^[257]

The consequences of the 2003 invasion and the Arab Spring led to increasing alarm within the Saudi monarchy over the rise of Iran's influence in the region.^[258] These fears were reflected in comments of King Abdullah,^[176] who privately urged the United States to attack Iran and "cut off the head of the snake".^[259] The tentative rapprochement between the US and Iran that began in secret in 2011^[260] was said to be feared by the Saudis,^[261] and, during the run up to the widely welcomed deal on Iran's nuclear programme that capped the first stage of US–Iranian détente, Robert Jordan, who was US ambassador to Riyadh from 2001 to 2003, said "[t]he Saudis' worst nightmare would be the [Obama] administration striking a grand bargain with Iran."^[262] A trip to Saudi by US President Barack Obama in 2014 included discussions of US–Iran relations, though these failed to resolve Riyadh's concerns.^[263]

In order to protect the house of Khalifa, the monarchs of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia invaded Bahrain by sending military troops to quell the uprising of Bahraini people on 14 March 2011.^[264] The Saudi government considered the two-month uprising as a "security threat" posed by the Shia who represent the majority of Bahrain population.^[264]

According to the Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki in March 2014, Saudi Arabia along with Qatar provided political, financial and media support to terrorists against the Iraqi government.^[265]

On 25 March 2015, Saudi Arabia, spearheading a coalition of Sunni Muslim states,^[266] started a military intervention in Yemen against the Shia Houthis and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was deposed in the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.^[267] At least 56,000 people have been killed in armed violence in Yemen between January 2016 and October 2018.^[268]

Saudi Arabia, together with Qatar and Turkey, openly supported the Army of Conquest,^[269] an umbrella group of anti-government forces fighting in the Syrian Civil War that reportedly included an al-Qaeda linked al-Nusra Front and another Salafi coalition known as Ahrar al-Sham.^[270] Saudi Arabia was also involved in the CIA-led Timber Sycamore covert operation to train and arm Syrian rebels.^[271]

Following a number of incidents during the Hajj season, the deadliest^[272] of which killed at least 2,070 pilgrim^[273] in 2015 Mina stampede, Saudi Arabia has been accused of mismanagement and focusing on increasing money revenues while neglecting pilgrims' welfare.^[274]

In March 2015, Sweden scrapped an arms deal with Saudi Arabia, marking an end to a decade-old defense agreement with the kingdom. The decision came after Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom was blocked by the Saudis while speaking about democracy and women's rights at the Arab League in Cairo. This also led to Saudi Arabia recalling its ambassador to Sweden.^[275]

According to Sir William Patey, former British ambassador to Saudi Arabia, the kingdom funds mosques throughout Europe that have become hotbeds of extremism. “They are not funding terrorism. They are funding something else, which may down the road lead to individuals being radicalised and becoming fodder for terrorism,” Patey said. He said that Saudi has been funding an ideology that leads to extremism and the leaders of the kingdom are not aware of the consequences.^[276]

Saudi Arabia has been seen as a moderating influence in the Arab–Israeli conflict, periodically putting forward a peace plan between Israel and the Palestinians and condemning Hezbollah.^[277] Following the Arab Spring Saudi Arabia offered asylum to deposed President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and King Abdullah telephoned President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt (prior to his deposition) to offer his support.^[278] In early 2014 relations with Qatar became strained over its support for the Muslim Brotherhood, and Saudi Arabia's belief that Qatar was interfering in its affairs. In August 2014 both countries appeared to be exploring ways of ending the rift.^[279] Saudi Arabia and its allies have criticized Qatar-based TV channel Al Jazeera and Qatar's relations with Iran. In 2017, Saudi Arabia imposed a land, naval and air blockade on Qatar.^[280]

Saudi Arabia halted new trade and investment dealings with Canada and suspended diplomatic ties in a dramatic escalation of a dispute over the kingdom's arrest of a women's rights activist on 6 August 2018.^{[281][282]}

Tensions have escalated between Saudi Arabia and its allies after the disappearance of Jamal Khashoggi from the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Turkish officials are highly skeptical of Khashoggi being murdered inside the consulate; this has strained the already suffering Saudi Arabia–Turkey relations. As stated by Ozgur Unluhiscarikli, director of the German Marshall Fund's Ankara office “Turkey is maintaining a very delicate balance in its relations with Saudi Arabia. The relations have the potential of evolving into a crisis at any moment.”^[283]

The pressure on Saudi to reveal the insights about Khashoggi's disappearance from the US and other European countries has increased. Saudi-US relations took an ugly turn on 14 October 2018, when Trump promised “severe punishment” if the royal court was responsible for Khashoggi's death. The Saudi Foreign Ministry retaliated with an equal statement saying, “it will respond with greater action,” indicating the kingdom's “influential and vital role in the global economy.” A joint statement was issued by Britain, France and Germany also demanding a “credible investigation to establish the truth about what happened, and – if relevant – to identify those bearing responsibility for the disappearance of Jamal Khashoggi, and ensure that they are held to account.”^[284]



Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir with then British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson (now Prime Minister) in London, 16 October 2016



Major Iran–Saudi Arabia proxy conflict locations

The US expects its Gulf allies involved in the coalition in Yemen to put in more efforts and address the rising concerns about the millions that have been pushed to the brink of famine. According to the United Nations, the Arabian peninsula nation is home to the world's worst humanitarian crisis.^[285] More than 50,000 children in Yemen died from starvation in 2017.^[286] The famine in Yemen is the direct result of the Saudi-led intervention and blockade of the rebel-held area.^{[287][288]}

In the wake of Jamal Khashoggi's murder in October 2018, the US secretary of state Mike Pompeo and the US defence secretary Jim Mattis have called for a ceasefire in Yemen within 30 days followed by UN-initiated peace talks. Pompeo has asked Saudi Arabia and the UAE to stop their airstrikes on populated areas in Yemen. Theresa May backed the US call to end the coalition. President of the International Rescue Committee David Miliband called the US announcement as "the most significant breakthrough in the war in Yemen for four years".^[289]

Jeremy Hunt, the UK Foreign Secretary, on his visit to Saudi Arabia and the UAE on 12 November 2018, is expected to raise the need for a ceasefire from all sides in the four-year long Yemen civil war. The US called for a ceasefire within 30 days.^[290] Andrew Smith, of Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), said that Hunt and Boris Johnson "played an utterly central and complicit role in arming and supporting the Saudi-led destruction of Yemen."^{[291][292]}

Military



"The Saudi pilots training in Italy 1935"—a scene from 'Our Eagles', one of four video wall shows made for the Royal Saudi Air Force Museum.

Saudi Arabia has one of the highest percentages of military expenditure in the world, spending more than 10% of its GDP in its military. The Saudi military consists of the Royal Saudi Land Forces, the Royal Saudi Air Force, the Royal Saudi Navy, the Royal Saudi Air Defense, the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG, an independent military force), and paramilitary forces, totaling nearly 200,000 active-duty personnel. In 2005 the armed forces had the following personnel: the army, 75,000; the air force, 18,000; air defense, 16,000; the navy, 15,500 (including 3,000 marines); and the SANG had 75,000 active soldiers and 25,000 tribal levies.^[293] In addition, there is an Al Mukhabarat Al A'amah military intelligence service.

The kingdom has a long-standing military relationship with Pakistan, it has long been speculated that Saudi Arabia secretly funded Pakistan's atomic bomb programme and seeks to purchase atomic weapons from Pakistan, in near future.^{[294][295]} The SANG is not a reserve but a fully operational front-line force, and originated out of Ibn Saud's tribal military-religious force, the Ikhwan. Its modern existence, however, is attributable to it being effectively Abdullah's private army since the 1960s and, unlike the rest of the armed forces, is independent of the Ministry of Defense and Aviation. The SANG has been a counterbalance to the Sudairi faction in the royal family: The late prince Sultan, former Minister of Defense and Aviation, was one of the so-called 'Sudairi Seven' and controlled the remainder of the armed forces until his death in 2011.^[296]

Spending on defense and security has increased significantly since the mid-1990s and was about US\$63.7 billion, as of 2016.^[297] Saudi Arabia ranks among the top 10 in the world in government spending for its military, representing about 7 percent of gross domestic product in 2005. Its modern high-technology arsenal makes Saudi Arabia among the world's most densely armed nations, with its military equipment being supplied primarily by the US, France and Britain.^[293]

The United States sold more than \$80 billion in military hardware between 1951 and 2006 to the Saudi military.^[298] On 20 October 2010, the US State Department notified Congress of its intention to make the biggest arms sale



Saudi and US troops train in December 2014

in American history—an estimated \$60.5 billion purchase by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The package represents a considerable improvement in the offensive capability of the Saudi armed forces.^[299] 2013 saw Saudi military spending climb to \$67bn, overtaking that of the UK, France and Japan to place fourth globally.^[300]

The United Kingdom has also been a major supplier of military equipment to Saudi Arabia since 1965.^[301] Since 1985, the UK has supplied military aircraft—notably the Tornado and Eurofighter Typhoon combat aircraft—and other equipment as part of the long-term Al-Yamamah arms deal estimated to have been worth £43 billion by 2006 and thought to be worth a further £40 billion.^[302] In May 2012, British defence giant BAE signed a £1.9bn (\$3bn) deal to supply Hawk trainer jets to Saudi Arabia.^[303]

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI, in 2010–14 Saudi Arabia became the world's second largest arms importer, receiving four times more major arms than in 2005–2009. Major imports in 2010–14 included 45 combat aircraft from the UK, 38 combat helicopters from the US, four tanker aircraft from Spain and over 600 armoured vehicles from Canada. Saudi Arabia has a long list of outstanding orders for arms, including 27 more combat aircraft from the UK, 154 combat aircraft from the US and a large number of armoured vehicles from Canada.^[39] Saudi Arabia received 41 percent of UK arms exports in 2010–14.^[304] France authorized \$18 billion in weapons sales to Saudi Arabia in 2015 alone.^[221] The \$15 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia is believed to be the largest arms sale in Canadian history.^[305] In 2016, the European Parliament decided to temporarily impose an arms embargo against Saudi Arabia, as a result of the Yemen civilian population's suffering from the conflict with Saudi Arabia.^[306] In 2017, Saudi Arabia signed a 110 billion dollar arms deal with the United States.

Saudi Arabia is Britain's largest arms customer, with more than £4.6 billion worth of arms bought since the start of Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. A recent poll conducted by YouGov for Save the Children and Avaaz stated that 63 percent of British people oppose the sale of weapons to Saudi.^[307]

Following the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, a nonbinding resolution was passed in the European Parliament on 25 October 2018, urging EU countries to impose an EU-wide arms embargo on Saudi Arabia.^[308] Germany became the first Western government to suspend future arms deal with the kingdom after Angela Merkel stated that “arms exports can't take place in the current circumstances.”^[309]

Human rights

Human Rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House condemn both the Saudi criminal justice system and its severe punishments. There are no jury trials in Saudi Arabia and courts observe few formalities.^[310] Human Rights Watch, in a 2008 report, noted that a criminal procedure code had been introduced for the first time in 2002, but it lacked some basic protections and, in any case, had been routinely ignored by judges. Those arrested are often not informed of the crime of which they are accused or given access to a lawyer and are subject to abusive treatment and torture if they do not confess. At trial, there is a presumption of guilt and the accused is often unable to examine witnesses and evidence or present a legal defense. Most trials are held in secret.^[311] An example of sentencing is that of UK pensioner and cancer victim Karl Andree, aged 74, who faced 360 lashes for home brewing alcohol.^[312] He was later released due to intervention by the British government.^[313]

Saudi Arabia is widely accused of having one of the worst human rights records in the world. Human rights issues that have attracted strong criticism include the extremely disadvantaged position of women (see Women below), capital punishment for homosexuality,^[314] religious discrimination, the lack of religious freedom and the activities of the religious police (see Religion below).^[197] Between 1996 and 2000, Saudi Arabia



In 2014, Saudi Arabian writer Raif Badawi was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes for "undermining the regime and officials", "inciting public opinion", and "insulting the judiciary".

acceded to four UN human rights conventions and, in 2004, the government approved the establishment of the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), staffed by government employees, to monitor their implementation. To date, the activities of the NSHR have been limited and doubts remain over its neutrality and independence.^[315]

Saudi Arabia remains one of the very few countries in the world not to accept the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In response to the continuing criticism of its human rights record, the Saudi government points to the special Islamic character of the country, and asserts that this justifies a different social and political order.^[316] The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom had unsuccessfully^[317] urged President Barack Obama to raise human rights concerns with King Abdullah on his March 2014 visit to the Kingdom especially the imprisonments of Sultan Hamid Marzooq al-Enezi, Saud Falih Awad al-Enezi, and Raif Badawi.^[318]



Last known photo of Dina Ali (left), April 10, 2017, a 24-year-old Saudi woman who attempted to escape the male guardianship system.^[319]

For example, Ali Mohammed Baqir al-Nimr was arrested in 2012 when he was 17 years old for taking part in an anti-government protests in Saudi Arabia during the Arab Spring.^[320] In May 2014, Ali al-Nimr was sentenced to be publicly beheaded and crucified.^[321]

In 2013, the government deported thousands of non-Saudis, many of them who were working illegally in the country or had overstayed their visas. Many reports abound, of foreigner workers being tortured either by employers or others.^[322] This resulted in many basic services suffering from a lack of workers, as many Saudi Arabian citizens are not keen on working in blue collar jobs.^[323]

Saudi Arabia has a "Counter-Radicalization Program" the purpose of which is to "combat the spread and appeal of extremist ideologies among the general populous (sic)" and to "instill the true values of the Islamic faith, such as tolerance and moderation."^[324] This "tolerance and moderation" has been called into question by the Baltimore Sun, based on the reports from Amnesty International regarding Raif Badawi,^[325] and in the case of a man from Hafr al-Batin sentenced to death for rejecting Islam.^[326] In September 2015, Faisal bin Hassan Trad, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, has been elected Chair of the United Nations Human Rights Council panel that appoints independent experts.^[327] In January 2016, Saudi Arabia executed the prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr who had called for pro-democracy demonstrations and for free elections in Saudi Arabia.^[328]

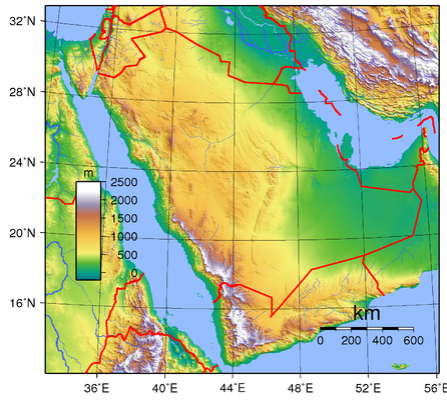
In August 2017, ten Nobel Peace Prize laureates, including Desmond Tutu and Lech Wałęsa, urged Saudi Arabia to stop the executions of 14 young people for participating in the 2011–12 Saudi Arabian protests.^[329]

On 2 October 2018, Saudi journalist and *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi went missing after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. According to Turkish government sources there is audio and video evidence for him having been murdered and dismembered inside the consulate.^{[330][331][332]}

Geography

Saudi Arabia occupies about 80 percent of the Arabian Peninsula (the world's largest peninsula),^[334] lying between latitudes 16° and 33° N, and longitudes 34° and 56° E. Because the country's southern borders with the United Arab Emirates and Oman are not precisely marked, the exact size of the country is undefined.^[334] The CIA World Factbook estimates 2,149,690 km² (830,000 sq mi) and lists Saudi Arabia as the world's 13th largest state.^[335] It is geographically the largest country in the Arabian Plate.^[336]

Saudi Arabia's geography is dominated by the Arabian Desert, associated semi-desert and shrubland (see satellite image) and several mountain ranges and highlands. It is, in fact, a number of linked deserts and includes the 647,500 km² (250,001 sq mi) Rub' al Khali ("Empty Quarter") in the southeastern part of the country, the world's largest contiguous sand desert.^{[135][337]} Though there are a few lakes in the country, Saudi Arabia is the largest country



Saudi Arabia topography

in the world by area with no permanent rivers. Wadis, however, are very numerous. The fertile areas are to be found in the alluvial deposits in wadis, basins, and oases.^[135] The main topographical feature is the central plateau which rises abruptly from the Red Sea and gradually descends into the Nejd and toward the Persian Gulf. On the Red Sea coast, there is a narrow coastal plain,

known as the Tihamah parallel to which runs an imposing escarpment. The southwest province of Asir is mountainous, and contains the 3,133 m (10,279 ft) Mount Sawda, which is the highest point in the country.^[135]

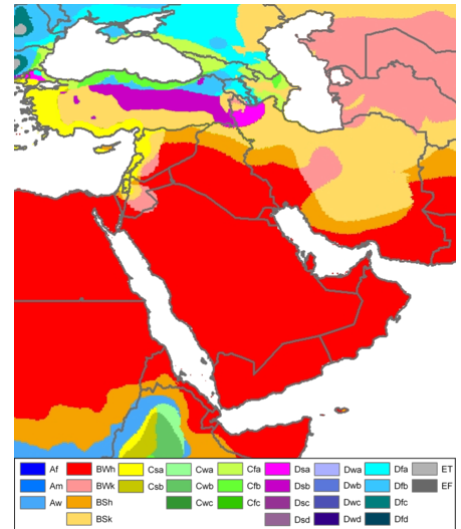
Except for the southwestern province of Asir, Saudi Arabia has a desert climate with very high day-time temperatures and a sharp temperature drop at night. Average summer temperatures are around 45 °C (113 °F), but can be as high as 54 °C (129 °F). In the winter the temperature rarely drops below 0 °C (32 °F). In the spring and autumn the heat is temperate, temperatures average around 29 °C (84 °F). Annual rainfall is extremely low. The Asir region differs in that it is influenced by the Indian Ocean monsoons, usually occurring between October and March. An average of 300 mm (12 in) of rainfall occurs during this period, which is about 60 percent of the annual precipitation.^[338]

Fauna

Wildlife includes the Arabian leopard,^{[339][340]} wolf, striped hyena, mongoose, baboon, hare, sand cat, and jerboa. Animals such as gazelles, oryx, leopards and cheetahs^[341] were relatively numerous until the 19th century, when extensive hunting reduced these animals almost to extinction. Birds include falcons (which are caught and trained for hunting), eagles, hawks, vultures, sandgrouse, and bulbuls. There are several species of snakes, many of which are venomous. Saudi Arabia is home to a rich marine life. The Red Sea in particular is a rich and diverse ecosystem. More than 1200 species of fish^[342] have been recorded in the Red Sea, and around 10 percent of these are found nowhere else.^[343] This also includes 42 species of deepwater fish.^[342]

The rich diversity is in part due to the 2,000 km (1,240 mi) of coral reef extending along its coastline; these fringing reefs are 5000–7000 years old and are largely formed of stony acropora and porites corals. The reefs form platforms and sometimes lagoons along the coast and occasional other features such as cylinders (such as the Blue Hole (Red Sea) at Dahab). These coastal reefs are also visited by pelagic species of Red Sea fish, including some of the 44 species of shark. The Red Sea also contains many offshore reefs including several true atolls. Many of the unusual offshore reef formations defy classic (i.e., Darwinian) coral reef classification schemes, and are generally attributed to the high levels of tectonic activity that characterize the area. Domesticated animals include the legendary Arabian horse, Arabian camel, sheep, goats, cows, donkeys, chickens etc. Reflecting the country's dominant desert conditions, Saudi Arabia's plant life mostly consists of herbs, plants and shrubs that require little water. The date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) is widespread.^[135]

Administrative divisions



Saudi Arabia's Köppen climate classification map^[333] is based on native vegetation, temperature, precipitation and their seasonality.

- BWh Hot desert
- BWk Cold desert
- BSh Hot semi-arid
- BSk Cold semi-arid

Saudi Arabia is divided into 13 regions^[344] (Arabic: مناطق إدارية; *manatiq idāriyya*, sing. منطقة إدارية; *mintaqah idariyya*). The regions are further divided into 118 governorates (Arabic: محافظات; *muhafazat*, sing. محافظة; *muhafazah*). This number includes the 13 regional capitals, which have a different status as municipalities (Arabic: أمانة; *amanah*) headed by mayors (Arabic: أمين; *amin*). The governorates are further subdivided into sub-governorates (Arabic: مراكز; *marakiz*, sing. مركز; *markaz*).



The 13 regions of Saudi Arabia.

Cities

Economy

As of October 2018, Saudi Arabia is the largest economy in the Middle East and the 18th largest in the world.^[9] Saudi Arabia has the world's second-largest proven petroleum reserves and the country is the largest exporter of petroleum.^{[355][356]} It also has the fifth-largest proven natural gas reserves. Saudi Arabia is considered an "energy superpower".^{[357][358]} It has the third highest total estimated value of natural resources, valued at US\$34.4 trillion in 2016.^[359] Saudi Arabia's command economy is petroleum-based; roughly 63%^[360] of budget revenues and 67%^[361] of export earnings come from the oil industry. It is strongly dependent on foreign workers with about 80% of those employed in the private sector being non-Saudi.^{[362][363]} Challenges to the Saudi economy include halting or reversing the decline in per-capita income, improving education to prepare youth for the workforce and providing them with employment, diversifying the economy, stimulating the private sector and housing construction, and diminishing corruption and inequality.^[364]

The oil industry constitutes about 45% of Saudi Arabia's nominal gross domestic product, compared with 40% from the private sector (see below). Saudi Arabia officially has about 260 billion barrels (4.1×10^{10} m³) of oil reserves, comprising about one-fifth of the world's proven total petroleum reserves.^[365]



The Arabian oryx are found in the deserts and are endangered animals



The Arabian horse is native to Arabia, and an important element of traditional Arabian folklore



The highly endangered Arabian leopard



Red Sea coral and marine fish

In the 1990s, Saudi Arabia experienced a significant contraction of oil revenues combined with a high rate of population growth. Per capita income fell from a high of \$11,700 at the height of the oil boom in 1981 to \$6,300 in 1998.^[366] Taking into account the impact of the real oil price changes on the Kingdom's real gross domestic income, the real command-basis GDP was computed to be 330.381 billion 1999 USD in 2010.^[367] Increases in oil prices in the aughts helped boost per capita GDP to \$17,000 in 2007 dollars (about \$7,400 adjusted for inflation),^[368] but have declined since oil price drop in mid-2014.^[369]

Share of world GDP (PPP) ^[9]	
Year	Share
1980	2.73%
1990	1.64%
2000	1.42%
2010	1.36%
2017	1.40%



King Abdullah Financial Center is one of the largest investment centers in the Middle East, located in Riyadh



Office of Saudi Aramco, the world's most valuable company and the main source of revenue for the state

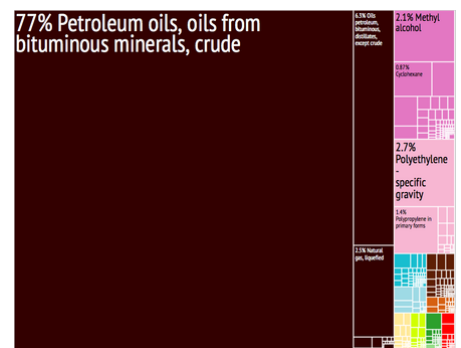
OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) limits its members' oil production based on their "proven reserves." Saudi Arabia's published reserves have shown little change since 1980, with the main exception being an increase of about 100 billion barrels (1.6×10^{10} m³) between 1987 and 1988.^[370] Matthew Simmons has suggested that Saudi Arabia is greatly exaggerating its reserves and may soon show production declines (see peak oil).^[371]

From 2003 to 2013, "several key services" were privatized—municipal water supply, electricity, telecommunications—and parts of education and health care, traffic control and car accident reporting were also privatized. According to Arab News columnist Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg, "in almost every one of these areas, consumers have raised serious concerns about the performance of these privatized entities."^[372] The Tadawul All Share Index (TASI) of the Saudi stock exchange peaked at 16,712.64 in 2005, and closed at 8,535.60, at the end of 2013.^[373] In November 2005, Saudi Arabia was approved as a member of the World Trade Organization. Negotiations to join had focused on the degree to which Saudi Arabia is willing to increase market access to foreign goods and in 2000, the government established the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority to encourage foreign direct investment in the kingdom. Saudi Arabia maintains a list of sectors in which foreign investment is prohibited, but the government plans to open some closed sectors such as telecommunications, insurance, and power transmission/distribution over time.

The government has also made an attempt at "Saudizing" the economy, replacing foreign workers with Saudi nationals with limited success.^[374]

Saudi Arabia has had five-year "Development Plans" since 1970. Among its plans were to launch "economic cities" (e.g. King Abdullah Economic City) to be completed by 2020, in an effort to diversify the economy and provide jobs. As of 2013 four cities were planned.^[375] The King has announced that the per capita income is forecast to rise from \$15,000 in 2006 to \$33,500 in 2020.^[376] The cities will be spread around Saudi Arabia to promote diversification for each region and their economy, and the cities are projected to contribute \$150 billion to the GDP.

In addition to petroleum and gas, Saudi also has a significant gold mining sector in the ancient Mahd adh Dhahab region and significant other mineral industries, an agricultural sector (especially in the southwest but



Graphical depiction of Saudi Arabia's product exports

not only) based on vegetables, fruits, dates etc. and livestock, and large number of temporary jobs created by the roughly two million annual *hajj* pilgrims.^[364]

Statistics on poverty in the kingdom are not available through the UN resources because the Saudi government does not issue any.^[377] The Saudi state discourages calling attention to or complaining about poverty. In December 2011, the Saudi interior ministry arrested three reporters and held them for almost two weeks for questioning after they uploaded a video on the topic to YouTube.^[378] Authors of the video claim that 22 percent of Saudis may be considered poor (2009).^[379] Observers researching the issue prefer to stay anonymous^[380] because of the risk of being arrested.

In September 2018, the Public Investment Fund completed a deal with a group of global lenders for a loan of \$11 billion.^[381] The deal raised more than initially planned and was the first time the PIF had incorporated loans and debt instruments into its funding.^[382] According to data from Fitch Ratings, over two years starting from May 2016 Saudi Arabia went from having zero debt to raising \$68 billion in dollar-denominated bonds and syndicated loans—one of the fastest rates among emerging economies.^[383]

Each year, about a quarter-million young Saudis enter the job market. With the first phase of Saudization into effect, 70% of sales job are expected to be filled by Saudis. However, the private sector still remains hugely dominated by foreigners. The rate of local unemployment is 12.9%, its highest in more than a decade.^[382] According to a report published by Bloomberg Economics in 2018, the government needs to produce 700,000 jobs by 2020 to meet its 9% unemployment target.^[382]

Agriculture

Serious large-scale agricultural development began in the 1970s. The government launched an extensive program to promote modern farming technology; to establish rural roads, irrigation networks and storage and export facilities; and to encourage agricultural research and training institutions. As a result, there has been a phenomenal growth in the production of all basic foods. Saudi Arabia is now completely self-sufficient in a number of foodstuffs, including meat, milk and eggs. The country exports wheat, dates, dairy products, eggs, fish, poultry, fruits, vegetables and flowers to markets around the world. Dates, once a staple of the Saudi diet, are now mainly grown for global humanitarian aid. In addition, Saudi farmers grow substantial amounts of other grains such as barley, sorghum and millet. As of 2016, in the interest of preserving precious water resources, domestic production of wheat has ended.^[384]

The Kingdom likewise has some of the most modern and largest dairy farms in the Middle East. Milk production boasts a remarkably productive annual rate of 1,800 gallons per cow, one of the highest in the world. The local dairy manufacturing company Almarai is the largest vertically integrated dairy company in the Middle East.^[385]

The Kingdom's most dramatic agricultural accomplishment, noted worldwide, was its rapid transformation from importer to exporter of wheat. In 1978, the country built its first grain silos. By 1984, it had become self-sufficient in wheat. Shortly thereafter, Saudi Arabia began exporting wheat to some 30 countries, including China and the former Soviet Union, and in the major producing areas of Tabuk, Hail and Qasim, average yields reached 3.6 tons per acre. The Kingdom has, however, stepped up fruit and vegetable production, by improving both agricultural techniques and the roads that link farmers with urban consumers. Saudi Arabia is a major exporter of fruits and vegetables to its neighbors. Among its most productive crops are watermelon, grapes, citrus fruits, onions, squash and tomatoes. At Jizan in the country's well-watered southwest, the Al-Hikmah Research Station is producing tropical fruits including pineapples, paw-paws, bananas, mangoes and guavas.^[386]



Al-Hasa is known for its palm trees and dates. Al-Hasa has over 30 million palm trees which produce over 100 thousand tons of dates every year.

The olive tree is indigenous to Saudi Arabia. In 2018 the Al Jouf Agricultural Development Company received a certificate of merit from The Guinness World Records for the largest modern olive plantation in the world. The farm covers 7730 hectares and has 5 million olive trees. The Guinness World Records also took into consideration their production capacity of 15000 tonnes of high quality of olive oil, while the kingdom consumes double that. The Al Jouf farms are located in Sakaka, a city in the north-western part of Saudi Arabia, which is a deeply-rooted in history. Sakaka dates back more than 4,000 years.^[387] The Al Jouf region has millions of olive trees and the expected number is expected to go up to 20 million trees soon.^[388]

Consuming non-renewable groundwater resulted in the loss of an estimated four fifths of the total groundwater reserves by 2012.^[389]

Water supply and sanitation

Water supply and sanitation in Saudi Arabia is characterized by significant investments in seawater desalination, water distribution, sewerage and wastewater treatment leading to a substantial increase in access to drinking water and sanitation over the past decades. About 50% of drinking water comes from desalination, 40% from the mining of non-renewable groundwater and 10% from surface water, especially in the mountainous southwest of the country. The capital Riyadh, located in the heart of the country, is supplied with desalinated water pumped from the Persian Gulf over a distance of 467 km. Given the substantial oil wealth, water is provided almost for free. Despite improvements service quality remains poor. For example, in Riyadh water was available only once every 2.5 days in 2011, while in Jeddah it is available only every 9 days.^[390] Institutional capacity and governance in the sector are weak, reflecting general characteristics of the public sector in Saudi Arabia. Since 2000, the government has increasingly relied on the private sector to operate water and sanitation infrastructure, beginning with desalination and wastewater treatment plants. Since 2008, the operation of urban water distribution systems is being gradually delegated to private companies as well.

Tourism

Although most tourism in Saudi Arabia still largely involves religious pilgrimages, there is growth in the leisure tourism sector. According to the World Bank, approximately 14.3 million people visited Saudi Arabia in 2012, making it the world's 19th-most-visited country.^[391] Tourism is an important component of the Saudi Vision 2030 and according to a report conducted by BMI Research in 2018, both religious and non-religious tourism have significant potential for expansion.^[392]

Starting December 2018, the kingdom will offer an electronic visa for foreign visitors to attend sport events and concerts. The “sharek” visa process will start with 15 December, Saudia Ad Diriyah E Prix race.^[393]

In September 2019, the Kingdom announced its plans to open visa applications for visitors, where people from about 50 countries would be able to get tourist visas to Saudi.^[394]



Masmak fort in Riyadh



The old city of Jeddah



Jabal Sawda (3,000 m (9,800 ft)) located in the Hijaz Mountains



Abha City, located 2,270 m (7,450 ft) above sea level



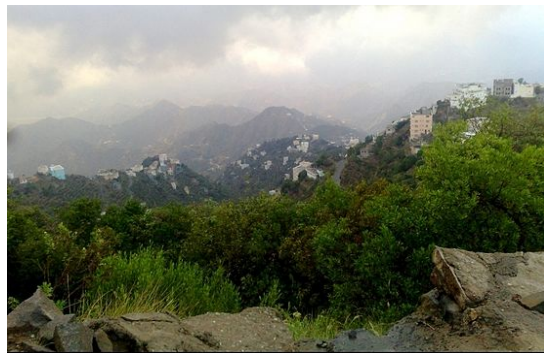
The ancient city of Al-Ula in Al Madinah Region



A farm in Al-Qassim Province



Faifa mountains in Jizan Province



Mountains in Jizan province



The Rub' al Khali desert

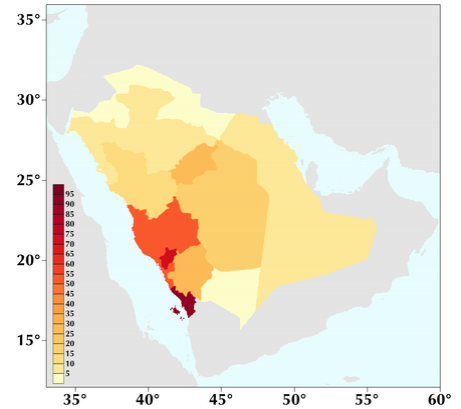


The 3000-year-old ancient historical city of Dumat al-Jandal in Al Jawf Province

Demographics

The population of Saudi Arabia as of July 2013 is estimated to be 26.9 million, including between 5.5 million^[3] and 10 million non-nationalized immigrants,^{[363][397]} though the Saudi population has long proved difficult to accurately estimate due to Saudi leaders' historical tendency to inflate census results.^[398] Saudi population has grown rapidly since 1950 when it was estimated to be 3 million,^[399] and for many years had one of the highest birthrates in the world at around 3 percent a year.^[400]

Population ^{[395][396]}	
Year	Million
1970	5.8
2000	20.8
2018	33.7

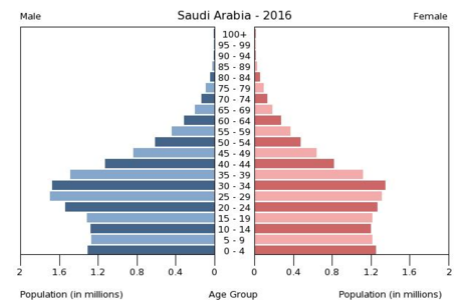


Saudi Arabia population density (people per km²)

The ethnic composition of Saudi citizens is 90% Arab and 10% Afro-Asian.^[401] Most Saudis live in Hejaz (35%), Najd (28%), and the Eastern Province (15%).^[402] Hejaz is the most populated region in Saudi Arabia.^[403]

As late as 1970, most Saudis lived a subsistence life in the rural provinces, but in the last half of the 20th century the kingdom has urbanized rapidly. As of 2012 about 80% of Saudis live in urban metropolitan areas—specifically Riyadh, Jeddah, or Dammam.^{[404][405]}

Its population is also quite young with over half the population under 25 years old.^[406] A large fraction are foreign nationals. (The CIA Factbook estimated that as of 2013 foreign nationals living in Saudi Arabia made up about 21% of the population.^[3] Other estimates are 30%^[407] or 33%^[408])



Population pyramid 2016

As recently as the early 1960s, Saudi Arabia's slave population was estimated at 300,000.^[409] Slavery was officially abolished in 1962.^{[410][411]}

Languages

The official language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic. The three main regional variants spoken by Saudis are Hejazi Arabic (about 6 million speakers^[412]), Najdi Arabic (about 8 million speakers^[413]), and Gulf Arabic (about 0.2 million speakers^[414]). Faifi is spoken by about 50,000. Saudi Sign Language is the principal language of the deaf community. The large expatriate communities also speak their own languages, the most numerous of which are Tagalog (700,000), Rohingya (400,000), Urdu (380,000), Egyptian Arabic (300,000), and Indonesian (250,000).^[415]

Religions

Virtually all Saudi citizens are Muslim^[417] (officially, all are), and almost all Saudi residents are Muslim.^{[418][419]} Estimates of the Sunni population of Saudi Arabia range between 75% and 90%, with the remaining 10–25% being Shia Muslim.^{[420][421][422][423][424]} The official and dominant form of Sunni Islam in Saudi Arabia is commonly known as Wahhabism^[425] (proponents prefer the name Salafism, considering *Wahhabi* derogatory^[426]) and is often described as 'puritanical', 'intolerant', or 'ultra-conservative' by observers, and as "true" Islam by its adherents. It was founded in the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century. Other denominations, such as the minority Shia Islam, are systematically suppressed.^[427]

According to estimates there are about 1,500,000 Christians in Saudi Arabia, almost all foreign workers.^[428] Saudi Arabia allows Christians to enter the country as foreign workers for temporary work, but does not allow them to practice their faith openly. The percentage of Saudi Arabian citizens who are Christians is officially zero,^[429] as Saudi

Arabia forbids religious conversion from Islam (apostasy) and punishes it by death.^[430] According to Pew Research Center there are 390,000 Hindus in Saudi Arabia, almost all foreign workers.^[431]

There may be a significant fraction of atheists and agnostics in Saudi Arabia,^{[432][433]} although they are officially called "terrorists".^[434] Apostasy is punishable by death in Saudi Arabia, hence non-believers hardly ever come out.

In its 2017 religious freedom report, the US State Department named Saudi Arabia a Country of Particular Concern (CPC).^[435]

Foreigners

Saudi Arabia's Central Department of Statistics & Information estimated the foreign population at the end of 2014 at 33% (10.1 million).^[436] The CIA Factbook estimated that as of 2013 foreign nationals living in Saudi Arabia made up about 21% of the population.^[3] Other sources report differing estimates.^[408] Indian: 1.5 million, Pakistani: 1.3 million,^[437] Egyptian: 900,000, Yemeni: 800,000, Bangladeshi: 400,000, Filipino: 500,000, Jordanian/Palestinian: 260,000, Indonesian: 250,000, Sri Lankan: 350,000, Sudanese: 250,000, Syrian: 100,000 and Turkish: 80,000.^[438] There are around 100,000 Westerners in Saudi Arabia, most of whom live in compounds or gated communities.

Foreign Muslims^[439] who have resided in the kingdom for ten years may apply for Saudi citizenship. (Priority is given to holders of degrees in various scientific fields,^[440] and exception made for Palestinians who are excluded unless married to a Saudi national, because of Arab League instructions barring the Arab states from granting them citizenship.) Saudi Arabia is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.^[441]

As Saudi population grows and oil export revenues stagnate, pressure for "Saudization" (the replacement of foreign workers with Saudis) has grown, and the Saudi government hopes to decrease the number of foreign nationals in the country.^[442] Saudi Arabia expelled 800,000 Yemenis in 1990 and 1991^[443] and has built a Saudi–Yemen barrier against an influx of illegal immigrants and against the smuggling of drugs and weapons.^[444] In November 2013, Saudi Arabia expelled thousands of illegal Ethiopian residents from the Kingdom. Various Human Rights entities have criticised Saudi Arabia's handling of the issue.^[445] Over 500,000 undocumented migrant workers — mostly from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Yemen — have been detained and deported since 2013.^[446]

Monarchs (1932–present)

- King Abdulaziz (1932–1953); second longest reigning Saudi monarch.
- King Saud (1953–1964); third longest reigning Saudi monarch.
- King Faisal (1964–1975); fourth longest reigning Saudi monarch.
- King Khalid (1975–1982); sixth longest reigning Saudi monarch.
- King Fahd (1982–2005); longest reigning Saudi monarch.
- King Abdullah (2005–2015); fifth longest reigning Saudi monarch.
- King Salman (2015–present); current monarch.

Crown Princes (1933–present)

- Crown Prince Saud bin Abdulaziz (1933–1953); became King. Crown Prince of King Abdulaziz.
- Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz (1953–1964); became King. Crown Prince of King Saud.
- Crown Prince Muhammad bin Abdulaziz (1964–1965); Resigned from post. Crown Prince of King Faisal.



Quba Mosque (Arabic: **مَسْجِدُ الْقُبَاءِ**, romanized: *Masjid al-Qubā*) in Medina, the Hejaz. This is considered to be the first mosque that dates to the lifetime of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad.^[e]



King Salman and President Trump take part in the traditional ardash dance at the Murabba Palace, 20 May 2017

- Crown Prince Khalid bin Abdulaziz (1965–1975); became King. Crown Prince of King Faisal.
- Crown Prince Fahd bin Abdulaziz (1975–1982); became King. Crown Prince of King Khalid.
- Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz (1982–2005); became King. Crown Prince of King Fahd.
- Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz (2005–2011); died in office. Crown Prince of King Abdullah.
- Crown Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz (2011–2012); died in office. Crown Prince of King Abdullah.
- Crown Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz (2012–2015); became King. Crown Prince of King Abdullah.
- Crown Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz (2015); removed from post. Crown Prince of King Salman.
- Crown Prince Mohammad bin Nayef (2015–2017); removed from post. Crown Prince of King Salman.
- Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (2017–present); incumbent. Crown Prince of King Salman.



Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman aboard the aircraft carrier *USS Theodore Roosevelt*, 7 July 2015

Second Deputy Prime Minister/Second-in-line (1965–2011)

- Prince Fahd (1965–1975); became Crown Prince.
- Prince Abdullah (1975–1982); became Crown Prince.
- Prince Sultan (1982–2005); became Crown Prince.
- Prince Nayef (2009–2011); became Crown Prince.

Deputy Crown Prince/Second-in-line (2014–present)

- Prince Muqrin (2014–2015); became Crown Prince.
- Prince Mohammad (2015); became Crown Prince. Son of Prince Nayef.
- Prince Mohammad (2015–2017); became Crown Prince. Defense Minister of Saudi Arabia. Son of King Salman.

Culture

Saudi Arabia has centuries-old attitudes and traditions, often derived from Arab civilization. The main factors that influence the culture of Saudi Arabia are Islamic heritage and Bedouin traditions as well as its historical role as an ancient trade center.^[447]

Religion in society

The Hejazi region, where the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina are located, is the destination of the Ḥajj pilgrimage, and often deemed to be the cradle of Islam.^{[448][f]}

Islam is the state religion of Saudi Arabia and its law requires that all citizens be Muslims.^[459] Neither Saudi citizens nor guest workers have the right of freedom of religion.^[459] The official and dominant form of Islam in the kingdom—Wahhabism—arose in the central region of Najd, in the 18th century. Proponents call the movement "Salafism",^[426] and believe that its teachings purify the practice of Islam of innovations or practices that deviate from the seventh-century teachings of Muhammad and his companions.^[460] The Saudi government has often been viewed as an active oppressor of Shia Muslims because of the funding of the Wahhabi ideology which denounces the Shia faith.^{[461][462]} Prince Bandar bin Sultan, Saudi ambassador to the United States, stated: "The time is not far off in the Middle East when it will be literally 'God help the Shia'. More than a billion Sunnis have simply had enough of them."^[463]



Supplicating pilgrim at *Al-Masjid Al-Harām* (Arabic: **الْمَسْجِدُ الْحَرَامُ**, The Sacred Mosque) in Mecca. The *Ka'bah* (Arabic: **كَعْبَة**, lit. 'Cube', Kaaba) is the cubic building in front of the pilgrim.

Saudi Arabia is one of the few countries that have "religious police" (known as *Haia* or *Mutaween*), who patrol the streets "enjoining good and forbidding wrong" by enforcing dress codes, strict separation of men and women, attendance at prayer (*salat*) five times each day, the ban on alcohol, and other aspects of *Sharia* (Islamic law). (In the privacy of the home behavior can be far looser, and reports from the Daily Mail and WikiLeaks indicate that the ruling Saudi Royal family applies a different moral code to itself, indulging in parties, drugs and sex.^[464])

Until 2016, the kingdom used the lunar Islamic calendar, not the international Gregorian calendar,^[465] but in 2016 the kingdom announced its switch to the Gregorian calendar for civil purposes.^{[466][467]}

Daily life is dominated by Islamic observance. Businesses are closed three or four times a day^[468] for 30 to 45 minutes during business hours while employees and customers are sent off to pray.^[469] The weekend is Friday-Saturday, not Saturday-Sunday, because Friday is the holiest day for Muslims.^{[135][470]} For many years only two religious holidays were publicly recognized – *Īd al-Fiṭr* and *Īd al-Aḏḩā*. (*Īd al-Fiṭr* is "the biggest" holiday, a three-day period of "feasting, gift-giving and general letting go".^[471])

As of 2004, approximately half of the broadcast airtime of Saudi state television was devoted to religious issues.^[472] 90 percent of books published in the kingdom were on religious subjects, and most of the doctorates awarded by its universities were in Islamic studies.^[473] In the state school system, about half of the material taught is religious. In contrast, assigned readings over 12 years of primary and secondary schooling devoted to covering the history, literature, and cultures of the non-Muslim world comes to a total of about 40 pages.^[472]

"Fierce religious resistance" had to be overcome to permit such innovations as paper money (in 1951), female education (1964), and television (1965) and the abolition of slavery (1962).^[474] Public support for the traditional political/religious structure of the kingdom is so strong that one researcher interviewing Saudis found virtually no support for reforms to secularize the state.^[475]

Because of religious restrictions, Saudi culture lacks any diversity of religious expression, buildings, annual festivals and public events.^{[476][477]} Celebration of other (non-Wahhabi) Islamic holidays, such as the Muhammad's birthday and the Day of Ashura, (an important holiday for the 10–25 percent of the population^{[421][422][423]} that is Shī'a Muslim), are tolerated only when celebrated locally and on a small scale.^[478] Shia also

face systematic discrimination in employment, education, the justice system according to Human Rights Watch.^[479] Non-Muslim festivals like Christmas and Easter are not tolerated at all,^[480] although there are nearly a million Christians as well as Hindus and Buddhists among the foreign workers.^{[481][480]} No churches, temples or other non-Muslim houses of worship are permitted in the country. Proselytizing by non-Muslims and conversion by Muslims to another religion is illegal,^[481] and as of 2014 the distribution of "publications that have prejudice to any other religious belief other than Islam" (such as Bibles), was reportedly punishable by death.^[482] In legal compensation court cases (*Diyya*) non-Muslim are awarded less than Muslims.^[480] Atheists are legally designated as terrorists.^[483] And at least one religious minority, the Ahmadiyya Muslims, had its adherents deported,^[484] as they are legally banned from entering the country.^[485]

Islamic heritage sites

Saudi Wahhabism is hostile to any reverence given to historical or religious places of significance for fear that it may give rise to 'shirk' (idolatry), and the most significant historic Muslim sites (in Mecca and Medina) are located in the western Saudi region of Hejaz.^[448] As a consequence, under Saudi rule, an estimated 95% of Mecca's historic buildings, most over a thousand years old, have been demolished for religious reasons.^[486] Critics claim that over the last 50 years, 300 historic sites linked to Muhammad, his family or companions have been lost,^[487] leaving fewer than 20 structures remaining in Mecca that date back to the time of Muhammad.^[488] Demolished structures include the



Non-Muslims are prohibited from entering the Islamic holy city of Mecca



The Mosque of the Prophet in Medina containing the tomb of Muhammad

mosque originally built by Muhammad's daughter Fatima, and other mosques founded by Abu Bakr (Muhammad's father-in-law and the first Caliph), Umar (the second Caliph), Ali (Muhammad's son-in-law and the fourth Caliph), and Salman al-Farsi (another of Muhammad's companions).^[489]

Five cultural sites in Saudi Arabia are designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih);^[490] the Turaif district in the city of Diriyah;^[491] Historic Jeddah, the Gate to Mecca;^[492] Al-Ahsa Oasis;^[493] and Rock Art in the Hail Region.^[494] Ten other sites submitted requests for recognition to UNESCO in 2015.^[495]

There are six elements inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list:^[496] Al-Qatt Al-Asiri, female traditional interior wall decoration in Asir; Almezmar, drumming and dancing with sticks; Falconry, a living human heritage; Arabic coffee, a symbol of generosity; Majlis, a cultural and social space; Alardah Alnajdiyah, dance, drumming and poetry in Saudi Arabia.

In June 2014, the Council of Ministers approved a law that gives the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage the means to protect Saudi Arabia's ancient relics and historic sites. Within the framework of the 2016 National Transformation Program, also known as Saudi Vision 2030, the kingdom allocated 900 million euros to preserve its historical and cultural heritage.^[497] Saudi Arabia also participates in the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH), created in March 2017, with a contribution of 18.5 million euros.^[498]

In 2017, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman promised to return Saudi Arabia to the “moderate Islam” of the era before the 1979 Iranian revolution.^[499] A new center, the King Salman Complex for the Prophet’s Hadith, was established that year to monitor interpretations of the Prophet Mohammed’s hadiths to prevent them being used to justify terrorism.^[500]

In March 2018, the Crown Prince met the Archbishop of Canterbury during a visit to the UK, pledging to promote interfaith dialogue. In Riyadh the following month King Salman met the head of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.^[501]

In July 2019, UNESCO signed a letter with the Saudi Minister of Culture of In which Saudi Arabia contribute US\$25 million to UNESCO for the preservation of heritage.^[502]

Dress

Saudi Arabian dress strictly follows the principles of hijab (the Islamic principle of modesty, especially in dress). The predominantly loose and flowing, but covering, garments are suited to Saudi Arabia's desert climate. Traditionally, men usually wear a white ankle length garment woven from wool or cotton (known as a thawb), with a keffiyeh (a large checkered square of cotton held in place by an agal) or a ghutra (a plain white square made of finer cotton, also held in place by an agal) worn on the head. For rare chilly days, Saudi men wear a camel-hair cloak (bisht) over the top. In public women are required to wear a black abaya or other black clothing that covers everything under the neck with the exception of their hands and feet, although most women cover their head in respect for their religion. This requirement applies to non-Muslim women too and failure to abide can result in police action, particularly in more conservative areas of the country. Women's clothes are often decorated with tribal motifs, coins, sequins, metallic thread, and appliques.

- Ghutrah (Arabic: غترة) is a traditional headdress typically worn by Arab men. It is made of a square of cloth ("scarf"), usually cotton, folded and wrapped in various styles around the head. It is commonly worn in areas with an arid climate, to provide protection from direct sun exposure, and also protection of the mouth and eyes from blown dust and sand.

- **Agal** (Arabic: عقال) is an item of Arab headgear constructed of cord which is fastened around the Ghutra to hold it in place. The *agal* is usually black in colour.
- **Thawb** (Arabic: ثوب) is the standard Arabic word for garment. It is ankle-length, usually with long sleeves, similar to a robe.
- **Bisht** (Arabic: بيشت) is a traditional Arabic men's cloak usually only worn for prestige on special occasions such as weddings.
- **Abaya** (Arabic: عبائة) is a woman's garment. It is a black cloak which loosely covers the entire body except the head. Some women choose to cover their faces with a niqāb and some do not. Some abayas cover the top of the head as well.^[503]

Arts and entertainment

During the 1970s, cinemas were numerous in the Kingdom although they were seen as contrary to Wahhabi norms.^[504] During the Islamic revival movement in the 1980s, and as a political response to an increase in Islamist activism including the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the government closed all cinemas and theaters. However, with King Abdullah's reforms from 2005, some cinemas have re-opened,^[505] including one in KAUST.

From the 18th century onward, Wahhabi fundamentalism discouraged artistic development inconsistent with its teaching. In addition, Sunni Islamic prohibition of creating representations of people have limited the visual arts, which tend to be dominated by geometric, floral, and abstract designs and by calligraphy. With the advent of oil-wealth in the 20th century came exposure to outside influences, such as Western housing styles, furnishings, and clothes. Music and dance have always been part of Saudi life. Traditional music is generally associated with poetry and is sung collectively. Instruments include the rabābah, an instrument not unlike a three-string fiddle, and various types of percussion instruments, such as the ṭabl (drum) and the ṭār (tambourine). Of the native dances, the most popular is a martial line dance known as the ‘arḍah, which includes lines of men, frequently armed with swords or rifles, dancing to the beat of drums and tambourines. Bedouin poetry, known as nabaṭī, is still very popular.^[135]

Censorship has limited the development of Saudi literature, although several Saudi novelists and poets have achieved critical and popular acclaim in the Arab world—albeit generating official hostility in their home country. These include Ghazi Algosaibi, Abdelrahman Munif, Turki al-Hamad and Rajaa al-Sanea.^{[506][507]} In 2016, the General Entertainment Authority was formed to oversee the expansion of the Saudi entertainment sector.^[508] The first concerts in Riyadh for 25 years took place the following year.^[509] Other events since the GEA's creation have included comedy shows, professional wrestling events and monster truck rallies.^[510] In 2018 the first public cinema opened after a ban of 35 years, with plans to have more than 2,000 screens running by 2030.^[511]

Developments in the arts in 2018 included Saudi Arabia's debut appearances at the Cannes Film Festival and the Venice Biennale.^{[512][513]}

Sport

Football is the national sport in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabia national football team is considered as one of Asia's most successful national teams, having reached a joint record 6 AFC Asian Cup finals, winning three of those finals (1984, 1988, and 1996) and having qualified for the World Cup four consecutive times ever since debuting at the 1994 tournament. In the 1994 FIFA World Cup under the leadership of Jorge Solari, Saudi Arabia beat both Belgium and Morocco in the group stage before falling to defeat Sweden in the round of 16. During the 1992 FIFA Confederations Cup, which was played in Saudi Arabia, the country reached the final, losing 1–3 to Argentina. Scuba diving, windsurfing, sailing and basketball (which is played by both men and women) are also popular with the Saudi Arabian



King Abdullah practising falconry, a traditional pursuit in the country

national basketball team winning bronze at the 1999 Asian Championship.^[514] More traditional sports such as horse racing and camel racing are also popular. A stadium in Riyadh holds races in the winter. The annual King's Camel Race, begun in 1974, is one of the sport's most important contests and attracts animals and riders from throughout the region. Falconry, another traditional pursuit, is still practiced.^[135]

Women's sport is controversial due to the suppression of female participation in sport by conservative Islamic religious authorities,^[515] however this restriction has eased slightly in recent years.^{[516][517][518]} Until 2018 women were not permitted in sport stadiums. Segregated seating, allowing women to enter, has been developed in three stadiums across major cities.^[519]

Saudi Arabia, in its vision for modernization introduced the nation to a number of international sporting events, bringing sports stars to the Kingdom. However, in August 2019, the kingdom's strategy received criticism for appearing as a method of sportswashing soon after Saudi's US based 2018 lobbying campaign foreign registration documentations got published online. The documents showed Saudi Arabia as allegedly implementing a 'sportswashing' strategy, inclusive of meetings and official calls with supreme authorities of associations like the Major League Soccer (MLS), World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), National Basketball Association (NBA). The strategy is being viewed as a method of sportswashing following the chaos spread across Yemen since 4 years.^[520]

On October 31, 2019, Saudi Arabia hosted the first ever women's wrestling match held by the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). However, the superstar players Lacey Evans and Natalya were required to cover their arms and legs by wearing bodysuits during the fight, instead of the more revealing gear that they would normally wear.^[521]

Cuisine

Saudi Arabian cuisine is similar to that of the surrounding countries in the Arabian Peninsula and the wider Arab world, and has influenced and been influenced by Turkish, Indian, Persian, and African food. Islamic dietary laws are enforced: pork is not allowed and other animals are slaughtered in accordance with halal. Kebabs and falafel are popular, as is *shāwarmā* (shawarma), a marinated grilled meat dish of lamb, mutton, or chicken. As in other Arab countries of the Arabian Peninsula, *machbūs* (kabsa), a rice dish with lamb, chicken, fish or shrimp, is among the national dishes as well as the dish mandi (food). Flat, unleavened taboon bread is a staple of virtually every meal, as are dates, fresh fruit, yoghurt and hummus. Coffee, served in the Arabic style, is the traditional beverage but tea and various fruit juices are popular as well.^[135] Arabic coffee is a traditional beverage in Arabian cuisine. The earliest substantiated evidence of either coffee drinking or knowledge of the coffee tree is from the 15th century, in the Sufi monasteries of Arabia.



Arabic coffee is a traditional beverage in Arabian cuisine

Women

Women do not have equal rights to men in the kingdom; the U.S. State Department considers Saudi Arabian government's discrimination against women a "significant problem" in Saudi Arabia and notes that women have few political rights due to the government's discriminatory policies.^[522] The World Economic Forum 2010 Global Gender Gap Report ranked Saudi Arabia 129th out of 134 countries for gender parity.^[523] Other sources had complained of an absence of laws criminalizing violence against women.^[522]

Under Saudi law, every adult female must have a male relative as her "guardian" (*wali*),^[522] As of 2008, a woman was required to have permission from her male guardian in order to travel, study, or work.^{[522][524]} A royal decree passed in May 2017 allowed them to avail government services such as education and healthcare without the need of a consent of a male guardian. The order however also stated that it should only be allowed if it does not contradict the Sharia system.^{[525][526]}

According to a leading Saudi feminist and journalist, Wajeha al-Huwaider, "Saudi women are weak, no matter how high their status, even the 'pampered' ones among them, because they have no law to protect them from attack by anyone."^[527]

Women face discrimination in the courts, where the testimony of one man equals that of two women in family and inheritance law.^[522] Polygamy is permitted for men,^[528] and men have a unilateral right to divorce their wives (talaq) without needing any legal justification.^[529] A woman can only obtain a divorce with the consent of her husband or judicially if her husband has harmed her.^[530] In practice, it is very difficult for a Saudi woman to obtain a judicial divorce.^[530] With regard to the law of inheritance, the Quran specifies that fixed portions of the deceased's estate must be left to the *Qur'anic heirs*^[531] and generally, female heirs receive half the portion of male heirs.^[531]

The average age at first marriage among Saudi females is 25 years in Saudi Arabia,^[532] with child marriage no longer common.^[533] As of 2015, Saudi women constitute 13% of the country's native workforce despite being 51% of all university graduates.^[534] Female literacy is estimated to be 81%, lower than male literacy.^{[3][535]}

Obesity is a problem among middle and upper class Saudis who have domestic servants to do traditional work but, until 2018, were forbidden to drive and so are limited in their ability to leave their home.^[536] As of April 2014, Saudi authorities in the education ministry have been asked by the Shoura Council to consider lifting a state school ban on sports for girls with the proviso that any sports conform to Sharia rules on dress and gender segregation, according to the official SPA news agency.^[363]

The religious police, known as the *mutawa*, impose many restrictions on women in public in Saudi Arabia.^{[522][537]} The restrictions include forcing women to sit in separate specially designated family sections in restaurants, to wear an abaya and to cover their hair.^[522]

Although Saudi Arabia imposes a strict dress code on women throughout the country by using religious police, female anchors working for Al-Arabia news network which is partly owned by Prince Abdulaziz, the son of the late King Fahad, are prohibited from wearing a veil and are encouraged to adopt a Western dress code.^[538]

A few Saudi women have risen to the top of the medical profession; for example, Dr. Ghada Al-Mutairi heads a medical research center in California^[539] and Dr. Salwa Al-Hazzaa is head of the ophthalmology department at King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh and was the late King Fahad's personal ophthalmologist.^[540]

In February 2017, Saudi Arabia appointed its first woman to head the Saudi Stock Exchange.^[541] As of 2018, two women hold cabinet positions in the Saudi government: Dr Tamadur bint Youssef Al Ramah, who was appointed deputy labor minister that year; and Norah bint Abdallah Al Faiz, who became deputy minister of education in charge of women's affairs in 2009.^[542]

Political, economic, and social changes of the 2010s

On 25 September 2011, King Abdullah announced that Saudi women would gain the right to vote (and to be candidates) in municipal elections, provided that a male guardian grants permission.^[543] Women were allowed to vote and be candidates in the 12 December 2015 municipal elections.^[544]

In August 2013, a law was passed that criminalized domestic violence against women. The ban includes penalties of a 12-month jail sentence and fines of up to 50,000 riyals (\$13,000).^{[545][546][547]}

In February 2017, Saudi Arabia appointed its first woman to head the Saudi Stock Exchange.^{[548][549]}



Saudi woman wearing a niqāb in Riyadh. Under Saudi law, women are required to wear a abaya but niqab and hijab is optional.

In April 2017, bin Salman announced a project to build one of the world's largest cultural, sports and entertainment cities in Al Qidiya, southwest of Riyadh. The 334-square kilometre city will include a safari and a Six Flags theme park.^{[550][551]}

As of February 2018, Saudi women can now open their own business, without a male's permission.^[552]

In March 2018, a law was passed allowing Saudi mothers to retain custody of their children after divorce without having to file any lawsuits.^[553]

In April 2018, the first public cinema opened in Saudi Arabia after a ban of 35 years, with plans to have more than 2,000 screens running by 2030.^{[554][555]}

In June 2018, King Salman issued a decree allowing women to drive, lifting the world's only ban on women drivers.^[556]

Other domestic reforms include significant regulations restricting the powers of the religious police and establishing a national entertainment authority that has hosted comedy shows, pro wrestling events, and monster truck rallies. Further cultural developments include the first Saudi public concerts by a female singer, the first Saudi sports stadiums to admit women, and an increased presence of women in the workforce.^[557]

On 1 August 2019, Saudi Arabia allowed women to travel abroad, register a divorce or a marriage, and apply for official documents without the consent of a male guardian. The laws also grant the women the eligibility for the guardianship of minor children.^{[558][559][560]}

Education

Education is free at all levels.^[561] The school system is composed of elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools. A large part of the curriculum at all levels is devoted to Islam, and, at the secondary level, students are able to follow either a religious or a technical track. The rate of literacy is 97.1% among males and is about 92.71% among females (2017).^[562] Classes are segregated by sex. Higher education has expanded rapidly, with large numbers of Universities and colleges being founded particularly since 2000. Institutions of higher education include the country's first university, King Saud University founded in 1957, the Islamic University at Medina founded in 1961, and the King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah founded in 1967. King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, known as KAUST, founded recently in 2009. Other colleges and universities emphasize curricula in sciences and technology, military studies, religion, and medicine. Institutes devoted to Islamic studies, in particular, abound. Women typically receive college instruction in segregated institutions.^[135]

The *Academic Ranking of World Universities*, known as Shanghai Ranking, ranked 4 of Saudi Arabian institutions among its 2016–2017 list of the 980 top universities in the world.^[563] Also, the QS World University Rankings has ranked 19 Saudi universities among the top 100 Arab institutions, on its 13th edition.^[564] The latest list of Academic Ranking of World Universities 2018, ranked two Saudi universities, King Abdulaziz University and King Saud University, among the top 150 universities in the World.^{[565][566]}



Laboratory buildings at KAUST



The Al-Yamamah Private University in Riyadh

According to critics, Saudi curriculum is not just dominated by Islam but suffers from Wahhabi dogma that propagates hatred towards non-Muslim and non-Wahhabis^[567] and lacks technical and other education useful for productive employment.^{[3][568]}

Memorization by rote of large parts of the Qur'an, its interpretation and understanding (Tafsir) and the application of Islamic tradition to everyday life is at the core of the curriculum. Religion taught in this manner is also a compulsory subject for all University students.^[569] As a consequence, Saudi youth "generally lacks the education and technical skills the private sector needs" according to the CIA.^[3] Similarly, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* wrote in 2010 that "the country needs educated young Saudis with marketable skills and a capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship. That's not generally what Saudi Arabia's educational system delivers, steeped as it is in rote learning and religious instruction."^[568]

The religious sector of the Saudi national curriculum was examined in a 2006 report by Freedom House which concluded that "the Saudi public school religious curriculum continues to propagate an ideology of hate toward the 'unbeliever', that is, Christians, Jews, Shiites, Sufis, Sunni Muslims who do not follow Wahhabi doctrine, Hindus, atheists and others".^{[570][571]} The Saudi religious studies curriculum is taught outside the Kingdom via Saudi-linked madrasah, schools, and clubs throughout the world.^[572] Critics have described the education system as "medieval" and that its primary goal "is to maintain the rule of absolute monarchy by casting it as the ordained protector of the faith, and that Islam is at war with other faiths and cultures".^[573]

Saudi Arabia sponsors and promotes the teaching of Wahhabism ideology which is adopted by Sunni Jihadist groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda and the Nusra Front. This radical teaching takes place in Saudi funded mosques and madrasas across the Islamic world from Morocco to Pakistan to Indonesia.^[574]

According to the educational plan for secondary (high school) education 1435–1438 Hijri, students enrolling in the "natural sciences" path are required to take five religion subjects which are: Tawhid, Fiqh, Tafseer, Hadith and Islamic Education and Quran. In addition, students are required to take six science subjects which are Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geology and Computer.^[575]

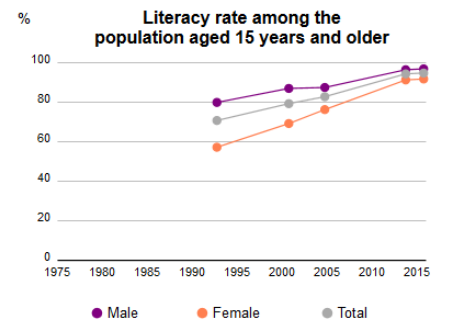
The approach taken in the Saudi education system has been accused of encouraging Islamic terrorism, leading to reform efforts.^{[576][577]} Following the 9/11 attacks, the government aimed to tackle the twin problems of encouraging extremism and the inadequacy of the country's university education for a modern economy, by slowly modernising the education system through the "Tatweer" reform program.^[576] The Tatweer program is reported to have a budget of approximately US\$2 billion and focuses on moving teaching away from the traditional Saudi methods of memorization and rote learning towards encouraging students to analyze and problem-solve. It also aims to create an education system which will provide a more secular and vocationally based training.^{[568][578]}

As of 2018, Saudi Arabia ranks 28 worldwide in terms of high-quality research output according to the renowned scientific journal *Nature*.^[579] This makes Saudi Arabia the best performing Middle Eastern, Arab and Muslim country.

Saudi Arabia spends 8.8% of its gross domestic product on education, compared with the global average of 4.6%, which is nearly double the global average on education.^[580]

Health care

Saudi Arabia has a life expectancy of 74.6 years (73.3 for males and 76.3 for females) according to the latest data for the year 2016 from the World Bank.^[581] Infant mortality in 2016 was 11.1 per 1,000.^[582] In the same year, 69.7% of the adult population was overweight and 35.5% was obese.^[583]



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

UIS literacy rate Saudi Arabia population, 15 plus, 1990–2015

See also

- Index of Saudi Arabia-related articles
- Outline of Saudi Arabia

Notes

- The *Shahādah* (Arabic: شَهَادَة, statement of faith) is sometimes translated into English as 'There is no god but Allah', using the romanization of the Arabic word *Allāh* instead of its translation. The word *Allāh* (Arabic: الله) literally translates as *the God*, as the prefix 'Al-' is the definite article.^[2]
- Legislation is by king's decree. The Consultative Assembly exists to advise the king.
- /sɔːdi əˈreɪbiə/ (listen), /saʊ-/ (listen); Arabic: السعودية *as-Saʿūdīyah*
- KSA**; Arabic: المملكة العربية السعودية *al-Mamlakah al-ʿArabīyah as-Saʿūdīyah*, pronunciation
- The Mosque of the Companions in the Eritrean city of Massawa dates to approximately the same period, the 7th century CE.^[416]
- A number of Muslims, using justifications from the Quran,^{[449][450][451]} insist that Islam did not begin with Muhammad, but that it represents even previous Prophets such as Abraham,^{[452][453][454][455]} who is credited with having established the sanctuary of Mecca.^{[456][457][458]}

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