

كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking_The_Mold

Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Country: Saudi Arabia

Background of the Saudi Context

| Sihem a Drissi |

The composition's characteristics of the feminist human rights movement in Saudi Arabia varied after 2011, especially in terms of demands, and adopted strategies and tactics, as well as the effectiveness of their achievements, but they were similar in their non-institutional nature, as the majority of the movement's groups were part of the informal civil society. In the context of social changes and protest movements after 2011, the feminist movement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia gradually developed and turned into an experienced and inspiring feminist model for whoever is looking for equality in rights and gender justice under the oppressive and authoritarian regimes. The majority of feminist groups and advocates for women's rights issues are active outside the institutions, especially in the virtual world on social media. Despite the absence of an institutional and associative character in the forms of organizing feminist human rights groups, their reliance on radical campaigns and their interest in the issues related to Saudi women's daily life such as mobility and mahram, led the Saudi feminist movement to overcome the national borders and open-up to comparative experiences and international agreements (CEDAW and the United Nations programs against Violence).

In this context, some groups of the feminist movement are addressing the reality of political and social harassment by spreading their ideas outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and with self-financing (with some exceptions), taking advantage of the international media's openness regarding their activities and the operationalization of social networking platforms. It is worth noting that initiatives supporting women's rights within the Saudi civil society organizations are funded by the government and are subject to their oversight, administratively, financially and other means, bearing in mind that the association work itself continues to perform its duties in the civil society, but in incomplete

developmental forms towards civil society¹. Hence, according to the law issued in 2015, many local financing sources are emerging, such as membership fees, revenues of the association's activities, zakat, endowments, government subsidies, and the Associations Support Fund. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that the manifestations of civil transformation, political modernization, and some legislative initiatives to reform the associations' law do not negate the existence of a set of factors that impede the work of formal and informal civil society, such as bureaucratic obstruction, lack of competencies, government restrictions on work agendas, and a lack of awareness on the importance of human rights and volunteer work.

There is no doubt that the state's restrictive policies in dealing with various issues of gender inequality have a reflection through local or affiliated media channels, whereby attitudes change and range from supporting activists in support of women driving cars and lifting guardianship and combating violence against or attacks on them, according to the directions of the actors of power. On the other hand, the feminist rights movement groups are supported by a large number of foreign Arab and Western newspapers and media channels and new media websites. As for the media affiliated with the Saudi leadership, their positions change according to the state of contradiction between decision-makers, as the feminist human rights movement is sometimes promoted as a continuation of modernization and reform efforts, and sometimes, counter campaigns are organized against activists and accused of betrayal and labor for the benefit of foreign embassies².

This background briefly reviews public policies to reduce the

¹ Nora Doaji, 19 October 2019, Saudi Women's Online Activism : One year of the 'I Am My Own Guardian' Campaign, The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, https://agsiaw.org/wp-content/uploads/10/2017/Doaji_Saudi-Guardianship-System_ONLINE.pdf

² Nermin Allam, March 2019 29, How Saudi Arabia uses Women's Rights reforms against Women's Rights and Reform, Monkey Cage, Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/29/03/2019/womens-rights-activists-released-bail-saudi-arabia/?utm_term=.93ac14bed7b0

phenomenon of gender-based violence, especially that cases of gender inequality and systematic abuse against women intersect with multiple aspects of economic, political, social and cognitive inequality. In fact, the presence of women in the Gulf region is low in high political and economic positions, which is a firmly-established phenomenon and reflects the persistent practices of discrimination against women, starting with the family law that governs marriage issues, child custody, divorce and inheritance, to the public field and economic and political participation (Seikaly & al, 2014)³.

The strengths of political legitimacy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia derive from the religious and conservative social system, represented in the decision-making process by the religious elites and tribal forces allied and consistent with the ruling monarchy's options. The political system of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is characterized by the existence of a historical and ideological alliance between the ruling Al Saud family and the Wahhabi religious movement, which strengthened the religious factor (meaning the strict application of Sharia) and the strength of its influence in political departments and public policy options. Hence, the various forms of the protest movement were associated with dissatisfaction with the existing utilitarian alliance between politics and religion, especially that the general situation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia after 1960 was characterized by the institutionalization of the social structure based on tribalism and tribal blocs, and the Wahhabi ideology penetrated it, which constituted another barrier to create revolutionary moments or radical changes in favor of women's issues.

The dilemma of "guardianship" (mahram) constitutes a kind of false consciousness, but it is socially approved and institutionally applied for only some groups, meaning that the tribal givens is not the only obstacle in making a radical change in favor of women's rights, but also highlights the practices of persecution and slavery that represent the third dimension for domination within the Saudi society.

Furthermore, the political and social nature of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia makes domains of domination divided in a symmetrical hierarchy in terms of mechanisms, and it is essential to recognize that the authority has a decisive impact, but the religious and tribal elite enjoys a second level of power and domination. However, the public has been allowed to apply the same authoritarian practices against women in economic contexts characterized by the oil boom and the rentier state's institutionalization.

Consequently, societal pressure initiatives to break the molds of gender abuse need decades to mobilize the Saudi street, that benefit somehow from the advantages of guardianship, especially in light of the presence of various forms of domination, vertical and horizontal inequality, and the introspection of popular culture and its compatibility with the idea of total dominance over women and dependence on their will.

Therefore, the transition from inequality to gender justice in the Saudi model requires the joining of all influential forces with the feminist and human rights movement taking place, especially on social media, to generate alternative positions facing this false awareness about the structural boundaries of forming a gender identity within the family, group, tribe, governmental departments, schools and central authority.

It is also worth noting that the general orientation of the post-oil



economy is currently contributing to the acceleration of public policies in support of women's freedom and betting on the impact of their participation in the labor market on the Saudi economy on the one hand, and austerity policies on the other hand. It is important to know that the close alliances between the central authority and the conservative, religious and tribal social forces often do not allow the adoption of progressive laws in favor of women. The existence of political and economic power in this "male" minority renders public policies and, crucially, reinforces the female component's marginalization and exclusion.

In addition, the movement groups are divided as follows: First, an Islamic feminist that seeks to obey the political will and bets on the ruling leadership to create paths of transformation in which intersect the components of the Islamic identity such as stewardship, justice and fairness, and modern and contemporary values such as effective engagement in the economy, politics, independence and equality before the courts. Secondly, liberal feminism that rejects the model based on patriarchal rule and calls for radical changes that guarantee women's rights according to international standards through the tactics of imposing their presence and getting used to it to change the exclusionary social mentality and break legislative barriers. These groups act accordingly and ally with other human rights activists to reach more modernization, despite the inevitable reality in the absence of freedom of expression and civil work censorship.

On the other hand, and in light of the current geopolitical climate, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's orientation towards nationalism and the defense of national options regionally, the rights of women are being used by decision-makers as an argument to satisfy the conservative forces within Saudi Arabia by rejecting the demands of "lifting the guardianship completely", while the movement groups are being encouraged by promises to achieve radical change, starting from empowering women to drive cars to more drastic measures, and the ability and strength of the movement groups to communicate on social media, reach broad groups of the Saudi society and build sympathetic relations abroad, to put the Saudi authority in the turbulent and insecure alliances with conservative forces, especially that the policies of women's oppression are formulated to preserve political and religious legitimacy, and have become an ideological approach

³ Seikaly May, Rahil Roodsaz & Corine Van Egten, *La Situation des Femmes dans les Etats du Golfe, Commission des Droits de la Femme et de L'Egalité des Genres, European Union*, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/509985/2014/IPOL_STUD\(509985/2014_FR.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/509985/2014/IPOL_STUD(509985/2014_FR.pdf)

that perpetuates a kind of gender racial discrimination despite the hidden dynamics of change.

CASE MODEL

LIFTING THE BAN ON WOMEN DRIVERS BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

The activities of the components of Saudi civil society have evolved, and their actions have been strengthened on social media, being a force for change and a clash with the system of arbitrary norms and discriminatory legislation against women and with the forms of male domination represented by the political and religious authorities. The decision to lift the ban on women drivers came as an opportunity to break the institutional molds of male dominance and to demonstrate the influential presence of informal movement groups on social media and their ability to push the authority towards making some small and symbolic changes in the field of rights and freedoms.

Lifting the legal ban on women drivers has always been considered as one of the main concerns of the human rights and societal movement in Saudi Arabia in recent years. It is easy to conclude that preventing women from driving is an extension of the symbolic violence practiced by state institutions to perpetuate exclusionary and arbitrary statements of the patriarchal system and impede women's participation in public life in light of the rentier economy.

Meanwhile, the royal decree granting the Saudi women the right to drive leads to a restructuring of power relations and a review of the social and political system of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, especially that most of the criticisms denounce the arrests of human rights activists and the fragility of reform policies that affect only areas of entertainment and culture⁴.

PROBLEM'S TIMELINE

An unofficial ban on women drivers has been imposed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since 1990. This measure has become an official state policy after the Mufti, who is the country's highest religious authority, issued a fatwa prohibiting women's driving under the pretext of protecting them from "social chaos" that may result from freedom of movement and travel without a mahram. This means that the most basic and natural human rights of "mobility" or personal well-being have become hostage to conservative, religious and ideological considerations and uneven hegemonic relations within the Saudi political and social context.

Usually, women's issues are considered a tool for extending the dominant groups' power, deepening the reality of discrimination against women, and a strategy for repositioning. It has become an obsession for an authority that fears the signs of feminist liberation that is affected by the Kuwaiti experience, the human rights movement in the early 1990s and the political changes resulting from the Gulf War, which prompted to institutionalize the reality of gender deprivation and persecution through an alliance between the extremist political and religious authorities, based on reviving the slogans of the national project represented by the "pious state" to protect the good morals and the societal unity... In this context, the Saudi national state system was established according to strict gender rules based on the model of the "religious modest" woman, her social behaviors and forms of her presence, as separating signs between the pious state and the regimes that are not committed to religious ethics in terms of dress and mahram...⁵ The Saudi women,

especially from the less wealthy classes, have borne the burden of appearing as an anti-Westernization version and a symbol of the purity of Islamic culture and traditions and national norms.

For more than two decades, it carried out many protest movements against this ban and produced symbols of the Saudi feminist struggle against an injustice that reduces a political will to exclude women from the public sphere and strengthen their subordination to men. It has become one of the most important issues on human rights activists' agenda and in public and media discussions. The Saudi activist campaign is considered a "model" of the most prominent protest movements that started on social media and contributed to the internationalization of the driving ban and made it the focus of widespread attention and criticism among human rights defenders.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES, THEIR PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE ISSUE

The first signs of a feminist movement against the prohibition laws started in 2007, with the establishment of a group of activists, most notably Manal Al-Sharif and a Facebook page called Support for #Women2Drive. The campaigns then followed successively, and Saudi Women to Drive and Women's Right to Drive in KSA emerged.

It is difficult to talk about a societal feminist movement while describing it as an independent movement opposed to the regime and capable of raising demands for freedom and independence, in light of the arbitrary lawful employment and the continuous restrictions against activists through censorship on the activities and the Internet, and campaigns of distortion, traitors and deprivation of job opportunities and arrests (Pomed, 2018)⁶. Nevertheless, many women's forces have relied on investing their relationships within the governance system to push towards adopting practical measures in favor of women driving cars by establishing alliances with influential political elements and taking advantage of the pressures of the regional and international situation (Haifa Jawad, 2017)⁷.

To this effect, being relied on by the movement's groups, the strategies emerge and are relatively clarified in the approach of social movements and the forms of conflictual policies that cause them a conflict. Despite the harassment of feminist activists, social media platforms represented the ideal framework for expressing collective anger, which was reflected in writing articles focusing on the social situation and human rights violations, as Wahaja Huwaider did with the total rejection of all forms of discrimination against Saudi women.

These protest movements allowed the establishment of a feminist social movement and the transformation of leadership's issue into an issue of symbolic value, as it reflects the injustice and deprivation imposed on the Saudi women, as well as the organization of multiple movements led by the Saudi bloggers, most notably Iman Al-Nafjan and Eman Al-Sharif. These movements succeeded in mobilizing international human rights support and building new forms of popular pressure on the Saudi government through social media platforms. The Arab Spring revolutions and the shedding of light on the Saudi reality contributed to the spread of these campaigns denouncing human rights violations locally and internationally. As a result of these changes and the spread of the protest movement in all Arab

Saudi Arabia, Cambridge University Press

⁶ POMED Project on Middle East Democracy, 16 October 2018 Saudi Arabia : No Country for Bold Women, <https://pomed.org/saudi-arabia-no-country-for-bold-women>

⁷ Haifa Jawad, September 2018, Saudi decree allowing women to drive cars is about politics, not religion, The Conversation Journal, <http://theconversation.com/saudi-decree-allowing-women-to-drive-cars-is-about-politics-not-religion84809->

⁴ Sarah Aziza, October 7, 2018, Saudi Women Who Fought for the Right to Drive Are Disappearing and Going into Exile, The Intercept, <https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/saudi-women-who-fought-right-drive-are-disappearing-and-going-exile>

⁵ Madawi Rashid, 2013, A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics and Religion in

countries, almost 40 Saudi women have collectively defied the decision to ban driving through the #Women2Drive campaign, which was launched on June 17, 2011, and received international media coverage. The effectiveness of these protest campaigns developed with the campaign on October 26, 2013, that was launched by a group of activists against the driving ban, during which they submitted a petition that collected 16,000 signatures, despite the restrictions imposed by the authority and the anti-campaigns organized by other groups affiliated with the authority and conservative forces.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS: PROBLEM FRAMING AND SETTING-UP THE AGENDA

The changes that were taking place since the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring revolutions helped increase the Saudi authority's attempts to prevent all forms of protest by expressing good intentions politically, and this overlapped with the increasing publicity of feminist protest against the power dynamics that entrench gender injustice institutionally and structurally, and confronting arbitrary social norms and stereotypes targeting the inferiority of women and their subordination to the mahram. With this context, the Women2Drive campaign was clarified on June 17, 2011, immediately after the release of activist Manal Al-Sharif, and gained an international and local media momentum in its second phase (2013-2014).

Since the beginning of the protest movement against the driving ban through social media, women activists have directly targeted and criticized state policies, especially in terms of promoting gender inequality and the lack of participation of women, rather than discussing the nature of the Saudi society and the dominant religious class. Unlike many expectations, the feminist protests related to the prevention of women's driving and the imposition of guardianship on the intense social effects of discrimination against women, with a clear clash with the political authority's practices that refused to politicize the demands and attempted to use them in the framework of compromising influence with the forces of Saudi society.

Furthermore, the women activists in the Right2Dignity campaign considered that the driving ban is deeply rooted in many other cases of persecution and intersects with other obstacles to Saudi women's economic, political and social integration. Hence, these campaigns' strategies are in line with the goals of activists defending public freedoms, human rights and freedom of speech... In this context, and thanks to the campaigns that they organized, the women activists have been able to establish networks of supporters on social media and present alternative visions and new forms of movement, far from feminist groups that are close to the authority and in harmony with the slow pace of reform, which has led to placing this issue among the priorities of the national and international human rights debate.

The campaign to lift the driving ban witnessed accelerated developments with the beginning of the Current Crown Prince as the savior and guarantor of Saudi women's rights. The movement's groups witnessed divisions between the approach to join the national project (Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association) or working against the state's options⁸.

INFLUENCING FACTORS, TRANSFORMATIONAL MOMENTS, OR POLICY NETWORKS

In 2016, Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, announced

the Saudi Vision 2030 and promoted it as an ambitious social and economic reform plan aimed at gradually abandoning the rentier economy system to pave the way for opening markets to foreign investment, which forces Saudi Arabia to rely on the female and youth workforce. As a result of the pressure of the feminist movement and the pragmatism of decision-makers, especially the Crown Prince in Saudi Arabia, King Salman bin Abdulaziz issued a royal decree on 26 September 2017 permitting women to drive a car, to be implemented on 24 June 2018.

At this stage, reforms in the field of women's rights have proven that the Kingdom is on its way to modernization, yet the series of arrests targeting prominent activists in the campaigns to lift the driving ban put the Saudi law and public policies in a contradiction.

The protest movement against the driving ban was linked to the changing political options of decision-makers in Saudi Arabia. Slogans began with a demand for a change of mindset, then quickly after 2011, turned into the popular mobilization against the state of collective deprivation of women driving and criticism of state policies. Later, during the October 26 campaign, the movement witnessed the largest mass mobilization against grievances and the declaration of total rejection of all forms of discrimination against women. Moreover, Saudi women's issues did not result from political bargaining or refuting the paternalism of power. The most prominent of these campaigns, we mention "Our Identities and Names", joining the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, and the list of shame on the names of those who reject women's freedom (Le Renard, A 2014)⁹.

THE INFLUENTIAL TRANSFORMATIONAL MOMENT

The ruling leadership is the ultimate authority and the sole reference to identify human rights and their limits; hence, lifting the ban on women driving a car has been linked since 2016 to the current Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, and it was considered one of the achievements that indicate the existence of change intentions in favor of some particular issues. The political discourse of the new and young Saudi leadership shed light on equity, women empowerment and openness to the movements of influential forces among human rights activists, which paved the way for the establishment of the transformational path that enables the Saudi society to enter the post-Wahhabi era.

Furthermore, the Saudi state's relationship to religion has historically manifested through alliance based on mutual interests between the Sheikhs of Wahhabism, a religious sect that follows the jurisprudence of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, and it has a strict background and the ruling Al Saud Family. In recent years, the decision-makers have adopted a return to the open and moderate Islam model that existed before 1979, despite the strict religious instructions of the Wahhabi sect in the Saudi mentality. However, this political abandonment of extremist religious statements was not strongly reflected in legislation or social policies, but according to observers, it was restricted to lifting the ban on artistic and entertainment activities such as visiting cinemas and concerts...

On the other hand, the feminist movement groups employed the dynamics of change towards a more liberal agenda and claimed more demands from driving a car to lifting the guardianship of the matter, especially that the Saudi society seemed ready for social and cultural reforms despite the firmness of the conservatism within this society¹⁰. In fact, the contradiction between the

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9 Le Renard, A.2014, *A Society of Young Women: Opportunities of Place, Power, and Reform in Saudi Arabia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

10 Eldar Mamedov, 6 November 2017, *The Discontents of the Saudi "Moderate Islam" Project*, *Lobe Log Journal*, <https://lobelog.com/the-discontents-of-the-saudi-moderate-islam-project/>

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8 Françoise De Bel-Air, Nasra M.SHAH, Phillippe Fargues & Usamah Alfarhan, *Possible Impact of Saudi Women Driving on Female Employment and Reliance on Foreign Workers*, http://gulfmigration.org/media/pubs/exno/GLMM_EN_04_2017.pdf

practices of the Saudi authority to subjugate women and some of its socially and institutionally achievable initiatives increase questions related to the mechanisms of formulating public policies, and whether they seek to consolidate the interests of government departments based on a human rights approach (a gradual pattern that takes into account the conservative social mentality) or is it just a marketing approach for a new image of the Kingdom. Practically, the Saudi authority's institutionalization of gender inequality has made the transformation mechanisms to address injustice limited and involve high levels of politicization. Therefore, the current Saudi leadership has been keen on empowering women to have the right to drive while being keen on promoting this transformative policy as a royal gift and not as a human rights entitlement, as evidenced by the reproduction of state feminists and the arrest of figures of the movement's groups that are not part of the political bargaining system on women's issues¹¹.

In general, the campaigns to lift the driving ban have invested in social changes, most notably the rise of a new generation of young feminist activists, the development of awareness levels concerning the absurdity of the persistence of gender divisions and the consideration of immigration, asylum and complaints before the international entities as forms of protest. This indicates that the path of transformation, in this case, is represented in a change in the forms of expression of injustice in itself, relying on videos, requests for asylum in Western countries and exposing cases of persecution against women abroad, which increases the impact of the protest movement on the Saudi citizen and embarrasses the decision-makers in front of Western public opinion.

POLITICAL RESULTS

The reasons for lifting the ban on women driving, including the cooperation between human rights activists and policymakers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, reveal the forms of employing power for women's issues, which were represented by the marketing of the new wave of modernization on the one hand, and the restraining the feminist movement and controlling over its dynamics after arresting many activists in the framework for victory for male guardianship on the other hand¹². It is also likely that this positive change in the state's relationship with women will respond to the challenges of post-oil economic policy and the general trend towards austerity policies, and there is no need to respond to the system of rights and freedoms. This public policy-making model illustrates how the authorities manipulate and formulate their domination over new forms of feminist human rights work, and the complete political appropriation of social mobilization successes, as evidence of the re-implementing injustice and arresting activists.

Reforms aimed at strengthening the status of women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have followed with the arrival of King Salman to power, starting with the issuance of the royal decree on 26 September 2017, which granted women the right to drive a car as of June 2018, followed by the decision to allow women to enter sports stadiums for the first time, as well as a royal decree that mandates the Ministry of Interior to draft legislation to criminalize sexual harassment. In the context of obtaining political and societal support to lift gender abuse and to narrow the scope of public policies, the authority classified activists not affiliated with its system as traitors to the homeland and agents of foreign embassies, as news websites published their photos with the word "traitor" on their faces.

In light of the increasing globalization, feminists and women activists in many countries are using at least three strategies to empower women and achieve equal changes, which are: the mechanism of women's policy within the state institutions, building a network to advocate issues outside formal institutions and developing practices of women's movements at the grassroots level that aim to cultural production, raising awareness and creating knowledge. The oppressive, patriarchal and authoritarian state in Saudi Arabia has made it extremely difficult for activists to benefit from all these strategies; hence, some feminist groups rely on their close relationships with the decision-making departments.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that the strategies used by activists to exert pressure on the government to promulgate the law to lift the ban on women driving by a royal decree have primarily interacted with the general context of change promoted as a strategic option for the Saudi Crown Prince on the one hand, and as a transformation adopted by decision-makers in public policies for empowering women without societal pressure, which constitutes an almost complete denial of the long years of activists' struggle and sacrifices.

Since women's driving has always been a point of surprise to the international public opinion and has received high levels of media coverage, as it reduces the vicious circle of gender persecution forms, the current Saudi leadership has employed it politically as part of its strategy to cover up military options and other human rights abuses such as the Yemen war, famine in Yemen, prisoners of freedom of speech in Saudi Arabia and the arrest of activists... This reform policy was also necessary to disperse the powerful forces in Saudi Arabia and test their loyalty to the new leadership that reduced national sovereignty in its person.

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¹¹ Nora Doajji, *From Hasam to Hazm : Saudi Feminism beyond Patriarchal Bargaining, in Salman's Legacy: The dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, Madawi El Rasheed (ed) 2018, Oxford

¹² Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Saudi Women : Navigating War and Market*, Middle East Centre Blog, 18 December 2017, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/18/12/2017/saudi-women-navigating-war-and-market>

CASE MODEL

THE LAW ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

Known as Vision 2030 and promoted by the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, as one of the changing paths, the national reform project renewed hope in narrowing the gap between societal forces and state institutions, based on building a greater awareness of rights.

Vision 2030 theoretically includes the dynamics of progressive reforms, the authority's recognition of the rights of socially marginalized groups and their protection against the control of the dominant conservative forces and the bureaucratic apparatus, as well as providing them with greater margins for action. Although this political development initiative was established for bold changes in favor of the Saudi women, its association with the Crown Prince's personality, instead of presenting it as societal policies, made them witness setbacks and regress, which obstructed the realization of these gains.

The political and legislative interaction with the phenomenon of violence against women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is clarified when evaluating the effectiveness of public policies in protecting women's rights in a country whose institutions are full of gender-based violence and discrimination, as well as when analyzing the dynamics and strategies of the mobility of activists involved in campaigns to ban all forms domestic and economic violence, marginalization, guardianship and human trafficking... The struggle for women's rights in Saudi Arabia is practically based on strategies that the Saudi government has defined and worked on in cooperation with civil society organizations to face the increasing rates of violence against women, whether physical, economic, psychological or control a male guardian. (Wafaa Hakiri, 2017)¹³.

PROBLEM'S TIMELINE

The report submitted by the Saudi government agencies to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), shows that the number of cases of violence against women reported in 2017 reached almost 1059 before the courts, including nearly 348 cases of physical violence, nearly 59 cases of domestic violence and almost 65 cases of sexual assault.

The local and international media interest in Saudi women's status has increased, especially after they have enjoyed many professional and economic opportunities after empowering them at all education levels for decades (Liv Tonnessen, 2016)¹⁴.

This societal governmental movement against gender-based violence against women goes back to the year 2011, when King Abdullah launched his historic initiative on September 25th, which calls for breaking the vicious circle of marginalization and systematic exclusion against women by granting them some political rights, such as voting in elections and participation in municipal elections and advisory councils, as "consistent with Sharia".

THE ROLE, PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES IN THE ISSUE

The societal movement against the phenomenon of gender-based violence often is clarified within the departments of power or its loyal organizations, which prompts an analysis of their statements and positions supporting Saudi women's empowerment, based on a public or secret thorough knowledge of the male system.

The beginning was with the statements of the "What was hidden was greater" campaign, which is considered a model in this context, as it shows the relations of rapprochement and preference that some civil society actors enjoy among the decision-makers and public policy formulation departments. That confirms the selective and adopted governmental approach concerning women's issues and rights, especially that the relationship between societal action and policy change is preconditioned based on the approval of the official state institutions and is built according to the attendant influence relationship, without being subject to serious negotiation and consultation on the content and objectives of anti-violence legislation. For instance, women's governmental associations and organizations involved in the campaign against domestic violence did not address the forms of protecting women from state violence and marital rape... they also did not formulate public policies guaranteeing respect for civil rights and human rights (the values of equality and the elimination of discriminatory laws and policies).

The cases of abuse that Saudi women are subjected to are a controversial topic and are often addressed as one of the paradoxes of contemporary history, for the reality of social inequality and discrimination against women coexist with high levels of economic prosperity, and with a complex and historically entrenched interlacement between the system of social oppression and its restrictions that obtain their legitimacy from some religious jurisprudence and its institutionalization in legal provisions. Therefore, understanding the current situation of Saudi women constitutes a critical challenge, given the institutional characteristics of abuse and gender-based violence that consist of the dynamics of interlacement between legal, social and economic factors, and the result of the human rights instability created by the powerful forces in Saudi Arabia, through the alternation between change policies and recognition of women's rights, and the authority's dramatic retreat from these rights once they come into effect.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS: PROBLEM FRAMING AND SETTING-UP THE AGENDA

Many civil society's institutions adopted social and educational programs denouncing the increasing risks of gender-based violence, and they launched campaigns such as "What was hidden is greater" against domestic violence (King Khalid Charitable Foundation in March 2013). Supported by the Saudi government, this campaign focused on breaking the silence concerning the social and institutional normalization with the phenomenon of abused women and establishing awareness of their rights.

The campaign advertisements relied on showing the signs of violence in the eyes of veiled women, with the addition of the phrase "there is something that cannot be covered", denouncing the increasing number of abused women. These societal calls emphasized ensuring social protection for women and children from violence through their contribution and opening the public field and political and legislative departments to discuss the

13 Wafa Al-Hakiri, *Saudi Arabia Campaign for Women Without Women*, Meem Magazine, December 2017, 4

<https://meemmagazine.net/-٤/١٢/٢٠١٧/٠D٠AA٠VD٠A٤٠٠٩D٠AB٠٢D٠AB٠٩D٠٠٠AD٠AA٠D٠A٠٠A٠D>

14 Liv Tonnessen, 2016, *Women's Activism in Saudi Arabia: Male Guardianship and Sexual Violence*, CMI Michelsen Institute, <https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/-٥٦٩٦womens-activism-in-saudi-arabia.pdf>

transcend standards and practices of the mentality of the Saudi government bureaucracy that actually consolidates the concepts of guardianship and mahram, not with shallow reform strategies but with measures that take into consideration the social, cultural, legislative and political dimensions of this type of gender discrimination deep-rooted in the collective consciousness and the institutional structure of the state.

CONCLUSION

Violence against women is one of the forms of global gender inequality, but in conjunction with the wave of modernization in Saudi Arabia, the necessity in recognizing the interlacement' state between the institutional and entrenched factors of violence based on the social mentality and the national identity.

The dynamics of causing gender inequality, including the forms of gender-based discrimination, are linked to the statements of the male national discourse of the Saudi decision-makers, and it intersects with religious statements devoted to male preference through the concept of "guardianship to men". Hence, and due to the interlaced nature of violence against women in Saudi Arabia, each reformative approach is facing real challenges, the most important of which is reviewing the representation of public institutions for women and their role within the society, and building gender relations based on citizenship instead of social norms and religious jurisprudence in which the inferiority of women is deep-rooted.

In the Saudi context, violence against women pervades the society's mentality, and it is legislated as recognized social practices to the point of reproducing them within the framework of the state's general policies, whether in education, health, work, political participation and other sectors, and with the emergence of the problem of covering this inferiority in the context of many women's mentality towards themselves.

CASE MODEL

REQUESTS TO ANNUL THE GUARDIANSHIP BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

This research shed light on the Saudi feminist movement against the guardianship system that showed new forms and pressure forces that used the cyberspace to pass their demands and mobilize their rights to the Saudi and international public opinion. It resulted in promulgating a law lifting guardianship in administrative affairs on April 17, 2017, particularly in the health and education sectors.

In fact, Saudi women need a legal documented permission from their male guardians to do almost anything they want in their routine lives, according to the 1992 Saudi Basic Law Decree that does not guarantee gender equality.

Many campaigns of the feminist movement were organized, most notably those managed by a group of activists such as Hala Al-Dossary and Loujain Al-Hathloul, despite strong opposition from many groups of society. These campaigns entitled "to end guardianship over women" and "I am the guardian of myself" in 2016 and 2017. They were also launched under various slogans on social media platforms such as "Empowering women without a guardian", "Saudi women demand the abolition of guardianship", #Together to end male guardianship over women and #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen. Many human rights activists consider that all Saudi women's movements, such as travel, education, prosecution, work and others, are subject to the approval or rejection of the mahram, whether he is the father, husband, son or even the uncle, who causes persecution and discriminatory practices against women (Stephan Kalin, 2019)¹⁹.

PROBLEM'S TIMELINE

In past years, the campaign to lift guardianship was a clear example of the development of human rights awareness related to the necessity of engaging Saudi women politically, socially and economically. Feminist movement groups could claim rights, while with the current Saudi Crown Prince declared "Vision 2030" (2016), and the diversity of international reports denouncing the guardianship system's negative effects in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, most notably the reports of Human Rights Watch. Since its approval under the 1992 legislation, the system of "guardianship" has devoted the divorced women's subordination to the mahram and the annulment of her citizenship. Hence, appears a mentality that strengthens her inferiority for normalization with the concept of male supremacy by religious arguments and social norms such as guardianship. Some civil society organizations, such as the Association for the Protection and Defense of Women's Rights, led by Wajeha Al-Huwaider and Fawzia Al-Ayouni, have intervened to confront and lift male guardianship over the Saudi women by organizing campaigns and submitting petitions to the King and the Saudi Shura Council²⁰.

against Women CEDAW, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention, <https://documents-ddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N49/304/16/PDF/N1630449.pdf?OpenElement> (2016)

19 Stephan Kalin, 2019, *Saudi Woman's flight rallies opposition to Male Guardianship*, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-women-guardianship/saudi-womans-flight-rallies-opposition-to-male-guardianship-idUSKCN1P427Y>

20 HRW (Human Rights Watch) 2008. "Perpetual Minors: Human Rights Abuses Stemming from Male Guardianship and Sex Segregation in Saudi Arabia." <https://www.hrw.org/news/15/11/2007/saudi-arabia-rape-victim-punished-speaking-out>

THE ROLE, PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES IN THE ISSUE

The issue of changing government policies and recognizing more women's rights has become an imperative need for female political activists and feminists in Saudi Arabia, especially as the oil welfare period ensured that they enjoyed high education levels and an advanced human rights culture.

In fact, the gaps between the rising awareness of women of their rights and the complete restriction of their presence in the public field without the consent of the mahram indicate the state's systematic policies full of religious justifications to exclude participation the public life. Saudi women continue to react to this historically and legally entrenched exclusion due to the differences in their interests and their social and class backgrounds. The movement opposing this form of discrimination against women was widely criticized by a group of female journalists and human rights activists in the early 2000s. The growth of the protest movement and the international media momentum around social transformations and scenarios for political change in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, along with the movement and revolutions of the so-called Arab Spring, and improving some Saudi women's movements activists to lift the guardianship system²¹. Activists took advantage of the public situation to express collective anger against a state that legalizes gender-based violence, and launched a campaign on social media platforms entitled #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen that was greatly supported by various movement groups such as independent human rights activists, young university women, the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association movement youth, and state feminist activists.

These campaigns calling for the lifting of guardianship were characterized by the diversity of cultures and backgrounds of activists, and they were confronted with campaigns opposing and rejecting these radical social transformations, led by female Islamic activists who launched campaigns such as "the guardian knows what is best for me", called for preserving the norms and foundations of the Islamic identity of the Kingdom and respecting Quranic legislation, and received almost 5,400 signatures. These protest movements intersected with the rest of the campaigns to lift the driving ban and the "My country" campaign, which demanded women's political participation.

Although most of them are held on social media platforms, the activities of the movement groups are organized through collective and intense movements with unified slogans and demands, which has created new patterns of negotiation with the repressive system of power and society, imposing a habitual presence of women and raising their issues repeatedly and openly.

These tactics of feminist groups, jurists, intellectuals, moderate clerics and ordinary people of different nationalities have made cyberspace, media presence, and campaigns on social media a platform and a form of resilience and resistance to the exclusionary ideology of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is represented by the policies of separation, non-mixing, gender discrimination and injustice towards women and the arrest of activists... Furthermore, the movement's groups agree on most of the demands, but the absence of a unified social movement and an official organizational structure has made the Saudi feminist movement against guardianship or the prohibition of driving a car into multi-centered and polar that is compatible some times and in a conflict in other times. It also turned it into a networked character in terms of the interconnectedness between them, and a sector of professors, students, employees, Islamic and liberal feminists and immigrant women.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS: PROBLEM FRAMING AND SETTING-UP THE AGENDA

This movement succeeded in passing several laws to empower women and limit the guardianship system, with the current leadership's support.

First, many women's organizations have attracted the support of active members of the royal family, the political and intellectual elite, and some clerics that impact the Saudi public opinion and decision-making departments, which gave them credibility and professionalism in dealing with Saudi women's issues.

Secondly, these women's organizations did not involve their struggles in free and sterile debates about feminist concepts of Western background or gender terms, but they were keen on identifying terms of Islamic religious reference in respect of the strong interconnected relationship between the Saudi society and the conservative cultural and moral background.

Third, and given the lack of supportive popular women's organizations, they chose to penetrate the society and promote their ideas by integrating many families and beneficiaries in associative activities, financing and supervising training sessions, establishing small projects for women, and collecting donations...

Finally, the movement of my feminist associations in Saudi Arabia is distinguished by its resort and effective use of social media, new media, and blogs, as well as conducting television interviews to promote the idea of defending Saudi women's rights and explaining them to the ordinary audience, as a strategy for popular mobilization and pressure on decision-makers to stand against the powerful groups that reject this movement seeking to achieve the common good, according to what its supporters assert²².

These supportive and opposing societal movements also created complex forms of citizen participation in discussing the ruling authority's orientations, which prompted decision-makers to reconsider this problem and review some laws.

21 Al-Rasheed, Madawi, 'Caught Between Religion and State: Women in Saudi Arabia', in Bernard Haykel et al. (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 313–292.

22 Nora Doajji, *From Hasam to Hazm : Saudi Feminism beyond Patriarchal Bargaining*, in Salman's Legacy: The dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia, Madawi El Rasheed (ed) 2018, Oxford,

INFLUENCING FACTORS, TRANSFORMATIONAL MOMENTS, OR POLICY NETWORKS

Social media has played a major role in mobilizing protest movements to lift the “guardianship”, which established forms of solidarity within the circles of human rights activists and feminists locally and internationally, most notably the #TogetherToEndMaleGuardianship campaign.

The feminist movement against the system of male guardianship over Saudi women aims at creating domains of resistance and opposition that go beyond the dominance of the state and its security services, and invest in the demand of Saudis on social media platforms. It is easy to conclude that campaigns such as Women2Drive allowed the human rights activists to discuss more in-depth, and to an institutional organization that perpetuates the inferiority of women through criticizing the strict ideological employment of some religious jurisprudence at the level of public policies, especially in the fields of education and work. The intersection between the various manifestations of the feminist protest movements revealed a serious determination to achieve radical social and bureaucratic change, which was evident through the increase in societal pressure on Saudi decision-makers. For instance, the movement groups devoted the October 26 campaign to lift the ban on women driving by issuing a petition calling for an end to Saudi women’s forbidden guardianship system²³.

It is worth noting that on October 27, 2008, the United Nations Committee on Discrimination Against Women expressed its concern about the system of male guardianship over women in Saudi Arabia and demanded the authority to allow women to enjoy all of their basic rights, such as education, travel, marriage, work and conducting administrative transactions, stipulated in the CEDAW agreement, and called for immediate steps to be taken to end male guardianship over the Saudi women.

TRANSFORMATIONAL MOMENT: INFLUENTIAL TRANSFORMATION

In the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia witnessed a sudden uprising by the political opposition, which submitted petitions to move to a constitutional monarchy; but the political and human rights organizations announced the organization of small-scale protests and published calls for popular protest on the Internet.

In this context, feminism developed and demonstrated its ability to influence local and international public opinion, especially in obtaining human rights that guarantee citizenship.

Women’s organizations seek gradual change through negotiation and discussion mechanisms, addressing women’s issues in the media, using cyberspace, and engaging the average citizen in a complete path to re-represent women within the Saudi society as an active and adult element without a male guardian.

These women’s organizations succeeded in developing approaches to defend women’s rights, commensurate with the conservative tribal nature of Saudi society, and formulated logical formulas that balance between the local culture of a male character and the provisions of the religious text, as well as taking into account the changes in all modern societies due to social development and globalization.

The Saudi case is characterized by institutionalizing forms of

discrimination against women, which necessitates focusing on monitoring forms of interaction, whether consensus or collision, between three actors, namely decision-makers, conventional pressure forces and informal civil society activists. It is important to review the law lifting the guardianship as a sovereign option to move towards neoliberalism and not change the philosophy of the state and its abandonment of the Salafi religious model in its relationship with women²⁴.

POLITICAL RESULTS

To explore the effects of these protest movements against male guardianship over Saudi women, the ruling authority ranged between superficial reforms and re-institutionalization of this system by establishing it in e-government. This political choice shows the keenness of decision-makers to preserve the reality of gender oppression and abuse and to reproduce it in a “soft” manner, which is evidenced by the refusal to radically address the policies devoted to the subordination of women and the keenness to maintain the mechanisms of oppression against women to satisfy the powerful conservative forces, whether religious, tribal or Social, especially that the priority is to confront unrest and threats to Saudi Arabia’s unity and geopolitical power²⁵.

Therefore, the Saudi authority’s interaction with these demands is considered timid, as only some laws that limit male guardianship over women were approved in 2017, but legislation criminalizing violence and harassment and women’s empowerment agendas and their inclusion in the political, economic and societal scene, as stipulated by Vision 2030 remained political promises.

On the other hand, some small legislative reforms have brought positive and stimulating change to many Saudi women, as many have rid themselves of part of their daily suffering after establishing the right to demand a divorce, obtain maintenance and the right to custody.

23 Haykel, Bernard et al., ‘Introduction’, in Bernard Haykel et al. (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 1–1

24 Bel Trew & Catherine Philp, *Saudi Arabian Women Urge End to Male ‘Guardianship’ Laws*, *The TIMES*, September 2017, 27. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/saudi-arabian-women-urge-end-to-male-guardianship-laws-mf762sg78>
25 Nathan J. Brown, ‘Why Won’t Saudi Arabia Write Down Its Laws?’ *Foreign Policy*, January 2013, 23, <http://foreignpolicy.com/23/01/2012/why-wont-saudi-arabia-write-down-its-laws>

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that the feminist human rights movement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has achieved an influential turning point through continuous pressure to improve citizenship rights, especially that the majority of protest movements sought to obtain legislative amendments that are devoted to women's dignity and their rights in the state of right and law, instead of profits that remain hostage to a royal decree or a game of political positioning.

No simple path for these protest movements or clear ways exists to measure their impact on public policies, but it promises to allow for the women's participation through the ability of movement groups to mobilize and raise demands to the state by following the strategies of internationalizing their issues and the cases of persecution that Saudi women suffer.

Although these protest movements against guardianship were not materialized in the field by mass demonstrations or protests, they were limited to particular forms of protest or mobilization of public opinion through electronic campaigns. They have become a source of concern due to criticism of the Kingdom's policy, which may lead to a revolutionary moment that predicts the danger of strong social mobilization and its ability to destabilize the guardianship system and the guardianship of the ruling family itself over Saudi society.

These political systems often derive their durability and the legitimacy of their rule from an implicit agreement with the authoritarian patriarchal social system, meaning that entrenching the male guardian's abuse against Saudi women is a routine embodiment of the reality of monopoly in power at a higher level. In terms of raising guardianship, unlike violence against women or prohibiting driving a car, its sustainability comes from the need to ensure the continuity of the political system itself, especially that promoting gender equality is nothing but a trap for decision-makers, which will make the most powerful force in Saudi society to turn against it, and the most prominent of them are the conservatives who form a large part of the society rejecting these social transformations.

Moreover, economic change agendas, i.e., privatization and neoliberal policies, have been reflected in concepts related to gender and rights, and the revival of the feminist movement is a product of the repercussions of the Arab Spring revolutions (2011). The economic response to the post-oil period and a response to some human rights demands threaten the regime's existential entrenchment. However, this "human rights" response is often conditional on applying legal boundaries and the preservation of social peace and the ethics of conservative society and the peculiarities of reality itself.



BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid-2018, the "Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World" program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project "Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making". This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project's goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media's expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.

THE ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB Policy Institute) is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. Inaugurated in 2006, the Institute aims to harness, develop, and initiate policy relevant research in the Arab region. We are committed to expanding and deepening policy-relevant knowledge production in and about the Arab region; and to creating a space for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, civil society and policy-makers.

Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs
American University of Beirut
P.O.Box 11- 0236

 Riad El-Solh / Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon, Issam Fares Institute Building, AUB

 +961-1-350000 ext. 4150 / Fax +961-1-737627

 ifi.comms@aub.edu.lb

 www.aub.edu.lb/ifi

 aub.ifi

 @ifi_aub

 @ifi_aub

