



**Gulf Research Centre Cambridge**  
Knowledge for All

## Workshop 4

# Domestic Policy Making and Governance in Saudi Arabia

### Workshop Directors:

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### Abstract

The following workshop tries to reach a better and more balanced understanding of the contemporary processes of domestic policy making and governance in Saudi Arabia. Comprehension of these two areas is particularly pertinent given the importance of the National Transformation Plan 2020 and Saudi Vision 2030.

The term governance specifically as related to domestic policy making has increased in usage as evidence mounts on the critical role it plays in determining societal well-being. As Graham et al (2003) argue *governance is not synonymous with government* and indeed, this confusion of terms can have unfortunate consequences. Rather governance is about how governments and other social organizations interact, how these relate to citizen concerns and aspirations, and how decisions are taken in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Thus governance as related to domestic policy making is a process whereby societies, institutions and/or organizations make important decisions, determine whom they involve in the process and how they render account. Indeed, Bevir (2011) argues that governance poses dilemmas that require new governing strategies that span jurisdictions, link people across levels of government

and civil society as well as mobilizing a variety of stakeholders. Furthermore, governance arrangements are often hybrid practices combining public-private sectors and individuals and institutions across different policy fields. In fact, effective governance is fundamental on all domestic levels, whether local, regional or national, but in today's rapidly changing and developing socio-economic and socio-cultural environments necessitates new ways of thinking and working together.

Drawing on the comparative experience of academics, researchers, policy-makers and practitioners with knowledge and experience of domestic policy making and governance in a) Saudi Arabia, b) the region c) relevant expertise in policy making and governance issues and d) from a theoretical perspective, the workshop will analyse the factors that either currently facilitate or constrain effective and viable domestic policy making and governance issues. Academics and practitioners would be drawn from a wide-range of backgrounds and institutions with the aim of not only comparing and capturing experiences, but also seeking ways in which to enhance, support and underpin a more effective way of comprehending domestic policy making and governance in Saudi Arabia.

## **Description and Rationale**

### **Background**

It is our strong belief that we cannot understand a state without studying its society or in the case of Saudi Arabia diverse societies sometimes with differing norms spread over a wide geographic area. However, much of the literature, analysis and reportage on Saudi Arabia focuses on areas of 'high politics' such as foreign policy whilst disregarding the less 'glamorous' area of 'low politics'. Yet, young people are the key to Saudi Arabia's future prosperity, and this necessitates studying the issues—many in the area of 'low politics'—that they believe are important such as employment, housing, and the rising cost of living; all of which in turn affect getting married and starting a family. Indeed, the Kingdom's demographics are vital to understanding challenges facing Saudi Arabia. At least 60 per cent of the total population is less than 30 years old. Moreover, improved educational standards, the impact of online public opinion and demands for greater government transparency via increased social media usage have raised expectations of more government accountability as well as increased participation in decision-making processes.

That said the Saudi government understands the need to address societal needs and concerns. As part of the National Transformation Plan 2020 and Saudi Vision 2030 domestic institutions have been established that deal with domestic policy making and governance issues. These include, for example, King Salman Center for Local Governance, King Salman Youth Center, the Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority and General Authority for Entertainment. Furthermore, most Saudi ministries have implemented e-government services and opened social media accounts to narrow the gap between government bureaucracy and the public.

## **Workshop goals**

The overall goal of the workshop is to encourage scholars and practitioners to better understand the complexity of Saudi domestic policy making and governance. The workshop focusses on both challenges and opportunities present in the contemporary socio-economic and cultural spheres as well as ways and means by which these can be addressed.

Therefore, the questions animating this workshop could include:

1. Why is good governance important and why is there a need for good governance?
2. To what extent should the views and concerns of Saudi Arabia's diverse societies inform domestic policy making? What are the most effective ways of accommodating such views and concerns, especially at a local level?
3. What can Saudi Arabia learn from the governance models of other states and/or regional groupings?
4. To what extent have e-government and ministerial social media accounts narrowed the gap between bureaucracy and the public? How can we measure this? Can this be measured accurately and if so, what conclusions can be drawn?
5. How can we define and understand governance hybrids in Saudi Arabia? To what extent do public-private policy domains overlap? What lessons can be drawn from experiences in other countries under transformation?
6. How can Saudi Arabia maximise its demographic dividend, namely its youthful population? What policies should be implemented and in which sectors?
7. Skills for our tomorrow: are we educating young people for the jobs of today or the jobs of the future? For example, to what extent will automation and artificial intelligence (AI) affect the Saudi labour market? What are the implications for education and employment policies?
8. How do you put in place new and inclusive governing structures that facilitate, support and sustain transformational change?
9. How can Saudi Arabia's youthful population contribute meaningfully to the decision-making processes and help align new policies with aspirations?
10. How do the World Bank and other international organisations' definitions and operationalization of governance—and good governance—conform to Saudi Arabia's contemporary models of governance? How will those governance models be required to change to accommodate the kingdom's transformation?
11. What role can Saudi Arabia's youth play in helping transform the kingdom's bureaucracy, making leading institutions more efficient and customer-oriented?
12. How can Saudi youth contribute towards the governance of the non-profit sector, as it expands to support fulfil aspects Vision 2030 and furthers the advance of volunteerism?

## **Workshop Scope and Proposed Topics**

The following are some proposed themes for the papers, but other relevant topics will also be welcomed. As previously mentioned, it is hoped that the workshop will attract a wide variety of papers from both academic and practitioners with an interest in domestic policy making and governance. This interest and experience does not need to be limited to Saudi Arabia alone, as knowledge and familiarity with the theoretical background of domestic policy making and governance as well as comparative

perspectives from the Gulf and beyond could inform analysis and discussion of Saudi Arabia's specific domestic policy and governance issues. Indeed, papers presented at the workshop will permit discussion and analysis of ideas and methods that can help facilitate a better understanding, and even implementation of policy, as related to Saudi domestic policy and governance.

This topic remains an extremely under-researched area; hence, the workshop's scope will be necessarily broad in order to include contemporary political, economic, social and cultural issues as well as their impact on Saudi domestic policymaking and governance. Therefore, a variety of perspectives from academics, researchers, policy makers and practitioners alike are invited. These could include (but are not limited to) the following areas:

- Policy making at national/macro level for context;
- Mapping the Saudi domestic policy making and governance sector: who are the principal actors? How do they engage with the central government/ministries and indeed, themselves? In sum, how does local governance work?
- Public-private sector hybrids;
- Governance and Institution-building: state and non-state;
- New forms of taxation and subsidy reform;
- Oil, petro-chemicals, energy, renewables and consumption habits;
- Social policy areas such as housing, healthcare, education, leadership and skills development and the environment;
- Employment/unemployment/underemployment: for example, the future of the labour market, entrepreneurship, volunteering, the role of SMEs, automation, AI etc. Are today's students being trained for the jobs of tomorrow?
- Sport and entertainment: promoting healthy attitudes and lifestyles;
- The role of consultancies such as McKinsey and Strategic Gears;
- Economic cities/new cities, Neom;
- Urbanization, urban renewal and the quality of urban life;
- The role of non-profit organizations in policy making such as charities;
- The role of multilateral institution such as the World Bank in domestic Saudi policy making.

### **Edited Book**

Another aim of this workshop is to publish an edited book based on the individual papers presented. It is hoped that this volume will fill a gap in the relatively thin literature on domestic policy making and governance issues in Saudi Arabia.

### **Potential Solutions and Recommendations**

We believe this proposed multi-disciplinary workshop will attract new research that reveals more domestic policy making and governance issues in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the workshop will contribute to the expansion of Saudi/Gulf Studies and beyond by first bringing together scholars and practitioners with first-hand knowledge and experience from a range of social, political, economic and cultural experiences with knowledge of the fields of domestic policy making and governance. We hope that the workshop and subsequent edited volume and/or academic/policy journal papers provide an important and relevant resource for academics and policy makers as well as those involved in governance issues.

### **Anticipated Papers**

These could include (but are not limited to) the following areas:

- **Case studies**  
States or government policies; governance issues, challenges and opportunities.
- **From theory to practice**  
Examples of proven success stories that demonstrate how theory can inform practice.
- **Methods, approaches and examples of domestic policy making and governance**  
Review of theory and praxis drawing on handbooks on governance supported by international organisations and experience in the field.
- **Public-private sector hybrid collaborations or projects**  
Lessons learned from other jurisdictions and inside the kingdom to better support future endeavours.
- **Multilateral contributions to domestic policy making and governance**  
What can we learn from these?

### **Anticipated Participants**

We encourage papers from socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural academics, researchers and practitioners with Saudi/Gulf experience (both native and non-native) as well as academics, researchers and practitioners with a strong knowledge of the theoretical background of domestic policy making and governance. In addition, the workshop is also open to policy makers and representatives of NGOs, governments, and think tanks. The papers could be individual, co-authored or small group contributions depending on the topic and/or institution. In sum, the aim of the workshop is to facilitate the sharing of ideas and to contribute to building a body of knowledge on this topic, based on real-life experiences in order to represent the broadest range of perspectives possible.

### **Workshop Director Profiles**

**Dr. Mark C. Thompson** is Assistant Professor of Middle East Studies at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, where he has been teaching undergraduate courses in International Relations and Globalization since

2012. He is also Senior Associate Fellow at King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS) and Research Fellow at King Salman Center for Local Governance (KSCLG) in Riyadh. Mark has lived and worked in Saudi Arabia since 2001 for diverse institutions such as Saudi Arabian Airlines, the Saudi Arabian National Guard, and Prince Sultan University. Mark holds a Ph.D. from the Institute of Arab & Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, UK. His principal research areas are Saudi socio-political development and societal transformation and he has published on topics such as Saudi youth issues and challenges facing Saudi women leaders in publications such as the *Journal of Arabian Studies*; *Asian Affairs*; *Middle Eastern Studies*; *Middle East Policy and Gulf Affairs*. In addition, he published a book with I.B. Tauris “*Saudi Arabia and the Path to Political Change: National Dialogue and Civil Society*” (2014). Mark is also the co-editor of the IB Tauris book entitled “*Policy-Making in the GCC: State, Citizens and Institutions*” (2017) with Dr. Neil Quilliam from Chatham House based on their Gulf Research Meeting workshop in 2015 as well as providing a chapters on Saudi Arabia for edited books such as “*Public Brain Power: Civil Society and Resource Management*” Palgrave Macmillan (2017). Mark has recently completed a book for Cambridge University Press “*Being Young Male and Saudi: Identity and Politics in a Globalized Kingdom*” about societal issues and change from the perspective of young Saudi men. Mark makes numerous presentations at international conferences, workshops and seminars.

**Dr. Neil Quilliam** is a Neil Quilliam is a Senior Research Fellow with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Programme at Chatham House. He is Director of Chatham House’s Future Dynamics in the Gulf project and previously directed its Syria and Its Neighbours policy initiative (2015-2017). Before joining Chatham House 2014, Neil served as Senior MENA Energy Adviser at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Senior Analyst at Control Risks, London, and Senior Programme Officer at the United Nations University, Amman. Neil has lived in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, and has travelled extensively around the MENA region, working on a variety of development, education and research projects. He has published a number of books and articles on international relations and political economy of Syria, Jordan, Iraq and the Gulf Cooperation Council states. Neil was the first recipient of the Prince of Wales and King Faisal Foundation Scholarship in 1998. He received his PhD in International Relations from the University of Durham in 1997.

## **Selected Readings**

Publications examining Saudi domestic policy making, domestic issues and governance are very few, but the following list provides some background to the topic.

- Aldosari, H. (2017) “Saudi Arabia’s Post-Oil Future” *Arab Gulf States Institute*

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  - Fukuyama, F. (2004) *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
  - Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2017) *GEM Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Report*, available at: [www.gemconsortium.org/country-profile/141](http://www.gemconsortium.org/country-profile/141)
  - Government of Saudi Arabia (2016), *Saudi Vision 2030* available to download at: [vision2030.gov.sa/download/file/fid/417](http://vision2030.gov.sa/download/file/fid/417)
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  - Held, D. & Ulrichsen (eds.) (2012) *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, economics and the global order*, Abingdon: Routledge.
  - Jones, D. and Punshi, R. (2013) *Unlocking the Paradox of Plenty: A Review of the Talent Landscape in the Arab world and Your Role in Shaping the Future*, Dubai: Motivate Publishing.
  - Kechichian, J. (2013) *Legal and Political Reforms in Saudi Arabia*, Abingdon: Routledge.
  - Khalaf, S. and Khalaf, R. (2011) (eds.) *Arab Youth: Social Mobilization in Times of Risk*, London: Saqi Books.
  - Levi-Faur, D. (ed.) (2014) *The Oxford Handbook of Governance (Oxford Handbooks in Politics & International Relations)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  - Moran, M., Rein, M. and Goodin, R. (eds.) (2008) *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy (Oxford Handbooks)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  - Najem, T. and Hetherington, M. (eds.) (2003) *Good Governance and the Oil Monarchies*, London: Routledge.
  - Niblock, T. & Malik, M. (2007) *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia*, Abingdon: Routledge.
  - OECD, (2011) *Perspectives Note: Capacity Development and Civil Society Organizations*, [Online] Available at: [www.oecd.org/development/governance-development/48252653.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/development/governance-development/48252653.pdf)

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- Sultan, N et al (eds.) (2011) *The New Post-Oil Arab Gulf: Managing People and Wealth*, London: Saqi Books.
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## **2019 Gulf Research Meeting**

**July 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**University of Cambridge**

### **Workshop 4**

## **Domestic Policy Making and Governance in Saudi Arabia**

### **Paper Presenter Abstracts:**

#### **How is evidence used for policymaking in Saudi Arabia? Lessons from Harvard's engagements in human capital development and labor policy**

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Abstract:

The public policy process – from agenda setting to problem identification and from solution design to implementation – is strengthened by rigorously collected, on-the-ground evidence for producing timely analytics. The quality of each country's research-to-policy ecosystem, from scholarly outputs by university to policy debates by think-tanks, determines how the extent to which government decision-making improves public welfare. It enables policymakers to access relevant scientific evidence and its impact on society in actionable ways. Besides universities and think-tanks, private foundations, not-for-profit agencies, foreign donors and for-profit businesses all play critical roles in shaping this ecosystem.

But in countries lacking robust homegrown institutions, external actors play key roles in shaping the policy agenda and influencing the policy development process. In low and middle-income countries, international development partners (aka ‘donors’) provide governments much needed technical assistance and capacity-building services through private contractors. In many high-income countries like Saudi Arabia, where governments offer lucrative contracts and generous terms, major management consulting firms have increased foothold in public sector consulting. They typically customize and apply internationally tested, private-sector inspired solution models in response to policy challenges, coupled with very effective communication tools such as interactive data dashboards.

In this environment, what role can international universities and public policy academics play in improving public policymaking? Should they provide infrastructure and capacity building support by establishing applied research centers? To what extent is there space for them to work directly with decision makers? Or, should they focus on their narrow research goals, and restrict support to policy insights in academic publications? And what incentives do governments have to engage with slow-moving academic projects, rather than rapid response consulting service providers? In this paper, we present insights from a major, multi-year research-policy collaboration between Harvard University economists and Saudi ministries.

Since 2013, Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD), a research program at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, has undertaken a series of research projects in collaboration with the ministries of labor, social development and education. The engagement focused on optimizing the Saudi labor market by tapping into national human capital reserves and promoting citizen welfare, particularly that of women and youth. Harvard economists jointly identified priorities with policymakers, and help design, evaluate, and re-design labor market policies. EPoD also provided customized capacity building programs, many focused on incorporating data-informed insights into policy-making, to support the mission of improving evidence-informed policymaking.

EPoD’s evidence-informed approach to policymaking sheds unique insights into governance and public decision making in Saudi Arabia. First, policy makers are under immense time pressure to make decisions and thus require real-time analytics as policies are designed and implemented, often on short order. In contrast, academic research, particularly rigorous impact evaluations of programs jointly designed with policymakers, requires 2-3 years to offer mature policy lessons. We thus consistently grapple with the challenge of matching academic and policy timelines in Saudi Arabia’s fast paced policy environment, i.e. how can policy-relevant insights be derived during research projects.

Second, while the government’s data collection infrastructure is robust in some sectors, data sharing protocols for policy research remain underdeveloped or non-existent, making the process of obtaining data frustrating, long-drawn, and uncertain. This becomes a major discouragement for top international academics, who have greater burdens on time and high global demand – many simply walk away from working in such difficult environments.

Third, academics' interest in journal publications is inherently inconsistent with any sensitives government agencies might have with certain policy subjects, such as regional disparities or expat worker levies. This is particularly true for political scientists, who by definition are investigating politically sensitive topics. It is therefore imperative for policymakers and academics to set clear data sharing expectations at the outset, however daunting it may seem.

Fourth, we find that the lack of robust local public policy and economics departments, where Saudi and international academics could collaborate to provide context rich interpretations of data. But the incentives of local academics must be aligned to create policy relevant research projects. Local universities must also be encouraged to establish and support homegrown policy oriented research institutions that could work in close proximity with government agencies on ongoing policy debates.

Because no single government agency is fully responsible for improving the research-policy ecosystem, a nationwide approach is required to improve avenues for rigorous evidence to be utilized for crucial public decisions. In the absence of such an effort, the somewhat inefficient and risk-laden public policy making environment will continue remaining a drain on public resources.

## **The Institutional Structure of Local Governance in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Opportunities**

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Abstract:

In recent years, local governance has gained global attention as an effective solution for 21st-century policy challenges such as population growth, urban densification, and increasing societal demands for enhanced quality of life and service delivery. While cities strive to boost their engines of economic productivity, the efficient processes and systems governing them have increasingly become crucial. Governance in Saudi Arabia is a three-tier system, consisting of a national, regional, and local level. All of these play a significant role in shaping the local governance system which dates back to the initial days of unification of the Kingdom. As the Kingdom developed and adapted its public sector to increasingly complex demands, there was a need for more standardized control which led to more centralized decision-making functions. However, local governance has been the site and subject of innovation and experimentation – from the first elections of Municipal Councilors in 2005 and the inclusion of women as voters and candidates in 2015. Today, local government entities are embedded in a complex governance system facing challenges like institutional overlaps and non-clarity of roles among others. To overcome these, the government is keenly trying to explore potential options for interventions in order to promote efficiency and excellence in local governance sector. This paper discusses the evolution of the local governance system and the existing institutional landscape. It outlines which key entities and stakeholders steer the processes of local governance in Saudi Arabia and attempts to explore their

statutory mandates, structures, and relationships. Based on that, it provides an overview of the institutional challenges embedded within the existing structure. Lastly, the study contextualizes the potential opportunities by the Vision 2030 and its implications on strengthening the local governance in the Kingdom.

## **Understanding project failure using agency theory: the case of a high-speed rail mega-project in Saudi Arabia**

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Abstract:

There is a belief often expressed within the literature that the current techniques used within project management have matured over recent decades (Cooke-Davies et al., 2003; Patanakul et al., 2010). However, the rate of project failure has never been greater and it has been claimed that performance in mega-project management has not improved over the last 70 years (Flyvbjerg, 2017). For example, Robertson et al. (2006) have reported that more projects overrun in time than are completed within the original allocated time scales. These overruns commonly occur in a rate of 40% to 200%. There are numerous examples of mega-projects that have failed along one or more of the classic parameters of performance (timescale, budget and specification). Flyvbjerg, (2014) described mega-projects as a magnified version of other types of smaller projects. However, they are a different breed of project, as they are associated with higher levels of aspiration, greater complexity and larger numbers of stakeholders involved. Many technical factors have been suggested as reasons for major infrastructure project failure, such as complexity, scale and a lack of precedent. However, among others, Hodgson and Cicmil (2006) and Söderlund (2013) also stress the importance of looking at the human elements of a project. With this in mind, we sought to examine projects of this nature from a more theoretical basis. We found that there appeared to be a gap concerning Agency Theory (AT) and its connection with large, temporary multi-organizational projects. Given that large, complex projects of the nature we were examining are, in large part, contractually mediated, we found this omission particularly surprising. In light of this, we devised the following research question: To what extent can agency theory be utilised in the analysis and explanation of mega-project failure in the case of a High-Speed Railway project in Saudi Arabia? This led us to establish the following research objectives:

- To identify the specific agency problems (APs), if any, which occurred within the case study project.
- To establish the extent to which these APs explained the project failure observed in the case study project.

## **Beyond the Glitter Factor: Building Defense Capacity in Salman's Saudi Arabia**

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Abstract:

Saudi Arabia spends enormous amounts of money on its security infrastructure, but does not get a commensurate return on its investment. The Saudi leadership is well aware of this shortcoming, which becomes more of a constraint on the Saudi state as the population rises and oil revenues lag compared to the elevated expectations of an ever-growing population. There is a significant body of writing laying out the shortcomings of the Saudis in this regard: some of the analysis doesn't originate from a place of love or concern.

The Saudis are well aware of their shortcomings. Both the disappointing performance in the various Yemen wars as well as the reform impetus of Vision 2030 have spurred a significant and unprecedented defense reform effort in the Kingdom.

An examination of the criticisms of past Saudi efforts, together with an examination of ongoing reforms in the context of total defense capacity building (DOTMILPF) will show that this effort is unprecedented both in its ambition as well as in the possibility to build effective defense capacity.

## **Vocational Education and Training in Saudi Arabia: How Decisions about TVET Can Help Align Education Policies with Young People's Aspirations**

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Abstract:

Although the Saudi education system has provided an opportunity to pursue varying pathways for young people, there is a limited understanding of young people's postsecondary education and employment trajectories in KSA. Reforms to the education system continuously strive to achieve development goals and economic

prosperity, yet challenges to implementing educational strategy include including its large youth population, diverse stakeholders, and limited education and employment opportunities. With the launch of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, education and labour policy efforts included an expansion to the initial vocational education and training (TVET) sector to stimulate economic growth and increase the employment of young Saudi citizens in place of foreign employees. However, the relatively low enrolment in vocational education and training and its weak status can provides insight into the way young people make decisions about their education to work transitions, and highlights a variety of individual and structural challenges young people continuously negotiate in the rapidly changing country. The findings shed light on the diverse views and understandings of TVET, and show that 'choice' is often illusionary, as youth aspirations are not always in line with opportunities, and are influenced by the dominant characteristics of the education pathways and the labour market. Additionally, young people are influenced by cultural factors such as kinship and status, family ties, and social characteristics such kinship ties and financial resources.

## **Engaging and Meeting the Aspirations of the Youth in Saudi Arabia: Platforms of Participation in the Kingdom's Transforming Political Economy**

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The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is seeking to prepare for the post-oil dependent era by overhauling its political economy. To do so, Vision 2035 promotes that the oil dependent economy needs to transform into a productive, private sector driven economy that is operated by the national citizenry. Crucially, it advocates that the redrawn political economy must be responsive to the socio-economic aspirations of society, especially the youth. With more than 60 per cent of the national population being under the age of 30, they are a critical source of socio-economic progress and if left marginalised, a source of political opposition. Organisations such as the King Salman Youth Center and Misk recognise the importance of the Saudi youth, where they have advocated that if the Kingdom is to successfully diversify its economic base, the country will need to utilize the potential of its young, often well-educated and ambitious youth population.

This will be a major challenge, however, because although the youth will inherit all of today's problems, they have rarely been consulted to provide solutions to the Kingdom's development dilemmas. This because over the oil development decades, Saudi Arabia's autocratic rule and rentier dynamics caused large segments of society to remain on the fringes of the policy domain where they had limited access to any formal mechanism of representation. Of which, was most acutely felt amongst young Saudis, who were always on the outer periphery of the government's patronage system. Indeed, as young Saudis are demanding a say in the Kingdom's development agenda and inform the socio-economic policies that affect their daily lives, the ruling elite have no option but to engage the bright and lively youth by giving them access to platforms of participation.

This policy-focused paper seeks to explore this issue, by identifying how Saudi youth are engaged in the Kingdom's decision-making process and how they are contributing to aligning policies with their aspirations. By identifying the platforms of participation they have access to, such as university based initiatives, scholarships, youth centres and volunteer programmes, this paper will identify the capacity the youth have in informing the strategies that affect their daily lives. What will be evident is that young Saudis are a critical agent of progress and the architects of the Kingdom's future. Therefore, harnessing their ambitions and enabling them to meet their own personal aspirations as well as those advocated by Vision 2030 will be central in building a new post-oil dependent Saudi Arabia.

## **In-depth analysis of obesity causes and proposed innovative solutions.**

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Abstract:

Obesity is considered a 21st century epidemic in developed and developing countries with a substantial economic cost, shortening health-span and reducing quality of life. The rise in obesity has massive health and economic consequences as it increases the risk of global causes of death such as heart diseases, type 2 diabetes (T2D) and certain forms of cancers (1, 2) with a substantial direct effect on emotional well-being, self-esteem and psychological health (10). By 2030, it is estimated that 57.8% (3.3 billion people) of the world adult population will be obese or overweight (21, 22). Hence, the obesity-associated burden of disease is expected to rise in forthcoming years. In many countries and regions, in particular in the Gulf region, the number of adults who are overweight or obese is exceeding those who are normal weight (20). Today, the adverse health consequences of obesity represent more significant risks for public health than hunger or malnutrition and therefore demand an urgent public policy actions (23).

The high global obesity figures are mirrored in Saudi, where data from 2016 showed that 67.5% of males and 69.2% of females are overweight, and 29.5% of males and 39.5% of females were obese (26). The prevalence of overweight and obesity in Saudi has accelerated dramatically since the oil discovery in 1938, which enabled a rapid transformations in Saudi from rural areas to ultra-advanced urban cities with limited adaption period. This fasted transformations, going from a sparsely populated desert to a moderately populated, relatively well-developed country with all the trappings of modernity including high-speed highways, vast airports, advanced medical facilities and state-of-the-art communications networks. All appear to have contributed to Saudis changing their lifestyles and eating habits enabling; easy increase in daily energy intake (Saudi Average daily energy intake estimated 3000 kilo calories) accompanied by limited physical activity (approximately 62% of the Saudi population is physically inactive). The Kingdom is also among the world top 10 countries for the prevalence of type-2 diabetes.

In this paper, we demonstrate for policy and decision makers an in-depth analysis of obesity causes which differ between population groups and across a person's life course. Indeed, the multifactorial condition of obesity is inherently unsuited to a 'one size fits all' approach and the complexity of the aetiology of obesity is showing why this disorder is hard to treat. This variability is an essential feature in that it points to a broad spectrum of innovative solutions and therefore provide policy makers with clear spectrum on tackling obesity. We will also demonstrate a Case study for innovative systemic solution for obesity prevention and its compatibility with the Saudi population, and the Saudi Vision 2030 efforts.

The remarkable increase in the global prevalence of obesity is telling that this condition is beyond solely an individual's willpower, rather is a public policy matter where governments should take ownership, leadership and necessary actions considering evidence-based inter-sectorial innovative solutions to tackle obesity. That been said, the Saudi government with the launch of Vision 2030 has taken enormous steps tackling obesity including the quality of life programme aiming for stabilising obesity prevalence in 2020.

## **How Can Saudi Arabia Better Coordinate Divergent Economic Reform Agendas?**

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Abstract:

This paper will explore how Saudi Arabia can overcome the lack of effective coordination between different economic reform agendas – a phenomenon described here as “reform dissonance”. Responding to fiscal pressures brought about by lower oil prices since late 2014, the current Saudi leadership has embarked on a new round of economic reform initiatives aimed at transforming the oil-dependent, state-centred Saudi economy into a “knowledgebased” one that harnesses market forces to drive economic growth. Thus, the new blueprints for the Saudi economy, most notably Saudi Vision 2030 and its interim plan National Transformation Program (NTP) 2020, advocate and advance a liberalisation agenda that includes policy aimed at promoting privatisation, financial deregulation, and the of lifting subsidies.

Nevertheless, this liberalisation agenda can sometimes conflict with other economic reform agendas, especially the job creation agenda. With the Saudi distributive state's welfare umbrella no longer capable of supporting all nationals through public-sector employment and a variety of subsidies that have characterized the system of rentier

patronage, Saudi leadership is now engaged in a serious effort to create job opportunities outside the public sector. Theoretically, the liberalisation and job creation agendas can go hand in hand – a stronger private sector can create more jobs for local jobseekers. However, in reality these two agendas often clash, creating a situation we describe here as “reform dissonance”.

In particular, labour localization efforts using quotas in the absence of large scale and effective human capital development programs has constrained the growth of the private sector, which has grown accustomed to recruiting labour from abroad. With private sector growth slow, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and state-sponsored “national champions” are often deployed and developed in nascent non-oil sectors as a quick solution to the job creation problem. This strategy, however, threatens to drive a vicious cycle of further inhibiting private sector growth by crowding out private firms, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); and critically, does not allow for the development of the state’s regulatory capacity.

Can Saudi Arabia coordinate these different economic reform agendas and pursue both goals simultaneously and in a harmonious manner? This paper will address this question in two steps: the first step is to outline the phenomenon of reform dissonance, looking at the pressures from which it emerges and highlighting examples of its impact on the broader economic reform project; the second step is to explore successful institutional models elsewhere, and extract useful insights that may shed light on how Saudi institutions can be developed to avoid reform dissonance- though the rentier state does have some specificities, policy dissonance is a challenge in many other states. In doing so, the paper will conduct a form of “deep benchmarking” – examining the political-economy conditions behind the genesis of such models and carefully assessing the Saudisability of these models by comparing these conditions with those facing today’s Saudi Arabia.

## **King-Makers or Knaves? The Role of Consultants in Domestic Policy Making and Governance in Saudi Arabia**

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Abstract:

This paper will analyse the general role and relative influence of consultants in The Kingdom in terms of their impact on domestic policy making and governance relating to major public sector initiatives. The role of consultants in Saudi Arabia policy making and governance is arguably particularly pervasive by international standards. Consultants are contracted in traditional projects from Strategy, PR, HR, financial and technical roles and they are also embedded as ‘advisors’ in the provision of basic social and civil services, military capability, technological and information resources and within a wide range of other government functions.

The paper will highlight the dynamic structure and hierarchy within Saudi Arabia, particularly during times of rapid public sector reform in the Kingdom. It will illustrate how consultants can provide the responsiveness, productivity and expertise often lacking elsewhere with government structures, as well as delve into the precarious role of foreign consultants operating on contractual arrangements with the public sector within the Kingdom, during a critical period in the deployment of initiatives related to the Vision 2030 and National Transformation Programme.

These reforms are associated with the accession in 2015 of King Salman and, in particular, the policy agenda associated with his son Mohammed, first as Deputy Crown Prince and then subsequently as Crown Prince. A conclusion will also draw upon relevant academic literature and reputable journalism to seek to extract meaning, learning and understanding from this specific case study to the wider field of study of domestic policy making and governance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## **Last Man Standing: Saudi Aramco and Global Climate Action**

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Abstract:

For Saudi Arabia's absolute monarchy, climate action represents a combined threat and opportunity for retaining the oil rents that underpin domestic political institutions and the kingdom's international influence. On the one hand, Saudi Aramco, the largest source of greenhouse gas-emitting fossil fuel among all firms worldwide, is exposed to risks around continued use of fossil fuels. On the other, Aramco is the producer with the world's lowest cost basis and lowest intensity of greenhouse gas emissions per barrel produced. These attributes suggest that oil from the kingdom should retain a prominent role in oil markets, particularly under climate constraints. While Saudi Aramco's April 2019 bond prospectus outlines steps the company is taking to ensure that it continues marketing oil far into the future, this paper argues that Aramco's quest to remain the "last man standing" in global oil depends not just on its substantial advantages in production costs, but on maintaining – and enhancing – its advantage in carbon competitiveness.

# **Climate Change Governance in Saudi Arabia: Integrity, Politics, Challenges and Opportunities**

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Abstract:

Has strongly revolved around oil and gas export revenues, Saudi Arabia's economy could be highly vulnerable to climate change mitigation measures especially constraints on fossil fuels. The physical impacts of climate change on non-oil economic sectors could also hinder the Kingdom's economic diversification ambitions set in Vision 2030. Aware of the potential threats posed by climate change, in its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, Saudi Arabia expressed its intention to engage in remedial climate action and planning in accordance with the kingdom's efforts toward economic diversification. Yet, little is known about Saudi Arabia's domestic governance to address climate change, or the extent at which climate change is addressed in line with its economic diversification. This paper focuses on domestic governance of climate change in Saudi Arabia. It assesses the challenges and opportunities for aligning climate change policies with the kingdom's economic diversification strategies. The paper, furthermore, examines the dynamic interaction between emerging climate-related initiatives and policies, and Saudi Arabia's political economic regime. Drawing from secondary literature and interviews with Saudi climate change experts, the paper reveals that effective governance of climate change in Saudi Arabia still faces fundamental challenges, among them, low data and information profile; absence of a climate action plan; heavy involvement of the Ministry of Energy, Industry, and Mineral Resources and energy industry in addressing climate-related matters; and fragmentation of climate-related policies and efforts. Furthermore, the paper reveals the importance of political economic structures, with vested interest in fossil fuels, in influencing climate action in Saudi Arabia. In particular, three political strategies that contribute to a delayed tangible action on climate change were identified: defensive strategies (by expanding public sector dominance of climate action and strategic isolation of other climate change interest groups), material strategies (i.e. using of large-scale low-carbon technologies to protect interests in hydrocarbons), and discursive strategies (i.e. influencing public debate through media framing).

## **In Search of Legitimation: Environmental Policy making in Saudi Arabia.**

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Abstract:

Albeit Saudi Arabia's hydrocarbon abundance and its traditional record as a trustworthy and main supplier of fossil fuels, numerous structural challenges nudged decision-makers into considering a more environmental-friendly sustainable policy. Climate policy-making appears to be a particular interesting research subject. On the one hand, climate change as a stress factor is one of the greatest challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and mitigating the severe effects of it and adapt to global warming have become key tasks for any political system. Hence, it bears a substantial degree of legitimation if it is successfully managed. On the other hand, environmental policy-making is characterized as a predominantly regulative policy field. Moreover, implemented climate actions (i.e. output) is not immediately visible as the effects (i.e. outcomes) are rather long-term and influenced by many other variables. Both can result in a delegitimizing effect of the government. Considering environmental policy-making as a legitimation strategy, this study provides a holistic analytical framework that intends to shed light on uncovering the underlying policy processes and its relation to garner political legitimacy.

## **Energy Governance: is the new meeting the old in Saudi Arabia's energy industries?**

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Abstract:

This paper suggests that while renewable energy in Saudi Arabia seems to be taking a different governance trend than the Kingdom's oil industry -which falls under poor sector governance-, there may be shortcomings that need to be addressed, and indicators that shall be improved to achieve good governance and improved competition, necessary for the sustainable development of the industry.

Saudi Arabia sits on the throne of oil exporters, which has generated tremendous revenues to the kingdom and has constantly sponsored its large public spending. Economies that have excess revenues are expected to have an ease of implementation of sustainable development measures. Yet, scholars note that most hydrocarbon-rich economies struggle in achieving sustainable development, despite accumulated wealth,

and that there's a direct correlation between sustainable development and good governance.

According to the Natural Resource Governance Institute's oil and gas governance ranking, the Kingdom ranked at 69 out of 89 country assessments, placing Saudi Arabia at poor oil sector governance, similarly to the other hydrocarbon- exporting economies in the Middle East, at the exception of Oman and Kuwait.

The main stakeholder in the Saudi's oil industry is Saudi Aramco; the National Oil Company. The political stability in Saudi Arabia has benefited Aramco, and subsequently, its oil industry. But monopoly, direct negotiations of contract, and lack of data have restricted competition and private sector participation, found to be necessary for development. Moreover, government meddling and using oil revenues to increase patronage and state's authority have been recorded. The company has become stronger than the institutions that were supposed to regulate it and the overall sector. In contrast, the renewable energy industry is endorsing auctions and open bids, promoting public private partnership through independent power producer schemes, and creating a more open environment. Yet, the industry can easily become monopolised by potential recurrent contract winning entities, and may still become a vehicle for political interference.

The paper provides an overview of the governance within the oil industry, and examines the trends in renewable energy. The analysis covers factors such as regulations, private sector participation, national governance indicators and sectoral indicators to draw a conclusion on whether or not, the alternative energy's governance is actually decoupling from the oil industry's, and identifies potential risks that shall be mitigated.

## **Challenges and Opportunities in Saudi Arabia Energy Transition**

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Abstract:

The proportion of renewable energy in world's energy basket is increasing. In an endeavor to benefit from renewable energy, every country is decreasing their dependency on foreign resources. Climate change and green gas emissions are other factors which have caused countries to use more renewable and green energy to generate electricity. Saudi Arabia, with huge oil reserves, is considered one of major players in the global oil market and its large revenue comes from oil exports. Hence, any change in the oil price directly affects the Saudi economy.

From the standpoint of wind energy, Saudi Arabia has not made any significant steps to generate electricity from renewable energy. One of the reasons is the existence of huge oil reserves in the country, which has provided energy security for decades. Saudi Arabia is looking to install 9.5 gigawatts of solar and wind power by 2023. Saudi projects this year include 3.3 gigabytes of solar photovoltaic and 800 megawatts of

wind. Saudi oil resources and oil policies play a primary role in the kingdom's dealings with the outside world. Whether Saudi Arabia can maintain oil prices to provide a steady stream of income is a matter that must be coordinated with OPEC, in which it is a powerful member state.

Saudi Arabia will be a serious competitor in attracting foreign investment to the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, including Iran, in line with the principles and plans outlined in the 2030 vision plan, and this could spell added tensions in the region. The pace of economic reforms in Saudi Arabia will likely be shaken or stopped as a result of global oil price fluctuations.

It is true that Riyadh has some economic and financial tools to coexist with these challenges in the short to medium term, but the plan for creating economic diversification requires deep and real economic and political reforms within the country and an effort to calm the regional situation to ensure stability. The foremost benefits of the program, if achieved, would buoy the Saudi economy and decrease the vulnerability of the country to fluctuations of the global oil market. However, the implementation of this large program is dependent on oil revenues and the ability of the country to procure investment from abroad.

## **Characteristics of Saudi Arabia's oil policy and implications on local economy**

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Abstract:

The paper assesses the general attributes of Saudi Arabia's oil policy as it evolved over the past 40 years. It finally examines the implications of the policy on the national economy and fiscal policy decisions. Saudi Arabia's oil policy shows that the concern for market stability and global economic growth, which occupied too large space in the policy landscape of Saudi Arabia, is the long-term policy, while price target and market share mechanisms are short-term tactics for revenue maximization and defending the status quo, respectively. This suggests that the policy shifts generally favor the long-term benefit of moderate prices and market stability over short-term revenues maximization as evident in multiple policy interventions. In retrospect, almost all policy shifts have been adapting primarily to exogenous variables stemming from oil market dynamics. Therefore, the rippling effect of the policy on domestic economy was undermined and determined by the competing and diverging interests of producing and consuming nations.