Internal Pressure Groups In Saudi Arabia: A Study Of Reform Movements 1990-2011

Chandra Prakash

Ph.D. student, Centre for West Asian Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Abstract

Until even six years earlier the conventional thought was that desert monarchies were blessed by Islamic Jurisprudence and seemingly endless revenues from oil had diminished the need of political and economic liberalization. As the late Sheikh Abdul-Aziz bin Baz, the grand mufti of the Kingdom, once said, "Politics is a prelude to sedition, liked and sedition, the work of Satan, is a grave sin in Islam". Saudi state defines radicalism not in terms of the violent content of an ideology but in terms of the challenge or support to the monarchy. So state accommodates a range of conservative, Salafists, jihadists, and other liberal actors co-opt and delegitimize on the basis of the need of the Saudi political system.

The religious movements in Saudi Arabia have adopted quietism, non-violent political opposition, or violent action against the state. Various actors have competed for the attention of the state and control of official religious institutions. Al Saud's political monopoly largely remains unchallenged due to confusion over how to engage with the state politically as those who have opposed the Al-Saud's rule who share basic creedal principles (largely family members) disagree on how to effectively share power within them. This chapter seeks to present an analysis of the internal pressures that were consolidated within due course of time and led to the uprisings. This chapter also seeks to understand the process of different pressure groups who struggled for reform and also how the state manages to co-opt such processes and voices in the political system.

Keywords: *GCC, Internal Pressure, Islamist, Internal reforms, Saudi Arabia, Muslim Brotherhood*

Introduction

In Weber's language, Saudi Arabia's legitimacy is based on religious doctrines as it projects itself to be the only true Islamic nation on the basis of the holy custodian of two sacred mosques, and this has special attributes and challenges. This singular responsibility of custodianship of the holy sites of Islam and this is, by their own reckoning, became a primary source, of the legitimate rule of Al Saud's family. When the basic premise of the rule is based on the traditional source of authority like religion and monopoly of power apparatus, this obligates the state to uphold certain values and forms of law and practice, which can earn particularly strong allegiance from citizens in return. This is an attribute of "establishment Islam", but popular Islam has challenged it to some degree. Therefore, in addition to performance norms, state obedience to its religious values is crucial. The windfall of oil revenue also consolidated the authoritarian rule. Although the creation of legislative and quasi-legislative bodies was inspired and justified by tribal and Islamic consultative traditions, fully representative consultative bodies have not yet been created.

In the contest of 2011, Saudi Arabia faced two challenges; the first one emerged as a consequence of the electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood, thereby acting as a catalyst for political Islamists to demand more reforms. The second challenge emerged from the pervasive militant ideologies and radicals operating in Syria against the Assad regime and later Iraq. They both were taken by State as a political as well as security threat[1]. These threats were dealt with by enabling counterterrorism policies which muted the eastern province protests of Shi'a and domestic opposition to Saudi rule. However, a number of significant events in the final decade of the 20th century prompted the ruling family to implement certain reforms in the political, social, educational, cultural, and economic spheres.

The most critical event was the attack on 11 September 2001 ('9/11') on the USA and a terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia itself, economic decline and high unemployment, the Iraq war, and the surge in terrorism in Saudi Arabia. Hundreds of members of covert terrorist organizations operating in Saudi Arabia were also detained by security forces, who also seized massive caches of weapons and explosives. These events led to the economic misfortune which resulted in the dangers of economic dislocation, social alienation, political stagnation, and religious radicalism. Such a situation became the fertile ground for radical Islamists who fed upon the groups and people who were left out of the rentier model and also from the groups and individuals who were on the receiving end of the Saudi Kingdom's financial largesse. So, reform petitions got the prominent attention of the ruling family[2]. The kingdom also felt the need to liberalize its political and economic system.

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[1] Gause, Gregory F. (2013), "Kings for All Seasons: How the Middle East's Monarchies Survived the Arab Spring", *Foreign Policy Brookings Doha center*, accessed 30 Nov. 2016, URL: https://www.brookings.edu/research/kings-for-all-seasons-how-the-middle-easts-monarchies-survived-the-arab-spring/

[2] Raphaeli, N. (2005), "Demands for Reforms in Saudi Arabia" *Middle Eastern Studies, 41*(4), 517-532. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4284386

Islamist Challenges

Since the Saudi state's consolidation, its legitimacy has been based on two things: political vows to defend Wahhabism, and Wahhabi recognition of Al-Saud's position as a temporal leader. As a result, religion has always had a significant influence on state politics. These include historical linkages between tribes, the addition of oil revenue to state expansion of administrative control, and military and economic strength. They also include customs of tribal loyalty and patronage. This annexation of political space by religion has so far resulted in devoted Salafists and Wahhabis who support Al-Saud's rule, liberals within the Islamic framework who are critical of the state's Wahhabism but supportive of a continued role for religion in public life, the Muslim Brotherhood who challenged the state power by organizing the Sahwa ("Awakening") movement, and many other groups; hard-liner Sheikhs or Ulemas, critical of political, economic and social reform that in their view undermine Saudi Arabia's authentic Islamic character; rebel militant groups fighting in Syria and Iraq, including Islamic State (ISIS). The Islamist movements became the main impetus for reform in the kingdom. These domestic groups demanding reform were influenced by a host of ideologies like Wahhabism, Sahwaists, Salafists, jihadists, and extreme radicals. However, the most powerful was the Islamists who enjoyed state patronage as well as key government positions. They are also the most vocal group for reforms.

Undoubtedly the Iran-Iraq war and Kuwait liberation efforts that unraveled subsequently impacted the reform measures in the kingdom. The situation was also aggravated by the presence of foreign troops in the homeland which made Islamists very critical of the regime as they were non-believers. They also accused King Fahd's government of being corrupt and weakened in its devotion to Islamic principles. This anti-western domestic Islamist opposition is thought to be behind the small-scale bomb attacks that started in 2000[3]. While the cause of Islamist opposition predated the war, both moderates and radical Islamist opposition exploited King Fahd's decision to invite foreign troops to Saudi Arabia as a way to voice their discontent with the government and mobilize the supporters.

The strongest opposition came from the young religious scholars who questioned if it was legitimate for Saudis to rely on non-Muslims to fight fellow Muslims. Due to mounting pressures from Islamists, King Fahd thought to give religious legitimacy to foreign troops and portrayed them as the defenders of Islam[4]. This war proved to be a big blow to the financial health of the kingdom. The Kingdom spent around US$ 60 billion to support the war efforts and the kingdom also has given assistance in the Iran-Iraq war close to US$ 50 billion. Thus, Saudi's budget deficit soared to nearly US$ 20 billion[5]. The oil prices also started declining and reached their lowest levels since 1973.

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[3] Cavindish, Marshall (2006), *World and Its Peoples*, volume 1, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, [online: web], 82-85, accessed 29 Nov. 2016, URL: https://books.google.co.in/books?id=j894miuOqc4C.

[4] Rubin, L (2014), Islam in the Balance: Ideational Threats in Arab Politics, Stanford: Stanford University Press, [online:web], 72-75, accessed 29 Nov. 2016, URL: https://books.google.co.in/books?id=DFXZAwAAQBAJ.

[5] Alnasrawi, A. (1986). Economic Consequences of the Iraq-Iran War. *Third World Quarterly*, *8*(3), 869–895. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3991927.

The liberal petition was presented to the king for sweeping reforms in the kingdom. These included responsible and democratic government, the end of corruption in the state machinery, S*haria* as the source of law, independent judiciary, consultative council, etc. They were also very critical of the amount of power enjoyed by the committee to promote virtue and forbid vice (Mutawwain) and called for restructuring and reformation. Yet they reiterated their allegiance to the regime[6]. Fahd's efforts at placating the country's fundamentalists proved ineffective.

In July 1992, a "Memorandum of Advice" was presented to the king, signed by senior clerics and religious scholars. It was focused on the wide gap that existed between the government's Islamic posturing and the reality in the kingdom. The memorandum also highlighted the widespread chaos, corruption, favoritism, and extreme feebleness of the courts. It was largely a restatement of the petition presented earlier[7]. Two months after this presentation, the memorandum was attacked and condemned by senior *Ulema* clergy. The *Ulema* accused the fundamentalists of inventing and exaggerating the country's problems, resorting to lies, and ignoring reality[8]. They also claimed that the signatories of the petition were deceived into a memorandum while others were controlled by foreign groups and parties.

Sahwists Consolidation

Sahwism, which was originally established in 1970 in Saudi colleges, is also known as Al-Sahwa-Al-Islamiyya. Its philosophical underpinnings combine old Wahhabi philosophy with contemporary Muslim Brotherhood ideologies. Naser and Sadat began persecuting the Sahwist in Egypt in 1960. The kingdom took them in because Saudi Arabia needed teachers for its newly established public school system, but there was a catch: they had to be conservative like Arab Muslims. They never disputed the regime's position on religious issues. They published publications and participated actively in princely discussion groups. In this fashion, they gradually took over Saudi Arabia's intellectual life[9]. They came into contact with the Saudi-educated youth, who absorbed the Salafist ideologies and the value of pragmatism. They cut themselves apart from the legitimate Wahhabism. The Sahwa movement was started to consolidate.

Sahwists were persuaded of the utility of Islam as a political tool after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, where Saudi nationalists volunteered to fight against the invasion. Sahwists called for a return to a more decentralised form of governance, the abolition of the Ulema as the exclusive authority on Islam, an end to corruption in the court and bureaucracy, the implementation of religious Islamic legislation, and a bolstering of the Islamic military and judicial systems. They also urged an end to the kingdom's sponsorship of relations with

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[6] Al-Dakhil, K. (2003), "Saudi Arabia's reform movement: a historical glimpse", *Arab Reform Bulletin* (1), accessed 6 January 2017, URL: https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/21519.

[7] Cordesman, A.H (2003), *Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-first Century: The political, foreign policy, economic, and energy dimensions*, London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 182-183, accessed 6 Jan 2017, URL: https://books.google.co.in/books?id=DCVicuT7kCMC

[8] Wilson, P.W. and D.F. Grahm (2016), *Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm: The Coming Storm,* Taylor & Francis, New York: Routledge [onlone: web], accessed 3 Jan 2017, URL: https://books.google.co.in/books?id=tIoYDQAAQBAJ

[9] House, K. E. (2013). On Saudi Arabia: its people, past, religion, fault lines and future. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

all non-Islamic governments, including those in Syria, Algeria, and Egypt[10]. This movement became a landmark for the Saudi people when they first time talked about politics and religion.

Neo-Salafism, another trend, began to emerge around 1970 at Saudi universities concurrently with the Sahwist movement. While Sahwists accepted the legitimacy of the state as a political culture and would only demand reform after 1990, neo-Salafists straightforwardly rejected the state's legitimacy. Because of this, Neo-Salafis were mostly found in the private sector and were opposed to working for individuals who are not genuine, whereas Sahwists were prevalent in public institutions and universities[11]. In extreme cases, they chose to withdraw from society and live in separate neighborhoods. Unlike the Sahwists, they were not eager to take part in political and cultural debates.

On the eve of 2011, Sahwists published several petitions to King Abdullah, including "Toward a State of Rights and Institutions," which argued for elections, and the more Salafi-oriented "Call for Reform". Despite the ban on political parties, they created the Umma Party (Hizb-al-Hamma) and call for elections and the separation of powers[12]. They confronted the regime on two principal issues related to militancy and religious ideology. The Sahwists and Muslim Brotherhood members put pressure on the Regime once more. The rise of the Islamic State, a violent Islamic organisation, posed another threat to religious authority[13]. It made the assertion that it was the sole legitimate source of Islamic law for all Muslims worldwide. Along with advocating aggression against all other governments, and their beliefs[14].

Several new petitions were circulated online during the Arab uprising. The first petition was named "The Declaration of National Reform" which demanded a constitutional monarchy. This petition also reiterated the petitions of the year 2004[15]. The petition clearly reflected the fears of Sunni Islamists of outside influence, especially from the west that new trends which are emerging in the country would flood the streets again. The petitions demanded a gradual approach to political reform which is wrongly considered as liberal.

In February 2011, second petition was circulated online titled "*Nahwa dawat al huquq wa al muasasat*" (Towards a State of Right and Institutions). It demanded the elected legislative council, and separation of power between the King and Prime Minister. It also reiterated its commitment to Islamic principles without openly calling for 'constitutional monarchy'. This petition was signed by at least 9000 Sunni Islamists which also showed growing Islamist influence in the country. The third petition "*Matalibb al- Sahah al-saoudi*" (Demands of the Saudi youth) attracted more than 10000 signatures. This petition demanded concrete economic and

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[10] Ibid, House, p. 17-19.

[11] Hegghammer, Thomas and Stephane Lacroix (2007), "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman Al- 'Utubi' Revisited", *Middle East Journal,* 39:103-122,accessed 4 Jan 2017, URL: hegghammer.com/_.../Hegghammer-Lacroix_-_Rejectionist_Islamism_in_Saudi_Ara..

[12] Menrot, Pascal (2016), "Repression and Protest in Saudi Arabia", *Crown center for middle East studies,* 101, accessed 29th Jan 2017, URL: https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB101.pdf

[13] Alterman, J. and W. McCants (2015), —"Saudi Arabia: Islamists Rising and Falling", in John Alterman (eds.), *Religious Radicalism after the Arab Uprisings,* London: Rowmanand Littlefield.

[14] Ahmad, Talmiz (2013), *The Islamist Challenge in West Asia: Doctrinal and Political Competitions After the Arab Spring*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press.

[15] Wehrey, F. M. (2013). *The Forgotten Uprising in Eastern Saudi Arabia* (Vol. 14). Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

political demands. Liberals petition accused the government that it has deviated from the principle of Sharia principles due to the introduction of new laws and decrees. It has failed to follow the Wahhabi-Saudi state[16].

Petitions refrained from confronting the government directly. None of them supported open demonstrations for the demand for reform. Activists refrained from openly calling for the overthrow of the government due to fear of arrest or detention. These petitions were centered on local issues and regional concerns and ideological debates. Therefore, these petitions never resulted in a threat to the government. The regime started to repress them brutally.

Shia Uprising

Subsequently, the Shia reform movement in Saudi Arabia has taken into account local, regional, and global challenges. The Shia leader pushed for a violent battle against the regime during the first phase (1975–1980). The major goal of their campaign was to rid Islam of "Sufi customs and selective use of religion to boost the regime's legitimacy. The monthly newspaper "*al Tawarah al-Islamiyya*" became its main voice. The Iranian Revolution and subsequent riots in the towns of Safwa, Sihat, and Qateef, further radicalized the movement. They directly confronted the regime with an uncompromising attitude[17].

Shia groups, unlike others, were harassed by both Sunni clerics and certain state policies. They were forbidden to show their culture and they were not allowed to build mosques, funeral homes, or community halls. The majority of complaints were against harassment by the Sunni religious police. They perceived that this was due to their exclusion from the power structure of the state than their religious beliefs. This perception forced their leader to rethink their political position and their strategy for reform movements.

Shia discourse changed after 1988, signaling an end to the revolutionary movement. Shia criticism now began to focus on broader agendas like human rights violations and on the absence of constitutional privileges. In 1990 Sheikh Hassan al Saffar published *al-Ta'adudiya walHurriya fial-Islam* (Pluralism and Freedom in Islam) which greatly influenced the reform movements of Shia. They supported pluralism by giving Islamic references. this pushed the movement toward a more moderate discourse. The moderating trend led to the emergence of a new magzine titled "*al-Jazeera al-Arabia*" in January 1991. The magazine did no call for the overthrow of the government; instead, it focussed on human rights, tolerance, problems of public administration, and corruption. The popularity of this magazine pressurized the government to take the Shia reform movement more seriously[18].

The Shia joined the liberal Sunni Islamist in 2003 and published a petition titled, "Vision for Homeland". This has significant importance as the first time Sunni Islamists agreed to sign a petition with Shia. But the fall of Saddam Hussain made the Shia hopeful as Najaf, the Shia heartland liberated. There were calls to improve their own situation in Saudi Arabia. To avoid the conflicting situation with Sunni Ulemas, in the year 2003 they presented another petition titled "Partners in the nation". The main objectives of this petition were to demand

[16] Al-Rasheed, Madawi (2015), "Is It Always Good To Be King? Saudi Regime Resilience After The 2011 Arab Popular Uprisings", *LSE Middle East Centre paper series*, 12, Middle East Centre, LSE, London, UK.

[17] Fandy, M. (2001), *Saudi Arabia and the politics of dissent,* New York: Palgrave

[18] Ibid, Fandy, p 21-24

freedom of worship, official support for building religious establishments, admission to Saudi universities, etc. In June 2003 the first "National Dialogue" was held in Riyadh. National dialogue convened for four days. It saw the gathering of almost fifty clerics involving Wahhabi Ulema, Shia, and liberal Islamists. Official Media applauded National Dialogue as for the first time in history different ideologues were sitting together[19].

After 2003, Saudi Arabia's regional problems stemmed from the rise of Iran and Shia in the region. Their empowerment in Lebanon and Iraq has given rise to the same fate in Saudi Arabia. They also expected the government to end discrimination and protect them from anti-Shia fatwas. But Saudi state is a religious state that derives its legitimacy from religious doctrines that is almost anti-Shia. They were also portrayed as a threat to religion and Islam. Numerically, their population is around 10 percent to 15 percent and is mostly confined to Al-Hasa province. They are considered apostates by their majority part. Most of them hailed from Qatif and their religious teachings did at Najaf and Karbala in Iraq[20]. They were not initially active due to quietism and noninterference of local leadership. They found themselves caught in the middle of Saudi persecution and disdain and the subject of Iranian recruitment to subvert the Saudi regime. Historically, their response has moved between quietism, reconciliation, accommodation, and terrorism. The two important political factors that constantly impacted the fate of Shia are the high-ranking Wahhabi Ulema and Iran, the main political and religious rival of Saudi Arabia[21].

Muslim Brotherhood

Saudi Arabia and brotherhood relations were established since the formation of the Saudi state under Al-Saud. Hassan al Banna welcomed the Saudi state and blessed the proclamation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in a bid to stop the Fauds'(Egyptian ruler) claim for a new Caliph. Although Abdul Aziz was generous towards the Muslim Brotherhood, he did not want it to have a branch in his country. After his failed assassination attempt, Gamal Abdel Nasser outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood and prosecuted them. This heavy clampdown forced them to take refuge in neighboring countries, mostly Saudi Arabia. In an effort to oppose Nasser's communism and pan-Arabism, Saudi King Faisal also welcomed them. Saudi Arabia was simultaneously seeking teachers and engineers to modernise their kingdom, but they had a need that they be conservative for its newly established educational system[22].

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[19] Teitelbaum, J. (2010), "The Shiites of Saudi Arabia". *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, *10*, 72+, URL: https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A347656536/AONE?u=anon~8ce88445&sid=googleScholar&xid=14db296f

[20] The Sunna and Shi'a in History: Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East13 Matthiesen, Toby(2014), *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism,* Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.
*Sunni and Shia Muslims – the two major branches of Islam – mark the day in separate ways. For Sunnis, Ashura is considered a day of atonement. Some choose to fast for two days, as the Prophet Muhammad did when he observed Jews doing the same for their Day of Atonement. For Shia Muslims, Ashura also commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, in the year 680 at Karbala in modern-day Iraq.

[21] Constrain, Samia (2016), "Shia in Saudi Arabia: A History of Discrimination, Oppression", *Alternativelives International Journal,* retrieved 12 Jan 2017, URL: http://www.alterinter.org/spip.php?article4502.

[22] Mazel, Zavi (2020), "The Muslim Brotherhood Stealth's expansion in Europe", *GIS,* December 4, 2020, [online:web], accessed December 30, 2021, URL: https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/muslim-brotherhood-europe/

They published books, organized discussion circles, and slowly took control of the intellectual life of Saudi society. The relationship between the state and the brotherhood was tainted due to the Saudis' support of the Iraq invasion and the subsequent arrival of foreign troops. In 2002, then Minister of Defense, Prince Nayef, went as far as declaring that the Muslim Brotherhood was indeed the main cause of distress in the region and the main source of problems for Saudi Arabia[23]. Brotherhood also supported the Sahwa movement to push for political reform. It also supported the Arab Spring in Saudi Arabia. The ruling family was also alarmed by Brotherhood's success in the Arab spring. It emerged as a major political force in Tunisia, Egypt, and in Turkey. Saudi Arabia is also upset by the situation in Egypt which has close human and economic ties with the regime.

The Middle-Class Dilemma

Due to state patronage, a middle class developed in Saudi Arabia. Massive bureaucracy makes up the majority of this class, however, a tiny portion is made up of elements from the private sector. Every dictatorship throughout history has made an effort to maintain this class' co-optation through attractive state posts. The middle class remained loyal to the monarchy as long as their status quo was upheld, but after facing financial hardship, they also embraced the political movement. The large capitalists who benefited from state contractors, however, continued to back the autocratic regime.

The Kuwait War altered this circumstance. The GDP of Saudi Arabia, which was US$ 18180 billion in 1981 but only US$ 8235 billion after the war, is evidence of this. The reduction of subsidies was another effect of this decrease. As a result, at first, their complaints were only economic in character, but there were also emerging political changes. The state's financial support for healthcare, education, and other social services decreased over time. Nearly all nations experienced this economic reorganization. Their development strategy was not intended to encourage economic growth but rather to win short- or long-term political support. By actively favoring some groups over others, the state has created and thrived patronage networks[24]. The lack of fundamental freedoms meant that people were unable to express their discontent, which finally resulted in the 2011 uprisings.

Birdsall (2015) also defined the middle class as a "vulnerable" category, a group of people who are neither financially secure nor below the world poverty line[25]. In most of such cases the governments of the WANA region acted as a predator rather than a benefactor towards this vulnerable category, and, furthermore, people such as these were left out of the safety net of state patronage, consequently, they were left out of the benefits of development funding.

Although Arab countries spent a lot on subsidies like health education, the adjustments related to budget cuts reduced the accessibility and quality of public services. In response to this many families turned to costly private education and health services, which turned out to be an increased burden on their out-of-pocket expenditures.

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[23] http://www.lindro.it/saudi-arabia-and-muslim-brotherhood/

[24] United Nations Beriut (2014),Arab Middle Class Measurement and role in driving change,Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2014 URL: https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/e_escwa_edgd_14_2_e.pdf.

[25] Birdsall, N. (2015). Does the rise of the middle class lock in good government in the developing world?. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 27(2), 217-229.

Moreover, the freezing of state-sponsored jobs and migrant workers made the situation very grim. These additional costs resulted in the squeezing of middle-class budgets and many families slipped into poverty. In 2012, 26 percent of the region's youth were unemployed against the global average of 13 percent. The female employment rate is very high as compared to their male counterpart. This region now has the world's lowest return on education and hence offers little incentive to invest in schooling. Furthermore, the reforms widely diverged from international development goals. Consequently, inequality has soared across this region[26]. A strong public education system, a robust health care system, and a clear voice in decision-making are prerequisites for the development of the middle class. There has always been a drive to retain the status quo while also delegating authority to those who were left behind since economic developments effectively establish an alternate basis of power as they cause a redistribution of wealth and hence control[27].

Rentierism and Dependency

The central idea of rentierism in an oil-based economy is that oil revenues are the primary and dominant sources of State revenue[28]. The sources of revenue come from ownership of the oil resources rather than from production operations. The state can generate money independently of its citizens. Oil-rich states have separate sources of income, such as the oil rent, and do not tax their residents' income. The state's main purpose is to distribute resources, and in order to justify its control, it creates a patron-client relationship. The monarchies of the GCC are patriarchal and focus on the "cradle to grave well-being" of their people. The demands of political participation are always ignored on the basis of 'no representation without taxation".

citizens' dependency on the government for welfare prevents any kind of opposition element. On the other hand, economic activities and market forces are monitored and dominated by the state, not by economic and business groups. The private sector is not autonomous. To operate their businesses, they are reliant on government assistance. The economic structures remain divided, and the globalisation and liberalisation chances for growth have not resulted in the horizontal integration and growth of regional markets. Vertical in nature, globalisation has not considerably increased national autonomy. The overarching dependency of different sections of society on State patronage erodes their bargaining power for political reforms vis-a-vis the state[29].

The markets in the region are highly fragmented and intra-regional trade is subjected to many non-tariff barriers. Such fragmentations of national and regional markets, and border trade that aid in the generation of rent is dependent upon state patronage. These provisions help the government to return to the predation or patronage of

[26] Malik, Adil and Awadallah Bassem (2011), "the Economics of Arab Spring", *CSAE working paper series WPS*/2011-23, Oxford and Jeddah.

[27] Saif, Ibrahim(2011), "The Middle Class Transformations In The Arab World", Carnegie Middle East center, retrieved 29 Jan 2017, URL:http://carnegie-mec.org/2011/11/02/middle-class-and-transformations-in-arab-world-pub-45895

[28] Hossein, Mahdavy (1970), "The Pattern and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran", in M.A.Cook (eds.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, retrived 30Jan 2017, URL: http://www-personal.umich.edu/~twod/oil-s2010/rents/Mahdavy.pdf.

[29] Haque, Mohammad Imdadul (2020), "The Growth of Private Sector and Financial Development in Saudi Arabia" *Economies* 8, no. 2: 39. https://doi.org/10.3390/economies8020039

the business groups[30]. The demography of the region has not only become younger but also more educated. The connectivity of social media has raised expectations of the present younger generation in the region for their rights to political reforms and has created a virtual constituency for demand for change.

Weak Private Sector and Jobless Growth

The involvement of the private sector is one of the main components of the Saudi political economy. Regarding the private sector, there were two distinct themes that developed. First, the private sector is growing as a result of formal connections between the government and corporate elites or informal connections between certain businesspeople and specific government officials. The second topic is the state's predatory actions, in which the private sector was dependent on patronage and deliberate favors from the government. The 1970s oil revenue created an autonomous state free from social groupings, as it does not have to levy taxes or customs duties for its survival. The state was only concerned with the security of oil fields which is the basis for buying consent and favors.

There were four categories of merchants' families operating[31]. First were the traditional merchant families whose social and economic position helped King Aziz to consolidate the state power. With the advent of oil exploration, these families automatically benefitted. The second category was the merchants who successfully formed good links with Saudi ruling families and were able to gain key agencies and construction contacts. Third, were the families of the eastern province who established close relations with the Saudi Arabian Oil Company(ARAMCO) and built their initial wealth on the supply of goods to ARAMCO. Fourth, were those who were advisers, senior Ulemas, consultants, or physicians and had been able to enter in the business on this basis[32].

Due to enormous oil resources, a state-led developmental paradigm arose between 1970 and 1985. The state began three development programmes (1970–1975, 1975–1980, and 1980–1985) for socioeconomic reform. As the only agent for the inception, control, and maintenance of development, the state has now assumed the primary role. These strategies mainly concentrated on developing Islamic principles, culture, diversification, military assurance, and human resources. State-led capitalism was emphasised in each of these programmes. None of them expressly discussed the function and growth of the private sector. While other nations have used expropriation of private money to achieve the same goal, this tactic was born out of oil rents[33].

The period of 1985-2000 was a period where oil revenue declined due to low oil prices. At this time the state adopted three approaches. First, the state was initially reluctant to cut down subsidies in hope that the oil prices may recover. Second, when oil prices became substantially low, the government was forced to cut down expenditures. The size of the fiscal deficit was kept low by delaying payments and selling foreign assets. Third,

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[30] Ibid, Malik, 13-14

[31] Holt, P. M. (1981). [Review of *State and Society in Dār Fūr*, by R. S. O'Fahey]. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, *44*(2), 370–372. http://www.jstor.org/stable/616414

[32] Nimblock, Tim and Monica Malik (2007), *The political Economy of Saudi Arabia,* London: Routledge.

[33] Ibid, page 56-94.

they have to solely rely on private-sector investment to compensate for falling public-sector investment. Although the domestic investment climate was not conducive to foreign capital yet private sector did grow at the expense of cheap and skilled foreign labor[34].

Due to developments in the globalised world, the state-led capitalism model started to lose favour in the latter part of 2000, and policymakers began to see the benefits of relying on the private sector. Social issues and economic difficulties were the main drivers of the majority of these reform initiatives. A relatively low level of foreign investment, rising unemployment, the balance of payment crises, and inadequate facilities for people were some of these urgent challenges. Population growth increased the demand for jobs and social programs. New measures were prompted by the need for money, but at the same time, the political climate improved.

Oil prices began to rise in the early period of 2001. They were averaging $25 in 2001-02, reached $60 in 2005, $80 for a short time in 2006, and up to $94.1 in 2008[35]. The increased revenue from the oil this time did not slow down the pace of reform. Possible explanations can be made: First from their early reform experiences now Saudi regime has realized the volatility of the market and the financial problem it poses. Second, they were in talks with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for its membership, which required significant liberalization and competitive market condition, and the abolition of subsidies. Third, domestic political unrest became more open and violent. As the state withdrew its safety net, the living standard fell and there was a huge problem of unemployment. Fourth, Saudi Arabia became a subject of more scrutiny due to the 9/11 event. The conditions prevalent in Saudi Arabia at that time were feeding into international terrorism. The seventh plan (2000-04) and Eight Plan (2005-09) put special emphasis on managing population growth, structural adjustment, Saudization of the workforce, and investment in capital-intensive industries[36].

Adil Malik's study further proposes that there are at least five common reasons for the private sector failure in the Arab world, for example, there is the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of few, they are characterized as a security state, the region is experiencing youth bulge across the region and dominant public sector and weak private sector, which are the main hurdle of liberalization and democratization of the country. This region is also one of the most food-deficient regions in the world and costs the state a huge subsidy burden. The GCC imports 90 percent of food items[37]. By 2020 total food imports are expected to grow by 105 percent. Saudi Arabia alone imported US$ 3 billion of food items in 2010[38]. This region is witnessing a demographic transition. The future of Saudi Arabia critically depends on the youth bulge transformation in productive assets. The old social contracts have been broken in light of the Arab Spring. An independent sector

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[34] Looney, R.E. (1985), " The Evolution and Evaluation of Saudi Arabian Economic Planning", J*ournal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies,*9(1), accessed 11 Jan 2017, URL: http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/dsg/unpan044212.pdf

[35] The Statistica Portal, Average annual OPEC crude oil price from 1960 to 2016 (in U.S. dollars per barrel), [online: web] accessed 13 Jan 2017, URL: https://www.statista.com/statistics/262858/change-in-opec-crude-oil-prices-since-1960/

[36] Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority, Annual Report Forty Fifth, retrieved 19 Jan 2017, URL: http://www.sama.gov.sa/en-US/EconomicReports/Pages/AnnualReport.aspx.

[37] Reutors (2016, September 19), Food For Thought : Water Starved GCC imports 90% of Eatables, *Arab News,* retrieved 12 Jan 2017, URL: http://www.arabnews.com/node/986406/middle-east

[38] Beer, Eliot (2014, August 2014), GCC Imports to Double in a Decade to $53bn, [online: web], accessed 13 Jan 2017, URL:http://www.foodnavigator.com/Regions/Middle-East/GCC-food-imports-to-double-in-a-decade-to-53bn

is the need of the hour which can serve as a strong impetus for economic and political reform. The Monarchs are no longer in a position to ignore these internal pressures. Either they have to genuinely delegate their power and build strong institutions or maybe another Arab spring event is waiting to happen.

Youth and ICT

Historically 'Information and Communication Technologies' (ICT) have been used as a weapon for postcolonial struggles and against cultural imperialism and colonization in third-world countries. As 12th Arab Human Development report highlights that there is no simple blueprint to make it clear for developing countries as to how and what model it should embrace[39].

Since Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, it always restricted the penetration of ICT deeper into society. Manual Castells explains it by arguing that the power of the state is eroded while the individual citizen's capacity increases and a state society become unordered. Political mobilization is no longer confined to public space and it cannot be constrained by state agents, hence it poses a challenge to the monarchy in terms of security, sovereignty, transparency, and accountability. Historical reasons are also responsible for the low penetration of ICT. These include initial socialization, low quality of formal education, low investment and research in higher education, and political exploitation of religion(AHDR 2003:21-23)[40].

The first Quarter of 2011 saw a substantial shift in social media usage to disseminate information, organize demonstrations as both pro and anti-government, and raise awareness of ongoing events locally and globally. At the same time, governments also urged people to participate in the government processes, while in other cases blocking access to websites and monitoring and controlling information on these sites[41].

Saudi Arabia also witnessed the 4th largest increase in Facebook users during the 2011 protests. However, the usage of Twitter saw a very subtle increase in Saudi Arabia compared to neighboring countries. Social media tools have also broken-down gender norms. Female users were 32 percent in 2010 which grew to 33.5 percent in the first quarter of 2011[42]. Twitter traffic remained low in terms of volume in Saudi Arabia, especially as compared to Bahrain, which has witnessed the largest protest among the GCC countries. The range for mobile phones moves from lows of 47 per 100 populations in Yemen to more than 150/per 100 in Kuwait, Libya, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Day of rage protest was organized on March 11 it was an online call. Khalid-al-Johani was detained because he was interviewed by BBC for alone protesting in Riyadh. Over the night he was known online as "the only brave man in Saudi Arabia". Women also organized the "Baladi" campaign for their electoral rights. Saudi Arabia is facing a more challenging situation nowadays than in 2011. Most of the protesting youth

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[39] Murphy,Emma (2007), "ICT and the Gulf Arab States: A force for Democracy" in Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Steven Wright (eds.), *Reform in Middle East Oil Monarchies,* Wales: ITHACA Press.

[40] United Nations Development Programme, Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society, retrived 1 Jan 2017, URL: hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/rbas_ahdr2003_en.pdf.

[41] Dubai School of Government (2011), Arab Social Media Development Report 2011, 1 (1), retrieved 4 Jan 2017, URL: http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/dsg/unpan044212.pdf

[42] Ibid, 32-39

have posted videos on YouTube in a desperate move to attract attention to their economic and political marginalization and its consequences[43].

As revolutions are neither started nor executed by the technologies, but instead by the people. But social media played an important role in opinion framing, education awareness. The empirical evidence above has shown the crucial role played by the technologies in starting protests against the regimes. Social media help them to reach every corner of the country and it also became the only medium of contact at the time of increased securitization by the state to curtail dissent.

Conclusion

The conventional thought about the Gulf monarchies that there is no need for politics where desert kings have been blessed by Islam (the primacy uniting force) and endless oil revenue seemed to have failed. The assumption that Islam provided a clear framework for every issue in society that can be discussed without involving the common people also failed as the demand for reform existed since the state came into existence. Dozens of political movements mushroomed in the country and the common feature was the rule of Sharia. They altogether rejected western-style democracy. Since the rentier economy of Saudi is very much dependent upon the volatile oil prices hence, they put a restraint on the rulers' capacity to buy the consent of the people.

This problem is further exacerbated by the increasing employable youth population, increasing fiscal deficit, and radicalization of Saudi youths. So grave economic difficulties and social tensions left little choice in front of the Al-Saud but to the opening of limited political space and introduce economic and educational reform. These internal pressures seemed to be emergent from the state's three-fold dilemmas. First, King fears that if he concedes reform under these pressures, they will open the gates for the flood that may sweep away their regimes, as concessions will only strengthen these local demands. Second, their legitimacy lies in their obedience to Wahhabism. This is the primary legitimacy source of the Saudi regime.

Hence any reform demand initiative must be in congruence with the conservative Wahhabi principle. So there remains little room for the king to initiate any liberal reform. Third, there is fear of cascading effects that any level of serious reforms might have on the cohesion of the ruling families themselves, and consequently on their survival. One thing is very clear from the chapter that demands for reform existed since the inception of the state and it grew as the state become more consolidated. The only drawback is that people never made a consensus on any kind of reform and hence the regime never felt threatened. The regime also used its divisions to counter them.

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[43]Al-Rasheed, Madavi (2014), Marginalized Saudi Youth Launch Virtual Protests, Al-monitor, [online: web], retrieved 5 Jan 2017, URL: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/saudi-protest-youtube-social-media-economy.html