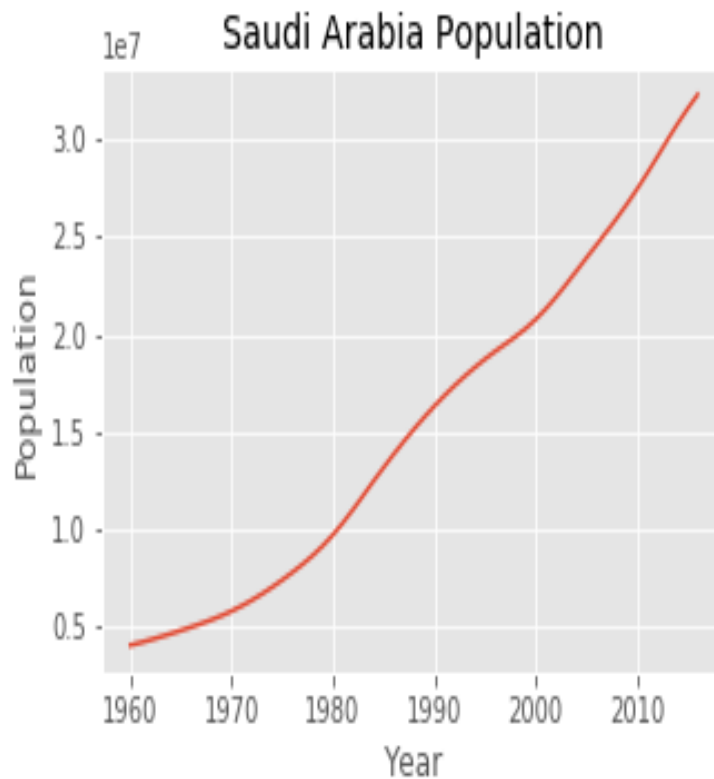


Saudi Arabia



Saudi Arabia ([listen](#)), ([listen](#))), officially the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), is a sovereign Arab state in Western Asia constituting the bulk of the Arabian Peninsula. With a land area of approximately 2,150,000 km² (830,000 sq mi), Saudi Arabia is geographically the fifth-largest state in Asia and second-largest state in the Arab world after Algeria. Saudi Arabia is bordered by Jordan and Iraq to the north, Kuwait to the northeast, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates to the east, Oman to the southeast and Yemen to the south. It is separated from Israel and Egypt by the Gulf of Aqaba. It is the only nation with both a Red Sea coast and a Persian Gulf coast and most of its terrain consists of arid desert and mountains. The area of modern-day Saudi Arabia formerly consisted of four distinct regions: Hejaz, Najd and parts of Eastern Arabia (Al-Ahsa) and Southern Arabia ('Asir). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 by Ibn Saud. He united the four regions into a single state through a series of conquests beginning in 1902 with the capture of Riyadh, the ancestral home of his family, the House of Saud. Saudi Arabia has since been an absolute monarchy, effectively a hereditary dictatorship governed along Islamic lines. The ultraconservative Wahhabi religious movement within Sunni Islam has been called "the predominant feature of Saudi culture", with its global spread largely financed by the oil and gas trade. Saudi Arabia is sometimes called "the Land of the Two Holy Mosques" in reference to Al-Masjid al-Haram (in Mecca) and Al-Masjid an-Nabawi (in Medina), the two holiest places in Islam. The state has a total population of 28.7 million, of which 20 million are Saudi nationals and 8 million are foreigners. The state's official language is Arabic. Petroleum was discovered on 3 March 1938 and followed up by several other finds in the Eastern Province. Saudi Arabia has since become the world's largest oil producer and exporter, controlling the world's second largest oil reserves and the sixth largest gas reserves. The kingdom is categorized as a World Bank high-income economy with a high Human Development Index and is the only Arab country to be part of the G-20 major economies. However, the economy of Saudi Arabia is the least diversified in the Gulf Cooperation Council, lacking any significant service or production sector (apart from the extraction of resources). The state has attracted criticism for its treatment of women and use of capital punishment. Saudi Arabia

is a monarchical autocracy, has the fourth highest military expenditure in the world and SIPRI found that Saudi Arabia was the world's second largest arms importer in 2010–2014. Saudi Arabia is considered a regional and middle power. In addition to the GCC, it is an active member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and OPEC. == Etymology == Following the unification of the Hejaz and Nejd kingdoms, the new state was named al-Mamlakah al-**Arabīyah** as-Su**ūdīyah** (a transliteration of **المملكة العربية السعودية** in Arabic) by royal decree on 23 September 1932 by its founder, Abdulaziz Al Saud (Ibn Saud). Although this is normally translated as "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" in English, it literally means "the Saudi Arab kingdom", or "the Arab Saudi Kingdom". The word "Saudi" is derived from the element as-Su**ūdīyah** in the Arabic name of the country, which is a type of adjective known as a nisba, formed from the dynastic name of the Saudi royal family, the Al Saud (**السعود**). Its inclusion expresses the view that the country is the personal possession of the royal family. Al Saud is an Arabic name formed by adding the word Al, meaning "family of" or "House of", to the personal name of an ancestor. In the case of the Al Saud, this is the father of the dynasty's 18th-century founder, Muhammad bin Saud. == History == There is evidence that human habitation in the Arabian Peninsula dates back to about 125,000 years ago. It is now believed that the first modern humans to spread east across Asia left Africa about 75,000 years ago across the Bab-el-Mandeb connecting Horn of Africa and Arabia. === Before the foundation of Saudi Arabia === In ancient times the Arabian peninsula served as a corridor for trade and exhibited several civilizations. The history before the foundation of Saudi Arabia divided into two phases: pre-Islam and after Islam. ===== Pre-Islamic Arabia ===== Religions of the people of the Arabian Peninsula before Islam consisted of indigenous polytheistic beliefs, Arabian Christianity, Nestorian Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. ===== Al-Magar Civilization ===== Al-Magar is prehistoric civilisation that was founded in the center of the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in Najd. Al-Magar is where the first domestication of animals occurred, particularly the horse, during the Neolithic period. ===== Dilmun Civilization ===== Dilmun is one of the ancient civilizations in the Middle East and in the Arabian Peninsula. It was a major trading centre, and, at the height of its power, controlled the Persian Gulf trading routes. The Dilmun encompassed the east large side of the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. One of the earliest inscriptions naming Dilmun is that of King Ur-Nanshe of Lagash (c. 2300 BC) discovered in a door-socket: "The ships of Dilmun brought him wood as tribute from foreign lands ===== Thamud Civilization ===== Thamud is the name of an ancient civilization in the Hejaz known from the 1st millennium BC to near the time of Muhammad. More than 9,000 Thamudic inscriptions were recorded in south-west Saudi Arabia. ===== Nabatean Kingdom ===== The Nabataeans, also Nabateans (; Arabic: **النبط** al-**Anbāṭ** , compare to Ancient Greek: **Ναβαταῖοι**, Latin: Nabatæus), were an Arab people who inhabited northern Arabia and the Southern Levant, and whose settlements, most prominently the assumed capital city of Raqmu, now called Petra, in CE 37 – c. 100, gave the name of Nabatene to the borderland between Arabia and Syria, from the Euphrates to the Red Sea. Their loosely controlled trading network, which centered on strings of oases that they controlled, where agriculture was intensively practiced in limited areas, and on the routes that linked them, had no securely defined boundaries in the surrounding desert. Trajan conquered the Nabataean kingdom, annexing it to the Roman Empire, where their individual culture, easily identified by their characteristic finely potted painted ceramics, was adopted into the larger Greco-Roman culture. They were later converted to Christianity. Jane Taylor, a writer, describes them as "one of the most gifted peoples of the ancient world". ===== Kingdom of Lihyan ===== The kingdom of Lihyan (Arabic: **ليحان**) or Dedan is an Ancient North Arabian kingdom. It was located in northwestern of the now-day Saudi Arabia, and is known for its Ancient North Arabian inscriptions dating to ca. the 6th to 4th centuries BC. ===== Kindah Kingdom ===== Kindah was a tribal kingdom that was established in the Najd in central Arabia. Its kings exercised an influence over a number of associated tribes more by personal prestige than by coercive settled authority. Their first capital was Qaryat Dh**āt** K**hil**, today known as Qaryat al-F**w**. ===== Middle Ages and rise of Islam ===== Shortly before the advent of Islam, apart from urban trading settlements (such as Mecca and Medina), much of what was to become Saudi Arabia was populated by nomadic pastoral tribal societies. The Islamic prophet Muhammad, however, was born in Mecca in about 571 A.D. In the early 7th century, Muhammad united the various tribes of the peninsula and created a single Islamic religious polity. Following his death in 632, his followers rapidly expanded the territory under Muslim rule beyond Arabia, conquering huge and unprecedented swathes of territory (from the Iberian Peninsula in west to modern day Pakistan in east) in a matter of decades. Arabia soon became a more politically peripheral region of the Muslim world as the focus shifted to the vast and newly conquered lands. Arab dynasties, originating from modern-day Saudi

Arabia, Hejaz in particular, founded the Rashidun (632–661), Umayyad (661–750), Abbasid (750–1517) and the Fatimid (909–1171) caliphates. From the 10th century to the early 20th century Mecca and Medina were under the control of a local Arab ruler known as the Sharif of Mecca, but at most times the Sharif owed allegiance to the ruler of one of the major Islamic empires based in Baghdad, Cairo or Istanbul. Most of the remainder of what became Saudi Arabia reverted to traditional tribal rule. For much of the 10th century the Isma'ili-Shi'ite Qarmatians were the most powerful force in the Persian Gulf. In 930, the Qarmatians pillaged Mecca, outraging the Muslim world, particularly with their theft of the Black Stone. In 1077–1078, an Arab Sheikh named Abdullah bin Ali Al Uyuni defeated the Qarmatians in Bahrain and Al-Hasa with the help of the Great Seljuq Empire and founded the Uyunid dynasty. The Uyunid Emirate later underwent expansion with its territory stretching from Najd to the Syrian desert. They were overthrown by the Ufurids in 1253. Ufurid rule was weakened after Persian rulers of Hormuz captured Bahrain and Qatif in 1320. The vassals of Ormuz, the Shia Jarwanid dynasty came to rule eastern Arabia in the 14th century. The Jabrids took control of the region after overthrowing the Jarwanids in the 15th century and clashed with Hormuz for more than 2 decades over the region for its economic revenues, until finally agreeing to pay tribute in 1507. Al-Muntafiq tribe later took over the region and came under Ottoman suzerainty. The Bani Khalid tribe later revolted against them in 17th century and took control. Their rule extended from Iraq to Oman at its height and they too came under Ottoman suzerainty. ===== Ottoman Hejaz ===== In the 16th century, the Ottomans added the Red Sea and Persian Gulf coast (the Hejaz, Asir and Al-Ahsa) to the Empire and claimed suzerainty over the interior. One reason was to thwart Portuguese attempts to attack the Red Sea (hence the Hejaz) and the Indian Ocean. Ottoman degree of control over these lands varied over the next four centuries with the fluctuating strength or weakness of the Empire's central authority. ===== Foundation of the Saud dynasty ===== The emergence of what was to become the Saudi royal family, known as the Al Saud, began in Nejd in central Arabia in 1744, when Muhammad bin Saud, founder of the dynasty, joined forces with the religious leader Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of the Wahhabi movement, a strict puritanical form of Sunni Islam. This alliance formed in the 18th century provided the ideological impetus to Saudi expansion and remains the basis of Saudi Arabian dynastic rule today. The first "Saudi state" established in 1744 in the area around Riyadh, rapidly expanded and briefly controlled most of the present-day territory of Saudi Arabia, sacking Karbala in 1802 and capturing Mecca in 1803, but was destroyed by 1818 by the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, Mohammed Ali Pasha. A much smaller second "Saudi state", located mainly in Nejd, was established in 1824. Throughout the rest of the 19th century, the Al Saud contested control of the interior of what was to become Saudi Arabia with another Arabian ruling family, the Al Rashid. By 1891, the Al Rashid were victorious and the Al Saud were driven into exile in Kuwait. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire continued to control or have a suzerainty over most of the peninsula. Subject to this suzerainty, Arabia was ruled by a patchwork of tribal rulers, with the Sharif of Mecca having pre-eminence and ruling the Hejaz. In 1902, Abdul Rahman's son, Abdul Aziz—later to be known as Ibn Saud—recaptured control of Riyadh bringing the Al Saud back to Nejd. Ibn Saud gained the support of the Ikhwan, a tribal army inspired by Wahhabism and led by Faisal Al-Dawish, and which had grown quickly after its foundation in 1912. With the aid of the Ikhwan, Ibn Saud captured Al-Ahsa from the Ottomans in 1913. In 1916, with the encouragement and support of Britain (which was fighting the Ottomans in World War I), the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali, led a pan-Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire to create a united Arab state. Although the Arab Revolt of 1916 to 1918 failed in its objective, the Allied victory in World War I resulted in the end of Ottoman suzerainty and control in Arabia. Ibn Saud avoided involvement in the Arab Revolt, and instead continued his struggle with the Al Rashid. Following the latter's final defeat, he took the title Sultan of Nejd in 1921. With the help of the Ikhwan, the Hejaz was conquered in 1924–25 and on 10 January 1926, Ibn Saud declared himself King of the Hejaz. A year later, he added the title of King of Nejd. For the next five years, he administered the two parts of his dual kingdom as separate units. After the conquest of the Hejaz, the Ikhwan leadership's objective switched to expansion of the Wahhabist realm into the British protectorates of Transjordan, Iraq and Kuwait, and began raiding those territories. This met with Ibn Saud's opposition, as he recognized the danger of a direct conflict with the British. At the same time, the Ikhwan became disenchanted with Ibn Saud's domestic policies which appeared to favor modernization and the increase in the number of non-Muslim foreigners in the country. As a result, they turned against Ibn Saud and, after a two-year struggle, were defeated in 1929 at the Battle of Sabilla, where their leaders were massacred. In 1932 the two kingdoms of the Hejaz and Nejd were united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. ===== Post-unification ===== The new kingdom was reliant on limited agriculture and pilgrimage

revenues. In 1938, vast reserves of oil were discovered in the Al-Ahsa region along the coast of the Persian Gulf, and full-scale development of the oil fields began in 1941 under the US-controlled Aramco (Arabian American Oil Company). Oil provided Saudi Arabia with economic prosperity and substantial political leverage internationally. Cultural life rapidly developed, primarily in the Hejaz, which was the center for newspapers and radio. However, the large influx of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia in the oil industry increased the pre-existing propensity for xenophobia. At the same time, the government became increasingly wasteful and extravagant. By the 1950s this had led to large governmental deficits and excessive foreign borrowing. In 1953, Saud of Saudi Arabia succeeded as the king of Saudi Arabia, on his father's death, until 1964 when he was deposed in favor of his half brother Faisal of Saudi Arabia, after an intense rivalry, fueled by doubts in the royal family over Saud's competence. In 1972, Saudi Arabia gained a 20% control in Aramco, thereby decreasing US control over Saudi oil. In 1973, Saudi Arabia led an oil boycott against the Western countries that supported Israel in the Yom Kippur War against Egypt and Syria. Oil prices quadrupled. In 1975, Faisal was assassinated by his nephew, Prince Faisal bin Musaid and was succeeded by his half-brother King Khalid. By 1976, Saudi Arabia had become the largest oil producer in the world. Khalid's reign saw economic and social development progress at an extremely rapid rate, transforming the infrastructure and educational system of the country; in foreign policy, close ties with the US were developed. In 1979, two events occurred which greatly concerned the government, and had a long-term influence on Saudi foreign and domestic policy. The first was the Iranian Islamic Revolution. It was feared that the country's Shi'ite minority in the Eastern Province (which is also the location of the oil fields) might rebel under the influence of their Iranian co-religionists. There were several anti-government uprisings in the region such as the 1979 Qatif Uprising. The second event was the Grand Mosque Seizure in Mecca by Islamist extremists. The militants involved were in part angered by what they considered to be the corruption and un-Islamic nature of the Saudi government. The government regained control of the mosque after 10 days and those captured were executed. Part of the response of the royal family was to enforce a much stricter observance of traditional religious and social norms in the country (for example, the closure of cinemas) and to give the Ulema a greater role in government. Neither entirely succeeded as Islamism continued to grow in strength. In 1980, Saudi Arabia bought out the American interests in Aramco. King Khalid died of a heart attack in June 1982. He was succeeded by his brother, King Fahd, who added the title "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques" to his name in 1986 in response to considerable fundamentalist pressure to avoid use of "majesty" in association with anything except God. Fahd continued to develop close relations with the United States and increased the purchase of American and British military equipment. The vast wealth generated by oil revenues was beginning to have an even greater impact on Saudi society. It led to rapid technological (but not cultural) modernisation, urbanization, mass public education and the creation of new media. This and the presence of increasingly large numbers of foreign workers greatly affected traditional Saudi norms and values. Although there was dramatic change in the social and economic life of the country, political power continued to be monopolized by the royal family leading to discontent among many Saudis who began to look for wider participation in government. In the 1980s, Saudi Arabia spent \$25 billion in support of Saddam Hussein in the Iran–Iraq War. However, Saudi Arabia condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and asked the US to intervene. King Fahd allowed American and coalition troops to be stationed in Saudi Arabia. He invited the Kuwaiti government and many of its citizens to stay in Saudi Arabia, but expelled citizens of Yemen and Jordan because of their governments' support of Iraq. In 1991, Saudi Arabian forces were involved both in bombing raids on Iraq and in the land invasion that helped to liberate Kuwait. Saudi Arabia's relations with the West began to cause growing concern among some of the ulema and students of sharia law and was one of the issues that led to an increase in Islamist terrorism in Saudi Arabia, as well as Islamist terrorist attacks in Western countries by Saudi nationals. Osama bin Laden was a Saudi national (until stripped of his nationality in 1994) and was responsible for the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in East Africa and the 2000 USS Cole bombing near the port of Aden, Yemen. 15 of the 19 terrorists involved in September 11 attacks in New York City, Washington, D.C., and near Shanksville, Pennsylvania were Saudi nationals. Many Saudis who did not support the Islamist terrorists were nevertheless deeply unhappy with the government's policies. Islamism was not the only source of hostility to the government. Although now extremely wealthy, Saudi Arabia's economy was near stagnant. High taxes and a growth in unemployment have contributed to discontent, and has been reflected in a rise in civil unrest, and discontent with the royal family. In response, a number of limited "reforms" were initiated by King Fahd. In March 1992, he introduced the "Basic Law", which emphasised the duties and responsibilities of a ruler. In December

1993, the Consultative Council was inaugurated. It is composed of a chairman and 60 members—all chosen by the King. The King's intent was to respond to dissent while making as few actual changes in the status quo as possible. Fahd made it clear that he did not have democracy in mind: "A system based on elections is not consistent with our Islamic creed, which [approves of] government by consultation [shura]." In 1995, Fahd suffered a debilitating stroke, and the Crown Prince, Abdullah, assumed the role of de facto regent, taking on the day-to-day running of the country. However, his authority was hindered by conflict with Fahd's full brothers (known, with Fahd, as the "Sudairi Seven"). From the 1990s, signs of discontent continued and included, in 2003 and 2004, a series of bombings and armed violence in Riyadh, Jeddah, Yanbu and Khobar. In February–April 2005, the first-ever nationwide municipal elections were held in Saudi Arabia. Women were not allowed to take part in the poll. In 2005, King Fahd died and was succeeded by Abdullah, who continued the policy of minimum reform and clamping down on protests. The king introduced a number of economic reforms aimed at reducing the country's reliance on oil revenue: limited deregulation, encouragement of foreign investment, and privatization. In February 2009, Abdullah announced a series of governmental changes to the judiciary, armed forces, and various ministries to modernize these institutions including the replacement of senior appointees in the judiciary and the Mutaween (religious police) with more moderate individuals and the appointment of the country's first female deputy minister. On 29 January 2011, hundreds of protesters gathered in the city of Jeddah in a rare display of criticism against the city's poor infrastructure after deadly floods swept through the city, killing eleven people. Police stopped the demonstration after about 15 minutes and arrested 30 to 50 people. Since 2011, Saudi Arabia has been affected by its own Arab Spring protests. In response, King Abdullah announced on 22 February 2011 a series of benefits for citizens amounting to \$36 billion, of which \$10.7 billion was earmarked for housing. No political reforms were announced as part of the package, though some prisoners indicted for financial crimes were pardoned. On 18 March the same year, King Abdullah announced a package of \$93 billion, which included 500,000 new homes to a cost of \$67 billion, in addition to creating 60,000 new security jobs. Although male-only municipal elections were held on 29 September 2011, Abdullah allowed women to vote and be elected in the 2015 municipal elections, and also to be nominated to the Shura Council. == Politics == Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy. However, according to the Basic Law of Saudi Arabia adopted by royal decree in 1992, the king must comply with Sharia (Islamic law) and the Quran, while the Quran and the Sunnah (the traditions of Muhammad) are declared to be the country's constitution. No political parties or national elections are permitted. Critics regard it as a authoritarian dictatorship. The Economist rates the Saudi government as the fifth most authoritarian government out of 167 rated in its 2012 Democracy Index, and Freedom House gives it its lowest "Not Free" rating, 7.0 ("1=best, 7=worst") for 2013. In the absence of national elections and political parties, politics in Saudi Arabia takes place in two distinct arenas: within the royal family, the Al Saud, and between the royal family and the rest of Saudi society. Outside of the Al-Saud, participation in the political process is limited to a relatively small segment of the population and takes the form of the royal family consulting with the ulema, tribal sheikhs and members of important commercial families on major decisions. This process is not reported by the Saudi media. By custom, all males of full age have a right to petition the king directly through the traditional tribal meeting known as the majlis. In many ways the approach to government differs little from the traditional system of tribal rule. Tribal identity remains strong and, outside of the royal family, political influence is frequently determined by tribal affiliation, with tribal sheikhs maintaining a considerable degree of influence over local and national events. As mentioned earlier, in recent years there have been limited steps to widen political participation such as the establishment of the Consultative Council in the early 1990s and the National Dialogue Forum in 2003. The rule of the Al Saud faces political opposition from four sources: Sunni Islamist activism; liberal critics; the Shi'ite minority—particularly in the Eastern Province; and long-standing tribal and regionalist particularistic opponents (for example in the Hejaz). Of these, the Islamic activists have been the most prominent threat to the government and have in recent years perpetrated a number of violent or terrorist acts in the country. However, open protest against the government, even if peaceful, is not tolerated. Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that effectively bans women from driving: although there is no written law to that effect, in practice women are hindered from obtaining the locally issued licenses required to drive. However, on 26 September 2017, King Salman decreed that women will be allowed to gain driver's licenses in the Kingdom, effectively granting women the right to drive. On 25 September 2011, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah announced that women will have the right to stand and vote in future local elections and join the advisory Shura council as full members. === Monarchy and royal family === The king combines legislative, executive, and judicial functions and royal decrees

form the basis of the country's legislation. The king is also the prime minister, and presides over the Council of Ministers of Saudi Arabia and Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia. The royal family dominates the political system. The family's vast numbers allow it to control most of the kingdom's important posts and to have an involvement and presence at all levels of government. The number of princes is estimated to be at least 7,000, with most power and influence being wielded by the 200 or so male descendants of Ibn Saud. The key ministries are generally reserved for the royal family, as are the thirteen regional governorships. Long term political and government appointments have resulted in the creation of "power fiefdoms" for senior princes, such as those of King Abdullah, who had been Commander of the National Guard since 1963 (until 2010, when he appointed his son to replace him), former Crown Prince Sultan, Minister of Defence and Aviation from 1962 to his death in 2011, former crown prince Prince Nayef who was the Minister of Interior from 1975 to his death in 2012, Prince Saud who had been Minister of Foreign Affairs since 1975 and current King Salman, who was Minister of Defense and Aviation before he was crown prince and Governor of the Riyadh Province from 1962 to 2011. The current Minister of Defense is Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the son of King Salman and Crown Prince. The royal family is politically divided by factions based on clan loyalties, personal ambitions and ideological differences. The most powerful clan faction is known as the 'Sudairi Seven', comprising the late King Fahd and his full brothers and their descendants. Ideological divisions include issues over the speed and direction of reform, and whether the role of the ulema should be increased or reduced. There were divisions within the family over who should succeed to the throne after the accession or earlier death of Prince Sultan. When prince Sultan died before ascending to the throne on 21 October 2011, King Abdullah appointed Prince Nayef as crown prince. The following year Prince Nayef also died before ascending to the throne. The Saudi government and the royal family have often, over many years, been accused of corruption. In a country that is said to "belong" to the royal family and is named for them, the lines between state assets and the personal wealth of senior princes are blurred. The extent of corruption has been described as systemic and endemic, and its existence was acknowledged and defended by Prince Bandar bin Sultan (a senior member of the royal family) in an interview in 2001. Although corruption allegations have often been limited to broad undocumented accusations, specific allegations were made in 2007, when it was claimed that the British defence contractor BAE Systems had paid Prince Bandar US\$2 billion in bribes relating to the Al-Yamamah arms deal. Prince Bandar denied the allegations. Investigations by both US and UK authorities resulted, in 2010, in plea bargain agreements with the company, by which it paid \$447 million in fines but did not admit to bribery. Transparency International in its annual Corruption Perceptions Index for 2010 gave Saudi Arabia a score of 4.7 (on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is "highly corrupt" and 10 is "highly clean"). Saudi Arabia has undergone a process of political and social reform, such as to increase public transparency and good governance. However, nepotism and patronage are widespread when doing business in the country. The enforcement of the anti-corruption laws is selective and public officials engage in corruption with impunity. A number of prominent Saudi Arabian princes, government ministers, and businesspeople, including Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, were arrested in Saudi Arabia in November 2017. There has been mounting pressure to reform and modernize the royal family's rule, an agenda championed by King Abdullah both before and after his accession in 2005. The creation of the Consultative Council in the early 1990s did not satisfy demands for political participation, and, in 2003, an annual National Dialogue Forum was announced that would allow selected professionals and intellectuals to publicly debate current national issues, within certain prescribed parameters. In 2005, the first municipal elections were held. In 2007, the Allegiance Council was created to regulate the succession. In 2009, the king made significant personnel changes to the government by appointing reformers to key positions and the first woman to a ministerial post. However, the changes have been criticized as being too slow or merely cosmetic. == Al ash-Sheikh and role of the ulema == Saudi Arabia is almost unique in giving the ulema (the body of Islamic religious leaders and jurists) a direct role in government. The preferred ulema are of the Salafi persuasion. The ulema have also been a key influence in major government decisions, for example the imposition of the oil embargo in 1973 and the invitation to foreign troops to Saudi Arabia in 1990. In addition, they have had a major role in the judicial and education systems and a monopoly of authority in the sphere of religious and social morals. By the 1970s, as a result of oil wealth and the modernization of the country initiated by King Faisal, important changes to Saudi society were under way and the power of the ulema was in decline. However, this changed following the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979 by Islamist radicals. The government's response to the crisis included strengthening the ulema's powers and increasing their financial support: in particular, they were given greater control over the education system and allowed

to enforce stricter observance of Wahhabi rules of moral and social behaviour. After his accession to the throne in 2005, King Abdullah took steps to reduce the powers of the ulema, for instance transferring control over girls' education to the Ministry of Education. The ulema have historically been led by the Al ash-Sheikh, the country's leading religious family. The Al ash-Sheikh are the descendants of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the 18th century founder of the Wahhabi form of Sunni Islam which is today dominant in Saudi Arabia. The family is second in prestige only to the Al Saud (the royal family) with whom they formed a "mutual support pact" and power-sharing arrangement nearly 300 years ago. The pact, which persists to this day, is based on the Al Saud maintaining the Al ash-Sheikh's authority in religious matters and upholding and propagating Wahhabi doctrine. In return, the Al ash-Sheikh support the Al Saud's political authority thereby using its religious-moral authority to legitimize the royal family's rule. Although the Al ash-Sheikh's domination of the ulema has diminished in recent decades, they still hold the most important religious posts and are closely linked to the Al Saud by a high degree of intermarriage.

=== Legal system === The primary source of law is the Islamic Sharia derived from the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the traditions of the Prophet). Saudi Arabia is unique among modern Muslim states in that Sharia is not codified and there is no system of judicial precedent, giving judges the power to use independent legal reasoning to make a decision. Saudi judges tend to follow the principles of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence (or fiqh) found in pre-modern texts and noted for its literalist interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith. Because the judge is empowered to disregard previous judgments (either his own or of other judges) and may apply his personal interpretation of Sharia to any particular case, divergent judgements arise even in apparently identical cases, making predictability of legal interpretation difficult. The Sharia court system constitutes the basic judiciary of Saudi Arabia and its judges (qadi) and lawyers form part of the ulema, the country's Islamic scholars. Royal decrees are the other main source of law; but are referred to as regulations rather than laws because they are subordinate to the Sharia. Royal decrees supplement Sharia in areas such as labor, commercial and corporate law. Additionally, traditional tribal law and custom remain significant. Extra-Sharia government tribunals usually handle disputes relating to specific royal decrees. Final appeal from both Sharia courts and government tribunals is to the King and all courts and tribunals follow Sharia rules of evidence and procedure. The Saudi system of justice has been criticized for its "ultra-puritanical judges", who are often harsh in their sentencing (with beheading for the crime of witchcraft), but also sometimes overly lenient (for cases of rape or wife-beating) and slow, for example leaving thousands of abandoned women unable to secure a divorce. The system has also been criticized for being arcane, lacking in some of the safeguards of justice, and unable to deal with the modern world. In 2007, King Abdullah issued royal decrees reforming the judiciary and creating a new court system, and, in 2009, the King made a number of significant changes to the judiciary's personnel at the most senior level by bringing in a younger generation. Capital and physical punishments imposed by Saudi courts, such as beheading, stoning (to death), amputation, crucifixion and lashing, as well as the sheer number of executions have been strongly criticized. The death penalty can be imposed for a wide range of offences including murder, rape, armed robbery, repeated drug use, apostasy, adultery, witchcraft and sorcery and can be carried out by beheading with a sword, stoning or firing squad, followed by crucifixion. The 345 reported executions between 2007 and 2010 were all carried out by public beheading. The last reported execution for sorcery took place in September 2014. Although repeated theft can be punishable by amputation of the right hand, only one instance of judicial amputation was reported between 2007 and 2010. Homosexual acts are punishable by flogging or death. Atheism or "calling into question the fundamentals of the Islamic religion on which this country is based" is considered a terrorist crime. Lashings are a common form of punishment and are often imposed for offences against religion and public morality such as drinking alcohol and neglect of prayer and fasting obligations. Retaliatory punishments, or Qisas, are practised: for instance, an eye can be surgically removed at the insistence of a victim who lost his own eye. Families of someone unlawfully killed can choose between demanding the death penalty or granting clemency in return for a payment of diyya (blood money), by the perpetrator.

=== Human rights === Western-based organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch condemn both the Saudi criminal justice system and its severe punishments. There are no jury trials in Saudi Arabia and courts observe few formalities. Human Rights Watch, in a 2008 report, noted that a criminal procedure code had been introduced for the first time in 2002, but it lacked some basic protections and, in any case, had been routinely ignored by judges. Those arrested are often not informed of the crime of which they are accused or given access to a lawyer and are subject to abusive treatment and torture if they do not confess. At trial, there is a presumption of guilt and the accused is often unable to examine witnesses

and evidence or present a legal defense. Most trials are held in secret. An example of sentencing is that UK pensioner and cancer victim Karl Andree, aged 74, faced 360 lashes for home brewing alcohol. He was later released due to intervention by the British government. Saudi Arabia is widely accused of having one of the worst human rights records in the world. Human rights issues that have attracted strong criticism include the extremely disadvantaged position of women (see Women below), capital punishment for homosexuality, religious discrimination, the lack of religious freedom and the activities of the religious police (see Religion below). Between 1996 and 2000, Saudi Arabia acceded to four UN human rights conventions and, in 2004, the government approved the establishment of the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), staffed by government employees, to monitor their implementation. To date, the activities of the NSHR have been limited and doubts remain over its neutrality and independence. Saudi Arabia remains one of the very few countries in the world not to accept the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In response to the continuing criticism of its human rights record, the Saudi government points to the special Islamic character of the country, and asserts that this justifies a different social and political order. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom had unsuccessfully urged President Barack Obama to raise human rights concerns with King Abdullah on his March 2014 visit to the Kingdom especially the imprisonments of Sultan Hamid Marzooq al-Enezi, Saud Falih Awad al-Enezi, and Raif Badawi. Saudi Arabia also conducts about 2 executions per week, mainly for murder and drug smuggling, although there are people who have been executed for deserting Islam and crimes against the Faisal bin Musaid. The method of execution is normally beheading in public. For example, Ali Mohammed Baqir al-Nimr was arrested in 2012 when he was 17 years old for taking part in an anti-government protests in Saudi Arabia during the Arab Spring. In May 2014, Ali al-Nimr was sentenced to be publicly beheaded and crucified. In 2013, the government deported thousands of non-Saudis, many of them who were working illegally in the country or had overstayed their visas. Many reports abound, of foreigner workers being tortured either by employers or others. This resulted in many basic services suffering from a lack of workers, as many Saudi Arabian citizens are not keen on working in blue collar jobs. Saudi Arabia has a "Counter-Radicalization Program" the purpose of which is to "combat the spread and appeal of extremist ideologies among the general populous" and to "instill the true values of the Islamic faith, such as tolerance and moderation." This "tolerance and moderation" has been called into question by the Baltimore Sun, based on the reports from Amnesty International regarding Raif Badawi, and in the case of a man from Hafr al-Batin sentenced to death for rejecting Islam. In September 2015, Faisal bin Hassan Trad, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, has been elected Chair of the United Nations Human Rights Council panel that appoints independent experts. In January 2016, Saudi Arabia executed the prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr who had called for pro-democracy demonstrations and for free elections in Saudi Arabia. In August 2017, ten Nobel Peace Prize laureates, including Desmond Tutu and Lech Wałęsa, urged Saudi Arabia to stop the executions of 14 young people for participating in the 2011–12 Saudi Arabian protests. === Foreign relations === Saudi Arabia joined the UN in 1945 and is a founding member of the Arab League, Gulf Cooperation Council, Muslim World League, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (now the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation). It plays a prominent role in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and in 2005 joined the World Trade Organization. Saudi Arabia supports the intended formation of the Arab Customs Union in 2015 and an Arab common market by 2020, as announced at the 2009 Arab League summit. Since 1960, as a founding member of OPEC, its oil pricing policy has been generally to stabilize the world oil market and try to moderate sharp price movements so as to not jeopardise the Western economies. Between the mid-1970s and 2002 Saudi Arabia expended over \$70 billion in "overseas development aid". However, there is evidence that the vast majority was, in fact, spent on propagating and extending the influence of Wahhabism at the expense of other forms of Islam. There has been an intense debate over whether Saudi aid and Wahhabism has fomented extremism in recipient countries. The two main allegations are that, by its nature, Wahhabism encourages intolerance and promotes terrorism. Counting only the non-Muslim-majority countries, Saudi Arabia has paid for the construction of 1359 mosques, 210 Islamic centres, 202 colleges and 2000 schools. Saudi Arabia and the United States are strategic allies, and since President Barack Obama took office in 2009, the U.S. has sold \$110 billion in arms to Saudi Arabia. In the first decade of the 21st century the Saudi Arabia paid approximately \$100 million to American firms to lobby the U.S. government. The relations with the U.S. became strained following 9/11. American politicians and media accused the Saudi government of supporting terrorism and tolerating a jihadist culture. Indeed, Osama bin Laden and fifteen out of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia; in ISIL-occupied Raqqa, in mid-2014, all 12 judges were Saudi. According to

former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for al-Qaida, the Taliban, LeT and other terrorist groups... Donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide." Former CIA director James Woolsey described it as "the soil in which Al-Qaeda and its sister terrorist organizations are flourishing." The Saudi government denies these claims or that it exports religious or cultural extremism. In April 2016, Saudi Arabia has threatened to sell off \$750 billion in Treasury securities and other U.S. assets if Congress passes a bill that would allow the Saudi government to be sued over 9/11. In the Arab and Muslim worlds, Saudi Arabia is considered to be pro-Western and pro-American, and it is certainly a long-term ally of the United States. However, this and Saudi Arabia's role in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, particularly the stationing of U.S. troops on Saudi soil from 1991, prompted the development of a hostile Islamist response internally. As a result, Saudi Arabia has, to some extent, distanced itself from the U.S. and, for example, refused to support or to participate in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The consequences of the 2003 invasion and the Arab Spring led to increasing alarm within the Saudi monarchy over the rise of Iran's influence in the region. These fears were reflected in comments of King Abdullah, who privately urged the United States to attack Iran and "cut off the head of the snake". The tentative rapprochement between the US and Iran that began in secret in 2011 was said to be feared by the Saudis, and, during the run up to the widely welcomed deal on Iran's nuclear programme that capped the first stage of US–Iranian détente, Robert Jordan, who was U.S. ambassador to Riyadh from 2001 to 2003, said "[t]he Saudis' worst nightmare would be the [Obama] administration striking a grand bargain with Iran." A trip to Saudi by US President Barack Obama in 2014 included discussions of US–Iran relations, though these failed to resolve Riyadh's concerns. In order to protect the house of Khalifa, the monarchs of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia invaded Bahrain by sending military troops to quell the uprising of Bahraini people on 14 March 2011. The Saudi government considered the two-month uprising as a "security threat" posed by the Shia who represent the majority of Bahrain population. According to the Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki in March 2014, Saudi Arabia along with Qatar provided political, financial and media support to terrorists against the Iraqi government. On 25 March 2015, Saudi Arabia, spearheading a coalition of Sunni Muslim states, started a military intervention in Yemen against the Shia Houthis and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was deposed in the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. As of 2015, together with Qatar and Turkey, Saudi Arabia is openly supporting the Army of Conquest, an umbrella group of anti-government forces fighting in the Syrian Civil War that reportedly includes an al-Qaeda linked al-Nusra Front and another Salafi coalition known as Ahrar al-Sham. Following a number of incidents during the Hajj season, the deadliest of which killed at least 2,070 pilgrim in 2015 Mina stampede, Saudi Arabia has been accused of mismanagement and focusing on increasing money revenues while neglecting pilgrims' welfare. Saudi Arabia has been seen as a moderating influence in the Arab–Israeli conflict, periodically putting forward a peace plan between Israel and the Palestinians and condemning Hezbollah. Following the Arab Spring Saudi Arabia offered asylum to deposed President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and King Abdullah telephoned President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt (prior to his deposition) to offer his support. In early 2014 relations with Qatar became strained over its support for the Muslim Brotherhood, and Saudi Arabia's belief that Qatar was interfering in its affairs. In August 2014 both countries appeared to be exploring ways of ending the rift. === Military === Saudi Arabia has one of the highest percentages of military expenditure in the world, spending more than 10% of its GDP in its military. The Saudi military consists of the Royal Saudi Land Forces, the Royal Saudi Air Force, the Royal Saudi Navy, the Royal Saudi Air Defense, the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG, an independent military force), and paramilitary forces, totaling nearly 200,000 active-duty personnel. In 2005 the armed forces had the following personnel: the army, 75,000; the air force, 18,000; air defense, 16,000; the navy, 15,500 (including 3,000 marines); and the SANG had 75,000 active soldiers and 25,000 tribal levies. In addition, there is an Al Mukhabarat Al A'amah military intelligence service. The kingdom has a long-standing military relationship with Pakistan, it has long been speculated that Saudi Arabia secretly funded Pakistan's atomic bomb programme and seeks to purchase atomic weapons from Pakistan, in near future. The SANG is not a reserve but a fully operational front-line force, and originated out of Ibn Saud's tribal military-religious force, the Ikhwan. Its modern existence, however, is attributable to it being effectively Abdullah's private army since the 1960s and, unlike the rest of the armed forces, is independent of the Ministry of Defense and Aviation. The SANG has been a counterbalance to the Sudairi faction in the royal family: The late prince Sultan, former Minister of Defense and Aviation, was one of the so-called 'Sudairi Seven' and controlled the remainder of the armed forces until his death in 2011. Spending on defense and security has increased significantly since the mid-1990s and was

about US\$63.7 billion, as of 2016. Saudi Arabia ranks among the top 10 in the world in government spending for its military, representing about 7% of gross domestic product in 2005. Its modern high-technology arsenal makes Saudi Arabia among the world's most densely armed nations, with its military equipment being supplied primarily by the US, France and Britain. The United States sold more than \$80 billion in military hardware between 1951 and 2006 to the Saudi military. On 20 October 2010, the U.S. State Department notified Congress of its intention to make the biggest arms sale in American history—an estimated \$60.5 billion purchase by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The package represents a considerable improvement in the offensive capability of the Saudi armed forces. 2013 saw Saudi military spending climb to \$67bn, overtaking that of the UK, France and Japan to place fourth globally. The United Kingdom has also been a major supplier of military equipment to Saudi Arabia since 1965. Since 1985, the UK has supplied military aircraft—notably the Tornado and Eurofighter Typhoon combat aircraft—and other equipment as part of the long-term Al-Yamamah arms deal estimated to have been worth £43 billion by 2006 and thought to be worth a further £40 billion. In May 2012, British defence giant BAE signed a £1.9bn (\$3bn) deal to supply Hawk trainer jets to Saudi Arabia. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI, in 2010–14 Saudi Arabia became the world's second largest arms importer, receiving four times more major arms than in 2005–2009. Major imports in 2010–14 included 45 combat aircraft from the UK, 38 combat helicopters from the USA, 4 tanker aircraft from Spain and over 600 armoured vehicles from Canada. Saudi Arabia has a long list of outstanding orders for arms, including 27 more combat aircraft from the UK, 154 combat aircraft from the USA and a large number of armoured vehicles from Canada. Saudi Arabia received 41 per cent of UK arms exports in 2010–14. France authorized \$18 billion in weapons sales to Saudi Arabia in 2015 alone. The \$15 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia is believed to be the largest arms sale in Canadian history. In 2016, the European Parliament decided to temporarily impose an arms embargo against Saudi Arabia, as a result of the Yemen civilian population's suffering from the conflict with Saudi Arabia. In 2017, Saudi Arabia signed a 110 billion dollar arms deal with the United States. == Geography == Saudi Arabia occupies about 80% of the Arabian Peninsula (the world's largest peninsula), lying between latitudes 16° and 33° N, and longitudes 34° and 56° E. Because the country's southern borders with the United Arab Emirates and Oman are not precisely marked, the exact size of the country is undefined. The CIA World Factbook estimates 2,149,690 km² (830,000 sq mi) and lists Saudi Arabia as the world's 13th largest state. It is geographically the largest country in the Arabian Plate. Saudi Arabia's geography is dominated by the Arabian Desert, associated semi-desert and shrubland (see satellite image) and several mountain ranges and highlands. It is, in fact, a number of linked deserts and includes the 647,500 km² (250,001 sq mi) Rub' al Khali ("Empty Quarter") in the southeastern part of the country, the world's largest contiguous sand desert. There are a few lakes in the country but no permanent rivers, however wadis are very numerous. The fertile areas are to be found in the alluvial deposits in wadis, basins, and oases. The main topographical feature is the central plateau which rises abruptly from the Red Sea and gradually descends into the Nejd and toward the Persian Gulf. On the Red Sea coast, there is a narrow coastal plain, known as the Tihamah parallel to which runs an imposing escarpment. The southwest province of Asir is mountainous, and contains the 3,133 m (10,279 ft) Mount Sawda, which is the highest point in the country. Except for the southwestern province of Asir, Saudi Arabia has a desert climate with very high day-time temperatures and a sharp temperature drop at night. Average summer temperatures are around 45 °C (113 °F), but can be as high as 54 °C (129 °F). In the winter the temperature rarely drops below 0 °C (32 °F). In the spring and autumn the heat is temperate, temperatures average around 29 °C (84 °F). Annual rainfall is extremely low. The Asir region differs in that it is influenced by the Indian Ocean monsoons, usually occurring between October and March. An average of 300 mm (12 in) of rainfall occurs during this period, which is about 60% of the annual precipitation. === Animals === Animal life includes Arabian leopard, Arabian wolves, striped hyenas, mongooses, baboons, hares, sand cats, and jerboas. Animals such as gazelles, oryx, leopards and cheetahs were relatively numerous until the 19th century, when extensive hunting reduced these animals almost to extinction. Birds include falcons (which are caught and trained for hunting), eagles, hawks, vultures, sandgrouse, bulbuls etc. There are several species of snakes, many of which are venomous. Saudi Arabia is home to a rich marine life. The Red Sea in particular is a rich and diverse ecosystem. More than 1200 species of fish have been recorded in the Red Sea, and around 10% of these are found nowhere else. This also includes 42 species of deepwater fish. The rich diversity is in part due to the 2,000 km (1,240 mi) of coral reef extending along its coastline; these fringing reefs are 5000–7000 years old and are largely formed of stony acropora and porites corals. The reefs form platforms and sometimes lagoons along the coast and occasional other features such

as cylinders (such as the Blue Hole (Red Sea) at Dahab). These coastal reefs are also visited by pelagic species of Red Sea fish, including some of the 44 species of shark. The Red Sea also contains many offshore reefs including several true atolls. Many of the unusual offshore reef formations defy classic (i.e., Darwinian) coral reef classification schemes, and are generally attributed to the high levels of tectonic activity that characterize the area. Domesticated animals include the legendary Arabian horse, Arabian camel, sheep, goats, cows, donkeys, chickens etc. Reflecting the country's dominant desert conditions, Saudi Arabia's plant life mostly consists of herbs, plants and shrubs that require little water. The date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) is widespread. == Administrative divisions == Saudi Arabia is divided into 13 regions (Arabic: **منطقة**; manatiq id-riyya, sing. **منطقة**; mintaqah idariyya). The regions are further divided into 118 governorates (Arabic: **محافظة**; muhafazat, sing. **محافظة**; muhafazah). This number includes the 13 regional capitals, which have a different status as municipalities (Arabic: **بلدية**; amanah) headed by mayors (Arabic: **عمدة**; amin). The governorates are further subdivided into sub-governorates (Arabic: **مركز**; marakiz, sing. **مركز**; markaz). The 13 regions of Saudi Arabia. === Cities === == Economy == Saudi Arabia's command economy is petroleum-based; roughly 75% of budget revenues and 90% of export earnings come from the oil industry. It is strongly dependent on foreign workers with about 80% of those employed in the private sector being non-Saudi. Among the challenges to Saudi economy include halting or reversing the decline in per capita income, improving education to prepare youth for the workforce and providing them with employment, diversifying the economy, stimulating the private sector and housing construction, diminishing corruption and inequality. The oil industry comprises about 45% of Saudi Arabia's nominal gross domestic product, compared with 40% from the private sector (see below). Saudi Arabia officially has about 260 billion barrels (4.1×10^{10} m³) of oil reserves, comprising about one-fifth of the world's proven total petroleum reserves. In the 1990s, Saudi Arabia experienced a significant contraction of oil revenues combined with a high rate of population growth. Per capita income fell from a high of \$11,700 at the height of the oil boom in 1981 to \$6,300 in 1998. Taking into account the impact of the real oil price changes on the Kingdom's real gross domestic income, the real command-basis GDP was computed to be 330.381 billion 1999 USD in 2010. Increases in oil prices in the aughts helped boost per capita GDP to \$17,000 in 2007 dollars (about \$7,400 adjusted for inflation), but have declined since oil price drop in mid-2014. OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) limits its members' oil production based on their "proven reserves." Saudi Arabia's published reserves have shown little change since 1980, with the main exception being an increase of about 100 billion barrels (1.6×10^{10} m³) between 1987 and 1988. Matthew Simmons has suggested that Saudi Arabia is greatly exaggerating its reserves and may soon show production declines (see peak oil). From 2003–2013 "several key services" were privatized—municipal water supply, electricity, telecommunications—and parts of education and health care, traffic control and car accident reporting were also privatized. According to Arab News columnist Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg, "in almost every one of these areas, consumers have raised serious concerns about the performance of these privatized entities." The Tadawul All Share Index (TASI) of the Saudi stock exchange peaked at 16,712.64 in 2005, and closed at 8,535.60, at the end of 2013. In November 2005, Saudi Arabia was approved as a member of the World Trade Organization. Negotiations to join had focused on the degree to which Saudi Arabia is willing to increase market access to foreign goods and in 2000, the government established the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority to encourage foreign direct investment in the kingdom. Saudi Arabia maintains a list of sectors in which foreign investment is prohibited, but the government plans to open some closed sectors such as telecommunications, insurance, and power transmission/distribution over time. The government has also made an attempt at "Saudizing" the economy, replacing foreign workers with Saudi nationals with limited success. Saudi Arabia has had five-year "Development Plans" since 1970. Among its plans were to launch "economic cities" (e.g. King Abdullah Economic City) to be completed by 2020, in an effort to diversify the economy and provide jobs. As of 2013 four cities were planned. The King has announced that the per capita income is forecast to rise from \$15,000 in 2006 to \$33,500 in 2020. The cities will be spread around Saudi Arabia to promote diversification for each region and their economy, and the cities are projected to contribute \$150 billion to the GDP. In addition to petroleum and gas, Saudi also has a small gold mining sector in the Mahd adh Dhahab region and other mineral industries, an agricultural sector (especially in the southwest) based on dates and livestock, and large number of temporary jobs created by the roughly two million annual hajj pilgrims. Statistics on poverty in the kingdom are not available through the UN resources because the Saudi government does not issue any. The Saudi state discourages calling attention to or complaining about poverty. In December 2011, the Saudi interior ministry arrested three

reporters and held them for almost two weeks for questioning after they uploaded a video on the topic to YouTube. Authors of the video claim that 22% of Saudis may be considered poor (2009). Observers researching the issue prefer to stay anonymous because of the risk of being arrested. === Agriculture === Saudi Arabia encouraged desert agriculture by providing substantial subsidies as well as consuming 300 billion cubic meter of mostly non-renewable water reserves free of charge to grow alfalfa, cereals, meat and milk in the Arabian Desert. Consuming non-renewable groundwater resulted in the loss of an estimated four fifths of the total groundwater reserves by 2012. === Water supply and sanitation === Water supply and sanitation in Saudi Arabia is characterized by significant investments in seawater desalination, water distribution, sewerage and wastewater treatment leading to a substantial increase in access to drinking water and sanitation over the past decades. About 50% of drinking water comes from desalination, 40% from the mining of non-renewable groundwater and 10% from surface water, especially in the mountainous southwest of the country. The capital Riyadh, located in the heart of the country, is supplied with desalinated water pumped from the Persian Gulf over a distance of 467 km. Given the substantial oil wealth, water is provided almost for free. Despite improvements service quality remains poor. For example, in Riyadh water was available only once every 2.5 days in 2011, while in Jeddah it is available only every 9 days. Institutional capacity and governance in the sector are weak, reflecting general characteristics of the public sector in Saudi Arabia. Since 2000, the government has increasingly relied on the private sector to operate water and sanitation infrastructure, beginning with desalination and wastewater treatment plants. Since 2008, the operation of urban water distribution systems is being gradually delegated to private companies as well. == Demographics == The population of Saudi Arabia as of July 2013 is estimated to be 26.9 million, including between 5.5 million and 10 million non-nationalized immigrants, though the Saudi population has long proved difficult to accurately estimate due to Saudi leaders' historical tendency to artificially inflate census results. Saudi population has grown rapidly since 1950 when it was estimated to be 3 million, and for many years had one of the highest birthrates in the world at around 3% a year. The ethnic composition of Saudi citizens is 90% Arab and 10% Afro-Asian. Most Saudis live in Hejaz (35%), Najd (28%), and the Eastern Province (15%). Hejaz is the most populated region in Saudi Arabia. As late as 1970, most Saudis lived a subsistence life in the rural provinces, but in the last half of the 20th century the kingdom has urbanized rapidly. As of 2012 about 80% of Saudis live in urban metropolitan areas—specifically Riyadh, Jeddah, or Dammam. Its population is also quite young with over half the population under 25 years old. A large fraction are foreign nationals. (The CIA Factbook estimated that as of 2013 foreign nationals living in Saudi Arabia made up about 21% of the population. Other estimates are 30% or 33%) As recently as the early 1960s, Saudi Arabia's slave population was estimated at 300,000. Slavery was officially abolished in 1962. === Languages === The official language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic. The three main regional variants spoken by Saudis are Hejazi Arabic (about 6 million speakers), Najdi Arabic (about 8 million speakers), and Gulf Arabic (about 0.2 million speakers). Saudi Sign Language is the principal language of the deaf community. The large expatriate communities also speak their own languages, the most numerous of which are Tagalog (700,000), Rohingya (400,000), Urdu (380,000), and Egyptian Arabic (300,000). === Religions === Virtually all Saudi citizens are Muslim (officially, all are), and almost all Saudi residents are Muslim. Estimates of the Sunni population of Saudi Arabia range between 75% and 90%, with the remaining 10–25% being Shia Muslim. The official and dominant form of Sunni Islam in Saudi Arabia is commonly known as Wahhabism (proponents prefer the name Salafism, considering Wahhabi derogatory) and is often described as 'puritanical', 'intolerant', or 'ultra-conservative' by observers, and as "true" Islam by its adherents. It was founded in the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the eighteenth century. Other denominations, such as the minority Shia Islam, are systematically suppressed. According to estimates there are about 1,500,000 Christians in Saudi Arabia, almost all foreign workers. Saudi Arabia allows Christians to enter the country as foreign workers for temporary work, but does not allow them to practice their faith openly. The percentage of Saudi Arabian citizens who are Christians is officially zero, as Saudi Arabia forbids religious conversion from Islam (apostasy) and punishes it by death. In spite of this, a 2015 study estimates 60,000 Muslims have converted to Christianity in Saudi Arabia. According to Pew Research Center there are 390,000 Hindus in Saudi Arabia, almost all foreign workers. There may be a significant fraction of atheists and agnostics in Saudi Arabia, although they are officially called "terrorists". Apostasy is punishable by death in Saudi Arabia, hence non-believers hardly ever come out. === Foreigners === Saudi Arabia's Central Department of Statistics & Information estimated the foreign population at the end of 2014 at 33% (10.1 million). The CIA Factbook estimated that as of 2013 foreign nationals living in Saudi Arabia made up about 21% of

the population. Other sources report differing estimates. Indian: 1.3 million, Pakistani: 1.5 million, Egyptian: 900,000, Yemeni: 800,000, Bangladeshi: 400,000, Filipino: 500,000, Jordanian/Palestinian: 260,000, Indonesian: 250,000, Sri Lankan: 350,000, Sudanese: 250,000, Syrian: 100,000 and Turkish: 80,000. There are around 100,000 Westerners in Saudi Arabia, most of whom live in compounds or gated communities. Foreign Muslims who have resided in the kingdom for ten years may apply for Saudi citizenship. (Priority is given to holders of degrees in various scientific fields, and exception made for Palestinians who are excluded unless married to a Saudi national, because of Arab League instructions barring the Arab states from granting them citizenship.) Saudi Arabia is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. As Saudi population grows and oil export revenues stagnate, pressure for "Saudiization" (the replacement of foreign workers with Saudis) has grown, and the Saudi government hopes to decrease the number of foreign nationals in the country. Saudi Arabia expelled 800,000 Yemenis in 1990 and 1991 and has built a Saudi–Yemen barrier against an influx of illegal immigrants and against the smuggling of drugs and weapons. In November 2013, Saudi Arabia expelled thousands of illegal Ethiopian residents from the Kingdom. Various Human Rights entities have criticised Saudi Arabia's handling of the issue. Over 500,000 undocumented migrant workers — mostly from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Yemen — have been detained and deported since 2013. == Monarchs (1932–present) == King Abdulaziz (1932–1953); second longest reigning Saudi monarch. King Saud (1953–1964); third longest reigning Saudi monarch. King Faisal (1964–1975); fourth longest reigning Saudi monarch. King Khalid (1975–1982); sixth longest reigning Saudi monarch. King Fahd (1982–2005); longest reigning Saudi monarch. King Abdullah (2005–2015); fifth longest reigning Saudi monarch. King Salman (2015–present); current monarch. === Crown Princes (1933–present) === Crown Prince Saud bin Abdulaziz (1933–1953); became King. Crown Prince of King Abdulaziz. Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz (1953–1964); became King. Crown Prince of King Saud. Crown Prince Muhammad bin Abdulaziz (1964–1965); Resigned from post. Crown Prince of King Faisal. Crown Prince Khalid bin Abdulaziz (1965–1975); became King. Crown Prince of King Faisal. Crown Prince Fahd bin Abdulaziz (1975–1982); became King. Crown Prince of King Khalid. Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz (1982–2005); became King. Crown Prince of King Fahd. Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz (2005–2011); died in office. Crown Prince of King Abdullah. Crown Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz (2011–2012); died in office. Crown Prince of King Abdullah. Crown Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz (2012–2015); became King. Crown Prince of King Abdullah. Crown Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz (2015); removed from post. Crown Prince of King Salman. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Nayef (2015–2017); removed from post. Crown Prince of King Salman. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (2017–present); incumbent. Crown Prince of King Salman. === Second Deputy Prime Minister/Second-in-line (1965–2011) === Prince Fahd (1965–1975); became Crown Prince. Prince Abdullah (1975–1982); became Crown Prince. Prince Sultan (1982–2005); became Crown Prince. Prince Nayef (2009–2011); became Crown Prince. === Deputy Crown Prince/Second-in-line (2014–present) === Prince Muqrin (2014–2015); became Crown Prince. Prince Mohammad (2015); became Crown Prince. Son of Prince Nayef. Prince Mohammad (2015–2017); became Crown Prince. Defense Minister of Saudi Arabia. Son of King Salman. == Culture == Saudi Arabia has centuries-old attitudes and traditions, often derived from Arab civilization. This culture has been heavily influenced by the austere puritanical Wahhabi form of Islam, which arose in the eighteenth century and now predominates in the country. Wahhabi Islam has been called "the predominant feature of Saudi culture." === Religion in society === Its Hejaz region and its cities Mecca and Medina are the cradle of Islam, the destination of the hajj pilgrimage, the two holiest sites of Islam. Islam is the state religion of Saudi Arabia and its law requires that all citizens be Muslims. Neither Saudi citizens nor guest workers have the right of freedom of religion. The official and dominant form of Islam in the kingdom – Wahhabism—arose in the central region of Najd, in the eighteenth century. Proponents call the movement "Salafism", and believe that its teachings purify the practice of Islam of innovations or practices that deviate from the seventh-century teachings of Muhammad and his companions. The Saudi government has often been viewed as an active oppressor of Shia Muslims because of the funding of the Wahhabi ideology which denounces the Shia faith. Prince Bandar bin Sultan, Saudi ambassador to the United States, stated: "The time is not far off in the Middle East when it will be literally 'God help the Shia'. More than a billion Sunnis have simply had enough of them." Saudi Arabia is one of the few countries that have "religious police" (known as Haia or Mutaween), who patrol the streets "enjoining good and forbidding wrong" by enforcing dress codes, strict separation of men and women, attendance at prayer (salat) five times each day, the ban on alcohol, and other aspects of Sharia (Islamic law). (In the privacy of the home behavior can be far looser, and reports from the Daily

Mail and WikiLeaks indicate that the ruling Saudi Royal family applies a different moral code to itself, indulging in parties, drugs and sex.) Until 2016, the kingdom used the lunar Islamic calendar, not the international Gregorian calendar, but in 2016 the kingdom announced its switch to the Gregorian calendar for civil purposes. Daily life is dominated by Islamic observance. Businesses are closed three or four times a day for 30 to 45 minutes during business hours while employees and customers are sent off to pray. The weekend is Friday-Saturday, not Saturday-Sunday, because Friday is the holiest day for Muslims. For many years only two religious holidays were publicly recognized – **■d al-Fi■r** and **■d al-A■**. (**■d al-Fi■r** is "the biggest" holiday, a three-day period of "feasting, gift-giving and general letting go".) As of 2004 approximately half of the broadcast airtime of Saudi state television was devoted to religious issues. 90% of books published in the kingdom were on religious subjects, and most of the doctorates awarded by its universities were in Islamic studies. In the state school system, about half of the material taught is religious. In contrast, assigned readings over twelve years of primary and secondary schooling devoted to covering the history, literature, and cultures of the non-Muslim world comes to a total of about 40 pages. "Fierce religious resistance" had to be overcome to permit such innovations as paper money (in 1951), female education (1964), and television (1965) and the abolition of slavery (1962). Public support for the traditional political/religious structure of the kingdom is so strong that one researcher interviewing Saudis found virtually no support for reforms to secularize the state. Because of religious restrictions, Saudi culture lacks any diversity of religious expression, buildings, annual festivals and public events. Celebration of other (non-Wahhabi) Islamic holidays, such as the Muhammad's birthday and the Day of Ashura, (an important holiday for the 10–25% of the population that is Sh■a Muslim), are tolerated only when celebrated locally and on a small scale. Shia also face systematic discrimination in employment, education, the justice system according to Human Rights Watch. Non-Muslim festivals like Christmas and Easter are not tolerated at all, although there are nearly a million Christians as well as Hindus and Buddhists among the foreign workers. No churches, temples or other non-Muslim houses of worship are permitted in the country. Proselytizing by non-Muslims and conversion by Muslims to another religion is illegal, and as of 2014 the distribution of "publications that have prejudice to any other religious belief other than Islam" (such as Bibles), was reportedly punishable by death. In legal compensation court cases (Diyya) non-Muslim are awarded less than Muslims. Atheists are legally designated as terrorists. And at least one religious minority, the Ahmadiyya Muslims, had its adherents deported, as they are legally banned from entering the country.

==== Islamic heritage sites ==== Saudi Wahhabism is hostile to any reverence given to historical or religious places of significance for fear that it may give rise to 'shirk' (idolatry), and the most significant historic Muslim sites (in Mecca and Medina) are located in the western Saudi region of Hejaz. As a consequence, under Saudi rule, an estimated 95% of Mecca's historic buildings, most over a thousand years old, have been demolished for religious reasons. Critics claim that over the last 50 years, 300 historic sites linked to Muhammad, his family or companions have been lost, leaving fewer than 20 structures remaining in Mecca that date back to the time of Muhammad. Demolished structures include the mosque originally built by Muhammad's daughter Fatima, and other mosques founded by Abu Bakr (Muhammad's father-in-law and the first Caliph), Umar (the second Caliph), Ali (Muhammad's son-in-law and the fourth Caliph), and Salman al-Farsi (another of Muhammad's companions). Four cultural sites in Saudi Arabia are designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the archeological site at Al Hijr (Kaaba); the Turaif district in the city of Diriyah; Historic Jeddah, the Gate to Mecca; and the cave art in the Ha'il Region. Ten other sites submitted requests for recognition to UNESCO in 2015. In June 2014, the Council of Ministers approved a law that gives the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage the means to protect Saudi Arabia's ancient relics and historic sites. Within the framework of the 2016 National Transformation Program, also known as Saudi Vision 2030, the kingdom allocated 900 million euros to preserve its historical and cultural heritage. Saudi Arabia also participates in the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH), created in March 2017, with a contribution of 18.5 million euros. === Dress === Saudi Arabian dress strictly follows the principles of hijab (the Islamic principle of modesty, especially in dress). The predominantly loose and flowing, but covering, garments are suited to Saudi Arabia's desert climate. Traditionally, men usually wear a white ankle length garment woven from wool or cotton (known as a thawb), with a keffiyeh (a large checkered square of cotton held in place by an agal) or a ghutra (a plain white square made of finer cotton, also held in place by an agal) worn on the head. For rare chilly days, Saudi men wear a camel-hair cloak (bisht) over the top. In public women are required to wear a black abaya or other black clothing that covers everything under the neck with the exception of their hands and feet, although most women cover their head in respect for their religion. This requirement applies to

non-Muslim women too and failure to abide can result in police action, particularly in more conservative areas of the country. Women's clothes are often decorated with tribal motifs, coins, sequins, metallic thread, and appliques. Ghutra (Arabic: غُثْرَا) is a traditional headdress typically worn by Arab men. It is made of a square of cloth ("scarf"), usually cotton, folded and wrapped in various styles around the head. It is commonly worn in areas with an arid climate, to provide protection from direct sun exposure, and also protection of the mouth and eyes from blown dust and sand. Agal (Arabic: أَغَال) is an item of Arab headgear constructed of cord which is fastened around the Ghutra to hold it in place. The agal is usually black in colour. Thawb (Arabic: ثَوْب) is the standard Arabic word for garment. It is ankle-length, usually with long sleeves, similar to a robe. Bisht (Arabic: بَشْت) is a traditional Arabic men's cloak usually only worn for prestige on special occasions such as weddings. Abaya (Arabic: أَبَا) is a women's garment. It is a black cloak which loosely covers the entire body except the head. Some women choose to cover their faces with a niqab and some do not. Some abayas cover the top of the head as well.

=== Arts and entertainment === During the 1970s, cinemas were numerous in the Kingdom although they were seen as contrary to Wahhabi norms. During the Islamic revival movement in the 1980s, and as a political response to an increase in Islamist activism including the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the government closed all cinemas and theaters. However, with King Abdullah's reforms from 2005, some cinemas have re-opened, including one in KAUST. From the 18th century onward, Wahhabi fundamentalism discouraged artistic development inconsistent with its teaching. In addition, Sunni Islamic prohibition of creating representations of people have limited the visual arts, which tend to be dominated by geometric, floral, and abstract designs and by calligraphy. With the advent of oil-wealth in the 20th century came exposure to outside influences, such as Western housing styles, furnishings, and clothes. Music and dance have always been part of Saudi life. Traditional music is generally associated with poetry and is sung collectively. Instruments include the rababah, an instrument not unlike a three-string fiddle, and various types of percussion instruments, such as the tabl (drum) and the r (tambourine). Of the native dances, the most popular is a martial line dance known as the sarshah, which includes lines of men, frequently armed with swords or rifles, dancing to the beat of drums and tambourines. Bedouin poetry, known as naba, is still very popular. Censorship has limited the development of Saudi literature, although several Saudi novelists and poets have achieved critical and popular acclaim in the Arab world—albeit generating official hostility in their home country. These include Ghazi Algosaibi, Abdelrahman Munif, Turki al-Hamad and Rajaa al-Sanea.

=== Sport === Football is the national sport in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabia national football team is considered as one of Asia's most successful national teams, having reached a joint record 6 AFC Asian Cup finals, winning three of those finals (1984, 1988, and 1996) and having qualified for the World Cup four consecutive times ever since debuting at the 1994 tournament. In the 1994 FIFA World Cup under the leadership of Jorge Solari, Saudi Arabia beat both Belgium and Morocco in the group stage before falling to defeat Sweden in the round of 16. During the 1992 FIFA Confederations Cup, which was played in Saudi Arabia, the country reached the final, losing 1–3 to Argentina. Scuba diving, windsurfing, sailing and basketball are also popular, played by both men and women, with the Saudi Arabian national basketball team winning bronze at the 1999 Asian Championship. More traditional sports such as horse racing and camel racing are also popular. A stadium in Riyadh holds races in the winter. The annual King's Camel Race, begun in 1974, is one of the sport's most important contests and attracts animals and riders from throughout the region. Falconry, another traditional pursuit, is still practiced.

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

=== Women === Women do not have equal rights to men in the kingdom. The US State Department considers Saudi government's discrimination against women a "significant problem" in Saudi Arabia and notes that women have few political rights due to the government's discriminatory policies. The World Economic Forum 2010 Global Gender Gap Report

ranked Saudi Arabia 129th out of 134 countries for gender parity. Other sources had complained of an absence of laws criminalizing violence against women. In August 2013, a law was passed that criminalized domestic violence against women. The ban includes penalties of a 12-month jail sentence and fines of up to 50,000 riyals (\$13,000). Under Saudi law, every adult female must have a male relative as her "guardian" (wali). As of 2008, a woman was required to have permission from her male guardian in order to travel, study, or work. A royal decree passed in May 2017 allowed them to avail government services such as education and healthcare without the need of a consent of a male guardian. The order however also stated that it should only be allowed if it doesn't contradict the Sharia system. According to a leading Saudi feminist and journalist, Wajeha al-Huwaider, "Saudi women are weak, no matter how high their status, even the 'pampered' ones among them, because they have no law to protect them from attack by anyone." Women face discrimination in the courts, where the testimony of one man equals that of two women in family and inheritance law. Polygamy is permitted for men, and men have a unilateral right to divorce their wives (talaq) without needing any legal justification. A woman can only obtain a divorce with the consent of her husband or judicially if her husband has harmed her. In practice, it is very difficult for a Saudi woman to obtain a judicial divorce. With regard to the law of inheritance, the Quran specifies that fixed portions of the deceased's estate must be left to the Qur'anic heirs and generally, female heirs receive half the portion of male heirs. The average age at first marriage among Saudi females is 25 years in Saudi Arabia, with child marriage no longer common. As of 2015, Saudi women constitute 13% of the country's native workforce despite being 51% of all university graduates. Female literacy is estimated to be 81%, lower than male literacy. Obesity is a problem among middle and upper class Saudis who have domestic servants to do traditional work but are forbidden to drive and so are limited in their ability to leave their home. As of April 2014, Saudi authorities in the education ministry have been asked by the Shoura Council to consider lifting a state school ban on sports for girls with the proviso that any sports conform to Sharia rules on dress and gender segregation, according to the official SPA news agency. The religious police, known as the mutawa, impose many restrictions on women in public in Saudi Arabia. The restrictions include forcing women to sit in separate specially designated family sections in restaurants, to wear an abaya and to cover their hair. Women are also forbidden to drive. Although Saudi Arabia imposes a strict dress code on women throughout the country by using religious police, female anchors working for Al-Arabia news network which is partly owned by Prince Abdulaziz, the son of the late King Fahad, are prohibited from wearing a veil and are encouraged to adopt a Western dress code. A few Saudi women have risen to the top of the medical profession; for example, Dr. Ghada Al-Mutairi heads a medical research center in California and Dr. Salwa Al-Hazzaa is head of the ophthalmology department at King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Riyadh and was the late King Fahad's personal ophthalmologist. On 25 September 2011, King Abdullah announced that Saudi women would gain the right to vote (and to be candidates) in municipal elections, provided that a male guardian grants permission. Women were finally allowed to vote on 12 December 2015. == Education == Education is free at all levels. The school system is composed of elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools. A large part of the curriculum at all levels is devoted to Islam, and, at the secondary level, students are able to follow either a religious or a technical track. The rate of literacy is 90.4% among males and is about 81.3% among females. Classes are segregated by sex. Higher education has expanded rapidly, with large numbers of Universities and colleges being founded particularly since 2000. Institutions of higher education include the country's first university, King Saud University founded in 1957, the Islamic University at Medina founded in 1961, and the King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah founded in 1967. King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, known as KAUST, founded recently in 2009. Other colleges and universities emphasize curricula in sciences and technology, military studies, religion, and medicine. Institutes devoted to Islamic studies, in particular, abound. Women typically receive college instruction in segregated institutions. The Academic Ranking of World Universities, known as Shanghai Ranking, ranked 4 of Saudi Arabian institutions among its 2016–2017 list of the 980 top universities in the world. Also, the QS World University Rankings has ranked nineteen Saudi universities among the top 100 Arab institutions, on its 13th edition. According to critics, Saudi curriculum is not just dominated by Islam but suffers from Wahhabi dogma that propagates hatred towards non-Muslim and non-Wahhabis and lacks technical and other education useful for productive employment. Memorization by rote of large parts of the Qur'an, its interpretation and understanding (Tafsir) and the application of Islamic tradition to everyday life is at the core of the curriculum. Religion taught in this manner is also a compulsory subject for all University students. As a consequence, Saudi youth "generally lacks the education and technical skills the private sector needs" according to the CIA.

Similarly, The Chronicle of Higher Education wrote in 2010 that "the country needs educated young Saudis with marketable skills and a capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship. That's not generally what Saudi Arabia's educational system delivers, steeped as it is in rote learning and religious instruction." The religious sector of the Saudi national curriculum was examined in a 2006 report by Freedom House which concluded that "the Saudi public school religious curriculum continues to propagate an ideology of hate toward the 'unbeliever', that is, Christians, Jews, Shiites, Sufis, Sunni Muslims who do not follow Wahhabi doctrine, Hindus, atheists and others". The Saudi religious studies curriculum is taught outside the Kingdom via Saudi-linked madrasah, schools, and clubs throughout the world. Critics have described the education system as "medieval" and that its primary goal "is to maintain the rule of absolute monarchy by casting it as the ordained protector of the faith, and that Islam is at war with other faiths and cultures". Saudi Arabia sponsors and promotes the teaching of Wahhabism ideology which is adopted by Sunni Jihadist groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda and the Nusra Front. This radical teaching takes place in Saudi funded mosques and madrasahs across the Islamic world from Morocco to Pakistan to Indonesia. According to the educational plan for secondary (high school) education 1435–1438 Hijri, students enrolling in the "natural sciences" path are required to take five religion subjects which are: Tawhid, Fiqh, Tafseer, Hadith and Islamic Education and Quran. In addition, students are required to take six science subjects which are Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geology and Computer. The approach taken in the Saudi education system has been accused of encouraging Islamic terrorism, leading to reform efforts. Following the 9/11 attacks, the government aimed to tackle the twin problems of encouraging extremism and the inadequacy of the country's university education for a modern economy, by slowly modernising the education system through the "Tatweer" reform program. The Tatweer program is reported to have a budget of approximately US\$2 billion and focuses on moving teaching away from the traditional Saudi methods of memorization and rote learning towards encouraging students to analyze and problem-solve. It also aims to create an education system which will provide a more secular and vocationally based training.

== Health care ==

== See also ==

Index of Saudi Arabia-related articles

Outline of Saudi Arabia

== Notes ==

== References ==

== Further reading ==

Tripp, Harvey; North, Peter (2009). *CultureShock! A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette. Saudi Arabia* (3rd ed.). Marshall Cavendish.

Tripp, Harvey; North, Peter (2003). *Culture Shock, Saudi Arabia. A Guide to Customs and Etiquette*. Singapore; Portland, Oregon: Times Media Private Limited.

== Bibliography ==

Abir, Mordechai (1987). *Saudi Arabia in the oil era: regime and elites : conflict and collaboration*. ISBN 978-0-7099-5129-2.

Abir, Mordechai (1993). *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society, and the Persian Gulf Crisis*. ISBN 978-0-415-09325-5.

Al-Rasheed, Madawi (2010). *A History of Saudi Arabia*. ISBN 978-0-521-74754-7.

Bowen, Wayne H. (2007). *The History of Saudi Arabia*. ISBN 978-0-313-34012-3.

Hegghammer, Thomas (2010). *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979*. ISBN 978-0-521-73236-9.

House, Karen Elliott (18 September 2012). *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines—and Future*. Alfred A. Knopf. ISBN 0307272168.

Long, David E. (2005). *Culture and Customs of Saudi Arabia*. ISBN 978-0-313-32021-7.

Malbouisson, Cofie D. (2007). *Focus on Islamic issues*. ISBN 978-1-60021-204-8.

Otto, Jan Michiel (2010). *Sharia Incorporated: A Comparative Overview of the Legal Systems of Twelve Muslim Countries in Past and Present*. ISBN 978-90-8728-057-4.

== External links ==

Saudi Arabia official government website "Saudi Arabia".

The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency.

Saudi Arabia at Curlie (based on DMOZ)

Saudi Arabia profile from the BBC News

Wikimedia Atlas of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia web resources provided by GovPubs at the University of Colorado–Boulder

Libraries Key Development Forecasts for Saudi Arabia from International Futures