

How is it possible for a country to be both a democracy and a theocracy? To much of the population, it is impossible, as the two are seen as completely contradictory forms of government. A democracy is a form of government which demonstrates the concept of power amongst the people of a state. A theocracy however, is quite different in the sense that religion and the state are indivisible (Hall & Seyfi, 2019). A theocratic regime follows leadership from both religious beliefs and those who are considered to be religiously divine. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia implements aspects of both democracy and theocracy, however it is best known to be classified as a monarchy. Theocratic regimes are generally known to only follow religiously guided policies, with leaders also being religious figures. However, in search of practicality, elements of democracy are almost always implemented. The ultimate governance of the kingdom is with the reigning monarch, who is expected to follow and maintain Islamic law throughout Saudi Arabia. This suggests that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is best classified as a theocratic monarchy, as its form of governance neither falls into democracy or pure theocracy.

Theocratic and democratic regimes have very contrasting ways of governance, as the former is led by religious laws and divine figures, while the latter is driven by the collective will of the people. Democratic governments include 3 different types of entities. Legislative, executive, and judicial entities.(Alboaouh & Mahoney, 2017). Under a democratic regime, it is possible to reach a common ground between political and religious authority, and authoritative figures. There are three minimal conditions to reach the stated common ground, (1) democratic governments are only permitted to generate policies within the bounds of the Constitution and human rights; (2) the judgment of whether a party violates democratic principles should be decided by the judicial courts; and (3) governments can impose constraints on religious political parties who violate democratic principles after they have been formed.(Alboaouh & Mahoney, 2017) In an ideal implementation of the democratic regime, people of all faiths must be free to practice without interference from other citizens or the state. Theocracy on the other hand, has 3 main notions, a pure theocracy, an ecclesiocracy, and a constitutional theocracy. A pure theocracy follows exactly what the name states, civil governance takes place by religiously divine figures only. An ecclesiocracy allows a religious group to gain political leadership but the group does not claim to be divine figures as seen in the former. Lastly, a constitutional theocracy creates a formal separation between the state and religion, however the state is in support and acknowledgement of the reigning faith (Hall & Seyfi, 2019).

When classifying Saudi Arabia as a theocracy or democracy in the terms above, it seems to slightly fall under the window of an ecclesiocracy and a pure theocracy. It also maintains some democratic aspects such as the existence of the Supreme Judicial Council of Saudi Arabia to supervise lower courts and advise the King on serious matters. Saudi Arabia shares some aspects with pure theocracies as there are no federal elections or constitutions. (Quamar, 2016). However, the reigning leader of Saudi is ultimately chosen at birth, which makes it a monarchy. Saudi Arabia is classified as an ‘absolute monarchy’, in which there is no constitution. The state

recognizes the Quran and Sunna (Islamic religious texts) to be their constitution. (Hall & Seyfi, 2019). In summary, Saudi Arabia's governance gathers elements of both theocracy and monarchy, with its dependence on Islamic law and hereditary rule making it a unique blend of theocracy and absolute monarchy.

Although Saudi Arabia implements a few democratic features and follows an absolute monarchy, its political systems are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and monarchical rule, thus implying it to be a theocratic monarchy. Pure theocracies as often imagined with Saudi Arabia, only allow religious officials to have authority over the state. Democracies support the decision of rules and largely affecting policies to be chosen by the people themselves, not through religious influence. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the Monarchs themselves are not divine figures, however they have traditionally implemented laws that are heavily influenced by Islamic law. Ultimately, Saudi Arabia's blend of both theocracy and monarchy have shown that some aspects of democracy can be implemented without challenging divine law or monarchical rule.

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