Mark C. Thompson
Neil Quilliam *Editors*

Saudi Youth

Policies and Practices

Springer

Gulf Studies

Volume 16

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Abbreviations

AAIP	Australian Apprenticeships Incentive Program
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BCURE	Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence
BIT	Behavioral Insights Team
CEDA	Council of Economic and Development Affairs
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHAT	Cultural-Historical Activity Theory
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DS	Digital Sociology
EAST	Easy, Attractive, Social or Timely
EPoD	Evidence for Policy Design
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FinTech	Financial Technology
GAS	General Authority for Statistics
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEA	General Entertainment Authority
GOSI	General Organization for Social Insurance
GRM	Gulf Research Meeting
GSA	General Sport Authority
HCDP	Human Capability Development Program
HRDF	Human Resources Development Fund
IoT	Internet of Things
IT	Information Technology
J-PAL	Abul Latif Poverty Action Lab
KASP	King Abdullah Scholarship Program
KFCRIS	King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies
KFUPM	King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MBS	Mohammed bin Salman

MCS	Ministry of Civil Service
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MERS virus	Middle East Respiratory Virus
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MISK	The Prince Mohammed bin Salman Foundation
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MOC	Ministry of Culture
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAO	National Audit Office
NDP	National Transformation Program
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NTP	National Transformation Program
OJT	On-the-Job Training/Traineeship
PIF	Private Investment Fund
PIF	Public Investment Fund
RCT	Randomized Control Trial
REDF	Real Estate Development Fund
SAR	Saudi Riyal
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SMP	Social Media Platforms
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise
SPDI	Smart Policy Design and Implementation
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TRSDC	The Red Sea Development Company
UAS	Unmanned Aircraft Systems
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nation's Children's Fund
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
VAT	Value Added Tax
VUCA	Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous
WEF	World Economic Forum
WTO	World Trade Organization

Chapter 1
Introduction

Setting the Scene: Saudi Youth Policies and Processes

Mark C. Thompson and Neil Quilliam

1.1 Overview

'Saudi Youth: Policies and Processes' aims to reach a better and more balanced under-standing of the dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities associated with youth policy formulation and implementation in Saudi Arabia, specifically envisaging the post-COVID-19 pandemic Kingdom. This edited volume focuses on the dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities present in the contemporary Saudi sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural spheres as well as ways and means by which these can be addressed. Underpinning this is a comprehension of the necessity in understanding 'policy and processes', based on evidence, as related to youth policy formulation and implementation; policies that resonate with the aspirations and concerns of young Saudi nationals themselves. In truth, relevant policy and decision makers in Saudi Arabia should be able to prioritize issues considered important by young nationals and therefore, policy and decision makers need 'direction' in terms of policy formulation, policy recommendations, and policy implementation; that is, they are often searching for 'policy relevance'. This policy relevance also needs to address Saudi youth aspirations and concerns in a fast changing and unpredictable world. What is also salient is that the concerns of young Saudis are often remarkably similar to those of their peers in other parts of the world: worrying about finding a suitable job, being able to get on the housing ladder, and coping with the rising cost of living. Indeed, Saudi Arabia's demographics are vital to understanding the challenges facing Saudi

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Arabia as a whole given that at least two thirds of the population are youth and children.

All too often, Saudi Arabia is perceived as a 'monolithic' entity, comprising a homogeneous society with 'fixed' and/or 'one size fits all' societal constituencies such as 'Saudi youth' or 'Saudi women'. Even though Saudi Arabia's diverse societies are connected by shared values, history, and heritage, adopting a 'one size fits all' approach disregards the multiplicity of Saudi societies, communities, and cultures. With the overall population at just over 32 million, in reality, these social groupings are highly diverse and spread across the Kingdom's thirteen administrative areas: Riyadh Region, Makkah Region, Eastern Province, Asir Region, Jazan Region, Al Madinah Region, Al Qassim Region, Hail Region, Tabuk Region, Najran Region, Al Jouf Region, Al Baha Region, and the Northern Borders Region. That said, due to internal migration, Saudi Arabia has become highly urbanized with close to 85% of citizens living in the principal urban centers of Riyadh, Jeddah, and the Dammam-Khobar-Dhahran conurbation in the Eastern Province. Yet, despite internal migration, principally to the capital Riyadh, many internal migrants retain their regional identities within the main urban centers. These Saudis include the less well-off who frequently reside in working class districts such as Dhahrat Laban (in Western Riyadh) on the outskirts of these sprawling cities. Nonetheless, in a Kingdom as diverse as Saudi Arabia, it is important to consider all voices, and detrimental to make decisions based on a homogenous view of Saudi societies and communities without considering socioeconomic and sociocultural differentiations.

A simplistic 'one size fits all' approach became increasingly problematic following the launch of Saudi Vision 2030 in April 2016 (and accompanying National Transformation Program) as the Kingdom's diverse societies and communities have undergone significant socioeconomic and societal transformations as a result of the Vision's agenda and programmes. Yet, when discussing the Vision and its impact on Saudi Arabia's predominantly young population, it is important to make a clear distinction between the Vision itself, and the more specific goals of the National Transformation Program (NTP). On the one hand, the Vision is precisely that, a vision of a future Saudi Arabia, unshackled from many of the more restrictive practices of the past. Moreover, the Vision represents the concept of a 'freer' Kingdom, something intangible, where opportunities abound for young nationals. On the other, the NTP exemplifies the 'nuts and bolts' of the Vision's tangible goals and programmes. It is within the NTP's more specific framework that we can measure the progress, and success of specific projects.[1] In fact, for many young Saudis Vision-related socioeconomic and sociocultural reforms opened a door of opportunity, a chance to participate in decision-making processes and create a twenty-first century Kingdom in their own image.[2] Hence, as Saudi Arabia moves beyond the COVID-19 pandemic era, it has become imperative that 'official' youth policies (whether governmental

[1] Thompson, Mark C., "The impact of vision 2030 on Saudi youth mindsets", Asian Affairs, 12 November 2021, available at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03068374.2021.1992202.

[2] Thompson, Mark C., Being Young Male and Saudi: Identity and Politics in a Globalized Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, October 2019.

or institutional) attempt to align with the changed expectations and requirements of young Saudis. Furthermore, when contemplating Saudi youth policy relevance, pertinent policy and decision makers need to be able to prioritize issues considered the most important by young nationals. Therefore, policy and decision makers need 'direction' in terms of policy formulation, policy recommendations, and policy implementation; that is, they are often searching for 'policy relevance' as related to Saudi Arabia's predominantly youthful population. To underscore this policy relevance, lessons can also be learnt from previous youth policy initiatives: Why was this policy successful? If this policy failed, what were the reasons? Did this policy resonate with young nationals? In other words, policy and decision makers should ascertain to anchor youth policy relevance in Saudi Arabia within their youth policy agendas.

Finally, similar to the rest of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic stalled and/or altered many government and institutional plans, i.e., prompted 'course corrections' to some policies and initiatives. Hence, we should recognize that Saudi youth attitudes to socioeconomic and social transformations as related to Vision 2030 goals and initiatives remain fluid due to the changing nature of domestic socioeconomic and sociocultural environments. In actuality, Saudi Arabia is in the midst of a transition that impacts and affects all aspects of life in the Kingdom—one that many young Saudis find simultaneously exciting, but sometimes causes apprehension. Indeed, change is challenging, and not surprisingly, there is a degree of anxiety amongst some Saudis about the pace and nature of socioeconomic and sociocultural transitions that are impacting accepted norms and disrupting the social status quo.

1.2 Background

In July 2021, we conducted a Gulf Research Meeting (GRM) two-day online workshop entitled 'Saudi Youth "Policy Relevance": Dilemmas, Challenges, Opportunities'.[3] The Gulf Research Meeting normally takes place at the University of Cambridge, UK. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was cancelled, and, for the same reason, in 2021 GRM was virtual. (In 2022, GRM returned in-person to the University of Cambridge.) The overall goal of the workshop was to encourage scholars and practitioners to better understand the complexity of Saudi youth issues in a globalized and transforming Kingdom. Moreover, our 2021 workshop aimed to reach a better and more balanced understanding of the dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities associated with youth policy formulation and implementation in Saudi Arabia, specifically envisaging a post-COVID-19 Kingdom. Drawing on the comparative experience of academics, researchers, and practitioners with knowledge and experience of youth policy making and formulation in (a) Saudi Arabia, (b) the region (c) relevant expertise in policy formulation and implementation, and (d) from a theoretical perspective, the workshop analyzed the factors that either currently

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[3] See: https://gulfresearchmeeting.net/documents/5ff1767479433wk8updateddoc.pdf.

facilitate or constrain effective and viable youth policy making. Whilst the workshop looked at Saudi Arabia explicitly, we believe analyses, insights, and recommendations linked to the topic are also relevant to youth policy formulation across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and indeed, the wider world.

Underpinning this was the necessity of understanding 'policy relevance' as related to youth policy formulation and implementation. Therefore, some of the questions animating the workshop included (but were not limited) to the following:

- Is there a need for a Saudi 'Ministry of Youth' (or similar)?
- How has the pandemic changed the perceptions of young Saudis? Post-pandemic what are their priorities?
- How can young Saudis be equipped with appropriate skills for the 21st Century labour market?
- To what extent does the Saudi education system address the needs, concerns, and aspirations of young nationals?
- What approaches and strategies can be utilized to minimize the manager (مدير_) mentality linked to a sense of entitlement amongst some young Saudis?
- What approaches and strategies can be promoted to decrease preference for public sector employment and simultaneously increase desirability in private sector employment?
- What approaches and strategies can be adopted to make blue-collar work more acceptable to young Saudis?
- What mechanisms can be put in place to ensure that all Saudi youth—irrespective of family, educational, or regional background—can share, feed into, or contribute towards youth policy?
- What role can the public and private sectors play—separately or in complement to one another—to support the mechanisms mentioned above?
- Are the current institutions tasked with mediating between policymakers and youth fit for purpose and able to deliver on policy? Is there are a need for further national (or regional) institutions to perform such a role?

Another important aim of the workshop was to include as many young Saudi scholars and/or practitioners as possible in order to allow a genuine 'Saudi voice' to emerge about the important issues that concern young nationals in the Kingdom. Indeed, can we understand issues that concern Saudi youth without their input? We also included a variety of scholars and practitioners who have an acknowledged track record of working on Saudi youth issues, such as Caroline Montagu, David Jones, and Radhika Punshi. The categories of participants varied in terms of age, nationality, gender, place of residence, academic background, and personal interests. This diversity enriched the workshop in terms of covering various aspects related to the title of the workshop, and in terms of the multiplicity of references that were utilized.

Workshop topics included (but were not limited to) Saudi Youth Practices, Vision 2030 and Cultural Production, The Impact of Globalization on Saudi Youth, the New Saudi Nationalism, The Development of Saudi Culture, Narratives of Change in Rural Change, Using Behavioural Insights to Boost Homeownership, Saudi Women's Identities and Their Online Practices Across Social Media Platforms, Overview of

Challenges, Opportunities, and Impacts of Increased Youth Participation in the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, Promoting Greater Employability and Embedding 21st Century Skills Amongst Saudi Youth, and Helping Saudi Youth Succeed in the Labour Market. Following the workshop, participants amended and edited their papers, and eight papers were selected as chapters for this edited volume.

1.3   Chapter Descriptions

This book is organized into three sections: identity, employment, and participation and agency. It compromises an introduction, a collection of eight chapters, and an afterword.

Part I: Identity Issues

Section 1.1 focuses on the issue of identity and considers the process of identity construction from four distinctive angles and the roles played by the state in shaping it. The authors examine how identity; rural–urban nexus; and culture are determining what it means to be 'Saudi' in the current context. In her chapter, The New Saudi Nationalism, Anna Viden argues that new Saudi nationalism needs to be more inclusive and encompassing, particularly regarding the fluidity of religious and cultural identities, if it is to truly resonate with Saudi youth. A common theme throughout this book is the agency of youth, and Viden opines that Saudi youth need to feel that they have agency and are not simply passive observers in the building of the new Saudi Arabia. As such, Viden suggests that this can be achieved by developing a new nationalist discourse, which references Saudi cultural heritage (including the pre-Islamic era); embraces a more 'moderate' interpretation of Islam; supports a more assertive Saudi foreign policy, and ensures that a direct relationship between state and society persists, without the intercession of the religious establishment.

In chapter two, Narratives of Change in Rural Saudi Arabia: A Cultural-Historical Study, Rami Alharbi explores the cultural challenges associated with the process of redevelopment using a case study of local communities living in the surrounding environs of Neom, which is a cornerstone of Vision 2030. Alharbi examines how the cultural transformation of the Kingdom is perceived by local rural communities. He argues that Saudi culture has been shaped by tribalism and religion. Tribalism has promoted stability, security, and unity in the empty desert terrain. Religion is also a unifying cultural force that has shaped society's norms, where the majority of the population are bound by a common faith, inviting good and forbidding wrong. Such a rural conservative cultural environment is hostile to change brought by modernity. Despite the limitations of the study (namely, non-representation of all cultural backgrounds, no controls for biases by the observer and respondents, and lack of participation of female subjects), which are acknowledged by the author, the study offers valuable insights, as it sheds light on this under-researched area, at a critical time of historical transformation in the Kingdom.

The final chapter in section one by Caroline Montagu examines Culture as a Tool for Youth Employment in Vision 2030. Montagu catalogues how the cultural economy has become an integral part of Vision 2030 and has been utilized to unite the country and provide Saudi youth not only with employment opportunities, but also hope for the future—by expanding their horizons and, at the same time, limiting the influence of 'conservative' Islam. However, as a long-time observer of Saudi Arabia, she reminds the reader that cultural production is not a new phenomenon in the Kingdom; however, since the 1970s, she opines, it has played second fiddle to business interests. Nevertheless, Montagu argues that culture is now critical to the Kingdom's transformation, as it opens up many job opportunities for young Saudis in nascent sectors, as well as cultivating and reinforcing young people's identity and strong sense of self-respect.

Part II: Employment Issues

Employment is the main theme of section two. It comprises two chapters: Promoting Greater Employability and Embedding 21st Century Skills Amongst Saudi Youth: Analysis and Lessons Learnt from the 'Yanmu' Project by David Jones and Radhika Punshi; and Helping Saudi Youth Succeed on the Labour Market: Evidence from a Job Training Programme by Ammar Malik, Roman Klimke, and Samia Sekkarie.

Jones and Punshi provide an in-depth case study on Saudi Arabia's National Growth Mindset initiative. The programme was conceptualized to provide youth with the awareness and behavioural change required for work preparedness, employability, and life skill development to support Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program (NTP). Their chapter discusses the design and deployment of the programme, which was first piloted in 10 schools in Riyadh and Jeddah, with 600 students in November and December 2019. The authors note that social and cultural change needs to be steered from within the Kingdom, so that the impact of programmes such as Yanmu can be 'super-charged' and reach the majority of citizens instead of being confined to the elite, which has often been the case with national scholarship programmes. To that end, Jones and Punshi argue that, unlike most employability programmes, Yanmu integrates elements of positive psychology, particularly positive education, into traditional employability models and activities. Therefore, it goes a long way to changing traditional attitudes and pre-conceived notions towards specific jobs in the market. Consequently, the programme not only plays an important role in changing perceptions about employment opportunities, but it also interfaces with a newly emerging Saudi identity.

The Tamheer programme is an on-the-job traineeship (OJT) for Saudi university graduates and is the subject of chapter five. It was launched in 2018 by the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) as a platform to help graduates gain hands-on job experience and practical skills by working in a private or government organization. Malik et al. provide an in-depth analysis of Tamheer using Harvard Evidence for Policy Design's (EPoD) 'Smart Policy Design and Implementation' framework and identify programme inefficiencies. Based on an analysis of available administrative data, qualitative data collected through focus groups and interviews, and a review of other countries' experience with similar programmes, the authors recommend a

number of policies that will help alleviate programme bottlenecks and, by doing so, provide Saudi youth with more equitable access to the labour market.

Part III: Participation and Agency

Section 1.3 moves the discussion from identity and employment to agency and participation. Scholars of Saudi Arabia have often neglected agency and participation in the Kingdom, most notably amongst youth. Whilst the Kingdom's transformation has been catalyzed by Crown Prince Mohammed, there can be little doubt that its youth have responded with a desire to participate in the country's new venture and shown their agency by engaging in every possible opportunity. In her chapter Using Behavioural Insights to Boost Homeownership in Saudi Arabia, Noreen Mandora considers what measures could be instituted to support the Saudi Housing Program Delivery Plan. The plan aims to develop the real estate sector through the creation of the Housing Data and Observatory Center, which better informs policy makers on the needs of the housing market. Mandora notes that Saudi youth are new to the housing market and therefore often need to undergo behavioural changes to make informed choices about when and how to purchase homes. She recommends a number of interventions to achieve this goal including, amongst others, forming a behavioural insight team within Sakani (a real estate initiative launched in 2017 by the Ministry of Housing and the Real Estate Development Fund to support Saudi citizens to own their first home) to help optimize the ministry's chances of changing behaviours of all associated stakeholders, and the establishment of a Nudge Unit within the Saudi Ministry of Housing to target newly-weds, as soon as they are eligible. Demand already outstrips supply, and this will only increase given that 66% of marriage-age Saudi youth is unmarried and, therefore, the behaviours of newly-weds will need to change to accommodate structural changes in the housing market.

The following chapter shifts the emphasis to young Saudi women. Ghayda AlJuwaiser continues with the theme of agency and brings a much-needed analysis of Saudi women's online practices on social media platforms. AlJuwaiser investigates the relationship between Saudi women's identities in the offline sphere and their online practices on social media platforms. She departs from more traditional analyses of women's offline and online identities, which point towards an identity dualism and argues that recent studies by Gulf Arab women scholars, including her own qualitative work, show that such identities and self-expressions are far more complex and reflective of different facets of personality shaped by social environments. The author uses a methodology less accessible to non-Saudi scholars, including online participant observation and semi-structured interviews with subjects, rather than conducting surveys, data mining/harvesting, or thematic analysis of tweets. As such, she argues persuasively that women's participation in social media platforms cannot be characterized as expressions of modernity based on material progress, but they are also grounded in Islam, which is a factor missed by many Western scholars. Furthermore, she argues that her research shows that Saudi women's participation in social media platforms shows their agency because they shape and characterize 'modernity' as both material and religious.

The final chapter broadens out the discussion and seeks to better understand the challenges, dilemmas, and opportunities associated with youth participation in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) activities and other related projects and programmes in Saudi Arabia. Aiman Albarakati posits that for the Kingdom to achieve its SDGs, state institutions leading the process need to engage with youth at every level—in both policy formulation and implementation. He argues strongly that the combination of poor youth participation, an unskilled civil society, and persistent gender disparity in key institutions could compromise the Kingdom's chances of achieving its targets. Albarakati makes clear that Saudi youth are committed to the SDGs and provides a series of recommendations on how youth can be better mobilized to support each particular goal. He notes how the SDGs align with Vision 2030 and that Saudi youth are already motivated, but Albarakati believes that greater effort made by the authorities to embed knowledge about the SDGs would better serve the Kingdom. To that end, he recommends that the government create a Ministry of Youth to encourage the country's young population to participate in national projects, such as the SDGs, engage more actively in voluntarism, and establish social enterprises.

1.4 Discussion and Main Themes

From the outset of this project (encompassing both the workshop presentations and discussions as well as the subsequent edited volume) our participants emphasized that since the launch of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has been experiencing an accelerating and increasingly complex rate of transformation, fueled by unique and contiguous political, economic, cultural, and societal developments within the Kingdom itself. Simultaneously, the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with technological innovation and environmental degradation have also affected the pattern of policy reform within Saudi Arabia, both accelerating the rate of change and simultaneously making it more ambiguous.

Some overall takeaways from this edited book project are (a) the broad diversity of Saudi youth and their perspectives and concerns about the future of the Kingdom; (b) the necessity for the state apparatus to acknowledge, make space for, and incorporate these varied perspectives into numerous different policy areas; and (c) the intersection of both growing domestic challenges and heightened potential capacity to address new issues. Therefore, addressing youth requirements and concerns across Saudi Arabia's thirteen administrative regions represents both the biggest challenge and greatest opportunity in terms of the 'youth dividend' for the government's youth policies to be effective. There was also recognition that in the years following the launch of Vision 2030, government policy has been moving towards preparing for the end of the current socioeconomic, and sociocultural transition (or phase) and beginning preparation for the next. In fact, we should recognize that in many ways Vision 2030 is the brand that represents these far-ranging transformations, ones that in actuality will continue far beyond the year 2030 itself. In consequence, youth policy is critical in this regard, as young nationals of both genders and from all walks

of life, were frequently at the 'cutting edge' of the first wave of reforms and will continue to be so as the Vision's goals are realized in future years.

The greatest challenge, according to our project participants, is how to better include youth in the transformation of Saudi Arabia so that they feel empowered. This is crucial both to harness the great potential of Saudi youth and to promote the mindset necessary to transition successfully. As previously highlighted, to achieve this, myriad Saudi youth constituencies should be understood in all their socioeconomic, cultural, geographic, ethnic, and religious diversity. Indeed, for the Saudi government's 'national' project to be successful and socioeconomically viable, it needs to embrace this diversity. Hence, the authorities should not try to pigeonhole different Saudi youth constituencies into one 'constructed' 'one size fits all' Saudi identity. In consequence, Saudi 'nationalism', to name the word, needs to be negotiated amongst young nationals and not solely imposed from above. It should include certain common denominations while allowing for individual, family (nuclear and extended), community, and regional interpretations.

Furthermore, to be successful and to be viable the 'new' Saudi Arabia and/or nationalism cannot be construed as an elite project that excludes so-called 'conservative' Saudi youth or other young nationals from different sociocultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Yet, these so-called 'conservative' values exist everywhere, and it should be stressed that 'conservatives' are simply people who grew up in a certain way, in a specific location and therefore, they are 'of their environment'. This is as true for individuals within Saudi Arabia's urban centers as it is for those living across the Kingdom in its entirety. For example, a single homogenous unit called Riyadh does not exist; in reality, there are many, often very different 'Riyadhs'. Thus, there is concern that some individuals and/or youth constituencies could be 'left behind' or disregarded if they fail to 'get with the programme', that is they fail to support or 'buy into' wholesale the Vision's reform agenda. Yet, national identity must encompass all sections of society; hence, it is important to highlight commonalities between different people or groupings and not only the differences in order to ensure that no young Saudi feels excluded or 'left behind'. In the final analysis, the solution is to embrace, or promote, acceptance of diversity across Saudi Arabia, but for this to happen young nationals should be educated to understand diversity as a positive attribute that contributes to national development.

Whilst many young Saudis see the Crown Prince as their generational peer, a central component of the project of national transformation is to create channels for non-politically connected and/or educated youth to communicate with the state apparatus about their needs, concerns, and future imaginaries about their lives in Saudi Arabia. These channels could take multiple forms, such as the formation of a Ministry of Youth, informal majalis or regional youth conferences, or a more explicit policy that the state monitors and adapts policy based on expressed opinions on social media websites. While there is significant media and academic attention on employment issues as the state ostensibly seeks to transition away from a petro-economy, equal regard must be taken vis-à-vis the social dynamics of political-economic shifts. In sum, the central challenge facing the authorities within the framework of Vision 2030 is to organize the significant diversity of the Kingdom under an umbrella of