POLITICAL REFORM AND ITS IMPACT ON POLITICAL STABILITY:

A CASE STUDY OF THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA DURING THE PERIOD FROM 1990 TO 2010

by

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the process of political reform in Saudi Arabia. Central to the study is an examination of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's constitutional reforms implemented between 1990 and 2010, focusing on the Consultative Council (Majlis al-shūrā) and municipal councils as case studies. The research analyses the objectives, values and concerns that have informed the Kingdom's policies of political reform. Also, the study examines the extent to which Saudi Government reforms have responded to internal and external pressures for more far reaching reform and democratization. The study investigates how the events of the 1990-1991 Gulf War, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Global Financial Crisis have influenced the direction of the Saudi Government's political reforms. Furthermore, the study examines how the Saudi Government dealt with various key stakeholders, co-opting some and excluding others from the reform process.

It is argued that the Saudi Government's political reforms have been limited. These limitations refer to the government's objective to undertake reforms that do not lead to increased social mobilisation through independent political institutions but instead seek to preserve power and sustain the government's legitimacy. The Saudi Government has kept the Consultative Council and municipal councils under tight control, limiting their independence and hindering any social mobilisation that might influence the decision-making process.

The government's ability to manage its limited, top-down institutional reforms can be contrasted with the scale and pace of social and cultural change in Saudi society, partly generated by government policies combined with rapid economic development over four decades. It is argued that the revival of tribal identities among the younger generation demonstrates how the penetration of new information technology platforms has facilitated social change, largely outside the control of government.

STUDENT DECLARATION

"I, Atif Abdullah Sukkar, declare that the PhD thesis entitled (Political reform and its impact on political stability: A case study of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the period from 1990 to 2010) is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

Signature   Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

It is a pleasure to record my gratitude to all those who gave me the inspiration to complete this study. This thesis would not have been completed without the loving support of so many people, to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude. To the soul of my mother and father who took care of me and to whom I owe my life together with a special thanks to my wife, Soha, who gave me her patience and sacrificed everything in her life to encourage me to complete my study. To my children, Ammar, Ahmed, Emad, and Roba, who stood by me and gave me inspiration when things looked cold and grey.

Many thanks to the rest of my loving family, especially my brothers and sisters and their wives, husbands, and children, all of whom encouraged and supported me throughout this work. Finally, great thanks go to my father in law, Mr. Ahmed Mohammed Al-grenawi, for his help and support which enabled me to overcome difficulties and which strengthened me, enabling me to complete this research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Correspondence relating to the conduct of interviews

- Correspondence, Consultative Council, Date 5/2/2007, granting permission to conduct interviews
- Correspondence, Municipal councils, Date 10/1/2007, granting permission to conduct interviews
- Correspondence, Academic Informants, Date 19/12/2006, granting permission to conduct interviews
- Correspondence, Business Informants, Date 18/12/2006, granting permission to conduct interviews
- Correspondence, Religious Authorities, Date 28/1/2007, granting permission to conduct interviews

GLOSSARY OF TERMS[1]

Ahl al-ḥal wa al-ʿaqd: eminent experts in the Islamic issues and have society experiences.

Al-ʿilmāniyūn: the liberal reformers commonly have been called secularists by their Islamist opponents.

Al-munāṣaḥa: rehabilitation programmes established by the Saudi Government since the early 2000s, as a counter terrorism strategy.

Al-Qāʿidah fi al-jaz īrah al-ʿarabiyya: al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, QAP.

Dustūr: a written constitution. The term constitution is not commonly used by the Saudi people. Saudis believe that only the Qura'an (the holy book or Koran) and the Sunna (the authoritative sayings of the prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him), in accordance with the interpretation of the Hanbali school, could be called a constitution.[2]

Fatwā: religious legal opinions.

Hadith: the prophet's speeches.

Hajj: pilgrimage.

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[1] The glossary of terms in this thesis follows the IJMES transliteration guide that is the most commonly used by scholars. See: http://web.gc.cuny.edu/ijmes/pages/transliterarion.html in conjunction with http://web.gc.gc.cuny.edu/ijmes/docs/TransChart.pdf.

[2] R. Aba Namay" Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 16, no. 3 (Spring 1993) p. 44.

Hanbali school of Islamic law: a doctrine that considers the Quran and Sunna to be the first and primary sources of law, followed by the consensus legal opinions of Mohammad's Companions.[3]

Ḥijāz: the western region of Saudi Arabia.

Ikhwān: a group of Najdi tribe's people who played a significant role for King Abdul Aziz, the founder of the contemporary Saudi state, during his territorial expansion, especially at the end the 1919s and during the early 1920s. In 1929, when the Ikhwān attempted to oppose and criticise the King publicly due to his submission to the British, the King defeated them at the Battle of Sibila.

Islamo-Liberals: new opposition groups, made up of former Islamists and liberals. Such groups hark back to the second half of the 1990s and arose from the Sahwists progressive ʿulamāʾ or Islamic "Awakening Sheikhs".[4]

Jihad: holy war.

Makkah: the holy city of Muslims.

Madinah: the city of the Prophet Mohhammed's mosque.

Majlis al-shūrā: the Consultative Council

Maḥram: legal guardians.

Muftī: a person who offers legal opinions.

Muṭawwaʿīn: religious police.

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[3] Delong-Bas, N. (2004). Wahhabi Islam: from revival and the reform to global Jihad. London, New York: I.B. Tauris. p. 95.
[4] Lacroix, S. "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists", *The Middle East Journal,* vol. 58, no. 3, 2004, pp.345-365.

Mudhakkirāt al-nāṣiḥa: Memorandum of Advice, the agenda of the religious establishment formed by progressive ʿulamāʾ in the early 1990s. This memorandum called for political reforms and was handed to King Fahd by Ibn Baz, the country's top religious authority, during a meeting held on 18 May 1992.

Najd: the central region of Saudi Arabia.

Qurʾān: the Muslim holy book.

Rentier state economy: the concept of a rentier state refers to a state financially dependent on external sources, such as oil rent, for a large proportion of its revenue. Also, the state is the main collector and distributor of external revenue in order to marginalise some other local sources of revenue.

Salafi: ultra-conservative religious scholars who invoke the basic concept of Islam, referring to the Qurʾān and Sunna, and who reject all cultural accretions to the Islamic faith.

Saudisation: a strategy that lead to restructuring much of the Saudi labour market by expelling expatriate workers and replacing them with Saudi youth.

Sharīʿah: Islamic law.

Shīʿah: Islamic sect.

Sunna: Islamic sect.

ʿUlamāʾ: recognized religious scholars.

ʿUlamāʾ al-ṣaḥw: Awakening Sheikhs. After the second Gulf War crisis (1990-91), this group started to criticise the Saudi regime as a result of the government's incompetence in dealing with domestic and external problems. Since the mid-1990s, the ʿulamāʾof Awakening Sheikhs decided to move away from internal political issues

in order to focus on religious work. In the 2000s, the Sahwists turned to the Saudi Government for support, making use of the government's strategy of co-option. This was clear in the first municipal elections held in 2005 when the most moderate Islamists, who won the elections, were backed by them using the so-called "golden list" which was circulated via cell phones and the internet.

Ultra conservative ʿulamāʾor clerics: ʿulamāʾwho have a major influence in the state's domestic policies, especially the law, religious police and womens' rights.

Wahhabism: an Islamic movement founded by the Islamic preacher Mohammed Ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703-92), who called for a return to the pure beliefs of Sharīʿah (Islamic law) and Sunna. The movement came to prominence after it was adopted by the al-Saudi family in 1744. Following Wahhabism's rise to power in the Arabian Peninsula in the twentieth century, its doctrines formed the political basis of the modern state of Saudi Arabia.[5]

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[5] Baxter, K. & Akbarzadeh, S. (2008). *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East: the roots of anti-Americanism*. London : Routledge. p. 22.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

This research investigates the process of political reform in Saudi Arabia. Central to the study is an examination of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's constitutional reforms implemented between 1990 and 2010, focusing on the Consultative Council (Majlis al-shūrā) and municipal councils as case studies. The research analyses the objectives, values and concerns that have informed the Kingdom's policies of political reform. Also, the study examines the extent to which Saudi Government reforms have responded to internal and external pressures for more far reaching reform and democratisation, and measures which might increase social mobilisation, distribute power more equally and loosen the government's tight grip on political power. In addition, it analyses the extent to which Saudi Government reforms served to decrease, rather than increase, the political disorder that destabilised the country. Furthermore, the study examines how the Saudi Government dealt with various key stakeholders and prevented them from being involved in the reform process, and analyses the political objectives and government agenda for political change. The study argues that if the government were to grant the Consultative Council legislative powers this would be a significant move towards greater democracy.

This chapter will provide background to the research and explain the aims and significance of the study, outlining the research methodology and sources of data. The final section summarises the organisation and structure of the dissertation.

1.2   Background

Of the many developments of the twentieth century, three key events have a continuing influence on the world in the new millennium. First, the global democratisation that began in 1974 as a result of the collapse of Portugal's

authoritarian regime.[1] The collapse of Portuguese authoritarian regime paved the way to overthrow decades of dictatorship and consolidate deliberative democracy not only in Portugal, but spread to Spain and Greece, the Latin American countries, a number of countries in Asia, Africa and Central and Eastern Europe as well.[2] Second, the Cold War ended as a result of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, accompanied by a rapid process of structural transformation towards democracy internationally; for example, the Soviet Union dissolved thus ending the US - USSR Cold War and causing the emergence of the United States as the sole super power.[3] The third and final key event was the acceleration and intensification of globalisation in the last decade of the twentieth century.[4] However, due to changes in the global political climate, political reform is one of the most important issues in the transition towards democracy. There is no single framework for assessing democratic change for all societies however and what constitutes effective reform in one world region may be quite different from that in another.[5]

The wave of democracy that transformed the governance of many countries also reached Arab countries. The Middle East region witnessed active discussions on the need for economic, social and political reform.[6] Since September 11, 2001 reform in the region including Saudi Arabia, and particularly political reform, has become an obsession of the West, especially the United States. While currently this obsession, especially American enthusiasm for democratisation, has lessened in its impact,

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[1] R. Doorenspleet, *Democratic Transitions* (New York: Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Pub, 2005) p. 38.

[2] L. Diamond, *Developing Democracy Toward Consolidation,* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) p. 24-25

[3] A. Saikal, *United Nations and the Middle East* (New York: United Nations University. Press, 2003) p. 73.
[4] I.N.S. Kim, *Korea's Democratization in the Global-Local Nexus* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 3.

[5] L. Diamond & L Morlino, "An Overview," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2004), p. 22.
[6] N. El-Mikkawy, "Perspectives on the Impact of Political Reform on the Regional Development Climate," *FORUM*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2004), p. 1.

pressures for reform and change are limited not only in Saudi Arabia but in most Arab countries for several reasons. First, US policy has failed to promote democracy in Iraq. Second, there has been the successful emergence of Islamist groups in the Arab political scene with some electoral success, such as Hamas in Gaza – Palestine, which came to power in 2006, Hezbollah in Lebanon which has a considerable presence in the Lebanese parliament and Islamist groups in Algeria. Third, the global economic crisis that recently happened in 2008-9 has had an impact. Fourth, the position of the Obama administration has been important, as it announced that reform should come from within and not be imposed from the outside. Finally, the strong position of most of the Arab petroleum countries, especially Saudi Arabia, in relation to the high price of oil was an important factor. However, the urge for political reform and democracy in the Middle East, while differing in intensity from one country to another, is not new. Since the middle of the last century, various individuals and groups have been urging reform.[7]

However, the most important factor that caused American policymakers to promote political reform in the Middle East was the political violence in many Arab countries in the early 1990s, particularly after the second Gulf War (1990–91) between Iraq and Kuwait, when the American military presence in the region created internal pressures.[8] Domestically, the Arab regimes faced severe socio-economic problems, popular demands for political rights, and the increasing strength of Islamic opposition movements that had their own agenda for reform and offered no support for US reform initiatives. These factors persuaded many Arab leaders to ease restrictions on political activity and expedite the transition to democracy by encouraging participation in formal political processes.[9]

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[7] M. Darwish, "Tinkering here and there," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 29 December 2005. Available [Online]: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/775/re181.htm [15 October 2006].

[8] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, no. 4 (2005) pp.153-170.

[9] A. Hawthorne, "Do We Want Democracy In The Middle East?", Available [Online]: http://www.afsa.org/fsj/feb01/hawthorne01.cfm [10 November 2006].

Political development is unlikely unless a regime works through a crisis and develops institutional changes to solve the crisis. In less developed countries, economic development policies and industrialisation, whether they succeed or fail, tend to give rise to new social forces that seek political liberalisation and democracy, and which challenge dictatorships and regimes[10]. Rustow states:

> Democracy is a process of choice and orderly change that allows for resolution of every dilemma that has proved fatal to numerous dictatorships … In the economic performance, Third World dictatorships seem to be caught in a catch-22. If the economy declines under heavy burdens of rising prices, unemployment or foreign debt, the rulers will face growing opposition or violent unrest. If the economy expands with a thriving middle class and growing export sector, pressure mounts for political liberalization and change of regime.[11]

Political change and the transition towards democracy in Eastern Europe was the result of a "crisis of failure" when economic development failed. This led to the collapse of dictatorships, with their economies changing from command economies to free-market models. It also led to a change from a one-party state to participatory, multi-party democracies and also strengthened opposition groups and weakened elites[12]. In this respect Geddes states:

> Economic crisis or some other disaster may push ordinary citizens into clamorous opposition, despite its risks. Such societal changes can strengthen opposition bargainers and weaken elites. Changes in the international economy or the influence of powerful neighbours may alter the cost-benefit calculations of both leaders and led about the feasibility of regime change.[13]

In fact, various changes in today's world have influenced most authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe, Latin America, South Asia and Muslim and Arab countries. For instance, Pakistan, Indonesia and Turkey, as major Islamic countries, all contain key elements that are relevant to Saudi Arabia; for example, the majority of their citizens are Muslim and they share a long history of authoritarian rule, but they are currently

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[10] S. Hood, *Political Development and Democratic Theory* (New York: M.E.Sharpe, 2004).

[11] D. Rustow, "Democracy: A Global Revolution?," *Foreign affairs* (1990) pp. 76-8.

[12] E. Colombatto & J Macey, 1994, "Transition In Eastern Europe". Available [Online]: http://web.econ.unito.it/colombatto/palgrave.pdf [10 October 2006].

[13] B. Geddes, *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003, p. 45.

governed by elected civilian governments. However, while Saudi Arabia is a Muslim country it has some distinguishing features that make it different from other countries (Arab, Muslim or non-Muslim). These features are very important for change and democracy for several reasons. First, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy based on the implementation of the Qurʾān and Sunna (Sharīʿah Islamic law) as the constitution of the polity and Sharia as the foundation of the legal system. Thus, Islam is the main source of legitimacy for the Saudi Government. The royal family is the most powerful political institution in Saudi Arabia.[14] Second, Islam plays an important role in the social, cultural and political life of Saudi Arabia and shapes its constitution and social practices.[15] Since the establishment of the first Saudi Government (1744–1818), the governance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has always had its legitimacy drawn from religion. The creation of the contemporary Saudi state was in part an outcome of a traditional religious-tribal alliance.[16] And unlike most Muslim or Arab countries, Saudi Arabia has not been directly controlled by any Western power; therefore, the introduction of foreign ideas and systems has remained subjugated to the concept of Islam and under the control of the Saudi Government. Finally, the overall homogeneous characteristics of the Saudi population in terms of religious and ethno-cultural identification are another important feature.[17] However, despite the importance of religion (Islamic Sharīʿah), today it has become a burden on the state. The relationship between the state and religion suffers from confusion and ambiguity. This grey area has widened as a result of the significant pressures religious authorities are exercising on the state to preserve their existence and power over society. They also apply pressure to stop any transformation that could change the political environment and reduce their control. There is also an

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[14] I. Glosemeyer, *Saudi Arabia: Dynamism Uncovered*, (London, 2004) pp. 141-172.

[15] K. Al-Habbas, The Theory and Practice of Saudi Arabian National Security since the Gulf War: A Mult-Dimentional Approach to the Pattern of Security Relations, Ph.D. dissertation, Warwick University, 1999.

[16] D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform* (London, 2003) pp. 21-22.

[17] A. Al-Shalhoop, *Constitutional System in Saudi Arabia between Islamic Sharia and Comparative Law* (Riyadh, 1999) p. 21.

implicit conflict between the various political stakeholders, particularly between what is called the conservative religious group that rejects any form of change, be it political or social, and the reformist group known as the liberal reformists that demands institutional and constitutional political reforms.

My conceptual framework for analysing democratic change and political constitutional reform in Saudi Arabia will encompass the idea of the quality of democracy, assessed by considering the extent to which there exists freedom, the rule of law by effective institutions, accountability, political participation, transparency, the effectiveness of representation and progress toward equality, particularly in so far as they affect political institutions within the context of Saudi political culture and local tradition. This notion of quality has created successful change, political reform and democratisation in different parts of the world. The presence of active political institutions can lay the foundation for further democratisation.[18]

This conceptual framework will be informed by the sociology of knowledge perspective of Berger and Luckmann. In their social construction of reality, Berger and Luckmann put forward a number of propositions relevant to my study, including:

- Knowledge is socially distributed
- Any body of knowledge has its own relevant structure
- The relevant structure is determined by a particular social setting
- What is taken for granted as knowledge in a particular social setting comes to be co-extensive with the "knowable"; that is, it's assumed to reflect the objective world
- This objective world is sustained on a daily basis by the roles we play in society.

They argue:

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[18] M. Herb, "Democratization in the Arab World? Emirs and Parliaments in the Gulf", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 4, (2002), pp. 41-47.

> Reality is socially defined. But the definitions are always embodied, that is, concrete individuals and groups of individuals serve as definers of reality. To understand the state of the socially constructed universe at any given time, or its change over time, one must understand the social organisation that permits the definers to do their defining. Put a little crudely, it is essential to keep pushing questions about the historically available conceptualisation of reality from the abstract "What?" to the sociologically concrete "Says who?"[19]

I propose to use Berger and Luckmann's approach by asking "Says who?" in relation to the various stakeholders in Saudi politics examined in the thesis. Their approach will help delineate how government and other stakeholders in Saudi politics define their social and political realities. Accordingly, concepts such as democracy, freedom, rule of law, accountability, transparency and equality will be interrogated in terms of institutional settings and the social constructs of the major stakeholders.

After the Gulf War of the early 1990s, the Saudi Government faced several serious problems, the so-called "crisis of failure". For instance, low oil prices in the mid-1990s, the heavy cost of the Gulf War, and more US arms purchases brought the Kingdom close to bankruptcy, while weak state-society ties and the emergence of neo-liberal reformers and opposition groups created socio-economic problems.[20] All these problems created pressures on the Saudi leadership for political reform. One of the most important pressures for change and reform was the domestic atmosphere of political infitah (openness). This atmosphere led to demands for an elected parliament with the power to make government accountable, to reform the royal family and its position of absolute power and increase political participation, thereby tackling

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[19] P. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York, 1966) p. 116.

[20] J. Robinson, "The Saudi problem: ignore the press reports. If the goal is stability, Saudi Arabia is becoming more stable today than in years past", *International Economy*, vol. 15, no. 6, (2001) pp. 28-54.

C. Ammoun, *The Institutionalization of the Saudi Political System and the Birth of 'Political Personnel,* (2006) pp. 213-240.

poverty, creating transparency in government and a fair distribution of wealth, improving women's rights and the creation of a free press.[21]

In order to avoid instability and domestic political violence while maintaining political legitimacy, the Saudi Government implemented long-promised political institutional reforms. For instance, in 1992 the Saudi Government announced a package of constitutional and administrative reforms as a result of the many years of work by a constitutional committee established especially for this task. The reforms were composed of three parts: the first dealt with the structure of the government and its duties; the second sanctioned the establishment of a Consultative Council; and the third concerned the development of provincial governments.[22] In 1995, the Saudi Government established the Committee of Petition inside the Consultative Council to receive complaints and even suggestions from the general public. It also increased the number of Council members from 60 to 90, then to 120 and finally 150.[23] In 2001 the Saudi Government issued a new press and publication law that allowed for more freedom and expression.[24] In 2003 the government established the King Abdullaziz Centre for National Dialogue to promote dialogue among all groups and people from different schools of thought.[25] In 2004–05 municipal council elections took place for the first time.[26] Despite their new formation, they are demanding more rights and freedom to enable citizens to obtain further political rights and to participate in decision-making processes. However, the empowerment of Saudi women is of

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[21] M. Al-Faleh, "The Future Policy In Saudi Arabia related to events of September 11: Reform in Face of Collapse or Division", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, London, 26 April – 1 May 2002. Available [Online]: http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2002/04Apr/26%20Apr%20Fri/Quds13.pdf [15 October 2006].

[22] R. Aba-Namay, "Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. XVI, no. 3 (Spring 1993), pp. 43-88.

[23] A. Ehteshami, "Reform from above: the politics of participation in the oil monarchies," *International Affairs*, vol. 1, no.79, (2003), p. 69.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 68.

25 J. Alshayeb, "New Saudi King and Challenge of Reforms," *Arab News*, Jeddah, 25 September 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=70672&d=25&m=9&y=2005 [17 July 2006.

[26] P.K. Abdul Ghafour, "178 municipal councils are formed across Saudi Arabia," *Arab News*, Jeddah, 15 December 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=74697&d=15&m=12&y=2005 [18 July 2006].

particular interest to the reformists who want the state to give women full political rights and participation in public affairs. In their opinion, women should have membership rights in the State Consultative Council. Also, women should be able to stand for municipal elections and to vote like women who enjoy full political rights in neighbouring countries, especially countries that are members of the Gulf Co-operation Council, such as Kuwait, Qatar and Oman, which are similar to Saudi Arabia in their social traditions. Finally, in 2006 the country witnessed the formation of a committee of princes (Allegiance Law) to vet candidates for succession to the throne for the first time since its inception.[27]

1.3 Aims of the study

The aims of the research are to examine the policies of the Saudi Government to implement institutional political reform and to enhance political development, as well as empower Saudi society through greater political participation in decision-making. The study discusses the evolution of institutional political reform in Saudi Arabia between 1990 and 2010, focusing on two political institutions: the Consultative Council and municipal councils. The research examines how the government has sought to advance political institutions while maintaining internal political stability, its own legitimacy and the stability of the regime. It also discusses how the government has sought to balance internal and external pressures for change and will highlight the challenges and obstacles to active political institutional change. The research explores how government policy makers have been able to define the reform process in Saudi Arabia. It also examines the relationship between the ruling elites of Saudi Arabia, considering the kingdom as both an oil monarchy and an emerging civil society experiencing rapid socio-economic and cultural change as well as political reform. The various political agendas of civil society are also explored as responses to the democratisation process, as defined by government policy makers. It also examines how a very conservative country that respects Islamic values is being

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[27] P.K. Abdul Ghafour, "Shoura Backs Allegiance Law," *Arab News*, Jeddah, 30 October 2006. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=83014&d=30&m=10&y=2006 [3 November 2006]. "The Allegiance Law is a rendering of the Arabic *Bay'ah*".

changed by democratisation. In summary, the specific aims of the research are as follows:

1. An examination of the evolution of political reform in Saudi Arabia from 1990 until 2010.
2. A consideration of how political institutions influence the pattern of political reform focusing upon two political institutions, the Consultative Council and municipal councils.
3. A consideration of how government has balanced domestic and external pressures for reform and change while maintaining internal political stability and its own legitimacy.
4. An assessment of how the distinguishing features of Saudi society – monarchy, Islam, no direct Western colonial rule, a tribal social structure and a relatively homogeneous ethnic and religious composition – have influenced the patterns of political reform and democratisation.

The thesis addresses several research questions. These are:

- How have the Kingdom's political reforms reflected its objectives, values and concerns?
- To what extent have the post-1992 political institutional reforms initiated by the Saudi Government led to significant change in the Saudi political system?
- To what extent have the Saudi Government's efforts satisfied the demands for political reform, particularly from within Saudi society?
- To what extent have limited reforms introduced and controlled by the Saudi Government served to decrease rather than increase demands for further political change?
- How do the weaknesses and limitations of the legislatures in Saudi Arabia inhibit further political change and broader political participation?
- To what extent did the creation of the Consultative Council and municipal councils reduced the power of the Saudi Government?

- To what extent has the establishment of the Consultative Council and municipal elections introduced the notion of democratisation?

- Does the Saudi Government wish to implement substantive change and empower society through greater political participation in decision-making?

- Who are the stakeholders in Saudi politics? Do any of them have agendas for political reforms which are different from government agendas?

- Is the Saudi Government's policy of involving some stakeholders in the political process while excluding others capable of mounting a serious challenge to political competitors? Might it destabilise the regime rather than stabilise it?

- How have the distinguishing features of Saudi society – monarchy, Islam, no direct Western colonial rule, a tribal social structure and a relatively homogeneous ethnic and religious composition – influenced patterns of political reform and democratisation?

1.4 Significance of the study

Research on political reform and human rights in Saudi Arabia by international non-government organisations is quite extensive.[28] The US State Department's Bureau Of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labour publishes an annual human rights report on Saudi Arabia.[29] These reports mostly discuss the economic, financial or human rights aspects of reform. However, there is a need to examine specifically the issue of political reform and liberalisation, focusing on the interaction between the ruling elite's policy of Saudi Arabia, being an oil monarchy, and the social transition to political liberalisation and the emergence of a civil democratic society. The study should contribute to knowledge of political reform through providing an

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[28] See for example, "Special Report: The UN Human Rights Council Report Card: 2007-2009," 10 September 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/84.pdf [5 February 2010], "Worst of the Worst 2009: The world's most repressive societies," May 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/specialreports/wow/WoW2009.pdf [5 February 2010] & International Crisis Group, "Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?" *Middle East Report* # 28, July 4 2004, p.17-18. Available [Online]:
http://merln.ndu.edu/archive/icg/cansaudiarabiareform.pdf [28 May 2008].
[29] US Department of State, Bureau Of Democracy, Human Rights, And Labour, 2009 Human Rights Report: Saudi Arabia, March 11, 2010. Available [Online]:
http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136079.htm [27 July 2010].

understanding of the efforts of the Saudi Government to implement reform within the context of Saudi political culture and local tradition.

This area of research has the potential to contribute to our understanding of political reform and democratisation in a political system that has been dominated by an absolute monarchy. This research will bring to an examination of political reform an understanding of Saudi political traditions and social structures. It will assess how Saudi political traditions and social structures inform political reforms designed to encourage the involvement of Saudi citizens in decision-making and in the establishment of representative institutions such as the Consultative Council and municipal councils. In addition to an examination of democratic institutions within the context of Saudi political culture, the significance of the study rests on its analysis of the emergence of a vibrant civil society, the separation of powers and the situation with regards to human rights. The significance of a study of political reform and democratisation in Saudi Arabia relates to the strategic position of the country situated in the geopolitics of the Middle East and to its status as the world's largest producer of oil.

1.5 Methodology and data collection

This study utilised qualitative methods as a basic technique to explore and analyse Saudi political change and reform. The strength of the qualitative technique allows a broader view to be taken and made the research approach more flexible. Qualitative analysis in this study was important in order to understand the context in which Saudi politicians evaluated the reform of the political system between 1990 and 2010, and it provided the researcher with in-depth information. According to Berg, most researchers have at least one research method which they feel most comfortable with.[30] Sarantakos argues that methods in qualitative research are designed to have some advantages[31]:

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[30] B. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, (Boston, 2001).
[31] S. Sarantakos, *Social Research*, (Australia, Macmillan Publishers Australia Pty Ltd, 2003).

- They bring the researcher closer to social reality and improve their social interaction with their research subjects;
- They help the researcher by providing a basis for further thinking and operations; and
- They are more flexible than other research methods, even while data is being collected.

However, the information necessary to conduct the study was derived and collected from secondary sources, concentrating on printed materials, books, articles, magazines, dissertations, the internet and relevant newspapers reports, especially in the *Arab News* which is a daily English newspaper based in Jeddah (the western province). In addition, original documents and interviews were used as a primary source. Sarantakos argues that the use of qualitative interviewing techniques in social research has some advantages[32]:

- They employ methods and a process of analysis that reflects the nature of the research objectives;
- Qualitative interviews are directed towards studying everyday life events;
- They make the respondents who provide information as important as the researcher – they are not just a source of data; and
- Qualitative interviews are more open. They do not use a strictly standardised method but rather enable a readiness to change, correct and adjust the study as required by the research.

In this study, the reason for using interviews as a basic technique of data collection is to obtain necessary original information on Saudi domestic politics. Saudi Arabia is a closed society, with a political system that only allows a minimal level of political freedom and discussion. Therefore, the availability of original information about Saudi political reform and domestic politics is still limited. Consequently, to compensate for this limitation, personal interviews were used as a basic technique

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[32] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

adopted to complement the data gained from secondary sources. Interviews conducted to gather in-depth information for this study were relevant to Saudi political change and reform. Briefly, data were collected from:

- Secondary sources which comprised information derived from printed materials, books, journal articles, magazines, dissertations, the internet and relevant newspaper reports about political reform.
- primary sources which consisted of firsthand information such as original documents and interviews conducted with senior political figures, as detailed in Table 1 below.

According to Jones[33] and Grbich[34], a qualitative interview is a social interaction between two people, one of whom wants to gather information from the other and who attempts to do that by asking questions. Some scholars argue that an interview is the interaction between two people: an interviewer and an interviewee. The interviewer is the person who has a general plan of inquiry and asks questions while the interviewee is the person who responds to questions and does most of the talking. The aim of this interaction is to develop an understanding of the social processes that have occurred in a particular setting and the set of experiences thus created.[35] Creswell argues that a discussion about the selection of participants might include four important aspects. They are:[36]

- the setting, where the research will take place;
- the actors, who will be observed or interviewed;
- the events, what the actors will be observed or interviewed doing; and

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[33] R. Jones, *Research Methods in the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, (New York, 1996).
[34] C. Grbich, *Qualitative Research in Health: An Introduction*, (Australia, 1999).
[35] P. Rice & D. Ezzy, *Qualitative Research Methods: A Health Focus*, (New York, 1999).
K. Esterberg, *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*, (New York. 2002).
A. Rubin & E. Babbie, *Research Methods for Social Work*, (New York, 1997).
[36] J. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (U.S.A, Sage Publication, Inc , 2003) p. 185.

- the process, the evolving nature of events undertaken by actors within the setting.

In this study, the researcher's experience in conducting interviews was similar to the above aspects. The researcher conducted interviews with 30 key informants selected from senior Saudi officials from the Consultative Council, elected members of municipal councils, senior Saudi administrators, academics, businessmen and ʿulamāʾfrom the Makkah and Riyadh regions. All interviewees were either senior participants in their organisations or experts from different backgrounds. This sampling enabled the researcher to exchange specific ideas and opinions with them about political change and reform while taking into account issues of confidentiality. The researcher was committed to maintaining the confidentiality of the interviewees. To meet their request for anonymity, a decision was made not to use their names in the thesis, but rather cite them in the text by using their initials (See table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Categories, location, number of interviewees and characteristics of participants

Category	Location Jeddah - Riyadh	No. interviewees	Identification of participants Jeddah - Riyadh
Consultative council group	2 - 2	4	SF, BH - MB,HA
Municipal council group	3 - 1	4	TF, AY, RZ - HZ
Academic group	3 - 1	4	TB, HD, SA - FB
Business group	2 - 1	3	EB, AB - HG
Religious group	1 - 0	1	AM - ---
Senior Saudi administrator	1 - 0	1	KA - ---

1.5.1 Selection of interviewees

The selection of interviewees was made according to sampling principles for qualitative research which tend to be limited in number in order to minimise

variations and be more accurate.[37] According to Alston and Bowles, non-probability sampling is very useful and justifiable for qualitative research because it enables the researcher to seek information which is close to his theoretical target subjects.[38] Phillips argues there are three types of non-probability sampling techniques: the purposive sample; the quota sample; and the convenience sample.[39] The sample chosen for this study is the former. Alston and Bowles indicate that purposive sampling aims to give the researcher a great deal of flexibility, as follows[40]:

- A sample is chosen for a particular purpose.
- A sample gives insights into a particular issue related to the study area.
- The number of samples is determined by the research topic and availability.
- A sample is generated.

The selection of interviewees for this study might be considered a purposive sample which is similar to Punch and Alston and Bowles[41]. Also, it is similar to Phillips[42] because this technique is generally used when there are only a certain number of groups who have the information needed by the researcher and which enable him to be close to his theoretical interests. Since Saudi Arabia has an area of about two million square kilometres, the researcher selected participants from Riyadh and Makkah and the cities of Riyadh and Jeddah. Riyadh was chosen because it is the political capital of Saudi Arabia and the location of many of the country's political institutions. Jeddah was the location of the first ministry announced by the government and this city is the major commercial port of Saudi Arabia; after Riyadh it is the second most important seat of government. Interviewees were chosen because of their status, their participation in the political process and their capacity to

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[37] K. Punch, *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches* (London, 2005) p. 187.
[38] M. Alston & W. Bowles, *Research for social workers: An introduction to method*, (Australia, 2003) p. 87.
[39] B. Phillips, *Sociological research methods: An introduction*, (Homewood, Ill: Dorsey Press, 1985) p. 199.
[40] Alston & Bowles, op. cit., p. 90.
[41] Punch, Alston & Bowles, op. cit.,
[42] Phillips, op. cit.,

articulate and explain the policies and agendas of the Saudi Government, businesses and the religious leadership. Furthermore, the selection was based on the basis of both a diversity of views and backgrounds. Using qualitative analysis through interviews, the aim was to explore the ideas, beliefs and experiences of Saudi political leaders and senior officials concerning constitutional reform between 1990 and 2010. In particular, the interviews conducted sought to examine the powers of the Consultative Council and municipal councils. Specifically, interview techniques analysed how these institutions improved the quality of democracy through a consideration of various elements including accountability, transparency and political participation in the Saudi political system. In summary, it helped to gather the following information from senior Saudi policy officials:

- The circumstances of the implementation of institutional political reform.
- The advantages and disadvantages of political change, reform and citizens' empowerment.
- The future of political reform, citizens' participation and democratisation in Saudi Arabia.

Field research was conducted in Saudi Arabia for a four month period from 30 November 2006 to 30 March 2007. The most important question for key informants was Berger and Luckmann's "Says who?"

1.5.2 Recruitment of participant groups

The characteristics of interviewees should be described by the researcher and include information about their gender, ages, regions and attitude and this study follows this practice[43]. Thirty participants for this study were recruited from six groups, each group consisting of five key informants. The recruitment of the interviewees were from diverse fields including senior Saudi officials from the Consultative Council, elected members of municipal councils, and senior Saudi administrators, academics, businessmen and ʿulamāʾ from the Makkah and Riyadh regions. They all held senior

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[43] A. Rubin & E. Babbie, *Research Methods for Social Work*, (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., c1997).

management positions in their organisations. Their characteristics were as follows: five were members of the Consultative Council, three from Jeddah and two from Riyadh; five were members from elected municipal councils, three from Jeddah and two from Riyadh; five were academics, three from Jeddah and two from Riyadh; five were business people, four from Jeddah and one from Riyadh; five were from the religious group, four from Jeddah and one from Riyadh; and finally, five were senior Saudi administrators, three from Jeddah and two from Riyadh (See table 1).

1.5.3 Interview techniques and structures

The technique of collecting data through interviews can occur by utilising different interview structures. Most interviews use a semi-structured approach involving semi-structured questions followed by unstructured or open-ended questions. According to Esterberg, there are several types of interview including structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews.[44] Aday and Cornelius argue that open-ended questions encourage respondents to use their own words to talk about what is on their mind or what first comes to mind when answering the question.[45] Semi-structured questions allow the interviewer to focus on specific topics, while unstructured questions permit an absolute freedom of response, yielding in-depth answers and providing otherwise unobtainable insights.[46] In this study, semi-structured questions allowed the researcher to focus on specific topics, while unstructured questions permitted absolute freedom of response which supports the observations of Esterberg, Aday and Cornelius and Gay and Airasian.[47] Moreover, this approach (semi-structured interviews) allowed for a greater range of questions to be asked and enhanced the research, especially the evolution of institutional political reform from 1990 until 2010. The interviews began with general questions followed by more specific questions. The duration of each interview was 45–90 minutes.

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[44] K. Esterberg, *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*, (New York, 2002) p. 85.
[45] L. Aday & L. Cornelius, *Designing and Conducting Health Surveys: A Comprehensive Guide*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006) p. 216.
[46] L. Gay & P. Airasian, *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications*, (New York, 2003) p. 291.
[47] Op. cit.,

1.5.4 Interview data collection

Interview data for this study was collected by the researcher using a tape recorder. This researcher's experience was similar to Rubin and Babbie who say that using a tape recorder is a powerful tool for qualitative interviews.[48] It not only ensures a verbatim recording but also frees researchers to fully focus on respondents, to communicate that they are listening to what is being said, and to probe into the interviewee's responses.[49] The researcher sought the agreement or approval of each interviewee to use a tape recorder before starting. Interview questions were written in English and translated into Arabic, as the interviews were conducted in Arabic. Rice and Ezzy argue that questions should be asked using the participant's first language.[50] Thus, the interviews were conducted in Arabic and the data translated into English. To ensure that the meaning of the Arabic version of the questions was identical to the English version, the Arabic version was compared with the original English version by an authorised public translation office.[51]

1.5.5 Interview data analysis

Data analysis is considered to be part of the phase of data collection.[52] Sarantakos indicates that the process of collecting and analysing data comes together in the same process.[53] All interview data were analysed as they were collected and preliminary analysis was completed during the period in which the interviews were conducted. Boynton argues there are several methods researchers should apply before they transcribe qualitative data. The key methods are:[54]

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[48] A. Rubin & E. Babbie E, *Research Methods for Social Work* (Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., 1997), p. 427.

[49] A. Rubin & E. Babbie, op. cit., p. 457.

[50] P. Rice & D. Ezzy, *Qualitative Research Methods: A Health Focus*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 58.

[51] L. Aday, *Designing and Conducting Health Surveys: a comprehensive guide*, (San Francisco, CA : Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996) p. 198.

[52] P. Liamputtong & D. Ezzy, *Qualitative Research Methods*, (New York, 2005) p. 191.

[53] Sarantakos, op. cit.,

[54] P. Boynton, *The Research Companion: A Practical Guide for the Social and Health Sciences*, (U.S.A., 2005) p. 149.

- Listen to tapes carefully and make notes of the main themes before starting transcription;

- Develop a style of transcribing, either by listening to a short segment before transcribing or transcribing verbatim from the tape;

- Once a tape has been transcribed, try listening to it again to check for accuracy and to avoid any errors;

- If the tape is not audible, let someone else help you by getting them to listen to the tape also, although confidentiality must be respected and the anonymity of participants must be ensured;

- You have to be alert during interviews and make notes which might help you decipher what was said if the tape is inaudible.

In this study the researcher followed Boynton's method.[55] Thus, during preliminary analysis, the transcripts were read while the interview tapes were played. This procedure enabled a general sense of the information to be attained by the researcher, which was then reflected upon as to its overall meaning.[56] The data was then coded. Sarantakos[57] and Liamputtong and Ezzy[58] define coding as the words, phrase, number, line, sentence, paragraph, symbols, or whole document. Walliman defines coding as labels or tags used to allocate units of meaning to the collected data.[59] Therefore, words and phrases taken from the interviews guided the initial coding strategy, with the words and phrases used being taken from the research question.[60] The researcher located specific words taken from the research questions and coded the text under that word. The researcher played with ideas because this is a useful technique for thinking about and understanding the data under investigation.[61] By the end of the coding process themes were identified for analysis. After thematic analysis,

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[55] *Ibid.*,

[56] J. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (New York, Sage Publication, Inc , 2003) p. 191.

[57] S. Sarantahos, op. cit., p. 283.

[58] P. Liamputtong & D. Ezzy, op. cit., p. 281.

[59] N. Walliman, *Your Research Project: a step-by-step quid for the first-time researcher*, (London, 2005) p. 311.

[60] S. Sarantakos, op. cit., p. 284.

[61] K. Williamson & A. Bow, *Analysis of Quantative and Qualitative Data*, (Australia, 2002) p. 293.

major themes were expected to emerge. When major themes emerged as main points of the investigation, further data was not added to the investigation.[62] The major themes were then written up as part of the research findings.[63] Computer software such as NVivo was used for data management and analysis. NVivo is one of the popular programs for analysing qualitative data.[64]

1.6   Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. **Chapter One** introduces the study, providing an overview of the research background and a description of the political reform and transition to democracy that is taking place in many countries. It identifies the aims of the study and describes its significance. It describes the methodology used in the study. **Chapter Two** consists of two sections. Section one discusses the causes and challenges of transitions to democracy and political development in the Third World since the early 1970s, the discourse of political change in Saudi Arabia , the modes of transition and , finally, types of authoritarian regimes. Section two focuses the rentier state concept and political development (this is the concept where a state is dependent on an external source of income as the only source of revenue, in particular, oil), its conceptual foundation and, finally, rentier politics and socio-economic and cultural change and political development in Saudi Arabia. The basic aim of defining the rentier state concept is to understand and comprehend the effects of this theory in promoting political change and democracy in those countries that are financially dependent on oil revenue, as a single source of income for their economic growth, rather than on the production of goods and services by its citizens. This freed Saudi Arabia from the need for domestic taxes and allowed it to utilise the oil boom to control any move or demands for political reform, thus hindering democracy.

Chapter Three deals with the various political aspects of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the way they interact. It critically highlights the political structure of the

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[62] C. Grbich, *Qualitative Research in Health: An Introduction*, (Australia, 1999).
 Williamson & Bow, op. cit..,
[63] Grbich, op. cit.,
[64] Williamson & Bow, op. cit.., p. 293.

state which includes the creation of the state, the political system, the constitution, the politics of the royal family, the nature of political power, and the religious establishment (the ʿulamā) and other groups. Discussion of the politics of the royal family is important for an analysis of Saudi Arabia's political transition, as the royal family is the most powerful political institutions.

Chapter Four discusses and conceptualises the dynamics of Saudi Government politics and political reform during the period from 1990 to 2010 as a result of changes in social attitude and the demand for power sharing. It discusses internal pressure for political change that includes several elements such as the changing structure of Saudi society and the emergence of a middle class; the dynamic of the Gulf War crisis of 1990 and the upheaval of opposition groups in Saudi Arabia; the impact of the events of September 11, 2001 on Saudi political change and reform; and other factors, the most important being the dynamic impact of demographic change in Saudi Arabia. Section two of this chapter focuses on the external pressure for political change and reform. Several factors mentioned in section one are discussed again but from an external perspective; for example, the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the crisis of September 11, 2001. In addition, the impact of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq and the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime on the political stability of Saudi Arabia are discussed. Section three concludes this chapter. It mainly discusses and conceptualises the strategic response of the Saudi regime toward internal and external political pressure for change and consists of two main parts. The first part discusses and analyses the strategic response of the Saudi regime toward internal and external pressures while the second part discusses the outcome of Saudi Government responses.

Chapter Five explores and examines the political transition of the state's political institutions through the establishment of the Consultative Council as an advisory body. Specifically, an attempt is made to assess the role and influence of the Saudi Consultative Council, within the analytical framework of enhancing institutional political reform and the political development. The assessment discusses three main elements: a brief overview of the establishment of the Consultative Council and its

phases; the composition of appointed members; and finally council decision-making and influence. Section two of this chapter discusses two other main elements: the impact of the Consultative Council on Saudi Government policy-making; and a general debate and assessment of the Consultative Council's operations.

Chapter Six explores and examines another national institution involved in constitutional political reform that the Saudi Government established in order to ease the pressure on the government for further democratic reforms and enhance political participation, namely municipal councils. The implementation of political reform with the municipal councils involved the conduct of elections in 2005. This was a progressive step for the Saudi Government toward introducing reforms promoting greater popular participation while perpetuating its power. This chapter discusses the historical evolution of the local government system and the government's objectives in conducting municipal elections. Section two examines the dynamic of municipal council elections and the final composition of the councils as well as, the "golden list", moderate Islamist candidates and Saudi women. Section three concludes this chapter. It is mainly concerned with the role and influence of municipal councils in promoting domestic mass participation in government decision-making and a general debate and assessment of municipal councils' operations.

Chapter Seven discusses and analyses important stakeholders in the Saudi political landscape who have been excluded from being politically involved in the institutional reform process. In addition, it discusses the complex relationships between the groups involved in the government's sponsored reform and those who are not. Among the important domestic groups excluded are some of the Islamist groups, in particular, the ultra-conservative clerics and militant jihadi groups, the liberal reformists, businessmen and tribal leaders. However, the chapter discusses the background of the stakeholders in the political landscape who were excluded from the government's institutional reforms and the government's relationship with them. It also examines the stakeholders' agendas and their ability to bring about any reform and change. Section two of this chapter discusses Saudi Government's sponsored reforms. The first part of this section analyses the relations between excluded and co-opted

stakeholders while the second part discusses the government's strategies in managing stakeholders.

Chapter Eight concludes the analysis of the patterns of political reform within the broader context of rapid socio-economic and cultural change in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (institutional political reform) and its impact on political stability. It outlines the findings of the thesis and offers recommendations for effective political change and political development.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore recent transitions in Third World countries from authoritarian regimes to democracy, something that has been happening since the early 1970s. It will include two main sections. The first section will discuss the causes and challenges such transitions face. In addition, the discourse of political change in Saudi Arabia will be discussed, the different ways in which transition has occurred and the different types of authoritarian regimes that exist. The second section will discuss the rentier state and political development, its conceptual foundation and, finally, rentier politics and socio-economic and cultural change and political development in Saudi Arabia.

Section One

2.2 Causes and challenges of transitions to democracy and political development in the Third World

The literature on democracy and democratisation sits within the long history of the study of political science. Since the "third wave"[65] of global democratisation that started in 1974, the number of studies on democracy and transition to democratisation has expanded dramatically, with contributions from Southern Europe, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa and East and Southeast Asia. Research in the field of comparative studies helped to create some successful democratic transitions in several Third World countries. These transitions to democracy in the latter part of the twentieth century led to the emergence of what has been called "transition literature". This huge body of literature on political transition and political reform has been very

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[65] Samuel Huntington has dubbed this post-1974 period the "third wave" of global democratic expansion. He defines a "wave of democratisation" simply as "a group of transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period" (L. Diamond (1996), "Is the Third Wave Over?", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 7, no. 3, p. 20).

influential in shaping the understanding of researchers who are studying the process of transition toward democracy. This global transition raises three important questions. Why did this transition toward democratic rule in the Third World take place? Why did a great wave of authoritarian regimes, mostly military dictatorships, get swept away? Is there a correlation between the nature of authoritarian rule and a transition to democracy? Another consideration is the high degree of variation in the assessment of democracy. Measures can focus on different dimensions; for example, religious factors, political culture and identity, economic concerns and external factors (Rustow,[66] Gill,[67] Garreton,[68] Diamond & Morlino,[69] Doorenspleet[70]).

An examination of most of the literature on the social, political and economic transitions in less developed countries shows that most of this literature lacks any generally accepted theory about such changes. According to Hadenius and Teorell, modernisation theorists have asserted the importance of socio-economic development for transition and change from authoritarian regimes. Others have identified different factors such as culture and religion, diversity, oil and other natural resources, and diffusion effects as factors that might advance or hinder a country's prospects for democratic transition[71]. Furthermore, Kugler and Feng argue:

> At the macro-level, social, economic changes shape the actors incentives and structure their preferences, generating preconditions to challenge autocratic regimes. Concurrently, at the micro-level, interactions between the autocracy and the pro-democratic forces create political dynamics that affect the chances of democratic transition.[72]

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[66] D. Rustow, "Democracy: a global revolution?", *Foreign affairs,* vol. 69, (1990), pp. 75-90
[67] G. Gill, *The Dynamics Of Democratization: Elites, Civil Society and the Transition Process*, (Baskingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).
[68] M. Garreton, *Incomplete Democracy: Political Democratization In Chile and Latin America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
[69] L. Diamond & L. Morlino, "An Overview", *Journal of Democracy*, vol.15, no.4 (2004) pp. 20-31.
[70] R. Dooresnpleet, *Democratic transitions: exploring the structural sources of the fourth wave*, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).
[71] A. Hadenius & J. Teorell, "Pathways from Authoritarianism", *Journal of Democracy* (2007) p. 143.
[72] J. Kugler & Y. Feng, "Explaining and Modelling Democratic Transitions", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 43, no. 2 (1999) p. 143.

In recent studies of democratic and political changes in the Third World, many scholars have distinguished between democratisation and liberalisation. According to Buchanan, liberalisation means space for people to act and to be involved broadly inside the system, while democratisation refers to the expansion of political participation, rights and freedom as well as the growth of civil society.[73] Shin argues there are four stages of democratisation. The second and third stages have received the most attention from scholars. These four stages are[74]:

1) Decay of authoritarian rule
2) Transition
3) Consolidation
4) The maturing of democratic political order.

Some scholars argue that every country has its own distinguishing features with regard to models and approaches used for political change and development. Such features sometimes create problems within society because they include the culture of the dominant Western powers, a culture that comes with urbanisation, literacy and mass media exposure. According to Huntington, the main portion of the blame for disorder in many developing countries is due to the excessive speed of mobilisation, as such excessive speed outruns the capacity to create and develop new institutions.[75] In his study of Iran and Saudi Arabia, Linjawi argues:

> Most of the less developed countries' political systems are a product of the integration of their political culture and social structure factors which distinguishes each nation's political system identity from other nations. It's the identity "who are we?" that gives each nation its own characteristics and explains how political systems came about and how and why polices of development were carried out. Also, at the same time, understanding the political culture

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[73] P. Buchanan, *Democratization Top-Down and Bottom-Up*, (Washington, DC: Foreign Service Inst 1987) p. 224.

[74] D. Shin, "Review: On the Third Wave of Democratization: A Synthesis and Evaluation of Recent Theory and Research", *World Politics* (1994) p. 143.

[75] S. Huntington, *Political order in changing societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968) pp. 35-36.

factors of nations can provide us with a practical analysis of why political participation can be denied.[76]

There is a relationship between democracy and political institutional and cultural changes. Mechanisms for cultural transmission and the source of ideological values in society are institutions such as the family and kinship, education, and religious and community organisations.[77] Democracy and political change are not attained simply by establishing institutional changes or elite-level manoeuvring but this change depends on the values, norms and beliefs of society.[78]

In writing about Third World countries that have transitioned from dictatorship to democracy, Wiarda[79] and Hood[80] point to several factors that play a significant role in sweeping away dictatorships and forcing them into transition to democracy. The first and most important factor is incompetence and inefficiency. For instance, many authoritarian regimes came to power in circumstances where there were no strong institutions to hold the government accountable. In time, most of them proved to be as incompetent and ineffective as their predecessors. Second, corruption as a factor is very important because it is widespread in most Third World countries. In the end, corruption will lead to upheaval and the creation of a socio-economic crisis; opposition groups including those upon which the regime relies for support demand political change and reform. Third, social change is one of the important factors for transition. When societies become more literate, educated and urban, new social groups emerge such as businessmen, labour unions, women and the middle class demanding for political development and participation in decision-making, all of

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[76] H. Linjawi, "Societies in transformation Iran and Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2006, p. 5.

[77] M. Smith, *Culture Reinventing the Social Sciences*, (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000).
[78] R. Inglehart, *Modernization and Post-modernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1997).
[79] H. Wiarda, *Political Development in Emerging Nations: Is There Still a Third World?,* (Canada, 2004).
[80] S. Hood, *Political Development and Democratic Theory: rethinking comparative politics*, (New York., 2004).

which challenge authoritarian regimes. Also, resurgent opposition groups are considered to be fatal for authoritarian regimes.

Furthermore, there are several important causes that play an important role in the transition of authoritarian regimes and the endurance of democracy and they vary from country to country. Some are a result of divisions which can be traced to splits within the country itself (domestic factors) such as a decline in the legitimacy of an authoritarian regime, the strengthening of civil society and an increasing number of educated people. Others are external factors from outside a country, such as foreign encouragement for domestic liberalisation, protection for important elite groups, cutting off economic and military aid or preventing membership of regional organisations.[81] Najem identifies six major sources of either external or internal pressures that challenged the regimes of many Third World countries over the past decade. These major sources are:[82]

- international aid donors
- international trade
- issue-based international NGOs
- transmission of values
- crisis of legitimacy
- emergent social forces.

The above approach might be useful for understanding the Saudi case, especially concerning the so-called "crisis of legitimacy". The Gulf War of 1990–91 created several serious challenges for the Saudi leadership and raised questions with regard to the regime's incompetence in dealing with domestic problems in general. One of the most important challenges was the government's decision to invite foreigners and

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[81] D. Shin, "Review: On the Third Wave of Democratization: A Synthesis and Evaluation of Recent Theory and Research", *World Politics*, Vol. 47, no. 1(1994). pp. 135-170.
[82] T. Najem, *Good governance: the definition and application of the concept*, (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003) p. 8.

non-Muslims into the country for protection, especially as it involved the presence of American troops on Saudi soil.

Wiarda argues that hopes and optimism about democracy and political development in most of the Third World is in decline. There are some challenges facing democratic transitions in the Third World. First, until recently, most of the democratic institutions of the less-developed countries are not performing well, as corruption and absence of the rule of law, special favours, cronyism and patronage are widespread. Second, democracy has not been able to deliver social and economic reforms, as the majority of people in developing countries expected. Third, there is a lack of confidence that democracy is good and will lead to social mobilisation. For instance, discouraging poll results create a sort of depression. Finally, there is a lack of honest and forthright governments that are working for poor people. In other words, a government must not just be democratically elected and constitutional in the eyes of the people, but also effective in the delivery of public programs.[83]

However, there are several general factors enhancing and influencing reform and the political transition to democracy. First, people should have a certain inclination and national consensus toward reform and transition. Second, the middle class needs to develop. Third, religion plays a role in supporting and promoting the push for democratisation. Fourth, the role of economic development and growth in promoting changes in social structures. Finally, there needs to be sustained outside pressure.[84] It is argued that, in the case of Saudi Arabia, all these factors were weak in terms of enhancing and influencing political reform, with the exception of economic growth and development, which played a substantial role in changing the overall structure of Saudi society, transforming a highly illiterate people to a wealthy urbanised and educated society.

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[83] H. Wiarda, *Political Development in Emerging Nations: Is There Still a Third World?*, (Canada, 2004).

[84] E. Leon, *An Overview of "Remarkable Developments*, (U.S.A., 1987).

2.3 The discourse of political change in Saudi Arabia

Wiarda argues that democracy means different things to different people and can vary from country to country. Also, democracy occupies a different level of priority in different societies and cultures.

> …The United States practices one form of democracy based on our British, Jeffersonian, Madisonian heritage; Europe practices another kind mainly based on its parliamentary practices. But when we get to the Third World we find even greater divergence: 'Confucian' or state-bureaucratic forms of democracy in Asia, 'organic' or 'corporatist' (unified, centralised) democracy in Latin America, and Islamic forms in the Middle East. … While we want to accept a variety of democratic forms and to suggest that democracy can vary from country to country, we will need to wrestle with the tough issue of what is truly universal in democracy and what, or how much, is culturally relative. For example, when the King of Saudi Arabia goes out into the desert to consult with Bedouin tribes and leaders, is that democracy or is it still monarchy with a modern face?[85]

The Saudi state sees that the open Majlis policy, or what the Saudi Government politicians like to call 'desert democracy', is one of the Saudi regime's political assets. In a study conducted recently, the researcher Taleb Al-Shareem (cited in Khudair)[86] said "The Hall is of significant importance for the King who often emphasizes the good treatment of citizens and dealing with them with patience. The King is really implementing the policy of the 'open Majlis' through receiving his citizens in a humane way, where he helps the elderly and assists the disabled". Al-Shareem adds, "The *divan* (Hall) is unique as it is so well organized and can accommodate for over 800 persons at the same time. Petitions number over 4000 a day. Regarding Scholars, Princes, Leaders and official guests, they have special protocols. The King enters the Hall and greets them according to Islam, then takes his place, takes care of everyone, invites them for lunch and gives every one of them the opportunity to speak, then gives the citizens who are willing to say something the chance to do so. Mondays have been designated for people with special needs and

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[85] H. Wiarda, op. cit., p. 92.

[86] M. Khudair, "Academic Thesis about the Open Majlis approach adopted by the Saudi King: Abdullah's approach reflects a balanced policy and translates his relationship with his people," Al-Jazirah Newspaper, Riyadh, 10 November 2006. Available [Online]: http://archive.al-jazirah.com.sa/2006jaz/nov/10/th1.htm [1 March 2007].

orphans"[87] Al-Shareem stresses the importance of these receptions and discussions in enhancing the security issue and says, "Through these receptions the King and his public talks demonstrates the importance of fighting extremism and ideological deviance and crime against the nation. By announcing his political vision in relation to these issues and by discussing them openly at the social level in the open meetings and via the media, the King reinforces the significance of the national security"[88] Dr. Madawi Al-Rasheed, a Saudi university professor in London and a leading Saudi opposition columnist, believes the open Majlis (the desert democracy) policy is unique in the Saudi Kingdom. It is a policy that institutionalizes and encourages petitioning and pleading instead of political development. It brings back to memory old traditions, customs and a bygone democracy. She believes that by promoting this policy, the state aims to:[89]

- promote the royal family and other high-ranking persons as the core for national issues, and the central point around which citizens' daily lives and living conditions revolve
- raise a whole new generation on the concept of petitioning for rights rather than teaching them to demand their rights and obtain them through political institutions
- create a window through which citizens can see the Palace of the Royal Family and feel its control and powerful presence.

Also, Al-Rasheed thinks that it's impossible for nations to develop politically in a culture of 'petitioning' and this policy can never lead to the development of citizenship and a state based on institutions. Relying on leaders to give them their rights leaves citizens dependent and at the mercy of the ruler and his will.

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[87] *Ibid*.,
[88] *Ibid*.,
[89] M. Al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia: the democracy of oping begging Majlises," *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, London, 6 August 2007. Available [Online]:
http://www.alquds.co.uk:9090/pdf/2007/08/06AugMon/qds19.pdf [10 August 2007].

Modernisation generally means the transition from a traditional society to a modern one. Without an increase in political participation and decision-making the political system will not be able to absorb political demands.[90] For Saudi Arabia democracy and modernisation must address two of the regime's objectives, the maintenance of its Islamic identity as the cradle of Islam and its traditional political values. The only way for the Saudi regime to articulate optimum socio-political development and participate in controversial debates is by promoting traditional political practices such as the open Majlis or the desert democracy, while preserving the regime's power and avoiding genuine public participation and individual decision-making. In this respect Ehteshami argues:

> Uniquely in the Muslim world, the GCC states have managed to keep some of their traditional political features while also adapting to the forces of modernisation. In virtually every oil monarchy today, one can be invited to go to a 'diwan', the formal meeting place of the leading families, to participate in a hot debate, or walk into a majlis (open meeting) held by a senior member of the royal family, a government minister or both….Attending the Majlis has become a deep-rooted custom and a tradition which some people would not like to miss. Seen from the leadership's perspective, the majlis system provides a direct and tangible link between the rulers and the ordinary citizens. This kind of instant access may not have the trappings of an institutionalized political structure, but by virtue of opening the door to every citizen with a problem or opinion; it does allow a bond to grow between the rulers and ruled.[91]

There is no doubt that the Majlis' open strategy, 'the desert democracy', is a sort of instant access between the ruler and the ruled and has its historical roots in a tradition followed by the royal family since its establishment. Furthermore, it is a milestone in Saudi politics according to the basic system of rule, Article 43, stating that "the King's palace and the Crown's kings are open for every citizen, for every complainant or aggrieved member of the community. Every citizen has the right to speak to the authorities about relevant issues that affect him.[92] But at the same time, this access does not influence the decision-making process or involve a broader political

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[90] H. Linjawi, "Societies in transformation Iran and Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2006, p. 13.

[91] A. Ehteshami, "Reform from above: the politics of participation in the oil monarchies", *International Affairs* vol. 1, no. 79 (2003) p. 72.

[92] A. Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia*, (Riyadh: Al-Kharaiji Press, 2000) p. 271.

participation throughout independent political institutions in the Saudi political system, as this study has emphasised. The open Majlis policy is a sort of strategy for the co-option of society instead of initiating institutionalised political participation, especially with regard to the decision-making process. In relation to this point, Aldamer argues that this structure is in fact an informal network of patronage consisting of notable pillars of society who have access to the influential office-holding princes, especially those with political fiefdoms. Those who attend the Majlis are either the privileged or the rural and low-income people who come to present personal grievances.[93] However, the open Majlis policy has become an impractical method for institutional political reform in general, because it is not a forum of communication or political debate between government and the people. This is compatible with Al-Rasheed's view mentioned above. In addition, Pye's[94] ten variable points of definitions for the concept of political development, which involves satisfying equality, political participation and social legal justice, will be discussed in this section. Hence, active political institutions enhance the concept of true citizenship and nationality. The respect of the state is a very important factor for reform and genuine political development and stability. True citizenship is not merely an approach, the open Majlis tradition or a lesson in a book; it is in fact a practice. Citizens should be able to feel that they can enjoy their social, economic and political rights without being indebted to anyone. Furthermore, open Majlis is incompatible with the current stage of progress which has witnessed the emergence of new generations who are looking for individual rights and modernisation, as will be discussed later in chapter seven.

Seznec argues that an open door policy in the Saudi Arabian political system refers to the salon or reception room where this meeting takes place and is something that reaffirms the regime's eminence and its inclination to preserve power. He states:

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[93] F. Aldamer, "Economic, social, and political developments and their impact on the role of the state: A case study of Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Manchester University, 1995, p. 256.
[94] L. Pye, *The Concept of political Development*, (New York: Wiley & Sons, INC, 1966).

> …One can see a senior prince receiving thousands of petitioners at majlis. The petitioners will kiss him deferentially and usually hand him a piece of paper bearing a request, perhaps for a land grant or a small sum of money. This paper is passed on to the prince's staff, which will then provide a response. It is a system in which the princes dole out largesse in order to display and reaffirm their eminence.[95]

Whereas, Rose-Ackerman argues that the threat of losing power in any political regime can induce high officials to become even more corrupt. In addition, reform will not occur unless powerful groups and individuals inside and outside government support it.[96] In this regard, Doran argues that, in general, the Saudi regime functions as the intermediary between two distinct, powerful political groups. The first one is progressive Westernised elite that looks to Europe and the United States as models of political development. The second group is an ultra-conservative Wahhabi religious establishment that holds up its interpretation of Islam's golden age as a guide.[97] However, Okruhlik argues that progressives in Saudi Arabia, alternatively called liberals, nationalists, or moderate Islamists, often refuse to use direct and explicit language to confront the Saudi state. They have tended to exclusively criticise the religious radicals.[98] It is argued here that the second Gulf War crisis empowered these two groups to stand up and voice their political demands as well as voice their criticism of the government's shortcomings, as will be discussed in chapter four. An illustration of their voices was seen in the various petitions submitted to the Saudi leadership at that time.

According to Cleveland both a liberal, Westernised Saudi group and Wahhabi religious Islamists signed a petition in late 1990 requesting political change in the Saudi regime.

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[95] J. Seznec, "Democratization in the Arab World? Stirrings in Saudi Arabia", *Journal of Democracy* vol. 13, no. 4 (2002) p. 34.

[96] S. Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, AND Reform*, (London, 2006) p. 199.

[97] M. Doran, "The Saudi Paradox", *foreign affairs,* vol. 83, no. 1(2004) p. 36.

[98] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly,* vol. 28, no.4 (2005) p. 167.

For instance, the liberal Westernised elite requested a consultative council, greater freedom of the press and a change in the status of Saudi women, while the Wahhabi religious establishment requested some of the same reforms that the Westernised elite group had requested; however, they framed their demands in terms of the need to observe the Sharīʿah (Islamic law) and to grant the ʿulamāʾa greater role in the decision-making process.[99]

It is argued that in Saudi Arabia there is a dilemma facing the Saudi Government with regard to the implementation of democracy and political development. This dilemma consists of two points: (1) the close ties with the United States and recent US reform initiatives in the region, particularly after the removal of Saddam Hussein from Iraq in 2003. Initially, the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, with its objective of promoting democratisation in the Middle East, pressured the Saudi Government to accelerate political change. The Saudi authorities were concerned about the way American intervention had empowered majority Shi'ites in Iraq and encouraged minority Shi'a elsewhere, especially in neighbouring Saudi Arabia. In this context, Alshayeb argues that in 2003 the Saudi Government established political institutions, such as the King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue, to promote dialogue among all groups and people from different schools of thought;[100] and (2) the importance of the Saudi state as the cradle of the Islamic religion and the home of Islam's two holiest shrines in the cities of Makkah and Medina. This means its relationship with the various groups and players inside the Kingdom, either the Westernised elite or with Wahhabi religious groups is important, especially with regard to which groups support US reform initiatives. Russell conceptualised the

[99] W. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2004) p. 493.

[100] J. Alshayeb, "New Saudi King and Challenge of Reforms", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 25 September 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=70672&d=25&m=9&y=2005 [3 March 2007].

central groups and players on the domestic Saudi political landscape into four main groups that did not share common objectives about the reform agenda, as follows:[101]

- The House of Saud: The royal family is reportedly divided on the pace and direction of reform. Central issues of the reform agenda such as corruption and a truly independent and empowered judiciary are not supported, so as to preserve the royal family's privileges.

- The religious establishment: the Nejd or Wahhabi religious establishment: This group is directly supported by the Saudi Government, and their fate is tied to that of the royal family. The prospect of a true reform threatens the primacy of the religious establishment because it will empower Saudi Shi'ites and bring them into the Saudi political community. The religious establishment also have an omnipresent role in the country's legal system.

- The merchant families of the Ḥijāz (the western province) and Riyadh: These powerful players in the Saudi political landscape have much to gain and lose in the reform process. For instance, within the reform agenda, the global economy threatens to put some of them out of business. Furthermore, for this group, Saudi Arabia's entry in 2005 to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was a critical issue. Some of these groups represent a source of financial and political support for militant groups.[102]

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[101] J. Russel, "In Defence of the Nation": Terror and Reform in Saudi Arabia", *Strategic Insights*, October 2003. Available [Online]: http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/CCC/publications/OnlineJournal/2003/oct03/middleEast2.html [15 March 2007].
[102] One of the main reasons why some in the private sector, including the merchants of the Ḥijāz and Najd, were concerned about Saudi Arabia's entry into the WTO was that they thought the US and Europe sought to make Saudi Arabia's industries and regulations more transparent. Saudi companies have historically been sheltered from foreign competition especially in the services and the petrochemicals sectors. WTO membership would force Saudi companies to operate in a more open and competitive environment. See: Saudi Arabia's WTO Membership and the Implications for its Top Firms. Available [Online]: http://dinarstandard.com/oic-trade/saudi-arabias-wto-membership-and-the-implications-for-its-top-firms/ [7 July 2011].

- "The Reformers" who represent an indirect pressure on the Saudi state to accelerate the implementation of the reform agenda through, for example, their demand for a constitutional government system that addresses the issue of women's rights. Furthermore, the reformers believe that the Saudi regime uses the internal security situation as an excuse to delay reforms.

Gause further classified Islamist groups in Saudi Arabia into four different types, none of which support US reform initiatives:[103]

- Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda sympathisers and associates who are working toward the overthrow of the Saudi regime.

- Pro-government conservative Salafis, who have been supportive of the government in its stance against Islamist militants, especially after the 2003 Riyadh bombings.

- Reformist Islamists who call for far-reaching changes inside the Saudi system, and who are critical of both radical Salafis and the government.[104]

- The government's religious scholars (ʿulamāʾ al dawla) who have been consistent in their support for the Saudi regime.

Russell[105] and Gause[106] identify the key stakeholders in Saudi politics and the relationship between them. Furthermore, underlying these political groupings there are two opposing orientations: the Liberals, who want a more evolutionary Islam, and those among religious groups who want to retain the literal Islamic doctrine. This will be explored further throughout this study.

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[103] G. Gause, "Saudi Islamist between the monarchy and the United States", *Global Issues,* vol. 3 (2005) pp. 108-113.
[104] The most distinguishing feature of this group is that they comprise former Islamists and liberals, Sunnis and Shi'ites, calling for democratic change within an Islamic framework through a revision of the official Wahhabi religious doctrine. This new trend has emerged since the late 1990s (S. Lacroix, "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 58, no. 3, 2004, p. 345).

[105] Russell, op. cit.,
[106] Gause, op. cit.,

Fandy argues that while the social and political significance of Islamists groups is growing, they still have a long way to go before they can be considered agents of change in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the lack of any coordination between them makes them vulnerable to the Saudi regime strategies of segmentation and fragmentation.[107] Dioun argues that the United States does not want to support the implementation of democracy and political development which could earn greater credibility for political institutional transition, not only in Saudi Arabia but also in other Middle East countries, at least in the near future.[108] This is because such a policy will empower or bring to power radical Islamists who oppose US policies, values and interests in the region. Therefore, any reform initiatives coming via the United States will be resisted, particularly after the occupation of Iraq under the name of democracy and the ongoing American support of Israel. In this regard Gause argues that it is impossible to overstate the importance of the Saudi regime to the American administration. Any realistic alternative to the current Saudi regime would be much less amenable to the United States.[109] Dioun states:

> We need to avoid the hubris of thinking that we know how to govern Saudi Arabian society better than the Al-Saud do, and remember that any realistic alternative to Al-Saud rule in Arabia right now would be much less amenable to US interests and US values than the current regime.[110]

However, Doran argues that the most important group is Osama Bin Laden and his followers, sometimes referred to as leaders of takfiri-jihadi in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Doran investigates a close associate of al-Qaeda, the Saudi cleric Ali bin al-Khudayr, who describes the United States as one of the greatest threats that Islam has ever faced, even greater than insufficiently devout Sunni Muslims.

> A close associate of al-Qaeda, al-Khudayr is known as a leader of the takfiri-jihadi streams of Islamic radicalism … takfir, the practice of proclaiming fellow Sunnis guilty of apostasy (a crime punishable by death). After September 11, he

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[107] M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) p. 244.
[108] C. Dioun, "Democracy Within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", 19 February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [20 March 2007].
[109] Gause, op. cit., p. 222.
[110] Dioun, op. cit., p. 22.

issued a fatwa advising his followers to rejoice at the attacks. Depicting the United States as one of the greatest enemies that Islam has ever faced, he chided those who had misgivings about the deaths of so many innocent civilians, listing a number of American "crimes" that justified the attacks: "killing and displacing Muslims, aiding the Muslims' enemies against them, spreading secularism, forcefully imposing blasphemy on peoples and states, and persecuting the mujahideen".[111]

According to Diamond, Linz and Lipset democracy is "a system of government that meets three essential conditions: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies; and a level of civil political liberties-freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation".[112] I argue here according to Diamond's definition of democracy that in any society, particularly in the Third World, to enhance the meaning of democracy people should choose leaders and representatives who will respond to their developmental needs and who can be replaced in regular free and fair elections. Khalaf and Luciani define democracy-building as "a process that can be viewed as consisting of two components. The first is formal and consists of the creation of institutions, the establishment of procedural rules, and a division and attribution of powers – in other words, constitutional reform broadly defined. The second is the opening up and development of political debate in a wider section of society, through the individual or collective expression of opinions, enhanced access to information, and the articulation of proposals for the conduct of the state – this can be called political participation".[113]

Pevehouse argues that any definition of democracy has three basic components which include procedural aspects of democracy, as follows:[114]

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[111] M. Doran, "The Saudi Paradox", *Foreign Affairs,* vol. 83, no. 1 (2004) pp. 39-40.
[112] L. Diamond, J. Linz &S. Lipset, *Introduction: Comparing Experiences with Democracy*, (New York, 1990) p. 6.
[113] A. Khalaf & G. Luciani, *Constitutional reform and political participation in the gulf,* (Dubai, Gulf Research Center, 2006) p. 12.
[114] J. Pevehouse, *Democracy from Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization*, (London, 2005) pp. 56-57.

- competitive elections;
- broad adult suffrage; and
- protection of minority rights and respect for civil liberties.

Thus entrenching effective independent elections is an important step toward political development and democracy-building. Electoral democracy is important because it enables the people to make their representatives accountable. In relation to this point, O'Donnell states:

> …Genuine elections will not only give new governments democratic legitimacy but foster a long term deepening of democratic participation and accountability…I do think that fair elections are extremely important. This is not because such elections will necessarily lead to wonderful outcomes. It is because these elections...mark a crucial departure from the arbitrariness of authoritarian rule…When some fundamental political freedoms are respected, this means great progress in relation to authoritarian rule…We see that the presence or absence of fair elections is important not only analytically to scholars but also practically to democracy promoters.[115]

According to Najem, historically, the development paradigm has several phases. First, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the development paradigm adopted by most post-colonial countries of the Third World entailed: (1) strong state direction of the development process and control of the means of production; and (2) protectionist trade practices, designed to secure national sovereignty by minimising external penetration. Second, beginning in the late 1970s, another developmental paradigm stressing economic liberalisation, especially free trade and privatisation, began to be asserted by Western theorists and policy-makers. Finally, by the late 1980s and partly in response to criticisms concerning the perceived human cost of economic liberalisation, some advocates of this approach began to articulate potential benefits in terms of political liberalisation and greater government accountability.[116] In short, it was suggested that economic liberalisation might be the key to establishing preconditions for democratic reform in many countries.

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[115] G. O'Donnell, *In partial defence of an evanescent "paradigm",* (London, 2007) pp. 322-323.
[116] T. Najem, *Good governance: the definition and application of the concept*, (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003) pp. 4-5.

The concept of political development has several meanings and can be confused with "modernisation". Some of these meanings are ambiguous and imprecise in terms of modernisation and political development.[117] For instance, some scholars of comparative politics do not distinguish between modernisation and political development. According to Almond, modernisation and political development can be used in the same way.

> Where we call this set of trends a movement toward a "world culture," a "development syndrome," "political modernisation", "political development", or "political change" it seems quite evident that all of us have been writing about movement in a particular direction.[118]

In the early days of nation building, Huntington argues that modernisation has a negative impact on political development. It is useful to distinguish political development from modernisation because rapid modernisation will lead to political decay, not political development.

> It is useful to distinguish political development from modernisation and to identify political development with the institutionalization of political organisations and procedures. Rapid increases in mobilization and participation, the principal political aspects of modernisation, undermine political institutions. Rapid modernisation, in brief, produces not political development, but political decay.[119]

It is argued that Huntington considers "institution building" as the key issue for political development. There must be a parallel between developments in the modernisation process and the growth of political organisations and institutions. Also, institution building leads to political stability while modernisation, as a fundamental change in social trends, leads to political instability. These global effects of modernisation raise two important questions. What is political stability? Why did modernisation lead to political instability? Huntington addresses the second question when he states:

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[117] R. Kearney, *South and Southeast Asia: A Regional Survey*, (New York, 1975).
[118] G. Almond, *Political Development: Essays In Heuristic Theory*, (Boston, 1970) p. 288.
[119] S. Huntington, "Political Development and Political Decay", *World politics,* vol. 17, no. 3 (1965) p. 386.

Political modernisation involves the extension of political consciousness to new social groups and the mobilization of these groups into politics…The political essence of revolution is the rapid expansion of political consciousness and the rapid mobilization of new groups into politics at a speed which makes it impossible for existing political institutions to assimilate them. Revolution is the extreme case of the explosion of political participation. Without this explosion there is no revolution.[120]

Linjawi argues that the dilemma of political systems in Middle Eastern countries can be seen in the way they absorb the people's demands. There are two kinds of demands in these political systems; generated within economic and technological areas in order to meet socio-economic demands and those that accompany the modernisation process. He states:

Here, we have to distinguish between the demands that are generated from economic and technological areas to meet the socioeconomic demands and that accompany the modernisation process, such as political participation, equality of opportunity, and social justice. In the countries of the Middle East, the political systems could satisfy the socio-economic demands; however, the dilemma for them is the socio-political demands. This is because socio-political demands need a political system to absorb new demands that are generated from the process of modernisation. New groups as a product of social and economic activities will always emerge to ask about political demands.[121]

It is argued that much of Linjawi's approach is related to Saudi political reform. The Saudi Government has tried to manage political change and reform by focusing on achieving both socio-economic development without any change in socio-political demands or structures. Thus it might have succeeded in attaining the second objective but not socio-economic development. Economic growth as a result of the oil boom and modernisation process has definitely led to socio-political change, bringing with it a clear challenge to the status quo and putting pressure on leadership for further change. As this study has emphasised, during the 1990s economic growth as a result of the oil boom changed the structures of Saudi society, increasing pressure for political reform and change. The rate of economic development and growth,

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[120] S. Huntington, *Political order in changing societies*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968) p. 266.

[121] Linjawi, op. cit., p. 70.

according to the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank, has made Saudi Arabia the thirteenth most economically competitive country in the world.[122] The very success of economic development challenges the government's capacity to manage the processes of social and cultural change generated by rapid economic growth.

Al-Rawaf argues that in Saudi Arabia social, economic and technological forms of modernisation are supported by the Saudi regime, while political modernisation is highly resisted.[123] Doumato also argues that since 1999 social mobilisation in Saudi Arabia has had a political impact on Saudi regime stability. This is the result of the global revolution in information technologies such as the Internet, satellite television, e-mail and cellular phones, all of which are devices for brainstorming and mobilisation. In addition, information technologies have already leapt over the state's information barricade and created a kind of democratic forum outside the state system, where ideas are shared, policies formulated, and actions pursued. Doumato states:

> Since the 1999 introduction of the Internet, there has been a burst of grassroots political activism in Saudi Arabia. In the past, most political demonstrations were about internal issues and were generated through the mosque; but more recent events, including an all-women demonstration in Jeddah, are unique in their grassroots origin, their spontaneity, their urban middle class character, and their focus on international issues e.g. Palestine. In addition, in the wake of this year's Israeli incursion into the occupied territories, there has been an ongoing grassroots boycott of US products and US affiliated businesses….None of this activism could have occurred without information coming from satellite television and the Internet, along with e-mail and cell phones, for brainstorming and organization.[124]

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[122] According to a rating from the International Finance Corporation, a subsidiary of the World Bank 'King boosts support for key research body', *Arab News*, Jeddah, 18 October 2009. Available [Online]: at http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=127474&d=18&m=10&y=2009 [20 October 2009].

[123] O. Al-Rawaf, "The concept of the crises in political development-relevant to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia," PhD, Duke University, 1980, p. 2.

[124] E. Doumato, "A Dialogue: Saudi Arabia", *SAIS Review of International Affairs,* vol. XXII, no. 2 (2002) p. 226.

The globalising new media presented a challenge to the Saudi regime. Although Internet facilities in the Gulf area were still very limited during the early nineties, global information technologies such as fax, e-mail and websites created by Saudi dissidents abroad, played a significant role for change and pressure within the country. It also created a sort of threat to the Saudi regime, one that was virtually impossible for the Saudi authorities to control. For instance, each week some political issues of concern to Saudi opposition groups (e.g. the CDLR)[125] were publicised via facsimiles of their newsletter being distributed to many points throughout the Kingdom; the same information was transmitted through e-mail and the World Wide Web. To support this argument, Fandy states:

> Although it exploits almost all available means of communication, the CLDR is limited by the existing communication structure. For instance, most of its information is distributed either through the United States or Britain, because facilities in the Gulf area are still very limited…From London, the leaders of the CDLR have sent a steady stream of information critical of the Riyadh government. "Every week, via CompuServe, the CDLR faxes its newsletter to 600 distribution points in Saudi Arabia". It also transmits the same information through e-mail and its World Wide Web home page.[126]

Moreover, in addressing the argument that the modernisation process causes political instability in transitional societies, Claude Ake presents what is perhaps the best known version of this argument.

> Modernization is characterized by changes of norms and values and this causes an orientation upheaval. The disorientation weakens societal ties and the mechanisms of social control and creates psychological stress. These factors in turn lead to political instability……Modernization creates new wealth and power whose relations to politics are undefined. Corruption occurs in the process of using wealth to secure political power or in the process of using political power to produce wealth. Modernization breeds corruption because it changes and multiplies the laws by which society is governed.[127]

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[125] The Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights. The CDLR was the first attempt at an organised opposition (D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*, London., 2003, p. 226). The researcher will explore and discuss Saudi opposition groups in other chapters of the thesis.

[126] M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) pp. 128-129.

[127] C. Ake, "Modernization and Political Instability", *World Politics,* vol.26, no. 4 (1974) pp. 576, 580.

Lemco defines political stability as "a condition in national political systems in which the institutionalized pattern of authority breaks down and the expected compliance to political authorities is replaced by violence intended to change the personnel, policies, or sovereignty of the political authorities by injury to persons or property".[128]

The concept of modernisation has several meanings. Most of these meanings focus on change in social trends, urbanisation, industrialisation, democratisation, education, media participation and traditional values and institutions. Irwin argues that most scholars have generally failed to define modernisation. He defines modernisation as "the emergence of new forms of integration, evolutionary 'upgrading' and an increasingly generalized adaptive capacity of societies".[129] According to Huntington, modernisation is a multifaceted process involving changes in all areas of human thought and activity.

> At the psychological level, modernisation involves a fundamental shift in values, attitudes, and expectations. At the intellectual level, modernisation involves the tremendous expansion of man's knowledge about his environment and the diffusion of this knowledge throughout society through increased literacy, mass communications, and education. Demographically, modernisation means changes in the patterns of life, a marked increase in health and life expectancy…in particular, the rapid growth of urban population. Socially, modernisation tends to supplement the family and other primary groups. Economically, there is a diversification of activity….the level of occupational skill rises significantly; the ratio of capital to labour increases and subsistence agriculture gives way to market agriculture; and agriculture itself declines in significance compared to commercial, industrial, and other non-agricultural activities.[130]

Pye introduced ten variable definitions for the concept of political development, as follows:[131]

- the political prerequisite of economic development

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[128] J. Lemco, *Political Stability In Federal Governments*, (New York, 1991) p. 24.

[129] P. Irwin, "An Operational Definition of societal Modernization", *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1975) p. 595.

[130] S. Huntington, *Political order in changing societies,* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968) pp. 32-33.

[131] L. Pye, *The Concept of political Development*, (New York, 1966) pp. 83-89.

- politics typical of industrial societies
- political modernisation
- operations of a nation-state
- administrative and legal development
- mass mobilisation and participation
- the building of democracy
- stability and orderly change
- mobilisation and power
- one aspect of a multidimensional process of social change.

However, some scholars argue that in order to understand the quality of development and democracy today, good governance and liberal democracy are the most important concepts of modernisation theory which enhance political development in Third World countries. In this respect Najem conceptualised the concept of good governance, as follows:[132]

- Economic liberalisation and the creation of a market friendly environment.
- Transparency and accountability with respect to both economic and political decision-making.
- Political liberalisation, particularly democratic reform.
- Rule of law and the elimination of corruption.
- The promotion of civil society.
- The introduction of fundamental human rights guarantees with respect to political rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom from arbitrary imprisonment.
- The adoption of policies designed to safeguard long-term interests such as education, health and the environment.

Good governance is very important in order to enhance the meaning of democracy and political development, particularly in developed countries. But for less developed

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[132] T. Najem, *Good governance: the definition and application of the concept*, (London, 2003) p. 2.

countries the implementation of this concept must be careful and gradual. Any development or change in these countries must be within the context of political culture, tradition and social structures. For instance, a country like Saudi Arabia, which is considered a very conservative country and in which Islam plays an important role as the main source of legitimacy for the Saudi Government, the separation of political reform and the context of social structures, particularly religious structures, is very difficult. Hence, to impose this concept in the name of modernisation and democracy may lead to chaos instead of democracy. Wald, Silverman and Fridy offer the following view:

> Consider the post-war comparative theorists who, preoccupied with the newly independent states carved out of colonial empires, identified modernization as the desired end product of political development. They defined modernization (in part) as the "separation of polity from religious structures, substitution of secular modes of legitimation and extension of polity's jurisdiction into areas formerly regulated by religion".[133]

2.4 Modes of transition

The transition to democracy has several modes which play a very important role in explaining the transition from authoritarian rule and the consolidation of democracy in most Third World countries. The mode of transition highlights who makes a transition and how they are made because it is not the only factor affecting democratisation. For instance, the impetus for change and transition sometimes comes from outside the incumbent elite. Each country has its own features and consequently adopts the mode that best suits its nature. According to Munck and Leff, there are several modes of transition, as follows:[134]

- First, reform from below. In this mode the impetus for change and reform comes from outside the incumbent elite from such forces as opposition movements who are demanding involvement in the political

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[133] K. Wald, A. Silverman & K. Fridy, "Making Sense of Religion in Political Life", *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 8, (June 2005) p. 123.
[134] G. Munck & C. Left, "Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective", *Comparative politics*, vol. 29, no. 3(1997) pp. 357-359.

arena. But in this transition incumbent elites are still strong and are able to impose constraints on elite contestation. The regime that emerges from this mode of transition is a restricted democracy.

- Second, reform through transaction. This mode of transition is associated with a more complicated and protracted process and results in less restricted versions of democracy. Because the incumbent elites acquiesce in regime change, reforms through transaction generate political openings for elite competition and subsequently create a stake in the new system for both the old and new regime.

- Third, reform through extrication. This mode of transition is like reform though transaction but results in unrestricted democracy. Both the incumbent and counter elites accept the need for elite contestation, which gives the impression that the former rulers will adapt to democratic rules and not threaten the system. In brief, reform through extrication makes both the process of transition to democracy and steady progress toward democratic consolidation easier.

- Fourth, reform through ruptures. This kind of reform appears to be the most unproblematic type of transition. It allows opposition movements to impose demands for unrestricted elections. However, reform through rupture makes the transition to democracy relatively easy, but also hampers democratic consolidation by reducing the incentive for counter-elites to develop cooperative relationships and consensus on key institutional rules during the critical period of transition.

- Finally, reform from above. This kind of reform resembles ruptures in its relative lack of complexity. It also generates political openings. But, as in reforms through rupture, the conditions that enable a swift transition to democracy may encumber democratic consolidation. Generally,

reform from above is probably the mode of transition least likely to sustain steady progress toward the consolidation of democracy.

In the Saudi case the strong top-down vision of a transition to democracy, which involves a gradual liberalisation and political institutional reform, assists as a mechanism of political contestation. This concurs with Buchanan's view. Buchanan introduces two different perspectives in relation to authoritarian regime transition: "top-down" and "bottom-up".

> Some transitions from authoritarianism are "top-down," others are "bottom-up". A "top-down" process involves a gradual liberalisation and political opening followed by competitive elections. In such cases adherence to procedure clears the way for the institutionalization of democratic structures.... A "bottom-up" process of transition occurs when civil society mobilizes and expands the range of its demands while moving to secure a greater voice in the governmental decision making process. This usually occurs as a result of the collapse or paralysis of the authoritarian regime.[135]

However, Dioun argues that top-down liberalisation as a vision of political reform involving gradual change by the Saudi Government as a way to promote transition while staying in power, such as local elections to half of each municipal council, may be impossible.

> Trying to control the reform process, Abdullah has announced plans for top-down liberalization in slow and steady steps starting with local elections to half of each municipal council'... Regardless, it may be impossible for the Saudi royals to liberalize and stay in power, even in the best-case scenario, when the reform process is measured and stable.[136]

The evolution of political reform, particularly political institutional reform in Saudi Arabia, is the result of government initiatives which resemble the concept of reform from above, or top-down, as a mode of transition. Therefore, reform as a result of government top-down initiatives relating to this concept may lead to limited political

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[135] P. Buchanan, *Democratization Top-Down and Bottom-Up*, (Washington DC: Foreign Service Inst 1987) p. 224.
[136] C. Dioun, "Democracy Within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", 5February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [22 March 2007].

transition and encumber democratic consolidation. In this respect, the Saudi scholars, Alshayeb,[137] Al-Faleh,[138] Yamani[139], argue that the interaction of the Saudi Government with domestic and external pressures to implement political institutional reforms has not been enough. It is still limited by way of comparison with Egypt or Jordan. For instance, the Saudi Government remains an absolute monarchy. The royal family is the most powerful political institution and its members hold considerable power. The Consultative Council is appointed by the King and has only advisory powers.

In this regard, the transition to democracy and the implementation of institutional political reform in Saudi Arabia is a very complicated and paradoxical case. Three forces play a significant role for change and democracy. First and foremost, Saudi Arabia is a profoundly religious country, and the ruling family has established a powerful religious legitimacy. Islam plays an important role in the social, cultural and political life of Saudi Arabia and shapes its constitution and social practices; this has created a very conservative country.[140] Second, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy with a traditional Islamic system. The Saudi royal family is well aware of the history of post-monarchical society in Iran, Iraq and Egypt. For instance, some of these royal families had to flee (Iran, Egypt) or were slaughtered (Iraq). Thus, the Saudi royal family does not promote liberalism and democratisation because they want to preserve power. Third, looking at the recent history of the region, the Saudi middle classes have observed that Iraq, Egypt and Iran have not done so well since their monarchies were overthrown but instead they have experienced bloody and terrible wars. Hence an emerging Saudi middle class, as a result of the process of reform and democracy, is not a priority of the government because they want to

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[137] J. Alshayeb, "New Saudi King and Challenge of Reforms", op. cit.,
[138] M. Al-Faleh, "The Future Policy In Saudi Arabia related to events of September 11: Reform in Face of Collapse or Division", *Al-Quds al-Arabi* , London, 26 April – 1 May 2002. Available [Online]: http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2002/04Apr/26%20Apr%20Fri/Quds13.pdf [22 March 2007].
139 M. Yamani, "Saudi Arabia Is Blocking Reforms", 30 June 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-401/i.html [23 March 2007].
[140] K. Al-Habbas, The Theory and Practice of Saudi Arabian National Security since the Gulf War: A Mult-Dimentional Approach to the Pattern of Security Relations, Ph.D. dissertation, Warwick University, 1999.

remain in power.[141] Furthermore, promoting political liberalisation without the proper development of political institutions in Saudi Arabia such as civil institutions is dangerous because opening political spaces could initially empower reactionary groups, creating momentum for anti-royalists.[142] Seznec however argues that a transition to democracy and institutional political reform is required in order to establish fundamental change in Saudi Arabia, such as equality under the law and an independent judiciary. Paradoxically, this change is dependent on an authoritarian ruler of stature who can push the country further towards reform and further away from "closed hegemony".[143]

2.5 Types of authoritarian regimes

Some scholars argue there is still a struggle to classify ambiguous regimes. Some countries, particularly in the Third World, fall into so-called "political grey zones" between democracy and autocracy, that is, between a full-fledged democracy and outright dictatorship. There is a relationship between the mode of transition and the type and nature of an authoritarian regime. Jaggers and Gurr define dictatorship and regimes as "kinds of political systems whose common properties are lack of regulated political competition and lack of concern for political and civil liberties".[144]

One of the most striking features of the post the post Cold War period is the unprecedented growth in the number of dictatorships and regimes that are neither clearly democratic nor conventionally authoritarian. These are so-called "hybrid" regimes. Moreover, recent academic writing has produced a variety of labels for mixed cases including not only hybrid regimes but also some other kinds of hybrid regimes such as "semi-democracy", "virtual democracy", "electoral democracy",

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[141] P. Clawson, "A Dialogue: Saudi Arabia", *SAIS Review of International Affairs,* vol. XXII, no. 2 (2002).
[142] C. Dioun, "Democracy Within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", 18 February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [24 March 2007].
[143] J. Seznec, "Democratization in the Arab World? Stirrings in Saudi Arabia", *Journal of Democracy* vol. 13, no. 4 (2002) p. 40.
[144] K. Jaggers, & T. Gurr, "Tracking Democracy's Third Wave with the Polity III Data", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 32, no. 4 (1995) p. 471.

"pseudo-democracy", "illiberal democracy", "semi-authoritarianism", "soft authoritarianism" "electoral authoritarianism" and "partly free".[145] A more ambitious and wide-ranging attempt at regime classification is the one introduced by Diamond who argues that the type of hybrid regimes (combining democratic and authoritarian elements) is one of the common types in most Third World countries.

> This type of hybrid regime which is now so common is very much a product of the contemporary world. Virtually all of the hybrid regimes in the world today are quite deliberately pseudo-democratic in that the existence of formally democratic political institutions, such as multiparty electoral competition, masks (often, in part, to legitimate) the reality of authoritarian domination.[146]

According to Geddes, one of the reasons regime transitions have proved so theoretically intractable is that different kinds of authoritarianism differ from each other as much as they differ from democracy. She classified non-democratic or authoritarian regime types, as follows:[147]

- personalist regimes (sultanist)
- military regimes
- single-party regimes
- hybrid regimes (amalgams).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia fits into Geddes' categories as a personalised regime. As will be discussed in chapter three, since 1932 Saudi Arabia has been ruled by King Abd al Aziz, the founder of the modern state, and his successors who have enjoyed absolute control over the country. The King and some members of the royal family monopolise the highest offices in government. Rustow conceptualises the political situation of personalist authoritarian regimes and the factors that usually apply in their demise and change.

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[145] S. Levitsky & L. Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 2, (2002) p. 51.
[146] L. Diamond, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes", *Journal of Democracy,* vol. 13, no. 2 (2002) p. 24.
[147] B. Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" , *Annual Reviews of Political Science*, vol. 2 (1999) p. 121.

> As a dictatorship becomes more centralised and personal, the government becomes increasingly repressive, important information often fails to reach top officials, and alternatives for orderly succession become scarcer. Illness, old age or deaths of dictators thus were a major factor in change and transformation.[148]

Hadenius and Teorell argue that despite the merits of Geddes' classification of types of authoritarian regimes, there is considerable room for improvement. For instance, Geddes' study ignores or omits some important types of authoritarian regimes, most notably, monarchies and "competitive" or "electoral" autocracies. In addition, Hadenius and Teorell argue that Geddes did not distinguish between one-party regimes, where opposition groups are not allowed, and dominant party regimes, where a single party rules but which allows for some opposition to grow. They classified authoritarian regimes into five main types, as follows:[149]

- monarchical regimes
- military regimes
- no-party regimes
- one-party regimes
- limited multiparty regimes.

However, for Hadenius and Teorell, the limited multiparty system is the most fragile form of authoritarianism and it has become the most common form of authoritarian government in most Third World countries. Monarchies are the most stable of the five types of authoritarian regimes.[150] Different types of authoritarian regimes have a different likelihood of dismissal or break- down in the process of being transformed into a democracy. It is useful to discuss why some monarchies are sometimes the most stable type of regime and survive, while others do not. Are there any specific features, for example, particularly in the dynastic Gulf monarchies, which Saudi Arabia has? To answer this question, first we need to define monarchies in general.

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[148] D. Rustow, "Democracy: a global revolution?", *Foreign Affairs,* vol. 69 (1990) pp. 76-77.
[149] A. Hadenius, & J. Teorell, "Pathways from Authoritarianism", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2007) p. 146.
[150] *Ibid.*, pp. 150-152.

Hadenius and Teorel define monarchies as "those regimes in which a person of royal descent has inherited the position of head of state in accordance with accepted practice and/or the constitution (one cannot proclaim oneself a monarch)".[151] The nature of the political systems and the political process in some of the countries with monarchies, particularly the dynastic Gulf monarchies, play a significant role in their political stability and continuation. For instance, all of these countries are governed by a centralised power through a huge number of members of the ruling family which gives them a sort of coherence. Huntington argues that centralisation of power is acceptable in the monarchies in order to stabilise the country. Also, stability depends on the balance between centralised and de-centralised power in order to assimilate the upheaval of some groups as a result of modernisation.[152] In reference to Saudi Arabia, Seznec argues that there is a correlation between the traditional process of choosing the princely candidate and political stability. These traditional processes enhance the dynastic coherence which is very important for political stability. In Saudi Arabia the king must be approved by the rest of the royal family.[153]

In this regard, Dioun argues there are some features that make monarchies the most stable form of government. These features depend on the nature of these regimes and the way in which they have ruled in order to monopolise political power. For instance, in the Saudi case, the royal family is a conservative dynastic monarchy that has monopolised political power since its foundation. In addition, the founder of the contemporary Saudi state in 1932, King Abd al-Aziz, was well aware of the nature of power politics in a tribal environment, when he decided to make kinship among them by marriage, which helped him to achieve his goal of expanding and consolidating his power among the tribes. Furthermore, the Saudi ruling family attempts to make policy decisions privately, emphasising consensus-based familial rule. This policy saw the

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[151] *Ibid*., p. 146.

[152] S. Huntington, *Political order in changing societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968) p. 177.

[153] J. Seznec, "Democratization in the Arab World? Stirrings in Saudi Arabia", *Journal of Democracy,* vol. 13, no. 4 (2002) p. 34.

country avoid political pluralism as well as empower the regime to control its people and make it more stable.[154]

Herb however explored different views of political stability and continuation of the monarchies in Jordan, Morocco and Oman. He argues that political stability and continuation in these monarchies is related to the form of rule which allows members of the ruling family to occupy high positions, but not to monopolise them. In addition, most of the family members in high positions are surrounded by their relatives and this introduces a kind of coherence and prevents them from collapsing.[155] Elsewhere Herb introduced further explanation that political stability and continuation in the dynastic Gulf monarchies is related to the form of rule; this means allowing a member of the ruling family to occupy high positions, the so-called "ministries of sovereignty".[156] In view of the foregoing discussion, what Herb explores here is the method of rule used by Gulf monarchies, whereby control is maintained by members of the ruling family occupying senior government positions. This is exactly the situation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For instance, the Saudi royal family is a large family, consisting of 7000 princes. Many of the Saudi royal family hold strategic and sensitive positions of power and surrounded by their relatives, particularly in the so-called "ministries of sovereignty". They hold absolute control over Ministries such as the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or act as Deputies in various key ministries. Furthermore, their political role can be compared to that of a political party in a single-party state.[157] In the Saudi case, Dioun argues that gradual liberalisation in Saudi Arabia lowers the potential cost of liberalisation as a result of the opening of negotiations between the Government and political elites with regards to the balance of power. This policy is very important, as it stabilises the regime by ensuring that it holds enough power to

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[154] C. Dioun, "Democracy Within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", 17 February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [28 March 2007].

[155] M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, (New York Press, 1999) p. 9.

[156] M. Herb, "Democratization in the Arab World? Emirs And Parliaments in The Gulf", *Journal of Democracy,* vol. 13, no. 4 (2002) p. 41.

157 T. Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy and survival*, (London: Routledge, 2006) p. 14.

control the reform process, while enabling reformers and regime opponents to share power in a limited fashion.[158]

In light of the foregoing discussion which explored the dynamic of global transitions from authoritarian regimes in less developed countries toward political development, the so-called "third wave" of democracy which has been happening since 1974, the next section discusses the dynamic of the rentier state in general, and in Saudi Arabia, in particular.

Section Two

2.6 The rentier state, reform and political development

As discussed in the previous section, members of the Royal family hold many of the strategic positions in the government and wield an all pervasive influence in the reform process. This domination is associated with the concept of the rentier state. Herb imputes the decline of such reform processes to the nature of rule in Arab countries and their rentier character. This character gives them little exposure to the threat of collapse. Herb states:

> I argue that the dynastic monarchies of Arabia lack parliaments because they suffer little threat of revolution. The far more common explanation, however, is that they do not have parliaments because they do not tax their citizens. The rentier state theory, while it has recently come in for some rethinking, remains the dominant theoretical paradigm in the study of the Middle Eastern monarchies. Its core argument is neatly summed up in the aphorism "no representation without taxation".[159]

Since the rentier state theory has influenced our understanding of reform and political change in Arab countries, and because some scholars impute the slowdown of political development and democracy in the Arab states due to this theory, in the following section rentier state theory will be explored. The focus will be on the

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[158] C. Dioun, "Democracy Within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", 17 February 2005). Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [2 April 2007].
[159] M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, (New York Press, 1999) p. 256.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as one of the Arab countries where the theory resonates and helps to explain how the huge revenues generated from the oil sector influence the pattern of political change and has affected the progress of institutional development.

The global oil market and its associated booms and busts have generated a large body of literature in political science. In recent years, many scholars have utilised the concept of a rentier state which, in general, refers to a state financially dependent on external sources, such as oil rent, for a large portion of its revenue. Scholars have used the concept to explain the absence of democracy and political development in the Arab states. The heavy reliance of many Middle Eastern countries on oil revenues, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council states of which Saudi Arabia is one, qualify them as rentier states.

The researcher will discuss the relationship between wealth as a result of being dependent on external rent from oil exports and political change and political development in Saudi Arabia. Two important questions arise when considering this relationship. First, did the rent of natural resources, particularly oil rent, hinder democracy? Second, in Arabian society, particularly in the Arab Gulf States, where family, tribal and religious ties, together with the cultural and moral values they hold, play a significant role for change and reform as well as in maintaining political stability and the legitimacy of the rulers. How did the governments of these states enhance the power of the ruling elite and maintain the cultural and moral values of their societies without depending on external sources of revenue, such as oil rent? This is similar to Huntington's argument about less developed countries and their modernisation; instead of nation-building and political stability, what happens instead is political decay.[160] However, the researcher will discuss the concept of a rentier state, focusing on the political rather than the economic concept of rent, its impact on socio-economic and political change in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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[160] S. Huntington, *Political order in changing societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968).

Many scholars argue there is a correlation between rent income and the development of democratic politics. Others argue that oil revenues make authoritarian regimes stronger by funding patronage and repressive apparatuses. Nonneman argues that the Middle East is unlikely to develop democratic politics due to cultural and historical factors, as well as the political economy of rentierism.[161] According to Okruhlik, the financial autonomy of oil states grants them immunity from social pressures.[162] Herb argues that oil revenues release the state from the accountability ordinarily exacted by the domestic appropriation of the surplus.[163] Perthes argues that although the relation between rent income and political competitiveness is neither direct nor mechanical, it cannot be ignored.[164] Also, Glosemeyer argues that the nature of the rentier state turned many members of the tribal elite into clients of the core elite and hence undermined their positions.[165] However, the concept of a rentier state gained more attention with the oil boom era of the 1970s through Iranian social scientist Hossein Mahdavy, who defines rentier states as "those countries that receive on a regular basis substantial amounts of external economic rent" (cited in Yates).[166] Shambayati defines a rentier state as "any state that receives a substantial portion of its income in the form of external rents".[167] Furthermore, in order to qualify as a rentier state, "the government must be the direct recipient of the external rents".[168]

Beblawi specifies four interconnected characteristics which must be present in order for a state to be categorised as rentier.[169]

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[161] G. Nonneman, "Rentiers and Autocrats, Monarchs and Democrats, State and Society: The Middle East between Globalization, Human "Agency", and Europe", *International Affairs* (2001) p. 142.
[162] G. Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States", *Comparative Politics* (1999) p. 295.
[163] M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, (New York Press, 1999) p. 257.
[164] V. Perthes, *Elite Change and Systems Maintenance*, (London, 2004) p. 301.
[165] I. Glosemeyer, *Saudi Arabia: Dynamism Uncovered*, (London, 2004) p. 143.
[166] D. Yates, *The Rentier State In Africa: Oil Rent Dependency And Neo-colonialism In The Republic of Gabon* (1996).
[167] H. Shambayati, "The Rentier State, Interest Group, and the Paradox of Autonomy: State and Business in Turkey and Iran", *Comparative Politics* (1994) p. 308.
168 *Ibid*.,
[169] H. Beblawi, *The Rentier state in the Arab World*, (London, 1990) pp. 87-88.

1. The rentier economy, of which the state is a subset, must be one where rent situations predominate.

2. The origin of this rent must be external to the economy.

3. In a rentier state, few are engaged in the generation of rent, while the majority are involved in its distribution and consumption.

4. The government must be the principal recipient in the economy of the external rent.

Shambayati distinguishes between rentier states where oil is the main source of government revenues, and non-oil producers, such as Jordan and Syria which receive substantial external rent money through petrodollar aid, loans and remittances that meet their revenue requirements.[170] In relation to this point, Luciani distinguishes between two types of states: exoteric and esoteric, in which exoteric states are generally states predominantly based on revenue accruing directly from abroad and esoteric states generally rely on domestic revenue and taxation.[171] Elsewhere, Luciani argues that the concept of a rentier state does not necessarily refer to oil exporting states. There are other rent-like sources of revenue which accrue directly to the state.

> Beside oil, other sources of income from abroad accruing directly to the state are transportation infrastructures of an international relevance and aid, be it economic, military or political, although the fact that it is sometimes in kind or tied limits the freedom to allocate it among different alternative purposes.[172]

In general, Bahgat summarised the concept of a rentier state as follows:[173]

- It is dependent on an external source of income as the only source of income revenue, particularly through oil rent.

- Its income revenue should not come from the productive activities of the citizens of the beneficiary state.

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[170] Shambayati, op. cit., p. 307.
[171] G. Luciani, *Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework*, (London, 1990) p. 71.
[172] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[173] G. Bahgat, "Military Security and political stability in the Gulf", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, (1995).

Thus the rentier state concept could be used as a tool to explain and analyse the functions and political development of Arab countries, particularly the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Herb argues that the rentier state theory remains the dominant theoretical paradigm in the study of Middle Eastern monarchies. Its core argument is neatly summed up in the aphorism "no representation without taxation".[174]

The classical rentier state theory (RST) provides an insufficient explanation of Rentier States' behaviour and policies. Over the last two decades, the literature on the role of external rents in developing world has evolved significantly. Okruhilik observes that the idea of the rentier state has come to imply so much that it has lost its content.[175] Ross suggests that the claim that oil impedes democracy has received little attention and requires more refinement.[176] Gause argues that the stabilizing and "de-politicizing" effects of the rentier state are real, but that the overall impression they give is static.[177] According to Gray, there are two limitations of the classical RST model. One is that the notion of state autonomy so central to classical RST is simplistic and unsustainable. The second point stems from that the state is just not autonomous, but rather is embedded in its political economy.[178] Foley states that

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[174] M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, (New York Press, 1999) p. 256.
[175] G. Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States" *Comparative Politics*, vol. 31 (April 1999), p. 308.

[176] M. Ross, "Does oil hinder democracy", *World Politics*, 53(3): 2001, p. 325.

[177] G. Gause, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994, p. 81.

[178] M. Gray, "Towards a Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," 2010, available [Online]: http://apsa2010.com.au.ful-papers/pdf/APSA2010 0020.pdf; [27 July 2011].

although the price of oil and revenues from oil sales increased with breakneck speed between 1999 and the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, the opposite of what the rentier model predicts has occurred. That is, governments held elections and permitted some groups outside of their elites to take a far more visible public role than before.[179] Elsewhere, Gray argues that classical RST, however, has proven inadequate to the task of understanding the rentier bargains that underpin state power in the Gulf in the current day. Too many variables – population change, globalization, business pressure, new international imperatives – complicate the state and its role, requiring an apolitical elite that wishes to survive in the long-term to develop a more nuanced, engaged and complex approach to society and to policy-making.[180]

Gray argues that the maintenance of a stable alliance or coalition is necessary component to minimize reform especially in Saudi Arabia. This coalition is required for state-building as well as to enable the government to remain in power. Gray states that:

> The royals deliberately are not allowing reforms which could undermine their or '*ulima* authority. It is also careful to preserve its central position in the Muslim world and as a result is extremely conservative about any reforms that might impact the state's religious reputation.[181]

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[179] S. Foley, *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010, p. 3.

[180] M. Gray, "Towards a Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," 2010, available [Online]: http://apsa2010.com.au.ful-papers/pdf/APSA2010 0020.pdf; [28 June 2011].

[181] M. Gray, "Towards a Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," 2010, available [Online]: http://apsa2010.com.au.ful-papers/pdf/APSA2010 0020.pdf; [27 July 2011].

Foley discusses one of the strategies of coalition building that has been used to minimize reform like Saudi Arabia. The Saudi government has sought to identify itself with tribal traditions as part of a strategy to co-opt and provide limited channels for the articulation of opinion and interests. He describes how:

> The king participated in Bedouin war dances in Mecca and elsewhere to prove his strength and vigor and did not impede many tribal legal traditions...These rituals reinforced tribal loyalties and group solidarity (*asabiyya*) and gave subjects opportunities to seek personal redress for their grievance and even to challenge a monarch's policies or action to his face.[182]

It is argued that the classical rentier state theory provides an inadequate explanation of Rentier state behaviour and policies and that a broader framework of analysis is required. What is required is a broader theoretical framework that examines how governments have sought to develop stable coalitions with sections of society and sustain the government's legitimacy by identifying themselves with established traditions and values. At the same time, oil revenues in the rich GCC states still insulate them from widespread demands for change especially in the short-term. Patronage and co-opting strategies enabled by oil revenues may contain pressures for reform in the short-term but, in the longer-term, they do not prevent established traditions and structures coming into uneasy contact with both modernity and wealth.

Okruhilik, Ross, Gause, Gray and Foley are among the scholars who have argued for a revised theory that more adequately explains rentier state behaviour.[183] Gray

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[182] S. Foley, *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010, p. 25.

[183] G. Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States" *Comparative Politics*, vol. 31 (April 1999); M. Ross, "Does oil hinder democracy", *World Politics*, 53(3): 2001; G. Gause, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994; M. Gray, "Towards a Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," 2010, available [Online]: http://apsa2010.com.au.ful-papers/pdf/APSA2010_0020.pdf; S. Foley, *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010.

contends that 'late stage rentierism', remains essentially renterism, however a revised theory needs to accommodate "quasi-rentier or non-rentier" aspects of the state. Gray asserts that rentier states have started to think longer term, take into consideration the impact of globalization, introduce new economic and development imperatives and policies as well as take into consideration population growth and employment pressures. These developments have meant that rentier states have been forced into adopting 'non-rentier' ways.[184] Foley claims that because of the rentier regimes still have not been willing to cede any real power to society or opposition groups, rentierism has remained the essence of government strategies. However, states are beginning to develop policies and approaches foreign to the traditional rentier state, hence the term 'late stage rentierism' is appropriate.[185] According to Gray, Globalization means that the context of rentirism has changed, not just its characteristics. So, because of the effects of globalization, states are essentially forced to conduct their affairs differently than they have in the past. Furthermore, alongside globalisation, population growth has also forced these rentier states, such as Saudi Arabia, to adopt new methods of employment other than the traditional ways.[186] Gray explains that the states that can be categorized as 'late rentier states' are much more efficient in dealing with and counteracting Islamism than traditional rentier states. Late stage rentierism reflects a change in the state's attitude concerning rent that will ultimately ensure its longer term survival.[187] According to Foley, rentier states such as the GCC states are facing new challenges that haven't been faced before. These new challenges, such as globalization and population growth, have forced methods, which

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[184] M. Gray, "Towards a Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," 2010, available [Online]: http://apsa2010.com.au.ful-papers/pdf/APSA2010 0020.pdf [4 August 2011].

[185] S. Foley, *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010, p. 3.

[186] M. Gray, "Towards a Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," 2010, available [Online]: http://apsa2010.com.au.ful-papers/pdf/APSA2010 0020.pdf [4 August 2011].

[187] Gray, *ibid.,*

are essentially non-rentier, to be adopted by the regime.[188] Gray contends that this new outlook implies a greater devolution of power to civil society and allows more flexibility with regard to pluralism, an aspect of civil society which is not inherent in these regimes past policies.[189] In conclusion, Gray summarizes the features of the late rentier state as follows:[190]

- It is non-democratic, but may allow some pluralism with more responsive than classical RST would argue.
- It is open to globalization.
- It is not only has an economic policy, but also has a development policy.
- It is state capitalist, whatever development policies it adopts.
- It is cognizant of long-term imperatives and threats.

2.7 Rentier politics, socio-economic and cultural change and political development in Saudi Arabia

The basic idea of defining the rentier state is to empower us to understand the nature political change in those countries that are financially dependent on oil revenues, as a single source of income, for their economic growth, rather than on the production of goods and services by its citizens. However, economic growth in Saudi Arabia is generated generally by oil exports, not by the productivity of any other sector. According to Cordesman, the oil age in Saudi Arabia itself passed through several

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[188] S. Foley, *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010, p. 5.

[189] M. Gray, "Towards a Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," 2010, available [Online]: http://apsa2010.com.au.ful-papers/pdf/APSA2010 0020.pdf [4 August 2011].

[190] Gray, *ibid.,*

main periods. The first period lasted from its foundation in 1952 to 1973, before the beginning of the oil boom. In this period, oil income and revenues were very modest. The second main period can be described as the oil boom period and this started in 1974 and continued until 1980. This boom transformed the country into a heavily urbanised welfare state. The third period was one of Saudi economic struggle, which started in the 1980s and continued until the end of the 1990s.[191] However, Bahgat argues that since the early 1990s significant internal and external developments have changed the dynamics of the political process and represent a serious threat to the basis of the state.

> The GCCs have relied on a three-dimensional defensive strategy since the early 1990s. These three dimensions are: self-reliance, regional balancing, and high-tech armaments. The pursuit of this strategy, particularly the last dimension, has contributed to the weakening of the rentier state.[192]

In relation to the main features of a rentier state, where that state or government must be the direct receiver of external revenues which dominate its economy, Niblock argues that, for the Saudi Government, this happened since the oil boom in 1970 until the fall of oil prices in 1980, which forced the government to promote limited economic reforms.

> Since the oil boom in the 1970s, the government has dominated the Saudi Arabia economy; the main engines behind economic growth in Saudi Arabia are oil revenues and the government spending of those revenues. However, with the fall in the oil price in the 1980s, the Saudi Government began to promote economic liberalization, aiming in particular to reduce the role of the state in the economy. The actual pace of reform, however, was very slow: the measures were mostly insubstantial, and their implementation tended to be piecemeal.[193]

The economy, and especially the oil sector, was dominated by the Saudi Government from the oil boom in the 1970s, which enabled the government to be autonomous

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[191] A. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century: The Political, Foreign Policy, Economic, and Energy Dimensions*, (Washington DC: The Centre for Strategies and International Studies, 2003) p. 4.

[192] G. Bahgat, "Military Security and political stability in the Gulf", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, (1995) p. 58.

[193] T. Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy and survival*, (London: Routledge, 2006) p. 122.

from its domestic economy and then become the only source of expenditure of goods and services and other forms of financial support. This freed the country from the need to forgo domestic taxes and allowed it to utilise the oil boom to control any demands for political reform, thus hindering democracy. In this respect Ross states:

> Theories of the rentier state contend that when governments gain most of their revenues from external sources, such as resource rents or foreign assistance, they are freed from the need to levy domestic taxes and become less accountable to the societies they govern.[194]

Schlumberger argues that Middle Eastern countries have survived and guaranteed political loyalty as a result of financial autonomy from external rent, which strengthens these countries financially.

> In the Middle East, political regimes have often survived in recent decades due to two factors which can both be considered international rents, at least as regards their effects on the domestic polity and economy: the influx of revenues from the export of oil and gas (differential rents); the influx of aid money and other forms of financial support (rent equivalents).[195]

Some scholars argue that even though wealth autonomy has enabled Middle Eastern states to avoid real opposition it has not prevented them from experiencing civil pressures. According to Okruhlik, for example, the financial autonomy of the Saudi Arabian state did not translate into immunity from civil pressures.

> Rent did not buy the support or loyalty of different social groups even during the boom. At most, it may have purchased temporary complacency. The vulnerability of the regime has been exposed in crisis. Dissent that was masked by distribution has been exacerbated by lower oil revenues and political crisis.[196]

Shambayati argues that the government has become the main receiver of financial rent, rather than it being diffused among the population, which has enabled the government to establish so-called "patron-client ties" between certain groups and the

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[194] M. Ross, "The Political Economy of the Resource Curse", *World Politics* (1999) p. 303.
[195] O. Schlumberger, "Rents, Reform, and Authoritarianism in the Middle East", (2006) 44. Available [Online]: http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipg/03652.pdf [2 May 2007].
[196] G. Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States", *Comparative Politics,* vol, 131, no. 3 (1999) p. 297.

government elite. These groups then, instead of challenging the state, compete to gain the state's favour.[197]

Subsequently, several political and social consequences are seen to follow from oil rents. First, the external rent earned by natural resources such as oil leads the state to become autonomous and separate from society. Second, citizens develop a "mentality" which means they do not make claims on the state. Therefore, the state becomes the patron of society. David Pool states:

> The political implications of rentier state theory are that civil society is relatively passive; it lacks any imperative to challenge the authorities allocating the oil revenues; and opposition movements and demands for democratic reform and government accountability are unlikely to emerge.[198]

Okruhlik argues that Saudi Arabian oil wealth leads to greater spending on patronage, which in turn dampens latent pressures, allowing the state to avoid really tough decisions about greater democratisation.

> Saudi Arabia, for example, is a classic rentier state. Its state is the functional extension of the ruling family. It is often a capital surplus oil exporter and has tremendous reserves in ground. Wealth has relaxed many traditional constraints of development and enabled the state to avoid really tough decisions or, when decisions are made, to repeal them quickly if opposition is met. Thus, the state can effectively postpone confrontations on property rights, monopolies, the enforcement of contracts, and efficient sectoral resource allocation.[199]

However, some scholars argue there is a correlation between income inequality and the promotion of democratic institutions which enable all citizens to participate in the governing process and thus avoid chaos. According to Muller, income inequality has a negative impact on democracy and political stability. Egalitarian institutions enable broader participation in government processes.[200] Okruhlik argues that in Saudi

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[197] H. Shambayati, "The Rentier State, Interest Group, and the Paradox of Autonomy: State and Business in Turkey and Iran", *Comparative Politics,* vol. 26, no. 3 (1994) p. 309.

[198] D. Pool, *Civil society: active or passive? Saudi Arabia*, (Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 291.
[199] Okruhlik, op. cit., p. 297.
[200] E, Muller, "Democracy, Economic Development, and Income Inequality", *American Sociological Review,* vol. 53, no. 1 (1988) pp. 61,65.

Arabia, where the ruling elite are the main collector and distributor of oil wealth and where there is an absence of the fair distribution of wealth, this helped to create a sort of inequality within Saudi society which established a fertile environment for opposition groups.[201] However, some scholars argue there is an inverse correlation between the price of oil and the pace of political reform and change in oil dependent regimes. For instance, Friedman argues that dependent oil regimes feel there are greater levels of stability during pre-boom and boom periods because this makes the demand for political change and reform decrease while, during bust periods, regimes feel more insecure because demands for political change and reform increase.[202]

In Saudi Arabia the serious decline in oil prices during the 1990s created pressure for political change and democracy. In order to avoid instability and domestic political violence and maintain political legitimacy, the Saudi Government implemented long-promised political institutional reforms. In this respect Ammoun points out:

> At the beginning of the 1990s, with the drastic diminution of oil income and the loss of legitimacy, the regime's perennial system was disturbed. It was thus natural that the middle class intensified its opposition. Deprived of its traditional instruments of defence, the regime had to innovate. This is how King Fahd ended up fulfilling the very old promise of conferring a Basic Law of governance.[203]

Herb argues that dependence on rentier income in the economies of the Gulf States is not healthy because oil and the income it generates are finite or limited resources. Instead Gulf States should be careful to conserve this commodity. Furthermore, the right way to keep this resource is by promoting political institutions that have the ability to impose political accountability on their regimes.[204]

In light of the foregoing discussion, the researcher argues that financial autonomy as a result of oil rent earned by the rentier states, as well as the absence of democratic and

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[201] Okruhlik, op. cit., p. 300.
[202] T. Friedman, "The power of green", *The New York Times*, 15 April 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/15/magazine/15green.t.html [15 May 2007].
[203] C. Ammoun, *The Institutionalization of the Saudi Political System and the Birth of 'Political Personnel*, (Gulf Research Centre, 2006) p. 220.
[204] M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, (New York Press, 1999) p. 259.

representative institutions and income inequality among people, has created several current problems in political, economic and social policies in Saudi Arabia. The most important is the former. For instance, even though oil revenues have empowered the regime to control and dominate the country for some time through the establishment of so-called "patron-client ties", this has not contained the pressure and demands of the various Saudi social groups asking for political reform, particularly institutional political reform.

In the next chapter the researcher will provide an overview of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, focusing on its political, historical, religious background. The chapter critically highlights the main political players, paying particular attention to the decision-making process and how this relates to political change and reform.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER THREE**</div>

<div align="center">**UNDERSTANDING SAUDI ARABIA: THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL CHANGE**</div>

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, focusing on its political, historical and religious background. The chapter critically highlights the main political players, paying particular attention to decision-making processes and how they relate to political change and reform. It will discuss the political structures of the Saudi state. This will include the creation of the state, the political system, the constitution, the politics of the royal family, the nature of political power in Saudi Arabia, the religious establishment and other groups including technocrats, businessmen and tribal leaders.

Section One: Political Strucutres

3.2 Creation of the state

The contemporary Saudi state was founded in 1932 when Abd al Aziz Ibn Saud, more commonly known as Ibn Saud (1881–1953), recaptured Riyadh and proceeded to conquer different regions of the Arabian Peninsula. However, before the present Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was created there were two previous attempts to form a state.

3.2.1 The first Saudi state (1744–1819)

The first Saudi state was the result of a tribal-religious alliance between Mohammed Ibn Saud, emir of Diraiyyah, and Mohammed Ibn Abd al Wahhab. Mohammed Ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703–92) was a Muslim scholar whose ideas formed the basis of the Wahhabi school of Islam.[205] This religious revival or puritanical movement, plus the

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[205] W. Bowen, "*The History of Saudi Arabia*", (London, 2008) pp. 69-71.

tribal-religious alliance developed through Ibn Abd al Wahhab and his followers, came to be known as al-muwahhidun or the Unitarian Movement. In fact, the Wahhabi school was different in its interpretation from other schools of Islam. This revival movement refers to the conservative Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence that concentrated on absolute monotheism and supports a return to the Islamic texts, the Quran and hadith, as the primary source of Islamic law.[206] However, al-muwahhidun or the Unitarian Movement was a powerful political influence on the first Saudi state and provided support for the religious role represented by Ibn Abd al Wahhab at that time. Its influence strengthened in the state while, at the same time, it provided the religious legitimisation needed to consolidate the territorial rule of Ibn Saud. Thus, Ibn Saud became a political leader and Ibn Abd al Wahhab became a supreme religious leader. Al-Habbas argues that for Ibn Saud this joint religious tribal alliance movement was an appropriate measure to create a central authority in a region characterised by anarchy and bitter intertribal warfare.[207] Also, Ibn Saud knew the importance of the role of religious authority in political affairs and in establishing legitimacy, to impose a strict order on the tribes he controlled, especially in a fragmented society where there were many tribes. In order to gain support he asked his eldest son, Abd al-Aziz, to marry a daughter of Ibn Abd al Wahhab, thus giving the house of Saud its special religious status, a status it has maintained. The division within society caused by the multiplicity of tribes during the 18th and early 19th centuries also existed during the third Saudi state (1902), especially when the so-called Ikhwān tribes movement happened. As indicated in the previous chapter, this movement tried to create division among Saudi tribes due to the submission of King Abdul Aziz to the British, which led the Ikhwān to oppose and criticise him publicly. Then when the King defeated them at the Battle of Sibila (1929) this broke up the tribal-religious alliance in favour of nation-building. A tribal-religious alliance between Mohammed Ibn Saud, the Emir of Diraiyyah, and Mohammed Ibn Abd al

[206] N. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, (New York: Oxford University, 2004).

[207] K. Al-Habbas, "The Theory and Practice of Saudi Arabian National Security since the Gulf War: A Multi-dimensional Approach to the Pattern of Security Relations", Ph.D. dissertation, Warwick University, 1999, p. 81.

Wahhab in the first Saudi state provided the doctrinal establishment for a new political entity. It created a supranational ideology, entrusted by the militant tribes, which empowered the Emir of Diraiyyah to enhance his authority over the disunited tribes and continue his territorial expansion. Thus, the alliance accommodated the vested interests of both figures, something which enhanced and perpetuated the developing political order, not only in the first Saudi state but also in the second and third Saudi states, despite the fact that the alliance mostly broke up in the third Saudi state when King Abd al-Aziz rose to power and started the process of nation-building.

3.2.2 The second Saudi state (1824–1891)

The second Saudi State was established when Turki Ibn Abdullah Ibn Mohammed Ibn Saud recaptured Riyadh from the Egyptian authorities in 1824, when he tried to re-establish a new base for his ancestor's political rule. This state was politically unstable and was short-lived (1824–1891). The greater challenge that faced the second Saudi state was the Egyptian intervention and the increasing domestic problems within branches of the ruling house. For example, in 1836, the Mohammed Ali Pasha of Egypt, as part of his war against the Ottomans, sent a force to the Ḥijāz to move against Faisal Ibn Turki, son of the second founder of the Saudi state, in his home territory of Najd. The aim was to establish a Cairo-centred empire at the expense of Istanbul.[208] However, the development of an inter-dynastic struggle paved the way for al-Rasheed of Hail[209] to capture the capital Riyadh in 1891; it was then governed by a representative of the Rashidi Emir.[210] Thus, the defeat of the Saudi family members made them flee to the coast seeking refuge with the Al Sabah, the Emirs of Kuwait. During this period, the struggle between the Ottoman Empire and Britain had become intense with increased external intervention in Arabian affairs.

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[208] D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform* (London, 2003) p. 30.

[209] Mohammed Ibn Rashid (1869–1897) was the emir of Hai'l, a northern oasis in central Arabia. The Rashidi emirate was founded by Abdullah Ibn Rashid (1836–1848) and rose to eminence during the second half of the nineteenth century (for further details on the al-Rashidi family, see M. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia,* Cambridge: New York : Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[210] Salem al-Sibhan was the most loyal commander of the emir of Hai'l, Mohammed Ibn Rashid, who became the new governor of Riyadh in 1891 (Al-Rasheed, *ibid*., p. 25).

This situation of political uncertainty was a good time for Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud to start his initiative to retain his ancestor's political legacy, using the historical alliance between the Al-Saud dynasty and the Najdi ʿUlamāʾon the one hand, while taking advantage of the tribal situation, on the other. Abd al-Aziz embarked on territorial expansion and gradually started to complete the process of his previous dream of unification of the country when he announced, in September 1932, the creation of a unified state which later became known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.[211]

In light of the above discussion, it is argued that one of the most significant things that helped to conquer different regions and legitimise the expansion of the contemporary Saudi state was by using the tribal-religious foundation inherited from the first and second Saudi states. At the same time, despite this historical tribal-religious alliance of the eighteenth century becoming the essence of the Saudi political system, it mostly broke up in the twentieth century when King Abd al-Aziz rose to power and completed the process of unification. The King aimed to achieve two goals. The first was to build good relationships with the dominant foreign powers of the day, especially with the British and the communist Soviet Union, and not depend solely on using religious motivation to gain authority like the former Saudi states. The second goal was to weaken the power of various tribes in order to consolidate and impose his authority, enhancing national cohesion and nation-building.

3.2.3 The third Saudi state (1902)

As mentioned, Abd al-Aziz (1879–1953) embarked on territorial expansion and gradually started to complete the process of unification of the country in 1932, founding the third Saudi state which became known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Since that time, six kings have ruled Saudi Arabia. Other than Abd al Aziz, the other kings were Saud, Faisal, Khalid, Fahd and the present ruler, King Abdullah, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. However, the question to be asked here is how could King Abd al Aziz succeed to consolidate his power and impose his authority

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[211] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 1999.

over most of the Arabian Peninsula in a society whose structure was nomadic, tribal and fragmented? For instance, as we know, the loyalty of Bedouins was mainly to the tribes, making it difficult to establish very simple things, let alone create a state. Ibn Khaldun, the famous fifteenth-century Arab scholar, described the nomadic people, more than five hundred years ago, as "the least capable, among all people of governing or being governed".[212] Also, Ibn Khaldun states that the strength of nomadic people lies in their asabiyyah.[213] But as they tend to organise, their solidarity and strength declines.[214] So, according to this concept, Abd al Aziz faced the problem of how to deal with them to transform their loyalty from the tribe to the community and state. However, several key factors allowed Abd al-Aziz to impose his authority, whether internally or externally, over most of the Arabian Peninsula. These factors are as follows.

First, from the beginning Abd al Aziz's desire was to build good relationships with foreign powers, leaving all options open, avoiding an alliance with any one power. For instance, he refused to commit himself to the British side. He also shaped the Kingdom through relations with other foreign powers, such as the United States. Furthermore, he established diplomatic relations, even with the communist Soviet Union.[215] Second, regardless of his commitment to religion, his political decisions were not exclusively driven by the ʿUlamā.[216] He was aware of power politics. In relation to this point, Al-Habbas argues that the founder of the contemporary Saudi state had an ability to draw a line between his strategic interests, when they seemed to

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[212] S. Malki, "International Inconsistency: A new Perspective on The Role of The state in Development: A Case Study of Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University, 1991, p. 182.

[213] Ibn Khaldun wrote a long time ago that asabiyyah is defined as 'zealous partisanship…party spirit, team spirit, esprit de corps…tribal solidarity, racialism, clannishness, tribalism' (D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform.* London, 2003, p. 64).

[214] K. Al-Habbas, The Theory and Practice of Saudi Arabian National Security since the Gulf War: A Mult-Dimentional Approach to the Pattern of Security Relations, Ph.D. dissertation, Warwick University, 1999. 98.

[215] J. Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia: The Formative Years 1902-1918*, (Harvard College, 1986) p. 181.

[216] A. Bligh, "The Saudi Religious Elite (Ulama) As Participant in The Political System of The Kingdom", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (1985) p. 48.

clash, or were incompatible with religious considerations.[217] It is argued that in the 1920s, when the Ikhwān challenged King Abd al Aziz both domestically and through foreign powers, the King crushed them, putting an end to their intervention[218].

Third, Abd al Aziz was a statesman with a good knowledge of history. Furthermore, his personal charisma played a fundamental role in his political achievements and success. For instance, he knew that only 3 of 14 successions within his family between 1744 and 1891 were uncontested. The 11 contested successions included assassinations and civil wars and, in a few cases, a bloodless revolution, which was what had happened with the second Saudi state. Therefore, he reintroduced a new mechanism to support his own succession, namely the bayah, a way of selecting the successor through representatives of the ʿUlamāʾ and the masses.[219] In addition, his stay in Kuwait, where he was exposed to foreign contact in 1890, enhanced his maturity as a statesman. For example, Abd al Aziz spent several years at Shaikh Mubarak's court.[220] Mubarak's court was the centre of diplomatic activity on an international scale. He met foreigners of all backgrounds, such as traders, merchants, travellers and representatives of foreign powers, giving him a good knowledge of political issues.[221] It is argued that today in the Saudi political system, the bayah mechanism is very important as a traditional Islamic act by the people to demonstrate their acceptance and allegiance to the new ruler.

Fourth, in the political setting of Saudi Arabia and in order to weaken the powers of the tribes, Abd al Aziz was aware that he had to take care of and remain with informal groups, such as the Bedouin tribes spread across the Arabian Peninsula, who were proud of their tribal way of life. Even so, as indicated previously, the loyalty of

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[217] Al-Habbas, op. cit., pp. 83-84.
[218] The researcher will give more details about the Ikhwan elsewhere in this section.
[219] J. Kechichian, *Succession in Saudi Arabia*, (New York, 2001) pp. 15-18.
[220] Shaikh Mubarak (The Great) was from the al-Sabah dynasty and was the governor of Kuwait during the period 1896-1915 (M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, New York, 1999, p. 70).
[221] J. Goldberg, *The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia: The Formative Years 1902-1918*, (Harvard College, 1986) p. 35.

Bedouin tribes was mainly to the tribe itself, which made it difficult to enforce the government's laws. Therefore, he sought to utilise tribal militancy to achieve his goals of expansion and, more importantly, to keep the tribes under his leadership when territorial expansion was achieved. Thus, Abd al-Aziz displayed a great understanding of the political, economic and social nature of a tribal environment. It is difficult to exert control over nomadic Bedouin tribes, as they are not static, but continue to move around in search of water resources and pasture. So to guarantee the loyalty and support of the tribe, he settled the tribes in villages where water resources were available. Tim Niblock states that:

> Abd al-Aziz turned, therefore, to the idea of settling numbers of Bedouin in agricultural settlement (hujar), where they would renounce the nomadic life and be welded through religious instruction and military training into an instrument which could spread Wahhabi belief and Saudi power throughout Arabia.[222]

Fifth, another method used by Abd al Aziz to settle the nomadic tribes was by reducing the need for long-distance travel between winter and summer grazing lands in search of water by using motorised transport such as tanker lorries to help the Bedouin to obtain water. This provided the opportunity for sheep and cattle herding and the creation of mini-settlements with basic facilities.[223] Sixth, also to bring the tribes under his control to guarantee their loyalty and give them protection, in the 1930s Abd al Aziz established tribal forces. A 1968–1970 study showed that 80 percent of all Bedouin had at least one family member in these tribal forces.[224] However, these tribal forces were the successor of the Ikhwān, the White Army later developed into the so-called National Guard. In relation to this point, Cordesman and Obaid state that:

> The National Guard is the successor of the Ikhwan, or White Army. It is still largely a tribal force forged out of tribal elements loyal to the Saudi family...The National Guard is sometimes viewed as a counterweight to the regular military

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[222] T. Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy and survival*, (New York, 2006) p. 32.

[223] H. Lackner, *A House Built on Sand a political economy of Saudi Arabia*, (London, 1978) p. 174.

[224] P. Wilson &D Graham, *Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm*, (New York., 1994) p. 30.

forces, where reliance on recruiting from loyal tribes creates a force the regime could count on to checkmate a coup by the regular forces. In practice, however, it has served more to ensure the continued loyalty of various tribes...[225]

Seventh, further methods used by Abd al Aziz to settle the nomadic tribes were enacted in 1968 when a new law stated that the Bedouin could gain land after farming it for three years.[226] Finally, to maintain the loyalty of tribal leaders, Abd al-Aziz gave them administrative authority within their own areas, so as to make their position strong among their own people.[227] It is argued that Abd al Aziz achieved his goals brilliantly by utilising his personal status in order to expand and consolidate his rule. However, a settled population and a strong central authority are substantially fundamental to state-making and this would not have been achieved without an institutional mechanism. Therefore, the next step was to establish institutional development.

3.3 The political system

Institutional and administrative development in the third Saudi Arabian state has reflected the government's intention to centralise its power and respond to developmental imperatives as a means of accelerating the process of state-building. However, before the oil boom Saudi Arabia was an underdeveloped society with high levels of poverty, illiteracy and political and economic backwardness, especially in remote areas.[228] Therefore, the Saudi Government had considerable obstacles to overcome before modernisation could take place. Financially, the country suffered from low revenue and its economy depended primarily on Hajj receipts, with the Hajj (one of the Five Pillars of Islam) constituting the main source of the state's income. For example, in the late 1920s an average of almost 100,000 people made the pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah during the Islamic month of Dhu-ul-Hijja (from Arabic *hajj*, meaning pilgrimage) annually. As a result of the worldwide financial

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[225] A. Cordesman & N. Obaid , *National security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, responses, and challenges* (New York, 2005) pp. 213,215.

[226] P. Wilson &D Graham (1994), op. cit.,

[227] T. Niblock, *Social Structure and the Development of the Saudi Arabian Political System*, (London, 1982) p. 90.

[228] R. Aba Namay, "Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1993)

crisis in 1930, the number of pilgrims declined to 85,000 and to just over 39,000 in 1931.[229] The situation gradually improved due to the growth of oil revenues, which empowered the government to enhance and support its political and economic development programmes. As a result, development and modernisation took place with clearly established objectives and the decision-making process entered a new phase of evolution with the adoption of five-year development plans.

According to Khaled Al-Habbas, institutional development in Saudi Arabia was a response to external systematic pressure rather than the transformation of tribal authority.[230] In the beginning, King Abd al Aziz was personally involved in every administrative detail as the state, at this stage of its development, had to be under his control. For example, Najd was ruled by King Abd al Aziz in a highly personalised way, but with the advice of a consultative council, the Shura, which consisted of leading members of the royal family and religious leaders all being members of the royal Diwan (Court).[231] But when he felt that the state had become established, King Abd al-Aziz decided to transfer the country or state from a centralised administration to a decentralised administration by developing the strategy of delegating authority. Thus, he situated some of his sons and relatives in important positions in the central administration and government of the provinces. For instant, the Council of Ministers of Ḥijāz, the western province, was headed by his son Faisal in 1939. Faisal was known as the Viceroy of the King in Ḥijāz territory. [232] Furthermore, in 1913, when King Abd al Aziz recaptured the eastern province, he had no adult sons. The province was far from Riyadh and needed a governor with independent authority. Therefore,

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[229] J. Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia 1916-1936 from Chieftaincy to Monarchical State*, (New York: Oxford University, 1993) p. 142.
[230] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 85.

[231] D. Long, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1997) p. 46.
[232] F. Al-Farsy, *Saudi Arabia: A case Study in Development*, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1982) p. 92.

King Abd al Aziz gave the post to Abdullah bin Jiluwi, a man from a distant branch of the Al-Saud.[233]

King Abdal Aziz introduced new forms of formal institutions when he captured the Ḥijāz in 1925. He established these institutions to govern the affairs of the Ḥijāz under what was called the Basic Law (al-qanun al-asasi). The first body was the Consultative Council. The second body, created later, was the Council of Deputies (Majlis Al-Wukala) which in 1953 became the Council of Ministers.[234] The functions of the Council of Deputies were similar to cabinet ministers. The council consisted of the Head of Cabinet (the Viceroy), the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of the Interior and members of the Advisory Council.[235] Worthy of mention here is that some of these institutions had elected representatives. For example, Consultative Council members were elected from the ʿUlamā, merchants and nobles of Ḥijāz. So, the Consultative Council experiment and elections in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia did not take place as a result of the long-promised political reform announced by King Fahd in 1992, but rather it was established in the Ḥijāz area after the conquest of the Ḥijāz in 1925. Joseph Kostiner notes that:

> A major stratagem for consolidating the loyalty of the Hijazi nobility was the reintroduction of an advisory representative body. Thus a body of Hijazi notables (al-majlis al-ahli) was elected after the occupation of Mecca and re-elected on August 1, 1925. Members came from various quarters of the town and from merchants and the *ʿulamāʾ*. The convened body was thereafter known as the Advisory Council (*Majlis al-shūrā*).[236]

Arguably, the Majlis al-shūrā of Ḥijāz (the Consultative Council) shows that while there was some political participation and development, since the formation of the central administration, the Ministers Council was established in 1953 and placed in charge of legislative and executive responsibilities. This ended the existence of some

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[233] M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies,* (New York Press, 1999) pp. 88-89.

[234] F. Al-Farsy, *Saudi Arabia: A case Study in Development*, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1982) p. 92.

[235] A. Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, (London, 1998) p. 297.

[236] J. Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia 1916-1936 from Chieftaincy to Monarchical State*, (New York: Oxford University, 1993) p. 101.

political institutions, especially the Consultative Council, to be discussed in chapters five and six. However, King Abd al-Aziz issued a royal decree on 9 October 1953 shortly before he died, announcing the creation of a Council of Ministers. This was intended to integrate the state under a centralised body that would administer the expanding areas of domestic and foreign affairs, control the steady increase in oil revenue and guide the country's economic development.[237] The Council of Ministers has historically exercised power to dominate all decisions inside and outside the country. Moreover, presently the Council of Ministers has legislative and executive powers over the whole kingdom. However, King Abd al Aziz inherited some formal institutions from the previous Ḥijāz administration. For example, both Jeddah and Makkah, the major towns of the Ḥijāz, continued to be administered by a town governor (a qaymmaqam), and the major towns had municipal councils.[238] Moreover, this provincial governor (the qaymmaqam) appointed officials and notables who advised them. Joseph Kostiner states that:

> The Basic Law also provided for the establishment in each province of a provincial governor (qa'imaqam) and a District Council, composed of appointed officials and notables who advised the governor[239].

In December 1932, King Abd al Aziz issued a decree uniting the Kingdom of Najd and its dependencies with the Kingdom of Ḥijāz, forming the new entity of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the established administrative structure of the Ḥijāzi kingdom gradually disappeared and many of its functions were absorbed by the central government. This returned the country to the old system of direct, authoritarian and centralised royal rule.[240]

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[237] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 86.

[238] D. E. Long, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (University Press of Florida, 1997) p. 47.

[239] J. Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia 1916-1936 from Chieftaincy to Monarchical State*, (New York: Oxford University, 1993) p. 101.

[240] R. Aba Namay, "Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 16, no. 3 (Spring 1993), p. 47.

3.4 The constitution

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy with a traditional Islamic system. Islam is the key feature of Saudi Arabia's political culture and dominates all domains or spheres of life including politics. Since unification in 1932, it has been governed without a written constitution.[241] In 1992, King Fahad announced the long-promised political reform process by proclaiming the Basic Law of Government. Many people considered it to include a written constitution. The term constitution (dustūr) is not commonly used by the Saudi people. Saudis believe that only the Qura'an (the holy book or Koran) and the Sunna (the authoritative sayings of the prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him), in accordance with the interpretation of the Hambali school, could be called a constitution.[242] Historically, the term constitution was first used in Saudi Arabia in 1926 when King Abd al Aziz announced what he called the "fundamental provisions" of the Kingdom of Ḥijāz.[243]

Since 1962, Saudi kings have promised more political liberalisation by establishing the Majlis al-shūrā, or Consultative Council, to advise them on governmental matters. However, none of them could take practical steps toward such political liberalisation. For example, Crown Prince Faisal promised at that time to announce the creation of a constitution that would allow for a national assembly.[244] However, it wasn't until 1992 that King Fahd announced the political reform process which included a written constitution. In fact, the new political reform did not mention constitution but instead mentioned the Basic System of Rule or the Basic Statute of Government (al-Nizam al-Assasy Li al-hukm). The reform was composed of three parts: the structure of the

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[241] Since the unification of the country in 1932, the state has been governed without a written constitution. There has not been an electoral system or any political party or civic club which might present formal opposition to government policy (Aba Namay, op. cit., p. 48).

[242] R. Aba Namay, "Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies,* vol. 16, no 3(Spring 1993), p. 44.

[243] A. Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, (London, 1998) pp. 294 -295.

[244] M. Hudson, "After the Gulf War: Prospects for Democratization in the Arab World", *The Middle East Journal* vol. 1, no. 45 (1991) p. 433.

government and its duties; the establishment of a consultative council; and the development of provincial government.[245]

The Basic System of Rule is based on nine chapters with 83 articles. In general, these articles explain the nature of the state and the division of powers, the national and local government, the legislative, the consultative council, the administration of justice and, finally, fundamental human rights and freedoms.[246] For instance, Article 26 states that "the state protects human rights in accordance with the Islamic Sharīʿah". It establishes relations between the ruler and the ruled.[247] The second statute of reform was the Consultative Council. The 1993 Consultative Council did not reflect tribal–government alliance. Herb states that:

> If the basis of Al-Saud rule was an alliance with tribal leaders, the 1993 majlis al-Shura does not reflect this alliance. No one on the council could be described as a traditional tribal leader. The Al-Saud, while they aimed for broad tribal and regional representation, clearly made education and not traditional leadership status the prerequisite for admission to the Majlis.[248]

In addition, the government has appointed the Consultative Council when the Saudi leadership has felt threatened. Historically, there were plans to open consultative councils. For example, after King Saud was deposed, during the revolution in Yemen in 1962, on the accession of King Khalid in 1975, after the Makkah crisis in 1979, and on the accession of King Fahad in 1982.[249]

Finally, the third statute, the law of provinces (Nizam al Muqata'at), considers local administration or local government. Local administration in Saudi Arabia goes back as early as 1939 when the first regional system was drawn up. It was called Nizam al Umara wa al Majalise al Idariyyah (Regulations of the Provincial Governors and Administrative Councils). This regulation defined the rights and duties of provincial

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[245] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 88.
246 Aba Namay, op. cit., p. 54.
[247] A. Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia*, (Riyadh, 2000)
[248] M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, (New York Press, 1999) p. 169.
[249] *Ibid*.,

governors (emirs) within the regional system.[250] In general, the aim of the regional system was to improve the level of administrative work and development in different regions of the kingdom, to maintain security and to guarantee the rights and liberties of citizens within the framework of the Islamic Shariah (as stated in Article 1 of the system) because previously nothing was as unsystematic or confusing in the country as local administration.

According to Lackner, a study conducted by Ibrahim al-Awaji about the problems of bureaucracy in Saudi Arabia discovered that all the provinces were divided into different smaller units, such as districts or cities, headed by Umara (members of the royal family). This situation made the emir responsible to the level above his province and did not give the lower officials enough authority to deal with minor issues. This created a centralised government structure.[251] However, the provincial system, included in the constitutional package of 1992, is a revised version of the 1963 provincial system. This was intended to replace the 1939 local administration system, but was never implemented due to limited financial resources at the time. Other contributing factors were the lack of bureaucratic cadres and security considerations. The 1992 provincial system divided the country into 13 provinces or emirates, each governed by an emir (governor) appointed by the King, but based on the recommendation of the Minister of the Interior and therefore accountable to him. Thus, the emir is responsible for the social, economic and urban development of the region. He is also responsible for welfare improvement and discusses the affairs of his region directly with the relevant ministers. This is in order to improve the performance of the governing bodies in his region which come under his authority. He then reports on his activities to the Minister of the Interior[252]

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[250] R. Aba Namay, "Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 16, no. 3 (Spring 1993), p. 60.

[251] H. Lackner, *A House Built on Sand a political economy of Saudi Arabia*, (London: Ithaca Press, 1979) p. 198.

[252] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 90.

Furthermore, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as a promise of reform, particularly with regard to the modernisation of local administration, announced in 2003 that it would hold partial municipal elections within a year. The elections would be held on the basis of a 1975 municipal council statute which provided for the election of municipal bodies but was never implemented. Consequently, the kingdom has started to implement what it announced. So, in February 2005, Saudi Arabia held its first elections for municipal councils. The newly formed 178 municipal councils across 13 regions in the kingdom had half its members elected and half appointed by the King. Significantly, municipal elections for local government in Saudi Arabia are the first step towards real political reform.

3.5 The royal family

The Al Sa'ud family is an extended family, including all those tracing their decent from Saud Ibn Mohammed Ibn Migren whose son, Mohammed, was the founder of the first Saudi state. Its number is estimated to exceed several thousand individuals.[253] As far as political power is concerned, only those members of the extended family who are the descendants of the founder of the contemporary state of Saudi Arabia, King Abd al Aziz Ibn Abd al-Rahman Ibn Faisal Al Saud (Ibn Saud), constitute the ruling family. It is this group of descendants who are referred to in this thesis as the Royal Family.   Before his death in 1953, King Abd al-Aziz had excluded his brothers from the line of succession and designated his eldest son, Saud, and his second son, Faisal, as Crown Prince.[254] Under Article 5 of the 1992 Basic System of Rules, rule passes to the sons of the founding King Abd al Aziz Bin Abd al-Rahman-al-Faisal Al-Saud, and to his descendents.   However, sons of the founder of the contemporary Saudi state, King Abd al-Aziz Al Saud, are estimated to be more than 45 in number.[255]

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[253] *Ibid*, p. 90.
[254] F. Aldamer, Economic, social, and political developments and their impact on the role of the state: A case study of Saudi Arabia, Ph.D. dissertation, Manchester University, 1995, p. 231.
[255] R. Aba Namay, "Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 16, no. 3 (Spring 1993), p. 55.

3.6 Political power

The ruling royal family is the most powerful political institution in Saudi Arabia. They dominate and hold absolute control over the Saudi political system. Members of the family hold a considerable amount of power in running the internal and external affairs of the kingdom. They seek to retain their dominance through policies designed to extend family influence throughout Saudi society. In this respect, Gwenn Okruhlik wrote,

> The al-Saud family has thoroughly penetrated society. They conduct business and are partners with major families in every sector of the economy. They control all key political positions, not only in Riyadh, but throughout the provinces. They strategically marry into other families. They have attempted to dominate Islamic institutions. The al-Saud skilfully use radio and television programs, publications of the ministry of information, and school textbooks to foster a sense of loyalty to the family for their services and accomplishments on behalf of the nation.[256]

The most prominent member of the royal family is the King who deliberates on and makes important decisions due to the vast authority he holds under Article 8 of the 1953 Royal Decree, which established the Council of Ministers. Al-Habbas argues that important decisions of the Council of Ministers cannot be put into effect until they have been sanctioned by the King. Senior princes make up about 25% of Council membership, especially in the so-called "ministries of sovereignty" such as the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In fact, the current Council of Ministers consists of 29 ministers, seven from the royal family, who decide with the King the most significant decisions such as security, foreign relations and oil policies in the so-called Privy Council.[257] According to Aldamer, important decisions are made by the King and the princes who hold office in the Privy Council, and then presented to the Council of Ministers to formalise their implementation.[258] However, the King still has the power to confirm the nomination of the Crown Prince, as well as the power to dismiss him. He is also the final point of

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[256] G. Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States", *Comparative Politics* vol. 131, no. 3 (1999), p. 301.
[257] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 91.
[258] F. Aldamer, "Economic, social, and political developments and their impact on the role of the state: A case study of Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Manchester University, 1995, p. 254.

authority. For instance, all ministers are responsible to the King who can veto council resolutions. He has the right to dissolve and reorganise the Council of Ministers and the Consultative Council. He also has the right to call the Consultative Council and the Council of Ministers to a joint meeting and to invite whoever he wishes to attend that meeting. Moreover, he is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Also, all high civil and military officials and provincial governors are appointed by the King.[259] More recently, Chapter Six of the Basic System of Rules, announced by King Fahd on March 1992, has several articles which deal with the authority of the King as head of state, stating that he shall be the point of reference for the judicial authority, executive authority and regulatory authority. The King has the right to appoint and remove all ministers, as well as dissolve or re-organise the Council of Ministers. He accredits all foreign diplomats and appoints Saudi diplomats abroad.[260]

3.7 Decision-making

Generally, policy-making in Saudi Arabia is based on three groups: the royal family; the ʿulamāʾand Bedouin tribes who are considered important in matters relating to their communities.[261] However, in Saudi Arabia all significant decisions, whether about internal or external matters, are resolved through consensus among members of the ruling royal family. The King and key senior members of the royal family such as the Crown Prince, as well as the Minister of Defence, the Minister of the Interior and the Governor of Riyadh are the most influential figures in this consensual-based, decision-making process. In relation to this point, Aldamer contends that:

> ...The argument that the decision-making process in Saudi Arabia encompasses
> many other elements, such as the ʿulamāʾand the technocrats, is incorrect as the
> ʿulamāʾand the technocrats are consulted purely in matters requiring their
> particular expertise...The ʿulamāʾ are given broad jurisdiction concerning code

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[259] R. Aba Namay, "Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 16, no. 3 (Spring 1993), p. 56.

[260] The Basic System of Rules announced by King Fahad (1992) included nine chapters with 83 articles. Chapter Six, The Authority of the State, included 44 articles (Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia* , 2000. op. cit, pp. 264–78).

[261] F. Al-Farsy, *Saudi Arabia: A case Study in Development*, (London, 1982) p. 173.

and public morality, while the technocrats are given sufficient authority to implement and run many developmental tasks.[262]

David Long's analysis provides important insights into the consensus decision-making process that operates at senior levels of the Saudi Government. He argues that:

> This informal process incorporates two fundamental concepts: ijma (consensus) and shura (consultation). Consensus has been used to legitimise decisions in the Arab world for millennia and has even been incorporated into Islam…. Even a Saudi King, despite all the powers concentrated in him, cannot act without consensus. With a consensus, the government can move with astonishing speed; without it, years can go by with no decision made….The King is both chief consensus maker and chief executive.[263]

In reality, the consensus-based decision-making process in Saudi Arabia contains a great deal of ambiguity. The ʿulamāʾand the technocrats can provide advice, each in their particular field of expertise. It is true that the King cannot act without consensus (ijma and shura), particularly among the ʿulamāʾ(religious clerics), but this is concerning matters related to the social code, public morality, developmental tasks and issuing fatwās (religious legal opinions issued by the top religious authority to justify government acts), particularly in times of turmoil. However, when decisions relate to the implementation of political reform, such as membership of the Consultative Council, women driving a car and women becoming members of parliament, these issues are then addressed through consensus among members of the royal family, with the King having the final say. The following sections will discuss the role of both the ʿulamāʾand other groups.

3.8 The religious establishment

Islam plays a significant role in the social and political life of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and the location of its two holiest cities, Makkah and Madina. The principles of the Holy Quraʾan and the tradition of the respected Prophet are the source of the basic statutes of government. State institutions are expected to

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[262] Aldamer, op. cit., p. 236.
[263] D. Long, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, (New York, 1997) p. 46.

fulfil the Shari'a and implement its teachings, as Islam is Saudi Arabia's official religion. The importance of religion in Saudi Arabia is demonstrated by two facts. First, as the birthplace of Islam, which is the official religion of the state, religion serves a broader purpose by shaping the constitution and social practices. Article 1 of the Basic System of Rules states that "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic state with Islam as its religion; God's Book and the Sunna of his Prophet, prayers and peace be upon him, are its constitution".[264] Second, Islam is a main source of the system of legitimacy for the government of Saudi Arabia. As mentioned, the creation of the modern Saudi state was in part an outcome of a traditional religious–tribal alliance. Islam provided the political ideology and rationale for the regime and helped harmonise state–society relations. Also, through its formal institutions the regime is committed to the promotion of Shari'a inside the kingdom and the support of Islamic issues all over the world.[265]

3.8.1 The ʿulamāʾ

The ʿulamāʾ (Islamic scholars) serve a unique role by providing religious legitimacy for Saudi rule while playing a significant role in shaping the state's domestic policies, especially in certain fields such as womens' issues, education and social morality. However, in Saudi Arabia, the ʿulamāʾare the main agents through which the impact of religion on political life can be examined.[266] The ʿulamāʾ include religious scholars, qadis (judges), lawyers, seminary teachers and prayer leaders (imams) of the mosques. Furthermore, religious supervision of all mosques in the kingdom is undertaken by the ʿulamāʾ.[267] As indicated, historically the royal family maintained close ties with the ʿulamāʾ. These close ties began in the mid-eighteenth century as a result of a tribal–religious alliance between Mohammed Ibn Saud, Emir of Deraiya, and a conservative Sunni religious scholar, Mohammed Ibn Abd al Wahhab. While the House of Saud provides the kingdom with its strength and continuity, the

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[264] A. Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia*, (Riyadh, 2000) p. 265.
[265] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 94.
[266] A. Bligh, "The Saudi Religious Elite (Ulama) As Participant in The Political System of The Kingdom", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (1985) p. 47.
[267] F. Al-Farsy, "Saudi Arabia: A case Study in Development", (London, 1982) p. 67.

conservative Sunni religious scholars have the religious-moral authority which legitimises the government. However, it is important to note the importance of maintaining close ties with the ʿulamāʾ, as well as the role of religion in the political domination and legitimacy of the rulers. This is shown through a letter quoted by Frank Vogel, written by Sheikh Mohammed Ibn Abd al Wahhab, which was sent to some who had criticised Mohammed Ibn Saud and which publicly asked them to overlook his mistakes. Vogel states that:

> The men of religion have a duty to join people to their ruler (emir) and to overlook his error…..Religion is love for God's sake, and anger for God's sake. If the ruler does not make his retinue men of religion, then his retinue will be men of evil. The men of religion have a duty to join people to their ruler, and to overlook his error. This is required of the men of religion, who overlook the failings of their ruler, just as the ruler overlooks their failings, and makes them his advisers and those of his council.[268]

Arguably, in the contemporary Saudi state, Wahhabi ideology is still of great importance for the prestige and legitimacy of the Saudi Government, as well as continuing to be the dominant factor which colours everyday life, as will be discussed next. However, the impact of the ʿulamāʾ on domestic and foreign policy in Saudi Arabia is not unlimited and depends on the situation. Sometimes their role is strong and sometimes their role is marginal. For example, as early as 1929, King Abd al Aziz dominated the Ikhwān as a political-military force when they challenged his domestic and foreign policy.[269] Madawi Al-Rasheed notes that:

> Immediately after the capture of Hijaz, the Ikhwan leaders held a 'conference' in Artawiyyah, at which they criticized Ibn Sa'ud on several grounds. The most important criticism centred on relations with Britain, the nature of Kingship, the Islamic legitimacy of ibn Sa'ud's taxes and his personal conduct….[270]

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[268] F. Vogel, *Islamic Law and Legal System: Studies of Saudi Arabia*, (New York, 2000) pp. 208-209.

[269] The Ikhwan were a class of fanatical ascetic Islamic warriors; they were Bedouins who accepted the fundamentals of orthodox Islam of the Hanbali school, as preached by Abd al-Wahhab, and they were created by King Abd al-Aziz in agricultural settlements located in Najdi (D. Long, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,* 1997, p. 30).

[270] M. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, (London: Cambridge University, 2002) p. 66.

Also, further marginalisation of the political impact of the ʿulamāʾ took place in the 1960s as state institutions developed. This was done to strength the authority of the state as well as to legitimise the political system. For example, in the early 1960s when Crown Prince Faisal had been granted full executive powers under King Sa'ud and permitted some limited reform, a confrontation between the King and the ʿulamāʾoccurred as a result of the installation of a television system in the Kingdom.[271] The ʿulamāʾ provide the leadership of Islam in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Their leadership is represented in a number of organisations. For example, the post of the Grand Muftī, initially occupied by Shiekh Mohammad Ibn al-Ashiekh before he died in 1969.[272] The post was cancelled in 1970 and replaced by the presidency of judgeship (qada), established in 1956, which evolved into the Ministry of Justice in 1975.[273] However, the creation of the Ministry of Justice was just a change in names, as many of the same people stayed in their positions. But it was also an attempt to modernise the bureaucratic machinery of the Islamic legal system without changing the substance.[274] In this respect, the creation of the justice ministry was also a blow to the political strength of an independent religious authority (Bligh, 1985:43).[275] Following the Gulf War, the post of Grand Muftī was re-established in 1993 by King Fahd Ibn Abd al Aziz and Sheikh Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz, the head of the Council of Senior ʿUlamāʾ, who was appointed Grand Muftī with the ranking of minister.[276]

In addition, another important position is the presidency of the Administration of Islamic Researchers and Ifta; originally established in 1954 it went through organisational and administrative development. The main organ of the presidency in 1971 was the Assembly of the Senior ʿUlamāʾ (hay'at Kibar al-ʿulamāʾ). It comprised

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[271] A. Bligh, "The Saudi Religious Elite (Ulama) As Participant in The Political System of The Kingdom", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (1985), p. 41.
[272] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
[273] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 95.
[274] D. Long, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, (University Press of Florida, 1997) p. 49.

[275] Bilgh, op. cit., p. 43.
[276] D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform* (London, 2003) p. 59.

some 15 to 20 senior ʿulamāʾ all of whom were appointed by the King.[277] According to Al-Habbas, the duties of the Assembly are the issuing of legal religious opinion (fatwā) regarding issues referred to it by government and the drawing of general religious–legal conclusions (ahkam ʿammh) regarding religious affairs in order to guide those who rule (leadership).[278] Other important institutions include the Higher Council of Judges (qudat) whose 11 members are appointed by the King; the Higher Council serves as a forum for the discussion of religious issues.[279]

In light of the above discussion, the role of the ʿulamāʾ, especially regarding Al-Habbas[280] and Vogel's[281] arguments in relation to the issuing of fatwās is to legitimate government functions; thus the importance of maintaining close ties with the ʿulamāʾ. The researcher supports Al-Habbas and Vogel's arguments. The most interesting thing in this matter is that the ʿulamāʾ in Saudi Arabia not only provide Islamic sanction for government policies but also provide sanction for policy decisions already taken by government. Decisions can sometimes put the government under relentless attack, especially from the Islamist opposition when decisions are not compatible with the Shari'a (Islamic law). Thus, things like protecting and guarding traditional values, social behaviour and Islamic laws, as the Islamist opposition claim, are not only enforced by the ʿulamāʾ over society, but when the matter involves the government and its policies they legalise it and do nothing. Furthermore, the paradox is that this authority granted to the ʿulamāʾ is organised and supported by the state.[282] However, two significant incidents signal a new low point for the Saudi ʿulamāʾ and provide strong proof of their political weakness. The first incident happened in 1979 when the Grand Mosque in Makkah came under attack by radical clerics, Juhaiman al-Utaibi, as will be discussed in chapter four. As a result, a fatwā was issued by the

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[277] G. Kramer, *Good Counsel to the King: The Islamic Opposition in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Morocco*, (New York, 2000) p. 261.
[278] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 95.
[279] A. Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia*, (Riyadh, 2000) p. 132.
[280] Al-Habbas, op. cit.,
[281] F. Vogel, *Islamic Law and Legal System: Studies of Saudi Arabia*, (New York, 2000).
[282] The researcher will provide more examples in relation to this matter in this study, especially concerning the role and influence of the Organization to Prevent Vice and Promote Virtue in Saudi society.

ʿulamāʾ permitting the Saudi Government to use military force to recapture the mosque.[283] The second incident was in 1990–91 when Iraq invaded Kuwait and King Fahd decided to invite US forces to enter Saudi Arabia for its protection; this was sanctioned in a fatwā issued by the former muftī, Shaikh Abd al Aziz bin Baz, so as to allow Western powers such as the United States to enter the Kingdom.[284]

3.9 Technocrats, businessmen and tribal leaders

Among the other significant political actors in Saudi Arabia are the technocrats, the business class and tribal leaders. Technocrats are mainly educated and technically trained people from different backgrounds, most of whom have completed their studies outside the country. The opportunity to complete their study was a result of the oil boom and economic growth; this increased the wealth of the country and enabled it to deal with the process of modernisation and to expand education. The expansion and importance of the education system enabled the economy to develop technologically. Furthermore, it created highly educated Saudis with the ability to question the government for any incompetence. For instance, the Saudi leadership faced pressure over changes, especially political ones, in the early 1990s as a result of the Gulf War crisis, when it invited foreign troops into Saudi Arabia to protect the country. People started to question the competence of the government in dealing with this problem, particularly concerning vast sums that were spent on the Saudi army. However, most groups, whether conservatives or liberals, were asking for some form of political participation, especially in decision-making processes. This led the government in 1992 to announce a package of constitutional and administrative reforms.[285]

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[283]J. Kechichian, "The Role of the Ulama in the Politics of an Islamic State: The Case of Saudi Arabia", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (1986) p. 57.

[284] D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*, (London, 2003) p. 62.

[285] The researcher will provide more discussion in relation to this matter in chapter four in this study.

According to Aldamer, the term "technocrats" denotes the top echelon of the non-royal members of the Saudi bureaucracy, including ministers, directors of parastatal agencies, and diplomats to foreign countries.[286] The technocrats emerged as significant bureaucratic and political actors in the early 1960s. This was related to government programs and resulted in the expansion of the bureaucracy. It also created a need for more highly educated and skilful people to deal with the modernisation process.[287] However, the technocrat's political objective in general was not to oppose the system or the regime. Most of them remained as senior executives and advisers to the royal family and worked towards a more practical evolutionary road toward change and reform inside the country. Abir observed that:

> In reality, the technocrats, notwithstanding the honours and authority they enjoyed, remained senior executives and advisers to the King …. Their power being totally dependent on those who appointed them…. Although occasionally disagreeing with their mentors, aware of the limitations of their power, members of the technocratic upper-crust, especially the new Najdi executives, reconciled themselves to the situation.[288]

The emergence of the merchant class is due to increasing oil wealth and the launch of modernisation programmes. The literature does not reach agreement on the influence of twentieth century merchants on government activities or Saudi society. Vassiliev believes there was early support for the Saudis from merchant families, such as Ali reza, al-Ghosaibi, Juffali, Bughshan, Jumaih and al-Sulaiman.[289] Furthermore Abir writes:

> The Jeddah chamber whose members after 1925 served in the new administration and proved most helpful to Ibn Saud and useful to his regent Faysal in dealing with foreign representatives and the Kingdom's trade. When

[286] Aldamer, op. cit., p. 242.
[287] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 97.
[288] M. Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, (New York, 1993) p. 91.
[289] A. Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, (London, 1998).

Faysal became king in 1964 members of the Hijazi Chamber of Commerce assisted him in developing the economy and modernizing the Kingdom.[290]

However, the alternative view is that the merchants exerted minimum influence on the aspirations of the Saudis, as Aldamer states:

> To the contrary, in fact, the most active members of the merchant community in both Qasim in central Najd and in the province of Hijaz were apprehensive and wary of Ibn Sa'ud's domination, which they perceived as restrictive and exploitive.[291]

Nevertheless, the merchant class contributed to the new Saudi-led society and were useful for their skills and knowledge in a largely illiterate society. They contributed the first finance minister and promoted the economic interests of the country.[292] The merchant class became more connected to the political and economic system, with the government increasing its spending and thus creating more business opportunities.[293] Since 1980, as a result of the collapse of oil prices and consequent budget deficits, which continued throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, investment opportunities inside the country have generally declined.[294] This has created economic stagnation and increased competition for government contracts, as well as some merchants or businessmen losing government financial support. Abir notes that:

> Coupled with financial support to businessmen and entrepreneurs…. The Kingdom's citizens now enjoyed housing and a wide range of other subsidies….Guaranteed employment and advancement in government service...[295]

The commercial class did not regain their influence with the rulers or their representation in public decision-making. The advent of oil rents and state control of the economic sector indicates that the greater part of the economy was under the

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[290] Abir, op. cit., p. 115.
[291] Aldamer, op. cit., p. 251.
[292] M. Almana, *Arabia Unified: A Portrait of Ibn Saud*, (London: Hutchinson Benham, 1980).
[293] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 97.
[294] D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*, (London, 2003) p. 147.
[295] M. Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis*, (New York, 1993) p. 73.

control of the royal family, who marginalised the role of the business class and their economic value.

The last group considered in this chapter is the tribal leaders. Such leaders have wielded political influence in the kingdom since its establishment. As indicated earlier in this chapter, the first Saudi state (1794–1818) was a result of a tribal–religious alliance. The Saudi state made concerted efforts to settle the tribes. The founder of the contemporary Saudi state, King Abd al Aziz, introduced brilliant initiatives aimed at weakening the powers of the various tribes in the Kingdom in order to consolidate his own power and impose his authority over most of the Arabian Peninsula, simultaneously reducing the tribes' cohesion. As indicated, to bring the tribes under his authority, King Abd al Aziz established agricultural settlements for them, raised a Bedouin army (now the National Guard), and rewarded tribal chieftains with large landholdings. This land exploitation denied the tribes their ancient migration routes in search of water and pasture, weakening them economically. In relation to the above argument, Aldamer states that:

> It must be noted here that tribalism and tribal leaderships in particular were not only weakened by the natural and spontaneous effects of modernisation, but also by intentional and deliberate governmental policies intended to impair tribal cohesion and leadership.[296]

However, tribes are a very simple form of social organisation. Their loyalty is based on kinship and their solidarity is stronger than it is for sedentary (hadar) people. They look to their sheihks for leadership. Their main strength is largely derived from the tribes' mobility and the strong asabiyyah (tribal solidarity and affiliation) binding its members together.[297] Generally, as mentioned, the centralisation and institutionalisation of the state through the policies of modernisation undermined the historical importance and role of the tribes. Successive rulers of the Al-Saud dynasty have sought to diminish the role and influence of the tribes. The function of tribal leaders is becoming superficial and mostly involves enhancing the welfare of the

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[296] Aldamer, op. cit., p. 85.
[297] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 98.

tribe; consequently, tribal leaders have little or no political influence. Therefore, activity by tribal sheihks is now limited to lobbying for improved tribal conditions and Al-Rawaf opines that the sheikhs appear to have no ambitions apart from maintaining the political status quo in each tribe.[298]

Arguably, there is no doubt that in contemporary Saudi Arabia, despite the brilliant efforts of King Abd al Aziz to consolidate his power over most of the Arabian Peninsula and to make tribal individuals become more dependent on the government, the Sheikhs (leaders) of the tribes still have influence among their nomadic people as well as with the Saudi regime. As indicated above, this influence relates to the so-called asabiyyah, especially among the young nomadic people. This has led the Saudi Government to continue with its previous policy, especially concerning the reform process that started in the 1990s. Part of this policy is aimed at weakening tribal cohesion by excluding tribal leaders from involvement in the government's reform processes, as will be discussed in chapter seven.

In conclusion, this chapter gave an overview of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in order to understand the context of this study. The chapter demonstrated that the political system reflects the importance of the position of the royal family in the country's politics. Also, it identified the main political players who affect the decision-making process, especially decisions relating to political change and reform. The role of these political players in forming government policy was reduced when the government sought to consolidate its power; this was especially true of the traditional pillars of Saudi society, the ʿulamāʾ and tribal leaders. However, all the issues discussed in this chapter will be explained in more detail, especially in chapters four and seven. The next chapter will discuss and conceptualise the dynamics of Saudi Government's political reform policies and the government's dealings with various Saudi social groups demanding political change and democracy in Saudi Arabia.

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[298] O. Al-Rawaf, "The concept of the five crises in political development-relevance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1980, p. 331.

CONCEPTUALISING THE DYNAMICS OF SAUDI GOVERNMENT POLITICS AND POLITICAL REFORM, 1990–2010

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the dynamics of Saudi Government politics and political reform during the period from 1990 to 2010. It will include three main sections. The first section will discuss internal pressure for political change. This will include several elements which include the changing structure of Saudi society and the emergence of a middle class; the dynamics of the Gulf War crisis of 1990; the government's decision to accept the deployment of 'infidel'[299] troops and the response of key stakeholders to this deployment and finally, the impact of the events of September 11, 2001 (hereafter 9/11). The second section will discuss external pressure for political change and reform. Several factors mentioned in section one will be revisited but from an external perspective; for example, the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the crisis of 9/11. In addition, the impact of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq and the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime on the political stability of Saudi Arabia will be discussed. Finally, the third section consisting of two parts will discuss and conceptualise Saudi Government policy considerations. The first part discusses and analyses the strategic response of the Saudi regime towards internal and external pressures while the second part discusses the outcome of Saudi Government responses.

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[299] The term 'infidel' in this context refers to the deployment of non Muslim-Western troops in 1990-91 in the holy land (Arabian Peninsula) to oppose Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. "Infidel' was used by the militant jihadist groups in their criticism of the Saudi Government policy to permit the deployment of non-Muslim troops. 'Infidel' was used because it is pejorative.

Section One

4.2 Internal pressure for political change since the early 1990s

4.2.1 The changing structure of Saudi society and the emergence of a middle class

The changing structure of Saudi society, which paved the way for the emergence of a new, educated Saudi middle class, began in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of oil wealth and the expansion of education programmes in Saudi Arabia and internationally.[300] According to Linjawi, Saudi Arabia started to develop education at local and international levels in the early 1960s. At the local level, the idea was to build as many schools and universities as possible. Internationally, the government sent many Saudis from different regions to study abroad. Thus, it was no surprise that by the 1970s, many educated Saudis returned to the Kingdom to contribute to and share the wealth of the modernisation process.[301] Aldamer argues that increasingly literacy in Saudi Arabia[302] is an effective agent of change in people's socio-political attitudes, perceptions, values and, more importantly, in adapting their approaches to achieve their objectives. He also argues that there is a link between the quality and

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[300] The first appearance of a middle class in Saudi Arabia was in the late 1950s and early 1960. This wave of educated Saudis was very small and limited (M. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.110). During the mid-1960s the number of educated middle class Saudis increased as a result of the expansion of the education system and the establishment of additional 'secular' and Islamic universities (M. *Abir, Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis.* 1993, p.51). The events of the Gulf War crisis in the early 1990s generated two opposing views within Saudi society, particularly among the educated middle class, whether from a secular educated or Islamist (the religious ulama) background. Some of the secular educated Saudis considered themselves as liberal Saudis or sometimes as the elite of Saudi society and these included ex-ministers, academics, journalists, government officials and merchants (R. Aba Namay, "Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 16, no. 3 [Spring 1993], pp. 50-52).

[301] H. Linjawi, "Societies in transformation Iran and Saudi Arabia, Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University", 2006, p. 257.

[302] This is a brief look at the development of the Saudi education system during the period from 1960 to 1990. In 1965 the number of students in Saudi Arabia was 193,140 but, by 1991, the numbers had jumped to 2,658,281, studying in 7,572 boy's schools and 5,660 girl's schools across all grades. In the higher education sphere, there were 133,000 students studying in 83 higher educational institutions including 7 universities, representing a significant increase from 100,000 in 1989. Furthermore, adult literacy rose from 9 per cent in 1970 to 62 per cent in 1990 (F. Aldamer, Economic, social, and political developments and their impact on the role of the state: A case study of Saudi Arabia, Ph.D. dissertation, Manchester University, 1995, p. 195).

importance of demands for political change and the level of educated people who are demanding change.[303]

Aba Namay argues that economic growth as a result of an oil boom during the seventies, as well as an increase in the number of educated Saudis returning from abroad, was one of the key factors that created domestic pressure on the Saudi regime for political change during the nineties. This was because economic growth had transformed a highly illiterate, traditional society into a wealthy, urbanised and educated one.[304] According to Tim Niblock, some analysts see the emergence of a new middle class in Saudi Arabia as constituting the social basis for political change. It meant that the Saudi elite started to reject the traditional political order which had excluded them from participating in political decision-making.[305] Taheri also argues that there has been a rapid expansion of communications and mass media and that this constitutes a significant agent for social change and a cultural space for a generation of literary figures, pop-singers and journalists from the emerging middle class. In the 1980s 12 national newspapers had been established. Saudi Arabia became an exporter of culture to the region and the world beyond.[306]

Saudi Government policy toward the new middle class has been to contain them by making them dependent on the state for employment, wealth and prestige. This dependency discouraged political activity and reinforced the mood of political acquiescence, which resulted in fairly limited political change. On this point, Cleveland argues that:

> In order to train individuals to staff the new positions in the bureaucracy, Faisal began a program of educational expansion….Although the new Western-educated

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[303] F. Aldamer, "Economic, social, and political developments and their impact on the role of the state: A case study of Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Manchester University, 1995, p. 194.

[304] R. Aba Namay, op. cit., pp. 48-49.
[305] T. Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy and survival*, (New York, 2006) p. 56.
[306] A. Taheri, "King Fahd His Nation on Path to Modernization", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 2 August 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=67828&d=2&m=8&y=2005. [2 March 2008].

elite achieved wider managerial responsibilities; they were excluded from the decision-making process. The King and selected members of the royal family, operating in conditions of extreme secrecy, determined the direction of state policy….Members of the new administrative elite were frustrated by their lack of participation in decision-making….They were awarded high offices within the bureaucracy and benefited from the wealth and prestige that went with their positions.[307]

Saudi Government policy discouraged middle class professionals from demanding political rights and reform under the sanctions of arrest, dismissal, denial of access to media coverage and travel restrictions. One example of this was the women's demonstration of 16 November 1990, when women demanded to drive a car and were subsequently arrested and dismissed from their positions, although most of them were members of the Western educated elite.

Ammoun defines and characterises the new middle class as being the consequence of either politics of "defensive modernisation" led by traditional regimes, or of the colonial powers' "civilizing mission". In either case, using Heller and Safran's definitions, Ammoun argues that these new middle classes are turning against their masters, either with the intention of further pushing the modernisation of the system, or with the nationalistic impetus of sovereignty. He describes the new middle class as:[308]

- being a creation of the politics of "defensive modernisation"

- presenting no real social, economic or ideological cohesion, but able to be galvanised by a crisis situation.

However, all these changes indicated that a new urban middle class, both liberals and progressive Islamists with their diverging reform agendas,[309] was evolving as a result of modernisation. These factors created a dynamic sociological base of activists who

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[307] W. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2004) p. 453.

[308] C. Ammoun, *The Institutionalization of the Saudi Political System and the Birth of 'Political Personnel*, (Gulf research centre, Dubai, 2006) p. 219.

[309] These two groups and their different agendas for political reform will be discussed later in this chapter and in later chapters.

agitated for change, particularly in the early 1990s, as a result of many factors including the decline of oil income, the loss of Saudi regime legitimacy, the presence of hundreds of thousands of American and European soldiers during the second Gulf War crisis, and the incompetence of the Saudi Government in dealing with this crisis and defending itself, in spite of billions of dollars spent on military equipment. All of the above paved the way for the new middle class to intensify its opposition. According to Aldamer, the second Gulf War of 1990 worked as a catalyst for politicisation and resurgence among the Saudis which led to more articulate and stridently expressed political demands as they sought a share in their country's future political decision-making.[310] The dynamics of the Gulf War of 1990 and its impact on political change and reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be discussed in the following section. The discussion will further analyse the causes that led to increased pressure for political change and reform through two significant elements: the Saudi Government's decision to accept the deployment of 'infidel' troops and the responses of key stakeholders to the deployment.

4.3 The dynamics of the Gulf War of 1990–91

4.3.1 The Saudi Government's decision to accept the deployment of 'infidel' troops

In spite of the fundamental changes and events which have taken place in the Gulf region since the late seventies, such as the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the first Gulf War between Iraq and Iran in 1980–1988, many scholars argue that the second Gulf War, which broke out as a result of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in August 1990, was the critical element in creating domestic and external pressures for political change and reform in most of the Middle East, particularly the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC States) of which Saudi Arabia is one. Domestically, it paved the way for the rise of dissent and for opposition groups in the region to voice their general discontent with their governments over important issues relating to enhancing democracy and political reform. Externally, it also paved the way for

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[310] Aldamer, op. cit., p. 263.

foreign powers, particularly the United States,[311] to expand their role in the region and involved more political and military manoeuvres.[312]

Champion argues that the "Desert Storm" of the Gulf War of 1990, was one of the largest and fastest mobilisations of troops and military equipment in history.[313] The key question was: where could this military option be deployed in order to influence the Iraqi Government? The answer was forthcoming when King Fahd of Saudi Arabia (1982–2005) agreed to receive a coalition of armed forces commanded by the United States. This was a key step towards the eviction of Iraqi troops from Kuwait and the destruction of Iraq during the war. On this point, Al-Rasheed argues that the liberation of Kuwait became a priority for the Saudi regime, as it not only restored the exiled, ruling Kuwaiti family to government, but also pushed the Iraqi army beyond its immediate borders.[314] Klare argues that King Fahd granted his permission for the deployment of the multinational force in Saudi Arabia after he was promised by the American administration that this force would be pulled out once the fighting was over. Klare states that:

> The King granted his permission for the deployment of American ground troops, but not before he added a strict injunction: the troops *must* be withdrawn from Saudi Arabia the minute the danger from Iraq had passed.[315]

Many analysts including Aldamer[316] and Al-Dakhil[317] have argued that no doubt the deployment of foreigners and non-Muslim troops to protect the Kingdom during the

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[311] After the liberation of Kuwait, the Bush administration gave the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) the green light to expand its role in the region and begin courting Iraqi opposition groups, such as the Iraqi National Council, established in Vienna in 1992, who were naturally highly motivated to get involved in the process (Z. Chehab, *Iraq Ablaze: inside the insurgency*, New York2006, p. 74).

[312] Aba Namay, op. cit; Aldamer, op. cit; M. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, (London: Cambridge University, 2002); G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly* (2005).

[313] D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*, (London, 2003) 218.

[314] Al-Rasheed, op. cit., p. 163.

[315] M. Klare, *Blood and Oil: How America's Thirst for Petrol is killing us*, (London, 2004) p. 51.

[316] Aldamer, op. cit.,

[317] K. Al-Dakhil, "Saudi Arabia's reform movement: a historical glimpse", *The Daily Star*, 18 October 2003. Available [Online]:

second Gulf War was a brave and wise decision by the late King Fahd, and that the Kingdom had no other choice but to defend its border. At the same time they argue that this decision was so serious it created a critical situation, particularly in the domestic sphere. The presence of foreign troops in Saudi Arabia during the second Gulf War crisis in order to protect the Kingdom was inevitable, but it created a sense of vulnerability and political failure in Saudi Arabia. By exposing the Saudi Government's inability to safeguard national security, the Gulf War crisis made pressure for political reform unavoidable.[318] Aldamer argues that in a period of increasing political awareness as a result of increased literacy, exposure to foreign mass media and global contacts, the legality of political procedures and the accountability of government for its conduct are becoming a major concern of many Saudi citizens. Consequently, and as a result of the failure of the government to initiate and implement genuine and credible political reform to enable Saudi citizens to participate politically and contribute to decision-making regarding their future, one can expect the Saudi regime's legitimacy to decline in the future, especially in a time of prolonged crisis and recession.[319]

However, this is not to deny the significant impact of King Fahd's decision that led to the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi invasion and protected Saudi Arabia from threats that may have led to political instability in the region. At the same time, the Saudi Government decision meant that Saudi Arabia was greatly dependent on American protection during the second Gulf War crisis, which implied that Saudi Arabia was not capable of defending itself against Iraq. Also, the Saudi Government's inclination not to mobilise the Saudi masses greatly influenced policy, especially in this crucial crisis which threatened the stability of the political system. Thus, the King refused any rivalry that might lead to his abdication of power, especially if this rivalry was introduced by militant jihadist leaders such as Osama Bin Laden, a wealthy Saudi

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http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_ID=1&article_ID=71653&categ_id=5 [3 March 2008].

[318] *Ibid.*

[319] Aldamer, op. cit., p. 219.

who had recruited Islamic groups to fight with him in Afghanistan, as will be discussed in this section. However, several important questions arise. Why did King Fahd grant permission for the deployment of foreigners and non-Muslim troops to protect the Kingdom? What were the factors behind such a strategic choice? And what were the King's policy calculations in making this very difficult and critical decision?

There are no definitive answers to these questions. However, two key points might explain the King's historical decision concerning the deployment of foreign and non-Muslim troops. First, the King realised that there was a sort of hostility, regionally and domestically, toward the United States, the Saudi regime and their close alliance, established in 1945 by President Roosevelt and King Abd al-Aziz. Al-Habbas states that:

> Saudi Arabia has been frequently criticized, regionally and domestically, for its close identification with the US, which for many in the Arab and Islamic world has pursued an uneven policy in dealing with international and regional events, especially those where Muslim and Arab interests are at stake.[320]

Al-Dakhil argues that one of the most important goals of the alliance between the Saudi Government and the United States is to keep Saudi Arabia and the GCC states out of the equation when considering the balance of power in the region. This was particularly true after the exit of Great Britain from the region in 1971. Furthermore, Al-Dakhil added that the Saudi Government chose not to be a direct party to activity in the region but left security to the Americans because there was a domestic concern that the growth of the military might impact negatively on the state. This could lead to the growth of the role and importance of the military within the state which, in turn, might lead to the military establishment having political aspirations far beyond the security responsibilities assigned to them, possibly resulting in a coup. Consequently, the King saw that it was better to depend on America for protection legitimised by the

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[320] K. Al-Habbas, "The Theory and Practice of Saudi Arabian National Security since the Gulf War: A Multi-dimensional Approach to the Pattern of Security Relations", Ph.D. dissertation, Warwick University, 1999, p. 265.

international community, instead of depending on the domestic military.[321] According to Cleveland, the most persistent and most immediately threatening foreign policy issue facing the Saudi regime from the early 1960s to the late 1970s was related to developments in neighbouring Arab countries.[322]

Second, by the end of the 1980s several key events occurred in different parts of the world which created rapid progress toward structural transformations to democracy, particularly the collapse of the Soviet Union which caused the emergence of the United States as the sole super power worldwide. There is a relationship between these events and the emergence of a new middle class inside these countries. In addition, the new middle classes were greatly concerned about government accountability. In Saudi Arabia, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the era of increasing political awareness among Saudi people and the emergence of a middle class, both progressive ʿulamāʾ and liberals. This was the result of the economic welfare policy during the seventies and increased global contacts in Saudi society in general. However, this policy failed to prevent the Saudi Government from becoming a major concern to many Saudi citizens who were demanding political change and participation in decision-making.

However, King Fahd recognised these global changes and they led him to reject giving key stakeholders any chance of becoming involved in government policy and decision-making, especially violent, militant jihadist groups, as has been discussed previously. Thus, faced with growing popular discontent as a result of political and economic stagnation, the King issued three major laws in March 1992: the first dealt with the structure of the government and its duties (the Basic Law of Government); the second, the Consultative Council (Majlis al-shūrā); and the third, the Law of Provinces.

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[321] K. Al-Dakhil, "The military and political institution in the Gulf", *Al-Ittihad newspaper*, 12 March 2008. .
[322] Cleveland, op. cit., p. 453.

4.3.2 The response of key stakeholders to the Saudi Government's decision

As has been indicated, the antecedents of the Kingdom's structural development were the socio-economic development from oil wealth, and rapid development of Saudi society including universal schooling and higher education. By the 1990s the impact of the Gulf War, an emphasis on ideology and the increased standing of Saudi Arabia in world affairs impacted the Kingdom's political and administrative structures. The emergence of stakeholder groups, especially Islamic religious groups, during this era created a challenge for Saudi leaders, particularly in their ability to provide a universally acceptable path for the country's future. Key stakeholders included the official government Islamic establishment of ultra-conservative clerics, the non-government establishment ʿulamāʾ including the Awakening Sheikhs, militant jihadist groups, including Osama Bin Laden and his supporters, and, finally, the new Islamo-liberal reformists.

Okruhlik conceptualised the nature of religious resurgence in Saudi Arabia before and after the second Gulf war in the following terms:

> In the previous decade, the resurgence of Islam was largely inchoate, private, inwardly focused, and concerned with the purity of social norms and religious practice. With the Gulf War, however, the private became public, the spiritual became political, and individual efforts became organised. Religious believers became political activists.[323]

According to Aba Namay, the second Gulf War crisis generated two opposing views within Saudi society. The first view is that of the religious establishment, who were considered to belong to the newly emerged progressive ʿulamāʾ,[324] and this view extends their argument for reform by proposing their own agenda. The second view is that of Saudi liberals who have their own views regarding reform.[325] An explanation

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[323] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly* (2005) p. 157.

[324] The progressive ulama was a new trend of Islamic opposition in Saudi Arabia, formed from the Saudi religious establishment in the early 1990s as a result of the second Gulf War. Its prominent members were Salman al-Awda, A'idh al-qarni and Saffer al-Hawali who collectively became known as the leaders of al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya (the Islamist Awakening, the Islamic opposition of the early 1990s) (S. Lacroix (2004), "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 58, no. 3, p. 345).

[325] Aba Namay, op. cit., p. 50.

of the agenda of the religious establishment can be seen in their Memorandum of Advice[326] (*Mudhakkirāt al-nāṣiḥa*). According to Champion, this memorandum called for political reforms and was handed to King Fahd by Ibn Baz, the country's top religious authority[327] during a meeting on 18 May 1992. It was also distributed widely in mosques throughout the Kingdom. The memorandum demanded an overall reform of the system and some restrictions on the power of the royal family, as well as several other important points, as follows:[328]

- The establishment of a Consultative Council, with its members chosen from the most competent candidates without any kind of exception or distinction
- The Islamisation of all social, economic, administrative and educational systems, as well as reform of the army aimed to create a modern, strong and independent Islamic army
- The introduction of comprehensive social justice based on equality for all citizens without any exception or exclusion of status and rank
- Reform of the press and media and the closure of the corrupt press to ensure a strong, independent Islamic press in the service of Islam.

Concerning the agenda of the Saudi liberals and according to Al-Kutbi, in 1992 a memorandum was submitted to King Fahd by forty-three prominent Saudi liberals,[329] including businessmen, journalists and government officials, who considered themselves to be part of the Saudi elite. Their main aims were to reduce the influence

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[326] The Memorandum of Advice was formed and generated from The Letter of Demands (from the first Saudi Islamic reform movement). Both were derived from the teachings of various Islamic sheikhs. These two documents were at the heart of opposition politics in Saudi Arabia (M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999, p. 22).

[327] Following the second Gulf War, the post of Grand Mufti was re-established in 1993 by King Fahd. Shayhk Ibn Baz, head of the council of senior ulama, was appointed Grand Mufti (Champion, op. cit., p. 59).

[328] Champion, op. cit., pp. 224-225.

[329] The Islamist's Letter of Demands, which became known as the Memorandum of Advice, came after the liberal forces Memorandum. Thus the Saudi liberals were first in demanding political reform in Saudi Arabia (Fandy, op. cit., p.160).

of the religious authorities in Saudi society, in addition to raising many important points about political change and reform, as follows:[330]

- The formation of an organised framework for the promulgation of religious fatwās (religious legal opinions issued by the senior religious authorities), subject to exhaustive discussion
- Reforming the judiciary through all its levels and powers
- Dispense justice and equality of opportunity to all people
- The immediate creation of a consultative assembly (Majlis al-shūrā)
- A comprehensive reform of religious policy and the curtailment of the activities and influence of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice
- A review of the status of Saudi women and the acknowledgement of their role in building society
- Reviving municipal councils
- Opening trade chambers in other provinces
- Placing a heavy emphasis on education
- Demanding that a written constitution be confirmed in a national referendum.

Those who presented a memorandum to the King in the early nineties criticised, among other things, the influence of the religious authorities in Saudi society, considered themselves as part of the non-royal Saudi elite and as having some influence over Saudi society. In relation to this point, Al-Rawaf argues that to understand the politics of Saudi Arabia, which is mainly confined to the elites, its important to distinguish between Royal, and non-Royal elites. The royal elite dominate the political, economic and social life of Saudi society while the non-Royal elite are a separate collection of groups and individuals.[331] Thus, in this study the non-Royal elite refers to a group of people whose status is based on education and

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[330] I. Al-Kutbi, "Democratic Transition in the Gulf Cooperation (GCC)", *The Arabic Future Journal* (2000), vol. 257, no. 23, p. 228.

[331] O. Al-Rawaf, "The concept of the five crises in political development-relevance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1980, pp. 316-317.

occupation rather than birth, as in the case of the royal elite, and who have some influence over politics in the Saudi bureaucracy.

There is no doubt that both the religious establishment including the newly emerged progressive ʿulamāʾ, who have their own views regarding the memorandum of advice, and the liberal elite of Saudi society posed a threat to the Saudi regime. Some of them were arrested by the Saudi Government, while others were allowed to leave the country.[332] However, in 1993 the Saudi opposition entered a new era when individual efforts became more organised.

The period that followed the end of the second Gulf War witnessed a resurgence of opposition[333] in Saudi Arabia. A number of dissident organisations formed including the Advice and Reformation Committee (ARC) associated with Osama bin Laden, who threatened Saudi leadership in the 1990s due to its dependence on foreign troops. This was different to the liberal and progressive Islamic reformers threat because it was accompanied in the mid-nineties by violence. For instance, the bombings of Riyadh in 1995 and Khobar (an eastern province of Saudi Arabia) in 1996 were both considered major events that threatened Saudi Arabian domestic stability as well as that of the United States (as will be discussed in this chapter). But foremost among those organisations was the Committee of the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR). The common view of Saudi opposition during this period was that Islam and its values were under attack, both globally and locally, as a result of the presence of foreign troops in the region and that the Saudi Government had failed to protect Islam

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[332] M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
[333] The most prominent opposition leaders of this period were Safar al-Hawali, Salman al-Auda, Muhammed Al-Mis'ari (who helped found the Committee for the Defence and Legitimate Rights), Sa'ad al-Faqih (who helped found the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia), Osama bin Laden (who helped found the Advice and Reform Committee) and Hassan al-Saffar (of the Shi'a Reform Movement) (Fandy, op. cit.,).

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and Muslims. Furthermore, all the problems of the regime were linked to the Saudi royal family and its monopoly of power.[334].

The CDLR was the first vocal Saudi opposition group organised inside the Kingdom, which suggests the opposition had been re-established after a long absence during the sixties and seventies. Butt argues that in the 1960s and early 1970s a number of Saudi opposition groups were based outside Saudi Arabia, particularly in Beirut, the Lebanese capital. Most of those involved espoused Arab nationalism, an idea which dominated political life in the region at that time. But in the years after the disastrous defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 war with Israel, which also saw the death of president Nasser of Egypt, the Beirut-based Saudi opposition faded away.[335] However, according to Al-Rasheed the CDLR was established in Riyadh in May 1993. The six signatories on the Committee's letter addressed to the Saudi leadership were of high status and included senior academics, a retired judge and religious scholars. The aims of the CDLR were to regain the independence of the judiciary and to make people aware of their rights under Islamic law, including human rights and democracy.[336]

Niblock argues that the CDLR was founded and headed by Muhammed al Mas'ari, a professor of physics at King Saud University in Riyadh, while another of its most prominent leaders was Sa'ad al-Faqih, a surgeon.[337] According to Al-Rasheed, the CDLR was immediately banned in Saudi Arabia because it represented a serious threat to the Saudi regime, with its strict enforcement of Islamic law. In addition, the highest religious authority in the Kingdom, the Council of the Higher ʿUlamāʾ, declared that the Committee was illegitimate in a country ruled according to the

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[334] M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); see M. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia,* Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*, (London, 2003).

[335] G. Butt, "Profile: Saudi Political opposition," *BBC News*, 10 February 2005. Available [Online]: http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/3772583.stm [12 March 2008].
[336] Al-Rasheed, op. cit., pp. 167-177.
[337] T. Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy and survival*, (London: Routledge, 2006) p. 99.

principles of Islam.[338] Muhammed al Mas'ari was arrested by the Saudi Government and later released. Sa'ad al-Faqih was also arrested but fled the country. Both met in London and established the CDLR headquarters in 1994. With the establishment of the CDLR in London, a new phase of Saudi Islamist opposition began.[339] According to Fandy, in March 1996, the CDLR faced a serious internal schism among its leaders as a result of differences over policy and methodology. This led Muhammed al Mas'ari to continue as leader of the CDLR, while Sa'ad al-Faqih created the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA).[340]

In the context of this research the important question to address is: What was the main cause that led to the (re)emergence of opposition groups in Saudi Arabia during the early 1990s? How did the emergence of these opposition groups reflect on the regime's legitimacy? Since the emergence of the CDLR the Saudi Government media and the official clerical establishment has condemned its letter. In addition, some of the signatories were questioned and threatened; others were banned from public speaking and suspended from their government jobs.

As we discussed earlier, many analysts attributed the re-emergence of opposition groups after the second Gulf War to the incompetence of the government in dealing with problems, whether they be the decision to deploy 'infidel' troops, the decline in oil revenues or even the cost of the war. In truth, we cannot deny the significant impact of the second Gulf War in spurring many Saudis to action but, at the same time, we cannot deny the significance of changes in the overall structure of Saudi society, especially among the educated who were pushing for political change and reform. In relation to this argument, Aldamer contends that the political revival in the nineties was a consequence of the process of modernisation and the maturation of

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[338] Al-Rasheed, op. cit., p. 177.
[339] Champion, op. cit., pp. 226-227.
[340] Fandy, op. cit., p. 150.

society. This is the natural response of a new consumerist society that is hungry for democracy and developing as a modern state that had hitherto stagnated.[341]

During the period that followed the second Gulf War crisis (1995–2000), and particularly since the mid-nineties, Saudi Arabia witnessed several significant domestic events. First, in 1995, King Fahd suffered a stroke and, in 1997, Abdullah[342], then crown prince, took control of most decision-making.[343] Second, there was the growth of a new generation of more radical Islamists who voiced their complaints and opposition much more forcefully by expanding the ideas of jihad and takfir, which is to declare someone an 'infidel'. Osama Bin Laden and the al-Qa'ida organisation were among them.[344] Third, a frustrated domestic atmosphere arose concerning the political reform the Saudi Government had declared in the early nineties. According to Champion, a package of constitutional and administrative reforms announced in 1992 did not satisfy most Saudis, particularly dissident Saudi groups. It consolidated the centrality of the Saudi regime rather than broadening political participation.[345] Finally, the rise of a new trend of opposition groups, the so-called "Islamo-Liberals" made up of former Islamists and liberals, whether Sunni or Shi'ite, saw them call for political change and democracy within an Islamic framework through a revision of the official Wahhabi religious doctrine, established since the first Saudi state was founded by Ibn Saud. This new trend of opposition groups managed to gain visibility by advocating new ideas for reform, notably through a series of manifestos and petitions which received support from the Saudi Government, particularly during the 2000s.[346]

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[341] Aldamer, op. cit., p. 263.

[342] When King Fahd died, King Abdullah bin abdul al-aziz al Saud (the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques) became the King of Saudi Arabia on August 1, 2005.

[343] C. Dioun, "Democracy within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", *Middle East Program*. February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [18 March 2008].

[344] *Ibid.,*

[345] Champion, op. cit., pp. 315-316.

[346] S. Lacroix, "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists", *The Middle East Journal* vol. 58, no. 3 (2004), 345-365.

However, as has been discussed, a number of dissident organisations posed a threat to the Saudi leadership. Osama Bin Laden, for example, had tried to persuade King Fahd to deploy a Muslim force of "Mujahedin fighters" to repel the Iraqi army from Kuwait instead of using non-Muslim American troops, but his idea was rebuffed causing him to fall out with the Saudi Government. As a result, he decided to find a way to create pressure by calling for domestic change.[347] Delong-Bas argues that two main factors incited bin Laden over the invitation of non-Muslim American troops as follows:[348]

- the defence of the homeland of Islam was rightfully the prerogative of Muslims, not 'infidels'
- the conflict at hand was one between Muslims, rather than one between Muslims and 'infidels'.

According to Champion, in August 1996, from his exile in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden issued his notorious declaration of jihad (holy war) against the United States.[349] Cleveland argues that political and religious leaders in the Arab Middle East condemned bin Laden's use of religion for terrorist purposes.[350] At the same time, Okruhlik argues that resistance to US hegemony in the Arab and Muslim world resonated among all segments of the population and further, that it would be a mistake to underestimate this sentiment.[351] Menoret argues that there is a relationship between the recruitment of Arab youth by violent movements and a lack of jobs and political participation.[352] However, between 1995 and 1997, as a result of bin Laden's declaration of jihad, bin Laden shifted his focus from domestic Saudi issues to broader international concerns, particularly against US policy in different parts of the world. This paved the way for the events of 9/11 to occur. Dioun points out that:

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[347] M. Klare, *Blood and Oil: How America's Thirst for Petrol is killing us*, (London, 2004).
[348] N. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, (Oxford University, 2004) p. 268.
[349] Champion, op. cit., p. 236.
[350] Cleveland, op. cit., p. 544.
[351] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly* vol. 28, no. 4 (2005) p. 158.
[352] P. Menoret, *The Saudi Enigma A History*, (Translated by P. Camille), (Lebanon: World Book Publishing, 2005) p. 190.

In February 1998, bin Laden's Al-Qaeda organisation announced a jihad against the United States. Six months later, terrorists believed to be followers of bin Laden bombed the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 258 and injuring over 5,000.[353]

Before the domestic challenges of the events of 9/11 and its impact on political change and reform in Saudi Arabia is discussed, there will be a brief overview of the rise of a new trend of opposition groups, the so-called "Islamo-Liberals", made up of former Islamists and liberals. This new trend harks back to the second half of the 1990s and is a result of the activities of the progressive ʿulamāʾ or Islamic "Awakening Sheikhs", such as Salman al-Awda, A'idh al-Qarni and Saffer al-Hawali, some of whom were still imprisoned. Their absence left the field open for new ideas and actors including the minor sahwists, who attracted some attention through a series of manifestos and petitions demanding political reform and democracy. These manifestos and petitions received support from the Saudi Government, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 when the government felt that it had to distance itself from Wahhabi values and the assertion that there was a link between Wahhabi religious doctrine and extremism.

The Islamo-Liberals constitute one of many different Islamist groups, who have taken a middle path and who call for far-reaching changes inside the Saudi system. They are also critical of militant jihadists of the Bin Laden mould, who use violence to generate change, and ultra-conservative clerics. This new trend can be attributed to nationalists (*alwataniyun*) who struggle for equal participation in a just and strong nation-state and who reflect different regions, coming from marginalised social groups. Also included in the mix are various ideologies such as old-fashioned Arab nationalists (*qawmiyun*) and humanists (*insaniyun*) including both genders and encompassing all religious groups, for example, Ismailis, Shi'as, Sufis and Sunnis.[354] However, this

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[353] C. Dioun, "Democracy within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", *Middle East Program*. February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [18 March 2008].

[354] S. Lacroix, "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists", *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 3, 2004, pp. 345-365.

new trend[355] has stood out since early 1998, when groups reformulated their calls for political change and reform in an Islamo-democratic fashion or mode. On this basis they could make alliances with other groups inside Saudi society, such as liberals and Shi'ites. These new alliances emerged from the radical Salafis and Islamic Awakening of the second half of the nineties.[356]

Elsewhere, Stephane Lacroix argues that the most important features of Islamo-Liberals in Saudi Arabia are as follows:[357]

- They represent the elite of Saudi intellectuals.

- They demand a comprehensive reform including all politics, economic and social Saudi institutions.

- They believe that the country should have a constitution with the establishment of constitutional institutions.

- They see that reform should come from within the Saudi state, rather than being imposed from the outside.

- They oppose Islamists who have chosen violence as a means of achieving change and reform.

- Generally they ask for fundamental issues to be addressed, such as separation of powers, respect for human rights, the founding of civil institutions, development of a climate of tolerance and pluralism, and the empowerment of Saudi women in order for them to achieve their goals in Saudi society.

Most of the significant demands of the new Islamo-Liberals were expressed during the aftermath of 9/11 when petitions were submitted to the Government demanding political change and reform. However, it should be noted from the previous discussion

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[355] Some prominent figures of this new trend (Islamo-Liberal) were Sheikh Abd al-Aziz al-Qasim, Abdullah al-Hamid, Hasan al-Malki, Muhammad Sa'id Tayyib, Ali al-domaini and Jafer al-Shayeb. See Lacroix, op. cit.,
[356] *Ibid.,*
[357] *Ibid.*, pp. 346-355.

that among the responses of key stakeholders in Saudi society during the 1990s, Islamic activist groups were the major opposition concerning the Memorandum of Advice, presented to the King in 1992. Also, the responses of key stakeholders in reality did not stem from the prominence of its leaders, but as indicated, from the incompetence of the government in dealing with problems, especially the deployment of non-Muslim troops. However, this government's incompetence prompted the western educated, journalists and businessmen to push the Kingdom towards more meaningful political reform.

4.4 The impact of the events of September 11, 2001

There is no doubt that the events of 9/11 in the USA were one of the challenges that most directly affected the legitimacy of the Saudi Government, internally and externally, and forced it to accelerate political change and reform. This is because the mastermind behind these events was Saudi-born Osama bin Laden (albeit he was stripped of his citizenship in 1994), and 15 of the 19 hijackers who perpetrated the attacks were Saudi citizens. This section will discuss the domestic impact of the events of 9/11. The external impact, particularly relating to the Bush Administration's "Greater Middle East Initiative", will be discussed in the following section.

According to Ammoun, these events of put the legitimacy of the Saudi regime on notice as the abovementioned fifteen hijackers were Saudi citizens who were supported by ultra-conservative religious figures in the Saudi Government.[358] Thus, the government was caught between external US pressure for reform, especially to increase the individual liberties of Saudi citizens and preserve vital Western interests, as well as domestic pressures such as petitions to the government that sought political

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[358] C. Ammoun, *The Institutionalization of the Saudi Political System and the Birth of 'Political Personnel*, (Gulf Research Centre, 2006) p. 216.

change and reform. Al-Faleh argues that the events of 9/11 contributed to a crisis of legitimacy in Saudi Arabia that led to internal challenges.[359]

Alshayeb argues that internal challenges and external reactions in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks forced the Saudi regime to re-formulate social and political structures in order to avoid possible social unrest. He asserts that:

> As a result of these internal challenges and outside reactions, the Saudis found themselves forced to thoroughly study their social and political structure and were able to conclude that the roots of violence came from the ideological and political system itself.[360]

Alshayeb's arguments relating to the 9/11 terrorist attacks suggest that the violence, whether arising internally or externally, was the outcome of contradictory policies that the Saudi Government has historically sought to promote in order to preserve power and maintain its own legitimacy. These policies related to the tensions between imposing radical Islam, on one hand, and promoting modernisation, on the other. The dilemma is that the system of paternalism relating to the oil boom of the 1970s and the lure of radical Islam have both contributed to political violence which ended with the seizure of the holy mosque in the holy city of Maccah in 1979. Ochsenwald argues that:

> The elite's perceived failure in the preservation of morality and criticism of excessive cultural borrowing from the West were among the reasons for the attack on the Makkah Haram in 1979.[361]

Externally, the Saudi regime has tried to control and spread its specific version of Wahhabi Islam outside the country, using financial support to gain religious

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[359] M. Al-Faleh, "The Future Policy In Saudi Arabia related to events of September 11: Reform in Face of Collapse or Division", *Al-Quds al-Arabi* , London, 26 April – 1 May 2002. Available [Online]: http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2002/04Apr/26%20Apr%20Fri/Quds13.pdf [18 March 2008].

[360] J. Alshayeb, "New Saudi King and Challenge of Reforms". *Arab News*, Jeddah, 25, September 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=70672&d=25&m=9&y=2005 [18 March 2008].

[361] W. Ochsenwald, "Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Revival", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* vol. 3, no. 13 (1981) p. 284.

legitimacy for the government. As a result of the political struggle between Saudi Arabia and Gamel Abdel Nassar's Egypt during the 1960s, the Saudi Government decided to concentrate its influence toward conservative non-Arab Muslim states.[362] This policy led to the promotion of radical Wahhabi Islam in most of the Islamic world. For instance, in the beginning Al Qaeda was created in Afghanistan during the 1980s through Saudi financial support. Klare observes that:

> While ultimately successful in repelling the Soviets, these efforts established a pattern of Saudi aid -or "charitable contributions"- to militant Islamic groups in Afghanistan, and so laid the foundation for the rise of Al Qaeda and the Taliban.[363]

However, this policy has encouraged political violence in Saudi Arabia and outside it, rather than hindered it, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

To conclude political violence in Saudi Arabia was not only related to the ideological dimension but also to policies designed both to strengthen morality and the values of radical Islam as well as to preserve the Saudi Government's own power and legitimacy. In so doing, the state avoided any substantial political development, even though Saudi society was undergoing significant change. This change began at the end of the 1970s and created a political class willing and able to lead while frustrated by what they saw as the incompetence of the government in dealing with mounting domestic problems. Okruhlik argues that opposition groups, state corruption, absolute power, inequality, the lack of representative political institutions and accountability and, finally religious deviation, are all factors that motivate people to violence and chaos. Oktuhilk states that:

> People contest the state on moral grounds because of corruption and authoritarianism, on material grounds because of inequality, on national grounds

[362] S. Al-Shihabi, "Saudi Arabia has two choices: reform or internal corrosion", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, London, 25 July 2007. Available [Online]: http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2007/07/25JulWed/qds19.pdf [18 March 2008].
[363] Klare, op. cit., p. 48.

because of a lack of true representation, and on religious grounds with charges of deviation from the Koran and sunna.[364]

As a result of the 9/11 attacks on Washington and New York, the United States considered the event as an act of war against America. Cleveland argues that in October 2001, America declared war against both the Taliban Movement and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the so-called "War on Terrorism".[365] Also, according to the US administration, it was going to be a long war and would include many other organisations and countries other than Afghanistan, including some Arab countries. According to Lacroix, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were a watershed for the new trend of Islamo-Liberals in Saudi Arabia. Prior to that date, most of the prominent Islamo-Liberal figures expressed their opinions in private places, such as salons, and Internet forums and articles.[366] However, the war on terrorism had already had adverse ramifications in Saudi Arabia, directly or indirectly, which affected domestic political stability, and Islamo-Liberal intellectuals formalised their demands by issuing political manifestos and petitions. According to Alshayeb, it started when the first petition was signed at the end of January 2003 by 104 intellectuals and delivered to King Abdullah while he was Crown Prince.[367]

Al-Saif argues that this petition, the "Vision on the Present and Future of our Nation (watan)"[368], contains five central demands. First, it asked for the implementation of constitutional institution reform; second, it suggested how to correct the economic situation; third, it again formalised the relationship between state and society; fourth, it requested the Saudi Government issue an initiative toward political reform; and finally it asked for a national dialogue conference to be organised, where all regions

[364] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly* (2005) pp. 156-157.
[365] Cleveland, op. cit., p. 542.
[366] Lacroix, op. cit., p. 346.
[367] J, Alshayeb, "New Saudi King and Challenge of Reforms". *Arab News*, Jeddah, 25, September. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=70672&d=25&m=9&y=2005. 19 March 2008].
[368] "Using the term 'nation' as slogan or title of a petition refers to the Arabic '*Watan*' which means country or homeland".

and social groups would be represented.[369]   Generally, the key points of the petition are as follows:[370]

- the separation of powers between the executive, judicial and legislative branches;
- the implementation of the rule of law;
- equal rights for all citizens regardless of their regional, tribal and confessional background;
- the creation of elected national and regional parliaments;
- complete freedom of speech, assembly and organisation to allow the emergence of a true civil society;
- call for a fair distribution of wealth, serious measures against corruption and waste and the diversification of the county's revenues;
- the respect of human rights, the ending of discrimination, the improvement of public services, the struggle against unemployment and the empowerment of women; and
- the liberation or fair trial of all political prisoners without risk of having their passport seized or losing their jobs.

This petition was unprecedented in Saudi experience. For instance, major demands, such as an elected Consultative Council, judicial independence, government accountability and separation of powers reflected the critical situation in the early 2000s as well as the boldness of what Lacroix called "Islamo-Liberal reformism". This movement demanded changes in Saudi methods of governance within an Islamic framework. Dekmejian introduced a significant background analysis of the 104 signatories of the petition in terms of their ideological orientation, occupational status, geographical origin and sectarian identity. The most interesting thing in this matter was that the majority of these signatories were well-educated liberals from the Najd

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[369] T. Al-Saif, "Implementation on Saudi Arabia "Despotism and the possible dynamic to face"". *Saudi Affairs*, London, September 2004. Available [Online]:
http://www.saudiaffairs.net/webpage/sa/issue19/article19/article16.htm. [20 March 2008].
[370] The text of the charter of national reform, *Saudi Affairs*, London, March 2003. Available [Online]:
http://www.saudiaffairs.net/webpage/sa/issue02/article02l/issu02lt011.htm [20 March 2008].

area, the central part of Saudi Arabia and the home of the Saudi royal family, followed by those from Ḥijāz, the western part of Saudi Arabia (see table 4.1).

Table 4.1 A profile of the signatories of the "Vision on the Present and Future of our Nation (*watan)*"

Ideology		Occupation		Regional background	
Liberal	49	Professor	25	Najd	51
Islamist moderate	9	Writer	23	Ḥijāz	20
Unknown	46	Bureaucrat	15	Eastern province	16
		Journalist/editor	9	South	6
		Businessman	8	North	1
		Engineer	3	Unknown	10
		Physician	3		
		Unknown	18		
104			104	104	

Source: R Dekmejian, "The liberal impulse in Saudi Arabia". *Middle East Journal*, vol. 57, no. 3, Summer, 2003, p. 409.

According to Alshayeb, the Saudi Government received a second petition from Shiite leaders in June 2003. This occurred when King Abdullah, then Crown Prince, met with eighteen Shiite leaders. The petition entitled "Partners in One Nation (*watan)*" was signed by 450 individuals from both sexes and included businessmen and intellectuals. The main purpose of the petition was to focus on religious freedom and civil rights for Shiite people. Also, on September 24, 2003, a third petition was delivered to King Abdullah. This petition entitled "In Defence of the Nation *(watan)*" supported the Saudi Government in its fight against terrorism, particularly against Al-Qa'ida.[371] However, petitioners attributed growing violence to the slow and hesitant

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[371] J. Alshayeb, "New Saudi King and Challenge of Reforms". *Arab News*, Jeddah, 25 September 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=70672&d=25&m=9&y=2005. [20 March 2008].

adoption of political reforms and the government ignoring demands for popular participation in decision-making. The petition's key points are as follows:[372]

- expressing refusal and condemnation of all kinds of extremism and violence;
- attributing the wave of violence to the absence of political reforms and, in particular, the Saudi Government ignoring demands for popular participation in decision-making;
- confronting terrorism can only be done through security measures and solutions; nevertheless, a thorough and comprehensive diagnosis of political, social and economic reforms is required also; and
- eliminating and ending corruption and the mismanagement of public funds, thus allowing for the redistribution of national wealth more equitably, and ensuring the importance of Saudi women in playing a prominent role in political and economic issues.

The fourth reform petition was submitted to the Saudi Government on December 16, 2003, entitled "Call for both Leadership and Citizens: Constitutional Reform is First".[373] Petitioners demanded the Saudi regime accelerate the implementation of a comprehensive political reform by establishing a new constitution. The key point in this petition was the demand calling for Saudi Arabia to become a constitutional monarchy[374] with, for the first time, an elected parliament. In addition, it demanded the establishment of a human rights group independent of government.

In April 2007, the fifth and final reform petition was signed by people from different walks of life, including some activists who were arrested in March 2004, after putting their names to the previous petition demanding a constitutional monarchy. According

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[372] "A new petition introduces to the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia demanding for political reform", *Saudi Affairs*, London, October 2003. Available [Online]: http://www.saudiaffairs.net/webpage/sa/issue09/article09l/issue09lt02.htm. [22 March 2008].
[373] "Call or Announcement for both Leadership and Citizen: Constitutional Reform is First", *Saudi Affairs*, London, January 2004. Available [Online]: http://www.saudiaffairs.net/webpage/sa/issue12/article12l/issue12lt2.htm. [2 April 2008].
[374] Three men were the most prominent leaders who called for an electoral process and a constitutional monarchy - Matruk al-Faleh, Ali al-Dumaiyyni, and Abdullah al-Hamed (Okruhlik, op. cit., p.161).

to the writer, Mohammed bin Hudeijan Al-Harbi, one hundred Saudi reformists sent a petition to King Abdullah calling for the establishment of an Islam-based constitutional monarchy. The petition was also sent to fifteen leading members of the Al-Saud ruling family, including Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz and Interior Minister Prince Nayef. The signatories, who call themselves "advocates of a civil society" and include five women, demanded the introduction of a parliament "elected by all adults, men and women" in ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia.[375] Al-Harbi added that the signatories decided to send the petition by mail, rather than request an audience with the King, because past experience suggested they stood little chance of being granted a meeting.[376] However, according to Al-Harbi, the petition included the following points:[377]

- Proposing electing half the members of the Consultative Council, an all-male advisory body whose 150 members are named by the King.
- Demanding the promulgation of laws to "combat poverty" and institute a fair distribution of resources, complaining of a "huge disparity" in apportioning the Kingdom's vast wealth.
- Issuing a code recognising the rights granted by sharia law, which guarantee freedom of opinion, expression and assembly.
- The promulgation of an "effective law" regulating the creation of independent civil associations.
- Calling for moves to enhance the independence of the judiciary, such as open trials, and the separation of the powerful interior ministry into two ministries: one in charge of local government and the other in charge of security.

Despite the attention given to Saudi Arabia's political environment in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, it was the Gulf War crisis of 1990 that first prompted demands for political change and reform. The emergence of Islamo-Liberal opposition groups in

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[375] M. Al-Harbi, "Saudi reformists call for elections", *Kuwait Times*, 3 April 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=Mzg5ODMxNjkw. [10 April 2008].
[376] *Ibid.*,
[377] *Ibid.*,

the aftermath of 9/11 generated a polite exchange of ideas between the regime and those calling for political change. At the same time, the petitions approach was successful because it demonstrated several important points, such as the rise of former Islamists and liberals, Sunnis and Shi'ites (Islamo-liberals), all of whom were calling for political participation, the creation of elected national and regional parliaments, pluralism and human rights.

Furthermore, these petitions did not produce significant reforms by the government. Concerning this point, in interview conducted for the *Arab News,* when Dr. Al-Gusayer, who was identified as an activist by the newspaper, was asked whether activists would continue producing petitions which stimulate debate on the streets of Saudi Arabia, as well as resentment in government, or if his participation in dialogue with the government amounted to a change in his position, he replied: "Petitions were just a tool, never a goal for us." He explained that perceived defects in the Saudi system had led to the petitions. These defects could be seen as the absence of political parties and the fact that opposition groups did not have the ability to pose a real threat to the Saudi state.[378] Fandy argues that despite the presence of vigorous and sometimes violent dissent, the country was stable. He concludes that Saudi political order is threatened more by the new challenges of globalisation than any political opposition.[379] This research supports Dr. Al-Gusayer and Fandy's conclusions. The petitions for reform have been numerous, but decision-making remained firmly in the hands of the government, despite the fact that globalisation has opened up society, creating a new challenge to the Saudi regime. Globalisation might offer benefits to Saudi society, but many devout believers are suspicious about the cultural values globalisation may bring.

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[378] Cited in E. Mubarak, "Reform Takes Centre Stage". *Arab News*, Jeddah, 30 December 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=22&section=0&article=75463&d=30&m=12&y=2005 [10 April 2008].
[379] M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) p. 243.

Section Two

4.5 External pressure for political change and reform

In the preceding section, significant factors in creating domestic pressure for political change and a transition to democracy in Saudi Arabia, prevalent since the early nineties, were discussed. In this section, the pressure for a transition to democracy in Saudi Arabia during the same period will be explored from an external perspective; for example, the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the crisis of 9/11. In addition, the impact of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq and the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime on the political stability of Saudi Arabia will be examined.

4.5.1 The 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait

As discussed in the preceding section, the second Gulf War crisis of 1990 was one of the key factors that played a significant role in political change and reform in Saudi Arabia; its impact has continued from the early 1990s until today. One of the most important domestic effects already mentioned was the re-emergence of well-organised Saudi opposition groups that, for the first time, demanded a transition to democracy and constitutional political reform. However, Sager argues that the current, critical political situation in most third world countries supports the notion that the transition to political reform and democracy was made possible by external pressure that ultimately led to successful reforms.[380]

The second Gulf War of 1990 contributed to political instability in the region, including all the GCC States, as has been discussed concerning the deployment of foreign troops. However, this promoted hostility among rivals and made them feel insecure. Al-Habbas argues that following the second Gulf War, security considerations including an arms race emerged in GCC countries. This led to an expansion of US military and political roles in the region, especially after the GCC

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[380] A. Sager, *Political reform measures from a domestic GCC perspective*, (Dubai, Gulf Research Centre, 2006) pp. 20-21.

states, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, signed security agreements with the United States.[381] Also Rogers points out that:

> Since the Gulf War of 1990, an arms race in miniature has developed between states seeking to protect assets by hardening or deep underground sheltering, and weapons developers in the United States and elsewhere who have worked to produce conventional and nuclear earth-penetrating warheads.[382]

Nevertheless, US policy in the region carries with it some potential sources of instability. According to Okruhlik, the single, most important factor that caused American policymakers to promote political reform in the Middle East was the political violence in many Arab countries in the early 1990s concerning US policy double standards in the Middle East, particularly in the wake of the Gulf War between Iraq and Kuwait, when the American military presence in the region created internal pressures.[383] Domestically, Arab regimes faced severe socio-economic problems, popular demands for political rights and the increasing strength of Islamic opposition movements that had their own agendas for reform and did not support US reform initiatives. These factors made many Arab leaders ease restrictions on political activity and expedite the transition to democracy by encouraging participation in formal political processes.

The second Gulf War crisis demonstrated that Saudi Arabia was not a strong military power, but rather it was dependent on Western forces, particularly on American protection against regional sources of threat such as Iraq and Iran. For instance, following the war, Iran strongly opposed the American presence in the Middle East and security arrangements it had entered into.[384] Rogers argues that Iran also viewed

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[381] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 259.
[382] P. Rogers, "Global security and the war on terror: Elite power and the illusion of control", (New York, Routledge, 2008) p. 121.
[383] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly* (2005) 157-158. Concerning this point, Cleveland argues that Arabs noted that though Washington was quick to enforce UN resolutions against Iraq, it had not tried to compel Israel to obey UN resolutions pertaining to the West Bank and Gaza Strip (W. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 2004, p. 481).
[384] One major aim of any US military action would be to forestall Iranian interference with Gulf oil exports from countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Rogers, op. cit., p. 181).

this presence, along with substantial US forces in the western Gulf states, as not being conducive to its own security.[385] Al-Habbas (1999:201) argues that Iran rejected a Western presence in the area and continued to rule out any regional security arrangements that included non-regional states.[386] However, the dependence on the United States for protection meant that the US continued to be involved intimately in the region's politics as it protected its own interests and objectives, and with no resistance from any other regional power, particularly the Soviet Union.[387] During the nineties and after the second Gulf War, US targets came under attack in the Riyadh and Khobar bombings. Furthermore, the US was strongly criticised domestically in Saudi Arabia because its policies were almost identical to those of the Israeli government and thus were not compatible with Saudi aspirations. As previously discussed, none of the Saudi groups during the past fifteen years has given any support to US reform initiatives, not even reformists who were critical of American policy in the region.

In general, the second Gulf War crisis indicated that the Gulf area is highly unstable and thus vulnerable to political threat and further that Saudi Arabia was not a strong military power and therefore not capable of self-defence without the assistance of the United States. A strong alliance between the two countries was founded in the late 1930s and this alliance relates to the fact that Saudi Arabia is the leading foreign supplier of crude petroleum to the United States.[388] At the same time, the Saudi regime realised that its need for security, as a result of this close relationship with the US, may lead to US involvement in Saudi domestic affairs, but this was viewed as preferable to the country being under the control of rival Saudi opposition groups. The Saudi Government realised the price of being defended by the United States, that is, the government would use its massive oil reserves to ensure a stable, affordable price for oil. But for domestic groups in Saudi Arabia, the price could be very costly; it

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[385] *Ibid.*, p. 156.
[386] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 201.
[387] One of the most significant objectives of the United States in the Gulf region was to keep Soviet influence out of Saudi Arabia in order to ensure US access to Saudi oil (M. Klare, *Blood and Oil: How America's Thirst for Petrol Is Killing us.* London: Penguin Books, 2004).
[388] *Ibid.,*

may, for instance, lead to the overthrow of the Saudi regime by a group led by Osama bin Laden. Some scholars view this situation as a defence dilemma. Al-Habbas states that:

> The fact that Saudi Arabia's external security requires a close link with the US while domestic security requires that such a link is less obvious and that the country should be more independent in its foreign, defence and oil policies has created a so-called "defence dilemma".[389]

Klare argues that US dependency on foreign energy sources creates immense economic challenges and vulnerabilities in the United States. This has led to a growing US public awareness and increased political pressure to find more efficient alternatives to an outdated economy that relies on fossil fuels, particularly from unstable regions.[390] However, in the following discussion, the combined impact on Saudi Arabia of the aftermath of 9/11 and the 2003 American invasion of Iraq will be considered. Also there will be a discussion of how these events affected political change and the prospects for democratisation, including what effect American government policies had in the region. It would appear in the discussion so far that the reaction and response of Saudi Arabia to the war on terrorism of 9/11 and the American invasion of Iraq was more sophisticated than during the second Gulf War. This is mainly due to the fact that Saudi Arabia had to accommodate disparate and sometimes conflicting domestic, regional and international pressures.

4.5.2 The crisis of September 11, 2001

As previously discussed, putting non-Muslim troops on the ground in Saudi Arabia was the only way to effectively defend the Kingdom during the second Gulf War crisis. Also, the continuation of a foreign presence in the Kingdom infuriated Islamic opposition groups, particularly Osama bin Laden's group, which decided to implement two important strategies. First, they took aim at the physical manifestations of American power in the region, especially military bases and embassies. Second, they attacked symbolic targets in the United States, thereby

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[389] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 266.
[390] Klare, op. cit., p. 18.

hoping to erode the American administration's attachment to its bases in Saudi Arabia. As part of the first strategy, bin Laden bombed the Saudi National Guard (SANG) headquarters in Riyadh in 1995, killing five Americans, and attacked the Khobar Towers in Dhahran in 1996, killing another nineteen Americans. The second strategy produced the 9/11 assaults on the World Trade Centre in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington.

There is no doubt that the aftermath of 9/11 generated important criticism of the Saudi regime among the international community, particularly from the United States, creating enormous pressure on Saudi Arabia to reform its domestic policies; such policies were said to be responsible for engendering violent anti-Americanism among the Saudi public that culminated in the 9/11 attacks. Most external criticism had come from high levels in the American administration, such as Congress and the Pentagon, describing Saudi political policies as a genuine menace to the United States. Kechichian argues that the Kingdom's reputation was further damaged after a US Congressional Report implied that Saudi Arabia played a role in the attacks. Also, he argues that in July 2002 the powerful Defence Policy Board at the Pentagon described Saudi Arabia as the 'kernel of evil' to the United States.[391] Dioun conceptualised three significant principles for policy options that the United States could promote with regard to political reform and democracy after the devastating shock of 9/11. These principles are as follows:[392]

- apply pressure for top-down liberalisation, where the Saudi Government allows limited participation
- support grassroots democratisation that may eventually lead to the replacement of the Saudi regime; and

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[391] J. Kechichian, "Testing the Saudi "Will to power": Challenges confronting prince Abdullah", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. X, No. 4, winter, 2003, p. 101.
[392] C. Dioun, "Democracy within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", *Middle East Program*. February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [10 April 2008].

- revert to a hands-off approach to Saudi internal developments, tacitly supporting the Saudi regime.

Also, Dioun argues that top-down liberalisation would be the most effective of the above options because it creates political release valves that will diminish the appeal of extremism, while at the same time controlling the pace of liberalisation.[393] Concerning this point, Gause argues that the American administration probably would not like to see the emergence of governments produced by free elections in the Middle East. He states that:

> Washington probably would not like the governments that Arab democracy would produce…History also indicates that legitimate democratic elections in Arab states would most likely benefit Islamists. In all recent Arab elections, they have emerged as the government's leading political opposition, and in many of them they have done very well…. In Saudi Arabia municipal elections, informal Islamist tickets won 6 of the 7 seats in Riyadh and swept the elections in Jeddah and Mecca. Candidates backed by Sunni Islamists also won control of the municipals in a number of towns in the Eastern Province.[394]

Generally speaking, since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the Saudi state has been in serious turmoil due to American pressure, as the US considered the Saudi government indirectly responsible for the attacks. The American administration demanded the Saudi Government take several important steps to exercise more control over the country. The most important demands were as follows:[395]

- step up efforts to curb the flow of funds to extremist Islamic organisations, particularly those connected to al-Qaeda (i.e. disrupt their financial pipeline);

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[393] *Ibid*.,

[394] G. Gause, "Saudi Islamist between the monarchy and the United States", *Global Issues*, Vol. 3, 2005. p. 73.

[395] This information is attributed to an interview with Adel al-Jubeir by CNN (Wolf Blitzer) on May 18, 2003. Al-Jubeir was the Saudi foreign affairs adviser to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia when he was Crown Prince. Mr al-Jubeir became the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States on 29 January 2007. The interview is available [Online]:
http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0305/18/le.00.html/ 28/10/2007. [2 May 2008]. The response of the Saudi Government concerning these demands will be discussed in section three of this chapter.

- establish new oversight bodies in Saudi Arabia to monitor the funding of charities;

- request the Saudi Government to explain the basic tenets of Islam, and to give information about those groups who use Islam as a justification for suicide bombings against US and Israeli civilians (e.g. groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad); and

- review all educational institutions in Saudi Arabia that promote anti-American hatred and incite violence, particularly some imams at mosques who have ventured into the political arena.

As we have seen, the external American pressure for democratisation and reform in the region evolved strongly as a result of the 9/11 attacks. The increased antipathy towards the west empowered America to invade Iraq in 2003. The American involvement in the region, particularly in Iraq, has created more external pressure for democratisation and reform, especially in Saudi Arabia. For instance, the Saudi Government accelerated the reform process in order to create stability and decrease Saudi antipathy against the west and, in particular, the U.S.A. But some scholars argue that the American presence in the region has shifted from reform and democratisation toward security and stability, especially after Iraq spiralled out of control. Andrew England argues that US pressure for reform brought greater security but that this has diminished in the wake of US failures in Iraq and Islamist gains in elections in the region.[396]

4.5.3 The impact of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq

As discussed in section two, the second Gulf War crisis of 1990 had dangerous security ramifications for the region because it intensified the challenges faced not only by Saudi Arabia but by all GCC states, both domestically, through extremism and terrorism, and externally from the regional environment. Among the most prominent ramifications of the second Gulf War was the emergence of the so-called

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[396] A. England, "Saudi reformers press for change", *Financial Times*, 2 April 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/96809d3a-e148-11db-bd73-000b5df10621.html [2 May 2008].

"Iraqi Case". This case is a very complicated issue, not only because of its multidimensional nature and multiple variables but also because of the many regional and international parties involved, which led to the occupation of the country by an international coalition under the leadership of the United States in March 2003. For instance, Bahgat argues that one of the most important regional factors was the growing presence of Iranian threats. Internationally, this brought into existence new challenges linked to US strategy which sought to restructure the region and impose political reforms on GCC states.[397]

Alain Gresh argues that political change toward democracy in Iraq was as a result of the invasion in 2003 and subsequent occupation, and this makes a transition towards a more participatory political order in Saudi Arabia inevitable. Any political changes in Iraq that make the majority Iraqi Shi'ites politically dominant will encourage minority Shi'a elsewhere, especially in neighbouring Saudi Arabia.[398] However, the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime also created security and stability problems in the region which made the United States shift its emphasis toward security and stability. For instance, having a Shi'ite majority in Iraq makes it vulnerable to Iranian influence, which is of concern to Saudi leaders, especially when there is a prospect that Iran will be armed with nuclear weapons. Iranian officials believe that their country is America's next target for regime change in the Middle East, after Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, Iran seeks to expand its role in the region and to influence the regional balance of power, particularly through military force following the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.

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[397] G. Bahgat, "Iran and the United States: The Emerging Security Paradigm in the Middle East", *Parameters,* vol. XXXVII, 2007, p. 5.
[398] A. Gresh, "Between tradition and demands for change Saudi Arabia: reality check", *Le Monde diplomatique* , February 2006. Available [Online]: http://mondediplo.com/2006/02/02saudi [3 May 2008].

Section Three

4.6 Saudi Government policy considerations

Part One

4.6.1 Saudi Government policy strategies

This section discusses the Saudi Government response to internal and external pressures outlined earlier in the chapter. The first part investigates the dynamic of Saudi Government policy strategies and the second part examines Saudi Government policy outcomes. Several questions will be raised. What did Saudi Government policy makers think about the challenges posed by internal and external pressures? What different approaches were considered? Why did the Saudi Government choose modest reforms instead of either repressing internal dissent or implementing far-reaching reform? What was their strategic thinking with regard to facing internal and external challenges, while maintaining political stability and legitimacy of government?

Political reform has become one of the most contentious issues. There is a consensus among Saudi reformist groups such as intellectuals, businessmen, progressive ʿulamāʾ and even members of the royal family that political reform is inevitable and a must for Saudi Arabia, and that the Saudi regime should try to preserve its position by managing and adopting the reform process. A liberal senior member of the Saudi royal family, Prince Talal bin Abdul-Aziz, is calling on the regime to grant immediate legislative powers to the Consultative Council, the unelected consultative body, thus sending a strong message about serious political reform.[399] An interview conducted by Hardy with Abdullah al-Hamed, a Sunni reformist, said the government should evolve into a constitutional monarchy, with an elected parliament of men and women. It is

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[399] Prince Talal "Earthquake reveals exacerbate conflict wing inside Saudi Arabia", *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (London), 6 September 2007. Available [Online]: http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2007/09/06SepThu/qds01.pdf [3 May 2008].

time for everyone to wake up in Saudi Arabia, and that includes those who rule the country and Saudi society.[400]

The discussion in Chapter Three shows the significance of the religious establishment since the first Saudi state, as a result of a tribal-religious alliance. Islam is the main source of legitimacy for the Saudi regime. However, the religious establishment challenged the country internally and externally from the late seventies. Okruhlik (2005:157) argues that Saudi Arabian domestic politics must be understood within the context of 1979, when radical cleric Juhaiman al-Utaibi, forcibly took control of the Great Mosque in Makkah and 1991, when Iraq invaded Kuwait: two watershed years.[401] These challenges pressured Saudi Government policy makers and forced them to evaluate and assess the reality of new demands for political change and reform. From the domestic perspective, the most important demands for political change came from the conservative religious establishment in the early nineties. For instance, as discussed in section one, a "memorandum of advice" by conservative clerics was handed to the head of the Saudi regime, King Fahd, in 1992, by Ibn Baz, the country's top religious authority. It demanded an overall reform of the government and some restrictions on the power of the royal family. According to Aba Namay, this action coming from the religious establishment created shock waves among senior Saudi officials and led to the council of senior Islamic scholars, including Ibn Baz, the country's top religious authority, to state its disapproval of the way the matter was handled. This was followed by the publication and distribution of a petition as a result of pressure from the Saudi Government.[402]

Also, as has been discussed concerning the emergence of two opposing views within Saudi society in the early nineties, the liberals and conservative ʿulamāʾ. This situation forced the Saudi Government to accept limited constitutional reform to

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[400] R. Hardy, "Saudi princes grapple with change", *BBC News* Middle East Analysis, 6 November 2003. Available [Online]:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/3241657.stm [3 May 2008].
[401] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly* (2005) p. 157.
[402] R. Aba Namay" Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 16, no. 3 (Spring 1993) pp. 50-51.

satisfy the rising demands of Saudi society while at the same time preserving its power. Henderson argues that in order to survive, it is more likely that the House of Saud will side with the conservatives rather than the liberals, because the former are stronger and more significant than the latter.[403] However, the escalating demands from the liberals and conservatives created a serious situation domestically, especially the latter who sent a critical message to government policy makers, warning them that a lack of action would lead to chaos inside the country and empower the conservative religious establishment to intervene in the public interest. Furthermore, they understood that this serious situation would mean that the head of the state would be unable to carry out his affairs of state and, ultimately, that the ʿulamāʾ could change the ruler under Islamic law, exactly what had happened with King Saud in the early sixties. In relation to this point, Ochsenwald argues that:

> On the chief occasion when major conflict within the country might have ensued, when King Saud was deposed in favour of his brother Faisal in 1964, the Ulama authorized the decision. They argued that the "threat of civil strife and chaos" meant that Saud was "unable to carry out the affairs of the state" and that holy law authorized the change so as to preserve "the public interests".[404]

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the agenda of Saudi Government policy makers was to react to mounting pressure with a two-track policy. On the one hand, it sought to suppress the most powerful elements of dissent, targeting in particular the Islamist opposition during the mid to late 1990s. On the other hand, the Saudi Government attempted to appease[405] and co-opt different groups, offering essentially token political gestures.[406] Concerning this policy, Dioun states that:

> A number of religious figures who opposed the regime's policies were given heavy prison sentences…Despite such measures, the regime made concessions to

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[403] S. Henderson, "The Saudi royal family: What is going on?", 15 July 2004. Available [Online]: http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/Henderson%20--%20Saudi%20Royal%20Family.pdf [4 May 2008].

[404] W. Ochsenwald, "Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Revival", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* vol. 3, no. 1 (1981) p. 274.

[405] An example where the regime chose to appease rather than confront religious radicalism during the 1980s was when it changed the title of the head of the state from "your Majesty" to "Custodian of the Two Holy Cities" (Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)," op. cit., p. 157).

[406] International Crisis Group. (2004). "Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself? (Middle East Report, p.6).

the Saudi Ulama to quell unrest from moderate and radical Islamists. Religious education was intensified in school and universities and the Commission for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, otherwise known as the religious police, was given greater powers to enforce public morality.[407]

Elsewhere, Dioun states that:

> The 1990s saw an escalation of Saudi Arabia's contradictory policies that cracked down on Islamic extremists and moderate Islamist opponents alike, while continuing to grant greater powers to the religious establishment that inspired them.[408]

However, the Saudi Government did not see any contradiction in promoting a reform agenda. Reform should come slowly and gradually. During the nineties, the government had seen that reform was a critical domestic issue. Incremental reform also needed to meet the requirements of the Kingdom's circumstances. Aba Namay notes that King Fahd said: "this political reform relating to the constitutional package intended not to be a prominent document....it will be subject to ratification and development according to the requirements of the Kingdom's circumstances and interests.....the proclaimed documents are susceptible of development and modification if we deem that necessary to stabilise the country....Modification must be orchestrated within the framework of our benevolent Islamic doctrine".[409] Furthermore, the Saudi Government rationalised its own conservative policies, such as preserving power, by claiming that it was trying to avoid any damage to Saudi national unity and to avoid political chaos. Following this argument, at the opening of the fourth annual session of the current Consultative Council, where he was addressing government officials and diplomats, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia said: "Let everyone know that the period of unrest which was ended by the founder King Abdul Aziz is gone and will never return". The King said: "God willing, what will be

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[407] C. Dioun, "Democracy within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", *Middle East Program*. February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [4 May 2008].
[408] *Ibid.*, p.10.
[409] Aba Namay, op. cit., p. 54.

left is a memory which further cements the principles of righteousness and unity for this country, a unity which helps turn hardships into determination and change."[410]

The Saudi religious establishment is one of the most powerful political institutions in the Kingdom and can influence Saudi policy making, in addition to the royal family, although the authority of religious leaders is restricted but they complement each other for several reasons. First, although some scholars refute this viewpoint, according to Al Habbas all important decisions dealing with domestic and foreign policy are handled by the royal family, with the King having the final say.[411] For instance, Saudi Arabia's leading cleric, Grand Muftī sheikh Abdel-Aziz al-Sheikh, said Saudis should not join jihad outside the Kingdom, as a warning to Saudis who were going to fight US led forces in Iraq.[412] Second, the Saudi Government's policies since unification tried to embrace the Saudi ʿulamāʾ, particularly those from distinguished tribes in the religious establishment, such as the al-Sheikh family, because the regime realised that its legitimacy and survival came from this source. Ochsenwald argues that in a number of concrete ways, twentieth-century Saudi history has shown the mutual dependence of the political elite and the ʿulamāʾ. Also, neither the ʿulamāʾ nor the Saudi regime is interested in real political reform because they do not want to lose their power and interests.[413] Andrew England argues that in Saudi Arabia, reform also faces resistance from the highly influential Wahhabi religious establishment, which has had a strong relationship with the royal family since the eighteenth century.[414] Many critics support the notion that any change in the Saudi system is politically impossible due to its tradition of proselytising, which has served both political and religious purposes since the Kingdom's inception. Yet

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[410] R. Qusti, "Nobody Is Above Criticism: King Abdullah", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 16 March 2008. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=107894&d=16&m=3&y=2008 [4 May 2008].

[411] Al-Habbas, op. cit., p. 92.

[412] "Saudi activists call for release of detainees", *Reuters,* 22 August 2007. Available [Online]:
http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL22828336 [16 May 2008].

[413] Ochsenwald, op. cit., p. 275.

[414] A. England, "Saudi reformers press for change", *Financial Times*, 2 April 2007. Available [Online]:
http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/96809d3a-e148-11db-bd73-000b5df10621.html [16 May 2008].

history shows that the regime has often realigned its political and religious agenda to strengthen its position.[415]

However, Saudi Government policy during the 1990s and early 2000s was focused on using extensive Islamisation programs to bolster its legitimacy, while empowering and appeasing conservative groups, by ceding the political discourse inside the country to radical conservative groups, particularly the Saudi religious police (Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) in order to gain their support and avoid confrontation. This policy has changed since the mid-2000s as will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

Dioun argues that Saudi Islamisation programs, intended to defend the regime from attempts at influence by external powers and internal criticism, have enabled radical Islamists to grow stronger and threaten both US and Saudi national security.[416] However, Saudi Government policy makers followed the same policy that enabled radical Islamists to grow stronger, even after 9/11. This policy led to the ousting of Muhammad al-Rashid, a pro reformist education minister who was replaced by Al-Obeid, the former director of the Muslem World League.[417] Okruhlik argues that Saudi Government policy during the last fifteen years constitutes four main strategies:[418]

- coercion;
- co-option through the disbursement of oil revenues;
- renewed relations with the religious orthodoxy; and
- playing social forces off against one another.

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[415] R. Bronson, "Saudi Monarchy: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?" The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch # 1011: Special Forum Report, 7 July 2007.

[416] C. Dioun, "Democracy within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", *Middle East Program*. February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [16 May 2008].

[417] J. Bradley, "Al Qaeda and the house of Saud: Eternal enemies or secret bedfellows?" *The Washington Quarterly* vol. 28, no. 4 (Autumn 2005) p. 144.

[418] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly* (2005) p. 165.

As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, social, economic and technological forms of modernisation are supported by the Saudi regime, while political development is highly resisted. This suggests that there is a kind of political vacuum with regards to reform and political change. The only change the Saudi Government wants to promote is regarding the economy; this has happened in a big way and impacted society as well. In general, the agenda which the government has implemented to sustain its legitimacy since the early 1990s, particularly in its attempts to appease and co-opt different groups, especially establishment clerics, while suppressing the most powerful elements of dissent such as the radical Salafis and groups associated with Osama Bin Laden, demonstrate that there is no real reform, and the government wants to stay in power and prevent the sharing of authority with anyone outside of the royal family. In relation to this strategy, Al-Howaymel argues that:

> Saudi Arabia, despite what was known as being governed by the most restrictive ownership regulations in the twentieth century, was not the worst of the traditional property systems both in Europe or even Asia. Saudi Arabia did not rely on just the stick in dealing with local political protests, but they do carrot often violent already in the hearts of their opponents, all in order to prevent the sharing of power and exit from the circle of the royal family[419].

Ali al-Dumeini, a leading Saudi reformist, argues that in order for the state to remain Islamic and, at the same time be capable of keeping up with the pace of change, it must strengthen its legitimacy through 'elected constitutional institutions, without the need for legions of missionary and religious institutions to support this legitimacy.[420] Furthermore, there are no common objectives shared among stakeholders of reform in Saudi Arabia which are central to the political reform debate, the main stakeholders being the three traditional powers, that is, the royal family, the clerical establishment and other groups such as technocrats, tribal leaders and the commercial middle

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[419] M. Al-Howaymel, Political reform in Saudi Arabia and the difficult choices, 11 October 2007. Available [Online]: http://cdhrap.net/text/makalat/5.htm [12 May 2008].

[420] M. Fadel, "Saudi reformists: the events of Riyadh insure the need for reforms", *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* London, 17 June 2003, Issue No: 4377. Available [Oline]: http://www.alquds.co.uk:9090/pdf/2003/06Jun/17JunTue/Quds04.pdf [16 May 2008].

class.[421] For instance, many scholars argue that there is division within the government about the pace and direction of reforms. Alyami, a US-based Saudi exile, argues that:

> Abdullah has made several encouraging announcements, but to implement meaningful transformation, he knows he must have solid support from his senior brothers, none of whom has ever endorsed the King's reform plans…Instead of addressing the powerless Council, the King should first convince his family to support his calls in order to prevent the country from sliding into civil and religious chaos. The obstacles in the way of meaningful reform are a lack of transparency throughout business and government, public accountability to the people, single-family rule, and a lack of a modern legal constitution to protect people's rights from an absolute and arbitrary system of governing…the King has yet to put together a plan to explain how and when he will start addressing the multitude of problems he outlined in his speech to the council[422].

There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia is facing one of the most serious periods in the entire history of the state since unification. This difficult time relates to the pace and direction of political reform, particularly among the royal family. In general, there are two trends inside the royal family concerning the concept of political change and reform – trends which have split the royal family into two camps. First, there are the so-called 'reformers', supported by King Abdullah, followed by the so-called 'hard-liners', which consist of the late King Fahd and his six full brothers, known in Saudi circles as 'al Fahd' or sometimes 'the Sudairi seven'. Most importantly, these include Prince Sultan, the Minister of Defence, and Prince Naif, the Minister of the Interior.[423]

A senior Saudi official, a reformer in the ruling family, said in interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that political reforms will be possible only if the executive becomes accountable to an elected legislature body. This would break the monopoly on power held by some members of the royal family for a long time. Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, a brother of King Abdullah, also said that reforms do

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[421] The researcher will specify a separate chapter about Saudi stakeholders and their political participation within this thesis.

[422] A. Alyami, "Abdullah's Reforms Must Begin in the Palace". *The Henry Jackson Society Project for Democratic Geopolitics,* 25 April 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/stories.asp?id=339 [16 May 2008].

[423] See M. Herb, op. cit.p 105

not happen overnight but have been occurring in the Kingdom since the 1960s. He added that the reform should apply to the rights of women as "we have signed international conventions, such as on women's rights, and we should respect them". Most significantly, for the first time, he declared that he was looking to form a political party comprised of personalities from the opposition.[424]

However, Aldamer observes that the general feeling among the Saudi elite was that the hardliners were still more powerful within the royal family because most of the sensitive state apparatus was controlled by the Al Fahd or Sudairi seven. In addition, their sons and nephews held many sensitive positions, ranging from governors of important regions, ambassadors to key positions in the armed forces.[425] Al-Rawaf argues that there is a group of influential princes in Saudi Arabia who formulate the family's policies, which in part, affect the decisions made by government. The abdication of King Saud in 1964 indicates that the family as a unit can be stronger than the King alone. It should be noted that the absence of consensus among the Saudi royal family toward political change and reform is one of the most significant issues the country is facing.[426]

Externally, several key international and regional events have forced the Saudi Government to accept and accelerate the process of reform in the early 1990s. Internationally, the global democratisation that began in 1974 was triggered by the collapse of Portugal's authoritarian.[427] This dramatic change paved the way to overthrow long-established dictatorships and consolidate deliberative democracy in Spain and Greece, the Latin American countries, a number of countries in Asia, Africa and Central and Eastern Europe as well.[428]The Cold War ended as a result of

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[424] Prince Talal "Earthquake reveals exacerbate conflict wing inside Saudi Arabia", Al-Quds Al-Arabi London, 6 September 2007. Available [Online]:
http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2007/09/06SepThu/qds01.pdf [17 May 2008].
[425] Aldamer, op. cit., pp. 237-238.
[426] Al-Rawaf, op. cit., pp. 320-321.
[427] R. Doorenspleet, *Democratic Transitions*, (New York: Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rinner Publishers, 2005) p. 38.
[428] L. Diamond, *Developing Democracy Toward Consolidation,* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) p. 24-25

the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This was accompanied by a rapid process of structural transformation toward democracy; for example, the Soviet Union dissolved, thus ending the US/USSR conflict, with the emergence of the US as the sole super power in international relations.[429] Concerning the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union on political reform in Saudi Arabia, the Interior Minister of the Saudi Government, Prince Nayef bin Abd al-Aziz, took a far more cautious view, which one commentator summed up as evoking the "fear that reform would be like the dissolution of the Soviet Union: once change starts, nothing can stop it.[430]

As discussed in section two, these dramatic world changes during the 1990s paved the way for the United States to intervene and dominate the Middle East region and Arabian Peninsula to protect its interests and repress political violence in the region as a result of the presence of a foreign power. One of the most important choices during the nineties was the rejection of democratic choice in Saudi Arabia as a result of fear and concern that democratic choice would give power to radical opposition groups. This continued until the events of 9/11 occurred, creating a serious threat to Saudi Government leaders.

Henderson introduced a framework for explaining the strategy of the Saudi regime to deal with domestic problems, particularly since the early 2000s, when the government sought to stay in power and sustain its legitimacy. The tactic of the Saudi regime was to rely heavily on traditional Saudi methods of political control, such as using the dual role of the family and tribe in dealing with problems inside society, trying to appease religious clerics and co-opting them, and dealing with those who were not acceptable

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[429] A. Saikal, *The United Nations and the Middle East*, (Tokyo: United Nations University. Press, 2003) p. 73.
[430] International Crisis Group. (2004). "Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?", *Middle East Report* # 28, July 4, p.5. Available [Online]: http://merln.ndu.edu/archive/icg/cansaudiarabiareform.pdf.   [18 May 2008].

to the government by sending them out of the country. In brief, the government used five tactics as follows:[431]

- appealing to families and tribes to take responsibility for young hotheads who caused problems;

- seeking to co-opt the establishment clerics, confirming the legitimacy of the House of Saud while de-legitimising its Islamic opponents;

- attempting to export real and potential troublemakers by sending them to work and, if necessary, to fight for Islam in other countries;

- channelling moderate technocrats into bodies like the consultative council but retaining tight control over newspapers and quashing any independent policy body; and

- deflecting US criticism by making apparent commitments when necessary.

Henderson's points are useful for explaining the strategy of the Saudi regime to deal with domestic and external problems since the early 2000s but particularly in the period that followed 9/11. However, as a result of increased oil prices since 2005, some points have changed. There is no doubt that the aftermath of 9/11 generated important criticism of the Saudi regime among the international community, particularly from the United States. At the same time this period witnessed the rise of the Islamo-Liberals, discussed earlier in this chapter. This group requested the implementation of political, economic and social reforms, concluding their demands by issuing the first official petition in Saudi Arabia for political change and reform. Most significantly, as mentioned, the group called for Saudi Arabia to become a constitutional monarchy with, for the first time, an elected parliament. Consequently, the Saudi Government could not fight two concurrent battles: one against the Al-Qaeda militants and the other against the Islamo-Liberals pro-democracy reformists. According to senior Saudi officials, "We are battling a campaign of violence by suspected Al-Qaeda militants over the past two years, which is a danger to the

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[431] S. Henderson, "The Saudi royal family: What is going on?", 15 July 2004. Available [Online]: http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/Henderson%20--%20Saudi%20Royal%20Family.pdf [17 May 2008].

stability and progress of our country. We do not want to fight two battles at the same time, one with militants and the other with the pro-democracy reformist movement. Now our strategy is to fight against militants to wipe them out, and engage liberals in a process of cautious reforms which is tailored to domestic specifications".[432]

The new strategy was aimed to mobilise the Saudi community in the war against militant groups in the pretext of engaging them in a process of reform while, at the same time, not engaging the Saudi community in strengthening state political institutions and enhancing political participation. The government sought to co-opt the establishment clerics and confirm the legitimacy of the House of Saud while de-legitimising its Islamic opponents (see the second of five points listed above). This strategy had three significant aims. It wiped out most of the militant groups who threatened Saudi domestic stability while at the same time delaying real political reform under the pretext of regional security and maintaining stability.[433] Also, it empowered the Saudi polity to co-opt establishment clerics by letting them issue f fatwā (religious legal opinions) against militants to justify the government's behaviour toward them. Most significantly, it empowered the government to deal comfortably with the pro-democracy reformist movement. For instance, in 2008 a leading Saudi reformist and his brother (Dr. Abdullah Al-Hamid and Issa Al-Hamid) were arrested for the sixth time concerning women imprisoned on charges of inciting demonstrations.[434]

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[432] K. Bhatti (2005), "Hardliners sweep the board in local council elections: Timid reforms will not solve deep political crisis". Available [Online]: www.socialistworld.net/z/bin/kw.cgi/show?id=1613. [17 May 2008].

[433] "In comments published in 2007, "Saudi royal opposes parliament elections". *Reuters*, 2 July 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/world/20070702-0357-saudi-elections.html [18 May 2008].

[434] It is noteworthy that Dr. Abdullah Hamid had been detained in 2004 for more than a year with a group of reformers, including Matrook Al-Faleh and Deminy and Mohammed Saeed Tayyib, for signing petitions demanding comprehensive reforms such as a constitutional monarchy and elected parliament. "Saudi Arabia: detained Abdullah and Issa Al-hamid", *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, London, 10 March, 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.alquds.co.uk:9090/pdf/2008/03/03-09/qds01.pdf [17 May 2008].

Part two

4.6.2 Saudi Government policy outcomes

Arguably there is a need to distinguish between change and political reform. Not every change is a reform in the political sense because there is no real transfer of power from one group to another which empowers citizens to effectively participate in politics; instead changes may in fact consolidate the power of political elites. Concerning this point, Bannan states that:

> Political reform means citizens effective and active participation in general issues to widen the scope of political responsibility in the community to reach to the citizen in order to be both the source and the subject of authority. In order to achieve citizen effective participation in decision making establishments, the space of competition should be open to involve all symbols of the authority establishments[435].

Okruhlik argues that in Saudi Arabia many political changes have taken place since the early nineties, particularly the establishment of the consultative council, but that they are not reforms because there is no real transfer of power or broadening of political participation. Changes taking place in Saudi Arabia do not reform the political system but instead consolidate the power of the Saudi regime. Okruhlik further states that:

> The regime's actions are always too little, too late and often represent lost moments of opportunity. The irony of islah is that, for the most part, "reforms" consolidate the power of the al-Saud family in political life. For example, the basic law introduced in 1992 established a consultative assembly (*Majlis al-shūrā*) and provincial administrations. Nevertheless, it also consolidated the centrality of the ruling family rather than broadening political participation.[436]

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Saudi Government is seeking to test the waters before taking reform measures. There is a sort of fear and hesitation to pursue broad political change and reform. According to a senior member of the royal family, Prince Turki al-Faisal, the Kingdom's former ambassador to the United States, the

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[435] T. Bannan, "Let us do it for ourselves", *Okaz*, Jeddah, 10 December 2006, Issue 14715. Available [Online]: http://www.okaz.com.sa/okaz/osf/20061210/Con2006121069938.htm [17 May 2008].
[436] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly* vol. 28, no. 4 (2005) p. 160.

government of Saudi Arabia is working hard to gradually implement and promote political reform to deal with the values and norms of Saudi society.[437] From the point of view of the Saudi Government, maintaining the centrality of the ruling family, rather than broadening political participation in elected political institutions, does not exist in a vacuum; it is the outcome of the nature of Saudi society, where tribal and religious factors still play a significant role in political life. In a statement,[438] the Saudi Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Aviation and Inspector General, dismissed any idea that the Consultative Council might become an elected legislature on the grounds that illiterate people might be voting. At the same time, Prince Sultan said that the polity is indeed looking forward to greater effectiveness in government and will not hesitate to support any step that enables it to improve its performance. In an interview by Lally Weymouth of the *Newsweek-Washington Post,* published on February 27, 2005 with the headline: "Changes in the Kingdom – on our timetable", which supports what has been discussed earlier in this chapter, the Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal said that the Kingdom is moving toward political reform, especially with regard to women, but that any effort must be "gradual".[439]

Also, when one of the key informants (AM, a judge in the Summary Court in Jeddah from the Ḥijāz) for this study was asked whether he thought the government's reform policies were appropriate to the local values and traditions of Saudi society, AM replied:

> The government is making efforts to enhance the level of education in the
> society and is funding this process. However, as you may know, Saudi society is
> quite simple and needs several years to change its way of thinking and its
> attitudes, in order to raise its level of awareness and then improve the political

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[437] M. Al-Madah, "Prince Turki al-Faisal: We reject accelerating reforms and foreign interpretations for democracy". *Okaz*, Jeddah, 31 October 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.okaz.com.sa/okaz/osf/20061031/Con2006103158804.htm [18 May 2008].

[438] Aljazeera channel, Qatar, (23/3/2004). Available [Online]: http://www.aljazeera.net/news/archive/archive?ArchiveId=73495. 2/4/2008. [18 May 2008].

[439] Saudi Royal Embassy, *Washington DC*, (2005). Available [Online] http://www.saudiembassy.net/2005News/Statements/StateDetail.asp?cIndex=505 [20 May 2008].

> system, and this is what I'm hoping to see. I feel that the tribal system has a great influence on the process of change and reform (AM, 30/1/2007, Jeddah).

Since the second Gulf War crisis and particularly the aftermath of 9/11, the Saudi Government has taken several steps toward political reform. The most important reforms were the package of constitutional and administrative reforms in 1992; the establishment of the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue in 2003; the implementation of municipal council election in 2005; and the formation of a committee of princes to vet candidates for succession to the throne in 2006 (Allegiance Law). All these initiatives enhance the meaning of of the reform process and political participation but they do not represent true reform. The government's goal was to avoid violence and combat extremism, as well as engage Islamo-liberals in a process of cautious reform in order to counter them. The Saudi regime continues to dominate and there has been no legitimate transfer of power. For instance, the most important reforms mentioned above needed further development to improve and enhance their meaning, particularly the "Allegiance Law", which will be discussed toward the end of this chapter. The concept of gradual change is right for a country like Saudi Arabia, but at the same time, this concept is sometimes incompatible with Saudi Government policy toward enhancing political development, unless it is accompanied by structural change that leads to wider public participation.

Hertog argues that although new mechanisms for political debate have emerged, this has not fundamentally changed existing power structures or the strong top-down nature of politics in the Kingdom.[440] Also, when one of the key informants (TB, a well-known academic in the political science department at King Adullaziz University in Jeddah and from the Ḥijāz) for this study was asked what the changes that had taken place in the political field in Saudi Arabia since 1990 were, TB replied:

> Since 1990 there have been some important political changes in the Kingdom. The most important change was the development of the State Consultative

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[440] S. Hertog, *The new corporatism in Saudi Arabia: Limits of formal politics*, edited by A Khalaf, A. & G Luciani, (Gulf Research Centre, Dubai, 2006) p. 241.

Council that is considered as an advisory body, semi-legislative but not fully legislative in the true sense of the word usually people make legislations! It's hard to say that it is a monitoring or observatory body because the main function of the Legislative Council is to make legislation and check on the government's agencies performance in general! (TB, 1/2/2007, Jeddah).

In addition, when another key informant (FB, a well-known academic in the political science department at King Saud University in Riyadh and from the Najdi) was asked whether he felt the response of the Saudi Government to local and international pressures to implement reform of the political institutions was sufficient, FB replied:

We do see changes but slowly and we believe that these changes have an impact on the flexibility of the regime and its ability to adapt to changes. This may have a negative effect on political stability. This is why we find that the government started now to evaluate the freedom from the 1990s to the present and we find that major changes took place. Freedom of the media and political participation although is limited because as we mentioned earlier that any increased participation will mean taking away some of the power from the decision makers, that is the government. Thus, we find that the government makes changes gradually (FB, 9/1/2007, Riyadh).

Self argues that any reform of political institutions should start with the role of legislative assemblies or parliament.[441] However, as discussed in section one, significant public demands for reform emerged shortly after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990; these were distinguished by the appearance of opposition movements which the Saudi Government had not had to confront before. As mentioned, public demands for reform increased, with many written submissions and petitions being forwarded to the government during the era of King Fahd. These came from various political forces, such as the Liberals and the Clerics. As a result, the government responded by introducing certain important steps towards political reform.

Dioun argues that this new law of governance did not substantially codify Saudi law, and the consultative council served only as a technocratic advisory board, with no legislative power.[442] This supports what Henderson argues above about the objectives

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[441] P. Self, *Political Theories of Modern Government, Its Role and Reform*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985) p. 193.

[442] C. Dioun, "Democracy within Boundaries...," *Middle East Program*. February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf [20 May 2008].

of the Saudi regime being to deal with domestic pressure through modest reform measures, such as establishing political institutions like consultative councils to co-opt moderate technocrats, while the government remained in power and sustained its own legitimacy.[443]

As discussed in this chapter, the establishment of the Consultative Council in 1992 did not satisfy those groups that had been demanding democratisation and political reform but instead stimulated more petitions, particularly post 9/11, from progressive clerics among the religious establishment as well as from the Islamo-liberals. Since then, the Saudi Government has undertaken a number of reforms and accordingly amended laws, as well as formulating new ones.

However, as mentioned a few pages earlier, one of the most concrete steps for political reform taken by the Saudi Government was the establishment in June 2003 of the King Abdullaziz Centre for National Dialogue. For the first time in the history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, this centre promoted dialogue among all groups and people from different schools of thought.[444] Ammoun argues that the National Dialogue, where sensitive subjects are freely discussed by representatives of Saudi society, would become a democratic forum leading to real reform of the Saudi system.[445] There is no doubt that the establishment of the King Abdullaziz Centre was a good step for political institutional reform and the promotion of tolerance in the Kingdom. For instance, different groups (Salafi and non-Salafi Sunnis, Sufis, Isma'ili, etc) came together to discuss issues affecting them, such as religious matters, ideological issues, the situation of women and the future of youth in Saudi Arabia.[446] Significantly, this all happened officially and under the patronage of the Saudi

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[443] A separate chapter will be included in this thesis to consider the dynamic implementation of the Consultative Council in Saudi Arabia.
[444] J. Alshayeb, "New Saudi King and Challenge of Reforms". *Arab News*, Jeddah, 25, September 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=70672&d=25&m=9&y=2005 [20 May 2008].
[445] C. Ammoun, *The Institutionalization of the Saudi Political System and the Birth of 'Political Personnel,* edited by A Khalaf, A. & G Luciani, (Gulf Research Centre, 2006) p. 234.
[446] Since its establishment until the present time, the National Dialogue Centre has held several meetings in different places around Saudi Arabia (e.g. Riyadh, Makkah, Madinah, Abha and Dhahran). Further information can be found [Online]: http://www.kacnd.org/eng/ [20 May 2008].

Government, which suggests a political opening to discuss sensitive issues. According to Abou-Alsamh, Ali Al-Demaini, one of three leading Saudi reformists jailed in 2004, argues "I used to criticise the existence of the National Dialogue Centre, but after much thinking in prison, I changed my mind and think that establishing a dialogue among Saudis is a very important step toward democracy".[447] Senior Saudi official Dr. Abdullah Nassif was in dialogue with *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* from London about the importance of the national dialogue meeting in Saudi Arabia when he questioned the significance of the timing of the meetings with regard to national dialogue. Dr. Anssif replied that national dialogue proved the Saudi people capable of a substantive constructive dialogue.[448]

Lacroix conceptualises the importance of the National Dialogue Centre at two significant levels: political and religious.[449]

- On the political level, the national dialogue recognises the necessity of implementing reforms and ensuring freedom of speech and a better distribution of wealth.
- On the religious level, the national dialogue document was a severe blow to the official Wahhabi doctrine. It acknowledges the intellectual and confessional diversity of the Saudi nation, which is contrary to traditional Wahhabi exclusivism.

Arguably, the National Dialogue is a good step to promote transparency and tolerance among different types of people. However, it still has neither power nor a precise institutional function, thus it cannot interact with the rest of the Saudi political system. Furthermore, its recommendations, issued at the end of the debates at each session,

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[447] R. Abou-AlSamh, "Saudi Islamists strike gold", *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 28 April – 4 May 2005, Issue No. 740. Available [Online]: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/740/re6.htm. [25 June 2008].
[448] Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, "Dr. Abduulah Nassif: national dialogue proved that the Saudi people capable of substantive dialogue construction", 17 February 2004, Issue No: 9212, p.3. Dr. Nassif is Vice Chairman of the Committee for National Dialogue in Saudi Arabia, He was previously Vice President of the Shura Council and Secretary General of the Muslim World League.
[449] S. Lacroix, "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists", *The Middle East Journal* vol. 58, no. 3 (2004) p. 326.

have not been supported by any institution which could impose their implementation and application; they have, in fact, all remained unheeded so far.[450] Okruhlik states that:

> The National Dialogue forums (muntadiat al hiwar al watani) initiated by Crown Prince Abdullah in June 2003 were a step toward tolerance, but they turned out to be a controlled dialogue to direct frustrations into acceptable channels rather than meaningful communication between social forces and the ruling family.[451]

From the government's point of view, the establishment of the King Abdullaziz Centre for National Dialogue was progressive. This promotion of dialogue aimed to create an atmosphere that rejected terrorism and extremism, as well as to motivate the Saudis to become involved in a dialogue that respected the opinions of others, in order to avoid any challenges that would harm national unity and prosperity at both the domestic and international. King Abdullah, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, when he was crown prince, announced, "I have no doubt the centre and the continuations of dialogue under its auspices are a historic achievement that will secure a channel for the responsible expression of opinion. This, in turn, will have an impact on the fight against extremism and provide an atmosphere where considered views and new ideas that reject terrorism and extremist thought can emerge."[452] The distinguished Saudi writer Turki Al-Sudairy attested to the importance of national dialogue, not only to motivate Saudis to engage in dialogue with others who have different opinions to enhance national unity but it was a good opportunity to discuss and explore domestic socio-economic problems.[453]

In an interview conducted by the International Crisis Group (ICG) (2004) with Turki al-Hamad, a Saudi political analyst, about the National Dialogue in Saudi Arabia, al-

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[450] C. Ammoun, *The Institutionalization of the Saudi Political System and the Birth of 'Political Personnel,* edited by A Khalaf, A. & G Luciani, (Gulf Research Centre, 2006) p. 234.

[451] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly* vol. 28, no. 4 (2005) p. 161.

[452] R. Qusti, "National Dialogue Chief Says No Boundaries in Forums". *Arab News*, Jeddah, 20 April 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=95206&d=20&m=4&y=2007. [28 May 2008].

[453] T. Al-Sudairy, "Actually...He is the maker of history", *Al Riyadh daily*, Riyadh, 5 April 2008, Issue No: 14530.

Hamad argues that it should not remain government sponsored and a controlled exercise. He recognised that:

> The national Dialogue is a good step, but these are still closed talks among select elite who are then invited to present recommendations. There has to be more transparency. We need a political and social dialogue on the general level. The most important thing is for the concept of dialogue to become established in a dominant culture that does not recognise it.[454]

However, the next important step in the Saudi Government's response to demands for political reform was the government announcement on October 13, 2003 that limited municipal elections would be held. In December 2005, council elections for 178 municipalities took place in Saudi Arabia for the first time.[455] The municipal councils will be further discussed in Chapter Six. The announcement that these elections[456] would take place came in the wake of domestic and regional developments that were the catalyst for the Saudi Government to implement reform measures. Dioun argues that by accepting the need to reform, the government used both the carrot and stick – undertaking limited changes while using force to keep reformers in check.[457] In relation to this point, when interviews were conducted with key informants for this research, some of whom were municipal council members, one interviewee said that municipal elections were meant to diffuse dissent while satisfying international pressure for change. This is supported by Henderson earlier when he states that the strategy of the Saudi Government was to remain in power by promoting limited reform, and that this has deflected US and international pressure.

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[454] T. Al-Hamad cited in, "International Crisis Group, "Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?"" *Middle East Report* # 28, July 4 2004, p.17-18. Available [Online]:
http://merln.ndu.edu/archive/icg/cansaudiarabiareform.pdf [28 May 2008].

[455] P. K. Abdul Ghafour, 178 Municipal Councils Are Formed Across Saudi Arabia. *Arab News,* Jeddah, 15 December 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=74697&d=15&m=12&y=2005). [28 May 2008].

[456] A separate chapter will be included in this thesis that discusses the implementation of municipal council elections in the Kingdom.

[457] C. Dioun, "Democracy within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", *Middle East Program*. February 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf. [29 May 2008].

However, despite these reforms, Saudi Arabia remains an absolute monarchy, in which the King is the highest judicial authority, and able to rule by decree. Some scholars, particularly from within Saudi Arabia, argue that the response of the Saudi Government to domestic and external pressures to implement political institutional reforms has not been enough. It is still limited in comparison with some other Arab countries such as Egypt or Jordan. For instance, the Saudi Government remains an absolute monarchy. The royal family is the most powerful political institution. The Consultative Council is an assembly of 150 members appointed by the King. It is an advisory committee, lacking the capacity or power to make policies. Its effective political role is limited to specific policy areas. Also, elections are not the only component of political reform and that what is required instead is a constitutional monarchy. However, while partial reform may take place, full liberalisation is a distant prospect. The Saudi Government has a long way to go before it will countenance comprehensive change.[458]

In conclusion, there will be a brief discussion of the "Allegiance Law" issued in 2006 by King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia. As mentioned, the formation of a committee of princes to vet candidates for succession to the throne was welcomed by the Shura Chairman, Dr. Saleh Bin-Humaid, who was reported as saying that all members of the consultative body had welcomed the law as a significant political

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[458] J. Alshayeb, "New Saudi King and Challenge of Reforms". *Arab News*, Jeddah, 25, September 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=70672&d=25&m=9&y=2005 [18 March 2008]; M. Al-Faleh, "The Future Policy In Saudi Arabia related to events of September 11: Reform in Face of Collapse or Division", *Al-Quds al-Arabi* , London, 26 April – 1 May 2002. Available [Online]:
http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2002/04Apr/26%20Apr%20Fri/Quds13.pdf [18 March 2008]; M. Yamani, "Saudi Arabia Is Blocking Reforms", 30 June 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-401/i.html [29 May 2009].

reform introduced by the King (cited in Abdul Ghafour).[459] Al-Harthy argues that the new law complemented existing laws such as the Basic Law of Governance, the Shura System, and the Regional Council System. The government's political objectives with this new law were to avoid any political chaos that would lead to a constitutional void. Also, to avoid a repeat of what had happened with the late King Fahd, who suffered ill health for about ten years before his death, by getting the King to relinquish some of his power for the sake of political stability.[460] Peterson argues that primogeniture does not appear to be a viable option in Saudi Arabia.[461] Under the headline "Thanks to a human king" Saudi writer Turki Al-Hamad said that "for the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia, the head of state has given up some of his power for the sake of stability".[462] In interview with Saudi Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdullaziz, he asked, "Your highness, the custodian of the two holy mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdullaziz, recently ordered the establishment of the Allegiance Commission System. It came as a surprise to many observers because it introduced many new articles pertaining to the transfer of power. What were the objectives and motives for the issuance of this new system? Why at this time?" Crown Prince Sultan replied diplomatically, "as you indicated in your question, the order to establish the Allegiance Commission System came as a surprise to many observers of Saudi affairs. However, it was not a surprise to us within Saudi Arabia because we are

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[459] P.K. Abdul Ghafour, "Shoura Backs Allegiance Law", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 30 October 2006. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=83014&d=30&m=10&y=2006 [2 June 2008].
[460] Z. Al-Harthy, "Constitutional reform in Saudi Arabia", *Asharq al-Awsat*, London, 31 October 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&article=389860&issueno=10199 [2 June 2008].
[461] J. Peterson, "Succession in the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council", *The Washington Quarterly*, (2001) p. 179.
[462] T. Al-Hamad, "Thank you, King Rights", *Asharq al-Awsat*, London, 24 October 2006, Issue No: 10192. Available [Online]:
http://www.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&article=388775&issueno=10192. [2 June 2008]. Usually in Saudi Arabia, the King appoints his crown prince but according to this new law (article 7), the King will nominate the crown prince after consulting with members of the three groups within the committee.

aware of the King's interest in reform. We know that he works hard to ensure the security and stability and to serve its citizens at all times".[463]

According to Mohammed al-Zulfa, a member of the Saudi Consultative Council, the system for the Allegiance Law was understood. The move would ensure that only the legitimate sons of King Abdullaziz, the founder of the contemporary Saudi state, would be eligible to rule. In addition, it would bring inner peace among members of the royal family and citizens alike.[464] Furthermore, al-Zulfa argues that King Abdullah made this decision at a crucial time when the Kingdom was going through a phase of political change and development and he wanted society to be in safe hands in the future.[465] However, the new law to streamline succession in Saudi Arabia consists of twenty-five articles. The committee will be made up of thirty-five members including twenty sons and thirteen grandsons of the late King Abdullaziz al-Saud. Two members are appointed by the King, one of his own sons and one of the crown prince's sons, but only if they prove to be eligible and capable.[466] Concerning how the new law will strengthen political stability, the Basic System of Rules issued by King Fahd in 1992 stipulated that, according to Article 5, succession must go through the sons of the founding King, Abdullaziz Bin Abd al-Rahman al-Faysal Al Saud, and to their children's children (grandsons).[467] However, it did not explain what methods should be chosen. Therefore, until the new law of succession was issued by King Abdullah on October 20, 2006, the transfer of power in Saudi Arabia was not clear, which may have led to political instability.

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[463] T. Al-Hemaid, "Saudi Crown Prince: Our policy is not to interfere in Iraq", *Asharq al-Awsat*, London, 8 January 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.aawsat.com/default.asp?myday=6&mymonth=1&myyear=2007&I2.x=12&I2.y=11 [2 June 2008].

[464] "Al-Bay'h declaration system for the governance and management of the deed King and the selection Crown", *Asharq al-Awsat*, London, 20 October 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=388223&issueno=10188 [3 June 2008].

[465] *Ibid*.,

[466] Z. Al-Harthy, "Constitutional reform in Saudi Arabia", op. cit. Available [Online]: http://www.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&article=389860&issueno=10199 [3 June 2008].

[467] Article 5, section 'B' of the Basic System of Rules (A. Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia,* (Riyadh, 2000, p. 265).

There is no doubt that the new Allegiance Law, issued by the custodian of the two holy mosques, King Abdullah, in October 20, 2006, was one of the King's major political institutional reforms during the '2001-10 period'. Also, there is no doubt that all these attempts at reform indicated that the government had an inclination to implement institutional political reform and to enhance political development, particularly when King Abdullah became ruler of Saudi Arabia.[468] For instance, the mechanism of choosing the Crown Prince by the "Committee of Allegiance" (see Articles 6 and 7) is a good step toward limiting some of the tremendous power of the King. In the past, the King retained the right to dismiss the Crown Prince and name someone else at any time according to the previous law of the Basic System of Rules.[469]   Another good step is the democratic manner of decision-making used by the Committee in relation to Article 21, which states that voting for committee decisions will be done by secret ballot among members of the council (which consists of thirty-five people – the sons and grandsons of the founder of the modern Saudi state). Concerning the Basic System of Rules, the King is the state's final point of power or authority.[470]

In terms of political reform, this new law about succession to the throne means that the possibility of a political vacuum is reduced, while enhancing regulation of the political process.[471]   Al-Tayar argues that in terms of political reform, the new law reflects the King's desire to achieve a smooth transition of power, in tune with modern democratic norms.[472] Moreover, Kurdi argues that the new law is a steady,

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[468] King Abdullah is viewed by many Saudis as a supporter of some political reforms but diplomats say his room to manoeuvre is hindered by opposition from powerful members of the royal family. See "Saudi activists call for release of detainees", *Reuters*, 22 August 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSL22828336 [3 June 2008].

[469] Article 5, section 'C' of the Basic System of Rules (Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia,* op. cit., p. 265).

[470] Article 44 of the Basic System of Rules (*Ibid*, p. 271).

[471] T. Al-Hamad, "Thanks to a human King", *Asharq al-Awsat*, London, 24 October 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&article=388775&issueno=10192. [3 June 2008].

[472] P.K. Abdul Ghafour, & S Al-Abyad, "New law to streamline succession". *Arab News*, 21 October 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=84257&d=21&m=10&y=2006 [3 June 2008].

progressive step toward political reform and democracy in Saudi Arabia and has removed shortcomings in the existing succession system. For instance, under the previous system, the power was transferred to the oldest son of King Abdullaziz, regardless of age and ability to run the country's affairs.[473] Magdi Abdelhadi, Arab affairs analyst for the BBC News, argues that for some Saudi reformers, the new law will probably be seen as nothing more than tinkering with a system they consider autocratic, and which concentrates power within the royal family.[474] A senior Saudi official (HA), a moderate Islamist Consultative Council member from Najd, argues that the response of the Saudi Government was a starting point and considers that:

> No. I think that the response of the government can be defined as a starting point. So as a starting point it has been a very good step, but we still need a lot of improvement and reform. Reform takes many steps and happens gradually over a long period of time, so we need to continue working towards achieving political reform (HA,24/1/2007, Riyadh).

The new law of succession indicates that institutional political reform that might promote greater political participation is still a long way off. For instance, Articles 10, 12 and 13 state there is a "Transitory Ruling Council" comprising five members of the committee from the royal family. This Council has great authority to solve most problems. However, the question is why does the system avoid and ignore other political institutions which have greater experience and ability than this small council to manage the country's affairs in case of emergency; for example, the Consultative Council and the Council of Ministers? These two political institutions, in particular, represent the elite of Saudi society from the so-called 'Ahl al-ḥal wa al-ʿaqd' or Saudi liberals and the traditional religious establishment. Why does the system avoid involving them in governing the country in situations of difficult circumstance, such as in the case of the death of the reigning king and the crown prince (see Article 13) and thereby enhancing political participation? Furthermore, if the Transitory Ruling Council failed to solve succession problems, there could be a struggle for power in Saudi Arabia. The rivalry in the royal family is about personal power and antipathy

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[473] *Ibid.*,

[474] M. Abdelhadi, "Saudi succession laws overhauled". *BBC News*, 25 October 2006. Available On-line at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6084002.stm. [3 June 2008].

rather than policy differences.[475] "This is a group which is not only blocking reform, but is also trying to eliminate others and take everything in its hand", Talal Bin Abdullaziz, a half brother of the King of Saudi Arabia said.[476] In this case, what can the committee of Allegiance Institution do? Al-Dakhil argues that one of the most important factors that led to the collapse of the second Saudi state (1824–1891) was an inter-dynastic struggle as well as the negative role of the religious establishment at that time.[477] However, arguably there is a contradiction in Saudi politics. The current regime depends on the country's elites to sustain its legitimacy and preserve power, where issues concerning the Saudi people and society are concerned, while they avoid and ignore the elites, whether liberals or the religious establishment, when it comes to issues concerning the royal family. This concurs with Alyami's argument that the law shows that the Saudi Government promises of reform are misleading and empty.[478]

However, as recently as March 2009, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia appointed Interior Minister Prince Naif to be a second deputy of the head of the Cabinet or the Council of Ministers, which means he could well become the next King.[479] This was a surprising decision, not only for the Saudi people, but also for some key members of the royal family. The surprise is not because of the experience, knowledge and political skills of Prince Naif, especially with respect to terrorism and security issues, but more due to its ignoring of the Allegiance Law. Furthermore, Prince Naif is known for his public opposition to elections for the Consultative Council and equal rights for women.

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[475] "The Saudi royal family: What is going on?", 15 July 2004. Available [Online]: http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/Henderson%20--%20Saudi%20Royal%20Family.pdf [3 June 2008].
[476] "Senior Saudi royal demands reform", *BBC News*, 5 May 2007. Available [Online]: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6980056.stm [3 June 2008].
[477] K. Al-Dakhil, "Wahhabi movement: a man of religion and political ambition*". Arab Renewal*, 15 November 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.arabrenewal.net/index.php?rd=AI&AI0=4021. [3 June 2008].
[478] A. Alyami, "Saudi family absolute rule re-enforced", The centre for democracy and human rights in Saudi Arabia. *Washington, DC*, 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.cdhr.info/Articles/SaudiFamilyAbsoluteRuleReenforced [3 June 2008].
[479] P.K. Abdul Ghafour, "Naif pledges greater efforts in the service of nation and religion". *Arab News,* Jeddah, 29 March 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=120949&d=29&m=3&y=2009 [28 July 2009].

Generally, the point of view of the Saudi Government toward the political reform agenda is that it should be implemented incrementally in dealing with the values and norms of Saudi society, and it should consider social acceptance and readiness and finally, maintain the centrality of the ruling royal family. In the following two chapters of this thesis, the most important institutional reforms – the Consultative Council (Majlis al-shūrā) and municipal councils – will be examined.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONSTITUTIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the transition of the state's political institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through the establishment of the Consultative Council as a national, rather than legislative advisory body. Specifically, an attempt will be made to assess the role and influence of the Consultative Council within the analytical framework of enhancing institutional political reform, in order to realise the transition to political change and reform. This will be examined in two sections. Section One will discuss three main elements: a brief overview of the establishment of the Consultative Council and its various growth phases; the composition of appointed members; and finally, council decision-making and influence. Section Two will discuss two other main elements: the impact of the Consultative Council on Saudi Government policy-making; and a general debate and assessment of Council operations.

Section One

5.2 A brief overview of the establishment of the Consultative Council (*Majlis al-shūrā*) and its formal powers

The establishment of the Consultative Council in 1991 was not the first such council. When King Abd al-Aziz marched into the Ḥijāz, the western province of Saudi Arabia, in 1924 and the following year occupied the holy city of Mecca, there was a representative council, *al Majlis Al Ahli* (National Council) in the Ḥijāz. The ruler of Ḥijāz, Husayn ibn Ali of the Hashemite family, had been appointed by the Ottomans as the Sharif of Makkah in 1908.[480] The Council in Ḥijāz was permitted to continue by King Abd al-Aziz and in 1932 was transformed into a national council for the

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[480] K. Baxter & S Akbarzadeh, *US foreign policy in the Middle East: The roots of anti-Americanism*, London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group (2008).

161

newly unified Saudi Arabia. It enabled limited political participation, self-government and representation for the merchants of the Ḥijāz. It was composed of two religious scholars (ʿulamāʾ) and one member representing the merchants, who were among twelve elected members representing all twelve districts of Makkah and three members appointed by King Abdul Aziz, in addition to the Council president and vice-president. The functions of the Council included reviewing the court system, internal security, education, health, trade, communications and municipal affairs.

Talal Bannan argues that the government accepted limited political participation in the Ḥijāz region for the sake of political stability. The government was not able to prevent the Ḥijāz people from political participation, as this was where pilgrims gathered, and it constituted a more open region with greater awareness compared to other regions in the country. However, King Abdul Aziz was not prepared to establish similar councils in other provinces. This would have been incompatible with the King's desire to establish strong central control to develop the cohesion of the newly unified kingdom.[481] Some contemporary Saudi reformers are of the view that greater political participation existed in the 1920s in Ḥijāz and that this should be a precedent for reform.[482]

The National Council was abolished in 1953 and replaced by a Council of Ministers appointed by the King. It was not until 1991 that a new Consultative Council was established.

However, this raises a significant question. Why did the Saudi Government re-establish and appoint the Consultative Council? As discussed in Chapter Four, the establishment of the Consultative Council was part of the Saudi Government's response to demands and pressures, particularly domestic ones that came at a critical time in 1990-1991, following the Iraq invasion of Kuwait and the launching of

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[481] T. Bannan, "The transition from the values of the rule of patriarchal society institutions", *Okaz*, 23 September 2006, Issue No: 1924. p. 4.
[482] H. Linjawi, "Societies in transformation Iran and Saudi Arabia, Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University," 2006, p. 319.

"Operation Desert Storm", which incurred massive costs in liberating Kuwait. Thus, King Fahd appointed the Consultative Council when the country was under threat by hastening Saudi Arabia's constitutional and participatory evolution. Historically, there were plans to form open consultative councils. For example, after the deposing of King Saud and the revolution in Yemen in 1962; on the accession of King Khalid in 1975; after the Makkah crisis in 1979; and on the accession of King Fahd in 1982. On March 1, 1992 King Fahd announced the long-promised political reform process to the Basic Law of Government of 1992. As pointed out in Chapter Three, the Basic System of Rules consists of nine chapters with 83 articles. In general, these articles explain the nature of the state and its division of power between national and local government, the consultative council and the fact that it does not have any legislative power; the administration of justice and finally fundamental human rights and freedoms. The reform was composed of three parts that dealt with the structure of government and its duties; the establishment of a consultative council; and finally, the development of provincial government. According to Bin-Baz, as the Consultative Council is a legislative body (according to Article 1 of the Law of the Consultative Council), its purpose was "to exercise the tasks entrusted to it in accordance with its statutes and the Basic System of Rules, with a commitment to the Book of God and the tradition of His Prophet, and maintaining the ties of brotherhood and cooperation in kindness and piety".[483] Thus, any law-making body in Saudi Arabia should conduct itself in accordance with Islamic law (Shari'a). In Saudi Arabia, God is the supreme legislator.[484] According to Bin-Baz, Saudi Arabia has a dual judicial system consisting of Islamic law (Shari'a) and a statutory system sometimes called administrative law.[485] The latter is called "Nizam" and it is autonomous from the legal system but not independent from Islamic law (Shari'a), specialising in administrative law and issues. The body that represents the statutory system is the ombudsman. In addition to its role as a legislative body designed to exercise the tasks entrusted to it in

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[483] A. Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia*, (Riyadh: Al-Kharaiji Press, 2000). P. 319.

[484] R. Aba-Namay, "The new Saudi representative assembly", *Islamic law and society*, (1998). vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 235-265

[485] Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia* , op. cit., pp. 130-131.

accordance with its statutes and the Basic System of Rules, the Consultative Council represents a social contract between the ruler and the ruled.[486] In general, according to Article 15 of Majlis al-shūrā law, the main purpose of the Consultative Council is to provide its advice (nasiha) on general government policies sent to Council by the head of the Council of Ministers (the King) in three general areas, as follows:[487]

- discuss the overall plan for economic and social development and express an opinion about it;
- study regulations and treaties and international conventions and privileges and make appropriate proposals.
- discuss annual reports provided by the ministries and other government bodies and make appropriate proposals regarding them.

As mentioned above, the Consultative Council, was a response to the political demands of Saudi society in 1992. In order to examine this argument, participants in the interviews were questioned about the reasons that led to the emergence of the Consultative Council in 1992. KA, a senior, well-educated Saudi official from the Najd, argued that:

> A set of changes to the political institutions occurred following 1990 and the Gulf War. The public demands increased asking the government to introduce reform. Many written submissions and petitions were forwarded to the Government during the era of King Fahd, from various political forces such as the liberals and the clerics. As a result, the Government responded by introducing the main ruling system, the Council of Ministers and the Consultative Council. Moreover, we have the system of the regions and the 1976 municipal act provides for local councils but this part of the act was not mentioned for a long time, until 2003 when a Royal Decree was issued to activate the municipalities where half of the members are elected and the other half appointed. So this change came as a response to the widespread demands for democracy and political development, particularly from educated Saudis (KA, 8/1/2007, Jeddah).

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[486] R. Dekmejian, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52 (2), Spring 1998, pp. 204-218.
[487] Bin-Baz, op. cit., pp. 321-322.

In the next section, the researcher will discuss the composition of Shura membership when the Council had sixty members in 1993, ninety members in 1997, one hundred and twenty members in 2001 and finally, one hundred and fifty members in 2005. The discussion will identify whether the composition has changed, with each expansion in membership, in relation to the social background of various political groups in Saudi society. Also, the discussion will deal with various groups in Saudi society not represented.

5.3 Composition of appointed members

To analyse the composition of members of the Consultative Council during its four terms of appointment from 1993 until 2005, it will be useful to take a brief look at traditional power in the Saudi political system, as this is a key factor influencing change and reform. As discussed in the previous chapter, the five traditional centres of power in the Saudi political system are the royal family, as the most powerful political institution, the religious establishment (the ʿulamāʾ) and other groups from the highest ranks of Saudi society, such as technocrats, whether liberals or Islamist, the business class and tribal leaders. In today's political context, although the tribal leaders matter in Saudi society, the ʿulamāʾ are the main agents through which the impact of religion on political life can be examined after the House of Saud's power and influence. For instance, no Saudi ruler can contemplate a significant policy shift without taking into account the likely reaction of the religious establishment. Moreover, neither liberal reformers, the so-called "moderate Islamists", the Western-educated technocrats nor the commercial class come close to matching the mass appeal of the religious establishment or their means of communication and influence.

The Consultative Council expanded from sixty to ninety members in 1997 to one hundred and twenty members in May 2001 to one hundred and fifty members in April 2005. Kapiszewski argues that this expansion reflects the speed with which the

Council was established within the Saudi political system.[488] It also reflects the tradition of governance, which "prizes consensus, strives to maintain harmony through consultation and is deeply averse to conflict".[489] In general, the main process of selection by the King of Majlis al-shūrā membership depends on two significant criteria: "absolute loyalty to the Saudi leadership and the key role the "safwat al-rijal" (the cream of men). In relation to this point, Dr. Madawi Al-Rasheed, a Saudi professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College, London and a leading Saudi columnist, conceptualised the criteria for selection and the specific role of the Consultative Council, as follows:

> However, the Saudi regime is based on distributing the seats to the technocrat and regional divisions to those who have absolute loyalty to the regime. Selections will not happen outside these criteria, no matter how widely campaigns advertise that the Saudi State Consultative Council is a body that is trying to include all regions by selecting representatives from each region. The other selection criteria is that politicians who get power, should have a token role, they are consulted on issues that are at the core of political life, such as external affairs, international politics, military issues, economic contracts and the distribution of the country's resources. Although these politicians are consulted, the regime does not listen to them, and do not have the power to impose their views.[490]

Dekmejian argues that in its first term (1993-1997), King Fahd appointed all sixty members of the Consultative Council in addition to its chairman. About 19% could be considered religious conservatives, while the rest were apolitical and Western educated. The Council began to practise its duties in 1994.[491] According to Bin-Baz, Article 13 of the Majlis al-shūrā law states "the period of the Majlis al-shūrā will be four Hijrah years (four-year term) starting from the date specified in the royal decree

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[488] A. Kapiszewski, *Elections and parliamentary activity in the GCC states: Broadening political participation in the gulf monarchies*, (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre, 2006) p. 92.
[489] *Ibid*.,
[490] M. Al-Rasheed, "The dilemma of the 'Saudi' consultative process: A draining political system", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, London, 18 April 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.alquds.co.uk:9090/pdf/2005/04Apr/18AprMon/Quds19.pdf [5 September 2008].
[491] Dekmejian, op. cit., p. 211.

issued regarding its establishment". Article 4 of Majlis al-shūrā law states that appointees to the Consultative Council require three significant assets, as follows:[492]

- must be a Saudi national and reside in Saudi Arabia;
- must be known to be good and competent; and
- must be no less than thirty years old.

According to Cordesman, one Shiite member was included among sixty members of the first Consultative Council. The creation of the Council drew on the formal Islamic law concept of Shura: to institutionalise the method by which political participation in Saudi Arabia was conducted, and to consult people with knowledge and expertise in order to legitimise public policy.[493] He added that among these appointees were businessmen, technocrats, diplomats, journalists, Islamic scholars and professional soldiers representing all regions of Saudi Arabia.[494] Viorst argues that membership of the first four sessions of the Majlis al-shūrā (1993-1997) characterised various groups of well-educated technocrats with PhDs. He observed that:

> The King named all 61 members of the Shura. Tapping no royals, he weighted the body toward academics, then added engineers, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, religious scholars, and retired civil servants. The appointments followed no pattern of geographic or tribal distribution. Naturally no dissidents were named. The principal qualifications seemed to be intellectual achievement and practical experience. More than half the members are PhDs, and two-thirds studied in the West.[495]

In its second term (1997-2001), King Fahd expanded the composition of the Consultative Council membership from sixty to ninety members. A study of membership of the second Consultative Council conducted by Dekmejian indicated that membership was broadly based in terms of occupation, although bureaucracy and business were underrepresented. About 23% were modernising academics, 7%

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[492] A. Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia*, (Riyadh: Al-Kharaiji Press, 2000). pp. 320-321.
[493] A. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century: The Political, Foreign Policy, Economic, and Energy Dimensions*, (New York: Praeger, 2003) pp. 148-149.
[494] *Ibid.*,
[495] M. Viorst, "The storm and the citadel", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 75, no. 1, January-February 1996, p. 103.

traditional religious academics, 3% journalists, 19% full-time bureaucrats, 24.3% constituted other roles such as academics or judges, 4.4% police, 3.3% military, and 7.8% were from the business sector. Overall, the study indicated that the educational level of members was high. For instance, 64% had been awarded doctorates, 14.4% held master's degrees and 21.2% held bachelor degrees. About 80% of members who held doctorates and masters degrees were from the West[496] (see table 5.1).

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[496] R. Dekmejian, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 52, no.2, spring 1998, p. 210.

Table 5.1   Occupational background of the members of the 1997 Consultative Council

Occupation	Number		Percentage
Academic (secular field)	23		
Academic (religious field)	7	33	36.7%
Academic/Journalist	3		
Bureaucrat			
Bureaucrat/Academic	19		
Bureaucrat/Businessman	7		
Bureaucrat/Judge	7	39	43.3%
Bureaucrat/Journalist	3		
Bureaucrat/Lawyer	1		
Bureaucrat/Religious	1		
Police	4		4.4%
Diplomat	4		4.4%
Military	3		3.3%
Businessman	3		
Businessman/Lawyer	1	7	7.8%
Businessman/Journalist	1		
	90		99.9%

Source: R Dekmejian, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 52, no.2, spring 1998, p. 209.

Furthermore, concerning the regional distribution of the Consultative Council in its second term (1997-2001), the above mentioned study indicated that membership was

heavily concentrated in favour of members from the Najd, the central part of Saudi Arabia, who made up 44% of the Council, though none were tribal leaders about 35% had a tribal background, while 29% came from the Ḥijāz, 9% from the eastern province and 18% from other provinces of Saudi Arabia (see table 5.2). Furthermore, the study indicated that there were only two Shiites in the one hundred and twenty-members of the Consultative Council.

Table 5.2 Regional distribution of the members of the 1997 Consultative Council.

Province	Number	Percentage
Najd	40	44.4%
Ḥijāz	26	28.9%
Eastern Province	8	8.9%
Asir	3	3.3%
Ha'il	2	2.2%
Jayzan	2	2.2%
Tabuk	1	1.1%
Baha	1	1.1%
Unknown	7	7.8%
	90	99.9%

Source: R Dekmejian, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52, No.2, spring 1998, p. 215.

In its third term, 2001-2005, the Consultative Council expanded its membership from ninety to one hundred and twenty members. The members were nominated from the highest ranks of Saudi society such as doctors, lawyers, military, business and finance experts, academics and scientists, thus the extended body still had a very high educational level. All members had university degrees, including more than 60% with doctorates, and extensive work experience.[497] Furthermore, concerning the regional distribution of Consultative Council membership, it was still heavily concentrated in favour of those from the Najd, who made up 31%, while 35% came from the Ḥijāz

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[497] A. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century: The Political, Foreign Policy, Economic, and Energy Dimensions*, (New York: Praeger, 2003) p. 150.

and 5.9% from the Eastern Province, which is heavily populated by Shiites. The remaining members (26.4%), originated from other remote provinces such as Al-Jouf, Tabuk, Ha'il and Northern Border as well as Jizan and Al-Baha and Asir in the south. Most of the Saudi contingent of the 9/11 hijackers came from Asir Province. (See table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Regional distribution of members of the Consultative Council (2001-2005)

Province	Number	Percentage
Najd	45	37.5%
Ḥijāz	43	35.9%
Eastern Province	7	6%
Asir	2	1.6%
Ha'il	2	1.6%
Jizan	-	-
Tabuk	4	3.3%
Al-Baha	1	0.8%
Unknown	12	10%
Al-Jouf	2	1.6%
Northern Border	2	1.6%
	120	99.9%

Source: Aggregation of data retrieved from the Internet. Available at: http://www.arabdecision.org/list_cvs_5_11_2_1_3_881.htm [13 September 2008].

The above table shows membership of the Consultative Council still heavily concentrated in favour of those from the Najd and the Ḥijāz which correlates with the

distribution of population in these regions. There is no doubt that the Saudi regime, in its allocation of seats, has privileged western educated technocrats, who in general have absolute loyalty to the government and play a key role in Saudi society, but this is not to suggest that loyalty is stronger in Najd and Ḥijāz than other regions. This is particularly the case with the Consultative Council, where all members are appointed by the King with prestigious positions, but lack the power to make policies. Loyalty could be measured more accurately if membership of the Consultative Council was by election rather than appointment. Thus, the low representation in other areas is proportionate to the large populations in Najd and Ḥijāz, which is linked to their importance in terms of religion, politics and economics. Also, this representation reflects the policy of co-option which the Saudi Government has developed with well-educated people. Of the 104 academics, businessmen and religious scholars who signed the petition, "A Vision for the Present and Future of the Nation", over half were from Najd (51%), followed by Ḥijāz (20%) (See Chapter Four, table 4.1).

However, from the above discussion, the membership of the first term of the Consultative Council did not reflect the tribal–government alliance. The Saudi Government sought to accommodate well-educated technocrats in the Council, instead of depending heavily on traditional religious and tribal leaders. This concurs with Herb's argument in Chapter Two that no member appointed to the 1993 Consultative Council could be described as a traditional tribal leader. Saudi leadership policy concerning Majlis al-shūrā membership however depends heavily on prominent traditional Islamic scholars and legal experts from the religious establishment being elected chair of the Majlis al-shūrā. This was apparent since a leading scholar, Sheikh Muhammad Bin-Jubair, was the first to be named speaker in 1993 and held this post until his death in 2002. One month after his death, the government replaced him with another prominent Islamic scholar, the Imam of the Grand Mosque in Makkah, Sheikh Saleh Bin-Humaid. However, this raises three questions. First, why did the Saudi Government in its first Consultative Council term (1993) focus on well-educated groups and ignore others? Second, did the government aim to make the Council a genuine representative institution? Third, did this strategy continue with other appointments to the Consultative Council in subsequent terms?

Sheikh Muhammad bin Jubair, a former chairman of the Consultative Council, explained that the purpose of appointing the well-educated was to avoid unqualified people entering the Council. Bin Jubair asserts that:

> If we left it to voters, they would not choose members qualified to offer the King advice—they would elect tribal chiefs unable to read or write. Instead, we have educated men, real experts.[498]

However, Aldamer argues that the 1993 Consultative Council fell short of being a representative body. The abundance of so many western educated professionals, government officials and academics serves to emphasise the few representatives from other key stakeholders such as religious leaders and businessmen.[499]

Moreover, besides the absence of traditional religious and tribal leaders, the membership of the first Consultative Council did not reflect other groups in Saudi society, such as minority Shiites and women. For instance, Shiites were not well represented in the first Consultative Council, with only one Shiite member. This does not represent the numbers in and significance of the Shiite group in Saudi Arabia which constitutes 20% of the population and who are considered an important element of Saudi politics.[500] In addition, women were excluded from any presence, either as members, consultants or observers, for domestic purposes. The subject of female membership in the Council will be discussed below.

However, this composition continued for both second and third terms of the Consultative Council. The majority of members were still well-educated, professional people with 64% of ninety members appointed in 1997 and more than 60% of one hundred and twenty members selected in 2001, falling into this category. Key segments of Saudi society such as tribal leaders, religious leaders and businessmen

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[498] Cited in M. Viorst, "The storm and the citadel", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 75, no. 1, January-February 1996, p. 104.
[499] F. Aldamer, "Economic, social, and political developments and their impact on the role of the state: A case study of Saudi Arabia," Ph.D. dissertation, Manchester University, 1995, p. 268.
[500] R. Dekmejian, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 52, no. 2, Spring 1998.

were not well represented, particularly tribal leaders, although tribalism remains a salient feature of Saudi society. In addition, regional distribution of members for both the 1997 and 2001 terms favoured Najd and Ḥijāz. Menoret argues that regionalism remains a critical factor due to shortcomings in the country's development, despite the long-established national postal service, domestic airline and road network. It is also a result of ignorance by other groups in Saudi society concerning their rights to be appointees to sensitive political institutions such as the Consultative Council. Finally, the expansion of membership still manifested in the absence of minority groups such as Shiites as well as women which, in general, reflected the ongoing limited nature of the Council's reform.[501]

I will now turn to the final expansion of Consultative Council membership during the fourth term (2005-2009). This expansion will be compared with the previous three terms in order to discern possible changes and trends in Saudi Arabia's political evolution. Why did the Council expand from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty members? With the expansion of Council membership in 2005, has the percentage of members from the educated group increased or decreased? And finally, have other groups from Saudi society, such as Islamists, liberals, Shiites and women, which have always demanded political reforms, been included in the final expanded membership, or have more people from essentially the same backgrounds been appointed?

In this final term, the late King Fahd rejuvenated Consultative Council membership by increasing its strength from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty members. The government explained and justified the expansion as a way to improve its work by broadening the power base, thus allowing broader political participation. Bin-Humaid, the chairman of the Council, said: "I am sure that the coming sessions of the Shura will witness qualitative changes in terms of responsibilities, powers, structure and mode of work." He welcomed the new members and thanked outgoing

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[501] P. Menoret, *The Saudi Enigma: a history*, (Translated by Camiller, P), (Beirut: World Book Publishing 2005) p. 173.

members for their contributions.[502] Addressing the weekly cabinet meeting, Prince Sultan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Aviation and Inspector General, also underscored the tremendous progress achieved by the Consultative Council: "The increase in Shura members from sixty to one hundred and fifty will improve its work, in terms of quality and quantity." [503] There is no evidence however to support this assertion. Even though the majority members of the current Consultative Council have academic qualifications the Council still fell short of being a representative institution. In terms of quality and quantity, the aforementioned function of the Council is to put forward views on subjects referred to it by the King as head of the Council of Ministers. And further, these recommendations are not binding.

According to SF, a moderate Ḥijāz Islamist and western-educated professor, as well as a member of the Consultative Council, the Council's function and role needs more time in order to become more powerful.

> When this Council fully becomes a legislative power, meaning that when it has the right to control, monitor, legislate and be accountable, then a lot can be expected of it, but before that stage, I don't have many expectations of it (SF, 4/12/2006, *Jeddah*).

Fulfilling some of the Consultative Council's functions is problematic. BH, a moderate Islamist and western-educated Council member from the Ḥijāz, argues there are many issues that need to be discussed about the emerging role and enhanced function of the Council, including monitoring the budget.

> The Council has looked thoroughly at the issues and following a meeting I think three years ago, has expressed its demands in a submission presented to His Highness. There were about 8-10 issues where change was needed and that were discussed in a closed meeting, including Section 23 and the Budget. The

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[502] Cited in P. K. Abdul Ghafour, "Shura Council forms key sub-committees," *Arab News*, Jeddah, 18 April 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=62331&d=18&m=4&y=2005. [14 September 2008].

[503] *Ibid.*,

King expressed his willingness to see what areas needed change. The Government is taking a very reserved stand to change and reform. It's willing to change but very gradually (BH, 24/1/2007, *Jeddah*).

Al-Dalan, a moderate Islamist and western-educated former member of the Consultative Council from Ḥijāz, argued that Consultative Council effectiveness had been influenced by the following issues:[504]

- A large number of public issues that come to Council in a very short time make it difficult for members to discuss issues effectively.

- The absence of consultants working beside members to help them fulfil their duties effectively, like most other parliaments in the world. Thus the performance of specialised committees within Council is poor or slow.

- The inability to use Article 23 effectively; this article might grant members the authority to propose new bills or amendments that enhance Council's legislative role.

- Finally, the inability of Consultative Council members to discuss state budget bills.

EB, a well-known Ḥijāz businessman, argued that these shortcomings and weaknesses are due to several factors. For instance, the ambiguity of Council's function in general, the method of selecting members and the absence of freedom in relation to accountability when compared to the neighbouring Gulf Cooperation Council (G.C.C.) states. EB states that:

However, many of them expressed their disappointment since they wished to see more responsive policies and changes that could better meet the needs of the citizens. For example, membership in the State Consultative Council should have been based on elections, or at least partial elections, rather than appointing the members. The other issue is the ambiguity of the function of the Council. Is it the monitoring of the performance of the governments agencies? Does the Council have freedom of movement in relation to accountability? Being a body that looks at issues referred to it by the government is not a healthy exercise. Some say, let's wait and see, this is still a starting point and a first step towards change, but

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[504] M. Dalan, "My experiment in the Shura Council: Council...budget discussion and empowerment of article 23", *Okaz*, 4 December 2005. Issue No: 14344. p. 2.

there are more demands now for more political freedom given that no genuine reform has been made towards democracy, especially that the neighbouring countries have preceded us, I mean the Gulf Co-operation Council's States. For example what happened in the United ArabEmirates? God willing we can follow their example. The strange thing is unfortunately we hear sometimes the Heads of the State Consultative Council who are appointed, giving excuses for our political situation (EB, 14/1/2007, Jeddah).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the 1990s and particularly the 2000s after the 9/11 attacks witnessed great debates about political reform, particularly that put pressure on the Saudi leadership to accelerate changes in general. Also, in part, the debate and pressure related to re-emerging demands for reform initially articulated in the petitions, mentioned earlier. The most interesting aspect, according to Deukmejian, is the ideology of petition signatories: 49% were liberals with 25% from well-educated backgrounds, while 51% were from Najd, the region of the Saudi royal family, and 20% from Ḥijāz (see Chapter Four). However, in its response to these petitions, the Saudi Government decided to further expand the Council in its next term to one hundred and fifty members. In brief, the Saudi Government responded to pressures for reform by expanding the Council's membership, but without compromising its monopoly of power.

Concerning the current term (2005-2009), membership consists of people from various social backgrounds and considers factors such as birthplace, occupation and level of education. A large portion of Council members are from a western educated, moderate group. As previously discussed, in its second term (1997-2001), approximately 64% of Council members had doctoral degrees. When membership expanded in the third term (2001-2005), more than 60% still had doctoral degrees. In the most recent expansion of the Consultative Council, the percentage of members represented by western educated, moderate technocrats is approximately the same. However, 70% of members now come from Najd or Ḥijāz (see table 5.4).

**Table 5.4 Occupational background of members of the Consultative Council ,
2005-2009**

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Academic (doctoral degrees-different fields)	105	70%
Bureaucrat/Engineer	12	8%
Bureaucrat/Religious	4	2.6%
Bureaucrat (masters or bachelor degree)	25	16.7%
Military	4	2.6%
	150	99.9%

Source: Aggregation of data from *Okaz*, 1f2 April 2005. Available [Online]:
http://212.119.67.87/okazarchive/Data/2005/4/12/Art_208113.XML [15 September
2008].

This suggests that regionalism still plays a role in the composition of Majlis al-shūrā
membership. As Al-Rasheed argues, the distribution of Consultative Council seats
goes to those who show absolute loyalty to the Saudi leadership, yet play a token role.
In order to support this argument and in the absence of published information to
obtain more qualitative data about Majlis al-shūrā members, four members of the
current Consultative Council, who have played an influential role, are profiled with
regard to regional background, skills, occupation, political and religious values and
finally their relationship to the royal family. Concerning the latter, this section will
analyse senior positions they have held. The government's approach has been to
choose people who are loyal and whose opinions are acceptable to the government. In
addition, recruitment of Majlis al-shūrā members often comes from the senior levels
of government agencies from those who already hold influential positions, rather than
outside government circles.

Profiles of four members of the 2005-2009 Consultative Council[505]

Dr. Bander Bin Mohammad Al-Hajjar, a member of the Economic Committee of the Majlis al-shūrā, was born in Madinah-Ḥijāz area. He holds a PhD in Economics from Indiana University and a Masters in Economics from Lufbra University. Dr. Al-Hajjar is considered a prominent, moderate intellectual with religious values. He plays an influential role in Saudi polity. For instance, Al-Hajjar has been selected to serve as a member of the Consultative Council for three terms since 1997. Also, he has held several important positions, including President of the Saudi Human Rights National Association (SHRA) since 2004. During his time as a Council member and as SHRA president, Al-Hajjar was influential in the decision to abolish the sponsorship (kafala) system in both public and private sectors and the establishment of a fully operative hospital in Jeddah's Briman Prison. Furthermore, Al-Hajjar has been recently appointed as the new vice-president of the Consultative Council with the rank of minister.

Dr. Mazen Bin Abdulrazaq Balilah, a member of the Educational Affairs and Scientific Research Committee of the Consultative Council, was born in Makkah- Ḥijāz. He holds a PhD and a Masters in Industrial Engineering from Leeds University. Dr. Balilah is considered a prominent, moderate intellectual. He plays an influential role in Saudi polity and was appointed by the King as a member of the regional council of the Makkah region. In addition, he has held several important positions in the government's administrative structure including Dean of Admission and Registration at King Abdul-Aziz University; Secretary General of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Dean of the College of Business Administration and Chief Editor of the daily newspaper *Al-Madinah*.

Dr. Abdullah Bin Sadiq Dahlan, a member of the Social Affairs and Family and Youth Committee of the Consultative Council, was born in Makkah- Ḥijāz. He holds a PhD and a Masters in Business Administration from Pepperdine University. Dr. Dahlan is considered a prominent moderate intellectual with religious values. He plays an influential role in Saudi polity, particularly in the private sector, as follows: Secretary General Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Jeddah, Professor of the Faculty of Economics and Management, University of King Abdul Aziz and a board member of both Saudi Arabian Airlines and the Western Electric Company

Dr. Bander Bin Mohammed Al-Ayban, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Consultative Council, was born in Riyadh-Najd. He holds a PhD in Political Science from Johns Hopkins University and a Masters in Public Administration from The University of South California. Dr. Al-Ayban is considered a prominent, moderate intellectual. He plays an influential role in Saudi polity. For instance, he has held several important positions in the country, the most important being Assistant Undersecretary of the National Guard.

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[505] These profiles are based on the following sources: *Arab News*, 6 June 2001; Al-Riyadh, 18 April 2005 and *Al-Sharq al-awsat*, 28 December 2006.

Although these members come from different regions, mostly from Najd and Ḥijāz, they do not have any social or economic status that relates to their tribal or religious background. Their social and economic status is derived from educational and occupational achievements. As mentioned, Dr. Al-Hajjar has recently been named Consultative Council vice-president, with the rank of minister. In relation to this point, Al-Rasheed states:

> If we look at the past European Parliaments, such as the British Parliament, where its members used to be appointed, we find they used to represent their social groups even though their political participation used to depend on the King. Those members of Parliament had vested interest in their local regions, whether for economic, military or sentimental value, the King allowed them to participate in the political game in order to prevent them from rebelling and disobeying him. So, despite the issue of appointment, those members still had some representative role.[506]

The Consultative Council consists of elite Saudi society, such as academics, moderate religious clerics, journalists, merchants and government officials who hold higher degrees, many of them from Najd and Ḥijāz. Focusing on this small section of Saudi society is very important to the Saudi Government in relation to its policy of co-option, to succeed in keeping a tight grip on the power for the royal family. Most of the demands for reform in the 1990s and 2000s have come from the better educated, who were frustrated by the incompetence of the Saudi Government in dealing with various problems. Thus, the government's response has been to appoint Consultative Council members from social groups that have historically been its principal critics, thus increasing pressure for political change and reform. Also, while highly educated technocrats are well represented, others are not, including businessmen, religious leaders and tribal leaders.

For example, the composition of the Consultative Council since expansion from 1993 to 2005 has created an informal network of patronage. For instance, since its

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[506] M. Al-Rasheed, "The dilemma of the 'Saudi' consultative process: A draining political system", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, London, 18 April 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.alquds.co.uk:9090/pdf/2005/04Apr/18AprMon/Quds19.pdf [17 September 2008].

establishment, the tertiary educated moderate group with PhDs has dominated Majlis al-shūrā membership. This confirms what Herb and Aldamer have argued above concerning previous Consultative Councils and the co-option of the well-educated members is to avoid further petitions calling for reform. The western educated elite enjoy social prestige in many but not all sections of Saudi society. Also, the petition for a constitutional monarchy, signed in 2004 by a group of liberals, was perceived by the Saudi Government as an attack on the Kingdom's leadership. Another example was the continuation of Saudi policy to rely more and more on tertiary educated groups with modern skills, not only to co-opt them in order to avoid further petitions, but to offer rewards within Council. Since its re-creation in 1993, the Council has become a place to promote its members to higher positions. Three members of the 1993 Consultative Council have been recruited into the Council of Ministers and several others have been appointed to top leadership positions in state agencies and organisations.[507] Recently, as mentioned, Dr. Al-Hajjar was appointed as the new vice-president in the rank of minister.[508] The appointment of well-educated, influential people will serve to silence foreign media who usually criticise the Saudi regime. In relation to this point, Dekmejian states:

> The Majlis also plays a powerful symbolic role both domestically and internationally, particularly in blunting foreign media criticism of the Saudi system. By highlighting key role of the Majlis and the qualifications of its members, the Saudi can rightly claim that they have chosen them to serve in their *Majlis al-shūrā*. As a showcase of men with doctorates and technocratic qualifications, the symbolic role of the Majlis cannot be underestimated.[509]

While internally, there is no doubt that part of Saudi Government policy concerning political reform in reality depends on balancing pressures for reform, particularly domestic pressures, between liberal intellectual reformists and the religious

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[507] R. Dekmejian, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52 (2), Spring (1998).

[508] "Al-Hajjar named Shura Council vice president", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 26 October. 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=115810&d=26&m=10&y=2008&pix=kingdom.jpg&category=Kingdom [26 November 2008].

[509] R. Dekmejian, "Saudi Arabia's Consultative Council", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 52, no. 2, (Spring 1998), p. 216.

establishment in general. This will sustain the government's power and legitimacy, particularly when critical voices come from the religious establishment. But in reality, the government prefers moderates, whether they are Islamists or liberal reformers. Thus, the government prefers Consultative Council membership to be dominated by moderates who have good relations with the royal family to avoid any criticism, particularly from the religious establishment, which usually criticises government for what it sees as deviations from Islamic teachings. This raises a significant question. Why doesn't the Saudi Government co-opt the ʿulamāʾ through membership of the Consultative Council? As discussed earlier in the introduction to Chapter One and more specifically in Chapter Three, Islam and the implementation of the Sharīʿah (Islamic law) are the core of Saudi Government legitimacy. The religious establishment are a source of stability and legitimacy for the Saudi polity because the religious establishment in Saudi Arabia is one of the most important political institutions after the royal family. Historically, as indicated in Chapter Three, this strong relationship between religion and polity began in the eighteenth century during the period of the first Saudi state (1744-1819). Consequently, the religious establishment exercises its influence outside the Consultative Council, even if its members are not well represented on Council.

However, given these ties, arguably the Saudi Government has not co-opted religious leadership as members of the Consultative Council to avoid any possibility of confrontation with religious leaders in order to sustain its character, particularly its legitimacy. For instance, the appointment of a majority from religious clerics instead of co-opting western educated technocrats would risk power sharing with a group viewed by the royal family as having great legitimacy and one that also legitimises the monarchy. Moreover, the Saudi Government might be more exposed to scrutiny for any of the state's shortcomings by religious clerics when they interfere in political activities inside the Consultative Council, bringing with them their religious and sectarian disagreements. The government was aware of the political crisis in Kuwait between parliament's religious leaders and the executive government, when the former criticised the prime minister, who was a member of the ruling Al-Sabah family. The religious leaders demanded that the prime minister resign because of the

government's shortcomings. In relation to this point, Al-Rashed, a leading Saudi columnist, states:

> The crisis provides us with current evidence about the level of tensions created by clerics when they interfere in political activities and bring with them their religious and sectarian disagreements…Some may disapprove of the fact that we do accept debate amongst intellectuals and politicians, whilst we reject it when it occurs amongst clerics and religious leaders. The reason is that their conflicts cause ruthless wars, but the conflicts that arise between intellectuals are mere ink on paper and if they are not useful they do not cause harm to anyone.[510]

However, one of the most important sources of ʿulamāʾ influence in legitimising force for the Saudi polity refers to the issuing of fatwā (religious legal opinions issued by a senior religious authority). As discussed in Chapter Four, the issuing of fatwā developed in the 1990s following the second Gulf War crisis, when government was criticised by opposition Islamist religious scholars for inviting foreign troops to defend the Kingdom. However, to justify and legitimise policy, the Saudi Government demanded the Grand Muftī issue a fatwā to justify its actions. In relation to this point, Al-damer observes that:

> Interestingly, in 1993, when the government came under relentless attack from the Islamist opposition, King Fahd re-established the post of the Grand Mufti ....not to placate the opposition but to delegitimate their demands by issuing fatwa refuting their criticism though the highest authority in the Kingdom.[511]

This might explain why the Saudi Government rejects proposals for an elected Consultative Council. However, the Council in spite of becoming more political due to the majority being made up of western-educated members, the religious establishment still dominates the inner workings of the Council. As discussed above, this reveals that the Saudi Government, while acknowledging the need for reforms, is reluctant to confront the religious establishment.

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[510] M. Al-Rasheed, "Saudi democracy starts with the Ministry of Health", *Alquds al-Arabi*, London, 14 July 2008. Available]Online]: http://www.alquds.co.uk:9090/pdf/2008/07/07-13/All.pdf [26 November 2008].
[511] Aldamer, op. cit., pp. 240-241.

This section will also discuss the absence of women from the membership of the Consultative Council. Hamzawy argues that in recent years the Consultative Council has undergone a meaningful transformation. The Council has grown more political due to the diversification of membership and agenda, as liberal reformists and moderate Islamists have been appointed. The new members have voiced concerns about political reform and challenged the dominance of Wahhabi clerics over the inner workings of the Consultative Council.[512] However, concerning Hamzawy's argument, there is a great and ongoing debate concerning the participation of Saudi women as council members. Within the last five years, invitations have been extended to Saudi female scholars to attend Council as consultants but not members, in order to provide information about social issues of interest to women. In a statement about women and the Consultative Council, the chairman, Dr Saleh bin Humaid, was of the view that the participation of women as members was not on the agenda during the period of Council's third term. Bin-Humaid stated that "the issue of women's participation in the Shura [Council] as members has not yet been mooted officially". He added that "the Council would continue to seek women's expert opinions on matters related to them".[513] Also, in an interview conducted with the chairman of the Consultative Council, when asked if women should be included as members, he said it was up to the King.[514] Osama Kurdi, a senior member of Council, has said that the appointment of women as members would strengthen the Consultative Council and would be beneficial to everybody. In addition, another

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[512] A. Hamzawy, "The Saudi labyrinth: Evaluating the current political opening", *Middle East series*, April 2006, no. 68. p. 11.

[513] Cited in, P. K. Abdul Ghafour, "Women to be kept out of Shura during reshuffle*", Arab News*, Jeddah, 10 February 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=58773&d=10&m=2&y=2005 [27 November 2008].

[514] Cited in, M. Akeel, "More women consultants' join Shura", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 29 June 2006. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=84524&d=29&m=6&y=2006 [15 September 2008].

senior Majlis al-shūrā member, Muhammed Al-Zulfa, said that there is no justification for keeping women out of the Council.[515]

The current role of Saudi women in the Consultative Council is limited to part-time consultants to provide advice specifically on women's issues. However, the Consultative Council allows women to represent Saudi Arabia in international parliamentary meetings, conferences and forums as members of official council delegations. Women's involvement on Council is important because they can play an active role in formulating policies affecting their lives, rather than acting as part-time consultants or observers for cosmetic purposes. Hatoon Al-Fasy, an associate professor at King Saud University in Riyadh and one of the women nominated to work on a committee as a part-time consultant, was surprised at being included and disappointed by the limited scope of her role. Also, she criticised the work of consultants to the Council, as they have no rights to make decisions, have no authority and their opinions are not taken seriously. However, Hatoon Al-Fasy argues, throughout Islamic history, women have been given the right to participate and speak about all aspects of life and community.[516]

5.4 Council decision-making and influence

Political transformation and involvement of the people in decision-making processes was also sustained through the establishment of the King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue in 2003 and, in 2005, the Kingdom held its first municipal council elections. However, the re-creation and promulgation of the Consultative Council came from the Council of Ministers. Thus, it is necessary to discuss the powers of the Council of Ministers and its relationship with the Consultative Council. As discussed in Chapter Three, the first formal Council of Ministers (the Cabinet) established in

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[515] Cited in, P. K. Abdul Ghafour, "Expanded Shura to have more power", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 30 March 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=61286&d=30&m=3&y=2005 [21September 2008].
[516] Cited in M. Akeel, "Bin-Humaid's Interview Raises Key Issues", *Arab News*, *Jeddah*, 6 November 2006. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=77653&d=6&m=11&y=2006 [21 September 2008].

1953 unified the administrative political structure by centralising the decision-making process previously dominated by the royal family; this led to the abolition of the Consultative Council of Ḥijāz. In 1993, the Council of Ministers was re-structured as a result of a package of constitutional and administrative reforms issued by King Fahd. According to Malki, the Council of Ministers fully controls the three branches of government in Saudi Arabia headed by the King. Malki explains that:

> In contrast to democratic systems of government, the three branches of government in Saudi Arabia are fully controlled and run by a unitary body, the Council of Ministers, headed by the King. The King, who is also the prime minister, appoints all officials of high rank including the ministers and the Shura Council members. He also retains the ultimate decision-making power on all matters including law making. It is important to note that the King and his ministerial cabinet have no competition in decision-making authority from any other public or private institutions.[517]

This quote clearly indicates that the King has control over appointing all officials of high rank and also has the power to appoint all members of the Consultative Council. According to Bin-Baz, Article 12 of the Council of Ministers Law states that the Council of Ministers consists of the King, who is prime minister, the Crown Prince, who is deputy prime minister, cabinet ministers with portfolios and ministers of state appointed by the King by royal decree. Article 19 outlines the function of the Council of Ministers as follows:[518]

> While deferring to provisions of the Basic Law of Governance and the Shura Council Law, the cabinet shall draw up the internal, external, financial, economic, education and defence policies as well as general affairs of the State and shall supervise their implementation. It shall also review the resolutions of the Consultative Council. It has the executive power and is the final authority in financial and administrative affairs of all ministries and other government institutions.

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[517] S. Malki, "International Inconsistency: A new Perspective on The Role of The state in Development: A Case Study of Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University, 1991, pp. 23-24.

[518] A. Bin-Baz, "The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia", (Riyadh: Al-Kharaiji Press, 2000) pp. 314-315.

Bin-Baz states that concerning the relationship between the two councils, Articles 15, 17, 22, 23 and 24 discuss the function and relationship between the Consultative Council and the Council of Ministers as follows:[519]

> Article 15 the Council's mandate is to "express opinions on the general policy of the State referred to it by the President of the Council of Ministers". In particular, the Consultative Council can do several things. These are as follows. Discuss the overall plan for economic and social development and express an opinion about it. Study regulations and treaties and international conventions and privileges and make appropriate proposals concerning them. Discuss the annual reports provided by the ministries and other government bodies and make appropriate proposals regarding them. Article 17 "Majlis Ash-Shura's resolutions shall be forwarded to the Prime Minister for consideration by the Council of Ministers. If the views of both councils are concordant, the resolutions shall come into force following the King's approval. If the views are contradictory, the King may decide what he deems appropriate". Article 22 "the Chairman of the Majlis Ash-Shura shall submit to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers requests to summon any government official to the meetings of Majlis Ash-Shura when matters relating to his jurisdiction are discussed. The official shall have the right to debate but not the right to vote". Article 23 "any group of ten members of Majlis Ash-Shura have the right to propose a new draft law or an amendment to a law already in force and submit it to the Chairman of the Council. The Chairman shall submit the proposal to the King". Article 24 "the Chairman of the Majlis Ash-Shura shall submit a request to the Prime Minister to provide the Council with statements and documents in the possession of government institutions, which the Council believes are necessary to facilitate its work".

Article 15 determines that some limited power was given to the Consultative Council and this partly reduced the Council of Minister's power that the Saudi Government had earlier established. Also, in addition to providing opinions about public policy, if asked by the King, as head of the Council of Ministers, about its role in the legislative process; the Consultative Council, is authorised to provide opinions and suggestions in the following areas: the general plan of economic and social development; international laws, charters, treaties and agreements, and concessions; the interpretation of laws; and annual reports submitted by ministries and other government bodies. Furthermore, according to Article 22, the Consultative Council has the ability to invite or request the presence of any government official at its

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[519] *Ibid.*, pp. 321-323.

meetings if the Council is discussing matters related to its mandate, and this official has the right to debate but not vote on such matters.

Next, the Council's decision-making processes will be discussed, particularly in relation to Consultative Council recommendations to the King. There are two significant questions. First, what sort of recommendations should go to the King? Second, to what extent will these recommendations be accepted by government, especially if they oppose existing government policy? There is no doubt that the role of the Consultative Council in decision-making for public matters since its re-creation has been very modest. Most of its decisions were often non-binding recommendations. As pointed out, according to Article 15, the Council has no legislative powers; it can only propose legislation on general policy of the State referred to it by the King. However, in 2003, King Fahd issued a royal decree which led to amendments to Articles 17 and 23 of the Consultative Council. These amendments granted wider powers to the Majlis al-shūrā, enabling it to propose legislation without the King's permission. According to Article 17, "both the Consultative Council and the Cabinet must be in agreement in order for the legislation to gain the King's approval. If the views of both councils vary, the issue is returned to the Consultative Council to decide whatever it deems appropriate".[520] Thus, this allowed the Consultative Council to present its recommendations directly to the King, instead of the Council of Ministers, ensuring an improved degree of responsiveness on the part of the executive. According to Article 23, "the Consultative Council is granted the power to propose new bills or amendments to regulations in force".[521] Some scholars such as Linjawi[522] and Hamzawy[523] argue that the above amendments are a good step toward paving the way for the Consultative Council to become more

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[520] P. K. Abdul Ghafour, "Bin-Humaid Welcomes Decision to Empower Shoura Council", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 9 December 2003. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=36157&d=9&m=12&y=2003 [22 November 2008].
[521] *Ibid.*,
522 H. Linjawi, "Societies in transformation Iran and Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2006.
[523] A. Hamzawy, "The Saudi labyrinth: Evaluating the current political opening", *Middle East series*, April 2006, no. p. 68.

independent by giving it oversight powers that will make it function effectively in dealing with social and political issues, although its oversight role is still not clear. Concerning this point, Hamzawy observes:

> In December 2003 King Fahd announced that the council would be empowered to play a more active role. In 2005 several amendments were finally enacted…However, the reformists' expectation that the amendments might provide for partial elections of the council's members and endow it with some oversight powers over the cabinet did not materialize.[524]

Also, concerning amendments to Articles 17 and 23, the chairman praised these changes saying "The changes give the Consultative Council clear and comprehensive powers to study final draft laws...This reflects the government's renewed confidence in the Shura [Council] while at the same time increasing the council's responsibility".[525] Whereas, besides Article 23 that gave the Consultative Council a more legislative role, there is a new measure that allows members to table an additional recommendation, or what is called a member's Bill, that can include new suggestions, amendments or comments that have not been previously discussed; this enhances Council's role and makes its decisions more flexible. This happened as a result of the presence of the so-called "additional recommendation" within the process of Council decisions. Dr. Mazen Balilah, a member of the Consultative Council, notes:

> The additional recommendations are a landmark in the State Consultative Council's history. They demonstrate flexibility and allow the addition of all new ideas, aspirations and expectations that the relevant committee has not thought of during the presentation of the report. They will substitute Article 23 of the Constitution of the State Consultative Council that gives members of the Council the right to make their suggestions, but to a certain extent. However, the additional recommendations provide more flexibility, where a representative

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[524] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[525] P. K. Abdul Ghafour, "Bin-Humaid Welcomes Decision to Empower Shoura Council", *Arab News,* Jeddah, 9 December 2003. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=36157&d=9&m=12&y=2003 [22 November 2008].

of the members can submit their ideas during the presentation, providing it is done at the appropriate time.[526]

According to the above statement, although the Saudi Government attempts to broaden Consultative Council powers, it still acts as an advisory body rather than a legislative one. However, one may ask what is an "additional recommendation"? Balilah also states that:

> During the session of the State Consultative Council, the relevant committee of the Executive authority presents its report on, issues whether concerning a Ministry or a government agency, a new organization, a new system or a new contract. The relevant committee presents also a study of the report with a number of recommendations, for discussion and voting in the general session. Some of the recommendations are passed, some are not. At that stage, the Constitution allows members of the Council to table an additional recommendation or what can be called a Bill that can include new suggestions, amendments or comments that have not been previously discussed. This is indeed a worthy approach that provides enough flexibility to listen to the aspirations of the citizens.[527]

To assess the influence of the Consultative Council decision-making, most of the Consultative Council's influence, through its resolutions and recommendations, focuses on social issues, while resolutions referring to Saudi Government policy are not within the competence of the Council. At the same time, most decisions and recommendations regarding social issues are not binding as a result of the absence of follow-up by Council with government agencies, as we will see in the next discussion, even though the amendments (Articles 17 and 23) give the Consultative Council clear and comprehensive powers to study final draft laws. However, since the foundation of the Council in the nineties until the amendment announced by King Fahd in 2003, most decisions and recommendations were non-binding, with no meaning. Cordesman observes that:

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[526] M. Balilah, "Additional recommendations and legislation", *Al-Watan*, Jeddah, 1 March 2008. Available [Online]:
http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=2710&id=4627&Rname=81 [20 September 2008].
[527] *Ibid.*,

While little was published on the substance of the council's work, the Saudi government reported that the full council had held 103 meetings by the end of the first four-year session in mid-1997, and that it had passed resolutions on 133 topics while studying another forty-nine. Its eight subcommittees held 727 meetings to discuss 143 subjects and issued 133 resolutions.[528]

Cordesman is correct in his assessment about the number of topics and resolutions discussed by the Consultative Council but, as mentioned above, most of these discussions and resolutions usually make recommendations about domestic social issues that are not binding. Furthermore, Council does have any influence on government policy and citizens' concerns. For instance, at present there have been no effective meaningful decisions issued by Council that may have created real change or solved critical problems in Saudi society, such as unemployment and the reliance on foreign labour, high inflation, problems in the stock-market, employing women in certain occupations and cases of terrorism. These are the sorts of cases that need action and yet the majority of Council decisions are merely non-binding recommendations. The feeling of being ineffective is one experienced by members. For example, a Majlis al-shūrā member criticised Council for issuing a recommendation demanding the establishment of toilets in the Sacred Mosque, while ignoring many other significant social problems needing support.[529] Others criticise the influence and role of the Council in general: "What is the purpose of the Council when regulations and resolutions are passed and their implementation is not followed up in government departments?...I have yet to see any of the Council's committees discussing with representatives of government departments the implementation of regulations" (Bandar Al-Hajjar cited in Qusti).[530]

The above discussion indicates the limited role and influence of the Consultative Council in dealing with citizens' needs and problems, especially as the Council has no

[528] A. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century: The Political, Foreign Policy, Economic, and Energy Dimensions*, (New York: Praeger, 2003) p. 149.
529 A. Al-Balawi, "T he demands of the Shura Islamic affairs committee provoke legal debate", *Al-Riyadh daily*, 16 July 2008. Issue no: 14632, p. 6.
[530] R. Qusti, "Shura members want airport tax abolished", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 18 September 2007. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=101318&d=18&m=9&y=2007 [22 September 2008].

ability to implement regulations in general. King Abdullah, in an interview with Saudi Podcasting Agency (SPA) in 2007 states: "We think the Consultative Council does represent Saudi society and we are happy with its performance".[531] In relation to this strategy, Aldamer notes:

> That is because the rulers persisted in preventing social forces from crystallizing into independent political bodies which, they perceived, might challenge their absolute hegemony. Instead, they employed the tactics of coercion, co-option, dependence, and subordination to perpetuate the status quo.[532]

HA, a moderate Islamist Council member from Najd argues:

> They [the Council decisions] are only recommendations and if His Highness wishes to approve them then they become decisions. However, I'd like to mention an important point. Section 23 of the Constitution of the Consultative Council allows any member to make suggestions and to present them to the Council's Chairman who then tables them for discussion in a general meeting. This would sustain our role. However, if the suggestions are then forwarded to His Highness this might weaken our role. For instance, if the majority of the Council's members agree about an issue suggestions, the issue should be forwarded to His Highness who may approve or reject the suggestions (HA, 24/1/2007, Riyadh).

How does the Consultative Council carry out the provisions of the Council's constitution and its daily duties? According to Aba Namay, the rules of procedure consist of defined protocols for the chairman, his deputy and the secretary-general concerning the Council's apparatus, methods of holding its sessions, management of its work and the work of committees, and methods of voting and decision-making.[533] This question will be addressed by focusing on the management of work and the work of committees and methods of voting and decision-making. In general, meetings of the Consultative Council take place in the city of Riyadh. According to Article 12, Riyadh is the headquarters of the Consultative Council, but the council may meet

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[531] "Saudi royal opposes parliament elections, king open", *Reuters*, 2 July 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.saudielection.com/en/forum/showthread.php?p=7211 [22 October 2008].
[532] Aldamer, op. cit., p. 274.
[533] R. Aba Namay, "The new Saudi representative assembly", *Islamic law and society*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1998, p. 247.

elsewhere inside the Kingdom, if the King deems it necessary.[534] However, decision-making within the Consultative Council involves several steps, starting with special committees and ending with regulations. In the Consultative Council, there are twelve special committees and each has no less than five members, as follows: Islamic Affairs, Judicial and Human Rights*;* Social Affairs and Family and Youth*;* Economic Affairs and Energy*;* Security; Administration and Human Resources and Petitions*; Educational and Scientific Research* Affairs; Cultural Affairs and Media*;* Foreign Affairs; Water and Sanitation and Public Services*;* Health and the Environment*;* Finance; *and* Transport, Communications and Information Technology.[535]

Concerning the mechanism of decision-making (see figure 5.1) in the Consultative Council and the process of formulating regulations, SF, a moderate Islamist Council member from Ḥijāz and professor of political science, argues that:

> Each Ministry or government institution presents at the end of the Hijri Year a thorough annual report about its activities, its nature, its achievements and the challenges and difficulties it faced, in addition to its future plans. This report is forwarded to His Highness who refers it to a panel of experts in the Council of Ministers that makes its comments about it. However, when there is a matter related to issuing a new rule or approving and verifying an agreement made by the Kingdom with another country or state, then the Council of Ministers forwards this matter to His Highness who refers it to the Consultative Council chairman who forwards it to specialised subcommittees (the committee stage). Such subcommittees consist of twelve to fifteen members who have the expertise in a specific field, in order to examine the issue at hand. For example, if the report is from the Ministry of Agriculture, then the Economic Subcommittee examines all its aspects and looks at present and future conditions of agriculture in the Kingdom, and has the authority to request any staff or even the Minister of Agriculture to attend a meeting to discuss the report. Then minutes would be taken and all discussion noted down and forwarded by the Subcommittee to the Chairman of the Consultative Council, who then tables the matter on the agenda of the general meeting for discussion by all one hundred and fifty members of the Consultative Council. Then recommendations are voted on, recorded and presented to His Highness to make decisions. If he accepts he'd issue a decree or order, or he may make an order approving the Council's recommendations (SF, 4/12/2006, Jeddah).

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[534] A. Bin-Baz, *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia*, (Riyadh: Al-Kharaiji Press, 2000) p. 321.
[535] H. Al-Seraihy, "The Consultative Council...the heart of the citizens and its their way to future", *Al-Madina*, Jeddah, 1 April 2006. Issue No: 15683. p. 4.

Figure 5.1 The ratification of laws and regulations in the Saudi Consultative Council

The Committee stage

All items of the draft, remitted by the government, are discussed thoroughly after they have been studied by the select committee. The draft is then incorporated by the general panel in the Council's agenda, with all necessary documents attached.

The Council stage

(Adaptation)

A general reading of the draft during a session, followed by members' remarks on the draft concept, then the adaptation is voted upon.

Discussion

Casting the draft for deliberation, item by item, without voting on it.

Voting

After hearing the committee's reply to members' remarks, voting is conducted on the draft articles, one by one.

The King

Put forward to the King for a final decision

The Council of Ministers

In case of disagreement between the two councils

In the case of congruity, perspective of the two Councils views (Cabinet & the Shura Council)

Returned to the Shura Council for consultation.

After being approved by the King, a royal decree is issued

Announcement in the official *Gazette*

Regulation (law)

Source: The Consultative Council of the K.S.A., Parliamentary Practice, translated by Nasser Al-Assaf (Riyadh, 2004, p.55).

The next section will discuss the impact of the Consultative Council on Saudi Government policy-making by exploring some cases that show whether the government took seriously what the Council had recommended in order to improve

institutional reform. In addition, the role and influence of the Saudi Majlis al-shūrā will be assessed with a discussion about how the council could be reformed through exploring different demands and opinions of both government and elite Saudi society.

Section Two

5.5 Impact of the Consultative Council (*Majlis al-shūrā*) on Saudi Government policy-making

The purpose of this section is examine the efforts of the Saudi Government in implementing effective institutional political reform and promoting political participation in the decision-making process by establishing the Consultative Council. The reform of institutions is an effective way of developing legislative capacity, given that legislative bodies influence government policy-making.[536] This raises the following question. To what extent have the advice and recommendations of the Consultative Council been accepted by the Saudi Government and implemented, or ignored? However, as previously discussed, many Majlis al-shūrā members and scholars argue that the Consultative Council has a limited role. As mentioned in the previous section, according to Al-Hajjar, the Council's impact on Saudi society is not measured by the hundreds of resolutions it has made, but by its influence on the Saudi Government to implement decisions. The Council has tried to change established government policies and attitudes; but there has been no real impact of Council resolutions issued about Saudi government policies, particularly concerning matters such as economic contracts and the distribution of the country's resources, foreign affairs and defence policies. All these matters are considered taboo for politicians and members of the Consultative Council to discuss, even with government consultation.

This chapter has argued that the King and key members of the royal family's approach to political participation, including appointments to the Consultative Council, has been to co-opt professionals, technocrats and intellectuals into the state

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[536] P. Self, *Political Theories of Modern Government, Its Role and Reform*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985).

administrative bureaucracy. Dekmejian suggests a number of functions for the Consultative Council.

> Thus, deliberative bodies may play any one or several of seven functions: consultative, legislative, meditational, cooptative, representational, symbolic, and honorific. The Western preference for the legislative role notwithstanding, it is necessary to explore specifically the symbolic, representational, cooptative and honorific functions of the Saudi Majlis, beyond its formal role as a consultative and meditational body.[537]

Confirming Dekemejian's argument about the "honorific function" of the Consultative Council, seven current members left after their appointments as a minister or top government official.[538] Dekmejian further argues, "In this context, the bestowal of membership constitutes a reward or recognition for service to the Kingdom, particularly for retired bureaucrats, generals and academics". Appointment to the Consultative Council is part of a process of co-option and serves to increase loyalty to the regime.[539] Dr. Al-Hajjar's appointment as vice-president of the Consultative Council, with the rank of minister, has been noted in this respect.

The extent to which Consultative Council recommendations have been accepted by the Saudi Government and implemented will be assessed by analysing Council's decisions, recommendations and its ability to influence and change Saudi society and government policy through several cases and associated issues. Concerning the ability of the Consultative Council to change Saudi society and enhance the idea of institutional political reform, Dr Khalid Al-Dakhil and a prominent Saudi intellectual, argued that the idea of political and institutional reform is still dominated by slogans and scattered achievements.[540] Elsewhere, Al-Dakhil argues that the some sections of

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[537] R. Dekmejian, "The liberal impulse in Saudi Arabia". *Middle East Journal*, vol. 57, no.3, 2003, p. 205.
[538] P. K. Abdul Ghafour, "Expanded Shura to have more power", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 30 March 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=61286&d=30&m=3&y=2005 [23 September 2008].
[539] Decmejian, op. cit., p. 216.
[540] Cited in S. Salama, "Gulf is not embracing democracy, say academics", *Gulf News*, Kuwait, 4 January 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.gulfnews.com/Nation/Society/10202126.html [25 September 2008].

society resist change, particularly the radical and narrow-minded ʿulamāʾ and preachers. He observes there is a growing gap between the authorities and the needs of society. In addition, a rift has been exposed between society, which continues to change, and the political authorities that seek to preserve themselves at any cost.[541]

This section will also explore the council's ability to influence government in the fields of educational reform and the naturalisation law. Of all the problems that Saudi Arabia has faced, particularly in the period following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the most difficult and troublesome was the system of education and its religious content. In recent years, there has been a protracted debate over educational reform between religious clerics and moderates about removing extremist ideas from the curricula to protect the country and promote the value of tolerance among Saudi youth**.** However, when this matter came before the Consultative Council for discussion, the chairman called for a review and upgrading of educational curricula to match development requirements, but without going against Islamic teachings and Saudi traditions, although some members of the Council supported change in order to protect the public interest. The chairman said, "There are two distinct opinions on the curricula. One says it's fine and there's no need for change and the other says it needs a total overhaul. There is yet another moderate opinion, which calls for changes to protect the public interest such as meeting job market needs. The Council has discussed the matter in detail and has given its recommendations".[542] However, in this case, the Consultative Council recommended that the curricula be changed, without any effective means of implementation.

The Council also discussed issues of women driving cars and girls' physical education. With respect to the former, some members were in favour of permitting

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[541] Cited in F. Matthew, "Gulf states 'resist political change'", *Gulf News*, Kuwait, 4 May 2008. Available [Online]: http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/04/05/10203072.html [25 September 2008].

[542] P. K. Abdul Ghafour, "Talk of elected Shura premature: Bin-Humaid", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 5 March 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=59936&d=5&m=3&y=2005. [21 September 2008].

women to drive. A special committee of the Council established to investigate the issue recommended against women driving.[543] Seventy-five members of the Consultative Council voted in favour of physical education for girls, which would put an end to a ban of more than forty years. The Chairman of the Council rejected the recommendation. Nevertheless, the Minister of Education announced that PE is good for the health of girl students and does not contain anything that violated Shariah law. In 2005, the liberal-minded Minister of Education was replaced by Dr. Abdullah al-Ubaid, a conservative ʿulamāʾ, and the proposal disappeared.[544] These cases demonstrate that the Council's ability to influence government decision-making on education reform, particularly if it involves the religious establishment, was limited. Outside the sensitive arena of religion and the status of women, the Council's influence had been negligible. In 2008, the Council attempted to influence the exchange rate policy. Most members of the Consultative Council, particularly the economists, argued that inflation was related to the exchange rate policy that pegs the Saudi riyal to the American dollar. Dr. Waleed Arab Hashem, a member of the Consultative Council's economic committee, says "it's logical to keep the peg to the dollar but the peg is not sacred, [the riyal] should be revalued." Thus, the Council issued a recommendation advising the King to revalue the riyal as a measure to fight inflation. But government policymakers have rejected the recommendation. According to Saudi Arabia's Finance Minister and Central Bank governor, they should not change foreign exchange policy for the time being.[545]

There have been demands in Saudi society to revise regulations for granting Saudi citizenship to foreigners; such regulations have not been changed for fifty years. In

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[543] "Saudi Shura Council voted on the passage without examining "the leadership of women", *Al-Arabia News Channel*, 28 January 2006, Dubai. Available [Online]: http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2006/01/28/20651.html [4 November 2008]. This article disscusses the issue of women driving cars, rather than the broader issue of women's "*leadership*".

[544] R. Qusti, "Physical education for girl students still on hold", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 7 January 2004. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=37674&d=7&m=1&y=2004 [5 November 2008].

[545] S. Karam, "Shura Council likely to recommend riyal revaluation", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 16 July 2008. Available[Online]:http://www.arabnews.com/?page=6&section=0&article=111862&d=16&m=7&y=2008 [13 October 2008].

order to find a resolution to this matter, the Ministry of the Interior referred to the Consultative Council for discussion only eight points in law of thirty-eight articles. The majority of Consultative Council members refused to discuss them. They demanded the complete law be revised, particularly points such as the Muslims-only stipulation, and that citizenship can be withdrawn within 10 years if naturalised citizens commit a crime, serve a prison term of more than one year, or if they are convicted of a felony related to national security.[546] Thus, some members challenged the Muslims-only stipulation. "We do not want to be seen as prejudiced people, especially since Saudi Arabia is in the spotlight at the moment," said one prominent member. "Islam allows Muslims to marry Christians and Jews. On what basis are we saying that only a Muslim can be naturalised? This will only cause people to think we are prejudiced. It will encourage hatred against us," he added.[547] But other members emphasised Saudi Arabia was the birthplace of Islam and home to its two holiest mosques. "The fact that the government only wants to grant citizenship to Muslims is a matter of pride, not prejudice," said another member.[548]

However, after much debate resulted in no consensus, several voices in the Consultative Council said the entire draft should be sent back to the Ministry of the Interior and be revised. Sheikh Saleh Bin-Humaid, the Consultative Council chairman, said there was a danger that this could spell the end of the draft law: "The fear is that if such a decision is taken and the draft is sent back to its source, it may be returned to us, or it may not," he said.[549] After drawn-out negotiations between Consultative Council members and the Ministry of Interior, Council passed and approved changes to eight of thirty-eight articles, exactly what the Ministry of Interior had wanted from the beginning.[550] The issue of education reform again illustrates the

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[546] R. Qusti, "No consensus on citizenship rules for foreigner", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 27 October 2003. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=34220&d=27&m=10&y=2003. [22 September 2008].

[547] *Ibid.,*

[548] *Ibid.,*

[549] *Ibid.,*

[550] P. K. Abdul Ghofour, "Shura Council passes amended citizenship law", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 10 May 2004. Available [Online]:

limited capacity and authority of the Consultative Council to influence government policy, particularly when members are consulted by the Ministry of Interior, in this case, and how the government does not listen to Council views; therefore Council lacks the power to impose its recommendations.

All these cases demonstrate that Council members are still not effectively involved in government policy and decision-making processes although the majority are well educated. Members recognise that in reality they are merely advisors to the Saudi Government bureaucracy rather than effective policy makers. However, the prestige associated with Council membership is valued. Aldamer observes:

> Many writers tend to exaggerate the increasing influence of the top echelon of the top technocrats in shaping official Saudi policy, whereas in reality the commoner technocrats, including ministers, are excluded from crucial decision-making deliberations and confine their activities to their field of expertise. The King remains the centre of power and ministers act as advisors rather than as initiators of policy.[551]

Also, it emphasises what we discussed earlier in this chapter, that is, the religious establishment remains deeply rooted in Saudi society, even if its members are not well represented on Consultative Council, and indeed no political or social institution, except the royal family, has been effective in countering its influence. Thus, the royal family have respected their views and accommodated many of their demands because their support is a source of legitimacy for the monarchy, as already mentioned. These cases confirm that the religious establishment is a more powerful institution than the Consultative Council. This institution still has power as well as influence however, even though its members are not well represented in Council, especially concerning certain reforms in Saudi society such as allowing women to drive cars, participate in physical education and other educational reforms. There is also a tension between the government's desire to preserve its authority at any cost, on the one hand, and its promotion of institutional reform and power sharing with the Consultative Council, on

http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=44672&d=10&m=5&y=2004 [23 September 2008].

[551] Aldamer, op. cit., p. 244.

the other. Al-Rasheed assesses the limitations of the Consultative Council in the following terms:

> With regard to our Saudi Consultative Council and consultation process, they are synchronised and follow a special rule described by some analysts as being an incapable bureaucracy that is unable to deal with current issues and milestone decisions due to the many specialisations as mentioned earlier, and because it lacks the genuine representation of people. As we have seen the technocratic system has failed. It was unable to tackle internal problems such as educational, economic, social and political problems. Even in the area of infrastructure, it was unable to develop basic facilities and services such as health, water, electricity, transport and other living necessities in general.[552]

There has also been a tendency for the government to bypass and ignore the Consultative Council. Cordesman argues that in 2002, King Abdullah, when he was Crown Prince, issued a royal decree to abolish separate male and female education departments. This decision was considered a very bold, courageous one by the King, because Saudi Arabia is a very conservative country and the move could incur strong opposition by the religious establishment. However, some members of the Consultative Council were disappointed by the decision, thinking it showed ignorance by government toward their role and position in relation to the making of Saudi Government policy.[553]

Also, another example of how government bypassed Council, as discussed in the previous chapter, occurred in 2006 when King Abdullah made the decision to establish the Allegiance Commission System for the first time in the history of the Kingdom. The new Allegiance Law was issued without Consultative Council involvement. For instance, Articles 10, 12, and 13 stated there is a "Transitory Ruling Council" comprised of five members of the committee, all of whom come from the royal family. This Transitory Ruling Council has great authority to solve most problems in the country. However, the decision suggests that the government invests

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[552] M. Al-Rasheed, "The dilemma of the 'Saudi' consultative process: A draining political system",. *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 18 April 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.alquds.co.uk:9090/pdf/2005/04Apr/18AprMon/Quds19.pdf [2 October 2008].
[553] A. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century: The Political, Foreign Policy, Economic, and Energy Dimensions*, (New York: Praeger, 2003) p. 152.

much greater trust in this small council rather than the Consultative Council, with much greater experience and ability. This decision also indicates that the Consultative Council still needs more substantive support and power, particularly from the government, if it is to undertake its socio-political role effectively.

The above analysis will be discussed by referring to the opinions of Consultative Council members, government leaders and observers of Council decision-making. Current discussion concerns the composition of the Consultative Council and expectations concerning both its performance and role. In general, despite it being sixteen years since the Council was formed, the Consultative Council's role and recommendations remain limited. The 2003 petition, "Vision on the Present and Future of our Nation", highlighted the absence of popular political participation in decision-making and the poor and limited role of Saudi political institutions, particularly the Consultative Council.

Furthermore, in November 2009, Jeddah, the major commercial port of the Kingdom, suffered heavy rains and flooding that killed more than a hundred people as a result of mistakes, mostly failures on the part of some government departments. Consequently, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah, ordered a high-level committee to investigate the reasons for the calamity.[554] Importantly, the committee was given great authority to conduct the investigation without the involvement of the Consultative Council. Also, the committee was allowed to invite and question any responsible person from positions of authority, such as ministers, bypassing the King's permission. The Consultative Council, despite being active for 16 years, does not have authority to conduct an investigation of this nature and call senior government officials to account, unless it gets the King's permission (Article 22).

[554] P. K. Abdul Ghafour, "Shoura wants flood plans prepared," *Arab News*, Jeddah, 7 December 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=129207&d=7&m=12&y=2009. [9 December 2009].

Academics and professionals demand Council have the power and authority for effective implementation of its decisions. They suggest anything which leads to empowering Council to have a greater or more effective role in controlling and implementing its decisions would be proactive.[555] This is true when compared to Council activities in its first year and even after Articles 17 and 23 were amended, as discussed earlier in this section—changes which reinforced the optimists' position as regards the institutional role within Saudi society. Dahlan, a member of the Consultative Council and a prominent Saudi columnist, suggested that promoting enhanced functions could be achieved by implementing a partial election for members of the Consultative Council. In relation to this point, the researcher asked participants about the challenges that faced political constitutional reform since it was first announced in 1992, and whether it has satisfied the political reform that people desired to see. According to AM, a judge in the Summary Court in Jeddah from the Ḥijāz, there still remain numerous challenges. The most important is the absence of elected political institutions, for example, an elected Consultative Council, that would enhance public involvement in decision-making processes and improve the quality of political development:

> There are numerous challenges. For instance, the first biggest challenge is the involvement of the public in political decisions, and the decisions made by the government in particular. Secondly, the election of the Councils that represent the people, such as the Consultative Council and the Municipal Councils, should be democratic. People should be able to elect the members of the Council, if not all of them, at least two thirds of them, while the regime appoints the remaining third (AM, 30/1/2007, Jeddah).

Writing in the Saudi daily, *Al-Watan*, columnist Mohammed Al-Asmary attributes the poor performance of the Consultative Council to the absence of communication between Saudi citizens and Majlis al-shūrā members. Al-Asmary cited as an example the organising of opening and closing hours for shops by the Consultative Council. He notes that:

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[555] M. Al-Ghamdi, "Demands to affect the role of the Shura Council after the stage of regulations issue," *Okaz*, Jeddah, 23 September 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.okaz.com.sa/okaz/osf/20060923/Con2006092349601.htm [3 October 2009].

> Dates of closing and opening shops should not be determined by government officials sitting in the air-conditioned offices even if they are members of Consultative Council staff. At the end, they are appointed employees and do not come from the bottom of the market. The market should be determined by the market people themselves.[556]

The one hundred and fifty Council members have no power to do more than comment on and approve policies that the Saudi Government has decided to implement.[557] A leading member of the Consultative Council, Dr Fahad Al-Hamad, argues that one of the most important problems the Council faces which prevents it from taking up its full duties, particularly that of financial oversight, is the existence of other agencies or institutions under the supervision of the Saudi Government, such as the General Auditing Bureau (Diwan al-Morakaba al-Ama) and the General Investigation Board (Hayah al-Rakabh Waltahkik), which do have a financial oversight role beside Council (cited in Abdullah).[558] This has created a duplication of function, making the monitoring role of the Council inadequate, particularly in the absence of any connection or link between these agencies and the Council. On this point, participants were asked in the Saudi Arabian interviews if they had a political plan in relation to political reform and change, with regards to other political institutions, such as the Consultative Council, in order to improve its performance. SA, a well-known academic in the political science department at King Adullaziz University in Jeddah and from the Hejaz area, argues that realising accountability might come through encouraging the creation of specific institutional checks and balances.

> As I said previously, it would be more effective to include the monitoring body to provide checks and balances that is now under the control of the Council of

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[556] A. Al-Asmary, "Shura Council: Where attend this evening?", *Al-Watan*, Jeddah,4 January 2008. Available [Online]:
http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=2663&id=3957&Rname=171[3 October 2008].
[557] A. Alyami, "Abdullah'Reforms Must Begin in the Palace", The Henry Jackson Society Project for Democratic Geopolitics, 25 April 2006. Available [Online]:
http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/stories.asp?id=339 [4 October 2008].
[558] H. Abdullah, "Fahad Al-Hamad to "Asharq al-Awsat": time is come for accountability, perform oversight and investigation", *Asharq al-Awsat*, London, 14 March 2007. Available [Online]:
http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=43&issueno=10333&article=410454&feature= [5 October 2008].

Ministers and some other bodies in the Council because this will strengthen its role and increase its powers (SA, 8/1/2007, Riyadh).

The perceived weakness of the Consultative Council is a consequence of government policy. The government has shown no inclination to promote the Council's role to enhance institutional reform through political participation, transparency and accountability. This undervaluing of Council can be seen from two significant perspectives. First, the Consultative Council can express its views only on policies submitted by the King, in an advisory capacity. Second, most of its arguments go in circles around the interpretation of laws and the examination of annual reports referred by ministers and government agencies, which means it has no effective oversight role. This role is important as a tool to change the trends of government as well as enhance Council credibility in the public eye. Ottaway and Dunne suggested three main patterns of managed institutional reform: institutional reform without power-sharing; substantive change without institutional reform; and coming to terms with the opposition. Also, they argue that Bahrain and Egypt are examples of the first pattern, "institutional reform that does not entail a real transfer of power", while Morocco and Saudi Arabia are examples of the second pattern, "substantive change without institutional reform".[559] Substantive change means reform in areas that affect citizens most immediately, such as human rights, personal freedom and more recently economic reform, while leaving the country's institutional architecture largely untouched.[560]

However, most "Saudi reformers" have called for a pattern of political reform similar to that in Bahrain. For instance, in Bahrain, which is a constitutional monarchy, there are two houses: the lower house with its representatives elected with limited power and the upper house, with appointed representatives who have more power. These demands, as discussed earlier, have been repeatedly made since 2003 when many

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[559] M. Ottaway & M Dunne, "Incumbent regimes and the "King's Dilemma" in the Arab world: promise and threat of managed reform", Carnegie Paper, Middle East Program no. 88, (2007), pp. 1-21. Available [Online]: http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/cp88_ruling_parties_final1.pdf [5 October 2008].
[560] *Ibid.,*

reformers, consisting of hundreds of people, both men and women, sent several petitions to the Saudi leadership calling for the establishment of an Islam-based constitutional monarchy with a parliament with half of its members being elected by all adults, men and women, while the rest appointed by the King. This is in stark contrast to the political systems in some Arab countries, particularly the GCC, such as Bahrain. This will empower Saudi citizens to participate in the political process and government decision-making by participating in election campaigns and paving the way for political development. However, at the same time, it does not mean that the Saudi regime has to relinquish significant powers (See Chapter Four).

However, this chapter will conclude by exploring various discussions and debates already mentioned about the need for further reform in order to improve and expand institutional work aimed at achieving greater participation. This will include demands for Council to be given more power, rather than simply maintain its present advisory role.

5.6 Debate concerning Council operations

As pointed out earlier, although the Saudi Consultative Council was established 16 years ago, the powers allocated to Council appear negligible and insignificant, when compared to those of parliaments in other countries, particularly the G.C.C. states. Most scholars, whether Saudi or non-Saudi, argue that whatever the Saudi Government is trying to do, the fact remains that the role of the Consultative Council is still purely advisory and it is an assembly body of one hundred and fifty members appointed by the King, rather than being elected, lacking the power to make effective policies. Furthermore, the King, according to Articles 3, 5, 10 and 15 of the Consultative Council system, still has broad discretionary powers to select and dismiss its members, including even the chairman of the council and his deputy and enjoys uncontested power to dissolve the Council at any time.[561] This means that the authority of executive and legislative functions remain with the King. Also, as

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[561] A. Bin-Baz, , *The Constitutional and Political System of Saudi Arabia*, (2000), Riyadh: Al-Kharaiji Press.

discussed in this chapter, Council decisions are merely recommendations, even after the changes of 2003, when King Fahd approved changes to the Council that gave it more effective power concerning amendments to Articles 17 and 23.

First, in general, the one hundred and fifty appointed members reflect the fact that the Saudi Government has focused to date on elite-level participation (top-down reform) rather than grass-roots democratisation. As discussed in Chapter Two, according to Buchanan, sustained democratic transition can only be achieved if "top-down" reforms are accompanied by local participation and development from below in a "bottom-up" process of transition. This occurs when civil society mobilises and expands its range of its demands, while moving to secure a greater voice in the governmental decision-making process. Thus, the strategy of members of the Council being appointed, rather than elected, is incompatible with the meaning of promotion of institutional reform and political participation, particularly with the emergence of a middle class. Al-Rawaf argues that the process of political participation becomes institutionalised by adopting the electoral system at both local and national levels. The right to vote is seen by many theorists as the cornerstone of political participation and democracy.[562] Diamond and Morlino argue that democracy is established in countries as a result of its quality, as measured by factors such as the amount of freedom enjoyed by citizens and the rule of law by effective institutions (mutually acceptable to citizens and representatives alike).[563]

Second, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the idea of the experiment of forming a Consultative Council and holding elections in the K.S.A. did not come about as a result of long-promised political reform announced by King Fahd in 1992. It had been in existence in the Ḥijāz region since 1925, which means that the argument that Saudi society is not ready for full political participation, or capable of having the authority to hold their elected representatives accountable for the exercise of legislative power, must be questioned. As pointed out, from the point of view of the Saudi Government,

[562] O. Al-Rawaf, "The concept of the five crises in political development-relevance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1980, p. 298.
[563] L. Diamond, & L. Morlino, "An Overview", *Journal of Democracy*, vol.15, no.4, 2004, pp. 20-31

maintaining the centrality of the ruling family, rather than broadening political participation in elected political institutions, does not happen in a vacuum; it is the outcome of the nature of Saudi society, where tribal and religious factors still play a significant role in Saudi political life, as has been argued by the Saudi Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Aviation and Inspector General (see Chapter Four). However, this is compatible with what Diamond argues, that before democracy can spread further, it must take deeper root where it has already sprouted.[564] Thus, Saudi citizens should have a say in the election of at least half of one hundred and fifty members of the Consultative Council.

Third, beside the absence of independent elections as a step toward political development and popular participation, with members of the Consultative Council appointed rather than elected, this mechanism prevented members and other individuals from being involved in decision-making. This makes the function of Council meaningless with regards to transparency and accountability, factors which protect people's rights and save them from an absolute and arbitrary system of governing. Therefore, securing effective independent elections is an important step toward political development and effective institutional-building.

Fourth, electoral democracy is important because it enables the people to make their representatives accountable. At the same time, popular participation should not be discussed purely as a political issue. Tolerance and acceptance need to be promoted and dialogue between all groups in society encouraged in schools, mosques and the media. Also, the right to propose legislation is still limited. As pointed out, one of the sections in the Majlis al-shūrā states that Council examines only what the President of the Council of Ministers refers to Council. Article 23, which has been amended, also states that the reports of the Consultative Council are to be forwarded to the King, who then accepts or rejects them. Therefore, the Consultative Council loses a big part of its power and becomes an advisory body, rather than a decision-making body. The

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[564] L. Diamond, "The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 87, no. 2, 2008, pp. 36-48.

Council of Ministers, still an executive body, passes the legislation that becomes law once it is ratified by royal decree. There are still demands calling for a more effective role for the Council in order to increase its powers and make it similar to legislative councils in neighbouring countries and other countries.

In addition, concerning Article 22, which gives the Consultative Council the authority to question government officials, the article is delineated in a narrow way. For instance, if Council decides to ask or question any government official in order to discuss competence, the Consultative Council should, through the president, firstly submit this question to the head of the Council of Ministers (the King), with a request for the government official in question to attend. This leads to a decline in the investigatory function of the Council and its political accountability, as well as creating interference between the function of the executive and legislative bodies. It also increases the dominance of the executive branch of government. As pointed out in Chapter Two, according to Uhr, the separation of political power among the three branches of government is one of the essential components of political accountability. The Consultative Council needs to have full authority to hold the executive accountable.

Finally, the Consultative Council does not have the power to discuss the budget, which is considered a serious failing in the system that needs to change. When participants in the Saudi Arabian interviews were asked about an effective way to promote institutional political reform in general, most focused on the empowerment of the Consultative Council through allocating an effective monitoring role over government budgets in order to create a transparent treasury. "I believe that the powers of the Council have increased but they're not enough. As I said before, the Consultative Council should have more powers in relation to accountability, the budget, pre and post process monitoring" (HA, a moderate western-educated Islamist, from the Najd area and a member of the Consultative Council, [24/1/2007/ *Riyadh*]). Uhr further argues that effective legislative scrutiny is at the heart of the work of a

deliberative assembly.[565] This will enhance and guarantee the supervisory function of the Council.

However, the formation of the Consultative Council was one of the most important political institutions that the Saudi Government has re-established in the last sixteen years. At the same time, the formation of the Council indicates the important efforts of the Saudi Government toward implementing and promoting institutional political reform, in spite of the modest gains these efforts have made in enhancing the meaning of reform and political change. This might be related to Diamond's argument about the so-called "wave of democratic recession" that has emerged in many countries since the second half of the 2000s, as a result of the absence of political institutions that lead to increasing political participation but impose the rule of law. According to Diamond, the wave of democratic recession is due to several factors such as the lack of a stable regime, the emergence of political and religious violence, the inclination of external power to avoid imposing democracy, the success of authoritarian regimes in restricting political access and, finally, the beneficial situation regarding oil prices which has financially enhanced some states, making them more independent in their decisions which in turn has affected reforms.[566]

Diamond's argument concerning the slowing of the momentum for democratic change can be seen today in some regions of the world, especially in the Arab world. For instance, the US has less focus on democracy and political change in general, and in the Middle East in particular, something which indirectly supports the government's hesitancy in implementing change. The implications of this slower momentum for democratic change in the region today may be connected to security and stability issues, which make the chances of political reform more modest, not only in Saudi Arabia but also in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC countries have disputes with a number of their neighbours, including Iraq, Iran and Yemen. For

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[565] J. Uhr, *Deliberative Democracy In Australia: The Changing Place of Parliament*" (London, 1998) p. 149.
[566] L. Diamond, "The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 87, no. 2, 2008, pp. 36-37, 47-48.

instance, Iran and the United Arab Emirates have been in conflict since the 1970s, concerning the sovereignty of three islands in the Gulf.[567] Also, Saudi Arabia and Yemen have a dispute referring to border conflicts dating back to the first quarter of the last century.[568] Despite the fact that both governments are trying to resolve this conflict, the security issue still exists. In 2009, Saudi Arabia engaged in armed conflict in order to protect its border with Yemen and to take action against a dissident group, the so-called "al-Houthi", which attempts to undermine Saudi security and sovereignty. Concerns about the stability and security of GCC countries have been reflected in slowing the momentum for democratic change.

However, the Consultative Council, apart from its limited role in Saudi politics, does not have the ability to play an effective role in handling socio-economic problems. An example, pointed out earlier in this chapter, was when it was noted that the Consultative Council does not have the ability to deal with socio-economic problems, or impose its views about such matters as women driving cars and the high prices of some local commodities. Also, leaving the Council fully appointed instead of even partly elected during all this time, under the pretext that society is not ready for widespread democracy and reform, is an ineffective or insufficient way to encourage or promote grassroots political participation and accountability, particularly today. However, during the last few years, the State has been happy to increase the number of members of the state Consultative Council who are appointed, as if the problem was in their numbers, rather than their duties and abilities to truly represent all community sectors. As discussed, the problem in Saudi Arabia is the absence of any real inclination, on the part of the Saudi Government, toward implementing genuine political reform. Concerning this matter, Al-Rasheed (2008) states:

> The problem in Saudi Arabia does not lie in the Ministry of Health, employment or education. It is a real problem due to creating obstacles in front of the genuine reform and being satisfied with rhetorical slogans by which the government

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[567] These islands are the Lesser and Greater Tunbs, and Abu Musa.
[568] K. Al-Habbas, The Theory and Practice of Saudi Arabian National Security since the Gulf War.., Ph.D. dissertation, Warwick University, 1999, p. 164.

hopes to conceal its opposition to political reform. The government wants to focus its efforts on fighting all reformist political movements.[569]

According to Diamond's definition of democracy for any society, particularly in the Third World, to enhance the meaning of democracy means that people should choose leaders and representatives who will respond to their developmental needs and who can be replaced in regular free and fair elections. Democracy is a way to promote strong institutions that eliminate the natural tendency to monopolise power. On this point, Diamond argues that "without legal and political institutions that control corruption, pro-growth policies will be ineffective".[570] Thus, on the basis of the evidence discussed, the Consultative Council has exercised very little influence on Saudi society and government policy. In conclusion, Al-Rasheed wrote of the shortcomings of the current Majlis al-shūrā and its minor influence on Saudi society and government policy as follows:

> With regard to our Saudi Consultative Council and consultation process, they are synchronised and follow a special rule described by some analysts as being an incapable bureaucracy that is unable to deal with current issues and milestone decisions due to the many specialisations as mentioned earlier, and because it lacks the genuine representation of people. As we have seen the technocratic system has failed. It was unable to tackle internal problems such as educational, economic, social and political problems. Even in the area of infrastructure, it was unable to develop basic facilities and services such as health, water, electricity, transport and other living necessities in general.[571]

In general, the discussion in this chapter argues that the Saudi Government's institutional political reform has limited and insufficient. Since the 1990s, when the government announced a package of constitutional and administrative reforms which

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[569] M. Al-Rasheed, "Saudi democracy starts with the Ministry of Health," *Alquds al-Arabi*, London, 14, July 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.alquds.co.uk:9090/pdf/2008/07/07-13/All.pdf [15 November 2008].

[570] L. Diamond, "The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 87, no. 2, 2008, p. 42.

[571] M. Al-Rasheed, "The dilemma of the 'Saudi' consultative process: A draining political system", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, London, 18 April 2005.Available[Online]: http://www.alquds.co.uk:9090/pdf/2005/04Apr/18AprMon/Quds19.pdf [16 November 2008].

led to the re-establishment of the Consultative Council, it aimed to ease the tension that had gripped the country due to the second Gulf War crisis in order to avoid unrest, instability and domestic political violence, and so it could stay in power and maintain its political legitimacy.

Today, empowering the Consultative Council, as a political institution, is not done by the amendment of its articles or increasing its membership but by how much democratisation it can permit without being dominated by government. Although mild reformist tendencies were shown by King Abdullah, the Saudi Government faces a dilemma: it can either promote effective institutional reform that might lead to jeopardising its power, legitimacy and interests, or it can continue to stymie the domestic political dynamic that demands political change and reform, even though it fears increasing violence and unrest.

The following chapter will explore and examine another national institution involved in constitutional reform, established by the Saudi Government in order to implement institutional political reform and enhance political development, namely municipal councils.

CHAPTER SIX

CONSTITUTIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MUNICIPAL COUNCILS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the political transition of the state's political institutions through the establishment of the Consultative Council as a national advisory body with greater powers. This chapter will examine another national institution involved in constitutional political reform in order to ease the pressure on the government for further reforms and enhance political participation, that is, municipal councils. The implementation of political institutions with mass political base participation involved municipal council elections that began in 2005. This was a progressive step toward introducing reforms promoting political reform. The initiative raises three significant questions. Did the holding of elections and the subsequent functioning of partially elected councils ease or increase the pressure on government for further political reforms? How have the distinguishing features of Saudi society – monarchy, Islam and a tribal social structure – influenced the patterns of political reform? And to what extent is the formation of political institutions compatible with government aims of promoting effective institutional reform while perpetuating power?

These questions will be examined in three sections. The first section will discuss two key elements: municipal councils as part of local government structure and the government's objective in establishing municipal elections. The second section will discuss municipal council elections and the final composition of councils, the so-called "Golden List" and moderate Islamist candidates and Saudi women and municipal elections. Finally, the third section will discuss the role and influence of municipal councils in promoting domestic mass participation in government decision-making and assess municipal council operations.

Section One

6.2 Municipal councils

The Royal Decree of 1977 established the administrative and financial independence of municipalities in the government structure and which gave them a body corporate status. This happened approximately two years after the introduction of the Ministry for Municipal and Rural Affairs in 1975.[572] The main task of the new ministry was to take over the role carried out since 1962 by the Municipal Affairs Ministry of the Interior. This initiative was the result of growth in urban development, with a subsequent increase in population, and increase in and demand for a diverse range of municipal services.[573] Since the early 1960s, the idea of holding elections at municipal level in general was not considered due to security issues, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, by the end of 2003, a plan was approved by the Ministry for Municipal and Rural Affairs to introduce local municipal elections for 89 of the 178 seats in the municipal councils in the Kingdom The plan called for elections to broaden political participation at the local administrative level, as part of the political reform.[574]

Municipalities in Saudi Arabia are established, regulated, partitioned or merged, following recommendations of the Regional Board to the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs, who then makes a decision based on demographic, transport, economic and environmental considerations.[575] According to Taamnah & Abd al-Wahab, municipalities in Saudi Arabia come under three categories: A, B and C. Category A, the secretariat, is represented by the main cities such as Dammam, Mecca, Medina, Riyadh and Jeddah. The mayor of the municipality is called "the Secretary". Category B municipalities include secondary cities such as Ta'ef and Baaha, while category C

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[572] T. Al-Metairy, "Administrative construction and organization for public administration" in Altawil M et al. (eds), *Public Administration in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Riyadh: The Institute of Public Administration, 1995), p. 127.
[573] *Ibid*., p. 122.
[574] A. Cordesman & N Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia*: Threats, Responses, and Challenges, (London: Preager Security International, 2005), pp. 362-364.
[575] Article 2 of the Constitution of the Municipalities and Villages System issued by Royal Decree No: (M/5) in 12/2/1977 (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, p. 1).

includes smaller cities. Each municipal council consists of 4 to 14 members including the mayor. The exact number is determined by the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs who cannot change this number during his term of office. Half of the members are appointed by the Minister and the other half elected directly by citizens. Members of municipal councils must be Saudi nationals, by birth or by blood relation, or must have held Saudi citizenship for at least 10 years. They must be 25 years old or over and local residents; not have any convictions for criminal offences; and not have been dismissed from public service for disciplinary reasons within the last five years[576]. Furthermore, members should be literate Saudi citizens registered on an electoral list and they should not be convicted of fraud or bankruptcy.[577] Further, members must not have membership in more than one municipality and must not have any conflicts of interest. They must not be involved in any business that would raise conflicting interests in their capacity as members of the municipality, nor should they attend any meetings or hold discussions about any businesses in which they might have a vested interest. In this case, the council can make discreet and confidential decisions without the attendance of those members. Concerning a member's term of office, the term for municipal councils is four years. The council elects its president and deputy president for a renewable two-year term. Decisions are made by a simple majority of attendees. However, if voting numbers are equal, the president or deputy president can vote in order to make a decision and announce it unless, for some important reason, the council decides to carry out a secret ballot. The council can form subcommittees from its membership to examine and report on specific issues.[578]

Concerning the history of municipal council elections, as has been discussed, it refers to the establishment phase in 1924, when King Abdul-Aziz annexed Ḥijāz to the Saudi state and created the National Council in Makkah; this included scholars, traders and prominent people, each elected by their own group. By 1925, the King

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[576] M. Taamnah, M. & S Abd al-wahab '*The local governance system in the Arab World and the trends of development*' (Cairo: the Arab organization for administration development publishers, 2005) p. 217.
[577] Articles 8, 9 and 11 of the Constitution of the Municipalities and Villages System, op. cit., p. 4.
[578] Articles 12, 13, 15, 20 and 21 of the Constitution of the Municipalities and Villages System, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

decided to reform the National Council so that it could be directly elected by the people. The National Council covered most of the cities in the Ḥijāz such as Madina, Jeddah, Yanbu and Wajh. The first official election law was issued in 1937 (the general regulation for the Secretariat of the Capital and the Municipalities). In the central region, the first and only municipal elections, prior to 2005, were organized in Riyadh in 1964 for all members of the council.[579] There is no specific reason for not holding elections, but as Al-Oqaili argues, it might relate to the political situation in the Arab world during the 1960s, particularly the influence of Nasserist Arab-nationalism, during which time the Saudi Government preferred stability rather than political reform.[580] Others also refer in general to the prevention of an electoral process and political development in the region being related to the unstable political climate as a result of the emergence of religious extremism in the region, particularly in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, following the 1967 defeat of Arab armies by Israel. In relation to this point, Mohammad argues:

> The 1967 defeat of some Arab states by Israel was not simply military, but also an ideological defeat of secular nationalism as a mobilizing force. This defeat allowed the 'Islamic Alternative', as propagated by the opponents of Jamal abul Nasser, the Muslims Brethren (the Ikhwan Al Muslmeen Movement), in Egypt, and King Faisal in Saudi Arabia[581].

6.3 Government's objectives in holding municipal elections

This section will examine the Saudi Government's objectives in the establishment and expansion of Saudi citizens' participation in managing local affairs, focusing on municipal council elections as a national local body with greater powers that took place in 2005 after an absence of 41 years. The previous municipal elections had been held in 1964. As previously discussed, the municipal electoral law was formulated in 1977, but never put into use. However, when the Saudi Government announced in

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[579] S. Al-Oqaili 'Why they stopped and why they are being resumed now', *Al-Watan*, 23 November 2004, issue no. 1516, p. 5.
[580] S. Al-Okaili 'An abridged history of municipal elections in the Kingdom'. *Saudi Gazette*, 28 November 2004, p. 4.
[581] A. Mohammad, "Roots of terrorism in the Middle East: Internal pressures and international constrains" in Bjorgo T et al (eds), *Root causes of terrorism: Myths, reality and ways forward*, (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), p. 110.

2003 that elections were to be held for 89 of the 178 seats in the municipal councils, while the remaining half were to be appointed, this was consistent with the the Municipal and Rural Regulation, issued in 1977. To discuss the Saudi Government's objectives in implementing municipal council elections, there are significant questions to be asked. What were the main objectives of municipal elections? Why were these elections postponed but reconsidered for municipal councils in the 2000s? What are the specific considerations relating to these decisions?

The most obvious government objective in holding elections of half the seats in the municipal councils was to broaden popular participation and ensure that citizens had a strong voice in local affairs while, at the same time, avoiding public unrest and allowing government to remain in control of the political process. Three specific considerations influenced the government's decision making.

First, as pointed out above, the implementation of municipal council elections in 2005 might be a tacit recognition that the Saudi leadership is committed to political reform. In a statement[582] Saudi Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Aviation and Inspector General, spoke about continuing economic, political and social reforms in the Kingdom. He referred to the holding of municipal elections in 2005 in which half of the Kingdom's municipal council members were elected by Saudi male voters. Elsewhere, he said that the government's political and administrative reforms were aimed at promoting the meaning of reform and change: "There are instructions from the King to deal with people with transparency and we are striving to do away with bureaucracy and complex regulations".[583] Moreover, Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb bin Abdulaziz, Deputy Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and head of the Higher Local Election Committee at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, emphasised that municipal councils in Saudi Arabia were a step towards institutional political reform in order to broaden

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[582] W. Talaat, "Prince Sultan: Saudi beyond the planning stage to expand political and economic participation". *Al-Riyadh*, 4 June 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.alriyadh.com/2008/06/04/article347901.html [5 August 2008].
[583] "King calls for transparency, less red tape", *Arab News*, 19 April 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?m=4&d=19&y=2006. [5 August 2008].

the participation of citizens in administering local affairs by means of elections. He added that this progressive step was made by the late King Fahd through the Council of Ministers in 2003.[584] A senior member of the Saudi Consultative Council, Muhammad Al-Quwaihes, described the decision to hold partial municipal elections as a practical step towards political and administrative reform. He expected that similar decisions for the Consultative Council and other bodies would be in line with the government's ongoing reform program.[585] This however might raise a question: why did the Saudi Government permit partial elections for municipal councils in 2005 in the absence of elections for regional or provincial councils? Part of the answer lies in a speech made by Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb. In his speech he pointed out that the reason for the government permitting partial elections in 2005 was to balance membership between appointed and elected members in order to avoid shortcomings in terms of qualifications and experience among elected members that might occur as a result of the election process.[586] It was not the potential lack of experience and poor qualifications of elected members but rather the government was concerned that elections might empower more radical Islamist politicians, tribal leaders and religious extremists,[587] particularly in significant political institutions such as regional councils and the Consultative Council. The partial elections of municipal councils were an experiment for the Saudi Government, through which it sought to maintain stability and government legitimacy.

Second, Okruhlik argues that the implementation of elections for municipal councils by the Saudi Government was merely a ploy to distract the attention of Saudi citizens away from the most common issues concerning political reform, such as the lack of freedom of expression and the diffusing of militant Saudi groups, while satisfying

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[584] Riyadh Daily, "Prince Mansur Ibn Miteb: Kingdom's policy in dealing with international pressure balance and muscular rank rational", 13 October 2004, no. 13263, p. 9.
[585] "Shura members, businessmen welcome elections", *Arab News*, 15 October 2003. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=33617&d=15&m=10&y=2003. [6 August 2008].
[586] A. Al-Faisal. (2009). 'Prince Mansour: no postponement from municipal councils'. *Al-Madinah*, 5 January, no. 16693, p. 10.
[587] In the next chapter, which discusses "stakeholders of political participation", this point will be explored in more detail.

external pressure for change[588]. Third, the government's objective in holding elections for municipal councils might send two significant messages. The first message was to the international community, especially the American administration, that increased pressure to accelerate political reform in Saudi Arabia might empower Islamic groups in general, allowing them to obtain a political role in government decision-making that might damage Saudi Arabian society, as might be the case with the Moslem brotherhood in Egypt, and what has already occurred in Palestine with Hamas, which fairly won the Palestinian elections in 2005. This would be unacceptable to external forces, particularly the United States, and the royal family. Insistence on elections in the region might enable Islamist parties with militants to enter the political process. For instance, what is happening in Turkey with a struggle between secularism and Islam. In Turkey, the strong secularists, especially the military, fear full democracy because this will empower Islamic forces and threaten the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP). It would also harm the principle of state secularism introduced in the 1920s by modern Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.[589]

In contrast, in Saudi Arabia, the conservatives, whether they be the royal family or the religious establishment, fear rapid political change and reform from two different perspectives. First, for the royal family, political reform risks empowering religious conservatives and the liberals, with their separate and conflicting agendas. The royal family fears that the religious conservatives' agenda would take the country backwards, while the liberals want social Westernisation. Both agendas are unacceptable to the government. Second, for the religious conservatives, political reform would harm the country as a cradle of Islam while, at the same time, see them lose their privileges and prestige within society. The agenda of the religious conservatives is not acceptable for either government or mainstream intellectuals. A gradual approach to change from the Saudi Government's perspective is a prerequisite to have successful institutional political reform. In addition, representation in political

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[588] G. Okruhlik, 'The Irony of Islah (Reform)' *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 4, (2005) p. 161.

[589] A. Purvis, 'God and country. As the rift between Muslims and secularists widens, Turkey's government finds itself in peril'. *Time Magazine*, 28 July, (2008) pp. 32-33.

institutions should represent moderates, from the government's perspective, while liberals want to accelerate reform, and the conservative ʿulamāʾ seek to weaken the government's gradual approach to reform. At the same time, another objective was to empower moderate Islamic groups to win elections in order to have a strong voice or presence in social affairs. This objective was also to achieve modernisation without alienating Islamic conservatives, while demonstrating that liberal groups are not well organised, particularly those who sign petitions calling for a constitutional monarchy. For instance, as discussed in Chapter Four, many of the signatories of the petitions were eventually arrested in order to avoid discussing politics publicly,[590] such as Matrouk Al-Falleh, a prominent advocate of reform in Saudi Arabia, who argued that the royal family should begin a democratic experiment.

Finally, the government's objective in holding elections for municipal councils might be to protect the country from chaos and political instability by countering the minority Shīʿah who live in the Eastern Province by satisfying them that elections mean they have a presence in Saudi society. This group was watching the political scene in Iraq at that time because of the Iraqi parliamentary elections of 2005, knowing that Saudi Arabia has its longest international border with Iraq. As discussed in Chapter Four, the political change in Iraq since 2003 made a transition towards a more participatory political order in Saudi Arabia inevitable, despite the government's policy intent to make it limited, particularly if radical elements in Iraq advocated an Iranian-style Islamic republic. Any political changes in Iraq that make the majority Iraqi Shi'ites politically dominant will encourage minority Shi'a elsewhere, especially in neighbouring Saudi Arabia. It would seem that from a Saudi perspective, change in Iraq is not so much a question of democratisation, but rather the way in which the US invasion shifted the political balance between Sunni and Shīʿah – giving Shīʿah politicians much greater power in government. As discussed in Chapter Four, the removal of the Iraqi regime also created security and stability problems in the region, which made the United States shift its emphasis toward security and stability.

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[590] The next section will explore who was successful and which sections of Saudi society they came from by discussing and analysing the dynamic of the elections.

However, the Saudi Government was keen to hold the first municipal elections in early 2005, close in its timing to the Iraqi parliamentary elections, in order to avoid turmoil. The results of the municipal elections held in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province showed the strength of Shīʿah consciousness.[591] The next section will discuss and analyse the dynamic of the elections and their final composition through two significant questions. Who was successful and well-represented in the elections? And how does the composition of the elected municipal councils compare with the appointed Consultative Council?

Section Two

6.4 The dynamic of the municipal council elections and composition of the councils

This section will analyse the dynamic of the 2005 municipal council elections focusing on the provinces of Riyadh and Makkah and the biggest cosmopolitan cities, Riyadh and Jeddah. The final composition of councils will also be considered. The analysis will proceed by seeking answers to three significant questions. First, who was successful in the elections? Second, what sections of Saudi society are well represented in councils and which sections of society are not represented? Finally, how does the composition of the elected municipal council compare with the appointed Consultative Council? However, I will first provide brief background information about the relevant rules and regulations for conducting elections for municipal councils.

As previously discussed, groundbreaking plans in 2003 to streamline local and municipal governments were to ensure that citizens as well as council members appointed by government had a strong voice in local affairs. Also, as mentioned earlier, the electoral law did not take effect until 2005 as part of the political reforms introduced by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah.[592] The delay

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[591] The next section will explain the dynamic of the elections, particularly the so-called "golden list".
[592] "I have the pleasure to announce the completion of the formation of the municipal councils with the grace of God and with the instructions of King Abdullah and Crown Prince Sultan," said Prince Miteb,

in implementation of this reform reflected government aversion to any disorder and threat to stability that might have strengthened the hand of both Islamic extremists and the liberals. Camille Ammoun suggests:

> ...the first general elections at the municipal level took place from February 2005 onwards. The multiple delays could have been due to the security situation, which considerably deteriorated during the year 2003. However, they could also have been due to the negotiations and struggles that we can reasonably expect to have taken place within the royal family.[593]

Finally, as discussed in Chapter Two, there is the argument concerning the "rentier state" concept and its impact on political change and reform. According to this argument many Arab States, including Saudi Arabia, are dependent on oil revenues and sensitive to fluctuations in the international market. As a result of the oil boom in the 1970s, particularly in Saudi Arabia, the "rentier state" concept empowered Saudi Arabia to sustain and consolidate its power. Thus, an increase in oil revenue enabled the government to contain the pressure and demands of the various Saudi social groups for political reform.[594] This containment saw the establishment of patron-client ties among various groups compete to gain state favour instead of opposing it.[595] One key point might explain King Abdullah's policy calculations, when he was Crown Prince, in making his historic decision concerning the re-implementation of municipal council elections – destabilising political and socio-economic factors in the 2000s. But the most interesting thing is that the factors that halted the elections over the last three decades are the same ones that led to their recent revival, with the difference being in the nature of the circumstances between 1977 and 2005.

Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs (PK Abdul Ghafour (2005). 178 Municipal Councils Are Formed Across Saudi Arabia. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=74697&d=15&m=12&y=2005). [14 August 2008].

[593] C. Ammoun, "The institutionalization of the Saudi political system and the birth of "political personnel"' in Khalaf A et al. (eds), *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf* (Dubai: Gulf Research Centre, 2006), p. 230.

[594] See Chapter Tow, p. 58.

[595] See Chapter Two, p. 63.

The proposal for elections marked an important step in the ongoing reform agenda to improve institutional political reform in the system of government and to broaden the role of popular participation in the political process. FB, a well-known academic in the political science department at King Adullaziz University in Jeddah and from the Hejaz, argues:

> Actually, holding the elections has been an unprecedented positive and great starting point in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They have enhanced the political participation especially that they were very well organized and they ran smoothly. Citizens went on a determined day and time to the poll sites and the candidates were elected smoothly. It was the first time and citizens will get used to this system and this life pattern. Although they were not ideal, the elections were considered a successful experience in all means. This is an excellent way to guiding the society through a democratic approach and system, where all sectors of the society participate in free elections, a step that would enable them to participate further in the political life such as in larger scale projects, that would not be limited to Municipal participation but to broader domains (FB, 9/1/2007, Jeddah).

Others see the new experiment of municipal elections as a way to promote institutional reform in other political institutions, such as the Consultative Council. KA, a senior Saudi administrator, states:

> We can say that overall they were a successful experience, even if there were some technical obstacles. The main aim of the municipal councils is the involvement of the public in the decision making process in order to make the councils more effective in service provision and to contribute to building and developing the country and to serve the citizens. So we can take this new experiment as a model for the Consultative Council and other institutions (KA, 8/1/2007, Jeddah).

There is a public debate among government critics concerning the possibility of extending the election mechanism to the Consultative Council. Moreover, Council, with municipal councillors fully rather than partially elected. As discussed in Chapter Five, most critics come from within the Consultative Council itself. However, on 9 August 2004, the government announced a new list of basic rules, regulations and systematic procedures for the local election process. These executive bylaws for the

municipal elections consist of eight chapters with 32 articles.[596] The local elections of 178 municipal councils were scheduled to be held in three stages, from late 2004 to early 2005.

In the first stage, elections were held in the Riyadh province in the central Nejd region. The actual implementation of the process, which had begun in late 2004, did not effectively get underway until 10 February 2005. In the second stage, elections were held in the Eastern Provinces, along the Arabian Gulf coast, on 3 March 2005, followed by provinces in the southern region of the Kingdom such as Asir, Baha, Jizan and Najran. In the final stage, elections were held in the provinces of Jeddah, Makkah and Madinah along the Red Sea on 21 April 2005, followed by provinces in the north of the Kingdom such as Qasim, Al-Jouf, the Northern Border, Tabuk and Hail. The main purpose of the delay was to avoid the season of Hajj (pilgrimage), particularly for the holy cities such as Makkah and Madinah. Thus, the first and second stages of elections were held before the Hajj while the third stage was held after the pilgrimage.[597]

According to Article 3 of the new electoral bylaw of municipal elections[598] eligible voters who have the right to vote are as follows:

- all male Saudi citizens above the age of 21[599]
- personnel serving in the military are not allowed to vote
- resident in the council area for at least a year before election day.

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[596] B. Almotawi, "The new list (the executive bylaws) was approved by Prince Miteb Bin Abdul Aziz, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs in 2004, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs", *Asharq al-Awsat*, London, 10 August 2004. Available [Online]: http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=9387&article=249454&feature= [11August 2008].

[597] "Kingdom announced regulations for municipal elections", *Arab News*, 10 August 2004. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=49626&d=10&m=8&y=2004. [10 August 2008].

[598] Almotawi, op. cit.,

[599] Relating to the new list of 2004, Article 3 did not specify the gender of the voter, whether male or female. It said: "Every citizen has the right to vote if they are over 21 years old, not a military...." However, women's exclusion will be discussed in this chapter.

There are many articles of the basic laws which discuss the duties of municipal councils. Articles concerning regulations and the process of elections relate to the analysis of political change and democratisation. Article 29 is the most important as it attempts to restrict electoral and political activity.

> Article 29 prohibited using any action during election campaigns that might lead to sedition and chaos. "Prohibits disturbing public order and traditions of the community, and creating discord or conflict of any sectarian or tribal or regional, or hurting any of the voters or candidates directly or indirectly, also prohibits the use of mosques and public facilities, etc.; for the purposes of electoral propaganda, and issued a ministerial resolution instruction on the organization of electoral propaganda".[600]

The discussion will now turn to the procedures involved in the municipal elections, in particular focusing on elections held in the provinces of Riyadh and Makkah and the cities of Riyadh and Jeddah.[601] According to Joyce "elections are the mechanism whereby the views of citizens are translated into political actions, providing them with an opportunity to play a part in the political affairs of their country. They enable public participation in key activities which include selecting the personnel of government and determining the counter of public policy"[602]. As previously discussed, municipal elections were held from February 10 to April 21, 2005.

About 148,000 male voters registered for the elections involving half of the 38 councils of 550,000 eligible voters in total in the Central Province. More than 1800 candidates stood for election in the first round. In Riyadh, the Saudi capital and home to 2.8 million citizens,[603] the number of voters registered was 86,000 in seven precincts covering 73 centres, while the number of candidates registered was 646 people from different backgrounds, ideologies and professions. Doctors, lawyers, engineers and other professionals were among candidates competing for seven of

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[600] Almotawi, op, cit.,

[601] Concerning the exact number of eligible voters, the researcher would like to explain that he found it difficult to get or obtain the exact number of eligible voters. There are several different resources with no definite count of the number of men eligible to vote in both Riyadh and Jeddah cities.

[602] P. Joyce, *Teach yourself politics*, (Transet Limited, Coventry, England, 2006) p. 60.

[603] Reported by Arab News "Riyadh population crosses 4 million mark", 7 March 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=60069&d=7&m=3&y=2005. [18 August 2008].

fourteen municipal seats representing the capital's council.[604] According to Menoret candidates were divided into three categories, each representing different sections of Saudi society. The first category represented moderate Islamists, who were present in all seven electoral districts of the capital. These moderates were well-organised with good support from public figures associated with influential religious scholars. The second category of candidates was tribal figures. As a result of the accumulated process of urbanisation and modernisation in Riyadh, these candidates secured numerous votes. Finally, the third category represented businessmen, including merchant families, who had a particularly good showing in some districts of Riyadh. Education and experience were not of foremost importance when people considered potential candidates[605].

Despite the three categories mentioned above, the elections witnessed considerable overlap between them. As discussed, traditional principles, particularly for candidates with Islamic affiliations, constituted an important common denominator. This usually played a decisive role in electoral campaigns and among most tribal and business candidates. According to Menoret, these venerable and traditional principles supported the platforms of religious leaders in the political competition as they mobilised their followers to participate in electoral meetings.[606] Endorsed by popular religious scholars, moderate Islamist candidates swept the polls in most provinces of Saudi Arabia and in the most important cities such as the capital Riyadh, the liberal commercial city of Jeddah, the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah and in Dammam in the Eastern Province. However, they did not poll as well in Qasim, a region some 320 kilometres north of Riyadh. Most moderate Islamists who won the elections were

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[604] R. Qusti & N. Al-Salti, "Landmark civic polls start today", *Arab News*, 10 February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=58768&d=10&m=2&y=2005. [16 August 2008].

[605] P. Menoret, The municipal elections in Saudi Arabia 2005: First steps on a democratic path. Arab reform Initiative (2005). Available [Online]: http://arab-reform.net/IMG/pdf/EN_saudi__final.pdf. [16 August 2008].

[606] *Ibid*.,

backed by prominent and influential religious scholars on the golden list circulated via cell phones and the internet.[607]

6.5 The golden list and moderate Islamist candidates

Influential scholars including Sheikhs Safar Al-Hawali, A'idh al-Qarni and Salman Al-Audah – the most charismatic preachers of the Shuyukh al-sahwa al-islamiyya – were Sheikhs of the Islamic Awakening. They emerged in the early 1990s after the second Gulf War, articulating their own views in the religious establishment. Their ideas of political reform were influential in government circles. During the municipal elections the Sheikhs issued their list of preferred candidates. The candidates supported were moderate Islamists, sometimes called "technocrats with Islamic leanings". They were highly educated professionals with a strong commitment to Islam.[608] They recognised the need to reform, but wanted to maintain the principles of the Islamic faith. Generally, among these moderates, there is a tendency from the government to entrench them in Saudi society instead of the ultra-conservative religious ʿulamāʾ, who wanted little or no change, and the liberals, who sought far-reaching political and cultural reform.[609] The Sahwists Sheikhs, who endorsed the moderate candidates during the elections, were one of four groups within the religious establishment.

The Sahwists Sheikhs were one of four groups of ʿulamāʾ identified by Gause (2005), as noted in Chapter Two.[610] According to Gause, the first group includes government religious scholars (ʿulamā al dawla), who have been consistent in their support for the Saudi regime. The second group, Salafis, have been supportive of the government in its stance against Islamist militants, especially post the 2003 Riyadh bombings. The

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[607] M. Ahmed & A. Mirza, '"Golden list" men sweep polls", *Arab News*, 24 April 2005. Available at: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=62688&d=24&m=4&y=2005. [25 August 2008].
[608] *Ibid*.,
[609] S. Al-Serahi, "Khaled stresses consolidation of Saudi moderation policies", *Saudi Gazette*, 18 March 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2009031832473. [20 March 2009].
[610] See Chapter Two, p. 38.

228

third group is made up of reformist ʿulamāʾ (Sahwists Sheikhs) who call for far-reaching changes inside the Saudi political system, and who are critical of both radical Salafis and the government. Finally, the fourth group consists of Osama Bin Laden's al Qaeda sympathisers and associates who are working toward the overthrow of the Saudi regime. This group consists of more radical Islamists who voice their complaints and opposition much more forcefully by expanding on the ideas of jihad and takfir.

In domestic Saudi terminology and according to Gause's classification, there are large differences among these four groups, particularly between the second and third groups concerning reform and change. For instance, pro-government ultra-conservative Salafis invoke the basic concept of Islam. They believe that any change should follow the example of the prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) and his companions (al-salaf). Recently, this trend has marginalised the Saudi moderate method of reform and change by issuing an edict (fatwā). Reformist Islamists, the Sahwists consist of many Islamist social forces. This group, as previously discussed, was the progressive Islamist opposition of the Saudi Government in the early 1990s, when they separated from the religious official establishment and started to criticise the Saudi regime in the early 1990s. This group became known as the ʿUlamāʾ al-ṣaḥw (Awakening or revival Sheikhs). For Awakening Sheikhs, change and reform is inevitable but not by using violence, as advocated by Bin Laden.

Until the second half of the 1990s, the most prominent ʿUlamāʾ of Saḥwists Sheikhs, such as Safar Al-Hawali, A'idh al-Qarni and Salman Al-Audah, were imprisoned by the government, which paved the way for a new trend to emerge in Saudi society known as Islamo-Liberal reformers, a group of minor Sahwists.[611] In the late 1990s, the Saudi Government released the sheikhs as part of a government strategy to co-opt them, as Dioun argues. Despite such measures, the regime made concessions to the ʿulamāʾ to quell unrest from moderate and radical Islamists of the 1990s, and the

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[611] S. Lacroix, Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists (2004), see Chapter Four, p. 112.

ʿUlamāʾ of Awakening Sheikhs decided to move away from internal political issues in order to focus on religious work[612]. After September 11, 2001, many of the Sahwists leaders, who had accused the government of departing from the tenets of Islam, were blamed for contributing to the events of September 11, as 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudis. To counter these charges, the Sahwists sought a rapprochement with the Saudi Government, making use of the government's strategy of co-option. Moreover, some of them served as mediators between the government and radical Islamists, not only in Saudi Arabia, but also in some Arab countries.[613] This relationship with the government flourished during the elections in 2005 and has continued since. In relation to this point, Beranek states:

> Today, it seems that after decades of mutual conflict, the Sahwists and the government have found common ground. The Sahwists accepted the schism between secular state and religious public space and stopped accusing the government of departing from the tenets of Islam. In exchange, the government provided them with more freedom of speech and with access to the media[614].

The successful moderate Islamists candidates supported in the golden list had not been key actors in Saudi politics, unlike businessmen and tribal leaders. They came from the wider Saudi populace that holds the key to social, political and economic development. They were "moderate Islamists". Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Umary, an Islamic moderate and one of the Riyadh municipal council winners, argues:

> ...Giving my own conviction about the issue and following the discussions we had, I announced my intention to nominate myself for the elections.....Day Seven: Sunday 06/02/2005, after dusk, a seminar was going to be presented by some of the Sahwists sheikhs....Sheikh Dr Ayedh Al-Qarni, who was very committed to participating in our program of events. Although we made our arrangements with him a long time ago, he was not able to return our numerous calls because he was away... Day Nine: Tuesday 08/02/2005, we had an appointment with his Eminence Sheikh Salman Al-Audah, just after the evening prayer, and he'd promised us to pay us a short visit and to present a talk before

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[612] Lacroix, op. cit., p. 345.

[613] M. Al-Ansary, *Al-Hayat*, 20 March 2009. Available [Online]: http://ksa.daralhayat.com/local_news/riyadh/03-2009/Article-20090319-209f94d4-c0a8-10ed-0042-76fd762e9041/story.html. [21 March 2009].

[614] O. Beranek, 'Divided we survive: A landscape of fragmentation in Saudi Arabia' (Crown Centre for Middle East Studies, January 2009, no. 33. pp. 1-7). Available [Online]: http://www.brandies.edu/crown. [22 March 2009].

the start of that day's program, because he had another commitment with another candidate on that day... The Sheikh focussed on his talk on having faith in God and believing in his guidance and trusting him in issues of the unknown and martyrdom...[615]

The electoral campaigns witnessed several methods of mobilisation throughout the country. Some of these methods concerned traditional values and culture, such as hospitality, generosity and poetry recitations, while other methods were more civilised with modern techniques such as debates, lectures, presentations, and mobile phone text messages to reach out to voters. Furthermore, candidates utilised enormous electoral campaign tents in order to maximise voter support and to hear speakers invited by candidates to discuss local issues. In general, the election campaigns lacked substance and any clear, effective issues or local improvement plans such as fighting corruption, protecting public money, maintaining the environment and reducing pollution. This meant that the campaigns focussed on the candidate's personality. Most election campaigns involved programs but they sounded funny and were merely promises that could never be kept. For instance, one of them even promised to allow women to drive a car! Another promised to develop the government and make it an electronic institution to spread education and literacy. Another promised to provide every man in his area with a wife and a house in order to overcome unemployment and the large number of unmarried women. And finally another candidate claimed there would be no holes in the road after today. Further, he wanted to seal the roads with marble.[616] As Dr. Al-Umary argues, there is no doubt that the new technology (the Internet, Bluetooth and mobile text messages) provided candidates with great coverage and wider geographic publicity and supporters. At the same time, technology was also used in a highly organised way and contributed to the endorsement of moderate Islamist groups in campaign programs by religious scholars.

The Islamic moderates backed by the Sahwists Sheikh in the golden list performed well in many regions, as Steven Coll reports:

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[615] A. Al-Umary, *Elections of Municipal Councils: A Personal Experience,* (2006)*,* King Fahad Publisher, pp. 28-32, 72, 76, 77.

[616] S. Asiri et. al. 'Men have supported recommendations while women refused membership'. *Al-Madina*, 25 May 2005, no. 15372, p. 6.

Saudi Arabia's limited 10-week experiment with electoral democracy ended here Saturday in a sweeping victory for slates of Islamic activists marketed as the "Golden List," who used grass-roots organizing, digital technology and endorsements from popular religious leaders to defeat their liberal and tribal rivals, even here in Jeddah, for decades Saudi Arabia's most diverse and business-driven city[617].

Also, writing in the Saudi daily, *Arab News*, Saudi columnist Abeer Mishkhas states:

The curtain has gone down on the elections in Jeddah and for all interested and cynical people, they are over. For those who do not like how things ended, they'll have to keep talking about it...The seven candidates on the so-called "Golden List" swept to victory. The Golden List appeared a few days before the election, was circulated in text messages and on the Internet and bore the signatures of well-known religious scholars who supported the seven candidates[618].

There was little surprise at the results. Senior professionals and moderates with an Islamic orientation won all seven seats in both Riyadh and Jeddah cities as well as in the main eastern city of Dammam. Five of the successful Riyadh candidates and three of the successful Jeddah candidates have doctorates and most were from Western universities. For instance, in Jeddah, Dr. Abdul Rahman Yamani, an engineering graduate from Stanford and Florida universities in the United States, won the highest number of votes (11,905 votes or 50.66 percent), followed by Hussein Baakeel (10,925 votes or 47.15 percent) and Dr. Hussein Al-Bar (11,481 votes or 44.8 percent).[619] This moderates' victory was a notable result, particularly in Jeddah, the most commercial and liberal Saudi city, where it might have been expected that liberal candidates would do well.[620] However, in some provinces, such as in Qassim to the north of Riyadh, a most conservative region and the heartland of the Wahhabi

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[617] S. Coll 'Islamic activists sweep Saudi council elections'. *Washington Post Foreign Service*. 24 April 2005, p.17.

[618] A. Mishkhas, "Will we ever come of age?", *Arab News*, 28 April 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=62858&d=28&m=4&y=2005. [24 August 2008].

[619] M. Ahmed & A. Mirza, '"Golden list" men sweep polls', op, cit.,

[620] One of the most surprising results in the Jeddah election was that none of the old Jeddah business families (Jamjoom family) won a seat (R. Abu-AlSamh, "Saudi Islamists strike gold", *Al-Ahram Weekly online*, 28 April – 4 May 2005. Available at: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/740/re6.htm. [25 August 2008]).

doctrine, they managed to win just two of six seats in the regional capital Buraidah and two of five seats in nearby Unaizah, where businessmen and civil servants won the remaining seats.[621] For instance, Saud Al-Mutairy, a liberal Saudi journalist for the *Al-Riyadh* Arabic newspaper, was the first Saudi journalist to win a seat in the municipal council elections. Al-Mutairy won the most votes in the remote Asyah municipality in the conservative Qassim province.[622] However, it should be noted that the success of moderate Islamists in the first municipal council elections concerning the golden list was that endorsement by religious clerics was expected in a country like Saudi Arabia, where Islam plays a significant role in people's lives. In relation to this point, Abdul Rahman Yamani, one of the successful candidates from a large field, said that if the predictions of the moderate Islamists success came true, he and his colleagues' victory would be down to three factors: they are a moderate religious people, and liberal candidates are not acceptable; voters wanted competence, and moderate Islamists were well-qualified professionals; and they worked hard to organise their campaign. Then came the scholars' endorsement, which, according to Yamani, was the icing on the cake.[623]

Also, religious groups in general have a prominent role, either with Saudi leadership or in Saudi society. As discussed in the previous chapter, they are the only groups allowed to gather and speak, or be strongly involved in Saudi social issues. In relation to this point, Faiza Ambah, a female Saudi columnist, argues that "the strong showing of the Islamist candidates, who swept the Riyadh elections, is credited to the fact that political gatherings are banned. Religious groups are the only ones allowed to gather

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[621] M. Ahmed & A. Mirza, '"Golden list" men sweep polls'. *Arab News*, 24 April 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=62688&d=24&m=4&y=2005. [24 August 2008].

[622] K. Al-Awadh, "Journalist who covered municipal beat wins big", *Arab News*, 28 April 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=62849&d=28&m=4&y=2005. [24 August 2008].

[623] M. Ahmed, "Candidates on "Golden List" look set to win", *Arab News*, 23 April 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=62620&d=23&m=4&y=2005. [24 August 2008].

and speak publicly in the conservative kingdom"[624]. Saud Al-Sarhan, a Saudi political analyst, also argues that "With the government's blessing for the past 30 years, the Islamists have been the only group in the political arena. The liberals were not allowed to gather or form coalitions because their demands were overtly political"[625]. In fact, these factors are related to the Saudi Government's objectives in implementing municipal council elections, namely to empower moderate Islamists, but not the liberals or the religious extremists. The government sought to give the moderate Islamists a strong voice in social affairs and to achieve modernisation without alienating Islamic conservatives. The liberals were not well-organised and restricted in their political activity because of their earlier support for petitions calling for a constitutional monarchy. There is no doubt that the winners of municipal council elections in both Riyadh and Jeddah and across the country were mostly moderate Islamists, well-educated and organised[626], but their endorsement and campaign had violated Article 29 of the electoral bylaws.[627] Dr. Khaled Batarfi, a prominent Saudi columnist, argues:

> The winners in all these towns have something in common. All are well educated, many in Western universities. Most are hard-working middle class, with a good record in community service, well before the elections were on the horizon. They have no known connection to ultra conservative organizations but they are no liberals. In fact, most are moderately conservative, like the rest of us.[628]

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[624] A. Faizah, "Saudi democratic experiment ends on a flat note". *The Christian Science Monitor*, 22 April 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0422/p07s01-wome.html. [24 August 2008].

[625] *Ibid.*,

[626] In Jeddah municipal council, five of the winning candidates have doctorates and four are Western-educated (R. Abou-AlSamh, "Thrill and anticipation in Saudi poll", *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 17-23 February 2005. Available [Online]: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/730/re34.htm. [25 August 2008]). According to Abdul Ghafour, seven of the fourteen members of Riyadh municipal council have doctorates (P. K. Abdul Gafour, "178 municipal councils are formed across Saudi Arabia", *Arab News*, 15 December 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=74697&d=15&m=12&y=2005. [25 August 2008].

[627] As discussed, according to Article 29, the bylaw urged Saudis not to use the elections to create sedition and radical, tribal or regional conflicts and not to defame candidates and voters.

[628] K. Batarfi, "Saudi liberals and elections lessons", *Arab News*, 8 May 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=63384&d=8&m=5&y=2005. [24 August 2008].

The moderate Islamists were also the people that the government wanted to see elected. As noted, tribal and business candidates were not on the golden list, even though we should not suppose that tribal influence was completely absent. Furthermore, election results show that liberalism did not attract voters. Even in Jeddah, the most liberal town, the electorate listened to the Awakening Sheikhs and trusted the moderate Islamists. Pierre Ferrero, a prominent French columnist for the well-known French newspaper *Le Figaro*, when asked by the London-based Saudi daily, *al-Sharq al-Awsa* about the most important feature of the Saudi elections after his long experience in covering a number of elections in different parts of the world, said that the golden list meant that there was a "political smell" behind the elections.[629].

The above analysis supports Ferrero's argument that golden lists were political in nature. This can be seen from several significant points. First, candidates endorsed by Awakening Sheikhs, particularly those endorsed by two of the most important Sheikhs (Safar Al-Hawali and Salman Al-Awda), were those who criticised the Saudi Government for deviating from the faith of Islam during the 1990s. As Beranek[630] argues, these people and the government have now found common ground: "The Sahwists accepted the schism between secular state and religious public space and stopped accusing the government of departing from the tenets of Islam". Second, most of the election winners were moderate Islamists who addressed real concerns and vital issues in Saudi society, while well-known figures, such as tribal leaders and businessmen, were defeated and did not get much of a chance to campaign. They did not imitate the golden list candidates' use of the internet and sms text messages, despite the abovementioned Article 29 prohibiting any action that might lead to

[629] Reported by *Asharq al-Awsat*, "French columnist: my most prominent features concerning Saudi municipal elections were the phenomenon of the golden lists endorsement", 24 April 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.asharqalawsat.com/details.asp?section=43&issueno=9644&article=295369&feature= [25 August2008].

[630] O. Beranek (2009) 'Divided we survive: A landscape of fragmentation in Saudi Arabia' (Crown Centre for Middle East Studies, January No. 33. pp. 1-7). Available [Online]:
http://www.brandies.edu/crown. [22 March 2009]

sedition and chaos. Third, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the government's objective in holding elections for municipal councils was to send a message to the American administration and the international community in order to decrease pressure for political reform and democratic practice in Saudi Arabia. This might empower Islamic groups in general, as Saudi Arabian people are religious by nature. And this would allow them in time to have a political role in government decision-making that could however have a regressive influence on Saudi Arabian society and not be acceptable to the international community.

Furthermore, in relation to government objectives, it might be said that the Saudi Government supported candidates endorsed in the golden list in an indirect way. The government supported candidates endorsed in the golden list who were indeed of similar background to municipal council members appointed by government itself. The government chose not to facilitate the establishment of municipal councils with diverse representations.

Generally, it should be noted that Saudi society is still suffering from the political strength of Islamic groups, whether they be hardline, official religious establishment or moderate Islamists endorsed in the golden list, even though the government was attempting to push for more political liberalisation and reform. Consequently, as has been discussed, the religious groups, particularly hardliners, had an overwhelming presence and influence. At the same time, there is no doubt that the Saudi Government has respected the ʿulamāʾ in general, favoured them, and listened to them concerning the historical relationship of the tribal religious alliance. However, this lazy and dependent mentality explains why most people did not bother to carry out a proper investigation of candidates and went directly with the golden list, endorsed by Sheikhs of the Islamic Awakening.

The Saudi Government strategy during the eighties and nineties to empower the religious groups proved to be counterproductive, both domestically, as it did not curb extremism, and in terms of Saudi Arabia's international standing. Reflecting a different approach, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah of Saudi

Arabia, dismissed the chief of the Saudi religious police and head of the supreme judicial council, as part of a government attempt to reform the Kingdom's hardline religious establishment.[631] Moreover, the King appointed the first women to a senior government job, assuming the post of deputy minister for girls' education, which until recently was controlled by religious authorities, rather than the ministry of education.[632] The next chapter will discuss the role and influence of the Saudi religious establishment in shaping government policies.

However, the above discussion explains to some degree why the composition of candidates for municipal council elections, particularly in both Riyadh and Jeddah, were moderate Islamists. Indeed, candidates from establishment business families or tribal elites failed to get elected. For instance, Osama Jamjoom, a 40-year-old Western-educated engineer from one of Jeddah's oldest and biggest business families was among the defeated candidates and so too was Walid Battarjee.[633] Also, tribal figures were among candidates who were unsuccessful, particularly those in the main cities across the country. Some Saudi scholars support this absence of businessmen and tribal leaders. Dr Khaled Batarfi, a prominent Saudi columnist, states:

> The electorate needs this kind of advice to help them choose from among hundreds of candidates. Without that, they might lose interest or choose the more familiar names. Those with the deeper pockets and influence are usually the winners in this case. Ads and other campaign activities cost more than 100 million riyals in Jeddah alone[634].

The background of elected municipal council members has much in common with that of appointed Consultative Council members. The previous chapter pointed out that the Consultative Council consists of a high number of moderate Islamists with a

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[631] Reported by *Al-Watan*, 15 February 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/index.asp?issueno=3061. [20 February 2009].

[632] A. Allam, "Saudi King speeds reform", *Financial Times*, 15 February 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/31b61bc4-fb3a-11dd-bcad-000077b07658.html. [22 February 2009].

[633] M. Ahmed& A. Mirza, "Golden list' men sweep polls", *Arab News*, 24 April 2005. Available
[Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=62688&d=24&m=4&y=2005 [25 August 2008].

[634] K. Batarfi, "Elections and the golden lists", *Arab News*, 1 May 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=62986&d=1&m=5&y=2005. [25 August 2008].

Western education. The majority of Council members are neither from the official religious establishment and Wahhabi movement, nor are they tribal leaders or from old business families. The government's concern that elections would see undesirable candidates elected, in terms of its interests, was not borne out in municipal elections. Since 2005 elected members of municipal councils have shared a similar socio-economic, educational and religious outlook to members appointed by government. The outcome of municipal elections broadly supports the government strategy of a gradual top-down institutional reform with limited power sharing, thus enabling government to maintain a tight grip on political power, containing grassroots movements and restricting the growth of civic society, and thereby enhancing government legitimacy and authority.

Looking at it from the other side, the golden list reflects two significant things. First, the extent to which the electorate listened and responded to their Sheikhs and trusted them, particularly in Jeddah, the most liberal town. This reflected the influence of religious scholars in general, while the influence of Western liberals was still a long way from achieving their goals in Saudi society. "Western-minded Saudi liberals should know that Islam is in the DNA of every Saudi, and that's a fact of life".[635] Second, the liberals misunderstand the conservative nature of Saudi society and that the right to vote is not yet broadly viewed as the cornerstone of political participation. Thus, establishing political socialisation and raising awareness among Saudi people might be more important than the actual elections. Municipal elections suggested that many Saudi voters were strongly influenced by the golden list issued by Islamic clerics. Mishkhas[636] argues that most Saudis are not trained to think for themselves, which she attributes to a problem with the Saudi educational system that needs to be fixed. Also, to confirm this argument, Dr. Batarfi states:

> This is the story of a generation taught not to argue with authority whether in homes, schools, or mosques. Children blindly obey parents; students study only

[635] *Ibid.,*
[636] A. Mishkhas (2005), op, cit. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=62858&d=28&m=4&y=2005. [25 August 2008].

schoolbooks and believers take their imams' teachings as final. That is why we are very much behind in scientific research. You need to have a free mind and spirit to be creative and adventurer. Faithfully following the script will help us maintain the status quo, but will never help us move ahead[637].

In addition, this lack of critical thinking might relate to the absence of political socialisation among voters about what the elections meant or how they were conducted and to the poor awareness campaign concerning the duration specified for advertising, which was considered very short for activities as Al-Umary argued. Muhammad Al-Amri, an assistant head at one centre in Jeddah, said the media campaign had been poor and that many citizens did not know the difference between voters and candidates.[638] However, the discussion will examine the most significant shortcomings and hence possible reasons for voter apathy concerning the municipal council elections. Hassan and Al-Salti explain there are several factors for voter apathy in municipal elections, the most important of which follow:

- absence of communication between candidates and voters;
- absence of clear strategies or programs of candidates; and
- simple lack of knowledge of candidates[639].

Also, Dr. Al-Salem, a voter at one of the polling centres in Riyadh, when asked about the causes of poor registration and, subsequently, the moderate turnout, said that "Ignorance and carelessness are two important factors contributing to the apathy on the part of a section of voters". He also said, however, that voting had picked up by

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[637] K. Batarfi, "Elections and the golden lists", *Arab News,* 1 May 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=62986&d=1&m=5&y=2005. [25 August 2008].

[638] M. Ahmed, "Voter registration low in south Jehhah",. *Arab News*, 17 February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=59113&d=17&m=2&y=2005&pix=kingdom.jpg&category=Kingdom. [25 February 2009].

[639] J. Hassan & N. Al-Salti, "Voter apathy shows as registration ends", *Arab News*, 23 December 2004. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=56455&d=23&m=12&y=2004. [25 August 2008].

midday at many polling centres in the capital city.[640] In addition, Dr. Wahib Soufi, a senior Saudi official and prominent academic, conceptualised participation in elections as a weakness for the reasons noted earlier.

Concerning restrictions on campaigning in general, the Saudi Government issued extensive regulations about how candidates could campaign. These regulations seem designed to restrict campaigning and constrain political participation. For instance: Article 12, "Candidates can nominate themselves within five days after the publication of a voter list. The list of candidates will be published 25 days before elections at the headquarters of each constituency"; Article 14, "Candidates can withdraw their nominations within five days after the publication of list of candidates"[641]; Article 3 states that every citizen has the right to vote except members of the military forces and only men 21 years of age and over were allowed to vote; Article 15, "The voting must be done secretly and a person should not vote for more than the required candidates".[642] As already mentioned, Article 29 prohibited all candidates from using any action during election campaigns that might lead to sedition, chaos and tribal or regional conflicts. In addition, they were barred from advertising on radio and television, and the campaign period lasted for only 12 days.[643] Al-Umran[644] argues that this timeframe was a very short period for campaign activities. It is argued that the new electoral list for municipal elections (2004) did not exclude women from voting, as mentioned above in Article 3, "Every citizen has the right to vote". However, the following section will discuss the exclusion of Saudi women in municipal elections. According to Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb, Deputy Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the head of the Higher Local Election

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[640] M. Ali Khan, "Voters turn up in large numbers to cast ballots", *Arab News*, 11 February 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=58834&d=11&m=2&y=2005. [23 August 2008].
[641] B. Almotawi (2004), "The new list (the executive bylaws) was approved by Prince Miteb Bin Abdul Aziz, Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs in 2004, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs", *Asharq al-Awsat*, London, 10 August 2004. Available [Online]:
http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=9387&article=249454&feature= [13 August 2008].
[642] *Ibid.,*
[643] *Ibid.,*
[644] Al-Umran, op, cit., p. 43.

Committee, in the city of Riyadh, 56,354 of 86,464 voted in the first stage of municipal elections, representing 65 percent of registered voters.[645] The third and final round of local municipal elections took place in Jeddah in the Western province on April 21, 2005. The number of voters registered was 80,000 in seven precincts covering 45 centres while the number of candidates registered was 548, all of whom came from different backgrounds, ideologies and professions.[646]

These figures show that there was a low voter turnout in both Riyadh and Jeddah. For instance, AY, a senior Saudi official from the Ḥijāz and one of the elected members of Jeddah's municipal council, argued that participation was limited. He states:

> Those elections were certainly a good experience in political participation. However, we notice that very few people voted. For example, in Jeddah city, only 55,000 persons voted while we expected 150,000 voters to participate (AY, 27/1/2007, Jeddah).

It is interesting to note the substantial difference between the total number of voters in the Riyadh province and those in the oil rich Eastern Province. The proportion of voters in the eastern region, where there is a Sunni majority with a Shiite minority, showed that voting was higher, particularly among the Shiite minority, in the second stage. According to Muhammad Al-Nagadi, deputy chairman of the elections commission, a total of 470,000 voters were registered in the first and second stages. Most voted in the second stage, which saw 320,000 registrations.[647] Al-Omran[648] argued that the high proportion of Shiites in the second stage of the municipal elections was related to minority rights and having a voice in the local process of decision-making.

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[645] "Islamists win Saudi elections", CBS News, 11 February 2005. Available [Online]: htt://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/02/10/world/printable672913.shtml. [19 August 2008].

[646] Y. Muhammad & A. Mirza, "Polling ends on a successful note", *Arab News*, 22 April 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=62603&d=22&m=4&y=2005. [21 August 2008].

[647] R. Qusti & N. Al-Salti, (2005). op, cit., Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=58768&d=10&m=2&y=2005. [21 August 2008].

[648] A. Al-Omran, Saudi Arabia's municipal elections. *Global Voices Online,* (2005) Available [Online]: http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/2005/05/02/saudi-arabias-municipal-election/. [21 August 2008].

These arguments relating to increased participation and voting by Shiites in the eastern province, who constitute about 10% of the Saudi population, demonstrate that Shiites are ready to make their presence felt via public political participation. Also, it indicates that Shiites want to be political players and claim their place within Saudi society, which makes it difficult for the Saudi Government to ignore them and their rights. Furthermore, the overall mobilisation and participation of Shiites sends a signal to the Saudi Government about expanding the sphere of elections to include regional councils and the Consultative Council in future, which indicates that a higher proportion of Shiites would be represented. As pointed out in section one in the preceding chapter, Shiites were not well represented in the Consultative Council and have not been since the Council was established in 1993. During this period, Shiite representation was limited to no more than 5 of 150 current members.

In responding to a question about the substantial difference between the number of voters in the Riyadh region to those in the Eastern Province, Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb attributed larger numbers of voters in the Eastern Province to the efforts of local committees. Other factors were that citizens realised elections had become a tangible fact. Also, when asked about a satisfactory percentage of voters in general, Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb stated:

> There is no clear-cut percentage. And we cannot compare this election to any other election because this is the first. In Saudi Arabia, voting is voluntary. It is not mandatory as in other countries, like for example in Jordan. Also, in other countries elections are combined with other regional state elections like what is going on in the United States. Therefore, we cannot pinpoint a certain percentage.[649]

6.6 Saudi women and municipal elections

Saudi women have been excluded as voters and candidates in all municipal elections held in 2005. This has been given a lot of attention by most analysts and scholars, particularly within the Kingdom as women make up more than half the population,

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[649] R. Qusti & N. Al-Salti (2005), op, cit. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=58768&d=10&m=2&y=2005. [21 August 2008].

hence this exclusion has created considerable debate within Saudi society. As already discussed, the municipal election bylaw did not exclude women from participating or voting. However, in responding to a question about whether women would be permitted to participate in municipal elections, Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb said that regulations for municipalities and villages and the election of municipal councils did not prevent or exclude the participation of women. Rather their exclusion related to logistical problems such as the lack of separate voting centres for female voters. He said "Municipal elections are a new experience in the Kingdom and the short time given to the Election Commission made it impossible to allow women's participation this time, particularly in the existence of 178 municipalities throughout the Kingdom".[650] Furthermore, an election official said that administrative and logistical reasons obstructed women from participating as candidates and voters because administrative departments did not have enough women to run the registration and polling centres allocated to them. He added that only a few Saudi women had personal identity cards.[651]

These reasons for women being excluded from elections are not convincing. Women are given the right to vote and participate in decision-making processes in most Muslim and Arab countries. But, most importantly, in most Gulf States Countries (the GCC) apart from Saudi Arabia, women are allowed to vote and participate in municipal council elections and parliamentary elections. For instance, the Kuwaiti parliament voted to amend Kuwait's electoral law to give women suffrage and the right to run for parliament; this was a significant step for political reform.[652] Now, Kuwait has become the fourth Gulf State after Oman, Qatar and Bahrain, where women have the right to participate in elections. As discussed in this section

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[650] Reported by *Al-Riyadh Daily* "Prince Mansur Ibn Miteb: Kingdom's policy in dealing with international pressure balance and muscular rank rational", 13 October 2004. Available [Online]: http://www.alriyadh.com/Contents/13-10-2004/Mainpage/LOCAL1_23086.php. [13 August 2008].
[651] P. K. Abdul Ghafour & A. Mishkhas, "87 percent Saudi back women's participation in elections", *Arab News*, 16 March 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=60527&d=16&m=3&y=2005. [13 August 2008].
[652] "Kuwaiti women win right to vote", *BBC News*, 17 May 2005. Available [Online]: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4552749.stm. [22 February 2009].

concerning the appointment of the first Saudi women in Saudi history to a senior government job, these events have given rise to deeper reforms that many Saudis long for, particularly for Saudi women to vote and be members in government and political institutions. Dr. Sadaka Fadel, a member of the political committee of the Consultative Council, recently confirmed the need for women to be involved in political institutions, particularly the Consultative Council.[653]

This important debate within Saudi society concerning the exclusion of Saudi women also includes women's rights, for example, permitting women to drive and physical education for girls, as discussed in the previous chapter. According to Hatoon Al-Fasy[654] the prevention of women's involvement in elections relates partly to perceptions and religious misinterpretations of Islam. There is nothing in Islam that states that women should not drive a car, vote and play sport. As pointed out, denying Saudi woman their rights is a violation of their rights. In fact, Muslim women participated in decision-making during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him). In relation to this point, Samar Fatany, a prominent female Saudi columnist, argues:

> The greatest impediments to Saudi women today are religious extremists who have exerted an intolerant stranglehold on the social and educational environment for a very long time. They continue to resist the implementation of reforms and accuse government reformists of adopting policies that fall beyond the narrow bounds of their so-called "Muslim" way of life[655].

HA, a moderate Islamist Consultative Council member from Najd argued that there are still many challenges that make it difficult for Saudi women. These challenges relate to the way people think about women in Saudi Arabia and religion is not

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[653] D. Al-Jassem, "Women participation in Shura Council stressed", *Saudi Gazette*, 22 February 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2009022230043. [23 February 2009].
[654] Chapter Five, p.181.
[655] S. Fatany, "Empowerment of women key to future prosperity", *Arab News*, 28 March 2007. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=94273&d=28&m=3&y=2007. [15 August 2008].

necessarily a key factor (*HA, 24/1/2007, Riyadh*). Also, EB, a well-known Ḥijāz businessman, argued:

> The presence of women is very important, but people misunderstand it and interpret it as if we want to involve women by force in a world that does not concern her, despite the fact that now there are a number of businesswomen who are involved in the commercial life of the country... It is a pity that our law gives people who are 21 and over the right to vote, while we have women who are highly educated and qualified, some are doctors, professors, engineers and researchers, who are mothers bringing up our children in schools. Why can't they vote or participate in decision-making? Women are responsible for the lives of many people and yet they cannot participate in the political life (EB, 14/1/2007, Jeddah).

Actually, it is unfair and unacceptable to exclude women from political participation and from expressing their opinions, particularly those who are well educated in society, while the bylaw empowers 21-year-old males to vote and participate, which amounts to discrimination. Today, in Saudi Arabia, there is a sort of dilemma concerning the concept of modernisation, liberalisation and reform. Undoubtedly Saudi Arabia is a conservative society and heavily influenced by fundamentalist interpretations of Islam and tribal customs. However, the government may need to balance traditional fundamentalists and modernising reformers advocating greater participation instead of merely placating the traditional fundamentalists. This is important in stabilising the country by avoiding social and political pressures resulting from the emergence of large numbers of educated people, whether male or female. On the contrary, the exclusion of women from political participation is against the basic values of Islam such as human rights, justice and equality. At the same time, there are other numerous challenges, the most important being a lack of political awareness, political socialisation[656] and maturity that explains participation in politics, especially for Saudi women. For instance, some think that democracy will allow women to vote or drive a car, ignoring other important mechanisms of democracy such as freedom of opinion, justice, equality, effective political institutions, and respect for the law and how it can be fairly implemented for all citizens.

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[656] Political socialization is the process of learning political attitudes and behaviour. Usually, the gradual process of socialization takes place in settings like the family and school (G. Wasserman, *The basics of American politics*, New York: Pearson Longman Publisher, 2008, p. 196).

This is exactly what the Saudi leadership sought to achieve. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques (King Abdullah), during the annual Consultative Council session in early 2008, states that to realise justice and equality among Saudi citizens without distinction was a basic rule of reform: "Our Islamic method makes it binding on us to spread justice among people without any distinction between strong and weak. All should be given their due rights. We will not keep back anyone's rights and all people are equal. Nobody becomes great except by his actions and none becomes small but by his crime.[657]" Also, as discussed, the establishment of the centre for national dialogue was an attempt to bring people with different views and attitudes together to address social and political concerns in Saudi society. Thus, focusing on elections or women driving cars narrows the concept of political reform and creates controversy. We need to promote actual participation through grassroots movements or civic societies and municipal elections are a part of these movements. That is not to say that women should not have rights, but that elections are only the means to an end. Other demands to establish a political culture with political socialisation as mentioned above need to be discussed.

However, there is every hope and possibility that women will participate in the upcoming municipal elections in 2011. However, the question is will Saudi women be candidates and voters? Responding to this question, Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb, said the decision is in the hands of the election committee. He added that the government did not deny or reject the possibility that women would participate in elections. In 2005 for instance they were not excluded by the system, but by "time constraints."[658] Generally, empowering women to participate in political institutions and to be part of the decision-making process is a step in the right direction. The Saudi leadership should have the will to act decisively to move forward and empower women in the

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[657] P. K. Abdul Ghafour, "Three years of reform and progress", *Arab News*, 30 June 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=111372&d=30&m=6&y=2008. [15 August 2008].
[658] S. Al-Sulami, "Women may vote in the next municipal council polls", *Saudi Gazette*, 24 May 2008. Available [Online]:
http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=200805247332. [15 August 2008].

Consultative Council and municipal council elections. After all, our society cannot progress with half of its qualified people sitting on the sidelines. Marginalising Saudi women, on the pretext that Saudi society must reach a consensus on women's empowerment, only serves to marginalise Saudi society. Thus government can pave the way for more effective participation of women who are qualified to take their natural place in society.

The next section will discuss the role and influence of municipal councils in promoting domestic mass participation in government policy making, concluding with a general discussion and assessment of the municipal council experiment.

Section Three

6.3 The role and influence of municipal councils in promoting domestic mass participation in government decision-making

As discussed in the previous section, a new system of municipal council elections were held in 2005 in which half of the candidates were elected and half appointed. Professionals with doctorates and moderates emerged as winners in most municipal council elections, while tribal and financial considerations did not win votes. And as mentioned, women were excluded on the pretext that there were no facilities for women at polling stations. However, this section will discuss the role and influence of municipal councils in promoting local political participation in government decision-making as a way of empowering Saudi citizens to participate in the decision-making process and to enhance institutional political reform. The section will conclude with a general discussion and assessment of the municipal council experiment. Two significant questions are raised. Do municipal council elections enhance domestic mass participation in decision-making processes, or is it merely a step taken by the Saudi Government to placate Saudis? To what extent are councillors free to discuss and debate matters involving their communities or introduce new legislation, rules or regulations to sustain domestic mass participation?

There is no doubt that the presence of elected members in the composition of municipal councils creates a social dynamic for genuine political development in

order to enhance domestic mass participation in the decision-making process. The presence of elected members has changed the way in which municipal councils operate today. Currently elected members can discuss and critique any situation related to municipality work. For instance, recently Jeddah city council criticised its appointed head when he decided to dismiss the secretary general of the council, who had criticized council's performance, without any consultation with council members; this forced him to appoint the dismissed secretary general to another top position.[659] Furthermore, despite this being a new experience and despite its negative aspects – particularly among elected members who felt that municipal council plays a complementary role to that of the regional secretariat and has no independent presence – it certainly achieved many positive effects including the spread of awareness about elections and increasing public involvement, fostering public scrutiny in relation to the performance of councils.

It was indeed a new experience and starting point for local political participation. At the same time, it was a turning point that had the potential to shape future institutional political reform. It is still too early to judge whether it has played a positive or negative role in developing Saudi society and promoting political participation, despite the fact that most scholars, particularly from within Saudi Arabia, argue that there were many obstacles that have shaped the development of municipal councils as part of the government's program of institutional reform, especially concerning their expanding authority. Thus, municipal councils in different parts of the country are caught between the promises they make to their constituencies and the reality of dealing with local government bureaucracy. As discussed in the previous section, some electoral campaign candidates made a lot of exaggerated promises, but some were genuine, even if they were not achieved or realised on the whole, for example:

- provide services for the residents;
- be fair in distributing municipal developmental projects and other tasks;

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[659] H. Al-Jalouk, 'Jeddah city council criticizes the dismissing decision of its secretary'. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* 16 July. Issue no. 10823, (2008), p.10.

- ensure improvements in infrastructure, in roads and neighbourhoods; and

- look after wealthy neighbourhoods but do not neglect disadvantaged ones[660].

In responding to a question about the reasons that prevented members of municipal councils not achieving what they promised, Al-Othman,[661] head of the Asir city council, in the southern part of Saudi Arabia, argued that what he had noticed in his council was that everyone was trying to work honestly and positively according to promises made to make ideas innovative, but the problem was that they were still dealing with an old system. For example, the main regime/system was developed in 1977, which meant it was outdated, but they still followed it. This concurs with what most key informants said, as will be discussed.

However, in terms of institutional reforms, Saudi Government interaction is still weak or limited and has not empowered Saudis to become involved in political participation. For instance, as discussed in Chapter Five, although the Council of Ministers is invested with both legislative and executive powers, it requires the King's approval before it can authorise or implement policies. Also, the Consultative Council still falls short of being a representative body. Generally, this supports the main argument in this thesis, that is, Saudi leadership is not prepared to grant Saudi citizens an effective political share in political institutions such as the Council of Ministers, the Consultative Council and even the municipal councils. Instead gradual reform is preferred for two main reasons. First, to reduce risk to the status quo and the government's monopoly of power, while at the same time allowing dissenters to be part of the reform process. Second, while several prominent members of the royal family seek reform and change, some powerful elements are also obstructing change. However, whatever the Saudi Government does to preserve power and sustain its legitimacy, without effective political development allowing citizens a share in political institutions, maintaining internal stability will not be guaranteed in this

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[660] N. Afet & F. Al-Kahtani, The Boards of the Municipal Councils: Powers on paper, clashing with regulations, *Okaz*, 21 December. Issue no. 15457, (2008), p. 10.
[661] M. Al-Bassam, 'The head of Asir city council confessed that he does not satisfied with the performance of Asir council'. *Al-Watan*, 18 July, no. 2483, (2007), p. 4.

current critical phase. In relation to the argument about broadening political participation within institutions, Bundagji, a prominent female Saudi columnist, states:

> Our first step then is to commit to institutionalizing municipal councils MC electoral process. This commitment will not only restore credibility to the process and its systems, but it will also pave the way to a culture of good public service governance at the most basic level of local government. To do this we have to honour the prescheduled date of 2009 as the year for electing new members for the 2nd term of the MC. If we neglect this, we will be aborting our budding national participation effort at its most vulnerable current stage.[662]

In analysing and assessing the role and impact of municipal councils in promoting or enhancing domestic mass participation in decision-making processes, three main factors should be considered, which play a significant role in enhancing local council's effectiveness in relation to municipal council regulations:

- council members – elected and appointed – and their understanding of their role and duties;
- official comprehensive administration (local government entities) and its relationship with municipal councils; and
- constituencies and citizens in general and their role in monitoring the council's work.[663]

Municipal councils have apparently misunderstood their role and function as outlined in the regulations of municipal councils. According to Article 23 of the Constitution,[664] the major functions of municipal councils are as follows:

- preparing the council's budget plan;

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[662] F. Bundagji, "Can we get to the polls on time?", *Arab News*, 28 March 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=108318&d=28&m=3&y=2008. [9 October 2008].

[663] J. AlShayeb, "Local councils struggling to produce results", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=21458&lang=ar. [5 October 2008].

[664] The Constitution of the Municipalities and Villages System issued by the Royal Decree no: (M/5) in 12/2/1977. op. cit., pp. 6-7.

- approving the final financial report in order to submit it to the relevant authorities;

- preparing the council's strategic plan, in conjunction with the relevant bodies, in order to forward it to the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs for his approval;

- developing the executive summaries of the planning and building requirements, as well as technical requirements in urban areas;

- handling proposals for town planning and urban development and building projects;

- developing the executive summaries that set out the council's practices and responsibilities in relation to health, public amenities, buildings and other public facilities;

- determining a ceiling for the fees, charges and penalties, so they do not exceed one hundred Ryals;

- handling submissions for setting the rate of fees, charges and penalties over one hundred Ryals;

- checking council revenues, expenditure and managing the finances according to the rules and current guidelines and within the limitations of government subsidies and funding;

- monitoring council operations and activities in order to improve its performance and competence in service provision;

- presenting submissions for projects to seize properties for the public interest; and

- determining direct and indirect costs and prices of services and materials provided by council.

However, the function and role of council remains limited in practice and has not sufficiently changed since the elections. Most problems with municipal council members are related to their lack of understanding of the significant role and influence of municipal councils in society in promoting or enhancing domestic mass participation in decision-making processes, particularly among Saudi Government officials. As discussed above, most municipal councillors who won their seats in the

2005 elections play an advisory rather than executive role in collecting information from their constituencies and reporting back to their municipal councils, according to the legislative framework currently in place. For instance, they cannot effectively redress the grievances of citizens who elected them as they do not work full-time for councils. Also, there is the fact that executive officers are still elected as mayors and some mayors are councillors, which sometimes eliminates the ability to check on any other parties or stakeholders involved in council services. Although most members work honestly and positively to enhance their role and influence by issuing effective local decisions, unfortunately they cannot take proactive steps to implement them.[665] For instance, Jeddah city council issued several decisions to get local government officials to listen to resident's demands concerning several environmental problems, including sewage when fish were contaminated in the waters off Jeddah; streets badly designed, particularly inside Jeddah's slums; the absence of parks and gardens in the city; the absence of a new modern city dump, etc. In relation to this point, Bundagji argued:

> It is believed that the shortcomings of four years ago were due to three main factors. The first was the sudden and unprecedented announcement of the decision to hold partial elections to create 178 municipal councils. The second was the presumptions that we, the public, were seasoned and prepared to successfully carry out the complex activities of campaigns and elections. And the third was the narrow timeframe (three months) that was assigned for carrying out the electoral process in a country where this process was completely new.[666]

However, to further this discussion concerning the limited role and influence of municipal councils, whether in Riyadh or Jeddah city, TF, a well-known academic at King Adullaziz University in Jeddah, an appointed member of Jeddah city council and

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[665] According to RZ, an elected member on Jeddah city council, there are nine committees and each one meets every 48 hours on average to discuss issues related to budget, cleanliness, public health, infrastructures, etc (RZ, 10/1/2007, Jeddah).

[666] 666 F. Bundagji, Can we get to the polls on time? (2008), op, cit., Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=108318&d=28&m=3&y=2008. [12 October 2008].

its chairman, argued that part of this problem related to the legislative framework currently in place. TF states:

> ... The problem is that council issues decisions but cannot impose them. So, it plays an advisory role rather than an executive one and this is a weak point. Municipal councils should be given more powers and their decisions should be binding (TF, 18/1/2007, Jeddah).

Also, AY, an elected member of the Jeddah city council emphasised that their role and influence in municipal council was still weak, even though they work honestly and positively. He refers to two important points: they are still dealing with the old system developed in 1977 and centralised decision-making. For instance, all decisions are subject to the approval of the Minister of Municipalities and Villages who makes the final decision. This process weakens the concept of broadening the participation of citizens in the administration of local affairs (*AY, 27/1/2007, Jeddah).* This discussion shows that the role of municipal council is limited in implementing further democratic reforms.

Next we will examine the limited role and influence of municipal councils on their local community with one case study in Jeddah,[667] This limited role and influence relates to the absence of coordination among the main stakeholders in general and how the regulations framework is interpreted and understood. This research considered the removal of Jeddah slums; a sewage crisis in the Musk Lake; construction waste being dumped on empty land, whether in Riyadh or Jeddah; and finally the demolition of Jeddah Beautiful Creatures Zoo. The Jeddah city council's role in the sewage crisis was the most appropriate case study through which to examine the capacity of municipal councils.

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[667] This is because Jeddah is the hometown of the present writer; therefore he has information about the city's problems and frequently follows most of its development plans, particularly in relation to local community work.

The problem of the sewage dump in Jeddah known as "Musk Lake[668]" is one of the most critical problems that threaten public health and the environment. For instance, health officials have warned that untreated sewage can contain infectious bacteria, viruses, parasites and toxic chemicals, which can seriously harm a person if ingested.[669] Musk Lake, Jeddah's sewage dump, is located 15 kilometres east of the expressway in an area called Briman. This lake was created more than 20 years ago in the absence of modern sewage networks, particularly in the northern and eastern parts of the city. Since that time, more than 800 tankers a day dump 50,000 cubic meters of sewage waste into the concrete dam of the lake.[670] During the last three years, toxic liquid in the lake started to seep into the groundwater through aquifers and people began to use this polluted water. Furthermore, in some areas around Jeddah people started to suffer from rising groundwater combined with a lack of sewage disposal, even though local residents had complained for some time to the municipality without getting any response. All of this happened with the acknowledgement of Jeddah city council officials.

Recently, as a result of rising water levels which put pressure on the concrete dam, King Abdullah, the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques, has ordered an allocation of SR95 million to help Jeddah municipality resolve the dangers posed to the city by Musk Lake. Municipality chief Dr. Tariq Fadaq said that council will take immediate action to find an urgent solution to rising water levels, particularly in the wake of the King's allocation of funds.[671]However, at the time of writing this thesis, nothing has happened to close Musk Lake; there has not even been a ban on sewage trucks

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[668] Misk or musk in Arabic means a substance with a strong, good smell, usually used in making perfume.
[669] E. Al-Harthi, "Dumping ban troubles Jeddah", *Saudi Gazette*, 14 October 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2008081814720 . [14 October /2008].
[670] H. Hatrash, "Municipality allays concerns over Jeddah's "Musk Lake"', *Arab News*, 21 August 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=113146&d=21&m=8&y=2008 [14 October 2008].
[671] Reported by *Saudi Gazette* "SR95 allocated to address Jeddah's sewage lake crisis", 24 July 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2008072412587. [14 October 2008].

dumping waste in order to slow the rising water level. Municipal council regulations do not have the authority to empower council members as representatives with close links with citizens or other agencies that have a direct stake in this local crisis, such as the Ministry of Health, the Saudi Water Sewerage agency, or the Ministry of Water and Electricity, under the pretext that the constitution of municipal councils does not give them authority to make decisions. In relation to this point, Ahmed Al-Ghamdi, head of the municipality's media department, states:

> The main problem lies with some other agencies, particularly the Ministry of Water and Electricity, which is responsible for the city's sewage network. People keep blaming the municipality for the sewage problem when in fact it's the responsibility of the Ministry of Water and Electricity, which until now hasn't completed the sewage network project.[672]

The Council's role in this issue was limited, despite its efforts to find a solution. The problem is the absence of coordination with other parties or stakeholders involved in community services. This refers to the fact that relations between the municipal council, the regional council and general bureaucratic bodies are ambiguous, due to overlapping specialisation and administrative offices. However, the chapter will conclude by exploring various discussions and debates within Saudi society about evaluating municipal council elections that took place in 2005, focusing on Riyadh and Jeddah, the biggest and most cosmopolitan cities. This includes demands for municipal councils to be given greater powers in the work they do with local communities, rather than being limited to their present role, which concentrates on municipalities only.

6.8 Debate concerning municipal council operations

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the 2005 municipal council elections were indeed a new experience for Saudi society and a starting point for local political participation,

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[672] H. Hatrash, "Municipality allays concerns over Jeddah's "Musk Lake"", *Arab News*, 21 August 2008. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=113146&d=21&m=8&y=2008. [15 October 2008].

which had not occurred since the Riyadh elections in 1964.[673] Whether it was a positive or negative step is still too early to judge. Thus, the elections issue as a first step towards institutional reform and political development is not a matter to be considered in the absence of empowerment and authority: "It is true that 'elections' do not mean 'democracy'. However, there is no democracy without elections because elections are the heart of democracy and its focal point. Nevertheless, the election processes that have taken place in the Kingdom in our country were just halfway through the long journey towards participation" said Saud Al- Balwy, a prominent Saudi columnist.[674]

The sewage Musk Lake crisis in Jeddah is ongoing and the city council is still powerless in dealing with local community problems. The Council is merely an observer. They are not able to play an effective role and address the grievances of citizens who elected them. Thus, in reality municipal councils have not achieved their purpose. Some scholars advocating for political change, particularly from within Saudi Arabia, argue that the involvement of the Saudi Government in implementing municipal council elections has not been enough. There are still many obstacles hindering the function and performance of municipal councils. Most of these obstacles are shortcomings in the regulation of municipal councils: "The people in the councils want to make you think that they are working, but ultimately they are powerless" said Bassim Alim, a prominent Jeddah lawyer and advocate for change.[675] "The reason for their failure may be due to regulations that limit their role in providing municipal services only and that do not meet the needs of local communities. Municipal services do not include education, health, culture and sport nor do they handle other facilities and resources such as electricity, water,

[673] See statement by Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz, Governor of Riyadh region, to the Aljazira Saudi Daily newspaper in its first issue, dated 30/6/1964 available [Online]:
http://www.rmc.gov.sa/council2/default.aspx?uc=NewNewsView&Today_ID=1958.
[674] A. Saud, "Waiting for a new election stage", *Al-Watan Daily*, 1 August 2008. Available [Online]:
http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=2863&id=6782&Rname=32. [21 October 2008].
[675] H. Fattah, "After Saudis' first steps, efforts for reform stall", *The New York Times*, 26 April 2007. Available [Online]:
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/26/world/middleeast/26saudi.html?n=Top/News/World/Countries%20and%20Territories/Saudi%20Arabia [19 October 2008].

communications, transport and other services" said Dr. Abdullah Dahlan, a member of the Consultative Council and prominent Saudi columnist.[676] Others believe generally that the experience in terms of broadening political participation in local decision-making is good. They argue that the picture is not very rosy, but it is also not altogether gloomy.

However, the discussion will now turn to a consideration of Saudi public arguments about council elections, whether positive or negative, and how it could be reformed. As mentioned above, some see council as having a growing role, while the majority see it as having no role or a limited one. The extensive reading about the experiment of municipal council elections was that the majority of Saudi society, particularly the elite such as academics, lawyers, prominent Saudi intellectuals and members of the Consultative Council are not altogether satisfied with the performance of municipal councils to date.

The official view of the Saudi Government is that municipal council elections are a positive step toward broadening political participation. For instance, the Saudi Government felt that the implementation of municipal council elections had realised the majority of government objectives in relation to political reform, even if there were obstacles. In a statement to Al-Sharq al-Awsat,[677] in response to the question "After three years of the first term of municipal councils, what has been achieved given that there is one year remaining of its term? What are the positive and negative points that you are trying to avoid in the next elections?" Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb, who was open and transparent, admitted that there were key negative effects due to the overlapping responsibilities of municipal councils as advisory decision-making bodies and executive bodies. He also said the Ministry is currently developing a new

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[676] A. Dahlan, "Regional councils and independent budgeting", *Al-Watan Daily*, 31 August 2008. Available [Online]:
http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=2893&id=7173&Rname=48. [22 October 2008].
[677] M. Al-Boqami, "Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb: The Municipal Councils had success despite the obstacles and the problems of their member", *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 15 June 2008. Available [Online]: http://www.asharqalawsat.com/details.asp?section=43&article=474908&issueno=10792. [20 October 2008].

system for the councils and he expects the next elections to take place according to this new system, which separates and defines these responsibilities. Prince Mansour added that the current experience was useful and that about 65% of council decisions have been implemented. TF, an appointed member of Jeddah city council from the Ḥijāz, observes:

> The presence of the municipal council is certainly essential and important in order to have genuine political development. Even if the council or the councillors do not have a very effective role, they would still play an important monitoring role that would stimulate improvement in performance. Having said that, there are highly responsible councillors who are highly qualified and educated and willing to participate politically for the benefit of the country. Having the ability to question things and to discuss them clearly and openly is still a relatively good practice that the system is allowing us to do (TF, 18/1/2007, Jeddah).

Also, RZ, an elected member of Jeddah city council and a moderate Islamist from Ḥijāz, argued that there is no doubt there are many problems and it will take time to manage them, but this is the price of any new work or experiment. RZ reflects:

> We have an Arabic saying: The thousand miles start with one step! So we are still in the first stage and the first step. Of course we took time to learn about internal tasks as well as the dealings with the wider society and system. We took time to find out what our tasks are and what is outside our area. There is no doubt that this is a new experience for us, but at the same time is very important.... Generally speaking, I'm satisfied with my role in the council despite the difficulties and big challenges that we face....Again, the thousand miles start with one step! (RZ, 10/1/2007, Jeddah).

The discussion will examine the main obstacles that accompanied municipal council elections in order to consider the negative side of the argument. These obstacles created debate concerning the limited role and performance of municipal councils in dealing with local community problems. In brief, we will discuss some of the most important obstacles facing members of municipal councils today. As discussed earlier, some of these obstacles relate to regulations while others relate to the absence of a public and comprehensive strategy concerning local work. In responding to the question: "What are the main obstacles facing members of municipal councils today in Saudi Arabia?", HZ, well-educated, from Najd and an elected member of Riyadh city council, argued that one of the main obstacles is the lack of full-time members

258

who are able to fulfil their role and be solely committed to the tasks at hand. HZ states:

> As a councillor myself, the issue of lack of full time commitment to working in the council is one of the main obstacles to the council's performance. If you can't devote your time to the council's work you cannot take responsibility of your role or be accountable (HZ, 26/1/2007, Riyadh).

Some prominent Saudi officials see that one of the most significant problems facing municipal council members is the presence of the executive officer or the mayor as a council member. They prefer these higher positions to be filled by people from outside the council. In relation to this point, MB, a Consultative Council member, states:

> The fact that the executive officers are still elected as mayors, and some mayors are councillors, represents a flaw in the regime, because it defeats 90-95% of the purposes of the accountability and monitoring processes. Whilst municipal council members should be able to check the performance of the mayor and the executive officer, these two positions are sometimes held by members of the council, hence giving rise to conflict of interests and lack of accountability (MB, 25/12/2006, Riyadh).

There is no specific number concerning mayors who are elected, not as counsellors, but as chairmen of municipal councils. As counsellors, they already existed in the council's regulations of 1977. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the regulation authorised the Minister for Municipalities and Rural Affairs to determine the number of members of municipal councils which, according to Articles 8 and 9, would be between four and fourteen. Furthermore, mayors should be included. Concerning the president and deputy of municipal councils, Article 10 states that the "municipal council elects its chairman and his deputy from its members (4-14) every two years, with renewal being acceptable."[678] Concerning this article, some mayors became presidents of municipal councils, which weakened the role of councillors with regard to accountability and monitoring government officials. For instance, as in Riyadh, Makkah, Tabuk, in the north, and elsewhere in the country, mayors who were

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[678] The Constitution of the Municipalities and Villages System issued by Royal Decree no: (M/5) in 12/2/1977. op, cit., p. 4.

presidents of their municipal councils in the second term led some Saudi scholars to criticise the situation. While Dr. Faez Jamal,[679] a prominent Saudi academic, argued that beside the condition that the executive officer or mayor should be a government official being inappropriate, the control of the government by 50% weakens people's participation to a significant degree and may lead elected members to lose hope concerning effective participation, weakening local work. Dr. Jamal called for a review of the 50% ruling, suggesting that no more than a third of members should be appointed with the other two-thirds elected.

Concerning the above quote, the situation in the formal regime, particularly with regard to the general regulation for the Secretariat of the Capital and Municipalities, which was created in 1937, the mayor was not a council member in general. Furthermore, there is a big difference in authority between the mayor and the president of the council. The powers in a municipal council are distributed as follows: the council board is the decision-making body and has the role of a monitoring body, while the mayor, assisted by council committees, has executive power.[680] According to Khashoggi, the mayor is the chief executive officer for the municipality and representative of the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, whilst the president represents the citizens and is the chief consultative officer. Thus, the mayor is subordinate to the supervision and recommendations of the municipal council.[681]

Others see communication as one of the biggest problems facing local community work. For instance, most municipal councils are without a permanent location, which sometimes prevents an effective connection between council members and their voters. In responding to the questions: "What is the nature of communication or contact between yourself and the citizens who have elected you? How do you communicate with each other or are there some difficulties?" an appointed member of

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[679]F. Jamal, 'The elections: The third...even the third, it is high proportion'. *Al-Madinah Daily*, 20 October. Issue no. 14789, (2003), p. 4.

[680] Article 6 of the Constitution of the Municipalities and Villages System issued by Royal Decree No: (M/5) in 12/2/1977. op. cit., p. 3.

[681] H. Khashoggi, *The local government in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,* (Riyadh, Dar al-Kheraiji publishers, 2002). p. 106.

Jeddah city council, TF, described the nature of communication or contact between councillors and their constituents. TF states:

> We have a committee called the Communication Committee. We have our headquarters in the city and we have a fax number and a website. So the first point of contact is via direct contact and it is an effective channel of communication. We also have workshops and individual efforts in certain areas. For a more effective contact I suggest that we hold an open day every last Thursday of each month where one councillor or 3 make themselves available at the council to meet with the constituency (TF, 18/1/2007, Jeddah).

AY, an elected member of Jeddah city council, described the difficulties of communication, attributing these difficulties to the absence of both a permanent location and effective communication channels. AY notes:

> Communications are to a certain extent limited. Sometimes we invite people to attend meetings but we don't have our own offices or enough time to communicate more effectively with the community (AY, 27/1/2007, Jeddah).

Also, RZ, an elected member of Jeddah city council, supported this argument. RZ states:

> ...Good question! As councillors we have difficulty with communication with people especially the laymen and simple people who constitute the largest part of our society. The problem is that we don't have an office. So we hold meetings sometimes and we invite people to attend, sometimes we use the old Town Hall in the city centre. This is hard because few people attend given the limited space available or the inaccessibility of the venue because it is in the city... (RZ, 10/1/2007, Jeddah).

It has been noted that there is more than one party taking on the role of local governance throughout the Kingdom, in addition to their affiliations and relations with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, for example, the Regional Council, the Provincial Council, neighbourhood centres and finally the municipal council. They are all in charge of local governance but they are not coordinated. This creates some overlapping and duplication, which weakens local community work in general. However, HZ, western-educated and from Najd and an elected member of Riyadh city council, argued that this is a real problem facing the

work of municipal councils as there is confusion in these overlapping roles, positions, responsibilities and powers. HZ states:

> There is certainly more than one authority in charge of local governance. This requires us all to get together and to hold discussions in a transparent and open way about restructuring this system...There are issues that are discussed and dealt with by more than one stakeholder. There is a lack of co-ordination and this is in fact a real problem that creates confusion and overlapping in the roles, positions, responsibilities and powers (HZ, 26/1/2007, Riyadh).

Saud Al-Balwy, a prominent Saudi columnist, conceptualised the weakness of the previous experiment of municipal council elections in interesting ways. He identified the following problems:

- Candidates who made unrealistic and exaggerated promises and criteria for candidates were based primarily on their educational level, good reputation and religious commitment.

- The absence of a public and comprehensive strategy in the Kingdom that would set out ideological, social, political and religious approaches and objectives for participation in public affairs.

- A lack of in-depth intellectual input focussing on students and young people to clearly identify their issues and the trends that are common amongst this community sector.

- A lack of civic education that enhances the sense of belonging, national identity, citizenship rights and responsibilities. Civic education does not constitute an important part of the curriculum, namely social education, and it is not properly promoted in the information students are taught.

- A lack of institutional channels or community organisations that would enhance, encourage, monitor and shape the political, social and cultural movements and that might gradually replace the fragmented groups that are bound by tribal, clan and religious fanaticism across the regions. The fragmentation of these groups will not end unless there is an alternative social structure.

- Poor local and regional media and information systems. What is available now are sectarian divisive media messages. There is a lack of communication appropriate to the demographic structures of each area.

- The religious attitude towards women's participation in voting and candidature is ambiguous. There is no clear-cut distinction between what religion is and what tradition is. This issue should be part of the general religious and social reforms. However, reform cannot be achieved if there is no political support.[682]

To conclude, although municipal council elections were a new experiment and there are still many obstacles and limitations in the function and performance of municipal councils as local institutions, they were still a positive first step toward institutional reform and political development. As TF states "The presence of the municipal council is certainly essential in order to have genuine political development, even if the councillors do not have very effective roles."[683] Also, as mentioned, municipal council elections created a sort of socio-political dynamic inside Saudi society. For instance, municipal council elections were seen as an opportunity for popular participation to exist for the first time since elections in Riyadh in 1964. At the same time, municipal councils in the Kingdom fall short of fulfilling Saudi's objectives and aspirations. As discussed earlier, there are still obstacles such as regulations that limit the needs of local community work in general. One of the main causes of the crises is the delay in the implementation of projects and programs linked to central administration that places decisions in the hands of individuals. "All our decisions should be subject to the approval of his Highness the Minister for Municipalities and Villages, which limits our power and delays development and progress, and this in itself defeats the purpose of having municipal councils."[684] Also, this researcher agrees with what Bundagji, a prominent Saudi columnist, argued concerning the

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[682] A. Saud (2008). "Waiting for a new election stage", op, cit., Available [Online]: http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=2863&id=6782&Rname=32. [21 October 2008].

[683] TF, an elected member of Jeddah city council, (See p. 255).

[684] AY, an elected member of Jeddah city council (Ay, 27/1/2007, Jeddah).

establishment of a culture of institutional work in order to promote effective political institutions. "Our first step then is to commit to "institutionalising" the municipal council's electoral process. This commitment will not only restore credibility to the process and its systems, but it will also pave the way to a culture of good 'public service' governance at the most basic level of local government."[685]

However, in general, municipal councils will not play an active role in society unless the citizens, business and non-governmental institutions get involved, in order to prepare an adequate environment for service provision and projects for citizens by way of structured community consensus. Municipal councils can be effective when there is an understanding and appreciation that they have a role to play as political institutions and are very closely linked to grassroots issues and to people's aspirations and concerns. They can be described as emergency centres that receive and treat all crises by coordinating with other relevant organisations such as the police, health, education and other service providers such as water and road authorities. Also, municipal councils need to be fully aware of their lead role and position in society in promoting political participation at the local level. And further, that these councils become decision makers after this role has been transferred from government institutions to citizens. As such they make decisions about the needs and concerns of citizens as decision makers and the monitoring body. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this has been guaranteed by the regime according to Article 2 of the Executive Summary of Municipal Councils issued by ministerial decree number 66866 on 14/12/2005. In addition, municipal councils need to be fully aware that their task is not limited to distributing and collecting rubbish, issuing building permits or opening new roads. These local works were certainly the core of the council's role before municipal councils were established. However, the role of municipal councils is to set objectives, shape policies, implement plans and programs, provide budgets, and monitor and evaluate their performance, thus holding councils accountable. But the position and role of municipal councils is misunderstood, despite the holding of elections as part of the democratisation process. "Municipal councils are supposed to

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[685] See, p. 247.

represent the citizens they serve and to be involved in education, health and other necessary services, rather than being restricted to dealing with buildings, local restaurants and cleanliness of the towns."[686]

Finally, in addition to this argument, as a first step to enhance institutional political reform, local work should promote the concept of neighbourhood centres, especially in big cities such as Riyadh and Jeddah. The neighbourhood includes individuals from all families and from various backgrounds who share common interests and needs such as water, hygiene and roads. This approach is the most successful and effective approach because mobilising neighbourhood centres builds people's capacity, and employs people's skills to participate at the local level in issues of public interest, and in vital areas that have a direct effect on their lives. So communities will develop by using their own resources in full liaison with their municipal councils. In fact, this approach has already been applied in the city of Jeddah where there are 10 neighbourhood centres, known as "the Neighbourhood Centres Association", with the first meeting of the board of management held on 5/7/2004. The idea of a "neighbourhood board of management" is that each neighbourhood centre will elect a representative body from the local geographical area that would represent the local community and look after its needs. The board consists of 12 elected members in addition to the sub-council mayor, a sergeant from the police station, representatives from education and health services, regional leaders of neighbourhoods plus an appointed neighbourhood centre manager.[687] Generally, as has been discussed, the main regulation sets out the responsibilities of the municipal council as the body responsible for the discussion of all issues concerning municipal tasks and for making decisions about these issues. However, the regulation has removed financial and administrative independence from councils, bringing them under the rule and scrutiny of the executive authority of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, or under the regional councils which weakens the monitoring role of municipal councils, creating major

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[686] AY, an elected member of Jeddah city council (Ay, 27/1/2007, Jeddah).
[687] Neighbourhood Centres Association in Mecca (2004) / Sub branch Board in Jeddah Province / Ministry of Social Affairs/ p. 4.

restrictive limitations to its functions. These restrictions are mainly in the following areas:

- The municipal council does not have financial independence or an annual budget within the city's regional council.
- The relationship of the municipal council with the regional council and general bureaucratic bodies is very ambiguous, due to the overlapping specialisations and administrative offices.
- The decisions made by the municipal council are not carried out unless they are approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

In general, the discussion in this chapter tells us that the Saudi Government's management of institutional political reform has been inadequate and limited, despite the fact that the experience of municipal council elections has taught councillors many lessons, mainly about developing new institutions based on elections, community participation and monitoring of the executive.

Empowering municipal councils as a political institution is not done by the mere conduct of elections. Measuring the progress of the country through a democratic transition should focus on the availability of the concept of good governance. For instance, how tightly political decision-making is controlled, how much freedom citizens have to participate, how effective political institutions are promoted, transparency, accountability and the rule of law and human rights. These elements remain essential for transitioning to real institutional political reform. As already discussed, the government's interference in the formation of the councils' membership, where the state, represented by the Ministry of Municipalities, appoints half of the councillors, takes freedom and will away from citizens. Also, this would entrench what Al-Dakhil, Saudi academic and political science analyst at King Saud University, argued in the previous chapter, that is, the idea that political and institutional reform in Saudi Arabia is still dominated by slogans and scattered achievements.

In addition, the exclusion of women, depriving them of the right to vote and to participate in the elections as a voter and as a candidate, is a significant weakness because it disables more than half the population of its voting power; this does not support good governance and political reform. The lack of women's participation is not in the best interests of municipal councils or municipalities.

As pointed out in the preceding chapter, the Saudi Government is still grappling with a dilemma; it can either promote effective institutional reform that might lead to jeopardising its power, legitimacy and interests, or it can continue to prevent or retard the growing domestic political dynamic that demands political change and reform, even though it fears this might lead to increasing violence and unrest. The following example emphasises the dilemma that exists between the Saudi Government and councillors. On January 5, 2009, Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb emphasised that municipal council elections in Saudi Arabia for the next new session in October 2009 would not be postponed.[688] At the same time, on March 5, 2009, the Prince announced that the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs was currently considering extending membership of municipal councils for a second term.[689] It is argued that such an extension might prevent some figures in Saudi society from participating and voting, particularly Saudi women, while it could also deflect criticism of conservative figures in the official religious establishment, who are considered to be significant stakeholders in Saudi politics.

The following chapter will discuss the main stakeholders in Saudi society, who play a significant role in promoting political participation in institutional political reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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[688] A. Al-Faisal, 'Prince Mansour: no postponing for the next municipal councils'. *Al-Madinah*, 5 January, no. 16693, (2009), p. 10.
[689] A. Faris, 'Maosour Ibn Miteb: a committee to evaluate the performance of municipal councils'. *Okaz,* 5 March, no. 2818. (2009), p. 4.

CHAPTER SEVEN

**STAKEHOLDERS IN POLITICAL CHANGE AND POPULAR
PARTICIPATION**

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the important stakeholders in the Saudi political landscape
who have been excluded from the government's political reform process. In addition,
it will discuss the complex relationships between excluded and co-opted stakeholders
in government sponsored reform. Among those important domestic groups who are
excluded are ultraconservative clerics and militant jihadi groups, liberal reformists,
businessmen and tribal leaders. In discussing these groups, three questions are
addressed. First, why did the Saudi Government exclude important players from being
involved in institutional political reform? Second, what sort of political reform does
the Saudi Government want? Finally, how does the Saudi Government manage the
various groups who are excluded, while maintaining domestic stability and national
unity as well as its own legitimacy?

The Saudi Government's vision of reform is a gradualist top-down approach to
liberalisation, which accommodates new stakeholders who have emerged as a result
of the modernisation process. The government's cautious approach to reform finds
support in Huntington's observation that much of the blame for disorder in many
developing countries is due to the excessive speed of mobilisation; as such excessive
speed outruns the capacity to create and develop new institutions.[690] This approach
incorporates the values and norms of Saudi society, considers social acceptance and
readiness and maintains the legitimacy of the House of Saud. At the same time it de-
legitimises its opponents, thus preventing the sharing of authority with anyone outside
the royal family. The Saudi Government's strategy to exclude significant stakeholder
groups from the reform process is an attempt to limit their influence while appeasing
and co-opting others. The Saudi Government's vision of institutional reform is the

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[690] S. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies,* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press,
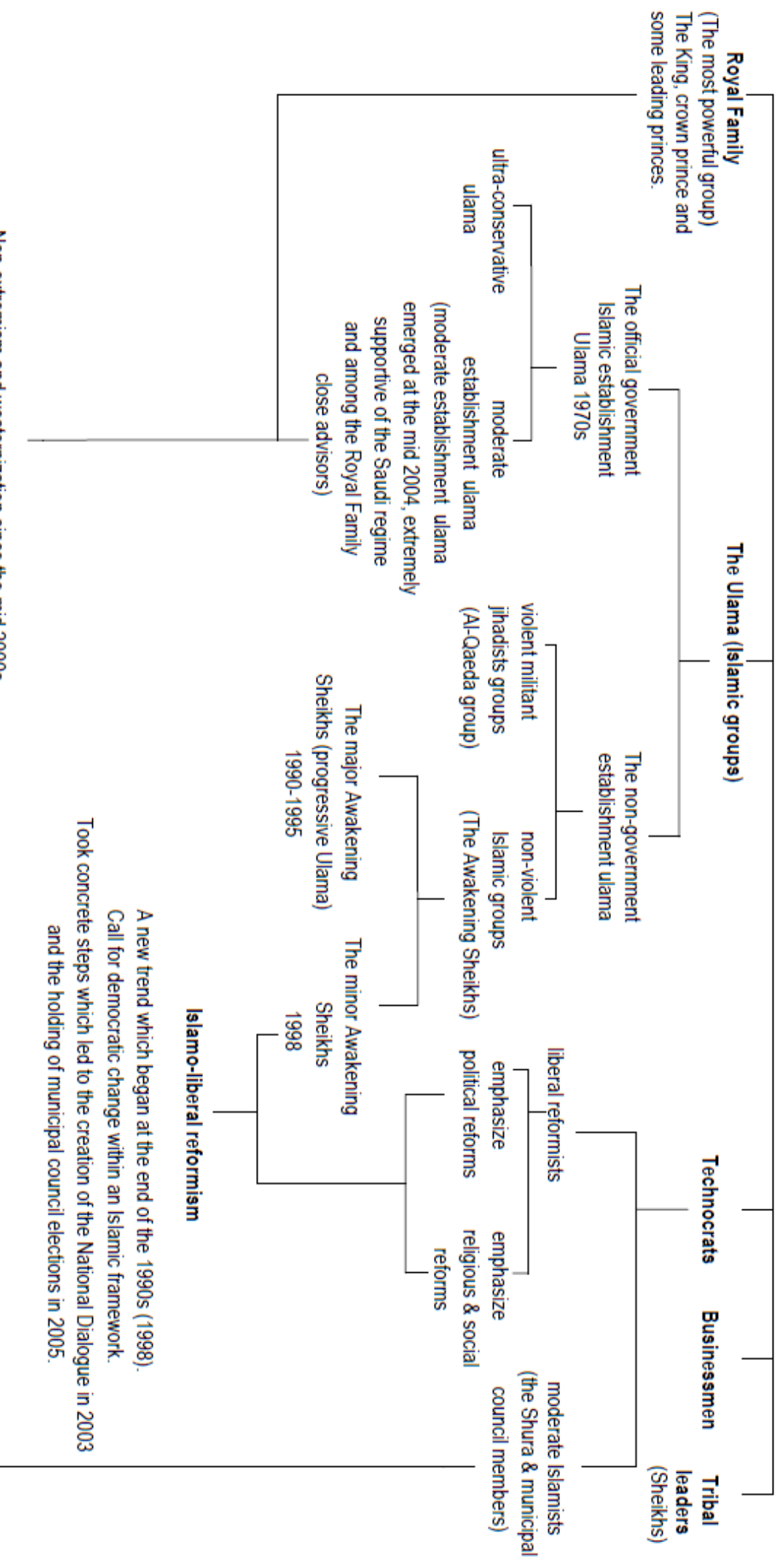1968), pp. 35-36.

province of the royal family who are advised by select moderate groups such as religious representatives in the government, other religious scholars (ʿulamāʾ) and non-cleric professionals.

The purpose of the diagram (figure 7.1) is to depict various stakeholder groups in the Saudi Arabian political landscape that have emerged during the last two decades. These groups are identified by their position, function and role in the government system. They are differentiated from each other by political, religious and cultural values and aspirations. The means with which they seek to achieve their political objectives is also critical in distinguishing Al-Qaeda from other stakeholders. Although not explicit in the diagram, the stakeholders depicted are in various ways integrated in and excluded from government, co-opted in the reform process, and yet excluded from the Consultative Council and municipal councils. Ultraconservative clerics, for example, are strategically integrated in government, especially within the legal and education systems. It shows that there are five main players in the Saudi political system: the royal family, the ʿulamāʾ and educated technocrats along with the business and tribal leaders. The royal family remains the dominant and pivotal stakeholder. Outside the royal family, the ʿulamāʾ, most notably ultra conservative clerics, are a major influence in the state's domestic policies, especially the law, religious police and women's rights. Figure 7.1 shows relations among various orientations of the broader ʿulamāʾ group consisting of ultra conservative, moderate, jihadist and Awakening Sheikhs. It also illustrates the patterns of cooperation between groups among the ʿulamāʾ and the technocrats. For instance, the influential Sahwists Sheikhs cooperated with the moderate establishment ʿulamāʾ during the municipal elections by issuing the so-called "golden list" in support of technocrat candidates from the moderate Islamists group.

This chapter comprises two sections. The first section identifies stakeholders excluded from the government's institutional reforms, examines the nature of their various relations with government and the issues emanating from those relations, and theorises on the groups' preferred outcomes. Further, the power structures and hence the ability of a particular stakeholder group to bring about reform is inherent in this

part of the discussion. The second section consists of two parts that investigate stakeholders and political change. The first part discusses relations between excluded and co-opted stakeholders involved in government sponsored reforms while the second part discusses government strategy in managing stakeholders to sustain authority and its own legitimacy.

Figure 7.1 The Key stakeholders in the Saudi Arabia political landscape

Royal Family
(The most powerful group)
The King, crown prince and some leading princes.

The Ulama (Islamic groups)

Technocrats **Businessmen** **Tribal leaders** (Sheikhs)

The official government Islamic establishment Ulama 1970s

The non-government establishment ulama

ultra-conservative ulama

moderate establishment ulama
(moderate establishment ulama emerged at the mid 2004, extremely supportive of the Saudi regime and among the Royal Family close advisors)

violent militant jihadists groups
(Al-Qaeda group)

non-violent Islamic groups
(The Awakening Sheikhs)

The major Awakening Sheikhs (progressive Ulama) 1990-1995

The minor Awakening Sheikhs 1998

liberal reformists

moderate Islamists
(the Shura & municipal council members)

emphasize political reforms

emphasize religious & social reforms

Islamo-liberal reformism

A new trend which began at the end of the 1990s (1998).
Call for democratic change within an Islamic framework.
Took concrete steps which led to the creation of the National Dialogue in 2003 and the holding of municipal council elections in 2005.

Non-extremism and westernization since the mid 2000s

Source: Aggregation of data used by the researcher from Al-Habbas (1999), Lacroix (2004), Gause (2005), Al-Tamimi (Arab News 18 March, 2009) and Beranek (2009).

Section One

7.2 Excluded stakeholders and the nature of their various relationships

7.2.1 Ultra-conservative clerics

Ultra-conservative clerics are a group of religious scholars who constitute the official religious establishment. Their religious values and attitudes relate to the Wahhabi doctrines that form the political basis of the modern state of Saudi Arabia. These Islamist groups invoke the basic concept of Islamic Shari'a derived from the Qurʾān and the Sunna. They believe that any change or reform should follow the example of the prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) and his companions (al-salaf).[691] The core of the Wahhabi doctrine refers mainly to the medieval Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya. Delong-Bas argues that Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) believed that a legitimate Islamic government had two major responsibilities: governance by Islamic law and the military defence of Muslim lands against invaders.[692] The presence of ultraconservative clerics is deep rooted through their control of large segments of the legal system, Islamic colleges, the education system, mosques and television and radio. The significance of the Wahhabi ʿulamāʾ and the role of religion in sustaining the state's legitimacy came from their frequent support of the regime, particularly in times of turmoil, by issuing religious legal opinions (fatwā), which mostly the regime invoked in order to legitimate its rule and sustain its power.

The government appoints members of the Cabinet, the Consultative Council, half of the municipal council members as well as senior administration officials. In all senior religious positions within government the ʿulamāʾ are appointed by the King. Royal patronage of senior ʿulamāʾ has not extended to appointments to the Consultative Council or municipal councils, which reflects government strategy. From their perspective, senior ʿulamāʾ do not aspire to be members of the Consultative Council

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[691] See Gause classification (2005), Chapter Two p. 38.
[692] N. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, (Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 248.

as they know the council has no power. Linjawi argues that ʿulamāʾ maintain their influence and position through the implementation of Sharīʿah (Islamic law).[693] Paradoxically, the ʿulamāʾ have been central to the legitimacy of Saudi rule, yet they have often been politically marginalised, especially from positions that are close to the king. The royal family recognises the role and influence of the ʿulamāʾ and, therefore, seeks to limit their involvement in the Consultative Council, municipal councils and cabinet in order to strengthen government control. Herb argues:

> Ibn Saud surrounded himself with advisers, many of them foreigners ...Only two classes of men had any sort of hope of claiming these offices: Ibn Saud's advisers, and his sons. The advisers—foreigners derived their power from their royal patron, and not from groups within Saudi society[694].

The ʿulamāʾ supported the government in defending the Makkah Mosque in 1979 and during the Gulf War (1990-91). Their support was to maintain their position of authority, fighting change and preserving their influence. The armed attack on the Grand Mosque in Makkah by clerics seeking to support conservative values created a crisis of legitimacy for the Saudi regime. Part of the Saudi regime's response was to accommodate the ultraconservative ʿulamāʾ demands for a more conservative Islamic rule that served to protect both the ruling family and ʿulamāʾ influence. Government response was to embrace ultraconservative clerics instead of confronting them; for example, the former King Fahd (1921-2005) changed his title in the early 1980s from "Your Majesty" to "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques". However, the attack on the Grand Mosque exerted pressure on government policy makers, which in turn forced them to re-evaluate the ʿulamāʾ, particularly the conservatives, as central players in political change and reform. Thus, the ultraconservative clerics were empowered in government, particularly in the educational sector. Okruhlik observes:

> Throughout the 1980s, religious conservatives were entrenched in institutions, as evidenced by university funding and in the expansion of the religious bureaucracy, both of which the state funded generously even during the mid-

[693] H. Linjawi, "Societies in transformation: Iran and Saudi Arabia", PhD dissertation, Howard University, 2006, p. 212.
[694] M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 88, 91.

decade downturn in oil revenues. The Islamic universities....continued to grow even as other programs were cut back.[695]

The deployment of foreign coalition troops during the second Gulf War generated two opposing views within the religious establishment. The conservative ʿulamāʾ who supported the government's decision to accept the deployment of foreign troops, while the progressive ʿulamāʾ (the Awakening Sheikhs), were critical of government and proposed their own agenda of political reform in 1992, the so-called "memorandum of advice agenda" (*Mudhakkirāt al-nāṣiḥa*).[696] The agenda was important because it was handed to King Fahd by Ibn Baz (1912-99), the conservative head of council of senior ʿulamāʾ and highest ranked muftī. However, when the Saudi Government rejected the memorandum, the council of senior ʿulamāʾ, including Ibn Baz, changed their opinion and agreed with the government position. These developments enhanced the power of ultraconservative clerics. Although, it empowered the role of the ultraconservative ʿulamāʾ as the main source of legitimacy for the regime and the deployment of foreign troops, this created a progressive group among the religious establishment, the Awakening Sheikhs, who were prepared to criticise the government.

A decade later, the events of September 11, 2001 created another crisis of legitimacy for the Saudi Government. The United States, the government's close ally, considered the event as an act of war against America and the majority of the hijackers were Saudi citizens. Some argued that the hijackers were supported by certain religious figures in the Saudi Government, particularly concerning their source of funding.[697] The government's response to the events of September 11, 2001 further entrenched the ultraconservative clerics' political power by extending their control over mosques. These clerics both supported the Saudi Government and were forthright in their anti-American views, at a time when the US was urging government reform. On the pretext of internal security, conservatives used their power to obstruct reforms,

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[695] G. Okruhlik, "The Irony of Islah (Reform)", *The Washington Quarterly* (2005), p. 157.
[696] R. Aba Namay, "Constitutional Reform: A Systemization of Saudi Politics," 1993, p. 50 & M. Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent,* New York: St Martin's Press, 1999, p. 22.
[697] See Ammoun (2006), Chapter Four, p.114.

particularly in relation to the educational system and women's rights. For example, Professor Al-Rashid, the Minister of Education, was ousted from the cabinet in 2005 when he said that physical education was good for the health of female students and did not represent anything that violated Sharīʿah (Islamic law); Dr Abdullah al-Ubaid, a graduate of the Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, replaced him.[698] This change of ministry was followed by a change of policy that generally aimed to empower and placate religious authorities. Okruhlik argues that:

> Through late 2004 when fear of state retribution for political activism declined....religious television programming has increased significantly. The regime has made dubious moves, jailing reformists, appeasing conservative religious authorities, empowering the social sahwa, and frightening the vast majority of the population into silence.[699]

The conservative clerics continued to use their power to hinder reforms by imposing their own agenda and were successful in this endeavour until 2005. The key points in this conservative agenda were as follows:

- policy reform must be in strict accord with Shari'a and Sunna law;
- resistance toward any truly independent judicial system that might threaten their privileges and prestige in the legal system[700];
- resistance toward the notion of a written constitution (dustūr). They believe that only the Qurʾān could be called a constitution[701];
- control of the country's educational system, particularly girl's education[702];
- a lack of interest in supporting women's rights, particularly in membership in the Consultative Council, voting for elections, appearing on state television and driving cars[703]; and

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[698] See Chapter Five, p. 194.
[699] Okruhlik, op cit, p. 164.
[700] J. Russell,. '"In defence of the nation": Terror and reform in Saudi Arabia' (2003). Available [Online]: http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/oct03/middleEast2.asp [17April 2009].
[701] Aba Namay, op. cit., p. 44.
[702] Russell, op. cit.,
[703] *Ibid.,*

- prohibition of any media, particularly satellite television stations that show content deemed immoral.[704]

The above discussion demonstrates the influence of ultraconservative clerics as important players who reject policy changes that may decrease their influence. The agenda of some ultraconservative clerics supported the government, while other aspects wanted less change than the government was willing to permit. This situation empowered them to impose their agenda concerning reform and change, especially in relation to the social sphere. The problem of this group is that since the inception of the state, the ultraconservative agenda has depended on resisting and marginalising any moderate policies that government want to promote and implement. And since the mid-2000s this platform of conservatism, especially in relation to the religious police – an institution that has provoked heated public criticism due to several allegations of abuse – has not been acceptable for the government or the majority of increasingly educated Saudis, who identify with the norms of the international community. An example of the difference between ultraconservative clerics and government was when the chief of Civil Defence in Saudi Arabia issued orders to his staff to employ the "regulatory use of force" against anyone attempting to impede firefighters or rescue workers entering any site of disaster, especially girls' schools and women's organisations.[705] In fact, the ultraconservatives still have some support and legitimacy in different regions, especially in the Najd and Asir regions where the majority of the population are nomadic. Hegghammer observes:

> The regions commonly viewed as socially and religiously conservative (often described in Western media as "hotbeds of extremism"), such as the central region of Qasim, or the southern regions of Asir, Jisan and Baha[706].

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[704] "Scholar issues edicts calling for prosecution of prominent Saudis", *Gulf News*, Dubai, 3 February 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.gulfnews.com/News/Gulf/saudi_arabia/10290934.html. [17 April 2009].

[705] M. Al-Shehri, "Civil Defence to 'use force' at any site to save lives", *Saudi Gazette*, Jeddah, 22 March 2010. Available [Online]: http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2010032267082 [25 March 2010].

[706] T. Hegghammer, "Terrorist recruitment and radicalization in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 13, no. 4, (2006), p. 42.

Generally, public dissatisfaction with ultraconservative clerics is evident, especially among the majority of increasingly educated Saudis who seek to distance government from ultraconservative clerics. Educated Saudis consider the agenda of these clerics as not being compatible with government policy of gradual reform and political change together with regional stability.

There is no doubt that there is a relationship between democracy and political, institutional, cultural and ideological change and the maintenance of political stability. In order to implement the government's vision of political reform, while avoiding extremist views and risking instability, ultraconservative clerics need to be both accommodated and marginalised. These clerics are dependent on royal patronage for their position, yet they resist the government's modest reforms. There is a paradox of mutual dependence between the government and the religious establishment. This dependency comes from the circumstances and events on which the government's legitimacy depends. Since the mid-2000s, the tensions between ultraconservative clerics and the government, together with the intractable position of the former, allowed the emergence of moderate ʿulamāʾ, who are less inclined to be rigid on Islamic issues and more supportive of government policies. This reflects Lacroix's observation, noted in Chapter Four, of an emerging flexibility in Wahhabi doctrine, the so-called Islamo-liberal trend.[707]

However, it seems that ultraconservative clerics remain central players, especially in matters relating to domestic social issues. Thus, they have social significance and this is reflected in their resistance to the government's modest reforms. This occurs while Saudi Arabia is an Islamic polity, with its constitution mainly based on Sharīʿah (Islamic law) and the core of its legitimacy derived from the ʿulamāʾ. What we have tried to emphasise throughout this chapter is that the Saudi Government seeks other sources of legitimacy and support, beside the religious establishment, especially in a society with raising expectations generated by rapid modernisation. This will

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[707] S. Lacroix, 'Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists', *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 58, no. 3,(2004), pp. 345-365.

empower the Saudi Government to face the resistance from the conservative ʿulamāʾ which opposes change and reform, even if there is mutual dependence between them.

Generally, since the mid-2000s, there have been several factors that led the Saudi Government to become estranged from the ultra conservative ʿulamāʾ. First, the reform process grew out of the government reacting to circumstances rather than being driven by the ultra conservative ʿulamāʾ. Second, the government moved towards the moderates as shown by its appointments to the Consultative Council and municipal councils. Third, the estrangement of ultra conservative clerics came at a time when the government was working enthusiastically with the United States administration to counter religious extremists, something which was done in order to demonstrate that Saudi Arabia continues to be an important partner for the US, especially in counterterrorism.

There have been a number of cases in recent years that have illustrated the tensions between the official religious establishment and the government, especially relating to the influence of ultraconservative clerics of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (the Muṭawwaʿīn or religious police). A crucial point came in a November 2007 court case regarding a woman from the city of Qatif who had been gang raped. However, the woman received a more severe judgement than one of her assailants because she was meeting a man who was not a relative in public when they were attacked. This case created widespread condemnation, especially when the Minister for Justice not only approved the ruling; he then doubled the woman's punishment because of undue media attention.[708] This matter was resolved in December 2007 when the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah, issued a royal amnesty for the girl. Of equal concern to the Saudi Government in 2008 was when the head of the Supreme Judicial Council, Sheikh Salih Al-Lihedan, issued a fatwā saying it is permissible to kill the owners of satellite TV stations that show content deemed to be immoral or decrease

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[708] H. Al-Shihry & A. Al-Ahmary, "A recommendation to double the punishment of the "girl of Qatif"'", *Al Watan*, Jeddah, 15 November 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/newsdetail.asp?issueno=2603&id=29063 [18 May 2009].

the domination of religious television programs. This fatwā was denounced across the Arab world.[709]

Concerning the religious police, this organisation has in the mid-2000s been seen by many Saudis as a force opposed to liberalisations proposed by the Saudi Government. Some describe its members as having a mandate to interfere in people's lives or as being a government inside the government. Sheikh Al-gaith, the new head of the Muṭawwaʿīn said, "We will try to be close to the heart of every citizen. Their concerns are ours".[710] However, Saudi Arabia has recently witnessed many examples of the religious police criticising government. Such examples demonstrate their extremist and limited vision, which believes that many social events such as conferences, forums and book fairs can lead to a violation of religious and moral values, especially if they involve women. An example of unwarranted police behaviour took place at the 2009 Riyadh Book Fair, where two well-known male Saudi authors who asked a female author to autograph copies of her new book were accosted. The police officer took the books off the men and instructed the woman to sign them. On returning the books, a male author was again admonished for thanking the woman, and the two men were then taken to a commission office and charged with "talking to an unrelated woman".[711]

These examples of intervention by the muṭawwaʿīn, which they consider to be protection of the Islamic values of Saudi society, created public criticism of these

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[709] "Tiptoeing towards reform". *The economist,* 21 February 2009. volume 390 no. 8619. P. 48-49. Available [Online]: http://0-web.ebscohost.com.library.vu.edu.au/ehost/detail?vid=8&hid=11&sid=04a88442-1913-4b58-9871-3c9ffe220baf%40sessionmgr14&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=aph&AN=36622091 [2 March 2009].

[710] J. Fleishman, "Saudi Arabia's King Abdulla appoints moderate to key posts", *Los Angeles Times*, 15 February 2009. Available [Online]: http://articles.latimes.com/2009/feb/15/world/fg-saudi-shuffle15 [20 May 2009].
[711] A. Mishkhas 'Always under a shadow of suspicion', *Arab News*, Jeddah, 10 March 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=120099&d=10&m=3&y=2009. [19May 2009].

ultraconservative standards, especially among Saudi intellectuals. For instance, to demonstrate how rigid these standards were, in a symposium held in the capital Riyadh in 2010 the muṭawwaʿīn demanded that the government deploy surveillance cameras in the markets to protect Islamic values; however, the suggestion was rejected by a wide range of writers and the local press.[712] Also, a conservative Saudi cleric issued a fatwā on his website in 2010 prohibiting the mixing of the sexes in Saudi society, warning that anyone who advocated this practice was an enemy of Islam and should be killed. This matter created strong criticism within Saudi society, which led the government to shut down the website.[713] The decisive role of ultraconservative views is in relation to religious faith, mainly in order to preserve the role of clerics and their influence on society while rejecting any fundamental reform or change. In general, these views are not compatible with the efforts of the Saudi Government to balance domestic and external pressures for reform and change while at the same time maintaining internal political stability. Furthermore, they are not compatible with the moderate line that the Saudi Government has been trying to take since the mid-2000s in order to achieve rapprochement between Islam and the West while promoting its reputation globally. Prince Naif, Deputy Premier and Minister of the Interior asserts: "At the international level, Saudi Arabia is now held in high esteem. Saudi Arabia was the only Arab country that took part in the G-20 meetings...and this shows its important position."[714] The Saudi Government has sought to limit the influence of powerful ultraconservative clerics in order to limit the harm to the country's growing reputation.

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[712] T. Al- Sahail 'The symposium of morality returns the file of markets control to the face'. *Asharq al-Awsat,* 29 March 2010. Available [Online]: http://www.aawsat.com//details.asp?section=43&issueno=11444&article=562997&feature= [10 May 2010].

[713] T. Al-Sahail 'A member of the Saudi senior ulama council: it's not allowed to decreeing one as unbeliever in un-consensus issues'. *Ashraq Al-Awsat*, 26 February 2010. Available [Online]: http://www.aawsat.com//details.asp?section=43&issueno=11413&article=558766&feature= [10 May 2010].

[714] 'Kingdom making all-out progress, says Prince Naif'. *Arab News*, Jeddah, 20 June 2009 Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=123850&d=20&m=6&y=2009. [20 May 2009].

However, in 2009 in an s unprecedented step toward change and reform, King Abdullah removedʿulamāʾ ministers, who had held their positions for decades and whose attitude was unchanged for a half century.[715] Most significantly, the King replaced the Minister of Education with his son-in-law, Prince Faisal bin Abdullah, a former assistant director of intelligence.[716] He also appointed a woman, Noora bint Abdullah Al-Fayez, to serve as deputy minister for women's education for the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia.[717]

However, several questions that arise in the absence of any real political reform that might give all stakeholders, except militant ones, the right to participate in public affairs and organise themselves politically are: Would the continued exclusion of these ultraconservatives from the institutions of political reform create risks for political stability? Also, is their exclusion the only or best solution that guarantees political stability? In the long term, if the Saudi Government feels threatened by events such as the 1979 attack on the Grand Mosque in Makkah by conservative clerics, considered as one of the greatest threats the country has ever faced since its inception in 1932, what could the government do? In 1979 it appeased and empowered the very forces that currently pose a great challenge to them, but in the future to whom will it respond? Will it appease the ultraconservatives again? Hence, are we still inclined to repeat the experiment of the early 1980s? This leads us to think that the existence of political institutions that give all stakeholders the right to participate in public affairs is the best option for change because the alternative is democratic practice (political stability) that mostly assimilates all stakeholder groups.

7.2.2 Militant jihadist groups

This section discusses militant jihadists, called "the deviant militant group" by the Saudi Government and who are, without doubt, excluded from official government

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[715] In section two, the researcher will explore the recent sacking in more detail.
[716] A. Al-Asmary, 'Hopes renewed from the reshuffle of Saudi Cabinet', *Saudi Gazette*, Jeddah, 21 July 2009. Available [Online] http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2009021729534 [23 July 2009].
[717] 'Nora Al-Fayez: A veteran educationist'. *Arab News*, Jeddah, 15 February 2009, p. 2.

and politics in Saudi Arabia. The militant jihadists first became known in the Kingdom in 2003 and were called Al-Qāʿidah fi al-jaz īrah al-ʿarabiyya (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, QAP). This group seeks to overthrow the Saudi regime by violent means. The roots of QAP go back to the central Al-Qaeda organisation that was created by Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan during the 1980s. As the central organisation was discussed in Chapter Four, the discussion here will focus on how the QAP relate to the ultraconservatives and others in the official religious establishment, as well as whether the militant's motivation is essentially anti-American or anti-regime.

In the diagram of the Saudi political landscape illustrated earlier in this chapter, the militant jihadists are classified as one of the Islamist groups. It is true that ultraconservative clerics and the militant jihadi come from the same Wahhabi school of Islam founded by Mohammed Ibn Abd al Wahhab, who called for a return to the pure beliefs of Sharīʿah (Islamic law) and Sunna. As noted above, ultraconservative clerics do not support reform or social, cultural or religious change, but they prefer to stay close to the Saudi regime and not challenge its legitimacy. In contrast, the militant jihadist groups, while advocating a return to the Islamic text, do not support the Saudi regime but rather label it as profane and its leaders as 'infidels' as well as seeking the overthrow of the royal family. Ultraconservative clerics mostly do not believe in utilising force or violence to support their beliefs. Instead they issue fatwā, which are mostly opposed by militant jihadists, while the tactics of militant jihadist groups depend on using violence and other radical means in order to realise their aims and resistance toward the West. Concerning their position on the Kingdom being allied with the United States, the so-called 'anti-Americanism' in the Arabian Peninsula and the difference between them, ultraconservative clerics oppose US and Western cultural, social and religious influence but accept political and economic relations between the Saudi Government and the United States. However, militant jihadist groups not only reject US influence in all forms, but also strongly oppose any US existence or presence on Saudi soil, especially in relation to the Saudi oil sector, which remains a priority target for these groups. The ultraconservative ʿulamāʾ group is integrated into government policy making and administration, while militant

jihadist groups are never involved, despite the fact that they have tried to influence Saudi Government policy. For instance, as mentioned in Chapter Four, when in the early 1990s Osama bin Laden tried to persuade King Fahd to deploy a Muslim force of "Mujahedin fighters" to repel the Iraq army from Kuwait, instead of using non-Muslim American troops, his suggestion was rebuffed, causing him to fall out with the Saudi Government. More recently, the Council of Saudi Ministers decided to extend the term of existing municipal councils to two years from October 31, 2009.[718] The decision to postpone the elections might be to do with the domestic security situation that the government faces, especially the threat posed by the deviant militant group. Prince Nayef, the second Deputy Premier and Interior Minister, argues: "These reports show that Saudi society is totally against the deviant militant group and will not allow them to operate within the Kingdom".[719] Recently, in a statement made in March 2010 by the Interior Minister, it was announced that Saudi Arabia had arrested dozens of QAP members who were planning attacks on energy and security facilities in the country. The Ministry's spokesman said: "We have compelling evidence against all of those arrested, that they were plotting terrorist attacks inside the Kingdom."[720] This illustrates that these groups from QAP are still intent on launching a violent campaign inside Saudi Arabia, under the pretext of jihad, to weaken and topple the regime. These terrorist actions give the Saudi Government the right to reject allegations of abuses on human rights levelled at the government's anti-militant campaigns by Amnesty International. For instance, a report by Amnesty International (2009) accused the government of Saudi Arabia of using its campaign against terrorism as a facade for a sustained assault on human rights activists as thousands of

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[718] 'Local councils' term extended by 2 more years'. *Arab News*, Jeddah, May 19, 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=122678&d=19&m=5&y=2009. [22 May 2009].

[719] N. Adlan, 'Ministry clarifies news reports on Gitmo returnees'. *Arab News*, Jeddah, 26 January 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=118540&d=26&m=1&y=2009. [22 May 2009].

[720] A. Al-Oraifij, 'Kingdom nabs 113 Qaeda men'. *Saudi Gazette*, Jeddah, 25 March 2010. Available [Online]:
http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2010032567358 [27 March 2010].

people were arrested and detained in uncertain circumstances.[721] However, a Saudi Interior Ministry official denied allegations of human rights abuses in the Kingdom, stating that "Our policies on human rights are very clear and the orders given are for prisoners to be treated with respect and according to international human rights principles".[722]

The political ideology and political agenda of the QAP has a relationship with the concept of jihad in Islam in general. There are three types of motivation behind jihad: political, religious and personal.[723] In Islam, jihad (holy war) is a fard kifayah (a collective duty), required of those who fulfil the requirements established by God: submission to Islam; maturity; financial ability; free status; the intent to remember and serve God in this endeavour; and having a good moral character. Also, the purpose of jihad is the protection and aggrandisement of the Muslim community as a whole, not for personal gain or glory, which means that it is not undertaken individually as contemporary extremists (the militant groups) have done. Furthermore, despite there being a serious debate among Muslim countries concerning scenarios where jihad might be implemented, most agree that it should be undertaken when the imam calls for it. The imam, a political leader who enjoys a special religious status, is the only authority who can declare jihad.[724]

However, concerning the three types of motivation for jihad activities – political, religious and personal – the most commonly cited among the jihadist groups is political motivation, considered a pre-condition for religious legitimacy.[725] Most terrorist actions have a strong political dimension and, from a Saudi perspective, are related to external developments such as military invasions and the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus the political ideology of most militant jihadist groups,

[721] A. Cowell (2009), 'Rights Group Accuses Saudi Arabia of "Gross" Abuses', *The New York Times*, 22 July 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/23/world/middleeast/23amnesty.html [28 April 2010].
[722]*Ibid.*,
[723] Hegghammer, op. cit., pp. 51-52.
[724] Delong-Bas, op. cit., pp. 201-203.
[725] Hegghammer, op. cit., p. 52.

including the QAP, were not initially hostile to the Saudi regime but rather were against American involvement in the Kingdom and US presence on Saudi soil. This related to the concept of "expel the polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula",[726] and led them to challenge the legitimacy of the Saudi state. Furthermore, they never produced a significant violent offshoot, unlike many of the other Islamic movements, such as the violent Islamist groups in Egypt and Algeria. In relation to this point, Hegghammer argues:

> For the same reasons, the political ideology of the Saudi jihadist movement has been more pan-Islamism than socio-revolutionary . . . What is conspicuously lacking in modern Saudi Arabia history is Islamist violence directed against the civilian government . . . The Kingdom has witnessed moderate regime-critical Islamism; but unlike the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) in Algeria . . . Even the QAP campaign launched in 2003 was fuelled not primarily by discontent with the regime, but rather by extreme anti-Americanism.[727]

However, Hegghammer's argument about there being limited hostility by the deviant militant groups toward the Saudi Government is, to some extent, not true while the government of Saudi Arabia still suffers from the attacks of deviant groups such as QAP, especially after American troops withdrew from the country in 2003. In addition, despite its close relationship with the United States, Saudi Arabia has been trying to diversify its alliances since the mid-2000s. For instance, China now has more involvement in the Saudi oil sector. So this raises the question: Why are there still outbreaks of hostility against the Kingdom's rulers? The answer concerns the main points of the political agenda of militant jihadist groups which focus on Beranek's argument[728] namely that the QAP has vitriolic aims: to overthrow the rulers

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[726] The quotation is from the hadith and is a saying of the Prophet Muhammad. The hadith is collection of *Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 2,932; also found in the hadith collection of *Sahih Muslim*, no. 3,089. *Sahih al-Bukhari & Sahih Muslim* are the two collections among the "six books" that today make up the Sunni *hadith* cannon.

[727] T. Hegghammer, 'Islamist violence and regime stability in Saudi Arabia'. *International Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 4, (2008), p. 705.
[728] O. Beranek , 'Divided we survive: A landscape of fragmentation in Saudi Arabia' (Crown Centre for Middle East Studies, January No. 33. 2009, p.3). Available [Online]: http://www.brandies.edu/crown. [23 March 2009].

of Saudi Arabia; to commit violent actions toward 'the West', especially the United States; and to engage in terrorism.

The Saudi Government is more challenged by militant, young Saudi jihadist groups than at any time since the early 2000s, even though it has begun a strategy of counter terrorism, including rehabilitation programmes (Al-munāṣaḥa). It is true that these militant groups do not have a clear reformist vision, but their extremist ideas are mostly derived indirectly through issues such as unemployment and education. They have skills to use the internet, mosques and cell phones to recruit young Saudi tribal people and weaken the Saudi leadership. A ministry spokesman observed: "[the] deviant group is benefiting from elements inside the country helping it to carry out its criminal plans.... Those arrested are between 18 and 25 years of age".[729] So stabilising the country will not only happen by implementing substantial economic reforms and building new cities, but by winning over young men's minds, something which the Saudi Government has been trying to emphasise since the mid-2000s.

7.2.3 Saudi liberal reformers

These reformers are another group excluded from the reform process. There is a difference between the liberals, who are always demanding political reform and change, and moderate Islamists who were appointed to the Majlis al-shūrā and elected to municipal councils. The fact that the liberals and moderate Islamists are mostly western educated does not necessarily mean they have the same ideology, beliefs and concepts concerning reform. For instance, from the point of view of the Saudi Government, the liberals want a voice in the reform process in order to agitate for greater political participation and social Westernisation – something that would erode the government's power and the country's faith – while moderate Islamists support the Saudi reform agenda and prefer the political status quo.

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[729] Al-Oraifij, op cit.

Beranek further argues that there are two factions of the liberal reformist movement: religious and social reformists demanding modernisation, and political activists who want a constitutional monarchy, an elected parliament and protection of human rights[730]. Our discussion in this section will consider the nature of the exclusion of liberal reformers by the royal family and their response to the government reforms, focusing on political activists. However, a brief explanation concerning the definition and evolution of the liberal reformist group is necessary. The liberal reformists commonly have been called secularists (Al-ʿilmāniyūn) by their Islamist opponents. According to Dekmejian, "liberalism in the Saudi Arabian context should be understood as a relative term to denote a reformist ideology derived from the practice of Western liberalism, although without reference to its foundational philosophical principles".[731] Hamzawy describes the liberal reformists as "non-violent dissenting groups" who mostly consist of secular-minded lawyers, university professors, intellectuals, political activists and journalists.[732]

As discussed in Chapter Four, the limited role of the liberal reformers was evident during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The limitation was due to circumstances faced during these decades, such as the Islamic revival of the 1970s and the rise of extremism in the 1980s. The liberals were constrained by the government, which described them as being influenced by Western ideology unsuitable to Saudi culture. This constraint continued even after the return of the liberals in the early 1990s, having been marginalised for more than three decades. The liberals engaged in a struggle with Saudi Islamist groups, particularly with ultraconservative clerics of the religious establishment. As discussed by Aba Namay, the Gulf War crisis generated opposing Islamist and liberal views within Saudi society.[733] These differences of opinion were not only limited to the Islamists and liberals but also extended to the

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[730] Beranek, op. cit., p. 4.
[731] R. Dekmejian, 'The liberal impulse in Saudi Arabia', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 57, no. 3, (Summer 2003), p. 401.

[732] A. Hamzawy, "The Saudi labyrinth: Evaluating the current political opening", *Middle East series, April* 2006, no. 68. p. 7.
[733] See Chapter Four p. 104.

royal family, especially since the late 1990s. The royal family is comprised of both progressives, supported by King Abdullah (whilst still Crown Prince), and conservatives, mainly drawn from the late King Fahd's full brothers.

Despite the return of the liberal trend in the early 1990s and its impact on the reform process, its influence among Saudi society was limited. Al-Rasheed argues that despite the Gulf War creating a climate of openness (infitah) that encouraged the Liberal's petition,[734] "the petitioners did not form an organized group with a clear political agenda nor did they represent a secular trend in Saudi society".[735] The impact of the petition on Saudi society was muted by the Gulf War crisis. Dekmejian commented:

> The King's decision represented an unprecedented opening to the outside world that placed enormous pressures on Saudi society and its traditional beliefs and lifestyles. This dynamic milieu of externally induced crisis and relative openness provided the impetus for the re-emergence of Saudi liberalism[736].

This might mean that the presence of the Saudi liberals was also limited in the 1990s, especially as it is known that during the nineties the liberals were not well organised as a group. Darwish argues that Arab Gulf states, through the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) of which Saudi Arabia is a member, do not have what one can describe as a well-organised political opposition to pursue their demands and it is still a long way before they can be considered agents of change in the Gulf.[737] Thus, the liberal stakeholders lack the institutional means to pursue their political reforms and they do not have a common leader as Ottaway observes: "the absence of organized

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[734] See Chapter Four, concerning the main point of the agenda of the Saudi liberals, submitted to King Fahd in 1992 by forty-three prominent Saudi liberals including businessmen, journalists and government officials.
[735] M. Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia,* London, 2002, pp. 168-169.

[736] Dekmejian, op. cit., p. 403.
[737] M. Darwish, 'Tinkering here and there'. *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 29 December 2005. Available [Online]: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/775/re181.htm [24 May 2009].

constituencies bringing sustained pressure for democratic change has allowed the process of political reform to slow or be reversed".[738] Hamzawy agrees:

> The lack of institutionalization in parties or opposition in Saudi Arabian movements as well as the absence of organized constituencies outside the urban educated elite makes liberal reformists highly vulnerable to repressive measures and easy to target individually.[739]

The basis of the liberal reformist agenda is the introduction of limited support for the Saudi Government's gradualist agenda, criticising the political status quo while seeking wider and deeper representation within the Saudi regime. Also, in order to achieve reform or modernisation they seek to reduce the influence of religious authority over society, especially in areas such as the religious education system and the role of women in public life.[740] This agenda was widespread during the early 1990s and has mostly continued until the present day. For the Saudi Government the agenda was a warning bell, particularly when liberal reformists started to criticise the government and raise serious questions concerning the right of government to rule after mismanagement of the economy and an inefficient defence system proved unable to withstand an assault from Iraq. Consequently, the appointed membership of the first four Consultative Councils (1993-1997) was predominantly well-educated technocrats, categorised in this analysis as 'moderate Islamists'. The appointments followed no pattern of geographic or tribal distribution. Naturally no dissident groups, including liberal reformers, were appointed.[741] This was the first exclusion of liberal reformers since the 1990s.

In the last decade, particularly in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Saudi Arabia has been subjected to external pressure and liberal reformers have developed two main strategies. The first strategy was to mobilise popular support for their demands, especially in the field of culture, curriculum development and women rights while the

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[738] M. Ottaway, *Democracy and constituencies in the Arab World*. Carnegie Papers, no.48, 2004, p. 6. Available [Online]: http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/CP48.Ottaway.final.pdf. [25 May 2009].
[739] Hamzawy, op. cit., p. 7.
[740] See the other important points (Chapter Four, pp. 104-105).
[741] M. Viorst, 'The storm and the citadel,' *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 75, no. 1, (1996), pp. 93-107.

second strategy was to obtain the ear of the moderate faction of the royal family.[742] Dekmejian agrees:

> Caught between these countervailing external and internal pressures, the Saudi leadership moved to relax controls over public discourse triggering an unprecedented outpouring of opinions.[743]

However, agitating for greater political practice and social Westernisation was not successful in some contexts. As discussed in Chapter Four, the early 2000s saw the opportunity for liberals to pursue support actions with a series of petitions. The demands expressed in the various petitions placed the liberal reformers again in conflict, not only with ultraconservative clerics but also with powerful conservative elements within the ruling family, as Russell notes:

> It is impossible to know the depth and breadth of support for the petitioners. As a group, their demands for a constitutional governmental system that addresses the issue of women's rights places them on the left side of the conservative Saudi political spectrum and at odds with the religious establishment. And, loudly proclaiming their demand for an end to corruption places them on a collision course with powerful elements within the House of Saud.[744]

However, the liberals were undisciplined in their approach and issued ideological petitions. For instance, statements such as "Islam needs a Lutheran reform", and "we need a new Islam",[745] were very provocative and counterproductive. The inability of the liberals to present a clear picture of a future Saudi Arabia as a constitutional monarchy, or to articulate a process of reform to mobilise popular support, demonstrates their incompetence in dealing with reform. Generally, the liberal approach toward reform lacked credibility for implementation and their argument mostly focused on criticising Islamists on women's issues. In fact, since 2003, the

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[742] Hamzawy, op. cit., p.7.

[743] R. Dekmejian, 'The liberal impulse in Saudi Arabia,' *Middle East Journal*, vol. 75, no. 3, (2003), p. 404.

[744] J. Russell, 'In Defence of the Nation": Terror and Reform in Saudi Arabia'. *Strategic Insights.* (2003), Available [Online]:
http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/CCC/publications/OnlineJournal/2003/oct03/middleEast2.html
[24 May 2009].

[745] S. Lacroix, 'Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists,' p. 353, 2004, quoting al-Nuqaydan.

liberal reformers were treated harshly for their activism, with up to a dozen people banned from teaching or travelling and imprisoned for between six and nine years. Prince Sultan, second Deputy Premier and Minister of Defence and Aviation argued that: "By demanding reforms overlooking social reality, they are actually trying to put the wand of Moses in the government's hand and this is not possible".[746] Some of the most important criticisms made of the liberals were that they used "Western terminology" in formulating their demands, questioned the king's role as head of the judiciary system, collected signatures for a petition and exploited the Kingdom's battle with Al-Qaeda terrorists for political gain.[747]

The dilemma of liberal reformers is mostly unrelated to the absence of well-organised constituencies, which is in agreement with Ottaway's observation cited earlier. Instead, it refers to their ideological beliefs and impact on the Islamic faith. This strengthened the government's resolve to exclude any political group that seeks to weaken its grip on political power and marginalise its moderate approach to reform. This was noted in the 2005 municipal council elections where the winners included many moderate Islamists. It is true that access to the voters was limited for liberal candidates in comparison with moderate Islamists. However, there is no doubt that the moderates not only benefited from the government's view of reform and change, but also from the support of the Awakening Sheikhs.[748] Nevertheless, Batarfi's point that "Western-minded Saudi liberals should know that Islam is in the DNA of every Saudi, and that's a fact of life" holds true.[749] In response the liberals might argue that over the last decade, and especially the last five years, they have witnessed a new trend calling for democratic change within an Islamic framework, called "Islamo-liberal

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[746] P. K. Abdul Ghafour, 'Kingdom Will Go Ahead With Reform Plan: Sultan', *Arab News*, Jeddah, 8 August 2008, Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=49540&d=8&m=8&y=2004. [24 May 2009].
[747] R. Qusti, 'Democracy won't be imposed', *Arab News*, Jeddah, 21 June 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=65731&d=21&m=6&y=2005 [24 May 2009].

[748] See the argument concerning the so-called 'political smell' (Chapter Six, p. 231).
[749] K. Batarfi, "Elections and the golden lists", *Arab News*, 1 May 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=62986&d=1&m=5&y=2005. [24 May 2009].

reformism" by Stephane Lacroix. This indicates that the liberals have acknowledged that an ideological line is still part of the reform process and that they are more aware of the importance of Islamic tenets for all Saudi citizens, something which they might take into account when expressing their dissent in future.

However, in the long-term, compromising the Saudi moderate method by incorporating the values and norms of Saudi society might be a barrier for the liberal reformers to pursue their promises to bring further substantive reform.[750] Prince Naif bin Abdul-Aziz, Minister of the Interior, told the Saudi-owned London daily, *Al-Hayat*, that any reform must maintain "our principles", which is a code word for the status quo for the governing royal family.[751]

7.2.4 The business community

The business community are important stakeholders who have been excluded from the reform process by the Saudi Government. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, historically this community had a significant commercial role in Arabian Peninsula society before the inception of Saudi Arabia in 1932. This role was most apparent in the Ḥijāz area.[752]

The merchant community helped to consolidate the unity of the country at its inception, particularly financially, even if this role was domestically limited concerning the source of subsidisation. However, the role and influence of the merchant community in socio-political aspects of Saudi Arabia was marginalised in the 1970s. This was the period of an oil boom that witnessed the rise of oil prices and gave importance to the concept of the rentier state economy at that time. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, the importance of the rentier state economy was due to the effective contribution it made to the state becoming financially

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[750] 'Audit bureau seeks king's support for its mission'. *Arab News*, Jeddah, 20 April 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=121728&d=20&m=4&y=2009 [24 May 2009].
[751] N. Raphaeli , 'Demands for reform in Saudi Arabia', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.41, no. 4, (2005), p. 529.
[752] W. Bowen*, The History of Saudi Arabia*, (London: Greenwood Press, 2008) p. 101.

dependent on external revenues, whereby the state is the main collector and distributor in order to marginalise local revenues that might come from the merchant class. "The business community is becoming increasingly marginalised as a result of the oil boom by the royal businessmen, who use their influence to amass great fortune".[753] It is unclear how much the royal family owns or what its private wealth is as no published statistics are available, but some scholars indicate that most of the economy is under their control. Cordesman argues that approximately 2000 princes already play an active role in the economy. Many play a substantive role in government or business. Saudi Arabia's economy and political stability has thus suffered from a failure to demarcate clearly the powers and rights of members of the royal family. There have been royal abuses of government funds, property rights, and contracts.[754] However, part of the princes' influence might relate to the royal family's policy of countering the re-emergence of an independent business class. Champion argues:

> By the 1960s the aspiring commercial-industrial elites of the Hijaz had formed the social basis of the newly created national market; previously independent business communities were utterly transformed into a dependent corporate group with strong institutional ties to the economic ministries...But, by the time the Hijazi merchant elites had established themselves as the Kingdom's pre-eminent socioeconomic group, their position was already being undermined. The stage had been set for the definitive ascent of an entirely new socioeconomic formation: the Najdis.[755]

This government business ascendancy in order to consolidate the traditional system of rule, while keeping the country under tight control, led to widespread corruption and favouritism in the economic sector which threatened the reform process. "Corruption is hindering and in some cases threatening the reform program. Many Saudi officials

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[753] F. Aldamer, "Economic, social, and political developments and their impact on the role of the state: A case study of Saudi Arabia," Ph.D. dissertation, Manchester University, 1995, p. 252.

[754] A. Cordesman , *Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century: The Political, Foreign Policy, Economic, and Energy Dimensions*, (2003), p. 142.

[755] D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform* (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), p. 90.

benefit from the existing order and in some cases actively hinder reform".[756] According to Champion, "although the Al Saud has been successful in maintaining a generally stable government and their own legitimacy in the eyes or the majority of the Saudi population, all has not gone smoothly".[757]

The main agenda of the merchant community can be discussed as three key points. First, there is no doubt that there are some common aims in the agendas of the stakeholders who are excluded – the business class and liberal reformers. One of the most important demands is to reduce the influence of religious authority on Saudi society. They seek to do this through having a constitution and private individuals joined this debate by signing the 1992 petition.[758] At that time, the petition was considered a bold step by the business class and an indication of its wish to return or resume its previous role and influence in formulating state domestic policies, a role they had lost in the seventies. Second, also on the agenda of the business class was to weaken or not support government economic reforms. One of these reforms was called "Saudisation", which meant to liberalise, diversify and privatise the Saudi economy in order to create more private sector jobs for young Saudis.[759] According to Russell, the merchant community had much to gain and lose in the economic reform process. For instance, within the reform agenda, the global economy threatened to put some of them out of business and questioned the existing level of economic accountability.[760] When the participants were questioned on the existing level of economic accountability, AB, western-educated and a well-known Ḥijāz businessman replied:

> Transparency requires detailed and precise reforms . . . because the laws may not
> be appropriate to the foreign companies who work in the Saudi Kingdom and
> may not guarantee their entitlements are met . . . The Kingdom should adhere to
> the international standards... However, in the private sector, such as the banking
> system, this level (of accountability) is much higher . . . because they deal with

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[756] A. Cordesman & N. Obaid, *National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges*, (2005), p. 377.
[757] D. Champion, op cit., p. 76.
[758] Aba Namay, op. cit., p. 52.
[759] A. Cordesman & N. Obaid, op cit.
[760] J. Russell, op. cit.

external standards and regulations in their transactions. So it is very important to have an independent monitoring body that is effective and has clearly set standards and transparency (AB, 12/1/2007, Jeddah).

Finally, the business class reform agenda included weakening the hegemony of the royal businessmen over the economy, a hegemony which saw royal businessmen amass great fortunes and which marginalised the business class. Ibrahim al-Afendi, a major figure in the Jeddah business community, argues:

> You talk extensively about reform. If you really want reform you have to start with the ruling family's incompetent princes who control the highest positions in the state.[761]

In brief, the business leaders' agenda for reform gives limited support to the Saudi Government agenda. It is interested in having the private sector more represented in government decision-making, especially regarding economic issues, in eliminating waste and corruption, having greater accountability and transparency, having respect for the law by all Saudis and decreasing royal hegemony over most of the private sector.

It should be noted that the business class, as an excluded group, do not participate meaningfully in the political debate as the ultraconservative ʿulamāʾ and liberal reformers have done. Those seeking wider representation within the Saudi regime are reactionaries who oppose change or agitate to preserve and extend their power. This was noted in recent municipal council elections where the presence of the business class was very limited in comparison with the moderate Islamists, despite the wealth and widespread nature of the influence of the business class. Similar to the liberals, the business class is fragmented along regional and social lines and lacks organisational structures, despite the presence of chambers of commerce. As discussed in the previous chapter, Osama Jamjoom, one of Jeddah's oldest and biggest business families, was among the defeated candidates. So when Jamjoom was

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[761] N. Raphaeli , "Demands for reform in Saudi Arabia", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 41, no. 4, (2005), p. 523.

asked about his loss, he explicitly mentioned the poor presence of the private sector among voters. He states:

> I would not lodge any complaint against the seven winners...We respect the decision of voters. I wish the winners every success, urged them to fulfil the trust reposed in them by the public.[762]

However, this discussion points toward several areas where grounds can be found for the exclusion of private sector activists from government decision-making. Historically, the traders were a formidable part of Saudi society, and as noted from the discussion, there is evidence that sections of traders treated the royal family with suspicion. Freed of criticism from the group, especially the merchant families of the Ḥijāz and Najd districts who may possibly support the militant dissidents, the government could also pursue its own economic agendum.[763] The business community also resents the government's policy of Saudisation and is concerned about the inadequate education of many Saudi school leavers. The government is concerned about the risks of unemployed and disaffected youth being attracted to crime and terrorism.

In all developed economies, democratic or constitutional monarchies, the business class is the driver of the nation to the extent that its flexibility and reaction to global markets rules the way in which economies work. Legislation and regulation are intended to guide the business class, not suffocate it. Saudi Arabia uses the international private sector for its development; Saudi funds assisted world economies during the global economic crisis, and Saudi oil influence is obvious by the country's invitations to participate in global forums like the G-20. Yet these signs are ephemeral acceptance if the global community does not believe government is pursuing structural reform that is not a façade. Thus the exclusion of the business community in

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[762] M. Ahmed& A. Mirza, "Golden list' men sweep polls", *Arab News,* 24 April 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=62688&d=24&m=4&y=2005 [25 August 2008].

[763] Russell, op cit.

public decision-making militates against unreserved international acceptance of Saudi Arabia.

7.2.5 Tribal leaders: Sheikhs

As discussed in Chapter Three, to bring the tribes under control, the founder of the Saudi state, King Abdul-Aziz, undertook several deliberate socio-political strategies aimed at undermining the identification with tribes among nomadic Saudis in order to enhance his own central authority. Champion states that "neo-tribal" might … define Saudi Arabia today, since tribalism continues to permeate the society even as the young nomadic state continues to consolidate and modernise".[764] In this section, the discussion will focus on how and why the Saudi Government excluded tribal leaders from being politically involved in the reform process when their power had already been weakened. The discussion will explore whether the policy of exclusion is related to the revival of tribal identities among nomadic Saudis.

Dating back centuries, Sheikhs have been a significant force in Saudi affairs. In contemporary Saudi society, it is true that the nature of tribalism has been reduced from what it was as a result of government policies and other factors, such as oil revenues and rising standards of living. A number of factors help explain the contemporary revival among tribal identities. First, the government's practice of making public service appointments as well as appointments to senior government positions from certain tribes has stimulated the revival of identities among tribes that have not benefitted from this government patronage. This has tended to reinforce a tribal sense of belonging at the expense of loyalty to the nation. Dr Amin Saati, a Saudi columnist, explains:

> What is needed from the government is it should adopt equal opportunity principles in employment and recruitment for all Saudis, to treat all citizens equally and to stop distributing positions and employment opportunities on tribal

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[764] D. Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform*, London. 2003, p 70.

and ethnic bases because this practise has set the first flame that had reinforced tribal bonds and favouritism versus patriotic loyalty and belonging.[765]

Second, growing prosperity during the 1980s and 1990s enabled many younger Saudis of tribal background to acquire higher tertiary degrees and qualifications. Some of these educated young Saudis did not obtain employment in keeping with their education and, as a result, have felt marginalised and alienated and have instead cultivated their tribal identity. Third, the government has sought to promote Islamic identity, especially of the Wahhabi School, as the focus of Saudi identity. The revival of identification with the tribe suggests that the government's promotion of a Saudi Islamic identity has not been entirely successful. Finally, access to contemporary information technology platforms – the internet, mobile wireless telecommunications and television – have been the vehicle for the promotion of tribal identities among the younger generation. Dr Abdullah Ghadhami, a Saudi intellectual, states:

> The Internet, with all its vast array of websites and techniques, has given its users absolute freedom of expression, and full liberal personal expressions without the fear of any blame… Undoubtedly the internet has allowed freedom of publications, the elimination of monitoring and censorship, it has also opened very dangerous doors to all devilish desires existing in humans. It has become the free space for both the good and the bad… This is how prejudice has generally become widespread and in particular tribal prejudices and fanaticism.[766]

Despite the Saudi Government's endeavours to absorb tribalism, tribal leadership and weaken the tribal fanaticism of Saudi society, it has failed to establish an alternative political culture, which has led to the contemporary revival of tribal fanaticism among young nomadic people. Rapid economic and social change has provided tribal youth with the chance to express themselves and to be proud of their past tribal way of life. This is noticeable in tribal websites and TV channels, especially in relation to issues such as the establishment of claims to nobility as well as tribal heritage and prestige, something which otherwise might threaten social cohesion. "A lot of people in Saudi

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[765] A. Saati. 'Our homeland or tribe...the matter is very serious', *Aleqtesadiah*, 15 February 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.aleqt.com/2009/02/15/article_196210.html [11 May 2010].
[766] A. Ghadhami. 'Tribe and society', *Al-Riyadh*, 25 October 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.alriyadh.com/2007/10/25/article289086.html [11/May/2010].

Arabia refuse to identify themselves as Saudi citizens and claim a much more noble origin than that of the others".[767]

Rivalries among tribes and tribal identities persist. Since the early 2000s, Saudi Arabia has witnessed an increasing number of Saudis using internet websites and TV channels; this is especially true among the young nomadic people. These networks were mostly established as a result of the absence of a strong political culture, represented by civil society institutions and accompanied by improvements in educational and financial systems. Tribal fanaticism threatens social unity and harmony of the country. According to Dr. Bader Kerayem, a member of the Saudi Consultative Council, the number of electronic tribal fanaticism websites is more than 3000. The websites threaten social cohesion and unity. They incite prejudice, put poison to honey and promote pride in tribes and their knights, wars and battles throughout history, enticing racism and tribal hatred and sectarian dissent.[768] It is not uncommon to find that each tribe has dozens of websites, for example, Hael in the north of the Kingdom. Regarding this issue, Dr Fayez Shahri, an Internet researcher, sees the increase of websites that encourage tribal fanaticism and prejudice as thinking that takes people back to the old times of ignorance. Regarding the website focus on tribal honour and the chivalry of knights, Shari asks: "Will this behaviour provide the tribe with power and influence?" and states: "There should be a cultural awareness education to the citizens to promote patriotic feelings rather than tribal and sectarian loyalty, and to put the nation first and to keep to the tribe its role in the positive aspects that it had carried out throughout history without it overriding the national interest".[769] Dr Mohamad Al Zalfa, a former member of the Saudi Consultative Council proclaims unity against division. He says: "I don't deny that the Saudi society was based on the tribal system ... this has changed when fears, famine, looting and threats have been overcome. However, this fact does not necessarily mean

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[767] Beranek, op. cit., p. 6.

[768] B. Kerayem, 'Tribal fanaticism who emergence it from death'. *Okaze*, January 15, no.15482, (2009), p. 11.

[769] M. Al-Awad, 'Academics and specialists: electronic tribal fanaticism is a disease eating away the body of the national unity'. *Okaze,* Jeddah, January 3, no. 15470, (2009), p. 10.

tribal prejudice and sectarianism, but to the contrary, it should mean that all tribes should be loyal to the nation and not against the nation".[770]

The use of contemporary information technology platforms to revive tribal identities has, paradoxically, added to the marginalisation of tribal leaders, and in this case, within their own tribal communities. The websites and TV channels are in the hands of younger educated members of tribal communities. This marginalisation of tribal leaders within their own communities is a factor in addition to the government's exclusion of the leaders from the institutions of political reform. The tribal leaders are left with their traditional dispute resolution and marriage broker roles.

Concerning the agenda promoted through tribal websites and TV channels, during his visits to some randomly selected tribal websites, the researcher noticed hundreds of websites attributed to some of the major Najdi tribes, such as Utaybah, Mutary, Harb and Qahtan. The debates on the websites mostly follow one common agenda and refer to issues such as maintaining solidarity, the tribal forefathers' bragging, nobility or tribal heritage, self-sufficiency and past military prowess. Concerning the TV channels, the author noticed that there is a TV program focusing on young tribes called "The Millionaire Poet". This program provides evidence that new life can continue with old ways of thinking and traditional ideas bringing back old characters in a modern way, which is very serious and dangerous. Yahya El Amir, a Saudi columnist states:

> What is happening today with the satellite TV channels through the program "The Millionaire Poet" is not merely a poetry competition. It is however, a reselling and promoting the old Bedouin lifestyle that revolves around concepts and issues that jeopardise the cultural and political loyalty towards the state and city. Talking again about bravery, gallantry and equestrian audacity, heroism and power, in most poems featured in this TV program.... These ideas overrun the ideas of the state, the nation and the city. One of the candidates say: "What is important for me in this competition is not my poem, nor is it my fans, what I'm interested in is just the tribal solidarity. Then he mentions the name of his tribe… The main problem is that all participants are young men, this means that people are living under the influence of the past rather than dealing with contemporary

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[770] *Ibid*, p. 10.

issues. This rhetoric discourse about heroism, audacity and cavalry is unacceptable in our days. It brings back to the community the concepts of the ignorance era…"[771]

Also, in his writing to *Elaph*, the electronic newspaper, the Saudi Minister for Culture and Information, Dr. Abdul-Aziz Khojah, cautioned about this new phenomena saying that the nation is above the trends and right is above fanaticism. Khojah states:

> It has been brought to my attention, recently, as a reader or as a receptor of various media, that some parties, from different attitudes and movements, have turned away from the high moral values of dialogue and its noble purposes and use dialogue to revenge or to send offensive messages and insults… to solve unresolved disputes… to achieve false glory and victory… at the expense of the unity of the country and the public interest. However, these values have collapsed in the mind of the audience or readers, or, it will collapse! What I want to say is that the Nation is above the trends… Right is above fanaticism… and dialogue is not a conflict field..![772]

It is true that at present the Sheikhs' agenda seems to have no political influence, as explained in Chapter Three, because the founder of the current Saudi state, King Abul-Aziz, was able to dismantle the tribes as independent political entities. But the huge importance of tribal solidarity as shown by these websites, especially among Saudi youth, may in future destabilise the political system. However, in order to avoid the impact of tribal fanaticism Prince Naif, Deputy Premier and Minister of the Interior, approved the launch of a Chair for National Unity Studies to promote and sustain nationhood, especially among Saudi youth.[773] This academic position aims to promote research that will enhance national unity rather than tribal identities, religious extremism, terrorism or westernisation.

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[771] Y. El Amir. 'The Millionaire Poet…enjoyable or concerning!' *Al-Riyadh,* Riyadh, 16 March 2007. Available [Online]: http://www.alriyadh.com/2007/03/16/article233328.print [2 May 2010].

[772] 'Let's not forget: Dialogue and not conflict', *Elaph*, 1 May 2010. Available [Online]: http://www.elaph.com/Web/news/2010/5/557333.html [2 May 2010].
[773] M. Abu Zahir. 'Chair of Prince Naif for national unity adopt the tribal websites'. *Riyadh Newspaper*, Riyadh, 8 April 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.alriyadh.com/2009/04/08/article420803.html [30 May 2010].

Religion and tribalism play a significant role in the political identity of the Saudi ruling family and have done so ever since the first Saudi state, the result of a deep-rooted alliance between tribal and religious factors. This shows that the relationships between the ruling family and tribal leaders is very strong. Al-Rawaf argues that many tribesmen, however, go frequently to see members of the royal family for personal demands, making use of the strong connection with the royal elite.[774] Also, when a member of Saudi security forces was killed by terrorists near the Saudi border with Yemen in 2009, Prince Muhammad Bin Naif, Assistant Deputy Minister of the Interior for Security Affairs, visited the soldier's village in the south of Saudi Arabia to offer the government's and his own condolences to the martyr's Sheikhs and family, an act which demonstrates deep relations between the royal family and tribal leaders.[775] In addition, as a result of militant activities since the mid-2000s, younger members of tribal communities have become involved in jihadist militant activities. This involvement led Saudi forces to kill Yousuf Al-Shahri, one of the young tribal militants. However, the tribal leader of Yousuf Al-Shahri expressed, along with his tribe members, their deep sorrow and apologised to the royal family, not only for the involvement of some of their younger members in jihadist militant activities, but also condemning any act that will affect the legitimacy of the royal family.[776]

What is strange in this situation is that with strong relations between the royal family and tribal leaders they are still excluded from representation, which leads to the question of should not this great relationship lead to the inclusion of tribal leaders in decision-making? However, when looking at the historic links between these two groups, this exclusion from decision-making only exists to maintain the strong and

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[774] O. Al-Rawaf, "The concept of the five crises in political development-relevance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1980, p 330.

[775] F. Al-Rubai. 'Emir visits martyr's family', *Saudi Gazette*, Jeddah, 15 October 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2009101551549 [15 May 2010].

[776] K. Al-Awfi 'The Elder of bani Jubair Tribe: Prince Muhammed Bin Naif returned him from Guantanamo and provided him with rehabilitation and married him off; and then Terrorism took him away from us', *Al-Riyadh*, Riyadh, 20 October 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.alriyadh.com/2009/10/20/article467822.html [15 May 2010].

important image of the royal family in front of tribal leaders. Also this exclusion is one of the factors in the revival of tribal solidarity or fanaticism. For instance, the absence of tribal leaders from political representation frustrated tribal youth and led them to look for another networks such as websites and TV programs to absorb their aspiration for representation and self-expression. There is a readiness among Saudi youth in general to be involved in issues that may not only dilute nationhood and national unity, but also affect the government's legitimacy. The question is to what extent will the strong historical relationship between tribes and the royal family continue while the government faces growing tribal fanaticism and militant groups? As discussed earlier in this chapter, the short term rehabilitation programmes for militants that began in the early 2000s may help the government, at least among the Sheikhs. From the point of view of the Saudi Government, the government's rehabilitation program has been successful in combating violent extremist sympathies, especially through innovative prisoner re-education. Also, the rehab program has created a favourable impression in the international community, after negative impressions of Saudi Arabia created by the September 11, 2001 attacks. Prince Naif argues: "This program has won the admiration of the security authorities in various countries... This is a scientific work that will benefit those who are working in rehabilitation programs...We are still facing terrorism. We are working day and night to detect and prevent terrorist acts".[777]

It is the view of some Saudi intellectuals that the effectiveness of the program is still limited. Dr. Madawi Al-Rasheed, a Saudi university professor in London and a leading Saudi opposition columnist, believes that the failed attempt to kill Prince Muhammad Bin Naif in late 2009 by young jihadist who had been involved in the rehab program for militants demonstrated the limited influence of the soft counter-terrorism strategy.[778] However, the government may not be focusing on militant

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[777] Y. Mohammad. 'Media urged to play vital role in fight against terror', *Arab News*, Jeddah, 30 March 2010. Available [Online]: http://arabnews.com/saudiarabia/article36664.ece [18 May 2010].
[778] M. Al-Rasheed. 'Saudi Arabia: the dimension of failed attempting assassination', *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, London, 31 August 2009. Available [Online]: http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2009/08/08-30/qra.pdf [18 May 2010].

groups, but also on the affect this will have on tribal communities, particularly the Sheikhs.

Hence the tribal factor has a link with the revival of tribal identity and the mobilisation of support for militants, especially that the tribal factor pervades Saudi society. As discussed in this section, the militant jihadist groups strongly oppose any US presence. Among tribal youth, a radicalism has developed along with the cultivation of zeal, bravery, fanaticism and military prowess, which are values that militant jihadists can appeal to in order to recruit followers. Many of those involved in the 11 September 2001 attacks were from tribal backgrounds. Militant jihadists can also draw on an older tribal tradition: the Ikhwān movement's opposition to King Abdul Aziz' cooperation with the British in the 1920s and the attack on the holy mosque in Makkah in 1979. The tribal youth and militant jihadists share anti foreign sentiments; anti-royal family views are more obvious among militants. [779]

There are two aspects of the government's exclusion of Sheikhs from its reform process. First, this exclusion was designed to keep them from being involved in issues that may demonstrate the government's incompetence and which could lead them to assume a less favourable view of the royal family. Second, the exclusion of the Sheikhs allowed the Saudi Government to avoid any representation of unskilled and un-well educated people in political institutions. This was shown by the reform that permitted half of the municipal council to be elected and half appointed. More extensive electoral reforms, especially in relation to the Consultative Council, raised anxieties in the Saudi Government that unskilled and non-educated people might be elected to high political positions. Hussain Al-Qatari, a Kuwaiti columnist, describes the situation in the Gulf States where there are elections that have facilitated broader participation and the revival of tribal identities. Al-Qatari postulates:

> Let's assume that a certain tribe has two candidates running for elections ... One of them is a university professor, and the other one is a school guard who can barely read and write. The professor comes from a branch that has less

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[779] Hegghammer, op. cit., p. 43.

population in the constituency, while the school guard has a larger number of relatives. Do you know who wins in this case? The illiterate school guard. Voters in primaries do not look at qualifications: they look at ancestry.[780]

These considerations explain why the Saudi Government seeks to minimise the role and influence of tribal communities by excluding them from the reform process. The government's fears relate to the spread of tribal fanaticism among young Saudis, which it believes makes them vulnerable to the appeals of Islamic radicalism. However, the promotion of tribal fanaticism is not just the result of individuals clinging to their tribal, religious and national traditions, but it is also a consequence of government endeavours to prevent its citizens from adapting culturally to the twenty-first century. The author believes that change in Saudi Arabia is more compatible with modern global trends that encourage democratic practice and enhance the meaning of nationhood. *Time* magazine journalist, Robin Wright, argues that there is a "Islamic soft or quiet revolution" taking place among young Muslims. He explains:

> The new revolutionaries are synthesizing Koranic values with the ways of life spawned by the Internet, satellite television and Facebook. For them, Islam, you might say, is the path to change rather than the goal itself...Even in Saudi Arabia, the most rigid Muslim state, the soft revolution is transforming public discourse...[781]

However, while Saudi society in general has witnessed rapid urbanisation and significant social change, young Saudi tribal activists are seeking the means to express themselves.

It is argued that the policy of excluding tribal leaders from the reform process needs to be revised. The re-emergence of tribal fanaticism, for example, is why the Saudi Government should reconsider its policy exclusion. In comparison with Saudi Arabia's neighbouring countries, such as Iraq and Lebanon, tribalism can have the

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[780] H. Al-Qatari. 'The difficulty in breaking away from the tribe', *Kuwait Times*, Kuwait, 10 April 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=MzcyMjU3MTY4 [15 May 2010].
[781] R. Wright, 'Islam's soft revolution'. *Time Magazine*, 30 March 2009, vol. 173, no. 12, pp. 34-36.

same effect as so-called "sectarianism" which has a significant influence on political stability and national unity in Iraq and Lebanon. So while the researcher partly agrees with the Saudi Government's policy, but with the quiet revolution Wright identified, the political presence of tribal activists might be more effective in sustaining the government's approach to reform. This will placate the tribal activists and empower the government to strengthen national unity by controlling critical issues, especially "electronic tribal fanaticism". Generally, this situation has created a complex relationship between the central players, which has required the Saudi Government to re-think its policy about excluding groups from the reform process in order to sustain its own authority and legitimacy.

The following section in two parts will discuss the relations between excluded and co-opted stakeholders and how the government has tried to play-off reactionary excluded groups and compliant co-opted groups in order to balance domestic competing pressures for change and reform, while maintaining political stability and legitimacy.

Section Two

7.3 Government sponsored reforms

The previous section discussed the stakeholders excluded from the reform process. This exclusion policy means that many voices in society are not heard, especially in the Consultative Council and municipal councils. This section seeks to discuss relations between excluded and co-opted stakeholders and government intervention.

The terms "excluded" and "co-opted" groups will be used to describe various stakeholders in the Saudi political scene since the mid-2000s. The term "co-opted" refers to those who in general support the government agenda for reform, that is, moderate ʿulamāʾ and moderate Islamist technocrats. The term "excluded" refers to those seeking wider and more significant representation within the Saudi regime, as well as reactionaries who oppose change or agitate to maintain and extend their power.

Part one

7.3.1 Relations between excluded and co-opted stakeholders

7.3.1.1 Moderate and conservative ʿulamāʾ

These two groups are the most intriguing of all excluded or co–opted groups, mainly due to the link they have with each other. Both groups represent the same school of Wahhabi doctrine and thus have a great deal in common. Moderate ʿulamāʾ represent the newer, more modern school of Islam. They are less inclined to take a rigid approach on Islamic issues or take extremist responses and their clerics are in a position to advise on state policy. In contrast, conservative ʿulamāʾ hold onto their way of thinking and their ideas or relationship to the community do not change. Conservative ʿulamāʾ take an extreme position of advocating a return to Islamic texts, which is incompatible with the views of the Saudi Government that wishes to relax repressive legal and religious conditions. At the same time, both groups complement and rely on each other; moderate ʿulamāʾ need conservative ʿulamāʾ to strengthen their influence over society. In addition, moderate ʿulamāʾ use reactionary ʿulamāʾ to try and influence government decision-making. While conservative ʿulamāʾ believe this is a phase that government will pass through, ultimately returning to a more conservative position, they are happy to be represented by the moderates instead of other groups, especially the liberals. However, despite this complex situation, both moderate and conservative ʿulamāʾ are equally marginal stakeholders, especially in certain government policy issues such as foreign relations, oil production and economic planning.

7.3.1.2 Liberal reformers and moderate Islamist technocrats

These two groups are quite similar to moderate and conservative ʿulamāʾ. Liberals and moderates come from the same background and enjoy a Western education. Another common factor is that they originate from similar positions in the top echelon of Saudi bureaucracy; however, both liberals and moderates vary in their interpretation of ideology, beliefs and concepts concerning reform. This is important as it explains why they are divided into reactionary and moderate or compliant groups. There are a number of reasons for this division, the most obvious being that

moderates have lost their interest or hope in fighting with the government on what they see as a losing matter, whereas liberal reformers do not totally agree with this viewpoint. In the absence of any political institution for an opposition, liberal reformers base their ideology for reform on waiting for opportunities to arise that may lead to massive or unavoidable change, such as the second Gulf War (1990-91) or September 11, 2001. However, this is not the case with moderates who think that if the above two events do not lead to massive change, then nothing will. Therefore moderates came to the conclusion that joining forces with the government to avoid being treated harshly is better than opposing government, as it may lead to small changes which make them feel more secure.

7.3.1.3 Tribal leaders and ʿulamāʾ

Relations between these two groups are very interesting because of their co-dependency and their mutual and significant role in the establishment of the Saudi state, yet both remain politically marginalised as independent political entities. Also, for the ʿulamāʾ and tribal leaders, the modernisation process is playing a significant role in changing their followers. However, while tribal leaders do not form an elite group like the ʿulamāʾ, they still articulate their views mainly through the ʿulamāʾ, who use the tribal leaders to influence and maintain their hold on the community, while tribal leaders need the ʿulamāʾ to emphasise their traditional tribal interests. This is an important point because the shared political goal of both groups is to ensure the continuity of the royal family. This is shown by the fact that ʿulamāʾ and government have had close relations since the birth of the Saudi state. As for tribal leaders and the government, their relations date from the earliest measures taken by King Abdul-Aziz, when tribes became a great internal ally for government. To describe this development in context between the royal family, ʿulamāʾ and tribal leaders, Aldamer states:

> The first Saudi state had been created in the eighteenth century when most of central Arabia's tribes were welded together by religious zeal (Wahhabism)

which justified along ethical and cultural lines the subsequent extension of Al Saud's power over the Arabian Peninsula.[782]

From this we can deduce that both the ʿulamāʾ and tribal leaders need and depend on each other in terms of common aspiration and goals, that is, both want the status quo and government to remain in control. The government has tried to divide this group into those who are excluded and those who are included, in order to maintain control. Thus, concerning the reform process, tribal leaders are excluded in order to contain the development of tribal fanaticism. Within the ʿulamāʾ, some are co-opted while others are excluded in order to avoid creating reactionaries who might take the country backwards.

Part two

7.3.2 Government strategy in managing the stakeholders

This study demonstrates that policy initiatives of the Saudi Government for political reform are being pressured from two sources: the liberals, who want a voice in reform, and conservative clerics who will stop at nothing to impose their control. Beside these two groups, the moderate Islamists and moderate ʿulamāʾ are included in the government-established Consultative Council and municipal councils. Both the moderate Islamists and moderate ʿulamāʾ seek to work with the government to further political reform.

The relationship between Saudi Government policy and excluded and co-opted stakeholders is complex. As mentioned above, the government pitches excluded stakeholders against co-opted stakeholders. At times the government uses ultraconservative clerics to counter the political ideas of liberal reformists. At other times, the government uses liberal reformists and moderate ʿulamāʾ to counter ultraconservative clerics; this became clear after the events of September 11, 2001 which paved the way for municipal elections in 2004-05. This policy was promoted

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[782] F. Aldamer, "Economic, social, and political developments and their impact on the role of the state: A case study of Saudi Arabia," Ph.D. dissertation, Manchester University, 1995, p. 76.

309

brilliantly, especially when King Abdullah ascended the throne in 2005, and brought about change in the political dynamic of Saudi Arabia's political system by using co-opted stakeholders, the moderate ʿulamāʾ, to counter the excluded groups, ultraconservative clerics, liberal reformists and tribal sheikhs.

Since the mid-2000s, the groups who were accepted as extremely strong advocates for the Saudi Government were the moderate ʿulamāʾ and moderate Islamists. Moderate ʿulamāʾ advisers enjoyed close relations with the government, who benefited from increased political legitimacy through fatwās to fight extremism within Saudi society, which threatened not only the security of the country but the monarchy. Prince Khaled Al-Faisal, Emir of Makkah argues: "Each trend has its agenda basically aimed at marginalizing the Saudi moderate method to consolidate the moderation policies".[783] The other accepted advisers, the moderate Islamists, have contributed their knowledge and skills in the Consultative Council since 1993 and also within municipal councils.

Those who have been rejected as advisers are ultraconservative clerics who strive to maintain or extend their structural power and the implacable liberal reformers. Nevertheless, ultraconservative clerics are still part of the government and are used in times of crisis, as are the moderate ʿulamāʾ, for their ability to influence religious discourse generally. Other stakeholders such as the business class and tribal leaders are ignored; nevertheless, they are available on demand by the government when deemed necessary. The business class is useful to the government, whether externally or internally, especially internally, concerning the case of Saudisation. Perceived threats to the royal family's hegemony are derived from opposition from excluded groups, the ultraconservatives and liberal reformers. The royal family sees ultraconservatives as wanting to strip the country of its wealth while liberal reformers want to reduce government power.

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[783] S. Al-Serahi, "Khaled stresses consolidation of Saudi moderation policies", *Saudi Gazette*, 18 March 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2009031832473 [17 March 2009].

There are several examples of the Saudi government playing off co-opted groups against excluded groups to sustain its legitimacy. When the King chaired a religious conference in Madrid in 2008, for example, and there was a challenge from conservative scholars who did not want the King to attend; the challenge was repudiated by the King who cautioned against extremism. The King, in his speech to the conference, cautioned against the forces of extremism, injustice and darkness that often seek to exaggerate and exploit differences between cultures and societies for the purpose of instigating conflicts and wars: "We are a nation with a sublime mission and a deeply rooted cultural heritage. Our religion urges us to embrace the principle of dialogue and to cooperate and coexist in peace with others... You will find these forces in panic when they feel that there is an effort to engage in dialogue and promote understanding instead of confrontation and rivalry. These same forces know that dialogue is the effective way to abort their evil plans".[784] The King was supported in these statements by the Grand Muftī of Saudi Arabia and the secretary-general of the Muslim World League, both of whom are government moderates. The Grand Muftī, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Aal Al-Sheikh, said: "We cannot live in isolation. We need to cooperate with others to make the most of advancement in all aspects of life. Dialogue is deep-rooted in our culture ... Islam has clearly explained the principles of dialogue and areas where dialogue is prohibited. The Prophet's guidance is the best example of translating and achieving this dialogue". Dr. Abdullah Al-Turki, secretary-general of the Muslim World League (MWL), said: "The aim of the conference is for us to get to know each other and look for ways to cooperate".[785] These leaders are both religious moderate scholars who have been consistent in their support for the Saudi Government. A further example of playing off various stakeholders concerned the early 1990s non-violent Islamic group, Sheikhs of the Islamic Awakening. In 2009 group leaders Al-Audah and Al-Hawali accepted that the

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[784]P. K. Abdul Ghafour, 'Dialogue will remove mistrust: King', *Arab News*, Jeddah, 16 July 2008. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=4&section=0&article=111879&d=16&m=7&y=2008. [2 May 2009].
[785] M. Haque, 'Inter-faith dialogue a significant step', *Saudi Gazette*, Jeddah, 23 July 2008. Available [Online]:
http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=200806239957 [3 May 2009].

issue at hand related to Islamic societies that are not politically but culturally orientated, and that modernisation was a valid alternative to fundamentalism.[786] Extremists can be removed from office to placate moderate advisers and avoid attacks in the media. As noted in section one, the government dismissed the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (Muṭawwaʿīn). Al-Audah was a non-violent Islamic activist but is now a moderate and close to the government who approved the change.

Furthermore, in a bid for inclusion for the first time in the history of the country since its inception in 1932, the King named representatives of all four major Sunni Islamic schools of religious law to the council of ʿulamāʾ, the leading clerics of the country, who were previously only represented by the Hanbali School.[787] Dr Mohammed Al Zulfa, a Consultative Council member, approved the inclusion of all four schools into the decision-making process. Through this inclusion, the King sent a strong message to the overwhelming majority of Sunni that their schools of thought would get due representation at the helm of affairs in the kingdom's apex of religious bodies.[788] Dr Naif Al Mutairi, a professor of political science, applauded the new appointments[789] which were also popular with the media: "This is the true start of the promises of reform," said Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi columnist: "They bring not only new blood, but also new ideas".[790]

Concerning liberal reformers, these groups are treated diffidently by the Saudi regime who views them as a quasi-opposition in their demands, especially for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. The lack of a defining role for the liberals

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[786] S. Al-Maymouni, 'Al-Audah: I'd rather be called a doctor than a sheikh. Religion promotes life not death' *Al-Watan*, no. 3123, 18 April 2009, p. 2.
[787] Reported by *Saudi Gazette*. 'Boost for reform'. 15 February 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2009021529322. [2 May 2009].
[788] A. Shaheen, 'All schools of thought represented' *Gulf News*, Dubai, 17 February 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi_arabia/10286168.html. [4 May 2009].
[789] *Ibid*.,
[790] J. Borger, 'Saudi Arabia appoints first female minister', *The Guardian*, 16 February 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/feb/16/saudi-cabinet-woman-minister. [18 May 2009].

does not prevent them from being used by the leadership, especially to counter conservative clerics. Dekmejian comments:

> . . . the liberals have considerable utility as a counter to excessive Islamist pressures, as a highly visible expression of modernity to the outside world, and possibly as a valuable resource to forge a strong and progressive Saudi future.[791]

Also, the government use moderate ʿulamāʾ against the liberals. For example, there is a debate concerning Saudi women who want to travel abroad and whether they should be accompanied by legal guardians (Maḥram). Some Saudi liberal reformers argue that it is not necessary to have guardians as the women are adults. However, Saudi Arabia‘s Grand Muftī issued a fatwā calling on Saudi girls to remain chaste in the face of liberal forces that divert women from the right Islamic path to satisfy ulterior motives which have nothing to do with Islam.[792] This might have been provoked in order to counter the liberal trend while appeasing the government's moderate ʿulamāʾ. Another example is the fact that there are still many debates inside the country, especially among reformers, about female gyms. In 2009 religious clerics refused to endorse licensed female gyms while Saudi women questioned a government clampdown.[793] However, the discussion demonstrates that the political landscape is complex, with difficult relationships between the various stakeholders, especially those who are mostly excluded from the reform process. The most powerful stakeholder is the royal family which occupies a central position in the political landscape. However, the royal family has little room to move in countering issues and events that could undermine the regime's power and legitimacy, especially when society has become wealthy, urbanised and educated. The lack of a shared vision for the future of Saudi Arabia could lead to a crisis of legitimacy, as Prince Talal explains:

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[791] Dekmejian, op. cit, p. 413.
[792] 'Saudi girls must stay chaste, says Grand Mufti', *Saudi Gazette* , Jeddah, 5 May 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2009050537035 [4 June 2009].
[793] 'Saudi women question government clampdown'. *Gulf News*, Dubai, 2 May 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi_arabia/10309507.html.Viewed [5 June 2009].

This region is roiling with turmoil and radicalism and the aspirations of a young population, and I am afraid we are not prepared for that. We cannot use the same tools we have been using to rule the country a century ago . . . Young Saudis see elections in Arab countries, Gulf countries, and even Bangladesh and Bolivia, and they wonder why we lack the same thing. We're not less able than those others.[794]

Prince Talal's vision is very important concerning the government's gradualist approach towards reform. His vision is not only limited to Saudi youth but widespread, taking in all of Saudi society, especially the urbanised and educated. It is true that Saudi youth today mostly look to what is argued above and in relation to Wright's aforementioned argument, but also the urbanised and educated have been interested in this issue, especially since the 1990s, as they also seek stronger representation. This does not mean that all citizens are craving secularism and Westernisation, but they are aspiring to changes compatible with modern global trends. This has come about because during the last five years the Kingdom has witnessed a huge number of Saudi youth applying to study abroad through King Abdullah's Foreign Scholarship Program which started in 2006. A report released in 2009 in Saudi Arabia by the Ministry of Higher Education states: "As many as 26,500 Saudis are currently studying in 36 foreign universities".[795]

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the complexities of groups involved in and excluded from government sponsored reforms including relations between excluded and co-opted stakeholders and government strategy in managing stakeholder relations. There is no doubt that the objective of government excluding some from the reform process was to preserve its grip on political power and sustain its legitimacy. This strategy involved retaining certain indispensable components of traditional political structures, especially religion and the charisma of monarchy. Beetham argues that leaders need to justify their position in terms of prevailing interests and beliefs.

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[794] A. Allam & A. England, 'Senior Saudi calls for political reforms', *Financial Times*, 28 April 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/723d88b0-3412-11de-9eea-00144feabdc0.html?ftcamp=rss. [22 May 2009].

[795] '26,500 Saudi studying abroad'. *Arab News*, Jeddah, 24 February 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=119540&d=24&m=2&y=2009&pix=kingdom.jpg&category=Kingdom. [30 May 2009]. Now became more that 7, 0000.

> A given power relationship is not legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy, but because it can be justified in terms of beliefs . . . how far it conforms to (people's) values or standards, how far it satisfies the normative expectations...the erosion of justificatory norms: slavery, conquest, dictatorship, coup d'état, separatist agitation, revolutionary mobilisation – all are examples where power lacks some element of legitimacy.[796]

This is a vital point that the Saudi Government needs to consider, especially for young people, instead of sticking with traditional ways of thinking. As Beetham's argument stands, the absence of shared beliefs, may lead to a crisis in legitimacy, whilst transparency and inclusion in decision-making may sustain legitimacy. Basing its legitimacy on religion and the personal charisma of the King, together with the exclusion of key stakeholders, the government's foundations are fragile given the absence of people's rights and responsibilities. The increasing speed of information technology, accompanied by the growth of a young population looking for more rights and responsibilities, must be a concern. However, the policy of exclusion of many significant stakeholder groups does not constitute effective management towards political change and only serves to distract the government from the problems it confronts. A gradualist approach to reform by the government should recognise stakeholders in the political process and acknowledge emerging trends in society. Without the active participation of stakeholders, issues such as unemployment, tribal fanaticism or solidarity, women's rights and young deviant groups continue to be unresolved.

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[796] D. Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power: Issues in Political Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 11-20.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

In this final chapter and throughout the thesis, which aims to examine political reform in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, focusing in particular on the Consultative Council (Majlis al-shūrā) and municipal councils, several key findings have been highlighted.

Political reforms announced by the Saudi Government in 1992 to enhance political development have been limited. These limitations refer to the government's objective to undertake reforms that do not lead to increased social mobilisation through independent political institutions but instead seek to preserve power and sustain government legitimacy. As indicated in this study, the Saudi Government has developed political institutions, namely the Consultative Council and municipal councils, keeping them under tight control, limiting their independence and hindering any social mobilisation that might influence the decision-making process. Thus, the emergence of both political institutions did not lead to mass participation in politics. The 150 appointed members of the Council reflect the fact that the Saudi Government focused on highly selective participation at an elite level. Further these elite groups represent well-educated technocrats in Saudi society with academic qualifications. As pointed out in this study, about 105 of 150 appointed members have PhDs and comprise 70% of Council. Consequently, the strategy of members being appointed, rather than elected, does not support democratisation or enhance political participation of the emerging middle class.

The process of political participation becomes institutionalised by adopting an electoral system at both local and national levels. The right to vote is seen by many theorists as the cornerstone of political participation and democracy.[797] In contrast to

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[797] P. Buchanan, "*Democratization Top-Down and Bottom-Up*", (1987); E, Muller, "Democracy, Economic Development, and Income Inequality", *American Sociological Review* (1988) pp. 61- 65; Diamond, L, Linz. J. & Lipset, S. 'Introduction: comparing experiences with democracy'. In Linz. J. & Diamond, L. et al. (Eds.), *Politics in developing countries: comparing experiences with democracy*, (1990), pp.1-37. U.S.A: Lynne Rienner Publisher; J. Pevehouse, "*Democracy from Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization*", (London, 2005).

Saudi Arabia, citizens in other smaller countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (the GCC), have the right to vote and elect representatives in parliament, despite the fact that these countries are not democratic. Citizens in smaller states such as Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain are involved and participate in the political and legislative process, especially in Kuwait, which has undertaken this experiment since the early 1960s. However, concerning institutional political reform, the Saudi Government granted further powers to the Consultative Council in 2003 by amending Articles 17 and 23.[798] These amendments included the right to propose new bills without the King's prior approval. Although the Consultative Council has increased its membership to 150, it does not have the authority to deal with domestic issues such as women's rights to drive a car, to vote or undertake physical education, or to discuss the provision of government services including water, education, health and employment. The Council's recommendations are not binding and as a parliament appointed by the King, the Council has no authority to hold the government accountable and has no real oversight of government decisions and the state budget. The Consultative Council can only express its views on policies submitted by the King. However, given members are fully appointed rather than even partly elected, under the pretext that society is not ready for widespread democracy and reform, this weakens government attempts to implement political reform. Despite the positive and negative experiences of Council in its previous four terms, its presence is better than its absence.

The Consultative Council was formed in a period when Saudi society became more mature and was prepared to engage in consultation and participate in politics. Arguably, the presence of the Council has contributed to raising and fostering political awareness and media awareness and subsequent activity. The Council has

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[798] P.K. Abdul Ghafour, 'Bin-Humaid welcomes decision to empower Shura Council', *Arab News*, Jeddah, 9 December 2003. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=36157&d=9&m=12&y=2003 [22 November 2008].

contributed to the creation of a new social dynamic and openness in Saudi society, expressed through Saudi daily newspapers. Nevertheless, for accountability, transparency and political participation to take effect, the Council lacks authority and power to enforce its decisions, for example, monitoring government performance; accessing the state budget; making ministers accountable by summoning them directly; and finally by addressing the issue of Saudi women's participation in consensus decision-making and consultative processes via effective membership.

The municipal elections held in 2005 were indeed a new experience and a turning point for local political participation that could shape future local governance. This minor reform had a tangible impact on the Saudi population, despite knowledge about the event among Saudis being very limited. For the first time since the inception of Saudi Arabia, male citizens were allowed to cast their ballots and elect representatives to work for them to protect their interests. However, although elections were successful and attracted wide community participation and interest, the powers of municipal councils in relation to checking and assessing the performance of mayors and others in charge were still limited. The problem was that municipal councils issued decisions but could not impose them, so they lacked the mechanisms to implement resolutions, as indicated in this study and this is a weakness.

The fact that executive officers are still elected as mayors, some of which are councillors, represents a flaw in governance because it defeats accountability and democratic monitoring processes. However, it is too early to judge this new experience that will further develop so the roles of mayor and executive officer will be clearly defined.

However, municipal councils will not play an active role in society unless other stakeholders such as civil society groups, non-governmental institutions and the business sector become involved and provide an adequate environment for service provision and projects for citizens with community consensus. Municipal councils can play an effective role when their role is understood and closely linked to grassroots issues and people's aspirations and concerns. These councils can be described as

emergency centres that receive and coordinate all crises with the police, health, education and other service providers including water and road authorities.

Also, most municipal councillors play an advisory role with limited authority which weakens their ability to promote political participation at the local level. It would seem that the municipal councillors' role is limited to the discussion of the Council's provision of basic services like collecting rubbish, issuing building permits and opening new roads. These public services have been the responsibility of the municipal councils since their establishment in the 1970s. The elections for half the members have brought about no significant expansion of the councils' responsibilities. However, the role of municipal councillors is supposed to be to set objectives, shape policies, implement plans and programs, provide budgets, and monitor and evaluate performance. But there has been a misunderstanding of the position and role of municipal councils, despite the holding of elections as part of a reform process. The Saudi Government has maintained tight central control over the administration and the formulation of government policy. The Consultative Council is under the control of the King, while municipal councils are under the control of the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs.

Furthermore, institutional political reform has not dealt with the issue of Saudi women, whether in the Consultative Council or in municipal councils. The empowerment of women is still mostly at the inception stage. At present, participation in the Council by Saudi women is limited to being part-time consultants. In addition, they advise only on women's issues. Women's appointment as members of the Council, rather than merely as consultants would enable women to play an active role in formulating policies that affect their lives. Also, this inclusion as members will empower them to make decisions with authority and to have their opinions taken seriously. However, the exclusion of women from the political process is not limited to the Consultative Council but extends to municipal councils. In the municipal council elections held in 2005 women were not allowed to participate as candidates or voters.

Concerning municipal council elections, women who have been excluded have not received convincing explanations and this issue has an ambiguous standing among key groups on the Saudi political scene. For example, the royal family and the ʿulamāʾ deny women rights in public life, based on strict interpretations of Islam. Furthermore, the Saudi Government actively discourages women from participating in municipal elections, even as voters, justifying the exclusion of women on logistic and administrative grounds.[799] On the other side of this ambiguous situation are liberal reformers and businessmen who are also excluded from the political reform process. These groups emphasise the importance of the presence of women in political institutions and the need to grant them rights to participate in the political process.

However, the Saudi Government's justifications for preventing Saudi women from being members of municipal councils or having the right to vote in elections are deemed unnecessary. Women should be involved in the political process. Women vote and participate in decision-making processes in most Muslim and Arab countries. However, according to the Saudi Government, the time is not ripe for Saudi women to be allowed to vote or participate in politics. The major reforms that have recently occurred and which witnessed the appointment of the first Saudi woman to a senior government job in Saudi history have given impetus to deeper reforms. Women who have been excluded from representation might currently be accepted in the Shura Council and municipalities. This is a small step towards the emancipation of women who are more educated and thus recognised as valuable human resources in Saudi Arabia.

Political reform has been top-down and controlled by the government. The pace of liberalisation has been gradual in order to release pressure valves that will diminish

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[799] See statements by Prince Mansour Ibn Miteb bin Abdul Aziz, Deputy Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs and head of the Higher Local Election Committee in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (Chapter Six, p. 214-215) and Prince Naif, Deputy Premier and Minister of the Interior (Prince Naif, *Women MPs and polls 'not need in Saudi Arabia'. Gulf News*, 3 March 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi_arabia/10298414.html. [22 May 2009].

the appeal of extremism over time. From the government's point of view, this strategy has been successful. The pace of liberalisation has been carefully controlled and grass-roots democratisation limited. Buchanan's (1987) argument that a sustained democratic transition can only be achieved if "top-down" reforms are accompanied by local participation and development from the "bottom-up" suggests that future political transition in Saudi Arabia will be difficult to sustain. However, the transition process remains heavily dependent upon top-down reforms initiated by the royal family, while bottom-up processes that lead to change in political structures have been limited. However, demands for change beyond what the government is prepared to contemplate have indeed increased. Political reform is thus controlled by a Saudi Government which seeks internal political stability above all else and responds to civic demands for change to reduce the appeal of religious and secular extremism. This study shows that, from the government's point of view, it has retained a high level of control over the political system and key actors. Some Islamo-Liberal Saudi intellectuals have however argued for more far-reaching changes and that government should not just seek to control, but rather eliminate militant jihadists and greatly diminish the influence of ultraconservative clerics. These intellectuals advocate political reform within an Islamic framework through a revision of the official Wahhabi religious doctrine.[800] The argument tendered herein is that this monarchical approach is not constructive to either maintenance of the status quo or to gradual democratisation, and that paradoxically the approach contributes to civic unrest through more strident and frequent demands for reform, such as a constitutional monarchy. Huntington extends Buchanan's argument of civic inclusion with the observation that ". . . limited reforms introduced from the top often increase rather than decrease bottom-up demands for more radical change".[801] This research supports this proposition that the government's limited and carefully controlled program of

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[800] S. Lacroix, 'Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islamo-Liberal" Reformists', *Journal The Middle East*, vol. 58, no. 3, (2004), pp. 345-365.
[801] M. Ottaway & M. Dunne, 'Incumbent regimes and the "King's Dilemma" in the Arab world: promise and threat of managed reform', Carnegie Paper, *Middle East Program*, no. 88, (2007), p. 4. Available [Online]: http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/cp88_ruling_parties_final1.pdf [23 December 2009].

political reforms has tended to stimulate demands for further and greater change. Whilst select civic groups are invited to participate in the decision-making process, the evidence in this study shows that government tolerance of the demands of dissident groups cannot sustain the political transformation it seeks. The liberalisation effects on the decision-making process of a wider constituency are limited by the selection of groups that are malleable to the government's interests and objectives.

Saudi Arabia's reform process does not include sufficient civic representation to ensure its continuation or the achievement of the government's objectives. The limited and carefully controlled "top-down" political reforms implemented since the early 1990s have served to increase demands for further change instead of decreasing them. Since 2003 these demands have been as strong as they were in 1992 when the government announced constitutional and administrative reforms. Since 2003 however several petitions have been submitted to the Saudi Government demanding political change and reform. In the first petition, signed by 104 Saudi intellectuals who were new Islamo-Liberal reformists, the Saudi Government was asked to create an elected Consultative Council, rather than the appointed Council, that was established in 1993. The fourth petition called for Saudi Arabia to become a constitutional monarchy. However, the top-down approach for reform in Saudi Arabia should be accompanied by a bottom-up approach in order to involve a wider constituency in the political decision-making process, while avoiding radical demands that might lead to disorder and threaten the regime's political stability. As indicated, the top-heavy nature of the Saudi Government's dominant role in the state is also reflected by the King Abdul-Aziz Centre for National Dialogue. This political institution, established in 2003 to promote dialogue among all groups, is an example of a strong top-down approach where the public is shut out of the process while the Centre's resolutions await implementation. The Centre for National Dialogue appears to be an attempt on the part of the Saudi Government to co-opt different segments of Saudi society, but it does not make provision for any independent political institutions.

Political reform has excluded key stakeholders while co-opting others. The stakeholders are part of a set of complex relations in the Saudi political scene between groups involved in and excluded from government sponsored reforms. Among the important domestic groups excluded are some Islamist groups, ultraconservative clerics and militant jihadi groups, liberal reformers, businessmen and tribal leaders. All stakeholder groups have agendas for political reform, which are different from the Saudi Government's vision. Also, the relationship between Saudi Government policy and excluded and co-opted stakeholders is complex. Sometimes the government uses ultraconservative clerics to counter the political ideas of liberal reformers as these ideas could undermine its power and legitimacy, especially when there are unpalatable demands coming from the international community. At other times, the government uses liberal reformers and moderate ʿulamāʾ to counter ultraconservative clerics; this has been evident since the mid-2000s. For instance, the royal family may place a favoured advisory group, the government's moderate clerics, in counterpoint to perceived antagonists. This confirms two important aspects of this study. First, the vision within the Saudi Government concerning political reform has fluctuated and is ambiguous and it has tended to be cautious and conservative. The second aspect concerns Dekmejian's[802] argument discussed in Chapter Seven, that is, the Saudi Government attempts to create a clash between liberals and conservatives in order to avoid having to implement more far-reaching reforms.

However, regardless of the fact that the state's legitimacy largely stems from the ultraconservative ʿulamāʾ, the ʿulamāʾ do not have any political aspirations to compete with the government. The ultraconservative ʿulamāʾs political aspirations may be limited, unlike other excluded groups such as the liberals. For instance, one of the most important demands of liberals is to make Saudi Arabia a constitutional kingdom; this sets up a confrontation with the royal family and other sections of Saudi society, especially ʿulamāʾ who strive to maintain their structural power. However,

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[802] R. Dekmejian, 'The liberal impulse in Saudi Arabia', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 57, no. 3, (Summer 2003), pp. 400-413

the government is not willing to introduce any political reforms that could lead to mobilising citizens and thus reducing its power under the pretext that this might destabilise the country. Thus other stakeholders, particularly liberal reformers could change their methods and political discourse and not make demands that are outside the capacity of the Saudi Government to grant. In this way, they might gain the government's trust instead of entering into confrontation. The demand that Saudi Arabia become a constitutional kingdom is incompatible with the strong top-down government reform policy, which is to introduce limited and carefully controlled reforms that do not lead to radical change or threaten their control of government. Furthermore, part of this government's policy is to contain the militants' campaign to overthrow the regime and thus sustain the conservative religious leadership of the royal family. It is argued that since its inception in 1932, there have been no significant steps toward mobilisation of public politics, except when municipal council elections were held in 2005. But these elections as a force for social mobilisation are compatible with the capacity of the state, while in demanding that Saudi Arabia become a constitutional kingdom, this might be considered an excessive and hasty step toward political mobilisation. A constitutional monarchy, as Bogdanor defines it, "... is a state which is headed by a sovereign who reigns but does not rule".[803] Thus political mobilisation can be promoted by the foundation of political institutions that curb the power of the royal family while enhancing popular participation in decision-making processes. Also, it can be realised that it is unacceptable to the Saudi regime to replace a system with a strong grip on power with one that permits the sharing of power with an elected parliament.

However, liberal demands seem to be incompatible with the political status quo. At the same time, their campaign for reform and change is not well organised. This could potentially weaken their effectiveness, especially compared to the ultraconservative ʿulamāʾ, since decisions issued in 2009 by King Abdullah included comprehensive change involving a large group of religious cadre in religious institutions, which was

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[803] V. Bogdanor , 'The monarchy and the constitution'. *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 49, no. 3, (1996), p. 407.

welcomed by many Saudi intellectuals.[804] It has been noted that there has been a reversal in the government's directions towards reform and change. This reversal has both internal and external aspects which created negative implications for political reform. For instance, internally, municipal council elections scheduled for late 2009 have been postponed to 2012. Also, the empowerment of women, enabling their rights, especially the right to vote and to be represented in parliament, has stalled. In addition, in March 2009, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz appointed Interior Minister Prince Naif to be a second deputy to the head of Cabinet or Council of Ministers, which means he could be next in line to become King.[805] This was a surprising decision, not only for the Saudi people but also for some key members of the royal family. The surprised response was not about the experience, knowledge and political skills of Prince Naif, especially with respect to terrorism and security issues, but more due to the violation of the Allegiance Law. Furthermore, Prince Naif is known for his public opposition to Consultative Council elections and equal rights for women. If Prince Naif were to become the next King, this may mean that government initiated reforms will remain limited in scope. As mentioned, the so-called "Allegiance Law" is a political institution recently issued (2006) by King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and consists of a committee of princes to vet candidates for succession to the throne. The law was welcomed by Saudi intellectuals[806] as a major institutional political reform by the King, but the sudden decision of Prince Naif's appointment created a major question concerning the future of institutional political reform, especially concerning a lack of mechanisms for its implementation. Externally, the US administration under President Obama has given less support for democratisation and political change in

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[804] *Asharq al-Awast*, 15 February 2009. Available [Online]:
http://www.aawsat.com//default.asp?myday=15&mymonth=2&myyear=2009&I2.x=15&I2.y=15 [22 May 2010].

[805] P.K. Abdul Ghafour (2009). 'Naif pledges greater efforts in the service of nation and religion'. *Arab News*, 29 March. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=120949&d=29&m=3&y=2009. [28 July 2009].

[806] PK Abdul Ghafour, 'Shura Backs Allegiance Law', *Arab News*, Jeddah, 30 October 2006. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=83014&d=30&m=10&y=2006 [16 June 2010].

general and in the Middle East in particular, something which indirectly supports the government's reluctance to implement change.

Political reform is mostly dependent on external pressures. Since the 1990s the Saudi Government's response to political reform happened in greater part as a result of international pressure. This pressure crystallised with the announcement of a package of constitutional and administrative reforms, the establishment of the King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue in 2003 and the holding of municipal council elections in 2004-05. All these changes occurred as a result of global external pressure; for example, the dramatic events of the second Gulf War crisis of 1990-91, September 11, 2001 and the occupation of Iraq in 2003. While in the mid- to late 2000s these external factors have lessened in impact, pressures for reform and change are limited not only in Saudi Arabia but in most Arab countries for several reasons. First, the American invasion and occupation of Iraq failed to promote democracy. Second, the successful emergence of Islamist groups on the Arab political scene and their electoral success, such as Hamas in Gaza, which came to power in 2006, Hezbollah in Lebanon, which has a considerable presence in the Lebanese parliament and Islamist groups in Algeria.[807] Third, the position of the US Obama administration was important as it announced that reform should come from within and not be imposed from outside.[808] And finally, the strong position of most Arab petroleum countries, especially Saudi Arabia, in relation to the high price of oil was an important factor. Thus, decreased international pressures have influenced the pace and direction of reform in Saudi Arabia, especially concerning its strong financial position. During the global financial crisis (2008-9) the focus was on Saudi Arabia, as the world's leading petroleum exporter and because it has a stable economy accompanied by huge financial reserves. Thus the financial crisis and relatively high price of oil have enhanced the political position of Saudi Arabia in the international community, which

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[807] M. Hafez (2000). 'Armed Islamist movement and political violence in Algeria', *Middle East Journal,* vol. 54, no. 4, p. 573.
[808] 'New beginning', *Saudi Gazette*, Jeddah, 5 June 2009. Available [Online]: http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2009060539982 [20 May 2010].

has enabled the Saudi Government to resist international pressures for reform while silencing domestic demands for democratisation through strategies of co-option.

Political reform relies on having a financially independent position. As indicated in this study, the heavy reliance on oil revenues has enabled the Saudi Government, as a 'rentier state', to be autonomous from its domestic economy and to become the only source of goods and services and other forms of financial support within the country. This freed the country from the need to forgo domestic taxes and allowed it to utilise oil revenues, especially with increased oil prices and to control and resist demands for political reform, whether internally or externally, thus hindering political reform. The financial autonomy of the Saudi Arabian government empowered it to become the main receiver of financial rent. This has enabled the government to establish patron-client ties between certain groups and government. Thus instead of challenging the state, these groups compete to gain favour, which minimises the pressure and demands for reform and change and allows the state to avoid tough decisions about greater democratisation. However, paternalism today is an insufficient way to empower Saudi society for social mobilisation or to create a society with political awareness. Furthermore, it does not create political stability, especially in the presence of a growing well-educated middle class, which is a product of modernisation.

In summary, political reform in Saudi Arabia has been limited and has depended on top-down processes, excluding some key stakeholders while co-opting others. It has been subject to external pressures and there has been a lack of cooperation between central players, something which has brought pressure to bear on the government. The reform process is hampered by the government's control of abundant resources and revenues that enable government to develop elaborate networks of patron-client relationships as well as co-opting potential critics.

Weak reforms are related to two factors. First, the Saudi Government can either promote effective institutional reform that might lead to its power, legitimacy and interests being jeopardised, or it can continue to retard the growing domestic political

dynamic that demands political change and reform, even though this might lead to increased violence and unrest. Thus, there is a dilemma concerning the processes of modernisation, liberalisation and reform. There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia is a conservative society, one which is heavily influenced by Wahhabi interpretations of Islam and tribal customs. The government believes it is important to stabilise the country by avoiding social and political unrest resulting from the emergence of large numbers of educated people, whether male or female, particularly if their demands harm the values and practices of Islam. However, although there have been mild reformist tendencies shown by King Abdullah, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, credible political institutions have not yet been empowered. One of the fundamental reasons for this dilemma is that the reform process is not well organised and does not use systematic methods for change. There is a complex relationship between the government and the central players in the political system. Sometimes, the government uses the ultraconservative clerics to counter political ideas of liberal reformists, especially when demands for change and reform seem to be dictated by the West. However, the government also uses liberal reformists to counter ultraconservative clerics. Furthermore, the Saudi Government also uses co-opted stakeholders, especially non-ultraconservative clerics who are consistent in their support for the regime to counter liberal reformist pressure.

Second, weak reforms reflect the nature of the Saudi royal family itself and its general understanding of politics, especially the sharing and distributing of power. It is neither inclined to reduce its monopoly through political institutions that lead to expanded political participation by citizens, nor is it inclined to empower the second rank of the royal family by appointing them to strategic positions, especially as most key members of the royal family are over eighty years of age. Thus, the nature of the regime has created a dilemma, which, in the long-term, might lead to disorder, especially among lesser members of the royal family who want greater authority. As indicated, the royal family is the most powerful political institution and its senior members occupy the most powerful positions. Through time, this practice has established highly personalised and centralised rule. Furthermore, it has created a feeling among the royal family that they are the only faction that has the privilege to

rule and preserve power. This concept has a link to the historical role of King Abdul-Aziz, who unified Saudi Arabia in 1932 at a time when the country was fragmented along tribal lines. Thus, this highly personalised and centralised power has contributed to the royal family having a deep sense of how to sustain and impose its rule, which makes it difficult for them to abandon such power. However, the royal family's preoccupation with its own hegemony and control of government has meant that the momentum of reform, let alone a transition to democracy, remains inevitably weak.

These arguments in relation to the royal family and political reform support those of Al-Rawaf, Aldamer, Herb and Dioun.[809] Al-Rawaf asserts: "Members of the Saudi royal family have not allowed political participation, because they believe that their moral quality and historical achievements give them the right to rule the country alone"[810] while Dioun states that these features depend on the nature of these regimes and the way that they have ruled in order to monopolise political power. In the Saudi case, the Saudi royal family is a conservative dynastic monarchy that has monopolized political power since its foundation. The Saudi ruling family attempts to make policy decisions privately, emphasizing a consensus-based familial rule. This

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[809] Al-Rawaf, "The concept of the crises in political development-relevant to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia," PhD, Duke University, 1980; F. Aldamer, "Economic, social, and political developments and their impact on the role of the state: A case study of Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Manchester University, 1995; M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1999; C. Dioun, "Democracy Within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalization in Saudi Arabia", 19 February 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.foreignpolicysociety.org/saudi.pdf.

[810] O. Al-Rawaf, 'The concept of the five crises in political development- relevance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia', PhD dissertation, Duke University, (1980).

sort of policy saw the country avoids political pluralism as well as empower the regime to control its people.[811]

The aim of this study has been to examine the efforts of the Saudi Government to implement institutional reforms and enhance political development, focusing upon two political institutions in particular, the Consultative Council and municipal councils. This study has provided a significant contribution to knowledge about political change and reform in Saudi society based on the following factors.

It confirmed arguments about political change and transitions to democracy advanced by Al-Faleh, Alshayeb, Buchanan, Cleveland, Ehteshami, Herb, Hood, Huntington, Inglehart, Leon, Linjawi, Russel, Rustow and Yamani.[812] Take for instance the arguments of Rustow, Ehteshami and Cleveland, that economic development policies and industrialisation, whether a success or failure, tend to give rise to new social

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[811] See C. Dioun (2005). Democracy within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalisation in Saudi Arabia (Chapter Two, p. 56).

[812] M. Al-Faleh, "The Future Policy In Saudi Arabia related to events of September 11: Reform in Face of Collapse or Division", *Al-Quds al-Arabi* , London, 26 April – 1 May 2002. Available [Online]: http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2002/04Apr/26%20Apr%20Fri/Quds13.pdf812; J. Alshayeb, "New Saudi King and Challenge of Reforms". *Arab News*, Jeddah, 25, September 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=70672&d=25&m=9&y=2005; P. Buchanan, *Democratization Top-Down and Bottom-Up*, (Washington DC: 1987, Foreign Service Inst); W. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, (New York, 2004); A. Ehteshami, "Reform from above: the politics of participation in the oil monarchies", *International Affairs,* vol. 1, no. 79 (2003); M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1999; S. Hood, *Political Development and Democratic Theory: rethinking comparative politic*", (New York., 2004); S. Huntington, "*Political order in changing societies*" (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968); S. Huntington (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Ed.). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; R. Inglehart, *Modernization and Post-modernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1997); E. Leon (1987). 'An Overview of "Remarkable Developmants'. In H. Binnendijk (Ed.), *Authoritarian Regimes in Transition* (pp. 173-180). New York: Foreign Service Inst; H. Linjawi, "Societies in transformation Iran and Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2006; J. Russel, "In Defence of the Nation": Terror and Reform in Saudi Arabia", *Strategic Insights*, October 2003. Available [Online]: http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/CCC/publications/OnlineJournal/2003/oct03/middleEast2.html ; D. Rustow, "Democracy: a global revolution?", *Foreign affairs,* vol. 69, (1990), pp. 69-75; M. Yamani, "Saudi Arabia Is Blocking Reforms", 30 June 2005. Available [Online]: http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-401/i.html.

forces that seek political liberalisation and democracy, and which challenge dictatorships and regimes. In Saudi Arabia this worked in relation to economic growth as a result of the oil boom in the 1970s that changed the structure of society and paved the way for the emergence of a well-educated middle class, who exerted pressure on the Saudi Government for change during the early 1990s. In Saudi Arabia this pressure for political change and democracy increased with a serious decline in oil revenue, as well as the cost of the Gulf War of 1990-91. It was also a result of the incompetence of government in dealing with mounting problems known as the so-called "crisis of failure".

This research also confirmed the arguments of Hood,[813] and Linjawi[814] concerning how religious and cultural factors progress political change and democracy. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, Islam plays a very significant role, whether in social or political life. As indicated in this study, one of the most important reasons that prevented Saudi women from obtaining their voting rights and being represented in political institutions, such as the Consultative Council and municipal councils, is related to religion and culture. Thus these roles are important in understanding political regimes. Democracy and political change are not attained simply by establishing institutional changes or elite manoeuvring but depend on the values, norms and the beliefs of society. Also, the study confirmed Leon's[815] argument that there are several general factors influencing reform and the political transition to democracy. First, people should have a certain inclination and national consensus

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[813] See S. Hood, *Political Development and Democratic Theory: rethinking comparative politic*", (New York., 2004).

[814] See H. Linjawi, "Societies in transformation Iran and Saudi Arabia", Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 2006, p. 5.

[815] See E. Leon, An Overview of "Remarkable Developmants. In H. Binnendijk (Ed.), *Authoritarian Regimes in Transition*, 1987, (pp. 173-180). New York: Foreign Service Inst (Chapter Two. p. 30).

toward reform. Second, the middle class needs to develop. Third, there is the role of religion in supporting and promoting the push for democratisation. Fourth, economic development plays a role in promoting changes in social structures. Finally, there needs to be support and sustained external pressure. All these factors were weak in Saudi Arabia in terms of enhancing political reform except the economic one, which played a substantial role in changing the overall structure of Saudi society, transforming a highly illiterate people to a wealthy, urbanised and educated one looking for change. However, a certain inclination and national consensus toward reform and transition among Saudis is still limited, which means people need to be more aware. As pointed out in Chapter Six, this limited awareness is illustrated by municipal council elections and the so-called "golden list" used by some influential scholars to endorse candidates across the country. Furthermore, there was a poor voter turnout in municipal elections. Also, the religious factor is still considered an obstacle in the development of political institutions. The Consultative Council still has no power to impose its decisions, even with respect to minor issues in Saudi society. As discussed, the ability of Council to influence the government's attitude to women driving cars and physical education for girls was hindered by a fatwā issued from Saudi ʿulamāʾ, which opposed these activities.[816]

In addition, the study confirmed Russell's[817] categories of the key stakeholders in the political landscape consisting of four main groups; the royal family, the religious establishment, the business class and the liberal reformers. All these groups are playing a significant role on the domestic policy for change and reform. In general,

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[816] 'Saudi Shura Council voted on the passage without examining "the leadership of women"', *Al-Arabia News* Channel, 28 January 2006, Dubai. Available [Online]:
http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2006/01/28/20651.html [16 June 2010] & R. Qusti, "Physical education for girl students still on hold", *Arab News*, Jeddah, 7 January 2004. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=37674&d=7&m=1&y=2004 [16 June 2010].
[817] J. Russel, "In Defence of the Nation": Terror and Reform in Saudi Arabia", *Strategic Insights*, October 2003. Available [Online]:
http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/CCC/publications/OnlineJournal/2003/oct03/middleEast2.html
(Chapter Two, pp. 36-37).

the study confirmed that the issues of change and reform are dominated by those who want a more liberal, progressive or evolutionary Islam and those who want to retain the literal Islam of the country's traditional religious heritage. Furthermore, the study confirmed the arguments of Buchanan[818] and Huntington[819] that the transition to democracy is a long, slow and painful process. A negotiating pact approach is a common solution to promote political reform. The opening of negotiations between regime reformers and opponents is very important to stabilise the regime. Negotiation and compromise among political elites is the key element of the democratisation transition process. Buchanan and Huntington's arguments do not apply in Saudi Arabia today, where the government has excluded the central stakeholders from the reform process. As pointed out in Chapter Seven, institutional political reform in Saudi Arabia is the province of the royal family, advised by selected moderate groups: non-ultra conservative clerics and moderate Islamists with non-extremist and non-Westernised views. Those excluded from giving advice are others such as ultraconservative clerics, militant jihadi, liberal reformers, the private sector and tribal leaders. Moreover, the study confirmed the arguments of Alshayeb,[820] Al-Faleh[821] and Yamani[822] that the interaction of the Saudi Government with domestic and external pressures to implement political institutional reforms has not been enough. It is still limited in comparison with Egypt or Jordan. The Saudi Government remains an absolute monarchy. The royal family is the most powerful political institution and its members occupy most positions of power in the government. However, while partial

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[818] See P. Buchanan, *Democratization Top-Down and Bottom-Up*, (Washington DC: 1987, Foreign Service Inst)

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[819] S. Huntington (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Ed.). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

[820] J. Alshayeb, 'New Saudi King and Challenge of Reforms'. *Arab News*, 25, September 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7&section=0&article=70672&d=25&m=9&y=2005.
[821] M. Al-Faleh, "The Future Policy In Saudi Arabia related to events of September 11: Reform in Face of Collapse or Division", *Al-Quds al-Arabi* , London, 26 April – 1 May 2002. Available [Online]:
http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2002/04Apr/26%20Apr%20Fri/Quds13.pdf
[822] M. Yamani, "Saudi Arabia Is Blocking Reforms", 30 June 2005. Available [Online]:
http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-401/i.html

reform may take place, full liberalisation is a distant prospect. The Saudi Government has a long way to go before it is willing to countenance comprehensive change. Finally the study confirms Herb's[823] and Cleveland's[824] arguments about the strength of the Saudi royal family and their absolute control over the Saudi political system, which allows them to contain demands for greater political change. Despite all the political changes within the Consultative Council and municipal councils, the royal family's strategic domination of government has not diminished. Co-option seems to have worked to prevent the foundation of alternative institutions that might empower the new, well-educated middle class to have an influence in the decision-making process. The King and the senior princes remain at the centre of power.

This study has offered alternative arguments and approaches to political reform and the possibilities of a democratic transition, mostly focusing on the royal family. Thus, this research supports the arguments of Al-Rawaf, Dioun, Herb and Cleveland[825] and confirms that institutional political reform and a change to democracy will not happen unless the royal family is inclined to implement change. Furthermore, this research supports the arguments of Ottaway and Dunne[826] in Chapter Five: "Saudi Arabia is an example of substantive change pattern without institutional reform". Thus the

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[823] M. Herb (1999). All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies (Ed.). USA: State University of New York Press. Also, M. Herb (2002). 'Democratisation in the Arab World? Emirs and Parliaments in The Gulf'. *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 41-47.
[824] W. Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East (Ed.). (2004) , New York: Westview Press.
[825] O. Al-Rawaf, 'The concept of the five crises in political development relevance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia', PhD dissertation, Duke University, (1980); C. Dioun (2005). Democracy within Boundaries: Managing Risks While Promoting Liberalisation in Saudi Arabia (Chapter Two, p. 55); M. Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1999; M. Herb, "Democratization in the Arab World? Emirs And Parliaments in The Gulf", *Journal of Democracy* (2002); W. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, (New York, 2004).

[826] M. Ottaway & M Dunne, "Incumbent regimes and the "King's Dilemma" in the Arab world: promise and threat of managed reform", Carnegie Paper, Middle East Program no. 88, (2007), pp. 1-21. Available [Online]: http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/cp88_ruling_parties_final1.pdf

inclination to implement sufficient change is very important as it will guarantee its political continuation and stability. Various changes in today's world in the new millennium have influenced most of the authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe, Latin America, South Asia and Muslim and Arab countries, which means political reform will occur whether regimes like it or not. However, what makes the researcher confirm his argument in this study is the recent violation of the "Allegiance Law" by the appointment of the Interior Minister to the position of second deputy to head of the Council of Ministers. This appointment weakened succession arrangements as an effective political institution, as well as abolished any hope that the limited role and influence of other institutions might be increased, as explored in this study in relation to the Consultative Council, municipal councils and the Centre for National Dialogue. Thus when some political institutions are respected, this means great progress has been made in relation to promoting political reform.

In the past it was difficult to analyse and evaluate the policies of the royal family toward reform and social mobilisation. However, since the written constitution, the basic system of rule that was announced in 1992 has become easy to analyse to what extent the royal family is committed to promote change and reform. However, to undertake such reforms aimed at preserving the old traditional power, while avoiding those which enhance political institutions that lead to a redistribution of power towards Saudi citizens, will not guarantee political stability in the long-term. Saudi society has changed socially and economically as a result of rapid modernisation, something that cannot of itself sit alongside a rigid political system that rejects change. The royal family has the right to sustain its power and legitimacy, but this should be through political institutions that provide a place for all stakeholders in Saudi society, from moderates to extremists, and within one chamber such as the Consultative Council to debate each other as they please, whilst the regime maintains control. For instance, exclusion of those who do not participate meaningfully in political debate, such as the business community and the sheikhs, appears unnecessary. The involvement and participation of all stakeholder groups would

enhance the reform process. As Beetham's[827] argument stands, the absence of shared beliefs, and thus stakeholders, may lead to a crisis in legitimacy, whilst transparency and inclusion in decision-making may sustain legitimacy.

Rewarding the new middle class with senior positions within the Saudi bureaucracy as part of a co-option policy may lead to containing greater political demands for reform, but at the cost of permitting some involvement in the decision-making process. Also, this containment might help to establish patron-client ties among various groups competing to gain state favour, thus containing opposition to the state. However, in the long-term, this policy may lead to the establishment of political institutions which are controlled by the government with no influence from well-educated people. This might create depression and discontent and fall short of meeting the needs of Saudi citizens. Furthermore, this strategy may also give positions and responsibilities to unqualified people, which may promote mismanagement of the system and in turn affect the reform process.

This research has made a contribution to the understanding of political change in Saudi Arabia in a number of ways. First, the study has highlighted the very limited nature of the government's institutional reforms and further argues that the political astuteness of the royal family has facilitated the longevity of the regime. The royal family occupy the dominant and central positions in the political system and from this position manage the subordinate stakeholders through strategies of co-option and exclusion. Further, the royal family has skilfully maintained its hegemony and legitimacy from the pivotal point in the political system, ranging from ultraconservative clerics and militant jihadists through to liberal reformers. To illustrate this argument the researcher uses his analysis of municipal council elections and the role of "the golden list" and argues that the government's objective in cooperating with the Sheikhs of the Islamic Awakening in municipal councils was to send a message to the international community, especially the American

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[827] D. Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power: Issues in Political Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 11-20.

administration, about how Islamists could be the beneficiaries of elections, with the objective of lessening pressure for political reform and democratisation. The government's management of the municipal elections also demonstrated how it was able to limit political participation and minimise any threat to its hegemony.

The government's ability to manage its limited, top-down institutional reforms can be contrasted with the scale and pace of social and cultural change in Saudi society, partly generated by government policies combined with rapid economic development over four decades. In his analysis of the revival of tribal identities among the younger generation, the researcher has demonstrated the penetration of new information technology platforms and how the internet and television have facilitated social change, largely outside the control of government. The use of cell phones and the internet in campaigning in the municipal elections has been noted and weakens the government's control of the flow of information into Saudi Arabia and how new media platforms are used domestically. Disenfranchised youth, in particular, who make up more than one half of the population, have become extremely active in the explosion of thoughts, desires, needs and opinions in such social media as twitter and Facebook. These young people would certainly benefit if they had a voice within political institutions. There are a large number of young Saudi men who are educated, ambitious and eager to participate in decision-making. The government could easily prevent this new generation from being politically involved, but it has difficulty in controlling their access to the media. Information technology provides the younger generation with many opportunities to express themselves in an environment where they would otherwise be deprived of a voice due to the lack of political participation. Without further reforms, media savvy youth will become involved in controversial issues such as tribal and regional dissent and be attracted to militant jihadists, as is evident among some tribal youth.

In his analysis of the classical rentier state theory, in the short-term, the researcher still finds support for Beblawi[828] and Luciani[829]. In June 2011, King Adbullah announced the allocation of $130 billion for increased salaries, new housing and religious organizations, in what some observers interpreted as an attempt to neutralise opposition, at a time when authoritarian rulers in Tunisia and Egypt had been forced from power and leaders in Syria, Yemen and Libya were facing wide-spread popular opposition.[830] This approach suggests that Beblawi and Luciani's arguments about the financial independentce of the states, where the state is the main collector and distributor of oil revenues, minimizes the pressure and demands of various domestic social groups still have some explanatory power. At the same time, this research indicates that the classical rentier state theory is too simplistic and insufficient. Since the early 1990s, the use of high levels of external sources of rent has only been one of the strategies used by the Saudi government to insulate itself from the domestic pressures for more extensive reform, as has been argued by Oktuhilik, Gause, Foley and Gray[831]. In Saudi Arabia, the government's use of oil revenues may have slowed the pressures for reform in the short-term but, in the long-term, increased material property, greatly expanded educational opportunities and technological changes have

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[828] H. Beblawi, *The Rentier state in the Arab World*, (London, 1990)

[829] G. Luciani, *Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework*, (London, 1990

830 N. MacFARQUHAR, **"**In Saudi Arabia, Royal Funds Buy Peace for Now". June 8, 2011, *New York Times.* Available [Online]:
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/09/world/middleeast/09saudi.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Saudi%20Roya l%20Funds&st=cse [28 July 2011]

[831] G. Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States" *Comparative Politics*, vol. 31 (April 1999); G. Gause, *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994; S. Foley, *The Arab Gulf States: Beyond Oil and Islam*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010; M. Gray, "Towards a Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," 2010, available [Online]: http://apsa2010.com.au.ful-papers/pdf/APSA2010 0020.pdf.

brought extablished traditions into uneasy contact with both modernity and wealth. In the longer term, spending money may be an inadequate strategy to manage the social and cultural changes and neutralize the demands for more extensive political reform. A more sustainable way forward for the government is to strike a different balance between its financial independence, as the main collectors of external rent, and its responses to the pressures and demands of various domestic social groups.

Finally, the conceptual framework developed in this study introduced a basis for future investigation or research in different areas of political reform and its impact on political stability in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thus many areas concerning the Saudi political reform and transition to democracy need further research. These research questions are as follows:

- How will the Saudi Government sustain its monopoly of political power in a society that is experiencing rapid socioeconomic change?
- Will the establishment of political institutions with limited power, such as the Consultative Council and municipal councils, enhance democratisation in Saudi Arabia?
- How will the education system, the family and a conservative religious culture in Saudi Arabia accommodate greater political participation, especially among youth?
- How will top-down and limited political reform accommodate the rapid evolution of information technology as well as population growth and rising unemployment?
- How will the tactics of coercion, co-option, dependency and patron-client ties lead to political reform and stability with a growing, well-educated, Saudi Arabian middle class?

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aAppendix 1: Correspondence relating to the conduct of interviews

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Majlis Ash Shura
Puplic Reletion

المملكة العربية السعودية
مجلس الشورى
العلاقات العامة

حفظة الله

سعادة الأستاذ/ عاطف بن عبدالله سكر

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ، وبعد،،

أشارة إلى خطابكم المؤرخ في ١٤٢٨/١/٢هــ بشأن مشروع البحث
ذي الرقم ١١٨ / ٦ لنيل درجة الدكتوراة من جامعة فكتوريا في أستراليا.
نخبركم بأنه قد تم إشعار أعضاء المجلس بذلك وعليه ففـــي حالـــة
توافر من يرغب التعاون معكم في موضوع البحث سوف نيلغكم بذلك .
وتقبلوا تحياتي ،،،

مدير عام العلاقات العامة والإعلام

د.عبدالرحمن بن عثمان الصيغير

الرقم : ٨١٥١٢٥٠

التاريخ : ١٤٢٨/١/١٧

المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة الشؤون البلدية والقروية
المجلس البلدي

المجلس البلدي بجدة
Jeddah City Council

سعادة الأستاذ عاطف عبد الله سكر   المحترم

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

إشارة لخطابكم بشأن إجراء مقابلات شخصية مـع عـدد مـن أعضاء المجلس البلدي بجدة ، حـول موضوع بحـثكم العلمي للحصول علـى درجة الدكتوراه الـذي تجرونه في جامعة فيكتوريا باستراليا ، مـع تأكيدكم لي بـأن الغرض مـن إجراء هذه المقابلات علمي بحت ؛ وأن المعلومات المستخلصة لن تتعدى الأطر العلمية للحصول علـى الدرجة العلمية ، أود إفادتكم بأنني قمت بتوزيع طلبكم لبعض الأعضاء ممـن يرغبون في إجراء المقابلة.

متمنيا لكم التوفيق والسداد ، ، ،

رئيس المجلس البلدي بجدة

أ.د رباح بن واصل الظاهري

سعادة الاستاذ/ عاطف عبدالله سكر   الموقر

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

إشارة الى خطابكم بشأن عمل مقابلات مع عدد من اعضاء هيئة التدريس بالجامعة حول الموضوع الوارد بخطابكم (مشروع بحث رقم ١١٨/٦) أود إفادتكم بأنني قمت بتوزيع طلبكم لعدد من اعضاء هيئة التدريس ومن لديه الرغبة في إجراء المقابلة سوف يقوم بالاتصال بكم والتنسيق معكم.

وتقبلوا فائق احترامي وتقديري

وكيل كلية الاقتصاد والادارة

للدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي

٢٨/١١/١٤٤٧هـ

د. حسام بن عبدالمحسن العنقري

صورة لمكتبنا

Encl. .... المشفوعات   Date .... التاريخ   Ref. .... الرقم

التاريخ : ٢٧ / ١١ / ١٤٢٧هـ

الموافق : ١٨ / ١٢ /٢٠٠٦م

سعادة الأستاذ/عاطف سكر   الموقر

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ،،،

إشارة إلى خطابكم بشأن عمل مقابلات مع عدد من رجال الأعمال حول الموضوع الوارد في خطابكم (مشرع بحث رقم ١١٨/٦) أود إفادتكم بـأنني قمت بتوزيع طلبكم لبعض رجال الأعمال ومن لديه الرغبة في إجراء المقابلـــة سوف يقوم بالإتصال بكم والتنسيق معكم.

وتقبلوا مني خالص الود والتقدير،،،

محمد منصور الساعد

المدير التنفيذي للجنة الإدارية

المركز الرئيسي: البغدادية الغربية - أمام مدينة الملك فهد الساحلية ص.ب ١٢٦٤ جدة ٢١٤٣١ هاتف ٦٥١٥١١١ فاكس ٦٥١٧٣٧٣
HEAD OFFICE: P.O.BOX 1264 JEDDAH 21431 KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA TEL 6515111 FAX 6517373 TELEX 601069 GHURFA SJ

مركز جدة الدولي للمعارض والمؤتمرات هاتف ٦٥٨١١٢٢ فاكس ٦٥٤٤٤٨١ - مدينة المستودعات هاتف ٦٣٧١٨١٨ فاكس ٦٣٦٩٠٢٨ - فرع الغرفة بالمدينة الصناعيةهاتف ٦٣٧٠٩٤٣ فاكس ٦٣٧١٠٨٥
فرع الغرفة بوزارة التجارة هاتف ٦٨٧٥٠٨٧ فاكس ٦٨٧٥٠٨٧ - فرع الغرفة برابغ هاتف ٤٢٢٠٥٢٠ فاكس ٤٢٢٣٦٦١ - فرع الغرفة بالقنفدة هاتف ٠٧/٧٣٢١٧٤٤ فاكس ٠٧/٧٣٢١٧٦٤
Jeddah Internationa Exhibition Center Tel 6544054 Fax 6544481 - Warehouse City Tel 6371818 Fax 6369028 - Industrial City Branch Tel 6370943 Fax 6371085
Minstry of Commerce Branch Tel 6875087 Fax 6875087 - Rabigh Branch Tel 4220520 Fax 4223661 - Al-Qunfudah Branch Tel 07/7321744 Fax 07/7321764

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة الشؤون الإسلامية والأوقاف
والدعوة والإرشاد
ومكالة الوزارة لشؤون المساجد والدعوة والإرشاد
مكتب الوكيل

الـــرقم :
التـاريخ :
المشفوعات :
الموضــوع :

سعادة الأستاذ / عاطف بن عبدالله سكر   وفقه الله

سلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته   أما بعد

فأسأل الله لكم العون والسداد

واشير إلى كتابكم المؤرخ في ١٤٢٨/١/١هـ بشأن مشروع البحث ذي الرقم ١١٨/٦

المؤرخ في ١٤٢٨/١/١هـ لنيل درجة الدكتوراه من جامعة فكتوريا في استراليا .

أخبركم بانه في حالة توافر من يرغب التعاون معكم في موضوع البحـث ، فـسوف يـتم

إبلاغكم بذلك .

والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته.

مدير مكتب وكيل الوزارة لشؤون المساجد والدعوة والإرشاد

قاسم بن سعد الشايع

375