

THE FUTURE OF YOUTH IN THE POST-OIL ERA

The Case of the United Arab
Emirates and Saudi Arabia



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ABSTRACT

To sustain the high standard of living attained by Emirati and Saudi societies to the youth and the coming generations, the two countries must set strategies and plans to integrate youth while continuing to diversify their economies away from oil. This study explores the impact of the post-oil reforms and strategy on the youth, including education, employment, social contract, and identity. The study applies Late Rentier State Theory (Late RST) to analyse the relationship between youth, the Emirati and Saudi states, the post-oil reforms, and their future trajectories. The study finds that, for the United Arab Emirates, the results of education and Emiratisations policies are likely to shape the shifting social contract between young Emiratis and the government.

With regards to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the study finds that while the government is investing massively in educational and employment reforms, young Saudis need to adopt entrepreneurial values and work ethic to ensure the success of “Neo-Saudism.” This in turn requires a certain level of responsiveness from the government and possibly more opportunities for youth to participate in decision making in the near future.

Key Words: FUTURE- YOUTH- UNITED ARAB EMIRATIS- SAUDI ARABIA – EMPLOYMENT- EDUCATION- POST-OIL- REFORMS

INTRODUCTION

The overwhelming demographic and social changes in the Gulf will continue in the coming decade. The total population was 45 million people in 2011. The population of Gulf states has been rising rapidly due to high fertility rates and the influx of migrant workers reaching 57.6 million in 2020.¹ The vast majority, 54%, will be under 25 and is estimated to decrease to approximately 36% by 2050. The swift growth and the population's relative youth present challenges and significant opportunities.

The most populated country in the Gulf is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), with 60.8% of the total population of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with 16.1% of the total.² Young people aged 15-34 make up 36.7% of Saudi Arabia's total population, according to a report by the Kingdom's General Authority for Statistics. The report also found that children and youth account for 67% of the Kingdom's population.³ However, young people in the UAE aged 15-34 make up 50% of the Emirati population.⁴

One of the most critical issues currently facing the Middle East is the changing composition of its demographic structure. A massive cohort of young people —known as a youth bulge —is challenging policymakers, with youth policies affecting security, education, the labour market, and welfare programs, among other areas. Given the relative stability and wealth of the Gulf states, this is an issue that is not often associated with the region. However, handling a growing young population is just as challenging in the Gulf.

The Gulf is one of the wealthiest regions in the world; in terms of GDP per capita, it is a distinctive region due to its unique hydrocarbon reserves compared to a relatively small national population. Gulf states rely on oil revenue —to varying degrees— to attract private investors and to provide extensive public services and subsidies to nationals.

١- المركز الإحصائي لدول مجلس التعاون لدول الخليج العربية STAT-GCC، ٢٠٢١م، ملخص إحصائي حول إحصاءات السكان في مجلس التعاون لدول الخليج العربية لعام ٢٠٢٠م، مسقط - سلطنة عمان.

2- Abyad, A. (n.d.). Demographic changes in the GCC countries: Reflection and future projection. platform.almanhal.com. Retrieved December 12, 2022, from [https://platform.almanhal.com/Files/2/117452#:~:text=The%20vast%20majority%2054%25%20will,as%20major%20opportunities%20\(1\)](https://platform.almanhal.com/Files/2/117452#:~:text=The%20vast%20majority%2054%25%20will,as%20major%20opportunities%20(1))

3- Naar, I. (2020, August 10). Youth account for 36.7 percent of Saudi Arabia's total population: Report. Al Arabiya English. Retrieved December 12, 2022, from <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2020/08/10/Youth-account-for-36-7-percent-of-Saudi-Arabia-s-total-population-Report>

4- The trends shaping the UAE's youth sector after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ideation Center. (n.d.). Retrieved December 12, 2022, from <https://www.strategyand.pwc.com/m1/en/ideation-center/research/2021/future-of-youth/future-of-youth-in-the-uae-english.pdf>

With not enough diversification in the economy, the Gulf countries' government spending will continue to be a barrier to economic diversification.

To sustain the high standard of living attained by Emirati and Saudi societies to the youth and the coming generations, the two countries set strategies and plans to integrate youth while continuing to diversify their economies away from oil. This study will explore the impact of the post-oil reforms and strategy on the youth, including education, employment, social contract, and identity.

Proponents of the youth bulge hypothesis contend that states where young adults constitute a large proportion of the population are expected to face an elevated risk of political violence and interstate conflict, regardless of being perpetuated by state or non-state actors. Additionally, the youth bulge hypothesis focuses on the ease of mobilization among risk-taking, idealist young adults when options for social and economic mobility are limited. Generally, states with a young adult population face pressure on demand for social services like healthcare, high-quality education, decent jobs, and basic infrastructure. Due to such risks, countries with a high proportion of youth face high out-migration rates.

This study does not refute the youth bulge hypothesis, widely used in the literature; however, it will add to it. The first part of the hypothesis will align with the youth bulge hypothesis as young adults could potentially make demands that challenge the status quo. However, it proposes that those risks can be alleviated under certain circumstances. Those circumstances include policies and strategies to be taken by governments that are relevant to youth needs and the surrounding environment. Namely, taking into consideration both agency and structure. The study will apply the Late Rentier State Theory (Late RST) to discover its impact on the Emirati and Saudi youth.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study applies an explanatory Mixed Method Research (MMR). Where both primary and secondary data are used to analyse the impact of employment and education reforms on youth. The study also utilizes the case study tool in order to explore the impact of post-oil reforms on youth in both the UAE and the KSA. The study explores the perceived impact of reforms on education, employment, and the social contract between the state and citizens. The following research questions guided this study: What are the post-oil reforms, why are they necessary or essential, what challenges if any impeded their action plan implementations? How have these reforms impacted youth? What does this impact entail for political and social stability? How can this capacity be strengthened to create more resilient and adaptable policies? To answer these questions, mixed methodological procedures were employed whereby quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analysed, and then aggregated into the study.

Objectives of the Study

- Provide an overview and assessment of UAE and KSA's new visions and post-oil reforms.
- Identify the current and prospective needs of youth in both countries.
- Evaluate the impact of reforms on youth's education, employment, identity, and social contract.
- Evaluate UAE and KSA's strategies and policies for youth engagement and empowerment.
- Analyse the extent to which post-oil reforms integrate youth considerations and are adaptable to their needs.
- Highlight the opportunities for each country to integrate youth considerations into their strategies better.

Importance of the Study

This study's findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of the ongoing post-oil reforms on the future prospects of Saudi Arabia and the UAE by focusing on their impact on the largest proportion of the population: youth. The analysis presented in the study is critical for policy makers and researchers interested in identifying the risks and opportunities associated with each country's respective development agenda. By focusing on education and employment policies as well as the changing social contract, the study highlights important socio-political perspectives that are necessary to consider for the effectiveness of economic policies.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework tackles the independent, intervening, and dependent variables of this study. Based on the theoretical framework, the independent variable is governmental policies and reforms aimed at achieving a safe transformation to the post-oil era. In that process of transformation, youth, as the intervening variable, are to be affected leading, at the end, to large scale alterations to the social contract present in the two states. In this regard, the dependent variable is the social contract.

Government's Economic Policies

Governmental economic policies are considered the independent variable in this study. It entails that in the post-oil era, governments tend to change their spending behaviours, aiming to implement a specific future vision. The study defines governmental policies as the new fiscal policy in the post-oil era after being transformed from an oil-dependent economy. In this regard, the operation definition goes as follows:

- Fiscal policy is defined as the policy under which the government uses its revenue to achieve certain public policies.⁵
- Oil-dependent economies are usually defined to be those economies reliant on the volatility of oil, gas and mineral prices in the international market.⁶ In oil-dependent economies, economic growth, even of non-oil output, tends to pick up during periods of high oil prices.⁷
- Post-oil reforms refer to the diversification of the economy, for example by attracting businesses to set up regional offices in the country. It can also be approached through following policies that can lead to an open-ended liberal economy.⁸

5- HORTON , M. A. R. K., & EL-GANAINY , A. S. M. A. A. (2022). Fiscal policy: Taking and giving away. IMF. Retrieved January 11, 2023, from <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/Series/Back-to-Basics/Fiscal-Policy>

6- Hamdi, H., & Sbia, R. (2013). Dynamic relationships between oil revenues, government spending and economic growth in an oil-dependent economy. Elsevier.

7- Tazhibayeva, K., Husain, M. A. M., & Ter-Martirosyan, A. (2008, November 1). Fiscal policy and economic cycles in oil-exporting countries. *imfsg*. Retrieved January 11, 2023, from <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/001/2008/253/article-A001-en.xml>

8- Hamdi, H., & Sbia, R. (2013). Dynamic relationships between oil revenues, government spending and economic growth in an oil-dependent economy. Elsevier.

Youth

It is commonplace that the youth category lacks a clear definition and in some situations it is based on social rather than chronological age. It differs across different studies, governments, and time frames.⁹ For instance, according to United Nations' definition, youth are those people aged between 15 and 24.¹⁰ In this study, we extend the definition of youth as anyone below the age of 30, as this is how governments define their targeted group. Operationally, "youth" as an intervening variable here refers to policies affecting this age group; namely, education, employment and identity.

- **Education:** Policy reforms as the development of rigorous standards and better assessments which serves their future aims in the post-oil era including curriculum reforms, teacher training, private sector involvement, technology integration, and internationalization.
- **Employment:** The utilization of youth as being necessary for the post-oil economy.

Social Contract

Philosophers as far back as Socrates, John Locke, and Rousseau have described the idea of the social contract as an agreement between those who rule and those who are ruled. The social contract entails that governments provide people with protection, provision and political decision making in return to moral and political rules of behaviour.¹¹ Accordingly, it is the agreement, or multiple simultaneous agreements, between societal groups and the state on their rights and obligations towards each other. In the operational sense, social contract is the government providing protection, provisions, and participation while societal groups offer recognition of legitimacy and other obligations.¹²

9- Bucholtz, M. (2002). youth and cultural practices. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31(1).

10- Assembly, G. (2013). Youth definition 2013-1-23 - united nations. United Nations. Retrieved January 11, 2023, from <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

11- Social Contract theory. *Ethics Unwrapped*. (2022, February 21). Retrieved January 11, 2023, from <https://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/social-contract-theory>

12- Loewe, M., Zintl, T., & Houdert, A. (2020). The social contract as a tool of analysis: Introduction to the special issue on "Framing the evolution of new social contracts in Middle Eastern and North African countries." *World Development*, 104982. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.10498

- **Protection:** Collective and individual security and rule of law dependent on state authority.
- **Provision:** Resources, infrastructure, social, and economic benefits dependent on state capacity.
- **Participation:** Political decision making generating state legitimacy.
- **Recognition of legitimacy:** Perceives the ruler as the one who has the right to rule.
- **Other obligations:** Taxes, military, and civil service.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Youth Bulge Theory

A youth bulge is used to describe the phenomena of growing young populations. According to the theory, nations with sizable youth populations and high rates of unemployment are more likely to experience political violence, terrorism, or civil war.¹³ Gary Fuller originated the term in 1985 while employed by the CIA. It has since shown to have a long shelf life¹⁴. It alludes to a demographic phenomenon in which a sizable fraction of young adults —those between the ages of 15 and 29— make up more than 40% of all adults, but it also denotes an air of unpredictability and an elevated danger of conflict. The main contention of the theory is that violence can be anticipated when there are “too many young guys” in an area.¹⁵

The youth bulge has sparked anxieties of expanding youth cohorts based on stereotypes, but hasn't been met by feminist international relations contributions or gender theory engagement, leading to a limited conceptualization of complex and dynamic young realities. Young people's experiences, thoughts, and needs are marginalized from peace and security when they are only seen as “threats” and “victims”, as opposed to being seen as multifaceted players who can influence policy and practice.¹⁶

It is claimed that the youth bulge idea needs to be re-evaluated since it places too much emphasis on civil conflict. The majority of ideas surrounding the youth bulge make the assumption that conflicts result from rivalry between younger and older cohorts or because younger cohorts encounter institutional “bottlenecks” due to their greater numbers than earlier cohorts. Second, countries with sizeable under-15 populations and high population growth will typically have underestimated youth bulges. According

13- Sayce, T.R. (2016). Recalibrating youth bulge theory : Saudi Arabia's youth and the threat to security.

14- Hendrixson, A., 2004. Angry Young Men, Veiled Young Women: Constructing a New Population Threat. Corner House Briefing 3. Available from <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/pdf/briefing/34veiled.pdf>

15- Pruitt, L. (2020). Rethinking youth bulge theory in policy and scholarship: incorporating critical gender analysis. *International Affairs*, 96(3), pp. 711-728. doi:10.1093/ia/iiaa012

16- Alexander, A., et. al., 2019. Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender and Violent Extremism. The George Washington University, Washington, DC.

to Huntington, cultures become more prone to war when the proportion of persons aged 15 to 24 reaches a “critical level” of 20% of the total population of a nation.¹⁷

The theory takes a gloomy stance on the rise in youth in developing nations because it believes that it will increase unemployment, which will result in disputes, and violent outbursts. The role that youth education has in forming their awareness is ignored by this viewpoint. Along with their diverse methods for containing the rise in the number of young people, the countries also differ in the quantity of their resources. Furthermore, prosperous states with small populations are not covered by this hypothesis.

Resource Curse Theory

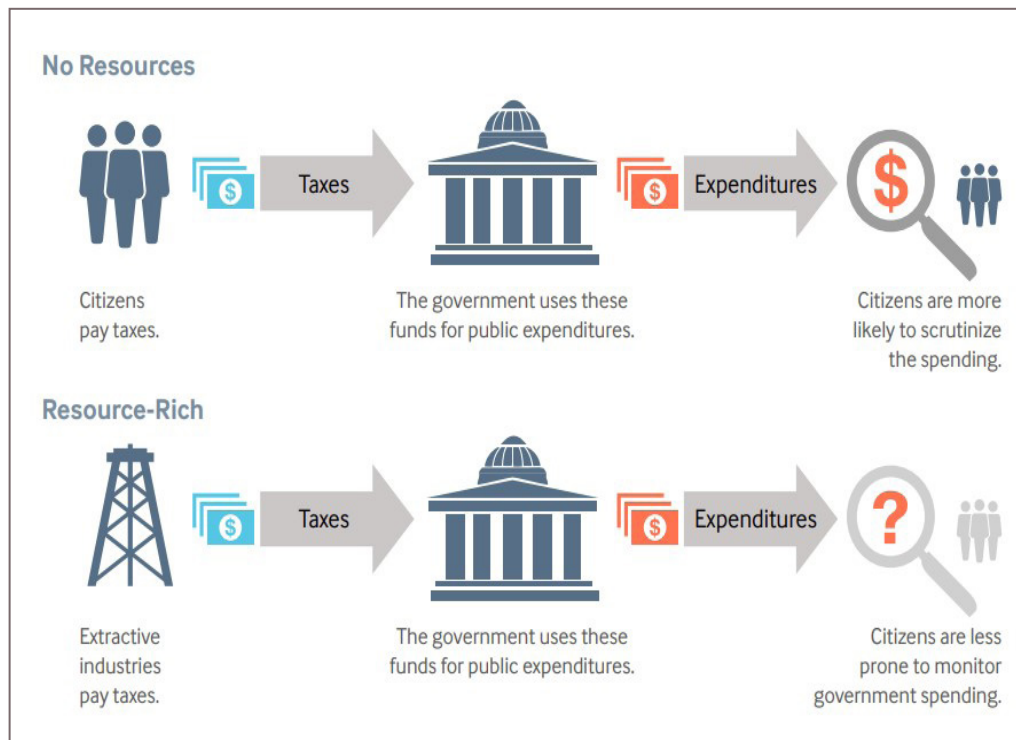
When examining the relationship between resources and political or social stability, Resource Curse Theory (RCT) is in some ways relevant for understanding Gulf countries. The theory suggests that natural resource wealth is linked to poor economic performance, instability, and violent conflict.¹⁸ Multiple models have emerged to explain this phenomenon since the 1990s, when the theory was developed. However, the issue is that there is no one theory to explain why the Resource Curse is present in some countries but not others. Still, the theory is valuable with regards to its acknowledgement that high-income oil states are largely spared by violence compared to lower revenue countries which are more likely to experience political instability. This can be applicable to many of the Gulf states which have the capacity to use revenues to create large scale distributive policies and maintain national security.¹⁹

17- Huntington, Samuel P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

18- International Resource Governance Institute. (2015, March). *The Resource Curse the Political and Economic Challenges of Natural Resource Wealth*. Retrieved January 11, 2023, from https://resourcegovernance.org/sites/default/files/nrgi_Resource-Curse.pdf

19- Basedau, Matthias, and Wolfram Lacher. “A Paradox of Plenty? Rent Distribution and Political Stability in Oil States.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.909189>.

Figure (1) Incentives in Resource Rich and Resource-poor Countries



Source: International Resource Governance Institute. (2015, March). The Resource Curse the Political and Economic Challenges of Natural Resource Wealth. Retrieved January 11, 2023, from https://resourcegovernance.org/sites/default/files/nrgi_Resource-Curse.pdf

RCT therefore accounts for many of the variables considered in this study including resources, political stability, and policies. However, it does not provide sufficient room for an understanding of the impact of distributive policies which are aimed at reducing dependence on resource wealth.

There are many studies that investigated the influence of oil dependency on the social contract and the impact of oil price fluctuations on the state's capacity to maintain autonomy from societal demands. However, few studies have examined the impact of post-oil reforms on youth while taking into account the social contract, which is what the following theory allows room for.

Rentier State Theory

According to the literature, Rentier State Theory (RST) is one of the leading theories used to assess the political economy, the nature of elite political dynamics, and state-society relations in GCC countries. Given that the paper is focused on understanding the impact of post-oil reforms on youth and local socio-political dynamics, the theoretical framework examines the relevance of RST to the presented research questions. The theory, which aims to explain the specific dynamics of countries that derive a large proportion of their income from external rents (in this case referring mainly to oil revenues), holds the assumption that since rentier states receive their main income externally and this is distributed to society, states are therefore relieved of the need to impose taxes and the subsequent need to make concessions to society in the form of, for example, democratic bargain or specific development strategies.²⁰

However, since its development in the 1970s and 1980s, RST has evolved in order to account for the vast changes within the Gulf states, which are now more globalized, as well as changes within the global context. Until today, RST has gone through at least three identifiable phases in its evolution. This evolution is relevant as it marks significant changes in scholars' approach to understanding the Gulf states, reflecting changes within the states themselves. The first phase was "Classical" RST, which became prominent in the 1980s and 1990s. In relation to economic policy, Classical RST highlights the limited role of rentier states in supporting or sustaining their non-rent domestic economies as their rents grew. It also points to their limited interest in economic diversification until economic and population pressures emerge — conditions that did in fact cause some Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, to consider economic diversification in the 1980s and 1990s.

The second phase of RST emerged as a response to challenges to the validity of certain elements of Classical RST. The most relevant of those, for this study, is the question of whether rent-dependent states truly become fully autonomous from society and if so then why do most rentier states still in one way or another respond to societal pressures? This phase resulted in different branches of RST including "Specialized" RST, which takes into account historical dynamics and exceptionalisms and "Conditional" RST which recognizes the weakness of the assumption that rents

20- Beblawi, H. (1987). The Rentier State in the Arab World. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 9(4), 383–398. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41857943>

render the state completely autonomous from society and that the threat of violent opposition or uprising is always a possibility. Therefore, states must, and do in fact, use different mechanisms to respond and navigate society's needs.

The third phase of RST, which has been termed "Late" RST retains the principles of the first phase while also recognizing the importance of non-rent factors for explaining the dynamics of rentier states. Late RST holds that rentierism has become more sophisticated as states have matured and new threats have emerged. This paper adopts Late RST which suggests that there are 7 main features of rentier states in the 21st Century. These are:

- 1- A responsive but undemocratic state.
- 2- Opening up to globalization, but with some protectionism remaining.
- 3- An active economic and development policy.
- 4- An "energy-driven" vs. an "energy-centric" economy.
- 5- An "entrepreneurial state capitalist" structure.
- 6- A state that is long-term in its thinking.
- 7- An active and innovative foreign policy.²¹

These characteristics and the principles underpinning Late RST will be used to guide the analysis of UAE and KSA's post-oil reforms, their impact on youth, and the subsequent impact on the countries' development plans through focusing on the key themes identified by the theory.

While Late RST does not dedicate specific attention to defining youth or the youth bulge, youth are essentially the subjects of the sixth characteristic which is concerned with the state's long term strategy. This paper adopts a simple definition of youth which is individuals aged below 30, as this definition is the one used in both the UAE and KSA's respective policies.

21- Gray, M. (2011). A Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf. CIRS Occasional Papers <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2825905> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2825905>

While there are numerous studies that apply Late RST to analyses of Gulf states, there are few studies using the theory to understand the relationship between youth, the state, post-oil reforms, and their future trajectories. The characteristics most referenced in the analysis are characteristics 2-6 with most of the analysis focusing on the impact of globalization, modernization policies, diversification, the state's encouragement of entrepreneurship, and the sustainability of their strategies with regards to the extent to which they accommodate youth's needs and account for changing societal structures and expectations.

1

Chapter One**THE IMPACT OF POST-OIL REFORMS ON YOUTH**

This chapter will examine the reforms and strategies in the UAE and KSA's education and employment sectors. The chapter will analyse the main reform elements such as; private sector engagement, curricula reforms, training of teachers, and technology integration. Furthermore, it will give an overview of government expenditures on education and the main results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests.

With the education reforms previously discussed, new graduates are better qualified with higher salary expectations and looking to enter the workforce. However, while many entry-level positions are unpleasant to job seekers across cultures, there is added pressure in Gulf states since the type of work, industry of employment, and social interactions within it more strongly influence the social status of the job holder than in other cultures, and with the previously guaranteed public sector job, with its higher wage and better job security no longer available, the private sector would be the only prospect for jobseekers.

Education in the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

A recent World Economic Forum report stated that a worldwide improvement in students' capacity for problem-solving to the average level of today's top 10 scoring countries could add an additional USD 2.5 trillion to the global economy. Governments that can alter their skill landscapes and improve their human capital's future readiness will be able to unleash labour market opportunities and show that they can be leaders rather than followers in the world.²² Therefore, education reform is crucial to a prosperous post-oil era in the Gulf states.

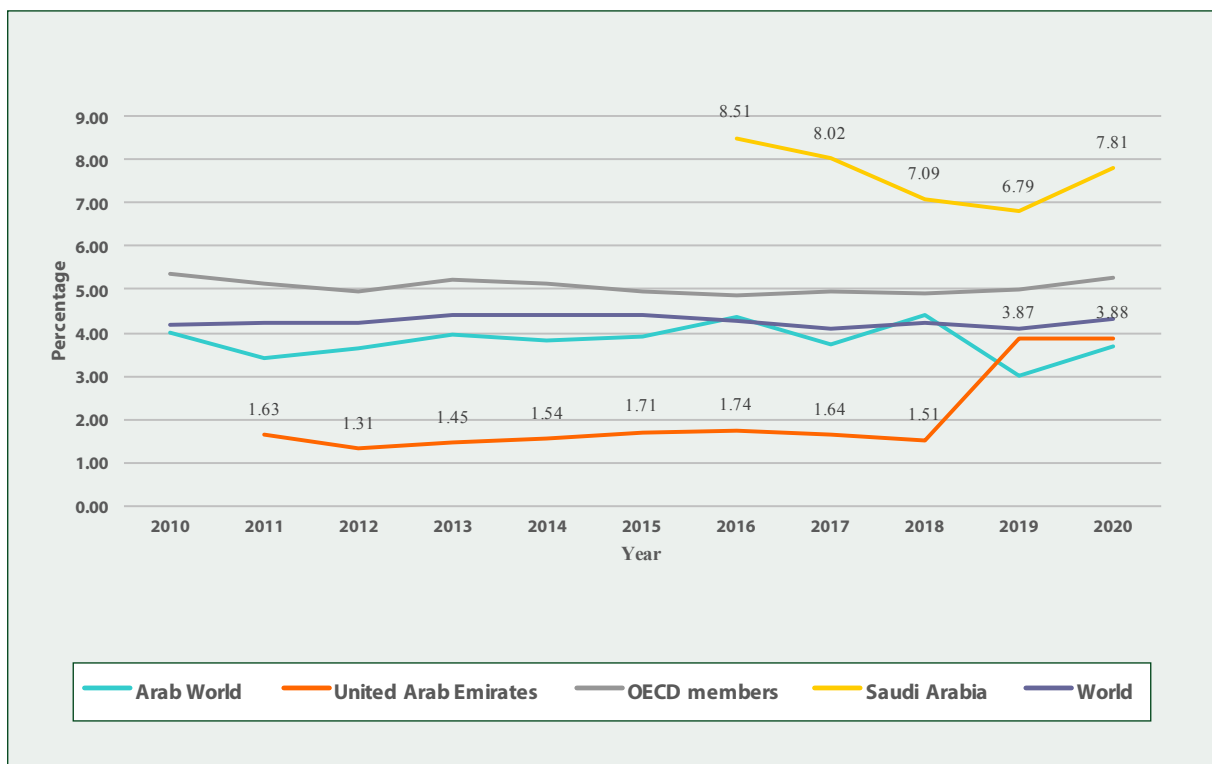
By highlighting education in the Gulf states the study finds that over the previous ten years, many Gulf states have publicly made long-term national vision announcements that include specific strategies and programs to transition to the post-oil era, by promoting economic diversity of which education reforms are an important aspect.

 22- Oommen, A. (2022, May 23). How will students, institutions, and the job market benefit from the UAE's new educational reforms? Arabian Business. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/industries/education/how-will-students-institutions-and-the-job-market-benefit-from-the-uaes-new-educational-reforms>

Given the social and political significance of education, both the UAE and the KSA have made it the cornerstone of their national strategies for transitioning to the post-oil era. The post-oil reforms in the Gulf states have led to a shift in the focus of education towards more practical and market-oriented skills, as well as increased private sector involvement. These changes are aimed at preparing the workforce for the diversified economies of the future and promoting economic development in the region.

Focusing on United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia both have undergone post-oil reforms in recent years as a result of declining oil prices and the need to diversify their economies. These reforms have had a number of impacts on education. Firstly, there has been an increased focus on vocational and technical training in order to meet the demand for skilled workers in emerging sectors such as technology, healthcare, and finance. Secondly, a push to improve the quality of education and to align it with the needs of the job market, through initiatives such as curriculum reform and teacher training programs. The post-oil reforms have also led to increased private sector involvement in education, with the establishment of private schools, universities, and partnerships between private companies and educational institutions. This has expanded access to education and created new opportunities for students.

Figure (2) Government Expenditure on Education, Total (% of GDP)



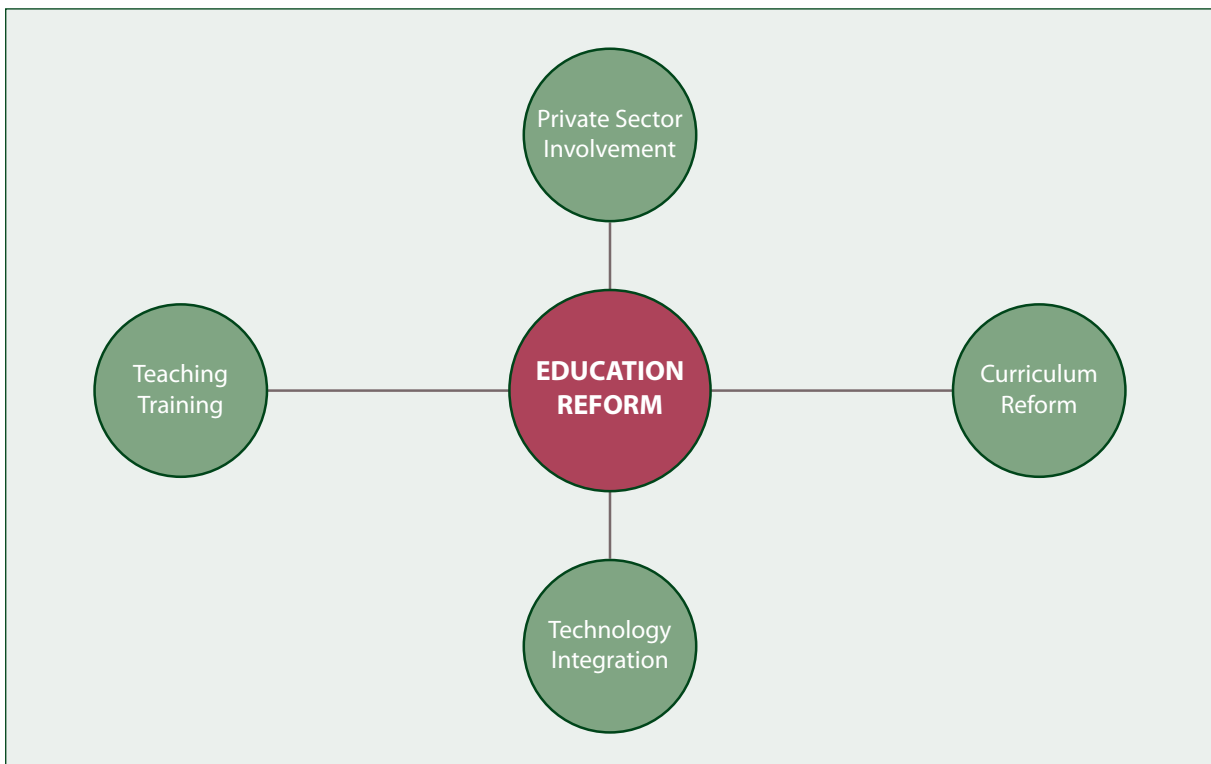
Source: The World Bank Data. (2022, December 22). Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP) - Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, OECD members, Arab World, world. The World Bank Data. Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=SA-AE-OE-1A-1W>

The above graph shows an overview of government expenditures on education in the UAE and KSA compared to the Arab World, OECD members, and the World. The graph indicates that the UAE is spending more on education than the Arab World since 2019. While, KSA spending is double the average for the Arab World between 2016-2020.

Central to large-scale educational reform is government spending to achieve the desired results. However, as of now government spending on education in UAE and KSA is close and exceeds that of developed countries. The above graph shows that the UAE expenditures on education for 2016 were 1.7% and increased to 3.9% in 2020, a 2.1% increase over the observed period. Saudi Arabia expenditures on education for 2016 were 8.5% and declined by 0.7% in 2020, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and its impact on oil prices.

This section will examine each country’s strategy and reforms for developing its education sector, while focusing on the indicators below.

Figure (3) The Indicators of Education Reforms



EDUCATION IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The UAE is a world-class nation in the field of education. In 2010, the UAE introduced Vision 2021 comprised of six national priorities, including the promotion of a first-rate education system, and a competitive knowledge economy.²³ In addition to the plans introduced by the Dubai Plan 2021 and Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 to enhance the quality of education through enhanced curriculum and infrastructure.²⁴

A number of reform strategies have been implemented by the UAE in recent years to promote economic growth and development. These strategies have focused on a number of areas, including human capital development; the UAE has focused on improving the education system and investing in training and development programs, in order to build a skilled and productive workforce. Completely restructuring its education system through a series of sweeping changes and reforms aimed at improving public schools, early childhood development, and youth education. The new structure will cover the Education and Human Resources Council, the Federal Authority for Quality and Standards of Education, the Ministry of Education, the Federal Authority for Early Childhood Education, and the Emirates Schools Establishment, in addition to the local educational authorities in each emirate, which will work according to one system and specific competencies. Three new ministers were appointed for various education related ministries and the State Ministry for Early Education was created to supervise the newly established Federal Authority for Early Childhood Education and will be responsible for developing comprehensive plans to follow up on child development from birth to fourth grade.

23- UAE Vision 2021. (n.d.). Retrieved January 3, 2023, from <https://www.vision2021.ae/en/uae-vision>

24- GFH Education Sector Report 2020. (2020, January). Retrieved January 3, 2023, from <https://gfh.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GFH-Education-Sector-Report-2020.pdf>

The Reforms Undertaken by the UAE in Education include Several Axes

Curriculum Reform

The UAE has implemented reforms to the curriculum in order to align it with the needs of the job market and to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The Curriculum Content Expansion Program is a significant step in broadening the scope of school content is the Ministry of Education's recent announcement of an overhaul of the physical education curriculum to include additional instructional hours and improved facilities. However, greater progress must be made in other areas, such as the arts and music, which have not yet received adequate attention in the national curriculum.

Teacher Training

Investments have been made in teacher training programs in order to improve the quality of teaching and to enhance the skills and knowledge of teachers with focus on increasing and improving Emirati teachers.

Private Sector Involvement

The UAE has encouraged the private sector to become involved in education through initiatives such as the establishment of private schools, universities, and partnerships between private companies and educational institutions.

Technology Integration

Education in the UAE has embraced the use of technology, including the use of online learning platforms and virtual classrooms. Emirati leadership have designed a vision for education to align with the sustainable development and the post-oil era, the vision includes monitoring visits, launching initiatives, with the leadership keen to establish a number of technological centres to keep pace with changes and develop new areas of work like: The Abu Dhabi Institute for Vocational Education and the Abu Dhabi Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training. The Investment in Knowledge Initiative and the Competitive Research Funding Initiative are two of the strategies' initiatives.

Internationalization

Internationalization of education has been encouraged by the exchange of students and teachers with other countries and by attracting international universities to set up campuses in the country. According to data from Abu Dhabi Education Council's Road to 2030 95% of graduating seniors in Abu Dhabi fail to meet university standards and require a remedial program.²⁵ However, the UAE is one of the most rapidly improving education systems in the world according to PISA. The UAE's ability to strategically develop and utilize its skill potential will be largely responsible for its future prosperity as well as that of other nations.²⁶

Ministry of Education 2021 Strategy

The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 was introduced by the Ministry of Education in September 2017. Its goal was to raise the country's standards for professional and scientific education in order to benefit future generations. To raise the standards of education the Ministry of Education (MoE) launched a strategy for 2017-2021, to develop an innovative education system for building a knowledgeable and globally competitive society. The system will include all age groups to be able to meet future labour market demand. It shall ensure the quality of the output of the MoE and provide the best services for internal and external recipients.²⁷

The New Plan is Based on the Following Values:

- Citizenship and responsibility
- The principles and values of Islam
- Commitment and transparency
- Equality and justice
- Participation and accountability
- Science, technology, and innovation

25- Matsumoto, A. (2019). Literature Review on Education Reform in the UAE. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 28(1), 4–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056787918824188>

26- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2015). *Education policy outlook 2015: Better skills, better jobs, better lives: A strategic approach to education and skills policies for the United Arab Emirates*. Paris: OECD.

27- Raising the standard of Education. The official portal of the UAE Government. (n.d.). Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/leaving-no-one-behind/4qualityeducation/raising-the-standard-of-education>

In 2021, the UAE launched “UAE Centennial 2071”, its long-term, full-vision plan that covers the five decades following 2021. It creates a clear road map for the government’s long-term efforts to strengthen the nation’s standing and soft power. By giving them the information and skills necessary to deal with rapid change and making the UAE the best country in the world by the next centennial in 2071, the plan aims to invest in the next generation. One of the main pillars of the plan is excellent education which emphasizes how crucial high-quality education is. Advanced science and technology, space science, engineering, innovation, and health sciences are some of the areas of focus in education. Other instructional strategies involve giving children tools to identify their unique skills at a young age.

On an institutional level, educational institutions are urged to act as hubs for global research and as incubators for entrepreneurship; all those sectors are considered as new specializations to cope with the post-oil era.²⁸

The government took steps towards education reform in parallel with economic reforms to address the future of economic reforms in the UAE. The establishment of the Federal Authority for Quality and Standards of Education will measure student performance, the efficiency of the education process, and the outcome of the process.²⁹ The UAE education reform strategy included different stages starting from the leadership and ending with the student. Following the appointment of new ministers in May 2022, the UAE lost no time in overhauling the educational system from the ground up. In schools with more private involvement, science, math, and technology are being emphasized more. It is important to mention that the government is concerned about early childhood development in order to stay current.

Education in the Government Budget

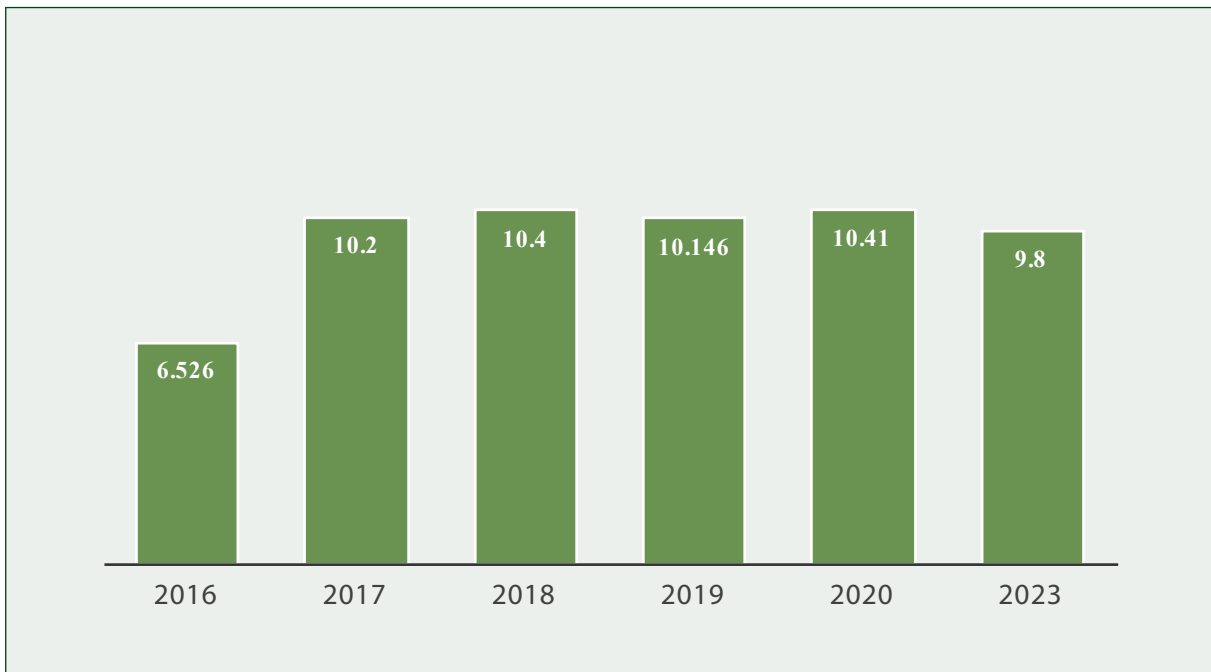
In order to provide high-quality educational services and advance a knowledge-based economy, the UAE allocates a sizable portion of the federal budget for the improvement

28- UAE Centennial 2071. The official portal of the UAE Government. (2022, November 24). Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/innovation-and-future-shaping/uae-centennial-2071>

29- The post-oil era in the UAE will be built on education. Teach Middle East Magazine. (2015, July 14). Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://teachmiddleeastmag.com/the-post-oil-era-in-the-uae-will-be-built-on-education/>

of the educational system each year. According to the draft budget data for the years 2016- 2020 the following sums were designated for the education.³⁰

Figure (4) The Federal Budget Allocated for Education in UAE, 2016-2023 (AED billions)



Source: Education budget - the official portal of the UAE Government. Ministry of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/education/education-budget>

The federal government in UAE allocated 15.5% of the total federal general budget (2023-2026) to public and university education programs at AED 9.8 billion.³¹

30- Education budget - the official portal of the UAE Government. Ministry of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/education/education-budget>

31- UAE approves Federal General Budget 2023-2026 with total estimated expenditures of AED 252.3 billion. Ministry of Finance United Arab Emirates. (n.d.). Retrieved January 3, 2023, from <https://mof.gov.ae/uae-approves-federal-general-budget-2023-2026-with-total-estimated-expenditures-of-aed-252-3-billion/>

Scholarships for Emirati Citizens

The Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge announced the Khotwa program to give thousands of high school graduates the opportunity to continue their education abroad. The program budget is a AED 1.9 billion scholarship program that will support a total of 6,000 students by 2028.³²

Measuring the Impact of the Reforms in the UAE

According to PISA, the UAE was one of the highest ranked participants in the index of students' awareness of global issues, and the index of students' self-efficacy regarding global issues.³³ Overall, these education reform strategies have been aimed at improving the quality and relevance of education in the UAE, as well as increasing access and opportunities for students.

32- The National News. (2022, September 22). 1.9-billion scholarships to help 6,000 students study abroad. The National News. Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/education/uae-dh1-9-billion-scholarship-to-help-6000-students-study-abroad>

33- United Arab Emirates - Student Performance (PISA 2018) - OECD. OECD. (n.d.). Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?plotter=h5&primaryCountry=ARE&treshold=5&topic=PI>

EDUCATION REFORMS IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Due to its small population, the influx of foreign workers, the lack of natural resources other than finite oil reserves, and the relatively new educational system, the development of education is extremely important to Saudi Arabia. The issue with the educational system appears to be its focus rather than its quantitative expansion. One of the system's significant flaws is that it places a high societal value on university education while undervaluing technical and vocational education. Unfairly, it is a common misconception that only students with poor academic standing and school dropouts enrol in vocational training.³⁴ This attitude is further supported by employment laws that, until recently, supported this educational structure by giving university graduates preference for work prospects in the public sector, making technical and vocational education even less appealing and socially undesirable. A stronger focus is placed on status and social mobility than on professional mobility and adjusting to a knowledge-based economy, which is how Saudi students perceive the world in general. The majority hold degrees in humanities studies and religion which may have been a suitable graduate output during the oil boom period and the abundance of work possibilities in the public sector, which sustained the cycle of graduates' choice for education and employment, but is no longer the case.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, developed and unveiled by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) in 2016, aims to diversify the Kingdom's economy away from its reliance on oil and toward other sources, with a special emphasis on industries including tourism, industry, and technology. In order to put the nation on the path to success in a post-oil future, it also wants to promote foreign investment, privatize state-owned assets, generate jobs in the private sector, and raise non-oil exports to 50% of total Saudi exports. Furthermore, in order for Saudi Arabia's human capital to compete in the local and international employment markets, the economic development of the country necessitates the modernization of the educational system.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 aims to produce independent, critical thinkers; a priority that may have once been unheard of in the Kingdom. The Saudi National Transformation Program aims to update the educational system, which has routinely ranked Saudi

34- Ramady, M. A., & Al-Sahlawi, M. (2005). EDUCATION AS A FORCE FOR ECONOMIC CHANGE IN AN OIL-BASED ECONOMY: A CASE STUDY OF SAUDI ARABIA. *The Journal of Energy and Development*, 30(2), 187–206. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24812663>

students at the bottom of worldwide assessment rankings and failed to adequately educate them for a post-oil economy.³⁵

An excerpt from the Saudi Vision 2030 website is provided below: **“Our ambition is for the long term. It goes beyond replenishing sources of income that have weakened or preserving what we have already achieved. We are determined to build a thriving country in which all citizens can fulfil their dreams, hopes, and ambitions. Therefore, we will not rest until our nation is a leader in providing opportunities for all through education and training, and high-quality services such as employment initiatives, health, housing, and entertainment”**. The 2030 Vision is concentrated on Saudi Arabia’s long-term growth and increasing possibilities for the entire population, as this excerpt demonstrates. For Saudi Arabia, education is a crucial tool for enacting economic reforms that have a long-term impact on all aspects of the economy. But while pursuing these admirable goals, educational reforms must also be taken into account.³⁶

Saudi Arabia has implemented a number of education reforms in recent years in order to improve the quality and relevance of its education system. These reforms include:

Curriculum Reform

The government is pursuing fundamental education reforms, such as updated curricula that emphasize critical thinking, teacher retraining, the building of brand-new, cutting-edge schools, as well as the decentralization of the school system, in order to meet expectations in the knowledge-based economy of the future. In order to continue the improvements and revamp of the educational system to match the goals of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia’s new school year started with some significant modifications to the structure and curriculum. The changeover from a two-semester system to a three-semester system with brief breaks in between was one of the educational reforms that went into force at public schools and universities this year. According to the Ministry

35- Pennington, R. (2021, July 6). Saudi plans major overhaul to poorly performing education system. The National News . Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/saudi-plans-major-overhaul-to-poorly-performing-education-system-1.683557>

36- bin Abdulaziz, M. bin S. (n.d.). Leadership message. Saudi Vision 2030. Retrieved December 27, 2022, from <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/v2030/leadership-message/>

of Education, the goal is to maintain pace with international best practices and reduce the gaps in the number of school days. Additionally, English will now be taught in the lower classes as opposed to intermediate level as before. Furthermore, religious education classes have been given less weight and their material has been changed to remove any passages that do not support moderate Islamic doctrines. Saudi Arabia has implemented reforms to the curriculum in order to align it with the needs of the job market and to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Teacher Training

Saudi Arabia has invested in teacher training programs in order to improve the quality of teaching and to enhance the skills and knowledge of teachers. The government's Programs for Teacher's Professional Development (PD) should ideally assess how professional learning opportunities enable educators to effectively affect change in their fields and communities. The Saudi Ministry of Education introduced the year-long Khbrat ("experiences" in Arabic) programme, a global initiative for teacher professional development. Through immersion experiences in K-12 schools and university academic cultures, it is hoped that Saudi teachers will modify their perspectives and become successful "change agents" in the reform of Saudi educational institutions. The Khbrat program's effects on Saudi teachers' leadership, classroom experiences, and sociocultural levels; the results inspire new programme design approaches and provide significant insights into teacher professional development programme evaluation.³⁷

Private Sector Involvement

Saudi Arabia has encouraged the private sector to become involved in education through initiatives such as the establishment of private schools and universities, and partnerships between private companies and educational institutions.

37- Bentahar, A., Copeland, K. D., Stevens, S. G., & Vukelich, C. J. (2021, September 26). Educational Change in Saudi Arabia: Insights from One USA/KSA Teacher Professional Development Collaborative. Retrieved January 11, 2023, from <https://udspace.udel.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/54742371-7795-4c54-a45b-479e22973dfa/content>

Technology Integration

Saudi Arabia has embraced the use of technology in education, including the use of online learning platforms and virtual classrooms. Smart classrooms and digital education management systems are being introduced throughout Saudi Arabia as a result of the Future Gate program, which is being carried out at the Saudi government's request by the business of Tatweer Educational Technologies (TETCO). Online tests are replacing printed exams. The government has made significant investments in research and the creation of new, specialized universities in the field of higher education. With population growth and other factors driving demand, its goal is to increase tertiary enrolments and meet this need. The largest portion of Saudi Arabia's government budget goes toward education. The nation invests more in education than the majority of Arab nations.

Internationalization

Saudi Arabia built 719 new schools in 2018 alone, despite the fact that dropping oil prices have put a strain on the country's resources and that overall education spending has declined in recent years. In a nation where the young unemployment rate is extremely high and more than half of the population is under 25, increasing educational attainment rates is essential. Although low-paid migrant workers make up the majority of Saudi Arabia's non-oil sector, as of late 2018, 25% of Saudi citizens were unemployed. Therefore, increasing enrolment in "fields of study connected to the job market" like computer science or business administration is one goal of current changes. Many Saudi students have historically preferred to major in social sciences, religious studies, history, or literature. Saudi Arabia has promoted the internationalization of education by encouraging the exchange of students and teachers with other countries and by attracting international universities to set up campuses in the country.

Ministry of Education Strategy

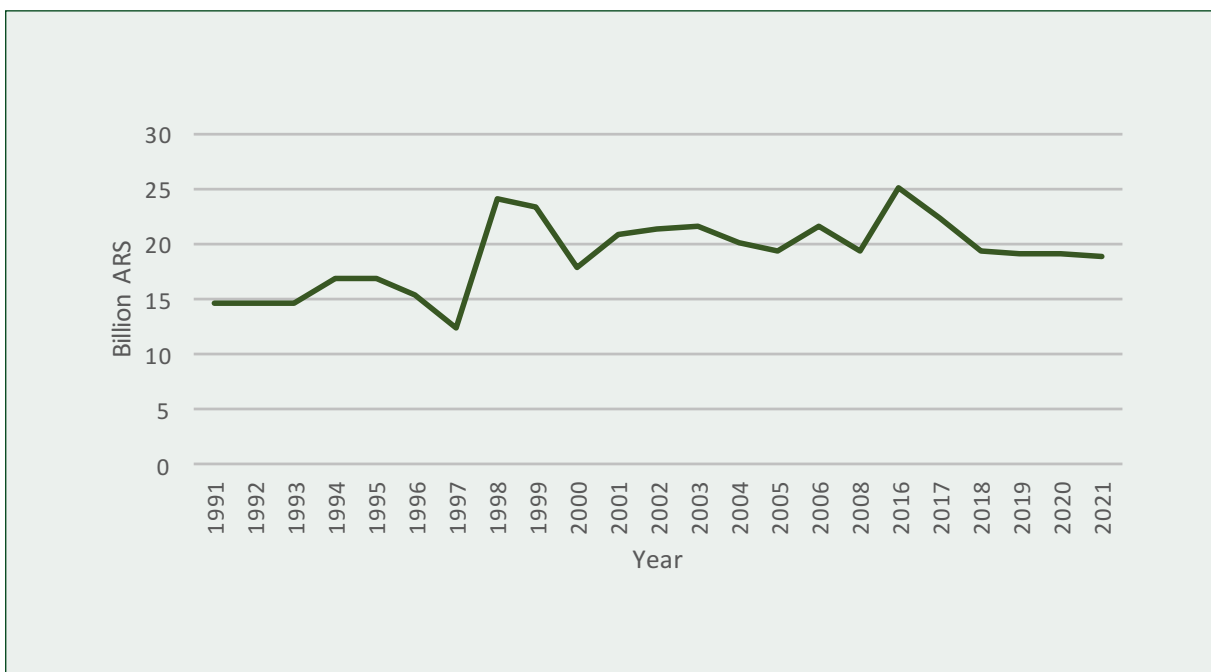
The Ministry of Education, and the government routinely devotes the largest portion of its annual budget to this sector. Pre-university general education had 6.4 million pupils enrolled as of 2019, with over 82 percent of them attending public schools. In addition, there are over 200,000 students engaged in technical and vocational education and about 1.6 million in universities. That amounts to around 20% of the population

enrolled in various educational levels who will graduate and enter the labour market during the following few years. Saudi Arabia continues to struggle with a high rate of unemployment, which many have previously attributed to the education system’s failure to produce enough knowledgeable workers to fill open positions.³⁸

Education in the Government Budget

Governments around the world, including Saudi Arabia, have been more cognizant of the urgent need for national education reforms since the early 1990s. During his reign, King Abdullah made significant improvements to the Saudi educational system. An overhaul of the social infrastructure was carried out, particularly in the area of public education, as a result of the rise in the price of oil during that time and King Abdullah’s vision for the development of the nation. The Saudi government places a great value on education, and it has shown this commitment by raising its national education budget. The World Bank estimates that the Saudi government spent SAR 12 billion (USD 320 billion) on education.³⁹

Figure (5) Saudi Arabia Education Spending 1991-2021



38- AKEEL, M. A. H. A. (2022, September 22). Education at the heart of Saudi Arabia’s progress. Arab News. Retrieved December 27, 2022, from <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2167211>

39- Allmakrah, A., & Evers, C. (2020). The need for a fundamental shift in the Saudi education system: Implementing the Saudi Arabia economic vision 2030. *Research in Education*, 106(1), 22–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034523719851534>

Source: Saudi Arabia education spending 1991-2023. MacroTrends. (n.d.). Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/SAU/saudi-arabia/education-spending>

More than any other sector, the Saudi government spent USD 37.5 billion on education in 2022. Saudi Arabia has fewer pupils enrolled in private schools from kindergarten through secondary education than its neighbours, despite having the most students overall in the GCC (about 7 million). Although it is anticipated that the market value of the education industry would increase from USD 4 billion in 2017 to USD 15 billion by 2030 as a result of rising private school enrolment, rising population, and rising tuition costs.⁴⁰

Providing Scholarships to Saudi Citizens

Through the scholarship programs established by the Ministry of Education, Saudi Arabia offers opportunities for people who want to continue their education outside the Kingdom in conformity with the demands of the labour market and the requirements and developments of the Kingdom. As a crucial branch in assisting Saudi universities in the public and private sectors with a variety of distinguished competencies, the scholarship agency at the Ministry of Education is actively preparing and qualifying Saudi human resources in order to become competitors in the labour market and scientific fields of research both locally and globally. MoE offers two main platforms for scholarship programs: The Program of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Foreign Scholarships and the Safer Platform.

To conclude the region as a whole is in a state of flux: economically, politically, socially, culturally, and educationally. An analysis of the educational development in each Arab Gulf State provides evidence that their educational systems are in urgent need of development. Education and particularly higher education play a major role in meeting the needs of the labour market. However, the reform efforts need to be in tune with religious and cultural traditions. Particularly in Saudi Arabia, the homeland of Muslims, the process of reform of the educational sector is difficult as conservative forces fear it goes hand in hand with secularism and the depreciation of religious values and cultural norms. Globalization, internationalization, privatization of education as well as penetration of English into Saudi Arabia a society have been dominant forces

40- Vision 2030 – education in Saudi Arabia. Leading Independent schools (HMS). (2022, March 30). Retrieved December 27, 2022, from <https://www.hmc.org.uk/hmc-blog/vision-2030-education-in-saudi-arabia/>

that have played a major influence in changing traditional roles and may even cause a total culture shift.

Both governments have made significant capital investments, but the impact of these programmes on educational attainment has been modest. Rigidity of top-down administration, insufficient knowledge of successful education reform, absence of an implementation management plan, and lack of professional capacity of the intended adoptees of reforms are among the factors that contributed to reform failure in the KSA as well as the UAE. Furthermore, it appears that significant stakeholders like teachers, students, and families have had little to no opportunity to participate in the reform agendas that the education system sets from the top. There is frequently little information available regarding such programmes, their objectives, or what is expected of instructors who choose to take part. On top of that, teachers regard change as something that happens to them due to top-down decision-making.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AND THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Following the discovery of oil, Gulf countries realized during the early stages of their economic development that to take advantage of their newly discovered wealth and rapidly improve their infrastructure and economy, importing large numbers of foreign workers was essential. As a result of the demand for foreign workers, labour laws were created to allow businesses to take advantage of cheap labour, therefore private sector labour laws were not devised with a permanent workforce in mind, much less one that would increasingly need to account for national employees. These labour laws have somewhat remained in place and are still very business friendly with the KSA and UAE having no minimum wage, and no trade unions.^{41 42}

With the economic growth of the 1970s to 1990s life expectancy, education, and population growth increased. Then, with the turbulent oil prices of the 1990s, Gulf countries came to the realization that the public sector, which had long been the source of employment for nationals and the primary method of transferring mineral wealth to the population, would no longer be able to absorb new and future graduates. Furthermore, the strain on public finances caused by expenditure on government wages has been and will continue to be a significant barrier for Gulf countries transitioning to post-oil economies.⁴³

With the education reforms previously discussed, new graduates are better qualified with higher salary expectations and looking to enter the workforce. However, while many entry-level positions are unpleasant to job seekers across cultures, there is added pressure in Gulf states since the type of work, industry of employment, and social interactions within it more strongly influence the social status of the job holder than in other cultures.⁴⁴ Additionally, with the previously guaranteed public sector jobs, characterized by higher wages and better job security no longer available, the private sector would be the only prospect for jobseekers. However, according to the International Monetary Fund, Gulf labour markets suffer from long standing

41- United Arab Emirates, Federal Law No 8 of 1980 (As amended by Federal Law No. 12 of 1986) The Regulation of Labour Relation

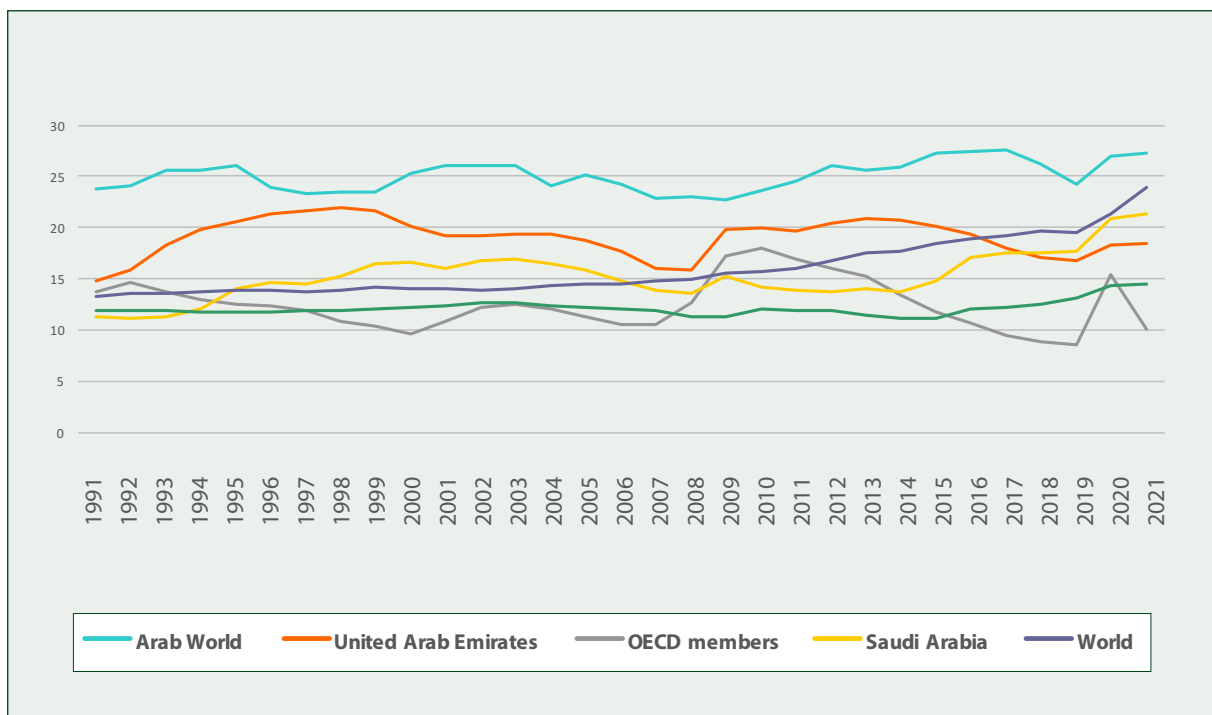
42- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Labor and Workmen Law Royal Decree No. M/21 dated 6 Ramadan 1389 (15 November 1969) Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 745, dated 23/24 Sha'ban 1389 (3/4 November 1969)

43- Forstenlechner, I., Madi, M. T., Selim, H. M., & Rutledge, E. J. (2012). Emiratisation: Determining the factors that influence the recruitment decisions of employers in the UAE. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(2), 406–421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.561243>

44- Al-Waqfi, M. A., & Forstenlechner, I. (2012). Of private sector fear and prejudice: The case of young citizens in an oil-rich Arabian Gulf economy. *Personnel Review*, 41(5), 609–629. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481211249139>

structural issues and a private sector dominated by expatriate workers.⁴⁵ This has caused increased levels of national unemployment and more importantly youth unemployment. Youth unemployment is not a unique problem for the Gulf countries but extends to the entire MENA region which has consistently had the highest rates of global youth unemployment since 1991, as seen below.⁴⁶

Figure (6) Total Youth Unemployment (% of Total Labour Force Ages 15-24)



Source: World Bank Data

Youth unemployment is of particular importance as it represents lost potential, large economic costs, and an underlying threat to social and political stability as witnessed during the Arab Spring in 2011. It is within this context that we analyse employment policies that have been enacted by the KSA and UAE and the barriers that these programs have faced.

45- The International Monetary Fund. (2022, November 29). Gulf Cooperation Council: Economic Prospects and Policy Challenges for the GCC countries. IMF. Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Policy-Papers/Issues/2022/11/29/Gulf-Cooperation-Council-Economic-Prospects-and-Policy-Challenges-for-the-GCC-Countries-525945>

46- The World Bank. (n.d.). Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate). World Bank Data. Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>

* Average of Sub-Saharan Africa, Africa Western and Central, Africa Eastern and Southern

EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The need for private sector employment opportunities for Emiratis was realized in the 1990s as it became clearer that the public sector would be incapable of absorbing future graduates and increasing employment. Federal Law No. 8 of 1980 stated that employment is a natural right for UAE citizens and that foreigners may only be employed in the UAE if appropriate UAE citizens cannot be found.⁴⁷ Despite the existence of the law more was needed to be done and the UAE began the process of Emiratisation to facilitate the employment of Emiratis in the private sector, the National HR Development & Employment Authority (TANMIA) and the Emirates Nationals Development Program were created to lessen reliance on imported labour by assisting Emiratis in gaining market-oriented skills to and better prepare them for the private sector.⁴⁸

In 1998, the Council of Ministers imposed a quota on all banks, indicating that 4% of the staff must be made up of UAE citizens with a cumulative quota increase of 4% rise per year.⁴⁹ The insurance industry followed in 2001 by adopting a similar quota of 5% although, it was not mandatory until 2003 and even then, was not enforced. Although the number of nationals employed by banks doubled during 1998 – 2003, it fell short of the Emiratisation target, while the insurance industry was unsuccessful, with only one of 46 insurers able to meet the 5% quota but came close at 4.5%. The main obstacle to attaining Emiratisation quota, according to insurance organizations, was the absence of genuine desire on the part of locals in careers in insurance. It was found to have demonstrated their lack of sincere interest, highlighted by national employees leaving a company after only a few months of employment.⁵⁰ Gains in Emiratisation were not made primarily during this period because Emiratisation remained a policy rather than a law, and in industry specific cases the law was not enforced. Moreover, general reluctance from nationals and a preference for public sector employment remained a barrier.

47- United Arab Emirates, Federal Law No 8 of 1980 (As amended by Federal Law No. 12 of 1986) The Regulation of Labour Relation

48- Goby, V. P., Ali, H. M., Lanjawi, M. A., & Al Haddad, K. I. (2017). Workforce localization, information sharing, and the imperative of culture: A preliminary exploration of Expatriate-Emirati information sharing in Dubai's private sector. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 25(1), 103–122. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-09-2015-0908>

49- Jones, N. (2020, July 5). Next steps in the push for Emiratisation in the financial sector. Al Tamimi & Company. Retrieved January 8, 2023, from <https://www.tamimi.com/law-update-articles/next-steps-in-the-push-for-emiratisation-in-the-final-sector/>

50- Goby, V. P., Ali, H. M., Lanjawi, M. A., & Al Haddad, K. I. (2017). Workforce localization, information sharing, and the imperative of culture: A preliminary exploration of Expatriate-Emirati information sharing in Dubai's private sector. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 25(1), 103–122. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-09-2015-0908>

Equipped with past experience, the UAE announced that 2013 was the “Year of Emiratisation” and a number of proposals were suggested to make the private sector more attractive for nationals and to make nationals further equipped for the private sector; amendments to Federal Law No. 8 of 1980 that guarantee two days off on weekends for the private sector, subsidizing the pay gap between the public and private sectors for UAE nationals, and establishing an unemployment insurance program.⁵¹

January of 2017 saw the launch of Tawteen which was tasked with enhancing the competitiveness of Emiratis and connecting the private sector with Emirati jobseekers. Additionally, a greater Emiratisation enforcement mechanism was introduced for employers and the introduction of labour market testing for employers with more than 50 employees.⁵²

Most recently, the Nafis program was introduced and replaced Tawteen. The Nafis program was announced with the goal of creating 75,000 new jobs for Emiratis in the private sector by 2026 alongside an Emiratisations target of 10%. The new requirement includes all employees under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisations and companies are expected to hire new Emirati employees as existing employees do not count towards the quota, additionally the new hires must be in skilled jobs.⁵³

Nafis also includes a salary support scheme, unemployment benefits for 6 months in the case of involuntary job loss, on-the-job training compensation, a child allowance scheme, and more schemes to incentivize Emiratis to shift to the private sector.⁵⁴ Furthermore, those in the public sector are allowed to take a year’s leave to start their own businesses while being paid half their salary and retaining their government position. The plan aims to encourage young Emiratis to take advantage of the resources available to them and the possible benefits of working in the private sector.

The deadline for the first phase of Nafis was on January 1st, 2023, 2% of employees should now be nationals and companies that do not abide by the quota are fined AED

51- Perrin, H. (2013, June 24). Emiratisation: What foreign businesses in the UAE need to know. Global Workplace Insider. Retrieved January 8, 2023, from <https://www.globalworkplaceinsider.com/2013/06/emiratisation-what-foreign-businesses-in-the-uae-need-to-know/>

52- Frod, R., Khoja, S., & Merod, L. (2022, September 13). Emiratisation in the UAE: The new requirements at a glance. Clyde & Co. Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.clydeco.com/en/insights/2022/09/emiratisation-in-the-uae>

53- Khaleeli, S. (2022, December 29). Emiratisation compliance part 1: Understanding the new requirements. Fragomen. Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.fragomen.com/insights/emiratisation-compliance-part-1-understanding-the-new-requirements.html>

54- Nafis - FAQ. Nafis. (n.d.). Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://nafis.gov.ae/>

72,000 for every national not employed as well as other fines for separate violations, incentivizing the private sector to look towards Emirati talents.⁵⁵ Seeing as Nafis has just launched it will take time before the benefits of the program can be seen. However, the program has been built taking into account previous attempts that did not reach their full targets due to reasons mentioned previously. Nafis mandates Emiratisations and enforces the quota when that was not the case previously, it attempts to bridge the gap between public and private sector wages to attract Emirati jobseekers, makes sure that Emiratis are employed in skilled jobs, and provides incentives to business owners to participate alongside the government.

55- ARN News Staff. (2023, January 6). Ministry starts issuing fines for non-compliance with Emiratisation. Dubai 92. Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.dubai92.com/news/uae/ministry-starts-issuing-fines-for-non-compliance-with-emiratisation/>

EMPLOYMENT IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Saudisation as it has come to be known is not a modern innovation for the Kingdom; Article 45 of the 1969 Labour and Workmen Law, declared that no less than 75% of a firm's workforce and 51% of its wage bill must be tied to Saudi employees.⁵⁶ However, the law was largely ignored and granted the Ministry of Labour discretion to lower the percentage as they saw fit, likely due to feasibility concerns. Midway through the 1990s, additional Saudisation regulations came into effect, requiring businesses to hire 5% more Saudis annually until the objective of 50% was attained in the majority of industries. Midway through 2006, the strategy was abandoned and 30% was to be the new target. Generally, due to the challenges of increasing the employment of nationals, Saudisation targets were not met.⁵⁷

Government and state-owned sectors saw more serious Saudisation efforts and were effective given direct government oversight on appointments. Expanding private sector employment for Saudis became a much more urgent priority in 2011 as the Nitaqat program was launched by the Ministry of Labour replacing the 2006 30% target with a collection of industry specific quotas and a focus on increasing Saudi labour participation in the private sector, to reduce high levels of youth unemployment.

Nitaqat has gone through multiple versions, Nitaqat 1.0 imposed quotas depending on business size and industry, businesses were categorized based on their compliance with quotas —non-compliant (red), partially compliant (yellow), fully compliant (green), exceeding compliance (platinum)— red and yellow businesses were not allowed to issue new work visas and visa renewals were limited to 3 months. Additionally, companies were also prohibited from creating new branches or altering the positions held by expats. In red and yellow enterprises, respectively, visa renewals ceased in November 2011 and February 2012, and its foreign workers were free to transfer to green or platinum firms, which also benefited from accelerated visa processing and tax deferrals.

56- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Labor and Workmen Law Royal Decree No. M/21 dated 6 Ramadan 1389 (15 November 1969) Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 745, dated 23/24 Sha'ban 1389 (3/4 November 1969)

57- Perrin, H. (2013, November 11). The NITAQAT program: What employers in Saudi Arabia need to know. Global Workplace Insider. Retrieved January 8, 2023, from <https://www.globalworkplaceinsider.com/2013/11/the-nitaqat-program-what-employers-in-saudi-arabia-need-to-know/>

Nitaqat 1.0 was successful in pushing businesses to boost the proportion of Saudis working for private companies. Additionally, it led to an increase in the proportion of Saudi women in the labour force. However, these benefits came at a very high cost to businesses, including lower firm size, decreased exporting business productivity and production, increased labour costs, a higher proportion of low-skilled Saudi workers, and higher business exit rates.⁵⁸ Furthermore, over the course of a 16-month period, Nitaqat 1.0 added over 63,000 Saudi workers to existing private sector companies, accounting for a sizeable portion of the approximately 169,000 additional Saudi workers hired by these companies overall, while causing approximately 11,000 business exits.⁵⁹

The program continued to be refined with extensions added such as in 2012 with the ‘expat levy’ which charged business a fee per expat per year if they employed more expats than Saudis. This amount has increased as the Saudi government continues to work on diversifying its sources of revenue alongside its main objective of increasing national’s employment in the private sector. Despite the ‘expat levy’ and incentives offered to the private sector, low wages continued to be a hindrance in attracting Saudi nationals to the private sector. Therefore, the government added a wage aspect to Nitaqat; for a Saudi employee to be counted towards the quota must be paid at least SAR 3000 per month,⁶⁰ the “minimum wage” * increased to SAR 4000 in 2021. The quotas themselves were revisited multiple times and new classifications were added within existing quotas, with specific industries such as retail targeted for 100% Saudisation.

Nitaqat has not been the only program to support Saudi private sector participation, there have been complementary programs and policies such as The National Labour Gateway (Taqaat) which is an online platform that connects employers with potential Saudi employees, the MARIN program which allows for flexible contracts and hourly wages, Unemployment Financial Assistance which supports job seekers by providing them with SAR 2000 for 15 months and provides job placement and training services, and the Employment Support Initiative which subsidizes the wages of Saudis in the

58- Cortés, P., Kasoolu, S., & Pan, C. (2020). Labor market nationalization policies and exporting firm outcomes: Evidence from Saudi Arabia. Center for International Development - Harvard. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w29283>

59- Peck, J. R. (2017). Can hiring quotas work? the effect of the NITAQAT program on the Saudi Private Sector. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 9(2), 316–347. <https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20150271>

60- Lopesciolo, M., Muhaj, D., & Pan, C. I. (2021, July 23). The quest for increased saudisation: Labor market outcomes and the shadow price of Workforce Nationalization Policies. *The Growth Lab*. Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://growthlab.cid.harvard.edu/files/growthlab/files/2021-07-cid-wp-132-saudi-labor-market-outcomes.pdf>

*This is not a binding minimum wage.

private sector up to a maximum of SAR 3000.⁶¹ As a result of these policies there are now more Saudis working in the private sector than the public. However, participation amongst Saudis remains somewhat low —52.5% for Saudi nationals⁶²— there is a preference in the KSA and other Gulf countries for public sector employment as wages are nearly double that of the private sector —the average salary of a public sector employee at SAR 10,684 while the average salary of a private sector employee is SAR 5,065⁶³— and more importantly the public sector is perceived as having more job stability. Returning however to salaries, the SAR 4,000 “minimum wage” and Employment Support Initiative aim to fill the gap in wage between the two sectors, however, the perception that public sector jobs may be available can contribute to unemployment in a number of ways. For example, jobseekers may decide not to apply for private sector jobs and holdout for an opening the public sector or they may join the private sector to gain experience and resign once an opening in the public sector becomes available.

This is not to say that Saudis are only looking for public sector jobs, the General Authority for Statistics mentions in its Q3 Labour Report that 93.3% of unemployed Saudis would accept employment in the private sector, however, only half would accept a commute longer than one hour and the majority prefer no more than an 8-hour workday.⁶⁴

The necessity of these programs is undeniable, the education and utilization of youth is necessary for a sustainable post-oil economy and Saudisation and Emiratisation have and will continue to be discussed and analysed for the foreseeable future, there are an endless number of metrics that can be pointed at to indicate the success or failure of job nationalization. The same can be said of the costs to this generation of Saudis and Emiratis and the dissatisfaction they may feel for not receiving benefits that were until recently considered guaranteed and previous generations received.

 61- Labor and Employment. Saudi Arabia’s National Unified Portal for Government Services. (n.d.). Retrieved January 8, 2023, from https://www.my.gov.sa/wps/portal/snp/aboutksa/employment!/ut/p/z1/jZLDolwEEW_hi0zKGDjruADFUWiKHZj0NSCQWoQxc-3UTcmvmY3k3NvTgYYxMCK5JKJpMpkkeRqXzF7PZwS06BoBIQMuhI6Hum58zFiH2H5CgRNy1HAuBXQ2cJAAtID9k8cPQ_FXfsYL1cHu2Cj00XNMZTExbAzDecf1R1FD9TyBb5p34lvHEJjI5ebxE1psmkQAK_mOl7zUz6U6p1V1PLU11LCua11IKXKub-VBw3eRVJ4qiF9JOB6i-DrYW_nFpzeJaB2X/#header2_2

62- Labour Market Statistics Q3/2022. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia General Authority for Statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en>

63- Subscribers Q1/2022. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia General Organization for Social Insurance. (2022, June 29). Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.gosi.gov.sa/>

64- Labour Market Statistics Q3/2022. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia General Authority for Statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved January 10, 2023, from <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en>

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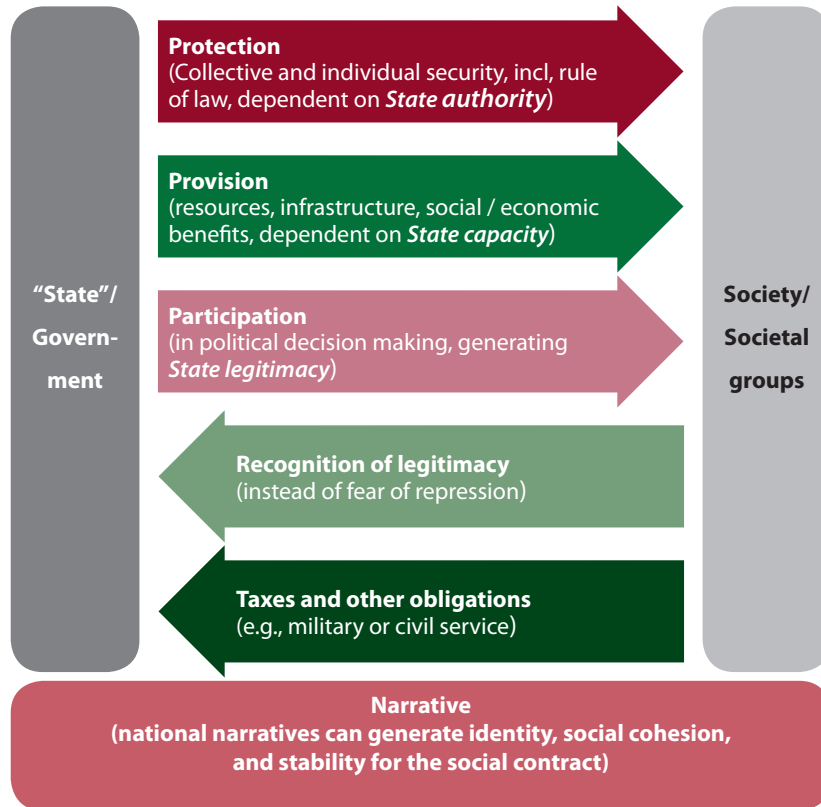
Chapter Two

SHIFTING SOCIAL CONTRACTS & IDENTITIES IN THE POST-OIL ECONOMY

A country's social contract can be defined as the agreement, or multiple simultaneous agreements, between societal groups and the state on their rights and obligations towards each other. There are elements of social contract theory that are useful for the following analysis. The main one is the temporal dimension of any social contract. This means that at any point in time, a social contract can change or become transformed. This is the result of a process of renegotiation, which can take many forms and can occur for a number of reasons. In the case of the Gulf states, whose economies have historically depended on rents, one of the main reasons for renegotiation could be the decline or decrease of external revenues which make it difficult for the government to uphold its obligations (benefits and resources redistributed to citizens) without raising taxes. This is linked to a second reason which is if a social contract no longer meets its obligations as well as a third reason, and a worst case scenario mostly found in failed states, where the social contract becomes completely defunct —loss of state authority, legitimacy and inability to protect or provide for citizens which in turn erases society's recognition of state legitimacy and leads groups to abandon any obligations to the state.⁶⁵ This relationship is depicted below.

65- Loewe, M., Zintl, T., & Houdert, A. (2020). The social contract as a tool of analysis: Introduction to the special issue on "Framing the evolution of new social contracts in Middle Eastern and North African countries." *World Development*, 104982. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.10498

Figure (7) Social Contract - State & Society Obligations



Source: Loewe, M., Zintl, T., & Houdert, A. (2020). The social contract as a tool of analysis: Introduction to the special issue on "Framing the evolution of new social contracts in Middle Eastern and North African countries." *World Development*, 104982. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.10498

However, despite the worst case scenarios, the renegotiation of a social contract can often be a positive marker of an evolving state and can be an opportunity for making what are known as "Pareto-improvements".⁶⁶ The idea that reforms and austerity measures in the Gulf countries will lead to discontent and social and political instability akin to the Arab Spring has already been contested by scholars who have been able to sidestep reductionist claims by analysing the nuances of the context. This chapter aims to evaluate the outcomes and potential outcomes of the post-oil and vision 2030 reforms on youth, the social contract as well as on identity which also plays into the overall socio-political dynamics.

66- Pareto improvement is an action that makes at least one person better off without making anyone worse off.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The UAE has been making progress and moving towards a post-oil economy by developing all sectors of its economy. Their development agenda may not necessarily be framed within the narrative of “reforms” as the Emirates have arguably been in a constant state of development in the last decades. However, the changes have noticeably been building up to a shifting social contract. Historically, the social contract governing state-society relations in the UAE has been known to create significant social divisions and inconsistent employment practices such as the gap between private and public sector jobs and Emiratis subsequent preference for the public sector. Among the six objectives of the UAE’s Vision 2021 were a sustainable environment and infrastructure, a first-rate education system, a competitive knowledge economy and a cohesive society and preserved identity.⁶⁷ Although foreigners still constitute the majority of the workforce, the role of Emiratis is integral to the realization of this new vision, and the most recent 2071 Vision as well. This collective goal signals a new era of state-society relations which includes new expectations for citizens. Analysing the impact of these ongoing changes on youth is therefore necessary to determine their readiness for the future UAE.

Education

Education is one of the tools used by the UAE to encourage the shift in the concepts of citizenship, national identity and the renegotiation of the social contract which is necessary for the post-oil economy. In promotion of this change of mind-set, President and Emir of the UAE Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan wrote, “Work is a true criterion of citizenship. It is evidence of sincerity and loyalty.”⁶⁸ Having committed to position itself as a global actor and its citizens as leaders of excellence, the UAE has made sizable investments, AED 10.2 billion between 2017 and 2021, that made it one of the world’s largest importers of higher education. The effectiveness of this reliance and often uncritical adaptation of foreign, mainly Western, models of education however remains contested.

67- UAE Vision 2021. (n.d.). Retrieved January 3, 2023, from <https://www.vision2021.ae/en/uae-vision>

68- Katulis, B., John, O. B., & Horvath, M. (2022, December 19). Beyond the Bedouin path: The evolution of Emirati national identity. Middle East Institute. Retrieved January 3, 2023, from <https://www.mei.edu/publications/beyond-bedouin-path-evolution-emirati-national-identity>

On an institutional level, there is a noticeable gap between the systems being placed and teacher's capacities with both public and private school teachers having expressed the need for more support, recognition as well as more participation in creating the curricula.⁶⁹ Research has also found that the educational reforms have to an extent created obstacles for Emirati university students who's high school experience has often not prepared them for both the academic and personal aspects of university life.⁷⁰ This combined with the government's expectation for young Emiratis to become globally competitive, in return for the huge resources pooled into education reforms, could be a source of disenchantment and alienation for many young Emiratis. Indeed, one of the results of discontent with the adjustment to the higher education system, which in contrast to secondary education places more emphasis on independent learning and is also mainly delivered in English, was students dropping out of university courses to opt for easier educational alternatives such as courses in vocational colleges.⁷¹

National attitude toward education is therefore one of the cultural challenges that the UAE must address in order to create a knowledge society and achieve its objective of raising student's academic performance to internationally competitive levels. A cultural shift may be required to complement education reform and this shift may also entail creating feedback mechanisms and a system that is more responsive to student's needs, as well as open to teacher's inputs. The importing of systems and experts and top-down implementation of policies may not be the most sustainable approach to improving Emirati education. Evidently, research has suggested that it is time for UAE policymakers to produce their own policies and systems catering to both the progressive and traditional aspects of their society.⁷² However, if there is one thing that can, and may indeed need to be adopted from the Western education context it is the integration of student perspectives into the learning environment; creating space for students to voice their academic concerns and opportunities to make necessary changes. This is the layer of participation that is often part of social contract renegotiation and may be useful in this case as the government fine tunes its strategy for improving the link between academia and the labour market.

69- Goe, L., Alkaabi, A. K., & Tannenbaum, R. J. (2020). Listening to and supporting teachers in the United Arab Emirates: Promoting educational success for the nation. ETS Research Report Series, 2020(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12289>

70- Matsumoto, A. (2019). Literature Review on Education Reform in the UAE. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 28(1), 4–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056787918824188>

71- Ray, T. P. (2017). Emirati Student and Expatriate Teacher Views on Problem Based Learning in UAE Higher Education Courses. University of Southern Queensland. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from https://research.usq.edu.au/download/4ae655e7b45d9c7a1664079365dff3aa1986e55586c6ec7ecabf1650a0f8003e/1840313/Ray_2017_whole.pdf

72- Matsumoto, A. (2019). Literature Review on Education Reform in the UAE. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 28(1), 4–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056787918824188>

“Emiratisation” & Domestic Employment

In the UAE context where economic productivity is expected, and where the shifting social contract comes with the possibility of increasing austerity measures, it is no surprise that barriers to employment could become a source of discontent among youth. Numerous nationalization initiatives have been made over the years to absorb unemployed and newly educated Emiratis as well as reduce dependence on foreign workers. Some of the initiatives, which address disparities between national and foreign employment prospects that left many Emiratis feeling excluded from the private sector include Tawtin and the Nafis program (mentioned in Chapter 1). Still, an effective and tested approach is yet to be identified and some of the government’s attempts to boost domestic employment have actually garnered significant criticism from frustrated youth on social media. The most recent example was in December 2022, triggered by an advertisement (now removed) asking Emirati citizens to apply for sandwich-making positions at a fast-food chain —a job that many Emiratis felt was inappropriate considering their educational qualifications and social status.⁷³ The Emiratisation agenda is increasingly under the spotlight, especially as the policies have officially begun enforcement on January 1st, 2023. The shifting social contract between young Emiratis and the government are likely to be determined by the outcomes of these policies and this could produce a variety of results ranging from the positive: an empowered, educated and skilled Emirati youth population, to the stagnating: disappointed and apathetic youth persistent in their preference of the public sector, to the more concerning yet unlikely result which is active opposition by discontented youth.

However, the outcomes of Emiratisation policies are not solely dependent on the government and youth. The private sector and foreign businesses are significant actors in the equation and their role must also be considered. Foreign values, beliefs and cultural practices continue to dominate the UAE’s private sector which is also based on the “economic evolutionary experience” of Western countries. Many private sector employers have made little effort to address the discomfort or isolation experienced by Emirati employees who often feel that their cultural identity and values are being side-lined or trivialized. The reality is that until recently, they had no reason to do so as

73- Al Qaed, A. (2023, January 5). “Sandwich-gate” caps another year of nationalisation woes in the UAE. Gulf International Forum. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://gulfff.org/sandwich-gate-caps-another-year-of-nationalization-woes-in-the-uae/>

more affordable expatriate employees were always available to replace Emiratis.⁷⁴ This working environment does not only contribute to feelings of marginalization among Emiratis but it also reduces their opportunity to feel ownership over organizational practices and systems —similar to the experience of Emirati teachers that are forced to navigate Western systems.

Overall, the social contract in the UAE is slightly shifting however it is still in the early stages considering the government’s ongoing and deep involvement in facilitating the transition. Still, if the government plans to cut public sector wages, which may be an inevitable step on the path to sustainability, then there must be careful management of citizens and private sector expectations in order to maintain stability.

74- Daleure, G., & Al Shareef, Z. (2015, April). Exploring under-representation of young Emirati adults in the UAE Private Sector. Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/5081768/Alqasimifoundation%20-%202018/Research%20Publications%201%20/Exploring%20Under-Representation%20of%20Young%20Emirati%20Adults%20in%20the%20UAE%20Private%20Sector.pdf>

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Similar to other GCC states embarking on their respective development paths and initiating transformative reforms, scholars and experts are closely watching and studying the reforms led by MBS in anticipation of outcomes that can mark a serious shift in the way Gulf political economies are understood. There are some who view the reforms as revolutionary, given the amount of change occurring within a short period of time, and others who see these changes as near-timely, possibly even overdue, and a necessary part of the Kingdom's evolution. The Crown Prince himself has been known for stating that he does not call himself a reformer as others have labelled his reign, and that this is the necessary path; building on the Kingdom's progress thus far. Still, the new style of Saudi leadership and the recent changes, which are effectively bringing the KSA out of isolation on many fronts, have impressed the majority of Saudi youth and arguably established a new form of trust which is crucial for our understanding of the evolving social contract. Still, while Saudi Arabia is in the process of creating its own model for reform, it is important to evaluate the impact of reforms on youth and state-society relations as well as their perceived limits and costs thus far, in order to envision their possible trajectories and plan for improved outcomes.

Education

As stated in Chapter 2, the Saudi government allocated over USD 30 billion for education in 2022. One of the crucial aspects of the educational reforms was the shift to focusing on critical thinking which is essentially aimed at reshaping the minds of youth and improving their ability to think creatively, independently and solve problems. This does not mean that young Saudis were unable to think critically prior to the introduction of critical thinking and philosophy classes in 2018, however it signals to youth that the government places importance on and in fact now encourages them to envision the role they would like to play in the new vision of Saudi Arabia; transmitting some form of historical and political consciousness through education.⁷⁵ The other significant shift in the educational system is the distance from religious content that does not align with what the government has identified as moderate Islam. This serves two functions;

75- HAMILL-STEWART, C. H. R. I. S. T. O. P. H. E. R. (2021, October 12). Introduction of critical thinking course in Saudi curriculum hailed as 'ground-breaking'. Arab News. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1946301/saudi-arabia>

on the one hand it helps prevent and eliminate the radical thought and extremism which in many instances posed a threat to social and political stability and on the other hand it also helps transform old understandings of national identity from being solely based on religious identity to also include citizenship, skill and other values.

Ideally, the educational reforms would work in parallel to reforms in other sectors; building the necessary skills, creating mind-sets adaptable to the “fourth industrial wave” and rapid global changes. However, there are also valid concerns about the clashing of new policies and identities with established norms. It is important then to place educational reforms within the larger context of change which has brought about more freedom for women and a more liberal approach to public life.⁷⁶ In the past, certain groups in Saudi society often felt threatened by changing norms and increased liberalization. For example, in 2006 a number of Sheikhs, professors, judges and educators expressed their discontent and concerns with changes to school curricula, warning about the effects of “westernization” on Saudi society. Nearly 10 years later, these kinds of concerns still exist although noticeably to a lesser degree, at least on the level of officials, as the new government has done a great deal to balance out the influence of religious clerics with modern institutions and innovations.⁷⁷ Still, the full impact of educational reforms combined with social transformation and evolving identities is yet to be reflected in the youngest generations for whom the post-oil is being created. The speed of change and the extent to which youth’s values and perspectives may clash with those of older generations is yet to be determined. The real challenge for Saudi decision makers and strategists will be in maintaining balance and stable relations between different societal groups.

The challenge of balancing and managing changes occurring in parallel also manifests in the impact of education reforms on employment and the persistent issue of market mismatching. This issue is at the core of challenges relating to the social contract; whereas the previous social contract was based on the redistribution of oil revenues by the state, and that reinforced what some have termed “rentier mentality”, the new social contract is adjusting Saudi’s socioeconomic expectations and broadening their level of public participation. Saudi youth are now, more than ever before, expected to

76- Alamer, S., & Alhussein, E. (2018, September 24). The gray zone of social reforms in Saudi Arabia. Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://agsiw.org/the-gray-zone-of-social-reforms-in-saudi-arabia/>

77- Elyas, T. (2014). Exploring Saudi Arabia’s EFL student identity: A narrative critical approach. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 3(5), 28–38. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.3n.5p.28>

maximize their education and build their careers from the bottom-up. By doing so, they are contributing to the realization of the Kingdom's vision as well as the sustainability of the economy they will lead in the future. This is essentially the narrative underpinning the shifting social contract; through investing in education, the government is providing the resources and infrastructure which youth will in turn generate into productivity and, eventually, taxes. However, what is visible at the moment is that the education system is still unable to fully prepare young nationals for the labour market, particularly private sector employment which the government is especially focused on improving.⁷⁸ This increases the likelihood of rentier mentality becoming reinforced over time.

“Saudisation” and Employment

Although rentier mentality may still be a concern, boundaries of acceptable employment are broadening many young Saudis who now have lower expectations for salaries and guaranteed public sector jobs. Since 2016, more youth were found taking up jobs that used to be socially unacceptable such as waiters in coffee shops or retail sales assistants. This was especially noticeable in the wake of the oil price fluctuations which almost forced greater flexibility of the social contract and set a precedent for shifting expectations between the state and society.⁷⁹ However, despite this significant shift, there is still an evident preference for public sector employment due to a widespread belief that the public sector offers more ‘job security’.⁸⁰ Furthermore, many also believe that the government still needs to play a role in improving working conditions and benefits for private sector employees therefore making private sector jobs more appealing for youth.⁸¹

What is noticeable here is that economic and social changes affecting youth are again happening in parallel and feeding into each other. The economic change being the government pushing for more private sector employment, changing its approach to provision by decreasing public sector jobs and salaries meanwhile the social change

78- Mark C. Thompson (2020) Inherent contradictions in the Saudi rentier state: distributive capacity, youth employment preferences, and attitudes to education, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 47:1, 77-95, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2020.1714868

79- Thompson, M. C. (2019, February). How Do Young Saudis View Skills for Future Jobs? King Faisal center for research and islamic studies. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://kfcris.com/en>

80- Mark C. Thompson (2020) Inherent contradictions in the Saudi rentier state: distributive capacity, youth employment preferences, and attitudes to education, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 47:1, 77-95, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2020.1714868

81- Thompson, M. C. (2019, February). How Do Young Saudis View Skills for Future Jobs? King Faisal centre for research and islamic studies. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://kfcris.com/en>

is taking place on the level of societal expectation; young people are expecting reforms to be better tailored to their specific needs and to produce more effective outcomes in terms of employment. As ongoing policy changes now affect youth more directly and have potentially more serious implications for their livelihoods (whereas before this was less of a concern) observing and forming opinions on reforms is becoming more commonplace. For many young Saudis, the reforms have presented an opportunity for them to participate in the national decision-making processes that affect them and reflect their aspirations.⁸² This could potentially become an obstacle to the full realization of the post-oil reforms if the gap between expectations and reality widens.

One of the ways expectations have been encouraged to shift was through the government's introduction of the socio-political organizing principle of "Neo-Saudism". Neo-Saudism arguably sits at the intersection between socio political and economic reforms. It can be seen as the philosophical foundation of the economic reforms and the subsequent new status quo where status and position are more based on knowledge, expertise and the idea of citizenship than religious or ethnic identity or exceptionalism.⁸³ However, the extent to which Neo-Saudism can be fully adopted and effectively used to guide Saudis towards their 2030 vision highly depends on the extent to which the economy is prepared and reshaped in alignment with this vision. This means looking at the economy's progress holistically as opposed to seeing different sectors in silos and seeing how, for example, neoliberal principles and freedom of access to cyberspace can be used to diversify the economy, increase domestic market competition and the growth of local businesses.⁸⁴ The post-oil economy requires that enough young Saudis adopt the entrepreneurial values and work ethic that are at the core of Neo-Saudism, and this in turn requires the government's reforms and policies to be more responsive to youth's needs. While the government is currently capable of maintaining this responsiveness through anticipating needs and providing the necessary resources, there may be a need for more opportunities for youth to participate in decision making in the near future.

82- Thompson, M. C. (2020, March 6). Being young, male and Saudi: Identity and politics in a globalised kingdom. Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://agsiw.org/being-young-male-and-saudi-identity-and-politics-in-a-globalized-kingdom/>

83- Alrebh, A. F. (2022, October 11). Saudi Arabia at 90: Ushering in a neo-saudi state? Middle East Institute. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://www.mei.edu/publications/saudi-arabia-90-ushering-neo-saudi-state>

84- Thompson, M. C. (2020, March 6). Being young, male and Saudi: Identity and politics in a globalised kingdom. Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://agsiw.org/being-young-male-and-saudi-identity-and-politics-in-a-globalized-kingdom/>

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Chapter Three

MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The UAE has been making progress and moving towards a post-oil economy by diversifying its economy and with a new Vision 2071 announced there will be a new era of state-society relations which includes a shift in expectations for citizens, who are integral to the realization of this new vision.

Education is one of the tools used by the UAE to encourage this shift and has made sizable investments in education, making it one of the largest importers of higher education. However, these investment gaps remain that have at times caused discontent among teachers, who require more support, and students who feel that they have not been prepared adequately for university life with students dropping out of university courses and opting for easier educational alternatives such as courses in vocational colleges. We find that it is necessary for UAE policy makers to produce their own policies and systems catering to both the progressive and traditional aspects of their society while integrating student perspectives into the learning environment.

On the employment front, programs such as Nafis aim to absorb unemployed and newly educated Emiratis as well as reduce dependence on foreign workers. However, there are barriers in the private sector which is dominated by foreign values and cultural practices which cause discomfort for Emirati employees who often feel that their cultural identity and values are being side-lined or trivialized reducing their opportunity to feel ownership over organizational practices and systems, making the private sector less attractive for youth who still view the public sector as the preferred source of employment.

The results of education and Emiratisation policies are likely to shape the shifting social contract between young Emiratis and the government, and this could lead to a range of outcomes, from the promising —a population of empowered, educated, and skilled Emirati youth— to the stagnant —disappointed and apathetic youth persistent in their preference of the public sector— to the more worrisome —yet unlikely— active opposition by dissatisfied youth.

THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

The KSA has embarked on what some have called a revolutionary set of reforms although Crown Prince MBS might likely disagree with the characterization he views the reforms as necessary to build a sustainable post-oil Kingdom.

The Saudi government has allocated USD 30 billion for education expenditure in 2022. With the educational reforms focused on shifting towards critical thinking and reshaping the minds of youth and improving their ability to think creatively, independently and solve problems, encouraging youth to envision the role they would like to play in the new vision of Saudi Arabia. Additionally, another significant shift in the educational system is the distancing from religious content that does not align with what the government has identified as moderate Islam. This serves two purposes: on the one hand, it aids in the prevention and eradication of radical ideology and extremism, which frequently posed a threat to social and political stability; and on the other hand, it aids in the transformation of outdated notions of national identity from being solely based on religious identity to also include citizenship, skills, and other values. It is important then to place educational reforms within the larger context of change which has brought about more freedom for women and a more liberal approach to public life.

We find that through investing in education, the government is providing the resources and infrastructure which youth will in turn generate into productivity and, eventually, taxes the government is bringing about a new social contract which adjusts Saudi's socioeconomic expectations and broadening their level of public participation in contrast with to the previous social contract, which was based on the state redistribution of oil revenues and reinforced what some have referred to as a “rentier mentality”.

Although rentier mentality may still be a concern, boundaries of acceptable employment are broadening for young Saudis who have lower expectations for salaries and guaranteed public sector jobs. Since 2016, more youth were found taking up jobs that used to be socially unacceptable. However, despite this significant shift, there is still an evident preference for public sector employment due to a widespread belief that the public sector offers more ‘job security’. Furthermore, many also believe that the government still needs to play a role in improving working conditions and benefits

for private sector employees therefore making private sector jobs more appealing for youth.

Finally, with the introduction of “Neo-Saudism” which can be seen as the philosophical foundation of the economic reforms to a post-oil economy, there is a necessity that enough young Saudis adopt the entrepreneurial values and work ethic that are at the core of Neo-Saudism. This in turn requires the government’s reforms and policies to be more responsive to youth’s needs. While the government is currently capable of maintaining this responsiveness, there may be a need for more opportunities for youth to participate in decision making in the near future. The speed of change and the extent to which youth’s values and perspectives may clash with those of older generations is yet to be determined. The real challenge for Saudi decision makers and strategists will be in maintaining balance and stable relations between different societal groups.

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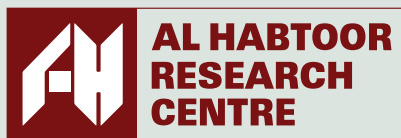
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