



THE FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRATIC ADVANCEMENT

Electoral Fairness Research

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Information Sources:

Human Rights Watch: Saudi Arabia: Criminal Justice Strengthened (2010)

Law of Printing and Publishing (2003)

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Political Background on Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932. The country name is from of Al Saud who was first king and founder.

The politics of Saudi Arabia takes place in the context of an of [Islamic absolute monarchy](#). The [King of Saudi Arabia](#) is both [head of state](#) and the [head of government](#), but decisions are to a large extent made on the basis of consultation among the senior princes of the royal family and the religious establishment. The [Qur'an](#) is declared to be the constitution of the country, which is governed on the basis of [Islamic law \(Shari'a\)](#).

Government is dominated by the vast royal family, the [Al Saud](#) which has often been divided internal disputes and factions. The family therefore constitutes the major arena for politics in the country. Political participation outside of the royal family is limited, but there has been pressure for some time to broaden participation. In recent years, there has been a rise in [Islamist](#) activism, which has also resulted in Islamist terrorism.

Constitution

Verses from the Quran, the official constitution of the country.

Saudi Arabia is an [absolute monarchy](#),^[1] although, according to the [Basic Law of Saudi Arabia](#) adopted by royal decree in 1992, the king must comply with [Sharia](#) (that is, Islamic law) and the [Quran](#). The Quran and the [Sunna](#) (the traditions of Muhammad) are declared to be the country's constitution. There is no legally binding written constitution and the Quran and the Sunna remain subject to interpretation. This is carried out by the [ulema](#), the Saudi religious establishment.

Election in Saudi Arabia

The first municipal elections in Saudi Arabia took place in 1939. Municipal elections for half the councillors, with voting by men only and men candidates only, [took place in 2005](#).

In February 2009 it was announced that municipal elections scheduled for 2009 would be postponed indefinitely "for evaluation"; reportedly, they were postponed to consider active (though not passive) suffrage for women in the next elections. All elections are municipal elections, which take place across Saudi Arabia's 178 municipalities.

Saudi Arabia has no legislature. A "[Consultative Assembly](#)" (*Majlis ash-Shura*) with 90 appointed members with only consultative tasks exists. No [political parties](#) are allowed in Saudi Arabia.

Women's participation

Women were not allowed to vote in the [2005 municipal elections](#). According to a statement by the [Ministry of Municipal and Rural affairs](#) on 22 March 2011, women will also be blocked from the [2011 municipal elections](#).

The Basic Law Of Government

The Custodian of the two Holy Mosques, King Fahd Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud issued a Royal Decree embodying the Basic Government Law. The following is the text of the Decree.

In the name of God, the most compassionate, the most Merciful,

No: A/90

Dated 27th Shaban 1412 H

With the help of God, we, Fahd Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Monarch of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, having taken into consideration the public interest, and in view of the progress of the State in various fields and out of the desire to achieve the objectives we are pursuing, have decreed the following:

1. The promulgation of the Basic Law of Government as the attached text,
2. That all regulations, orders and decrees in force shall remain valid when this Basic Law comes into force, until they are amended to conform with it,
3. That this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette, and shall come into force on the date of its publication.

In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful,

Chapter One General Principles

Article 1:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic State. Its religion is Islam. Its constitution is Almighty God's Book, The Holy Quran, and the Sunna(Tradition) of the Prophet(PBUH). Arabic is the language of the Kingdom. The City of Riyadh is the capital.

Article 2:

The State's public holidays are Eid Al Fitr (the Feast of Ramadan) and Eid Al Adhha (The Feast of the Sacrifice). Its calendar follows the Hijri year (the lunar year).

1. Laws and regulations that pertain to the political content of the media and broadcasters before, during, and after an election

Main Research Findings:

The political content of public and private media and broadcasters must conform to Sharia law and the kingdom, and promote public security, public unity, public policy, national interest etc., Constructive criticism is allowed within the bounds of supporting the principles and goals of the kingdom.

There is no established right to freedom of expression and assembly.

Citizens have a right to correction for free of charge for inaccurate media content.

The kingdom issues licenses for all media activity. Journalists and media persons must have a record of good conduct and reputation, and be qualified in their media field. License fees for printers, television, radio, newspapers are 2000 SA (533 USD) and 1000 SA (218 USD) for bookstores, writers, photographers etc.

The kingdom regulates media content for conformity to Sharia law.

Media persons in violation of the law may be subject to a maximum fine of 50,000 SA (13,322 USD), closure of media business for two months, and confiscation of offending media publications.

Foreign journalists and media must conform to implementation principles of media used by domestic journalists. In other words, foreign journalists must conduct themselves in accordance with the principles of Islam and Sharia law, and support the kingdom.

Research Excerpts:

Basic Law of Government

Article 12:

Consolidation of the national unity is a duty. **The State shall forbid all activities that may lead to division, disorder and partition.**

Article 39:

Mass media and all other vehicles of expression shall employ civil and polite language, contribute towards the education of the nation and strengthen unity. It is prohibited to commit acts leading to disorder and division, affecting the security of the state and its public relations, or undermining human dignity and rights. Details shall be specified in the Law.

LAW OF PRINTING AND PUBLICATION

[2003]

Article One: Definitions

The following terms whenever used in this law shall have the meanings assigned to them as follows:
Circulation: To put the printed material within the reach of a number of persons by distributing them freely or by offering them for sale or by sticking them to walls or by displaying them on the fronts of

show rooms or in light boards or streets sign boards or by other means.

Journalism : The Profession of editing or issuance of journals.

Journalist : Any person who practice editing of journals as a profession whether full or part-time.

The Journal : Any printed matter under a constant title issued periodically or occasionally on a regular or irregular date such as newspaper, magazines and bulletins.

Printer : The person responsible for the press whether the owner or the person acting for him.

Printing Press : Any establishment prepared for printing words, sounds, drawings or pictures for the purpose of circulation.

Printed Materials : Any means of expression suitable for circulation whether a word, drawing, picture or sound.

Bookshop : The place prepared for offering books, newspapers or the like for sale or renting.

Distributor : The intermediary – whether an individual or a company – between the author or the publisher and the distribution points and the beneficiary.

The Author : The person who prepares a scientific, cultural or artistic material for the purpose of circulation.

The Publisher : The person who issues a scientific, cultural or artistic work for the purpose of circulation.

The Ministry : The Ministry of Information.

The Minister : The Minister of Information.

Article Two

The following activities shall be governed by the provisions of this Law:

Printed Matters.

Pre-printing Preparatory Services.

Printeries.

Bookshops.

Drawing and Writing.

Photography.

Importation of Films and Videotapes, sale or rent thereof.

Tape Recording and Discs.

Radio, Television, Cinematographic or Theatrical Artistic works.

Televisions and Broadcasting studios.

The Offices of Foreign Information Media and their Reporters.

Publicity and Advertisement.

Public Relations.

Publication.

Distribution.

Journalistic Services.

Production, Sale or Renting of Computer Programs.

Information Studies and Consultations.

Copying and Reprography.

Any activity suggested to be added by the Ministry and approved by the Prime Minister.

Article Three

Call to Islam, noble manners, leading to all that is good and proper and spreading of culture and knowledge shall be among the purposes of printed matters and publication.

Article Four

None of the activities mentioned in Article Two shall be carried out except with a license from the

Ministry and this shall not be an excuse to justify failure to obtain any license required by other laws. The Implementing Regulations shall determine the period of the license for each activity in addition to the grace period for renewal of the license before its expiration after making sure that the activity was being carried out.

Article Five

Subject to the provisions of the Laws and Treaties the person to whom the license is issued shall satisfy the following conditions :

ñ He shall be a Saudi national.

He shall not be less than 25 years of age but the Minister may give exemption from this age for justifications he thinks proper.

He shall be known to be of good conduct and reputation to carry out such activity.

He shall have a suitable qualification in accordance with the provisions of the Implementing Regulations.

In case of Companies the above conditions shall apply to their representatives.

The Implementing Regulations shall provide for the necessary conditions that must be observed by the offices and reporters of foreign information media.

Article Six

Government authorities, educational and research institutes, scientific societies, art and culture clubs and the national journalistic establishment may issue non-periodical printed matters in their field of specialization and under their responsibility.

Article Seven

The License or renewal fees of the head office or the branch shall be determined in accordance with the following:

(A) Two Thousand Saudi Riyals (SR 2,000) for each of the following activities :

Printeries.

Preprinting preparatory services.

Publication.

Distribution.

Artistic works for broadcasting, television and cinema.

Broadcasting and television studios.

Information studies and consultations.

Journalistic services.

Publicity and advertisement.

Public relations.

Importation, sale or renting of films and video tapes.

Production, sale or renting of computer programs.

(B) One Thousand Saudi Riyals (SR 1,000) for each of the following :

Bookshops.

Sound Recording and Discs.

Drawing and Writing.

Photography.

Copying and Reprography.

Article Eight

Freedom of expression is guaranteed in the different media of publication within the limits of Sharia Rules and Law.

Article Nine

When permission is given to a printed matter the following shall be taken into consideration:

ñ **It shall not be conflicting with Sharia Rules.**

It shall not lead to breach of public security, public policy or serving foreign interest that conflict with national interest.

It shall not be exciting to fanatical instincts or stir up discord among citizens.

It shall not prejudice the dignity and liberty of persons or lead to their blackmail or injure their reputation or commercial names.

It shall not lead to approval and incitation of criminal conduct.

It shall not injure the economic or health situation in the country.

It shall not disclose the secrets of investigations or trails except with the permission of the competent authority.

It shall observe objective and constructive criticism that aims at public interest and which is based on facts and evidence.

Article Ten

The necessary paper information provided for in the Implementing Regulations shall be recorded on each printed matter printed inside the Kingdom.

Article Eleven

The license may be surrendered or rented to third parties or make them partners in it with the consent of the Ministry and in accordance with the provisions of this law.

Article Twelve

If the owner of the license dies, his heirs shall notify the Ministry within two months from the date of death and they are entitled to continue with the activity with the consent of the Ministry in accordance with the provisions of this law.

Internal Printed Matters

Article Thirteen

Each author, publisher, printer or distributor who desires to print or distribute any printed matter shall provide the Ministry with two copies for approval before printing or offering it for circulation and the Ministry shall approve or reject it stating the reasons for that within thirty days and the person concerned may object to the rejection resolution before the Minister.

Article Fourteen

Each printing office shall keep a registration for printed matters printed in it to be shown to the competent persons on demand but the Ministry may exempt in the Implementing Regulations from requirement of registration any printed matter it thinks fit.

Article Fifteen

The author, the publisher and the printer are responsible for any violations in the printed matter if printed or put into circulation before approval is given but if it is not possible to identify the person responsible then the distributor becomes responsible, otherwise the responsibility lies on the seller.

Article Sixteen

The Ministry shall make the author or publisher responsible to deposit in accordance to the relevant law the copies required to be deposited of materials printed inside the Kingdom.

Article Seventeen

The publicity and advertisement materials shall not be added to films or tapes or the like on which

artistic or sports matters or others are recorded provided that they are contracted for to be used inside the Kingdom except through local publicity and advertisement companies and after the said materials are approved by the Ministry and the Implementing Regulations shall determine the time period for advertisements in each work.

External Printed Matters

Article Eighteen

External printed matters shall be approved if free from anything insulting to Islam or the system of Government or injurious to high interests of the state or scarify public morality and conflict with ethical standards.

Article Nineteen

The external printed matters shall be approved or rejected for reasons to be expressly stated within 30 days from the date of filing the application but newspapers shall be treated in accordance with the provisions of the Implementing Regulations.

Article Twenty

Any Saudi who issues a non-periodical printed matter outside the Kingdom and applies to the Ministry for its approval shall attach with his application something to prove that he has deposited the required copies in accordance with the relevant law.

Article Twenty One

The Ministry shall have no authority to censor the printed matters imported by Government authorities, educational and research institution, scientific societies, art and cultural clubs and private journalistic institution for their own purposes.

Article Twenty Two

The Implementing Regulations shall – within the limits of this law – regulate the importation and distribution of external printed matters in addition to the necessary procedures to facilitate accompanying books and other printed matters and subscription therein by researchers and thinkers for their scientific purposes and within the limits of their personal possession.

Article Twenty Three

Foreign journals may be printed in the Kingdom with the consent of the Prime Minister in accordance with the provisions of the Implementing Regulations and the provisions of this law.

Local Journalism

Article Twenty Four

The local journals shall not be subjected to censorship unless in exceptional circumstances approved by the Prime Minister.

Article Twenty Five

Journals may be issued – outside the scope of private journalistic establishments – by private authorities or individuals in accordance with a license from the Ministry with the consent of the Prime Minister.

The consent of the Ministry alone is sufficient to issue the following :

ñ Bulletins of limited circulation and for a purpose other than sale such as those issued by private authorities provided these bulletins are confined to the promotion of the activities of the authority issuing them.

ñ Specialized scientific and professional magazines issued by private authorities or individuals.

ñ Issuance of journals and scientific magazines by the public educational authorities and Government authorities after the Ministry is notified.

The supervisor of any of the printed matters mentioned in this Article and the director of the issuing authority are responsible for what is published in them in accordance with the provision of this law.

Article Twenty Six

There shall be put in a prominent place of the journal, the name of the owner of the license, the name of the chief editor, the number of the issue, date, price and the name of the printing press.

Article Twenty Seven

- The name of a journal which was previously issued and ceased shall not be used except after the expiration of ten years from the date of withdrawal unless the persons concerned have given up the name before the expiration of this period.
- A journal shall not be given a name that may be confused with the name of another.

Article Twenty Eight

The Implementing Regulations shall provide for the rules that regulate the annual subscription fees of the journals, the price of one issue and the advertisements affairs.

Article Twenty Nine

The Ministry may withdraw the license or cancel the consent to issue the journal in any one of the following two cases :

ñ If it is not issued within a maximum period of two years from the date of notice of the license.

ñ If the issuance is suspended for a continuous period of more than one year.

Article Thirty

The journals and those working in them shall not accept any benefit such as gift, financial assistant or other from local or foreign authorities except with the consent of the Ministry.

Article Thirty One

The issue of the journal shall not be prohibited except in exceptional circumstances and after the consent of the Prime Minister is obtained.

Article Thirty Two

- **The written advertisements of establishments and individuals may be published provided that it is referred to as an advertisement material.**
- The written advertisement of the states may be published after the consent of the Ministry is obtained provided that it is referred to as an advertisement material.

Article Thirty Three

- The chief editor of the journal or his representative when he is absent is responsible for what is published in it.
- Without prejudice to the responsibility of the chief editor or his representative the author of the statement is responsible of what is stated in it.

Article Thirty Four

Um Al-Qurah newspaper is the official Gazette of the State.

Penalties

Article Thirty Five

Any journal that imputed to another an incorrect statement or published an erroneous news shall correct that by publishing it free of charge at the request of the person concerned in the first issue after the correction request and in the same place where the news or the statement was first published or in a

prominent and any one injured is entitled to claim compensation.

Article Thirty Six

In case of necessity the Ministry may withdraw any issue of the issues of the journal without compensation if it contains anything conflicting with the rules of the Sharia Law on the basis of a resolution issued by the committee provided for in Article Thirty Seven.

Article Thirty Seven

Violations of the provision of this law shall be decided by a committee to be constituted in accordance with a resolution issued by the Minister under the chairmanship of the competent undersecretary of the Ministry and its members shall not be less than three provided that one of them is a legal advisor and shall take its resolution by majority vote after calling the violator or his representative and hearing his statements and may call anyone it deems fit to hear his statements and seek the assistance of anyone it deems fit but the resolution of the Committee shall not be valid until approved by the Minister.

Article Thirty Eight

Without prejudice to any other more serious penalties provided for in another law anyone who violates any provision of this law shall be punished with a financial fine of not more than (SR 50,000) Fifty Thousand Saudi Riyals or by closing his place of business or establishment for a period of not more than two months or by closing his place of business or establishment finally – the penalty shall be issued in accordance with a resolution by the Minister on the recommendation of the committee provided for in Article Thirty Seven of this law.

Article Thirty Nine

The Ministry may withdraw the printed matters offered for circulation whether internal or external in the following two cases :

- When its circulation is prohibited.
- When it is not approved and contain some of the prohibitions provided for in Article Nine or Article Eighteen. The authority who has jurisdiction in this case is the committee provided for in Article Thirty Seven which decides what it thinks fit either to destroy them without compensation or to order the person concerned to return them outside the Kingdom at his expense if they were external.

Article Forty

The person who is subjected to a penalty in accordance with the provisions of this law may put a complaint before the Board of Grievance with 60 days from the date in which he was notified of the resolution issued in this respect.

Article Forty One

If the Ministry approved the printed matter but a reason for its withdrawal subsequently arises, the Ministry shall compensate the person concerned for the cost of the copies withdrawn.

General Provisions

Article Forty Two

The Ministry shall entrust qualified competent and specialized persons who have knowledge of the Regulations and publication instructions and may seek the assistance of the part timers it thinks fit from outside the Ministry to approve scientific and intellectual works.

Article Forty Three

The Ministry shall, in coordination with the authorities concerned, work out rules that regulate the

setting up of books exhibition by private publication and distribution establishments and supervise them.

Article Forty Four

Societies may be formed in accordance with a resolution issued by the Minister to exercise the activities provided for in Article Two to solve their problems and coordinate their functions and each society shall lay down regulations to be approved by the Minister to indicate its purposes and regulate its work.

Article Forty Five

The Ministry is the authority entrusted to follow up the implementation of this law and to interrogate any person who violates it in accordance with its provisions.

Article Forty Six

The Minister shall issue the Implementing Regulations of this law within a period of not more than eighteen months from the date of its publication and shall be published in the Official Gazette.

Article Forty Seven

Any person carrying out any of activities governed by this law shall adjust his situations in accordance with its provisions within two years from the date in which it becomes effective.

Article Forty Eight

This law shall replace the Printed Matter and Publication Law issued by Royal Decree No. (M/17) dated 13/4/1402 H. and shall cancel any provisions inconsistent with it.

Article Forty Nine

This law shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall come into force after ninety days from the date of Publication.

Law of Press Establishments

29 July 2001

Article One: Definitions:

The following terms, wherever mentioned, shall have the meanings following them unless the context requires otherwise:

- (1) License: The official approval that permits the formation of a press establishment.
- (2) Full time commitment: Not being engaged in any governmental or non-governmental job for a wage in other than the establishment.
- (3) Establishment or establishments: The press establishment or press establishments.
- (4) Member of an establishment: The person who owns part of the capital of the establishment.
- (5) The paper: The newspaper or magazine.
- (6) Publications: Newspapers and other published materials of the press establishment.
- (7) The Ministry: The Ministry of Information.
- (8) The Minister: The Minister of Information.

Part One

Formation of the Establishment

Article Two:

- (a) This Law stems from the information policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and achieves its goals.

- (b) An establishment is a private entity that aims at publishing periodicals to serve society by disseminating culture and knowledge, committed to truth and objectivity in all its publications. It may make reasonable profits in a way consistent with its object, within the provisions of this Law.
- (c) An establishment shall be formed pursuant to the provisions of this Law and shall have a distinctive name.

Article Three:

- (a) The Minister shall issue the License to form an establishment upon the approval of the President of the Council of Ministers based on an application submitted by a number of Saudis, not less than thirty, stating the goals of the establishment, names of founders, their qualifications, professions and ages, the name of the establishment, the publications to be issued by it, the language or languages of its publications, its capital, head office and other data specified by the Ministry.
- (b) An establishment may be permitted, by a decision of the Minister, to issue additional periodicals.

Article Four:

The head office of the establishment shall be in the city specified in the license, and some of its publications may be issued in places other than the head office upon the approval of the Ministry.

Article Five:

- (a) The capital of the establishment shall be a sum sufficient to achieve its goals.
- (b) The establishment shall have a corporate personality and an independent financial responsibility, and the financial liability of the members shall be limited to their respective shares in the capital of the establishment.
- (c) Each establishment shall publish its closing accounts and annual budget, certified by a licensed auditor.
- (d) A sufficient percentage of the annual profits shall be set aside for the purposes of training and the procurement of modern technological means necessary for improving journalistic work.
- (e) A statutory reserve of not less than 10% of the annual profits shall be set aside. The general assembly may decide to discontinue allocating to such reserve when it reaches half of the capital.

Part Two

Members of an Establishment

Article Six:

A member of an establishment shall meet the following conditions:

- (a) Be a Saudi national.
- (b) Not be a member of another press establishment.
- (c) Be a holder of a university degree at a minimum, a man of learning, intellect and the media or a businessman with interest in culture. Membership of corporate persons of intellectual, cultural and scientific nature may be accepted.

Article Seven:

- (a) Members of an establishment shall enjoy equal voting and candidacy rights to the board of directors.
- (b) New members may join the establishment through increasing its capital or by a member selling his shares or part thereof or assigning his shares or part thereof or by inheritance.
- (c) In case of inheritance, the heirs shall nominate one of them. If the nominated heir does not meet membership requirements the shares may be sold to one or more of the members of the establishment or to persons from outside.

Part Three

The General Assembly and the Board of Directors

Article Eight:

The general assembly shall be comprised of all the members of the establishment, and it shall be the highest authority. It may take the necessary resolutions to realize the purposes for which the establishment was formed, particularly the following:

- (a) Formulating the general policy of the establishment.
- (b) Selecting and appointing members of the board of directors.
- (c) Approving the appointment and dismissal of the general manager and the editor-in-chief.
- (d) Approving the budget and closing accounts of the establishment.
- (e) Appointing a certified auditor.
- (f) Issuing the internal regulations of the establishment as well as the other regulations that regulate the conduct of its business.

Article Nine:

General assembly meetings shall convene in accordance with the following rules and procedures:

- (a) The general assembly shall meet once annually upon invitation by the chairman of the board of directors. It may also be invited, when necessary, by the chairman of the board of directors, at the request of three members of the board of directors, or at the request of at least a quarter of the members.
- (b) The chairman of the board of directors shall preside over the meetings of the general assembly.
- (c) The general assembly shall convene with the attendance of the majority of members. If there is no quorum in the first meeting, the second meeting shall be deemed valid if attended by one third of members, personally or by proxy. The Ministry may assign a representative to attend the meeting.
- (d) Voting in the general assembly shall be on the basis of membership, and every member may vote on his own behalf or on behalf of another member by proxy. The resolutions of the general assembly shall be adopted by absolute majority of the members attending the meeting in person or by proxy. In case of a tie, the chairman shall have the casting vote.
- (e) Minutes shall be written for every meeting of the general assembly recording the names of members attending in person and those represented by proxy, in addition to the agenda and resolutions adopted, as well as an adequate summary of the deliberations that take place during the meeting. These minutes shall be recorded regularly after every meeting in a special register signed by the chairman of the assembly and the secretary of the meeting. Copies shall be distributed to the members of the general assembly.

Article Ten: Board of Directors:

- (a) Each establishment shall have a board of directors to be comprised of:
 - (1) A number of members of the establishment, not fewer than six.
 - (2) The general manager and the editors-in-chief of the establishment provided that their number shall not exceed one third of the total number of the members of the board of directors.
 - (3) The members of the board shall elect, by absolute majority, from amongst themselves in their first meeting a chairman for the board, provided that he is not the general manager or the editor-in-chief.

Article Eleven:

Subject to the powers given to the general assembly, the board of directors may adopt the resolutions and take the measures necessary to achieve the objects of the establishment, particularly the following:

- (a) Proposing the internal and other regulations that regulate the conduct of business.
- (b) Approving the necessary plans to increase the resources of the establishment.
- (c) Approving the draft budget and closing account of the establishment before presentation to the general assembly.
- (d) Proposing new publications and applying to the Ministry for approval.
- (e) Nominating the general manager and the editor-in-chief for each paper and obtaining the approval of the Minister for the nomination and dismissal of the editor-in-chief.

Article Twelve:

- (a) The board of directors shall meet upon invitation by its chairman at least once every three months.
- (b) A meeting of the board shall not be valid unless attended by at least half of its members, including the chairman or whomever he deputizes.
- (c) Resolutions of the board shall be adopted by absolute majority vote of members present. In case of a tie, the chairman shall have the casting vote.
- (d) Minutes shall be written for each meeting, recording the place and date of the meeting, the names of the members present and absent, the reason of absence, if any, the agenda, topics discussed and the resolutions adopted. The minutes shall be signed by the chairman of the board, the secretary and the members present.
- (e) The chairman of the board may – in case of his absence – deputize a member of the board to represent him for a specified period.

Article Thirteen:

Membership of the board shall expire in the following cases:

- (a) The expiration of the board term as specified in the internal regulations of the establishment.
- (b) Resignation or physical disability.
- (c) Removal of the member from the board pursuant to a resolution by the general assembly.
- (d) If the member appointed to the board by virtue of his position in the establishment loses his post.
- (e) If the member is convicted of a crime impinging his religion, honor or honesty.

Article Fourteen:

If the post of a member of the board other than the *ex officio* members in the establishment becomes vacant, the board may appoint a replacement, provided that this is presented to the general assembly in its following meeting. The new member shall continue the term of his predecessor on the board.

Part Four

Management and Editing

Article Fifteen:

Every establishment shall have a general manager to run its financial and administrative affairs, in accordance with the governing policies and instructions, and represent it in its relations with other bodies regarding financial and administrative matters. The internal regulations of the establishment shall specify his authorities and powers.

Article Sixteen:

The general manager shall satisfy the following conditions:

- (a) Be a Saudi national.
- (b) Work on a full time basis.

(c) Hold a university degree, with experience not less than five years in administrative or journalistic work. A person with a distinguished intellectual and administrative ability may be exempted from the requirement of the university degree.

Article Seventeen:

In case the post of the general manager becomes vacant, his deputy shall assume responsibilities. If there is no deputy, the board of directors shall choose one of its members to perform the duties for a period not exceeding three months. In both cases, a general manager shall be chosen during the said period to be appointed temporarily until the matter is presented to the general assembly in its following meeting for approval.

Article Eighteen:

Every paper shall have an editor-in-chief to be responsible for what is published therein. He shall have the following tasks and powers:

- (a) Directly supervising, managing and directing all editorial affairs of the paper in order to achieve the goals and objects of the establishment.
- (b) Representing the paper in its relations with others regarding journalistic affairs.
- (c) Preparing plans and programs for the development of the paper.
- (d) Exercising the authorities given to him by internal regulations which enable him to carry out his duty in a suitable and competitive manner.

Article Nineteen:

The editor-in-chief shall satisfy the following conditions:

- (a) Be a Saudi national.
- (b) Work on a full time basis.
- (c) Hold a university degree with adequate intellectual and journalistic abilities.

Article Twenty:

Service of the general manager and the editor-in-chief shall terminate in one of the following cases:

- (a) Acceptance of resignation or physical disability.
- (b) If a reasoned recommendation by two thirds of the members of the board of directors is issued to relieve any one of them of his post and the same is approved by the general assembly.

Article Twenty One:

If the post of editor-in-chief becomes vacant, the board of directors shall assign one of the employees of the establishment to perform the tasks of editor-in-chief. The board of directors shall take the legal measures to appoint an editor-in-chief within a period not exceeding three months from the date of such vacancy.

Article Twenty Two:

The paper shall have full-time editors appointed by the editor-in-chief. Their tasks shall include:

- (a) Working to achieve the goals and objects of the establishment.
- (b) Working to achieve the excellence required for the paper.
- (c) Properly representing the paper in functions, meetings and conferences.
- (d) Observing the provisions of the Copyright Law.

Article Twenty Three:

Service of an editor shall terminate in the following cases:

- (a) Acceptance of resignation or physical disability.
- (b) If a reasoned recommendation is issued by the editor-in-chief and the same is approved by the board of directors.

Part Five

Dissolution and Liquidation of an Establishment

Article Twenty Four:

An establishment shall be dissolved and the license for its formation revoked in the following cases:

- (a) If the losses of an establishment amount to fifty percent of the capital unless the general assembly decides the continuation of the establishment with the approval of the Ministry.
- (b) If the general assembly decides to dissolve it by a majority of two thirds of the members.

Article Twenty Five:

In the event that an establishment is dissolved, the following measures shall be taken:

- (a) The general assembly shall determine the manner of liquidation and shall appoint a liquidator whereupon the functions of the board of directors and the general manager shall terminate.
- (b) The activities of the establishment shall end except as necessary to carry out the liquidation process.
- (c) The liquidation process shall be carried out under the supervision and responsibility of the liquidator in his capacity as a representative of the owners, monitored by the Ministry.
- (d) The Ministry shall call for a meeting of the general assembly to approve the results of the liquidation.

Part Six

General Provisions

Article Twenty Six:

An establishment shall, within one year from the beginning of its activity, prepare the following:

- (a) An organizational chart indicating departments, sections and units of the establishment and showing their tasks and administrative relations.
- (b) Work regulations stating the duties and rights of the employees of the establishment.
- (c) Rewards and penalties regulations.
- (d) Pay scale insuring the employees of the establishment of their rights to promotion and annual increments.
- (e) Regulations for assignment, allowances, compensation and the like.
- (f) Internal regulations which determine the functions of the establishment's departments and powers of its officers. They also regulate relationships among them, in addition to other relevant organizational matters.

Article Twenty Seven:

An association of Saudi journalists of an independent corporate personality concerned with the journalists' affairs shall be established in accordance with the provisions of this Law. The implementing regulations shall specify its tasks and powers.

Article Twenty Eight:

Existing establishments shall, within one year from the date of this Law's coming into effect, adjust their affairs to conform to its provisions.

Article Twenty Nine:

The Minister shall issue the implementing regulations necessary for the implementation of the provisions of this Law within one year from the date of its promulgation.

Article Thirty:

This Law shall supersede the Private Press Establishments' Law issued by Royal Decree No 62 dated 24/8/1383 H. and shall become effective thirty days after the date of publication in the Official Gazette.

2. Laws and regulations that pertain to the influence of political candidates and parties before, during, and after an election

Main Research Findings:

The political content of public and private media and broadcasters must conform to Sharia law and the kingdom, and promote public security, public unity, public policy, national interest etc., Constructive criticism is allowed within the bounds of supporting the principles and goals of the kingdom.

There is no established right to freedom of expression and assembly.

The kingdom bans political parties.

Saudi Arabia is governed by an absolute monarchy; the Qur'an is the constitution; Sharia is the law; Saudi religious establishments administer Saudi law.

Municipal elections take place in all 178 municipalities. The state postponed the 2009 elections until 2011. There are no other elections in Saudi Arabia. Municipalities are subservient to the kingdom.

The 2005 elections were for only half of the municipal councilors; the other half were appointed.

The Saudi government has a 90 person appointed Consultative Assembly, and the King and his executive made up of the Royal family.

Women are not allowed to vote or run as candidates in municipal elections.

There are no electoral finance laws.

There is no penal code. A Sharia Council based on Sharia law determines the penal code. Judges can issue the death penalty for offenses against God (*hudud*) including apostasy, offenses against persons such as murder and rape or any other act a judge think warrants the death penalty. Defendants are entitled to a lawyer which will paid for by the State if the defendant cannot afford a lawyer. Amputations of feet or hands for robbery, flogging for drunkenness etc., are other potential penalties.

Research Excerpts:

Basic Law of Government

Chapter One

General Principles

Article 1:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic State. Its religion is Islam. Its constitution is Almighty God's Book, The Holy Quran, and the Sunna(Tradition) of the Prophet(PBUH). Arabic is the language of the Kingdom. The City of Riyadh is the capital.

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The State's public holidays are Eid Al Fitr (the Feast of Ramadan) and Eid Al Adhha (The Feast of the

Sacrifice). Its calendar follows the Hijri year (the lunar year).

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- b. Its width equals two thirds of its length.
- c. The words, "لا اله الا الله - محمد رسول الله" (There is no god but God and Mohammed is His Messenger) are inscribed in the center, with a drawn sword underneath.

The flag should never be inverted. The Law will specify the rules pertaining to the flag.

Article 4:

The State's Emblem represents two crossed swords with a palm tree in the middle of the upper space between them. The Law will define the State's Anthem and medals.

Article 5:

- a. Monarchy is the system of rule in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.**
- b. Rulers of the country shall be from amongst the sons of the founder King Abdulaziz Bin Abdulrahman al Faisal Al-Saud, and their descendants. The most upright among them shall receive allegiance according to Almighty God's Book and His Messenger's Sunna(The Tradition).**
- c. The King shall choose the Crown Prince and relieve him by a Royal Decree.**
- d. The Crown Prince shall devote himself exclusively to his duties as Crown Prince and shall perform any other duties delegated to him by the King.**
- e. Upon the death of the King, the Crown Prince shall assume the Royal powers until a pledge of allegiance (bay'a) is given.**

Article 6:

In support of the Book of God and the Sunna of His Messenger(PBUH), citizens shall give the pledge of allegiance (bay'a) to the King, professing loyalty in times of hardship and ease

Article 7:

Government in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia derives its authority from the Book of God and the Sunna of the Prophet(PBUH), which are the ultimate sources of reference for this Law and the other laws of the State.

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The family is the nucleus of Saudi Society. **Members of the family shall be raised in the Islamic Creed, which demands allegiance and obedience to God, to His Prophet and to the rulers, respect for and obedience to the laws, and love for and pride in the Homeland and its glorious history.**

Article 10:

The state shall aspire to promote family bonds and Arab-Islamic values. It shall take care of all individuals and provide the right conditions for the growth of their talents and skills.

Article 11:

Saudi Society is based on full adherence to God's guidance. Members of this society shall cooperate

amongst themselves in charity, piety and cohesion.

Article 12:

Consolidation of the national unity is a duty. **The State shall forbid all activities that may lead to division, disorder and partition.**

Article 13:

The aim of education is to implant the Islamic Creed in the hearts of all youths, to help them acquire knowledge and skills, to qualify them to become useful members of their society, to love their homeland and take pride in its history.

Article 23:

The State shall protect the Islamic Creed, apply the Sharia, encourage good and discourage evil, and undertake its duty regarding the Propagation of Islam(Da'wa).

Article 24:

The State shall develop and maintain the Two Holy Mosques. It shall provide care and security to pilgrims to help them perform their Hajj and Umra and visit to the Prophet's Mosque in ease and comfort.

Article 25:

The State will nourish the aspirations of Arab and Moslem nations in solidarity and harmony and strengthen relations with friendly states.

Article 26:

The State shall protect human rights in accordance with the Sharia.

Article 27:

The State shall guarantee the rights of the citizens and their families in cases of emergency, illness, disability and old age. The State shall support the Social Insurance Law and encourage organizations and individuals to participate in philanthropic activities.

Article 28:

The State shall facilitate job opportunities for every able person, and enact laws to protect the worker and the employer.

Article 29:

The State shall patronize sciences, letters and culture. It shall encourage scientific research, protect the Islamic and Arab heritage, and contribute towards Arab, Islamic and human civilization.

Article 30:

The State shall provide public education and commit itself to the eradication of illiteracy.

Article 31:

The State shall look after public health and provide health care for every citizen.

Article 32:

The State shall work towards the preservation, protection and improvement of the environment, as well as prevent pollution.

Article 33:

The State shall form armed forces and equip them to defend the Islamic Creed, the Two Holy Mosques, the society and the homeland.

Article 34:

It shall be the duty of every citizen to defend the Islamic Creed, the society and homeland. The Law shall specify rules for military service.

Article 35:

The Law shall specify rules pertaining to Saudi Arabian nationality.

Article 36:

The State shall provide security for all citizens and residents on its territories. No one may be confined, arrested or imprisoned without reference to the Law.

Article 37:

Dwellings are inviolate. Access is prohibited without their owners' permission. No search may be made except in cases specified by the Law.

Article 38:

No one shall be punished for another's crimes. No conviction or penalty shall be inflicted without reference to the Sharia or the provisions of the Law. Punishment shall not be imposed ex post facto.

Article 39:

Mass media and all other vehicles of expression shall employ civil and polite language, contribute towards the education of the nation and strengthen unity. It is prohibited to commit acts leading to disorder and division, affecting the security of the state and its public relations, or undermining human dignity and rights. Details shall be specified in the Law.

Article 40:

The privacy of telegraphic and postal communications, and telephone and other means of communication shall be inviolate. There shall be no confiscation, delay, surveillance or eavesdropping, except in cases provided by the Law.

Article 41:

Residents in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia shall abide by its laws, observe the values of the Saudi community and respect Saudi traditions and feelings.

Article 42:

The State shall grant the right of political asylum provided it is in the public interest. International agreements and laws shall define rules and procedures for the extradition of common criminals.

Article 43:

Councils held by the King and the Crown Prince shall be open for all citizens and anyone else who may have a complaint or a grievance. A citizen shall be entitled to address public authorities and discuss any matters of concern to him.

Article 44:

The Authorities of the State consist of:

- The Judicial Authority
- The Executive Authority
- The Regulatory Authority

These authorities will cooperate in the performance of their functions, according to this Law or other laws. The King is the ultimate arbiter for these Authorities.

Article 45:

The Holy Quran and the Sunna(Tradition) of God's Messenger shall be the source for fetwas(religious advisory rulings). The Law shall specify hierarchical organization for the composition of the Council of the Senior Ulema, the Research Administration and the Office of the Mufti, together with their functions.

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The Judiciary is an independent authority. The decisions of judges shall not be subject to any authority other than the authority of the Islamic Sharia.

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All people, either citizens or residents in the Kingdom, are entitled to file suit on an equal basis. The Law shall specify procedures for this purpose.

Article 48:

The Courts shall apply rules of the Islamic Sharia in cases that are brought before them, according to the Holy Quran and the Sunna, and according to laws which are decreed by the ruler in agreement with Holy Quran and the Sunna.

Article 49:

Courts are empowered to arbitrate in all disputes and crimes, taking into account the provisions of Article 53 of this Law.

Article 50:

The King or whomsoever he may deputize shall concern himself with the implementation of judicial rulings.

Article 51:

The Law shall specify the composition of the Supreme Judiciary Council and its functions, as well as the hierarchy for the courts and their functions.

Article 52:

Judges shall be appointed and relieved by Royal Decree, based on a proposal of the Supreme Judiciary Council, in accordance with provisions of the Law.

Article 53:

The Law shall specify the hierarchy of the Board of Grievances and its functions.

Article 54:

The Law shall specify the relationship between the Commission of Inquiry and the Attorney General

and their organization and functions.

Article 55:

The King shall rule the nation according to the Sharia. He shall also supervise the implementation of the Sharia, the general policy of the State and the defense and protection of the country.

Article 56:

The King is the Prime Minister. Members of the Council of Ministers shall assist him in the performance of his mission according to the provisions of this law and other laws. The Council of Ministers Law shall specify the powers of the Council in respect of internal and external affairs, organization of governmental departments and their coordination. In addition, the Law shall specify the qualifications and the powers of the ministers, ministerial accountability procedures and all matters pertaining to the ministers. The Law of the Council of Ministers and the areas of their authority may be amended according to this Law.

Article 57:

- a. The King shall appoint and relieve deputies of the Prime Minister and member ministers of the Council by Royal Decree.**
- b. Deputies of the Prime Minister and member ministers of the Council shall be jointly responsible to the King for the implementation of the Sharia, laws and the general policy of the State.**
- c. The King is entitled to dissolve and reconstitute the Council of Ministers.**

Article 58:

The King shall appoint those who are at the rank of ministers and deputy ministers, and those who are at the highest grade and relieve them by a Royal Decree as provided by the Law. Ministers and heads of independent departments shall be answerable to the King in respect of the ministries and agencies they head.

Article 59:

The Law shall specify the rules of the Civil Service, including salaries, awards, compensations, privileges and pensions.

Article 60:

The King is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. He shall appoint and dismiss officers from service, as provided by terms of the Law.

Article 61:

The King shall announce any state of emergency or general mobilization and shall declare war. The Law shall specify rules for this purpose.

Article 62:

If an imminent danger is threatening the safety of the Kingdom, the integrity of its territories or the security and interests of its people, or is impeding the functions of official organizations, the King may take urgent measures to deal with such a danger. When he considers that these measures should continue, necessary arrangements shall be made in accordance with the Law.

Article 63:

The King shall receive kings and heads of states, appoint his representatives to other states, and receive

credentials of other states' representatives accredited to him.

Article 64:

The King shall award medals according to provisions of the law.

Article 65:

The King may delegate some powers of authority to the Crown Prince by Royal Decree.

Article 66:

Should the King happen to travel abroad, he shall issue a Royal Decree to deputize the Crown Prince to manage the affairs of State and look after the interests of the people, as set out in the Royal Decree.

Article 67:

The Regulatory Authority shall be concerned with the making of laws and regulations which will safeguard all interests, and remove evil from the state's affairs, according to Sharia. Its powers shall be exercised according to provisions of this Law and the Law of the Council of Ministers and the Law of the Shura Council.

Article 68:

The Shura Council shall be established. Its Law shall specify the details of its formation, powers and selection of members. The King may dissolve and reconstitute the Shura Council.

Article 69:

The King may summon the Shura Council and the Council of Ministers for a joint session. He may summon others whom he deems necessary to attend the meeting and discuss whatever affairs he considers fit.

Article 70:

Laws, international agreements, treaties and concessions shall be approved and amended by Royal Decrees.

Article 71:

Laws shall be published in the Official Gazette, and implemented effective from the date of publication, unless another date is specified.

Saudi Arabia's Political System:

3. Contemporary Problems and future trends

3.1. Human Rights

The Judiciary system of Saudi Arabia has been **criticised** by human rights organisations for a long time. There are several aspects for which the country is most heavily ostracised by the West, among them the treatment of women and the cruelty of the Islamic judicial system. Yet, at the same time, the kingdom is signatory of a number of international agreements to protect and aid the development of human rights.

3.1.1. Points of criticism

Although prohibited by Article 36 of the Basic Law, **arbitrary arrests** appear to be relatively common in the Kingdom. This instrument is commonly used against suspected political crimes or

potential terrorists.

Other aspects arousing protest in the Western World are related to Saudi Arabia's legal system which is based on the Shari'a (cf. 2.3). Both **corporal and capital punishment** are criticised for being too severe and their imposition for being too arbitrary. Robbery, for example, can be punished by the amputation of hands or feet whereas drunkenness can be penalized with lashings often in front of large audiences. Similarly, executions, either by decapitation or by stoning, are generally carried out publicly. On average, 50 executions take place every year according to Amnesty International². The condemned do not possess the possibility to challenge the sentence and are not even informed about the date of their execution.

Women's rights are also deemed to be improperly recognised. Western observers excoriate the submission and discrimination of women in the kingdom. Sensitive issues are testimonies (women are not allowed to testify in many cases), marriage and dress codes. The discrimination of women is also evident in the work sector, where only 5% of the employees are female, a factual contradiction with article 111 of the ILO-statute. Furthermore, although Saudi Arabia is a member of the *International Labour Organisation* (ILO, cf. 3.1.2), **labour unions and strikes** are illegal. Despite an international engagement, little progress has been made in ensuring fair and equal salaries.

Repression of the freedom of expression and religion is also often criticised. All religions other than the state's Islamic faith, and even other Islamic confessions are not to be exercised publicly.

Moreover, the judicial rights of non-Muslims are limited. Likewise, oppositional publications or those expressing "un-Islamic" ideas are subject to censorship which also affects the liberty of research at the universities.

In an attempt to thwart public criticism, Saudi Arabia has decreed the **exclusion of NGO** such as Human Rights Watch for a long time, a policy that has changed in the recent past, however.

3.2. Political Reform

3.2.1. Causes

The kingdom is in a difficult position, for it currently faces internal and external **pressures for reform** and yet has to accommodate the wishes of the conservative religious establishment which provides legitimacy for the rulers. The external demands arise from Civil and Human Rights Groups as well as from governmental statements (especially since the 9/11 attacks; 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi citizens). Socio-economic push-factors such as poverty, unemployment and population growth, and the emergence of a militant group dedicated to fighting the current regime, are among the internal pressures. These pressures have led to the emergence of an **informal reform lobby** of liberals and progressive Islamists who want to avoid a violent crackdown by the state and prefer political reform instead. In response to this development, the government began subtle changes and promised its openness to reform. Unfortunately, the reform agenda was inhibited by the menace of a growing violence of the extremists. However, in the long term reforms have to be accomplished in order to **re-establish the legitimacy** which has suffered from an opaque and arbitrary political system and corruption scandals within the Royal Family. In order to achieve this, the government was advised to initiate a gradual and transparent reform programme, to strengthen institutions and enhance the distribution of power, as well as accelerating economic and social reform.

3.2.2. Progress

Since 1995, the structure of governance in the kingdom was **subtly changed**. In order to balance the factions within the Royal Family, new advisory groups were created and power diffused (cf. 1.4.1). 2003 saw a reorganisation of the Council of Ministers and various schemes stipulation municipal councils and democratic elections. Scheduled for October 2004, the first municipal **elections** took place in February 2005, albeit with an extremely low turnout of about 25 percent of eligible male voters (women were not allowed to vote). Some observers interpreted the elections as a sign of progress whereas others stated that the poor turnout reflected dissatisfaction with the limited extent of the political reforms.

3. Laws and regulations on electoral finance

Main Research Findings:

There are no laws electoral finances.

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Should the King happen to travel abroad, he shall issue a Royal Decree to deputize the Crown Prince to manage the affairs of State and look after the interests of the people, as set out in the Royal Decree.

Article 67:

The Regulatory Authority shall be concerned with the making of laws and regulations which will safeguard all interests, and remove evil from the state's affairs, according to Sharia. Its powers shall be exercised according to provisions of this Law and the Law of the Council of Ministers and the Law of the Shura Council.

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The Shura Council shall be established. Its Law shall specify the details of its formation, powers and selection of members. The King may dissolve and reconstitute the Shura Council.

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Article 71:

Laws shall be published in the Official Gazette, and implemented effective from the date of publication, unless another date is specified.

4. Laws and regulations on voter say

Main Research Findings:

Saudi men are entitled to vote and run as candidates in municipal elections when the kingdom decides to have them. Women are not allowed to vote in elections or run as candidates. There are no other elections in Saudi Arabia.

Municipalities are subservient to the kingdom. The 2005 elections were for only half of the municipal councillors; the other half were appointed.

There is no election act.

There are no electoral finance laws.

The kingdom bans political parties.

Political content must conform to the kingdom and Sharia law, and not be counter to public security, public policy, and public unity.

Saudi citizens do not have the right to freedom of expression or freedom of assembly.

There is no penal code. A Sharia Council based on Sharia law determines the penal code. Judges can issue the death penalty for offenses against God (*hudud*) including apostasy, offenses against persons such as murder and rape or any other act a judge think warrants the death penalty. Defendants are entitled to a lawyer which will paid for by the State if the defendant cannot afford a lawyer. Amputations of feet or hands for robbery, flogging for drunkenness etc., are other potential penalties.

Research Excerpts:

Basic Law of Government

Article 12:

Consolidation of the national unity is a duty. **The State shall forbid all activities that may lead to division, disorder and partition.**

Article 26:

The State shall protect human rights in accordance with the Sharia.

Article 39:

Mass media and all other vehicles of expression shall employ civil and polite language, contribute towards the education of the nation and strengthen unity. It is prohibited to commit acts leading to disorder and division, affecting the security of the state and its public relations, or undermining human dignity and rights. Details shall be specified in the Law.

Saudi Arabia's Political System:

3. Contemporary Problems and future trends

3.1. Human Rights

The Judiciary system of Saudi Arabia has been **criticised** by human rights organisations for a long time. There are several aspects for which the country is most heavily ostracised by the West, among them the treatment of women and the cruelty of the Islamic judicial system. Yet, at the same time, the kingdom is signatory of a number of international agreements to protect and aid the development of human rights.

3.1.1. Points of criticism

Although prohibited by Article 36 of the Basic Law, **arbitrary arrests** appear to be relatively common in the Kingdom. This instrument is commonly used against suspected political crimes or potential terrorists.

Other aspects arousing protest in the Western World are related to Saudi Arabia's legal system which is based on the Shari'a (cf. 2.3). Both **corporal and capital punishment** are criticised for being too severe and their imposition for being too arbitrary. Robbery, for example, can be punished by the amputation of hands or feet whereas drunkenness can be penalized with lashings often in front of large audiences. Similarly, executions, either by decapitation or by stoning, are generally carried out publicly. On average, 50 executions take place every year according to Amnesty International². The condemned do not possess the possibility to challenge the sentence and are not even informed about the date of their execution.

Women's rights are also deemed to be improperly recognised. Western observers excoriate the submission and discrimination of women in the kingdom. Sensitive issues are testimonies (women are not allowed to testify in many cases), marriage and dress codes. The discrimination of women is also evident in the work sector, where only 5% of the employees are female, a factual contradiction with article 111 of the ILO-statute. Furthermore, although Saudi Arabia is a member of the *International Labour Organisation* (ILO, cf. 3.1.2), **labour unions and strikes** are illegal. Despite an international engagement, little progress has been made in ensuring fair and equal salaries.

Repression of the freedom of expression and religion is also often criticised. All religions other than the state's Islamic faith, and even other Islamic confessions are not to exercised publicly.

Moreover, the judicial rights of non-Muslims are limited. Likewise, oppositional publications or those expressing "un-Islamic" ideas are subject to censorship which also affects the liberty of research at the universities.

In an attempt to thwart public criticism, Saudi Arabia has decreed the **exclusion of NGO** such as Human Rights Watch for a long time, a policy that has changed in the recent past, however.

3.2. Political Reform

3.2.1. Causes

The kingdom is in a difficult position, for it currently faces internal and external **pressures for reform** and yet has to accommodate the wishes of the conservative religious establishment which

provides legitimacy for the rulers. The external demands arise from Civil and Human Rights Groups as well as from governmental statements (especially since the 9/11 attacks; 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi citizens). Socio-economic push-factors such as poverty, unemployment and population growth, and the emergence of a militant group dedicated to fighting the current regime, are among the internal pressures. These pressures have led to the emergence of an **informal reform lobby** of liberals and progressive Islamists who want to avoid a violent crackdown by the state and prefer political reform instead. In response to this development, the government began subtle changes and promised its openness to reform. Unfortunately, the reform agenda was inhibited by the menace of a growing violence of the extremists. However, in the long term reforms have to be accomplished in order to **re-establish the legitimacy** which has suffered from an opaque and arbitrary political system and corruption scandals within the Royal Family. In order to achieve this, the government was advised initiate a gradual and transparent reform programme, to strengthen institutions and enhance the distribution of power, as well as accelerating economic and social reform.

3.2.2. Progress

Since 1995, the structure of governance in the kingdom was **subtly changed**. In order to balance the factions within the Royal Family, new advisory groups were created and power diffused (cf. 1.4.1). 2003 saw a reorganisation of the Council of Ministers and various schemes stipulation municipal councils and democratic elections. Scheduled for October 2004, the first municipal **elections** took place in February 2005, albeit with an extremely low turnout of about 25 percent of eligible male voters (women were not allowed to vote). Some observers interpreted the elections as a sign of progress whereas others stated that the poor turnout reflected dissatisfaction with the limited extent of the political reforms.