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Article

Human Rights in Saudi Arabia and The Country Vision Of 2030: An Analytical Perspective

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Abstract : This essay examines the complex interplay between human rights developments in Saudi Arabia and the country's Vision 2030 initiative, which aims to modernize its social, economic, and political landscape. The research question posed is: How are human rights being addressed within the framework of Vision 2030? The goal of the essay is to provide a qualitative analysis of the reforms and policies emerging under Vision 2030, highlighting both advancements and ongoing challenges. Key discussions include historical human rights perspectives, specific strategies aimed at enhancing women's rights and labor rights, and the implications of legal reforms. The essay draws upon a range of scholarly sources to underscore the intricate relationship between human rights improvements and socio-economic objectives in Saudi Arabia. The main conclusions suggest that while significant strides have been made, particularly in women's empowerment and labor rights, substantial obstacles—rooted in cultural norms and institutional practices—persist. Ongoing international scrutiny and a robust domestic dialogue on human rights remain critical for the success of these reforms. The essay ultimately advocates for sustained efforts to uphold human rights as a cornerstone of the Vision 2030 agenda.

Keywords: human rights; Saudi Arabia; Vision 2030; women's rights; labor rights; qualitative analysis

Introduction

Human rights have long been a topic of significant concern and interest globally, but the situation in Saudi Arabia presents a complex landscape marked by both progress and challenges. The introduction of Vision 2030 by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been a turning point in Saudi Arabia's developmental trajectory, aspiring to diversify the economy, reduce dependency on oil, and importantly, improve various social indicators, including human rights. Vision 2030 is not just an economic manifesto; it also embodies a social reform agenda, promoting a more open and inclusive society (Kumar, 2023). This vision aims to create a more balanced approach between maintaining the kingdom's cultural and religious essence while embracing aspects of modernity, particularly in improving human rights standards. The complex interplay between international perceptions and internal reforms in Saudi Arabia has often been scrutinized. Historically, Saudi Arabia has faced criticism for its human rights record, particularly concerning freedom of expression, gender equality, and treatment of migrant workers. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that Saudi Arabia's contributions to international organizations, peace, and security in the region have been significant, especially when compared to its regional counterpart, Iran. Ghaziani and Ghaziani (2022) argue that despite certain human rights setbacks, Saudi Arabia's overall impact on international law and human rights has been more positive than that of Iran. This comparative perspective underscores the nuanced progress Saudi Arabia has made and continues to make, albeit at a pace and in a manner sometimes deemed slow by international standards.

The legal and institutional underpinnings of Saudi Arabia's human rights landscape are critical for understanding the current reforms. The Saudi legal system is intricately linked to Sharia law, which has traditionally governed various aspects of social, economic, and political life. This intersection of religion and law poses unique challenges for reform, particularly when it comes to aligning national laws with international human rights standards (Ghaziani & Ghaziani, 2022). Vision 2030 seeks to gradually modernize these frameworks, balancing the rigidities of an authoritarian

monarchical system while introducing more progressive laws and policies. This balancing act is crucial, as it aims to foster human rights without triggering severe backlash from more conservative factions within society.

Exploring the importance of human rights reforms under Vision 2030 requires an understanding of the vision's broader objectives. Vision 2030 is not just about economic diversification; it is also about social transformation. It envisions a Saudi Arabia where citizens enjoy improved quality of life, better healthcare, and education, and greater social freedoms (Kumar, 2023). These aspirations resonate strongly with Amartya Sen's framework of development as freedom, where the enhancement of individual capabilities and freedoms is seen as both the primary end and the principal means of development (Sen, 1999). By improving human rights, Saudi Arabia is not only addressing ethical and moral imperatives but also laying the foundation for sustainable and inclusive development. Moreover, the social contract in Saudi Arabia is undergoing a significant evolution. Traditionally, the Saudi social contract was characterized by a paternalistic system where economic benefits and social stability were provided in exchange for political acquiescence. Vision 2030 is attempting to renegotiate this contract by fostering a more engaged and participatory citizenry (Kumar, 2023). Human rights reforms are integral to this new social contract, aiming to empower individuals and communities, thereby fostering a more dynamic and vibrant society.

In conclusion, the background and importance of human rights reforms in Saudi Arabia, particularly under Vision 2030, cannot be overstated. While the kingdom faces substantial challenges rooted in its legal, cultural, and religious traditions, there is a clear and deliberate effort to push boundaries and usher in a new era of human rights and social freedoms. This aligns not only with the national objectives of Vision 2030 but also with broader international human rights standards, marking Saudi Arabia's journey towards a more progressive and inclusive future.

Vision 2030 Framework in Saudi Arabia Related to Human Right

The Saudi Vision 2030 framework represents a comprehensive plan designed to transform various sectors within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, aiming to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on oil. One of the central objectives tied to this vision includes substantial improvements in the realm of human rights. Vision 2030 outlines explicit strategies to enhance various aspects of human rights, including women's rights, freedom of expression, and labor rights. These strategies are part and parcel of the broader goal to foster sustainable social and economic development. Saudi Vision 2030 acknowledges the integral role that advancements in human rights play in achieving a dynamic, diverse, and internationally competitive society. A pivotal study by Awad et al. (2023) explored the joint influence of overall quality management and the modified balanced scorecard in realizing the objectives of Vision 2030 in Saudi universities. This study was particularly insightful as it highlighted the impact of integrated quality management practices on achieving these strategic objectives. The researchers identified key performance indicators that significantly improved as a result of these practices, specifically in King Khalid University. The application of these strategies is indicative of the broader national effort to align education and other sectors with the human rights goals integral to Vision 2030 (Awad et al., 2023). In parallel, Abdullateef, Alsheikh, and Mohammed (2023) examined how educational transformation at the university level can contribute to making Saudi Vision 2030 a reality. Their study emphasized the need for reform in recruitment, training, and curriculum development to bridge gaps in the current educational system. By improving values, core skills, and fostering creativity and innovation, the educational sector can support the broader human rights objectives of Vision 2030. They argued that preparing the young Saudi workforce for the international labor market is crucial for the country's socio-economic goals. Enhancing educational quality and aligning it with market needs illustrates the interconnectedness between human rights improvements and economic development aspirations under Vision 2030 (Abdullateef et al., 2023).

The framework of Vision 2030 also places a significant emphasis on women's rights, which have been a focal point of both domestic and international discussions. Almutawa and Magliveras (2020) have addressed the enforcement of women's rights under the Arab Charter on Human Rights, pointing out that countries like Saudi Arabia have faced challenges in implementing these rights

effectively. Public perception of gender roles has been a substantial barrier, suggesting that changing societal attitudes is critical. The government's initiatives to foster awareness about women's rights are part of a broader strategy to transform social norms and integrate these values within the societal fabric, aligning with Vision 2030's human rights objectives (Almutawa & Magliveras, 2020).

Moreover, Saudi Vision 2030 aligns with the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), emphasizing comprehensive human rights reforms, including the rights to education, freedom of expression, and gender equality. The Vision 2030 framework envisions a society where fundamental human rights are esteemed and uplifted through legal reforms, institutional advancements, and societal transformation. Collectively, the strategies nested within Vision 2030 aim to address existing gaps in human rights practice through legislative changes, enhanced educational frameworks, and cultural shifts. The convergence of these efforts signifies a robust commitment to improving human rights and achieving the multifaceted goals of Vision 2030. This integrated approach underscores the necessity of a holistic strategy encompassing education, legal frameworks, and societal norms to create a thriving, equitable, and progressive Saudi society.

Historical Context of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia

The historical context of human rights in Saudi Arabia provides crucial insights into the current landscape and the changes envisioned under Vision 2030. Prior to Vision 2030, human rights issues in Saudi Arabia were deeply intertwined with religious, social, and political norms that have shaped the country's legal and institutional frameworks. As highlighted by Bassiouni (2024), the discourse on human rights in Saudi Arabia is longstanding and complex, merging historical debates about the compatibility of Islamic tradition with modern norms of human rights. Saudi Arabia's legal system is predominantly based on Sharia law, which has played a significant role in shaping human rights. According to Almutairi (2018), Saudi Arabia adopts a dualistic approach in which international human rights obligations must align with Sharia principles. This framework has often led to conflicts when international human rights conventions impose standards that are seen as incompatible with Islamic law. For instance, despite ratifying the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the country has often failed to fully comply with its provisions, particularly those concerning non-discrimination. One of the most critical areas of concern has been women's rights. Historically, women in Saudi Arabia have faced significant legal and societal restrictions. Policies rooted in traditional interpretations of Islamic law have restricted women's freedom of movement, employment opportunities, and legal rights. Rachman (2019) emphasizes that these misogynistic policies have effectively denied half of the population equal rights, neglecting the potential contributions of women to the nation's development. The restrictions on women's rights have been one of the starkest examples of broader human rights violations in the country. Beyond women's rights, freedom of expression has also been severely limited. The government has maintained strict control over media and public discourse, often censoring criticism and restricting the activities of civil society organizations. The lack of freedom of expression and the repression of political dissent have stifled public debate and hindered social progress. As Rachman (2019) points out, these policies not only contradict the rights outlined in Vision 2030 but also undermine the very societal development that the Vision seeks to promote.

Moreover, the treatment of migrant workers has been another persistent human rights issue. Migrant workers constitute a significant portion of Saudi Arabia's labor force, yet they often experience harsh working conditions, inadequate legal protections, and exploitation. Almutairi (2018) argues that despite some national human rights organizations' efforts to promote and protect migrants' rights, the lack of ratification of specific international conventions on migrant worker protection has left this vulnerable group exposed to continued abuses. In the broader historical context, the interplay of colonial and post-colonial influences has also shaped the human rights landscape in Saudi Arabia. Bassiouni (2024) underscores that contemporary Islamic discourse on human rights mirrors historical debates from the nineteenth century about modernity and tradition. These debates produced varying stances, from secularist views advocating for complete imitation of

European models to traditionalist views insisting on preserving Islamic traditions. The modernist position, which sought to reconcile Islamic principles with modern human rights norms, still finds resonance today, reflecting a nuanced and contested understanding of human rights.

In summary, the historical context of human rights in Saudi Arabia before Vision 2030 is marked by a complex interplay of religious, social, and political factors. Women's rights, freedom of expression, and the treatment of migrant workers have been significant areas of concern, shaped by a legal framework grounded in Sharia law and influenced by colonial and post-colonial legacies. To achieve the ambitious goals of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia will need to address these historical issues and adopt more inclusive and rights-respecting policies.

Legal and Institutional Framework

The legal and institutional framework governing human rights in Saudi Arabia has evolved significantly, particularly in light of the ambitions laid out in Vision 2030. Vision 2030 has fostered initiatives to align Saudi Arabia's legal underpinnings with broader human rights norms, acknowledging the criticality of such reforms for socio-economic development (Amuda & Alabdulrahman, 2023). This evolving framework is underpinned by both modern policy directions and traditional Islamic jurisprudence, creating a hybrid legal structure that poses unique challenges and opportunities for human rights practices. Among the primary legal documents is King Fahd's Basic Law of Governance, established in 1992, which delineates the overall governance mechanism of the Kingdom and implicitly addresses human rights by stressing the adherence to Islamic law (Shari'ah) (King Fahd's Basic Law of Governance, 1992). The Basic Law forms the constitutional framework within which all other laws operate, thereby setting the stage for the application and interpretation of human rights within an Islamic context. This has profound implications for the integration of universal human rights norms, which, as research indicates, often pose challenges in both Islamic and secular states due to inherent jurisprudential differences (Ghaziani & Ghaziani, 2021). Saudi Arabia's alignment with Vision 2030 necessitates considerable transformation within this legal framework. The National Investment Strategy, introduced in October 2022, exemplifies this shift by aligning investment laws with Vision 2030's objectives, thereby attracting foreign investments and fostering economic diversification (Al-Qahtani & Albakjaji, 2023). Addressing foreign investments requires not only economic and policy adjustments but also significant legal reforms to create a predictable and reliable regime that aligns with international human rights standards. This includes adjustments to legal mechanisms that historically may have restricted freedoms in various spheres, such as labor rights, women's rights, and freedom of expression. Islamic insurance, or Takaful, serves as an illustrative example of how the legal framework in Saudi Arabia is adapting to meet both traditional Islamic principles and modern financial needs. The incorporation of Islamic insurance under Vision 2030 reinforces the necessity for a robust legal framework that can pivot away from conventional insurance challenges like fixed interest (Riba), uncertainty (Gharar), and speculative trading (Maisir) (Amuda & Alabdulrahman, 2023). By reinforcing policies and the legal framework around Takaful, Saudi Arabia aims to stabilize its financial system, which is a core element in promoting both economic development and human rights.

In addition to these financial reforms, the integration of universal human rights norms into Saudi's municipal laws remains a formidable task. The peculiar dualistic legal system in Saudi Arabia, as highlighted by Ghaziani and Ghaziani (2021), creates distinctive application challenges that must be navigated to achieve comprehensive human rights reforms. The dual commitment to Shari'ah and secular elements necessitates careful crafting of laws to ensure both compliance with Islamic principles and adherence to international human rights standards. The overarching role of Vision 2030 in shaping the legal and institutional framework cannot be overstated. Its emphasis on modernization and alignment with global norms has prompted a reevaluation of existing laws to foster a more inclusive, equitable society that protects fundamental human rights. This legal evolution is further supported by various state institutions dedicated to enforcing and monitoring human rights practices, which are critical for ensuring compliance and addressing violations.

In conclusion, the key regulations and institutions governing human rights in Saudi Arabia are in

a state of dynamic transformation. These changes are greatly influenced by Vision 2030's directives that aim to create a balanced legal framework, capable of integrating universal human rights norms while respecting the foundational Islamic principles of the Kingdom. King Fahd's Basic Law of Governance sets the constitutional tone, while modern reforms continue to align the legal infrastructure with broader economic and social goals, providing a holistic approach to human rights in the evolving landscape of Saudi Arabia.

Human Rights Reforms under Vision 2030

The introduction of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has significantly influenced the landscape of human rights within the country. This comprehensive plan aims to diversify the economy, reduce dependency on oil, and enhance various sectors, including human rights, education, and women's empowerment. Noteworthy transformations have been observed in the number of human rights initiatives, underscoring the Saudi government's commitment to aligning with international human rights standards (Azhar & Rashid, 2024). One of the critical areas addressed under Vision 2030 is the education sector, specifically through the integration of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education into the K-12 curriculum. The systemic incorporation of STEM represents a significant leap towards human capital development and preparing the younger generation for a knowledge-based economy. This change is vital for many reasons, among which is the advancement of instructional strategies for K-12 teachers. The vision's reforms have fostered professional development training aimed at equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively impart STEM education (Azhar & Rashid, 2024). This focus on education reform indicates a long-term strategy to empower individuals with essential skills, thereby enhancing their capacity for critical thinking and problem-solving, two critical components of human rights education. In addition to educational reforms, Vision 2030 encompasses significant strides in enhancing women's rights in Saudi Arabia. Historically, women's roles in the Kingdom were strictly confined to the private domain, guided by stringent socio-cultural norms. However, Vision 2030 has facilitated a paradigm shift by promoting gender equality and empowering women to participate actively in the public sphere. According to Sholihah et al. (2023), the most prominent changes include granting women the freedom to engage in public spaces without the constant presence of a male guardian (mahram). This newfound autonomy is monumental, allowing women to assert their independence and contribute meaningfully to societal growth.

Moreover, the vision's policies have allowed women unprecedented freedom in education, enabling them to choose their fields of study without restrictions. This progress is momentous, considering that education is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone for achieving long-term socio-economic development. Women's participation is not limited to academia; they are also making strides in politics and the economy. Reforms under Vision 2030 have positioned women to hold political offices and even attain ministerial roles, signifying a significant departure from past norms (Sholihah et al., 2023). In the economic sector, women enjoy unparalleled freedoms, empowering them to pursue careers in various fields and assume leadership positions in corporations. This shift not only acknowledges women's potential but also aligns with global gender equality standards. Despite the considerable progress made, the implementation of these reforms is not without challenges. There are persistent cultural and institutional barriers that may hinder the full realization of Vision 2030's human rights objectives. As observed by Azhar and Rashid (2024), cultural acceptance remains a crucial factor in the successful integration of educational reforms, including STEM education. This observation implies that continual engagement with various societal stakeholders is necessary to foster a supportive environment for these changes. Similarly, while significant advances have been made in women's rights, societal perceptions and resistance can pose substantial obstacles. The evolving roles of women, although supported by legal reforms, require broader cultural acceptance to be truly effective. This necessity underscores the importance of continuous advocacy and policy adjustments tailored to address emergent challenges.

In conclusion, Vision 2030 has sparked notable changes and initiatives aimed at improving human rights in Saudi Arabia. Education reforms, especially in STEM, and the empowerment of

women in various sectors signify substantial progress. However, the journey is ongoing, necessitating sustained efforts to overcome cultural and institutional barriers. The vision's success will depend on the continued commitment of Saudi Arabia to integrating these reforms effectively and fostering an environment conducive to embracing these changes.

Women's Rights within Vision 2030

Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia's ambitious reform agenda, aims to reshape the kingdom's socio-economic landscape, fostering inclusivity and enhancing the role of women in society. The initiative acknowledges the importance of women's contributions to achieving national transformation goals. Significant progress has been achieved in numerous areas; however, several challenges persist that need ongoing attention and effort. The empowerment of women under Vision 2030 has led to substantial transformations in their civil and legal rights. According to El-Bakr (2022), the condition of Saudi women has seen significant improvements since the inception of the Vision, with substantial steps taken to ensure fairness and empowerment. This vision is crucial as it facilitates women's active participation in socio-economic development both scientifically and practically. The changes occur at multiple levels, including within families, professions, and the business sector. Despite these advancements, there remain challenges such as adapting to these rapid changes and overcoming entrenched societal norms. Proposed solutions include continuous engagement and education to foster inclusive mindsets. Further analysis by Rizvi and Hussain (2021) reflects on the legislative reforms undertaken to empower women, which have played an essential role in implementing Vision 2030. The Council of Ministers introduced numerous revisions in civil and labor laws in 2019, which expanded women's rights concerning travel, employment, and financial independence. These reforms are significant milestones towards gender equality and have contributed substantially to women joining the workforce. As a result, women have ventured into sectors previously inaccessible to them, demonstrating their competence and challenging traditional gender roles. The World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law 2020 report highlighted Saudi Arabia as one of the top economies showing considerable progress toward gender equality since 2017. This recognition is attributed to the reforms enhancing freedom of movement and economic opportunities for women.

Despite the positive strides, challenges remain. The societal mindset and cultural expectations continue to pose barriers to the full realization of women's rights. El-Bakr (2022) suggests that while legal and civil rights have been granted, societal acceptance lags, creating a gap between policy and practice. Professional advancement for women often encounters resistance in male-dominated work environments. Additionally, family structures and societal expectations still place substantial pressure on women to conform to traditional roles, limiting their professional growth and participation in decision-making processes. Rizvi and Hussain (2021) further argue that economic reforms have created opportunities but have also introduced complexities. The rapid integration of women into the workforce demands supportive measures such as policies for work-life balance, equal pay, and safeguarding against workplace harassment. Additionally, to sustain the momentum of these reforms, continued government support and public-private partnerships are essential in overcoming resistance and creating inclusive work environments.

In conclusion, the vision for women's empowerment under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has led to noteworthy progress in granting civil and legal rights, expanding economic opportunities, and promoting gender equality. Nevertheless, the journey towards complete empowerment is still fraught with challenges. Ensuring that societal attitudes align with legislative reforms requires persistent efforts, educational campaigns, and policies that support women's ongoing integration into all facets of economic and public life. As Saudi Arabia continues on this transformative path, the dual focus on creating opportunities and dismantling hindrances will be crucial for the true realization of Vision 2030.

Policy Changes and Outcomes Regarding Freedom of Expression

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 represents a transformative plan aimed at diversifying the economy and modernizing societal norms, including those related to human rights. A critical aspect of this vision is the policy changes surrounding freedom of expression and media. Historically, Saudi Arabia has maintained stringent controls over media and public discourse, which have been the subject of both internal and international scrutiny (Ugland, 2019). This subchapter delves into the significant policy changes regarding freedom of expression initiated under Vision 2030, examines their impacts, and discusses related theoretical perspectives. Among the most noteworthy policy changes is the attempt to loosen the tight grip on media and allow for a more open public discourse. This shift is embodied in various legal and institutional reforms that aim to create a more transparent and accountable media environment. For instance, the Saudi General Authority for Media Regulation has implemented new regulatory frameworks that permit greater latitude for journalistic freedom, albeit within certain confines (Carter, 2017). These frameworks aim to balance the government's control with the emerging need for a transparent media landscape crucial for the vision's economic and social objectives. However, the success of these initiatives is still a matter of debate, given that significant restrictions remain in place. One of the key changes under Vision 2030 is the revision of the anti-cybercrime law, which has historically been instrumental in curbing dissent and suppressing freedom of expression online. This law now includes provisions that focus more on protecting individual privacy and less on penalizing free speech. Another notable regulation is the enhancement of protective measures for journalists and media personnel, aimed at shielding them from arbitrary arrests and allowing for more investigative reporting. These changes are partly in response to international criticism and partly due to internal advocacy for greater media freedom as a catalyst for other reforms outlined in Vision 2030 (Ugland, 2019).

Despite these positive strides, numerous challenges undermine the full realization of freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia. One such challenge is the enduring control over major media outlets by the state or state-affiliated entities. Royal decrees and executive orders often influence editorial policies, limiting the scope of critical journalism. Moreover, censorship remains pervasive, especially concerning politically sensitive subjects and issues related to the royal family or national security (Davidson, 2021). These constraints are often justified under the guise of maintaining national unity and preventing societal discord, which complicates the genuine democratization of media space. Technological advancements also play a dual role in shaping the media landscape under Vision 2030. While new technologies provide platforms for alternative voices and foster greater political participation, they also introduce new legal risks and surveillance possibilities. For instance, the proliferation of social media has opened new avenues for public discourse, yet it has also led to heightened monitoring and censorship of online activities (Davidson, 2021). This dichotomy highlights the tension between fostering a free media environment and maintaining strict governmental control.

International perspectives offer a mixed review of Saudi Arabia's progress in this area. On one hand, global organizations and advocacy groups have acknowledged the incremental improvements in media freedom and expression. On the other hand, they continue to highlight significant deficiencies and call for more substantial reforms (Carter, 2017). The international community's reaction is crucial for Saudi Arabia, as it seeks to enhance its global image and attract foreign investment, both central to Vision 2030's overarching goals. Ugland (2019) emphasizes the role of education in addressing these ongoing issues, suggesting that a recalibration of curricula to include media law and policy education could empower citizens to navigate and challenge media restrictions. Enhancing civic knowledge and political efficacy can foster a more informed and engaged populace, which is essential for sustaining any meaningful progress in freedom of expression.

In conclusion, while Vision 2030 has initiated several promising policy changes regarding freedom of expression and media, the journey toward a fully open and free media environment remains fraught with challenges. The interplay between governmental control, technological advancements, and educational initiatives will be pivotal in shaping the future landscape of media

freedom in Saudi Arabia. Further reforms are necessary to dismantle existing barriers and ensure that the principles of free expression are genuinely upheld.

Labor Rights and Migrant Workers

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 outlines a transformative socio-economic agenda designed to diversify the economy and improve the social conditions in the country, including labor rights. The Kingdom has historically relied heavily on migrant labor, particularly for low-wage jobs that require significant physical labor, such as construction and domestic work. These workers often face numerous challenges, including poor working conditions, limited legal protections, and social marginalization (Navarro-Gambín & Jansen, 2023). Understanding the impacts of recent reforms aimed at improving labor rights is essential to evaluate the progress and remaining obstacles in ensuring a dignified life for all workers in Saudi Arabia. Recent reforms have placed significant emphasis on enhancing the labor conditions of migrant workers. For example, the introduction of the Wage Protection System (WPS) and the reform of the Kafala system are notable steps forward. The WPS aims to ensure that workers are paid on time and in full, providing a measure of financial security that was previously lacking. The Kafala system, which tied workers' residency status to their employers, has been reformed to allow greater worker mobility and reduce the instances of forced labor. These changes align with Vision 2030's broader goals of improving human rights and social justice within the Kingdom. Despite these advancements, significant challenges persist. Studies highlight that labor conditions often remain harsh and exploitative, particularly for those in lower-skilled positions (Navarro-Gambín & Jansen, 2023). Migrant workers from countries such as India, Pakistan, and the Philippines often report issues like delayed salaries, poor living conditions, and limited access to healthcare and legal recourse. For instance, laborers are frequently housed in overcrowded and unsanitary accommodations, which can exacerbate health problems and create unsafe living conditions. These factors collectively contribute to a heightened state of social vulnerability for these workers.

Moreover, societal attitudes towards migrant workers add another layer of complexity. Migrant laborers are frequently marginalized and face various forms of institutionalized discrimination (Zeng, 2017). This marginalization is reflected not only in their working conditions but also in their everyday interactions in host societies. Migrants often feel isolated and excluded from the broader social fabric, struggling to integrate and build meaningful connections. This social exclusion is compounded by cultural differences and language barriers, which further impede their ability to advocate for better conditions or seek assistance when needed. The economic ramifications of these issues are far-reaching. Despite their significant contributions to the Saudi economy, migrant workers often occupy the most precarious and lowest-paying jobs. These positions are essential for the functioning of numerous sectors, including construction, agriculture, and domestic service. However, the poor treatment of these workers can lead to lower productivity, high turnover rates, and weakened economic relations with countries that supply labor. As a result, improving labor conditions is not only a moral imperative but also an economic necessity to support sustainable development under Vision 2030. International perspectives provide valuable insights into these challenges and the potential for reform. Studies from other regions experiencing similar issues, such as the case of agricultural workers in Spain, demonstrate that improving labor conditions requires a multifaceted approach (Navarro-Gambín & Jansen, 2023; Zeng, 2017). Efforts must address both legal frameworks and societal attitudes to bring about meaningful and lasting change. Policies that ensure fair wages, adequate housing, and access to healthcare and legal services are crucial. Additionally, public awareness campaigns and educational programs can help shift societal perceptions and reduce discrimination against migrant laborers.

In conclusion, while Vision 2030 has set the stage for remarkable changes in labor rights, the path to realizing these ambitions is fraught with challenges. The Kingdom must continue to implement and enforce reforms that protect the rights and dignity of migrant workers. By addressing both legal and social dimensions of labor rights, Saudi Arabia can move closer to achieving the holistic and inclusive vision envisaged in its ambitious 2030 agenda.

Global Reactions to Human Rights Reforms under Vision 2030

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative has garnered significant international attention and mixed reactions due to its ambitious agenda to drive social, economic, and human rights reforms. It is vital to evaluate these global perspectives to comprehend better the successes, challenges, and areas needing further improvement as the country strives to align its domestic policies with international human rights standards. The Vision 2030 plan has catalyzed substantive conversations among scholars, policymakers, and international organizations, thereby shaping the discourse on Saudi Arabia's human rights trajectory. The economic transformations heralded by Vision 2030 have been central to international reactions. Jabali, Alharbi, and Rajan (2023) highlight the substantial economic progress, particularly in diversifying the Saudi economy beyond oil dependence. The authors illustrate the significant shifts in sectors such as tourism, renewable energy, and entertainment, which have attracted international investments and interest. However, the intersection of economic reform and human rights remains a critical point of debate. For instance, while the economic diversification has been praised globally, questions have been raised about the equitable distribution of newly generated wealth and whether these economic gains translate into tangible improvements in human rights conditions across the population (Jabali et al., 2023). The lens through which international stakeholders view Saudi Arabia's human rights reforms is also influenced by broader geopolitical dynamics. Genoud (2023) provides a thought-provoking discussion on the "binary narrative" prevalent in global human rights discourses, wherein countries such as Saudi Arabia are often positioned against Western democratic standards. This dichotomous framework can obscure nuanced understanding and constructive engagement. Genoud argues that Western nations frequently lack self-reflection and fail to critically assess their shortcomings, thereby reducing the effectiveness of their critiques and engagement with countries like Saudi Arabia. This perspective underscores the need for a multi-faceted approach that considers differing historical, cultural, and political contexts when evaluating human rights reforms under Vision 2030 (Genoud, 2023).

Cultural initiatives, such as the establishment and evolution of institutions like the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, offer compelling parallels and lessons for Saudi Arabia's efforts to promote human rights. Ostow (2021) evaluates how the Museum responded to historical injustices and fostered a human rights-based culture through its exhibits and activist initiatives. This case illustrates how cultural institutions can play a pivotal role in supporting human rights education and advocacy. For Saudi Arabia, integrating human rights principles into public education and cultural practices could enhance international perceptions and contribute to more substantial and sustained human rights improvements. The example set by the International Slavery Museum shows the potential for cultural institutions to bridge past abuses with a future-oriented human rights framework, a model that Saudi Arabia could emulate to build credibility and legitimacy in its human rights agenda (Ostow, 2021). Overall, the international community's reaction to Saudi Arabia's human rights reforms under Vision 2030 is complex and varies widely. While there is recognition of the significant economic and social strides the country has made, persistent concerns about political freedoms, justice systems, and the rights of specific groups, such as women and migrant workers, remain. The critical insights from the studies by Jabali, Alharbi, and Rajan (2023), Genoud (2023), and Ostow (2021) reveal that achieving meaningful human rights reform will require continuously addressing these concerns in a manner that respects cultural differences while adhering to universal human rights principles. In advancing Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia must balance international expectations with domestic realities, leveraging global partnerships and local initiatives to create a more rights-respecting society.

Future Directions and Recommendations

The trajectory of human rights in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030 reveals substantial progress, yet it faces a myriad of challenges that warrant further action and strategic direction. As we embark upon future pathways, it is crucial to focus on enhancing the existing human rights framework by leveraging international best practices, addressing nuanced local issues, and preparing for forthcoming societal shifts. Future developments in business and human rights law suggest a

dynamic intersection with climate change and technological advancements (Robert, 2024). For Saudi Arabia, the integration of human rights considerations into climate policies and tech-driven initiatives presents a critical area for development. As the Vision 2030 agenda progresses, advocating for environmental sustainability must align with the protection of fundamental rights. For example, the deployment of advanced technology should ensure that it does not infringe on privacy rights or exacerbate existing inequalities. Regulatory frameworks should be updated to address these emerging issues, promoting a balanced approach that advances technological progress while safeguarding human rights. On the legal and administrative front, Rahman et al. (2024) highlight the necessity for robust law enforcement and transparent public administration to protect human rights. Saudi Arabia's legal institutions must continue evolving to address resource constraints, corruption, and abuse of power. This requires fostering stronger institutional capacities and promoting higher standards of transparency and accountability. Enhanced training for law enforcement officials, coupled with community engagement initiatives, can support a culture of respect for human rights. Additionally, involving civil society organizations in the policy-making process can help ensure that public policies are inclusive and reflective of the needs of all societal segments. Empirical insights from UN recommendations reveal critical trends in human rights discourse which can inform future Saudi strategies (Keydar et al., 2024). The UN Human Rights bodies' focus on certain protected groups and issues can offer guidance on areas requiring intensified attention in Saudi Arabia. For instance, the growing emphasis on migrant rights and the rights of women and children in UN discussions underscores similar needs within the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia can adopt a targeted approach, addressing these groups' specific vulnerabilities through tailored policies and comprehensive support systems. Furthermore, structural critiques of international human rights mechanisms suggest that Saudi Arabia could benefit from fostering regional collaborations and dialogues. Engaging with neighboring countries and global human rights organizations can provide Saudi Arabia with diverse perspectives and innovative solutions to shared challenges. This can enhance not only the Kingdom's human rights records but also its standing as a leader in promoting regional stability and human rights.

In conclusion, future directions for advancing human rights in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030 should encapsulate a multi-faceted approach: aligning business and environmental policies with human rights, bolstering legal and institutional capacities, and leveraging empirical insights from global human rights discourse. By integrating these elements into its Vision 2030 strategy, Saudi Arabia can continue to progress towards a more inclusive and rights-respecting society, paving the way for a sustainable and equitable future.

Conclusion

The essay provides a comprehensive examination of human rights reforms in Saudi Arabia under the Vision 2030 initiative, contextualizing these changes both historically and socio-politically. It begins by outlining the significance of Vision 2030, established by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, which aims not only to diversify the oil-dependent economy but also to promote social reforms, including improvements in human rights standards. The research question central to the essay investigates the extent to which human rights are being addressed in this transformation and how these efforts relate to global human rights norms. A detailed discussion highlights the critical aspects of Vision 2030 that are directly linked to human rights improvements, particularly focusing on women's rights, freedom of expression, and migrant labor conditions. The essay underscores major policy changes that have facilitated women's participation in public life, including reforms that grant them more autonomy and opportunities within the workforce, as well as educational advancements that aim to empower women in various sectors. The exploration of labor rights particularly emphasizes the significant ongoing reforms targeting migrant workers, aiming to improve their working conditions and protections through changes to existing labor laws and the implementation of the Wage Protection System. Despite these progressive developments, the essay identifies substantial challenges that continue to hinder the full realization of human rights in Saudi Arabia. Cultural attitudes, institutional resistance, and the enduring impact of historical norms

significantly affect the implementation of policies aimed at enhancing human rights. It highlights the gap between policy and practice, asserting that while legislative changes are beneficial, they must be accompanied by broader societal acceptance to drive meaningful transformation.

Finally, the essay emphasizes that while Vision 2030 has laid a crucial foundation for advancing human rights in Saudi Arabia, sustained efforts and a commitment to addressing entrenched cultural and institutional barriers are necessary. The interplay between international scrutiny and domestic reforms will be vital in shaping a rights-respecting society as the country continues to navigate its ambitious modernization agenda under Vision 2030.

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