



# Saudi Arabia

*Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*



## Key Facts



**World Freedom Press Global Index Ranking (Overall):** Ranked 172 (65.88)

**Head of State / Head of Government:** King and Prime Minister SALMAN bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud (since 23 January 2015); Crown Prince MUHAMMAD BIN SALMAN bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud (born 31 August 1985); note - the monarch is both chief of state and head of government

**Capital city:** Riyadh

**Population:** 33,091,113 (July 2018 est.)

**Official Language(s):** Arabic

**Ethnic Groups:** Arab 90%, Afro-Asian 10%

**Currency:** Saudi riyal

**Gross domestic product (PPP):** 683.8 billion USD (2017)

**Internet penetration:** 73.8% (July 2016 est.)

**Most trusted medium of information:** N/A

**Legal System:** Islamic (sharia) legal system with some elements of Egyptian, French, and customary law; note - several secular codes have been introduced; commercial disputes handled by special committees

**Political system:** absolute monarchy

**Journalists Killed/Jailed 2019:** 0

**Media Environment:** broadcast media are state-controlled; state-run TV operates 4 networks; Saudi Arabia is a major market for pan-Arab satellite TV broadcasters; state-run radio operates several

networks; multiple international broadcasters are available. The Saudi government closely monitors media and restricts it under official state law. Changes have been made to lessen these restrictions; however, some government-led efforts to control information have also drawn international attention. In 2014, Reporters Without Borders described the government as, "relentless in its censorship of the Saudi media and the Internet."

**Media Issues:** Saudi Arabia permits no independent media. Authorities keep Saudi journalists under close surveillance—even when they are abroad, as Jamal Khashoggi's murder in Istanbul in October 2018 illustrated. Despite his talk of reform, Mohammad bin Salman has intensified the repression since his appointment as crown prince in June 2017. The number of journalists and citizen-journalists in detention has tripled since the start of 2017. Most are being held arbitrarily and are likely subjected to torture, which is almost systematic for prisoners of conscience. Journalists who voice criticism or analyze political problems are liable to be fired or detained under criminal code provisions or under the terrorism or cybercrime laws on charges of blasphemy, "insulting religion," "inciting chaos," "jeopardizing national unity," or "harming the image and reputation of the king and the state." Everyone censors themselves, even on social networks.

## Popular Forms of Media Consumption

**Print:** The print media in Saudi Arabia, though privately-owned, is closely tied to the government. The registration of new journalists, changes in staff of a media outlet, and creation of new outlets all require government approval.[12] Due to government subsidies, the daily newspapers often rely on state support and tend to align with the Saudi Press Agency on more controversial topics. Despite this, newspapers have increasingly published stories on topics such as crime, drug trafficking, and extremism. There are numerous documented instances of the Saudi government forcing the resignation of journalists or banning them from publishing in the country. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported in 2002 that the Ministry of Information forced two different newspaper editors to resign and fired the head of a publishing house due to the critical and liberal nature of what they had published.[16] Several more writers were banned from the press in 2003, including Wajeha Al-Huwaider, a writer for Al-Watan and Arab News and a prominent women's rights activist.

**Social Networks:** The Saudi government began blocking internet communications through online apps such as Skype and WhatsApp in 2013, due to fears that activists may use these platforms. As part of the country's economic reforms to boost businesses and diversify the economy, the government lifted the ban in 2017. However, the CITC confirmed that calls will still be monitored and censored, both on global and local apps. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are widely used in Saudi Arabia, with nearly 30 percent of Arab region Twitter users from Saudi.[47] Twitter has become an important platform for expressing dissent. However, liberal citizens, and more recently conservatives, have been arrested and sometimes given punishments, such as prison time and fines, for criticizing the government on social media.[48] The government has been reported to have a hand in utilizing bots and human "trolls" in order to minimize the work of its critics on Twitter.[49] Saudi was also accused of infiltrating Twitter through a Saudi employee that joined the company in 2013 but was put on leave two years later after the potential plot was brought to the attention of Twitter.