A VOICE UNSILENCED:
Saudi Women Advocating Their Rights, 1990-2017

By: Monera Al Nahedh and Hessah Al Sheikh
A Voice Unsilenced:
Saudi Women Advocating Their Rights, 1990-2017

Authors: Monera Al Nahedh and Hessah Al Sheikh
Publisher: Center for Women’s Global Leadership

Cover Image:
Face Book1 by Hend Al-Mansour

Cover poem translation:
I am writing my face
Hear me, O home
And hold your judgment until the moment is over
I grow out of you, yours is my direction when I pray
Hear me out until the end of the painting

You are whom I write for
You are whom I paint for
You are the crowd who avoids the asking gaze
Avoids searching for the eye of truth
Listen to me for a moment

First print: March 2018
ISBN: 978-0-9711412-5-4

Center for Women’s Global Leadership
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
160 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8555 USA
Tel: 1-732-932-8782
Email: cwgl@cwgl.rutgers.edu
Website: http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu

© 2018 Center for Women’s Global Leadership and Authors
Printed in the United States of America
All rights reserved

Supported by: Center for Women’s Global Leadership and
Funded by: Channel Foundation, Rutgers Global and Center for Women’s Global Leadership

Edited by: MaryBeth Bognor and Maria C. Hughes
Fact checked by: Aleka Russo
Reviewed by: Melissa Upreti
Designed and printed by: Princetonian Graphics, Inc.
The Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL) had the pleasure and honor of partnering with Monera Al Nahedh and Hessah Al Sheikh to publish and support their important and timely work of examining Saudi women’s advocacy for their rights since 1990. In the face of restrictive laws and practices that have continuously violated and denied the full realization of human rights for Saudi women, opposition has persisted. Saudi women have tirelessly advocated through campaigns and demands that have been carried out in public spaces through demonstrations, as well as online through the use of social media to both organize and share their struggles internationally.

Though there have been recent policy changes that show progress on the surface, make no mistake that it is Saudi women who have been the driving force in drawing attention to substantive issues concerning gender equality in Saudi society, and in addressing changes that are essential for women to gain full access to their rights. Most of what is written about Saudi women comes from outside sources, which have often tended to be too presumptive in viewing them as weak and lacking agency or in selectively focusing on issues that trivialize Saudi women’s realities. Given the recent promising policy shifts, such as the easing of guardianship laws and the end of the driving ban for women, among others, it is time for the voices of Saudi women to be heard. It is in this spirit that CWGL welcomes the research by Monera Al Nahedh and Hessah Al Sheikh and publicizes it to expose Saudi women’s role in demanding change and equality. This report is also an invaluable avenue to connect them with a world that stands to support them in their endeavor.

As a feminist human rights organization, CWGL aims to amplify feminist thought, standards, and leadership to influence civil society and its institutions and structures, thereby addressing inequality, discrimination, and violence. This includes amplifying women’s voices of the Global South in how they are defining and demanding their rights by connecting them to global spaces. It is with these values that we embarked on this partnership and published this report. It is also with these same values that we acknowledge the human rights abuses of those most marginalized within Saudi Arabia based on gender and other intersecting identities. Though this report does not address the full range of human rights issues and marginalized groups in Saudi Arabia, we emphasize the urgent need for a broad based holistic approach to ensure the rights of all women. **We are confident that this report is the beginning of a reflection of Saudi women’s voices in what promises to be a long, powerful, and courageous journey.**

Krishanti Dharmaraj
In the last seven or eight years, Saudi women captured the attention of international media with their numerous initiatives to gain their rights and change their status in Saudi society. They launched approximately twenty campaigns and demands. Their committed advocacy affected Saudi society in fundamental ways, while energizing younger generations and supporters of women’s rights. It also angered the conservative sectors of society.

Recent developments in the country have put Saudi Arabia under increased international attention and scrutiny. The government, under the guidance of King Salman and the Crown Prince, has steered the country towards a new course of economic and social policies that may have significant implications for change in the status of women, as signaled by the September 2017 royal decree allowing women to drive as of June 2018. Nonetheless, the question remains whether or not these new policies will actually lead to change in the legal and institutional order that govern women’s lives, such as in abolishing the guardianship system and gender segregation as well as putting measures in place for women’s political participation and equality in social and economic spheres.

This initiative to explore and study Saudi women’s advocacy for their rights is an expression of deep respect and an urge to contribute to this ongoing process. We are deeply grateful for the cooperation of those who enabled us to engage in a dialogue and learn from their experiences as well as to those who responded to our questionnaire. A special thanks, however, goes to those remarkable women leading the struggle, for giving us the opportunity to examine their personal experiences and journeys in activism. Our gratitude and thanks are also extended to CWGL, which gave us support and the opportunity to publish our work. Special thanks goes to Krishanti Dharmaraj and MaryBeth Bognar from CWGL, whose assistance, friendship and, thoughtful comments over many months were influential in the process of completing this study. We also appreciate the help we received from Yakin Erturk. Her comments were very illuminating and helpful.

Monera Al Nahedh

Hessah Al Sheikh
# CONTENTS

Executive Summary .......................................................................................................................... 5  
Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 8  
Methodology ................................................................................................................................... 10  
Historical and Legal Context ........................................................................................................ 12  
Review of Literature Written by Saudi Authors .............................................................................. 18  

**Part 1**

Saudi Women’s Advocacy, 1990-2015 .......................................................................................... 23  
Focus Group Discussions .............................................................................................................. 35  
The Stakeholder Survey .................................................................................................................. 40  
Women Leaders: In-depth Interviews: .......................................................................................... 43  

**Part 2**

Online Advocacy .......................................................................................................................... 48  
Quantitative Twitter Analysis ........................................................................................................ 48  
Qualitative Analysis of Activist Twitter Accounts ........................................................................ 60  
Summary of Results: A Tale of Exceptional Advocacy for Saudi Women’s Rights over the Past 27 Years ................................................................................................................................. 72  

Endnotes ........................................................................................................................................ 77  
References ..................................................................................................................................... 80  

**Appendix**

I. Methodology ............................................................................................................................. 86  
II. Major Campaigns and Demands, 1990-2015 .......................................................................... 97  
III. Twitter Accounts Advocating for Women’s Rights ............................................................... 101
TABLE INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Opinions and Attitudes on Difference between Activism and Movement</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Contribution to Women’s Advocacy in the Saudi Context</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Respondents’ Age Distribution</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Respondents’ Distribution According to Profession</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Priorities of Saudi Women’s Activism in Last Ten Years</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Categorization of Saudi Women’s Activities as Feminist Activism</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Major Campaigns and Demands by Saudi Activists, 1990-2010</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Web Based Campaigns and Demands, 1990-2010</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Known Activists in Social Networking Sites and the Community Having 30K+ Followers</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>AG Activists Not Widely Known in Community with 30K+ Followers</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Public Female Figures Supporting Women’s Rights</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Accounts Associated with Campaigns</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Anonymous AG Activist Twitter Accounts (800-24.6K Followers)</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Women’s Accounts with Followers from 2K to 19K</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BACKGROUND

Saudi women are discriminated against based on their gender, including through the high-profile ban on driving, which is set to remain in place until June 2018. They face a fierce and pervasive patriarchal system that determines their status legally, socially, and in civil society. This system mandates their segregation in the public sphere, requires male guardianship over adult women, and excludes them from certain professions and decision-making positions. This research initiative tells the previously untold story of the exceptional advocacy of Saudi women for their rights from 1990-2017, and does so by Saudi women rather than external sources.

OBJECTIVE

This study aims to explore the trends, discourses, and strategies of Saudi women in their advocacy for women’s rights from 1990-2017, in order to identify major features of this advocacy as seen by its participants, stakeholders, and sympathizers. The focus of this study is on the local perspectives, Saudi writers, leaders of the advocacy, activists, and sympathizers of women’s rights in Saudi society. It tells the personal stories of women who suffer under male guardianship and details the processes under which they came together to create activist groups, organize protests, and demand their rights. It also examines how Saudi women’s advocacy is impacted by the Islamic feminist movement. With few assumptions, this study allows the data and protagonists of this story to point the way to its results and conclusions.

FINDINGS

The study identified twenty initiatives of activism by Saudi women starting from the historic demonstration against the driving ban on November 6, 1990 to 2017. Within this period, the study identified three waves of activism:

1. **The first wave began in 1990**, when 47 women took to the street, drove their cars, and endured the consequences. The severe punishments from their government and society resulted in a state of hibernation of open activism and defiance for almost two decades.

2. **The second wave was from 2011 to 2015**, marked by a surge in demands for women’s rights and related campaigns. This fruitful and energetic period started when Manal al-Sharif drove her car and posted a video of the event. She inspired other campaigns for driving and women’s rights among collectives of women activists. Events in the later part of this wave, including Lujain al-Hathloul driving across the Saudi-Emirati border and the December 2015 municipal elections, marked a progression in women’s activism toward campaigns on Twitter and a focus on abolishing guardianship.

3. **The third wave, or “Twitter wave,”** was the subject of in-depth analysis in this study. These younger, mostly anonymous Twitter activists created an explosion of advocacy. Twitter has allowed women activists to engage with one another and has served as a platform to reflect women’s reality by exposing their struggles and needs, including in ways considered risky that did not correspond to social norms. The focus on abolishing guardianship continued as a top priority as women posted about abuse under this system.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Priority Issues
Driving has remained symbolic for advocacy toward women’s rights. Though it often receives a high level of attention, it is far from the only issue of focus for women’s demands and campaigns. Beyond driving, campaigns and demands during this time focused on violence against women, male legal representation for businesswomen, guardianship of adult women, and municipal election participation. Hashtags for women driving are often the most prominent on Twitter, but more recently, a shift calling for abolishing guardianship has become the focus throughout social media.

Successful Strategies
Demands were most likely to be met if there was political will or if they were adopted by the political elite. For example, the national identity card for women was first issued after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, which coincided with increased national security and the rise of Islamic militancy. Additionally, the abrupt decision in 2017 to allow women to drive has been linked to a broader political and economic agenda outlined in the 2030 Vision for Saudi Arabia, which reflects the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This research identified other successes by Saudi women activists in the areas of domestic violence (2006), the inclusion of women in municipal elections (2015), and businesswomen’s rights in Chambers of Commerce and the Ministry of Commerce (2002-2011). Saudi women activists have also garnered their own tools to further their activism. They used activist collectives to address harsh limitations on self-expression and organized campaigns. These are small, organic groups of women activists that provide mutual support when lobbying for their causes by creating alliances locally, nationally, and internationally. Beginning in 2010, Saudi women activists increasingly utilized the internet and social media, particularly Twitter, as tools for action. Women activists continue to seek refuge and salvation from the top level of patronage (the king and the royal court) through petitions, letters of requests, and complaints.

Perceptions of Saudi Women’s Activism
Perceptions of Saudi women’s activism among writers and analysts assessed in this study ranged from Saudi feminists to those who declare there is no real women’s movement or leaders. Others do not dispute the significant presence of women’s activism, but critique its mode of organization, orientation, and agenda. Women’s rights advocates who participated in the study primarily said that women’s activism in Saudi Arabia has not been successful in clarifying itself as a movement with a recognizable intellectual discourse, orientation, and set of priorities. The women’s advocacy leaders who were interviewed demonstrated reluctance for using the term “activist” both to refer to themselves and to describe others, stating that it implies political action. Instead, they reiterated that “changing the policies toward women” is their focus.

Despite the contributions of Saudi women writers, columnists, and bloggers, the sample in this study held divided views on their efficacy as advocates for women’s causes. Some were adamant that women writers are effective advocates, especially when writings focus on real issues for women. Others thought that activism for women should be on the ground and within a platform of action. The majority of the study’s participants shared the view that membership of women in the Shura Consultative Council (Shura Council) has not been effective for women’s advocacy. In fact, they felt that most female members in the Shura Council cannot act effectively as advocates for women’s demands due to the dominance of patriarchy in the systems governing Saudi society and all branches of government.
CONCLUSIONS

This study’s analysis of the demands for and campaigns about women’s rights during this time period – drawn from literature written by Saudi women authors, online Twitter activism, and insider accounts collected through focus groups, interviews, and a survey – revealed a number of important findings. Despite variations in emphasis and points of view, informants were unanimous to a great degree in their perceptions of women’s rights movements. Most significantly, this study found that women’s activism is severely constrained, not only due to political and cultural factors, but also due to contradictions existing within the movement itself. Their few successes in various campaigns, and most recently their online courage and solidarity, have had a profound effect on how Saudi popular culture sees women’s issues and reacts to their demands and aspirations.
INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to explore the trends, discourses, and strategies of Saudi women in their advocacy for women’s rights. For the first time, it is Saudi women who have led the research and writing on Saudi women’s advocacy for their rights rather than an external source. We approached it from the perspective of local actors sympathetic to the women’s cause in Saudi society. The opponents of women’s rights activism are, for the most part, dominant groups within society, whose views are well documented and known. Therefore, they are not included in this study. The study sets out to answer the following questions:

1. What happened in Saudi women’s advocacy for their rights from 1990 to 2017?
2. What are the elements that drove these Saudi women activists to action, intellectually and emotionally, despite all the obstacles and risks they faced in this restrictive context politically and socially?
3. What tools, methods, and strategies have Saudi activists employed to relay their message and demand their rights and why?
4. How is progress viewed and how do others view the impact on the Saudi culture or society and on women’s reality?
5. What are the dynamics operating within Saudi women’s advocacy for their rights over time as well as within the groups of advocates themselves? Do these dynamics affect their methods and efficacy?
6. What are the societal factors that support them or shape their advocacy and how have these changed over time?

In recent years, international media awards were bestowed on Saudi individuals or organizations for their role in influencing change in Saudi women’s status. Local critics, however, have argued that the achievements publicized by these awards, as important as they may be, do not reflect profound change in the basic structure of Saudi society or in women’s lives. For example, the appointments to what are considered top decision-making positions like Deputy Minister or member of the Shura Council are not qualitatively changing the basic legal status of Saudi women. These same women are still required to obtain their guardian’s permission to travel for official visits and still operate under the patriarchal structures of the institutions in which they work. Many focus group members in Riyadh and Khobar in the summer of 2014 and writers in Riyadh in 2017 have suggested that these nominal appointments are merely tokens to give the image that change is taking place in Saudi society without confronting or altering the discriminatory practices against women. This may be, but one cannot help but ask if there is a process in Saudi society that is gradually and progressively bringing forth changes in women’s status, regardless of the obstacles and limitations facing them. Is women’s advocacy for their rights part of that process?
REPORT ROADMAP

In assessing Saudi women’s advocacy for their rights, this study begins with a historical and legal background that sets the stage by showing the socio-political context occurring alongside Saudi women’s activism, the legal obligations that Saudi Arabia has to women, and relevant policies the country has passed or updated, as well as the primary challenges women continue to face that restrict them from fully realizing their rights. It then provides a unique assessment of Saudi women’s writings, further emphasizing the Saudi woman’s voice. The study’s findings are divided into two parts. The first part assesses Saudi women’s advocacy from 1990 to 2015 by reviewing their primary campaigns and demands and analyzing responses given in focus groups, interviews, and surveys. The second part of the study focuses on online advocacy through an in-depth Twitter analysis.
This study is exploratory in nature. Therefore, no hypotheses were made in regards to Saudi women’s advocacy. Field work began in the summer of 2014, when Saudi women’s advocacy was at a peak with many initiatives and campaigns. Twitter was increasingly becoming a social forum for Saudi society, especially for the younger generation, and was frequently used as a tool for self-expression, intellectual and academic discourse, as well as the dissemination of unfiltered news and commentary. In April 2017, the authors made a decision to add a focus of Saudi women’s online advocacy to this study and they conducted an in-depth Twitter analysis. Study participants were chosen from among supporters of the Saudi women’s cause and included social media users who look favorably on improving Saudi women’s status.

OBJECTIVES

1. Conduct a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the activities of Saudi women advocates, including their demands and campaigns from 1990 to 2017, focusing on strategies, patterns, methodologies, and outcomes.

2. Identify major features of Saudi women’s advocacy as seen by women activists within the movement as well as other stakeholders.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this study. First, the research was limited by its focus on local perspectives and writings in that it did not introduce many international studies, analyses, or accounts of Saudi women. Second, it focused solely on supporters and advocates for Saudi women’s rights, which may have limited the study’s perspective on the changes within the proponents’ intellectual discourse. Third, the researchers collected fewer survey and focus group responses than originally planned. Fourth, the methodology of this study may have missed groups of women who are less visible or connected in the virtual platforms utilized by the researchers. Finally, recent changes for Saudi women, such as the decision to remove the driving ban, were not assessed in depth. The researchers suggest that future studies include this period of change in their focus.

ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY: A DIFFERENTIATION AND AN INTERSECTION

Activism is “action on behalf of a cause.” It is action that goes beyond what is the convention or norm in any given society. Activism cannot be defined narrowly because it can take many shapes. Activists can work in big groups that undertake larger tasks, such as organizing a city-wide campaign; in small groups that form organically for a particular cause; or even as individual actors expressing dissent with a rebellious action, petition, website, or statement to the media. Political and social movements operate side by side with activism and what counts as activism depends on what is acceptable in a particular society. In a democratic
METHODS AND TOOLS
The first part of this study, conducted in summer of 2014, utilized the following methods of inquiry:

- A review of literature by Saudi women authors regarding Saudi women’s issues, leadership, and activism and the value systems to which it relates, as well as the programs and platforms of action that Saudi women have adopted. The review primarily focuses on the background of these women leaders in advocacy and the actions taken by activists.

- An assessment of group actions taken by Saudi women from 1990-2017, and how these actions relate to social conditions and factors operating at that time.

- A qualitative analysis of the results of the following tools of study:
  - Four focus groups in two major regions of Saudi Arabia—the central and eastern regions. More than fifty relevant stakeholders were involved, including six men.
  - A survey was circulated online through email lists available to the researchers and social media that targeted relevant groups.
  - Eleven in-depth interviews with leaders for Saudi women’s rights who are currently identified as instigators and actors in Saudi women’s advocacy.

The second part of this study, conducted in late 2017, utilized the following methods of inquiry:

- A quantitative Twitter analysis on Saudi women’s advocacy for abolishing guardianship, conducted by a data analysis firm associated with Twitter.

- Tracking Twitter accounts to identify major participants and hashtags that advocate for Saudi women’s rights. The study tracked abolishing guardianship because it was the most active demand on Twitter since July 2016.

- A qualitative analysis of content and types of engagement of Saudi women’s advocates.

- Two focus group discussions with Twitter advocates.

- One online interview with an administrator of a major Twitter account and hashtag that advocated for Saudi women’s rights.
HISTORICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF WOMEN’S ADVOCACY

Before describing the actions undertaken by Saudi women to demand their rights during the period 1990-2017, it is important to shed light on the socio-political circumstances of the decades under study. This is to put actions into context in order to understand their outcomes and how the authorities and society perceived and reacted to them.

1980-1990

In Saudi Arabia, the 1980s were impacted by the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and by the Grand Mosque seizure during November and December of 1979, when extremist insurgents calling for the overthrow of the al-Saud regime took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The seizure of Islam’s holiest site and the large number of casualties shocked Saudi society and the Islamic world. In the aftermath of the attack, the Saudi King Khalid al-Saud implemented a stricter enforcement of Sharia (Islamic law), giving the Ulama and religious conservatives more power over the next decade and making the religious police more assertive.8

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait and the Gulf region was transformed into a conflict zone. This allowed the overt entry of US military forces to Saudi soil and increased anti-Western sentiments.9 Female cadets from the US army and Kuwaiti women fleeing Iraqi forces were allowed to drive and were visible in Saudi cities. Saudi society was in a heightened security alert and undergoing political unrest. Liberal thinkers who saw the upheaval as an opportunity to demand changes in the political system called for democratic reforms and a constitutional monarchy. Within this context, 47 women of different backgrounds who collectively believed in women’s rights saw an opportunity to state their demands for change. In less than a week, they organized a driving protest in Riyadh on November 6, 1990, enraging the official religious authorities, militant Islamic groups, and government officials.10

1991-2000

The 1990s were hijacked by Islamic revivalism. The strength of local conservative Islamic discourse grew and was accompanied by an increased number of extremist Muslim groups. Political activism stagnated due to heightened state security measures, the dominance of the traditional religious establishment, and militant Muslim groups.11

2001-2010

Saudi Arabia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)12 in 2001, with a general and unclear reservation that the treaty in its totality should not come in opposition to Islamic Sharia law, which shall supersede all of its articles.13 The September 11, 2001 terror attacks in New York were an awakening for Saudi Arabia and marked significant changes in policies toward Islamic revivalism and extreme conservatism.14 The state began to move against Muslim extremist groups and Islamic militancy. The media and intellectual climate, moreover, became more favorable toward enlightened thinking and social change.15 Significant state-driven developments to improve the Saudi image and alter some practices toward women were enacted, as seen in legal developments below.
2011 -2015
The Arab Spring of 2011 brought about a change in the political climate of the Saudi Arabia. On one hand, it revived the liberal demand of the 1980s, calling for a political change toward a constitutional monarchy, political representation of the people, freedom of expression, and viable civil society organizations. On the other hand, it resulted in a stepping up of state security measures. Saudi Arabia escaped the influence and upheaval of the Arab Spring dynamic, but Saudi society was impacted insofar as a part of its population was energized by the climate of the Arab popular revolutions and saw that modern technology can be an effective tool for political activism, engaging with supporters, organizing actions, and disseminating messages. Saudi women participated strongly in this surge of activism and their demands and campaigns were numerous and visible. The Saudi government enacted significant policies that created an improvement in the status quo for women as seen in legal developments below.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS OF SAUDI ARABIA TOWARD WOMEN
As noted above, Saudi Arabia ratified CEDAW in 2000 with a general, unclear reservation that the agreement in its totality should not come in opposition to Islamic Sharia Law and that Sharia supersedes all its articles. This reservation is used for all proposals that concern women’s rights and for the ratification of international laws and agreements in general. The supremacy of Sharia, in fact, is not reflected in the processes of change that Saudi society has passed through, nor in the policies that the government has passed in its modernization of the Saudi economy and governing systems. Saudi Arabia submitted a combined initial and second periodic report to the CEDAW Committee in March 2007. In their concluding observations and 32 recommendations, the CEDAW Committee urged Saudi Arabia to remove all reservations to CEDAW, fully incorporate the principle of equality between men and women in all legislation, and remove male guardianship over women.

Developments since 2000 and the ratification of CEDAW
It is not clear whether the following developments and policies were driven by Saudi Arabia’s ratification of CEDAW or how large a role other factors played:

- Chambers of Commerce allowed women to vote and declare their candidacy for the Boards of Directors, 2002.
- Scholarships granted to women outside Saudi Arabia with an accompanying male relative as a chaperone (Mahram), 2005.
- First woman deputy minister appointed, 2009.
- Mandatory legal representative for women in business abolished, 2011.
- Women given membership in the Shura Council (20% quota), 2012.
HISTORICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

- Fingerprinting used to identify women in court cases, to reduce abuse by male guardians of their authority, 2014.xxx
- Employment extended to women as cashiers in malls and supermarkets, 2014.xxxi
- Prohibition against private sector employers requesting guardians’ permission when employing women, 2014.xxxii

The year 2017 brought the most developments regarding Saudi women’s status, and it came as part of the articulated economic vision for Saudi Arabia (Vision 2030) decreed by King Salman in April 2016. These include:

- Allowing physical education in public schools for girls, 2016 (not yet implemented).xxxiii
- Beginning to implement the “women’s empowerment” program included in vision 2030.xxxiv This includes increasing women’s employment in the public sphere and in previously-forbidden institutions, such as aviation and monetary organizations. Nationally, it aims to raise employment for women from 22% to 30%.xxxv
- Decreasing the power of the religious police (Haia), resulting in greater freedom for young women and men in public spaces and mixed environments, 2016.xxxvi
- Implementing programs for recreation, 2017.
- Starting to formulate a program by the Justice Department to empower women in the public courts as practitioners and beneficiaries.xxxvii
- An end to governmental institutions asking women for the permission of a “legal guardian” when responding to applications for services or employment.xxxviii
- Appointing at least ten women to high decision-making positions in the government, private sector, and public institutions.xlix
- Finally, and most notably, allowing women to drive in September 2017 (to be implemented in June 2018).xli

The above developments, some of which are not yet begun or just beginning, are nonetheless promising for the future of women’s rights in Saudi Arabia. They, however, do not mark a very clear “on the ground” change for women’s equality. Saudi Arabia has neither theoretically nor empirically closed the gap between men and women with regard to women’s presence in the public sphere and their access to resources.xlii This can be attributed to the continuing strict social inhibitions on women and the dominance of patriarchy. It is also due to the fact that even though changes have occurred, mechanisms for implementation remain unclear.
Saudi Arabia’s legal obligations on the international level

The single most important factor to consider when studying Saudi obligations to women’s rights according to international law is the general reservation that they not violate Sharia Law. This creates great ambiguity in their acquiescence to all articles and opens the door to interpretation of the laws within Islamic jurisprudence that govern women. For example, after the King decreed that the government would allow women to drive, national Islamic leaders and religious institutions rushed to change their positions. Previous religious interpretations that opposed women’s driving were deleted from the official websites of religious institutions.xliii

CHALLENGES TO WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Saudi women activists have persisted in their demands despite restrictions on their legal status and civic freedom under government regulations stemming from an accepted interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence toward women grounded in the cultural context and political history of Saudi Arabia. Some of the challenges they face are outlined below.

Male guardianship over women

The practice of male guardianship over women translates into the need for written permission from male guardians for women to work, enroll in education, travel, undergo medical procedures, and marry.xlv

Connected to the concept of guardianship is that of Mahram for women in the public sphere. This could consist of a husband, father or close family member. The issue of male guardianship has been raised in shadow reports submitted anonymously by Saudi women activists to the CEDAW Committee, in 2007 and again in 2013.xlv The elimination of male guardianship is the most frequently cited obligation of Saudi Arabia toward women by the CEDAW Committee in their recommendations to the Saudi government and by Human Rights Watch.xlvi xlvi

The court system and its requirements for women

The court system in Saudi Arabia mandates complete veiling for women, requiring a male guardian or close relative to make a positive identification of any woman needing legal action, such as issuing a power of attorney, buying or selling real estate, inheritance or divorce proceedings, disputes hearings, etc.xlix The patriarchal court systems and the lack of direct access encourages the misuse of power by men over women. This can even extend to the false identification of women accomplices, blackmail, or outright disregard of women’s testimonies in the courtroom. To address this gap in women’s legal rights, digital fingerprints have been introduced as an alternative method for identification, but implementation is restricted to airports and digitized sections of government agencies.

Ban on mixing genders and restricted access to institutions

These policies require a legal representative for women in the male dominated public, civil, and government sphere.xlx A civil regulation by the Ministry of Commerce formalized this by requiring businesses owned and operated by women to appoint men as legal representatives of their interests in government and civic organizations.1 This changed in 2011 after a long campaign by activists who are also prominent
businesswomen. Nonetheless, Saudi women still need an acceptable legal representative for transactions in the public sphere because they lack direct access to most government agencies. In the last decade, some ministries, like the Ministries of Interior and Labor, opened women’s sections for issuing required government documents, such as identification papers and visas for foreign domestic workers, applying for work, and other routine applications. However, the decision-making process in all matters remains predominantly within the male sections and excludes female employees in women’s branches.

Restriction on movement and travel

Freedom of movement and travel is marred by the ban on women driving, as well as by the requirement that women obtain permission to travel from male guardians under the Mahram system. The more religious strata of society prefer women to receive permission from their guardians even to leave the house briefly, and sometimes require them to have male chaperones with them in public. The need for male drivers for women puts an economic burden on women and their families and increases their dependence on both male relatives and transportation providers.

Restrictions on study

The public education system prevents women from entering certain areas of study, including engineering and industrial fields, although some private colleges and universities do have architecture departments for women. One of the most illustrious universities for industrial sciences, King Fahd University for Petroleum and Mineral Sciences, does not allow women’s enrollment. As a result, women face limitations in employment in these fields as well as in public government organizations and public transportation.

PERSPECTIVES OF SAUDI WOMEN ACTIVISTS

Saudi women’s activism represents a unique model within the Arab women’s movement. It stands against harsh social restrictions and gender disparity and encompasses basic human demands. Their platform of action is worthy of study because the actors are schooled and informed by 21st century tools of knowledge, but face prejudices formulated in previous centuries and formalized by a state in modern times. These include power structures that address the delicate balance between the formal religious establishments vis-a-vis state authority, the tribal versus nontribal social identification disparity that prohibits intermarriage between the two groups, as well as the gender based differentiation. The value base for Saudi women’s advocacy for their rights may range from invoking women’s equality in the Holy Quran to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or feminist discourse, be it Western or Islamic. The following are characteristics that exist within this context:

- Saudi women’s activism faces the most severe of social limitations for women in the Muslim world, therefore the ceiling for Saudi women’s demands does not go beyond their most basic of rights.
- The social and legal setting imposes severe political and cultural limitations that create fear of persecution that leads to a lack of synergy, differing awareness of goals for the future, and a haphazard approach to actions.
• Saudi women’s activism is formed in isolation from any national political movement.\textsuperscript{lx}
Women activists formulate their resources within the accepted parameters of the political elite and official religious leadership to avoid negative and/or violent reactions.

• The advances in social media and internet communication have provided opportunities for the transfer of knowledge, the enhancement of social awareness, and freedom of expression, especially among Saudi youth. This has allowed for better leadership, increased awareness of the issues, greater coordination of visions, and approaches to social activism.\textsuperscript{lxiii}

**ISLAMIC FEMINISM**

This study also examines how Saudi women’s advocacy for their rights is impacted by the Islamic feminist movement. Islamic feminism grew in the 1990s and was developed by prominent women leaders who are practicing Muslims and actively committed to changing Muslim women’s status, as a cultural reaction to the international feminist movement. Their agenda included reforming extremist mores and traditions practiced in most Muslim societies.\textsuperscript{lxii} They saw their mission as correcting extremist interpretations of Islamic laws concerning women by reverting to true Islam and also as a safeguard against the encroachment of Western values and the displacement of Islamic culture and traditions. Despite this, Islamic feminism retained the holistic methodologies adopted by international feminism and rebelled against patriarchy in Muslim society at all political, social, economic and legal levels. The movement also advocated for qualitative reforms that touch women’s lives in a real way and therefore will bring balance to women’s status in the various societies of the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{lxiii}

The Islamic feminist movement’s reference point rests on the knowledge of the concepts of Muslim jurisprudence and an enlightened analysis of Sharia law and the specific Quranic verses that Islamic feminists deemed hijacked by patriarchy in the Muslim cultures of today. There are various models of the Islamic feminist thesis in the Arab region, as the cases of North Africa and Syria demonstrate, depending on the branches of Muslim jurisprudence practiced.\textsuperscript{lxiv} These different paradigms are still a subject of examination by Muslim feminists themselves, concerned academics, and different sectors of Arab society. Sectors of the general public, the ruling elite, and some Muslim groups (extremist and traditional) target Islamic feminists for criticism and serious attacks. This is because they are viewed as problematic in their open modern interpretation of Islamic Sharia law, as this interpretation offers a challenge to entrenched legal, political, and cultural reference points. Islamic feminists advocate for major changes that require the abandonment of strong social values and concepts.\textsuperscript{lxv}
The review of literature on Saudi women’s activism focuses mainly on works by Saudi women writers. This choice is based on the contention that outside analysts, even if sympathetic to the cause of Saudi women, tend to judge the situation by their own standards without fully understanding what is happening in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi writers reviewed below were the first to tackle Saudi women’s activism as a movement and provide analysis of its relevance to feminism as both a concept and as a struggle for women’s rights in the national context. Many more studies would be written later, especially after 2016.

HATOON AL-FASSI

Very few academic papers are written about Saudi women’s activism. The majority of what is available exists in newspaper and magazine articles, and blogs. As far as we know, the only academic contribution is by Hatoon al-Fassi (2009), who differentiated between feminism as a concept and as an entity within the context of Saudi Arabia. She elaborates by saying that feminism as a concept encompasses “human awareness of the systematic discrimination against women” and is not widespread or legitimated in Saudi society. It is, however, always present in different forms among the public and in popular culture. This awareness is linked to practices that discriminate against women in local traditions, societal mores, and the accepted interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence.

Al-Fassi adds that “feminism” and “gender” are both ill-reputed terms and concepts generally misunderstood in the popular culture of Saudi Arabia. This is due to a lack of academic interest, leading to a lack of university departments specializing in women’s studies and history. On the other hand, these terms are also seen by conspiracy theorists as part of the process of Westernization and the displacement of Islamic values and cultures. In her analysis of the Saudi women’s movement in the 1970s, al-Fassi differentiated between “feminist ideology” and “feminist action.” The latter she characterized as an organized political movement that has an agenda and represents a systematic expression of women’s issues and positions. She concluded that it is not useful to continue to ponder the characterization of Saudi’s women’s movement and suggested that we call it Saudi feminism.*
Other Saudi women writers also tackled the issue of feminism in the context of Saudi women’s activism in a direct way. In her 2011 analysis of the royal decree to allow women to participate in the Shura Council and the Municipal elections for advisory council, Iman al-Guwaifli, wrote that although the decree was welcomed and hailed as a milestone for Saudi women generally, it was still a manifestation of patriarchy. The system in Saudi Arabia was careful to keep women’s advancements and rewards at minimal levels, despite the nation’s significant wealth and unlimited resources for decision-makers. She stated that the majority of women activists are elites who engage in a form of “soft feminism” while other women’s groups adopt political reforms as an agenda. In this article, al-Guwaifli called upon all women activists to stop and reconsider their positions as feminists toward the reformist agenda and their reliance on the political patriarchy. She added that because Saudi feminists are isolated due to the hostility they face from most sectors in their traditional society, they look for protection and support from the patriarchal state and the political elite.\textsuperscript{lxvii}

Nahid Bashatah (2013) presented an opposing view, in which she praised the royal decree for including women in the Shura Council and said that it is a serious step toward women’s inclusion and representation in the political system. She furthermore called upon women to be aware that feminism is linked to liberation, dissipation, and decadence, which will remove the women’s movement from the sphere of concern and study and may result in ignoring women’s demands altogether. She summarized her position by saying that it is not important for Saudi women to have a feminist movement, but it is vital to actively fight discrimination against women with the strong tools of feminism. She argues that it is more realistic to advocate “Islamic feminism,” which also struggles against discrimination and patriarchy but has a deeper understanding of the culture of male dominance in Muslim societies.\textsuperscript{lxviii}
MAHA AQIL

Maha Aqil, in an article in 2013, denies that there is a feminist movement in Saudi Arabia in the clear and defined sense that exists in other Arab and Muslim countries. Some may consider women’s demands to lift the ban on driving as a beginning of the feminist movement. The equality between the sexes, however, that is integral to feminist ideology is totally unacceptable in the Saudi context, since the majority of Saudis refuse the notion as a Western concept. Aqil continues to say that even Saudis who describe themselves as liberals, modernists, or secularists hesitate to call themselves feminists, because of the prejudice against that ideology. Feminism in the Saudi Muslim context brings to mind Westernization, sexual freedom, illegitimate children, and the displacement of Islamic values. Aqil concludes that Saudi women’s activism is a manifestation of freedom of expression and public demands for their rights and it is not a real and organized feminist movement. lxix

LAMIA AL-SUWAILIM

In two articles, Lamia al-Suwailim (2013) focused on patriarchy in Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf countries, emphasizing the difference between activists of the younger generation and those of the older generation. She considered the younger generation unconcerned with feminist issues as such. Instead, they opted to engage with the political human rights movements standing in opposition to the ruling regimes. The leadership of these movements are male dominated and steer away from feminist causes. She continues by inquiring how women human rights activists can work effectively for issues like freedom of speech and political prisoners if they are unaware of their own constraints as women. She concluded by calling on women activists to link with the broader national issues without losing sight of their own cause as women.

In another article al-Suwailim (2013) re-emphasized her views that Arab Gulf countries are extremely patriarchal at all levels and that patriarchy is a historical legacy that encompasses the Islamist’s discourse, the political regimes, and the social-economic system. She continues to say that some Gulf Arab countries are able, because of oil revenues, to provide expensive alternatives to compensate for women’s loss of basic rights (in both the private sector and the marketplace). The biggest challenge, she contends, is in the religious establishment, and how it re-enforces and invests in patriarchy, and subsequently creates a rigid Islamic jurisprudence that is incapable of meeting the need for change, especially in Saudi women’s status. lxx
Another great challenge for Saudi women at present, according to the same article, is how to face the current political human rights movement that is dominated by men and seeks to use the women’s cause as a political card to pressure local governments. According to al-Suwailim, the problem is not with the human rights political movement as such, but with the patriarchy prevailing at the level of its leadership, which will not hesitate to push aside the Saudi women’s cause to gain political power if the need arises.

HALA AL-DOSSENY

Hala al-Dossery (2013) discussed the motivations for Saudi women’s activism and wondered if the need to be a “fully qualified citizen” in Saudi society is a primary incentive for women’s actions and demands. She emphasized the confusion that modern changes have created with regard to women’s status in their society, and how these changes have brought new roles for women that now exist alongside the traditional ones. According to al-Dossery “the right to drive” as a frequently stated demand has posed many questions regarding women’s priorities. This is because Saudi women’s issues, according to al-Dossery, include their exclusion from the public arena at all levels due to the limited services available to them from government agencies as compared to men and the lack of real investment in women’s education. In fact, the education system has worked to emphasize the model of the traditional “Muslim woman” as envisioned by the Islamic traditional discourse and the stereotypes of what that entails. Al-Dossery concluded her paper by stating that there is no ideal format for women’s priorities in the push for empowerment and qualitative change. The only alternative open for women’s activists is in cumulative work that builds experience from within the local context.
In 2014, Basma Hijazi published a report on the endeavors of Saudi women activists. It was comprehensive in that it included all active channels, including social media outlets, and all women activists, including those who espouse human rights causes, so-called “liberal activists,” as well as traditional Islamist women activists. She objectively described each classification and named the activists, including links to their blogs, social media groups, videos, and websites. Her summary concluded that there are three groups of activists for Saudi women’s issues. Two are considered extreme, which include the “liberals” on the one side, and the “Islamists” on the other. In the middle are the moderate Muslim women. She estimated that there are few activists who base their stances on the social issues of women and their status in Saudi society and even fewer who come close to the forbidden red line of political activism.

Hijazi also conducted an interview with the famous political exile Madawi al-Rasheed, a notable scholar whom she asked about the ability of woman’s activism to effect change in Saudi Arabia. Al-Rasheed declared that there is no real women’s movement in Saudi Arabia. There are efforts to create a movement, but these are divided and dispersed. According to al-Rasheed, there is no clear unification of purpose, and some of these efforts are within the framework of the system while others make skirmishes against it. Al-Rasheed also emphasized that without real research into the effectiveness of women’s activism, no answer can be given.

On women’s leadership in Saudi Arabia, al-Rasheed stated that there are no real leaders of the women’s cause. There are women with media access, who are hence thought to be leaders, but, in fact, they have no real effect on Saudi women. Hijazi concluded her report by saying that the women’s cause in Saudi Arabia has become a hostage to the system and to the competing objectives of the general public and women’s activists.
This study identified 20 instances of activism by Saudi women during the period between 1990 and 2015, in the form of campaigns and demands. Some may have escaped documentation and visibility because they were ignored or marginalized by the authorities or the public or have not been memorialized on the internet. Data documented in Part 1 was sourced through websites and social media outlets (Facebook and Twitter), Saudi shadow reports submitted to the CEDAW Committee in 2007 and 2013, concluding comments of CEDAW to the committee and observations on the reports in 2008 and 2016, eleven in-depth interviews with lead activists during the summer of 2014 in Riyadh and Al Khubar, and personal communication with those involved in Saudi women’s activism. Further details for each demand or campaign can be referenced in Appendix II.
MAJOR CAMPAIGNS AND DEMANDS BY SAUDI ACTIVISTS, 1990-2010

Driving Cars, November 1990: 47 women break the ban on driving on the streets of the capital

In early November of 1990, a small group of women approached a leading promoter of women’s rights with the idea that women should advocate for their rights during the period of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and the impending first Gulf War. They were inspired by a petition that liberal Saudi men had signed and circulated calling for democratic reforms and a constitutional monarchy. They decided that a petition was not enough; they would also hold a protest and car rally where women would drive. They chose this strategy because driving symbolizes the numerous gross violations of women’s rights and because the ability to drive during times of conflict could be framed as a necessity, especially since foreign women were afforded the right to drive in Saudi Arabia during this time. Small committees within the group accompanied petitions to authorities and mapped out the course of the cars’ motorcade. Telephone calls were made to women to request their support and participation, but the resulting turnout was low. Many women either disagreed with the idea or were fearful of repercussions. On November 6, 1990, the petition was presented to the governor of Riyadh. A few hours later, at precisely 3:30 in the afternoon, women congregated in the parking lot of a Safeway supermarket in a Riyadh neighborhood. Thirteen cars were used to carry 47 women and the thirteen women with valid international driver’s licenses dismissed their drivers and started the motorcade. They were prepared to be arrested. Some contacted international media beforehand to help publicize the event and ensure international exposure to minimize the risk of personal danger. The aftermath and repercussions are detailed fully in the book *6th of November* written by Aisha al-Mana and Hessah Al Sheikh.

Detention was brief, largely due to the media exposure, but the women faced a campaign of unprecedented punishment and hate for years after.

National Identity Card for Women, 2001

Prior to 2001, Saudi women were named, but not depicted, as dependents on their father or husband’s identity cards. For years, Saudi women advocates had been calling for national identity cards for women through the media by publicizing personal experiences and in petitions to the authorities. Fraud was widespread, with corrupt male guardians issuing court orders, enacting commercial and real estate deals, or traveling locally with women companions by using their own ID cards and allowing their companions, wearing a niqab, to pose as their wives or relatives. Authorities began issuing identity cards to women for the first time in November 2001, but did not publicly acknowledge or explain the measure until December 2001. By then, more than 2,000 Saudi women applied for and received cards. In the beginning, to qualify for an identity card a woman needed to be 22 years old and have the written consent of her guardian as well as a letter from her employer, if applicable. All women applicants had to provide a picture of themselves with their hair covered and faces clear...
of make-up. Opponents argued that the cards, which show a woman’s unveiled face, violate Saudi custom. As a result, they were not mandatory until March 26, 2013, when the Council of Ministers mandated them despite opposition from conservative male guardians. This decision was made in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. It could be the result of an official revision of the national security measures to combat Islamic militancy or a response to a real need expressed by women.

**Family Safety Program, 2001**

In 2000, a healthcare provider treated a woman who had been badly injured as a result of rape committed by her husband. After her primary treatment, the doctor was forced to release the woman back into her husband’s custody, even though he refused further care for his wife. The doctor informed her cousin of these circumstances, and her cousin contacted one of the driving activists of 1990. A group formed among other 1990 activists to combat violence against women and children. It grew in number and strength in 2001 by calling on experts in Sharia Law, healthcare providers, social care workers, and other experts in the field to join them. They worked as a low profile shadow group documenting cases, writing articles, mobilizing support, writing petitions, raising awareness, and creating alliances. They met regularly as volunteers and worked on documents that highlighted their issues, needs, and priorities, outlining national strategies to tackle violence within the family and against women and children. The core group succeeded in a breakthrough by enlisting the support of HRH Princess Adilah, the daughter of King Abdullah al-Saud. In 2006, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz issued a royal Decree establishing The National Family Safety Program. The Decree ordered the program be linked administratively and organizationally to the Ministry of National Guard. It has been effective in criminalizing domestic violence, issuing civil laws that enforce penalties on offenders, creating a hotline for victims, and linking with the Ministry of Social Work for shelters. Despite this, the program does not focus on women and children’s status in the family and society, which was the original vision of the activists.

**The Business Woman Forum, 2001**

The Business Woman Forum began in 2001 when 26 prominent businesswomen in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province (including an activist from the 1990 driving protest) joined together to protest the discriminatory treatment of businesswomen by the country’s Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Commerce. They asked to create a forum for women under the umbrella of the Chamber of Commerce to give assistance and support to women in business. However, the Chamber of Commerce refused to give them permission and referred them back to the Ministry for the required license. They were never granted the license to establish a center, but gained strength when they created an alliance with prominent businesswomen in Jeddah, the largest city in the Western Province. Their demands included:

- Centers of support for businesswomen within the framework of the Chambers of Commerce.
- Inclusion of women in the election process of the Management Boards of Chambers of Commerce, as candidates and voters.
- The abolition of the mandatory legal male representative for businesses owned and run by women.
SAUDI WOMEN’S ADVOCACY, 1990-2015

Their campaign gained momentum and recognition because of their persistence and the alliances they forged with powerful members of the business community. Their first victory came when members were granted the right to declare their candidacy and vote for management positions in the chambers of commerce in 2002. In November 2004, the Khadijah Bint Khouaild Business Women’s Center launched in Jeddah under the umbrella of the Chamber of Commerce. Other chambers of commerce followed, but with varying degrees of success. In 2011, they succeeded in petitioning the Ministry of Commerce to abolish the regulation that mandates a male legal representative for all women-owned businesses.

WEB BASED CAMPAIGNS AND DEMANDS, 1990-2010

Saudi women’s activism on the internet started with four websites. Initially, they did not gain much momentum or support because the internet’s surge in popularity was only at its start in Saudi Arabia. Three of the four websites are now inactive and only one, the Divorce Initiative, is believed to have impacted Saudi society. The four are as follows:

• **The Divorce Initiative, 2008**
  – This initiative was instigated by a woman demanding civil laws to end the suffering of divorced Saudi women. Its primary tool was its website (saudidivorce.blogspot.com). It is believed to have impacted Saudi society by drawing attention to the suffering of women divorcees facing legal battles in the courts for child custody, child support, and changes to the guardianship status of fathers and husbands. It is also believed that the 2010 establishment of Mawaddah Association, a charity concerned with issues facing divorced women, can be attributed to this initiative.

• **Black Straps Campaign, 2009**
  – This campaign was launched by a woman activist to commemorate the nineteenth anniversary of the 1990 women’s driving demonstration. It consisted of a call to wear black wrist straps in support of Saudi women’s issues. Overall the campaign was limited and its website was blocked by authorities.

• **Women’s Coalition to Promote Saudi Women’s Status, 2009**
  – This coalition consisted of a web-based women’s association by the name of National Feminist Harmony. Their website (www.alyafarid.com) is still active.

• **Violence is Weakness Campaign, 2010**
  – This Facebook campaign aimed to protect Saudi women from all forms of violence, abuse, and discrimination.
MAJOR CAMPAIGNS AND DEMANDS BY SAUDI ACTIVISTS, 2011-2015

In five years, Saudi women activists implemented six major campaigns, accelerating the activism of the prior twenty years during which they had only been able to mount four such campaigns. This is not surprising considering the harsh punishment dealt to the 47 activists in 1990 and the socio-political context of the years that followed, when Islamist revivalism was the dominant discourse nationally and liberal thinking was not tolerated. Deviation and diversity in intellectual discourse started with the Arab Spring’s populist uprisings in 2011. The reenergized liberal thinking, the opening up of traditional Arab media outlets, and the digital revolution for communication all combined to create opportunities to demand social change.

Abolition of Mandatory Legal Representative for Business Women Campaign, 2011

This campaign was led by business women calling for the abolition of mandatory legal representatives when dealing with government departments. Its objective was achieved by pressuring the Ministry of Commerce with petitions, a campaign website, and a Facebook page.

Baladi Campaign, 2011

The Baladi Campaign was organized by a group of women representing all regions of the country. It aimed to achieve the full and effective participation of Saudi women in the municipal council’s elections through the use of petitions, meetings, a Facebook page, and special trainings. The campaign resulted in the 2015 municipal elections allowing women as both candidates and voters.
THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AND BALADI CAMPAIGN, DECEMBER 2015

Women’s demand for inclusion in the municipal council’s elections began in 2004. A campaign was started by a group of women working for change and raising awareness of the existence of an article in the Saudi National Constitution that allows all individuals to be included in such elections. The message was broadcasted widely in the media. The group’s activity was interrupted in October 2004, when an official government ban was announced that excluded women from participating in the election.

A nationwide women’s campaign called Baladi (the Arabic word for my country) was launched on January 15, 2011 to raise community awareness of the importance of women’s participation in municipal elections. Their work included women’s empowerment workshops, trainings for prospective candidates, and the promotion of issues at the community level. When a royal decree was announced that allowed women’s participation in the 2015 elections, Baladi increased its work. In the 2015 municipal elections, 979 women ran in the nationwide election, while men numbered 5,938. Twenty-three of the women were Baladi trainees. Women also ran for 38 of the total 3,156 municipals seats nationwide and 21 were elected, two of whom were part of the Baladi campaign. Despite its success, Baladi was hampered by officials with orders to halt its activities and enforce sex segregation during and after the election. Further, adherence to Muslim code of behavior was required for women candidates, but the standards they were expected to meet were vague and subject to interpretation. In some cases, this meant that after women were elected, they were ordered by the Minister to attend council meetings in a separate room for females and to only communicate with male colleagues through a microphone. Nonetheless, Baladi was awarded the 2015 Chaillot Prize for the Promotion of Human Rights in the Arab Gulf.
Women to Drive Campaign, 2011

Activists drove their cars on public roads, took videos of the event, and uploaded them to a Facebook page. One of the activists was imprisoned for nine days. Other women were arrested and released after signing a pledge with their guardians not to repeat the action.

My Right My Dignity, 2011

This petition was signed by more than 700 Saudis calling for the revocation of the lashing judgment issued against one of the women from the Women to Drive Campaign. My Right My Dignity issued a call for solidarity with Saudi women’s rights, including the right to drive. A website, Facebook, and Twitter were used. The website (www.myright2dignity-news.blogspot.com) remains active. xlv

My Right My Dignity, Driving Campaign, October 26, 2013

In early 2011, a group of women activists consulted with one another about how to enact a campaign to demand Saudi women’s right to drive. Manal al-Sharif, a young divorced woman who works for the Saudi oil company ARAMCO, decided to lead by example. She, along with others, called for a day of driving on June 17, 2011, called “drive for your life”. She drove her own car, accompanied by another activist who filmed the event. The video was posted to Facebook and within hours it had been viewed almost 7,000 times. In retaliation, the security police arrested al-Sharif and detained her for nine days. Women across the kingdom who had responded to her call to action were arrested and later released after they and their male guardians signed pledges promising not to repeat the protest. Al-Sharif’s action and subsequent detention catapulted women activists into launching several campaigns in support of her and other women drivers under the banner of My Right My Dignity.

My Right My Dignity was comprised of activists and advocates from all over Saudi Arabia. They mainly communicated through social media via Facebook and Twitter and through WhatsApp groups. At least ten of the activists were from the 1990 driving protest. Those who advocated vocally and visibly through television channels, news articles, or interviews became recognizable faces and voices for Saudi women’s rights. This group was the force behind the high profile October 26, 2013 driving campaign. They employed successful innovative tools to increase visibility and social impact like petitions, individual actions, and uploaded videos of women drivers on campaign websites and Facebook. My Right My Dignity did not focus solely on the right to drive, but tackled other violations of women’s rights like male guardianship over adult women and violence against women, among others.
Border Crossing, 2014

Lujain al-Hathloul and Maysa al-Amoudi attempted to cross the Emirati-Saudi border in support of a driving campaign on October 26th. They both were severely punished for defying Saudi rules and regulations.

**BORDER CONTROL: LUJAIN AL-HATHLOUL’S CASE, NOVEMBER 30, 2014**

In support of the October 26th women’s driving campaign, Lujain al-Hathloul, a 24 year old graduate of the University of British Columbia in Canada, headed towards the Emirati-Saudi border with a valid Emirati driver’s license. She was tweeting and documenting her experience. At the Saudi passport control she was denied entry into Saudi Arabia and detained for 24 hours. Maysa al-Amoudi, a Saudi broadcaster and journalist living in Dubai, followed al-Hathloul to the border for support. Although al-Amoudi did not request entry into Saudi Arabia, she was also detained. Both women were transferred to police custody in al-hasa, in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia, where al-Hathloul found herself in a girl’s juvenile detention center since she was under 25, and al-Amoudi in a women’s prison. Both were charged with online incitement of the public against the government. After 73 days of confinement, the case was dismissed by a judge who stated that the offence was out of his court’s jurisdiction. This case demonstrates how the younger generation bravely defies the status quo. Al-Hathloul used social media to broadcast her challenge to the authorities and to freely express her defiance of the law in favor of women’s freedom. The punishment she received was harsh, as it was meant to deter similar women’s activism and to demonstrate the state’s intention to hit hard at challenges to its authority.
WEB BASED CAMPAIGNS AND DEMANDS, 2011-2015

Six web campaigns and demands were launched between 2011 and 2012. Three were either connected to My Right My Dignity or were created, organized, and run by subgroups of that larger collective of activists. These three included Guardianship of Women, I Will Drive My Car, and Um Salma. The most significant development in Saudi women’s activism during the period of 2011-2015 was a gradual shift toward using the internet and social media to organize and conduct campaigns, voice demands, and raise awareness. Through these outlets, women were able to congregate, engage with each other, reach younger generations, and raise awareness more safely. In 2015, after al-Hathlool and al-Amoudi’s harsh punishment, there were no overt, on-the-ground activist campaigns, but web-based advocacy continued and exploded on Twitter in 2016, as analyzed further in part two of this report. The six web campaigns and demands in this period were:

- **Guardianship of Women, 2011**  
  – Through a website, this campaign aimed to define the issues with male guardianship for women.

- **Work is a Worship, 2011**  
  – This campaign lasted for one month and aimed to support the work of female cashiers in retail stores through its website.

- **Saudi Woman, 2011**  
  – This Facebook forum was established to initiate a dialogue on challenges and opportunities facing Saudi women.

- **I Will Drive My Car Myself, 2012**  
  – Considered an extension of My Right My Dignity, this campaign aimed to grant all women the permission to drive. It utilized YouTube, petitions, websites, Facebook, and Twitter.

- **Saudi Women Married to Foreigners, 2012**  
  – This campaign aimed to provide family stability to Saudi women married to non-Saudis and to grant their children Saudi citizenship. It advocated for the cause through newspaper articles, statistics, studies, petitions, and its website, at www.saudi-sons.com.

- **Um Salma, 2012**  
  – Established by a group of activists from the major cities of Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam, the aim was to promote women’s empowerment through conducting research on women’s rights in Islam and to create a public awareness campaign around these rights. The group had monthly meetings and operated a Facebook group.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Substance and timeline
The driving demonstration on November 6, 1990 marked a new beginning in women’s activism for their rights in Saudi Arabia. It was a departure from the traditional welfare programs and activities that woman’s associations had been engaged in to improve Saudi women’s livelihood in the country. Driving became the most frequent demand and generated five activist campaigns from 1990 to 2015, though many other issues received attention as well. Even when only driving was targeted, it was because driving is a symbolic, visible aspect of the inequality of women. All the campaigns connect to the broader platform of advocating for Saudi women’s rights.

After 1990, there was an eleven year gap before advocacy for Saudi women was visible again. The extreme political and cultural measures against the 47 women participants of the 1990 driving protest had a negative effect on Saudi women’s rights supporters and defenders and fear of reprisal likely contributed to these years of inactivity. Beginning in 2011, there was a return to active advocacy demonstrated by approximately eight demands and campaigns. This surge came with the spread of social media and the internet, which allowed free expression of women’s policy demands. Around this time, the advocacy started a process of differentiation, so that campaigns began to take up specific inequalities including violence against women, male legal representation for business women, guardianship of adult women, and participation in municipal elections. Most of the campaigns and activist actions by Saudi women were in 2011. Two factors could explain this. The first is the widespread use of social media among Saudis, which allowed freedom of expression and for the call to action to be broadcasted among targeted groups for web-based campaigns and demands. This platform was also safer because it enabled participants to avoid the accusation that they were defying authorities. At the same time, the enthusiasm generated by the political movements in the region as part of the Arab Spring bolstered interest in Saudi women’s activism.

Degree of visibility and impact
Nine of the 20 campaigns have had high visibility and impact on Saudi society and for Saudi women. These include: the 1990 driving protest, Family Safety Program in 2001, the abolition of legal representatives for business women in 2011, the Baladi Campaign for the inclusion of women in municipal elections in 2011, Driving My Car in 2013 and the Crossing the Border initiative by al-Hathlool. Their impact is noted in the descriptions presented earlier in this chapter. Women’s driving remained an elusive goal until September 2017 when the abrupt decision was made to overturn its ban. This has been linked to broader political and economic agendas that were outlined in the 2030 Vision for Saudi Arabia, which was announced by the younger leadership of the royal court and seen to be consistent with the SDGs. The rest of the most visible and successful campaigns were based on a strategy of long-term advocacy by different Saudi women’s rights collectives. Their methods included petitions, action-oriented research, training, gatherings to raise awareness, and soliciting the support of notable people and institutions in Saudi Arabia.
The success of demands seems to be linked with political will. For example, the national identity card for women was mandated in 2002 after the New York City terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 because of the perceived need to maintain stricter control on Saudi citizens for national security reasons, rather than because of demands by women activists. Similarly, if a certain demand is adopted by any members of the ruling strata or elite it will often be accepted officially. Two examples are The Family Safety Program and the divorced women’s association Mawadah. Both have been supported by princesses of the royal family and are not seen as challenging to the religious or political system.

Aside from political will and support of the elite, Saudi women activists have garnered their own tools to further their activism. Activist collectives are used to address the issue of harsh limitations on self-expression and organize campaigns. These are small, organic groups of women activists who provide mutual support when lobbying for their cause by creating alliances locally, nationally, and internationally. Most of the post-2009 initiatives were carried out by individual advocates for women’s rights. They were mostly web-based and not action-oriented, which reduced their visibility and impact in the larger society. The active websites were connected to one group of activists who were committed members of the My Right My Dignity Facebook campaign. This group came together to protest reprisals against women and the imprisonment of an activist who drove her car on a public road. They are the same group who organized the October 26, 2013 driving campaign and created four related websites.

The internet in general has served as a tool and a platform for making demands, raising awareness, creating alliances, increasing outreach, and enacting advocacy. This began by connecting on Facebook, WhatsApp, and other media outlets. In the year after al-Hathloul’s border crossing event, there was a marked lull in campaigns and demands because of the increased risk and need for caution. Twitter, however, was markedly developing as the preferred social platform for Saudis and women’s advocates. Arguments in favor of abolishing guardianship exploded on Twitter in mid-2016, prompting the researchers to focus on this aspect of internet advocacy as an important development in the Saudi women’s rights struggle. This analysis is in part two of this report.
Comparing two prominent members of each generation who shared similar levels of commitments, achievements, and involvement with women’s causes:

- The 2013 activist was able to reach the same level of prominence as the 1990 activist in less than four years due to her presence in the media and social networks. She is also an accomplished writer and blogger with a reach through her work on human and women’s rights, as well as other social issues.
- 2013 was an easier time to be an activist due to the ease of accessing information from a variety of international and local sources. There was also easy communication with local and international supporters. With the rise of the internet and social media, work can be done in public rather than in the shadows, as in previous generations of activists.
- The 1990 activist suffered a great deal of pressure after the 1990 driving demonstration. She received death threats by extremist groups and was ordered to leave the city where she worked. Subsequently, her activism was frozen for 10 years (as was the case for her colleagues from the 1990 campaign) and her case was not publicized or even acknowledged, due to fear of further targeting by officials and extreme religious groups.

This is not to say that the women activists today are immune to persecution or pressure exerted by the government or by extremist or other opposition groups. They are frequently maligned and abused through the same networks in which they operate.

Comparing the November 1990 driving demonstration and the October 2013 driving campaign:

**1990:**
- All women participants were harassed by the police and religious groups who congregated to the area. They were arrested and released the next morning.
- All women and their male guardians were forced to sign a pledge that they will not repeat the same action.
- Women who worked in government agencies and private sector jobs were expelled from their posts by a royal decree. The expulsion lasted a little more than two and a half years until it was reversed by another decree in 1993.
- Women and their families were banned from traveling outside the country for one year.
- A hate campaign was launched against the women protestors, their families and relatives, and malicious rumors were spread to destroy their characters in the public eye.
- The Ministry of Interior issued a complete ban on women driving, which was supported by a religious Fatwa by The High Commission of religious leaders.

**2013:**
- Women drove individually and were not harassed as publicly as the women of 1990. Some were arrested, though, and some cars were confiscated for several days or more.
- Civil fines were issued for driving without a local license and the same pledge not to drive again was required, as in 1990, signed by both the women and their legal guardians.

The most important factor to note in this comparison is that the repercussions of 1990 were based on a religious fatwa and on the precepts of correct moral and Islamic conduct. In 2013, the base was defiance of civil laws and the infiltration of national security by disruptive elements. The progression from religious-based condemnation to accusations of disrupting national security and civil disobedience reflects a moving away from the traditional pillars of Saudi society and a march toward modernity when it comes to women’s issues, but the severity of punishment retains the ironfisted control the government maintains on freedom of expression and civil liberties.
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of the four focus group discussions, which included 34 participants, was to gain insight and factual knowledge. Since the selection criteria for the focus groups favored individuals who support Saudi women’s causes, the researchers assumed that they would generally express sympathetic views towards women’s activist groups and actions. However, they were more critical than anticipated.

ACTIVISM AND WHO IS AN “ACTIVIST”

The participants differed in their definition of an activist in the Saudi woman’s cause. Two or three in each group questioned the validity of the term itself, pointing out that it is a Western concept used in international circles that have nothing to do with how Saudis demand change locally. Those who accepted the term differed in their definition of who is an activist. A small number characterized activists loosely as those who believe in women’s rights and act accordingly, including those who raise awareness like, for example, teachers and enlightened parents. The majority of participants agreed that an activist is a member in a group working actively and effectively in the field of women’s rights.

EFFECTIVENESS OF WRITERS AND ACADEMICS IN THE CAUSE OF WOMEN

There was confusion among focus group participants on the question regarding activists who write or blog about Saudi women’s issues and writers and columnists in general. There was a difference in opinion between those who agreed that writers are effective in the Saudi women’s struggle, especially when they are seen to practice what they preach and, therefore, are legitimate advocates of Saudi women’s rights. Others said that writing, especially in newspapers and magazine columns, has its own momentum and is usually reactive to events and controlled by editors. They added that most Saudi columnists have their own agendas and could be classified as being from within the status quo and, therefore not true advocates of change. The same differentiation was used for the world of academia and women professors. Most focus group participants agreed that academics are potentially powerful advocates for Saudi women’s rights. In reality, however, Saudi academics rarely take up that role because of constraints on their freedom of expression or fear of reprisal.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A WOMEN’S MOVEMENT AND WOMEN’S ACTIVISM

Focus group participants had differing opinions on how to characterize Saudi women’s activism. Some stated that it could not be characterized as a movement because it lacks clear objectives, a coherent methodology, agreed-upon action plans, and viable mechanisms. Most considered it to be in an early, immature, haphazard, and elitist stage driven by the attention of both conventional and social media outlets that afford them the space to voice their issues and aspirations. Therefore, they argued, it is not in touch with the real needs of ordinary women. It is not surprising that when asked about specific aspects of Saudi women’s activities, the responses were mostly unfavorable. Others agreed that it could be seen as a movement, but it is at an early stage of development.
TABLE 1: OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ACTIVISM AND MOVEMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women’s Activism</th>
<th>Women’s Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An unorganized activity by a group of activists who determine their objective and the methodologies and mechanisms to achieve it.</td>
<td>An organized, systematic activity with specific vision and methodology, clear goals and set mechanisms and action plans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN WOMEN’S ACTIVISM AND POLITICAL OPPOSITION
There was a great deal of hesitation in answering this question among focus group participants. This could be for two reasons. The first is that political opposition is banned in Saudi Arabia and is punishable by the authorities. The second is that it does not reflect the reality of Saudi women’s activism. In fact, Saudi women’s rights advocates are careful to reiterate the position that they do not act against the government but are interested in changing policies and reforming practices. The few who replied in the affirmative explained that ultimately any call for change in Saudi Arabia is an act of opposition. This is because Saudi Arabia does not have a civil society that legitimizes and supports women’s demands and actions. In effect, all matters are dependent on the reaction at the highest levels of decision making in Saudi Arabia, which include the leaders in the royal regime and the various agencies and administrations they direct.

WOMEN’S ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES
Focus group participants were given seven general activities undertaken by Saudi women to improve their status. They were then asked to rate the effectiveness of each in advancing Saudi women’s status. The objective was to discover if there are multifaceted forces for change and advocacy for Saudi women’s rights. The targeted activities are listed in Table 2.


**TABLE 2: CONTRIBUTION TO WOMEN’S ADVOCACY IN THE SAUDI CONTEXT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Work through Welfare Societies</td>
<td>All participants agreed that social work through associations is not activism for women due to the strict supervision of the government over their activities. They expressed that even women’s empowerment projects do not consider gender issues in their working methodologies. This denotes that such projects are not very effective in supporting women’s rights, nor are they active in a women’s movement. One participant characterized them as an anesthesia deflecting focus from real action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Demands</td>
<td>All participants agreed on the importance of human rights demands as part of the advocacy for women, citing examples such as combating violence against women, the right to drive cars, and the abolition of mandatory male legal representation. They identified the 1990 driving protest as the real beginning of women’s activism. The October 26, 2013, driving campaign was seen as a continuation of the action taken in 1990.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia &amp; Cultural Clubs</td>
<td>Most participants agreed that the work of academia and cultural clubs is influential at raising awareness and bringing about change in the perceptions of the role of women in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Organizations</td>
<td>Some participants emphasized the importance of structured work through official organizations for the women’s movement. They admired the effectiveness and success of campaigns through the Business Woman Forum, which led to their being included in the election process in the Chambers of Commerce throughout Saudi Arabia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Groups &amp; Collectives</td>
<td>Most participants agreed that women’s groups and collectives have had an impact on Saudi society and led to important campaigns for Saudi women’s rights. They cited the Baladi Campaign and My Right My Dignity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing &amp; Media</td>
<td>Participants differed in their views on writing and media and their role in advancing Saudi women’s issues. They saw the content, depth, and relevance of these publications as determining their efficacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shura Council</td>
<td>Despite the significance of women’s inclusion in the Shura Council and its praise locally and internationally, all participants indicated that it has been negative to the women’s movement. The female members of the Shura Council are not able to represent Saudi women’s demands or advocate for their rights within the structure of the council and the balance of power that governs it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Further, in regards to the Shura Council, focus group participants discussed four factors related to its ineffectiveness to Saudi women’s rights:

- Women members in the Shura Council are examples of successful and respected professional Saudi women, but those who believe in the Saudi women’s cause cannot advocate effectively. They hesitate to voice their support for fundamental changes and critical issues in the council’s proceedings for fear of backlash against their personal standing in the generally unsupportive male-dominated council.

- They are a typical reflection of the inherent nature of the Council in regards to its function, as an advisory body empowered to study and propose laws. The Council’s recommendations are then submitted to the King who decides which will be referred to the Saudi Council of Ministers.

- The appointed members may represent society geographically and its diverse concerns and intellectual discourses, but selection criteria favors those who are mostly moderate and not those with views to the left or right of social norms as is the case for Saudi women’s causes.

- The lack of true representation and the strict control the Shura leadership maintains on proposed motions and recommendations have been cited as prohibitive factors for true advocacy for Saudi women’s cause.

IDEOLOGY, VISION, STRATEGY, AND MOTIVATIONS OF SAUDI WOMEN ACTIVISTS

The majority of focus group participants expressed a consensus that Saudi women activists as a whole do not reflect a clear and unified vision, nor do they represent a cohesive discourse or ideology for their actions. They felt that activists have multiple objectives and operate without presenting a platform of action with clear boundaries and tools. Despite this, the participants also agreed that some human rights campaigns, which targeted women’s rights, had influenced Saudi society such as the Business Woman Forum, Family Safety Program group, and the Baladi Campaign. They estimated that the motivations for Saudi women’s activism stem from the needs and suffering felt by Saudi women as a result of being unable to fully realize their human rights. The assertions made regarding women’s lack of organization and systematic actions seem at odds with the stated success and impact of some of their campaigns. A possible explanation may be high expectations held by our participants because of the surge of activism in the last five years. Another possible reason is that the stated successful campaigns started in the early 2000s and took many years to achieve their impact.
Participants were asked directly about the effectiveness of Saudi women’s activism in achieving impact and reaching results. The views varied between yes, somewhat, and no. Those who answered positively listed the challenges to Saudi women’s activism as follows:

- It is limited in size and engagement and quite slow to impact the public.
- It faces severe opposition from Saudi society in general.
- Saudi women’s demands are marginalized by the patriarchal political system and its administration.
- The context of Saudi Arabia’s socio-political system and civil society is limiting.

Those who answered negatively listed the following obstacles:

- The nature of the movement itself, because it presents a cloudy vision and harbors a fear of persecution that limits its strength and effectiveness.
- An elitist, media-generated methodology with little ability for networking within Saudi women’s base and public.
- Lack of a conceptual framework and a solid knowledge base.
- The absence of civil society organizations.
- The absence of civil laws.

A final question was posed to the groups on how to increase the effectiveness of Saudi women’s activism. The following steps were frequently mentioned:

- Plan and strategize better.
- Develop better methodologies to communicate the message and vision, establish networking and dialogue, setting priorities and incorporate others.
- Eliminate the ego or the cult of personality at work in campaigns.
- Maintain consistency of demands.
- Sway political will and decision makers.
- Work to promote women’s economic empowerment as a strategy.
In general, the survey results showed a better perception of Saudi women’s activism in comparison to the focus groups. This is surprising since the focus group participants were prominent sympathizers to the cause and could be closer to the process and the activists. The survey questions raised three issues:

1. Priorities of Saudi women’s activism in the last ten years.
2. Saudi women’s activities as feminist activism.
3. Effectiveness of Saudi women’s activism.
PRIORITIES OF SAUDI WOMEN’S ACTIVISM IN THE LAST TEN YEARS

Table 5 reflects the respondents’ perception of Saudi women’s priorities in their activism. Violence against women came first in their perception, followed by the issue of Mahram and women’s rights in the family. The right to drive came fourth despite being the most frequently expressed demand throughout the six campaigns since 1990.

**TABLE 5: PRIORITIES OF SAUDI WOMEN’S ACTIVISM IN THE LAST TEN YEARS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Impartial</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence Against Women</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>83.40</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8.80</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahram</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>76.50</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14.30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Rights</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>76.40</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14.30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to Drive a Car</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>72.60</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>69.70</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16.10</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>14.20</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardianship</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>52.00</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Citizenship to Children and Husband</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>49.60</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>28.50</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>21.90</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SAUDI WOMEN’S ACTIVITIES AS FEMINIST ACTIVISM

The respondents were divided on the issue of classifying Saudi women’s advocacy as feminist activism. Nearly 56% replied in the affirmative and 44% in the negative. This differs from the consensus of the focus groups. Answers to what activities are considered feminist activism can be seen in Table 6.

**TABLE 6: CATEGORIZATION OF SAUDI WOMEN’S ACTIVITIES AS FEMINIST ACTIVISM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing &amp; Media</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>70.60</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demanding Saudi Women’s Rights through Social Media</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>70.40</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Welfare Associations &amp; Committees</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>57.30</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized Work through Institutions &amp; Other Bodies</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>56.20</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic &amp; Scientific Work</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>53.30</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>15.20</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in the Shura Council</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>51.80</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

The approval rate for media and writing as feminist activism was ranked highest among our respondents alongside human rights demands. This reflects more respect and resonance among survey respondents for the efforts of well-known writers and commentators on Saudi women’s issues as compared to focus groups. The work of women’s welfare associations and civil society organizations was approximately the same in approval rates while membership of the Shura Council and academic work came last as it did for the focus groups.

EFFECTIVENESS OF SAUDI WOMEN’S ACTIVISM

The respondents were divided (52% yes and 48% no) as to the effectiveness of Saudi women’s activism. Unfortunately, less than half the sample explained their choice.

For those who were affirmative regarding effectiveness, the stated reasons were:

• Saudi women gradually and with great effort on their part gained the needed education and awareness, which allowed them to achieve social respect and effectiveness in the decision-making process. In other words, women forced their ideas on the Saudi society despite challenges and extremist ideologies and traditions.

• Saudi women’s demands have spread and became part of the reformist agenda.

• Many Saudi women have broken out of the family sphere and became active agents in the public sphere.

• The external and international image of Saudi women changed due to their activism demonstration of their determination, despite all the obstacles.

Those who did not see Saudi women’s activism as effective explained their statements as follows:

• The priorities of Saudi women’s activism are not headed in the right direction, in both ideology and emphasis.

• Saudi women’s activism did not affect Saudi society with real changes in their daily lives. The decision-making processes have not been affected.

• The lack of a civic social structure or organizations that advocate for Saudi women’s demands prevent Saudi women from effecting change.

• Patriarchy is supreme in Saudi culture and acceptance of women’s rights is very limited.

• Few Saudi women are equipped to take leadership roles and activist organizations lack organizational skills.

• Advocacy for Saudi women is still expressed at the individual level, rather than organized or formalized, and therefore can be personalized.
SAUDI WOMEN LEADERS: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The selection of these eleven individuals was based on their well-known involvement in Saudi women’s activism. The focus group meetings informed the choice of interview subjects and confirmed the status of the women who were selected. They were mostly of the newer generation of activists, having participated in the 2011 surge. Only one was active in both generations. Most are in their thirties or forties and reside in Saudi Arabia. Their personal stories could not be relayed out of concern for maintaining their anonymity and ensuring their safety, as they are frequent targets of the authorities and general public. However, the interviewed women are recognized by their peers as leaders. Interviews covered self-perception, motivation and intellectual discourse, support and personal resources, and campaigns and activities.

“We agitate and stir still waters.”
- T.W.

SELF-PERCEPTION
Self-perception and self-identification was not as clear among the leaders of Saudi women’s activism as anticipated. It actually posed more questions than answers:

- Six of the interviewed leaders refused to identify themselves as activists, despite all evidence to the contrary. They were asked to select from five choices: leader, activist, social reformer, human rights reformer, and nationalist. Some said they want to avoid the backlash that comes with identifying as an activist and the political ramifications associated with the term.

- Three of the women interviewed also included “nationalist” in their self-perception. They affirmed that they are not rebels, nor do they oppose the Saudi state, society, and culture.

- Six of the women stated that they were working for “women’s human rights.” They qualified their self-identifications by saying that they do not oppose the state, nor do they seek to change the systems of government. They seek to change policies and practices for the betterment of Saudi women and society.

- The majority (8 of 11) refused to label themselves as political activists. One of the remaining three reluctantly admitted that her activities had aspects of political change, but she would rather not emphasize that.

“I do not call myself an activist because I have not reached the level of action attained by others.”
- E.N.
MOTIVATIONS AND INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSE AMONG SAUDI WOMEN LEADERS

The motivations for activism among the interviewees did not reflect a specific intellectual discourse. The majority cited personally felt motivations, including their own suffering and/or Saudi women’s plight in all aspects of their lives. Only two of those interviewed mentioned positive influence from family for their choice to engage in Saudi women’s causes.

One asserted that she derives her intellectual influence from the Islamic feminist movement. The rest described themselves as unconcerned with this ideology. In fact, most expressed avoidance of Islamic feminism and were doubtful about its effectiveness. The possible reasons for this perception could be multi-layered, but include the fact that the Islamic feminist discourse emphasizes major reforms to Muslim jurisprudence regarding women. This is a major taboo in Saudi Arabia as decreed by the religious official establishment. Five of the 11 stated that they are concerned with the discourse of the international human rights movement and women’s rights. They affirmed that this is the motivation and base for their engagement in Saudi women’s causes.

“I chose to work within the human rights approach because it encompasses all strata of society and restores human dignity.”

– N.S.

Despite the fact that these women represent respected, leading figures in Saudi women’s rights and share like minded concerns and goals, their responses showed that they lack clarity on their own roles in Saudi women’s advocacy. There is little awareness among them of what makes their groups’ activities valuable in the context of Saudi society. They also did not openly characterize the links between their groups’ actions and the creation of needed political pressure for change. It is unclear whether they are individually avoiding linking their groups to political activism or if, as a group, they are hesitant to make that connection. Caution was dominant in their responses and attitudes.

SUPPORT AND PERSONAL RESOURCES

Central to the personal resources of the leaders interviewed was the support that they received from other women colleagues, friends, and stakeholders. Some expressed total satisfaction with the support they received from intellectual groups of young men and women who support their causes, want to serve as advocates, and desire to be included in their circles. Formal community support was only available to two of the women interviewed; they both came from a province known for its strong local social network. Those two began their activism in local centers for community development, with series of lectures and awareness
campaigns. One young leader stated that she is engaged in Saudi women’s advocacy despite her husband’s objections and his constant worry that it will endanger their family. Writers and bloggers who were interviewed said that they feel great satisfaction from the support they get from those who follow their blogs, columns, or articles.

“Our priorities are to empower other women, support their activities, as well as create groups of advocates who support each other.”

– E.N.

CAMPAIGNS AND ACTIVITIES
The interviewees engaged in multiple levels of advocacy and several causes involving more than one activity at any time. Their most frequent engagements were in the driving campaigns (7 of the 11 interviewees), blogging and otherwise documenting Saudi women’s causes (5 out of 11), the Baladi Campaign for the municipal elections (5 out of 11), and Saudi women’s civil and religious rights (6 out of 11). The campaigns and programs that they executed never involved services to stakeholders. Unlike welfare organizations, they are not licensed by any government organization, do not have permission to operate, mobilize, or fundraise. Help for women and their families were undertaken voluntarily and on an individual level rather than by the group. The exception to this rule was the Baladi Campaign, which received financial support and patronage from an important foundation in Saudi Arabia run by Prince Waleed Bin Talal, which was accepted because of the royal decree allowing women to be included in municipal elections. They proceeded, thereafter, to implement a series of local trainings for women encouraging effective participation in local elections.
SAUDI WOMEN LEADERS: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

EFFECTIVENESS OF ACTIVITIES: METHODOLOGIES, MECHANISMS, AND TOOLS

There was a high level of personal satisfaction among the leaders in regards to their work and actions, despite the fact that they have not achieved their goals in most cases. They also expressed satisfaction about the importance of their activities for Saudi society. When asked about the six driving campaigns since 1990 and their limited effectiveness, the leaders nonetheless expressed a very high level of satisfaction. To understand the discrepancy between actual achievements and positive evaluation of effectiveness, we observed the following possible factors:

1. The leaders are focusing on the positive aspects of the process, i.e. coming together as a group, identifying the issue and taking action. This alone is an achievement in the harsh limitations of the system and society.

2. Enthusiasm overpowers critical thinking, so effectiveness is exaggerated despite the results.

3. Their expectations are low in the first place, so the lack of success does not mar positivity.

4. Most importantly, the use of digital methods to raise awareness may increase their sense of the work’s effectiveness.

Saudi society ranks as one of highest in the Arab region for use of the internet and social media. Saudi women activists mostly operate through these means, using the internet to state demands, start campaigns, put forth petitions, or motivate action. The feedback they receive through these means is usually positive. Virtual feedback, however, does not always translate well on the ground and virtual commitment does not carry the same risk as real-world action. For example, a petition to remove the ban on women driving was introduced in October 2013, and collected 17,000 signatures. However, when the time came for implementing the proposed action – that is, when women were asked to drive their cars and post a video of the event on a designated YouTube channel – only approximately 100 videos were received. The low turnout is not surprising, considering the high stakes of the ban on protests in Saudi society.

Roles, methods, challenges, and priorities

It was unfortunate that this part of the interview came at the end of the interviewing process, because the interviewees were brief in describing those elements of their work. One prevalent attitude among them was their lack of concern with setting roles and responsibilities. In fact, there was a softness in assigning roles for themselves and others, and a flexibility in the responsibilities that these entailed. They did not agree, moreover, that they are in positions of leadership in their groups. Fear and caution may have been at the core of their denial of a structure for the group. On the other hand, creating groups of this sort is a new experience for women, which may explain the flexibility they allow in the formulation’s roles and affiliations.
The stated challenges faced by this group of leaders included the personal. They told stories of being fired from work, threatened by officials or extremist Muslim groups, and questioned by the authorities. They also spoke of general challenges, though: a lack of support from Saudi women, being blocked by the administration, a lack of supportive civil society organizations, and the ban on other types of organizations such as political parties, unions, and independent women’s organizations.

“One of our strengths is that we have nothing to lose.”

– A.M.

When asked about the strength and weaknesses of their activities, they mentioned the following:

- External support received from international organizations like the United Nations, European Union, and international civil society.
- The level of sensitivity that the Saudi government feels towards international criticism of how it deals with women’s rights and issues.
- A large sector of youth who are supportive and very active on the internet and the social media.
- The belief that their advocacy has become a “movement of the people” by virtue of their large outreach on the internet and their use of social media outlets, like Facebook and Twitter.

The above-listed strengths, as seen by Saudi women leaders, are mostly related to external factors. The perceived weaknesses, however, were mostly internal. They described a lack of clarity in vision and methodology. The response of one of the women sums up most of the views expressed by the others regarding weaknesses:

- The framework of activities suffers from a lack of vision. The objectives are multiple and the conceptual base and shared values are unclear.
- Methodology is based on low expectations including a low ceiling for demands, lack of focus, a low knowledge base, and little experience.
- Activists repeat what others do. They do not dare to discover for themselves. They mistrust each other and are afraid to go public.

The priorities expressed by the interviewees for strengthening their activism and impact echoed the perceived weaknesses they outlined: they advocated a clear framework for action with a clear objective for each activity, a clear methodology, and specialized committees with distinct roles. They also emphasized the need for better networking, alliances, partnerships, and a wider reach.
FOCUS AND PARAMETERS

The Twitter analysis targeted public discourse on abolishing legal guardianship over women in Saudi Arabia (referred to as “AG” for this section of the study), because it was found to be the most frequent demand by activists and Twitter accounts advocating for Saudi women’s rights. The trend to focus on AG grew steadily from when it was first identified as a priority in shadow reports on violations of Saudi women’s rights such as the CEDAW shadow report prepared by Saudi Women for Reform in 2007\textsuperscript{iv}, the stakeholder report for the Universal Periodic Review of Saudi Arabia in 2013\textsuperscript{v}, and Human Rights Watch reports on Saudi Arabia since 2008 including, Perpetual Minors Human Rights Abuses Stemming from Male Guardianship\textsuperscript{vi}, Sex Segregation in Saudi Arabia, and Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia’s Male Guardianship System.\textsuperscript{vii}

The period of September 2016 to April 2017 was chosen for analysis due to its high level of Twitter activity. Mid-2016 marked an increase in the number of activist Twitter accounts for Saudi women’s rights. These accounts slowly gained strength in content, number of followers, and relative influence on the public arena.c Additionally, several accounts highlighting important cases started trending on Twitter and gained attention from the Saudi public. These cases included that of Mariam al-Otaibi being imprisoned by her family for disobedience and that of Dina, the young woman who was a runaway and was brought back from the Philippines by her uncle. The letter to King Salman regarding guardianship over women was also a trending event as was a continuous series of hashtags for AG since June 2016.ci cii

This analysis was conducted by a specialist company, Lucidya\textsuperscript{iii}, to measure the public’s attitude on Twitter based on the retrieved content regarding AG (commonly known as sentiment analysis). The results include insights into top influencers, top content (images, videos, links), and spikes in rates of engagement. This analysis focuses on 1.8 million tweets within the noted time frame and around the issue of AG and assessed the following:

1. Volume and reach
2. Geological location
3. Gender distribution
4. Engagement distribution: support for AG vs. opposition to AG
5. Most influential accounts and tweets
TWITTER IN SAUDI ARABIA

Twitter is one of the most effective and influential social networks for Saudi society. Statistics show that:

- Around 40% of MENA region Twitter accounts are Saudi.
- Saudi Arabia was estimated to have about 6.37 million Twitter users in 2016.
- Twitter is the third ranked social media platform after WhatsApp and Facebook and the fifth ranked website in Saudi Arabia.
- Saudi Arabia has the highest percentage of internet users in the MENA region who are active on Twitter; it ranks seventh globally in terms of individual accounts on social media.
- 24% of these users access it on a daily basis, with an average of five tweets per day.

SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

**Start Date**
1 September 2016

**End Date**
16 April 2017

**Locations**
Saudi Arabia

**Goal**
Explore and find out Saudi's attitude towards different issues of Women's Rights

**Languages**
English / Arabic

Source: Lucidya 2017
# QUANTITATIVE TWITTER ANALYSIS

## Keywords

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abolishing Guardianship</td>
<td>اسقط الولاية</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Right My Dignity</td>
<td>حفي كرامتي</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Dina at the Airport</td>
<td>استقبلوا دينا بالطيار</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Guardianship over Women Except in Marriage</td>
<td>لا ولاية على المرأة إلا في الزواج</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam Gave her the Right to Manage Her Own Affairs</td>
<td>الإسلام كفل لها إدارة شؤونها بنفسها</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariam al-Otaibi</td>
<td>مريم العنبي</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know Your Rights</td>
<td>اعرف حقك</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest through Walking</td>
<td>المفاوضة بالمشي</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am My Own Guardian</td>
<td>أنا ولية أمر نفسي</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Saudi System of Men’s Guardianship</td>
<td>نظام ولاية الرجل في السعودية</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Driving</td>
<td>قيادة المرأة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and Guardianship</td>
<td>المرأة والولاية</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No to Abolishing Guardianship</td>
<td>ضد اسقط الولاية</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Hashtag

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Hashtags</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saudi women against marginalization</td>
<td>#سعوديات ضد التهميش</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi women demanding full competency</td>
<td>#سعوديات تطلب اهلية كاملة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Together for abolishing guardianship</td>
<td>#معا لإنهاء ولاية الأمر</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abolish guardianship</td>
<td>#سقط الوصاية</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi women demanding the abolition of guardianship</td>
<td>#سعوديات تطالب بإسقاط الولاية</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am my own guardian initiative</td>
<td>#مبادئنا أنا ولية أمري</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter to the King regarding guardianship</td>
<td>#رقية الولاية ٢٠سبتمبر</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break your silence and say</td>
<td>#كشف كلامك ولدنا أمريك</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom for Mariam al-Otaibi</td>
<td>#حرية لمريم العنبي</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are all Mariam</td>
<td>#كلنا مريم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give us Mariam back</td>
<td>#عودوا لنا مريم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariam unjustly imprisoned</td>
<td>#القبض على مريم العنبي ظلما</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi women against abolishing guardianship</td>
<td>#سعوديات ضد اسقط الولاية</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My guardian knows best</td>
<td>#ولي أمري أدرى بامر</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariam al-Otaibi</td>
<td>#SaveMariamAlotaibi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VOLUME & REACH
Total number of tweets within time period: over 1.8 million.
Highest date of engagement: March 15, 2017 (113,512 tweets).

Source: Lucidya 2017
QUANTITATIVE TWITTER ANALYSIS

Engagement is highest when it reflects societal events, personal stories, and/or involves a declaration by a public figure. The highest volume of tweets was on March 15, 2017, when Prince Talal (a high-ranking prince and brother to the King) declared that women would be allowed to drive by May 2017. Three hashtags were created and trended extensively. One was Prince Talal’s declaration to the media, the second was about women driving in general, and the third was regarding “what Saudi liberals want.” The second highest engagement was when the Shura Council rejected a proposal by a female member to permit female driving in Saudi Arabia. That month, two different stories captured the attention of Twitter users and Saudi society. One was the reported escape of two sisters from their family and subsequent arrival in South Korea, and the other was the forcible divorce of a woman from her husband because of genealogical incompatibility (she belongs to a tribe and he does not). By contrast, the letter to King Salman signed by approximately 14,000 women in September 2016, requesting AG was tweeted and retweeted substantially less. By April 2017, however, AG was a primary cause for women activists on Twitter and continued to grow in number and urgency.

Although the levels of volume and engagement with Saudi women’s issues through Saudi Twitter is modest (250,000 unique authors) compared to those on the international level or with other issues, it has the potential to reach a large percentage of the 6.3 million Saudi Twitter users. This allows the dissemination of information about Saudi women’s issues that dwarfs the exposure offered by other media outlets. On Twitter, statements by supporters are unfiltered, sometimes anonymous, and therefore more direct, hard-hitting, and true to women’s reality.
GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

The pins in the above image show tweets posted across Saudi Arabia and surrounding countries.

Source: Lucidya 2017
The geographical distribution of tweets was shown to be highest in urban areas, including cities of the central, eastern, and western provinces. There were also higher levels of engagement than anticipated in areas of outside Saudi Arabia, such as Egypt and Jordan, and in areas considered less urban and rural within the country, such as the southern and northern provinces. This indicates how widespread the use of Twitter is in Saudi Arabia and the high level of activity among internet users.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION

It was anticipated that there would be high levels of women’s participation in public discourse on women’s human rights. The analysis showed that Saudi women comprised approximately 41% of active Twitter users. In a society with a large gender gap in empowerment, employment, and social status, Twitter seems to be an outlet for Saudi women to raise their voices and push for change.

Source: Lucidya 2017
ENGAGEMENT DISTRIBUTION: SUPPORT VERSUS OPPOSITION OF AG

The methodology used to classify attitude and sentiment in the content of 1.8 million tweets was done by using a Machine Learning Model that utilizes human labeled data as a training dataset and then uses that dataset to classify any given tweet. The classification used was Support - Against - Neutral.

The results of this part of the statistical analysis were overwhelmingly in favor of supporting AG and other stated women’s rights issues raised on Twitter, in terms of both engagement and sentiment. Approximately 82% of Saudi Twitter users approved of AG and the other popular demands, versus 17% in opposition. Nearly two million supportive retweets and likes were recorded, while the opposing retweets were numbered at 270,000, as shown by the chart above. These results conflicted with Saudi society’s generally negative attitude toward AG and the traditional view of women’s status. This outcome left the following questions:

1. Are Twitter users who oppose Saudi women’s demands so complacent with the status quo that they are indifferent to issues raised by activists and like minded Twitter users, leading to a significant reduction in their engagement on Twitter?

2. Was the process of classifying users’ attitudes on Twitter content done correctly?

3. Did activists for Saudi women’s rights energize Twitter to their cause by a spontaneous or planned positive engagement that allowed for this high level of positivity?
MOST INFLUENTIAL ACCOUNTS & TWEETS

On the basis of number of followers, the top 100 individual accounts on Twitter (excluding organization accounts) were analyzed regarding their opinion on AG and other issues. The following results were reached:

- 50 accounts were against Saudi women’s demands. They had 50 million combined followers (without removing duplicates). The total number of ‘likes’ their tweets received was 7,426.
- 29 accounts were classified as supporting women’s demands. They had 23 million combined followers (without removing duplicates). The total number of ‘likes’ their tweets received was 4,558.
- 21 accounts were neutral. They had 17 million combined followers (without removing duplicates). The total number of ‘likes’ their tweets received was 2,217.

The ratio of likes to followers is higher among the supporting accounts. This could be because they are primarily followed by those who seek change and demand action.

The top seven most influential accounts include:

1. Mohammed al-Arifi, an Islamic religious Mufti and leader (against)
2. Local news outlet “al-Sabaq” (neutral)
3. Waleed al-Dhafeeri, an opinion writer (support)
4. Adil al-Kilbani, a former Imam of the Mecca Great Mosque (neutral)
5. Saudi news (neutral)
6. Taq Taq, an anonymous ultra conservative account (against)
7. Mixed Feeling, a conservative personal account (against)

These accounts tweeted about Saudi women’s issues such as AG, women’s driving, and Saudi women running away, but it is not clear how they influenced public discourse.
The combined followers of these influential accounts are around 51 million, of which approximately 21 million are followers of accounts opposed to women’s demands and 1.5 million follow the top account in support of Saudi women’s demands. If the total number of Saudi Twitter users is approximately 6.4 million, this raises the question of whether the following of any Twitter account is a reliable indicator in measuring the attitude of a user. However, assessing the accounts with top engagement begins to fill in some of these gaps.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: @MohamadAlarefe, @sabqorg, @waleeddhafeeri, @abuabdelelah, @saudinews50, @SSSu, @Raid_bc via Lucidya 2017</th>
<th>19.1 million fans</th>
<th>Against</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 million fans</td>
<td>Neutral (News)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1 million fans</td>
<td>Neutral (News)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 million fans</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 million fans</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.14 million fans</td>
<td>Against</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 million fans</td>
<td>Against</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the top nine accounts for engagement, seven are anonymous Saudi women's activist accounts with relatively few followers, one is a known activist for Saudi women's rights (Sahar Nasif), and one was created by a man (Abdul-Aziz al-Otaibi) who opposes Saudi women's demands. Total engagement with these accounts by tweets, retweets, likes, etc. is around 52,500, of which 3,000 opposed the expansion of women's rights. In general, many anonymous activist accounts are created by or on behalf of women. The number of these accounts grew in the last three years, especially in 2016. Some of them are in reaction to high profile cases of women who experienced oppression by their families, the police, or society.
When assessing posts with the highest engagement, two of the top tweets classified as supportive of Saudi women’s rights were from news outlets in Europe and reports on Saudi women’s “suppression and enslavement,” and the third was a thank you note from Mariam al-Otaibi after she was released from almost two months’ imprisonment for the disobedience charge brought by her family. The total number of retweets on the top three supportive posts was less than half compared to the three top tweets against AG. It is important to note that foreign news reports that highlight Saudi women’s blight and struggle, written with Saudi women’s cooperation, may be seen by the more conservative strata of society as a betrayal of religion and country, and a smear on women’s activism. Retweeting may also be done by those who oppose AG to spread a negative image of activists.
Qualitative analysis of activist Twitter accounts

Questions arose from the quantitative analysis, including one on the discrepancy between overall high support of Saudi women’s demands on Twitter and its relationship to the top 100 influential accounts. The researchers wanted to assess further to see if the dissonance between the two could be explained by a targeted look into Saudi women’s accounts on Twitter, including known activists, public women engaged with women’s causes, and the AG campaign accounts. These are not among the top 100 influential accounts list, but could still account for the increase in online support. The impact of those accounts can be measured by their followers and their rate of engagement in supporting AG. Other objectives for this part of the study are to examine these accounts, focusing on:

1. Their content and relevance to Saudi women’s advocacy.
2. A timeline of their creation correlated to the rise of causes, campaigns, and demands.
3. How they fit into the larger picture of advocacy for Saudi women’s rights at its various stages.
4. The stories they expose in monitoring Saudi women’s struggles to improve their livelihood and gain their rights.

This was done using the following methods:

1. Tracking Saudi women’s accounts that advocate for women’s rights. Some are well known and some are small, personal accounts created anonymously or recently.
2. Holding two focus groups with AG anonymous Twitter activists who represent a loose network of new activists. Questions were prepared to track the history of these accounts, the motivations of the women behind them, their personal stories, and their viewpoints on issues.
3. Contacting an active, anonymous AG account in the western province privately and, after gaining consent, sending questions to the account administrator.
4. Monitoring the content of these accounts to identify issues, tone, and orientation.

Advocacy through Saudi Women’s Twitter accounts

By tracking women’s accounts that support Saudi women’s rights and AG, 65 were identified that were not significant to the quantitative analysis outlined in the previous section. The criteria used to identify them in this qualitative assessment included:

1. Accounts that are relatively large with 30,000 or more followers.
2. Accounts associated with campaigns begun during or after 2011.
3. Small accounts focused on AG, which were created more recently and represent a trend.
This criterion excluded a large number of medium-sized accounts with 10,000+ followers and some accounts created by known activists. The purpose of focusing on the largest and smallest accounts was to highlight significant women’s accounts with a certain number of followers while examining the dynamics of AG advocacy on Twitter. The accounts assessed included:

1. Personal accounts of known advocates and women in the public arena, i.e. public figures supporting women’s rights.
2. One application created by a female lawyer to raise awareness of women’s legal rights in Saudi Arabia.
3. One online newsletter, al-Amal.
4. Five accounts related to campaigns.
5. Twitter accounts, mostly anonymous, that focus on AG as it relates to women’s issues.

This assessment found a significant online presence of women supporting Saudi women’s rights. It is clear from the number of followers that Twitter has attracted many women activists and those who support their causes. The high engagement rate of these women activists and their followers, as shown in the previous section, further contributes to the trend of increasing support on Twitter for AG. This shows that women fighting for AG using those accounts are not complacent but rather actively engaged online to raise their voices.

THREE WAVES OF ACTIVISM

This research identified three waves of Saudi women’s activism over a period from 1990-2017, as it relates to presence, influence, and engagement in today’s advocacy. Among the accounts assessed in this qualitative analysis, the following was identified:

- One participant from the 1990 driving protest, Fawziah al-Bakr, has an account with a large following. She is also a known writer and academic.
- Fifteen accounts are associated with Saudi women’s advocacy campaigns starting after 2011. Four creators of these accounts were interviewed as leading activists for this study in 2014.
- 40 accounts are run by anonymous women advocates for AG. They range from 72 to 800 followers and were mostly created in early 2016. Seven of these online anonymous activists were also participants in the Twitter analysis focus groups for this study and offered responses to the questionnaire.
Based on this analysis, we are able to describe the three waves of Saudi women’s activism since 1990:

1. The first wave consists of Saudi activists who are among the 47 women of the 1990 driving protest. They have been characterized as older, likelier to be academics, and representatives of an era when activism for Saudi women was part of a holistic platform of political demands. Although their influence is still felt, their presence online is not as significant as that of later activists, since fewer than 10 are actively engaged online. Two activists from this group have been a constant presence in the subsequent waves as powerful supporters for women’s rights: Aisha al-Mana, and Madeha al-Ajroush. Each brought her expertise and unique abilities. They never wavered or removed themselves from the public arena and were always recognized by the younger groups of activists as assets.

2. The second wave consists of Saudi activists who were engaged in the 2011-2015 campaigns and policy demands. This group included known personalities who engaged on social media under the auspices of their true identities. They also conducted newspaper and television interviews. Their campaigns were numerous and they had high levels of engagement in online activism. They knew and met each other, even if their collectives were not formalized, and were cautious toward anonymous activists for fear of their circles being infiltrated by negative individuals. They were also targets of conservative groups and maligned online. Their online presence is still significant.

3. The third wave of Saudi activists represents a younger, angrier, and less apologetic sector of Saudi women. They prefer, in the majority, to remain anonymous and to focus on women’s needs for freedom and equality and for the AG cause. They are mostly sufferers of abuses under the Saudi system of patriarchy and guardianship over women and they speak from experience and personal urgency.
THE LATEST WAVE OF ONLINE ADVOCACY, CONTENT, AND RELEVANCE

Since the first section of this study focused on the leaders and collectives of post-2011 Saudi women’s advocacy and the 1990 driving protest, this section focuses on the recent third wave of advocacy. Two popular hashtags known to be created by the new wave of Twitter activists became the sites of analysis for this segment of the study: #abolishguardianship and “#citizens, but.” From the groups involved in these hashtags, two focus groups and an anonymous interview were conducted. The focus group and research questions concentrated on the following:

- When was the account/hashtag created?
- Who is administering the account (number of participants and ages) and how do they engage and communicate?
- What are the objectives – the strategy – the priorities?
- What is the substance of your message?
- When was your first tweet?
- Why Twitter and how do you evaluate Twitter’s influence and efficacy?
- What is your own story and do you know the stories of the others working with you?

THE STORY OF #CITIZENS, BUT

Six professional young women (ages 30-35) who are Twitter users from different regions met and created a WhatsApp group. This group was concerned with women’s lack of rights in Saudi Arabia, specifically adult women’s lack of independence and the full rights of citizens in Saudi society and culture. Each of them had either a personal story of suffering under guardianship or knew women who live under that particularly abusive subjugation. All of them agreed to work together on Twitter to highlight women’s collective plight, particularly under the guardianship system. In February 2016 they created an account and began to gain membership. Their first tweet was posted months before the online campaign #AbolishGuardianship was launched. The overall goal was to raise women’s voices on Twitter, which they consider to be “Saudi Arabia’s Social Forum” or the “second force” for change after the Saudi Government. They view Twitter as the strongest platform for raising awareness and social activism. Their priority issue is to alleviate suffering under the guardianship system.
Through the use of Twitter, the group aims to maintain anonymity and increase focus on their goal. However, they still face a lot of abuse and attacks on Twitter. They were accused of immorality and heresy, causing some members to feel disappointed and dejected, and ultimately forcing some of them to retreat from strong engagement. Those who persisted still maintain the account regardless of these obstacles. Those who are still members shared personal stories for this study including the following:

- A female physician who had her life dramatically altered alongside her sisters’ lives after her father passed away. Their half-brothers took over the guardianship role from their father and confiscated the women’s passports, causing them to be unable to travel, including to medical conferences. The women filed a court case against their half-brothers, but have yet to receive justice.

- A teacher who was ejected from the family’s home after her father passed away and was never allowed to travel. She had to move to another town to reside in another house belonging to her father.

- A teacher who is attacked physically by her younger brother if she raises her voice to him.

- A divorced woman with daughters who never receives child support. The ex-husband refuses to issue passports for his daughters or allow them to travel.

- A medical doctor who never lived with her father or had his financial support but was not allowed to marry, travel, or receive scholarships for further education. Her mother by extension was also unable to travel because of her daughter’s situation.

- An academic whose brother refused to provide permission for her to travel or study further.

- A young woman who wanted to study nursing was not given permission by her brother to do so.

- A young woman who was not given permission to marry by her brother because he claimed she and the intended man were not compatible genealogically (tribal and non-tribal).

- Sisters who never knew their father nor received financial support from him were not allowed to travel and accompany their mother for medical treatment because their father refused permission. The mother passed away outside the country without seeing her daughters.

For this group, guardianship is the central issue of Saudi women’s suffering and their goal is to highlight these cases, raise awareness, and gain full citizenship and rights for adult women and girls of all ages.

THE STORY OF “#ABOLISHGUARDIANSHIP”

The large group instrumental in starting #AbolishGuardianship in July 2016, grew from existing advocacy against guardianship over women. Four important hashtags /campaigns against guardianship were created before July 2016, including: #SaudiWomenAgainstMarginalization, #SaudiWomenAgainstGuardianship, #citizens, but and #iammyownguardian. These efforts combined and united in July 2016, to create a bigger Twitter campaign #AbolishGuardianship.
Two focus groups were conducted in Riyadh with activists engaged with this campaign, in February 2017 and October 2017. The February 2017 focus group participants were among the instigators and leaders of the campaign. Their personal account of how their initiative was started is as follows:

We were around 50 accounts advocating for women’s rights and abolishing guardianship (most of us anonymous and some under real names). The accounts were dispersed all around the country and had no means of direct contact. Ten of us got to know each other, created a WhatsApp group, and met twice. We created #Iammyownguardian, but we did not keep up personal contacts. In July 2016, #AbolishGuardianship was created to represent a priority common to almost all of us. Our campaign and hashtag took off and was supported by known leading activists with large followings. It drew vigorous engagement from accounts advocating for women’s rights. Our strategy was to create the same hashtag with consecutive numbers each day to prolong the campaign, count the days of the campaign, and reduce sabotage to our cause online. Our motivations are our personal suffering, the need to raise awareness among Saudis on this issue, and the need to advocate for women’s rights. The next step was publishing a letter to King Salman requesting the abolishment of guardianship over women, which was signed by around 14,000 persons online. The letter was delivered to the royal court by a known activist in September 2016. Some accounts of women activists were stopped for personal reasons or by their family’s objections. Others continued with the campaign anonymously or as open supporters.

The group considers Twitter the best platform for action and advocacy for Saudi women’s rights in Saudi society and culture. It increases personal security, dissemination of ideas, public awareness of the issues, and it enhances freedom of expression. In addition to advocating for AG, the campaign began to highlight cases of abused women and advocate for them. These cases included:

- Khadijah, who suffered physical and mental abuse from her husband, filed a court case against him but later retracted it and returned to the home. She later broke her spine and lost use of her legs under suspicious circumstances. In early 2017, Khadija passed away and some activists accused her husband as well as lack of familial and police protection of contributing to her death. Although the events surrounding Khadijah’s passing were not verified by official reports or personal accounts of family members, two to three campaign members of #AbolishGuardianship personally organized a condolences event (similar to a memorial service) to advocate for women’s rights, fight against domestic abuse, and to support her family. This was the first and last event associated with the campaign to take place on the ground in an organized manner.
Mariam al-Otaibi was the highest profile guardianship case associated with the campaign, since she was one of its most active members. She was a target of her younger brother’s abuse. He collaborated with police officials to imprison her for “disobedience” and “escape” from the family’s home. She is free now, but her case is still pending in the courts. Her story was verified by her personal account and others when she agreed to join the second focus group in October 2017.

**MARIAM AL-OTAIBI**

Mariam al-Otaibi was 29 years old, unmarried, and living with her family in Al Ras, a town in al-Qasim province, one of the most conservative regions of Saudi Arabia. She was working as a cashier when she was involved in a number of claims and counter claims against her brother, which resulted in her detainment for three days at the women’s prison in Buraidah, the capital of al-Qasim. Her father’s case against her was for “disobedience.” She always maintained that she has been repeatedly threatened and abused by a younger brother and that he was the force behind her father’s case. She was forced to recant her claims in order to have the case against her dismissed.

Al-Otaibi told the story of her family’s degradation for this study after another of her brothers escaped in 2013 to Syria to join ISIS. The whole family was derided and rejected by their relatives. This weakened her elderly father and made him susceptible to the influence of his other son’s need to control his sisters. Her escaped brother was reported killed in action after three months. Al-Otaibi chose to publish her story online through a Twitter account using her real name @MERiAM_AL3TEEB. Her brother disputed the authenticity of the account, so she published her ID with her picture. This infuriated her brother, who asked her to close her account.

Approximately six months after al-Otaibi was released from Buraidah’s prison, she packed her bags and traveled to Riyadh, having secured a job as a cashier in a commercial establishment. She left a letter to her father saying that she was leaving the house forever and to please let her be. Once in Riyadh, she made contact with the protection center for domestic abuse to seek refuge there, but she never received any help or recognition. Al-Otaibi also sent three telegrams to seek protection from her family’s cruelty. The first was to King Salman bin Abdul Aziz, the second to the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, and the last to the Governor of Riyadh, Faisal bin Bandar.

Five days after her arrival in Riyadh, she disappeared from her rented apartment. She was seized by the authorities. Al-Otaib had secretly retained a second phone and was able to inform her sisters and friends that she was being detained at a Riyadh police station. Her father had filed a complaint against her for escaping the family’s home in al-Ras. Her new home had been invaded and all her electronics, books, and private papers were confiscated as evidence. She insisted to the authorities that Riyadh was her new home and she resisted transfer back to al-Ras. Meanwhile, the activists on Twitter launched a massive campaign for her release. After 104 days in prison, al-Otaibi was released. She was not placed back in the custody of her guardian, but her case is still pending in Riyadh’s courts. After her release from jail, she tweeted, “Don’t let others tell you that you can’t achieve – you can achieve whatever you want if you put your mind to it and believe you can.”

---

**CASE STUDY**

**QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ACTIVIST TWITTER ACCOUNTS**

Mariam al-Otaibi was the highest profile guardianship case associated with the campaign, since she was one of its most active members. She was a target of her younger brother’s abuse. He collaborated with police officials to imprison her for “disobedience” and “escape” from the family’s home. She is free now, but her case is still pending in the courts. Her story was verified by her personal account and others when she agreed to join the second focus group in October 2017.
• Dina is a young woman who escaped from her family’s control and boarded a flight to Australia, where she planned to seek humanitarian asylum. In a transit stop in Manila she was intercepted by the Philippine immigration services and detained under the instructions of the Saudi authorities (her uncles are high status employees in the Saudi administration). She was returned to Riyadh on the next flight and was met by Saudi Social Services and detained in the Center for Women Offenders for telling her story on Twitter and including live videos emphasizing her fear of being killed by her male relatives immediately after being detained in Manila. Her cry for help was taken up by the Twitter campaign, #wearealldina was created. It is not clear what happened to Dina beyond the fact that she continues to be a ward of the state.

• Alaa al-Anazi, a 24-year-old medical student and activist for the AG campaign, created #meetDinaattheairport and proceeded to the airport as a gesture of support and solidarity. At Riyadh International Airport, she was arrested alongside another young male journalist who was there to report on the matter. The plight of al-Anazi was short-lived, but resulted in her withdrawal from active engagement in the campaign.

ALAA AL-ANAZI

Alaa al-Anazi, a 24-year-old medical student, had previously been a strong contributor to the #AbolishGuardianship campaign and was central to organizing the condolences event for the Khadijah case, advocating against domestic violence and for the rights of abused women. Khadijah lived a life of mental and physical abuse with her husband, and suffered an accident that left her paralyzed under suspicious circumstances. She later died of a heart attack. Al-Anazi was also a strong influence in the women’s resistance movement by creating the hashtag #Resistancebywalkingandriding, and was one of the first to show solidarity with Mariam al-Otaibi.

In a widely-publicized case, al-Anazi declared her full solidarity with Dina Ali al-Salloum on Twitter. Al-Salloum escaped her family in the summer of 2017, and boarded a flight from Saudi Arabia to Australia, where she intended to seek humanitarian asylum. When her father and uncles learned of her escape, they asked the Saudi embassy in Manila to detain her at Manila International Airport and return her to Saudi Arabia. She was detained for 13 hours in Manila, and managed to record and publish a video calling on Twitter activists and human rights organizations to protect her, because her family might kill her when she was returned to them. Activists on social media denounced what they called “forced return” and urged the international community to act to support Saudi women, their human rights, and their freedom of choice. Al-Anazi and other activists launched a campaign of solidarity for al-Salloum by creating the hashtag #meetDinaattheairport.

Al-Anazi proceeded to the airport without telling her parents. She was arrested along with a young male journalist who was trying to report on al-Salloum’s arrival. Riyadh police announced later that they had seized a 24-year-old Saudi girl accompanied by a 27-year-old Saudi man on charges of trying to secretly photograph the security officers at the airport. She was detained in the Riyadh Center for Women Offenders. Al-Anazi was released after seven days, but only after her father signed a pledge to curtail her activity on Twitter and for women’s rights.
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ACTIVIST TWITTER ACCOUNTS

• Ahlam, a divorced woman with a daughter, ran away from her family home and sought shelter with her aunt (mother’s sister). She was detained upon the request of her brothers and father and placed in prison at the Center for Women Offenders. The details of her case were not clear or verified by independent sources, but the circumstances of her case were highlighted by #AbolishGuardianship.

• The latest case of runaway girls is Aminah (age 20), who recorded videos to post online in case of arrest or harm to herself. She escaped a year ago from her family and sought shelter with a sympathetic family. All her IDs and her passport were confiscated by her father, who physically abused her for disobedience. She needed her national ID for work and study, and sought help to have them issued without the consent of her guardian as a replacement for a lost ID. As soon as she applied for her ID, she discovered that her name was on the police list, per her father’s request. She was detained and imprisoned in the Center for Women Offenders. At the time of this writing, her case is the latest trending story in #AbolishGuardianship and her videos are retweeted widely among activists.

The October 2017 focus group was organized to include six of the leading activists of #AbolishGuardianship, among them being the recently released Mariam al-Otaibi, who recounted her story and verified the details of her struggle with her father’s guardianship and brother’s abuse. The focus group provided these details about their campaign:

• Over 40 of the AG activists are still anonymous to us and we do not always agree on certain issues. We take different stands sometimes on strategy and acceptable tweets.

• There are some we do not trust because they are extreme in their social views and pose a political risk to the rest of the group with their criticism of the Saudi government.

• A good number of important supportive Twitter accounts retweet us.

• International Twitter activism and Human Rights Watch’s support has had a great influence on official outcomes concerning women’s cases. This has saved the lives of many runaway women and high-profile cases of guardianship abuses. Al-Otaibi’s sister is convinced that international exposure and support was instrumental in forcing her release.

• We face opposition on Twitter through conservative personal accounts and official government accounts. We go on despite the fierce personal attacks and accusations.

• Our personal experiences and those of others have convinced us that there is corruption in the policing system. Patriarchal solidarity among abusers of the guardian system and officials in the justice system manifests to our detriment.
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ACTIVIST TWITTER ACCOUNTS

• Personal cases, when highlighted on Twitter, raise awareness and garner public attention. Al-Otaibi says that her personal account’s followers jumped from 3,000 to 15,000 followers as soon as she published her national ID and documented the abuses inflicted on her by her brother before escaping the family’s home. She also received support online from the AG group and other human rights activists. They worked on her behalf on Twitter and in the justice system. She adds, “this allowed me to tell my own story and express myself without prejudice or third party interference.”

• Two more activists told their stories. One is a divorced woman who fought for her divorce through the justice system and filed a court case asking to be her own guardian. She is a nurse who also works with abused women. Another woman with a supportive family told of her efforts to raise awareness of women’s rights in a town in the far north of Saudi Arabia. The repercussions on her career and her place in the community were negative. She was prohibited from teaching and families refused to allow their girls to attend her training sessions.

Of their motivations, the focus group participants said that in addition to their personal experiences of abuse and suffering, they have an urge to fight for their human rights and those of others. One said that she has feminism inside her soul. “I found myself on Twitter,” she added. Another said, “suffering and subjugation create courage and breaks chains.” They add that “our demands are equality, political representation, abolishing polygamy, a just inheritance system, reforming Islamic jurisprudence (especially regarding women), a just personal status law, and secularism.”

AN ANALYSIS OF CONTENT AND TONE OF #ABOLISHGUARDIANSHIP AND #CITIZENS, BUT

In Saudi Arabia, 24% of the 6.3 million Saudi Twitter users are tweeting five times per day. This confirms that Saudis consider Twitter a social forum for public discourse that allows them freedom of expression, unfiltered sources of information, and a chance to interact with social forces beyond their immediate circle. Twitter is seen and used by Saudis as a social platform — a space to voice opinions, demands, personal aspirations, and to engage with ideas and others. Given this information, an analysis of the activists’ content was conducted by looking at followers, content, language, systematic thinking, raising awareness, dissemination of information, relevance to discourses on women’s issues, visual effectiveness, and steering public opinion. The following are comments that relate to these elements:

Positives:
• The majority of activist accounts engages in raising awareness of Saudi women’s issues and persists in highlighting them in most tweets.
• The taboo of the sacred familial privacy in prohibiting images of women’s uncovered faces, hair, and bodies was broken, often when documenting abuse. Doing so drew attention to victims of abuse and the issues surrounding guardianship. Since 2015, the AG activists who had large Twitter followings (Lujain al-Hathloul: 303,000; Maysa al-Amoudi: 205,000; Mariam al-Otaibi: 44,000) also broke with these traditions.
Many of the accounts examined engage in the rebuttal of Twitter content, news, and media writings against women.

The activist accounts are courageous in their tone, demands, and social comments, often pushing the envelope.

They declare themselves through their aspirations for their “self” and “spirit;” for example, “I’m a free woman and not a private part,” “I’m an extremist for liberty and a fanatic for equality,” and “free spirit, AG”.

One of the biggest contributions of Saudi women online activists is that they have changed the tone, terminology, and conversations in regards to women’s issues. Many of the previously unacceptable concepts regarding women’s human rights, behavior, and social status are becoming normalized. Consider the following: women driving against the regulations of the government, defying the social norms regarding modesty and women’s cover, challenging the guardianship system and the justice system, exposing abuse against women and their abusers, demanding equality with men, and claiming to be feminists. All of these concepts are discussed as legitimate points of contention and are not automatically dismissed as extremist or irrelevant ravings of irrational women.

Negatives:

- A few anonymous accounts use bad language and provocative images and engage in unconstructive interactions with opposing tweets on their accounts.

- Although Twitter does not allow long statements, very few of the activist accounts engage in systematic or methodological statements about their platform of action or strategy. In other words, the expected intellectual discourse is not apparent. On the other hand, accounts that advocate civil rights and freedom of expression and argue systematically for these have fewer followers than accounts that agitate/provoke for Saudi women’s rights.

- Since the activist accounts do not represent an organized entity of advocacy, very few accounts present or tweet sophisticated media tools or arresting images or visuals to capture issues through creative methods. Two accounts by Saudi artists advocating for Saudi women’s rights were very effective in presenting the issues through images.
The stories that have been outlined by Twitter activists speak for themselves. They made their mark and were instrumental in creating a popular platform for women’s demands. The Saudi public discourse on Twitter also includes listening to activist voices, other points of views, challenges to ingrained beliefs, and often-taboo aspirations. On Twitter, it is possible to develop changes in the tones of discussions, an alternative terminology, and language that was never common in the past. All of this is limited to the traditional sources of public discourse in Saudi Arabia. The public forum on Twitter, furthermore, bypasses regional isolation and brings together common concerns and issues. Guardianship is a case in point. It was never before something that Saudis would tackle easily, because it has long been considered part of religious precepts. The cases brought forward by women’s Twitter advocacy have exposed guardianship as a tool for control, abuse, and cruelty. But most importantly, while guardianship had not been a subject in the public forum of Saudi Twitter before, it has become the hottest subject nowadays.
Summary of Results: A Tale of Exceptional Advocacy for Saudi Women’s Rights Over the Past 27 Years

With the aim of this study being to explore trends, discourses, and strategies of Saudi women in their advocacy for their rights, the main objective was to shed light on Saudi women’s advocacy starting with the historic 1990 driving protest through 2017. This study is, for the first time, conducted and authored by Saudi women about their advocacy within the country. Through an analysis of the demands and campaigns during this time period, literature written by Saudi women authors, online Twitter activism, and responses gathered through focus groups, interviews, and a survey many aspects are exposed through the findings. An overall synergy of perception was found throughout the research despite variations in emphasis and points of view. Additionally, this study found that women’s activism is severely constrained not only by political and cultural factors, but also from contradictions existing within the movement itself.

The activism examined is the product of the unique circumstances of Saudi society. It was shaped by the patriarchal political structure, limits on civil society, burning needs for individual dignity, changing social structures, and particularly by the technological advances in social media. Even now, women activists continue to seek refuge and salvation from the top levels of patronage through petitions, appeals, complaints, and outright pleading. Campaigns and initiatives are conducted that target reforms in official government policies towards women. These activists recognize the strength of cultural forces, but blame top decision makers for their roles in shaping those forces through their unwillingness to change the basic rules that govern women’s lives and denigrate them. This confused state between defiance and conditioned obedience is the mark of this patriarchal society.

Three Waves of Activism

The Saudi women’s struggle for their rights came in waves as groups of women came together to protest gender disparity and the subjugation of their human rights. Their activism was through various initiatives, campaigns, virtual platforms, and individual efforts. Their methodologies differed and were indicative of their time and available tools. It depended, mostly, on alliances, collaborations, and personal associations. In almost all cases, it never rose to the level of a formalized or an institutionalized movement. The lack of organizational structures in Saudi women’s active struggle for their rights is due to the limitations on civil society’s organizations in the Saudi political structure, the strict official control on populist movements, and freedom of expression. Overall, Saudi women’s activism can be categorized into three waves from 1990-2010, 2011-2015, and 2016 to present with shifts among priorities, strategies, and activists in each.

Perceptions of Saudi Women’s Activism

The focus group discussions, survey, and interviews displayed a lack of clarity on the nature of Saudi women’s struggle to change the status quo. There was an overall reluctance to using the term “activist” for describing others or for self-perception. Focus group participants felt that it was an imported term and interviewed leaders claimed that it implies political action. Those who do accept the term are divided on its definition. Some see activists as anyone who supports the cause and becomes an asset for its progress, where others see them as those working on the ground to bring about change with a vision, set agenda, and goals. In general, the leaders interviewed did not, by their own assessments, meet the criteria for activists because they were not political organizations, do not advocate political actions, and do not declare they
want to change the system. “Changing policies toward women” is their focus, as they repeatedly stated. Survey responses were more positive toward women’s activism, with 60% of respondents describing it as effective for bringing Saudi women’s issues to the public arena.

Overall, this lack of clarity is a limitation. Focus group participants declared that Saudi women’s activism does not rise to a position of a women’s movement. Survey participants agreed, but to a lesser degree. The question remains: is anyone in a position to do more in leadership roles within the present socio-political climate and its severe limitations and harsh penalties? A positive approach would be to focus on what can be learned from the experiences of previous women activists for better management of women’s demands, a wider grassroots outreach, greater effectiveness, and a positive reception in Saudi society.

Saudi women’s effectiveness in achieving their advocacy goals was found to be limited by several factors cited throughout the study including lack of clarity, lack of systematic methodologies, and reliance on frameworks that are “elitist” and “media focused.” Results of this study do not confirm these implications, but as a whole these activists are from various backgrounds and use the media to transmit their message. Their commitment to the cause is apparent and if there are exceptions, they are on an individual level. Nonetheless, these impressions make it imperative for women’s activists to review their strategies to gain better legitimacy and increase their effectiveness.

Saudi women activists of the second wave and the stakeholders who participated in this study do not identify themselves as feminists. Part of the reason for this may be fear of the classification associated with the feminist discourse and the negative connotation of feminism in Saudi culture and society. Islamic feminism, moreover, calls for reforms to Islamic jurisprudence, which is taboo for the Saudi religious establishment and most of the public. Knowledge and appreciation of what Islamic feminism advocates and stands for was not evident throughout this research, except by a few focus group participants. Only one of the leaders considered herself to be following the discourse of Islamic Feminism. The survey sample, however, was not averse to calling women’s advocacy and activism “feminist.”

**WOMEN ADVOCATES: EFFICACY AND INTERSECTIONS**

One focus of the study was to examine how sympathizers, stakeholders and leaders in Saudi women’s activism perceive efficacy in the advocacy for their rights and intersections with other elements in Saudi society. The noted agents for change in women’s status in the Saudi context included social work through women’s welfare societies, academia and cultural clubs, human rights demands, civil society organizations, writing and media, and the Shura Council. There was general agreement among study participants that demands for human rights are the most effective and visible ways of advocating for women. There was also agreement that women’s welfare societies can play a contributing role in advocacy for women and in improving their status. Within this, however, a majority felt these welfare societies are not currently effective because their work is traditional and lacks gender methodologies. They are also closely monitored and supervised by the Ministry of Social Welfare, which makes them limited in their scope of work. Overall, their efforts do not intersect with the work of women’s groups in their aim to demand women’s rights. In regards to the Shura Council, the majority of study participants agreed that membership of women on the council has not been effective for women’s advocacy.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS**
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

PRIORITY ISSUES
Since the November 6, 1990 protest, driving has become symbolic to both activists and those who oppose reforms. Advocacy has come in many forms, ranging from collective in 1990, to individual and semi-individual since 2011, and has included petitions to consecutive Saudi kings, demands presented to the Shura Council, and social media campaigns on Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms. The hashtags for women driving were the most prominent on Twitter. The public discourse on women’s status was dominated by this issue until recently when the call for abolishing Guardianship became the focus of Saudi women’s activism on social media, especially Twitter.

Though advocacy related to driving received a high level of attention, it is far from the only issue on which women’s demands and campaigns have focused. This study identified 20 campaigns since 1990. After an 11 year gap in visibility for women’s activism due to the extreme measures taken against participants of the 1990 driving protest, 2011 saw a surge in activity with 15 of the campaigns falling in this time period. This return to activism also correlates with the rise of social media. Beyond driving, campaigns and demands of this time focused on violence against women, male legal representatives for business women, guardianship of adult women, and municipal election participation.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES
Successful campaigns were based on a strategy of long-term advocacy by Saudi women’s rights collectives. Their methods included petitions, action-oriented research, training and organizing gatherings to raise awareness and knowledge of the issues facing women, as well as soliciting the support of notable people and institutions in Saudi Arabia. The success of demands also seemed to be linked with political will or connections to any members of the ruling strata or elite. Once the rise of social media took hold, online advocacy added a new dimension to activist strategies. Twitter especially offered an assurance of relative anonymity and increased support and engagement within a country that otherwise offered a lack of institutional support and continued abuse. These factors led to an explosive presence online of young women who engaged frankly and published their own stories of suffering and those of others regardless of personal safety or outcome.

The online Twitter activists also wanted to steer the advocacy toward what they considered a must for Saudi women’s wellbeing. Motivated by personal experience and guided by the rise of women runaways from male guardians, #AbolishGuardianship exploded on Twitter and was administered by a group who had little knowledge of each other. This recent wave of Twitter activists also reached out to first and second wave activists for advice and support, which generated a mixed response. They are sometimes viewed as reckless, putting themselves in the line of fire as they support all cases that come to their attention, even before verification. They often publish pictures and videos that do not follow social norms of modesty, and they may espouse causes that are considered risky in the social landscapes of Saudi Arabia. Their power, however, is in speaking their hearts and souls as they throw themselves into a cause that represents their own suffering and aspirations. By raising the level of demands for women’s freedom to live independently, they help to change Saudi public discourse on the rights of women, even if they have not yet obtained their goals.
CHALLENGES

Reform of Saudi women’s status is faced with the dominance of patriarchy and an extremely conservative religious institution that has been backed by the government for decades. These forces create a legal, societal, and cultural environment that is hostile to developments toward gender equality. The regional diversity and disparity between the rural and the urban and that of the privileged and the unprivileged contributed to a lack of a united popular base for Saudi women’s demands. This was a dominant trend until recently when Twitter became a platform of action and a tool of engagement for Saudi women sufferers of all classes, regions, and backgrounds.

This study also found that authorities denied and rebuffed every organized campaign, even when it did not employ a political methodology like a demonstration or action. To navigate this and other obstacles, women activists operated within small groups of activist collectives. These interconnected collectives gave mutual support to other groups. They lobbied for their causes and created alliances locally and with other regions of Saudi Arabia. Membership in the activist groups ebbed and flowed, steadily increasing when web-based activism gained strength.

There is a tendency among Saudi women activists to seek both refuge and exposure in international media and from human rights organizations. This is primarily because international exposure can be a protective shield against severe punishment for active engagement in women’s causes, or for any individual or woman going against the system. In this age of mass digital media, exposing cases of abuse and the subjugation of Saudi women is a tool of activism.

RECENT CHANGES

Over the last decade, since 2002, the Saudi government has made an effort to improve its image regarding social issues, especially women’s rights. These developments were violently and publicly opposed by the more fanatical religious groups and gave an apparent image of the government being the champion for women against a conservative society. These developments, nonetheless, do not change the essential status of women when it comes to religious courts, civil rights, guardianship, women’s status within the family, or driving (until September 2017).

The September 2017 royal decree to allow women to drive in June 2018 has thrown Saudi society into uncharted territories. Those who never expected a change in Saudi women’s status were blindsided by this decision. The accompanying relaxation of moral policing by religious institutions in the public sphere, the vow to destroy fanatic and extreme Islamic groups, and the new 2030 Vision for Saudi Arabia are all innovative political strategies. They contain the seeds for radical changes in Saudi women’s status. This led many Saudi women activists to praise the present political system and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for beginning women’s liberation. Their optimism leads them to expect further changes in the legal and social systems that govern Saudi women’s lives, including abolishing guardianship, gender segregation, and ensuring political participation. Although some activists may claim credit for the driving decree, the question remains, are these changes a matter of internal political expediency to alter Saudi Arabia’s image in the world and its relation to the super powers, or is it a turning point in Saudi Arabia’s society and the end of male patriarchy? This is a question for future studies.
CONCLUSION

Generally, Saudi women’s advocacy over the last 27 years has been instrumental in increasing awareness of Saudi women’s issues, breaking the silence and some previously considered taboo activities for women. As the survey results showed, they gave voice, respect, and visibility to Saudi women’s issues abroad and in their society. This study took note of the development of their advocacy, despite obstacles. Their few successes in various campaigns, and most recently their online courage and solidarity, have had a profound effect on how Saudi popular culture sees women’s issues and reacts to women’s demands and aspirations. Even if Saudi women’s activism cannot be classified as an organized movement, it is certainly an important part of a process, not yet fully formed but rapidly progressing toward lasting changes in women’s status. Women’s education, the needs of a modern economy, the new media, the changing social fabric of Saudi society, and the growing sectors of educated men and women are all elements that point to the fact that matters have already gone beyond the confines of the closed traditions of society. Young women and men oriented toward achievement and progress are starting to take the helm in Saudi Arabia. They disregard previously held beliefs about women, their roles, and their positions in the family and marketplace. There is no doubt that they will continue to point out the essential changes needed in the social structures that govern women’s civil and religious rights, becoming the voice that never wanes.
ENDNOTES

1. BBC, “Saudi women get identity cards.”
2. Jones, “The Clerics, the Sahwa and the Saudi State.”
5. The Saudi Majlis al-Shura or consultative council is a body of appointed members whose primary task is to study and propose laws. These are then submitted to the king who decides which will be referred to the Saudi Council of Ministers. In 2013 King Abdullah appointing the 30 women, or 20% of the total membership, to the consultative body. See https://fanack.com/saudi-arabia/governance/shura-council/
7. See appendix for further details on methods and tools.
13. CEDAW Country Reports, Saudi Arabia.
14. UN, “Declarations, Reservations and Objections to CEDAW.”
17. Al-Matter, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring.
18. Ibid.
21. UN, “Declarations, Reservations and Objections to CEDAW.”
23. BBC, “Saudi women get identity cards.”
24. CEDAW Country Reports, Saudi Arabia.
25. Ibid.
29. National Family Safety Program
31. Human Rights Watch, Boxed in.
32. Barthe, “Saudi Arabia labour market reforms bring change at the checkouts.”
33. Human Rights Watch, Boxed in, 62.
34. Hubbard, “Saudi Arabia to Offer Physical Education Classes for Girls.”
37. Worley, “Saudi Arabia strips religious police of powers of arrest and says they must be ‘kind and gentle’.”
38. Al-Fawwaz, “Women in the Ministry of Justice for the first time.”
ENDNOTES

x. Reuters, “Saudi woman named to senior government post for first time.”
xi. Shalhoub, “Remarkable week for Saudi women as females conquer top financial jobs.”
xii. Hubbard, “Saudi Arabia Agrees to let Women Drive.”
xiii. El-Dosari, “Unfulfilled Promises.”
xv. El-Dosari, “Unfulfilled Promises.”
xvii. Human Rights Watch, Boxed in.

1. El-Dosari, “Unfulfilled Promises.”
3. Based on summer 2014 interview in al-Khubar with interviewee who worked with the campaign.
4. This reflects the personal experience of the authors and members of the focus groups. It applies to most women’s sections in Ministries and banking. Women applying for services experience long periods of waiting while files are sent to male offices to complete processing and approval of the service needed.


c. Al-Guwaifi, “Al-nasawiyah a’su’udiyya wa al-islah al-siyasi.”
d. Further reference in part two’s Twitter analysis

e. For a historical perspective on The rise of Islamic feminism see: Eyadat, “Islamic Feminism: Roots, Development and Policies.”

f. Abou Bakr, Al-nisawiyah wa al-dirasat al-diniyah.
g. Abdelwahab, “Al-nasawiyya al-islamiyya: ishkaliyyat al-mafhoum wa moutatatlibat al-waki’.”
h. Eyadat, “Islamic Feminism: Roots, Development and Policies.”
i. Al-Fassi, “Is there A Saudi Feminism?”

k. Bashatah, “30 imra’a ta’tb majlis al-shūrā… hal hiya fidāyāt `asr ‘alnasawiyya al-su’udiyya’?”
m. Al-Suwailim, “Al-haraka al-nasawiyah fi al-khalij: bayn haq al-mar’a wa istghilal al-mu’arada!”

n. Al-Suwailim, “Nāshitt huqūqiyyāt bi awwāliyyāt dhukūriyya!”
q. Al-Manae, The Sixth of November.

r. The Economist, “Saudi Women Getting Their Cards.”
s. BBC, “Saudi Women Get Identity Cards.”
t. Abuzaid, “IDs a must for Saudi women.”

u. Personal knowledge. Authors were part of this group. One left the institution in 2008 and one of them remained with The National Family Safety Program until 2013.
The National Family Safety Program

Human Rights Watch, Boxed in.

Process described in an interview summer 2014 in al-Khubar.


Suggested by a large number of the focus group participants during summer 2014 in Riyadh.

Al-Shaihani, “Al-’onf do f. hamla li mounasarat almar’a.”


Doaiji, “Saudi Women’s Online Activism.”

Hubbard, “Saudi Arabia Agrees to let Women Drive.”


Criteria for focus group participant selection can be found in the methodology section and annex.

Focus groups, summer 2014, al-Riyadh, al-Khubar.

A challenge is a task or situation that tests someone’s abilities. A limitation is a factor that controls how much of something is possible or allowed.

See appendix for full survey.

Most civil society organizations are registered as “charities” under the ministry of social affairs, which closely supervises their program.


CASE STUDY ENDNOTES

1 Doaiji, “Saudi Women’s Online Activism.”


3 MacFarquhar, “Saudi Monarch Grants Women Right to Vote.”

4 Sadek, “FALQs: Saudi Arabia Municipal Elections.”

5 Telephone interview with a leading activist working in the Baladi Campaign in Riyadh after the municipal elections in 2015.

6 The Chaillot prize, named after the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, aims to acknowledge and encourage remarkable efforts and work for the promotion and protection of human rights. The Chaillot Prize in GCC is presented annually by the delegation of the European Union for actions, campaigns, and projects which favor human rights. See https://kw.ambafrance.org/IMG/pdf/chaillot_prize_2014_rules.pdf


8 Tomlinson, “Women drivers in Saudi Arabia face trial as terrorists.”

9 Doaiji, “Saudi Women’s Online Activism.”

10 Al-Manae and al-Sheikh, The Sixth of November.

11 This information comes directly from an account by Mariam al-Otaibi.

12 Gathered and retold from information available on public Twitter accounts.

Abdelwahab, Norhan. “Al-nasawiyaa al-islamiyya: ishkaliyyat al-mafhoum wa moutatatlibat al-waki’.” [Islamic Feminism: Issues of Concept and the Demands of Reality]. Mu’minoun bila hudud, Oct. 1, 2016. http://www.mominoun.com/articles/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D8%B4%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%81%D9%87%D9%88%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9-4369


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


Appendix I: Methodology

Focus Groups

- The first focus group invited 15 women to participate. The workshop took place in Riyadh on Wednesday, June 11, 2014, and was attended by eleven of the invited women.

- The second focus group took place in Riyadh. Fifteen young women between 20 and 30 years old from different regions of Saudi Arabia were invited. The workshop took place on Wednesday, July 2, 2014. Eleven of the invited women attended the workshop.

- The third focus group took place in Al-Khobar on Thursday, August 14, 2014. Fifteen women were invited to attend, ten of whom attended.

- The male focus group took place in Riyadh. The men who were invited came from different regions in Saudi Arabia. They are involved in women’s issues. Fifteen men were invited to attend the workshop, six of whom attended.

Focus Group Criteria:

For inclusion in the focus groups, participants were required to be:

- Educated about and supportive of Saudi women’s rights and advocacy that included academics, writers, professional women (and some men) and social NGO activists for women’s empowerment.

- Participants or open supporters of initiatives or campaigns for Saudi women’s rights during the period of 1990-2017.

- Saudi nationals from differing regions of the country; the researchers invited individuals from other cities and regions to attend the meetings held in both Riyadh and Dhahran.

These groups consisted mostly of prominent supporters and advocates for women’s rights (professionals, academics, writers, columnists and members of intellectual strata). They did not include the identified women leaders who were selected for the in-depth interviews. The discussion concentrated on the following nine themes, posed as questions:

- Who is an activist for the Saudi women’s cause?
- Are writers and academics effective for Saudi women’s activism?
- What is the difference between a women’s movement and women’s activism and can it be said that there is a Saudi woman’s movement?
- Is Saudi women’s activism linked to political opposition?
- What social activities do you consider as parts of the advocacy for women in the Saudi context?
- What ideology or conceptual paradigms do Saudi women activists adopt?
- What are the motivations and objectives for Saudi women activists?
- What are the challenges that Saudi women’s activism faces?
Limitations and obstacles in the focus group discussions

The total number of focus group participants was lower than originally planned, with twenty two of the sixty who were invited to participate unable to make it. The time allotted for focus-group meetings did not allow for participants to include everything they wanted to contribute. Therefore, certain issues were discussed in a hurried manner compared to others. Discussions veered from the themes and had to be pulled back repeatedly. In analyzing the focus group recordings, findings and results it was not possible to determine any precise numbers or percentages for any given perspective. This was due to the tendency among participants to engage energetically with all issues, conduct overlapping conversations and for cross talking. An effort was made by the researchers to record the most frequently expressed ideas and opinions, rather than the precise answer of each participant to each question. Despite limitations, the attitudes, perceptions and tendencies of participants were mostly clear enough to record, even when unable to quantify.

Focus Group Questions on the Women’s Movement in Saudi Arabia

I. How would you define an activist in the field of Saudi women’s rights?

II. Do you consider a successful writer to be an active part of the Saudi Women’s Movement, and why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

III. Do you consider a successful academic to be an active part of the Saudi Women’s Movement, and why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

IV. Do you consider an activist to be a political reformist, and why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### APPENDIX I: METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V. What is the difference between the Women’s Movement and women’s activism?</th>
<th>Women’s Movement</th>
<th>Women’s Activism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VI. Do you consider the Saudi women who work for their rights a movement or activism?</td>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Is there a women’s movement beginning in Saudi Arabia?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. What activities can be categorized as Saudi women’s advocacy for their rights?</td>
<td>Social work through associations and other entities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demands for human rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scientific academic work and forums</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational work through civil organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational work through groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing and media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in the Shura Council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IX. What intellectual trends fuel women’s activism in Saudi Arabia?

- Development
- Proper Islamic Sharia
- Rights/humanitarian
- Reforms
- Political
- The feminist cause
- Islamic feminism
- A mixture of trends
- Uncertain

X. What motives fuel women’s activism in Saudi Arabia?

________________________________________________________________________________________

XI. Do you think the Saudi women’s activism is effective in improving the status of women?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes: What challenges does it face?</th>
<th>No: Does it face any obstacles or have any gaps?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

XII. What three elements could potentially contribute to an increase in the effectiveness of women’s social activism in Saudi Arabia?

Additional information you consider important
APPENDIX I: METHODOLOGY

INTERVIEWS
Samples of the descriptions of the interviewed activists, as stated by the media:

• An academic and human rights activist
• A social activist particularly interested in women’s issues and social development
• A specialized academic and writer who participated in the drafting of international reports on women’s rights in Saudi Arabia
• A Saudi blogger interested in Saudi affairs in general and in women’s rights in particular
• A human rights activist and member of a number of associations
• A professional woman interested in public affairs and in the women’s movement of the region
• A pioneer in the social work and feminist movements of the region
• An activist in the field of women’s empowerment and domestic violence prevention; also an opinion writer and blogger
• A Saudi academic and writer who is an activist in the campaigns for women’s right to drive
• A human rights activist who supports women’s rights
• A human rights activist who is interested in domestic violence and the Baladi campaign
• A writer and human rights activist
• A Saudi human rights activist
• A Saudi writer and women’s rights activist
• An activist who started the call for Saudi women to be allowed to practice law

Some interviews were not carried out for various reasons, although we contacted all known activists. We found it difficult to get interviews with a number of activists either for personal reasons or because they were out of the country in the summer of 2014. Some of the women who declined interviews apologized in advance without stating their reasons. We also contacted the members of the Shura Council who had played a role in the discussion of women driving at the level of the council, but we were unable to get their consent for an in-depth interview.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you define yourself?
   ○ Activist  ○ Leader  ○ Reformist  ○ Human Rights Activist  ○ Citizen  ○ Feminist

2. Explain your choice. ________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________
3. What motives made you participate in defending of women’s rights? Give an example.
   ○ Humanitarian ○ Political ○ Human rights ○ Development ○ Reform

4. Example: ________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

5. What intellectual resources do you rely on?
   ○ The theoretical perspective (human rights, women’s rights)
   ○ Personal experience
   ○ Set of values (moral, humanitarian, Islamic)
   ○ Audiovisual media.
   ○ Cultural activism.
   ○ Other.

6. Do you define yourself as a political activist?
   ○ Yes ○ No Why? _________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

7. On which level do you find support?
   ○ Familial (father, husband, mother, sister, etc.)
   ○ Social (friends, colleagues, people with the same interests)
   ○ Institutional (committees, organizations) □ internal □ external

8. Did you ever carry out, by yourself or with your group, any activities or programs pertaining to demands for women’s rights? ○ Yes ○ No
   Please mention them. __________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

9. Have you ever, by yourself or with your group, provided services pertaining to claims for women’s rights? ○ Yes ○ No
   Please mention them. __________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
10. What activities or programs do you believe have been more successful than others in advocating for women’s rights?  ○ Yes  ○ No
Please state why. ____________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

What methodologies were applied, and how?
○ Mobilization  ○ Support  ○ Advocacy  ○ Networking
○ Organization  ○ Facilitation  ○ Raising Awareness

11. What techniques were used in this activity?
○ Organized work  ○ Using technologies through social media
○ Building structures  ○ Building knowledge

12. What were the tools used during this activity?
○ Twitter  ○ Facebook  ○ WhatsApp  ○ Audiovisual tapes
○ Lectures  ○ Conferences  ○ Brochures and leaflets  ○ Other

13. Please state in detail the role you played in these activities.

14. What kinds of challenges did you face during the execution of these activities?
○ Administrative  ○ Political  ○ Social  ○ Psychological  ○ Other__________________

15. Do you rely in your work on knowledge of laws and regulations that support women’s rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Civil Status Code, and the Labor Code?  ○ Yes  ○ No  ○ Both  ○ Other__________________

16. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of women’s rights activism?

17. What priorities do you think should constitute a starting point for you collectively as an activist group?
SURVEY ON WOMEN’S ACTIVISM

General Questions Concerning Women’s Activism in Saudi Arabia, via Survey Monkey

1. Age:

2. Sex:  ○ male  ○ female

3. Occupation:  ○ civil employee  ○ private business  ○ unemployed  ○ student  ○ retired

4. Which of the following women’s issues do you consider as a priority?
   ○ The guardianship  ○ The chaperone  ○ Personal status  ○ Civil rights
   ○ The prevention of violence against women
   ○ Women’s right to give the Saudi nationality to her children and spouse
   ○ The right to drive a car

5. Which of the following activities can be categorized as a Saudi women’s movement?
   ○ The work of associations and social welfare societies
   ○ Human rights demands in the social media
   ○ Academic scientific work and scientific conferences/forums
   ○ Organizational work through institutions and formal bodies  ○ Writing and media
   ○ Work in the Shura Council  ○ Other

6. Do you think a women’s movement is beginning to appear in Saudi Arabia?  ○ Yes  ○ No

7. What intellectual orientations drive the women’s movement in Saudi Arabia?
   ○ The correct Islamic Sharia  ○ Developmental  ○ Reforms  ○ Political
   ○ Global Feminism  ○ Islamic Feminism  ○ Human Rights/ Humanitarian rights

8. Do you think the women’s movement in Saudi Arabia is effective in improving the status of women, and why? _________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

Stakeholder opinions and attitudes towards women’s activism in Saudi Arabia were explored through a survey utilizing the platform Survey Monkey. It was disseminated in the summer of 2014 via email, using contacts and mailing lists available to the researchers, online publishing and postings through social media platforms. The targeted outlets were considered liberal and included known groups on Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. The survey was tweeted by one of the researchers to her 6,600 followers. It was then seen 72,556 times and retweeted 1,289 times. Most respondents came from Twitter and the email list. Actual respondents did not exceed 400, of which 268 were women.
APPENDIX I: METHODOLOGY

TWITTER ANALYSIS

Quantitative
The methodology used to classify attitude and sentiment in the content of 1.8 million tweets was done by using a Machine Learning Model that utilizes human-labeled data as a training dataset and then uses that dataset to classify any given tweet. The classification used was Support - Against - Neutral. It operated as follows:

1. Collect the whole tweets of the period
2. Get random sample from the tweets collected
3. Random tweets reviewed by a human to determine what class it belongs to (labeling step)
4. Run the model
5. Model uses the tweets that are labeled by human to understand the factors (pattern and keywords sequence) that caused the tweet to be labeled with that class
6. After the model builds its knowledge and rules by running through all the labeled tweets, it starts to classify the unlabeled tweets

Qualitative
Since some members of the group were known, the researchers reached out to them and two focus groups were organized: February 23, 2017 in Riyadh, and October 2, 2017 also in Riyadh. The number of #Abolish-Guardianship activists who were willing to participate in the meetings did not exceed six, but that is not surprising since the majority of these accounts are anonymous and wish to remain so. The other group representing “#citizens, but” waited longer to respond to the researchers’ inquiries, but agreed to respond online to our questions without sacrificing their anonymity. These participants provided their responses in May of 2017 via telephone and WhatsApp.

The focus groups and the research questions concentrated on the following:

- When was the account/hashtag created?
- Who is administering the account (number of participants and their ages) and how do they engage and communicate?
- What are your objectives, strategies, and priorities?
- What is the substance of your message?
- Location in Saudi Arabia?
- When was your first tweet?
- Why Twitter and how do you evaluate Twitter’s influence and efficacy?
- What is your own story and do you know the stories of the others working with you?
## APPENDIX II: MAJOR CAMPAIGNS AND DEMANDS OF SAUDI ACTIVISTS, 1990-2015

### TABLE 7: MAJOR CAMPAIGNS AND DEMANDS BY SAUDI ACTIVISTS, 1990-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demands &amp; Campaigns</th>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Developments and Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Driving Cars, Nov. 6, 1990</td>
<td>• Collective claims</td>
<td>A letter was sent to the Governor of Riyadh demanding a lift on the ban on women driving. A rally composed of 47 women driving their cars in Riyadh for almost two hours. Participants were arrested and held in the police station for several hours and their male guardians were summoned. They had to sign pledges not to drive a car again.</td>
<td>Subjected to harassment including loss of their jobs (they were reinstated after two years through a royal pardon), a hate campaign and defamation of character through leaflets calling for their expulsion and punishment, and a ban on travel outside Saudi Arabia. A government decree was issued to ban women from driving cars and was based on a fatwa issued in Nov. 1990 by the Senior Cleric’s Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Identity Cards for Women, 2001</td>
<td>• Newspaper articles, Petitions on personal experiences</td>
<td>Women demanded the issuance of national identity cards for many years, to protect them from exploitation and fraud and to guard their legal rights.</td>
<td>Authorities in 2011 began issuing national identity cards for Saudi women, although it was not mandatory at the beginning and was dependent on the consent of women’s guardians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Safety Program, 2001</td>
<td>• Individual efforts by a small number of women activists, Regular meetings, Social studies and surveys, Petitions to decision makers and officials, Awareness campaigns</td>
<td>The idea of the Family Safety Program emerged as an initiative of a shadow group in 2000. The initiative was later adopted by HRH Princess Adilah who communicated the idea to her father, King Abdullah.</td>
<td>King Abdullah issued a Royal Decree establishing The National Family Safety Program in 2006. The decree called for linking the program administratively and organizationally to the Ministry of National Guard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Woman Forum, 2001</td>
<td>• Collective claims, Meetings</td>
<td>Twenty-four business women in the Eastern Province established the Business Women’s Group to demand equal rights under the Chambers of commerce.</td>
<td>The forum has been successful in attaining inclusion in the Chambers’ election, establishing centers for women businesses, and abolishing male legal representatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX II: MAJOR CAMPAIGNS AND DEMANDS OF SAUDI ACTIVISTS, 1990-2015

### TABLE 8: WEB BASED CAMPAIGNS AND DEMANDS, 1990-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demands &amp; Campaigns</th>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Developments &amp; Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Divorce Initiative, 2008</td>
<td>Website: <a href="http://www.saudidivorce.org">www.saudidivorce.org</a></td>
<td>The initiative was instigated by a woman demanding civil legal laws to end the suffering of divorced Saudi women.</td>
<td>It is believed that the establishment of Mawaddah Association, a charity association concerned with the affairs of divorced women in 2010, could be attributed to this initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Straps Campaign, 2009</td>
<td>Call to wear black wrist straps in support of Saudi women’s issues</td>
<td>Launched by a woman activist to commemorate the nineteenth anniversary of the 1990 women’s rally to drive in the streets of Riyadh.</td>
<td>The campaign was limited. The site was blocked by authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Coalition to Promote Saudi Women’s Status, 2009</td>
<td>Website: <a href="http://www.alyafarid.com/?p=918">http://www.alyafarid.com/?p=918</a></td>
<td>A web-based women’s association bearing the name of “National Feminist Harmony.”</td>
<td>The site is active.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence is Weakness Campaign, 2010</td>
<td>Facebook campaign</td>
<td>This campaign aims to protect Saudi women from all forms of violence, abuse and discrimination.</td>
<td>The site has been inactive since 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigns &amp; Demands</td>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Developments &amp; Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Abolition of Mandatory Legal Representative for Businesswomen Campaign, 2011 | • Petitions  
• Website  
• Facebook  
• Meetings [http://aawsat.com/details.asp?section=43&article=628367&issue no=11898](http://aawsat.com/details.asp?section=43&article=628367&issue no=11898) | This campaign was led by business women calling for the abolition of mandatory legal representatives for business women dealing with government departments. | The objective was achieved through pressuring the Ministry of Commerce to abolish the requirement. |
| Baladi Campaign, 2011 | • Petitions  
• Meetings  
• Training courses  
Website: [www.facebook.com/groups/baladi](http://www.facebook.com/groups/baladi) | A group of women representing all regions of the country organized this campaign. It aimed to achieve full and effective participation of Saudi women in municipal council elections through awareness and special training. | In the 2015 municipal elections, women were allowed as candidates and voters. |
| Women to Drive Campaign, 2011 | Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Women2DriveKSA/](http://www.facebook.com/Women2DriveKSA/) | An activist was subjected nine days' imprisonment after driving her car on public roads, videotaping the event, and uploading it on Facebook. Other women who drove their cars in support for the same demand were arrested and released after signing a pledge, with their guardians, agreeing not to repeat the action. | The site is still active. |
| My Right My Dignity, 2011 | • Facebook and Twitter  
• Website: [http://myright2dignity-news.blogspot.com/](http://myright2dignity-news.blogspot.com/) | A petition signed by more than 700 Saudis calling to revoke the lashing judgment issued against one of the women who drove in Jeddah. It represents a call for solidarity with Saudi women’s rights, including the right to drive. | The site is active and up to date. |
| October 26 Driving, 2013 | • Petitions  
• Meetings  
• Individual outings  
• Uploading videos of women drivers on campaign sites  
Facebook  
Website: [https://twitter.com/oct26drving”26](https://twitter.com/oct26drving”26)  
Website: [www.youtube.com/user/oct26drivinos](http://www.youtube.com/user/oct26drivinos) | The campaign started with an online invitation to express support through signatures, resulting in over 12,000 within a week. Women were then called on to drive their cars and record the event through video on October 26, 2013. | On September 30, 2013, it was reported that authorities blocked access to the campaign’s website. Following the campaign, numerous articles appeared in Saudi press in support of their demands. |
| Border Control, Nov. 30, 2014 | A social media figure drove her car, tweeting, and documenting her experience. | In support of the October driving campaign, Lujain drove toward the Emirates/Saudi border with a valid Emirate driver’s license. At Saudi passport control, she was denied entry into Saudi Arabia and was detained for 24 hours. Maysa al-Amoudi followed Lujain to support her and was also detained. | Both were charged with obstruction of the law and assaulting the country’s regulations and rulers. 73 days later, a judge stated the offense was out of the court’s jurisdiction and dismissed the case. They were released Feb. 12, 2015. |
## Table 10: Web Based Campaigns and Demands by Saudi Activists, 2011-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campaigns &amp; Demands</th>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Developments &amp; Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guardianship of Women, 2011</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>This campaign aims to define the issues of male guardianship for women.</td>
<td>The site is not active.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work is a Worship, 2011</td>
<td>YouTube: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/">www.youtube.com/</a> watch?v=dENm</td>
<td>This campaign aims to support the work of female cashiers in retail stores.</td>
<td>The campaign lasted for one month (Jan. 17 to Feb. 17). The site currently contains various newspaper articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Woman, 2011</td>
<td>Website: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/groups/">www.facebook.com/groups/</a> saudiwomen</td>
<td>This forum was established to initiate a dialogue on challenges and opportunities facing Saudi women.</td>
<td>The site is still active and updated with published materials concerning Saudi women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Will Drive My Car Myself, June 2012</td>
<td>• YouTube: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/">www.youtube.com/</a> watch?v=gZfw1_aqsaA • Petitions • Websites: <a href="http://drivingksa.blogspot.com/2011_06_24_archive.html">http://drivingksa.blogspot.com/2011_06_24_archive.html</a> • Facebook: <a href="https://arar.facebook.com">https://arar.facebook.com</a> • Twitter</td>
<td>The campaign aimed to grant all women permission to drive. It could be considered an extension of My Right My Dignity.</td>
<td>The site is active and updated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Women Married to Foreigners, 2012</td>
<td>• Newspaper articles • Statistics • Studies • Petitions • Website: <a href="http://www.saudisons.com">www.saudisons.com</a></td>
<td>This campaign aimed to provide family stability to Saudi women married to non-Saudis and to grant their children Saudi citizenship.</td>
<td>The site is active and up to date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Um Salma, 2012</td>
<td>• Facebook group • Monthly meetings to share developments on women issues</td>
<td>Established by a group of activists from the major cities of Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam, their aim is to promote women’s empowerment through conducting research and studies on women’s rights in Islam and creating a public awareness campaign of these rights.</td>
<td>The site is no longer active.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX III: TWITTERS ACCOUNTS ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND AG

#### TABLE 11: KNOWN ACTIVISTS IN SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND THE COMMUNITY HAVING 30K+ FOLLOWERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Twitter Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manal al-Sharif</td>
<td>312K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/manal_alsharif">https://twitter.com/manal_alsharif</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loujain al-Hathlol</td>
<td>303K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/LoujainHathloul@LoujainHathloul">https://twitter.com/LoujainHathloul@LoujainHathloul</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Souaad al-Shammary</td>
<td>224K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/SouadALshammary">https://twitter.com/SouadALshammary</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maysaa al-Amoudi</td>
<td>205K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/maysaaXM">https://twitter.com/maysaaXM</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hala al-Dosari</td>
<td>52.1K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Hala_Aldosari">https://twitter.com/Hala_Aldosari</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatoon al-Fassi</td>
<td>42.9K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/HatoonALFASSI">https://twitter.com/HatoonALFASSI</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aziza al-Yosef</td>
<td>39.8K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/azizayousef">https://twitter.com/azizayousef</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eman al-Nafjan</td>
<td>37.8K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Saudiwoman">https://twitter.com/Saudiwoman</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamador al-Yami</td>
<td>35.8K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/TamadorAlyami">https://twitter.com/TamadorAlyami</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamsa Sonosi</td>
<td>31.9K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/hamssonosi">https://twitter.com/hamssonosi</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 1285.3K

#### TABLE 12: AG ACTIVISTS NOT WIDELY KNOWN IN COMMUNITY WITH 30K+ FOLLOWERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Twitter Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khulod al-Fahad</td>
<td>78.5K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/khulods">https://twitter.com/khulods</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raghad Abdulaziz</td>
<td>72.4K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Haunted2012">https://twitter.com/Haunted2012</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariam al-Otaibi</td>
<td>44.2K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/MERiAM_AL3TEEBE">https://twitter.com/MERiAM_AL3TEEBE</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nouf</td>
<td>41.7K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/nouf_ahm">https://twitter.com/nouf_ahm</a>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alanoud al-Tamimi</td>
<td>39.7K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/nbaa2t">https://twitter.com/nbaa2t</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taleen</td>
<td>33.1K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/SECULARSH">https://twitter.com/SECULARSH</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folathya</td>
<td>30.5K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/zooztox">https://twitter.com/zooztox</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 340.1K
### APPENDIX III: TWITTERS ACCOUNTS ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND AG

#### TABLE 13: PUBLIC FEMALE FIGURES SUPPORTING WOMEN’S RIGHTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Brief Background</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Twitter Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Badriah al-Besher</td>
<td>Writer, novelist, TV presenter</td>
<td>519K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/badriahalb">https://twitter.com/badriahalb</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona Abuslaiman</td>
<td>Strategic Development Adviser</td>
<td>502.1k</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/abusulaym">https://twitter.com/abusulaym</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latifah al-Shaalan</td>
<td>Associate Professor of Psychology, Member of Shura Council, Writer</td>
<td>74.8K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/LatifahAsha">https://twitter.com/LatifahAsha</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thuraya E. al-Arrayed</td>
<td>Saudi Arabian Poet, Columnist, LR Planning</td>
<td>55.2K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/ThurayaArr">https://twitter.com/ThurayaArr</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fawziah al-Bakr</td>
<td>Faculty of Edu. at KSU, Writer, Woman Activist (one of the 47 drivers in 1990)</td>
<td>31.1K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/fawziah">https://twitter.com/fawziah</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahid Bahashata</td>
<td>Saudi journalist, PhD. in media from University of Salford</td>
<td>30.1K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/NahidBash">https://twitter.com/NahidBash</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 1,212,200

#### TABLE 14: ACCOUNTS ASSOCIATED WITH CAMPAIGNS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accounts Supporting AG</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Twitter Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The official account for promoting women’s rights and AG in Saudi Arabia.</td>
<td>14.5k</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/FreeKsaWomen">https://twitter.com/FreeKsaWomen</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens, But: An account that summarizes the suffering of Saudi women and focuses on AG.</td>
<td>14.2k</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/CitizensBut">https://twitter.com/CitizensBut</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alamal: An independent electronic newspaper concerned with Saudi women’s issues.</td>
<td>8.7k</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/alamal_news">https://twitter.com/alamal_news</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know Your Rights: A computer app designed by Nisreen Alissa, a lawyer, to help women identify their rights.</td>
<td>5.1K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/knowyourrightsa">https://twitter.com/knowyourrightsa</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am My Own Guardian Initiative: A voluntary initiative that seeks to organize joint action to AG.</td>
<td>2.3K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.co/endguardianship">https://twitter.co/endguardianship</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 44.8K
### Table 15: Anonymous AG Activist Twitter Accounts (800 - 24.6k Followers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Twitter Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anon: Stop Enslaving Saudi Women #AG</td>
<td>24.6K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/dontcarebut">https://twitter.com/dontcarebut</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>21.5k</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/mune90a">https://twitter.com/mune90a</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama Queen #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>20.9K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/MADRY">https://twitter.com/MADRY</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reem .oj: trying to make our voices heard\feminist #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>19.6k</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/reem020533?lang=ar">https://twitter.com/reem020533?lang=ar</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layla: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>19.4K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/ayya_86">https://twitter.com/ayya_86</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatema: #Stop Enslaving Saudi Women</td>
<td>19.4K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/50BM">https://twitter.com/50BM</a>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>16.9K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/_D__1">https://twitter.com/_D__1</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandari: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>14.3K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/b_b12331">https://twitter.com/b_b12331</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meilad: A free creature with no sins, apart from humanity belonging to nothing #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>12.7K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/melad_sa">https://twitter.com/melad_sa</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alazzee: Extremist for freedom, fanatic for equality #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>11.8K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/TheRubyy">https://twitter.com/TheRubyy</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairuz: No value for an individual who does not own self</td>
<td>11.5K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/F1__ZZ">https://twitter.com/F1__ZZ</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eager may God give her: This world is boring as an obedient girl, all women’s pain is mine Tawaquh allah yughniha #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>7.628K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/n00ly">https://twitter.com/n00ly</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afooo: I’m not the person I used to be, I admit lots of things got to me. I am for right wherever and whenever #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>5.481K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/afaf_rashed1">https://twitter.com/afaf_rashed1</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Saffaa: Artist &amp; Agent of Change</td>
<td>Creator of the #I Am My Own Guardian</td>
<td>5.217K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violated: No to guardianship</td>
<td>5.637K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Mo3nafh1">https://twitter.com/Mo3nafh1</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alessantt: #AG</td>
<td>5.092K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/alesenttt">https://twitter.com/alesenttt</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No to Guardianship: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>3.728K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Afeminist">https://twitter.com/Afeminist</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amani: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>3.464K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/1990amani">https://twitter.com/1990amani</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashael: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>2.705K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Mashael19811">https://twitter.com/Mashael19811</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurrah85: Free85No to Guardianship#</td>
<td>1.341</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/hurrah85">https://twitter.com/hurrah85</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No to AG</td>
<td>1.292</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Cif_04">https://twitter.com/Cif_04</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#Stop Guardianship</td>
<td>1.268</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/noona_2080">https://twitter.com/noona_2080</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasha: #it will fall. No to Guardianship</td>
<td>1.158</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/4ilililil">https://twitter.com/4ilililil</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#AG</td>
<td>1.156</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/m000nz6">https://twitter.com/m000nz6</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Bint Abdullah: My ambition will never stop #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>1.154K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/shkawee">https://twitter.com/shkawee</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay: #AG</td>
<td>1.151K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/toxicjayce1?lang=ar">https://twitter.com/toxicjayce1?lang=ar</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free spirit: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>1.102K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/limi35">https://twitter.com/limi35</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX III: TWITTER ACCOUNTS
ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND AG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account Brief Background</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Twitter Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Umaima al-Khamis Writer and novelist</td>
<td>19.9K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/omaimakhamis">https://twitter.com/omaimakhamis</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suhailah Zain Alabidin Member of Saudi Human Rights Organization, writer</td>
<td>18K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/suhaila_hammad">https://twitter.com/suhaila_hammad</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasimah al-Sadah Human rights activist</td>
<td>16K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/nasema33">https://twitter.com/nasema33</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasha al-Duaisi Activist</td>
<td>13K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Rsha_D">https://twitter.com/Rsha_D</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fawzia Abo Khalid An academic specializing in political sociology and sociology of knowledge, poet, writer</td>
<td>10K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/FAbukhalid">https://twitter.com/FAbukhalid</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iman al-Usaimi Human rights activist</td>
<td>11K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Eman_Osaimi">https://twitter.com/Eman_Osaimi</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahar Nasif Jeddawiya and Ittawiya don’t really know why God is used for evil purposes promoting hate and violence</td>
<td>8.6K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Da7eyatAlmjtm53">https://twitter.com/Da7eyatAlmjtm53</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisha al-Mana Activist and educator</td>
<td>6.2K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/aalmmana">https://twitter.com/aalmmana</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walaa al-Shiber Activist, I am a free woman and not awra (forbidden body part)</td>
<td>3.4K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/search?q=">https://twitter.com/search?q=</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora al-Ghanim Activist</td>
<td>2K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/NourahAlghanem">https://twitter.com/NourahAlghanem</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 108.11K

TABLE 16: WOMEN’S ACCOUNTS WITH FOLLOWERS FROM 2K TO 19K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account Brief Background</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Twitter Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>1.100k</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/omomar159">https://twitter.com/omomar159</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asma: I am not a minor to need a guardian. Soon I will be responsible for myself</td>
<td>1.067k</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/oeioi00">https://twitter.com/oeioi00</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jojo: we call for AG because it is a right #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>1.011K</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/NkcNdd">https://twitter.com/NkcNdd</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fai: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>995</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/fai99989">https://twitter.com/fai99989</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No to Guardianship: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>960</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/Be99">https://twitter.com/Be99</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viva: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>843</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/veva_330">https://twitter.com/veva_330</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhf: #Saudi women for AG</td>
<td>835</td>
<td><a href="https://twitter.com/rhf_1r">https://twitter.com/rhf_1r</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 177.717k
A VOICE UNSILENCED:
Saudi Women Advocating Their Rights, 1990-2017

By: Monera Al Nahedh and Hessah Al Sheikh