Saudi Women

Behind the Wheels

Why the Saudi Government Lifted the Driving Ban on Women

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Abstract

This paper discusses why the Saudi government lifted the driving ban on women. Through the framework of social constructivism the paper examines three factors that could drive the government: campaigns against the ban, and Saudi Arabia’s economic, and international situation. The hypothesis is that the first two factors were not sufficient conditions in the process, but the economic situation created a window of opportunity. The methodology is the review of the literature and media news coverage, an interview with an expert, and the analysis of Saudi citizens’ manifestations on social media. The study concludes that the campaigns and the foreign policy were not sufficient conditions, but the economic situation of Saudi Arabia led to the policy change.

Keywords: Human rights, norms, social constructivism

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1. Introduction

The volume of discrimination and oppression against women in Saudi Arabia is unique even within the Middle East. Many of women’s rights that Western societies consider as basic human rights are limited. Among others, they cannot travel or dress freely, they cannot have credit cards, in some cases they cannot even decide on their own whether to receive a major medical intervention (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Most of these oppressing restrictions on women’s rights derive from the strongly embedded social customs such as the male guardianship system or the gender segregation (Human Rights Watch, 2008). In Saudi Arabia, up until recently, women were not allowed to drive. The government announced the elimination of the ban this September and will execute the decision next June (Hubbard, 2017).

The research question in this paper is that what factors drove the conservative Saudi government to eliminate the driving ban against women. In this research paper, I am looking for an explanation on why such a conservative state decides to make a liberal step that does not fit into its structure and identity. In the first part of the paper, I will introduce the theoretical framework in which I will analyze the case. Then, I am going to examine three different factors that could play an important role in the process. Firstly, I am going to study the campaigns organized by Saudi women, the successes they achieved, and whether this could lead to a policy change. I will also introduce the country’s international situation and whether its foreign policy goals could be affected by the ban’s existence. Next, I will analyze the country’s economic situation, and how it might affect the decision making. I have chosen these three factors to examine for two main reasons. On one hand, the theoretical framework, and especially the definition of international norm diffusion suggests these factors as examples that in general can drive a state to adopt certain norms. On the other hand, the literature I have used as my resources mention these three factors as important elements of the process that has lead to the policy change.

My hypothesis is that even though the first two factors, the campaigns, and the foreign affairs played an important role in the process and were necessary elements of this operation, they were not sufficient conditions. I believe that the country’s economic situation provided a window of opportunity for this case, and eventually lead to the elimination of the ban.

In my paper, I will examine the Saudi society’s attitude and reaction to the ban’s elimination and the campaigns through their posts on social media. Lastly, I will show the limits of my research.
2. Theoretical framework

I am going to use constructivism as my theoretical framework to show the way how ideas become norms and how they spread internationally as other countries implement them over time. I will mostly refer to Michael Barnett’s chapter of constructivism in John Baylis’ book of International Relations Theories (2014). Constructivism is a social theory, not a substantive International Relations theory. And thus, as a social theory, it studies the relationship between agents and structures, for instance, it examines the situation of a state in world politics (Barnett, 2014). Constructivism studies the role of human consciousness in international politics (Ruggie, 1998 p. 856, cited by Barnett, 2014 p. 158). The core of constructivism is idealism which states that the world is composed of material and ideational factors.

The ideational factors are constructed by society, which means they can be shaped and altered by the collectively held ideas, such as the language or symbols, and this indicates that they are dependent on common human agreement. On the other hand, material factors are the so-called brute facts, which are independent of common human agreement. In contrast to the mainstream International Relations theories like realism or liberalism, constructivists state that the identities of states are not immutable. Moreover, ideas and the knowledge of people have the ability to shape and construct these identities (Barnett, 2014). According to constructivism, states are willing to create or adopt norms in order to regulate their behavior if this will bring benefits to the state. An example of this phenomenon is „institutional isomorphism” (Barnett, 2014, p. 163), which means that states tend to act in similar ways because they seek acceptance or a status. Norms are the attributes of the appropriate behavior related to a certain activity for actors given a certain type of identity. Since norms are ideational factors, which means they are constructed by society, they are not immutable.

Finnemore and Sikkink’s theory explains that norms and normative rules are not static, and how they evolve over time. People make attempts to change norms and rules so that they can shape the identities of states. For example, Wendt (1992, cited by Barnett, 2014, p. 159) states that „Anarchy is what states make of it”, which means that different approaches and understandings of anarchy and thus any definition of an ideational factor can result in different behaviors and actions.

2.1 Life cycle of norms

Finnemore and Sikkink’s theory (1998 pp. 894-905, cited by Barnett, 2014, p. 165), „the life cycle of norms” states that there are three main stages in the process of how norms are created.
The first stage is called „norm emergence”, through which the so-called norm entrepreneur, the person who came up with a new idea tries to convince a critical mass about the validity of their idea, and thus make it a norm. Using language, they can name the new norm, and thus they can interpret it so that the broader public can process and understand it easily. The last phase of the norm emergence is institutionalization, which means that the norm must be adopted by an organization or an institution of the given community.

The second stage of the life cycle of norms is the „norm cascade”, during which the certain state where the norm emerged tries to convince other states to become followers of the norm. States tend to adopt norms for several reasons, for example, in order to earn legitimacy, another reason can be the desire to obtain conformity. According to the constructivists, the so-called cumulative effect can also drive states to adopt certain norms. The latter phenomenon occurs when many countries on a given region adopt the same norm, and thus they put pressure on the rest of the states in the region to do the same thing. According to constructivists, seeking legitimacy is a typical behavior of states and actors of international politics. This is also called the „logic of appropriateness” (Barnett, 2014, p. 159) when actors follow rules and norms because they worry about the legitimacy of their actions and behavior.

The last stage is called the norm internalization. In this phase, the norm obtains a quality of being taken for granted, and people no longer question its validity. According to Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, pp. 894-905, cited by Barnett, 2014, p. 165), the norm entrepreneurs play a significant role in the first two phases of the life cycle of a norm. But as a norm becomes stronger over time, their role declines. As a norm obtains this quality, other communities and states tend to adopt them.

2.2 Norm diffusion

The way norms spread across countries and different communities is called norm diffusion. The basic assumption behind diffusion is that states act in similar ways, and adopt the same norms because they seek acceptance and legitimacy. This indicates that states are willing to adopt certain norms, even if they do not believe in it or in its righteousness, they just simply benefit from its adaptation. According to Finnemore and Sikkink’s theory (1998, cited by Barnett, 2014, p. 163), we can distinguish between five forms of norm diffusion. The first one is called coercion, when countries adopt certain norms following dominant states, like in the case of colonialism. In the second case, states adopt norms similar to those countries they are competing with so that they can be or stay even on the battlefield, or in economic terms. This form is called
strategic competition. Another form is when countries face a need for certain resources, and adopting a given norm facilitates obtaining them, or its adaptation will bring other benefits for the country, such as a certain status. This process is called formal or informal pressure. When a state faces some kind of difficulty and is uncertain about how it could solve it, it tends to follow a method or a technique another state has already applied, and that was it proved to be successful. This is called uncertainty. The last form of diffusion is called symbolic standing, when the adaptation of the norm functions as a status symbol for the states.

In the case of the elimination of the driving ban against women in the Saudi Arabia we can interpret the definitions of constructivism to describe what is happening. Women protesting and organizing movements against the ban represent the norm entrepreneurs who play a significant role in the process of norm diffusion. The Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman also acts as a norm entrepreneur in this situation. The literature I have reviewed during my research mentions three different approaches to the question. These are the approach which examines the protests organized by Saudi women, the one that studies the country’s foreign affairs, and the third analyzes the situation of the Saudi economy. These three factors can be correspondent to reasons mentioned to be possible driving factors of international norm diffusion: The economic situation of the country represents the state of uncertainty, the foreign affairs shows the situation in which a country considers adopting a norm only to gain legitimacy and acceptance. The campaigns and the protests also indicate a state of uncertainty, since these create domestic pressure towards the government. Human rights are norms, which means they are socially constructed, ideational factors. This indicates that the way these norms shape the behavior of different cultures and societies differs according to the different interpretations. This explains why different cultures have very different understandings of what „human rights” mean. In this specific case, the norm is women’s right to drive, the state which adopts the norm is the Saudi Kingdom.

3. Women’s rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In this section, I will describe the situation of women in the Saudi Kingdom, the way they are treated legally and their position in the Saudi society. Women in Saudi Arabia are treated as legal minors by the authorities, they have little or no authority over themselves (Human Rights Watch, 2008), and face several limitations on their rights (Doumato, 2010, cited by Al-bakr et.al., 2017 p. 56) - on rights that Western societies consider as unquestionable „basic human rights”. Saudi Arabia’s strict, rigid and ultraconservative structure is unique, even within the
Muslim majority countries (Berger, 2010; Tønnessen, 2016, cited by Al-bakr et.al., 2017, p. 55). This is especially true for the strict gender segregation that restrains women from participating in the labor market and creates an obstacle in practicing their rights in public life (Berger, 2010; Tønnessen, 2016, cited by Al-bakr et al, 2017, p. 55). The gender segregation system forbids the „Khulwa”, which is the mixing of women and men who are not related (Berger, 2011, Tønnessen, 2016, cited by Al-bakr et al, 2017, p. 55). For example, in 2005, in the first municipal elections, women were not able to vote, because there were no suitable facilities that would provide a possibility for women to vote separately from men (Doumato, 2010, cited by Al-bakr et al, 2017, p. 56). They were also prohibited from standing during the elections (Prados and Blanchand, 2007, cited by Al-bakr et al, 2017, p. 56).

The rights of women in Saudi Arabia are limited in many other fields. Even though there is a significant advance in females’ school enrollment in the country, women still have to struggle with discrimination in the education system, and they lack the ability to choose their studies freely (Al-Fassi, 2010, cited by Al-bakr et al, 2017, p. 54). Owing to the gender segregation, women only have access to inferior educational facilities, and thus they have unequal opportunities in academic life, because, according to Ertürk (2009, cited by Al-bakr et al, 2017, p. 54), males are given the priority in terms of resources and the access to educational facilities and possibilities.

Some studies show, that the sex-segregation derives from the country’s interpretation of Islam (Meijer, 2010; Doumato, 2010, cited by Tønnessen 2016 p. 6). The study also states that sex-segregation is not a traditional factor, rather, it derives from the process of the oil-boom, urbanization and conservative religious discourses (Al-Khateeb 2007, van Geel 2012, cited by Tønnessen, 2016, p. 6). That is why rural societies do experience gender mixing. Tønnessen (2016) also points out that the driving ban itself is not a societal ban either, it is the aftermath of urbanization.

In her study, Tønnessen (2016) explains that in the 1980’s, as the oil-boom reshaped the Saudi economy the employment opportunities for men increased, and thus their salaries did too. Thus, women’s salary was no longer necessary to maintain the households. As a result, women staying home turned into a symbol representing wealth and moral distinction (van Geel, 2012 cited by Tønnessen, 2016, p. 6).

If we consider this issue from the point of view of the Saudi government, the creation of “only women” places is not a conservative act, rather it is elaboration which facilitates women’s
participation in public life and education (Tønnessen, 2016). Similar reforms have been made in terms of women’s rights such as the recognition of their right to vote, the Consultative Council even introduced a 20% quota for female participation (Tønnessen, 2016, p. 7), but these initiatives were all done within the paradigm of gender segregation (Tønnessen, 2016).

In the past decades, many job opportunities have opened up for women, and their entrance into teaching positions is deriving from the gender segregation system itself, since women-only schools needed female teachers (Tønnessen, 2016). Recently engineering positions became available for women too (De-Long Bas, 2009, cited by Tønnessen, 2016, p. 7).

Suzy D’Enbeau (2015) analyzed the role of religion and the Quran in terms of the sex-segregation and male guardianship and the different interpretations of gender roles and differences in terms of work environment by Muslim women. According to D’Enbeau (2015) religion and the patriarchy predestinates women’s role as homemakers and mothers. In her study, in which women and men from the Middle East and North Africa region, especially Saudi Arabia were interviewed, D’Enbeau (2015) introduced different understandings of the relationship and difference between males and females: some considers the „different but complementary roles” in the workplace as the norm (Metcalfe, 2009; D’Enbeau, 2015, p. 276), while others think women should take the central role of the family. D’Enbeau (2015) also emphasized that Islam is a decisive part of people’s identity in the MENA region, and even though many Muslim societies oppose to the patriarchy, the interpretation of Islam is the factor that defines women inferior to men.

A verse from the Quran was explained as man and women are biologically different both in terms of physical and mental capabilities (Tønnessen, 2016). According to Islamic feminists, this is a misinterpretation that has been providing virtual authority for men over women for decades.

The study of D’Enbeau showed that there exists a separate-but-equal mentality in terms of workplace, and occupational segregation between men and women is the norm in most of the places. In the meantime, many people consider the relationship between men and women as complementary in terms of the home, family, and religion as well, since a man and women are not complete without each other. According to this mentality, it is important for the religion that women obey their husbands and provide them a good environment in their home (D’Enbeau, 2015).
Another social factor that does not let women practice their rights is the so-called Wilaya, the Male Guardianship System (Human Rights Watch, 2008, p. 1). The Wilaya forbids women from traveling abroad, accept governmental scholarships to study abroad, obtain a passport, to get major medical procedures, and several other activities without the permission of a „Wali al-amr” (male guardian, usually the father or the husband). According to Human Rights Watch (2008), these discriminative regulations, the segregation, and the guardianship system are implemented by the social customs and not by the law. Moreover, the government’s policy concerning these factors is not unambiguous. Despite the fact that these restrictions are not clearly implemented by the law, the government plays a central role in their enforcement (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Even though the policies are not clear regarding neither the guardianship system nor the gender segregation, some people stick to them, and they require to get a male’s permission for women, even when it is not necessary (Human Rights Watch, 2008). According to Bager (2013), some Saudi women still believe that they have to get a permission if they want to travel abroad. Bager (2013) also states that one of the factors that support these social customs is the patriarchal way religious texts are interpreted. According to Human Rights Watch (2008), the male guardianship system itself origins from the interpretation of an obscure quotation of the Quran: „Men are protectors and maintainers of women because God has given the one more [strength] than the other and because they support them from their means.” (Human Rights Watch, 2008, p. 10). The interpretation of the Quran is crucial, since jurisdiction system of the country is based on the Quran and the Sunna, which together create the constitution of the state as well (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Islamic law experts tried to give rationality to the male guardianship system analyzing the Quran, but according to scholars, the two basic reasons the Quran quotation refers to are no longer valid, since in the twenty-first century physical strength is no longer a determining factor, and women are capable of maintaining themselves financially as well. Thus, there is no longer need for male guardianship (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

3.1 The driving ban against females

The study focuses on one specific oppressing limitation on women’s rights, which is the ban on driving. According to Huda Mohsin Alsahi (2017), it does not simply forbid women from driving but limits the mobility of women, which means an obstacle in several fields of their everyday life, for example, it prevents them from participating in the labor market. It has become an international symbol for the oppression of women in the kingdom (Hubbard, 2017). Since women are not allowed to drive, they had to hire professional drivers to take them to
work and help them take the kids to school. This solution is not affordable to everyone, and even if some women choose to live by this possibility, the cost of the driver will consume a significant part of their salary (Mohsin Alsahi, 2017). Another problem is that public transport does not offer a perfect alternative either (Bager, 2013). This often leads to women being stuck at home and not being able to attend work or fulfill their duties, and also it leads to children not being able to attend school if their male relatives are not around to drive them (Bager, 2013). People who argue in favor of the driving ban state that driving can pose danger for women, especially on their ovaries, and thus women driving are putting their fertility at stake (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

The Saudi government announced to lift the ban on women driving in September 2017. The order will be officially implemented in June next year (BBC News, 2017). The step of the government proposes several questions. It is hard to adjust the elimination of the ban with the uniquely strict, rigid and conservative system of the Saudi state and society. The way people in Saudi Arabia adjudicate women and the way the Wilaya (the Male guardianship system) and the gender segregation system is embedded into society is in incongruity with this liberal and democratic act of the government. What could motivate the ultra-conservative Saudi government to make this step? There are several factors that could have led to the elimination of the ban. Based on my research, I found that there are three major factors that had a fundamental role in this process. For one, Saudi women have been protesting against it ever since the 1990’s, which by itself could not manage to make a policy change but created a significant internal pressure towards the government. The country’s international reputation could also be improved by the elimination of the ban. The Saudi economy’s situation and the need for reforms was a window of opportunity for Saudi women that eventually did lead to policy change.

4. Campaigns against the driving ban

In this section I will introduce the movements against the driving ban organized by Saudi women, specifically the Women2Drive campaign. Ever since the 1990’s, women in Saudi Arabia protested against the ban on driving. In the first movement which took place in the early 1990’s, 47 women drove in the capital of Riyadh to express their resistance against the regulation (Mohsin Alsahi, 2017). Another campaign against the ban on females driving called Women2Drive is the most well organized and most successful campaign by women that ever took place in the country (Mohsin Alsahi, 2017). The movement is almost entirely social media
driven, it is present on Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. The campaign started in 2011 as part of the Right2Dignity movement which protests against all forms of discrimination against women in Saudi Arabia (Mohsin Alsahi, 2016).

4.1 Women2Drive and the role of internet and social media

The Women2Drive movement tried to encourage women to drive on their own, by the activists filming themselves as they drove and uploading the videos in different social media websites. So did Manal AL-Sharif, the activist who started the campaign who was then arrested for driving. But her video went viral and reached thousands even outside the country, a social media post on her arrest received 30 000 comments in only one day (Cummins, 2015 p. 119). She managed to attract significant media attention to the movement, the ban itself and the oppression of women (Mohsin Alsahi, 2016). Owing to the international pressure, Manal Al-Sharif was finally released. In 2013, members of the movement started an online petition, to encourage women to drive on their own (Casey, 2013, cited by Mohsin Alsahi, 2016). Videos and photos of women driving in the country were uploaded to social media websites by the supporters of the movement. According to Huda Mohsin Alsahi (2017), even though the ban on women was not lifted for several years, and the government sometimes responded with even stricter regulations (Almahmoud, 2015), the movement was successful in the sense that it managed to make many people in Saudi Arabia question the validity of the ban, it also succeeded in getting the recognition of the international audience (Mohsin Alsahi, 2017), and it put the question of the driving ban on the international agenda. The role of media in the process is without a doubt important. One of the reasons why the Women2Drive campaign earned such enormous media attention is the high level of internet penetration in Saudi Arabia and the increasing usage of social media websites (Mohsin Alsahi, 2016).
The first figure shows how the number of internet users in millions has been growing over the past few years.

Even though the campaign against the driving ban was a significant push factor in the process that has eventually lead to the ban’s elimination, it was not a sufficient condition, by itself it did not lead to policy change. The government’s response to the campaigns was the even more strict enforcement of the ban. According to Barakat (2016), even persistent efforts through
social media sites are not enough to change such institutional systems that have been immutable for decades. The country’s economic situation played a crucial role in this process.

5. The Economy of Saudi Arabia

In this section, I will talk about the situation of the Saudi economy, the challenges it faces and how the attempts by the Saudi government towards the diversification of the economy are related to the expansion of women’s rights.

The economy of Saudi Arabia is heavily dependent on oil and oil-based industries (Al-Darwish et al., 2015). During the oil age the country benefited from the export of the natural resource, but since 2014, as the price of oil has been dropping (Statista, 2017), the country faces serious challenges in terms of economic growth.

Oil was discovered in 1938 in Saudi Arabia, and ever since, the country has became the world’s largest petroleum exporter and producer (Nurunnabi, 2017). It also holds the world’s largest crude oil reserve, which takes up to 16% of the world’s total oil reserves (Nurunnabi, 2017, p. 541). In 2003 Saudi Arabia provided 12.8% of the world’s total oil output, and in 2015 it was the second largest petroleum and other liquid producer in the entire world after the United States (Nurunnabi, 2017, P. 541). Oil provided 80% of the country’s export revenue, and 90% of the country’s fiscal revenue (Al-Darwish et al., 2015, p. 1).

By 2013, the price of crude oil was almost four times as high as compared to the prices in 2003 (Mckinsey, 2015, p. 19). This was the second oil boom that the world has experienced in only three decades (McKinsey, 2015). The rapid growth in the price of crude oil had many positive effects on the country’s welfare: the average annual GDP growth rate between 2003 and 2013 was 6% (McKinsey, 2015, p. 19), and Saudi Arabia became the 19th largest economy in the world, as compared to the 27th spot in 2003 (McKinsey, 2015, p. 19.). Owing to the rapid increase in oil prices the household income in the country raised by 75%, which derives from different social transfers such as pensions, student stipends and unemployment benefits (McKinsey, 2015, p. 22). In the meantime life expectancy also increased by 7 years (McKinsey, 2015, p. 22.) During the oil boom the country’s debt decreased from 94% of the GDP in 2003 to only 3% of the GDP in 2013 (McKinsey, 2015, p. 27), and the government deficit rate of 5% shifted to an 11% government surplus (McKinsey, 2015, p. 27).
5.1 The Oil Price Shock

Even though the country experienced inimitable prosperity and development in the past decades, it faces serious challenges owing to its economy’s dependence on oil. According to McKinsey Global Institute (2015), this growth model is not sustainable in the long run. Ever since 2014, the price of crude oil has been dropping at a high pace (Statista, 2017). The fall in oil prices indicated immediate negative effects on the country’s fiscal and external balances (Al-Darwish et al, 2015).

![Average annual OPEC crude oil price 2013-2016](image)

3. Figure: Average Annual OPEC Crude Oil Price 2013-2016 (made by the author, data source: Statista, 2017)

The reason behind the significant fall in oil prices can be traced back to several different factors. The situation of other large oil producer countries, such as Iraq makes the supply uncertain (Al-Darwish, 2015). On the other hand, the United States exceeded expectations in terms of crude oil production and became the third largest oil producer in the world after Saudi Arabia and Russia (Resnick-Ault, 2018). Now Saudi Arabia remains the first largest oil-producing country, taking up to 13,4% of the world's total oil output, followed by Russia with 12,6%, and the United States with 12,4% (Statista, 2016). The output of the United States is expected to grow even higher in the coming years (Resnick-Ault, 2018). The price of oil also depends on the production capacity of other OPEC countries and non-OPEC oil producers such as Canada or Brazil. Thus even though the demand for petroleum is increasing, there are significant uncertainties in terms of the supply (Al-Darwish et al, 2015).

Despite the uncertainties, the supply is expected to exceed demands by 1,4 mbd by 2019, and this tendency will maintain the downward pressure on oil prices (Al-Darwish, 2015, p. 13).

The drop in oil prices poses serious threats concerning the Saudi economy. It also creates a political challenge. The main question is, how can the country manage its economy’s
dependence on oil revenues, and how to isolate the economy from the volatility of the global oil market (Al-Darwish, 2015).

The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia launched an economic plan in 2016, the so-called „Saudi Vision 2030”, which contains several economic and social reforms aiming to ease the economy’s dependence on oil (The Economist 2017). The plan is based on three main aspects: first, the fact that Saudi Arabia possesses Mecca and Medina, second, the country’s geographical centrality to world commerce, And last but not least, the planned IPO of Aramco, which is the world’s largest oil producer company (Cole, 2016).

According to Juan Cole (2016), these aspects will not provide as much revenue and stability as Saudi Vision 2030 makes it appear. First of all, the possession of Medina and Mecca will not bring the expected revenues, since the religious police and the alcohol ban makes the country an unattractive destination for many tourists. Religious tourism still exists, but it takes up to only 3% of the GDP and is expected to remain small (Cole, 2016).

The Vision 2030 refers to the country’s geographical location as a major source of future revenues, because it states, that around 30% of global trade goes through this region. But according to Cole (2016:9), that this is an exaggeration, and this number is at most 10%.

Cole (2016) points out, that since Saudi Arabia suffers from the so-called Dutch disease, meaning that its currency is tied to the oil-based assets, industrialization faces several hurdles. Anything made in the country is too expensive for the Indian market for example because even though the oil market will collapse eventually, at the moment petroleum is still valuable (Cole, 2016).

The article of Cole (2016:15) also shows that the enormous spendings deriving from the direct war in Yemen and the proxy war in Syria resulted in a huge budget deficit, around $ 100 billion. The demand for oil will collapse eventually, moreover, an extreme global event could accelerate this process, and not even the IPO of Aramco will be able to replace the money lost from oil revenues (Cole, 2016).

5.2 Possible Solutions

According to the analysis by the International Monetary Fund (Al-Darwish et al. 2015), fiscal policy is the best tool to convert oil wealth into economic outcomes and social benefits. In the past decades, the Saudi government used fiscal policies well and converted the revenues deriving from oil to the improvement of infrastructure and the education system, and supported
higher living standards (Al-Darwish et al, 2015). Now the volatility of oil revenues put the fiscal management into an uncertain situation. According to the analysis by IMF, the country’s fiscal policy must target three goals. First the „development goal”, meaning that the country’s expenditure decisions must be made in a way that the long-term economic growth aspect is taken into consideration, second, the state must invest serious amounts in order to support human and physical capital, this is called the „stabilization goal”, and third, „the intergenerational equity goal” which considers the non-renewable characteristic of oil as a resource in terms of the country's dependence on oil (Al-Darwish et al, 2015).

The IMF analysis also states that fiscal rules would provide a predictable and sustainable fiscal policy, creating a stable and safe environment for businesses and encourage investments and employment in the country (Al-Darwish et al, 2015).

McKinsey sees huge potential in the retail and wholesale trade industry, which showed significant and rapid growth in the past decades: since 2003, the industry’s share in the GDP grew from 4% to 7% by 2013 (McKinsey, 2015, p. 62), and expanded at an average a rate of 12% for the past few years (McKinsey, 2015, p. 62). This industry is also one of the largest employers in the country, providing a job for around 1.5 million people (McKinsey, 2015, p. 62). According to McKinsey’s report (2015), this segment of the Saudi economy is expected to grow further, double its production, and create an additional 800 000 jobs (p. 63). According to the report, this industry could drive the growth in the private sector (McKinsey, 2015).

One of the biggest hurdles concerning the development of the private sector is the problem of the human capital in the country. There are two main issues in terms of the labor market of Saudi Arabia: the high unemployment rate, especially among young educated females, and the high dependence on the foreign labor force. The low employment rate of women is present in every country in the Middle-East, but in Saudi Arabia, this rate is exceptionally high. The rate of unemployment among educated females reaches up to 35% (Khorsheed, 2015:11.). Even though the number of women employed has grown over the past decade from 10% to 18%, still, half as many women are employed in Saudi Arabia as compared to Bahrain or Kuwait (McKinsey, 2015, p. 32). These tendencies derive from legal and practical hurdles, such as the gender segregation, resulting in inferior academic possibilities for females (Ertürk, 2009, cited by Al-bakr et al, 2017, p. 54), or limitations such as the driving ban on women, since the ban on driving, together with the lack of appropriate public transport system prevents many women from participating in the labor market (Bager, 2013).
Another serious issue concerning the economy of the country is the significant ratio of foreigners in the labor market (Hvidt, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, the migrants take up to one-third of the total population (Hvidt, 2015, p. 41), and they also take up the majority of the labor market: 53% of the total labor force is non-Saudi (Ministry of Labor and Social Development, 2016, p. 11). This phenomenon created a segregation in the labor market: usually, natives work in the public sector and expatriates in the private sector. This has negative effects, for example, the high ratio of foreigners in the labor market reduces the competition for certain jobs since in the private sector very few natives apply for positions (Hvidt, 2015).

![Labor Force in Saudi Arabia in 2016](image)

4. Figure: Labor Force in Saudi Arabia in 2016 (made by the author, data source: Bin Salman, 2016)

McKinsey (2015) also points out, that a comprehensive set of expenditure and revenue reforms could help eliminating the Saudi government’s fiscal deficit, especially by reforms in the field of the government’s capital spending and operating expenditure. According to the report, a better government procurement, and an optimized capital expenditure could amount up to 90 billion (McKinsey, 2015, p. 101).

The elimination of the driving ban on women could eliminate more hurdles in terms of economic reforms and development. On one hand, it can ease the country’s dependence on the foreign labor force and it could provide a significant labor force for the private sector. Another aspect is the car industry: according to Reuters, allowing women to drive could mean 9 million potential drivers and 2.7 million non-Saudi resident women (Aswad, Frost, 2017:5). The article points out, that the ban’s elimination can lift up Saudi car sales by 15-20 percent per annum (Aswad, Frost, 2017:7). This tendency will benefit the car company Naghi Motors, distributor of luxury brands such as BMW, Mini or Rolls Royce (Aswand, Frost, 2017).
To conclude this section, the research shows, that the expansion of women’s rights in the country, especially the elimination of the driving ban against them is essential in order to ease the economy’s heavy dependence on oil and petroleum based industry’s. First, because the Saudi economy faces serious challenges in terms of human capital, which is crucial to economic diversification, especially the development of the private sector. The problem of human capital can be mitigated with the increase of unemployed educated females, which is indirectly connected to the driving ban. On the other hand, the elimination of the driving ban will cause an immediate growth in the number of car sales in the country. This case is an example of the type of norm diffusion which is called uncertainty, which means that a state tends to adopt norms that not necessarily fit their perceptions and principles, but will provide a way out of an uncertain situation. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the driving ban’s elimination is not consistent with the cultural values and the customs and institutions embedded into society. But as the country faces serious difficulties in terms of economy, the government decided to implement a policy characteristic to liberal societies.

6. Foreign Affairs

In this section I will analyze the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia since 2015, emphasizing the country’s relationship with the United States, and how the foreign affairs of the country are related to the expansion of women’s rights. In this section, I will mostly refer to the foreign policy report of Christopher M. Blanchard (2017) to understand the American perspective.

According to the constructivist theory, states tend to behave and make decisions according to the „logic of appropriateness”, which means, that they act in a certain way, not because they believe in its rightfulness, rather because it is considered legitimate and appropriate. States seek legitimacy because it brings them benefits (Barnett, 2014). In the case of Saudi Arabia, the driving ban on women was sharply judged on the international level as well. Due to the work of activists and the use of social media, the issue of the ban and thus the oppression of women in the country became recognized throughout the world (Mohsin Alsahi, 2017). People from different nationalities joined the online campaigns, like Women2Drive, and expressed their support of the Saudi women against discrimination on social media, for example on Twitter: „Your own government may be against you, but the world is behind you. Fight for your rights! #Women2Drive, Yes, make us proud” (Aschvachin, 2011). In Ukraine, women organized a protest against the ban in 2011 (Femen, 2015). The European Union’s high representative for foreign affairs, Catherine Ashton announced her support for Saudi women in
the campaign after 7,000 signals were collected on an online petition asking for a public declaration of support (Marya, 2011). The United Nations allowed the country’s accession on condition it will take steps to detain and eventually eliminate discrimination against women. Even the closest allies of the Saudi state expressed their opposition against discrimination against women (Hubbard, 2017).

Even though many actors on the international level have expressed their opposition against the discriminative behavior and created a significant external pressure towards the Saudi government, it was not sufficient to achieve a policy change. However, the situation of the country has changed in the past few years due to the escalation of the civil war in Yemen.

6.1 The U.S-Saudi relations

The successive US administrations often referred to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as an important partner, and this alliance is fundamental for Saudi Arabia as well. The US-Saudi relations have faced several challenges over the past decades, but current domestic and foreign policy initiatives by the Saudi government may provide a new drive to the maintenance of the close alliance between the two countries.

The relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia is mostly based on the common concerns related to Jihadi terrorism. According to the Saudi government, terrorist organizations such as the Al-Qaeda, its affiliates or the so-called Islamic State pose a direct threat to the country. The U.S. State Department stated that Saudi Arabia is a strong partner in terms of counter-terrorism attempts.

The United States has been supporting the Saudis by providing military training, military logistic assistance and most importantly by weaponry sales: between 2009 and 2016, the two countries created a formal arms sale agreement of over $ 65 billion (Blanchard, 2017:2).

The political and security changes occurred in the past decade in the Middle-East put the U.S.-Saudi relationship into a transition point. The U.S. Congress has increasing concerns about this partnership because of the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia since the transition of power in Saudi government in 2015: especially regarding the more assertive military actions in Yemen, the growing number of civilian casualties, the risks concerning the Saud leadership transition question, the country’s instability deriving from lower oil prices and relating economic challenges.
6.2 The war in Yemen

According to Eksy (2017), the foreign policy of Saudi Arabia is built on a security axis, aiming to maintain the balance of power in the Middle East, and the maintenance of the security of the regime. Similar to Iran, Saudi Arabia considers itself as the „natural leader of the Muslim world” (Esky, 2017, p. 142), since it possesses two holy cities Medina and Mecca. The foreign policy priority of Saudi administrations was to protect the status quo in the region, meaning that they did not let the hegemony of Riyadh in the Arabian Peninsula to be challenged (N. Rózsa, Szalai, 2016). But in the past decade, its foreign policy became more assertive and aggressive, since according to Eksy, the foreign policy of the country now aims to restore the previous status quo, because after the Arab spring and the U.S. intervention in Iraq the previous balance of power in the Middle East collapsed. Another reason behind the shift of the country’s foreign policy, is that Egypt and Turkey are no longer aspiring to leadership in the region, since Egypt has weakened both in terms of economy and in terms of domestic situation, arising from terrorist attacks (N. Rózsa, Szalai, 2016), thus it is no longer a potential rival regarding the leadership position in the region. Third, Iran has recently obtained more influence in the region, which was interpreted by the Saudis as a direct threat to their national security. Eksy (2017) says, that since the Arab Spring there has been a hegemony rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The two countries have been fighting proxy wars for years, and they have come to the status of „balance of proxy war”, which means that neither of the parties can outcompete the other (Eksy, 2017, p. 138).

The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia are based on geopolitical considerations and sectarian rhetoric, which date back to far before the Arab Spring. The hegemony rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran resulted in an ongoing proxy war in Yemen, as Iran’s influence started to increase in the country (Eksy, 2017). According to other studies, however, even though there is Iranian influence and support in Yemen, the volume of these factors is not as strong as the Saudi narrative makes it appear, and as it would justify a proxy war between the two countries (Szalai, 2016).

The current stage of the ongoing Yemen conflict began in 2014 when the so-called Houthi movement based in Northern Yemen allied with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh became more aggressive and made steps in order to coerce the transition of the current president Abed Rabbo Mansour al Hadi (Esky, 2017). The Houthis represent Iran’s political influence in Yemen, and they enjoy the support of approximately 35% of the country’s population (Esky, 2017, p. 146). President Hadi, pushed away by the Houthi forces was supported by Saudi
Arabia, and thus the attack against him and the Iranian penetration in Yemen was interpreted as a direct threat to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi government declared Houthis as terrorists and, after the Houthi’s operation on Saudi borders, the airstrike campaigns against Yemen begun (Esky, 2017). According to another study, however, Saudi Arabia referred to the fight against terrorism and aggressive Iranian expansion is only an excuse to legitimize their military operations, but the actual motive behind the attacks is related to the main foreign policy aim of Saudi Arabia, the restitution of the leading position of Riyadh in the Arabian Penninsula and to strengthen its regional hegemony (Szalai, 2015). The military operations executed in Yemen were supported by the United States in the form of weaponry, military training and logistic assistance (Blanchard, 2017). As the Saudi operations become more assertive and aggressive, and the number of civilian casualties rose, the U.S. Congress started to express its concerns related to the military aid provided for Saudi Arabia. Before the 115th Congress, the State Department planned to disapprove, or at least put conditions on the U.S. arms sales already proposed, and thus limit the funds of U.S. involvement in Yemen (Blanchard, 2017).

The discussion about the Saudi relations in the U.S. Congress also included concerns regarding the economic instability of the country deriving from the falling oil prices, and the uncertainty about the leadership transition, and issues related to human rights (Blanchard, 2017).

Another important event affecting the U.S.-Saudi relations is the Nuclear Deal. In 2015, the Obama administration signed a deal with Iran, which eliminated the economic sanctions on the country, and in return, Iran limited its nuclear program (Barrett, Malloy, 2016). This eliminated hurdles from Iran to further expand its political and economic power and increase its influence in the region. This made the Saudi government concerned that Iran would deepen its influence in Syria, Iran, Lebanon, and Yemen as well (Barrett, Malloy, 2016). Which means, that the Saudi government needs the support and military aid provided by the United States even more.

These series of events, the increasing political and economic influence of Iran in the Middle East, the nuclear deal between the United Stata and Iran, the escalation of the war in Yemen and the growing number of civilian casualties have shaken the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Another reason why the U.S.-Saudi relations have weakened is that the number one priority in terms of foreign policy for the Saudi administration is the hegemonic rivalry with Iran, while this conflict is inimical to the U.S. interests (Walt, 2017). The main interest of the U.S. in the region is the fight against terrorism, and that is what its alliances are built on in the region (Watts, 2016).
The relationship with the United States is indispensable for Saudi Arabia. They must maintain an alliance with the U.S., and recently the Saudi administration seeks even closer cooperation referring to the aggressive expansion of ISIS in the region and „Iranian efforts to destabilize Yemen through support for the […] Houthi movement“ (Blanchard, 2017, pp. 13-14).

According to Joseph Westphal, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, the role of the Crown Prince Bin Salman is crucial regarding the future of the U.S.-Saudi relations, since his reforms and initiatives in terms of the education and jurisdiction may provide a field for further cooperation. But, according to Westphal, the failure of such initiatives might bring more volatile and uncertain situation for the U.S.-Saudi relations (Blanchard, 2017).

6.3 The Role of the Crown Prince

Muhammad Bin Salman was appointed as Deputy Crown Prince in 2015, and later he also became the defense minister in the country, taking control above significant levers of power (Dickinson, 2017). After taking deputy crown prince post he centralized all power in his hands (Khashoggi, 2017) by appointing young princes on leading positions (Henderson, 2017). As defense minister, he launched the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthi-Iranian alliance in the war in Yemen (Dickinson, 2017).

Steps taken by the Crown Prince can be evaluated as attempts to improve the country’s negative international reputation and adjudication, which was formed based on the country’s new, more assertive and aggressive foreign policy: its military operations in Yemen and the increasing number of civilian casualties. For example, in November 2017 eleven members of the royal family were arrested accused of corruption (Henderson, 2017), which can be interpreted as signals that the royal family is no longer above the law.

Similarly, efforts towards the expansion of women’s rights in the country, such as the recognition of women’s right to drive could also contribute to a better international reputation, which is crucial for the Saudi government at the moment, as its actions in the field of foreign policy are harshly judged on the international level.

The theoretical framework can provide two theories in social constructivism that can offer a possible explanation for this situation. First, the Saudi government’s decision to eliminate the driving ban against women and further expansion of their rights can be explained by „institutional isomorphism” which means, that states act and look alike, because they want
acceptance, legitimacy, and status (Barnett, 2014, p. 163). This can be explained by the „logic of appropriateness”, according to which actors follow rules and norms because they worry about the legitimacy of their actions and behavior (Barnett, 2014, p. 159). According to this narrative, the Saudi government decided to implement such policies as women’s right to drive, because they seek to legitimize their actions and to obtain acceptance on the international level.

This case can be explained by another social constructivist theory, the type of norm diffusion called uncertainty. Similarly to the economic situation, the status of Saudi Arabia on the international level became unstable and uncertain, as its most important alliance begun to weaken, and its main rival grew even stronger and further expanded its influence in the region. In order to maintain and strengthen its alliances and could not risk having such a bad international reputation as it does because of the discriminative acts, and assertive military operations. Thus the Saudi leadership had to make such measures that are not characteristic of its core identity. This resulted in the expansion of women’s rights, which included allowing them to drive.

7. The process of norm diffusion in Saudi Arabia

In this section I will introduce the process of norm diffusion in this specific issue. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the norm itself is the right of women to drive freely, without the permission of their male guardian. The norm entrepreneurs are the Saudi women, who started to organize protests and campaigns in order to raise awareness of the ban and its consequences and effects on the everyday life of all women in the country, and the several limitations this ban creates. By driving on the streets and even posting photos and videos on social media of themselves activists create an issue, through which they bring in the question of the ban into the national political agenda. The campaigns and the protests represent the first stage of the „life cycle of norms”, which is called „norm emergence”, which means, that the norm entrepreneurs are trying to convince a critical mass about the norm’s rightfulness (Barnett, 2014). Due to the activists’ work, many Saudis started to question the ban’s necessity and validity, and thus, they have created a constantly growing internal pressure towards the government. The only part of the „norm emergence”, that was not fulfilled is institutionalization, which means, that up until recently, the campaigns and the protests could not reach the ultimate goal, which is the policy change. Even though the institutionalization could not come true, the norm emergence process was, without a doubt, successful, and a significant contributor to the process that has eventually led to the elimination of the ban, but it was not a sufficient condition.
According to Riman Barakat (2016), this is not a unique phenomenon in the region. She admits, that the younger generations have a crucial role in the revolutionary and civil society. Through the use of different social media sites, they have the ability to reach people from all around the world, regardless of age or gender, and thus they can create an „international community of activism and social protest” (Barakat, 2016, p. 54.). But even though they can manage to create worldwide pressure towards their state, the tools and instruments they have are not enough to reach their ultimate goal: the policy change itself (Barakat, 2016). The reason behind this according to Barakat (2016) is, on one hand, that there is a huge gap between the goals and expectations of the younger generation, the activists, and the demand of the majority of society, and on the other hand, they do not possess of instruments that could make a change in institutional stagnation, which is a typical feature of the region’s political systems.

The situation in Saudi Arabia is no different: even though the younger and educated generation already considers the right to drive as a basic human right, that should be given to all people regardless of gender, there are still parts of the Saudi society, who would not even question the ban’s validity, and whom even expressed their opposition against the elimination of the ban: „Women2drive shouldn't be allowed in KSA. Y wasting the uniquity of the country??” (Sarwaar, 2011). And since these practices, like the male guardianship system and the gender segregation are still embedded in society, campaigns and social media protests will not be enough to eliminate the ban.

Owing to the high internet penetration rate in the country (Internet Live Stats, 2014), and the high rate of social media usage among Saudi people (Statista, 2017), the campaign could have spread internationally and attracted significant media attention to the ban, and thus the oppression of women in the country (Mohsin Alsahi, 2017). This enhanced the pressure towards the Saudi government because it brought attention to the fact that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the only country in the region (and the entire world), that still forbids women from driving (Mohsin Alsahi, 2017). According to the constructivist theory on the life cycle of norms, states in similar position tend to adopt norms, if all other states in the region did so, this phenomenon is called cumulative effect (Barnett, 2014, p. 165). These factors represent the second stage of the life cycle of norms. This stage, which is called „norm cascade”, is usually characterized by imitation. In this process, the norm entrepreneurs try to „socialize” other states to become norm followers. Whether a state adopts a norm or not can depend on several factors, among others the desire to obtain conformity, legitimacy and the cumulative effect plays a significant role (Barnett, 2014). But it was still insufficient to result in policy change.
The third stage of the life cycle of norms, internalization could not come true. We cannot state that women’s right to drive is taken for granted or is not questioned within the society, moreover, many people attack it, and think that it is a harm to women, some even state that they could not handle seeing women driving (Hubbard, 2017). But we cannot say, that it failed completely since a very significant part of the Saudi society now thinks about the driving ban as a completely unnecessary and oppressive regulation, which creates a limitation not only on women but also on the entire Saudi society (Mohsin Alsahi, 2017). The younger generation also believes that it is unacceptable that a ban like this still exists in the 21st century. This attitude appears on social media sites, like Twitter as well: „It's 2011 and we really are talking about #Women2Drive. It beggars belief” (Jessop, 2011). This indicates, that the internalization of the norm did start on a micro-sociological level (Mohsin Alsahi, 2017).

The factor that created a window of opportunity for Saudi women, and eventually led to the elimination of the ban, is the country’s economic situation and the need for radical changes. According to the international norm diffusion theory, one of the possible reasons why states might adopt a norm is uncertainty, this means, that when a state faces difficulties and obstacles and needs to make changes in its existing system. In order to combat these difficulties, states tend to implement the practices or entire models of other countries, that already proved to be successful (Barnett, 2014). I believe this is the process that is happening in Saudi Arabia: because of the significant drop in oil prices, the economy’s dependence on oil poses a serious threat to the country and could cause significant losses in export and government revenues. It was obvious that the country needed to terminate the dependence on oil, and diversify the economy (McKinsey, 2015), in order to become more stable, and more resistant against the volatility of oil prices.

According to studies, in order to diversify the economy, the Saudi government should support the private sector (McKinsey, 2015). To do so, they must solve the question of human capital and education which are the main hurdles in the Saudi economy. In the case of human capital, the biggest issue is the high unemployment rate of educated females. The driving ban accompanied by the inappropriate public transport services in the country was obviously an obstacle for women to participate in the labor market (Bager, 2013). The other problem is the extremely high rate of the foreign labor force in the domestic labor market (Ministry of Labor and Social Development, 2016), and the segregation between the native and foreign workers according to public and private sectors of the economy.
Thus, the government needs to make radical policy changes to eliminate these obstacles that prevent the economy from becoming more diverse and modern. Based on the study of McKinsey (2015), I believe that the elimination of the driving ban on females was a step forward an economy and a society in which the establishment of a more diverse and modern economy is feasible. It will facilitate the participation of women in the labor market.

Constructivism explains that states tend to act according to the logic of appropriateness, meaning they will adopt norms regardless whether they believe in it if it will benefit them in the form resources, legitimacy or a certain status. In this case, the norm, which is women’s right to drive, does not fit into the structure of the Saudi society, it is in sharp contradiction with the set of social values and customs. But, implementing it will bring benefits for the country because doing so will facilitate female participation in the labor market, which will contribute to the diversification of the economy. And thus, it will mitigate the harm and the possible losses the significant drop in oil prices might cause.

I believe that the state’s desire to improve its international reputation could also encourage it to make this shift in the economic structure. According to the constructivists, the adaptation of a norm or a model could be a signal towards other states that they use modern techniques, and thus they can be potential allies (Barnett, 2014).

The oil price shock put the country into an uncertain situation, which created the sufficient condition to make the policy change come true, and the government announced the elimination of the ban in September 2017. According to Huda Mohsin Alsahi (2017) even if the motivation for implementing the norm was not that it is internalized within the society or that there has been a shift on the ideological level, but it does not mean that there will never be such changes and shifts in the ideology. Activists are very optimistic concerning this change as well: „#Women2Drive done #IamMyOwnGuardian in progress” Manal Al-Sharif posted on Twitter (2017). Many activists believe, that it does not matter what was the motive of the government, the elimination of the ban is the first step for women to have greater authority over themselves.

8. Conclusion

The aim of this research paper was to answer the question of what drove the ultra-conservative Saudi government to eliminate the driving ban against women. The hypothesis of the paper states that out of the three factors that played a significant role in this process; the campaigns organized by Saudi women, the foreign affairs and the economic situation, the first two were
necessary but not sufficient conditions, and only the economic situation was a sufficient condition to achieve the policy change. In order to answer the research question, I analyzed other documents and the result of research papers on this issue, I reviewed the media coverage relating to this question, and I made an interview with Huda Mohsin Alsahi, an expert on the topic. In order to examine the attitude of the Saudi society relating to this question, I analyzed their manifestations on social media sites such as Twitter posts. In the beginning of my research paper, I introduced the different forms of norm diffusion according to the theory of constructivism. Then, I listed the most important factors that could have contributed to the process that has led the Saudi government to eliminate the driving ban against women. Saudi women have been campaigning and protesting against the ban since the 1990’, and they managed to raise awareness of this issue within the region and even in the international environment, and they could bring significant media attention on the question. Despite their successes and the strong internal pressure against the government that they created, they could not reach their ultimate goal, which was the elimination of the ban. The government only responded to their activism with more strict enforcement of the ban. Based on my research, I believe their activism was not a sufficient factor to a policy change. Women’s right to drive did not manage to become a norm in the country yet.

The country’s desire to improve its international reputation could also be a motive to eliminate the ban if we consider the theory of constructivism: since the civil war in Yemen escalated and as Iran’s influence in the region has increased significantly, the situation of Saudi Arabia has become more unstable and insecure. I believe that with the expansion of women’s rights together with other measures taken by the Crown Prince Bin Salman, such as the arrest of members of the royal family, the state aims to alter the negative reputation it has, and thus improve its international situation. Also, the ban’s elimination is a step towards a more diverse economy. The shift in the economy according to constructivists could be a signal towards other states that they are a modern state. In this case, as the Saudi government needs the support of the United States against Yemen backed by Iran, the shift in the economy became more urgent.

The significant drop in oil prices has put the country into an uncertain situation, which forced the government to make radical changes. This created a window of opportunity for Saudi women. The economic pressure eventually did lead to policy change in the country, thus this uncertain situation was the sufficient factor.

During my research, I faced several limitations. Without the understanding of the language I could only observe the attitude and the reactions of the Saudi people through their
manifestations on social media, especially on Twitter, and within those, only the English ones. The issue with this is that the trends in internet usage in the country show that the percentage of internet users is the highest among the younger generations: 37% between the ages of 26 and 35, and 22.5% between the ages of 19 and 25 (Simsim, 2011, p. 103). In terms of education, we can see that the ones who have accomplished a Bachelor program show the highest tendency to use the internet, 50.3% of them considers themselves as regular internet users (Simsim, 2011, p 103). This is the group of the Saudi society that considers women’s right to drive as a basic human right, and thus they support the movements similar to Women2Drive. Those groups of the Saudi society, the older generations whom are more conservative and believe that the ban is necessary (Mohsin, Alsahi, 2017), show a lower tendency in the usage of internet and thus social media sites, and thus the extent to which I could observe their attitude was very limited.
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Mohsin Alsahi, Huda (2017, November 18) Skype Interview


Anna Mészégető


