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Aftermaths of Opposition: Effectiveness of Repression Against Reformist Islamists in Saudi Arabia

Londyn Lorenz

AFTERMATHS OF OPPOSITION: EFFECTIVENESS OF REPRESSION AGAINST REFORMIST ISLAMISTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

By Londyn Michelle Lorenz

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Approved:

Advisor: Dr. Steven Schaaf

Reader: Professor Ashleen Williams

Reader: Dr. Ian Gowan

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ABSTRACT
LONDYN MICHELLE LORENZ: Aftermaths of Opposition: Effectiveness of Repression Against Reformist Islamists in Saudi Arabia
(Under the direction of Steven Schaaf)

Saudi Arabia has long been considered a religious, political, and economic hub of the Middle East and North Africa as the home of the two holiest cities in Islam: Mecca and Medina. The kingdom's leaders, the Al Saud family, have relied on their Islamic clout to remain in power since the 1700s, but their Islamic credentials were called into question following their allowance of American troops on Saudi soil and alliance with Western ideals during and following the Gulf War of the 1990s. Islamist outrage against the throne poured out across the nation, bringing demands for political change and increased popular control. While this wave of opposition was met with some repressive tactics alongside co-optation and acceptance of demands, the later wave of reformist opposition during the Arab Spring era of the 2010s was met with staunch repression that silenced all forms of resistance.

This thesis seeks to answer why repression was more effective during the 2010s than in the 1990s, arguing that in-group fragmentation and social prestige had direct impacts on repression outcomes following the two movements. Using Saudi laws and policies, opposition memorandums and communiques, and official religious rulings (fatwas) from the Saudi Council of Senior Scholars, this thesis analyzes the tactics used by the Saudi government to quell its vocal reformist opposition and what made each tactic successful or unsuccessful in ending dissent.

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Glossary

Abd al-Aziz Ibn Abdullah Bin Baz: Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia from 1993 to 1999, leading the Council of Senior Scholars during and after the Gulf War.

Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al-Sheikh: Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia from 1999 to the present, leading the Council of Senior Scholars during and following the Arab Spring.

Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud: King of Saudi Arabia from August 2005 to January 2015, ruling during and immediately following the Arab Spring.

The Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CLDR): The first opposition organization in Saudi Arabia to openly challenge the monarchy, established in May 1993 by prominent Saudi Islamists.

Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud: King of Saudi Arabia from June 1982 to August 2005, ruling during the Gulf War, introducing the Basic Law of Saudi Arabia, and establishing the *Majlis al-Shura.*

***Majlis al-Shura*:** The consultative council of Saudi Arabia, established by King Fahd in August 1993. All members are appointed by the king and serve to advise the king on important matters.

Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud (MBS): Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia from 2017 to the present, MBS is the first senior Saudi royal from the second generation after King Abdulaziz and is known for strict, authoritarian statecraft.

The Muslim Brotherhood: Founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928, it is a transnational Sunni Islamist organization beginning as a Pan-Islamic social movement that has evolved into a politically-aspirational organization.

Nasir al-Umar: Leader of the Saudi Sururi movement, which combines Muslim Brotherhood political understandings with Wahhabist theology, and outspoken anti-Shi'ite.

Saddam Hussein: Leader of Iraq from July 1917 - April 2003. Initiated the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, becoming an important anti-Western and Muslim-forward figure to a number of Islamists.

Safar al-Hawali: A Saudi Islamist scholar who was a central figure of the Sahwa Movement, co-leader of the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights, and frequent critic of the Saudi government. al-Hawali was arrested in 1994 for opposition following the Gulf War, released in 1999, and detained in July 2018 alongside his four sons and brother for a book criticizing the Saudi royal family.

Salman al-Odah: A Saudi Islamist scholar who, alongside al-Hawali, was a central figure of the Sahwa movement and co-leader of the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights. al-Odah was also arrested in 1994, released in 1999, and was detained in September 2017 for criticizing the Saudi-led Qatar blockade.

Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud: King of Saudi Arabic from January 2015 to the present, he ruled following the Arab Spring and enacted strict restrictions and repression against Islamist dissidents.

Wahhabism: A puritanical form of Islam tracing back to Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab, an eighteenth-century Muslim scholar. This form of Islam is dominant in Saudi Arabia, and the Al Sauds claim legitimacy of rule through the family's connection to al-Wahhab.

Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the political, economic, and religious center of the Arab and Islamic worlds, boasting a robust rent-based economy, the long-standing Al Saud monarchy, and the two holiest cities in Islam: Mecca and Medina. The monarchs of the desert kingdom have long anchored their legitimacy in the 1744 alliance between Mohammed ibn Saud and Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, cementing the Al Sauds' role as protectors and evangelists of the Wahhabi subsect of Sunni Islam in exchange for its members' political allegiance (Alamer 2022). The modern state, established by King Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud in 1932 after the unification of the kingdoms of Nejd and Hejaz, espoused the complete rule of the monarch and unification of the Saudi public under this relationship.

On January 27, 2022, however, after "perusal of the Basic Laws of Governance," King Salman decreed February 22 "Founding Day," celebrating "the beginning of the reign of Imam Mohammed ibn Saud and his foundation of the first Saudi state…in February of the year 1727" (Saudi Press Agency 2022). This was closely followed by a logo for the national holiday, featuring symbols of dates, a majlis council, an Arabian horse, and a market, notably excluding any religious imagery (Alamer 2022). This issuance has drastic political implications, completely changing the Saudi political myth, exchanging its legitimacy mechanism from Wahhabi- and Islam-based to a purely political one by basing the Al Sauds' claim to power on Mohammed ibn Saud's establishment of a Saudi state in 1727 rather than its previous basis on the legitimacy and power gain through his relationship with al-Wahhab. This move, supposedly in accordance with the Saudi Basic Laws issued in 1992 following Islamist protest during and after the Gulf War, erases an, until recently, central tenet throughout Saudi history and politics, one that Islamist resistance movements have been able to use for its political agency.

Looking to the past at times when this Islamic legitimacy was jeopardized by Islamist resistors, movements during and following the Gulf War of the 1990s and the Arab Spring of the 2010s have been the largest fronts for change in the kingdom carried out by Islamist reformers. These extensive movements forced the Saudi government to quell opposition, both to protect its power on the throne and the ruling family's prestige as an Islamic power; this was done via limited repression and co-optation during the first instance and more extensive repressive tactics in the 2010s.

I. Research Question

Exploring the intricacies of Islamist opposition in Saudi Arabia, this thesis looks at the most politically salient instances of dissent during the Gulf War and the Arab Spring. This specifically focuses on the government's response to opposition and the following popular shockwaves, asking the question: Is repression an effective strategy for weakening Islamist opposition in Arab authoritarian regimes?

This question contributes to the existing discourse in two ways. First, it examines the factors necessary for Saudi reformist opposition groups to succeed and analyzes repressive tactics used by the monarchy and their effectiveness in quelling dissent. While the existing literature records specific instances of opposition and attaches them to following government policies (Piscatori 1991; Kapiszewski 2006; Hegghammer 2008; Miller and Weinberg 2013; Alaoudh 2021), this thesis analyzes the strategies the Al Sauds sought to employ via these policies to minimize dissent and how these mechanisms developed over time. Secondly, this thesis analyzes how effective repression has worked to stifle opposition compared to other approaches such as appeasement or co-optation. While this has been done in many different contexts, including in Nazi Germany and rural China (Finkel 2015; O'Brien and Deng 2015),

this thesis looks specifically into the success of repression in an Islamic context where the government and the opposition members claim to subscribe to the same sect and tenets of Islam.

II. Case Selection

Saudi Arabia has impressively kept its royal family strong and opposition low compared to the coups, civil wars, and toppling regimes found throughout recent Middle Eastern history. Political threats such as Nasser's Arab nationalism and goals of a transnational caliphate from the Islamic State have not shaken the Saudi power structure, and its public has remained quite calm and accepting of rule compared to other Arab nations such as its neighbor Yemen or Tunisia.

While this relative stability has led to fewer studies and media coverage compared to more politically volatile nations in the region, the Saudi monarchy has faced multiple instances of resistance within its borders, facing criticism and anti-government organization from diverse populations. None have, however, been more successful or more tightly organized than the reformist Islamist threat faced by the regime, most threatening during the Gulf War of the 1990s and the Arab Spring of the 2010s.

Saudi Arabia has faced three different forms of Sunni Islamist threat: rejectionist, reformist, and jihadism, alongside smaller Shiite movements (Hegghammer 2008). Rejectionism, as demonstrated by Juhayman al-Uytabi and his 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, is against the very concept of a nation-state, focusing instead on individual faith and morals and adopting a conservative lifestyle rejecting Wahhabi and Sahwa teachings (Hegghammer and Lacroix 2004). Saudi jihadism, commonly traced back to Saudi participation in the Afghan-Soviet Union war and support for the mujahidin and subsequent training and combat

alongside groups such as al-Qaeda, romanticizes violent resistance and has sought to bring it home to Saudi Arabia (Hegghammer and Lacroix 2004). Reformist Saudi Islamism, the topic of this thesis which will often be shortened to "Islamism," refers to Islamic and political activism tracing back to the 1960s that has denounced the increasing lack of Islamic virtues in Saudi policy and Western influence in the kingdom (Hegghammer and Lacroix 2004). This branch of Saudi Islamism, often represented by *al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya* (The Islamic Awakening, shortened to Sahwa), mixes traditional Wahhabi attitudes toward social issues and political activism similar to that of the Muslim Brotherhood. Shiite Islamism, which can be further divided into smaller subgroups, has a unique role in the state, as it is a minority form of Islam inside a largely puritanically Wahhabi society. It cannot, therefore, be accurately compared to these larger, potentially more politically threatening Sunni movements in the context of government repression, as its political capital and ability to appeal to a large Saudi audience are comparatively low. While all aforementioned forms of Islamism, alongside the official Wahhabi tradition, have influential roles in Saudi Arabia, this thesis explores the effect of reformist Islamists on the monarch and how the government responds to potential threats.

The reformist Islamist threat in Saudi Arabia is especially unique among others around the Islamic world. Whereas in nations such as Egypt, Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, have served as service organizations and unifying spaces to act on politics and religion, Islamist activity in Saudi Arabia holds a specifically ideological role, solely uniting Islamists around teachings and principles of anti-Western imperialism and increased Islamic virtue rather than providing services or organizing for elections. This threat singularly intimidated the Saudi monarch, as the Al Sauds' legitimacy to rule, until recently, hinged on their

Islamic credentials, and this ideological danger could not be neutralized using the royal family's extensive wealth or political power.

III. Historical Background

As Saudi Arabia began to export oil in the 1940s, foreign workers from across the Arab world migrated to the kingdom seeking employment, eventually securing roots in the nation. Alongside this economic growth, the population grew exponentially, demanding infrastructure and public sector expansion. Fulfilling the gaping needs for education and legal expertise, Muslim Brotherhood members fleeing persecution in Egypt and Syria gained power in Saudi schools and courts as the most formally educated individuals in the kingdom throughout the 1950s and 60s (Hegghammer and Lacroix 2004).

Outside of their roles in Saudi bureaucracy, Islamists in the kingdom also held an important role in Arab politics. Confronted by Nasserist Arab nationalism and Syrian Baathism from its neighbors, Saudi Arabia used its Islamist population to promote Pan-Islamism, a movement to unite all Muslims with Saudi Arabia, home of the two holiest cities in Islam, at its helm. This further emboldened Muslim Brothers and other Wahhabi Islamists inside the kingdom to become more politically active as the Saudi government worked to incorporate educated immigrant Islamists and Muslim Brothers from Egypt and Syria in its education and judicial systems (Hegghammer and Lacroix 2004).

This growing group of Islamists evolved into the Sahwa movement, a movement native to Saudi Arabia that melded Wahhabi ideology with the Muslim Brotherhood's political agency. Primarily younger Islamic scholars, Sahwa members began to use new media and technology, such as cassette tapes, to disseminate their messages, spreading much faster than Wahhabi

establishment communication. Also in the 1970s, rejectionist Islamism gained more notoriety, with Juhayman al-Utaybi and his fellow insurgents seized the Masjid al-Haram, or Grand Mosque, the holiest mosque in Islam in Mecca. This two-week-long occupation in 1979, organized out of anger against the Al Saud family and rule as well as the official Wahhabist establishment, prompted the Saudi government to empower more peaceful Islamists and strengthen the existing religious establishment (Hegghammer and Lacroix 2004). This bolstered reformist Sahawis, giving them extra funding to expand their ideological presence in the education sector and empowering them to publicly debate against secularist liberals and staunch, conservative Wahhabi clerics alike. This political positioning directly emboldened Sahwa members of the 1990s and forward to challenge the monarchy and its decisions, as analyzed in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

IV. Literature Review

This thesis builds off of a body of literature on rentier Islamism and the nature of repression, as well as primary sources including fatwas, opposition memorandums, and Saudi legislation and policies.

Using Courtney Freer's interpretation of rentier Islamism, that is, Islamism in nations whose economy is based on natural resource wealth "shows that ideology rather than rent motivated the formation of Islamist movements" (Freer 479, 2017). Freer claims that in a non-rentier context, the Muslim Brotherhood's roles are to participate in elections, provide social welfare, and provide a social organization for members of a larger citizenry; none of these, however, apply in a rentier context. In Saudi Arabia, political organization for elections is not a reality; the state provides handsome welfare benefits to its citizens, leaving no room for the

Muslim Brotherhood or other Islamist organizations to provide these services; and the citizen population is so small that Saudi nationals do not need to be further unified. Saudi Islamists, therefore, pose a distinctly ideological threat to the throne, which is much greater than the other listed potential threats in a Saudi context, as it puts the Al Saud family's legitimacy to rule at risk and cannot be thwarted with government resources or by disenfranchisement.

As for the nature of repression, this thesis looks at repression backfire, resulting in a greater oppositional threat rather than a neutralized one. Comparing claims made by Evgeny Finkel (2015) on skilled Jewish resisters rising from selective Nazi repression during the Holocaust and Kevin O'Brien and Yanhua Deng (2015) on repression backfire in Zhejiang Province, China after a violent government response to small peaceful protest against political realities in Saudi Arabia, this thesis offers a unique perspective on repression in a religious environment where both the government and opposing parties claim to represent the same religion and ideology.

When looking at literature on broad Islamist activity in the Arab world, many scholars have focused on popular uprisings and Islamist jihadism in states such as Egypt, Syria, and Yemen (Heydemann and Leenders 2011; Bischoff and Fink 2015). Furthermore, scholars tend to specifically overlook Saudi Arabia, as data is often limited by authoritarian restrictions from the government or other practical limitations, as evidenced by Arab Barometer's inclusion of Saudi Arabia in one wave of surveys while other Arab nations, especially those outside of the Gulf, are included in multiple waves (Arab Barometer 2022).

This thesis, however, investigates under what conditions Saudi Islamists can successfully organize and the monarchy's repressive tactics against opposition, embracing the unclear and seldom written about nature of these situations and navigating policies and official actions in

search of answers. Building upon previous literature and accounts of government responses to opposition, such as Alaoudh 2021, Alterman and McCants 2014, Faksh 1994, and Murphy 1992, this thesis interprets the oppositional framework and structure leading up to and during the studied movements as well as the Saudi government's goals in quelling opposition and the tactics most effectively employed. By analyzing the social positioning and fracturing of reformist movements, this thesis seeks to observe which oppositional conditions are most likely to be stifled by repression rather than co-optation or acquiescing. Additionally, this piece examines the Saudi government's learning process throughout instances of opposition and quelling and how it translates into quelling future resistance movements.

V. Methodology

This thesis uses historical process tracing to analyze Islamist opposition members' strategies of opposition and government response and their evolution over time. Islamist demands and their basis for action shifted over the twenty years between the Gulf War and the Arab Spring; simultaneously, the Saudi monarchy learned which strategies, including repression or co-optation, worked best to quell dissent from those which enabled further resistance.

In this thesis, repression is defined as the selective targeting of opposition members resulting in direct harm such as detainment, injury, and exile or resulting in censorship, reduced rights, or another form of undue punishment based on ideological ties and acts of peaceful opposition. This definition focuses specifically on selective repression, in this case of reformist Islamists, and not indiscriminate, widespread repression regardless of identifier; this distinction aligns with Finkel's 2015 assertion that reformists should become more skilled resisters after experiencing targeted repression. While other mechanisms of stifling resistance were carried out,

including acquiescing to organizers' demands and independent government actions that aligned with reformists' requests, these strategies will not be included in the definition of repression, rather as counter- and co-strategies that repression can be compared against. While strategies and effectiveness of quelling resistance may be combined into one outcome, the effectiveness of repression is measured by how successfully non-alignment movements are temporarily or permanently stopped after instances of direct repression, with the length of effectiveness being taken into account.

Using qualitative data, including media and academic accounts of repression and opposition activity, fatwas (religious rulings answering a question or addressing a specific issue) issued by the Saudi state Council of Senior Scholars, and government policies, this thesis analyzes the instances of repression following and attached to specific instances of opposition alongside the repression's effectiveness in silencing specific opposition claims. Both empirical chapters first outline central oppositional principles, figures, and statements, which are followed by a timeline of government responses, both repressive and co-optive, ending with an analysis of the opposition and repressive outcomes, the kingdom's goals via their responses, and the longer-lasting implications of both the resistance's demands and the government's crackdown and quelling.

VI. Overview

Chapter One outlines the theoretical framework and argument of this thesis, specifically looking at the effect of social positioning and fragmentation on repression effectiveness. Arguing that increased internal fracturing and lower political prestige weakens the opposition and makes repression a more effective mechanism of government withstanding, this thesis pushes back

against Finkel's (2015) assertation that sustained selective repression makes more skilled resisters, as well as O'Brien and Deng's (2015) argument that repression serves as a "transformative event" in a resistance movement, as repression during the Gulf War period had little to no transformative effect on reformists' resistance tactics or other implications in the 2010s Arab Spring period.

Moving into empirics, Chapter Two focuses on the 1990s Gulf War period, displaying and examining opposition strategies, goals, and methods and the official Saudi response via state religious, legal, and authoritative arms. The chapter additionally analyzes how the kingdom employed both repressive and co-optive strategies of quelling opposition, which strategies proved more effective, longer-lasting, and most impactful on daily Saudi life, and the unifying and supporting forces for the reformist opposition group, both domestic and abroad.

Chapter Three moves forward to the Arab Spring waves of resistance, where a much more fragmented and surveiled oppositional wave arose, rallying over increased freedoms and political rights rather than the unified force against American troops in Saudi Arabia two decades prior. These factors alongside reusing resistance strategies and techniques allowed the government to silence opposition members using its gained knowledge since the 1990s and employing distinctly repressive suppression tactics rather than co-optation or acquiescing. This instance of repression has proved more effective and longer-lasting, largely due to the aforementioned contributing factors and the appearance of a less lenient and negotiable monarchy under Kings Abdullah and later Salman bin Abdulaziz.

Chapter One: Theory

This thesis argues that Saudi repression against reformist opposition will only succeed when reformists are not united in their dissent, when their social prestige is lower than the average Saudi Arabian, and when the government has a keen understanding of resisters' ideals and tactics and is able to refute them. While repression was unsuccessful following the Gulf War, allowing dissidents to reorganize into another oppositional front during the Arab Spring, repression in the 2010s proved more successful in quelling resistance and preventing Islamist recovery. This thesis seeks to explain under what conditions repression is successful in achieving the Saudi government's goals and when it backfires to further motivate Islamist activism.

I. Social Prestige

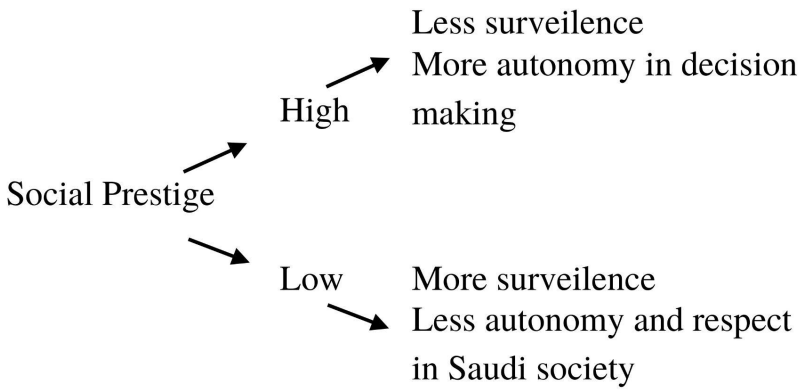
In Saudi Arabia, Islamists have experienced periods of inclusion in the government framework, largely in the education and judicial structures, followed by periods of selective repression during times of increasing political turmoil and ideological dissent. Whereas in the 1980s Saudi Arabia worked to 're-Islamize' society and strengthen the institutional position of the Sahwa movement specifically in the face of growingly violent rejectionist Islamism, reformists in the 2010s had faced a decade of repression in the 1990s followed by a decade of close monitoring and activity alongside Saudi jihadi Islamists causing violence and political tension (Alterman and McCants 2014). As Sahwa members and reformists were removed from their places of authority and subjugated to stricter Saudi control, their standing was lowered in Saudi society, making them inferior to the everyday Saudi in the government's eye, and their actions were more closely monitored, making it easier for the state to learn the opposition's tactics and which silencing mechanism will prove most effective.

After the Grand Mosque Seizure of 1979, the Saudi Arabian monarchy was concerned that more fringe, rejectionist Islamists would act out against the monarchy. To prevent further erratic Islamist behavior, the government began empowering more mainline Islamist figures, including the establishment Wahhabi Ulama and the highly educated, institutionally-integrated Sahwa movement. This was achieved through "clamping down on unreligious behaviors and expressions such as music and song on television and immodest dress by women," actions that pleased conservative reformist individuals while still working to prevent threatening fringe movements from developing (Alterman and McCants 154, 2014). In the following years, many informal religious groups, such as al-Utaybi's "al-Ikhwan" were forced to dissolve and disperse, yet the Sahwa movement was allowed to stay and its members remained important figures in the Saudi educational and judicial systems. This empowerment strengthened Sahwa members' presence in the nation and allowed its ideology to spread without institutional obstacles, directly impacting the movements' ability to organize and oppose government decisions once it felt betrayed during the Gulf War.

Following the first wave of opposition and open threat to the Al Saud family in the 1990s, the Saudi government kept a more watchful eye on Sahwa members and related movements while also working to crack down on jihadi activity from groups such as Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP) in the 2000s. Scholars such as Roel Meijer have debated whether this jihadi wave of violence resulted from state repression against Sahwa repression in the 1990s, but this thesis, alongside Thomas Hegghammer's work on Saudi Islamism, views the strains as separate entities with little to no shared ideological motivations (Hegghammer 2008). Despite their separate idols and goals, jihadists' and reformists' co-existence in the 2000s did, however, result in strict monitoring and exclusion of both groups from the public sphere by the

Saudi government. This directly impacted both the government's ability to learn about reformists' ideological motivations and organization tactics, as were displayed in the 1990s, and the Sahwa movement's ability to reorganize and unite over a single set of ideals, as was the case during and following the Gulf War. This government reconnaissance and learning explicitly affected the reformist movement of the 2010s, as reformist Islamists were prevented from fully uniting on political goals, causing a rift in motivations for opposition in the Arab Spring. With this lowered social standing and advanced monitoring of reformists' daily lives, the Saudi state was better able to employ repressive tactics to quash dissent in the 2010s, not having to give in to resisters' demands or face a socially and politically empowered movement.

Figure 1: Theoretical Map of Social Prestige



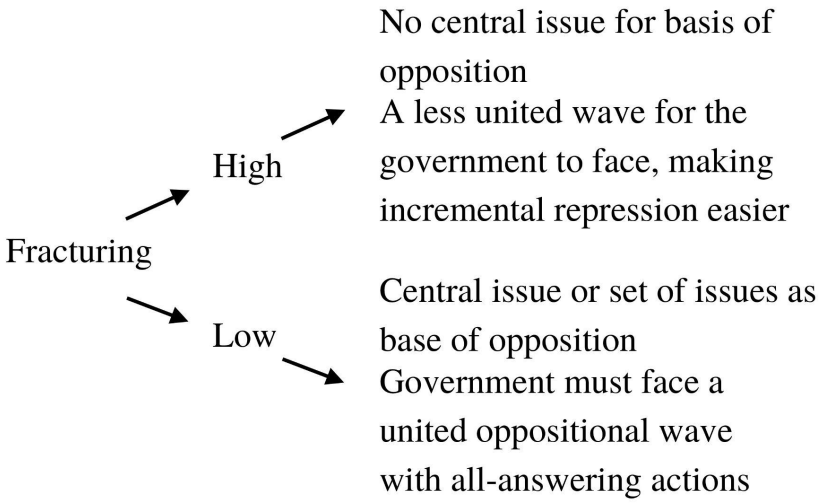
II. Fracturing

When internal fractures and increased government suspicions are present, Saudi repression is more likely to effectively silence Islamist opposition and minimize opportunities for growth or future reorganization. While reformist Islamists of the 90s united against a Western invasion of the Holy Lands and growing Saudi relations with Israel, Arab Spring reformists held

varying priorities, including outrage against the support of the Egyptian coup and demands for an elected government framework distinct from the king. This fragmentation made it harder for Islamists to show a united front, allowing the government to initiate repressive policies and slowly remove reformist demands from the public eye.

Because of the more fragmented reformist demands in the 2010s, the government was able to target seemingly more threatening groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, more immediately. This allowed the kingdom to work toward repressing less organized groups and certain individuals later rather than confronting a more united, single-issue or single set of issues front as seen in the 1990s.

Figure 2: Theoretical Map of Fracturing



III. Theoretical Framework

This study observes effectiveness by a repressive episode's ability to quell outspoken opposition, prevent future instances of dissidence, and the ability of the regime to ignore the opposition's demands. In the case surrounding the Gulf War, objectors faced repression through imprisonment and exile, however, major dissenting materials and impactful communiques were

still able to spread their message via fax and the internet. This subversion allowed opposition ideologies to evade silencing via repression and ultimately forced the government into acquiescing to some reformist demands, including establishment of the Saudi Basic Laws and the *Majlis Al-Shura*. Following the Arab Spring, however, the monarchy enacted strict counterterrorism laws, allowing the government to swiftly crack down on major dissenters, banning their media outlets and detaining figures such as Salman al-Odah and Safar al-Hawali, who are yet to be released. Rather than co-opting or accepting aspects of Islamists' demands, the Saudi government stayed firm in its policy practices, only adopting measures that somewhat followed Islamist goals that could be channeled to the monarchy's own benefit.

Existing literature on repression effectiveness and backfire distinguishes between selective and indiscriminate repression and the conditions necessary to successfully silence opposition. Evgeny Finkel (2015) argues that groups subjected to selective repression, in his case looking at Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, become more skilled resisters and will be less affected by further repression. While this theory does hold water in Finkel's selected cases, it does not account for oppressor learning during and following oppositional waves and reactions to certain government responses, nor does it account for successful repression subversion, as seen in the 1990s, and how unaltered opposition strategies can find continued success. While existing literature on authoritarian learning in the Arab world exists, such as Heydemann and Leenders's 2011 work, it primarily focuses on cross-government learning, such as Gulf nations learning from Egypt and Syria on Islamist democratic movement, and not in-nation learning about domestic groups over a period of time. Following the Gulf War wave of dissent, the Saudi monarchy knew how reformists organized themselves, how their opposition manifested – including recordings of speeches and memorandums to the king, and how effective each official

response was in quelling dissent. By observing that politically-inspired fatwas issued by the Council of Senior Scholars made the opposition critical of the religious establishment and the periods of relative silence from al-Odah and al-Hawali following their arrests, authorities knew that repressive tactics seemed to have longer-lasting effects than religious appeals or co-optation of dissidents' demands and applied this knowledge in the 2010s.

O'Brien and Deng observe in their research on repression backfire in rural China that harsh repression against protesters at a tent encampment near a chemical park resulted in more aggressive opposition tactics and ideological spread (O'Brien and Deng 2015). Their work explores the dissent-repression nexus, asserting that repression will neither dampen protest nor inspire dissent in every case, but its presence is a "transformative event" that affects the frequency of opposition and influences dissenters' tactics. This claim again does not acknowledge the evolution of oppressors' tactics and furthermore does not represent Saudi Arabia's case, as reformists used similar if not identical tactics in the Arab Spring to those employed during and following the Gulf War. This lack of tactical shift, shown by the reliance on memorandums to the king and dissemination of oppositional messages through new media in both cases, further allowed the Saudi government to develop its tactics, becoming more effective in the second instance of mass repression.

Accounting for internal fracturing, social prestige, and the ability for repressor learning, this thesis seeks to explore the factors that lead to repression effectiveness and how these factors can be manipulated for the state's benefit. When fracturing is high and social prestige is low, as was the situation in the Arab Spring period, repression will more effectively silence opposition, particularly after resisters' tactics remain unchanged and opposition members have been subjected to state surveillance. Predating these factors in the Gulf War period, however,

reformists were more easily able to organize around one or two central goals and evade state suspicion after having been incorporated into the Saudi bureaucratic framework over the past decades. These factors are, in this work's opinion, the two most important differences between the two oppositional waves that have a direct result on state oppression's effectiveness in quelling dissent and prolonging future periods of defiance and state criticism.

Chapter Two: The Gulf War

The Gulf War, which lasted from August 1990 to February 1991, was a conflict between Iraq and a coalition of 35 nations, led by the United States, beginning with the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait. Protecting its ally and fellow Arab Peninsula nation, Saudi Arabia served as a launching pad for American involvement in the war, additionally contributing militarily and monetarily to the defense of Kuwait and the defeat of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. This role angered Islamists around the Islamic world, as American and Western troops, many non-Muslim, were now carrying out military operations from the holiest land in Islam, as Saudi Arabia strengthened its Western ties and its connection with Israel. Reformist Sahwa members, who the state had been clinging to in the face of volatile rejectionism in decades past, were enraged alongside their Islamist brothers and began vocalizing their opposition to the Saudi crown, with some even taking the side of the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Hussein, who had just spent a decade at war with Iran, held a contentious position in the Middle Eastern political realm at this time; showing that by his war against Iran that he was not a beholder of Islamic solidarity while also showing his lack of pan-Arabism by invading Kuwait.

Hussein, instead, took a unique role of defender of traditional Arab and Islamic identity against Western invasion, both culturally and physically with boots on the ground in Saudi Arabia. A number of Islamists and Arab activists across the Middle East, including Islamist clerics in Saudi Arabia, found themselves supporting Hussein's campaign and using his claims as a basis for their own popular movements.

Saudi reformists were outraged by the American presence on the same ground as the two holiest cities in Islam, leading to distrust in the monarchy and religious establishment for

allowing this to occur and demands for change. Hundreds of Islamists across the nation, including leading Saudi Islamic scholars, united over these issues, signing memorandums to the king to demand political change and claiming the monarchy proved it could not be trusted after allowing Western influence in their sacred nation.

This being the first instance of sweeping opposition in the nation, the Al Sauds' legitimacy to rule had not been tested to this extent, nonetheless from individuals who had been included in the Saudi bureaucratic structure for so long. In attempts to pacify opposition demands as well as maintain internal legitimacy as a religious and political authority, the monarchy employed many response tactics, including repression against outspoken opposition members and those deemed to be foreign threats alongside accepting demands from the memorandums and re-establishing conservative norms and practices. The government maintained its independence in decision-making through foreign policy deals with Western nations and Israel, yet it was also beholden to its Islamist population to prioritize Palestinian rights when possible to maintain its Islamic legitimacy.

This chapter records and analyzes reformist dissent movements and Saudi official responses, drawing connections between which specific demand or issue called for which government response. Additionally, this chapter analyzes the effectiveness of repression alongside other silencing tactics in the short and medium-term, looking at how repression affected eventual opposition satisfaction or silencing and what gaps were left open for reformists to re-organize 20 years later.

Islamist Motivations and Initial Actions

Having been strongly incorporated into the Saudi government framework for decades, reformist Islamists had few issues with Al Saud rule until the 1990s. Many were professors or deans at the kingdom's highly regarded Islamic university and enjoyed relative freedom of expression, especially in religious matters. Following Saudi involvement in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, however, the first rifts between government and reformist understandings of Islam in politics and Western presence in the region began to form and expand, eventually resulting in gaping chasms between Saudi official practices and Islamist ideology.

During this time, a number of reformists found themselves rallying around Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and his apparent representation of Islamic and Arab strength. Evidenced by adding *Allahu akbar*, "God is great," to the Iraqi flag in 1991, many Islamists across the Muslim world believed Saddam Hussein had changed from his formerly ways of anti-Islamic unity and had become a full and pious Muslim (Piscatori 1991). Before a military operation, Hussein recalled a story of Muslim warriors defeating "the companions of the elephant" in the Qur'an to rally his senior commanders, referring to the United States and its Republican party as "the companion of the elephant," (Piscatori 18, 1991). Followed by cries of "Yes, Mr. President! How history repeats itself!" his fighters were inspired by his militaristic, political, and now religious strength. After stories of this and other instances of Quranic reliance and motivation spread, Islamists in Saudi Arabia and across the Islamic world began to think more highly of Saddam and his movement into Kuwait, becoming an Islamic figurehead in the region and a warrior fighting against the ever-encroaching Western imperialists (Piscatori 18, 1991).

"Until the voice of right rises up in the Arab world, hit their interest wherever they are and rescue holy Mecca and rescue the grave of the Prophet in Medina," Saddam said as he spoke of the Holy Lands being held "hostage by Americans" (Piscatori 22, 1991). This, alongside the

longstanding Israeli occupation of the third holiest city Jerusalem, was at the forefront of Islamist dissenters' minds, and they saw Saddam as the main fighter for Islamic control. Upon invading Kuwait in August 1990, Hussein stated he would not leave unless Israel withdraws from the occupied territories. Although this, of course, did not mirror reality, Saddam exploited the fervor Saudi reformists felt for Palestinian freedom and protection of the trinity of Islamic holy sites, especially as the Saudi government seemed to break away from this commitment in favor of Western and Israeli interests in the region.

Islamists from Saudi Arabia and those abroad were fervently against a Western, specifically American, presence in the Arab world that the Saudi government seemingly welcomed. Azzam Tamimi, director of the Muslim Brotherhood's parliamentary office in Jordan, said "We concluded early in the crisis that there was a conspiracy against Iraq, and therefore against Islam and the Arab world, led by the U.S. and Israel…It's not Saddam I care for, it's Iraq…When I see U.S. aims, it is only logical that I oppose any attempt to destroy its power" (Mosely 1991). This fight against Western invasion included backing the erratic Iraqi dictator against the previously most Islamic-forward government in the region, which was now welcoming American soldiers into the holy domain of Mecca and Medina. Reformists across the Middle East, especially those from Saudi Arabia, were insulted and humiliated to see Western soldiers in the nation of the two holiest cities in Islam, and Hussein used this as his rallying cry.

Even those who did not care for Saddam were outraged and offended by the American presence. The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood called for Muslims "to purge the holy land of Palestine and Najd and Hijaz[1] from the Zionists and imperialists" (Piscatori 18, 1991). This

[1] The Najd (or Nejd) and Hijaz are the two provinces united under King Abdulaziz to form the modern Saudi nation in 1932.

extended to not only the Western forces in the two nations but also the governments who allowed them to come in.

One of the leading detractors of the Saudi government, who believed he was aiding the United States in their "Western crusade against Islam," was Safar al-Hawali, the then-Dean of Islamic Studies at Umm al-Qura University in Mecca (Faksh 210, 1994). Dr. al-Hawali, thought to be the primary spokesman for the Wahabi sect at the time and a central figure of the Sahwa movement, believed that the United States had long been planning to occupy Saudi Arabia and that the Saudi government and leading Islamic officials "have gravely misunderstood their religion and must atone before God," as it is "contrary to the laws of Islam to join with non-Muslims in a battle against Muslims" (Fandy 1990). These statements, among other accusations against the Americans and the Saudi government, were recorded on tapes and disseminated across the kingdom wherein al-Hawali claimed that supporters of the foreign troops were idolators, as America had become their God (Fandy 1990).

Salman al-Odah, another central figure of the Sahwa movement alongside al-Hawali and then-Dean at the Muhammed Bin Saud University in Qasim, made more direct references to the regime, warning that "nations decline when rulers maintain themselves in power through corruption and resist the Islamic duty of consultation with the ulama and others," accusing the Saudi government of turning its back on its Islamic population and duty in favor of royal gain (Piscatori 25-26, 1991). This criticism came alongside foreign opposition, including an imam at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem claiming "Arab leaders are giving the Muslim lands to the Americans" before 10,000 worshippers and over 400 individuals shouting "death to [King] Fahd" outside the Saudi embassy in London over the American presence (Piscatori 22, 1991).

This overwhelming domestic and foreign opposition led to three main memorandums to the King, the first being presented in May 1991 by over 400 Saudi Islamists. It demanded strict adherence to Islamic norms in economic and foreign policy issues and extensive reform of the political and judicial systems. Criticizing corruption of the government, it called for "greater consideration to be given to qualifications and merit than to kinship" in the government appointment process and stressed that a consultative council should be independently established and given broad powers, which many reformists believed they should have a role in after decades of service to the King (Kapiszewski 461, 2006). Finally, it demanded that the army be built up and strengthened while foreign policy be based on Islamic laws and not foreign alliances not sanctioned by the Sharia.

This was followed by a second petition, the Memorandum of Advice sent to Sheikh Ibn Baz, the head of the Council of Senior Scholars, after King Fahd refused the letter in July 1992. Signed by more than 100 sheiks, mostly academics at Islamic universities, it echoed many of the complaints of the earlier memorandum and emphasized the denial of freedom of expression for Islamist preachers and activists, the abolition of all un-Islamic laws and treaties with non-Muslim states, and demanded that more power be given to Islamic scholars across the nation (Murphy 1992). It staunchly criticized the kingdom's foreign policy accommodations for "the interests of Western governments," including "compliance with the United States in making decisions, such as the decision to move ahead in the peace process with the Jews" (Murphy 1992).

A final, third petition, titled the Memorandum of Exhortation, was published in September 1992 by members of the Sahwa movement including al-Odah and al-Hawali. The document criticized the regime's overfinanced and underproducing military, the glorification of decadent and Westernized lifestyle, and the censorship of dissenting Islamist opinions

(Kapiszewski 461, 2006). Following this petition, an emboldened group of prominent reformist scholars and academics established the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CLDR), the first opposition organization in Saudi Arabia to openly challenge the monarchy, in May 1993 (Kapiszewski 2006). The group, led by al-Odah, al-Hawali, and Mohammad al-Massari, then a physics professor at King Saud University, accused the monarchy and senior ulama of "not doing enough to protect the legitimate Islamic rights of the Muslims" (Kapiszewski 462, 2006). The organization used newly developing media, including fax machines and later the internet, to disseminate their message domestically and later from London after members were forced into exile or arrested.

Although reformists rallied behind different champions of their movement, whether it be Saddam Hussein or the founders of the CLDR, they remained united under a common goal: freeing Saudi Arabia from the clutches of Western imperialism and prioritizing Islamic politics. With support from Islamists across the Middle East, Saudi reformists stood firm in their demands, doubling and tripling down on their critiques of the government and its practices. Dissidents saw each day the American military was in their country as an insult to the nation's holy sites and consistently accused the Al Sauds of corrupting their religious morals to bend their knee to America and abandoning its core Islamic tenets and population.

Government Response and Repression

This united wave of opposition railed strongly against the Saudi monarchy and put royals on high alert. As the Al Saud's claim to rule hinged on its Islamic clout, this Islamist decrying of the family's true Islamic belief was a direct threat to its legitimacy. Saudi royals had to choose to gain the approval of the kingdom's Islamic heavyweights or to silence their opposition while

their legitimacy remained intact. This being the first time the government faced mass upheaval, especially from a group with high social prestige and public trust, it had to navigate the crisis very carefully, eventually using a variety of tactics to both silence and appease reformists.

The Saudi government first sought to quell Islamist opposition through its religious arm, the Council of Senior Scholars. In a fatwa addressing "Iraq's aggression against the State of Kuwait," Sheikh Ibn Baz denounced Hussein's invasion, saying "what happened was due to the causes of sins and disobedience, the emergence of evil, and the lack of faith and authority" (Bin Baz 130-136). Seeking to discredit Islamists' belief in Saddam's piety and righteousness in his actions, Ibn Baz claimed that the invasion was caused by evil and spiritual corruption. Ibn Baz calls on

> all Muslims to denounce evil, to support the oppressed state, to repent to God of their sins and misdeeds… be patient with it in jihad against themselves and in jihad against their enemy and those who assaulted them, to hold fast by the rope of God all together, and to be one row, one body, and one building against the enemy and against the oppressor, whether he is Muslim or non-Muslim (Bin Baz 130-136).

This injunction requires Saudi Muslims to condemn Saddam Hussein, whose "evil" actions must be denounced and unite against him, no matter if he is the Muslim leader some Islamists claimed him to be.

Further into the unusually long fatwa, Ibn Baz speaks about the American military presence in Saudi Arabia. Ibn Baz claims that the Saudi government's decision to "seek the assistance of multi-ethnic forces among Muslims and others," was in line with Islamic values, citing a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad said Muslims could reconcile with the Romans for their benefit (Bin Baz 130-136). Furthermore, he goes on to say inviting American troops was permissible according to Shari'a and "an imperative duty when necessary" to protect the nation (Bin Baz 130-136). This characterization of American troops as "others" and

Islamically-backed invitation to protect the nation sought to soften the American presence in the Holy Lands for opposition members, yet it only inspired more outrage. Reformists saw how quickly the Council of Senior Scholars fell in line with Saudi official policy and issued fatwas at the government's request, proving how corrupt the kingdom's religious establishment was and how necessary reform was.

After al-Odah and al-Hawali spread their criticisms of the American presence and the Al Saud's religiosity for its support of Western troops more widely, Ibn Baz stated that they must repent of their conduct, or they would be "banned from lecturing meetings and cassette-recording" (Kapiszewski 463, 2006). Additionally, he accused the authors of the memorandums of "inventing and exaggerating" problems in the kingdom, basing their accounts on ideas that are "contrary to reality" and "serving the interests of the enemies of Saudi Arabia" while condemning the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights, as "Sharia is the law of the land, and religious courts are available to seek justice" (Murphy 1992; Faksh 212, 1994). These rulings from the highest Islamic authority in the kingdom only further proved that the Al Saud's corruption had seeped into the state's religious arm and how steadfastly the government would cling to its fledgling Western alliances.

Seeing how unsuccessful these fatwas were in silencing dissent, the monarchy instead turned to repression and forced silence. Shortly following Ibn Baz's condemnation of their materials, al-Odah and al-Hawali were arrested alongside many of their followers in Buraydah in 1994, while the Saudi government exiled many Egyptian Muslim Brothers residing in the nation, including Muhammad Qutb (Kapiszewski 2006). Qutb, brother of the famous leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Sayyid Qutb and then a professor at Umm al-Qura University, was one of the many exiled Egyptian Muslim Brothers who immigrated to Saudi Arabia in the

1950s-60s and helped found the Saudi education structure, yet he and many others like him were being forced away or imprisoned as the government seemingly abandoned its previously most trusted academics.

This anti-Islamist sentiment extended into Saudi foreign policy, as Saudi Arabia worked closely with the United States and Israel after the Gulf War, much to the ire and protest of Saudi reformists. Immediately after the war, Saudi Arabia owed a large debt to the nations that gave military aid, the majority of which was to the United States, of which a large portion was paid through arms contracts with American firms (Britannica). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia supported the American-led peace process between Israel and Palestinians, serving as the main organizer for Arab support of Israel and the United States. The kingdom was tasked with softening Syria's position against Israel and securing their attendance at the October 1991 Madrid Conference, in which Israeli and Palestinian representatives reopened peace talks (Britannica).

In 1994, Saudi Arabia led Gulf Cooperation Council member states, including Oman and Qatar, to withdraw from the decades-long Arab League boycott of all companies directly or indirectly related to Israel (Britannica). A year prior, however, following the signing of the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia pledged large amounts of money to develop the newfound government despite its president Yasser Arafat's and the Palestinian Liberation Organization's support for Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War and criticism of the Saudi government's allowance of American activity in their nation.

This support of a known Islamist and Al Saud critic was simply one example of the government's desperation to please the kingdom's reformist population. Despite the monarchy's reluctance to acknowledge the complaints of the Islamists or engage with the opposition, the government later conceded to many demands in the memorandums, as repression was not able to

silence the reformists' united front. On March 1, 1992, King Fahd created a system of regional government for the fourteen Saudi provinces, a consultative council to the king entitled the *Majlis Al-Shura*, and decreed the Saudi Basic Laws, a near-constitution that dictates the framework and basis for the Saudi government, all of which were demanded in the three memorandums (Faksh 213, 1994). While not all demands were met, as the council was King-appointed and held little power, many traditional religious leaders were consulted and appointed to the council at this time, which seemed to be a re-entry point for previously respected reformists into Saudi bureaucracy. Additionally, the conservative Department for the Preservation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (the *mutawwin'in* or moral police) was allowed to be revived, accompanied by strong support from the Islamist community (Faksh 1994).

Analysis

This wave of ideological opposition, bolstered by the religion Saudi Arabia is supposedly centered around, was the first mass movement of domestic resistance in the nation. The Saudi monarchy's legitimacy was overwhelmingly threatened by this Islamist undermining, as the Al Saud's claim to power hinged on their historic ties to Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab and their protection of the two holy mosques. The monarchy was thereby forced to quell current opposition and prevent any future outbreaks while also keeping the Islamic establishment content with their rule and holding as fast to Islamic beliefs as possible, so as not to further jeopardize their religious legitimacy.

Royals could not deny Saudi Islamists' claims of Western favoritism and reliance. The presence of 500,000 American troops on Saudi soil was more than enough to anger Islamists and ignite opposition, but the growing Saudi-American alliance and Saudi campaign for Israeli

recognition and acceptance caused enough outrage to drive a considerable number of Islamists to support Saddam Hussein as he claimed to fight the West on Muslims' and Arabs' behalf. The Saudi government's clearest course of action was to secure fatwas authorizing the Western presence on the Holy Lands and criticizing vocal opposition members such as Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Odah from the Council of Senior Scholars, but rather than silencing opposition, this only showed how much control the King held over the traditional religious establishment. Rather than forcing reformists into acceptance of Western presence after the senior Ulama allowed it, these rulings made reformists lose respect for the council and further united the opposition in favor of their own seemingly less politically-inspired form of Islam.

Acts of repression and systemic organization against reformists backfired, as dissenters continued their operations abroad post-exile, disseminating materials via fax and later the internet, while domestic opposition maintained its presence throughout the 1990s. Reformists did not quiet their united movement against Western imperialism and the Saudi government's allowance of it, even after central figures like al-Odah and al-Hawali were arrested. The kingdom was therefore forced to co-opt many aspects of the movement and accede to many of the opposition's demands, including the creation of the *Majlis Al-Shura* and the revival of conservative government departments. Even acts of repression were later reversed, as al-Hawali and al-Odah were released from prison in 1999, though much less outspoken against the government after their release; this temporary silence was the only positive result from repressive tactics, yet it still was only temporary.

The delicate balance between the monarchy acting as it wishes and appeasing Islamist dissent forced the government into many difficult situations. While it wanted to appear strong by working alongside the United States and Israel for royal gain, the government was forced to

appear weak to domestic and foreign opposition, succumbing to Islamist demands at home and supporting Yasser Arafat, a supporter of Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War and enabler of Islamist activity across the region.

If the Islamist activity at home was based on the traditional functions of groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, such as providing welfare or organizing elections as Freer points out, the government could have easily stopped these activities and limited Islamist influence. Because the Saudi political and economic climate did not call for these functions, however, as the government already provided handsome welfare benefits to its citizens and elections did not exist, the Islamist movement took on a more dangerous, ideological role. This resulted in a much more dangerous threat to the Al Sauds, as any critique of their Islamic credentials was a direct attack on their legitimacy to rule. Because reformists were so united under their concerns for the Holy Lands and criticism of Saudi governance accompanied by their pre-existing social prestige and foothold in the Saudi administration, official repressive tactics could not overcome the united threat, and the government was forced into compromise and co-optation rather than authoritative rule.

Chapter Three: The Arab Spring

The Arab Spring began in December 2010 when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire to protest the Tunisian government's seizure of his fruit cart, a spit in the face of all impoverished and under- and unemployed Tunisians. This act of desperate opposition evolved into a spirit of protest and revolution that spread throughout the Arab world, leading to massive demonstrations, toppling regimes, and civil wars in Egypt, Syria, and other Arab states. The Syrian Civil War, which is still being waged, sought to overtake authoritarian Ba'athist President Bashar al-Assad, while the Egyptian revolution resulted in the ouster of dictatorial President Hosni Mubarak, followed by the tumultuous, democratically-elected Muslim Brotherhood government under Mohamed Morsi and the subsequent coup by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Saudi Arabia felt its share of dissident shockwaves, resulting in the resurrection of the reformist movement of the 1990s albeit under different social conditions and ideological goals.

Instead of a distinct conflict like the Gulf War, the movements of the Arab Spring hinged on pent-up dissatisfaction and distress with governments' rule and incompetence. Rather than the opposition of the 1990s, which was largely based on religious claims and protecting the Holy Lands, reformism during and after the Arab Spring focused on the religious and social impacts of Saudi policies rather than a particular religious affront happening in the nation such as an American occupation. Islamists in the 1990s believed that the American and Israeli presences in the three holiest sites in Islam put their religion in jeopardy, threatening the spaces in which the Prophet Muhammad established and experienced his holy encounters. Arab Spring dissidence, however, was based more on Islamists' rights in their own country and the religious implications of the Saudi government's policies. Rather than seeking protection of a religious space, opposition members called for elections and support for forces in the Syrian Civil War while

condemning Saudi support of the Egyptian coup, which removed a democratically-elected Islamist government from office.

While the reformists used the same tactics as their last movement, including memorandums and media communication, the Saudi government took note of which quelling strategies proved more successful in achieving the monarchy's goals during the Gulf War period and which proved to be fruitful for future opposition. The royals saw that acquiescing to dissidents' demands emboldened reformists to rise up again while their repressive tactics seemed most effective in silencing the threat, however temporary the silence may have been. Rather than using a plethora of strategies to quell opposition, Saudi officials largely relied on continuing repression, which extends into the present day, to minimize threats to their legitimacy and only adopted a single demand from the reformists when it could be used for the government's benefit.

Islamist Motivations and Initial Actions

Following the opposition of the 1990s, the Saudi government kept a close eye on reformist dissidents while also facing direct jihadi attacks. Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP), an extension of the jihadist Al Qaeda network that was active in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, began a campaign of violence, leaving 300 dead between 2003 and 2007 (Hegghammer 701, 2008). While reformists attempted to keep a lower profile during this time, the Saudi state continued to monitor any sign of reformist activity and exclude reformists and their sympathizers from legal and educational frameworks as any increase in Islamist activity alarmed the monarchy. This resulted in reformists' reduced social and political prestige as well as political tension between the state and opposition members, which was brought to the fore by the revolutionary spirit sweeping the region, ending in open dissent and organized opposition.

As in the 1990s, Salman al-Odah was a central figure in opposition to the monarchy. After the government ordered his release from prison in 1999, a move to finally silence reformist dissent, al-Odah remained relatively non-critical of the Saudi government, likely due to harsh conditions in Saudi prisons and a possible under-the-table arrangement for his release. This changed, however, once the Arab Spring began. al-Odah, going against the kingdom's official stance, supported the revolutions taking place around the region, including in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. He once more became outwardly critical of the Saudi regime, tweeting after el-Sisi took over Egypt, "It is clear who is driving Egypt to its destruction out of fear for their own selves," the "who" in question being the Saudi throne after the Al Saud's support for el-Sisi and apparent celebration over Morsi's ouster (Alterman and McCants 163, 2014).

Nasir al-Umar, leader of the Saudi Sururi movement, was also vocal against the Saudi handling of the Arab Spring, praising the Islamists who came to power in Egypt and Algeria and condemning any individuals or governments who supported the subsequent Egyptian coup. Umar tweeted "Don't those who support the Felul revolution[2] and the Tamarrud movement[3] in #Egypt against their legitimate leaders know that by doing so they validate the legitimacy of revolution in their own countries and revolt against their rulers!" and, following the coup, "All those who carried out or aided the #slaughter_Rabi'a_al'Adawiyya, even if it was just a word, is falling under the promise: his recompense is Gehennam[4], therein dwelling forever, and God will be wroth with him and will curse him, and prepare him for a mighty chastisement" (Alterman and McCants 167, 2014). These tweets are direct threats to the Saudi throne, suggesting that its actions in Egypt will "validate" a Saudi revolution and, even more threatening, that the Saudi

[2] The remainders of the Mubarak regime in Egypt who were seeking power.
[3] A grassroots movement against Morsi with 22 million supporters.
[4] Hell.

officials who supported el-Sisi's coup against the Muslim Brotherhood government will go to Hell.

Reformists across the nation began preparing for democracy as Islamists abroad gained democratic power, with intellectuals tied to the Sahwa movement establishing the Islamic Umma Party (*Hizb al-Umma al-Islami)*, the first Saudi Arabian political party. A petition entitled "Toward a State of Institutions and Rights" that gained over 5,000 signatures within days of being posted online called for parliamentary elections, a prime minister distinct from the king, and "an end to administrative corruption" (Al-Rasheed 2012). This demand for democracy had never been seen from such a large portion of the Saudi population before and continued to gain traction online.

This was parallel to the democratic movements abroad that Saudi Islamists supported, especially in Egypt. Brotherhood members and sympathizers in Saudi Arabia criticized the Saudi government's support of the coup and el-Sisi, even adding Egyptian Brotherhood symbols to their Twitter avatars (Alterman and McCants 2014). Muhammad bin Nasir al-Suhaybani, an imam at the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, condemned all who supported the coup during a sermon while Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Brotherhood's spiritual leader exiled to Qatar, accused Saudi Arabia and its ally the United Arab Emirates of standing against Islamist regimes (Alterman and McCants 2014).

Alongside support and grief for the Egyptian political climate, Saudi reformists and jihadists alike threw their support behind Syrian rebels during the Arab Spring, with over 2,000 Saudis even traveling to fight in Syria as of November 2014 (McDowall 2014). Saudi Islamists, especially Saudi youth, were "enticed by the chance to be part of what they consider the final battles leading to the Day of Judgement," while others grew "weary of patiently working their

way up the ranks of Islamist study circles and are seeking to burnish their Islamist credentials by fighting in Syria…A number of the men do not identify as radicals, but they strongly dislike the Saudi government" (Alterman and McCants 170, 2014). Older clerics, including Nasir al-Umar, organized online and in-person fundraising campaigns to support the Islamic Front in Syria, a Salafi rebel group. They were, however, swiftly shut down by the Saudi government, as it believed Syrian Salafi groups may eventually turn their sites to the kingdom, leading 72 reformist imams, including al-Umar, to demand support for the Islamic Front in Syria and criticize the government for only supporting non-Salafi groups to that point (Miller and Weinberg 2013).

Government Response and Repression

Learning from the monarchy's mistakes of the 1990s, the Arab Spring-era government refused to accede to reformists' demands or co-opt any aspect of their movement, with King Abdullah only eventually organizing a fundraiser for Syria under his strict terms and only supporting groups the royals chose, those without Islamist or transnational goals. Seeing that reformists of the 2010s were much less united in their demands, ranging from calls for domestic democracy to condemnation for support of el-Sisi in Egypt, Saudi officials were able to silence opposition and outspoken individuals one by one through repression rather than fighting against and attempting to appease a wall of united hostility that would result in even further mass upheaval and outcry.

To counter reformists' movements for Syrian support, the Saudi government prohibited public organization for Syria, only allowing official fundraisers and movements to organize (Alterman and McCants 2014). Afraid that certain rebel factions may eventually turn their sights

toward the Saudi monarchy, the government banned all citizens from raising and sending money to rebel groups without state sanction alongside fighting in Syria, securing a ruling from the Council of Senior Scholars that Saudi citizens cannot fight against the Assad regime in June 2012 (Alterman and McCants 169, 2014).

To appease the roars of support for Syria across the nation and not only from its Islamist population, King Abdullah sponsored a public fundraiser for the Martyrs of Syria Batallion, a non-Islamist unit of the Free Syrian Army, with the donations dispersed by the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of the Interior took on this role and more, following King Abdullah's decree to sentence those who give "moral or material support to groups the government considers extreme" to five to 30 years in jail and sentencing any Saudi national who travels overseas to fight to three to 20 years (Al Jazeera 2014).

The Saudi government also sought to minimize the transnational Islamist threat by under-supporting and underfunding the new Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, which the monarchy feared would inspire further reformist and Brotherhood activity in the kingdom. Following former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's ouster in February 2011, Saudi Arabia promised $3.5 billion USD to the new Egyptian government as an act of Arab goodwill and before the Muslim Brotherhood won its election, yet only sent $1 billion after Mohammed Morsi took power and began talks with Saudi rivals, including Iran (Ayad 2013). This tension boiled over in the summer of 2013, when the Saudi government supported General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in his coup against the Muslim Brotherhood government, immediately promising $5 billion USD in aid and organizing $3 billion and $4 billion to be given from the UAE and Kuwait, respectively (Alterman and McCants 162, 2014). This enraged Saudi Islamists, inspiring further

vocal opposition via online activism on Twitter and claims that Saudi officials will face the fires of Hell as previously mentioned.

King Abdullah, having supported the Egyptian government's bloody and murderous crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood post-coup in a "justified action against terrorists," officially declared the Brotherhood a terrorist organization on March 7, 2014, with Bahrain and the UAE soon following (Alterman and McCants 162, 2014; Ajbaili 2014). This designation was not a surprise to the "25,000 or so Brothers in the Kingdom," who had begun canceling gatherings and removing themselves from the public eye before the designation was officially announced, but it was a more severe stance against the Brotherhood and opened a path to persecuting Brotherhood-adjacent and other Islamist Saudis. (Alterman and McCants 164, 2014).

While Bahrain, the UAE, and Kuwait aligned with Saudi Arabia in its support of the Egyptian coup and fight against Islamism, Qatar refused to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization and allowed Islamist activity to occur within its borders. While no group had an official presence in the nation, many Muslim Brotherhood officials and other Islamist figures, including Yusuf al-Qaradawi, resided in Qatar and were given airtime or other media opportunities on government-owned and funded outlets such as Al Jazeera. In March 2014, the Saudi and Emirati governments refused to send ambassadors to Qatar and accused them of funding, harboring, and giving media exposure to the Brotherhood (Salman 2021). Saudi Arabia was also frustrated with the Qatari presence in Syria, as the nation funded the Salafi Islamic Front among other Islamist groups with potentially threatening transnational agendas.

This frustration boiled over into the Qatari Diplomatic Crisis, in which Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt severed diplomatic ties with Qatar and banned Qatari travel over these nations' airspace, sea routes, and land crossings. This isolation sought to repress an international

Islamist threat, as Saudi Arabia and its allies worked to keep the Muslim Brotherhood and its re-emerged political and democratic threat out of the Arabian Peninsula. Lasting from June 5, 2017, to January 5, 2021, Qatar was forced to rely more heavily on ties with Iran and Turkey, Saudi Arabia's biggest rivals in the region (Daragahi and Trew 2021). The nations hostile to Qatar, headed by Saudi Arabia, presented the kingdom with a list of thirteen demands to be met to reestablish ties immediately following the cut, including scaling down diplomatic ties with Iran and Turkey, severing all ties to "terrorist, sectarian and ideological organisations" such as the Muslim Brotherhood, declaring these organizations as terror groups, shutting down Al Jazeera and "all news outlets funded directly and indirectly by Qatar," and "paying reparations and compensation…for losses caused by Qatar's policies in recent years" (Al Jazeera 2017).

These anti-Islamist and censoring policies and repressive tactics were mirrored inside the kingdom, with Salman al-Odah losing his weekly television show alongside an alleged member of the "terrorist Brotherhood movement" member Tareq al-Suwaidan's popular show from al-Risala TV (Alterman and McCants 163, 2014). Additionally, al-Suwaidan and al-Odah's books were banned by the government, while the Ministry of the Interior launched a brief campaign to "detain Islamists at the local ministry branches and force them to sign a pledge agreeing to cease criticism of the Saudi state" (Alterman and McCants 163, 2014). Following this crackdown, many reformists were arrested, with al-Odah and Safar al-Hawali both being re-detained in 2018. al-Odah was arrested for a tweet that allegedly "mock[ed] the government's achievements" by asking to end the Qatari Diplomatic Crisis, while al-Hawali was detained for publishing a 3,000-page book entitled *Muslims and Western Civilisation*, which criticized the Al Sauds and Saudi foreign policy (Alaoudh 2019; Salem 2019).

Additionally, seven of the ten founding members of the Islamic Umma Party were detained, as the government launched anti-terror and security forces around the kingdom. Beginning in January 2014, the Penal Law for Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing alongside later decrees targeted Islamist activity inside and outside the nation, with crimes such as aiding or sympathizing with terrorist organizations, "contact or correspondence with any groups, currents, or individuals hostile to the kingdom," and "seeking to shake the social fabric or national cohesion" being punishable with sentences from three to twenty years (Human Rights Watch 2014). This law was replaced by another "Penal Law for Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing" on November 1, 2017, which gave the Saudi government similarly broad powers in making arrests, with terrorism including definitions of "disturbing the public order" and "exposing its national unity to danger" (Human Rights Watch 2017b).

Rather than openly targeting its own citizenry, however, the Saudi monarchy blamed foreign actors such as Iran for dissident activity, as similarly done during the Gulf War. The government also tried to redirect Sunni anger toward the government at the Saudi Shi'ite minority. This designation of foreign-influenced opposition makes it even easier for the Ministry of the Interior, and later the Ministry of Public Prosecution and Presidency of the State Security in 2017, to envelop all non-compliance under the established terrorism laws (Human Rights Watch 2017b). Saudi officials argued that these dissident waves "were the product of an Iranian conspiracy aimed at 'destabilizing the Kingdom," which makes it more acceptable to a non-Islamist, Wahhabi Saudi citizen for mass arrests and repression against Islamist and Shi'ite figures and clerics (Alterman and McCants 160, 2014). A Shi'ite activist claimed that this blame shift to the Shi'a population allowed for the government sealing and destruction of Awamiya, a predominantly Shi'a town in the Eastern Province, resulting in multiple injuries and casualties

beginning in May 2017 (Human Rights Watch 2017a). As the Saudi government lumped its domestic reformist movement with other domestic and allegedly international rivals, it worked to lower reformists' social prestige in hopes that Saudi nationals would celebrate this repression as acts of public protection.

Additionally, Saudi Arabia was facing increasing legitimacy threats from foreign radical Islam groups, largely the Islamic State (ISIS) and Al Qaeda. If ISIS's claims of religious authority over all Muslims were to come to fruition, the Saudi monarchy would lose its role as the protector of the two holy mosques, and the Al Sauds would lose their place as the rightful rulers of Saudi Arabia and "Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques." The Saudi monarchy, therefore, sought to delegitimize ISIS's claims by securing a fatwa from grand mufti Abdulaziz Al al-Sheikh, declaring "the Islamic State and Al Qaeda are 'enemy number one of Islam' and that 'extremist and militant ideas and terrorist which spread decay on Earth, destroying human civilization, are not in any way part of Islam…and Muslims are their first victims;" al-Sheikh also called ISIS a "modern incarnation of the Kharijite movement," which rejects its claim to Islamic authority and emphasizes its heresy (Alterman and McCants 172-173, 2014). al-Sheikh additionally issued fatwas in the mid-2010s defining the role of allegiance in Islam, focusing on its political aspects to the then-new King Salman, and emphasizing "the concept of obedience to the guardian," citing the verse "O you who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you" (al-Sheikh). These fatwas sought to limit transnational radical Islamist threats, which the monarchy hoped to lump its domestic groups in within the public eye, as well as emphasize each Saudi citizen's duty to worship the monarchy, both of which sought to reduce opposition in the nation and further criminalize the reformist movement.

Analysis

This second wave of mass opposition in a twenty-year period forced the Al Sauds to rethink their previous strategies of quelling resistance. Compared to Islamist repression during the Gulf War, repression during and after the Arab Spring has been more policy-backed and longer-lasting, as many political prisoners are still detained or have died in prison, while the harshest terrorism laws are still on the books. Although the government did seemingly acquiesce to the more moderate reformist demands on support for rebel groups in Syria, this appeasement was done solely on the government's terms rather than a joint effort between the two parties.

Reformists were fragmented over their policy priorities in the 2010s, with some focusing more on parliamentary elections and individual freedoms while others focused on support for Islamist groups abroad in Syria, Egypt, and Qatar. Compared to the 1990s, the Saudi government was better able to pick apart dissenting groups, target their demands with more repressive policies, and move on to a less threatening incarnation of reformist opposition until none was publicly open. Reformists were also continually subjugated during this time, after experiencing two decades of scrutiny and surveillance from the government while also being tarnished in the public imaginary after being grouped with more extreme and threatening groups to the kingdom.

The two Penal Laws for Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing enacted in 2014 and 2017 gave the government powers to detain any separatist from Saudi official policy, allowing Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Odah to face life sentences as they have waited six years in prison for sentencing after their arrest. These uncompromising, repressive laws have garnered concern from the international human rights community, including Human Rights Watch and the United Nations, yet the current King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have continued these practices while facing little to no sanctions or other consequences.

Instead of facing international consequences, Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies punished Qatar for not quelling Islamist activity within its borders thoroughly enough and allegedly supporting Islamists with transnational threats via their donations to Salafi Syrian rebels, the Muslim Brotherhood, and other "detestable" groups. Qatar was also accused of using its state-owned media outlet, Al Jazeera, as a mouthpiece for the Muslim Brotherhood to threaten the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy, which brought Gulf nations, led by Saudi Arabia, to demand thirteen items of Qatar before ending the crisis, one of which called to shut down Al Jazeera. These demands, however unfounded or outlandish, further contributed to the subjugation of Saudi domestic Islamist opposition while providing more avenues for internal fragmentation of reformists as more issues arose to protest.

Saudi Arabia's more rigid, longer-lasting repression against and discouragement of foreign and domestic Islamist activity following the Arab Spring shows the large perceived threat the monarchy feels by movements such as the Sahwa movement and the Muslim Brotherhood. This repression, however, has proved more successful in neutralizing the domestic reformist threat, as Saudi Arabia has not faced any widespread opposition following its unwavering crackdown on dissenters, despite its minimal co-optation of and acquiescing to Islamists' demands.

Conclusion

Saudi repression of reformist Islamists proved much more effective following Arab Spring opposition than in the 1990s Gulf War period. This can be directly attributed to the opposition's lack of cohesion during the 2010s compared to its earlier movement and reformists' reduced prestige, resulting in easier repression from the government and less public response or acknowledgment. Rather than succumbing to oppositional demands of reform out of desperation for peace as done in the 1990s, the Saudi establishment held firm in its rejection of Islamist demands, learning from its failure to remain authoritative following the Gulf War and the subsequent years of monitoring reformist and jihadist opposition.

Saudi repression was effective in quelling reformist activity only when the opposition was more ideologically fragmented and subjected to extreme monitoring after a loss of social prestige. Although the reformist movement eventually died down in the 1990s and early 2000s, it was only after Saudi royals enacted many of their policy demands, leaving repression to be mostly ineffective, with its repressive tactics such as the arrest of high-profile figures Salman al-Odah and Safar al-Hawali eventually being reversed. During and following the Arab Spring, however, the Saudi monarchy led off with repressive tactics, declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, enacting strict anti-terrorism laws that targeted even minor oppositional actions as detainable offenses, and expanding this targeting into its foreign policy decisions. These repressive decisions have lasted into the present, as al-Odah and al-Hawali remain in prison while the strict anti-terrorism laws of 2014 and 2017 remain on the books to this day, removing opportunities for a potential re-emergence of opposition and continuing to subdue reformists' social standing.

This thesis highlights two concepts that are vital to repression effectiveness in Saudi Arabia, in-group fragmentation and reduced social prestige, that directly impacted repression outcomes between reformist opposition movements in the 1990s Gulf War period and the 2010s Arab Spring era. Although this thesis investigates these factors in a Saudi context, they have roles in every form of public outcry and opposition and may have important implications in repressive incidents outside of Saudi Arabia and the Arab World.

Building upon this research, future scholarship can examine how fragmentation and prestige have affected repression outcomes in other political backdrops and instances of state repression. Additionally, future scholarship can analyze how these tactics affect the future of reformist and Islamist activity in the kingdom while also delving deeper into the implications of the Qatari Diplomatic Crisis's end in January 2021. While the end of this crisis seemingly had much to do with potential economic gains from Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup and fears surrounding Qatar's increasing diplomatic ties with Iran and Turkey, its end may also have an impact on future Islamist activity in the kingdom, potentially viewing it as a step of accession to a supposed Islamist stronghold. Furthermore, as time nears the 20-year mark after the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia may see a rise in potential reformist activity, as Saudi Islamist youth grow more unsatisfied with Al Saud rule as repression either continues as it is currently or weakens over time.

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