

Saudi Arabia's Surprise Soccer Victory

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Brief Analysis

The Saudi men's team's major upset against Argentina in their opening World Cup match has brought together many Saudis and the Arab world writ large in celebration, demonstrating the powerful pull of the game.

An Unexpected Win

As with many countries, soccer is a major preoccupation, both among the general public and at the highest political levels. Just one month ago, on October 23, Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) [met \(https://www.alarabiya.net/sport/saudi-](https://www.alarabiya.net/sport/saudi-)

[illegible]

From the point of view of the players, it might have been embarrassing to know of the overall low expectations for their performance. Indeed, prior to this moment, an overall sense of immense frustration and pessimism with the Saudi team's prospects was anecdotally observed among Saudi soccer fans. Nevertheless, Saudi fans showed up in droves to Qatar's World Cup and have been one of the largest foreign fan bases present, due both to proximity and the widespread popularity of the game among Saudi Arabia's 35 million inhabitants.

Nor has the team's previously muted performance been for want of financing. The Saudi local soccer league [ranks \(\[https://www.alqabas.com/article/5808933-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D9%2525252585%25252525D8%25252525A9-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A3%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252589-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A8%25252525D8%25252525B7%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A2%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525AF%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D8%25252525B1%25252525D9%252525258A-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D8%25252525B9%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D8%25252525AF%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A3%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252584-%25252525D8%25252525B9%25252525D8%25252525B1%25252525D8%25252525A8%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D8%25252525A7">https://www.alqabas.com/article/5808933-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D9%2525252585%25252525D8%25252525A9-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A3%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252589-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A8%25252525D8%25252525B7%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A2%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D9%2525252588\]\(https://www.alqabas.com/article/5808933-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D9%2525252585%25252525D8%25252525A9-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A3%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252589-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A8%25252525D8%25252525B7%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A2%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525AF%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D8%25252525B1%25252525D9%252525258A-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D8%25252525B9%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D8%25252525AF%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A3%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252584-%25252525D8%25252525B9%25252525D8%25252525B1%25252525D8%25252525A8%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D8%25252525A7\)](https://www.alqabas.com/article/5808933-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D9%2525252585%25252525D8%25252525A9-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A3%25252525D9%2525252582%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252589-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A8%25252525D8%25252525B7%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A2%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525AF%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D8%25252525B1%25252525D9%252525258A-%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525B3%25252525D8%25252525B9%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D8%25252525AF%25252525D8%25252525A7%25252525D9%2525252584%25252525D8%25252525A3%25252525D9%2525252588%25252525D9%2525252584-%25252525D8%25252525B9%25252525D8%25252525B1%25252525D8%25252525A8%25252525D9%252525258A%25252525D8%25252525A7)

Going into the Saudi team's first game, the odds were stacked in Argentina's favor: Argentina previously had a 36-match unbeaten streak and seemed set to tie Italy's unbeaten 37-match record. Besides Argentina being among the top **projected** (<https://www.espn.com/soccer/fifa-world-cup/story/4803282/world-cup-predictions-argentina-over-brazil-france-england>) winners of the World Cup, it is also Argentina's legendary captain Lionel Messi's last World Cup.

Afterwards, the Saudi team's coach told an interviewer that it may have been precisely the lack of undue pressure that fired up the national team's passion, and helped secure a momentous victory against what was ranked as the third highest team in the world. Now, the team has been more than gratified by the national response and recognition: Salem Al-Dossari, the player who scored the team's second and winning goal, [tweeted \(https://twitter.com/salem_d29/status/1595073883052425218?s=61&t=sm9QEdGaUlkZfbqCVuIXvA\)](https://twitter.com/salem_d29/status/1595073883052425218?s=61&t=sm9QEdGaUlkZfbqCVuIXvA) images of MbS celebrating and prostrating himself in the manner that some Muslim players will thank God for a successful goal.

Reactions in Saudi Arabia and Beyond

The game has had a major impact on the Saudi public. At workplaces in Saudi Arabia—be it hospitals, corporate headquarters, or public offices—large screens were brought to show soccer matches and to watch the 1 PM Saudi-Argentina game. Offices were subsequently overwhelmed with chanting and victory dancing. Saudis are celebrating both inside of the country and out, including some Saudi dissidents (https://twitter.com/TurkiShalhoub/status/1595033038471442432?s=20&t=_jw2hwsr9xGRBY-VjrtuPA) on social media who have celebrated this moment.

Social media tweets from across the Arab world are depicting the impact of the win on a broader scale. Videos of celebrations have streamed from [Yemen](https://twitter.com/SaudiDRPY/status/1595123768707485702) (<https://twitter.com/SaudiDRPY/status/1595123768707485702>), [Egypt](https://twitter.com/alekhbariyatv/status/1595041940646817794?s=20&t=-1AaCf1WWnmLTOSlIfUow) (<https://twitter.com/alekhbariyatv/status/1595041940646817794?s=20&t=-1AaCf1WWnmLTOSlIfUow>), [Gaza](https://twitter.com/GazaNownews/status/1595072084341841921?s=20&t=-1AaCf1WWnmLTOSlIfUow) (<https://twitter.com/GazaNownews/status/1595072084341841921?s=20&t=-1AaCf1WWnmLTOSlIfUow>), [Kuwait](https://twitter.com/AQeshaysh/status/1595131822605639681) (<https://twitter.com/AQeshaysh/status/1595131822605639681>), [Sudan](https://twitter.com/HassanBakry19/status/1595036221193027584?s=20&t=-1AaCf1WWnmLTOSlIfUow) (<https://twitter.com/HassanBakry19/status/1595036221193027584?s=20&t=-1AaCf1WWnmLTOSlIfUow>), [Iraq](https://twitter.com/KSA_farsi/status/1595045645601148931) (https://twitter.com/KSA_farsi/status/1595045645601148931), and [Syria](https://twitter.com/Ibraheea47804295/status/1595134605979709440) (<https://twitter.com/Ibraheea47804295/status/1595134605979709440>). One [Tunisian](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/22/proud-day-to-be-arab-joy-for-saudi-arabia-tunisia-fans) (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/22/proud-day-to-be-arab-joy-for-saudi-arabia-tunisia-fans>) fan described the moment as a “Proud day to be Arab,” given Saudi Arabia’s



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