

Saudi Arabia's Virtual Quest for Citizenship and Identity

by [Hala Aldosari \(/experts/hala-aldosari\)](/experts/hala-aldosari)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Hala Aldosari is a visiting scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, focused on the development of women's rights in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.



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In this ninth essay in a series exploring Middle East actors pressing for political reform, Saudi activist Hala Aldosari discusses, first, the network of human rights activists encompassing Shiites, liberals, and women; and, second, social entrepreneurs who advocate for a cultural transformation to resist politically forced norms.

Inside the Saudi kingdom, political uncertainty often triggers a surge in public demands. Because the privileges and entitlements of citizenship are based on religious affiliation, gender, and loyalty to the king, many resulting reform movements challenge these prescribed aspects of Saudi identity.

In this essay, the ninth in a series exploring Middle East actors pressing for political reform, Saudi activist Hala Aldosari addresses two of these sometimes overlapping movements: first, the diverse and inclusive network of human rights activists that encompasses many Shiites, liberals, and women; and second, social entrepreneurs who advocate for a cultural transformation to resist politically forced norms. Dr. Aldosari argues that intensified Saudi conflicts with regional and international actors, coupled with reduced oil revenues and increased public expenditure, have created a unique opportunity for reform. She maintains that reformers can exploit this opportunity by employing the same tactics as the state: creating alliances with national constituencies and harnessing media and supportive organizations as alternative, influential power centers to help institute change.

THE AUTHOR

[Hala Aldosari \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/hala-aldosari\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/hala-aldosari) is a visiting scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, focusing on the development of women's rights in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. She currently directs and maintains a women's rights advocacy project online and participates in advocacy efforts and community capacity building aimed at promoting women's rights and empowerment in Saudi Arabia. Her publications have been featured in several major media outlets including the *Guardian*, *Foreign Policy*, and Al

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