



# **SAUDI ARABIA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY & VISION 2030**

**BURAK DİKİCİ**

**DECEMBER 2025**

## THE SHIFT

- **Old image:** oil-focused economy, ultra-conservative structure, “closed kingdom,” only hajj/umrah tourism.
- **Turning point:** fluctuations in oil prices and the demands of the young population.
- Vision 2030 (announced in 2016): led by crown prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS).
- **Goal:** diversify the economy, return to “moderate Islam,” and transform the country into a global investment/tourism hub.

## KEY INSTITUTIONS

### Actors in Public Diplomacy:

- **Public Investment Fund (PIF):** The financial engine of Vision 2030 (purchasing Newcastle United, LIV Golf investments, etc.).
- **General Entertainment Authority (GEA):** The institution building the entertainment sector from scratch (concerts, events).
- **Ministry of Culture:** Promoting cultural heritage to the world.
- **Misk Foundation:** A soft power tool focused on youth and education.

# CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

## Opening of the Kingdom

- **E-Visa Application:** Introduction of tourist visas in 2019 (previously only business or pilgrimage visas were available).
- **AIUla Project:** Saudi Arabia's "Petra." Branding as a destination for history and luxury tourism.
- **Cinema and Arts:** Lifting of the 35-year cinema ban. Red Sea International Film Festival (with Hollywood stars in attendance).
- **MDLBeast Soundstorm:** The Middle East's largest music festival (a complete reversal of the old conservative image).



## PROJECTING THE FUTURE

- **NEOM & The Line:** The image of transitioning from a traditional state to the “Country of the Future.”
- Emphasis on sustainability and high technology.
- A PR tool to attract international investors and talent.



# SPORTS DIPLOMACY

## Global Sports Hub

- **Football:** The transfer of stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar, and Benzema to the Saudi Pro League.
- **Formula 1:** Jeddah Corniche Circuit.
- **Golf:** Competing with the PGA Tour through LIV Golf and merger processes.
- **FIFA World Cup 2034:** The process of hosting as the sole candidate.
- **eSports:** Hosting the eSports World Cup.

## HUMANITARIAN & RELIGIOUS

### Religious & Humanitarian Soft Power

- **Hajj and Umrah:** Maintaining leadership in the Islamic world while digitizing services.
- **KSrelief (King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center):** Global humanitarian aid.

# ASSESSMENT

## Soft Power & Challenges

- **Global Soft Power Index:** Saudi Arabia's rise in the rankings (see Brand Finance reports).
- Efforts to restore its image following human rights reports and the murder of Jamal Khashoggi.
- Women's rights reforms (lifting the ban on driving, easing the guardianship system) vs. ongoing criticism.
- **Conclusion:** Image change is a top-down process and is still ongoing.

## REFERENCES

- Al-Rasheed, M. (2021). *The Son King: Reform and repression in Saudi Arabia*. Oxford University Press.
- Brand Finance. (2024). *Global Soft Power Index 2024*. <https://brandfinance.com/softpower>
- Chadwick, S. (2022). From utilitarianism to weaponisation: The geopolitical economy of sport in the Gulf. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 14(4), 1-16.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2022.2087792>
- Kinninmont, J. (2017). *Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's social contract: Austerity and transformation*. Chatham House.  
<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2017/07/vision-2030-and-saudi-arabias-social-contract>



# BURAK DİKİCİ

Senior Student, Political Science and International  
Relations MEF University | İstanbul, Türkiye (Turkey)

[www.burakdikici.com](http://www.burakdikici.com)