Saudis’ attitude toward principles of modernity: Social progress, individualism, and democracy

Ammar Ali H Alhumood

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Saudis’ Attitude toward Principles of Modernity: Social Progress, Individualism, and Democracy

by

Ammar Ali H Alhumood

Thesis

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Kristine Ajrouch, Ph.D, Chair

Robert Orrange, Ph.D, Committee Member

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Abstract

This study investigated attitudes of Saudi youth towards modernity and its principles, which are social progress, individualism, and democracy. Methodologically, the study used mixed methods by applying two scientific tools: semi-structured interviews and a survey. Study questions, both close-ended and open-ended, are programmed using REDCap. Data was gathered virtually via Zoom meetings. Twenty-one Saudi youth (10 males and 11 females) aged between 18 and 30 years old participated. They were recruited via social media platforms. Descriptive statistics were conducted to analyze survey data, and an inductive approach was used to analyze the semi-structures interviews. The results show that the Saudi youth have an acute awareness and cautious attitudes regarding their own social, cultural, and political circumstances in dealing with modernity and its fundamental principles. However, distrust emerged as an issue in the story of Saudi modernity due to the perception that it is a government-led project and not an internal, dynamic process.
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

List of Figures ................................................................................................................................. vii

INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................. 1

Purpose of Study ............................................................................................................................... 3

Significance of Study ....................................................................................................................... 3

BACKGROUND .................................................................................................................................... 5

Background: Saudi Arabia ............................................................................................................... 5

Politics ............................................................................................................................................... 5

Religion ........................................................................................................................................... 5

Culture ............................................................................................................................................ 6

Modernity ......................................................................................................................................... 7

Modernity and the Islamic World ..................................................................................................... 9

Islamic Modernists ........................................................................................................................ 10

Islamic Activists ............................................................................................................................. 11

Saudi Arabia and Modernity .......................................................................................................... 13

LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................................................................... 15

The Concept of Modernity ............................................................................................................. 15

Social Attitude ................................................................................................................................ 17

Social Progress ............................................................................................................................... 21
Individualism.................................................................................................................. 25
Democracy ....................................................................................................................... 26
METHOD ............................................................................................................................ 32
Research Design .............................................................................................................. 32
Sampling ........................................................................................................................... 33
Data Collection ................................................................................................................ 33
Data Entry ........................................................................................................................ 36
Measure ............................................................................................................................. 36
Modernity .......................................................................................................................... 37
Social Progress .................................................................................................................. 38
Individualism ..................................................................................................................... 39
Democracy ........................................................................................................................ 42
Data Analysis ..................................................................................................................... 44
FINDINGS ........................................................................................................................... 46
Attitude toward Modernity ............................................................................................... 46
  The Definition ................................................................................................................ 46
Feelings towards Modernity ............................................................................................. 48
The Nature of Modernity in Saudi Arabia ......................................................................... 49
Change in Saudi Arabia .................................................................................................... 51
The Importance of Religion and Social Traditions and Custom ........................................ 53
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam &amp; Modernity.</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernity &amp; the West</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward Social Progress</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with How Things Are Going in Saudi Arabia.</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Agents of Change in Saudi Society</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Social Change Definition</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things to Change</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compatibility between Science and Religion</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward Individualism</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Resources</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual vs. Group Interactions</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Parenting Interaction</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Ties vs. Hard Work to Get Ahead in Life.</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference Group Sources</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Concept of Freedom</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward Democracy</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Governmental Forms</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Democracy</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of Democracy</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles of Democracy</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE DISCUSSION ........................................................................................................... 90

Attitude toward Modernity ........................................................................................ 90

Attitude toward Social Progress .............................................................................. 93

Attitude toward Individualism .................................................................................. 94

Family ....................................................................................................................... 95

Religion .................................................................................................................... 96

Attitude toward Democracy .................................................................................... 98

Distrust as a National Issue ...................................................................................... 101

CONCLUSION ........................................................................................................... 104

Limitations of the Study ........................................................................................... 105

Difficulties of the Study ........................................................................................... 106

Recommendations and Further Research ............................................................... 106

References ................................................................................................................ 108

Appendix A: Survey Form ....................................................................................... 142

Appendix B: University Human Subject Review Committee Approval .................. 150
List of Figures

Figure 1. Conflict of Values ........................................................................................................ 118
Figure 2. Compatibility between Modernity and Islam ............................................................. 119
Figure 3. The Source of Modernity ............................................................................................. 120
Figure 4. Attitude toward Social Change ................................................................................... 121
Figure 5. Compatibility between Islam and Science ................................................................. 122
Figure 6. Satisfaction with How Things are Going in Saudi Arabia ........................................ 123
Figure 7. Social Change Agents ................................................................................................. 124
Figure 8. Sources of Deepest and Most Profound Truth ............................................................. 125
Figure 9. Prioritizing Feelings .................................................................................................... 126
Figure 10. Individual vs. Group Opinion .................................................................................... 127
Figure 11. Going Along with the Parents ................................................................................... 128
Figure 12. Choosing Career Path ............................................................................................... 129
Figure 13. Family Connections or Hard Work .......................................................................... 130
Figure 14. Reference Group Source for Advice ......................................................................... 131
Figure 15. Attitude toward Democracy ...................................................................................... 132
Figure 16. Compatibility between Democracy and Islam .......................................................... 133
Figure 17. Saudis Readiness to Have Democracy ....................................................................... 134
Figure 18. Importance of Democracy in Saudi Arabia ............................................................... 135
Figure 19. Saudis' Ability in Making Political Decisions ............................................................ 136
Figure 20. Good Democracy or Strong Economy ...................................................................... 137
Figure 21. Democratic Government or a Strong Leader ............................................................. 138
Figure 22. Democracy vs. Stability ............................................................................................ 139
Figure 23. Attitude toward Government Forms...................................................... 140
INTRODUCTION

Debates over the meaning of modernity are often heated in non-Western countries because “modernity” poses a threat to the status quo. The word conjures up social progress, change, economic growth, individual emancipation, cultural modernism, cultural decline, loss of authenticity, and economic dependency (Kraidy 2009). Nonetheless, if modernity means coming to new cultural and social circumstances, then Saudi Arabia is one of these societies that has come up in modernity debates for more than three decades. The concept of modernity has been through several stages in Saudi Arabia (Al-Ghutami 2005).

In 1985, modernity became a controversial topic in Saudi Arabia, shaking social stability. Individuals who discussed or supported the modernity project, as an intellectual necessity to place Saudi Arabia among other respected cultures, put themselves in danger or faced social exclusion (Alzahrani 2019). In 1988, as a hatred campaign against modernists was at its peak, governmental sensitivity to modernity increased. The ministry of media gave an order to not utilize the word “modernity” in any kind of media, including newspapers, television, and radio. Also, in articles that used the term “modernity,” editors replaced it with alternative words like renewal, development, or progress. Once, a broadcaster asked Khalid bin Faisal Al Saud, a son of the third king and a highly respected prince in Saudi Arabia, to not say “modernity” during a television show (Al-Ghutami 2005).

From 1985 to 1995, the Saudi debate over modernity became an intellectual debate among educated individuals who talked about it in their private gatherings, and sometimes they used local newspapers to present modernity. At first, people who invoked modernity’s principles were arrested and put in jails; they were rejected from Saudi society and became a central target
of social and religious instigation by conservative Islamists. The debate around modernity destabilized Saudi society due to conservative Islamists who introduced modernity as evil Westernization. Thus, it was seen as a weapon against religious (i.e., Islamic) beliefs. Consequently, Saudi society divided into two major parties: conservative Islamists who rejected modernity and modernists who embraced the idea and tried to market its implications, such as freedom, democracy, social progress, and gender interaction in the public sphere among other social ideas (Al-Ghutami 2005).

In 2016, the debate around modernity took a different trajectory when the crown prince of Saudi Arabia announced a 2030 vision in which one of the pillars aimed to reform the cultural system. This vision consisted of many notions that belong to a modern lifestyle, including empowerment of women in public, acceptance of religious and cultural diversity, support for music entertainment, and rejection of religious supervision in the public sphere (Saudi Vision 2030 n.d.). As in the past, Saudi society divided profoundly into two sides: opponents and proponents.

When I visited Saudi Arabia in summer 2018, I witnessed the re-birth of the debate on modernity, which appeared ubiquitously in television shows, media, intellectual gatherings, social reactions, and private and public meetings. Saudis started claiming that they were modern individuals, and the evidence they displayed to manifest that modernity involved wearing fashionable clothing, reading certain books—mostly novels—and going to Starbucks coffee shops more often. The behaviors reflecting modernity seemed superficial, vague, and fake.

In this study, I examined the core principles of the modernity project as identified by modernity’s scientists: social progress (Giddens and Pierson 1998; Delanty 1999; Wagner 2012, Kahil 2013), individualism (Foucault 1991; Delanty 1999; Wagner 2012), and democracy
These principles led the contemporary world into the modern stage. My main concern is to better understand whether Saudis are close to or far away from embracing the principles of modernity in their lives. If not, it is important to identify whether they have the fundamental seeds for modernity to be planted in the future. This study investigated the following three questions: (1) What does modernity mean to Saudis? (2) Do they know its principles? (3) Do they have inclinations of social progress, individualism, and democracy?

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs of Saudi citizens toward the essential principles of modernity. These attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs aimed in understanding Saudis’ perspectives about social progress, individualism, and democracy. By exploring these perspectives, the study may determine to what extent Saudi culture is compatible with modernity and how Saudis understand social progress, individualism, and democracy. Thus, the study can scientifically support social programs that upgrade the Saudis’ social progress toward modernity.

**Significance of Study**

Modernity is a social-historical process that identifies change and progress through the contrast between the “modern” and the “traditional” (Yamani 2000; Delanty 2004). Studies of Saudi Arabia have lacked a sociological investigation that links Saudis with modernity’s principles (Al-Ghutami 2005). Thus, this study used mixed methods to explore Saudis’ attitudes toward modernity’s principles by conducting descriptive research using semi-structured interviews and using the survey approach with 21 Saudis distributed in different regions of Saudi
Arabia. Applying mixed methods benefits the research because it addresses the complexity of modernity in Saudi Arabia by offering a more comprehensive understanding than could be achieved by either quantitative or qualitative research methods alone. The quantitative approach gives an empirical understanding of Saudis’ frequent behaviors that imply modernity’s principles. On the other hand, the qualitative approach illustrates the meanings of those behaviors (Gerrish and Lacey 2010; Halcomb and Hickman 2015).
BACKGROUND

This section outlines the background of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the concept of modernity and its principles in order to offer an overall insight of a potential connection between these pillars of the study: Saudi Arabia and modernity.

Background: Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is in Western Asia by the Arabian Peninsula. Geographically, it is the largest country in Western Asia, the second largest in the Arab world after Algeria, the fifth largest in Asia, and the 12th-largest in the world, including one of the world's youngest populations (Invest Saudi 2017).

Politics. Modern Saudi Arabia was established in 1932 when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was unified by King Abdelaziz ibn Abdul Rahman Al Saud through a series of conquests that had begun in 1902. Since the country was created, Saudi Arabia has been an absolute totalitarian monarchy that applies a dictatorship policy to govern while pretending to utilize Islamist principles (Robbers 2007; Al-Rasheed 2013). The royal family monopolizes the political system; the massive numbers of the royal family control most of the kingdom’s sovereign positions at all levels of government. In Saudi politics, political parties and national elections are not allowed (Aldosari 2007). “Democracy Index 2018: Me too?” (2019) rated the Saudi government the second most authoritarian government in the Middle East out of 20. Saudi Arabia was rated 159 out of 164 globally.

Religion. The birthplace of Islam’s prophet Muhammad, and the home of the two holiest Islamic cities, Mecca and Medina, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a global reputation as the country of Islam (Abukhalil 2004). The founders of al-Saud rulers picked Wahhabism as a
religious sect that shaped the political ideology and cultural practices of Saudi Arabia. By its law, Saudi Arabia requires all its population to be Muslims. Any kind of worship by non-Muslim believers is not allowed, and any non-Muslim who desires to request Saudi’s nationality must convert to Islam (Roth 2018). According to official statistics, 75–85 percent of Saudi Arabian citizens are Sunni Muslims, and 10–15 percent are Shia (Central Intelligence Agency 2021).

Theologically and morally, Wahhabism, as one of the most conservative Islamic sects, forbids all types of modern arts, such as music, songs, theatrical performances, and photography; not only is listening or attending these events forbidden but also studying and teaching them are not allowed in Saudi schools. Besides, Wahhabism also rejects all types of visual media and entertainment activities that contain the likenesses of human beings. Wahhabism's followers call watching television “a necessary evil” because television fuels the inclination to temptation, seduction, and immoral practices (Nafi 2006; Al-Atawneh 2012).

Culture. Therefore, Islam is more than a religion to Saudis; it is a self-contained, comprehensive cultural system that forms all aspects of people’s lives. Many Saudis refuse to disconnect their cultural traditions from their belonging to Islam. As one said, “tradition is important, and religion is tradition” (Yamani 2000).

The boundaries that constitute Saudi Arabia were the site of several ancient cultures and civilizations. However, the indigenous people of Saudi Arabia have been associated with a nomadic lifestyle; one of every ten people living in Saudi is still nomadic, and they emphasize certain social values, such as the concept of manhood, hospitality, tribal alliances, conflicts, generosity, falconry, hunting, respect for elders, and an absolute fatalism (Abukalil 2004).
One of the permanent Wahhabism concepts that might hinder social progress is fatalism. Based on the Islamic emphasis on the omnipotence of God’s will, fatalism is often expressed in the Arabic phrase Insha Allah or “God willing.” If God does not will something, it cannot be considered within the realm of personal responsibility. Thus, Saudis sometimes use this Islamic concept of God’s will as an excuse to abdicate personal responsibility, which can denote passivity.

Although Wahhabism provided the Saudi authority with an egalitarian, universal, and moral system that has served to politically bind together rulers through many crises and troubles, it did not produce a clever interpretation of Islam or significant intellectual work, nor did it capture the imagination of other Muslims. It was mainly an ideology faith, imposed by the state power of an autocratic government.

These facts of Saudi Arabia play a crucial role in shaping Saudis’ reactions toward the project of modernity and its principles: social progress, individualism, and democracy. To some extent, there are profound roots in religious policies, political ideology, and cultural inclinations that do not interact enthusiastically with modernity’s principles.

**Modernity**

Even if there is little consensus about when modernity began (Giddens 1998; Bennett 2005), modernity has been an essential theme in the humanities and social sciences since the 1970s. Modernity refers to multiple dimensions. On one level, modernity indicates a historical period of the 17th to 19th centuries that holds a combination of certain socio-cultural norms, attitudes, and practices, known as the Enlightenment era. At that time, the Enlightenment established solid foundations on which universal knowledge could be erected, mostly freedom
and rationalization. Preceding Enlightenment values, the American and French revolutions had introduced humanity to the idea of liberal democracy based on individual rights and popular sovereignty (Allan 2013). Consequently, modernity refers to a new kind of society that emerged from a series of significant transformations in Europe and North America, ending in the industrial and democratic revolutions. On another level, modernity can also refer to the manifestation the subjective experience of the modern industrial, political, economic, and social conditions and their continuing influence on human culture (Wanger 2012).

As a concept in political philosophy and cultural theory, modernity means a cultural process of self-renewal, social transformation, self-assertion, and the progressive expansion of the discourses of creativity, reflexivity, and discursivity in all life’s aspects. Modernity is also considered as the quest of social and personal autonomy, of which three predominant projects can be emphasized: political independence and cultural and social autonomy (Delany 1999; Wanger 2012).

In sociology, modernity is associated with individual subjectivity, scientific explanation and rationalization, a decline in emphasis on religious worldviews, the emergence of bureaucracy, rapid urbanization, the rise of nation-states, and accelerated financial exchange and communication. The term modernity mostly refers to the social conditions, processes, and discourses consequent to the Age of Enlightenment. In the most basic terms, Giddens (1998) described modernity as

a shorthand term for modern society, or industrial civilization. Portrayed in more detail, it is associated with (1) a specific set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation, by human intervention; (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; (3) a specific range of political
institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy. Primarily because of these characteristics, modernity is vastly more dynamic than any previous type of social order. It is a society—more technically, a complex of institutions—which, unlike any other culture, lives in the future rather than the past. (p. 94)

To sum up, these insights show that modernity is a comprehensive project that covers all aspects of societal components. It raises individual subjectivity, looks for dynamic transformation, and establishes democratic rights. However, the Islamic world was not alien to modernity’s concepts and consequences altogether. Modernity reached the Arab world through colonialism. At first, the interaction of the Islamic world toward modernity was tentative. The next section explains how the Islamic world dealt with modernity.

**Modernity and the Islamic World**

Modernity in Muslim Arab societies has been crystallized during the last two centuries by colonial rules (Toguslu and Leman 2019). The Islamic world has been witnessing a religious revival and social outburst since the nineteenth century as Muslims dealt with the impact of European colonialism. By the nineteenth century, many Muslim countries had been conquered by the West, for example, the French in North, West, and Equatorial Africa and the Levant; the British in Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq, the Arabian gulf, the Indian subcontinent, and Malaya in Southeast Asia; and the Dutch in Indonesia (Esposito, Fasching, and Todd 2006). Consequences of these European occupations made Muslim societies vulnerable to external power. Sharing the fate of many, they fell victim to European imperialism, which ultimately did much to shape the modern Muslim political, economic, religious, and cultural world. When Europe overpowered North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century, it
reduced most of Muslim society to absolute colonies. As a result, many Muslims experienced these defeats as a religious crisis as well as political and cultural setbacks (Esposito et al. 2006).

The twentieth century brought the creation of modern Muslim nation states, the superpower rivalry between America and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and the notable failures and challenges of Islamic societies, all in the religious, intellectual, and moral contexts of rapid change and globalization that continued into the 2000s. Therefore, Muslims found themselves on the defensive against a European imperialism that challenged their political, religious, and cultural identity as well as threatened their beliefs and religious practices. Muslims’ responses to Europe’s political and religious pretension and dominance varied significantly, ranging from resistance or warfare in defense of Islam to accommodation of Western values, if not explicit assimilation. So two major trajectories emerged to rescue Muslims’ identity: Islamic modernists and Islamic activists (Esposito et al. 2006).

*Islamic modernists.* Islamic modernists sought to restore the pride, identity, and strength of the Islamic community by bridging the gap between Islamic tradition and the modernity project. They asserted the compatibility of Islam with reason, science, and technology, and they raised the need for a reinterpretation of Islamic legislation to meet the needs of the modern world (Esposito et al. 2006).

Islamic modernists tried to provide a rationale for reinterpretting Islamic doctrine and law. For the adoption or adaptation of modern ideas, science, technology, and institution, they declared Islam to be a religion of reason, science, and progress. Modernists called upon Muslims to reclaim the beliefs, attitudes, and values that had made the Islamic community so successful in the past and that had contributed to the creation of Islamic empires and a world-class civilization in the 8th to the 14th centuries (Esposito et al. 2006).
At the governmental level, Muslim rulers from Egypt to Iran attempted to imitate or adopt what had made the West superior: its knowledge, science, and technology as well as its cultural values. From Muhammad Ali, an early nineteenth-century ruler of Egypt, to the shah of Iran in the twentieth century, who were convinced of the superiority of Western culture, the aims were to modernize societies with modern militaries. Furthermore, students were sent to the West to study and to learn the sources of its success. Modern schools and institutions, based on European model curricula, were created in many parts of the Muslim world to provide a modern education for new generations (Esposito et al. 2006).

Most supporters of the Western secular model of development favored applying Western political, economic, and social institutions in their societies. In addition, they wanted to introduce a process of secularization, entailing separation of church and state and the restriction of religion to private rather than public life. Islamic modernists inspired movements for religious reform and national independence but remained primarily attractive to an intellectual elite (Esposito et al., 2006). Unfortunately, despite all these efforts, the Islamic modernists and rulers failed to fabricate a systematic reinterpretation of Islam, nor did they develop effective organizations and institutions to preserve and propagate the modernity message (Esposito et al. 2006).

Islamic activists. The failure of Islamic modernists and rulers led to the emanation of Islamic organizational activists, such as Muslim brotherhood and Jamaat-i-Islami (the Islamic society). Both movements accused Islamic modernists of trying to dilute Islam in favor of Western civilization. They condemned the inclinations of most Muslim countries to embrace Western models of development thoroughly and uncritically. Islamic activists claimed that Islam proposes an alternative path to Western capitalism and communism. They saw Islam as a comprehensive way of life that does not need an external module (Esposito et al. 2006).
These movements proclaimed Islam to be a self-sufficient, all-encompassing way of life, an ideological alternative to Western capitalism and Marxism. However, Islamic activists did not simply retreat to the past and instead joined thought and action. They provided ideological and organizational Islamic response to their twentieth century Muslim societies to address such issues as how to respond to European colonialism and revitalize the Muslim community and its fortunes (Esposito et al. 2006).

To establish an Islamic state, they at first required the Islamization of society through a gradual process of social change. Both maintained that Muslims should not look to Western capitalism or communism. They believed that Western democracy has not only failed but also has contributed to authoritarianism, economic exploitation, corruption, and social injustice. Also, Islamic activists predicted that the inherent fallacy of Western secularism, separation of religion and state, would be responsible for the moral decline and ultimate overthrow of the West (Esposito et al. 2006).

However, there are examples, such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia, of what are called Muslim states where the majority population is Muslim; such countries adopted Western institutions like: parliament, political party systems, legal codes, educational systems, and cultural values that have become prominent and pervasive among the wealthy and powerful in urban centers. However, the degree of progress and success for individuals, cities, and government was measured in terms of conformity to Western standards and values. Based on these criteria, Turkey, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, and Iran are often seen as among the more modern, advanced, and enlightened like Westernized and secular countries. Saudi Arabia, the states of the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are generally regarded as more traditional, religious, and thus “backward states” (Esposito et al. 2006).
Saudi Arabia and Modernity

Saudi Arabia may have a unique position due to its Islamic symbolism and its unique heritage as the guardian of Mecca and Medina. This privilege plays a central role in Saudis’ identity, and it contributes to shaping Saudis’ insight about themselves and others (Yamani 2000). However, since the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was unified by King Abdelaziz ibn Abdul Rahman Al Saud in 1932, the kingdom has had a special and cooperative relationship with the United States of America. Since then, Saudis have seen the United States of America as a gate of modernity and modern values (Yamani 2000).

Media and traveling abroad are the major channels through which Saudis encounter modernity. Even though many Saudis are excited about the potential opportunities that come from the Western world, they are reluctant to communicate with the modern world freely. This relationship is controlled by fear and reluctance because they think Western values threaten the inherit values of their identity, which are family and religion. As for modernity, the main debate revolves around what are Islamic versus non-Islamic values. Saudis see that Western values are not compatible with Islamic virtues. For example, the concept of being “open minded” seems to convey a sense of profligacy of personality, a person without control over themselves and their relationship with the world (Yamani 2000).

Hence, in Saudi Arabia, there are tensions between tradition and modernity. This was particularly evident when some individuals tried to adopt Western values or used some technology, such as the radio or television. When these technologies arrived in Saudi Arabia, they threatened the social structure and stability of Saudi and Islamic values. As a result, the state and religious authorities showed great reluctance to permit public access to some forms of modern communication. There was a widespread understanding that modernity may contain
more than just advanced technology. For many, modernity could bring Western values that were seen a threat to Saudi identity and its social and religious traditions (Yamani 2000).
LITERATURE REVIEW

Disciplines within the humanities provide various definitions of modernity and its principles—social progress, individualism, and democracy—in relation to their fields’ interests. In this section, the definitions of the main concepts of the study are outlined. These definitions were chosen due to their suitability to Saudi cultural circumstances. Also, this section reviews studies related to the concepts of the study of Saudi Arabia.

The Concept of Modernity

Modern Saudi Arabia was established in the middle of the 18th century by Muhammad ibn Saud, also known as Ibn Saud, who is considered the founder of the First Saudi State and the Saud family. Ibn Saud made a social contract with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a religious advisor from Najd who crystallized the religious and social movement called Wahhabism (Asad 2018). Others think that Abdelaziz ibn Abdul Rahman Al Saud, the first monarch and founder of the third Saudi state, established the “modern Saudi” because he led the formations of governmental bureaucracy and authority offices from traditional tents to modern buildings (Al-Sweel 1993). However, the majority of publications about Saudi Arabia use the term modern/modernity to indicate either nation-state building (Farsy 1990; Amin 2006; Al-Rasheed 2007; Jordan 2011) or economic welfare that commenced with oil discovery in 1938 (Jones 2010; Lacroix 2011).

For example, Farsy (2009) published a descriptive handbook called “Modernity and Tradition: The Saudi Equation” to provide detailed information on all modern structural aspects of the Saudi Kingdom that were established during the King Fahad period: geographical, historical, economic, social, religious, judicial, and educational. Also, the handbook provides a
handy compendium of facts, photos, and charts, with details of the modern structure of the
government, the five-year plans, and aspects of developments. Farsy’s work documented the
creations of many ministries and modern governmental structures. However, it ignored an
analytical treatment of the internal tensions acquired as a result of the rapidity of change,
especially social reactions toward these changes. The book is highly flattering to those in
authority, but academic literature outlines modernity differently. They analyzed specific matters
related to modernity’s principles of individualism, social change, and democracy.

On the other hand, Saleh (1998) used the term modernity to highlight the importance of
urban and architectural identity in architectural and urban projects in Riyadh, the capital city of
Saudi Arabia. Even though he saw architecture as an aspect of modernity, he mentioned the
Western values that it may contain, which do not fit Saudi’s local values. In his paper, he applied
a case study approach to perform a cross-analysis of the traditional, transitional, and modern
urban patterns and architectural character of Riyadh, which is highly representative of the nature
of the Najd region only. Saleh argued that the urban fabric of older Riyadh had changed
drastically over the past four decades. The traditional city in the region had an urban, organic
material that exhibited a high degree of cultural identity and unity. However, the modern, overall
urban fabric of the town revealed no cultural identity, continuity, or unity because of applying
Western architectural patterns to the city. Therefore, Saleh stated that national governments
should discourage the excessive adoption of Western principles and standards of community
planning and design. On the other hand, he emphasized using mixed treatments that serve
modern needs and to not ignore the experience of the past. In this study, modernity meant
applying Western standards. Still, the most notable point is that Saleh rejected Western
applications in Saudi society because these applications may not fit the traditional treatment of the local community.

Social Attitude

Divid Voas (2014) asserted that attitudes are social phenomena that come from the internal workings of human minds. Attitudes are normative statements about social order, not only personal expressions of preferences. There are two different kinds of judgments created by people: personal choices and normative standards that are applied collectively. Thus, attitudes are evaluative judgments applying to others as well as ourselves. They are not merely personal preferences; they lead how people in general ought to think, feel, and behave (Voas 2014). Therefore, this study applied this perspective of attitude to investigate Saudis’ evaluative judgements about current social circumstances and how things should be in terms of social progress, individualism, and democracy.

Contrary to Farsy (2009) and Saleh (1998), who focused on the material appearance of modernity, Yamani (2000) focused her anthropological study on the attitudes and meanings of modernity in Saudis’ perspectives to comprehend the developments of the Saudis’ characteristic national culture that emerged as a result of modern establishments and the way in which young Saudis see their state and society through a new perspective of that national culture. Yamani focused her attention on the centrality of the younger generation to the future of Saudi Arabia. Yamani provided detailed information about the hearts and minds of the younger generation as they view the present and future of the Saudi state. She highlighted the psychological clash within Saudi society between continuity and change. Her analysis drew upon dozens of interviews with Saudi males and females between the ages of 15 and 30, conducted mainly in Saudi Arabia. Yamani’s subjects included members of seven overlapping groups: the royal
family, other high-ranking and politically connected families, key trading and business families, intellectuals, the new middle class, those of rural origin, and religious activists as well. A main theme of the study is how modernization and economic evolution have raced far ahead of social and political development. Also, the study shows what these youths think about controversial issues, like the declining standards of living, gender identity, the royal family, the role of Islam in daily life, and the Kingdom's close relations with the United States. Her questions covered identity, political aspirations, education, the economy, family, religion, and the future of the country. Because the literature that is available on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia does not provide enough information on how Saudis feel about these issues, Yamani's work is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the changes in Saudi society.

Yamani (2000) argued that the identity of the new generation has been shaped by overlapping and conflicting variables: internal factors, such as family, religion, tribe, nation, and region; and external factors, which are the result of the forces of Western modernization. She divided the subjects of her research into four groups: liberal modernists, traditionalists, conservative Salafi, and radical Salafi. Liberal modernists are pragmatists; their main concern is to witness social and economic progress. Therefore, they engage with the modernizing West; they support Western influence with hope. Outward expressions of piety are kept at a minimum, and they place their hope in the rationality of the individual. They believe that the individual should decide how to be a good Muslim, and Islam should not put obstacles in the way of progress. Secondly, the concern of the traditionalists, who represented the majority of the study’s subjects, is a coherent Islamic identity and the protection of what they see as Islamic values. They see these values as being threatened by Westernization, whether through the commercialization of Saudi society, satellite television, or the internet. Thus, modernization, as
an unavoidable and necessary movement, must be mediated by the cultural certainty of Islam.

Third, the conservative Salafi think that they are the guardian of Saudi society, and they have the right to guide and remind Saudi society to be on the true path. The main desire of this group is to see a distinctive Saudi Wahhabi society, distinguished by the application of local tribal values, that would form everyone’s moral, social, and political behavior. They also have a profound comprehension of the cultural contradictions created by unrestricted access to modernity and the issues this brings. The distinctive element of this group is their way of thinking that civil reform should be within the Islamic system. Thus, they do not have a desire for serious political change, and they share with the majority the “can’t do” attitude. On the other hand, the fourth group, Radical Salafi, are the only group who openly and actively challenge the regime’s legitimacy because they believe a crisis of legitimacy is at the heart of the political system under the Al-Saud, and all social problems faced by the country result from the deviance from the true Islamic law. Additionally, they express a clear and serious fear of the Western-style modernization they see spreading in Saudi Arabia and the ambiguity of authorities’ response to its negative consequences.

Yamani (2000) concluded that the dilemma facing Saudi youth is how to benefit from Western modern technology and, at the same time, reject Western values that contradict Islamic values. According to Yamani, new generations face a much more uncertain future; employment is more restricted, tensions between official claims of state or family and reality are growing, and the impact of the outside world is becoming stronger. Notwithstanding, the question of how to keep the balance between conservative Saudi values and increasing exposure to Western ways of life and integration in the modern world has yet to be addressed.
While Yamani (2000) stressed that there is no nucleus for a movement of political reform, observers of the kingdom can expect increasing calls for reform and accountability. Al-Rasheed (2016), in her book “Muted Modernists,” mapped the struggle for the soul of Islam between traditionalists and modernists and explored this tension as it plays out in Saudi Arabia. The book overall focuses on the relationship between conservative Salafi and modernists who embraced political change in the Arab world during the Arab springs of 2011.

Al-Rasheed (2016) examined textual and oral sources to document the emerging discourse on civil liberties, human rights, and democratic reforms. Al-Rasheed particularly highlighted the modernists’ use of Twitter and YouTube as platforms for distributing protest messages and sharing videos before the Arab uprisings. Al-Rasheed relied on many qualitative sources, such as articles, leaflets, books, and interviews to figure out the modernists’ different views on the reinterpretation of Islamic manuscripts. Due to the sensitive nature of studying socio-political reformists’ activities in Saudi Arabia, Al-Rasheed interviewed social activists and intellectuals via telephone and social media. However, Al-Rasheed’s approach focused on intellectual elites; thus, the study lacks standard individuals’ views.

In her book, Al-Rasheed (2016) also examined conflicting socio-cultural and political power relations between traditional-fundamentalist Islamists and modernists. Modernists were comprised of socio-political activists, intellectuals, and religious scholars who attempted to reorganize Islamic norms and reinterpret initial Islamic manuscripts with a view to aligning them with the spirit of Islam and modern society. Al-Rasheed described the modernists as calling for a rational evaluation of Islamic history and adjustments to modern perspectives to establish greater freedom and political representation. By standing for these points of views, modernists directly challenge governmental ideologies.
In terms of modernists’ influence, Al-Jarbou (2007) introduced the positive role of modernists in the development of the Saudi legal system. After outlining the complexity of the Saudi legal system, Al-Jarbou emphasized the importance of modernists’ role in Saudi Arabia. In his study, he presented and defined the two movements: modernists and traditionalists. Moreover, he evaluated their backgrounds and approaches. He also explored their influences on the Saudi legal system through evaluating their approaches to the following areas: the legislative process, people’s perspectives toward applied laws, the judicial system, and legal education. Al-Jarbou concluded the development of the Saudi legal system has been affected by the concurrent influences of the traditionalist and modernist movements. Alongside the traditionalist movement, a modernization movement has been primarily promoted by members of educated elites, technocrats, and legal professionals, such as lawyers and law professors. Most of these intellectuals studied in Western countries that influenced their ideas and approaches toward the development of the country, including its legal system. They try to benefit from Western culture in influencing the development of life in the Kingdom. They believe that Saudi Arabia must pay attention to the pragmatic needs for growth and survival in such a complex world. Modernists claim that the impact of international trade and globalization will not allow Saudi Arabia to stay isolated from the rest of the world. The importance of this study is on its emphasis on modernists’ role in the Saudi public. Unlike many have done in Saudi Arabia, it does not ignore or accuse the modernists’ movement. It legitimizes modernists’ existence in the Saudi scene.

Social Progress

Modernity is associated with progress in the belief that new generations should have a better life than previous generations, express a notion of advancement across time, and increase in wealth and improvement of life conditions (Wagner 2012; Noll 2014). However, for some
theorists, social progress is a normative concept that can be seen as the development of societies’ conditions and people’s lives in a desirable direction based on prevailing values and goals of advancement. Profoundly, the present should be better than the past, and the future should be better compared to the present (Noll 2014).

A majority of the new generation of Saudis think that change means uncertainty and doubt; they fear change and believe that things will only get worse. Besides, the idea of progress is associated only with the need to absorb modern technology (Yamani 2000).

In terms of resisting progress, Al-Atawneh (2010) stated that conservative religious leaders challenge any social change in general, while in other instances the muftis, a Muslim legal expert who is empowered to give rulings on religious matters, provided new interpretations of the sharia (religious laws) often using the concept of public interest as justification. Works on contemporary Muslim legal systems have often been of a purely pragmatic nature to assuage political leaders’ concerns about modernists’ voices. In another study, Al-Atawneh (2012) examined contemporary Islamic disputes on entertainment, particularly music and audio-visual media, such as television, Internet, cinema, and theater, to demonstrate the religious sense of clergies in Saudi that reject any “new” interventions in social Saudis’ lives. He focused on modern Islamic legal perspectives on malâhî, which is the religious name of types of entertainment, by analyzing the views of Muslim scholars and religious institutions. On this topic, there are two major parties in Islam. One, who is more flexible, believes that malâhî are needed for the performance of religious practices, and some time should be devoted not only to worship and religious duties but also to worldly affairs. Islamic leaders who embrace this insight claim that there is no solid evidence that music is prohibited in Islam. Moreover, music can have a positive influence on people, and singing and listening to certain musical instruments may help
to eradicate loneliness. The second group of scholars, best represented by Wahhabs, the dominant Islamic sect in Saudi Arabia, prohibits most entertainment involving music. For the Wahhabis, all types of music are forbidden, since they provide an arena for temptation, seduction, and other immoral practices. Thus, attending parties or musical events and singing, even in the official Saudi media, are religiously not allowed. Wahhabi restrictions on music are clearly visible in various areas of Saudi daily life. For Wahhabis, it is prohibited not only to listen to music but also to study and teach it. They reject music instruction, the singing profession, the performance of music, and the buying or selling of musical instruments, and they reject almost all types of visual media as well. Also, Al-Atawneh convincingly examined the institutional history of the Dar al-Ifta (the highest religious institution in Saudi Arabia), including its membership and structure; the interactions between the Ministry of Justice and the Saudi kings; and the legal reasoning underlying a host of fatwas, a formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar. However, in his study, Al-Atawneh relied on published and online information only, which makes the study a more theoretical, rather than grounded, investigation of the nature of the issue.

Another matter that may affect social progress in Saudi Arabia is the wasta. As Yamani (2000) mentioned in her study, many Saudis complain about the predominance personal connections—Wasta—in both obtaining and keeping the jobs. This issue highlights the value of social progress among Saudis and how wasta impedes it. For example, Harbi, Thursfield, and Bright (2016) conducted a study to discover the interrelation between Arabic culture and employees’ experiences in performance assessment in a Saudi Arabian company called SACO. The researchers applied an interpretive and qualitative methods. The researcher found that Western models of performance evaluation were built upon rationality and objectivity which
contradict Saudi Arabian culture of the subjectivity of the personal relations that associated in the social practice of wasta.

Wasta was understood as using an unfair impact on the outcome of the performance evaluation process in the company. It forced employees to build a personal relationship with their managers to receive excellent evaluations. This was done by offering services for the managers, such as assisting them with work-related projects and doing non-work-related personal services. When connections already existed at the larger social levels such as family, tribal, and regional networks, the dynamic of wasta became easier because it worked as mediation and moral obligations to where a person belongs. Family connections were, for instance, identified by participants as strong tools that could influence the evaluation decisions. The person who has a popular family name was seen as having a higher opportunity to be appraised positively than a person without well-known family name.

In SACO, there was a common opinion among participants that executives were more loyal to individuals who belongs to their own tribes. Thus, they received higher performance evaluations. The study showed that SACO managers used their autocratic powers to pursue their own interests as well as using assistants to do both work and non-work-related services. The participants believed that, to obtain a good evaluation rating, employees must follow and fulfil all their managers’ requests. Otherwise, it would be seen as disrespecting and challenging the manager’s positions. So the employees believed that they have been treated unfairly and seen unvalued. The employees stated that the cultural norms that are associated with Saudi Arabian collectivist culture and Wasta should be questioned and rejected in favor of alternative values that are linked to organizational justice and individual egalitarianism. Apparently, these values are considered Western values.
As mentioned previously, a majority of the new generation of Saudis think that change means uncertainty and doubt; they fear change and believe that things will only get worse. The idea of progress is associated only with the need to absorb modern technology (Yamani 2000). Therefore, this study investigated Saudi attitudes toward social progress: how social progress is defined and whether or not Saudis have a positive attitude towards the future.

**Individualism**

In the early twentieth century, people became more self-reliant, more individualistic, more economically productive, and less dependent on community relations (Wagner 2012; Perrin 2014). In social and political theory, individualism involves individuals’ maximum welfare and freedom. Basically, individualism consists of four core components: (1) being true to oneself, (2) freedom of choice, (3) personal responsibility, and (4) universality (Realo et al. 2002). Other theorists identify seven components relating to individualism, which are independence, goals, competition, uniqueness, privacy, self-knowing, and direct communication. However, most studies of individualism state that the valuing of personal independence is the most prominent feature of individualism, which means functioning according to personal choices in terms of prioritizing the self and enhancing self-esteem as unique compared to others (Ayyash-Abdo 2001; Shulruf, Hattie, and Dixon 2007). In the collective culture of Saudi Arabia, individuals prioritize sense of belonging to in-group’s interdependence; they seek harmony and avoid conflict with others (Yamani 2000; Shulruf et al. 2007). Nevertheless, Saudi youth are caught between the traditional institutions of family and religion and the modern institutions of the market and state, so they become confused in terms of refining their identity. Some of them express a more individualistic morality of personal achievement and call for greater freedom of
expression, but “most of the time you cannot say what you think, which is good,” according to some Saudis (Yamani 2000:23).

Similarly, Jong and Moaddel (2013) showed that the Saudi public has increasing desire for individualistic values, gender equality, less intrusion in daily life by religious authorities, and a wider recognition of national identity rather than religious one. Young people in Saudi Arabia show more interest in a greater degree of individualism. Jong and Moaddel gave an example that the recognition of individual choice in Saudis’ case is in the selection of one’s spouse in marriage. This indicator is constructed from the interviewee’s answer to the question regarding the basis for marriage: “In your view, which of the following is the more important basis for marriage: (1) parental approval or (2) love?” Jong and Moaddel thus proposed that individuals who see love as a more important factor for marriage than parental approval have more inclination toward social individualism. The findings showed that young Saudis were more supportive of marrying for love than were people between age 35 and 54, and this gap between younger and older age groups seems to be increasing. Moreover, youth showed more inclination to gender equality than people in the older age groups. Further, they experienced a slightly larger decline in trust in religious institutions and support for the sharia than other age groups.

Therefore, this study investigated the attitudes of Saudis toward individualism as the application of personal choices: do they like to be more independent and freer when they make decisions, or do they prefer to melt in collectivism and follow others’ preferences?

Democracy

Democracy is the dominant version of political modernity because democratic practices, rules, systems, assumptions, approaches, and values emerged during modern times (Wagner
2012; Perrin 2014). Also, democracy means collective self-determination with regard for the common good. In this regard, it is not only a political system, but it is also a social, cultural, and historical accomplishment (Wagner 2012). Therefore, since people are fundamentally social, they form preferences, attitudes, and decisions through interactions with groups they are part of and those of which they are not part (Perrin 2014). In academic fields, there is no consensus about definitions of democracy and what constitutes a democracy (Horowitz 2006). However, in Ancient Greek, the term democracy divided into two parts: “demo-” referred to the people and “-cracy” meant power. In democracy, then, power and government come from the people (Perrin 2014; Bianco and Canon 2017). Moreover, the meaning of democracy varies from country to country. However, when one confronts people with the word democracy in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, or Europe, they assert the popular rights that empower people. Throughout the world, people power is the core meaning of democracy for most people (Welzel and Alexander 2008).

The Arab Spring revolutions, occurred mostly by youth and women, represented the desire for democracy in the Middle East. As a result, many regimes were overthrown in order to facilitate the process of political and social reform. According to El-Husseini (2015), the Middle East has repeatedly been labeled as impervious to democracy. Institutional, structural, and cultural explanations have been advanced to elucidate democracy discrepancy. The perception that democratization in the Middle East has been reduced by Islamist views on sexual and social morals and on women’s political and social rights was debunked. El-Husseini concluded that Arab uprisings are not embedded in Islam but rather in a demand for reform and human rights. She emphasized that if Arab countries improve to have democracies, indigenous forms of
democracy where religion (i.e., Islam) plays a major role should be expected. Also, women should be as active and equal contributors in political sphere.

El-Husseini (2015) emphasized the importance of youth and feminist participation in changes in the Arab world. She presented two sides of the debate about democracy in the Arab world: one that believes democracy in the Arab world is impossible because of some inherent Islamic reasons, and another that believes all the unrest of the Arab spring occurred because of looking for democracy and freedom. Unfortunately, El-Husseini did not use any data to support her claims. Instead, she depended on some historical background and superficial analyses of what has occurred in the Middle East. However, she pointed out that if any democratic movements want to succeed, the religious factor cannot be ignored, which means that secularism is not appropriate in this case.

In terms of the problematic issue of Islam and democracy, Rowley and Smith (2009) demonstrated the deficiency of democracy and freedom in Muslim-majority countries in comparison to the rest of the world; they believed that these deficits are not fully explained by poverty or by oil but seem to have something to do with Islam itself. Rowley and Smith further demonstrated that the democracy and freedom deficits are larger in the Islamic heartland than elsewhere in Muslim-majority countries. Also, they showed that the democracy deficit is not driven by demands for autocracy in Muslim-majority countries. They claimed that individual Muslims value democracy more than non-Muslims. At the end, they suggested that the lack of religious freedom in Muslim-majority countries may be a major factor in explaining the democracy shortfall. Rowley and Smith tried to challenge Islam itself about the deficits of democracy and freedom in the Islamic world rather than looking for social factors that impede democracy and freedom in Islamic countries. This article used quantitative methods and
statistical analysis. However, it did not give in-depth explanations underlying the finds sociologically.

In the circumstance of Saudi Arabia, Jong and Moaddel (2013) investigated if Middle Eastern youth’s attitudes toward certain values have changed: social individualism, gender relations, forms of government, the relationship between religion and politics, the basis of identity, and democracy. The researchers conducted two surveys between 2003 and 2011. The Saudi data was derived from a comprehensive national values survey that was gathered in the country in 2003. This survey used a nationally representative sample of 1526 respondents, of which 1026 were Saudi citizens and 500 were foreign residents. The other survey was conducted in 2011 using a representative sample of 954 young adults (ages 18–25 years) from three cities—Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam-Khobar. Both Saudi surveys used face-to-face interviews in the respondents’ residences and were conducted by the Saudi branch of the Pan Arab Research Center. The study found that the movements for democracy have been much weaker in Saudi Arabia than in other countries of the region, but there is a hope for change. There was a decline in the favorable attitudes toward democracy, with those who strongly agree that “democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government” went down from 33 percent in 2003 to 23 percent in 2011. During the same period of time, individuals who strongly agreed that “men make better political leaders than women do” grew up from 49 percent to 63 percent. Additionally, the Saudi public displayed a higher appeal towards individualistic values, gender equality, less intrusion in daily life by religious authorities, and a wider recognition of national rather than religious identity. The change in values were more notable among Saudi youth than among seniors. Also, Saudis showed the lowest average mosque attendance and low rate of reporting religious faith as a significant quality for kids. This decline in religiosity in Saudi
Arabia may be a trend in future. Even though there were downward trends among Saudi youth in attitudes toward democracy, a major area of change in Saudi society may be an increase in positive attitudes toward individualism and gender equality, particularly in education and the family.

Jong and Moaddel’s research is the closest study that is related to the subject of this proposed thesis. However, the researchers used quantitative methods only to reveal Saudis’ attitudes toward some of modernity’s values, such as social individualism, gender relations, forms of government, the relationship between religion and politics, the basis of identity, and democracy, and did not give any analytical explanation for the changes that happened in Saudi attitudes between 2003 and 2011.

Furthermore, Al-Atawneh (2009) gave an overall theoretical view of the problematic issue of the relation of religion and politics in Saudi Arabia; he examined modern Wahhabi theories of politics and governance. Al-Atawneh addressed two Islamic principles: (1) sovereignty (hakimiyya) and (2) authority-holders (wulat al-umur, sing. walai alamr). Then, he explained how religion involved in politics and governance by examining the dynamic of power. Al-Atawneh revealed the authentic relationships between religious scholars and rulers. Plus, he addressed how authority is implemented in this kind of relation dynamic. In terms of the attitude toward democracy, he divided the attitudes into three major groups: (1) People who dislike democracy clamming it is a foreign concept forced by Westernizers upon Muslim societies. These individuals are less likely to play a part in elections, and they ignore participating in intellectual debates in the media. (2) People who believe that true Islam and democracy are in harmony. This group state that Islam is fundamentally democratic. Hence, the democratization and the Islamization of Muslim societies are compatible. (3) People who emphasize the
representative forms of democracy. These people appear to be less skeptical than the individuals of the first two parties concerning the possibility of applying democracy in Islamic societies.

As a result, Al-Atawneh (2009) stated that the Saudi monarchy is neither theocratic nor secular in the Western sense. It should be described as a “theo-monarchy,” formed by religion and long-standing religio-cultural norms. The Saudi monarchy is based on a continuing cooperation between the two major authorities: the existing religious institutions and the Saudi monarchy.

However, Al-Atawneh’s (2009) article has no empirical evidence. It relies mainly on intellectual bases, not an ongoing, social process. Also, Al-Atawneh analyzed Islamic political leaders only, not the Islamic population engaged in the social process. Al-Atawneh did not focus on Saudi Arabia specifically, but he talked about Islamic situations in general. Thus, the debate in this article is between Wahhabism and other Islamic political visions, not about interactions between Wahabi and Saudi people in terms of democracy.

In conclusion, because the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has no Western type of democracy that depends on representative systems, this study focused on how Saudi youth define democracy, whether or not it is a preferable political system in Saudi circumstances, as well as underlying reasons for their answers.
METHOD

Studies of Saudi Arabia lack a comprehensive sociological investigation that directly correlates Saudis with modernity project and all its principles (Al-Ghutami 2005). Therefore, this study aimed to make an initiative in this trajectory. Methodologically, the study used a mixed methods approach to reveal Saudis’ attitudes toward modernity and modernity’s principles. Descriptive research was conducted applying two scientific tools: a survey approach and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) with 21 young adult Saudis living in different regions of Saudi Arabia (see Table1). A mixed-methods approach addresses the complexity of modernity in Saudi Arabia because it gives a more comprehensive insight than what could be achieved by either quantitative or qualitative research methods alone.

Research Design

The term “mixed methods” is increasingly applied in social science to describe research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration of the studied theme (Symonds and Gorard 2010). Mixed-methods research involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data and integrating the two forms of data together. The underlying assumption is that the integration of quantitative and qualitative data adds further comprehension beyond the information provided by either quantitative or qualitative data alone. Therefore, this study applied mixed methods to obtain a stronger understanding of the research questions and overcome the individual limitations of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Gerrish and Lacey 2010; Halcomb and Hickman 2015; Creswell and Creswell 2018). The quantitative
approach gave an empirical understanding of behavioral attitudes towards modernity’s principles. On the other hand, the qualitative approach illustrated the meanings of the Saudis’ thoughts toward modernity by their own words through open-ended questions (Gerrish and Lacey 2010; Halcomb and Hickman 2015).

**Sampling**

Saudi Arabia has one of the world's youngest populations. According to General Authority for Statistic (2019), the Kingdom’s total population in 2018 was roughly 33.5 million, of which approximately half were under the age of 30, almost evenly split between the 0-to-14 and 15-to-29-year-old age groups. Saudi citizens are nearly 60 percent under the age of 30, and nearly 40 percent are 18 years or younger. Most of the population is concentrated around the 10 largest urban agglomerations, of which the most prominent are Riyadh, Jeddah, Mecca, Medina, and Dammam (Glavine 2018; Alaoui 2019). Thus, 160 invitations were sent to Saudis youth through social media platforms. The total simple of this study is 21 (10 males, 11 females) Saudi youths, aged between 18 and 30, distributed across the five largest cities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and coming from different cultural, religious sects backgrounds. Only four participants, all of them females, accepted the social media invitation. The rest of the sample were recruited through the snowball method.

**Data Collection**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has in recent years seen a significant embarkation in youth movements that are especially visible online, particularly on Twitter and YouTube (Glavine 2018). Online communities have become increasingly important in Saudi Arabia because strict standards regulate against public protest gatherings. Therefore, the use of information and
communications technology (ICT) has rapidly grown in Saudi Arabia, which has been in the top ten most high use countries since 2010 (Mourtada and Salem 2014). The Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) (2014) of Saudi Arabia found that Internet usage increased from 13 percent of the population in 2005 to 64 percent in 2014. This increase in using Internet services and broadband was due to high social media use (CITC 2014). The events of the “Arab Spring” of 2011 were considered a reason for this acceleration, and what makes social media advantageous is that it enables citizens to self-organize outside traditional channels (Salem and Mourtada 2011; Harlow 2013)

According to these facts, this study used social media as a sampling frame to recruit participants. The study used Twitter and Instagram as prime social media platforms due to the availability of users’ personal information, which eased the participant identification and recruitment process. The study aimed to recruit participants from different Saudi regions, ages, and gender to collect cultural data. Because of the sensitivity of the subject of modernity in Saudi Arabia (Ghadhdhāmī 2013) and asking participants for political, social, and personal attitudes relevant to the study, nonprobability sampling, using convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods, were used. In convenience sampling, participants are chosen based on their convenience and availability. In snowball sampling methods, a key informant helped locate one or two individuals to participate in the study (Bernard 2013; Creswell and Creswell 2018). But convenience sampling was a prime approach to recruit participants for the study. However, when the study faced difficulties in convincing individuals to participate, snowball sampling was used as a second choice. After finishing data collection with an identified participant from social media, he/she was asked to suggest some friends who might be willing to participate. Having a
friend who was familiar with the interview who then recommended it to others, built trust in advance, which eased the recruiting process.

To recruit participants, the researcher searched for accounts that have intensive Saudi followers, such as Saudi Press Agency (SPA), Ajelnews24, Saudinews50, and Jarirbookstore in Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These accounts include 19 million, eight million, ten million, and a million followers, respectively, most of whom are Saudis. To identify participants, the researcher unsystematically browsed the “followers” section of those accounts to pick potential participants. After identifying participants, the researcher sent the potential participants a private message explaining the purpose of the study. Then, they were asked if they are interested in being a part of this study. For those who are interested, they were asked to provide demographic information: their region, age, and gender (in the cases when this information was not on their account page).

When potential participants met the study’s eligibility criteria (being aged 18-30 years old and a Saudi national), the researcher scheduled a Zoom meeting with each participant to complete the survey and answer the open-ended questions, which did not take longer than 90 minutes. Each participant was informed that this project will be conducted as a part of the thesis requirement for a Master of Arts degree at Eastern Michigan University. It was explained that there are no known risks linked to participating in this study and it is completely voluntary. Also, they were informed that they can withdraw at any time from the interview, and they may refrain from answering any question that seems uncomfortable for them.

The interview with participants started with the quantitative questions and then progressed to the qualitative ones. The quantitative section included a survey that consisted of questions about modernity, social progress, individualism, and democracy. The purpose of this
section was to investigate participants’ thoughts about common cultural practices and individuals’ preferences. On the other hand, the qualitative questions of the study included open-ended questions. The interviewees were asked to give their definitions and opinions about modernity, social progress, individualism, and democracy. The purpose of the qualitative section was to explore Saudis’ shared insights about these themes.

*Data Entry*

Due to all participants being in Saudi Arabia and the researcher being in the United States of America, the data collections were via Zoom meeting using REDCap survey design (see Appendix A), a secure web platform for building and managing online databases and surveys. When the participants agreed to participate, the researcher scheduled a Zoom meeting in order to conduct the research interview using REDCap to enter data. The researcher read the questions and recorded the data in the REDCap database. In order to not miss any information, the interviews were audio recorded, after having verbal consent to do so, except one case where the subject refused to be audio recorded. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher, as he is a bilingual speaker. Then, the researcher translated the interviews into English. For the sake of protecting confidentiality, the participants were asked to not give any personal information, such as name, address, phone numbers, or any other identifiable information. Instead, each participant was assigned a code number to their transcript and survey questionnaires.

*Measure*

To investigate Saudi youths’ attitude about modernity and its principles, which include social progress, individualism, and democracy, the data for this study were collected from Saudi
subjects directly through virtual interviews. A survey was used that contained close-ended questions for quantitative measures of Saudi attitudes toward related elements of modernity. Many of the closed-ended questions were adopted from Inkeles and Smith (1982) as well as other sources: Pew Research Center (2012), Wike et al. (2017, 2019), and Lowy Institute (2019). Others were created specifically for this study. Open-ended questions were included for the qualitative purpose of determining the meanings Saudi youth gave to principles of modernity. Most of the time, for each section, the interviews began with quantitative questions and then were followed by qualitative questions (see Appendix A).

*Modernity*. For the modernity section, interviews started with two open ended questions. Subjects were asked:

I. When you hear the word modernity, what comes to your mind?

II. Tell me your thoughts about how modernity relates to Saudi life? then followed with a question: “tell me about that.”

Survey questions followed with the response categories of yes or no.

I. Do you feel that we have a conflict between the values of development and traditional values?

II. Do you think that modernity is compatible with Islam?

A third survey question included the response category of “I do not know” in addition to yes or no.

I. Is Modernity a western project?
Each survey question was followed by an open-ended question “Tell me about that” in order to allow the subjects to express their deep thoughts and opinion freely.

*Social progress.* To measure the attitude of Saudi youth toward social progress, the subjects were asked quantitatively about their feeling toward the goodness of social change, the area which they concentrated more to improve, and the industrial progress as a pioneer that led to modernity as it happened in western culture. The responses options of all these questions were: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

I. I think change is always good.

II. I think industrial (manufacturing, material) progress is more important than any other type of progress.

III. I am working to improve myself in all aspects of my life.

IV. I support social change in my country.

V. There should be restrictions in social changes.

Occasionally subjects would elaborate the reasons behind their responses. Those explanations were included with the other qualitative data collected. Also, the subjects were asked to rate their satisfaction (satisfied or dissatisfied) about the current conditions of the country.

I. Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today?

In addition, subjects were asked to identify who they should rely on (themselves, religious leaders, the government, the family ties) in response to the following question:
II. To improve the condition of life in this community, some say the people must get together to help themselves. Others say that it will require the help of others. What do you think? To improve this community should people rely (Choose one)?

Each close-ended question was followed by the prompt, “Tell me about that” in order to understand their authentic attitude and meaning behind their answers. Those explanations were included with the other qualitative data collected as well.

The qualitative questions in the social progress section focused more on figuring out the conceptual narrative of Saudi youth regarding positive change, negative change, and opinions about change in general. Thus, the subjects were asked:

III. In your words, how do you define positive social change?

IV. In your words, how do you define negative social change?

V. In your opinion, what do we need to change in our country?

VI. What things we should not be changed?

Individualism. The recognition of autonomy of the individual is a principal feature of modernity. Theoretically, individualism is a way of life where persons prioritize their peculiar natures in making decisions. However, individualism has many dimensions: political, economic, and social aspects. For example, economic individualism supports the value of hard work and belief in the work-reward nexus and stresses individual responsibility over governmental responsibility in providing well-being of the people. On the other hand, social individualism focuses on individual choices regarding social matters, such as decisions around personal affairs and child-rearing.
In this study, the focus was on measuring social and economic individualism. Thus, individualism was measured by asking subjects to choose their preference around the following situations:

I. Some people say that kids learn the deepest and most profound truth from old people. Others say that kids learn the most profound truth from books and in school. What is your opinion?
   - Most truth from old people.
   - Most truth from books and school.
   - About equal truth from both.

II. Some people say a child/kid should be taught always to take into consideration the feelings of others. Others say a child/kid should be taught to protect his own feelings since others can look out for themselves. Should one teach a child/kid to protect first:
   - Their own feelings.
   - Other's feelings.

III. Do you think that it is necessary for a child to have the same ideas (opinions) as his parents?
   - In all important matters.
   - In the majority of matters.
   - In certain matters.
   - In nothing.
IV. Some people say an individual should not insist on their own opinion if their group disagrees with them. Others say that an individual should hold to their own opinion even if the whole group disagrees with them. In the face of disagreement by their group, should you teach an individual:

- Always to go along with the group.
- Most times to go along with the group.
- Most times to hold to his own opinion.
- Always to hold to his own opinion.

V. Whose advice would you give most weight to:

- Your parents.
- Your tribal leader.
- The religious leaders.
- The government.
- No one.

VI. If an individual must choose between a job which they like or a job which their parents prefer for that individual, which should they choose?

- The job they prefer.
- The job their parents prefer.

VII. Which one is more important: Family connections OR hard work to get ahead in life in Saudi Arabia?

- Family connections.
- Hard work.
Subjects would often elaborate the reasons behind their responses. Those explanations were included with the other qualitative data collected. Plus, one qualitative question about the Saudi youth’s attitude toward the concept of freedom was asked of the subjects.

VIII. What comes to your mind when you hear the word “freedom”?

Democracy. The attitudes toward democracy were measured in terms of how Saudi youth think about democracy and their political preferences. The democracy section began by presenting two open-ended questions. The subjects were asked at the beginning of the interview:

IX. In your opinion, what does democracy mean?

X. What are the obstacles of establishing democracy in Saudi Arabia?

Survey questions followed with different response category, as outlined below:

I. How important is it to have democracy in our country?
   
   • Very important.
   • Somewhat important.
   • Not too important.
   • Not important at all.

II. In your opinion, are Saudis ready to have democracy in Saudi Arabia? followed with the response categories of yes, no, or I do not know.

III. If you had to choose between a good democracy or a strong economy, which would you say is more important?
   
   • Good democracy.
   • Strong economy.
IV. Some feel that we should rely on a democratic form of government to solve the country's problems. Others feel that we should rely on a leader with a strong hand to solve the country's problems. Which comes closer to your opinion?

- Democratic government.
- Strong leader.

V. In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the wisdom of the Saudis when it comes to making political decisions?

- A very great deal.
- A good deal.
- Not very much.
- None at all.

VI. Which is more important to you?

- That Saudi has a democratic government, even if there is some risk of political instability.
- That Saudi has a stable government, even if there is a risk it will not be fully democratic.

VII. Do you think there is a fundamental conflict between the teachings of Islam and democracy? followed with the response categories of yes, no, or I do not know.
Saudi youth were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree) in response to several questions about their attitude toward democracy.

I. Democracy is the greatest form of government.
II. Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
III. In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
IV. Democracy is a Western way that would not work in most Muslim countries.

In addition, they were asked to indicate their opinions about different forms of political governing. The response options were very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, very bad.

I. A democratic system where citizens, not elected officials, vote directly on major national issues to decide what becomes law.
II. A democratic system where representatives elected by citizens decide what becomes law.
III. A system in which a strong leader can make decisions without interference from parliament or the courts.
IV. Experts, not elected officials, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, convergent design was applied (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Convergent design consists of three phases: first, analyzing the qualitative database; second, analyzing the quantitative database in terms of statistical results; and third, integrating the two databases for the mixed methods data analysis.
For the qualitative questions, data collection and data analysis occurred concurrently. This approach helped in identify shared thoughts, emergent ideas, and concepts that need to be clarified and/or expanded in subsequent interviews. The approach in working with the transcribed data included profile construction, continuous data analysis, and interpretation. The deductive data analysis involved thorough reading, markings, and comments in the transcript margins, identifying, refining, adding codes, and categorizing themes around: modernity, social progress, individualism, and democracy. The process of data analysis was flexible, evolving, and consisting of systematic and rigorous development of code categories and subcategories. On the other hand, for the quantitative section, SPSS program was used to obtain frequencies.

After completing analysis of the qualitative and quantitative databases separately, they were converged together in order to obtain a depth explanation of the Saudi youth attitudes about modernity and its core principles: social progress, individualism, and democracy.
FINDINGS

*Attitude toward Modernity*

To reveal Saudis’ attitudes toward modernity and its principles (i.e., social progress, individualism, and democracy), the researcher interviewed Saudi subjects with questions about modernity: how they define it, how they feel about it, how Saudi society interacts with modernity, is modernity a Western project, and is Islam compatible with modernity or not? Most of the questions in this section are qualitative open-ended questions to obtain the authentic meaning and free thoughts about the concept of modernity in general that would build the basic thoughts about its principles. The themes I identified are non-material understanding of modernity.

*The definition.* At the beginning of the interview, most subjects hesitated to give definitions of modernity because they thought they needed to have certain knowledge or some level of education to participate in the topic. A considerable number of subjects said that they have no idea what modernity is, and they have never thought about the topic in depth before. However, when they were asked what first thoughts come to their minds when they hear the word “modernity,” they tried to derive the meaning from the word itself linguistically: modern, newness, and something that did not exist and then exists. These were the first thoughts that came into the subjects’ minds. After asking for more clarification, new words and thoughts came in: social change, self-improvement, and transformation. Improvement was the preeminent concept used to define modernity. Most subjects considered modernity as changing society, changing traditions and social customs, and improving thoughts not only for all aspects of life, but also improving current thoughts, beliefs, and ideas. Definitions of modernity emphasized non-material aspects of culture verses material aspect.
Subject 1: “Modernity means development, continuity, and progress, it means that the person is going for the better.”

Subject 2: “Modernity –to me– is always linked to revolution against the traditions.”

Subject 3: “Modernity is all about changing in thoughts and ideas, not related to constructions and architecture.”

Subject 4: “Changes for the better . . . and renewing.”

Subject 5: “Changes and applying newness.”

Subject 6: “Questioning current thoughts.”

Some subjects were specific in their definitions, referring to openness toward science, advanced technology, revolution against tradition in terms of eating manners and fashion, modern thinking, and being civilized. As subjects state,

Subject 8: “Profound changes in education strategies, clothes, and ways of thinking in general.”

Subject 12: “Revelation against traditions and social customs especially on clothes and eating manners.”

Some subjects critiqued the way some Saudis interact with modernity, which indicates that the comprehension of some Saudi youth extends beyond material aspects:

Subject 15: “Modernity is superficial on Saudi Arabia. Saudis focus on external appearance: fashions, eating manners, shopping, getting modern and advanced
technology. Modernity has not reached to the internal areas such as ideas and beliefs.”

There are two types of comprehensions of modernity. The majority tendency comprehended modernity as a concept that is related to nations, ideas, and thoughts, extending to deal with economic, political, and social spheres. On the other hand, the minority of subjects represented modernity only on tangible matters and devices, such as modern furniture, smart phones, modern cars, and other advanced technology.

Subject 20: “New Buildings, modern city . . . this is what comes to my mind when I hear modernity. Also, it means modern furniture, technologies and modern devices.“

The definition of modernity emphasized nonmaterial aspects. The youth however convinced modernity compatible with Islam, and not a western project. This theme is illustrated next.

*Feelings towards modernity.* Subjects responded to three survey questions that asked about their feeling toward modernity. When the subjects were asked if there is a conflict between the values of development and traditional values, the majority of subjects (80 percent) said that there is a change causing conflict in Saudi society between traditional values and modern values. On the other hand, 20 percent said there is no conflict (see Figure 1); most subjects (76 percent) think that modernity is compatible with Islam. However, 24 percent thought that modernity and Islam are not in harmony (see Figure 2); 52 percent of subjects believed that modernity is not a western project, but (38 percent) thought that modernity is a Western project; and (10 percent) replied that they do not know.
When the subjects were asked to elaborate their thoughts regarding the way they answered the questions above, three themes were brought up: the nature of modernity in Saudi Arabia, the local concept of change in Saudi society, and the importance of religion and social traditions and customs.

The nature of modernity in Saudi Arabia. Modernity is perceived by subjects as superficial and impulsive in Saudi Arabia. They described Saudis as focusing more on external appearance to reflect that they are modern (e.g., fashions, eating manners, shopping, and modern and advanced technology) without adopting the ideas and beliefs that they identified as representing modernity.

Subject 18: “Modernity is superficial on Saudi Arabia. Saudis focus on external appearance: fashions, eating manners, shopping, getting modern and advanced technology. Modernity has not reached to the internal areas such as ideas and beliefs.”

Additionally, according to subjects, the individuals who consider themselves modernists bring social chaos by questioning social and religious norms and standards. They have no red lines and no respect for religion; they use scientific and philosophical arguments to challenge social norms, which makes people skeptical and uncomfortable with the concept of modernity.

Subject 3: “They are questioning everything especially religious thoughts/rules and social assumptions, which make people –especially older generations– less accepting modernity project, and more skeptical about it.”

Subject 12: “Modernists are superficial and have no specialty, and they have aversion from (motivation against) religion.”
Also, some subjects mentioned that the so-called modernists belong to an elite class that is related to the government, such as ministries and governmental consultants. They are not from regular people. Therefore, people in society will enter into unfair and tense classist conflicts in interacting with modernity due to classist tensions and intellectual differences.

Subject 5: “The modern thoughts and improvement come from the elites that related to the government such as ministries, governmental consultants. It is not from social ground, average people, or society.”

On the other hand, some subjects comprehended modernity as a positive project that means progress, development, and seeking for better in all aspects of life. However, they evaluated modernity in Saudi negatively by saying that Saudis have no serious and rational experience because this experience misses a legitimate referring group which is the teachings of Islam. As a result, they act superficially and deal with modernity impulsively, and modernity has not entered to the core of Saudi mentality.

Subject 2: “I see their interactions is more negatively, I did not mean that the religion makes the experience negative, but our comprehend of the religion is wrong, which makes our acceptance of modernity negative.”

Subject 5: “Our dealing with modernity is not based on solid religious bases . . . so the interactions with it is arbitrary.”

Subject 7: “I think people misunderstand it in terms of openness without morals, without personal rules. People copy things without having personal moral values in their use.”
The subjects’ discussion of the nature of modernity in Saudi Arabia leads to their perception of change.

*Change in Saudi Arabia.* The majority of subjects (80 percent) mentioned that there is a change causing conflict in Saudi society between traditional values and modern values (see Figure 1). However, they referred many variables that are causing this conflict such as ages, geographical spot, educational level, and nature of personalities. All subjects agreed that they are witnessing social changes and a new era in Saudi society, which to some extent is causing social upheaval. For example, one subject pointed to conflict that occurs depending on the region of Saudi Arabia in which people live.

Subject 7: “. . . the people of Jeddah, the people of Al-Gharbia, their concept of modernity is not like the concept of modernity in the eastern region, the southern region, since it is a rocky and solid area, the environment reflects its features on its people.”

In particular the diversity within the different regions of Saudi Arabia may impact feelings toward modernity and whether or not change is accepted. Subjects talked about how some regions of Saudi Arabia are more tribal than others.

Subject 16: “If a society . . . for example, tribal society does not accept the idea of modernity, because it will be against traditions, tribal instructions, and against everything they used to settle in a hundred years ago . . . . But in an individual society, it is easier to reach [a] mentality that it accepts new ideas.”
Another pointed to the significance of age,

Subject 21: “From my point of view, and as I notice, young men, yes. for such people, 40 years old and above, they are not welcoming modernity.”

A majority of subjects explained Saudis’ attitude toward changes is more acceptable when it was not happening within the country.

Subject 14: “Saudis accept and embrace changes when it happens outside the country, and they interact with it positively. On other hand, when these changes come to Saudi Arabia, they reject it.”

Currently, there are some changes that did not exist before, but now they are practiced widely, such as excessive partying, women’s empowerment, women driving cars, and some government laws have been changed in favor of women. Also, new generations start challenging the previous generations because older generations do not accept the new modern lifestyle. The tension between generations may challenge traditional family structure.

Subject 5: “New generations challenge the previous generations –parents– because they do not accept modern lifestyle, and change.”

Moreover, many Saudis are not sure and feel unease with these changes in general. There is a resistance towards any changes, and the elderly are perceived as not comfortable seeing social norms collapsing overnight suddenly.

Subject 16: “Modernists (the elites) are questioning everything especially religious thoughts\rules and social assumptions, which make people – especially
older generations- less accepting of the modernity project, and more skeptical about it."

Despite this discomfort with modernists, the average person has no voice because these changes have come from authoritative entities; the government led all these changes. The nature of change is not coming through natural, gradual, and dialectical social development based on interactions among social forces and normal social equations. As one subject said: “Authority and laws are stronger than society’s word in terms of forcing changes and applying newness.” Discomfort with modernization is very prominent when the participants talk about religion.

The importance of religion and social traditions and customs. It was shown in the interviews that the religion theme is sensitive to Saudis overall. They even brought up the topic of religion before those interview questions were reached. The matter was a deal breaker to them. If modernity challenges the religion, it is not needed. Modernity can be injected into any of life’s aspects, except religion. The matter of religion was present in both themes: the nature of modernity and the concept of change in Saudi society. Subjects stated that the importance of religion and its holiness decrease due to the challenges from modernists. Some Saudis see that the main mission of modernists is to eradicate the religion, not to seek social improvements and better life.

Subject 2: “Modernists are superficial and have no specialty, and they have aversion from (motivation against) religion.”

Subject 18: “Modernists are chaos, it generates social problems, and it challenges the religion.”
This perception hinders the social interactions with modernity for sure. It tarnishes the reputation of modernity, and Saudis’ attitude toward it is skeptical. Some subjects wondered about the resources of modernists and their real intentions. Some subjects saw it as an external intervention.

Subject 15: “It seems to me that it comes from outside rather than from internal dynamic.”

In sum, the subjects did not agree on how Saudis interact with and accept modernity. They gave various variables that determine how Saudis interact with the modernity project: age, educational level, adherence to traditions, personality, regions that individuals live in, and social values. Older (over 40) Saudis are perceived less likely to believe in modernity and accept change whereas younger Saudis are more open to modernity and social change. Higher educated Saudis are more open to and accepting of modernity’s project, but the more an individual believes in traditions and social customs, the less they will interact with change and modernity’s project. Similarly, individuals who have curiosity and motivation to learn are more accepting of modernity and social change. In addition, some subjects mentioned that where people dwell may play a crucial role in dealing with modernity. The farther the region is from the center of Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, the more culturally open are individuals in terms of interacting with modern values. However, in individuals who dwell closer to the center, though the region is more advanced technologically, they tend to be more conservative culturally. The desert and mountainous regions are also more conservative (e.g., Riyadh, south and north areas) whereas coastal regions (e.g., Dammam, Jeddah) are more open and accepting of modernity. Also, social values are seen as a profound element of interacting with modernity. In tribal communities, believing in tribal values slows down interaction with modernity, so such individuals are more
conservative. On the other hand, individualistic communities are more open and accepting of modernity.

**Islam & modernity.** In the dialog of Islam and modernity, qualitative data revealed the meaning of modernity. As illustrated in Figure 2, more than three-fourth (76 percent) of studied subjects reported that modernity and Islam are in harmony. In other words, studied subjects perceived Islam as a comprehensive religion that can easily incorporate principles of modernity.

Subject 1: “There is a harmony between Islam and modernity . . . . Islam has its own modernity, which is called Islamic modernity. It is more general than Western modernity that depends only on reason. While Islamic modernity has a wider circle because it believes in metaphysical and non-material ideas as well.”

Subject 4: “It is very compatible with Islam. Islam is a comprehensive religion for all aspects of life and has not left an aspect that it did not care about, as such as modernity.”

Subject 5: “I think it is compatible . . . I believe that Islam supports development and supports modernity.”

However, these same subjects who agreed Islam and modernity are compatible also cautioned that we should choose the positive side of modernity and not accept the negative side that they believe challenges Islam. Therefore, they felt that they should be selective. The meanings attributed were more complicated than blanket compatibility. Most subjects said that we should look at modernity and see if something is compatible with Islam; otherwise, we should reject it.
Subject 5: “Modernity is compatible with Islam in general. But there are things that can turn against Islamic law, such as commercial (capitalism) modernity. If they take it and apply it exactly, it will contain violations of Sharia. We must take from modernity what suits us.”

Subject 17: “but we, as a Muslim society, take the good things from modernity and leave those that conflict with our values. I think that modernity, in my sense, is the one that facilitates life, such as the using of technology, modern furniture, modern buildings and the development of cities, and these are all things that are compatible with Islam.”

Because modernity did not emerge through internal social dynamics, the participants identified positive and negative aspects of modernity. For example, capitalism as an economic system, may reflect on social and religious values that go against religious statements that support social solidarity, like sharing your own economic interests with others. On the other hand, the concrete objects such as technology, furniture, buildings, and cities do not carry a threatening ideology, but makes life easier. Aspects of modernity are not simply accepted as good and desirable.

Further, some subjects (24 percent) had an extremely critical view towards modernity. They stated that modernity and Islam are complete opposites, so Saudis should choose modernity or Islam. They saw the idea of combining modernity and Islam to be impossible.

Subject 20: “From my point of view, modernity is a faith, and Islam is a faith, and it would be a great shock if we fully embrace modernity in our society because we are an Islamic society, its faith is Islam, and modernity has its own faith.”
The people who thought that modernity is not compatible with Islam view it as a comprehensive ideology that cannot be divided. Therefore, their perspective is either you have to take it all or leave it.

It can be seen that both perspectives agreed that modernity is not internal social and cultural processes that came from local cultural ingredients. On the contrary, modernity is an entity that was created outside, and we should assess its fit and threat.

Modernity & the West. Even though subjects presented Islam as a determining factor and a core element of their identity and thinking process, the West was present in the background of considering modernity and its principles. In the interview, all subjects used Western culture as an example to defeat modernity or reject some of its principles or applications. As illustrated in Figure 3, eight subjects (38 percent) out of 21 agreed that modernity is a Western project, but 11 subjects (53 percent) said that modernity is not a Western project. Two subjects (9 percent) said that they did not know if it is a Western project or not.

Based on the qualitative data, the subjects who agreed that modernity is a Western project can be divided into two groups based on their answers. Group one justified their answers based on modernity’s ideology and its applications. The other group justified theirs based on modernity’s products. The first group stated that due to modernity’s reliance on science, it denies Islam’s main principle—the existence of God. Modernity has never led us to God. Therefore, it is not something that belongs to our ideology, faith, and culture.

Subject 2: “We as Muslims have a final result, which is the existence of God, if we go with modernity step by step, we will not reach God, even if we use science and logic, we will not reach the existence of God.”
Subject 16: “Islamic modernity. It is more general than Western modernity, which depends only on reason. While Islamic modernity has a wider circle because it believes in metaphysical and non-material ideas as well.”

Subject 11: “From my point of view, modernity is a faith, and Islam is a faith, and it would be a great shock if we fully embrace modernity in our society because we are an Islamic society . . . modernity has its own faith.”

These subjects suggested that Islamic modernity solves this paradox, overcoming the stated conflict between Islam and the west. Another subject mentioned that modernity is a Western project because it is acceptable practice in Western societies, but it is not fully acceptable in our society.

Subject 13: “I think that modernity is a Western project because modernity is acceptable in Western society and culture, but it causes a tension in our society and culture.”

Another subject mentioned that modernity is not only an idea, but it is a belief that is not compatible with Islamic society.

Subject 19: “I believe that modernity is a Western project, and it is not suitable for Islamic societies because modernity is not just ideas, but it is a belief. The application of modernity as a doctrine in Islamic societies is almost impossible.”

Though there was plenty of discussion referring to the ideological tensions that defined modernity as a Western project, the second group justified their answers due to modern’s products that have been imported from Western markets. All modern/advanced products that
Saudis have, like cell phones, internet, and advanced technology, are from Western society. Therefore, it is a Western project.

Subject 15: “Quite frankly, yes. I see that modernity comes only from the West; I do not see anything that we use is created by us. All modern things are imported from west: electrical appliances, technology devices . . . television programs, and even their shows’ style is all inspired by the West, we are not the ones who make them.”

However, the side that disagreed that modernity is a Western project justified their answers by stating that the core of modernity is changing, transforming, and developing for the better, and these notions do not exclusively belong to Western culture or another culture as well. These concepts are the rights of all cultures and regions to seek for change and better their circumstances.

Subject 14: “No, I do not agree that modernity is a Western project. On the contrary, every country and every society needs modernity, needs development in political and economic spheres. I mean development in general.”

Subject 16: “Because the view of modernity is the development of areas of life, the development of ideas to keep pace with the times in which we live.”

Moreover, the contents of modernity may not come only from Western culture, but it may also come from Eastern cultures or even from Saudi society as well. Subjects who belonged to this point of view, even though they saw modernity as merely concepts that every culture could apply for their sake, admitted that Western culture precedes us on this path, and we can take what is suitable for our social and culture context.
Subject 12: “But we can say that Western culture preceded us to modernity. I feel that modernity is in natural steps and that it is the fate of all societies that they enter into modernity, but if these societies are open to the West, it may help them accelerate the process of modernity. Because they are societies that preceded us to modernity.”

Some of them went beyond that by stating modernity is a fate of all cultures to enter the era of modernity and deal with its principles.

Subject 16: “No. Each country develops in its own way. It can take a lot of certain things from the West. But in the end, there remains a taste of the local culture that is the basis of its culture.”

Subject 11: “But whether it is a Western project or not, I do not see anything wrong with using it if it benefits the community. There is no problem in using it and benefiting from it. If the West thought and produced something modern, we should benefit from it as human beings without thinking that it is Western or Arab. Why don't we take advantage of it?”

According to the subjects’ answers of both sides, they tended to deal pragmatically with modernity, regardless of whether or not it is a Western project. They said that we should not embrace all of modernity. However, we should be selective and alarmed by our interactions with modernity. We should take what suits and benefits us, then adding our cultural flavor to make it safe and applicable to our Islamic society. The researcher may call this situation a conditional interaction with modernity.
Attitude toward Social Progress

When the study gauged the attitude of Saudi youth toward social progress, it asked various questions that can determine the attitude of Saudi youth toward change, such as the goodness of change, should it be restricted, do they support the social change, and in which areas do they concentrate their efforts to make change.

In terms of the goodness of change, the quantitative data showed that 19 percent strongly agreed, 33.3 percent agreed, 23.8 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, 19.0 percent disagreed, and 4.8 percent strongly disagreed with the statement “I think change is always good.” Thus, 52 percent of the participants were in favor of the goodness of change. Furthermore, when they were asked if they support the change in their country, 28.6 percent of subjects strongly agreed, 42.9 percent agreed, 23.8 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, 4.8 percent disagreed. However, 80 percent of respondents thought that there should be restrictions in social change which may indicate that even though Saudi youth have a positive attitude toward change and progress, they also have a paradoxical feeling toward it. In the area of change, the subjects concentrated on self-improvement more than trying to participate on improving the social atmosphere around them. In fact, 57 percent of subjects strongly agreed, 38 percent agreed that they work to improve themselves in all aspects of their life. On the other hand, when they were asked about the importance of industrial (manufacturing, material) progress –as the pioneer of western modernity– 42 percent stated that the industrial progress is not more important than any types of progress (see Figure 4). Further, 67 percent of the subjects believed there is no conflict between their faith as Muslims and science; however, 24 percent think that there is a conflict (see Figure 5).
Satisfaction with how things are going in Saudi Arabia. The paradoxical attitude around social progress is further illustrated by whether or not the Saudi youth are satisfied with how things are going in Saudi Arabia. Most subjects stated they were dissatisfied (43 percent), while 3 percent of the subjects said they were satisfied with the way things are going in Saudi country today (see Figure 6). However, five subjects (24 percent) chose not to disclose their opinions, which may indicate there were some threatening feelings about this question.

When the subjects were asked whom people should rely on to improve community, they overwhelmingly identified themselves (61.9 percent) as an agent of change (see Figure 7). The second most commonly identified agent of change was the government (19 percent). Less often mentioned were religious leaders (9.5 percent) and family relations (9.5 percent). The quantitative results suggested that subjects placed a lot of faith in the power of individuals themselves to make change which may suggest tendency toward individualism. However, the qualitative data that follows later in this chapter clarified the meanings subjects attributed to these agents of change.

In sum, the quantitative date showed that the Saudi youth have a paradoxical attitude around change, and social progress. As a result, they thought it should be restricted. Plus, they believed and focused more on themselves as individuals to make change in social atmosphere. Even though they state that they support the change in the country, most of them were dissatisfied with what is going on in Saudi Arabia. The following section will present the qualitative data to reveal the reasons behind the quantitative data.

The agents of change in Saudi society. In terms of the sources to make change in Saudi society, Saudi youth identified themselves as individuals, and the government as the primary sources. However, the qualitative data revealed deeper understanding about these change forces.
Participants stated that change starts from a person who is convinced and has desire, motivation, and passion to make change because the change originally comes from inside to outside, not by the force of others. Otherwise, changes cannot occur physically. To illustrate this feeling, Subject 1 said:

Subject 1: “Improvement of the self leads to improvement of society automatically.”

Several subjects mentioned that society would improve automatically suggesting that change should not be imposed by outside forces. These data showed that the Saudi youth believe in themselves, however, they think that the individuals cannot lead the change in Saudi society because the strongest agent that can make change is the government due to the fact that it has the power and sources to lead the change:

Subject 5: “The state . . . because I feel that . . . the state controls other choices [people, religious scholars, family ties, and the tribes].”

Therefore, the Saudi youth concentrated on themselves because they felt that they do not have a lot of space to make changes on a larger social scale. They described the government as having absolute power to make (or to obstruct) change. These results may explain why some subjects felt threatened when they were asked to reveal their satisfaction with change in Saudi society.

In sum, all these qualitative data explained the attitude of youth towards change. They tended to define social change on personal scales rather than through social structural ways. However, they were hesitant because they recognized that they have no strong position to make change given the power of the government. Therefore, they have withdrawn from attempting to
influence change in society and instead concentrate more on themselves. Next, the subjects’ explanations reflected on their understandings of positive and negative change.

To better understand positive and negative aspects of social change the subjects were asked to elaborate their perspectives. Qualitatively, when they defined positive social change, the majority of subjects defined positive change as improving personal morality, such as tolerance, generosity, honesty and fidelity; increasing understanding and awareness; rejecting rumors; being religious; respecting other’s privacy; freedom; and loving for others what you love for yourself.

Subject 8: “Positive change is having more positive virtues morals like tolerance, generosity, honesty, fidelity.”

Subject 19: “I see it like increasing the understanding, awareness, rejecting rumors.”

Subjects 6: “Positive change are good manners . . . to love for others what you love for yourself.”

Secondly, focusing on educational matters took the second position as an indication of positive social change when subjects were asked, “What do we need to change in our country?”

Subject 1: “I cannot think about anything more important than education. We are spending times there more than in our homes.”

Subject 7: “Education, we need to make it more fun and attractive to students.”

Subject 15: “I don't know, I feel that the change is in education, technology and ideas that have a direct result and impact, and the change is not the change in the
economy or politics, or in the environment as much as the change is in the person himself.”

Subject 13: “To the education be better: more applied than theoretical memorization.”

The educational system was an important matter to most subject in need of fixing. They wished to reform the education from being abstract to being more interactive which would be as a sign to move to positive change. While change in education is a responsibility of the government, the subjects discussed it as a key foundation for individuals to improve themselves organically.

Afterward, enhancing social relations and social solidarity were mentioned as a type of positive change. Also, some subjects mentioned that trying to get rid of some social customs and traditions that have no rational basis is a positive social change. However, most of the subjects emphasized the importance of social relation to glue the society together.

Subject 5: “If society wishes to develop itself positively, from one stage to another, it must improve social relations . . . family relationships . . . or every relationship between the two that is in society.”

Subject 17: “We need to keep collective culture, social solidarity, family connections, we cannot get rid of these things . . . these things should remain.”

To sum up, defining positive social change followed the emphasis on change beginning at the individual level. It was seen as increasing morality and presented as an acceptable pathway to modernity. The strong emphasis on improving education supports the subjects’ belief that modernity should occur through development of individuals. The subjects showed less interest
on structural social changing likely because they believed it is not in their hands or within their
realm of responsibilities. It is instead within purview of the government’s power. Next, the
subjects’ discussion of negative aspects in social change clarified their understanding of social
progress.

*Negative social change definition.* On defining negative social change, the subjects
presented qualitatively what they believe were the negative social phenomena taking place in
Saudi society,

Subject 4: “Prioritizing the self over groups interests . . . in other word . . .
individualism.”

Subject 8: “Individuals’ rights having more priority than the rights of social
groups.”

Subject 12: “Excluding some social groups.”

Subject 6: “Disrespecting other personal choices.”

The tension between self and others was presented vividly as the subjects describe
negative social phenomena. The other negative phenomena that were mentioned by subjects
were religious and intellectual extremism, indecency, sexual harassment, sexual fluidity, fighting
in social media, bullying, materialistic focus, increasing money’s role in determining social
position, the weakness of parental supervision, excessive social partying, and environmental
pollution.

Subject 6: “Fighting in social media, bullying.”

Subject 18: “Openness to new things without awareness.”
Subject 7: “Excessive social partying . . . that is not allowed by our religion.”

Subject 9: “Rising money role that has become the standard of social position . . . you were treated by how much you earn.”

Subject 11: “The weakness of parental supervision . . . now it is not like before .. parents have no control over their children.”

Subject 21: “Focusing on materialism, and individualism. people start to think about themselves only.”

In sum, subjects noted a variety of negative social phenomena in need of attention. Yet when the researcher asked the subjects qualitatively about things that should be changed in the country, the answers varied in general, but it can be categorized generally into governmental functions.

*Things to change.* The subjects focused heavily on governmental functions which may support other findings that reflect their perception that government has a monopoly on the launching of social progress and change. The subjects mentioned matters such as creating jobs and the need for Saudi government to find revenue beyond taxing citizens’ income. Income tax is a new element in Saudis’ life. Also, some subjects mentioned that laws and justice should be clearer and reasonable to the citizens. In addition, the theme of human rights was mentioned as well.

Subject 8: “Tax, the government should look for another way to get money rather than citizens.”
Subject 5: We need to ease Judicial procedures, improve police officers’ behaviors . . . we are afraid of asking police to help even if it is just an inquiry.”

Subject 3: “Clarifying laws, because people do not know their rights.”

Subject 9: “The first thing I feel . . . that should be changed . . . is equality and justice. This is the most important thing. Also, many people do not get a job because of tribal relations.”

Subject 15: “Rapid and sudden changes of governmental decisions that make people unable to keep up . . . . You plan your life based on what is going on, then go to sleep ... when you wake up, everything is changed . . . overnight . . . so you need to replan your life.”

Thus, the Saudi youth focused their critique on governmental actions and limit any references to the role of individual in making change on a wider structural scale. Beyond defining positive and negative aspects of social progress, subjects shared their views about the role of science in social progress. Specifically, they discussed links between science and religion.

*Compatibility between science and religion.* Modernity is existentially related to science which is the main launcher of social progress. When asked if the Saudi youth feel there is a conflict between Islam and science 67 percent of the subjects believed that there is no conflict between their faith as Muslims and science, because the source of both is one entity, Allah.

Subject 11: “If science is merely sensory observations and measurements . . . under this framework . . . there is not conflict with religion, because they are natural phenomena. I believe that my religion is true, and that it is revealed from
God, and I believe that God created these natural phenomena, and sent down this religion . . . therefore . . . I believe that religion does not conflict with science.”

Overall, these subjects had peaceful insight about the relation between science and Islam as Islam is a religion that encourages seeking knowledge.

As Subject 15 stated: “There is never any conflict, on the contrary, religion urges us to learn, seek for knowledge.”

However, 24 percent thought that there is a conflict, but the conflict is not inherent to Islam. Instead, the conflict arises when science is deemed to be biased or ideological.

Subject 12: “Pure science that is free from desires, personal, biased opinions, and agendas, never contradicts religion, because the principle is the same, and the one who instituted create science is the one who instituted create religion.”

In sum, overall, the subjects reported that Islam contains, explains, and covers every single piece of life that enriches Muslims’ needs. Therefore, Islam is an important supporter of science.

Attitude toward Individualism

To reveal the attitude of Saudi youth toward individualism, the subjects were asked various quantitative and qualitative questions about their opinions about many aspects of life. Subjects responded to survey questions that asked about educational resources, individual vs. group interactions, the importance of family ties vs. hard work to get ahead in life, parenting, and advice seeking. Even though this section shows a high tendency toward individualism, it is obvious that there is some tension of dealing with it in such a collective culture like Saudi Arabia.
Educational resources. Whether subjects preferred older people, or formal education as the most trusted source to obtain knowledge signified attitude about individualism. Older adults represent traditional source of truth and knowledge that link the individuals to collective culture. On the other hand, relying on schools and books which are parts of formal education encourages individual learning. In other words, the individuals seek knowledge and truth through their own efforts separate from the family and larger group to which they belong. The subjects largely (42 percent) rated the traditional institution (older adults) as the source from which kids learn the deepest and most profound truth. On the other hand, 28 percent of the subjects thought that schools are more useful. The same percentage (28 percent) thought that children learn equally from both, as illustrated in Figure 8. On this matter, the quantitative data hinted at the possibility that subjects were less individualistic.

Individual vs. group interactions. When it comes to prioritizing their own feelings first or others’ feelings first (see figure 9), a total of 60 percent of the subjects thought that kids should be taught to prioritize their own feelings over others’ feelings. However, 40 percent of the subjects prioritized caring for others’ feelings. Given that the majority of subjects agreed that kids should prioritize their own feelings over other’s feelings seems to challenge collective social expectations and showed slight tendency toward individualism.

Moreover, subjects showed a high level of individualism when they were asked if an individual should not insist on their own opinion if their group disagrees with them or if they should hold to their own opinion even if the whole group disagrees with them (see Figure 10). The participants stated they should hold their opinions most of the time (57.1 percent), always hold to their own opinion (23.8 percent). Fewer went with “most times to go along with the
group” (19.0 percent). However, no one went with “always to go along with the group” (0.0 percent).

The parenting interaction. The subjects’ beliefs about the role of parents in their children’s socialization is an important area for understanding individualism. If a parent raises their child to think for themselves as opposed to have the same idea as their parents, then that would suggest a high level of individualism. Subjects’ responses were distributed across all options (see Figure 11) when they were asked if they think it is necessary for a child to have the same ideas as their parents. The highest percentage (48 percent) stated that in certain matters this is preferred. A lesser percentage preferred this to be the case in the majority of matters (24 percent). The lowest percentage preferred this in all important matters (9.5 percent).

Moreover, in terms of parents’ role, the subjects were asked “If an individual must choose between a job that they like or a job that their parents prefer for the individual, which should they choose?” (see Figure 12). All subjects, except one, said that the individual should choose what they want, even if their parents disagree or get upset. The response indicated that certain matters, such as a career path, should depend on the individual’s choice, not others even if the others are their parents. This suggests an individual sense among Saudi youth.

Family ties vs. hard work to get ahead in life. Between family connections and personal efforts (see Figure 13), 47 percent of subjects indicated that family connections are important to get jobs and get ahead in life in Saudi society. On the other hand, 52.4 percent of the subjects reported that personal effort is currently the way to get ahead in life in Saudi Arabia. Thus, Saudi youth preferred to rely more on their personal efforts rather than family connections to find their career path and get ahead in life.
Reference group sources. While family ties were rated lower than personal effort to get ahead in life, the subjects weighted their parents more (47.6 percent) than anyone else to take advice from (see Figure 14). Secondly, the subjects choose “No one” as the source of advice to which they would give most weight to (29 percent). Lastly, the religious leaders had the third position (23.8 percent). However, the tribal leader and the government were not identified as sources to which they would give a lot of weight.

In sum, the quantitative data showed a tendency of subjects toward individualism in terms of prioritizing their own feelings and preferring personal efforts to obtain jobs. Further, they supported the importance of upholding their own opinions most of time as opposed to agreeing with the group. Finally, the fact that a considerable percentage of subjects identified no one as preferable reference group to influence them hinted at individualism.

However, the qualitative data showed that even if most subjects were in favor of individualism, there were some situations in which individual choices were challenging for the subjects. Specifically, they identified situations that may bring tensions with others which may lead to social dualism.

For example, when it comes to having disagreement with others, most subjects preferred to uphold their own opinions, but they are willing to get rid of theirs if it will cause social problems.

Subject 5: “Sometimes holding our own opinion generates problem without good consequences. We should hold our opinion as long as it does not shake the social solidity.”
Subject 21: “Holding my own opinion but not crashing with society to keep my social relationships.”

Subject 6: “Yes, I should hold my opinions if there are no social negative consequences.”

Subject 14: “If these opinions are so different from the social thinking, I should keep it to myself and not talk about it publicly. But, if the society fights with me because of it, I should fight back and hold it strongly”.

Thus, the social dualism was illustrated by the sentiment that subjects clearly believed in having and maintaining their own opinion, but also stated a need to hide their opinions if it threatens to bring negative social consequences or to lead them to lose their social relationships. Moreover, some subjects stated that they are willing to leave their own opinions if it shakes social solidarity.

Family connections play a crucial role to get ahead in life in Saudi Arabia. For example, being promoted at one’s job often happens because of family connections not due to one’s hard work (Harbi et al. 2016). However, in recent years changes occurred. When the subjects were asked “Which one is more important: Family connections or hard work to get ahead in life in Saudi Arabia?” they favored personal efforts. They valued getting ahead in life with their own rather than relying on their family connections. Plus, the government’s reformation movement played a fundamental role in this matter by keeping out unqualified individuals in order to abolish corruption. All these changes seemed to increase the sense of individualism in Saudis’ life.
Subject 2: ”For five years, the hard work become more important due to the improvement movements in the country. The concentration now is to put the right person in the right position.”

Subject 19: “The importance of family connections will never go away, but I think it is not effective like it was in the past.”

Subject 5: “The family connection WAS powerful, but now it is not that important, its powerfulness decreases.”

Because this data showed that the subjects believed in and favored personal efforts and not relying on family connections, it suggests that there is a kind of fragmentation with family structure occurring in Saudi society. The data above illustrated a change where individuals were breaking off from their family relations to move ahead in their careers and life choices. This study also illustrated this fragmentation extends to the parents’ roles in their kids’ life. Most subjects stated that the kids should not take the opinions of their parents most of the time. Nevertheless, they preferred that kids follow the parents’ lead in certain matters, especially in religion and morality.

Subject 8: “The kid should follow them on morality such as honesty, but not in general ideas and opinions, they should not.”

Subject 12: “Kids should follow them on religious matters. Otherwise, the kid should improve their own ideas and opinions.”

Moreover, the subjects believed that the parents have no right to participate in choosing career path. They believed these matters are up to the person themself in order to live their life as they want and to be creative and productive.
Subjects 1: “He should go to what he chose even if the parents disagree. They have no right to get upset with him or force him to what they want.”

Subject 6: “If you do not like your job/field, you will never be creative at it. You must like it to be creative.”

Subject 9: “If he chooses something he does not like, his productivity and career performance will be so bad.”

This data showed that the subjects preferred to get ahead in life with their own personal choices and their efforts far away from family control. However, the subjects highly chose their parents as a preferable agent to get advice from when it is needed. Most subjects identified trust as a main factor and justified their choice emotionally:

Subject 2: “I trust them. I do not need to ask individuals that I do not know. I trust who raised me probably.”

Subject 17: “I am more comfortable with my parents’ answers, even if their answers are wrong, but I trust them.”

Subject 4: “No one will care about you like them, their advice comes from their heart sincerely.”

Subject 13: “They are who I trust most, and their advice comes from their heart.”

The survey question that asked subjects to rank the importance of several social agents as the preferred source of advice in Saudi Arabia included parents, tribal leaders, religious leaders, and government. Parents were ranked number one. The government and tribal leaders were in the lowest rank to take advice from. Surprisingly, in such a religious society, the religious leaders
were not in the top either which may indicate that their importance is decreasing a bit. However, the second highest choice picked to get advice from was “No one.” They appreciated professionals and access to diverse sources to get advice from:

Subject 2: “It depends on the question, if it is educational, I ask a classmate. If it is medical, I ask a doctor . . . etc.”

Subject 6: “Most of the time my parents, but If I have a religious question, I ask religious leaders. If it is a scientific question, I ask expertise on that felid.”

Subject 18: “It depends on the question, and the type of advice I want.”

Subject 5: “If I want advice on how to rise children, I go to my parents. If I want advice on a scientific matter, I go to expertise on that felid. If I want advice on legislation, I go to the government. At the end, you need to give everyone their space.”

Through the qualitative data, the subjects showed a sense of differentiation, a phenomenon which is an important aspect of modernity.

The concept of freedom. As individualism and personal choices linked essentially with the concept of freedom, the subjects were asked to give their definition and attitude toward this concept. Their answers illustrated the reasons why Saudi youth have some tensions in balancing between their sense of individualism and living in collective culture. Many subjects defined freedom as a positive and civilized concept theoretically that allows people to choose whatever goes with their interests like freedom of expression, freedom to seek education, or even as refusing what goes against their interests.
Subject 15: “I feel that freedom is that a person has a right to say his opinion, a right to learn, to live a decent life, to be free to choose, for example, his future, to choose his life partner, free in these things.”

However, approximately all subjects evaluated freedom in Saudi society negatively in practice. They mentioned that Saudis comprehend freedom as having no limitations, doing whatever the person wants regardless of any social or religious considerations. When people want to violate the social moral and religious lines, they use the word “personal freedom” as a justification to break these roles.

Subject 12: “Breaking the moral and religious boundaries, it distorts the concept. Anyone here does anything immoral, then refers it as personal freedom.”

Subject 16: “But society sees that the concept of freedom is that a person does what he wants without limitations or controls, without a person taking any consideration for others or society, but he does not live alone.”

Thus, freedom is a paradox in this study. In the abstract, the concept of freedom was acceptable and valued. Yet, in practice, freedom was perceived as threatening. Saudis were skeptical that others in their society have the ability to practice personal freedom responsibly. Reference to having personal freedom was often stated when there is a desire to challenge social norms.

*Attitude toward Democracy*

As democracy is a political form of modernity, the study contains various questions related to Saudi youth opinions about this political form. Whether democracy is the greatest form of government or not, the responses ranged from strongly agree (5 percent), agree (25
percent), neither agree nor disagree (35 percent), disagree (20 percent), strongly disagree (15 percent). Thus, 35 percent of subjects chose to be neutral, but another 35 percent of subjects disagreed and strongly disagreed that democracy is the greatest form of government. Also, in response to the question of whether democracy is the preferable form compared to other kinds of government, the heavier weight was in favor of disagreement. Specifically, 35 percent disagreed, and 10 percent strongly disagreed. However, 35 percent agreed, yet 20 percent indicated neither agree nor disagree. Furthermore, 75 percent of the subjects (35 percent strongly agreed, 40 percent agreed) believed that in some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable, and 20 percent indicated neither agree nor disagree. Nevertheless, in response to whether democracy is a Western way that would not work in most Muslim countries, more than half of subjects (48 percent) disagreed with this statement. Moreover, 9.5 percent strongly disagreed, and 24 percent neither agreed nor disagreed (see Figure 15). On the other hand, when the subjects were asked if there is a fundamental conflict between democracy and Islam, 32 percent of the subjects stated there is disharmony, but more than half of the subjects (58 percent) believed there is no conflict. Ten percent said that they have no idea (see Figure 16).

When the subjects were asked, “How important is it to have democracy in Saudi Arabia?” A majority of subjects (55 percent) stated that democracy is somewhat important to have in Saudi Arabia, 25 percent said it is very important, 15 percent not too important, and 5 percent believe it is not important at all (see Figure 18). Furthermore, in response to whether Saudis are ready to have democracy, 62 percent of subjects said that the Saudis are not ready to have democracy, but 24 percent believed that they are ready; 14 percent answered that they do not know (see Figure 17).
In response to how much trust and confidence do the subjects have in the wisdom of Saudi people when it comes to making political decisions, 58 percent of subjects stated not at all/not very much. On the other hand, 42 percent stated a very great deal/good deal of trust and confidence in the Saudi people’s ability to make political decisions (see Figure 19).

Saudi youth showed that they have an undesirable attitude toward democracy. This attitude was further supported through their responses to questions that asked them to choose between democracy and other options. Notably, they always chose the other options over democracy. For example, when they were asked which one is more important to them, democracy or a strong leader, democracy or economic prosperity, democracy or stability, they overwhelmingly chose the other options. More than half of the subjects (71%) chose strong economy over democracy (29%); 74 percent chose a strong leader over a democratic government (24 percent), and the highest percent (79 percent) chose a stable government, even if there is a risk it will not be fully democratic (see Figures 20, 21, and 22.) The attitudes toward democracy are further illustrated by questions about democratic government forms.

*Democratic governmental forms.* While the findings above showed that Saudi youth supported a strong leader and stable government, when they were asked about the government forms, they rated a strong leader who makes decisions without interference from the court or parliament (60 percent) as an undesirable form of governing. On the other hand, almost three quarters (72 percent) of subjects identified a government of experts, not elected officials, as the best governmental form (see Figure 23). Further, the democratic government forms were less highly supported. Sixty-seven percent of Saudi youth supported a government of elected representatives by citizens, followed by the democratic system where citizens, not elected officials, vote directly on major national issues to decide what becomes law (62 percent).
Overall, the findings from the quantitative data reflect the subjects’ attitude toward the political circumstances of Saudi Arabia. Even if the subjects emphasized neutrality by choosing “neither agree nor disagree” in most quantitative questions and asked to skip other questions during the interview, their informative responses in reply to qualitative questions told something else. Their replies may be attributed to living in such an absolute monarchy and authoritarian regime. Furthermore, Saudi youth were realistic about democracy given their current living conditions.

*Defining democracy.* The first question aimed to gauge how Saudi youth conceptualize democracy. The majority of subjects defined democracy as the freedom of expression. They emphasized democracy as a social practice more than as a form of governing.

Subject 15: “Democracy . . . as I understand it . . . is having the freedom of expressing your thoughts and you feel safe that you will not be arrested.”

Subject 2: “It means that everyone lives free, no one bothers him if he doesn’t break the laws of the country which he lives in.”

While the majority emphasized social aspects, a couple referred to political aspects. For example, some subjects said that democracy means people are involved in everything such as, legal legislation and the judiciary.

Subject 8: “Community participation in governance. Involving the people in politics. Involving the people in everything like legal legislation, the judiciary. The people to participate in everything in any law that may be issued. Vote for it.”

In sum, the majority of subjects comprehended democracy as a synonym of freedom, listening to others and accepting differences. The subjects tended to clarify their thoughts about
democracy as a social practice more than a political one. They saw democracy mainly as person expressing their opinions and doing what they want, while at the same time, letting others say what they want.

The few subjects who tended to define democracy in a political way mentioned that democracy means listing to the majority, but also taking into account the opinion of the minority at the same time, even if the government intends not to apply the minority’s desires.

As a Subject said: “Taking in account the opinion of the majority, but not eliminating the opinion of the minority, even if you will not take minority’s opinion seriously.”

The importance of democracy. Although 55 percent of subjects stated that democracy is somehow important and it should be adopted in Saudi Arabia, the qualitative data showed where there is some hesitancy. Specifically, the subjects discussed some fears about its practice or consequences for Saudi society, both socially and politically.

As a subject mentioned, “If Saudi society opens up to democracy completely, wrong decisions will be taken, and the society will not be able to bear the consequences. What if the majority is wrong or has destructive ideas? There will be a big problem until the wrong democratic ideas are fixed.”

This subject described wrong decisions as referring to any situations that challenge moral, ethical and religious ideals. Importantly, she elaborated destructive ideas as the possibility of actions that would challenge social stability. For example, this subject stated the possibility of the majority supporting protests against the government in order to make changes in the country. She believed that would lead to reactions from the government that may destroy the livelihood of
families through government retaliation, which only makes the situation worse, and ultimately challenges social stability.

Clearly, there is an underestimation about the ability of majority rule. So the best way to start with democracy is to start from basic level. As a subject said, “My suggestion is that democracy begins at a small level, such as Kuwait. It begins by criticizing ministries, princes of regions, and refraining from criticizing rulers until people realize that their opinions are influential.”

In terms of underestimating the majority’s ability to make valid decisions, religious beliefs play a vital role in shaping this sentiment. When the subjects were asked if there is a fundamental conflict between Islam and democracy, there were two diverging tendencies on this point. Some subjects believed that Islam and democracy are in harmony, and there is no conflict or tension between the two because Islam has always supported freedom of expressing thoughts and accepting others.

Subject 17: “No, there is no contradiction. If we go back to the religious or Islamic origin, there is nothing that prevents the idea of freedom itself. I mean, there is nothing in Islam that prevents people from behaving freely or expressing their opinion freely.”

Subject 9: “No, there is no contradiction. On the contrary, Islam urges us to say our opinion, what we believe to be true, and this is something from ancient times. For example, from the time of the misfortune of Imam Hussein, peace be upon him, he insisted on his opinion and said that this thing is not true; I do not follow
you if you are wrong. This is a kind of democracy. We like to express our opinion on what we think is right or wrong.”

However, the other subjects judged democracy according to the concept of majority governing. In this matter, Islam has obvious roles and religious orders that they believe should never be affected by majority opinions. For example, the subjects overwhelmingly stated support for religion as the absolute truth that should guide all human behavior. The majority opinion should not, therefore, interfere with religious teachings. Therefore, there can be some incompatibility between Islam and democracy.

Subject 15: “Yes, there is a disagreement, it may be that the rule of the majority of people does not agree with Islam, there will be a disagreement between Islam and democracy because our main source is the Qur’an and the Prophet’s Sunnah, not the rule and opinion of majority. After the Noble Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, and the consensus of Islamic scholars follows.”

Subject 6: “Yes, there is a fundamental disagreement, because the opinion of Islam does not depend on the opinion of the majority, as democracy does.”

Overall, there are two aspects of democracy identified by the subjects in this study. The first aspect refers to freedom of expression and is described as a welcomed social (not political) element of democracy. The second aspect is majority rule, which is a political element of democracy that is not readily acceptable. Based on their circumstances of living in Saudi Arabia, the political meaning attributed to democracy is a realistic perspective for the subjects. This is especially noteworthy for a society that believes Islam is a religion that enriches all aspects of Muslim life. The subjects desired to elicit Islamic order regardless of majority opinion.
In addition, this hesitation to implement democracy in Saudi society was also attributed by subjects to many other variables: the personality of Saudis, social context that still relies on tribal affiliation, and religious discrimination. These reasons were presented in response to the question if Saudis are ready to practice democracy in their country.

Subject 1: “... democracy is speaking and expressing your thoughts, and the Saudi people are a barbaric and rigid people who act without laws or morals. The Saudi people need awareness and to be educated first.”

Subject 13: “Democracy will not succeed because it will be outside its social context, imposed by force by the government with full of punitive treatment ... and I think people in Saudi Arabia are hostile towards each other religiously and tribally.”

In sum, the subjects stated that if democracy is instituted in Saudi society, the tribals will take advantage of it because they will vote only for their sons, not for who is qualified from the other Saudis candidates. Therefore, problems come, and the social stability will be shaken. Other subjects believed that Saudis do not understand democracy, they do not know how to act and practice it because it is foreign to their social context. Plus, they are uneducated, barbaric, biased; they cannot bear others’ opinions and differences; they are fun-loving people, so they do not know how to deal with these matters seriously.

**Obstacles of democracy.** According to the subjects, when asked to talk about the difficulties of applying democracy in Saudi Arabia, tribalism, social traditions, and ignorance were considered the main obstacles. The majority of subjects mentioned tribalism as a
fundamental obstacle to practicing democracy in Saudi society due to the tendency of Saudis to support members of their own tribe, regardless of whether the member is qualified or not.

Subject 4: “Tribalism . . . wherever you put their people, they will choose their tribe . . . anywhere . . . in any organizations. The most important thing for them is their tribe to win . . . people need to be educated.”

Subject 11: “Tribalism . . . children are raised in families that do not accept democracy, but to be more affiliated to their tribes.”

Subject 8: “Tribalism . . . each tribe feels that there is a position that they miss . . . has not taken yet. As a result, these tribes will compete deadly in competitions to take their position. It is unacceptable to open up democracy if these tribes and barbaric people still exist.”

Tribalism is a value system that emphasizes group membership over individuals, but in Saudi context, it also reinforces a monarchic system. This last quotation illustrates a general sentiment among the subjects that each tribe wishes to win the position of becoming the royal family to rule the country. The reference to a willingness to compete in deadly competition shows how serious a commitment people have toward rule by monarchy. Democracy is seen as unacceptable because tribal affiliations commit individuals to a larger ideal, which reinforces a monarchy system.

In addition, tribalism hinders the practicing of democracy because it privileges within group relationships while discouraging connections with others. In other words, accepting others outside tribe is not commonly done. Moreover, ignorance, as illustrated in the first quotation
below, and unprepared social context, noted by the subject in the second quotation, were strongly presented as obstacles to applying democracy in Saudi Arabia.

Subject 6: “I think that people themselves are unqualified because they have not been educated democratically. They have not yet learned how to accept others. So, how will they know the meaning of democracy or how they will learn how to deal with it.”

Subject 21: “The concept of democracy is not derived from the Saudi social context. To accept a concept like democracy, we need a cultural development from the internal context.”

It seems that the identification of these obstacles explains why subjects in this study do not support applying democracy in Saudi society. When presented with alternatives to democracy, they overwhelmingly chose any other option, such as a strong economy, stability, and a strong leader. The reasons for these choices are described below:

Subject 12: “The strong economy is more important than democracy . . . we experienced economic prosperity without democracy, and it was a good and positive experience . . . democracy without economy is useless . . . it is like a poor country.”

Politically, the subjects preferred a stable government, even if there is a risk it will not be fully democratic.

Subject 5: “Saudi Arabia is an oil country. Instability will make the exploiters and greedy people deepen instability to steal the state . . . then the situation will remain like this forever . . . like Libya and Iraq.”
In addition, according to the social and culture circumstances, the subjects even liked the strong leader over democracy to keep things in peace.

Subject 3: “There are societies that can never be controlled by democracy. Saudi society is diverse and has many differences. Therefore, only force and punishment can make things more stable. A very strong person can control things better than democracy here.”

Subject 14: “The country is more valued when it is owned by one king who is wise, strong, and rational in dealing with matters. We do not need more than this. We do not need elections, chaos, protests, and headache. Let us be like what we have . . . that is better . . . we are relaxed and comfortable without all those things. We want a strong, rational and responsible king who knows how to deal with life and rules the country in excellent manners, and that is set.”

These data describe an aversion to democracy because it is perceived to bring changes that threaten the current social and political system that they see as adequate and comfortable. Further, they appreciate and value the status and respect that comes with having a king to lead the country. This admiration is rooted in historical and cultural heritage that emphasizes the importance of an authoritative and charismatic leader.

Even though the subjects preferred the strong leader over democracy, they thought that an absolute monarchy is not the best form of governing. They wished –as citizens– to participate in the general sphere of Saudi society. Thus, some subjects looked for a form that can keep the kingdom as it is, but at the same time allow citizens to participate politically. So “Experts, not elected officials, who make decisions according to what they think is best for the country” was
the best form among other types of governing presented to the subjects. Obviously, those experts are citizens. In addition, they can help the king to make wise decisions in governing. Conditionally, according to the subjects, these experts should have social awareness and not be isolated from the mass’s needs.

Subject 16: “Leader + administration of experts is better . . . better than just a parliament in which the representatives share a similar proportion of influence. In any case, the leader's (the king) percentage of influence must be above 80 percent. The experts have experience in state’s leadership and ministries’ administration. Plus, they are specialized scholars in their fields”

Subject 8: “These experts should be close to people and know the citizens’ needs.”

Some subjects suggested a way that ordinary people can participate in the decision-making process for their own benefit.

Subject 9: “The great foundations are laid in the hands of the leader or experts. Either one should not be alone in making decisions. To create fundamental rules or to solve major issues that affect state, categorical vote should be the strategies to make decisions. If the decision is about students, students must vote. If it concerns women, women must vote. This model is better than random public voting.”

Therefore, as the subject suggested, people should not be omitted from the participation in making decisions about their life. Instead, she suggested a categorized participation that each group should be listened to regarding their interests.
In sum, this section showed that the subjects had an undesirable attitude toward democracy. They preferred the current political hierarchy and status quo and wanted nothing to be changed. They explained this position as due to the peculiarity of the Saudi context, such as religious perceptions, tribalism, national character, and unprepared social and culture circumstances. The subjects fear that democracy would undermine stability of the country, which seems to be the ultimate concern stated by the subjects. Nevertheless, they believed that citizens must be heard and have some kind of contribution to the general political decision-making process.
THE DISCUSSION

This study provided insights into Saudi youth definitions and attitudes about modernity and all of its principles. The section below discusses each element to show how this study advances knowledge about social progress, individualism, and democracy in the Saudi context.

Attitude toward Modernity

In social sciences’ literature, common theme surrounding modernity are as a cultural process of self-renewal and social transformation, assertion of the self or individuals, and the progressive expansion of the discourses of creativity, reflexivity, and discursivity in all spheres of life. Modernity is also seen as the pursuit of autonomy in many different areas of life, of which three projects can be highlighted: political independence and cultural and social autonomy (Delany 1999; Wanger 2012). Modernity is associated with a specific set of attitudes towards the world and the idea of the world as open to transformation by human intervention. Also, modernity is vastly more dynamic than any previous type of social order. It is a society that lives in the future rather than the past (Giddens 1998). To sum up these insights, modernity is a comprehensive project that covers all aspects of societal components, raises individual subjectivity, looks for dynamic transformation, and establishes democratic rights.

The majority of literature that looks at modernity in Saudi Arabia illustrates modernity as establishing modern governmental systems and institutions, such as building ministries, creating bureaucratic systems, and having modern house style (Saleh 1998; Celik 2008; Farsy 2009; Jordan 2011). In addition, Yamani (2000) and Jordan (2001), who interviewed ordinary Saudi people, mentioned that many Saudis think that modernity is choosing and accepting technology and advanced material goods to improve Saudi society, such as health care, education, and
economic prosperity. It also means being aware that Western values may seep into Saudi society through these technologies and goods.

However, in my study, a minority of the subjects defined modernity as only advanced material goods. On the other hand, the majority of Saudi youth defined modernity as internally changing thoughts and convictions, getting rid of obsolete traditions, and seeking authentic transformations to better all aspects of life, which means that new generations of Saudi youth have increased their awareness of the concept of modernity. Saudi youth’s mentality is compatible with the concept of modernity that is presented in the sociological and cultural literature as it is defined as a cultural process of self-renewal and social transformation (Giddens 1998).

Yamani (2000) distinguished between two movements in Saudis’ reaction toward modernity: traditionalists and liberal modernists. Traditionalists are worried about being threatened by Westernization, advanced technologies, and the commercialization of Saudi society. For them, the world beyond the Kingdom, especially the Western world, is very dangerous. They are highly concerned with maintaining a coherent and constant Islamic identity and protecting the values they regard as crucial to it, such as gender separation to maintain moral integrity. Also, traditionalists believe in obedience to Islamic principles as declared by official religious agencies. In terms of dealing with modernization, it must be mediated through undoubtable cultural certainties of Islam. On the other hand, liberal modernists, who are defined by their pragmatism, have a more diffuse sense of religious belonging than traditionalists, and they actively and optimistically engage with secular cultural Western modernization; they put their faith in the rationality of the individual, believing that Islam supports individual choices as to how best to be a good Muslim, and it does not clash with the benefits of progress. Their main
concern is to witness social and economic progress. For liberal modernists, it is important that Saudi Arabia allows progress and development towards a market economy that can keep up with the demands of the integrated global economy. Although religion and tradition are less important for liberal modernists than for others, a constant balancing act between the new and potentially unsettling and the old and certain is needed.

The tradition of the dialog in presenting modernity in Islamic cultures is mentioning the tensions between western values, specifically those of the United States of America (Yamani 2000), and Islamic values (Yamani 2000; Jordan 2001; Al-Rasheed 2002; Bennett 2005; Esposito et al. 2006). In my study, even if the Saudi youth acknowledged fundamental cultural differences between western and Saudi values, they did not see western values as a threat to Saudi culture. On the other hand, Saudi youth comprehended modernity as a phase of globalization, a phase of life that each country and culture have the right to experience, regardless of its sources. The youth saw no tension in the idea of western culture existing in Saudi Arabia, but they preferred to compromise with what aligns with their identity and religious values, as were clarified through the other elements of the study. After that, they had no problem with dealing with western culture openly. It seems that the Saudi youth have reconciled with the presence of western culture; however, they admitted they need to have a filter and be cautious but not to protest or fight against its existence. Especially, they admitted that western culture was the first to develop modernity. Instead of rejecting it, we better deal with it openly and pick what benefits and fits us as a Saudi nationality and Muslims. It is up to Saudis to decide what those rules, restrictions, and freedom should be in the future so that those decisions will be made from within a Muslim and Arab framework (Yamani 2001; Jordan 2001). Therefore, according to my study, it seems that the Saudi youth showed a shift from the traditionalist mentality to the liberal
modernist more. Tending toward secular modernization (Moaddel 2013), the majority of youth favored individual choices and social progress and living peacefully with the current regime, and religious institutions and social traditions were less important than before in their lives.

**Attitude toward Social Progress**

Changes and rapid transformations in all aspect of life have been the norm for three generations since the establishment of the contemporary Kingdom. The government has used modernization processes to bring changes to the Kingdom, specifically in the oil industry and education system (Yamani 2000; Jordan 2001). All these transformations have been led by the government with strategic plans to create a modern country and its facilities, such as ministries, bureaucratic systems, modern education systems, health care, and modern houses. The government, however, has implemented these changes; that have not been the result of internal social dynamics to fulfill ordinary people’s social needs. The top-down way of leading changes has resulted in reactions. These reactions have ranged from hesitant attitudes at best to radical ones at worst, such as fighting or even murdering the king in 1975. In my study, Saudi youth showed a conservative attitude toward changes and social progress. However, they are more welcoming than previous generations in dealing with and accepting those changes and social progress. As this study discovered, Saudi youth tend to concentrate more on defining how social progress changes individuals’ moralities because this is a controllable area for them that is not monopolized by the government (Jordan 2001). However, even if Saudi youths tend to have a slightly conservative attitude toward changes, their attitudes toward material, technological, and industrial progress are more tolerant than their ancestors’ due to witnessing its benefits in public areas, but they still worry that such progress may deteriorate religious and social moralities.
Another point in the modernity movement in Saudi Arabia is that the course of accepting the social changes and progress has taken an uneven geographical path. The government launched modernization in the biggest cities first, such as Riyadh, where the royal family is concentrated, Dammam, and Jeddah. Then, it was applied on the peripheries. According to the subjects, more central areas, such as Riyadh, have more conservative cultural attitudes whereas more peripheral areas tend to have more open attitudes about change. In my study, the respondents were very aware of this dynamic equation combining both modernization and religious conservatism in the urban centers.

These uneven movements of modernization reflected a dualistic attitude among my Saudis respondents, who experience conflicts between the ideal and real. They want benefits of changes, but at the same time, they are hesitant to get involved before its social acceptance. It is common to hear Saudis say things like “change is supposed to be good, but . . .” For example, “freedom is good, but . . .” which shows how the Saudi mentality is divided in dealing with new things and going along with modernity but hesitant to do so until they feel such changes are more widely accepted.

Attitude toward Individualism

Research has found that Saudis are increasingly embracing individualism. For instance, De Jong and Moaddel (2003) found that young people in Saudi Arabia appear to be more interested in a greater degree of individualism than older generations are. My study strongly indicates a great shift in tendencies toward individualism among Saudi youth, who prioritize their emotions, opinions, career path, and personal choices. In a culture where members define themselves based on their tribal affiliations, collective belongings and being unconditionally obedient to the elderly are important (Yamani 2000; Jordan 2001). Saudi youth nowadays tend to
distinguish themselves as autonomous entities and challenge and reevaluate the social traditions to see if they fit their own contemporary interests. As some literature (Yamani 2000; Jordan 2001) has shown, family and religious practices are profound values and institutions in Saudi culture. However, my study indicates that these institutions have been changing.

Family. Jordan (2001) mentioned that the importance of family and tribal affiliation in Saudi Arabia cannot be overstated, and there is no talk about giving up the strong traditional family that may be a burden but also a strong support and blessing. In addition, Yamani (2000) stated the importance of family in Saudi life, but she also mentioned problems that Saudi youth face with their family due to their exposure to wider influences and education than their parents; they face problems having to meet the expectations of previous generations’ standards, such as not challenging the elders and replacing their personal choices in favor of social norms. While Yamani mentioned the challenges of Saudi youth and their parents, my study witnessed a further development of those problems, in that the holy image of family and parents has decreased even further. For example, respondents felt that parents should be respected, but they have no right in their children’s life choices, such as choosing a career path or marital partner. While Saudi youth still respectfully listen to parental advice, they tend to discount it in practice. Moreover, my study indicates that Saudi youth no longer rely on their tribal affiliation to get ahead in life. Instead, they think that relying on personal efforts works better in Saudi Arabia these days, which is a change from what literature has shown (Harbi et al. 2016).

In terms of attitudes toward marriage, the general conclusions of my study regarding rising individualism and challenging traditions seem supportive of Moaddel’s work (2005) where he notes a higher percentage of Saudis appearing to support some change in the institution of marriage. For instance, 15 percent of Saudis agreed that “marriage is an outdated institution.” It
is common to read in the newspapers that an increasing number of people are getting married late or are in no position to marry, which may indicate disapproval of the current practice of marriage. Saudis’ critical attitude toward marriage may thus reflect their dismay at the prevalent situation rather than a negative attitude toward the institution per se. Nonetheless, this attitude may be indicative of their desire for change toward a less traditional practice of marriage (Moaddel 2005). Thus, the roles of family relations and tribal affiliation have been devalued and are now less important in Saudi society, which may indicate that more values change in the future may favor individualism.

Religion. Theoretically, Saudi culture cannot be understood without comprehending the rudiments of Islamic faith and Islam’s roles in Saudi society (Jordan 2001). This is because not only does Saudi Arabia contain the holiest cities – Makkah and Madinah – but also because the role of Islam and its teachings has shaped Saudi culture and identity more than other social institutions have (Yamani 2000). Plus, Islam is the main frame of reference, and it represents the dominant building block of Saudi identity both personally and collectively (Yamani 2000; Moaddel 2006). Nonetheless, being religious is one thing, and having confidence in the existing religious institutions and emphasizing the significance of the shari’a (religious laws), as understood from the current practices of the religious authority, is something quite different. Even if Saudis see religion as the only core value in their life and identity, their perspectives about religious institutions have changed, which is an indicator of modern perspective. They have repositioned the religious institutions and religious leaders in Saudi Arabia. As Giddens (1998) mentioned, one of the indications of modernity is a declining religious sense in dealing with the world.
In terms of placing high importance on religious faith as a quality for children, Saudis have been giving this quality less emphasis than their counterparts in Algeria, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, and Pakistan (Moaddel 2010). Moaddel (2006) also notes that Saudi Arabia has lower mosque attendance than the citizens of other Islamic countries. The result of this study shows this trend continues, if not increased.

In my study, Saudi youth showed low trust in religious leaders and institutions and did not consider religious leaders the key for change, improving situations in Saudi and giving advice when needed. The youth did not see religious leaders as society’s guardians. These results are supported by Moaddel (2013), who also reported a significant decline in trust in religious institutions and support for the shari’a across all age groups, which may indicate that the Saudi public desires fewer intrusions into their daily lives by religious authorities and less rigorous application of the shari’a law by the government.

Instead of depending on official religious institutions, ordinary Saudis tend to interpret the Qur’an by themselves. When they read the Holy Qur’an, they decide what should and should not be done (Alshaikh 2019). Thus, for Saudis, religion has become only one part of their life and now has less importance in determining their life matters. This trend suggests that the Saudi public, and the youth specifically, may be more receptive to secular ideas today than they were a decade ago (Moaddel 2013).

Despite this low trust in religion, the Saudi youth in my study still believed in Islam as a divine religion that has authentic teaching to guide its members. What they do not believe anymore is that family and religious clerks should control and limit the choices of the youth.

As family and religious values have weakened, youth have look for more personal space and have thought about themselves and their interests more. The decline in religiosity and family
functionality will be a component of future values trends in Saudi Arabia that may lead to more individualistic sensibility, which has started appearing in Saudi society. The Saudi youth in this study still wish to hold collective values, such as generosity, standing up for others, and family attachments; they worried about these values going away from society with the rise in individualism. These shifting changes can be linked to the current governmental reformations in Saudi Arabia (2030 Vision), such as women empowerment, Saudization, initiating entertainment activities, taxations, privatization, judging and prioritizing by personality not tribal affiliations, and dismantling corruption, which indicate that more attitude shifts are still being formed and have not settled down yet.

**Attitude toward Democracy**

Saudi youth showed an understandable and realistic attitude toward democracy based on their historical, political, and social circumstances. Even if they conveyed ignorance on some questions by answering “neither agree nor disagree” and asked to skip other questions during the interview, as Moaddel (2010) experienced these reactions, too. It was likely due to some fears of showing their political opinions. However, their informative responses on qualitative and descriptive questions told something else, which may be attributed to living in such an absolute monarchy and authoritarian regime. However, many of their answers showed an acceptable level of political awareness. Due to their political circumstances, the majority of subjects in my study defined democracy as freedom of expression, not as a form of governing. However, when asked to expand their answers, they utilized some democratic terms, such as majority opinion, minority rights, state control, and political forces.

In terms of the attitude toward democracy, Saudi youth did not reject the idea of democracy completely as a concept itself, or because it comes from the west, as the stereotypical
rejection in Islamic countries. However, my respondents had an undesirable attitude toward democracy. In fact, De Jong and Moaddel (2013) noted a decline in attitudes toward democracy, with those who strongly agreed that “democracy may have problems, but it is a better than any other form of government” dropping from 33 percent in 2003 to 23 percent in 2005.

In my study, Saudi youth showed an awareness of judging democracy based on the complexity of their cultural, historical, and current circumstances. While they were supportive of the applications of democracy at the micro-level of life experiences, like managing family, and practices in governmental agencies, such as ministries, they did not see it as a useful tool to govern the country. The Saudi youth believed that Saudi citizens are not ready to deal with the concept of democracy yet, and it is not a suitable form of governing in Saudi Arabia due to two main reasons: tribalism and the nature of Islamic laws. In contrast, Jordan (2001) mentioned that some Saudis were hopeful that Saudi Arabia may become a democratic country, but they need to study the existing forms of democracies to determine what forms might fit for them.

Tribalism has represented cultural and historic roots in the Arabic-speaking world for more than a thousand years, and it is central to the social, economic, and political reality of Saudi Arabia, which was built by King Abdelaziz unifying various tribes in 1932. Any changes will cause instability because the tribes will fight each other to gain leadership, which will collapse the country and destroy all local and global benefits. Consequently, no Saudi wishes for that. Al-Rashaad (2011) said that this notion of losing the country if any democratic changes are injected into the current political form is what the authoritarian regime of Saudi Arabia uses to frighten citizens and keep itself in power. Regardless of what Al-Rashaad mentioned, this idea is shared by many subjects in this study who have witnessed the political instability and lack of economic prosperity of their neighboring countries who have sought a democratic form of governing, such
as Syria, Iraq, and Libya. Therefore, the thinking goes that keeping the royal family in power is the most suitable way to keep the country stable, and any changes are not welcomed as my respondents seem to indicate.

The second obstacle of accepting western democracy in the Saudi environment is the nature of Islamic laws. The notion of working to format legislations based on the agreement of the majority has no place in an Islamic community such as Saudi Arabia. In Saudi culture, the teachings and laws of Islam are straightforward and unchangeable; Muslims must follow these teachings and laws regardless of the opinions of the majority. If a case contains ambiguous statements, the *alamuh* –Islamic experts– clarify based on deductions from other Islamic laws. Hence, there is no place for ordinary citizens in determining laws to govern the state by agreements of the majority. Islamic laws should be implemented without popular consent; these implementations need a strong leader, not parliamentary participation as reinforced by my respondents who were very mindful of these considerations.

While there are several factors in Islamic traditions are used to rationalize the spread of authoritarian regimes, the failure of democracy in the Muslim world is referred to Islam’s inadequate conceptual frame in individual rights. Lewis (1993) claimed that Western democracy is deep-rooted in Roman laws of the legal person. While Christianity was forced to recognize the authority of Roman law, Islam has no such recognition, hence no legislative function. Without this legislative function, there is no demand for legislative organizations nor for any principle of representation (Lewis 1993). This is clear in Saudi youth’s answers that they seek to discover a democratic form that fits their Islamic laws and identity that is deriving from their own historical journey and Islamic identity, not from Western democratic principles. As Moaddel (2010) stated, any sociological investigation about the relationship between Islamic culture and politics would
be insufficient without taking into account other socio-historical variables that may distinguish the specificity of politics in Islamic societies.

The subjects in this study supported the current political form of monarchy, even when they admit that it needs some modifications and improvements. They emphasize that they have no historical experiences with democracy and to introduce it within a tribal community will cause chaos and instability, so the best choice is to keep the current form that consists of the king and his league of expertise to provide him with advice. However, the study’s subjects see the necessity of the ordinary citizens to improve the country, but the best way to do so is by participating in scientific studies conducted by ministries and academic agencies.

_Distrust as a National Issue_

One of the most crucial findings of my study is a general attitude of distrust. Subjects commonly expressed distrust in relation to all sections of modernity and its principles in Saudi Arabia. The study revealed Saudis’ sense of distrust toward the government and religious agencies, which are the vital social keys in Saudi society. My respondents see distrust issues among generations, those who belong to different tribal affiliations, localities, social classes, and religious sects. They feel that Saudis do not trust and feel a sense of national belonging with those who differ from them in opinions or thoughts, even if they belong to the same tribe or religious sect. Nearly all the study’s subjects said that Saudis are not friendly and positive in accepting and respecting diversity. In addition, when subjects were asked to what extent they trust Saudis in making political decisions, the majority mentioned that Saudis are incompetent in such serious matters or high level of participation due to a lack of tolerance.

As Moaddel (2010) mentioned, religious and social tolerance are an integral part of the movement for democratic change. Tolerance is necessary for a secure and continuous
functioning of political pluralism, where various viewpoints are publicly stated and discussed without the outbreak of serious destabilizing conflict (Moaddel 2010). Therefore, not accepting others and not respecting diversity would hinder Saudi society from moving toward modernity in their Saudi environment. My respondents strongly feel the Saudi Arabia does not contain such qualities necessary to have a functioning democracy.

Plus, Saudis also distrust religious institutions and the government because religion has designed Saudi identity and government has launched modernity in Saudi Arabia. Saudis have started to trust religious institutions less and interpret the Qur’an’s teachings by themselves more than depending on the official explanations of the official religious institutions (Moaddel 2011; Alshaikh 2019). All these findings are supported by the subjects of my study, indicating that religious leaders are not the first, or even the second choice to receive advice from when it is needed. For instance, one subject mentioned that religious leaders are not in a position to change or improve Saudi society because even they are controlled by the government. Contrary to the past, when they were in a position of being an equal rival to the government as a social and political force, and they were seen as guardians of society and religion. Today, they are a controlled part of the social scene with no significant role. In addition, Saudis distrust the government as my study indicates. As mentioned, the modernity story in Saudi Arabia is led exclusively by the government and its agencies, and citizens do not engage in the decision-making process at all; they do not understand why and how governmental decisions are made. Thus, if the government initiates any plans to improve the Saudi reality, the expectation for the citizens is to obey unconditionally. Otherwise, punishments are coming. This situation creates a gap between the government and citizens that makes citizens uncomfortable with national
dynamics. All this distrust makes the situation in Saudi Arabia fragmented, which makes launching any authentic national projects to the next level of modernity uncertain at best.
CONCLUSION

Saudi youth comprehend the concept of modernity as a cultural process of self-renewal and social transformation to better all aspects of life, which is contrary to the literature’s focus on the material illustration of modernity. Moreover, the youth tend to contribute to secular modernization by selectively cooperating with western culture without feeling threatened. However, they keep in mind their exceptional religious and national circumstances and look for their own version of modernity.

In terms of social progress, the modernity story in Saudi Arabia is led exclusively by government initiatives, so current Saudi youth show a conservative attitude toward changes and social progress due to not having participated in the decision-making process. Instead of interacting to bring about those changes, the youth must wait until social approval spreads culturally. This limited interaction with modernization defines Saudi youth’s mentality about social progress, which they see as changing social manners and traditions, not as structural transformations. However, they are more welcoming than the previous generations in dealing with and accepting technological, material changes and scientific progress.

Also, Saudi youth show increasing tendencies toward individualism in prioritizing their personal emotions, opinions, career path, and choices over others. They are forming an awareness of themselves as autonomous entities away from others and starting to challenge and reevaluate social traditions, especially in family or tribal affiliations and religious practices. The decline in religiosity and family functionality will be a component of future values trends in Saudi Arabia that may lead to a greater individualistic sense.

Saudi youth have a neutral to undesirable attitude toward democracy due to reflecting on the region’s historical, political, cultural, and social features, like having a profound tribalism
culture and the nature of Islamic laws. However, the youth do not reject democracy applications on a micro-level, such as managing family decisions.

One of the biggest challenges of the story of modernity in Saudi Arabia is distrust. Saudi youth do not believe in or cooperate with other Saudi citizens. Also, the youth are not comfortable communicating and cooperating with the government in launching modernity in Saudi society. Plus, Saudi youth have lost their trust in the religious institutions that historically were the social, religion, and identity protectors, which may lead to confusion about what is right and wrong based on Islamic teachings. Therefore, the Saudi government as the only planner in launching and leading changes and transformations in Saudi society must invite all national players and citizens to express themselves safely in order to create an authentic and national experience of modernity in Saudi Arabia.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of this study concerns the generalizability of results. Due to applying nonprobability sampling, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all people in the Saudi population. However, the primary aim of the study was to initiate an investigation on modernity in Saudi Arabia so that future studies can explore the theme in-depth with new perspectives that may be shown in this study.

Despite this limitation, few studies have comprehensively explored the subject of modernity and its principles in Saudi Arabia. Most have focused on one principle of modernity, such as democracy, and ignored other principles. Even though some studies have investigated a principle of modernity, they have not linked it to modernity as a comprehensive theoretical framework.
Difficulties of the Study

The researcher faced some difficulties in conducting the study. One was the limited resources that discussed in depth modernity in Saudi Arabia. However, some studies talk separately about some elements of modernity, but not enough sociological studies investigate the modernity movement comprehensively in Saudi Arabia, which is why conducting more sociological studies on the topic is encouraged.

Second, recruiting subjects from the social media platform was the most challenging factor in the study. Asking random people to participate in a topic, like democracy, that is so sensitive in Saudi Arabia caused some worrying and fear among Saudi youth, especially because they did not know the researcher before, so some of them thought that the researcher might be from governmental intelligence agencies spying on them. Therefore, the researcher took time in introducing the nature of the study, security of storing data, and safety of their identity as subjects of research.

Also, many of the subjects thought that to participate in academic research, they needed certain levels of background on the topic and a certain level of intelligence to give “the right answers,” which created some uncertainty in providing data. To address that, the researcher took time to convince them that they needed only to share their life experience and thoughts, and there were no right or wrong answers in the study.

Conducting the interviews in Arabic and then translating all the data to English consumed a lot of time, especially without having a team to assist, and was also one of the difficulties.

Recommendations and Further Research

Because the aim of the research was not to give the last word about modernity in Saudi Arabia, we recommend researchers initiate more research on modernity relating to all its core
principles, especially factors playing a crucial role in forming the modernity journey, such as the economic aspect and how that factor either accelerates or hinders the modern experience of Saudis in their cultural context. Also, it is recommended that future research aims to understand social programs that strengthen Saudis’ experience of modernity while maintaining their cultural and religious identity.

As this study applied a nonprobability sampling method that does not allow the researcher to generalize the results of the study, it is recommended that further research ask the same research questions but apply random and probability methods to generalize results all over the population of Saudi Arabia. Future research should also consider subjects’ economic status, urban positions, and tribal relations, and not just their age and Saudi nationality. As the subjects of the study mentioned, they have not received or interacted deeply and culturally with what modernity means, on the ground, so the study recommends that schools and universities conduct social programs and conversational platforms to encourage youth to talk about the topic and also to get to know people from different backgrounds to eradicate stereotypical negative images among Saudis.
References


Table 1. Demographic Description

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<thead>
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<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Subjects (N)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td>Divorced</td>
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<td><strong>Educational Level</strong></td>
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<td>Employed Full-Time. (40+ hours a week)</td>
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<td>Self-Employed.</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</table>
Do you feel that we have a conflict between the values of development and traditional values?
(N=21)

Figure 1. Conflict of Values
Figure 2. Compatibility between Modernity and Islam
Figure 3. The Source of Modernity
Figure 4. Attitude Toward Social Change
In Your Opinion, Do You Think There is a Conflict Between Science and Religion? (N=21)

Figure 5. Compatibility between Islam and Science
Figure 6. Satisfaction with How Things Are Going in Saudi Arabia
Figure 7. Social Change Agents
Some People Say that Kids Learn the Deepest and Most Profound Truth from Old People. Others Say that Kids Learn the Most Profound Truth from Books and in School. What is your Opinion?

(N=21)

Figure 8. Sources of Deepest and Most Profound Truth
Some People Say a Child Should be Taught Always to Take into Consideration the Feelings of Others. Others Say a Child Should be Taught to Protect his Own Feelings Since Others Can Look Out for Themselves. Should One Teach a Child to Care first:
(N=21)

Figure 9. Prioritizing Feelings
Some People Say an Individual should not Insist on Their Own Opinion If Their Group Disagrees with Them. Others Say that an Individual Should Hold to Their Own Opinion Even If the Whole Group Disagrees with Them. In The Face of Disagreement by Their Group, Should You Teach an Individual: (N=21)

![Bar Chart]

Figure 10. Individual vs. Group Opinion
Do You Think that It is Necessary for a Child to Have The Same Ideas as his Parents?
(N=21)

Figure 11. Going Along with the Parents
If an Individual Must Choose Between a Job Which They like or a Job Which Their Parents Prefer for that Individual, Which Should They Choose? (N=21)

Figure 12. Choosing Career Path
Which One is more Important: Family Connections OR Hard Work to Get Ahead in Life in Saudi Arabia?
(N=21)

Figure 13. Family Connections or Hard Work
Figure 14. Reference Group Source for Advice
Figure 15. Attitude Toward Democracy
Figure 16. Compatibility between Democracy and Islam
Figure 17. Saudis Readiness to Have Democracy
Figure 18. Importance of Democracy in Saudi Arabia
Figure 19. Saudis' Ability in Making Political Decisions
Figure 20. Good Democracy or Strong Economy
Some feel that we should rely on a democratic form of government to solve the country's problems. Others feel that we should rely on a leader with a strong hand to solve the country's problems. Which comes closer to your opinion? (N=21)

Figure 21. Democratic Government or a Strong Leader
Which is More Important to You?

1- Having a Democratic Government, Even If There Is Some Risk of Political Instability
2- Having a Stable Government, Even If There Is a Risk It Will Not Be Fully Democratic

(N=21)

Figure 22. Democracy vs. Stability
Figure 23. Attitude Toward Government Forms
APPENDICES
Appendix A: Survey Form

Modernity Project

Please complete the survey below.

Thank you!

1) The Date of Consent

2) The Time of Consent

At the beginning of the interview, I am going to ask you some questions about the concept of modernity. There are no right or wrong answers in this interview. I am just interested to know what you think about the topic. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer.

3) Modernity and Its principles

4) When you hear the word modernity, what comes to your mind?

5) In your opinion, what are the principles of modernity?

6) Tell me your thoughts about how modernity relates to Saudi life?

7) Do you feel that we have a conflict between the values of development and traditional values? ○ Yes ○ No

8) Tell me about that

9) Is Modernity a western project? ○ Yes ○ No ○ I do not know

10) Tell me about that

11) Do you think that modernity is compatible with Islam? ○ Yes ○ No

12) Tell me about that
Now, we will begin the second section of the interview, which is related to the topic of social progress. I will ask you questions about this theme. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Just answer according to your own belief that you feel is correct. I would like to remind you that you are not obliged to answer any questions you do not want to answer, just say, "Let us move on to the next question and then we will move on to the next question, ready?"

### 13) How would you describe the current economic situation in Saudi Arabia - is it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Somewhat good</th>
<th>Somewhat bad</th>
<th>Very bad</th>
<th>I do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 14) Over the next 12 months do you expect the economic situation in our country to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improve a lot</th>
<th>Improve a little</th>
<th>Remain the same</th>
<th>Worsen a little</th>
<th>Worsen a lot</th>
<th>I do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 15) Thinking about your personal economic situation, how would you describe it - is it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Somewhat good</th>
<th>Somewhat bad</th>
<th>Very bad</th>
<th>I do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 16) Over the next 12 months do you expect your personal economic situation to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improve a lot</th>
<th>Improve a little</th>
<th>Remain the same</th>
<th>Worsen a little</th>
<th>Worsen a lot</th>
<th>I do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### I am going to read you a series of statements, and I would like you to tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17) I think change is always good.
18) I think the next generation should have better life opportunities.
19) I think industrial (manufacturing, material) progress is more important than any other type of progress.
20) I am working to improve myself in all aspects of my life.
21) I support social change in my country.
23) I am optimistic about the future of the country

24) In your words, how do you define positive social change?

25) In your words, how do you define negative social change?

26) When children today in Saudi Arabia grow up, do you think they will be better off or worse off financially than their parents?

27) Tell me about that

28) Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in our country today?

29) Tell me about that

30) In your opinion, what do we need to change in our country?

31) What things we should not change?

32) To improve the condition of life in this community some say the people must get together to help themselves. Others say that it will require the help of others. What do you think? To improve this community should the people rely (Choose one):

33) Tell me about that

34) In your opinion, do you think there is generally a conflict between science and religion?

35) Tell me about that
At the following section of the interview, the questions will be about individualism. Be reminded that you do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36) Some people say that kids learn the deepest and most profound truth from old people. Others say that kids learn the most profound truth from books and in school. What is your opinion?</td>
<td>Most truth from old people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37) Some people say a child/kid should be taught always to take into consideration the feelings of others. Others say a child/kid should be taught to protect his own feelings since others can look out for themselves. Should one teach a child/kid to protect first:</td>
<td>Their own feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38) Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39) Do you think that it is necessary for a child to have the same ideas (opinions) as his parents?</td>
<td>In all important matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40) Some people say an individual should not insist on their own opinion if their group disagrees with them. Others say that an individual should hold to their own opinion even if the whole group disagrees with them. In the face of disagreement by their group, should you teach an individual:</td>
<td>Always to go along with the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41) Whose advice would you give most weight to</td>
<td>Your parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42) Tell me about that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43) Suppose the government of (the country) recommended to people to limit the size of their families and showed them how to do it. Should people then follow this advice?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
44) Why?

45) If an individual must choose between a job which they like or a job which their parents prefer for that individual, which should they choose?
- The job they prefer
- The job their parents prefer

46) In your opinion, how important is the strength of family connection in getting ahead in life in Saudi Arabia?
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important

47) In your opinion, how important is one's own ability and hard work in getting ahead in life in Saudi Arabia?
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important

48) Which one is more important: Family connections OR hard work to get ahead in life in Saudi Arabia?
- Family connections
- Hard work

49) Tell me about that

50) What comes to your mind when you hear the word "freedom"?

51) Do you think it is healthy in society to have various opinions and choices?
- Yes
- No

52) Why?

53) How do people in Saudi Arabia treat those who are different from them (in terms of religion, opinion, gender)?

54) At what point and for what reasons should a group stop an individual from doing what he or she wants?
Now, we will begin the last section of the interview, which is related to the concept of democracy. I will ask you questions about this theme. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Just answer according to your own belief that you feel is correct. I would like to remind you that you are not obliged to answer any questions you do not want to answer, just say, "Let us move on to the next question and then we will move on to the next question, ready?"

55) How important is it to have democracy in our country?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Not too important</th>
<th>Not important at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56) Tell me about that.

57) In your opinion, what does democracy mean?

58) In your opinion, are Saudis ready to have democracy in Saudi Arabia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

59) Tell me about that.

60) What are the obstacles of establishing democracy in Saudi Arabia? Tell me about that.

61) If you had to choose between a good democracy or a strong economy, which would you say is more important?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good democracy</th>
<th>Strong economy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

62) Some feel that we should rely on a democratic form of government to solve the country's problems. Others feel that we should rely on a leader with a strong hand to solve the country's problems. Which comes closer to your opinion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democratic government</th>
<th>Strong leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

63) In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the wisdom of the Saudis people when it comes to making political decisions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A very great deal</th>
<th>a good deal</th>
<th>not very much</th>
<th>none at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
64) Thinking about Saudi's future, how important is it that honest elections are held regularly with a choice of at least two political parties

- very important
- Somewhat important
- Not too important
- Not important at all
- I do not know

65) Which is more important to you?

- That Saudi has a democratic government, even if there is some risk of political instability
- That Saudi has a stable government, even if there is a risk it will not be fully democratic

66) Do you think there is a fundamental conflict between the teachings of Islam and democracy?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

---

| Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements: |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **strongly agree** | **agree** | **neither agree nor disagree** | **disagree** | **strongly disagree** |
| 67) Democracy is the greatest form of government | | | | |
| 68) Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government | | | | |
| 69) In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable | | | | |
| 70) Democracy is a Western way that would not work in most Muslim countries | | | | |
| 71) For someone like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have | | | | |
I am going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing our country. For each one, would it be a very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad way of governing this country?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>very good</th>
<th>somewhat good</th>
<th>somewhat bad</th>
<th>very bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>a democratic system where citizens, not elected officials, vote directly on major national issues to decide what becomes law</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>a democratic system where representatives elected by citizens decide what becomes law</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>a system in which a strong leader can make decisions without interference from parliament or the courts</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Experts, not elected officials, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Demographic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

77) What is your birth year?  
(e.g. (1989))

78) What is your marital status?  
○ Single  
○ Engaged  
○ Married  
○ Separated  
○ Divorced  
○ Widowed

79) What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?  
○ Less than a high school diploma  
○ High school degree or equivalent  
○ Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS)  
○ Master's degree (e.g. MA, MS, ME)  
○ Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD)  
○ Other (please specify)  
○ Prefer not to answer

80) What is your current employment status?  
○ Employed full-time (40+ hours a week)  
○ Employed part-time (less than 40 hours a week)  
○ Unemployed (currently looking for work)  
○ Unemployed (not currently looking for work)  
○ Student  
○ Self-employed  
○ Not in Labor Force (retired, homemaker, etc)  
○ Unable to work
Appendix B: University Human Subject Review Committee Approval

IRB #: UHSRC-FY20-21-32
Title: Saudis' Attitude toward Principles of Modernity: Social Progress, Individualism, and Democracy
Creation Date: 9-4-2020
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Ammar Ali H Alhumood
Review Board: University Human Subjects Review Committee
Sponsor:

Study History

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<th>Submission Type</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Review Type</th>
<th>Expedited</th>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Approved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Key Study Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kristine Ajrouch</td>
<td>Co-Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kejrouch@emich.edu">kejrouch@emich.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammar Ali H Alhumood</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:aalhumoo@emich.edu">aalhumoo@emich.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammar Ali H Alhumood</td>
<td>Primary Contact</td>
<td><a href="mailto:aalhumoo@emich.edu">aalhumoo@emich.edu</a></td>
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</table>