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NAVIGATING INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE: WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN SAUDI ARABIA AND AFGHANISTAN

AUTHORED BY: ANIMESH RANJAN & JOSHUA JOSEPH

Abstract:

This paper examines the intricate connection between international pressure and the progress of women's rights in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. The first part of the paper will delve into the history of women's rights in both of the country. The second part of the paper describes the diverse international pressure methods, including diplomatic initiatives, financial incentives, public awareness campaigns, and the power of organisations such as the United Nations. The third and final part will highlight progress made in women's rights in each of countries. The progress made by Saudi Arabia through its transformative Saudi Vision 2030 plan aims to be less dependent on oil. However, despite important improvements in Saudi Arabia, such as granting women the ability to drive, cultural criticisms linger. Afghanistan on the other hand, can be seen to have a more turbulent journey, due Taliban's comeback and the implementation of the Sharia rule which has led to the rights of women decline over the recent years. Finally, the essay emphasizes the worldwide significance of these case studies, urging for specialized solutions, continued international pressure, and diplomatic measures to improve women's rights in these various circumstances.

The importance of women's rights resonates as an embodiment of human dignity, equality, and justice in a world marked by different cultures, shifting sociopolitical landscapes, and an uncompromising pursuit of universal human rights. These rights cover a wide range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural liberties that should be equally available to everyone, regardless of gender. Generations have been spent fighting for women's rights, including battles for equal pay, suffrage, education, and employment. This goal represents more than just a moral aspiration; it also represents a steadfast dedication to creating a world where people of all genders coexist peacefully, enjoying equal opportunities and legal protections.

Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia are two countries that are well-known for their Shariah-based legal systems and authoritarian administration styles.¹ However, both these two Islamist regimes are taking opposing positions on women's rights. This is evident through the international pressure that is exerted on such countries. Such pressure is brought on even by non-state actors, that may involve militaristic or non-militaristic means. This is done through diplomatic channels, financial incentives, public awareness campaigns, and the influence of international organisations like the United Nations. This in turn affects domestic politics, although it does not always succeed.

New developments in these countries have put them under the spotlight regarding women's rights. The current Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's vision of modernization is driving Saudi Arabia's ambitious reform agenda. Afghanistan on the other hand, which has been characterized by years of violence and the Taliban's repressive rule, has seen the resurgence of international pressure as a force for reform. This international pressure, which is based on universal human rights principles, has impacted the development of women's rights in both countries, albeit in different ways. When starting this comparative investigation, it is crucial to understand that the fight for women's rights transcends geographical boundaries and demographics. It is an essential component of a larger global movement that reflects a shared commitment to justice, equality, and human dignity. This analysis, which considers historical settings, policy changes, and the difficult obstacles to gender equality, sheds light on the crucial role that international pressure had in expanding women's rights in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. Therefore, this paper aims to give a comparative analysis of the effects of international pressure on women's rights in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia.

The paper is divided into three sections; First, we will look into the historical context of women's rights in both countries. The second section will delve into the existing international pressure mechanism. The third and last section will look into the progress these two countries have attained after being put under the international pressure mechanism.

¹ Akmal Dawi, *Saudis, Taliban Follow Different Paths on Women's Work, Education*, VOA (30th November 2023, 3:04 PM), <https://www.voanews.com/a/saudis-taliban-follow-different-paths-on-women-s-work-education-/7265548.html>.

The historical context of women's rights

Afghanistan

King Amanullah (1919–1929), instituted several reforms, including granting women the right to vote in 1919. This was one of the first in Asia and was responsible for Afghanistan's modernization. However, his abdication came about due to opposition to such changes. Afghanistan had through a time of comparatively improved stability throughout this time. Women now had even more access to jobs and educational possibilities. Women also gained the right to take part in politics due to the 1964 Constitution.²

During the 90s, the Taliban occupation ruthlessly imposed various social restrictions on women such as compulsory burqa coverings, while simultaneously brutally restricting their access to education, jobs, and health care. Prohibitions on women from going out in public without a male chaperone were imposed, this unsurprisingly led to the widows and their children suffering from starvation. Holding any jobs except harvesting opium and cultivating poppies was prohibited for women, even professions such as gynecologists were not allowed to be women.³

Photography, filming, or the display of female pictures in any form were prohibited. Women were also not allowed to appear on radio, TV or even at public gatherings—places named after women were also renamed. Widows' homes that were on the ground and first floor were painted over and women were prohibited from going on balconies. If they wore any nail varnish, their thumb tips would be cut off, and if they did not declare loyalty to the Taliban then they were stoned to death.⁴ During the Post-Taliban 2004 Constitution Era, the Afghan Constitution gave women many rights. Afghanistan also saw social and economic growth that dramatically improved the socio-economic environment. From having almost no medical services available to women during the Taliban's regime, the post-Taliban era built 3,135 working health facilities by the year 2018. In theory, 87% of Afghan people had access to medical facilities within two hours, but travel on the road was still unsafe due to the Taliban's continued military activities.⁵

² Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, *A History of Women in Afghanistan: Lessons Learnt for the Future or Yesterdays and Tomorrow: Women in Afghanistan*, 4(3) *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 1-14 (2003), <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol4/iss3/1>.

³ John R. Allen and Vanda Felbab-Brown, *The fate of women's rights in Afghanistan*, BROOKINGS, (30th November 2023, 3:04 PM), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-fate-of-womens-rights-in-afghanistan/>.

⁴ Sky News, <https://news.sky.com/story/afghanistan-what-is-sharia-law-and-how-has-the-taliban-interpreted-it-12383974#:~:text=Taliban%20interpretation%20of%20Sharia%20law,public%20stonings%2C%20whippings%20and%20hangings> (last visited November 29, 2023)

⁵ World Health Organization,

In 2003, less than 10% of girls were attending primary schools, and by 2017 it went up to 33%. Secondary school enrollment for girls went from 6% to 39%. This was progress and a step in the right direction, but it still is not enough. Female life expectancy grew from 56 years in 2001 to 66 years in 2017 and childbirth mortality reduced from 1,100 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 396 per 100,000 live births in 2015. 21% of Afghan civil servants and 27% of members of parliament were women by 2020. But even after the above-mentioned progress, 80% of Afghan women were victims of domestic violence. The killing of their abusive and brutal husbands in self-defence was seen as a cause for persecution.⁶

Saudi Arabia

First and foremost, the 1930s saw a huge development in the nation with the discovery and production of oil. Major changes were brought about in the early 1970s as a result of oil-related money in the political, social, and economic spheres. A tendency toward studying abroad and a shift in lifestyle were brought on by the economic upheaval brought on by the increased money from oil, and these two changes had an impact on the entire social structure. Oil production in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s led to the founding of ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company) in Dhahran, a city on the country's east coast where most American businesses are based.⁷

American women were driving vehicles and shopping in malls in public, both of which were prohibited for Saudi women. Soon after, Saudi women started requesting some of the same rights as American women. Some conversations were formal. However, the Mecca uprising of 1979 put an end to these ideas.

Up until 2002, the Ministry of Education handled the education of boy children, while the Department of Religious Guidance oversaw women's education at all levels, including elementary, secondary, high school, and university. Many Saudi women and men believe that since women are not born with the same nature as males, they should not be allowed to hold jobs that are traditionally held by men. Because of this, only a select few professions, such as teaching

http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/afghanistan/WHO_at_a_Glance_2019_Feb.pdf?ua=1 (last visited November 29, 2023).

⁶ ReliefWeb, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-revised-humanitarian-response-plan-2023> (last visited November 29, 2023).

⁷ Rajkhan, S.F. (2014) Women in Saudi Arabia status, rights, and limitations. Available at: <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/25576/Rajkhan%20-%20Capstone.pdf?sequence=1> (Accessed: 01 December 2023).

and nursing, as opposed to engineering were open to women.⁸

Before 2001, Saudi women were thought of as an extension of their male guardians. The passport of the family of the woman's father is what initially makes her identity known. If she marries after that, she will be added to her husband's card or, in the case of her father's demise, to the card of her nearest male relative.

The male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia is the biggest obstacle to the realization of women's rights in the nation, according to scores of Saudi women who spoke with Human Rights Watch. Regardless of her social or economic level, every Saudi woman suffers from guardianship laws. A male guardian must give his consent for an adult woman to travel, get married, or leave prison. To work or receive medical care, they might need to give guardian consent. Without a male relative, women frequently struggle to complete a variety of tasks, from filing legal claims to renting apartments.

Women have faced numerous difficulties in both Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, including restrictions on their freedom due to legal and cultural restrictions, lack of access to high-quality education, difficulty finding employment opportunities, patriarchal guardianship systems, gender-based violence, and political underrepresentation. These barriers have reduced women's autonomy in a variety of spheres of life and hampered their personal and professional growth. To solve these issues, advance women's rights in both nations and move them closer to gender equality, international pressure and activism are crucial.

International Pressure Mechanisms

To advance women's rights globally, international pressure methods are essential instruments. These mechanisms use a multifaceted approach, employing a range of tactics to combat and eliminate prejudice based on gender. These factors all work together to change and promote gender equality, from the significant roles played by international organisations like the UN and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to diplomatic pressure, financial incentives, the influence of the international media, and public opinion.⁹

⁸ *Supra Note 7.*

⁹ Raunak Jahan, *National mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women*, UN, (30th November 2023, 3:04 PM)
https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/TechnicalCooperation/docs/National_Mechanisms_2008_Report.pdf.

International organisations, especially the United Nations (UN), have been instrumental in promoting gender equality and women's rights across the world. Several treaties and resolutions have been created by the UN, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which offers a thorough framework for addressing gender-based discrimination. The CEDAW, which was enacted in 1979 and has since been ratified by many nations, has established a global standard for women's rights. In addition, UN Women works as a specialized UN organization devoted to empowering women and promoting gender equality. It is a crucial resource for learning the advancements and difficulties in this field since it provides useful materials and reports on the state of women's rights throughout the world.¹⁰

To achieve women's rights through the use of political power, alliances and diplomatic pressure are crucial. Examples of this can be seen when countries carry out statements or letters by government officials. Countries can also exert pressure if certain aspects of a treaty are not followed by their fellow country. Several countries and international alliances work together to advance gender equality through diplomatic channels. They take part in negotiations, agreements, and collaborations with nations that may not be doing enough to defend women's rights. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, among other international gatherings and conferences, provided insight into the diplomatic efforts made to enhance women's rights. To advance women's rights, similar diplomatic pressures and coalitions have been formed, as seen by national government statements at UN conferences and other international venues. These diplomatic initiatives aim to persuade countries to prioritise women's rights and to create a global consensus on the importance of gender equality.

The promotion of women's rights gains a lot from monetary rewards and punishments. Nations can be persuaded to pass laws that support women's rights, advance equality, and put an end to discrimination by using economic techniques. On the one hand, agencies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regularly evaluate economic factors that affect gender equality. Their research and writings shed light on the financial costs of gender inequality and the potential applications of economic incentives to advance women's rights. On the other hand,

¹⁰ Estelle Loiseau and Keiko Nowacka, *Can social media effectively include women's voices in decision-making processes?*, OECD, (30th November 2023, 3:04 PM) https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/DEV_socialmedia-issuespaper-March2015.pdf.

governments could be compelled to use economic sanctions to address systemic gender imbalances. The fear of financial penalties may influence nations to make substantial policy changes in support of women's rights.

Financial and economic pressures are frequently just as powerful as traditional international pressure, if not more so. Through efforts led by Crown Prince, Muhammed Bin Salman, Saudi Arabia has been making incremental strides towards parity with the Western world in terms of women's rights ever since the price of oil began to decline. This implies that they are aiming to establish a system in which women are permitted to fill positions that have historically been filled by males under the "Vision Saudi 2030" initiative. An example of this can be seen when 13 women were appointed to be a part of the Kingdom's Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2020. This meant that half of the council were women.¹¹ Therefore the old perception of Saudi society, which was historically quite oppressive and patriarchal, has unquestionably transformed as a result of this campaign that was pushed.¹²

Significant advancements have been made because of the rise of women's rights and these international pressure mechanisms. The UN's interaction with NGOs has tremendously helped establish international standards and advance gender equality. Alliances and diplomatic pressure have encouraged dialogue and negotiation, which has pushed nations towards greater gender equity. Governments have been effectively prompted to pass laws that support women through financial incentives and punishments. Globally speaking, the media and the public have helped the cause by raising awareness and mobilizing support.¹³

The efficiency of these methods can, however, differ depending on cultural, political, and geographical settings, which is something that must be acknowledged. Because of the histories, cultural norms, and political complexity of Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, for example, the use of these techniques assumes distinctive aspects. The study that follows will provide insight into how these international pressure tools have been applied in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, as well as the various results they have produced in the fight for gender equality in these two very

¹¹ Shreya Kasana, *Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030: A Catalyst for Realizing Women's Rights*, THE GEOPOLITICS, (1 December 2023, 3:45 PM), <https://thegeopolitics.com/saudi-arabias-vision-2030-a-catalyst-for-realizing-womens-rights/>.

¹² Lawrence Potter, "Saudi Arabia in Transition.", GREAT DECISIONS 51, 56 (2017) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44215463>.

¹³ UN, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/> (last visited Nov. 30, 2023).

different situations.

Women's Rights Progress

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia, a nation historically characterized by deeply entrenched conservative values and rigid gender norms, has embarked on a remarkable journey of reforms and policy changes in the realm of women's rights. This transformation has been significantly driven by the vision of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, creating a complex interplay of societal reactions, resistance, and tangible impacts on the daily lives of women in the kingdom.

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has witnessed a series of reforms aimed at dismantling barriers to women's rights. These reforms encompass various aspects of women's lives, from legal rights to economic opportunities and cultural participation. Notable changes include granting women the right to drive, a development that marked a significant departure from long-standing restrictions. Furthermore, the kingdom has implemented measures to improve women's access to education¹⁴ and employment, striving to empower them with the skills and opportunities needed to thrive in diverse professional fields. Additionally, the legal landscape has witnessed adjustments, including reforms in family law, guardianship regulations, and the establishment of specialized courts to address family matters. These policy changes collectively aim to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

Central to Saudi Arabia's transformative journey in women's rights is seen under the Saudi Vision 2030 by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The goals set in these programs led to such reforms, emphasizing their significance in the broader context of national development. Many have praised the change made by the Crown Prince as it was considered a forward-looking approach that has been instrumental in initiating reforms through various bureaucratic and societal challenges.

Many speculate that the Crown Prince realized the country's sole income source is oil, and shortly, there will be a decline in oil prices and consumption. Therefore, directly affecting the

¹⁴ Al Rawaf, Haya Saad, and Cyril Simmons. "The Education of Women in Saudi Arabia." *Comparative Education*, vol. 27, no. 3, COMPARATIVE EDUCATION 287, 289 (1991)<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3099298>.

GDP of Saudi Arabia in future. This is one of the reasons that Saudi under the leadership of the Crown Prince is focusing on the improvement of human rights thereby leading Saudi to be more conducive to foreign investment and trust in the country.

While the reforms have garnered support and applause from many quarters, they have also generated significant societal reactions and resistance. Traditional norms deeply rooted in Saudi society have presented challenges to the full implementation of women's rights. Resistance from conservative factions has occasionally led to pushback against reforms. Public discourse surrounding these changes has been marked by a diversity of perspectives, with some embracing the reforms as long-overdue steps toward gender equality, and others viewing them as threats to cultural and religious traditions.

The impact of these reforms is most keenly felt in the daily lives of Saudi women. The lifting of the driving ban, for instance, has granted women newfound freedom and mobility, transforming their daily routines. Additionally, enhanced access to education and employment has expanded opportunities for women, paving the way for their economic and social empowerment. Changes in family law and guardianship regulations have also influenced the dynamics of women's lives within the family unit, granting them greater autonomy and legal rights. These reforms are gradually altering the societal landscape, enabling women to participate more actively in public life, the workforce, and education. They represent a pivotal moment in the history of Saudi Arabia, as the kingdom continues to evolve and redefine the roles and rights of women within the society.

Even though such changes have been applauded, many still critique the authenticity of such changes. This can be seen with the arrest and trial of human rights activist and media influencer Loujain al-Hathloul in 2018.¹⁵ Loujain was arrested right before women were given the right to drive in the country, a cause which she immensely supported. However, justice was not served as Loujain was sentenced to five years in prison by a Specialised Criminal Court. Loujain is just one of many stories which have come about regarding the status of women activists in the country. Furthermore, in the international field, Saudi Arabia has signed and ratified many treaties supporting human rights, especially women's rights. However, it has ratified the CEDAW with reservations, and it also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). However even

¹⁵ BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55467414> (last visited on 1 December 2023).

though such international treaties were signed, the effect seems to be minimal until 2019. The CEDAW committee even has tried to remove Saudi Arabia from its membership as it had laws that went against its primary objective.¹⁶ Even with the so-called pressure mechanism, we can still see that Saudi Arabia's religious sentiments are deeply rooted in its current laws. The recent Personal Status Law (PSL) made in 2019 made some improvements to the living standards of women by giving them access to passports and the minimum age for marriage. Despite these positive impacts on women's rights, the PSL still requires women to obtain consent from their male legal guardian to get married and imposes conditions on financial support from husbands. The PSL perpetuates aspects of the male guardianship system, hindering women's ability to exercise their rights and violating international law. Women lack equal access to divorce and separation, as men can unilaterally divorce their wives without conditions. The PSL also discriminates between men and women in inheritance rights, giving men a much larger share of assets.

Afghanistan

THE *US INTERVENTION*

Using women's rights and female empowerment as justification George W. Bush and his administration continued a war on the Taliban. During Barack Obama's administration, then-Secretary of State Hilary Clinton proclaimed that the U.S. negotiations with the Taliban had preconditions that included that the Taliban would recognize the Afghan Constitution and protect women's rights. And even after more than nine years the constitutional order and rights for women are subject to intra-Afghan negotiations and an ever-changing balance of military power will surely have an effect as well. Many Afghani women were negatively affected the intra-Afghan Deal, especially those in the urban areas.¹⁷

The reduction in the US military presence and the Taliban's maintaining strength on the battlefield led to uncertainty regarding Afghan women and their rights. After the deal in Doha signed by the US with the Taliban on 29th February 2020, the Afghan women's future was completely up to the intra-Taliban negotiations and battlefield developments. The withdrawal of

¹⁶ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/saudi-arabia-personal-status-law-codifies-discrimination-against-women/> (last visited 1 December 2023).

¹⁷ SKY NEWS, <https://news.sky.com/story/afghanistan-what-is-sharia-law-and-how-has-the-taliban-interpreted-it-12383974#:~:text=Taliban%20interpretation%20of%20Sharia%20law,public%20stonings%2C%20whippings%20and%20hangings,> (last visited Nov. 29, 2023).

the US forces was only met with assurances of no attacks on the US or its allies and a non-conduct of terrorist attacks against the same and the territory controlled by the Taliban. This has left out the protection of women and their rights.¹⁸

The Taliban Rule

In August 2021, the Taliban took over the Afghan Government. Due to the takeover, there was a mass exodus of people due to the fear of persecution. Once the new Taliban government was established, the existing structures of rights were taken down. Rules were implemented stating that women could not attend schools or universities, and their right to work as a professional or a volunteer has been almost completely stripped as well. They can either work from home, which for those stricken with poverty is extremely difficult, or they have to be accompanied by a male to work. Many families have been forced into extreme poverty due to such policies. This in turn led to the number of beggars on Afghan streets rapidly increasing.

The ban on women to move around in public unless they are accompanied by a male relative chaperone is once again brought into force.¹⁹ Maternal mortality is also seeing a drastic incline. The UN estimated that every two hours an Afghan woman faces death while giving birth or during pregnancy.²⁰

Child marriages, forced marriages and rapes are on the rise as well. Women afflicted by such atrocities have nowhere to turn to since women's rights activists are being hunted, and their safe houses raided. Any protests against the Taliban, even if they were peaceful, were cracked down on with violent enforcement, and the protestors who escaped were hunted.²¹

¹⁸ *Supra Note 3*

¹⁹ PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE ACROSS THE WORLD, https://prisonersofconscience.org/about-poc/prisoners-of-conscience-across-the-world/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwm66pBhDQARIsALIR2zA150hqCikUgtLfpZe0OgUuNTtJDry7qQIBpzJERAW4ZGV6PIhvwhQaAnqiEALw_wcB#Afghanistan-achor (last visited Nov. 29, 2023).

²⁰ MEDICAMONDIALE, <https://medicamondiale.org/en/where-we-empower-women/afghanistan> (last visited Nov. 29, 2023).

²¹ THE STORY EXCHANGE, https://thestoryexchange.org/afghan-women-we-are-not-fragile/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwm66pBhDQARIsALIR2zAI5CL5YRchKh2Ni8CZAwSypQArjKHuFiBqHQNVJYF0Ym6po7KYntEaApADEALw_wcB (last visited Nov. 29, 2023).

Current Global Status of Afghanistan

Following the Taliban takeover, a former top UN official remarked that it is up to the new Taliban government to honour international human rights treaties and conventions. According to the official, the Taliban would only declare their adherence to Human Rights Treaties "within the context of Sharia Law," which has no clear definition.²² One such example can be seen in how Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid stated that the Taliban would abide by human rights and international law. He also claimed that the "*Islamic Emirate is committed to the rights of women within the framework of Sharia.*"²³ However many such as John Sifton from the Human Rights Watch have stated that the Taliban need to demonstrate through their action and not by their vague words. Sifton further stated that the words of the Taliban are no different to its previous iteration that occupied Afghanistan before the US stepped in. Many reports even have stated that the Ministry for Women's Affairs was replaced with the Ministry for Vice and Virtue, an extremely conservative police force that does not allow women to be seen in public without male relatives. Many human rights activists have been stranded in Afghanistan since the Taliban reclaimed power and are thought to be miserable. Mahmud, an Afghan human rights defender, recalled receiving threats and requests to hand over the assets of his organization, which prompted him to flee. Human rights advocate Nazir recounted how the Taliban badly battered his friend Parwiz after he attended a women's rights march.²⁴ These accounts show that the situation in Afghanistan has worsened since the Taliban came to power.

Another set of events that showcases how ineffective pressure mechanisms are in Afghanistan can be seen when the Economic Minister barred women from working for non-governmental organizations. The reason stated by the Taliban was that some female NGO employees in Afghanistan were not wearing the hijab correctly. The Taliban administration's spokesman, Mr Zabihullah Mujahid, tweeted in support of the ban. He emphasized that all foreign institutions who seek to operate in Afghanistan must first comply with the country's standards.²⁵ This was received with fierce condemnation from even UN officials, who claimed that such a prohibition would deprive many women of their livelihood. Four humanitarian groups ceased activities in

²²Thalif Deen, *Will Taliban Honour UN Treaties Signed by Afghanistan Over the Last 20 Years?*, GLOBAL ISSUE, (1 December 2023, 3:04 PM), <https://www.globalissues.org/news/2021/10/06/28984>.

²³ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/18/afghanistan-taliban-rights-pledges-raise-concerns> (last visited Nov. 29, 2023).

²⁴ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/09/afghanistan-taliban-wasting-no-time-in-stamping-out-human-rights-says-new-briefing/> (last visited 1 December 2023).

²⁵ ABC, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-26/afghan-ngos-halt-work/101808516> (last visited 1 December 2023).

Afghanistan, claiming that they could not effectively assist people in severe need without the participation of women. This would then lead to many families who were dependent on reliefs given by the groups to starve.

Global Implications & Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see that Saudi Vision 2030 and the changes initiated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman are reshaping the current status of women in Saudi Arabia. These reforms are influencing the daily lives of Saudi women, expanding their horizons, and gradually breaking down the barriers that have long constrained their potential. However, such changes may have been due to the shift created due to the country's dependence on oil. Furthermore, we see the effects of international pressure in the context of Saudi Arabia, as these changes reflect not only domestic aspirations but also the interconnected nature of women's rights on a global scale.

Women's rights in Afghanistan on the other hand seem to be depleted even further. The Taliban taking control over Afghanistan and imposing an extreme version of Sharia law has made the lives of many Afghan people especially women miserable. The progress being made post-Taliban since the 2000s has been ruined and a woman's right to health care, education and employment was stripped away. The International Community has to make an effort to help the Afghan people and return to them peaceful and sincere lives where equality and harmony can thrive.

Women's rights are significantly impacted by the intricate interaction of shifting geostrategic objectives, outside pressure, and the desire to present a contemporary Muslim image in both Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. This comparison can help international advocacy efforts learn crucial lessons. They emphasise the value of financial incentives, media influence, and diplomatic engagement in furthering women's rights.²⁶ These lessons stress the requirement for specific, culturally aware techniques in every nation. This dynamic also highlights how important women's rights are becoming in diplomacy and international affairs since a country's standing on gender equality is becoming more and more important. Countries that prioritize gender equality typically receive better treatment on the international stage in a linked globe.

²⁶ Rachel George, *Opinion – Why Women's Rights in the Gulf Matter for Afghanistan*, E-INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (1 December 2023, 3:04 PM), <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/11/21/opinion-why-womens-rights-in-the-gulf-matter-for-afghanistan/>.

Looking ahead, bigger geopolitical issues are entwined with the future of women's rights in both countries. Despite obstacles within the country and criticism from abroad, Saudi Arabia's continuing changes indicate a change in the country's perspective on women's rights. Women's rights in Afghanistan are in danger due to continued political unrest and security concerns. For both nations to advance, there must be constant international pressure, diplomatic discussion, and gender equality measures. This global setting serves as a reminder that women's rights are an issue that cuts across national boundaries and that any progress made in this area benefits all of mankind.²⁷



²⁷ *Supra Note 18.*