



SPORTSWASHING

Saudi Arabia 2023





GRANT LIBERTY

PRO LIBERTATE

Sportswashing and
prisoners of conscience

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— Introduction

Sportswashing

The problem with Saudi Arabia's Ownership

Investing in sports generally is a good thing that brings entertainment and fosters the development of human talent worldwide. Access to sports in any form brings joy to billions of people across continents and uplifts the spirits of the masses, including financially or socially vulnerable communities that find solace in the timeless pleasure of sports.

The acquisition of clubs and sporting institutions is generally seen as a positive move, as it promotes the continuous growth and advancement of sports. However, Saudi Arabian ownership of these sports entities poses a significant problem, as this goes against the ethics and values that democratic societies have developed over centuries.

Saudi Arabia operates under an oppressive monarchical system, which has consistently failed its people in terms of equality, justice and human rights, despite global efforts made to improve the lives, laws and living conditions of citizens. The wealth generated by the Kingdom has enabled the State to perpetuate human rights abuses with impunity, which would not be tolerated by Western nations if not for the economic benefits these countries access from their ongoing relationship with this rogue State.

The level of injustice within Saudi Arabia escalated further when Muhammad bin Salman (MBS) assumed power in 2015, following the death of King Abdullah and the ascension of King Salman, MBS's father. Seeking to improve the kingdom's economy and image, MBS embarked on a mission to bring about liberalisation in a country deeply entrenched in Wahhabism for over two centuries. However, this journey towards change was far from inclusive, as even the perception of dissenting opinions were swiftly and viciously suppressed.

MBS began by imprisoning popular figures, including journalists, bloggers, human rights activists, NGO workers, clerics, academics and others. Members of the royal family and prominent businessmen were also subjected to abduction and torture, culminating in the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a journalist for The Washington Post, who was gruesomely killed at the Saudi embassy in Istanbul.

Currently, over 300 prisoners of conscience remain incarcerated in the kingdom with many having already

Recent harsh sentences handed down to Salma Al-Shehab, Sarah Al-Jabri, Fatima Al-Shawarbi, Nourah Al-Qahtani, and others clearly indicate that Saudi Arabia is not prepared to join the global community and should never be granted the honour and prestige of hosting the array of sports events that have taken decades to develop into the beloved and cherished activities they are today.



What is PIF Saudi Arabia?

The Public Investment Fund (PIF) of Saudi Arabia was established in 1971 and is the nation's sovereign wealth fund. It provides financing for productive commercial projects that are strategically significant to the development of the Saudi Arabian economy.

Following on from our 2021 Saudi Sportswashing report, the level of investment and the obfuscation of that operation has grown exponentially in the region. Sporting stars and brands that had previously shunned offers to play in Saudi due to human rights abuses, have now been enticed to rethink their moral standing and accept big money deals - even though those same human rights abuses continue and worsen to this day.

Examples of this can be seen by the likes of when Cristiano Ronaldo put pen to paper to sign a \$75 million per year deal to play for Al Nassr FC, one of the top 4 Saudi teams owned by the PIF. Whilst the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) bans government owned sports clubs, the giant red flag is the fact that PIF is controlled by MBS - who is the Chairman -and ultimately all investments are made by the Fund.

This follow up report shows huge growth at such a rapid rate and the lengths that KSA is currently going to, to actively engineer the palatable, compelling image of a progressive country. This image is starkly in opposition to the reality within KSA. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been making significant investments in various sports as part of its Sportswashing campaign in recent years.

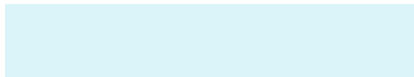
This overview provides insights into the major Saudi investments and activities in sports, focusing on boxing, golf, football, esports, tennis, UFC, horse racing, chess, motorsports, wrestling, and snooker. The analysis is based on reported figures of deals between Saudi entities and prominent sporting governing bodies or individuals. These deals were primarily established during the Vision 2030 era, which began after April 2016.

It is important to note that the figures mentioned may underestimate the true scale of investment, as some amounts remain undisclosed. While Saudi Arabia's sports investments have garnered attention, critics argue that they serve as a means to divert attention from the country's human rights abuses.

The following sections delve into the specific sports and their corresponding Saudi involvement, shedding light on the substantial financial commitments and their potential impact on the sporting landscape.

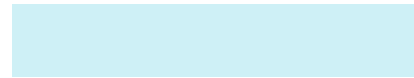


This blurred boundary hints at the utilisation of Sportswashing as a strategic manoeuvre at the highest echelons of power by MBS. Its purpose is to divert attention from the abhorrent human rights abuses committed by KSA, such as the ongoing Yemen conflict and instead present KSA as a global sports powerhouse, prioritising this image over its reliance on oil.



The analysis presented is grounded in reported data concerning agreements between entities affiliated with the Saudi state and prominent sporting governing bodies or individuals.

Methodology



These deals have been finalised during the period of Vision 2030, which began after April 2016. The compilation encompasses ventures directly overseen by the Saudi authorities, such as NEOM, Qiddiya, and Visit Saudi. However, it does not encompass the financial transactions involving Saudi individuals, such as members of the royal family, who are not under the direct control of the State. The sources for each mentioned figure can be found in the footnotes of the respective table.

In cases where the precise Saudi investment in a particular deal is not readily available, we have denoted the monetary amount as undisclosed. Consequently, these aggregated figures are likely to represent a conservative estimate of the actual magnitude of investment.



Boxing

US\$ 262.2m

The Saudi Arabian regime started using boxing as a Sportswashing tool in 2019, when the State hosted the Amir Khan vs Billy Dib fight in July in Jeddah, followed by the Andy Ruiz vs Anthony Joshua 2 fixture later that year. It was of course not enough, as Following this, they offered a reported US\$150 million to host the much-anticipated fight between Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua.

The Fury vs Joshua match was confirmed to take place in August 2021, only for it to be cancelled due to Deontay Wilder winning the legal rights for a rematch against Fury, making him unavailable. However, Saudi Arabia succeeded in hosting the rematch between Anthony Joshua and Oleksander Usyk, to the tune of US\$150 million. Later, in early 2023, the Kingdom hosted a match between Jake Paul and Tommy Fury costing around US\$13 million. While the Kingdom had been securing key cultural capital via these highly anticipated matches, it seems that more remained to be done. It was revealed in April 2023 that a super fight night in Saudi Arabia, including fighters like Joshua, Wilder, Fury and Usyk, is currently being discussed, with a cost of around US\$400 million. The boxers themselves are making immense sums of money, which appears to be enough of a catalyst to ignore the climate of ongoing human rights violations within Saudi Arabia.



US\$ 5.06bn



GOLF

In 2019, a Saudi interest in golf began to take shape, a tournament named Saudi International was created as part of a European Tour, with an annual prize of US\$3.5 million, which after 3 iterations became US\$5 million - when the tournament signed a 10-year deal to become part of Asian Tour.

In 2022, the Saudi Arabian regime became a major player in the world of golf, perhaps the only one in comparison to other States. It was in that year that PIF decided to invest at least US\$2 billion to create LIV Golf, the golf league with the most lucrative tournaments in the world.

They even offered Tiger Woods, commonly perceived as the best golfer of all time, around US\$800 million to join LIV Golf. The player, out of loyalty, refused in order to stay with their contenders, PGA tour. Ironically in June 2023, PIF persuaded PGA tour to merge with Saudi-created LIV golf. The Kingdom invested US\$3 billion in the merger, again demonstrating the formidable power of wealth in reshaping the public narrative.

These Saudi-led events are expected to change the world of golf that the fans know and love. Sadly, the State are willing and able to pay billions in order to hide their human rights abuse.



GOLF, BUT HUMAN RIGHTS ARE LOUDER

LIV Golf Invitational Series

US\$ 50.7bn

Football

When it comes to the most popular sport worldwide, football is surely the number one most engaging sport. The sport is watched by people of all nationalities and ages. It has a huge influence on fans, on and off the pitch. Saudi Arabia appear to have noticed how essential football is to their Sportswashing campaign, as they started heavily investing a few years ago. In 2019, the State they signed deals with the Italian and Spanish football associations to host different versions of their respective super cups in the kingdom.

Events began to develop significantly in 2020, when PIF bid several hundreds of millions to buy Newcastle United F.C, a prestigious team that plays in the English Premier League, which is commonly and colloquially understood to be the best football league in the world.

The bid was eventually fought off through a combination of human rights activism – of which Grant Liberty was proud to play a part – and a television rights row that made the deal unviable. Sadly, the deal was later sealed and the takeover was concluded on 7th October 2021, for a fee around US\$400 million.

Multiple Saudi sponsorship deals followed

Multiple Saudi sponsorship deals followed, such as the NEOM AFC sponsorship, signing Messi as a “Visit Saudi” ambassador for US\$75 million and various PIF football sponsorships worth US\$2.3 billion. Remarkably, a Visit Saudi sponsorship of FIFA women world cup 2023 was reversed under the pressure of human rights activist groups. However, these events appeared to be just the beginning. It appeared obvious to civil society organisations that the Kingdom would aim to acquire famous football players within their league - who would be more popular than Cristiano Ronaldo himself?

In December 2022, the Portuguese penned a deal with Saudi club Al-Nassr worth more than US\$500 million over two years -the highest salary for a football player in history up to that day. Six months later, after Saudi Arabia privatised football clubs and PIF took over the majority of shares within the four major clubs in KSA⁽²⁶⁾, a lot of world-famous players such as Karim Benzema, N'golo Kante and Ruben Neves started following in Ronaldo's footsteps, leaving the highest level of competition behind in favour of huge pay cheques. Even former players are starting to take managerial jobs in KSA, such as Liverpool FC legend Steven Gerrard, who recently became Al-Ettifaq's head coach..

It is worth noting that Leo Messi refused an immense deal, worth a reported US\$1.1 billion, which would require him to join Saudi club Al-Hilal in 2023.

At this point, we know that Saudi Arabia will also host FIFA Club World Cup 2023, AFC Asian cup 2027, and has bid to host AFC Women's Asian cup in 2026.

All these events can be understood as a warm-up for the biggest and most prestigious event, hosting the world cup in Saudi Arabia. A joint bid between KSA, Egypt and Greece is being explored to host the FIFA World Cup 2030, but whether it is going to succeed or not, the regime is highly likely to continue applying immense financial power until the bid is successful.

It is extremely concerning to imagine the biggest sports event in the world could potentially be held in a country that is actively imprisoning and torturing people with relative impunity, with charges that are largely falsified to suit the narrative of the monarchy.

Human rights organisations need to implore Greece not to join this triangle of oppressive regimes known for the murder, torture and abductions of their citizens.



US\$ 37.8bn **Esports**

Saudis are extending their reach outside of traditional sports and into the lucrative and far-reaching arena of Esports through Savvy Games Group, a company established and owned by PIF. We believe that MBS plans to invest a staggering US\$37.8 billion in Esports and gaming.

Savvy games group has already bought US\$1 billion worth of shares in Embracer Group, and acquired Scopely, a mobile publisher, for US\$ 4.9 billion. They also spent US\$ 1.5 billion to buy esports league organisers ESL and FACEIT, and merged them together to form ESL FACEIT group, who now organises and hosts some of the biggest Esports tournaments in the world.^[48] PIF also owns various shares in different gaming companies.

US\$ 6 M **Tennis**

The Diriyah Cup is a tennis tournament that first took place in Saudi Arabia in 2019. The tournament then returned in 2022, with a US\$3 million prize money for each edition. In addition, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic were offered a combined US\$2 million to play an Exhibition match in Saudi back in 2018. The exhibition match was then cancelled, with injury to Nadal reported as the key reason.

Andy Murray, the most famous British tennis player, reportedly refused an offer of US\$1.8 million to play exhibition matches in KSA in 2022 due to the current state of human rights within the Kingdom.

At this moment, his representative is now not ruling out going to Saudi in the future. Andy Murray also recently implied that he'll have to think about it, if Saudi Arabia is to host major tournaments in the country.^[49]

FAILED **UFC**

When it comes to UFC, Saudi Arabia is yet to host a major event. However, a bid to host fight between Khabib Nurmagomedov and Connor McGregor worth US\$100 million was refused by Nurmagomedov in 2020. It is worth mentioning that Endeavor, UFC owners, returned US\$400 million investments to PIF and severed ties with Saudis in 2019, on the back of the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

US\$ 129m **Horse racing**

The Saudi Cup, which began in 2020, is currently the most lucrative race in the world – with a prize fund of US\$35 million across the weekend, and US\$20 million for the cup itself.

In 2021, Grant Liberty worked with Lina al-Hathloul – sister of Loujain – to write to third place UK sports personality of the year Hollie Doyle. We asked her to boycott the race in solidarity with human rights activists in the Kingdom. Sadly, the letter was ignored.

US\$ 2m **Chess**

In 2017 Saudi Arabia hosted the King Salman World Chess Championship, with an enormous US\$2m prize fund. The World Chess Federation (FIDE) said the fund was “almost 350% more than the previous event.” The event saw the Ukrainian double champion, Anna Muzychuk refusing to attend in protest at the treatment of women in KSA^[37]. She was stripped of both of her titles for refusing to attend. Within a year Saudi Arabia had lost the right to host international chess tournaments, after banning players from Israel.^[38]

US\$ 1bn

Wrestling

In 2018, Bin Salman decided to bring WWE, the most famous wrestling brand, to Saudi Arabia. The country signed a deal with WWE to host 2 events yearly in the kingdom, starting from 2018 and spanning over 10 years, including the highly lucrative high-profile pay-per-view event, with each event costing around US\$50 million amounting to a billion-dollar deal in total!

These events would feature the biggest names in the wrestling industry to attract vast audience across the Middle East and rest of the world. MBS saw this as an opportunity to present Saudi Arabia as a modern upcoming holiday and tourist destination.

US\$ 33m

Snooker

The Snooker authorities have signed a ten-year deal for an annual event – the Saudi Arabian Masters – worth US\$3.3m (approx. £2.5m) in the Kingdom beginning in 2020. The US\$500,000 prize for the winner matches the fund for the World Championship. As part of the deal, the sports' governing body has announced that any player can pass on playing at the event.^[50] KSA also hosts the IBSF's World Under-21 Snooker Championship for men and women, and World Under-17 Championship for men in July 2023.

US\$ 1.4bn

Motorsport

Saudi Arabia's entry into the world of motorsports mirrors its ventures in golf and football. In 2018, the Kingdom hosted The Race of Champions, the first international motorsports event on Saudi soil.

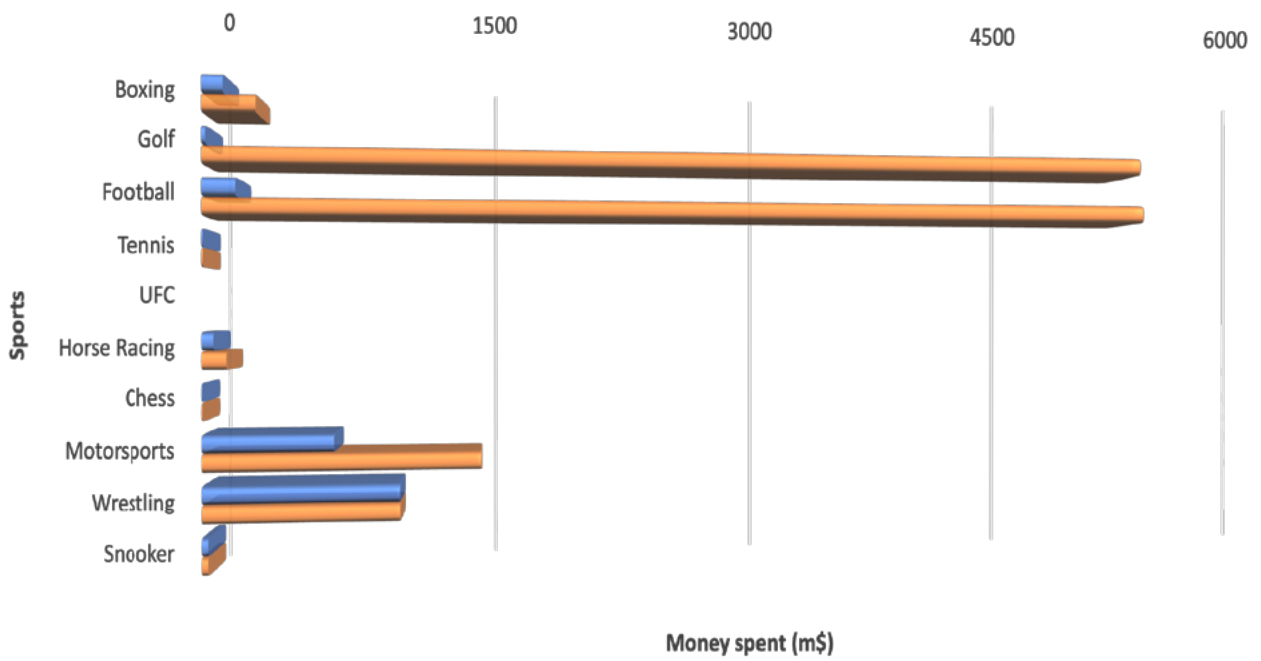
Expanding its involvement, Saudi Arabia secured a remarkable 10-year, \$260 million deal in 2018, establishing an annual Formula E race. Embracing other prominent events like the Dakar Rally and Extreme E in 2020 and 2021 respectively, the Kingdom showcased its commitment. Additionally, Saudi Arabia secured a five-year, \$60 million sponsorship deal with McLaren teams, including support from NEOM, a futuristic city project.

The F1 Grand Prix stands as Saudi Arabia's flagship motorsports venture. Through a sponsorship agreement between ARAMCO (Saudi Owned) and Formula One, the Kingdom obtained the privilege of hosting an annual Grand Prix starting in 2021. This 10-year, approximately \$450 million deal, initiated in 2020, requires ARAMCO to contribute an extra \$65 million per race.

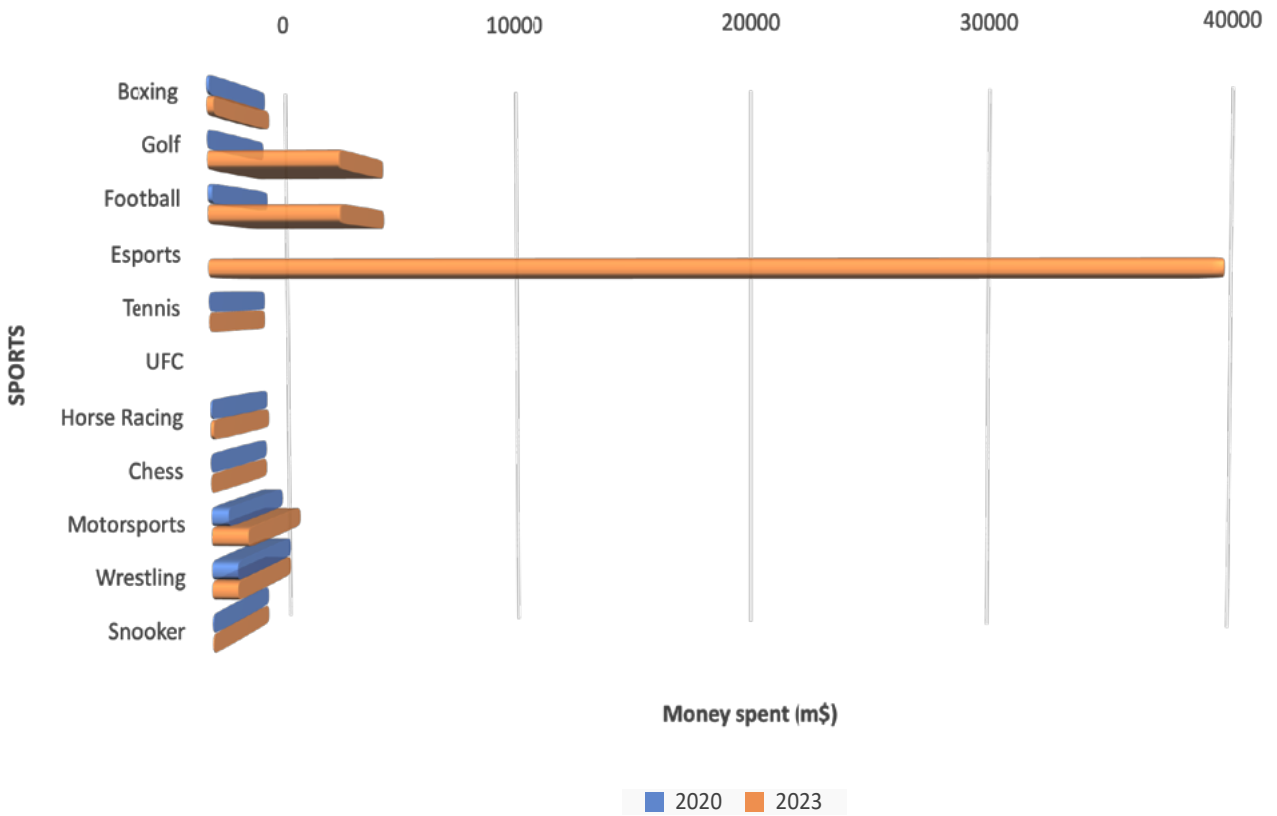
In January 2023, reports unveiled Saudi Arabia's audacious \$20 billion bid to acquire the entire Formula One enterprise, swiftly rejected by Liberty Media Group. Such an extravagant bid suggests the Saudi regime's steadfast determination to gain control over motorsports, possibly as a means to divert global attention from its well-documented human rights violations.

**US\$
50.786 bn**

**The total investment of
SaudiArabia
in sportswashing**



Money Spent by KSA on sportswashing starting in 2016 (excluding Esports)

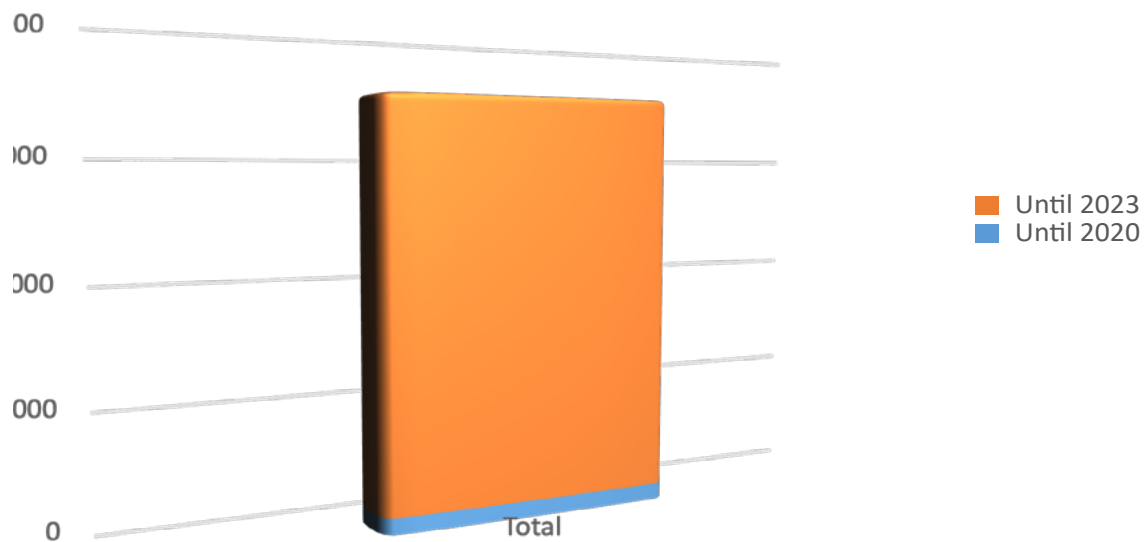


Money Spent by KSA on sportswashing starting in 2016

	Money spent until 2020 (\$m)	Money spent until 2023 (\$m)
Boxing	107	262.2
Golf	20	5060
Football	169	5077.6
Esports	0	37800
Tennis	6	6
UFC	0	0
Horse Racing	60	125
Chess	2	2
Motorsports	664	1420
Wrestling	1000	1000
Snooker	33	33
Total	2,061	50,786

Money Spent by KSA on sportswashing starting in 2016

Money Spent on Sportswashing (M\$)



The money spent by KSA on sportswashing from 2016 until 2020, compared to the money spent until 2023

FOOTBALL				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
Italian FA 10	114			2019-2029
Spanish FA 11	145			2019-2021
Newcastle Purchase 12	415			2021
NEOM AFC Sponsorship deal 13	undisclosed			2021-2024
Messi Visit Saudi deal 14	66			2021-2023
PIF Various Football Sponsorships 15	2300			2022-
Cristiano Ronaldo to Al-Nassr deal 16	537			2023-2025
FIFA Club World Cup 2023 17	n\a			2023
FIFA Women World Cup 2023 Sponsorship 18		n\a	n\a	2023
Benzema to Al-Ittihad deal 19	643			2023-2026
Kante to Al-Ittihad deal 20	300			2023-2025
Messi to Al-Hilal Deal 21		1500	1500	2023-2025
Ruben Neves to Al-Hilal Deal (fee+salary) 22	120			2023-2026
Roberto Firmino to Al-Ahli deal 51	66			2023-2026
Marcelo Brozovic to Al-Nassr deal (fee+salary) 52	155			2023-2036
Edouard Mendy to Al-Ahli deal (fee+salary) 53	56			2023-2026
Kalidou Koulibaly to Al-Hillal deal (fee+salary) 54 5	70			2023-2026
Jota to Al-Ittihad deal (fee+salary)55	70			2023-2026
Gerrard to Al-Ettifaq deal 56	20.6			2023-2025
African Super League sponsorship deal 23		200		2024-
AFC Women's Asian Cup 2026 24		n\a		2026
AFC Asian Cup 2027 25	n\a			2027
TOTAL	5077.6	1700	1500	

Tennis				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
Nadal/Djokovic 29		2	2	2018
Driyah Cup 2019 30	3			2019
Andy Murray Exhibition matches 31		1.8	1.8	2022
Driyah Cup 2022 30	3			2022
Next Gen Finals 2023 32		n\a		2023
TOTAL	6	3.8	3.8	

UFC				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
Endeavor (UFC owner) investment 33		400	400	2019
McGregor/Nurmagedmedov fight 34		100	100	2020
TOTAL		500	500	

Wrestling				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
WWE 10 year deal 46	1000			2018-2027
TOTAL	1000			

Horse Racing				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
Saudi Cup ³⁵	125			2020-2023
TOTAL	125			
Boxing				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
Joshua vs Ruiz 2 ¹	100			2019
Khan vs Dib 2	7			2019
Joshua vs Fury 3		150	150	2021
Joshua vs Usyk 4	150			2022
Jake Paul vs Tommy Fury 5	5.2			2023
Super fight night 6		~400		2023
TOTAL	262.2	550	150	
Esports				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
Investments in gaming companies via Savvy ^{27,28}	37800			2022-2030
TOTAL	37800			
Golf				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
Saudi International 6	60			2019-2031
LIV Golf 7	2000			2022
Tiger Woods LIV deal 8		800	800	2022
LIV/PGA merge 9	3000			2023
TOTAL	5060	800	800	
Motorsport				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
Race of Champions ³⁹	undisclosed			2018
Formula E deal ⁴⁰	260			2018-2027
Dakar Rally ⁴¹	undisclosed			2020-
Neom McLaren deal ⁴²	60			2022-2026
Aramco F1 sponsorship ⁴³	1100			2020-2029
Extreme E ⁴⁴	undisclosed			2021-
F1 acquisition bid ⁴⁵		20000	20000	2023
TOTAL	1420	20000	20000	
Chess				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
King Salman World chess championship ³⁶	2			2017
TOTAL	2			
Snooker				
Event	Spent (\$m)	Bid (\$m)	Failed (\$m)	Year
Saudi Masters	33			2020-2029
IBSF World U-17 Championship (men) ⁵⁸	n/a			2023
IBSF World U-21 Championship (men and women) ⁵⁹				2023
TOTAL	33			

Prisoners of conscience and sportswashing

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has faced scrutiny and international criticism for its treatment of human rights activists. Numerous individuals who have dared to speak out against the government or advocate for social and political reforms have found themselves behind bars, their voices silenced and their freedoms curtailed. This collection of cases highlights some of the prominent individuals who are currently imprisoned in Saudi Arabia for their activism.

Unveiling the Dark Side

Never before in Saudi Arabia's history has the nation attracted such widespread attention as it does today. The dark spotlight falls with gloomy shadow on the Kingdom, reminiscent of the days of Lawrence of Arabia. The driving force behind this newfound scrutiny is none other than the newly appointed leader, MBS, who harbours deep insecurities about his hold on power. In his quest to solidify his authority, MBS embarked on a ruthless campaign, targeting the most influential figures in the Kingdom, including Mohammed bin Nayef, the rightful heir to the throne, Prince Nawaf bin Nayef, Prince Al Waleed Bin Talal, Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, and numerous others. This calculated move sent an unequivocal message to all lesser figures in the country: resistance against his path of change is futile.

Not content with neutralising immediate threats to his consolidation of power, MBS extended his iron grip to imprison even those who once served as his mentors and companions, such as Dr. Salman al Odah and others.

While ostensibly championing progressive reforms for this deeply conservative nation, MBS has simultaneously imprisoned activists striving for even the most incremental advancements in women's rights, such as the freedom to drive or travel. In becoming a tyrant, he brooks no dissenting opinions that deviate even an iota from the state-sanctioned line.

It is deeply troubling that a country that seldom incarcerated its own female citizens now readily resorts to lengthy and unjustifiable prison sentences for acts that would not be considered crimes in any civilised nation. Nourah Al-Qahtani, for instance, was sentenced to 45 years for sending tweets, while Fatima



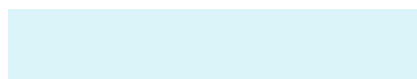
Al-Shawarbi received a 30-year sentence for expressing her opinions and sharing her thoughts online. Salma Al-Shehab faces a 34-year sentence for the same “offense,” with countless others enduring similar treatment.

This conduct befits neither a civilised nation nor the principles of justice. Regrettably, the West has turned a blind eye at the state level, with countries that champion democracy and freedom gladly embracing MBS and his Saudi Arabia. Even more disheartening is the complicity of free-thinking individuals from the realms of sports and media, who, enticed by lucrative sums of money, willingly ignore the atrocities being committed, despite being able to earn comparably lesser amounts in any free nation.

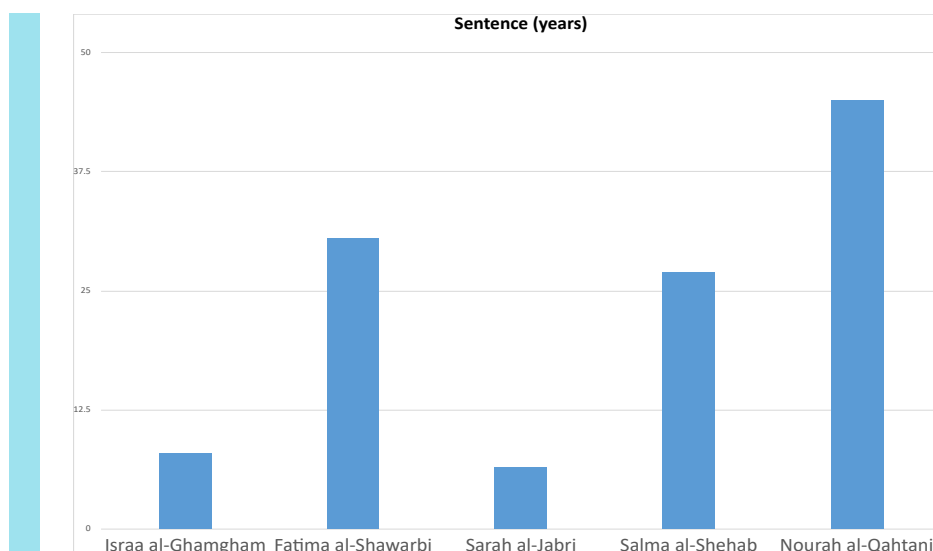
The disgrace lies squarely with great nations like the U.S., U.K., Europe and others, who seek economic benefits from a tyrant and bear responsibility at the state level. It also falls upon individuals such as Ronaldo, Messi, Joshua, Jake Paul, Fury, Gerrard and countless others who have turned a blind eye to this abhorrent situation.

Furthermore, respected organisations that have succumbed to their greed, including the PGA, Premier League, WWE, F1, and the World Chess Federation (FIDE), have shamefully tarnished their century-long legacies.

The only way we can truly stand against tyrants and advocate for humane treatment of our fellow human beings is by standing up against injustice collectively and individually. We must speak out with both words and actions, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to justice and the preservation of human rights.



*Saudi Arabia - The only country on the face of the earth where twitter posts can land you with a **45 year sentence***



Graph showing the harsh and unjustified sentencing of women for wrongful convictions



Female Prisoners of Conscience



Zana al-Shehri

A courageous Saudi journalist and human rights activist, has been unjustly detained since her arrest on November 16, 2019. She was taken into custody for her brave advocacy for reforms within Saudi Arabia. Shockingly, she has not yet been formally charged, and her case remains unresolved, devoid of a verdict.



Sarah Al-Jabri

The daughter of former KSA Official Saad Al-Jabri, is also currently in prison. She was arrested in late 2020 in an attempt to blackmail her father to return from Canada to Saudi Arabia. Sarah, a student, was charged with suspicious monetary transactions and money laundering. On April 23, 2021, she was sentenced to six and a half years in prison, followed by a six and a half- year travel ban. Saad Al-Jabri, a former senior Saudi intelligence official, fled Saudi Arabia in 2017. According to Al-Jabri, he left Saudi Arabia out of fear for his safety and the safety of his family. He claims that he was aware of several high-level corruption cases and had knowledge of sensitive information that could potentially harm powerful individuals within the Saudi government.



Asma Al-Sibaii

A promising university student, was forcibly abducted by authorities from her family's residence in Riyadh. Her arrest was a direct consequence of her social media activities, particularly her tweets and posts defending women's rights in Saudi Arabia. Asma, like Zana al-Shehri, has not yet faced any charges, and her case remains in limbo.



Nourah Al-Qahtani

A devoted mother of five and a fervent social media activist, was arrested in July 2021 due to her online activities. Shockingly, she received the longest sentence ever given to a female in Saudi Arabian history. Nourah's arrest stemmed from her tweets calling for reforms and allegedly undermining public order through social media. In August 2022, she was sentenced to a staggering 45 years in prison.



Dr.Lina Al-Sharif

A physician and passionate human rights activist, was apprehended on May 1, 2021, for her unwavering commitment to advocating for human rights. Her arrest was directly linked to her activism on various social media platforms. Despite her prolonged detention, she has not yet been formally charged, and her case remains unresolved..



Maha Al-Rafidi

A respected Saudi journalist and human rights activist, was forcefully taken into custody on September 28, 2019. Approximately thirty armed and masked individuals raided the home of a family member where Maha was staying. Her arrest was a direct result of her exercise of free speech and activism. Similar to others mentioned, Maha has not received any charges, and her case remains unresolved.



Najlaa Al-Marwan

A passionate human rights activist, blogger, and single mother, was abducted from her home by authorities on July 20, 2021. Her arrest was a direct consequence of her calls for peaceful protests demanding reforms within Saudi Arabia. As of now, Najlaa has not faced any charges, and her case remains unresolved.



Israa Al-Ghamgham

A courageous human rights activist, was arrested on January 1, 2016, for her participation in Al-Qatif demonstrations. She was falsely charged with terrorism-related offenses and causing unrest within Saudi Arabia. On February 10, 2021, Israa received a harsh verdict, sentencing her to eight years in prison.



Aisha al-Marzooq

A dedicated human rights activist and survivor of domestic violence, was apprehended on October 6, 2017, at Riyadh airport upon her return to Saudi Arabia, where she was promised safety. Her arrest was directly linked to her inspiring story of escaping domestic violence. Similar to others, Aisha has not been charged, and her case remains unresolved.



Aida al-Ghamdi

The 66 years old mother of activist Abdullah al-Ghamdi, who lives in exile, was arrested on March 28, 2018. She was subjected to excessive force during her detention, and her arrest was a blatant attempt to pressure her son to cease his activism. Aida, like others, has not received a verdict in her case.

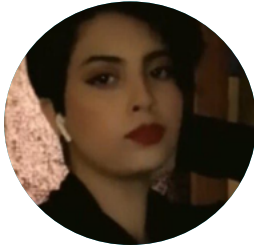
“

My elderly mother and brother are being held hostage because I stand for justice and equality for my fellow Saudis. It is bewildering that the world fails to recognise the oppression occurring in Saudi Arabia against those who dare to advocate for the routinely abducted and tortured.

I am astonished that so many well-meaning sporting celebrities choose to turn a blind eye to the terror inflicted on my mother and other women while they live, play, and collaborate with an oppressive regime.”



Abdullah Al Ghamdi, a Saudi political refugee residing in the U.K.



Reina AbdulAziz

A brave 20-year-old blogger, was arrested on May 13, 2021, during a campaign targeting human rights activists. Her activism primarily focused on advocating for human rights through her social media presence. To date, Reina has not faced any charges, and her case remains unresolved.



Yasmine Al Ghufaili

A young and passionate human rights activist, was arrested on May 17, 2021, as part of a broader campaign targeting bloggers. Her dedicated activism centered around shedding light on human rights issues through social media platforms. Yasmine, similar to others, has not yet been charged, and her case remains unresolved.



Fatima Al-Shawarbi

A Saudi blogger and activist, was arrested in September 2020 due to her thought-provoking tweets under an anonymous profile. Her online posts expressed her opinions on various matters in Saudi Arabia, particularly defending women's rights. Fatima was charged with undermining public order through her social media presence. In May 2023, she received a severe sentence of 30 years in prison, followed by a 30 year travel ban.



Salma Al-Shehab

A dedicated Saudi PhD student studying in the UK and an outspoken human rights activist, was arrested in January 2021. Her arrest was directly linked to her tweets advocating for the freedom of prisoners of conscience, supporting reforms, and expressing solidarity with Palestine. Salma was charged with destabilising society and the state's security, as well as undermining public order. Initially sentenced to 34 years in prison followed by a 34-year travel ban.

The cases of Zana al-Shehri, Sarah Al-Jabri, Asma Al-Sibaii, Nourah Al-Qahtani, Lina Al-Sharif, and many others underscore the ongoing challenges faced by human rights activists in Saudi Arabia. Their imprisonment without charge or verdict represents a concerning violation of basic human rights and freedom of expression. The international community continues to monitor these cases closely and advocate for the fair treatment and release of those arbitrarily and extrajudicially detained.

Male Prisoners of Conscience



Salman al-Odah

A prominent advocate for religious reform, has faced a series of arrests by the Saudi state, with the first occurring in 1994. His most recent detention took place in 2017, and he continues to be held in custody, awaiting trial. The grounds for his arrest were explicitly attributed to a tweet he posted on Twitter, wherein he expressed appreciation for a phone conversation between the Emir of Qatar and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, viewing it as a positive step towards resolving the Gulf crisis. In his tweet, he wrote, “Praise the Lord... O God, soften their hearts toward each other for the good of their peoples.” Although the Gulf crisis has since been resolved, al-Odah remains incarcerated.

“

The impunity enjoyed by MBS, a dictator and killer, due to his deep pockets and control of oil wells. While reformers languish in prison, Western governments enable a sports-washing machine orchestrated by MbS to operate freely in the US and Europe.

”



Abdullah Alaoudh, son of Salman al Ouda,



Ali al-Omari

An esteemed figure in the Arab world, has gained significant popularity through his influential Youth Awareness channel. He holds the position of chairman at TV channel 4Shbab and is recognised for his role as a talk-show host. Al-Omari’s television programs have been instrumental in advocating for women’s rights and actively opposing violent extremism.

Regrettably, al-Omari finds himself facing an alarming predicament as he confronts over 30 terrorism-related charges, including the accusation of “forming a terrorist youth organisation,” carrying the potential consequence of a death sentence. His imprisonment has been marked by distressing accounts of torture, solitary confinement, and the denial of a fair and transparent trial. Disturbing reports suggest that he has endured severe injuries and burns across his body due to the application of electric shocks during his solitary confinement.



Abdulrahman al-Sadhan

A humanitarian, employed by the Red Crescent in Saudi Arabia, Abdulrahman was arrested in March 2018, apparently for voicing peaceful opinions on social media. Since his arrest he has been tortured, held in solitary confinement, separated from his family and forced into hunger strikes. His family are forced to rely on updates on his condition smuggled out of prison by his fellow detainees. He was first able to communicate with his family 23 months after his arrest. In April 2021 he was sentenced to 20 years in prison and a 20-year travel ban.

“



Areej Al-Sadhan Sister of Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan

My brother Abdul Rahman Al Sahdan who was an aid worker for the Red Crescent who was forcibly disappeared simply for expressing opinions and accused of false charges. He was sadly sentenced to 20 years in prison along with a 20 year travel ban upon his release which is an outrageous sentence for what he is wrongly accused of in a modern society Saudi Arabia claims to be.

The UN has declared that Abdul's detention is arbitrary and called for his immediate release, but Saudi Arabia is completely ignoring and not respecting UN laws. Worse still, since his sentence was passed we have not been allowed any communication with him, not even one call, which clearly goes against the very basic human rights.

Whilst people continue to support the current sportswashing in the kingdom, they continue to support the human rights abuses taking place. This has to stop, we have to take a stand to create change in the region.

”



Rabee Hafez

Rabee Hafez is a composer and singer, with a record of supporting the Palestinian people both in his songs and in his activism. Before his arrest, his last tweet was a song for “The heroes of Palestine” and the one before a retweet of Khaled Al-Alkami (also a prisoner) condemning the arrests of clerics and public figures. Arrested in September 2017 and sentenced to three years, Hafez nevertheless remains in prison where he has endured prolonged solitary confinement and been denied access to both his family and a lawyer.



Khaled al-Omair

A dedicated human rights activist, was apprehended by State Security in July 2018, shortly after completing a prolonged eight-year sentence for his alleged involvement in political activities. Al-Omair’s arrest followed his courageous act of filing a complaint against an officer who had subjected him to torture while he was imprisoned. His ordeal included being handcuffed, enduring extensive periods of solitary confinement, and being forced to stand until he lost consciousness. Shockingly, instead of addressing his complaint, the authorities responded by re-arresting him.

Upon his return to prison, al-Omair was confronted with the distressing prospect of being tried in a criminal court specialising in terrorism charges. In protest against this unjust treatment, after enduring six months of enforced disappearance, he initiated a hunger strike. In a clandestine note smuggled out from his prison cell, he defiantly expressed, “I am not a terrorist. I hold opinions and have exercised my fundamental right to freedom of expression.”

In April 2021, al-Omair was sentenced to seven years in prison, and later in August 2021, this sentence was increased to nine years. These harsh rulings further underscore the oppressive environment he has been subjected to, despite his nonviolent activism and peaceful advocacy for human rights.



Essam al-Zamel

Ex-Aramco economist, Blogger, and a businessperson with over 800k followers who expressed his support for human rights and liberties. Essam was known for criticising MBS’s economic vision. Several news outlets reported that his arrest appears to be connected to a series of tweets in which he criticised the proposed initial public offering (IPO) for the Saudi Aramco oil company. However, what was on his official charge sheet was “Communicating with a Qatari figure after the Doha boycott” among other charges. Was sentenced to 15 years in prison on 4 October 2020.



Conclusion



**Our call to action is simple.
Saudi Arabia must:**



- 1.** Immediately release all prisoners of conscience
- 2.** Put an end to abductions, arbitrary arrests, and torture of its citizens.
- 3.** Treat all prisoners humanely.

We urge sports stars and sporting bodies to awaken to the atrocities that Saudi Arabia inflicts upon its people and cease all participation with the country until it demonstrates a genuine commitment to implementing basic human rights.

By accepting money and engaging with Saudi Arabia to host sports events within and outside the Kingdom, you become complicit in a regime that encourages and perpetuates unlawful imprisonment, abduction, torture, and murder.



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