

What Pakistan needs to learn from Saudi Arabia

Nasir Iqbal | 06th May, 2025



Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has been a game-changer, reshaping the kingdom's future and setting a bold path for its development. The kingdom, which has traditionally been governed by conservative norms and heavily dependent on oil revenues, is now aiming to diversify its

economy, promote social reforms, and establish itself as a global player in industries like technology, entertainment, and tourism.

Saudi Arabia is transforming so profoundly that it offers invaluable lessons for countries like Pakistan, which are grappling with their socio-economic challenges, political instability, and governance issues.

Pakistan, like Saudi Arabia, has a rich cultural and historical heritage, but it faces significant challenges in its quest for long-term economic prosperity. Pakistan's economic growth has often been hampered by a lack of policy continuity, political instability, and security concerns.

It is in this context that we should closely examine Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and reflect on how its leadership, approach to transformation, and bold policies can offer valuable insights for Pakistan's transformation journey.

The success of Vision 2030 is rooted in the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), whose vision and strong resolve have played a pivotal role in bringing about real, tangible change. MBS understood that for Saudi Arabia to secure its future, it had to move away from the constraints of oil dependency and transform its socio-economic and political fabric. This transformation is not just about diversifying the economy; it's about changing the mindset of the population, shifting from a closed, traditional society to an open, globally connected, and innovative society.

The boldness of MBS's vision lies in its ability to challenge deeply ingrained social norms and offer a new, forward-looking path for Saudi Arabia. Under his leadership, the kingdom has made significant strides in opening its society, allowing women to drive, expanding access to entertainment, and creating new job opportunities.

These changes have required significant leadership and vision, as they were not simply economic policies but cultural shifts that have deeply impacted the society's way of life. Saudi Arabia's leaders demonstrated the importance of visionary thinking in turning these challenges into opportunities for growth and change.

For Pakistan, this type of transformation is necessary, but not easily achievable. The country's political instability, weak governance, and security concerns have created a deeply fragmented social and economic landscape.

However, it is possible to draw lessons from Saudi Arabia's experience to begin a process of deep-rooted transformation in Pakistan, shifting from a closed, stagnated system to one that is more dynamic, open-minded, and forward-looking.

One of the most significant lessons from Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is the importance of leadership in effecting transformation. MBS's leadership has been central to driving the vision forward, pushing through reforms, and challenging the status quo. His clear sense of purpose, strong resolve, and ability to rally support within the country and from global partners have been critical in making Vision 2030 a reality.

For Pakistan, the question is not just about having a visionary leader, but also about creating an environment where such leadership can thrive. Pakistan's political environment, marked by frequent leadership changes, corruption, and power struggles, has often prevented long-term policies from being effectively implemented. To overcome these challenges, Pakistan needs a political culture that encourages visionary leadership, a commitment to policy continuity, and strong resolve in the face of challenges.

Pakistan must learn from Saudi Arabia's approach to leadership by cultivating a new generation of leaders who are committed to economic

reform, social transformation, and governance. While MBS's leadership has been controversial at times, his ability to push forward a bold, transformative agenda has shown that leadership can be the key to overcoming stagnation and unlocking a country's potential. Similarly, Pakistan needs leaders who can prioritize the long-term future of the nation over short-term political gains, ensuring stability and policy continuity.

Another critical lesson is the importance of aligning economic policies with societal transformation. MBS recognized that the economic diversification of Saudi Arabia could not be achieved without transforming the broader social and cultural structures. He understood that policies aimed at economic reform had to be paired with a change in the public's mindset, moving from a closed-minded society to an open one that embraces global opportunities.

In Pakistan, economic reform will not succeed unless it is accompanied by similar social reforms. For instance, women's empowerment, expanding access to quality education, and fostering an entrepreneurial culture are essential components of any economic growth strategy.

However, Pakistan faces a much more complex challenge in this regard. Unlike Saudi Arabia, where a centralized system of governance allows for faster policy implementation, Pakistan's political system is more fragmented, and its society is deeply divided. Social, ethnic, and religious divisions have often hindered national cohesion and progress.

To fill this gap, Pakistan must work toward bridging these divisions by creating policies that promote inclusivity, social justice, and education. Policies should focus on fostering critical thinking, promoting diversity of thought, and encouraging open-mindedness in the younger generations. Public education reform, vocational training, and entrepreneurship programs could go a long way in helping to change the national mindset.

The third lesson from Saudi Arabia's transformation is the importance of creating an environment that fosters innovation and attracts global investment. MBS's leadership has been instrumental in making Saudi Arabia a more attractive destination for foreign investment, creating a business-friendly environment, and supporting sectors like technology and tourism. Vision 2030 has positioned Saudi Arabia as a leader in the region in terms of infrastructure, technological development, and global partnerships.

For Pakistan, creating such an environment is not only about improving infrastructure, but also about ensuring political stability and security. Policies that promote ease of doing business, reduce corruption, and encourage technological innovation are critical for Pakistan's transformation.

Finally, for Pakistan to embark on this transformative journey, the country must focus on security. Security is a critical factor in implementing economic policies, especially in a politically unstable environment. Saudi Arabia has been able to make significant strides despite regional security concerns because it has strong internal security and a clear vision.

Pakistan, on the other hand, faces challenges on both internal and external fronts, with security issues ranging from terrorism to border tensions. For transformation to be effective, Pakistan needs a multi-faceted security strategy that ensures the safety of its citizens, attracts investment, and stabilizes its political system.

In conclusion, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 offers important lessons for Pakistan in terms of leadership, transformation, and policy implementation. While the challenges are significant, particularly in a politically unstable and security-conscious environment, the key lies in creating a long-term vision, prioritizing leadership and governance reforms, and focusing on inclusivity and innovation.

By adopting some of the principles behind Saudi Arabia's transformation, Pakistan can set itself on a path toward a more open-minded, dynamic, and prosperous future. The road will be challenging, but with strong leadership and commitment to a transformative agenda, the gap can be filled, and real change can be achieved.

(The writer is an Associate Professor and Registrar at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE). He can be reached at: nasir@pide.org.pk)

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