In January 2018, human rights activists and co-founders of the Union for Human Rights Mohammed al-Otaibi and Abdullah al-Attawi have been sentenced to 14 and seven years in prison, respectively, for “forming an unlicensed organization.” Both were tried in the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), which tries terrorism cases.

Community activist Issa al-Nukhaifi was sentenced in February 2018 to six years in prison and a six-year travel ban on charges of insulting the authorities and inciting opposition to the state under the Anti-Cyber Crimes Law. Al-Nukhaifi tweeted his opposition to the war in Yemen and advocated for the release of people associated with banned NGOs. He was tried by the SCC.
Many other fundamental issues have been left unaddressed. As of now, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remains:

- **An absolute monarchy ruled by the al Saud family.** Rulers are male heirs of Abdulaziz bin Saud and derive their authority “from the Book of God and the Sunna,” not from the people. Elections are held only at the local level, for municipal bodies with almost no authority.

- **Among the nine most politically repressive governments in the world.** Political rights and civil liberties have decreased as a result of the government’s moves to narrow the already-minuscule political space and its efforts to suppress members of the Shi’a minority.

- **One of three countries (along with China and Iran) carrying out the most executions, including for nonviolent offenses.** Crimes punishable by death—primarily through public beheadings or stoning—include blasphemy; atheism; sexual misconduct; homosexuality; the possession, use, or sale of alcohol/drugs; as well as terrorism, which is defined vaguely to include nonviolent political criticism and dissent.

- **Marked by strict religious intolerance.** It is illegal to “cast doubt on the fundamentals of Islam” and to openly practice non-Islamic religions, including for the roughly 10 million foreign residents in the Kingdom, many of whom follow other religions. Shi’a Muslims are subjected to severe discrimination and abuse, such as in August 2017 when authorities demolished much of Awamiya, a city that is home to 30,000 Shi’a residents.

- **The only country requiring women to live under supervision of a male guardian.** Despite a loosening of guardianship laws in February 2018, the Saudi state still requires a woman to obtain permission from her guardian to travel, marry, and even access some medical, legal, and residential services. Women are barred from job sectors deemed too hazardous, such as construction and energy.

Activist **Maryam al-Otaibi** was detained for more than 100 days in 2017 after her family reported her to authorities for disobedience because she was not at home. She was eventually released based on a lack of evidence.

**Dina Ali Lasloom** tried to escape a forced marriage in April 2017, but was stopped at the airport in Manila and forcibly returned to Saudi Arabia for violating guardianship laws. She has not been seen or heard from since, and authorities will not say if she is in jail or back with her family, who she told witnesses at the airport would kill her if she was returned.