



## [Even Government Allies are Not Exempt from Saudi Repression as 10 Former Judges are Tried for "High Treason"](#)

In February 2023, the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) in Riyadh, which is known for prosecuting “terrorism” cases, charged six former prominent SCC judges and four former High Court judges with high treason, a crime punishable by death in Saudi Arabia. According to Washington-based ‘Democracy Now in the Arab World’ (DAWN), the 10 former judges were charged with high treason for neglecting to inflict severe punishments in cases they tried. The government has refused the defendant's legal representation and has kept them imprisoned since their arrest on April 11th, 2022. DAWN stated that the SCC judges had to "sign admissions declaring they had been too 'lenient'" in the cases they tried. This charge against the judges is emblematic of the Crown Prince's wider purges within the country and his attempts to make the judiciary subservient solely to his wishes.

The charges against the former judges have been criticized by DAWN, a human rights organization created by dissident Saudi writer Jamal Khashoggi just before his murder and dismemberment in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. DAWN's Gulf director Abdullah Alaoudh stated that the shocking charges leveled against these judges demonstrate that no one is safe in Saudi Arabia. Among the former SCC judges accused are Abdullah bin Khaled al-Luhaidan and Abdulaziz bin Medawi al-Jaber, who has been directly linked by DAWN to violations of human rights in Saudi Arabia. Loujain Alhathloul, a well-known advocate for women's rights, was found guilty by al-Luhaidan in December 2020 on bogus terrorist accusations, while al-Jaber was responsible for the execution of 81 people in March 2022 after having condemned many more to death, including a juvenile.

The charges against the former judges could be seen as a warning to current judges, who might now be hesitant to rule against the wishes of the Crown Prince. Judges who were loyal to the Crown Prince in the past but are not aligned with him now may also be concerned about their safety. The charges could also affect the confidence of the international community in Saudi Arabia's legal system. The government's refusal to provide legal representation to the defendants is a clear violation of their rights, and their imprisonment since their arrest without trial raises concerns about the fairness of their trial. The lack of transparency and due process in their prosecution raises further concerns about the rule of law in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia has been criticized for its human rights record, particularly about its legal system and treatment of political dissidents. The country has a strict interpretation of Sharia law, and the justice system is heavily reliant on confessions, which are often obtained through coercion or torture. This often leads to unfair trials and a lack of due process. These issues can have significant implications for civil societies in Saudi Arabia to push for democracy. The lack of political freedom and the suppression of dissent can stifle political opposition and prevent the emergence of alternative voices. Furthermore, the

use of the legal system to punish political opponents or critics can undermine the legitimacy of the government and erode public trust.

In conclusion, the charges of high treason against former judges in Saudi Arabia demonstrate the Crown Prince's attempts to control the judiciary, which will lead to a loss of confidence in the legal system from the international community. Although Saudi Arabia has made some socioeconomic changes, the ongoing purges of dissidents and human rights activists raise concerns about the government's commitment to human rights and the rule of law. To move towards democracy, Saudi Arabia will need to address these issues and work towards establishing a fair and impartial legal system, which will require reforms to the justice system, greater protections for political freedom and freedom of speech, and a commitment to human rights.