

## From Moderation to Modernization: Media, Religion and Cultural Reconfiguration in Saudi Arabia

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### **Abstract:**

Saudi Arabia is experiencing an accelerated reconfiguration of its cultural and social order, in which media functions as both a site of negotiation and an instrument of transformation. Historically embedded in a tightly regulated system privileging religious authority and state stability, Saudi media has simultaneously projected international narratives of modernization. This duality persists but is now rearticulated through cultural institutions such as the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) and events like the Diriyah Biennale. These practices exemplify a symbolic rebranding where Islam is mobilized not as a counterpoint to modernity but as a legitimizing resource for cultural diplomacy and economic diversification within Vision 2030.

From a cultural studies perspective, these shifts signal not secularization but a reorganization of religious discourse under state hegemony, embodied in the Crown Prince's call for a "return to moderation." Media thus becomes a mediating apparatus through which religion retains symbolic centrality while its institutional power is recalibrated. Women's increased participation as content creators, journalists, and filmmakers further illustrates how gender identities are being renegotiated within mediated spaces. Rather than eroding tradition, media practices reveal how religion, gender, and nation are reimagined in mutually constitutive ways.

### **Keywords:**

Cultural studies, media, Islam, gender, nation-building.