

Saudi Arabia Is Arresting People for Tweeting About Unemployment

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Note: the original article is provided as a separate file (attached to the email or downloadable from the website).

1. Reading Passage

In late 2025, Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Media Regulation announced it had summoned 49 people for questioning over 68 alleged violations committed on social media. Their offense was not terrorism or fraud. It was complaining – about unemployment, and about foreigners holding senior jobs at a state-owned company. The clause cited was broad enough to swallow almost anything: a section of the Audio Visual Media Act that bans 'disrupting public order, national security and the requirements of the public interest.'

The immediate flashpoint was Qiddiya, an enormous entertainment and sports complex being built on the outskirts of Riyadh and owned by the Public Investment Fund, the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund. A LinkedIn account had claimed that 'underqualified' Western expatriates were dominating critical departments at the project. Users amplified the post, circulating screenshots of expatriate employees – among them a former New Zealand footballer now in a senior role. The Financial Times reported that it could not independently verify the LinkedIn account or its claims. A person close to Qiddiya said hiring Saudi nationals was a priority, but acknowledged that only 40 percent of employees were currently Saudi citizens.

On paper, Saudi Arabia's labor market looks healthier than ever. Citizen unemployment closed the previous year at a record-low 7.2 percent. But headline numbers can hide a lot. The US–Israeli war on Iran has rattled the region, and the Saudi government was already delaying some projects because of tightening liquidity and widening fiscal deficits. When officials held a job fair in the northwestern city of Tabuk, 13,000 people registered – an uncomfortable image for a state whose flagship promise is jobs for its young, fast-growing citizenry.

The government's response is revealing. Media minister Salman al-Dosary, who also chairs the regulator, said the state welcomed 'objective criticism' but had moved against people engaged in 'agitating and misleading' the public. The line between the two is, conveniently, drawn by the regulator he runs. Human rights groups linked the summons to the LinkedIn posts. Some expatriates in Saudi Arabia agreed that unfair practices existed in the job market but argued individual foreigners should not be targeted online; one Polish digital marketer wrote on TikTok that combing through random foreigners' accounts felt strange.

What makes this episode more than a local quarrel is the political logic underneath it. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 program promises to transform the economy away from oil dependence by building new industries, including tourism and entertainment. That promise carries an implicit deal: citizens will get the good jobs that come with the transformation. When ordinary Saudis go online to argue that the deal isn't being honored – that expatriates, not citizens, are running the showcase projects – they are not just venting. They are publicly scoring the government against its own pledge. By summoning the complainers rather than addressing the complaint, Riyadh has chosen to manage the perception of failure rather than risk debating its reality. The cost of that choice is subtle but important: a state that punishes feedback eventually stops receiving it, which means it also stops knowing when its plans are veering off course.

2. Explanation

Imagine getting hauled in for questioning because you complained on TikTok that your dream job went to a foreigner. In Saudi Arabia right now, that's not hypothetical – it's policy.

What's Going On?

Saudi Arabia's media regulator has summoned 49 people over 68 alleged 'violations' for social-media posts complaining about unemployment and the hiring of foreigners for senior jobs at state-owned companies. The trigger was a wave of online anger about expatriates running key departments at Qiddiya – a giant entertainment and sports complex being built outside Riyadh by the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund.

Officially, the unemployment rate among Saudi citizens hit a record low of 7.2% at the end of last year. But the wider economy has been wobbling: oil revenue is squeezed, deficits are widening, and some mega-projects are being delayed. When 13,000 people showed up to a single job fair in Tabuk, it was hard to pretend everything was fine.

How To Think About It

This isn't really a story about TikTok. It's about what happens when an authoritarian state stakes its legitimacy on an economic transformation – and the citizens it promised to enrich start asking awkward questions out loud.

- Think of a soccer manager who guarantees the title in pre-season. When the team stumbles in October, he doesn't just lose games – he loses the dressing room. Saudi Vision 2030 made a similar promise: jobs, prosperity, national renewal. Complaints about foreigners getting the best roles aren't just gripes; they're scoreboard-watching.
- Or think of HOA rules that ban 'unsightly' yard signs right before an election. The Audio Visual Media Act bans 'disrupting public order' – vague enough to cover almost anything, which is the point. Vague rules give the referee total discretion over which fouls to call.

Key Things To Know

- 49 people were summoned over 68 alleged violations of a clause banning 'disrupting public order, national security and the requirements of the public interest.'
- Qiddiya – owned by the Public Investment Fund, Saudi Arabia's roughly \$900-billion sovereign wealth fund – says only 40% of its employees are currently Saudi citizens.
- A LinkedIn account drew outrage by claiming 'underqualified' Western expats dominated critical departments; users then circulated screenshots, including one of a former New Zealand footballer now running a senior role at Qiddiya. The FT could not verify the claims.
- Media minister Salman al-Dosary – who also chairs the regulator summoning the posters – said the government welcomes 'objective criticism' but is targeting 'agitating and misleading' speech. He gets to decide which is which.
- What people miss: 'Saudization' (replacing foreign workers with citizens) has been official policy for over a decade. The crackdown isn't against the complaint itself – it's against citizens making the

government look like it's failing at its own goal.

Why It Matters

Saudi Arabia is the world's biggest oil exporter, a top buyer of American weapons, and the host of the 2034 World Cup. If you'll be watching that tournament, applying for an internship at a Gulf-linked firm, or just following oil prices that move what you pay at the pump – the question of whether Vision 2030 actually delivers jobs for young Saudis (half the country is under 30) shapes a lot of what your adult world will look like. It's also a live case study in something you'll see again and again: governments that try to modernize economically while keeping a tight lid politically.

The Bigger Picture

The deeper tension here is old: every oil-rich autocracy from Venezuela to the UAE has tried to convert hydrocarbon wealth into a diversified, knowledge-based economy before the oil runs out or the world stops buying it. Almost none have nailed it. Watch three things: whether Qiddiya and similar 'gigaprojects' actually open on schedule, whether the share of Saudi nationals in private-sector senior roles climbs above today's 40% benchmark, and whether the crackdown spreads from job complaints to other economic grievances. If citizens learn that complaining about expats gets you summoned, the safer move is to stop complaining – which means the government also stops hearing real signals about whether its plan is working.

3. Key Terms Glossary

Saudization (Nitaqat)

A long-running Saudi policy that requires companies to hire a minimum percentage of Saudi citizens rather than foreign workers, especially in senior or skilled roles.

Public Investment Fund (PIF)

Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund – a state-owned investment vehicle that holds hundreds of billions of dollars and bankrolls 'gigaprojects' like Qiddiya, NEOM, and stakes in companies like LIV Golf and Uber.

Gigaproject

Saudi shorthand for the country's enormous, multi-billion-dollar construction schemes – new cities, resorts, and entertainment complexes designed to diversify the economy away from oil.

Qiddiya

A planned entertainment, sports, and culture complex on the outskirts of Riyadh, owned by the PIF and intended as a major tourism destination.

Vision 2030

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's flagship plan, launched in 2016, to wean Saudi Arabia off oil dependence by building tourism, entertainment, tech, and finance sectors.

General Authority of Media Regulation

The Saudi government body that licenses media and enforces content rules, including punishing social-media posts deemed harmful to 'public order.'

Liquidity (in government finance)

The amount of readily available cash a government has on hand to spend; tightening liquidity means the state has less cash flexibility, often due to lower oil revenue or rising debt costs.

Expatriate (expat)

A person living and working outside their country of citizenship – in Saudi Arabia, expats make up roughly a third of the population and a large share of the workforce.

4. Reading Comprehension Quiz

Circle the best answer for each question.

- Q1.** The passage most directly argues that the Saudi crackdown reflects which underlying tension?
- A) A religious dispute between conservative clerics and reformist citizens
 - B) A clash between economic modernization promises and tolerance for public dissent
 - C) A diplomatic conflict between Saudi Arabia and Western expatriate-sending nations
 - D) A budget fight between the media regulator and the Public Investment Fund
- Q2.** According to the passage, the summoned posters were accused of violating a clause that bans which of the following?
- A) Spreading falsehoods about named government officials
 - B) Disrupting public order, national security, and the public interest
 - C) Posting workplace photos without employer permission
 - D) Encouraging citizens to boycott state-owned companies
- Q3.** The passage indicates that Qiddiya's current workforce is:
- A) Almost entirely staffed by Western expatriates
 - B) Roughly 40% Saudi citizens, with citizen hiring a stated priority
 - C) Subject to a hiring freeze due to widening deficits
 - D) Made up mostly of South Asian construction workers
- Q4.** As used in the passage, the word 'agitating' most nearly means:
- A) Mechanically stirring or shaking
 - B) Stirring up public anger or unrest
 - C) Worrying or upsetting oneself
 - D) Campaigning peacefully for reform
- Q5.** As used in the passage, the word 'tight' (in 'keeping a tight lid politically') most nearly means:
- A) Stretched without slack
 - B) Restrictive and tightly controlled
 - C) Friendly and closely bonded
 - D) Financially stingy
- Q6.** Which statement about the LinkedIn account can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?
- A) Its claims have been verified by Saudi state media
 - B) Its authenticity and accuracy remain unconfirmed by reporters
 - C) It was created by Qiddiya's human resources department
 - D) It has been removed by LinkedIn for policy violations
- Q7.** The passage suggests that the timing of the crackdown is connected to:
- A) Rising tensions between Saudi Arabia and New Zealand
 - B) Economic strain from regional conflict and tighter government finances
 - C) A surge in foreign tourists during the summer season
 - D) A leadership change at the General Authority of Media Regulation

Q8. The author's tone toward the Saudi media regulator is best described as:

- A)** Openly hostile and condemnatory
- B)** Skeptical and quietly ironic
- C)** Admiring and broadly supportive
- D)** Neutral and purely descriptive

Q9. Which statement about Saudi unemployment can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

- A)** Official statistics tell the full story of citizen job anxiety
- B)** Headline jobless figures can coexist with widespread anxiety about jobs
- C)** Unemployment among citizens has risen sharply in the past year
- D)** Foreign workers have largely left the Saudi labor market

Q10. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A)** The reference to the Audio Visual Media Act and its broad clause
- B)** The mention of a record-low 7.2% rate alongside a 13,000-person job fair
- C)** The description of Qiddiya as a Public Investment Fund gigaproject
- D)** The note that the FT could not verify the LinkedIn account's claims

My Score: _____ / 10

5. Answer Key with Explanations

Q1. The passage most directly argues that the Saudi crackdown reflects which underlying tension?

Answer: B

The passage frames the arrests as an authoritarian state staking legitimacy on Vision 2030 while punishing citizens who publicly question whether it's working – that's modernization vs. dissent. (A) is a real-world Saudi tension but the passage never mentions clerics; classic Trap C. SAT Tip: 'Primarily argues' questions reward the choice that captures the whole passage's thesis, not a single colorful detail – eliminate options that only fit one paragraph.

Q2. According to the passage, the summoned posters were accused of violating a clause that bans which of the following?

Answer: B

The passage cites a clause of the Audio Visual Media Act banning 'disrupting public order, national security and the requirements of the public interest.' (A) sounds plausible but isn't the clause described – Trap B, using nearby vocabulary in a wrong combination. SAT Tip: For 'according to the passage' questions, find the exact line in the text before looking at the options; never rely on what sounds reasonable.

Q3. The passage indicates that Qiddiya's current workforce is:

Answer: B

The passage directly states that 40% of Qiddiya employees are Saudi and that employing citizens is a priority for the project. (A) exaggerates the LinkedIn account's claim into a fact – Trap C, a real-world-plausible idea unsupported by the passage. SAT Tip: Numbers in the passage are gold – anchor your answer to the exact figure rather than to a vibe.

Q4. As used in the passage, the word 'agitating' most nearly means:

Answer: B

The media minister contrasted 'objective criticism' with 'agitating and misleading' speech – he means stirring up unrest, the target of the crackdown. (A) is the literal/chemistry meaning, the classic vocab-in-context trap. SAT Tip: On vocab-in-context, substitute each option for the word and reread the sentence – the right answer keeps the original meaning intact.

Q5. As used in the passage, the word 'tight' (in 'keeping a tight lid politically') most nearly means:

Answer: B

The phrase describes a government tightly controlling political expression while loosening economic rules; 'tight lid' means restrictive control. (A) is the literal physical meaning – a common-meaning trap. SAT Tip: Idioms work as units – translate the whole phrase ('keep a tight lid') into plain English first, then match it to the option.

Q6. Which statement about the LinkedIn account can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

Answer: B

The passage states the FT could not independently verify the account or its claims – meaning the authenticity is unconfirmed. (A) reverses the truth and is Trap A (right scope, wrong direction). SAT Tip: 'Can be inferred' answers should require only a small logical step beyond the text – if you need to add new facts, you've gone too far.

Q7. The passage suggests that the timing of the crackdown is connected to:

Answer: B

The passage links the renewed anxiety to the US-Israeli war on Iran, project delays, tightening liquidity, and widening deficits – all economic strain. (A) mistakes a single colorful detail (a New Zealand footballer) for a geopolitical cause; Trap B, using passage vocabulary out of context. SAT Tip: When a question asks about cause, find the explicit 'because' or 'triggered by' clauses in the text rather than connecting dots yourself.

Q8. The author's tone toward the Saudi media regulator is best described as:

Answer: B

Lines like 'He gets to decide which is which' and the HOA analogy convey skepticism with a wry edge – not neutral, but not a rant either. (D) is tempting because the piece reports facts, but the asides reveal a viewpoint; Trap C, plausible but ignores the editorial touches. SAT Tip: Tone questions hinge on small word choices (sarcastic asides, loaded adjectives) – scan for those before picking 'neutral.'

Q9. Which statement about Saudi unemployment can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

Answer: B

The passage notes a record-low 7.2% citizen unemployment alongside 13,000 people flooding a single job fair and online anger – the headline number understates the anxiety. (C) contradicts the record-low figure (Trap A: wrong direction). SAT Tip: When a passage juxtaposes a reassuring statistic with worried behavior, the inference is almost always 'the statistic doesn't capture the whole picture.'

Q10. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

Answer: B

The juxtaposition of the low official rate with the huge job-fair turnout is exactly the evidence that headline numbers and on-the-ground anxiety can diverge. (A) supports a different claim about vague laws, not unemployment perception; Trap B. SAT Tip: For evidence-pairing questions, restate your previous answer in one sentence, then pick the option whose words most directly prove that sentence.