



# SAUDI ARABIA

## Key facts

**Official name:** Mamlaka al Arabiya as Sa'udiya (The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)

**Head of State:** The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al Sa'ud (from 1 Aug 2005)

**Head of government:** King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al Sa'ud (from 1 Aug 2005)

**Area:** 2,149,690 square km (approximately)

**Capital city:** Riyadh

**Official language/s:** Arabic

Mainly Arabic, with English widely spoken in business and diplomatic circles.

**Population:** 23.34 million (2004)

In 2003, over 42 per cent of the population was under the age of 15 and just under 3 per cent over 65 years.

**Ethnic make-up:** The majority of Saudis originate in the peninsula and are of Arab extraction, but there is a sizeable minority of the population which has migrated mainly from central Asia and China. One-third of the population is non-Saudi. Most of these are from Yemen, Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines as well as a significant number from Western Europe and North America.

**Religions:** The majority of the population is Sunni (Wahhabi) Muslim, with around 8 per cent Shi'a Muslim, the latter being mainly located in the Hasa (Eastern) Province. Sufism is practised throughout the Hejaz, and

there is a Sunni Salafi opposition movement which, in particular, opposes the authoritarian rule of the clergy. Islam's two holiest cities of Makkah (Mecca) and Medina are both in Saudi Arabia.

Despite Islam's recognition of Christians and Jews as People of the Book, public adherence to other faiths is forbidden in the Kingdom.

**Form of state:** Absolute monarchy

**Independence date:** 1927

**Ruling party:** No political parties – absolute monarchy.

**Last elections:** None

**Next elections:** Legislative elections are not held. February 2005 (local elections; women are barred from voting)

## KEY INDICATORS

	Unit	2002	2003	2004
Population	m	21.98	22.66	*23.34
Gross domestic product (GDP)	US\$bn	188.70	214.70	*250.56
GDP per capita	US\$	8,584	8,879	9,972
GDP real growth	%	2.1	2.9	5.3
Inflation	%	-0.4	0.7	0.2
Oil output	'000 bpd	8,680	9,817	10,584
Natural gas output	bn cum	56.4	61.0	64.0
Exports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	67,270	84,076	126,063
Imports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	30,950	33,928	40,841
Balance of trade	US\$m	38,700	50,148	85,222
Current account	US\$m	11,680	29,702	49,280



The figures here are drawn from the IMF, World Bank and other international, as well as local government, sources. While Worldinformation.com endeavours to be as up-to-date as possible, it cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies.

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