



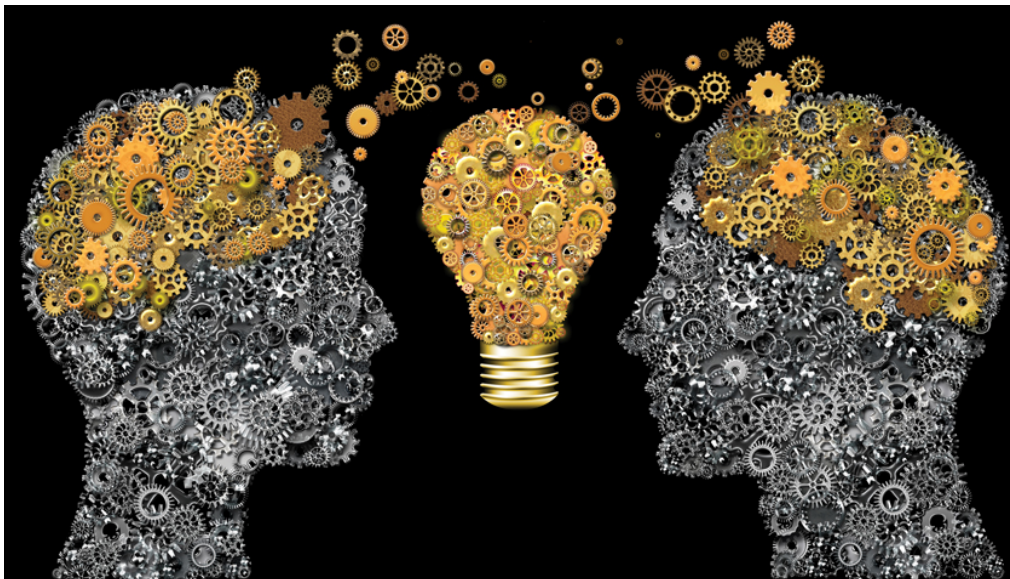
GOVERN
ECONOMIC AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE CENTER

Governance of Arab Think Tanks

For Stakeholder Impact and Sustainability

Flagship Report for the T20

Analysis and Recommendations



Commissioned by the King Abdullah Petroleum
Studies and Research Center

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ABOUT KAPSARC

KAPSARC was founded as a non-profit institution for independent research into petroleum and global energy, environmental, and energy economics issues. It brings together an international group of expert researchers of more than 20 nationalities. From its base in one of the world's most important energy-producing regions, KAPSARC develops economic frameworks to help achieve effective alignment between energy policy objectives and outcomes.

KAPSARC researchers collaborate with leading international research centers, public policy organizations, and industrial and government institutions, to share knowledge, insights and analytical frameworks. Affordable, sustainable energy underpins the growth of a country's economy and the wellbeing of its citizens. As such, effective energy policy is one of the greatest challenges for governments and other stakeholders across the globe.

KAPSARC is a non-government, non-profit institution located in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Center was established by the Saudi Council of Ministers, and its facilities were opened in 2013. KAPSARC's activities are funded by an endowment provided by the Government of Saudi Arabia. Through its research, KAPSARC aims to improve societal well-being and prosperity both in the region and worldwide. KAPSARC's research can be accessed at <https://www.kapsarc.org>

ABOUT GOVERN CENTER

GOVERN - the Economic and Corporate Governance Center - is a niche advisory and research institute specialising in economic and corporate governance in emerging markets. We work alongside decision-makers to create legal and regulatory policies as well as construct institutions that promote business integrity, corporate governance and support the competitiveness of the region's capital markets and firms.

The Institute provides specialist advice on capital markets development and corporate governance to stock exchanges, securities regulators, Central Banks, Ministries, sovereign actors and other regulators in the region. The team is comprised of senior practitioners with experience in leading securities regulators, stock exchanges, banks, academia and international organisations.

GOVERN's experience developing policies for regulators and implementing them for corporates is complementary and gives us the flexibility to create teams of professionals with targeted regulatory, financial and economic experience. GOVERN Senior Advisors have accumulated expertise in a range of financial markets and governance matters as well as relevant academic and private sector experience.

With a decade long advisory and research experience in the Middle East, GOVERN experts have also spent decades working on corporate governance in other emerging markets as well as in Europe and North America. GOVERN has published a range of reports and articles on governance in the MENA region which can be accessed at <http://www.govern.center>.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	5
INTRODUCTION.....	6
METHODOLOGY.....	8
PART I. OVERVIEW OF THE SECTOR	10
The Landscape of Arab Think Tanks.....	10
Resources of Arab Think Tanks.....	15
The Legal Framework	17
Governance and Research Independence.....	21
PART II. THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK.....	26
Founding Documents.....	26
Board Nomination and Composition.....	28
Board Diversity	32
Board Expertise.....	34
Board Committees.....	34
Senior Leadership Role and Responsibilities.....	36
PART III. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	39
PART IV. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	44
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	51
Legal Framework.....	51
Board Level Governance.....	51
Strategy and Risk Management	52
Stakeholder Relations	52
ANNEXES.....	54
Annex I. Arab Think Tanks, Classified by Country	54
Annex II. Online Survey.....	59

FIGURES

Figure 1- MENA Think tanks in the Global Context.....	10
Figure 2- Geographic Distribution of Think Tanks (n=140)	11
Figure 3- Geographic Distribution of Select Think Tanks (n=40).....	11
Figure 4- Geographic Focus of Activities (n=140)	12
Figure 5 - Thematic Orientation (n=140).....	14
Figure 6- Collaborations of think tanks (n=40).....	15
Figure 7- Legal Status of Think Tanks (n=40)	17
Figure 8- Affiliation of Arab think tanks (n=140)	21
Figure 9- Self -Perception of the Think Tank's Affiliation (n=24)	22
Figure 10- Stakeholder Perception of the Think Tank Affiliation (n=24).....	22
Figure 11- Perception of the Think Tank Affiliation (n=24)	23
Figure 12- Governance Priorities, Select Think Tanks (n=24).....	24
Figure 13- Founding Documents (n=24).....	26
Figure 14- Presence of Board, Board Charter and Code of Ethics (n=40)	27
Figure 15- Presence of Risk and Audit Frameworks (n=40).....	27
Figure 16- Board Size of Think Tanks (n=140)	28
Figure 17- Board size of think tanks by country (n=140)	29
Figure 18- Board size by type of think tank (n=40)	30
Figure 19- Board Diversity in Select Think Tanks (n=40).....	33
Figure 20- Needed Expertise, Select Think Tanks (n =24).....	34
Figure 21- Committees of the Board (n=40)	35
Figure 22- Frequency of Board meetings, Select Think Tanks (n=24).....	36
Figure 23- Appointment of Senior Executives, Select Think Tanks (n=24)	37
Figure 24- Mechanisms to Appoint Senior Executives, Select Think Tanks (n=24)	37
Figure 25- Experience of Senior Management, Select Think Tanks (n=24)	38
Figure 26- Key roles in the organisation (n=40)	38
Figure 27- Disclosure Provided, Select Think Tanks (n=24).....	39
Figure 28- Disclosure of Key Documents and Projects (n=40).....	40
Figure 29- Availability of an updated annual report (n=140).....	41
Figure 30- Availability of budget information (n=40)	41
Figure 31- Budget Disclosed, Select Think tanks (n =40)	42
Figure 32- Audit and compliance functions (n=40)	43
Figure 33- Critical Challenges, Select Think Tanks (n=24)	44
Figure 34- Trust Building Mechanisms, (n=24).....	45
Figure 35- Stakeholder Engagement, Select Think Tanks (n=24).....	45
Figure 36- Impact Assessments, Select Think Tanks (n=24).....	46
Figure 37- KPIs Utilised in Impact Assessments (n=24).....	47
Figure 38- Sources of Risk, Select Think Tanks (n=24).....	48
Figure 39- Risk Management Mechanisms, Select Think Tanks (n=24).....	48
Figure 40- Impact of Better Governance, Select Think Tanks (n=24)	49
Figure 41- Most Important Governance Obstacles, Select Think Tanks (n=24)	49
Figure 42- Governance Priorities, Select Think Tanks (n=24).....	50

TABLES

Table 1- Top Ten Think Arab Think Tanks (by size).....	12
Table 2- Governance Elements of NGO laws, Select Countries.....	19
Table 3- Board Structure at Select Large Think Tanks (n=40).....	32

PREFACE

Independent research is of crucial importance as Arab countries, their governments and citizens face important socio-economic challenges ranging from youth employment to energy sustainability to political instability. At the same time, the region has not been historically recognized for its capacity to produce independent research: instead, research on the Middle East was produced outside of the region.

In recent years, this trend has reversed and think tanks based in the region – whether they are affiliated with governments, the private sector or academic institutions – have sought to and are continuing to meaningfully contribute to the important policy debates of relevance to the future prosperity of the region. We believe that across the region, they are making a key contribution in a number of areas.

As the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has assumed the G20 Presidency in 2020, the issue of think tank sustainability is considered as being of critical importance to facilitating thought leadership and innovation in the region. It is for this reason that the T20, led this year by the King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center and the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, considers it of vital importance to focus on the governance of think tanks in the region.

While governance as a discipline has gained importance within the private and public sectors across the region and its importance for the future of the region's economies is increasingly recognized, governance of think tanks has to date not been addressed adequately, with the result that practices in the region remain extremely variable, and in some instances may put future sustainability of these entities at risk.

While a number of large think tanks now operate in the region, many face significant resource challenges and concerns about their independence, which fundamentally endangers their operating model as well as the relevance of their activities. An examination of the regulatory framework governing think tanks as well as a benchmarking of actual practices is needed to identify positive examples and create a platform for sharing them.

In order to isolate best practices as well as existing weaknesses in the governance of Arab think tanks, KAPSARC has commissioned GOVERN - a leading niche governance research and advisory Center, to develop the present report based on a first of a kind review of practices across the region, based on extensive primary and secondary research and unique data collection.

This report “Governance of Arab Think Tanks for Stakeholder Impact and Long-Term Sustainability”, provides an overview of the development of the sector and its governance, analyses practices and challenges that the sector faces, and ultimately provides a roadmap with best practices and recommendations to address the sustainability of the sector, notably from a governance perspective.

We hope that the findings of this report will add value to the future of the think tank community in the region, while being relevant to the broader stakeholder community to which some of the recommendations contained in this report are addressed, including policymakers, donors, and international organisations.

Alissa Amico, Managing Director, GOVERN Center

Fahad Alturki, Chairman T20 and VP, Head of Research, KAPSARC

Adam Seminski, President, KAPSARC

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East region has for decades now been subject to significant research by a range of international actors - academic, governmental and more recently private - as the region is of long-standing geopolitical and commercial interest. Historically, however, most of the research on the Arab world has originated from outside the region, including from leading universities such as Harvard, Oxford, the LSE, SOAS and others, some of which have established dedicated centers.

During the past three decades, this picture has shifted with the creation of domestic think tanks and research centers. According to our latest research, the region is now home to approximately 140 active think tanks and many more research initiatives housed by foundations, universities, corporations and government bodies. This explosion of research bodies across the Middle East has been propelled by a range of forces.

Most recently, the growth of the think tank community in the region has been facilitated by the development of private philanthropy which supports research on the Arab world. Corporate philanthropy, although a relatively new concept in the region, beyond the zakat requirements included in Shari'a law, has also supported the establishment of new think tanks and research centers.

The growth of domestic research institutions has been facilitated by other trends, notably large international universities establishing regional presence¹ as well as the expansion of the research agenda of local universities. With the trend for local actors, both corporate and governmental, to further diversify the sources of economic rents by fostering the knowledge economy, research activities are now recognized as being of national priority.

In the years following political instability in many countries of the region, international donors have also established new entities to promote independent thinking or have decided to support the agenda of existing think tanks and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs). As explored further in this report, their choice of whether to establish new institutes or support existing initiatives has had a fundamental impact on the regional think tank community.

These trends have resulted in a rapid growth of research centers and think tanks not only focusing on the Arab world, but also based in the region. This has in turn translated into a richer research agenda, less dominated by peace and security and international relations issues which have historically dominated academic discourse in the region. As explored in this report, the addition of new entities has resulted in a broader thematic focus and broader geographic coverage of think tanks.

These developments have led to a richer, but also a more complex landscape of research organisations operating in the region, contributing to regional social and economic development priorities, and aiming to shape government policy and public opinion. As a result, we are now witnessing a growing competition among various actors producing research on the region from within the region. Competition among think tanks has been reinforced after revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia which led some donors to establishing additional independent initiatives.

This competition extends beyond the pure think tank community insofar as many other actors conducting research on the region are organized as NGOs (foundations, specialized sectoral bodies, etc.) as well as commercial entities (which produce research on the region directly or through philanthropic entities they have established for this purpose).² Some entities such as business federations also act or host think tanks which focus on business environment issues.³

¹ These include, for instance, New York University in Abu Dhabi and the Sorbonne University in Doha.

² Refer to for example, <https://www.legatum.com/philanthropy/>

³ In Tunisia for example, the Institut Arabe des Chefs d'Entreprises hosts a governance think tank which operates quasi-independently.

The growth of the think tank sector warrants new and innovative governance approaches for research organisations in the region to effectively deliver on their mission and to foster stakeholder confidence. While corporate governance in the region has been subject to significant attention since the turn of the millennium, governance of think tanks and research institutions has not been addressed so far.

Over the past two decades, the region has seen significant developments and improvements in governance in the corporate sector, notably among the listed companies, and less so among state-owned entities and family companies. Almost all countries in region have introduced dedicated corporate governance codes, which have been revised, raising the bar notably in terms of board composition and also in terms of the quality of disclosure.

Some efforts have also been made to improve governance in the public sector and among quasi-public institutions. Similarly, in recent years the university sector has also demonstrated some interest in governance. However, these efforts have not percolated easily to the think tank sector. As a result, governance approaches adopted by think tanks in the region display extreme diversity and tend to be less formalized than in regional corporates.

These existing ad-hoc approaches towards think tank governance are facilitated by the fact that while the corporate sector is increasingly regulated from a governance perspective, the think tank sector is not subject to specific regulations in terms of its governance. As discussed in this report, in some countries the NGO legislation broadly addresses governance requirements, however these are significantly less specific than those contained in corporate or the securities legislation.

At the same time, NGOs and think tanks in the region have been under spotlight for a variety of reasons, notably due to the concern of some governments that they could be used for illicit purposes. Since the activities of NGOs in the region has been subject to further government scrutiny, think tanks organised as NGOs (but also others) are concerned with political capture. This lack of trust between government actors and think tanks is a fundamental theme, further explored in this report.

Discussions with think tanks in the region have highlighted a growing concern among senior executives and board members that governments may be adopting uneven and, in some instances, unproductive approaches towards NGOs and think tanks. This is reflected in the process of registration, the receipt of funds, and in the appointment of boards, which can critically impede the credibility of these organisations as sources of unbiased research.

Fostering donor trust is another critical theme explored in this report, with a focus notably on transparency and accountability. Transparency has been one of the most challenging governance areas in the region: as revealed by our review of annual reports published by Arab think tanks, it is also so for the think-tank sector. These and other governance challenges are being addressed, for the first time, in the following report on the governance of Arab think tanks, of which the methodology is outlined below.

METHODOLOGY

Data and information on think tanks operating in the Arab world is scarce. Although efforts have been made, notably by the Global Go To Think Tank index, to collect and compile systematic data and produce analysis specifically on think tanks, this report, commissioned by KAPSARC and authored by GOVERN Center, is the first to comprehensively address Arab institutions. It is based on a first-of-a-kind data collection exercise which sought to first, identify the population of think tanks across the Arab region and second, to gather information on their governance.

As such, we have first defined a comprehensive universe of think tanks, from countries of the Arab region, from North Africa, to Levant and the Arabian Gulf.⁴ In developing a list of think tanks, we have relied on existing compilations, complementing them with information published by the regional bodies such as Euromesco and the Institute for the Mediterranean Studies. The completeness of our think tank database has also been verified with various relevant regional experts.

That said, the process of identification of think tanks is an inherently subjective exercise. In the Arab world, this exercise is also complicated by the fact that many think tanks are registered as corporate entities due to various legal and political challenges that this report addresses. We have included these entities in the scope of the project for reasons explored in further detail in the following section.

While we have included in our analysis think tanks hosted by local universities, not all university-based centers were considered as think tanks given their activities and profile. Adding small centers of academic research based within academic structures that have no independent nature or sizeable research programme to our comprehensive list of entities would have resulted in sample that would no longer be meaningful.

The resulting comprehensive compilation of Arab think-tanks, which currently numbers approximately 140 organisations across 17 countries, is reflected in Annex I. These think tanks vary significantly in terms of their size, independence and in terms of their legal form. Their fundamental characteristics are presented in the following section of the report to set the stage for further analysis of their governance.

From the overall universe of 140 entities, we have targeted 40 most active think tanks operating across the region as identified by several criteria including their impact, staffing and budget to examine in detail their governance practices, covering a range of issues including board composition, transparency, management structure, accountability and relationship with the stakeholders. A list of these entities is also contained in Annex I.

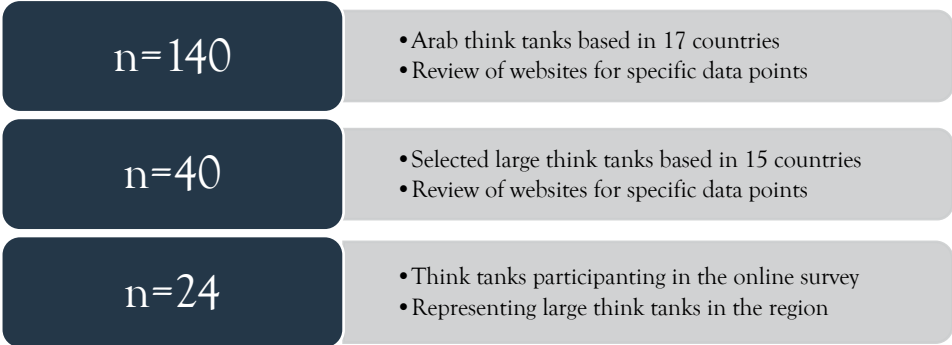
For these 40 think tanks, we have conducted a detailed analysis of their governance using a proprietary methodology developed for this report and based on of the information they disclose publicly. In addition, interviews were organised to gather a more nuanced understanding of strategic challenges and opportunities they face and gather views on how existing governance models support strategic objectives.

In addition to secondary research, a confidential online survey, comprising approximately 30 questions, was disseminated through various channels to the community of think tank executives and board members in September 2019. The objective of the online survey was to collect subjective information that could not be gathered through public channels.

The data collected through the online survey and secondary research was compared and, in some instances, merged in order to obtain a more representative sample. Inconsistencies were identified in terms of our assessment of the governance practices and think tanks' perception of their own practices which were rectified.

⁴ The countries reflected in our analysis include Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen. This report only analyses think tanks based in the region, think tanks focused on the Arab world but based outside of the region have been excluded from our analysis unless they have established physical presence in the region (i.e. Carnegie Center).

The Figures and Tables contained in this report draw on this data collection exercise for the entire think tank universe and for the large think tanks, with references to sample size made for further clarity. The large think tank sample contained 40 entities from our overall sample of 140 bodies, while survey responses were provided by 24 entities. Some overlap between the sample of 40 and 24 think tanks was observed.

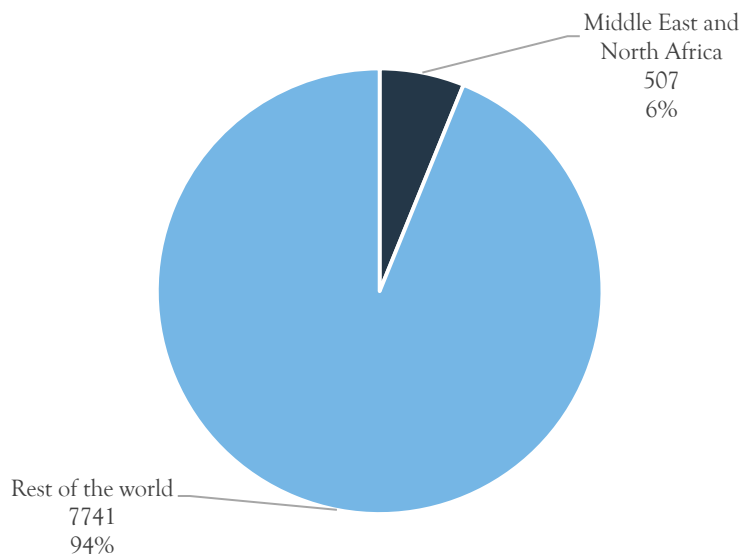


PART I. OVERVIEW OF THE SECTOR

The Landscape of Arab Think Tanks

Think tanks in the Middle East still comprise a small fraction of the global think tank community, at 6 % of the total global think tank population, as highlighted in Figure 1 below. Our estimates of the number of active entities, based on the methodology outlined above, result in an estimation of 140 think tanks spread across 17 jurisdictions. As highlighted in the Figure 2 below, the majority of them are based in Egypt, Morocco and Jordan.

Figure 1- MENA Think Tanks in the Global Context



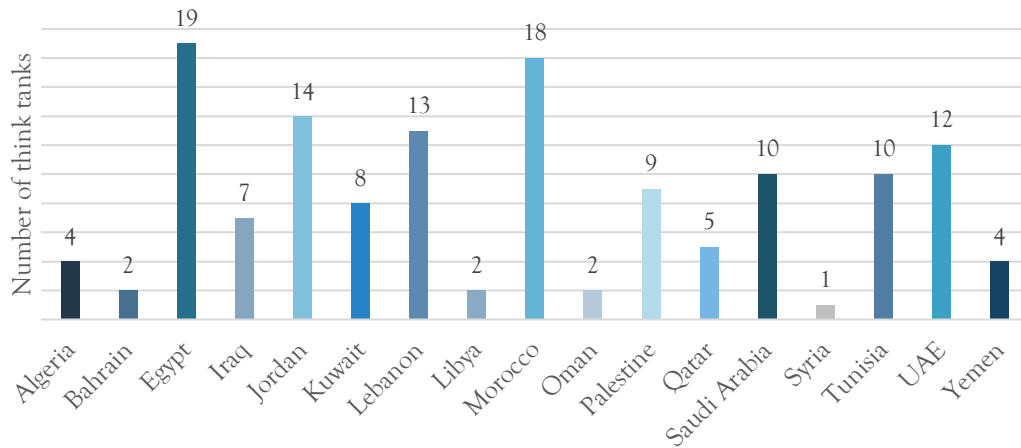
Source: GOVERN Analysis based on the Global Go To Think Tank Report, 2018.

Note: For the purposes of this graph, we have considered all of the population of think tanks in the region, whereas a narrower geographical definition was adopted for this report.

“The idea of a think-tank is still new in the Middle East”
Omar Shaban, CEO, Palthink, Palestine

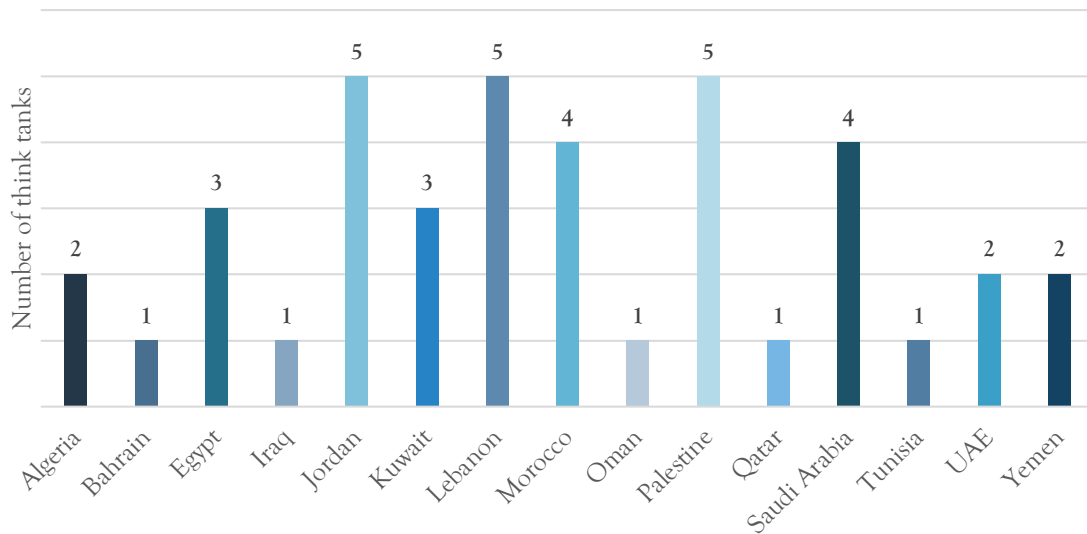
This reflects the economic and cultural heritage of the region, where countries such as Egypt and Lebanon have historically been most active in terms of research and cultural production, but also more recent trends notably the aspiration of many of the GCC countries to position themselves as centers of knowledge creation. However, if we examine the population of most active think tanks in the region, they are significantly less concentrated as each country has at least one important think tank.

Figure 2- Geographic Distribution of Think Tanks (n=140)



Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

Figure 3- Geographic Distribution of Select Think Tanks (n=40)



Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

A list of most active think tanks in the region is provided below for illustration purposes. They include a range of entities with varying mandates and also size both in terms of human and financial resources. Some of the largest tanks in the region including the Center of Economic Applied Research (Centre de Recherche en Economie Appliquée pour le Développement, CREAD) in Algeria, the Economic Research Forum (ERF) in Egypt, and the King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC) in Saudi Arabia have approximately 100 employees, whereas most other entities operate with less than a dozen employees.⁵

⁵ A significant outlier in this regard is the Institute for Scientific Research in Kuwait which counts over 500 employees.

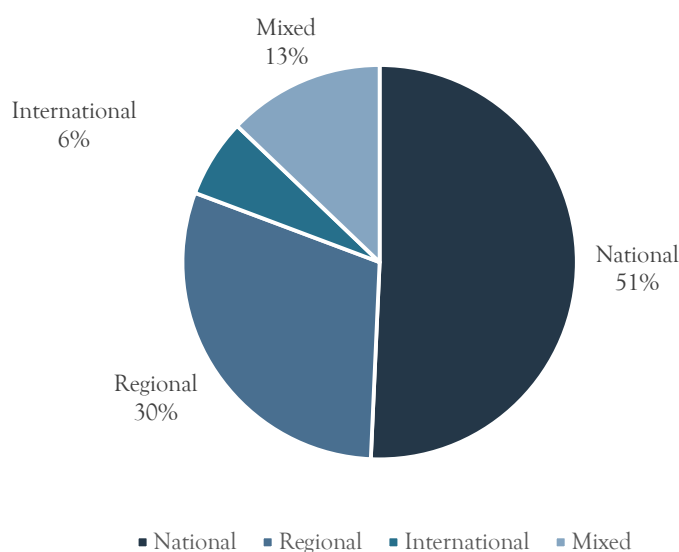
Table 1- Top Ten Arab Think Tanks (by number of employees)

Think tank	Country	Think tank	Country
Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR)	Kuwait	Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI)	Lebanon
Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique et Technique (CNIRST)	Morocco	Policy Center for the new South (formerly: OCP Policy Center)	Morocco
Centre de Recherche en Economie Appliquée Pour le Développement) (CREAD)	Algeria	International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)	Lebanon
King Abdallah Petroleum Studies and Research Centre (KAPSARC)	Saudi Arabia	Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS)	Kuwait
International Center for Biosaline Agriculture	UAEUAE	Economic Research Forum (ERF)	Egypt

Source: GOVERN Center, review of websites, 2019

As highlighted in Figure 4, most think tanks in the region have a domestic orientation in that their work is entirely focused on national priorities, although few have regional and even international ambitions. Of the entire sample we have examined, only 30% had a regional and 6% an international focus. This reflects the nature of their establishment either as government or private sector-funded entities with a specific domestic mandate.

Figure 4- Geographic Focus of Activities (n=140)



Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

A few think tanks in the region have an international focus by their very nature. For example, the Emirates Diplomatic Academy's (EDA) mission is to support the development of the UAE's diplomatic corps, hence its

research is oriented towards international developments. Others, such as for instance, the Gulf Research Center (GRC), has a regional orientation by nature of its mandate to research into Gulf foreign and economic policy.

Finally, few think tanks in the region have a broad mandate that is not rooted in their geographic position. Those who have both a regional and an international focus include the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies in Jordan, International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas in Lebanon, the King Abdallah Petroleum Studies and Research Centre in Saudi Arabia and the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture in the UAE.

While the common trend is for international think tanks to establish offices in the region, a few think tanks in the region have succeeded in establishing presence beyond their home jurisdictions. The GRC for example has established three locations, of which two are outside the region (i.e. Cambridge and Geneva). The entity has established a collaborative network of research with dozens of other entities which has positive implications on its governance and also on its ability to have a global impact.

“We are proud of the network of partners and peers we have been able to reach since the establishment of the think tank in Jeddah” Abdulaziz Sager, Chairman, Gulf Research Center

This collaborative approach is also adopted by a few other think tanks in the region such as the Arab Thought Forum (ATF) in Jordan⁶ and the Economic Research Forum (ERF) in Egypt.⁷ Incidentally, these represent the few membership-based organisations in the region which require them to have a more open approach to their governance. On the other hand, other think tanks which operate in a collaborative nature do so due to their own limited human and financial resources.⁸

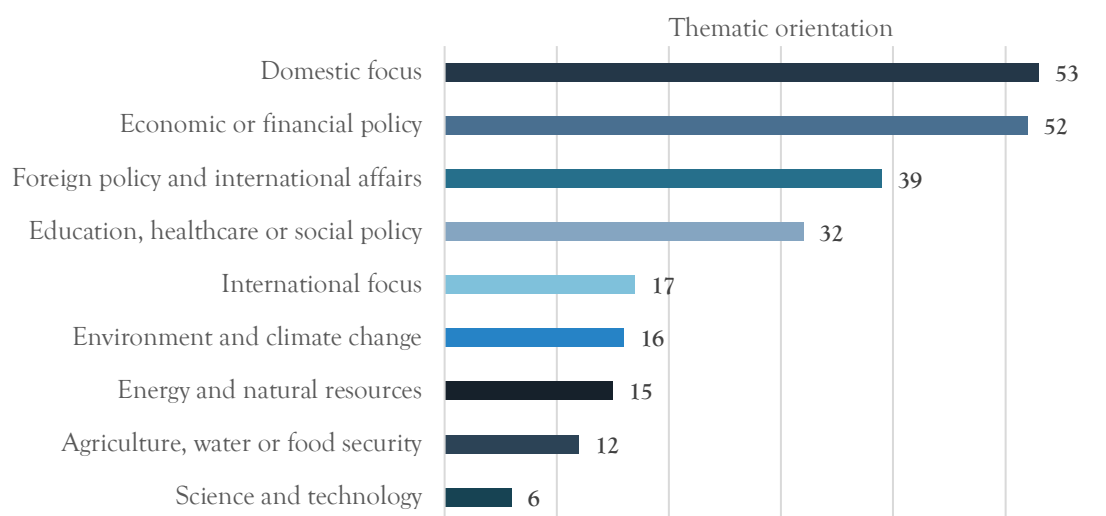
The geographic focus of regional think tanks determines, to some extent, their thematic orientation. Our research demonstrates that while the vast majority are multidisciplinary in nature, most are focused on economic and financial policy, foreign policy and international affairs, as well as domestic issues. As highlighted in the Figure 5 below, few entities are focused on issues related to social issues, science and technology and the environment.

⁶ The ATF was launched by is an independent, pan-Arab nongovernmental organization in 1981 by 25 leading Arab thinkers, decision-makers and development experts and led by a member of the Jordanian Royal Family.

⁷ The ERF was originally established as a regional network to promote sustainable development in the Arab world (as well as Iran and Turkey) and has such has two regional offices and a number of collaborative research arrangements, including with the leading international universities.

⁸ For instance, PASSIA, a Palestinian international relations think tank has established co-operation with external experts and organisations to whom it commissions some of its work, requiring its board to oversee this process.

Figure 5 - Thematic Orientation (n=140)



Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

Note: Figures were compiled based on the number of areas covered by each of the think tanks. Where no specific direction could be identified, activities were categorized as being either domestic or international.

In most cases, the ability of think tanks to cover multiple thematic areas is constrained by their limited staffing, lack of expertise (in specific areas such as science and technology) and historical preoccupation with security, foreign policy, international relations and natural resource issues. This is in turn driven by the financial resources of Arab think tanks, which in most cases are lower than their European and North American peers.

In view of limited resources available to most think tanks in the region, their level of collaboration can be characterized as being moderate. Strong collaboration with regional and international peers has been established by entities such as the ERF and the GRC. Stronger collaboration can assist think tanks in the region leverage their limited resources to achieve their objectives.

“PASSIA has at times joined forces with other NGOs or institutions which share the same goals and approaches to cooperate in certain projects and share resources.”

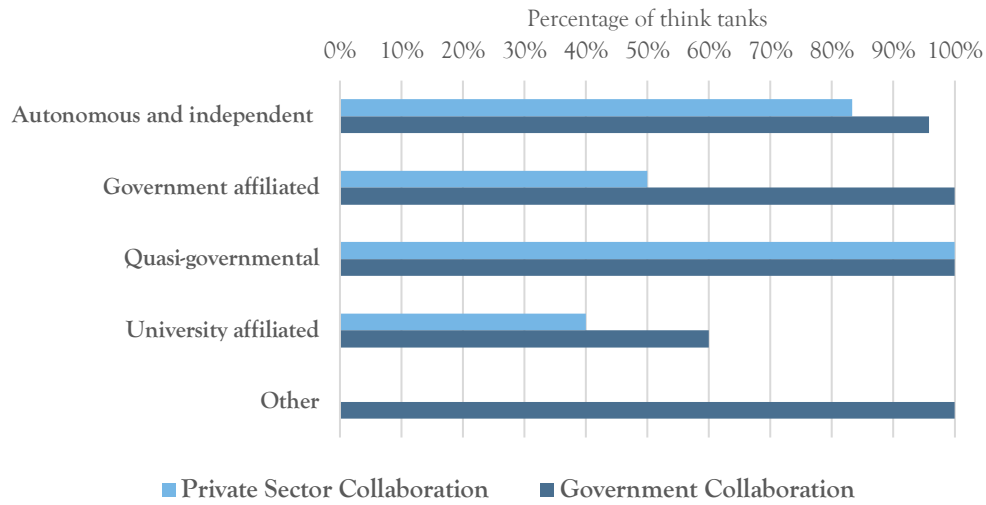
Deniz Altayli, Program Director, PASSIA, Palestine

In particular, better collaboration with the private sector may be warranted at a time that private donors and large companies are establishing and funding their own research activities.⁹ Further strengthening collaboration among Arab think tanks requires effective platforms for better co-operation such as the Arab Foundations Forum for the foundations sector.

Currently, co-operation between entities in the region is facilitated by regional platforms such as the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (Euromesco) or the European Institute for the Mediterranean Studies (EIMS). The governance of these bodies is in fact of interest to note as a model for the region as they tend to represent the interests of all the stakeholders. For instance, the EIMS Med has a Board of Governors, a Board of Trustees and an Advisory Board with representation from across the region.

⁹ Judging by the receipt of corporate donations, collaboration with the private sector is also generally weak except for few specialized entities. For example, the Pearl Initiative, an initiative is focused on governance and transparency, launched by a private sector entrepreneur, is funded by a range of corporate donors.

Figure 6- Collaborations of think tanks (n=40)



Source: GOVERN Center, review of websites, 2019.

Resources of Arab Think Tanks

Financial and, hence, human resource constraints were a fundamental theme highlighted by our research, for almost all think tanks surveyed. With the exception of the King Abdullah Center for Petroleum Studies in Saudi Arabia, the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture in the United Arab Emirates, the Economic Research Forum in Egypt and the Gulf Research Center in the UAE, most other think tanks in the region have what can be considered as constrained budgets.

This can be explained by a number of factors, notably financial resource scarcity in the Levant and Maghreb sub-regions in particular. As highlighted in discussions with senior members of the Arab think tank community, funding scarcity is linked to increasing competition for financing and the fact that most think tanks are not membership-based organisations, instead relying on ad-hoc donor funding, mostly from international donors and domestic government sources. This funding structure ultimately impacts both their governance and their independence.

Few think tanks in the region, apart from KAPSARC and the ERF are funded through an endowment which allows them to take a long-term perspective. The ERF, whose main budget is based on an endowment is also funded by a number of regional international organisations.¹⁰ Apart from these examples, few entities appear to have a sustainable, long-term budget structure based on an endowment or similar multi-year funding model.¹¹

Other government associated think tanks such as the EDA in the UAE or the CREAD in Algeria receive funding from the government on an annual basis. Though this is fundamentally similar to an endowment, this model renders government-funded think tanks potentially more vulnerable since funding is allocated by the Ministry of Finance or the equivalent on an annual basis.

Budgetary independence is also a matter of government policy for some think tanks not specifically affiliated with or funded by the public sector. For a number of NGOs operating in countries such as Egypt and Jordan,

¹⁰ International organisations are important donors to and partners of regional think tanks, especially those in specific jurisdictions such as Palestine.

¹¹ This is indeed a challenge that they consider as negatively affecting their independence.

receipt of funding is subject to a government approval process which is reportedly rather time consuming. For Palestinian think tanks (in East Jerusalem), no more than 50% of funding can come from international institutions and they are subject to an audit by the State Audit Body.¹²

For think tanks in the region which are not funded by the government, financial sustainability is more precarious as they compete for funding not only with each other, but also increasingly with other entities, including private foundations, international universities and research centers. Some think tanks have commented that their independence would be reinforced if their funding model was based on an endowment.¹³

“Endowment-based funding would allow the Institute to create a more seamless approach to its projects, whereas the current funding model require it to accept funding and then attempt to create a coherent research agenda.” Mudar Kassis, Director, Muwatin Institute, Palestine

Industry participants have highlighted that competition for financing in the region has become more intense in recent years, endangering the sustainability of think tanks which are forced to continuously compete for funding. Few donors are now providing multi-year funding that is not linked to the delivery of specific outputs, which makes think tanks less agile in their deployment of resources and less able to operate with a long-term perspective.

This fact endangers their sustainability as it is linked to specific research projects which may or may not be funded beyond each financial year. While senior representatives of think tanks do not see undue international donor interference in their activities, some believe that they do influence their thematic orientations as think tanks need to reply to request for proposals issued by international organisations in order to remain financially viable.

*“The sector is now characterised by higher competition since donors and international organisations more generally have established presence in the region after the Arab Spring”
Mohamed El Agati, Director, Arab Forum for Alternatives, Lebanon*

“This competition reflects a lack of boundaries and a lack of understanding of differences between an NGO and a think tank.” Omar Shaban, CEO, Palthink

Resource constraints have an impact not only on the thematic orientation and scope of work of Arab think tanks but also on their ability to effectively engage with their constituencies. This is perhaps most markedly reflected in their ability to influence government policy. Overall, think tanks in the region commented that they are less active in advocacy and that their impact on public policy is limited as compared to their international peers.

This is also a reflection of their sentiment, which is interestingly also true for government-funded think tanks, that government actors are not typically seeking to utilize their research in developing public policies. Our research has highlighted that research and other products of think tank activities, whether or not these are government-funded, can indeed be better leveraged to inform public policy. Even government-funded think tanks believe that rarely influence government policy, instead they either deliver or communicate on it.

¹² Government-funded think tanks such as CREAD and the EDA are also subject to broader government rules and procedures in terms of procurement and expenditures, in addition to being subject to external audit.

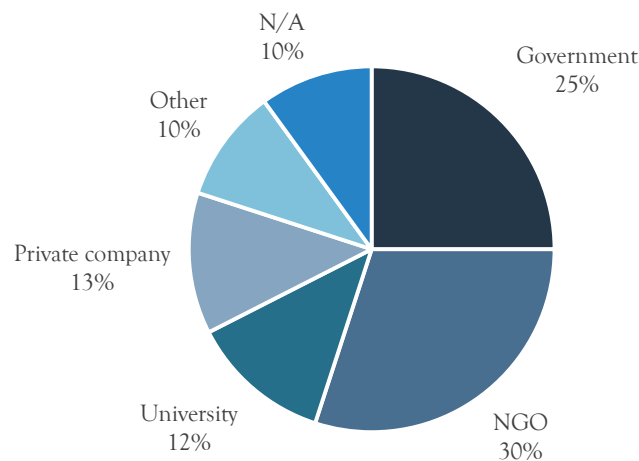
¹³ For example, the Muwatin Center in Palestine noted this as a top priority for its sustainability.

The Legal Framework

The funding and the legal structure of think tanks are usually closely interrelated. While internationally think tanks are commonly registered as not-for-profit, non-governmental (NGO) organisations to preserve their intellectual and operational integrity and independence, this is not always the case in the region. In fact, the landscape of think tanks in the region is extremely diverse in a number of ways, including their legal form.

Think tanks in the region are registered in a variety of forms including corporate entities (sole proprietorships, LLCs, etc.), companies of mixed nature, not-for-profit entities and NGOs. A number of think tanks surveyed for this report revealed that they are registered in a corporate form in order to avoid the complexities associated with NGO registration. As highlighted in the Figure below, only 30% of the largest think tanks examined for the purposes of this report are registered as NGOs and a further 25% as government entities.¹⁴

Figure 7- Legal Status of Think Tanks (n=40)



Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

In practice, classification of think tanks in the region is significantly more complex. A number of think tanks surveyed for this report are registered in a variety of corporate forms, including as not-for-profit companies. While they acknowledge this being a suboptimal solution, registering a think tank as an NGO can be complex or even risky from the perspective of independence. In a number of jurisdictions such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, registering an NGO is a lengthy and a legally complex process.¹⁵

“One of the most significant challenges for think tanks is the difference between legal framework and the actual governance needs of the entity.”
Mohamed El Agati, Director, Arab Forum for Alternatives

Registration of think tanks as not-for-profit, non-governmental organisations is also plagued by other practical formalities related to their supervision and funding models. While NGOs are often registered with one entity (commonly the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Interior or the equivalent), they are supervised by a range

¹⁴ This categorization is also rather fluid as whether a think tank considers itself as part of the government or an NGO is not always clear because in some instances they are registered as not for profit governmental or corporate entities but effectively operate as NGOs and/or consider themselves as NGOs.

¹⁵ For more established think tanks in the region, such as the Gulf Research Center for instance, registration as an NGO was not a feasible option as the legislation was not developed at the time of its creation.

of various Ministries including Finance, Economy and others.¹⁶ These entities are also involved in controlling the receipt of funding via various government approvals.

A further factor cited by some think tanks as guiding them not to establish as an NGO is the lack of legal clarity. In Egypt for example, the NGO law has been subject to continuous amendments.¹⁷ In some cases, these amendments have relaxed the overall framework governing NGOs, in other recent amendments have had the opposite effect. Some representatives of the sector cited that governments may impose high and arbitrary penalties to exercise censorship or control over specific think tanks.

Indeed, the penalties envisioned by some NGO laws make it prohibitive for individuals to register and operate these entities across the region. In Egypt for example, the revised NGO law issued in July 2019, removes the jail penalty and replaces it with fines between \$12,000-\$60,000 USD for infringement of the law. Opponents of the legislation suggest it can be used to silence certain NGOs which challenge government policies.

The status of NGOs may be complicated by other parameters, both formal and informal. In Palestine for example, legal pressure on NGOs may be exercised in informal ways, leading to a number of Palestinian entities to register as companies. In Lebanon, in recent years it became more challenging to register a Syrian think tank or any NGO. The Emirati government has taken a more formal approach, limiting the term of the licence.

“The term of the licence of the Non-governmental Association shall be one-year renewable for similar periods. At the request of the Non-governmental Association, and after obtaining the approval of the CDA and the Concerned Authority, the licence term may be more than one year but not more than three years.” Dubai NGO law, 2017

Overall, registration in the form of an NGO is perceived to be associated with a number of risks including unpredictability in the registration process, possible government or political party interference and limitations on receipt of funding. These complications are reflected in the low figures of NGO registration in the region. In 2009, there were 162 MENA NGOs increasing to 260 by 2018, although their share remained at less than 5% of NGOs worldwide.

The decision for a think tank to register in corporate form or as an NGO ultimately has significant consequences from the perspective of its governance. Corporate legislation in some countries of the region incorporates some governance provisions: for example, in Saudi Arabia limited liability companies are required to establish a board which must have an audit committee. On the other hand, most laws governing the establishment of NGOs have rather minimal provisions on governance, usually dealing only with board size and the requirement for an annual audited report.

The Table below summarises key governance provisions of NGO laws, which are reflected in the governance structures of think tanks registered as NGOs for illustrative purposes. These provisions are important insofar as they address board level governance and transparency of Arab think tanks established as not-for-profit, non-governmental organisations. More detailed provisions are available in Annex III to this report.

¹⁶ For example, in Jordan grants have to be approved by four different Ministries as well as the Prime Minister’s Office.

¹⁷ As a result of the instability of the regulatory framework, some NGOs have migrated from one country of the region to another (for example from Egypt to Lebanon).

Table 2- Governance Elements of NGO Laws, Select Countries

Country	NGO Law and Regulations	Date of Issue	Board composition	Transparency	Other provisions
Egypt	The NGO Law 149 of 2019 Oversight Authority with the Ministry of Social Solidarity	2019	All board members must be non-executive Bylaws to further define roles Board may not be remunerated	The general assembly assigns auditors and their remuneration Entity to disclose minutes of meeting, decisions and amendments and final accounts Entity to disclose on its website statutes, accounts, budget, sources of funding, names of its members and its activities	Additional provisions on good governance, funding as well as associations of special nature
Iraq	Law on Non-Governmental Organizations (Law 12 of 2010) Oversight Authority The NGOs Department in the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers	2010	No Board composition provisions Minimum number of founding members established	Entity must keep records of members' register; decisions of the General Assembly and the board; accounts including NGO's revenues and expenses; activities and projects Financial documents must be kept for 5 years	Additional Membership, Financial. Performance, Audit, Foreign NGOs; NGO networks provisions Internal audit to be conducted every year when. budget exceeds 75 million dinars annually
Jordan	Law of Societies (No. 51 of 2008) as amended by Law 22 of 2009) Oversight Authority Ministry of Social Development or the Council of Ministers	2009	Board composition not regulated, as per the bylaws of the society	The relevant Ministry shall be provided with records of General Assembly and board proceedings including meetings, agenda, resolutions, annual reports, annual work plan, annual budget	Additional provisions on funding, donations and associations of special nature (unions, non-profit companies, religious entities)
Lebanon	Ministry of Interior and Municipalities Circular Oversight Authority Ministry of Interior and Municipalities	2006	No Board composition provisions Administrative body: at least 2 persons to be present at the main office	The Ministry shall be provided with the statute of association, annual budget, list of the name of the general body members, accounts of the past year, minutes of election (of administrative body)	Additional provisions on the establishment of new associations
Morocco	Decree on the Right to Establish Associations	1958	No Board composition provisions	Public benefit associations must present holding accounts according to the	Additional provisions on associations of special nature

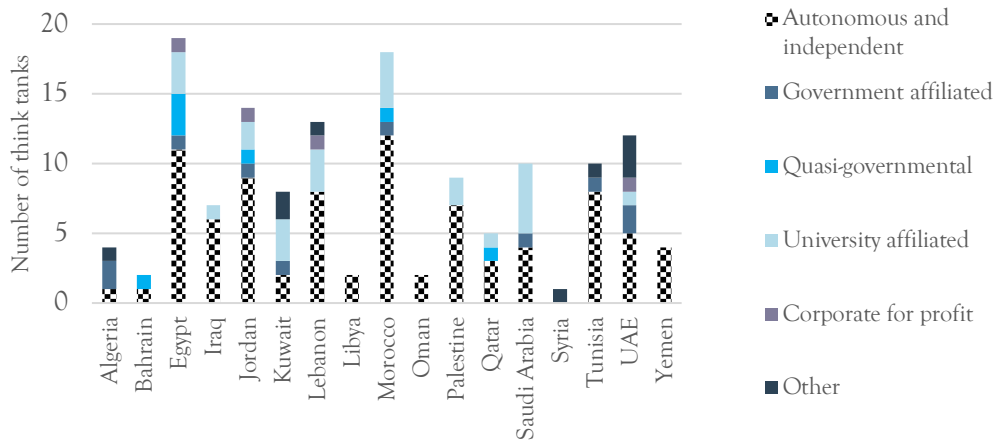
	Circular on the Conditions of Recognizing Public Benefit for Associations	(amended 2002 and 2005)	Associations must develop “basic laws”/ statute and a list of members assigned to manage the association	conditions stated in the circular; annual reports including all resources received within a year. Public benefit associations must present their budget and accounts to donating agency	(political parties, and associations of political nature; public benefit associations; universities and federal associations; foreign associations; armed groups) and on disposition and possession of funds/support
Palestine	Law of Charitable Associations and Community Organizations Implementing Regulations for Law 1 of 2000, Council of Ministers Decision 9 of 2003	2000 2003	Board composition addressed All board members must be non-executive	Present an administrative report containing a full description of the activities of the Association Present a financial report signed by the auditor, containing a detailed revenue and expenditure account of the Association in accordance with the accepted accounting principles	Additional provisions on financial affairs, records and foreign and charitable organizations
Tunisia	Law No. 154 of 1959 on Associations Basic Law No. 80 pertaining to the registration of NGOs in Tunisia Decree Number 88 for the Year 2011 on Pertaining to Regulation of Associations Oversight Authority Ministry of Interior	1959 1993 2011	No board composition provisions Associations must keep a register of members, minutes of BoD meetings, register of financial or in-kind assistance	Association must submit to the ministry its articles of association/ by-laws and publish them on their website Associations receiving government subsidies must submit financial reporting to the ministry Publish sources of funding, value and purpose, financial statements and auditor’s financial report	Additional foreign associations; associations of national interests, financial and audits of registers of account provisions
Yemen	Law on Associations and Foundations (Law No. 1 of 2001) Implementing Regulations for the Law on Associations and Foundations Oversight Authority	2001 2004	Board composition addressed All board members must be non-executive Exceptions to be approved by the General Assembly	File with the ministry articles of association, activities and projects reports and financial reports To be ratified by the General Assembly	Additional financial, membership, control committee and non-Yemeni associations provisions

Source: GOVERN research, 2019.

Governance and Research Independence

The vast majority of the entities surveyed for this project consider themselves as being autonomous and independent. As highlighted in the Figure below, in all countries apart from Algeria and Syria and to a lesser extent Bahrain,¹⁸ most national think tank sectors are dominated by independent institutions. Although a number of think tanks consider themselves to be autonomous, the reality appears more complex from both governance and funding perspectives.

Figure 8- Affiliation of Arab Think Tanks (n=140)

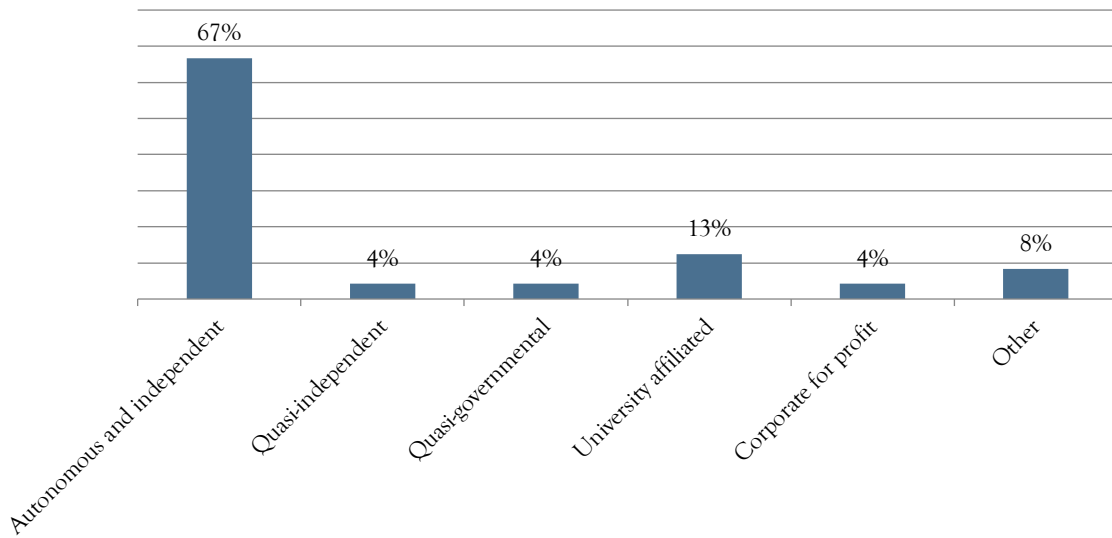


Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

The online survey disseminated in the region for the purposes of this report inquired how the representatives of the sector perceive the status of the entity and how the entity perceives itself. As can be deduced from Figures 9 - 11 below, while 67% of respondents considered the think tank they represent as being autonomous and independent, only 54% of the entities confirmed that their stakeholders perceive it as being so.

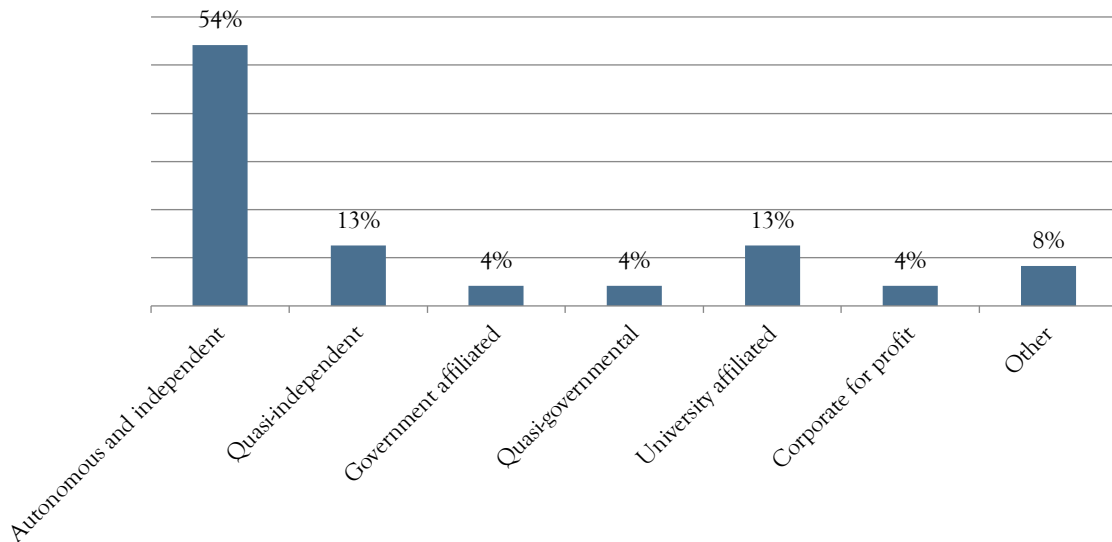
¹⁸ In these countries, the overall think tank sample was insufficient to make statistically meaningful inferences.

Figure 9- Self-Perception of Think Tanks Affiliation (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

Figure 10- Stakeholder Perceptions of the Think Tanks Affiliation (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

Important differences emerge between how the stakeholders perceive a given entity and how its own board members of senior staff perceive it. For example, some think tanks such as KAPSARC and EDA which consider themselves as being independent from the government, commented that external stakeholders may assume that it is linked to the government. Both are chaired by the respective Minister and directly or indirectly receive government funding.

The EDA, whose board is chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, considers itself not to be part of the government apparatus because it has been established as an independent federal entity by a decree of a Council of Ministers. Through the Foreign Affairs Minister chairs the board, the EDA's budget is allocated by the

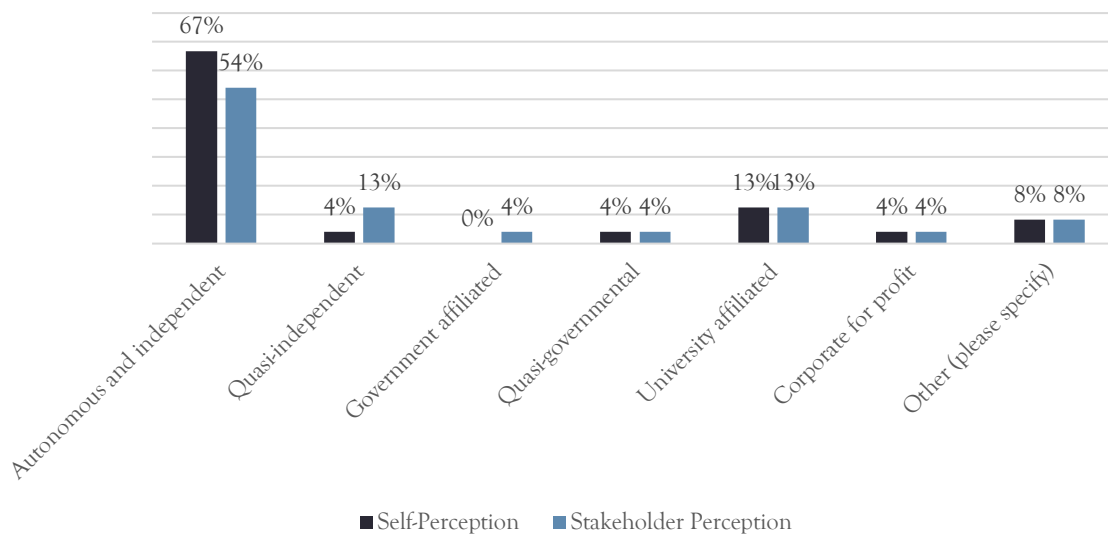
Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the Minister chairs the board since the entity provides training to the foreign service, but the EDA does not formally report into the Ministry itself.

A particular concern for entities such as the EDA is not only that it is perceived as being part of the government, but also that their research indirectly represents official government policy, which may not be the case. In the case of the EDA, the governance structure of the entity is not perceived by its management to result in the politicization of its activities, but is instead a reflection of government priorities in its training activities, which is natural given that the mandate of the EDA is to develop the UAE diplomatic corps.

KAPSARC in Saudi Arabia, though also chaired by the relevant Minister, also considers itself as not being government affiliated as its budget is based on an endowment and its research agenda set by its management, who is effectively independent. The board of KAPSARC reviews its thematic programming on a bi-annual basis during the regular board meetings and the entity’s budget is based on a government endowment and is not subject to political interference.

Fundamentally, the funding model of a given think tank drives its independence. Our research revealed that local government funding is often associated with the risk of politicization of think tanks’ activities, whereas the same risk is not perceived when it comes to foreign donor support. The risk of domestic political interference is not only perceived vis-à-vis the government but also vis-à-vis different political factions (e.g. for example Fatah and Hamas in Palestine).

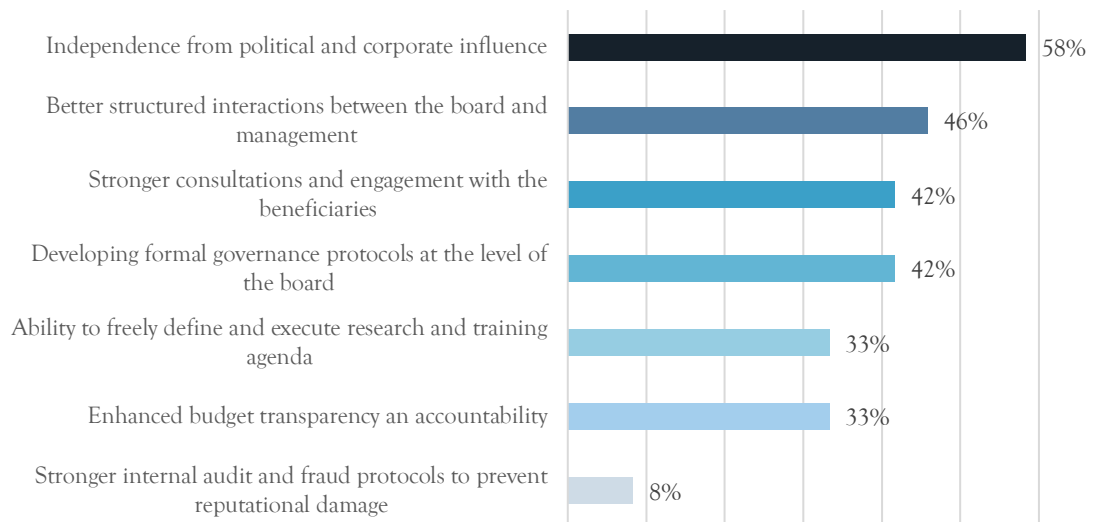
Figure 11- Comparison Perception of the Think Tank Affiliation (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

In line with the above, it is not surprising that the online survey we have disseminated prioritized independence from political and corporate influence as an overwhelming priority, as highlighted in Figure 12 below. Political interference in think tank activities was indeed perceived as a significant challenge, which has precluded them from registering as NGOs but is one that also represents an obstacle from the perspective of their ongoing operations.

Figure 12- Governance Priorities, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

As discussed in the following sections of the report, the independence of a number of entities is placed at risk by virtue of their funding dependence and by political interference in critical governance processes such as receipt of funding, board appointments and even the substantive research orientations. Notably, think tank representatives consider that competition for funding may have further reduced their independence.

This is linked to the fact that donors now generally do not accept to take a holistic view of activities, instead allocating funding to specific projects and for shorter-term projects, whereas the impact of a think tank’s activities may be spread over a long-term period. Liberal donors may have a longer-term evaluation approach, tracking performance indicators over 3 years or longer, whereas most donors have an annual approach.

Government-funded think tanks that are less concerned with funding instability have expressed a concern that they are also heavily influenced by political forces in terms of their own governance and even at the level of project management. For example, CREAD, a government-affiliated Algerian scientific think tank, may be asked to deliver specific projects on an ad-hoc basis by the government even if these do not feature in their annual research programme. This necessarily orients their activities towards shorter term projects.

A number of think tanks have noted as matter of policy not to accept government funding and have publicly committed to doing so. For instance, the Maghreb Economic Forum has the following policy to guard its financial independence: “The MEF will never favour the interests of any political party, government (national or international), donor, or non-governmental organizations over the interests of the common good.”

“In the case that an expert receives inappropriate pressure on his or her analysis, conclusions, research, or other activities, the expert must immediately inform the president and relevant members of the MEF.” Maghreb Economic Forum website, 2019

Government-funded think tanks are naturally subject to most political influence both in terms of their substantive activities and in terms of their governance structure. For instance, the governance structure and substantive activities of CREAD in Algeria are decided by the relevant Minister. The board of the think tank is appointed by the Minister and the CEO is also appointed by a decree of the President, on the

recommendation of the relevant Minister. In other entities, the head of state (king or equivalent) nominates the CEO which effectively has the powers that are normally associated with board prerogatives.¹⁹

Think tanks that are government funded or otherwise affiliated consider that lack of board independence, inadequate separation between board and senior executive roles is of particular concern to them. For example, one large government affiliated think commented that its key governance obstacles included lack of board or trustee independence and objectivity, inadequate separation between executive and board roles, and lack of governance awareness at the level of the management.

“PASSIA accepts donations, grants and other sources of funding provided that they have no strings attached and provided that the administration of PASSIA approves them.”

Deniz Altayli, Program Director, PASSIA, Palestine

¹⁹ For instance, in the Moroccan Royal Institute for Strategic Studies (Institut Royal pour les Etudes Strategiques), both the CEO and the board are appointed by the King.

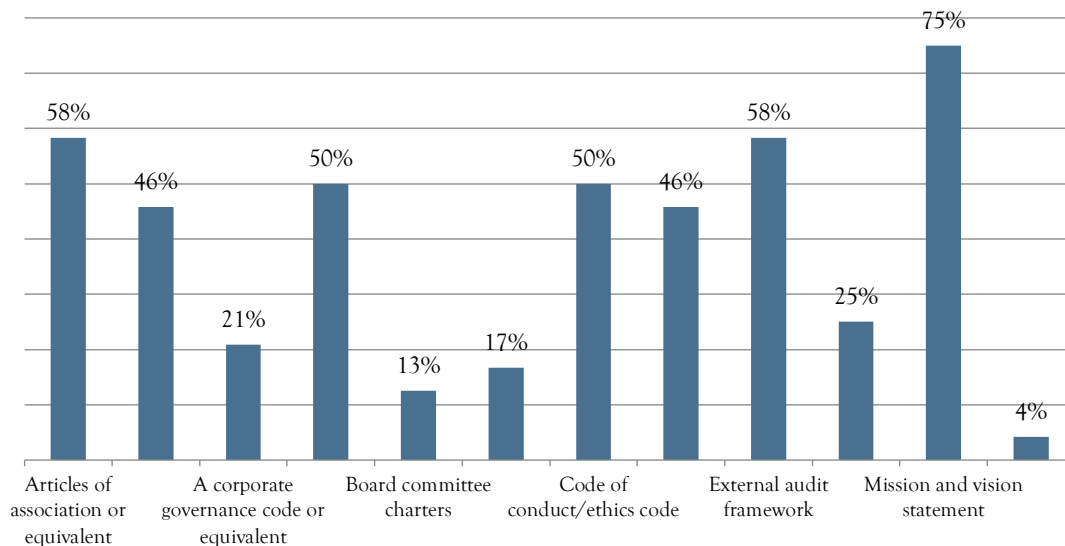
PART II. THE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Founding Documents

The founding documents of Arab think tanks reflect the diversity of their legal registration. Think tanks in the region can be registered by a royal or government decree, as a non-government organisation, as a not-for-profit corporation, a for profit entity or be part of a university and, hence, not registered as a separate entity. The method of incorporation of a think tank fundamentally determines the sophistication of its underlying governance framework.

Based on our survey of think tanks, few appear to have a formalized governance framework and even fewer make it publicly available. According to our survey of the largest think tanks in the region, the most commonly available aspects of their governance were their mission and vision, whereas few think tanks have key documents such as the delegation of authorities (25%) or a risk management framework (17%).

Figure 13- Founding Documents (n=24)



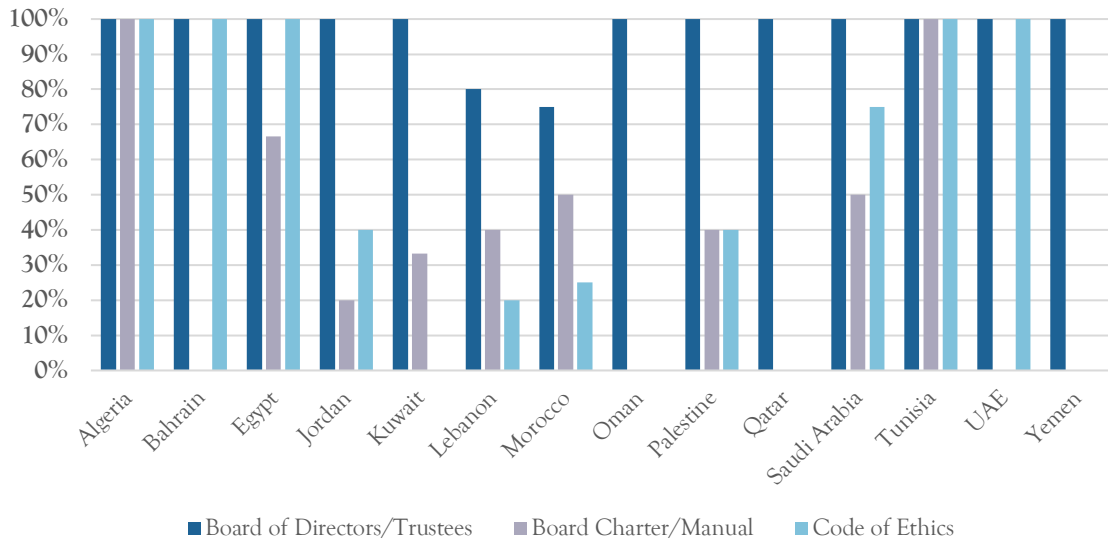
Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

While across the region, the largest think tanks all have a board of governors or a board of trustees, few have a board charter and even fewer have a code of ethics. For instance, large think tanks in the UAE and Qatar generally do not appear to have either, which represents an opportunity for improvement. However, some best practices merit to be highlighted in this regard.

For instance, the Economic Research Forum publishes its institutional charter which clearly addresses its governance structure, including board appointments, the mandate of the board, as well as the division of responsibilities between the board and the advisory committee. The charter also specifies the composition of the annual general assembly, the frequency of its meetings and the relationship between the annual general assembly (AGM) and the board.

“Amendments to the Charter may be proposed by the Board of Trustees or by at least 20% of the Research Fellows, following deliberations during the General Assembly meeting.”
Economic Research Forum, Egypt, Extract from the Charter, 2019

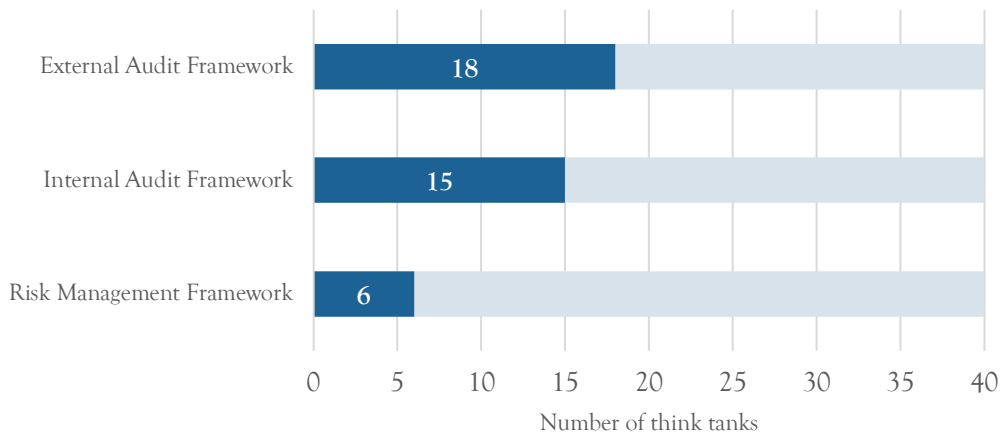
Figure 14- Board Charters and Codes of Ethics (n=40)



Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

While many think tanks note that they have external and internal audit frameworks, these are not made publicly available. Less than half of the largest think tanks have either an external or an internal audit framework and only 6 out of 40 most active entities have a risk management framework. To some extent, this is a reflection of other checks and balances such as audit by the state audit body for government think tanks.

Figure 15- Presence of Risk and Audit Frameworks (n=40)



Source: GOVERN Center, review of websites, 2019.

Best practices would call for at least an external audit framework to be in place and indeed some NGO laws require an external audit for organisations of a certain size. In some organisations such as for example the EDA, the external audit framework is submitted to the Chair of the board for review and approval. Another positive example is Palthink, which has its governance and audit framework which is developed jointly with the strategic planning framework by the senior staff, reviewed and adopted by the board every 3 years.

In some instances, lack of a formalized governance framework is a consequence of the legal form of establishment. For instance, university affiliated think tanks may have their governance structures subsumed in broader university governance structures. As such, they are governed through a two-tier structure of the

university board and the board of the think tank. As such, they do not necessarily have a separate audit and risk framework.

In other cases, the lack of a formalized governance process is a reflection of the quality of the governance process of a given entity and the quality of the regulatory framework in a particular country. Interestingly, some leading regional think tanks, recognizing the lagging regulatory frameworks, have decided to register their operations outside the region.

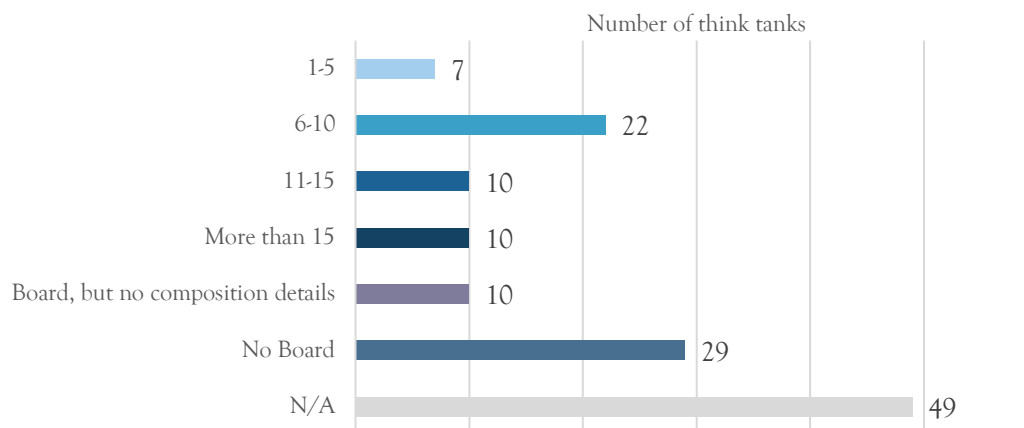
This is for instance the case with the Gulf Research Center, originally set up in Dubai, and later registered in Geneva such that would be governed by Swiss NGO law which requires specific governance parameters. This is perceived by the management to add further credibility to the think tank’s activities and further transparency vis-à-vis its donors.

“One of the reasons for which we have in fact opened an office in Geneva was to further enhance the governance of GRC as the Swiss law has requirements in this regard and Swiss NGOs are respected by donors for this reason.” Oskar Ziemelis, Director of Cooperation, Gulf Research Center

Board Nomination and Composition

Whether a think tank is registered as an NGO or a corporate entity, the board of directors or trustees is arguably the most critical supervisory organ, ultimately responsible for the delivery of its mission and the fulfilment of obligations towards donors and other beneficiaries. As highlighted by our research, only 49 think tanks in our sample of 140 appear to have a board and disclose its composition. This compares negatively to board governance in the corporate world in the region where board composition is better addressed.

Figure 16- Board Size of Arab Think Tanks (n=140)



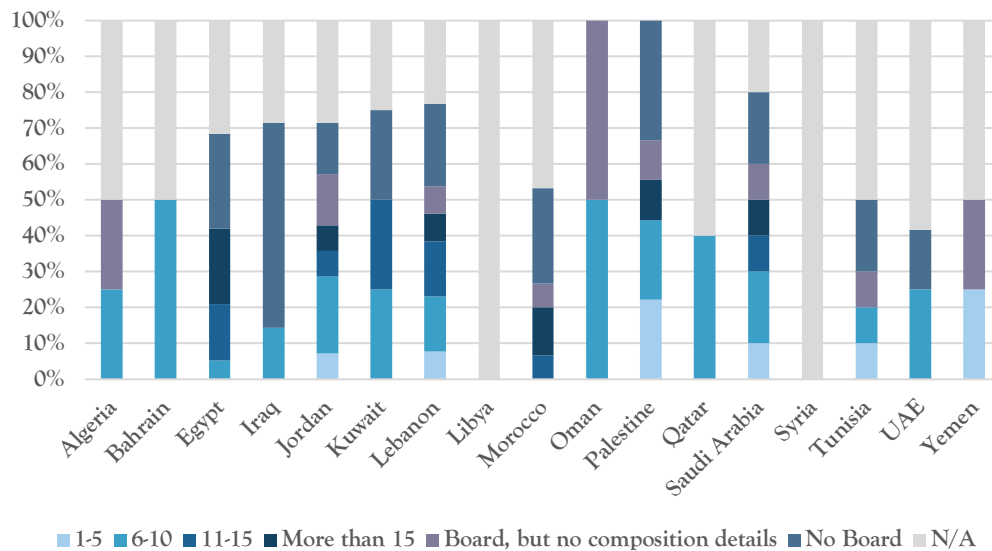
Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

As highlighted by Figure 16 above, the most common board size in the sample was of 6-10 members, which is broadly in line with practices in the corporate sector. However, it bears to mention that the size of think tanks boards is extremely diverse, ranging from 25 members for the Arab Thought Forum in Jordan and the

Moroccan Institute for International Relations to a 3-member board at Palthink. While some think tanks are expanding their boards, others are reducing them.²⁰

As highlighted by figures 17 and 18 below, country differences or type of think tanks do not appear to pinpoint to any particular trend in terms of board size. In general, however, it appears that for institutions which have established governance processes the board of directors, the board of trustees or the equivalent tend to be larger reflecting the representation of a wider set of stakeholders including donors, researchers and prominent social figures.

Figure 17- Board Size By Country (n=140)



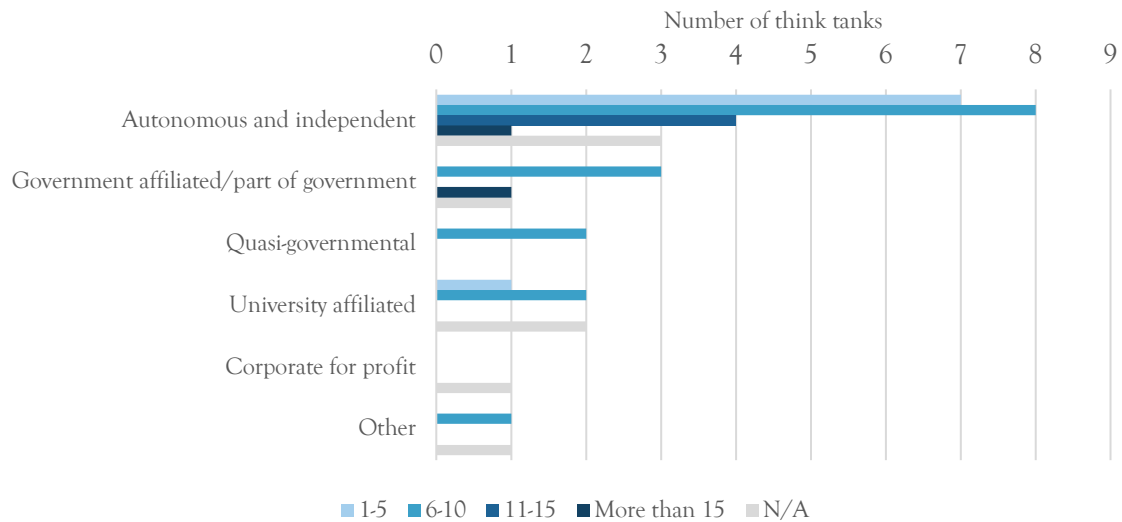
Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

At the same time, whether a think is autonomous, government-affiliated or university-affiliated does appear to make a difference in terms of the board structure as highlighted in Figure 18 below. Even the conceptualization of what a board is and what its responsibilities are is quite different depending on the type of the entity. The conceptualization of what a board of a think tank is responsible for does not always appear to be clear as a result.

A number of think tank boards feature multiple boards, including a board of directors, board of trustees, advisory and other boards the responsibilities between which are not always clearly defined. Many boards such as consultative or advisory boards have no formal mandate, whereas they can be more developed than the main supervisory board in terms of their membership.

²⁰ For example, the board of the Gulf Research Center which has been appointed by its Founder and Chairman, was reduced from 16 to 6 over the years. In other instances, however, such as in the case of KAPSARC, board size is poised to increase to reflect the growth of the organization.

Figure 18- Board Size by Type of Think Tank (n=40)



Source: GOVERN Center, review of websites, 2019.

In some instances, effectively a dual board oversight structure is in place. This is generally the case for university-based think tanks supervised by their own board and the university’s board. The university board typically approves the university budget and senior appointments, including of any think tanks hosted by the university. The think tank in turn often has its own board and, in best practice cases, has its own governing documents, even if not established as a separate legal entity.

“As a university-based think tank, we are limited in our lobbying or advocacy activities, however we enjoy the support of the university in terms of our research agenda, which we consider critical for the success of the entity”

Mudar Kassis, Director, Muwatin Institute, Palestine

For instance, the Muwatin Institute, which was first established as an NGO in Palestine, was subsequently merged with the Birzeit University in order to ensure its sustainability within the university framework where it can draw upon academic and support functions to deliver its projects. The Institute is supervised by its own board but also by the CEO of the university and, less directly, by the university board. The board of the institute is structured as an advisory board of academics, whereas the university board acts more as a governing board.

Our interviews have highlighted that in the region, the board is often appointed by the government in government-affiliated think tanks and by the CEO and/or the Chair in privately curated ones. The appointment of boards of government-affiliated think tanks is typically done through a Ministerial decree. For instance, at the EDA in the UAE, the Cabinet appoints the Chair (i.e. the Minister of Foreign Affairs), who nominates the remaining board for the official appointment by the Cabinet. The senior management team is also appointed by a Cabinet Decision, and not by the board itself.

In privately organized think tanks, board members sometimes are effectively shareholders, having to purchase shares at a nominal price in order to be appointed so that they could be registered in the company registrar. According to our interviews, this is reported to occur most frequently in including Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. This situation creates ambiguity in the relationship between the board and the CEO as the former does not effectively decide on the recruitment, remuneration and dismissal of the CEO and the executive team.

Donors generally do not ask to sit on think tank boards, instead exercising their oversight primarily through specific grant conditions or restrictions and also through the review of annual and periodic reporting. Donors

operating in some politically sensitive jurisdictions such as Palestine appear to be more careful in their activities. As a result, some think tanks have commented that a majority of board and CEO responsibilities deal with “defending” projects that they are delivering.

Ultimately, think tank boards range from purely formalistic boards in place to satisfy certain governance requirements, to boards which provide strategic and funding orientation, to boards which are largely engaged to provide guidance on research directions. The role of the board is also in some cases conceived as one that represents the interests of the organisation vis-à-vis donors and stakeholders as opposed to one that supervises the activities of the entity.

The nomination process for think tank boards appears to be rather ad-hoc as opposed to structured within the think tank founding documents, as it would be the case for a corporate structure. As such, the procedures for nomination and election, remuneration and dismissal are not codified in the founding documents or not applied as per the prevailing applicable legislation (i.e. NGO or corporate law).

This allows for the composition of the board to be determined by the founding CEO or the Chairman as he/she often effectively “recruits” the board. These processes ultimately dictate the type of boards that think tanks in the region tend to have. Only few boards in the region focus on strategy of the think tank as a key priority. Some entities such as the Gulf Research Center, do however believe that their board is providing valuable inputs in terms of its strategy.

“Our boards in Dubai and Geneva are extremely valuable as they provide further input on strategic issues that the GRC faces.”
Abdulaziz Sager, Chairman, Gulf Research Center

In general, two types of boards appear to be most common, a board that represents the think tank vis-à-vis its stakeholders and donors and whose role is therefore primarily funding related and a board whose role is to oversee the think tank’s alignment with government strategy. Few organisations in the region such as PASSIA in Palestine has a board of trustees comprised of leading academic figures which guide its research activities.

“The board of trustees is composed of a minimum of 7 members and a maximum of 20. The founders of PASSIA are automatically considered the first Board of Trustees regardless of their number. The Board elects new members from the active members within PASSIA.”
PASSIA by laws, 1987

The structure of boards of the region’s largest think tanks is summarized in the Table 3 below, highlighting a significant diversity in terms of board size, but also committee structure and gender diversity, discussed in detail in the following section. Ultimately, despite this diversity in structures, the challenge for boards of Arab think tanks is to focus on strategy oversight.

“At EDA, the focus of our board during its bi-annual meetings is on strategic orientations. For example, recognizing that the UAE diplomatic corps needs a more in depth understanding of the Asian region, we have launched a UAE-Asia programme.”
Phil Dufty, Acting Deputy Director General and Director of Research, the Emirates Diplomatic Academy, UAE

Table 3- Board Structure, Select Think Tanks

Name of the Think Tank	Size of the Board	Women on the Board	External Experts on Board	Board Committees
Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique et Technique	28	5	0	Scientific, Ad-hoc Audit
Arab Thought Forum	25	1	18	Executive Advisory
Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies	14	4	N/A	-
Economic Research Forum	13	5	11	Advisory, Ethics Finance
Egyptian Center for Economic Studies	12	1	0	Audit Executive
Arab Forum for Alternatives	11	6	8	-
Kuwait Economic Society	10	1	N/A	Various board and executive level committees
International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas	10	4	9	Advisory, Executive Ad-hoc
International Center for Biosaline Agriculture	10	3	4	-
Emirates Diplomatic Academy	10	1	0	Advisory

Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

Note: External experts are defined as non-nationals of the country where the think tank is registered.

Board Diversity

Board diversity in the think tank sector in the region is generally in line with existing practices in the corporate sector. First, in a number of countries such as for instance in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, a certain percentage of board members are required to be nationals. In other countries such as Palestine, de facto situation renders it difficult to invite external board members to sit on the board.

The laws and regulations governing the think tank sector (and also the corporate sector) in the region rarely specify how board diversity is to be achieved through the participation of a greater number of external experts or women on the board. In most countries of the region, only the percentage of non-executive directors in listed companies is specified. The gender aspect of board composition is generally not addressed except to some extent in the UAE, where listed companies are required to nominate women on its boards.

In practice, most board members in Arab think tanks are appointed and remain on boards for more than ten years as they have been brought on board by the founding chair (e.g. GRC). In other instances, their appointment may be linked to the duration of their academic appointment (e.g. Muwatin). There is therefore a lack of renewal of these boards: on the one hand, this provides a degree of stability in oversight, on the other it does not allow for fresh ideas to develop at the level of the supervisory organs.

While in many countries of the region, corporate boards are lacking female representation, boards of research centers appear to fare better. 30 think tanks (75% of our sample of 40) in the region disclose the number of female board members: 24 (60%) have at least one woman on the board and 8 (20%) have 4 or more. Board diversity is slowly improving due to an increasing recognition that women participation is important.

For example, Palthink, has approximately a third of its board comprised of women. The Royal Institute of Interfaith Studies 4 out of 14 and the ERF board of trustees has 5 women out of 13. The EDA board, comprised of all UAE nationals, has one female representative and its international advisory board has 2 out of 8 women. The Arab Forum for Alternatives appears to have the most diverse board, with approximately half of the board being comprised of women.

“This is a reflection of the fact, to some extent, of the evolution of our clients; the UAE diplomatic corps, where today the majority of EDA students are female.”

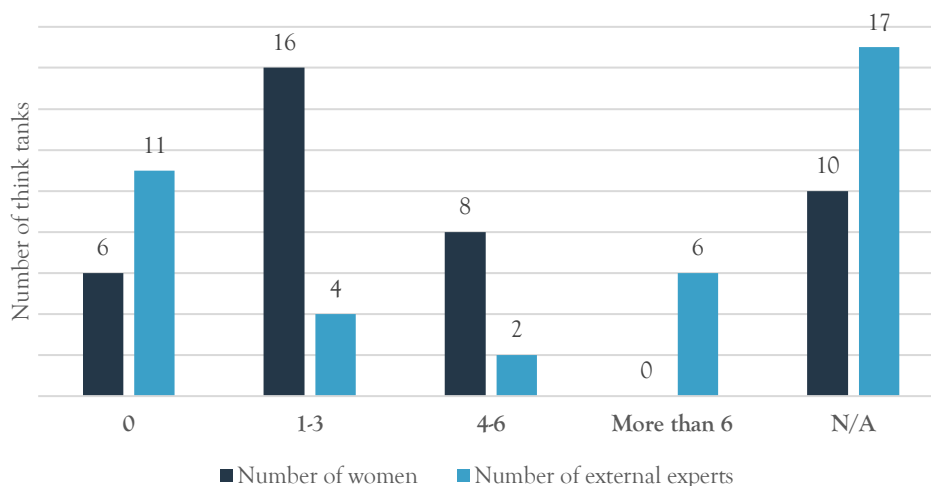
Phil Dufty, Acting Deputy Director General and Director of Research, EDA, UAE

Boards are also increasingly being renewed in favour of new members, including youth, which is an important segment of MENA societies that needs to be better integrated in defining the research agenda. However, young researchers and social leaders are generally not well represented on boards of Arab think tanks.

“For this reason, PASSIA is now actively reaching out to young leaders with a view to diversify the board from a gender and age perspective.”

Deniz Altayli, Program Director, PASSIA, Palestine

Figure 19- Board Diversity in Select Think Tanks (n=40)



Source: GOVERN Center, review of websites, 2019.

Note: External expert defined as non-national of a country where the think tank is legally registered.

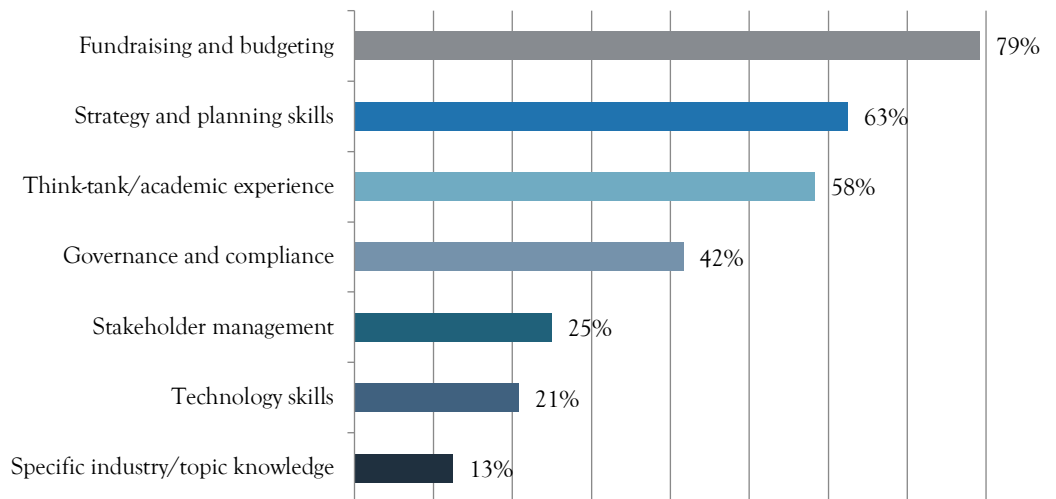
While boards of think tanks in the Arab world do not tend to be diverse from the perspective of having representatives from outside the country, international representatives are often present on the advisory boards. From our sample of 40 think tanks, 12 think tanks declare to have international board members, which are most prevalent in non-government affiliated, autonomous and independent think tanks, especially in Lebanon and Jordan. Think tanks with a regional or international focus, such as ERF in Egypt or GRC in Saudi Arabia tend to have more external experts represented in their boards compared to national-focused think tanks.

While almost no think tanks in the region explicitly outline in their board appointment procedures or quotas for the appointment of directors, a number of best practices can be identified by observing the actual structure of boards of a few think tanks such as the EDA in the UAE, the ERF in Egypt or KAPSARC in Saudi Arabia. For example, KAPSARC, one of the largest think tanks in the region has a 5-member board of trustees, and a 10-member advisory board of which only 2 are Saudi nationals.

Board Expertise

According to the survey conducted for this report, fundraising and budgeting skills and as well as strategy skills are most relevant and demanded, whereas governance and compliance skills were rated as being less critical. This does not reflect the level of board knowledge on governance issues but rather that funding prerogatives dominate board agenda. Likewise, the need for strategy skills at the level of the board reflects the increasing recognition that boards need to take a more active role in setting the overall strategic agenda in think tanks.

Figure 20- Needed Expertise, Select Think Tanks (n =24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

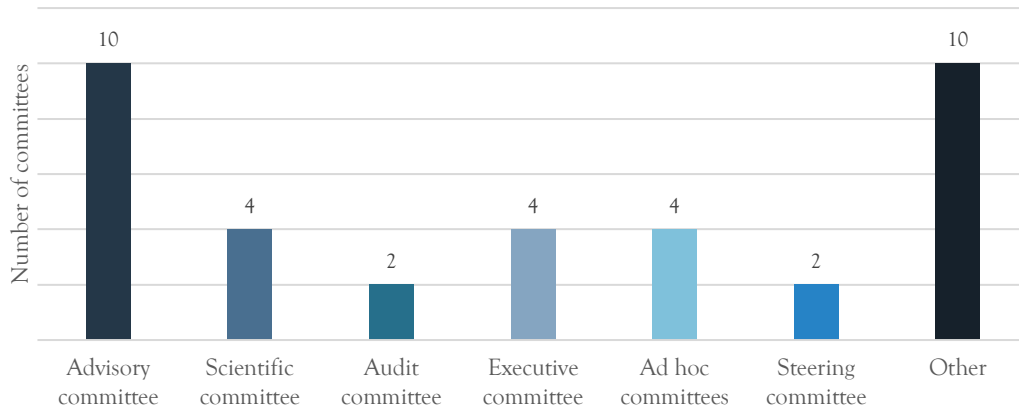
Board Committees

Board committees in regional think tanks are much less formalised and common than in commercial organisations. Unlike in commercial organisations where the Audit Committee is most common, the most common committee for Arab think tanks is the Advisory Committee to the main board (refer to Figure 21 below). However, it is generally not a committee of the board itself, but rather has an advisory role to the board. In many instances, the advisory committee to the board can be as large as the board itself.

“The Board of Trustees shall appoint an Advisory Committee of nine members. The Board of Trustees shall also appoint the Advisory Committee’s Chairperson from among those nine members. Members of the Advisory Committee shall be affiliates of ERF or other qualified persons.” The Economic Research Forum, Institutional Charter, Egypt

On the other hand, Risk Management and Governance Committees are much less common in Arab think tanks than among corporations in the region. Some think tanks such as the ERF for example has an Ethics and a Finance committee. In PASSIA, the board may appoint a special executive or a supervisory committee to oversee key financial operations (i.e. PASSIA by-laws, 1987). However, such committees tend to be relatively rare among the region’s think tanks, as highlighted by the Figure below.

Figure 21- Committees of the Board (n=40)



Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

The diversity of regional think tanks is reflected not only in board composition, but also in terms of its committees. For instance, some think tanks in the science and technology domain have a board Science and Technology Committee. The CREAD in Algeria, being a science and tech think tank has a Scientific Council instead of an Advisory Committee.

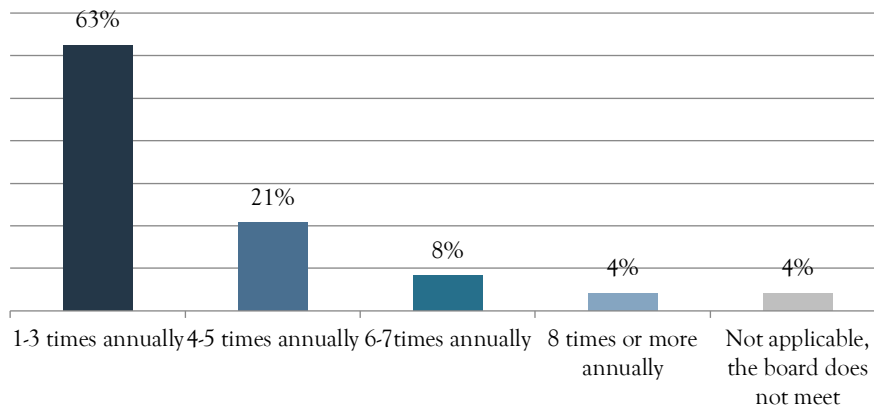
“The Scientific Council is chaired by a permanent researcher elected by the members of the scientific council from among the elected permanent researchers, of the highest rank. The scientific council decides on research programs and projects to be submitted to the board of directors.” CREAD, Algeria, 2019.

Our research has highlighted a significant variance in term of the frequency of board and committee meetings. 23 of entities surveyed disclose the frequency of their board meetings, however our interviews revealed that this frequency is generally lower than that of corporate entities in the region. Over 60% of boards of Arab think tanks meet 1-3 times annually. A few exceptions to this exist: for instance, the Muwatin Institute have board meetings 6-7 times a year, reflecting its board’s more active role in strategy and project delivery.

Also, the process and the formalities around board meetings appear to be less formalized in that the notification and in the overall procedures guiding board meetings are less established. To some extent, this reflects the ad-hoc nature of the governance processes, and to some extent this is also a reflection of the practical challenges that boards of Arab think tanks face. For example, PASSIA suggested that its board of directors cannot meet in person due to travel restrictions in Palestine.

*“The Board shall meet at least once a year, upon the invitation of the Chairman.”
Institutional Charter, Economic Research Forum, Egypt*

Figure 22- Frequency of Board Meetings, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

The ad-hoc nature of board meetings is a reflection of the absence of a formalized role of a corporate secretary except in a handful institutions. In recent years, the role of the corporate secretary is becoming increasingly formalized across the region’s corporates. The appointment of a corporate secretary is now a requirement or a recommendation in corporate governance codes across the region especially in the Gulf countries. However, only a handful of think tanks, such as the Arab Thought Forum and the EDA, have a dedicated board secretary, a practice that has substantially improved the quality of the governance process at these entities.

Senior Leadership Role and Responsibilities

Few think tanks have a specific process to appoint the CEO or other senior executives. Survey responses revealed that approximately half of the think tanks have the CEO and other senior executives appointed by a decision of the board, 17% by a dedicated board committee, 8% by a patron of a think tank, and 5% by a leading government figure.

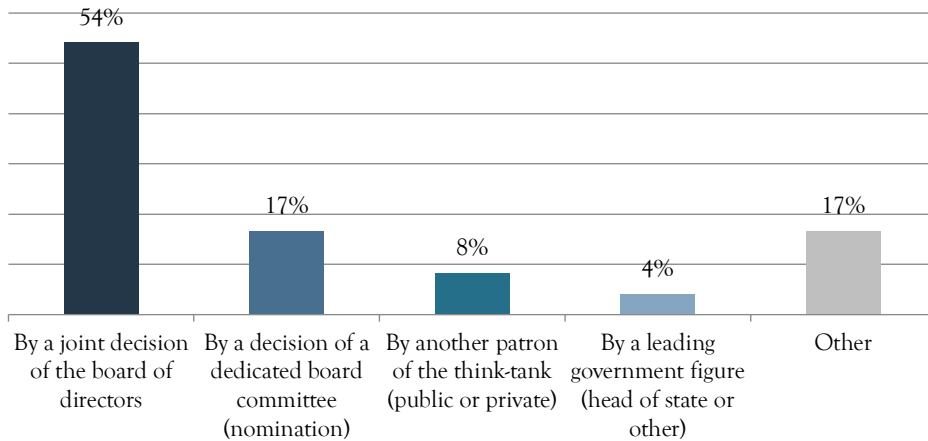
Generally speaking, in government affiliated think tanks such as the CREAD in Algeria, the CEO is appointed by a leading government figure instead of the board. In privately organized think tanks, the role of the CEO and board roles overlap: in fact the CEO is often not formally appointed by the board, on the contrary the CEO “appoints” the board.²¹

Very few think tanks have a structured process where the board selects the CEO and has a succession process for the replacement of senior executives (refer to Figure 23 below). In less than 50% of the most active think tanks in the region does the board have a formal process around succession planning. As a result, less than 15% of think tanks confirm that they have a pipeline of senior executive and board candidates.

That said, our research has also identified a number of best practices in this regard. For instance, the ERF notes that its Nomination Committee, though it is not a formal committee of the board, has a responsibility for the recruitment of its CEO. It indicates that the board has identified an interim CEO in case of emergency and that the board communicates with management about the succession planning.

²¹ This is for example the case of the GRC and PASSIA where the think tank was set up by an initiative of a single individual.

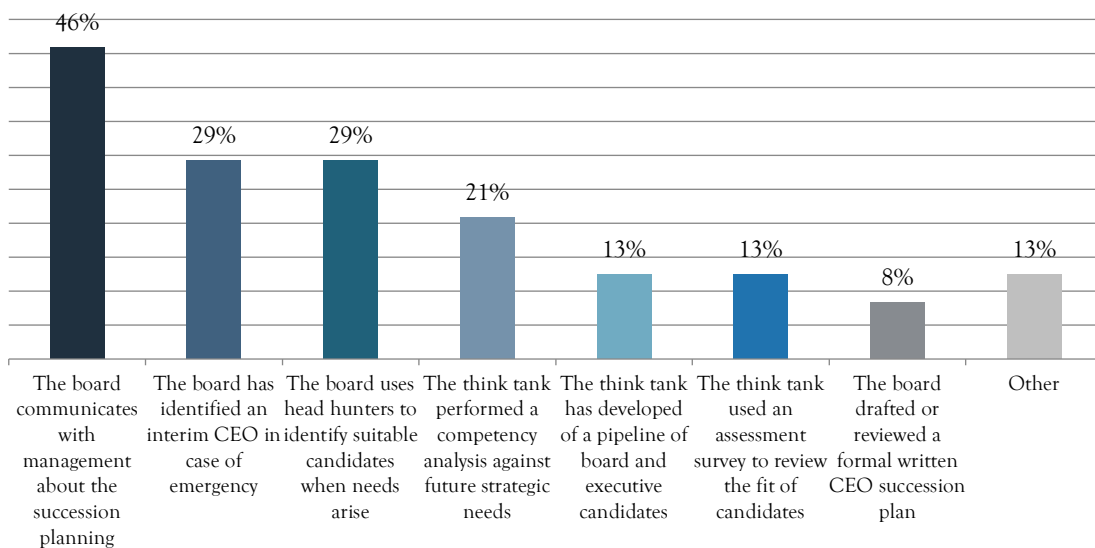
Figure 23- Appointment of Senior Executives, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

“The Board of Trustees shall appoint a Managing Director who will be experienced, qualified and enjoy leadership qualities. The Board of Trustees shall determine his/her remuneration and delegate to him/her broad authorities to manage the day to day operations of ERF.” The Economic Research Forum, Egypt, Institutional Charter

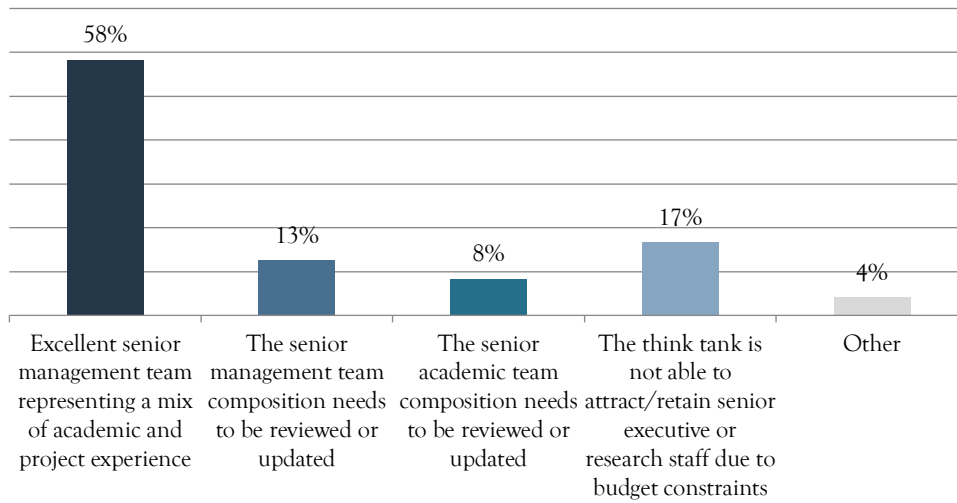
Figure 24- Appointment of Senior Executives, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

While this lack of a structured process to recruit senior management of think tanks poses a sustainability risk, almost 60% of the entities which responded to the GOVERN survey believe that they have an excellent management team, and less than 15% believe that the senior management team needs to be updated. Less than 10% consider that the academic team needs to be reviewed.

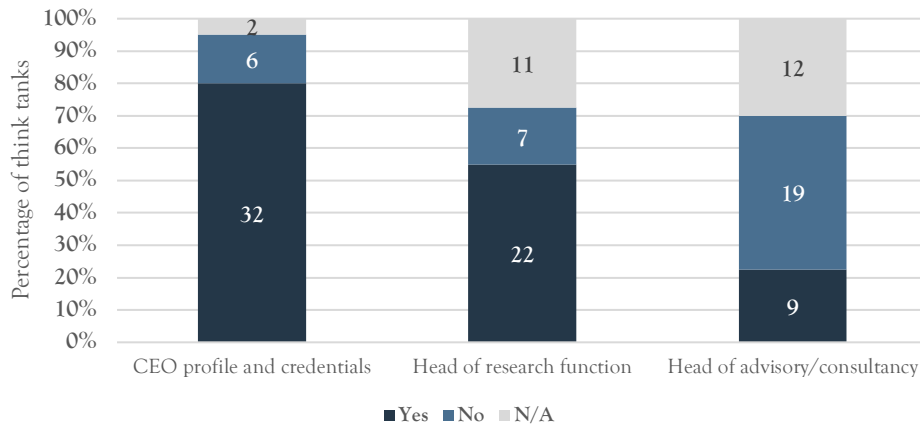
Figure 25- Senior Management Experience, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

Most think tanks disclose their organizational structure and the profile of key roles in the organization. In most cases however, the organigram does not explicitly specify reporting lines and the relationship between the board and management. In the sample, 32 out of 40 disclosed the profile of their CEO and 22 the profile of the head of the research function (refer to Figure 26 below). The profile of the head of the advisory function was less frequently disclosed. Not all think tanks have this function as some are purely focused on research and do not engage in advisory activities.

Figure 26- Key Roles in the Organisation (n=40)



Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

PART III. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The quality of disclosure and transparency is a key challenge in corporate and public governance across the Arab world and is also a challenge for the think tank sector. Data transparency and availability has indeed been a major obstacle in the preparation of this report as many think tanks do not communicate their key governance and financial information through their website either in English or in Arabic.²²

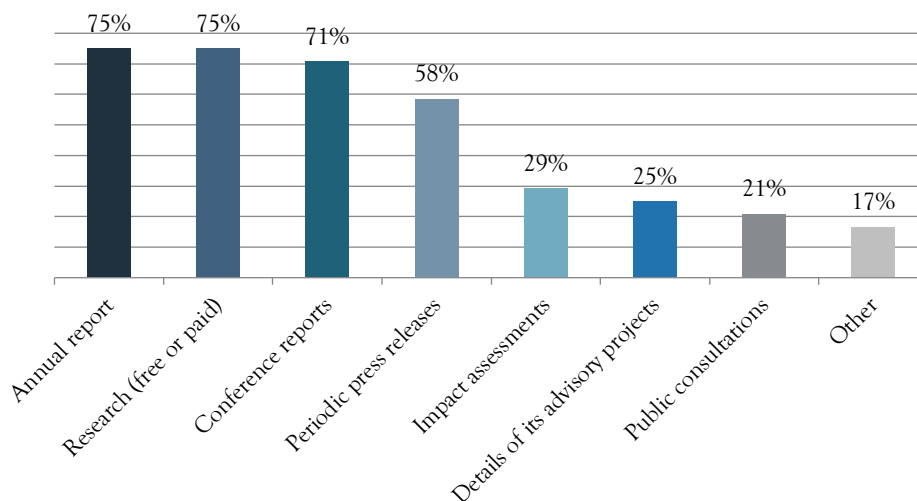
This includes key governance and financial data that is important for stakeholders and donors to judge the impact of a given entity's activities. While think tanks provide reporting to donors, they may disclose substantially less information to the stakeholder community. The overall governance framework including the board composition, stakeholder relations, and the organizational structure are rarely reported on.

The founding documents, apart from the vision and mission statements which remain for most part general, are often not available in the public domain. There are however a number of exceptions to this which provide best practices for the think tank community in the region. For instance, the Royal Institute of Strategic Studies (l'Institut Royal des Etudes Strategiques), a Moroccan think-tank publishes its founding documents online.²³ The Economic Research Forum also publishes its Charter, Board Composition and other governance related documents.

Generally speaking, it appears to be more common for think tanks that are founded and funded by governments to provide better quality disclosure, whereas entities that are created and funded by the private sector tend not to do so. Private sector founded and funded entities appear to be concerned that transparency might result in further audits from the government or investigations and political interference in their activities.

The size of the think tank appears to be an important factor insofar as the quality of disclosure is concerned: larger think tanks provide better disclosure in a wider number of areas than their smaller peers (refer to Figure 27 below). Over 70% of these disclose their annual report and make publicly available their research and conference reports.

Figure 27- Disclosure Provided, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

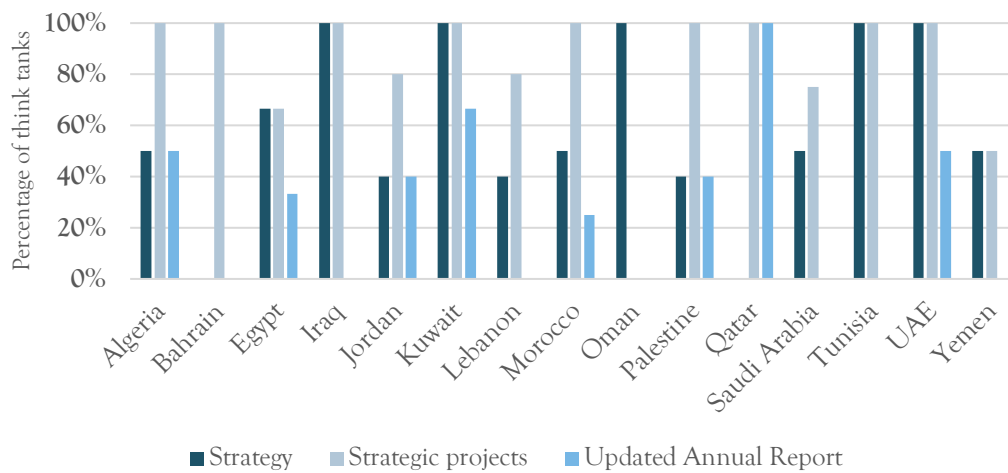
²² The data collected for this report was compiled based on a review of websites and other publicly available information provided by think tanks in the region. Where the sought data was not available, we have sought to address this through primarily data collection through the online survey and interviews to gather more qualitative information and perspectives.

²³ <https://www.ires.ma/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Dahir-portant-creation-de-l-Institut-Royal-des-Etudes-Strategiques.pdf>

It is noteworthy that a number of the larger think tanks also publish periodic newsletters and publications, which indicates an advanced level of maturity and accountability. On the other hand, as highlighted by the above Figure, think tanks in the region generally fare poorly in conducting public consultations. This is indeed a common point with the public sector, which also practices less engagement with the citizens as opposed to other countries.

Theoretically, the quality of disclosure should be dictated by the national regulatory framework and indeed Kuwait and UAE based think tanks appearing to perform better than their peers. Notably, in some countries, there is a requirement to submit the audited annual report to the authorities. This is for instance the case for Palestinian think tanks operating in East Jerusalem as their audited statements need to be provided to the relevant authorities in Israel.

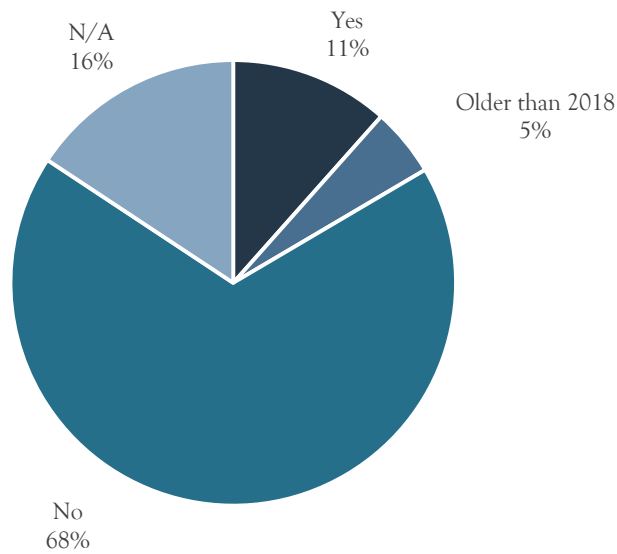
Figure 28- Disclosure of Key Documents and Projects (n=40)



Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

Note: Updated annual report considered available for 2018.

Figure 29- Availability of an Updated Annual Report (n=140)



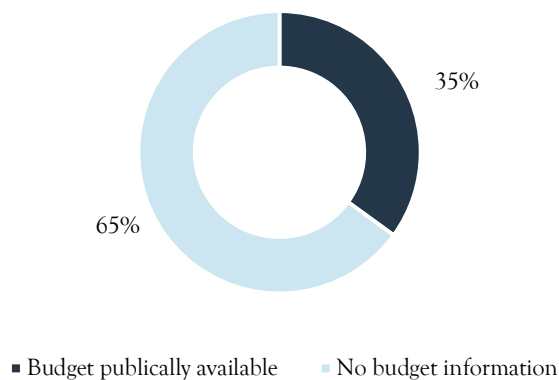
Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

Note: We defined an updated annual report as one available for 2018. The N/A category refers to think tanks which claim to publish an annual report, but they were not found/available through our review of publicly available information.

Interviews conducted for this report revealed that think tanks are reticent to publish their financial data for reasons reflecting the presence of economic informality more generally. In some cases, the financial profile is only briefly mentioned in general discussion of the entity's activities. 35% of large think tanks disclose their financial information publicly. However, a number of other think tanks select to have their annual report audited, in large part in order to foster a degree of trust with donors.

Having reviewed the data disclosed by the various entities, we conclude that approximately 38% of our sample display an acceptable degree of funding transparency. Additional transparency would be useful around the advisory activities of think tanks – especially those registered as NGO - as a number of them perform additional consulting type activities. Likewise, better disclosure of their governance in the form of a board report would also be welcome.

Figure 30- Availability of Financial Information (n=40)

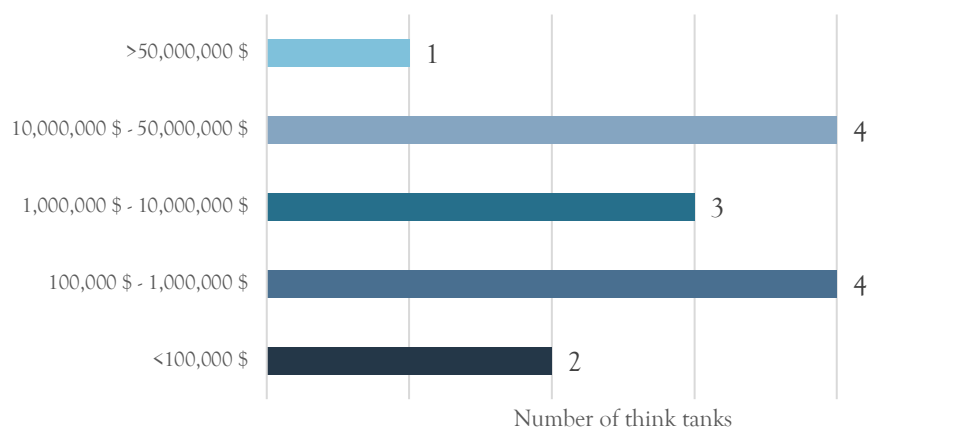


Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

Some think tanks have established a voluntary reporting framework to disclose their financial performance publicly even when not required by the applicable legal and regulatory framework. For instance, the Gulf Research Center publishes its consolidated and audited financial statements online (for the three jurisdictions where it operates) including notably sources of funding.²⁴

Further information on the budget of select think tanks is available from the Figure below. In this regard, it is worth highlighting that the disclosed financial information rarely includes payments to the board and the executive staff, whereas disclosure of remuneration of board and senior management members is becoming increasingly mandated and common by the region’s corporates. For the think tank sector, this is to some extent related to the fact that board members and advisory committee members are often not remunerated.

Figure 31- Budget Disclosed, Select Think Tanks (n =40)



Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

Transparency around the financial model of think tanks appears to be correlated to the affiliation of a given think tank in that government funded entities provide better disclosure. On the other hand, the fact that most think tanks do not communicate on their governance appears to be correlated to the sophistication of existing governance arrangements. Additional transparency on the governance of think tanks would be welcome, notably on the profile and composition of their boards and committees.

Our research has highlighted a few best practices in terms of disclosure. For example, CREAD, an Algerian scientific think tank is one of the few in the region to produce a report on its activities which outlines the nature of its projects and their impact. The report provides an overview of collaborative projects and published research, however, does not disclose think tanks’ financial information.²⁵

The Policy Center for the New South (formerly OCP policy center), a Moroccan think tank, provides its annual report in English and Arabic. The report provides detailed overview of the think tank’s activities including scientific activities and reports by project.²⁶ It provides also a detailed overview of the think tank’s work in terms of its publications, profiles of its researchers and impact of its activities such as the number of participants in the various forums and conferences. It does not, however, provide any financial disclosure.

Indeed, there appears to be a lack of differentiation between an annual report and an activity report which are occasionally combined. This is the case for CREAD which publishes an annual report on its research activities, but no board report or financial statements. From our analysis, it follows that the concept of an annual report

²⁴ Incidentally, it is also the think tank with the largest disclosed budget in the Arab world.

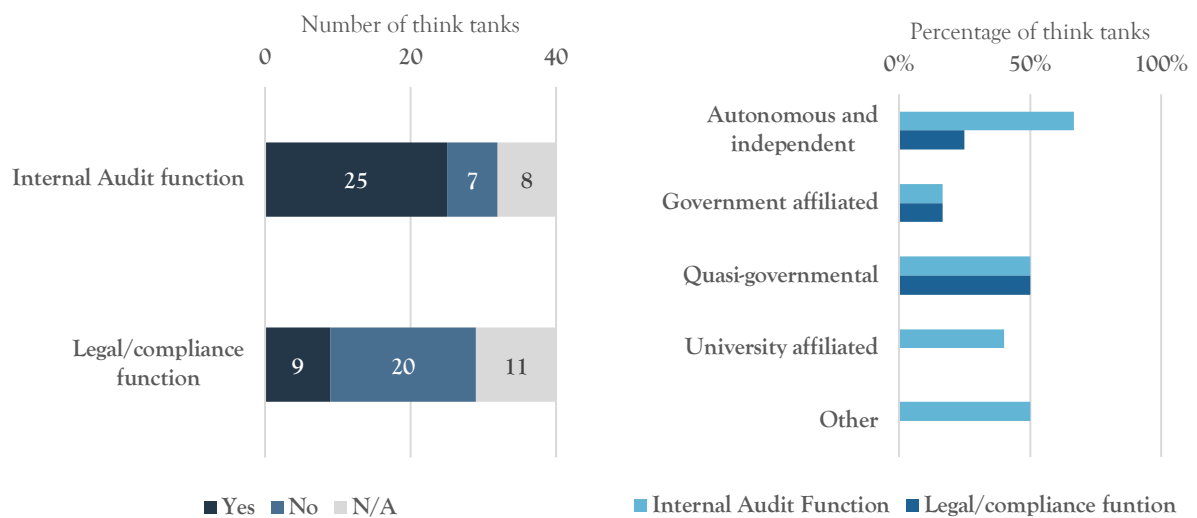
²⁵ The report is accessible on <http://www.cread.dz/tmp/2019/04/Rapport-dactivit%C3%A9-CREAD-2018.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/Rapport%20d%27activit%C3%A9%202018%20%28Version%20English%29.pdf>

appears to be much less understood and developed in the think tank community in the region than in the corporate sector.

In line with these observations, the audit and compliance functions demonstrate a variable degree of development. Of the 40 large think tanks we reviewed, 25 had an internal audit function and 9 had a legal and compliance function. University affiliated think tanks tend not have their own legal and compliance function since these functions are typically centralized at the level of the university. Others appear to be missing these functions due to a lack of resources.

Figure 32- Audit and Compliance Functions (n=40)



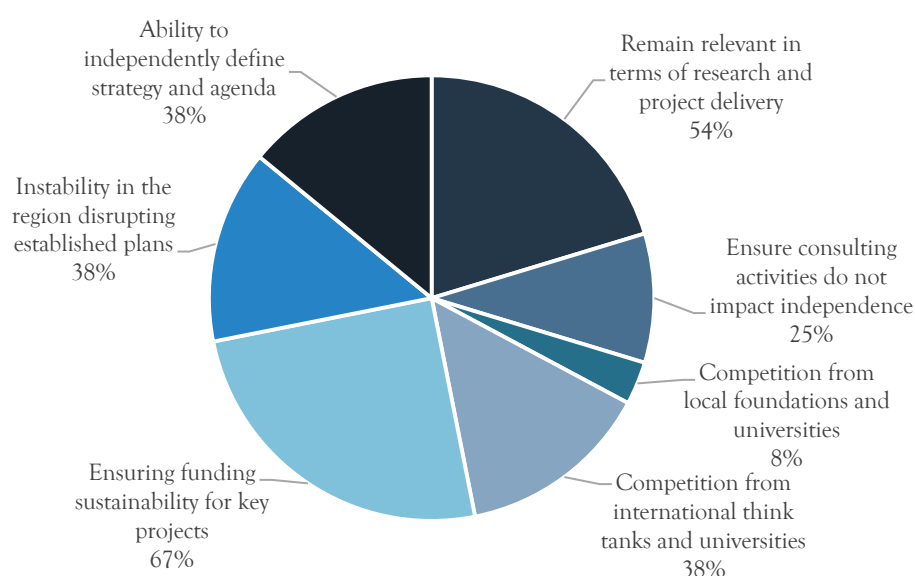
Source: GOVERN Center, 2019.

PART IV. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A key objective of this report was to investigate how better governance frameworks can support the development of the think tank sector in the region by fostering better quality research, stakeholder trust and donor accountability. While the previous sections of this report focused on analysing the weaknesses and opportunities in the formal governance structures, this concluding part of the report seeks to shed light on how governance structures can support the development of the sector more generally.

To do so, a better understanding of the strategic challenges facing think tanks in the region is required. According to our survey of the largest think tanks in the region summarized in Figure 33 below, their top priorities were funding sustainability (67%), followed by maintaining relevance (54%). Regional instability and the ability to independently define strategy were allocated an equal 38%.

Figure 33- Critical Challenges, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



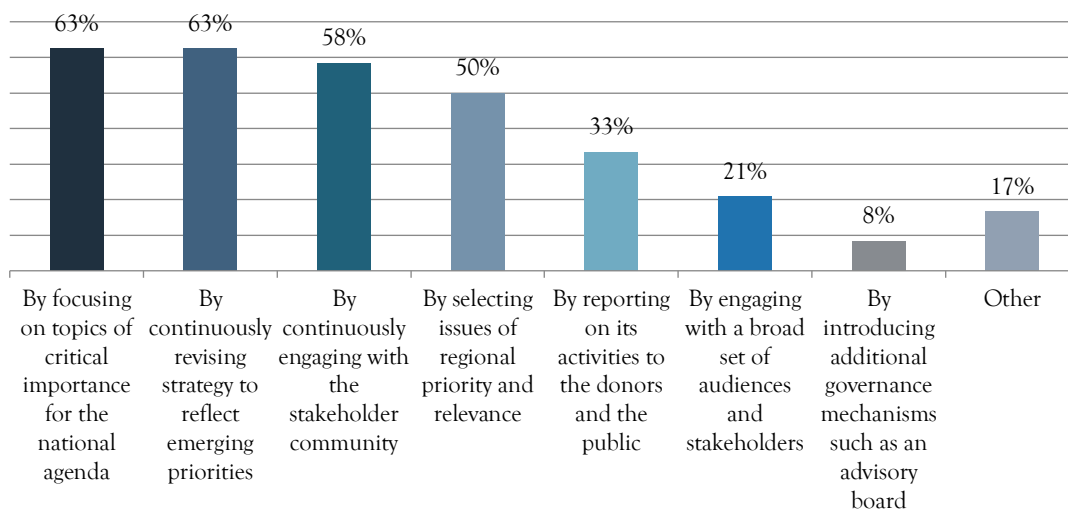
Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

As discussed throughout this report, funding sustainability and operational independence is inherently linked to governance structures adopted by think tanks. The quality of these structures is quite variable considering the variety of legal forms adopted by think tanks and also the variability of national regulatory frameworks.

While some entities have selected to address their governance through voluntary measures within the parameters set by the relevant domestic legislation, others such as the GRC for instance, have opted for an additional foreign registration in order to inspire further trust among stakeholders and confidence among its donors and partners.

Overall, think tanks have adopted a range of measures to foster trust among donors and stakeholders, most of them focusing on the national agenda (over 60%) and on reflecting emerging priorities (also over 60%). On the other hand, reporting on activities to the donors and engagement with stakeholders have received lower scores as highlighted by Figure 34 below.

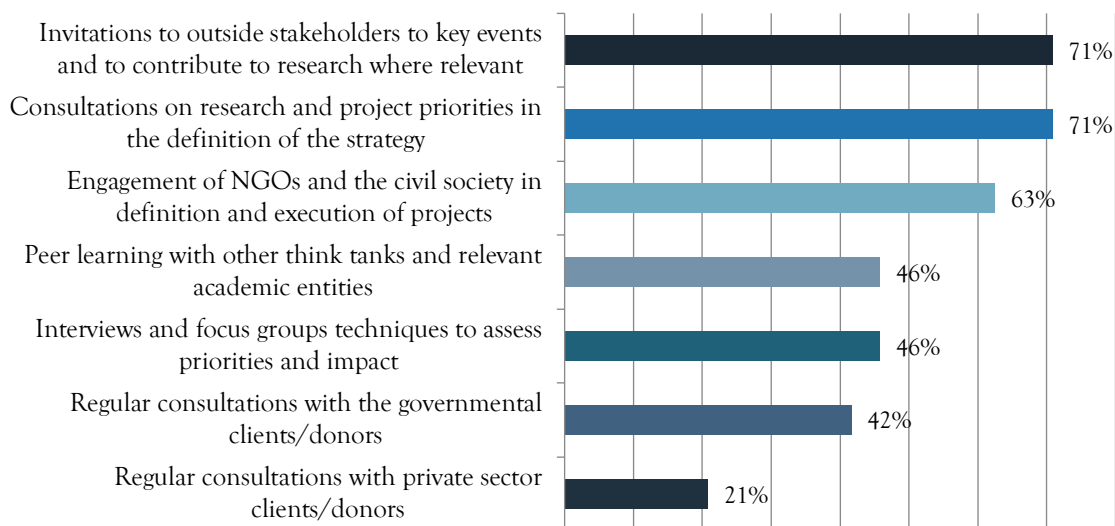
Figure 34- Trust Building Mechanisms, (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

Survey responses have highlighted that in order to foster trust, think tanks have adopted a broad range of measures to engage with their stakeholders, the most prominent of them being invitations to key events and consultations on research priorities, whereas other mechanisms such as peer debates are less frequently employed. Some organisations such as the ERF for instance, engages stakeholders at early stages of strategy definition, which constitutes a good practice for the rest of the sector in order to remain relevant.

Figure 35- Stakeholder Engagement, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



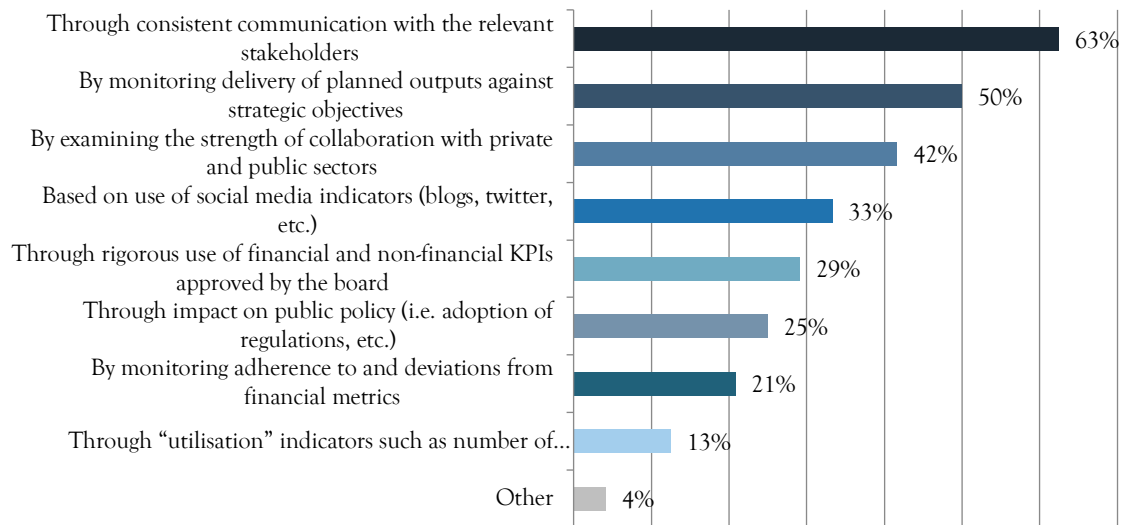
Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

Another important mechanism used by think tanks to remain relevant are impact assessments of their work, however our research highlights that they remain relatively unstructured. As demonstrated by the Figure below, most areas assessed by think tanks focus on the quality of their research, impact on public policy debates and ability to deliver on established projects.

“Few think tanks and NGOs in the Middle East more generally conduct impact assessments which is fundamental to understanding of the value add of their activities”
Naila Farouky, CEO, Arab Foundations Forum, Belgium

At the same time, most think tanks commented that their impact assessments are linked to objective KPIs such as number of participants in conferences and number of publications which provide objective but unfortunately not forward-looking metrics. Some entities use more sophisticated metrics such as the number of new participants and the number of papers published in recognised research journals.

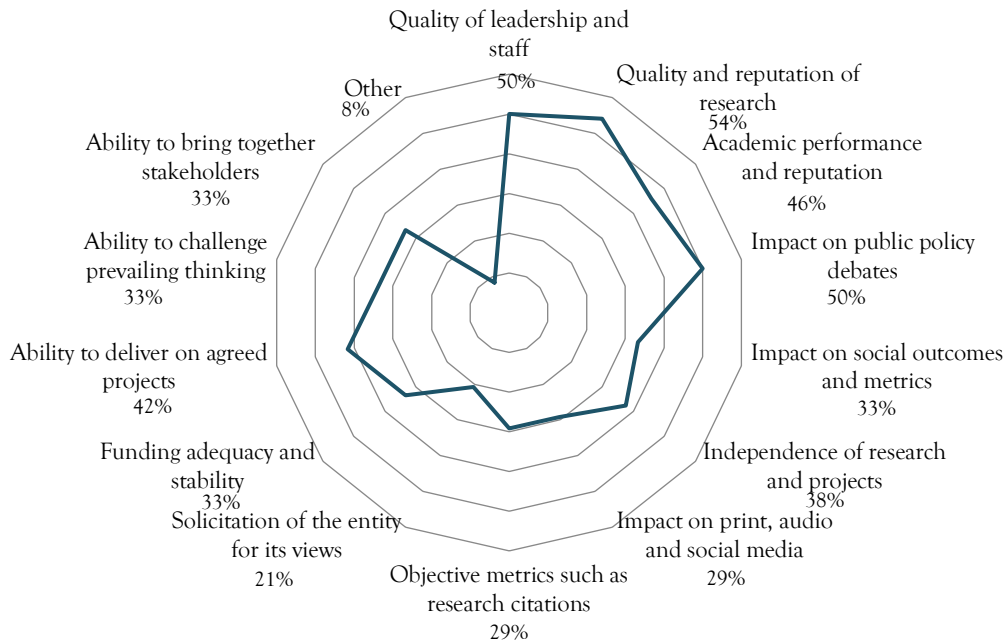
Figure 36- Impact Assessments, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

“More relevant KPIs include more innovative metrics such as new stakeholders being represented in the debates, the ability to influence public debate and influence government policy. However, these are long term KPIs which may take a long time to realise and track.”
Mudar Kassis, Director, Muwatin Institute, Palestine

Figure 37- KPIs Utilised in Impact Assessments (n=24)

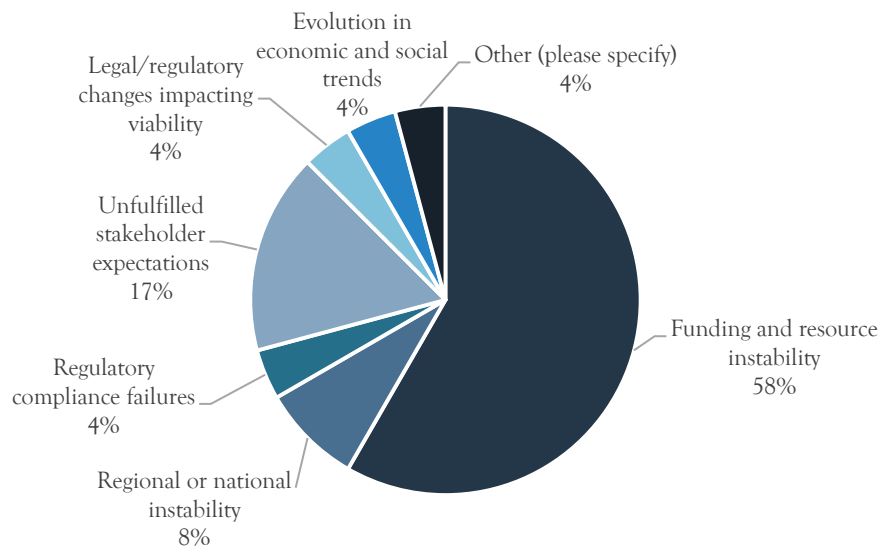


Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

As highlighted by Figure 37 above, think tanks most frequently employ variables attempting to capture the quality of research, leadership reputation and impact on public policy debates as KPIs. However, it appears that boards are rarely involved in monitoring performance relative to the established KPIs, which would potentially negatively impact the quality of the risk management process.

Senior representatives of the sector perceive funding instability as the key risk with over half of respondents highlighting it as the top risk, followed by unfulfilled stakeholder expectations, which can also be seen as a manifestation of funding shortages. Given this perception of risks facing the industry, the risk management mechanisms, summarized in Figure 38 below, correspond to key risks facing the sector.

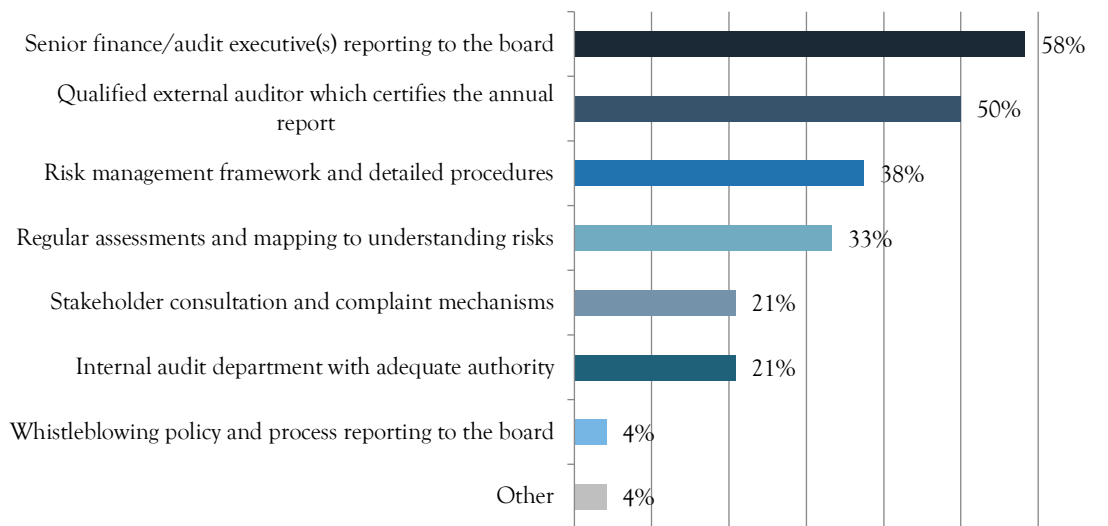
Figure 38- Sources of Risk, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

58% of survey respondents noted that the primary risk management mechanism is a senior financial officer reporting to the board, followed by the certification of the annual report by an external auditor. On the other hand, traditional mechanisms of risk mapping and regular risk assessments are less utilized as opposed to the corporate sector. As highlighted in earlier sections of this report, practices related to internal controls such as the presence of an internal audit department, whistleblowing and other mechanisms are for the moment also less developed among Arab think tanks.

Figure 39- Risk Management Mechanisms, Select Think Tanks (n=24)

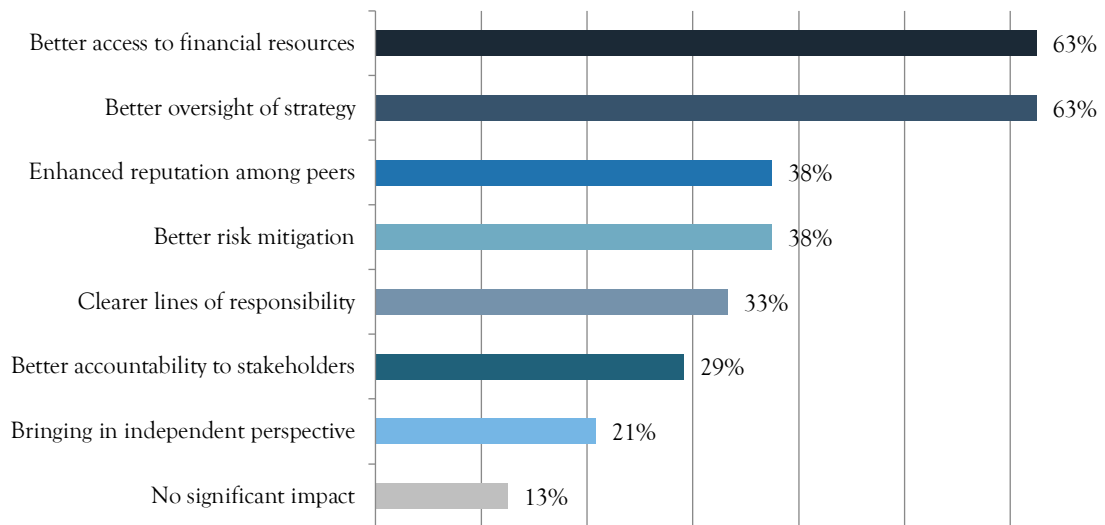


Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

Improved risk management was ranked as fourth in terms of governance priorities by think tank representatives. Better access to finance was once again ranked as the first priority, followed by better strategy

oversight. Just over 10% of the respondents to our surveyed considered that better governance practices would not result in a significant impact on the performance and eventual impact of their entity.

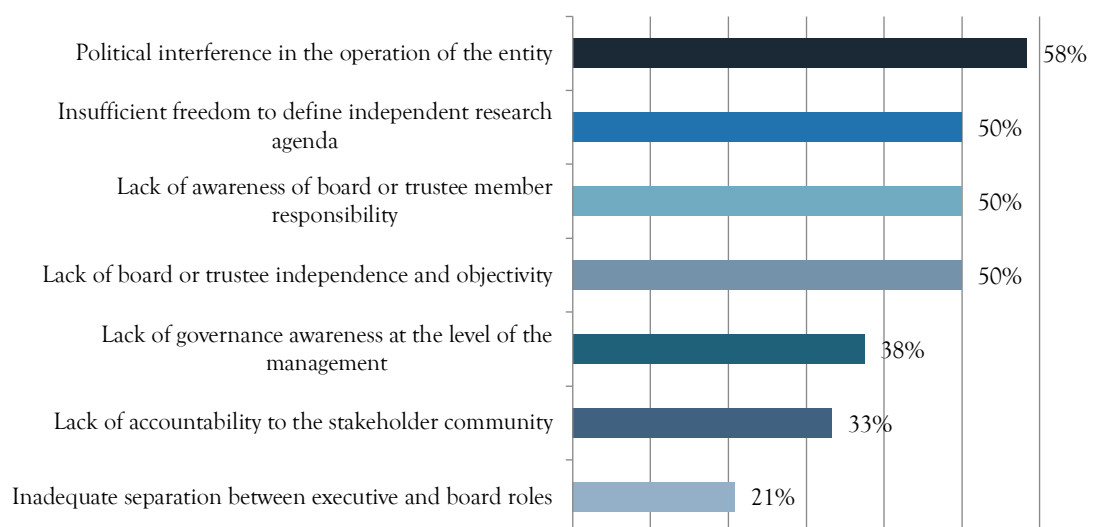
Figure 40- Impact of Better Governance, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

Achieving stronger governance practices entails addressing the most pressing challenges, of which political interference was ranked as the top obstacle (by over 60% of respondents), followed by insufficient freedom to define the research agenda (by over 50% of respondents). Lack of board member responsibility and objectivity was also highlighted as an important obstacle by half of the survey respondents. This reflects our analysis above, which highlighted that most board members in government-affiliated entities are appointed by the state, and in private entities recruited by the founder.

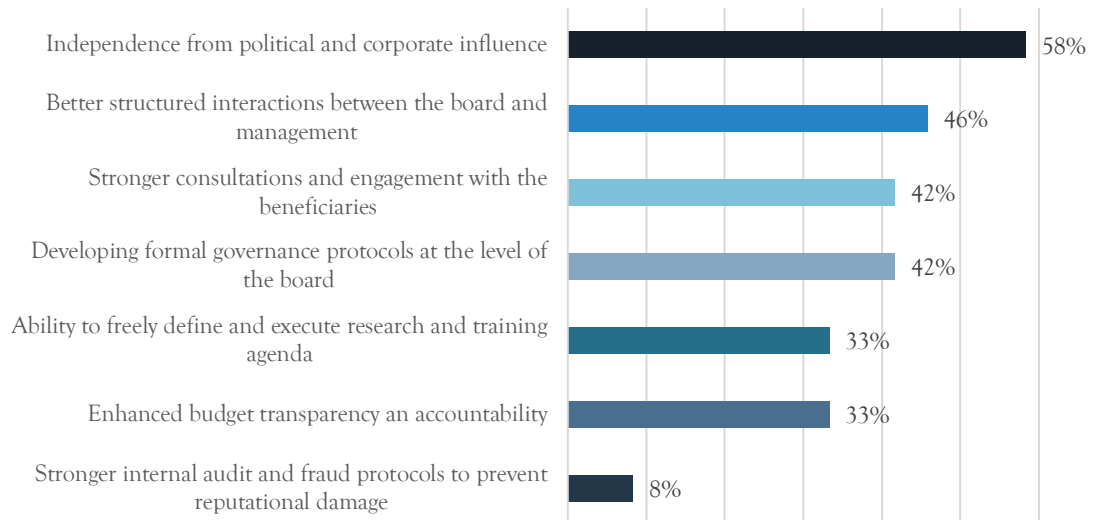
Figure 41- Most Important Governance Obstacles, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

The governance priorities highlighted by think tanks reflect these challenges, whereby close to 60% of respondents noted that independence from political and corporate influence is a key consideration. Other governance priorities included better structured interactions between board and management, formal board protocols and stronger engagement with beneficiaries (refer to Figure 42 below). These priorities are summarised in the recommendations put forth in the following section of this report.

Figure 42- Governance Priorities, Select Think Tanks (n=24)



Source: GOVERN Center, online survey, 2019.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The benchmarking and analysis undertaken for this first-of-a-kind regional report on governance of Arab think-tanks allows to advance a number of recommendations, developed based on an assessment of both best practices and weaknesses. These recommendations were socialized with the senior representatives of the sector and reflect current priorities.

Legal Framework

- Policymakers should facilitate the registration of think tanks as non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations.
- The governance framework of governmental or government-affiliated think tanks should be clearly codified in their founding documents to avoid unnecessary political influence.
- The oversight of think tanks should be entrusted to a designated Ministry in order for think tanks to have a clear interlocutor.
- While the receipt of grants shall be subject to appropriate controls, the current involvement of government bodies in the approval of grants creates cumbersome and unwarranted interference.
- The think tank sector should be free of political interference in its activities that might occur in a variety of ways, including politicised board appointments, grants approvals, and implicit censorship.
- Policymakers are suggested to avoid unnecessary changes in the NGO legislation or other relevant legislation affecting think tank activities as legal instability can adversely affect their long-term planning.
- For think tanks registered as commercial entities, governance mechanisms and controls need to be introduced to ensure that think tank activities are separate and not influenced by any commercial engagements.
- Policymakers may wish to consider allowing the establishment of entities with a dual for profit and not-for-profit mandate in order to foster the creation of think tanks that have both functions.

Board Level Governance

- A better understanding is needed among think tanks in terms of differences between a supervisory, trustee and a management board which would facilitate a division of responsibilities among them.
- As a matter of best practice, board and committee structures and other critical board governance protocols should be addressed in a board manual or the equivalent. It should also specify the mechanisms through which amendments to it can be introduced.
- To ensure board sustainability, think tanks may consider having staggered boards such that the entire board shall not be subject to replacement once its term expires.
- Boards of think tanks may benefit from having advisory committee(s) to provide inputs on emerging topics with a view of enriching the research and project agenda.

- Think tank boards would benefit from having a more diverse structure of stakeholders and a more dynamic board renewal process, based on a formal mandate to be established in its governing documents.
- Think tank boards would benefit from being focused on defining and monitoring the execution of the strategic research and project agenda.
- Boards of think tanks are advised to have a formalized process for recruitment and appointment of the CEO and possibly other senior executives that ensures long term sustainability of their activities.
- The board should exercise a formal responsibility to appoint and set the remuneration of the CEO and other senior level staff.
- Boards of larger think tanks may wish to consider establishing board committees and if needed, advisory committees to the board. If established, the mandate and responsibilities of such committees shall be codified in the board charter.

Strategy and Risk Management

- Formal risk management mechanisms would benefit the development of the sector and would help ensure institutional sustainability.
- Risk management protocols, notably focusing on key risks such as funding and political instability, would be useful to ensure think tank sustainability.
- Think tanks in the region could benefit from closer research and project collaboration in view of their limited resources.
- To this end, a coordination platform may be considered to systematically allow them to exchange on critical priorities and to pool resources.
- Think tank boards should establish key performance indicators (KPIs) that seek to measure the short and long-term impact of their activities.
- In addition to simple qualified metrics such as the number of workshops, more sophisticated metrics on behavioural change resulting of research or other activities may be useful for larger entities.
- Governments, the private sector and other donors may wish to consider supporting think tanks operating or seeking to operate in specific domains such as science and technology where independent research is lagging.
- All grants and contributions to think tank budgets should be assessed from the perspective of their independence and any potential conflicts of interest.
- Think tanks should establish clear policies and conditions concerning the acceptance of funding and reporting on its utilization.

Stakeholder Relations

- Resources allowing, think tanks should carry out impact assessments of their research and other activities utilizing relevant KPIs approved and monitored by the board.

- Think tanks are encouraged to publish an annual report which includes their financial resources and expenditures, as well as key achievements and impact in order to build stakeholder and donor trust.
- An annual external audit of the annual report is recommended for communication with the national authorities, donors and stakeholders.
- Consultations with the stakeholder groups can support engagement of key constituencies with the think tank not only as “consumer” of its work but also in defining the agenda of its activities.
- Likewise, consultations and discussions with the policymakers can help ensure the relevance of think tank activities to public policy.
- International organisations and donors may be advised to consider how to channel funding towards research projects such as not to foster unnecessary competition among think tanks in the region.
- Think tanks are advised to provide better disclosure in particular around the nature of their research and advisory work, and how potential conflicts of interests are managed.

ANNEXES

Annex I. Arab Think Tanks, Classified by Country

Highlighted: Selected Think Tanks (n=40)

	Name	Country
1	African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT)	Algeria
2	Cercle d'Action et de Réflexion Autour de l'Entreprise (CARE)	Algeria
3	National Institute of Strategic Global Studies	Algeria
4	Research Center in Applied Economics for Development (CREAD)	Algeria
5	Bahrain Center for Human Rights	Bahrain
6	Bahrain Center for Strategic, international and Energy Studies (DERASAT)	Bahrain
7	Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS)	Egypt
8	Alternative Policy Solutions (AUC)	Egypt
9	Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA)	Egypt
10	Arab Reform Forum	Egypt
11	Baseera	Egypt
12	Center for Political Research and Studies	Egypt
13	Economic Research Forum (ERF)	Egypt
14	Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR)	Egypt
15	Egyptian Center for Economic Studies (ECES)	Egypt
16	Egyptian Center for Public Policy Studies (ECPPS)	Egypt
17	Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs (ECFA)	Egypt
18	Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights	Egypt
19	Egypt's International Economic Forum	Egypt
20	Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies (ICDS)	Egypt
21	Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC)	Egypt
22	Institute of National Planning	Egypt
23	Law & Society Research Unit - AUC	Egypt
24	Partners in Development (PID)	Egypt
25	Social Justice Platform	Egypt
26	Al Bayan Center for Planning and Studies	Iraq

27	Arab Studies Center, Al Mustansiriyah University	Iraq
28	Dar Al Khibra Organization (DKO)	Iraq
29	Hammurabi Center for Research and Strategic Studies	Iraq
30	Iraqi Center for Policy Analysis and Research	Iraq
31	Middle East Research Institute (MERI)	Iraq
32	New Iraqi Center for Research and Strategic Studies	Iraq
33	Al Badeel For Studies	Jordan
34	Al Rai Center for Studies	Jordan
35	Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center (UJRC)	Jordan
36	Al-Quds Center for Political Studies	Jordan
37	Arab Foundations Forum	Jordan
38	Arab Institute for Security Studies	Jordan
39	Arab Thought Forum (ATF)	Jordan
40	Center for Strategic Studies (CSS)	Jordan
41	Center for The Study of The Built Environment (CSBE)	Jordan
42	Jordan Institute of Diplomacy	Jordan
43	Middle East Scientific Institute for Security (MESIS)	Jordan
44	Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies	Jordan
45	The Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies	Jordan
46	West Asia and North Africa Institute	Jordan
47	Arab Planning Institute (API)	Kuwait
48	Center for Gulf Studies	Kuwait
49	Center for Research and Studies on Kuwait	Kuwait
50	Center of Strategic and Futuristic Studies (CSFS)	Kuwait
51	Kuwait Economic Society	Kuwait
52	Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS)	Kuwait
53	Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR)	Kuwait
54	Middle East Center for Economics and Finance (CEF)	Kuwait
55	Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations	Lebanon
56	Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA)	Lebanon
57	Carnegie Middle East Center	Lebanon

58	Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS)	Lebanon
59	Center for Strategic Studies Research and Documentation (CSSRD)	Lebanon
60	Ideation Center (Strategy&)	Lebanon
61	Institute for Palestine Studies	Lebanon
62	International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)	Lebanon
63	Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI)	Lebanon
64	Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS)	Lebanon
65	Lebanese Institute for Market Studies	Lebanon
66	Rami Makhzoumi Corporate Governance Initiative	Lebanon
67	The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at AUB	Lebanon
68	Libyan Organization for Policies and Strategies (Loops)	Libya
69	Sadeq Institute	Libya
70	Amadeus Institute	Morocco
71	Arab Center for Scientific Research and Human Studies	Morocco
72	Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches en Sciences Sociales (CERSS)	Morocco
73	Centre Jacques-Berque etudes en sciences humaines et sociales	Morocco
74	Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique et Technique (CNRST)	Morocco
75	Group of Studies and Research in the Mediterranean (GERM)	Morocco
76	Institut de Recherche pour le Developpement	Morocco
77	Institut des Etudes Africaines	Morocco
78	Laboratoire d'Etudes politiques, des Sciences humaines et sociales (LEPOSHS)	Morocco
79	Laboratory for Research on Comparative Democratic Transition	Morocco
80	Le Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Aziz Belal (CERAB)	Morocco
81	Moroccan Institute for International Relations	Morocco
82	Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis (MIPA)	Morocco
83	Moroccan Interdisciplinary Center for Strategic Studies	Morocco
84	Policy Center for the new South (formerly: OCP Policy Center)	Morocco
85	Prometheus Institute for Democracy and Human Rights	Morocco
86	Public Policy Center (PPC)	Morocco
87	Royal Institute for Strategic Studies (IRES)	Morocco
88	International Research Foundation (IRF)	Oman

89	Tawasul	Oman
90	Contemporary Center for Studies and Policy Analysis (Medad)	Palestine
91	Health, Development, Information and Policy Institute	Palestine
92	Issam Sartawi for the Advancement of Peace and Democracy (ISCAPD)	Palestine
93	Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights	Palestine
94	Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)	Palestine
95	Palestinian Center for Peace and Democracy	Palestine
96	Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research	Palestine
97	PalThink for Strategic Studies	Palestine
98	Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (PRIME)	Palestine
99	Al Jazeera Centre for Studies (AJCS)	Qatar
100	Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies	Qatar
101	Brookings Doha Center	Qatar
102	Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS)	Qatar
103	Qatar Foundation	Qatar
104	Center for Strategic Development	Saudi Arabia
105	Desert Agriculture Initiative	Saudi Arabia
106	Gulf Research Center (GRC)	Saudi Arabia
107	International Institute for Iranian Studies/FKA Arabian Gulf Center	Saudi Arabia
108	King Abdallah Petroleum Studies and Research Centre (KAPSARC)	Saudi Arabia
109	King Abdullah Institute for Research and Consulting Studies	Saudi Arabia
110	King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies	Saudi Arabia
111	King Salman Center for Local Governance (KSCLG)	Saudi Arabia
112	Prince Sultan Institute for Environmental, Water and Desert Research	Saudi Arabia
113	Sustainable Energy Technologies Center	Saudi Arabia
114	Syrian League for Citizenship	Syria
115	Association des études internationales	Tunisia
116	Center for Mediterranean and International Studies (CEMI)	Tunisia
117	Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR)	Tunisia
118	Democratic Transition & Human Rights Support Center	Tunisia
119	Institut Arabe des Chefs d'Entreprises (IACE)	Tunisia

120	Kheireddine Institute	Tunisia
121	Maghreb Economic Forum	Tunisia
122	Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies (ITES)	Tunisia
123	Tunisian Observatory for a Democratic Transition	Tunisia
124	Tunisian Observatory for Economics	Tunisia
125	Dubai Public Policy Research Center	United Arab Emirates
126	Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR)	United Arab Emirates
127	Emirates Diplomatic Academy	United Arab Emirates
128	Emirates Policy Center	United Arab Emirates
129	Future Center for Advanced Researches and Studies	United Arab Emirates
130	Hedayah	United Arab Emirates
131	International Center for Biosaline Agriculture	United Arab Emirates
132	Legatum Limited	United Arab Emirates
133	Mohamed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG)	United Arab Emirates
134	Sheikh Saud Bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research	United Arab Emirates
135	The Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis (INEGMA)	United Arab Emirates
136	WAMDA	United Arab Emirates
137	Organization for Defending Rights and Democratic Freedoms	Yemen
138	Sana' Center for Strategic Studies	Yemen
139	Sheba Center for Strategic Studies (SCSS)	Yemen
140	Studies and Economic Media Center	Yemen

Annex II. Online Survey

How do you perceive the entity you represent based on its board and governance structure?

- Autonomous and independent
- Quasi-independent
- Government affiliated/part of government
- Quasi-governmental
- University affiliated
- Corporate for profit
- Politically affiliated
- Other, please specify_____

How do the stakeholders perceive the entity you represent based on the board and governance structure?

- Autonomous and independent
- Quasi-independent
- Government affiliated/part of government
- Quasi-governmental
- University affiliated
- Corporate for profit
- Politically affiliated
- Other, please specify_____

Please indicate the focus of the think tank's activities. Please select most relevant category.
If the think tank's work covers multiple areas, please select a maximum of 3.

- Energy and natural resources
- Environment and climate change
- Foreign policy or international affairs
- Agriculture, water or food security
- Education, healthcare or social policy
- Economic or financial policy
- Science and technology
- Other, domestic focus
- Other, international focus

What do you believe have been the most significant obstacles to improving the governance of think tanks in the region? Please select top 3.

- Lack of board or trustee independence and objectivity
- Lack of awareness of board or trustee member responsibility
- Political interference in the operation of the entity
- Inadequate separation between executive and board roles
- Lack of accountability to the stakeholder community
- Insufficient freedom to define independent research agenda
- Lack of governance awareness at the level of the management
- Other, please specify_____

Which of the following formal governance documents/protocols does your think tank have?
Please select all that apply.

- Articles of association or equivalent
- Special law/decreed establishing the think tank
- A corporate governance code or equivalent
- Board charter or manual
- Board committee charters
- A risk management framework
- Code of conduct/ethics code
- Internal audit framework
- External audit framework
- Delegation of authorities
- Stakeholder audit framework
- Mission and vision statement
- Other, please specify_____

What is the size of the board of directors or the board of trustees of your organisation?

- 2-6
- 7-9
- 10-12
- 13 or more
- No formal board

How many female board/trustee members or senior executives does the entity have?

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 5 or more

How independent do you consider your board of directors and/or trustees? Select the option that best applies to your organization.

- Fully independent and objective, operating in the interest of the beneficiaries
- Partially independent and objective, operating in the interest of beneficiaries and donors
- Subject to considerable political and/or corporate influence in its strategic and operational decisions
- Board decisions are fully dictated by political considerations or funding availability
- Other, please specify_____

What is the frequency of board meetings (excluding committee meetings)?

- 1-3 times annually
- 4-5 times annually
- 6-7times annually
- 8 times or more annually
- Not applicable, the board does not meet

What committees, if any, have been established at the level of the board? Please select all that apply.

No board committees established
Audit
Risk
Remuneration
Nomination
Executive
Strategy
Governance
Research
Advisory committee to the board
Other, please specify_____

What are the top barriers to improving board effectiveness in your entity? Please select top 3.

The board or the management do not prioritise governance
Weak director capabilities and lacking expertise
Lack of clarity between Chairman and the CEO responsibilities
Dominant Chairman does not foster communication
Tone at the top does not help establish a governance culture
Lack of renewal or diversity in board members
Board controlled by the founder of the entity/its donors
Lack of qualified board members in the region
The think tank does not have the resources to have adequate governance
Conflict of interest between research and advisory functions
Inadequate oversight of key functions such as research
Other, please specify_____

How do the board and senior management foster trust and relevance of the think tank's activities?
Please select all that apply.

By continuously engaging with the stakeholder community
By focusing on topics of critical importance for the national agenda
By selecting issues of regional priority and relevance
By engaging with a broad set of audiences and stakeholders
By reporting on its activities to the donors and the public
By introducing additional governance mechanisms such as an advisory board
By continuously revising strategy to reflect emerging priorities
Other, please specify_____

Where would you like to see more expertise on in terms of the board's knowledge? Please select top 3.

Think tank/academic experience
Specific industry/topic knowledge
Governance and compliance
Strategy and planning skills
Stakeholder management
Fundraising and budgeting
Technology skills
Other, please specify_____

What is the process of appointment of the CEO of the think tank?

By a leading government figure (head of state or other)
By another patron of the think tank (public or private)
By a joint decision of the board of directors
By a decision of a dedicated board committee (nomination)
On the suggestion of the donor(s) to the think tank
Other, please specify____

What are the sources of risk that you perceive most important for your think tank?

Funding and resource instability
Regional or national instability
Regulatory compliance failures
Unfulfilled stakeholder expectations
Inability to deliver impactful research
Inability to engage with the stakeholders
Legal/regulatory changes impacting viability
Evolution in economic and social trends
Other, please specify____

The think tank has the following risk management practices.
Please select all that apply.

Risk management framework and detailed procedures
Regular assessments and mapping to understanding risks
Internal audit department with adequate authority
Senior finance/audit executive(s) reporting to the board
Qualified external auditor which certifies the annual report
Whistleblowing policy and process reporting to the board
Stakeholder consultation and complaint mechanisms
Other, please specify____

How would you qualify the experience and the contribution of your senior executive team?
Please select a statement that best corresponds to the current situation.

Excellent senior management team representing a mix of academic and project experience
The senior management team composition needs to be reviewed or updated
The senior academic team composition needs to be reviewed or updated
The think tank is not able to attract/retain senior executive or research staff due to budget constraints
Other, please specify____

Do you feel that succession planning for key posts has been adequately addressed? Please select all that apply.

The think tank performed a competency analysis against future strategic needs
The think tank has developed of a pipeline of board and executive candidates
The think tank used an assessment survey to review the fit of candidates
The board has identified an interim CEO in case of emergency
The board uses head hunters to identify suitable candidates when needs arise
The board communicates with management about the succession planning
The board drafted or reviewed a formal written CEO succession plan
Other, please specify_____

What disclosure does the think tank provide to stakeholders and the public?
Please select all that apply.

- Annual report
- Periodic press releases
- Conference reports
- Details of its advisory projects
- Impact assessments
- Public consultations
- Research (free or paid)
- Other, please specify_____

Is the think tank effectively able to engage with its key stakeholders?
Please select all that apply.

- Government
- Private sector
- NGO community
- Academic community
- General public
- Donors
- International community
- Other, please specify_____

What statement would best describe the current funding structure of your entity?

- Reliant on a government endowment
- Reliant on a corporate or private endowment
- Reliant on corporate funding on a multi-year basis
- Reliant on corporate funding on a year-to-year basis
- Reliant on government funding on a multi-year basis
- Reliant on government funding on a year-to-year basis
- Reliant on donations with high net worth patrons
- Other, please specify_____

Are disclosures regarding the following items made publicly available in the annual report or in other sources of information? Select all that apply.

- Board/trustee composition and profiles
- Composition of the senior management team
- Funding structure and resource utilisation
- Strategic priorities and resources allocated to them
- Compensation of board members and senior executives
- Key decisions taken by the board and management
- Key risks and strategy to address them
- Project impact assessments
- Other, please specify_____

What are the mechanisms that you utilise to engage with the stakeholder community?
Please select all that apply.

Consultations on research and project priorities in the definition of the strategy
Engagement of NGOs and the civil society in definition and execution of projects
Interviews and focus groups techniques to assess priorities and impact
Invitations to outside stakeholders to key events and to contribute to research where relevant
Peer learning with other think tanks and relevant academic entities
Regular consultations with the governmental clients/donors
Regular consultations with private sector clients/donors
Other, please specify_____

How does the think tank evaluate its impact?
Please select all that apply.

Through rigorous use of financial and non-financial KPIs approved by the board
Through consistent communication with the relevant stakeholders
By monitoring delivery of planned outputs against strategic objectives
By monitoring adherence to and deviations from financial metrics
Through “utilisation” indicators such as number of references, patents, etc.
Through impact on public policy (i.e. adoption of regulations, etc.)
Based on use of social media indicators (blogs, twitter, etc.)
By examining the strength of collaboration with private and public sectors
Other, please specify____

What KPIs do you utilise in assessing impact?
Please select all that apply.

Quality of leadership and staff
Quality and reputation of research
Academic performance and reputation
Impact on public policy debates
Impact on social outcomes and metrics
Independence of research and projects
Impact on print, audio and social media
Objective metrics such as research citations
Solicitation of the entity for its views
Funding adequacy and stability
Ability to deliver on agreed projects
Ability to challenge prevailing thinking
Ability to bring together stakeholders

What impact do you believe the introduction of better governance might have for the think tank?
Please select all that may apply.

Better risk mitigation
Clearer lines of responsibility
Better oversight of strategy
Bringing in independent perspective
Better access to financial resources
Enhanced reputation among peers
Better accountability to stakeholders
No significant impact

What governance priorities do you believe as being most critical for think tanks in the region?

Developing formal governance protocols at the level of the board
Better structured interactions between the board and management
Enhanced budget transparency and accountability
Stronger consultations and engagement with the beneficiaries
Independence from political and corporate influence
Ability to freely define and execute research and training agenda
Stronger internal audit and fraud protocols to prevent reputational damage
Other, please specify_____

What are the most critical strategic challenges facing think tanks in the Middle East?

Remain relevant in terms of research and project delivery
Ensure consulting activities do not impact independence
Competition from local foundations and universities
Competition from international think tanks and universities
Ensuring funding sustainability for key projects
Instability in the region disrupting established plans
Ability to independently define strategy and agenda
Other, please specify_____