

# Exploring the State of Policy Evaluation: A Critical Study on Regulatory Impact Assessment Practices in Saudi Arabia

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## ABSTRACT:

This study examines the current state of Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, focusing on its institutionalization, implementation, and alignment with international standards. As part of the country's broader regulatory reform agenda under Vision 2030, RIA has emerged as a critical tool for improving the quality of regulations, enhancing transparency, and promoting evidence-based policymaking. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the research relies on a review of official documents, relevant literature, and survey data collected from stakeholders across government institutions. The findings reveal that while Saudi Arabia has made significant strides in establishing a legal and procedural framework for RIA, several challenges persist, including limited institutional capacity, insufficient awareness among policymakers, and weak stakeholder engagement. The paper highlights gaps between policy intent and practice, and it offers practical recommendations for strengthening the institutional foundations, training mechanisms, and participatory processes necessary for effective RIA implementation. These insights contribute to ongoing efforts to enhance regulatory governance and public sector efficiency in the Kingdom.

*Keywords:* Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA); Public Policy; Policy Evaluation, Saudi Arabia, Regulatory Reform

*Subject classification codes:* H83, H11, K23

## 1. Introduction

Nations are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of integrating Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) into policymaking processes to ensure evidence-based decision making, despite the relative newness of this approach. To this end, they have started evaluating their regulatory frameworks more systematically while still implementing conventional policy and regulation design techniques. Several factors are driving this shift towards RIA, whether during a policy's formulation or after its implementation

First, RIA is grounded in evidence-based decision-making, it ensures a regulatory framework's overall quality. However, this approach can be difficult to implement due to the organizational culture and institutional hierarchies. Second, countries are seeking to offer more business- and investment-friendly regulatory environments. Third, by fostering transparency, accountability, and regulatory stability, RIA facilitates better governance (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2016). The launch of Vision 2030 in 2016 prompted the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to also become more aware of the value of RIA, with government agencies recently paying increasing attention to this methodology. Moreover, in Saudi Arabia,

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regulation functions as a central instrument of public policy, establishing general and enforceable rules approved by the Council of Ministers pursuant to Article 21 of its governing law. These policy objectives are operationalised through executive regulations that define compliance requirements, enforcement mechanisms, and institutional responsibilities, issued either by the Council of Ministers or by delegated ministries (Al-Issa, 2011).

More recently, Saudi Arabia has introduced a series of regulatory reforms aimed at streamlining government processes, most notably by mandating that all government entities publish draft laws, regulations, and amendments, particularly those related to economic and developmental affairs, on the national public consultation platform (istitlaa). This reform represents a significant milestone in the country's regulatory governance agenda and aligns closely with OECD-style "better regulation" principles and Regulatory Impact Assessment practices (OECD, 2019). However, it remains uncertain whether the implementation of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) has achieved institutional maturity, or whether observed limitations in current practice are attributable to the relative newness of regulatory reforms linked to the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030.

Many countries still face challenges in implementing RIA, often due to the levels of comprehensiveness and rigor required. These inadequacies often manifest as poorly articulated problem definitions, a lack of clearly stated policy objectives, insufficient regulatory alternatives for comparison, and insufficient analytical methodologies. For RIA to be effective, each of these elements is necessary.

Interest in RIA has only recently emerged in the context of Saudi Arabian governmental and legislative institutions, raising critical questions that the current study seeks to answer:

- What is the current state of RIA implementation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?
- To what extent is the concept understood and applied by the individuals responsible for its implementation?

Jacobs (2024) notes that "RIA, in turn, is a key tool of the larger 'better regulation' toolbox that has been widely adopted around the world", highlighting the cruciality of understanding its adoption and integration within existing governance systems.

## **2. Theoretical and Practical Background**

### **2.1 Definitions of RIA**

The literature offers a variety of definitions of RIA, all converging around a common conceptual framework. RIA is typically understood as a systematic process for evaluating the potential positive and negative impacts of proposed or existing regulations, as well as assessing any non-regulatory alternatives (OECD, 2009; Carroll, 2010; Jacobs, 2016). According to the World Bank, RIA acts as a policy tool enabling decision-makers to pose structured, analytical questions regarding the likely outcomes of governmental interventions and any alternative policy options. In other words, by promoting rigorous analysis of the expected impacts of policy alternatives, the RIA process essentially facilitates evidence-based comparisons among.

## 2.2 Definitions of RIA from a public policy perspective

According to Drummond and Radaelli (2024), RIA is a tool for evaluating evidence that can guide regulatory decision-making. As part of this framework, it is positioned as a central component of the broader “better regulation” agenda, which seeks to promote rational policy design, increase transparency, and strengthen governance accountability. Radaelli (2020) also characterizes RIA as a systematic appraisal of how proposed primary or secondary legislation may affect specific categories of stakeholders in various domains, including economic, social, and environmental spheres. This perspective underlines the importance of identifying who a policy affect and how.

Conceptualizing RIA based on the broader literature, it can be considered a structured, evidence-based process that governments and legislators can use when formulating and revising public policies. It ensures the careful evaluation of the anticipated impacts of both proposed and existing regulations, particularly regarding the stakeholders’ interests and well-being. Through its systematic identification and mitigation of any unintended consequences, RIA can improve the quality, consistency, and coherence of regulatory frameworks. This, in turn, supports more stable and predictable regulations, diminishes the need for frequent amendments, and strengthens the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of policy design and implementation overall.

## 2.3 Regulatory impact assessment as a tool for governments

Typically, a well-structured RIA outlines how a policy issue is identified, the consultation process and its outcomes, and a range of policy alternatives, including the option of maintaining the status quo. It also details the criteria used to evaluate and select among these options (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2016). In light of the recent adoption of RIA in several jurisdictions, this study examines its application based on four principal pillars: (1) the identification of the policy problem being addressed by the proposed regulation; (2) the determination and comparative assessment of viable policy alternatives with input from relevant stakeholders; (3) the selection of appropriate analytical tools to evaluate these alternatives’ impacts; and (4) the institutionalization of RIA as a standardized routine procedure within the policymaking process.

However, institutional complexities such as hierarchical structures and organizational cultures resistant to procedural innovation can hinder the implementation of RIA (Warghade, 2015; Dunlop & Radaelli, 2016). Empirical research indicates that institutions may have difficulties adopting RIA due to inadequate institutional commitment or capacity regarding qualified personnel (Schwartz, 2015). Nonetheless, institutionalizing RIA is crucial to its continued use and effectiveness as part of high-quality evidence-based policymaking (Jordan & Turnpenny, 2015).

Drummond and Radaelli (2024) further emphasize the importance of integrating insights from behavioural science into the RIA process. Human factors such as cognitive biases, emotional dispositions, and experience can influence policy analysts, thereby significantly shaping each stage of RIA, i.e., from problem definition and stakeholder engagement to the analysis of policy alternatives and the eventual selection of preferred options.

## 2.4 Identifying the problem

Government agencies tend to struggle to accurately identify both the problems they intend to address as well as diagnose their underlying causes. According to the literature, RIA is fundamentally linked to the problem identification process and thus relies on the capacity of policymakers and analysts to fully comprehend the nature of the problem and determine the suitable level of legislative intervention (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2016). Accordingly, to ensure the clear definition of the issue and its appropriate placement on the policy agenda, the problem identification of the RIA framework requires significant transparency, accountability, and responsibility. This also serves as the foundation for the subsequent analytical process.

Based on the above, problem definition is a critical step in RIA. Notably, it goes beyond merely the act of naming the problem, achieving deep understanding of its root causes. Without this understanding, the policy solutions may be misdirected or ineffective. A key analytical question that arises hereby is whether the problem genuinely warrants legislative or regulatory intervention. For instance, (Jifri & Duwihy, 2023) conclude that government bodies in Saudi Arabia do not have sufficient awareness regarding stakeholder engagement before designing and implementing new regulations for the private sector, which leads to unnecessary or harmful regulations, and the reasons behind that are the filer of identifying the problems that need government intervention or not, And how such interventions could take place. With reason that the Saudi legal system, regulations consist of general and enforceable rules approved by the Council of Ministers and implemented through executive regulations that specify enforcement mechanisms, issued either centrally or by delegated ministries as authorised by law (Al- Issa, 2011; Al-Rukadh, 2018).

Finally, a principal challenge in accurately identifying policy problems and their underlying causes arises from the potential for bias within the government entity responsible for conducting the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). As noted by Jacobs (2016), entrenched organizational cultures or pre-existing institutional agendas may influence how problems are framed, often in ways that legitimize preferred policy interventions. This dynamic can undermine both the objectivity and credibility of the RIA process. In this context, systematic stakeholder engagement plays a critical mitigating role by introducing external perspectives, contesting problem definitions, and enhancing transparency in the early stages of regulatory design. The absence or limited use of stakeholder consultation may therefore exacerbate institutional bias, reinforcing narrow problem framings and weakening the analytical foundations of RIA outcomes (Drummond & Radaelli, 2024).

## 2.5 Determining the availability of policy alternatives and choices

After identifying the problem and its root causes, the next central component of the RIA process is formulating and evaluating policy alternatives in preparation for legislative analysis. At this stage, it is crucial that the proposed alternatives are clearly defined, have specific policy objectives, and align with the broader strategic priorities of both the government and the legislative authority. This stage typically presents significant challenges for agencies, often due to inadequate technical expertise, institutional constraints, or insufficient capacity (Jacobs, 2016; Kurniawan et al., 2018; Drummond & Radaelli, 2024).

Often, these challenges are complicated by inadequacies in the preceding step, i.e., problem definition, which directly impacts the generation of viable alternatives. According to Schwartz (2015), in the analytical phase of RIA is greatly affected by any confusion or inefficiencies stemming from the failure to accurately define the problem. Specifically, the absence of suitable alternatives undermines the integrity and utility of the assessment.

When evaluating policy alternatives in RIA, the focus is typically on considering their expected economic, social, and environmental impacts. This can be achieved via standardized analytical tools such as CBA, MCA, and the SCM, which offer a structured framework for comparing alternatives, making them integral to evidence-based regulatory decision-making. Indeed, it is generally held that in order to be comprehensive, an RIA process must have at least one of these analytical approaches for evaluating the proposed policy alternatives (Adelle and Weiland, 2012).

## **2.6 Analytical Methods Used in RIA**

Several analytical tools can be used to assess policy alternatives as part of an RIA, such as cost-benefit analysis (CBA), multi-criteria analysis (MCA), and the standard cost model (SCM). These are among the most widely used methodologies for evaluating the potential regulatory impacts of different policy options. Based on the above, selecting the right analytical tool is a critical aspect of the RIA process. While the specific methods employed may vary depending on the regulatory context and policy issue, the literature consistently identifies three core methodologies as fundamental to effective RIA, namely CBA, MCA, and the SCM (Jacobs, 2016; Schwartz, 2016; Belfield, Bowden, & Rodriguez, 2019). These are discussed in the following.

### **2.6.1 CBA**

CBA is a widely used tool in RIA, offering a systematic framework for evaluating the economic advantages and disadvantages of various regulatory options by quantifying and comparing the expected total costs and benefits of each. In CBA, the primary objective is to determine whether a proposed regulation produces a net societal gain, which would justify its use (Jacobs, 2016; Schwartz, 2016; Boardman et al., 2018). Its strength lies in its ability to provide a clear, monetized comparison of alternatives, particularly in the context of economically significant regulations.

### **2.6.2 MCA**

MCA is a decision-making tool for evaluating and prioritizing policy alternatives using qualitative and quantitative criteria. Unlike CBA, MCA is especially valuable in cases where certain impacts, e.g., environmental, social, or ethical considerations, cannot be easily expressed in monetary terms. In the context of RIA, MCA enables policymakers to assess trade-offs among multiple dimensions, making it essential for evaluating complex policies with diverse and often conflicting objectives (Dodgson et al., 2009; Jacobs, 2016).

### **2.6.3 SCM**

The SCM estimates the administrative burden that regulations impose on businesses, especially regarding compliance with information obligations. This approach quantifies the costs associated with regulatory paperwork and procedural requirements, identifying areas ripe for administrative simplification. Within the RIA framework, SCM is frequently used to detect unnecessary bureaucracy and support regulatory reform efforts aimed at reducing compliance costs (OECD, 2005; Jacobs, 2016).

In summary, the above has shown that a robust RIA process usually relies on one or more of these analytical tools. Applying CBA, MCA, and SCM as part of an RIA ensures a comprehensive assessment of the policy alternatives, enhancing the objectivity, transparency, and effectiveness of regulatory decision-making.

## **2.7 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's efforts Regulatory Reforms**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undertaken substantial regulatory reform initiatives aimed at enhancing governance, promoting private sector development, and improving the overall business environment. There are a range of regulatory instruments at the government's disposal, the most prominent of which is the Royal Order. As a direct expression of the sovereign will of the King, the Royal Order is issued with the King's signature in his capacity as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. Complementing this are Royal Directives, which deliver high-level instructions to specific entities or sectors, and Royal Decrees, which represent the King's formal approval of proposals, such as new legislation, submitted via the Council of Ministers (Al-Rukadh, 2018).

In the Saudi legal framework, regulation is a general and abstract set of rules intended to govern specific matters uniformly across the population. Violations of such regulations are met with predefined penalties, enforceable by state authorities. These regulations are typically issued through decisions by the Council of Ministers, which, according to Article 21 of the Council of Ministers Law, is tasked with reviewing and formally approving draft laws and regulations. The implementation of these laws is operationalized through executive regulations, which are detailed provisions that clarify the enforcement mechanisms of primary legislation. These can be ratified by the Council of Ministers or issued by the relevant ministry (Al-Rukadh, 2018).

Recently, Saudi Arabia has advanced a series of regulatory reforms aimed at streamlining governmental processes, the Council of Ministers Resolutions No. 713 (30/11/1438 AH) and No. 476 (15/07/1441 AH). Represented a landmark development in regulatory reform. They require all government entities to publish draft laws, regulations, and amendments, particularly those concerning economic and developmental affairs, on the national "Istitlaa" (Public Consultation) platform. This allows private sector actors and the general public to provide feedback prior to the new regulations' adoption. The aim of this initiative is to strengthen regulatory transparency, inclusiveness, and responsiveness, ultimately increasing the quality and effectiveness of regulations that will affect the business environment.

## **5. Obstacles facing RIA**

The important study by Kamkhaji et al. (2019) focused on the challenges facing the sustainability of RIA systems in developing countries. The study examined the key features of systematic and effective RIA frameworks, and the factors influencing their presence in these countries. Similar to Carrol (2010), Kamkhaji et al. (2019) honed in on several core issues, including:

1. the existence of formal governmental commitment to the RIA process.

2. capacity building and developing competent human resources for effective RIA implementation.
3. the time needed to establish a fully functional RIA system, and
4. the misconception of RIA as a scientific and evidence-based process.

Their study was particularly detailed, emphasizing the practical and operational challenges of RIA system implementation. However, due to the operational complexities, this approach may be difficult to apply directly in the Saudi context, where the concept of RIA is still relatively unknown. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to draw on only the conceptual foundations outlined by this study, rather than the operational mechanisms.

Based on their findings, Kamkhaji et al. (2019) concluded that developing countries need to allow more time and space for the institutionalization of RIA methodologies, while ensuring adequate qualified personnel and a standardized, ready-to-implement model. This will greatly support the creation of well-governed, evidence-based policy-making processes embedding high levels of maturity.

### 3. Methodology

The use of a quantitative survey methodology is academically justified for this study due its systematically collection of standardized data from a broad population of regulatory practitioners and policy stakeholders. RIA is a procedural and institutional tool applied across various government agencies, and a survey can gather comparable data on knowledge, practices, perceptions, and institutional barriers across different organizational settings (Kirkpatrick & Parker, 2004; OECD, 2020).

Surveys are especially effective in policy studies where the goal is to capture a broad spectrum of implementation, rather than gather in-depth insights from a specific case (Bryman, 2016). In the context of Saudi Arabia, where empirical research on RIA is still nascent, a survey will allow the researcher to establish a foundational understanding of how RIA is perceived, operationalized, and institutionalized.

Moreover, this method aligns with prior international research on RIA adoption and effectiveness (e.g., Radaelli, 2005; Kurniawan et al., 2018), which has often employed survey instruments to capture both cross-agency variation and the influence of policy culture. By quantifying awareness levels, procedural integration, and perceived challenges, the survey can offer findings that support evidence-based recommendations for institutional capacity-building and regulatory reform. Finally, by including a pilot phase reliability is enhanced, while the structured format permit replicability and future benchmarking.

In line with the challenges outlined above facing the implementation of RIA in countries where it is newly adopted, specifically in the case of Saudi Arabia, and in line with previous studies (Dodgson et al., 2009; Jacobs, 2016; Kurniawan et al., 2018; Kamkhaji et al., 2019; Drummond & Radaelli, 2024), it may be surmised that the key obstacles commonly encountered include the following:

- Difficulty in accurately identifying the problem and its root causes.
- Lack of clear organizational objectives to address regulatory issues.

- Failure to apply appropriate analytical tools to assess available policy alternatives, when such exist.
- Absence of a clear institutional framework or comprehensive guideline for implementing RIA.
- Lack of qualified specialists or insufficient training for those responsible for conducting RIA.
- Limited access to the necessary data required for analysing policy alternatives.
- The absence of a dedicated institutional body to oversee the RIA process, or a shortage of competent professionals and practical manuals to guide assessments.

### 3.1 Research Perspective

Based on these points, this research explores the current status of RIA within legislative bodies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, given that the concept of RIA is relatively new in the Saudi policy landscape. This study aims to understand the Saudi context of RIA through several key dimensions:

1. The level of awareness and understanding of the concept of RIA.
2. The extent of stakeholder engagement throughout all stages of the RIA process, starting with problem identification and ending with policy alternatives' selection.
3. The methodology used to analyse legislative alternatives.
4. The challenges faced by the individuals conducting RIA or by the broader system, including institutionalization issues.
5. The institutionalization of RIA and how it can be developed into a more structured and effective system for government entities that adopt and apply RIA in their regulatory practices.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Basic Demographics

The data were collected using a survey of 151 professionals, examining their perspectives concerning the implementation of RIA and policy evaluation practices in Saudi Arabia. The study aim is to investigate the current state of policy analysis, or RIA, before introducing new policies and regulations and after implementation. Among the 151 respondents, 77% were male while 23% female (see Table 1).

**Table 1** : Basic demographics

Variable	Category	Count	Percent
Gender	male	116	76.8
	female	35	23.2
Age	20-30	27	17.9
	31-40	63	41.7
	41-50	44	29.1
	51-60	9	6
	61-More	8	5.3

Educational Qualification	Diploma	4	2.6
	Bachelor's	50	33.1
	Master's	76	50.3
	Doctorate	21	13.9
Work Experience	From 1 - 5 years	29	19.2
	6 years - 10 years	34	22.5
	11 years - 20 years	46	30.5
	More than 20 years	42	27.8

The age distribution of respondents shows a concentration in younger to middle-aged groups, with the 31–40 years category representing the largest proportion at approximately 42%, education is relatively high, with Master's the most common at 76 respondents (50.3%). It is particularly consistent with prevailing trends observed in Saudi Arabia's governmental and consultancy sectors, where higher education is often a prerequisite for career advancement and policy-related roles.

This professional experience distribution reflects a well-balanced representation of both early-career and seasoned professionals, offering a comprehensive perspective on policy implementation and institutional effectiveness.

#### 4.2 Employment Type Distribution

Figure 1 shows the employment profile of the sample. It indicates that most respondents (approximately 73%) are employed in government institutions. Consulting firm employees comprise around 15% of the sample, suggesting a modest but relevant presence of private-sector expertise in policy-related functions. Meanwhile, about 10% of respondents are employed in non-governmental or hybrid institutions, including semi-governmental bodies and non-profit organizations, highlighting a degree of sectoral diversity in the sample. Predominantly government employees with a substantial number working in a consulting firm. 66% of respondents said there is somewhat related to public policy, while 34% said their work is unrelated. Therefore, the sample heavily skews toward the public sector, where regulatory practices and RIA frameworks are most relevant.

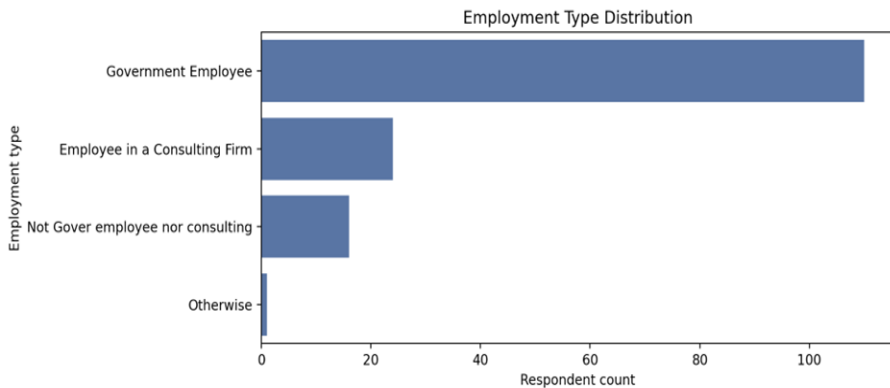


Figure 1. Respondents' employment type distribution.

### 4.3 Roles and Use of RIA

In response to the question whether their job related to public policy, 99 respondents answered ‘Yes’. Thus, 66% indicated their job is related to public policy. This is two-thirds of respondents report that their work is indeed policy-related, while one-third say it is not (see Table 2).

### 4.4 Use of RIA

Of the 99 respondents who reported being in policy-related roles, only 29 (29.3%) reported that they had conducted a full RIA independently (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Respondents in a policy-related job who have independently conducted a full RIA.

Total with Policy-Related Job	Applied Full RIA	Percentage (%)
99	29	29

The above demonstrates that while policy roles are common, the actual implementation of RIA remains limited. This highlights a capacity gap, in that most respondents rely on others for regulatory analysis or engage only partially in the process. This reinforces earlier findings about the capacity gap, namely that even inside the policy community, practical RIA know-how is far from universal.

### 4.5 Awareness and Application of RIA

Regarding knowledge of RIA, many respondents reported that they were aware (65%), while the rest stated that they were unaware (35%); (see Figure 2).

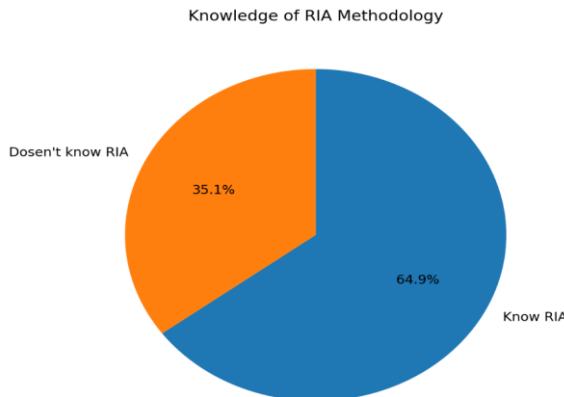


Figure 2. Respondents’ knowledge of RIA.

When asked whether they had ever applied an RIA from start to finish, their answers varied, with some indicating "Yes" (25%) and most "No" (75%); (see Figure 3).

This means although many were aware of RIA, very few implemented RIA from start to finish.

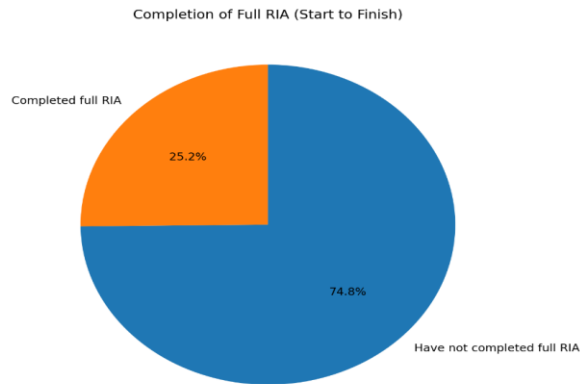


Figure 3. Respondents' completion of RIA.

Table 3 contrasts respondents who know about RIA with those who have completed an RIA from start to finish.

**Table 3.** Respondents who know of and have completed a full RIA.

Response	Knows RIA	Completed full RIA
Yes	98	34

Among those who know of the RIA methodology, only 37% have applied it from start to finish in a project assigned to them. Thus, while 65% claimed awareness of RIA, only 37% of those had ever applied it fully. Moreover, a significant number seemed to confuse familiarity with RIA concepts with the practical ability to conduct them. Many who reported that they knew RIA were not using core methods such as CBA, which undermines the validity of their claim.

#### 4.6 Application in Practice

Figure 4 displays the number of respondents based on their application of the RIA methodology. A significant portion of respondents indicated that they have not applied the RIA methodology, while a smaller group reported using it in some capacity; (see Figure 4).

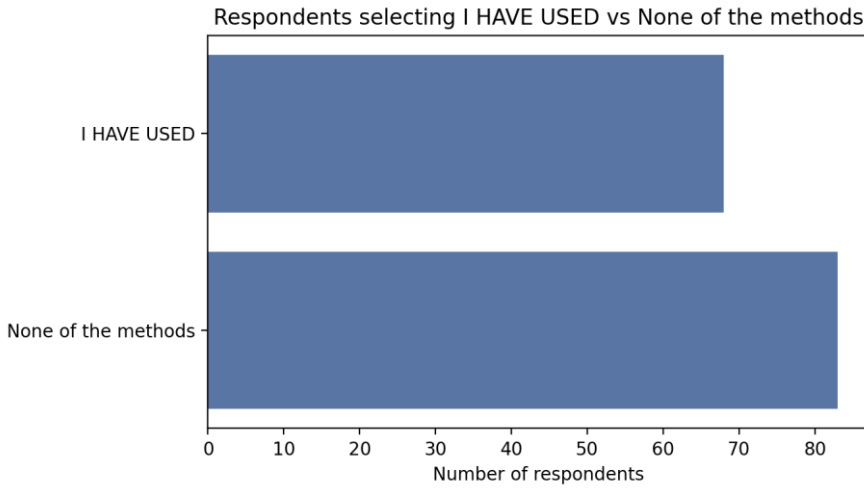


Figure 4. Respondents' use of RIA methodologies.

The respondents also mentioned using various tools in their policy analysis, including CBA, MCA, decision trees, the Delphi method, and risk analysis and environmental scanning. However, a significant portion still indicated using no formal methods, revealing inconsistent methodological application even amongst those familiar with RIA. This pattern suggests a partial or symbolic implementation of RIA frameworks rather than comprehensive adherence to established analytical procedures, highlighting a gap between awareness of these tools and their systematic application in practice (see Figure 5).

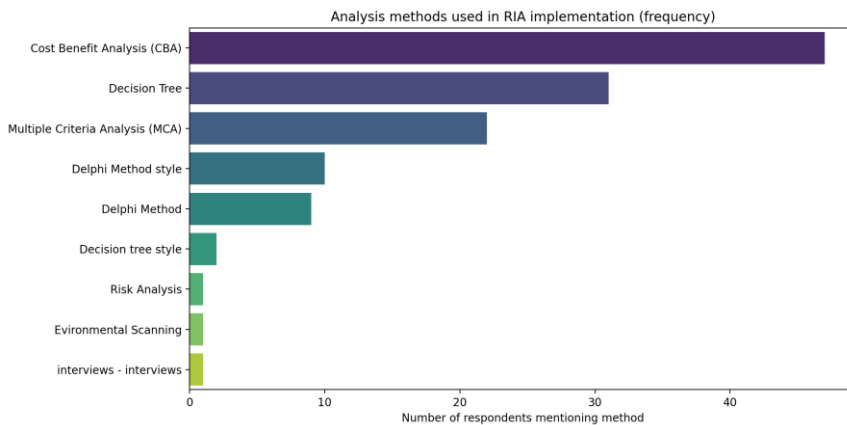


Figure 5. Respondents' use of analysis methods in RIA implementation.

Overall, the application of RIA is not widespread among the respondents. When it is applied, it tends to be partial or stage-specific. In fact, 40% did not know what RIA was. And of the 60% who said they know RIA, 43% had not used any of the analysis methods associated with the RIA process, such as CBA and MCA (see Figure 5). Many

scholars and practitioners note that if CBA or MCA is not used, then no policy analysis or RIA was conducted (Jacobs, 2016; Schwartz, 2016; Boardman et al., 2018). Therefore, many of respondents who assumed they knew RIA did in fact not (see Figure 6).

The cross-tabulation results in Figure 6 demonstrate a clear association between the use of analytical methods and the successful implementation of RIA. Among those who implemented RIA (80 respondents), 58.8% (47) relied on analytical methods, while 41.3% (33) reported implementing without using any methods. In comparison, among non-implementers (51 respondents), only 31.4% (16) reported using analytical methods, while the majority, 68.6% (35), did not. This indicates that 74.6% of those who used analytical methods successfully implemented RIA, compared to just 48.5% of non-method users, highlighting the importance of methodological capacity. However, the findings also reveal a critical weakness: a substantial share of respondents who claimed to implement RIA (41.3%) did so without employing any analytical techniques. Since genuine RIA requires structured tools—such as cost–benefit analysis (CBA) or similar methods—such cases may represent incomplete or superficial adoption, raising concerns that some implementation was nominal rather than substantive.

The findings of this study advance the regulatory governance literature by demonstrating that symbolic adoption of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) in the Saudi context is driven not only by institutional and organisational dynamics, but also by persistent deficits in analytical skills among regulatory officials. While RIA has been formally embedded within regulatory procedures, its practical execution frequently lacks systematic application of core analytical tools, including cost–benefit analysis, regulatory alternatives assessment, and structured stakeholder analysis. This pattern aligns with arguments by (Jacobs, 2016; Kurniawan et al., 2018; Drummond & Radaelli, 2024) that the design of regulations comes without substantive analytical engagement. Therefore, the present study extends this literature by empirically highlighting skill limitations as a key enabling mechanism of symbolic adoption. In this sense, insufficient training, limited exposure to applied policy analysis methodologies, and uneven professional backgrounds constrain officials' ability to translate formal RIA requirements into analytically robust practice.

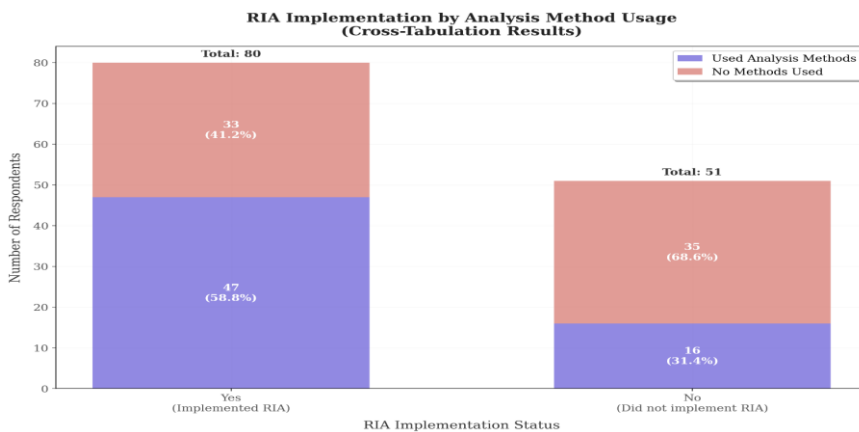


Figure 6. Respondents' use of analysis methods in RIA implementation; cross-tabulation.

The cross-tabulation results in Figure 7 reveal that knowledge of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) significantly increases the likelihood of implementation. Among respondents without knowledge of RIA (40 in total), 62.5% (25) did not implement it, while only 37.5% (15) did. In contrast, among those with RIA knowledge (91 respondents), 71.4% (65) reported implementation compared to just 28.6% (26) who did not. This indicates that knowledgeable respondents are nearly twice as likely to adopt RIA (71.4% vs. 37.5%), and indeed, 81.2% of all implementers had prior awareness. However, the results also highlight a critical weakness: almost one-third (28.6%) of those who know RIA still failed to implement it. This gap suggests that awareness alone is insufficient, and that other barriers—such as limited institutional capacity, lack of resources, or weak enforcement mechanisms—may prevent knowledge from translating into practice.

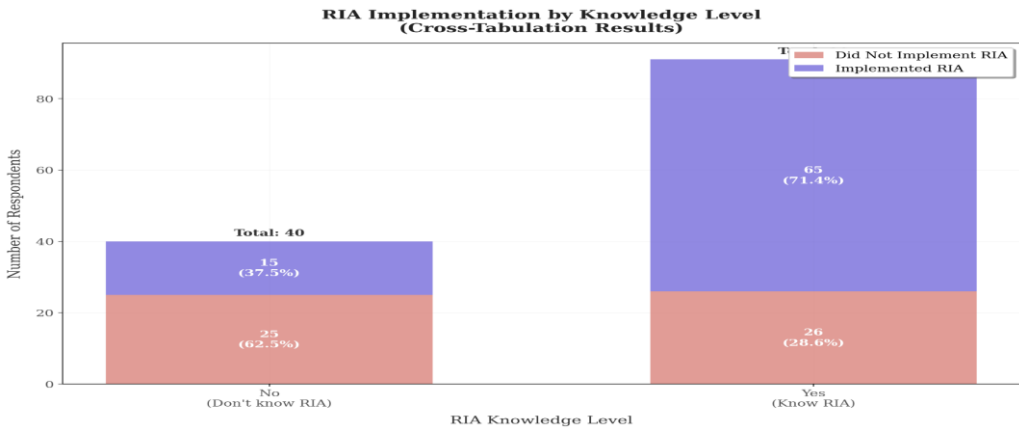


Figure 7. Respondents' implementation by knowledge in RIA implementation; cross-tabulation.

Stakeholders are involved at various stages (see Figure 8), with many indicating "not sure" when stakeholders should be involved and mentioned involvement "At all stages" or "During problem identification." Engagement ranges from full participation to only early-stage involvement (problem identification). Overall, the respondents perceived stakeholder participation as present but not consistently strong, and there was some uncertainty about when exactly stakeholders are brought into the process. In other words, stakeholder involvement is acknowledged but often lacks consistency or strategic integration throughout the policy lifecycle.

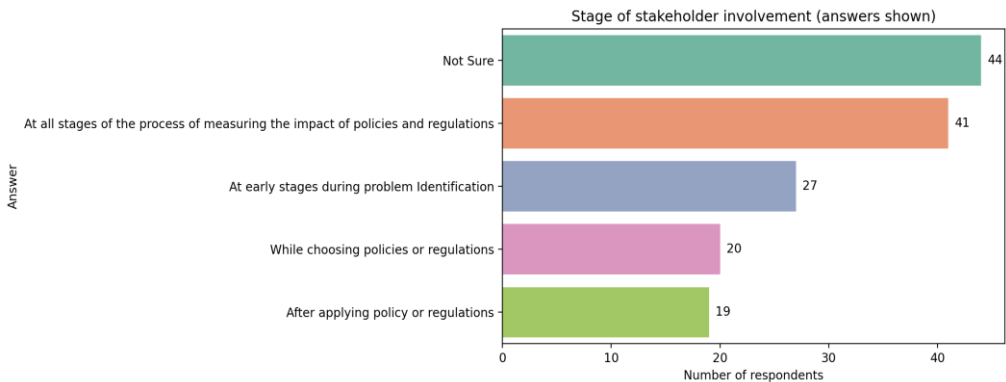


Figure 8. Stakeholder involvement.

#### 4.7 Barriers to effective RIA

Issues commonly reported by the respondents were time constraints, limited awareness, lack of training and inaccessible data (see Table 4). These barriers suggest systemic weaknesses in institutional capacity and policy design processes. A structured training and support framework is urgently needed.

Table 4. Barriers to effective RIA, as reported by respondents.

Obstacle	Average Score
Lack of clear methodology for regulatory impact assessment	2.721
Lack of qualified staff to analyse policy impact	2.66
Lack of sufficient time for policy analysis due to the need for quick decision-making	3.52
Lack of awareness of the importance of regulatory impact assessment and weak culture around it	3.44

The average scores provide insights into the perceived significance of various obstacles and factors related to RIA. Lack of qualified staff to analyse policy impact had lowest mean of 2.66. Many respondents indicated that there is a shortage of qualified personnel to implement the impact assessment methodology effectively. Data availability issues were also mentioned. This indicates that difficulty in obtaining the necessary data to analyse the impact of policies is a significant barrier. In terms of time constraints, the

respondents noted a lack of sufficient time to analyse policies due to the urgency of decision-making processes. Finally, regarding awareness and cultural challenges, there is a general lack of awareness regarding the importance of regulatory impact assessment, coupled with a weak culture surrounding its implementation. The above suggests that the barriers to RIA adoption are significant and widespread, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address these issues. There is a perceived need for institutional frameworks and training to enhance application levels.

#### 4.8 Institutionalization Strategies

Based on the findings, we can highlight several key strategies for institutionalizing policy processes and practices:

- **Involvement of Central Government Bodies:** Approximately 60% of the respondents highlighted the pivotal role of central government institutions in driving and sustaining institutionalization efforts. Their authority and coordination capacity make them essential actors in embedding reforms and practices across the public sector.
- **Role of Ministerial Departments:** Around 30% emphasized the role of departments within ministries, reflecting the importance of intra-organizational structures in operationalizing institutional reforms and ensuring policy continuity at the sectoral level.
- **Emphasis on Training and Awareness:** A substantial 70% of participants underscored the necessity of continuous training and awareness programs. This finding suggests that capacity building and stakeholder sensitization are viewed as foundational pillars for effective institutionalization.
- **Establishing Dedicated Units or Systems:** Nearly 50% pointed to the establishment of dedicated organizational units or systems (e.g., regulatory impact units or monitoring frameworks) as a recurring institutionalization mechanism. These structures support sustainability and consistency in implementation.

Together, these elements point to the need for a multi-tiered strategy that combines structural, procedural, and human capital components for embedding long-term policy effectiveness.

#### 5. Discussion

The study's findings present a mixed picture of current RIA practice in Saudi Arabia. Quantitatively, policy officials have a reasonable awareness of the RIA concept, with roughly 65% of survey respondents claiming familiarity with it. However, their practical application of RIA lags considerably, as only about 37% of those aware had independently conducted a complete RIA from start to finish. In other words, of the 110 respondents who knew what RIA was, only 34 had done such an assessment in a policy project. This reveals a substantial implementation gap.

Furthermore, we found only limited use of the formal analytical tools integral to rigorous RIA. While some respondents reported employing techniques such as CBA, MCA, decision trees, or Delphi methods, a large proportion admitted to using no

structured analytical method in their policy analyses. This inconsistency suggests that many RIA exercises purported to have been conducted were in fact only partial.

We also discovered variability in stakeholder engagement. While some officials involved stakeholders “at all stages” of policy development, others did so only during initial problem definition. This indicates that stakeholder participation, though acknowledged in principle, is not consistently or systematically integrated into the process.

Taken together, these empirical results indicate that while the concept of RIA has gained a foothold in terms of awareness, its comprehensive application remains sporadic. Many of our respondents appear to have practiced RIA in a fragmented or even symbolic manner, i.e., checking the RIA “box” without executing the full suite of analytical steps or stakeholder consultations necessary for robust RIA. We also identified key institutional challenges, with the respondents highlighting a lack of clear RIA methodology, insufficient training, a lack of qualified staff, limited data availability, and severe time constraints as major obstacles to effective impact assessment. These barriers point to systemic weaknesses in the current policy analysis framework and are further examined below.

Our results show that although the participants reported being familiar with the concept of RIA, there remains a clear deficiency in the scientific processes and methodologies used to define and analyse policy problems in need of government intervention. This concern has already been raised in previous studies (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2016; Jacobs, 2016; Kurniawan et al., 2018).

In addition, the participants demonstrated a lack of a clear mechanism for when stakeholders should be involved in the RIA process. It should hereby be noted that our perspective on stakeholder engagement in the RIA process differs somewhat from that applied in previous studies. We believe that stakeholder involvement should start at the very outset, i.e., during the problem identification stage, and continue through the process of defining and analysing alternatives, culminating in consulting them on the preferred option. This represents a significant contribution that has not been explicitly addressed in previous studies, including reports by the World Bank reports and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

A critical theme emerging from the findings is the gap between conceptual awareness and the practical implementation of RIA. Most of the surveyed officials recognize RIA as a concept, reflecting the influence of global good regulatory practices, yet relatively few have carried it out in practice. This gap suggests that RIA in Saudi Arabia may be more nominal than substantive. Indeed, many respondents who claimed to know of RIA did not actually employ core RIA methods such as CBA, undermining the credibility of their claims. Indeed, 43% of those who professed familiarity with RIA admitted to using none of the standard analytical tools associated with impact assessment. Given that comprehensive RIA processes are widely understood to require the application of one or more rigorous analytical approaches, the absence of such methods implies that much of what is labelled as RIA may in fact fall short of international standards. In effect, there appears to be an element of symbolic adoption, with officials acknowledging RIA as important and perhaps including cursory elements in their workflow, but without the systematic analysis and evidence-based comparisons that characterize genuine RIA practice. This is likely due to the lack of specialists and practitioners with backgrounds in public policy and RIA (Carrol, 2010). In the studied context, most of those working in the

public policy field have legal or Sharia backgrounds, which may limit their understanding of the processes and concepts underlying RIA unless they have been fully trained and properly qualified therein.

This conceptual–practical divide should come as no surprise in light of insights from the literature. Jacobs (2016) warns that institutions can appropriate the rhetoric of RIA without embracing its substance, e.g., by framing regulatory problems in ways that justify predetermined solutions. Such behaviour results in RIA being employed as a form of post hoc justification rather than an objective method of appraisal. Our findings on the Saudi experience seem to underline this risk: while the awareness of RIA’s importance is high, in line with global trends that consider it a cornerstone of the “better regulation” agenda, its actual implementation often lacks depth. Notably, the evidence from this study indicates that in the current Saudi practice, RIA frequently does not fulfil the structured, evidence-driven role it assumes in the global context. Our results suggest that some RIAs might be conducted in name only, for instance, by writing a brief statement or performing a checklist on the impacts without undertaking a thorough analysis. This gap between theory and practice underscores a need to critically examine why officials who are aware of RIA fail to carry it through.

This gap likely stems from the barriers identified in this study, particularly the limited access to the data necessary for conducting RIA, the lack of qualified specialists, and the insufficient time for stakeholders to carry out an appropriate and effective RIA process (Carrol, 2010). Additionally, the absence of an institutional framework governing and standardizing the RIA process further compounds the challenge (Kamkhaji et al, 2019). Finally, our findings imply that simply introducing the concept of RIA (e.g., via awareness campaigns or basic guidelines) is insufficient if the institutional context does not support its systematic execution (Drummond and Radaelli, 2024).

The following sections take a closer look at the reasons for this shortfall. By delving into the barriers, we highlight how methodological, institutional, and cultural factors have constrained the translation of RIA from a well-intentioned concept into a routine policy practice.

### **5.1 Barriers to RIA adoption**

This study has identified a constellation of methodological, institutional, and cultural barriers driving the limited uptake of comprehensive RIA in Saudi Arabia. Methodologically, one fundamental hurdle is the lack of clear guidelines or standardized frameworks for conducting RIA. The respondents reported confusion or inconsistency in how to perform impact assessments, which aligns with the survey result that a “lack of clear methodology for RIA” is a substantial obstacle (with a low mean score indicating a significant problem). In practice, this means that officials are likely unsure about the steps to follow or tools to use, resulting in ad hoc analyses or the omission of critical components (e.g., formally comparing alternatives or quantifying costs and benefits). The inconsistent use of analytical tools, as noted earlier, reflects this methodological gap: without standard procedures, many default to simplistic or qualitative judgments, diminishing the assessment’s rigor. The literature reinforces the importance of methodology, in that a well-structured RIA should systematically identify problems, consult stakeholders, evaluate multiple alternatives, and apply analytical criteria for

decision-making (Drummond and Radaelli, 2024). However, our findings indicate that the Saudi case shows deviation at each stage, e.g. the problem definition may not be thoroughly evidence-based, alternatives may not be fully explored, and analysis techniques may be underutilized, largely due to absent or weak methodological frameworks.

On the institutional side, capacity and resource constraints emerged as prominent barriers. The survey respondents highlighted shortages of skilled personnel trained in policy analysis and RIA, reflected in a low mean score (2.66) for the availability of qualified staff. A lack of structured training programs has contributed to this shortage, with many officials responsible for regulatory analysis not yet having received formal instruction in RIA techniques. Consequently, even if they understand RIA conceptually, they may lack the technical know-how to execute it (Carrol, 2010). Time pressure is another institutional barrier: with the often rapid pace of decision-making, the officials reported insufficient time to conduct thorough impact analyses. As RIA can be time-intensive, requiring data gathering, consultation, and detailed analysis, it may be sidelined or rushed in environments where quick policy turnaround is expected. Another significant obstacle cited by the participants was limited data availability. Effective RIA relies on access to relevant and high-quality data on regulatory impacts, but if such data are scarce or hard to obtain (as is often the case when inter-agency data sharing is weak or statistical systems are underdeveloped), analysts cannot perform robust cost-benefit calculations or risk assessments. These institutional weaknesses are consistent with challenges documented in other contexts. Specifically, hierarchical bureaucracies and fragmented administrations tend to resist new analytic procedures like RIA, especially if there is no strong mandate or capacity to implement them. Dunlop and Radaelli (2016) observe that organizational culture and hierarchy can impede the adoption of impact assessment innovations, while Schwartz (2015) notes that insufficient commitment or expertise within institutions will stunt RIA efforts. The Saudi findings echo these points, revealing a public sector that has yet to fully institutionalize RIA as a routine practice, in part due to scarce expertise, unclear responsibility lines, and a lack of supporting infrastructure. Indeed, the respondents signalled that there are no dedicated units or formal oversight mechanisms currently in place to ensure RIA quality, and many called for establishing centralized bodies or systems to fill this governance gap.

Historically, regulatory decisions may have been driven by legalistic or top-down approaches, with less emphasis on evidence-based evaluation. RIA represents a shift towards analytical, transparent decision-making, although this may be at odds with entrenched administrative cultures. As one barrier, the survey identified a general lack of awareness of RIA's importance and a weak culture around its use (mean score ~3.44, indicating a prevalent issue). This suggests that even beyond technical know-how, there is an attitudinal component. To be specific, some officials may not fully buy into the value of conducting RIAs, viewing it as a mere box-ticking exercise rather than a vital step for good governance. Changing such mindsets is challenging and typically requires both leadership reinforcement and a demonstration of RIA's benefits.

Additionally, the study uncovered a specific cultural/institutional phenomenon in Saudi Arabia's public sector: the conflation of legal and policy roles without adequate policy analysis training. Due to past gaps in educational output, there have been shortages of graduates specialized in public policy, leading professionals from other fields (notably

law) to fill policy analysis positions. As a result, these experts in law or other disciplines approach regulatory design and impact assessment through the lens of their own training, often without applying the proper scientific and analytical methods used by policy specialists. This trend has produced superficially crafted policies and RIAs that reflect disciplinary biases more than systematic evaluation. The outcome is a kind of pseudo-RIA, with analyses rooted in legal reasoning or administrative conventions rather than the data-driven appraisal of options.

Drummond and Radaelli's (2024) insight into human factors is pertinent here, emphasizing that policy analysts' cognitive biases, professional backgrounds, and predispositions can significantly shape each stage of RIA. In a context where many analysts lack formal training in impact assessment, personal biases and non-evidence-based heuristics are likely to dominate, further undermining the rigor of RIA exercises. This cultural barrier means that strengthening RIA in Saudi Arabia is not just a technical matter of issuing guidelines, but also one of changing mindsets and professional norms. Without a shift towards valuing empirical analysis and stakeholder input in the regulatory process, RIA will continue to be applied unevenly or superficially.

A key implication is the need for professional training and development. The current workforce of policy analysts and regulators must be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct proper RIAs. This will entail investing in training programs focused on RIA methodologies, including how to perform CBA and MCA, how to gather and interpret data, and how to engage stakeholders systematically. The respondents' calls for more training and dedicated analytical staff highlight this necessity. By instituting regular training workshops and perhaps incorporating RIA modules into civil service education, the government can start building a cadre of professionals who not only understand RIA in theory but can also apply it effectively in practice. Such capacity-building aligns with best practice recommendations, which emphasize continuous training and the development of specialized evaluation units within ministries. Over time, this could also help address the cultural issue: as more officials become fluent in the language of evidence-based policy and see RIA as a valuable decision-support tool, a stronger evaluation culture may take root.

Accordingly, it is worth highlighting some of the institutional efforts undertaken by the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, most notably the recent initiative by the Ministry of Economy and Planning through a national program aimed at enhancing efficiency, titled "Developing National Capabilities in the Field of Regulatory Impact Assessment." This is an excellent initiative, and we hope it continues. This study aims to contribute by identifying key areas on which the program should focus in order to strengthen national competencies and reduce the gap between current practices and the desired practices in the field of Regulatory Impact Assessment.

The results further suggest that institutional reforms are needed to anchor RIA in the policy process. The absence of clear accountability and the ad hoc nature of current RIA efforts indicate that RIA should be more formally embedded in regulatory procedures. One implication is the establishment of a centralized institutional framework or oversight body for RIA. Both the respondents in particular and best-practice analyses in general recommend creating a central government entity (or strengthening an existing one) that is tasked with overseeing policy evaluation and impact assessment across

agencies. Such a body could set uniform guidelines, review the quality of RIAs, and ensure that ministries carry out the required analyses before approving new regulations. In tandem, individual ministries may establish their own internal RIA units, i.e., teams specifically responsible for conducting or coordinating impact assessments for policies in that sector. This dual structure (central oversight plus ministerial evaluation units) would institutionalize RIA as a routine and mandatory part of policy development, rather than an optional or incidental step. It would also clarify responsibility and accountability: officials would know that RIA is expected and that there are dedicated experts to lead it, reducing the current ambiguity about “who should do RIA” that is hampering implementation.

Moreover, addressing the identified methodological gaps implies developing clear RIA guidelines and standards for Saudi Arabia. The government could draw on international frameworks (for instance, OECD’s RIA best practice principles) to formulate a standardized approach that all agencies must follow. By codifying the steps of RIA, from problem definition and baseline scenario analysis to option identification, CBA, and consultation requirements, policymakers would have a concrete roadmap to follow, which would improve consistency (Adelle and Weiland, 2011). The need for such methodological clarity was evident in the survey, and indeed it is a precondition for moving from partial to full RIA. Furthermore, a data strategy would drive investment in better data collection and sharing mechanisms, empowering analysts to perform quantitative evaluations. This might involve building databases of regulatory costs, economic indicators, or social outcomes, and fostering collaboration with academic and research institutions for data analysis support.

From a broader perspective, these implications tie into Saudi Arabia’s ongoing regulatory reform and Vision 2030 initiatives. Vision 2030, launched in 2016, explicitly seeks to modernize the country’s governance and make it more efficient and transparent. A robust RIA system aligns perfectly with those goals by ensuring that new laws and regulations are scrutinized for effectiveness and cost-efficiency before implementation. However, as the study reveals, simply being “aware” of RIA is not enough to achieve better regulation outcomes, and the systematic integration of RIA is necessary. This requires political and administrative leaders to champion RIA not just as a concept but as a required practice (Kurniawan et al, 2017). High-level commitment can manifest, for instance, in mandates that no significant regulation goes forward without RIA, coupled with the allocation of time and resources for such analysis (e.g., allowing policy development timelines to include an analytical phase, rather than pushing out regulations under urgent deadlines that preclude analysis). Indeed, securing strong political support was noted as a best practice for successful RIA implementation (Kamkhaji et al., 2019). Without leadership backing, lower-level officials may have neither the incentive nor the authority to pause a regulatory initiative in order to conduct a thorough impact study.

Finally, the implications extend to stakeholder engagement and transparency in the regulatory process. Given the finding that stakeholder involvement is inconsistent, improvements here could greatly enhance RIA quality and credibility. Instituting clear guidelines for when and how to consult stakeholders (businesses, experts, civil society, etc.) can ensure that diverse perspectives inform the assessment, reducing blind spots and increasing buy-in for the final policy. This is in line with OECD and international

principles, which see stakeholder input as integral to effective RIA, improving both the information base and the legitimacy of regulatory decisions. For Saudi regulators, strengthening stakeholder engagement might involve public comment periods for major regulatory proposals or forming advisory committees during the RIA process. Such practices make RIA a more participatory exercise rather than an internal bureaucratic checkbox (Drummond and Radaelli, 2024).

This situation reflects the barriers identified in the findings of this study, which are similar to ones mentioned in previous literature (e.g. Carrol, 2010; Belfield et al., 2019; Kamkhaji et al., 2019; Drummond & Radaelli, 2024). The following in particular are salient to the current situation. First, a weakness in the process of analysing problems that require specific policies using scientific analytical methods. Second, limited access to data for conducting regulatory impact assessments. Third, the revealed issues in RIA implementation, such as the poor implementation of CBA and MCA. Fourth, the absence of qualified specialists, whereby human resources barriers (personnel and culture) are found to be slightly more severe than operational barriers (time and data). Fifth, the insufficient time available to stakeholders for implementing appropriate RIA. Finally, the lack of an institutional framework to govern and regulate the RIA process. All of which are findings fully consistent with previous studies in the field (Belfield et al., 2019).

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on our findings and considerations from the previous literature, we make the following main suggestions for improving the implementation of RIA in Saudi Arabia. First, establish a centralized institutional framework in the form of a dedicated central government entity responsible for overseeing policy evaluation and impact assessments. Second, develop clear methodologies and standards to support the implementation of standardized procedures and impact assessment frameworks. Third, conduct capacity building and training by investing in continuous training programs for government employees. Fourth, institutionalize evaluation units within ministries, establishing dedicated units within each ministry or agency. Fifth, promote a culture of impact evaluation by raising awareness of the importance of impact assessment. Sixth, use pilot projects and phased implementation to test methodologies. Seventh, ensure political and administrative support by securing commitment from top leadership. Finally, monitor, review, and improve processes, such as by establishing feedback mechanisms for regular review.

An evaluation is critical to the effective implementation of RIA, and there are several strategies that can be used to promote this, as outlined in the following. Firstly, training and capacity building can be achieved by implementing comprehensive training programs for government employees. Secondly, a centralized evaluation body should be established to ensure evaluation standards. Thirdly, awareness campaigns can be used to highlight successful evaluation practices. Fourthly, integration into policy processes can be ensured by embedding evaluation requirements into policy development. Fifthly, incentives and recognition can be developed for evaluation activities. Sixthly, stakeholder engagement can be achieved by involving stakeholders in evaluation processes. Seventhly, leadership commitment is achievable by securing commitment from top government

leadership. Finally, regular monitoring and feedback can come from implementing ongoing monitoring systems.

The labor market has witnessed a blurring of roles between legal professionals and those specialized in public policy, mostly due to previous shortcomings in the output of local universities in graduating specialists in public policy, which is a field that falls under the discipline of public administration. As a result, individuals without formal specialization have come to consider public policy design and analysis as an extension of their own fields of study. They have begun practicing policy design, analysis, and impact assessment without adhering to scientific methods or benefiting from the perspectives of experts in the field. Consequently, they have been producing outputs within their institutions based on their disciplinary viewpoints, leading to results far removed from proper public policy design and evaluation practices. This, in turn, has increased complexity for the stakeholders who are directly affected by these policies and regulations.

Accordingly, we recommend the establishment of requalification programs for professionals working in policy analysis and RIA through intensive training initiatives that address both their theoretical and practical weaknesses. We also suggest revisiting the recruitment process, with a focus on attracting candidates from academic backgrounds more closely aligned with this field. Moreover, we emphasize the need for a national unified guideline for RIA implementation, alongside activating this function by establishing an independent supervisory body with legal personality under the government, dedicated specifically to overseeing RIA practices.

## **6. Limitations and Future research**

Accordingly, given the exploratory nature of this study and the absence of prior applied research on Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) in the Saudi context, reliance on primary data in the form of surveys was considered appropriate at this stage. In addition, government entities tend to be cautious about sharing internal documents and data related to regulatory practices. Consequently, survey-based data collection provided a suitable methodological approach until the concept and practice of RIA became clearer and more established within the Saudi regulatory environment. This initial empirical inquiry may also help pave the way for future researchers to employ a broader range of data sources and methodological approaches.

Future research on Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) in the Saudi context would benefit from adopting more diverse, methodologically robust data-collection strategies. While survey-based quantitative approaches are valuable. To enhance analytical depth and validity, future studies should incorporate methodological triangulation by integrating primary survey data with secondary sources, such as document analysis, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews, thereby strengthening the reliability and explanatory power of the findings. Therefore, we further recommend that future researchers in this field go beyond merely identifying the obstacles to RIA implementation in Saudi Arabia and instead focus on uncovering the operational determinants and the human capabilities that shape its application. This includes gaining a deeper understanding of how stakeholders are engaged, how their views are collected and responded to, and how this process can be institutionalised and reflected in the actual outputs of RIA exercises.

As institutional awareness and acceptance of RIA practices continue to evolve within government entities, greater access to administrative documents and regulatory data is expected, enabling more comprehensive empirical investigations. In this regard, longitudinal research designs are particularly recommended to examine changes in regulatory awareness, stakeholder engagement practices, and RIA implementation over time. Such approaches would allow researchers to capture institutional learning, policy maturation, and shifts in regulatory behaviour, thereby providing deeper insights into the gradual institutionalisation of RIA within Saudi Arabia. This progression may also facilitate more advanced evaluations of regulatory quality and effectiveness using mixed-method and longitudinal frameworks.

## **7. Conclusion**

The current state of RIA in Saudi Arabia, namely characterized by high-level awareness but fragmented implementation, highlights a critical juncture for regulatory reform. Bridging the conceptual–practical gap will require concerted efforts on multiple fronts: upskilling the workforce, developing clear methodologies, building supportive institutions, and nurturing a culture that values analytical decision-making. These changes are mutually reinforcing. As the literature suggests and this study affirms, RIA should evolve from a nominal concept to a norm of governance, where every significant regulatory decision is preceded by careful impact analysis and evidence-based deliberation. Achieving this in Saudi Arabia will not only improve the quality and consistency of new regulations but also advance the broader goals of accountability and transparency set out in national transformation programs. The findings of this research serve as both a diagnostic and a roadmap: they expose the gaps and challenges in the current system, and by doing so, they point to the reforms needed for RIA to become an integral, effective tool for policymaking in the Kingdom.

## **Ethics Approval Statement**

This study was conducted in accordance with Administrative Decision No. 4639126, issued on 20 October 2024, which established the departmental committee for the study of ethical considerations in research. All procedures complied with institutional guidelines, relevant national regulations, and the ethical standards of the Research Ethics and Contracts Committee. And the Data were collected between 21/4/2025 and 4/06/2025 for this research.

## **Data Availability**

All data analyzed were collected through questionnaires. This data are held securely by the researcher, and access to the shareable portions may be provided in accordance with research-ethics documentation upon contacting the researcher.

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