



The Middle Eastern and African Arbitration Review

2025

Saudi Arabia

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The Middle Eastern and African Arbitration Review 2025 contains insight and thought leadership from 34 pre-eminent practitioners from the region. It has grown into one of the best resources anywhere for tracking significant cases and arbitration-related court rulings unfolding in the region, along with developments that may give rise to disputes.

This edition offers backgrounders on numerous key seats, as well as overviews on energy, mining, telecoms, construction and Saudi Arabian projects. All articles are supported with footnotes and relevant statistics.

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Saudi Arabia

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Saudi Center for Commercial Arbitration

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IN SUMMARY

Saudi Arabia's legislative and institutional advancements are part of its Vision 2030 transformation, marked by significant reforms in arbitration and other forms of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). These include the establishment of the Saudi Center for Commercial Arbitration (SCCA) as a trusted and independent not-for-profit institution aligned with international standards, enhanced digital transformation, and judicial cooperation. Key highlights include the SCCA's evolving governance, the remarkable growth of its caseload, and initiatives such as the Riyadh International Disputes Week (RIDW) and the SCCA International Arabic Arbitration Moot (SIAM). This chapter explores these milestones, their impact on dispute resolution, and Saudi Arabia's growing influence on the global arbitration landscape.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Saudi Arabia's legislative renaissance and Vision 2030's impact on arbitration
 - The SCCA's governance overhaul by reshaping its board of directors, complemented by the SCCA Court and the SCCA Global Advisory Committee
 - The SCCA's digital transformation and integration with national infrastructure
 - The growing international trust in the SCCA reflected in its caseload, market penetration, and diverse user participation
 - Cooperation with the judiciary and strengthening its institutional knowledge on arbitration
 - Continued judicial support in aid of arbitration
 - The SCCA's focus on nurturing the next generation of arbitration experts through SIAM and providing a range of educational programs through SCCA Academy
 - The Riyadh International Disputes Week (RIDW) as a global platform for ADR
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REFERENCED IN THIS ARTICLE

- Saudi Vision 2030 and its legislative reforms
 - SCCA Arbitration Rules (2023)
 - Saudi judicial decisions from the 'SCCA Saudi Case Law Study'
 - Riyadh International Disputes Week (RIDW 2025)
 - New York Convention and its regional judicial roadshow in Saudi Arabia
 - Key legislation: Saudi Electronic Transactions Law, E-Commerce Law, and Procedural Guide for Online Litigation Services
 - SCCA Board of Directors, SCCA Court, and SCCA Global Advisory Committee
 - Partnerships with ICCA and GCC Secretariat
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INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has embarked on an unprecedented journey of legislative, social, and economic reform, positioning itself as a global leader in competitiveness and innovation. Ranked 16th globally in the 2024 World Competitiveness Yearbook, Saudi Arabia demonstrates a sustained commitment to economic transformation under the leadership of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

Central to this transformation is the Kingdom's commitment to creating a robust legal and business environment. Over 900 reforms have been implemented, with 1,200 legislations reviewed and updated through the participatory 'Istitlaa' platform.^[1] This ensures transparency and alignment with global best practices while addressing the needs of the public, government entities, and the private sector, including the legal community.

In the realm of arbitration, Saudi Arabia has established itself as a model jurisdiction. The Saudi Center for Commercial Arbitration (SCCA) operates as an independent, neutral, and not-for-profit institution adhering to and setting international standards. The Saudi Companies Law further supports the use of arbitration by providing multiple dispute resolution mechanisms, fostering investor confidence, and reducing the outflow of disputes to foreign jurisdictions.

GOVERNANCE OVERHAUL: INDEPENDENCE, NEUTRALITY AND GLOBAL EXPERTISE

A pivotal milestone in the Kingdom's ADR evolution is the recent reconstitution of the SCCA Board of Directors, the introduction of the SCCA Court in 2023, and the extension of the SCCA Global Advisory Committee with its roots going back to 2019.

The new Board, in its fourth term formed in February 2025, comprises distinguished international and Saudi experts, reflecting diversity in expertise, nationality, and gender. Chaired by Dr Walid Abanumay, with renowned British arbitrator Toby Landau KC as Vice-Chair, the Board ensures the SCCA's strategic alignment with global best practices without intervening in the case administration - a hallmark of its independence. The latter is also reflected in the fact that the SCCA statute does not allow any member to hold a governmental position while sitting on the Board.

The SCCA Court is presided over by Prof Jan Paulsson with Dr Ziad Al-Sudairy and James Hosking serving as Vice-Presidents. The SCCA Court comprises a total of 15 court members with 13 different nationalities. It operates fully independently from the SCCA and derives its authority from the SCCA Arbitration Rules. By the time this text was prepared, the SCCA Court disposed of 323 matters since its inception in May 2023. The top five matters include the fixing of the advance deposit (89), the confirmation of arbitrator nominations (73; with only one rejection), the review of arbitral awards (52), the direct appointment of arbitrators (47), and the final fixing of fees and expenses (36). In addition, the SCCA Court has published its Internal Rules of the SCCA Court, a step that was heralded as a welcome initiative to promote transparency and trust in the decision-making process. By introducing the SCCA Court, the SCCA has delivered on its promise to safeguard consistency and continuity in making key administrative decisions free of any internal or external influences.

The SCCA Global Advisory Committee is headed by Richard Naimark and is composed of 15 distinguished arbitration experts with ten nationalities from around the globe. The Committee provides technical advice to refine the SCCA's rules, procedures, and policies, monitor international arbitration trends and evolving best practices, and introduce innovative services. Most notably, it provided vital support in reviewing and drafting the 2023 SCCA

Arbitration Rules and is currently working on the revision of the SCCA Mediation Rules, among other projects.

This strategic governance framework and support mechanism empowers SCCA to achieve its vision of becoming the preferred ADR institution in the MENA region by 2030.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN ARBITRATION AND ADR

Saudi Arabia's digital transformation has revolutionised its judicial and arbitration ecosystem, enabling efficiency, transparency, and accessibility. The SCCA has embraced digitalisation across its operations, supported by Saudi Arabia's robust digital infrastructure. Key achievements include:

- Digitalised Arbitration Rules and Services
 - The 2023 SCCA Arbitration Rules emphasise the use of technology to streamline procedures, reduce the environmental impact, and enhance process efficiency.
 - Almost all service requests under the SCCA rules and procedures are filed electronically, with online platforms facilitating communication, submissions, and hearings.
- Comprehensive Case Management System
 - Automation of over 600 workflows and ten ADR services.
 - Collection of 1,500 data points for monitoring and reporting.
 - Digital issuance and electronic delivery of awards with hard copies provided only upon request.
- Judicial Digitalisation
 - Over 160 judicial services are available through the Ministry of Justice's 'Najiz' platform,^[2] enabling the electronic filing and enforcement of arbitral awards, among other things.
 - Saudi Arabia's global ranking in digital services has surged, now standing in fourth place globally and leading regionally.

This integrated digital ecosystem not only enhances domestic operations but also positions Saudi Arabia as a global leader in arbitration efficiency.

JUDICIAL COOPERATION AND THE NEW YORK CONVENTION ROADSHOW

Early on, the SCCA reached out to the judiciary to strengthen its institutional knowledge on arbitration and emphasise the vital role judges play in the process. Based on cooperation agreements signed with the Saudi Ministry of Justice in 2018 and 2019, the SCCA has organised or co-hosted five events for judges with resounding success.

The latest project in which the SCCA joined forces with the International Council for Commercial Arbitrators (ICCA) and the GCC Secretariat was this year's Riyadh International Judicial Colloquium on the New York Convention. The colloquium was hosted during the Riyadh International Disputes Week 2025 (RIDW25) and was supported by the International Commercial Dispute Resolution Council of the Kingdom of Bahrain. It brought together

judges from across the six GCC states alongside global arbitration experts. The colloquium highlighted key obstacles in enforcing foreign arbitral awards and explored opportunities to harmonize processes. It marked a historic step in fostering regional judicial cooperation. The launch of the second edition of the ICCA New York Convention Guide on this occasion further underscored Saudi Arabia's commitment to aligning regional practices with international standards.

SCCA CASELOAD GROWTH AND INTERNATIONAL TRUST

The SCCA's caseload continues to witness substantial growth, reflecting an increasing trust among domestic and international users in the SCCA's services. In 2024 alone, the SCCA recorded 120 new filings, an increase of 30.4% over 2023's 92 filings.

Particularly, the growth rate of the SCCA's arbitration caseload increased from 46 in 2023 to 73 in 2024, a jump of 58.7%. The SCCA's arbitration caseload saw similar growth rates in the preceding three years despite global challenges ranging from the pandemic to economic turbulence (2020-2021: 50%; 2021-2022: 66.7%; 2022-2023: 84%). The SCCA has swiftly adjusted to these changes and scaled its case administration capabilities to accommodate the increase in its arbitration caseload.

Arbitrations with a total sum in dispute exceeding 1.1 billion Saudi riyals (US\$304 million) were disposed of on average in less than six months. Arbitrations ending in an award closed on average in less than seven months with the longest taking just under 14 months, manifesting the SCCA's firm commitment to getting parties in and out of dispute swiftly with fair and just results.

Market penetration again increased last year with disputes deriving from 13 different industry sectors. Construction & Engineering, again, led the charts with 38%, followed by Professional Services (18%), and Employment & Labour (13%). Other areas of interest included Capital Markets and Investment (7.5%), Agriculture, Food and Beverages (4.2%), Commerce/e-Commerce, Trade and Retail (4.2%), Real Estate (4.2%), and Corporate (3.3%).

Notably, international market players are increasingly adopting SCCA clauses, not only for Saudi-based projects but also for regional ventures. Since its inception, the SCCA has seen 29 different nationalities participating in its caseload. This trend signifies the SCCA's growing reputation as a trusted ADR provider beyond the MENA region.

CONTINUED JUDICIAL SUPPORT IN AID OF ARBITRATION

In 2025, the SCCA completed its fourth study of arbitration-related judgments issued by the Saudi Appeal Courts in 2023. As in the previous three studies prepared by the SCCA, the rate at which arbitral awards have been annulled was again remarkably low, showing continued judicial support in aid of arbitration.

The fourth study included a sample of 1,064 judgments. Out of the 1,194 reasons why parties petitioned the Appeal Courts, 390 (32.7%) motions related to arbitral awards. Of these 390, 152 were motions to annul the arbitral award of which only eleven (7.2%) were successful. Notably, of these successful motions to annul, none was based on Shari'ah principles beyond what is already codified in Article 50(1) of the Saudi Arbitration Law (2012), and only four (2.6%) succeeded on public policy grounds.

When comparing the results of this fourth study, with the SCCA's overall study results of a sample of 2,484 judgments issued between 2017 and 2023, of the 819 motions to annul,

the SCCA identified only five (0.6%) motions based on Shari'ah principles that led to the annulment of an arbitral award.

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: SCCA INTERNATIONAL ARABIC MOOT (SIAM)

The sixth edition of SIAM exemplifies SCCA's commitment to nurturing future arbitration leaders. This year, 154 teams from 124 universities representing 24 countries showcased their advocacy skills and mastered the art of arbitration. The 924 students were judged by 663 arbitrators who volunteered their time to hear 231 hearings. SIAM aligns with SCCA's strategic goal to educate and empower the next generation while reducing the outflow of regional disputes to other jurisdictions; thereby fostering a robust and self-reliant arbitration ecosystem.

The SCCA complements SIAM with a range of educational programs offered by its educational arm: the SCCA Academy. The SCCA Academy's mission is to equip young practitioners with the knowledge and skills needed to practice ADR at an international level. It also provides more seasoned arbitrators and mediators with a platform where they can share their experience and extend their knowledge. The International Fellowship in Commercial Arbitration program in close cooperation with the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (ciarb) alone has seen over 1,800 participants across all modules over the past five years. Programs are offered year-round in Arabic and English with the goal to advance the ADR industry in the Arab region.

RIDW25: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ADR

This year's Riyadh International Disputes Week (RIDW25) has emerged as the MENA region's largest legal gathering, attracting over 5,300 participants from 82 countries. The SCCA's fourth international flagship conference (SCCA25), under the theme 'Arbitration and the Law as Pillars of Transformation,' welcomed royalty, ministers and industry leaders, along with over 1,350 high-level attendees from six continents, and explored how ADR and the rule of law drive economic stability and growth.

CONCLUSION

The SCCA has evolved into more than an arbitral institution - it is a catalyst shaping the future of global ADR. Its operations and initiatives, from case administration to the SCCA Academy, the SCCA International Arabic Moot (SIAM), the Riyadh International Disputes Week (RIDW), and the Ciarb Saudi Arabia Branch, reflect a holistic approach to ADR ecosystem development. Driven by Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia continues to set benchmarks in arbitration, fostering trust, efficiency, and innovation.

As the Kingdom's leadership inspires transformation, the SCCA stands as a testament to the power of ambition, collaboration, and excellence in redefining the global ADR landscape.

Endnotes

- 1 A unified electronic platform affiliated with Saudi's National Competitiveness Center for public consultation, seeking the opinions of the public, government entities, and the private sector regarding economic and development environment laws and regulations issued by government entities prior to their approval (<https://istitlaa.ncc.gov.sa/en/About/Pages/default.aspx>). [^ Back to section](#)

- 2 A unified electronic platform for judicial services (<https://new.najiz.sa/applications/landing>). ^ [Back to section](#)



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