

2026

GLOBAL STATE OF DEMOCRACY: A LOOK AT THE ARAB WORLD



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FOREWORD

LAUNCH OF THE GLOBAL STATE OF DEMOCRACY 2026 REPORT BY INTERNATIONAL IDEA

On 15 September, the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS), represented by Victoria Rebok, remotely attended the launch of the Global State of Democracy 2026 report by International IDEA.

Introducing the report, Secretary-General Kevin Casas-Zamora highlighted several concerning trends in the state of democracy worldwide. He noted that democracy is experiencing a global decline, with 2026 marking the 11th consecutive year in which more countries experienced democratic decline than progress. While this trend is concerning, Mr. Casas-Zamora emphasised that stagnation is even more troubling. Over 80% of countries saw no significant change in their democratic performance— a particularly concerning finding given that most countries remain clustered within the mid- and low-performance ranges.

Turning to the second part of the report, which examines the relationship between democracy and conflict, Mr. Casas-Zamora highlighted the troubling implications of democratic stagnation for peace and security. He noted that the countries experiencing the highest levels of conflict are not those that are fully authoritarian or fully democratic, but rather those occupying a “messy middle”— a category that is becoming increasingly prevalent. At a time when democracy and security are increasingly framed as competing priorities, with governments retreating from democratic commitments in the name of national security, these findings suggest that strengthening democracy should not be seen as coming at the expense of security. Rather, investing in democracy is, in turn, an investment in security.

Despite being a key region in terms of both democracy promotion and security, the report does not treat the Arab world— or, alternatively, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)— as a distinct region of analysis. Instead, relevant countries are dispersed across the categories of ‘West Asia’ and ‘Africa’. To address this gap, ACHRS— in conjunction with the Election Network in the Arab Region (ENAR)— has produced an overview and analysis of the state of democracy across the Arab world. Drawing on GSoD data, the analysis traces the region’s democratic trajectory from 2006 to 2025, identifying key trends, recurring patterns and significant divergences across countries and sub-regions. By examining developments across Representation, Rights, Rule of Law and Participation, it seeks to provide a clearer understanding of the region’s democratic progress and setbacks, the factors shaping these trajectories, and the priorities for strengthening democratic governance in the years ahead.

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS) extends its sincere gratitude to International IDEA for producing the Global State of Democracy report and compiling the data that made this analysis possible.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REGION-WIDE FINDINGS

In 2025, the region's average scores fell substantially below global averages across all four dimensions of democracy. Representation stood out as the lowest-performing category in 2025, with an average of 0.22. Underscoring this category's poor performance, four out of five lowest ranking sub-categories are under the Representation, with the lowest overall being Local Democracy (0.15). Conversely, the highest sub-category was Basic Welfare, with 0.60. Curiously, Electoral Participation is the second lowest ranking sub-category with 0.21, while Civic Engagement is amongst the highest, scoring 0.50 in 2025. This suggests that engagement in political and public affairs does not necessarily translate to participation in engagement.

The long-term trend shows that, between 2006 and 2025, the Arab world broadly reflected the global pattern of democratic decline and stagnation identified by International IDEA. Significant improvements were relatively rare, while deterioration was concentrated in particular countries and dimensions. Most countries recorded no statistically significant change in several dimensions over the period. Disaggregating the 2006-2012 period and the 2012-2025 period shows that the political openings associated with the 2011 Arab Uprisings did not translate into sustained regional democratic progress. This is particularly true of Representation, which saw the largest increase from 2006-2012, and the largest deterioration from 2012 onwards.

THE MAGHREB

Rule of Law is the lowest-ranking category in the sub-region (0.31) in 2025, followed by Representation (0.32), Rights (0.39), and Participation (0.40). The lowest performing sub-category was Local Democracy (0.14), and the highest was Inclusive Suffrage (0.88).

Tunisia and Libya were the two countries in the sub-region most affected by the 2011 Arab Uprisings, with both recording significant improvements across almost all dimensions. However, these gains were subsequently reversed: in Libya following the outbreak of civil war in 2014, and in Tunisia following the onset of democratic backsliding in 2021. Most other countries have experienced relative stagnation, with Morocco and Algeria standing out for recording very limited variation across most categories.

A notable finding is that Civic Engagement stands out as the fourth highest-ranking sub-category overall, at 0.54. Civic Engagement has also remained comparatively stable over the past two decades, while Electoral Participation has exhibited substantially greater variation. With the exception of Morocco, Electoral Participation has followed a broadly downward trajectory. Likewise, Political Equality has followed a largely downward trend, with notable decreases in Social and Economic Equality, while Basic Welfare has increased.

THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA

Representation is the lowest-ranking category in the sub-region (0.21) in 2025, followed by Rule of Law (0.27), Rights (0.30), and Participation (0.36). The lowest performing sub-category was Local Democracy (0.13), and the highest was Civic Engagement (0.51).

The Nile Valley and Horn of Africa has experienced limited democratic progress over the past two decades, with relatively low and persistent scores in Djibouti, significant fluctuations in Egypt, gradual deterioration in Comoros, and severe disruption in Sudan– the latter of which saw its post-2019 gains quickly reversed by instability and conflict. Somalia is the main exception, recording modest improvements across Rights, Rule of Law, and Participation, although its lack of national elections continues to constrain Representation.

While the sub-region is notable for its high Participation score, it is also worth highlighting the contrast between Civic Engagement and Electoral Participation: while the former scores 0.51 (making it the highest-ranking sub-category in the region), the latter stands at an average of 0.26. Another notable finding concerns disparities within the Rights category. Basic Welfare is the highest-scoring sub-category, with an average of 0.61, while Political Equality ranks lowest, at 0.36. This divergence suggests that improvements in welfare have not been accompanied by equivalent progress in political equality

THE MASHREQ

Representation is the lowest-ranking category in the sub-region (0.30) in 2025, followed by Rule of Law (0.34), Rights (0.39), and Participation (0.49). The lowest performing sub-category was Electoral Participation (0.24), and the highest was Inclusive Suffrage (0.86).

Countries within the Mashreq have followed highly divergent democratic trajectories, with relatively stable scores in Iraq and Jordan, deterioration in Lebanon and Palestine, and major disruption followed by recent recovery in Syria. Scores across the sub-region did not appear significantly affected by 2011 Arab Uprisings, with the exception of Participation.

At the sub-category level, the most notable regional trend is the decline in Electoral Participation. Civic Engagement, by contrast, has remained comparatively strong across the region, averaging 0.57 in 2025. Another notable observation regards Rights: while Basic Welfare is the highest-ranking Rights sub-category, with an average of 0.61, Political Equality is the lowest-ranking, averaging 0.36. This suggests that, while welfare has increased, this has not been equal.

THE GULF

Representation is the lowest-ranking category in the sub-region (0.10) in 2025, followed by Participation (0.31), Rights (0.35), and Rule of Law (0.39). The lowest performing sub-category was Electoral Participation (0.07), and the highest was Inclusive Suffrage (0.75)

The Gulf emerges as the most stable sub-region in the Arab world, with most countries' scores remaining largely unchanged throughout the 2006-2025 period. This is concerning given the sub-region's low scores: Saudi Arabia and the UAE have maintained Representation scores of 0 throughout, while Qatar and Kuwait have recently reverted to 0 following the suspension or abolition of their respective electoral institutions. Meanwhile, Bahrain and Yemen experienced more pronounced declines following periods of political upheaval and conflict.

In 2025, the region recorded a regional average of 0.75 in Basic Welfare, the highest of the four sub-regions. It also stands out for having Rule of Law as its highest-scoring sub-category, whereas this ranks among the lowest across the other sub-regions.

Combined with its low Representation scores, this suggests that comparatively strong rule of law can coexist with authoritarian governance, highlighting the distinction between institutional legal frameworks and representative political systems. The region's strong repressive tactics are also evident in its low Participation score, which sets it apart from the rest of the region. Yet despite this, the Civic Engagement sub-category remains relatively high at 0.41, showing a degree of civic resilience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prioritise local democracy and political representation. Persistently low Representation scores, particularly in Local Democracy, highlight the need to expand meaningful opportunities for citizens to influence political decision-making. Governments should strengthen elected local councils, ensure municipal autonomy and promote inclusive, accountable local governance. International partners should support decentralisation that transfers genuine decision-making authority rather than merely administrative responsibilities.

2. Translate civic engagement into sustained electoral participation. The gap between Civic Engagement and Electoral Participation suggests that active civil society does not necessarily translate into consistent participation in formal political processes. Governments should remove barriers to electoral participation, ensure credible and accessible elections, and strengthen public trust in electoral institutions. Civil society organisations should complement these efforts through voter education, public awareness initiatives and engagement with underrepresented groups, particularly young people. The objective should be to build stronger links between citizens' existing civic engagement and their participation in electoral processes.

3. Support Syria's political transition and prioritise democratic consolidation. Syria presents an important opportunity to establish more inclusive and accountable institutions following the fall of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024. International partners should support Syrian-led political processes, inclusive constitutional development, minority participation, transitional justice and accountable local governance. However, the experience of the 2011 Arab uprisings demonstrates that political openings do not guarantee lasting democratisation. Sustained support for institutional resilience and constraints on executive power is therefore essential to prevent democratic reversals.

4. Consolidate welfare gains while addressing inequality. Basic Welfare recorded the greatest improvement between 2006 and 2025. However, low Political Equality scores across the region highlight persistent inequalities in both economic resources and political influence. Governments should consolidate welfare gains while promoting more equitable access to resources, opportunities and decision-making. The Gulf illustrates that improved welfare does not necessarily translate into democratisation, underscoring the need to address economic and political inequalities alongside development.

5. Adopt context-sensitive approaches to democratic reform. The four sub-regions exhibit distinct political trajectories, making uniform policy prescriptions inappropriate. International organisations, donors and civil society actors should tailor their support to country-specific conditions, using sub-regional and country-level evidence to identify priorities and monitor progress. Across the region, the overarching objective should be to consolidate improvements across democratic dimensions rather than allowing progress in individual areas to coexist indefinitely with persistent institutional weaknesses.

METHODOLOGY

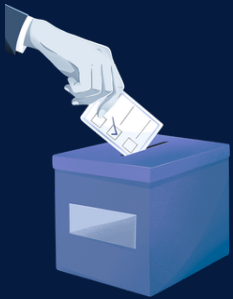
DATA AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This report examines changes in democratic performance across the Arab world between 2006 and 2025, using the International IDEA Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices. The analysis covers 22 Arab countries and draws on four dimensions of democratic performance: Representation, Rights, Rule of Law and Participation. Scores are analysed at the country, regional and sub-regional levels to identify common trends, divergences and areas of relative strength or deterioration.

Although the GSoD framework incorporates indicators from V-Dem, alongside data from other sources, it is important to distinguish between the two: the analysis uses the GSoD framework and its four democratic attributes rather than V-Dem's own high-level democracy indices. The GSoD indices provide a multidimensional framework for examining democracy beyond the presence or absence of competitive elections, recognising that democratic governance also depends on the protection of rights, constraints on state power and opportunities for public participation.

DEMOCRATIC CATEGORIES AND SUB-CATEGORIES

The GSoD framework conceptualises democracy through four interrelated attributes, each comprising subattributes that capture distinct institutional and societal dimensions of democratic performance. All four attribute scores are standardised on a scale from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating stronger performance in the relevant dimension.



Representation measures the extent to which citizens have free and equal access to political representation. Its six subattributes are Credible Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties, Elected Government, Effective Parliament and Local Democracy. Together, these assess electoral integrity, the inclusiveness of voting rights, political competition, the selection of government through elections, legislative oversight and the availability of meaningful electoral participation at the local level.



Rights captures the extent to which individual liberties and the material conditions necessary for their exercise are protected. Its four subattributes are Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, Basic Welfare and Political Equality. These encompass the fairness of legal institutions, respect for civil liberties, access to essential services such as healthcare and education, and equality across social groups, economic circumstances and gender.



Rule of Law assesses whether public authority is exercised within predictable legal constraints and whether individuals are protected against abuses of power and violence. Its four subattributes are Judicial Independence, Absence of Corruption, Predictable Enforcement, and Personal Integrity and Security. This dimension therefore captures both institutional checks on government and aspects of the security and integrity of public administration.



Participation examines the extent to which citizens are actively involved in political life, both within and beyond elections. Its three sub-attributes are Civil Society, Civic Engagement and Electoral Participation. These measure the freedom and influence of civil society organisations, citizens' involvement in civic organisations, and participation in national elections.

Examining these attributes separately allows the analysis to identify differences that would be obscured by a single aggregate measure of democracy. For example, a country may perform relatively well in one dimension while exhibiting substantial weaknesses in others. Such divergences are analytically significant because they demonstrate that democratic performance is multidimensional and that institutional strength in one area does not necessarily imply broader democratic accountability or political inclusion.

SUB-REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

The countries selected are the 22 member-States of the Arab League. These countries are divided into four sub-regions: the Maghreb, Nile Valley & Horn of Africa, Mashreq, and Gulf. This classification provides an intermediate level of analysis between individual country assessments and a single regional average.

The Arab world encompasses substantial variation in political institutions, historical trajectories, state structures and experiences of political change. A region-wide average can conceal these differences, particularly when improvements in some countries coincide with deterioration or stagnation in others. Disaggregation into four sub-regions makes it possible to assess whether observed trends are geographically concentrated, shared across the region or shaped by distinct sub-regional trajectories.

The classification also provides a framework for interpreting differences in countries' experiences of major political developments, including the 2011 Arab uprisings and their subsequent aftermath. While the uprisings affected much of the region, their political consequences varied considerably. Comparing sub-regional patterns therefore helps distinguish broader regional developments from changes concentrated in particular political contexts.

Sub-regional averages are used to identify patterns rather than to imply that countries within each grouping are politically homogeneous. Country-level variation remains important, and regional findings are interpreted alongside individual country results wherever necessary. The classification is consequently an analytical device for organising comparison, not a claim that the four sub-regions constitute internally uniform political units.

MEASURING CHANGE AND STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The analysis examines changes in each country's scores between 2006 and 2025, as well as changes in the distribution of performance across countries and sub-regions. For each attribute, the absolute change is calculated by subtracting the earlier score from the later score:

CHANGE= later-year score – earlier-year score

A positive change indicates an increase in the relevant score, while a negative change indicates a decrease. However, the direction of change alone does not establish whether the difference is statistically significant.

To distinguish meaningful changes from fluctuations that may reflect measurement uncertainty, the analysis considers the uncertainty intervals accompanying the GSoD point estimates. Changes are classified as significant increases or decreases where the relevant uncertainty intervals for the two comparison years do not overlap. Where intervals overlap, the change is treated as not statistically significant for the purposes of this analysis, with its direction recorded separately where useful.

This approach distinguishes four possible outcomes: statistically significant increase, statistically significant decrease, non-significant increase and non-significant decrease. Where scores remain effectively unchanged, the findings are described as stagnation or no clear change, depending on the size and direction of the observed difference.

The distinction matters because a positive numerical change does not necessarily constitute robust evidence of improvement, just as a negative change does not automatically demonstrate a statistically significant deterioration. Reporting direction and significance separately therefore provides a more cautious assessment of democratic trajectories than interpreting point estimates alone.

The significance classification should nevertheless be interpreted as a conservative analytical rule rather than a formal hypothesis test of the difference between two estimates. In particular, overlapping uncertainty intervals do not, by themselves, establish that the difference is statistically insignificant under every possible statistical test. The analysis uses the available intervals to identify changes supported by clearer separation between estimates, while retaining non-significant directional changes as potentially informative descriptive evidence.

PERIODISATION: 2006-2012 AND 2012-2025

The 2006–2025 period was selected to provide a comprehensive, 20-year (inclusive) perspective on democratic developments across the Arab world. To examine how patterns of democratic change evolved over time, the analysis compares two periods: 2006–2012 and 2012–2025. The division is intended to distinguish the years preceding and encompassing the 2011 Arab uprisings from the longer period following them, allowing the analysis to assess whether the breadth and direction of democratic change differed across these two political contexts.

The first period captures the years leading up to the uprisings and their immediate aftermath. The second examines the subsequent trajectory, including the consolidation of authoritarian responses in some countries, political transitions and reversals elsewhere, and the effects of prolonged instability and conflict. The year 2012 serves as the dividing point, providing a common reference year for comparing the scores at the end of the first period and the beginning of the second.

This periodisation is analytically useful but involves an important limitation: the intervals are unequal in length. The 2006–2012 comparison spans six years, whereas 2012–2025 spans thirteen. Consequently, comparing the magnitude of score changes across the two periods does not provide a direct comparison of the annual pace of democratic change. The longer second period also allows more time for political developments to accumulate, increasing the opportunity for both deterioration and improvement to occur.

The periods are therefore not treated as equivalent units of time. Rather, the comparison is intended to identify differences in the overall distribution, direction and statistical significance of democratic change across two broad historical phases. Particular attention is paid to whether improvements or deteriorations are widespread across countries and attributes, or instead concentrated in specific cases or sub-regions.

The comparison is further limited by the fact that the 2011 uprisings did not constitute a uniform regional turning point. Countries experienced different political developments, and the effects of these developments unfolded over different timescales. The division should therefore be understood as a historically informed analytical framework rather than evidence that the uprisings alone caused subsequent changes in democratic performance.

DOWNLOADABLE DATASET

The dataset used in this analysis is available for download below. Compiled by International IDEA as part of its Global State of Democracy (GSoD) initiative, the data has been filtered to include Arab countries and the indicators relevant to this analysis. It also includes calculated changes between 2006 and 2025 and, where applicable, their statistical significance.



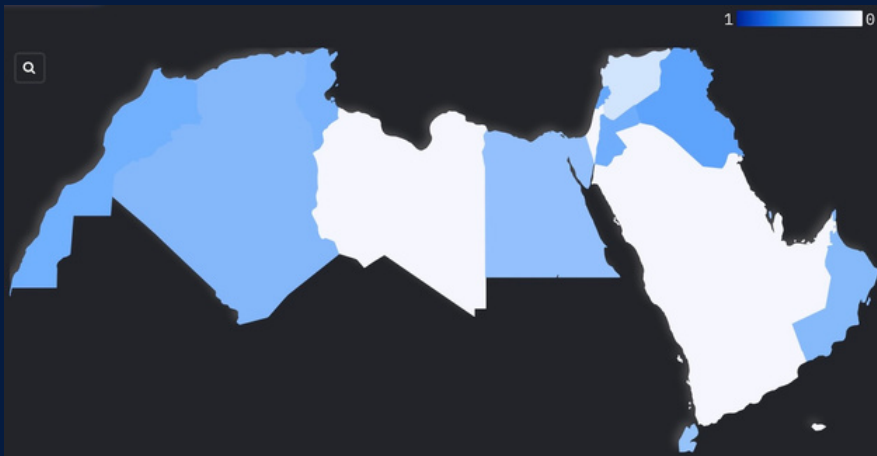
[DOWNLOAD DATA](#)

Data attribution and disclaimer: The underlying data is sourced from International IDEA's Global State of Democracy database. ACHRS has filtered and processed the data for the purposes of this analysis; the calculations and any resulting interpretations are its own. The original data and methodology remain attributable to International IDEA. Please refer to International IDEA's official database and documentation for the original data, definitions and methodological details.

A LOOK AT THE ARAB WORLD

International IDEA's Global State of Democracy report observes that, in West Asia, the "small share of declines reflects how few of the region's countries had room to fall further". An examination of the Arab world brings this observation into particularly sharp relief. In 2025, the region's average scores fell substantially below global averages across all four dimensions of democracy: Representation (0.22, compared with a global average of 0.50), Rights (0.36 versus 0.50), Rule of Law (0.34 versus 0.46), and Participation (0.40 versus 0.53). These disparities underscore the depth of the region's democratic deficits and the limited progress towards closing the gap with global performance.

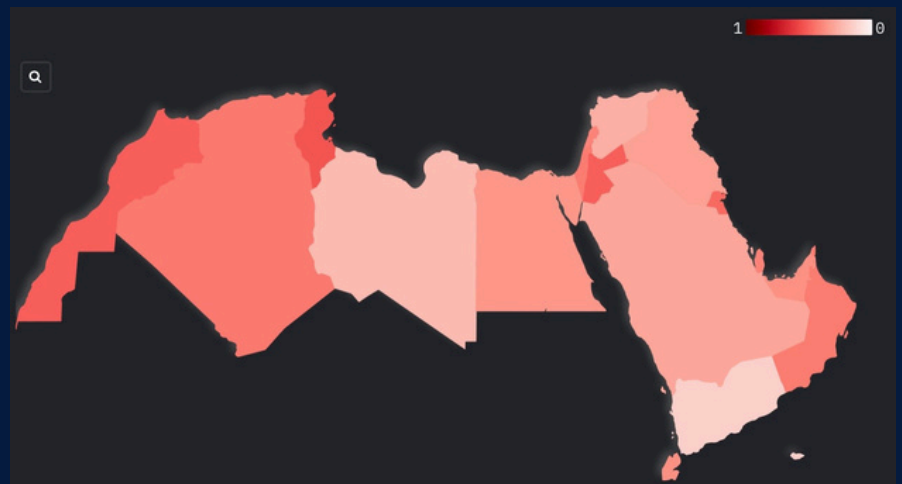
REPRESENTATION IN THE ARAB WORLD (2025) *



With a regional average of 0.22, Representation is the lowest-performing sub-category in 2025. The Gulf records the lowest sub-regional average (0.10), with only Bahrain and Oman registering non-zero scores. The Maghreb performs comparatively better, recording the highest sub-regional average at 0.32, although this remains low.

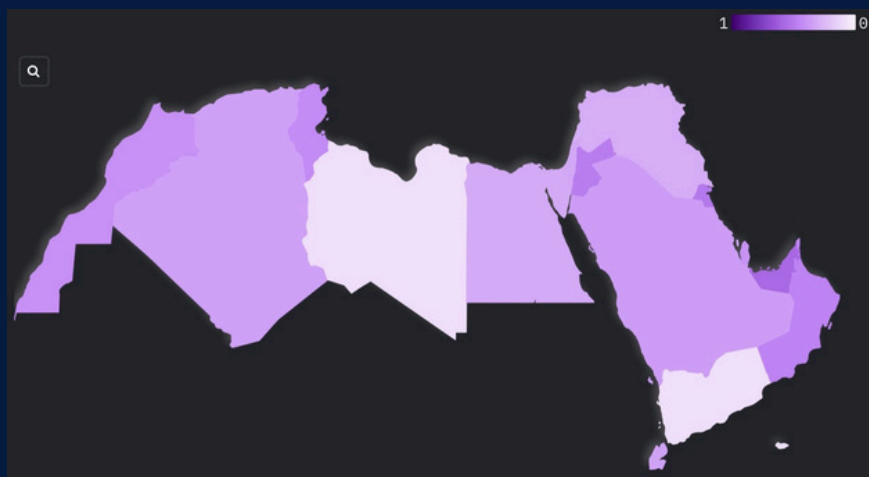
Rights presents a comparatively more positive picture, with a regional average of 0.36. The Maghreb and Mashreq jointly record the highest sub-regional averages, at 0.39, while the Nile Valley & Horn of Africa ranks lowest, with an average of 0.30. Despite these differences, the relatively narrow range of scores suggests that rights remain a challenge across the region, albeit to varying degrees.

RIGHTS IN THE ARAB WORLD (2025)



*Comoros is excluded from this and all subsequent maps in this section due to technical limitations in the mapping process.

RULE OF LAW IN THE ARAB WORLD (2025)



Rule of Law records a regional average of 0.34. The Gulf ranks highest among the sub-regions, with an average of 0.39, while the Nile Valley & Horn of Africa ranks lowest, at 0.27. The 0.12-point gap between the two highlights differences in regional performance, although even the highest-scoring sub-region remains relatively close to the overall average.

Participation is the highest-performing category in 2025, with a regional average of 0.40. The Mashreq records the highest sub-regional average, at 0.49, while the Gulf ranks lowest, at 0.31. This is the widest disparity between the highest- and lowest-scoring sub-regions among the three categories discussed, suggesting that Participation is characterised by particularly pronounced regional variation.

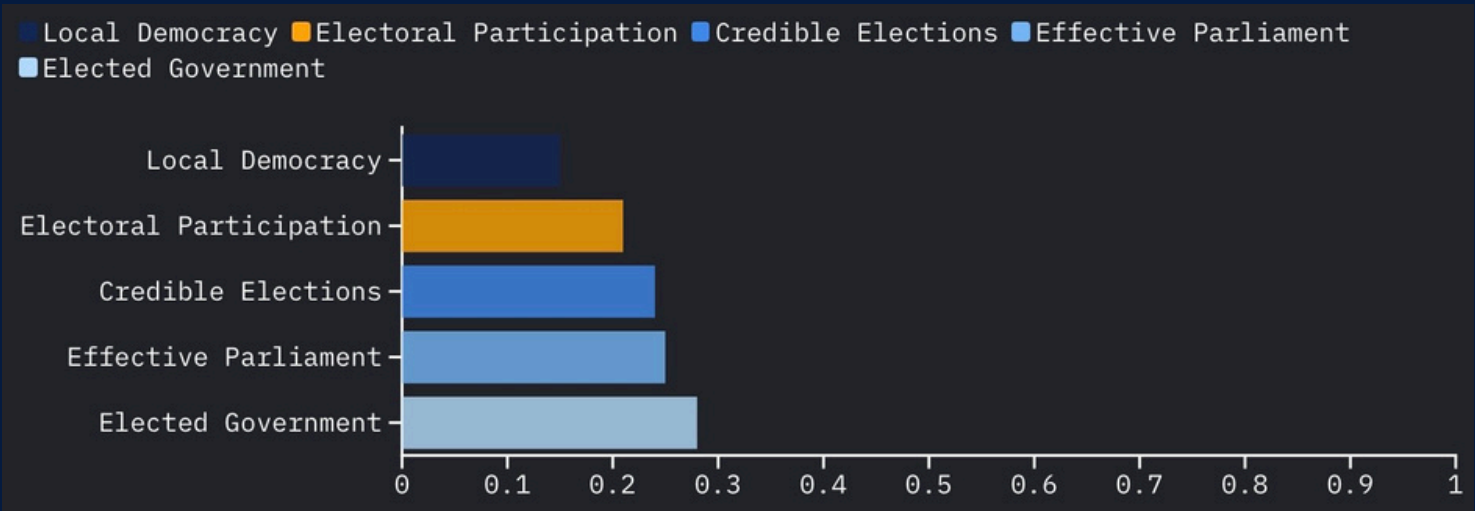
PARTICIPATION IN THE ARAB WORLD (2025)



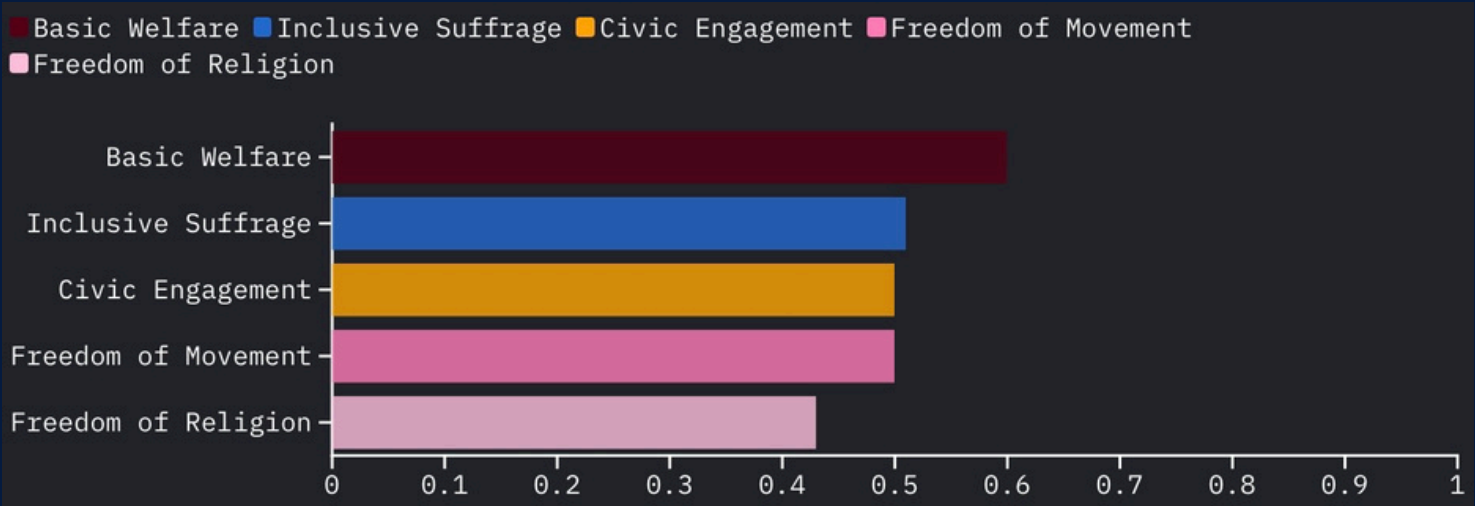
The sub-regional distribution highlights the uneven and multidimensional nature of democratic governance across the Arab world. The Maghreb's comparatively stronger performance in Representation contrasts with the Gulf's particularly low scores in this dimension, where only Bahrain and Oman register non-zero values, suggesting a pronounced weakness in political representation across the sub-region. Yet the Gulf's stronger performance in Rule of Law demonstrates that comparatively better institutional performance does not necessarily coincide with broader opportunities for political participation or representation. The Mashreq, meanwhile, performs comparatively well in both Rights and Participation, although these results alone do not establish equivalent strengths in the other dimensions of democratic governance. The Nile Valley & Horn of Africa's weaker performance in Rights and Rule of Law points to challenges extending beyond political representation to the broader institutional and rights-based conditions underpinning democratic governance. Taken together, these differences suggest that democratic weaknesses manifest in distinct ways across the sub-regions, underscoring the importance of examining their individual institutional and political contexts rather than treating the Arab world as a homogeneous regional bloc.

SUB-CATEGORY ANALYSIS: DISAGGREGATING DEMOCRATIC COMPONENTS

An examination of the sub-categories underlying the four dimensions provides a more nuanced picture of the Arab world's democratic performance. The region's weakest results in 2025 are concentrated in Representation, which accounts for all five of the lowest-scoring sub-categories. Local Democracy ranks lowest, with a regional average of 0.15, followed by Electoral Participation (0.21), Credible Elections (0.24), Effective Parliament (0.25) and Elected Government (0.28). These scores point to persistent weaknesses in democratic representation at the local and national levels, as well as in electoral processes and the effectiveness of elected institutions.

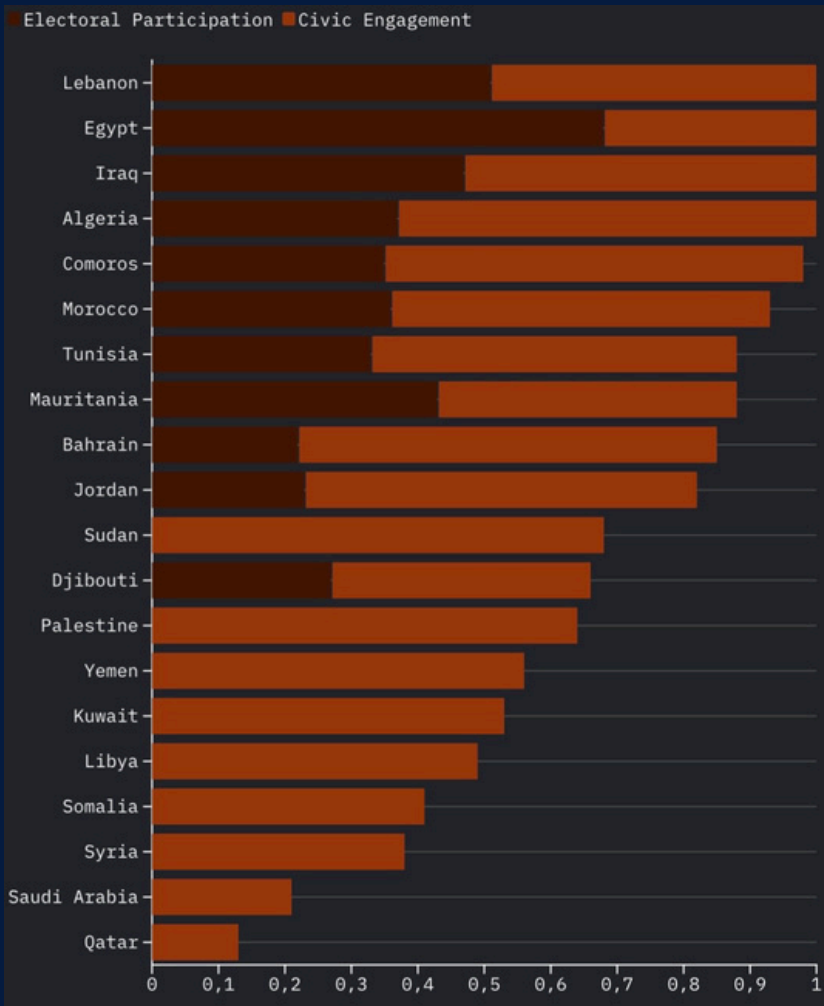


By contrast, Basic Welfare records the highest regional average, at 0.60, followed by Inclusive Suffrage (0.51), Civic Engagement (0.50), Freedom of Movement (0.50), and Freedom of Religion (0.43). The disparity between these scores and those for Representation highlights the uneven nature of democratic performance: comparatively stronger outcomes in basic welfare and formal inclusion coexist with substantial deficits in representative institutions and electoral processes.



These trends largely hold when looking at the sub-regions. Local Democracy was the lowest-scoring sub-category in the Maghreb (0.14) and the Nile Valley & Horn of Africa (0.13), while being the second lowest-scoring sub-category in the Mashreq (0.27) and the Gulf (0.09). In both of these two, the lowest-scoring sub-category was Electoral Participation, at 0.24 and 0.07 respectively. Meanwhile, Inclusive Suffrage was the highest-scoring sub-category in the Maghreb (0.71) and Mashreq (0.68), and second-highest in the Nile Valley & Horn of Africa (0.51). While the overall average for Inclusive Suffrage in the Gulf is an extremely low 0.25 (putting it amongst the bottom five sub-categories), this is mainly due to the lack of elections in the sub-region. Discounting those countries whose score of 0 is attributable to an overall lack of elections, the Gulf's Inclusive Suffrage score is a high 0.88. This figure exceeds that of the region's highest-ranking sub-category, Basic Welfare, which sits at 0.75. The Nile Valley & Horn of Africa stands as an outlier, with the highest-scoring sub-category being Civic Engagement at 0.51.

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



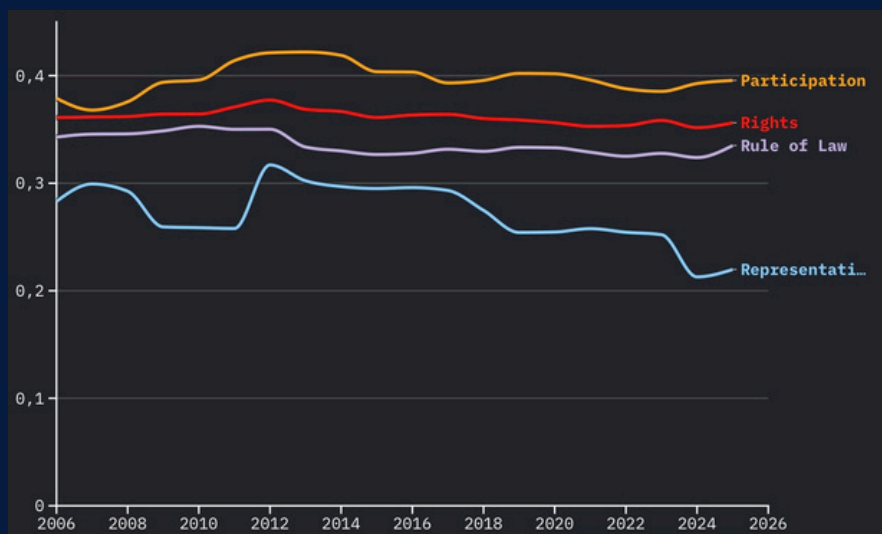
Particularly striking is the contrast between Civic Engagement, which ranks among the higher-scoring sub-categories, and Electoral Participation, which ranks among the lowest. This disparity suggests that relatively stronger civic engagement does not necessarily correspond to stronger participation in electoral processes. The two indicators capture distinct aspects of political life, and their contrasting scores raise questions about the extent to which civic engagement translates into meaningful electoral participation.

The longer-term trajectory of Electoral Participation reinforces this concern. Between 2006 and 2025, it exhibited the clearest downward trend of any sub-category: Egypt was the only country for which an increase was recorded, while all other countries with available data either experienced a decline or registered no change.

The particularly low scores for Local Democracy, Credible Elections, Effective Parliament and Elected Government further suggest that the region's democratic deficits extend beyond participation itself. They also concern the institutional channels through which citizens can exercise political agency, hold elected representatives accountable and influence decision-making. Taken together, these findings point to a structural gap between certain forms of civic engagement and the effective functioning of representative democracy.

THE LONG-TERM TREND: 2006 VS 2025

DEMOCRATIC INDICATORS IN THE ARAB WORLD (2006-2025)

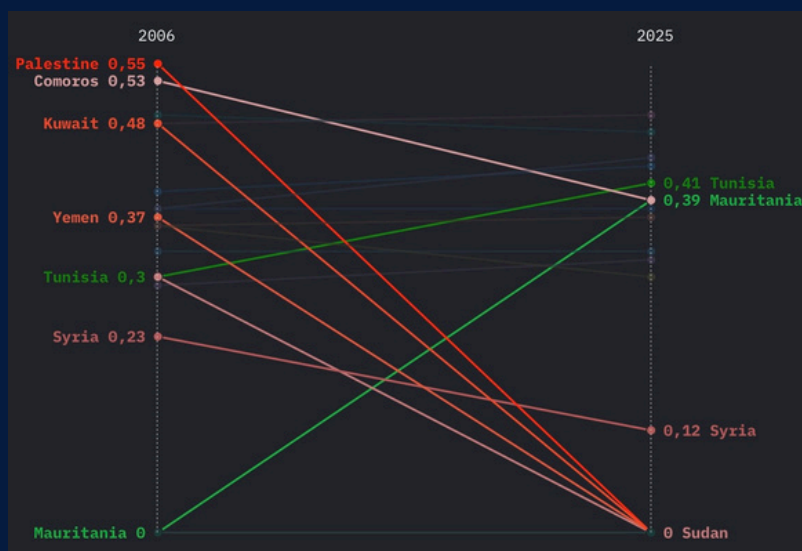


The longer-term picture is similarly concerning. Between 2006 and 2025, the Arab world broadly reflected the global pattern of democratic decline and stagnation identified by International IDEA. Significant improvements were relatively rare, while deterioration was concentrated in particular countries and dimensions. Most countries recorded no statistically significant change in several dimensions over the period.

Such apparent stability should not, however, be mistaken for democratic resilience: where democratic performance is already low, stagnation can entrench existing deficits rather than indicate meaningful progress.

The distribution of change across the four dimensions reveals both the persistence of these deficits and important differences in their severity. Representation experienced the most widespread deterioration, with six countries recording significant declines against only two significant improvements. Comoros (-0.14), Sudan (-0.30), Syria (-0.11), Palestine (-0.55), Yemen (-0.37) and Kuwait (-0.48) deteriorated, while only Tunisia and Mauritania improved, with changes of +0.11 and +0.39 respectively.

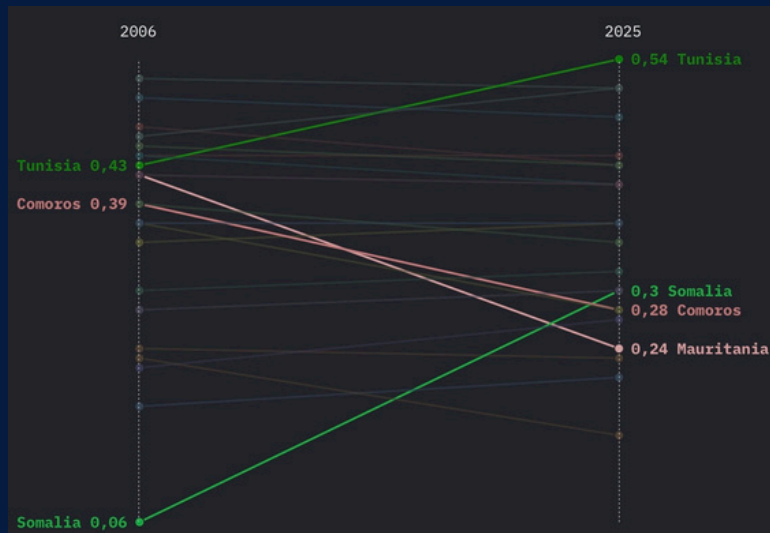
REPRESENTATION SCORES, 2006 VS 2025 **



The remaining 14 countries– Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Somalia, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman– recorded no statistically significant change. While this suggests relative stability in their Representation scores over the period, it should not be interpreted as evidence of democratic progress or the absence of political change. Rather, the persistence of low levels of representation across much of the region points to the resilience of existing political arrangements and the limited extent of meaningful structural transformation.

**This and the following slope graphs illustrate the overall change between 2006 and 2025 and should not be interpreted as showing fluctuations or trends throughout the intervening period.

RIGHTS SCORES, 2006 VS 2025



Rights followed a more mixed trajectory. Tunisia (+0.10) and Somalia (+0.24) recorded significant improvements, while Mauritania (-0.19) and Comoros (-0.11) experienced significant declines. The other 18 countries– Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Djibouti, Sudan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman– showed no statistically significant change. The predominance of statistically unchanged scores should not be interpreted as evidence that rights are protected, but rather as an indication of the limited change recorded over the period.

Civil Liberties stands out as the sub-category that saw the most declines, with Mauritania (-0.14), Algeria (-0.10), Comoros, (-0.09) Egypt (-0.12), Yemen (-0.15) and Qatar (-0.19) all experiencing significant decreases. This pattern suggests that restrictions on individual freedoms represent a particularly persistent challenge across the region. The fact that declines occurred across countries with different political contexts also indicates that the erosion of civil liberties is not confined to a single national trajectory.

Rule of Law exhibited a similarly uneven pattern, with significant improvements in Tunisia (+0.09), Somalia (+0.19) and Iraq (+0.07), against significant declines in Mauritania (-0.13), Libya (-0.10), Palestine (-0.07), Yemen (-0.12) and Bahrain (-0.07). The remaining 14 countries– Algeria, Morocco, Djibouti, Comoros, Sudan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman– recorded no statistically significant change.

RULE OF LAW SCORES, 2006 VS 2025



The coexistence of improvements and declines suggests that developments in the rule of law have been shaped by distinct national trajectories rather than a uniform regional trend. While Tunisia, Somalia and Iraq registered progress, deterioration elsewhere underscores the fragility of such gains and the uneven nature of institutional change. The large number of countries recording no significant change further points to the persistence of existing conditions, suggesting that advances in the rule of law have remained limited and geographically uneven.

PARTICIPATION SCORES, 2006 VS 2025



Participation also saw limited progress. Libya (+0.26) and Syria (+0.24) recorded significant improvements, while Yemen (-0.16) and Bahrain (-0.21) experienced significant declines. The other 18 countries– Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Somalia, Djibouti, Comoros, Sudan, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman– showed no statistically significant change. The sub-category that saw the most negative change was Electoral Participation***, with Egypt standing out as the only country to increase (+0.68).

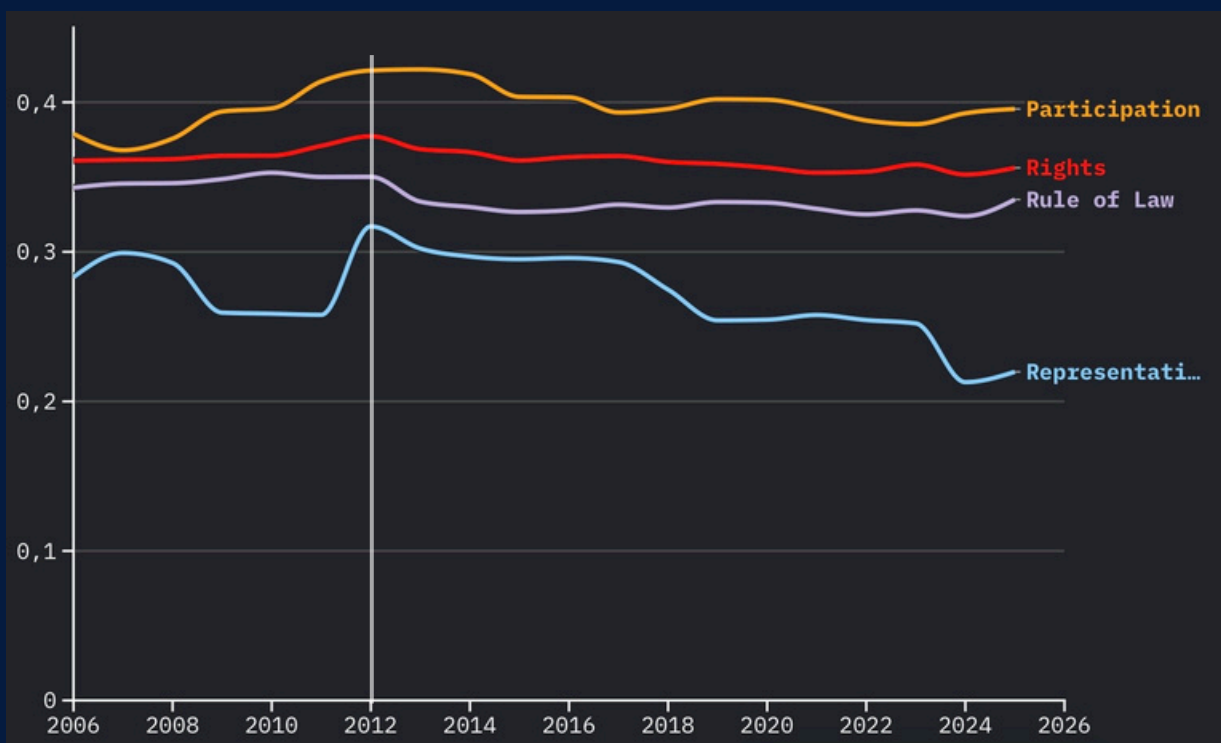
Except Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and Libya (which saw no change), all other countries decreased. Taken together, these findings highlight an important distinction between the overall Participation category and its electoral component: while aggregate scores reflect divergent national trajectories, the widespread decline in Electoral Participation suggests that opportunities for electoral engagement have generally weakened across the region between 2006 and 2025.

***Statistical significance could not be assessed for Electoral Participation, as International IDEA does not provide lower and upper confidence bounds for this sub-category, which is based on a single indicator: voter turnout.

THE 2011 ARAB UPRISINGS

Disaggregating the 2006–2025 period into 2006–2012 and 2012–2025 reveals a striking shift in the direction of democratic change. The earlier period saw significant improvements in several countries across Representation, Rights and Rule of Law, particularly in the Maghreb and the Nile Valley and Horn of Africa. The later period, by contrast, was characterised by more widespread deterioration, especially in Representation and Rule of Law, alongside negative movements in Participation across much of the region. Although these trajectories varied considerably between countries, the contrast suggests that the political openings associated with the 2011 Arab Uprisings did not translate into sustained regional democratic progress.

DEMOCRATIC INDICATORS IN THE ARAB WORLD (2006-2025)



REPRESENTATION

Between 2006 and 2012, the only three countries experiencing significant improvements in Representation were clustered in the Maghreb– specifically Tunisia (+0.31), Libya (+0.49) and Mauritania (+0.37). A further eight countries– Morocco, Djibouti, Comoros, Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait and Oman– registered non-significant increases. Significant deterioration was limited to Palestine (-0.55)– likely due to the 2007 Fatah-Hamas split and subsequent lack of elections since– while declines and stagnation were otherwise concentrated primarily in the Mashreq and Gulf.

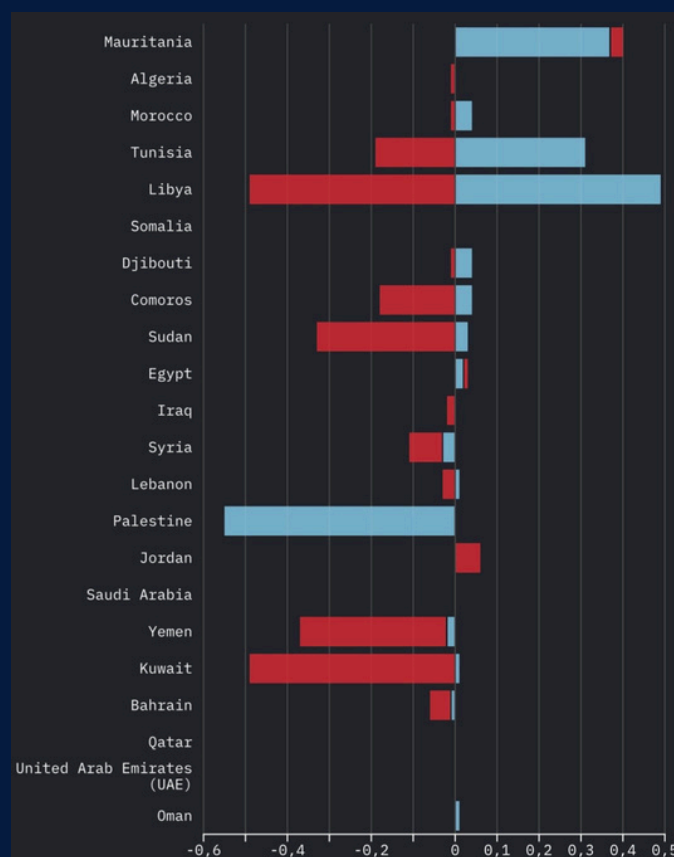
After 2012, this pattern changed markedly. No country recorded a significant improvement in Representation, and only Mauritania, Iraq and Jordan registered increases, none of which were statistically significant.

Conversely, seven countries– Tunisia (-0.19), Libya (-0.49), Comoros (-0.18), Sudan (-0.33), Syria (-0.08), Yemen (-0.35) and Kuwait (-0.49)– experienced significant declines. The remaining countries recorded either no change or non-significant decreases.

The contrast is particularly pronounced in Tunisia and Libya, both of which experienced significant improvements in the earlier period before recording significant declines in the later one. Libya, in particular, saw its 2006-2012 improvement of +0.49 completely reversed in the 2012-2025 period, with a decline of -0.49. Their trajectories illustrate the fragility of representative gains and the extent to which initial political openings failed to produce sustained improvements. More broadly, the absence of significant gains after 2012, alongside seven significant declines, makes Representation the clearest example of the region's deteriorating democratic trajectory.

REPRESENTATION CHANGES (2006-2012 VS 2012-2025)

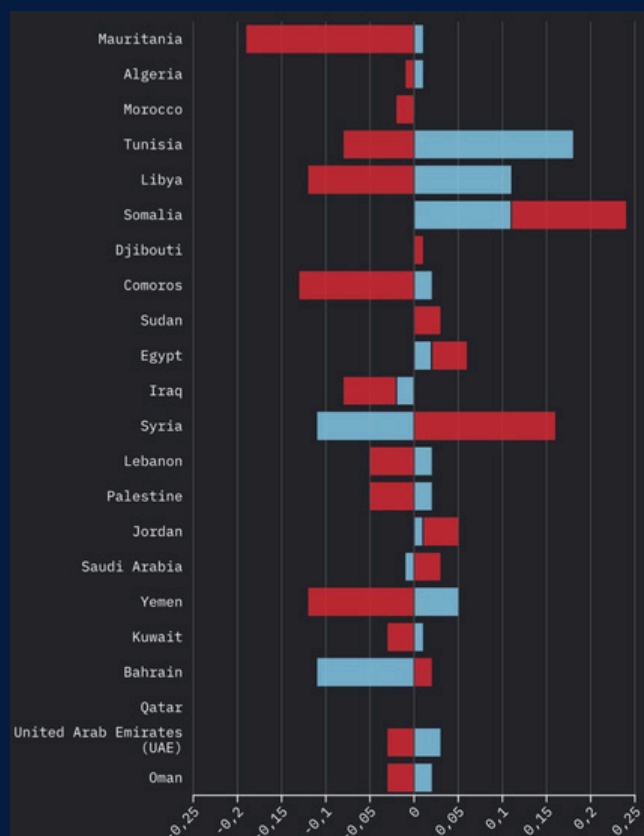
2006-2012 Change Score 2012-2025 Change Score



RIGHTS

RIGHTS CHANGES (2006-2012 VS 2012-2025)

2006-2012 Change Score 2012-2025 Change Score



Rights also improved in several countries during the 2006-2012 period, although gains were more geographically dispersed. Tunisia (+0.18), Libya (+0.11) and Somalia (+0.11) recorded significant increases, while Algeria, Mauritania, Djibouti, Comoros, Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Oman registered non-significant increases. Significant declines were limited to Syria (-0.11) and Bahrain (-0.11). With regards, to Syria, this might be a result of the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in early 2011. Bahrain likewise experienced political upheaval in the wake of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, with the government responding to protests using repressive tactics.

After 2012, the balance shifted towards deterioration, although less decisively than in Representation. Mauritania (-0.19), Libya (-0.12), Comoros (-0.13) and Yemen (-0.12) experienced significant declines.

Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Oman recorded non-significant decreases. Only Somalia (+0.13) and Syria (+0.16) registered significant improvements, with the latter largely resulting from the country's recovery in the post-Assad period. Mauritania, Iraq and Jordan experienced non-significant increases.

RULE OF LAW

Rule of Law followed a similarly uneven trajectory. Between 2006 and 2012, Tunisia (+0.15), Libya (+0.11) and Somalia (+0.09) recorded significant improvements. However, the pattern was less uniformly positive than in Representation: Algeria, Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Oman registered non-significant decreases, while Syria (-0.09) and Bahrain (-0.13) experienced significant declines.

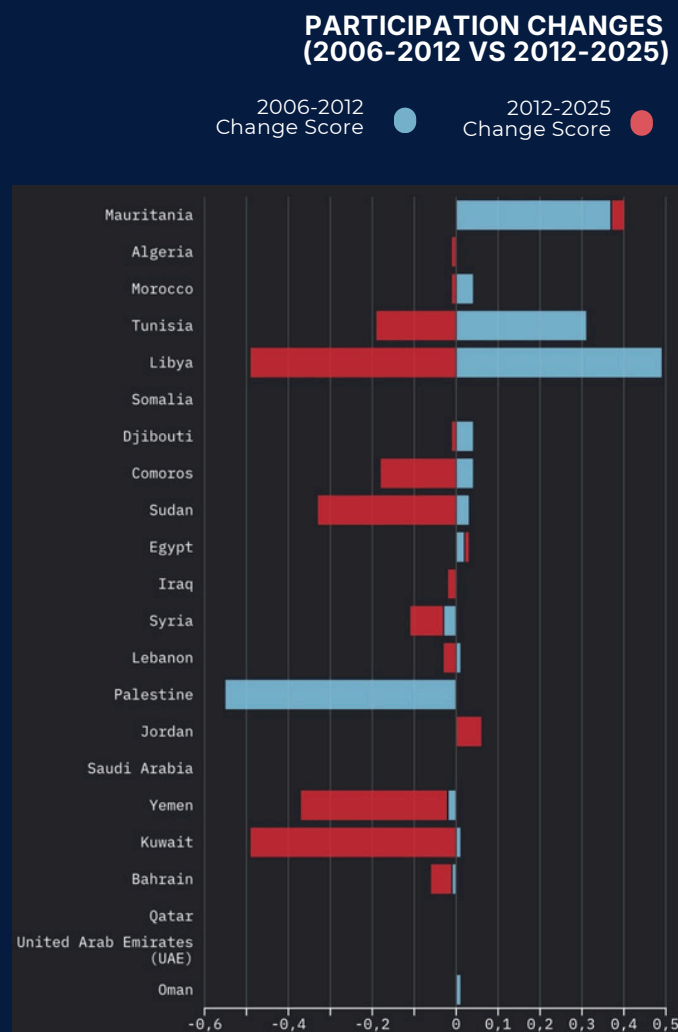
After 2012, deterioration became more pronounced in several countries. Mauritania (-0.11), Tunisia (-0.07), Libya (-0.21), Palestine (-0.08) and Yemen (-0.12) recorded significant decreases, while Somalia (+0.11), Iraq (+0.06) and Syria (+0.13) registered significant improvements.

PARTICIPATION

Participation experienced significant improvements in Tunisia (+0.29) and Libya (+0.26) during 2006-2012, alongside non-significant increases in Morocco, Sudan, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. Bahrain (-0.18) was the only country to record a significant decline, possibly due to the government's repression of civil society following the 2011 protests.

The post-2012 period was substantially less favourable. Tunisia (-0.23) and Yemen (-0.22) experienced significant decreases, while Morocco, Djibouti, Comoros, Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman recorded non-significant decreases. Only Syria recorded significant improvements (+0.20).

This widespread negative movement suggests both that opportunities for political participation came under pressure across much of the region after the Arab Uprisings, and that there was widespread disillusionment with political processes leading to a lack of civic engagement post-2011.



Tunisia's trajectory is again particularly illustrative: significant improvements in the earlier period were followed by significant deterioration after 2012. That said, the prevalence of non-significant decreases cautions against making blanket pronouncements about the state of Participation in the 2012-2025 period.

FINDINGS

Three findings emerge from comparing 2006–2012 and 2012–2025. First, the earlier period saw a broader distribution of democratic improvements, particularly in Representation, Rights and Rule of Law. These were especially evident in the Maghreb, where Tunisia and Libya improved across several dimensions, and in parts of the Nile Valley and Horn of Africa, notably Somalia.

Second, the post-2012 period saw a marked deterioration in the balance of change, particularly in Representation, alongside widespread negative movement in Participation, much of which was statistically non-significant. This reversal was evident in the Maghreb, where earlier gains were followed by significant declines in several dimensions, and in the Mashreq, where Syria, Palestine and Yemen experienced deterioration in Representation or Rule of Law. However, trajectories remained uneven, with some countries improving in particular dimensions while others remained broadly unchanged.

Third, Tunisia illustrates the limitations of assessing democratic trajectories through net change alone. It was the only country to record significant improvements across three dimensions over 2006–2025, with a non-significant increase in the fourth. Yet this overall progress conceals significant post-2012 declines in Representation, Rule of Law and Participation, alongside a non-significant decrease in Rights. Tunisia's trajectory demonstrates how earlier gains can be reversed, reflecting a broader pattern in the Maghreb in which initial improvements were not consistently sustained.

The Gulf followed a different trajectory, characterised largely by stagnation rather than significant change. Less directly affected by the Arab Uprisings than other sub-regions, it nevertheless experienced deterioration in specific dimensions. Bahrain's post-2012 declines in Rule of Law and Participation illustrate the repressive responses and restrictions on political activity that followed the uprisings in parts of the Gulf.

Overall, the comparison suggests that the democratic openings associated with the Arab Uprisings were not consolidated into durable regional improvements. Subsequent deterioration in representative institutions, persistent weaknesses in political participation and uneven developments in Rights and Rule of Law point to the fragility of earlier gains. The region's trajectory is therefore better characterised by limited and uneven progress, punctuated by reversals, than by uniform democratic decline or stability.

THE MAGHREB

SUMMARY

Tunisia and **Libya** were the two countries in the sub-region most affected by the 2011 Arab Uprisings, with both recording significant improvements across all four dimensions. However, these gains were subsequently reversed: in **Libya** following the outbreak of civil war in 2014, and in **Tunisia** following the onset of democratic backsliding in 2021. Most other countries have experienced relative stagnation, with **Morocco** and **Algeria** standing out for recording very limited variation across most categories.



Rule of Law is the lowest-ranking category in the sub-region (0.31) in 2025, followed by Representation (0.32), Rights (0.39), and Participation (0.40). The lowest performing sub-category was Local Democracy (0.14), and the highest was Inclusive Suffrage (0.88) [1].

REPRESENTATION

Representation scores have shown limited variation across **Morocco**, **Algeria**, and **Mauritania** [2] over the past two decades, remaining broadly within the 0.38-0.43 range.

The greatest variation in Representation scores over the past 20 years is observed in **Tunisia** and **Libya**. Both countries experienced sharp increases following the 2011 Arab Uprisings, with **Tunisia**'s score rising from 0.30 to 0.53 and **Libya**'s from 0 to 0.49.

REPRESENTATION IN THE MAGHREB (2006 - 2025)



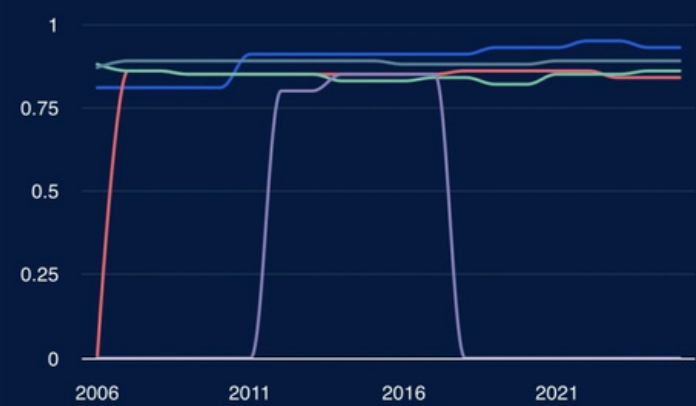
Tunisia's score continued to improve steadily over the following decade, reaching a peak of 0.70 in 2020. This progress was subsequently reversed following President Saied's decision to suspend parliament and dismiss the prime minister in 2021. **Tunisia**'s Representation score has since declined sharply, reaching 0.41 in 2025– the lowest level recorded since the 2011 revolution.

In **Libya**, the improvement was considerably more short-lived. Following Gaddafi's deposition and the 2012 parliamentary elections, the country's Representation score began to decline, falling to 0.38 by 2017. Following the breakdown of the UN peace plan in 2018, **Libya**'s score fell further to 0 and has remained at this level since.

[1] Excluding Libya, which does not hold elections.

[2] Mauritania's Representation score fell to 0 in 2006 following the 2005 coup d'état. Following the parliamentary elections held in late 2006, the score rose sharply to 0.44 in 2007, the country's highest Representation score of the past two decades. It subsequently stabilised, averaging 0.38 over the following 19 years.

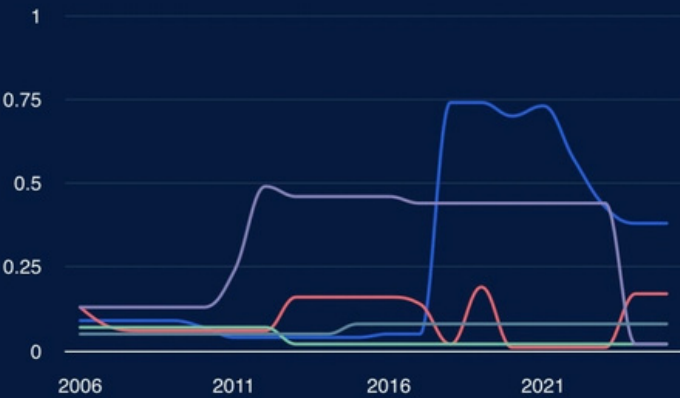
**INCLUSIVE SUFFRAGE IN THE MAGHREB
(2006 - 2025)**



Although these broad trends are largely reflected at the sub-category level, several notable patterns emerge. Inclusive Suffrage scores have remained consistently high across the region, indicating a high degree of equality in voting rights between men and women. Excluding **Libya**, whose score of 0 reflects the absence of elections, the regional average for this sub-category was 0.88 in 2025, making Inclusive Suffrage the highest-performing sub-category.

By contrast, Local Democracy was the lowest-performing sub-category, with a regional average of just 0.14 in 2025. This suggests that citizens across the sub-region have comparatively limited opportunities to participate in and influence local governance. While Local Democracy scores remained, for the most part, consistently low during the 2006-2025 period, there are notable exceptions. **Tunisia** saw a sharp increase following the country's first-ever municipal elections in 2018.

**LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN THE MAGHREB
(2006 - 2025)**



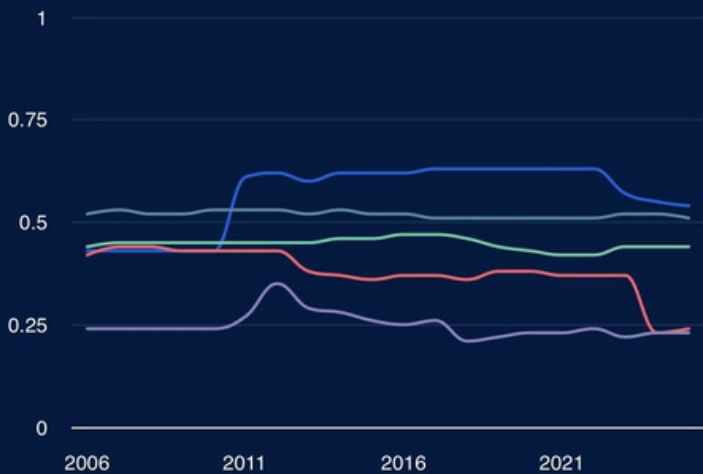
However, these gains were largely reversed following President Saied's decision to suspend parliament. Likewise, **Libya's** Local Democracy score plummeted following the collapse of the December 2021 electoral process, and subsequent failures to organise municipal elections.

RIGHTS

Morocco and **Algeria** have maintained relatively stable Rights scores in the past 20 years, fluctuating around 0.52 and 0.45 respectively.

Following the 2011 Arab Uprisings, **Tunisia's** Rights score rose sharply, from 0.43 in 2010 to 0.61 in 2011. It remained relatively stable over the following 11 years, averaging 0.62, before declining to 0.57 in 2023.

RIGHTS IN THE MAGHREB (2006 - 2025)

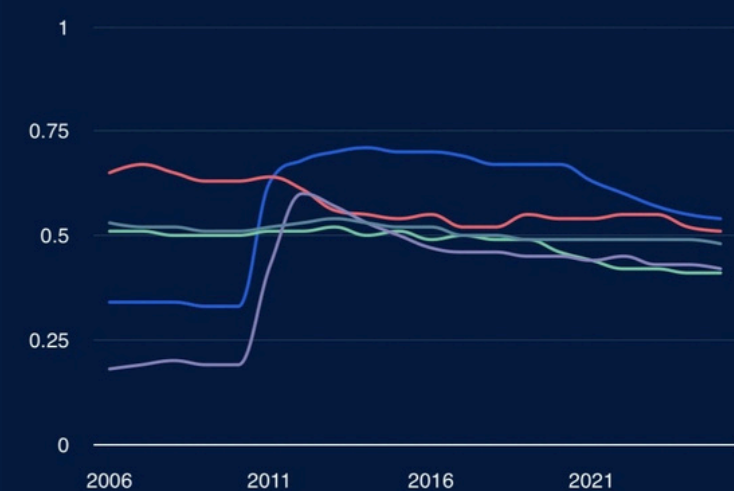


At the sub-category level, this decline appears to have been driven largely by a deterioration in Access to Justice, which fell from 0.69 in 2022 to 0.62 in 2023. **Tunisia**'s Rights score has continued to decline since, reaching 0.54 in 2025. Despite this deterioration, **Tunisia** continues to record the highest Rights score in the region, and its 2025 score remains above its pre-2011 level.

Libya followed a similar trajectory in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 revolution, but its gains were considerably more short-lived. Its Rights score increased from 0.24 in 2010 to 0.35 in 2012, before beginning to decline almost immediately. By 2018, the score had fallen below its pre-2011 level, reaching 0.21. Although it has fluctuated slightly since then, **Libya**'s Rights score has remained broadly at this level, standing at 0.23 in 2025– the lowest in the region, narrowly below **Mauritania**.

Mauritania, by contrast, followed a markedly different trajectory. Having maintained an average Rights score of 0.43 between 2006 and 2012, the country experienced a modest decline to 0.38 in 2013. The score then remained relatively stable, averaging 0.37 through 2023, before falling sharply to 0.23 in 2024. As in **Tunisia**, this decline appears to have been driven largely by a deterioration in Access to Justice, which fell from 0.43 in 2023 to 0.19 in 2024.

CIVIL LIBERTIES IN THE MAGHREB
(2006 - 2025)



Beyond the declines in Access to Justice observed in **Tunisia** and Mauritania, the region has also experienced a gradual deterioration in Civil Liberties. While countries such as **Tunisia** and **Libya** recorded sharp improvements in respect for civil liberties in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, these gains were subsequently reversed as scores either stagnated or declined. With the exception of Morocco, where scores have remained relatively stable, all countries have experienced a decline since 2012.

The regional average has consequently fallen from 0.59 in 2012 to 0.47 in 2025. Within the Civil Liberties sub-category, the most significant declines are observed in Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Press, which currently stand at 0.42 and 0.49, respectively.

Political Equality, meanwhile, has remained largely stagnant across the region, with the only noticeable change being a significant decline in Libya. This was mainly due to decreases in Economic and Social Group Equality. Gender Equality is the only sub-factor to have experienced increases in all Maghreb countries during this time period, although these were largely limited and not statistically significant. Basic Welfare presents a more positive trend, however, with the regional average increasing from 0.49 in 2006 to 0.57 in 2025.

RULE OF LAW

Mirroring their trajectories across Representation and Rights, **Morocco** and **Algeria** have maintained relatively stable Rule of Law scores over the past two decades, fluctuating around 0.39 and 0.36, respectively.

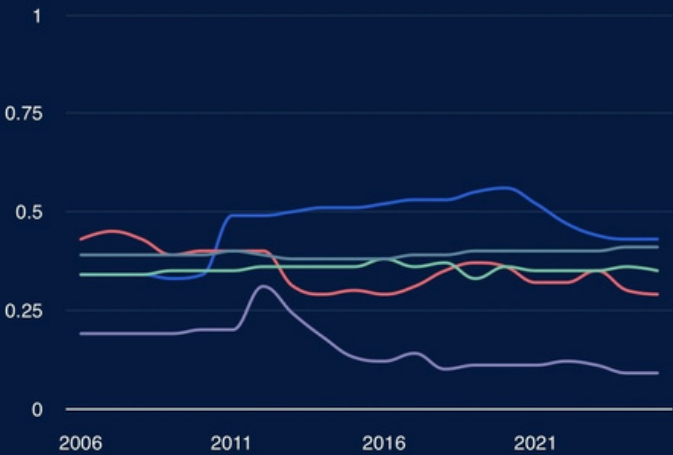
As in the previous categories, **Tunisia** experienced a sharp increase in its Rule of Law score following the 2011 Arab Uprisings, rising from 0.34 in 2010 to 0.49 in 2011. This upward trajectory continued over the following decade, with the score reaching a peak of 0.56 in 2020.

Following President Saied’s suspension of parliament and concentration of executive power in 2021, however, **Tunisia**’s Rule of Law score began to decline, reaching 0.43 in 2025. This deterioration appears to have been driven primarily by a sharp decline in Judicial Independence, which fell from 0.62 in 2020 to 0.39 in 2023. Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement have also declined since 2021, although less substantially.

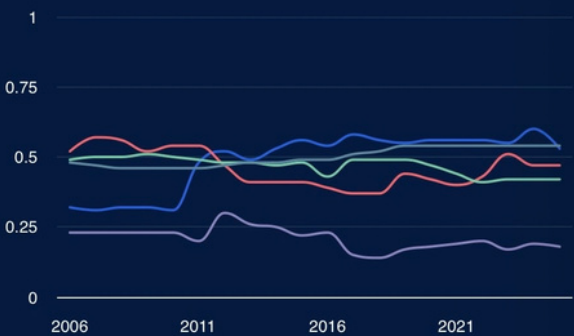
Libya likewise experienced a sharp improvement in Rule of Law in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 Arab Uprising, with its score rising from 0.20 in 2011 to 0.31 in 2012. This progress was short-lived, however, with the score beginning to decline almost immediately, falling below its pre-2011 level by 2014. The downward trajectory has continued since, with **Libya** recording a score of just 0.09 in 2025.

Mauritania’s Rule of Law trajectory has been more variable, but has nonetheless followed a broadly downward trend. The country recorded its highest score of the past two decades in 2007, at 0.45, before declining sharply in 2013 from 0.40 in the preceding year to 0.31. This coincided with the repeated postponement of the 2012 legislative elections and the subsequent violent repression of protests. Although the score has fluctuated since, it currently stands at a 20-year low of 0.29.

RULE OF LAW IN THE MAGHREB (2006 - 2025)



PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND SECURITY IN THE MAGHREB (2006 - 2025)



At the sub-category level, most indicators have stagnated or declined, with Personal Integrity and Security a notable exception. While **Libya** and **Algeria** have experienced declines, with **Libya** reaching a low of 0.18 amid conflict, several countries have improved. **Tunisia** has followed a broadly upward trajectory despite a slight decline in 2024–2025 amid increased government restrictions during the 2024 elections. **Morocco** has also recorded gradual improvements, while **Mauritania** has made more modest gains since reaching a 20-year low in 2018.

PARTICIPATION

Algeria and **Mauritania** have maintained relatively stable Participation scores over the past two decades, averaging around 0.44 and 0.40, respectively. Both countries recorded a modest increase in 2023, bringing their scores to a joint 0.46 in 2025. **Morocco**, by contrast, has followed a gradual downward trajectory. Its Participation score reached a 20-year peak of 0.58 in 2008, before declining steadily over the subsequent years to 0.50 in 2025.

PARTICIPATION IN THE MAGHREB (2006 - 2025)



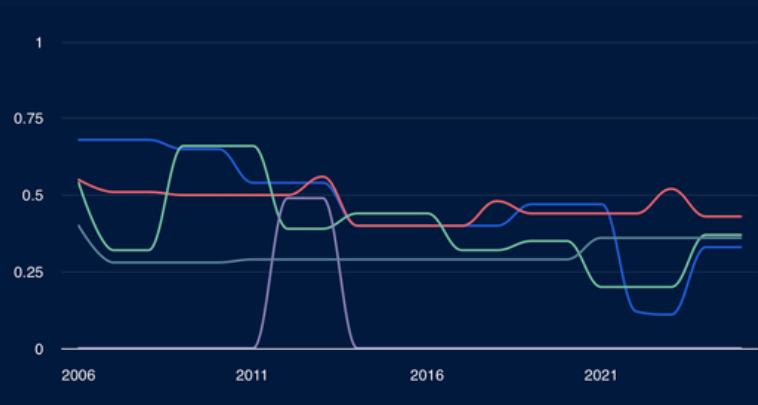
Consistent with the trends observed across the other categories, **Tunisia** experienced a sharp increase in Participation following the 2011 Arab Uprising, with its score rising from 0.39 in 2010 to 0.61 in 2011. Between 2013 and 2020, **Tunisia** recorded an average score of 0.71, the highest in the region.

This trajectory was subsequently reversed, with the score falling to 0.64 in 2021 following President Saïed's suspension of parliament and continuing to decline thereafter, reaching 0.45 in 2025. The initial decline appears to have been driven primarily by a sharp fall in Electoral Participation, which dropped from 0.47 in 2021 to 0.12 in 2022. Although this indicator has since partially recovered to 0.33, **Tunisia's** overall decline has continued, driven increasingly by deterioration in Civic Engagement and Civil Society. Civic Engagement fell from 0.76 in 2020 to 0.55 in 2026, while Civil Society declined from 0.70 to 0.48 over the same period.

Libya presents a markedly different trajectory. As with the other categories, its Participation score increased sharply following the 2011 Arab Uprising, rising from 0.19 in 2010 to a 20-year peak of 0.46 in 2013. Unlike in previous categories, however, this improvement did not subsequently reverse. Instead, **Libya's** Participation score remained relatively stable, averaging 0.41 between 2014 and 2025, albeit towards the lower end of the regional range. This relative stability is largely attributable to Civic Engagement and Civil Society, as Electoral Participation has remained at 0 since 2014 in the absence of elections. Despite this, **Libya's** Civil Society score of 0.47 exceeds Algeria's, while its Civic Engagement score of 0.49 exceeds Mauritania's.

At the sub-category level, Civic Engagement stands out as the highest-ranking sub-category within Participation, and the fourth highest overall, at 0.54. Together with Civil Society, Civic Engagement has remained comparatively stable over the past two decades, while Electoral Participation has exhibited substantially greater variation.

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN THE MAGHREB
(2006 - 2025)



With the exception of **Morocco**, Electoral Participation has followed a broadly downward trajectory. Tunisia's score fell from 0.68 in 2006 to 0.33 in 2025, while **Algeria**'s declined from 0.54 to 0.37, after peaking at 0.66 in 2009–2011. **Mauritania** likewise fell from 0.55 to 0.43. By 2025, Electoral Participation was the lowest-performing sub-category within Participation and the second-lowest overall. These trends suggest that engagement in public affairs is not necessarily translating into sustained electoral participation.

THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA

SUMMARY

Overall, the Nile Valley & Horn of Africa has experienced limited democratic progress over the past two decades, with relatively low and persistent scores in **Djibouti**, significant fluctuations in **Egypt**, gradual deterioration in **Comoros**, and severe disruption in **Sudan**—the latter of which saw its post-2019 gains quickly reversed by instability and conflict. **Somalia** is the main exception, recording modest improvements across Rights, Rule of Law, and Participation, although its lack of national elections continues to constrain Representation.

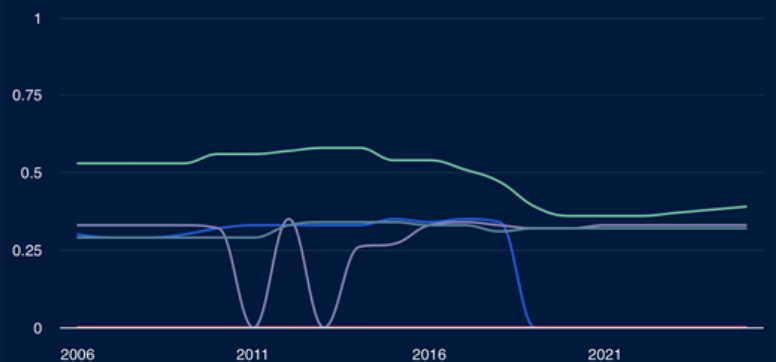


Representation is the lowest-ranking category in the sub-region (0.21) in 2025, followed by Rule of Law (0.27), Rights (0.30), and Participation (0.36). The lowest performing sub-category was Local Democracy (0.13), and the highest was Civic Engagement (0.51).

REPRESENTATION

With the exception of **Somalia**, whose system of indirect elections has kept its Representation score consistently at 0, **Djibouti** is the only country in the region whose score has remained broadly unchanged over the past 20 years, averaging a low 0.32 across the period. This reflects the limited scope for meaningful electoral competition: although **Djibouti** holds regular elections, political power remains highly concentrated in the presidency.

REPRESENTATION IN THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA (2006 - 2025)



Ismaïl Omar Guelleh has held the presidency since 1999, and the ruling party has maintained a dominant position throughout his tenure. **Comoros**, meanwhile, has followed a downward trajectory since 2016. Between 2016 and 2020, its Representation score fell from 0.54 to 0.36. This decline coincided with a series of political changes under President Azali Assoumani, who returned to office in 2016. Most notably, a 2018 constitutional amendment removed the requirement for the presidency to rotate among the archipelago's three main islands and extended the president's eligibility for additional terms. These changes weakened an important institutional mechanism for distributing executive power and facilitated a greater concentration of authority in the presidency. The country's Representation score has since plateaued, averaging 0.37 between 2020 and 2025.

Sudan's decline has been considerably more dramatic. Having maintained an average Representation score of 0.32 between 2006 and 2018, the country's score fell to 0 in 2019. This sharp decline coincided with the political upheaval surrounding the Sudanese Revolution, which began in December 2018 and culminated in the ousting of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. Although Bashir's removal opened the way for a civilian-military political transition, that transition was disrupted by the October 2021 military coup and ultimately collapsed with the outbreak of armed conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April 2023. The continuing conflict has prevented the restoration of regular national electoral processes, leaving **Sudan**'s Representation score at 0.

While generally stable over the longer term, **Egypt**'s Representation score experienced sharp fluctuations in 2011 and 2013. In 2011, the score fell from 0.32 to 0 following the Arab Uprisings and the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak, as the country entered a period of military-led political transition. Elections held during the subsequent transition, including the 2012 presidential election won by Mohamed Morsi, saw the score recover to 0.35. However, Morsi's removal by the military in July 2013 again brought the score down to 0. After a brief period of recovery, during which the score fluctuated between 0.26 and 0.33, **Egypt**'s Representation score stabilised at an average of 0.33 between 2017 and 2025.

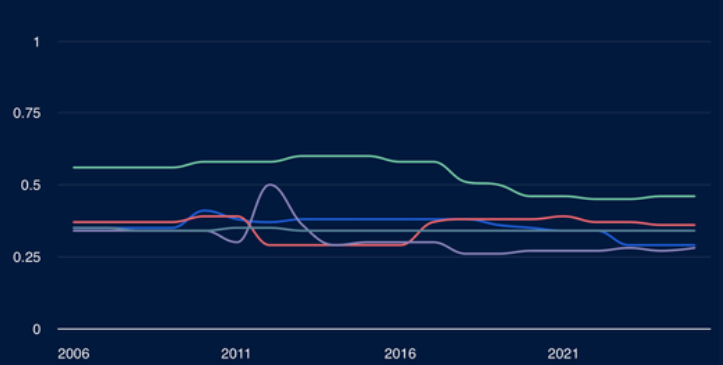
LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA (2006 - 2025)



At the sub-category level, the highest scores in the region are recorded for Inclusive Suffrage. Excluding **Somalia** and **Sudan**, whose lack of elections results in a score of 0 for this sub-category, the regional average stood at 0.85 in 2025. At the other end of the spectrum, Local Democracy recorded the lowest average score, at just 0.13, indicating limited opportunities for participation in local governance.

The Free Political Parties sub-category presents a more mixed picture. Despite the absence of elections, **Somalia** and **Sudan** record scores of 0.36 and 0.29, respectively, for this sub-category. The regional average of 0.35 in 2025 is also comparatively high relative to other indicators, suggesting that the presence and functioning of political parties are not necessarily dependent on the holding of elections.

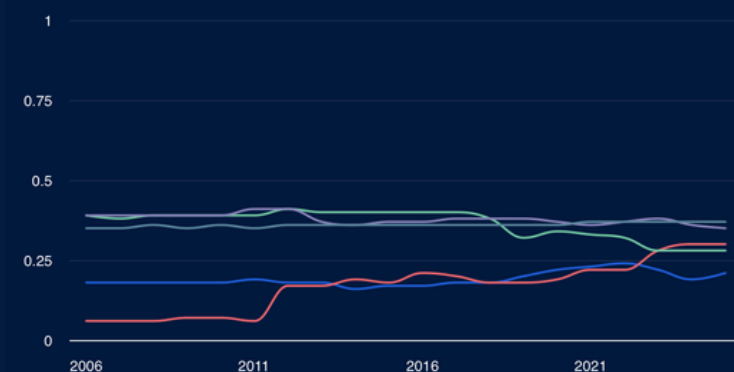
LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA (2006 - 2025)



RIGHTS

Djibouti and **Egypt** have maintained relatively stable Rights scores over the past two decades, averaging 0.36 and 0.38, respectively. **Sudan** has likewise remained relatively consistent, although within a considerably lower range, with scores fluctuating between 0.18 and 0.24 over the period. **Comoros**' Rights score was similarly stable between 2006 and 2017, averaging 0.40 and varying by only three points across the period.

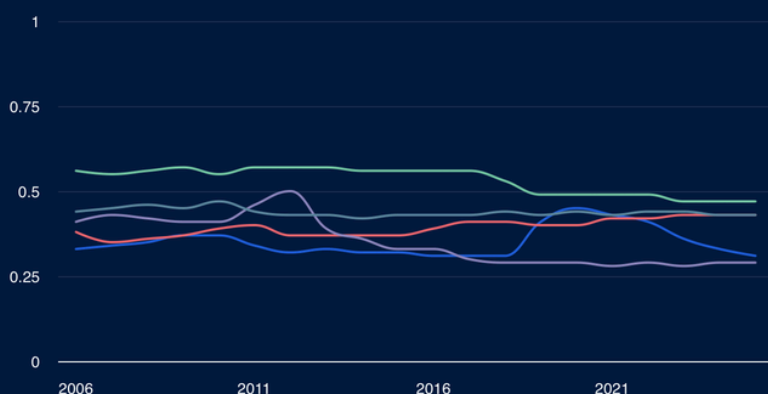
RIGHTS IN THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA (2006 - 2025)



Since 2018, however, the country has followed a downward trajectory, with its score reaching 0.28 in 2025. This decline appears to have been driven primarily by a deterioration in Access to Justice, which fell sharply from 0.36 in 2018 to 0.25 in 2019, coinciding with the 2018 constitutional amendment promoted under President Assoumani. Access to Justice has continued to deteriorate since, reaching 0.19 in 2025.

Somalia is the only country in the region to have recorded an overall increase in its Rights score over the past two decades, rising from 0.06 in 2006 to 0.30 in 2025. The most substantial improvement occurred between 2011 and 2012, when the score increased from 0.06 to 0.17. This coincided with the establishment of the Federal Government of **Somalia** (FGS) and the adoption of a new constitution, which formally guarantees a range of fundamental rights and freedoms. At the sub-category level, the most notable change was in Access to Justice, which increased from 0 in 2011 to 0.17 in 2012 and has since continued to improve, reaching 0.35 in 2025—slightly above the regional average of 0.31.

CIVIL LIBERTIES IN THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA (2006 - 2025)



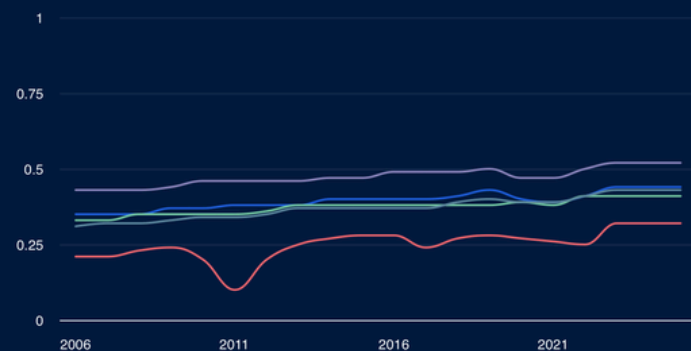
At the sub-category level, Civil Liberties presents a mixed picture across the region. **Djibouti** has remained relatively stable, averaging 0.44 over the past two decades, while **Comoros** followed a similar trajectory between 2006 and 2017, averaging 0.56 before declining from 2018 onwards. Its score has since stabilised somewhat, averaging 0.48 between 2019 and 2025.

Sudan also experienced a temporary improvement: after remaining around 0.33 between 2006 and 2018, its Civil Liberties score increased following the 2019 overthrow of President al-Bashir, reaching a peak of 0.45 in 2020. This improvement was subsequently reversed, with the score returning to approximately its pre-2019 level by 2023.

Egypt's Civil Liberties score reached a peak of 0.50 in 2012, before declining following President Morsi's removal in 2013. It currently stands at 0.29. The country's largest declines since 2012 have been recorded in Freedom of Association and Assembly, which fell from 0.42 to 0.22; Freedom of Expression, from 0.47 to 0.24; and Freedom of the Press, from 0.55 to 0.31. **Somalia**, by contrast, has recorded a modest improvement in Civil Liberties, with its score increasing from 0.38 in 2006 to 0.43 in 2025.

Basic Welfare stands out as the only Rights sub-category in which all countries have recorded a significant improvement. The regional average increased from 0.33 in 2006 to 0.42 in 2025. Political Equality, by contrast, has remained largely stagnant across the region, a trend reflected in both Social Group Equality and Economic Equality. Gender Equality is the principal exception, with modest improvements recorded across all countries and a significant improvement evident in **Egypt**.

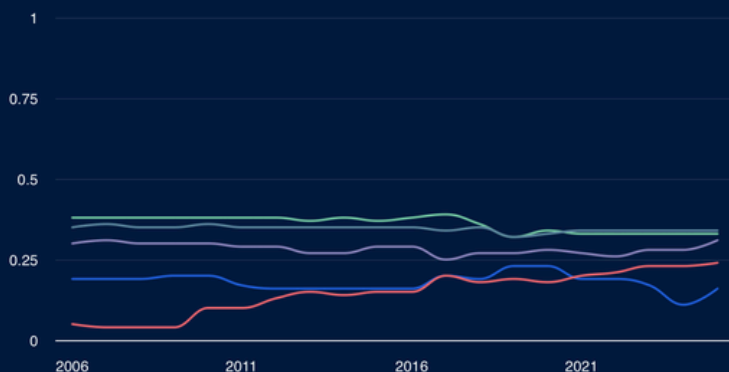
BASIC WELFARE IN THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA (2006 - 2025)



RULE OF LAW

Egypt and **Djibouti** maintained relatively stable Rule of Law scores over the past two decades, averaging 0.28 and 0.34, respectively. **Sudan's** score has likewise remained relatively consistent, albeit within a wider range of 0.11 to 0.23. Its highest score of 0.23 was recorded in the immediate aftermath of President al-Bashir's ousting in 2019. **Comoros** also maintained a relatively stable Rule of Law score over the period, fluctuating between 0.32 and 0.38.

RULE OF LAW IN THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA (2006 - 2025)



However, the country experienced a notable decline following 2018, coinciding with the adoption of the constitutional amendment that year. This deterioration was driven primarily by a decline in Judicial Independence, which fell from 0.40 in 2018 to 0.33 in 2019. **Comoros'** Rule of Law score currently stands at 0.33, compared with an average of 0.38 between 2006 and 2017.

Somalia is the only country in the region to have recorded a sustained increase in its Rule of Law score over the past two decades, rising from 0.05 in 2006 to 0.24 in 2025. This improvement has been driven primarily by gains in Predictable Enforcement, which increased sharply from 0.06 in 2009 to 0.13 in 2010 and has continued to rise since, reaching 0.27 in 2025.

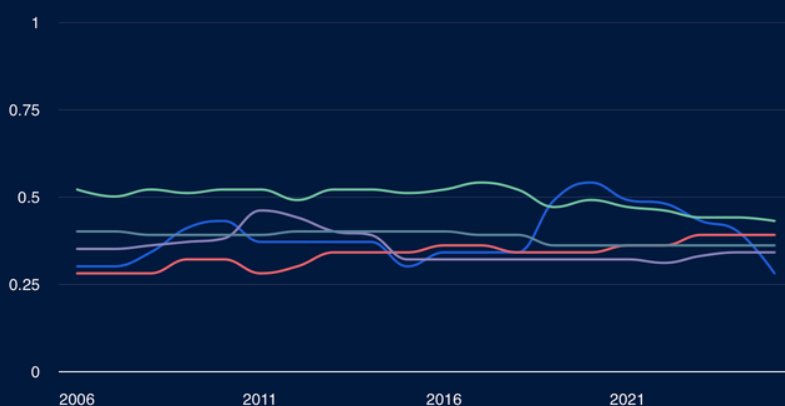
The initial increase coincided with the formal adoption of Sharia-based legislation in 2009, which is likely responsible for establishing a base for predictable enforcement.

These broader trends are largely reflected at the sub-category level. In 2025, the weakest-performing areas were Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement, with regional averages of 0.31 and 0.30, respectively.

PARTICIPATION

Djibouti has recorded the most stable Participation scores in the region over the past two decades, averaging 0.38 between 2006 and 2025. **Comoros** likewise maintained a relatively stable score between 2006 and 2018, averaging 0.52, before entering a downward trajectory from 2019 onwards. Its Participation score currently stands at 0.43.

PARTICIPATION IN THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA (2006 - 2025)

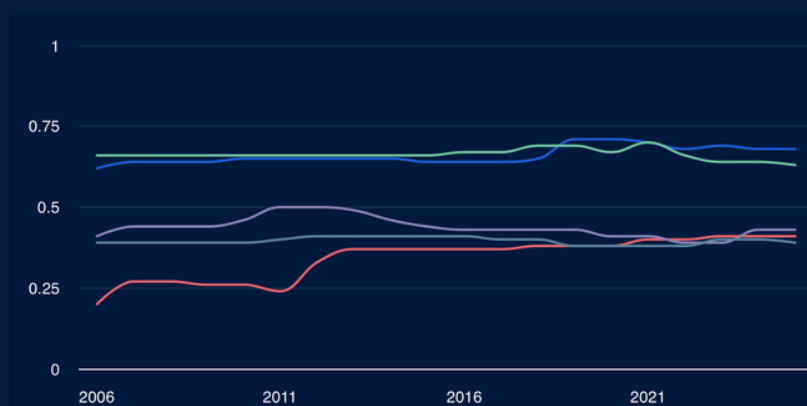


Sudan experienced a sharp increase in Participation amid the ousting of President al-Bashir in 2019, with its score rising from 0.34 in 2018 to 0.49 in 2019 and reaching 0.54 in 2020. This improvement was subsequently reversed as the political transition fractured and the country descended into civil war. By 2025, **Sudan**'s Participation score had fallen to 0.28, its lowest level in two decades. The decline was driven primarily by Electoral Participation, which fell from 0.31 in 2019 to 0 in 2020. Civil Society also deteriorated after reaching a 20-year peak of 0.52 in 2020, falling to 0.24 in 2025– the lowest score in the region. Civic Engagement, by contrast, has remained comparatively strong. Following a peak of 0.71 in 2019, it has remained close to this level, standing at 0.68 in 2025, the highest score in the region.

Egypt has likewise followed a broadly downward trajectory since its Participation score peaked during the 2011 Arab Uprising. The score fell from 0.46 in 2011 to 0.32 in 2015 and has since remained around this level, averaging 0.32– below its pre-2011 average of 0.36. This decline has been driven primarily by a sustained deterioration in Civil Society, whose score fell from 0.48 in 2012 to 0.34 in 2025. Electoral Participation has followed a more variable trajectory, declining from 0.50 in 2013 to 0.27 in 2015 before increasing again during subsequent election cycles. It reached a peak of 0.68 in the 2023 elections and has remained at this level since.

Somalia is the only country in the region to have experienced a sustained, albeit modest, increase in Participation, with its score rising from 0.28 in 2006 to 0.39 in 2025. Given the country's Electoral Participation score of 0 throughout the period, this improvement has been driven primarily by gains in Civic Engagement and Civil Society. Civic Engagement increased from 0.20 in 2006 to 0.41 in 2025, while Civil Society rose from 0.34 to 0.43 over the same period.

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN THE NILE VALLEY & HORN OF AFRICA (2006 - 2025)



At the sub-category level, Electoral Participation exhibits the greatest variation, with scores fluctuating in line with election cycles. The sub-category is the lowest within Participation, and ranks amongst the bottom five in 2025, with an average of 0.26. Civil Society scores remain comparatively low, with no country exceeding 0.43 in 2025.

Civic Engagement, by contrast, is substantially stronger, with a regional average of 0.51, making it the highest-ranking sub-category in the region. Scores are particularly high in **Sudan** and **Comoros**, at 0.68 and 0.63, respectively.

THE MASHREQ

SUMMARY

Countries within the Mashreq have followed highly divergent democratic trajectories, with relatively stable scores in **Iraq** and **Jordan**, deterioration in **Lebanon** and **Palestine**, and major disruption followed by recent recovery in **Syria**. Scores across the sub-region did not appear significantly affected by 2011 Arab Uprisings, with the exception of Participation.



Representation is the lowest-ranking category in the sub-region (0.30) in 2025, followed by Rule of Law (0.34), Rights (0.39), and Participation (0.49). The lowest performing sub-category was Electoral Participation (0.24), and the highest was Inclusive Suffrage (0.86) [3].

REPRESENTATION

Representation scores in **Iraq** and **Lebanon** have remained relatively stable over the past two decades, averaging 0.48 and 0.47, respectively. **Syria** likewise recorded a relatively stable score between 2006 and 2023, averaging 0.21. Its score fell sharply to 0 in 2024, likely reflecting the overthrow of the Assad regime, before rising to 0.12 in 2025. This represents a modest recovery, although **Syria's** Representation score remains well below its pre-2024 average.

REPRESENTATION IN THE MASHREQ
(2006 - 2025)

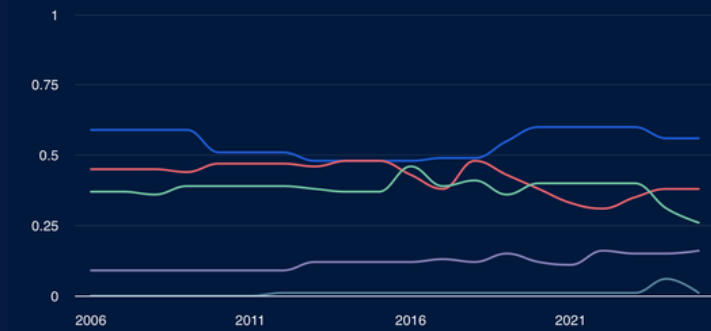


Jordan experienced one of the most notable fluctuations in the region, with its Representation score falling sharply from 0.37 in 2008 to 0 in 2009. This coincided with King Abdullah II's dissolution of parliament in November 2009. The score recovered to 0.36 in 2010 and has followed a broadly upward trajectory since, reaching 0.44 in 2025.

Palestine presents a distinct trajectory. Its Representation score declined from 0.52 in 2007 to 0.42 in 2008, coinciding with the Hamas-Fatah split, which resulted in Hamas exercising de facto control over Gaza while the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority continued to administer parts of the West Bank. This political division is reflected at the sub-category level, with **Palestine's** Effective Parliament score falling from 0.38 in 2007 to 0 in 2008. The expiration of President Mahmoud Abbas's presidential term in January 2009, followed by the expiration of the Palestinian Legislative Council's term in 2010, further contributed to the absence of renewed national elections. **Palestine's** Representation score subsequently fell to 0 in 2010 and has remained at this level, reflecting the continued absence of national elections.

[3] Excluding Palestine, which does not hold elections.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN THE MASHREQ (2006 - 2025)

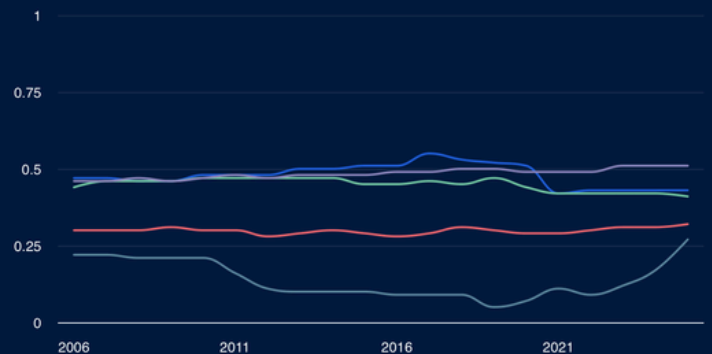


At the sub-category level, Inclusive Suffrage is the highest-performing indicator in the region. Excluding **Palestine**, whose absence of elections results in a score of 0 for this sub-category, the regional average stood at 0.86 in 2025. Local Democracy is generally the lowest-performing sub-category, with a regional average of 0.27 in 2025. **Palestine** is a notable exception: despite its overall Representation score of 0, it has consistently recorded the highest Local Democracy scores in the region, reaching 0.56 in 2025.

RIGHTS

Rights scores in **Jordan** and **Iraq** have remained relatively stable over the past two decades, averaging 0.48 and 0.29, respectively. **Lebanon** likewise recorded a relatively stable score over most of the period, averaging 0.45 and remaining within a relatively narrow range of 0.41-0.47. However, its score began to decline after 2019, driven primarily by a deterioration in Basic Welfare, which fell from 0.67 in 2020 to 0.58 in 2021. Political Equality also deteriorated, particularly Economic Equality, which declined by almost 10 points between 2016 and 2019.

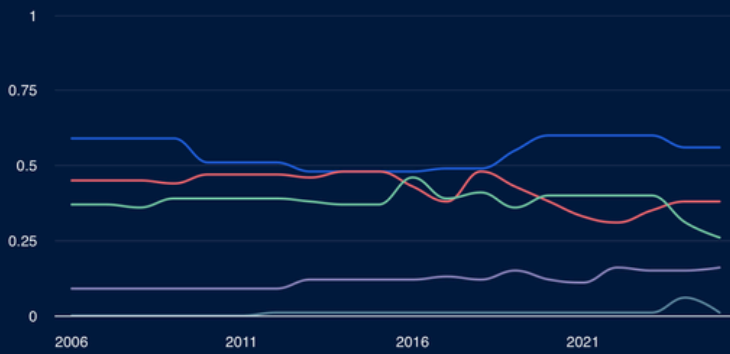
RIGHTS IN THE MASHREQ (2006 - 2025)



Palestine's Rights score increased gradually between 2006 and 2017, rising from 0.47 to 0.55, before beginning to decline. The most significant deterioration occurred between 2020 and 2021, when the score fell from 0.51 to 0.42. At the sub-category level, this decline was driven primarily by a deterioration in Access to Justice, which fell from 0.58 to 0.46 over the same period. This coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the 11-day escalation of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in May 2021. **Palestine**'s Rights score subsequently stabilised at around 0.43 between 2021 and 2025.

Syria's Rights score began to decline following the outbreak of the 2011 uprising and subsequent civil war, falling from 0.21 in 2010 to 0.16 in 2011 and 0.11 in 2012. This deterioration was reflected across the sub-categories. The country reached its lowest Rights score in 2019, at 0.05, before beginning a gradual recovery. The most significant increase occurred following the overthrow of the Assad regime, with the score rising from 0.17 in 2024 to 0.27 in 2025. The largest improvement was recorded in Civil Liberties, which increased from 0.22 to 0.38. At the sub-factor level, Freedom of Expression more than doubled, from 0.15 to 0.34, while Freedom of Association and Assembly increased from 0.17 to 0.33 and Freedom of the Press from 0.24 to 0.43. Notably, there was no change in Basic Welfare over the same period, with the score remaining at 0.54.

BASIC WELFARE IN THE MASHREQ (2006 - 2025)



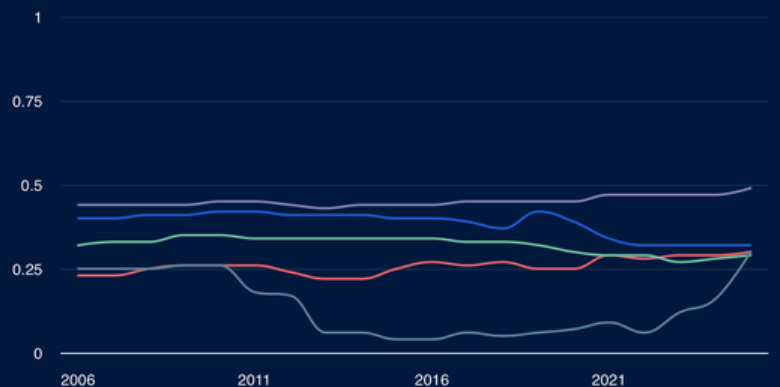
Basic Welfare is the region's highest-performing sub-category in Rights, and second-highest overall, at an average of 0.61 in 2025. However, this improvement is not linear. **Syria's** score has fluctuated between 0.42 and 0.56, with more sustained improvement since 2018. **Lebanon's** score has remained at 0.71 since 2022, while **Palestine's** declined from 0.67 in 2022 to 0.55 in 2023, coinciding with the genocide in Gaza.

Political Equality remains the lowest-performing Rights sub-category, with a regional average of 0.36 in 2025. Within this category, Social Group Equality is the lowest-performing sub-factor, also averaging 0.36 in 2025.

RULE OF LAW

Rule of Law scores in Iraq and Jordan have followed broadly upward trajectories over the past two decades, rising from 0.23 to 0.30 and from 0.44 to 0.49, respectively. In **Jordan**, this improvement has been reflected across all four sub-categories. In **Iraq**, by contrast, the increase has been driven primarily by gains in Personal Integrity and Security, whose score rose from 0.29 in 2006 to 0.37 in 2025.

RULE OF LAW IN THE MASHREQ (2006 - 2025)



Lebanon and **Palestine** have followed the opposite trajectory, with both countries experiencing a gradual deterioration, particularly since 2019. **Palestine's** Rule of Law score fell from 0.42 in 2019 to 0.32 in 2025, while **Lebanon** experienced a more modest decline from 0.32 to 0.29 over the same period.

In **Palestine**, this deterioration was reflected most clearly in Judicial Independence, which fell from 0.63 to 0.43, followed by Predictable Enforcement, which declined from 0.44 to 0.34, and Personal Integrity and Security, which fell from 0.43 to 0.36. **Lebanon**, meanwhile, experienced smaller declines across almost all sub-categories.

Mirroring its trajectory in Rights, **Syria's** Rule of Law score declined sharply following the outbreak of the 2011 uprising and subsequent civil war, falling from 0.26 in 2010 to 0.06 in 2013. It reached a low of 0.04 in 2016 before beginning to recover in 2022. The most significant increase occurred between 2024 and 2025, when the score rose from 0.16 to 0.30, bringing it above its pre-2011 level.

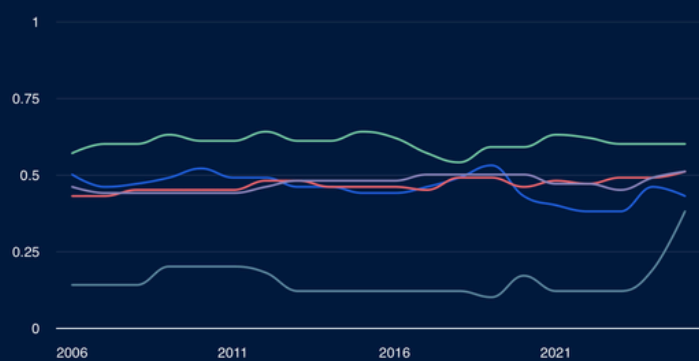
The decline following 2011 was driven primarily by deterioration in Absence of Corruption, Predictable Enforcement, and Personal Integrity and Security, while improvements in these same sub-categories account for much of the subsequent recovery. Judicial Independence has remained comparatively stable over the period, averaging 0.20.

At the sub-category level, all four indicators remain relatively weak across the region. Predictable Enforcement is the lowest-performing, with a regional average of 0.36 in 2025, followed by Absence of Corruption at 0.38 and Personal Integrity and Security at 0.41. Judicial Independence performs comparatively better, although its regional average of 0.42 remains low.

PARTICIPATION

Participation scores have remained relatively stable in **Jordan**, **Lebanon**, and **Iraq** over the past two decades, averaging 0.47, 0.60, and 0.47, respectively. **Syria** likewise recorded a broadly stable score between 2006 and 2023, generally remaining within the 0.10–0.20 range. The most notable fluctuation during this period occurred between 2009 and 2012, when Syria’s Participation score averaged 0.20.

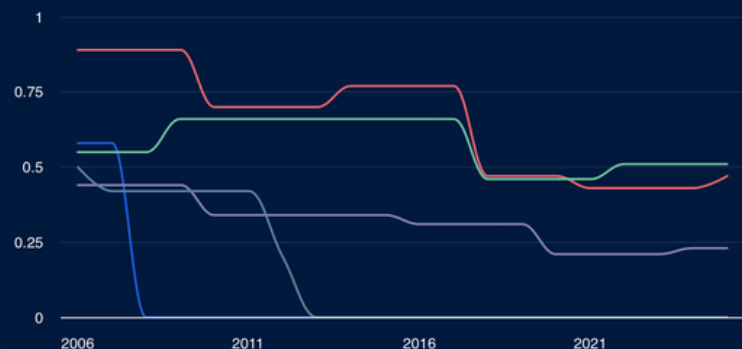
PARTICIPATION IN THE MASHREQ (2006 - 2025)



At the sub-category level, the increase during this period was driven primarily by gains in Civil Society, whose score rose from 0.09 in 2007 to a peak of 0.20 in 2011, before falling back to 0.10 in 2013. A smaller increase occurred between 2019 and 2021, followed by a much more substantial rise after 2023, when **Syria**’s Participation score increased from 0.12 to 0.38 in 2025.

Palestine’s Participation score remained relatively stable between 2006 and 2019, averaging 0.48, before declining to 0.38 in 2023, recovering to 0.46 in 2024, and falling to 0.43 in 2025. Civil Society followed a similar trajectory, declining from 0.56 in 2019 to 0.33 in 2023, before recovering in 2024 and falling again in 2025. The temporary increase in Participation in 2024 may also reflect a corresponding rise in Civic Engagement, which subsequently declined.

ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN THE MASHREQ (2006 - 2025)



At the sub-category level, Electoral Participation has declined across the region. **Iraq** recorded the largest decrease, from 0.89 in 2006 to 0.47 in 2025, followed by **Jordan** (0.44 to 0.23) and **Lebanon** (0.55 to 0.51). **Palestine** has scored 0 since 2008, while **Syria** has remained at 0 since 2013. By contrast, Civic Engagement remains comparatively strong, averaging 0.57 in 2025.

THE GULF

SUMMARY

The Gulf emerges as the most stable sub-region in the Arab world, with most countries' scores remaining largely unchanged throughout the 2006-2025 period. This is concerning given the sub-region's low scores: **Saudi Arabia** and the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** have maintained Representation scores of 0 throughout, while **Qatar** and **Kuwait** have recently reverted to 0 following the suspension or abolition of their respective electoral institutions.



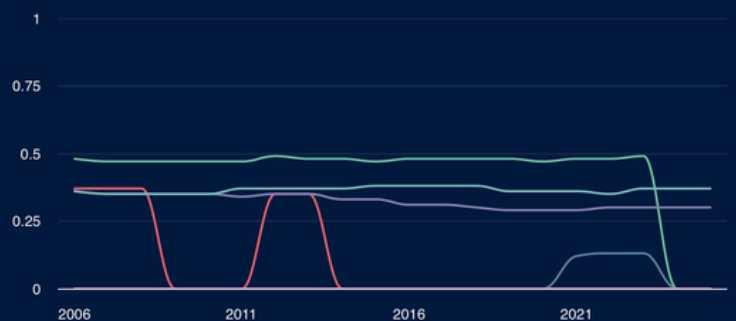
Meanwhile, **Bahrain** and **Yemen** experienced more pronounced declines following periods of political upheaval and conflict.

Representation is the lowest-ranking category in the sub-region (0.10) in 2025, followed by Participation (0.31), Rights (0.35), and Rule of Law (0.39). The lowest performing sub-category was Electoral Participation (0.07), and the highest was Inclusive Suffrage (0.75)[4].

REPRESENTATION

The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** and **Saudi Arabia** have maintained a Representation score of 0 throughout the past two decades. **Qatar** followed a similar trajectory, recording a score of 0 between 2006 and 2020 before rising to 0.12 in 2021, following the country's first general election for the Shura Council. The score remained at this level until 2024, when constitutional reforms abolished elections to the Council, coinciding with a return to 0.

REPRESENTATION IN THE GULF (2006 - 2025)



Yemen maintained a Representation score of 0.37 between 2006 and 2008 before falling to 0 in 2009. This decline coincided with the indefinite postponement of parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2009. The score subsequently recovered to 0.35 in 2012, following the presidential election that marked the formal end of President Ali Abdullah Saleh's 33-year rule. Following the breakdown of the political transition, however, Yemen's Representation score fell back to 0 in 2014 and has remained at this level since.

Bahrain and **Oman** have maintained relatively stable Representation scores over the past two decades, averaging 0.32 and 0.37, respectively. **Kuwait** likewise recorded a stable score between 2006 and 2023, averaging 0.47– the highest in the region. Following Emir Mishal al-Ahmad's suspension of parliament in 2024, however, Kuwait's Representation score fell sharply to 0.

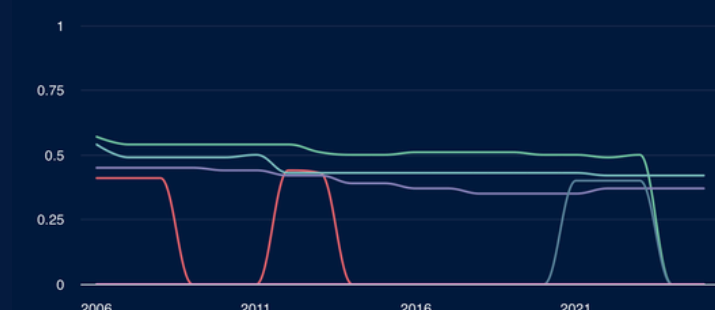
[4] Excluding those countries which do not hold elections.

Yemen maintained a Representation score of 0.37 between 2006 and 2008 before falling to 0 in 2009. This decline coincided with the indefinite postponement of parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2009. The score subsequently recovered to 0.35 in 2012, following the presidential election that marked the formal end of President Ali Abdullah Saleh's 33-year rule. Following the breakdown of the political transition, however, **Yemen's** Representation score fell back to 0 in 2014 and has remained at this level since.

Bahrain and **Oman** have maintained relatively stable Representation scores over the past two decades, averaging 0.32 and 0.37, respectively. Kuwait likewise recorded a stable score between 2006 and 2023, averaging 0.47– the highest in the region. Following Emir Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad's suspension of parliament in 2024, however, **Kuwait's** Representation score fell sharply to 0.

Although the lowest-ranking sub-category within Representation is Local Democracy, averaging 0.09 in 2025, all sub-categories record low scores. Credible Elections and Effective Parliament both sit at 0.11, Elected Government at 0.12, and Free Political Parties 0.16. The only notable sub-category is Inclusive Suffrage: excluding all countries whose Representation score is 0– and therefore do not hold elections– this sub-category had a sub-regional average of 0.88 in 2025. This shows that both countries who hold elections– **Bahrain** and **Oman**– have relatively gender-equal election laws.

CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IN THE GULF (2006 - 2025)

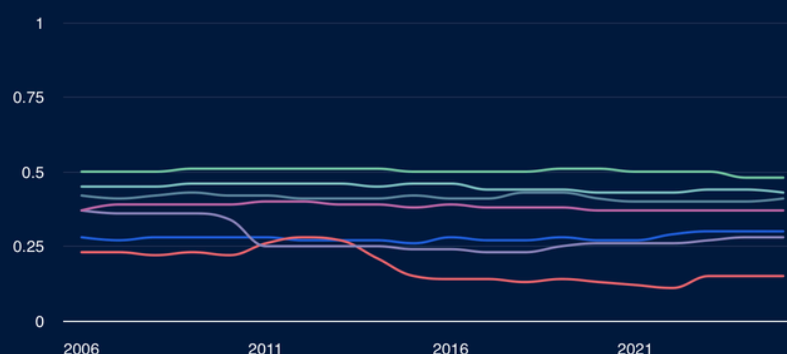


These trends are largely reflected at the sub-category level. **Bahrain** and **Oman**, the only two countries in the region to retain a non-zero Representation score in 2025, have both experienced gradual declines in Credible Elections. **Bahrain's** score fell from 0.45 in 2006 to 0.37 in 2025, while **Oman's** declined from 0.54 to 0.42 over the same period. By contrast, both countries have maintained relatively high Inclusive Suffrage scores, standing at 0.83 in Bahrain and 0.92 in **Oman** in 2025.

RIGHTS

Most countries in the region have maintained relatively stable Rights scores over the past two decades. **Kuwait** has recorded the highest average score, at 0.50, although this declined slightly from 0.50 to 0.48 following the suspension of parliament in 2024. **Oman** has averaged 0.45, followed by **Qatar** at 0.41, the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** at 0.38, and **Saudi Arabia** at 0.28.

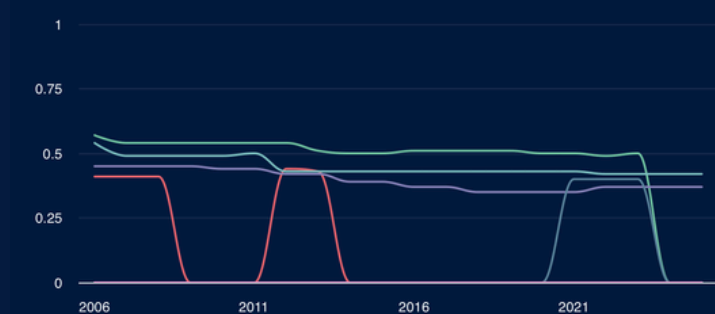
RIGHTS IN THE GULF (2006 - 2025)



Bahrain maintained a relatively stable Rights score between 2006 and 2010, averaging 0.36. This fell to 0.25 in 2011, coinciding with the Bahraini uprising and the subsequent government crackdown. The score has remained broadly at this level since, averaging 0.25 between 2011 and 2025.

Yemen has experienced the greatest variation in Rights scores over the period. Its score increased between 2010 and 2013, reaching a 20-year peak of 0.28 in 2012. This improvement was driven primarily by an increase in Civil Liberties, which rose during the same period. The score subsequently declined amid the country's escalating political and armed conflict, reaching 0.15 in 2025.

BASIC WELFARE IN THE GULF (2006 - 2025)



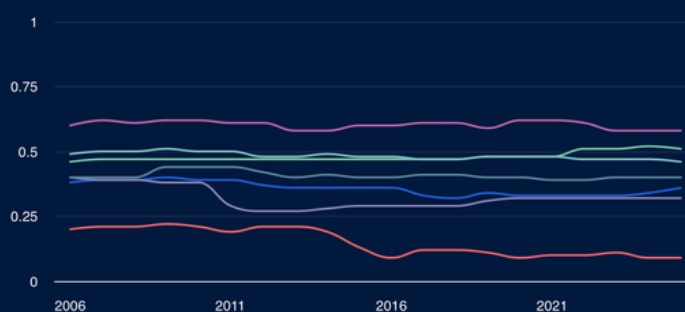
At the sub-category level, Basic Welfare is the highest-performing indicator– both within the Rights category and overall– with a regional average of 0.75 in 2025. Yemen is a notable outlier, recording a substantially lower score of 0.46. Political Equality is the lowest-performing Rights sub-category, with a regional average of 0.31. This is primarily driven by a low Social Group Equality score, while Economic Equality is relatively high at 0.41.

Civil Liberties also remains comparatively low, particularly at the sub-factor level: Freedom of Expression recorded a regional average of 0.25 in 2025, followed by Freedom of Association and Assembly at 0.28 and Freedom of the Press at 0.29.

RULE OF LAW

Most countries in the region have maintained relatively stable Rule of Law scores over the past two decades. The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** has recorded the highest average score, at 0.60, followed by **Kuwait** and **Oman** at 0.48, **Qatar** at 0.41, and **Saudi Arabia** at 0.36. **Bahrain** maintained a relatively stable Rule of Law score between 2006 and 2010, averaging 0.39, before falling to 0.29 in 2011 amid the Bahraini uprising and subsequent government crackdown. Its score has remained within a relatively narrow range of 0.27-0.32 since.

RULE OF LAW IN THE GULF (2006 - 2025)

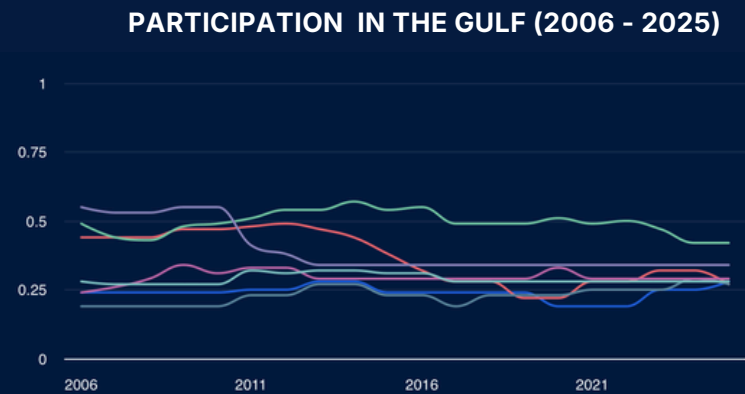


Yemen likewise maintained a broadly stable score, averaging 0.21, until the onset of the conflict in 2014. Its score subsequently declined to a low of 0.09 in 2016 and has remained within the 0.09–0.12 range since.

Although these broader trends are largely reflected at the sub-category level, it is worth highlighting that three out of the five highest-ranking sub-categories were in the Rule of Law category: Absence of Corruption (0.47), Predictable Enforcement (0.42), and Personal Integrity and Security (0.42).

PARTICIPATION

The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, **Oman**, **Saudi Arabia**, and **Qatar** have maintained relatively stable Participation scores over the past two decades, averaging 0.30, 0.29, 0.24, and 0.23, respectively. Temporary increases in scores have occasionally coincided with regional political developments, including the 2011 Arab Uprisings. **Kuwait** has experienced greater variation, with its Participation score fluctuating between 0.42 and 0.57 over the same period.



Mirroring the trends observed in other dimensions, **Bahrain's** Participation score declined from an average of 0.54 between 2006 and 2010 to 0.41 in 2011. It continued to fall, reaching 0.34 in 2013, where it has remained since. While Civic Engagement remained relatively strong during this period, averaging 0.76 between 2006 and 2015, the overall decline was driven primarily by a deterioration in Civil Society. Its score fell from 0.52 in 2010 to 0.39 in 2011, before declining further to 0.29 in 2013.

Yemen's Participation score likewise began to decline after 2012, following seven years of relative stability at around 0.46. It subsequently fell to a low of 0.22 before recovering modestly, reaching 0.27 in 2025.

At the sub-category level, Electoral Participation stands out as the lowest-ranking sub-category, both within the Participation sub-category and overall, at a 0.33 average in 2025. Civic Engagement fares comparatively better, at an average of 0.41 respectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this report point to the need for a multidimensional approach to democratic development in the Arab world. Persistently low Representation scores, particularly in Local Democracy, highlight the limitations of political systems in translating citizens' preferences into meaningful political influence. Meanwhile, the distinction between Electoral Participation and Civic Engagement suggests that democratic development requires more than participation in formal political processes: it also depends on citizens' ability to organise, articulate demands and hold decision-makers accountable between elections. The following recommendations address these structural weaknesses while recognising opportunities for progress, particularly in countries undergoing political transitions.

1. PRIORITISE LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND MEANINGFUL POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The persistently low levels of Representation across the region, alongside particularly weak performance in Local Democracy, indicate that expanding meaningful political representation should be a central priority. While national elections and representative institutions remain important, democratic accountability also depends on citizens having opportunities to influence decisions that directly affect their communities. Local governance can provide a more immediate connection between citizens and public authorities, creating opportunities for political participation even where national-level democratic reform remains constrained.

Governments should therefore prioritise the establishment or strengthening of elected local councils, meaningful municipal electoral competition and mechanisms through which local representatives can be held accountable. These institutions must have clearly defined responsibilities, adequate financial resources and sufficient decision-making autonomy to respond to local needs. Without these safeguards, decentralisation risks transferring administrative responsibilities without transferring meaningful political power.

International organisations and development partners should support local governance programmes that strengthen municipal transparency, public consultation and community oversight. Particular attention should be paid to the inclusion of women, young people, minorities and marginalised communities in local decision-making. Local democracy should not be treated merely as an administrative extension of central government, but as a means of broadening political representation and strengthening accountability from the bottom up.

2. BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The disparity between Civic Engagement and Electoral Participation suggests that active civic participation does not necessarily translate into sustained engagement with formal political processes.

While citizens may participate in civil society organisations, community initiatives and public debate, these forms of engagement do not consistently correspond to participation in elections. Bridging this gap is important to ensure that citizens' political interests and demands are reflected in formal decision-making and that electoral institutions remain responsive to the populations they represent.

Governments should address the institutional and practical barriers that discourage electoral participation, including restrictions on political competition, limited electoral choice and a lack of public confidence in electoral processes. Ensuring that elections are accessible, competitive and credible is essential to demonstrating that electoral participation can produce meaningful political outcomes. Efforts should also focus on strengthening the relationship between elected representatives and their constituents, ensuring that electoral participation is accompanied by ongoing accountability rather than limited to periodic voting.

Civil society organisations and international partners can complement these efforts through civic and voter education, public awareness initiatives and programmes that connect community-level engagement with formal political institutions. Particular attention should be paid to young people and other groups whose civic engagement may not be reflected in electoral participation. Supporting independent civil society organisations, facilitating dialogue between citizens and elected representatives, and creating opportunities for public consultation can help connect existing forms of civic engagement with electoral processes.

3. SUPPORT SYRIA'S POLITICAL TRANSITION WHILE PRIORITISING DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

Syria represents an important opportunity for political change following the fall of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024. The transition creates scope to establish more accountable institutions, expand political participation and address longstanding exclusions. However, the experience of the 2011 Arab uprisings demonstrates that the opening of political space does not, in itself, guarantee lasting democratisation. Political transitions can be reversed where representative institutions remain weak, executive power is insufficiently constrained and new political arrangements fail to secure broad public legitimacy.

International partners should therefore support a Syrian-led transition that prioritises inclusive constitutional development, accountable institutions, meaningful political competition and the protection of fundamental freedoms. Particular emphasis should be placed on ensuring that women, religious and ethnic minorities, and other historically marginalised communities can participate meaningfully in political decision-making. Transitional justice, independent judicial institutions and mechanisms for investigating abuses are also essential to rebuilding public trust and preventing the reproduction of authoritarian practices.

The transition should additionally prioritise local governance and the restoration of effective public institutions. Following years of conflict and displacement, strengthening local authorities can help communities participate in reconstruction, address local grievances and rebuild trust in public institutions. International assistance should support these processes without substituting external priorities for Syrian political agency.

Crucially, international engagement should extend beyond supporting the initial transition or the organisation of elections. The post-2011 experience across the region demonstrates the importance of consolidation: representative institutions must acquire the capacity, legitimacy and independence necessary to withstand political crises and attempts to concentrate power. Syria's transition should therefore be evaluated not only by the establishment of new institutions, but also by whether these institutions become inclusive, accountable and resilient over time.

4. CONSOLIDATE IMPROVEMENTS IN BASIC WELFARE WHILE ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES

Basic Welfare recorded the greatest improvement among the report's subcategories between 2006 and 2025, highlighting the importance of socioeconomic development and access to essential services. Governments should consolidate these gains through sustained investment in healthcare, education and social protection, while addressing disparities in access to public services across socioeconomic groups and geographical areas.

However, the comparatively low scores for Political Equality across several sub-regions, particularly the Maghreb, Mashreq and Gulf, highlight the need to address inequalities in both political influence and economic resources. Improving access to essential services is important, but it does not necessarily ensure that wealth, opportunities and political power are distributed more equitably. Governments should therefore pursue policies that reduce socioeconomic disparities, expand equal opportunities and strengthen the political representation of marginalised groups, ensuring that citizens can both benefit from development and influence decisions that shape its distribution.

Importantly, improvements in Basic Welfare should not be conflated with democratisation. The Gulf illustrates this distinction: comparatively stronger welfare provision can coexist with restricted political representation and persistent inequalities in political and economic power. This demonstrates that improvements in living standards do not necessarily translate into more equitable governance or greater democratic accountability. Governments and international partners should therefore pursue welfare improvements alongside measures that address economic inequality, broaden political inclusion and strengthen public accountability. The objective should be to ensure that development translates not only into improved living conditions, but also into a more equitable distribution of resources, opportunities and political influence.

5. ADOPT DIFFERENTIATED, CONTEXT-SENSITIVE APPROACHES TO DEMOCRATIC REFORM

The report's sub-regional analysis demonstrates that democratic trajectories across the Arab world are neither uniform nor reducible to a single regional pattern. Countries have experienced different combinations of political opening, authoritarian consolidation, conflict and institutional deterioration. Accordingly, democratic reform initiatives should be tailored to country-specific conditions while remaining attentive to common regional weaknesses.

In the Maghreb, the reversal of earlier political openings highlights the need to protect representative institutions and prevent the concentration of executive power. In the Nile Valley and Horn, conflict, institutional fragility and constraints on political participation require approaches that connect governance reform with institutional recovery and the protection of fundamental freedoms. In the Mashreq, prolonged conflict and political transitions make inclusive institution-building, local governance and accountability particularly important. In the Gulf, persistently constrained political representation underscores the importance of expanding meaningful opportunities for public consultation, civic engagement and local political participation.

These priorities should not be understood as rigid prescriptions for internally homogeneous sub-regions. Rather, they provide a framework for adapting reform efforts to different political contexts. International organisations, donors and civil society actors should use country-level and sub-regional evidence to identify where support is most needed, monitor progress over time and distinguish substantive institutional change from improvements in individual indicators.



The **Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS)** is an independent, non-governmental think tank and research center dedicated to advancing human rights, democracy, and the rule of law across the Arab region. Through research, publications, advocacy, training, and international engagement, ACHRS works to strengthen civil society, promote human rights education and support democratic participation. The Center holds special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and was awarded the United Nations Human Rights Prize in 2023.



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Established in 2006 at the initiative of the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS), the **Election Network in the Arab Region (ENAR)** brings together 16 civil society organisations and networks working on electoral issues across the Arab world. Through election observation, regional cooperation and the training of local observers, the Network promotes transparent, inclusive and democratic electoral processes. Since its establishment, ENAR has conducted 33 election observations across 12 Arab countries, involving approximately 70 international observers and thousands of trained local observers.

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