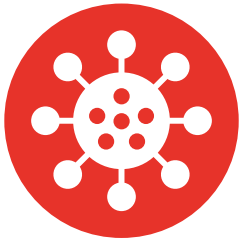# The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Special Brief, January 2021

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This *GSoD In Focus* on Africa and the Middle East aims to shed light upon the trends observed in Africa and the Middle East before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to carry out a more granular analysis and respect the particularities of both regions, the report considers each region separately, and analyses the trends right before and during the pandemic for each independently. Even though certain trends and elements overlap for both regions, the particularities of each region mean they deserve separate chapters.

About this *GSoD In Focus*

This *GSoD In Focus* aims at providing a brief overview of the state of democracy in Africa and the Middle East at the end of 2019, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, and then assesses some of the preliminary impacts that the pandemic has had on democracy in the region in the last 10 months.

The pre-pandemic democracy assessment (section 2) aims at providing an updated overview of the state of democracy in Africa and the Middle East at the end of 2019, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, based on the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices with data from 2019. The GSoD Indices are built around a conceptual framework of democracy developed by International IDEA and which centres on 5 core attributes considered essential for healthy democracies: (1) Representative Government; (2) Fundamental Rights; (3) Checks on Government; (4) Impartial Administration; and (5) Participatory Engagement. The GSoD Indices 2019 offer a valuable baseline for understanding the pre-pandemic democratic context. However, given the disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the responses by governments to contain the spread of the coronavirus, it is likely that the democratic status of some countries in the region will have changed as a result of more recent developments. Such changes will not be reflected in the GSoD Indices until the next update in 2021.

The review of the state of democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (section 3) is organized along these 5 attributes of democracy, and uses qualitative analysis and data of events and trends in the region collected through International IDEA's Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights (International IDEA 2020a), an initiative co-funded by the European Union. The Global Monitor is a digital platform that tracks the democracy and human rights impacts of measures implemented to curb COVID-19 across 162 countries in the world. The Global Monitor is based on a methodology developed by International IDEA and uses secondary sources and information from other trackers (International IDEA n.d.).

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

A. Taking stock of regional democratic trends in Africa before and during the COVID-19 pandemic

Key facts and findings

- The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the African continent at a point when the positive advances in democracy witnessed since 1975 were starting to weaken.

- While democracy is the most common political system in the region, democracies in Africa were marred by weak performance prior to the pandemic. None of the democracies in the continent was classified as high performing and there has been an increase in the number of weak democracies.

- In 2019 alone, 75 per cent of African democracies saw their scores decline, and electoral processes in Africa have failed to become the path for political reform and democratic politics. The reasons are many, including weak electoral management and executive aggrandizement.

- Africans, however, remain highly committed to democracy, and are increasingly more vocal in their support for democracy. From protests in Nigeria against police brutality, the opposition to long-standing leaders in Uganda or Guinea, to

the *mahraganat* music that was openly critical of the regime in Egypt, Africans' voices resonate stronger each day. This is also accompanied and supported by stronger parliaments, more judicial independence and stronger and more independent media.

- The key challenges to democracy brought about by the pandemic involve the management of elections, restrictions on civil liberties (especially freedom of expression), worsening gender equality, deepening social and economic inequalities, a disruption to education, deterioration of media integrity, disruption of parliaments and an amplified risk of corruption. These challenges exacerbate and accelerate long-standing problems in the region.

- Despite the challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic might galvanize governments to reinforce public health and social protection mechanisms, rendering the state more able to cushion the impact of the crisis, and enhancing its legitimacy.

1. Introduction

Since 1975, the African continent has undergone a period of unprecedented political transformation, during which a region once dominated by authoritarian regimes has become one where democracies are the most common regime type. In 1975, only 3 countries on the continent were considered democracies—Botswana, the Gambia and Mauritius—while 91 per cent of the continent was dominated by authoritarian and hybrid regimes. The transformation started in the mid-1970s, but it gained significant momentum during the 1990s, as a consequence of the end of several armed conflicts and the introduction of multiparty elections in many countries. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the continent at a point when this positive tendency towards democracy was starting to show signs of weakening. The democratic advances seen in Africa since 1975 came to a halt around 2015, and many of the gains of the last decades had started to recede over the last 5 years. Those trends were only cemented in 2019.

Since 2015, 11 countries have recorded declines in the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) aspect of Civil Liberties, with 2 countries registering declines between 2018 and 2019. On Media Integrity, 3 more countries have registered declines, bringing the total number of countries with declines in Media Integrity to 8 since 2015. Of special relevance is the decline in Clean Elections, which has been registered in 14 countries since 2015 (28 per cent of the total), including 5 countries seeing declines in Clean Elections in the last year. In addition, positive tendencies in Predictable Enforcement and Access to Justice observed since 2015 came to a stop in 2019.

Moreover, in 2019 the African continent added 1 more authoritarian regime, Sudan (see Box A2.1 for a detailed explanation), making a total of 12, or 24 per cent of the continent. The case of Sudan deserves a deeper analysis as the country's tumultuous political situation in 2019 negatively affected

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

its democratic scores, although the prospects of democratization have since increased. In 2020, even in the middle of the pandemic, Sudan has achieved several milestones in the democratization transition process, such as the signature of the peace agreement in October 2020 (France 24 2020) and, if the transition continues, its scores would reflect these advances. In August 2020, Mali, considered a democracy, suffered a coup d'état that will directly affect its prospects to remain a democracy in the short term.

The picture, however, is not complete, without attending to the improvements that are being recorded throughout the continent. A total of 14 countries have recorded gains in Absence of Corruption since 2015, with 5 additional countries seeing improvements in 2019 alone. Effective Parliament has also improved, with 3 more countries recording gains in 2019, to reach a total of 9 countries since 2015 seeing gains. Yet, even with these improvements, Africa remains the region with the highest number of hybrid regimes globally.

This is the context in which the African continent has had to withstand the COVID-19 pandemic and take measures to curb the spread of the disease and its collateral effects on society. The pandemic has exacerbated long-standing crises on the continent and has placed increasing pressure on some countries that were already affected by severe challenges such as state fragility, poverty or instability. Good examples are the recent coup d'état in Mali, the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods in Somalia, the disregarding of scientific advice in Burundi and Tanzania, or the attack on freedom of expression taking place in countries such as Benin, Egypt, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

This *GSoD In Focus* aims at providing an updated overview of the state of democracy in Africa at the end of 2019, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, based on GSoD Indices data from 2019 (section A2). The methodology and conceptual framework of the GSoD Indices can be found in the Methodology section of *The Global State of Democracy 2019* (International IDEA 2019). The framework centres on 5 core attributes considered essential for healthy democracies: (1) Representative Government; (2) Fundamental Rights; (3) Checks on Government; (4) Impartial Administration; and (5) Participatory Engagement. The review of the state of democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 is organized along these 5 attributes of democracy, and uses qualitative analysis of events and trends in the region collected through International IDEA's Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights (International IDEA 2020a), an initiative funded by the European Union. The Global Monitor is a digital platform that tracks the democracy and human rights impacts of measures implemented to curb COVID-19 across 162 countries in the world. The Global Monitor is based on a methodology developed by International IDEA, and uses secondary sources and information from other trackers (International IDEA n.d.).

This review of the state of democracy under the COVID-19 pandemic therefore offers an opportunity to contribute to the debate, by gauging the pulse of democracy in the region almost a year into the pandemic.

The next section of this Special Brief provides a succinct overview of the democratic landscape in Africa based on the GSoD Indices 2019 (International IDEA 2020b). Section 3 is divided into 2 subsections addressing first challenges and then opportunities for democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these are the result of measures implemented to curb the COVID-19 pandemic and others are developments that cannot be directly attributable to the pandemic, but that have impacted democracy in the region during this time. The events and country cases mentioned throughout the brief are illustrative and are not intended to be exhaustive. Likewise, given the fluidity of the situation since March 2020 and the rapid pace of change of measures, some of the events mentioned here may yet have changed by the time of publication. However, it is still valuable to show the evolving nature of the pandemic response and its preliminary impact on democracy in the region during this historic time.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

2. The democratic landscape in Africa prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

☺ Opportunities for democracy

The COVID-19 pandemic hit an African continent that has seen significant democratic advances in the last 4 decades. Since 1975, the number of democracies has followed a nearly constant increase, especially since 1990. In 1990, Africa had only 4 democracies, whereas in 2019 the region had 21 democracies, or 42 per cent of the countries (see Figure A2.1). The 4 African democracies in 1990—Botswana, the Gambia, Mauritius and Namibia—remain democracies, although the Gambia lost its democracy status from 1994 to 2017. However, globally, Africa has the second lowest share of democracies, at 42 per cent, compared with 50 per cent of countries in Asia and the Pacific, 91 per cent in Europe and 83 per cent in Latin America. Only the Middle East and Iran score lower, with 15 per cent of countries counting as democracies in that region.

FIGURE A2.1

Regime types in Africa, 1975–2019
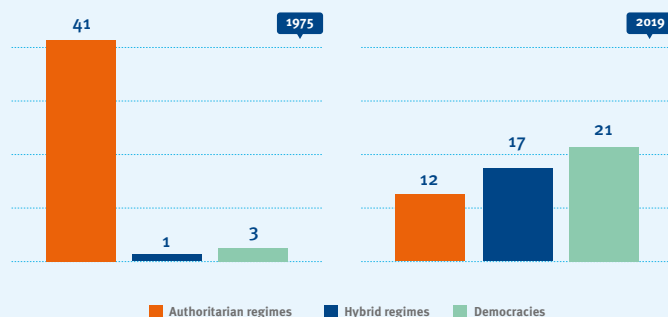
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 19 October 2020.

Despite democratic erosion, support for democracy remains high on the continent. Popular demand for democratization has not flattened in the African continent. According to the public opinion survey Afrobarometer in 2018, 68 per cent of Africans think democracy is preferable to any other form of government. This data is a slight increase from the results of the same poll in 2015. This is reflected in the resurgence of pro-democracy protests on the continent, with Algeria, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guinea and Sudan all seeing pro-democracy protests in recent months. Most protests on the continent are often triggered by a single issue, such as the price of bread in Sudan or a proposed constitutional reform in Guinea, but tend to expand to become broad anti-government protests that demand more accountability, democratic reform and less corruption (Brannen, Haig and Schmidt 2020). Support for multiparty politics is high in the region, with 63 per cent of people in favour (Afrobarometer 2018).

- **Elections were the norm before the pandemic.** Most African countries, including some authoritarian regimes, hold regular elections. Only 4 countries have no form of elections—Eritrea, Libya, South Sudan and Sudan. The case of Sudan, however, is complex, as the current leadership remains committed to holding national elections once the country and its institutions are ready to hand over power to an elected government, which is not expected before 2022. Yet, the quality of

elections remains a challenge in Africa. Only 4 countries—Cabo Verde, Ghana, Mauritius and Senegal—score highly in Clean Elections, while 29 have a mid-range score and 17 register low scoring. None of 17 the low-scoring countries are democratic (see Figure A2.2).

FIGURE A2.2

Clean Elections in Africa, 2019
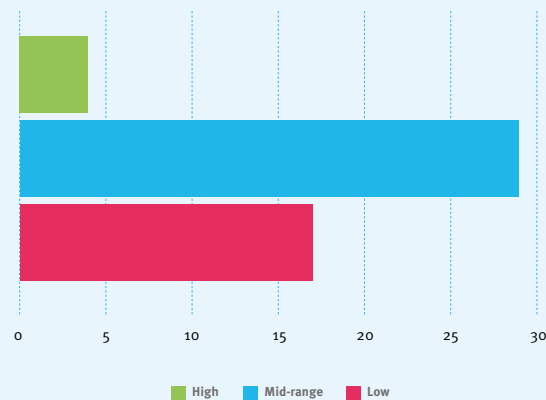
High   Mid-range   Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 19 October 2020.

- **There is hope for Judicial Independence in the region.** Although weak levels of judicial independence is an obstacle for democracy on the continent, new beacons of hope keep appearing. In Malawi, the Supreme Court made a leap towards achieving further independence in 2019 by declaring the election of 21 May null, after a series of complaints were filed in front of the Constitutional Court. After the verdict of the Constitutional Court declared the election null, the incumbent President Peter Mutharika and the Electoral Commission appealed the decision. The Supreme Court upheld the annulment of the results and called for a re-run of the election. The re-run took place on 2 July 2020, after being postponed from its original date of 19 May (Mavedzenge 2020). The incumbent President, Mutharika, winner of the nullified election, lost against the candidate of the opposition coalition formed after the nullification, ushering a change in the presidency facilitated by an independent judiciary. In the Gambia, the Supreme Court reinstated a member of parliament after she was expelled by the President allegedly for making comments about him. The rule of the Supreme Court allowed her to repossess her democratically won seat at Parliament.

- **Media Integrity in Africa saw improvements before the pandemic.** Since 2016, the share of high-performing countries in Africa in Media Integrity has been around 40 per cent of the total countries. In 2019, most democracies score highly in Media Integrity, with only 7 out of 21 in the mid-range (Benin, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho and Mali). The development of a freer media environment in Africa responds to a number of factors. One of them is the increasing penetration of digital media, and the difficulties that political and economic elites have in capturing or controlling these media outlets. Afrobarometer shows that 18 per cent of Africans get news from the Internet daily. Furthermore, 19 per cent of Africans also get daily news from social media, while in some countries, such as Mauritius, Morocco and South Africa, the proportion of people getting daily news from

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

social media is above 40 per cent (Afrobarometer 2018). Undoubtedly, digital and social media have an impact on the way people on the continent access and consume news, and on the capacity of media outlets to remain free from undue influence.

- **Parliamentarism was becoming stronger in Africa prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.** The number of countries scoring highly on the Effective Parliament aspect in Africa has continued to rise, as seen over the last few years. In 2019, 7 countries in Africa scored highly in Effective Parliament—Cabo Verde, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Niger, South Africa and Tunisia. All those with high scores in Effective Parliament are democracies, with the exception of Niger, a hybrid regime. The number of high-scoring countries has been gradually on the rise over the last 5 years. Nevertheless, many democracies in Africa remain in the mid-range when it comes to Effective Parliament. Of the 21 democracies on the continent, 14 are mid-range performers in Effective Parliament and 1—Burkina Faso—scored low.

😞 Challenges to democracy

- **Africa and the Middle East are the only regions where democracies do not outnumber non-democratic regimes.** Although the situation in Africa has improved greatly since 1975—when the continent only had 3 democracies—there is still a dominance of non-democratic regimes on the continent. Africa has 12 authoritarian regimes and 16 hybrid regimes, making it the region with the largest share of both regime types.

- **More than half the democracies in Africa are weak.** Of the 21 democracies in Africa, more than half are low-performing/weak (a total of 12), whereas 9 are mid-range democracies. After the Middle East, Africa is the region with the largest share of weak democracies. There is no high performing democracy in the region. This implies a weak state of democracy on the continent and increases the risks of democratic fragility, pushing more countries into hybridity or even authoritarian regimes. Among all the democracies in Africa, only Mauritius scored highly on 3 aspects in 2019, whereas Cabo Verde, Ghana and Tunisia scored highly in 2. Overall, 11 democracies—or half the democracies in Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali Namibia, Nigeria and Senegal)—do not perform highly in any of the aspects. All of them, except Lesotho and Namibia, are low scoring in at least 1 aspect, and 4 of them (Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar and Nigeria) have a low score in 2 aspects.

- **Democratic erosion is on the rise in Africa.** In 2019, 75 per cent of the democracies on the continent had seen a decline in their democracy aspects in the five years preceding the outbreak of the pandemic. In 2018, that number was 42 per cent. A total of 13 countries—or 65 per cent of countries in the region—have seen a decline on more than 1 aspect of democracy in the last 5 years, with the largest erosion taking place in Benin and Namibia, with declines in more than 2 aspects. The share of democracies with democratic erosion in Africa is well above the already high global average of 52 per cent.

- **Democracies in Africa suffer from democratic fragility.** Africa has the largest share of fragile democracies after the Middle East. On the continent, 6 democracies are fragile democracies, implying that they became democracies after 1975, suffered a partial (to hybrid regime) or full (to authoritarian regime) democratic breakdown and have since returned to democracy. One case—Guinea-Bissau—has completed such a trajectory more than once. In addition, 4 countries—Central African Republic, Niger,

Tanzania and Zambia—have been a democracy at some point since 1975, but are currently either an authoritarian or a hybrid regime.

- **Africa suffers from deepening autocratization.** In 2019, 15 per cent of authoritarian regimes in Africa and 18 per cent of hybrid regimes were suffering deepening autocratization, meaning that they experienced significant declines in 3 or more aspects of democracy during the last 5 years. The phenomenon is particularly serious in hybrid regimes. Over the last 5 years, the average proportion of hybrid regimes suffering deepening autocratization was 9 per cent; in 2019, this number had doubled to 18 per cent (see Figure A2.3).

FIGURE A2.3

Percentage of authoritarian and hybrid regimes suffering deepening autocratization, 2015–2019
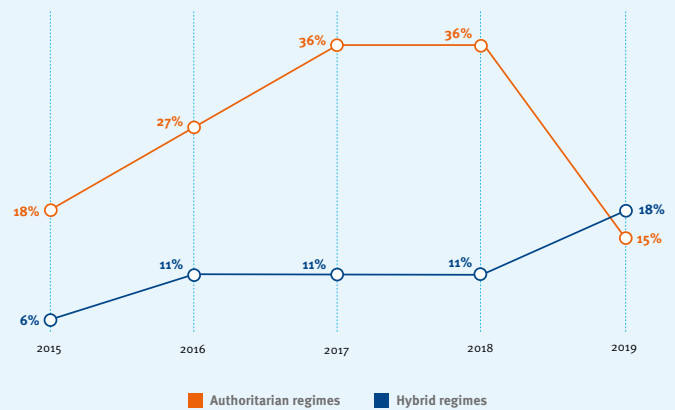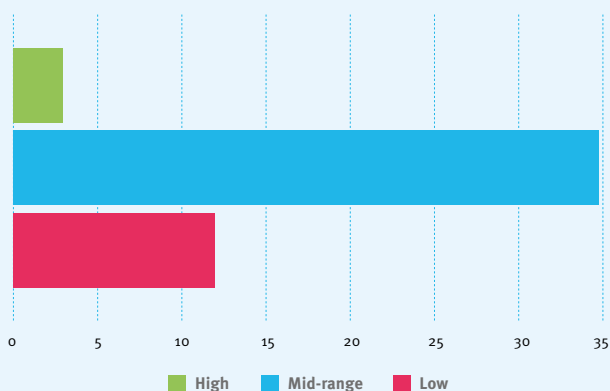

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 19 October 2020.

- **Autocratization in Africa takes several shapes and happens in diverse forms.** It is often the case that many dents in the quality of democracy are related to long-standing leaders attempting to remain in power and enlarge their reach and control of the state. Some of the longest-serving heads of state in the world are found in Africa—for example, Teodoro Obiang in Equatorial Guinea, Paul Biya in Cameroon, Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, Idriss Déby in Chad, Isaias Afwerki in Eritrea or Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Congo. Others are following similar trajectories, altering and corrupting the political system in their countries so as to remain in power as long as possible. In 2019, Africa witnessed continuous attempts to retain power through fraudulent means, such as in Malawi or Algeria. In Algeria, the December 2019 election was widely boycotted by opposition and the results were criticized as rigged in favour of the former Prime Minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune, formerly loyal to the deposed leader Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

- **Elections in Africa still face several, multi-layered challenges to deliver democratic change on the continent.** Throughout Africa, elections still face many challenges to become the vehicles for change that they ought to be. Change in leadership through elections is increasing, with changes in dissimilar polities, such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tunisia or Zimbabwe, in the last few years (Cheeseman 2020). More recently, Burundi and Malawi have seen a new leadership elected. However, the complexity of each transfer of power makes it almost impossible to draw a clear trend for how elections are becoming, or failing to become, the natural conduct for improved democratic governance. Many of the democratic changes of leadership witnessed in Africa in recent years are based on dominating parties changing their leadership, rather

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

than these parties losing power. This is the case in Angola, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. These changes are still significant and can usher in a wave of reforms, as seen in Angola and Ethiopia. Yet, in many cases, they remain limited in their capacity to solve some of the key challenges of democracy in these countries.

- **Electoral management remains a contentious issue on the continent and a source of instability.** The consequences of the mid-range and low performance of electoral processes in Africa are felt around the continent, inducing protests, riots, instability and conflict. In 2019 alone, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) registered 514 protests and events related to elections throughout the continent. For example, in Malawi protests erupted after the disputed elections of May 2019, accusing the Malawi Electoral Commission of rigging the election in favour of the incumbent. These protests spilled over into many other topics until the 2020 elections, in which the opposition candidate Lazarus Chakwera defeated incumbent Peter Mutharika. In Algeria, protests in the streets of the main cities erupted after the December 2019 elections. Other elections, such as those in Cameroon, Mozambique or Nigeria, have been marred with different degrees of protests and violence. In Mali, the irregularities in the 2018 elections increased tension and instability in the country, culminating in the August 2020 coup d'état.

- **Before the pandemic, the negative trend in Civil Liberties was accelerating.** Only 3 countries in Africa scored highly before the pandemic (Cabo Verde, Mauritius and Namibia) (see Figure A2.4). This follows the tendency of decreasing numbers of countries with high scores in Civil Liberties observed in recent years. Several countries, such as Benin, Ghana, Liberia and Tunisia, which formerly scored high in Civil Liberties in 2018 and 2017, descended into the mid-range. Even though some of the data points towards small glimmers of hope, with 5 countries experiencing statistically significant advances on Civil Liberties (Angola, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Mali and Sudan), the decreases in general are more noticeable, with 11 countries suffering statistically significant declines. Among these 11 countries, 3 are democratic regimes (Burkina Faso, Ghana and South Africa), 6 are hybrid regimes (Cameroon, Gabon, Niger, Tanzania, Togo and Uganda), and 2 are authoritarian regimes (Burundi and Somalia). Of special concern among Civil Liberties was Personal Integrity and Security, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 1 country, Cabo Verde, scored highly, with 2 democracies—Kenya and Nigeria—getting a low score.
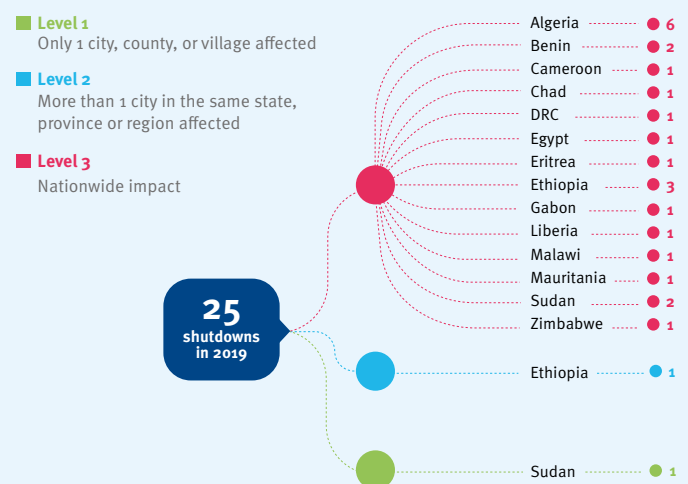
FIGURE A2.4

Civil Liberties in Africa, 2019

| | High | Mid-range | Low |

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 19 October 2020.

- **Civic space has been shrinking in many countries in Africa despite a stronger and more mobilized civil society.** Civic space in the GSoD Indices is measured through the aspects of Media Integrity, Civil Liberties and Civil Society Participation. In 2019, the declines in civic space were taking place mostly in countries with deepening autocratization (e.g. Burundi) and in countries suffering democratic erosion (e.g. Benin or Kenya). In total, 17 countries in Africa have suffered statistically significant decreases in 1 of these 3 aspects in the last 5 years. In 2019, only Burundi registered statistically significant decreases in all 3 of them. Civic space is also being restricted online, with an increasing use of Internet shutdowns in Africa. According to Access Now, Internet shutdowns grew by 47 per cent in 2019 compared with the previous year (Taye 2020). A total of 14 countries have used Internet shutdowns, including Internet shutdowns during electoral periods (specifically, Benin, the DRC, Malawi and Mauritania) (see Figure A2.5).

FIGURE A2.5

Affected levels of Internet shutdown in Africa

Level 1
Only 1 city, county, or village affected

Level 2
More than 1 city in the same state, province or region affected

Level 3
Nationwide impact

25 shutdowns in 2019

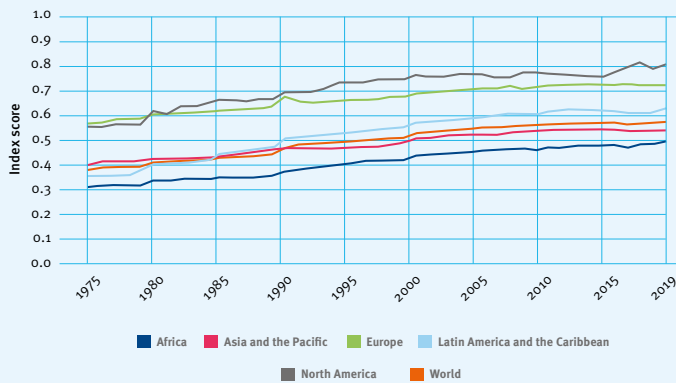|	
Algeria	6
Benin	2
Cameroon	1
Chad	1
DRC	1
Egypt	1
Eritrea	1
Ethiopia	3
Gabon	1
Liberia	1
Malawi	1
Mauritania	1
Sudan	2
Zimbabwe	1
Ethiopia	1
Sudan	1

Source: Taye, B., *Targeted, Cut Off, and Left in the Dark: The #KeepItOn report on internet shutdowns in 2019* (New York: Access Now, 2020), accessed 24 September 2020.

- **Africa's scores in Gender Equality are the lowest globally after the Middle East.** No African country scored highly in Gender Equality in 2019 (see Figure A2.6). Among democracies, all except 1 scored mid-range, whereas Nigeria scored low. Among the hybrid regimes, 3 countries registered low scores (Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Guinea), while the rest were mid-range. Authoritarian regimes in Africa have the lowest scores in Gender Equality, with nearly 50 per cent of the authoritarian regimes with a low score.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
**IN FOCUS**

Gender Equality in Africa

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 19 October 2020.

- **Weak Judicial Independence in Africa remains an obstacle to advancing democracy.** Before the pandemic only 2 countries—the Gambia and Tunisia—scored highly in Judicial Independence, with most democracies having a mid-range score, with the exceptions of the low-scoring Madagascar and Sierra Leone. A total of 22 countries in Africa, 44 per cent of the total number, are low scoring in Judicial Independence, and Africa is home to 43 per cent of the countries worldwide with low Judicial Independence. What is more worrisome is the insignificant improvement over time, with average levels of performance similar to those observed in 1975.

- **Trust in parliaments was decreasing throughout the continent before the COVID-19 pandemic**. The Afrobarometer found that African citizens' trust in their parliaments is decreasing (see Figure A2.7). When asked about how much MPs try to listen to citizens, almost half of respondents said 'never', with only 6 per cent stating 'always'. In terms of trust of their National Assembly or Parliament, only 23.3 per cent of Africans claim to trust their Parliament or National Assembly 'a lot'. This number was 25.7 per cent 5 years ago, and 30.1 per cent 15 years ago (Afrobarometer 2018).

FIGURE A2.7

Trust in parliaments in Africa

How much of the time do you think MPs try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?
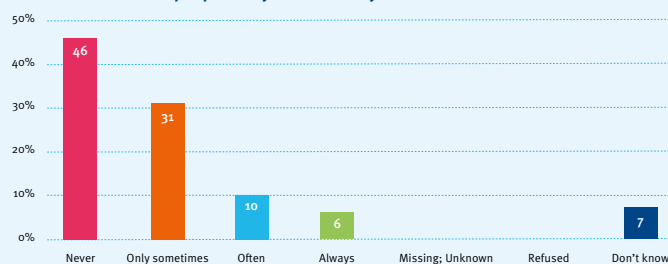

Source: Afrobarometer, Afrobarometer Survey 2016–2018, accessed 21 October 2020.

- **Corruption remains an enduring phenomenon in Africa and an obstacle for democracy.** Africa remains the region with the highest levels of corruption in the world, with 56 per cent of countries with high levels of corruption (see Figure A2.8). Moreover, the low levels of performance are also found among democracies, with no democracy having low levels of corruption and 30 per cent of them having high levels of corruption. However, in the last 5 years, 14 countries have experienced a statistically significant improvement in their Absence of Corruption score. Among these, 6 are democracies (Benin, the Gambia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali and Nigeria). Yet, even with improvements in the last 5 years, many of these countries remain low performers. Corruption in these countries, even while decreasing, remains a major obstacle for governance and, ultimately, for development. Furthermore, in 6 countries (Egypt, the Gabon, Namibia, Senegal, South Sudan and Zambia), levels of corruption have increased in the last 5 years. Worryingly, 2 of these countries—Namibia and Senegal—are democracies.

FIGURE A2.8

Absence of Corruption in Africa, 2019
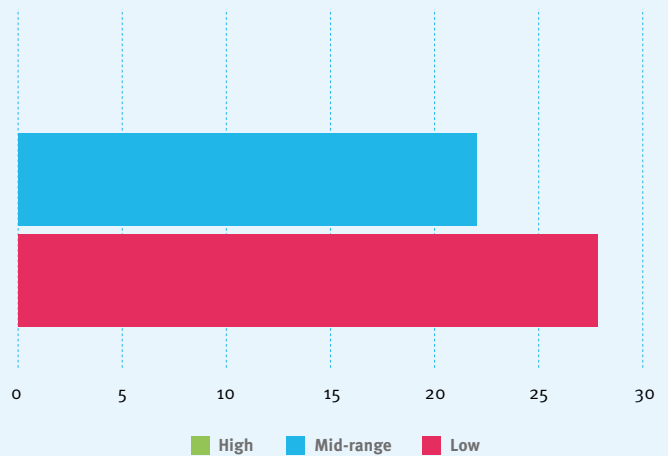
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 19 October 2020.

- **In terms of Predictable Enforcement, only 1 country on the continent scores highly—Botswana—while 85 per cent of the democracies on the continent are mid-range scoring**. In Africa, 3 democracies—Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar and Nigeria—see low scores in Predictable Enforcement. Among the hybrid regimes, 9 score low while 8 score in the mid-range, and among authoritarian regimes, as expected, 11 score low and only 1 country—Rwanda—scores in the mid-range.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

BOX A2.1

Sudan

Sudan moved from a hybrid to an authoritarian regime in 2019, according to the data of the Global State of Democracy Indices, affected by the conflict and evolving events in the country.

In December 2018 a protest against the rise of bread prices in the city of Atbara, quickly evolved into waves of protests spreading to other cities, including the capital Khartoum. Within months, these protests challenged the regime of Omar al-Bashir. On 11 April 2019, the military ousted al-Bashir in a coup d'état and a Transitional Military Council (TMC) took power. Protests continued after the coup demanding civilian rule. On 20 August 2019, following an agreement between the TMC and protestors, the Sovereign Council of Sudan became a multi-member head of state. On 21 August 2019, a new civilian Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok, was sworn in. Since then, the country has been implementing political and social reforms to pave way for a democratic election that will complete the first stages of the transition in June 2022.

For much of 2019, Sudan was in a state of protest and military rule, with the limited democratic provisions of the al-Bashir regime suspended. This has negatively affected the GSoD Indices scores, rendering the country an authoritarian regime even if the current developments point towards an encouraging democratic transition.

3. Democracy in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges and opportunities

Challenges to democracy

3.1. Challenges to democracy

Representative Government

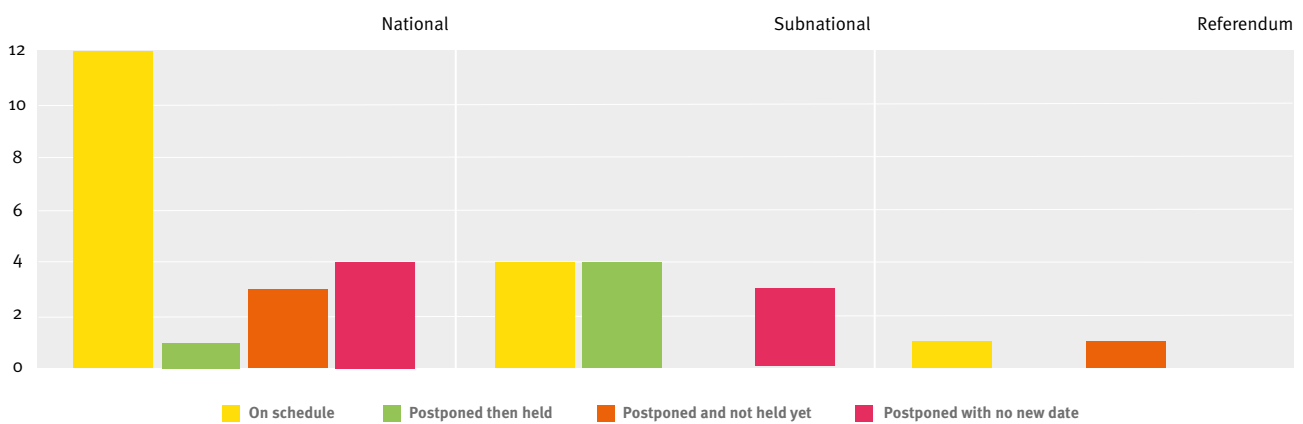#### 3.1.1. Representative Government

Challenge 1. Postponement of elections

Clean Elections

FIGURE A3.1

Elections in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic

Legend:
- On schedule
- Postponed then held
- Postponed and not held yet
- Postponed with no new date

Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 19 October 2020.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

The pandemic is causing massive disruption to electoral processes in the region and is deepening risks of autocratization. Since the start of the pandemic, 15 national and local elections have been postponed. Of the postponed, 7 have been postponed with no new date, including 4 national elections—Ethiopia, Gabon, Nigeria by-elections and Chad—whereas 12 national elections (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Seychelles, Tanzania and Togo), 1 referendum and 4 local elections have taken place on schedule. Among the national elections that took place during the pandemic, we can observe the same shortcomings that have been observed before on the continent, especially in recent years. In the hybrid regimes of Guinea and Togo and the authoritarian regime of Egypt, the elections were marred by repression of opposition parties and candidates, and irregularities. In the cases of Cameroon and Mali, significant instability in regions of the country made it impossible to conduct the voting procedures, diminishing the integrity of the results. In Burundi, the opposition claimed victory in the May 2020 elections, even though the Electoral Commission gave the victory to the government-party leader, Evariste Ndayishimiye. The elections in many of these countries have been used to maintain a democratic façade to retain and further justify the grip on power held by the ruling party or government.

In the last months of 2020, presidential and parliamentary elections have taken place in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Tanzania. Given the problems posed by the pandemic, many of these elections have encountered significant challenges in addition to the difficult governance context of some of these countries. In Burkina Faso, prospects for political reform after the elections, including review of the presidential term limit, remain elusive as the constitutional referendum was postponed indefinitely. The country continues to face a number of challenges compounded by a governance and security crisis. These challenges include the increasing citizen resentment over the government failure to deliver public goods and the deteriorating security environment. The outcome of the post-November 2020 constitutional referendum—if it is eventually conducted—might be used by the incumbent to legitimize presidential term elongation, a technicality that was also used by Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire to justify his bid for a third term. In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveri, in power since 1986, was reelected with almost 59% of the vote amidst accusations of vote rigging and voter fraud by runner-up Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (popularly known as Bobi Wine). The election was marked by a strong military presence, violence, limits to campaigning for the opposition with the government using the COVID-19 pandemic to justify the measures, and a government-ordered internet shutdown on the eve of the election.

TABLE A3.1

Elections in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic

	National	Subnational	Referendum
On schedule	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Seychelles, Tanzania, Togo	Benin, Cabo Verde, Niger, Nigeria	Algeria
Postponed then held	The Gambia	Libya, Niger, South Africa, Tunisia, Uganda	
Postponed and not yet held	Kenya (by-election), Liberia, Somalia		Liberia

Approaches to the postponement of elections due to the pandemic have varied across countries. In Ethiopia, elections were a decisive phase in the democratization of the country, and their postponement has to be framed as a step aimed at securing the stabilization of the country before this important milestone. The recent eruption of conflict in the Tigray region, however, put these efforts at risk. In the authoritarian regime of Chad, however, the elections remain part of the previously mentioned fraudulent management of voting procedures to entrench power and to

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

place hurdles in the democratization process. The Chadian elections were originally scheduled for 2015, but have since then been delayed on several occasions, enlarging the mandate of Idriss Déby, in power since 1990 (Jeune Afrique 2020). Elections were supposed to take place in 2020, but they have again been postponed, this time due to the pandemic, with no clarity on the new date. Two key elections in Africa took place at the end of October, in Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire. Both elections were held as planned but have been marred by controversies and have resulted in post-electoral violence. In Tanzania, President John Magufuli has been accused of not allowing a free and fair competition, repressing the opposition, ignoring scientific advice to fight the pandemic and imposing Internet shutdowns (Burke 2020). The voting process, albeit marred by irregularities, was virtually not altered by the pandemic (National Electoral Commission 2020). In Côte d'Ivoire, President Alassane Ouattara decided to bid for a third term after the death of his party's candidate to the presidency. The opposition boycotted the election and restrictions on public gatherings were imposed between 15 September and 15 October, curbing rising protests against Ouattara's bid using the pandemic as a pretext (RFI 2020).

BOX A3.1

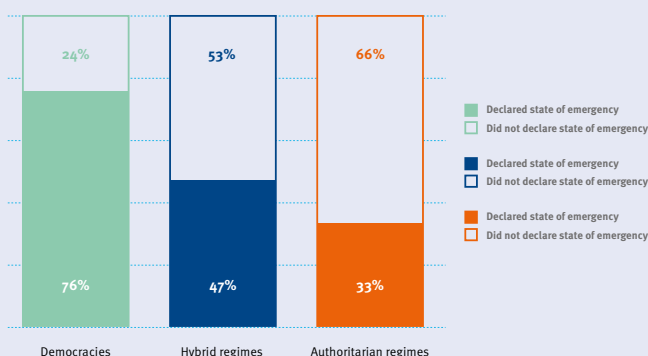## The use of emergency powers in Africa to curb the pandemic highlights democratic governance

In order to implement the type of measures that are required to curb the spread of COVID-19, many countries globally have resorted to emergency powers of some type, usually in the form of a state of emergency. In Africa, a total of 33 countries have declared some type of state of emergency. These range from a pure state of emergency, such as in Cabo Verde or Namibia, to a state of health emergency, as in Niger or the Republic of Congo, or a state of calamity, as in Angola or Mozambique. In most cases, the different terminology does not imply major differences in terms of the reach of emergency powers (International IDEA 2020d).

There are 2 factors influencing the declaration of emergency powers. On the one hand, local politics play a fundamental role. In the Gambia, the declarations have been influenced by the current president losing the support of the party that raised him to power. In Lesotho, a vote of no confidence and a criminal investigation against the president influenced the use of emergency powers. Secondly, the different declarations, and their checks and balances, depend on the constitutional arrangements at hand, and on the capacity of the government to use one or other instrument. The declaration of the state of emergency has been more common among democracies, with 76 per cent of them declaring a state of emergency. The number decreases to 47 per cent for hybrid regimes, and to 33 per cent for authoritarian regimes (see Figure A3.2).

FIGURE A3.2

Declaration of a state of emergency by regime type in Africa

Declared state of emergency
Did not declare state of emergency

Declared state of emergency
Did not declare state of emergency

Declared state of emergency
Did not declare state of emergency

The process for declaring a state of emergency or acquiring emergency powers for a government varies from country to country. For instance, in Botswana the declaration of a state of emergency needs to be approved by parliament, whereas in South Africa it is a prerogative of the executive. Again, local particularities and the exact regulation of emergency powers in the constitution and the body of laws of the country are decisive factors. In North Africa, for instance, Morocco passed legislation to allow the declaration of a 'state of health emergency', in order to give the government the necessary emergency powers to address the pandemic. Most countries in North Africa have declared a state of emergency. In this region, 2 countries—Egypt and Tunisia—were already under a state of emergency before the pandemic (International IDEA 2020e). In East Africa, the tendency has, on the contrary, been against the declaration of a state of emergency, presumably to avoid the greater levels of parliamentary scrutiny involved (International IDEA 2020d). In addition, existing legal provision allows for the implementation of a wide range of measures without resorting to emergency powers. In West Africa, nearly all countries have imposed some type of state of emergency which, in most cases, respects the constitutional procedures, although sometimes fails to respect their core principles and limitations (International IDEA 2020c).

There are 2 key aspects to understanding the impact of the use of emergency powers to curb the pandemic in the long term. First, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a globally binding legal instrument, in its article 4 delineates a number of fundamental rights that are non-derogable. These cannot be derogated, even under emergency powers. In addition, for other rights, a number of limitations are in place, including proportionality, temporality and periodic reviews. The application of these principles is paramount to guaranteeing that emergency powers are not abused. The second key element is the potential 'entrenchment' of emergency measures. This might happen either by passing legislation that allows the government to derogate from fundamental rights without resorting to emergency powers (such as in the case of Gabon) or by unjustified lengthy applications of emergency powers.

Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 19 October 2020.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Fundamental Rights

Civil liberties might be the hardest hit aspect of democracy during the pandemic and may take longest to recover

Freedom of Association and Assembly

Freedom of Movement

Freedom of Religion

Freedom of Expression

22 per cent of countries in Africa have curtailed freedom of expression during the pandemic

3.1.2. Fundamental Rights

Challenge 2. Restrictions on civil liberties

Restrictions of fundamental rights have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Civil liberties might be the hardest hit aspect of democracy during the pandemic and may take longest to recover given the pre-existing challenges to realizing civil rights in the region. Nearly all countries on the continent have limited civil liberties to curb the pandemic. This is a world-wide phenomenon, and is understandable from a public health perspective as, in most cases, the restrictions on civil liberties have been taken with the greater objective of protecting and saving human lives. Yet, the structural political conditions in Africa outlined in this paper make it likely that there will be enduring effects from the measures taken to curb the pandemic.

Freedom of association and assembly have been widely restricted during the pandemic. Nearly all countries in Africa (48, or 96 per cent of them) have imposed measures to curb the virus that limit freedom of association and assembly. In particular, freedom of assembly is being directly affected. Although, in most cases, these measures have been part of the ongoing efforts to limit the spread of the virus, some countries have used the exceptional measures to advance their political interests. In the case of Guinea, measures restricting freedom of assembly were imposed right after the March 2020 elections, seizing the opportunity to silence anticipated protests. The country had been experiencing protests since early 2019 and the pandemic presented a perfect opportunity to repress social dissent and crush the opposition even further (De Bruijne 2020).

Freedom of religion and freedom of movement have been affected by the pandemic with restrictions put in place across the region. These measures have the potential for concern if they are not withdrawn when the pandemic is over. Movement has been restricted in all but 1 country. Some of the most common restrictions imposed have been regarding places of worship, either closing down religious temples or limiting the number of worshippers allowed at the same time. These measures have been applied uniformly to all faiths, which demonstrates the common acceptance of religious diversity on the continent. A case of concern, however, is Egypt, where measures applied to mosques for Shia Muslims—a minority religious group in Egypt—are not the same as for other faiths.

One aspect especially affected by the measures to curb the pandemic has been freedom of expression. In total, 22 per cent of countries in Africa have curtailed freedom of expression during the pandemic. Most of the concerning measures have been justified by authorities as part of a fight against the spread of disinformation around the pandemic. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is, in fact, an 'infodemic' associated with the spread of false or manipulated information about the pandemic (*The Lancet* 2020). However, the measures taken by many countries in response to this are disproportionate, and the risks of them remaining after the pandemic are high. They are disproportionate because they classify the spread of 'disinformation' as a criminal offence—for example, in Eswatini or Egypt. Scores of journalists and social media actors have been arrested in various countries across Africa, such as Cameroon, Kenya, Somalia and Zimbabwe, as a consequence of their reporting of the pandemic (Bagnetto 2020). In Tanzania, journalists have suffered dire consequences for contradicting the official governmental message that the country is free from the virus (Dahir 2020). Even democratic countries, such as Benin, Botswana, Kenya and Tunisia, have witnessed concerning developments and media laws that drastically curtail freedom of expression.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Personal Integrity and Security

Personal integrity and security have been adversely impacted by measures to curb the pandemic. In exceptional times with exceptional measures, the capacity of citizens to maintain their sense of personal security and integrity is paramount. The role of the forces of the state is a key element in both increasing trust in the state and ensuring compliance with the measures. In the case of Africa, low levels of personal integrity and security set the stage for the application of COVID-19-related measures, but also, at the same time, they create uncertainty among citizens over how these measures will be applied. Disproportionate use of force to enforce COVID-19 measures has been registered in several African countries, including by police and the army. More than half of the countries in Africa (26 countries, 52 per cent) have witnessed the use of excessive force to enforce the measures (see Figure A3.3). There have been 5 countries (10 per cent)—Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Sudan—that have deployed the army to enforce compliance with the COVID-19 measures. In Sudan, the army was allegedly responsible for shooting 2 people for breaching curfew restrictions (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed 2020). In total, 12 countries in Africa, including 2 democracies—Kenya and Tunisia—have had concerning developments around personal integrity and security during the pandemic, mostly related to excessive and disproportionate use of force by the army and police forces.

FIGURE A3.3

Reports of use of excessive force
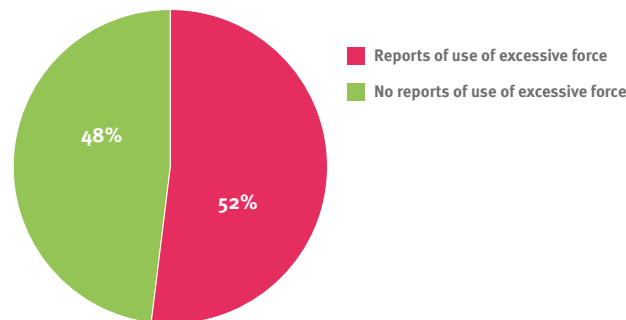
- Reports of use of excessive force
- No reports of use of excessive force

48%

52%

Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 5 November 2020.

Gender Equality

Challenge 3. Worsening gender equality and future repercussions

The pandemic can potentially exacerbate the vulnerabilities of women and girls and hinder progress towards gender equality on the continent. Gender equality is already suffering from the impact of measures to curb the pandemic, especially in an indirect way. According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), poverty among women is expected to increase 9.1 per cent from 2019 to 2021 globally (UN Women 2020). School closures, which have affected all but 1 country in Africa, deprive girls of a much-needed education. School closures also deprive these girls from a safe space. According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the average time in school for girls in sub-Saharan Africa was 8.8 years before the pandemic (UNESCO UIS 2020). Missing just 1 year denies girls around 11 per cent of their school time. In addition, girls are more exposed to sexual violence with the closure of schools. Data suggests that cases of domestic violence and violence against women and children have increased. Data on Google searches for 'domestic violence help' points to a surge in possible cases of domestic violence, and to increasing difficulties in addressing them in many cases (Chuku, Mukasa and Yenice 2020).

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

The economic crisis stemming from the pandemic will also most likely hit women disproportionally, as they lack access to power and decision-making circles to influence the outcome of the crisis (Lührmann et al. 2018). Maternal health has been noted as a public health field that is recurrently and direly affected by focusing medical resources in a single vertical programme (Roberton et al. 2020). Early data from countries such as Burundi and Zimbabwe indeed points towards worrisome decreases in the quality of maternal health in these countries, and this can plausibly be extended to most African countries (WHO 2020).

Challenge 4. Deepening social and economic inequalities

The economic crisis stemming from the pandemic is hitting a continent that remains economically and socially unequal. Before the pandemic, Africa remained afflicted by high levels of poverty. Out of every 10 people living in poverty across the globe, 7 were Africans in 2019 (Hamel, Tong and Hofer 2020). Yet, in 2019 poverty in Africa was taking a positive direction, with more people escaping poverty than falling into it (World Data Lab 2020). The impact of the pandemic, however, has reversed this trend, resulting in a negative trajectory for progress on poverty, with more people falling into poverty than escaping it and 39 per cent of Africans living in extreme poverty (World Data Lab 2020). The increase in poverty will most likely have dire consequences for the quality of democracy on the continent. Low per capita income in highly populated countries makes them more prone to internal conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Poverty also decreases the opportunity cost of mobilization (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). Poverty is one of the factors sustaining the 'conflict trap' that has affected several African countries in the last decades (Hegre et al. 2011). This mechanism means the resurgence of conflict is more likely for conflict-affected countries, and one of its key components is an increase in poverty.
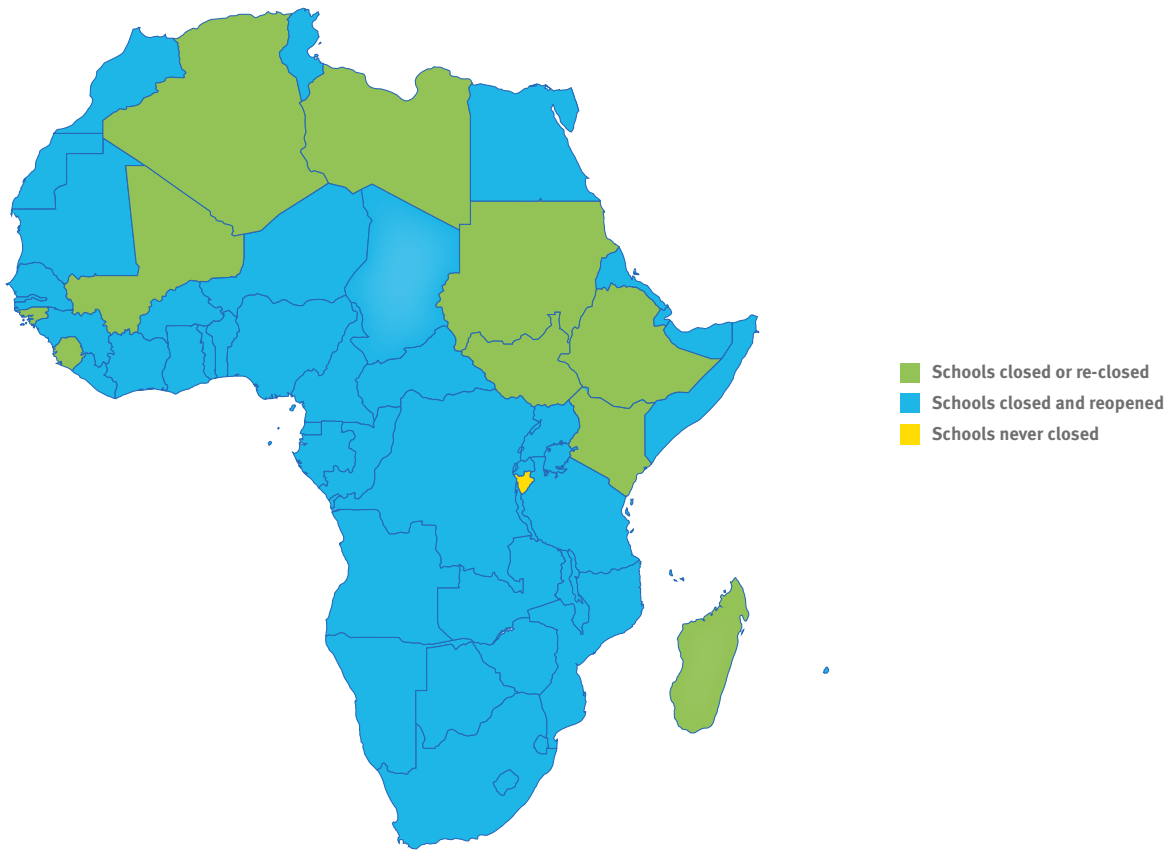
Challenge 5. School closures throughout Africa can have a long-lasting negative effect

In the years before the pandemic, African countries scored generally low on the GSoD aspect Basic Welfare, especially when compared with other regions. Systematically, since 1975, African Basic Welfare has been lower than any other region and the gap in performance has remained basically the same. Although the Basic Welfare score was statistically significantly better for Africa in 2019 than in 1975, it still remains the lowest across the world. Nevertheless, in the last 10 years, 39 countries have improved their Basic Welfare score, although the trend was slowing dramatically, with only 2 countries—Angola and Eswatini—improving their Basic Welfare score over the last 5 years. This paints a picture of a continent where basic welfare improvements had stagnated before the pandemic. It is highly likely that the pandemic will not only reinforce this stagnation, but even push it towards a negative trend. Nearly all countries, except Burundi, have closed their schools. While many countries have gradually reopened their schools, some are imposing long closures, such as Eritrea or Kenya.
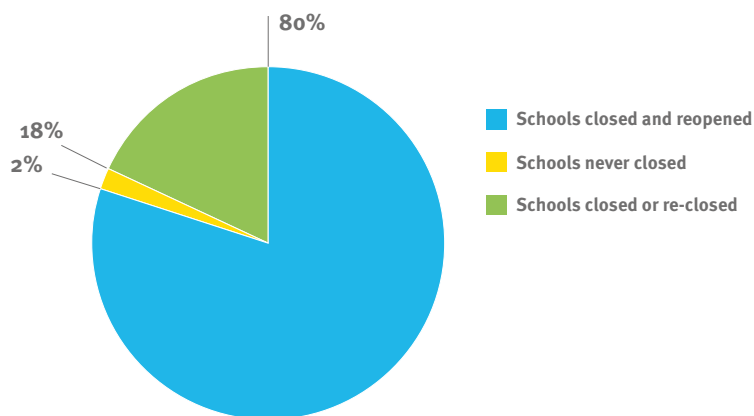
Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

FIGURE A3.4

School closures in Africa during the pandemic, November 2020

■ Schools closed or re-closed
■ Schools closed and reopened
■ Schools never closed

FIGURE A3.5

Percentage of school closures in Africa during the pandemic, November 2020

80%
18%
2%

■ Schools closed and reopened
■ Schools never closed
■ Schools closed or re-closed

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Checks on Government

Media Integrity

15 countries in Africa (**28 per cent**) have had concerning developments in relation to media integrity during the pandemic

3.1.3. Checks on Government

Challenge 6. Deterioration of media integrity

The pandemic is placing tremendous pressure on media integrity. There are 2 key factors jeopardizing the positive evolution of media integrity on the continent. First, several African countries have suffered government-led restrictions in the capacity of journalists to report on the pandemic, as well as new legislation that makes it difficult for them to freely exercise their profession (Masters 2020). Journalists have been arrested in diverse countries across the continent for their reporting of the pandemic. In the DRC, Mali and Niger, journalists have been arrested while reporting about the pandemic (Reporters Without Borders 2020a, 2020b; Global Voices 2020). In Botswana, new legislation criminalizes sharing any information about the pandemic that does not come directly from the WHO (Masters 2020).

A second, more long-term impact will be on revenues to media outlets, and how the subsequent economic crisis stemming from the pandemic might have an impact on the capacity of African media outlets to report independently (Ntibinyane 2020). Lack of revenue and dire economic conditions can, in the first place, put some media outlets out of business, and then, secondly, tie other media outlets closer to government if they receive financial support from the government or other authorities, thereby jeopardizing their independence. In Liberia, the lockdown forced newspapers to suspend printing, even while the government owed them nearly USD 250,000 for unpaid advertising (Reporters Without Borders 2020c). Likewise, in Sudan many newspapers have stopped their printed editions and are only publishing online, in a country with low Internet penetration (BBC News 2020a). In total, 15 countries in Africa (28 per cent) have had concerning developments in relation to media integrity during the pandemic (see Figure A3.6). Of those countries, 50 per cent are democracies. Among them, some cases are of special concern, such as the DRC, where scores of journalists have been arrested while reporting about COVID-19, or Nigeria, where journalists have been beaten while covering police abuses in the enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions (Reporters Without Borders 2020a; MFWA 2020).

FIGURE A3.6

Countries in Africa with concerning developments in media integrity during the pandemic, September 2020

Concern

Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 19 October 2020.

15

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Effective Parliament

32 per cent of parliaments have been suspended because of the pandemic, including 6 in democracies, 5 in hybrid regimes and 5 in authoritarian regimes

Challenge 7. Disruption of parliaments in Africa

The pandemic has meant a disruption for parliaments in Africa. The activity of most parliaments on the continent has been altered one way or another by the pandemic. In total, 32 per cent of parliaments have been suspended because of the pandemic, including 6 in democracies, 5 in hybrid regimes and 5 in authoritarian regimes. In 20 per cent of countries, there have been concerning developments with regard to effective parliament. Often the concerning development is related to the role of parliament in the approval of the state of emergency. Parliament was not involved in the declaration of the state of emergency in Angola, the DRC and Equatorial Guinea. Many state of emergency declarations do not require parliamentary approval, but extra scrutiny and consensus is a positive democratic sign. In some cases, parliamentary activity has been directly affected by COVID-19, as MPs tested positive. In Botswana, the whole parliament was placed in quarantine in April (VOA News 2020). In Zimbabwe, parliamentary business was suspended after 2 MPs tested positive. News of MPs testing positive has also arisen in Zambia and South Africa (Reuters 2020; Jordaan 2020).

Impartial Administration

Absence of Corruption

3.1.4.   Impartial Administration

Challenge 8. Amplified risk of corruption

The pandemic can exacerbate and increase unpredictable enforcement and corruption. Corruption related to COVID-19 is a growing concern globally, including in Africa. Reports from Transparency International, for instance, point towards an increase in police forces demanding bribes or abusing their power (Transparency International 2020). This increase is facilitated by the restrictive measures imposed to curb the pandemic, as new road blocks or restrictions provide corrupt officials with greater opportunities to demand bribes and abuse their power. In the Congo, the DRC and Zimbabwe, reports point to police misbehaviour, taking advantage of the pandemic. In Kenya, the police have allegedly used the official quarantine centres to extract payment from citizens to be released after the quarantine. As a consequence, the government eliminated the fees so police could not abuse them (Kabale and Owino 2020). Other corruption reports are related to the management of national funds for recovery, such as in Cameroon. In Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Health has been charged with corruption over the procurement of health equipment, and there have been other scandals linking the Cabinet to corrupt procurement of sanitary supplies (Kairiza 2020). The likely influx of resources that will take place on the health front, both from inside countries and from international support, will also open a window of opportunity for corruption. In South Africa, a major corruption scandal has pushed the government to investigate its own party (BBC News 2020b).

Opportunities for democracy

3.2. Opportunities for democracy

Opportunity 1. Innovative practices strengthening parliaments

Effective Parliament

The pandemic is also an opportunity for parliaments in Africa to reinforce their role and strengthen their capacity, and even to introduce digitalization measures that can remain after the pandemic. Examples include the Gambia, where parliament exercised its constitutional responsibility to approve the extension of the state of emergency and ensure the duration was reasonable and proportional, given the needs of the situation. Parliament approved a 45-day extension of the state of

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

emergency, even though the president had asked for 90 days. On a subsequent extension, parliament rejected the presidential proposal. Amid high political tensions, the Gambian Parliament has shown resilience and constitutional responsibility. Another example is South Africa, which has amended its Rules of Procedure to allow both chambers and their committees to operate remotely, enabling the resumption of meetings even while parliament was physically closed (IPU 2020). In Cabo Verde, the parliament has also continued to operate using digital means, allowing for the continuation of business amid the pandemic. These measures can potentially remain after the pandemic, to improve the capacity of parliaments on the continent to deal with unforeseen circumstances, but also to give MPs greater flexibility, allowing them more time in their constituencies and cutting travelling time and environmental impact. Notwithstanding this, requirements for physical meeting and voting may be part of the legislature or included in standing rules, which means that shifts to digital engagement by MPs may require legal or regulatory changes. It is fundamental that, if changes are to become more permanent, their regulation is firm and clear.

Opportunity 2. Renewed democratic control of the economy and development

Reform packages might create a window of opportunity for renewed democratic control of the economy and development processes. The ensuing economic hit of the pandemic is ushering in different economic packages on the continent. From World Bank loans to expansive African Development Bank programmes, over the coming years the continent will be receiving significant support from continental and international financial institutions, as well as from internal sources with special budget allocations. These special economic packages create an opportunity for legislative scrutiny from parliaments, both in their conceptualization and inception, and in their deployment. Increased scrutiny can enhance the impact of such support, reduce opportunities for corruption and ensure available funds are used to boost economic and environmental transformation.

Opportunity 3. Development of public health systems

Basic welfare, especially public health systems, can take a prominent role in political discussions. The impact of the pandemic on the continent might galvanize governments to revamp and reinforce Africa's medical capacities. At the start of the pandemic, the whole continent had only 2 testing labs—in South Africa and Senegal—with the technical capacity to test for COVID-19. Joint efforts have raised that capacity in 6 months to 44 countries (AfDB Group 2020). Increasing the capacity of health infrastructure in Africa is vital as, even with the exponential increase in testing capacity, Africa remains the weakest region globally in terms of lab capacity. Moreover, increasing medical capabilities would also create the first barrier against future epidemic outbreaks, especially if the outbreak started in Africa itself.

Opportunity 4. Restructuring democracy in Africa

The seismic waves that the pandemic is sending through all political systems might open opportunities for a renewal of the democratic contract in many African countries and for innovation in the way politics takes place. The pandemic might increase, even in times of limited movement and restrictions on assembly, the presence of the state upon the territory. The unprecedented scope of a global pandemic is ushering in a more capable statehood that does not leave any territory behind in order to contain the pandemic effectively. These efforts might be replicated in the way countries move beyond the pandemic, to strengthen the presence of the state and its capacity to maintain the basic rule of law and policy implementation.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

4. Conclusion

The outlook for democracy in Africa before the pandemic was bleak. The continent was showing serious signs of fragility and low performance among its democratic regimes. It was also showing increasing levels of autocratic governance. Before the pandemic, the continent did not have any high-performing democracies, and it had recently added 1 more authoritarian regime, Sudan. It is important to note, however, that the case of Sudan deserves special attention, as it is in the middle of a democratic transition and its inclusion in the group of authoritarian regimes is probably temporary. Mali suffered a coup d'état in the middle of the pandemic, adding an extra military-led unelected government to the continent. The decreasing quality of democracy on the continent stems from many points. In most cases, elections remain unable to be the catalyst for democratic change that they ought to be, being marred by contentious electoral management and widespread disrespect for electoral law. On top of this, weak respect for civil liberties and weak judicial independence remain serious obstacles to democratization. Of special concern is the shrinking civic space, which is complemented by increasing Internet shutdowns all over the continent. The bleak picture, however, needs to be balanced with the few positive trends seen on the continent, especially in relation to support for democracy, increasing media integrity, and stronger parliamentarism and capacity of parliaments.

It was in this bleak landscape that the pandemic hit the continent. The effects of the pandemic will be long term, and many will only be felt once the ensuing economic crisis is well under way, increasing stress to precarious livelihoods, increasing the danger of populist political figures and even risking economic collapses in the weakest countries on the continent, such as those in the Sahel or West Africa. So far, what can be observed is an acceleration of the process already seen in 2019. In many cases, elections—rather than being a catalyst for democratic change—remain an instrument for deepening autocratization and executive aggrandizement. Countries such as Burundi or Guinea have used elections to maintain and enhance the governmental grip on power. Other countries, such as Burkina Faso, Chad and Côte d'Ivoire, seem to be going in the same direction, benefiting from the exceptional circumstances to alter the electoral process in their favour.

Civil liberties are suffering serious restrictions that, if not lifted, will significantly dent the quality of democracy on the continent. Although it is plausible to think that restrictions to freedom of movement or freedom of association and assembly will be lifted in due time, as is gradually the case, doubts arise over restrictions to freedom of expression. Before the pandemic, freedom of expression was significantly lower in Africa than in most of the world, except Asia and the Pacific. The pandemic might degrade freedom of expression even further on the continent if the regulations imposed in countries such as Botswana, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe are not lifted.

Nevertheless, the pandemic is also showing some glimmers of hope for the continent, and possibilities of pushing for democratic change. Judicial independence, a persistent problem in Africa, has shown its potential during the pandemic in Malawi, with the repeat of elections thanks to a court decision, and the victory of the opposition. In the Central African Republic, the Constitutional Court ruled that constitutional amendments could not allow postponement of elections. Stronger independent judiciaries can be a building block upon which democracy can be reinforced on the continent. Parliaments were becoming better and more effective before the pandemic, and they have proven resilient during the pandemic. Most have been able to adapt to the new normal, securing continuity of governance with minimal disruption.

Yet, the biggest challenge for the continent will be the management of the post-pandemic situation and the dire effects of the ensuing economic and social crisis that is already shaking the continent. The real challenge for democracy on the continent is to generate an inclusive, democratic and accountable recovery, which addresses the main ailments of democracy on the continent and draws a new democratic social contract.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

B. Taking stock of regional democratic trends in the Middle East before and during the COVID-19 pandemic

Key facts and findings

- The Middle East is the most undemocratic region in the world. Only 2 out of 13 countries in the region are democracies. The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened the economic and social problems of the region, which could exacerbate the pre-existing democratic challenges.

- Protests have occurred in several countries in the region (Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar and Syria) during the pandemic, although some governments are using COVID-19 to justify harsh action against them.

- Freedoms of expression and media were severely curtailed in many countries in the region prior to the pandemic. In some cases, COVID-19 has aggravated this. Countries have closed media outlets and banned the printing and distribution of newspapers, under the pretext of combating the spread of COVID-19. This has restricted citizens' access to information.

- The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) has been key in the region. Even though their efforts have continued during the pandemic, some of them face risks to their survival. The forced relocation of CSOs and the scarcity of funding are their greatest challenges.

- Migrant workers and internally displaced people have been disproportionally affected by COVID-19. A significant proportion of the infections in the region have been in impoverished migrant and refugee communities. In the Gulf region, curfews and lockdowns have resulted in many migrants losing their livelihood, right to medical attention and even repatriation. Migrants have also faced discrimination often being held in detention centres, in poor conditions, as part of governmental efforts to curb the number of COVID-19 infections among citizens.

1. Introduction

December 2020 marked 10 years since the beginning of the Arab Uprisings. In the first 3 years after the uprisings, the Middle East experienced more changes within its governmental institutions than in the previous few decades. For example, because of protests in Jordan, 2 successive cabinets resigned (*The Telegraph* 2011a, 2011b). In Kuwait, the Prime Minister was replaced in November 2011 and the parliament was dissolved until elections were held in February 2012 (Khaleej Times 2011). In Bahrain, the global condemnation that followed the attack on pro-democracy protesters by security forces in February and March 2011 prompted King Hamad to create the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) in July that year, which recommended the prosecution of security forces personnel (BICI 2011). Until 2015, of the 26 recommendations made by the commission, only 2 were fully implemented and 8 saw no progress at all (Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain 2015). This did not, however, translate into significant democratic progress and transitions for the Middle East. Dictators were overthrown, but new and harsher rulers followed. This period has shown how a magnificent social mobilization fell apart, and how a movement for democratic advancement ended up, in some cases, with deepening autocratization of regimes—for example, in Bahrain in 2018 and Yemen in 2019. People's aspirations for freedom and democracy faced violent crackdowns and armed interventions from their own governments. In Yemen, confrontations between the government and secessionist groups led to a civil war, which has caused, together with the war in Syria, the migration and displacement of millions of people, but which has also created, in Yemen, the worst humanitarian crisis of the last 100 years.

It could be interpreted that the Arab Uprisings, instead of bringing democracy, brought more autocracy to what was already the most autocratic region in the world. However, the movement was by no means the cause of the deepening authoritarianism in the region. The Arab Uprisings were a first broad attempt by a population to show, through their actions, that they had the will to change their deteriorated systems of government.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Nonetheless, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, civil unrest was again growing stronger, citizens and groups of non-citizens were denouncing their governments and yet again fighting for change. It is clear that the socio-economic conditions in the region have deteriorated, and this has pushed people to take to the streets again demanding a change. Authoritarian regimes, such as Palestine in 2019, saw their populations denounce the high cost of living and increases in taxes through protests, known as We Want to Live (Knell 2019). Hybrid regimes also experienced protests. In May 2018, Jordanians took to the streets to protest a new tax law that aimed to tackle Jordan's growing public debt (Sowell 2018; PWC 2018) and that affected citizens directly due to the rise in prices. The peaceful protests extended throughout the whole country and, after 4 days, Prime Minister Hani Mulki presented his resignation to King Abdullah II (Al Jazeera 2018). Demonstrations did not end until the new Prime Minister Omar Razzaz (Reuters 2018) withdrew the tax bill (Akour 2018; BBC Newshour 2018). Lebanon and Iraq, the 2 democracies in the region, also faced civil unrest in 2019. In Lebanon, the high number of unemployed, the languid economy and the endemic corruption of governmental institutions sparked demonstrations against the government (UN OHCHR 2019; Report Syndication 2019; Al Jazeera 2019b). They resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri in January 2020 (Al Jazeera 2019c; Haines-Young 2019), but this did not result in the end of protests, which went on until October 2020. In Iraq, protests started in October 2019 (Al Jazeera 2019a) with citizens demonstrating against the same issues as in Lebanon—a crumbling economy, state corruption, unemployment. Yet in Iraq protests were not peaceful; although Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi announced his resignation in late November 2019 after mounting pressure from anti-government protesters (Politico 2019), by December 2019 more than 500 people had been killed (Rubin 2019) and the protests continued.

One of the darkest periods the region has experienced, when economic, social and political crises were worse than ever, became even darker when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. A new challenge that could be either the opportunity that countries in the Middle East need to be able to reconfigure the region in all areas or the impetus for propelling them into deeper uncertainties.

2. The democratic landscape in the Middle East prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

- **Since 1975, the Middle East region has seen the slowest democratic progress in the world.** The region has only gained 2 democracies since 1975: Palestine/West Bank (from now on referred to as Palestine), which transitioned from authoritarian regime to democracy in 1996 but had a democratic breakdown and went back to autocracy in 2007; and Iraq, which transitioned to democracy for the first time in its history in 2005. This makes the Middle East the region with the smallest share of democracies in the world (15 per cent), and the 2 democracies it hosts (Lebanon and Iraq) are considered weak democracies. It also contains 3 (23 per cent) hybrid regimes and 8 (62 per cent) authoritarian regimes, 4 of which are some of the most enduring authoritarian regimes in the world—countries that have never experienced democracy or even hybridity at any point in their history: Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

- According to GSoD Indices data, in 2010 when the Arab Uprisings began, there were 3 democracies in the Middle East: Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine; 5 hybrid regimes: Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman and Yemen; and 5 authoritarian regimes: Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the UAE (see Figure B2.1). By December 2019, the region had lost: 1 democracy in a complete democratic breakdown in 2013—Palestine; and 2 hybrid regimes—Bahrain (which experienced a deepening autocratization between 2013 and 2018) and Yemen. This means that the region has gained 3 authoritarian regimes since 2010.

Difference in regime types between 2010 and 2019 in the Middle East
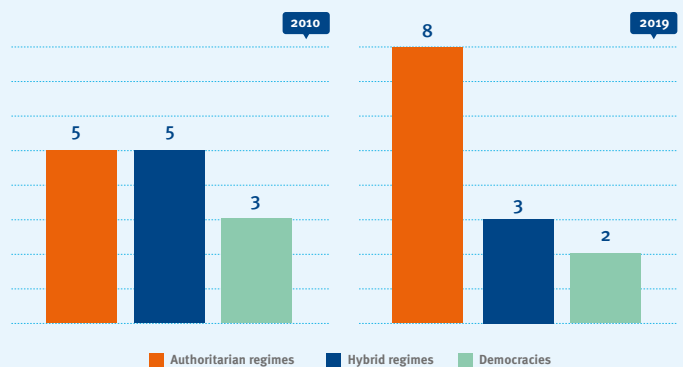
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 19 October 2020.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

- **The Middle East has shown the slowest progress and consistently poorest performance of all the world regions on the GSoD attributes of Representative Government, Fundamental Rights and Checks on Government.** On each of these attributes, and on Impartial Administration too, the region's performance has consistently been well below the world average. Saudi Arabia, 1 of the 18 countries in the world that has never experienced democracy (since its establishment as a state in the post-colonial partition of the Middle East into nation-states), has the poorest performance in the region on the GSoD aspects. By 2019, Saudi Arabia scored in the bottom 25 per cent in the world on almost all the democratic subattributes (14 of 16).

- According to the GSoD Indices, 8 (20 per cent) of 41 countries in the world scoring in the bottom 25 per cent on Checks on Government pre-COVID-19 are in the Middle East.

- **Iraq and Lebanon, the only democracies in the region, do not follow the same democratic pattern but they were both weak democracies pre-COVID-19.** In the authoritarian regimes in the region, 4 different patterns have been identified before the COVID-19 pandemic started (see Table B2.1). The worst pattern, found in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, sees all 5 attributes of the GSoD Indices having a low performance.

TABLE B2.1

Autocratic patterns in the Middle East

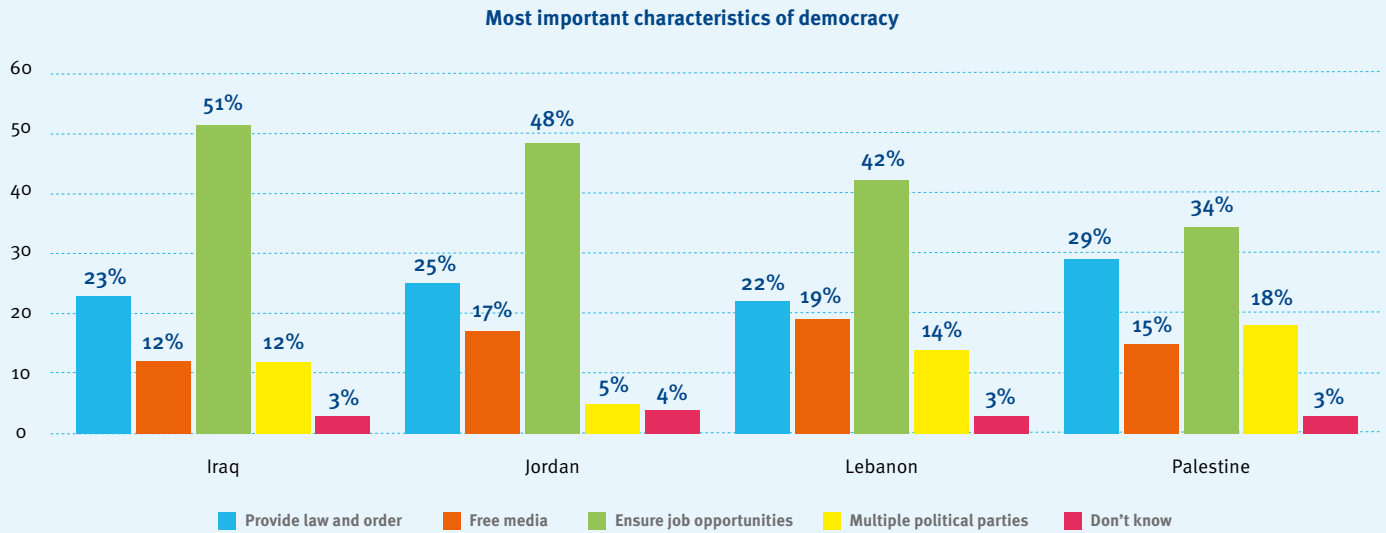|	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Bahrain	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Iran	Low	Low	Mid-range	Low	Low
Palestine	Low	Mid-range	N/A	Mid-range	Low
Qatar	Low	Mid-range	Low	Mid-range	Low
Saudi Arabia	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Syria	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
United Arab Emirates	Low	Mid-range	Low	Mid-range	Low
Yemen	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low

■ **Mid-range performance in 2019** (0.4–0.7)   ■ **Low** (< 0.4)

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 19 October 2020.

- **The Middle East experienced a sign of democratic erosion and deepening autocratization prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.** In 2019, Iraq suffered a significant decline in the GSoD aspect Effective Parliament, which eroded the already weak democracy. Yemen's 5 declines pushed the country, which ranks number 1 in the Fragile States Index (Fragile States Index 2020), into deepening autocratization. Interestingly, hybrid regimes did not experience any significant declines in the past 5 years and half of the authoritarian regimes had at least 1 significant decline between 2015 and 2019. Bahrain's declines were the only ones in the region linked to civic space.

- An increase in democratic breakdown is fuelled by citizens' frustration. In 2019, a year before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, people from 4 different countries in the region took to the streets to protest. In Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, dissatisfaction with the government reached new heights, with a growing economic crisis, unemployment and corruption pushing citizens to demand change. According to the Arab Barometer in 2018, in these 4 countries (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine) people did not trust their governments, with lack of trust in Iraq reaching 62 per cent (Arab Barometer 2018) and 85 per cent in Jordan (Arab Barometer 2018; Asharq Al-Awsat 2019; Information International 2020). Even though just Iraq and Lebanon are democracies, people in all 4 countries prefer democracy over any other kind of government—Iraq 55 per cent, Jordan (hybrid regime) 73 per cent, Lebanon 58 per cent and Palestine (authoritarian regime) 50 per cent (see Figure B2.3). People also thought that the main democratic characteristic of a government should be to ensure job opportunities (see Figure B2.2). With Iraq at 51 per cent, Jordan 48 per cent, Lebanon 42 per cent and Palestine 34 per cent, this came above the duty of the government to provide law and order, freedom of media or multiparty free elections (Arab Barometer 2018).
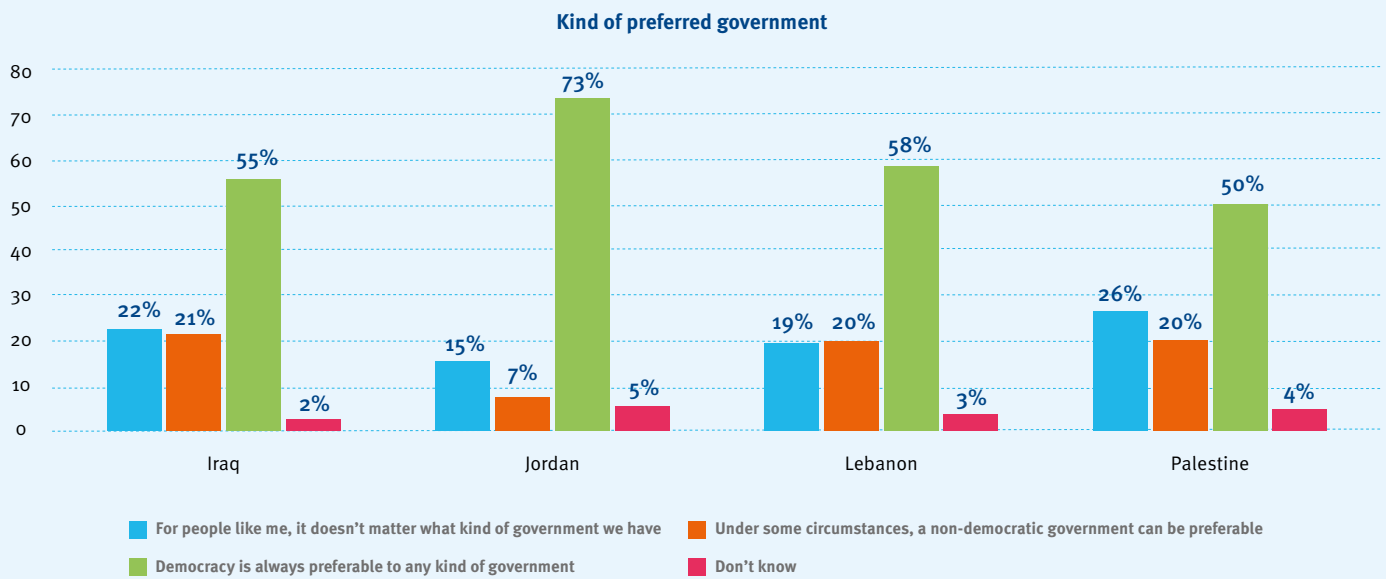
Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

FIGURE B2.2

Main characteristics of democracy in the Middle East

Most important characteristics of democracy

Source: AB Wave V – 2018, Arab Barometer, Data Analysis Tool, 2018, accessed 15 October 2020.

FIGURE B2.3

Main characteristics of democracy in the Middle East

Kind of preferred government

Source: AB Wave V – 2018, Arab Barometer, Data Analysis Tool, 2018, accessed 15 October 2020.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

3. Democracy in the Middle East during the COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges and opportunities

☹ **Challenges to democracy**

3.1. Challenges to democracy

With only 3 countries declaring a state of emergency, the region was far from following the global pattern where 59 per cent of countries declared a state of emergency
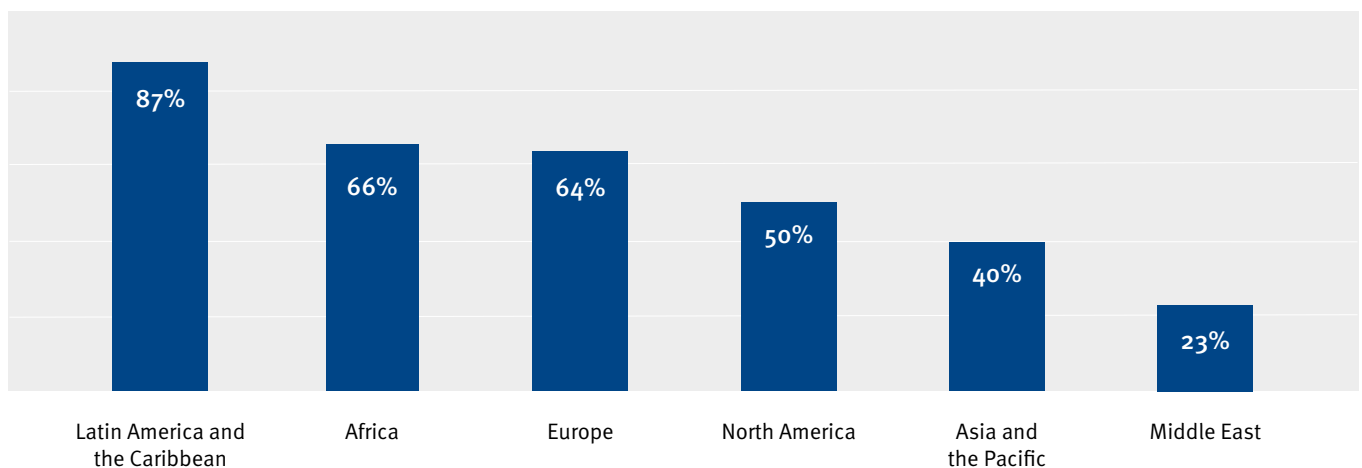
The Middle East is the region with the smallest share of countries, just 23 per cent, declaring a state of emergency since the COVID-19 pandemic started: 1 democracy (Lebanon), 1 hybrid regime (Jordan) and 1 authoritarian regime (Palestine). In Iraq, President Barham Salih and then caretaker Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi stated that on 15 March 2020 they had asked parliament to declare a state of emergency for 30 days (Saleh 2020). That same day, the parliament's speaker, Mohammed al-Habousi, made a statement saying that he had not received such a request (Iraqi Parliament 2020). No state of emergency was declared in the country.

With only 3 countries declaring a state of emergency, the region was far from following the global pattern where 59 per cent of countries declared a state of emergency (see Figure B3.1). By the beginning of August, one-third of countries worldwide had lifted their states of emergency. The same applied in the Middle East, where Lebanon lifted the state of emergency on 2 August. However, by September, Lebanon had declared another state of emergency (Al Jazeera 2020b), this time due to the explosion that rocked the capital (BBC News 2020d) and forced Lebanon into a deeper abyss. On 11 January 2021, a new state of health emergency was declared by the government in an attempt to contain the spread of the virus (Houssari 2021).

FIGURE B3.1

States of emergency by region, February to September 2020

| Latin America and the Caribbean	Africa	Europe	North America	Asia and the Pacific	Middle East
87%	66%	64%	50%	40%	23%

Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 19 October 2020.

All of the countries in the region have implemented at least 1 measure intended to curb the number of infections and deaths from COVID-19 that has been considered either concerning (a measure or action to curb COVID-19 deemed as undemocratic because it is disproportionate, unnecessary, illegal or indefinite) or a development to watch (a measure or action where a transgression of democratic standards may occur if enforced or maintained over time) from a democracy and human rights perspective (see Figure B3.2). Democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes in the

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

region all have a similar number of concerning developments or developments to watch, which could be interpreted as meaning that the regime type is not relevant when it comes to measures taken by governments in the region that put democracy and human rights at risk. That is not the case in other regions. For example, in Latin America non-democratic regimes (hybrid and authoritarian regimes) presented 3 times more concerning developments than democracies.

FIGURE B3.2

Number of concerning developments during the pandemic in the Middle East
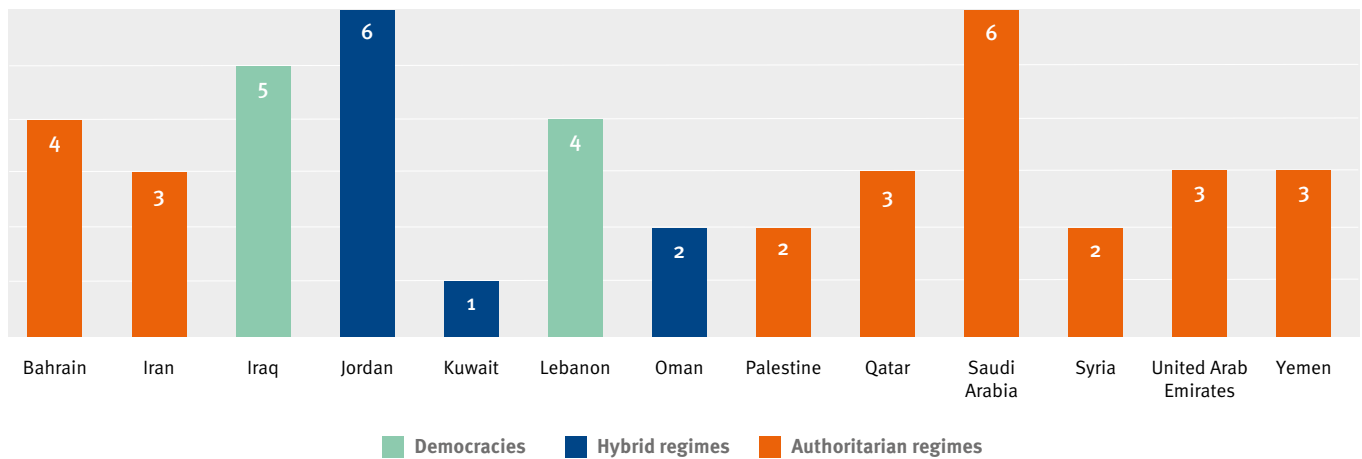
■ Democracies	■ Hybrid regimes	■ Authoritarian regimes

Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 19 October 2020.

Representative Government

3.1.1.   Representative Government

Challenge 1. Postponement of elections in a region where there are already few electoral exercises

Clean Elections

The majority of the countries in the Middle East do not hold clean elections. The few electoral exercises in place have limited sway over executive power. In 2019, almost 77 per cent of countries in the region scored below the global average on Clean Elections. Free political parties are rare in the Middle East. Some of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) monarchies—Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE—ban political parties, although what they refer to as 'societies' or 'blocs' function as such. Many countries that do allow political parties place severe restrictions on their operation or even existence, making access to political power in the region hardly free or equal. The space within which political parties can express themselves is also significantly limited by institutional factors, because in most countries in the region monarchs hold broad executive authority. The existence of free political parties, including both Islamist and non-religious parties, is an important step to enable democracy to potentially take root in the region.

In 2020, 4 elections were due to be held in the Middle East. Iran, Jordan and Kuwait had national elections scheduled and Oman had local elections. Iran, knowing that there were cases of COVID-19 in the country and that they were on the rise, held the first round of legislative elections on time on 21 February. The elections had the lowest turnout in a parliamentary election since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, with only 42.6 per cent of eligible voters casting their vote. The last election in 2016 had a turnout of 62 per cent (BBC News 2020a; Wintour 2020). The second round was

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

to be held on 22 April, but it was postponed and held on 11 September instead. As for Jordan, the government held the national elections on time as scheduled for 10 November with a turnout of 29.9 per cent, one of the lowest the country has seen. The tough measures imposed by authorities—up to year in prison if the voter tested positive for COVID-19 and still went to the polls—and the concerns because of the pandemic, might have been the reason for the low turnout (Reuters 2020). In Kuwait, the National Assembly election will be held on 5 December (Al Mulla 2020). And finally, Oman has postponed local elections with no clear date set for holding them.

Challenge 2. Economic realities shaping the strategies to eradicate the virus

Economic and health system capacity—rather than political regime type—have determined the pandemic strategy adopted by countries in the Middle East

The effectiveness in curbing COVID-19 in the region does not seem related to the type of political regime, but to economic development. The strategies adopted by the countries in the region to curb the spread of COVID-19 differ extensively. From the data gathered by the Global Monitor, it seems that the regime type is not the main factor that determines the strategy a government follows, but rather the economic situation of the country and the state of the health systems and technological infrastructure, which are for the most part poor. Strategies range from restrictions on association, assembly and movement (curfews, lockdowns, travel restrictions) to reinforcing health systems, widespread sanitation and tough hygiene rules. Extensive testing has been seen in the rich Gulf region with the UAE and Saudi Arabia leading the list in the Middle East (Our World in Data 2020). Contact tracing adopted by Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE—being compulsory in the first 2 (International IDEA 2020a)—poses great risks to data privacy and protection. Contact tracing measures might be entwined with surveillance and might also potentially not follow the international good practice guidelines regarding personal data storage; this data, in turn, could be used for political surveillance purposes rather than controlling the virus.

Some of the strategies followed by the governments are clearly related to the status of their economy, political sphere and health services prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. With corruption being endemic in the region, the institutions that have been affected the most in terms of under-investment are normally health related, especially in countries that have

BOX B3.1

Looking into a post-COVID-19 era in UAE: The restructuring of a government

After a series of virtual meetings between 10 and 12 May, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced that, as part of its strategy for dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, a broad government restructuring would take place. The new strategy aimed to produce business plans, redesign governmental structures and revise policies to ensure the short-, medium- and long-term development of the country's governmental work and, of course, to try to halt the social and economic challenges that the country will face after COVID-19 (UAE Government n.d.). Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum stated that the changes would be made because the country needed more 'agile, flexible and speedy government' and therefore they would change ministerial and government structures, as well as reduce the size of the government. Health, economy, food security, education, society and government would be the focus topics when formulating the new strategy for the country's post-COVID-19 era (Emirates News Agency 2020; UAE Government n.d.).

By July, the government announced the restructuring and the appointment of new ministers of economy and industry. The government planned to immediately merge half of the federal agencies and create new ministerial positions (Cherian and Nasrallah 2020). Within a year, they would achieve their priority targets for the country and in a 2-year period rescind 50 per cent of their service centres by converting them into digital platforms (Al Jazeera 2020a).

Powerful officials kept their positions after the overhaul, including the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who come from an influential ruling family in Abu Dhabi, the capital that controls the presidency of the country (Al Jazeera 2020a). This strategy might have come as a surprise, but in the last decades the country had demonstrated its intention to be at the forefront of many aspects of societal change, and this time, according to Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed, is no different. Tourism will now give space to medicine and education, while business and trade remain the main priorities in the country.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

been dealing with government illegitimacy and economic hardship. This might have resulted in governments taking strong measures, such as lockdowns, curfews, and bans on mass gatherings, travel, and religious and social activities, for longer periods of time, in an attempt to curb the infection rate of the virus. However, these measures have also had devastating effects on countries' economies, hence causing the increase in frustration of citizens, who have taken to the streets, in spite of the restrictions, to protest and demand change (England 2020). The clearest case of this is Lebanon, where, in spite of restrictions, protests have been taking place non-stop since 2019. After the terrible explosion in Beirut's port on 4 August, 3 hospitals were completely lost, the economy collapsed and, as public anger mounted and protests continued, the whole government resigned to try to appease its population (BBC News 2020c).

Daniel Habib (2020) makes a very interesting distinction between Lebanon, ranked at number 85 out of 120 in the Fragile States Index, and Qatar, which is ranked at 45 (Fragile States Index 2020). He argues that the responses to COVID-19 are quite different. The most fragile state, Lebanon, mobilized the army to enforce travel restrictions, border closures, lockdowns and curfews around the country with minimum investment. The country could not afford to implement community-wide testing due to the significant investment that would require. The measures have taken a toll on the economy of the country and have plummeted it into a deeper crisis than before the pandemic started. On the other hand, a not-so-fragile state like Qatar has the economic means and state capacity to home-deliver medication and initiate mass testing (including drive-through testing), and has made the effort to lessen stringent restrictions such as by inspecting a large number of work sites, which has allowed the country to have more open and diverse economic activity during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in less impact on its citizens. Habib goes as far as to argue that 'ultimately, policies can be categorised into 2 groups: those which impose restrictions and those which support health monitoring, hygiene, and the provision of testing resources' (Habib 2020).

Fundamental Rights

3.1.2. Fundamental Rights

Civil Liberties

Challenge 3. Curtailment of civil liberties, endemic in the Middle East, might get worse due to the COVID-19 pandemic

When the pandemic started, countries around the world started implementing states of emergency, curfews and lockdowns and restricting movement and association, in an effort to stop the virus from spreading. The Middle East was no stranger to this, but for years the adherence to civil liberties has been one of the weakest points for most regimes in the Middle East. The measures taken by the governments are supposed to reduce the civil liberties of their citizens for a restricted period of time, in order to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, but in this region such restrictions have proven to be in place for longer than in most countries. Civil liberties have been affected at different levels, with freedom of religion one of the most affected in this region.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

BOX B3.2

Civil Liberties in the Middle East

Freedom of Expression

Amnesty International have reported that several countries in the region have used COVID-19 as an excuse to suppress freedom of expression even further. In the statement, they affirmed that 'the GCC states have failed to justify how these measures are necessary and proportionate for the protection of public health' (Amnesty International 2020c).

Several countries in the region have used the argument of countering disinformation to criminalize journalists, media organizations and regular citizens who expressed a different narrative from the government. For example, in Saudi Arabia the government's official reports are the only ones that can be used. The Ministry of Health has asked the public to refer only to official sources and trust the government. A number of governments consider reporting that is critical of the official discourse to be misinformation and punish such actions with fines and hefty jail terms (Cheikh 2020).

Freedom of Association and Assembly

All countries in the region placed temporary restrictions on freedom of association and assembly. Measures ranged from banning all types of gatherings, to restricting the number of people that could get together, either indoors or outdoors. By September, restrictions remained in at least half the countries in the Middle East.

Freedom of Movement

All countries in the region took measures that affected freedom of movement. All of them initiated quite stringent lockdowns, in an effort to contain the spread of the virus and prevent a second wave. The lockdowns were national, regional and local. Countries including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Oman had lifted their lockdowns but then reinstated them (at least at a regional level) as the number of infections started to increase again. Travel restrictions were also enforced, with the majority of the international airports in the region closed. Bars, restaurants, parks and beaches were closed, but are starting to open again as the restrictions start to be eased. All countries in the region still have some kind of movement restrictions in place, most of them travel related (local or international).

Freedom of Religion

The Middle East and North America (2 countries) are the only regions where 100 per cent of their countries have placed restrictions on freedom of religion. In the Middle East, Freedom of Religion was the Civil Liberties aspect of democracy from the GSoD Indices that had the lowest score, at 0.29, way below the global score at 0.51. The restrictions ranged from closing religious sites (mostly mosques), to limiting the number of worshippers in the mosques or banning religious gatherings during Ramadan and Eid. These restrictions were harshly implemented with cases of arrests and large fines for those who went ahead with mosque attendance and public prayers (Middle East Online 2020; Hilton and Khalid 2020). In Kuwait, in the hopes of encouraging people to respect restrictions, a *fatwa* was issued authorizing Friday prayers at home (*Gulf Times* 2020). Some countries eased the restrictions or changed curfew hours to accommodate the holy month of Ramadan, but restrictions were mostly not lifted in spite of it being the biggest celebration in the Muslim world (International IDEA 2020a). Even Hajj this year was different. It was attended by approximately 10,000 pilgrims instead of the normal 2 million (BBC News 2020b) and Umrah also had restrictions that have been gradually lifted since September (An-Nablusi and Aliyev 2020). As of September, restrictions on freedom of religion remained in at least 7 countries.

Personal Integrity and Security

At least 10 countries have imposed restrictions regarding personal integrity and security. Iran, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon are some countries that have seen the police make arrests and use excessive force to enforce lockdowns and curfews. To prevent the spread of the virus, a number of countries in the region used drones, robots and apps to monitor the movement of citizens (Samaro and Fatafta 2020). Amnesty International revealed that Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar and the UAE had the most invasive COVID-19 tracing apps in the world (Amnesty International 2020b) and, at least in Bahrain and Qatar, they were compulsory (International IDEA 2020a).

The COVID-19 pandemic started to spread within prisons in the region. For example, it was reported that in the UAE, the unsanitary conditions and lack of medical care helped to spread the virus (MEMO 2020), while in Iran the government failed to control the virus in the prisons (Arab News 2020a). The 13 countries in the Middle East released prisoners in an attempt to curb the spread of COVID-19 in their facilities. Most of the detainees and prisoners that were granted liberty were being incarcerated for minor crimes. This showcased, in most cases, the poor conditions in which convicts live, and, for example, in the case of Syria, it exposed the horrific conditions they had suffered during years of detention (Enab Baladi 2020).

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Challenge 4. Migrants becoming more vulnerable

Social Rights
and Equality

Migrant workers and internally displaced people are especially vulnerable in the region during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, at least 11 of the 13 countries in the region have a concerning development or a development to watch from a democracy and human rights perspective regarding measures that affect these particular groups (International IDEA 2020a). Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among others, have reported that migrants in the GCC countries are at greater risk now than they were pre-pandemic times (Amnesty International 2020a; Human Rights Watch 2020). A significant proportion of the infections in the region have been in impoverished migrant and refugee communities. The UAE passed a law enforcing the quota on the number of migrant workers, which raises concern over the future of migrants, the impact on their economy and the uncertainty of their future, as most of them are unable to return to the country after being repatriated when the pandemic started (Amnesty International 2020a). Migrant workers are also discriminated against in Saudi Arabia. It has been reported that African migrants in the Kingdom have been held in detention centres to try to curb the number of COVID-19 infections. They have been kept in heinous conditions in these centres (Al Jazeera 2020c; Brown and Zelalem 2020; International IDEA 2020a). Human Rights Watch criticized in a report the conditions of migrant workers in Qatar. In response the government introduced some labour reforms in late August that are expected to help migrant workers faced by the hardship that the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed on them (Human Rights Watch n.d.; International IDEA 2020a). In Kuwait, the government's measures were particularly stringent—for example, qualified migrants (referred to as expatriates) were deported if they violated the curfew, and foreign employees were disproportionately laid off (International IDEA 2020a). This can be seen as a move from the government to further its agenda on the 'Kuwaitization' of the emirate by excluding non-citizens. The results of a survey conducted by the Centre of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies at Kuwait University was published in local media in August 2020. It found that 65 per cent of survey respondents believed that the outbreak of COVID-19 was to be attributed to migrant workers, and 76 per cent agreed that expatriates should be deported. That same study reported that 39 per cent of survey participants thought that expatriates should not be given free treatment for COVID-19 in government-run hospitals (HW News 2020; Shariff and Lacsina 2020; Kajal 2020). For a country where 3.4 million people, out of the total population of 4.8 million, are migrants, it is a very concerning development. In the UAE, while thousands of migrants had to call upon their embassies for help after loss of income due to the pandemic, Emiratis were provided with assistance in finding new jobs, subsidized housing, free healthcare, free higher education and generous pension plans (Al Jazeera 2020a).

Challenge 5. Closure of schools and the impact it might have on gender equality

Gender
Equality

All countries in the region closed schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Yemen required the closure of schools at all levels. Bahrain, Lebanon and Qatar closed schools at some levels, and Syria just recommended the closure of schools but did not enforce it (UNICEF 2020; International IDEA 2020a).

Some of the most common problems that girls and women were facing in the region before the COVID-19 pandemic were early marriage, domestic violence and general violence against women. Related to this, the economic impact of COVID-19 might, unfortunately, result in more girls not going back to school again, compared with boys, when they reopen, in a clear sign of COVID-19's gendered impact. With fewer girls attending school and the economic situation getting worse, the problems girls and women experience are likely to increase. The number of child marriages is

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

likely to increase, as many experience a dip in their family incomes and are forced to accept early marriage where people offer substantial sums of money to marry their children (Halawa 2020). In a region where domestic violence is already prevalent, its exponential rise is almost certain as the COVID-19 crisis evolves, with lockdowns, curfews and movement restrictions increasing stress levels and job insecurities. A 2017 study headed by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) highlighted WHO figures that estimate 35 per cent of women in the Middle East and North Africa region have experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives (UN ESCWA 2017). Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments across the region have reported an increase in calls to domestic violence hotlines since the beginning of the pandemic, as has happened around the world (Oxfam 2020). The Family Protection Department in Jordan shared that the increase in reports of domestic violence in the first month of lockdown was 33 per cent (OECD 2020). To make things worse, the Jordanian Women's Union has stated that, since the beginning of the pandemic, 3 clinics they work with, to help and support victims of domestic violence, have closed; and there has been a 70 per cent reduction of staff at women's shelters (Oxfam 2020).

However, countries are taking some measures related to gender equality during the pandemic. According to the OECD (2020), several governments are taking action to protect women during the pandemic. For example, Iraq has granted full paid leave to women working in the public sector. In Palestine, the government has pushed companies to allow women to take paid leave or have flexible working hours if they have children under 10 years old. In Lebanon, a new hotline for domestic violence has been created following an increase in the number of cases. This hotline is administered by the National Commission for Lebanese Women and the Internal Security Forces Directorate.

Checks on Government

Media Integrity

3.1.3. Checks on Government

### Challenge 6. Media integrity more at risk than ever

Since the pandemic began, the Middle East has been facing several restrictions when it comes to Media Integrity. In a region that has curtailed freedom of expression and media for years, it is not surprising that stringent measures have been taken by governments to silence the voices they do not want to hear. The Iranian Government closed the *Jahan-e Sanat* newspaper in early August, after it published the remarks of an expert on the national task force saying that the official death toll for COVID-19 could be 20 times higher than reported (International IDEA 2020a). Iraq suspended Reuters' licence in the country and imposed a fine of USD 20,800 at the beginning of the pandemic, when it reported that the Iraqi Government was under-reporting the number of confirmed infections. The suspension was lifted by April (International IDEA 2020a). Journalists have been arrested in Bahrain, Iran, Jordan and Palestine in government attempts to control what is reported about the pandemic (IPI 2020; Reporters Without Borders 2020a). Even though there is no evidence that the printing and distribution of newspapers correlates with the spread of COVID-19, some countries—such as Iran, Jordan, Oman and Yemen—suspended the production and distribution of newspapers, magazines and publications, claiming it as a precautionary measure to combat the spread of COVID-19 (International IDEA 2020a; Reporters Without Borders 2020b; Cheikh 2020). However, this appears to be an attempt to control and safeguard the official discourse of these countries regarding the pandemic, which in turn has curtailed even further the right of citizens to have access to information.

Media freedoms are an essential building block for strong and robust democracies. In order to hold governments accountable, citizens have found new spaces for expression, including social media networks. Protesters and journalists in the Middle East have used social media tools to raise issues on the public agenda and to expose human rights and other violations. Nevertheless, for journalists,

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

the Middle East continues to be one of the most dangerous regions in which to operate. The World Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders (2020c), which provides measurements for 180 countries, shows that 5 countries in the Middle East are among the 15 worst for journalists in the world: Bahrain (ranked 169th), Iran (173rd), Saudi Arabia (170th), Syria (174th) and Yemen (167th). Syria actually advanced 3 positions in the ranking between 2018 and 2019 but remained the same as of September 2020 (Reporters Without Borders 2020c). The Global Monitor shows that, regarding media integrity, most of the countries in the region have taken measures that should be monitored because if sustained will become concerning from a democracy and human rights perspective. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have both set high fines for people or media outlets showing information regarded as false, which raises concerns of how free the media is to report on COVID-19.

FIGURE B3.3

Developments to watch and concerning developments in Media Integrity
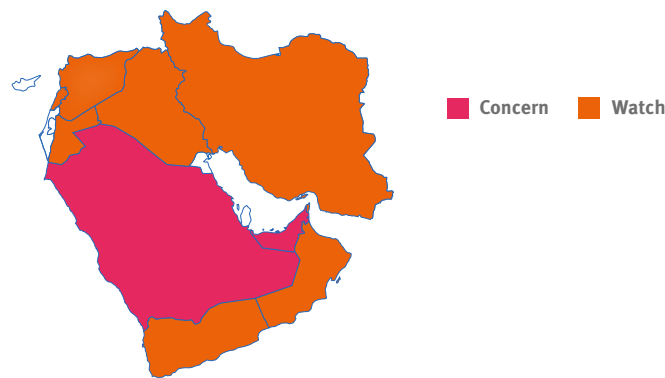
Source: International IDEA, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, accessed 19 October 2020.

The International Press Institute (IPI) listed a number of countries that have passed 'fake news' regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of the list of 17 countries, 2 were in the Middle East: Jordan and the UAE. In March 2020, King Abdullah from Jordan approved a 'defence law', which gave the prime minister maximum powers to 'deal firmly' with anyone spreading false news about COVID-19. The UAE announced in April 2020 that they would fine people up to EUR 5,500 for sharing information that contradicted official statements from the government (IPI 2020).

3.1.4. Impartial Administration

Impartial Administration

Challenge 7. Endemic corruption

Absence of Corruption

The topic of corruption has been at the centre of the debate in the Middle East for decades, as it is one of the central challenges in the region. According to the GSoD Indices, 9 countries' levels of corruption are above the world average. The region has 5 countries with high levels of corruption, scoring low for Absence of Corruption, while 8 have mid-range levels. While no country has low levels of corruption, the UAE has relatively high mid-range levels, scoring at 0.67 despite being one of the world's few persistent authoritarian regimes. Citizens regard government officials and members of parliament as being most corrupt (Arab Barometer 2018), and this claim is sustained by another study from Transparency International (2019), which states that 44 per cent of people in the Middle East and North Africa think that most or all members of parliament and government officials are involved in corruption. Politics and corruption are therefore closely interlinked, and

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

vested interests work to ensure that laws passed to fight corruption remain unenforced (Transparency International 2019). Figure B3.4 shows the Absence of Corruption subattribute performance in Middle East countries in 2019.

FIGURE B3.4

Performance in the Absence of Corruption subattribute, by country, 2019
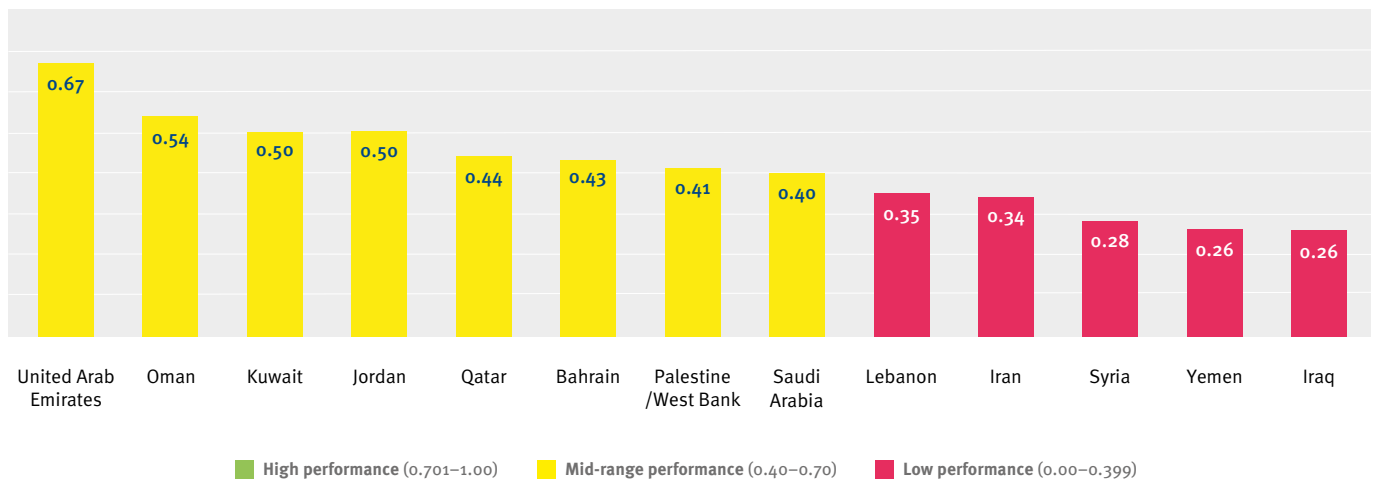
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, accessed 19 October 2020.

The COVID-19 crisis is testing governmental capacity and efficiency, as governments must implement health and safety measures in a very short timeframe. However, while many administrations have shown their capacity to mobilize and implement measures that are preventive, corruption can still cause problems. As Kinda Hattar, Transparency International's MENA Regional Advisor, puts it: 'We welcome the speed with which governments have responded, but unless anti-corruption measures are implemented during this crisis, corruption will cost lives and slow the economic recovery from the crisis' (Transparency International 2020).

3.1.5.   Participatory Engagement

Challenge 8. The survival of civil society organizations

Since 2015, the Middle East has seen a shrinking of civic space. In the last decade, the region has increasingly become more violent, resulting in the relocation or closure of a number of civil society organizations (CSOs). In addition, various laws have been passed that restrict CSO operations. According to Abdelaziz (2017), these laws have been especially harsh on CSOs focusing on human rights and democracy issues. Bahrain and Jordan provide telling examples. In Jordan, the Council of Ministers decided in 2017 that NGOs would be subject to the requirements of the 2007 Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Law. NGOs that fail to comply with these requirements now face suspension, monetary fines or even personal detention. In Bahrain, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior vet funding for CSOs from international sources (Abdelaziz 2017).

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Marginalized communities around the world have relied on CSOs for providing healthcare, food and shelter, especially for vulnerable groups such as children, women, refugees, migrants and internally displaced peoples. During the COVID-19 pandemic, their role has been maintained, but the likelihood of their survival in the region has diminished even further, because of declines in funding for such organizations (Arab News 2020b). For example, in Syria the relocation of some organizations to safer areas has left vulnerable groups lacking much-needed support: children are without school and/or protection, women are without psychological support, and even social entrepreneurship has been halted completely. In April, several CSOs came together as part of an initiative to help raise awareness of COVID-19, by promoting protective measures recommended by health organizations (such as respecting social distancing, hygiene regulations, wearing a mask), especially in displacement camps.

In Palestine, the Palestinian NGO Network, the Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council and the Independent Commission for Human Rights called on the international community to intervene in the Gaza Strip, because of fears that a humanitarian crisis was imminent and efforts were needed to prevent it.

☺ **Opportunities for democracy**
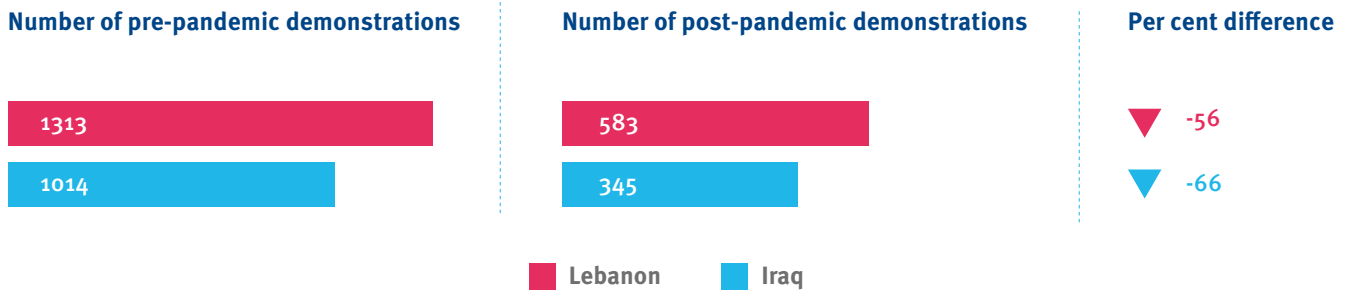
3.2. Opportunities for democracy

Opportunity 1. Another attempt to change the deteriorated governments in the region

Even though governments might have seen the pandemic as a 'golden opportunity' to deter protests against them, under the pretext of enforcing curfews, lockdowns and even social distancing, the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic did not hamper the protests in the region. Despite seeing a decrease in the number of demonstrations when the pandemic was declared, and strict lockdown and freedom of movement measures imposed by governments to help curb the number of infections, 7 countries (Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar and Syria) in the region continued or started to have demonstrations through the COVID-19 pandemic (International IDEA 2020a). In Iraq, in early March when public gatherings were banned, demonstrators refused to leave the streets. According to the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights, more than 600 protesters were killed by security forces and militias supported by the government, but the demonstrations continued (Solomon 2020). Protestors are not just objecting to how governments have approached the pandemic, but also pushing for a change in the ruling elite again, fighting for reform of corrupt political systems, an increase in employment and the improvement of state services (Middle East Institute 2020). This last point was highlighted by the pandemic, which has showed that, in a number of countries in the region, the lack of health services has been a constant for years.

7 countries in the region continued or started to have demonstrations through the COVID-19 pandemic

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

FIGURE B3.5

Political violence landscape before and after COVID-19 pandemic

Number of pre-pandemic demonstrations	Number of post-pandemic demonstrations	Per cent difference
1313	583	▼ -56
1014	345	▼ -66

■ Lebanon ■ Iraq

Source: Pavlik, M., 'A great and sudden change: the global political violence landscape before and after the COVID-19 pandemic', Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 2020, accessed 23 October 2020.

Once the restrictions on movement began to ease, demonstrations in Iraq and Lebanon started to re-emerge with more force. The discontent of citizens had not diminished and had even grown in some countries because of COVID-19's economic impact. However, as of July, no countries have seen protests back to pre-pandemic levels. It is thought that, if numbers of infections increase again, the number of protests will diminish, and states might keep taking advantage of the situation and continue to use the implementation of pandemic-related restrictions as a tool to stop the movements against them (Pavlik 2020).

4. Conclusion

Just 10 years ago, the Arab Uprisings showed the world the will of people in the region to change their democratic realities. People's aspirations and their fight for freedom could not tackle the governments, however, even if they succeeded in overthrowing dictators. Their resistance and continued calls for change did not translate into real democratic progress in the region. Nevertheless, even if their first attempt to change their deteriorated systems of government might have failed, their will for change remained indestructible.

When COVID-19 struck the Middle East, citizens and groups of non-citizens were confronting their governments again. Protests in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine had been taking place, in some cases since 2018. The socio-economic conditions in some countries had deteriorated and COVID-19 indicated that these would deteriorate even further. It also demonstrated that the deepening of an economic crisis would likely aggravate the already existing social and political turmoil.

The curtailment of civil liberties, especially freedom of expression and movement, is not something unusual in the region. The COVID-19 pandemic, through the enforcement of measures to curb the spread of the virus, has enabled governments to implement further curtailment of civil liberties, since the restrictions have proven to be longer in the Middle East than in most countries worldwide. This has also exacerbated the gruelling conditions that some minority populations, such as migrants or refugees, have been facing throughout the pandemic, when they have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic with poor or no access to healthcare and often the target of xenophobic attacks, amplified on social media. To aggravate the situation for these minorities, some of the CSOs in the region, which often provided the services that governments neglected to provide, have needed to relocate or even close because of the pandemic.

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

However, the protests in the region have brought a new light. People are not giving up on their pursuit of freedom and democracy, and that has been seen more than ever during the pandemic. Protesters are defying the COVID-19 restrictions and keep fighting for their voice to be heard: the pandemic has not decimated their will. This might be the new opportunity to reconfigure the region, and countries in the Middle East need to be able to grasp it.

Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
BICI	Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry
CSO	Civil society organization
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GSoD	Global State of Democracy
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IPI	International Press Institute
NGO	Non-governmental organization
TMC	Transitional Military Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WHO	World Health Organization

References

1. Africa

African Development Bank Group (AfDB Group), 'African Development Bank approves $27.33 million to ramp up the African Union's COVID-19 Response Initiative', press release, 9 September 2020, <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/african-development-bank-approves-2733-million-ramp-african-unions-covid-19-response-initiative-37795>, accessed 9 October 2020

Afrobarometer, Afrobarometer Survey 2016–2018, <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online>, accessed 21 October 2020

Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 'Sudan soldier kills two on "speeding rickshaw" during coronavirus curfew', 17 May 2020, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/5/17/sudan-soldier-kills-two-on-speeding-rickshaw>, accessed 24 September 2020

Bagnetto, L., 'Press freedom violations throughout Africa linked to Covid-19 coverage', Radio France International (RFI), 14 April 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20200414-press-freedom-violations-throughout-african-continent-linked-to-covid-19-coverage>, accessed 22 September 2020

BBC News, 'Coronavirus in Sudan exposes new leaders', 25 May 2020a, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52735520>, accessed 24 September 2020

—, 'Coronavirus in South Africa: Misuse of Covid-19 funds "frightening"', 2 September 2020b, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54000930>, accessed 13 October 2020

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Brannen, S. J., Haig, C. S. and Schmidt, K., *The Age of Mass Protests: Understanding an Escalating Global Trend* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2020), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/age-mass-protests-understanding-escalating-global-trend>, accessed 9 September 2020

Burke, J., 'Opposition leaders allege fraud in Tanzanian elections', *The Guardian*, 29 October 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/29/opposition-leaders-allege-in-tanzanian-elections>, accessed 3 November 2020

Cheeseman, N., *A Changing of the Guards or A Change of Systems? Regional Report Sub-Saharan Africa* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020), <https://dx.doi.org/10.11586/2020048>

Chuku, C., Mukasa, A. and Yenice, Y., 'Putting women and girls' safety first in Africa's response to COVID-19', Brookings, 8 May 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/05/08/putting-women-and-girls-safety-first-in-africas-response-to-covid-19>, accessed 19 November 2020

Dahir, A., 'Tanzania's president says country is virus free. Others warn of disaster', *The New York Times*, 4 August 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/04/world/africa/tanzanias-coronavirus-president.html>, accessed 22 September 2020

De Bruijne, K., 'Authoritarianism is Guinea's First Coronavirus Survivor', Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 2020, <https://acleddata.com/2020/05/05/authoritarianism-is-guineas-first-coronavirus-survivor>, accessed 22 September 2020

Fearon, J. D. and Laitin, D., 'Ethnicity, insurgency and civil war', *The American Political Science Review*, 97/1 (2003), pp. 75–90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3118222>, accessed 22 September 2020

France 24, 'Sudan govt, rebel groups sign landmark peace deal', 3 October 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20201003-sudan-govt-rebel-groups-sign-landmark-peace-deal>, accessed 9 October 2020

Global Voices, 'Amid COVID-19 pandemic in Niger, government violates whistleblowers' freedom of speech', 12 May 2020 <https://globalvoices.org/2020/05/12/amid-covid-19-pandemic-in-niger-government-violates-whistleblowers-freedom-of-speech/>, accessed 19 November 2020

Hamel, K., Tong, B. and Hofer, M., 'Poverty in Africa is now falling—but not fast enough', Brookings, 28 March 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2019/03/28/poverty-in-africa-is-now-falling-but-not-fast-enough>, accessed 22 September 2020

Hegre, H. et al., 'The Conflict Trap', paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting: The Politics of Rights, Seattle, 11 October 2011

Humphreys, M. and Weinstein, J. M., 'Who fights? The determinants of participation in civil war', *The American Journal of Political Science*, 52/2 (2008), pp. 436–55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2008.00322.x>

International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy 2019. Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2019.31>

—, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/#/indices/world-map>, accessed 19 October 2020

—, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/#/indices/world-map>, accessed 19 October 2020

—, *The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Constitutionalism and the Rule of Law in French- and Portuguese-Speaking Countries of Central and West Africa*, Analytical report, 23 April 2020 (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2020c), <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2020.33>

—, *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Constitutionalism and the Rule of Law in East Africa*, Analytical report, Webinar, 11 June 2020 (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2020d), <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2020.45>

—, *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Constitutionalism and the Rule of Law in North African Countries*, Analytical report, Webinar, 30 June 2020 (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2020e), <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2020.42>

—, *Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights: Methodology and Codebook* (Stockholm: International IDEA, [n.d.]), <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/COVID19_Global-Monitor-Methodology-and-Codebook.pdf>, accessed 19 October 2020

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 'Country compilation of parliamentary responses to the pandemic', 29 April 2020, <https://www.ipu.org/country-compilation-parliamentary-responses-pandemic>, accessed 23 September 2020

Jeune Afrique, 'Tchad: nouveau report des élections législatives initialement prévues en 2015' [Chad: new postponement of legislative elections initially scheduled for 2015], 10 June 2020, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/998131/politique/tchad-nouveau-report-les-elections-legislatives-initialement-prevues-en-2015>, accessed 21 September 2020

Jordaan, N., 'More MPs test positive for Covid-19', *The Times LIVE*, 22 July 2020, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2020-07-22-more-mps-test-positive-for-covid-19/>, accessed 23 September 2020

Kabale, N. and Owino, S., 'Covid-19: Relief as testing, quarantine in public facilities now free', *The Daily Nation*, 13 May 2020, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/covid-19-relief-as-testing-quarantine-in-public-facilities-now-free-289288>, accessed 24 September 2020

Kairiza, T., 'Drax scam: New indictment on Mnangagwa's regime', *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 5 June 2020, <https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2020/06/05/drax-scam-new-indictment-on-mnangagwas-regime/>, accessed 23 September 2020

The Lancet, 'Editorial: The COVID-19 infodemic', *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, 20/8 (2020), p. 875, <https://doi.org/10.1016/S1473-3099(20)30565-X>

Lührmann, A. et al., 'State of the world 2017: Autocratization and exclusion?', *Democratization*, 25/8 (2018), pp. 1321–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1479693>

Masters, R., 'COVID-19 in Africa: Right to information another casualty with spike in attacks on journalists', IFEX, 17 April 2020, <https://ifex.org/covid-19-in-africa-right-to-information-another-casualty-with-spike-in-attacks-on-journalists>, accessed 23 September 2020

Mavedzenge, J., 'A breath of fresh air as the Supreme Court of Malawi breaks rank with its own precedent and peers in Southern Africa', *OpinioJuris*, 25 May 2020, <http://opiniojuris.org/2020/05/25/a-breath-of-fresh-air-as-the-supreme-court-of-malawi-breaks-rank-with-its-own-precedence-and-peers-in-southern-africa-part-1/>, accessed 18 September 2020

Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), 'COVID-19 Environmental Task Force beat journalists', 15 April 2020, <https://www.mfwa.org/country-highlights/covid-19-environmental-task-force-beat-journalists>, accessed 24 September 2020

National Electoral Commission, Tanzania, 'Preparations for the 2020 General Elections', June 2020, <https://www.nec.go.tz/uploads/documents/en/1602348888-NEC%20Eng%20Newsletter%20-%20ENGLISH.pdf>, accessed 2 November 2020

Ntibinyane, N., 'Journalism in jeopardy: Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on newspapers', *Africa Portal*, 29 May 2020, <https://www.africaportal.org/features/saving-journalism-mitigating-impact-covid-19-newspapers>, accessed 23 September 2020

Radio France International (RFI), 'Cote d'Ivoire elections: Ouattara wins controversial 3rd term' 3 November 2020 <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20201103-cote-d-ivoire-elections-alassane-ouattara-wins-controversial-3rd-term-opposition-violence-ivory-coast-boycott>, accessed 4 November 2020

Reporters Without Borders, 'DRC – Congolese police run down reporter covering coronavirus lockdown', 26 March 2020a, <https://rsf.org/en/news/drc-congolese-police-run-down-reporter-covering-coronavirus-lockdown>, accessed 22 September 2020

—, 'Coronavirus infects press freedom in Africa', 29 March 2020b, <https://rsf.org/en/news/coronavirus-infects-press-freedom-africa>, accessed 22 September 2020

—, 'Covid-19 lockdown forces Liberia's newspapers to suspend printing', 15 April 2020c, <https://rsf.org/en/news/covid-19-lockdown-forces-liberias-newspapers-suspend-printing>, accessed 22 September 2020

Reuters, 'Fifteen Zambian lawmakers, 11 parliamentary staff contract COVID-19', 24 July 2020, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-zambia/fifteen-zambian-lawmakers-11-parliamentary-staff-contract-covid-19-idUSKCN24P1LU>, accessed 19 October 2020

Roberton, T. et al., 'Early estimates of the indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal and child mortality in low-income and middle-income countries: a modelling study', *The Lancet Global Health*, 8/7 (2020), pp. 901–08, <https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30229-1>

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Taye, B., *Targeted, Cut Off, and Left in the Dark: The #KeepItOn report on internet shutdowns in 2019* (New York: Access Now, 2020), <https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2020/02/KeepItOn-2019-report-1.pdf> accessed 24 September 2020

Transparency International, 'Police corruption is becoming a pandemic too', 23 September 2020, <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/police-corruption-is-becoming-a-pandemic-too?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=alac-secretariat#>, accessed 24 September 2020

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2020, <http://data.uis.unesco.org>, accessed 22 September 2020

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), *From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19* (New York: UN Women, 2020), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19>, accessed 12 October 2020

VOA News, 'Botswana president, lawmakers end quarantine after testing negative for coronavirus', 24 April 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/botswana-president-lawmakers-end-quarantine-after-testing-negative-coronavirus>, accessed 24 September 2020

World Data Lab, 'World Poverty Clock' 5 November 2020, <https://worldpoverty.io/map>, accessed 5 November 2020

World Health Organization (WHO), 'WHO concerned over COVID-19 impact on women, girls in Africa', 18 June 2020, <https://www.afro.who.int/news/who-concerned-over-covid-19-impact-women-girls-africa>, accessed 22 September 2020

2. Middle East

Abdelaziz, M., 'The hard reality of civil society in the Arab world', Washington Institute, 11 December 2017, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-hard-reality-of-civil-society-in-the-arab-world>, accessed 20 May 2019

Akour, O., 'New Jordan PM says he will cancel tax bill', AP News, 7 June 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/0f83a9b88c514798a9b46aaca0b96e08>, accessed 15 October 2020

Al Jazeera, 'Jordan PM Hani al-Mulki resigns amid mass protests over tax bill', 4 June 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/04/jordan-pm-hani-al-mulki-resigns-amid-mass-protests-over-tax-bill>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Iraq's protests: All you need to know in 500 words', 4 October 2019a, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/04/iraqs-protests-all-you-need-to-know-in-500-words>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Protests erupt in Lebanon over plans to impose new taxes', 17 October 2019b, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/17/protests-erupt-in-lebanon-over-plans-to-impose-new-taxes>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Lebanon Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigns after mass protests', 29 October 2019c, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/29/lebanon-prime-minister-saad-hariri-resigns-after-mass-protests>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'UAE orders government shake-up as coronavirus hits economy', 5 July 2020a, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/07/05/uae-orders-government-shake-up-as-coronavirus-hits-economy/?gb=true>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Lebanon gov't declares emergency in Beirut after deadly explosion', 5 August 2020b, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/5/lebanon-govt-declares-emergency-in-beirut-after-deadly-explosion>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Telegraph: International condemnation of Saudi Arabia after the disclosure of horrific violations in immigration detention centres', 3 September 2020c, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/humanrights/2020/9/3/%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%BA%B1%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A5%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%-D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82>, accessed 10 December 2020

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

**The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS**

Al Mulla, Y., 'Explainer: Everything you need to know about the 2020 Kuwaiti parliamentary elections', Gulf News, 5 November 2020, <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/kuwait/explainer-everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-2020-kuwaiti-parliamentary-elections-1.75076105>, accessed 2 December 2020

Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), *Shattering the Façade: A Report on Bahrain's Implementation of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) Recommendations Four Years On* (Washington, DC: ADHRB, 2015), <https://www.adhrb.org/2015/11/shattering-the-facade-a-report-on-bahrains-implementation-of-the-bahrain-independent-commission-of-inquiry-bici-four-years-on/>, accessed 19 August 2019

Amnesty International, 'COVID-19 makes Gulf countries' abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore', 30 April 2020a, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/04/covid19-makes-gulf-countries-abuse-of-migrant-workers-impossible-to-ignore>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Bahrain, Kuwait and Norway contact tracing apps among most dangerous for privacy', 16 June 2020b, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/bahrain-kuwait-norway-contact-tracing-apps-danger-for-privacy>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'GCC: Flawed laws exploited in pandemic to further crush freedom of expression', 15 October 2020c, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/10/gcc-flawed-laws-exploited-in-pandemic-to-further-crush-freedom-of-expression/>, accessed 11 November 2020

An-Nablusi, I. and Aliyev, J., 'Saudi Arabia to gradually lift ban on performing Umrah', Anadolu Agency, 23 September 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/saudi-arabia-to-gradually-lift-ban-on-performing-umrah/1982462>, accessed 30 December 2020

Arab Barometer, Data Analysis Tool, 2018, <https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-analysis-tool>, accessed 15 October 2020

Arab News, 'Iran failing to control coronavirus spread in prisons: Rights group', 2 September 2020a, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1728521/middle-east>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Civil society playing essential role in world's COVID-19 recovery', 15 September 2020b, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1735021>, accessed 15 October 2020

Asharq Al-Awsat, '85% of Lebanese don't trust their politicians', 22 February 2019, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/1603436/85-lebanese-don%E2%80%99t-trust-their-politicians>, accessed 15 October 2020

Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry* (Manama: BICI, December 2011), <http://www.bici.org.bh/BICIreportEN.pdf>, accessed 19 August 2019

BBC News, 'Iran elections: Record low turnout but hardliners set for win', 23 February 2020a, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51605942>, accessed 11 November 2020

—, 'Coronavirus: Scaled back Hajj pilgrimage begins in Saudi Arabia', 26 July 2020b, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53571886>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Beirut explosion: Lebanon's government resigns as public anger mounts', 10 August 2020c, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53722909>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Beirut explosion: What we know so far', 11 August 2020d, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53668493>, accessed 15 October 2020

BBC Newshour, 'Jordan tax law to be scrapped after protests', 7 June 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p069d9k5>, accessed 11 November 2020

Brown, W. and Zelalem, Z., 'International condemnation rains down on Saudi Arabia after Telegraph investigation into hellish detention centres', *The Telegraph*, 1 September 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/international-condemnation-rains-saudi-arabia-telegraph-investigation>, accessed 15 October 2020

Cheikh, S. B., 'Covid-19 exacerbates freedom of expression pressures in Middle East and North Africa', Ethical Journalism Network, 28 April 2020, <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/covid-19-exacerbates-freedom-of-expression-pressures-in-middle-east-and-north-africa>, accessed 15 October 2020

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Cherian, D. and Nasrallah, T., 'Sheikh Mohammed announces new UAE government structure', *Gulf News*, 5 July 2020, <https://gulfnews.com/uae/government/sheikh-mohammed-announces-new-uae-government-structure-1.1593922172348>, accessed 15 October 2020

Emirates News Agency, 'UAE to review government structure, build post coronavirus economy', 13 May 2020, <https://wam.ae/en/details/1395302842717>, accessed 15 October 2020

Enab Baladi, 'Syrian regime releases dozens of detainees, leaving many more to unknown fate', 28 April 2020, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2020/04/syrian-regime-releases-dozens-of-detainees-leaving-many-more-to-unknown-fate>, accessed 15 October 2020

England, A., 'Coronavirus deepens frustrations of young in Middle East', *Financial Times*, 27 April 2020, <http://www.ft.com/content/6c346c85-8d01-4242-81f5-314a7db0958f>, accessed 15 October 2020

Fragile States Index, Global Data, 2020, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/data>, accessed 15 October 2020

Gulf Times, 'Kuwait shuts mosques over coronavirus', 13 March 2020, <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/658326/Kuwait-shuts-mosques-over-coronavirus>, accessed 15 October 2020

Habib, D., 'COVID-19 in the Middle East', Policy Forum, Asia & The Pacific Policy Society, 14 August 2020, <https://www.policyforum.net/covid-19-in-the-middle-east>, accessed 15 October 2020

Haines-Young, J., 'Lebanon: President Michel Aoun accepts Saad Hariri's resignation', *The National*, 30 October 2019, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/lebanon-president-michel-aoun-accepts-saad-hariri-s-resignation-1.930749>, accessed 15 October 2020

Halawa, H., 'The gendered impact of COVID-19 in the Middle East', Middle East Institute, 11 June 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/gendered-impact-covid-19-middle-east>, accessed 15 October 2020

Hilton, T. and Khalid, T., 'Coronavirus in Kuwait: Three years in jail, 10,000 KD fine for breaching curfew', Al Arabiya, 22 March 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2020/03/22/Coronavirus-in-Kuwait-Three-years-in-jail-10-000-KD-fine-for-breaching-curfew>, accessed 15 October 2020

Houssari, N., 'Lebanon declares state of emergency as military enforces lockdown', Arab News, 11 January 2021, <https://arab.news/zvuh5>, accessed 12 January 2021

Human Rights Watch, 'Qatar: Events of 2019', [n.d.], <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/qatar>, accessed 11 November 2020

—, 'Qatar: Protect Migrant Workers During Pandemic', 2 April 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/02/qatar-protect-migrant-workers-during-pandemic>, accessed 15 October 2020

HW News, 'Protecting migrant workers in Kuwait: a Resident Coordinator's blog', 8 July 2020, <https://hwnews.in/united-nations/protecting-migrant-workers-in-kuwait-a-resident-coordinators-blog/140573>, accessed 15 October 2020

Information International, Opinion Polls & Surveys, 2020, <https://information-international.com/page/42/opinion-polls-surveys>, accessed 15 October 2020

International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy 2019. Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2019.31>

—, Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, 2020a, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/#/indices/world-map>, accessed 19 October 2020

—, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, 2020b, <https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/#/indices/world-map>, accessed 19 October 2020

—, *Global Monitor of COVID-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights: Methodology and Codebook* (Stockholm: International IDEA, [n.d.]), <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/COVID19_Global-Monitor-Methodology-and-Codebook.pdf>, accessed 19 October 2020

International Press Institute (IPI), 'COVID-19: Number of media freedom violations by region', 2020, <https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring>, accessed 15 October 2020

Iraqi Parliament, 'Notice', 15 March 2020, <https://en.parliament.iq/2020/03/15/notice>, accessed 15 October 2020

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Kajal, K., 'Kuwaiti dream of cutting foreign workers threatens Indians most', Nikkei Asia, 13 August 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Kuwaiti-dream-of-cutting-foreign-workers-threatens-Indians-most>, accessed 15 October 2020

Khaleej Times, 'New powers to Council of Oman welcomed', 19 March 2011, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/region/new-powers-to-council-of-oman-welcomed>, accessed 19 August 2019

Knell, Y., 'Gaza economic protests expose cracks in Hamas's rule', BBC News, 18 March 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47616809>, accessed 15 October 2020

Middle East Institute, 'Protest movements in Algeria, Iraq, and Lebanon during COVID-19', Middle East Focus podcast, 15 October 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/multimedia/podcast/protest-movements-algeria-iraq-and-lebanon-during-covid-19>, accessed 15 October 2020

Middle East Monitor (MEMO), 'Covid-19 continues to spread in UAE prisons', 22 June 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200622-covid-19-continues-to-spread-in-uae-prisons>, accessed 15 October 2020

Middle East Online, 'Coronavirus curfew enforced in several MENA countries', 24 March 2020, <https://middle-east-online.com/en/coronavirus-curfew-enforced-several-mena-countries>, accessed 15 October 2020

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), COVID-19 Crisis in the MENA Region: Impact on Gender Equality and Policy Responses (Washington, DC: OECD, 2020), <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-crisis-in-the-mena-region-impact-on-gender-equality-and-policy-responses-ee4cd4f4/>, accessed 15 October 2020

Our World in Data, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Testing, 2020, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-testing>, accessed 15 October 2020

Oxfam, 'Life under lockdown: Part I. Covid-19 curfew in Jordan: How an Oxfam women's rights partner continues to help women in harm's way', Jordan Diaries, 30 March 2020, <https://oxfaminjordan.exposure.co/life-under-lockdown-part-i?source=share-oxfaminjordan>, accessed 15 October 2020

Pavlik, M., 'A great and sudden change: the global political violence landscape before and after the COVID-19 pandemic', Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 2020, <https://acleddata.com/2020/08/04/a-great-and-sudden-change-the-global-political-violence-landscape-before-and-after-the-covid-19-pandemic>, accessed 23 October 2020

Politico, 'Iraqi PM formally submits resignation amid more violence', 29 November 2019, <https://www.politico.com/news/2019/11/29/iraq-prime-minister-resign-worsening-crisis-074396>, accessed 15 October 2020

PWC, 'Jordan: Proposed amendments to the Income Tax Law', 2018, <https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/services/tax/me-tax-legal-news/2018/jordan-proposed-amendments-to-the-income-tax-law.html>, accessed 15 October 2020

Report Syndication, 'Lebanon protesters found strength in unity, ditched sectarianism', 27 October 2019, <https://reportsyndication.news.blog/2019/10/27/lebanon-protesters-find-strength-in-unity-ditched-sectarianism>, accessed 15 October 2020

Reporters Without Borders, #Tracker_19. Live updates of Covid-19 impacts of press freedom, 2020a, <https://rsf.org/en/tracker19-Coronavirus-Covid19>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Middle East governments clamp down on coronavirus coverage', 27 March 2020b, <https://rsf.org/en/news/middle-east-governments-clamp-down-coronavirus-coverage>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 2020 World Press Freedom Index, 2020c, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>, accessed 29 October 2020

Reuters, 'Jordan king asks Omar al-Razzaz to form new government: ministerial source', Egypt Independent, 4 June 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-jordan-protests-razzaz/jordan-king-asks-omar-al-razzaz-to-form-new-government-ministerial-source-idUSKCN1J01G3>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Poor turnout in Jordan elections reflects limits of kingdom's democracy', 11 November 2020, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/poor-turnout-in-jordan-elections-reflects-limits-of-kingdoms-democracy/>, accessed 2 December 2020

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Rubin, A. J., 'Iraq in worst political crisis in years as death toll mounts from protests', *The New York Times*, 21 December 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/21/world/middleeast/Iraq-protests-Iran.html>, accessed 15 October 2020

Saleh, I., 'Iraqi president seeks state of emergency over COVID-19', Anadolu Agency, 16 March 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/health/iraqi-president-seeks-state-of-emergency-over-covid-19/1767264>, accessed 15 October 2020

Samaro, D. and Fatafta, M., 'COVID-19 contact-tracing apps in MENA: a privacy nightmare', Access Now, 18 June 2020, <https://www.accessnow.org/covid-19-contact-tracing-apps-in-mena-a-privacy-nightmare>, accessed 15 October 2020

Shariff, O. and Lacsina, N., 'COVID-19: Expats in Kuwait blamed for spreading deadly coronavirus', *Gulf News*, 3 August 2020, <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/kuwait/covid-19-expats-in-kuwait-blamed-for-spreading-deadly-coronavirus-1.73433313>, accessed 15 October 2020

Solomon, H., 'The Impact of Covid-19 on the Middle East and North Africa', Jerusalem Issue Briefs Vol. 20, No. 6, 12 April 2020 (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs), <https://jcpa.org/article/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>, accessed 15 October 2020

Sowell, K. H., 'Slowing Jordan's slide into debt', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 22 March 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/75865>, accessed 15 October 2020

The Telegraph, 'Jordanian King sacks his cabinet to stem protest', 1 July 2011a, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/jordan/8296137/Jordanian-King-sacks-his-cabinet-to-stem-protests.html>, accessed 20 August 2019

—, 'Jordan's King Abdullah II names prime minister to push through reforms', 17 October 2011b, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/jordan/8832315/Jordans-King-Abdullah-II-names-prime-minister-to-push-through-reforms.html>, accessed 20 August 2019

Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer: Middle East & North Africa 2019. Citizens' Views and Experiences of Corruption* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2019), <https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2019_GCB_MENA_Report_EN.pdf>, accessed 15 October 2020

—, 'Corruption risks in Middle East and North Africa threaten national responses to COVID-19', 9 April 2020, <https://www.transparency.org/en/press/corruption-risks-in-middle-east-and-north-africa-threaten-national-responses-to-covid-19#>, accessed 15 October 2020

United Arab Emirates (UAE) Government, 'The UAE's post COVID-19 strategy', [n.d.], <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/justice-safety-and-the-law/handling-the-covid-19-outbreak/the-uaes-post-covid-19-strategy>, accessed 15 October 2020

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Dashboard on Government Responses to COVID-19 and the Affected Populations, August 2020, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/government-responses-due-to-covid-19-affected-populations>, accessed 15 October 2020

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Status of Arab Women Report 2017: Violence Against Women: What Is At Stake?* (ECSWA, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), 2017), <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/arab-women-report-violence-against-women-english.pdf>, accessed 15 October 2020

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), 'Press briefing note on Lebanon', 25 October 2019, <https://ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25209&LangID=E>, accessed 15 October 2020

Wintour, P., 'Iran elections: conservatives on brink of landslide victory', *The Guardian*, 22 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/22/iran-elections-conservatives-heading-for-large-majority>, accessed 11 November 2020

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Africa and the Middle East Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Special Brief, January 2021

The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

Acknowledgements

About this series

In 2018, International IDEA launched the new *GSoD In Focus* series. These short updates apply the GSoD Indices data to current issues, providing evidence-based analysis and insights into the contemporary democracy debate. This is a special issue in this series, focused on democracy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

About International IDEA

Founded in 1995, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. The Institute is the only intergovernmental organization with a global mandate solely focused on democracy and elections, and is committed to be a global agenda-setter in the democracy-building field. With 33 Member States from all continents, International IDEA supports the development of stronger democratic institutions and processes; and fosters sustainable, effective and legitimate democracy through the provision of comparative knowledge resources, dialogues and partnerships at the global, regional and country levels.

The Global State of Democracy Initiative is headed by the Democracy Assessment and Political Analysis (DAPA) Unit. For queries regarding the GSoD Initiative or the GSoD Indices, please contact the DAPA team and GSoD Helpdesk at GSoD.Indices@idea.int.

Design and layout by Vision Communications based on an original design concept by Phoenix Design.