



مؤشر المشاركة السياسية
في دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي 2024
Political Participation Index
in the GCC States 2024





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The Gulf House for Studies and Publishing is a think tank based in London, working as a non-profit institution for research and publishing. It is also concerned with the production and publication of monitoring and analytical studies as well as strategic and in-depth studies on policies and issues related to the Gulf States and the regional neighbourhood

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01

Introduction

After 5 years of monitoring and analyzing the state of political participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, the fifth edition (2024) of the GCC Political Participation Index (GCCPPI) presents the most important variables and developments in the six GCC states: Kingdom of Bahrain, State of Kuwait, Sultanate of Oman, State of Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

This index provides an annual overview and scientific monitoring of the degree of political, social and cultural participation in these states. It is unique in being the first specialized research publication concerned with measuring the degree of political participation in the GCC states. It is characterized by the fact that it takes into consideration all conceptual contexts (academic, international conventions and agreements, knowledge and practical experiences), in addition to the peculiarities, emergence conditions and structure of governance systems in the GCC states.

This fifth edition provides an assessment of the transformation paths in the performance of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states towards enabling or restricting their citizens from the ability to participate in tangible politics, and explains the apparent causes of improvement or decline of these states in their constitutional articles, local laws, institutional structures, declared strategies and executive exercises, as well as the interaction of local communities with these changes during the past five years.

It is worth noting that the Gulf House for Studies and Publishing, being the entity that supervised the design and implementation of this index study, is a think tank based in London. It is a non-profit research institution and publishing house concerned with the production and publication of monitoring and analytical studies, as well as strategic and in-depth studies on policies and issues related to the Gulf States and their regional neighbourhood.

As the issue of "Political Participation" is one of the most essential components of the achievement of a democratic state, the existence of this index represents an urgent necessity for governments and civil society organisations in the Gulf States, as well as for the relevant international bodies and research institutions.

The index attempts to answer a key question related to the extent and proportion of the GCC states' political engagement of their citizens, and the consequent desire and ability of citizens themselves (individuals and groups) to participate in decision-making and

influence state policies, legislation, and all aspects of political and social life in their states.

This index takes advantage of regional and international indices, especially with regard to some approved scales. However, it differs in several ways: its 'specific' scope by focusing on a more precise and specific topic, namely "political participation", taking into account the nature and specificity of the region covered in this study (the Gulf Cooperation Council states).

This specificity has enabled the researchers to formulate the index benchmarks with the desired level of accuracy and appropriateness.

The index is based on describing and determining the nature of possible political participation in the research countries based on the political history of these countries, hereditary systems of governance, the nature of their communities and local cultures.

While there is a steady conceptual consensus that political participation is an inherent component of the achievement of a modern and democratic state, it is, in practice, the 'mechanism' that guarantees individuals the realization of their 'aspirations' and the ability to influence political, economic, social and cultural decision-making in order to achieve 'development' and "public welfare".

Despite the many definitions, and the degree of agreement and difference among their explanations, this indicator defines "political participation" as

"the actual and effective involvement (direct and indirect) of individuals and groups' contribution to and influence on decision-making processes, in the management and representation of the state, in making development policies and in ways of spending wealth".

The researchers did not neglect to monitor traditional patterns of participation, such as tribal and family deliberations and social councils in decision-making, the index's scales are concerned with the extent to which these patterns of participation are institutionalized and transformed into modern and effective constitutional and legal establishments that allow each citizen the ability to represent themselves or choose their representatives in the administration of public affairs.

The index seeks to highlight the most prominent successes and failures in terms of empowering Gulf citizens and facilitating their political participation and contribution to community development and decision-making.

The selection of countries in this index was based on the fact that they fall within the field of interest and work of the Gulf House for Studies and Publishing. Historical, cultural and social commonalities and similarities in governance systems (hereditary monarchies) between these countries have also contributed to consistent and homogeneous index scales.



02

Summary of Results



The results of the GCCPPI reveal that the Gulf states tend to converge in the patterns of running political systems and in the laws and executive mechanisms in the management of public affairs, which may indicate that there is an interchange of practises or an inter-influence due to the similarity of systems of government and the similarities of social structures.

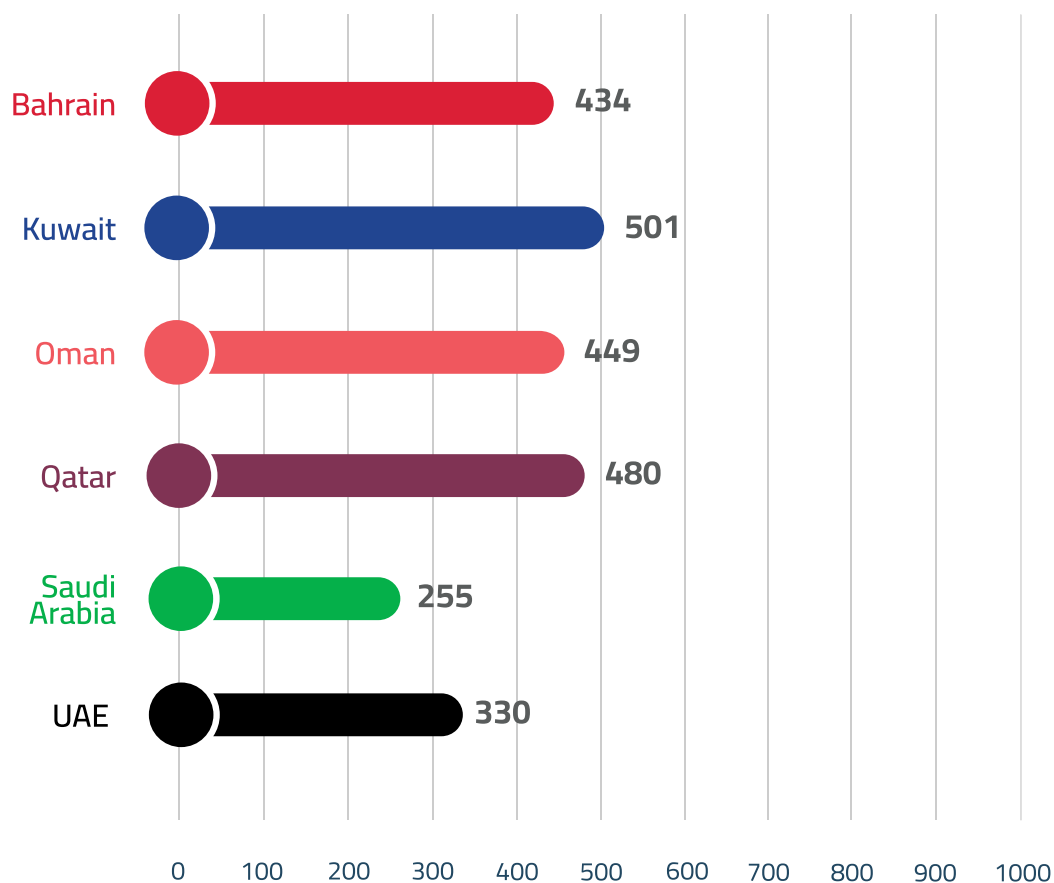


illustration 1: General Results of the Index 2024

While the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Bahrain have witnessed a decline over the past five years in freedoms and political action, we find that the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have made significant progress in the areas of women's empowerment and youth engagement and in facilitating the environment for civil society institutions, specifically in the social and charitable fields.

While Gulf governments seek to empower their citizens in the developmental, economic and social fields, there are no visible signs of allowing organised political action or easing restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression, as the formation of political parties, the availability of opposition tools and the safety of political practitioners continue to pose serious challenges in all GCC countries. With the exception of Bahrain, the rest of the Gulf states criminalize or do not legalize the formation of political parties.

Despite the increasing number of civil society organisations established in the GCC States, the powers and roles of these institutions appear to be limited or reducing, and the laws regulating the action of these institutions impose severe restrictions on the activities and sources of funding.

Levels of community participation in independent oversight of government agencies' performance and spending remain limited.

The powers of oversight, accountability, and questioning in legislative or advisory authorities in Gulf states are often restricted or unavailable. GCC states lack clear national policies and strategies to expand frameworks for political participation, especially with regard to strengthening and expanding the powers of elected councils, improving election laws, and promoting equal citizenship.

The Sultanate of Oman is characterized by the existence of legislation and executive procedures that promote equal citizenship and proportional representation of various groups and minorities in society. On the other hand, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and

Bahrain adopt legislation and policies that appear to be discriminatory with regard to candidacy or voting in general elections for their citizens. These policies are determined by the laws of nationality, the exercise of political rights and the organisation of elections, all of which impose control and restriction on the electoral process.

The results of most of the index's scales point to the emergence of issues related to equal citizenship in the GCC countries. Certain practices and laws hinder the active participation and proportional representation of some groups and minorities. Stateless people are among the most prominently marginalized groups in these countries.

There has been notable progress in improving stable residency and working environments for foreign communities through ongoing legal reforms and by allowing the formation of clubs and community institutions for these communities.

Except for Qatar, members of the ruling families in other Gulf states hold a significant share of high government positions, as well as senior roles in security, military, and judicial institutions. This concentration of power restricts access to these positions for the wider population.

The results for the GCC states over the past five years (2020-2024) reflect continuous positive developments in Qatar and Saudi Arabia. While the UAE shows signs of stagnation, Bahrain and Oman have experienced fluctuating results year by year. Despite maintaining overall strong performance among GCC states, Kuwait has seen an exceptional decline this year.

All GCC countries still have numerous opportunities to enhance citizen participation in decision-making and public policy formulation. It is evident that there is room to strengthen the work of legislative, municipal, and civil institutions, as well as to improve society's role in monitoring and critiquing government performance.

02 Ranking of states on the index

In the results of the fifth edition (2024), the State of Kuwait ranked first with a score of 501 out of a total of 1,000 on the GCCPPI. The State of Qatar maintained its second place with a score of 480.

Oman remained in third place with 449 points. Bahrain came in fourth place with a score of 434, followed by the United Arab Emirates in fifth place with a score of 330, and Saudi Arabia in last place with a score of 255.

The advancements of UAE (10 points) and Qatar (8 points) are the most prominent compared to the previous year's results, while Saudi Arabia advanced by 5 points, Oman by 4 points and Bahrain by one point. Kuwait was the only country to see a 33-point decline.

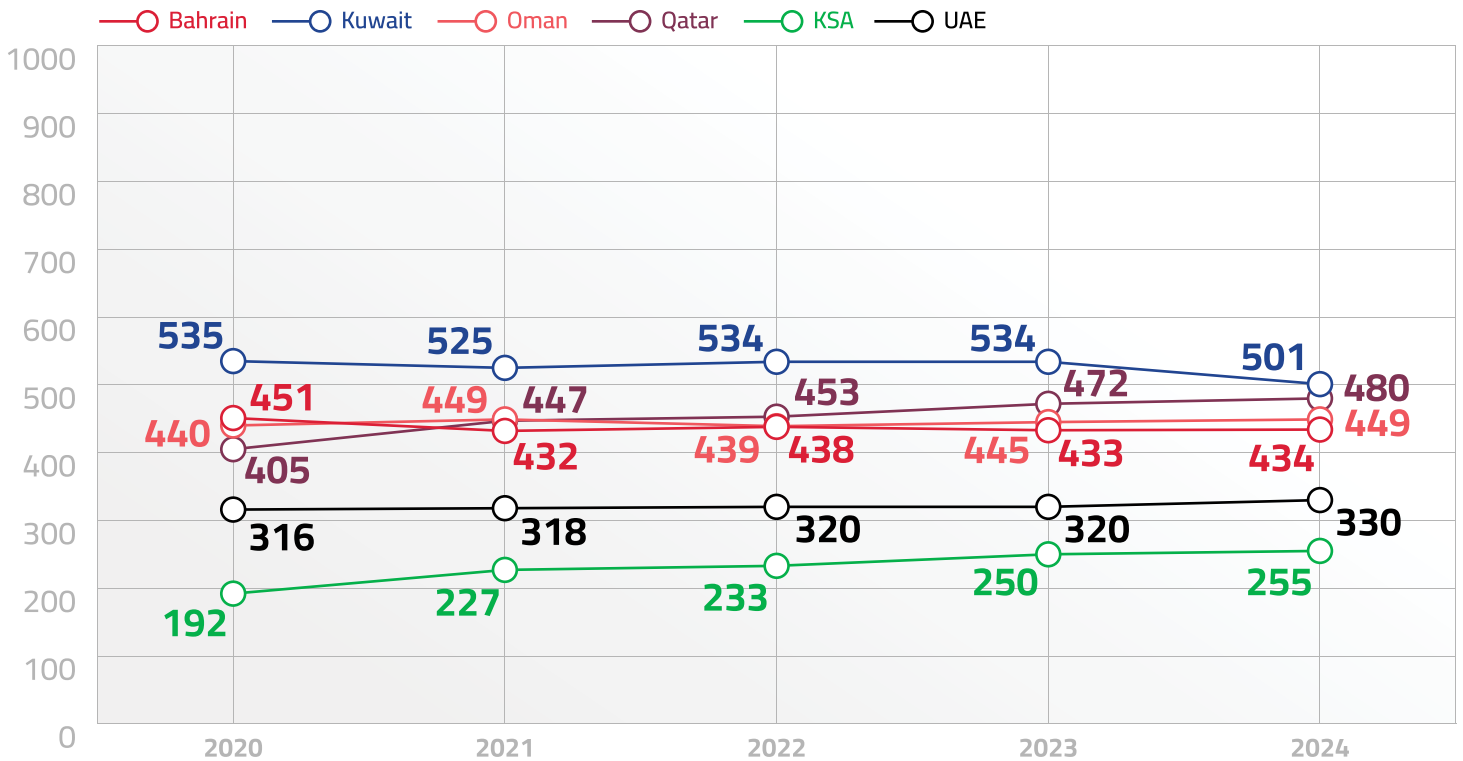


illustration 2: the extent of change on the index between two years 2020 and 2024



2.1

STATE OF KUWAIT

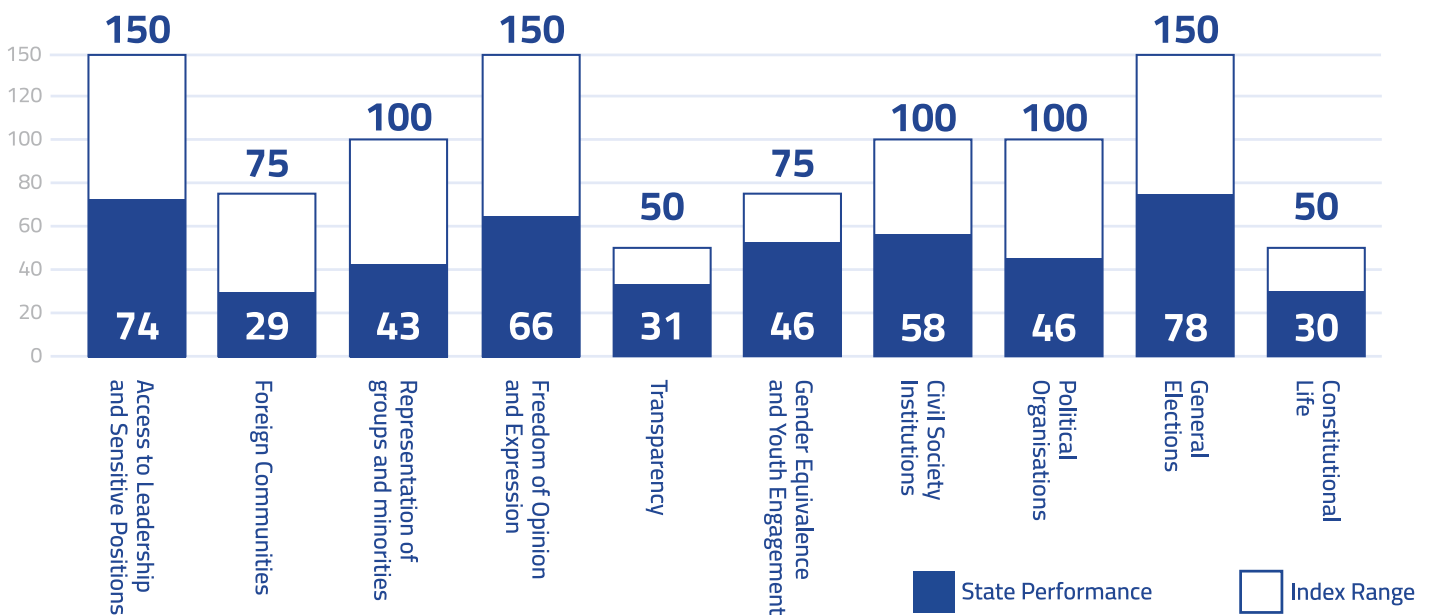


illustration 3: Kuwait - Metric results 2024

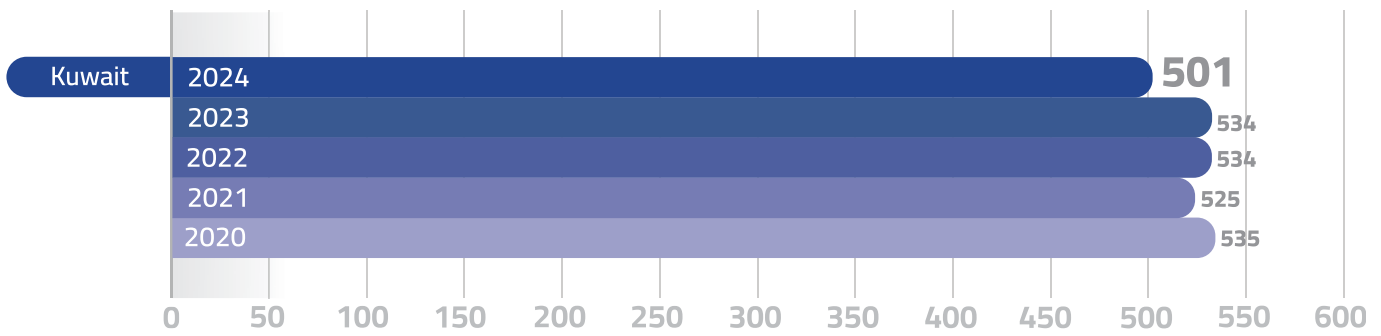


illustration 4: Index overall results between 2020 and 2024

Kuwait’s results this year indicate a decline in performance by 33 points, due to the dissolution of the National Assembly and the suspension of a number of constitutional articles. The decline came on the scale of Constitutional Life (6 points), the scale of General Elections (23 points), the scale of Political Organisations (7 points), and the scale of Freedom of Opinion and Expression (two points).

Kuwait ranked first in the GCC Political Participation Index, scoring 501, surpassing the 500 mark (1,000).

Kuwait’s performance improved in the scale of Access to Leadership and Sensitive Positions (4 points) due to the shrinking number of members of the ruling family in the government, and advanced one place on the scale of Gender Equivalence and Youth Engagement.

Kuwait topped 3 scales (General Elections / Transparency / Freedom of Opinion and Expression) compared to other states. However, the state ranked bottom in the scale of Foreign Communities, and, along with Oman, in the scale of Gender Equivalence and Youth Engagement.

Significant challenges arise with regard to the governance of elected institutions and the role of the legislative authority (the National Assembly). It also includes empowering Kuwaiti women and their representation in the executive and legislative authorities, legislating the work of political parties, resolving the “Bidun” issue, addressing laws that prevent societal groups from accessing senior positions and participating in elections, as well as empowering young people and ensuring their representation in the executive authority, in addition to ensuring stable and effective residence for foreign workers and expatriates in the country.

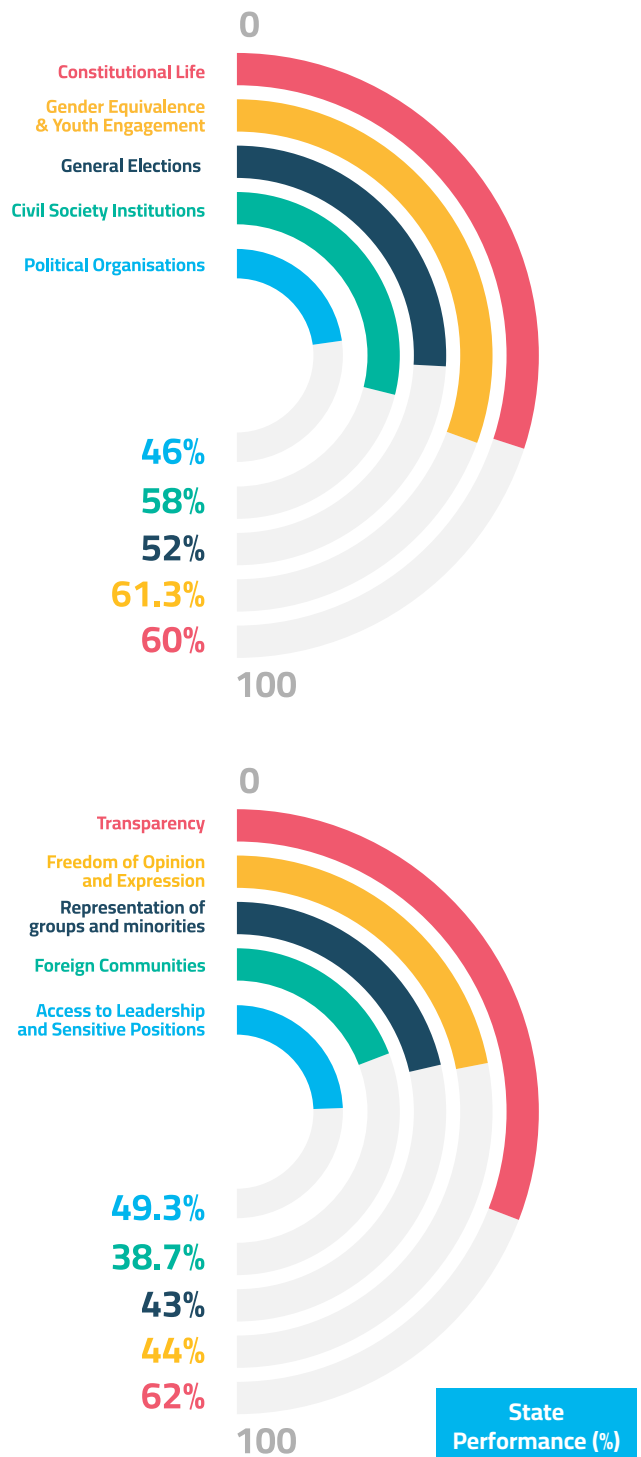


illustration 5: Kuwait – Political Participation 2024



2.2

STATE OF QATAR

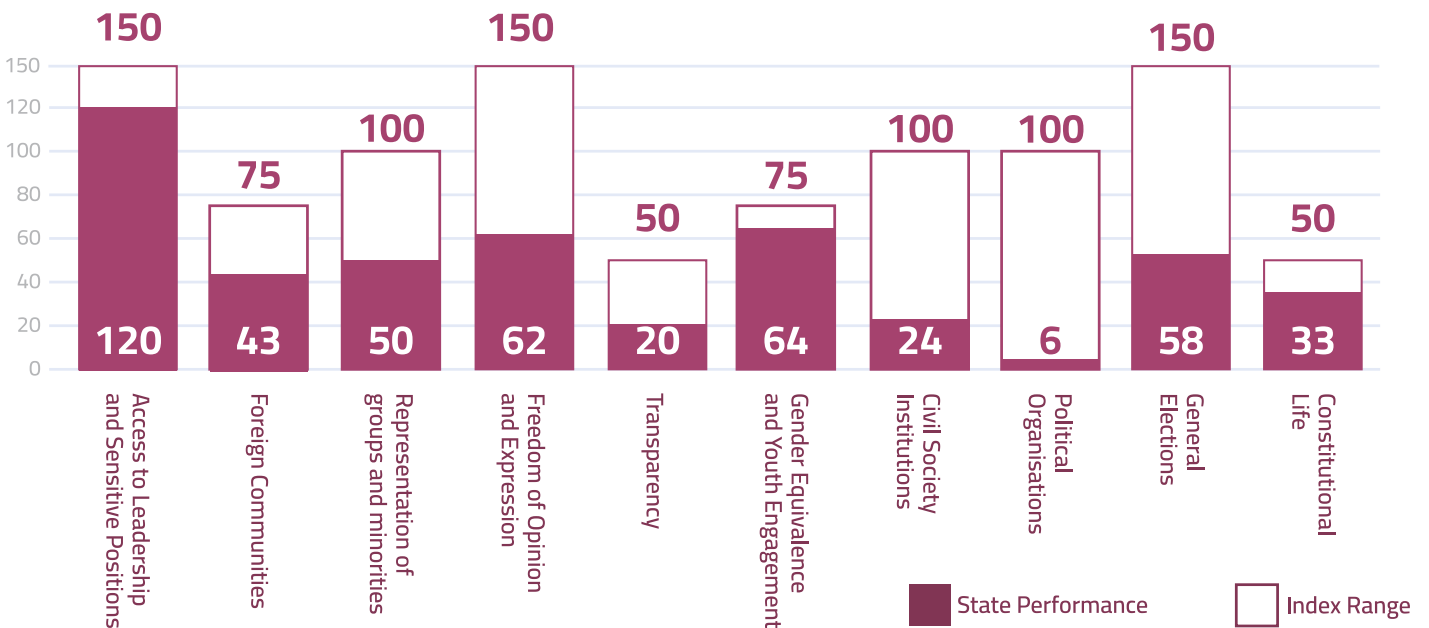


illustration 6: Qatar - Metric results 2024

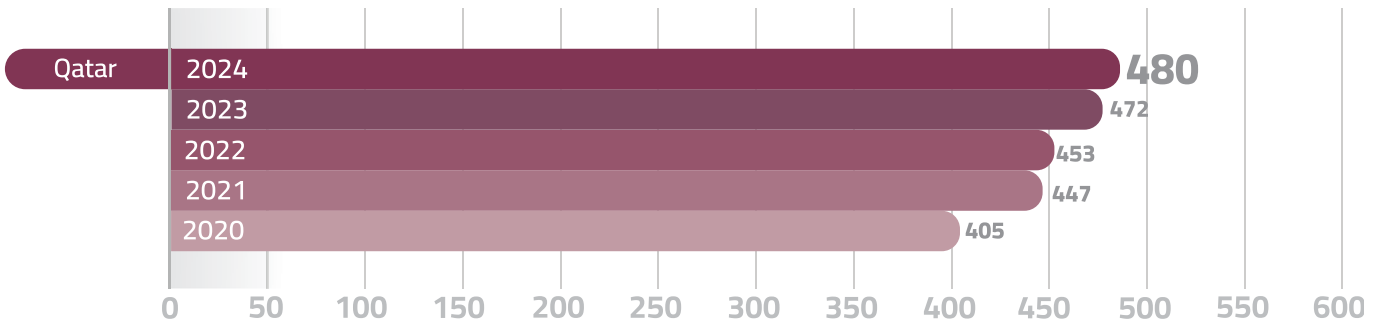


illustration 7: Index overall results between 2020 and 2024

Qatar continued to advance among the GCC states by advancing (8 points) of the total score of the index, and maintained second place with 480 points, expanding the difference between it and Oman to 31 points.

For the first time, Qatar topped the scale of Constitutional Life following Kuwait’s decline, as well as Access to Leadership and Sensitive Positions.

The country improved on the scale of Freedom of Opinion and Expression (5 points) by allowing popular demonstrations in the capital, Doha, an unprecedented scene, and last year saw the emergence of community media run by migrants in different languages.

Qatar advanced in the scale of Gender Equivalence and Youth Engagement (two points) and one score in the scale of Political Organisations. Qatar did not witness decline in any of the ten scales.

Qatar still scores low on the scale of Political Organisations (6 out of 100) as it presents challenges related to the legitimacy of organised political action and the safety of practitioners. Similarly, in the scale of Civil Society Institutions (24 out of 100 points), the governing laws place restrictions on institutions that do not allow them to operate independently.

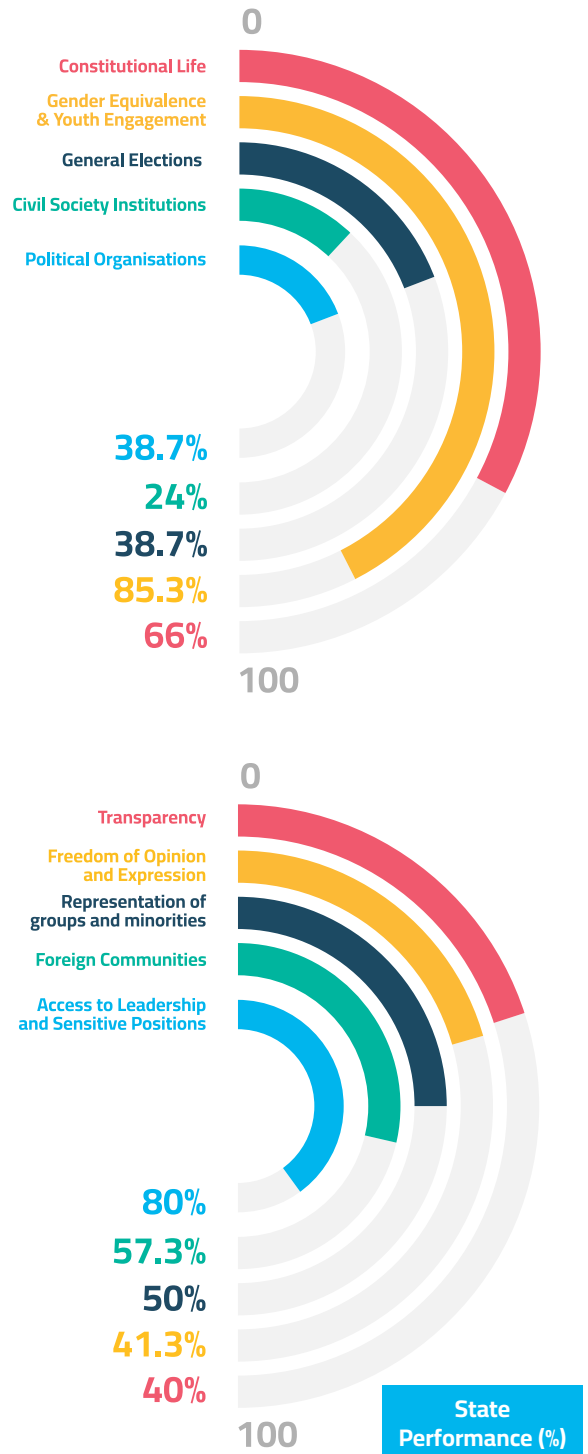
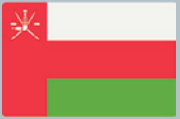


illustration 8: Qatar – Political Participation 2024



2.3

SULTANATE OF OMAN

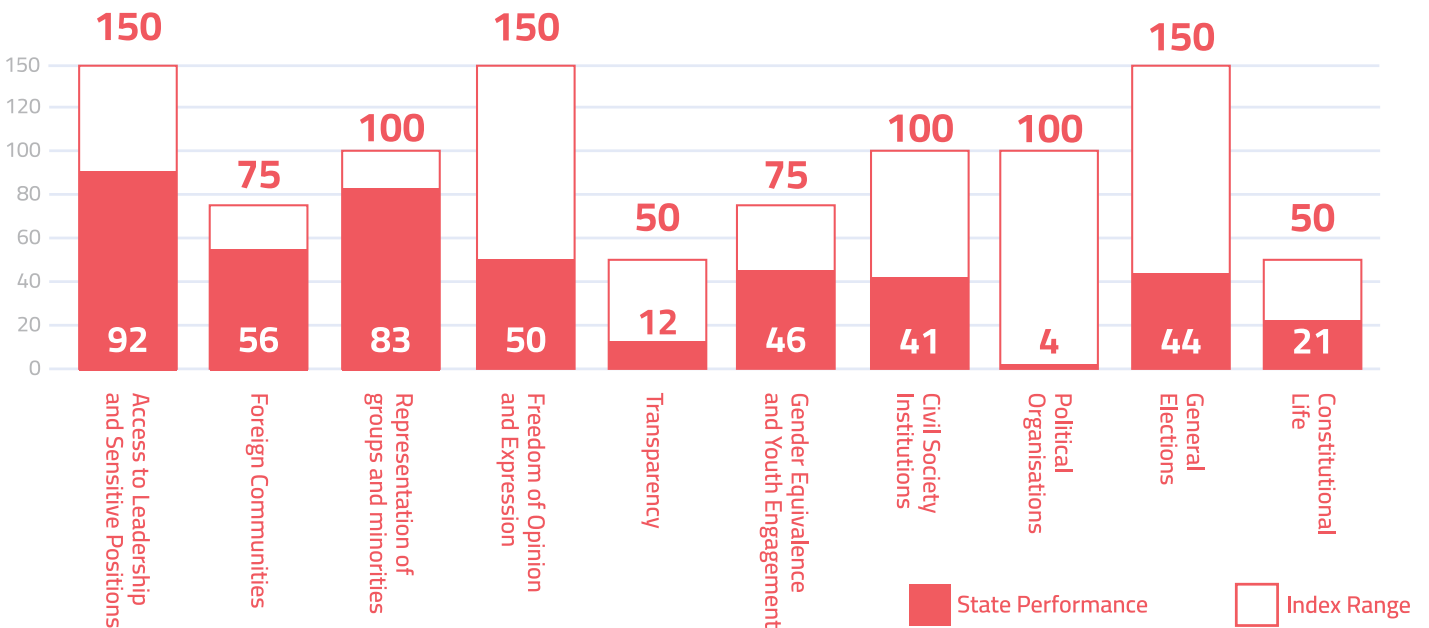


illustration 9: Oman - Metric results 2024



2.3 State of Oman

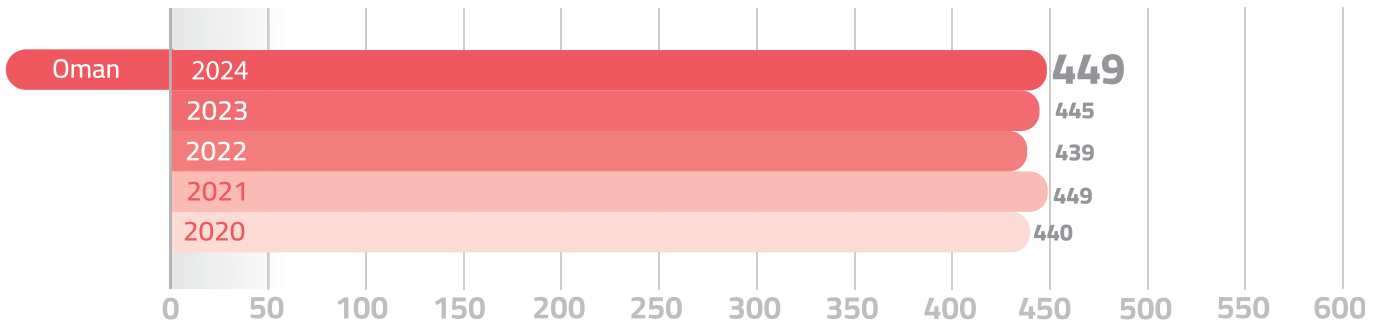


illustration 10: Index overall results between 2020 and 2024

The Sultanate of Oman advanced for the third consecutive year in the results of the index, and the Sultanate advanced in the General Elections scale (5 points) due to the stability of the periodic Shura Council and municipal elections, enhancing the manifestations of electoral integrity and facilitating the voting process.

Oman ranks third (449 out of 1,000) 15 points ahead of Bahrain.

The Sultanate topped the scale of Representation of Groups and Minorities (83 out of 100) for the fourth consecutive year, relying on Government policies that ensure equality among its citizens and proportionate representation of various components of society. Oman ranked second among the GCC states in the scales of Foreign Communities (56 out of 75) and Access to Leadership and Sensitive Positions (92 out of 150).

Despite its progress (4 points) out of the total score of the index this year, the country's performance is still disappointing in the scale of Political Organisations (4 out of 100), as the formation or accession of political organisations is considered a crime in Omani law. In the scale of Gender Equivalence and Youth Engagement (46 out of 75 points) due to the absence of a clear policy to encourage and support women to run for elections, as well as the absence of a national policy or strategy aimed at engaging and empowering youth.

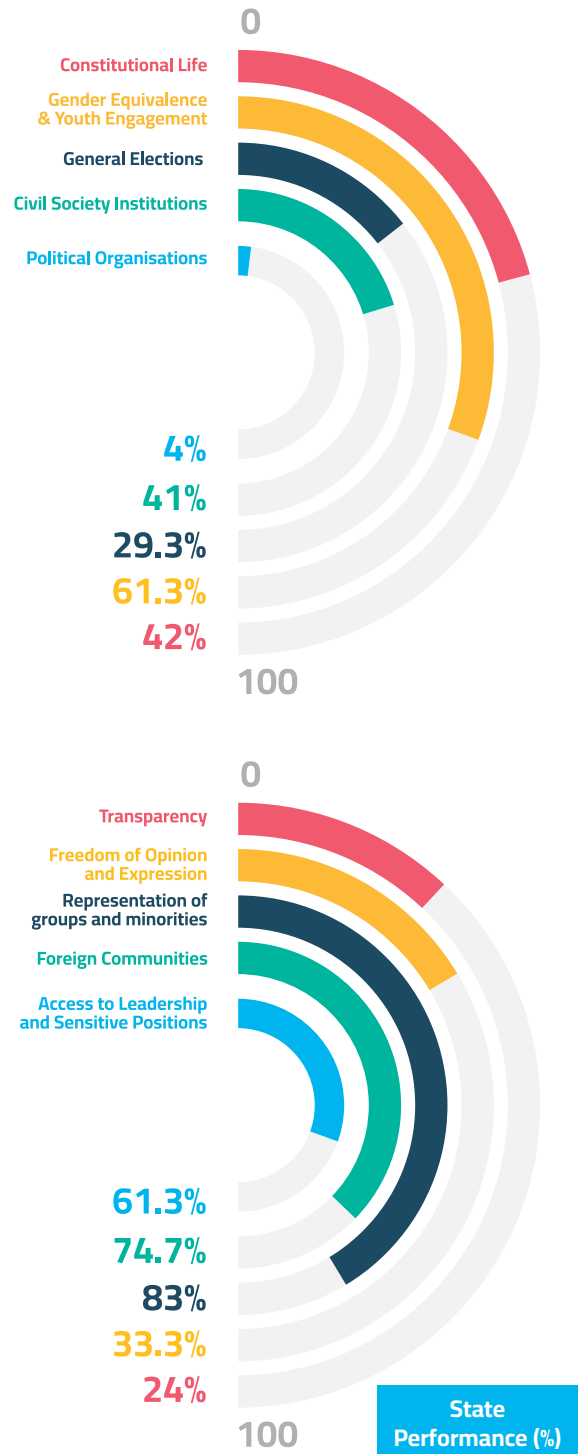


illustration 11: Oman – Political Participation 2024



2.4

KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

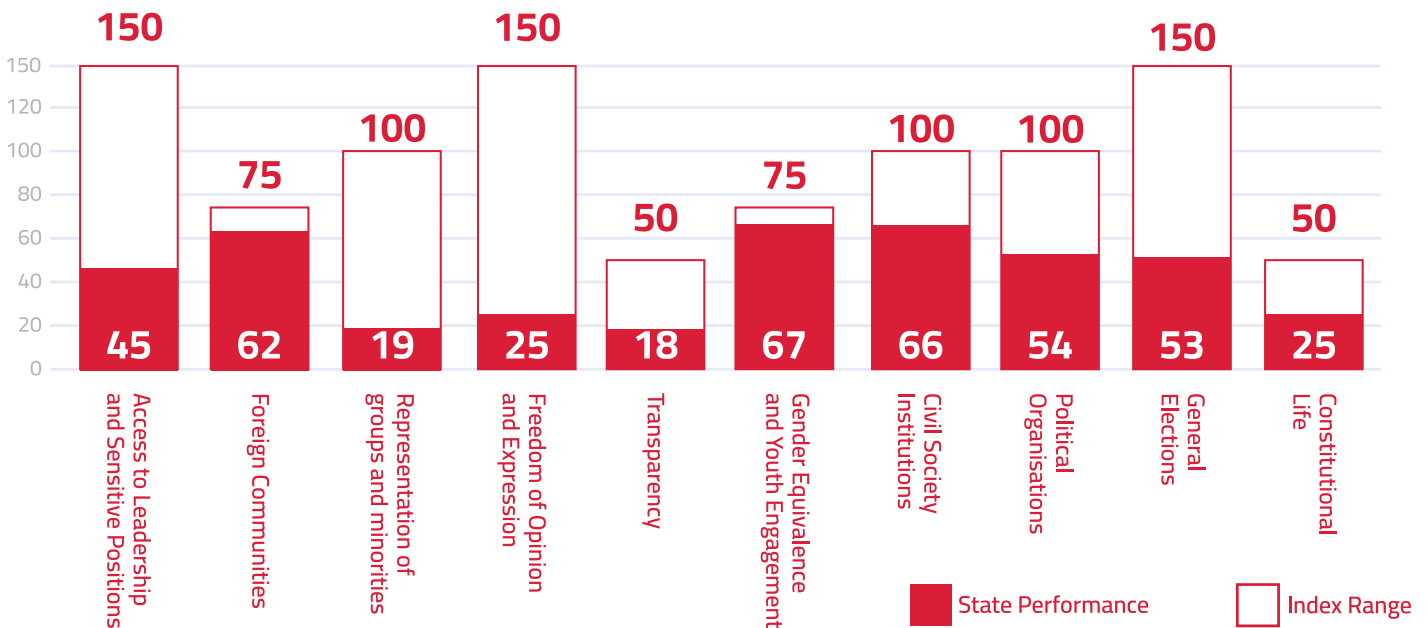


illustration 12: Bahrain - Metric results 2024



2.4 Kingdom of Bahrain

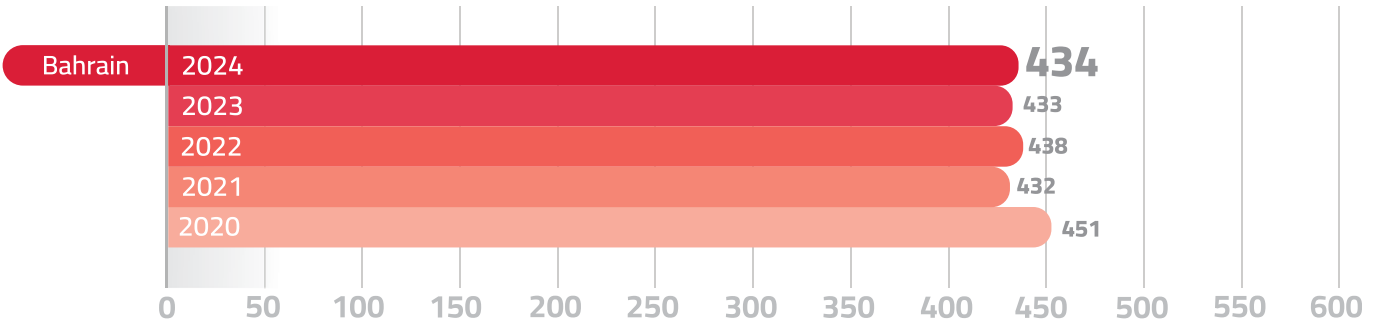


illustration 13: Index overall results between 2020 and 2024

Bahrain scored its only progress in the scale of Political Organisations (6 points) after pardoning 1,584 convicts, including those detained in connection with the political unrest that the country has witnessed since 2011.

Bahrain declined again in the scale of Freedom of Opinion and Expression (two points) on the back of an increase in summons and interrogations of researchers, writers and online activists. It also declined slightly in the scale of Transparency (two points) and the scale of Civil Society Institutions (one point).

Bahrain continued to rank fourth (434) of the total score of the index.

Although Bahrain fell in the scale of Civil Society Institutions, it continued to be considered the best performing country among the GCC states in this scale. It also maintained the top performance in the scale of Foreign Communities (62 out of 75) while ensuring stable and effective residence for foreign communities residing there.

Bahrain's most significant challenge is ensuring proportionate representation of groups and minorities and promoting equal citizenship, with the country at the bottom of the scale of Representation of Groups and Minorities (19 out of 100). Bahrain also ranks at the bottom of the scale of Access to Leadership and Sensitive Positions (45 out of 150 points), and despite the low number of members of the ruling family in the cabinet, it still notes its numerical dominance over the supreme bodies and councils that have high steering and executive powers. Bahrain also ranks at the bottom of the scale of Freedom of Opinion and Expression (25 out of 150).

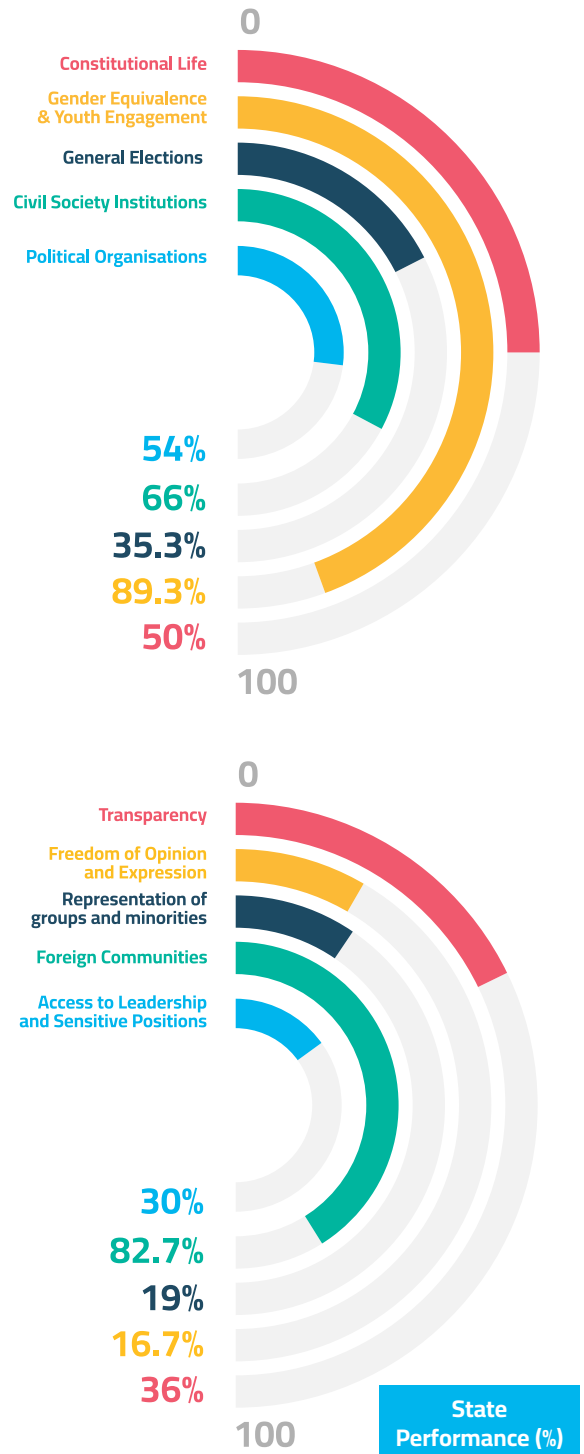


illustration 14: Bahrain – Political Participation 2024



2.5

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

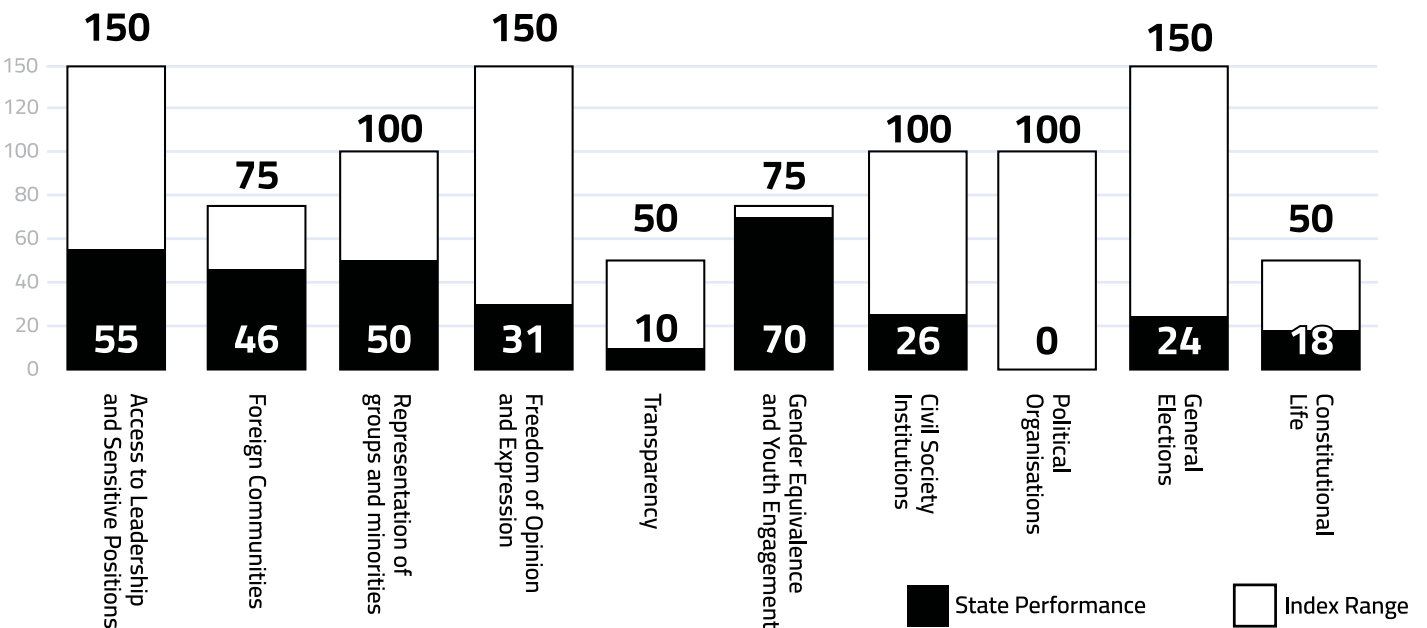


illustration 15: UAE - Metrics Results 2024

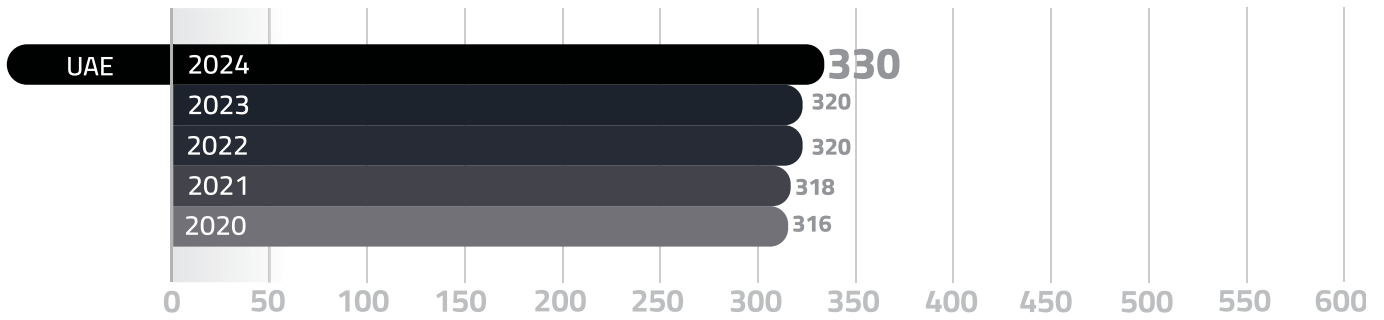


illustration 16: Index overall results between 2020 and 2024

The UAE has made the best progress among the GCC states by collecting (10 points), achieving a total score of 330 of the total score of the index and ranked fifth among the GCC states.

The UAE advanced in the scale of Civil Society Institutions (9 points) on the back of the issuance of a federal law regulating public benefit institutions, which sets a comprehensive framework for the work of NGOs, including sponsoring and financing them, allowing them to invest, and granting them the right to appeal government decisions. The UAE also maintained progress (two points) and the lead in the scale of Gender Equivalence and Youth Engagement (70 out of 75 points) due to the continuation of government policies and special scales to ensure a balanced representation of Emirati women and youth in various state agencies, and maintained relatively advanced results in the scale of Representation of Groups and Minorities (50 out of 100 points), where it ranked second on par with Qatar.

The UAE fell in the scale of Freedom of Opinion and Expression (one point) due to the re-trials of political activists previously sentenced and completed their sentences last year.

The UAE remained with a “zero” mark in the scale of Political Organisations and lagging results in the scale of General Elections. It also lagged behind the index states in the scale of Transparency (10 out of 50 points), as there are no independent societal watchdog bodies that specialise in transparency and scrutiny of the disbursement of public funds.

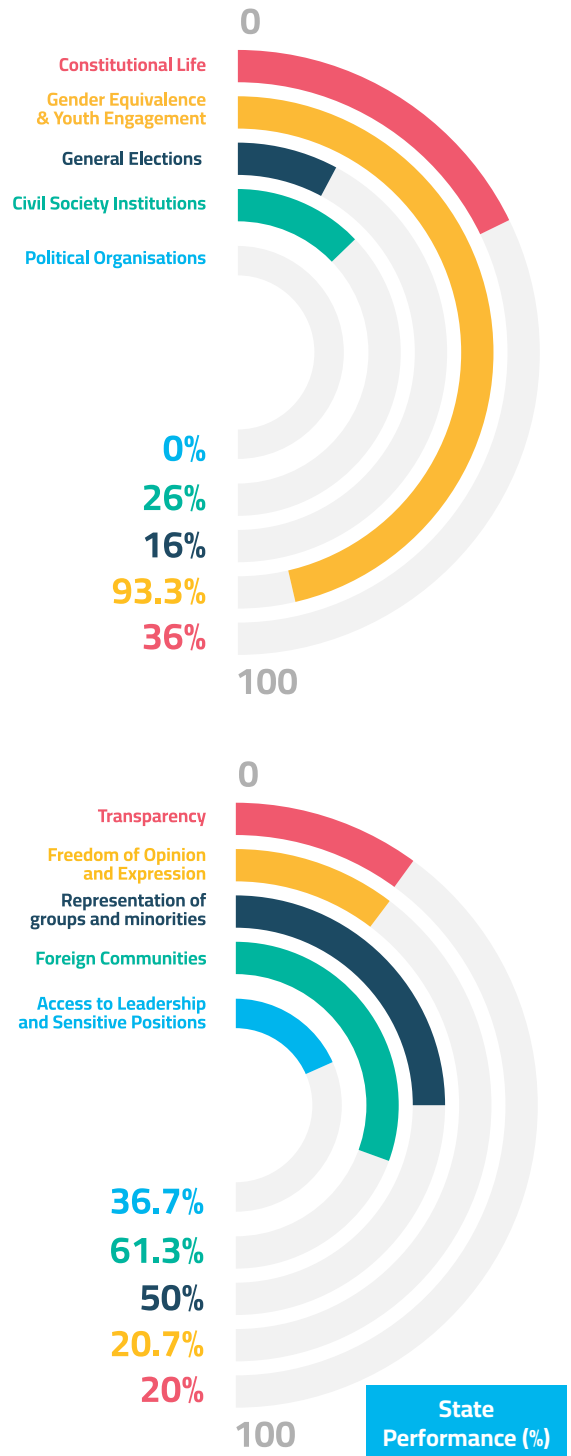


Illustration 17: UAE – Political Participation 2024



2.6

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

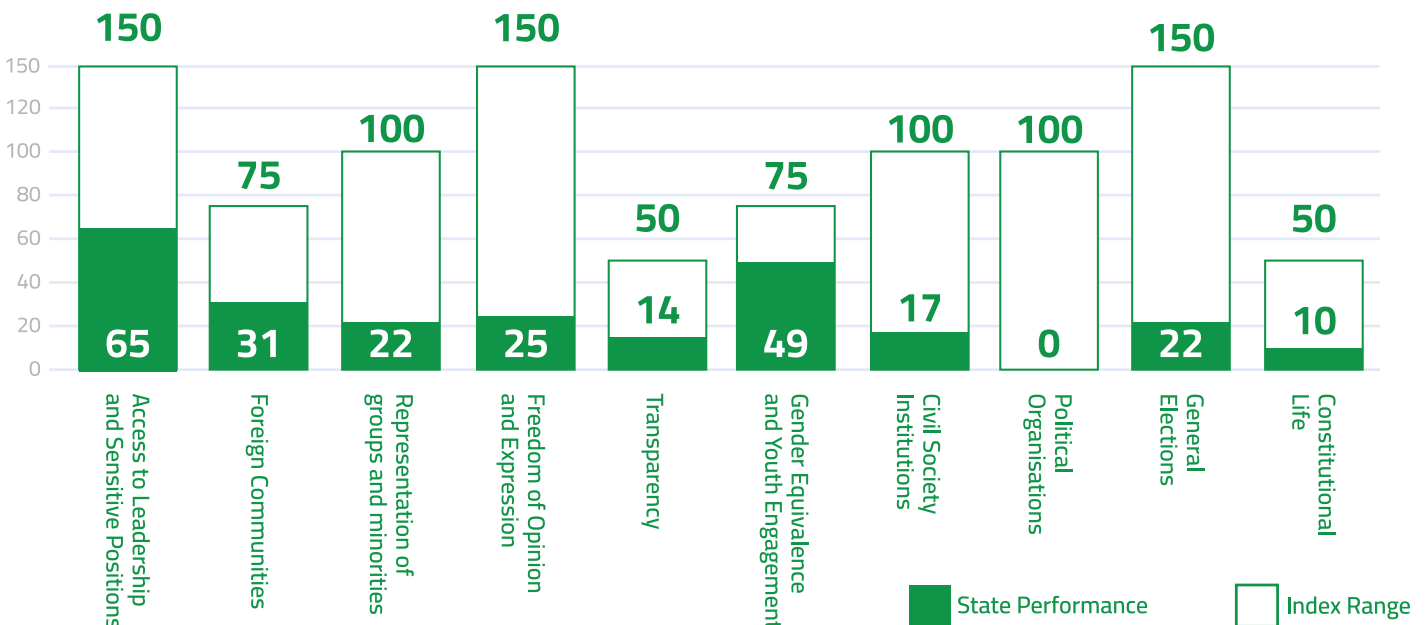


Illustration 18: Saudi Arabia - Results for metrics 2024

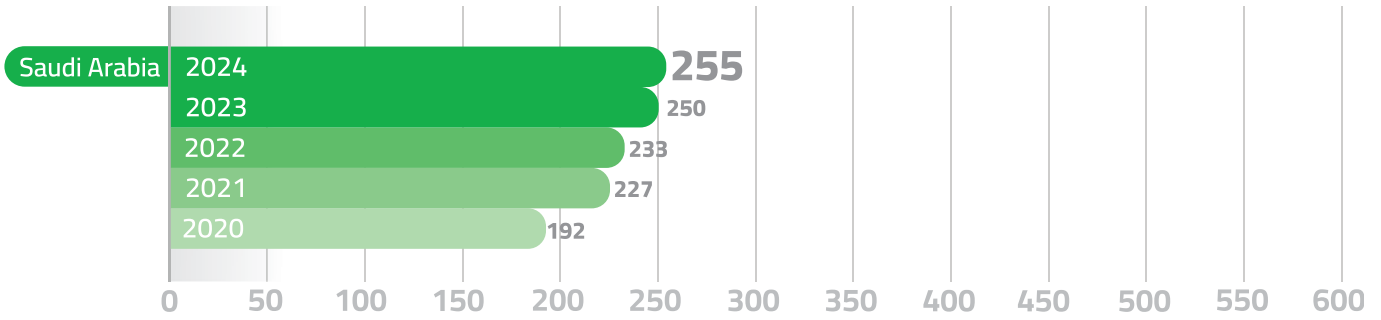


illustration 19: Index overall results between 2020 and 2024

Saudi Arabia’s progress in the scale of Gender Equivalence and Youth Engagement continued by 3 points, as the pace of women’s empowerment in public affairs accelerates as one of the fastest reform paths in recent years. Saudi Arabia also advanced in the scale of Foreign Communities (two points), as the country witnessed an improvement in working conditions and ensuring the rights of expatriate workers through amendments to the labour law that provide a more stable environment for foreign workers.

Despite Saudi Arabia’s overall rise for the fifth consecutive year to 255 out of 1,000, the kingdom remained at the bottom of the total index ranking.

For the second year in a row, Saudi Arabia did not witness any decline in any of the index’s scales, but it remained “zero” in the scale of Political Organisations and shared with Bahrain the bottom of the scale of Freedom of Opinion and Expression, as well as the ranking of the index states in the scales (Constitutional Life / General Elections / Civil Society Institutions / Foreign Communities).

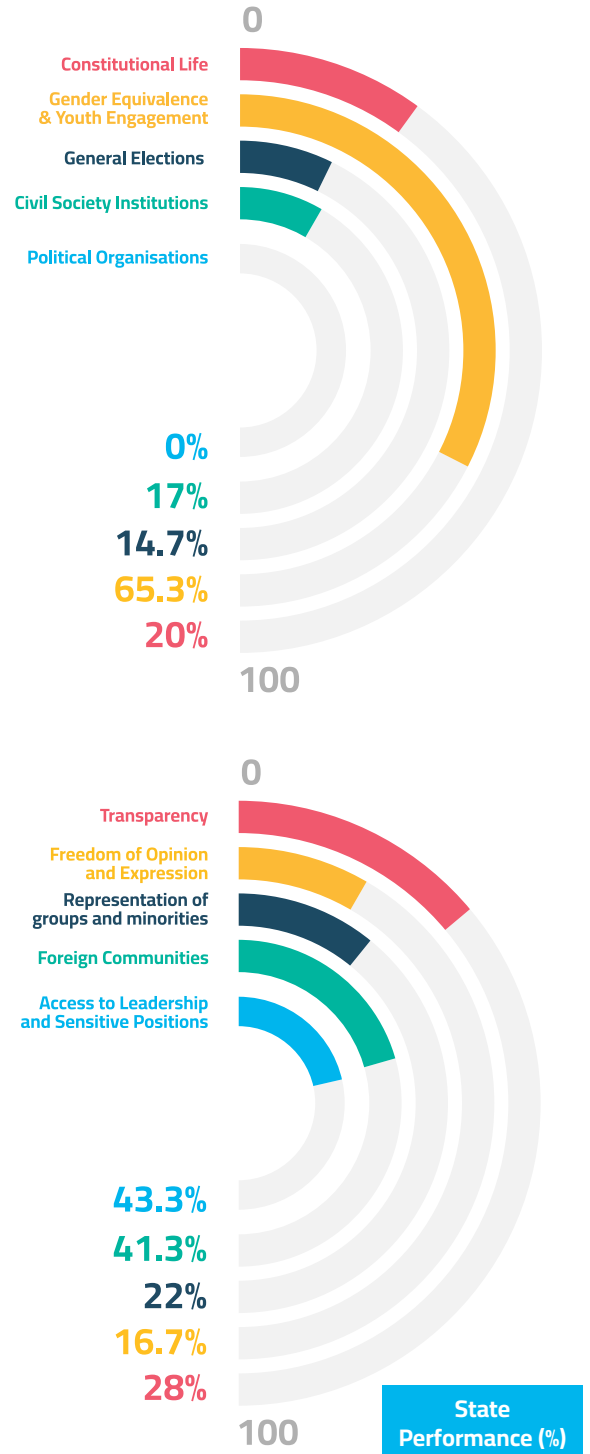


Illustration 20: KSA – Political Participation 2024

03

Presentation of Results





3.1 Scale One: Constitutional Life

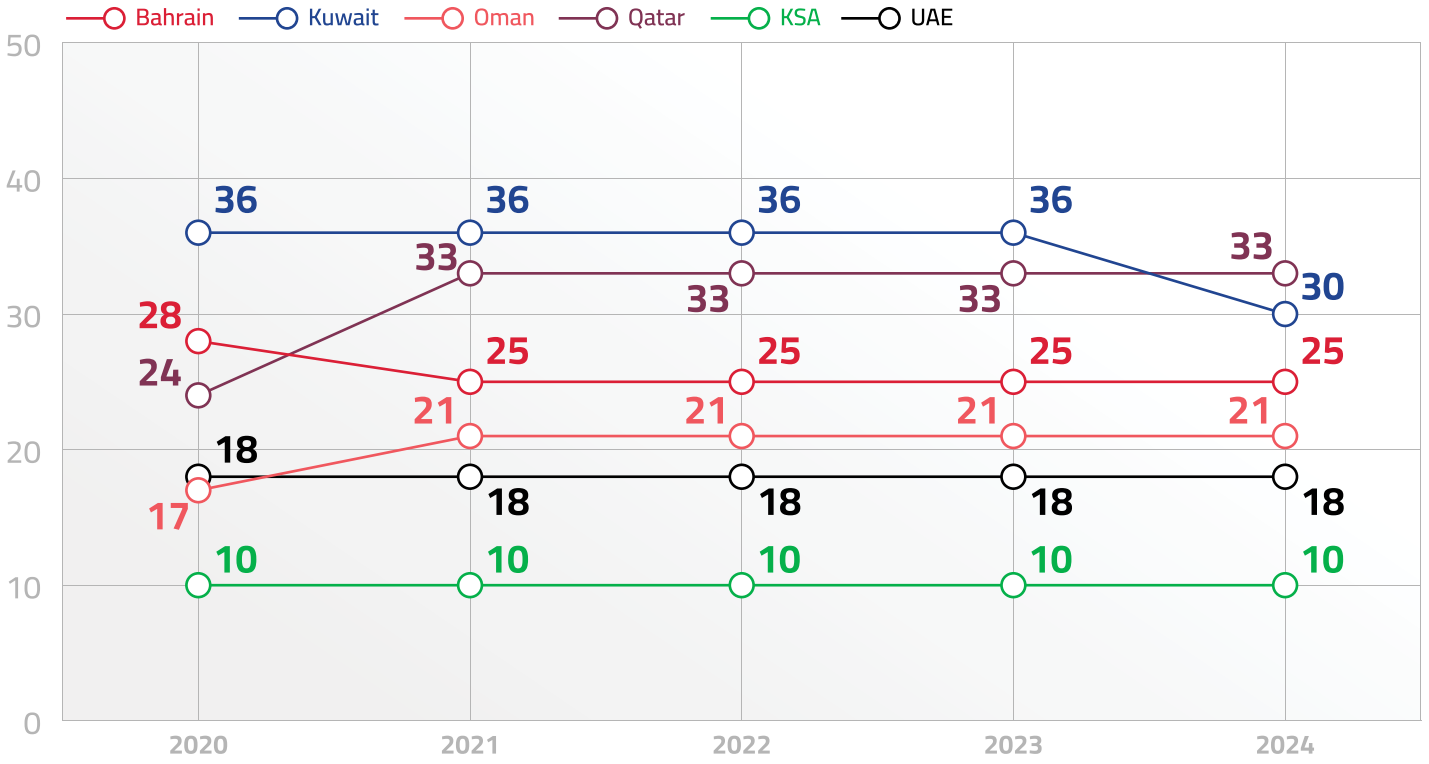


illustration 22: Constitutional Life Scale Results 2020-2024

Scale elements	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
Constitutional Authority Mechanisms for Issuance and Amendment 10 scores	6	8	3	7	2	5
Guaranteeing the right to political participation 15 scores	8	9	5	9	1	3
Regulating / restricting laws 15 scores	4	7	5	9	3	5
Compliance with the provisions of the Constitution 10 scores	7	6	8	8	4	5
Total 50 scores	25	30	21	33	10	18

Table 1: Results / First Scale – Constitutional Life Scale Scores



Kingdom of Bahrain

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain was promulgated on February 14, 2002, by Royal decree. While some opposition parties describe it as a “non-contractual” constitution, it is considered by the ruling establishment as a result of a mandate and interpretation of the referendum of the National Action Charter, approved by 98.4% of the voters in 2001.

Any constitutional amendment requires the approval and ratification of amendments approved by two-thirds of the members of the National Assembly, which includes the Chamber of Deputies (elected) and the Shura Chamber (appointed by the King). Bahrain has a good package of laws regulating candidacy and

election, but some of them include obstacles or exceptions for some groups, especially the Law on the Exercise of Political Rights, which prevents the leaders and members of actual political societies dissolved by a court ruling from running for the House of Representatives.

In June 2022, Bahrain continued to restrict the areas of political participation and an amendment was issued to the Social, Cultural and Sports Associations and Clubs Law, which stipulated that any member of a political association, a practitioner of political work, or a member of the legislative authority would be prohibited from running for membership in the boards of directors of clubs or sports bodies.



State of Kuwait

Kuwait fell 6 points in this scale due to the Emiri order issued on May 10, 2024, to dissolve the National Assembly, which has not held any session since the elections which were held on April 4, 2024, and to the suspension of constitutional articles for a period of “not more than 4 years.” The suspended articles “51, 65 (paragraphs two and three), 71 (paragraph two), 79, 107, 174 and 181”, were related to the elected National Assembly.

This is the third parliamentary pause in Kuwait’s political history, where similar actions were taken in 1976 and 1986.

The Constitution of the State of Kuwait was promulgated on November 11, 1962, through

an elected Constituent Assembly composed of twenty members, but it was not put to a direct popular referendum.

The Emir and one third of the members of the National Assembly have the right to propose a revision of the Constitution, and the approval of any amendment requires the approval of two thirds of the members as well as the ratification of the Emir.

The Constitution has given Kuwaiti citizens the right to political participation, which is evident in the National Assembly elections. Some Government laws restrict the rights and freedoms stipulated in the provisions of the Constitution.



State of Oman

The Basic Law of the Sultanate of Oman, promulgated by Sultan Haitham ben Tariq Al Said on January 12, 2021, is the supreme constitutional document in the State.

The Basic Law was promulgated without a democratic mechanism for its drafting or a referendum for its approval. It provides for a well-defined mechanism for the succession of the ruling, and cancelled the detailed articles related to the (two-chambered) Oman Council and stipulated for it in a special law, which abolished the financial and administrative independence of the Council of Oman, and gave each of the two councils the power to draw up internal regulations and publish

it in the Official Gazette.

The Basic Law enshrines the civil dimension in the State, including the promotion of rights and equality between women and men. The Basic Law gives a constitutional character to the follow-up and control of government performance, through a committee whose work reports directly to the Sultan through the "State Financial and Administrative Control Authority".

So far, a competent judicial authority has not been formed to settle disputes related to the extent to which the laws, proceedings and royal decrees are in conformity with the Basic Law of the State.



State of Qatar

The Constitution of the State of Qatar was promulgated in 2004 after a popular referendum held in 2003 on the draft drawn up by a drafting committee composed of 32 appointed members. It was approved by 96.6% of the voters, replacing Qatar's first provisional Basic Law of Governance, issued at the beginning of the 1970s.

The Constitution provides for a number of principles

of political participation, such as freedom of assembly, association and addressing the authority. However, the organisation of these principles is left to the laws that were issued in a way that restricts the exercise of some of these rights by individuals, in addition to granting the executive authority – in some cases – the powers of approval of such rights and allowing them to be practised.





Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia still relies on the Basic Law of Governance issued in 1992, which is a combination of the Shura Council system and the Council of Regions system to define the system of governance in the Kingdom. None of these three systems contains any articles defining the concept or nature of political participation.

According to the Basic Law of Governance, the King has the exclusive authority to enact and amend laws, and is the reference for all authorities.

The terms of reference of the Allegiance Council (unelected and concerned with the sons of the founding King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud) do not seem clear in regulating the transfer of power, and its decisions do not seem necessary or binding in this regard, as the crown princes were dismissed and appointed without consulting to the Allegiance Council.

Accordingly, there does not appear to be an explicit text that can be referred to as a legal reference.



United Arab Emirates

The Constitution of the United Arab Emirates was promulgated as a temporary constitution in 1971, and it was declared a permanent constitution for the country in 1996 by the Federal Supreme Council, the highest constitutional authority in the country and the key legislative and executive body that formulates public

policies and approves federal legislation.

None of the members of the Federal Supreme Council is elected, and the Constitution was not put to a popular referendum. Although the Constitution does not explicitly refer to the right to political participation, its preamble indicates that the final intent is to reach "a full-fledged representative democratic regime," which has not yet been reflected as far as State institutions are concerned.

Some State laws restrict the rights and freedoms stipulated in the provisions of the Constitution.





3.2 Scale Two: General Elections

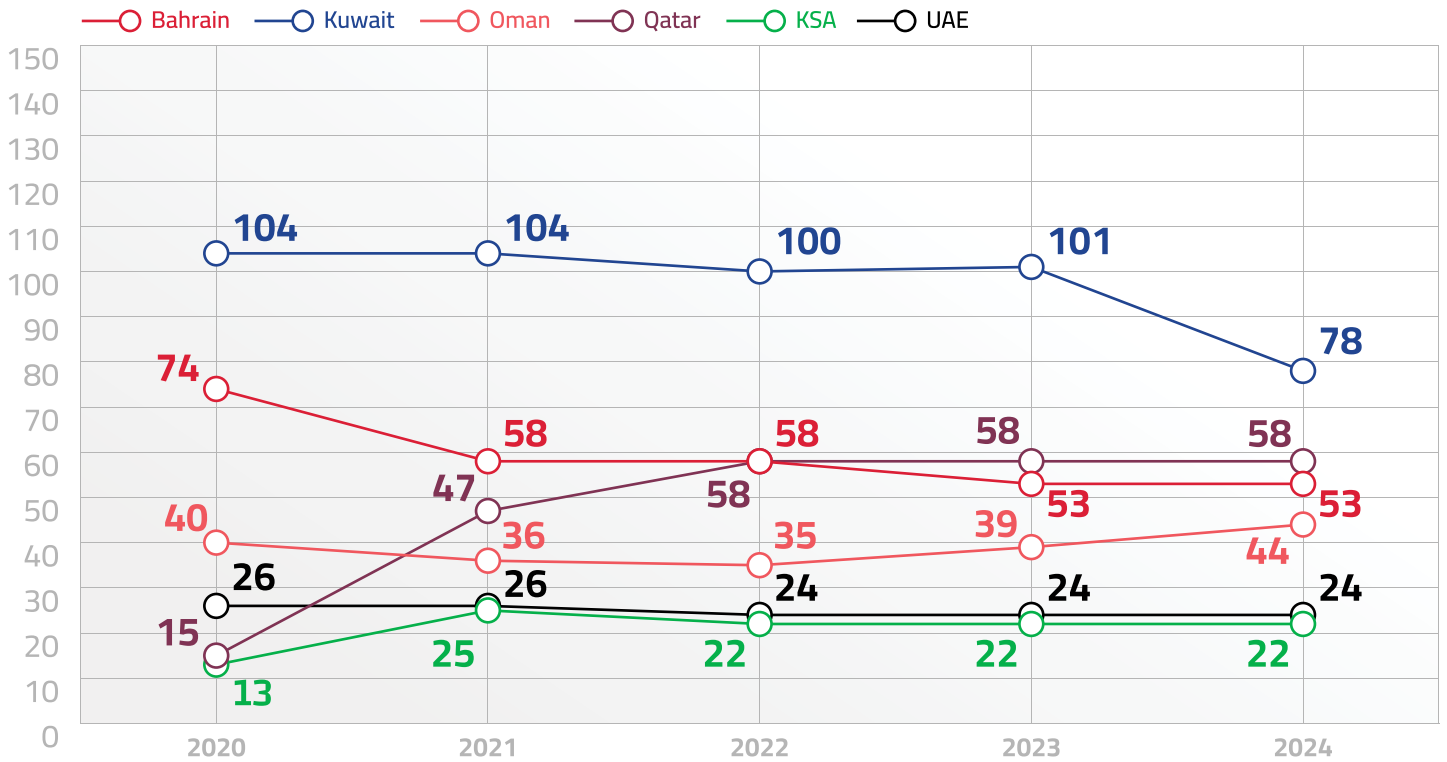


illustration 22: General Election Scale Results 2020-2024

Scale elements	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
Electoral Areas (governmental, representative and municipal councils) 20 scores	8	5	7	8	2	3
Power of elected institutions (authority / separation of powers / oversight / legislation / accountability / partnership in decision making / powers to dissolve institutions) 50 scores	14	24	11	26	6	9
Effectiveness and efficacy of elected institutions 40 scores	14	18	10	14	6	9
Mechanism for drafting the electoral system and drawing districts 40 scores	17	31	16	10	8	3
Total 150 scores	53	78	44	58	22	24

Table 2: Results / Second Scale – General Elections Scale Scores



Kingdom of Bahrain

On June 19, 2024, Decree-Law No. 7 was issued amending Article 28 of Decree-Law No. (15) of 2002 Concerning the Shura Council and the Council of Representatives, regarding the revocation of the membership of elected MPs. The new amendments granted the Court of Cassation the power to revoke the membership of the Council of Representatives “if the member loses the confidence or respect of the Council or fails to fulfill the duties of membership... Official bodies may, at any time, request the Court of Cassation to rule on the invalidation of a member’s membership in those cases.” Activists raised concerns that the executive authorities are using this article to invalidate the memberships of elected MPs due to ignoring or not officially scrutinizing the requirements for candidacy and membership in the Council of Representatives.

In November 2022, Bahrain witnessed legislative and municipal elections, the sixth since the return of constitutional life in 2002, amid the absence of the opposition, which decided to boycott the elections. That Elections witnessed the effects of the amendments made in 2018 to the Law on the Exercise of Political Rights, including preventing leaders and members of political associations that have been judicially dissolved from running the elections, in addition to removing the names of citizens from the voter lists.

A number of citizens were unable to have their names reinstated on the voter lists despite resorting to the announced legal channels, and local human rights activists estimated that those removed from the voter lists numbered tens of thousands.

Although there have been periodic direct parliamentary and municipal elections since 2018, several laws have been in force that forbid anyone who was a member of a judicially

dissolved political association from running for elections, and all those convicted of criminal offences are also denied this right, even if special a pardon has been granted or they have been rehabilitated.

These laws are considered permanent obstacles that deprive those affected of the right to contest an election for life. These provisions also apply to elected members who have decided to terminate their mandate unilaterally or leave parliamentary work in a manner that is considered as “intentionally harming or disrupting the functioning of constitutional or parliamentary life,” pursuant to the law.

The High Elections Committee is still affiliated with the government and is not independent. It is possible to note that some articles of a number of laws issued may contradict the principles and rights stipulated in the Constitution, especially the Council of Representatives’ By-Laws, which reduce the powers of MPs and is deemed a clear restriction of the powers of the legislative authority in public debates, as they stipulate that, debate may not include “criticism, blame or accusation” levelled at the Government.

The Municipal Council of the Capital Governorate is the only one (among the four governorates of the country) that has been formed by Royal Decree since 2014. The laws grant residents the right to vote – without running for office – in municipal elections, provided they own real estate in the country, allowing this category to have good proportional participation.

Electoral districts (40 constituencies) in Bahrain are drawn by a special Royal Decree, and some opposition groups consider the existing delimitation of electoral districts to be “unfair” as it gives a numerical advantage to areas over others.



The Constitution and relevant laws restrict the powers of members of the legislative authority (Council of Representatives). While the right to question ministers is allowed, the Prime Minister is exempted from this, and the Council of Representatives does not have the power to grant or withdraw confidence in the Government, but it has the power to grant confidence to the government's programme. The Constitution includes explicit texts about the mechanism of withdrawing confidence from one of the Government ministers (who are appointed by Royal Decree) or declaring the inability to cooperate with the Prime Minister (appointed by Royal Order), a matter to be referred to the king for final decision.

However, no case of dismissal of a minister has been reported so far through this mechanism, which requires a two-thirds majority of the members of the Council of Representatives. In accordance with the Constitution, the detailed annual financial and

administrative oversight falls within the jurisdiction of the Financial and Administrative Audit Office (National Audit Office), affiliated to the King.

The statute of the Council of Representatives restricts their roles within the Council, as it specifies for the Council member to not exceed more than one question per month, and a parliamentary committee is assigned the task of examining the "seriousness" of interrogation requests submitted by representatives and decide on their validity.

The King has the power to dissolve the legislative authority after consulting with the chairpersons of the Council of Representatives and the Shura Council or based on the opinion of the Prime Minister.

In accordance with the Constitution, the king has a direct role in the legislative process by issuing decrees that have the force of law (unless one of the two chambers rejects them later).



State of Kuwait

Kuwait fell 25 points in the General Election Scale following the Amiri order to dissolve the National Assembly, which was elected in April 2024.

The order issued on May 10, 2024, included suspending political life in the country and suspending the articles of the constitution related to the National Assembly for a period of "not more than four years."

Prior to that, on February 15, 2024, an Amiri decree was issued dissolving the Assembly for "exceeding the constitutional principles in showing respect for the Supreme Court and deliberately using uncontrolled rhetoric" during a parliamentary intervention.

The dissolution of the council led to a legislative vacuum that the government now fills in consultation with the emir.

This has also led to the disruption of the governance of the National Assembly and its constitutional powers.

Kuwait had approved voting based on the residential address documented in the civil ID instead of what was previously in force through the address recorded in the nationality document, which allowed updating the electoral lists and counting the actual number of voters in each district. However, there is still a marked disparity between the numbers of voters in the five constituencies.

The government voluntarily abstained from voting in presidential elections and membership of committees in the National Assembly in the 2022 and 2023 chambers, which allowed elected deputies to elect the occupants of these positions without government interference.

The National Assembly, which has been dissolved and suspended, has relatively influential powers and broad authority to legislate and monitor the performance of the government.



The National Assembly has the constitutional right to discuss decisions taken by the government, direct questions and interpellations to ministers and the prime minister, submit requests for discussion or form investigation committees, receive and address petitions and complaints from citizens, and it also has the right – after the interpellation process – to withdraw confidence in the minister concerned or submit a letter to the Emir that it is not possible to cooperate with the Prime Minister, and the Emir is

supposed to replace the Prime Minister in this case.

Article 82 of the Constitution limits the right to run for the National Assembly in Kuwait to those who hold nationality “by foundation”, namely Kuwaitis who are defined by law as “settlers in Kuwait before 1920”, and the law also prohibits those with acquired nationality from voting until 20 years have elapsed since their naturalization. According to the electoral law, members of the armed forces and police are denied the right to vote.



State of Oman

Oman advanced 5 points in this scale due to the stability of the periodicity of the Shura Council and municipal elections, enhancing the manifestations of election integrity and transparency, and facilitating the voting process using electronic applications that took into account the needs of voters with visual and hearing disabilities.

In October 2023, the Sultanate witnessed elections for the tenth term of the Shura Council, and the percentage of registered voters reached 49.67% of the total number of Omanis over the age of 21, and 65.88% of registered voters casted their vote. The Higher Election Commission has not received any complaints or reports of any irregularities or illegal practices.

Elections are held within all states according to the administrative division determined by the government, so that each state with more than 30,000 citizens has two deputies represented in the Shura Council, while states with less than 30,000 citizens represent one deputy, and this distribution resulted in a variation in the number of voters in electoral districts.

Oman witnessed legislative amendments to the competencies of the Ministry of Interior that transferred the competence of governors' affairs to municipal councils, which were granted limited decentralization in decision-making related to

municipal services and fees, thus witnessing a slight development in the field of separation of the powers of the Shura Council and municipal councils in terms of law and practice, and the latter now has a more specific role in the administrative apparatus of the state and local administration.

In the Sultanate of Oman, elections are held to select the members of the Shura Council (half of the members of the Council of Oman) and two-thirds of the members of the municipal councils, while the remaining members are appointed by the Sultan.

Omani law explicitly prohibits all members of the security and military services from running or voting until two years have elapsed since their departure.

The law does not regulate campaign financing, but increases penalties for buying and selling votes.

The Council of Oman Law (promulgated by Royal Decree No. 7/2021) grants the elected Shura Council limited oversight powers, particularly with regard to the right to interpellate, withdraw confidence, and evaluate performance. In addition to the fact that the Law of the Council of Oman does not stipulate a specific period in which the Council of Ministers must respond to the interpellation request, the interpellation of more than one minister has been suspended.



State of Qatar

The constitution stipulates for the right to political participation through the Shura Council (45 members), 30 of whom are elected, and the emir appoints 15 other members. The constitution explicitly stipulates that the Shura Council assumes the authority to legislate, approve the State's general budget, and monitor the performance of the executive authority, but oversight is limited to asking questions for clarification with no recognized right to interpellation and withdrawing confidence.

Qatar witnessed the first Shura Council elections in October 2021 after the formation of a high election commission, the issuance of electoral law, and the decision of the Ministry of Interior to divide the country into 30 electoral districts. However, the delimitation of districts and voter registration have witnessed internal controversy for their adoption of tribal classifications, in addition to restricting the right to run and vote to Qataris in an original capacity,

whom the law defines as families who settled in Qatar before 1930.

The members of the Government (ministers) are appointed entirely by the emir.

Municipal council elections have been held in Qatar since 1999 and continue periodically, the last of which was in June 2023, when Qataris elected 29 members. The elections resulted in a turnout of 40.8%. Low turnout was observed during the last three sessions. The municipal council can only effectively monitor the implementation of laws and decisions relating to municipal affairs without monitoring the performance of the executive apparatus. The Council also has the right to submit proposals and proclivities to the executive authority, which decides to adopt or neglect them. The municipal electoral process remains in compliance with the electoral system formulated and demarcated by the Government (represented by the Ministry of the Interior).



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Despite the holding of 8 sessions of the Shura Council (1993-2022), it is noted that the Council's interaction with public issues is limited.

The Shura Council is composed of a chairman and 150 members appointed by the King. Members' rights, duties and all their affairs are defined by Royal Decree. The Council's role is limited to providing non-binding advice to the executive authority. The power relationship between the Shura Council and the Government is unbalanced, making it devoid of any legislative or oversight powers, leaving the Government the final and supreme reference authority in public affairs.

In December 2021, the Ministry of Municipalities announced the end of the third session of the work of municipal councils, after an extension for two years. Contrary to the provision of Article (16) of the Law on Municipal Councils System, the government has not

scheduled the date for the new elections or explained the reasons for the delay. According to statistics of municipal councils in 2019, there are 285 municipal councils in various regions and governorates of Saudi Arabia, while the number of members has reached 3,159, including 2,106 elected members.

The practice of municipal councils is the only experiment – in recent times – in which election is held to elect two-thirds of the seats in each council, while the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs appoints the remaining third. The first municipal electoral process was held in 2005, followed by 2011 and 2015.

The authority charged with setting up the electoral mechanism into a system and districts is the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, which has the authority to amend the electoral system and the districts.

United Arab Emirates

The fifth round of elections for half of the members of the Federal National Council took place in October 2023, with turnout of 44% of the electoral bodies chosen by the official authorities in each of the seven emirates.

The Federal National Council is the fourth federal authority in terms of ranking in the five federal authorities stipulated in the Constitution: (the Supreme Council of the Federation, the President and Vice-President of the Federation, the Council of Ministers of the Federation, the Federal National Council, and the Federal Judiciary).

The Constitution does not stipulate that the National Council is a legislative authority, but lists powers such as debating, approving or rejecting constitutional amendments, draft laws, the annual general budget of the Federation and its final accounts, and international treaties and agreements. It also does not stipulate the right of the Council to propose draft laws, but rather to discuss what is presented to it. The Council's opinion is not considered binding, as the President of the Union has the right to issue laws alone.

The constitution does not state the right to vote and does not mention it, leaving each emirate the right to determine the method of selecting its representatives in the Federal National Council, which was done through appointment.

At the end of 2006, the first elections were held to select half of the members, in which a limited number of citizens of each emirate chosen by the ruler of the emirate vote and their names are registered in the electoral college. It is noted that there is no law regulating the electoral process, but a guide issued by the National Elections Committee in 2019.

While all council members (elected and appointed) have the right to ask questions and queries to members of the government, they lack the right to interpellate, form commissions of inquiry, or withdraw confidence. According to Article 92 of the Constitution, the Council of Ministers has the power to prohibit the discussion of any subject if it is in the "supreme interests of the Union". The powers of the National Council do not extend to the local governments of the seven emirates.

The number of members of the Council (40 members) reflects a variation in the size and influence of each emirate, with Abu Dhabi and Dubai holding 8 members each, 6 members each for Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah, and 4 members each for Ajman, um Al Quwain and Fujairah.

The Emirate of Sharjah is unique in having an elected advisory council, as there are no elections in other advisory and municipal councils in various emirates.





3.3 Scale Three: Political Organisations

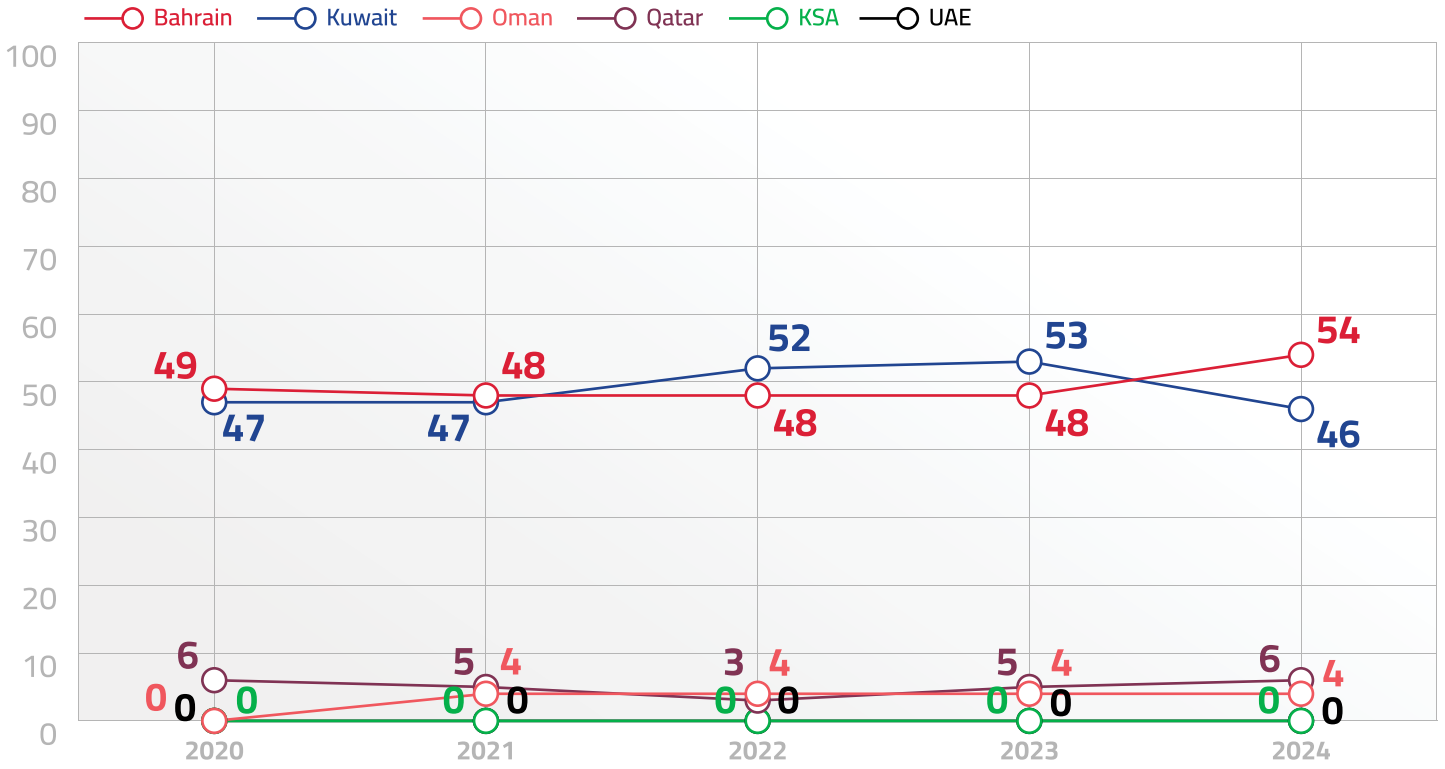


illustration 23: Results of the Political Organisations Scale 2020-2024

Scale elements	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
Legitimacy of political organisations 30 scores	22	8	0	0	0	0
Availability of opposition tools 25 scores	7	12	0	0	0	0
Safety for political activists 25 scores	10	17	4	6	0	0
Administrative and financial independence 10 scores	6	3	0	0	0	0
Participation in elections on slates 10 scores	9	6	0	0	0	0
Total 100 scores	54	46	4	6	0	0

Table 3: Results / Third Scale – Political Organisations Scale Scores



Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain advanced 6 points after pardoning 1,584 prisoner, including those arrested during the political crisis that the country has witnessed since 2011. The pardon was welcomed by political and human rights bodies, considering that it spreads a positive atmosphere in the country and eases political tension.

Bahrain has a law regulating the work of political organisations as “political societies”. However, the legal environment through which these societies operate is considered hostile where activists and politicians may be subjected to harassment and prosecution. Due to the existence and expansion of laws restricting political participation, organised political action in the country remains marginal.

These political societies engage in political action similar to that of political parties, except for participation in Government. The electoral system does not oppose the participation of political societies in the parliamentary and municipal elections through their own electoral

lists.

During the 2022 parliamentary and municipal elections, it was noted that there were no lists of political societies, and the number of candidates belonging to these societies decreased to 9 candidates out of a total of 343 candidates.

Some political societies – particularly of the opposition – have been dissolved by court decisions, while some opposition groups operate underground or from outside the country. It is also noteworthy that many leaders of opposition political groups have been arrested, while some are living in exile.

Political societies are prohibited from receiving donations or funding from outside the framework of the organisation, and their financial resources are limited to member donations and membership subscriptions, in addition to the funds provided by the Ministry of Justice. These societies are also subject to the supervision of the Ministry of Justice and the audit by the National Audit Office, affiliated to the King’s Court.



State of Kuwait

After advancing for two consecutive years, Kuwait fell (7 points) in this scale due to the restrictions that the country witnessed during the past year, including arrests and judicial trials that affected activists and former and current deputies (members of the dissolved 2024 Assembly), as well as prison sentences for their opposition to suspending the constitution and dissolving the National Assembly.

This year also witnessed the security authorities prevent a number of political groups from organising vigils on the Gaza war in March and May 2024.

There is no provision in the Constitution of Kuwait that provides for or prohibits the freedom to establish political parties. However, in practice the State forbids the official formation of parties. In October 2019, the Supreme Judicial Council refused to approve a proposal for a law on the organisation of political bodies submitted by a number of MPs, deeming it “a danger to the integrity of democratic governance and the unity and stability of the country”.

There are major political blocs of various streams that operate openly.



These political blocs work on the ground and have their positions and groupings as political forces that voice their positions on events and participate in elections through candidates whose identity is clearly known to the Kuwaiti public opinion.

Some of these groups have complained about the one-person-one-vote electoral system that makes it difficult for them to win as a slate of candidates. There is a lack of transparency in the work of these blocs and their funding sources.



State of Oman

The Law in Oman criminalises forming or joining political organisations. Although the Basic Law of the State grants citizens civil rights such as peaceful assembly, addressing public authorities and expressing opinion, laws regulating the exercise of those rights have not yet been promulgated. In addition, other laws (the Penal Code and the Press and Publications Law) restrict some of those rights.

for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

In 2020, the Sultanate of Oman acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention

The Sultanate offers Omani opponents and jurists outside the country the opportunity to return home and settle their positions in a way that seems systematic and continuous. Nevertheless, this does not include allowing them to engage in any political activity inside the Sultanate.



State of Qatar

There are no laws in Qatar to regulate or allow for the formation of political organisations in any way, and the country lacks any organised work practised by citizens to address issues of politics and public affairs.

affiliated with any party or forming any electoral alliances. The judiciary in Qatar issued prison sentences for a number of citizens, some are up to “life imprisonment,” after protest gatherings against the citizenship law and the right to run in the Shura Council elections in 2021.

Candidates for membership in the Shura Council run in the elections as independent candidates, not





Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Political organisations of all kinds are prohibited in Saudi Arabia. In March 2014, the Ministry of Interior published a list of “security and intellectual prohibitions” that confirmed the criminalisation of “anyone who supports, shows affiliation with, sympathizes with, or promotes organizations, groups, movements, gatherings, or parties, or holds meetings under its umbrella, whether inside or outside the Kingdom, and this includes participation in all audio, print, or visual media...” The list is the first official document that includes an explicit text banning political parties of all kinds.

In accordance with the Basic Law of Governance, demands related to public affairs are dealt with as individuals’ demands, as stipulated in the Basic Law of Governance that “the King’s Council and the Council of the Crown Prince shall be open for all citizens and anyone else who may have a complaint or a grievance, and every individual shall have the right to address public authorities in matters of concern to him”.

The active political groups (internally or externally) are not officially recognised. Some are organised in overt, secret or semi-secret organisations, and

the leaders are always arrested or forced into exile. Targeting political activists has increased noticeably in recent years.

The US State Department’s Human Rights Report 2023 notes numerous violations including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and restrictions on freedom of expression and the media, which include censorship, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists.

Statements issued by the Saudi Ministry of Interior indicate that a number of death sentences have been carried out against citizens. Human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, consider that the judiciary has used vague legal provisions under the laws against cybercrime and terrorism that equate peaceful expression and online activities with terrorism. During its UPR on January 22, 2024, Saudi Arabia received 377 recommendations from 136 countries on various issues including the right to freedom of expression, the prohibition of torture, and the death penalty, and called on the Saudi authorities to reform the country’s counterterrorism framework.



United Arab Emirates

Laws in the United Arab Emirates do not permit any type of political work, and it has been noted that a number of previous attempts to organise political activities or others critical of the performance of the authorities have exposed organisers to harassment, imprisonment, citizenship revocation or deportation.

In December 2023, the UAE began retrying at least 65 former defendants in the so-called “UAE 94” case, and authorities charged defendants who had completed prison sentences in previous sentences with “establishing a secret organisation for the purpose of committing acts of violence and terrorism,” which referred them to receiving new life sentences.



3.4 Scale Four: Civil Society Institutions

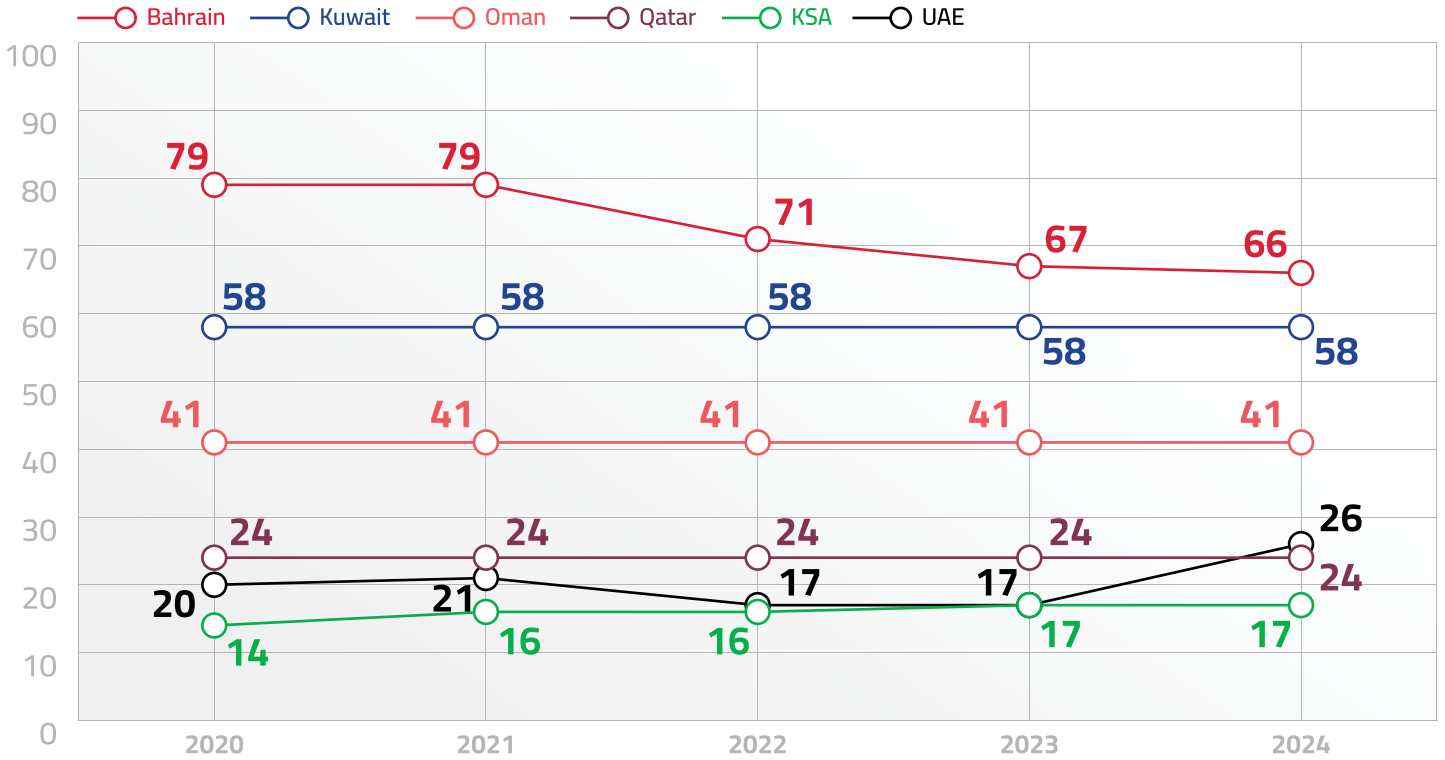


Illustration 24: Results of the Civil Society Institutions Scale 2020-2024

Scale elements	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
Legal environment guaranteeing the right of individuals and groups to form NGOs and pressure groups 40 scores	27	30	15	10	9	18
Trade unions and professional societies legislation / union pluralism and trade unions / availability of union work tools, including the right to strike 40 scores	30	18	20	10	4	2
Institutional independence 10 scores	5	5	3	2	2	3
Restrictions and obstacles 10 scores	4	5	3	2	2	3
Total 100 scores	66	58	41	24	17	26

Table 4: Results / Fourth Scale – Civil Society Institutions Scale Scores



Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain fell one point in this scale as security restrictions increased on members of dissolved political societies from running for the boards of directors of civil society organisations, including the Bahrain Human Rights Society, the Lawyers Society, and the Islamic Enlightenment Society.

The bans are based on a June 2022 amendment to the Law on Social, Cultural and Sports Associations and Clubs. The amendment prohibits any member of a political society, a practitioner of political action or a member of the legislative authority from running for membership in the boards of directors of clubs or sports bodies. This is in addition to the bundle of restrictions and obstacles, including security checks.

The Government restricts all NGO relations with any party outside the country, whether in terms of obtaining funding, scholarships, training, or field visits, and requires prior official approvals in this regard.

Bahrain has more than 650 licensed NGOs. The law requires that applications for incorporation be submitted to the competent ministry, and there is a limited number of associations that have had their applications suspended without handing over a rejection decision to their founders. The law obligates board members of NGOs to hold

periodic elections and submit annual reports. A number of NGOs have been dissolved because they were deemed “ineffective or because they were unable to provide something that would benefit society”. Over the past two years, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development has intervened in the appointment or dismissal of some 60 administrative boards. With some exceptions, the Government generally does not interfere in directing the internal activities of NGOs.

Bahrain enjoys reasonable freedom of trade union activity, as the law provides for the formation and operation of trade unions, including the formation of federations of trade unions. The Government does not interfere in the formation and management of these trade unions, where members freely elect their leaders. The law also guarantees the right to protest, including the right to strike, but in recent years extensive restrictions have been placed on organising protests.

Employees working in Government organisations are not allowed to form trade unions that represent them, but they can join professional societies under the NGOs law, as is the case with doctors, engineers and journalists, but these entities lack many of the privileges and legal status enjoyed by trade unions.



State of Kuwait

Kuwait's constitution (article 43) stipulates for the right to form associations and trade unions. Kuwaiti law regulates the right to form NGOs, and although the Government has resorted to the same law to dissolve a number of associations for committing "violations" or carrying out foreign activities "without permission", the margin for the work of associations remains noticeable.

In dissolving the boards of directors of cooperative societies, the state relies on internal investigation committees in the Ministry of Social Affairs, and there are societal demands for the adoption of judicial rulings in these decisions.

In May 2023, the Ministry of Social Affairs addressed public benefit associations through a reminder circular that included instructions and decisions that NGOs considered obstructing their work. The circular included a reminder that any licensed association is prohibited from conducting any activity or issuing

any publications except with prior approval from the Ministry. It also stipulated that no government agency may be addressed except through it.

The law allows the formation of trade unions in all sectors (private and governmental) with the requirement of approval of the Minister of Social Affairs for the trade union to acquire legal status. The Kuwait Trade Union Federation has continued its activities since its establishment in 1961.

There is no legal framework governing professional trade unions, so professionals in Kuwait organise activities under the framework of the Clubs and Public Welfare Societies Law. Despite the nonexistence of legal articles regulating the right to strike, a number of strikes were organised in the past. It is noticeable that the Government interferes in financing trade union organisations, all of which receive various forms of funding, and some of which receive funding continuously on an annual basis.



State of Oman

The law in the Sultanate of Oman regulates the formation and operation of NGOs, but it gives the Minister of Social Development a broad range of supervisory powers. A number of cases have been reported for societies whose establishment registration requests were rejected without explaining reasons for rejection. The Government interferes with the nature of NGOs' funding, but some receive financial support from the Government.

Trade unions in Oman are regulated by provisions within the labour law, and some administrative regulations that clarify the procedural aspects and

licensing requirements for trade unions and trade union federations, which also prohibit the formation of trade unions in the public sector as well as vital sectors.

Omani unions (despite their limited powers) have financial independence from the Government and a space for independent and, somewhat, undirected action. According to statistics from the General Federation of Oman Workers until the end of 2022, the number of trade unions in the Sultanate is 323, while the number of sectoral labour unions is 7 and the number of professional associations is 10.



State of Qatar

Qatari law allows for the establishment of civil organisations and associations. However, it prevents them from engaging in any political activities and places restrictions on their activities and sources of funding. The law requires the approval of the Minister of Interior, who has the authority to dissolve them administratively.

Over the past years, it has been reported that a number of requests were rejected without providing any reasons. As for trade union work, the Labour Law guarantees Qatari citizens (only) to participate and

form labour organisations. This right is limited to establishments in which the number of Qatari workers is not less than 100 workers.

Strikes are prohibited for foreign workers, but they are allowed under many conditions including Government's approval. The government also determines the procedures and conditions for the workers' committees.

As for professional associations, licensing is granted for three years only, to be renewed by a government's decision.



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The number of non-profit NGOs in Saudi Arabia has increased, including 4,721 NGOs operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and are prohibited from working outside the scope of charity and solidarity work. At the same time, NGOs specialising in different fields and activities are licensed by other government ministries.

The regulation of civil society institutions and NGOs is considered late in Saudi Arabia, and it began with the issuance of a special Royal Decree in 2015, which stipulated that the Ministry of Interior is the competent authority for licensing and rejection, along with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, in addition to any other authority overseeing the sector in which the organisation will operate.

Human rights groups have documented a number of requests which have not been approved by the

relevant authorities, while some activists have been arrested for their activities in organisations considered by the State to be "unlicensed".

Saudi legislation lacks a law on trade unions, and there are no labour organisations in the country, with the exception of some committees, associations and bodies involving practitioners of some professions. The "National Committee on Labour Communities", which was formed by a resolution of the Minister of Labour and Social Development (January 2019), is concerned with representing labour committees in some private sector institutions. It is a (semi-official) committee with advisory powers, which is concerned with Saudi labour only.

The right of workers to organise themselves in free trade unions is still prohibited. Moreover, taking a step of this kind may subject them to forced dismissal, arrest or deportation for expatriate workers.



United Arab Emirates

The UAE advanced 9 points in this scale against the issuance of Federal Decree Law No. (50) of 2023 regarding the regulation of public benefit institutions on October 2, 2023. Despite that the law does not include trade unions, places restrictions on the activities of associations, and grants the executive authorities the power to dissolve and liquidate public benefit institutions without resorting to the judiciary, it, however, sets a comprehensive framework for the work of NGOs, including sponsoring and financing them and allowing them to invest financially in accordance with the law. The law gives associations the right to appeal government decisions to the authority of ministers and judicial institutions.

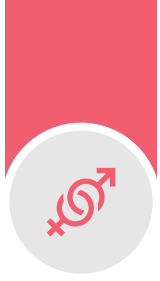
The constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association within the limits of the law, and there are about 300 licensed NGOs in the UAE operating in various sectors and regulated by a law that gives the Ministry of Community Development licensing authority and broad supervisory powers.

In the past, there have been cases of refusal to license associations specialised in human rights, as well as cases of associations that were dissolved for reasons related to sources of funding or political action.

Government authorities tighten financial and administrative control over civil society organisations. Dubai issued Decree No. (9) of 2022 to “subject private entities of public benefit established under legislation to the supervision and control of the Community Development Authority in Dubai,” which limits the independence of civil society organisations and restricts their activities.

In the absence of a law on the formation of trade unions, the labour law permits the employer to deprive a worker of his/her wages if he/she takes part in strikes. Although there are some professional associations, they are closer to civil action than to trade unions.





3.5 Scale Five: Gender Equivalence and Youth Engagement

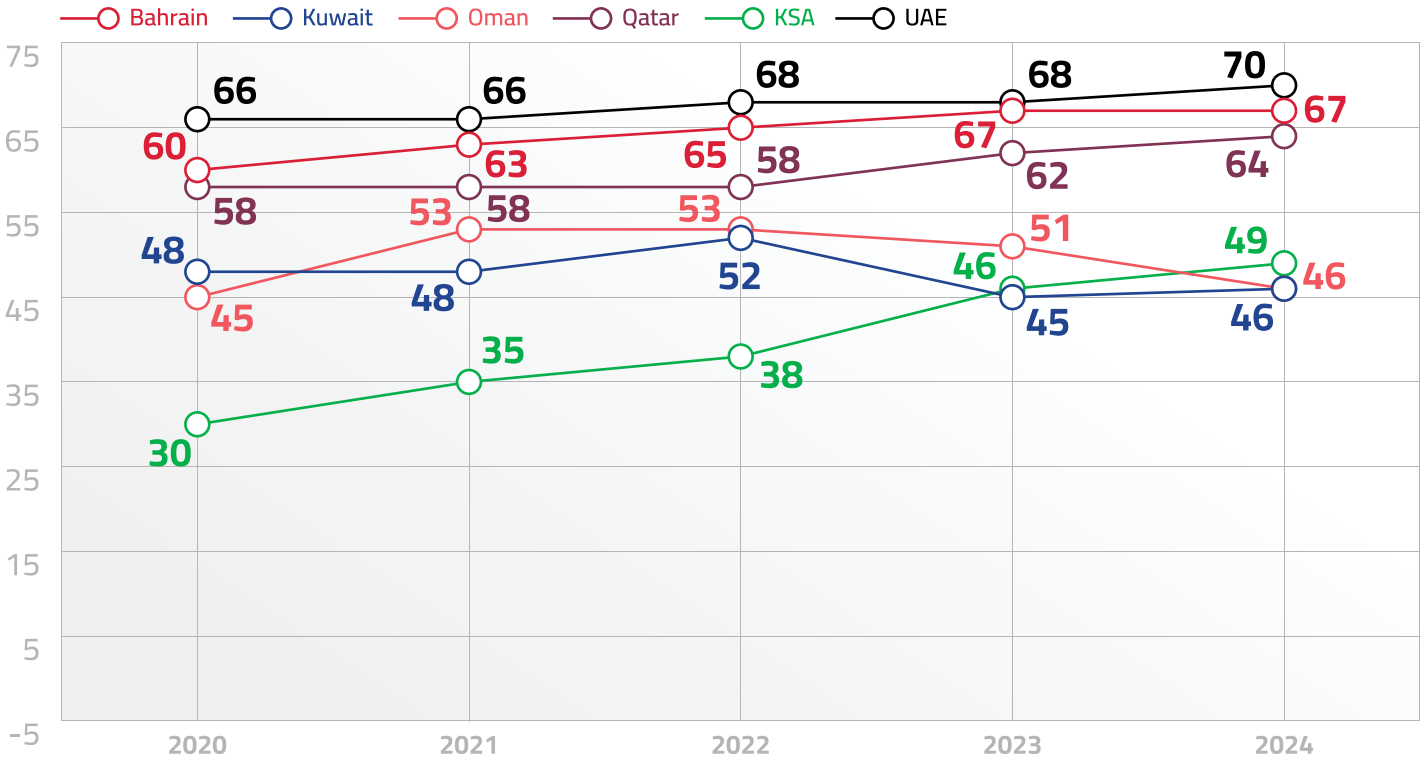


illustration 24: Results of the Gender Equivalence and Youth Engagement Scale 2020-2024

Scale elements	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
Women empowerment the right to vote / a quota in elected councils / holding leadership and senior positions 50 scores	46	35	33	42	30	48
Youth engagement voting age / holding senior positions 25 scores	21	11	13	22	0	0
Total 75 scores	67	46	46	64	49	70

Table 5: Results / Fifth Scale – Gender Equivalence and Youth Engagement Scale Scores



Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain maintained its score in this scale as the country's policies continued to empower women and youth in leadership positions.

Women and youth continue to be appointed in most government appointments.

According to the latest statistics, Bahraini women represent about 56% of government sector employees and 35% of workers in the private sector, and the percentage of Bahraini women in the diplomatic corps is 33%.

Women are represented in the elected parliament (8 women with of a total of 40 members), and 3 women have won seats in municipal councils. Women's representation in the appointed Shura Council increased from 9 to 10 women, equivalent to 25 percent of the council's seats.

The increase in the representation of women and youth in the government formation that followed the elections with the appointment of a new minister who took over the youth affairs portfolio, bringing the representation of women in the cabinet to 5 women.

There was an increase in the representation of women and youth in the government formation

that followed the elections with the appointment of a new minister who assumed the youth affairs portfolio, bringing the representation of women in the Council of Ministers to 5 women.

In the youth sector, it was noted that the government reversed a previous policy of supporting youth NGOs after withdrawing the headquarters of all youth societies from the Youth NGOs Complex following an administrative decision by the Ministry of Social Development.

On the other hand, Resolution No. (2) of 2022 was issued to establish and form the Youth Empowerment Committee in the public and private sectors. There are also government institutions that provide funding and training programs that are clearly concerned with assisting and developing the youth group.

The conditions for candidacy for the House of Representatives stipulate that the age of the candidate on election day should not be below 30 years old. In addition, one the conditions for participating in voting is that the citizen has reached the age of 21, which makes a segment of young people outside the electoral process.





State of Kuwait

Kuwait advanced one point in this scale due to the increase in the share of women in the Kuwaiti government from one to two in the last government formation (May 2024).

In the April 2024 National Assembly elections, the composition of the assembly included only one woman.

The National Assembly elections witnessed a marked disparity between the number of female candidates (13 candidates) and the number of male candidates (187 candidates), due to the lack of laws or procedures to ensure gender equivalence in the government or in elected institutions.

Kuwaiti women have the right to vote and run for office in the National Assembly and Municipal Council elections.

The voting age is 21 years, and to run for office a candidate must be 30 years old, which excludes a segment of the youth from the electoral process.

In addition, the Kuwaiti authorities do not have a clear policy towards involving the youth in decision-making, and their appointment in senior government positions is limited. However, some government institutions are undertaking special measures to empower youth and women, including the Central Bank of Kuwait, where women hold about 50% of leadership positions.



State of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman fell 5 points in this scale due to the absence of a clear policy to encourage and support women in the elections, as 32 women competed alongside 843 male candidates for 90 seats in the Shura Council elections without any of them winning, while the previous elections had witnessed the candidacy of 40 women and the victory of two of them.

In November 2023, a royal decree was issued appointing members of Majlis al-Dawla, the second legislative chamber, consisting of 86 members, including 18 women. The Sultan also issued a decree appointing 14 members, including 3 women members of the Omani Human Rights Commission.

In the municipal council elections that took place in the Sultanate in December 2022, only one female candidate out of a total of 27 female candidates competed with 942 male candidates for 126 seats, which is an additional decline (women held 7 seats in the previous municipal term) in women's representation and participation in decision-making.

The Sultanate's Basic Law provides for gender equality

and makes it a duty of the State. Although female representation has been strengthened at the level of appointments of ministers and undersecretaries, it is still limited (3 ministers out of a total of 23 ministers). Also, despite the enhanced participation of young people in the ministerial formation and at the level of undersecretaries, it is not clear that these scales are carried out under a clear or formal policy.

Omani women have the right to vote and enjoy equal opportunities to run for elections to the Shura Council and municipal councils. There are no laws to ensure gender equivalence in government or elected institutions, nor is there a national policy or strategy aimed at empowering women in leadership or senior positions.

Statistics from the Ministry of Social Development (September 2022) indicate that the number of Omani women's societies with their branches has reached about 60.

With the exception of the position of the Sultan, there are no areas or positions in the state to which women are legally excluded. The voting age in Oman is



21 years and the age to run for office is 30 years, which keeps a segment of young people out of the electoral process. With the exception of three articles listed

under the mission of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, there is no national policy or strategy aimed at engaging and empowering youth.



State of Qatar

Qatar rose two points in this scale due to the implementation of more measures to support women’s empowerment and participation in decision-making positions. According to official data, women represent 48% of the Supreme Judicial Council and hold 69% of senior positions in the judicial administration.

The participation rate of Qatari women in the labour market is about 37% for women in the age group (25-29) years, and is close to 49% for the age group (30-34) years, and the percentage of women’s representation in decision-making positions is 30%. The contemporary educational structures and international competition have contributed to advancing the role of Qatari women in the course of work and development.

After the cabinet reshuffle in March 2023, the share of women in the government formation remained stable (3 ministerial positions). Women hold senior positions, including head of Qatar’s permanent delegation to the United Nations in the New York and Geneva offices, chairing the National Human Rights Committee and chairing Qatar Charity.

Qatari women have the right to vote and run for office, but there are no laws or customs that guarantee gender equivalence, whether in the government formation, the Shura Council, or the Municipal Council, and despite the candidacy of 28 women for membership of the Shura Council in 2021, none of them was able to win, as well as during the 2023 municipal council elections. Although the Amir appointed two female members (out of 15 appointed members of the Shura Council), Qatari women’s representation in the Shura Council remains marginal (2 out of 45 members).

With regard to youth engagement, Qatar sets the age for voting in the Shura Council and municipal councils (18 years) and candidacy (30 years). There is no clear policy regarding youth empowerment and political participation, but it is noticeable that many of them hold leadership positions in the state, and the results of the 2023 municipal council elections witnessed the arrival of young faces to the council’s membership.



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia continued to advance for the fifth consecutive year in this scale (3 points) as the pace of women’s empowerment in public affairs accelerates as one of the fastest reform paths in recent years.

2023 saw a 38 percent growth in female entrepreneurship, according to official statistics. The participation rate of women in the labour market increased to 35.9% and the proportion of working women increased to 30.1%. According to the Saudi Labour Market Bulletin 2023, females constituted 40.8% of the total 2.3 million nationals working in the private sector. Statistics also show a

decrease in the unemployment rate among Saudi women, reaching 16.3% compared to 20.5% in the third quarter of 2022. According to the World Bank report, women’s participation in the labour market increased to 35.3 percent in 2023 compared to 17 percent in 2017. It included empowering Saudi women in leadership positions and new areas such as the tourism and entertainment sector. Among the notable appointments, Princess Reema bint Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz, Dr. Maha Juffali were members of the Board of Directors of the Mahd National Sports Academy, Amal Al-Mouallimi was



appointed Ambassador to Canada, Haifa Al-Judaie was appointed Head of the Saudi Mission to the European Union, Nawal Al-Rasheed was President of Taibah University, and Manal Al-Lahibi was Director General of Jeddah Education. Adwaa al-Arifi was also appointed assistant to the sports minister.

Women hold 30 of the 150 seats in the Shura Council. Saudi women participated for the first time as voters and candidates in municipal council elections, winning 20 seats.

Despite the announcement of the establishment of a committee to empower women, none of them has yet held a ministerial position. Saudi Arabia also has no laws guaranteeing gender equivalence in government or public institutions, including municipal councils.

On March 8, 2022, the Council of Ministers issued a new personal status law that introduced virtual guidelines for marriage, divorce, and child custody,

enhancing women’s participation in public life. With regard to youth engagement, and in accordance with the municipal council elections system, the voting age was set at 18 years and candidacy at 25 years. Since the appointment of Prince Muhammad bin Salman Al Saud as Crown Prince, discussion has focused on the role of youth, and a several have undertaken sensitive advisory and executive roles, including young princes who have held the positions of regional princes, undersecretaries and ambassadors. The policies of empowering young people who have been promoted to senior positions and in the decision-making circle are facing criticism that they do not represent the various sections of Saudi society.

Saudi Arabia reported progress in empowering youth, through a series of decisions that encourage this group to participate in public work and give them priority in recent appointments, in addition to having a clear policy to involve youth in decision-making.



United Arab Emirates

The UAE advanced two points in this scale due to increasing attention and policies to empower Emirati youth.

The laws state that the age of candidacy for election is 25, and the laws do not specify the voting age.

The UAE adopts the “National Youth Strategy” on youth participation in decision-making and societal and economic empowerment, and in 2016 the government established a youth council with an advisory role in topics and areas related to youth.

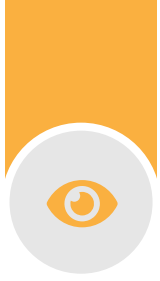
There are several young ministers in the federal government, and it is noteworthy that many projects, as well as financial and political support, are directed toward the youth of both genders. The percentage of young members in the seventeenth legislative term of the Federal National Council is approximately 37.5%.

In June 2019, the UAE recognised “the right to include members of the Emirati youth on the boards of directors of government entities, institutions

and companies.” In February 2020, the government recognised “the right to involve young people in the official missions of the federal state entities.”

The UAE has an effective policy in empowering women, as the percentage of women’s representation in the current cabinet is 9 ministers out of a total of 36 ministers, and Emirati women have the right to run for office and vote in the Federal National Council elections. In 2019, the Federal Supreme Council issued a decision to make it mandatory for women to represent half of the elected seats in the Federal National Council.

To enhance the presence of women in state institutions and gender equivalence at work, the Government established the Gender Equivalence Council in 2015, which seeks to establish positive measure to ensure women’s involvement in appropriate fields of work and membership in representative boards and boards of directors of companies, especially public and listed companies.



3.6 Scale Six: Transparency

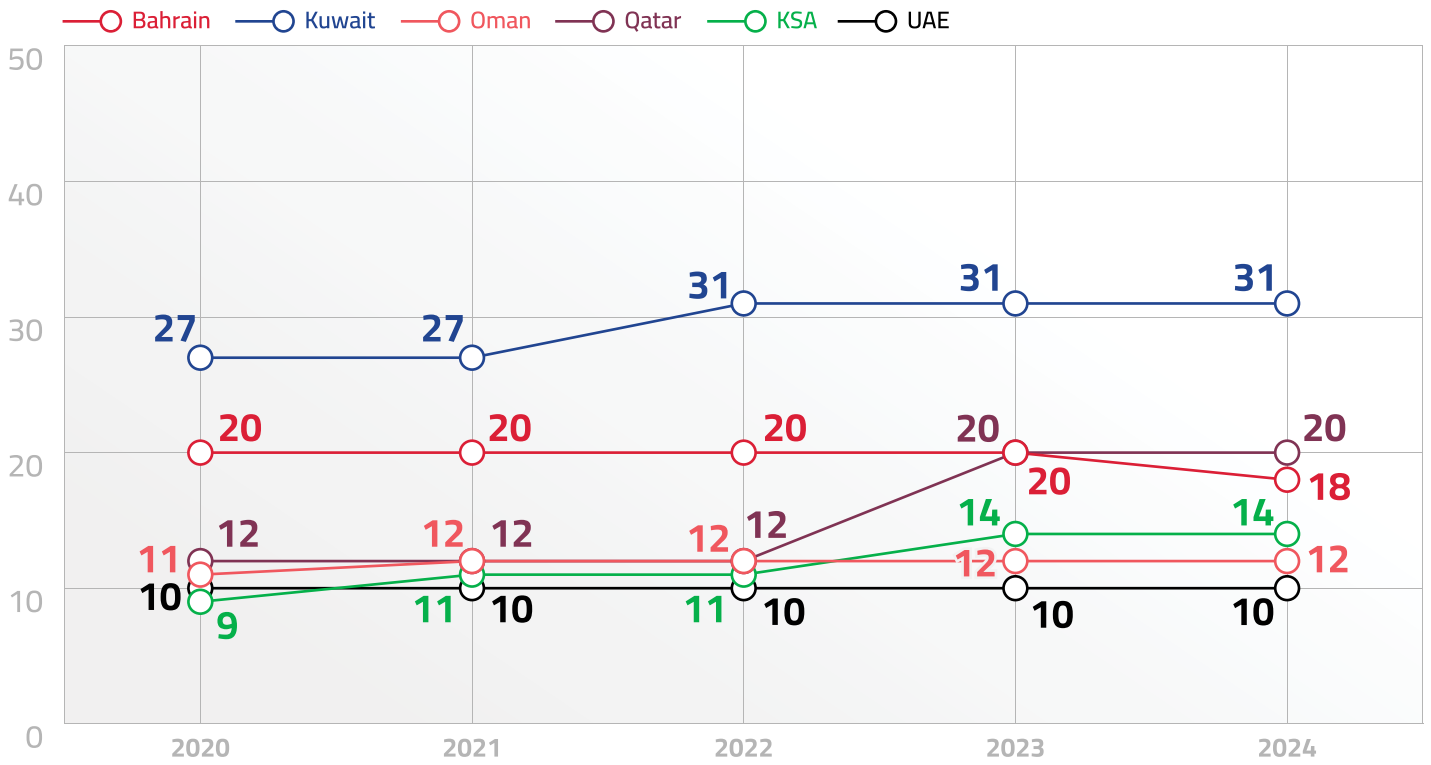


illustration 25: Transparency Scale Results 2020-2024

Scale elements	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
Information sharing right to access, circulate and disseminate information 25 scores	10	16	7	15	9	5
Independent oversight the actions and performance of the executive, legislative and judicial authorities, sources of wealth, spending of public funds 25 scores	8	15	5	5	5	5
Total 50 scores	18	31	12	20	14	10

Table 6: Results / Sixth Scale – Transparency Scale Scores



Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain decreased two points in this scale due to continued restrictions on civil society organisations concerned with independent oversight of the work and performance of the State authorities. In July 2023, the Bahrain Transparency Society was subjected to financial judicial sanctions after criminalising the collection of financial donations from members of the society.

The law regulating the press, printing and publishing provides for the right to obtain and publish information. Nevertheless, Government authorities refuse to disclose data and information under debate in society, including arms expenses and oil revenues.

There are documented cases where journalists, photojournalists, activists, and citizens were subjected to pressure, threats or arrest for publishing or circulating information, or participating in the media through the use of the Penal Code, which provides for imprisonment and fines.

With regard to community oversight, the Bahrain Transparency Society was licensed in 2001, but it is not involved in monitoring aspects of public spending. Its activity is limited to issuing statements and participating in events to promote values and principles of transparency and anti-corruption.



State of Kuwait

Law No. (12) of 2020 provides for the right of access to information and obliges ministers and government institutions to archive and organise all data and information, facilitate access to information and ensure their disclosure. Nevertheless, cases of summoning activists for publishing information or exposing "corruption cases" have been reported in Kuwait.

In July 2019, the Supreme Committee for Leading and Coordinating the First National Strategy for Enhancing Integrity and Combating Corruption was formed with the membership of government institutions and with the participation of civil society organisations.

In 2016, Kuwait established the Public Anti-Corruption Authority (NAZAHA), which receives complaints from individuals confidentially. It has the authority to investigate and refer to the Public Prosecution the suspects in cases of financial corruption, and it is the body authorised to obtain financial disclosure statements from the Prime Minister and members of the Council of

Ministers, the National Assembly, the Municipal Council and the Judiciary, in addition to heads and members of councils and executive bodies and those occupying leadership positions in the Government.

With regard to community participation in oversight, the Kuwaiti Transparency Society was established in 2006, but it was dissolved by the authorities, and in March 2018 the General Assembly of the Transparency Society elected a new board of directors. The Kuwait Association for Protecting Public Funds, established in 2005, is a public benefit society whose aim is to educate citizens about the importance of guarding, defending and maintaining public funds.

The Kuwait State Audit Bureau (KSAB) reports directly to the National Assembly and assists the Government and the Assembly in monitoring the collection of state revenues and its expenditure within the limits of the budget. Nevertheless, sharp criticism of rampant corruption in State institutions is increasing in Kuwait.



State of Oman

There is no law regulating or guaranteeing the right to access information. Official State data is generally available. However, according to observers and opponents, there is doubt about its accuracy.

The Law for the Protection of Public Funds and Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest requires officials to disclose their property, assets, and wealth, but they remain confidential and are not made public. In previous years, cases of journalists or activists who were threatened, arrested or imprisoned for publishing or circulating information were documented, and

newspapers, media and journalistic institutions were closed for the same reasons.

With regard to community participation in oversight, there are no independent civil society institutions dedicated to transparency and monitoring public expenditure. The Omani Economic Association, in cooperation with Transparency International, sometimes performs this role within a limited framework due to the strict laws and the wide discretion of those responsible for law enforcement.



State of Qatar

The law in Qatar guarantees the right to seek information. According to Law No. 9 of 2022, any person has the right to submit an official request to any government agency to obtain information, and the law requires a decision on the request within a period not exceeding 30 days, with the need to state the reasons in the event of rejection. The law imposes fines and penalties that can reach imprisonment for deliberately withholding or failing to provide information or provide incorrect information.

In previous years, cases have been documented of activists and journalists subjected to harassment

and pressure due to the circulation of information, as both the Press and Publications Law and the Anti-Cybercrime Law impose severe restrictions.

With regard to community oversight, there are no independent civil institutions in Qatar that are specialised in transparency and oversight of public expenditure. There is a Governmental body, the Administrative Control and Transparency Authority (ACTA), as well as the National Committee for Integrity and Transparency, which is affiliated with the Government.





Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

There has been no significant change in this metric after Saudi Arabia’s progress over the past years due to the adoption of several effective measures across several government agencies to regulate and classify data. Electronic platforms allow ministries and government institutions the right to access information under legal controls. The Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) and its subsidiary entities also serve as a source of information available to the public. In February 2021, the Shura Council approved the Personal Data Protection and the Freedom of Information laws.

Freedom House’s 2023 report notes a relative improvement in the availability of some economic

data, including data on the government budget, but also notes that the mechanisms for spending state funds and internal decision-making are unclear, as there is no general mechanism to hold senior officials to account for their decisions. The defence budget is far from public oversight, and the sovereign wealth fund’s data is also largely obscure.

With regard to community participation, there is no civil institution concerned with transparency and scrutiny in the areas of disbursement of public funds, despite the popular demands through petitions and articles stressing the need to fight corruption. Citizens can address the National Anti-Corruption Commission, which was established in 2011.



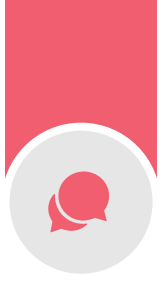
United Arab Emirates

Despite the development of the UAE’s supervisory procedures with regard to combating corruption, there is no law regulating or guaranteeing the right to access information to allow individuals and civil society institutions to participate in oversight.

There is what is known as a Guide to Access Government Information from federal agencies, as well as the Law on Data Dissemination and Exchange in the Emirate of Dubai, which is primarily concerned

with establishing the Dubai Data Authority. It is noted that the provisions of the articles of the Penal Code and the Law on Combating IT and Cyber-crimes have broad discretionary power and heavy penalties, especially with regard to accessing or disseminating information.

With regard to popular participation, there are no civil society institutions specialised in transparency and scrutiny of disbursement of public funds.



3.7 Scale Seven: Freedom of Opinion and Expression

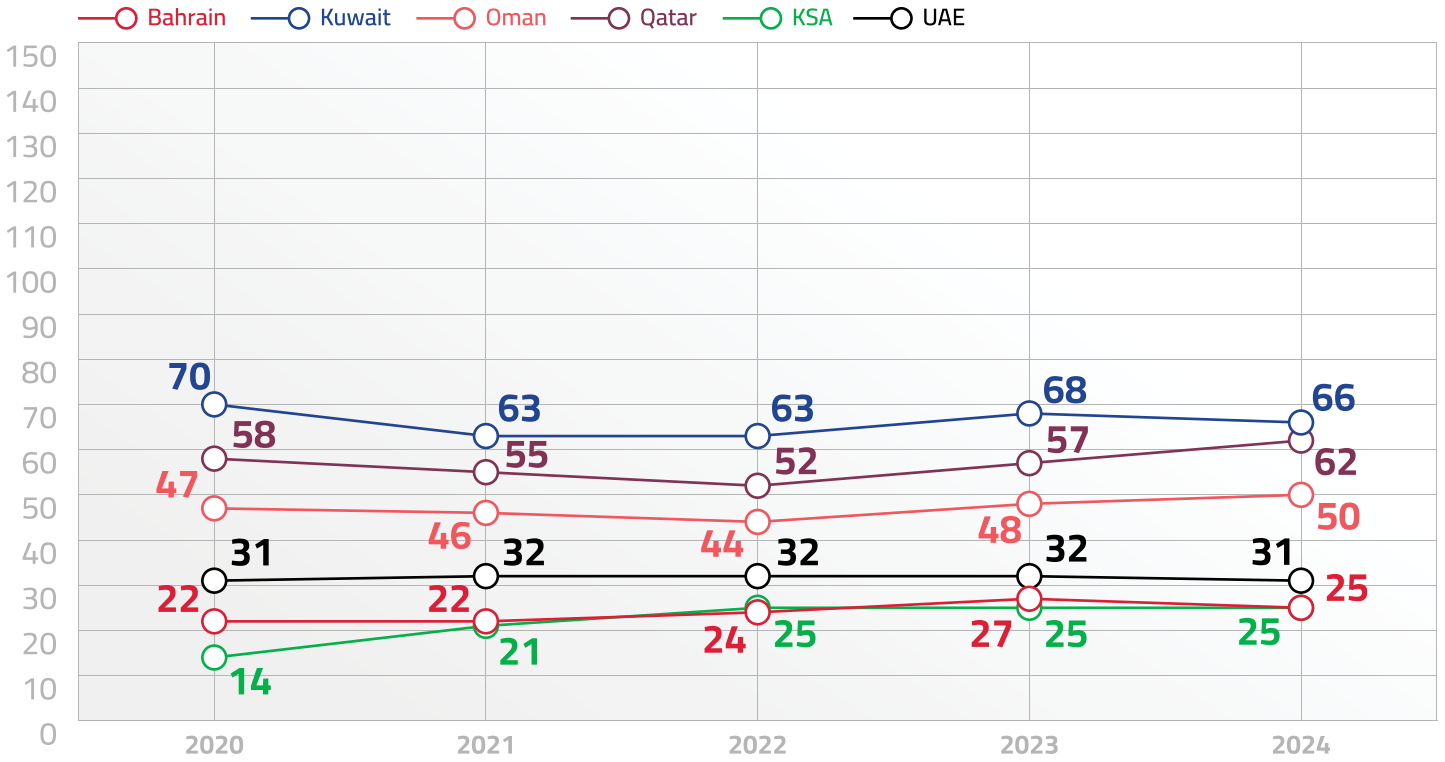


illustration 26: Results of the Freedom of Opinion and Expression Scale 2020-2024

Scale elements	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
Freedom of the press 30 scores	5	17	8	16	3	4
Independence of media institutions 30 scores	5	15	5	7	5	5
Internet censorship 30 scores	6	14	5	7	4	4
Freedom and safety of individuals to exercise criticism 30 scores	4	8	7	13	3	3
Confronting hate speech and incitement to violence 30 scores	5	12	25	19	10	15
Total 150 scores	25	66	50	62	25	31

Table 7: Results / Seventh Scale – Freedom of Opinion and Expression Scale Scores



Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain fell back in this scale by two points due to an increase in summons and interrogation of researchers, writers and online activists.

Bahrain continues to witness legal prosecutions against some activists and opinions opposed to the Government, through the Law on the Protection of Society from Terrorism, the Penal Code, and the Law Regulating Printing and Publishing. The Cybercrime Department is responsible for summoning and interrogating activists on social media sites, blocking and disabling websites, and targeting influential accounts.

It is noted that the government continues to ignore inflammatory speeches that include calls for hatred towards some social components and not others.

Bahrain ranked last among the Gulf countries in Reporters Without Borders' 2024 annual Press Freedom Index. It also fell two places in the global index from 171st (2023) to 173rd (2024) out of 180 countries, thus becoming among the bottom ten countries in the organisation's ranking.

The Bahrain Press Association documented 53 violations against journalists, media professionals, writers and online activists during 2023 and 11 cases during the first half of 2024, referring to the Government's "extremist" policy towards writings and publications related to

Bahrain's history, including confiscating books, preventing their circulation, and targeting researchers and academics working in this field.

Bahrain is accused of spying on its citizens inside and outside the country. Freedom House (March 2024) also classifies Bahrain as a "repressive and not free" state, scoring only 12 out of 100 points in the organisation's index.

Media institutions do not have true independence from State policies, and no individual can freely establish media institutions due to political, legal and financial constraints. Therefore, the opposition resorted to establishing media outlets from outside the country.

The Constitution of Bahrain and the Law regulating the Press, Printing and Publishing provide for freedom of opinion, expression and the press. However, due to broad interpretations, laws are used to restrict freedom of the press.

The Penal Code in Bahrain addresses the issue of incitement to hatred in Article 172, which stipulates penalties of imprisonment and a fine for anyone who "publicly incites hatred or contempt for a certain faction of society, if such incitement is likely to undermine public peace". Nevertheless, calls for hatred and targeting for political and sectarian reasons spread in the country, and it is noted that the State applies this article selectively.



State of Kuwait

After its progress last year, Kuwait has decreased two points due to the arrest and trial decisions of a number of activists and politicians and the sentences handed down to a number of them for posts on the X app and other social media platforms. The security authorities

intensified summons, arrest and trial procedures following the suspension of some articles of the constitution and the dissolution of the National Assembly, while most Kuwaitis imposed on themselves "self-censorship", after the security crackdown that affected dozens.



Official statistics issued by the Information Technology and Statistics Sector at the Ministry of Justice (November 14, 2023) indicate that the number of cases registered with the Public Prosecution for 9 months of 2023 amounted to 4,718 cases with the Media and Publication Prosecution specialized in issues of publications and social media posts.

Kuwait monitors what is published on the Internet through the Cybercrime Law issued in 2015, which stipulates penalties up to imprisonment and financial fines, and prosecutes the Department of Combating Cybercrime (affiliated with the Ministry of Interior) for everything it deems to be contrary to the law. Because of the cybercrime law (which has been criticized by international human rights organisations), a number of bloggers and opinion makers have been imprisoned.

According to Reporters Without Borders, Kuwait has risen 23 places to 131st in the World Press Freedom Index out of 180 countries. The organisation considered that Kuwait, despite being the “least repressive” country in the Gulf region, exercises “great control over the media field.” Freedom House classifies Kuwait as a “partially free” country (March 2024), scoring 38 points out of 100 in the organisation’s index.

All local newspapers and private television channels are owned by powerful families, so it seems difficult to consider them completely independent of the executive authority in the country, especially since licensing procedures require Government’s approvals.

Kuwait does not deal strictly and repressively with every criticism of the Government and its performance. However, it is strict in punishing any opinion that criticises matters that concern the Emir or against any Gulf country. Kuwait sometimes blocks some websites with political content.

Kuwait enacted the Law on the Protection of National Unity and Rejection of Hate, promulgated in 2012, which prohibits “initiating, advocating, or inciting by any means of expression [...] hatred or contempt for any group of society, inciting sectarian or tribal strife, or spreading ideas calling for the superiority of any race, group, colour, origin, religious sect, gender, lineage, or incitement to violence”. Nevertheless, instances of sectarian-motivated hate speech as well as against expatriate workers have been documented, especially after the outbreak of Covid-19. It is noted that the Government does not deal seriously with such cases.



State of Oman

Oman has witnessed a slight improvement (two points) in dealing with issues of public interest, however, freedom of the press and expression continues to face challenges, as arrests, interrogations and court sentences against citizens for expressing their opinions have continued.

In Reporters Without Borders’ annual World Press Freedom Index 2024, Oman advanced 18 places. The Sultanate ranked 137th globally with 42.52 points compared to 37.87 points in 2023.

High levels of self-censorship exist among individuals and organisations. This is due to ambiguity in the laws

relating to publication, as well as wide discretion to interpret the legal articles in question.

The Press and Publications Law curtails freedom of opinion and expression, as pressure on individuals and institutions has been documented.

Any individual may establish a media institution, but within restrictions and conditions that some regard to be financially insurmountable, and are also linked to security approvals. As for radio stations and live broadcasting services, they are prohibited except under restrictions or on subjects that the Government does not consider political or critical.



There is a set of laws related to censorship, some of which are general, such as the Law on Censorship of Artistic Works and the Law of Publications and Publishing, and some of them are special, such as the Omani Penal Code and the Law on Cybercrimes. These laws generally clarify practices that warrant arrest, detention, or banning the activity. There is close monitoring and follow-up on the content posted on the Internet, which includes blocking websites that publish political analyses or studies classified by the Government to be anti-government or causing trouble.

The accusations levelled by the authorities against the citizens and residents who are arrested because of their opinions vary from public defamation, insulting or outraging public decency, or what might be considered inconsistent with the traditions and customs of society, as well as stirring up public opinion, disturbing public order or violating public morals.

The Omani Penal Code deals very clearly and strictly with regard to confronting hate speech and incitement to violence, and the application of the law in this aspect is strict to everyone, giving a high sense of coexistence and protection.



State of Qatar

Qatar advanced 5 points in this scale by allowing popular demonstrations in the capital Doha – an unprecedented scene. While in previous years a number of foreign journalists were arrested and deported for covering local issues, the past year saw the emergence of community media run by migrants in different languages.

Qatar rose from 105th to 84th globally in Reporters Without Borders' annual World Press Freedom Index 2024.

The state allows media institutions within it to deal with Arab and international issues with a high ceiling of freedoms, which is not observed in local issues. Local media do not appear independent and by law the establishment of a newspaper requires approval from the Minister of Information.

Harassment and summons of a number of citizens and foreigners for expressing their opinions are documented.

The authorities monitor the Internet using a set of laws, including the Anti-Cybercrime Law issued in 2014, which received widespread criticism from

international human rights organisations. Freedom of opinion and expression is also subject to monitoring, as Article 19 of the Law on Combating Terrorism grants the authorities broad powers to conduct surveillance by any means for a period of 90 days before any judicial review. The Anti-Cybercrime Law includes similar provisions that are broad and vague, as it permits, for example, the imprisonment of anyone for setting up or running a website that publishes "fake news, with the intent to endanger the safety of the State, its public order, its internal or external security".

The Qatari law criminalises incitement to hatred and violence. Qatar acceded to a number of international conventions related to confronting racial discrimination, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965, the International Convention for the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid of 1973, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), but the State has not yet enacted clear laws in this context. It is commonplace to monitor inflammatory and racist speech against expatriate workers.



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Arrests and trials of citizens and residents for expressing their views in Saudi Arabia continue. According to Reporters Without Borders' annual World Press Freedom Index 2024, Saudi Arabia ranks 166 out of 180 compared to 170 the previous year.

Human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International, have reported that Saudi authorities continue to use counterterrorism and cybercrime laws to suppress dissenting opinions and punish individuals who express their opinions freely, including on social media.

According to a February 2023 Amnesty International report, the organisation documented 15 cases which were sentenced in 2022 to prison terms ranging from 10 to 45 years simply for peaceful activities online, including a sentence believed to be the longest that a Saudi woman has been sentenced for expressing an opinion. The organisation also documented the cases of 67 people prosecuted for exercising their rights to freedom of expression.

Penal, anti-terrorism and anti-cybercrime laws provide for imprisonment or suspension of journalists for any criticism in any matter of State affairs, including religious matters. The accusations vary from blasphemy, harming religion, threatening national

unity, or harming the image of the King and the State.

Saudi Arabia does not allow any internal criticism of its foreign policies, and is accused of spying on its citizens inside and outside the country.

Saudi Arabia lacks free media, and journalists and activists in Saudi Arabia are subject to tight surveillance.

The state exercises strict control over the press, and most media institutions are owned by those close to the ruling establishment.

Although the Press and Publications Law provides for the right to practice "objective and constructive criticism aimed at the public interest", the law grants the institution of government immunity from any criticism.

Saudi Arabia justifies the reasons for blocking websites on the pretext of violating the Saudi State's religious belief and criticising the State policies.

Numerous cases of hate speech and incitement on sectarian grounds are documented, often against Shia, Ismailis and Sufis. Notwithstanding, it is noted that Saudi Arabia has adopted more serious measures in face of hate speeches.





United Arab Emirates

Last year, in December 2023, a mass trial of the so-called "UAE 94" case took place.

The UAE continues to restrict freedom of opinion and expression, and individuals and institutions adopt high levels of self-censorship.

The penal code criminalizes insulting the rulers of the Emirates or criticising the ruling families of the seven emirates and the governments of friendly countries. The UAE is accused of spying on individuals, activists and politicians inside and outside the country.

The state controls online censorship of journalists and civil society activists through its Cybercrime Law. They are subject to defamation and judicial charges that include insulting the State or spreading false information.

According to Reporters Without Borders' annual World Press Freedom Index 2024, the UAE fell 15 places to 160th.

Media institutions are not independent from State policies, and in accordance with the law, any violation is subject to prosecution or suspension of activity. While the law permits anyone to establish media institutions, it sets exaggerated restrictions and conditions linked to security approvals. There is a vast

number of private media organisations that operate only in the entertainment and commercial fields.

There is a well-established legal system to prosecute any criticism of the State, including what is general, such as the UAE Press and Publications Law, and the UAE Penal Code, and what is special, such as the Law on Combating Cybercrimes. These laws generally clarify practices that require arrest, detention, or banning an activity.

The State blocks websites that publish political analyses or studies that may be classified as violating State policies. There are societal and legal restrictions and broad discretionary powers for law enforcement authorities such as the public prosecution, police and security agencies to interpret what is said, written, or published, which makes freedom of opinion restricted.

In a number of articles, UAE laws criminalise incitement to hatred, division, or anything that would harm national unity or social peace. If religion, religious institutions, or any public institutions or civil organisations are used for these purposes, this is considered a compounding circumstance to double the penalty. Nevertheless, cyberspace is awash with sectarian posts by some tweeters who are not subject to any prosecution.



3.8 Scale Eight: Representation of Groups and Minorities

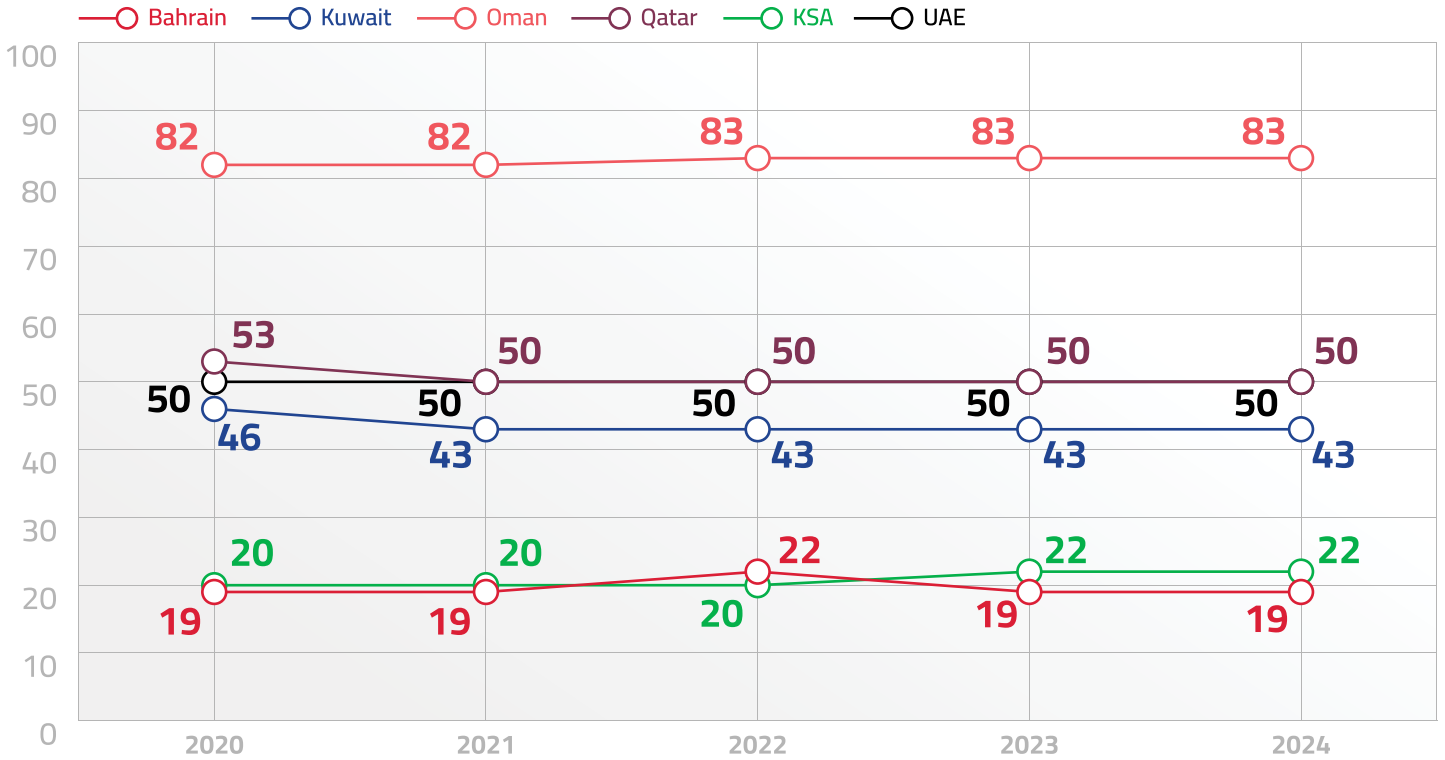


illustration 27: Results of the scale of representation of groups and minorities 2020-2024

Scale elements	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
Equality ensuring equal right of all citizens to full citizenship 40 scores	10	15	35	21	9	20
Discrimination ensuring that there is no discrimination on political, religious, cultural, regional, ethnic or class grounds 40 scores	4	20	30	19	6	20
Proportional representation ensuring proportionate and fair representation of groups and minority in state institutions 40 scores	5	8	18	10	7	10
Total 100 scores	19	43	83	50	22	50

Table 8: Results / Eighth Scale – Representation of Groups and Minorities Scale Scores



Kingdom of Bahrain

Shia citizens complain of “discriminatory policies” towards them, and express constant feeling of being targeted. The Religious Freedom Report issued by the US State Department for the year 2023 documented dozens of incidents related to Shia harassment of their rituals and discrimination against them in jobs, especially in the military. The Bahraini Ministry of Interior prevented the participation of preachers and religious chanters from abroad in the occasion of Ashura, contrary to the freedom available to followers of other religions and sects in Bahrain. Events of assaults by security forces on the manifestations of Ashura and the summoning of dozens of preachers and religious chanters participating have also been documented.

The Government Survey and Land Registry refused to register some land plots within the endowments affiliated with the Jaafari Endowments Administration.

Human rights bodies and organisations state “the existence of sectarian and ethnic policies” (the Periodic Review of Human Rights, reports by the US and British State Departments). The government is accused of pursuing (sectarian,

ethnic, racial and tribal) discriminatory policies in appointment to senior posts, sovereign ministries, electoral districts, judicial appointments, wealth distribution, housing services, and scholarships.

The Constitution provides for equality between citizens. Bahrain has also ratified international conventions on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and acceded the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights. Notwithstanding, there are wide criticisms related to the Bahraini government’s commitment to implementing and adhering to these legislation and laws.

There is no law criminalising discrimination in Bahrain, and the Government has previously rejected a proposal submitted to the Council of Representatives to this effect.

State institutions do not reflect a representation commensurate with the size of groups and minorities in the country, and there are certain groups whose dominance of some or all of the State’s institutions is proportionally higher than their actual size in society.



State of Kuwait

Kuwait maintained its same scores in this scale due to the lack of any sign of finding a solution to the file of the category of illegal residents “Bidun” in Kuwait, where more than 100,000 individuals suffer from difficulties of living, integrating into society and accessing government services.

The Bidun are the most significant marginalised minority in Kuwait, as they are deprived of citizenship rights, as well as having positions and representation in the state.

During the past year, three governments were formed in Kuwait, but despite this, not all ministerial formations reflected proportionate representation of the various components of Kuwaiti society, in addition to appointments to leadership positions and the judiciary.

The Constitution of Kuwait states the principle of equality: Article (7) stipulates that “justice, liberty, and equality are the pillars of society; co-operation and mutual help are the firmest bonds



between citizens". Only an "original" Kuwaiti citizen is eligible to run for office, that is, to be a member of the families who settled in Kuwait before 1920. As for Kuwaitis who obtain citizenship under other articles (such as non-Kuwaiti women married to Kuwaitis or who acquired citizenship because of their great services to Kuwait), they cannot vote in the elections

except after twenty years from the acquisition of citizenship.

There is no clear law in Kuwait that criminalises discrimination, but in 2012, a Law on the Protection of National Unity and Rejection of Hate was enacted, yet it does not seem sufficient to address the gaps and manifestations of discrimination in the State.



State of Oman

The Sultanate's Basic Law states that justice, equality and the Shura are the basis for governance, and it prohibits "discrimination between citizens on the grounds of gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status". However, there is no national law criminalising discrimination.

The Sultanate ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, these conventions have not been translated into laws, regulations or practices that criminalise discriminatory practices.

There are special laws, such as the Civil Service Law and the Labour Law, which prohibit discrimination between equally qualified citizens in obtaining a job being applied for, but such these laws do not criminalise such discriminatory practices.

Citizens are treated equally, but there are exceptions that may be due to individual practices – tribal or traditional – that do not appear to be systematic.

It was recently noted that the appointments by Royal Decrees included Omanis of Indian origins. The Oman Investment Authority has also amended the membership of some (semi-governmental)

corporate boards to promote ethnic diversity among its members.

The manifestations of discrimination appear to be limited because the Omani Penal Code criminalises insulting religions (Articles 269 and 273). Discrimination is also interpreted as inciting religious, sectarian or tribal strife, which is also criminalised under the Omani Penal Code.

The most visible example of discrimination in Oman is the qualification for jobs advertised in entities that are not subject to central or unified operation, such as state-owned companies, regulatory bodies, and public bodies established for special purposes. There are also manifestations of discrimination and social pressure against Omani women married to non-Omanis.

In addition, there is discrimination in interpreting competency requirements contained in the Personal Status Law, and there are cases where the Supreme Court adopted the interpretation of the Court of First Instance or the Appeals Court regarding the ethnic or class dimension (social status) as one of the interpretations of competency requirement, which was subsequently used as the basis to annul marriage contracts.



State of Qatar

The Nationality Law (2005) reduces the rights of (equality) and (proportional representation) of social components of Qataris. Although the constitution stipulates that “citizens are equal in public rights and duties and there is no discrimination between them on the grounds of gender, origin, language, or religion”, the Nationality Law prohibits Qatari citizens “naturalized” after 1930 from the right to run for office or vote.

Pursuant to the effects of the law, Qatari citizenship is divided into “native” citizens and others, which indicates the existence of social stratification, where participation in elections and housing services are on top of the issues subjected to discrimination

According to the US State Department’s Human Rights Report (2023), there are about 2,500 stateless individuals who were born in Qatar. They have the right to education and health care, but they are prohibited

from owning property. Qatari authorities refer to stateless persons as “individuals holding temporary Qatari identity documents.”

Despite Qatar’s accession to the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1976, country lacks any special legislation that criminalises or prosecutes acts of racial discrimination and racial segregation that may be committed by individual, groups or organisation.

It seems difficult to understand the distribution of formations in State institutions and to ensure fairness, especially in the absence of accurate statistics. There are allegations that tribes that are closer to the ruling family have a greater share in the State’s institutions, from highest Government positions to the rest of civil, security and military institutions, as well as minorities with limited representation.



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In its 2024 report, the US Embassy in Riyadh renewed its designation of Saudi Arabia as a “Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom. On November 30, 2022, the Foreign Minister renamed Saudi Arabia as a country of particular concern.

The British Foreign Office (January 2022) stated that Saudi Arabia “remains a priority” in the human rights file, especially due to the application of the capital penalty, restrictions imposed on women’s rights and discrimination in the distribution of wealth and services.

During this year’s Ashura season (2024), the Saudi authorities imposed severe restrictions on husayniyyas and those in charge of them, as well as the practice of religious rituals during the Ashura season held by Shia citizens in the Eastern Province. The 2023 Religious Freedom Report prepared by the

United States Civil Liberties Commission indicated that “religious freedom in Saudi Arabia is still low despite slight improvement. The government also continues to prevent non-Muslims from building places of worship.”

There are no constitutional or legal provisions guaranteeing equal representation among the components of society. Addressing the concepts of citizenship and national unity is not based on any legal background. In contrast, there are government positions and rhetoric based on Islamic law, and the principle that discrimination is forbidden in Islam.

Article (12) of the Basic Law of Governance states that “Promoting national unity is a duty, and the State shall prevent whatever leads to disunity, sedition and division”. However, this article is rarely applied in documented cases of discrimination in the country on sectarian, tribal, or regional grounds. In its report 2022, Human Rights Watch states that Saudi Arabia



does not allow followers of religions other than Islam to practice their rituals in public places, and systematically discriminates against Muslim religious minorities, especially Twelver Shiites and Ismailis, including discrimination in government education, the judiciary, religious freedom, and employment. Despite steps to reduce hate speech and intolerance contained in some religious school textbooks during 2021, current provisions retain content that degrades practices associated with Shiite and Sufi Muslims. The Council of Senior Scholars and the Fatwa Committee in the Kingdom are still limited to the Hanbali school of thought, as is the case in the judiciary and criminal

courts, and local courts are allocated to other schools of thought that are limited to matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

There is no law criminalising discrimination, and Saudi Arabia has entered many reservations to international covenants and treaties it has signed, some of which relate to women's rights of citizenship (including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) and others about other rights that the State considers in violation of the provisions of Sharia (including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism).



United Arab Emirates

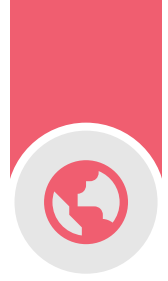
Articles (14 & 25) of the Constitution provide for the right to "equality, social justice, ensuring safety and security and equality of opportunity for all citizens shall be the pillars of the Society", and that "all persons are equal before the law, without distinction between citizens of the Union regarding race, nationality, religious belief or social status". Nevertheless, there is implicit discrimination in enjoying some rights or preferential treatment related to whether a citizen's nationality is acquired by law, naturalisation, or dependency in accordance with the provisions of the law (the UAE Nationality Law). Discrimination in this regard includes denying Emirati citizens by naturalization or dependency from running for office or voting in elections and citizenship revocation in the event of absence from the country for two years. Human rights organizations also documented cases of family members of those convicted in political cases who were subjected to forms of discrimination in renewing their official documents and ensuring the right to travel and movement.

In 2015, a decree-law was issued to combat discrimination and hatred, but it does not adequately define discrimination and its various forms. There are also special laws such as labour laws that prohibit discrimination between equally qualified citizens in obtaining a job being applied for or failure to treat

them equally, but these laws that do not criminalise discrimination. In the event a violation of this prohibition occurs, no criminal or freedom-depriving penalty is imposed. In such cases, the only action taken is to nullify the decision, restore the rights, and provide compensation for material and psychological harm suffered in such cases.

The enforcement of international conventions ratified by the UAE, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1974) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (2004), requires the State to amend national laws, issue legal tools, or take appropriate administrative measures.

Officially, there are no specific ratios or preferential criteria that give one class or group of people priority or accessibility to leadership and sensitive positions in State institutions. Notwithstanding, international human rights organisations (Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) confirm that citizens have been subjected to discrimination related to rights due to their political stances, in addition to some tribal considerations, as most sensitive positions in the State are held by members of specific tribes falling under tribal alliances that have accompanied the establishment of the UAE.



3.9 Scale Nine: Foreign Communities

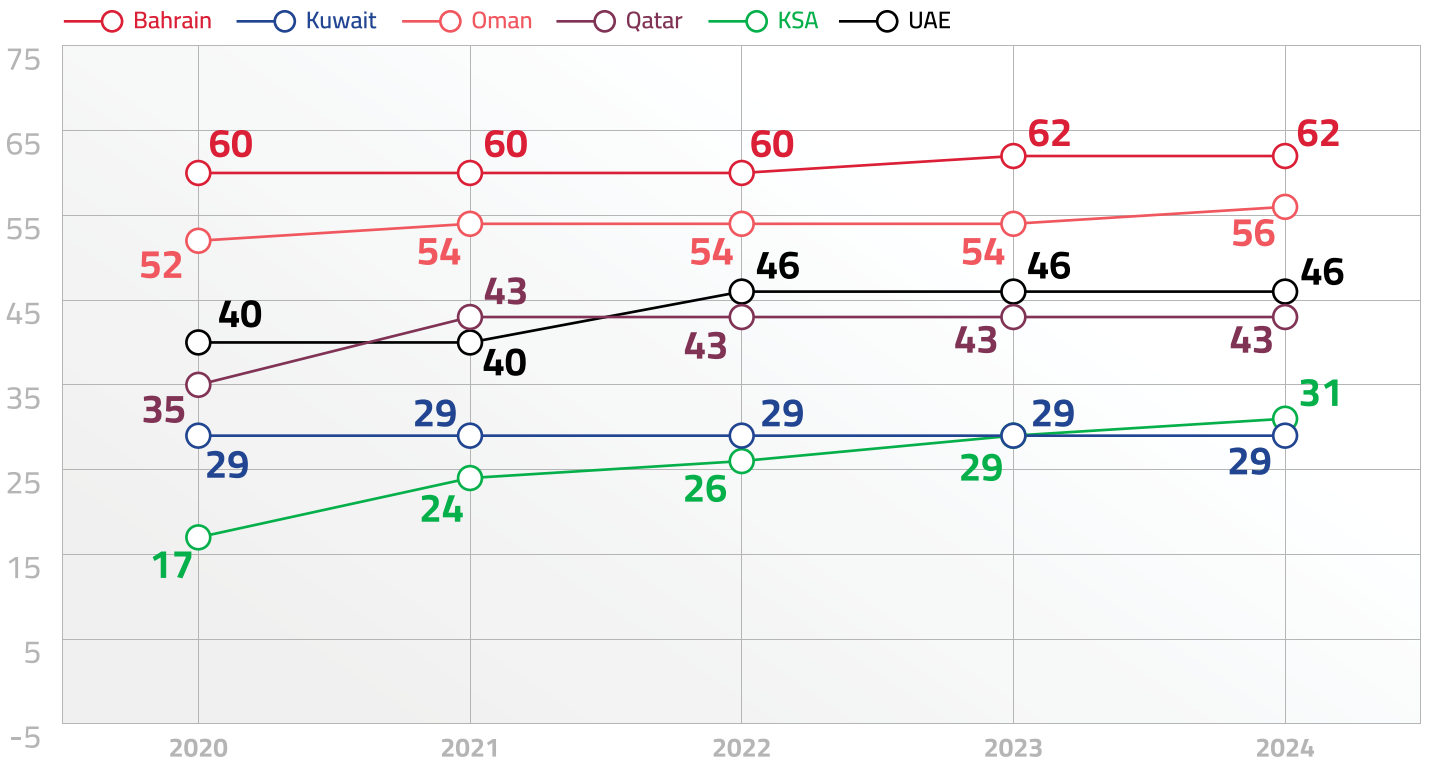


Illustration 28: Results of the Foreign Communities Scale 2020-2024

Scale elements	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
Stable and effective residency the existence of regulations that allow expatriates to have fair and clear residency that guarantees rights, including participating in the election of municipal institutions 35 scores	32	10	23	23	22	24
Union / professional representation membership, election, candidacy and protection of interests 20 scores	10	11	13	2	4	2
Societal activities the right of communities to organise activities and establish associations and clubs 20 scores	20	8	20	18	5	20
Total 75 scores	62	29	56	43	31	46

Table 9: Results / Ninth Scale – Foreign Communities Scale Scores



Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain continues to be advanced in providing stable residency opportunities for expatriates by offering foreign-owned projects in a number of tourist and investment areas, in addition to offering “Platinum Residency” and “Golden Residency”.

In June 2023, the Government approved the “Platinum Residency” category, which allows its holder to leave and return to Bahrain, in addition to owning built properties and land, with the exception of some areas, in addition to obtaining entry and residence permits for the husband or wife, children, and parents. To obtain residency, the foreigner’s period of residence must not be less than 15 years, and the average basic salary must not be less than 4,000 dinars in the last five years.

Bahrain also grants a long-term “Golden Residency” visa to working foreigners whose monthly income is not less than two thousand Bahraini Dinars (about 5,300 USD), retirees whose monthly income is not less than four thousand Bahraini Dinars (about 10,600 USD),

real estate owners, or talented people, according to Government requirements. The Government had previously approved “Flexible Work” permits that give foreigners the right to employment and residency without any need for a sponsor.

Bahrain ratified 10 International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions, five of which are basic. The State has a distinguished and pioneering record of equitable residency for expatriate workers and their families, and rarely faces human rights criticism in this regard.

With regard to participation in municipal elections, foreign residents who own real estate have the right to vote in the elections, but not standing as candidates.

The State laws give expatriate workers the right to join and vote in unions and professional association elections, but they do not allow them to run for office. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Development guide, there are dozens of organisations, associations, and clubs for expatriate communities.



State of Kuwait

Kuwait is facing widespread criticism regarding the rights of expatriate workers, including the Kuwaiti Council of Ministers’ decision in February 2023 to approve the formation of a national committee to regulate the demographics in the country, which sparked widespread controversy about determining policies related to the appropriate cap for workers’ nationalities, which may result in the termination of services of a large number of residents.

Over the past year, jobs of hundreds of expatriates have been terminated in government

agencies, and there have been online campaigns launched by Kuwaitis that incite against expatriates of certain nationalities.

In addition to the dismissal of expatriates, the government is resorting intensively to “administrative deportation”. The number of deportees by the authorities since 2023 reached about 43,000 residents. The Ministry of Interior says that most of those who are deported violate the residency system or have “committed acts that would harm the security of the country,” while local media published “cases



of deportation of violators of traffic regulations, or because of publications on the Internet.”

Other government measures include restrictions on expatriates, most notably the suspension of visas to join a breadwinner for temporary periods, and the obligation of expatriates to pay their bills before leaving the country.

In 2015, Kuwait approved a standard contract for expatriate workers, allowing some workers to transfer their sponsorship to a new employer after three years of work without any conditions. However, these reforms do not include migrant domestic male and female workers. A large number of expatriate workers fall victims of the phenomenon of “residency trade”.

The State of Kuwait acceded to the International Labour Organisation in 1961, and ratified 19 of

its conventions, including seven of the eight basic conventions. Foreigners do not have the right to vote in municipal elections.

State laws allow expatriates to join unions but not the right to run for office, which is restricted to Kuwaiti citizens. The labour law also allows expatriate workers the right to choose a representative to communicate their opinion to the union’s board of directors.

The Law on Clubs and Public Benefit Societies prohibits non-Kuwaitis from establishing any association or club. While the law concerned allows non-Kuwaitis to have “affiliate” membership, it prevents them from registering in the general assembly or running for board of directors. Expatriate communities are allowed to organise their national, social, sports and religious events on a small scale.



State of Oman

In 2021, the Omani government abolished the non-objection certificate system, which required expatriate workers to obtain a non-objection certificate from the sponsor before transferring to another sponsor. The current system considers the contract term (two years) sufficient to fulfil the right of the first sponsor, but following that the worker can have his sponsorship transferred freely. However, in practice, some official authorities still require a no-objection certificate from the previous sponsor.

The Foreigners’ Residence Law and its executive bylaws allow expatriate workers to bring their families or their dependents within specific rules and conditions, including the minimum wage for the worker wishing to bring his family. Sponsors are responsible for ensuring that an expatriate worker

and his/her family have access to adequate health care coverage, and there are exceptions depending on certain circumstances taking into consideration such as family and cultural conditions.

Expatriate workers can participate in trade union activities through joining the General Assembly of Trade Unions and participating in all aspects related to the tasks of the General Assembly, but they cannot establish trade unions or run for its administrative body, a right restricted to Omanis.

In coordination with the Ministry of Social Development, members of expatriate communities may organise their own social, cultural and sports activities, as well as establish and manage private associations or clubs. According to the ministry’s data, the number of social clubs for foreigners is 13.



State of Qatar

Despite the package of laws and resolutions issued by the Qatari government during the past two years to improve the work environment for expatriate workers, human rights reports indicate that some reforms are “ineffective” and that some workers are “still being exploited”. In addition, deportation cases have continued against the backdrop of labour protests due to “late salary payments”.

The law allows expatriate workers to change their workplace without obtaining the consent of the employer, and establishes for the abolition of the sponsorship system. The Government’s approved minimum wage is QAR 1,000 (USD 275), in addition to providing workers with decent housing and food

conditions.

The ILO has an office in Doha that monitors the implementation of a technical cooperation programme with the Government in order to carry out reforms of work environment.

Foreigners do not participate in municipal council elections. Law No. (12) of 2004 on Private Associations and Foundations, under which professional associations operate, does not permit expatriate workers to join or run as candidates except in exceptional cases.

There are clubs for some Arab and foreign communities, and allows communities to establish their own schools.



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia advanced in this scale (two points) as it witnessed an improvement in working conditions and ensuring the rights of expatriate workers. Amendments to the new labour law during 2024 have provided a more stable environment for foreign workers, as it provides for some new provisions and regulations to regulate labour relations between Saudi employers and workers, in terms of determining working hours, wages, rights and responsibilities. This includes health insurance, training and rehabilitation.

The improvements include the Labour Reform Initiative, which gives foreign workers greater freedom of movement and independence. In March 2024, the General Directorate of Passports announced a list of professions that can be worked in without a sponsor, as part of a strategy aimed at promoting and protecting workers’ rights. This step aims to prevent problems that some residents are exposed to by their sponsors, such as illegal exploitation.

There is no provision in the labour law in Saudi Arabia related to the rights of foreign workers to

run for elections and vote in unions and professional associations.

The labour law makes no reference to the right of foreign workers to establish or even organise social or sports clubs, and such activities remain limited to inside closed workers’ compounds and according to agreement between workers and employers, and are not based on a clear and published legal code.

Despite the official announcement of the abolition of the sponsorship system in March 2021, the implementation of this reform requires time and effort to ensure its actual enforcement and the desired benefits.

Saudi Arabia joined the International Labour Organisation in 1976 and ratified 16 conventions, including 6 basic conventions.

In April 2022, the 2014 Protocol supplementing the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 No. 29, entered into force, protecting workers from fraudulent and abusive employment practices, strengthening



preventive scales, protection, compensation, and eliminating all forms of forced labour.

On 7 December 2020, Saudi Arabia filed documents of ratification of the Convention No. (95) of 1949 on the Protection of Wages and the Convention No. (120) of 1964 on Health Rules in Commerce and Offices, which were placed in the category of guarantees to protect the rights and welfare of workers.



United Arab Emirates

On 7 December 2020, Saudi Arabia filed documents of ratification of the Convention No. (95) of 1949 on the Protection of Wages and the Convention No. (120) of 1964 on Health Rules in Commerce and Offices, which were placed in the category of guarantees to protect the rights and welfare of workers.

Annual reports by human rights organisations state that some expatriates face persecution, raids of their residences and mass forced deportations without fair trials or a guarantee of their material rights.

Saudi laws do not provide for the right of expatriate workers to establish social or sports clubs or even to organise them. Such activities remain limited and are restricted to closed labour compounds and are based on agreement between workers and employers rather

Annual reports by human rights organisations state that some expatriates face persecution, raids of their residences and mass forced deportations without fair trials or a guarantee of their material rights.

It is worth noting that non-Muslim expatriates do not have the right to freely practice their religious rituals except on a small scale, and in the event expatriates practice worship in private, they are subjected to arrest, imprisonment or deportation.

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According to Legislative Decree No. (50) of 2023 regarding the organisation of public benefit institutions, persons who do not hold the nationality of the state may participate in the establishment of civil associations, provided that their percentage does not exceed 30% of the total number of founding members. However, the law allows exceptions to all or some of the conditions by virtue of a decision issued by the Council of Ministers.



3.10 Scale Ten: Access to Leadership and Sensitive Positions

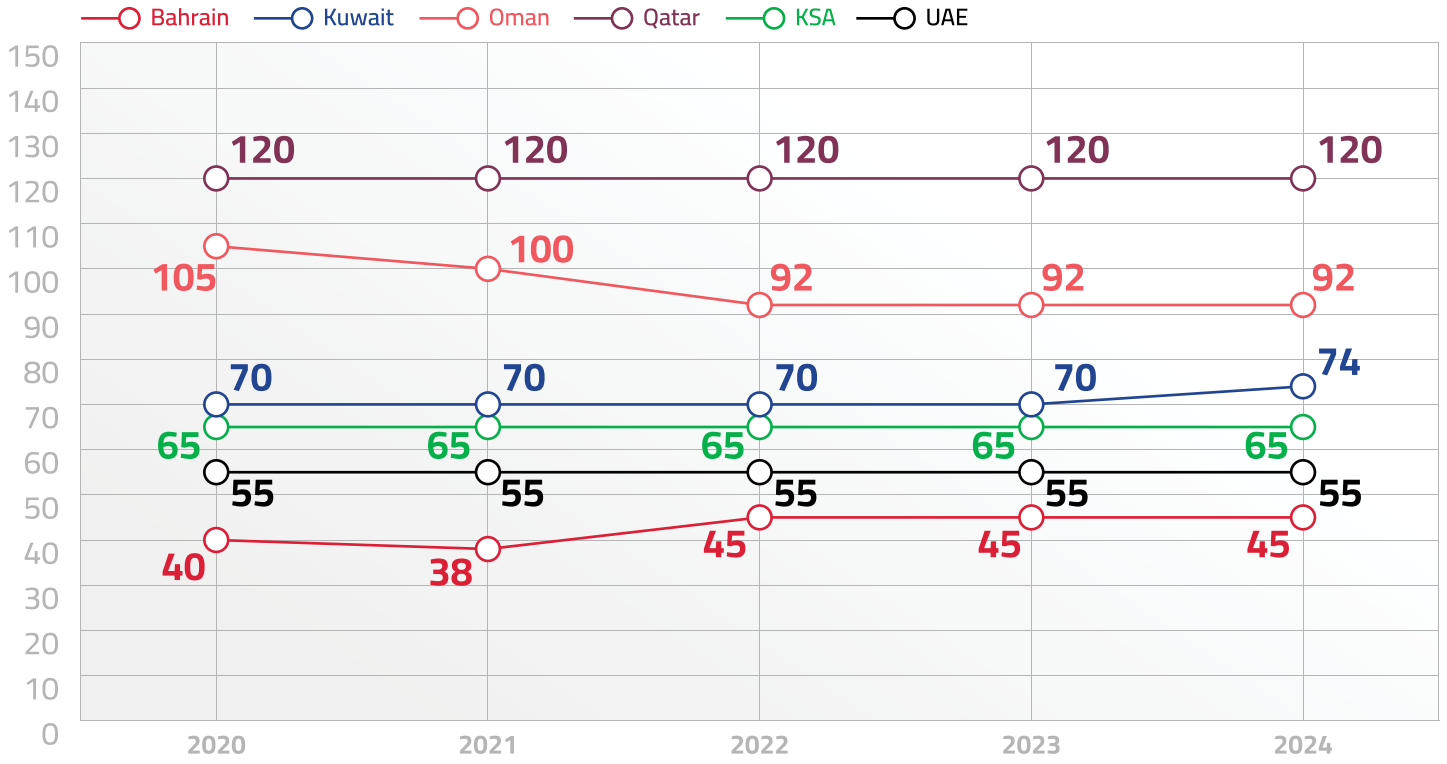


illustration 29: Results of the scale of access to leadership and sensitive positions 2020-2024

Scale elements	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	KSA	UAE
Influence of the royal families representation of royal family members in higher positions 100 scores	28	54	55	80	35	35
Localization of positions ability and priority for citizens to access leadership and sensitive positions in the judicial, security and military bodies 50 scores	17	20	37	40	30	20
Total 150 scores	45	74	92	120	65	55

Table 10: Results / Tenth Scale – Access to Leadership and Sensitive Positions Scale Scores



Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain witnessed a fall in the representation of members of the ruling family in the Cabinet formation (June 2022), which was limited to the Prime Minister, his deputy, and the ministers of interior and finance, with citizens holding the portfolios of the ministries of foreign affairs, justice and defence affairs. Nevertheless, in addition to the ruling family's dominance over the State supreme bodies and councils, appointments of family members to high military and governmental positions (undersecretaries/general directors) have been observed. In addition, in judiciary institutions, ruling family members constitute a significant proportion compared with the unproportional presence of

the rest of the other components of society.

Estimates state that the leadership and high-ranking positions in the State (especially the sensitive ones) belong to members of the ruling family, and as it is observed that there are recruitment policies that tend to depend on how close to the royal family one is, which applies to specific tribes and families that enjoy preferential advantages over the rest of the citizens.

There are existing policies favouring reliance on foreigners in the military and security services due to discriminatory policies against Shia citizens (reports of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, reports of the US State Department, and the periodic review of the Human Rights Council).



State of Kuwait

Kuwait advanced 4 points in this scale due to the decrease in the number of members of the ruling family in the government formed in (May 2024) from two ministers to one minister (Ministry of Interior and Defence) out of 13 ministers, in addition to the prime minister. Despite this, family members are predominantly present in sovereign and leadership positions in the state in general, especially governors (4 out of 5 governorates).

No presence of ruling family members is observed in the judiciary compared to their significant presence in the security and military institutions. It should be noted that only original Kuwaiti nationals are permitted to occupy high positions in these bodies as well.

In general, Kuwait allows citizens to take positions in the judicial, security, and military institutions.





State of Oman

The Sultan’s family hold senior positions, including Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Vice President of the Supreme Judicial Council (who serves as President of the Supreme Court), Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Interior, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, President of Sultan Qaboos University, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Central Bank governors and some governor positions.

Four members of the royal family sit in the appointed 86-seat State Council.

It is noteworthy that members of the ruling family are present in some senior and academic positions. As for the higher military positions – other than the position of the Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs – all are occupied by citizens who do not belong to the ruling family.

There are no specific ratios or preferential treatment criteria that give one category of people priority or accessibility in leadership and sensitive positions in the judicial, security and military bodies. It can be seen that there is a rotation between different tribes or representatives of interests in leadership and sensitive positions.

Except for the positions of the President of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Vice-President of the Supreme Court, there is no significant presence of the ruling family members in the judicial institutions. As for the senior positions in the security and military agencies (national security and intelligence institutions), there are some members of the ruling family by virtue of their military or administrative hierarchy, but there is no evidence of preferential treatment.



State of Qatar

The presence of members of the Qatari ruling family in the Council of Ministers is limited to the Prime Minister of the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Trade, Industry, Culture, Sports and Youth (5 ministries). Qataris from other families hold senior and leadership positions, although it is noticeable that specific family names are repeated in these positions.

The ruling family does not have a monopoly over judicial positions, nor does the Constitution stipulate that the Emir heads the judiciary, which is something

that is unique to Qatar compared to the rest of the Gulf countries.

The Supreme Commander of the army is the Emir of the State, but most military positions in the army are open to citizens, who are allowed to assume judicial and military positions, although the priority is for the tribes and families that are close to the ruling family.

Qatar allows expatriates to work in its military and security institutions.





Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The ruling family monopolises most sovereign ministerial positions. These include the Prime Minister, Ministry of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Defence, National Guard, and the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, with the exception of the Ministry of Finance. The number of ministers who are family members is 10 out of a total of 35 ministers.

The Crown Prince oversees a number of bodies: Economic and Development Affairs Council, Political and Security Affairs Council, Supreme Council for Saudi Aramco, General Investment Authority, Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption, and National Risk Assessment Unit.

Ruling family members control the positions of regional princes in the kingdom, and most of the military institutions are headed by princes.

There is no indication of any presence of members of the ruling family in the judiciary, and foreigners do not assume any positions within the judicial institutions. Citizens can assume judicial, security and military jobs, but employment is subject to strict criteria determined by how close to the ruling family one is. There also seem to be regional and sectarian norms and influences involving access to public positions in the State.



United Arab Emirates

Members of the ruling families in each emirate monopolise many sovereign ministerial and higher executive positions, but at the federation level, it seems possible for citizens to reach some important ministries, such as the economy, education and health.

Members of the ruling families, however, retain the sovereign ministries such as foreign affairs, security, defence and the interior. Members of the ruling families hold 9 ministerial portfolios out of a total of 34 ministerial positions.

Members of the ruling families are predominant in higher positions of the State, but it is possible to note

political and tribal balances in sovereign and military portfolios. However, members of the ruling families are not present in the Federal National Council. There is a core of tribes and families linked to the ruling families that seem to have a monopoly over a part or share in the structures and positions of the State.

Judges are often from outside the ruling families. However, tribal and family connections play a role in these appointments.

Members of the ruling families and tribal representatives have ample access to leading positions in security and military services.

04

Methodology and Adoption of Scales

This study has taken for five years to prepare by a team of researchers from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and specialists in the study of the Gulf region, specifically in the fields of political sciences and humanities. The index relied on 10 main scales to measure the level of “Political Participation” in the research countries. Each “scale” includes a set of “elements” and then “details” that are evaluated and researched.

Based on the results of previous editions, the researchers proceeded to evaluate, explain, and explicate the circumstances of each country under study in terms of scales, elements and details, through monitoring forms used as a unified guide to track cases of participation, disruption, obstruction or absence, in addition to monitoring the variables which have occurred until mid-2024.

As in previous edition, this fifth edition relies on the ten scales that consist of sub-elements adopted as basic components for weighing each scale and determining its coherence to infer the participation status. Each item is divided into details, each of which has weights whose final scores are determined based on reading the data and observing phenomenon and events. The areas of the scales, their topics and the distribution of scores over them were adopted in the first edition according to the significance of each scale, the extent of its interaction and its impact on the nature of the existing political systems in the six countries and the social conditions therein.

Weights were also distributed on the scales on the basis of adopting (1,000) scores as a hypothetical end result for the ideal state in which political participation is most effective and included in all fields and sectors. Similarly, the scores on each scale were similarly distributed among the elements in each scale. It was taken into account that the disparity in the weights and scores of examination should not be big between the various measures and elements in order to avoid linking the final results to signs and factors that dominate everything else, without actually having weight and influence in the cases of the countries under study, which may give the index skewed readings based on a purely distant theoretical diagnosis unrelated to the complex political, social and cultural structure of these countries.

Researchers relied for their information on several sources, namely official government data, official statements, legislation and laws in force, reports of official and civil institutions, data of international organisations and bodies such as the International

4.1 Adopted Scales

Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and reports of organisations and committees of the United Nations. Researchers were keen to scrutinise the data to ensure it is valid and realistic so that the results are not biased to what the official narratives may promote in describing a fictitious state of openness and internal participation, or by contrast, what may be raised by non-objective and unscientific political opinions of individuals or parties opposing the ruling authorities.

In addition to evaluating the authorities’ performance in legislating, restricting, making available or monopolising the spaces and tools for political participation, the researchers were also interested in noting the desire and potential of local communities to engage in political interaction in the spaces available in a given state and to seek to expand these spaces or develop mechanisms for accessing or working within them.

The results of the fifth edition (2024) provide an insight into the progress or regression of the GCC

states in cases of political participation and the nature of the areas in which change has occurred, positively or negatively, between the mid-2023 and mid-2024.

The index lists the countries displaying the results in the alphabetical order of their names in English.

The progress or decline of any country in the final results of the index does not reflect its detailed results in all adopted scales.

Scale Two General Elections (150 scores) It is concerned with the following elements	
Electoral processes (governmental, parliamentary, municipal councils)	20 scores
Governance of the elected institutions (powers / separation of powers / oversight / legislation / accountability / partnership in decision-making / powers to dissolve institutions)	50 scores
Effectiveness and efficiency of the elected institutions	40 scores
Mechanism for drafting the electoral system and drawing electoral districts	40 scores

Scale One Constitutional Life (50 scores) It is concerned with the following elements	
Constitutional reference: mechanisms for issuance and amendment	10 scores
Ensuring the right to political participation	15 scores
Regulatory/Restrictive Laws	15 marks
Commitment to the provisions of the constitution	10 scores

Scale Three Political Organisations (100 scores) It includes the following elements	
Legality of political organisations	30 scores
Availability of opposition tools	25 scores
Practitioners’ safety	25 marks
Administrative and financial autonomy	10 scores
Participation in elections as lists	10 scores

Scale Four Civil Society Institutions (100 scores) It includes the following elements	
Legal environment: ensuring the right of individuals and groups to establish NGOs, public benefit associations and pressure groups	40 scores
Trade unions and professional associations: legislation / plurality of unions and unions / availability of trade union tools, including the right to strike	40 scores
Independence of institutions	10 scores
Constraints and obstacles	10 scores

Scale Seven Freedom of Opinion and Expression (150 scores) It includes the following elements	
Press freedoms	30 scores
Independence of media institutions	30 scores
Internet censorship	30 scores
Freedom and safety of individuals when making any critical remarks	30 scores
Combating hate speech and incitement to violence	30 scores

Scale Five Gender Equivalence and Youth Engagement (75 scores) It includes the following elements	
Empowerment of women the right to vote / quota in elected councils / access to leadership and senior positions.	50 scores
Engaging yout voting age / senior positions.	25 scores

Scale Eight Representation of Groups and Minorities (100 scores) It includes the following elements	
Equality ensuring that all citizens are equally entitled to full citizenship rights	40 scores
Discrimination ensuring that there is no discrimination on political, religious, cultural, regional, racial or class grounds	40 scores
Proportional representation ensuring proportionate and fair representation of groups and minorities in state institutions	20 scores

Scale Six Transparency (50 scores) It includes the following elements	
Information sharing the right to access, exchange and disseminate information.	25 scores
Independent oversight actions and performance of the executive, legislative and judicial branches, sources of wealth and expenditure of public funds.	25 scores

Scale Nine Foreign Communities (75 scores) It includes the following elements		Scale Ten Access to Leadership and Sensitive Positions (150 scores) It includes the following elements	
Stable and effective residency existence of systems that allow the foreigner to reside in a fair and clear manner that guarantees rights, including participating in election of municipal institutions	35 scores	Influence of royal families: representation of family members in senior positions (government ministries and agencies / the judiciary / security and military institutions)	100 scores
Trade union / professional representation the right to membership, election, candidacy, and care of interests	20 scores	Nationalisation of positions the permeability and priority of citizens in accessing leadership and sensitive positions in the judicial, security and military agencies	50 scores
Community activity the right of communities to organise activities and establish associations and clubs	20 scores		

4.2 Scale Adoption Factors

The scales included in this index were adopted based on several factors, namely:

- In-depth readings in International Bill of Human Rights: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – United Nations General Assembly – December 10, 1948; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly – December 16, 1966; and the Covenant International Conference on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly of 16 December 1966.
- A comparative study involving other Indexes, including Freedom Index (Freedom House), Arab Democracy Scale (Arab Reform Initiative), the World Press Freedom Ranking (Reporters Without Borders), and other international and regional standards.
- The extent of the ability to access and analyse information, and verify its sources.
- The ability to apply and measure these scales – as much as possible – to all countries according to the nature of governance systems and the structure of the political system.
- The results of the workshops in which a group of experts, academics and concerned people participated, as well as the technical notes received from the consultants.



مؤشر المشاركة السياسية
في دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي **2024**
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