

2. Governance in North Africa: Taking Stock for Future Change

Guillaume Biganzoli, Pietro Gagliardi

Much attention is being given to public governance in North Africa and the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.¹ In a recent strategic foresight exercise organized by the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), involving twenty-five experts from nineteen different think tanks from the northern and southern shores of the broader Mediterranean region,² governance reforms were identified as the most influential policy area to sustain inclusive growth in the region.

In recent history, the MENA region has been the particular focus for ideas about the modern social contract,³ which is defined as the agreement between the state and its citizens whereby the latter accept the rule of the former in return for certain rights and privileges. The Arab uprisings of 2010-11, often referred to

¹ R.P. Beschel Jr. and T.M. Yousef, *Public Sector Reform in MENA: The Achievable Governance Revolution*, Op-Ed, Brookings Institution, May 5, 2021. This paper focuses on North Africa, namely Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, although it also refers to developments in the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

² L. Demichele et al., “What Is In Store for the MENA Region in 2021 and Beyond?” Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), March 31, 2021.

³ M. Loewe, T. Zintl, and A. Houdret, “The Social Contract as a Tool of Analysis: Introduction to the Special Issue on ‘Framing the Evolution of New Social Contracts in Middle Eastern and North African Countries’”, *World Development*, vol. 145, 2021.

as the Arab Spring, are widely understood as the result of the breakdown of the social contract due to governments' failure to deliver on the political, social, and economic rights and needs of its citizens.⁴ This has led to a redefining of the Arab social contract or state-citizen relationship, and it has highlighted the necessity of effective public governance at its core.⁵

Difficulties emerge in defining governance, and good governance in particular.⁶ There is "no clearly agreed definition of governance today" in the academic literature and policy field, Francis Fukuyama notes.⁷ In Arabic, the very translation of the word is a challenge and ranges from *al-hakimia* (ةي م ك ا ح ل ا) to *al-hawkama* (ة م ك ف و ح ل ا) and *al-hikama* (ة م ك ا ح ل ا).

Yet governance remains a useful concept, if properly defined in substance and scope. This paper starts from Fukuyama's definition of [good] governance as the "government's ability to [effectively and efficiently] make and enforce rules, and deliver services".⁸ To overcome some of its conceptual issues, this paper focuses solely on public governance (as opposed to economic, regional, etc.), i.e., on the state-citizen interface, looking at the supply, or public sector-led, side and the demand, or citizen-led, side of governance, as Daniel Kaufmann put it.⁹

⁴ S. Devarajan and E. Ianchovichina, "A Broken Social Contract, Not High Inequality, Led to the Arab Spring," *Review of Income and Health*, 2017.

⁵ A. El Haddad, "Redefining the Social Contract in the Wake of the Arab Spring: The Experiences of Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia", *World Development*, vol. 127, 2020); and H. Larbi, *Rewriting the Arab Social Contract: Toward Inclusive Development and Politics in the Arab World*, Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, May 2016.

⁶ C. Offe, "Governance: an 'Empty Signifier?'," *Constellations*, vol. 16, 2009, pp. 550-62.

⁷ F. Fukuyama, "Governance: What Do We Know, and How Do We Know It?," *The Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 19, 2016, pp. 89-105.

⁸ F. Fukuyama, *What Is Governance?*, Working Paper 314, Center for Global Development, January 2013.

⁹ D. Kaufmann, *Governance and the Arab World in Transition: Reflections, Empirics and Implications for the International Community*, Brookings Institution, 2011.

Good governance is a necessary precondition for a functioning public administration that delivers quality goods and services to all citizens and businesses.¹⁰ Over the past decade, from the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments worldwide have faced a multiplication of increasingly global, multidimensional, and interconnected challenges. The COVID-19 crisis has underlined how citizens and businesses rely on governments in an existential way when faced by a collective threat. Responding to such crises at the national level requires an efficient, coordinated, and crosscutting approach. Yet low levels of trust in public institutions, growing fiscal constraints, and the looming issues of climate change and rising inequalities, curtail public administrations' ability to effectively deal with these problems. This situation is compounded by long-standing governance problems in North Africa, such as corruption, inefficient spending, and administrative red tape, as well as the inadequacy of government structure, institutions, and tools. In fact, failing public governance may lead to greater financial burdens and inequalities,¹¹ further undermining citizens' trust.

Ten years after the Arab uprisings, North Africa (and the MENA region more broadly) is one of few places in the world that has lost ground in terms of good governance, according to most indicators.¹² In this chapter, indicators are used as a starting point for a deeper assessment of the state of governance in North Africa today, acknowledging the oft-positivist and normative limits of such markers, colored by predominant and Eurocentric understandings of governance.¹³ Instead, the literature has highlighted the existence of diverse forms of

¹⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Policy Framework on Sound Public Governance: Baseline Features of Governments That Work Well*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2020.

¹¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The Governance of Inclusive Growth*, Paris, OECD Publishing, May 31, 2016.

¹² Beschel Jr. and Yousef (2021).

¹³ Fukuyama (2016).

governance, including “governance without government”,¹⁴ of which Libya might be the most emblematic example. This paper hopes to capture this more nuanced approach through an analysis of the supply and demand sides of governance.

North African public sectors can be analyzed through the same lens as those of the rest of the world.¹⁵ At the same time, from conflict-torn Libya to democratizing Tunisia, diversity within the region is stark in terms of governance structures as well as history, politics, and socioeconomic dynamics. Therefore, this short stocktaking paper cannot give proper justice to the complexity and pluralistic reality of the region.

This chapter provides first an assessment of North African public administrations’ performance in service of their citizens today compared to pre-2011. It then explores the relationship between North African citizens and civil society on the one hand and public institutions on the other. The paper finally draws some conclusions as to the future of public governance and the social contract in North Africa, ten years after the Arab uprisings.

Supply Side: Public Administration Performance

The supply-side of governance looks at public administration’s ability to effectively and efficiently deliver services to its citizens. The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) data set summarizes responses in enterprise, citizen, and expert surveys conducted by numerous organizations in industrial and developing countries on six broad dimensions of governance including government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of

¹⁴ R.A.W. Rhodes, “The New Governance: Governing without Government”, *Political Studies*, vol. 44, 1996, pp. 652-67.

¹⁵ R.M. Schomaker and M.W. Bauer, “Public Governance in the MENA Region: Reform Trends and Patterns”, *International Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 43, 2020, pp. 378-91, doi:10.1080/01900692.2019.1669179.

law, and control of corruption.¹⁶ While the WGI have drawn criticism from a methodological and normative point of view,¹⁷ they can help provide a first overview of public governance developments in North Africa. As Table 2.1 shows, the overall trend for North Africa is negative: in all but three instances, each country's situation across these four indicators has worsened between 2010 and 2019. The most notable deterioration can be observed in Libya, where protracted conflict and worsening instability have exacerbated already dismal governance measures, especially in regulatory quality (by 23 percentage points, or pp), rule of law (by 17 pp), and government effectiveness (by 16.5 pp). The data set seems to confirm the lack of substantive progress made to achieve good governance in North Africa ten years on.

TABLE 2.1 - KEY GOVERNANCE INDICATORS ACROSS
NORTH AFRICA, 2010-2019

	Performance Ranges from Approximately -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) Governance				
	Algeria	Egypt	Morocco	Tunisia	Libya
Government Effectiveness Index (2010)	-0.48	-0.37	-0.10	0.22	-1.92
Government Effectiveness Index (2019)	-0.52	-0.42	-0.12	-0.10	-1.10
Government Effectiveness Evolution (2010-2019)	-0.04	-0.05	-0.02	-0.32	-0.82

¹⁶ D. Kaufmann *et al.*, “World Governance Indicators”, Research Data Set, World Bank, 2019.

¹⁷ L. Langbein and S. Knack, “The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Six, One, or None?”, *Journal of Development Studies* vol. 46, 2010, pp. 350-70, doi:10.1080/00220380902952399; M. Thomas, “What Do the Worldwide Governance Indicators Measure?”, *The European Journal of Development Research*, vol. 22, 2009, pp. 31-54, doi:10.1057/EJDR.2009.32; and C. Arndt, “The Politics of Governance Ratings”, *International Public Management Journal*, vol. 11, 2008, pp. 275-97, doi:10.1080/10967490802301278.

Regulatory Quality Index (2010)	-1.17	-0.17	-0.08	-0.03	-1.19
Regulatory Quality Index (2019)	-1.30	-0.83	-0.21	-0.44	-2.35
Regulatory Quality Evolution (2010-2019)	-0.13	-0.65	-0.13	-0.41	-1.16
Rule of Law Index (2010)	-0.78	-0.18	-0.17	0.06	-0.99
Rule of Law Index (2019)	-0.82	-0.42	-0.14	0.06	-1.85
Rule of Law Evolution (2010-2019)	-0.03	-0.24	0.04	0.00	-0.85
Control of Corruption Index (2010)	-0.52	-0.63	-0.20	-0.26	-1.29
Control of Corruption Index (2019)	-0.62	-0.67	-0.28	-0.08	-1.60
Control of Corruption Evolution (2010-2019)	-0.10	-0.04	-0.07	0.18	-0.32

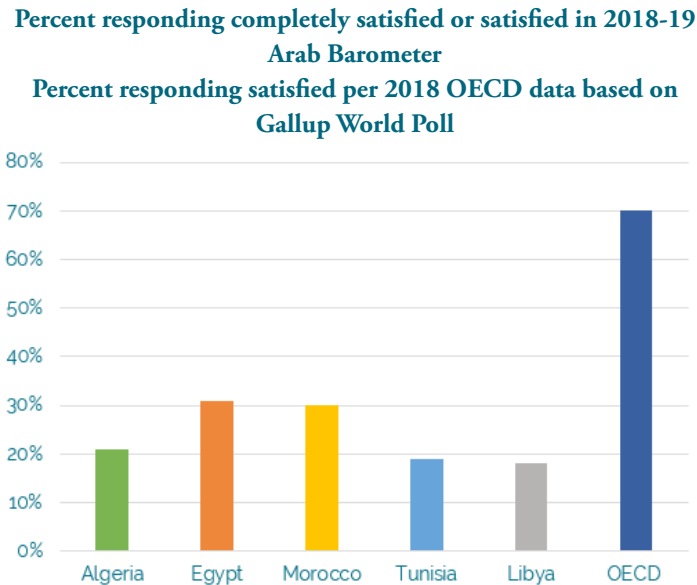
Note: As defined by the World Bank, the dimension on "Governance Effectiveness" reflects "perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies." The dimension on "Regulatory Quality" reflects "perceptions of the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development." The dimension on "Rule of Law" reflects "perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence." The dimension on "Control of Corruption" reflects "perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as "capture" of the state by elites and private interests."

Source: D. Kaufmann et al., "World Governance Indicators", Research Data Set, World Bank, 2019.

Governance failures are illustrated by low levels of citizens' overall satisfaction with government performance, which experienced an important drop in the aftermath of the 2010-11 Arab uprisings, with the exception of Algeria. Data from the Arab Barometer highlight that public discontent continues to

be rampant in the region, with only 25% of citizens expressing satisfaction with their government in 2019. The health sector offers a telling comparison: 28.4% of North Africans (on average) and 70% of citizens in member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) expressed satisfaction with their healthcare services (Figure 2.1). Early findings suggest that this level has further decreased amid the COVID-19 crisis in North Africa and the Middle East more generally.¹⁸

FIG. 2.1 - GENERAL SATISFACTION WITH THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM IN NORTH AFRICA AND OECD



Note: The Arab Barometer polled residents of Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya in 2018 and 2019. The OECD calculated the simple average for its thirty-eight member countries based on a similar survey conducted by the Gallup World Poll. Both were published in 2019.

Sources: Arab Barometer, 2019; OECD, 2019.

¹⁸ S. Al-Shami, “Citizens Weigh in on the Health of Their Healthcare Systems in MENA”, Arab Barometer, April 7, 2021.

Looking at the region's current trends in government efficiency, integrity, and accountability – three cornerstones of good public governance – this section hopes to shed light on the underlying developments behind the dismaying assessment of macro-level indicators.

Big governments prevail

For decades, the public sector in the Arab world, including in North Africa, has been the first national employer, offering jobs to recent graduates, with greater job security, social benefits, and pay than in the private sector.¹⁹ The appeal of the public sector has not waned over the years. An increasingly young and educated population continues to consider public-sector employment as a right and one of the core tenants of the Arab social contract.²⁰ Unsurprisingly, in the immediate aftermath of the 2010-2011 demonstrations, several North African countries resorted to massive hiring drives in the public sector as a one-off solution to citizens' demands for “Work, Freedom, and Dignity” (عمل، حرية، كرامة إنسانية). Egypt and Algeria notably created two hundred thousand public-sector jobs each between 2011 and 2012.²¹

This hiring spurt was short-lived. Public reforms have become a *sine qua non* for North African countries' access to internationally backed multiyear loans. In Tunisia, this included public-sector hiring freezes, subsidy reductions, and pension reforms, a source of grievance for Tunisians and the influential Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT). North Africa's dependency on foreign aid has also led to a shrinking of the public sector.²²

¹⁹ R. Assad and G. Barsoum, “Public Employment in the Middle East and North Africa: Does a Changing Public Sector Workforce in the MENA Region Provide an Opportunity for Restructuring?”, *IZA World of Labor*, vol. 463, August 2019.

²⁰ N. Kabbani, “Economic Dimensions of the Social Contract and How to Address Them”, in Y. Cherif (ed.), *The Modern Arab State: A Decade of Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa*, Berlin, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2021.

²¹ Assad and Barsoum (2019).

²² Ö. Tür, “Political Economy of the Arab States: Wither Any Change?”, in Y.

Nevertheless, the public sector in North Africa remains one of the world's largest. Because civil servants cannot simply be let go, they must be offered incentives for early retirement, an option that has not proven to be appealing to many public officials. As a result, public jobs still represented between 22% and 37% of total employment in Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia in the late 2010s,²³ compared to 18% in OECD countries in 2015.²⁴ A bloated public sector also continues to put tremendous pressure on public financial resources, with one-third of total public expenditures in 2018 going to paying civil servants' salaries (Figure 2.2).

Overextended public sectors have limited the diversification of the region's economies, especially in Algeria given its continued reliance on oil and gas resources. In addition, this overextension has dissuaded the development of relevant skills to make workers more competitive in the job market, and stifled innovation by driving young talent away from the private sector. Finally, large bureaucracies have constrained attempts to engage in consequential public-sector reforms in the region.²⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the resilience of public sectors and the adequacy of current public-employment management systems. North African governments have nevertheless demonstrated a surprising level of flexibility to facilitate teleworking and the remote delivery of services during the crisis.²⁶ This capacity is a clear indication that a deep reform of public sectors in the region, promoting innovative and adaptive responses to rapidly changing societal needs and realities, is not only possible but achievable.

Cherif (ed.), *The Modern Arab State: A Decade of Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa*, Berlin, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2021, pp. 93-116.

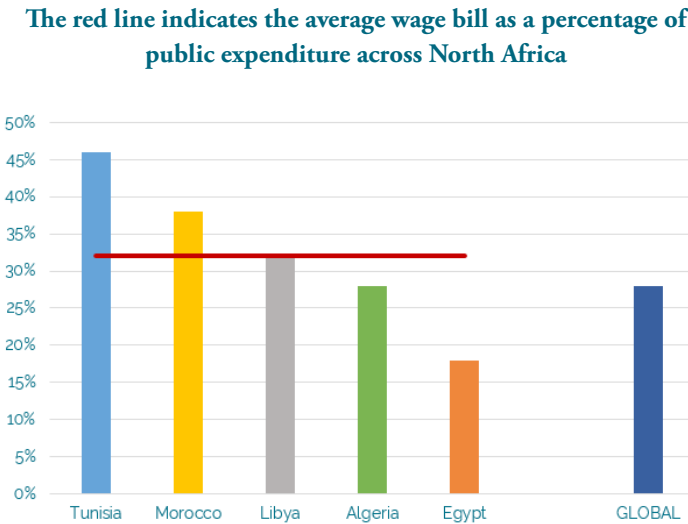
²³ "Employment Statistics: Employment by Sex and Institutional Sector (thousands)", International Labour Organization's ILOSTAT, November, 2020.

²⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "[Government at a Glance 2017](#)", OECD, July 13, 2017.

²⁵ Tür (2021).

²⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "[OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus: COVID-19 Crisis Response in MENA Countries](#)", OECD, Updated November 6, 2020.

FIG. 2.2 - WAGE BILL AS A PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURE, 2018



Source: World Bank. *Worldwide Bureaucracy Indicators Dashboard*, 2021

Policies and services lack quality and efficiency

Overregulation creates burdens and inefficiencies within the public and private sectors. This is where regulatory policy comes in. It serves to evaluate the quality of regulations, with the aim of improving the prospect of legislation and regulation delivering the best possible outcome for citizens and businesses.²⁷

Undertaking regulatory reform in countries that inherited sprawling public administrations from the colonial period, with complex regulations, has, however, been difficult. Egypt is a case in point, with close to 120,000 laws and 36,000 regulations. Such a level of regulatory complexity is a real obstacle for

²⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Regulatory Reform in the Middle East and North Africa: Implementing Regulatory Policy Principles to Foster Inclusive Growth*, Paris, OECD Publishing, November 12, 2016.

citizens trying to access critical services and businesses in their day-to-day affairs. Yet, some attempts at regulatory reform have been made. The Egyptian Regulatory Reform and Development Activity (ERRADA) initiative, created in 2008, has engaged in a large-scale regulatory simplification with the removal of two thousand contradictory or redundant instruments and the online publication of thirty thousand legislative texts.²⁸

Governments in the region struggle to produce quality policies due to a lack of a clear and coordinated or whole-of-government approach in their formulation, implementation, monitoring, and enforcement. The Arab uprisings and the subsequent political upheavals have led to a reconfiguration of institutional structures and created a vacuum in leadership, two essential conditions for effective regulatory reform.²⁹ The highly centralized nature of most administrations in the region also hampers the effective enforcement of policies across all levels of government. Local administrations are providers of key public services such as education, healthcare, and transportation, and citizens report higher confidence toward them than their national governments.³⁰ Yet local authorities often lack the appropriate resources and mandate to translate national priorities on the ground and provide the appropriate level of service.

Since 2011, Tunisia and Morocco have made considerable efforts to enhance both the mandate and resources of local authorities through the processes of *régionalisation avancée* (advanced regionalization) in Morocco's 2011 constitution and *décentralisation* (decentralization) in Tunisia's 2018 *Code des Collectivités Locales*, which enabled the country's first free and

²⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Compact for Economic Governance: Stocktaking Report: Egypt*, supervised by Anton Leis Garcia, OECD in Collaboration with the Deauville Partnership, n.d.; and OECD, *Regulatory Reform in the Middle East and North Africa: Implementing Regulatory Policy Principles to Foster Inclusive Growth...*, cit.

²⁹ OECD, *Regulatory Reform in the Middle East and North Africa: Implementing Regulatory Policy Principles to Foster Inclusive Growth...*, cit.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

representative municipal elections. This process is still ongoing and remains fraught with setbacks and challenges.³¹ Many popular demonstrations in recent years have in fact erupted due to lack of access to basic services in often resource-rich but marginalized and underserved regions, such as the Rif mountain chain in Morocco, Tataouine governorate in Tunisia, and Ouargla province in Algeria.³² The COVID-19 pandemic has further challenged governments' capacity to ensure the continuity and upgrade of essential public services to all. As a result, digital government has become an ever more pressing issue, with information and communication technologies as possible levers for administrative simplification, enhanced access to public services, and greater transparency and participation, as will be detailed below.

Integrity and rule of law remain fragile

Another obstacle to public-sector performance is corruption, which wastes public funds and resources, widens inequalities, undermines the rule of law, and reduces trust in institutions. Effective public governance relies on strong integrity systems and an independent and nonarbitrary judiciary to ensure fairness and equality between all citizens and businesses.³³

From everyday petty corruption to statewide kleptocratic cronyism, corruption was pervasive in the region before the Arab uprisings. Elites across the region "captured the state" by concentrating power and wealth among the few, at the expense

³¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Voix citoyenne en Tunisie: Le rôle de la communication et des médias pour un gouvernement plus ouvert", in *Examens de l'OCDE sur la gouvernance publique*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2019; and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Accompagner les réformes de la gouvernance locale au Maroc: Guide de bonnes pratiques", Paris, OECD, 2017.

³² I. Fakir and S. Yerkes, "Governance and the Future of the Arab World", in *Arab Horizons*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018; and D. Ghanem and E. Jrad, "When the Margins Rise: The Case of Ouargla and Tataouine", Berlin, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2021.

³³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Public Integrity Handbook*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2020.

of the many.³⁴ Corruption has widespread corrosive effects across societies undermining all aspects from the economy and human rights to security and the rule of law.³⁵ In the latter case, and especially before 2010-11, legislative and judicial processes were used in North Africa to enable corruption through absent or weak integrity rules and frameworks, and to encourage it by introducing arbitrariness and unfairness in front of the law. Although most countries in the region had enshrined the principle of judicial independence in their constitutions, the weight of executive authority severely restricted it. Across the region, judges were placed under the direct authority of the minister of justice and the executive, who controlled their nominations and postings, thus depriving them of their independence.³⁶ Legal mechanisms were often perverted and weaponized to ensure long-term control over the electoral process and the crackdown of political opponents.

Ten years after the Arab uprisings, corruption and justice indicators remain low in North Africa. In 2020, perceptions of corruption levels across the entire region were worse than average, according to the Corruption Perception Index, despite modest improvements since 2009, notably in Egypt (by 5 pp) Morocco (by 7 pp), and Algeria (by 8 pp). Once again, Libya fares worse since perceived corruption has actually deteriorated during the same time, by 8 pp.³⁷ Data for 2019 from the Arab Barometer reveal that many citizens across the region still consider bribes as necessary to obtain better services in healthcare (53%) and education (44.6%).³⁸

³⁴ J.S. Hellman, G. Jones, and D. Kaufmann, *Seize the State, Seize the Day: State Capture, Corruption and Influence in Transition*, Washington DC, World Bank, 2020.

³⁵ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 58/4, United Nations Convention against Corruption, A/RES/58/4, October 31, 2003, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/>.

³⁶ *The Reform of Judiciaries in the Wake of Arab Spring*, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, Proceedings of the Seminar of February 11-12, 2012, in Rabat.

³⁷ “Corruption Perceptions Index”, Index 2020, Transparency International.

³⁸ S. Al Shami, “Arab Barometer Report: Perceptions of Corruption on the Rise across MENA”, World Bank (blog), December 12, 2019.

Some positive developments should be acknowledged. As the aforementioned WGI reflect, Morocco and Tunisia made considerable efforts to strengthen their respective integrity frameworks. They both adopted national anti-corruption laws and reformed or created independent national anti-corruption agencies. In 2017, Morocco transferred the public prosecutor office from the Ministry of Justice to the Court of Cassation,³⁹ and Tunisia adopted a major whistleblower law, two strong signals in favor of rule of law and integrity.⁴⁰

A major constitutional reform movement swept the region following the 2011 protests, enshrining fundamental civil rights and freedoms in new constitutions in Morocco (2011), Tunisia (2014), and Egypt (2014); in constitutional amendments in Algeria (2016); and in a draft constitution in Libya (2017); the initiatives have had varying degrees of success in practice.⁴¹ Contrary to trust levels in government, popular trust in the legal system has actually increased in many countries since 2011, reaching an average of 58.75% in the region – Libya excluded – in 2019.⁴²

Attempts for reparative justice have been undertaken in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. In the latter case, it resulted in the sentencing of President Ben Ali and his wife in absentia to thirty-five years in prison and a \$65 million fine.⁴³ Tunisia

³⁹ A. Chentouf, “[Morocco’s Pursuit of Judicial Independence](#)”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 28, 2017.

⁴⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Open Government in Tunisia*, Paris, OECD Publishing, February 8, 2016; and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Diagnostic d’intégrité au Maroc: Mettre en œuvre des politiques d’intégrité pour renforcer la confiance*, Paris, OECD Publishing, July 11, 2018.

⁴¹ I. Szmolka, “Political Change in North Africa and the Arab Middle East: Constitutional Reforms and Electoral Processes”, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 36, 2014, pp. 128-48.

⁴² “[Social Capital in the Middle East and North Africa](#)”, Arab Barometer, November 2019.

⁴³ J. Sorensen, “[Ideals without Illusions: Corruption and the Future of a Democratic North Africa](#)”, *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights*,

also created a Truth and Dignity Commission that (despite many procedural and political challenges) examined 62,000 allegations of human rights violations and corruption going back as far as 1955,⁴⁴ and recovered 745 million Tunisian dinars (\$270 million) in “arbitration and reconciliation awards”.⁴⁵ Tunisia has been the most successful example of transitional justice in the region, though recent developments now raise questions about adherence to democratic principles.

In fact, the path toward good governance is nonlinear and an ongoing process requiring solid political institutions, sound legal and regulatory frameworks, and proven ownership of reforms by citizens. Despite the aforementioned achievements, progress remains slow paced and fragile. The implementation of ambitious constitutional provisions is lacking in some respects, and egregious infringements to rule of law persist.⁴⁶ COVID-19 was also used across the region to justify the extension of state of emergency prerogatives.⁴⁷ The following section will expand on the challenges faced by the civic space and citizens in terms of participation.

2012.

⁴⁴ A. Ali, “Kinetic Karam: Bargaining for Dignity in the Pursuit of a New Arab Social Contract”, in Y. Cherif (ed.), *The Modern Arab State: A Decade of Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa*, Berlin, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2021.

⁴⁵ Truth and Dignity Commission, *Tunisia, Final Comprehensive Report: Executive Summary*, May 2019,

⁴⁶ International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), *Egypt’s Judiciary: A Tool of Repression - Lack of Effective Guarantees of Independence and Accountability*, ICJ with support from the Open Society Foundations, 2016; and E. Bellin and H.E. Lane, *Building Rule of Law in the Arab World: Tunisia, Egypt, and Beyond*, Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2016.

⁴⁷ F. Tamburini, “The COVID-19 Outbreak in North Africa: A Legal Analysis”, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 56, January 2021, pp. 1738-54.

Demand Side: Inclusive Governance

From the Bottom Up

Going beyond conceptualizations of governance as only the state's capacity to provide basic public goods and services, this section complements the previous one by assessing how citizens participate in decision-making across North Africa. The definition of "inclusive institutions" needed to promote economic development, per Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, includes dimensions of participation and pluralism.⁴⁸ Similarly, the relationship between governmental and nongovernmental actors is often highlighted as a key element in the definition of governance in the literature.⁴⁹

The future of the MENA region, observed Tamara Cofman Wittes, "will largely be determined by the quality of governance, not its mere existence".⁵⁰ While governance does not necessarily require the government to be democratic,⁵¹ moving toward concepts of open state, government and societies can support countries in achieving a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance. Citizen participation, transparency, and open government are recognized as important trends by public officials in the MENA region: based on their Arab Administrative Elites Survey, Rahel M. Schomaker and Michael W. Bauer find that citizen participation is recognized

⁴⁸ D. Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, New York, Crown, 2012.

⁴⁹ M. Howlett and M. Ramesh, "The Two Orders of Governance Failure: Design Mismatches and Policy Capacity Issues in Modern Governance", *Policy and Society*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2014, pp. 317-27, doi:10.1016/j.polsoc.2014.10.002; and R. Steurer, "Disentangling Governance: A Synoptic View of Regulation by Government, Business, and Civil Society", *Policy Sciences*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2013, pp. 387-410.

⁵⁰ T. Cofman Wittes, convener, *Politics, Governance and State-Society Relations*, Working Group Report of the Middle East Strategy Task Force, Atlantic Council Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East and The Brookings Institution, 2016.

⁵¹ Fukuyama (2013).

as an important trend by 41% of surveyed public officials, and transparency and open government by 48% of them.⁵² However, only 15% report that participatory approaches have been used in practice to a significant extent in their own policy area. Inclusive institutions and citizen participation in policy making can create the necessary incentives and opportunities to harness creativity and diversity in society, avoid policy capture by the interests of narrow groups, and contribute to aligning policies with the needs of society, setting the foundations for inclusive growth, social cohesion, and trust in government.⁵³

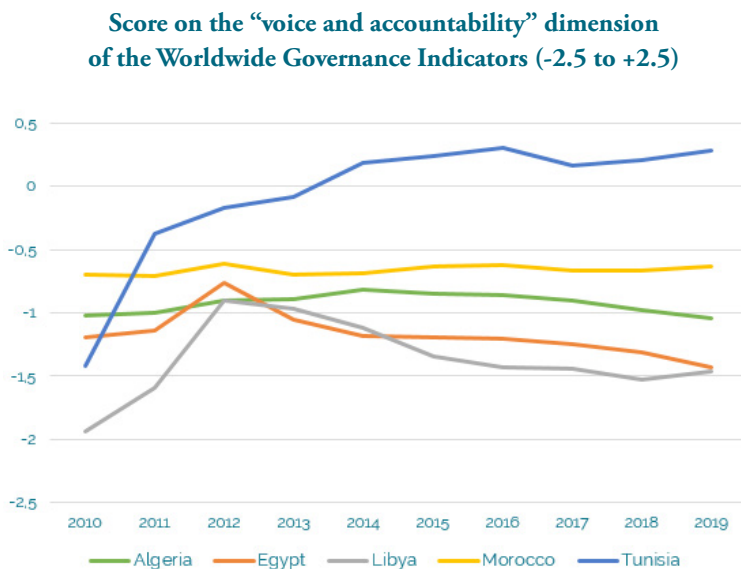
The WGI on voice and accountability provide an overall view on the extent to which countries' citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as enjoy freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media. As Figure 2.3 shows, the indicator on voice and accountability was higher in 2019 than in 2010 in all North African countries except Egypt, although wide variations are recorded. In particular, Morocco's score has stagnated since the Arab uprisings in 2011, which largely left the kingdom's regime untouched. Algeria, Egypt, and Libya had experienced improvements in their ranking soon after 2011, although Libya and Egypt have seen their situation severely deteriorate since 2012, and Algeria has lost territory since 2014. Tunisia, with its unique transition toward democracy, stands out for significant improvements in its voice and accountability ranking, although it has experienced setbacks since 2016 as also illustrated in recent developments. Tunisia and Morocco's reform efforts have been significant at the national and international levels including, for instance, their adherence to the OECD Recommendation

⁵² R.M. Schomaker and M.W. Bauer, "Public Governance in the MENA Region: Reform Trends and Patterns", *International Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 43, no. 5, 2020, pp. 378-91, doi:10.1080/01900692.2019.1669179.

⁵³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Policy Shaping and Policy Making: The Governance of Inclusive Growth*, Background Report to the Public Governance Ministerial Meeting, 2015; and OECD, *Open Government: The Global Context and the Way Forward*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2016.

of the Council on Open Government.⁵⁴ Despite variation and notable reform efforts across countries, inclusive governance nonetheless remains fragile in North Africa. Going beyond aggregate indicators, this section looks at the extent to which governance across North African countries is inclusive in terms of trust in government, civic participation, transparency, and citizens participation in policy making.

FIG. 2.3 - VOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACROSS NORTH AFRICA, 2010-2019



Source: Kaufmann et al., “World Governance Indicators.”
Research Data Set, 2019, World Bank (website)

⁵⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Recommendation of the Council on Open Government*, OECD/LEGAL/0438, 2017, accessed June 30, 2020.

The trust deficit

The erosion of trust in national governments and public institutions has come to the forefront of the policy debate in numerous countries since the 2007-08 financial crisis. Inequalities in income and opportunities, unemployment and job insecurity, lack of economic growth, perceived corruption, and global challenges have often been recognized as elements undermining the confidence that citizens, and especially young people, express in institutions.⁵⁵ Across North African and Middle Eastern countries, the lack of trust between citizens, political leaders, and governments has been qualified as “perhaps the most daunting obstacle to the restoration of regional stability”.⁵⁶

Perceptions among citizens of rentier elites in the MENA region are negative and eroding, according to a study by Hamid E. Ali, using Arab Barometer data.⁵⁷ While citizens trust in government increased to 81% in Egypt and 66% in Tunisia immediately after the 2011 uprisings, for example, it has been shrinking, especially since 2016, with a fall of 15 percentage points (pp) in Egypt and 46 pp in Tunisia as of 2019. In Morocco, similarly, around 40% of respondents expressed trust in government in 2013, and only 29% of them did so in 2019.⁵⁸ Other political institutions, such as parliament and political parties, tend to enjoy even more limited trust than national governments.⁵⁹ The deficit of trust is particularly

⁵⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Government at a Glance 2017*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2017; OECD, “[Governance for Youth, Trust, and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?](#)”, in *OECD Public Governance Reviews*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2020.

⁵⁶ Wittes (2016).

⁵⁷ H.E. Ali, “Public Perception of Rentier Elites in the Middle East and North Africa”, *International Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 43, no. 5, 2020, pp. 392-403, doi:10.1080/01900692.2019.1677710.

⁵⁸ Arab Barometer, *Arab Barometer V: Morocco Country Report*, 2019, accessed June 28, 2021.

⁵⁹ A.-W. Kayyali, “[The Arab World’s Trust in Government and the Perils of](#)

noticeable among young people in North Africa, which is a source of major concern given people aged 15-29 represent 21% of the population in Tunisia, 22% in Algeria, 24% in Libya and Morocco, and 25% in Egypt.⁶⁰

Losing ground on media and civic participation

Evidence from the Arab Barometer suggests that the MENA region has broadly experienced a retrenchment of rights and freedoms since 2016, reversing numerous gains made in the early 2010s.⁶¹ When citizens cannot speak freely, peacefully assemble, and protest or gather in associations, they will not be able to partake peacefully in public governance from the bottom up, rather laying the foundation for dissatisfaction and social unrest. Ali further highlights that traditional media across the region suffer from censorship and intimidation, and from a media elite highly dependent on government support.⁶²

In Algeria, the extent to which respondents to the Arab Barometer believe that freedom of speech is guaranteed has dropped by 42 pp between 2013 and 2019; similar retrenchments are observed in terms of freedom of association and assembly (by 32 and 15 pp, respectively). Concerns notably include the limited fairness of elections, suppression of street protests, legal restrictions on media freedom, and rampant corruption.

In Morocco, the constitution that was adopted after the 2011 uprisings enshrines principles such as the protection of human rights, democratic participation, access to information, freedom of the press and association, good public governance, transparency, and integrity. The constitution also provides for the

[Generalization](#)”, Arab Pulse (blog), Arab Barometer, June 23, 2020, accessed June 30, 2021.

⁶⁰ Authors’ calculations based on data collected from the UN’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision*; and PopulationPyramid.net.

⁶¹ M. Robbins, “[Freedoms and Retrenchment in MENA](#)”, Arab Barometer, 2020, accessed June 28, 2021.

⁶² Ali (2020).

creation of independent institutions to guarantee the principles of good governance. Transforming the new constitutional provisions into concrete practices has, however, proven challenging.⁶³ For instance, reported perceptions of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association have eroded since 2016 by 19, 11, and 27 pp, respectively, according to data from the Arab Barometer. Despite having a vibrant civil society, citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) report that civil liberties remain constrained in practice.⁶⁴

The Media Regulation Law in Egypt prescribes prison sentences for journalists who “incite violence” and permits censorship without judicial approval, among other provisions.⁶⁵ Egyptian CSOs also are severely constrained by the 2013 protest law.⁶⁶ Robert Hoppe and Nermeen Kassem notably point to the “criminalization of public dissent in the name of national security and counterterrorism, the use of legal reforms and decrees to institutionalize previously extrajudicial repressive practices, and targeted harassment and defamation of Egypt’s leading human rights activists and organizations”.⁶⁷ In Libya, CSOs suffered from the domination of the state over four decades of authoritarian rule: since 2011, CSOs have mushroomed, but their role and participation remain limited, suppressed, weak, or absent, and their members are often driven into exile.⁶⁸

⁶³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Open Government in Morocco*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2015.

⁶⁴ L. Khatib, “What Has Changed in the Arab World’s Political Systems?”, in Y. Cherif (ed.), *The Modern Arab State: A Decade of Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa*, Berlin, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2021.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ R. Hoppe and N. Kassem, “Civil Society Associations’ Efforts to Influence Post-Uprisings Governmental Policymaking in Three Arab States: A Regimes-Triad Approach”, *International Journal of Public Administration*, 2019, doi:10.1080/01900692.2019.1676257.

⁶⁸ Khatib (2021); and Y.M. Sawani, “Public Administration in Libya: Continuity

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Tunisia has stood out among the other North African countries in relation to media and civic participation. From gender equality to freedom of information, the provisions of Tunisia's 2014 constitution reflect "the spirit of the revolution".⁶⁹ Several key articles in that constitution enshrine the rights of citizens and civil society to participate in government decision-making and protect their freedoms. Tunisia also has ratified a large number of international instruments and adopted wide-ranging legal texts on human rights as well as on women's rights specifically. In fact, 66% of Tunisians surveyed by the Arab Barometer in 2019 reported that their right to free speech is guaranteed, while 50% say the same about their freedom to associate, and 48% about the freedom to demonstrate peacefully. Overall, civil society in Tunisia has space to be independent, it is able to operate outside of elite co-optation, and it has shown impact on policy making.⁷⁰ For instance, Tunisian unions, and especially the UGTT, play a central role in influencing policy and acting as government watchdogs. Hoppe and Kassem also highlight the example of the CSOs' energy and mining coalition (Coalition Tunisienne pour la Transparence dans l'Énergie et les Mines).⁷¹ This coalition successfully pushed for the government decision to publish oil and gas contracts in June 2016, following sit-ins and demonstrations in Tunis and in the southern regions of the country, including at the oil-extraction site of Kamour, where protesters were asking for "a fair share" of the hydrocarbon profits. However, Tunisia also has experienced setbacks in the protection and promotion of media and civic participation since 2016, as also illustrated in recent developments.⁷²

and Change", *International Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 41, no. 10, 2018, pp. 807-19, doi:10.1080/01900692.2017.1387146.

⁶⁹ OECD, *Open Government in Tunisia...*, cit.

⁷⁰ Khatib (2021).

⁷¹ Hoppe and Kassem (2019).

⁷² Robbins (2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led governments across the world to take considerable action to limit the spread of the virus, including by temporarily limiting individual freedoms. The social acceptability of such measures is critical for their effectiveness. The latest results from the Arab Barometer, in 2021, indicate that 66% of Algerians and Moroccans as well as 53% of Tunisians surveyed considered it sometimes or always justifiable for the government to limit freedom of speech during a public health emergency. The survey also found large support among Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian respondents for censorship of the media during a public health emergency. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on media and civic participation might have lasting consequences: as Daniella Raz notes, “the pandemic will eventually end, but the corrosion to civil liberties could prove more resilient and enduring than the virus itself”.⁷³

A new dimension is emerging around internet-related freedoms. In North African countries, limited access, limits on content and websites, violations of user rights, surveillance systems, and crackdowns on online journalists are common concerns when it comes to freedoms on the Internet. In Egypt, there are also concerns about increased website blocking, social media disruptions, and pretrial detentions of online journalists and activists. For instance, the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law gives Egyptian authorities the possibility to block websites considered to be a threat to national security; however, the law’s broad definition is considered vulnerable to abuse.⁷⁴

Transparency

When looking at governance as a relationship between principals and agents, it becomes clear that transparency and access to information are crucial elements: principals (citizens)

⁷³ D. Raz, “Is COVID-19 Compelling Arab Citizens to Surrender Freedoms to Their Governments?”, Arab Barometer, 2021.

⁷⁴ “Freedom in the World 2021: Egypt”, Freedom House.

need to have access to information on the behavior of agents (the government, legislators, and bureaucrats) to keep them accountable.⁷⁵ Transparency and information are by definition aspects of governance, but they also have been found to be positively correlated with reduced corruption,⁷⁶ better service delivery,⁷⁷ and factors affecting economic growth.⁷⁸

Differently from their North African neighbors, Morocco and Tunisia have made important progress in promoting transparency and access to information through constitutional norms recognizing citizens' right of access to information (ATI) and through laws setting specific ATI provisions. For instance, Tunisia's 2016 Organic Law on the Right to Access Information, and Morocco's 2018 Right to Information Law (in force since March 2020), allow citizens to request access to laws, data, and reports retained by government and public authorities and gain access to the information within twenty days. Digital government also can contribute to creating greater transparency.⁷⁹ For instance, Tunisia has adopted a national

⁷⁵ Fukuyama (2016).

⁷⁶ T. Blumkin and M. Gradstein, *Transparency Gloves for Grabbing Hands? Politics and (Mis)Governance*, Discussion Paper, Centre for Economic Policy Research, 2002; R. Reinikka and J. Svensson, "Local Capture: Evidence from a Central Government Transfer Program in Uganda", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 119, no. 2, 2004, pp. 679-705, doi:10.1162/0033553041382120; and L. Etter, "Can Transparency Reduce Corruption? Evidence from Firms in Peru and Mali on the Impact of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) on Corruption", (presentation, Doing Business Conference, Georgetown University, Washington DC, 2004).

⁷⁷ R. Islam, "Does More Transparency Go Along with Better Governance?", *Economics and Politics*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2006, pp. 121-67, doi:10.1111/j.1468-0343.2006.00166.x; and L. Peisakhin and P. Pinto, "Is Transparency an Effective Anti-Corruption Strategy? Evidence from a Field Experiment in India", *Regulation and Governance*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2010, pp. 261-80, doi:10.1111/j.1748-5991.2010.01081.x.

⁷⁸ R. Glennerster and Y. Shin, *Is Transparency Good for You, and Can the IMF Help?*, International Monetary Fund Working Paper, WP/03/132, 2003.

⁷⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The COVID-19 Crisis: A Catalyst for Government Transformation?*, Paris, OECD

e-government strategy, which resulted in the creation of a national platform for open data, an e-procurement platform, and individual open data platforms for specific ministries. In January 2021, Tunisia took one step further, mandating by decree all public institutions to proactively make public data available on the national data portal. Laws, decrees, and orders are made available online for free within three days of issuance (www.iort.gov.tn/).⁸⁰ There are, however, notable barriers to the effective implementation of ATI laws in Tunisia and Morocco: requirements for such implementation include a well-funded oversight institution, specialized ATI staff in public bodies, a fitting institutional and personal culture on information, and a robust civil society at the national and subnational levels.⁸¹

Citizen participation and accountability

Governments in the MENA region have become more sensitive to public opinion since the 2011 uprisings out of fear of renewed mass mobilizations, as Wittes notes.⁸² Real accountability, however, requires inclusive public governance arrangements that allow all citizens to actively participate in how decisions are made and implemented, and to keep their government accountable.

One way for citizens to influence policy is through voting and running as candidates in free and fair elections in a pluralist political system. Egypt shows clear limitations when it comes to elections.⁸³ In Libya, several elections were held at the local level

Publishing, November 10, 2020.

⁸⁰ OECD, “Voix citoyenne en Tunisie: Le rôle de la communication et des médias pour un gouvernement plus ouvert...”, cit.; and OECD, “Open Government in Tunisia...”, cit.

⁸¹ OECD, “Voix citoyenne en Tunisie: Le rôle de la communication et des médias pour un gouvernement plus ouvert...”, cit.; and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Voix citoyenne au Maroc: Le rôle de la communication et des médias pour un gouvernement plus ouvert”, in *Examens de l’OCDE sur la gouvernance publique*, Paris, OECD Publishing.

⁸² Wittes (2016).

⁸³ Khatib (2021).

in 2019-20, but the governance split between the eastern and western sides of the country has so far not allowed free and fair elections at the national level. In Algeria, following the widespread protests that started in February 2019 (also known as *Hirak*) and following President Bouteflika's resignation, presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 2019 and 2021, respectively; these elections had historically low turnout amid boycotts, and outside observers were not allowed to monitor the polls.⁸⁴ On the other hand, Tunisia had made remarkable progress since 2011, holding multiple rounds of national and local elections since 2011, with dozens of political parties (including the "Muslim-democratic" *Ennahda* party) participating under nonconstraining laws in free and fair elections.⁸⁵ Tunisia has also made significant strides in promoting gender equality in public and political life: since 2014, gender equality in elected assemblies is recognized as a constitutional principle. To implement this provision, Tunisia has adopted gender quotas mandating party lists to include male and female candidates alternately. In Morocco, political space was opened up for the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Justice and Development Party (PDJ) to play a key role in government, although the political system remains largely controlled by the monarchy.⁸⁶

At the same time, free and fair electoral processes do not per se ensure citizen participation. First, public governance measures are crucial to reduce the specific legal, economic, and cultural barriers that hamper the electoral participation of certain groups such as young people and women.⁸⁷ Second, having freely and

⁸⁴ News Wires, "Turnout at Lowest in 20 Years in Divisive Algerian Parliamentary Elections", *France 24*, June 13, 2021.

⁸⁵ Khatib (2021).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Renforcer l'autonomie et la confiance des jeunes au Maroc*; OECD, *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2021; OECD, *La place des femmes dans la vie politique locale en Tunisie*, OECD, 2018, accessed July 12, 2021; and OECD and the Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research, *Women in Public Life: Gender, Law and Policy in the Middle East and North Africa*, Paris, OECD

fairly elected representatives can promote (indirect) citizen participation only to the extent that representatives themselves have influence on policy making and are accountable to the electorate.

Beyond elections, governments in North Africa have adopted a wide array of mechanisms to open up since the 2011 uprisings. In 2014 and 2018 respectively, Tunisia and Morocco joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a multilateral partnership launched in 2011 that aims to “empower reformers inside and outside of government who are seeking to open up their governments” by supporting the design, implementation, and monitoring of concrete government commitments “to make government more open, responsive, and accountable to citizens”.⁸⁸ In this context, Tunisia and Morocco have elaborated and implemented action plans with commitments including on opening their governments to citizens. While commitments in Tunisia and Morocco have been significant, implementation remains a major challenge.⁸⁹ Initiatives to promote citizen participation also can be adapted to target specific groups that are underrepresented in formal politics, such as women and young people. Yet to ensure meaningful participation, citizens need to be equipped with the opportunity and the resources to collaborate during all phases of the policy cycle, including financial and human resources as well as access to information. At the same time, public officials need appropriate skill sets and resources for engaging with underrepresented groups, appropriate incentives to close the feedback loop, and good structures for consultation and coordination.⁹⁰

Publishing, 2014, accessed July 12, 2021.

⁸⁸ Open Government Partnership, *The Open Government Partnership's Implementation Plan 2020-2022: Draft*, February 2020, accessed August 9, 2021.

⁸⁹ N. Dutta and T. Ninua, “Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia: Civic Space as a Key Prerequisite of Open Government Reforms in the MENA Region”, Open Government Partnership blog, part of *Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) Week: A Year in Review*, November 3, 2020.

⁹⁰ OECD, “*Governance for Youth, Trust, and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?*”..., cit.

Instead, excluding citizens (and especially marginalized ones) from engaging in policy making can create disillusion, if not dissatisfaction and social unrest.

As mentioned, Morocco and Tunisia have embarked on significant decentralization reforms since 2011. These processes can bring public governance closer to citizens and open up further spaces for citizen participation and accountability. Instead, a high level of centralization of public authority risks undercutting and crowding out mechanisms of accountability.⁹¹ For instance, in the framework of municipalities' powers in the allocation of resources, La Marsa was the first municipality in Tunisia to institute a participatory budgeting program, involving citizens in the design of street-lighting services through public meetings, focus groups, and voting.⁹² However, Tunisian decentralization efforts, among others, have been hampered by the instability of elected councils, confusion over the distribution of functions and competencies, and a lack of human and financial resources.⁹³ Similarly, in Libya, the Local Governance Law adopted in 2012 by the now-defunct General National Congress effectively limited the autonomy of local councils vis-à-vis the Ministry of Local Affairs, as they are exposed to the risk of being replaced and/or deprived of ministry funding, which is often their sole source of revenue.⁹⁴

Conclusion

Public governance, as Schomaker and Bauer note, is shaped by “the impact of the past and the aspirations for the future”.⁹⁵ Ten years after the 2011 Arab uprisings, the impact of the past is

⁹¹ Schomaker and Bauer (2020).

⁹² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Supporting Open Government at the Local Level in Jordan*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2020.

⁹³ Fédération Nationale des Communes Tunisiennes, *Le décentralisation vue par les communes: Rapport synthétique*, 2021.

⁹⁴ Sawani (2018).

⁹⁵ Schomaker and Bauer (2020).

still very much felt. The pace of reforms in North Africa has not been sufficiently steadfast and implementation of policy changes is found wanting. On the supply side, the governance deficit is characterized by underperforming public administrations with prevailing big governments, poor quality policies and services, and fragile integrity and rule of law. On the demand side, after initial quick progress in the aftermath of the uprisings, low trust remains pervasive, civic space is losing ground, and efforts to improve transparency and citizen participation need to be strengthened.

However, aspirations for a better future, with more accountable, transparent, open, and efficient governance, are widespread in North African societies. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the region has demonstrated incredible resilience. The region continues to be an inexhaustible source of talent, ideas, and innovation, especially from younger generations, that can and should be leveraged.

Public governance is essential for governments to renew the social contract with their citizens and deliver on their expectations. Without an efficient and inclusive government, they will be unable to manage old and new challenges including economic reforms, climate change (chapter 3), demographic transformations (chapter 5), and infrastructure development (chapter 4). The pathway to recovery from the COVID-19 crisis presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for countries in North Africa to reform and modernize their public governance frameworks and seize the “achievable governance revolution”.⁹⁶ In doing so, countries can and should draw from the wealth of experience already existing in the region to learn from each other and adopt the best solutions for their current challenges. For instance, the MENA-OECD Governance Programme is a strategic partnership that fosters sharing knowledge and expertise, including the dissemination of good governance standards and principles between MENA and

⁹⁶ Beschel Jr. and Youssef (2021).

OECD countries.⁹⁷ Such intergovernmental fora can effectively support countries in North Africa and beyond, informing and enhancing their reform efforts to build effective and inclusive public governance.

⁹⁷ The OECD and The MENA region and North Africa, “[About the MENA-OECD Governance Programme](#)”, OECD (website), 2021.