



annd

Arab NGO Network for Development  
شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية

# Civic Space Monitor

Regional Report on Civic Space 2023



# Civic Space in Arab Countries

---

Regional Report 2023

August 2023

**Adib Nehme**

Consultant for the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)

# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>First: The Arab Region and Civic Space in Times of Global Crises</b>	<b>5</b>
Introduction	5
What is New in the World?	5
New Regional Developments	6
<b>Second: An Extensive Presentation of National Reports</b>	<b>9</b>
Algeria: The Authorities Take a Breath as Comprehensive Practices Resurface	9
Mauritania: A Young Civil Society with Efforts to Shape its Identity and Strategy	11
Morocco: Retracing Previous Achievements and Civil Society at a Crossroads	13
Lebanon: Civil Society Struggles Amidst Fragmented and Lawless Authority	15
Jordan: Government Growing Impatient and Public Space Continues to Shrink	18
Yemen: Authority Merges with Militias Amid Widespread Social Breakdown	20
<b>Third: Conclusions</b>	<b>23</b>
Similarities and Variations in the State of Civic Space	23

# Preface

This report complements [the previous regional report on civic space](#) in Arab countries, which ANND issued in February 2023. Prevailing trends regarding civic space in 2023 are no different from what they were in the past two years and may have even reached a more severe level of restrictions and repression in some cases.

As a reminder, the previous report identified four entities and factors impacting the state of civic space:

1. Authority in its various forms.
2. Extremist and conservative movements in society.
3. Donors and international institutions.
4. Weaknesses or strengths in the capabilities of civil society and its organizations.

The report also pointed to a remarkable similarity in the means of restriction and repression between various Arab countries, with differences in the severity and importance of these means. Means of restriction and repression range from legislation that takes no system of rights into account, financial restrictions, judicial prosecution, dissolution, and imprisonment procedures, all the way to kidnapping, displacement, and murder, especially when de facto militia forces have control over geographical areas or in circumstances of war and civil war. The previous report included six countries: **Bahrain, Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, Palestine, and Sudan.**

The current report covers developments in 2022/2023 and includes six countries: **Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, and Yemen.** Both reports address common trends at the level of the entire Arab region and in the context of global developments.

This report follows a similar design to the previous one and includes three major sections:

- First, an analytical introduction to developments in the Arab region and the world
- Second, a condensed presentation of the six national reports for this year
- Third, conclusions

# First: The Arab Region and Civic Space in Times of Global Crises

## Introduction

The abovementioned previous report covered developments in the years 2020/2021 and mainly addressed the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, reaching the following conclusions, which we will mention very briefly:

1. The authority/government/state in all Arab countries tends to restrict civil society. The difference is in the extent of the restriction, not in the essence of the authorities' position and practices.
2. The influence of non-state actors varies depending on the government's effectiveness and monopoly on legal violence. Their repressive role is extremely influential where wars and militias prevail and where the latter interfere with the institutions of power, and their methods combine direct physical violence with symbolic violence in all its forms.
3. The role of the UN in supporting civil society has declined, along with its independence from major powers, as it has sought to keep pace with the agendas and priorities of governments and centers of world power, especially with the blurring of lines between civil and political matters after the Arab Spring.
4. The growing overlap between political and civil matters, civil society increasingly faces tasks related to political change. This exposes it to additional challenges that require developing new types of competencies and skills.

The previous report ends with the following general conclusion: "All indicators for the next few years point to the continuation of the current path of restriction under the pretext of new crises and wars, circumventing addressing the structural causes of what ails the world and our region. In other words, civil society will still struggle for its freedom and right to transform our societies and create a better future in the coming years."

According to monitoring results during the past year (2022/2023) and the six new national reports for this year, this trend towards further restrictions on freedoms and public and civic space is continuing, and there are even signs of an additional escalation in these practices.

## What is New in the World?

The present report primarily addresses current global developments, which seek to build a new future for our world. This has been a raging topic after the coronavirus pandemic and other crises, especially the Russian war on Ukraine and the financial crises, the most recent of which was the bankruptcy of three American banks, the collapse of Switzerland's Credit Suisse bank, the exacerbation of the debt crisis, and the restrictions it causes on political spaces. The opening interventions of the workshop discussed the national reports and the draft regional report, addressing these developments that challenge civil society in Arab countries (and globally) with tasks that go beyond the national scope to include regional and international ones.

In the media, the world's political, financial, and economic leaders and officials of international organizations and institutions take the lead in talking about climate change, the global crisis/crises, and the necessity of reshaping the global system and molding its future. This trend emerged after the coronavirus pandemic and has crystallized since the Russian-Ukrainian war and the additional

vulnerabilities it revealed in global production and exchange chains, especially in the energy and food sectors, in addition to severe structural imbalances in the global governance system and the violation of international law and the rules of global diplomacy.

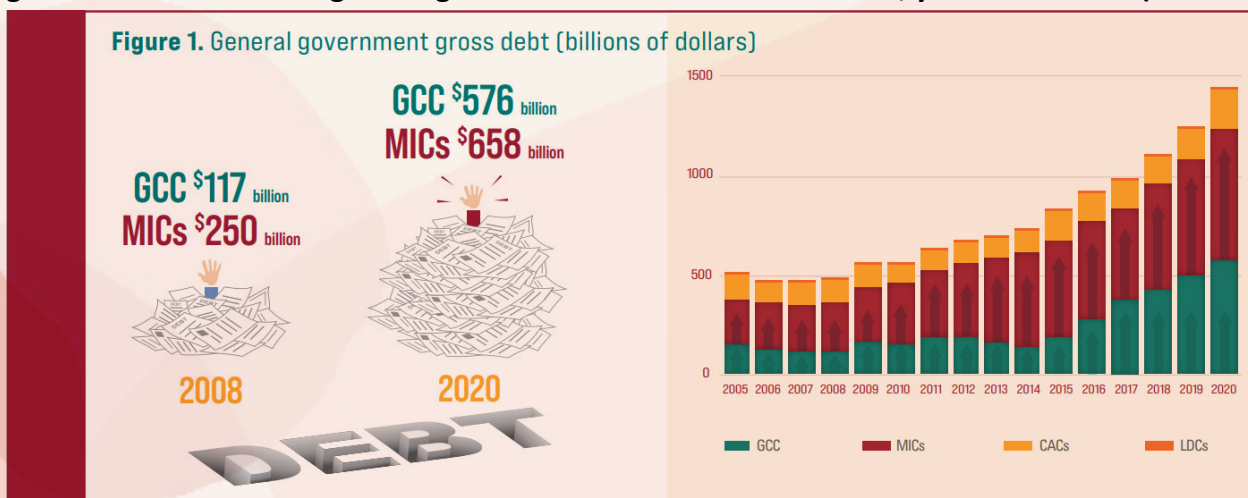
Talk of the crisis took on additional dimensions with the financial collapses that occurred in some banks, which brought back memories of the nightmare of the 2008 crisis, not to mention the debt crisis that has begun to appear in more than one region of the world (total public and private debt reached \$300 trillion in 2022, equivalent to 349% of the GDP),<sup>1</sup> causing new questions to be raised regarding the global financial system. This has caused global confusion in the foundations of the current world economic order, which goes all the way back to the founding moment at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944. This confusion is partly illustrated by the “new” proposals for a way out of the crisis and the depiction of the future of the world (unclear to say the least), which may not go beyond formal linguistic innovations (such as the creation of the term polycrisis, i.e. multiple crises in one), or truncated initiatives that focus on financing and ignore the structural causes of the crises (as in the meeting called by Macron in Paris on June 22 and 23, 2023). Important global events, such as the SDG summit in 2023 and the Summit of the Future in 2024 - both organized by the UN - may have a foundational nature in the medium term. These events, in addition to other occurrences, have a global impact and repercussions on the

Arab region and the work of civil society: they may either constitute an additional threat to civic space and cause these regions to stray further away from human rights or be an opportunity to protest and fight to return to the path of progress and rights, which is the only way out of the current crises.

## New Regional Developments

In the context of **Arab countries as a whole**, the impact of global crises on **economic and social conditions** is nearly ubiquitous. One of their most prominent manifestations is the wave of **inflation** and the **decline in living standards** in most countries, which most analyses attribute to structural factors, as well as the Russian-Ukrainian war and its impact on the availability and prices of food and energy. Concurrently, the escalating issue of **debt** in Arab countries is **sapping the resources of nations and their populations, constraining the scope of policies, and impeding development efforts**. The total public debt in the Arab region reached \$1.4 trillion in 2020, representing 60% of the countries’ GDP, compared to 25% in 2008.<sup>2</sup> The debt-to-GDP ratio continues to climb at an alarming rate in some Arab nations and is among the highest globally. For instance, this ratio is 259% in Sudan, 172% in Lebanon, 155% in Libya, 128% in Bahrain, and 104% in Djibouti. Similarly, it hovers around 90% of GDP in Jordan and Egypt and approximately 80% in Tunisia and Morocco.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1: The evolution of general government debt in Arab countries, years 2005-2020 (in Bn USD)**



Source: ESCWA, 2021

**Regarding political developments**, the deterioration trend persists, despite positive attributes particularly associated with the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement (which started to wane as the process slowed down and obstacles emerged in August 2023) or with the Abraham Accords, as some parties suggest. **From a developmental and human rights standpoint, the prevailing opinion leans towards direct, medium-term, and long-term negative impacts on development and rights.**

Among the key political developments in the ongoing year 2022/2023 are the following:

a. At the **regional level**, the **Saudi-Iranian** rapprochement under Chinese sponsorship has yet to yield complete results. The contents of the agreements, their limits, and the settlements they provide also remain unclear. **Syria's** potential return to the Arab League and participation in the Jeddah Summit (2023) can be seen as part of this overall climate. However, this step carries profound implications, notably in denying the plight and rights of the Syrian people, including their right to live in a democratic system and enjoy their political, civil, and cultural rights. It perpetuates the logic of impunity from accountability and punishment and restores respect, albeit partially, to the authoritarian regime (which, with the support of the Russian veto, renewed its rejection of United Nations arrangements to bring aid into Syria on July 11, 2023). Signs of a deceleration in the rapprochement process and waning optimism became evident in the summer of 2023, with the postponement of the opening of embassies between Saudi Arabia and Iran and of steps to open the Saudi embassy in Syria, the slowness of the settlement process in Yemen, and the resurgence of adverse regional effects on Lebanon.

b. At the **regional level**, the warning about the consequences of the **Abraham Accords** on the Palestinian people and their rights is increasingly confirmed, as the right-wing government is progressively unleashing settlers against Palestinian citizens. Additionally, there is a growing trend of

Israeli operations in Gaza and the West Bank, the most recent of which was the **storming of the Jenin camp** in June and July 2023. These actions are a general violation of international law and human rights. The ongoing political developments within the occupying power further amplify these concerns. The far-right government is actively tightening its grip on the judiciary (judicial reforms proposed by the Netanyahu government, which face strong opposition) as a preemptive institutional measure to stifle any "internal" opposition to settlement policy, aggression, and continual infringement on the rights of the Palestinian people (on July 24, 2023, the Knesset approved the first package of judicial amendments proposed by the government).

c. In **Sudan**, an open war broke out between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces in mid-April 2023. The warring factions are the two military allies who executed a coup against the path of democratic transition and the transfer of power to civilians in October 2021, as stipulated in the agreement regarding the transitional phase following the overthrow of Al Bashir's regime. This turn of events poses a grave threat to the democratic transition process and the establishment of civilian governance, as it plunges Sudan into a civil war fueled by conflicts over interests and spoils among the combatants. Furthermore, this transformation underscores the failure of both simplistic and malicious approaches by international or regional actors who claimed to promote internal dialogues and support the transitional process. Instead, they provided cover – and possibly support – to the coup plotters, facilitating their engagement in armed conflict to safeguard their political and economic interests (including the division of revenues from gold mines and the export of Gum Arabic and other Sudanese resources).

d. In **Libya**, every solution seems to falter, and the hybrid structures established through external intervention are crumbling, yielding to the complete obstruction of transitional mechanisms and intensifying prospects of military conflicts.

Meanwhile, international attention is predominantly centered on neutralizing the oil sector and ensuring the export of petroleum products, often disregarding any sense of responsibility and respect for human rights in Libya, namely the rights of the Libyan people themselves, which continue to be undermined as they grapple with the chaos sown by internal factions and regional and international interventions. Furthermore, Libya remains a focal point for some of the most extensive human trafficking operations and violation of migrant rights, all occurring amidst a disconcerting silence from European nations.

e. In **Egypt**, economic and living conditions are rapidly deteriorating. The authorities' response to the crisis remains consistent with their previous policies: increased borrowing, stricter adherence to IMF conditions, greater foreign capital acquisitions – often from the Gulf region – of assets and companies, the initiation of more colossal projects that lack genuine utility (such as the construction of the new administrative capital); and the relentless destruction of cultural, archaeological, and civilizational landmarks in Cairo. As for civil society, 2023 has witnessed the actual translation of the previously mentioned positive confusion and possible loosening of the grip of extremism on civil society. This has become evident through endeavors to establish a "parallel sphere" for independent civil society, particularly under the banner of "national dialogue" and its mechanisms. These developments reveal renewed strategies aimed at forming networks of organizations entirely under government influence, treating them as the public face of civil initiatives in Egypt at the expense of the autonomy of civil efforts, especially in the domains of human rights and development. Moreover, Egypt's attention is tightly focused on the upcoming presidential elections in spring 2024, which will have a decisive impact on revealing the future direction of the country's development.

f. In **Lebanon**, as the socio-economic crisis inches closer to rock bottom, the political and institutional crisis deepens, resulting in near-complete disruption of constitutional and judicial functions. Lebanon currently lacks a president and a fully functioning government; its parliament is paralyzed, unable to elect a president or resume legislative activities. The state apparatus, ministries, and public administrations are all but paralyzed. The judiciary is similarly hindered, especially in its efforts to investigate the Beirut port explosion and protect the rights of citizens and depositors in the face of monopolistic banks and cartels. Its activities are limited to the branches and courts that target journalists and activists, further eroding freedoms. Indeed, 2023 has seen a significant and perilous regression, notably in the stance of the Bar Association regarding freedom of expression, as lawyers are now required to secure prior permission before engaging with the media or commenting on public affairs.

In other countries covered in the previous report, which were not mentioned above - **Bahrain, Tunisia, and Iraq** - there has been no positive change, but rather an additional escalation in repressive tendencies. This includes actions of both the authorities and their agencies (in Bahrain and Tunisia) and the authorities and armed militias (in Iraq).



## Second: An Extensive Presentation of National Reports

The second section of this report highlights the most important points regarding the status of civil space in six countries: **Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, and Yemen**. It is based on national reports and insights gathered from national experts who participated in the regional workshop held in Beirut on July 6, 2023. This section summarizes key points and conclusions from the regional report's perspective. It does not replace a thorough reading of the complete national reports (available on the network website). This publication refrains from delving into detailed data sources to enhance readability and directs the reader to the full text of the national reports.

### Algeria: The Authorities Take a Breath as Comprehensive Practices Resurface<sup>4</sup>

Today, Algeria and its civil society find themselves in the aftermath of the 2019 popular protest movement. This movement successfully ousted the "fifth term" presidency of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, thanks to an unprecedented and massive popular uprising. However, the movement's subsequent objective, which aimed to reform the political mechanisms that empower the ruling authorities, remains unfulfilled. Additionally, the movement has struggled to evolve into a viable alternative national political project, in contrast to most Arab Spring movements.

The authorities utilized the COVID-19 pandemic to suppress the protest movement and undermine its

expected outcomes. Subsequently, they benefited from the increase in oil prices following the Russian-Ukrainian war, which bolstered the authorities' financial resources and reduced popular pressure on the government. However, the current regime lacks popular legitimacy despite conducting presidential, parliamentary, and local elections (in two regions), which occurred amidst widespread popular boycotts and historically low voter turnout (respectively 40%, 23%, and 35-37%). There has been a general disengagement from electoral mechanisms that did not meet democratic standards, and the people have not granted legitimacy to the authority and the system. Nevertheless, the official discourse ignores this reality and promotes itself as adhering to the new constitution.

Under this heading, the system actively restricts the political and civil public spheres and bolsters itself by implementing a new set of legislations designed to adapt various laws to the new constitution. The fundamental steps in this process encompass the following:

- 1- The issuance of a presidential decree aimed to amend Article 87, which is reiterated in the Penal Code. This amendment expands the definition of terrorism to encompass advocacy for a change in the governing system. Dozens of activists have been pursued under this article
- 2- Approval of draft laws related to media and e-journalism, with some still undergoing development, and the endowment of the executive authority with enhanced jurisdiction in assessing media institutions (2023)
- 3- Imposition of stricter regulations on labor unions through a new law that curtails union activities (2023) and mandates unions to revise their statutes to align with the new legislation
- 4- Drafting a new law for associations (2022) that imposes extensive restrictions on their activities,

particularly regarding the criminalization of access to foreign funding. It also prohibits "attempting to sow discord among the components of the nation or inciting society members against them, and delving into their economic, religious and/or cultural choices and their religious references." Associations are also subject to criminal penalties, and the system effectively maintains a system of prior approval for association formation

5- Assigning associations affiliated with the authorities to become members of bodies that maintain communication with international organizations to constrain interactions with global organizations, channeling them through organizations under the authority's jurisdiction

6- While these elements resemble practices seen in other countries, what sets Algeria apart in this context is the cloaking of these actions in an ideological guise reminiscent of tactics employed in totalitarian regimes. Furthermore, an ongoing and systematic campaign seeks to vilify civil society organizations under the pretext that they "work for foreign interests," portraying them as "instruments of societal destabilization."

In this context, the Algerian authorities are working to seize control of the independent civil space through three pathways:

a. Harnessing the judicial, security, media, and political apparatus to confront all participants in the popular movement and all forms of civil and political organizations, targeting all associations and parties that supported the popular movement

b. Supporting and promoting certain associations aligned with the government at the expense of independent associations to transform them into representatives of Algerian civil society abroad. The condition for recognition and support is the adoption of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's plan in this regard. This pathway is still in its early stages, and its detailed results and directions have yet to emerge

c. Establishing official structures to frame and contain civil society, which became apparent with the formation of the National Observatory for Civil Society and the Higher Council for Youth, as institutions mandated by the 2020 constitution

As a comprehensive summary of the aforementioned, we find that the Algerian authorities are employing outdated mechanisms alongside new tools to counteract the freedom of civil society. Some fractures among the components of authority have begun to emerge as the 2024 presidential elections draw near, opening up a greater margin to take action. The widespread repression imposed by the laws that have been approved or are in the process of approval is the most significant challenge facing civil society in Algeria in the context of the authorities' desire to impose authoritarian rule, as many specialists in legislation and freedoms have pointed out. However, this situation is not permanent.

## Mauritania: A Young Civil Society with Efforts to Shape its Identity and Strategy<sup>5</sup>

During 2023, the general situation in Mauritania was marked by legislative and municipal elections. The ruling party won by an overwhelming majority, while the opposition only obtained 19 out of 178 seats. Given the extent of the violations that marred them, these elections triggered objections from the opposition and other civil communities. The disputes over the elections constituted one of the signs of political conflict in the country, in addition to the accompanying tribal and partisan disputes and disagreements. These disputes also exist within one party or tribe, increasing the complexity of the political and societal situation.

Mauritania stands out as one of the most underdeveloped nations, grappling with fragility in its state institutions, a feeble governmental structure, and economic and financial vulnerability, especially since basic resources are mostly owned by a handful of aristocrats ever since the establishment of the modern state. In terms of investment and profitability, most of them remain within the accounts of foreign multinational companies that invest in the exploitation of Mauritanian mines and take the largest portion of extractive resources. On the other end, poverty, unemployment, deprivation, and fragility spread across the country. Additionally, the country has not fully recovered from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, as state institutions that provide services to citizens have not regained their ability to respond to the growing needs in various sectors. Then, the Russian war on Ukraine further exacerbated the situation, as the prices of various services, food products, and goods skyrocketed, and the import of wheat, rice, and sugar declined, deepening the country's food security crisis.

These circumstances increased the burdens on CSOs,

which are striving to compensate for the shortfall of state institutions, the decline in international funding, and the damage resulting from climate change and climate fluctuations. They do so by providing some ancillary activities in favor of citizens, especially the most vulnerable, like providing water and food, distributing aid, and alleviating poverty. The most important consequences of these circumstances include social movements, internal displacement from villages to major cities, regular and irregular external migrations, multiple demand movements, and loss of confidence and hope in a better future (unofficial estimates are indicating that 30,000 people migrated to the US since the beginning of 2023).

Several legislative texts govern Mauritanian civic space, the most important of which are the Mauritanian Constitution (1991) and the new Associations Law No. 004-2021. This law is considered a significant breakthrough compared to the previous one. The Constitution guarantees basic freedoms, including freedom of movement and freedom to establish associations and engage in political activities. As for the new Associations Law, it shifted from a license system to a permit system. It revived civil work and contributed to establishing associations, reaching more than 5,000 organizations and associations since the law was issued in 2021. The law also grants associations the right to participate in public policy follow-ups and the possibility of establishing associations at various central, local, regional, and national levels. The law also addresses the matter of dialogue on various issues relating to the intervention of civil rights organizations.

This progress in texts remains incomplete, be it in practice or even in the texts themselves, as the authorities still practice all forms of restrictions, similar to authorities in all neighboring countries. As per the new law, all financing operations, both internal and external, are subject to oversight in accordance with anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism laws. It even expanded them, giving the

government the right to question and monitor fund spending, verify fund distribution methods, and whether all of this is being done per the association's declared objectives. The ratification of the "Protection of National Symbols" Law (2021) represented a direct threat to the freedom of expression and opinion, especially online. This constituted the biggest blow to bloggers and human rights activists and prevented them from expressing their views. This legal text prohibits criticizing those in power and their policies under the pretext that they are national symbols, and by violating it, activists risk legal prosecution. This has indeed happened, as under this law, some bloggers were interrogated and arrested. The Minister mandated by the Interior and Public Security may also suspend the work of any association suspected of carrying out activities that would "disrupt public security" and dissolve any organization in case of inactivity for six months. He may also dissolve an organization should it engage in an activity that does not fall within the objectives specified in its statute.

Other aspects are hindering the work of civil society in Mauritania. The country became a modern state, but civil practice did not develop within the citizenship and state ideology. Society still lives under some pre-state authorities' influence, such as factions, clans, and tribes. This means that civil society organizations' challenges relate not solely to the state and legislation but also to cultural and societal transformation. In addition, there are still problems in the country pertaining to the abolition of slavery, and discriminatory practices against women are still standard. They include forms of violence such as fattening girls at the expense of their health to prepare them for marriage, excision (female circumcision), forced marriages, school dropouts. Not to forget the restrictions imposed by society on women's ambition and freedom to move and own property. The prevailing real estate system is based on collective land ownership, which deprives women of real estate ownership in violation of the law.

In conclusion, the civil society in Mauritania is new, and the institutional organizations of the modern state are not well-established and are still governed by a two-element system: The first element is the great dependence on external factors and the decisive role of foreign companies in the economic activity and their influence over power components. The second element is the continued active role of tribes and the accompanying culture that differs from the culture of citizenship and human rights. The government in Mauritania is based on these two elements, which renders the work of the nascent civil society even more difficult.

However, a real civil nucleus for progress and change is under formation. In Mauritania, an enlightened youth movement is growing across various available spaces, parallel with the growing role and effectiveness of feminist, development, and human rights civil society organizations. This new movement must go well beyond traditional methods that reduce the role of civil society to that of a subordinate entity chasing scraps of foreign aid to become an effective and independent national civil society. Therefore, it is necessary to leverage the new legal space that allows marginalized people and various parties to work as a local civil society that may fight some of the old sediments and diseases, like slavery, illiteracy, and marginalization of remote areas. In this regard, the priority lies in providing proper conditions and an enabling environment and in paving the way to the emergence of an organized, responsible civic space. The latter must have the necessary credibility, capable of asserting and advocating for its viewpoint and bringing about societal change towards a more democratic, rights-respecting, and inclusive society, with the active involvement of youth and women.

## Morocco: Retracing Previous Achievements and Civil Society at a Crossroads<sup>6</sup>

Given the situation in Morocco, we can approach its civic space from two different perspectives: The first perspective relates more to the transformative political dimension, similar to the rest of the Arab countries, especially those facing political or socio-economic crises or wars that create exceptional situations in the country. The second relates more to the traditional approach of civil society work from the perspective of the international discourse of a “normal” state whose institutions operate acceptably and whose legislation and laws are in effect at a minimum (except when it comes to sensitive points that constitute lines that cannot be crossed, and that trigger violent reactions from authorities). The dual structure of the regime and the authority (between the royal institution on one hand and the government on the other) provides a margin of freedom and flexibility to the regime to deal with cases of popular or political objections and with civil society. It differs from the case of Jordan, where the government is a tool and a facade for the actual authority, a tool that can be easily dispensed with as a scapegoat in favor of the actual authority. The regime in Morocco is closer to a constitutional monarchy than that of Jordan, and its government, albeit imperfect, is a partner in power and is the product of real electoral, political, and popular mechanisms.

Therefore, we will find in the Moroccan report on civic space the traditional problems of civil society, like the relationship with the government, the analysis of the legislative and institutional elements, the interaction with community vitality, and financing. Not to forget as well other aspects of pure political nature, even if they are not, in this case, overshadowing other aspects like in other countries mentioned in the regional report.

As in other countries, the Moroccan civic space holds a range of issues for which it advocates, such as democracy, human rights, individual freedoms, women’s rights and empowerment, environmental issues, and linguistic matters. The report systemically leveraged a survey in which 36 Moroccan associations participated and the discussions and recommendations of the National Civil Society Forum, in which 500 representatives of national and regional associations participated and discussed various issues included in the report.

Regarding political, economic, and social developments, the Covid-19 pandemic marked a significant turning point, resulting from lockdowns and other well-known effects. It increased unemployment and fragility and disrupted the ability of broad social groups to provide livelihood. It also restricted the movement of citizens and limited CSO response, while the state had control over crisis management and response. Dealing with health aspects and the vaccination campaign was a success to a certain degree, and the pandemic revealed the gaps in the social security system, which the state compensated for by providing aid to broad categories of citizens during the pandemic, deeming it the most crucial measure within its policy. With the recession of the pandemic, tourism regained its vitality, as did the economic cycle, but the crisis effects did not completely disappear. The government's plan to develop and disseminate the social security system represents one of the key elements of its current approach.

On the political level, Morocco's most significant event was joining the Abraham Accords with the State of Israel alongside another Gulf state. Not to forget the overlapping shifts in foreign policy regarding the Sahara issue and countries' positions on recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara, considering it a significant criterion in these shifts that do not get widespread approval without becoming an impactful element of internal conflict. The major problems are at the economic level

alongside their relevant social repercussions. This especially includes inflation and rising prices that lead to an environment of objection and protest movements. This inflation wave (which is global) cannot be solely explained by the effects of the Russian war on Ukraine. Still, it has other causes, some structural and others relating to monopolistic practices, which increase the risk of wide protest. As for the government's policy, it follows the directions of the IMF and the World Bank. This entails lifting subsidies on goods and canceling the compensation fund to leverage achieved savings to expand cash transfers to eligible social groups. The logic behind targeting certain groups remains the governing principle of the new social security system instead of adopting the rights perspective, as demanded by civil society organizations.

Regarding civil society, associations in Morocco have witnessed a significant development in numbers, as legally established associations reached 259,000. This number reflects the size and importance of civil society associations in public life, especially with the evolving roles granted to them constitutionally. The Moroccan Constitution adopts the principles of decentralization and participatory democracy. It stipulates the necessity of involving civil society in development planning and policymaking at the national and local levels, but this does not happen in practice. The answers of the associations participating in the survey align with the civil society workshop discussions. They confirm that their participation is nominal and often limited to being informed about the decisions taken and policies adopted. Even when the associations do participate in the discussions, they are often not considered, save for exceptional cases in which the person responsible is open to the association's idea.

On the other hand, there are funding problems. Although there is public funding for civil society, it is insufficient, as acknowledged in the ESEC report. External funding is also available and takes place directly or through government agencies via support programs for civil society. What generally happens is that the beneficiary associations are often those

affiliated with the government. External funding is also allocated to priorities linked to donor agendas, and national associations must adapt to them.

In conclusion, the legislative framework relating to civicspace, especially the Constitution, does not apply in practice or to all relevant laws and regulations. Some laws are outdated and need updating, others are inconsistent with human rights references, and others may reveal gaps during implementation, as is the case with the Family Code. Civil society today raises the need to address these shortcomings and bridge the gender gap, an area in which no tangible progress has been achieved in recent years, as per relevant international and national reports. Perhaps the intensive communication and exchange meetings carried out by women and human rights associations express the importance of the moment to adopt a code that ensures equal rights between men and women, especially regarding individual freedoms, inheritance, and the marriage of minors.

The recommendations of civil organizations and associations in Morocco focus on the following points:

- Providing a legal ecosystem for associative work in line with international treaties and the 2011 Constitution and providing legal protection for associations and defenders of rights and freedoms
- Bringing MOI restrictions to an end, especially the obstruction of the freedom to establish associations and renovate their offices, to delegate to the public prosecution the powers to receive statements, and to subject associative work to judicial oversight only
- Immediately halting various harassments, preventions, and blockages to which several associations are subjected by granting them access to public spaces to organize their activities and programs intended to citizens
- Establishing, increasing the powers of, and activating the advisory council for youth and associative work as a constitutional advisory body

- Putting in place a financing system based on fairness, transparency, and sustainability and developing an accounting system for NGOs

As in other countries, civil society is a space where multiple options interact and involve differentiated positions. The differences in stance towards participation in the IMF and WB annual meeting, which will be held in Marrakesh next October, constitute an example thereof. Stances were divided between those who see the opportunity for networking and exerting joint pressure on international financial institutions and those who opt for boycotting and exerting pressure from abroad. We witnessed the same differences within Egyptian (and Arab) civil society regarding the climate summit in Sharm El-Sheikh (COP27) 2022. This is evidence of the vitality and diversity of civil society and the diversity of the issues it addresses, ranging from local work to matters of economic and social rights to climate change and global development agendas.

## Lebanon: Civil Society Struggles Amidst Fragmented and Lawless Authority<sup>7</sup>

Structural features of the Lebanese system, such as political sectarianism and the post-Taif Agreement power dynamics, involve the power-sharing between militia leaders and traditionalist figures, all affiliated with regional powers, particularly the Syrian regime before 2005. These elements serve as foundational factors in the backdrop of the current state, which has witnessed pivotal developments that exert substantial influence on the present situation.

Today, Lebanon is experiencing a profound and extensive crisis.

- Politically, Lebanon is facing deep divisions among the power structures, with the October 17, 2019 revolution intensifying them. This is paired with diminishing room for national initiatives due to regional and international agendas and interventions.

- Politically, Lebanon has also experienced significant and perilous events (such as the Beirut port explosion and strained relations with traditionally friendly Arab and global nations). Some of these events have been foundational (like the agreement to delineate maritime borders between Lebanon and Israel and entering a partnership for gas exploration and investment).

- Institutionally, the country lacks a sitting president and a fully functional government. The judiciary is largely disabled and heavily influenced by politicians, due in part to the failure to enact legislation on judicial independence. Politically, Lebanon has also experienced significant and perilous events (such as the Beirut port explosion and strained relations with traditionally friendly Arab and global nations). Some of these events have been foundational (like the agreement to delineate maritime borders between

Lebanon and Israel and entering a partnership for gas exploration and investment).

- Economically and socially, the Lebanese pound has lost 98% of its value against the dollar, leading to a widespread decline in living standards and the erosion of the middle class. Public services like water, electricity, and social services in education and health are deteriorating. Banks are insolvent and withhold depositor funds, while the Central Bank lacks effective governance, facing both international and domestic accusations of money laundering and embezzlement of public funds.

In summary, the state in Lebanon is nearing dissolution, from its exclusive right to exercise lawful force to its provision of daily services. This is evident in the widespread state of strikes and the consistent reluctance of employees to attend their workplaces. This lack of a state results in the absence of an accountable entity for civil society to engage with, whether in conflict or partnership. This leaves civil society confronting a vague mix of external, national, and local powers and parties, excluding it from the formal mechanisms meant to outline a path out of the crisis. This situation once again presents civil society with tasks primarily of national political importance.

This year's report on Lebanon shed light on developments concerning the trade union movement's reaction to the ongoing crisis. Over the past decades, the ruling powers and their parties systematically took control of the trade union movement through repeated suppression, containment, and endorsement of unions loyal to them. By the onset of the October 17, 2019 revolution, the trade union movement had largely lost its autonomy. However, the 2019 popular uprising instilled new energy in society. Some professional groups, energized by the movement, either contested elections within their unions or sought alternative platforms, sometimes succeeding and other times failing. The momentum of the 2019 popular uprising resulted in electoral victories for

the movement in the Bar Association, with notable success by Melhem Khalaf, as well as wins for the "Syndicate Rises" coalition in both the Engineers and Pharmacists Syndicate elections.

Conversely, given the lack of clear paths forward in certain situations, various societal and professional groups gravitated towards establishing "alternative unions." These shadow union committees and independent union assemblies (possibly inspired by the Sudanese Professionals' Association in Sudan) emerged in various forms, such as the Alternative Press Syndicate assembly, the Professionals' gathering, the Committee of Independent Contracted Teachers, Alternative Parents Associations in Private Schools, the Judges Club, and the Lawyers Committee to Defend Protesters During the Revolution, among others. The experience emphasizes the significance of these shifts and their role in fostering new professional energy. However, they also faced challenges from deep-rooted interest networks within union and societal frameworks. These transformations also encountered resistance from power structures capable of suppressing or assimilating them, whether through political-sectarian alignments or exerting pressure via economic means.

Continued pressure and limitations were placed on civic space, civil society organizations, and freedoms of the press, expression, and cyberspace. Old and new tactics were employed, such as accusations of treason, allegations of being influenced by foreign powers and embassies, and claims of corruption, which escalated notably due to donor reluctance to support the government. Instead, donors preferred to engage directly with Lebanese non-governmental organizations or to implement projects themselves. This campaign was spearheaded by the ruling political parties rather than the state itself.

Amidst the disintegration of the state, violations of law related to suppressing freedoms and public space have persisted. Lebanon has experienced assassination, such as the case of Lokman Slim.



Additionally, there has been frequent unlawful use of the judicial system and security services, aligned with various political affiliations, to target journalists, media professionals, and activists across various fields. Party officials have repeatedly filed lawsuits over any form of criticism directed at them, whether it be a Facebook post, a tweet, or a public statement. The Anti-Cybercrime Office handled a notable portion of these cases, and sometimes the Military Court. For example, journalist Dima Sadek was sentenced to one year in prison on charges of defamation. This matter should have, in principle, been within the jurisdiction of the Publications Court. Other activists, including William Noun, one of the leading figures in the Port Victims' Families Association, were summoned for investigation. Violations of this sort are exceedingly common.

However, what is noteworthy at this level is the authority's "somewhat" successful effort to shift the conflict into society itself and within union structures. The most alarming example is the Beirut Bar Association's decision to require lawyers to seek permission before speaking to the media or on social media. This move infringes on the constitutional right to express opinions. A similar move was made toward judges, possibly to control the Judges Club, which was seen as a unique entity. The driving force behind this was largely the role of the Legal Agenda in championing citizens' rights and spearheading strategic litigation campaigns. Nizar Saghieh, the Agenda's director, was called before the Syndicate Council. The struggle continues, but the implications are alarming, showcasing the hidden power the authorities still use to influence public and civic spaces. Among such manipulative tactics are the recent racist campaigns against Syrian refugees in Lebanon, intended to shift the focus from tackling political, institutional, and socio-economic crises and blaming refugees. Additionally, there are organized efforts against the LGBT community and restrictions on personal freedoms, such as banning swimsuits at Sidon Beach and prohibiting parties. These actions seem to have no purpose but to disseminate hate speech and provoke internal societal conflicts rather than address the real causes of the crisis.

In conclusion, the continuous violation of human rights and the lack of accountability have become a prevailing norm, with the invasion of fundamental and public freedoms being orchestrated by political parties and security agencies, often shielded by certain judges. What is truly alarming is the systematic clampdown. This campaign intensifies as the opposition movement gains momentum in the country, recalling a return to an era reminiscent of the Syrian hegemony period. During that period, Syrian and Lebanese security services linked to Syria relentlessly targeted and oppressed activists, restricting their freedom of expression and assembly. Nevertheless, even in the face of these challenging conditions, society has not surrendered. There continue to be individuals and groups advocating for establishing a solid state and robust institutions, emphasizing the importance of separating religion from the state. Activists persist in offering mutual support whenever issues affecting freedom of expression arise, and civil society remains dedicated to combating hate speech and uncovering the underlying problems within the country. As long as voices of dissent endure, hope remains alive.

## Jordan: Government Growing Impatient and Public Space Continues to Shrink<sup>8</sup>

The Jordanian authorities have long navigated two distinct paths: The first revolves around upholding Jordan's external image as a moderate nation characterized by stability and a commitment to international laws and formal democratic standards. Maintaining this image is crucial for the continued political and financial support it receives from Western nations. It also ensures that Jordan can engage with international entities like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. The second path is marked by a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the level of freedom granted to various civil society organizations, including unions. This dissatisfaction is also linked to concerns about these organizations' capacity to influence public opinion and potentially hinder specific government initiatives, particularly those that could adversely affect a widening population segment. This segment continues to expand due to the deepening economic and social crisis. Shortly after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there emerged a discernible shift towards explicit constraints on civic space liberties and public and trade union freedoms. The executive authority responded by intensifying its efforts in terms of repression, prevention, and legal action, capitalizing on the global trend favoring security and stability, even at the cost of tolerating and overlooking human rights violations and restrictions on public freedoms. This, in turn, emboldened the executive authority to extend the implementation of such policies further.

The dynamics within Jordan's political system and its institutions provide the flexibility to dissolve the government when faced with significant crises and hold it accountable for the deteriorating situation. At times, this process includes organizing general

elections, essentially characterized as a disassembly and reconfiguration process aimed at rebuilding various state institutions along similar foundations. In an objective assessment of the nature of the state in Jordan, as reflected in global rankings, the classification of Jordan has regressed according to indicators of democracy and governance, marking it as an authoritarian and unfree state with limited room for criticism of policies and the government. The extent of these constraints varies depending on the stage of development, the severity of the crisis, and the growth and radicalization of the opposition movement. Regarding the economic and social conditions in Jordan, the country has recently concluded its eighth joint program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It is currently engaged in the ninth program. However, the stated objectives of these programs have not been realized as intended. Instead, this path has led to a deepening reliance on foreign aid, an exacerbation of the public debt issue, and a significant decline in the living standards of citizens. This outcome results from successive governments' consistent adoption of neoliberal globalization principles. These principles involve implementing financial austerity measures, reducing the state's social responsibilities, discontinuing subsidies, privatizing state assets, and more. This neoliberal approach also encompasses indirect taxes, increased borrowing, and other governance and administration restructuring elements, weakening the trade unions and civil society. Regarding the so-called ongoing "reform" efforts, spanning approximately 34 years, progress has been slow, and they have not yielded a positive impact on the promotion of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural human rights. These incomplete "reform" initiatives have included various programs and initiatives, such as the National Charter, "Jordan First," "We Are All Jordan," the National Agenda, the outcomes of national dialogues, the royal discussion papers, and the various ongoing "reform" programs such as the Economic Modernization Vision, the Political Modernization Program, and the Administrative Modernization Program.

The failure to attain substantial reform progress has

led to public discontent among Jordanian citizens. This discontent has manifested through various protests, including gatherings, demonstrations, sit-ins, and strikes, led by different social and economic sectors. These actions have involved multiple groups, including movements, political parties, civil organizations, and unions. Jordan has witnessed many protests in recent years, encompassing various causes and objectives. Among these, movements advocating for economic and social rights and policies have played a significant role in Jordanian protests. This should not overshadow the political dimension of these demonstrations, particularly those that focus on demands for expanded freedoms, the release of prisoners of conscience, and opposition to government agreements such as the "water for electricity" memorandum with the Israeli occupation. Additionally, there have been protests in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle and, most recently, demonstrations against the draft Cybercrime Law (July - August 2023).

The Jordanian government frequently employs legislative measures to constrict the civic space. This trend raises concern about enacting new undemocratic laws alongside existing ones, which may pose a future challenge when trying to remove these constraints.

- The Ministry of Social Development possesses extensive supervisory and regulatory powers over the establishment and operations of associations. It also has the authority to dissolve associations and reject their registration.

- Non-profit associations and companies face constraints on their activities, requiring government approval for all external financial transactions.

- The government is actively advocating for a reduction in the scope of civil society organizations, restricting their functions primarily to "charitable activities" rather than human rights advocacy.

- Despite their existence and the government's need

to engage with them, coordination frameworks among civil society organizations are yet to receive legal recognition.

- In terms of trade unions, it's noteworthy that Jordan has not seen the establishment of any new trade unions for nearly fifty years. Furthermore, the authority to determine which categories of workers are eligible to form unions has been shifted from the tripartite committee to the Minister of Labor. Additionally, the Jordanian government has not complied with the Court of Appeal's ruling to reinstate the teachers' union up to this point. This is compounded by its failure to uphold the Constitutional Court's interpretive decision issued around a decade ago, which granted public sector workers the right to establish unions.

- The Ministry of Labor, in accordance with the law, possesses extensive authority to establish both labor unions and employers' unions. In practice, this authority grants the ministry almost complete control over the functioning of labor unions.

- Labor unions have undergone restructuring to exercise more control over them, including various worker categories within specific unions. For instance, agricultural workers and those in the water and sewage services sector were incorporated into the food industry workers' union, while domestic workers were merged with the public services workers' union. Cement workers found themselves under the purview of the mines and mining workers' union. Additionally, the category of workers in delivery service companies and those associated with smart applications was added to the General Union for Land Transport Mechanical Workers, and workers in duty-free markets were brought under the umbrella of the General Trade Union of Workers in Air Transportation and Tourism.

- Workers not part of a labor union were deprived of their right to engage in collective bargaining with their employers.

- In terms of public and press freedoms and freedom of expression, the government mandates obtaining prior approval for any large-scale gathering or closed meeting involving a limited number of participants. In 2022, authorities issued numerous gag orders, and the year saw the arrest of multiple political and social activists due to their involvement in political and social protests or their proactive efforts to prevent such protests. Some of these individuals remain in detention to this day. Presently, there is a significant ongoing confrontation with the authorities concerning the Cybercrimes Law, which severely curtails freedom of expression in the digital realm, thereby infringing upon fundamental rights.

In summary, it is evident that the political and legislative climate is not favorable to the activities of civil society organizations, and the government is actively engaged in efforts to regulate and restrain these entities. Furthermore, certain leaders within civil society organizations, activists, and human rights advocates face numerous forms of harassment and constant surveillance threats. For instance, in 2021, some politicians and human rights advocates discovered that the "Pegasus" spy program had targeted their mobile phones. Additionally, no established written policies are in place to facilitate broader consultations on matters of state policy.

Nevertheless, civil society in Jordan remains aware of these challenges, and numerous human rights and development organizations have managed to preserve their autonomy and their capacity to collaborate effectively in countering the ongoing and systematic constriction of civic space freedoms. Recent confrontations in the past few years have demonstrated the resilience of these organizations in their capacity to resist or impede undemocratic government policies and tendencies.

## Yemen: Authority Merges with Militias Amid Widespread Social Breakdown<sup>9</sup>

Unquestionably, the overarching situation in Yemen takes precedence over any individual factors, whether within societal or institutional contexts. The country is engaged in a comprehensive, devastating war that has led to the collapse of institutions and social cohesion. Territorially, Yemen is split between two controlling powers: the Houthi authorities in Sanaa and the north and a hybrid authority in the south, based in Aden, consisting of local and external components with formal regional legitimacy. This authority is marked by a diverse mix of internal and regional elements and is not without its internal contradictions. Meanwhile, the Yemeni population faces extreme hardships as they navigate this reality, relying on humanitarian aid and whatever internal resources are left for resilience and survival. This complex situation significantly influences the operations of civil society organizations and the civic space in general. Generally speaking, these organizations see their roles and responsibilities as closely aligned with the struggles of the Yemeni people. Their focus includes immediate humanitarian needs and efforts to end the ongoing conflict and restore a nationally driven path toward resolution involving all segments of Yemeni society.

Over the past decade (or so), Yemeni civil society has experienced three distinct phases: ascent, containment, and relapse. These stages mirror the evolution and progression of the crisis in Yemen.

### **a- Ascent phase:**

Over the period from the onset of the 2011 movement until the conclusion of the national dialogue in December 2014, civil society in Yemen underwent a phase of growth and increased

effectiveness. While confrontations with the regime had been ongoing even before 2011 and possessed a political dimension, it was the 2011 protests that surged with unparalleled momentum. The public vigorously sought to overthrow the regime, aiming for a transformative shift in Yemen's political and institutional trajectory. Throughout these street protests, from 2011 until President Saleh's resignation in February 2012, civil society, embodied by the popular uprising, took center stage, superseding the role previously held by opposition parties. Notably, within the heart of this movement, youth and women emerged as pivotal catalysts. They sought a profound change, not only in the political structure but also in civil society's modus operandi and mindset. They showcased innovative strategies for exerting pressure and influence, techniques previously unfamiliar within the country. During the national dialogue from 2013 to January 2014, civil society held a prominent position, represented by 60 seats, ensuring a fair representation of youth and women. It significantly influenced the content, results, and mechanisms of the dialogue, reflected in the outcomes and the draft constitution. This draft sought to integrate civil and political rights, advocate for a civil state, and implement transitional justice, aiming for a subsequent referendum. However, this progressive trajectory encountered resistance from traditional forces opposed to the concept of a civil state, including groups of political Islam and some tribal and counter-revolutionary groups. Ultimately, these conservative elements succeeded in thwarting and derailing the initiatives set forth during the dialogue. Additionally, civil society successfully integrated provisions into the draft constitution that promoted women's political participation,<sup>10</sup> safeguarded freedom of belief and conscience, and restricted presidential terms to a maximum of two.

In summary, the influence of peaceful protests in Yemen may have been more substantial than in other Arab nations, particularly considering Yemen's tribal and heavily armed context. These

protests positively shaped the behavior of political parties and social factions. This was evident in how tribal citizens participated in the peaceful popular uprising and how various political parties unified under the banner of the popular revolt in 2011.

#### **b- Containment phase:**

The groundwork for the new direction began with the Gulf initiative and was solidified with Saleh's resignation, followed by the onset of the national dialogue. Traditional political parties, all of which had shared power at different points in Yemen's modern history, became more active following the fall of the previous regime. They began recruiting young people, promoting their initiatives, and seeking to expand their influence within the popular uprising, particularly after the dispersal of street sit-ins. Civil society found itself vulnerable against this newly reconstituted old transitional authority. During this period, clear distinctions emerged within civil society organizations: some were drawn towards political parties and movements; others leaned heavily on international organizations and foreign entities, while a third segment retained its independence, striving to ground their operations in developmental and human rights principles.

Nonetheless, the shifting landscape inevitably influenced priorities and agendas. External players impacted this "containment" phase by funneling funds, shaping agendas, and setting limited political objectives. It's worth noting that while the national dialogue acted as an efficient participatory mechanism in the Yemeni context, it simultaneously functioned as a soft containment tool. This is because it defined the boundaries and processes, moderately mandating an interaction between civil society representatives and other factions that might not align with its foundational values and objectives. Nevertheless, the proper containment occurred outside the framework of the national dialogue imposed by political parties and the transitional government. Instead of fostering genuine dialogue

and participation, these entities engaged in power-sharing arrangements that considerably diminished the role and effectiveness of civil society within various structures and mechanisms.

### **c- Relapse phase:**

The conflict began in 2014 and profoundly impacted the civic space and civil society landscape. Based on a 2105 survey, 60% of civil society organizations experienced violence, looting, harassment, or had their assets frozen. These organizations confronted many challenges, including security and safety threats like detention, extortion, physical assault, kidnapping, and even assassination attempts by armed factions or individuals on their staff. Beyond this, there were campaigns to discredit the reputations of organizations and activists to hinder their efforts, alongside constraints on freedom of speech and the right to assemble.

The conflict resulted in the militarization of civic space, contributing to the fragmentation of civil society, with some organizations becoming indirectly entangled in the conflict's structure. Civil society finds itself navigating two challenging environments, with the most oppressive being in Sanaa and areas under Houthi control. In these regions, the prevailing ideology does not acknowledge civil society, its autonomy, or civic and citizen-oriented thought concepts. Consequently, civil and human rights organizations have been migrating significantly from Sana'a and other Houthi-dominated areas. Under the jurisdiction of the Aden government, individuals in civil society, journalists, and human rights activists face multiple forms of harassment, including killings and assassinations. Civil organizations and associations are primarily consumed with relief efforts, divided among various parties and internal factions, including armed militias aligned with the Presidential Council. This situation leaves no opportunity for independent civic activities. Additionally, these organizations often find themselves reliant on external funding.

There are intrusive influences on associations' internal operations and staffing, along with specific constraints on journalists and media outlets that mirror those in other Arab nations.

Despite this grim landscape, a resilient core of civil society organizations has managed to maintain their independence and commitment to political rights, freedom of expression, and the establishment of civic institutions. They also strive to counteract the limited opportunities for protest activities. However, the intensity and outcomes of the ongoing armed conflict make legal and political efforts extremely difficult. In contrast, there is still a modest scope for focusing on social solidarity, economic and social rights, and grassroots initiatives for the rights of certain social groups.

Regarding the overall situation, international players hold predominant influence in the "peace process," sidelining Yemeni civil society from any significant political role in Yemen's political landscape. While civil society cannot overlook humanitarian imperatives, it is essential to complement this by advocating for restoring the Yemeni people's political voice, which external forces have largely confiscated. Despite the challenges and apparent impasses, civil society remains the most viable instrument for Yemenis to reclaim this role.

## Third: Conclusions







### Similarities and Variations in the State of Civic Space

Based on the national reports previously submitted and discussions during the workshop held in Beirut in early July 2023, it has been reaffirmed that conditions across various Arab countries bear similarities. Although there are differences, these do not negate the fundamental commonalities in the restrictions, challenges, and objectives faced by civil society in each nation. The increasing trend toward authoritarianism, limitations on public and individual liberties, and the erosion of some gains made in the

decade following the Arab Spring are prevalent and interrelated characteristics that cannot be ignored. Furthermore, civil society increasingly finds itself tasked with transformative roles that fall under the umbrella of political change. This positions it in heightened conflict with governments, conservative movements, non-governmental entities, and de facto powers, particularly armed groups in several countries. Additionally, the nations in the region are grappling with economic and social crises, as mentioned in the opening sections of this report.

The following table outlines some features of civic space and the entities impacting it, highlighting both similarities and differences, as well as the role played by four key actors (similar to the table in the prior regional report):

**Table 1: A table that details the roles various entities play in shaping the civic space across the six countries.**

	Party	Authority / Government	Non-state actors	Donors and international institutions	Organizations' endogenous capabilities
	Algeria	Very extreme	Inconclusive and weak	Weak	Tendency towards positivity
	Mauritania	Extreme	Extreme	Influential with a tendency towards dominance	Weak
	Morocco	Extreme	Inconclusive and weak	Tendency towards positivity	Positive
	Jordan	Extreme	Extreme	Under the government's umbrella	Positive
	Lebanon	Tendency towards extremism, but weak authority	Tendency towards dominance and extremism	Increasing influence amid government boycott	Positive
	Yemen	Two authorities and integrated militias, all extremely militant		Influential and dominant role	Weak

Within this framework, national reports and discussions emphasized the significance and urgency of regional solidarity and collaborative action. Such united efforts are essential and effective in addressing these challenges at the regional level and supporting civil forces in each country. This is especially true for civil forces and agents of change confronting particularly challenging and exceptional circumstances, such as threats of wars, civil conflicts, societal fragmentation, and the drift towards total autocracy. The crucial need for regional (and international) solidarity arises in part because governments—particularly those in the Arab region—are often aligned in supporting counter revolutions and coups to prevent any potential democratic transformations and the development of a modern, civil state committed to human rights. Some governments engage in direct or indirect military intervention to achieve these ends. Given the solidarity and support among governments and entities opposed to democratic transformation and the principles of citizenship, justice, and human rights, it is advisable for civil forces to strengthen their collaboration to support the civil society uprising, both at the national and regional levels.

*The Arab Spring presented a momentous opportunity in 2011, for which we were inadequately prepared. Whole populations up, demanding change in a phenomenon that cannot indefinitely sustain itself without generating its vision and means to effectively combat the counterrevolutionary forces. However, if we were unprepared in 2011, can we still afford to be unprepared 12 or 13 years later?*

*A shift in the role of civil society, notably in the political sphere, is inevitable. This change is driven by the national or regional context or the current global trajectory, which places us at a pivotal juncture requiring the shaping of a new world. Our response should involve a united, strategic, and self-constructed civil initiative that forms the core of collective efforts, steering clear of scattered endeavors. The objective is to actively contribute to and shape the course of change through a coordinated three-tier approach: national, regional, and global. Today, there is an opportunity to intervene and amplify our voices on the critical global decisions that will be made in the months ahead.*

*Our role is inherently political, whether we want it or not, and ahead of us lies a challenging task, but not unachievable one.*

*Ziad Abdel Samad - Beirut July 6th, 2023*

*Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)*



In this context, it is imperative to operate along three interconnected trajectories within a unified framework:

- **The first trajectory** involves constructing broad national coalitions encompassing the social or grassroots civil opposition movements that advocate for civil and democratic transformation at the national level.

- **The second trajectory** entails establishing and enhancing regional coalitions designed to serve as coordinating bodies for national alliances. These regional coalitions should formulate an inclusive and forward-looking discourse that addresses regional challenges and crises and develop an action plan at both regional and national levels. This includes organizing regional campaigns to counter the encroachments on public and civic space.

- **The third trajectory** is for the regional coalition to actively align itself with international alliances pursuing similar objectives. This trajectory is

motivated by two primary factors: The alignment of goals and the incorporation of desired regional transformations into the context of the global transformation agenda. Secondly, the necessity for international solidarity with civil society in Arab countries and the support that the global civil society can extend, both in the South and the North. This is particularly significant as international actors play a substantial role in addressing the region's challenges.

These imperatives explain the report's emphasis on the global dimension. The effectiveness of civil society's efforts in Arab nations will be enhanced if it integrates its objectives and action plan into the broader context of the global trajectory. The following two years will witness significant milestones in reshaping the global political and economic framework. As mentioned earlier, we must strongly influence this trajectory, preventing any further marginalization of civil society globally and within our nations.

# Endnotes

- 1 Check the link: <https://www.spglobal.com/en/research-insights/featured/special-editorial/look-forward/global-debt-leverage-is-a-great-reset-coming#:~:text=Global%20debt%20has%20hit%20a,%25%2C%20from%202007%20to%202022>
- 2 ESCWA, Liquidity shortage and debt: Obstacles to recovery in the Arab region, 2021. Check link: [https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/liquidity-shortage-debt-obstacles-recovery-arab-region-arabic\\_0.pdf](https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/liquidity-shortage-debt-obstacles-recovery-arab-region-arabic_0.pdf)
- 3 Precise data concerning debt-to-GDP ratios regarding global and regional sources shows fluctuations from differences in reference years and various influencing factors. However, it typically relies on the WB or IMF as a primary source, with some projections or updates undertaken by the publishing entity. Numbers are extracted from the WB website or other statistical sources and are largely consistent despite the reference year fluctuating between 2020 and 2023. These ratios are generally on the rise in most Arab countries.
- 4 The full text of the Algerian national report is available via the link: [https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local\\_reports](https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local_reports)
- 5 The full text of the Mauritanian national report is available via the link: [https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local\\_reports](https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local_reports)
- 6 The full text of the Moroccan national report is available via the link: [https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local\\_reports](https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local_reports)
- 7 The full text of the Lebanese national report is available via the link: [https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local\\_reports](https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local_reports)
- 8 The full text of the Jordanian national report is available via the link: [https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local\\_reports](https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local_reports)
- 9 The full text of the Yemeni national report is available via the link: [https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local\\_reports](https://civicspace.annd.org/en/local_reports)
- 10 The quota system was adopted, ensuring that women constitute at least 30% of all executive, legislative, and judicial institutions within the state.