

# ASPIRE | Arab States Partnership for Inclusive Rights in Elections



## Newsletter

Today's reading time: 7½ minutes.



### Feature Story : Lebanon's Long-Awaited Local Elections

In May 2025, Lebanon held its first municipal and mukhtar elections since 2016—an important moment for local democratic governance in the region. Conducted in four phases across all governorates, voters elected around **1,065 municipalities and 3,196 mukhtar**, with turnout reaching **39%** of more than **4 million** registered voters.

The polls brought gradual gains in women's political participation. Women made up **12%** of candidates, and their share of municipal council seats doubled from **5% in 2016 to 10% in 2025**, though their representation in mukhtar posts remained at **2%**.

UNDP Lebanon, through its Electoral Assistance Project, supported the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities with operational preparedness, inclusive voter outreach, and digital transformation. Efforts included a nationwide awareness campaign—with **sign language interpretation, accessible messaging, and inclusive visuals**—technical training on E-Day procedures for **more than 100** staff across governorates, **a new automated candidate registration system** deployed nationwide, and **a national call center** that handled around 18,000 inquiries. Support to the accreditation of observers and media further reinforced transparency and public confidence.

Lebanon's local elections not only renewed democratic processes at home but also stand as a reminder of the importance—and the challenges—of sustaining inclusive electoral practices across the Arab region.

Through targeted technical support, UNDP played a key role in facilitating inclusive and transparent elections, advancing Lebanon's path toward strengthened democratic governance.

## Calendar of Elections



May 2025

Lebanon  
Municipal  
Elections



August 2025

Egypt  
Senate  
Elections



August 2025

Libya  
Municipal Council  
Elections



November 2025

Iraq  
Parliamentary  
Elections



November 2025

Egypt  
Parliamentary  
Elections



December 2025

Tunisia  
Local  
Elections

## Feature Story : UNDP and Sida Renew Partnership to Strengthen Democratic Institutions in the Arab States



UNDP and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) have signed a new agreement launching Phase III of the Arab States Partnership for Inclusive Rights in Elections (ASPIRE)—marking more than a decade of joint commitment to inclusive participation, accountable institutions, and democratic resilience across the region.

ASPIRE is unique in its regional approach. It complements national electoral support by building cross-border platforms for cooperation, promoting peer learning, and creating the trust needed to address sensitive governance challenges. Over the past decade, this approach has helped establish the Arab Organization of Electoral Management Bodies (ArabEMBs) and strengthen the electoral capacities of the League of Arab States' Electoral Affairs Department and the Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions—together serving as important regional platforms for regional cooperation, capacity development, and knowledge sharing.

In its new phase, ASPIRE will continue to advance electoral integrity, inclusive participation, and institutional preparedness, including through innovations like the eMonitor+ tool to track disinformation and online hate, and the Women's Leadership Academy for the Digital Era to equip women leaders for today's fast-changing governance landscape.

By renewing ASPIRE, Sida is sending a clear message: even in times of global uncertainty, the rights of people in the Arab States to participate, to be heard, and to hold institutions accountable remain a priority—and an investment worth making.

# The Region in Action: Highlights from the Field

15-18 April

## Youth Camp on Participation in Civic and Political Life

Tunisia



In April 2025, as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen youth engagement in political processes across the Arab region, the Arab Network for Youth in Elections—under the umbrella of ArabEMBs—organized the first national rollout of the regional curriculum on youth civic and political participation. The national youth camp, held in Tunisia from 15 to 18 April 2025, was jointly organized by ArabEMBs and the Tunisian Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), with full funding provided by ISIE—reflecting a strong national ownership and commitment to advancing youth engagement in public life.

Bringing together 27 young participants aged 20–35, the camp targeted young leaders from electoral bodies and civil society organizations. It provided a dynamic platform for young women and men to build their capacities, exchange experiences, and deepen their understanding of political and civic participation, with the goal of strengthening youth inclusion in political life.

This camp marked the first national implementation of a regionally developed curriculum by the UNDP Regional Electoral Support Project in 2022, previously piloted at both global and regional levels. The training was delivered by members of the Youth Network Steering Committee, including participants who had taken part in previous regional trainings—demonstrating the strength of peer-to-peer learning and the emergence of a growing pool of youth trainers across the region. This milestone represents a significant step toward institutionalizing civic education in the Arab region and enhancing the sustainability of youth engagement at the national level.

Looking ahead, the Network is planning for national rollouts of the curriculum in Jordan, Libya, and Palestine. In parallel, efforts are underway to finalize the Arabization of the curriculum to ensure greater accessibility, clarity, and relevance for Arabic-speaking youth across the region. A joint UNDP-Network launch of the Arabic version is planned, further solidifying this milestone as a cornerstone for sustainable youth engagement and civic education programming in the Arab region.

18-29 May

## Bridge Train-the-Facilitators (TTF) Workshop

Amman, Jordan



From 18 to 29 May 2025, in Amman, Jordan, the Electoral Affairs Department of the League of Arab States (LAS), in response to a request from the Independent Election Commission (IEC) of Jordan, supported the organization of a Train-the-Facilitators (TTF) workshop. It aimed to strengthen institutional capacities and build a pool of potential BRIDGE workshop facilitators equipped with essential skills and practical knowledge in electoral processes.

The ten-day intensive training brought together 20 participants from the IEC and civil society organizations, 80% of whom were women—highlighting the workshop’s strong focus on women’s empowerment and inclusive participation. Participants were trained in critical facilitation techniques, presentation and group work skills, and the preparation and delivery of BRIDGE sessions, all within an interactive and supportive learning environment.

The training emphasized hands-on learning, with participants receiving continuous feedback to enhance their facilitation abilities and increase awareness of their strengths and areas for improvement.

The training was organized by UN-Women Jordan, in collaboration with the IEC. The UNDP Regional Electoral Support Project played a key role by providing two of the six accredited BRIDGE facilitators who delivered the workshop. This collaborative effort between LAS, UN Women, UNDP, and IEC reflects a strong commitment to advancing democratic processes and strengthening institutional capacities in the Arab region.

27–28 May

## Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights: Opportunities, Risks, and Visions for a Better Future

Doha, Qatar



Over 1,200 global leaders, experts, and advocates gathered in Doha, Qatar for the International Conference on “Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights: Opportunities, Risks, and Visions for a Better Future.”

Organized by the Qatar National Human Rights Committee, in partnership with UNDP, OHCHR, GANHRI, Qatar’s Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, the National Cybersecurity Agency, and international stakeholders, the conference explored the intersection of AI and human rights.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping societies, unlocking opportunities for innovation and growth. However, its rapid development also raises urgent questions about privacy, bias, surveillance, and accountability. This conference examined the promises and perils of AI through a human rights lens to establish shared pathways for ethical and inclusive AI governance.

Key Topics Included: Privacy, surveillance & data protection, Algorithmic bias and discrimination, AI & freedom of expression, Democratic integrity, Legal frameworks for responsible AI, AI for Good: advancing justice and rights.

The event concluded with the Doha Declaration on AI and Human Rights, outlining actionable recommendations and best practices to guide ethical AI governance globally.

Key recommendations emphasized the importance of strengthening media and information literacy by equipping individuals with the skills needed to navigate today’s complex information environment. The Declaration also called the need to collaborate with electoral management bodies and media regulators to monitor and respond to AI-driven threats to democratic participation and electoral integrity, and to conduct regular assessments of AI’s human rights impact—particularly on governance, democratic processes, and marginalized or vulnerable communities.



28-18 May

## The New Frontier: AI, Electoral Integrity, and the Future of Democratic Participation

Webinar- Zoom



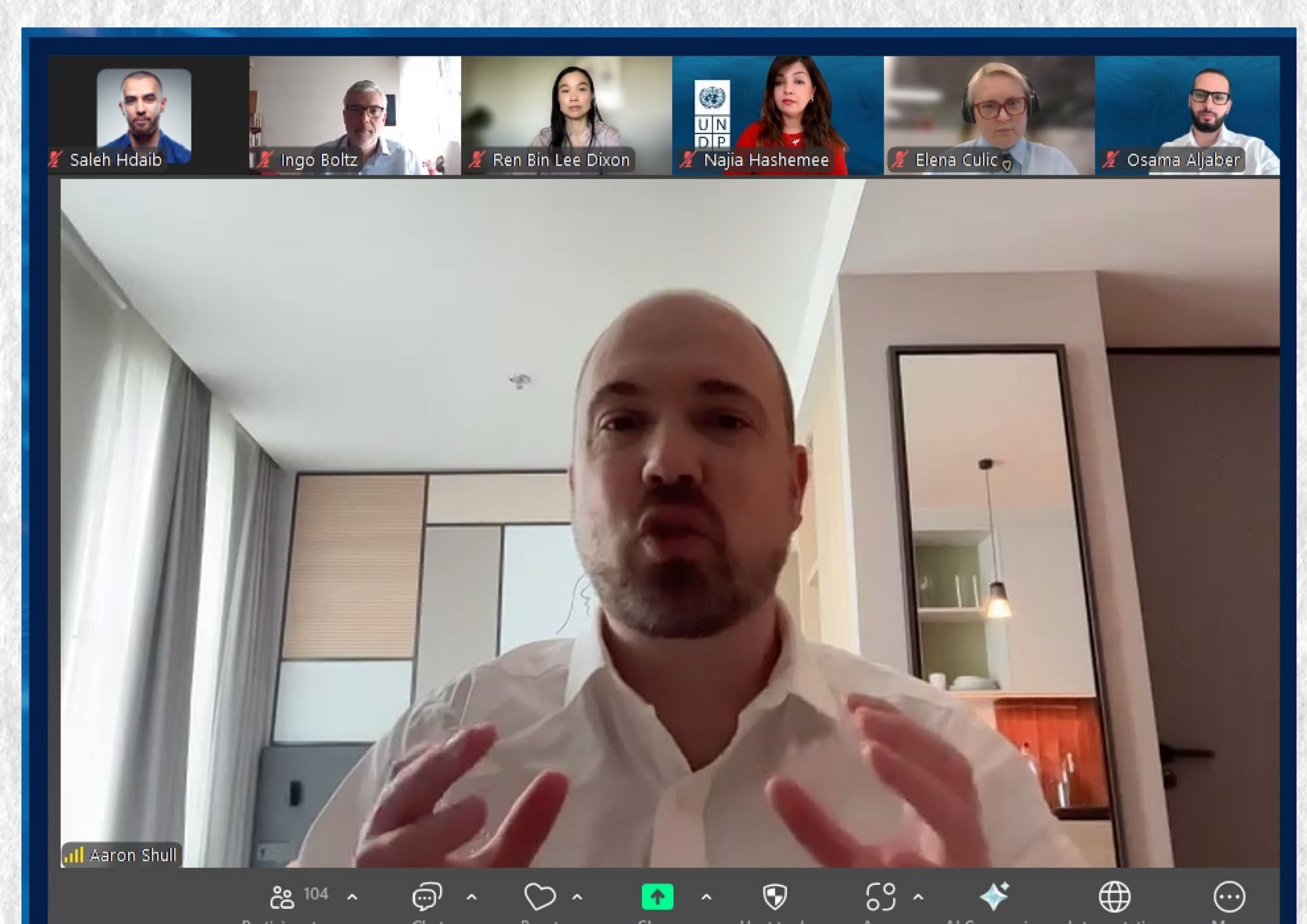
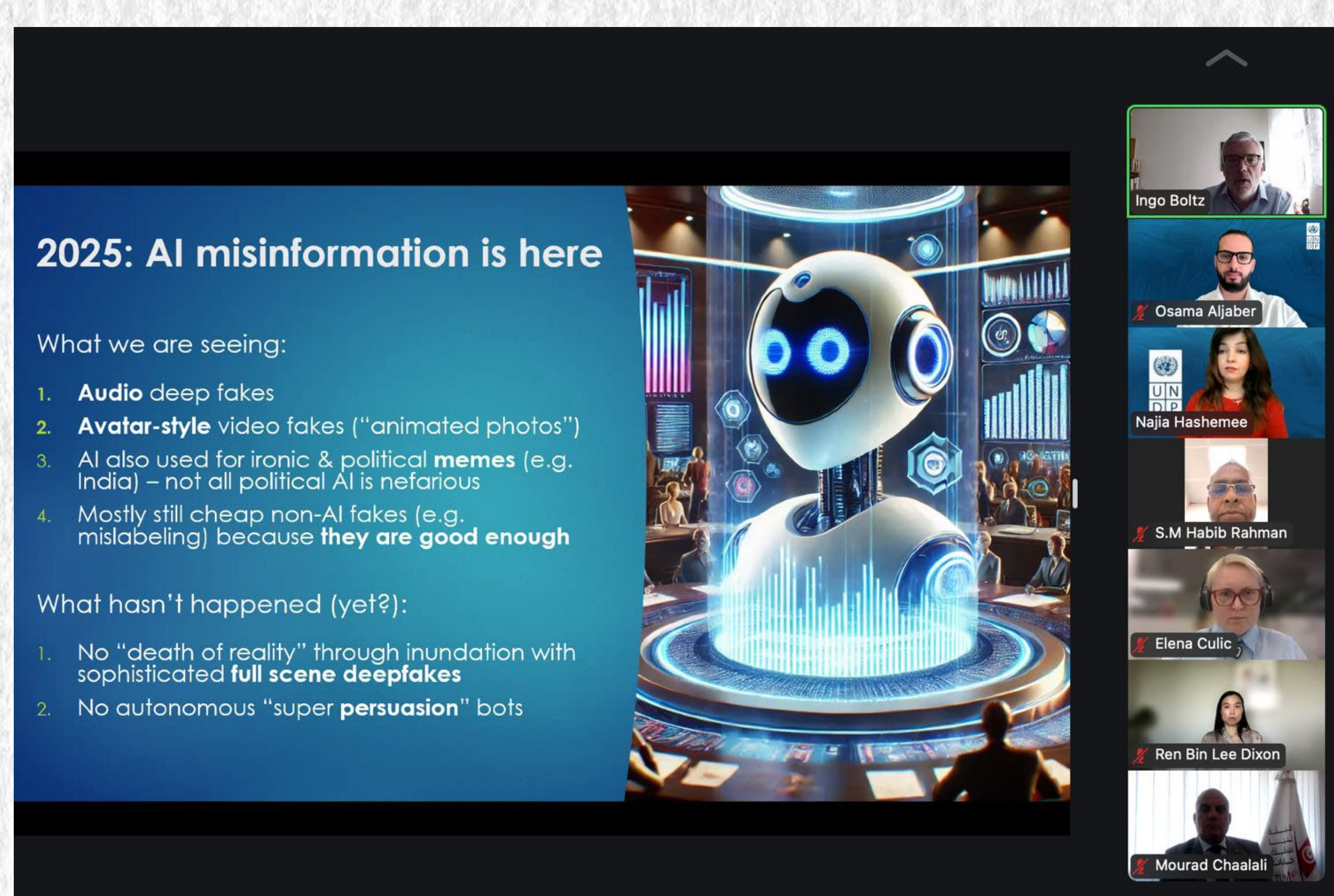
On 24 June 2025, the first webinar in UNDP’s global series on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Elections, titled “The New Frontier: AI, Electoral Integrity, and the Future of Democratic Participation.” The event brought together over 240 participants from 83 countries, highlighting the global relevance and urgency of addressing the connection between emerging technologies and democratic governance.

The session brought together leading experts from the legal, policy, and electoral fields—including representatives from the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), the Center for AI and Digital Policy (CAIDP), The Carter Center, and UNDP—to explore the implications of AI for elections and democratic governance. The discussion focused on practical tools, regulatory frameworks, and institutional responses that can equip electoral management bodies (EMBs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and policymakers to navigate this new terrain and uphold democratic values in the digital age.

Webinar recording available here: [https://youtu.be/ngBbmN9xbwA?si=uv1bC\\_Pcw5Plm62j](https://youtu.be/ngBbmN9xbwA?si=uv1bC_Pcw5Plm62j)

### Key Highlights from the Discussion

- **AI as Both Tool and Threat:** The discussion highlighted how AI introduces systemic risks to democratic processes—including disinformation, voter manipulation, surveillance, and erosion of public trust. Strengthening legal and institutional safeguards was emphasized as essential to preserving electoral legitimacy in the digital age.
- **Global Norms and Frameworks:** Presenters highlighted the importance of aligning national strategies with global governance frameworks, including the OECD AI Principles, UNESCO Recommendations on the Ethics of AI, the Council of Europe’s Convention on AI, and the upcoming UN Global Digital Compact. These frameworks offer valuable guidance for enhancing transparency, accountability, and human rights protections in AI deployment.
- **Real-World Digital Threats to Elections:** Field-based insights underscored the use of AI tools—such as deepfakes, harassment networks, and targeted disinformation—to manipulate electoral environments. The need for ethical frameworks, digital integrity tools, and evidence-based observation methodologies was emphasized to safeguard public trust and civic participation.
- **Institutional Preparedness and Resilience:** Drawing on lessons from the field, speakers highlighted the need for electoral management bodies (EMBs) to invest in strategic communication, risk audits, and partnerships with civil society and media actors to counter digital threats and foster voter confidence.



### Some Questions Raised by Participants

Participants asked a number of forward-looking questions, reflecting the complexity of the topic and the need for continued dialogue:

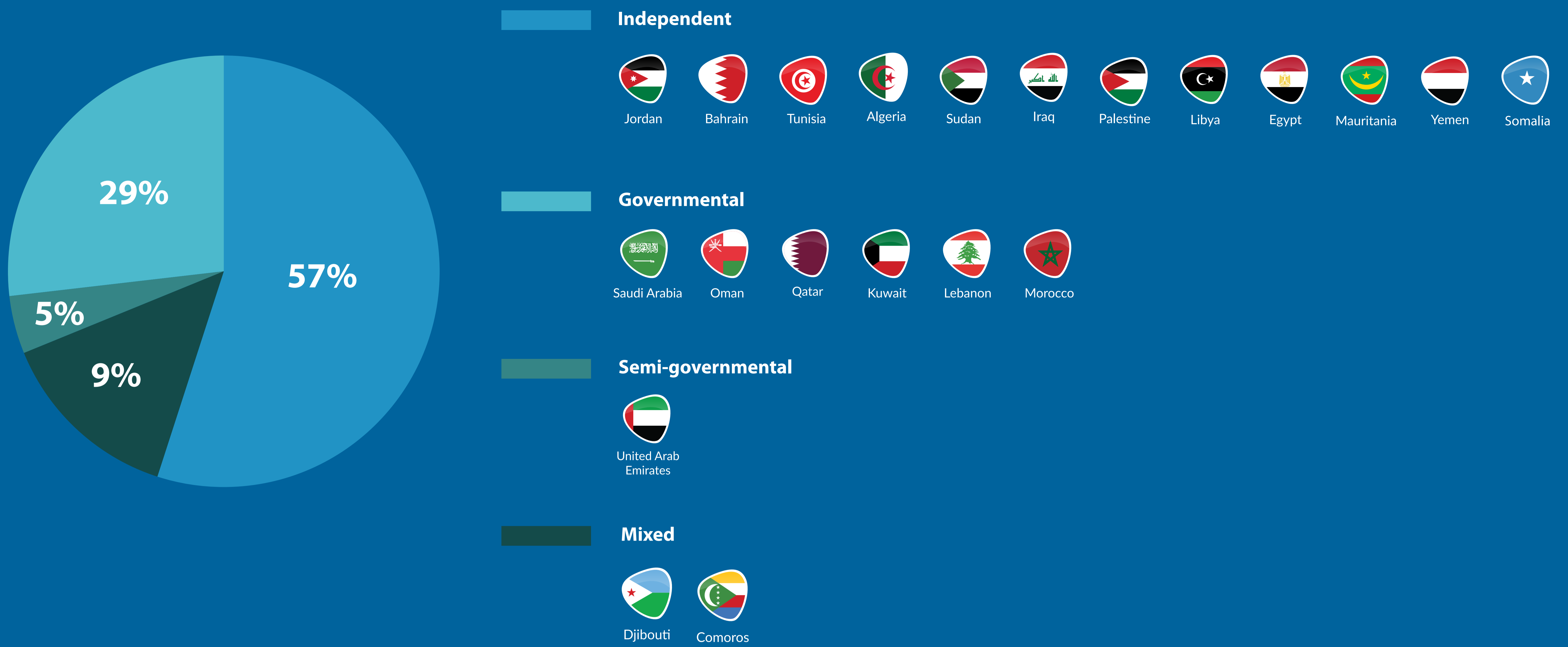
- What institutional mechanisms can EMBs adopt to build public trust in AI-influenced information environments?
- Can AI be leveraged to improve voter registration and identity verification processes?
- What role should digital literacy and civic education play in combating manipulation and misinformation?

This session is the beginning of webinar series designed to equip electoral stakeholders with the tools, knowledge, and global perspectives they need to uphold democratic values in a rapidly changing digital world.

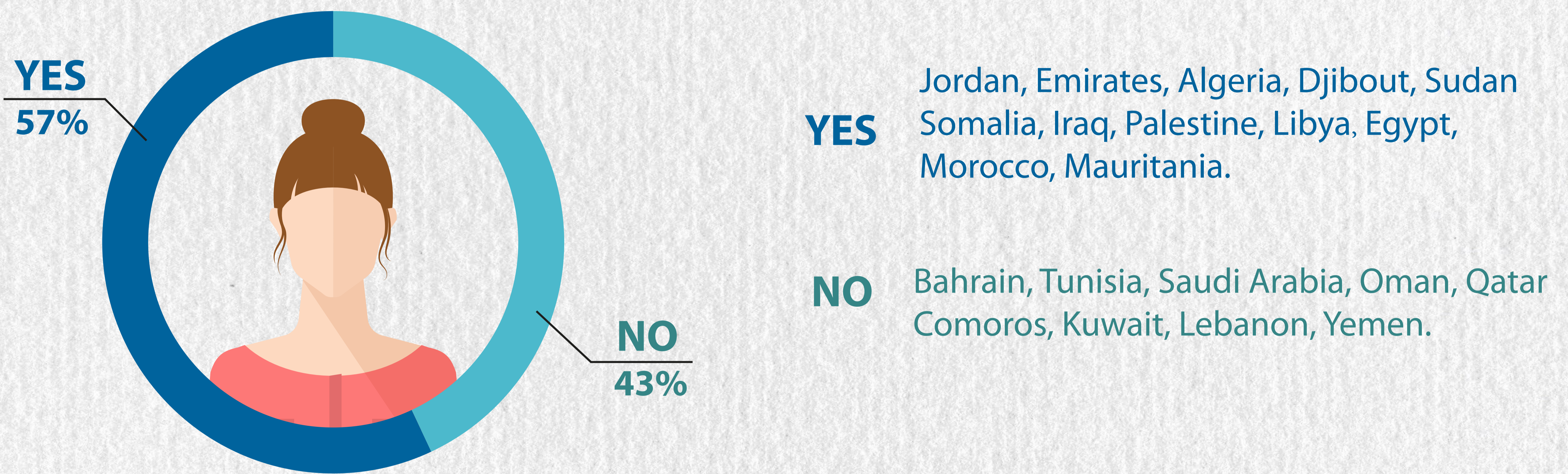
**Stay tuned for the next session in the series.**

# Data Spotlight

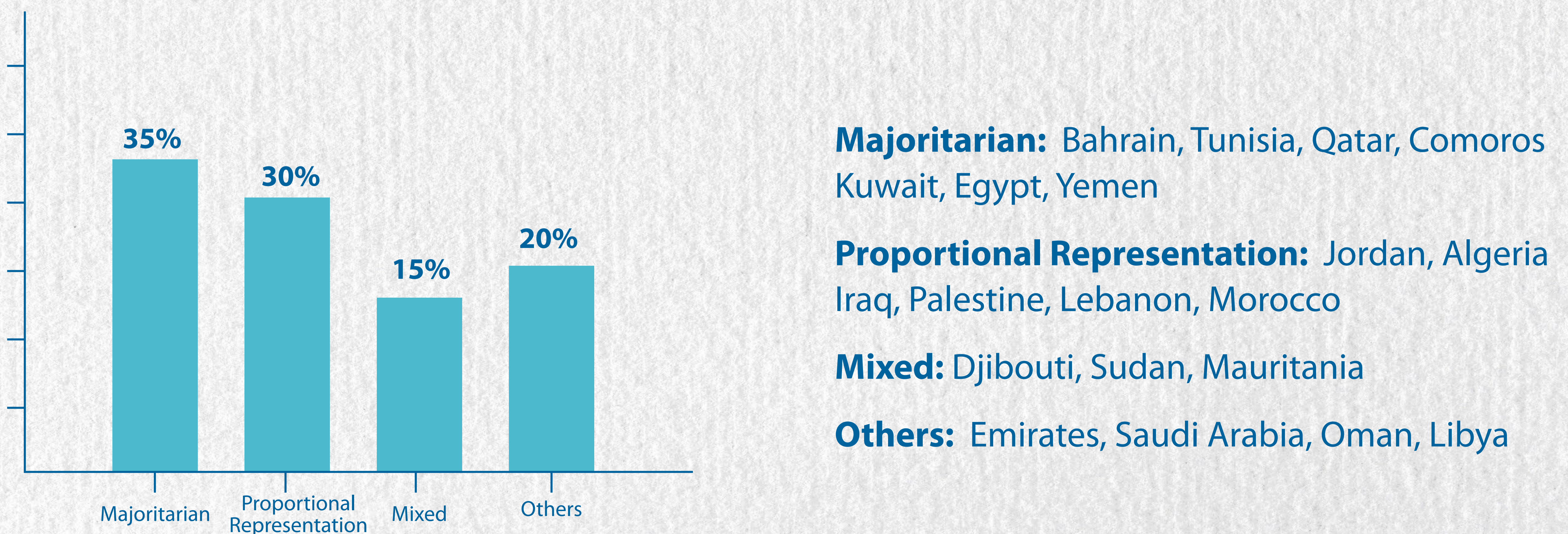
## Types of EMBs in the Arab States



## Women's Participation Quota



## Electoral Systems



## Changemaker Spotlight

Every newsletter, we'll **spotlight a key figure** who has played a critical role in advancing democratic processes and contributing to the project's achievements and impact - because behind every credible and inclusive electoral event are dedicated individuals and teams working tirelessly to make it happen.

Meet **Badriyah Al-Balbisi**, Minister of State for Public Sector Development, Jordan

**Badrieh Al-Bilbisi** has been a driving force for electoral integrity and democratic governance in the Arab region. As the first Secretary-General of the Organization of Arab Electoral Management Bodies (ArabEMBs), she played a pioneering role in building cooperation among electoral institutions across Arab states and laying the foundations for the organization's development, operationalization, and growing influence. Under her leadership, ArabEMBs became a key platform for regional cooperation on elections, facilitating knowledge exchange and strengthening the capacities of electoral management bodies.



Her career bridges public administration, electoral governance, and institutional reform. As Assistant Secretary-General of Jordan's Independent Election Commission, she helped shape the national electoral framework and operational planning. She also served as Secretary-General of both the Ministry of Public Sector Development and the Civil Service Bureau, where she contributed to policy reforms and was a member and rapporteur of Jordan's Public Sector Modernization Committee—one of the pillars of the country's National Modernization Vision.

Most recently, Badriyah served as a Member of the Jordanian Senate (Majlis Al-Aayan), continuing to champion governance reforms. **This month, she was appointed as Minister of State for Public Sector Development—a role in which we warmly congratulate her and look forward to seeing her continued leadership in advancing transparent, inclusive, and effective governance.**

Behind every milestone we celebrate are people—leaders, experts, and visionaries—whose names and faces tell the true story of change. The achievements of this project are possible because we work alongside dedicated individuals like Badriyah Al-Balbisi, whose leadership and commitment strengthen democratic institutions and inspire others. By supporting and connecting such changemakers, we help create the conditions for credible, inclusive, and sustainable democratic processes

## AI and Changing Information Ecosystems during Elections



The internet has cultivated new ways to access, produce and disseminate information. As found within the 2023 UNESCO/IPSOS Survey on the impact of online disinformation and hate speech, in many countries, particularly those with a lower human development index, social media can be the primary source of news for most people, even while believing it to be the main source of disinformation.

Independent media, influencers and other content creators contribute to the variety of opinions which exist in the digital sphere. Journalists are more likely to have been trained on professional ethical and professional principles, and traditional media often operate under tighter scrutiny. Whether algorithms prioritize engagement, potentially favoring controversial content, has been raised as a concern as it could influence the content created. Online news sources are increasingly popular globally, as experience shifts from text to video and audio, away from traditional brands to media startups and partisan commentators, and delivery on video and audio (such as podcasts) distribution networks and messaging apps.

Investment by news publishers in AI and automation have the potential to enhance professional journalism. Large language models can support, not replace humans in investigative journalism and political analysis. Currently, AI automated news production and the use of synthetic media are not publicly welcomed.

For more information

<https://www.undp.org/publications/freedom-expression-artificial-intelligence-and-elections>

Source : Freedom of expression, artificial intelligence and elections - UNESCO, UNDP

Stay tuned for more updates from the Elections Team at the Amman Regional Hub—advancing democratic institutions and processes in the digital era.