Preliminary analysis of 2026 IIAG *Democratic Elections* results over the 2016-2025 decade

Mo Ibrahim Foundation

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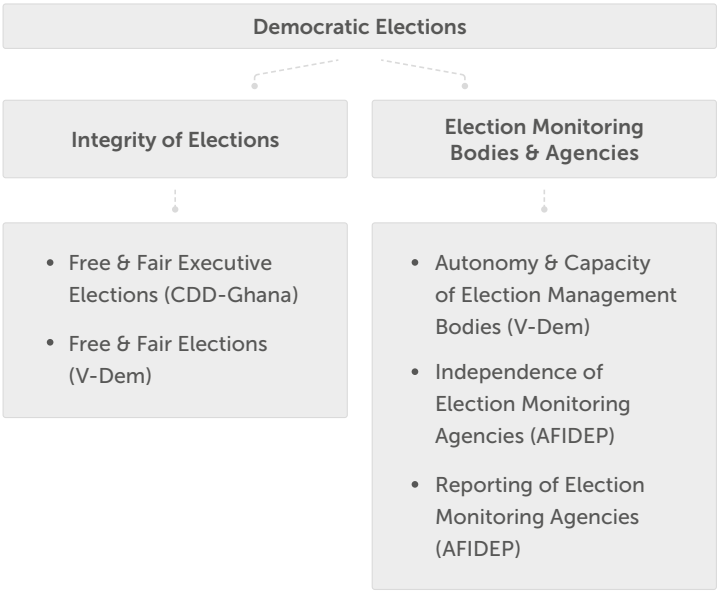
As the concluding part of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation's ongoing democracy series, including the MIF's NGN democracy survey, various blogs on exporting democratic models, youth opinions on democracy, and What public perception data tell us about the kind of political systems African citizens want, guest papers by International IDEA and Afrobarometer, this brief looks at preliminary *Democratic Elections* results from the forthcoming 2026 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG).

***Democratic Elections* within the IIAG framework**

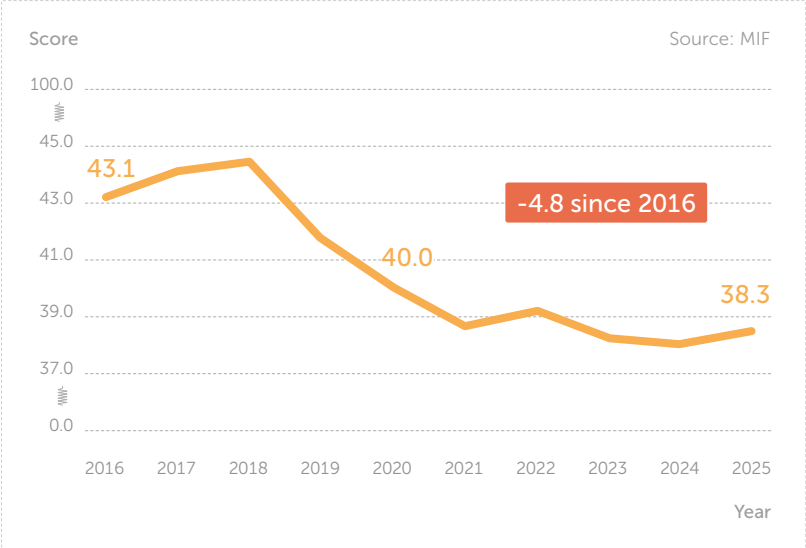
Democratic Elections is one of six indicators under the IIAG's Participation sub-category. Based on available data, the indicator measures the extent to which elections are free and fair as well as the extent to which election monitoring bodies and agencies are independent and have operating capacity, including for reporting. The indicator is made up of five base variables, sourced from the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), and the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem):



2026 IIAG findings highlight that the 'democratic backsliding' observed since 2018 seems to be levelling out from 2023

The 'democratic backsliding' that Africa is experiencing, of which recent coups in the Sahel are only the most egregious form, is supported by the trajectory of the *Democratic Elections* score over the last decade. Between 2016 and 2025, the African average declined by -4.8, from 43.1 to 38.3. More worryingly, most countries (30 out of 54) score below this continental average of 38.3. However, Africa's decline in this indicator happened mostly between 2018 and 2021, after progress between 2016-2018 but eventually levelling out from 2023, with even some minor progress in 2024-2025: over the decade the continental trend is one of *Slowing Deterioration*.

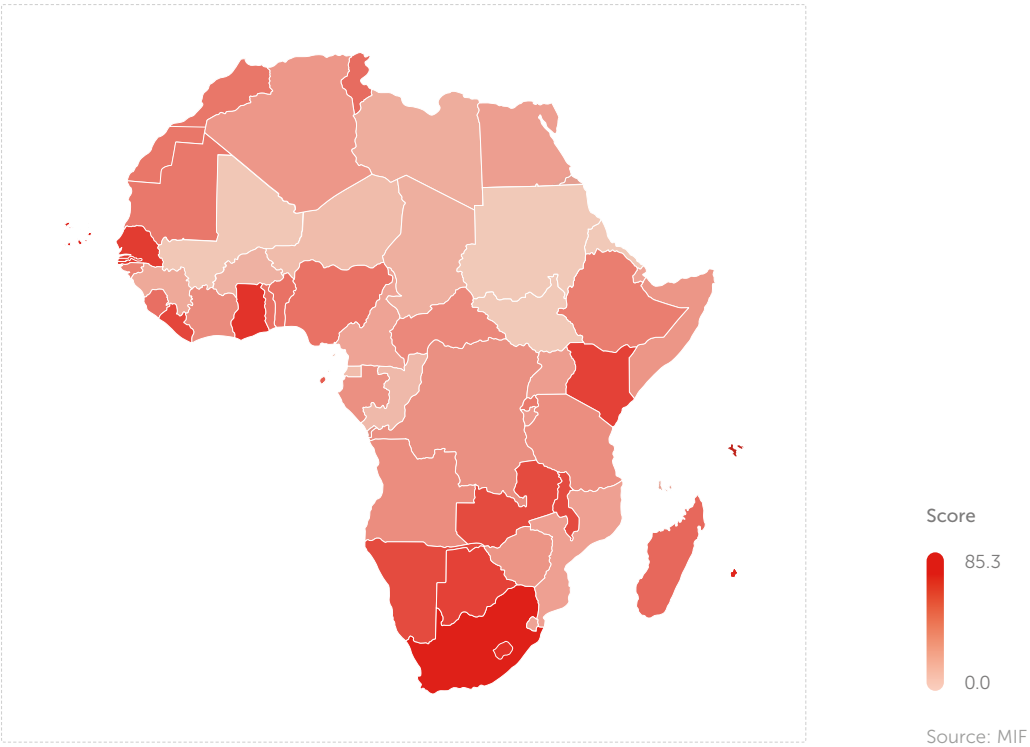
Africa: *Democratic Elections* score (2016-2025)



Small island states and South Africa lead in *Democratic Elections*

At the end of the decade, Seychelles is the highest scoring country at 85.3, followed by Cabo Verde, South Africa, Mauritius and Lesotho – three of the six African small island developing states (SIDS). Located at the bottom of the ranking are Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan and Eritrea with a score of 0.0, making the gap between the highest and lowest scoring country 85.3 points.

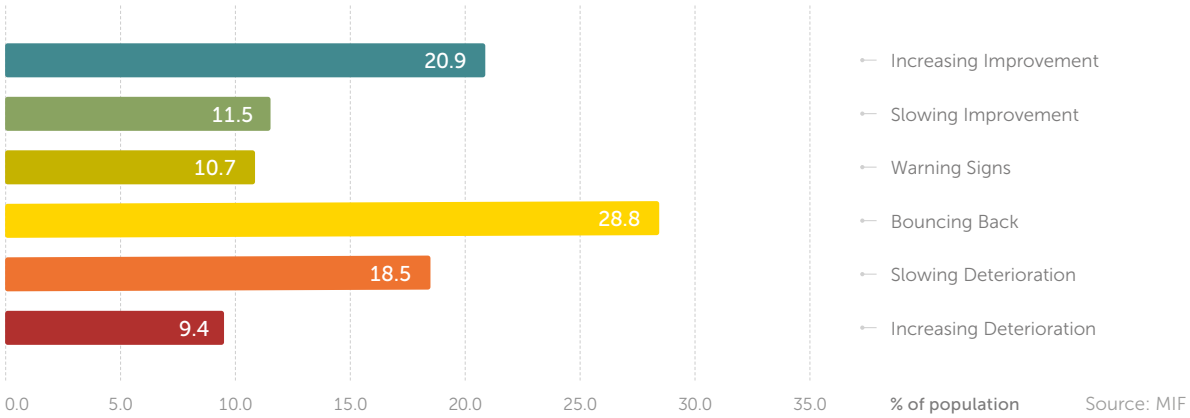
African countries: *Democratic Elections* scores (2025)



Most African citizens live in countries where democratic decline is flattening or even reversing

Despite this rather negative overall continental trend and the extremely low scores among the bottom-ranked countries, in many African countries, the decline is flattening or reversing. Overall, 23 countries, host to 43.1% of the continent's population, have improved their scores over the last ten years. Nine countries, hosting almost a third (28.8%) of Africa's population, recorded a trend of *Bouncing Back*, meaning that while their 2025 score remains worse or the same than in 2016, they have been improving since 2021.

Democratic Elections: share of African population by trend (2016-2025)



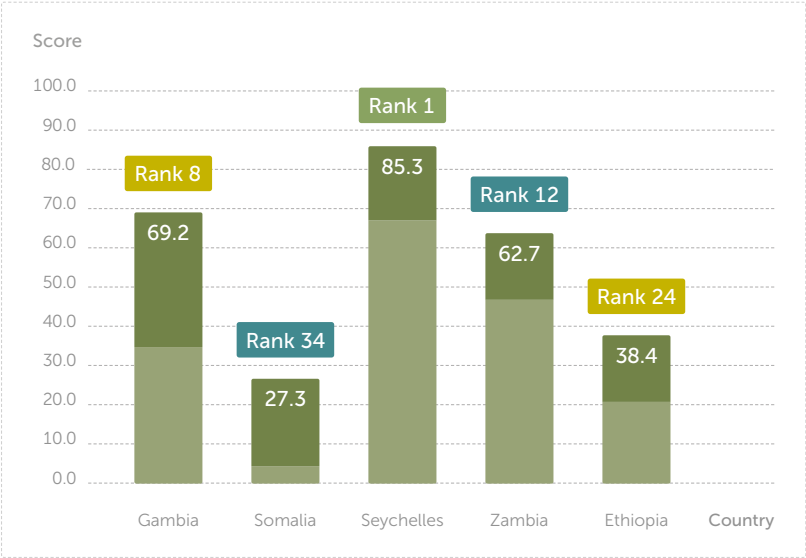
Source: MIF

Gambia and Somalia are among the most improved countries

The top five most improved countries in *Democratic Elections* are Gambia, Somalia, Seychelles, Zambia and Ethiopia. While Seychelles and Zambia were already among the better performing ones in 2016, the large gains made by Gambia and Somalia present more of a transformation. With the announcement of Yahya Jammeh leaving office in 2017, Gambian citizens saw the first democratic transition in their country's modern history. Consequently, the *Democratic Elections* score rose sharply between 2016 and 2023 (+44.3).

Somalia increased its 2016 score of 3.3 more than eightfold to 27.3. While the country's electoral model is still far from universal suffrage and 'one person, one vote', the elections conducted in the 2016-2025 period under review were considered largely peaceful and a step in the right direction in Somalia's troubled political history. The improvement also relies on the way the IIAG measures *Democratic Elections*, especially CDD-Ghana's African Electoral Index, from which data for one of the base variables is sourced. This source not only assesses their freeness and fairness, but also their overall conduct regardless of who is eligible to vote.

Democratic Elections: top 5 most improved countries' scores,10-year changes, ranks and trends (2025)

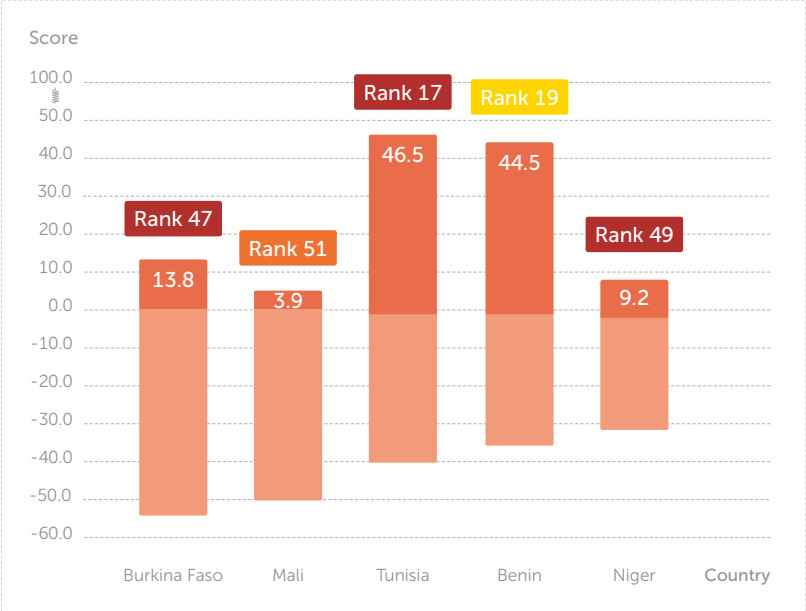


Source: MIF

Countries under coups are among the most deteriorated

Unsurprisingly, among the five most deteriorated countries since 2016 are three members of the 'Coup Belt': Burkina Faso (-54.1), Mali (-49.8) and Niger (-31.6). Formerly ranked in the top ten for *Democratic Elections* Burkina Faso has followed a downward trajectory since 2020, recording a trend of Increasing Deterioration since its two consecutive coups in 2022. While not officially part of the 'Coup Belt', Tunisian President Kais Saied's 2021 power grab has been described as a 'self-coup', and the country has plummeted from rank 1 in 2016 to rank 17 in 2025, also on a trajectory of *Increasing Deterioration*.

Democratic Elections: top 5 most deteriorated countries' scores, 10-year changes, ranks and trends (2025)



Source: MIF

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