

FROM NUMBERS TO NARRATIVES, AND PARTICIPATION TO POWER



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. INTRODUCTION: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN AFRICA

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to the world's youngest population. Nearly seven in ten citizens are under the age of 30. But where do we hear the voices of its youth? The Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI) provides a data-driven lens on this dilemma. Children, adolescents, and young adults make up more than three-quarters of the region's population, a demographic reality that has long been described as both a potential dividend and a looming challenge. This youth majority represents an extraordinary reservoir of talent, energy, and creativity, capable of driving innovation, shaping new industries, and revitalizing democratic life. Yet many young Africans continue to confront persistent exclusion – from decision-making, formal employment, and the civic and digital spaces where futures are now negotiated. The stakes are high. Without meaningful inclusion, the continent's ambitions to meet the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063 risk being delayed or derailed.

Using 41 indicators across four dimensions: Socio-Economic, Civic Space, Political Affairs, and Elections, the GYPI assesses how effectively young people exercise voice, influence policy, and access opportunities in 141 countries, including 40 in Sub-Saharan Africa. Findings are sobering: the region's average score of 52 trails the global mean by nine points, with uneven performance reflecting disparities between and within countries. Smaller states like Seychelles, Mauritius, and Cabo Verde lead regionally, while larger ones such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo lag near the bottom. Strengths appear in the Socio-Economic dimension (65), but weaknesses persist in Civic Space, Political Affairs, and Elections due to systemic constraints, unequal access, and weak accountability, restricting youth participation.

These variances highlight both the potential and limits of Africa's democratic transformation. Where engagement rules remain opaque or exclusionary, young people reinvent participation, seizing the means to be heard without permission. Streets, campuses, and digital platforms serve as classrooms for democratic experimentation, from

Kenya's #RejectFinanceBill protests to Nigeria's #EndSARS movement, reshaping politics through moral service, collective care, and creative dissent when institutions falter.

This report bridges these dimensions of Africa's youth politics: Quantitative data patterns and qualitative civic realities. The first section, Mapping Youth Participation in Sub-Saharan Africa, analyses GYPI evidence, identifying inequality patterns and country divergences, structural drivers of inclusion or inhibition, and variations across the four dimensions. It shows that smaller, open political systems perform better, underscoring proximity, predictability, and trust as key enablers.

The second section, Sub-Saharan African Youth Participation and Response to Representation, delves into how young people experience, contest, and remake democracy on the ground. Drawing on case studies from Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Senegal – bolstered by insights from Seychelles, Mauritius, Cabo Verde, and Lesotho – it illustrates youth movements redefining citizenship via humour, protest, art, and digital activism. Three shifts define this new civic grammar: increasingly horizontal, hybrid, and moral participation, with coalitions eschewing hierarchy, blending online-offline spaces, and rooting claims in values like care, fairness, and honesty over party ideology.

Together, these views portray a disillusioned yet determined generation. Data reveals gaps in opportunity and representation, but lived experiences demand politics that feels human – transparent, decent, accountable. Young Africans forge moral politics through service over slogans, digital creativity alongside institutional critique. Their movements affirm democracy's sustenance by civic culture insisting on dignity and fairness, not procedures alone. This report contends Sub-Saharan Africa's democratic future hinges on reforming institutions while nurturing emerging civic forms. Subsequent chapters shift from data's inequality architecture to youth-led change's living laboratories, scripting African democracy's next chapter.

2. MAPPING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

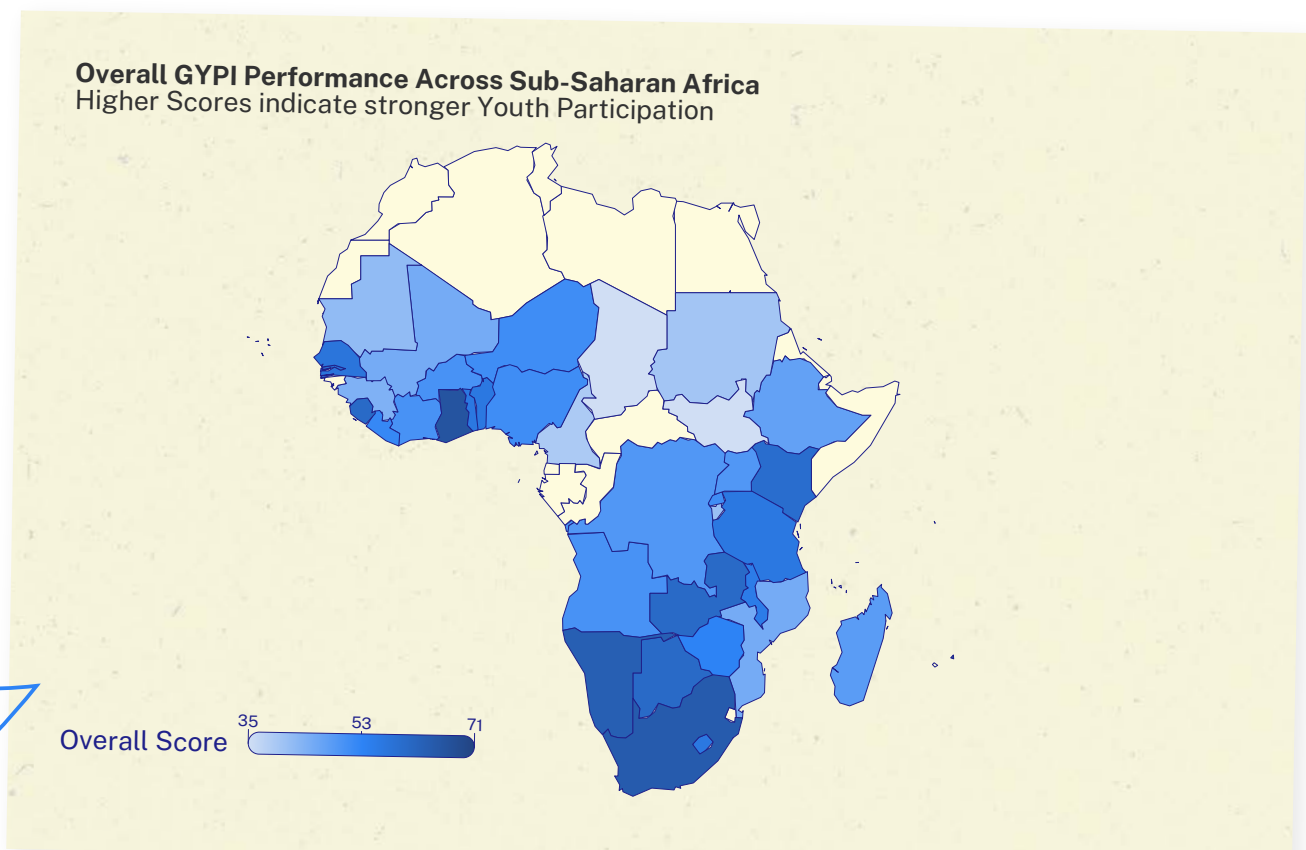
The Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI) provides a comprehensive picture of how young people engage in public life across Sub-Saharan Africa. Built around four dimensions – Socio-Economic, Civic Space, Political Affairs, and Elections – it evaluates forty-one variables on a scale from 0 to 100. The findings reveal a region marked by sharp contrasts: extraordinary demographic potential coexists with persistent exclusion, and countries differ widely in how they empower or constrain their youth.

2.1. Regional and Dimensional Patterns

Across the forty Sub-Saharan countries covered, the regional average GYPI score is 52 – nine points below the global mean of 61. No Sub-Saharan country features in the global top thirty, and only three – Seychelles, Mauritius, and Ghana – make it into the top fifty. If the region were considered a single country, it would rank 103rd worldwide, underscoring the scale of structural barriers to youth inclusion.

The disparities are visible from the outset. Figure 2, which depicts the bottom-ranked countries globally, shows that 60 percent of the world’s lowest performers are in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, small states such as Seychelles, Mauritius, Cabo Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe dominate the regional top twenty, while populous countries such as Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ethiopia fall toward the bottom. Figure 1, which maps the overall Youth Participation Index across the region, illustrates this geographic variation, with higher scores concentrated in southern and island states and lower scores across central and eastern Africa.

Figure 1 Map of the GYPI in Sub-Saharan Africa



The differences become even clearer when disaggregated across dimensions. Table 1 presents these results, showing the highest, lowest, and average scores for each dimension. The Socio-Economic dimension performs best (regional average 65), followed by Elections (49), Civic Space (46), and Political Affairs (46). A statistical test ($p = 0.00006$) confirms that these differences are significant, meaning the four dimensions do not perform equally. The higher socio-economic scores reflect gains in youth education, employment, and inclusion policies, while lower scores in Civic Space and Political Affairs point to restrictions on association, weak institutional responsiveness, and limited representation.

Table 1 Score of Sub-Saharan by Dimension

| Dimensions | Highest | Lowest | Average | Level Category |
|-------------------|---------|--------|---------|----------------|
| Political Affairs | 62 | 28 | 46 | Low |
| Elections | 81 | 1 | 49 | Low |
| Civic Space | 100 | 0 | 46 | Low |
| Socio-Economic | 85 | 44 | 65 | High |
| Overall | 71 | 32 | 52 | Low |

2.2. Country-Level Disparities and Emerging Trends

At the country level, Seychelles ranks first in Sub-Saharan Africa and thirty-sixth globally, followed by Mauritius (67), Ghana (66), and South Africa (64). Table 2 lists the top and bottom twenty countries in the region, revealing the extent of variation: while Seychelles and Mauritius score above 65, South Sudan and Somalia sit below 35. More than 60 percent of Sub-Saharan countries fall into the “low participation” category.

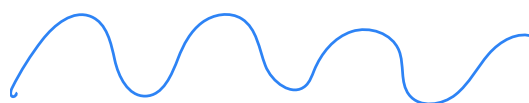


Table 2. Ranking of GYPI Score for Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

| Top 20 Countries | | | Bottom 20 Countries | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| Rank | Country | Score | Rank | Country | Score |
| 1 | Seychelles | 71 | 21 | Niger | 51 |
| 2 | Mauritius | 67 | 22 | Rwanda | 51 |
| 3 | Ghana | 66 | 23 | Nigeria | 51 |
| 4 | South Africa | 64 | 24 | Angola | 50 |
| 5 | Namibia | 63 | 25 | Côte d'Ivoire | 50 |
| 6 | Cabo Verde | 63 | 26 | Burkina Faso | 50 |
| 7 | Sao Tome and Principe | 61 | 27 | Democratic Republic of the Congo | 49 |
| 8 | Botswana | 60 | 28 | Uganda | 49 |
| 9 | Zambia | 60 | 29 | Madagascar | 48 |
| 10 | Sierra Leone | 60 | 30 | Ethiopia | 47 |
| 11 | Kenya | 59 | 31 | Mozambique | 45 |
| 12 | The Gambia | 58 | 32 | Mali | 45 |
| 13 | Senegal | 57 | 33 | Guinea | 44 |
| 14 | Lesotho | 56 | 34 | Mauritania | 42 |
| 15 | Benin | 56 | 35 | Burundi | 41 |
| 16 | Tanzania | 56 | 36 | Sudan | 40 |
| 17 | Togo | 56 | 37 | Cameroon | 39 |
| 18 | Malawi | 55 | 38 | Chad | 35 |
| 19 | Zimbabwe | 53 | 39 | South Sudan | 35 |
| 20 | Liberia | 52 | | | |

Seychelles and Ghana appear among the top 10 ranking for each of the four dimensions. Countries with notable high performances include South Africa, Cabo Verde, Namibia and Mauritius. Somalia, South Sudan, and Chad are also consistently among the bottom 10 countries in all dimensions. Sudan, Burundi, Guinea and Togo also have low dimensional performance.

Figure 3 visualises the differences in average scores across the four dimensions. These variations are not trivial – they highlight the region’s uneven performance and the need for targeted interventions. In the Civic Space dimension, for instance, a discrepancy of 100 points separates the highest and lowest scorers: top countries reach near-perfect results, while the bottom-ranked score close to zero. The Elections dimension reveals an 80-point gap, while Political Affairs and Socio-Economic dimensions record narrower but still significant disparities.

Table 3 ranks the top and bottom ten countries on the Political Affairs dimension. South Africa leads with a score of 62, followed by Ghana (61) and Tanzania (59). Zimbabwe, despite its lower overall GYPI score, performs relatively well here, ranking eighth. The lowest performers include South Sudan (28), Somalia (29), and Cameroon (30). Figure 4 and Figure 5 identify the key drivers shaping these outcomes. Among top performers, strong results derive from factors such as state employment opportunities for youth, trust in political parties, the existence of youth associations within parties, and legislation lowering the age of eligibility for public office. Among bottom performers, the absence of national youth policies, lack of youth quotas, and weak legislative inclusion depress scores.

Table 3 Ranking of Countries on Political Affairs Dimension

| Top 10 Countries | | | Bottom 10 Countries | | |
|------------------|--------------|-------|---------------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| Rank | Country | Score | Rank | Country | Score |
| 1 | South Africa | 62 | 31 | Niger | 38 |
| 2 | Ghana | 61 | 32 | Democratic Republic of the Congo | 37 |
| 3 | Tanzania | 59 | 33 | Burundi | 36 |
| 4 | Uganda | 58 | 34 | Liberia | 33 |
| 5 | Namibia | 57 | 35 | Mauritania | 33 |
| 6 | Sierra Leone | 56 | 36 | Sudan | 32 |
| 7 | Seychelles | 56 | 37 | Chad | 31 |
| 8 | Zimbabwe | 56 | 38 | Cameroon | 30 |
| 9 | Burkina Faso | 55 | 39 | Somalia | 29 |
| 10 | Zambia | 55 | 40 | South Sudan | 28 |

The Elections dimension exhibits the greatest discrepancy – an 80-point range between the best and worst performers. Table 4 shows that Seychelles (81), Mauritius (78), and Namibia (75) top the list, while Togo (1), Chad (25), and South Sudan (27) occupy the bottom positions. Figure 6 and Figure 7 highlight the factors behind these differences. In high-performing countries, accessible registration processes, online and mobile voting systems, and compulsory voter registration strengthen participation. In lower-scoring countries, limited civic education, the absence of early voting, and low public trust in electoral fairness undermine inclusion.



Table 4 Ranking of Countries on Elections Dimension

| Top 10 Countries | | | Bottom 10 Countries | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| Rank | Country | Score | Rank | Country | Score |
| 1 | Seychelles | 81 | 31 | Guinea | 40 |
| 2 | Mauritius | 78 | 32 | Tanzania | 39 |
| 3 | Namibia | 75 | 33 | Democratic Republic of the Congo | 38 |
| 4 | Botswana | 68 | 34 | Rwanda | 37 |
| 5 | South Africa | 68 | 35 | Somalia | 36 |
| 6 | Sao Tome and Principe | 65 | 36 | Uganda | 32 |
| 7 | Cabo Verde | 64 | 37 | South Sudan | 27 |
| 8 | Zambia | 64 | 38 | Burundi | 27 |
| 9 | Ghana | 60 | 39 | Chad | 25 |
| 10 | Kenya | 57 | 40 | Togo | 1 |

Civic freedoms are the most uneven of all dimensions. Table 5 ranks countries from a perfect 100 (Seychelles, South Africa, Cabo Verde, Ghana) to zero (Somalia, South Sudan, Chad). Figure 8 and Figure 9 show that high-scoring countries are characterised by low government censorship, robust freedom of peaceful assembly, and low levels of civil society repression. In contrast, bottom-ranked states combine tight internet restrictions, intolerance toward minorities, and limited freedom of religion. This extreme divergence reflects how crucial civic openness is to youth participation: when young people cannot assemble, organise, or express dissent, other forms of political engagement quickly deteriorate.

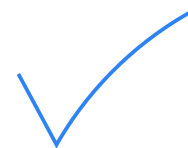


Table 5 Ranking of Countries on Civic Space Dimension

| Top 10 Countries | | | Bottom 10 Countries | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------------------|--------------|-------|
| Rank | Country | Score | Rank | Country | Score |
| 1 | Seychelles | 100 | 31 | Cameroon | 8 |
| 2 | South Africa | 100 | 32 | Burundi | 8 |
| 3 | Cabo Verde | 100 | 33 | Botswana | 0 |
| 4 | Ghana | 100 | 34 | Niger | 0 |
| 5 | Mauritius | 92 | 35 | Burkina Faso | 0 |
| 6 | Sao Tome and Principe | 92 | 36 | Sudan | 0 |
| 7 | Liberia | 92 | 37 | Guinea | 0 |
| 8 | Lesotho | 92 | 38 | Somalia | 0 |
| 9 | Namibia | 75 | 39 | South Sudan | 0 |
| 10 | Malawi | 75 | 40 | Chad | 0 |

The Socio-Economic dimension records the region's highest average score. Table 6 lists the top ten countries – Seychelles (85), Mauritius (82), and Kenya (82) lead – alongside the lowest ten, where South Sudan and Somalia again anchor the bottom. Figure 10 and Figure 11 reveal the main drivers. Among top performers, youth employment, low NEET rates, primary school completion, and the absence of early marriage are key. Among lower performers, persistent gender inequality, poor education quality, and high rates of early marriage continue to undermine progress. This dimension demonstrates that socio-economic opportunity remains the most reliable foundation for future participation, even where formal institutions lag behind.

Table 6 Ranking of Countries on Socio Economic Dimension

| Top 10 Countries | | | Bottom 10 Countries | | |
|------------------|--------------|-------|---------------------|--------------|-------|
| Rank | Country | Score | Rank | Country | Score |
| 1 | Seychelles | 85 | 31 | Madagascar | 57 |
| 2 | Mauritius | 82 | 32 | Guinea | 56 |
| 3 | Kenya | 82 | 33 | Burkina Faso | 56 |
| 4 | Benin | 77 | 34 | Sudan | 51 |
| 5 | Tanzania | 75 | 35 | Togo | 51 |
| 6 | Sierra Leone | 74 | 36 | Chad | 50 |
| 7 | Ghana | 73 | 37 | Mozambique | 48 |
| 8 | Rwanda | 72 | 38 | Mauritania | 46 |
| 9 | Cameroon | 72 | 39 | Somalia | 44 |
| 10 | Cabo Verde | 71 | 40 | South Sudan | 44 |

2.3. Interpreting the Data: Scale, Trust, and the Limits of Representation

The GYPI findings suggest that youth participation is shaped as much by proximity and trust as by formal representation. Smaller systems, such as those in Seychelles and Mauritius, allow closer contact between citizens and decision-makers, shorter feedback loops, and greater institutional transparency. This proximity builds trust and predictability – key ingredients for participation. By contrast, in larger and more centralised states, the distance between government and governed often leads to frustration and disengagement.

Figure 1 visually reinforces this pattern: Areas with smaller populations and higher institutional accessibility display darker shading, representing stronger youth participation. The correlation between scale and inclusivity is particularly evident when smaller, more predictable systems are compared with larger ones where bureaucracy and fragmentation dominate.

The GYPI also highlights the interconnectedness of the four dimensions. Where civic freedoms are protected, socio-economic and political participation improve as well. Countries investing in transparent elections, open media environments, and inclusive education tend to perform better across all measures. Conversely, restrictions on expression, weak rule of law, and economic precarity lower participation levels across the board. This confirms that progress in one domain of youth empowerment often depends on advances in others.

Overall, the data paints a picture of uneven empowerment. Sub-Saharan Africa’s youth are not apathetic – they are constrained by institutional and structural barriers that limit their influence. While some countries demonstrate progress in education and employment, these gains have yet to translate into deeper political participation or civic trust. Yet the data also points to resilience: even in restrictive environments, young people continue to find creative entry points for engagement, whether through online platforms, mutual aid, or grassroots organising.

This statistical overview lays the foundation for the qualitative section that follows. Moving from data to lived experience, the next part of this report explores how young Africans translate civic aspiration into action – through humour, protest, art, and community care – and how these practices are redefining the moral and participatory fabric of democracy across the continent.



3. AFRICAN YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSE TO REPRESENTATION

A deeper look at youth participation reveals how young Africans are developing new repertoires of political agency in response to weak representation. In Kenya, participation has increasingly shifted from formal institutions to digital civic mobilisation. The 2024-25 protests under #OccupyParliament and #RutoMustGo signalled a generational rejection of elite mediation: young Kenyans organised without party brokers, opposition leaders, or NGO gatekeepers, coordinating instead through encrypted platforms and open digital forums. This mobilisation style reflects a broader decline in confidence in formal channels of representation, consistent with findings from the Afrobarometer survey data (2023), which shows markedly higher youth trust in informal civic networks than in political parties or parliaments.

The protests reframed participation around civic ethics rather than patronage or electoral gain. Satire, parody, and meme culture operated as a political language that made dissent more accessible and less intimidating, lowering the entry cost for first-time protesters. This form of symbolic politics turned accountability into a socially intelligible demand rather than a technical or legal one. Rather than pursuing access to power, young people asserted proximity to the public interest, a redefinition of legitimacy itself.

The protest infrastructure also revealed evolving conceptions of democratic protection. Crowdfunded legal defence teams, volunteer medics, and citizen documentation networks compensated for weak institutional safeguards. By developing these parallel accountability mechanisms, young activists functionally substituted for state oversight, illustrating how civic solidarity can become a governance instrument in contexts where institutions are perceived as compromised. Data from the CIVICUS Monitor (2024) now classifies Kenya's civic space as "repressed", having recently downgraded this rating from "obstructed". Yet the density and speed of mobilisation suggest that youth are not deterred by legal or bureaucratic barriers when they view participation as a civic duty rather than a procedural right.

What emerges is not disengagement but a relocation of participation: From electoral arenas to civic ones; from hierarchical organisations to decentralised publics; from representation to vigilance. Youth are asserting democracy as an active practice rather than a cyclical event. As framed by the African Union Youth Charter, participation is no longer experienced as consultation, but as direct authorship of the political sphere.

In Nigeria, youth participation has been shaped by a crisis of institutional credibility that has redirected political energy into autonomous civic organising. The #EndSARS actions in 2020 began as a campaign against police violence but rapidly evolved into a wider challenge to state unaccountability. What distinguished the movement was its operational sophistication: real-time coordination, digital fundraising, medical assistance, and legal support created an alternative civic infrastructure that briefly outperformed state responsiveness. These dynamics align with patterns observed in the Afrobarometer survey data (2023), where young Nigerians express extremely low trust in state institutions but high confidence in horizontal networks and peer-organised initiatives.

The Feminist Coalition’s role illustrated a further conceptual shift: leadership became functional rather than hierarchical, and representation was earned through competence rather than title. Participation did not flow through parties or NGOs, but through credibility, transparency, and proof of care for the commons. Although the state responded with repression, including financial surveillance and digital disruption, the mobilisation reshaped the political imagination — turning protest into civic pedagogy. Long after the demonstrations ended, the expectations of accountability and procedural fairness they articulated are still visible in youth-led voter registration drives, mutual aid networks, and issue-based monitoring campaigns. In this sense, #EndSARS produced not a moment but a political generation.

Yet Nigeria also offers one of Africa’s clearest examples of data-driven reform. The *Not Too Young To Run* campaign mobilised demographic evidence, legal research, and cross-party youth coalitions to successfully advocate for the constitutional amendment lowering age requirements for federal and state office. Rather than being framed as a generational demand alone, the campaign tied youth inclusion to democratic legitimacy, electoral competitiveness, and long-term governance sustainability. By grounding advocacy in census data, turnout patterns, and legislative analysis, and by strategically engaging policymakers, media, and civil society, activists converted a civic demand into formal institutional reform through the 2018 constitutional amendment passed by the National Assembly and signed by the President.

This combination of street-level pressure (*#EndSARS*) and institutional negotiation (*Not Too Young To Run*) illustrates that youth agency in Nigeria operates through multiple channels: confrontation, persuasion, and evidence-based advocacy. It underscores a broader insight across Sub-Saharan Africa: Where institutions are responsive, youth movements can convert demographic weight and data into legal change; where institutions are resistant, they construct parallel civic architectures until the state is compelled to adapt.

South Africa illustrates a different pathway: here, a strong constitutional framework coexists with deep social inequality, and youth participation has targeted the contradiction between formal inclusion and lived exclusion. Movements such as #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall challenged not only economic barriers but the symbolic architecture of power embedded in universities. The political arena was not “outside” the institution, but within it, and the demand was not simply access but transformation. This form of participation sits squarely within what the African Union Youth Charter describes as “substantive citizenship” — the right not only to be recognised by the state, but to reshape its norms.

South African youth activism also highlights how cultural and intellectual labour can become political participation in itself. This mobilisation blended protest with analysis, symbolism with critique, and education with agitation, collapsing the distinction between civic and political action. Even where institutional concessions were partial, the shift in discourse was structural: youth established that procedural democracy is insufficient without redistributive justice and epistemic dignity. This is reflected in civic space assessments by the CIVICUS Monitor (2024), which note that although assembly rights are frequently contested, youth activism continues to set the moral terms of public debate.

In Senegal, youth participation has consolidated around long-horizon civic vigilance rather than episodic protest. The Y’en a Marre collective, formed by artists and journalists, recast political engagement as cultural pedagogy: music, spoken word, and neighbourhood forums translated constitutional principles into everyday practice. This model blurred the distinction between civic education and mobilisation, building a durable constituency for accountability across electoral cycles. Civic space assessments by the CIVICUS Monitor (2024) describe a fluctuating environment, yet the movement’s emphasis on citizenship as practice — monitoring officials, promoting turnout, and resisting co-optation — has sustained influence beyond election moments. The approach aligns with the UNDP Youth Strategy, which frames youth agency as both developmental and democratic, and with the African Union Youth Charter’s emphasis on participation as a right exercised continuously, not only periodically.

Senegal's experience also demonstrates how participation can be cumulative rather than climactic. While political tensions have periodically narrowed formal space, youth actors retained social legitimacy by combining issue-focused advocacy with community service and media literacy. Where institutions proved responsive, engagement flowed through oversight and dialogue; where they did not, cultural platforms sustained pressure without requiring street confrontation. This adaptability has helped keep youth voices credible across shifting political contexts.

Seychelles illustrates a distinct, small-state pathway in which proximity and predictability encourage collaborative participation. With institutions that are physically and administratively close to citizens, influence often travels through consultation forums, petitions, and accessible representatives rather than contentious mobilisation. The result is less dramatic public action but higher routine responsiveness. Youth advisory structures and participatory dialogues resonate with the African Union Youth Charter's provisions on consultation and with the UNDP Youth Strategy's stress on institutional pathways. While the CIVICUS Monitor (2024) generally records fewer overt restrictions than in larger states, the key lesson is not permissiveness but proximity: when government is within reach, young people default to negotiation over protest.

Mauritius reflects a model where institutional strength lowers the cost of engagement and channels youth participation through structured platforms rather than disruptive mobilisation. Consultation is routinised through advisory councils, participatory planning, and civic policy dialogue. Because these mechanisms are credible, youth treat them as effective arenas of influence. Trust levels recorded in the Afrobarometer survey data (2023) are comparatively higher than in most of the continent, not because youth are less critical, but because institutions are perceived as amendable rather than extractive. This aligns with the UNDP Youth Strategy's emphasis on "participatory governance ecosystems" and shows how formal inclusion is most effective when it coexists with cultural legitimacy.

Cabo Verde demonstrates a hybrid configuration in which social trust and consensus-building sustain civic engagement. Political participation is frequently channelled through community forums, hybrid CSO-state collaboration, and youth-driven oversight initiatives. Rather than contestation, the primary mode of influence is negotiation. The state is neither feared nor romanticised; it is instrumental. The CIVICUS Monitor (2024) categorises its civic environment as comparatively open, which allows youth participation to be proactive rather than defensive. The institutional compact is underwritten by accountability norms that do not require confrontation to be credible. This model illustrates how democratic culture can substitute for protest when public institutions remain responsive.

Lesotho, however, sits at the opposite end of the stability spectrum. Here, political volatility and persistent socio-economic fragility shape youth participation away from visible demonstration and into relational forms of community-based governance. Engagement occurs through informal dispute resolution, mutual aid, and micro-level civic stewardship rather than formal advocacy. When institutions lack reliability, legitimacy is relocated to horizontal accountability networks. Although this is rarely captured in conventional participation metrics, the African Union Youth Charter recognises these practices as legitimate forms of citizenship. In this context, youth sustain a political community not by confronting the state, but by compensating for its absence.

4. CONCLUSION

The Global Youth Participation Index (GYPI) lays bare Sub-Saharan Africa's paradox: a youthful continent brimming with democratic aspirations yet hindered by structural exclusions. But the data, intertwined with stories from Lagos to Nairobi, from Dakar to Cape Town, reveals determination. Young Africans are proving that political participation is not only a matter of institutional access but also civic imagination and democratic resilience. The GYPI makes clear that while gaps in representation, civic freedom, and socio-economic opportunity persist, this generation's story is not defined by disengagement, but by determination, and by the innovation that emerges when formal channels fall short.

Crucially, this Index is not simply a diagnostic tool; it is a resource for action. Civil society organisations, reform coalitions, youth networks, policymakers, and development partners can use its data to identify strategic entry points for change, benchmark progress, and build evidence-driven campaigns. Nigeria's *Not Too Young To Run* reform, where demographic evidence strengthened civic mobilisation and led to constitutional change is one reminder that when data, activism, and a receptive political moment align, institutional transformation becomes possible. Equally, movements such as Kenya's *#OccupyParliament* and Nigeria's *#EndSARS* demonstrate that where formal channels falter, youth create alternative civic architectures that sustain pressure for accountability.

By grounding advocacy in evidence, the GYPI provides shared reference points that can help build durable reform coalitions, strengthen messaging, and support youth leaders making the case for democratic inclusion. It offers a map for locating opportunities not only where institutions are open, but also and simply where civic energy is already generating democratic possibility from below.

As such, the Index reminds us that the question facing Sub-Saharan Africa is not whether young people will participate, as they already are, but whether institutions can evolve quickly enough to match their ambition, ethics, and ingenuity. Harnessing the GYPI means turning data into strategy, strategy into reform, and civic energy into lasting democratic power.

APPENDIX

Figure 2 Rank of bottom countries globally

Ranking of Bottom 20 Countries Globally

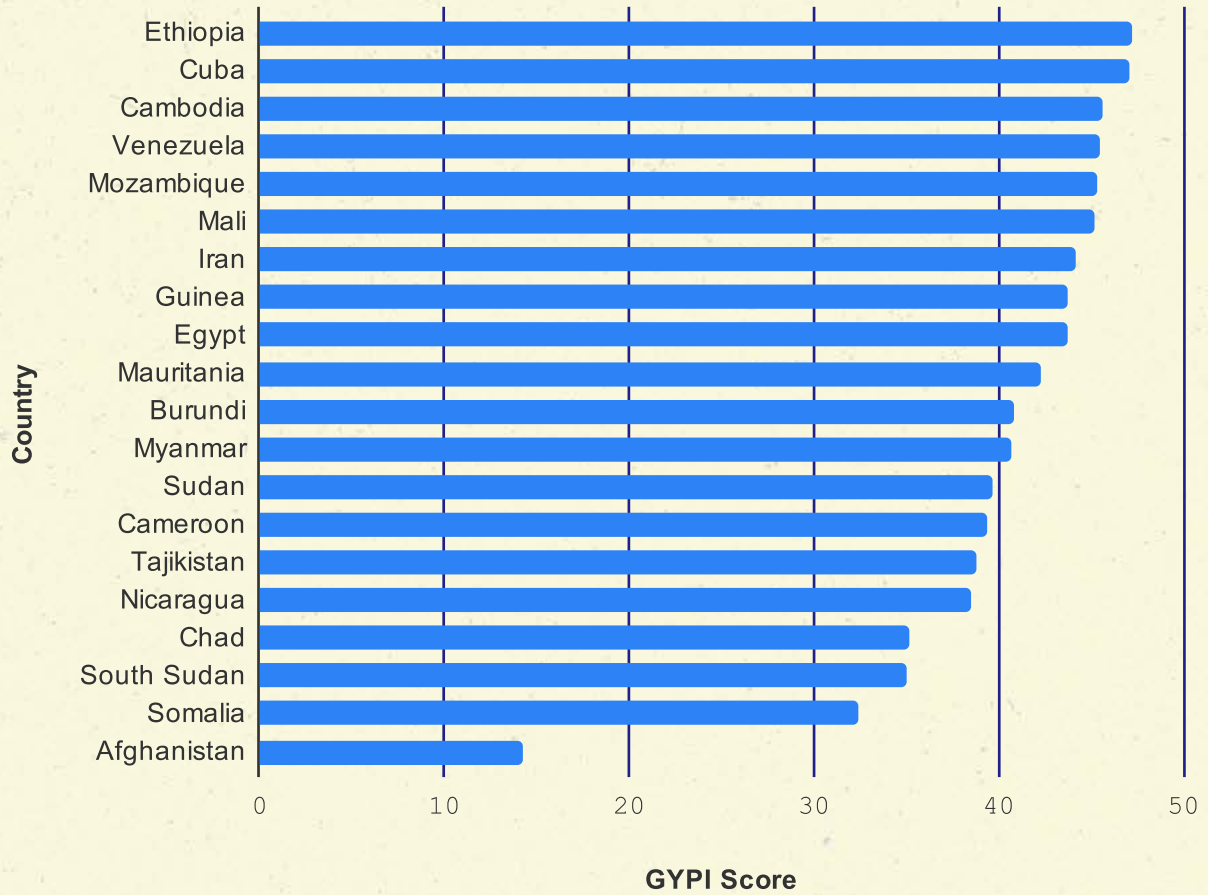


Figure 3 Differences in Scores across dimensions in Sub-Saharan Africa

Average Scores for each Dimensions in Sub-Saharan Africa

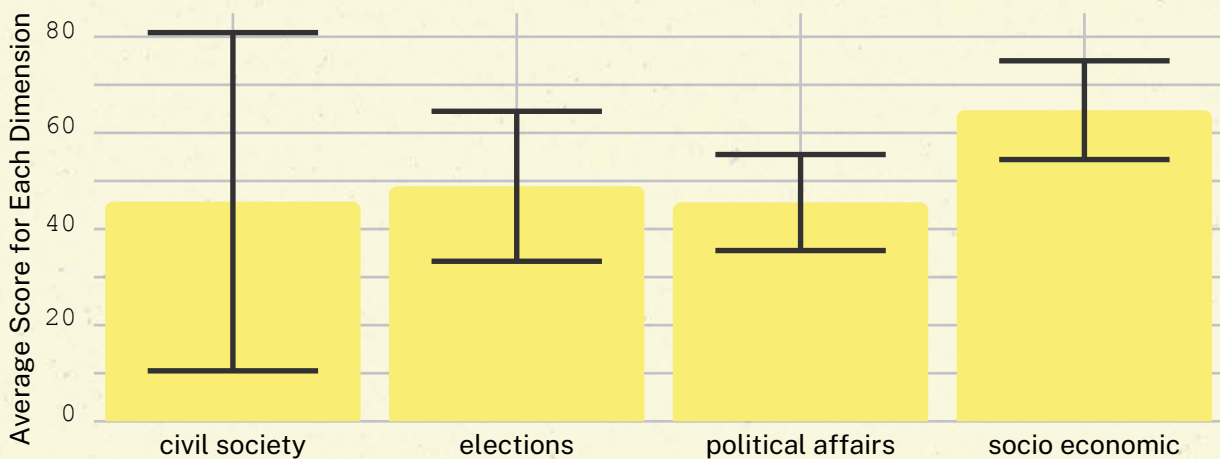


Figure 4 The Drivers of Differences in the Political Affairs Dimension among Top Ranked Countries

Key Drivers of Political Affairs Scores among Top-Ranked SSA Countries

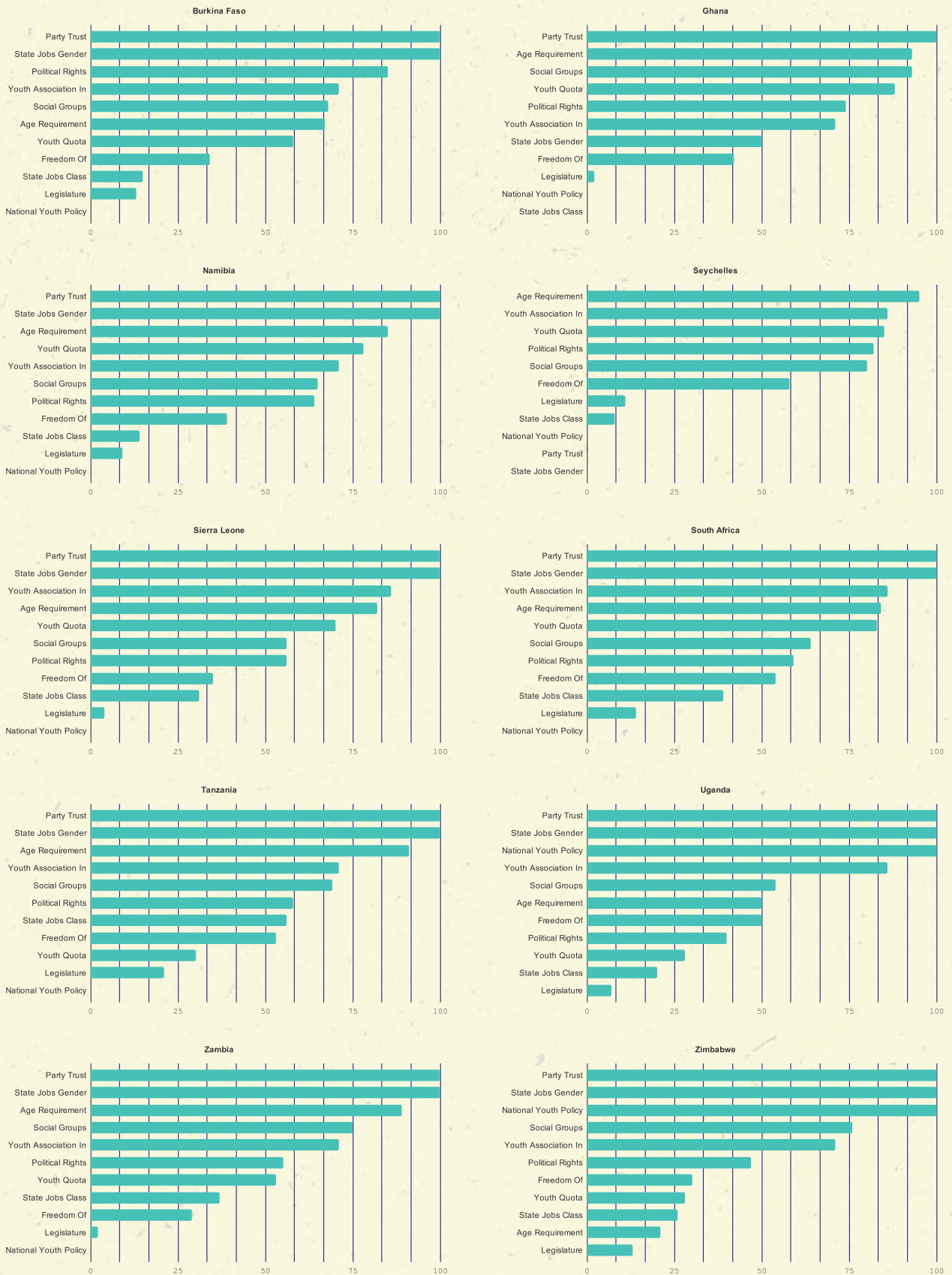


Figure 5 The Drivers of Differences in the Political Affairs Dimension among Bottom Ranked Countries

Key Drivers of Political Affairs Scores among Bottom-Ranked SSA Countries



Figure 6 The Drivers of Differences in the Elections Dimension among Top Ranked Countries

Key Drivers of Elections Dimension Scores among Top-Ranked SSA Countries

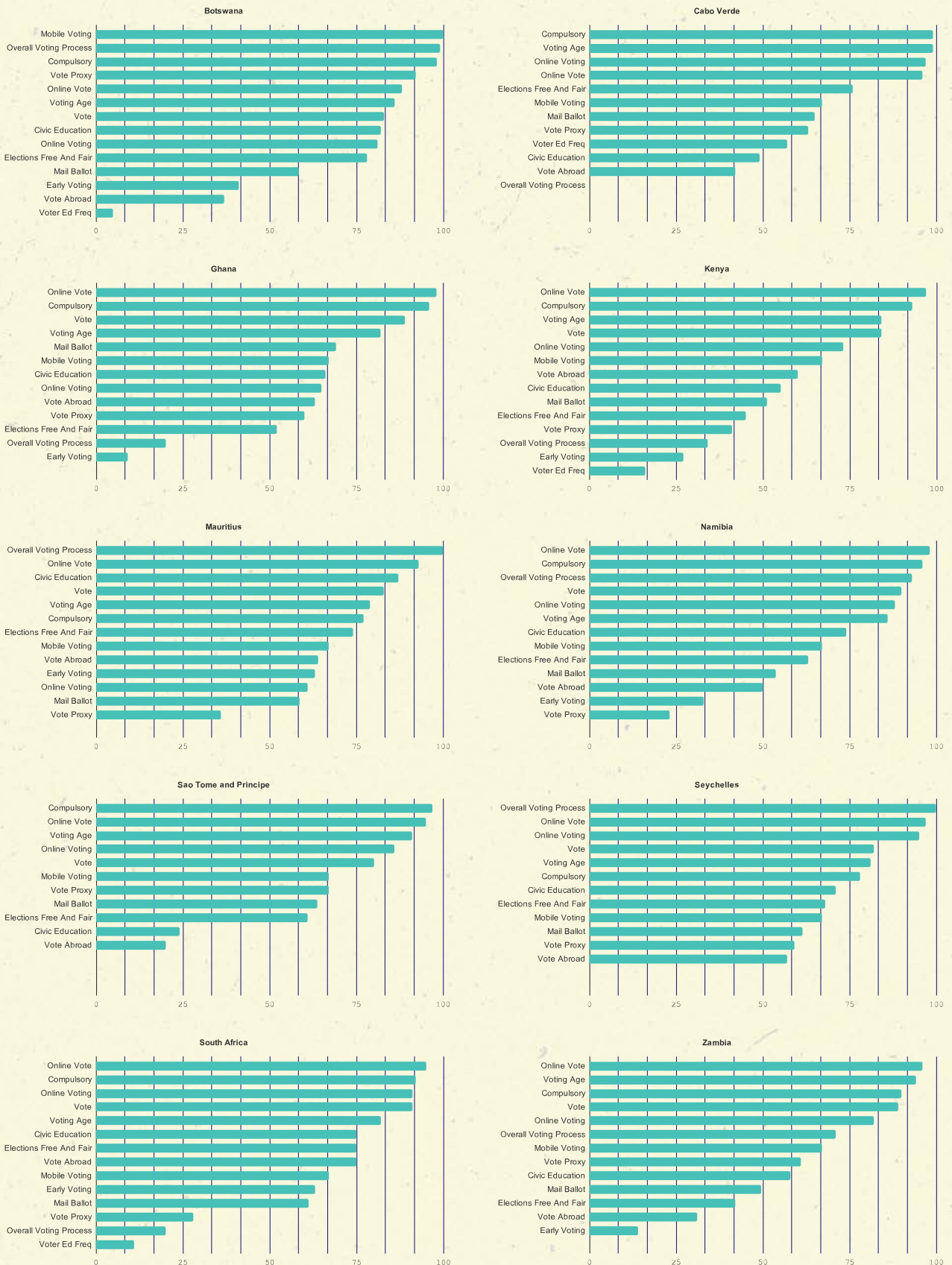


Figure 7 The Drivers of Differences in the Elections Dimension among Bottom Ranked Countries

Key Drivers of Elections Dimension Scores among Bottom-Ranked SSA Countries

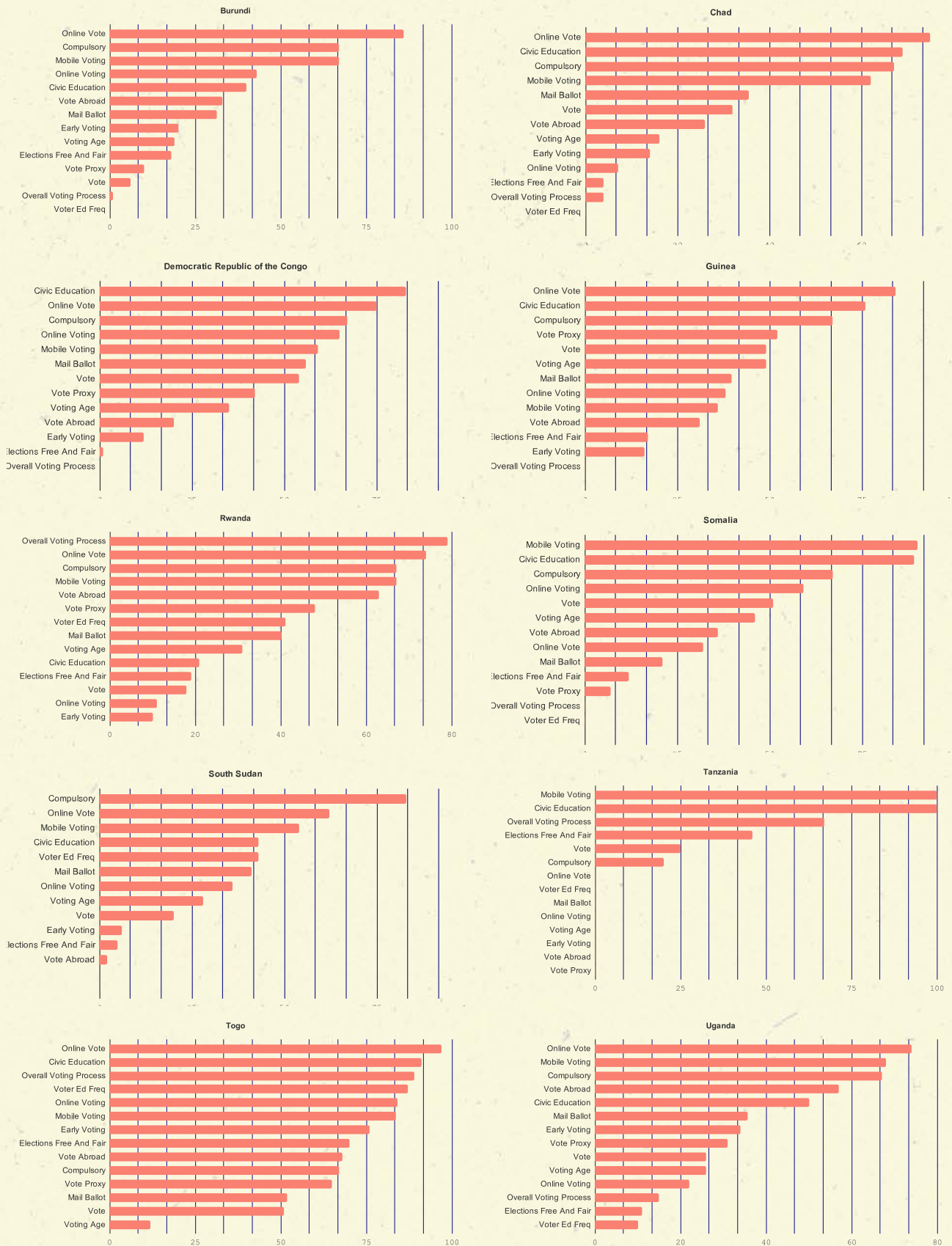


Figure 8 The Drivers of Differences in the Civic Space Dimension, Top Ranked Countries

Key Drivers of Civil Society Dimension Scores among Top-Ranked SSA Countries

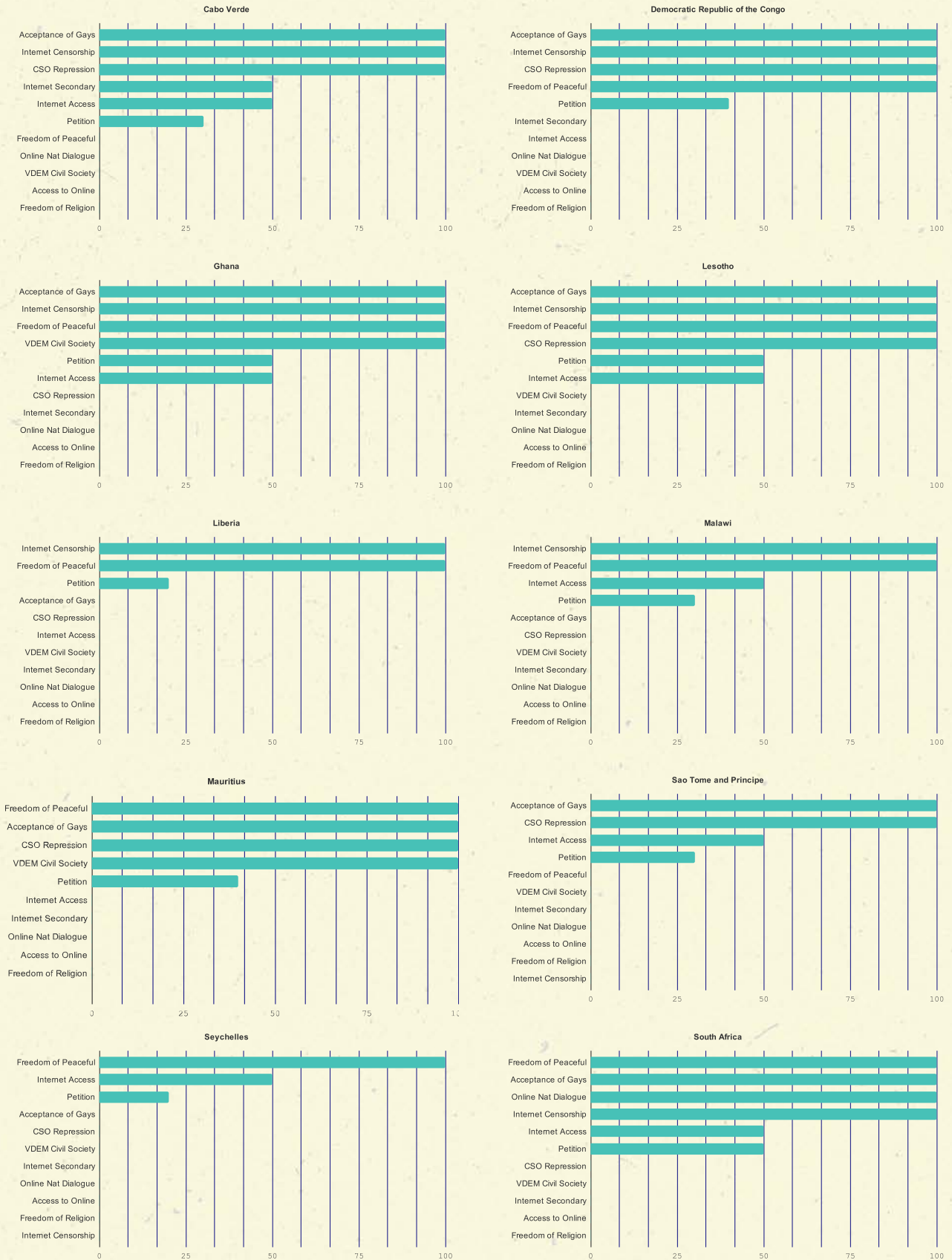


Figure 9 The Drivers of Differences in the Civic Space Dimension, Bottom Ranked Countries

Key Drivers of Civil Society Dimension Scores among Bottom-Ranked SSA Countries

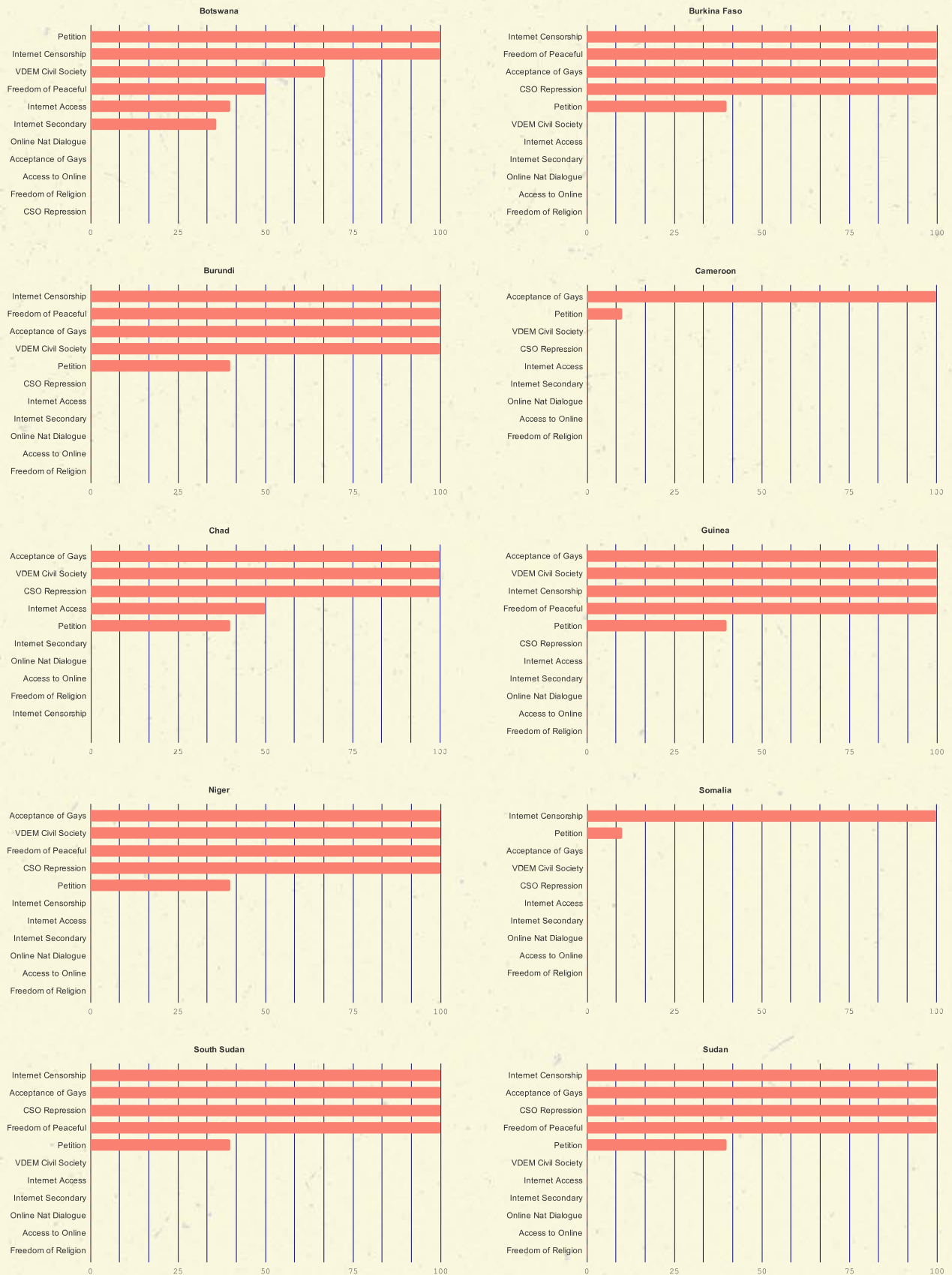


Figure 10 The Drivers of Differences in the v Dimension, Top Ranked Countries

Key Drivers of Socio-Economic Dimension Scores among Top-Ranked SSA Countries

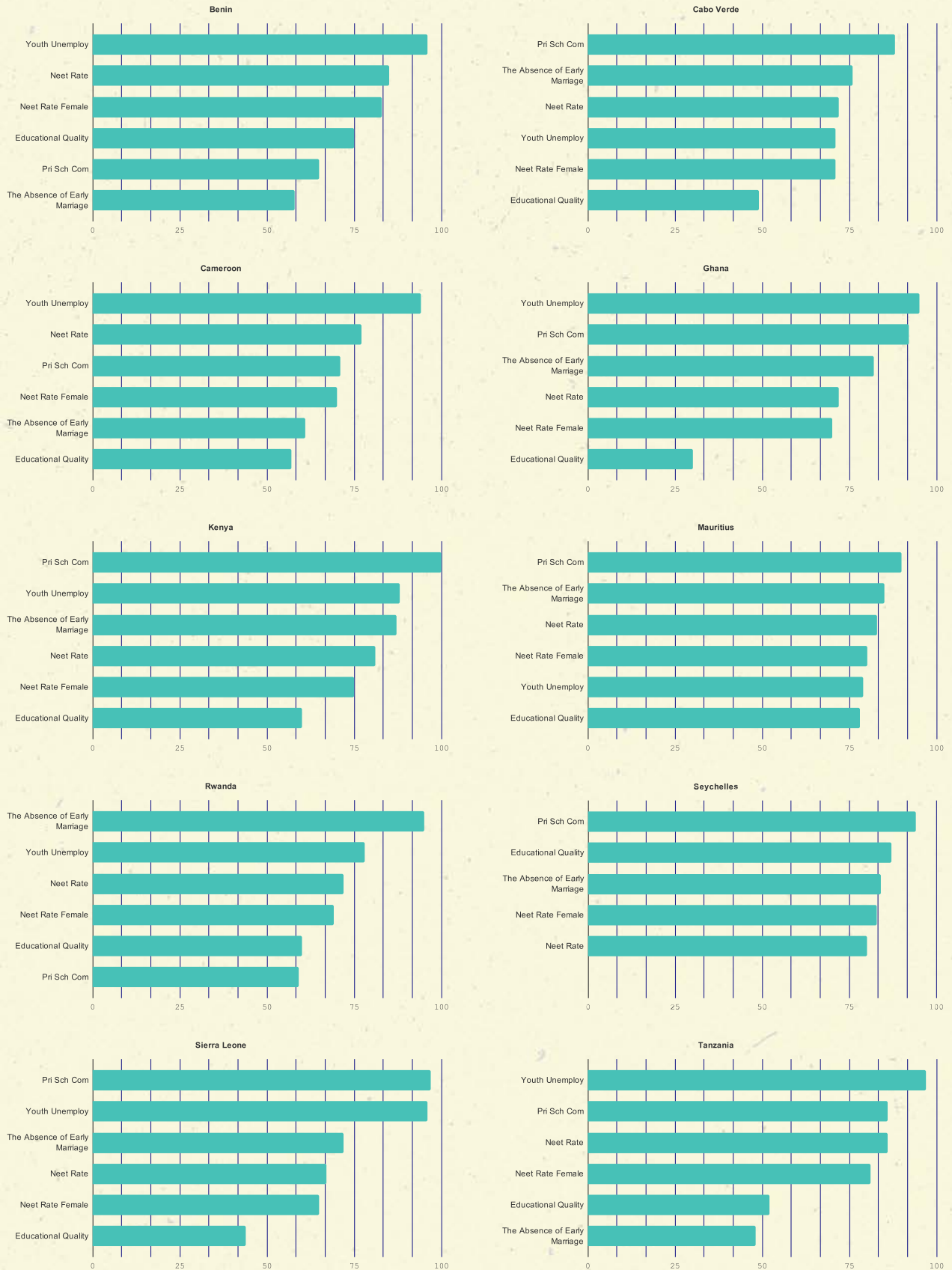
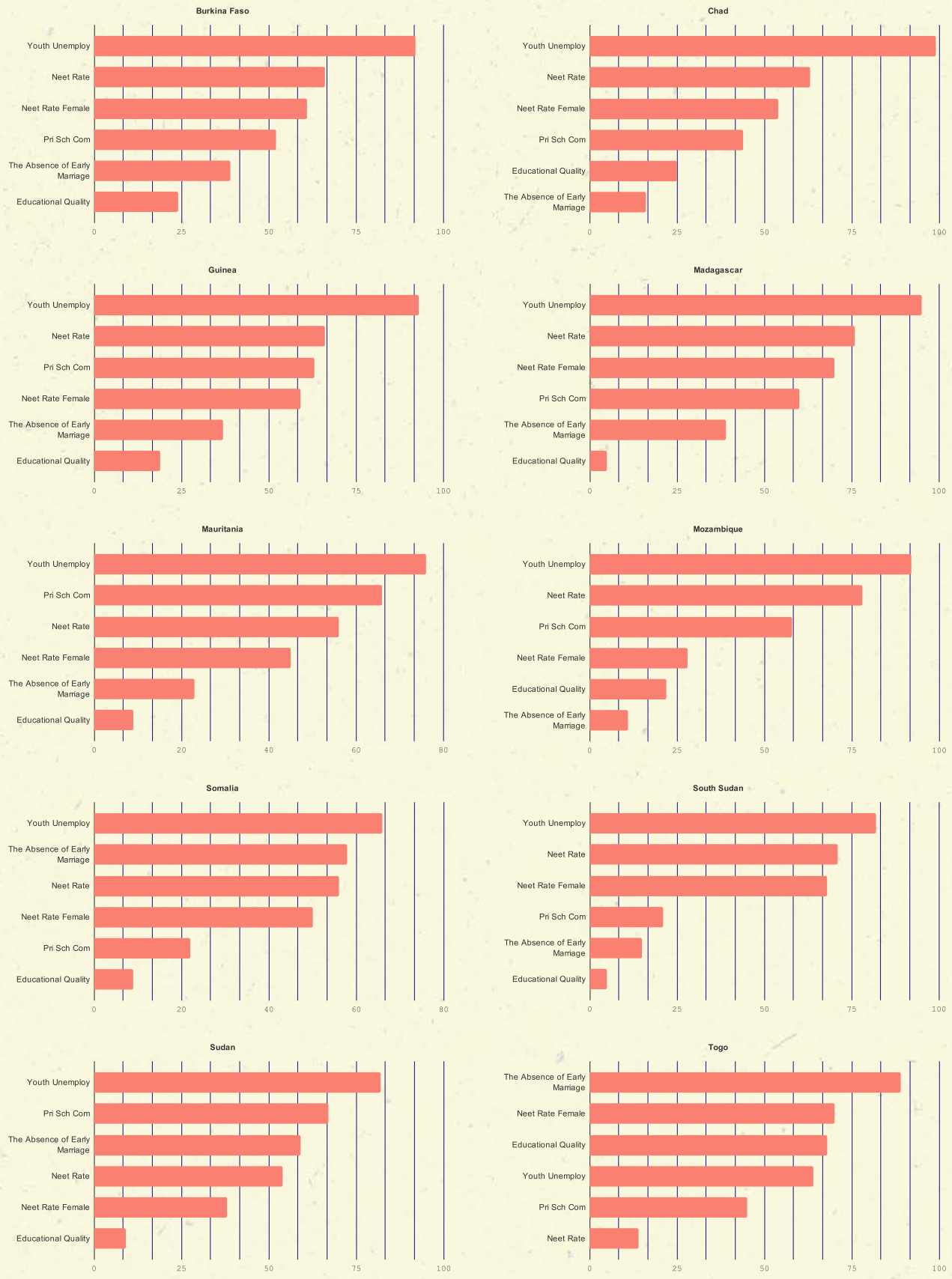


Figure 11 The Drivers of Differences in the Socio-Economic Dimension, Bottom Ranked Countries

Key Drivers of Socio-Economic Dimension Scores among Bottom Ranked SSA Countries



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