

The Procurement Imperative

A view from the C-suite in the Middle East

Supported by

SAP Ariba

In 2026 procurement remains central to business decision-making. But the function is at a crossroads. Procurement teams are being asked to do more: cut costs, manage disruption and drive digital change. But confidence in their ability to deliver on that broader mandate, and in its alignment with wider corporate strategy, is slipping.

The latest iteration of Economist Enterprise's research takes the pulse of the C-suite on procurement's evolving role, tracking its transformation over the past five years. The findings are anchored in a survey of 2,648 C-suite executives across Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, the Nordics and North America. **Within the Middle East, 136 executives were surveyed in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.**

Artificial intelligence now shapes procurement's agenda

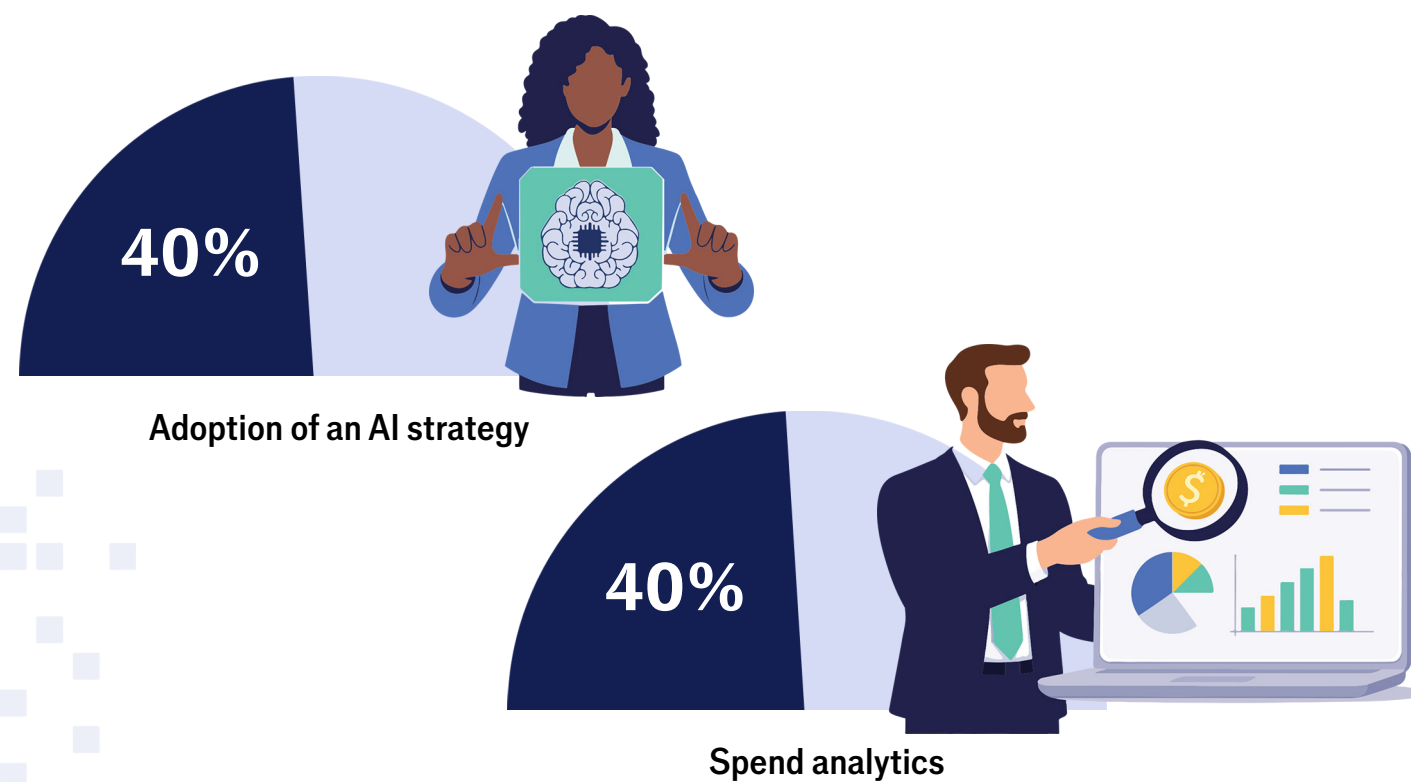
Executives in the Middle East increasingly see procurement as a data-led function, with digital transformation topping procurement's short-term priorities.

Top short-term strategic priorities for procurement in the Middle East



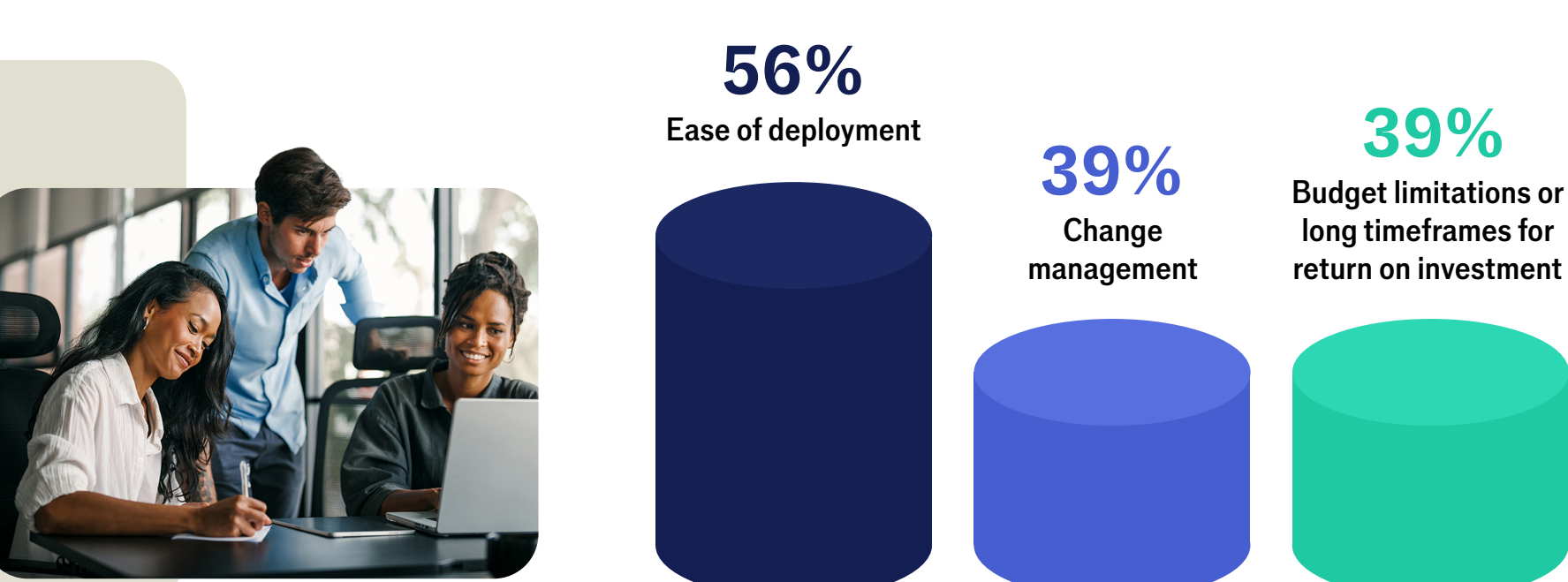
AI sits at the centre of this shift. The adoption of AI strategies and spend analytics are driving digital transformation, and agentic AI is emerging as the technology most likely to shape procurement's future in the Middle East.

Top drivers of digital transformation in procurement in the Middle East



But AI adoption has so far yielded mixed results and faces technical obstacles.

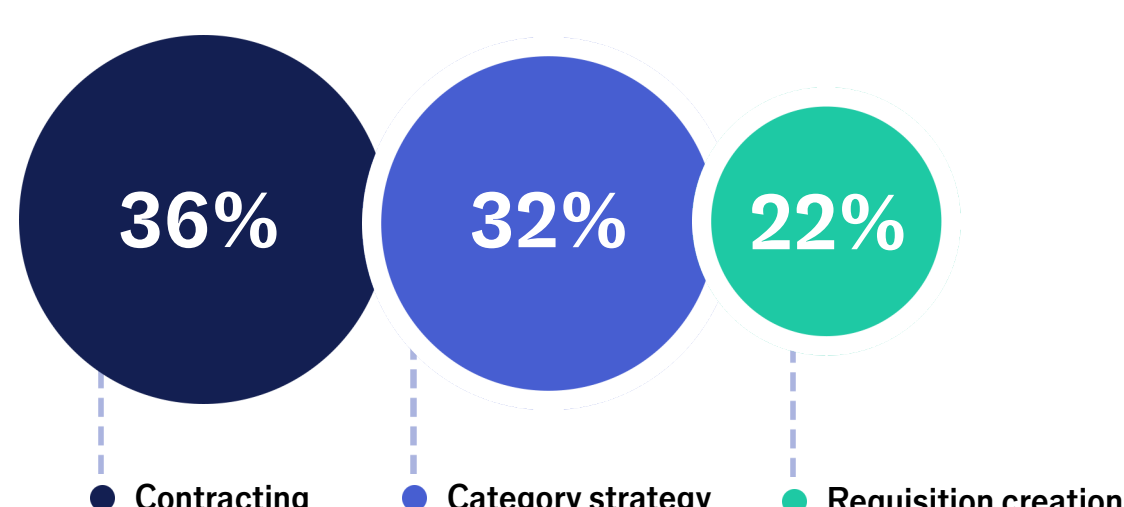
Top barriers to adopting or scaling AI in the Middle East



Procurement is aiming AI at its biggest bottlenecks

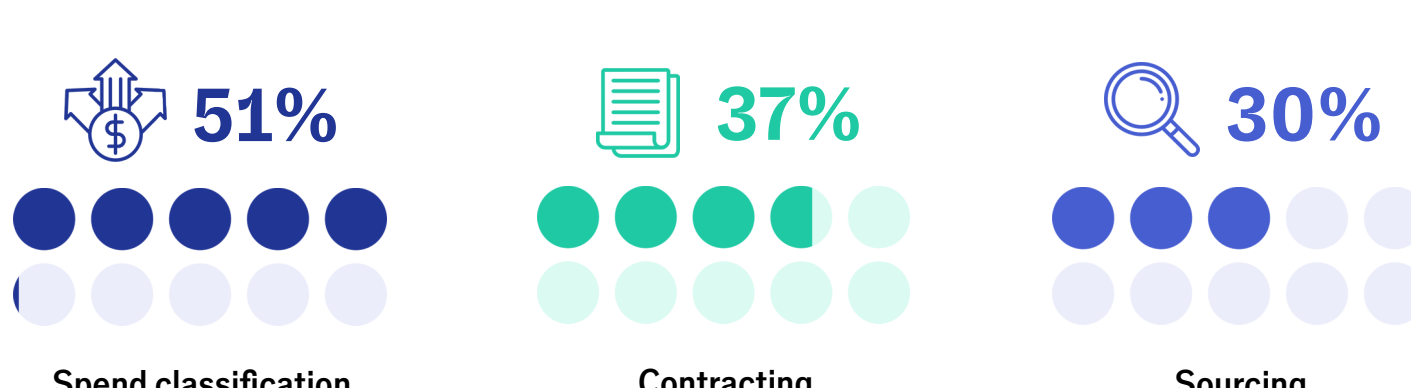
Even as AI climbs the agenda, several core processes remain stubborn sources of delay.

Areas experiencing the biggest delays in procurement processes in the Middle East



Executives in the Middle East are pointing AI at these same pain points. The outlier is spend classification, which owes its prominence less to delay than to the data-led ambition behind digital transformation—echoing the strength of spend analytics as a driver above.

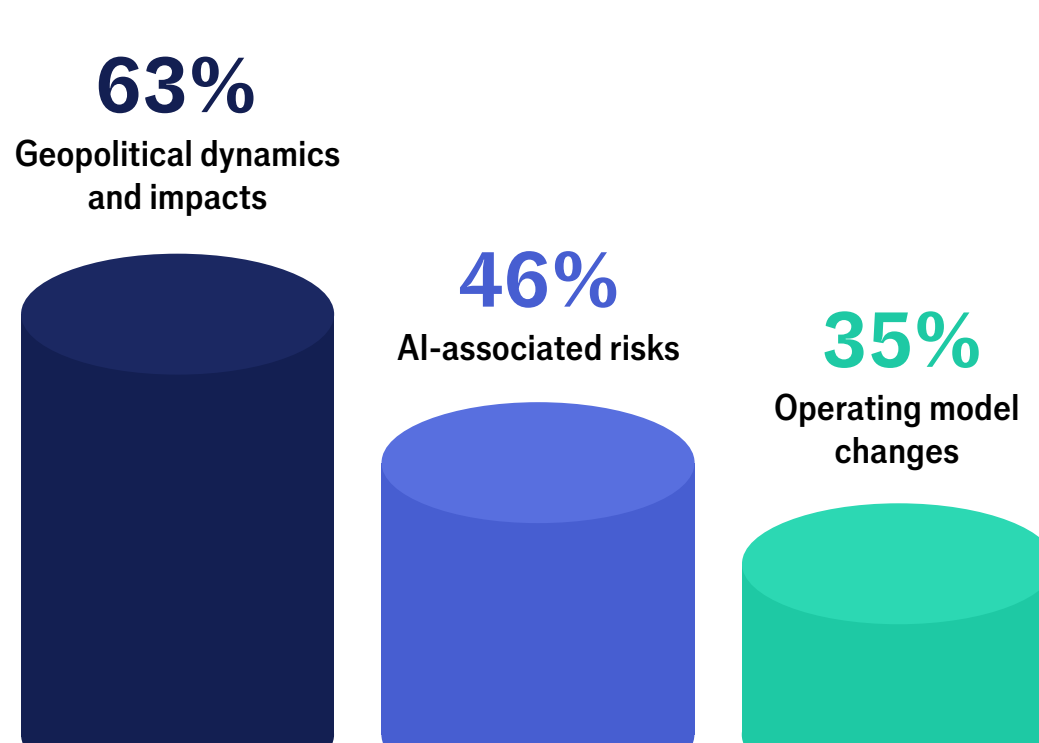
Procurement processes to be improved through the use of AI over the next 12 to 18 months in the Middle East



Geopolitics is shaping procurement's priorities

Procurement leaders in the Middle East are navigating a more volatile external environment than their peers in many other regions. While AI remains a growing concern as organisations adopt new technologies, executives are focused first on the geopolitical forces that can disrupt supply chains, reshape trade flows and alter sourcing strategies.

Top short-term priorities for organisational risk in the Middle East



Find out more about how procurement is changing—and what it means for your organisation—in our [full analysis](#).

