

Democracy in Jordan 2004

Public Opinion Poll Unit

**Center for Strategic Studies
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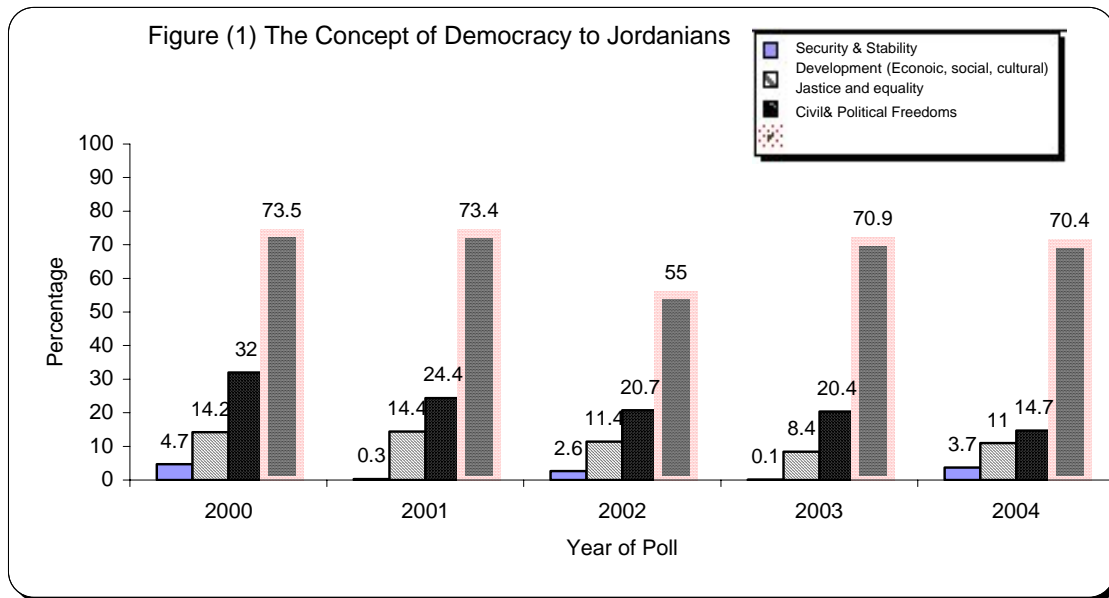
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Introduction

The Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan conducted a poll on democracy in Jordan during the period from 30/9/2004 to 6/10/2004. This poll is the eleventh annual poll conducted by the Center as part of the study on democratic transformation in Jordan. The sample of the study totaled 1,386 respondents, aged 18 years and over, who completed the questionnaire. The poll aims at finding out the opinion of Jordanian citizens on democratic transformation in Jordan in general. This includes measuring the level of democracy as perceived by the citizens, what democracy means to Jordanians and the form of political system desired by Jordanians. Additionally, the degree of guaranteeing public freedoms and the extent of the spread of justice and equality in Jordan were measured. The role of political parties and their popularity were evaluated. Moreover, the poll included an evaluation of the performance of the current parliament in creating laws to deal with the problems of unemployment, poverty, corruption, price increases and the guarantee of public freedoms. The role of constituency members of parliament (MPs) was also evaluated, and specifically, their interaction with the voters. Among the most important topics of the poll was the issue of the priorities of Jordanians: Are they foreign or domestic? Political or economic? The importance of this topic arose from the fact that it dominated dialogue in Jordan in the last few years. The poll branched into the issue of political development in terms of how much the respondents were aware of the plan declared by the government and what the plan will lead to. The poll covered the audio and visual media and the extent of trust in it with regard to local, Arab and international news. The most important results of the poll will be presented in the following paragraphs.

I. The Concept of Democracy

Most Jordanians understand democracy as a concept closely related to civil and political liberties, and this understanding, in essence, is not different than the concept of democracy in advanced democratic countries. Since the last poll in 1999, the percentage of those who defined democracy as civil freedoms and political rights varied approximately two thirds of the respondents on average. In addition to this political understanding of democracy, there is a sociological understanding that defines democracy through linking it with justice and equality (approximately a quarter of Jordanians) and with social development, politics and economics (approximately 10% of Jordanians). See figure 1.



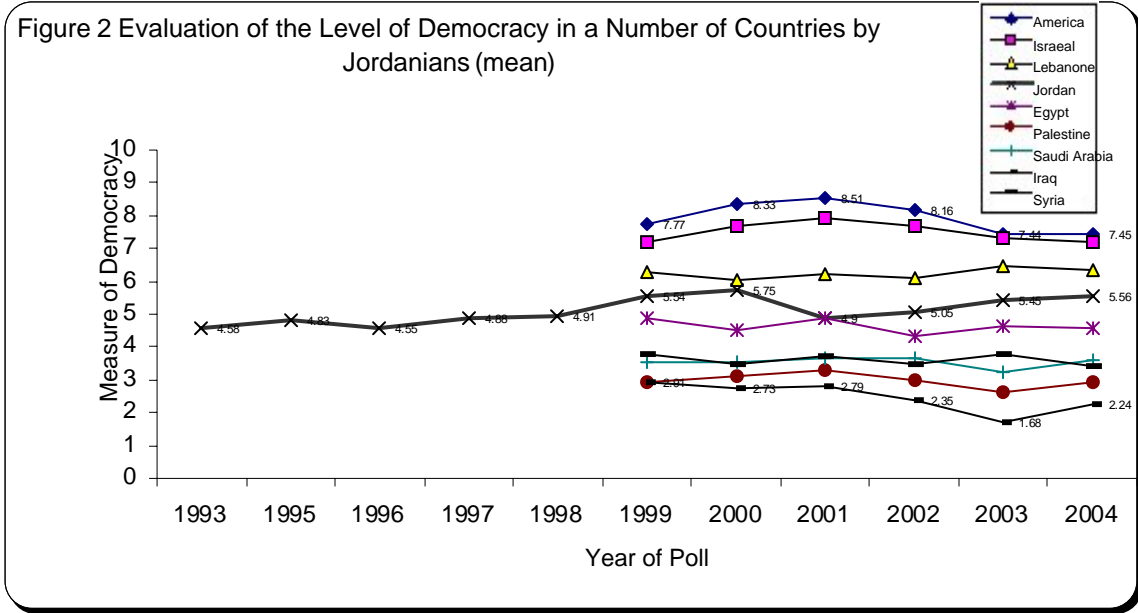
The great majority of Jordanians prefer the democratic political system and reject the authoritarian political system. 91% of the respondents stated that the “democratic political system” (public freedoms, guarantee of equality in civil and political rights, alternation of power, transparent accountability of the executive authority) is a good system to rule the country, this percentage was 88.8% in the 2003 poll. This support for the democratic political system was counteracted with a rejection of the authoritarian political system, as approximately three quarters of the respondents stated that any political system where the president of the government is authoritarian (non-democratic) and does not care about parliament and elections, is a bad form of governance in the country, this percentage in 2003 was 80.9% of respondents. This data indicates that Jordanians have clear positions toward the political system they want. This indicates that Jordanians have unambiguous views regarding the political system they want for their country. A degree of conformity exists in the opinions of Jordanians regarding the level of democracy in democratic countries and countries undergoing transformation, and non-democratic countries as will be seen later. 49% of Jordanians see that the

Jordanian political system is a democratic system (which is an evaluation close to their evaluation of the level of democracy in Jordan with a different methodology as will be seen later), while 12% believe that it is an authoritarian system, and 11% believe it is a system where technical experts make whatever decisions they believe are appropriate for the country.

II. Level of Democracy

The evaluation of Jordanians of the level of democracy in their country and other countries reflects a complex understanding of the content of democratic rule in general. Jordanians believe that democracy in Jordan remained the same as last year. When comparing the level of democracy in Jordan with other countries, we find that Jordanians assess the United States of America and Israel as democracies, despite the fact that their evaluation of these democracies decreased slightly last year, as the poll was conducted a few months after Iraq's occupation, but their evaluation of the level of democracy in these two countries remained very close to last year. They evaluate Saudi Arabia, Syria, Palestine and Iraq as undemocratic, and this evaluation remained similar to the former evaluations of the level of democracy in those countries since 1999. It is worth noting that the level of democracy in Jordan, as perceived by Jordanians, still remains around the middle of the road, while noting that the most fluctuations in the evaluation of the level of democracy by Jordanians occurred between 1999 and 2003. Consequently it must be pointed out that the respondent's opinion on the level of democracy in the various countries depends on the extent of their understanding of the concept of democracy, which is an understanding largely connected to public liberties, and does not necessarily reflect an objective evaluation of the internal democratic performance or the lack of it in the countries included in the poll. However, it is an important indicator that cannot be ignored. (See figure 2)

Figure 2 Evaluation of the Level of Democracy in a Number of Countries by Jordanians (mean)



III. Indicators of Democracy

Public Freedoms and Fear

As most Jordanians define democracy according to public freedoms, it is necessary to find out the extent of their belief in the guarantee of these freedoms in Jordan. Arithmetic averages of answers on freedom of opinion, press and freedom to join political parties indicate that these freedoms are guaranteed to an extent. The freedom of the press is the most guaranteed freedom, as reported by 59% of respondents, followed by freedom of opinion with 56% and freedom of belonging to political parties, where only 38% believe they are guaranteed in Jordan. With regard to the freedom of demonstrating and sitting-in, most Jordanians believe they are not guaranteed, as only a third of respondents believe they are guaranteed. The reason is that Jordan is still halfway with regard to the lack of the citizen's belief that the public freedoms are guaranteed to the extent that they can be practiced without fear of the authorities. There are no significant differences between the percentage of belief in the guarantee of freedoms for this year and last year. In general, the percentage of those who believe they can express their opinion without risk remains very low (those who believe that these freedoms are guaranteed to a great extent). A total of 80.6% of the respondents reported that they cannot publicly criticize the government and disagree with it without them or members of their family being subjected to security or living consequences, compared with 83.2% in the 2003 poll. With that the percentage of those who fear criticizing the government has decreased slightly, and this decrease is not statistically significant. Generally, the percentage of fear remains high, as it was

69.9% in 1999. The percentage of those who believe they cannot participate in peaceful political opposition activities such as (demonstrations, sit-ins, fliers and articles, and political opposition festivals, lectures and forums) without them or their family members being subjected to any consequences (security or living) also rose from 70.9% in 1999 to 77.6% in the 2003 poll and 78.7% in this poll. (See figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9).

Justice, Equality and the Economy

There is a general impression in almost half of the respondents that Jordan is a country where justice and equality prevails, as stated by 55.99% for equality and 47.3% for justice. This belief on the level of justice and equality remains low in general. The prevailing belief in 47.3% of Jordanians that the principle of equality of opportunities is not implemented in Jordan is enhanced by the general feeling regarding the low level of justice and equality in Jordan, compared with 10.5% who believe it is implemented and 36.7% who believed it was somewhat implemented.

With regard to justice and equality in the distribution of national economic returns, approximately three quarters of society feel some form of injustice, as 74.1% stated that the country's economy is used for the service of people with interests and not all citizens, which is the same percentage recorded in 2001 and 2003. The low level of justice and equality in Jordan can be understood by looking at the percentage of those who stated that their economic situation has become worse in the last twelve months (42.4%), compared with 13.4% who stated their economic situation improved and 43.4% who stated their economic situation remained the same, despite the fact that the official figures issued by the Public Statistics Department indicate that the percentage of economic growth in the first half amounted to 7% and that unemployment decreased to 12.5% (May 2004), as did the level of poverty. Almost half of Jordanians (46.6%) believe that the government is serious in fighting corruption, which they believe is one of the priorities that must be dealt with.

IV. Political Parties

Evaluation of Party Performance

The position of respondents on the performance of political parties did not improve significantly. A third of the respondents said they did not know or were not concerned with whether the parties have succeeded or not in practicing politics. When comparing former polls since 1996 and until this poll, it becomes clear that the Jordanian evaluation of the performance of political parties did not

change in essence, as public opinion still believes that parties suffer from a crisis in reaching the public. When the respondents were asked whether the political parties in Jordan work in the service of the people or in service of their leadership, 49.1% reported they work in service of their leaderships, compared with 12.8% who reported they work in service of the people. It must be noted here that 35.3% responded that they did not know.

Popularity of Parties and their Size among Jordanians

Poll data indicates that all current political parties constitute only 9.8% of the political, social and economic aspirations of the citizens. That means that 90% do not believe that the current parties represent their aspirations. The Islamic Labor Front represents most the political, social and economic aspirations of the citizens, more than any other political Jordanian party, as stated by 6.6% of the respondents in this poll, compared with 14.7% in last year's poll that was executed after the parliamentary elections that took place in 17/6/2003. The National Constitutional Party came in second with a percentage of 0.6% compared with 1.0% in last year's poll. As for the remaining parties, none of them exceeded 0.2%.

When the respondents were asked the following question: "Which of the current parties in Jordan do you believe is qualified to form a government?" 84.2% responded "none", while the Islamic Labor Front received 3.5% (and this is different than the representation of the formerly mentioned aspirations), the National Constitutional Party came second with 0.4%. As for the remaining parties, none of them exceed 0.1%. The respondent's perception of the parties reflects on their position towards any political party assuming power. 57.7% of the respondents reported they did not personally accept any political party that does not agree with them assuming power, 11% said they accept and 29.1% said they did not know. This stand on the assumption of power of a party indicates the level of political forgiveness in the Jordanian public. The concept of the political party to the Jordanian public is still incomplete. When the respondents were asked "which of the following two statements do you consider closer to your opinion", 63.7% said that the statement "the party is a political organization that seeks to participate in the political process without assuming power" is closer to their point of view, compared with 25.1% who said that the statement "the party is a political organization that aims to assume power through constitutional means" is closer to their point of view.

V. Parliament and Priorities of Jordanians

Evaluation of Parliament Performance

A large majority of citizens (71%) believe that the election law under which the current parliament elections were held was fair to women, and 56% believe that the law was fair in representing all sectors of the population. On the other hand, 46.7% of Jordanians believe that the current parliament does not practice its authority of holding the government accountable, compared with 36.4% who believe otherwise. This evaluation reflects on the respondent's satisfaction with the parliament's performance, as the percentage of those who were pleased with the general performance of the parliament was only 39% of the respondents. Less than a third of the respondents have an impression that parliament was successful in drafting laws to deal with the problems of unemployment, poverty and corruption. As for drafting laws to fight price increases, the percentage of those who believe parliament was successful decreases to less than a quarter. Only a third of respondents believe that parliament was successful in drafting laws to guarantee public freedoms. In all, parliament does not enjoy the trust of most citizens.

The percentage of those satisfied with the performance of parliament is general matches those satisfied with the performance of the MPs who won in the respondent's constituency (it is worth mentioning that this sample was not drawn on the basis of the division of constituencies but on the distribution of population according to governorates. Therefore, the results presented here do not represent the constituencies in themselves), with the percentage reaching 39%. That means that citizens do not differentiate between the performance of parliament in general and the performance of the MPs of their constituencies for the purposes of the evaluation. With regard to the interaction of MPs with voters, the percentage of those who believe the interaction was enough was low, approximately a third of respondents. A third of the respondents also said that the follow-up of MPs of constituencies on the nation's main issues and problems, and the issues and problems of the constituency, was sufficient.

On the reelection of MPs of constituencies, 24% of respondents said they would reelect the current MPs of their constituencies if elections were held now, while 64% said they would not. There are many visions and stands that contribute to creating the position in two thirds of respondents that they would not reelect current MPs, the most significant of which is that 69% of respondents believe that the MPs were more interested in their own personal and family interests. Only 18% said that the MPs were more interested in the interests of society and the country as a whole.

In the 2003 poll, the following question was listed "did the absence of parliament for two years have a positive or negative effect on you?" The results showed that the former parliament did not leave a good impression with regard to its

effectiveness in most citizens. 64.3% said that the absence of parliament for two years did not affect them negatively or positively, while 25% said they were negatively affected by the absence of parliament, and 2.4% said the absence of parliament had a positive effect on them. In this poll, the percentage of those who said that the presence of parliament from 17/6/2003 until the date of the interview did not affect them positively or negatively was 60.5%, while the percentage of those who said parliament's presence affected them positively was 10% and 22% said parliament's presence affected them negatively. On the legislature approved by parliament in its first year, 12% said it would affect them positively, 22% said it would affect them negatively, and 49% said it would not affect them positively or negatively, while 18% said they do not know what the effect of the legislature would be on them.

Priorities of Citizens

In affirmation of the information in previous polls executed by the Center, the priorities of Jordanians in this poll were similar to what was listed in last year's poll. In contrast with the prevalent expectations, foreign issues did not govern the priorities of Jordanians. When respondents were asked about five problems facing Jordan and were asked to determine the most important problem in terms of its priority and the fact that it must be dealt with, the problem of "poverty and unemployment" was the most important priority, with a percentage of 52%, compared with 58% in the 2003 poll. "Financial and administrative corruption" came in second with 27% compared with 24.6% in 2003, while the "Palestinian issue" came in third with 17% compared with 13.7% in 2003. The "Iraqi issue" came in fourth place with 0.9% compared with 2.0% last year, and the issue of "enhancing democratic and freedom of expression" came last 3.2% compared with 1.4% last year. The ranking of the second most important problem facing Jordan that should be dealt with came as follows: "corruption and favoritism" 33.5% compared with 32.9% in 2003, "poverty and unemployment" 30.4% compared with 25.9%, "Palestinian issue" 18.4% compared with 25%, "Iraqi issue" 11% compared with 10%, and "enhancing democracy and freedom of expression" 6.6% compared with 5.7% in 2003.

VI. Political Development

In spite of the continued dialogue, the wide media coverage and the amount of meetings conducted by the government with all society's sectors on political development in Jordan, the percentage of those who were aware of the political development plan did not exceed 16% of the respondents. When the citizens were asked about what the political development will lead to in the end, 53% said they did not know, while 5% said it would lead to Western democracy, 11% said it

would lead to more political freedom without achieving Western democracy, 25% said it would not change, and 6% expected a regression in democracy.

VII. Visual and Audio Media

Most Reliable Sources on Local News

48% of those who pinpointed the most reliable source of local political news considered that Jordan Television is the most reliable source, compared with 52.2% in 2003, followed by Al Jazeera Channel with a percentage of 25%, compared with 20.6% in last year's poll.

Most Reliable Sources on Arab Political News

39% of those who pinpointed the most reliable source of Arab political news considered that Al Jazeera Channel is the most reliable source compared with 35.5% last year, followed by Jordan television with a percentage of 33% compared with 32.3% in the 2003 poll, and followed by Al Arabiya with a percentage of 14% compared with 7.9% in the 2003 poll.

Most Reliable Sources on International Political News

41% of those who pinpointed the most reliable source of international political news considered that Al Jazeera Satellite Channel is the most reliable source, compared with 34.9% in the 2003 poll, followed by Jordan television with a percentage of 31% compared with 31.2% in the 2003 poll, and Al Arabiya with a percentage of 14% compared with 8.5% in the 2003 poll.

VIII. The Spread of Computers and the Internet

The percentage of those who use the computer rose from 29.5% in 2003 to 35% this year. There was no significant rise in the percentage of internet users since 2002, where it was 15.6%, 17.4% in 2003 and 17.5% this year.