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Democracy in Jordan 2004

Public Opinion Poll Unit

**Center for Strategic Studies
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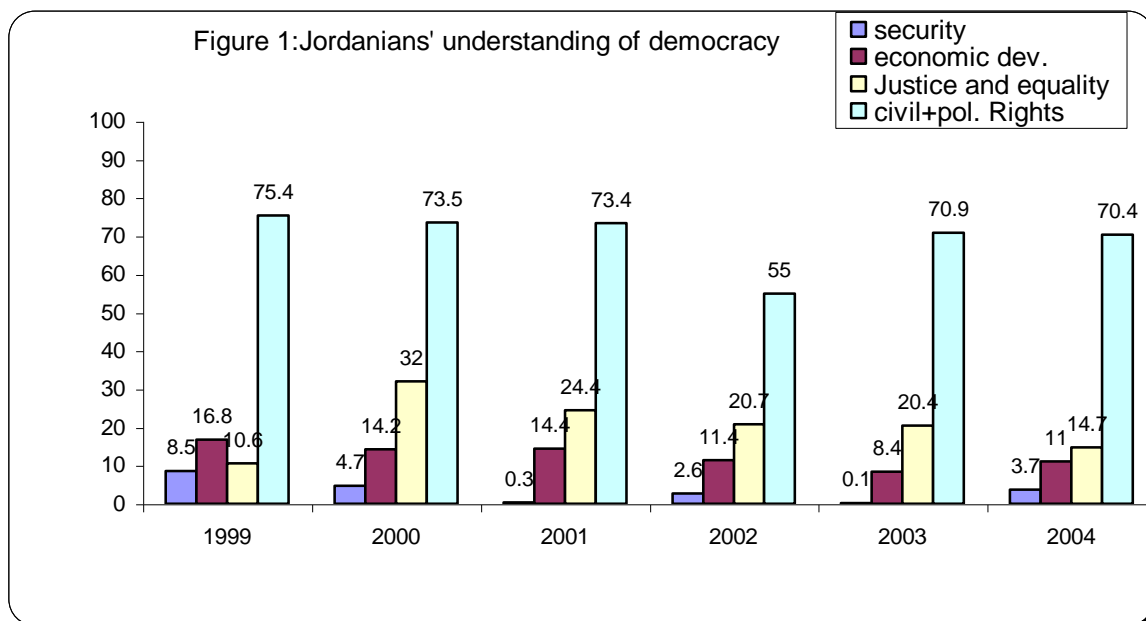
October 2004

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 a study on democratic transformation in Jordan. The sample totaled 1,386 respondents 18 years of age and over. The poll aimed at identifying the opinions of Jordanian citizens on democratic transformation in Jordan generally. This included 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 poll measured the degree to which public freedoms are seen as guaranteed and the extent of the spread of justice and equality in Jordan. The role of political parties and their popularity were evaluated as well. 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 safeguarding of public freedoms. The role of constituency representatives in parliament (MPs) was also evaluated, and specifically, their interaction with the voters. Among the most important topics of the poll was the issue of priorities of Jordanians: Are they external or internal? Political or economic? The importance of this topic is rooted in the fact that it has dominated public debate in Jordan in the last few years. The poll also covered the subject of political development in terms of how aware the respondents were of the plan declared by the government and what the plan will lead to. The poll covered broadcast media and the amount of trust held in its in relation to local, Arab and international news. The most important results of the poll are presented in the following report.

I. The Concept of Democracy

Most Jordanians understand democracy, as a concept closely related to civil liberties and political rights, and this understanding, in essence, is not different from the concept of democracy in advanced democratic countries. Since the poll conducted in 1999, the percentage of those who defined democracy as civil liberties and political rights has been approximately two thirds of the respondents on average. In addition to this political understanding of democracy, there is a sociological understanding that defines democracy in terms of justice and equality (approximately a quarter of Jordanians) and in terms of social, cultural, and economic development (approximately 10% of Jordanians). *See figure 1.*

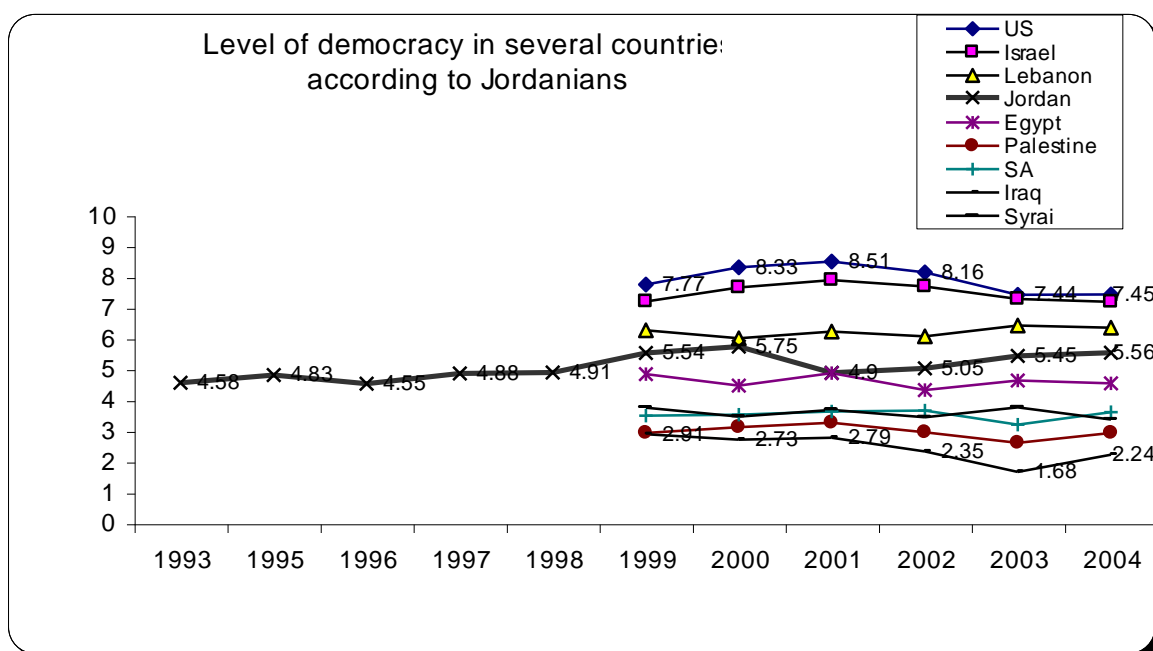


An overwhelming majority of Jordanians prefer the democratic political system and reject the authoritarian political system. 91% of the respondents stated that the “democratic political system” (public freedoms, guarantee of equality in civil and political rights, rotation of power, transparent accountability 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 qualified with a rejection of the authoritarian political system, as approximately three quarters of respondents rejected rule by “a strong head of government who does not have to bother with elections and parliament”, stating that it is a bad form of governance for the country. This percentage in 2003 was 80.9% of respondents. These data indicate that Jordanians have clear positions regarding the political system they desire for their country. A degree of conformity exists in the opinions of Jordanians regarding the level of democracy in democratic countries, countries undergoing transformation, and non-democratic countries, as will be seen later. 49% of Jordanians regard the Jordanian political system as 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 sophisticated 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. However, their evaluation of the level of democracy in these two countries remained very close to last year.

Respondents 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 respondents' 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 lack thereof, in the countries included in the poll. However, it is an important indicator that must be taken into account. See figure 2.



III. Indicators of Democracy

Public Freedoms and Fear

As most Jordanians define democracy by public freedoms, it is necessary to explore the extent of their belief in the mechanism safeguarding such freedoms in Jordan. Arithmetic averages of answers about freedom of opinion and the press, and freedom to join political parties indicate that these freedoms are guaranteed to some extent. The freedom of the press is the most protected freedom, as reported by 59% of respondents, followed by freedom of opinion with 56% and freedom of joining political parties, where only 38% believe it is guaranteed in Jordan. With regard to the freedom to participate in demonstrations and sit-ins, most Jordanians believe this is not guaranteed, as only a third of respondents indicated as such. The reason Jordan's democracy is still seen by Jordanians as being "in the middle of the road" is partly explained by the perceived lack of belief among citizens that public freedoms are guaranteed to an extent that would allow citizens to exercise their rights of public

expression without fear of governmental reprisal. There are no significant differences between the percentage of respondents believing in the safeguarding of freedoms for this year and last year. In general, the percentage of respondents believing that they can express their opinion without taking some risk remains very low (those who believe that these freedoms are guaranteed to a great extent amount to 20% on average). Moreover, a total of 80.6% of the respondents reported that they cannot publicly criticize the government and disagree with it without fearing that they or members of their families may be subjected to governmental punishment of one sort or another, compared with 83.2% in the 2003 poll. 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 demonstrating, sit-ins, distributing fliers and articles, political opposition rallies, lectures and forums) without them or their family members being subjected to any consequences (security or living) also increased from 70.9% in 1999 to 77.6% in the 2003 poll and 78.7% in this poll.

Justice, Equality and the Economy

There is a general impression among 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 regarding the level of justice and equality remains low in general. The prevailing belief (47.3% of Jordanians) that the principle of equality of opportunity 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 justice and equality are enforced and 36.7% who believed they are somewhat enforced.

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 that their economic situation improved and 43.4% who stated that 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 about 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 out to the public. When the respondents were asked whether political parties in Jordan work in the service of the people or in service of their leadership, 49.1% reported they work in the 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 represent only 9.8% of the political, social and economic aspirations of the citizens. This means that 90% do not believe that the existing political parties represent their aspirations. The Islamic Action Front Party represents most of the political, social and economic aspirations of the citizens, more than any other Jordanian political 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 on 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 Action Front Party received 3.5% (and this is different from 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%. As far political tolerance is concerned, 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 tolerance in the Jordanian public. The concept of the political party to the Jordanian public is still underdeveloped. When 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

Evaluations of Parliamentary Performance

A large majority of citizens (71%) believe that the electoral system under which the current parliamentary 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 the respondents' 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 respondents hold the view that parliament was successful in drafting laws to deal with the problem 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 legislations 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 in general matches those satisfied with the performance of the MPs who won in the respondent's constituency, reaching 39%. (It should be noted that this sample was not drawn according to the division of constituencies, but according to population distribution by governorates; therefore, the results presented here do not represent the constituencies themselves). This 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 adequate 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 re-election of MPs of constituencies, 24% of respondents said they would re-elect the current MP in their constituency if elections were held now, while 64% said they would not. There are reasons contributing to this position among two thirds of respondents who would not re-elect current MPs, the most significant of which is that 69% of respondents believe that MPs were more interested in their own personal and family affairs. Only 18% said that MPs were more interested in the affairs of the society and country as a whole.

In the 2003 poll, the following question was asked, "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 legislation 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 conducted by the Center, the priorities of Jordanians in this poll were similar to what was listed in last year's poll. In contrast to 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 priority and the fact that it must be dealt with, the problem of "poverty and unemployment" was indicated as most important, 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 issue of "enhancing democratic and freedom of expression" came fourth with 3.2% compared with 1.4% last year. The "Iraqi issue" came in fifth place with 0.9% compared with 2.0% 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 continued debate, the wide media coverage and the amount of meetings conducted by the government with all of 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 respondents. When citizens were asked about what 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 for Local News

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

Most Reliable Sources for Arab Political News

39% of those who indicated their most reliable source for Arab political news considered Al Jazeera most reliable 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 for International Political News

41% of those who indicated their most reliable source for international political news considered Al Jazeera 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. Computer and Internet Usage

The percentage of those who use the computer increased 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.