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Democracy in Jordan 2005

Public Opinion Polling Unit

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September 2005

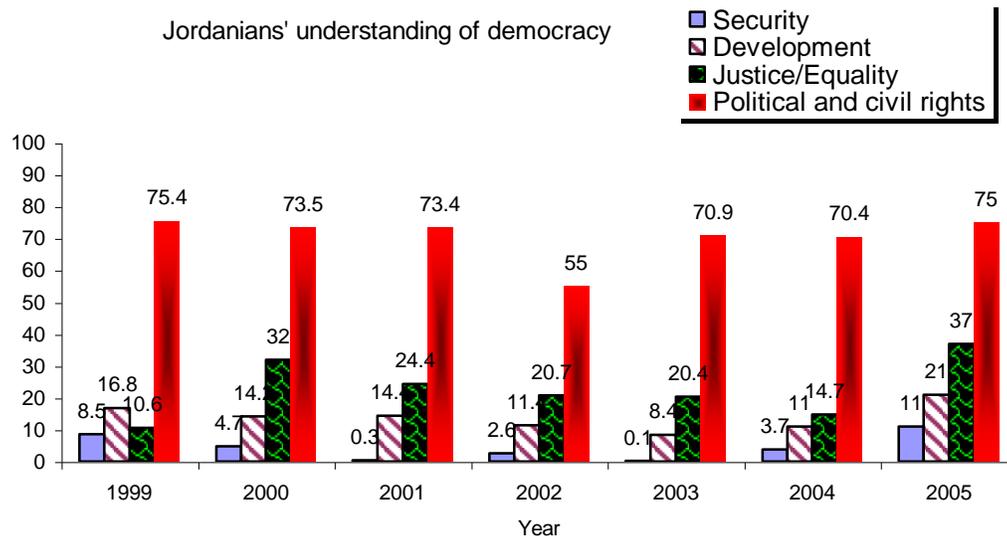
Introduction

The Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan conducted an opinion poll on democracy in Jordan in the period 26/8/2005 to 1/9/2005. This is the twelfth annual poll carried out by the Center as part of a study on democratic transformation in Jordan. The size of the completed poll sample totaled 1385 respondents 18 years of age and over. The polling project aims to track the opinions of Jordanian citizens on the democratic transformation in general. It includes measuring the level of democracy as perceived by citizens, what democracy means to Jordanians, and what kind of political system Jordanians prefer. Additionally, the degree of guarantee of public freedoms and the extent of the prevalence of justice and equality in Jordan were measured. The role of the political parties and their popularity was measured. The poll also evaluated the performance of the current parliament in drafting laws to address problems of unemployment, poverty, corruption, price hikes, and the guarantee of public freedoms. The specific performance of the electoral constituency MPs was measured, as well as the extent of their communication with the voters. Among the important topics addressed by the poll was the issue of priorities among Jordanians: Are they external or internal? Political or economic? The importance of this topic arises from the fact that it has occupied a sizeable area of dialogue in Jordan in recent years. The poll also included a measurement of the degree of citizen participation in various civil society institutions. The poll addressed broadcast media and the extent of people's trust in it with regard to local, Arab and international political news. The most important results of the poll will be presented below.

I. The Concept of Democracy

Most Jordanians understand democracy as closely related to civil liberties and political rights. This understanding, in essence, does not differ from the concept of democracy in advanced democratic nations. Since the poll in 1999 and up until the time of this poll, the percentage of individuals who defined democracy as civil liberties and political rights was, on average, approximately three quarters of the respondents. In addition to this political understanding of democracy, there is a sociological understanding that defines democracy by linking it with justice and equality (approximately a quarter of Jordanians) and social, political and economic development (approximately 10% of Jordanians). There is a small percentage that defines democracy in terms of security and stability, as shown in *figure 1*.

Figure 1



Note: Respondents were able to express the three most important factors that must be available in a country in order to classify the country as a democracy. Therefore, the total for these percentages exceeds 100% because percentages were calculated from the number answers given by respondents

The great majority of Jordanians prefer a democratic political system, and reject the authoritarian, undemocratic political system. 83% of the respondents stated that the "democratic political system" (public freedoms, guarantee of equality in civil and political rights, the rotation of power, and transparent accountability of the executive authority) is a good system to rule the country. This percentage was 91% in the 2004 poll and 88.8% in the 2003 poll. This support for the democratic political system was qualified by a rejection of the authoritarian political system. Approximately three quarters of respondents stated that the form of any political rule where the head of the government is authoritarian (undemocratic), and does not care about parliament and elections, is a bad form of ruling the country. This was the same percentage recorded in the 2004 poll, while in 2003 this percentage was 80.9% of respondents. This information indicates that Jordanians have a clear stand about the political system they want. There is a degree of harmony in their opinions towards the level of democracy in democratic countries, countries going through a transition, and undemocratic countries, as will be seen later. 51% of Jordanians believe that the Jordanian political system is a democratic system (which is a close evaluation of their assessment of the level of democracy in Jordan using a different methodology as will be seen later) compared with 49% who described it this way in the 2004 poll. 10.4% believe that it is an authoritarian system, compared with 12% in the 2004 poll. 12% believe it is a system where technical experts make decisions they feel appropriate for the country, compared with 11% in the 2004 poll.

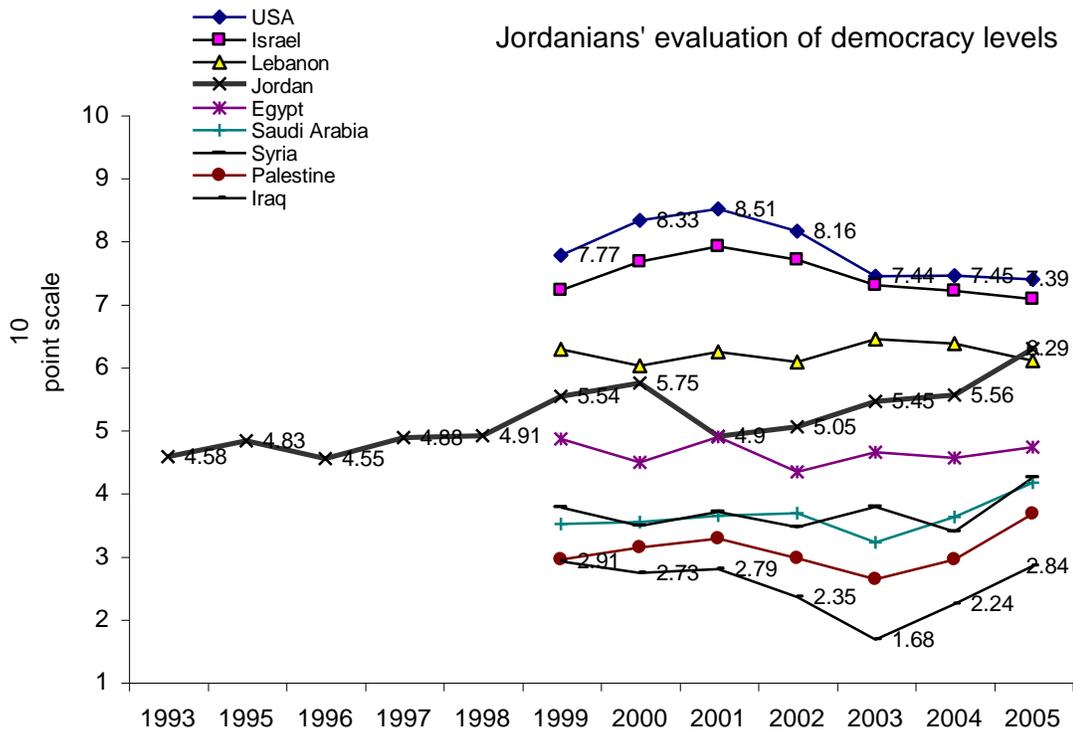
II. Level of Democracy

The evaluation of Jordanians of the level of democracy in their country and other countries reflects an advanced and sophisticated understanding of the content of democratic rule in general. Jordanians believe that the level of democracy in Jordan has improved compared with the previous years since 1993. It has exceeded, for the first time since 1993, the six-point barrier, reaching 6.29%. The reason behind the improvement in the way Jordanians evaluate the level of democracy in their country is perhaps due to the unprecedented, intensive, and courageous discussions and debates that have been witnessed in the country in recent months, as well as the general deliberations over many topics that had not been previously open for discussion.

When comparing the level of democracy in Jordan with other countries, we find that Jordanians evaluate the United States of America and Israel as democracies, in spite of the fact that their evaluation of these two democracies decreased slightly after the war on Iraq in 2003, and has since remained at around the same level recorded in that year. They evaluate Saudi Arabia, Syria, Palestine and Iraq as undemocratic countries. This evaluation remained constant compared to former evaluations of the level of democracy in these countries since 1999. Iraq occupies the lowest rank among the countries included in the study, despite the slight improvement in the evaluation of Jordanians of the level of democracy in Iraq compared with previous years. Regardless of this slight improvement, the evaluation of Jordanians of the level of democracy in Iraq did not increase in this poll over what it was in 1999. This is an indication that Jordanian public opinion is not convinced that what is happening in Iraq at the political level is a transformation towards democracy.

It is worth noting that the level of democracy in Jordan, as perceived by Jordanians, and in spite of the improvements compared with last year, is still around half way, taking into consideration that the most fluctuations in the evaluation of Jordanians of their level of democracy took place between 1999 and 2003. It must be mentioned here that the evaluation of the respondents of the level of democracy in the various countries is based on the extent of the understanding of the concept of democracy, which is an understanding related to public freedoms to a great extent, 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 indication that cannot be ignored. (See *figure 2*).

Figure 2

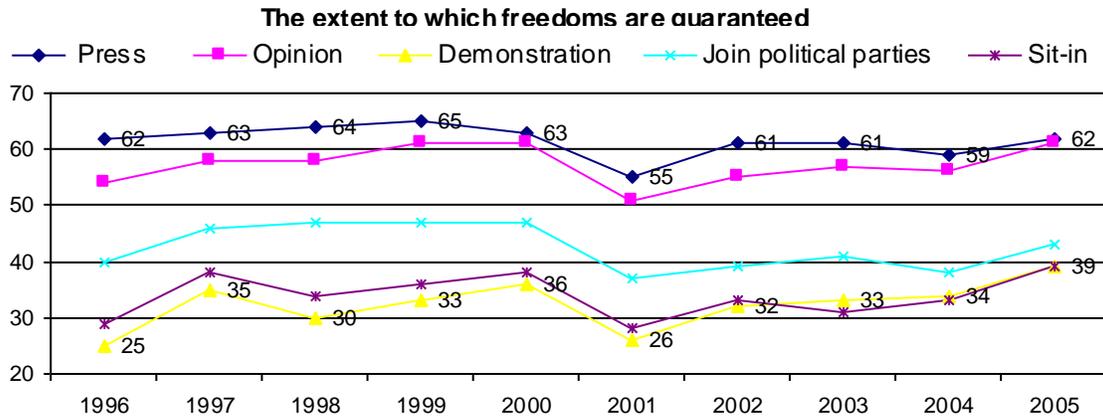


III. Indicators of Democracy

Public Freedoms

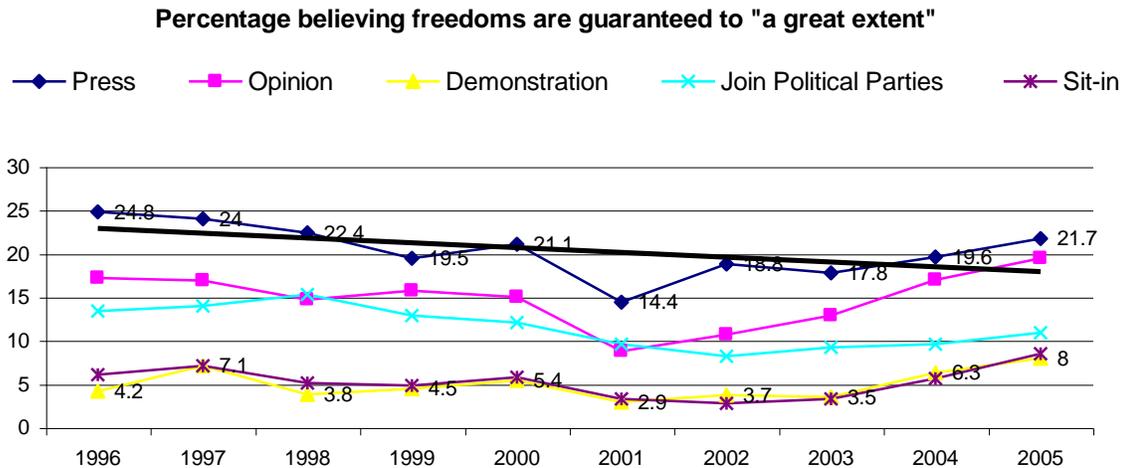
As most Jordanians define democracy in terms of public freedoms, it is necessary to determine their belief in the guarantee of these freedoms in Jordan. The results of this poll reflect a general air of optimism of a slightly improved level of freedoms, and perhaps this explains the recorded increase on the scale of democracy. Arithmetic means of answers on the freedom of opinion, press and membership in political parties indicate that these freedoms are guaranteed to a certain extent. The freedom of the press is the most guaranteed freedom, as stated by 62% of respondents in this poll, compared to 59% in the 2004 poll. It is followed by freedom of opinion with 61% in this poll, compared to 56% in the 2004 poll, and the freedom of membership in political parties, where only 43% believe is guaranteed in Jordan, compared to 38% in the 2004 poll, shown in *figure 3*. With regard to the freedom of demonstrating and staging sit-ins, although there is a slight increase in the percentage of respondents who believe they are guaranteed, the majority of Jordanians still believe they are not (*figure 3*). Only approximately a third of respondents believe they are guaranteed. The reason behind Jordan being halfway on the road to democracy is that citizens do not feel that public freedoms are guaranteed to the extent that they can be practiced without fear of the authorities.

Figure 3



Despite the slight increase in the percentage of those who believe that public freedoms are "guaranteed to a great extent", as shown in *figure 4*, the percentages of those who believe they can express their opinions without risk is generally very small (those are the same individuals who believe that freedoms are guaranteed to a great extent).

Figure 4



Fear

It seemed very clear that the fear of criticizing the government in public and disagreeing with it is based on impressions and perceptions previously formed among respondents. These impressions and perceptions remained a reference for respondents on the issue of government criticism. In spite of the fact that approximately three quarters of the

respondents stated they fear criticizing the government in public for fear of punishments related to security or living, only 1.4% stated they had been subjected to security or living punishments as a result of criticizing the government or participating in peaceful opposition activities.

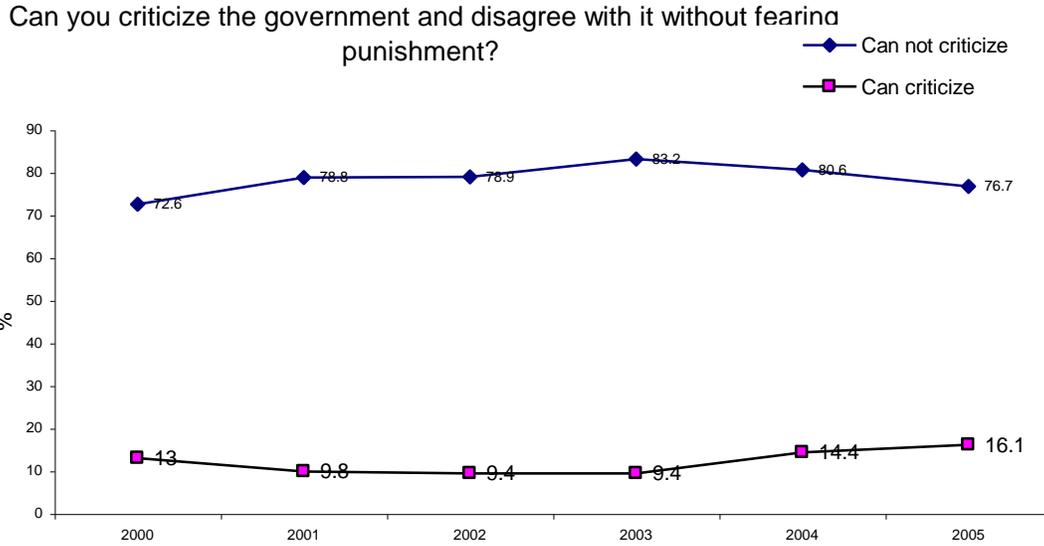
Education is an important factor in lowering fear of criticizing the government, i.e. the higher the level of education an individual reaches, the less fearful he or she is of criticizing and disagreeing with the government. 93% of illiterates and people with an elementary education say they cannot criticize the government in public for fear of security or living punishments against them or members of their families, compared with 84% of those with intermediary or secondary education, and 72% of those with higher education (above secondary level).

The monthly family income variable for the respondents constitutes another important factor in reducing the level of fear of criticizing the government: the higher the income of the family, the lower the percentage of those who fear of government criticism. 57% of high income individuals (who stated the monthly income of their family is 501 JD and above) stated they cannot criticize the government in public without fear, compared to 76% whose family monthly income falls between 401 and 500 JD, and 86% of individuals whose income ranges between 1-200 JD, 201-300 JD and 301-400 JD.

This information indicates that the rise in levels of education and income partially contribute to lowering the percentage of fear of government criticism.

A total of 77% of respondents reported that they cannot criticize and disagree with the government in public without being subjected to security or living consequences, compared to 80.6% in the 2004 poll, and 83.2% in the 2003 poll. Therefore, the percentage of those who fear government criticism has slightly decreased. This decrease is not substantial from a statistical point of view, but it does correspond with other indices: the decrease in the percentage of fear of government criticism corresponds to a rise in the percentage of those who believe in the guarantee of public freedoms. 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 opposition political activities (e.g. demonstrations, sit-ins, brochures and articles, conferences, forums and political opposition rallies) without being subjected (themselves or their family members) to any consequences (security or living) remained 77% of respondents, compared to 70.9% in 1999, 77.6% in the 2003 poll and 78.7% in the 2004 poll. See *figure 5*.

Figure 5

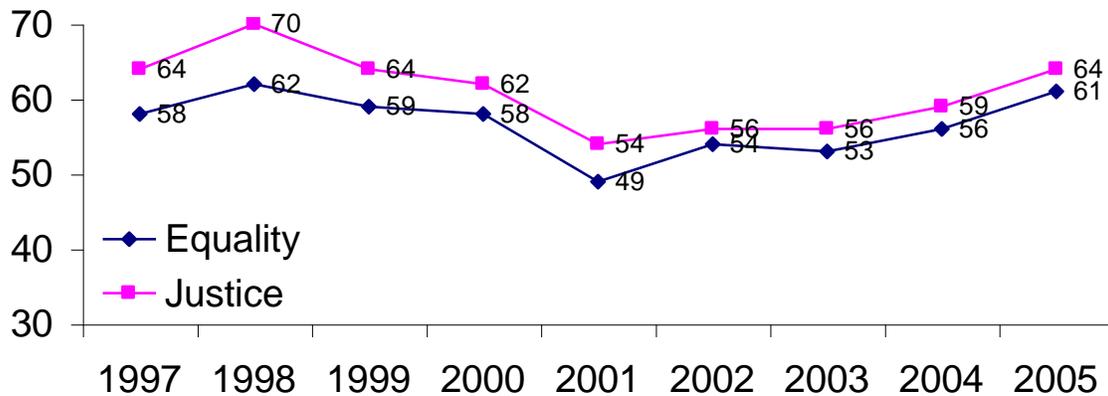


Justice, Equality and the Economy

There is a general impression among approximately 61% of respondents that Jordan is a country where equality prevails, compared with 55.99% in the 2004 poll. As for justice, 64% of respondents believe that Jordan is a country where justice prevails, compared with 58.66% in the 2004 poll. Perhaps the prevailing belief among 40.5% of Jordanians "that the principle of equal opportunities is not implemented in Jordan" explains the way Jordanians view the level of justice and equality in Jordan; this is compared with only 15.5% who believe it is implemented and 35% who stated it is implemented to a certain extent. It must be noted here that a slight improvement has taken place in this index as well when comparing these percentages with 47.3%, 10.5% and 36.7% in the 2004 poll.

Figure 6

Perceptions of the levels of equality and justice



With regard to justice and equality in distributing the returns of national income, approximately two thirds of Jordanians feel some form of injustice; 65% stated that the country's economy is utilized in service of people with interests and not all citizens, compared with 74.1% in the 2004 poll, which is the same percentage recorded in 2001 and 2003. It is worth noting here that the percentage of those who believe that the national economy is utilized to serve people with interests has decreased from approximately three quarters to two thirds. 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 deteriorated in the past twelve months: 45%, compared with 42.4% in the 2004 poll. This is in contrast to 12.6% who stated the economic situation has improved, compared with 13.4% in the 2004 poll. 41.8% stated their economic situation remained the same, compared with 43.4% in the 2004 poll. 43.3% of Jordanians believe the government is serious in fighting corruption compared with 39% who believe it is not.

IV. Political Parties

Evaluation of the Role of Parties

The position of respondents on the performance of political parties has not improved substantially. Approximately a third of respondents stated they do not know or are not concerned with whether the parties had been successful or not in practicing political work. In comparison with previous polls since 1996 and up to this poll, it is clear that the evaluation of Jordanians of the performance of political parties has not changed substantially, as public opinion still believes that the parties suffer from a crisis in coming down to the streets. When respondents were asked about whether political parties in Jordan work in service of the people or in service of their leadership, 53.5% stated that

they work in service of their leadership, compared with 49.1% in the 2004 poll. This is in contrast with 13.8% who stated they work in service of the people, compared with 12.8% in the 2004 poll. It should be noted that 29.7% stated they did not know, compared with 35.5% in the 2004 poll.

Party Popularity and Size among Citizens

Information from the poll indicates that all existing political parties represent only 6% of the political, social and economic aspirations of citizens compared with 9.8% in the 2004 poll. This means that more than 90% do not believe that the current parties represent their aspirations. *The Islamic Action Front was the most representative of political, social and economic aspirations of citizens, more than any other Jordanian political party, as stated by 4% of respondents in this poll, compared with 6.6% in the 2004 poll and 14.7% in the 2003 poll, which was executed after the parliamentary elections that took place on 17/6/2003.* The National Constitutional Party came in second place with 0.6%, which is the same percentage recorded for this party in the 2004 poll, compared with 1.0% in the 2003 poll. None of the parties had a percentage that exceeded 0.2%.

When respondents were asked the following question: "Which of the current parties in Jordan do you believe is qualified to form a government?" 82.4% said "none", compared with 84.2% in the 2004 poll. The Islamic Labor Front received 2.5% compared with 3.5% in the 2004 poll (this is different than representing the aspirations previously mentioned). In second place came the Constitutional National Party with 0.4%. As for the remaining parties, none had a percentage over 0.1%. The perceptions respondents have of parties reflect their view of the rise of a political party to power. 58.4% of respondents stated that they do not personally accept the rise of a political party that does not agree with them to power, compared with 57.7% in the 2004 poll. 13.4% said they would accept, compared with 11% in the 2004 poll. Perhaps this position on the rise of a political party to power indicates the level of political tolerance among the Jordanian public. The concept of the political party is still divided. When respondents were asked "which of these two statements is the closest to your point of view", 63.4% stated that the statement "The party is a political organization that seeks to participate in the political process without assuming power" is the closest to their point of view, compared with 63.7% in the 2004 poll. In contrast, 21.9% stated that the statement "The party is a political organization aimed at assuming power through constitutional means" is the closest to their point of view, compared with 25.1% in the 2004 poll. Perhaps this understanding reflects the separation that characterizes the relationship between political parties and the people in general.

V. Parliament and Citizen Priorities

Evaluation of Parliamentary Performance

49.8% of Jordanians believe that the current parliament does not practice its authority of government accountability, compared with 46.7% in the 2004 poll. 28.7% believe that parliament does not practice its authority of government accountability compared with 36.4% in the 2004 poll. This evaluation reflects the respondents' satisfaction with the performance of parliament. The percentage of those generally satisfied with the performance of Parliament totaled only 39%, which is the same percentage as the 2004 poll. There is an impression among only a quarter of the respondents that parliament was successful in passing laws to address the problems of unemployment, poverty and corruption. As for passing laws to fight price hikes, the percentage of those who believe parliament did so decreased to 18%. Only about a third of respondents believe that parliament was successful in passing laws to guarantee public freedoms. Overall, parliament does not enjoy the trust of most citizens.

The percentage of those who are generally satisfied with the performance of parliament matches the percentage of those satisfied with the performance of the MPs who won in the respondent's electoral constituency (it must be noted here that the sample was not drawn on the basis of electoral constituency divisions but rather the distribution of the population according to governorates. Therefore the results presented here do not represent the electoral constituencies themselves). The percentage was 37% compared with 39% in 2004. This means that the citizens do not differentiate between the performance of parliament in general and the performance of the MPs of their electoral constituencies for purposes of the evaluation. With regard to the communication of MPs with the voters, the percentage of those who believe the communication was sufficient was 29%, which is a low percentage, compared with approximately a third in the 2004 poll. 28% of the respondents also said that the follow-up of MPs of electoral constituencies of the nation's main issues and problems, and the issues and problems of the electoral constituency, was sufficient, compared with a third in the 2004 poll.

On the re-election of electoral constituency MPs, 20% of the respondents said they would re-elect the current MPs from their constituencies if elections were held now, compared with 24% in the 2004 poll. 70% stated they would not, compared with 64% in the 2004 poll. There are many visions and positions that contribute to the creation of such an opinion among two thirds of respondents who say they would not re-elect current MPs, namely that 69% of respondents believe the MPs were more concerned with their personal and family interests, which is the same percentage recorded in the 2004 poll. Only 17% stated that the MPs were more concerned with the society and nation's interests, compared with 18% in the 2004 poll.

In the 2003 poll, the following question was listed "did the absence of parliament for two years affect you positively or negatively?" The results were that the formed parliament did not leave a good impression of its efficiency among the majority of citizens. 64.3%

stated that the absence of parliament for two years did not affect them negatively or positively. 25% stated they were negatively affected by the absence of parliament, and 2.4% said the absence affected them positively. In the 2004 poll, 60.5% stated that the existence of parliament since 17/6/2003, and up to the date of the interview (October 2004), did not affect them negatively or positively, while the percentage of those who said that the existence of parliament did affect them positively was 10%. 22% said that the existence of parliament affected them negatively.

In the 2005 poll, 62% of respondents stated that parliament did not affect them negatively or positively, while 19.3% said it affected them negatively, and 10.5% said it affected them positively.

On the legislation passed by parliament in its first year of life, 11% stated that it would affect them positively, compared with 12% in the 2004 poll. 26% said it would affect them negatively, compared with 22% in the 2004 poll. 45% said it would not affect them positively or negatively, compared with 49% in the 2004 poll. 17% said they do not know what the affect of the legislation will be on them, compared with 18% in the 2004 poll.

Citizen Priorities

In confirmation of the former polls conducted by the Center, the Jordanian arrangement of priorities in this poll matched the replies in last year's poll. Contrary to many widespread expectations, foreign issues were not a priority among Jordanians. When respondents were asked for five problems facing Jordan and were asked to determine the most important problem which has priority in treatment, the problem of "poverty and unemployment" was listed as the most important problem with regard to priority in treatment, with a percentage of 54% compared with 52% in the 2004 poll and 58% in the 2003 poll. In second place came "financial and administrative corruption" with a percentage of 28% compared with 27% in the 2004 poll and 24.6% in the 2003 poll. The "Palestinian issue" came in third place with 8.9% compared with 17% in the 2004 poll and 13.7% in the 2003 poll. The issues of "enhancing democracy and freedom of expression" as well as "resolving the Iraqi issue", both came in fourth place with 1.2%. The ranking of the second most important problem facing Jordan with regard to priority of treatment was as follows: "financial and administrative corruption" with 40% compared with 33.5% in the 2004 poll and 32.9% in 2003, "poverty and unemployment" with 27.5% compared with 30.4% in the 2004 poll and 25.9%, "the Palestinian issue" with 14% compared with 18.4% in the 2004 poll and 25% in the 2003 poll, in last place came the "Iraqi issue" and "enhancing democracy and freedom of expression" with 6% for each.

VI. Broadcast Media

Most Reliable Sources for Local Political News

43% of respondents specified Jordan Television as the most trustworthy source of local political news, compared with 48% in 2004, and 52.2% in 2003; this is followed by Al Jazeera satellite channel with 27%, compared with 25% in the 2004 poll, and 20.6% in the 2003 poll.

Most Reliable Sources for Arab Political News

42% of respondents specified Al Jazeera satellite channel as the most trustworthy source of Arab political news, compared with 39% in 2004 and 35.5% in the 2003 poll; this was followed by Jordan Television with 29%, compared with 33% in the 2004 poll and 32.3% in the 2003 poll. Al Arabiya ranked next 12%, compared with 14% in the 2004 poll, and 7.9% in the 2003 poll.

Most Reliable Sources for International Political News

41% of respondents specified Al Jazeera satellite channel as the most trustworthy source of international political news, compared with the same percentage in the 2004 poll and 34.9% in the 2003 poll this was followed by Jordan Television with 26%, compared with 31% in the 2004 poll and 31.2% in the 2003 poll. Ranked next was Al Arabiya with 13%, compared with 14% in the 2004 poll, and 8.5% in the 2003 poll.

VII. Computer and Internet Usage

The percentage of those who use the computer rose from 29.5% in 2003 to 35% in 2004, and to 38% this year. The percentage of those who use the Internet has also risen since 2002, reaching 15.6%, 17.4% in 2003, 17.5% in 2004 and 22.8% this year. It is worth mentioning here that these percentages apply only to those aged 18 and above.

VIII. Membership in Civil Society Institutions

The percentage of those who stated that they belong to various civil society institutions, including unions, associations, organizations and clubs was 15% of total respondents, compared with 17% in the 2004 poll.