



Democracy in Jordan – 2006

Public Opinion Poll Unit

**Center for Strategic Studies
University of Jordan**

July 2006

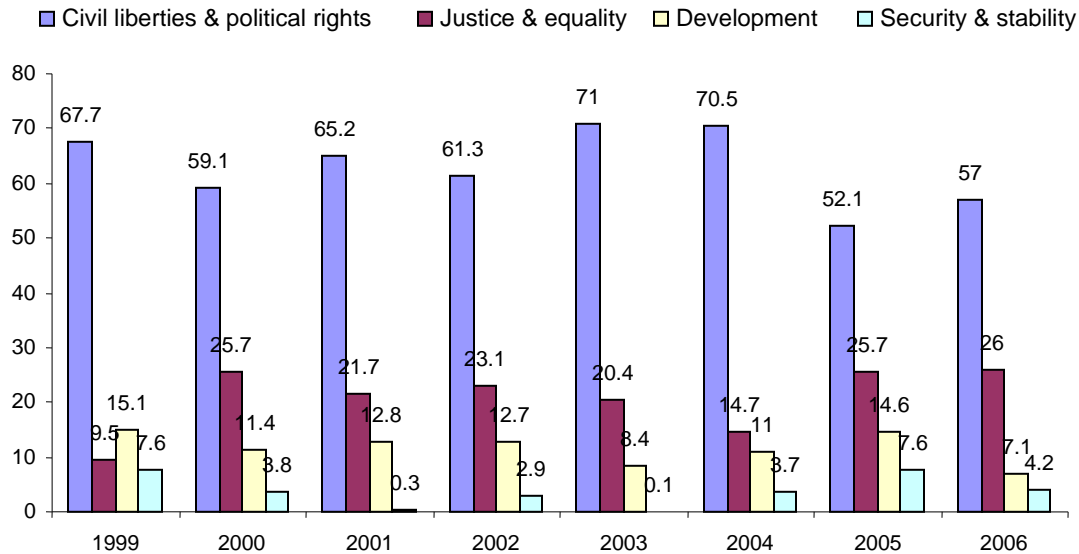
Introduction

The Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan conducted an opinion poll on democracy in Jordan in the period 27 June - 1 July 2006. This is the 13th annual poll carried out by the CSS as part of a research project on democratic transformation in Jordan. The size of the completed poll sample totaled 1115 respondents aged 18 and above with a margin of error of $\pm 3\%$. The poll aims to track the opinion of Jordanian citizens on democratic transformation in general by assessing the level of democracy as perceived by citizens, what democracy means to Jordanians, and what type of political system Jordanians prefer. Additionally, the degree to which public freedoms are guaranteed and perceived obstacles to democracy in Jordan were measured, as well as the role political parties and their respective popularity. The poll also evaluated the performance of the current parliament in drafting laws to address problems of unemployment, poverty, corruption, price hikes and 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 held by Jordanians: Are they external or internal? Political or economic? The importance of this topic arises from the fact that it has been prominent in national dialogue in Jordan in recent years. The poll also addressed visual and audio media and the extent of people's trust in it with regard to local, Arab and international political news. The major findings of the poll are presented in the following report.

I: 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 **two thirds** of the respondents. 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 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: The concept of democracy according to Jordanians



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

Preferred Political System

The great majority of Jordanians prefers the democratic political system, and rejects the authoritarian, undemocratic political system. 89% 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 83% in the 2005 poll, 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 (71%)** 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 2005 poll and 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. 51.7% 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 51% who described it this way in the 2005 poll, and 49% who described it this way in the 2004 poll. 2.3% believe that it is an authoritarian system, compared with 10.4% in 2005, and 12% in the 2004 poll. 11.2% believe it is a system

where technical experts make decisions they feel appropriate for the country, compared with 12% in 2005, and 11% in the 2004 poll.

As far as the link between democracy and economic development is concerned, 53.2% of Jordanians feel that the democratic system is the best system to improve the living conditions of their families, compared to 3.1% who believe in the authoritarian system, and 16.5% who believe in the success of a system of technical experts as being the best system to improve living conditions. Additionally, Jordanians see the democratic system as the best system to solve their economic problems, with 80.5% agreeing with the statement that “the best way to solve unemployment in Jordan is to create a parliamentary government that is elected every four years.” When it comes to the problem of poverty, 80.8% of Jordanians believe the democratic system is the best system to solve this problem. This matches similar answers to the problem of administrative and financial corruption, where 79.6% of Jordanians believing that democracy is also the best solution to this problem.

II: Level of Democracy

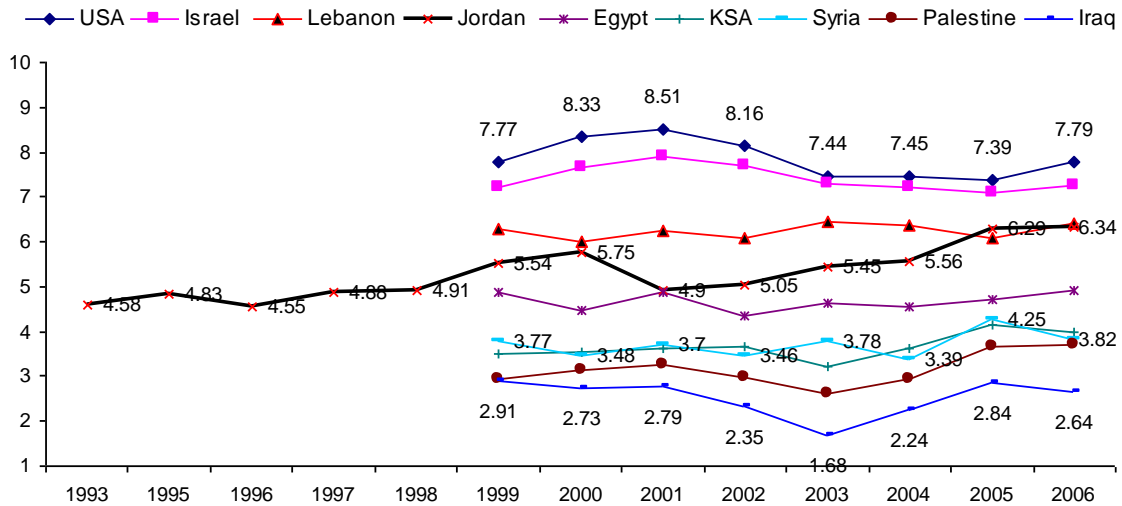
The evaluation of Jordanians of the level of democracy in their country and other countries reflects an advanced and sophisticated understanding of the content of democratic rule in general. Jordanians believe that the level of democracy in Jordan has remained static since last year, but has improved compared with the previous years since 1993. It has exceeded, for the second time since 1993, the six-point barrier, reaching 6.34, compared to 6.29 in 2005.

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. 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, 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

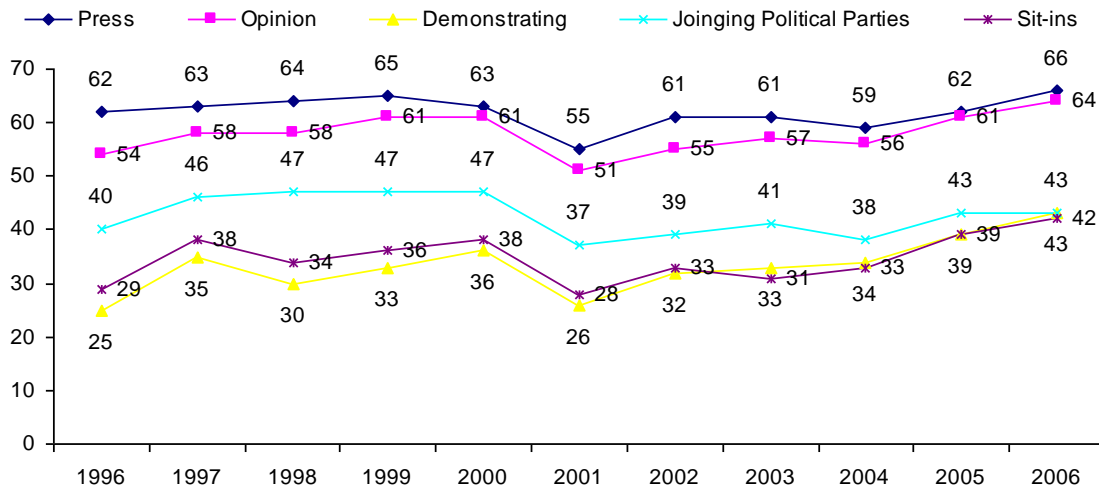


III: Democracy Indicators

Public Freedoms

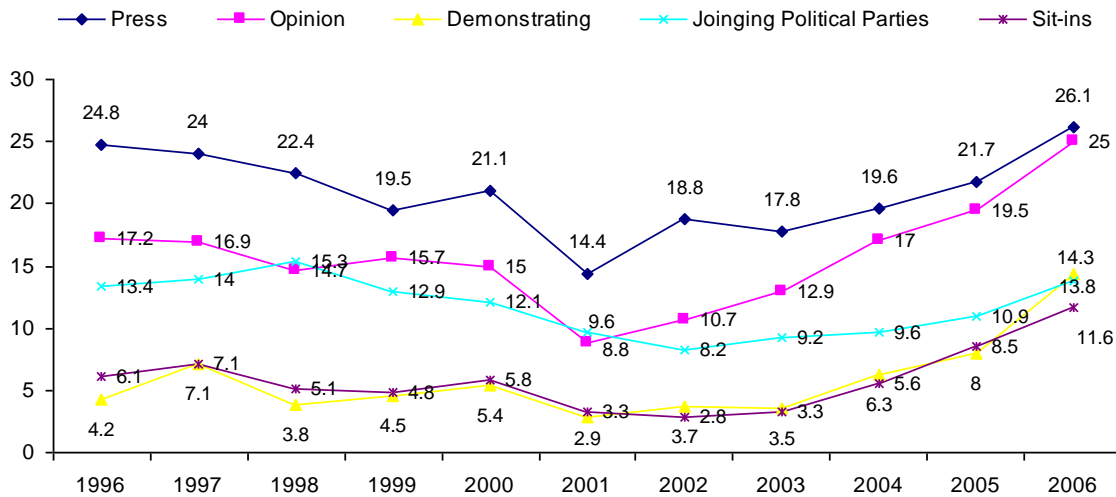
As most Jordanians define democracy in terms of public freedoms, it is necessary to determine their belief in the guarantee of these freedoms in Jordan. The results of this poll reflect a general air of optimism of a slightly improved level of freedoms, and perhaps this explains the recorded increase 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 65.5% of respondents in this poll, compared to 62% in 2005 and 59% in the 2004 poll. It is followed by freedom of opinion with 64.3% in this poll, compared to 61% in 2005 and 56% in the 2004 poll, and the freedom of membership in political parties, where only 43% believe is guaranteed in Jordan, which was the same percentage in 2005, and 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: Extent to which public freedoms are guaranteed



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), particularly with regard to joining political parties and demonstrating.

Figure 4: Percentage believing public freedoms guaranteed "to a great extent"

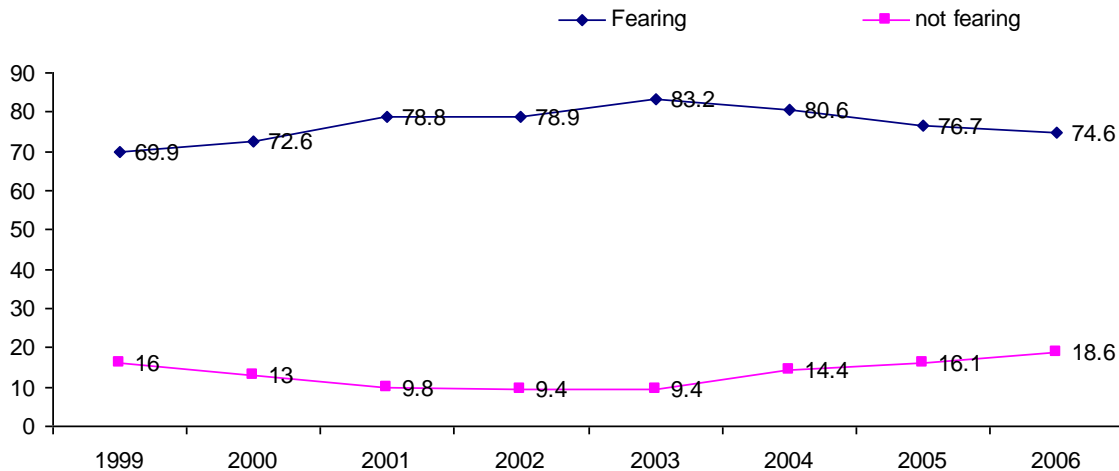


Fear of Criticizing the Government

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 2% stated they had been subjected to security or living punishments as a result of criticizing the government or participating in peaceful opposition activities.

A total of 74.6% of respondents reported that they cannot criticize and disagree with the government in public without being subjected to security or living consequences, compared to 76.7% in 2005, 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, such as: (demonstrations, sit-ins, brochures and articles, conferences, forums and opposition political forums) without being subjected as individuals or family members to any consequences (security or living) was 78.5% of respondents, compared to 70.9% in 1999, 77.6% in the 2003 poll, 78.7% in the 2004 poll, and 77% in 2005. See Figure 5.

Figure 5: Fear of publicly criticizing the government



IV: Barriers to Democracy

In order to measure public opinion regarding barriers to democracy, we asked respondents to pick the largest barrier to democracy in Jordan from a list of possible barriers. The largest barrier was “lack of regional stability” with 17.6%; however, if we were to add other answers, which fit into the category of regional stability—such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, instability in Iraq, among others, we find that regional stability in fact makes up 37.3%. The largest internal barriers were administrative and financial corruption and *wasta* (12.7%). Overall, we also find that 50% of respondents see external barriers to democracy, while 42.9% see internal barriers as more of a factor, as shown in Table (1).

Table 1: Obstacles to democracy in Jordan

Obstacles	%
Regional instability	17.6
Administrative and financial corruption	12.7
The U.S. does not want democracy in Jordan	11.0
Ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict	9.4
Fear of the alternative homeland for the Palestinians in Jordan	7.8
Fear of Islamist control of Parliament	4.9
Presence of tribalism in the society	4.9
Lack of political elites' desire to have democracy in Jordan	4.5
Lack of state seriousness to achieve democracy	4.5
Incompatibility of democracy with the society's culture	4.4
Society's lack of readiness to practice democracy	4.0
Lack of economic elites' desire to have democracy in Jordan	3.0
Ongoing instability in Iraq	2.5
Lack of democracy in neighboring countries	1.7
Other reasons	2.3
Don't know + decline to answer	4.7
Total	100

V: Political Parties

Evaluation of the Role of Parties

The position of respondents on the performance of political parties has not improved substantially. Approximately a quarter of respondents stated they do not know or are not concerned whether political parties had been successful or not in practicing politics. 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 a crisis in reaching out to the people. When respondents were asked about whether political parties in Jordan work in service of the people or in service of their leadership, 58.7% stated that they work in service of their leadership, compared with 53.3% in 2005 and 49.1% in the 2004 poll. This is in contrast with 14% who stated they work in service of the people, compared with 13.8% in 2005 and 12.8% in the 2004 poll. It should be noted that 24% stated they did not know, compared with 29.7% in 2005 and 35.5% in the 2004 poll.

Party Popularity among Citizens

Data from the poll indicates that all existing political parties represent only 6.8% of the political, social and economic aspirations of citizens compared with 6% in 2005 and 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 4.2% of respondents in this poll, compared with 4% in the 2005 poll, 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 0.7%, compared with 0.6% in the 2004 and 2005 polls, and 1.0% in the 2003 poll. None of the parties had a percentage that exceeded 0.5%.

When respondents were asked the following question: "Which of the current parties in Jordan do you believe is qualified to form a government?" 90.4% said "none", compared with 82.4% in 2005 and 84.2% in the 2004 poll. The Islamic Action Front received 2.5%, which is the same percentage received in 2005 compared to 3.5% in the 2004 poll (this is different than representing the aspirations previously mentioned). In second place came the Constitutional National Party with 0.6% compared to 0.4% in the 2005 poll. 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. 64% 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 58.4% in 2005 and 57.7% in the 2004 poll. 12.4% said they would accept, compared with 13.4% in 2005 and 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. Public opinion regarding the concept of the political party is still divided. When respondents were asked "which of these two statements is the closest to their point of view", 65.8% 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 63.4% in 2005 and 63.7% in the 2004 poll. In contrast, 24% 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 21.9% in 2005 and 25.1% in the 2004 poll. Perhaps this understanding reflects the gap that characterizes the relationship between political parties and the people in general.

Name Recognition of Political Parties

To discover the extent of knowledge about the existence of certain political parties, respondents were asked to mention the names of political parties they know exist, and then were told of those they did not mention, and were asked if they had heard of them before or not. The results show that the Islamic Action Front party is the most well known amongst Jordanians, where 47.4% knowing of the party's existence. This is followed by the National Constitutional Party with 25.1%, followed by the Jordanian Communist Party with 16.8%, and the Jordanian Arab Socialist Baath party with 14.9%. The other parties were known to less than 10% of the respondents, as shown in Table (2). These results point to the fact that most of the Jordanian political parties continue to suffer from the problem of reaching out to citizens and identifying themselves.

Table 2: Name recognition of political parties

Party Name	knew the party spontaneously	knew the party after reminding	did not know the party after reminding	declined to answer	not interested	total %
Islamic Action Front Party	47.4	20.8	23.1	4.3	4.4	100
National Constitution Party	21.5	20.7	48.7	4.2	4.8	100
Communist Party	16.8	15.8	58.4	4.2	4.8	100
Arab Socialist Baath Party	14.9	15	60.9	4.2	4.8	100
Democratic Popular Unity Party	8.3	12.9	69.8	4.2	4.7	100
Democratic People's Party	7.3	12.7	71.0	4.1	4.8	100
Pan-Arab National Party	6.6	12.6	71.7	4.2	4.8	100
Islamic Centrist Party	6.1	10.0	74.6	4.3	4.8	100
Covenant Party	5.8	7.8	77.3	4.1	4.8	100
Progressive Arab Baath Party	4.8	9.8	76.3	4.1	4.1	100
Islamic Arab Democratic Movement	4.2	11.1	75.7	4.1	4.8	100
Liberal Party	4.0	9.8	77.2	4.1	4.8	100
Labor Party	3.6	9.8	77.5	4.1	4.8	100
Renaissance Party	3.2	8.1	79.5	4.3	4.8	100
Citizen's Rights Movement	3.0	9.3	78.3	4.2	4.8	100
Nation Party	2.9	8.0	80.1	4.1	4.8	100
Future Party	2.8	9.2	79.0	4.1	4.8	100
Jordanian Arab Constitutional Front	2.6	8.3	80.1	4.1	4.8	100
Message Party	2.4	5.0	83.4	4.3	4.8	100
Justice and Development Party	2.3	4.9	83.6	4.3	4.8	100
Peace Party	2.1	8.2	80.7	4.1	4.8	100
Progressive Party	2.1	2.4	80.4	4.1	4.8	100
Pan-Arab Democratic Popular Party	2.0	7.0	82.0	4.1	4.8	100
Generations Party	1.9	6.2	82.9	4.1	4.8	100
Democratic Left Party	1.8	7.8	81.1	4.3	4.8	100
Arab Land Party	1.6	5.7	83.7	4.1	4.8	100
New Arab Dawn Party	1.6	6.4	82.8	4.1	4.8	100
Welfare Party	1.6	6.5	82.7	4.3	4.8	100
Freedom and Equality Party	1.6	8.2	81.0	4.3	4.8	100
Green Party	1.4	4.4	85.0	4.3	4.8	100
Arab Jordanian Party	1.3	5.5	84.0	4.3	4.8	100
"Ansar" Arab Jordanian Party	1.1	6.5	82.3	4.1	4.8	100
Communist Workers Party	1.0	3.7	86.1	4.3	4.8	100
People's Committee Party	0.9	5.1	84.8	4.3	4.8	100

VI: Parliament and Citizen Priorities

Evaluation of Parliamentary Performance

Roughly half (50.5%) of Jordanians believe that the current parliament does not exercise its authority of government accountability, compared with 49.8% in 2005 and 46.7% in

the 2004 poll. 32.3% believe that parliament exercises its authority of government accountability compared with 28.7% in 2005 and 36.4% in the 2004 poll. This evaluation reflects respondents' dissatisfaction with the performance of parliament. The percentage of those generally satisfied with the performance of Parliament totaled only 36.9%, compared to 39% in the 2004 and 2005 polls. 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. These percentages are almost identical to those recorded in the 2005 poll. As for passing laws to fight price hikes, the percentage of those who believe parliament did so remained 18.4%, which is the same percentage recorded in 2005 poll. Only about a third of respondents believe that parliament was successful in passing laws to guarantee public freedoms, which is the same percentage recorded in 2005 poll. 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). However, the percentage of satisfied respondents with their constituencies MPs was 31.5% compared with 37% in 2005 and 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 28.9%, compared to 29% in 2005, and with approximately a third in the 2004 poll. 29.7% of the respondents also said that the follow-up of MPs of electoral constituencies and the nation's main issues and problems, and the issues and problems of the electoral constituency, was sufficient, compared with 28% in 2005 and a third in the 2004 poll.

On the re-election of electoral constituency MPs, 20.4% of the respondents said they would re-elect the current MPs from their constituencies if elections were held now, compared with 20% in 2005 and 24% in the 2004 poll. 68.3% stated they would not, compared with 70% in 2005 and 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 71.2% of respondents believe the MPs were more concerned with their personal and family interests, which is the same percentage recorded in the 2004 poll, and compared to 69% in 2005. Only 17.4% stated that the MPs were more concerned with the society and nation's interests, compared with 17% in 2005 and 18% in the 2004 poll.

In the 2003 poll, the following question was asked "did the absence of parliament for two years affect you positively or negatively?" The results were that the former parliament did not leave a good impression of its efficiency among the majority of citizens as 64.3% stated that the absence of parliament for two years affected them neither negatively nor 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%, and 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. In this poll (2006) 56.8% of respondents stated that parliament did not affect them negatively or positively, while 27.9% said it affected them negatively, and 8.4% said it affected them positively.

On legislations passed by parliament so far, 10% stated that these legislations would affect them positively, compared with 11% in 2005 and 12% in the 2004 poll. 30.2% said it would affect them negatively, compared with 26% in 2005 and 22% in the 2004 poll. 46.6% said it would not affect them positively or negatively, compared with 45% in 2005 and 49% in the 2004 poll. 13.1% said they do not know what the affect of the legislation will be on them, compared with 17% in 2005 and 18% in the 2004 poll.

Citizens' Priorities

In confirmation of the results of former polls conducted by the Center, the Jordanian arrangement of priorities in this poll matched the order of priorities in last year's poll. Contrary to many widespread expectations, foreign issues were not a priority for Jordanians. When respondents were asked about five problems facing Jordan today and were asked to rank them according to the most important priority of these problems to be dealt with, the problem of "poverty and unemployment" was listed as the most important problem with regard to priority in tackling, with a percentage of 52.9% compared with 54% in 2005, 52% in the 2004 poll and 58% in the 2003 poll. In second place came "financial and administrative corruption" with a percentage of 34% compared with 28% in 2005, 27% in the 2004 poll and 24.6% in the 2003 poll. The "Palestinian issue" came in third place with 7% compared with 8.9% in 2005, 17% in the 2004 poll and 13.7% in the 2003 poll. The issues of "enhancing democracy and freedom of expression" came in fourth with 4.2%, and "resolving the Iraqi issue" came in with 1.9%. The ranking of the second most important problem facing Jordan with regard to priority of treatment was as follows: "financial and administrative corruption" with 39.1% compared with 40% in 2005, 33.5% in the 2004 poll and 32.9% in 2003, "poverty and unemployment" with 34.8% compared with 27.5% in 2005, 30.4% in the 2004 poll and 25.9%, "the Palestinian issue" with 14.7% compared with 14% in 2005, 18.4% in the 2004 poll and 25% in the 2003 poll, then came "enhancing democracy and freedom of expression" with 6.1%, and finally the "issue of Iraq" with 5.2%.

VII: Visual and Audio Media

Sources Most Trusted for Local Political News

43% of respondents specified Jordan Television as the most trustworthy source of local political news, compared with the same percentage in 2005, 48% in 2004, and 52.2% in 2003; this is followed by Al Jazeera satellite channel with 29%, compared with 27% in 2005, 25% in the 2004 poll, and 20.6% in the 2003 poll.

Sources Most Trusted for Arab Political News

45.3% of respondents specified Al Jazeera satellite channel as the most trustworthy source of Arab political news, compared with 42% in 2005, 39% in 2004 and 35.5% in the 2003 poll; this was followed by Jordan Television with 25%, compared with 29% in 2005, 33% in the 2004 poll and 32.3% in the 2003 poll. Next came Al Arabiya channel with 17.5%, compared with 12% in 2005, 14% in the 2004 poll, and 7.9% in the 2003 poll.

Sources Most Trusted for International Political News

44.3% 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, 41% in 2005, and 34.9% in the 2003 poll this was followed by Jordan Television with 24.2%, compared with 26% in 2005, 31% in the 2004 poll and 31.2% in the 2003 poll. Next came Al Arabiya channel with 17.5%, compared with 13% in 2005, 14% in the 2004 poll, and 8.5% in the 2003 poll.

VIII: Spread of Computers and Internet

The percentage of those who use the computer rose from 29.5% in 2003 to 35% in 2004, to 38% in 2005, and has remained at that level (38% in 2006). The percentage of those who use the Internet has risen since 2002, where it had been 15.6%, and rising to 17.4% in 2003, 17.5% in 2004, 22.8% in 2005, and has remained at that level (22.2%) this year. It is worth mentioning here that these percentages apply only to those aged 18 and above.