Democracy in Jordan 2007

Public Opinion Poll Unit

Center for Strategic Studies
**University of Jordan**

December 2007

Introduction

The Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan conducted an opinion poll about democracy in Jordan during the period Nov. 29 - Dec. 4, 2007. This is the 14th annual poll that the Center has executed as part of the study of democratic transformation in Jordan. The size of the completed poll sample was 1,133 respondents aged 18 and above, while 67 individuals declined to take part in the poll, making the participation rate 94% and the rejection rate 6%. This poll aims to identify the views of Jordanians about the democratic transformation in Jordan. It measures the level of democracy as perceived by citizens, identifies what democracy means to Jordanians, what type of political system Jordanians prefer, and what political system they perceive as the best to address the issues of poverty, unemployment, and financial and administrative corruption. Additionally, the poll gauges the degree to which public freedoms are guaranteed and explores the factors that pose the largest obstacles to democracy in Jordan. The role of the political parties and the extent of their popularity are also assessed. Furthermore, the poll tackles the extent of participation in the 15th parliamentary elections, and the political orientations for which citizens voted. The poll also evaluates the integrity of the 15th parliamentary elections at the national and electoral district levels. The extent to which people thought the 15th parliamentary elections were free and fair is compared to the 14th parliamentary election and to the municipal elections which were held on July 31, 2007. The poll also addresses audio-visual media and the degree of people's trust in it with regard to local, Arab and international political news. The most important results of the poll are presented below.

I. Concept of Democracy

Most Jordanians conceptualize democracy as closely related to civil and political liberties. This understanding, in essence, does not differ from the concept of democracy in developed democratic countries. Since the 1999 poll and until the time of this poll, 63% of total responses defined democracy as civil liberties and political rights. Alongside this political perception of democracy, there is a sociological understanding that defines democracy by linking it with justice and equality (21%), and with social, political and economic development (12%). A small percentage of respondents defined democracy as security and stability (4%), as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: The meaning of democracy according to Jordanians**
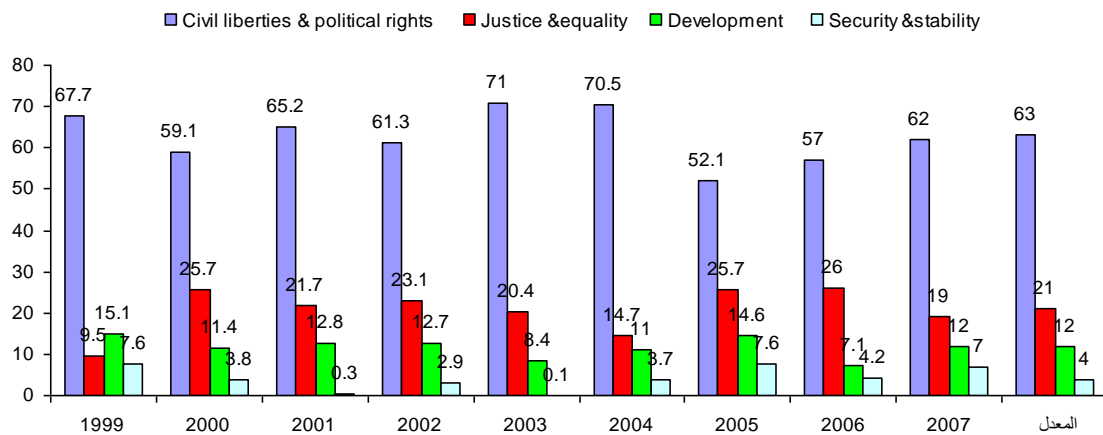
Note: Respondents had the opportunity to express the three most important factors that must be present in any country in order to classify that country as democratic. Percentages in this poll were calculated out of the total number of answers rather than respondents. Percentages were recalculated based on the responses from democracy polls of previous years to facilitate comparisons.

The suitable political system for Jordan:

Previous polls indicated that the overwhelming majority of Jordanians prefer the democratic political system and reject the authoritarian system. For this poll, we posed a new set of questions evaluating this position with different wording in order to test the extent of the Jordanian public's consistency with regard to democracy. The poll results show that the position of Jordanians towards democracy is positive despite the changed questions, as the difference in their position was a matter of degree and not of nature. 50% of respondents think that "a parliamentary system in which nationalist, leftist, rightist and Islamist parties compete through parliamentary elections" is a very suitable system (25%) or suitable for Jordan (25%). 16% of respondents indicated that this system is somewhat suitable while 24% think it is completely unsuitable for Jordan. Comparing Jordanians' opinions with the opinions of other Arab societies reveals that Jordan does not differ significantly from the Algerian and Kuwaiti societies regarding the extent to which its citizens think that this system is suitable for Jordan. Meanwhile, a larger percentage of members of the Palestinian and Lebanese societies think that this is a suitable political system for them as shown in Figure 2.

Figure No. 2: The extent to which "a parliamentary system in which nationalist, leftist, rightist and Islamist parties compete through parliamentary elections" is suitable for Jordan compared with the opinions of citizens of other Arab societies regarding the extent to which this system is suitable for them.
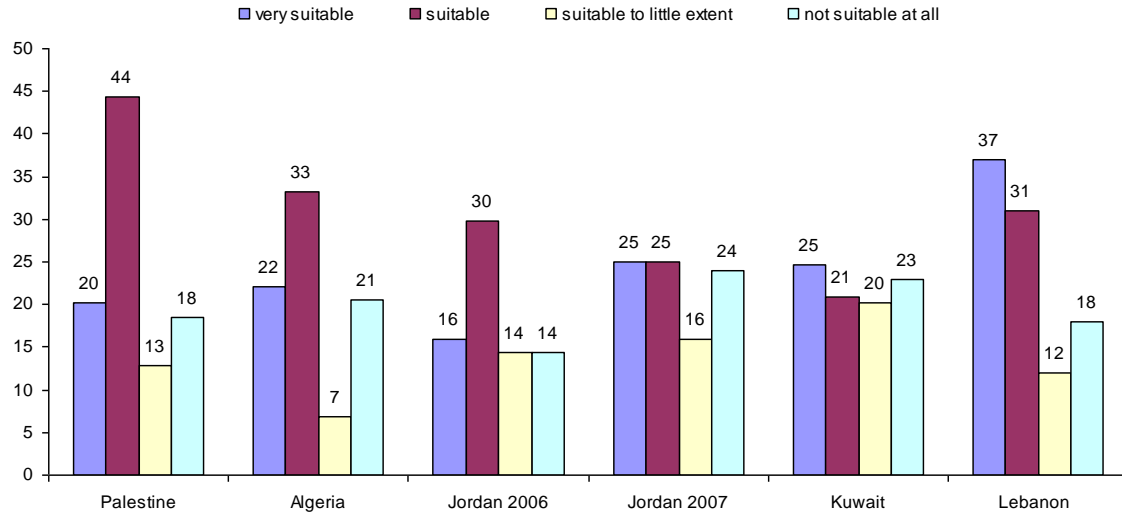
Source: Data taken from the Democracy in Jordan poll 2007\And the Arab Barometer Survey. Center for Strategic Studies – University of Jordan.

Despite the presence of other preferences in Jordanian public opinion, the public's rejection of political authoritarianism is evident in its absolute rejection of "a parliamentary system in which only Islamist parties compete", as the percentage of those who said that this system is absolutely unsuitable for Jordan was 51%. Likewise, the Jordanian public rejects religious and other forms of authoritarianism, as evidenced by 59% of Jordanians saying that "a political system ruled by a strong authority that makes decisions without considering election results or opposition opinions", is not suitable at all for Jordan as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1:

I will mention some of the political systems that currently exist in some Middle Eastern countries, and I would like to know the extent to which these systems would be suitable in Jordan.				
	A parliamentary system in which only Islamist parties compete in parliamentary elections	A political system ruled by a strong authority that makes decisions without considering election results or opposition opinions	A system governed by Islamic Shari'a without elections or political parties	A parliamentary system in which nationalist, leftist, rightist and Islamist parties compete through parliamentary elections
Very Suitable	7	8	23	25
Suitable	16	12	16	25
Somewhat Suitable	15	14	15	16
Absolutely Unsuitable	**51**	**59**	**37**	24
Don't Know	11	10	9	12

The largest percentage of Jordanians thinks that a competitive parliamentary political system is the "best" to solve the problems of unemployment, poverty and financial and administrative corruption. 38% of respondents think this system is the best to solve the problem of financial and administrative corruption, 33% think that it is the best to solve the poverty problem, and 35% think it is the best to solve the unemployment problem. Although the "system governed by Islamic Shari'a without elections or political parties" was ranked second, this position is closer to "respect" for the idea of Shari'a rather than support for the Political Islam, because the parliamentary system in which only Islamist parties compete obtained the lowest percentage of responses among the four systems. As will be shown below, the percentage of those who voted for the Islamic Action Front Party (as an indicator) was significantly lower than the percentage of those who preferred this system to solve the economic problems facing Jordanian society, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2:

Which of the following systems is the best for addressing the issue of "poverty"…	Administrative and Financial Corruption	Poverty	Unemployment
A parliamentary system in which	9	10	8

only Islamist parties compete in parliamentary elections			
A political system ruled by a strong authority that makes decisions without considering election results or opposition opinions	14	15	15
A system governed by Islamic Shari'a without elections or political parties	28	28	28
A parliamentary system in which nationalist, leftist, rightist and Islamist parties compete through parliamentary elections	**38**	**33**	**35**
None of these systems	5	5	3
Don't know	8	9	9
Total	100	100	100

II: Level of Democracy

The Jordanian public's evaluation of the level of democracy in Jordan decreased compared to last year despite the fact that municipal elections were held on July 31, 2007 and parliamentary elections were held on November 20, 2007. The level of democracy in this poll was 5.7 on a scale of 10 down from 6.3 in 2006. This decrease represents a statistically significant change in the Jordanian public's perspective of the level of democracy in Jordan compared with last year. Jordanians' evaluation of the level of democracy in their country and other countries reflects an advanced understanding of the content of democratic governance in general. The Jordanian public believes that the level of democracy in Jordan has improved compared with its level in 1993, but that it is still only halfway to being fully democratic despite the fact that 17 years have passed since the inception of the democratic transformation as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The Jordanian public's evaluation of the level of democracy in Jordan and a number of other countries. A score of 10 indicates the highest level of democracy and a score of 1 indicates that the country is still in the early stages of democracy.
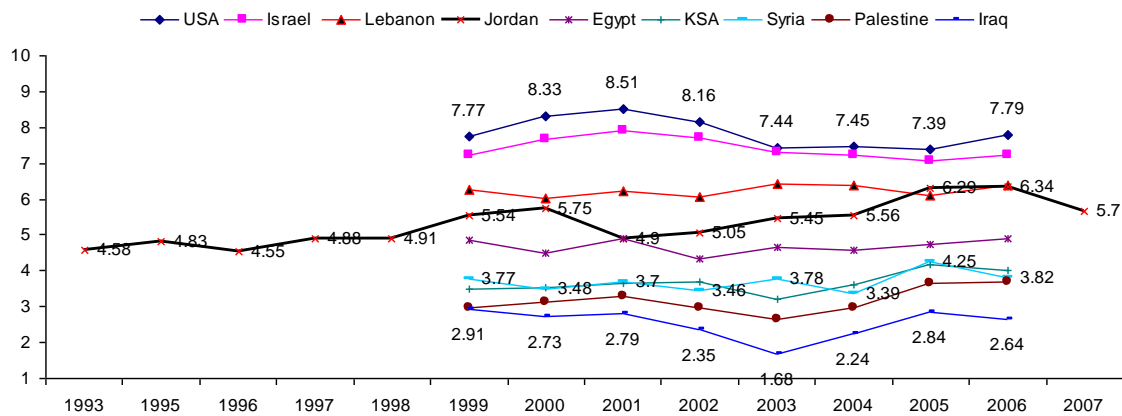

When comparing the level of democracy in Jordan with other countries, we find that Jordanians evaluate the United States of America and Israel as democracies, in spite of the fact that their evaluations of these two democracies decreased slightly after the war on Iraq in 2003. There was no significant change in the evaluation despite a slight increase in Jordanians' assessment of the level of democracy in the United States, from 7.4 to 7.8. They evaluate Saudi Arabia, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq as undemocratic countries. This assessment is consistent with previous evaluations of the level of democracy in these countries since 1999, reflected in the rates that were calculated for every country from 1999 until 2006 as shown in Figure 4. Iraq occupies the lowest rank among the countries included in the study. It is notable that Jordanians' evaluation of the level of democracy in Iraq did not increase from its 1999 level in any of the polls conducted since. This is an indication that the Jordanian public is not convinced that the current political events in Iraq constitute a transformation towards democracy.

It is important to point out that respondents' evaluation of the levels of democracy in different countries depend on the extent of their understanding of the concept of democracy. This understanding is linked to a great extent with civil liberties and political rights, and does not necessarily reflect an objective evaluation of the internal democratic performance, or lack thereof, of the countries included in the poll. However, this evaluation is an important indicator that should not be ignored.

Figure 4:

Average mean for the level of democracy in these countries according to Jordanian Public Opinion
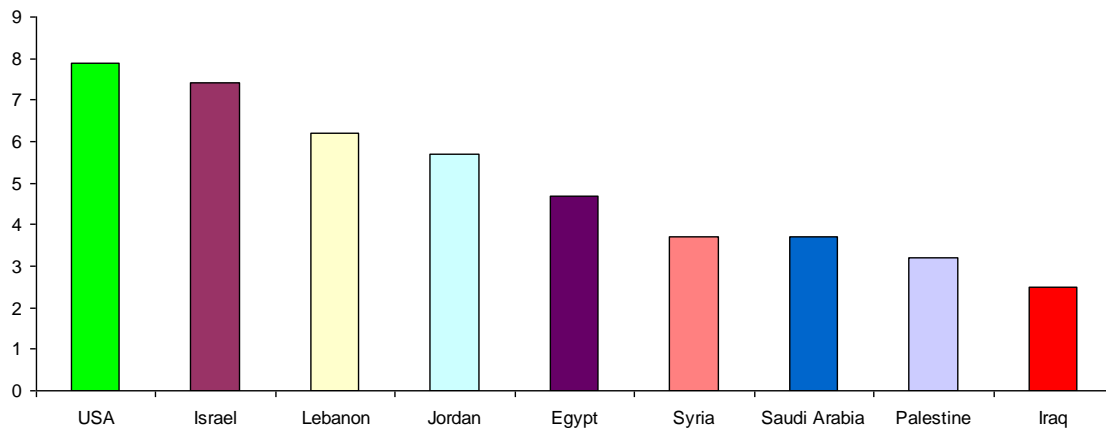

III: Democracy Indicators

Public Freedoms

As most Jordanians define democracy as public freedoms, it is necessary to determine the extent of their belief that these freedoms are guaranteed in Jordan. The results of this poll reflect a general trend indicating a slight decrease in the extent to which the Jordanian public believes that public freedoms are guaranteed. It is noteworthy that this decrease reflects the decrease in the evaluation of the level of democracy in Jordan. Arithmetic means of responses on the freedom of opinion, freedom of the press and the freedom to join political parties indicate that these freedoms are guaranteed to a certain extent. The freedom of the press is considered the most guaranteed freedom, as stated by 63% of poll respondents, compared with 66% of respondents in the 2006 poll, 62% in the 2005 poll and 59% in the 2004 poll. Freedom of the press is followed by freedom of opinion with 59%, compared with 64.3% in the 2006 poll, 61% in 2005 and 56% in 2004. As for the freedom to join political parties, only 40% of respondents believe that this freedom is guaranteed in Jordan, compared with 43% in both the 2006 and 2005 polls and 38% in the 2004 poll as indicated in Figure 5. With regard to the freedom to demonstrate and organize sit-ins, despite a slight increase in the percentage of respondents who believed that these freedoms were guaranteed in 2006, this percentage decreased significantly in this poll. The percentage of respondents who believe that the freedom to demonstrate is guaranteed decreased from 43% in 2006 to 35% in this poll, and the percentage for the freedom to organize sit-ins also decreased from 42% in 2006 to 34% in this poll. Despite this change, as indicated in Figure 5 the majority of respondents still believe that these freedoms are not guaranteed (65% and 66% respectively).

Figure 5: Arithmetic means of responses regarding the extent to which public freedoms are guaranteed in Jordan
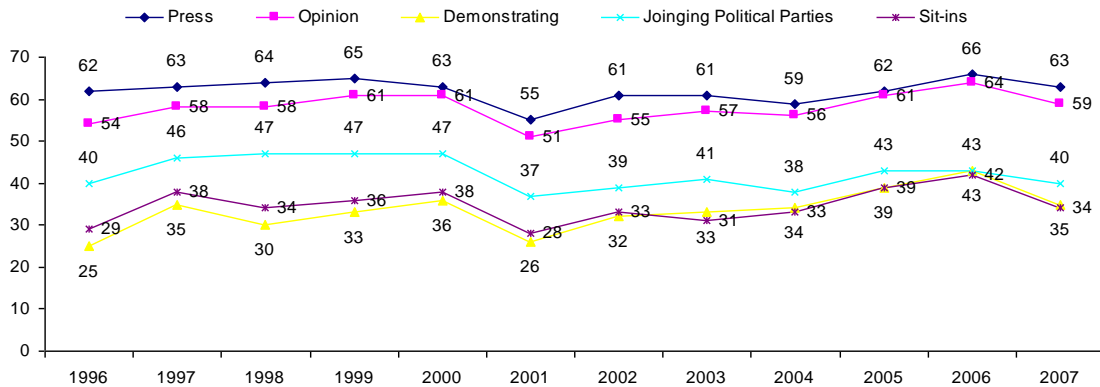
Elaborating on the above results, we find that the decrease in the percentage of respondents who believe that public freedoms are guaranteed "to a great extent" reflects the decrease in the level of democracy. In general, the percentages of those who believe that they are able to express their opinions without risk (who are the same individuals who believe these freedoms are guaranteed to a great extent) are very small, particularly with regard to demonstrating, organizing sit-ins and joining political parties. We find that compared with the percentages for 2006, the freedoms of "written and oral expression" decreased, but the freedom of "physical expression" decreased more significantly such as the freedom to demonstrate, organize sit-ins, and join political parties, as shown in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Extent to which freedoms are guaranteed – to a great extent**
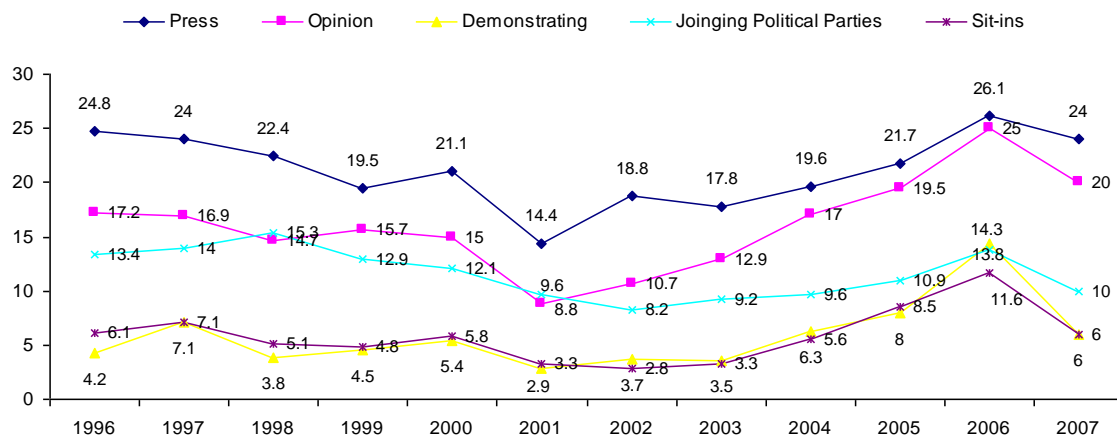
Fear

It seemed very clear that the fear of **publicly criticizing the government** and disagreeing with it is based on perceptions and impressions that respondents formed previously. These impressions and perceptions continued to constitute the reference framework for respondents with regard to **criticizing the government**. Despite the fact that

approximately three quarters of respondents stated that they are afraid of publicly criticizing the government because they fear persecution related to their security status or livelihoods, only 1.2% said that they had been subjected to such persecution as a result of criticizing the government or participating in peaceful opposition activities. When those individuals were asked about the type of punishment they were subjected to, 4 of them said they were imprisoned, one said that he was subjected to "psychological punishment", one described "administrative detention", three said that they were subjected to interrogation, one cited "referral to the governor", two mentioned "threats of beatings and imprisonment" and one mentioned "passport revocation." When these statements are compared with the ages of the respondents, it becomes clear that most of these punishments were imposed on people over the age of 34, while those under the age of 34 described imprisonment and interrogation.

A total of 78% of respondents stated that they cannot publicly criticize or disagree with the government without exposing themselves and their family members to persecution related to their security situations or livelihoods, compared with 74.6% in the 2006 poll, 76.7% in the 2005 poll, 80.6% in the 2004 poll and 83.2% in the 2003 poll. Therefore, the percentage of respondents who fear criticizing the government has increased slightly. This increase is not statistically significant, but it does correspond with other indicators: the increase in the fear of criticizing the government corresponds with the decrease in the percentage of respondents who believe that public freedoms are guaranteed. In general, the percentage of fear remains high, as it was 69.9% in 1999. The percentage of respondents who believe they cannot participate in peaceful political opposition activities such as: (demonstrations, sit-ins, pamphlets and articles, conferences, workshops and political opposition forums) without exposing themselves and their family members to any consequences (related to security or their livelihood) was 82% in this poll, compared with 78.5% in 2006, 77% in 2005, 70.9% in 1999, 77.6% in 2003 and 78.7% in 2004. (See Figure 7).

Figure 7: Fear of publicly criticizing the government
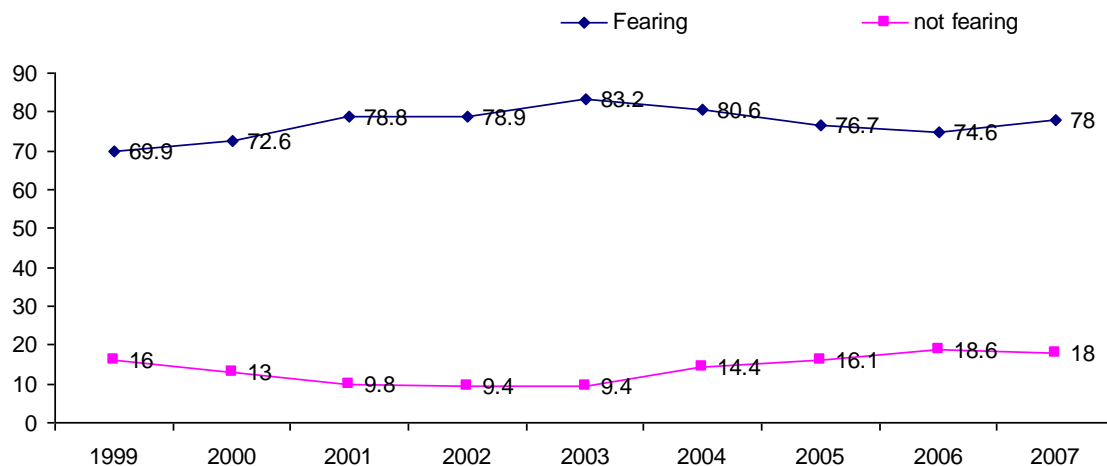
IV: Obstacles to Democracy

In order to determine the Jordanian public's position regarding the issues that constitute obstacles to democracy in Jordan, we asked respondents to choose the most prominent obstacle to democracy in Jordan from a list of possible obstacles. The most prominent obstacle was "the spread of financial and administrative corruption, favoritism and nepotism" at 18.9%, followed by "regional instability" at 9.8%. If we add to that the percentages for other factors which fit into the category of regional instability but are more specific, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, instability in Iraq and fear about the issue of the alternative homeland for Palestinians in Jordan, we find that the regional instability issue constitutes 27.4%, down 10 percentage points from 2006, when it accounted for 37.3%. When comparing internal and external obstacles, we find that 40.1% of respondents perceive the obstacles to democracy as external in this poll, compared with 50% in the 2006 poll, while 52.8% of respondents think that the obstacles to democracy in Jordan are internal, compared with 42.9% in the 2006 poll. These figures are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Most prominent obstacles to democracy in Jordan:

Obstacles	Type of Obstacle	Percentage 2006	Percentage 2005
Administrative and financial corruption, favoritism and nepotism	Internal	12.7	18.9
Regional instability	External	17.6	9.8
The U.S. does not want democracy in Jordan	External	11.0	9.3
Tribalism in the society	Internal	4.9	8.2
Ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict	External	9.4	7.1
Fear of the alternative homeland for the Palestinians in Jordan	External	7.8	6.8
Society's lack of readiness to practice democracy	Internal	4.0	6.7
Fear of Islamist control of Parliament	Internal	4.9	4.1
Incompatibility of Jordanian culture with democracy	Internal	4.4	4.1
Lack of political elites' desire to have democracy in Jordan	Internal	4.5	3.9
Lack of executive authority's seriousness about the democratic transformation in Jordan	Internal	4.5	3.9
Ongoing lack of stability in Iraq	External	2.5	3.7
Lack of democratic systems in neighboring countries	External	1.7	3.4
Lack of desire of economic elites to have democracy in Jordan	Internal	3.0	3.0
Other reasons		2.3	0.7
Don't know + refused to answer		4.7	6.4
Total		100	100

V: Political Parties

Evaluation of the Performance of the Parties

The position of the respondents regarding the performance of the political parties did not significantly improve. Approximately one-fourth of respondents stated that they did not know or are not concerned with whether the parties were successful or not in their political work. When comparing previous polls since 1996 and through the current poll, it is clear that Jordanians' evaluation of the performance of political parties has not changed substantially, as the Jordanian public still believes that the parties are suffering a political crisis in terms of their ability to reach the people. When respondents were asked whether political parties in Jordan work to serve the interests of the people or the interests of party leaders, 61.5% of respondents said that they work to serve the interests of their leaders compared with 58.7% in the 2006 poll, 53.3% in the 2005 poll, and 49.1% in the 2004 poll. In contrast, 13% of respondents in this poll said that the parties work to serve the interests of the people, compared with 14% in 2006, 13.8% in 2005, and 12.8% in 2004. It is notable that 24.4% of respondents stated that they did not know, compared with 24% in the 2006 poll, 29.7% in 2005 and 35.3% in 2004.

The popularity of parties among citizens

The information obtained from the poll indicates that all existing political parties represent only 9.7% of the political, social and economic aspirations of citizens, compared with 6.8% in the 2006 poll, 6% in 2005, and 9.8% in 2004. This result means that more than 90% of respondents do not think that the existing parties represent their aspirations. The Islamic Action Front was more representative of citizens' political, social and economic aspirations than any other Jordanian political party, as indicated by 5.6% of respondent in this poll compared with 4.2% in 2006, 4% in 2005, 6.6% in 2004, and 14.7% of respondents in the 2003 poll that was conducted after the parliamentary elections held on June 17, 2003. The National Constitutional Party occupied ranked second with .7% of responses, which was the same percentage of responses for the Party in the 2006 poll. These results are compared with .6% of responses in the 2005 and 2004 polls and 1% in 2003. None of the other parties obtained percentages of responses exceeding .5%.

When respondents were asked the following question: "Which of the existing parties in Jordan do you believe is qualified to form a government?", 80% of respondents said "none", compared with 90.4% in 2006, 82.4% in 2005, and 84.2% in 2004. The Islamic Action Front received 3.4% of responses in this poll, compared with 2.5% in the 2006 and 2005 polls and 3.5% in the 2004 poll (this result is different from the representation of aspirations mentioned above). The National Constitutional Party was second with 1.1% of responses in this poll compared with .6% in the 2006 poll and .4% in the 2005 poll. As for the rest of the parties, they did not receive percentages of responses over .3%. Respondents' opinions about the parties are reflected in their positions regarding

the potential rise of such parties to power – 68.9% of respondents said that they would not personally accept the rise of a political party that they did not agree with to power, compared with 64% in the 2006 poll, 58.4% in 2005, and 57.7% in 2004. 12.5% of respondents said they would accept such a situation, compared with 12.4% in 2006, 13.4% in 2005, and 11% in 2004.

The understanding of political parties among the Jordanian public is still divided. When respondents were asked, "Which of these two statements is closer to your point of view?", 60.9% 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 opinion, while 65.8% of respondents chose this statement in 2006, 63.4% in the 2005 poll and 63.7% in the 2004 poll. In contrast, 31.6% of respondents said that the statement "The party is a political organization that aims to assume power through constitutional means" is closer to their opinion, compared with 24% in the 2006 poll, 21.9% in the 2005 poll, and 25.1% in the 2004 poll. This understanding could reflect the gap that characterizes the relationship between the political parties and the people in general.

VI: The 15th Parliamentary Elections

Participation in the Elections

55% of respondents said that they voted in the 15th parliamentary elections. 79.5% of those who voted said that they voted in the electoral districts in which they live, while 20% said that they voted in a different electoral district. Regarding the extent of the efficacy of the election campaigns in reaching out to voters, 26% of the total number of respondents stated that one of the candidates or one of their campaign members contacted them during the election campaign, and this percentage constitutes 45.7% of those who actually voted. Of those who said that one of the candidates or a member of their campaign contacted them, 29.9% said that they voted for that candidate as a result of this personal communication.

Regarding **voting decisions**, 62.1% of respondents who voted stated that they chose the candidate they voted for more than three weeks before election day. 13.2% said they decided who to vote for three weeks before election day, 5.8% said they decided two weeks before the elections, 8.8% said they decided one week before the elections and 8.7% decided who to vote for on election day itself.

As for **transportation of voters to polling stations**, only 16.5% of respondents said that they reached polling stations using one of the transportation methods provided by the candidates. The majority of those who voted, 59.6%, said that they went to the polling stations with their families or friends, while 14.7% said that they went alone.

Regarding the **buying and selling of votes**, 16% of respondents stated that they personally received offers to buy their votes or that one of their relatives or friends received such offers. As for the pervasiveness of this phenomenon in the electoral

districts in which respondents voted, 15.8% of those who voted said that the practice of buying and selling votes was widespread to a very great extent, 14% to a great extent, 15.9% to a limited extent and 9% to a very limited extent. 37% of respondents who voted said that the practice was absolutely not widespread in their electoral districts. It is important to note that 95% of Jordanians believe that this practice has a negative impact on democracy.

In regard to the **integrity of the elections**, 21.8% of the total number of respondents indicated that the 15th parliamentary elections were not free and fair, compared with 18% who expected that they would not be free and fair in polls conducted prior to the elections. 66.4% of respondents stated that the elections were free and fair, compared with 54% who expected them to be free and fair in pre-election polls. 11.1% of respondents said they did not know, while 27.7% said they did not know before the elections. With regard to the electoral districts, 77.4% of those who voted said that the elections were free and fair in the electoral districts in which they voted, while 17.3% said that they were not.

The phenomenon of buying and selling votes was the **most important reason** that respondents cited for their belief that the elections were not free and fair, as indicated by 70% of respondents. The second position was occupied by procedural problems at 10%, then problems with identity cards at 2%. There were a number of other various reasons.

When asked to **compare the extent of the integrity of the parliamentary elections to the extent of the integrity of the municipal elections** held on July 31, 2007, 41.7% of respondents perceived that the parliamentary elections were more free and fair, 27% said that they displayed the same level of integrity and 15% said that they were less free and fair than the municipal elections. The Jordanian public's evaluation of integrity of the municipal elections held on July 31, 2007 was as follows: 42% said that the elections were free and fair, 33.5% said that they were not free and fair and 23.5% said that they did not know if the elections were free and fair or not.

Regarding voting behavior, the results showed that the largest percentage of voters voted along tribal lines, as this group was 34.5%, followed by those who voted for independent loyalists, 31.8%, then those who voted for independents, 6.4%, the Islamic Action Front party, 4.5%, and opposition independents, 4.2%.

It is clear that the voting behavior of voters before the election was different from actual voting behavior when the results of pre-election polls are compared with post-election polls, as indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. For which political trend did you vote in the last parliamentary elections: In the pre-elections poll, the text was "what political orientation will you vote for in the upcoming parliamentary elections?"	Post elections Actual vote	Pre-elections Intentions to vote
Tribal	34.5	47.2
Independent loyalist	31.8	10
Independent	6.4	1.7
Islamic Action Front party	4.5	8.5
Independent opposition	4.2	3.4
Nationalist orientation	2.8	4.0
Other	2.7	1.3
Islamist candidate independent of the Islamic Action Front	1.9	7.3
Leftist	.4	2.2
Don't know + refused to answer	12.7	12.5
Total	100	100

VII: Audio-Visual Media

Most Reliable Sources for Local Political News

51% of those who identified the most trusted source for local political news consider Jordan Television the most reliable source compared with 43% in the 2006 poll, 43% in 2005, 48% in 2004, and 52.2% in 2003. Jordan Television was followed by Al-Jazeera with 28% in this poll, 29% in the 2006 poll, 27% in 2005, 25% in 2004, and 20.6% in 2003. Al-Arabiya was considered the most reliable source for local political news by 4.7% of respondents in this poll.

Most Reliable Sources for Arab Political News

57.1% of those who identified the most trusted source for Arab political news consider Al-Jazeera the most reliable source, compared with 45.3% in the 2006 poll, 42% in the 2005 poll, 39% in 2004 and 35.5% in 2003. Al-Jazeera is followed by Jordan Television with 30.4% of respondents in this poll, compared with 25% in 2006, 29% in 2005, 33% in 2004, and 32.3% in 2003. Al-Arabiya was considered the most reliable by 12.8% of respondents, compared with 17.5% in the 2006 poll, 12% in the 2005 poll, 14% in 2004 and 7.9% in 2003.

Most Reliable Sources for International Political News

57.3% of respondents who identified the most trusted source for international political news said that Al-Jazeera is the most reliable source as compared with 44.3% in the 2006

poll, 41% in the 2004 and 2005 polls, and 34.9% in the 2003 poll. Jordan Television followed Al-Jazeera with 18.8% of respondents in this poll, compared with 24.2% in the 2006 poll, 26% in the 2005 poll, 31% in 2004, and 31.2% in 2003. Finally, Al-Arabiya was considered the most trusted source for international political news by 13.5% of respondents in this poll compared with 17.5% in the 2006 poll, 13% in 2005, 14% in 2004 and 8.5% in 2003.

VIII: Prevalence of Computers and the Internet

The percentage of those who use a computer increased from 29.5% in 2003 to 35% in 2004, and to 38% in the 2005 and 2006 polls. The percentage increased slightly in this poll to 39.9%. The percentage of those who use the internet has also increased since 2002 as it was 15.6% and reached 17.4% in 2003, 17.5% in 2004, 22.8% in 2005, and 22.2% in 2006. This percentage also increased slightly in this poll to 23.6%. It is important to note here that these percentages only apply to individuals aged 18 and over.