

Public Opinion Poll

PERFORMANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF DR. MAAROUF BAKHIT, ONE YEAR AFTER FORMATION

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The Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan has conducted a public opinion poll to measure the performance of the government of Dr. Marouf Bakhit one year after its formation, together with the recent reshuffle on November 22. The poll was carried out from 27 November – 1 December 2006. The total size of the national sample was 1,180 respondents, while the sample size of public opinion leaders' parallel sample was 629 respondents representing seven categories. These include: private business executives; political party leaders; professionals (lawyers, engineers, medical doctors, dentists, pharmacists, geologists, nurses and agricultural engineers); those working in the media (writers, artists, journalists); leaders of professional associations, trade unions and NGOs; high ranking state officials (former ministers, directors general, MPs, senators, former security officers and tribal leaders) and university professors.

The survey was conducted to gauge public opinion on the performance of the Bakhit government after one year in office. The poll is the latest in a series, that the CSS has been conducting since 1996, as each successive government has been sworn in and then after a hundred days, six months and one year in office. The polls are intended to measure both opinion leaders and the general public's initial expectations and then their perceptions of the prime ministers' and their team's performance.

The aim of this latest poll was to identify trends in Jordanian public opinion with regard to the evaluation of the performance of Dr. Bakhit's government; especially concerning its ability to solve the problems and issues assigned to it. The poll also measured the public's assessment of the problems that Jordan is currently experiencing and that "the government must deal with immediately." The study also tried to explore the respondents' perceptions of the possible impact of government reshuffles on Jordan's policies, especially at the domestic level.

This survey covers of five themes:

- The first addresses Jordanian public's general expectations and evaluations of the performance of the current government as compared to the previous governments since 1996. This section also includes the results of all the polls that have been conducted on each successive government (formation, 100 days, 200 days, one year, one year and a half, two years). In order to properly identify the attitude of Jordanian public opinion toward different governments, the report supervisors calculated the percentage of respondents who believe that the government "will be highly successful" in carrying out its responsibilities, as well as the percentages of those who believed that the government "has not been successful in carrying out its responsibilities since its formation" in all the previous polls.
- The second section presents a general comparison of the respondents' assessments of the performance of the prime minister, the ministers, as well as the government as a whole.

- The third section examines public perception of the government's performance after one year in office, compared to that in the 200-day poll and the citizens' expectations from Bakhit's government upon formation.
- The fourth section is a general comparison of the respondents' expectations after the recent cabinet reshuffle, and their assessment of the performance of the prime minister, the ministers, and the government in general.
- The fifth section addresses the main problems currently faced by Jordan and which require the government's immediate attention. This section also includes citizens' perceptions of the financial/ economic status of their families during the past three years.

Survey Results: An Overview

- The poll showed that 60% of the respondents believed that Bakhit was capable of handling his tasks as prime minister, and 56% of the same sample said the government was capable of undertaking its tasks.
- The latest results are slightly lower than those recorded after 200 days in office (62% for Bakhit and 59% for the government). But at the same time, the percentages recorded are similar to those registered after 100 days in office. In March 2006, public confidence in Bakhit's government fell significantly. The percentage of those who believed that Bakhit was capable of carrying out his mission, dropped from 72% upon formation to 59% after 100 days. Performance evaluation also dropped from 69% to 56%.
- Although opinion leaders' evaluation of the government's performance dropped slightly in this poll, the results remained fairly consistent with those taken upon the government's formation and after 100 and 200 days in office.
- With regards to the prime minister, the percentage remained fixed at 72% of opinion leaders believing Bakhit to be capable of handling his tasks one-year-on, while 63% said that the government was capable of handling its tasks (a drop from 64% after 200 days in office).
- The results suggest that citizens want the government to reduce unemployment, alleviate poverty and address the rising cost of living. Corruption and low incomes remain pertinent issues; although they alternate in position. These issues have continued to be the Jordanian citizens' major concerns, at least for the past five years.
- About 33% of the national sample respondents said the government of Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit should immediately deal with unemployment.
- Nearly a quarter (24%), of the opinion leaders in the parallel sample, wanted the government to take action on poverty. Around 26% of the national sample gave poverty as the second priority, as opposed to 19 % of the opinion leaders' sample who said that unemployment was their second priority.
- Consistent with a recorded trend showing a growing "lack of confidence" in the performance of consecutive governments, the survey data suggest that citizens are increasingly pessimistic about these economic problems

being solved. The poll showed that the majority of Jordanians (71 % of the national sample and 86% of the opinion leaders' sample) report that their living standards have not improved over the past three years. The same survey shows that 34 % of the national sample and 39% of the opinion leaders said that their economic conditions had become worse over the past three years. For 45 % of the national sample and 32% of the opinion leaders, the poll showed that the situation had remained the same. Those who said their economic situation had improved were 20 % of the national sample and 27% of the opinion leaders.

- According to the survey, public evaluation of the performance of Bakhit and his government one-year-on, dropped slightly from the previous evaluation conducted in March, after 200 days in office. That evaluation fell significantly lower than the expectations recorded upon the government's formation in November 2005.
- The poll revealed that the Cabinet reshuffle had a slightly more positive impact on citizens perceptions. Of the national sample respondents, 60% said the recently revamped government would be capable of undertaking its responsibilities and 64% said Bakhit would also succeed in shouldering his responsibilities. The percentage is slightly higher than the 56% evaluation of success before the reshuffle for the government and 60% for Bakhit.
- Opinion leaders' expectations of success, however, dropped, as 58% said the government would be able to shoulder its responsibilities after the reshuffle, compared to 63% before the reshuffle. On Bakhit, 65% expected success after the reshuffle compared to 72% before.

Highlights of Perception of Performance in the Political Field

- 46% of the national sample saw the government as successful in working toward creating a democratic/egalitarian political party' law, compared to 46% in the 200-day poll and 48% in the 100-day poll, and 62% who had initially expected the government to succeed in this field upon formation. For the opinion leaders' sample were: 30%, 32%, 39%, and 56% respectively.
- 50% of the national sample saw the government as successful in working toward creating a democratic municipality law, compared to 50% in the 200-day poll and 51% in the 100-day poll, and 64% who had initially expected the government to succeed in this field upon formation. For the opinion leaders' sample: 38%, 36%, 43%, and 63%.
- 55% of the national sample saw the government as successful in working toward creating a democratic electoral law, compared to 55% in the 200-day poll and 52% in the 100-day poll, and 66% who had initially expected the government to succeed in this field upon formation. For the opinion leaders' sample: 31%, 31%, 38%, and 58%.
- 54% of the national sample saw the government as successful in encouraging freedom of expression, by

creating opportunities for people to voice their opinion freely and show respect for the opinions of others, compared to 54% in the 200-day poll and 58% in the 100-day poll, and 66% who had initially expected the government to succeed in this field upon formation. For the opinion leaders' sample: 45%, 48%, 52%, and 60%.

- 62% of the national sample saw the government as successful in improving the public sector, compared to 62% in the 200-day poll and 60% in the 100-day poll, and 72% who had initially expected the government to succeed in this field upon formation. For the opinion leaders' sample: 45%, 48%, 52%, and 60%.
- 68% of the national sample considered the government to be successful in supporting the Iraqi people, compared to 68% in the 200-day poll and 71% in the 100-day poll, and 71% who had initially expected the government to succeed in this field upon formation. For the opinion leaders' sample, the percentages were: 49%, 46%, 62%, and 70% respectively.
- 69% of the national sample saw the government as successful in managing foreign policy, compared to 69% in the 200-day poll and 69% in the 100-day poll, and 79% who had initially expected the government to succeed in this field upon formation. For the opinion leaders' sample, the percentages were: 67%, 67%, 65%.
- 77% of the national sample saw the government as successful in supporting the Palestinian people, compared to 46% in the 200-day poll and 73% in the 100-day poll, and 78% who had initially expected the government to succeed in this field upon formation. For the opinion leaders' sample, the percentages were: 72%, 73%, 68%, and 77%.
- 85% of the national sample saw the government as successful in taking appropriate steps to deal with acts of terrorism, compared to 46% in the 200-day poll and 78% in the 100-day poll, and 86% who had initially expected the government to succeed in this field upon formation. For the opinion leaders' sample, the percentages were: 86%, 87%, 78%, and 88%.

Conclusion

The results of CSS's one-year opinion poll suggest that the overall evaluation of the performance of Dr. Marouf Bakhit's government has declined slightly since the 200-day poll, but remained close to the public perceptions of the 100-day poll. However, it is still below the initial expectations highlighted in the poll taken upon the government's formation. There continues to be a clear lack of societal confidence and successive governments. There is also a noticeable difference between the assessments of the national sample and those of the opinion leaders. While the overall trend for opinion leaders, between 1996 and 2006, has remained generally stable with no significant changes. The attitudes of the national sample show a on going fall in the level of confidence and a widening gap in the expectations of the people and the successive governments. The current government under Bakhit is no exception.

With regards to specific issues, the national sample found the government to be successful in dealing with 13 of the 19 assignments it was given. The opinion leaders, on the other hand, argued that the government was successful in handling only 8 of the 19 issues at hand. The opinion leaders gave the efforts of the Bakhit Government to fight corruption, a considerably more favorable assessment than the views they reported in the 200-day poll.

In conclusion, the national sample has shown consistency in the evaluation of the Government's performance on both the general and the specific issue-related levels. There were some variations in the perceptions of the Government's performance in addressing specific issues with in the country. Nevertheless, the overall trend in both the general and specific appraisals demonstrated a slight downward tendency across the four polls conducted since the formation of the current government.

The CSS poll has also highlighted, once again, the issues of unemployment, poverty, and the rising cost of living as the three major problems that Jordanians are currently experiencing, and need to be immediately addressed by the government.