

Public Opinion Leaders' Evaluation of the Performance of the Current Lower House since its Election

Center for Strategic Studies
University of Jordan

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Dr. Mohammad Al-Masri

Introduction

The Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan conducted a poll of opinion leaders in Jordan to identify their views regarding the performance of the current Lower House since its election in November 2007. This project is part of a series of polls the Center is conducting to evaluate the performance of the current Lower House. The Center published a poll previously regarding the opinions of the general public on the same topic.

Table 1: Distribution of the public opinion leaders sample according to category

Category	Completed	Refused	Total
High Ranking State Officials	91	9	100
Writers and Journalists	87	13	100
Political Party Leaders	97	3	100
Union Leaders	95	5	100
University Professors	89	11	100
Professionals	90	10	100
Senior Economists	74	26	100
Total	623	77	700

This poll was conducted between March 31 and April 4, 2009. The size of the complete public opinion leaders' sample was **623** respondents, originally 700, with 77 individuals refusing to participate. The sample was distributed among the categories of public opinion leaders as shown in Table 1.

This report includes five main sections: the first addresses the Jordanian public opinion leaders sample's evaluation of the

performance of the current Lower House. This section includes data on the extent of opinion leaders' satisfaction with and evaluation of the Lower House in carrying out its fundamental constitutional duties: its monitoring role, questioning role and its control of public spending. In addition, this section presents the evaluation of the Lower House's performance regarding certain basic issues. The second section aims to identify opinion leaders' evaluations of the extent of the current Lower House's independence and the main determinants of MP voting during the current term. The third section identifies the extent to which public opinion leaders followed the activities of the current Lower House, and their evaluation of the extent to which MPs communicated with citizens. The fourth section addresses respondents' evaluation of the women's quota system that was applied for the second time in the process of electing the current Lower House. The fifth and final section presents the trends in opinion leaders' assessments regarding the privileges normally accorded to the Lower House.

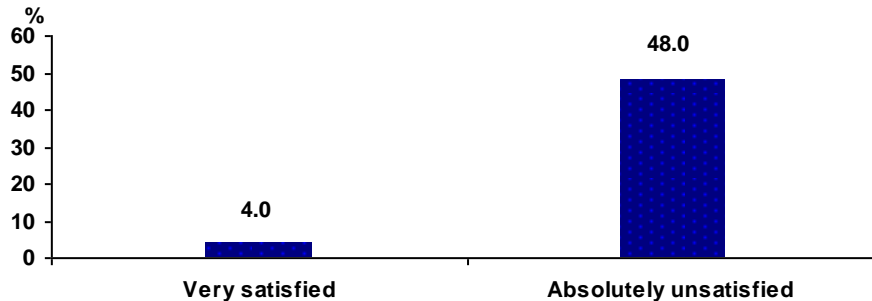
I. Performance evaluation of the 15th Parliament since its election

This section aims to identify the degree of the public opinion leaders sample's satisfaction with the performance of the Lower House since its election, and to evaluate its performance in carrying out its constitutionally-assigned duties, as well as the role of the House in dealing with a range of topics that are important to the Jordanian society.

- **Satisfaction with the Lower House's performance**

Opinion leaders sample respondents' evaluation of the performance of the current Lower House was not positive. 4% of respondents reported that they were very satisfied with the performance of the current Lower House since its election, while 48% said they were absolutely unsatisfied with its performance.

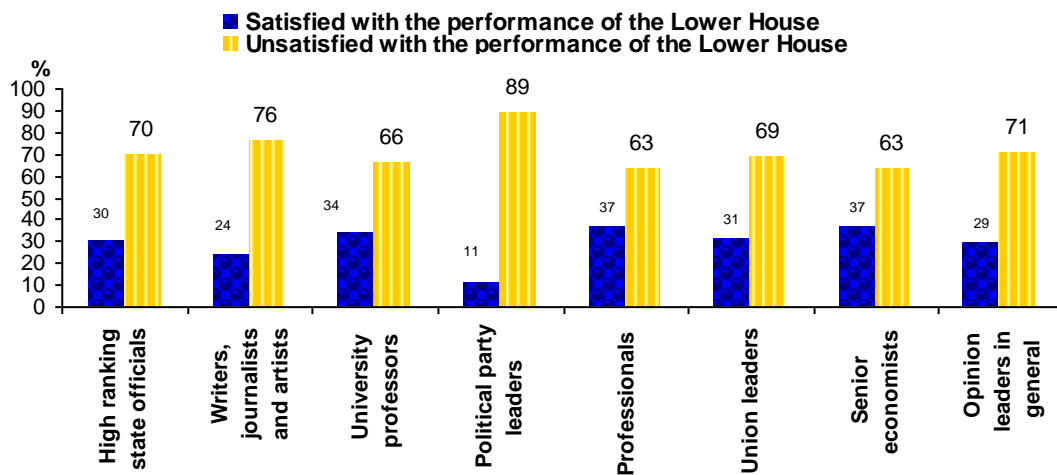
Figure 1: Respondents who reported that they were very satisfied or absolutely unsatisfied with the performance of the current Lower House



When the arithmetic mean of the respondents' extent of satisfaction with the performance of the current Lower House since its election is calculated as a percentage, the results show that the majority of the opinion leader respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the current Lower House. 29% of respondents reported that they were satisfied, to varying degrees (high, fair, low), with the performance of the current Lower House since its election in November 2007, while 71% said they were unsatisfied with its performance.

Comparing the extent of different categories of public opinion leaders' satisfaction with the performance of the Lower House, we find that the category that expressed the highest level of dissatisfaction with the Lower House was the political party leaders. 89% of respondents from this category said that they were unsatisfied, followed by writers and journalists at 76%, and high ranking state officials at 70%.

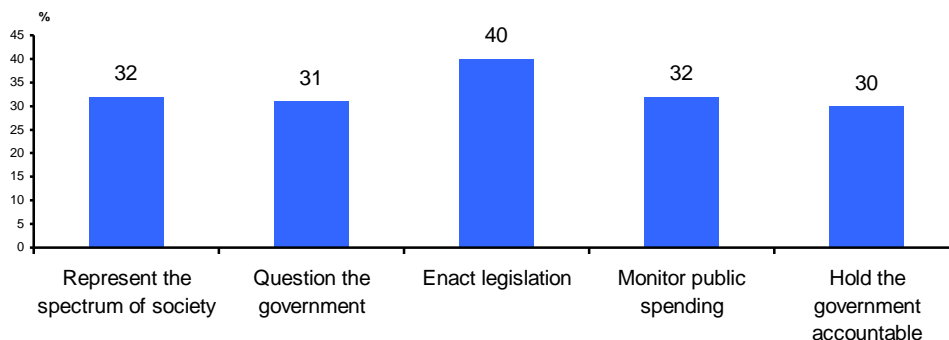
Figure 2: Satisfaction with the current Lower House’s performance according to the categories of the public opinion leaders sample



- Evaluation of the Lower House’s performance in executing its constitutional duties

The majority of respondents from the opinion leaders sample said that the current Lower House did not execute its constitutional duties, as between 60 and 70% of respondents agreed that the House did not carry out its duties. 40% of respondents said that the current Lower House carried out its role of enacting legislations, while 32% said that it monitored public spending and the same percentage of respondents said that it represented the spectrum of Jordanian society. 31% of respondents said that the current Lower House carried out its role of questioning the government. In the same vein, 30% said that the Lower House held the government accountable. In other words, the majority of respondents from the opinion leaders sample evaluated the House as unsuccessful in executing its constitutional duties.

Figure 3: Opinion leaders sample respondents who reported that the current Lower House executed its constitutional duties



- **Evaluation of the Lower House’s performance regarding a number of issues**

This poll aimed to identify public opinion leaders’ evaluation of the Lower House’s performance with regard to certain fundamental issues of foremost importance to Jordanian citizens. These issues have been the subject of discussions and controversy since the election of the current Lower House. They include: enhancing freedoms, the State’s economic policy, the public expenditure policy, government job formations, privatization, foreign policy, and fighting corruption. The poll aimed to identify respondents’ views on whether the Lower House had a role in addressing these issues. The poll then sought to identify the evaluation of the House’s performance according to those respondents who said the House had a role in addressing these issues. The results showed that the majority of respondents, between 53 and 79%, from the opinion leaders sample said the Lower House had no role in addressing these issues.

Meanwhile, 9-23% of respondents said the Lower House had a role in addressing these issues and evaluated that role positively. About one third of respondents said the House played a negative role in government job formations, while one fifth said that it played a negative role in privatization.

Table 2: Trends among public opinion leaders with regard to whether the Lower House had a role in addressing certain fundamental issues, and the evaluation of that role

	The Lower House had a role in...			The House did not have a role	I do not know whether or not the House had a role	Total
	The House’s role was positive	The House’s role was negative	The House’s role was neither positive nor negative			
Fighting corruption	23	10	3	62	2	100
Enhancing freedoms	19	5	2	73	2	100
Public expenditure policy	19	11	5	61	4	100
Economic policy	17	6	2	74	2	100
Foreign policy	12	4	2	79	3	100
Government job formations	9	32	2	53	5	100
Privatization	11	18	3	62	6	100

II. The independence of the current Lower House

This section aims to identify trends among public opinion leaders with regard to the independence of the current Lower House from the executive authority and the influential social, political and economic powers in the Jordanian society.

- **Lower House independence**

Regarding the independence of the current Lower House from the executive authority, 38% of respondents said that the House was absolutely not independent from the executive authority, while 6% said it enjoyed a great degree of independence.

The arithmetic mean of respondents' answers shows that the majority of public opinion leaders, 65%, believed that the current Lower House was not independent from the executive authority, while 35% of respondents said the House enjoyed independence from the executive authority to varying degrees (high, fair, low).

The results showed that there was virtual consensus among respondents from the political party leaders category, 84%, and the high-ranking state officials category, 70%, in the opinion that the current Lower House was not independent from the executive authority.

Figure 4: Trends among public opinion leaders vis-à-vis the independence of the current Lower House from the executive authority

■ Lower House is independent from the executive authority
■ Lower House is not independent from the executive authority

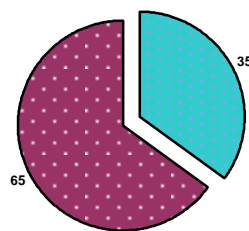
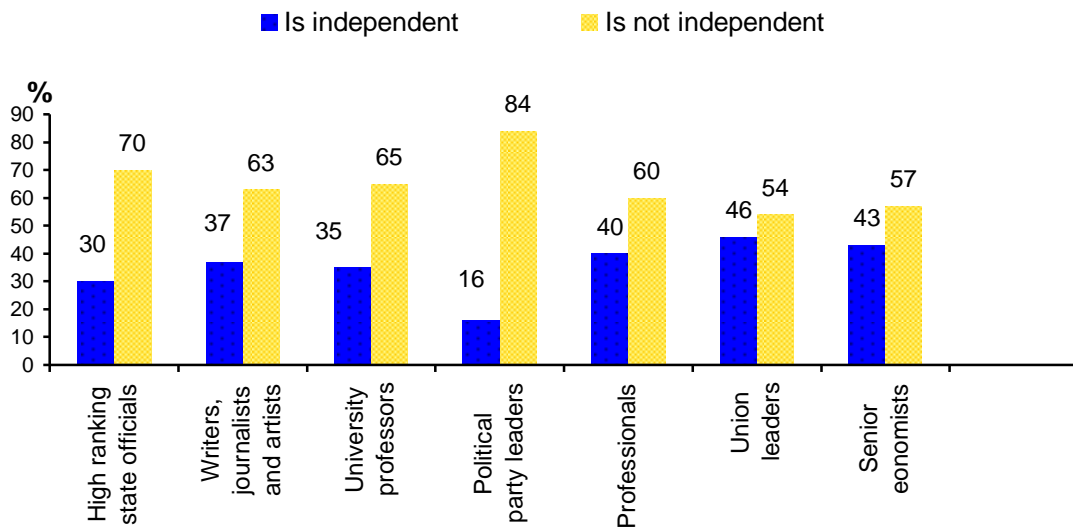


Figure 5: The extent of the Lower House's independence according to categories of the opinion leaders sample



As for the extent to which members of the current Lower House were pressured by political, economic, media and social powers to vote in a particular direction, the results showed that respondents from the public opinion leaders sample were divided into three main groups in this respect. The first and largest group among respondents believed that MPs were pressured to vote in a particular direction, as 43-67% of respondents from the public opinion leaders sample stated that the MPs were pressured to vote in a certain direction by: the government, a minister, the security apparatus, individuals with political influence from outside of the government, senior economists, tribal leaders, relatives, leaders in their districts, their constituencies, or the press. The second group of respondents, 29-51%, believed that MPs were not pressured, while the third and smallest group, 4-14% of respondents, said they did not know whether MPs were pressured to vote in a particular direction.

More than two thirds of respondents who said MPs were exposed to pressures to vote in a particular direction believed that MPs responded to such pressures from: the security apparatus, the government, senior economists, individuals with political influence, tribal leaders, a minister, leaders in their districts, or relatives. The respondents from the public opinion leaders sample believed that the MPs were less responsive to pressures from their constituencies and the local press, as 60% of respondents who said MPs were exposed to pressures from these two groups said that MPs responded to these pressures.

Table 3: The extent to which MPs were pressured by political, social and economic powers, and the extent to which they responded to such pressure

MPs were exposed to pressure from:	%Yes	%No	Don't Know	Percentage who said that MPs responded to these pressures among the group of respondents who said they were exposed to such pressures
Tribal leaders	66	29	5	72
The government in general	67	27	6	80
Community leaders in their electoral districts	65	31	4	70
Their relatives	62	33	5	69
Ministers	45	45	10	72
Senior economists	56	34	10	78
Security agencies	46	40	14	83
Individuals with political influence from outside the	62	30	8	75
Local press	43	51	6	60
Their constituencies	47	48	5	59

III. Following the activities of the current Lower House

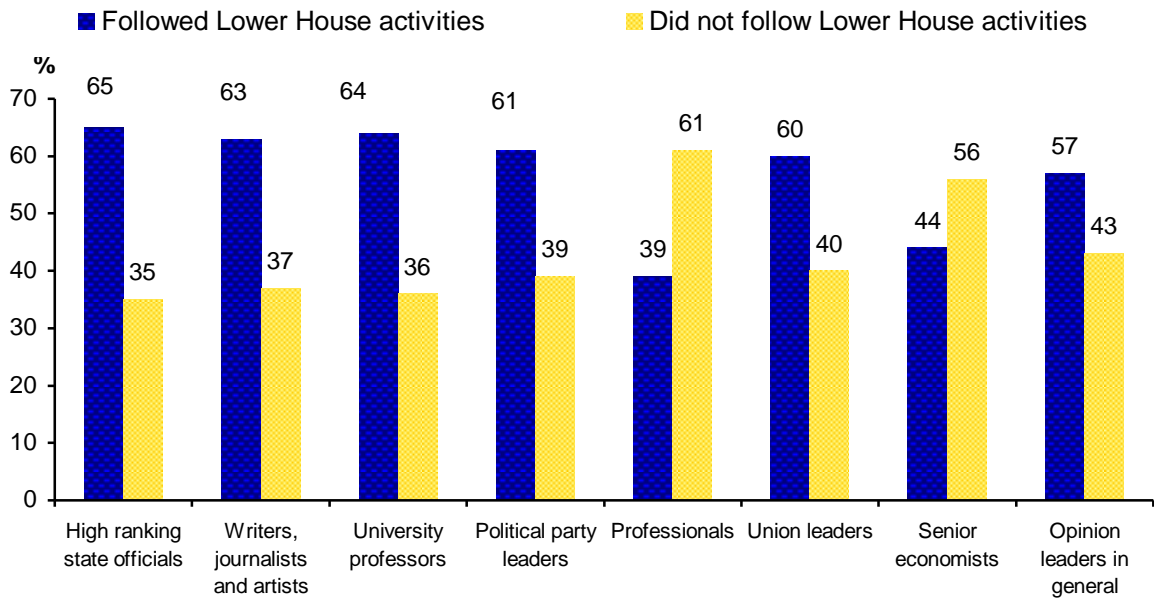
This section aims to identify the extent to which opinion leaders followed the activities of the current Lower House, and to gauge respondents' views about the extent to which MPs of the current Lower House communicated with citizens in general.

- **Following the activities of the current Lower House**

The poll results showed that the majority of opinion leader respondents followed the activities of the current Lower House. 20% of respondents said they followed the activities of the Lower House to a great extent, in contrast to 14% who said they did not follow Lower House activities at all.

The arithmetic mean of respondents' answers as a percentage shows that 57% of respondents from the public opinion leaders sample followed Lower House activities to varying degrees (high, fair, low), compared with 43% of respondents who said that they did not follow the activities of the current Lower House. Of the opinion leaders sample categories, senior economists followed Lower House activities the least.

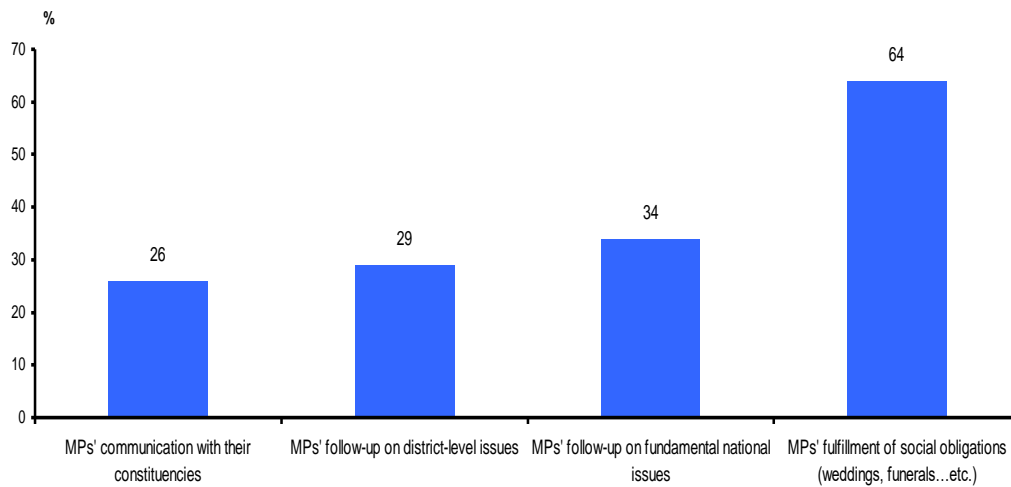
Figure 6: Respondents according to whether they followed the activities of the current Lower House disaggregated by public opinion leader category



- **Communication between current Lower House members and citizens**

Respondents from the public opinion leaders sample evaluated the current Lower House’s performance with regard to MPs communication with citizens negatively. 26% of respondents said that MPs’ level of communication with citizens was sufficient, 29% said that MPs’ follow-up on issues and problems in their electoral districts was sufficient, and 34% said that MPs’ follow-up on fundamental national issues was sufficient. It is notable that 64% of public opinion leader respondents said that MPs’ fulfillment of their social obligations was sufficient. In other words, public opinion leaders evaluated MPs’ fulfillment of their social duties as successful, while they evaluated MPs as unsuccessful in following up on electoral district and national issues and in communicating with their constituencies.

Figure 7: Respondents' evaluation of the level of MPs' communication with citizens

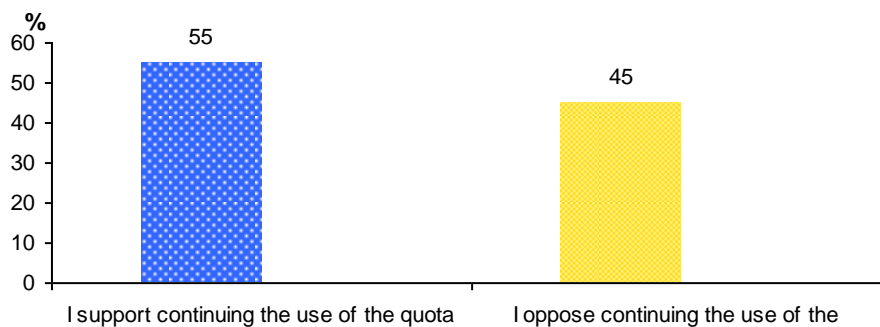


IV. Performance evaluation of female MPs in the current Lower House

The elections for the current Lower House were conducted with a “women’s quota”, as were the elections for the previous Lower House. The quota stipulated the election of six female MPs. The current Lower House has six female MPs elected on the basis of the “quota” and a seventh elected through open competition. This poll aimed to assess public opinion regarding the women’s quota system as well as the performance of the women MPs.

The results showed that the majority of the public opinion leaders, 55%, supported continuing the women’s “quota”, while 45% opposed it.

Figure 8: Respondents supporting and opposing continuing the use of the women’s quota



Comparing the performance of female MPs to that of their male counterparts in the current Lower House, 19% of respondents stated that the performance of female MPs was better than that of male MPs, 47% said their performance was equal to that of the men, and 30% said it was worse than that of the male MPs.

Table 4: Performance evaluation of the female MPs in the current Lower House

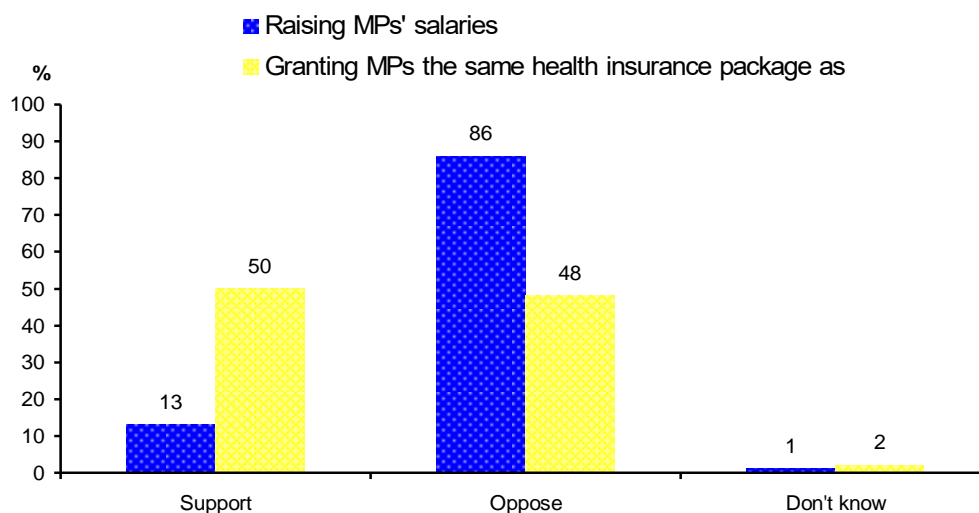
The performance of female MPs is better than that of male MPs	19
Is equal to that of male MPs	47
Is worse than that of male MPs	30
Don't know	30

V. The public opinion leaders' evaluation of the privileges accorded to MPs

During the current Lower House's term, MPs' monthly salaries were raised and they were granted health insurance parallel to that accorded to ministers. In addition, governments and some institutions have been accustomed to granting privileges to MPs of the current Lower House and previous Lower Houses. This section of the poll aims to identify public opinion leaders' views regarding these privileges.

In general, there is significant opposition to the raise in MPs' salaries, as 13% of respondents supported the raise in MPs' salaries while 86% opposed. The public opinion leaders sample was divided with regards to according MPs a health insurance package parallel to that granted to ministers, as 50% of respondents supported granting MPs the same health insurance package as ministers, while 48% opposed.

Figure 9: The public's views regarding the raise in MPs' salaries and granting them the same health insurance package accorded to ministers



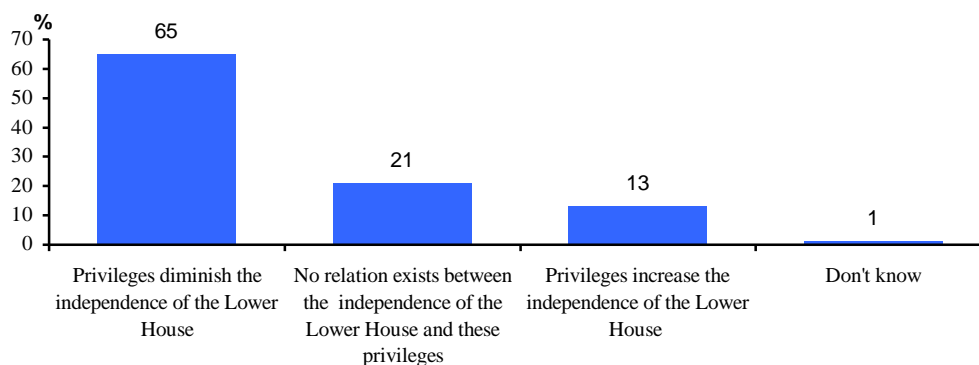
Additionally, respondents from the public opinion leaders sample did not support the governments' and some institutions' habit of granting MPs other privileges. The results indicated a virtual consensus among members of the public opinion leaders sample opposing such privileges, as 77 – 92% of respondents opposed: allocating a number of positions to each MP, waiving the customs fees of MPs' vehicles, granting a number of visas for the Hajj to each MP for distribution, allocating university seats for MPs, allowing MPs to sell their vehicle customs fee waivers, giving MPs grants to distribute among needy students, and granting each MP financial and in-kind assistance to distribute to the poor.

Table 5: Governments' and some institutions' practice of granting privileges to MPs: Do you support or oppose the government's or some institutions' granting of...%

	Support	Oppose	Don't know
Granting each MP financial and in-kind assistance to distribute	22	77	1
Allocating grants that MPs distribute among students	21	78	1
Allocating a number of visas for the Hajj to each MP and for	18	81	1
Allocating university seats for MPs	16	83	1
Allocating a number of positions to each MP	13	85	2
Waiving the customs fees of MPs' vehicles	19	80	1
Allowing MPs to sell their vehicle customs fee waivers	7	92	1

The poll results also showed that two thirds of the public opinion leaders sample respondents believed that granting such privileges diminishes the independence of the Lower House, compared with 13% of respondents who said such privileges increase the independence of the Lower House, while 21% said there was no relation between the independence of the Lower House and these privileges.

Figure 10: Respondents' views regarding the impact of granting the said privileges to MPs for the independence of the Lower House



Conclusion

Public opinion leaders in Jordan represent segments in the society that are capable of influencing the Jordanian public through their direct means of communication as well as their social, economic, political and cultural statuses. The Jordanian public follows the views of these segments given their experience, qualifications, and various respective positions. Citizens look to public opinion leaders' segments as experienced and more informed, more politically involved and more concerned with safeguarding the legitimate political and constitutional frameworks. Therefore, identifying the public opinion leaders' evaluation of Lower House's performance is extremely important and a significant indicator as well.

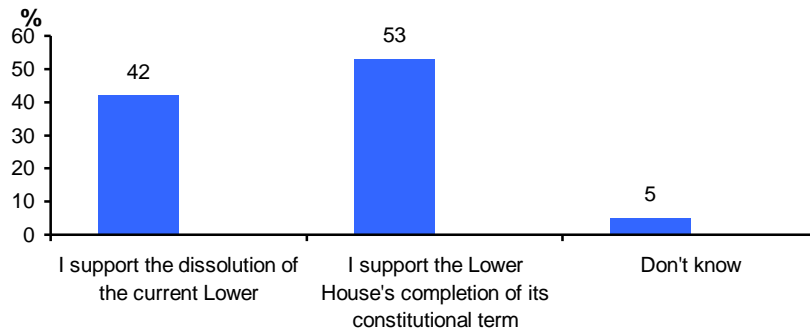
The poll results showed that the public opinion leaders sample's performance evaluation of the Lower House since its election was negative. The majority of sample respondents said they were not satisfied with the Lower House's performance in general. Moreover, most of the respondents said the Lower House did not carry out its constitutional duties of enacting legislations, monitoring the government and representing citizens. The majority of respondents agreed that the Lower House did not have a role in addressing important issues in Jordan such as: strengthening freedoms, fighting corruption, privatization...etc. A limited percentage of respondents, one fifth, evaluated the role of the Lower House in addressing these issues as positive.

The majority of the public opinion leaders sample respondents believed that the current Lower House is not independent from the executive authority. Public opinion leaders also evaluated MPs communication with citizens in their constituencies as negative, while most of them opposed the privileges MPs obtain or could obtain. Furthermore, the majority of respondents believed that such privileges contribute to diminishing the independence of the Lower House.

This negative evaluation of the performance of the Lower House is reflected in several significant indicators: the Lower House's loss of its representative quality, the indifference of public opinion leaders towards the Lower House and their lack of feeling that the Lower House should be defended as a constitutional institution. Second, their negative evaluation is reflected in the constant decline in public opinion leaders' confidence not only in the current Lower House but also in the institution of the Lower House in general.

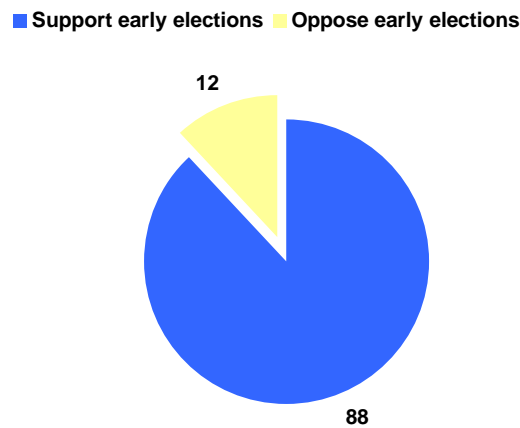
The public opinion leaders' indifference and declining confidence in the performance of the Lower House is further expressed in the sample's split regarding the dissolution of the House or its completion of its constitutional term. 42% of respondents supported the dissolution of the current Lower House before the completion of its constitutional term, compared with 53% who supported the completion of the House's term.

Figure 11: Respondents according to their support either of the current Lower House’s dissolution or its completion of its term



The majority, 88%, of respondents who supported the dissolution of the current Lower House reported that they support holding early elections during the first four months following the dissolution of the current House, while 12% opposed early elections.

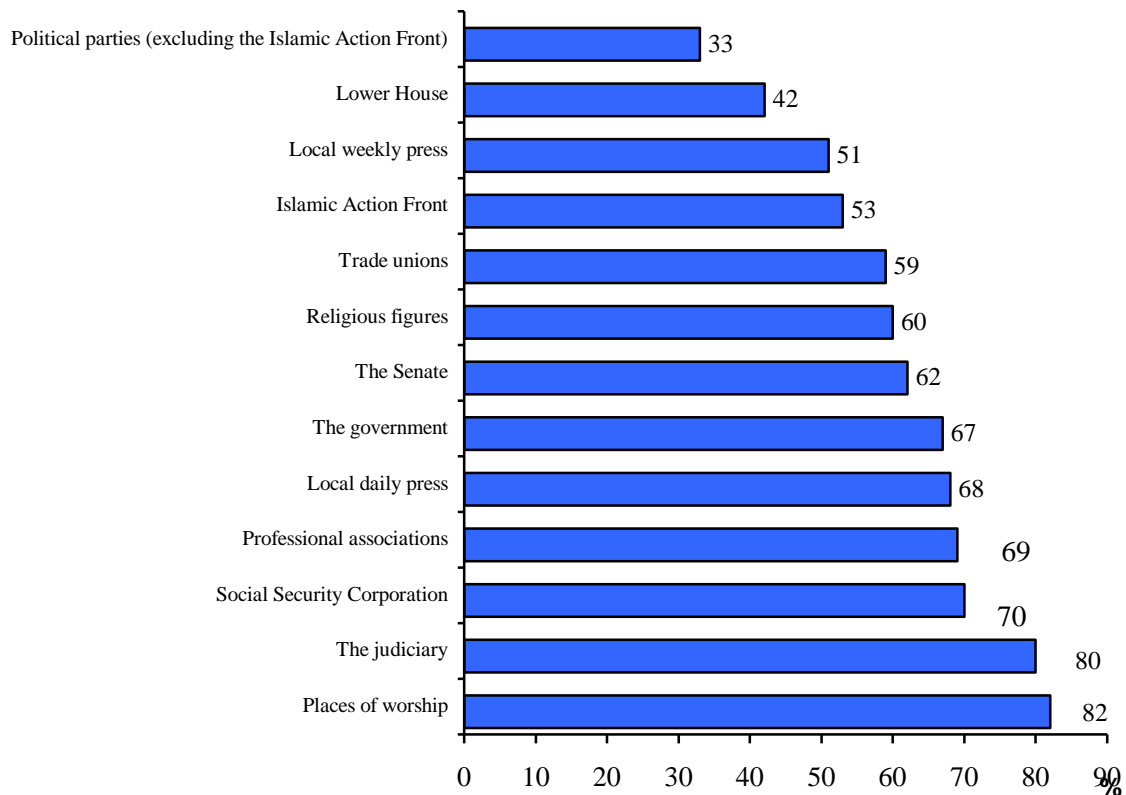
Figure 12: Respondents supporting the dissolution of the current Lower House based on their support or opposition to holding early elections during the first four months following the dissolution



The negative evaluation of the performance of the current Lower House impacts the extent of public opinion leaders’ confidence in the “institution of the Lower House”, as 42% of respondents said they were confident in the institution to varying degrees (high, fair, low). Comparing this level of confidence with opinion leaders’ confidence in various institutions within the framework of the State and Jordanian society revealed that the public opinion leaders had more confidence in the following institutions than they did in the Lower House: places of worship, the judiciary, the Social Security Corporation, professional associations, the local daily press, the government, the Senate, religious figures, trade unions, the Islamic Action Front, and the local weekly press. The results also showed that opinion leaders’ confidence in the

Lower House exceeds their confidence in political parties only, with the exception of the Islamic Action Front.

Figure 13: Public opinion leaders' trust in official and non-official institutions and entities



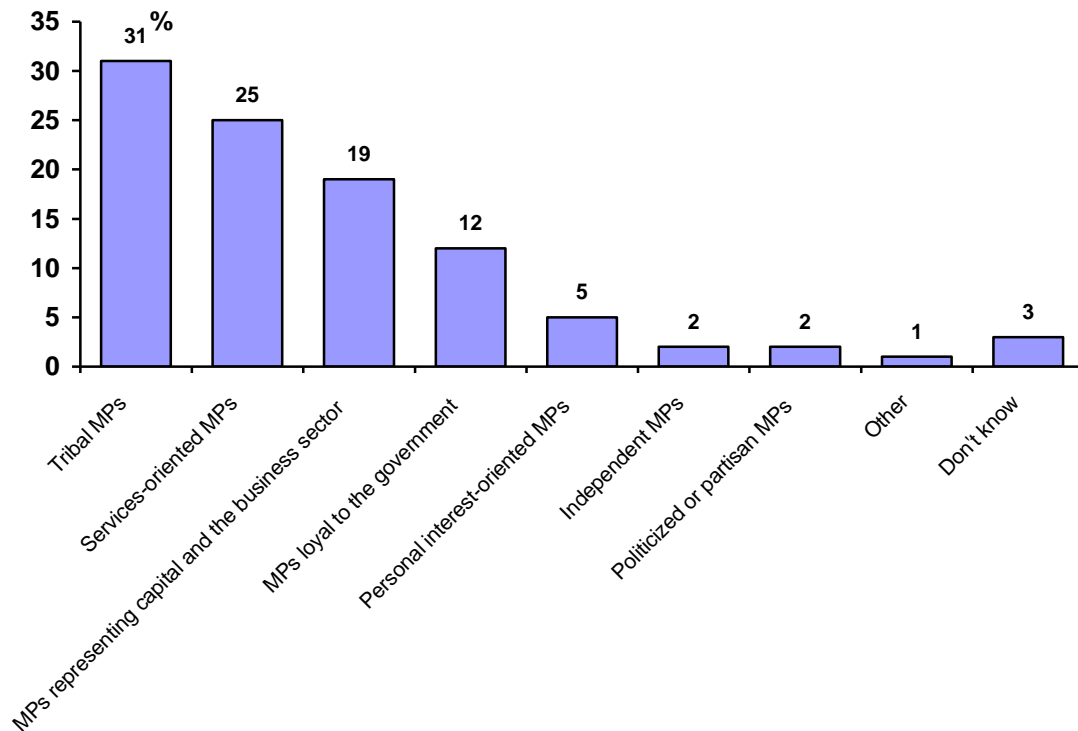
The results also showed that public opinion leaders have potential agendas for improving the performance of the Lower House generally and for strengthening its role in executing its constitutional duties. The results revealed trends among opinion leaders with regard to which electoral system is most suitable to enhance the role of the House as well as those electoral systems that contribute the most to diminishing the House's ability to carry out its constitutional duties. 26% of public opinion leader respondents said that the electoral district list law that was in force in Jordan in 1989 is the best system to strengthen the role of the Lower House in carrying out its constitutional duties, while one fourth of the opinion leader sample respondents said that the nationwide proportional list law is the most suitable electoral system to strengthen the role of the House, and 15% said the law currently in force (one-person one-vote) is the best law to strengthen the role of the House in carrying out its constitutional duties. As for the laws that have the most negative impact on the Lower House's performance, 54% of respondents said that the one-person one-vote law in force in Jordan since 1993 is the system that most severely diminishes the role of the House in carrying out its duties.

Table 6: Trends among public opinion leaders with regard to the most suitable electoral law to strengthen the role of the Lower House in carrying out its constitutional duties and the electoral law that most severely diminishes the House's role

Law	What is the most suitable system to strengthen the role of the Lower House in carrying out its constitutional duties?	What electoral system most severely diminishes the House's role in carrying out its constitutional duties?
The one-person one-vote law for a district that has one seat. The electoral districts are divided so as to be equal to the number of Lower House seats: 110 MPs = 110 electoral districts	16	11
The nationwide proportional list law. The Kingdom becomes one electoral district and voters vote for electoral lists.	25	14
The mixed system, by which 50% of MPs are elected through proportional lists and 50% are elected through the one-person one-vote system	15	7
The one-person one-vote law in force in Jordan since 1993. Voters have the right to vote for one candidate in an electoral district with multiple seats.	15	54
The electoral district list law that was in force in Jordan during the 1989 elections. Voters have the right to vote for the number of candidates that corresponds to the number of seats in their electoral districts.	26	6
Don't know	3	8

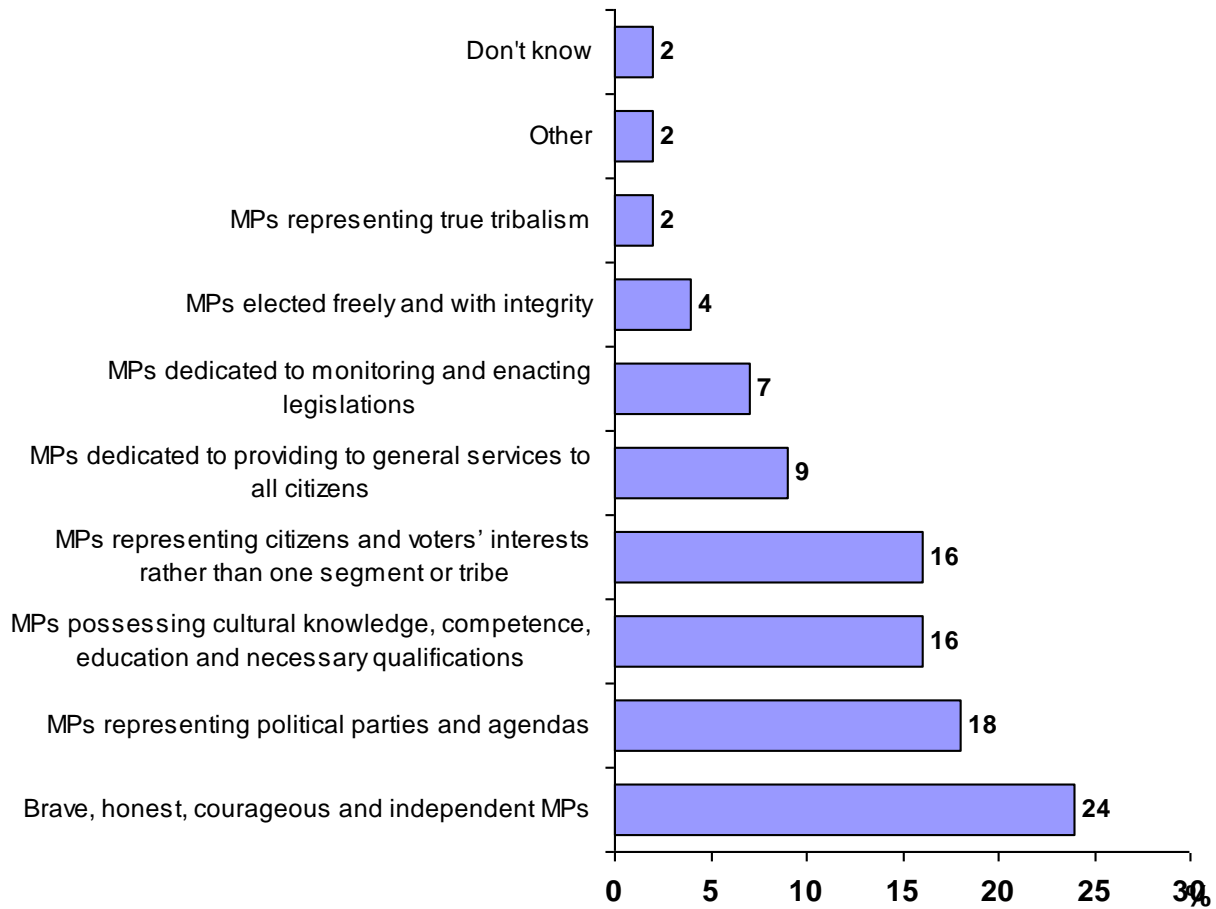
Likewise, the opinion leaders expressed a position with regard to the characteristics MPs must have in order to strengthen the role of the House in comparison with the most prominent characteristics possessed by the current MPs. With regard to the most prominent characteristic of the current MPs, 31% of respondents said they were tribal, 25% said they were services-oriented, 12% said that they represented capital and the business sector and 12% said they were loyal to the government, as shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14: The most prominent characteristic of current Lower House members according to public opinion leader respondents' views



In contrast to the above description of qualities possessed by current Lower House members, the opinion leaders sample respondents identified the qualities that MPs must have in order to strengthen the role of the Lower House. The most important characteristic, according to 24% of respondents, is for the MP to be brave, honest, courageous and independent, while 18% of respondents said that MPs must act as representatives for the political parties and must possess political agendas. 16% of respondents said that MPs must represent the interests of the citizens rather than one segment or tribe, and the same percentage said that MPs should possess cultural knowledge as well as the required competence, education and qualifications.

Figure 15: The most prominent characteristic that MPs must have in order to strengthen the role of the Lower House



The opinion leaders sample's evaluation of the performance of the current Lower House was generally negative, and was more negative than the public's evaluation. This evaluation was reflected in the level of confidence in the institution of the Lower House and the division among respondents regarding the dissolution of the House. It appears that the majority of the respondents in the opinion leaders sample agree that the current electoral system, in force since 1993 and based on the "one-person one-vote" principle, is the electoral system that contributes the most to diminishing the role of the House in carrying out its constitutional duties. Respondents also identified a number of standards that MPs must manifest in order to strengthen the role of the Lower House, beginning with the requirement that MPs be honest, independent and courageous, that they represent political orientations and agendas, and that they represent the interests of the citizens rather than specific segments of the society. Lack of change in the performance of this Lower House, and its inability to convince opinion leaders that it represents and defends the interests of citizens rather than specific segments and to prove that the MPs of this House are brave, courageous and independent and represent political orientations and agendas, will lead to further decline in opinion leaders' confidence in the current House and in the institution of the Lower House. The ability of opinion leaders to impact public opinion, given their means of influence and communication on the one hand and their economic and social statuses on the other, will surely contribute to the decline in citizens' confidence in the Lower House. This decline will in turn contribute to the erosion of citizens' confidence in this representative institution, and will negatively impact their confidence in the institution of the State and other political and legal institutions.