

**Review**

# **Hybrid Democracy, Social Structure and Democratization in Jordan – The 2010 National Elections**

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**The Jordanian case represents the duality of the effectiveness of the political process as a result of the procedural elections. On one hand, the electoral process – despite its limitations – promises future possibilities. On the other hand, holding democratic processes under conditions in which the concept of citizenship has yet to mature finds certain sectors and leaderships resorting to primordial identities – on the expense of the joint citizenship - as part of the selection process during the elections. During the last decades, basic contradiction between democratic and anti-democratic characteristics has shaped the Jordanian public sphere. The uniqueness of the "democratic incentives" and concomitant changes in various domains exist simultaneously with gradually intensifying anti-democratic regime responses that have the effect of immobilizing or freezing the political structure of the regime.**

**Key words:** Jordan; Elections; Middle East; Arab World; Moslem Brotherhood.**INTRODUCTION**

Events in the Arab World, at least most Arab states, in the first half of 2011 indicate there is vibrant political activism in these societies. This activism is not a product of sudden unforeseen changes. Instead, this activism is a product of cumulative events in various Arab societies on an unprecedented scale. It is difficult to point to one aspect of political developments that led millions to take to the street demanding the ouster of regimes and the establishment of a democratic rule (POMEPS, 2012; Gause, 2011)

Undoubtedly, this agitation for change occurred within different contexts, as part of different conditions between one state and the other, despite similarities between the demands and the slogans, as well as some of the living conditions. For example, it will be difficult to use similar methods to explain grievances in monarchical and republican systems given the varying degrees of authoritarian approaches. Thus, one must examine these cases as a whole, and later partition said cases in order to understand better the underlying developments.

In this article I attempt to understand a particular aspect

of the changes that occurred in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. More specifically, the reference is to the question of political representation following the parliamentary elections – November 2010. These elections were not a mere distraction orchestrated by the opposition to the detriment of the monarchy and the king. They originated as part of a change in the structure of governance, its elements and the processes of harmonizing its structure with the demands of democratic openness.

**Theoretical Context – Hybrid Democracy, Social Context and the Limitation of Democratization Process**

The rapid political changes in several Arab states can be understood by application and extension of the analytic framework inherent in the concept of "hybrid democracy." Hybrid democracies have been defined as 'ambiguous systems that combine rhetorical acceptance of

democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liberties with essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits' (Ottaway, 2003). The term "electoral authoritarianism" is sometimes used to describe the type of hybrid democracy in which regimes have responded to unprecedented pressure, international and domestic, to adopt—or at least to mimic—the democratic form (Diamond, 2002: p. 23).

Virtually all hybrid regimes in the world today are quite deliberately *pseudo democratic*, in that "the existence of formally democratic political institutions, such as multiparty electoral competition, masks (often, in part, to legitimate) the reality of authoritarian domination. All such regimes lack an arena of contestation sufficiently open, free, and fair so that the ruling party can readily be turned out of power if it is no longer preferred by a plurality of the electorate. While an opposition victory is not impossible in a hybrid regime, it requires a level of opposition mobilization, unity, skill, and heroism far beyond what would normally be required for victory in a democracy" (Diamond, 2002, 23-24). In other words, authoritarian regimes often use democratization processes to control the political system, rather than to move away from authoritarianism (Menocal, et al, 2007)

The prevailing concept of hybrid democracy suggests that regimes often initiate certain features of democracy while simultaneously attempting to manipulate these democratic processes in order to ensure that the regime survives the limited changes and continues to exert control over the political system. In this article we maintain that the expansion of this concept of hybrid democracy. Specifically, I contend that hybrid democracies stemming from different authoritarian orientations constitute much wider phenomena than those that are initiated by the regime or the state. In other words, the level of the democratization processes associated with a hybrid democracy might be a reflection of a wider social structure within the society in addition to the political structure and the balance of power in the political sphere (Ghanem, 2012).

The transformations of the political sphere in Jordan during the last decades are a reflection of a political, social, and cultural developments that have been occurring for several decades. During these decades, basic contradiction between democratic and anti-democratic characteristics has shaped the Jordanian public sphere. The uniqueness of the "democratic incentives" and concomitant changes in various domains exist simultaneously with gradually intensifying anti-democratic regime responses that have the effect of immobilizing or freezing the political structure of the regime.

A local version of "hybrid democracy," and the gradual democratization process raised hope among the public and the elites that an age of democracy was imminent. However, hybrid democracy in Jordan has consisted of

ambiguous systems that combine rhetorical acceptance of democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions, and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liberties with essentially illiberal, or even authoritarian traits, the democratization processes have been used to control the system, rather than to authentically reform or replace the authoritarian regime.

### **Dissolution of the Fifteenth House of Representatives**

On 24 November 2009,<sup>1</sup> the king issued an order to dissolve the 15<sup>th</sup> House of Representatives and conduct an "early"<sup>2</sup> election. The king did not provide any explanation for the dissolution of the House of Representatives. In fact, the constitution grants the king full power to dissolve the House of Representatives without providing an explanation (Article 34). In addition, under the constitution, the king is not obligated to provide an explicit explanation for such action, although implicitly according to Article 34 of the constitution, the government has some responsibility. Article 74 states, "If the House of Representatives has been dissolved for any reason, the new House of Representatives cannot be dissolved for the same reason."

Many political party members in Jordan welcomed the dissolution of parliament. They were certain that a dissolved House of Representatives would not have brought about a fair election otherwise. In addition, opposition parties argued that the dissolved parliament provided personal privileges such as exemptions from import tax, including monthly financial incentives equivalent to their monthly wages to cover the expenses of their political activities<sup>3</sup>. Other groups in Jordanian society attributed the dissolution to the government's desire to issue new economic laws – taking advantage of an inactive parliament – as was the case when the government postponed the elections following the dissolution of parliament in 2001. Then, the government passed more than 200 temporary laws in the absence of an active parliament<sup>4</sup>.

This diligence would seem reasonable if one left aside the government's dissolution of parliament and its postponement of the elections for a year. Yet, the same government had issued 48 temporary laws<sup>5</sup>, most of which had no constitutional backing. The Jordanian Popular Unity Party believed that one of the reasons for the dissolution of parliament was the government's desire to issue temporary laws. In the Central Committee's communiqué to boycott the elections it stated, "Dissolving the 15<sup>th</sup> House of Representatives was the result of fraudulent elections in 2007, as was evident from statements made by officials in positions of authority in the executive branch". The communiqué added that, "Parliament's dissolution was justified due to its ill performance. It did not meet expectations. Later, [the real reasons were] that the current government's intention to

dissolving parliament was to pass temporary laws, chief among them was the Budgetary Law, Income and Taxation Law and Elections Law<sup>6</sup>.

Upon the dissolution of the House of Representatives, King Abdullah II sent a letter to then prime minister, Nader al-Dhabi asking the government, "To make immediate preparations for parliamentary elections and take all necessary measures, including amendments to the Elections Law, and development of electoral procedures so that the coming elections will be transparent, just and impartial"<sup>7</sup>.

In preparing for elections, the cabinet created a ministerial committee headed by the prime minister. The committee's goal was to suggest amendments to the Elections Law<sup>8</sup>. On 8 December 2009, the government stated that it was impossible to conduct elections in the following four months as required by the constitution. Consequently, the king<sup>9</sup> issued a decree to postpone the general elections to the House of Representatives until further notice<sup>10</sup>. King Abdullah II's act was followed by an order asking Samir al-Rifa'i on 9 December 2009 to form a new government. In his letter to Al-Rifa'i, the king emphasized that the new government needed to act to amend the Elections Law and improve election procedures. The king conditioned his order upon the general election taking place no later than the last quarter of 2010<sup>11</sup>.

On 12 December 2009, the new prime minister formed a ministerial committee headed by him to amend the Elections Law<sup>12</sup>. The committee concluded its work by drafting a new Elections Law in mid-May 2010. The government approved the new law, publishing it on the government's official gazette on 19 May 2010<sup>13</sup>. Following the publication of the law, on 25 May 2010, the king issued his decree to conduct parliamentary elections in accordance with the new Elections Law<sup>14</sup>. Hence, the government decided to conduct the elections on 9 November 2010<sup>15</sup>.

The new Elections Law included a slew of adjustments to the previous law. Some of the primary changes were a higher number of seats in the House of Representatives (excluding the 12-seat quota for women); these were raised from 104 to 108 seats. The additional four seats were distributed over four districts, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Districts in the Capital Governorate, the 1<sup>st</sup> District in Al-Zarqaa' Governorate and the 1<sup>st</sup> District in the Governorate of Irbid. It bears mentioning that these districts have high population density of voters of Palestinian origin. At the same time, it was one of the most underrepresented districts in the House of Representatives, given its number of residents and the number of eligible voters (Al-Sha'er, 2011).

The new law relied on the principle that every seat in the House of Representatives (excluding the women's seat-quota) in multi-seat districts, would have an exclusive district called the Branch District. Branch Districts do not have geographic boundaries and lack

exclusive electoral lists, the media named such districts, "Hypothetical" or "Fictitious". Nevertheless, the effect of Branch Districts appears on the candidacy level, as each candidate must pick a Branch District in which he nominates himself or herself. Victory is determined based on the Branch Districts, not the primary district. Hence, a candidate wins a Branch District's assigned seat if he wins the highest number of votes. Notably, the law does not require election authorities to notify each candidate of the Branch District numbers selected by that nominee's predecessors (Al-Sha'er, 2011).

The government explained these Branch Districts as necessary to leveling the playing field between districts; each Branch District had one representative seat due to the One Vote system used, however numerous were the primary district seats. The Minister of Political Development, the engineer Mousa al-Ma'ayyah described this concept when he stated, "The Elections Law actualizes equality between all candidates by dividing electoral districts into branches, with a single representative [seat] and a single vote in accordance with the top winner system,"<sup>16</sup> however. The Minister of Interior, Nayif al-Qaadi, defended the formation of Branch Districts on the basis that the new law provided, "equal power to the electoral vote of every citizen of the kingdom in accordance with the one district, one vote concept. The power to vote became equal among all the electoral districts as the government has safeguarded the manifestation of justice and equality between voters and the power of their votes by dividing the kingdom into individual electoral districts in which each has one representative seat"<sup>17</sup>. Table 1.

## **Forces Participating in the Elections and Forces Boycotting the Elections**

Out of eighteen existing parties, two parties broke away to boycott the elections; the Islamic Labor Front Party, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood; and the Jordanian Democratic National Unity Party, the Jordanian wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The remaining parties, however, had taken a positive stance to participation as some had nominated representatives in declared lists. Others had run for elections as part of declared coalitions, still some were not able to nominate their own candidates.

**Parties that Independently Participated in the Elections:** The National Trend Party is the youngest Jordanian party. It is of particular importance in view of the nature of its composition, based primarily on a wide selection of former parliament and government figures. Abd al-Hadi al-Majaali, a former minister and the president of the Jordanian House of Representatives for nine consecutive sessions<sup>18</sup> is the party's leader. This gives the party an advantage over all other Jordanian

**Table1.** Branch Districts in which Winning Candidates did not Win the Majority Vote in their Primary District

Number	Governorate	Multi-seat districts in which winning candidates did not win the highest number of votes	Number Branch Districts	Candidates more likely to win than the winning representatives
1	Capital-Amman (Amman)	4	26	6
2	<i>Irbid</i>	2	11	3
3	<i>Al-Balqaa'</i>	1	7	3
4	<i>Ma'an</i>	1	2	1
5	<i>Al-Mafraq</i>	1	4	1
6	<i>Al-Tafilah</i>	1	3	1
7	<i>Ma'daba</i>	1	2	1
8	<i>Jarash</i>	1	4	1
9	<i>Ajloun</i>	1	2	1
10	<i>Southern Bedouin</i>	1	3	1
Total		14	64	19

**Source:** Compiled by the author based on official election results

parties, just after the Islamic Labor Front Party due to its chances of winning an equal number of seats in the House of Representatives.

Officially, nominated by the National Trend Party, the list included a group of 33 persons<sup>19</sup>. However, the list emerged with 32 candidates after the withdrawal of Dr. Asser al-Sharman from the elections. Another group from the same party nominated itself. Among them, former representatives like Miflih al-Rahimi (*Jarash*), Mounir Sober and Lutfi al-Dirbani (Amman), Abd-Allah al-Zuryqat (*Al-Karak*), Abd al-Ruhmaan al-Hanaqtah (*Al-Tafilah*), Ridda Hadaad (*Ajloun*), and Miflih al-Khaza'leh (*Al-Mafraq*). From this list, six female candidates won the elections, eight of whom were former representatives who won within the women's seat-quota. The number of votes won by the candidates of the official party list was 73,478 votes<sup>20</sup>, comprising 6% of the legal votes.

The appointed chair of the National Trend Party, Abd al-Hadi al-Majaali, asserted that his party won 25 seats in the 16<sup>th</sup> House of Representatives<sup>21</sup>. That is to say that the number of winners outside the list was 17 representatives. Yet, the party's bloc in parliament was comprised of 17 members only. The party chair explained that such was the case due to the withdrawal of a number of representatives from their previous obligations promising to be part of the National Trend bloc, despite being party members since its founding<sup>22</sup>.

In addition, Al-Hayat Party's agenda focuses on the environment and on persons with special needs. The party nominated one candidate to represent persons with special needs, but he was not fortunate to win the elections<sup>23</sup>. The United Jordanian Front Party nominated 11 candidates. The party's secretary general and a former minister, Amjad al-Majaali was the sole candidate to win. The party's candidates won 10,021 votes,

constituting 0.8% of the legal votes (Al-shabeel newspaper, 18\11\2010).

#### **The Parties that Participated in the Elections as Part of Coalition Lists**

**The Democratic National List:** This list included six candidates, two among whom were women. This list represented an electoral coalition of a number of national and left wing parties; the list included the Jordanian Democratic People's Party (*Hashad*, [JDP]) – the Jordanian branch of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine – the Jordanian Communist party, the Socialist Arab Ba'ath Party in Jordan (Modeled after Iraqi Ba'ath), and the National Direct Democracy Movement Party. Representatives of this list won 6,586 votes, representing 0.2% of the total legal votes (Al-Shabeel newspaper, 18\11\2010).. The first secretary general of *HASHD* (JDP), Ablah abu-Ablah won the seat for the Capital Governorate at the expense of the women's seat-quota.

**The Islamic Center and *Al-Risaalah* Coalition Party:** A number of Islamic political leaders, who left the Islamic Labor Front Party after the 1997 election boycott, founded the Islamic Center Party. *Al-Risaalah* Party has considered itself a party with a liberal agenda. Evidently, this coalition was closer to a declaration of political intentions than an electoral coalition as each party had its own exclusive list. In addition, each of the two parties has had its own candidate in the same two districts of the Capital Governorate.

The Islamic Center Party included 11 candidates four among whom were women and four former representatives. Among them, only one candidate,

Mousa al-Zahawirah, from *Al-Zarqaa'* Governorate had won. The total number of votes won by the list's candidates was 16,604. That equaled 1.3% of the total legal votes (*Ibid, Ibid*).

*Al-Risaalah* party, however, consisted of five candidates, none of whom won. In addition, the number of votes received by them did not exceed the one-thousand-vote mark.

Importantly, the Islamic Center Party had initiated the issuance of the 25 September 2010 document. Five hundred and seven political and labor union figures signed this document. It called for an immediate participation in the parliamentary elections, "In keeping with national interest and [for the purpose of] strengthening the National Front against external pressure."<sup>24</sup>

One cannot ignore that this document came as a response to the call by the Islamic Labor Front Party to postpone the elections in anticipation of an Elections Law amendment. Haitham al-Ama'irah, the party's secretary general stated that the release of the document did not come in response to the call for an election boycott. Perhaps *Al-Risaalah*'s secretary general was clearer in his statement, when he said, "There are negotiations to urge those boycotting the elections to withdraw their support."<sup>25</sup>

The National Council for Coordination Party is comprised of four centrist political parties. These are the Constitutional National Party, the Equality and Freedom Party, the Welfare Party and the Development and Justice Party. This coalition nominated five candidates. Hamad Abu-Zeid, the secretary general of the Equality and Freedom Party and a former representative, won the seat. The total number of votes won by the coalition was 8,083, or the equivalent of 0.7% of the total legal votes (*Al-Shabeel* newspaper, 18\11\2010).

**Participation by other Political Parties:** Seven candidates of the Islamic Labor Front Party participated in the elections despite their party's boycott of the elections. Ahmad al-Qadah was one such candidate who won after running for the 1<sup>st</sup> District in *Ajloun*. The total votes received by these candidates were 14,036, the equivalent of 1.1% of the total number of legal votes. The party later decided to bring the seven to an internal trial for their violation of the decision to boycott the elections<sup>26</sup>. In addition, one candidate from the Democratic Popular Unity Party ran for election as representative of the 1<sup>st</sup> District in the *Al-Tafilah* Governorate and won 3,377 votes.

In addition to these nominations, one can add the sweeping victory of three members of the former Democratic Left Party. Among them were two former parliament representatives and a former minister, however. This is a defunct party, as it had failed to conform to the Law of Political Parties of 2007.

**Election Boycott Forces - The Islamic Labor Front:** The Muslim Brotherhood's spokesperson, Jamil Abu-

Bakr, described the decision to dissolve the House of Representatives as logical. He explained that the dissolution of the House of Representatives stemmed from weak legislation and oversight; the majority of its members won through a fraudulent process and vote buying. He considered the One Vote Law to be responsible for producing such a weak House of Representatives<sup>27</sup>.

Abu-Bakr welcomed, on behalf of the Muslim Brotherhood, the resolution to dissolve parliament. He called for an early election based on a new Elections Law that would guarantee true representation for all Jordanians. In addition, the new Elections Law would ensure the integrity of the electoral process and prevent fraud. He added that without a new elections law the dissolution of parliament could become a "normal decision promising very little."<sup>28</sup>

Zaki bani-Irsheid, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood's Council and the former secretary general of the Islamic Labor Front Party, mentioned that the Islamic Movement was first to call for the dissolution of the House of Representatives and for an early election according to a new law. He attributed that call to several factors, citing weak legislation and lack of oversight by the council. He based his claims on statements made by election observers and results of opinion polls. Bani-Irsheid added that the House of Representatives was elected through a widespread fraudulent process and bribes. That set a precedent in Jordan's election history. He stressed that the decision to dissolve Parliament was a step in the right direction pending proper application of both the Elections Law and the democratic process of representing Jordanians in the coming elections.<sup>29</sup>

Table 2 – about here

The Islamic Labor Front Party's advisory board, inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood's 29 July 2010 decision to boycott the elections, took a similar stance on 31 July 2010 to boycott the elections<sup>30</sup>. This decision passed, "with a majority of 73 of all those in attendance. Fifty-two voted in favor and 18 voted to participate in the elections. Ali Abu Al-Sukkar, the chair of the party's advisory board reported these results.<sup>31</sup>

Previously, Jamil Abu-Bakr, the spokesperson for the Islamic Movement drew attention to one of the important demands of his movement. Specifically he called for a revision of the elections law and guarantees for the integrity of elections. In addition, he requested the lifting of restrictions from the movement, including the Islamic Center Association case dealing with teachers' concerns and day laborers. Abu-Bakr did not rule out the movement's withdrawal from an elections boycott should the government meet his movement's demands.<sup>32</sup>

At the conclusion of the 9 November 2010 elections, the Islamic Labor Front Party set aside time to evaluate the electoral process. On 14 November 2010, the movement held a press conference to announce its position on the electoral process. In particular, the

**Table 2.** The Electoral Weight of the Islamic Labor Front Party (1989 - 2007)

Report	Elections of 1989	Elections of 1993	Elections of 2003	Elections of 2007
Number of Party Candidates	26	36	30	22
Number of Winning Party Parliamentarians	20*	16	17	6
Total Votes for Party Candidates	291,290	130,935	168,000	96,152
Total Number of Winners from the Party	281,404	90,634	139,229	31,823
Total Number of Voters	2,024,928*	819,576	1,368,879	1,411,935
Ratio of party candidates to voters	14.39%	15.97%	12.03%	6.8%
Ratio of winning candidates to voters	13.89%	11.05%	9.97%	2.25%
Number of members in the house of representatives	80	80	110	110
Ratio of winning party candidates to total number of parliamentarians	25%	20%	15.5%	5.45%

(\*) Does not account for two Muslim Brotherhood leaders who were nominated outside the Brotherhood's official list.

(\*\*) Total number of votes as indicated by voters, not the number of voters as the 1989 electoral system in question relied on an Open List. In that system, the constituent is granted several votes, in accordance with the number of seats in the election district.

movement sought to make clear its stance on the elections law, voter turnout, violent incidents and electoral fraud, all of which have taken place on previous election days. At the conclusion of its statement, the party affirmed several points, more importantly<sup>33</sup>:

- The elected House of Representatives, in accordance with the current law and procedures, did not truly represent the Jordanian people.
- The executive branch's insistence on using the current Elections Law was a violation against the House of Representatives and the people. The executive branch, by issuing a temporary law, imposed its will on the people – in the absence of the House of Representatives – thus the new House of Representatives was formed in accordance with the executive branch's will.
- The ideas for change, propagated by the government, were mere illusions. There could be no change or reform, or democracy in light of the current law. There was hope among citizens following the dissolution of the previous House of Representatives. They had hoped the dissolution was the start of a reform that could bring a new just law, ensuring a fair representation of the people. Such reform could have restored the people's trust in the House of Representatives; however, the results disappointed and frustrated citizens. The government had missed an excellent opportunity to reform and delve into a national program to resolve the political, social and economic crises, a matter that could exacerbate future problems.
- Political reform is an urgent matter that which the government cannot postpone. The first step toward reform requires the enacting of a new Elections Law, one that represents the will of the Jordanian people. That is the only path to achieving a national consensus. In addition, the government must hold new elections in accordance with the new law. The new law must combine

two sets of legislation combining proportional representation with district representation at a ratio of 50% for each. Moreover, a new law must limit election oversight to an independent, neutral, national committee. The law must eliminate the invention of sub-districts and use accurate registration records for voter eligibility.

**Why Boycott?** A quick reading of Table 2 gives the impression that the weight of the political electoral party has been in decline since 1989. Such is the case due to the factors related to the social context of the elections, more so than the state of the party itself. First, there is the change to the 1993 Elections Law that brought about a change from an open list to the One Vote system. This explains the decline in the number of party representation from 22 to 16 seats. In addition, the 2007 elections were fraud-laden. In that election, party representatives were limited to six representatives only. Compared to that situation the party had maintained its parliamentary representation power in 2003 when it won 17 seats. One of these seats was from the women's seat-quota, compared with 16 seats in 1993. Therefore, one could say that one of the leading reservations the party had against election laws, exclusively focused on the procedures of One Vote system and the lack of election integrity. In 1997, the party boycotted the elections due to the One Vote system. However, evidence suggests that the party feared election fraud, as it feared the government siding with the recently formed Constitutional National Party, a coalition of nine smaller parties.

As for the election boycott of 2010, the party's position reflected a double standard. On the one hand, there was fear of election fraud, despite a government effort to alleviate concerns. The government took comprehensive measures to cancel the process of illegally transporting voters between voting districts during the 2007 elections.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the government had allowed the National Human Rights Center to supervise the elections.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, the invention of Fictitious

Districts, known as Branch Districts, kept alive doubts concerning election fraud. In particular, the new law did not guarantee the allocation of representatives in sub-districts.<sup>36</sup>

The other reason that affected the decision to boycott the elections was the conflict between hawks and doves in the party, a conflict that had been raging since the 2007 elections. The conflict started when the party's leadership did not provide the necessary political support to all party candidates. In particular, the government's heavy-handed control – stemming from claims of corruption in the management of the Society – emboldened the boycott trend.

In addition the Popular Unity Party as the major opposition party, there are few other smaller parties and political organization that boycotted the elections. Dr. Said Diab, the Democratic Popular Unity Party's secretary general had announced in a press conference on 7 August, 2010 that the party's central committee decided to boycott the parliamentary elections in protest of what he referred to as, "Undemocratic practices, chief among them the ratification of the temporary Elections Law relying on One Vote". Dr. Tiab called on the government to implement a list of changes, at the forefront of which was, "Adjustment of the Elections Law by moving away from One Vote in reliance on the proportional representation principle. In addition, [he called] for the formation of a neutral national body to supervise the elections and amend laws governing public life."<sup>37</sup>

The National High Committee of Retired Military Personnel declared in a statement issued on the eve of 2 August 2010 that it, "calls for the boycott of parliamentary elections, be it nominations, voting, participation or cooperation". It is important to mention that the Committee of Retired Military Personnel had called for the dissolution of the National High Committee, and decided in July the establishment of a temporary committee.<sup>38</sup> The Revival Committee for Teachers' Labor Union hinted on 25 August 2010 that it would boycott the elections in protest of the governmental campaign that terminated the employment of a large number of teachers and a number of managers at the Ministry of Education.<sup>39</sup>

On 15 September 2010, more than 300 public figures signed the declaration<sup>40</sup> in which they announced their desire to boycott the elections. The declaration reviewed the decision to dissolve the Fifteenth House of Representatives. It pointed out that the dissolution of parliament came, "As a result of weakness and lack of professionalism. Later it became clear that the reasons behind the dissolution of parliament were the passage of several temporary laws." The declaration pointed to the government's insistence on keeping the temporary One Vote Elections Law, with a clear stand: "Circumstances have forced us – party representatives, institutions and national figures – to announce our decision to boycott the parliamentary elections of 2010. Our decision is political

and national. It comes to oppose the policies and legislations undertaken by the government, decisions that have caused dire consequences to our Jordanian people. Our decision refuses to give legitimacy to the fraudulent process against the people's will and aspirations for progress and true representation."

It bears mentioning that the majority of the signatories to the declaration were leaders and activists of the two parties that boycotted the elections. These were the Islamic Labor Front Party and the Popular Unity Party. In addition, other figures from labor unions and opposition circles with a national leftist or Islamic background were among the signatories.

### **Voter Turnout in the Elections**

The average voter turnout was 53% of eligible voters. Participating in the elections were 1,257,987 voters out of 2,242,789 registered in the voting lists of electoral districts in the kingdom.<sup>41</sup>

As for the Islamic Labor Front, one of the largest parties in Jordan that had decided to boycott the elections, this voter turnout was very high compared with other elections. When compared with the elections results of 1997 in which the Islamic Movement boycotted the elections, one finds that the voting average was about 44.9% (AL-Hourani, 2004: 195) of voters. These results are about 8% lower than the 2010 elections. Comparatively, in the elections of 2007 voter turnout was 57.02% (Al-Hourani, 2008: 318), a 4% difference from the 2010 elections.

There are three primary reasons behind the high voting rate in the 2010 elections compared with previous elections (Al-Sha'er, 2011). These reasons are:

- The political environment in which the elections took place, following the dissolution of the previous House of Representatives. These conditions propagated a climate that affected the integrity of the electoral process.
- Widespread governmental efforts to raise the voting average.
- Doubt among the public about the justifications Islamic movements used for the boycott, and their acceptance of the boycott without active mobilization urging the electorate to boycott the ballot.

Nevertheless, the increased average in voter turnout conceals vast voting differences between electoral districts. However, the Ministry of Interior did not publish voter turnout averages for the district level and settled for publishing them for the governorate level and for Bedouin districts. Within this framework, we classify voter turnout percentages into four categories. These classifications reveal the type of differences in voter turnout (Table 3).

**Table3.** Registered Voters in Electoral Lists and the Percentage of Voter Turnout by Governorate and Bedouin District

Number	Governorate/District	Registered Voters	Voting Percentage
1	Capital-Amman	780,555	34.2%
2	Al-Zarqaa'	298,289	36.2%
3	Al-Balqaa'	188,299	64.6%
4	Ma'daba	69,246	74.4%
5	Irbid Governorate	472,748	61.8%
6	Al-Mafraq	56,753	73.6%
7	Jarash	68,857	71.6%
8	Ajloun	73,714	71.7%
9	Al-Karak	120,292	72.9%
10	Al-Tafilah	43,581	75.1%
11	Ma'an	37,943	72.7%
12	Al-Aqabah	26,738	60.5%
13	Northern Bedouin District	55,926	81.2%
14	Central Bedouin District	39,105	77.1%
15	Southern Bedouin District	41,530	80.3%

**Source:** Table prepared by the author based on official election results.

- The first category, 80%, the highest percentage of voting rates, limited to some of the Bedouin districts. The Northern Bedouin District reached the highest percentage in the kingdom, coming in at 81.2%. The Southern Bedouin District followed at 80.3%. Though the Central Bedouin District did not break the 80% barrier, it received the third place in the kingdom at 77.1%.

- The second category concerns the smaller governorates per their number of voters (Excluding Al-Aqabah). These are mostly rural or remote areas. Voting average in these governorates – seven in number – ranges from 71.6% in the Jarash Governorate and 75.1% in Al-Tafilah Governorate.

- The third category includes three governorates with voting averages in the 60s; these are Al-Aqabah Governorate with an average of 60.5%, the Irbid Governorate with an average of 61.8% and Al-Balqaa' Governorate with an average of 64.6%.

- The fourth category includes two governorates that registered the lowest voting rates in the kingdom, well below the general voting average. These two governorates are Amman, the Capital Governorate, with an average of 34.2% and Al-Zarqaa' Governorate with an average of 36.2%. These governorates are renowned for the influence of the Islamic Labor Front Party.

These two governorates are highly populated with Jordanians of Palestinian descent and have a historical tendency to abstain from participation in elections. These two reasons explain the low voting rates in both governorates. Such rates have been low in every election. For example, in the election of 2007, the voting percentage was 46.7% in the Capital Governorate and 43% in Al-Zarqaa' Governorate. (Al-Hourani, 2008: 318)

Further, a review of voter turnout in the governorates reveals variations in voting rates on the district level. For example, voting rates are lower in the Capital District, which represents the main city in that governorate, known as Al-Qasabah. When calculating turnout rates based on real voting numbers, that is to say, the total number received by all candidates in the election districts, in addition to the total from all governorates, the following results emerge:<sup>42</sup>

In the Irbid Governorate, the voting rate was 60.3%. However, in the 1<sup>st</sup> District (Al-Qasabah), turnout averaged 45.4%. In Al-Karak Governorate, the voting rate was 71.4%, but the average voting rate in the 1<sup>st</sup> District (Al-Qasabah) was 64.8%. In instances where this conclusion conflicts with the actual data, one can attribute the reasons for variations to demography and other factors. As an illustration, in Al-Balqaa' Governorate, the average voting rate in the 1<sup>st</sup> District (Al-Qasabah) was 78.7%. At the same time, the average voting rate in the 4<sup>th</sup> District was 43%. The latter covers the province of Ein al-Basha, which includes one of the largest refugee camps in Jordan, Al-Baqa' Camp.

### Voting Patterns

The elections had a tribal character manifested by the marginalization and inclusion of all uniting factors such as national unity and collective interest. Instead, family relations and clan coalitions took priority over other factors. In his news report, Jihad al-Mansi, the parliamentary reporter for *Al-Ghadd* Newspaper, described in an article the outcome of the elections,

**Table 4.** Party Participation in the Election and in the House of Representatives

Election Year	Total Number of Candidates	Total Declared Party Candidates	Percentage of Party Candidates	Number of Party Winners	Percentage of Party Representatives in Parliament
1989*	647	46	7.1%	24	30%
1993**	534	57*	10.7%	19	23.75%
1997	525	20	3.8%	5	6.25%
2003***	765	40	5.2%	20	18.2%
2007	885	30	3.4%	6	5.45%
2010	763	68	8.9%	12	10.0%

**Source:** Aggregate table taken from reports prepared by the New Jordan Center for Studies about the elections of 1989, 1993, 1997, 2003, 2007, in addition to data recorded by the author.

(\*) Does not account for three non-declared Muslim Brotherhood candidates, two of whom had won.

(\*\*) Does not account for 36 party candidates running on a personal platform, 12 of whom had won.

(\*\*\*) Does not account for 24 party candidates running on a personal platform, 13 of whom had won.

stating, “The new House of Representatives is overwhelmingly clan and service oriented, while it marginalizes political character”.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, another report<sup>44</sup> mentioned that the distribution of candidates was, “influenced primarily by clan politics”. As for the National Party, the report mentioned that in defining electoral districts, the party exclusively chose, “Geographic areas in which its candidates have extended clan support.” The report also mentioned that the Jordanian Unity Front has also chosen its electoral districts based on geographic areas depending on tribal electoral presence”.

In his analysis entitled, “What is the harm in the House of Representatives being dominated by tribal influence?” The *Al-Dustour* reporter, Wa'il Al-Jaraysheh wrote, “All Jordanian parties have little chance that their representatives will win and enter parliament without clan support. This rule is true in the city, in rural areas and in the [refugee] camps. There is no single Jordanian region that relies on clan politics while others do not. Winning representatives of political parties in the current parliament sought clan support, too. In addition, the head of the National Party, one of the centrist and important parties, relied on clan support when elections started before taking any final decision. The structure of Jordanian society is marked by clan politics until the end of days”.<sup>45</sup>

The weight of clan politics and its impact on national politics is not a matter of fate, rather a result of the legislative, political and procedural process of the elections themselves. Since 1989, elections underwent several stages. Each stage witnessed an increase in the clan role.

Stage One: Elections according to the Open List. That arrangement benefited the larger political organizations. For that reason, political parties found it acceptable. One of the outcomes of Ope List arrangement was the Muslim Brotherhood's winning of 22 seats. National leftist parties were limited to one representative only, to include The Communist Party, The Socialist Arab Ba'ath Party, The

Jordanian Democratic People's Party (JDP) and The Jordanian Democratic Popular Unity Party.

In light of the expansion of electoral districts, the repercussions of this electoral arrangement were that non-affiliated party winners were in most cases public figures in the kingdom, or figures known on the governorate level. Such was the case as the clan alone, however its size, could not play a decisive role.

Stage Two: This stage witnessed a change in the Elections Law and the adoption of the One Vote Law. This change was a turning point as it favored the clan, which started to play a decisive role in the elections. More importantly, this stage was characterized by an end to restrictions on political parties when in 1992 the new Parties Law ended restrictions on the establishment of political parties, banned since 1957. In addition, several public figures, including former ministers, retired army officers and civil servants, participated in forming new parties as an entry to political life. In sum, these parties publicly nominated 57 candidates, in addition to 36 individual party candidates. Nineteen of those who were officially nominated had won the elections, in addition to 12 who were individually nominated by the two parties (Table 4).

This stage was marked by the passage of the 2001 law, in reliance on the One Vote system, however. It included the restructuring of major electoral districts into smaller districts with fewer seats. Through these changes, the clan's influence increased to the degree that some districts became clan monopolies. For example, the 2<sup>nd</sup> District in Al-Karak Governorate (The Qasser Province) became Al-Majaali clan's district. Abd al-Haadi al-Majaali, an engineer and district representative had won the elections in 2003 and 2007. In the election of 2010, Amjad al-Majaali won that district. Another example was the 2<sup>nd</sup> District in Al-Balqaa' Governorate (Southern Shounah Province) that became Al-Udwan's clan district. In the 2003 elections, Muhammad Noufan won the district seat, and in 2007, Mahmoud Ahmad al-Udwan won that seat. Most recently,

**Table 5.** Party Participation in Both the Elections and Parliament of 2010

Number	Governorate/District	Party Candidates	Total Candidates	Percentage of Party Candidates
1	Capital-Amman	25	158	
2	<i>Al-Zarqa'</i>	14	85	
3	<i>Al-Balqaa'</i>	5	76	
4	<i>Ma'daba</i>	1	38	
5	<i>Irbid</i>	7	136	
6	<i>Al-Mafraq</i>	1	22	
7	<i>Jarash</i>	2	28	
8	<i>Ajloun</i>	2	29	
9	<i>Al-Karak</i>	4	83	
10	<i>Al-Tafilah</i>	3	19	
11	<i>Ma'an</i>	-	21	
12	<i>Al-Aqabah</i>	2	14	
13	Northern Bedouin District	1	18	
14	Central Bedouin District	-	21	
15	Southern Bedouin District	1	15	
	Total	68	763	8.9%

**Source:** Prepared by the author according to party nominations and total nominations.

in the 2010 elections, Shahdi al-Udwan won the district seat. That law was implemented in the 2003 and 2007 elections.

Stage Four: During this stage, the Fictitious District concept was introduced. As a result, the Islamic Labor Front boycotted the elections. During that election the percentage of political party candidates, compared to the total number of candidates, was 8.9% (See Table 5). These results imply that the majority of candidates were not party supported and were individually motivated, relying on their families, clans and their own wealth to win the elections. It bears mentioning that political parties often nominated more than one candidate in some districts, despite those districts having enough voters. This meant that these partisans relied on clan and family influence more than they did on their party's support and electoral power. Table 5

Of the total number of winning candidates, 12 were party affiliated. That is to say that the remaining winners ran as individuals. In addition to those individuals, there were 11 winners, members of political parties; however, they did not disclose their political party affiliation. Among these were two parties that decided to boycott the elections. Therefore, with the exception of two parties in which candidates relied partially on constituencies, the remaining winners drew support from family, clan or personal connections, as well as services they provided the public. That was particularly applicable to former parliament members – thirteen in number – and eight former ministers, in addition to civil servants and retired high-ranking military officers. In addition, there were cases where bribery, whether direct or indirect, was used to buy votes. By contrast, 32 former members, among them four former ministers, and several businesspersons

who did not win the elections.

In December 2010, after the elections, the Strategic Studies Center at the University of Jordan published a study. The study asked respondents about the factors important to them when choosing a candidate. Eighteen percent of those surveyed replied that clan or familial ties were of utmost importance. Meanwhile, 15% stated that candidates had provided previous services and 12% indicated the most important factor was for the candidate to be from the same area as the voter. By contrast, 3% considered it important to know the candidate on a personal level. Of all respondents, 13% refused to answer, while 35% provided other answers pertaining to the candidate's characteristics and qualifications.

When respondents were asked whether consensus among their clan, family or in their hometown had any impact on a candidate's chances of winning, 42 % reported that their clan ties, family connection or place of birth had such impact. Meanwhile, 48% reported there was no consensus based on these factors.

As for respondents whose clan, family ties, geographic proximity or town of origin shared a consensus about a given candidate, 70% reported they adhered to that consensus. Meanwhile, 30% reported they did not adhere to their clan's consensus at the time of voting.

About the role played by the clan in parliamentary elections, results showed that 85% of respondents thought that the clan played a role in these elections (On various levels). By contrast, 4% thought that the clan played no role whatsoever in these elections.

### Summary

Partial democratic measures in Jordan have consisted of

conflicting elements for change. The elections themselves have promised a transformation toward democracy under a constitutional monarchy. These <sup>1</sup> hopes were based on democratic trends starting with the elections of 1989. In addition, they built upon the king's willingness to deal with opposition demands, such as the dissolution of parliament, a new election that could lead <sup>2</sup> to a more credible parliament compared to previous ones.

In this article we argue that many of the reforms and changes the king has agreed upon could very well be <sup>3</sup> tactical maneuvers to absorb protests of the lack of democracy. Previous experience shows the king could <sup>4</sup> undertake measures to delay the democratization process. Therefore, to ensure a continuous democratic <sup>5</sup> process, there is need for continuous public and political party pressure on the king and the regime. One of the most important developments in the past few years was the withdrawal of the old Elections Law and the passage <sup>6</sup> of a new one, aimed at limiting the opposition power of the Islamic movement in particular. In other words, the <sup>7</sup> king and the government's actions can be seen as a retreat, even from the idea of a limited Democracy.

Meanwhile, the same democratic methods <sup>8</sup> implemented in Jordan have deepened primordial <sup>9</sup> tribalism in Jordanian society. They have led to division <sup>10</sup> that grows at the expense of shared citizenship. Thus the procedural democratic innovations are perpetuating the opposite of democracy. As such, procedural may pave <sup>11</sup> the way to relative transformation to democracy, at the <sup>12</sup> same time; it could become the dominant factor in facilitating an expedient process of regression away from <sup>13</sup> democracy.

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<sup>41</sup> According to the Jordan News Agency - PETRA, 9 November 2010.

<sup>42</sup> There was a need to calculate the accurate voting figures as the government did not publish official data for the electoral district level.

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