

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The map is centered behind the title.

# Parliamentary Elections in Jordan

## A Competition of Mixed Messages

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- In the midst of continuous regional turmoil, Jordanians will be heading to the polling stations next week on 20 September to cast their votes for the 18<sup>th</sup> national Parliament.
- A new election law based on open proportional lists at the district level sees an increased role for political parties. Yet, after almost three decades of an electoral system explicitly designed to weaken their role, it comes as little surprise that parties are still struggling to present themselves as strong actors.
- In the run-up to the elections, candidates have formed alliances across the political spectrum but few lists feature programmatic agendas or even a clear political vision.
- Having boycotted the past two elections, the Muslim Brotherhood has decided to compete again this year. As a result of the numerous crises within the Brotherhood in the past few years, a variety of Islamist groups are competing against each other.
- Several polls show high frustration among citizens with regard to the role and performance of Parliament as well as a significant degree of indifference towards the elections, making a low voter turnout very likely.

When Jordanians will be heading to the polling stations next week on 20 September to cast their votes for the 18<sup>th</sup> national Parliament, it will be under yet another new election law. It is the ninth piece of electoral legislation since elections were reintroduced in 1989; since then, every parliamentary election in Jordan has been held under a new law.

Government Spokesperson Mohammad Momani expects the upcoming parliamentary elections »to be historic by all means«.<sup>1</sup> Yet, it remains to be seen how many citizens share this optimism and will choose to participate in the elections. Several polls have shown shockingly little intention among the population to cast their ballots. Authorities will be nervously watching, with voter turnout being seen as a central indicator of the »success« of the election and a vital piece of Jordan's international image. Khaled Kalaldehy, Chairman of the Independent Election Commission (IEC), pre-emptively declared the IEC »not responsible for encouraging people to vote«, citing regional wars and conflicts as factors discouraging citizens from participating in the elections.<sup>2</sup>

## Voter Frustration

While the many regional crises certainly do take their toll on the Kingdom, the prime reason for voter abstention must be seen elsewhere. Although the legislative role of the Parliament is clearly stated in the Jordanian constitution and King Abdullah II even envisioned a »transition to [a] true parliamentary government« in his Discussion Papers<sup>3</sup>, the reality is still sorely lacking. In the context of the current political system, Parliament is a weak institution. This is further exacerbated by the fact that it is composed by individual members not factions, thus lacking the capacity to exercise its task as monitoring government performance. Many Jordanians view their Parliament not as a decision-making body but as an institution, which merely »rubber stamps« government decisions. Adnan Sawaaer, a multi-term Member of Parliament, openly admitted at a public event in July that »there is no role for Parliament in shaping policies«.

There is a considerable trust gap between the elected representatives and their constituents. »When you have election laws that are structurally designed to produce weak governments, and when the executive branch regularly interferes in the work of parliament, it is natural that people will lose trust,« explains veteran statesman Marwan Muasher.<sup>4</sup> Many constituents feel that election pledges usually remain empty slogans and question the independence of their deputies. Cases like Parliament's same-day »U-turn« regarding the Israeli investment ban fuel these suspicions. In said incident dating back to 22 May 2016, Parliament voted to exclude Israel from its National Investment Fund; during the evening session of the same day, Parliament suddenly reversed its previous decision with several vocal supporters of the Jordanian anti-normalization movement voting in favor of trade with Israel.<sup>5</sup>

Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that the run-up to the elections has shown just how prevalent voter frustration is in Jordan. An opinion poll conducted by the Jordanian NGO Phenix Center in August showed that only 38.9 % of the sample intended to vote, while 42.1 % planned not to participate and 19 % were still undecided.<sup>6</sup> Other polls confirmed similar numbers.

Jordanian blogger Naseem Tarawneh admits: »Yes, Parliament has been a source of comic relief over the years, but behind every cringe-worthy act that ranges from shouting matches to the occasional drawing of shoes or pistols in the heat of intense exchanges, public confidence in the Lower House has dwindled, and with it, overall faith in the legislative branch.«<sup>7</sup> This tendency is confirmed in a 2016 study by the International Republican Institute (IRI) where 72 % of the sample responded that the impact of the previous Parliament (17<sup>th</sup> legislature) had moved Jordan either in a »worse direction« or in a »much worse direction«.<sup>8</sup> 87 % felt that this Parliament had not accomplished anything it should be commended for. That

1. Mohammad Ghazal: »Gov't ready with by-law on distribution of constituencies.« *The Jordan Times*, 29 March 2016.

2. »Boosting voter participation »not IEC's role« — Kalaldehy.« *The Jordan Times*, 3 September 2016.

3. H.M. Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein: »Making Our Democratic System Work for All Jordanians.« 16 January 2013. <http://kingabdullah.jo>

4. Abdul-Wahab Kayyali: »A Statesman Speaks.« *Venture*, Issue 126. September 2016.

5. »Jordan: What's behind parliament's U-turn on Israeli investments ban?« *The New Arab*, 24 May 2016. [www.alaraby.co.uk](http://www.alaraby.co.uk)

»Amid scandal and suspicion, Jordan's Parliament votes for Israeli investment.« *albawaba*, 24 May 2016. [www.albawaba.com](http://www.albawaba.com)

6. Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies: »Poll Results: The Attitudes of Jordanian Citizens Towards Participation in the Upcoming 2016 Parliamentary Elections.« 21 August 2016. [www.phenixcenter.net](http://www.phenixcenter.net).

7. Naseem Tarawneh: »Jordan's Ballot Box: Empty Slogan's Or Chance for Reform?« *The New Arab*, [www.alaraby.co.uk](http://www.alaraby.co.uk), 8 September 2016.

8. International Republican Institute (IRI): »Survey of Jordan Public Opinion. National Poll #13.« April 19-24, 2016. [www.iri.org](http://www.iri.org)

being said, in a country with clear red lines for criticism, Parliament can also serve as a handy scapegoat for voicing general discontent, which cannot be directed at the actual decision-makers.<sup>9</sup>

Said survey by the Phenix Center found that the most prevalent motives for boycotting the elections were dissatisfaction with Parliament's performance (30.5%), doubts as to the integrity of the elections (25.7%) and rejection of the competing candidates (23.6%).<sup>10</sup> Unsurprisingly for a country like Jordan, where tribal and family ties run deep and so-called »service Parliamentarians« still compensate for a widely lacking efficient municipal service structure, a large share of those set to vote named tribal and family relations (32.6%) or personal gain (10.3%) as motives. Yet, 27.2% claimed a sense of civic duty and 24.8% sharing particular candidates' views.

While no political party has called for a boycott of the elections, a number of citizens have been openly encouraging it, with one group even forming a »National Coalition for Boycotting the Elections«. The IEC has been urging the media to challenge the »culture of boycott« and has called on Jordanians to respect the »values of good citizenship and democracy«.<sup>11</sup> In a video statement on the IEC Facebook page, Chairman Khaled Kalalkeh encourages young voters to express their dissatisfaction with an empty ballot but to participate in the elections to make their voices heard: »If you do not find a list that represents you, cast an empty ballot, because you deserve democracy, even if nobody deserves your vote.«<sup>12</sup> The efforts of the IEC in this regard give reason to believe that the number of invalid ballots will be made transparent to the public at these elections and will be taken as a serious indicator of electoral preferences.

It has to be handed to the Jordanian government that they did not go for the cheap shots in terms of voter turnout. Quite the contrary. The number of eligible voters was increased by approximately 240,000 by reducing

the voting age of previously 18 years; a citizen can now vote in the elections if he/she is 17 years old at least 90 days prior to Election Day. Additionally, in the upcoming elections, it is no longer necessary as in 2013 to have been pre-registered as a voter; all citizens can vote using their national ID cards. So, all other factors aside, the relative voter turnout will almost certainly be lower than in 2013 given the increase in the absolute number of eligible voters.

Unfortunately, the recent electoral reform did not include the introduction of absentee ballots. This means that citizens unable to leave the house, those otherwise occupied or absent from their constituencies on Election Day as well as the considerable numbers of Jordanians living abroad will be excluded from casting their votes.

## The New Election Law

Until 2016, Jordan had figured among the three countries worldwide using the rare Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system, more commonly referred to as »one man, one vote«. In 2012, this system was amended to include a second vote for a national closed proportional list, through which 27 out of 150 seats in Parliament were chosen in the 2013 elections. The election law then underwent a complete overhaul with the abolishment of both the SNTV system and the national lists, and the introduction of an open proportional list system at the district level. In a rare maneuver, the sitting 17<sup>th</sup> Parliament had also voted to reduce the number of parliamentary seats from 150 to 130 for the coming legislature.

Under the new system, candidates must register through lists on the district level with a minimum of three members on each list. The number of candidates on the list cannot exceed that of the available seats in the respective district and is generally topped off at ten. Voters can cast their vote for the whole list as such, for different candidates on one list or for all candidates from the chosen list. Through the open list system, there is thus competition between the different lists as well as between the candidates of each list.

The minimum age for candidacy was kept at 30 years. While this is not uncommon in international comparison, it is deplorable with regard to the age structure of Jordanian society where more than 55% of the population

9. Naseem Tarawneh: »The Cautious Optimist's Guide to Parliamentary Elections. Jordan's Biggest Show Returns but Trust Issues Remain.« 27 July 2016. [www.black-iris.com](http://www.black-iris.com)

10. Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies: »Poll Results: The Attitudes of Jordanian Citizens Towards Participation in the Upcoming 2016 Parliamentary Elections.« 21 August 2016. [www.phenixcenter.net](http://www.phenixcenter.net).

11. Omar Obeidat: »Election boycott campaigners ›do not believe in democracy« — IEC.« *The Jordan Times*, 27 July 2016.

12. Independent Election Commission, 9 August 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/EntikhabatJO/videos/vb.181043418687430/544499029008532>

are below 25 years of age.<sup>13</sup> A substantial number of active voters under 30 are thus prevented from competing at the elections and representing the youth vote in Parliament.

Many Jordanians were surprised by the abolishment of the national lists introduced in the 2013 elections, which had seemed as an adequate step towards forging country-wide coalitions instead of going back to a district-based rationale. »The government could have improved the national lists and not replaced them with proportional lists,« contended veteran Member of Parliament Abdul Hadi Majali.<sup>14</sup> The new open list system at the governorate level, he argued, is »just a replication of the one-person, one-vote system«. While the new election procedure obviously differs in nature from the SNTV, this comment might still be justified by a similar election outcome, i.e. by the possibility that the new Parliament could take after its predecessor with regard to its membership. This will eventually depend on the deputies' ability to forge sustainable coalitions within the new Parliament. If they fail, it will be a return to a Parliament composed of individuals.

Skepticism with regard to the new law also sparked due to the brief period of time for the implementation of the new law, which only entered into force in mid-March of this year. After the dissolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> Parliament on 29 May, the election date of 20 September was announced at the beginning of June, just before the start of the fasting month Ramadan, a time when working hours are reduced and official activity slows down. This left little time for the authorities to solve detail questions, invest in large scale voter information campaigns and train candidates and staff. »We didn't have a lot of time to build platforms,« complained a Zarqa candidate. »We had to establish our list under a lot of pressure without being able to ensure that there is consensus on major issues among all candidates on the list.« On top of it all, the entire week before Election Day was declared a public holiday to mark Eid al Adha, thus increasing the obstacles for campaigning and official preparations for the elections.

13. Central Intelligence Agency: The World Factbook. »Jordan.« Data estimates from 2015. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>

14. Raed Omari: »House Sharply Divided over Suggested Elections Law.« *The Jordan Times*, 14 September 2015.

## Newly Shaped Electoral Districts

Jordan has heavily gerrymandered electoral districts. While the layout of the constituencies has certainly changed under the new law, the intentional flaw of the overrepresentation of some districts over others has been partially softened but not erased. The 2016 election law and its bylaws have reshaped and simplified constituencies and decreased their number from 45 to 23. The new districts now correspond to the 12 governorates, apart from Amman, which is divided into five districts, Irbid into four and Zarqa into two. The three additional Badia districts will be further detailed below.

Even after this redesign, there is still stark evidence of disproportional representation, mainly in Amman and Zarqa. Amman's Second District, for example, contains 9.71 % of the total voting population, while it only has a 5.20 % share in seats; likewise in Zarqa's First District, with 10.92 % of the voting population and a mere 6.90 % of seats.<sup>15</sup> Said constituencies traditionally have a high percentage of Jordanians of Palestinian origin and of supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. On the receiving end of this system are constituencies in the South, most notably Kerak (4.05 % of voters, 8.60 % of seats) and Ma'an (1.43 % of voters, 8.60 % of seats), historically strongholds of loyalists and seen as the backbone of the regime.

The Jordanian election law traditionally knows three Bedouin districts – North, Central and South Badia –, which are treated as governorates; for them, voters are not assigned by residence but by family name. These are closed districts in the sense that no non-Bedouin can request to vote or run there. However, for several electoral cycles, there have been recurring issues with Bedouins requesting to run as candidates in regular districts, against which there is no explicit legal provision.<sup>16</sup> Hind al-Fayez, a Badia deputy in the previous Parliament, had unsuccessfully challenged this legal practice in 2015 on grounds of unconstitutionality. The Badia regions, she argued, were classified as separate governorates »with the aim of empowering the Bedouins and ensuring them a presence in the Lower House«.<sup>17</sup> Accusing the govern-

15. Unpublished numbers from the RASED monitoring coalition. September 2016.

16. RASED Statement on the IEC's Transparency during the Candidate Registration Period. 27 August 2016. [www.hayatcenter.org](http://www.hayatcenter.org)

17. Raed Omari: »Badia Figures Question Constitutionality of Voting System for Bedouins.« *The Jordan Times*, 14 October 2015.

ment of treating Bedouins as »second-class citizens«, she urged to take into consideration that »Bedouins are no longer nomads« but have become permanent residents and built their networks in cities around Jordan.

The registration phase for the coming elections again saw several cases pertaining to this issue. Basem Tlilan, for example, originating from a Bedouin family but wishing to run in Amman's Third Constituency, had his candidacy rejected by the IEC and the Appeals Court building on legal precedent. Ironically, this does not prevent all Bedouins from running as candidates outside the Badia districts – if they are lucky enough to have had no formal complaint lodged against their candidacy with the IEC.

## A New Role for Political Parties

»It is a good law,« proclaimed a Zarqa candidate at a public event in September, »just not suitable for Jordan. It needs an organized party system.« This remark hits upon an essential point. The success of the new list system will eventually depend on political parties building nation-wide alliances, yet, for the time being, few parties are worth mentioning. After almost three decades of a system, which was explicitly designed to weaken the role of political parties, it comes as little surprise that parties are still struggling to present themselves as strong actors in the political system in Jordan. It remains to be seen if the upcoming elections will serve as a positive impulse in this regard.

Out of the 50 political parties that are currently registered in Jordan, 39 are presenting candidates in the elections.<sup>18</sup> 18% of candidates (232 in absolute terms) participating in the elections are party members. 99 out of the 226 competing lists include at least one party member as a contender. Yet, there are few »genuine« party lists. 73 lists run members from a single party (among other non-partisan candidates), while 26 lists contain members of different parties.

Unsurprisingly, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the only

competitive party in terms of membership, structure and organization, is presenting the majority of party-affiliated candidates (72). It is followed by the National Current Party (23), the National Congress Party »ZamZam« (20), the Centrist Islamic Party (16) and the National Unity Party (16).<sup>19</sup> The lion's share of partisan candidates thus come from Islamist parties.

In an attempt to boost political party activism, state funding for the elections is only accessible to partisan groups. The 2016 by-law to the Political Parties Law allows for parties to receive a loan of up to 20,000 Jordanian Dinars (28,000 US\$) from the government for electoral campaigning. According to Minister for Political and Parliamentary Affairs, Musa Maaytah, these payments come as loans since the government cannot directly finance party campaigns.<sup>20</sup> Parties forming coalitions can receive an additional 5,000 Jordanian Dinars (7,000 US\$). For the upcoming elections, 11 out of 29 eligible parties received such loans.<sup>21</sup>

Under the new by-law, which will be enacted after the 2016 elections, political parties can receive 50,000 Jordanian Dinars (70,000 US\$) per year and double that amount if party members (with a membership of more than one year) ran as parliamentary candidates in at least 35% of the electoral districts.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, parties can obtain 2,000 Jordanian Dinars (2,800 US\$) per member who won a parliamentary seat, capped at a total of 10,000 Jordanian Dinars (14,000 US\$). Parties become eligible for state funding one year after their registration.

Candidates and lists do incur substantial costs for participating in the elections. Apart from costs for campaign activities and PR, which candidates are usually expected to cover individually, each candidate has to pay a registration fee of 500 Jordanian Dinars (700 US\$); additionally, each list must deposit a refundable 2,000 Jordanian Dinars (2,800 US\$). A considerable number of candidates thus either come from affluent backgrounds or are affiliated to people with financial resources. Funding can therefore pose a substantial obstacle to citizens with

18. RASED: Mapping-Out Partisan Participation in Jordan's 2016 Parliamentary Elections. 1 September 2016. [www.hayatcenter.org](http://www.hayatcenter.org)  
NB: The »Integrity Coalition for Election Observation« has minimally differing numbers (see: »The 2016 Elections of Jordan's 18<sup>th</sup> Parliament. Analysis of Candidates Registration Numbers«. Undated document. [www.identity-center.org](http://www.identity-center.org))

19. RASED: Mapping-Out Partisan Participation in Jordan's 2016 Parliamentary Elections. 1 September 2016. [www.hayatcenter.org](http://www.hayatcenter.org)

20. Khetam Malkawi: »New By-Law on Party Funding ›Will Encourage Political Activity.« *The Jordan Times*, 9 August 2016.

21. Verbal information by the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs. 13 September 2016.

22. »Cabinet Endorses By-Law on Funding Political Parties«. *The Jordan Times*, 30 March 2016.

modest financial means, and particularly to younger candidates. Jawad Jaafreh, a member of the newly registered Jordanian Socialdemocratic Party (JSDP), for example, states that he went back on his original intention to run as a candidate in his hometown of Zarqa because as a young father he could not shoulder the financial burden of a campaign.

## Lists and Candidates

Despite justified concerns that candidates and lists would not be sufficiently informed and prepared given the short notice, 1,252 candidates and 226 lists were approved to compete.<sup>23</sup> 21 candidates were rejected by the IEC or Appeals Court, most for having failed to resign from public positions 60 days prior to Election Day. 95 members of the previous Parliament of 150 are running again. A large majority of candidates (73.7%) are competing for the first time, though.<sup>24</sup> The sheer number of new faces in the race might motivate citizens to vote on the grounds of a fresh start in Parliament.

Few lists feature programmatic agendas or even a clear political vision. Given the diversity of the political backgrounds and convictions of their contestants, several lists have caused raised eyebrows among voters with regard to the motives of their alliance and their political sustainability after the elections.

Tribal alliances still played a substantial role in the forming of lists. A study by the RASED monitoring coalition showed this to be the sole basis for 43.5% of the lists.<sup>25</sup> Yet, »if you belong to a small tribe,« complains a candidate from Irbid, »you will probably have no place on the strong lists.«<sup>26</sup> Throughout the Kingdom, a number of tribes still maintain a tradition of pre-selecting candidates or holding internal elections before the actual Election Day. For some areas, like Wadi Musa, where local tribes had previously followed a rotation system among the different tribes with regard to parliamentary representation, the new layout of their constituency, which now includes

the entire governorate of Ma'an, has effectively put an end to this custom.

## Back at the Table: The Muslim Brotherhood

It will be most interesting to observe the Islamist lists and electorate during the upcoming elections, chiefly for two reasons: One, after boycotting the past two elections, the Muslim Brotherhood has decided to join the race again this year. Two, there is a variety of Islamist groups competing with each other, mostly as a result of the numerous crises, through which the MB has gone in the past few years.

While the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan has been no stranger to internal conflicts and has traditionally harbored different streams, the last few years have seen increasing division within its ranks and considerable disintegration. In 2013, the ZamZam movement was launched by a group of MB activists, which called for substantial reforms and explicitly welcomed non-MB members. In March 2015, 40 MB members officially registered the so-called Muslim Brotherhood Society (MBS), which was quickly recognized by the government as the »official« Brotherhood in Jordan. In December 2015, Hamzeh Mansour, veteran leader of the Islamic Action Front, and his group dubbed the »Wise Men« withdrew from the IAF to found a new political party.

The Muslim Brotherhood, which, despite heavy losses, especially among its leadership, still retains a majority of the membership, has seen its previous license – dating from 1946 – rescinded and has been requested by the government to correct its status. In March 2016, the MB was banned from holding its internal elections. In a surprise move in April of this year, the Jordanian authorities closed MB offices around Jordan.

The IAF had boycotted the elections in 2010 and 2013, objecting to an election system designed to keep support for the Brotherhood at bay. On 11 June, the IAF, retaining its legal status as political party in Jordan, announced its intention of competing in the September elections. Given the circumstances, this can be seen as the only option for the party to avoid descending into complete irrelevance. In an unprecedented strategy shift, the IAF established the National Alliance for Reform (Al-Islah), a platform on which candidates from across the politi-

23. »1,252 Candidates Run for Elections via 226 Tickets«. *The Jordan Times*, 11 September 2016.

24. RASED: Mapping-Out Partisan Participation in Jordan's 2016 Parliamentary Elections. 1 September 2016. [www.hayatcenter.org](http://www.hayatcenter.org)

25. RASED: Mapping-Out Partisan Participation in Jordan's 2016 Parliamentary Elections. 1 September 2016. [www.hayatcenter.org](http://www.hayatcenter.org)

26. Raed Omari: »Candidates in North ›Struggling to Join Election Lists.« *The Jordan Times*, 26 July 2016.

cal spectrum as well as from minorities would compete alongside IAF members. Naming economic and political reform as its prime aim, Al-Islah has refrained from using the IAF's traditional Islamist symbolism and slogans like »Islam is the Solution«. Audeh Quawas, a well-known Christian figure and leader, is among their candidates for Amman's Third Constituency. For him, the new strategy based on inclusion, tolerance and moderation, which the IAF is presenting, is »good for Jordan« and an important step to ensure peaceful coexistence in the Kingdom.

Competing with 128 candidates – including eight minority members – on 23 lists (three under a different name),<sup>27</sup> the IAF-affiliated lists easily appear as the strongest contender for the 2016 elections. In view of this surprising new approach, columnist Fahed al-Khitani asks whether the Jordanian Brotherhood might be following »in the steps of the Tunisian Nahda Movement, dispensing of the traditional Egyptian approach altogether«. <sup>28</sup> He concedes that the support for this new direction is so far limited to the upper echelons of the Party and Brotherhood but that their base and electorate have yet to get on board. Hussein al-Rawashdeh, an Islamist columnist and open critic of the IAF's new strategy, expects that »such an alliance will be short-lived and will test the credibility of the Muslim Brotherhood with their new allies«. <sup>29</sup>

Pointing to internal difficulties within the MB in response to the strategy shift, Amer Bani Amer from the RASED monitoring coalition, estimates that voter turnout from the traditional MB electorate could be much less than expected. The low attendance of Al-Islah events in the run-up to the election may already be a hint in this direction. Likewise, Fahed al-Khitani doubts that the IAF-affiliated lists will manage to gain more than 20 seats in the Parliament. This would, however, in all likelihood still make them the biggest faction.

While the IAF-affiliated lists present themselves as the most prominent force, there are a number of Islamist contenders. The Centrist Islamic Party, which was founded in 2001 following a split of its members from the Muslim Brotherhood, is competing with 23 of its members on 14 different lists across eight governorates.

Ironically, seven of these candidates are unknown as they chose not to disclose their affiliation with the Party. And most of the others, claims Mohammad Abu Rumman, an expert on Islamist movements, do not share the party's political vision.<sup>30</sup> He deplores that the Party is missing the chance of presenting a moderate Islamist discourse and realistic agenda.

Among the more recent splits from the Muslim Brotherhood, the ZamZam movement recently registered as the National Congress Party »ZamZam« and is competing in the elections with 20 candidates. The party of the new »Muslim Brotherhood Society« is running with one list in Irbid's Third Constituency and one in Kerak. It is seen as highly unlikely that ZamZam and the MBS will win more than a few seats at best. The »Wise Men« around Hamzeh Mansour have postponed their involvement to the following elections, in which they intend to compete with their new party as an alternative to the IAF.

## A Surge in Female Candidates

While the total number of candidates in this year's electoral race has dropped by 277 (18 %) with regard to the last parliamentary elections in 2013, there is an unprecedented number of female candidates, amounting to an increase by 37 (17 %).<sup>31</sup> Out of the 226 lists, only eight are exclusively featuring male candidates, while two lists are female-only.<sup>32</sup> The majority of the lists contain a single female candidate with the aim of competing for the quota seat.

While the women's quota guarantees female candidates a minimum of 15 seats in the new Parliament, it does not limit them to quota seats. Thus, the openly stated intention of several lists to include a woman running for the quota seat is based on an erroneous assumption. Female candidates first compete in the regular race and will be solely judged based on the votes they received. Only those women who did not manage to win a seat in the first round, will be taken into account for the quota seat, which will be awarded according to the »strongest loser«

27. Unpublished numbers from the RASED monitoring coalition. September 2016.

28. Fahed Khitan: »Islamists: Strategic Transformation or Elections Tactic?« *Al Ghad*, 6 September 2016. <http://english.alghad.com>

29. Osama Al Sharif: »Will Jordan's Brotherhood Make Breakthrough in Upcoming Elections?« *Al Monitor*, 1 September. [www.al-monitor.com](http://www.al-monitor.com)

30. Mohammad Abu Rumman: »Why Miss the Chance?« *Al Ghad*, 28 August 2016. <http://english.alghad.com>

31. Integrity Coalition for Election Observation: »The 2016 Elections of Jordan's 18<sup>th</sup> Parliament. Analysis of Candidates Registration Numbers«. Undated document. [www.identity-center.org](http://www.identity-center.org)

32. RASED's Study on Women Attitudes towards Jordan's 2016 Parliamentary Elections. 10 September 2016. [www.hayatcenter.org](http://www.hayatcenter.org)

system. In the 2013 elections, three female candidates managed to win outside of the quota.

The relative women's quota witnessed a slight increase with regard to the old system. The 15 quota seats were maintained while overall seats were reduced to 130, thus boosting the quota share in Parliament. With chances of female candidates winning outside the quota still being comparatively slim, though, women's rights activists had – unsuccessfully – lobbied for additional quota seats.

One women's quota seat is assigned to each of the 12 governorates and 3 Badia districts, not to the electoral districts. This, therefore, creates a strong disproportionality between multi-district governorates like Amman, Irbid and Zarqa and more sparsely populated governorates. As an example: The capital of Amman with more than 4 million inhabitants has a single quota seat as does the governorate of Aqaba with a population of roughly 140,000.

### Minorities: Bad Deal?

Jordan's minorities, Christians as well as Chechens and Circassians, are traditionally granted quota seats, which remained unchanged under the new law. 9 seats are reserved for Christians, 3 for Chechens and Circassians. However, the upcoming elections will be the first time that the minorities are unlikely to be the deciding force with regard to who wins their quota seats. With the new list system, the majority determines who will represent the minorities, says Amer Bani Amer.

An example: As mentioned above, there are a number of Christian candidates running on lists affiliated with the IAF, like the Al-Islah list. Yet, most Christians are – quite understandably – unlikely to cast their votes for a list affiliated with a party sporting a clear Islamist rhetoric. Voters for Al-Islah could vote for the Christian candidate on the list or not – this would not take away votes from the Muslim candidates, but in any case the Christian candidate would still profit from the overall vote count of the list. Given the size of the minority communities in Jordan, even a unified community vote would not suffice to tip the balance in their respective electoral districts. Marwan Muasher, himself a Jordanian Christian, refers to this as an »anomaly«, which »the state might not have thought of« when designing the new law.<sup>33</sup> He assumes

that this will be subject to a change in the law after the 2016 elections.

It is also worth noting that, different from the women's quota, which is a minimum quota allowing for female candidates to win additional seats, the minorities' quotas are closed. A Christian candidate is, thus, unable to compete for a seat outside the assigned quota seats. The only – albeit unlikely – scenario under which minority representatives could exceed this number, would be if a minority woman were to win the women's quota seat in her electoral district.

### Outlook

The fact that the elections will be held under a new system makes it hard, at this point, to venture anything more than general predictions as to the possible outcome of the elections. It seems unlikely that individual lists will manage to win high shares of the seats in their districts. Instead, votes will probably be spread out across the list spectrum, with often a few votes making the difference of winning a seat or not. Given the skepticism among Jordanians towards the upcoming elections, it is likely that voter turnout will be low, even if slightly higher as anticipated by the above-mentioned polls.

The run-up to the elections has seen a spike in political debates and activities, many of which were organized by civil society and youth. These events are a testament to the level of interest in political developments among citizens and an important contribution to the democratic culture in Jordan, which will flourish in an atmosphere of open public debate.

The challenges for the coming week lie in ensuring the integrity, transparency and speediness of the electoral process as well as in preventing any violent clashes that might arise in the context of the elections. Yet, the most significant challenge is waiting after Election Day: the performance of the new Parliament according to the mandate, with which the Constitution and the citizens have tasked it. Lastly, needless to say, lessons will have to be learned from the experience with the new election law. In all likelihood, this will not have been the last time that Jordanians voted under a new law.

33. Email communication. 12 September 2016.





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