

The State of Political Participation and Representation in Jordan 2022

Policy Paper

Expressive and Action-oriented Activism

Jordan has launched three major reform initiatives over the past two years concerning the political system, the economy, and the public sector administration. A survey, conducted by NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions in partnership with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung with a nationally representative sample of 1,256 and university students' sample of 822 in October 2022, found a growing perception that Jordanians (half of the national sample) reported they believe they are able to freely express their views about policy issues publicly without fear of reprisal, and two thirds of the university student sample reported the same. This represents a major change from the previous two decades in which the majority of Jordanians held the view that they could not criticize government decisions in public, without fear of reprisal. This perception began to change since 2011 and continued to grow exponentially.

Despite this change in Jordanians' attitude toward "expressive activism", action-oriented activism neither grew in a similar fashion nor was it translated into increasing Jordanians' interest in politics, as those who reported that they were "very disinterested" (nearly 60%) in politics were about 12-fold those who reported "very interested" in politics (nearly 5%).

Although Jordanians report heavy involvement in social activities, such as participating in Azza and Jaha (weddings, engagements and social conflict mediation), their interest and involvement in political activities leave a lot to be desired. This raises the question of why do Jordanians not engage politically, beyond voting? What needs to be done to make Jordanians more interested in politics, and by extension, engage more effectively and diversely in the various types and degrees of political action? Furthermore, what needs to be done to ensure that the three reform initiatives (on political, economic and administrative modernization), driven by the King and the government, are fulfilled?

Social and Political Participation

The weak interest in politics can be seen, quite clearly, in Jordanians' level of participation in the various types of political action, particularly nonconventional political participation, which includes sit-ins, petitions, demonstrations, and volunteering for political campaigns, among others. When it comes to conventional participation, such as voting, Jordanians, expectedly, tend to participate at a higher level than when it comes to nonvoting nonconventional means.

The survey found that, on average, more Jordanians participate in social events such as Jaha and Azza than non-voting conventional events such as contacting officials and writing in the media and political nonconventional events such as demonstrations and sit-ins. Although the material and perceived political cost associated with non-voting conventional “political actions” is almost negligible, people do not necessarily resort to them in a significantly different way than those that require a higher cost (protest, demonstrations, sit-ins) such as time, effort, or money. As such, the different types of channels of political communication through which people can place their demands on the political system are underutilized.

Type of Behavior	Type of Engagement	National Sample	University Students
Voting Conventional	Voting in any type of elections	57.8	43.4
Non-voting Conventional	Signing a petition	4.8	4.0
	Advocating for a certain issue at parliament	2.5	6.3
	Write in the media	6.9	22.7
	Working in political campaigns	10.7	19.5
	Contacting an official	14.8	18.4
	Contacting an MP	14.4	15.6
	Contacting a representative of the Municipal Council	18.6	15.3
	Volunteering for a political party	0.7	2.1
	Raising community awareness about an issue	9.3	25.3
	Donating money	34.2	58.2
	Environmental volunteering (public hygiene campaigns or campaigns to preserve the environment)	16.1	34.4
	Met with a CBO or NGO representatives	6.3	10.9
	Participated in community consultation sessions	12.7	19.5
	Participated in trade/ labor union activity	4.9	6.7
Nonvoting Nonconventional	Joining a demonstration	2.0	4.5
Social Conventional	Attended a Jaha (Social conflict mediation)	36.2	36.0
	Attended a Jaha (engagements or weddings)	89.3	91.7
	Attended a Azzaa’	93.2	90.4
	Attended tribal groups activities	31.6	39.1

Table 1: Percentage of Jordanians and university students surveyed who reported they had taken part in these activities over the past 4 years

Further, Jordanians' level of participation rate in social events is about 6-fold that of nonvoting conventional political action, and it is about 3 times for the university students sample. When voting is factored in the equation, the ratio between social and political action decreases. The weight associated with voting is largely because Jordanians treat voting in a similar vein in which they approach social events. People feel a sense of obligation toward participating in social events, but they do not feel similarly toward political participation, unless it concerns voting.

As such, voting can be associated with what we can call "primordial civility"; significant numbers of Jordanians vote on the basis of their "none-choice-based" geographic, tribal, ethnic, and familial ties as previous research by NAMA suggests that such factors remain relevant to political behavior. While this might manifest itself as a civic engagement, its roots are more primordial than civic. Adding to that, Jordanian universities have largely failed to change their students' views toward a more civic-based rather than traditional, primordial values they brought with them to their universities. Primordial, in this context, entails non-choice social identity whereas civic encompasses a choice-based political values and behavior.

Leveraging Political Parties for Civic Engagement

Additionally, the survey found a marginal level of membership rate in political parties along with a weak propensity or desire to engage with political parties, including a lack of willingness to vote for political parties in parliamentary or municipal elections. Both the national sample and the university students' sample attributed their drivers of support for political parties to personal reasons in the first place (i.e., political aspiration), followed by a desire for better political representation; and finally, the significance of political parties toward systemic reforms.

Conversely, among those who indicated that political parties have been ineffective, the majority of both samples, outlined reasons related to **party deficiencies** such as party programs do not address people's needs, parties lack meaningful programs, and their weak presence in the parliament; **system deficiencies**, including a deeply-held perception that government does not encourage people to join political parties, the abundance of political parties, and legal and legislative hindrances; **values** driven by religious perceptions; and **perceived risks** such as fear of reprisal.

The question, now, is how can civic political participation become weaved into primordial participation to achieve gradual civic engagement? What needs to be done to increase political participation on one hand and enhance the efficacy of political parties to become more appealing for Jordanians? And what is needed in order to overcome some misconceptions that are no longer valid?

To address that, a lot of work ought to be done by political parties, who have been largely inactive and ineffective in persuading Jordanians to engage them, in any shape or form. The survey found that 4.4% of Jordanians and 8.8% of university students were **invited** to attend a political party event over the past 12 months. Of those, 14.5% of the national sample and 25% of the university students' sample reported that they have attended.

Of those who reported that they attended from the national sample, **half** of them found the events to be **very or somewhat useful**, as opposed to nearly **89%** from the students' sample. Moreover, every respondent, from both samples, who found these events to be very useful, stated that they would attend again while most of those who found them somewhat useful would attend again, as the majority of those who did not find them useful would not attend another similar event.

Additionally – and while it was a very small percentage, most of Jordanians who are affiliated with a political party were invited to attend an event over the past 12 months, of whom, more than a half reported that they attended such events. When it comes to the university students' sample, only a quarter of those who reported they were affiliated with political parties were invited to events over the past 12 months, half of whom indicated that they attended.

To that end, political parties need to get out of their comfort zone and become much more proactive in (a) organizing recruitment and familiarization events (b) conducting much more events that are public policy oriented; (c) inviting more Jordanians to reach a desirable turnout; and (d) exploring important aspects of interest for Jordanians such as issues related to transportation, energy prices, and general public service provision such as water and electricity. Inviting such a number of Jordanians to attend can in fact result in a higher potential for voting for them in elections.

The survey results support that. In fact, about a **third** of Jordanians who were **invited** to a political party event over the past 12 months stated they would definitely or probably vote for a political party in the upcoming parliamentary elections of 2024. This percentage increases to **three quarters** among those who **attended** political party events, and it would reach, expectedly, 100% among political party **members**. The situation was slightly different among university students, as a third of those who were **invited** to a political party event over the past 12 months stated they would definitely or probably vote for a political party in the upcoming elections, and it would not increase significantly among those who **attended** such events, but it reached 88% among those who reported they were political party **members**.

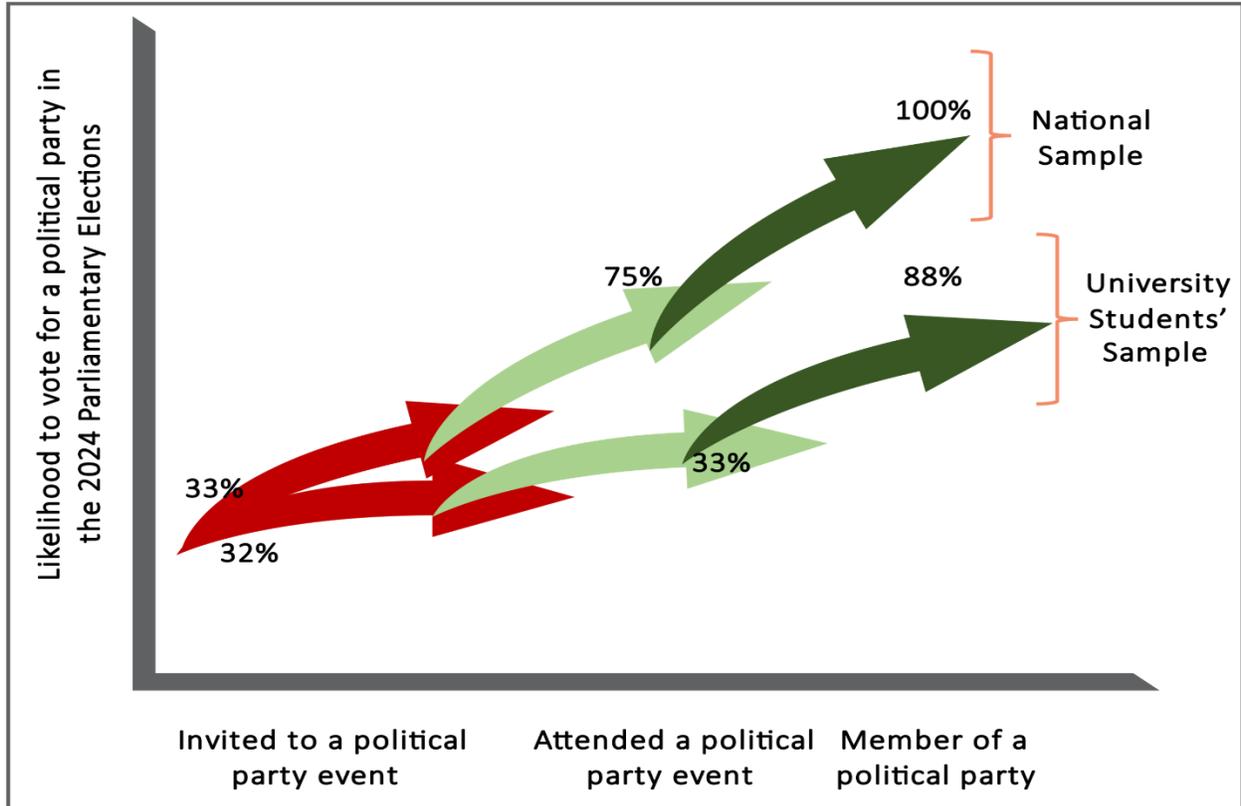


Figure 1: Percentage of Jordanians and university students surveyed who reported they had would vote for a political party in the 2024 parliamentary elections, cross-examined with whether they were invited to attend a political party event, whether they attended such an event, and whether they were members of a political party

To that end, the type of content explored in political party events is as essential to acquire Jordanians' support. First, when political parties discuss matters that concern Jordanians, including transportation, energy prices, and general service provision, then it is expected that Jordanians' level of trust and confidence in political parties would increase. Second, should political parties refrain from discussing such integral public policy matters, they could even lose more support. While it was a small and insignificant number of Jordanians who were invited and attended, about a third of them indicated that the events were not useful. That is solely an event related response. As such – and since only 41 seats will be allocated for political parties for the proportional representation national list in the upcoming parliament, it is rather important to ensure that those seats are made up of policy-oriented programs and representatives, which would potentially increase public participation and improve efficacy of representation.

Jordan has done quite a lot over the past couple of decades, and especially with three visions launched in 2021-2022. This necessitates time for these visions to flourish and be impeccably implemented. Nevertheless, there are some misperceptions that ought to be modified by demonstrating that the practices, upon which these misconceptions were formed, are in fact no longer legal.

For instance, 60% of university students surveyed indicated that in case a political party member was calling to hold a public political event or a meeting on a university campus, they would be questioned by the authorities. However, this perception does not match with the new legal framework, as two provisions resulted out of the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System are:

- (1) Students of higher education institutions who are members of a political party have the right to practice all party activities within the campus of those institutions without any restrictions or prejudice to their rights; and
- (2) The law ensures that no citizen may be subjected to, questioned, held accountable, or prejudiced against their constitution or legal rights because of their party affiliation.

This posits the question of why does this misconception persist despite the fact that there has been a significant change in legislation? This is partly due to the long-standing perception that university campuses were not seen as legitimate space for political parties and their activism on campuses were perceived as intrusive and illegal. This is because, for over three decades 1950s-1990s, Jordan implemented a Martial Law, banning political activity altogether, and it was not until 1992 that Jordan enacted its first political party law.

In addition to that, the Government enacted a recent bylaw to regulate the practice of political party activities in universities within the spirit of political modernization committee which is based on freedom of political activity. This bylaw, indirectly, provides university leaderships with the full authority to regulate political party events on university campuses, including rejecting proposals to hold political party events and changing the dates, venues, or even the agendas of the events.

While it might be necessary to engage university leadership especially those who deal with student affairs, solely for logistical and security matters, it is important to ensure their full compliance with the law. They could also go the extra mile to encourage students to be curious citizens and approach political parties to learn about their platforms and policy propositions.

The Government, similarly, has an important role to play here – primarily the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Government Communications, who should, once again, reiterate their full commitment to these new laws and assure Jordanians in general, and students specifically, that their rights are safeguarded.

Looking Ahead

Further – and based on the empirical evidence gathered in the survey, it is recommended that public institutions as well as political parties ensure consistency of their actions with the level of discourse they have already produced and adopted post the political modernization committee recommendations. It is recommended that they continue to emphasize the same discourse to essentially build a unifying atmosphere toward the implementation of political modernization. This could also be accompanied by a positive tone that encourages participation, rather than merely condemning hindrances to participation and representation.

By building and maintaining a unified and a consistent discourse that are in line with the political modernization committee recommendations, we could potentially see a shift toward formalized and institutionalized participation that genuinely upholds the spirit of the law, to be essentially prioritized over progress that is measured quantitatively. Meaning, to increase voter turnout in the 2024 parliamentary elections to 40% (up from 29.9% in 2020) would not be as meaningful and would not reflect in effectively building the tenets of civic duty among Jordanians if it were not accompanied by a wholesome environment and a consistent institutional atmosphere that promotes and encourages policy-oriented, party led, culturally transformative, ownership cognizant, and citizen-accountable participation and representation.

Finally, the nongovernment sector – both local and international, also have an important role to play. Their programs and activities should contribute primarily to the objectives of the political modernization vision, so that all stakeholders work jointly toward transforming its recommendations, and even the laws that resulted out of it, into a shared actionable vision.

For that, local civil society organizations and international nongovernment organizations should (a) work closer with political parties, including the newly formed, to enhance their capacities in terms of outreach, canvassing, and help orient their approach to citizen needs, concerns, and priorities; (b) build their capacities in relation to effective campaigning and campaign messaging as well as in regards to orienting their mission into clear policy goals, accompanied by well-defined action plans that are measurable and participatory by nature; (c) work with universities to support them in actualizing the new reforms within their campuses; and (d) working with citizens on raising their awareness levels of the new reforms on one hand and building their knowledge and capacities ahead of the upcoming vital parliamentary elections.

This policy paper has been prepared by NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions, December 2022.

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