Jordan: The Next Chapter
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Institutionalization of Political Parties in Jordan

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This policy paper discusses the significance of party institutionalization and presents policy insights and recommendations based on a pilot assessment of political parties in Jordan. Evidently, parties with poor party institutionalization have been unsuccessful in political participation and transparency. There are two obstacles against realizing institutionalization among Jordanian parties. First is the lack of awareness about the concept and strategies for implementation. The second and most widely common obstacle is resources to carry out such strategies. Accordingly, the government in partnership with relevant NGOs and international organization should raise awareness among the political parties and identify opportunities for funding party institutionalization programs.

Introduction

Although the role of political parties in Jordan is still in question, the widely spread and most conservative belief remains that the future of political life in Jordan is contingent on the emergence of strong and active political parties.

There are several reasons why political parties in Jordan are ineffective in terms of political participation and representation. The most common cause is the unfavorable political circumstances and environment where these parties exist and operate. This includes but is not limited to the existing political parties law and poor public participation in political parties.[1]

Nevertheless, this is not a complete view, as other issues are usually neglected. For example, organizational and operational elements of existing parties are often overlooked. Moreover, one should devote closer attention to whether parties maintain an up-to-date website or social media channels. Also, the party's visibility towards the public, funding, clarity of policy and goals,

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[1] Al Ghad Newspaper, Article: Factors for the Failure of Political Parties to Win Parliament Elections. https://alghad.com/?p=987624 (March, 29, 2021).

transparency, relations with civil organizations, planning, campaigning, and availability of strategy and political programs require greater consideration.

Significance of Party Institutionalization

P arty institutionalization has broad conceptual definitions in the literature. As a result, there are inconsistencies and ambiguities in conceptualizing the term and reaching a consensus on its featuring dimensions.[2] But when it comes to elaborating the term in a practical manner and within the context of this paper, party institutionalization can be illustrated as the unique attributes, systems, principles, and organizational aspects that characterize a specific party. There are several dimensions suggested by the literature for party institutionalization that are relevant to our scope, including but not limited to:

1. **Organization:** This concerns the party's organizational elements such as structure, congresses and committees, resources, leadership and membership, communication, funding, and visibility to the public;

2. **Programs:** The availability of the party's specific policies and political programs including a clear ideology, goals, and vision;

3. **Internal democracy:** This is relevant to the party's decision-making process, the principles, transparency for internal decisions and the process for selecting leadership and committees;

4. **Roots in society**: This is associated with the party's nation-wide presence, public engagements, activities beyond election campaign and relations with civil society organizations.[34]

Lacking party institutionalization is not the only obstacle towards influential parties and eventually successful political participation in Jordan. However,

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[2] Randall, V. and Svasand L., "Party Institutionalization in New Democracies", Party Politics Journal Vol 8. No.1 PP 5-29, 2002

[3] German Institute of Global and Area Studies: Measuring Party Institutionalization in Developing Countries: A New Research Instrument Applied to 28 African Political Parties, February 2008

[4] Weissenbach, K., "Political parties and party types – Conceptual approaches to the institutionalization of political parties in transitional states", 2010

different dimensions of institutionalization, such as the organizational aspects do in fact, influence the party's chances to lead successful campaigns, win elections, expand and grow, and most importantly, increase its likelihood for a long-term presence in politics. In other words, party institutionalization is a key determinant for the stability and success of any political party and its destabilization and demise as well.

Therefore, institutionalization is relevant and important as much as the other issues such as political parties law when it comes to the overall political development in Jordan. Eventually, regular voters can never recognize a political party if they never heard about it in the first place. Neither will they trust or support a party that lacks transparency, clear goals, programs, or social roots in public.

Some argue that achieving such institutionalization would require a more favorable political environment, including new elections and political parties' laws. However, given that there are already some Jordanian parties that have achieved notable progress on institutionalization while they still exist and operate in the same political environment. Yet, this reaffirms how timely it is to deal with party institutionalization since Jordan is about introducing new elections and parties' laws.

Research Objectives and Methodology

Several international and non-governmental organizations are working in Jordan on programs to support the overall political development and advance the role of political parties. However, the degree to which such programs or implemented solutions are practical and impactful is contingent on the proper identification of all root causes and actual needs and priorities for the political parties – considering the cultural and social context in which these exist. Understanding party institutionalization contributes to the political parties' dilemma in Jordan will support addressing the problem and planning for more effective interventions.

As such, this policy paper aims to assess institutionalization for different Jordanian parties, identify gaps and areas for improvements, and provide insights and recommendations for relevant non-governmental and international organizations working in Jordan.

For the purpose of this policy research, the organization structure and program of party institutionalization are selected and assessed for five identified Jordanian parties. The selection is based on the relevance to the Jordanian context and the degree to which assessing the dimension is attainable. For instance, it can be challenging to assess certain dimensions such as internal democracy given the availability of verified data.

As a basic method for assessment, questions were developed as indicators for each criterion of the selected dimensions, shown in Table.1. Based on collected information and data from the research resources and references, parties are assessed over these criteria by answering the questions for each element.

Table.1 Assessment Criteria and Indicators

Dimension 1: Organization	
Criteria	**Indicator**
1. Organizational structure, congresses, and leadership	Does the party have a clear and effective organizational structure, including active congresses, branches, and committees?
2. Communication and visibility to public	Does the party have accessible means of communications with the public, including TV/Radio stations, newspapers, websites, social media, and contact information?
3. Membership	Does the party have a clear process for membership that is published and accessible to the public?
Dimension 2: Programs	
Criteria	**Indicator**
1. Ideology, values, goals, and vision	Does the party have a clear ideology, values, goals, and vision that are accessible to the public?
2. Availability of policies and political programs	Does the party have practical policies and political/economic programs that are published or available for voters?

Five different Jordanian parties were selected for this assessment. Their selection was based on these conditions: diverse ideology, relatively new, and active in politics. One reason for targeting newly established parties is the fact that such parties are the main beneficiaries of the assistance programs implemented by NGOs and international organizations. Moreover, it is plausible to argue that institutionalization is more relevant to immature parties as well as parties with poor performance in elections. Accordingly, newly established parties with different positions on the political spectrum were selected, of which all have participated in the most recent parliament elections but none have won any seats.

Namely, these are:

1. Jordanian Nature Democratic Party (Green), (2016)
2. Jordanian National Conference Party- Zamzam (Moderate Islamist), (2016)
3. Al-Etijah Jordanian National Party (Nationalist-Conservative), (2016)
4. Jordanian Social Democratic Party (Center-Left), (2016)
5. Jordan Strong Party (Center Liberal – Feminist), (2013)

Assessment Findings

In assessing the organization dimension, most parties lacked effective and diverse means of communication with the public. In fact, three out of the five parties solely rely on Facebook for their public communications. Two of them do not have a website, and one has an outdated website without sufficient information about the party. Generally, communication is detrimental to persuasion in political discourse. Therefore, the weakness of communication impacts a party's ability to reach and influence the public knowledge, beliefs and views. As such, the overall chances of growing the party's support and winning public votes in elections are undermined by poor communication.

Although a clear organizational structure is one of the requirements for licensing a party, not all assessed parties have a functional and clear organizational structure. In most parties, the structure was limited to the presence

of leadership or executive bureau (political bureau) in best cases. Only one party showed a robust organizational structure that includes the executive board, political bureau, advisory board, and other committees (Jordanian National Conference Party - Zamzam). A clear and sophisticated structure is evidence of organization. The absence of such an aspect puts the party's credibility and transparency in question. In terms of the number of branches, only one party has branches in every governorate – a total of twelve branches. Whereas the other parties have six or fewer branches – one party does not have any branches. Branches and governorate committees are an indicator of the party's presence and support nationwide. Moreover, a wide presence across the country enables the party to reach further categories of voters and supporters.

Membership is open for every party in Jordan; however, one relevant obstacle is the clarity of the process and accessibility to such information. Only two of the assessed parties have a clear process for membership, and one of them made it possible for people to understand the process and apply for membership via the website.

In assessing the program dimension, all parties have established goals and vision, but only two parties have these published and accessible for voters on the internet. That being said; not every party made these goals and vision as clear or detailed as possible. For example, one goal of the first and only green party in Jordan is "support friendly-environment policy" without further details or illustrating.

Another major gap in the program dimension is the party's availability of practical programs and policy. Only one party has established and detailed political and economic programs, namely the Jordanian National Conference Party- Zamzam. The party provides electoral programs under nine pillars including youth empowerment, public administration, and security. This reflects the parties' inability to articulate proper programs that address the public aspirations and serve in the nation's political and economic interests.

In summary, three parties lack a certain degree of party institutionalization in terms of organization and program dimensions (Jordanian Nature Democratic Party, Al-Etijah Jordanian National Party, and Jordanian Social Democratic Party), whereas two parties performed better overall (Jordanian National Conference Party- Zamzam, and Jordan Strong Party).

Summary results for the assessment are shown in Table.2 below:

Table.2 Summary Results of the Assessment[5]

Criteria/Indicator	Nature Party	Zamzam	Al-Etijah	Social Democratic	Jordan Strong
Does the party have a clear and functional organizational structure including active congresses, branches and committees?	• Limited to leadership • No committees • 5 branches including a headquarter	• Clear and functional organization • Political bureau, advisory board and general assembly. • 12 branches across all governorates	• Limited to leadership and political bureau. • Three branches	• Exist but not clear or published • 6 branches including a headquarter	• Exist but not detailed • Political bureau, central bureau, and general assembly • One branch
Does the party have accessible means of communication with the public including website, social media, contact information?	• No website • Contact information is available on third party blogs • Communication is limited to a Facebook page • Statements published through third-party internet blogs	• Informative and up-to-date website, local committees • Engagements, outside campaign activities • Statements published in newspapers and website	• Non-informative and not-updated website • Facebook page • Statements published through third-party internet blogs	• Website is down • Contact information is available on third party blogs • Communication is limited to a Facebook page • Statements published through Facebook and newspapers	• Up to date website, • limited engagements outside campaign activities • Statements published on websites, forums, and newspapers • Closed TV station

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[5] Sources for data collection include but not limited to: (1) Book, "Political Parties in Jordan, A Historical and Analytical Perspective 1921-2016," KAS and AlQuds center. (2) Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs (MOPPA) website (3) Guide to Jordanian Political Life website (4) Ordun Aqwa Party official website (5) Zamzam Party official website (http://zamzamparty.com)

Does the party have a clear process for membership?	• No	• Yes, but not published on the website	• No	• No	• Yes, published on the website
Does the party have a clear ideology, values, goals, and vision that are accessible to the public?	• Not published or accessible • Not detailed: one small generic sentence about goals	• Clear and accessible	• published and accessible but not detailed	• Yes but not published or accessible on the internet	• Clear and accessible
Does the party have practical policies and political/economic programs that are published or available for voters?	• No	• Detailed programs published and available to the public	• No	• Not clear	• Yes, but not detailed

Conclusion and Recommendations

The organizational dimension for party institutionalization differentiates between a "one-person" party and a society party, and between a local party and a national party. Usually, the latter reflects political transparency and wider representation across the nation and therefore performs better in the political arena. Ideally, voters tend to support a specific party based on its goals and programs. As such, the lack of practical and clear goals and programs reflects poor political competency, and therefore, it would be difficult for a party to gain voter support and win elections. Evidently, the two parties that performed better in the assessment had achieved relatively better results in recent elections than other contesting parties. For instance, out of the forty-one parties that participated in the 2020 parliament elections, Zamzam was among one of only four Jordanian parties that achieved the 1% vote threshold – becoming one of four parties that

earned the highest number of votes nationwide.[6] In that sense, more attention must be given to party institutionalization in Jordan by both civil and governmental stakeholders.

In the new parties' draft law, the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System worked to address some aspects of party institutionalization. Generally, the draft obligates parties to have in their bylaws clear principles and goals and policies for membership, structure, and organization. For instance, Article 18 states that the party has to publish programs on its website, including vision, goals, plans, and solutions for national issues. Such amendments to the existing law could encourage the parties to pay more attention to some party institutionalization dimensions in compliance with licensing requirements. However, if a decision to take further steps towards institutionalization is to be taken, some Jordanian parties might find themselves in front of two obstacles. First is the lack of awareness about party institutionalization and its implications and the pathway for achieving progress on this issue. For instance, not all parties are aware of the concept of internal democracy nor are familiar with recommended practices to realize it. Second is the lack of resources required to plan and implement measures for institutionalization. For example, some parties may lack funds for branding and launching effective means of communication, i.e., a website.

NGOs and international organizations can assist in that. First, relevant and interested NGOs should work with Jordanian authorities to conduct a needs assessment for party institutionalization in Jordan and accordingly articulate awareness programs for stakeholders and beneficiaries from different Jordanian parties. Such programs should introduce practical measures and best practices to make progress on the different dimensions of party institutionalization. Secondly, most Jordanian parties have limited resources and are financially dependent on grants and governmental funds for covering operational expenses. It should not

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[6] Alghad Newspaper, Article: Four Parties bypass the 1% Votes Threshold. https://alghad.com/?p=940730 , 14 December, 2020

be expected that all parties would be able to carry out institutionalization improvements on their expenses. If this is to be the case, parties may deprioritize party institutionalization altogether. Therefore, the government should work with the political parties to identify funding opportunities and assistance programs, focusing on planning and implementing improvements towards better party institutionalization.

Almuntaser Bluwi is interested in Middle East politics and security. In 2021, he was selected as a fellow of KAS Jordan's Policy Analysis Fellowship Program. Mr. Bluwi works in the science and policy of the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats field. Mr. Bluwi has a Bachelor's degree in nuclear engineering and a Master's degree in international relations and conflict resolution.

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Jordan. The next chapter – أفكار أردنية

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