

**Jordanian Youth and the Debate on
Political Participation in the 2020
Parliamentary Elections**

Ahmad AL-Qudah

Abdullah Jbour

Foreword

Dr. Jafar Hassan

President of Politics and Society Institute (PSI)

This report is the summary of an important effort, in terms of circumstance and timing, to study the political participation and influence of young people in the parliamentary elections. The project took place during the two weeks preceding the parliamentary elections of November 10, 2020, within the framework of a number of intensive dialogue sessions in cooperation with the Phenix Center for Economic & Informatics Studies and Germany's Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (Amman office) and their important contribution.

This project, the first since the establishment of Politics and Society Institute (PSI), reflects the institute's priorities in its focus on young people and ways to activate and enrich their national and political role. The idea of Politics and Society Institute (PSI) was to be a factory for ideas, a laboratory for studying and analyzing external and internal

variables, and a research center producing practical solutions and modern approaches. These activities help build a deep, objective awareness based on scientific knowledge for studying complex changes and variables, provide objective scientific analysis, and establish a realistic, rational framework to deal with these shifts.

Among the key priorities of the institute is the issue of today's youth in the Arab world, Jordan in particular. Because this social group is important to our social structure and faces major and unprecedented challenges, we believe it is necessary to expend great energies to integrate and actively involve them in building their communities, developing state institutions, and supporting civil society with great energy in order to build the desired future.

The firm conviction behind the establishment of this institute is the necessity of bridging the generational gap in public decision-making. The mission of Politics and Society Institute (PSI) reflects a belief in the importance of scientific research and knowledge in creating public policy with an emphasis on the democratic values that elevate societies and nations. These values include respect for pluralism; a strong system of national values; a culture of moderation,

rule of law, and good governance; and the promotion of democratic life as an indispensable basis, without which it is impossible to develop state and social institutions and achieve stability, growth, and prosperity.

The project's dialogue sessions confirm that this is an opportune time for young people to establish political alliances. Young people need to overcome their current state of political isolation, search for political commonalities on issues that concern both young people and women, and work to achieve joint outcomes and goals.

More than ever, it has become necessary to instill a culture of active political participation in the official educational system, so that the process of political development begins from an early age in schools and universities and space is allocated for extracurricular activity programs related to active citizenship.

Unfortunately, we often find (as we note in this report) that an element of frustration dominates young people's attitudes towards participation in public life and, in particular, parliamentary elections. They see obstacles, frustrations, and problems more than they see the opportunities

available to them to work and engage with the situation. What is required is a review of legislation and policies, strengthening of relevant institutions, and building a national strategy to achieve this.

Despite all of the above, it is clear that the general trend among young people seeks reform, change, and integration, yet they are groping for a way to practically achieve this. It is also necessary to shift certain categories of young people from street politics to the political game by integrating them into state institutions and public work, as well as providing a nurturing environment to achieve. This requires steps on the part of young people and governments and state officials as a whole.

In presenting this report, I must thank all the partners, starting with the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, the Phenix Center, the team at Politics and Society Institute (PSI), and the young people who participated very effectively in the dialogue sessions. These young people provided valuable and important perspectives that enabled us to observe the attitudes of young Jordanians towards political participation and public life and present the conclusions and recommendations you will read in this report.

Introduction

1. Project concept and goals

This report presents the proceedings of the intensive dialogue sessions held by the Politics and Society Institute (PSI), with the Phenix Center for Economic & Informatics Studies and Germany's Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (Amman office), during the two weeks preceding the parliamentary elections of November 10, 2020. A total of ten sessions were held, dealing with various topics related to the political participation and influence of young people in the parliamentary elections. The sessions were held on Zoom due to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This project proceeded from two main angles: first, political development through promoting active and positive youth participation, and, second, research to study and analyze youth attitudes, positions, and opinions regarding participation in the parliamentary elections. The titles and philosophy of the ten sessions reflect the attempt to achieve this goal by building dialogue and communication channels between politicians and officials active in

Jordanian political life, on the one hand, and a group of young people presenting their visions, attitudes, and questions for discussion, on the other hand. This achieved two main things: first, the sessions resembled “focus groups,” and, second, dialogue and communication took place between the two parties (politicians and officials and young people) that bridged the clear gap that appeared in previous years.

The issue on which the project was based is the clear desire of a large segment of young Jordanians to exercise political positions and express differing opinions only through protests and demonstrations, without trying to shift towards long-range, organized political action. Such political action could involve merging into political parties or influence groups that speak for the young generation of Jordanians, or even the formation of youth currents that participate in the political process, especially the parliamentary elections, with a representative, generational leadership elite.

In general, the youth generation in Jordan still feels alienated from organized political work. There is even a gap with state institutions, especially among youth on the

peripheries and in the governorates, with the growing problem and record levels of unemployment, which reached 23% in 2020. In conjunction and parallel, there is a growing economic gap between the poor and the rich, which took on a social-geographic character between the governorates and the capital, Amman. This explains the state of anger, frustration, and often the feeling of marginalization among young people in the governorates.¹⁾

It is true that there is a remarkable awareness among decision-makers and state institutions of the seriousness of these gaps. Moreover, there are large-scale projects directed at young people in various fields, as well as youth organizations established with state sponsorship and support. These include the All Jordan Youth Commission as an arm of the King Abdullah II Fund, the Haqiq Initiative as a youth arm of the Crown Prince Foundation (which devotes its attention to the young generation) and other institutions and activities of the Ministry of Youth, which established the initiatives of the Political Institute to prepare youth leaders, including the Youth Parliament and the Youth Government 2019. Nevertheless, the features of the

1- For the rise in unemployment rates, see "Unemployment rates in Jordan rise to 23%, Al-Ghad newspaper, 9/8/2020.

angry youth discourse and the gap between young people and political life affect the relationship of young people with the state.¹⁾

In the public opinion poll conducted by the Center for

1- The All Jordan Youth Commission, established in 2006, says on its website that it is “a Royal initiative by His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein and is implemented by the King Abdullah II Fund for Development. The commission seeks to...activate the role of the youth as true and influential partners in public life at the political, social and economic spheres though building their capacities and enhancing the culture of voluntary work and taking the initiative and connecting the various institutions working in the field of youth together.” See: <https://cutt.us/YNyhA>. The Haqiq initiative, one of the initiatives of the Crown Prince Foundation, defines its objectives on its official website: “Haqiq, a four-step national leadership program for ninth and tenth graders, was established to realize our youth’s commitment to becoming successful leaders in their local communities. After selecting students from public schools in every governorate, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, our participants benefit from a program model built on training workshops, field visits and camps that call on youth to engage with their peers and communities throughout Jordan. As future agents of change, Haqiq’s graduates embody the program’s values, including integrity, resilience, learning from failure, commitment, hard work, focus, responsibility, open-mindedness and self-confidence.” See: <https://www.cpf.jo/ar/our-initiatives/%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%82>. The Crown Prince Foundation was established in 2015 to supervise the implementation of the initiatives of His Highness the Crown Prince, Prince Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II. Its vision is “Capable Youth for an Aspiring Jordan,” and it has three pillars: employability and entrepreneurship, leadership, and citizenship. Its value set includes inclusiveness, innovation, ethics, and positivity. The foundation seeks to achieve many goals at the strategic level, such as strengthening and empowering a supportive youth environment, leading thought and thinking supportive of young men and women, reaching and influencing young men and women from all governorates of the Kingdom, and leading comprehensive initiatives for young men and women. See: <https://cutt.us/T9a3o>. The Political Institute for the Preparation of Youth Leadership is “a national youth umbrella implemented by the Ministry of Youth with ideas, programs, projects and youth cadres and youth in partnership with them, in addition to partnerships with a number of ministries and partner institutions. The Political Institute carries out a number of programs and projects concerned with the involvement of young people in public life and activating their role in the decision-making process through the national program through its projects, the Jordanian youth government project and the Jordanian youth parliament project, in addition to the political academy program which offers a series of educational courses for young people in politics to prepare youth leaders in each governorate.” See: <https://www.shababgovjo.org/SiteContent.aspx?id=118>.

Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan a few months before the parliamentary elections, a clear trend emerged whereby a majority of citizens planned on boycotting the parliamentary elections or abstaining from voting. According to current and previous opinion polls, this percentage is highest among the younger generation, which is usually less enthusiastic about participating in elections.¹⁾

On this basis, the project aims to build dialogue sessions with young people to examine these positions and test opinions towards parliamentary elections and active political participation on the one hand, and to promote a trend of active political participation in parliamentary elections, on the other hand.

2. Project methodology

As we mentioned earlier, the methodology of the project is based on preparing intensive and structured dialogue sessions, with each session covering a specific topic related to the factors and trends affecting youth participation in the elections. The results of the discussion between officials, politicians, and the focus group were scrutinized, which

1- <http://jcss.org/ShowNewsAr.aspx?NewsId=860>

produced themes, results, and recommendations that can be used, both to study youth attitudes and positions and to create policies to increase their electoral participation.

Sample of participants in the discussion sessions

The sample of male and female participants in eight discussion sessions included diverse groups of Jordanian youths active in civil society and engaged in public affairs. There were 46 participants, between the ages of 18-30, from different regions of Jordan and from various social and political backgrounds, representing the governorates of Aqaba, Maan, Balqa, Amman, Zarqa, Jerash, Ajloun, Irbid, and Mafraq, in addition to youth participation from the Badia districts.

Table 1-1

Distribution of members of the sample according to gender

Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	22	48.9
Female	23	51.1
Total	46	100

Table 1-2

Distribution of members of the sample according to age group

Age group (years)	Percentage
18-24	61.8
25-30	38.2

The dialogues were moderated by Ahmed AlQudah, Media and Communications Officer for Politics and Society Institute (PSI). Nine main sessions were arranged, and groups of youth actors in the governorates were recruited, in addition to officials and political figures, with specific criteria for selecting youth groups and politicians. At the level of groups, the criteria were geographical diversity, people from various governorates, 20-35 years of age, gender diversity (males and females), and diversity in social and economic backgrounds and personal interests. For political figures, the study sought to choose those who possess political skills and capabilities for interacting with young people, while avoiding candidates in the parliamentary elections. Political and ideological trend was also considered so that we had true diversity in that area. The final criterion

was for political figures who believe in active youth political participation in elections, whether in the government, close to it, or in the political opposition.

3. Project division

Based on the preceding, the project was split into a series of sessions and main topics:

1. Young people and the debate on participation versus boycott. The politician was the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, Ali Al-Khawaldeh. The session dealt with the issue of participation, boycott, and abstention, investigating the reasons for youth participation or boycott and related trends. The first session was held on November 1.
2. Young people, participation, and political parties. The politician was Jamil al-Nimri, Secretary-General of the Social Democratic Party, former member of parliament, writer, and political analyst. The session dealt with the issue of young people, political parties, and participation in the parliamentary elections. The session took place on November 2.

3. Why should I participate? What are the justifications for participation and the reasons and factors that increase youth participation in parliamentary elections and political life? The guest was Dr. Rahil al-Gharaibeh, Secretary-General of the National Congress Party (Zamzam). The session was held on November 3.
4. The transition from protest to political reform work. The guest was Dr. Muhammad Abu Rumman, a researcher at the Center for Strategic Studies and former Minister of Youth and Minister of Culture. The session dealt with the reasons and factors behind the protest practices of young people and how to integrate them into constructive public and political work. The session took place on November 4.
5. Women's issues in the elections and young people's impression of how much these issues are expressed. The guest was former MP Wafaa Bani Mustafa, an expert and specialist in women's affairs, who discussed the role of women in the House of Representatives and young people's views on how to promote this. The session took place on November 5.

6. How do we promote youth participation in political life? The guest was the lawyer and political activist, Saed Karajeh, one of the founders of the Civil Alliance Party. The session discussed the policies and measures needed to promote youth participation in elections and how to develop the quality of this participation. The session took place on November 7.
7. What is required of young people in the parliamentary elections? The guest was Dr. Reem Abu Hassan, former Minister of Social Development, who specializes in reform and civil society. She discussed the tasks and capabilities that young people could undertake in the parliamentary elections. The session was held on November 8.
8. What are the criteria for candidate and list selection, and how do I evaluate candidates and their programs? What are the selection criteria for Jordanian youth? The guest was Jumana Ghunaimat, former Minister of Information and Communication and former editor-in-chief of the Jordanian daily *Al-Ghad* newspaper. The session was held on November 9.

This report, then, is the outcome of the proceedings and trends from the aforementioned dialogue sessions, and it summarizes the main findings and recommendations. In the end, we can only thank everyone who has worked diligently and intensively to prepare the sessions, complete the report, and reach this stage of findings and recommendations. At the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, special thanks are due to the director of the office in Amman, Tim Petschulat, who provided support and participated in the completion of this work, and Batool Zeidan, director of the foundation's youth leadership program, who worked with great effort and dedication to bring the sessions to fruition and handle logistics.

We also thank Dr. Ahmed Awad, director of the Phenix Center for Economic & Informatics Studies, who extended a hand of partnership and cooperation in completing this project. His organization was an active partner in the success of the project. The same applies to the team at Politics and Society Institute (PSI), beginning with the institute's president, Dr. Jafar Hassan, Oreib al-Tarawneh, program manager, Ahmed al-Qudah, media and communications

director and project coordinator, and both Obaidah Faraj Allah and Abdullah al-Jabour, who worked actively to prepare the sessions and present this report. We also thank the social media team, Saleh and Dalia, who made great efforts to carry out this project.

-1-

Young people and the debate on participation versus boycott

The session discussed the topic of participation, boycott, and abstention, in an attempt to investigate the reasons for participation or boycott among young people and related trends. The session also tried to measure the extent of youth confidence in the current electoral system and discussed how to develop it from their point of view.

Dr. Ali al-Khawaldeh, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, tried to downplay the negativity of the boycott option, which he described as a case of social reluctance more than of political boycott. He rejected the presence of the term boycott in the Jordanian and international electoral process, stressing that young people in Jordan can have a decisive impact on the electoral process and influence its course. Al-Khawaldeh noted

that the number of young people under the age of 30 who are eligible to vote in the upcoming elections is estimated at 1,600,000 voters, stressing young people's need for change. He added that the process of encouraging youth participation in the electoral process is not only the government's responsibility, but is also a shared responsibility within institutions of civil society.

Young people addressed the issue of the legislative aspect, which they see as an obstacle to their effective participation. The amendments to the constitution and election laws did not include the issue of lowering the candidacy age, which is still 30 years old, despite the major demographic and electoral momentum of young people. One youth warned against delaying the integration of young people into political life. In this way, a more effective political participation will be achieved that is constantly learning lessons and useful experiences in this regard.

Similarly, one young participant finds in the boycott process a behavior that aims to send a message about the state of social and political dissatisfaction among young people. A female participant pointed to the state of institutional

negligence in the area of political development and education.

Al-Khawaldeh affirmed that the task of early political development and education, which the participants presented in its official framework, is basically an integrative process with a group of ministries, starting from the Ministry of Education, through the Ministry of Social Development and Higher Education, and from there to the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs.

Concerning the inclusion of young people in party work, al-Khawaldeh said that Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs figures indicate that 33% of young people under the age of 35 are members of parties. Despite this, there is no great activity, as confirmed by a study prepared by the Ministry on the internal democratic status of the parties that revealed that 80% of the parties have not changed their leadership for a long time, some for as long as 20 years. This situation, of course, is a factor that repels young people from party work. At the same time, al-Khawaldeh stated that the new party financing system encourages the participation of parties in the elections.

One of the participants linked the difficulty of youth candidacy to the elections, due to the deterioration of the material situation of young people. Candidacy requires submission fees and a budget to promote the electoral process. With regard to the work of party youth, the same participant referred to the legacy of fear of parties, while one of the participants pointed out a problem in the election law, especially in the Badia districts that have been described as closed districts.

One of the female participants indicated the importance of youth initiative in dialogue with the candidates and vice versa, because dialogue with the candidates facilitates the process of exchanging ideas and seeking common ground. One of the young women reinforced this when she held a youth dialogue with one of the candidates, who was able to convince her to participate after she had made a decision to abstain.

A group of young people, who expressed their reluctance to participate in the elections, showed a lack of confidence in the ability of both MPs and parliament as a whole to bring about real and tangible change that would directly affect the lives of people. On the other hand, the young

people who had made the decision to participate stressed that the outcomes of abstaining are necessarily negative. Since there are candidates who are better than others, the participation process contributes, even if partially, to improving the subsequent performance of parliament.

Summary

The age requirement for candidacy constitutes a barrier and is a basic pillar for young people in activating their participation in both parliamentary elections and party work. There is an urgent need to review the election law and amend and develop articles of the constitution in the interest of giving the opportunity to the largest number of young people to form party blocs and participate in elections.

A state of trust still prevails between young people and public institutions, but this situation is progressing in a markedly negative way, as groups of young people find that official institutions have no confidence in them regarding official work, decision-making, and leadership positions.

It has become more necessary than ever to activate a culture of active political participation in the official educational system, so that the process of political development

begins from an early age in schools and universities, with space allocated for extracurricular activity programs related to active citizenship.

-2-

Young people, participation, and political parties

The session was characterized by a clear and general trend among the youth participants, as a whole, to have a critical attitude towards political parties on more than one level. Foremost among these is the ineffectiveness of political parties and the weak relationship between parties and the youth generation. Participants also reiterated their fears of party and political work.

The Secretary-General of the Social Democratic Party, Jamil Al-Nimri, discussed the arguments and opinions of young people and presented his answers to the criticisms and opinions presented, especially what we might call the parties' dilemma in their inability to attract today's younger generation compared to previous decades, as al-Nimri himself acknowledged.

1. Ineffectiveness of political parties: It can be said that most of the space for discussion and dialogue in the session focused on a group of criticisms directed by young people toward political parties and their perception of the parties' inability to make a difference. The participants held the nearly fifty political parties generally responsible for the political ineffectiveness and the inability to break the deadlock in the political situation. Most of the participants stated that they do not see any role for the parties in the reform and change process, nor do they believe the parties have the ability to find solutions to the plight of young people.

Another criticism was the absence of parties from the daily reality of citizens and young people and the failure of their programs to address the problems, especially economic and development, of the younger generation in the governorates. One young participant asked how he could be asked to vote for a particular political party or candidate and their vague programs that do not provide convincing and realistic answers to real problems. Others criticized the weakness of the action program

of the political parties, with one of them saying that perhaps the party candidate's program will solve such-and-such problems without explaining to us how. What is his actual realistic project, and why do I really believe that he is able to bring about such a change on the ground?

Another young man pointed to a stereotypical and pessimistic view prevalent among young people, as well as negativity and skepticism about the role of parties in public life. They barely see the parties' effect in the House of Representatives or on the political situation. Others opined that political parties are restricted and do not have real freedom to present perspectives and visions of true political reform.

Other criticisms made by the participants are that the parties are fragmented and do not agree on comprehensive and integrated national programs. Thus, they are weak and limited and have often turned into a stepping stone to achieve personal and factional interests or even specific agendas. This makes young people suspicious of parties and of involvement in party work in general in the current reality.

2. The ability of parties to attract young people: Most of the participants confirmed that they see a marked weakness in the ability of political parties to attract the younger generation today. One of the participants asked about the percentage of youth leaders in political parties, the rate of youth participation in decision-making processes in these parties, and finally about the extent to which the parties' programs, directions, and proposals come close to addressing the concerns of young people.

Many of the youth participants believe that political parties suffer from "senility" in terms of leadership, programs, and the ability to build communication channels with the younger generation, whether in the discourse, language, or tools used. How many parties, one of the participants wondered, have actually managed to develop social media communication capabilities and the language that makes the younger generation feel that the parties have a discourse relevant to them? He answered his question himself: he has not seen any such party.

Among some young people there is still a real fear of the agenda of political parties, especially vis-à-vis young people. They believe that many parties deal with young people merely as stepping stones. They also criticized the parties' attempts in the current elections to include a number of young people (over 30 and mostly under 35) in their electoral lists. They considered this participation perfunctory and fake, aiming to obtain the additional financial support provided by the government to parties that engage youth (according to the financial contribution system to support political parties). One participant asked how a young man would come forward in the name of a political party and on its list for the parliamentary elections, when we know very well that he does not belong to the party, has no history with it, and does not propose a program for youth within the party.

3. Political and economic obstacles: Many of the young participants reiterated their fears and concerns that affiliation with political parties would deprive them of many opportunities, especially in the

field of public work and, sometimes, private work. They noted that the legacy of martial law still exists, and some young people presented evidence of what they say is the requirement of some official university scholarships that the recipient not adhere to a specific party, and that there are prosecutions and monitoring of those who engage in party activities.

It seems that this factor brings us today to an important dimension: the cultural aspect of young people's attitude towards party and political work in general. At a time when young people are looking for job opportunities and trying to attain their basic rights, they still believe that involvement in party work may hinder this condition or lead to prosecution and questioning.

The economic aspect dominated the participation of some youth from more than one angle. The first, as one of them said, is the absence of innovative economic solutions for political party programs. As long as the parties do not have a useful vision for

the major problems that the younger generation faces today, what is the benefit of joining them?

When thinking about integration into party and political work, the second angle proposed by some young people is the priority of their economic concerns. One young man asked, how do they expect us to be active in political and party life or think about political reform, for example, when we do not have the money for our daily expenditures and our transportation fare? What shall I say to my father: I am busy with political reform, and I do not have a job? How many of today's unemployed youth have become a burden on their families? How many families have more than one unemployed university graduate? Such a reality makes young people "ticking time bombs" who should not be pushed into political and party work, which will be seen at the time as a luxury, as this young man concluded.

4. Youth, civil society, and training: Some of the young participants raised important questions about the reason behind the expansive participation of young people today in civil society institutions and the

integration of their projects, while they are reluctant to participate in party work. These observations are worthy of attention, especially in recent years, where thousands of Jordanian young people have been involved in the work of these organizations, associations, and institutions. This may be explained on more than one level. There is the financial factor, as these institutions provide a financial allowance for youth participation and offer other similar advantages such as travel abroad, training, and development of capabilities and skills. Some may consider the lack of engagement of these institutions in direct political action yet another factor that relieves the young participants' concerns and fears regarding party work, as we mentioned earlier.

On the other hand, some young people made an important observation regarding the thousands of young people who are being trained in political and civil work programs—within projects of civil society institutions—on civil work, democratic political culture, campaign-building skills, lobbying, and

other programs and projects, but, at this point, do not actually do political and party work. As one of them said, we have a “training glut:” there was no training course on political work we did not enter, and there was no skill we did not obtain; we became experts in these training programs. In the end, however, we do not actually use any of these skills and capabilities because the political reality is completely separate from that.

5. The decline of the role of political parties in public life: The Secretary-General of the Social Democratic Party, Jamil al-Nimri, acknowledged the decline of the role of parties in political life, noting that he has been involved in political and party work since the 1970’s. There was an active youth current in the party, and he is now the secretary-general of a political party. In his comparison between young people’s engagement with political parties and the current reality, he sees that previous youth turnout, even during the period of martial law, was better than it is today.

As al-Nimri points out, the strength of political parties appeared during the 1989 elections, which enshrined the return of parliamentary life. Islamists and their allies won nearly 25 seats, nationalists and leftists won 15 seats, and party leaders emerged at that stage. Then political life began to slow down, which affected the role of political parties. A noticeable curtailment occurred in party presence. As long as the parties do not significantly change the political reality and do not find a direct and effective means of political representation in parliament and the government, why should people accept them?

Therefore, as al-Nimri points out, parties have become, in the view of many people, useless and marginal. Tribal and social considerations turned into partisanship in the selection of candidates. Many candidates preferred to run in the elections in the name of their tribes rather than political parties, even if they were members of these parties, because the tribal channel is dominant, not the partisan channel.

Al-Nimri holds official policies and political parties partially responsible, along with young people themselves through their lack of serious attempts to learn about political parties, read their programs, and examine them closely. Instead, a large percentage of young people are satisfied, according to al-Nimri, with an initial impression that includes general judgments of all political parties, without a practical engagement with the reality of these parties.

Some parties have attempted to approach the younger generation by renewing their political and ideological discourse. Among the examples given by al-Nimri is the establishment of the Social Democratic Party's Shaza network, led by a number of young people and concerned with Jordanian youth. The network provides political discourse relevant to the younger generation and has developed its media and political communication tools.

Al-Nimri also indicated that there are a number of distinguished young people among the party's candidates who have the capabilities and skills needed to run in the elections. Al-Nimri said that the party

is eager to increase youth participation, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Summary

The causes and factors that created the foregoing general opinion among young participants regarding political parties and participation in parliamentary elections can be summarized by the term “futility.” As long as political parties do not affect the process of political representation in a fundamental and qualitative manner, as long as they do not fulfill the need for services and benefits for young people to help them tackle their economic circumstances, then why participate in political and party work?

Note the gap between the young participants in the dialogue, who represent a proportion of Jordanian youth in various governorates, and the political parties. It seemed that there was a set of objective reasons, such as certain official policies and practices, for doubting and fighting party work, especially on the opposition side. Meanwhile, the subjective reasons (related to the political parties themselves) mentioned by young people are practical.

These include, for example, the inability of many political parties to develop their political discourse and vision, the weak representation of young people in the framework of leadership and decision-making, and the decline of the role and effectiveness of parties in political and public life.

On the other hand, some responsibility falls on the shoulders of young people themselves. Many of them are satisfied with general impressionistic stereotypes and pre-packaged ideas about party work, without objectively approaching political and party work and seeing the changes and developments that have occurred in many parties. Many parties have managed to improve the level of their discourse, update their tools, and promote the presence of young people in leadership positions. These parties remain limited, but they have begun to realize the magnitude of

the gap between them and young people, and they are working to bridge this gap and attract the new generation. Young people are alienated even from accurate knowledge of the reality of political parties and their role. This was evidenced when the dialogue leader asked questions of many

of the young people critical of the party lists and the young representatives in their governorates. Most of their answers denied any knowledge, indicating that their judgments are mostly general, preconceived, and impressionistic.

It was clear that many young people are unaware of the extent to which young people run for office today. There are 111 candidates between the ages of 30-35, 65 men and 46 women. In addition, there are 115 candidates between the ages of 35-40, 71 men and 44 women.

On the other hand, as al-Nimri pointed out, global, cultural, and technological developments may create new conditions different from traditional, stereotypical party work, generating new spaces for activity in the public sphere, especially in youth currents and networks. Such developments would provide a fertile field for young people without having to start by working within an organized party hierarchy.

-3-

Why should I participate?

The session discussed the factors and causes that drive young people to participate in parliamentary and political elections and the barriers that prevent youth inclusion and prevent them from participating actively. In the session, it was observed that young people continue to identify the overall negative aspects that they see as the real barrier to their active participation. Some young people insisted on continuing to hold political parties directly responsible, along with official policies and laws.

The Secretary-General of the National Congress Party (Zamzam) and President of the Board of Trustees of the National Centre for Human Rights presented his view of the need to move past the aforementioned negative identification onto engagement with political and reform work. In order to achieve the needed change, instead of merely blaming the status quo, he called on young people to avail themselves of the developments taking place in the world, especially with regard to the formation of new and creative methods and tools, in place of the old formulas for political and public work.

1. Infrastructure for political participation: Several participants made important observations about the weak environment for nurturing political participation among young people. There is nothing in the educational and political curricula in schools and universities that reinforces or promotes the concept of participation and the associated concepts of democracy, human rights, pluralism, and practical, procedural rotation of power. While officials argued that school parliaments are a microcosm of political participation in the educational process, young people responded that they are perfunctory and superficial, and by contrast, many Jordanian universities forbid their students from having student councils.

Participants in the session spoke of a contradiction. When universities send many messages and signals that imply a negative view of political and party work in universities, how can we at the same time—as one of them said— talk about the inclusion of young people in political work?

Some young people re-emphasized that scholarships are conditional on young people not joining party work, seeing them as an example of the ongoing bureaucratic mentality that considers partisan and political youth as a danger or threat to national security. This mentality builds walls between young people and their involvement and participation in political and party life.

2. The path of democratic transformation: Why was it interrupted? Some participants returned to the question of the real reasons behind the breakdown of democratic transformation since the return of representative and democratic life in 1989. They wondered if there is a real resolve in the halls of power to answer questions about what we want and where the engine of political reform will lead. At the end of the day, is there a real intention to attain a full democracy? What really justifies young people's involvement in the field of reform and change? Or is there a retreat or perhaps a reluctance to go this way? If so, said one participant, what is the point of all these official and unofficial

stories and conversations about integrating young people into political and public life, as long as there is an inherent and fundamental problem in the structure of Jordanian democratic life?

These questions were reinforced by another participant who believes that there are major distractions from the truly necessary questions. What is required today is not just the empowerment of young people or women; the problem is not just young people, but society as a whole. As long as society itself is incapable, it is natural that young people, women, and others, as members of this society, will be in a state of “marginalization.” The result, according to the participant, is a deviation of the discussion from its required path of how to empower society to obtain its rights in political participation. Only then will young people be part of this equation.

Within these themes that are skeptical of the usefulness of youth participation in the parliamentary elections, other participants raised questions about the effectiveness of the House of Representatives as a legislative and oversight authority, and

whether it actually plays the role required of it in this context. Because in their view the answer is “no,” they wondered what the point is, then, of participating in parliamentary elections.

On the other hand, several participants rejected the option of boycotting or abstaining from participating in the elections, believing that it would reinforce the negative situation. In this view, the basic principle is for young people to vote on the basis of their convictions for whomever is best for parliament. If they truly cannot find a suitable person or list, then they should vote even by casting a blank ballot as a political message of the desire for reform and change.

Those of this opinion added that failure to participate based on substantive criteria is among the reasons that many people are elected to parliament without the required qualifications and capabilities and who do not represent the aspirations of the younger generation. This reinforces the current gap and increases young people’s state of frustration and acrimony.

3. The gap between official rhetoric and reality: A female participant said that the real problem faced by Jordanian young people today is that they hear beautiful and important words everywhere about the role of youth, their inclusion, and the interest in them, but these words are not reflected on the ground in any way. Another young man affirmed these convictions, adding that young people today are fed up with words and talk about Jordanian youth, their role, their advancement, and confronting their problems, with, in his opinion, no real implementation of all these speeches on the ground. One participant wondered about the translation of official speech on the level of youth legislation and policies. Where is it? Nothing really changes, thus a large percentage of young people have come to doubt everything they hear, and they say, “The government itself does not help young people change this reality.” Other young people demanded the enactment of legislation and the demarcation of policies that actually help them engage in public life, such as

a law to empower youth. Some of them asked how it can be explained that the voting age is 18, but the age to run for elections is 30? They considered this a contradiction in policies. Others added that they believe that today everyone wants to ride the wave of the appeal to youth empowerment. For example, they are now seeing some candidates using slogans such as “youth consensus candidate,” whom young people neither chose nor nominated.

4. Participation with the goal of lobbying and reform: Dr. Rahil al-Gharaibeh answered some of these questions by initially acknowledging that things on the ground are neither ideal nor rosy, and that the democratic path still needs a major push to reach the required milestones. However, such a push is achieved through the active participation of young people, and not the other way around. This means that the goal of participation in elections and public work, for young people, consists of engaging with this reality and pushing for improving the conditions and circumstances that nurture youth work, so that an institution such as parliament, for example, does not end up being greatly removed from

the youth generation and its political representation, and so that the tribal factor is not the only basis upon which candidates are chosen.

Dr. al-Gharaibeh said that if young people do not see the currently existing parties actually achieving youth goals and coming to grips with youth problems and challenges, then the space is open for young people to consider creating platforms and forms for bringing about change, expressing their demands and issues, and creating new modes consistent with the transformations that are taking place in order for them to have a voice in the halls of power.

However, al-Gharaibeh rejected the general stereotype about political parties and holding them responsible for the inability to attract the younger generation today, or accusing them of impotence and weakness. According to him, the parties have not been tested in the government, and it is difficult to pre-judge them. Reaching definitive conclusions about the parties requires studies, experiments, and experience we do not yet have.

At the same time, al-Gharaibeh admitted that there is a bureaucratic political legacy and a social culture suspicious and skeptical of party work, which hinders improving the conditions and circumstances that compel young people to integrate, work, change, and exit their current state of anger and frustration. He stressed the importance of reviewing youth policies and legislation to improve them and provide the appropriate conditions to integrate young people into public life. Young people must find themselves in representative institutions and not feel this alienation or gap with the existing political reality.

Al-Gharaibeh supported, for example, removing all obstacles and policies that hinder youth integration, including the conditions placed on some university scholarships that prevent young people from joining parties, or the current requirement that a public servant must resign if he decides to run for parliamentary elections. Such a requirement prevents people with valuable skills and capabilities from reaching the House of Representatives. It could be

replaced by giving leave to the employee, and if he wins the election, he resigns from his job, so as not to hold two positions at the same time.

Al-Gharaibeh also warned against persisting in condemning the previous generation or elders in public and political work. He believes that the alternative is the option of “debate,” i.e., interaction and mutual benefit among generations. All are members of one community, and the principle is that there is no conflict, but rather dialogue, between generations.

Summary

Frustration dominates young people’s attitudes towards participating in public life, and in parliamentary elections in particular. They see obstacles, frustrations, and problems more than they see the opportunities available to them to work and engage with reality.

An important observation is that it is important to consider the environment that nurtures the inclusion of young people in public life and promotes their political participation in a positive and effective manner. What is required

is a review of legislation and policies, the strengthening of relevant institutions, and building a national strategy to achieve this. What some young people have proposed regarding the enactment of a law to empower Jordanian youth may be appropriate, especially because there is a centralized trend in the state's policies in this regard.

Despite all of the above, it is clear that the general trend among young people is seeking reform, change, and integration, but they are groping for the way to achieve this practical engagement via a safe and effective path.

-4-

From a culture of protest to reform activity

This session discussed the dominance of the culture of protest in the oppositional political behavior of Jordanian young people, at the expense of considering progressive political reform work. The participants presented their views of the reasons that push young people towards protest rather than other methods. Likewise, they focused on the required alternatives and steps for moving to another level that goes beyond protest to offer reformist approaches and options.

Dr. Muhammad Abu Rumman, researcher at the Center for Strategic Studies and former Minister of Youth and Minister of Culture, offered an approach on the necessity of moving young people past a culture of protest towards presenting practical and phased programs of reform and change.

1. What do we need? Most of the young participants indicated that the culture of protest among Jordanian youth has flourished since the events of the Arab Spring in 2011. Groups of Jordanian young people have faith in the effectiveness and relevance of protests for changing conditions and making a difference, after change was previously ruled out in the Arab world. In the beginning, what happened in Arab countries such as Tunisia and Egypt encouraged young people to break the traditional and psychological barriers that stood against the culture of street protest. The street became the first and main means of expressing the opinions, concerns, and demands of Jordanian youth, whether for reforms, services, or even related issues such as unemployment and job opportunities.

Regarding what drives young people to protests rather than to traditional or organized political work, one participant said that the protests have proven truly effective and powerful compared to other means, adding, “What you can change in one week through protests may take decades of normal and traditional lobbying methods and party work to achieve.”

Another female participant said that protests, whose goal is reform, achieve what other means are unable to. She was supported by another participant who said that the political message behind the protests is to tell officials that we are here, adding that young people did not resort to protests until after they were overwhelmed and had reached a very bad economic situation, and they felt that their voice was not being heard in the halls of power.

Another female participant pointed out that the real problem is the lack of extended dialogue between the government and young people. Oftentimes, many of them find resorting to the streets an alternative to the inability to communicate with officials.

2. The culture of protests and beyond: Some participants asked systematic questions about the culture of protest itself, whether it is temporary or specific to particular circumstances or reactions, or has really become a normalized, daily culture that young people see as the only possibility for change or, at a minimum, the expression of their demands.

Some participants pointed out that protests achieved important results during the last stage, breaking many taboos and smashing many walls that prevented young people from expressing their opinion, making their voices heard, and taking to the streets. However, these participants also said young people need to shift their thinking from considering these protests a strategy and an objective in themselves to seeing them as a tactic or other means to achieve other reform goals. Young people must think about these other means.

In the same context, session participants pointed out the experiences of the Arab Spring, which showed that Arab youth had a vital and important role in the popular revolutions and protests but had

no project for what would follow the protests. This caused other forces and parties to reap what young people had sown, while young people experienced increasing frustration and disappointment.

One participant added that young people have to shift from thinking only about protest policies to other innovative policies, by making use of their many and varied tools. For example, social media can actually give young Jordanians important tools and spaces for dialogue and accountability and oversight of the government and parliament. Social media also provides young people important and vital platforms for presenting options and alternatives and forming lobbying groups.

One participant presented the idea of an application, a designated youth platform, through which young people can collect opinions and positions and develop visions to reach proposals and amendments with a large base of popular support. This represents a form of democracy and active youth participation.

Another young participant concluded that it is important for young people to move from a short-term to a long-term policy, and from contenting themselves with protests to thinking beyond them to realistic progressive awareness of the process of reform and change. Young people must work to develop themselves and their capabilities in order to seize historical moments and opportunities that give young people a wide space for reform and change.

3. From protest to reform: Dr. Muhammad Abu Rumman commented on the overall opinions mentioned in the young people's discussion, emphasizing that the intention in the discussion is not to condemn or diminish the protest culture or call on young people to abandon it. Rather, the goal is to translate the transformations that have occurred and shift angry, disaffected, frustrated young people, who see protests as the only means of expressing their demands and needs, to a new stage or place that pushes them towards realistic, progressive public and political work. This certainly may be more difficult and take longer than

effective short-term protests, but it can bring about an important and qualitative shift in young people's awareness of the tools and methods through which they can change reality.

The issue, as explained by Abu Rumman, is that protests can make an immediate difference, as has happened many times in Jordan, and can lead to a change of government or reversal of a specific policy, which is often a good thing. However, protests will not present an alternative and will not be effective in making fundamental changes and building the necessary alternatives to what they are rejecting and protesting against. The point is that young people must adopt a new and effective framework for the needed change in order for them to be able to sustain and develop their sources of power. Empowerment comes not only from opposition and protest, but also from proposing alternatives, projects, and even youth leaders.

In this context, Abu Rumman proposed more than one framework and option in which young people can work, for example the idea of youth streams

that match today's networked era. In this way, young people who are not in traditional parties can shape a form of political currents that present a strong, reformist youth discourse, have an impact on political participation and public action, and make the needed difference.

If there are difficulties for many young people in running for parliamentary elections, for example, either due to age (cannot be younger than 30) or the conditions and the nature of the current laws and legislations governing the political process, then they can transform into an electoral lobbying force. For example, young people can organize themselves in the governorates and say that we have so many thousand votes, we will give our vote only to a candidate who adopts specific demands or a certain rhetoric, and we will differentiate between lists and candidates on this basis.

Abu Rumman then pointed to a fundamental problem, as he put it, that plagues youth work in Jordan. Youth work has seen a real qualitative leap in recent years, along with a big jump in the volume of

youth participation in initiatives, civil society, and volunteer work, and a remarkable qualitative shift in the critical political awareness of young people. However, these transformations are still suffering from fragmentation, randomness, individualism, and division in Jordanian youth work. Everywhere there are creative young individuals, each of whom works alone or in a small group without cooperating with others or thinking about building a network of young people in the governorate. They do not consider grouping businesses and moving from individual to collective organized action, whether at the governorate or the national level. Therefore, according to Abu Rumman, one of the most important steps for building the capabilities and strength of young people in public and political work in Jordan is to shift from individualism to collective formulations.

Summary

All participants recognized more than one conclusion. The first is that the protests were linked to the Arab Spring and a stage of despair regarding the realistic possibility of change and action through existing frameworks. Utility,

effectiveness, and rapid impact compared to traditional methods may be behind the transformation of protest into a social culture.

At the same time, protest is not a long-term policy. It does not change conditions in a systematic and practical manner, as much as it expresses the rejection of existing policy or positions. Therefore, young people should not be satisfied with a policy of protest.

The other and more important issue is the need for young people to shift from street politics to the political game by integrating them into state institutions and public work and providing them a nurturing environment. This requires steps on the part of both young people and government and state officials in general. Among the important observations of the young participants was the issue of officials'

state of mind in the state's policies towards young people and the constant change in those policies. An example is the continual change in youth ministers, which is reflected in the ministry's continuous change and lack of clarity, stability, strategy, policies, and programs during the previous period.

-5-

Women's issues in the elections and young people's perception of how much they are expressed

The session discussed women's issues in the elections, young people's perception of how much they are expressed, and the biggest obstacles to the political progress of women in Jordan and ways to overcome them. The session was an opportunity for discussion and evaluation of women's experiences in parliament over the past 12 years. Its guest was the expert in women's affairs and former MP, Wafaa Bani Mustafa. During the session, the participants presented a general evaluation of the role and parliamentary activity of women, and discussed lessons learned in the development and framing of women's political work, as seen by young people.

Ms. Wafaa Bani Mustafa shared her experience in political work, which began when she was a young woman and saw her serve more than one term in parliament from an early age. She benefited from competitive access, which helped her gain experience and expertise in political work. She had an opportunity to provide a review and evaluation of the experiences she gained and share them with the participants.

The participants raised the issue that female MP's suffer from low individual development and political advancement, which sets them up against the negative cultural legacy towards women in public affairs. The participants found that women active in the political sphere must work to build intellectual and technical capabilities that help them shift to a collective effort that contributes to bringing about the required change at the political and social levels.

1. Women in internal elections and formation of lists:
A group of participants emphasized the negative role played by unofficial internal elections in keeping women and young people from being active in the competitive electoral scene in tribal areas. In this way, the popular legacy of political culture

helps export leaders according to criteria and trends where the type of service-oriented MP prevails.¹⁾ One of the participants believed that women are exploited in order to bring votes for the list, as the election law requires the presence of at least one woman in each list. This is why many lists seek an opportunity to choose female candidates with specific characteristics, either formally in terms of appearance, or with a social presence like those active in charitable work.

Young men and women see a marked weakness in the mechanisms and tools of communication between women parliamentarians and voter blocs on the one hand, and female parliamentarians and social political work on the other hand. One of the most important reasons for this modest presence is the low level of political activity among women

1- Informal elections precede the candidacy process. They emerged notably in the 1990's due to weak party representation in tribal regions in choosing the so-called "tribal candidate." Women are usually prevented from participating in these internal elections. For more, see: "The Tribal Consensus Candidate: A Mini-Democracy or the Denial of Free Will?" <https://www.7iber.com/society/tribal-consensus-in-jordans-parliamentary-elections/>.

outside parliament, which increases society's negative stereotype of women and their political leadership capabilities.

2. Challenges and opportunities for women in electoral races: Participants agreed on the existence of a set of factors that pose social, cultural, and economic challenges for the future of women in political work in general, and for elections and access to decision-making in particular:

First, women have shown their superiority in the field of quality and higher education, yet, by contrast, the female unemployment rate was 28.6% during the second quarter of 2020, compared to 21.5% for men. Therefore, designing and building programs targeting employment and reducing unemployment rates will be effective programs for the female electoral base.¹⁾

Second, the political development of women is an existential requirement for the future of their political work, just as with men. It requires women to continually take the

1- See the Department of Statistics website: http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/ar/unemp_q22020/.

initiative to participate in activities and programs related to democratic activity. Such activity gives them the opportunity to be politically present and acquire political knowledge through the exchange of acquired experiences and expertise, the search for female participants, and the development of available skills and tools. Therefore, the opportunity will be greatly conducive to a political bloc or what is known as “political advocacy.”

Third, the low economic empowerment of women is a parallel obstacle to their political empowerment. On the other hand, this constitutes an opportunity to form “feminist lobbying groups” in the political arena that aim to develop policies of economic empowerment that lead to political empowerment.

Ms. Wafaa Bani Mustafa proposed an idea she called “the feminization of politics” and defined it operationally as “a trend that pumps new blood regarding decision-making through women, and this trend depends on women’s awareness and youth support,” on the grounds that change begins with the initiative. Bani Mustafa defended the “women’s quota” as an attempt to “fix a historical error.” She explained that the

question of competence is directed to women more than men, even though the monitoring and evaluation numbers issued by civil society institutions prove women's abilities in legislation, oversight, and accountability.

Bani Mustafa noted the frequent negative messaging directed to young people in order to alienate them from political action. Her focus is on the image of female parliamentarians who are constantly exposed to "political violence" that alienates many girls from the political sphere. She ruled out the notion that governments are actually serious about empowering women economically and politically, as evidenced by the fact that governments encourage women to participate in elections each election cycle, while at the same time governments do not trust women and do not depend on their competence in leadership positions. The state must take the initiative to offer a model for placing women in high positions, especially political positions.

Bani Mustafa answered the question of her not running in the upcoming elections by saying that the

previous political period needs self-evaluation and review, as well as validity of the electoral law. She indicated her interest in shifting to political organization through the institutionalization of new, collective, and more effective political work.

Summary

Women's political work needs to shift from individualism to collective action, via the formation of political forces that compete with traditional forces. This work starts from the popular base and goes all the way to parliament, where women find common political cause with other parliamentarians in terms of demands and aspirations, or with young people, who find, in return, political commonality with women on issues of political renewal and change, the development of legislation and practices for effective and organized political work, and shared spaces in civil society.

Economic empowerment and the social legacy vis-à-vis women are hindrances in the election of women. This can be overcome through political action, which works to positively transform the negative legacy with regards to

women by imposing change and achievement and developing legislation related to women so that it effectively contributes to empowering women economically in a structural and sustainable fashion.

-6-

How do we promote youth participation in political life?

The session discussed the set of policies and measures required to promote youth participation in the elections and how to develop the quality of this participation through acquired skills and knowledge and the creation of changes necessary to develop the political life of young people and effectively integrate them. The discussion guest was Mr. Saed Karajeh, a lawyer, political activist, and one of the founders of the Civil Alliance Party.

Saed Karajeh focused on a central idea of youth participation in political life, which is that young people are the tool, means, and goal of change. He shared with the young people his party experiences and lessons learned, along with his overall evaluation of the methodology of party work

in Jordan and the problems that young people must overcome in their political practices, be they party practices or normal political currents. He referred to the significant role of elections in achieving the desired progress for young people through active citizenship that creates change.

One participant pointed out the failure of state institutions in the political development process. Civil society institutions tried to fill this space, and young people gained a kind of political development in their theoretical framework, but they did not find the space to exercise it in a practical way. Another participant noted that young people need a safe environment for political work and real guarantees, because political work needs protection, as he put it.

A female participant asked about the role of laws and legislation in developing, limiting, or hindering political life. Another asked about the lack of interest in political education in educational institutions, because this attitude reflects the seriousness of the political reform process, saying that she is ready to enter into the experience of party work if certain conditions are fulfilled, first and foremost a clear vision and direction that can be applied on the ground.

1. Methodology of political thought among young people: Mr. Saed Karajeh sought to provide a working definition of political participation, in which it is not limited only to participation in the general elections. Rather, political participation is activated by the principle of citizenship, which includes

active participation in public affairs through societies, syndicates, student unions, and party work, which is considered the cornerstone that organizes political work. Young people must not retreat and wait for someone to come and change their political situation; they must take the initiative to make the change they want, according to the saying, “Be you the change you want to see in the world.” Karajeh praised the ability of young people and their possession of the necessary tools that enable them to mobilize and influence, stressing the positive impact on the interest of the state and its reflection on the interest of young people themselves.

Young people are affected by parents’ warnings about political work during the university period. One of the participants confirmed this, describing it

as a historical problem that will continue to hinder political and party work for young people. Therefore, safe, practical models must be available for young people in the overall political sphere to serve as motivating messages for young people.

2. Reconciliation with party work: The participants focused on a problem that was repeated in more than one session, the “relevance of party work,” especially in light of young people’s observation of the parties’ lack of a strong presence on the political scene and their lack of confidence in young people and young leadership. They also focused on their disappointment with the personalization of parties that are established for the sake of individuals more than for party work. On the other hand, Saed Karajeh suggested, based on his party experience, that young people can make a difference, either by joining existing political parties and changing their legislation, renewing their programs, and assuming leadership, or by establishing new parties and building them in a way that benefits young people and the state. Karajeh also focused on what he

called the distortion afflicting the identity of parties in Jordan, as a result of the replication of ideological parties that need to be more Jordanian in order to be able to represent the Jordanian reality.

One participant pointed out the inherited difficulty of political activity.

3. Youth confidence in the elections: With regard to elections and the low confidence of young people in the representative institution, Saed Karajeh stressed that boycotting is a negative weapon, and the reality of young people can only be changed by young people. It is now in the interest of the state to defend itself, and it must embrace young people politically, because young people who do not participate in political frameworks will necessarily participate outside the framework, which is not in the interest of the state.

Summary

Young people hold a negative stereotype of political life, specifically the electoral process. Many factors have contributed to building and developing this image, perhaps most notably the media's coverage focusing on the negative more than the positive aspects. Given the prevalence of social media platforms, the circulation of negative stories alienates young people and promotes the futility of political work, which has become almost a stigma in young people's eyes.

The fear inherited from the pre-1989 era represents a negative collective memory that impedes the process of integrating young people into political life. Most parents, having lived through that period and its negative effects on social life, warn their children against political activity both inside and outside universities. Therefore, efforts must be made to recall the positives of political life and the democratic models that the state needs in its path to progress.

There is a capacity for integrating young people into political life and political organization, but only by providing conditions and guarantees protecting them from

persecution and harassment. Parties must have clear and realistic political programs, not based on personalities, and must assume a new outlook and contemporary tools that can bring about change.

-7-

What is required of young people in the parliamentary elections?

The session discussed the tasks and capabilities that youth can undertake during the parliamentary elections in order to develop the outcomes of the electoral process. The guest of the session was Dr. Reem Abu Hassan, former Minister of Social Development and a specialist in reform and civil society. Her conversation focused on the importance of youth skills and how they can be used in the interest of societal and developmental needs, as well as on the importance of engagement and positive action towards elections and the role of civil society institutions in promoting political and parliamentary participation and overseeing the work of parliament.

A female participant noted that youth have an important role in the electoral process that is not limited to selecting suitable candidates. The role extends to community awareness of best electoral practices, how to choose candidates according to their programs and orientations, and how to evaluate their subsequent performance.

1. The decline in the role of political associations: One of the participants asked the reason for the small number of political associations, particularly given their major role in promoting political development and electoral education. It was noted that there are 206 political societies in Jordan affiliated to the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs,¹⁾ out of 2,426 associations registered under the umbrella of the Ministry of Social Development's Registry of Societies.²⁾

Speaking of civil society, Abu Hassan noted the importance of the monitoring and oversight activity of civil society institutions in evaluating the per

1- See the website of the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs: <http://moppa.gov.jo/index.php/ar/>.

2- See Jordan's Registry of Societies website: <http://www.societies.gov.jo/UI/Arabic/Default.aspx>.

formance of not only parliament, but also municipalities and elected councils. She affirmed that this role contributes to improving performance, on one hand, and engagement and participation, on the other.

2. Overcoming political isolation: One of the female participants mentioned the importance of eliminating the political isolation of young people, because this situation directly helps traditional, parliamentary political forces control decision-making areas and continue to provide poor performance that does not serve the future of the state and does not help develop key, vital sectors. This participant also focused on the fact that the electoral process does not include only parliamentary elections: governorate council elections, municipal elections, and unions represent vital sectors of direct concern to young people and give voice to their demands and aspirations.

On the question of positive operational progress, Abu Hassan mentioned the experiences and cour

age of people with disabilities who participated in the upcoming elections. Abu Hassan described this as an important lesson for people who have special demands and want to defend them, as well as for those who find political participation a challenge and an obstacle.

3. Youth candidate: A female participant mentioned a youth electoral model in one of the governorates, where a group of young people nominated their own young man for the parliamentary elections. They knew him well and trusted him and his ability to represent them and defend their demands. She also highlighted the importance of replicating this experiment in the future in different regions of Jordan in order to propagate positivity and confidence among young people. On the other hand, some candidates who call themselves the youth candidate are not.
4. Alliance of women and youth: At the end of her discussion, Abu Hassan advised young people of the importance of discussing ways to create an alliance between young people and women in the political

and social spheres. Such alliances work to communicate the voice of young people and women together, which constitutes a source of strength for the issues that each party adopts.

Summary

Civil society institutions whose programs work for development and political empowerment contribute to improving the quality of the electoral process in general, whether through the process of awareness and political and democratic education, or through improving the quality and performance of elected councils through ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Thus, young people and women must be encouraged to establish more political societies or join existing ones.

This is an opportune moment for young people and women to establish political alliances, and there is a need to overcome young people's experience of political isolation, find political commonalities on issues that concern both young people and women, work to develop joint programs, and achieve shared accomplishments and goals.

-8-

How do I choose a list and candidates, what are the principles and criteria?

The session discussed the basis for selecting candidates, the list, and how to evaluate electoral programs, in addition to the principles and criteria candidates must meet in order to gain the confidence of voters, especially the youth vote. The session also focused on electoral culture and media advertising in improving the outcomes of the electoral process and parliamentary work.

Ms. Jumana Ghunaimat, former Minister of Information and Communication and former editor-in-chief of the Jordanian daily newspaper, *Al-Ghad*, presented scenarios differentiating between participating in the elections and boycotting them. Participation, which she described as an important process that contributes to improving the outcomes of the electoral process as much as possible, outweighs boycott, which she described as contributing to the formation of a “vacuum” that gives a negative opportunity for unqualified people to assume crucial responsibilities and tasks in the lives of citizens. Thus, boycotting the

elections will squander the opportunity to later hold accountable MP's in the areas of legislation and oversight.

Ms. Ghunaimat outlined the importance of specifying clear, individual criteria before the candidate selection process and taking care in the selection process, especially given what one participant called the “jumble of slogans” and the weakness of candidates’ political programs or electoral information. Ghunaimat emphasized that specific criteria necessarily contribute to improving the performance of subsequent parliamentary work, which is reflected in the standard of living of citizens.

Young people indicated that they have initiated the process of researching real and clear political programs that express their ambitions and goals and can be implemented and measured. However, the results of their research were not what young people wanted. On the other hand, Ghunaimat praised the initiative of one of the female participants who had a dialogue and discussion with a candidate about his electoral program, his priorities for parliament, and how to implement his aspirations.

1. The tribal factor in the elections: Ghunaimat explained that the political status of the tribes dominates the electoral scene and greatly influences the direction of the voters' will towards the tribal candidate at the expense of the program or party candidate. Ghunaimat called this behavior the "party of the tribe," which constitutes a response to fill the large void left by the lack of party vitality and demonstrates the individual's need for a permanent political umbrella. Ghunaimat also affirmed what Saed Karajeh said in a previous session: at the time of Jordan's creation, the tribes gave up part of their power in the interest of forming a state in its modern sense. Therefore, the tribes are present on the political scene, and their influence and place will remain significant, especially in the absence of vital party work.

Thus, Ghunaimat warned young people that the selection of tribal candidates must be subject to the principles and criteria presented by them, in accordance with the so-called "policy of the possible." The selection process must have clear answers to the following questions:

1. What are the candidate's skills that qualify him to be a positive presence in parliamentary work?
2. What are the practical experiences that enable the candidate to create the desired positive change?
3. Does the candidate have the ability to develop an action program that serves the key growth sectors?
4. Is the candidate able—before, during, and after the electoral process—to empower alliances and blocs capable of creating change?

The participants added parallel criteria no less important than those presented by Ghunaimat, focusing on the power of persuasion of the candidate and the bloc, the previous positions of the candidate, whether in public work or parliamentary work, and the achievements of the member during his time in parliament.

2. Limits of electoral campaigning: One young man asked why the nominating and election campaigning period was shortened before the polling process, which limits sufficient opportunity and space available to voters, especially young people, to get to know the largest number of candidates and to discuss and compare them. In turn, candidates are not allowed the space to promote their programs and participate in events, dialogues, and debates with their constituencies and at the national level.¹⁾

One female participant also asked about political money, its role, and its limits in the electoral process, the difference between money that is provided for news and advertising purposes, and why money that is paid to an individual or to the media is condemned. In turn, Ghunaimat confirmed that professional media organizations that respect their content clarify to their audience whether the content is news or advertising – such behavior is related to the objectivity and professionalism of

1- See Article 20, Paragraph (a) of the Chamber of Deputies Election Law No 6 of 2016 and its amendments: <https://www.iec.jo/sites/default/files/2019-12/ElectionNo6-2016.pdf>.

the media organization. Ghunaimat also affirmed the right of individual candidates to use media platforms and news sites for campaign advertising and to specify the information and programs they want to present on themselves.

3. Candidates' political programs: Participants in the discussion session agreed on the importance and centrality of the campaign platform of candidates and those doing parliamentary work, because of its role in a proper and organized selection process and in the subsequent evaluation of parliamentary performance. One female participant also raised the importance of having an interactive platform that hosts the candidates' programs and promotes them with voters. One idea went even further than this, to obliging the candidates to present a campaign platform that includes a set of areas on which the MP and his bloc or party will focus. On one hand, Ghunaimat found this idea to be unfeasible currently, due to the process of replication and duplication. However, she also noted the importance of this becoming a social norm during the elections

by putting pressure on the candidates and questioning their programs, such that it subsequently becomes a fundamental requirement in the electoral culture. She also suggested that civil society institutions specializing in political and democratic work assist candidates in preparing and forming their own political platforms.

4. Representative of private and public interest: Ghunaimat highlighted the importance of an issue that directly affects the electoral and parliamentary process. This is the fact that the focus is always on holding the candidate or the MP responsible, while neglecting to hold responsible the community that chooses and produces the House of Representatives. Blame is then directed only at the candidates, as service issues and special requests contribute to producing a more service-oriented than political representative. Thus, this affects the legislative and oversight role of the MP. His practical priority and criterion for success and longevity become dependent on the amount of service requests performed. At this point, a sort of double standard is applied by

the society that judges both him personally and the parliament for the basic role he came to perform, which is oversight and legislation.

Summary

The participants missed the opportunity to discuss digital social media platforms and their negative and positive role in gaining electoral and political support for candidates. This is especially the case for young male and female candidates and those who possess these low-cost and effective technical skills that affect public opinion and can contribute to the easy formation and promotion of political blocs among the youth component.

The will of young people, their interest in engaging with parliamentary work, and the possibility of bridging the gap of confidence in the legislative institution are demonstrated in the enthusiasm of the participants for evaluations that take place after those candidates reach parliament. Civil society institutions can play this role and create spaces for dialogue and accountability for MP's, on the one hand, and for the government, on the other.

Young people have a great interest in the political program as a supreme reference for the processes of selecting the parliament and evaluating its performance, whether it is implemented individually or collectively. Thus, it is possible to work in the future to develop youth skills and build their capabilities in forming, evaluating, developing, and promoting the political program.

