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# What Pandemic? Parliamentary Elections in Jordan at Any Price

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Fida Nasrallah

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International IDEA  
Strömsborg  
SE-103 34 Stockholm  
Sweden  
Telephone: +46 8 698 37 00  
Email: [info@idea.int](mailto:info@idea.int)  
Website: <https://www.idea.int>

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# Contents

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What pandemic? Parliamentary Elections in Jordan at any price .....	5
1. Introduction .....	5
2. Institutional context .....	6
3. Political and socio-economic context .....	7
4. Election administration .....	9
5. Election day .....	11
6. Conclusion .....	13
7. References .....	14
About the author .....	17
About International IDEA .....	18

# What Pandemic? Parliamentary Elections in Jordan at Any Price

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Case Study

Fida Nasrallah

## 1. Introduction

Jordan holds parliamentary elections every four years, and the Jordanian general elections of November 2020 took place within their constitutional deadline. Despite rumours that the elections would be postponed as they coincided with the peak of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the authorities were determined to hold the elections as scheduled. Irrespective of the health situation, and in the face of trending social media hashtags such as ‘boycott the elections for the sake of your lives’ (Twitter 2020), it was important for the authorities to show their commitment to regular parliamentary elections (see e.g., Al-Ghad 2020). Keeping to schedule would serve to both reinforce their respect for state institutions and project stability.

Jordan had fared well in the initial stages of the pandemic. It implemented very strict lockdown measures in February 2020 that brought the country to a virtual standstill. The economy suffered terribly but it was accompanied by a very low rate of coronavirus cases. Yet ultimately the government’s decisions proved to be erratic and contradictory. The government relaxed the stringent measures in the summer and lost control over its border crossings, resulting in a rapid rise in cases. Despite the increasing numbers, it decided to reopen schools in September—only to be forced to suspend them again after dozens of infections were discovered among teachers and students. It did not, however, impose a second nationwide lockdown for fear that the economy would deteriorate further. As a result, the popularity resulting from successfully managing the pandemic, which the government had enjoyed in spring 2020, by the autumn had completely disappeared.

On 29 July, King Abdullah II instructed Jordan’s Independent Election Commission (IEC) to prepare for elections to the country’s 19th legislature. Shortly afterwards the IEC set the date for 10 November 2020. On polling day, the country had recorded its highest infection and mortality rate, with around 126,401 infections and 1,467 deaths (Worldometer n.d.). In this context, it was ill-advised to go ahead with an election in the

midst of a pandemic without adopting any alternative voting mechanisms. To assume that polling staff would be wearing PPE everywhere and that the population would be disciplined enough to abide by the social distancing and curfew rules was short-sighted. Moreover, the lack of alternative voting provisions disenfranchised those who were ill or in quarantine.

## 2. Institutional context

Jordan is a constitutional monarchy in which the King holds broad executive powers, and the powers of the prime minister are limited. The King appoints the prime minister, who heads the cabinet, also appointed by the King. King Abdullah II can dismiss the prime minister and cabinet, and dissolve parliament, at his discretion. Jordan has a bicameral National Assembly consisting of a 65-seat upper house (the Senate) appointed by the King and a 130-seat lower house (the House of Representatives). The lower house is elected for a four-year term or until the parliament is dissolved. Fifteen seats are reserved for women.

The King also has the leading role in setting policy directions and drafting legislation. Legislation is submitted by the government to the House of Representatives and parliament may approve, reject, or amend bills. To become law, however, bills require the approval of the Senate, which as mentioned is appointed by the King. A group of no fewer than 10 MPs can propose legislation, though it first needs to be referred to the government before a draft law can be returned to the House. Parliament in Jordan is less about national policy debate and more services-minded; an MP will campaign on delivering government services to their constituency and thereby represents voters on a local level (Kayyali 2020).

### Electoral system

In 2015, the electoral system changed from the single non-transferable vote to a proportional open list system. In the new system, the Kingdom is divided into 23 constituencies, and parties or blocs must provide a list of at least three candidates. The number of candidates on a list cannot exceed the number of seats allocated for that constituency. It is difficult for a list to win in its entirety, as the 2016 elections conducted under the same system have shown, so most voters end up choosing the first name on their preferred list. One adverse effect of this system is that it promotes intra-list competition—members discourage their supporters from supporting other candidates on the same list—and thus conflict within blocs.

Boundary delimitation is skewed to favour non-urban areas with smaller populations. This is where tribal and royalist candidates are strongest; the cities, where Islamist and liberal opponents enjoy most support (where most Jordanians of Palestinian origin reside), are correspondingly under-represented. Urban areas have far fewer MPs per voter than the countryside. For example, the district of Ma'an with 59,000 voters elects four members of parliament whereas the district of Zarqa, with over 450,000 voters, elects six parliament members. This is one way of ensuring that the main opposition party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), remains weak.

Since 2012 Jordan's elections have been administered by an Independent Election Commission (IEC) whose Chairperson and four members are appointed by royal decree for a six-year non-renewable mandate. This appointment is made upon the recommendation of a three-member committee comprising the Prime Minister, who chairs it, the President of the House of Representatives and the President of the Judicial Council. The IEC operates according to Law No. 11 of the year 2012 (IEC n.d.). The IEC has administrative independence but receives its budget from the State. It is supported by a Secretariat comprising five departments, 23 District Election Committees (DECs) and 8,061 Polling

and Counting Committees (PCCs)—almost doubled in 2020 compared to 2016—to administer a much expanded network of 1,483 polling centres (total staff numbers were stable, i.e., fewer staff deployed per polling centre). The Commission set up three Special Committees, each responsible for a designated area of Jordan, to carry out auditing of preliminary results. As part of the ongoing reform of key legislation, the IEC's mandate has expanded to include conducting not only parliamentary elections, but also governorate, council and municipal elections.

### 3. Political and socio-economic context

In February 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the globe, Jordan enforced one of the most severe social distancing measures in the world. It enforced a total lockdown, sealed its borders, evoked the Defence Law of 1992 (HRH King Abdullah II 2020; Roya News 2020a), imposed a night curfew and shuttered its economy for two and a half months. Jordan's draconian measures succeeded and by the end of May it lifted the total lockdown and opened up most businesses in an attempt to revive the economy.

Rather than injecting money into the sectors most in difficulty and offering wage or living cost supports, under the Defence Law of 1992 the government then attempted to respond to the economic fallout of the pandemic through austerity measures. Prime Minister Omar Razzaz allowed employers to reduce wages of active employees. The government also suspended the bonuses and allowances for the public sector and cancelled the bread subsidy. In June it initiated a plan to provide financial aid to daily labourers for a period of three months from a special fund that received donations from public and private companies. The government did not reduce taxes on goods and services to stimulate spending (Al-Sharif 2016). The cumulative effects of these decisions on Jordanian workers and on the economic recovery were severe (see Al-Sharif 2020).

Political problems compounded the country's economic woes. On 15 July 2020 the Court of Cassation dissolved the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) for failure to renew its licence under a 2014 law on political parties. Jordan had long tolerated the group's political arm, the IAF. Since 2014, however, the authorities have considered the MB illegal although it continued to operate. In 2015 the government licensed the Muslim Brotherhood Association—an offshoot from the MB—further straining relations between the MB and the State. In 2016 the MB's headquarters in Amman and several regional offices were closed and ownership was transferred to the splinter group. When the MB took legal action to retrieve their property, the court ordered their dissolution. The Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood has wide grassroots support in the kingdom although this has declined in recent years.

In late July 2020, the Teachers' Union, widely perceived to be very close to the Muslim Brotherhood, was suspended for two years. Its headquarters were shut and 13 of its members were arrested, allegedly for incitement and financial wrongdoing. While government officials accused union leaders of harbouring the political agenda of the Islamist opposition, the union said that this accusation was part of a government smear campaign. Demonstrations erupted throughout the country calling for the release of the arrested members, and they were released a month later. The government was accused of using the emergency laws activated in March to limit civil and political rights and to stifle expression on the poor economic and sanitary situation in Jordan (HRW 2020).

By August 2020, the political climate was in favour of a boycott of the elections (not only by Islamists but also by teachers following the closure of the Teachers' Union). A fierce internal dispute erupted within the Islamic movement over whether or not to participate in

the elections, although some observers understood this discussion itself to have been a form of pressure on the government for concessions. The government opened up channels of communications, encouraged the Islamist forces to participate and provided assurances that there would be no conditions or restrictions, or a desire to contain them. On 21 September, the IAF declared that it would take part in the November parliamentary elections to avoid being completely deprived of an opposition platform and voice.

King Abdullah II dissolved parliament on 27 September 2020, giving Prime Minister Omar Razzaz a week in which to resign. On 12 October, the King issued a decree approving the formation of a new cabinet and appointing Bisher Al Khasawneh as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. Parliamentary elections would be held under Al Khasawneh's watch. The government would ultimately gain parliament's vote of confidence on 13 January 2021.

### Emergency powers and their effect on civil and political rights

On 17 March 2020, Defence Law No. 13 of 1992 came into effect by Royal Decree on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers. The Defence Law is invoked should an emergency (including pandemics) threaten the national security or public safety. It was the first time that the Law was invoked in the reign of King Abdullah II.

The Defence Law, which was not modified specifically for Covid-19, grants the Prime Minister the power to govern by decree (by issuing defence orders) and to undertake all the necessary measures on Covid-19-related matters. These include the suspension of ordinary legislation, placing restrictions on people's freedom of movement and assembly, and arresting or detaining those suspected of posing a threat to national security and public order. King Abdullah II had directed the government to ensure that the implementation of the Defence Law and the orders issued under it be within the most limited scope possible. There were 26 defence orders issued between 17 March 2020 and 24 February 2021 (for Defence Orders 1–9, see Moubaydeen and Moubaydeen 2020).

On 20 March, the Council of Ministers issued Defence Order 2, imposing a curfew and a general lockdown, and a few days later it issued Defence Order 3 that stated the penalties for violating the lockdown. Defence Order 8 issued on 15 April was the one that ultimately proved to be the most controversial. It banned anyone from publishing, re-publishing or circulating any news about the pandemic that would 'intimidate' or 'sow fear' among people through the media or social media and set out penalties for infractions: up to a three-year prison sentence, a fine of JOD 3,000 (USD 4,230) or both.

Jordan has been a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) since 1975. Article 19 of the ICCPR establishes freedom of expression as a fundamental human right. Restrictions are permitted but under very strict conditions. Not only did Jordan use the Defence Law to curtail journalists' ability to report freely on the pandemic, in July the emergency measure limited media coverage of protests stemming from the government's aforementioned actions against the Teachers' Union. The Attorney-General issued an order prohibiting the publication or discussion of trials pertaining to the closure of the union. The UN criticized the clampdown as a serious violation of the rights to freedom of association and expression (UN News 2020).

Human Rights Watch reported (HRW 2020) that two journalists who covered the protests were beaten and at least two others were arrested. It also confirmed that journalists had increasingly encountered restrictions in their reporting either through gagging orders, through harassment by security forces or through withholding requisite permits (Freedom House n.d.a).

Use of emergency powers was only the latest in a series of restrictions on press freedoms and wider freedom of expression in the country. Some experienced foreign journalists reported being monitored and shadowed. Others claimed to be regularly contacted and intimidated by the General Intelligence Directorate. Jordan also invoked its Cybercrimes

Law 27/2015 of 1 June 2015 (Council of Europe 2020) to question journalists and other bloggers about their social media activity, and arrested scores of dissidents for criticism on social media. Facebook posts on the plight of Bangladeshi migrant workers during the Covid-19 lockdown resulted in the arrest of a Bangladeshi journalist (Sharbain 2021).

After the elections, the government used Defence Law No. 13 banning large gatherings to prevent the opposition from holding a press conference to discuss violations of the electoral process. A siege of the headquarters of the 'Jordan Stronger Party' by the security forces was further confirmation, if any were needed, that emergency powers introduced under Covid-19 provided cover for serious civil and political rights violations in Jordan.

#### 4. Election administration

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) adopted a number of measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the elections and to ensure the success of the electoral process while safeguarding the security and safety of citizens. It started off by testing for Covid-19 all IEC staff, polling officials and other personnel to be stationed at the polling centres.

The IEC did not, however, establish any alternative voting measures in relation to the pandemic. Voting was to take place in one day, in person and at a polling station. Early voting was not an option. Neither were postal ballots, as post offices in Jordan are not set up for complex operations. There has never been any mobile voting in Jordan and such measures were not introduced for 2020. No special provisions for voting were made for people isolating, or in hospitals. Indeed, the authorities had declared that voters who tested positive for Covid-19 must stay at home or face up to a year in prison if they ignored these instructions.

The IEC had made provisions, in its executive instructions, that people in isolation or under quarantine would be able to vote and that voting hours would be extended from 07:00 to 21:00 for that purpose (IEC 2016). This provision, however, was never applied. The explanation provided was that the instruction applied to healthy eligible voters residing in neighbourhoods under quarantine. By then, however, there were no neighbourhoods under quarantine, so those specific provisions were non-applicable (ArabEMBs 2020: minute 17; Bani Amer 2020).

For the 2020 elections, the IEC had linked the national electoral register with the database created by the Ministry of Health (MoH) of all the people who had contracted Covid-19. In a briefing to reporters, IEC Chairperson Khalid Al Kalalkeh admitted that election officials 'had records of active Coronavirus cases'. Certain domestic groups that had observed the elections, such as RASED and Sisterhood is Global (SIGI), noted that Covid-19 had been a bar to some people voting, without polling officials providing any mechanism of verification (SIGI 2020a). This confirmed the existence of a linkage with the database of the MoH. Such cases were scarce, however (SIGI 2020b; ArabEMBs 2020: minute 20:56).

This raises a number of questions on many levels. An independent electoral management body (EMB) took the decision to deny people who had contracted the virus the right to vote, on the basis of complying with the government's directives that people who have tested positive for the virus should stay at home. This puts into question the EMB's neutrality and impartiality, especially given the lack of transparency surrounding the move: nowhere was it stated that such a linkage would be instituted, and no minutes or council decisions reflected such a decision. The disenfranchisement of even a small number of voters could be considered a breach of the IEC's own mandate, as it should have found alternative means of upholding the voting rights of all Jordanians.



### Voter education

Concerned about voter turnout, the IEC concentrated most of its voter outreach efforts on 'getting out the vote' campaigns. On 19 September it also conducted mock elections for 600 young men and women from the capital (European Union 2020). Held in partnership with the NGO RASED and supported by the EU and the Spanish Agency for International Development (AECID), this activity was aimed at both increasing public awareness of the electoral process and integrating the health protocols of the Epidemiological Committee with observation procedures.

The health and sanitary situation also led NGOs to transform face-to-face campaigns into virtual online campaigns. Those were less effective for the general public, except perhaps for young people and first-time voters in the cities. Since schools and universities were closed due to the pandemic, peer-to-peer voter education activities for the youth were cancelled.

### Candidate registration

The IEC introduced new measures to avoid the typical overcrowding that occurs in the early morning on the opening day of candidate registration; in previous elections, where numbers were allocated on a first come, first served basis' candidates rushed to compete for first place on the ballot. Candidates on the list usually attended together and nominated a list representative on their behalf. For the 2020 parliamentary elections, the IEC stipulated that nomination be personal and that only one candidate list per hour could present themselves for registration. In addition, the IEC invited the representatives, at the close of business on the third day of registration, to attend a lottery to determine the ranking of the lists on the ballot. On election day, any candidate currently isolating had the right to delegate a registered voter to be present in a polling station on their behalf.

Some candidates experienced difficulties in processing their paperwork. Others were subjected to severe pressure by the authorities to refrain from running or withdraw their candidacies once submitted. These non-Covid-19 related claims were made by the spokesperson of the IAF, who further stated that the government had supported the formation of certain lists and interfered in others with the aim of weakening the National Alliance for Reform (National Alliance for Reform 2020). Certain popular candidates, who would have definitely been elected had they run, withdrew their nominations. The total number of registered candidates was 1,674, including 360 women, whereas in 2016 there were 1,252 candidates of whom 252 were women. There were 294 electoral lists in 2020 compared to 226 in 2016.

### Campaigning

Traditionally, campaigning in Jordan takes place in large tents with candidates providing food and drink and chatting to their visitors. This type of campaigning, however, was absent in the 2020 elections because the campaign period (from 6 October until 9 November) coincided with the middle of the pandemic when social distancing measures were in place. Campaign festivals and mass gatherings were banned, as were any gatherings exceeding 20 people. Candidates were forbidden from offering people food and drink. Campaign headquarters were permitted to open only briefly by the IEC, and in accordance with directives from the Epidemiological Committee (Al Ghad 2020), namely with social distancing and, again, a prohibition on offering food or beverages, with the exception of bottled water.

The pandemic seriously affected the shape of the campaign by forcing many candidates to resort to social media to reach their constituencies, transforming traditional face-to-face campaigns into virtual events. The reach of Internet access is much more concentrated in the cities than it is in the countryside, especially in the most deprived areas (Freedom House

n.d.b). In such cases candidates tried to meet voters face-to-face, organizing small gatherings of up to 20 people, but that was easier to do in the villages than in urban areas (Silva 2020).

The University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) carried out a poll (CSS 2020) in October 2020 which found that 25 per cent of respondents claimed to follow the candidates of their constituency on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or WhatsApp. Forty-four per cent received some sort of information from their candidates through these platforms. Sixty-one per cent did not believe that the IEC would be able to impose social distancing rules, while 61 per cent responded that the Covid-19 pandemic had no effect on their decision to vote.

## 5. Election day

The IEC had recruited and trained around 62,000 poll workers. Poll workers were recruited either for two or three months or for two days, according to the nature of their work. Despite the pandemic, training was conducted in person. A total of 1,220 training workshops were held over a period of 16 days. Each was limited to 20 participants and held in large rooms to comply with social distancing requirements. Training materials were amended to take into account the new sanitary provisions. The IEC also held additional online training sessions via Zoom (ArabEMBs 2021).

Polling started at 07:00 and was initially scheduled to end at 19:00 but the IEC decided to extend the voting period until 21:00. As mentioned, the IEC doubled the number of polling centres (to 1,824) to shorten waiting times and prevent long queues. The safe maximum number of people present in the polling stations was determined by the presiding officer based on the guidelines set by the Epidemiological Committee. Inside the polling stations, polling staff wore masks and gloves, although observer groups such as SIGI reported that some polling staff in certain polling stations were not wearing adequate protective gear, and some were without masks or gloves.

The IEC deployed 17,000 youth volunteers on election day who were paid a stipend to distribute masks, gloves and pens for voting, ensure social distancing and prevent campaigning outside the polling stations. Approximately 53,000 police officers were deployed to safeguard citizens during the elections. Local media reported that the Public Security Directorate (PSD) deployed drones for aerial surveillance to make sure that there would be no breaches of the ban on mass gatherings during the election period.

Turnout was low, recorded at only 29.9 per cent at the end of the two-hour extension as compared with 36 per cent in 2016. Khalid Al Kalaldeh, Chief Commissioner of the IEC, told reporters that fear of coronavirus had impacted the level of participation (Al-Khalidi 2020). Of the 4,640,643 eligible voters, 1,387,711 turned out to vote. Turnout was approximately 17.5 per cent higher among men than among women. Many attributed the low turnout, especially that of women, to the lockdown expected after the announcement of results. Anticipating that, some women had to prioritize stocking up on provisions over turning up to vote.

All the PPE, extra polling stations and auxiliary staff increased costs considerably. Whereas the initial budget calculated by the IEC for the legislative elections of 2020 was for JOD 15.5 million (USD 21.157m), with the pandemic an additional JOD 8 million (USD 11.29m) was spent, making a total of JOD 23 million (USD 32.44m) (ArabEMBs 2020: minute 49:38).

### Counting and tabulation

No sooner had the polls closed than Jordan went into a four-day total lockdown, ostensibly to help flatten the coronavirus curve, overruling the earlier decision to impose it after the results (Al-Mamlaka 2020b). The order came under Defence Law No. 13.

Islamic leaders criticized this decision, accusing the authorities of wanting to control the outcome by ensuring that counting and tabulation would take place without candidate representatives or observers present. The Chairperson of the IEC clarified that the lockdown would not be applied to candidates and delegates in polling and counting centres, presiding officers, members of the election committees in the field, domestic observers, media professionals and accredited journalists. Counting was conducted immediately after the close of the polls, in the same polling stations, and in the presence of the aforementioned stakeholders. According to the IEC official website 9,667 local observers and 108 foreign observers had monitored the elections (Eurasia Review 2020).

Provisional results started coming out by noon on the following day, resulting in celebration rallies throughout a number of provinces by hundreds of supporters of the winning candidates, in breach of social distancing measures. Conversely, those supporting losing candidates started rioting, closing off roads with burning tyres and rubbish bins. As rioting grew out of control, the King tweeted his displeasure and the Minister of the Interior Tawfiq Al-Halalmeh, who assumed moral responsibility, resigned.

### Results

The results of the elections produced no surprises, and many claimed that the elections were won by the King (Frisch 2020). The new parliament did not feature liberals, leftists or pan-Arabists. Rather, the winners were tribal and pro-government candidates. The Islamists won some seats, but fewer than they had in 2016 (Al-Arabi 2020).

Only 15 women were elected, down from 20 in the outgoing parliament where women had won five extra seats in the district races, on top of their allocated quota. Several reasons account for such a drop. Chief among them was the electoral system itself; male candidates had actively encouraged their supporters not to vote for female ‘allies’ on the same ticket. Thus traditional male chauvinism interacted with the tendency to intra-list competition noted earlier.

As for the Islamists, several factors account for their loss. The first was again the electoral system and its bias to non-urban, royalist areas as mentioned (Al-Khalidi 2020; Sowell 2015). Another was the changing regional environment. The failure of Israel’s attempts to annex parts of the West Bank removed an important card from the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies who have always used the Palestinian cause to mobilize political and popular support.

The Islamists themselves attribute their losses to the apathy, disillusionment and fear among their base; the inhospitable political climate that characterized the electoral period had culminated in the Court of Cassation’s decision to dissolve the MB itself. IAF Secretary-General Murad Adaileh claimed that voter abstention was more than 70 per cent, even 90 per cent in the capital Amman. Although the leadership of the Islamic groups had decided to participate in the elections, they were unable to convince their supporters to participate ‘as we saw that the citizens were willing to stand for two hours in a queue to get bread, but not even 10 minutes to vote after they lost trust in the political process’ (MoH 2020).

## 6. Conclusion

Some have claimed that Jordan's 2020 elections for the 19th legislature were the least democratic and transparent that the country has witnessed (Kao and Karmel 2020), and that that was due mainly to the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences. According to statistics issued by Jordan's Ministry of Health, there was a spike in transmission rates in the run-up to the election with the highest rate of transmission recorded at 5,996 new cases on 10 November (MoH 2020). On 17 November, the head of the coronavirus portfolio in Jordan Wael Hayajneh predicted a rise in the number of daily positive cases one week after the parliamentary elections and the gatherings that followed as a result (Roya News 2020b). Indeed, the number of new cases between 16 and 18 November increased (with new cases recorded at 5,861, 6,454 and 7,933 on these successive days, respectively) but this was followed by a steady decline in the days and weeks that followed (MoH 2020).

While the pandemic did have certain adverse effects on the integrity of the elections (with respect to how the Defence Law was used, the effect of the post-electoral lockdown on turnout, and the lack of any alternative voting mechanisms), the weaknesses in Jordan's 2020 elections cannot be solely attributed to the public health emergency.

Unfair boundary delimitations, an electoral system that weakens political parties, and a growing trend of clampdowns on freedom of expression produce an unlevel playing field that predates the elections and the pandemic (NCHR 2021; Sowell 2015; EUEOM 2016). Turnout was certainly very low—down from 36 per cent in 2016 to 29.9 per cent four years later. While the health situation certainly did not help, this can at least partially be explained by endemic voter apathy and, in turn, by the unsuitable political climate.

In particular, voters recognize that parliament has only limited power. A poll published by RASED of Al Hayat Center on 7 September 2020 revealed that 45.9 per cent of Jordanian youth (aged 19–22) did not intend to participate in the elections (Al-Mamlaka 2020a). The survey also showed that 57 per cent of respondents did not believe that the incoming parliament would be more effective than its predecessors. Results of a survey by the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies, released on 6 October, revealed that of the 50 per cent of respondents who said they would not be voting, 40 per cent said this was because they lacked confidence in Parliament. The survey also found that for 61 per cent of Jordanians, the epidemic was not a factor in deciding whether to participate (CSS 2020).

For Jordan to move forward in its democratic process, it needs to strengthen its political parties and amend the electoral system (NCHR 2021; Kao 2016) and introduce such changes long before the conduct of the next parliamentary elections: time is needed to allow both candidates and voters to understand how the system works. Historically, with few exceptions, almost every election in Jordan has been accompanied by a new electoral law. Such constantly changing rules confuse both candidates and voters. For political parties to flourish they need the opportunity to learn the ropes, learn from their mistakes, and accumulate institutional experience. Paradoxically, in 2020 the electoral law did not change. It was the same law that was used in the 2016 elections. And there were lessons learned from 2016, but those lessons were mainly about how the open list proportional system could be used to reduce the number of elected women. The makeup of the new parliament will ensure that it is not critical of the government.

Until parliament is empowered and given more prerogatives such as the authority to legislate, and turned into an institution that is more politically representative, it is unlikely that future parliamentary elections in Jordan will fare much better.

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## About the author

**Fida Nasrallah** is an electoral expert with over 18 years' experience in providing technical assistance to election commissions: conducting needs assessments and evaluations, and advising on voter and civic education projects, among others. She has participated in several election observation missions and supported domestic election observation groups.

Fida has worked extensively in the Middle East and Africa as well as Bosnia, Cambodia, Serbia and Timor Leste. She was the Country Representative of the Carter Center in Tunisia from 2015 to 2020 and Chief of Party for the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) in Egypt from 2013 to 2015. In 2008–2010 she worked for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Indonesia as Chief Technical Adviser of a capacity-building and electoral assistance programme and in 2007–2008 she was Chief Technical Adviser and Head of the Electoral Assistance Office for the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN).

Fida holds a PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics. She is fluent in English, French and Arabic.

## Contributors

**Toby S. James** is Professor of Politics and Public Policy at the University of East Anglia, UK.

**Alistair Clark** is Reader in Politics at the University of Newcastle, UK.

**Erik Asplund** is Programme Officer in the Electoral Processes Programme, International IDEA.



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