




Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs



موسسة  
السياسة والمجتمع  
Politics & Society Institute

# **From Dialogue to Design: Policy Pathways for a Jordanian Democracy**



**Prepared by: Anas Dabbas**  
**Politics and Society Institute**

**2025**

# **From Dialogue to Design: Policy Pathways for a Jordanian Democracy**

# Table of contents

	Introduction.....	3
	Building Political Capacity: The Strategic Role of Political and Policy Analysis for Jordanian Political Parties.....	5
	Governance Mechanisms and Accountability Structures in Political Parties.....	25
	Building Sustainable Political Parties in Jordan: Policy Options for Democratic Consolidation.....	46
	The Role of Youth in Politics and Parties.....	71
	The Role of Women in Politics and Political Parties.....	98

## **Introduction**

The Politics and Society Institute, in partnership with the Norwegian Embassy in Amman, organized a series of workshops under the project Democratic and Political Transition: A Norwegian Jordanian Approach. These workshops convened Norwegian and Jordanian academics, parliamentarians, and political figures to foster dialogue between representatives of transitional and consolidated democracies. Discussions explored a range of themes, from demographic inclusion to the institutionalization of political parties.

Building on the first volume, *Lessons in Democratic Transformation: From Norway to Jordan*, which presented academic analyses of both theory and practice, this second volume complements that work by distilling the workshop insights into five focused policy papers. Each paper addresses a critical aspect of democratic praxis relevant to Jordan's political landscape.

Our methodology combined primary data collected through the workshops with secondary desk research to fill remaining gaps, enabling a comprehensive examination of the issues at hand.

Recognizing that democratic transitions are complex and context-dependent, this collection seeks to move beyond superficial reforms. It addresses the structural and cultural constraints that continue to challenge Jordan's democratic development amid institutional flux and rising public scepticism towards formal politics.

Collectively, the policy papers analyse vulnerabilities within Jordan's partisan system and propose practical interventions aimed at reforming, revitalizing, and institutionalizing political party life. Key themes include internal party governance, ideological and policy coherence, youth and women's participation, and long-term party sustainability.

Through these two volumes, we aim to lay a foundational step toward a deliberative, participatory, egalitarian, and representative democracy in Jordan. Given the scarcity of primary research and reliable data on Jordanian

politics, we reiterate our call for rigorous empirical studies and encourage readers to engage critically with the evidence and contribute their own informed recommendations.

Anas Dabbas

## **First Workshop**

**19 Jun 2025**

### **Building Political Capacity: The Strategic Role of Political and Policy Analysis for Jordanian Political Parties**

---

**Mr. *Mani Al-Husseini*** -Norwegian expert and Parliament member

**Mr. *Omar Al-Ayasrah***- Jordanian Senate member

## Preamble

This policy paper is the result of research and dialogue efforts consolidated within a specialized session held to discuss relevant issues and challenges. The paper was co-presented by Norwegian expert and Parliament member Mr. *Mani Al-Husseini*, who contributed an international perspective and comparative expertise in policy analysis, and Jordanian *Senate member Mr. Omar Al-Ayasrah*, who provided a local perspective grounded in the regional context and his experience in the political and media spheres.

The session was attended by a distinguished group of experts, academics, policymakers, and representatives from relevant sectors, enabling a rich and multidimensional discussion that addressed key challenges and available opportunities, and contributed to the formulation of a number of practical proposals and recommendations.

The *Policy and Society Institute* research team contributed to the preparation of this paper by analysing the session's outcomes, developing policy alternatives,

and formulating them within an analytical framework that reflects actionable recommendations.

This paper aims to summarize the key ideas and perspectives raised during the session and to present feasible policy proposals that contribute to deepening understanding of the issue at hand and supporting reform and development efforts in this field.

## **Executive Summary**

This policy paper addresses a critical yet overlooked dimension of party development in Jordan: the analytical capacity of political parties to formulate evidence-based, ideologically coherent policies. In a transitional democracy marked by fragmentation, personalism, and policy incoherence, the absence of robust political and policy analysis within parties severely undermines their ability to articulate compelling platforms, attract voters, and perform effectively in parliament.

Jordanian parties face numerous structural and contextual barriers. Many are formed around individuals or tribal loyalties rather than ideological programs. They lack the financial resources, technical capacity, and institutional culture necessary to support internal policy development. Most parties operate without in-house research units, access to credible data, or links to academia or independent analysts. This analytical void leads to vague slogans over substantive proposals, diminishes electoral competitiveness, and erodes public trust in democratic institutions.

This paper proposes two policy interventions aimed at institutionalising analytical capacity within Jordan's party system:

**(1) Publicly Funded Policy Support Units:**

Independent, state-backed units under the supervision of parliament or the electoral commission that provide legislative analysis, impact assessments, and data briefs to all registered parties. This policy aims to level the informational playing field and enable evidence-informed debate across party lines.

**(2) Academic Partnerships:**

State-supported incentives for universities and think tanks to collaborate with political parties, fostering mutual exchange and bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical politics. These partnerships would build long-term research capacity within parties and help develop a new generation of analysts.

Both proposals are assessed based on political feasibility, cost-efficiency, specificity, and long-term impact. The feasibility analysis finds both to be economically viable, though academic partnerships may encounter ideological resistance. Public support units are scalable and can be embedded into existing institutions with minimal risk.

The paper concludes with a two-step recommendation: pilot policy support units within existing electoral frameworks and initiate structured engagement between universities and political actors. Strengthening the analytical foundation of parties will not only enhance policy coherence and electoral accountability but also contribute to the broader project of democratic consolidation in Jordan.

## **Introduction**

The role of political and policy analysis in shaping democratic systems has become increasingly central in contemporary governance. In transitional democracies like Jordan, the capacity of political parties to craft coherent, evidence-based policy platforms is often underdeveloped. This weakness hampers the ability of political parties to formulate policies and agendas, ground their ideology in a contemporary socio-political context, attract voters, and perform in parliament.

Political analysis refers to the ability of parties to assess and understand power systems and stakeholder engagement, conduct risk, exposure, and cross-benefit analyses. Meanwhile, policy analysis refers to parties' usage of empirical data and a theoretical framework to formulate policies that provide practical solutions to public problems. The combination of political and policy analysis allows parties to position themselves according to

their ideological paradigm using an evidence-based foundation and propose policies that are appealing to the electorate and prepared for implementation.

Without these capacities, parties risk losing their ideological framing and becoming more centred on specific figures rather than overarching ideologies, or offering overarching slogans rather than concrete policies. The magnitude of risk increases exponentially in emergent parties, which lack the institutional heritage to be resilient to populist shifts. Thus, political and policy analysis are not luxuries that only established parties can afford, but necessities for the functioning of a democratic system, especially in a transitional system facing complex issues on the local, national, and regional levels.

This paper investigates the importance of political and policy analysis for Jordanian political parties. It outlines the challenges they face in acquiring analytical capacity, compares international best practices, and proposes policy alternatives for

institutionalising this function. The overarching goal is to enhance democratic accountability and long-term party sustainability.

## **The Jordanian Context**

Jordan's political landscape is marked by volatility, fragmentation, and a historical legacy of personalist and service-based politics. Many parties are formed around individuals or tribal loyalties rather than policy agendas. The 2022 Political Parties Law aimed to encourage programmatic parties, but institutional and cultural obstacles persist.

The Jordanian context is marked by significant policy challenges in politics, culture, economy, and security. Being situated in a volatile region increases the importance of geopolitical engagement with events such as the Arab-Israeli Wars, the Arab Uprisings and their impact on the country, and the constantly high tensions between Israel to its west and Iran to its east. On the national level, Jordan's society has suffered from identity fragmentation, constant refugee waves, water and energy shortages, and multiple failed democratization attempts. However, political parties in Jordan are not equipped to manage such a complex context, as they mostly lack the capacities and capabilities to effectively run policy, and in some instances, are effectively ideologically fluid.

Internally, most parties lack in-house analysis and policy units, and do not have access to credible analysis through thinktanks, research centres, or collaborations with academics. The starkest cause of this is budgetary concerns and lack of funding, as political parties often cite having the financial capabilities strictly for administration and campaigning, without the ability to hire in-house or external analysts. Other factors that limit the ability of parties to access expertise extend to the culture of fear of engaging with political parties, due to the aggressive state policy during the martial law period, lack of volunteering culture, especially with political institutions, difficulties in accessing experts, and the often lack of an ideological worldview that would help parties determine the direction of their policies.

As a result of these issues, parties, and programmatic parties in particular, are incapable of producing full policy recommendations and election agendas that would effectively attract voters during elections, or that would be proposed if parties win parliament seats. Consequently, voters are unable to decide how to cast their ballots beyond descriptive representation, and in the case of Jordan, tribal affiliations, or hold their representatives accountable during their terms. The

consistent lack of policy agendas across many election cycles has led voters to view membership in parliament as a patronage tool, conflating the role of parliament with that of a service provider.

In comparison, parties in established democracies often maintain policy units or external thinktanks, which operate on a high level nationally and internationally. German parties, for example, maintain independent thinktanks that analyse their policies in light of their ideology, with the most well-known in Jordan being the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF). In the US, a similar approach is used, though thinktanks are more disconnected from their parties than their German counterparts. Thinktanks such as the Centre for American Progress and the Heritage Foundation act as their respective parties' go-to policy shop.

These structures and institutions provide their parties with essential political services, including stakeholder mapping, power analysis, policy evaluations, data polling, and empirical research. The absence of these structures in Jordanian politics is detrimental to party

performance, as it deprives them from crucial insights critical to their ability to respond to public needs, adjust their rhetoric according to electoral appeal, or propose and formulate well-vetted and research policy proposals to issues such as youth unemployment, public transport crisis, or water scarcity. This underscores the urgency of institutionalising analytical capacity.

## **Costs of Analytical Weakness**

The analytical deficit among Jordanian parties has real-world consequences before, after, and during elections. Before the elections, the public is likely to engage with parties that lack a solid, well-articulated, and convincing agenda, leaving voters vulnerable to populist, personalist, or patronage-based parties. During elections, voters who do not have trust in the system are unlikely to respond to election calls and are more likely to cast white ballots or vote based on parochial concerns. After the elections, MPs without these support structures will not be able to perform their legislative responsibilities in full, further lowering public trust in parliament and other democratic institutions, in a vicious cycle of democratic degradation.

Furthermore, without clear data and evidence-based analysis, parties often rely on populist slogans, as in the case in Jordan, leading to indistinguishable party lines, or rely on donor and interest-group-driven policies, prioritising the interests of specific groups over the

interests of the general electorate. These facilitate the vicious cycle and lead towards citizen apathy, disengagement, and policy incoherence.

## Structural Barriers

Several systemic barriers hinder the development of analytical capacity in Jordanian parties. Firstly, public funding remains tied to performance, and most parties claim that the current amount of public funding is insufficient to cover their administrative and campaigning needs. While some parties can bypass this hurdle, such as the Islamic Action Front, which has an internal policy bureau, most emergent parties lack the financial capital to form such bureaus. Secondly, political culture in Jordan underevalues technical expertise, with emphasis instead on populist policies and anecdotal experiences. Thirdly, independent analysts are often restricted from accessing government databases, hindering independent efforts to provide third-party analysis. Lastly, party structures rarely integrate into academic and research institutions, restricting their access to experts. Even if a party attempts to utilise expertise from these institutions, they're unlikely to succeed in accessing these centres and the academics there.

## **Policy Alternatives**

To address the analytical gap, this paper proposes three policy interventions. These aim to institutionalise the practice of political and policy analysis across party structures, ensuring all parties, not only resource-rich ones, can compete with credible, evidence-based platforms.

### **1- Publicly Funded Policy Support Units**

The first policy involves creating independent policy support units under the oversight of the electoral commission or parliament. These units would provide analytical assistance to all registered parties, particularly emergent and under-resourced ones. Modelled after parliamentary research services in other democracies, these units would offer data briefs, legislative summaries, and impact assessments.

The benefits are twofold: parties improve their platforms and performance, and the state benefits from more informed political debate. Risks include politicisation of the support units or limited uptake by sceptical party leaders. Nonetheless, this policy represents a scalable and equitable entry point to institutionalised analysis.

## **2- Academic Partnerships**

The second policy recommends incentivising formal partnerships between political parties and academic institutions. Through grants or tax incentives, universities and think tanks can be encouraged to provide policy research, host debate series, or support interns working within party research wings.

Such collaboration would bridge the knowledge-practice gap and bring fresh perspectives into party structures. Over time, this would also train a new generation of political analysts with practical experience. The challenge lies in ensuring academic independence and overcoming ideological mistrust between academia and political actors.

## **Feasibility Analysis**

The two policy proposals target core structural weaknesses that affect party sustainability, personalism, financial inequality, and limited access to expertise. Their comparative feasibility is assessed using four criteria: political feasibility, economic cost, policy specificity, and potential impact.

Public support units are politically feasible and cost-efficient, especially if placed within existing parliamentary structures. Academic partnerships carry a low financial cost but may face ideological resistance.

<b>Public Support Units</b>	+	+	+/-	+/-
<b>Academic Partnerships</b>	+/-	+	+/-	+
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Political Feasibility</b>	<b>Economic Feasibility</b>	<b>Specificity</b>	<b>Potential</b>

Table 1: Feasibility chart, where the "+" sign signifies feasibility, the "-" sign signifies reduced feasibility, and the "+/-" signifies a positive equilibrium in feasibility.

## Recommendations

This paper recommends a staged reform strategy:

- (3) Pilot a policy support unit under the electoral commission.
- (4) Facilitate university-party dialogue through public grants.

## **Conclusion**

In Jordan's evolving political landscape, the capacity of parties to conduct political and policy analysis is essential for sustainability, credibility, and democratic legitimacy. Current weaknesses in analytical infrastructure hinder parties' ability to engage voters, influence legislation, or govern effectively.

Reforms that institutionalise analysis—through public support units, academic partnerships, and targeted financing—are urgently needed. These interventions would not only improve party functioning but also contribute to a more informed and responsive political system.

## Second Workshop

19 Mar 2025

# Governance Mechanisms and Accountability Structures in Political Parties

---

**Ms. Anette Trettebergstuen** -Norwegian Parliament member  
and former culture minister

**Dr. Mohammed Abu Rumman** - Former culture minister  
from Jordan

## Preamble

This policy paper is the outcome of research and dialogue efforts consolidated within a specialized session held to examine the state of governance and accountability in Jordanian political parties. The paper was co-presented by Norwegian Parliament member and former culture minister Ms. Anette Trettebergstuen, who presented a comparative reading of party governance practices in advanced democratic contexts, and former culture minister Dr. *Mohammed Abu Rumman* from Jordan, who offered an in-depth analytical perspective informed by Jordan's experience in party regulation and political reform.

The session was attended by experts, decision-makers, and representatives from relevant institutions and political parties, allowing for an in-depth and multidimensional discussion that addressed the main structural challenges and available opportunities in this field.

The *Policy and Society Institute* research team contributed to the preparation of this paper by analyzing

the outcomes, developing policy alternatives, and formulating them within an analytical framework that reflects actionable recommendations.

## **Executive Summary**

This policy paper examines governance mechanisms and accountability structures in Jordanian political parties, drawing on a workshop hosted by the Politics and Society Institute. It applies Yu Keping's framework of good governance—legitimacy, transparency, accountability, rule of law, responsiveness, and effectiveness—to assess the current legal and institutional environment and to evaluate three potential policy interventions.

The paper finds that Jordanian party laws partially address legitimacy, transparency, and rule of law, while responsiveness and internal effectiveness remain largely unregulated. Based on this assessment, it proposes three policy alternatives: mandating primary elections for candidate selection, imposing term limits on senior party leadership, and decentralizing party structures through mandated local representation.

Each policy is evaluated based on political feasibility, economic feasibility, specificity, and potential impact. Mandating primaries emerges as the most viable and

impactful policy, offering improvements in legitimacy, transparency, and accountability. Term limits also score highly, particularly in promoting internal turnover and responsiveness. However, both policies face resistance from entrenched elites. The decentralization policy, while promising in theory, is limited by economic constraints and the demographic imbalance in Jordan's population distribution.

The paper concludes by recommending the adoption of primary elections and leadership term limits as legislative reforms, implemented via amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Law and the Party Law respectively, to enhance democratic governance within political parties.

## Introduction

Good governance in political parties in Jordan has become a topic of interest for both domestic and international actors in the public and nonprofit sectors. However, the term lacks a concrete definition in Jordanian politics. A working definition used in a training guide is that governance is a set of rules and regulations to organise the relationship between different parties within an organisation to achieve specific objectives. It is the process through which organisations are directed and monitored to ensure the achievement of strategic goals, efficiency, and transparency.<sup>1</sup>.

As the definition shows, governance in political parties in the MENA region lacks conceptual clarity and specificity.

---

<sup>1</sup> Samir Abdelaziz, 'حوكمة الأحزاب السياسية - دليل تدريبي' (Al Sharq Academia Training Workshops, Alsharqa: Unpublished, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.28432.62720>.

This issue is common in the literature: Francis Fukuyama pointed out the issue of the state, elaborated on the weakness of empirical measures of the quality of states, and proposed a framework for conceptualising governance.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Keping outlined a teleological definition of “good governance refers as the public administration process that maximises public interests” and outlined six essentials: legitimacy, transparency, accountability, rule of law, responsiveness, and effectiveness.<sup>3</sup> In this policy paper, we will use Keping’s conceptualization and framework of good governance to examine possible policies that will enhance it in Jordanian political parties.

Following this framework, the first section assesses the status quo of political parties’ good governance policies in Jordan, the second assesses three possible policy alternatives: mandating election primaries, imposing term limits on general secretaries and

---

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama, ‘What Is Governance?’, *Governance* 26, no. 3 (July 2013): 347–68, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12035>.

<sup>3</sup> Yu Keping, ‘Governance and Good Governance: A New Framework for Political Analysis’, *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 11, no. 1 (March 2018): 4–6, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-017-0197-4>.

other senior officers in parties, and mandating a decentralised structure for the party. In the third section, the feasibility of the three policies is discussed, and based on the analysis, two policies are recommended. The analysis methodology utilises heuristics to evaluate the benefits and potential challenges of the three alternative policies and assesses them according to four dimensions: political feasibility, economic feasibility, effectiveness, and specificity.

## Status Quo Assessment

There is a significant lack of literature that defines good governance on an empirical level, as pointed out by Fukuyama. This issue compounds further when attempting to assess the situation in Jordan, as literature on concrete issues relating to good governance in Jordan is scarce in quantity and specificity.

Jordanian legislation covers the essentials of good governance in political parties as follows:

**Legitimacy.** The Party Law (2022) aims to enhance party legitimacy through mandating a wide representation of youth, women, and governorates. Simultaneously, the Financial Contributions to Political Parties Regulations (2023) and the Providing Financial Support to Political Parties Instructions (2024) aim to enhance party legitimacy by showcasing transparency and emphasising the disallowing of contributions from foreign and legal entities and anonymous contributions.

**Transparency.** The Financial Contributions to Political Parties Regulations (2023) mandate the disclosure of

annual audit budgets to both the Independent Elections and the public, ensuring transparency in financial regulations. On the other hand, the Party Law mandates the open-access publication of all party bylaws and relevant documents.

**Accountability.** The Political Parties Law (2022) outlines penalties for legal transgressions and appoints administrative courts to oversee disputes within the party.

**Rule of Law.** The enforceability of bylaws and the role of administrative courts to oversee their implementation provide an extent of the rule of law. However, state regulations do not address conflict resolution within the party, and do not outline any relevant structures.

**Responsiveness.** This essential is not addressed within the current laws, regulations, and instructions relevant to political parties. Timeframes strictly address bureaucratic procedures and formalities, and members' demands are not mandatorily enforced or responded to.

**Effectiveness.** Internal party bureaucracy is not addressed in relevant laws, regulations, and instructions.

## Policy Alternatives

Although good governance is a policy priority shared by the Independent Election Commission, political parties, and third sector activists, the lack of conceptualisation, evidence, and topical literature prevents the concrete proposal and assessment of viable alternative policies. However, within the scope of this policy paper, I will outline possible policies and measure how feasible they are, and which areas of Keping's six essentials.

## Mandating Primaries

Primary elections, understood as a tool to allow the electorate to participate in choosing party candidates, can help bridge *democratic deficits*.<sup>4</sup> Compelling parties to hold primary elections can increase the legitimacy of candidates, enhance the transparency in choosing party candidates, make nominees more accountable to the general body of the party, institutionalize the process of selecting candidates, and produce candidates that hold

---

<sup>4</sup> Robert G. Boatright, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Primary Elections* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 7.

more moderate beliefs that align with a broader set of the electorate.

The participation of electors in the selection of nominees guarantees reduced involvement of internal hierarchies in the selection of nominees. While this guarantee increased good governance and would have the support of average party members, it faces difficulties in implementation due to political challenges that stem from disenfranchising traditional power centers. While the policy is otherwise feasible through allocating state funding for party primaries, it is highly specific and has high potential to enhance good governance within parties. However, the political feasibility issues need to be addressed, and cannot be neglected until the next parliamentary elections, which will include more party seats from traditional power centers and make the implementation of this policy more difficult.

## **Term Limits**

The current party law only mandates that general secretaries are limited to two consecutive terms and does not limit terms for other executive offices within the party. While this allows parties more autonomy in deciding on their leadership, this structure favours senior leadership and traditional power holders and creates hurdles for the inclusion of other demographic components, such as youth and women, in leadership positions.

From the six essentials of good governance, this policy directly tackles legitimacy and effectiveness, as it reduces the chances of parties centering around a specific leadership figure and follows scientific administrative procedures. As a secondary benefit, the policy enhances responsiveness, as the introduction of new leadership figures allows for the turnover of party administration, which would be selected based on its alignment with the concerns of party members.

However, the policy is vague to the extent that it should be implemented. Limiting terms for general secretaries

is the minimal requirement of this policy, but it could be further extended to other senior leadership positions within the party, such as the executive office.

Similarly to the previous policy, it faces challenges in political feasibility, as it would directly challenge the interests of traditional leadership and old power centers. This policy also shares the other feasibility points of the previous policy, with high economic feasibility, specificity, and potential.

### **Local reps**

In the workshop, the speaker extensively discussed the benefits of grassroots mobilisation in increasing legitimacy, accountability, and transparency, and the role of grassroots in party structure within the Norwegian model of basing the election of regional representatives on the election of local representatives.

While the party law dictates that there is a minimum of 30 party members from each governance, mandating the inclusion of local representatives in a hierarchical representation structure would ensure the fair representation of local interests, thus increasing the

legitimacy of parties in representing national interests rather than a specific region.

However, two primary concerns regarding demographic distribution arise: the first is the allocation of seats and the possibility of gerrymandering, and the second regarding unfair representation. The demographic distribution of Jordan is highly centralised in two urban centers: Amman and Zarqa, with Amman containing around 40% of the total population of Jordan. On the other hand, the East banker population in Jordan dominates other population centers in urban, rural, and Bedouin areas. On the political level, this policy faces challenges as it would require a unified structure for all parties, which does not allow parties the freedom to structure in a way that appeals to their social bases.

While this policy is specific and has potential for enhancing legitimacy and responsiveness, it faces economic challenges as party resources are often scarce, and mandating such a policy would require increasing state funding for political parties significantly. If these resources are not made available for all parties equally, legacy parties and parties with financial backing from

wealthy individuals would benefit the most, as they would be the only parties capable of operating following such high requirements.

Primaries	+/-	+	+	+
Term Limits	+/-	+	+	+
Local Representation	-	-	+	+
Criteria	Political Feasibility	Economic Feasibility	Specificity	Potential

Table 2: Feasibility chart, where the '+' sign signifies feasibility, the '-' sign signifies reduced feasibility, and the '+/-' signifies a positive equilibrium in feasibility.

## Discussion

The three policy alternatives proposed all fulfill the six essentials of good governance. However, implementation is the key challenge facing these policies. Primaries are the most direct approach to addressing good governance within political parties, have the most scientific evidence backing, and are the most feasible. The challenge that faces the implementation of party primaries is the disempowering of old power and traditional elites in favour of a voter-trust-based system. However, as this challenge is faced by all reformist and democratic policies, and the policy is directly reformist and aims to enhance good governance within political parties, it is unlikely to be directly opposed by elites, as they will appear undemocratic if they do.

Similarly, term limits directly address good governance in political parties through limiting the power of old elites and traditional power centers, and it shares the same challenge of confrontation with the old elite. However, unlike primaries, elites could present their opposition to term limits as an attempt to prevent a

takeover of the party, and to maintain party ideology and program. This challenge makes this alternative policy slightly less politically feasible, but it would remain feasible overall.

Lastly, mandating a decentralized party structure faces two challenges: a political and an economic one. Politically, its feasibility is affected by the demographic distribution of Jordan, which would impact interest representation regardless of the model. Economically, the increased costs of party quarters and supporting grassroots initiatives would not be feasible for most political parties and would empower legacy political parties that already possess the capacity to run these local quarters.

Primaries and term limits thus become the clearest policy alternatives to increase good governance within political parties. As policies, the policy concerning primaries would be implemented through amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Law, while the policy on term limits would be an amendment to the Party Law, and their execution would be through the responsible parties named in each law.

## **Conclusion**

Good governance, although well appreciated and stressed by Jordanian public bodies and political parties, has been poorly defined in MENA literature and policies. In this policy paper, I examined the conception of good governance and utilized the framework developed by Yu Keping to examine the status quo of good governance in political parties in Jordan, assess alternative policies, and make policy recommendations. Following the analysis, the two policies that appear to have the most significant effect on good governance and are most feasible are the mandating of primary elections for party nominee lists, and setting concrete term limits for senior party leadership, which could include only the secretary general or expand to include executive committees and other decision making positions in the party.

## **Third Workshop**

**19 Jun 2025**

# **Building Sustainable Political Parties in Jordan: Policy Options for Democratic Consolidation**

---

**Mr. *Mani Al-Husseini*** -Norwegian Parliament member

**Ms. *Dina Al-Bashir***- Jordanian Parliament member

## Preamble:

This policy paper, titled *"Building Sustainable Political Parties in Jordan: Policy Options to Strengthen Democracy"*, is the result of research and dialogue efforts undertaken with the contribution of a group of local and international experts. The paper was co-authored by Norwegian Parliament member Mr. *Mani Al-Husseini*, who provided an analytical perspective grounded in comparative international experience, and Jordanian Parliament member Ms. *Dina Al-Bashir*, who enriched the paper with deep political and institutional expertise rooted in a nuanced understanding of the Jordanian context.

The paper's findings and recommendations were presented and discussed in a specialized session that brought together a select group of politicians, academics, decision-makers, and representatives from relevant sectors. This provided a dynamic and multidimensional platform for dialogue, which contributed to enhancing the paper's substance and shaping realistic and actionable policy recommendations.

The *Policy and Society Institute* research team contributed to the preparation of this paper by analyzing the session's outputs, developing policy alternatives, and formulating them within an analytical framework that reflects feasible and applicable recommendations.

This paper aims to present policy alternatives designed to support the sustainability of political parties in Jordan and to strengthen their capacity for influence and institutional consolidation, within a reform-oriented framework that seeks to reinforce the foundations of parliamentary democracy in the Kingdom on firm institutional and representative grounds.

## **Executive Summary**

This policy paper addresses the urgent issue of political party sustainability in Jordan, a foundational element for any functioning parliamentary democracy. While the number of active parties remains relatively constant, their institutional fragility, personalist structures, limited financial resources, and underdeveloped policy capacities undermine their long-term viability. These weaknesses hinder parties' ability to survive multiple election cycles, build ideological consistency, and contribute meaningfully to democratic consolidation.

The paper assesses the status quo, highlighting challenges such as limited institutionalisation, financial dependency, social perceptions of parties as patronage networks, and the lack of legislative clarity regarding parliamentary party representation. These challenges are particularly acute for emergent parties, which struggle more than legacy parties to institutionalise, mobilise, and develop coherent policy platforms.

To address these issues, the paper proposes three policy alternatives:

**-Enforcing Internal Democracy** to depersonalise party structures and promote institutional integrity through mandatory primaries and separation of internal powers.

**-Capping the Ratio Between Public and Private Funding** to level the playing field for emergent parties and reduce the outsized influence of legacy and business-backed parties.

**-Publicising Analyst Reports in Independent Public Institutions** to provide equitable access to expert policy analysis for all parties and enhance the quality of public discourse and legislative proposals.

Each policy is evaluated using a heuristic feasibility framework considering political and economic feasibility, specificity, and potential impact. The analysis shows that while each policy faces implementation challenges, particularly political resistance from entrenched actors and specificity limitations due to the indirect nature of sustainability, their combined impact can significantly empower emergent parties and strengthen Jordan's democratic infrastructure.

The paper concludes with a call for holistic reform to support party sustainability through institutional, financial, and knowledge-based support systems. It recommends phased implementation of the proposed policies, monitored by independent analysts, to ensure effectiveness, adaptability, and alignment with democratic development goals.

## **Introduction**

A functioning parliamentary democracy requires robust and consistent party structures, able to propose policies with a clear ideological framing, mobilise supporters, undergo and win elections, and campaign and perform between election cycles. Thus, the issue of party sustainability is clear and foundational in any transitional system, including Jordan. While it's vaguely defined, the common understanding of party sustainability pictures it as a result of various organisational, functional, and institutional variables, rather than a quality that could be directly enhanced or measured. This understanding results in the need for assessing performance, retention, attrition, and the challenges faced by these parties.

This need for this policy paper stems from sustainability's critical status as a condition of a consolidated democracy. In this paper, I will assess the current situation regarding party sustainability, propose three possible policies that could address these issues, and evaluate them through a heuristic approach based on their feasibility. Following the assessment, a brief discussion highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each policy follows, and the article is concluded with a

brief overview of the findings and arguments presented throughout it.

## **Status Quo Assessment**

The task of assessing the current reality of political parties in Jordan remains a challenging one, as there is a significant lack of literature studies on the ever-changing political scene. A telling example of the rapid shifts in the political party atmosphere in Jordan is the rapid change in the number of parties through dissolutions, mergers, and the creation of new parties. The number of parties in Jordan is in a state of dynamic equilibrium, maintaining the number between 35 and 40 parties. Of the current political parties in Jordan, 20 have persisted since before the Political Parties Law (2022), and 13 were created in the period between the law taking effect and the 2024 elections. Currently, the absolute number stands at 37, but that number does not indicate the persistence of parties.

## **Parties as Institutions**

Sustainability of political parties, in essence, requires political parties to at least be persistent across multiple election cycles, rather than survive through one election. This persistence requires the satisfaction of multiple institutional and functional conditions. Namely, political parties should have consolidated institutions that do not rely on the membership of the leadership of a certain individual or group (i.e. they are not personalist parties). The difficulty of satisfying this institutional condition stems directly from the perception of political parties as vehicles for patronage links: they provide certain individuals with the political power necessary to attain and distribute services through patronage links, rather than viewing political parties as a tool to implement change on the policy level.

This view is deeply ingrained in society and seems to be mostly a product of tribal affiliations and of the martial law period to a greater extent. During the martial law period, the only persistent political group, the Muslim Brotherhood, was legally and functionally identified as a charity, solidifying the role of political actors as service providers, and solidifying the model of the Muslim

Brotherhood, and later the Islamic Action Front as the model party. On the other hand, newer parties, especially ones that emphasise an electoral program (known locally as *Programmatic Parties*), are often weakened by the social views on the role of political parties, as they often lack the legacy and political capital to act as service providers.

## **Funding as a Challenge**

Legacy parties further benefit from greater financial capabilities, avoiding the primary challenge often cited by emergent parties, the latter parties struggle with essential costs associated with hiring staff, drafting policy proposals, marketing, and mobilisation. Political parties often cite low public funding, citizens' inability to pay membership fees, and low donation rates as significant hurdles affecting party effectiveness and ability to institutionalise.

Considering the nonexistence of a political volunteering culture in Jordan, political parties need significant financial capital to increase credibility within their constituencies. Contrasting Norwegian and Jordanian parties, the former benefit significantly from volunteering in grassroots mobilisation, outreach, and administration, while the latter rely on employed staff to achieve these responsibilities. Further, public engagement and awareness programs, such as workshops, and hiring policy experts have their financial costs, which would constitute a significant cost for a poorly funded party.

## **Difficulties in Parliament**

Challenges facing parties extend to within parliament, on both the organisational and functional aspects. Organisationally, the Jordanian House of Representatives' bylaws are not clear on the relationship between the party and the seats they won, placing ambiguities on whether the seats belong to the MP or the party. Thus, if MPs leave their parties, whether by choice or through penalisation, the bylaws do not clarify whether they retain the seat or if it moves to a different MP of the same party. The ambiguity in regulations has already caused commotion following the issue of MP Jarrah, who was expelled from the Labour Party, yet retained his seat until the date of writing.

On the organisational level, parties receiving a low number of seats significantly increase the workload of individual MPs in parliament, preventing specialisation among party parliamentarians and depriving them of critical support structures crucial to the fulfilment of their roles. This is a common issue among parties in the current parliament, especially since most parties received fewer than three seats. While some of these issues are

addressed through parliamentary blocs, these blocs are not robust enough to advise, connect, and provide analysis and capabilities for party representatives.

## **General assessment**

Internal and external challenges within parliament, parties, and the broader society hinder the performance of party parliamentarians and, by extension, the ability of parties to consolidate institutions adequately to achieve sustainability. These challenges range from regulations and bylaws, poor financial resources and lack of support structures. The general understanding of party sustainability as the ability of the party to persist beyond specific members and policy objectives dictates that parties receive trust from the public for their overarching purpose, rather than specific motivations. The challenge remains to take parties from the personalist state of existence to an ideologically driven, evidence-based policymaking function.

## **Policy Alternatives**

### **Enforcing Internal Democracy**

Personalism within parties, as a phenomenon, indicates low levels of collective engagement and party institutionalism, as robust institutions are likely to curb the consolidation of authority within the party around central figure(s). In this case, democracy would be understood as the collection of institutions required to facilitate participatory decision-making, and essential principles of democracy would be implemented, including the rule of law, the separation of powers, accountability and transparency, and political equality. On the institutional level, internal democracy would manifest through mandating primaries, elections to hold offices within the party, and mandating separation between executive, legislative, and judicial bodies within the party.

Creating such a system would ensure depersonalization of the party and allow for the transition of power within the party. The competition among internal candidates, on the other hand, would facilitate the creation of party identity and ensure its evolution to represent the general

electorate of the body, in turn, ensuring the involvement of members on the grassroots level. However, holding fair, free, and frequent elections would require a substantial involvement of capital, and party members may disregard the importance of internal democracy in favour of allocating party resources towards parliamentary campaigning.

## **Capping the ratio Between Public and Private Funding**

Current legislation provides public funding to political parties depending mostly on their performance in local and parliamentary elections, rewarding different amounts for different results, including reaching half the threshold requirements, and winning parliamentary or local seats, with increased amounts rewarded to parties based on the demographics of their winning candidates. Additional funding is also provided to parties following mergers, and a fixed amount of 5000 JODs is granted to each party every four years to hold their national congress.

As the most influential variable remains party electoral performance, emergent parties face significant challenges in reaching the benchmarks needed to secure public funding and have to rely on private funding for administration and campaigning. This presents a large advantage for legacy parties and personalist parties relying on businesspeople and private interests, which are able to secure funding independently.

Thus, considering that Jordan is a transitional democracy with many emergent parties, there arises a need to provide a level playing field in financial capabilities without taking away from performance-based funding. The policy alternative in this case would be to set a cap on the ratio of private funding to public performance-based funding that a party could receive.

## **Publicising Analyst Reports in Independent Public Institutions**

Parliamentarians and emerging parties face significant challenges in formulating policies and agendas due to the high cost of hiring expert policy analysts and the unavailability of insights. This role is partially fulfilled by non-partisan public institutions in Norwegian politics, such as Norges Bank, the central bank of Norway, whose analysts provide authoritative economic policy recommendations. In contrast, Jordanian parliamentarians do not have direct access to expert analysts in all the various fields of policy and have to rely on personal and partisan experience to formulate their policies and agendas.

Publicising and empowering civil servant analysts provides equal access to experts to all parties, whether represented in parliament or not, without increasing party public funding. The policy carries further benefits in national decision-making, as positioning expert analysts in key offices and institutions would enhance bureaucratic decision-making and provide state bodies with rapid access to expert analysis.

## Discussion

The three proposed policy alternatives all aim to address issues that Jordanian emergent parties consider the primary challenges to party sustainability. The focus on emergent parties stems from the proven ability of legacy parties to survive multiple election cycles, adapt to the 2022 Political Parties Law, and continue surviving after the 2024 elections. Emergent parties, on the other hand, are fragile, as they merge, disband, and form more often, face difficulties mobilising on the national level, and need to formulate new policies and campaign agendas.

To compare the three policy proposals, I will use a heuristic approach of comparing their feasibility on the political and economic levels, the specificity of each policy, and their potential. The approach highlights the four primary pieces in a feasibility study and will be summarised in a feasibility table following the discussion.

The three proposed policies have different levels of political feasibility. Enforcing internal democracy, for example, would face vehement opposition from leaders

of personalist parties, as it would transfer power according to members' preference competitively, rather than through preexisting power structures. On the other hand, setting a specified maximum ratio of private funding to public funding is likely to receive opposition from legacy parties with established financing structures, and parties connected with national stakeholders, especially those from corporate interest groups, but would receive support from emergent parties representing working-class interests. Lastly, supporting policy analysts in public institutions would not necessarily face opposition initially, but would face political challenges when providing analysis contrary to established positions.

Economically, enforcing internal democracy would be the only policy to carry increased financial requirements, which would need to be accounted for in public funding. The increased costs stem from the expenses of elections and increased governance spending. The other two policies, capping the ratio between public and private funding, and empowering public analysts, carry no major additional financial costs, as the first policy does not require increased spending by any stakeholder, while the

last policy recommendation relies on preexisting analysts, and any external expertise or increase in labor would be aligned with institutionalizing state institutions, rather than directly or exclusively empower political parties.

Specificity and potential remain as the major hurdles for all three policies, as party sustainability cannot be addressed directly. The three policy recommendations, essentially, strive to institutionalise all parties and level the playing field between legacy and emergent parties. Thus, concerning specificity, any policy recommendation would essentially fail. On potential, enforcing internal democracy would create the incentive for parties to move away from personalism towards institutionalism, reducing their reliance on central figures whose departure would be detrimental to the party. On the other hand, the second and third recommendations would help the sustainability of emergent parties by empowering them to participate more competitively in elections, qualify for performance-based public funding, and enhance plurality. In effect, this policy would help in reducing the

rate of dissolution of parties and achieve sustainability, specifically among newer parties.

Internal Democracy	-	-	-	+
Funding Ratio	-	-/+	-	+
Public Analysts	+	+	-	+
Criteria	Political Feasibility	Economic Feasibility	Specificity	Potential

Table 3: Feasibility chart, where the "+" sign signifies feasibility, the "-" sign signifies reduced feasibility.

## **Conclusion**

The current state of Jordanian political parties as personalist and rapidly shifting presents challenges and doubts on their sustainability. And as party sustainability is not a direct characteristic, rather a result of institutionalism, grassroots connections, and solid ideological framing, it needs to be addressed through enabling parties to acquire these characteristics, creating a more competitive pluralist system, and providing universal capacities to all political actors, as the policies proposed in this paper aim to accomplish.

The discussion on the three policies suggested highlights the difficulties in implementing them, showcasing political challenges that would be faced by challenging existing power systems, economic challenges in a strained Jordanian economy, specificity challenges by aiming to achieve to shift the status of parties towards sustainable, and a potential issue in policies that do not directly address the primary cause directly yet aim to increase sustainability through indirectly addressing its causes.

“ The feasibility study, on the surface, appears to show low feasibility in most aspects of most of the proposals. However, it’s important to recognise the importance of general reforms for the performance and longevity of political parties. Essentially, the policies aim to reform and empower parties in Jordan in an even playing field where elections remain competitive and allow for pluralist parliaments. The last recommendation, specifically, is critical to build the capacities of the bureaucracy and political parties and enable academics and researchers to provide rigorous analysis of the various policies in various sectors. Thus, the paper recommends the implementation of the three policies discussed, tasking the appropriate authorities with ensuring their implementation, and monitoring and evaluating their performance through independent and qualified analysts.

## Fourth Workshop

13 Jan 2025

# The Role of Youth in Politics and Parties

---

**Ms. *Ane Breivik*** Norwegian Parliament member.

**Mr. *Ibrahim Al-Awran*** the Deputy Secretary-General of  
*Irada party* Jordan.

## Preamble:

This policy paper is the outcome of research and dialogue efforts consolidated within a specialized session convened to examine issues related to the participation of Jordanian youth in political and party life. The paper was co-presented by Norwegian Parliament member Ms. *Ane Breivik*, who contributed a comparative perspective rooted in the Norwegian experience in youth political empowerment, and Mr. *Ibrahim Al-Awran the Deputy Secretary-General of Irada party* Jordan, who offered a local analysis reflecting the institutional and societal challenges facing youth engagement in politics.

The session brought together youth activists, politicians, and party representatives, enabling a multi-level discussion that helped formulate practical proposals to enhance youth participation and promote equal opportunities within political parties.

The *Policy and Society Institute* research team contributed to the preparation of this paper by analyzing the outcomes, developing policy alternatives, and formulating them within an analytical framework that reflects actionable recommendations.

## Executive Summary

Youth participation and engagement in Jordanian politics remain limited despite reform efforts. While the 2022 Royal Committee for Modernizing the Political System introduced measures to include youth, implementation has been ineffective. The current election law limits youth candidates to less electable positions, resulting in only six youth MPs in 2024—just 4% of parliament, despite youth making up 34% of the electorate. Additionally, political parties lack meaningful mechanisms to integrate youth into decision-making structures.

This policy paper, informed by a PSI-Norwegian Embassy workshop, assesses barriers to youth engagement and evaluates policy alternatives. Two policies emerge as **both feasible and impactful**:

**Mandating Youth Wings in Political Parties** – Properly structured youth wings can institutionalize youth participation, providing leadership opportunities rather than serving as symbolic groups. Their effectiveness depends on autonomy, decision-making power, and integration into party structures.

**Ensuring Youth Representation in Executive Committees** – Including youth in key decision-making bodies fosters substantive representation and shifts party norms. This policy is cost-effective but may face resistance from established party elites.

The paper proposes **combining these policies into a single framework**, ensuring youth wings have representation in executive committees. This approach balances institutional reform with practical feasibility, fostering genuine political empowerment.

Implementation requires advocacy, legislative lobbying, and public engagement. The **Independent Election Commission (IEC)** should oversee enforcement, ensuring compliance. By adopting this framework, Jordan can modernize its political system, strengthen youth representation, and enhance democratic governance.

## **Introduction**

Both academic literature and policy papers have consistently shown that youth's active engagement in politics has significant positive effects on democracies through descriptive and substantive representation, the inclusion of an entire section of the population, and the empowerment of young adults to engage in leadership positions in the political process.

The monarchy and the government recognise the need for political modernisation, as demonstrated through the different discussion papers and committees established throughout the years. The latest reform attempt, the 2022 Royal Committee for Modernising the Political System, had a dedicated sub-committee for youth, and other committees included the political empowerment of youth as a foundation of the modernisation process.

However, there is much to be desired. The current election law only requires that a youth, defined as under the age of 35, be among the five candidates in party lists<sup>i</sup>. In practice, this article has been interpreted by political parties to restrict the presence of youth in party lists to the fifth seat. The repercussions of this law has been seen

in the 2024 elections when only six youth candidates made it into parliament.

Further, youth membership in political parties is seldom regulated, with the only clauses in the political party law about passively empowering youth, among other social components, through ensuring equal opportunity in party bylaws and access to resources. As opposed to the active empowerment required to challenge and change the status quo.

The complexity of the problem is only multiplied by the lack of structured data on the engagement of youth in politics in Jordan. This gap in the literature exists not only in Jordan but in the region, making it difficult to assess trends in the behaviour of youth or compare them to other regional case studies.

To find possible policy alternatives, the Politics and Society Institute, in partnership with the Norwegian Embassy in Amman, conducted a workshop with 20 youth activists, parliamentarians, and partisans from Jordan and Norway, to discuss the current youth experience in politics, differences in youth engagement between Jordan and Norway, areas of weakness and

possible policy remedies. This policy paper will use this workshop and other resources to assess the status quo in section one; analyse the feasibility and effectiveness of different policy alternatives in the second section - two policies appear to be most feasible and effective; the third section then discusses the implementation of these two policies.

To conclude, the problem facing youth engagement in politics and partisan bodies has not been fully addressed in Jordanian legislation, with amendments mostly failing to effectively address youth's lacklustre representation in leadership positions and ineffectual engagement in politics. These issues lead to the marginalization of youth and youth issues in the decision-making process. This policy paper investigates possible policies that would increase the engagement of youth in partisan politics directly.

## **Status Quo Assessment**

As there is a gap in research and literature on the current position of youth engagement in partisan politics, I will rely on extrapolating the assessment based on research in areas of partisan and political empowerment, reports on the electoral proceedings in Jordan, and qualitative data gathered from the PSI workshop.

Currently, there are six youth Members of Parliament (MPs) exclusively in the lower chamber of parliament. The upper chamber, the senate, does not include any youth members, as Article 64 of the Jordanian constitution requires that senators be aged over 40 years old to be appointed.

The low rate of representation of youth in Jordan, six out of 138, is an increase from the previous elections, which took place under an election law that had the age requirement of 30 and only included two MPs under the age of 40. However, the current parliament only includes 6 youth MPs, representing 4% of the total House of Representatives. This percentage does not reflect or represent the size of the electorate from the same age group, which amounts to 34% according to the detailed

2024 parliamentary elections report, released by the Independent Election Commission.<sup>ii</sup>

On political parties, Jordanian legislation does not offer any regulations on the role of youth within them. Instead, it includes one regulation on the maintenance of at least 20% of the general assembly under the age of 35, encourages the formation of youth wings and prohibits discrimination against youth in undertaking positions of leadership or access to party resources. However, these regulations remain insufficient to address the non-inclusion of youth in party structure, and, instead, turn youth into a “requirement” for political parties to meet while maintaining previous power structures.

Analysis of this case shows that although normative policies which encourage youth participation are in place, they remain ineffective in successfully achieving equitable representation in parliament and leadership positions within political parties.

In conclusion, while regulatory policies have had some success in increasing youth representation through lowering the candidacy age and mandating a youth candidate in the first five names in party lists, they have

not addressed the issue of the inclusion of youth in party decision-making offices and were unsuccessful in the empowerment of youth. On the other hand, normative policies have failed in changing or shifting norms and attitudes towards youth in the electoral process.

## **Policy Alternatives**

Although there exist many possible policy approaches to support youths' political empowerment, the lack of literature and evidence on the issue limits the creation and recommendation of local evidence-based policies. Instead, we will utilize heuristic methods to be able to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the policies recommended in this section.

### **Mandate the Creation of Youth Wings**

One of the most effective possibilities is the creation of youth wings for political parties if regulated by appropriate internal and external bylaws, which in most cases it is not. Youth wings have Pickard argues that political parties keep youth secluded in youth wings, without giving them access to the decision-making processes<sup>iii</sup>. In the case of the 2015 British general elections, Pickard argues that although youth membership in youth wings increased, political institutions neglected the youth vote<sup>iv</sup>.

These negative results are contrasted by the Norwegian experience, which gives the youth wings autonomy, decision-making power, and candidacy opportunities. In the workshop, speaker Anna stressed that youth wings and youth parties may hold differing views from the mother party and that the bylaws guarantee substantive representation for the youth wing in executive committees.

The impact of creating youth wings in Jordanian political parties is thus dependent on the norm of the institutions and their bylaws; are youth wings simply a social club for peers, or are they fully fledged decision-making institutions? The former presents no guarantee for the engagement of youth and is likely to weaken youth engagement by acting as a buffer before politically engaged youth and political leadership.

The challenge then appears to be to ensure that the youth wings created have decision-making abilities and can enhance youth political engagement rather than contain it. Instrumentally, mandating that bylaws regulating youth wings include specific clauses could ensure the fulfilment of the goals of this policy, but would face significant resistance from stakeholders who benefit

from the exclusion and disenfranchisement of youth, such as the old guard of political parties, and strong support from other stakeholder, most significantly, youth.

The creation of institutions carries significant financial costs, imposing the question of political party funding again. While there is an argument that the creation of youth wings would attract more members, whose membership fees would then cover the budget for a youth body, this model would only transfer the financial cost of these bodies to the youth, who face financial hardship due to high living costs and lack of employment opportunities. Alternatively, if the political parties need to finance the youth wing, it will jeopardise the operations of newer and smaller political parties, who rely exclusively on government funds and membership fees to finance campaigning, headquarters, and projects. Other political parties would be able to finance the youth wing operations, examples include parties that already finance a youth wing such as the Social Democratic party, and legacy parties that are financially equipped to incur extra costs, such as the Islamic Action Front party.

While the possible drawbacks of this policy are evident, the specificity towards youth is immense, and it has the unique advantage of creating an institution dedicated to youth. And it has great potential if it is regulated strictly to empower, rather than contain, youth.

## **Mandate the Inclusion of Youth in Executive Committees**

While the creation of a youth wing would empower youth in the general assembly of a party, the mandating of youth members in executive committees would empower them through descriptive representation in decision-making.

The potential of this policy in addressing the goal of this paper relies on changing the normative frameworks that exist within political parties; during the PSI workshop, youth mentioned how norms ignore youth, and the old guard perceives youth's role in political parties as a requirement for the licensing of the party, rather than active members. This status quo makes this regulatory policy less politically feasible than youth wings, as it would require a radical shift in institutions to be effective rather than starting a new institution based on a specific framework.

However, this policy alternative is much more economically feasible than creating youth wings, as it does not have an express economic or financial cost. While it specifically targets integrating youth into

executive committees, it does not serve to integrate more youth into political and civic life expressly.

Therefore, mandating the inclusion of youth in executive committees ensures descriptive representation, which has been consistently shown to increase mobilisation in the context of race and gender. Castanho Silva has argued further that age is another characteristic that benefits from descriptive representation<sup>v</sup>. The inclusion of youth in executive committees may also help in shifting norms, through showcasing youth's capacities in decision-making and political work. Nonetheless, this policy would face backlash from relevant stakeholders.

## **Mandate Civic Education in Party Structures**

Civic education that is planned and administered by political parties has the advantage of raising awareness of party ideals and stimulating debates among party members on the goals and objectives of the party. However, formulating a civic education curriculum that is unique to political parties requires a rigid ideological framework for all party members to follow. Currently, as the Jordanian political system is relatively young, and public engagement with politics was restricted until 1989, ideologization has not fully occurred.

The lack of ideological frameworks is far from being the only issue in feasibility; education is expensive. The need for qualified individuals to develop curriculum, instructors, facilities, and resources requires a large budget, which most political parties in Jordan are unable to acquire.

Another issue when implementing this policy is specificity to the target demographic. Assuming the goal is increasing youths' political engagement, intra-party civic education would only increase the degree of engagement of party-affiliated youth, rather than its

quality, or mobilise unengaged youth. While civic education has been shown to increase political participation, studies have focused on non-partisan education, rather than party-led education, casting doubt on the effectiveness of party-led education.

## **Increase Representation in Party Lists**

The confinement of youth candidates to the fifth place on party lists was one of the major grievances expressed by youth during the PSI workshop. This policy alternative then comes to address that issue directly, through increasing representation on lists.

While increasing representation could be done by increasing the mandated number of youths on the list or increasing their ranking on the list, either option would face two issues in the application. The first issue is related to confronting the current power holders in party structures, who would risk being lowered on their party lists if youth candidates were to take a higher place. Secondly, most political parties did not secure more than a few seats in the 2024 elections. While the first issue affects political feasibility, as confronting stakeholders does, the second issue indicates that for this to be an effective policy, youths must be guaranteed one of the first three seats.

Current legislation requires a woman to be among the first three candidates, and requiring a youth candidate to

be within these three would highly restrict political party choices. Roughly 57% of political parties' candidates on the national lists were men aged over 35.

This policy meets all other criteria: it is effective in increasing descriptive representation, as it increases the likelihood of youths reaching parliament; it does not have an economic cost associated with it; and it specifically targets youth. However, removing traditional candidates from lists would not be politically feasible, and would be faced with more resistance than the inclusion of youth on executive committees, which would not require the removal of the restriction of traditional power holders.

However, implementing this policy will require a major clash with traditional power centres, which are mostly comprised of men aged over 35.

## Feasibility Chart

Mandate the creation of youth wings	+/-	+/-	+	+
Mandate youth inclusion in executive committees	+/-	+	+	+/-
Mandate civic education in party structures	+/-	-	-	+/-
Increase representation in party lists	-	+/-	+	+
Criteria	Political Feasibility	Economic Feasibility	specificity	Potential

Table 4 Feasibility chart, where the '+' sign signifies feasibility, the '-' sign signifies reduced feasibility, and the '+/-' signifies a positive equilibrium in feasibility.

## **Discussion**

While all issues have feasibility challenges, two policies stand out as most feasible: The inclusion of youth in executive committees and mandating the creation of youth wings. Other policy alternatives face critical issues: Civic education is costly, difficult to implement, and does not target the issue directly; and increasing representation in party lists will have significant political challenges, especially considering that the current primary demographic in party lists is men aged over 35.

The challenges faced by the two feasible policies could be mitigated by merging them into a singular framework, increasing their efficiency in implementation. The creation of youth wings, although costly, will help generate member fees by increasing mobilizing in the youth demographic, which would be more engaged through having a representative of the youth wing in the executive committee.

These youth wings will be less likely to be used to contain youth if they are ensured to have exercisable power in party politics, and the representative of the youth wing in the executive committee would lobby actively for its empowering, as an elected position by the

youth wing, they have an inherent interest in maintaining youth interests.

The implementation of this policy would have to address political pushback from traditional power centres and would require a coordinated campaign through formal and informal structures to push for this policy. It is important to recognize that it is likely that these actors would rather maintain their current positions as decision-makers over allowing for a stronger representation of youth.

On the formal front, the six youth MPs need to engage actively with the rest of parliament to lobby for more efficient inclusion of youth, while youth leaders, from political and civil societies, engage their organizations to push for support of the policy. The informal route, on the other hand, would include a broad social media mobilization campaign, utilizing Facebook and Instagram to push for awareness materials, while using Facebook and X to stimulate national public discourse on the issue.

As the most recent elections took place in 2024, the timeline for the campaign and pushing for the amendments is flexible and can extend well into 2026. The goal of the campaign, and the policy, is to influence the next pre-election campaign.

The policy, considering its scope and goals, would be implemented by the Independent Election Commission (IEC), which would be able to monitor its progress and effectiveness through its direct contact and supervisory authority on political parties. As the main regulatory body, the IEC would ensure compliance with the policy, and determine penalties for its implementation. However, independent monitoring and evaluation is also necessary, which would determine the effectiveness of the policy in integrating youth in partisan politics.

---

Castanho Silva, Bruno. 'No Votes for Old Men: Leaders' Age and Youth Turnout in Comparative Perspective'. *European Journal of Political Research* 64, no. 1 (February 2025): 276–95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12694>.

Pickard, Sarah. 'Trying to Turn up the Turnout: Youth Wings and the Youth Vote in the 2015 General Election'. *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* 20, no. 3 (16 October 2015). <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.503>.

. 'Youth Wings and Student Wings of Political Parties'. In *Politics, Protest and Young People*, by Sarah Pickard, 195–234. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2019. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-57788-7\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-57788-7_7).

## **Conclusion**

Jordanian youth are not sufficiently or adequately represented in formal political power structures in Jordan. Although there have been significant efforts to address this issue, they have not resulted in effective change, and the representation of youth remains minimal.

Although a variety of policy options exist, our analysis has shown two policies to be most effective and feasible: mandating the creation of youth wings, and the inclusion of youth in executive committees in political parties.

However, these two policies should be merged into a singular framework, that mandates the creation of youth wings in parties, and that these wings be represented in the mother party's executive committees.

## **Fifth Workshop**

**14 Jan 2025**

# **The Role of Women in Politics and Political Parties**

---

*Jette Christensen* Norwegian Parliament member.

*Ms. Rawan Al-Hayari* Methaq Party member.

## Preamble:

This policy paper is the result of research and dialogue efforts consolidated within a specialized session held to discuss the challenges facing women's participation in political and party life in Jordan. The paper was co-presented by Norwegian Parliament member *Jette Christensen*, who brought an international perspective and comparative expertise in women's political empowerment, and Methaq Party member Ms. *Rawan Al-Hayari* from Jordan, who provided a local vision grounded in Jordan's social and institutional context and her experience in gender and public engagement issues.

The session was attended by a distinguished group of parliamentarians, experts, and representatives of party and official institutions, which enabled a rich and multidimensional discussion that addressed key obstacles and opportunities, and contributed to formulating a set of practical proposals and recommendations.

The *Policy and Society Institute* research team contributed to the preparation of this paper by analyzing the outcomes, developing policy alternatives, and formulating them within an analytical framework that reflects actionable recommendations.

## **Executive Summary**

Women in Jordanian politics remain underrepresented despite decades of reform efforts. While legal amendments have increased female parliamentary representation to 19.6% in 2024, women continue to face structural and societal barriers that limit their political participation. Challenges include restrictive electoral list rankings, patriarchal norms excluding women from informal decision-making spaces, and the failure of existing policies to address grassroots empowerment.

This policy paper, based on research and a workshop conducted by the Politics and Society Institute, evaluates four policy alternatives to enhance women's political engagement. Two stand out as both feasible and effective:

- **Mandating Women's Wings in Political Parties**  
Properly structured women's wings can institutionalize political engagement, providing leadership opportunities rather than isolating women into symbolic roles. Ensuring autonomy

and integration into party structures is critical for success.

- Localizing Social Justice Efforts Aligning women's rights discourse with Jordan's sociocultural context can help dismantle patriarchal norms that limit political participation. This policy has broad feasibility and can be integrated into the next National Strategy for Women's Empowerment (2026).

The paper recommends implementing these policies through oversight by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Jordanian National Commission for Women. By adopting this dual approach, Jordan can create a political landscape that genuinely empowers women, fosters grassroots mobilization, and strengthens democratic representation.

## Introduction

Women were granted the right to vote in parliamentary elections in Jordan in 1974. However, during the past 50 years, women's rights movements have still faced significant challenges in civil and political areas alike. This policy paper will thus focus on recommending policies that address women's lack of proportional engagement in Jordanian partisan and parliamentary politics.

Arguments for the importance of inclusion of women in the democratic process are compelling. While the justice argument, which emphasises the importance of the inclusion of all demographic components, including women, in the democratic process firmly stands and is incredibly important, other arguments, which emphasise the contributions women make to democratic systems have also been substantiated heavily in academic and policy literature. These arguments span the three different powers in a democratic system: women justices are shown to produce more thorough and better-constructed arguments<sup>vi</sup>. In the executive power, the political empowerment of women has been shown to

correlate with better economic outcomes<sup>vii</sup>. In the legislative power, the inclusion of women has been shown to have a causal link with the mobilization of women voters.

However, the inclusion of women should be driven primarily by the justice argument: Women should be represented and included in the political process for the sake of inclusion, and their inclusion should not be contingent on the inclusion of certain economic, political, or social benefits. Nonetheless, there is a need to address discourse on the degree of inclusion expected in a democracy: democracies are defined by several dimensions, including the representative dimension.

---

<sup>i</sup> Sarah Pickard, 'Youth Wings and Student Wings of Political Parties', in *Politics, Protest and Young People*, by Sarah Pickard (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2019), 195–234, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-57788-7\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-57788-7_7).

<sup>1</sup> Bruno Castanho Silva, 'No Votes for Old Men: Leaders' Age and Youth Turnout in Comparative Perspective', *European Journal of Political Research* 64, no. 1 (February 2025): 276–95, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12694>.

By definition, democracies are inclusive rather than exclusive.

As such, this policy paper will be driven by the primary assumption that rather than justifying inclusion, it should be the rule in a democracy, and exclusion should be an exception and, as such, require justification.

This paper is written during a possible time for change for Jordanian women: While significant democratic reforms are taking place across public policies, the national strategy for the empowerment of women is only valid until the end of the year, significant changes will take place within the next election cycles, and normative shifts are possible due to the major social changes currently taking place across the country.

---

<sup>1</sup> Louisa Boulaziz, 'Beyond the Glass Ceiling, more "Housework"? Womens' Work Assignment, Performance and Influence in Political Institutions', 2 December 2024, <https://doi.org/10.33774/apsa-2024-7zv2r>.

<sup>1</sup> Sirianne Dahlum, Carl Henrik Knutsen, and Valeriya Mechkova, 'Women's Political Empowerment and Economic Growth', *World Development* 156 (August 2022): 105822, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.105822>.

The paper is divided into four sections following the introduction. The first section assesses the current state of women's engagement in Jordanian politics. The second section examines the feasibility of four policy alternatives: The creation of a women's fund, mandating the creation of women's wings in political parties, localising social justice efforts, and extending maternal protections. The third section discusses the implementation of the two most feasible policies. And the last section presents some concluding remarks.

## **Status Quo Assessment**

Women first practised their right to vote in parliamentary elections in Jordan in the 1984 elections, exclusively as electors, as candidates were exclusively men. Following the lifting of martial law and the resumption of democratic life in 1989, women participated as candidates for the first time. In the 1993 elections, Toujan Faisal became the first elected woman parliamentarian in Jordan and remained the only elected woman parliamentarian until the implementation of the women's quota clause during the 2003 elections. While the quota system has ensured the representation of women in parliament, the number of seats remained lower than desired: 15.3% in the 18<sup>th</sup> parliament, and 11.5% in the 19<sup>th</sup> parliament. This problem was addressed through the Royal Committee for Modernising the Political System in 2022, which recommended amendments to the election and political parties' laws that mandate an increased representation of women.

Specifically, the current election law mandates that within party lists, women are represented within the first three and second three candidates. The amendment

effectively increased women's representation in parliament, with a record 27 women MPs reaching parliament, comprising 19.6% of the House of Representatives. The increase is attributed to two factors: The increase of the women's quota from 15 to 18 seats (11.5% to 13.3%), and the introduction of the national lists, where nine women were elected. However, further breakdown of the national lists is required: out of the nine women that reached parliament, only one woman was the first candidate on her list, one was the second, three were third, and one was sixth. The remainder ranked 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> on their lists. These rankings show that apart from two candidates, women were included at the lowest rank possible in their respective lists.

While data on the elections are publicly available through various resources, data on the challenges facing women outside of elections are far scarcer and more outdated. To compensate for the lack of empirical data, the Politics and Society Institute held a workshop with a group of women parliamentarians, party-affiliated women, and experts. The workshop highlighted different challenges facing women in formal and informal spaces and politics. Challenges within informal spaces and

politics were patriarchal. A prime example was that informal political spaces were not accessible to women due to norms relating to the social role of women; after-hours policymaking would clash with domestic responsibilities women would be expected to bear, and women are expected to be engaged strictly with women's issues in official spaces.

The current situation reflects a dire reality: while women's empowerment has been an important part of the modernization agenda, it has missed its objective by neglecting to change social norms that limit women's access to politics. Instead, policies tend to restrict women into specific positions in parliamentary and partisan spaces as a separate component, licencing requirement, or restrict them strictly to women's issues without giving them access to broader policy issues.

## **Policy Alternatives**

Historical and current policies have followed top-down approaches to empowering women politically, through implementing quotas, mandating minimum representation percentages, and mandating inclusivity of women in party lists. However, these policies have failed to address normative issues that prevent women's empowerment on the grassroots level. Thus, the primary goal in the following policy alternative is to allow for grassroots mobilisation of women for politics, rather than directly increasing quotas, setting list orders, or gender diversity percentages.

### **Women's Fund**

The first alternative policy is to create a fund within political parties dedicated to supporting women's engagement in politics and political parties. This policy has the potential to mitigate economic challenges facing women but does not address the social and societal restrictions being placed on Jordanian women. Although women's funds have existed in Jordan, the creation of a distinct fund is likely to receive support from feminist

women, men, and organisations, but is as likely to be opposed by stakeholders who view women's empowerment as a component of the modernisation process, rather than an end on its own. The criticism will be compounded by the fact that economic challenges do not exclusively affect women and are not inherently based on gender. However, this pushback could be mitigated through awareness campaigns on the intersectionality of economic marginalisation and womanhood and highlighting the importance of the empowerment of women outside the modernisation paradigm.

A women's fund is highly specific and carries high potential. It specifically targets women's needs in politics, and it addresses a major challenge facing the engagement of women in partisan politics.

A fund would allow women to campaign more effectively, increase access to party headquarters, organise events raising awareness of women's rights, and allow for the creation of women-led spaces in political parties. The policy, however, also has the potential to restrict women's activism into areas that are deemed by party structures to be "women areas" due to their

relationship with the stereotypical social roles of women in Jordan.

However, a fund dedicated to supporting women's engagement in politics faces a significant feasibility issue: political parties do not possess the financial capacity to allocate resources to the fund; with a few notable exceptions, parties in Jordan rely on state funding. While some political parties can secure alternate forms of funding to implement this policy, it would put more economically challenged parties at risk of failing to implement it. On the other hand, allocating state funding for the women's fund would only increase the strain on the national budget. The unreliability of the economic capacity to implement this fund across the political spectrum makes it economically unfeasible.

## **Women Wing**

The second alternative policy is women's wings, or possibly other structures within political parties that are specific to women, which some political parties in Jordan already have. A women-exclusive structure is politically feasible, as it is highly unlikely to attract criticism from either conservative or liberal voices in the Jordanian political spectrum; conservative voices are likely to support the existence of women-exclusive spaces, as they adhere to traditionalist segregation standards, while progressive voices are likely to support the presence of structures that support the empowerment of women voices, and that allow women to take space in political activism. However, these further policies must regulate these structures, as they have the potential to either empower or isolate women.

While the empowerment of women would take place like the historical example of the English tea rooms, women-only spaces that allowed free discourse among women, allowing the first suffragettes to articulate and debate their ideas, they could also be used as a tool by traditional power holders to contain women and their voices into

these specific voices, like the case of youth wings in the UK. These challenges could be mitigated by specific policies that regulate the relationship between the women's wing and the mother party, requiring certain levels of representation of the women's wing on the executive level, and giving the wing a strong empowering mandate.

As women's wings are likely to increase women's membership, women's wings will be economically feasible in the long term, relying on increasing membership fees. Regardless, the short-term economic challenge of introducing a new intra-party institution should not be understated; political parties need to be able to form and support women wings after their formation to be able to engage more women, and to be able to acquire sufficient memberships to support institutions in the long term. However, as the most recent parliamentary elections took place in 2024, and the next election should take place in 2028, implementing this policy in the gap between these two elections would allow parties to dedicate resources that will be made available by the lack of active campaigning to the creation of women wings.

## **Localising the Struggle for Social Justice**

The most direct way to address patriarchal norms directly is to localize the terms, language, and frameworks that women's rights movements in Jordan use. However, this policy needs to be implemented as part of the national strategy for the empowerment of women. As the current strategy is set to expire in 2025, the addition of this policy as an underlying principle for the next strategy will influence legislative, executive, and judicial functions, starting in 2026. It is politically feasible, as the Jordanian National Commission for Women is the party responsible for the creation of the national strategy.

This policy does not have a direct economic cost, increasing its economic feasibility.

However, planning and implementing an executive plan should be expected to have associated costs. This challenge could be addressed by integrating this goal within the planning of the next national strategy. While localizing social justice rhetoric by aligning it with national socioeconomic dynamics, rhetoric, and culture does not directly address political engagement, it directly

addresses the underlying cause of many of the challenges facing women in political engagement: patriarchal standards. Successful implementation of this policy as a principle of the national standard would help destigmatise terms and actions associated with feminism and women's rights and help achieve overall equality.

## **Maternal Protections**

While the previous policy addresses the underlying patriarchy, this policy addresses some of its effects, which confine women to performing unpaid domestic labour, and force them to prioritise household labour over social engagements, such as political life. Maternal protections can vary in their form but can include guaranteeing protection of pregnant women in parliament, political parties, and workplaces; paid maternity leaves, and access to family planning. Further policies that protect women's right to engage socially include paternal leave, which can destigmatise the role of fathers in the household and in raising children; as childbirth and raising children has a high cost on women, they need to be aided by families and the state to enable them to integrate meaningfully in politics.

However, the implementation of extensive maternal protections would have significant economic costs. While the current legislative framework guarantees maternal leave and a short paternal leave, it is formulated under the implicit bias that fathers do not have extensive responsibilities in childcare, leading to the cementing of

stereotypical social roles that limit women's engagement in politics. The policy also faces significant political challenges in implementation, as it would be opposed by stakeholders in the private and public sectors, who would have to allocate funds for most of the expenses associated with these policies; and patriarchal power centres, who would benefit from the social roles of women. As such, considering the current social norms, and political and economic challenges, this policy is not feasible.

## Feasibility Analysis

Women Budget	+/-	-	+	+
Women Wing	+	+/-	+	+/-
Localizing Social Justice	+	+	+/-	+
Maternal Protections	+/-	-	+	+
Criteria	Political Feasibility	Economic Feasibility	Specificity	Potential

Table 5: Feasibility chart, where the “+” sign signifies feasibility, the “-” sign signifies reduced feasibility, and the “+/-” signifies a positive equilibrium in feasibility.

## Discussion

The recommendation of any policy for the empowerment of women in politics and in political parties needs to consider the policy's feasibility. From the previously discussed policy alternatives, two stand out as most feasible: mandating women's wings and the localising of social justice rhetoric and campaigns.

On the other hand, a dedicated women's fund and extensive maternal protections are not politically and economically feasible under current conditions. This leads to the recommendation of the two feasible policies under certain stipulations.

Women's wings and institutions within political parties must be regulated by policies set by the Independent Election Committee, which will also be responsible for oversight of implementation, and holding parties accountable for non-implementation. To ensure that wings do not ostracise or contain women, regulations should be set to mandate the autonomy of the wing, regulating its relationship with the mother party through methods that guarantee the representation of women in

the executive committee, and ensuring that the women's wing, while independent, is an integral part of the party, rather than an accessory to it.

On the other hand, localising social justice will be within the purview of the Jordanian National Commission for Women, which will be responsible for integrating it as an underlying principle of empowering Jordanian women in the national strategy. The executive goals, objectives, outcomes, and oversight of implementation will be similar within the planning and implementation of the national strategy, to ensure integration with other official initiatives. However, the goal of localizing the language of social justice needs to be implemented in partnership with feminist local organizations across Jordan, with an emphasis on marginalized communities where women face challenges due to their intersectional identity.

## **Conclusion**

Women have been marginalized in Jordanian politics, political parties, and elections since the independence of the kingdom in 1946. Although the political will has existed since the 1970s, policies and initiatives have not adequately addressed the patriarchal social factors leading to women's marginalization. Thus, we recommend the implementation of two policies, one that directly addresses the integration of women into politics, and one that addresses the underlying causes of many of the challenges women face.

The creation of women's wings in political parties and the localizing of social justice efforts will help integrate women into political work, provide them with spaces to debate and implement ideas and initiatives and destigmatize women's role in politics.

While many normative and empirical challenges must be addressed to achieve gender equality, the analysis shows that these two policy recommendations are a step in towards empowering women politically, increasing the representation of women in decision-making offices, and

creating and maintaining spaces that grassroots movements rely on to empower women in Jordan.

---

<sup>i</sup> Jordan. *Election Law for the House of Representatives*, 2022, Article 8, Section 3. Official Gazette, Issue 5782, February 2, 2022.

<sup>ii</sup> تقرير مفصل: الانتخابات النيابية 2024: *Al-Intikhābāt al-Niyābiyya 2024: Taqrīr Mufaṣṣal* [Parliamentary Elections 2024: Detailed Report]. Independent Election Committee, 2024,

<sup>iii</sup> Sarah Pickard, 'Trying to Turn up the Turnout: Youth Wings and the Youth Vote in the 2015 General Election', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* 20, no. 3 (16 October 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.503>.