

معهد السياسة والمجتمع
Politics and Society Institute (PSI)



Policy paper

Local administration between form and function Where does the impact falter?

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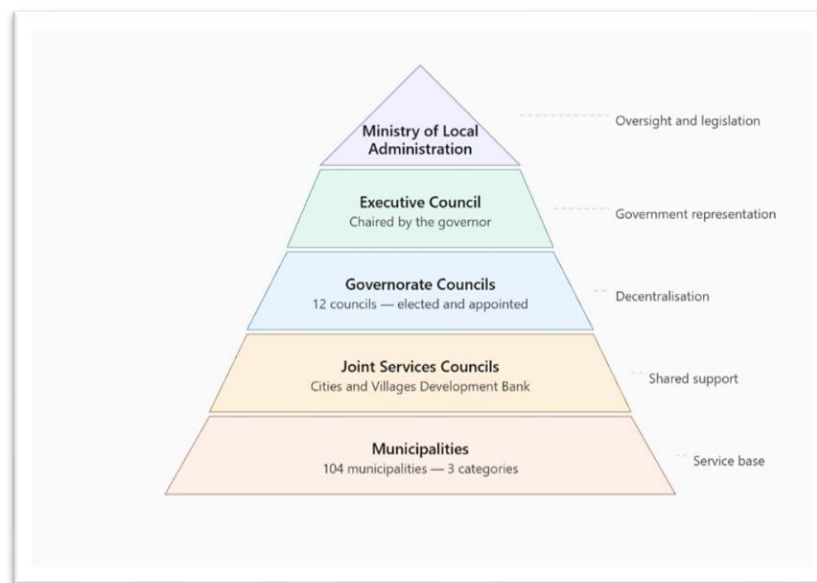


Executive Summary

- This paper examines the current state of local administration in Jordan through the lens of the gap between institutional form and actual function, within the broader framework of political and administrative reform led by the state under the outcomes of the Royal Committee to Modernise the Political System. It argues that local administration continues to suffer from structural imbalances that constrain its transformation into an effective system of local governance.
- Available data indicate a marked decline in participation rates in local elections over recent years, dropping from approximately 43–45% in the 2013 elections to around 30–31% in 2017, before stabilising at roughly 29–32% in 2022. This trend reflects declining public confidence in local councils and weakening societal engagement with them.
- Financially, the paper reveals that first-category municipalities allocate approximately 78% of their expenditures to current spending, compared to only 22% for capital expenditures. This demonstrates a structural imbalance in resource distribution that favours operational costs over development, thereby limiting municipalities' capacity to implement development projects with tangible impact.
- The paper also highlights a high level of dependence on central government transfers, coupled with weak self-generated revenues, mounting debt burdens in some municipalities, volatility in funding sources such as fuel tax revenues, inefficient collection systems, and the persistence of unrecovered financial dues.
- Furthermore, the paper underscores challenges related to the limited developmental role of municipalities, whose focus remains largely confined to the provision of basic daily services, with restricted capacity in economic planning and investment attraction. These challenges are compounded by gaps in digital transformation, weak adoption of smart city concepts, and significant disparities in institutional capacities across municipalities.
- Additional challenges include rising energy and maintenance costs, underutilisation of municipal assets and land, fragmented relationships with public service companies, weak inter-municipal cooperation, insufficient capacity-building and training programmes, and deficiencies in oversight, planning, and accountability mechanisms.



- In response, the paper proposes a package of reform measures, most notably: strengthening genuine decentralisation through expanded local authority, reforming the financial system by diversifying revenue streams and rationalising expenditures, activating participatory budgeting, establishing a municipal union framework, advancing smart city strategies, improving oversight systems, enhancing institutional capacity, strengthening public-private partnerships, and restructuring the relationship with service companies while restoring selected developmental powers such as public transport management.
- The paper concludes that reforming local administration is no longer merely an administrative option but a strategic necessity. Transitioning toward an effective local governance model requires addressing current structural gaps, enhancing financial and administrative autonomy, and broadening community participation in ways that improve service quality and strengthen trust between citizens and the state.



Local Administration Institutions¹

¹ First , municipalities : These are the most well-known local government institutions, and their number has reached municipalities, divided into three categories according to the population of the governorate 104

Second , the governorate councils : These are decentralized councils, and their number is 12 councils according to the number of governorates. They consist of two parts: an elected part at the level of the governorate and its regions and a part appointed from institutions that are already elected, such as chambers of commerce and industry, the farmers' union, and reconstruction institutions

Third , the Executive Council : This is the council that represents the central government in the province and is formed under the chairmanship of the governor and with the membership of the district administrators and directors



Introduction

Developing Jordan's local administration system represents one of the most prominent pathways of political and administrative reform currently being advanced within a comprehensive state modernisation vision led by His Majesty King Abdullah II. The contours of this vision have been translated through the outcomes of the Royal Committee to Modernise the Political System, encompassing constitutional amendments, reforms to the electoral and political parties laws, as well as the legislative framework governing local administration. The Royal Letter addressed to the Committee underscored the centrality of this trajectory by calling for "the development of legislation governing local administration, the expansion of public participation in decision-making, and the creation of a legislative and political environment that guarantees the role of youth and women in public life," reflecting the strategic importance of this file within Jordan's broader reform agenda.

Within this context, local administration emerges as a foundational pillar for achieving balanced development and strengthening political participation. The degree of state advancement is closely tied to its ability to empower local units—particularly municipalities—to effectively fulfil their developmental and service-oriented roles in ways that improve service delivery and enhance quality of life across all regions.

Moreover, the adoption of decentralisation constitutes a strategic reform choice that reinforces state stability and cohesion by broadening participation in decision-making and institutionalising principles of good governance, including transparency, accountability, and the equitable distribution of authority. This approach contributes to rebuilding trust between citizens and state institutions by enabling local communities to identify, shape, and monitor their own developmental priorities.

of departments in the province who represent the central government, such as the directors of health, public works, education, agriculture, etc

Fourth , Joint Services Councils : These are councils made up of the heads of neighboring municipalities, headed by an employee appointed by the Minister of Local Administration. This council is responsible for serving the joint municipalities in multiple areas such as waste management, assisting municipalities in crises and emergencies, cleaning services, pesticide spraying, and is treated as a second-class municipality

Fifth , the Cities and Villages Development Bank : It is the financial arm of the municipalities or the municipal fund into which the municipalities deposit their money, and the bank manages these funds and supports the municipalities in loans, grants and partnership in implementing joint projects

Sixth , the Ministry of Local Administration : This ministry oversees the work of local administration institutions, drafts legislation, monitors the implementation and application of legislation, and provides technical and financial support. It has directorates in all governorates



This reformist vision is rooted in a fundamental understanding of the relationship between state and society. Rather than operating through a one-directional logic of state patronage, this relationship is inherently reciprocal, grounded in active citizenship and shared responsibility. Within this framework, local administration represents the sphere closest to citizens in which this relationship is materially expressed. It is the level at which public policy is transformed into tangible services, and where trust is either built or eroded according to institutional responsiveness to societal needs. Accordingly, reforming local administration is not merely an administrative matter; at its core, it constitutes the reconstruction of a social contract that consolidates citizens' rights to participation, accountability, and belonging.

For this reason, local administration should not be approached through a narrow service-delivery lens that reduces its role to infrastructure provision or road maintenance. Rather, its broader developmental function must be recognised, positioning it as a driver of local economic and social development. A capable and empowered municipality is one that can attract investment, create a supportive local business environment, generate employment opportunities, and preserve the cultural and environmental heritage of its community. Equally important is its role in strengthening social cohesion and ensuring equitable distribution of resources across regions and social groups, making it an indispensable pillar of any integrated national development strategy.

Building on this premise, any Local Administration Law must be founded upon a clear framework of objectives and values that serve as evaluative benchmarks for legislative reform in this field. Foremost among these are **participation** as a constitutional right rather than a procedural formality; **distributive justice** to ensure less developed regions receive their fair share of resources and attention; **accountability** to transform local councils into bodies subject to both institutional and popular oversight; and **sustainability** to connect local decision-making with its long-term environmental and social consequences. These values form the analytical framework through which this paper assesses the extent to which the proposed law meets the requirements of substantive reform.

However, achieving these objectives requires comprehensive structural reform of Jordan's local administration system—one that moves beyond traditional administrative models reliant on individual discretion toward institutional frameworks based on clear principles of efficiency, accountability, role distribution, and strengthened financial and administrative autonomy. This demands a transition beyond cosmetic legislative amendments toward genuine systemic transformation in the architecture of local governance.

Accordingly, this paper seeks to analyse the current reality of local administration in Jordan in light of the proposed Local Administration Law by identifying the principal challenges confronting



the sector, reassessing the relationship between central government and local institutions on the basis of partnership rather than guardianship, and presenting a set of alternatives and recommendations informed by best practices. Ultimately, it aims to contribute to the development of a more effective local administration model capable of laying the foundations for genuine local governance.

Background

The Position of Local Administration within Jordan's Political System

The position of local administration in Jordan is characterised by a dual nature that combines significance in terms of its service and developmental role with limited autonomy in terms of actual authority. Jordan, as a state with a predominantly centralised political system, relies on the central government for the formulation of public policy and the management of major economic and financial affairs, while local administration institutions are primarily tasked with delivering daily public services to citizens across governorates and municipalities.

Despite this strong centralist framework, local administration institutions have emerged and evolved over decades as an integral component of the state's administrative architecture. They have functioned as mechanisms for bringing services closer to citizens, alleviating pressure on the centre, and promoting local development. Historically, this level of governance has been associated with advancing spatial justice in service distribution and enabling local communities to manage aspects of their day-to-day affairs within defined boundaries.

From a theoretical perspective, local administration in Jordan is regarded as an important instrument for enhancing public participation, whether through local elections or through citizen representation in municipal and governorate councils. In principle, this system is intended to provide institutional space for articulating diverse local needs, particularly given the disparities among governorates in terms of resources, opportunities, and developmental priorities.

Local administration also constitutes a critical arena for expanding societal oversight over public services. Citizens are generally closer to local decision-makers than to central authorities, creating greater opportunities for influence through participation, accountability, and community pressure. However, this role remains constrained by a governance framework in which the central government retains supervisory authority over budgets, appointments, and overarching public policy. As a result, the relationship between the centre and local units remains one of continuous balancing: granting local institutions sufficient autonomy to perform effectively while maintaining central oversight to safeguard national resource management.



In practical terms, the scope of local autonomy is shaped by several structural factors, most notably limited self-generated financial resources and the heavy dependence of local institutions on government transfers, in addition to disparities in administrative capacity across municipalities. This reality produces uneven performance among local units, where their ability to initiate, innovate, and pursue developmental planning is often determined less by legal powers than by available resources and institutional capability. It also places local administrations in a sensitive position between rising citizen expectations on one hand and constrained operational capacity on the other.

Accordingly, understanding local administration in Jordan requires viewing it as part of a broader governance system in which development, participation, accountability, and resource allocation intersect within an ongoing framework of political and administrative modernisation. It should therefore not be reduced to the narrow conception of service councils alone, but rather recognised as a central institutional layer in the state's wider reform and governance architecture.

The Core Problem

The central challenge facing Jordan's local administration system lies in the persistent gap between the roles expected of local councils and the actual tools, authorities, and capacities available to them to fulfil those roles effectively. Despite the existence of elected councils at both municipal and governorate levels, many fundamental decisions related to budgeting, financing, and project implementation continue to pass through centralised state structures, thereby constraining these councils' ability to respond directly and efficiently to the needs of local communities. At the same time, the institutional framework is characterised by overlapping roles between appointed executive bodies and elected councils, particularly amid ongoing efforts to redistribute certain powers, which in turn affects the clarity and coherence of decision-making processes at the local level.

Financially, local councils face substantial structural constraints, most notably weak fiscal autonomy and the disproportionate allocation of expenditures toward recurrent costs—particularly salaries—at the expense of developmental and capital investment. This imbalance significantly limits their ability to generate tangible developmental outcomes or meaningfully improve service delivery. In parallel, deficiencies in planning and implementation tools, coupled with limitations in oversight, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms, continue to undermine institutional efficiency and overall performance.



Taken together, these structural, financial, and governance-related challenges have contributed to declining public confidence in local councils, alongside reduced levels of citizen participation and engagement. Consequently, the fundamental issue is not merely the existence of local governance structures, but rather the extent to which these structures are genuinely empowered to perform their intended roles through clearly defined authority, strengthened financial independence, and more effective governance mechanisms. Addressing this challenge is essential to supporting Jordan's transition toward a more capable, accountable, and development-oriented model of local administration.

Diagnosing the Reality of Local Administration in Jordan

This section seeks to diagnose the current state of local administration in Jordan by presenting a clear and objective picture of how local councils and municipalities presently operate, as well as the structural conditions that shape their performance. This diagnostic approach is essential for developing a deeper understanding of the factors influencing local administrative efficiency, whether these relate to the legal framework, financial resources, or the nature of the relationship between local institutions, central government, and local communities.

Assessing the current reality is intended to clarify the broader operational environment within which local councils function, thereby contributing to a more integrated understanding before moving toward deeper analysis of structural challenges and the development of viable reform alternatives. A precise understanding of present conditions is a fundamental prerequisite for any meaningful effort aimed at reforming or modernising the local administration system.

1. Central Government Authority and the Distribution of Powers

Local councils in Jordan operate within a legal and administrative framework that grants the central government extensive authority over many of the core functions associated with local governance. This includes oversight over budget approvals, authorisation of certain financial decisions, supervision of tenders and development projects, as well as regulatory control over various administrative aspects within municipalities.

This framework creates an intertwined relationship between the centre and local units, whereby decision-making is not exercised fully independently at the local level. Rather, in many cases, local decisions must pass through central governmental channels for review or approval. Such an arrangement can often prolong administrative procedures and limit the ability of local councils to respond swiftly and effectively to immediate community needs.

Moreover, the overlap of powers between central and local institutions can create ambiguity regarding the distribution of responsibilities, which in turn affects the clarity of local decision-



making and undermines implementation efficiency. In practice, this structural overlap often places local councils in a constrained position—formally tasked with addressing local priorities, yet functionally limited by layers of oversight that reduce both flexibility and responsiveness.

As a result, while local administration institutions may exist as representative structures, their operational autonomy remains shaped by a governance model in which central authority continues to play a decisive role. This dynamic represents one of the defining features of Jordan's local administration landscape and forms a critical starting point for evaluating the broader challenges facing its development into a more effective system of local governance.

2. Public Trust in Local Councils

Recent experience in Jordan indicates a noticeable decline in citizens' trust in local councils, a trend reflected most clearly in the decreasing rates of participation in successive local elections, which in recent cycles have stabilised at approximately 30%. This erosion of trust is also evident in the generally weak levels of sustained citizen engagement with local councils after their formation, suggesting that the relationship between voters and local institutions often diminishes significantly once electoral processes conclude.

This decline is linked to a set of interconnected structural and political factors. Among the most prominent is the evolution of the electoral system and the restructuring of local governance institutions, particularly the introduction of Governorate Councils during the 2017 electoral cycle. While intended as part of Jordan's decentralisation agenda, these structural changes also generated a degree of public ambiguity regarding the distinct roles and responsibilities of the various tiers of local administration. For many citizens, this institutional complexity has reduced clarity around who holds authority over local development priorities, service provision, and decision-making.

At the same time, the limited visible impact of local councils in improving service quality or meaningfully influencing developmental outcomes has reinforced public perceptions that these bodies remain constrained in effectiveness. When elected institutions are not widely perceived as capable of producing tangible improvements, electoral participation itself risks becoming increasingly detached from broader democratic or governance aspirations.

Furthermore, weak channels of sustained communication between local councils and citizens after elections have intensified perceptions of discontinuity. In many cases, citizen engagement remains concentrated around electoral periods, without translating into meaningful ongoing interaction throughout councils' terms. This dynamic has widened the gap between citizens and

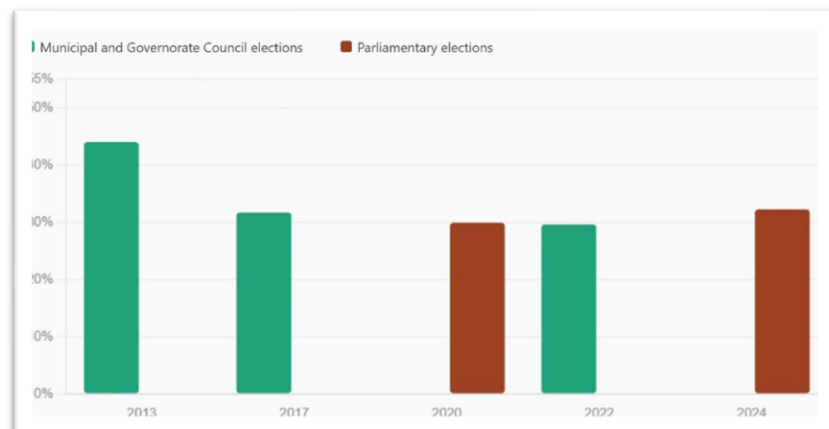


local institutions, while simultaneously weakening broader forms of societal participation in local decision-making, both electorally and administratively.

These trends are consistent with public opinion findings from the Institute of Politics and Society's survey on local administration, which revealed limited levels of trust and engagement with local councils², reflecting the persistence of the citizen–institution gap and underscoring the need to strengthen mechanisms of communication, accountability, and local responsiveness. The survey further demonstrated that motivations for participation in local elections remain overwhelmingly service-oriented and socially driven rather than governance-focused. Among respondents willing to participate, 81.7% identified improving municipal services as their primary motivation. By contrast, only 26.7% cited improving governance and transparency, 25.8% referred to belief in democratic participation, 21% indicated support for a relative, and 19.1% identified enhancing youth and women's representation as a motivating factor.

These findings reveal that immediate service delivery remains the dominant driver of participation, while motivations associated with governance reform, political accountability, and democratic engagement remain comparatively weaker. This suggests that local elections are still largely perceived through a functional and clientelist lens rather than as part of a broader participatory governance framework.

The significance of these figures becomes even more pronounced when situated within a broader national political context. Participation in municipal and governorate council elections declined from approximately 44% in 2013 to 29.6% in 2022³—a drop of nearly 14 percentage points over a single decade.



This trajectory parallels developments in parliamentary elections, where the 2020 House of

² Institute for Policy and Society, "Politics and Society Poll: More than half of citizens are inclined to abstain or hesitate to participate in local elections," January 11, 2026. See: <https://wp.me/pdSluF-5q1>

³ The Independent Election Commission (Jordan), "Detailed Report - Elections for Governorate Councils, Municipal Councils and the Greater Amman Municipality Council 2022", official website, no date see: <https://www.iec.jo/election-inners-pages?nid=21071&tid=35>



Representatives elections recorded the lowest voter turnout in modern Jordanian history at 29.9%, followed by only a modest increase to 32.25% in 2024⁴. The narrow gap—roughly 2%—between local and national electoral participation rates suggests that political disengagement is not confined solely to the local level.

Rather, this convergence points to a broader structural pattern of political disengagement that transcends individual electoral arenas. It reflects a more comprehensive crisis of trust in the political process itself, encompassing both local and national institutions. Consequently, declining participation in local governance should be understood not merely as a municipal challenge, but as part of a wider legitimacy and confidence deficit that reform efforts must address if Jordan's political modernisation agenda is to achieve substantive public resonance.

3. Local Expenditure Structure and Fiscal Balance Challenges

The financial reality of local administration in Jordan reveals one of the most critical structural determinants of its effectiveness. Beyond questions of representation or institutional design, the capacity of municipalities and governorate councils to fulfil their developmental and service mandates is fundamentally shaped by the architecture of their revenues, expenditures, and financial governance systems. Within this context, fiscal imbalance emerges as a defining challenge, manifested through three interrelated pathways.

First: Revenue Structure and Dependence on Central Financing

Municipalities and governorate councils in Jordan rely primarily on financial transfers from the central government, alongside a range of theoretically available local revenue sources such as fees, service charges, local taxes, licensing revenues, and municipal levies. Despite this apparent diversity in revenue channels, local financial resources often remain insufficient to meet growing developmental and service demands. More importantly, these resources are frequently characterised by instability, given that a significant proportion depends on centrally managed transfers—most notably fuel tax revenues and other state-controlled allocations.

This dependency creates a structurally constrained financial environment in which local institutions often lack predictable and autonomous fiscal planning capacity. In practice, while local councils may possess formal budgetary frameworks, their actual financial flexibility is significantly influenced by decisions made at the central level, limiting long-term developmental planning and responsiveness to local priorities.

⁴ Independent Election Commission (Jordan), Detailed Report on the 2024 Parliamentary Election Process , Voter Turnout - p. 100, see <https://www.iec.jo/node/22764>.



At the same time, local councils face operational challenges in strengthening self-generated revenues that extend beyond legislative limitations alone. Weak collection efficiency, the accumulation of unpaid dues, and persistent financial arrears constitute major barriers to fiscal sustainability. In many municipalities, substantial sums owed by citizens or businesses remain uncollected due to administrative inefficiencies, enforcement limitations, or weak institutional capacity. This creates a persistent gap between projected revenues and actual realised income, undermining sound financial planning and reducing municipalities' ability to allocate resources strategically.

Furthermore, limited optimisation of existing local revenue streams—including wholesale markets, professional licensing, building and property taxes, and municipal service fees—reflects broader deficiencies in local resource management. These gaps often stem from outdated or inaccurate databases, weak administrative systems, and inconsistent valuation or collection practices, all of which negatively affect both revenue efficiency and perceptions of fiscal fairness.

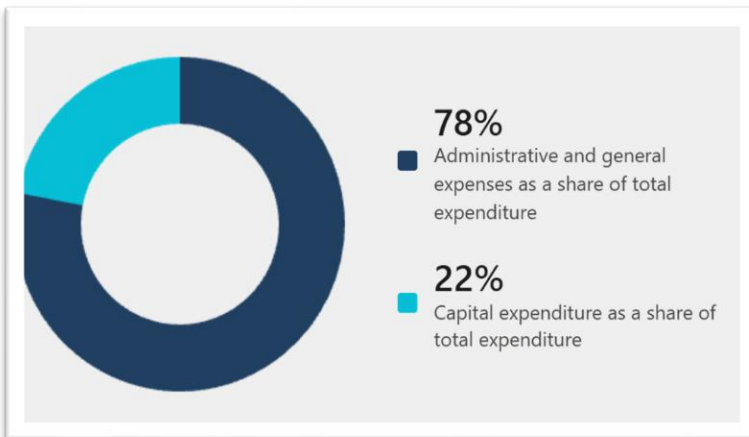
In this context, the challenge is not solely one of resource scarcity, but also of financial governance. A significant part of the structural problem lies in how revenues are managed, prioritised, and allocated. The absence of strategic financial planning frameworks linked to developmental priorities often restricts councils' ability to channel expenditures toward transformative local projects, instead reinforcing short-term administrative survival.

Second: Expenditure Structure and Operational Pressures

On the expenditure side, available data indicate that municipal spending structures are heavily skewed toward operational and recurrent expenditures. Salaries, wages, administrative overhead, and day-to-day operational costs consume the overwhelming majority of municipal budgets, while capital expenditures dedicated to development projects remain comparatively limited.



This imbalance is especially evident in first-category municipalities, where approximately 78% of



total expenditures are allocated to current spending, compared to only around 22% directed toward capital expenditure. This financial composition highlights a deeply entrenched structural pattern in which municipalities function primarily as service-maintenance bodies rather than developmental institutions.

Financial performance of expenditures of first-class municipalities ⁵

The implications of this expenditure model are substantial. High operational burdens constrain municipalities' ability to invest in infrastructure expansion, economic development initiatives, smart technologies, or strategic local projects capable of generating long-term socioeconomic impact. In effect, local councils are often trapped in cycles of maintaining existing services rather than building future-oriented developmental capacity.

Moreover, rising operational costs—including wages, energy expenses, maintenance obligations, and administrative commitments—further intensify these pressures, particularly in municipalities with already limited revenue bases. As recurrent costs expand, the fiscal space available for innovation, investment, or developmental transformation narrows even further.

This operationally heavy spending pattern also raises broader governance concerns, as it reflects not merely financial constraints but deeper institutional priorities and structural inefficiencies. Without expenditure restructuring, local administration risks remaining focused on administrative continuity at the expense of broader developmental effectiveness.

Overall, Jordan's local financial model reveals a systemic tension between fiscal dependence, weak revenue optimisation, and expenditure structures that prioritise operational survival over strategic development. Addressing this imbalance is central to any meaningful reform agenda

⁵ .Ministry of Local Administration, Municipalities Financial Report for 2019, Issue No(3) , p. 21 ,2020 , see: <https://2u.pw/996oCa>



aimed at transforming local administration from a service-delivery apparatus into an effective pillar of local governance and balanced national development.

This distribution reflects the nature of the operational pressures facing major municipalities, which must sustain the continuity of essential public services while managing extensive administrative structures. At the same time, however, it significantly constrains their capacity to expand developmental projects or invest meaningfully in infrastructure. In practical terms, the largest share of available resources is directed toward meeting existing obligations, often at the expense of strategic developmental expenditure.

Within this context, the core challenge is not simply the overall volume of resources available, but rather the manner in which those resources are allocated. Achieving a more balanced distribution between operational expenditures and developmental spending therefore becomes a decisive factor in strengthening local administration's capacity to generate tangible developmental impact. Without such rebalancing, municipalities risk remaining structurally focused on sustaining current functions rather than advancing broader local economic and social transformation.

Third: Debt Burdens and Revenue Volatility

A number of municipalities in Jordan face varying levels of indebtedness, stemming in part from accumulated historical obligations as well as broader challenges in financial management. In some cases, administrative decisions, inherited liabilities, or structural fiscal weaknesses have intensified financial pressure on local units. Alongside this, several revenue streams have experienced notable fluctuations in recent years, particularly those linked to fuel tax returns and certain service-related allocations, resulting in reduced or unstable financial inflows.

Such volatility directly affects municipalities' ability to formulate stable and predictable financial plans, increasing their exposure to year-to-year funding uncertainty. This instability not only complicates long-term developmental planning but also reinforces dependence on reactive budgeting practices. At the same time, high debt levels in some municipalities place additional strain on local budgets by diverting resources toward debt servicing and past liabilities, thereby reducing the fiscal space available for launching new developmental or service-oriented projects.

4. Weak Developmental Role of Local Councils

In practical terms, the work of most municipalities remains heavily concentrated on the delivery of essential daily services such as sanitation, road maintenance, and general public services. By contrast, broader developmental functions—including local economic planning, investment



attraction, productive project creation, and strategic economic transformation—remain comparatively underdeveloped.

This imbalance reflects several interconnected factors, including limited availability of specialised personnel in planning and development fields, insufficient technical and administrative tools for managing complex developmental projects, and an institutional framework that does not yet clearly position municipalities as comprehensive developmental actors. As a result, municipalities continue to function primarily as service providers rather than as dynamic engines of local development.

5. Digital Transformation and Smart Cities

The implementation of digital transformation concepts within Jordan’s local administration system remains in a gradual developmental phase. Comprehensive digitisation has not yet been achieved across all municipalities or across the full range of municipal services. This uneven technological integration means that many procedures continue to be managed through traditional administrative methods, affecting transaction speed, data management efficiency, and transparency.

Moreover, incomplete digital systems complicate real-time performance monitoring and data analysis, limiting municipalities’ ability to improve service delivery through evidence-based governance. Without broader adoption of integrated digital systems and smart city frameworks, opportunities to enhance efficiency, citizen engagement, and institutional accountability remain constrained.

6. Oversight and Monitoring

Jordan’s local administration system requires continuous enhancement of its administrative, financial, and technical oversight tools, both in terms of institutional mechanisms and the incorporation of modern technological solutions. While oversight structures do exist, weaknesses in monitoring tools can in some cases make it difficult to accurately track project implementation, assess expenditure efficiency, or evaluate institutional performance comprehensively.

The challenge, therefore, is not the absence of oversight, but rather the need to strengthen and modernise it so that it becomes more systematic, integrated, and effective in improving overall 7. governance quality and transparency.

7. Planning and Accountability

Many local councils continue to operate without clearly defined executive plans that guide their work throughout their elected terms. In numerous cases, activities are carried out incrementally



or reactively without an overarching strategic framework linking objectives to measurable outcomes.

The absence of structured planning frameworks makes it difficult to objectively measure progress, evaluate effectiveness, or hold institutions accountable for performance. By contrast, clearly articulated implementation plans would significantly improve work quality, institutional coherence, and the alignment of local efforts with measurable developmental goals.

8. Land and Available Assets

Some municipalities face limitations in the availability of land or strategic assets that could be utilised for service expansion, developmental initiatives, or investment projects. This shortage directly constrains municipal capacity to expand infrastructure, attract investment, or diversify income sources.

Limited asset bases also reduce opportunities for public-private partnerships and weaken municipalities' long-term financial sustainability by restricting their ability to generate additional revenue streams.

9. Capacity Building and Training

Local administration increasingly requires sustained investment in institutional capacity-building and workforce development at both administrative and technical levels. Municipal governance has become significantly more complex, requiring specialised expertise in planning, financial management, project administration, and technological adaptation.

Strengthening human capital within local councils directly contributes to improved service quality, more effective decision-making, and stronger institutional performance overall.

10. Operating Costs and Energy Pressures

Energy costs and machinery maintenance constitute a substantial component of municipal operational expenditures. Rising energy prices and ongoing maintenance demands have placed increasing pressure on local budgets, further reducing the resources available for service expansion or developmental investment.

This growing operational burden reinforces the structural challenge of municipalities functioning under tight fiscal constraints while attempting to maintain service continuity.

11. Relationship with Utility and Service Providers



The relationship between municipalities and key service providers—particularly electricity and water companies—continues to present governance and coordination challenges, especially concerning infrastructure usage, revenue-sharing mechanisms, and financial obligations.

In some cases, insufficiently clear frameworks governing these relationships create inefficiencies or institutional gaps. Clarifying and restructuring these relationships could improve resource management and enhance coordination between local councils and broader service systems.

12. Inter-Municipal Cooperation

Cooperation among municipalities in implementing joint projects remains relatively limited and often occurs through informal, temporary, or initiative-based arrangements rather than through institutionalised frameworks.

Establishing more structured cooperative mechanisms could significantly improve resource utilisation, facilitate larger-scale projects, and encourage knowledge-sharing across municipalities, thereby increasing collective efficiency and developmental impact.

13. Public Transport Sector

Public transport is a strategically important sector directly affecting citizens' daily lives, yet in many regions its planning and management remain underdeveloped. There are clear opportunities to improve this sector through stronger partnerships between municipalities and the private sector, enabling improved service quality, expanded accessibility, and reduced pressure on citizens.

Expanding local administrative roles in transport planning could also enhance municipalities' developmental relevance by integrating mobility into broader local economic and social planning frameworks..



Structural gaps in local governance

Axis	Main gap	Impact on performance	Required response indicator
Powers and Governance	Overlapping roles between elected councils and appointed executive bodies Centralized approval of budgets and tenders at the central level	Prolonging the decision-making cycle and diluting accountability Reducing the scope for local initiative and hindering independent development planning	Defining clear and exclusive powers for each level with institutional coordination mechanisms Reviewing and gradually expanding the limits of financial authorization according to objective criteria
Finance and Revenues	Current expenditures rose to compared to only 22% for ,%78 capital expenditures Weak collection of self-generated revenues and accumulation of uncollected financial receivables Fluctuations in hydrocarbon revenues and centralization shifts	The minimal tangible developmental impact A gap between expected and actual revenues .disrupts financial planning Difficulty in long-term planning and weak investment capacity	Setting ceilings for current expenditures and binding standards for the percentage of development spending Developing a digital collection system and linking it to updated databases Building local financial reserves and diversifying revenue sources
Planning and performance	The absence of implementation plans that link the council's priorities to measurable results Limited digital transformation and varying levels of computing .between municipalities ,Weakness of the administrative financial, and technical control system	Difficulty in assessing performance and weak accountability for results Lengthy service procedures and weak transparency and oversight mechanisms Difficulty in monitoring projects and evaluating spending efficiency	Councils are required to prepare an action plan with documented performance indicators Adopting a national roadmap for digital transformation in municipalities Developing internal audit units and linking them to publicly accessible oversight platforms
Participation and trust	Voter turnout declined from to ~30 (2013) %44~% (2022) . Communication channels between councils and citizens .were severed after the elections	Weak popular legitimacy and eroding trust in local institutions The interaction was concentrated only during the voting stage.	Reviewing the local electoral system and clarifying the roles of the councils for citizens. Adopting institutionalized mechanisms for community participation, advisory committees, and periodic public reports
Institutional capacity	Limited number of specialists in development planning and financial management. Limited institutional cooperation between municipalities in joint projects	Weakening the developmental role and keeping municipalities within the scope of daily services.	Adopting a national capacity-building program linked to institutional performance standards. Building a clear legal and financial framework for



		Dispersion of resources and weak capacity to implement higher-impact projects	partnerships between municipalities
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The Role of Political Parties in Restructuring Local Representation and Building Programmatic Governance

The findings of this paper demonstrate that the dysfunction within Jordan’s local administration system is not solely a product of limited powers or weak financial resources, but also stems fundamentally from the nature of local representation itself. Local representation remains largely governed by an individualistic, service-oriented logic that weakens its ability to generate coherent, measurable, and accountable local public policies. This structural reality helps explain declining levels of trust and participation, as well as the continued concentration of electoral motivations around immediate service delivery or social relationships rather than broader governance considerations. Within this context, the integration of political parties into local administration should not be understood as a supplementary reform option, but rather as a structural entry point for reshaping the very foundations of representation by shifting local politics from competition over service provision to competition over policy production.

This transformation requires redefining the role of political parties within the local sphere as policy-producing institutions rather than merely electoral vehicles. By their organisational nature, political parties possess the capacity to translate community needs into integrated developmental programmes, connect local priorities to broader national agendas, and formulate these priorities into measurable implementation frameworks. In doing so, parties directly address one of the central structural gaps identified in this paper: the absence of programmatic planning and the weak linkage between resources and outcomes. Under such a model, electoral competition becomes centred on clear policy alternatives rather than personality-based appeals or fragmented service promises, thereby enhancing voter choice quality and establishing more rigorous mechanisms for subsequent accountability.

Simultaneously, party participation can fundamentally reorganise accountability within local governance by shifting it from an intermittent, individualised process to a continuous institutional one. The presence of active political parties—both within councils and externally—creates the potential for systematic performance monitoring, periodic evaluation, parallel reporting structures, and clearer alignment between electoral commitments and verifiable outcomes. This



strengthens the capacity of local governance systems to regulate their own performance while reducing the fragmentation of responsibility that often characterises individual-based representation. Moreover, this institutionalised accountability contributes to rebuilding the relationship between citizens and local institutions by transforming it from one based on diffuse expectations into a more contractual relationship grounded in explicit programmes and obligations.

The impact of this transformation also extends to the relationship between local councils and society itself. Political parties can facilitate the development of sustainable channels of communication that extend beyond electoral moments, creating ongoing engagement structures capable of systematically translating social demands into actionable policy frameworks. In this sense, political parties do not merely represent society; they help organise representation itself, reducing its randomness and giving it a more stable, institutional character.

However, activating this role requires substantial restructuring of the institutional environment within which parties operate at the local level. At the electoral system level, this would necessitate a gradual transition toward encouraging programmatic electoral lists and linking competition to publicly declared policy platforms, thereby redefining the criteria of political legitimacy and representation. At the council level, it would require the introduction of regulatory tools mandating the publication of executive programmes, linking performance to measurable indicators, and enabling collective council action in ways that prevent local decision-making from fragmenting into disconnected individual initiatives. At the societal level, political parties should be integrated into participatory governance mechanisms in ways that strengthen rather than replace broader public participation, ensuring that expanded engagement remains meaningfully connected to actual decision-making processes.

The success of such a transformation also depends on the internal development of political parties themselves. This includes sustained investment in institutional capacity-building and the preparation of qualified cadres in local planning, financial administration, and economic development, ensuring that party participation does not simply reproduce the existing individualistic model under an organisational label. The essence of this reform lies not in merely introducing parties into local governance, but in enabling them to perform a qualitatively distinct function that reshapes the nature of local political work itself.

Within this framework, the significance of this approach lies in its potential to address multiple structural dysfunctions identified throughout this paper—not as an isolated reform track, but as an integrated mechanism for confronting weak planning, absent programmatic governance, declining accountability, and broader crises of trust and participation. Nevertheless, this path



remains conditioned by several challenges, including the risks of politicising service delivery, weak party organisational structures, and possible social resistance in its early stages. Yet managing these challenges does not require limiting the political role of parties; rather, it requires regulating that role within a gradual institutional framework tied to clear performance standards, thereby ensuring a balance between developing local political life and preserving effective service delivery.

First: Principal Recommendations and Pathways for Reform

1. Central Government Authority and the Distribution of Powers

Reforming Jordan's local administration system requires a comprehensive reorganisation of the relationship between central government and local governance institutions within a gradual framework of administrative decentralisation. This approach should focus on expanding the powers of municipalities and local councils in ways consistent with the requirements of effective local governance, while simultaneously strengthening institutional oversight and accountability through competent national bodies such as the Audit Bureau and the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission. The objective is to establish a balanced model in which expanded local authority is matched by stronger governance safeguards.

Within this framework, there is a clear need to revisit the current distribution of powers, which has evolved through successive legislative phases since the 1955 legal framework, in order to create greater clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of different governance levels. A particularly important principle is preserving decision-making centrality within elected councils as the primary institutional expression of local democratic will. This strengthens the substantive value of local elections and protects the representative character of municipal governance. Fundamentally, the expansion of local powers should be accompanied by proportional development of institutional oversight tools, governance mechanisms, and a recalibrated relationship with central government in line with Jordan's broader political and administrative reform agenda.

2. The Role of Political Parties in Local Administration

Empowering political parties to engage meaningfully in local governance represents a critical entry point for strengthening democratic development at the municipal level. This transformation would shift local elections from competitions among individuals toward competition among measurable programmes and policy alternatives.



To achieve this, political parties should be encouraged to present clear local electoral lists and developmental platforms tailored to the priorities of each municipality. This would allow voters to make choices based on programmatic considerations rather than personal or social affiliations. Beyond elections, political parties can strengthen social accountability through active roles both inside and outside elected councils by monitoring the implementation of electoral commitments, issuing regular performance reports, and creating structured channels of communication between citizens and local institutions.

Such a model could significantly reduce trust deficits, enhance institutional continuity, and minimise the personalisation of local decision-making. However, for this role to be effective, the legal and regulatory environment must be restructured to enable genuine partisan participation within local councils and prevent the marginalisation of party politics in favour of purely individualistic or tribal considerations.

3. Electoral Representation and Eligibility Conditions

A foundational democratic principle for local governance reform is that local councils should be fully elected without appointment mechanisms, including in exceptional governance zones such as Aqaba, Petra, and the Greater Amman Municipality. Full electoral representation strengthens democratic legitimacy and ensures that governance outcomes reflect popular will.

Similarly, candidacy rights should remain broadly accessible without restrictive or exclusionary eligibility conditions that could undermine constitutional principles of equality among citizens. One of the key indicators of democratic electoral systems is the absence of excessive barriers to candidacy, leaving voters free to determine who is most suitable. Where appointment mechanisms are retained, they must never override or distort the outcomes produced by elected representation.

4. Cities and Villages Development Bank

Given that the Cities and Villages Development Bank is fundamentally financed through municipal resources, restructuring its governance model is essential. Municipal leaders—particularly mayors—should hold a majority within its governing board to ensure that municipal funds are directed primarily toward local developmental priorities rather than becoming disproportionately absorbed into central governmental frameworks.

Additionally, the proposed municipal union framework could play an important role in addressing accumulated municipal debt burdens through shared financing structures, debt restructuring programmes, and collective support mechanisms.



5. Developmental and Investment Functions

Municipalities must transition from primarily service-oriented institutions into developmental and investment-oriented actors. This requires strengthening enabling legislation, developing practical frameworks for public-private partnerships, and establishing specialised technical teams capable of serving groups of municipalities by analysing resources, comparative advantages, and investment opportunities.

Under this model, municipalities could contribute underutilised assets—such as land, property, or facilitated licensing—in exchange for commitments related to local employment generation and municipal revenue-sharing. Regular investment conferences could also be organised to present municipal opportunities to private-sector actors. Crucially, such developmental transitions should be linked to programmatic electoral competition, ensuring that candidates are evaluated and held accountable on developmental platforms.

6. Participatory Budgeting: Concept, Benefits, and Implementation Mechanisms ⁶

Participatory budgeting represents one of the most promising governance innovations for strengthening local democracy in Jordan. It involves directly engaging citizens and civil society institutions in the preparation, prioritisation, and implementation of municipal budgets, thereby enabling communities to influence public spending priorities.

In the Jordanian context, participatory budgeting offers a strategic tool for rebuilding trust between citizens and municipalities by transforming the citizen's role from passive service recipient to active participant in decision-making.

Its principal benefits include: Enhancing transparency and trust by involving citizens directly in budget preparation processes and reducing ambiguity in financial decisions. Aligning expenditures with real societal priorities by allowing communities to identify and rank urgent needs. Strengthening accountability by enabling citizens to monitor spending and project implementation more effectively. Improving financial decision quality by integrating multiple societal perspectives into budgetary planning.

⁶ Institute of Politics and Society, " Party Development - Third Training: Budget Preparation: Proposed Methodology, Fifth" , July 10, 2024, pp. 61-62, see : <https://politicsociety.org/2024/07/10/%d8%ad%d8%b2%d8%a8%d9%8a-%d8%aa%d9%86%d9%85%d9%88%d9%8a/>.



Practical implementation mechanisms in Jordan could include:

Regular public hearings to present budget orientations, gather community input, and publicly document outcomes. Representative community committees including youth, women, persons with disabilities, and civil society organisations to participate in budget formulation and oversight. Citizen voting on priority lists, allowing communities to directly shape budgetary allocations and grant budgets stronger democratic legitimacy. Digital platforms that enable broader participation through municipal websites and social media channels, thereby expanding access beyond physical attendance. Structured treatment of unfunded priorities through documented participatory budgets that can be presented to donors and development partners, thereby increasing the likelihood of external support aligned with genuine local needs. Taken together, participatory budgeting can serve not only as a fiscal mechanism, but as a broader democratic instrument that reconnects governance, accountability, and citizen trust at the local level.

7. Municipal Readiness for Risk and Crisis Management

A comprehensive reform of local governance in Jordan requires embedding a systematic municipal risk management framework capable of enhancing preparedness, response capacity, and institutional resilience. Municipalities should adopt an integrated risk matrix covering three interconnected phases: pre-crisis prevention and preparedness, crisis response, and post-crisis recovery and rehabilitation.

➤ **In the pre-crisis phase,**

1. municipalities should systematically catalogue businesses, industrial facilities, and licensed establishments while assessing their environmental and public health risks, including chemical pollution, gas incidents, and food safety hazards.
2. This should be accompanied by historical environmental and climate risk mapping
3. covering floods, snowstorms, landslides, epidemics, and vulnerable zones—alongside continuously updated databases of available municipal resources, including machinery, personnel, drivers, and emergency contact systems.
4. Sensitive sites such as schools, hospitals, cemeteries, and potential shelters must also be mapped comprehensively.
5. Institutional coordination should be formalised through clear protocols linking municipalities with the National Centre for Security and Crisis Management and relevant security agencies.

➤ **During crises**



municipalities should activate emergency plans immediately, mobilise rapid-response teams according to prioritised needs, coordinate directly with civil defence, security, and health institutions, and allocate resources dynamically based on the scale and nature of the event.

➤ **In the recovery phase**

municipalities should conduct precise damage assessments, restore infrastructure and essential services, support affected communities, and institutionalise lessons learned to improve future crisis response frameworks.

To operationalise this model, each municipality should establish a specialised crisis management unit equipped with trained personnel, operational databases, and clear emergency protocols. A proposed Municipal Union could play a particularly important technical support role, especially for smaller municipalities lacking sufficient institutional capacity.

8. Integrating the Smart Cities Concept

The transition toward smart municipalities should be recognised as a strategic priority for improving local governance efficiency and citizen quality of life. Smart municipal systems require advanced technological infrastructure capable of digitising services, reducing bureaucracy, accelerating service delivery, and safeguarding both municipal and citizen rights.

Beyond service efficiency, smart city systems can significantly strengthen public oversight and participatory governance through interactive platforms that allow citizens to monitor expenditures, projects, and service performance transparently. Digital governance should therefore be viewed not simply as a technological upgrade, but as a governance transformation that enhances transparency, accountability, and institutional responsiveness.

9. Municipal Union Framework

Drawing on successful international and regional experiences, Jordan would benefit substantially from establishing a technical and financial Municipal Union to support municipalities collectively. Such a framework would strengthen administrative and technical cooperation, facilitate shared investment initiatives, and potentially establish a municipal development fund for larger-scale developmental projects.

A Municipal Union would also enhance municipalities' ability to engage with international municipal networks, attract external support, and implement larger collaborative projects with greater developmental impact than isolated municipal efforts. Moreover, it could provide collective financing mechanisms to reduce debt burdens on financially distressed municipalities.



10. Strategic and Executive Planning with Accountability

Local administration institutions should be legally required to develop strategic and executive plans in partnership with local communities within the first months of council formation. These plans should become the central framework for institutional monitoring, evaluation, and accountability throughout the council's term.

Equally important, elections themselves should increasingly operate on programmatic foundations, ensuring that candidates compete on clear, measurable platforms for which they can later be held accountable. This would significantly enhance seriousness, policy orientation, and citizen confidence in local democratic processes.

11. Administrative, Financial, and Technical Oversight

A genuinely effective local governance system requires an independent and diversified oversight architecture covering administrative, financial, and technical dimensions. This includes strengthening internal audit structures, integrating advanced technological oversight tools, and developing public-facing transparency platforms capable of monitoring expenditures, revenues, and administrative procedures.

The guiding principle should be that governance failures are addressed through stronger oversight and accountability—not through weakening municipalities or reversing broader political reform commitments.

12. Addressing Financial Resource Deficits

The first pathway involves establishing a developmental fund supported by major institutions, corporations, and the state, alongside increased government support through existing fuel tax revenues designated for municipalities. This must be paired with institutionalised digital revenue collection systems capable of identifying data weaknesses, recovering outstanding dues, and modernising revenue streams such as vegetable markets, professional licences, and property taxation.

The second pathway focuses on reducing expenditures while diversifying revenues⁷

⁷ Institute of Politics and Society, " Party Development - Third Training: Budget Preparation: Proposed Methodology, Fifth" , July 10, 2024, p. 60, see <https://politicsociety.org/2024/07/10/%d8%ad%d8%b2%d8%a8%d9%8a-%d8%aa%d9%86%d9%85%d9%88%d9%8a/>.



On the expenditure side, municipalities should rationalise procurement through contract review, digitised purchasing systems, and centralised procurement frameworks. Energy burdens should be reduced through solar investment, leasing rather than purchasing heavy equipment where appropriate, and gradually transitioning to electric vehicles. Workforce structures should also be reviewed to reduce administrative inflation and align staffing more closely with service needs.

On the revenue side, municipalities should modernise collection systems, optimise underutilised municipal assets, develop public-private investment partnerships, expand tourism and cultural economies, secure rightful payments from electricity and water companies for infrastructure use, and reclaim public transport powers as a long-term sustainable revenue source.

Any expansion of fees or taxes should remain conditioned by rigorous financial and social impact assessments to preserve public trust and affordability.

13. Municipal Land Allocation

Given that approximately 80% of Jordan's land remains state-owned, allocating portions of underutilised public land for municipal developmental projects could substantially reduce production costs, strengthen infrastructure development, and improve municipalities' attractiveness to private-sector investors. Strategic land allocation could become a major instrument for reducing long-term dependence on central transfers.

14. Institutional Capacity Building

The establishment of a specialised institute dedicated to training and capacity-building for local administration personnel is strongly recommended. Such an institution should combine practical expertise with technical knowledge in planning, financial management, project administration, and digital transformation. Human capital development is a foundational condition for sustainable municipal reform.

15. Relationship with Electricity and Water Companies

Electricity and water companies operate as revenue-generating entities while extensively utilising municipal infrastructure and public spaces. Municipalities should therefore secure compensation for this usage, including full payment of waste collection fees linked to electricity meters. Joint re-evaluation of utility infrastructure databases with municipalities could also resolve longstanding discrepancies and unlock legitimate municipal revenues.

16 .Public Transport Authority



Returning public transport powers to municipalities represents a strategic opportunity to strengthen both service quality and local financial sustainability. Through structured partnerships with the private sector, municipalities could improve transport systems while generating substantial long-term revenues. Public transport should be treated not merely as a service sector, but as a developmental tool linking municipal governance directly to everyday citizen welfare.



Conclusion

The development of local administration in Jordan is no longer a secondary administrative consideration; it has become a national and strategic imperative directly linked to the quality of governance, the advancement of sustainable development, and the improvement of public service delivery. Because local administration constitutes the level of governance closest to citizens, its effectiveness-or dysfunction-has direct consequences for public trust, state legitimacy, and spatial justice in resource distribution.

Accordingly, transitioning toward effective local governance requires comprehensive reconstruction across multiple levels: legislative reform redefining centre-local relations, institutional and administrative restructuring, strengthened human capacity, modernised governance tools, and expanded frameworks for accountability, transparency, and meaningful social participation.

The strategic vision for municipal reform should therefore move gradually from a traditional local administration model focused primarily on constrained daily service provision toward a more integrated developmental local governance model. Under this model, municipalities would function not only as service providers, but also as developmental, economic, and planning institutions central to local growth management.

This transformation depends on enhanced municipal autonomy within a disciplined national framework, sustainable financial restructuring, developmental investment capacity, stronger governance ecosystems, and broader societal engagement—including political parties, civil society, and participatory governance mechanisms.

Ultimately, integrated reform policies supported by clear political will and effective coordination between central and local levels can reposition Jordan's local administration system on more balanced, effective, and sustainable foundations—transforming municipalities from limited service actors into genuine engines of local development, democratic participation, and long-term national stability.