

PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan

Poll # 33: Democracy in Jordan 2003, conducted in June 2003.

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Strategic Studies at Jordan University conducted an opinion poll on democracy in Jordan at the period between 21.6.2003 – 29.6.2003, which is the tenth annual survey executed by the center as part of the democratic transformation studies project in Jordan. Size of survey sample reached 1403 respondents. This survey aims to explore Jordanians' tendencies towards democracy in Jordan, particularly political parties and their popularity. Furthermore, this survey has treated the subject of last parliamentary elections, to investigate citizens' orientations towards the new parliament and their prospects regarding its effectiveness, internally and externally. The survey aims also to identify the underlying dimensions of electoral behaviour of Jordanians. The survey investigated Jordanians' priorities in order to rank internal, external, political, economic and political issues according to their importance for citizens. The importance of this subject lies in the fact that it occupied a considerable space of the dialogue in Jordan during the last few years. The survey included the audio and visual information and the extent of trust concerning local, regional and international the political news. The survey observed the spread of satellite sets, computer and the Internet usage. Below is a summary of the preliminary results.

FIRST: the concept of Democracy

Majority of Jordanians identify democracy as civil liberties and political rights. Such conception does not differ, in essence, from democracy conception in advanced democratic countries. Since 1999 until now, the percentage of people who identified democracy as civil liberties and political rights constitute two thirds of respondents on average. Besides this political understanding of democracy, there is sociological understanding identifying democracy as equality and justice (about a quarter of Jordanians) and social, political and economical development (about 10% of Jordanians).

Majority of Jordanians prefer a democratic political system and reject authoritarianism. An overwhelming majority of respondents reported that "democratic political system" which safeguards (public freedoms, equality, civil liberties and political rights, rotation of power, transparency and accountability of the executive authority) are a good system to govern the country. On the other hand, 80.9% of respondents reported that an authoritarian head of state (undemocratic) that does not have to bother with parliament and elections is a bad to rule the country. The data show that Jordanians have clear positions on the political systems they prefer. This reflects a rather high level of political awareness, since there is a high degree of consistency in Jordanians' views of the level of democracy in established democracies, democratising countries, and undemocratic countries, as we shall see below.

SECOND: Level of Democracy

Evaluation of Jordanians to the democracy level in their country and other countries reflects a rather sophisticated understanding of the content of democratic rule in general. They believe that democracy in Jordan has progressed if compared to last year, but within slight limits and such progress happened in other countries too (e.g. Syria, Egypt and Lebanon), while they reported that U.S.A and Israel are democracies, Jordanians evaluation to them dropped slightly. It is important to say that democracy level in Jordan, as Jordanians see it, is still ranging around the middle of the road, taking into consideration that most fluctuations in their evaluation were between 1999 and 2003. We should bear in mind that respondents' evaluation of democracy level in various countries depends on their understanding of democracy, which is connected so far with public freedoms and not necessary to reflect an objective evaluation to the internal democratic performance, in the respective countries comprised in the survey, but it is an important indication that cannot be avoided.

THIRD: Democracy indicators

Public freedoms and fear

Whereas, Jordanians determine democracy by public freedoms, it is necessary to know the extent to which they think civil liberties are safeguarded in Jordan. Arithmetic averages for freedom of opinion, press, and freedom to join political parties, indicate that such freedoms are guaranteed, somewhat. Among these, Jordanians view freedom of press as the most safeguarded in Jordan followed by freedom of opinion and then freedom to join political parties. Regarding freedom of demonstration and sit-in, most Jordanians believe that they are not guaranteed. The reason why Jordan is still at the middle of the road is that citizens do not feel that public freedoms are safeguarded to the extent, which makes them secure enough to express their views. No significant differences between the percentage of those believing that freedoms are guaranteed at this year and the last year. In general, percentages of those believing that they can express their opinions without risks are very little (Those who believe that the freedoms are safeguarded to a great extent). A large majority of respondents (83.2%) reported that they could not criticize the government openly and disagrees with its opinion without being exposed with their family's members to security or living sequences. Therefore, percentage of fear has increased from 69.9% in 1999 to 83.2% in 2003 and the percentage of respondents believing that they cannot participate in peaceful political opposition activities (e.g. demonstrations, sitting-in, publications, essays, Carnivals, lectures, opposition political seminars) without being exposed with their families to security and living sequences, from 70.9% in 1999 to 77.6% this year.

Just, equality and economy

Data show that there is a significant decrease in the percentage of people who think that Jordan became a country in which justice is present. The percentage of people who think that justice is present in Jordan " to a great extent" decreased by 9.6% compared with survey of the last year. On the other hand, the percentage of people who believe that justice does not exist in Jordan at all increased from 11.6% at last years to 15.2% this year. Percentage of people who believe that equality is present in Jordan has greatly decreased for 8% whilst no significant change happened to the percentage of people who

believe that equality does not exist in Jordan. Such figures can be understood by looking to the percentage of people reported that their economical situation deteriorated within the last twelve months (49.8%) against 10.6% reported that their economical situation improved and 38% remained as they were. The matter which confirms the general feeling that just and equality in Jordan have retreated, is the prevailed feeling of 51.1% of Jordanians that principle of equality of opportunities is not applied in Jordan, against 12.5% only believe that it is applied and 27.4% reported that it is somewhat enforced. Concerning justice and equality in distributing the national economy proceeds, three quarters of the society feel a kind of inequity, that 73.2% of the country economy is employed to serve the owners of interests and not for all citizens.

FOURTH: Political Parties

Evaluation of parties' performance.

Respondents' position towards political parties has not been improved much and two thirds of respondents reported that they do not know or care whether the parties succeeded in exercising the political work or not. Compared with previous surveys since 1996 until this survey, it is clear that the political parties are passing through a crisis to reach the street, when we consider the percentage of people reported that they know of existing political parties, only 44% of the survey respondents know of the existence of the Islamic Action Front Party. The Arab Ba`ath Socialist party came second, it was recognized by 12.1% of respondents, thirdly the Jordanian Communist party 11.8%, then the Constitutional National Party 10.2%, the fourth was Jordanian People Democratic Party (Hashd) 6.9%, the fifth was Jordanian People Union 6.0, but other parties (26) could not exceed 5% for each.

Parties' Popularity

The data suggest that the Islamic Action Front Party is the most representative for political, social and economical anticipations of the people rather than any other Jordanian political party (14.7% of the respondents) and the second rank was the constitutional National party (1.0%) and none of the other parties, could exceed 0.2%.

FIFTH: Parliamentary elections and citizens priorities

Participation effectiveness

Most of citizens think that election is a national duty (90.2%) and 84.1% think that public elections enhance democracy, 81.5% agreed with the following statement "your vote has an effect to decide the election results". Even though, election percentage reached just 58%. Why?

Why participation?

Voters have taken various incentives and motivations into account when they voted. A third of the sample (33.8%) of surveyed said that they elected because they feel it is "a national duty and a institutional right", while tribes and relationship came the second main reason (20.9%), the third rank as main reason was "putting suitable person at suitable position" (13.3%) then participation with incentive of "democracy enhancement" (9.3%), but those who reported that the main reason of participation is

"the district candidate provided and will provide service to the elector" reached 7.2% of those who voted .

Why not to vote?

In respect of those who didn't vote, they gave many reasons, most important of them "no identification (ID cards) suitable for election", and percentage of reported this reason is 21.1% and the second rank was "No satisfactory candidate to the voter is available" (17.8%, and at the third rank "No time is available" (17.6%, but "No satisfaction of election and the electoral law" ranked the fourth (12.5%).

Political trends for election

Percentage of voters to some certain political tendency (dependent/tribal) reached 22% of voters. While 20% of voters did not know whether the candidate they voted for has a political tendency. The percentage of respondents who said that they elected the Islamic Action Front Party reached 15.5% while 2.5% said that they voted to independent islamists not committed with Islamic Action Front Party, 3.7% voted to the Pan-Arab political trend, 0.3% to the left wing and 57.9% voted to independents and tribal candidates.

Citizens Priorities

On the contrary, of much anticipation, external issues were not the subjects that determine Jordanians priorities. Upon asking the respondents about five problems that Jordan faces and to specify the most important problem to be treated at first, "poverty and joblessness" came as the most important problem to be solved (58%), and the second was "Financial & Administrative corruption" 24.6%, while "the Palestinian issue" occupied the third rank 13.7%, and the Iraqi issue occupied the fourth rank 2.0% and the last issue was "enhancing democracy and freedom of speech" 1.4%.

Election TV Coverage

55.8% of respondents reported that Jordan TV coverage of the election campaigns was fair, against 11.4% said that they were unfair and 29.6 did not watch.

SIXTH: Absence of the parliament

It seems that the last parliament did not leave a good impression about its effectiveness with the majority of citizens. 64.3% reported that the absence of parliament affected them neither negatively nor positively; while 25% said that they were affected negatively of, the parliament's absence and 2.4% were affected positively.

Parliament effectiveness

More than a third (42.3%) of respondents think that nothing will be changed with or without the parliament, but 50.7% have an opposite view. Furthermore, 53% think that the new parliament will have an effective role in making internal political decisions and approximately a half of this percentage (24.1%) think that it will not have an effective role, while 22.6% did not give any opinion on this subject. When it comes to the role of parliament in external politics, the optimists' percentage goes down to 34.1%.

Regarding the two main problems face Jordan, in terms of priority to solve, 46.3 % of who specified the problem of "Poverty & Joblessness" as the most important problem think that the parliament will be able to provide the solution for this problem, 39.7% of those who specified the problem of "Financial & Administrative Corruption" as the most important problem, believe that the parliament will be able to provide the solution for such problem, while 41.6% disagree with them. Detailed percentages indicate that citizens are more optimistic of the parliament capacity to give solutions for the problem of "Joblessness and Poverty" more than the problem of "Financial & Administrative Corruption". The impression prevailed, about the parliament members, does not reflect that most of them are concerned of the country and society as whole: 52.6% reported that "elected deputies will be more attentive to their personal and family interests" while 26.5% said that elected deputies will be more concerned to Country and Society interests as whole".

Impartiality of elections

General impression, common with the Jordanian public opinion, is that the elections had occurred with impartiality, somewhat. 42.1% reported that the elections were impartial, against 27.9% said that they were impartial to some extent, against 18.2% reported that they were unfair.

SEVENTH: Visual & Audio Information

The most trusted resources concerning a local political news:

52.2% of respondents identified Jordan T.V as the most trusted source in respect to local political news and then Al-Jazeera TV (20.6%).

The most trust sources regarding an Arabic political news:

Al-Jazeera was identified by 35.5% of respondents ads the most trusted source in respect to Arabic political news, then Jordan TV (32.3%) then Al Arabiah TV (7.9%).

The most trusted source in respect to international political news:

34.9% of respondents consider Al-Jazeera the most trusted source, followed by Jordan TV 31.2% then Al-Rabia 8.5%.

Spreading of Satellite systems

52.4% of respondents said that they have working satellite systems at home.

EIGHTH: Computer & Internet spreading

Percentage of those who use computer is ranging at its position, 29.5% reported that they use it, compared with 29.0 for the last year. A slight increase occurred to the percentage of those who use internet (from 15.6% in 2002 to 17.4% this year). Regarding respondents who have computer systems at home, the percentage increased from 25.1% on 2002 to 27.3% in this survey.