



In Brief: Election in Jordan 2010

Standard Note: SN/IA/5737

Last updated: 28 October 2010

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Despite Jordan's reputation as a moderate country, it has a longstanding record of authoritarianism: martial law was imposed in 1967, and political parties banned. There are allegations of widespread vote-rigging at every election, and the parliament is still not representative of the Jordanian population.

Although martial law was lifted in 1989 and parties un-banned, the 2007 election was clouded by allegations of vote-buying and other irregularities on the part of pro-government forces. The composition of the last Jordanian House of Representatives was as follows:

House of Representatives 2007-2009

Party/Group	Seats
Independents and tribal representatives	104
Islamic Action Front	6

Source: Europa World Online, Jordan

In April 2008, 24 out of Jordan's 36 political parties were dissolved after their failure to comply with a new political parties law. The law required parties to have a minimum of 500 founder members from at least five governorates, and forced parties to reveal their accounts to the Government. Twelve parties, including the Islamic Action Front, successfully validated their status, while others opened legal actions in an attempt to overturn their disqualifications. Candidates for the election must register with the Central Electoral Commission (which is headed by the Interior Minister rather than being an independent institution).

In 2009, parliament was dissolved by royal decree, only two years into its normal four-year term. No official reason was given for the move, but analysts attribute it to:

...widespread dissatisfaction with the parliament, which was viewed by many Jordanians as being hampered by tribal and partisan rivalries and ineffective in dealing with pressing economic, social and political issues.¹

Early elections were called but, in another royal decree, they were then postponed indefinitely, pending electoral reform. Shortly after this, the government resigned; King Abdullah approved a new cabinet on 15 December 2009. After the dissolution of parliament last year the king took the opportunity to pass 30 decrees, including a "temporary" election law which did little to improve the distribution of seats.² The new law has raised the total

¹ Jordan, Europa World online. London, Routledge. House of Commons. Retrieved 27 October 2010

² "Not much of a choice", *Economist*, 16 October 2010

number of seats from 110 to 120, and doubled the number of seats reserved for women to 12. Measures against vote-buying are said by the government to have been toughened.

A spokesman for the opposition parties described the reforms as, "superficial, [...] they do not affect the core of the law which has turned the parliament into a public service institution affiliated with the government, at the expense of its political role."³ Seat distribution favours rural areas, where conservative tribal politicians tend to back the monarchy. Urban areas, where Jordanians of Palestinian origin predominate and the Islamists are stronger, get fewer seats. Many opposition politicians want a proportional representation system.

The next legislative election in Jordan will take place on 9 November 2010. Non-governmental organisations complained recently that government restrictions mean that they could no longer scrutinise the elections. The government had said that national and international observers would have to be supervised by the National Centre for Human Rights, a government body. The withdrawal of the NGOs would leave the NCHR as the only body scrutinising the conduct of the election.

The Islamic Action Front, the political wing of the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, is the main opposition party. Islamists held 34 out of 80 seats after the 1989 election, while a number of leftist groups were also represented. As the election results from the 2007 election (above) show, the Islamist party has more recently had difficulty in gaining much representation in parliament. The government conducted a severe clampdown on the activities of the IAF after the Gaza crisis during the winter of 2008-9,⁴ as the government accused the IAF of fomenting unrest and using anti-Israeli sentiment to its own advantage.⁵

The party has announced that it will boycott the forthcoming election. An independent political analyst said:

The IAF is the largest political and opposition party in Jordan, it can mobilise hundreds of thousands of people. It will be difficult for the government to convince people to go to the polls with the Islamists boycotting them. The mood in Jordan is generally negative before elections. Even if all other parties take part in the elections, they will not fill the vacuum left by the absence of the Islamists.⁶

Commentators say that the turnout in cities is normally low, even with Islamist participation. With the IAF boycott, it is likely to be lower still. Identity politics is becoming increasingly important in Jordan, and many pro-regime politicians fear democratic reform because they see it as leading inevitably to the empowerment of Palestinians, who make up about a half of the population.

A government spokesman has denied that the elections were in crisis and said that there would not be a low turnout. On 26 October, the government announced that international and domestic observers would, after all, be allowed to move freely around the country without escorts.⁷

³ "Jordan cabinet adopts temporary election law for 2010", *al-Shorfa*, 24 May 2010

⁴ For more information on the Gaza conflict, see the Standard Note [Gaza: The conflict between Israel and Hamas](#) of 23 January 2009

⁵ "Election 2010: Muslim Brotherhood to Boycott Election in Jordan", *IHS Global Insight*, 3 August 2010

⁶ "Jordan election officials predict large turnout in November despite Islamists' boycott", *al-Shorfa*, 27 September 2010

⁷ "Election observers may move freely", *Jordan Times*, 26 October 2010