



**Focused Studies**

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**Jordan's Municipality  
and Decentralization  
Elections 2017**

**A Political and Statistical Study**

# **Jordan's Municipality and Decentralization Elections 2017**

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**Abdullah Al-Majaly  
Ayman Khater**

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## **Excusive Summary**

Jordan municipal elections are considered tools to promote the public role in local development and expand participation in the decision-making process. The last municipal elections took place on 15 August 2017 under new legislations, seeking a new impetuous to the concept of political decentralization and forming a “Governorate Councils” for the first time in the Kingdom’s history as stated in the Decentralization Law No. 49, 2015.

This study attempts to investigate the effectiveness of the new law, developments in the political composition of the country and the strengths and weaknesses of the last municipal electoral race.

### **I. Municipal Councils**

The present Municipality Law divides most municipalities into local councils. There are 101 municipalities, including that of the Greater Amman Municipality. Thus 82 of these make up 357 municipal councils; as well, the mayors and members of 18 of these councils are directly elected.

This is a new electoral experiment in Jordan. Previously, municipal councils and their mayors used to be elected directly, however, the current Municipal Law puts forward three forms of popular representation. First, electorates fully choose all heads and members of municipal councils in the Kingdom. Second, partial representation were voters elect some members while the rest are appointed by the government as in the case of the Greater Amman Municipality. Third, no representation in specific areas of the Kingdom with the government appointing these as the case in

the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority and the Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority.

## **II. Governorate Councils (Decentralized Elections)**

These elections are held for the first time in Jordan and are part of a law applying the concept of decentralization on the governorates level and as an approach to the state whilst boosting public participation in the decision-making process to development issues.

In accordance with the Decentralization Law No. 49 of 2015, a council is formed in each governorate, called the Governorate Council; 88% of its members are elected, while the rest are appointed by government as recommended by the Interior Minister in accordance with Article (6).

The total number of seats of those Councils amount to 380, 32 of which are for the women quota and with 45 appointed by the government.

## **III. Candidates of Municipality and Decentralization Elections Map**

The number of people eligible to vote in the 2017 local elections were 4,109,423. The total number of male and female candidates were 6,517, competing for 2,444 seats; these included those competing for council mayors, members of municipalities, local councils and (decentralized) Governorate Councils. The number of female candidates was 1,160 (17.8%).

The number of candidates for Governorate Councils (Decentralization) was 1,239, including 115 (9.3%) females. The total number of municipal candidates was 4,470, including 1,041 (21.9%) females, competing for 1,961 seats.

There were 538 candidates competing for mayors of municipalities, including 4 (0.74%) females.

The above numbers indicate an average of 2.66 candidates competed for each seat which is much lower than the 16.55 in the 2016 General Election. On the other hand, it is also lower than the 2013 Municipal Election that had a ratio of 3.5 for each seat.

#### **IV. Municipal and Decentralization Election Turnout**

The number of those who voted in the last local elections was 1,302,902 according to the Independent Election Commission. This number represented 31.7% of those eligible to vote.

This electoral turnout was higher than the 2013 race that hovered at 24%. The reason for this may do with new variables, like the rise of the number of candidates to 1,556, that's a 41% which tallied with the increase in the number of voters. Another variable is the new elections for Governorates' Councils (so-called decentralization experience). A third factor, according to analysts, is the strong participation by the Muslim Brotherhood, which boycotted the 2013 municipal elections, taking part under the National Alliance for Reform.

The IEC pointed to the young nature of the population, stating that 560,000 in the 18-35 age group category took part in the 2017 local elections, that's 43% of the total eligible electorates. On the other hand, the percentage of females who actually voted of the total number of those registered to vote was 28.7% while it was 35.1% among males. The IEC also stated the number of blank papers put in ballot boxes was 145,309, 4.8%.

## **V. Greater Amman**

The Municipalities Law excludes the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) from electing its entire council, including the mayor. In other words, the mayor and 25% of the council members are government appointees. In the August 2017 elections there were 145 candidates competing for 28 seats (including 6 on women quota seats), with a ratio of 5.2 for each seat, that was less than the 5.4 ratio in 2013. However, the competition was more in Irbid and Zarqa, double that of the general ratio nationwide.

However, nominations weren't as great in number as was the voting, with available figures showing that the ballot rate within the borders of the Amman Greater Municipality was the lowest in the Kingdom, with only 17.56 percent. This percentage represents the Amman Governorate which includes the Greater Amman Municipality's 22 areas and a number of other municipalities whose participation rates are usually big. That meant the participation rates within the Amman Municipality limits was far less than the stated percentage, if we take into account that the voting rates in Amman areas in 2013 reached a mere 10.4 percent. This gives the impression that the movement of candidates didn't convince voters to go to ballot boxes as was the case in other areas.

It is to be noted that specifying the capital Amman which has 1,630,204-registered voters – through different electoral mechanisms and is the political, cultural, economic, social and scientific center of the Kingdom –raised much political, legal and human rights questions.

## **VI. Women Quota**

The number of women candidates throughout the country was 1,160 at 17.8 %in the 2017 elections. The number of women candidates for municipal councils and the Greater Amman Municipality, was 1,041 at 21.9% whereas their number for Governorate Councils was 115 at 9.3%. As for mayors of municipalities, there were only four women who competed at 0.7%. Finally, for GAM there were 10 women candidates at 6.9%.

Women managed to win 241 seats through free competition and 549 on the quota, occupying 175 seats of municipal councils, 342 of local councils and 32 of Governorate Councils and making up 32.3% of total seats, with 11% won through free competition – the highest in the history of Jordanian municipal and general elections alike. However, women lost in the so-called decentralized elections, winning only won 4 out of 335 seats. They also saw a significant defeat at the level of heads of municipalities and Greater Amman constituencies, winning none of these seats.

## **VII. Partisan Participation in Municipality and Decentralization Elections**

The elections were an opportunity for political parties to prove their abilities and popularity. However, these parties are so weak most of them were not able to announce an official elections list. Rather, they just declared their participation through the approved mechanisms and mentioning their candidates in the media. The exception to this was the National Alliance for Reform, with the Islamic Action Front (IAF) as its backbone.



On the other hand, the electoral system does not encourage partisan participation or coalitions between parties or with figures and non-partisan blocs. Rather it encouraged candidates to run on individual basis.

According to the IEC Chairman Khaled Al-Kalaldah, out of the 49 parties licensed by the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, only 34 took part in the elections process at 69.4%.

### **1. Partisan Participation**

A Ministry of Political Development study stated 399 candidates (4.6%) ran on party lines in the 2017 elections but only 87 (3.5%) managed to win seats. In contrast, partisan participation in the last 2016 general election was 10.3%.

The IAF spokesman Murad Al-Adaila announced the NAR fielded 50 members for the 2017 Municipality and Decentralization Elections, with three mayor candidates for municipalities in Irbid, Zarqa and Al-Russeifa. In addition, 21 were supported but not under the NAR and therefore not under the IAF banner. The Islamic Centrist Party fielded 50 candidates with the National Conference Party (Zamzam) putting up 20 candidates.

The leftist and Arab-nationalist parties fielded 29 candidates and supported independent candidates in different governorates like the National Unity Party which supported 23. The Communist Party put up three official contenders for membership of municipal and decentralization councils and supported a nationalist list in Karak. The Jordanian Democratic People's Party also said it fielded 25 candidates, including two as mayors in different areas.

Only the IAF under the NAR banner had a political manifesto. This absence is attributed to the lack of partisan lists as well as to the insufficient attention by political parties

to the municipal polls in contrast with the 2016 general election. This is because of the traditionally-held view that local elections are “services polls” and not “political” ones excluding the law, which does not encourage participation on basis of blocs and/or coalitions.

## **2. National Alliance for Reform**

The NAR is the only party that contested the elections on an open partisan list. Even here, it was limited to areas in the Amman, Irbid, Zarqa and Balqa governorates – especially urban electoral centers. But these lists were also absent in the rest of the kingdom, in contrast with the 2016 general election.

The NAR candidates constituted 36.6% of the total number of party candidates and 95% of the total party-based candidates run under this Islamist banner. The NAR won 43 seats (39%), making up 49% of the total partisan winners. The IAF – backbone of the NAR – is still the biggest and most widespread party in the country.

The results show the NAR won five seats in the Greater Amman Municipality, it gained the post of mayor of the Zarqa Municipality –second biggest in the Kingdom – 22 seats of local councils and 15 of Governorate Councils.

Figures also show 28% of the NAR candidates in Amman won their seats, 47% in Zarqa, 26% in Al-Ruseifa, 50% in Irbid and 37% in Balqa.

## **3. Partisan Participation Results**

According to a study by the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, 87 out of 300 partisan candidates running in different ways won in the last local elections. This

points to the weakness of most political parties who could not secure their candidates win unless they had tribal support because of the special considerations related to municipal elections, so less than a third of party candidates were able to win, 29% of the total number of candidates running on partisan lines.

Although most parties – except NAR which won 43 seats – didn't declare their candidates during the campaigns leading up to the elections, they announced them immediately after the results as follows: The Islamic Centrist Party declared it won 31 seats, the Jordanian Democratic People's Party 7 seats, National Conference 6 seats, Shura Party 4 seats, Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party 5 seats, Jordan Stronger Party 4 seats, and the People Unity Party and Arab Ba'ath Progressive Party got a seat each.

#### **4. Impact on Results on Partisan Reality**

The parties' participation in the election did not affect their reality in public life for two main reasons. First, most parties neither used their names explicitly for electoral lists nor engaged in publicity campaigns – except for the NAR. Second, results achieved by parties, 3.5%, were too modest to have any bearing on them directly except in so far as they were backed by their different tribes and clans.

#### **Conclusion**

- Many national and international institutions monitoring the Municipality and Decentralization Elections confirmed there had been no major violations of the process, except for that of what happened to the boxes in the Al-Muwaqqar Municipality. Thus, the IEC cancelled the balloting in three municipal councils there and that of the 28

districts of the Governorate Council, all of which are in the Central Badia area, southern Amman.

- The overall turnout of those that allowed to vote in the 2017 municipal elections was 31.7% but in spite of this, there was an increase in the number of candidates on the 2013 elections and which should have reflected on the turnout in a bigger way but this didn't happen. Amman witnessed the lowest turnout in the Kingdom at 17.56%, taking into account it represents the political, economic and social elite and it is the biggest in terms of population density.
- The simultaneous holding of both municipal and “decentralized” elections negatively affected the balloting in a negative way and confusing people as there was obvious failure to explain the essence and significance of the Decentralization Law.
- The elections showed again the weakness of most political parties and their inability to build popular to invest in. However, this was not the case with the Islamist IAF fighting under the NAR, capturing 49% of partisan seats and the Islamic Centrist Party, at 31%.
- Women managed to gain 11% of the seats through direct competition but not via the women quota. This is the highest percentage in the history of municipal and general elections alike for them.
- The study of the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs urges the executive authority to take legislative and practical measures to develop political parties to allow them to play a greater role in

parliamentary, local and decentralized elections, calling for the modernization of the Political Parties Law, stop state intervention in parties' role and political activity to boost partisan action and encourage party affiliation to advance democracy and fair participation.