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The role of research centers in Jordanian political decision- making | 1989-2010

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Research, Advocacy and Public Policy-making in the Arab World (RAPP) studies the effectiveness of think tanks and research policy institutes in influencing public policy in the region. It aims to establish a permanent network of self-financed think tanks and research centers across the Middle East that are better able to impact public policy in their respective countries.

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General environment of research centers in Jordan:

It is difficult to assess the role of research centers in any country without understanding the overall environment in which they operate. The activities of these centers are intertwined with the movement of society in its various aspects, with the government in its various decisions, and with organized social forces in a civil society (parties and others). These activities are also not separate from the implications of their regional and international environments.

Political literature in Jordan defined “civil society” for the first time in a newspaper article in 1923, two years after the formation of the Jordanian political entity¹. However, transforming this term into a social, political and cultural action did not take shape until after 1989, due to a series of local developments (disturbances in the South especially in the city of Ma’an, growing size of the cultural elite, and urban congestion) and international developments (collapse of the socialist model and decline of the interventionist state), prompting a succession of calls to political, cultural, and economic openness which opened the way for the establishment of private research centers².

The general environment in Jordan is characterized by three features that define, in their entirety, the reality in which research centers operate. Jordan is a demographically small country (6.1 million inhabitants), thus limiting qualified human resources, since the number of employees who are holders of a bachelor degree or higher in the entire country is less than 30,000. There are about half a million Jordanians working outside Jordan (about 8.5%), 17% of staff in Jordanian universities left in 2009 and this figure rose to 20% in 2010. This shows limitations of the sector that research centers can rely upon³.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the prevailing conservative culture is predominant in such a way that impedes researchers from exploring issues challenging the system of knowledge and values of society. It would be enough to take a look at the number of prospective or political studies on the ruling family, religious thought or tribal dimensions in research centers or universities to notice the limited space available to researchers. The system of knowledge and values is a barrier to the informal access to these issues.

The second is the political and legal feature. The vulnerability of political action traditions in the field of civil society and political freedoms is highlighted in the position of Jordan in political freedom indexes provided by international standards. Jordan is among the “not free” countries as far as civil and political freedoms are concerned. I have already supervised the publishing of the freedom standard in Jordan issued by the Higher Media Council for several years starting in 2004. I have also examined restrictions on political freedoms in media and publishing, through the Department of Press and Publications, making freedom measurement results at low levels⁴. Political and civil levels of freedom remained virtually unchanged until 2011; Jordan was ranked in international standards as a “not free” country, with political freedoms receiving 6 points and civil freedoms 5 points (the worst is 7 points)⁵.

It would be enough to take a look at government requirements for conducting field or statistical studies in any sector. An official circular issued by the prime ministry requires research centers to obtain the approval of the Ministry of Interior to conduct statistical studies, as well as prior coordination with the Department of Statistics. The circular stipulates that private sector institutions and centers shall not be granted authorization to conduct statistical studies by the Ministry of Interior without coordination with and approval of the Department of Statistics when carrying out any statistical survey (household, economic, agricultural or public opinion poll). The circular emphasizes the need to adhere to the provisions of General Statistics Law No. 8 of 2003 whereby the Department of Statistics shall be considered the only government body authorized to collect statistical information and data from respondents. The Department also required several procedures to be followed to conduct field studies (sending the Director General of the Department an official letter, specifying the title and objective of the study, clarifying the methodology of the study, indicating sample size and enumeration areas, interview method, whether personal or by phone, and identifying poll period). As for researchers, the Department requires, in addition to

the personal photo and police record, providing personal information for Jordanian researchers (full name, date of birth, mother's name, national number, place of residence, educational qualifications, and phone number). Concerning non-Jordanian researchers, they are required to provide a copy of the passport, full name, date of birth, mother's name, educational qualifications, place of residence and phone number⁶.

This environment makes it difficult for researchers to tackle the most critical issues when interpreting political movements or analyzing official political decisions. Thus, research centers focus on research which aims at justifying the government's policies or introduce policies the government plans to implement, or turn to issues not considered "taboos" by authorities or the society. This is confirmed by many directors of these centers during interviews, as they point out three dimensions in this context⁷:

A- The government requires research or studies to "market" its policy to Jordanian society, so the intellectual output of these centers would look as if it were an extension of the official propaganda machine, although few studies, in particular those conducted by some semi-official centers, do not fall under this propaganda, but are rather characterized by scientific objectivity.

I can refer to two experiences of interaction between research centers and the government. In 1995, I was commissioned by the Center for Jordanian Studies at Yarmouk University (which later became the Queen Rania Center) to conduct a study on the future of Jordan in 2015. When I asked to obtain documents on some issues fundamental for future analysis, my request was not approved for reasons I am still not aware of.

The second experience was when several official bodies asked me to prepare a study about Jordan's electoral system. Findings of the study funded by the Center for Jordanian Studies at Yarmouk University would be presented in a meeting that would bring together trade unions, political parties and representatives of the government. A dialogue would be held around the study on how political power could take advantage of it. Unfortunately, after completion of the study within approximately six months, the meeting was canceled and the study was preserved at the library⁸.

B- Successive Jordanian governments show some sort of mistrust in local centers. Sometimes, decision makers are inclined towards Western centers due to a widely held belief that they are more feasible, or because the government wishes to limit research to non-sensitive issues, particularly if research addressed strategic issues (such as the issue of health effects of Israel's Dimona reactor in the south of Jordan or issues affecting policies of certain countries such as Gulf countries).

C- The State mostly requires research centers to carry out "opinion polls". However, these polls raise methodology questions on one hand, and remain subject to questioning by society on the other. It turned out that these polls have a limited influence on government policies, which we will be tackling later.

Legally speaking, Jordanian Legislation and Opinion Bureau defined research centers as "institutions that conduct and publish studies and research, and provide consultancy in political, social, cultural, economic, humanitarian and other fields". While legislature defines public opinion poll centers as "institutions that undertake research in order to explore public opinion trends through surveys or other means"⁹. This means that legislature is mixing between advisory bodies and research centers. Despite the overlap between the two, they are not the same. In accordance with law No. 60 of 2007, Jordanian legislature considered research centers as non-profit organizations. Thus, they were granted work permits from the Companies Control Department at the Ministry of Industry and Trade to ensure the soundness of their financial positions. This was later amended and research centers were attached to the Ministry of Social Development as we will see later.

Jordanian legislation sets forth requirements for establishing research centers as follows¹⁰:

- a. Submitting an application on a form intended for this purpose.
- b. The director of the center shall be Jordanian and permanently residing in Jordan.
- c. Shall not be convicted of a criminal offense.
- d. Shall have academic qualifications or experience that match the requirements of the institution's work as appropriate and in accordance with instructions issued by the Minister for this purpose.

It should be noted that "the Minister's instructions" are to be followed in establishing and funding the center and in limiting its scope of action, as we will see later.

By tracking the establishment of Jordanian research centers, we found that 60% were established between 1990-2000, a period that followed the political openness phase after 1989, and after changes in international politics following the collapse of the Soviet Union, while 20% were present before that period, and 20% were established after 2000.

The third feature of the Jordanian general environment is economic hardship. According to most estimates, Jordan is ranked between 106 and 113 globally in terms of per capita income in 2010¹¹. The percentage of spending on research did not exceed 0.34% of GDP¹². The statement of the Chairman of the Higher Council for Science and Technology in Jordan reinforced these data, stating that scientific research in Jordan is conducted by universities and specialized scientific centers. The quality of research output is divided into two parts: supply-driven research (serving the needs of the individual), and demand-driven research (serving national needs). The chairman of HCST pointed out that 70% of the funding for scientific research in Jordan comes from the government, 27% from universities, and 3% from the private sector and international organizations.

He added that the total expenditure of Jordan on research and development as percentage of GDP increased from 0.34% in 2006 to 0.55% in 2007 and that the number of full-time researchers for every one million people reached 588 in 2006¹³.

Research centers are compelled to look for local, Arab or foreign sources of funding. And since the first and second environments are incapable of funding due to economic conditions sometimes and political and social conditions at other times, the door becomes open to look for foreign sources of funding.

Foreign funding is a major point of weakness to the work of research centers. Jordan's legal system¹⁴, in its various stages of development, stipulates that "research centers, public opinion poll centers or their staffs are prohibited from receiving any aid, financial donation or funding from Jordanian or non-Jordanian bodies. This does not include funding of joint projects or research approved by the Minister". This means that research needs the approval of a high official entity (Minister of Trade and Industry until 2007 since research centers were considered non-profit organizations under the supervision of the Companies Control Department to ensure the soundness of their financial positions or Minister of Social Development since 2008). Despite these restrictions, former head of the Bar Association Saleh Armouti addressed a letter to Prime Minister Nader Dahabi in which he says: "I wish to express my concern over the increasing activities of some research centers and associations funded by foreign bodies, since the activities of these institutions violate Islamic law and Jordanian Constitution and are inconsistent with the requirements of political and social stability". The Prime Minister responded by commissioning the concerned Minister to follow up on this matter¹⁵. Former Secretary General of the Jordanian Communist Party Yaacoub Zayadin talked about possessing documents that prove the existence of 44 foreign institutions supporting research centers in Jordan since 2003¹⁶. He pointed out that they are pushing for specific research on specific topics such as issues of minorities and others. According to some sources, the number of foreign institutions providing support to civil society institutions and research centers in 2010 amounted to about 45, mostly from the United States, Germany, Britain, Canada, Denmark, Sweden and France¹⁷. We have already addressed in another research U.S. efforts to influence Jordanian research centers through funding in order to direct research towards specific topics related to American strategic perspective towards the Middle East¹⁸.

In early 2009 and along the same lines, a statement of the National Constitutional Party called for¹⁹:

1. United national position of all fellow Jordanian parties to stop dealing with foreign offices operating in Jordan under the headings and banners of democratic development.
2. The party believes these offices, which have become a sponsor of various activities and seminars, are nothing but a foreign mischievous puppeteer. Their activity and presence in some countries of the region only seek to divide and look for and feed factors of discrimination to create sectarian and ethnic plurality and not political pluralism as a democratic, political and reformist concept. In this regard, the party emphasizes paragraph E of Article 22 of Jordanian political parties law in force which is necessary to comply with and which states that "parties shall not have any organizational or financial connections with non-Jordanian bodies or direct party activities based on foreign orders or directives". This means directing partisan activities on the basis of foreign directives is not accepted.
3. The party also notes that the existence of some research centers is based on funding from these organizations, and these bodies became a source of making money, as if Jordan is a country without a constitution or law.
4. The party points out that some parties have become part of these offices, believing that they can promote people to positions of responsibility in Jordan.
5. The National Constitutional Party has been following with great and remarkable interest some opinion polls conducted in Jordan and funded by some of these offices. Many of the poll questions addressed to citizens affect the sovereignty of Jordan and some of them incite sectarian and racial strife. This confirms the presence of suspicious and resentful objectives, and is a flagrant breach of national sovereignty.

In the same context, the Interior Ministry accused Jordanian human and civil rights centers of abusing the image of Jordan and fabricating false reports in order to obtain external funding. These centers denied the charges against them and a number of activists expressed their surprise at the charges asserting that centers are doing their part in monitoring and detecting abuses against the rights of citizens, and that charges against the centers are not based on facts²⁰. In March 2010, Jordan's Interior Minister Samir Habashneh said that "some research centers have become facades for a number of suspicious powers and are funded from abroad. Annual funding of one of these centers reaches 400 thousand dinars, and this big money turns into suspicious actions"²¹.

Directors of research centers recognize the negative impacts of external funding especially with regard to impartiality and objectivity of research. Research funded by the Jordanian government is done by "centers that promote policies of the government". Some centers only contract with the government. Most foreign funders provide funding for research centers since they began working with the government and then turned towards the centers²². Dealing with external funding takes two forms: 1- the center prepares a research project and then seeks to find a foreign organization to fund it, 2- the center seeks funding in advance and adapts with the terms of the funder. All this makes the literature of the centers lose its honest scientific research standards.

All this means that research centers operate in a largely unfavorable environment because of the restrictions that were already discussed. This is reflected in the degree of cooperation between them and decision making bodies, although Jordan was ranked 51 worldwide by the index of the quality of research centers in 2009, and was ranked third in the Arab world after Qatar and Tunisia²³.

Internally, the centers witness a number of difficulties that limit their influence on decision makers. In addition to the problems discussed in previous pages, there are the following issues:

1. Lack of coordination between the centers themselves which weakens their role as a pressure group on decision makers.
2. Poor database due to their recent inception and to the lack of adequate and modern references in their libraries.
3. Weak relationships with productive institutions that can contribute to supporting these centers.

Content analysis of the literature of Jordanian research centers²⁴:

The number of Jordanian research centers until the end of 2010 was 136. Many of these centers specialize in applied sciences²⁵, and some of them are still in the founding phase or had only been established for a short period to track their output. This made us concentrate our research on centers concerned with political, social, and economic issues (20 research centers representing all centers with adequate specifications to be worth studying). When reviewing the records of the Ministry of Industry and Trade to know the number of research centers, it turned out there are more than 300 institutions bearing the name of Research Center, but do not clearly conduct scientific research. Some of them "terminated" their establishment contracts, and output of some others is no more than publishing press reports on the status of an institution or the like. This is why we are focusing on centers that produce continuous scientific research²⁶.

After analyzing the contents of 311 researches (research papers presented to conferences and not published were excluded, some studies are from the eighties of the last century, while others are from other periods until 2010), we came up with the following findings (see Table 1 on analyzing the content of the literature of research centers):

	Name of the Center	Date of Establishment	Military and security	Political	Economic	Social	Legal	Ideological/Theoretical	Geographical scope of research
1	Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought	1981		20				80	The world
2	Arab Thought Forum	1981		20	20	15		45	Middle East
3	Center for Strategic Studies-University of Jordan	1984		25	25	50			Jordan and Palestine
4	Royal Jordanian National Defense College's Center for Strategic Studies	1985	20	30	25	25			Middle East
5	Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center (New Jordan Research Center)	1990		30		60	10		Jordan - Arab World
6	National Center for Human Resources Development	1990				100			Jordan
7	Middle East Studies Center	1991		85	5		5	5	Middle East

	Name of the Center	Date of Establishment	Military and security	Political	Economic	Social	Legal	Ideological/Theoretical	Geographical scope of research
8	Jordan Badia Research and Development Program	1992			100				Jordan
9	Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies	1994						100	The world
10	Center for Civil Society Development	1994				100			Jordan
11	Academic Center for Political Studies	1995		80				20	The world
12	Jordan Center for Social Research	1998			10	90			Jordan
13	Jerusalem Center for Political Studies	2000		70		20	10		Middle East
14	Regional Human Security Centre	2000						100	Jordan
15	Amman Center for Human Rights Studies	2000		10			90		Jordan
16	National Center for Human Rights	2002		5		80	15		Jordan
17	Jordan Center for Public Policy Research and Dialogue	2004		100					Jordan
18	Knowledge World Center for Polls	2005		50	30	20			Jordan
19	Queen Rania Center for Jordanian Studies	2006		40	20	40			Jordan

Table 1: Research topics of Jordanian centers

Social issues had the largest percentage of the studies conducted with 30% of the total topics. This percentage varied between centers, reaching 100% at the National Center for Human Resources Development due to the nature of the specialization of the center. The percentage was 90% at the Jordan Center for Social Research and 60% at the Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center (mostly on civil society), while social studies constituted 15% only at the Arab Thought Forum. Social studies revolve mainly around a number of issues such as civil society (parties, unions, etc...) and in particular the issue of women and empowerment, in addition to social freedoms, charities, cultural clubs, non-governmental organizations and social issues of refugees.

As for political issues, the overall percentage was about 28.25%, with 85% at the Middle East Studies Center, mostly about the Arab-Zionist conflict. The percentage was 70% at the Jerusalem Center for Political Studies and 80% at the Academic Center for Political Studies, concentrated mostly on academic subjects serving university educational purposes. Political research focuses on the Arab-Zionist conflict, Jordan's international relations and democracy issues, particularly the issue of elections.

Theoretical and ideological topics constituted 17.5% of the total output. Most of this theoretical literature focuses on cultural dimension and interfaith dialogue. The percentage at the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies was 100%, while it reached 80% at the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought and 5% at the Middle East Studies Center.

Concerning legal issues, the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies was prominent; approximately 90% of its academic output was about the legal aspects of human rights. The percentage drops to 5% at the Middle East Studies Center. The total percentage of studies in all centers was 11.50%, concentrated largely on human rights and legislation on local administrative organizations.

The percentage of economic topics was 100% at one center (Jordan Badia Research and Development Program), while it decreased to 5% at the Middle East Studies Center. It ranged between 10% and 25% at the rest of the centers. The overall percentage was 11.75%, mostly focusing on issues of development, unemployment, or economies of some countries in the region.

One center only conducted military-security research (Royal Jordanian National Defense College's Center for Strategic Studies). This center might have carried out other studies in this aspect, but they had not been published or are difficult to access due to the nature of the institution.

When considering the geographical areas covered by these studies, 63.15% of the research focuses on Jordan. Studies on the Middle East in general (Turkey, Iran and Israel are included in this region in these studies) accounted for 21.05%. Studies covering the world reached 15.79% and address topics such as globalization or policies of major powers in various regions of the world.

However, it is interesting to note that among the output of these centers, we have not found studies on Jordan's political decision or the relationship of these centers with the process of political decision making, except for one study dating back to an earlier period (14 years ago). This study was conducted in the context of an academic conference on the role of research centers in political decision making in the modern state of Jordan²⁷ and a seminar organized by the national Defense College in 2009²⁸. The number of published studies of some of these centers has exceeded two hundred, as is the case of the Arab Thought Forum.

Perhaps reviewing the objectives of these centers reinforces this lack of studies on political decision making and the role of research centers in it. We did not find among these goals any reference to a direct role in the process of political decision making except for the Strategic and Security Studies Center. The objectives of the center are the following: conducting security studies and research, providing consultancy for leadership and commanders of General Security Service units to take appropriate decisions in different areas of work in order to provide a better security service, conducting strategic and security studies and research, monitoring of threats, problems and criminal incidents on local and external arenas, raising awareness in security and police magazines, managing dialogues associated with them at local, regional and international levels, establishing a national security database to conduct research and studies and preparing and studying security strategies that keep pace with national, regional and international changes and help in planning, decision-making and monitoring security problems and incidents affecting national security in a way that would help in formulating future plans and conducting security studies using the best methods of academic research and applying them in forecasting and planning.

There are no references to the role of the rest of the centers in decision making. For example, the Center for Strategic Studies-University of Jordan's (which is the most in line with the State as an official institution conducting polls continuously) objectives are to "conduct studies and research in the field of regional conflicts, international relations and security". Then the objectives of the center expanded to "planning and research in new fields". After that, the center became distinct in conducting public opinion polls on various aspects of life in Jordan in particular political issues and specifically evaluating the performance of successive governments.

Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center's objectives are to "contribute to deepening and spreading culture, democracy and civic education, strengthening civil society institutions, encouraging research and intellectual input in proposing possible scenarios for modernization and change in Jordan and in the Arab world".

The Middle East Studies Center's objectives are to "provide studies and consultancy, raise awareness among intellectuals and provide accurate information to researchers". The Jordanian Center for Studies and Information identifies its tasks in "raising awareness of the nation and providing studies and consultations". The Center for Jordanian Studies (which later became Queen Rania Center), has identified its objectives in researching and studying issues related to Jordanian society and obstacles to development, and developing appropriate solutions, as well as issues related to Jordan's foreign relations. The objectives of the rest of the research centers are not different from the objectives mentioned before.

Opinion polls by research centers:

Several Jordanian research centers conduct opinion polls on many topics in different time periods. There were 46 opinion polls during the period 2000-2011. The Center for Strategic Studies-University of Jordan conducted the most opinion polls during that period. These polls were divided among the following topics:

Poll topic	Number of polls	Percentage
Democracy and human rights	11	23.9
Jordanian government performance evaluation	10	21.7
Level of Jordanian press	2	4.3
Economic situation	7	15.2
Jordanian-Arab relations	3	6.5
Jordanian-international relations	3	6.5
Women	2	4.3
Judiciary	1	2.2
Terrorism	1	2.2
Abuse of the Prophet in Western media	1	2.2
More than one topic	5	10.9

Table 2: Poll topics of public opinion poll centers

When assessing how scientific these polls are and how they are beneficial to the government in decision making, opinions vary greatly. Suffice to point out that a poll revealed that 76% of Jordanians do not want to give their views for fear of the government²⁹. Perhaps this confirms what we have said at the beginning of this research concerning the general political environment surrounding research centers.

The views of the State on these polls conducted by research centers can be seen in the position of Deputy Prime Minister (and Member of Parliament) Dr. Abdullah Nsour. He says that a lot of public opinion polls in Jordan lack credibility as they do not follow sound conventional scientific standards. For example, evaluating the performance of the government was traditionally done 100 days after its formation. However, the method of collecting data is wrong because people who collect this data mention the name of the respondent, which leads to a lack of explicit opinions due to personal embarrassment. He pointed out that after taking a look at some different poll questions and the poll method, he believes that public opinion polls are shrouded in mystery and potential duality, which will affect final results. The random sample of respondents must be inclusive of all segments of society in terms of age, gender and occupation and according to their actual percentage in society as well as other standards. He also pointed out that polls are not free from flaws and lack credibility which leads to officials of different ranks not seriously considering the results³⁰. Commenting on a poll conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies on the popularity of the current Jordanian government (government of Marouf Bakhit), he said that this poll is not scientific and has no value. If we want a political survey, it should be given on closed paper, because some people fear the government and others are ashamed of it. Dr. Nsour added: "I was contacted one day by someone from the Center for Strategic Studies-University of Jordan and asked me about my name. They said that my name is among the national sample to be surveyed. As I remember, it was the government of Adnan Badran at that time. I wanted to give my opinion but I did not want to be embarrassed by him, because it is a scientific poll and not a testimony in court. Names should not be disclosed. Thus many people are either afraid or ashamed of officials"³¹.

Deputy Bassam Haddadin pointed out that Jordanian public opinion polls are unpopular among civil and official communities. These polls are few and perhaps limited to the Center for Strategic Studies-University of Jordan. Such studies and polls are governed by motives and accuracy of statistics. Although these polls are limited, they are useful for policy makers in Jordan. However, they face lack of interest and initiative in order to be activated in formulating government policies, and remain disputed and criticized among Jordanian intellectuals. Haddadin concluded by saying that opinion polls in Jordan are limited and their impact on policy makers in Jordan is not sufficient³².

It would be difficult to link statements of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Member of Parliament with the Center for Strategic Studies-University of Jordan ranking second among the top five research centers in the Middle East (after Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies-Egypt) out of 218 centers, according to a study conducted by Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the International Relations Program – University of Pennsylvania³³.

Due to the lack of any documents or studies on the impact of polls on political decision making, I considered linking the results of opinion polls conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies-University of Jordan on the popularity of Jordanian governments with the decisions of the King to change and assign new governments. We theoretically assume that the more the government is popular or citizens are satisfied from the government, it will remain longer in power and will not be changed by the King. This shows the impact of polls on political decision making.

In order to find a logical link, we have calculated the duration of successive governments during the period 2000-2010 (excluding the current government since its term is not known). Then lifespan of the government was linked to its popularity. We assumed that the greater the government's popularity in the poll, the longer its lifespan will be and vice versa. The results were as follows:

Name of Prime Minister	Beginning - end of ministry	Duration in months	Date of poll	Percentage of public support	Ranking in duration	Ranking in popularity
Ali Abu Ragheb	June 2000 – June 2003	37	October 2000	22	1	6
Faisal al-Fayez	October 2003 – April 2005	18	October 2004	64	4	1
Adnan Badran	April 2005 – November 2005	8	August 2005	35	6	5
Marouf Bakhit	November 2005 – November 2007	24	March 2006	59	3	4
Nader Dahabi	November 2007 – December 2009	25	May 2009	62	2	2
Samir Rifai	December 2009 – February 2011	14	March 2010	57	5	3

Table 3: Relationship between the satisfaction of citizens from the government and its duration in power

The following chart shows the relationship between government's popularity and its duration in power and indicates that the relationship is almost non-existent between lifespan of the government and its popularity. This means that the impact of opinion polls on decision makers is almost non-existent. We were unable to ascertain whether the lack of poll impact is the result of lack of trust in decision makers or the result of not viewing these polls or the decision is taken for reasons not related to government's popularity and popular satisfaction.

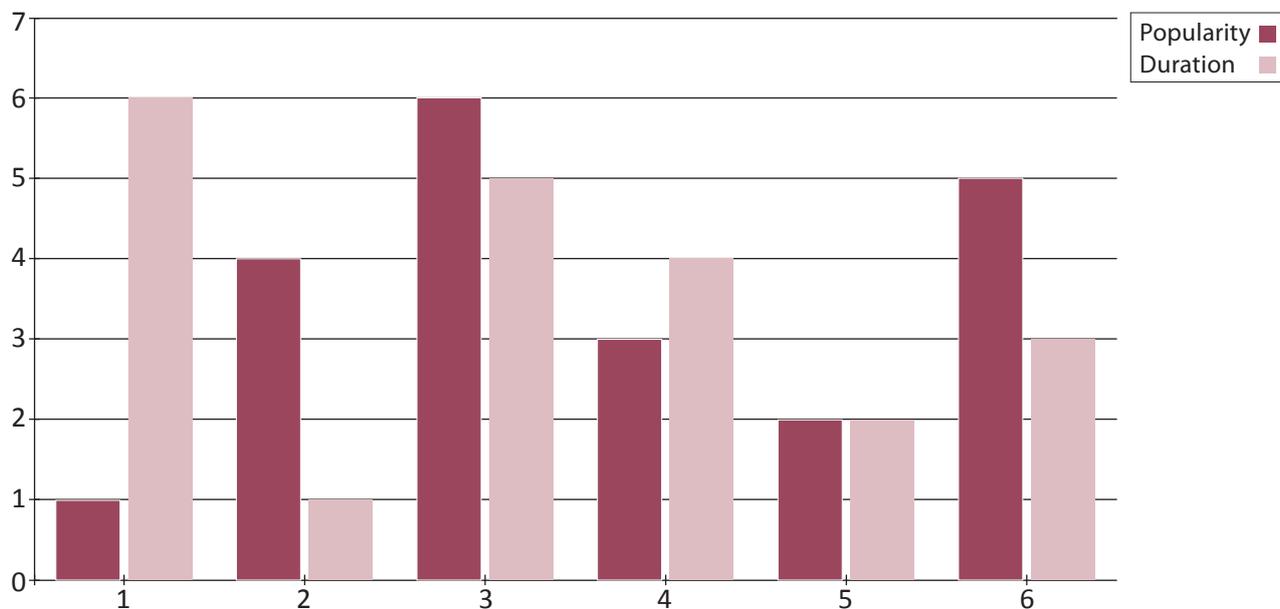


Figure 1: Relationship between government's popularity and its duration in power

According to table 3, the previous figure shows that the first government had the least satisfaction rate while it had the longest duration in power. In comparison, we find that the second government had a high satisfaction rate while its duration was the shortest among all governments, and so on with the rest of the six governments. This reinforces the lack of impact of these polls on the decision to change the government.

Relationship of research centers with Jordanian decision making:

There are many questions we should stop at when discussing the role of research centers in the process of decision-making in general. Is the role of research centers limited to a particular phase of decision making? Do research centers have a role in post decision making phase? Is there a specific mechanism for dealing with research centers by various government bodies?

In our opinion, research centers can contribute to the decision making process at three levels³⁴:

- a. Decision preparation phase: research centers contribute to creating various alternatives and providing, classifying and interpreting information, a role involving the centers along with state bureaucracy and political forces (parties and others).
- b. Decision assessment phase: providing feedback studies and receiving reports, responses and results, including the decision procedure in terms of decision making body, impacts of the decision, availability of information and the need for the decision and its importance.
- c. Decision amendment phase: providing a study on the gaps and errors that can be later detected and that require intervention to address them.

To translate these aspects into the practical domain, the role of research centers was monitored based on the model adopted by the study discussed in previous pages³⁵.

I- Research sample: A study by Dr. Adnan Hayajneh included 8 research centers and identified 11 governmental institutions related to political decision making, namely: Ministries of Planning, Foreign Affairs, Finance and Information, Ministry of State for Cabinet Affairs, Royal Court, Office of the Crown Prince, General Intelligence Department, House of Representatives, Senate and Institute of Diplomacy.

II- Research topics: The study attempted to determine the following aspects in the relationship between the centers and official institutions:

1. Institutions are familiar with existing research centers in Jordan relevant to the competence of the institution (measuring the availability of information among staff in a given ministry on research centers concerned with issues that fall within the scope of work of the ministry).
2. Availability of research centers or organizations within official institutions. Jordanian ministries differ in terms of the availability of affiliated research centers that contribute to the rationalization of decisions at this ministry, or through the presence of research services or departments within it. It is natural that the Ministry shall be less cooperative with external institutions if such institutions are available within it.
3. Sources of information on decision topic at official institutions: attempting to identify sources from which the ministry derives information for its work, and whether the centers are one of the sources.
4. Official institutions accepting the idea of cooperation with research centers relevant to the work of the concerned institution, and whether there are joint workshops and seminars and exchange of publications and scientific data between institutions and centers.
5. Availability of a special budget for academic research in official institutions. Does the ministry allocate sums of money in its budget for academic research or specific studies? If the ministry does not have the benefit of such allocations, it will be less inclined to cooperate with the centers.

6. Extent of communication between research centers and institutions; centers showing readiness to conduct research for these institutions (initiative of the centers to offer their services to ministries).
7. Willingness of government employees to enroll in research centers at the end of their service in their institutions, which promotes cooperation between institutions and centers due to the availability of such individuals who are familiar with both governmental institutions and centers.
8. Extent of cooperation between centers and institutions in various stages of decision preparation, whether by direct request or other means.

Results: The most significant results of the study referred to previously are the following:

1. 20% of the formal institutions do not know of the existence of research centers in Jordan, they do not have any information about research centers in Jordan that are relevant to the competence of the ministry.

The level of information in institutions that know about the existence of these centers is superficial and lack clarity. It is closer to public information rather than relevant and accurate information. This applies to 80% of these institutions, and perhaps this confirms the weak connection between government institutions and centers.

2. Although 80% of government institutions have the budgets for the purposes of conducting studies and research, results of the study indicate that the percentage of government information sources (own sources) on the decisions of these institutions do not exceed 20%. It is the same percentage of information obtained by these institutions from universities and public and private research centers.

This means that government institutions rely on public and private centers as a source of information (data), but do not resort to them to conduct decision making studies in most cases. This shows that these institutions (that know about the centers) track the output of these centers. All these institutions confirmed that they follow new academic research related to the topics of interest to these institutions, but we were unable to determine the access percentage from all these studies.

3. There is some level of cooperation between centers and institutions. Aspects of this cooperation are highlighted in the following:

A. Receiving invitations to participate in academic seminars and workshops held by the centers. However, among the list presented by the Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center for studies on Jordanian civil society during the period 1990-2009 which included 188 studies³⁶, we did not find any study indicating the impact of civil society bodies in general and research centers in particular on political decision making. We also did not find any study on the nature of the relationship between private and public (affiliated with universities) centers and the different state institutions, despite the participation of both parties in academic seminars that end with the conclusion of the seminar.

The National Dialogue Committee created to address political reform issue in March 2011 held several meetings with research centers for consultation regarding some reform issues as a model of relative cooperation between the two parties³⁷.

B. Willingness of employees in official institutions to enroll in research centers at the end of their service in their institutions. 100% of respondents (employees at these institutions) expressed this willingness.

4. Institutions evaluating academic output of research centers. 80% of employees in the institutions familiar with the centers described output as being good, while 20% described it as being of average quality.

As from the perspective of research centers, 40% of these centers do not have any role in offering consultations or even reporting to decision making institutions at different levels. The remaining 60% provide reports or consultations to institutions, but most of these consultations are done in an irregular and not continuous manner. This means that the center may contribute once or twice in a decade, making this contribution less important than that suggested by the percentage listed.

A study on the Middle East Studies Center shows that it provides 35 governmental institutions including supreme state bodies with all the output of the center (studies, reports, books), and that the center provided 15 academic consultations during ten years, but it does not know how beneficial these consultations are³⁸.

It is interesting to note that the initiative in the relation between the two parties is taken by the centers. No feedback was given by 60% of the institutions, while feedback of the rest of the institutions was transient and irregular.

Available data shows that the average number of researchers in research centers is 24, mostly non-residents in these centers. 11% of these researchers have previously worked in decision making institutions with governmental experience, and can be a bridge between government and centers.

Concerning governmental research centers, we find they are relatively more related with government institutions than private centers. The relation between the two parties is reflected in the following:

A. Half of governmental research centers provide consultancy related to the state. The other half offers such consultations on an irregular basis. This means that the rate of the relationship between the centers and government institutions is between average and good levels with regard to consultation. It should be noted that most of the governmental research centers are related to public universities.

As for topics of the reports, they all submit reports to government institutions. These reports have a routine nature and are used as sources of information rather than providing decision alternatives.

B. The study showed that half of the governmental centers received commissioning requests from government institutions to carry out specific studies (could be a one-time commissioning), while the other half received no commissioning from any official body.

C. Although half of the governmental centers receive financial support from the government, the content of studies is not compatible for the most part with the government's policy. Perhaps this raises a problem that needs our attention. Funding is often linked to the nature of the studies carried out by research centers. However, the model before us does not theoretically reinforce this matter, as it contradicts the statements of some officials that research of these centers is along the lines of the government.

Examining the issue does not refer to the invalidity of the argument of interdependence between funding and orientations of research centers. Official research centers are the closest to being institutions with a degree of financial independence or are only functionally associated with one of the departments, without the department being able to take punitive measures against these institutions in case of differing research orientations with the institution.

Examples of research submitted to the State:

1- Study on the Ma'an crisis:

The study focused on dealing with the unrest in southern Jordan in 2002. The city had witnessed a similar disturbance in 1989, prompting the Center for Strategic Studies-University of Jordan to carry out a field study on the overall situation of the city and to present findings to the Royal Court³⁹.

The report is divided into five parts. The first part provides a general introduction of Amman governorate. The second part offers a diagnosis of the vital economic reality in the city to identify the most influential variables in the emergence of violent protest. This part of the report attempts to discuss and refute the current impressions of the city, while identifying aspects of the city subject of study different from other Jordanian cities and determining its specificity, to help to identify mechanisms for addressing the situation.

The third part of the report is an in-depth study of the city's social structure, by studying tribal structure and value orientations of the city and then measuring the role of these traditional ties in shaping collective reactions of the city's population and in managing daily life matters of the population in natural and unnatural conditions.

In the fourth part of the study, researchers carry out a historic tracking since the first crisis in 1989 up to the second in 2002. Then they proceed to the interpretation and analysis of both crises to determine the extent of change in crisis motives and to identify constant variables of the crisis that would help in determining proposed solutions.

The study was based on personal interviews with the parties to the crisis (former and current officials). The state also contributed by providing a huge amount of official data. Then researchers surveyed the system of values prevailing in the region. This was done by using anthropological research methods including the research team living with some of the people of Ma'an for a period of time.

Researchers reached a number of results presented as recommendations to the political power, including:

- A. Creating a popular committee in the city that the State should deal with seriously, particularly as the demands of the popular committee are totally reasonable.
- B. Promoting cooperation with elites of the city close to citizens, and impartiality of the state agencies and bodies towards all parties.
- C. Improving performance of local government institutions representing the Central State in the city to overcome the existing crisis of trust even if that meant making some changes like general security bodies.
- D. Imposing law and order on everyone in the city and stopping the release of those accused of criminal offenses to satisfy some of the notables would help overcome the crisis of trust and improve the image of general security for citizens.
- E. Crisis in the city cannot be isolated from the national context; political and economic development in the Kingdom would be positively reflected in the city.
- F. Developing infrastructure to improve the economic situation in general. Focus should be on highlighting the characteristics of the city or governorate that can be exploited for implementing new investments managed in modern ways to avoid repeating past industrial experiences.

G. Finding channels of expression for young people through clubs and associations or exploiting university facilities in the city.

There are paragraphs in this study that sharply criticize State bodies. The study (pp. 57-59) points out to the differences within State bodies in their interpretation of the crisis and to the adoption of a “flimsy security theory” by the state. The study indicates that “the General Security Service considers itself as one of the clans of the city and not a representative of the authority to enforce the law” (p. 67). It also noted that intelligence reports about the situation were closer to reality, but authority dealing with the dignitaries who make up one of the truce mechanisms was negative. (pp. 68-69).

We could not find any studies or documentation indicating how much the State benefits from the results of this study except that it was submitted to the Royal Court. The Royal Court is a body headed by a person trusted by the King and is often a former prime minister. The Court serves as the link between the government and the King, and its importance stems from the fact that its head has access to most of the King’s official correspondence.

2- Study on Jordan’s electoral system:

The electoral system to be applied is a controversial issue between government and parties. After 1989 elections in which Islamists achieved high results taking advantage of the list system, the State replaced the list system with the one vote system.

Controversy erupted over the advantages and disadvantages of different electoral systems, prompting some government bodies to request from the Center for Jordanian Studies to prepare a study on the most appropriate electoral system for Jordan. Researchers carried out a comparative study of all electoral systems, and then studied the evolution of Jordan’s electoral system and its relationship with political and social development in Jordan. A model that the study deemed the most appropriate for Jordan was developed. The study included influential indicators in determining the most appropriate model such as: relative weight of political forces, tribalism, women, political extremism, political participation, performance of the political system, electoral districts, relationship between the voter and the candidate, population pyramid, partisan system, equal opportunity, constitutional constraints, level of political stability, ease of the electoral process’ administrative procedures, election monitoring, and pattern of the prevailing political culture.

In its recommendations to the government, the study concluded that the State has two alternatives: either adopting the open list system with the division of the State into an equal number of allocated seats, or the voter shall have two votes, one for a single-seat district and the other for a proportional list on a larger scale.

However, the government did not adopt any of the two models, and resorted once again to the one vote system that leads to the low representation of partisan forces in the legislature.

Conclusion:

The most important results of our study are as follows:

1. The role of research centers (governmental or private) in Jordanian political decision-making is very limited and remains confined to non-sensitive issues.
 2. There is a lack of evidence that shows that the State is guided in its decisions by outputs of research centers.
 3. Initiative of the relationship between the two parties is usually taken by research centers not by government institutions.
 4. Academic output of research centers is predominantly social studies (civil society and women).
 5. The finding that the society and government officials doubt research centers is more negative than positive, in terms of the level of their outputs or in terms of motives of foreign funding for research of these centers.
- Jordanian research centers operate in a politically, economically and socially stressful environment. The relationship between the centers and political and economic decision making bodies is not only irregular but is often unilateral.

On the other hand, it is clear that official research centers are closer to decision making centers than private centers, but following up outputs of these official centers does not show the clear impact of this relationship.

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The other type of civil society institutions does not register at the Ministry but is closely related to its work like the National Council for Family Affairs, National Center for Human Rights, and NGOs registered according to special laws such as the Jordan River Foundation, the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development, the King Hussein Foundation, and the Jordanian Red Crescent. See details at:
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24. I wish to thank graduate students in the Political Science Department who have contributed to sorting out the contents of studies published by these centers (excluding books translated from languages other than Arabic and publications produced by these centers). The number of studies (with a great variation in the size of these studies in terms of number of pages and variation in output abundance between centers) was 311.
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Dr. Mustafa Hamarneh, director of the center at the time of the study, told me that the study was submitted to the Royal Court.

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