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## An Analytical Reading

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On March 22nd, 2022, Jordanians cast their votes to elect their representatives in municipal and governorate councils and the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) Council, as well as mayors, in the first local elections after merging the Laws on Municipalities and "Decentralisation" into one law. Each voter cast three ballot papers: one in a box for electing the mayor, a second for selecting members of the municipal councils or the GAM Council, and a third for selecting members of the governorate councils.

The total number of eligible male and female voters, who fulfilled the conditions to participate in elections, stood at about 4,599,602, 47% of whom were men and 53% were women. It was noted, according to age groups, that the percentage of young voters (35 years old and below) reached 44%. A similar percentage (43% of voters) participated in the elections, which is promising.

A total of 1,016 candidates were running for the **governorate councils'** elections in 158 electoral districts across the Kingdom. They were competing over 230 seats, 59 of which were reserved for the female quota (82 seats by appointment). 865 candidates were men (85%) and 151 were women (15%). The number of young candidates (Below 35 years old) reached 114 (11% of the total of candidates), of which 87 were men (10% of the total number of male candidates) and 27 were women (18% of the total number of female candidates). According to the Independent Election Commission (IEC), political parties nominated 42 candidates, 25 of whom were men and 17 were women; while the number of young partisan candidates (35 years and below) stood at four candidates, including one young woman only.

## Table No. 1: Number of candidates running for the governorate councils' elections across the Kingdom

| | Total Candidates | Male Candidates | Female Candidates |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Candidates | 1016 | 865 | 151 |
| Number of young candidates (below 35 years old) | 114 | 87 | 27 |
| Number of candidates from political parties | 42 | 25 | 17 |
| Number of young partisan candidates (below 35 years old) | 4 | 3 | 1 |

A total of 519 candidates were running for **mayor**, competing over 100 seats. They were all men, with only 23 young candidates (35 years and below), forming only 4% of the total number of candidates. According to the IEC, political parties nominated 36 candidates, all of whom were men, without any young candidates among them.

## Table No. 2: Number of candidates running for mayor across the Kingdom

| | Total Candidates | Male Candidates | Female Candidates |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Candidates | 519 | 519 | 0 |
| Number of young candidates (below 35 years old) | 23 | 23 | 0 |
| Number of candidates from political parties | 36 | 36 | 0 |
| Number of young partisan candidates (below 35 years old) | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The total number of male and female candidates competing over 918 seats in **municipal councils'** elections reached 3,005. 200 of the seats were reserved for the female quota across 409 electoral districts. The number of male candidates stood at 2,328 (77%) and the rest were women (677 women, 23%). 10% of the candidates were young (below 35 years old). A total of 315 candidates competed

for municipal council seats, including 224 men (71%) and 91 women (29%). The number of party-backed candidates was 42 (25 men and 17 women), among them were four young people under the age of 35, 3 men and 1 woman.

## Table No. 3: Number of candidates running for the municipal councils' elections across the Kingdom

| | Total Candidates | Male Candidates | Female Candidates |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Candidates | 3005 | 2328 | 677 |
| Number of young candidates (below 35 years old) | 315 | 224 | 91 |
| Number of candidates from political parties | 42 | 25 | 17 |
| Number of young partisan candidates (below 35 years old) | 4 | 3 | 1 |

The **GAM Council** elections were distributed across 22 electoral districts. 106 candidates competed over 22 seats, with 89 men (84%) and 17 women (16%). 6 seats were reserved for the female quota (14 seats by appointment and one-third of seats were equal). The total number of candidates from the youth category was 9 (8%), of whom 8 were men and only one was a women, political parties nominated 8 men, with only one young candidate, and not a single woman.

## Table No. 4: Number of candidates running for the GAM Council elections across the Kingdom

| | Total Candidates | Male Candidates | Female Candidates |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Candidates | 106 | 89 | 17 |
| Number of young candidates (below 35 years old) | 9 | 8 | 1 |
| Number of candidates from political parties | 8 | 8 | 0 |
| Number of young partisan candidates (below 35 years old) | 1 | 1 | 0 |

Political Parties and Local Elections in Jordan (2022)

# THE SECRET BEHIND 30%

The number of male and female voters who cast their votes reached 1,363,465, with a percentage of less than thirty percent (29.64%), one of the lowest voter turnouts in the history of the Jordanian general elections, on local or parliamentary levels. This unprecedented percentage raised the concern of authorities, observers, and all political parties in the country since it reflects the state of "uncertainty", even among the groups that wish to participate and actually did. Statements issued by the head of the IEC revealed that there were nearly 165,000 blank votes, which is over 12% of the total number of voters, and a little less than 4% of the total number of electors, indicating the electors' diminishing trust in the political process and their reluctance to participate in it.

**Table showing the numbers of electors, voters, and blank votes**

| Number of eligible voters | Number of voters | Blank votes |
|---|---|---|
| 4599602 | 1363465 | 165000 |
| 100% | 29.64% | 3.6% |

One of the main reasons behind the decreased voter turnout is citizens' reluctance to participate in elections, particularly in the overpopulated Amman and Zarqa governorates (over half of the total population of the Kingdom). The following table shows voter turnout in each governorate, compared to those in the last parliamentary elections (2020):

| Governorate | Voter Turnout in the 2022 Local Elections | Voter Turnout in the 2020 Parliamentary Elections |
|---|---|---|
| **Table No. 5: A comparative table showing the voter turnout in the various governorates of the Kingdom in the 2022 Local Elections and the 2020 Parliamentary Elections** | | |
| Amman | 14.75 | 16.6 |
| Irbid | 40.61 | 39.2 |
| Zarqa | 16.96 | 21.8 |
| Karak | 56,37 | 54.6 |
| Madaba | 45.92 | 45.1 |
| Balqa | 37.17 | 36.3 |
| Maan | 59.35 | 50.2 |
| Tafileh | 54.33 | 49.3 |
| Aqaba | 33.21 | 37.8 |
| Jerash | 59.45 | 50.9 |
| Ajloun | 62.57 | 49.4 |
| Mafraq | 61.08 | 45.4 |
| General rate | 29.64 | 29.9 [1] |

The previous table shows that voter turnout in the last local elections decreased in three governorates: Amman, Zarqa, and Aqaba, while 9 governorates recorded varying increases in the number of voters. This recurring phenomenon requires comprehensive and long-term reforms and urges the State, civil society institutions, and political parties to develop appropriate strategies to activate the political life in these governorates.

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(1) Ratio after including the three *Badia* districts.

**Figure 1: the voter turnout in the various governorates of the Kingdom in the 2022 Local Elections and the 2020 Parliamentary Elections**

■ Voter Turnout in the 2020 Parliamentary Elections ■ Voter Turnout in the 2022 Local Elections

| Governorate | 2020 Parliamentary | 2022 Local |
|---|---|---|
| General Rate | 29.9 | 29.64 |
| Mafraq | 45.4 | 61.08 |
| Ajloun | 49.4 | 62.57 |
| Jerash | 50.9 | 59.45 |
| Aqaba | 37.8 | 33.21 |
| Tafileh | 49.3 | 54.33 |
| Maan | 50.2 | 59.35 |
| Balqa | 36.3 | 37.17 |
| Madaba | 45.1 | 45.92 |
| Karak | 54.6 | 56.37 |
| Zarqa | 21.8 | 16.96 |
| Irbid | 39.2 | 40.61 |
| Amman | 16.6 | 14.75 |
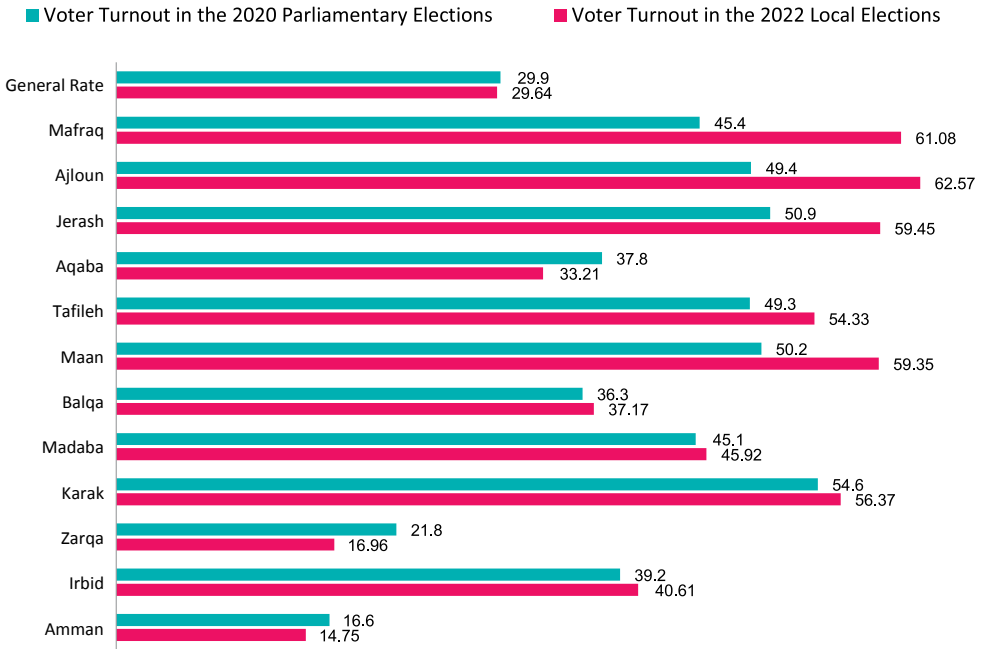
The reluctance to participate in the general elections garnered the attention of State institutions, political parties, civil society institutions, research centers, and the media after low voter turnout (less than 30%) was witnessed twice in less than two years. Adding fuel to the fire, a rate of up to "two-thirds" or even 70%, is recurrent in many negative indicators revealed by the results of the Jordanian public opinion polls. Over two-thirds of Jordanians do not follow the political updates in their country, including those directly affecting their lives and future, such as the recommendations of the Royal Committee and amendments to the Laws on Political Parties and Elections, and related Consitutional amendments. This same percentage maintains a more pessimistic view of the future, considers that their living conditions have not improved during the past years, and does not maintain the required level of "social trust", including with friends and neighbours. This same group usually maintains the lowest level of confidence in governments, parliaments and political parties, which makes the reluctance to participate in the elections a deeper and more dangerous aspect of a phenomenon that pertains to the trust gap between State officials, decision-makers, and society on the one hand, and public opinion in its vast majority on the other hand. This trust gap is like scissors, the larger the distance between its sharp blades, the greater the danger.

**The reasons for the reluctance to participate in its different dimensions, some aspects of which have been clarified, can be attributed to the following factors:**

**First:** The diminishing confidence in the political process and the elected institutions emanating from it, including parliament, and municipal and governorate councils. Jordanians elect regularly and periodically, however, their participation in elections does not bring about a fundamental change in the public policies or approaches adopted by State departments to manage public affairs.

**Second:** The electoral behavior of a large group of Jordanians is still controlled by the conviction that election results are pre-arranged. This conviction still fuels the reluctance to participate. These convictions were perhaps born out of past electoral experiences that were characterized by the crude intervention of other government administrations and agencies. As a result, the expression "Electoral Engineering" has become widely used, in reference to government interventions aimed at controlling the results of ballot boxes.

**Third:** Some attribute one of the reasons for the reluctance to participate in politics to the spread of "black money" in the electoral process, or what is known as the "vote-buying" phenomenon, which, in one way or another, predetermines the election results, or part of them. This phenomenon does not guarantee "equal competitive opportunities" between the different candidates, amid questions about the reasons for the "laxity" of the State and law enforcement agencies in addressing this phenomenon, and whether this laxity results from weak capacities for monitoring, control, and accountability, or if it stems from political reasons represented in the desire of governmental actors to bring certain profiles to decision-making positions in the elected institutions.

**Fourth:** Municipalities have suffered from significant economic and financial pressures, leading to their inability to provide appropriate services to citizens aspiring to improve their living conditions. Moreover, the stumbling in the Jordanian "decentralisation" experience cast further doubts on the usefulness of participation and the expected results.

**Fifth:** The "uncertainty" over the State's sincerity, through its various institutions, to achieve a "breakthrough" in political reform still dominates the convictions of a large portion of Jordanians. This is mainly due to the local and parliamentary elections experience two years ago and the fact that they were not set up in a climate of political détente and increase in liberty caps following a series of legislations and practices that further restricted public space. These included repressing youth movements and social media activists, the cybercrime law, the position of the teachers' syndicate and its activists, as well as the various forms of interference and "electoral engineering" witnessed by syndicates and professionals.

**Sixth:** The optimism that prevailed following the conclusion of the "Royal Committee to Modernise the Political System" quickly dissipated amid additional constitutional amendments made by the government in virtue of the committee's recommendations, stripping the executive authority represented by the government of many of its powers, weakening the belief in the sincerity of the Jordanian reform-renaissance plan. Furthermore, the practices that accompanied and followed the work of the committee, such as arrests and restrictions on the public sector's activists and some of its syndical and professional institutions, contributed to the consolidation of these convictions among larger portions of the population.

**Seventh:** Undoubtedly, the unprecedented economic and social pressures under which Jordanians suffer, as well as the economic crisis exacerbated by Covid-19 and the Ukrainian crisis, rearranged the priorities of the Jordanian household and lessened the Jordanians' interest in political participation.

**Eighth:** If the aforementioned reasons explain the phenomenon of low voter turnout in the general elections and apply, in varying degrees, to the various governorates of the Kingdom and its population, then the reluctance in electoral districts with a majority of Jordanians of Palestinian origin seems worse, with an additional set of reasons that require special rectifications in these districts and for this large portion of citizens.

We witnessed a significant decrease in the participation rate of the capital's residents' in the GAM Council elections (11.33%), but there are figures that further prove the prevalence of reluctance. Out of the 22 electoral districts in the capital Amman, 8 major districts recorded polling rates of 10% or less. While some districts of the capital, with a tribal population structure, recorded a high voter turnout of 64% (Uhud) and 57% (Bader Al-Jadidah), in other districts, voter turnout did not exceed 4% such as in Abdali, 6% in Basman and 7% in Zahran and Jubaiha. In fact, what applies to some districts of Amman also applies to other districts in other governorates.

Unfortunately, the chronic reluctance of this group of citizens to participate in politics in general, and in elections in particular, did not receive sufficient attention from successive governments. We did not see any development of plans and strategies urging this group of citizens to participate. Instead, we witnessed critical, misplaced, and inflammatory statements issued by ministers, accusing the "people of Amman" of preferring to go on picnics on election day and making the most of the sunny weather rather than going to the polling stations to cast their votes!

# POLITICAL PARTIES AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

The biggest surprise of the 2022 Local Elections was perhaps the decision of the largest Jordanian opposition party, the Islamic Action Front[2], to "suspend" its participation in the elections. The party chose to use the expression "suspend the participation" instead of boycott, to fend off any future accusations of "negativity" and preferring boycott over participation: accusations that were long met with denial from the party and the "mother party" (the Muslim Brothers) spokespersons. The party had started preparing its electoral campaign and lists before deciding, a few weeks before the elections, to suspend its participation.

The second surprise of the elections was the unprecedented results obtained by the Islamic Centre Party (also known as the Islamist Centrist Party), allied with the National Congress Party "Zamzam" under what became known as the "National Coalition" party. The party obtained nearly a quarter of a million votes in the last elections, relying on declared and undeclared candidates, in alliance with persons with representative standing within the Jordanian tribal community, or persons with a distinguished bureaucratic past.

All that aside, the participation of political parties in the 2022 Local Elections did not differ from their participation in the 2020 Parliamentary Elections, except in levels of participation enthusiasm. In general, political parties attach greater significance to parliamentary elections than to local elections. This is a dilemma that explains "to a certain extent" the reasons for the political parties' weak participation in local elections and the low results. This must be overcome and this approach must be reconsidered. The local elections are not less important than the parliamentary elections for political parties, as long as the municipal and governorate councils are the first step towards linking party elites and the masses of voters and citizens. Long-standing democratic experiences have always indicated that many leaders who were heads of State or government passed through the mayoralty of major municipalities in their countries. When in office, they demonstrated high competence in managing public affairs and improving services, likening their experience to an "entry ticket" to positions of sovereign power.
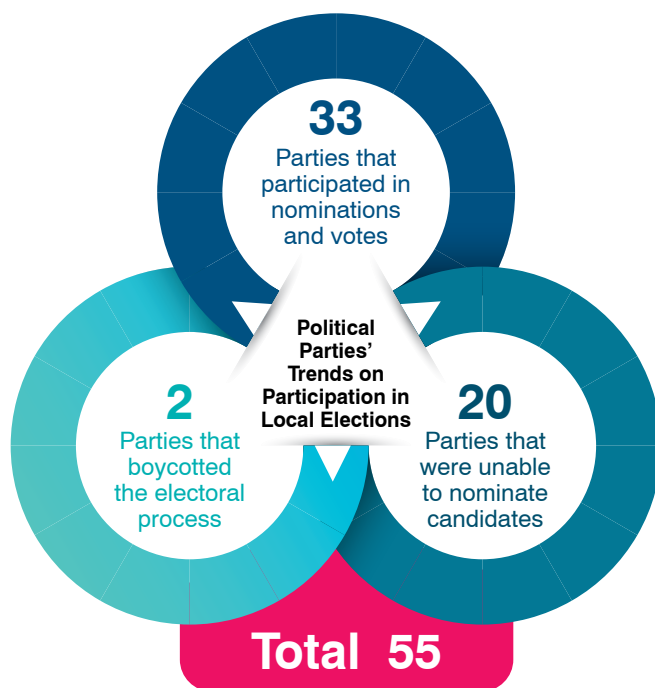
The parties that participated in electing the 19th parliament (in 2020) are almost the same ones that participated in electing the heads and members of municipal and governorate councils and the GAM Council. The parties that were unable to nominate candidates for the parliamentary elections were in turn unable to do so for local elections. Their numbers exceeded one-third of the number of political parties registered in the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs (MoPPA)

(2) The party is seen as a political arm of the "dissolved" and "lost juridical and legal personality" of the Muslim Brotherhood, according to the ruling of Jordan's Court of Cassation in mid-July 2020.

before the parties' reference and registration were transferred to the Independent Election Commission under the recent constitutional amendments in 2022.

Even the only party that boycotted the parliamentary elections for declared political reasons, the Rescue and Partnership Party, boycotted the local elections for the same reasons without any official announcement. The party justified the election boycott, in meetings with some of its leaders, by the lack of confidence in the political and electoral process, accusing the authorities of "electoral engineering" and prearranging results. The party also rejected the outcomes of the "Royal Committee to Modernise the Political System." However, the new addition this time is that the party was not the only one to boycott the elections. The Islamic Action Front followed suit for the same stated reasons.

**Figure 2: Political Parties' Trends on Participation in Local Elections**



**33** Parties that participated in nominations and votes

**Political Parties' Trends on Participation in Local Elections**

**2** Parties that boycotted the electoral process

**20** Parties that were unable to nominate candidates

**Total 55**

Contrary to the experience in democracies based on multi-party parliament, the researcher encounters difficulties in obtaining accurate figures and data on the participation of each party in the Jordanian general elections, both parliamentary and local, namely candidate names and election lists. There is a disparity in the numbers and estimates, even the official ones, about the number of participating parties, the names of their male and female candidates, and the electoral districts in which they are competing.

While the IEC estimated the number of participating political parties at 25, the MoPPA stated that their number has reached 33, a more accurate number, after AQC researchers asked the registered parties, one by one, whether they've participated in or boycotted the elections.

The reason behind this disparity is that the IEC does not require registering candidates to disclose their partisan identity, or to even acknowledge it. However, the MoPPA requires the submission of a written letter from the political party stating its participation, the names of its candidates, and their electoral districts. This is at least to estimate the size of the financial contribution required of the candidates to run under the party's name, slogan, and programme, and if they wish to apply for the financial support stipulated under the political parties' financial contribution system for 2019.

One of the reasons that further complicate this issue is that many political parties do not disclose the partisan identity of their candidates, or of some of them, and prefer they compete in the elections under their social identity, meaning familial and tribal identities. They consider that the candidates' partisan identity may negatively affect the number of their backers and supporters, who are mostly linked by kinship and social and regional ties. Some of them have a "negative image" of parties and partisan life in Jordan, as indicated by successive public opinion polls conducted in recent years.

Information obtained by AQC researchers from parties participating in the elections indicates that 33 parties participated in the elections in its four cycles: governorate councils, the GAM Council, mayors, and members of municipal councils, with 183 candidates, including 52 women. These numbers reflect candidates running under their partisan identities or their tribal and familial identities.

The IEC's documents revealed that 25 political parties had participated in the elections, with 128 candidates nominated in various districts out of a total of 4,646 candidates across all districts, meaning less than 0.3% of the total number. These figures included 8 candidates for the GAM Council, 42 for governorate councils, 36 for mayoralty, and 42 for municipal council membership. 4 of the candidates have been elected for the GAM Council, 11 for governorate council membership, 10 for mayoralty and 14 for municipal council membership, with a total number of 39 winners out of 1,340, also slightly less than 0.3%.

When comparing the IEC's and MoPPA's lists of participating parties, it is revealed that there were 5 parties in the IEC's list that were not on MoPPA's list, including the party with the biggest win in the elections, the Islamic Centre Party (there are also Al-Mustaqbal, Al Ansar, Al Nahj Al Jadeed and National Unity parties). There were also 13 political parties in MoPPA's list that were not mentioned in the IEC's list, which further complicates the scene.

## Table No.6: Kingdom-wide Participation of Political Parties in Local Elections[3]

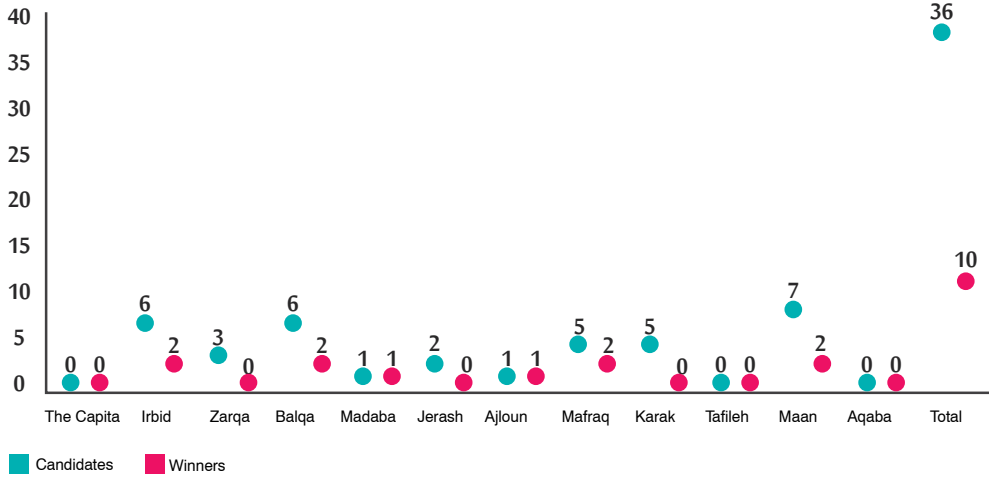| Governorate | Governorate Councils | | Mayoralty | | Municipal Councils | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Candidates | Winners | Candidates | Winners | Candidates | Winners |
| The Capital | 11 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| Irbid | 10 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 2 |
| Zarqa | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| Balqa | 5 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 12 | 5 |
| Madaba | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Jerash | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| Ajloun | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Mafraq | 0 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Karak | 4 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Tafileh | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Maan | 1 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Aqaba | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 42 | 11 | 36 | 10 | 42 | 14 |

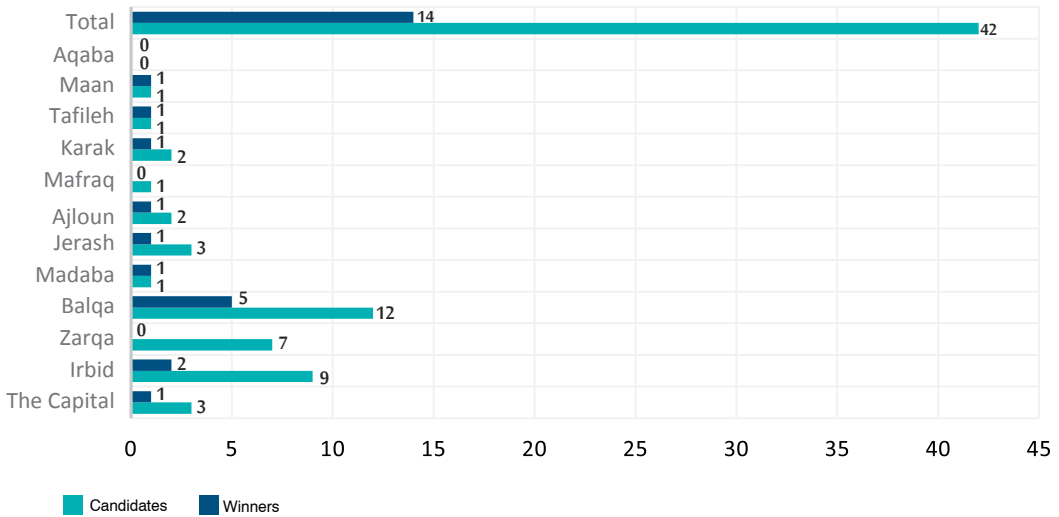## Figure 3: Participation of political parties in the governorate councils' elections across the Kingdom
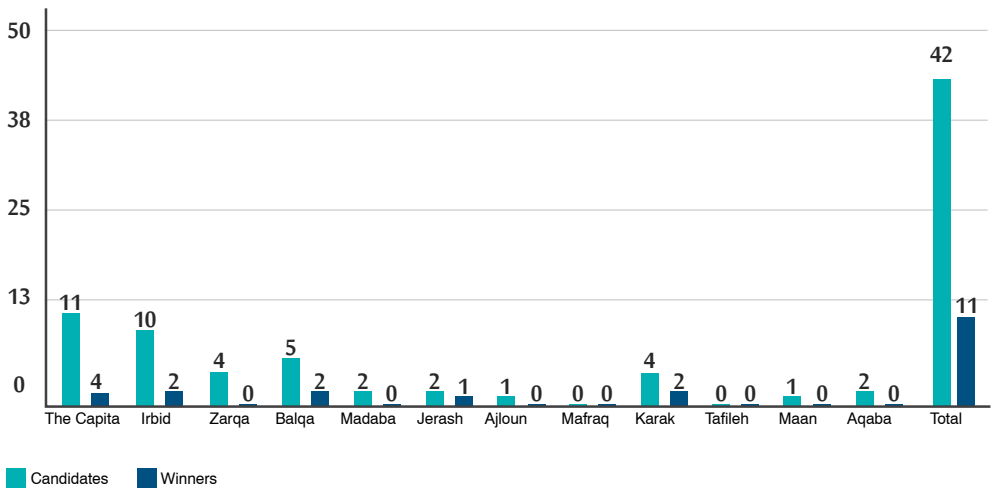


(3) Independent Election Commission (IEC).

**Figure 4: Participation of political parties in the municipal councils' elections across the Kingdom**

Legend: Candidates (teal), Winners (magenta)

| Region | Candidates | Winners |
|---|---|---|
| The Capital | 0 | 0 |
| Irbid | 6 | 2 |
| Zarqa | 3 | 0 |
| Balqa | 6 | 2 |
| Madaba | 1 | 1 |
| Jerash | 2 | 0 |
| Ajloun | 1 | 1 |
| Mafraq | 5 | 2 |
| Karak | 5 | 0 |
| Tafileh | 0 | 0 |
| Maan | 7 | 2 |
| Aqaba | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 36 | 10 |



**Figure 5: Participation of political parties in the mayoralty elections across the Kingdom**

Legend: Candidates (teal), Winners (dark blue)

| Region | Candidates | Winners |
|---|---|---|
| The Capital | 3 | 1 |
| Irbid | 9 | 2 |
| Zarqa | 7 | 0 |
| Balqa | 12 | 5 |
| Madaba | 1 | 1 |
| Jerash | 3 | 1 |
| Ajloun | 2 | 1 |
| Mafraq | 1 | 0 |
| Karak | 2 | 1 |
| Tafileh | 1 | 1 |
| Maan | 1 | 1 |
| Aqaba | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 42 | 14 |

By distributing the elections' candidates and winners on the main political and party-backed currents, the Conservative National Islamic movement, represented by the "Centre" and "Zamzam" parties (National Coalition), received the biggest share of nominations, votes, and seats, followed by centrist parties that usually call themselves the programmatic national parties. Left-wing parties and the nationalist movement, with their various formations, were at the bottom of the list.

# THE ISLAMIST-CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

The Islamist-Conservative movement, outside both the Islamic Action Front and the Partnership and Salvation Party, had over half the number of candidates, with a total of 97 candidates; 77 males and 20 females. The Coalition Party stated in a press release that 41 candidates on its lists won the elections, with a success rate of 43%; it won the presidency of 11 municipalities, and 11 of its candidates were elected in governorate councils, and 5 others in the GAM Council, 14 in the municipal council, in addition to 9 elected female candidates.

As it is known, this movement mainly includes: the Islamic Centre Party (ICP) (84 candidates; 65 males and 19 females), followed by the National Conference Party "Zamzam" with seven candidates (6 males and one female only). Once the election results were announced, it turned out that six elected candidates joined the "National Coalition"; the framework that will bring both parties together in one integral unit, under the aforementioned name.

A candidate of this movement (from the Zamzam party) winning the presidency of Greater Irbid Municipality - the second largest city in Jordan - is a landmark in this movement's performance and in the local elections overall. It also scored other equally important results, as it appeared that the party had candidates whose partisan identity was undeclared. How else can we explain their 41 earned seats, when the IEC announced that the total number of seats won by the political parties combined was only 39 seats? And winning 11 mayorships, when the Commission states that the parties won only 10 mayorships? And 5 seats in the Amman Municipality Council, when the Commission's numbers reveal that only 4 candidates affiliated with a party were elected as members in this council?

The number of votes gathered by this movement accounted for nearly a quarter of a million (241,622) votes, and in our calculations which include the winners, losers, and members of the coalition who are not part of the two component parties, the movement gathered 247,214 voters, with a percentage over 18% of total votes reaching 1,363,465 votes.

In comparison with the last parliamentary elections (2020), the total votes obtained by the ICP accounted for 49,349 votes, or 3.56%, while the Zamzam party received 17,053 votes or 1.23% only. This means that the total votes gathered by the two parties in the movement did not exceed 66,402 votes, with a percentage below 5% (4.79%) of total votes. Thus, what made the results of this movement increase nearly four times within two years? How was the movement able to reap all these gains?

In order to explain the phenomenon of unprecedented success of the Islamist-Conservative Movement, its supporters attribute it to the movement succeeding in building partnerships and alliances with social figures that have significant tribal and bureaucratic influence in their regions and constituencies. Furthermore, they attribute the success to the movement's efficient and effective management of its electoral campaigns. It is absolutely difficult for the observer or researcher to conclude that the political base of this movement has reached this level of expansion; even in the previous parliamentary elections, a study prepared by Al-Quds Center for Political Studies showed that one of the reasons for the "Islamic Centre" movement's triumph was mainly due to its "electoral tactics". The proof of this is that most of the party's candidates did not declare their partisan identity, but also, most of them were not registered in MoPPA or the IEC as party members. The most prominent winner of the Greater Municipality presidency from the movement did not campaign under partisan identity, although, as he said, he did not hide it, but preferred to represent a broader spectrum of political and social forces in the governorate.

In another interpretation of the results, it can be said that the local elections, unlike parliamentary elections, are dominated by policies and services rather than politics. Furthermore, a good way to manage electoral campaigns is by selecting the candidates who are best suited to provide services to their constituencies and people, those who are involved with the concerns and interests of the popular social bases and those who represent them the most. Leading sources in the movement say that they made the right choice this time; in allying or including in their lists candidates who have such characteristics from different regions.

There is a third explanation for this movement's inflated achievements that is being circulated by political parties - mainly the opposition - and independent observers, related to the desire of powerful governmental bodies to "elevate" this movement, with the aim to compensate for the IAF's "boycott" of the elections on the one hand, and to make it perhaps a more moderate "Islamic" alternative, closer to State institutions and its official policies in general, on the other.

Whatever the case may be, the challenge facing the new party emerging from the "ICP" and "Zamzam" coalition is in making intensive efforts to ensure consistency and harmony in the performance of its elected candidates with the party's programme, and for everyone to work as representatives of one political - partisan reference. The party had previously failed to form a large and harmonious bloc in recent parliaments, given the different backgrounds and references of those it counted as winners based on their social, rather than partisan, identities.

# THE LEFTIST AND NATIONALIST PARTIES

This movement includes three nationalist parties: the Arab Socialist Baath Party, the Jordanian Baath Progressive Party, the National Movement Party, and four leftist parties: the Jordanian Communist Party, the Jordanian People's Democratic Party "Hashd", and the Popular Unity Party. These six parties gather under the umbrella of "The Coalition of Leftist and Nationalist Parties". As for the fourth leftist party, the Social Democratic Party, it is not a part of this coalition, and has its own proposals.

The leftist and nationalist parties participated in the local elections with 19 candidates (10 males and 8 females), 5 of whom were elected as municipal council members but none as mayors. They collectively received 12,216 votes, which is less than 1% (0.89%). Certain candidates and winners, though few, ran in the elections under a local and tribal cover, and not under partisan banners and slogans.

In the previous parliamentary elections, this movement received a total of 18,816 votes across all its electoral districts, constituting at the time 1.36% of the total votes. It was noted that two leftist parties of this movement did not have any candidates: the Jordanian Communist Party and the Popular Unity Party, which had previously participated in the last parliamentary elections.

In fact, the results of this movement were not surprising. The reason for its fall in local elections compared to parliamentary elections is twofold: the first being the parties' lack of interest in municipal and local work in general, and the predominance of political slogans and stance over their activities; the second is the absence of two out of the seven parties that took part in the parliamentary elections. These parties sat out local elections despite not declaring a boycott or suspending their participation, as was the case with both the "Partnership and Salvation" and "Islamic Action Front" parties.

# THE CENTRIST PARTIES

Twenty-six political parties categorised as centrist/nationalist/programmatic parties participated in the elections with 68 candidates (45 males and 23 females): 8 parties with only one candidate, 10 with two candidates, 2 with three candidates, 2 others with four candidates, one party with five candidates, another with six candidates, a party with seven candidates, and a last one with the highest number of candidates, which is eight.

These parties combined won 21 candidates, including 3 mayors, and the rest were elected as members of municipal and governorate councils, garnering a total of 147,016 votes or 10.7%. Their results were close to those in the last parliamentary elections, which reached a total of 131,770 votes with a close percentage.

The weights and volumes of these parties are largely disproportionate, as reflected in the results of the last general elections. The National Charter Party (newly-formed) received nearly 39,000 votes and won two mayorships, while the National Current Party received only 132 votes. In the previous parliamentary elections, the Jordanian United Front Party received nearly 24,000 votes, while the Jordanian Raya Party was the least represented with only 14 votes.

The following tables show the number of votes obtained by each political party participating in the elections compared to the 2020 Parliamentary Elections as shown in the first table, while the second table shows the participation of each political party in the local elections, with the number of its candidates and winners, based on the IEC's data:

Table showing the number of votes received by the Jordanian party movements in the 2022 Local Elections and 2020 Parliamentary Elections

| Table No.7: Results of the Political/Partisan Movements in the 2022 Local Elections and 2020 Parliamentary Elections | | |
|---|---|---|
| Movement | 2022 Local Elections | 2020 Parliamentary Elections |
| The Islamic Conservative Movemen [4] | 241622 | 66402 |
| The Leftist-Nationalist Movement [5] | 12216 | 18816 |
| The Centrist-Programmatic Parties[6] | 147016 | 131770 |

(4) Not taking into account the two boycotting parties: The Islamic Action Front and the Partnership and Salvation Party. The concerned parties are the Islamic Centre Party and the National Conference Party (Zamzam), which have recently united within the framework of the National Coalition Party.

(5) Two leftist factions did not participate in the local elections: The Jordanian Communist Party and the Popular Unity Party.

(6) The map of centrist parties has changed over the past two years, some parties joined and others left, but this movement has almost preserved its electoral size.

## Table No.8: Number of Candidates for the Parties Participating in the Local Elections[7]

| Party | Governorates | Mayorship | Municipal Council | Amman Municipality Council | Overall Total | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Males | Females | Total |
| Islamic Centre | 21 | 29 | 27 | 7 | 65 | 19 | 84 |
| The National Conference Zamzam | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Nationalist Movement | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Al Baath Progressive | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Al Baath Socialist | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Social Democratic | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Shura | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Justice and Reform | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| National Union | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Future | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Al Anssar | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Freedom and Equality | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Sho'ala | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Nature | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Al Mouatana | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Equality | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Nabd Alwatan | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| National Charter | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| Al Hayat | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| National Current | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Jordan Baytona | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Al Nidaa | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Al Nahj Al Jadeed | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Jordanian National | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| National Unity | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Overall Total | 42 | 36 | 42 | 8 | 94 | 34 | 128 |

(7) The information is provided by the ICE and includes 25 political parties, according to the commission's statements.

# THE NON-BOYCOTTING AND NON-PARTICIPATING PARTIES

According to MoPPA's website, the number of registered political parties was 55 at the time of the elections, 33 of which participated, at most, and two parties boycotted. This means that 20 political parties did not participate in the elections, 7 of which were too recent to be able to participate, formed right before the local elections, while the rest of them failed to nominate candidates for the elections. This is a frequent and increasing phenomenon, as 6 political parties have previously refrained from or failed to nominate candidates during the 2020 Parliamentary Elections, without taking the decision to boycott the elections or suspend their participation.

This phenomenon, which trippled in less than two years, indicates the existence of a large number of non-serious parties, reflecting another phenomenon of "effortlessness" in creating a political party without it even being linked to a political project or a program and vision, or a desire to work long-term, to enhance the party life in the country. The majority of these parties stems from the personal desire of a limited number of their founders, to have a political presence, however it may be, or to satisfy a need related to the social and political status of this group of founders.

## THE BOYCOTTING PARTIES

A statement released by the Executive Office of the Islamic Action Front[8] included an elaboration of the main reasons behind its decision to boycott the local elections. The decision was due to what it considered "an accumulation of negative practices by the officials and the persistence of an approach of exclusion, restriction and political targeting, which is an unfavourable environment for political participation." Adding that "this exacerbated the disappointment of the Jordanian people, including the party's base."

The Executive Office considered that: "The practices we are witnessing on the local political scene remind us of previous elections in 2007 and 2020, when the will of the public was blantatly disregarded through the engineering and falsification of the election results, further burdening the government and society, increasing popular outrage, and losing confidence in the State's institutions."

The statement adds that "the party's approach throughout its history and the history of the Islamic Movement is based on participating in parliamentary, municipal, syndical and other elections in order to achieve the supreme national interest," stressing that the party was always keen to open the door to dialogue with any

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(8) The party›s statement on January 25, 2022.

of the country's components, such as political forces, parties, national and tribal personalities, or official bodies, as well as to participate in the Royal Committee to Modernise the Political System, in hopes of changing the laws and practices regulating the political life in Jordan, albeit in a cumulative manner."

However, the party saw that "the authorities, instead of ingraining the positive atmosphere it tried to spread after the outputs of the Royal Committee were issued, some of which we agreed on and others we rejected, passed constitutional amendments that circumvent these outputs, clash with the Jordanian people's interests, and directs the political system towards absolute monarchy, undermining the general mandate of the government."

As for the party's opponents, and some observers keeping track of developments within the Jordanian Islamic Movement led by the "Muslim Brotherhood", they attributed the decision of "participation suspension" to internal strife, between a group calling for a boycott due to the reasons presented in the aforementioned statement and a second group that believes that the interests of the party lie in participation, based on previous boycott experiences. This comes amid concerns from both groups that the party and its candidates will be targeted by certain State departments and institutions, in order to prevent them from achieving results that are consistent with the scale of their influence and representation. Either way, the party did not have high expectations for the desired results of the elections, as long as tension and mistrust define its overall relationship with State institutions and agencies.

The Partnership and Salvation Party did not feel the need to issue a statement announcing its boycott of the local elections, considering it a given after boycotting the 2020 Parliamentary Elections on the one hand, and its critical position on the outcomes of the "Royal Committee to Modernise the Political System" on the other hand. It was recently noted that the party's level of trust in the feasibility and seriousness of the political process led by State institutions is steadily decreasing. Further, the party is intensifying its political discourse opposing the Jordanian political system and is getting closer to forming a coalition with political movements, parties, and personalities affiliated with the extreme opposition on the Jordanian political spectrum.

# SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The political parties' participation in recent local elections is full of lessons and conclusions for the upcoming elections, especially since the country is awaiting major elections in the upcoming year or the one after. This experience should highlight the main recommendations and suggestions that must be mainstreamed for the benefit of the various parties and actors on the political and social scenes, be it the government with its various administrations and agencies, or the political parties and civil society institutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**First:** The government and the National Assembly must work on actualising the eight goals and sixty-one recommendations set by the "Royal Committee to Modernise the Political System" to enhance local administraion, which mostly revolve around sustainable development, popular oversight, integrity, independence, social cohesion, good governance, rule of law, accountability, transparency and public participation.

**Second:** Urgently amend and develop relevant legislations and take into consideration the guiding rules included in the recommendations of the Royal Committee, which were issued after the Local Administration Law was referred to the House of Representatives, including the Public Administration Law, the Law on Organizing Cities, Villages and Buildings, and the Real Estate Ownership Law, the Public-Private Partnership Law, the Profession Licensing Law and other relevant laws, as well as their relevant regulations and instructions.

**Third:** The government must promptly provide the governorate councils with the necessary logistical, technical, and advisory services in their various areas of actions. Additionally, it should fulfill its obligations in terms of submitting the approved budgets in a timely manner, without bureaucratic obstruction or delay, enabling these councils to perform their role and enhance citizens' trust in the "decentralisation" process.

**Fourth:** The government must organise initiatives to assist municipalities in paying off their debts, increasing resources, rationing and decreasing expenditure, adopting all the required oversight, accountability, and transparency measures, and preparing plans and programmes to support the capabilities of local administrations.

**Fifth:** The government is required to intensify its motivational messages to citizens in order to increase their participation in political and public life, including local and parliamentary general elections, adding reassuing messages on the safety of participation and describing it as a national right and duty, provided it matches its words with actions.

**Sixth:** The government, with its various administrations and agencies, must work without hesitation, delay, or fear, to increase public participation by ensuring freedom of expression, speech, press and media, and to enable civil and party-affiliated institutions to carry out their activities without disruption. Furthermore, it must adopt enough confidence-building measures to bridge the gap between citizens and state institutions, by releasing detained activists and social media activists, and addressing the pending issue of the "Teachers Syndicate", as without such concrete actions, it is difficult for citizens and activists to trust that Jordan is on an irreversible path towards true, comprehensive, and non-selective political reform.

**Seven:** The State, through its various institutions, must fully consider the "repertoire" of ideas and recommendations concluded by the royal discussion papers, the committees' recommendations and reform initiatives, the latest being the "Royal Committee to Modernise the Political System" in order to establish active and equal citizenship and apply the principles and values of justice, rule of law, and equal opportunity, as well as to promote national cohesion and uniting Jordanian national identity, and encourage different citizens, regardless of their backgrounds, affiliations, and origins, to strive towards a civil-democratic State that does not discriminate against its citizens on any basis and preserves the rights and freedoms of all its political, social, civil and partisan entities and components.

**Eighth:** Addressing the phenomenon of election boycott in constituencies with the least political and electoral participation requires the adoption of measures and policies, some in the immediate and short term, and others in the medium and long term. In the immediate term, the State and its various institutions, must establish plans and programmes that send motivational messages coupled with messages of reassurance needed for this category of citizens, urging them to participate. Also, they are required to give way to political parties and civil society institutions to play their role in spreading awareness and urging citizens in these electoral districts to participate without any restrictions or obstacles. Whereas in the long term, addressing this phenomenon is a national matter par excellence; it revolves around the reform-renaissance project; the project of a democratic civil citizenship State. There are no solutions to the dilemmas of any group of citizens outside of the general and comprehensive national-democratic project.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLITICAL PARTIES

**First:** Political parties must abandon the "implicit perception" of disregarding local elections in practice and highly regarding them verbally. Municipal and governorate councils are the link in the chain of communication between party elites and the masses of citizens; an individual that fails to be effectively present in these councils fails to provide a convincing citizenship model on the political party's ability to

assume the responsibility of providing services and promoting development. Work at the local level has always been the path of the political party and its leaders to access parliament, government, and power.

**Second:** Political parties must focus on and prioritise preparing for the general elections at all time, not only during the few weeks preceding the elections. Selecting the most appropriate candidates, preparing programmes, equipping the electoral "machines", and studying the political and social power balance in electoral districts are continuous tasks that must be undertaken by the party before and after the elections, and not only for a season spanning a few months or weeks.

**Third:** Political parties should expand the scope of their political and social alliances. Local elections have their own "specificities" stemming from their nature, as service provision prevails over political visions and slogans. Hence, voters tend to choose the candidate they see best able to serve them, rather than his intellectual and ideological backgrounds. Experience has proven that adding certain local, social leaders on a political party's lists can enhance its chances and presence, and maximise its chances of winning.

**Fourth:** After winning the elections, political parties that choose to rely on non-member candidates based on their social "importance" or their previous bureaucratic status, must integrate these people into their vision and programme, and assist them in performing their jobs within the party's vision, based on its socioeconomic programmes. Candidates who are said to be part of a certain party may not act independently; we should learn from the inability of certain parties that managed to have deputies in the parliament but failed to turn them into a large bloc bearing its slogan, programme and vision. This experience cannot recur on the level of municipal councils, governorate councils, and the GAM Council. There is no harm in candidates who have presented their partisan identity, but the problem would be with parties failing to integrate those candidates into their work mechanisms, vision and programme.

**Fifth:** Political parties should give special attention to activating their role and presence in the electoral districts that have the lowest voter turnout rates, starting with the districts in which the voting rate is below 10%. This is not the government's responsibility, but rather the responsibility of the parties and civil society institutions, each in their own way and tools.

**Sixth:** Parties that have failed to nominate candidates for general elections twice in less than two years must reconsider their raison d'être and seriously consider the challenges preventing them from adapting to the requirements of the new law on political parties. Further, they should, without delay and in a positive spirit, seek to merge with other parties and form broader party coalitions, or dissolve themselves

and join the existing parties closest to them in terms of vision and programme. What is the point of a political party without election participation and access to power, on both local and national levels?

**Seventh:** Political parties should give more importance to expanding the number of youth and female members, empowering the existing ones, ensuring that they reach leadership positions within the party, and adopting special mechanisms and arrangements to ensure this, even if it requires the adoption of the "quota-seats" system for women and youth within the party's leadership.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

**First:** Civil society has special responsibilities in terms of spreading awareness on the importance of political participation, voter turnout in general elections, and the organisation of society in general. An organised society is a society capable of modernisation, development, and change. Without horizontal organizational frameworks that bring together citizens on common issues and goals, our society will remain at the mercy of vertical frameworks and structures based on kinship ties (familial and tribal).

**Second:** Civil society institutions should draw roadmaps to promote participation in the elections, whether local or parliamentary, and start, as suggested to political parties, with the districts that recorded the lowest levels of participation and voter turnout.

**Third:** Civil society institutions have a role to perform in helping candidates, including party members, to run the most successful electoral campaigns, based on their knowledge of the best Arab and international experiences, especially for women and youth candidates, without excluding party candidates.

**Fourth:** Civil society institutions play a role in empowering general elections winners, particularly those of local elections, due to the gap between their qualifications and the tasks they are required to accomplish during their service years, provided that the empowerment and habilitation programmes are serious, creative, and not a charade or to report on achievements.

**Fifth:** Civil society institutions, each within its competence, must follow-up on any governmental effort to actualise the recommendations of the "Royal Committee to Modernise the Political Organization" to enhance local administration, specifically in terms of suggesting the policies and amendments that must be integrated into the relevant legislations. If governments falter in carrying out this task, it is the duty of civil society institutions, by virtue of their function and mandate, to urge the government and the National Assembly to fulfil this obligation.