THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Youth Engagement in Jordanian Political Parties: Reality and Challenges

Amin Ali Al-Azzam

Associate Professor, Department of Bayt Al-Hekmah (House of Wisdom)
Al al-Bayt University, Jordan

Abstract:

This study aims at investigating the reality of Jordanian youth participation in political parties, in addition to discussing the main challenges facing young people and their engagement with political parties. Accordingly, the basic questions that need to be answered in this study are: What is the reality of Jordanian youth participation in political parties? What are the major issues and challenges affecting Jordanian young people's involvement to political parties? Are these challenges stem from the parties itself, or is it cultural obstacles? This study will use the qualitative research methodology that will help develop a better understanding and analyzing the views of young adults (ages 18-30 year) towards the political parties.

The study concluded that there is a mutual distrust between political parties and Jordanian young people. Moreover, Young people feel like they lose influence and there are many challenges facing them to be represented in the institutional political institution in order to participate effectively in decision-making process.

Keywords: Youth, political parties, challenges, democracy, development

1. Introduction

Democracy has been defined by different researchers in various ways. However, almost all researchers agree that democracy refers to a form of government in which the people select their leaders and hold their leaders accountable for their policies and their actions or inaction. The citizens decide who will represent them in parliament and in government. They do so by choosing between competing parties by holding free and fair elections at regular intervals. In addition, it has been argued that no contemporary democracy has excelled without political parties.

To meet the requirements of democracy, politics require social organizations that collect interests, and communicate them to the political and governmental institutions. Political parties, beside the other non-governmental organizations of the civil society, are such organizations that collect and aggregate social interests.

Political parties are universally regarded as central institutions of democracy as it plays a critical role in every process of democratic politics, starting from attracting citizens to join them; electoral process; forming governments and holding governments accountable. Accordingly, the importance of citizen's participation in political parties stems from the fact that this participation provides unique benefits, including opportunities to influence public decisions and to be a crucial component of the democratic decision-making process.

In addition, meaningful democracy requires the meaningful role of youth in political decision making. The participation of youth in democracy is essential to build more democratic and prosperous societies and to enhance democratic processes and institutions.

Throughout history youth population has considered as a creative force, a dynamic source of sustainable innovations, and more importantly they participated in a catalytic role in creating significant changes in political systems, power-sharing dynamics and economic opportunities. Development theorists argue that there is growing importance of youth participation in development practice. They added that there are numerous benefits associated with the inclusion of youth in politics, as their integration in public life and the policy-making process will foster inclusive growth and development in different sectors.

Moreover, it has been argued that youth involvement is a central theme of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Young people make up one quarter of the world's population, and one third of the population of the Arab region. Additionally, since the Arab Spring, youth have been shaping social and economic innovations, challenging values, cultural and social norms, and breaking new ground.

Kofi Annan former Secretary-General of the United Nations stated that 'Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.'¹

¹<http://archive.ipu.org/dem-e/idd/2014-youth.htm>

Nevertheless, generally, there are many challenges facing young people and their engagement with democracy in general and political parties in particular. These challenges vary widely from political system to another and from developing to developed countries.

1.1. Research Objectives

In Jordan case, it has been argued that amplifying youth participation is critical for overall social development, political stability and citizen empowerment. In reality, however, it has been noticed that young people in Jordan have depressingly low levels of political interest as they are turning their backs on democratic institutions due to several reasons, among which lack of trust in political institutions particularly political parties. They also have very poor opinions of politician's behavior (especially parliamentarians and partisans). Accordingly, this study set out to investigate and examine the reasons why this is so, and to further examine the extent of young people's political engagement.

1.2. Research Arguments

- Although, theoretically no one can deny the importance of youth engagement in the political arena particularly in light of recent events and democratic transitions, in the Arab States as well as other regions, but at the practical level, there is no concrete intervention included.
- Although Jordanian youth have remained politically active through 'political movements', but still disengaged and disillusioned with and in political parties and excluded from policy development.

1.3. Research Questions

In order to achieve the research objectives, the current study aims to answer the following questions:

- What is the reality of Jordanian youth participation in political parties?
- What are the Jordanian youth attitudes towards the political parties particularly and democratic institutions generally?
- What are the major issues and challenges affecting Jordanian young people's involvement to political parties?

1.4. Research Design and Methods

The study is qualitative in design and based upon a consideration and analysis of the views of young adults (ages 18-30 year). The main purpose for limiting our study to this age group was that the Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines 'children' as persons up to the age of 18, then youth starts from age 18 years. More importantly, this age group is eligible to be founder or member to political parties according to article 6\B-2 and article 18 of Law on Political Parties No. (39) of 2015.²

1.4.1. Sample Description

The ideal sample size for a population of 60000 students from three public universities³ with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 4% is 595. Accordingly, a total of 595 questionnaire were distributed; of these, 510 were completed and returned with a response rate of 85.7%. The majority of respondents, 278 (54.5%) were females, and 232 (45.5%) were male as shown in figure 1.1. The reason behind the high percentage of female students with respect to males in the whole study population is attributed to the fact that females' enrollment rate in public Jordanian universities is 51.6% compared to 48.4% for males according to the Department of Statistics (DOS)⁴.

Figure 1: Gender Distributions

²Article 6- (B). A founding member shall fulfill the following conditions: 1. Has been a Jordanian national for ten years at least. 2. Has completed his eighteenth year of age.

Article 18 – Every Jordanian completing eighteen years of age shall have the right to join the party after being announced as established in compliance with this Law, provided that fulfills the requirements stated in Paragraph (B) of Article (6) of this Law excluding item (5) of that paragraph.

³Al al-Bayt University (AABU), located in the north-east of the capital Amman, University of Jordan (UJ) in the capital of Amman, and Al-Hussein Bin Talal University (AHU) located in the heart of the southern region.

⁴<http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/jordanian-womens-report-on-the-occasion-of-the-international-womens-day-statistical-perspective/>

In terms of age groups, the respondents aged 18-24 comprised 82% of the total; those between 25-30 years accounted for 18% as clear in figure 1.2.

Figure 2: Age Distribution

However, in relation to educational level the vast majority of the respondents 85% (435 respondents) were in Bachelor level, and 15% (75) respondents were in higher education level, of whom 50 were in master degree and the other 25 are in PhD programs as figure 1.3 shows.

Figure 3: Level of Education

2. Conceptual Framework

The first and most important step in the research process is to identify the basic concepts of the study. The most important concepts in this study are; political parties; youth; and youth inclusion.

2.1. Political Parties (Definition, Role and Importance)

2.1.1. The Origin of the Word 'Party'

The word 'party' as a group of persons organized to advocate for their common interests has been known since ancient times. In the Republic, Plato mentions the political factions of Classical Athens⁵, and in the Politics, Aristotle deliberates the tendency of different types of government to produce factions⁶. Some argue that, the definition of parties is changeable and must be related to the era and the social and political milieu in which the party lives. Accordingly, defining a party in antiquity differs from its definition in the Middle Ages, and from a party during the French Revolution and its aftermath.

Additionally, they argue that although the idea of the party differs markedly in structure and in functions from time to time and from place to another, but there is a fixed common element in all parties. This element is the moral solidarity that unites party members. The party members are united by shared ideas that make them work together to put their policy into practice. However, the modern concept of political party originated first in Europe and the United States at the end of the 18th or early 19th centuries along with the electoral and parliamentary systems⁷. And according to Andrew Heywood, political parties exist in almost all the countries of the world, whether these countries are developed or developing, with very few exceptions, those countries with authoritarian rule (military rule, theocratic regimes, absolute monarchy)⁸.

⁵Plato (1935). *The Republic*. Macmillan and Co, Ltd.

⁶Aristotle (1984). *The Politics*. The University of Chicago Press. p. 135.

⁷Metcalfe, Michael F. (1977). 'The first 'modern' party system? Political parties, Sweden's Age of liberty and the historians'. *Scandinavian Journal of History*. 2 (1-4): 265-287. doi:10.1080/03468757708578923.

⁸Heywood, A. 2002. *Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

2.1.2. Definition of Political Party

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, a political party is defined as 'a group of persons organized to acquire and exercise political power' (<https://www.britannica.com>). According to the ACE Encyclopedia, a political party is defined as 'an organized group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions, that seek to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office' (<http://aceproject.org>).

Andrew Heywood defined political parties as a group of people organized to gain political power, whether by electoral process or other means⁹. One of the most well-known researchers on political parties Giovanni Sartori defined a party as 'any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free), candidates for public office'¹⁰. Another important definition to political parties provided by Anthony Downs who defined political parties in terms of their goals as 'a political party is a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election'¹¹. Based on the above definitions, it is clear that although there is some difference in the understanding of political parties, but they all emphasize that there is an essential element that characterizes political parties which is the participation in elections and the interest to gain public offices and mandates.

According to Andrew Heywood, there are four characteristics that distinguish political parties from other organizations¹²:

- Parties aim to win elections, control government, and thereby influence government policies;
- Parties generally aim for adopting a broad issue focus, and representing and integrating of different social groups. While other organizations' aims limited to specific issues or concerns of particular social groups;
- What distinguishes political parties from factions and interest groups is that political parties-to varying degrees-are shared by an ideological identity;
- Political parties are the main actors in the democratic transition process.

2.1.3. The Importance of Parties (The Relationship between Political Parties and Democracy and Development)

Diamond and Morlino in their article *The Quality of Democracy* argue that democracy, at the minimum, has four basic elements¹³:

- Adult universal suffrage;
- Recurring, free, competitive and fair elections;
- More than one serious political party; and
- More than one source of information.

Accordingly, it is clear that political parties can play a number of fundamental roles in democratic politics and development, including¹⁴:

- (Function of political opinion-making) by aggregating citizens' views, expectations and interests;
- (function of socialization and participation) by providing structured political choices to citizens;
- (function of selection) by selecting candidates to contest an election for political office;
- (function of integration) by developing policies and taking responsibility to implement them; and
- (Function of exercising political power). By participating in electoral process to occupy political charges.

As political parties play a crucial role in democratic politics, they also play a leading role in promoting sustainable development. Political parties serve as the vital link between citizens and civil society another key decision-makers such as Government and Parliament. Therefore, on the one hand, they can initiate pro-development policies by reflecting the interests of the people in the process of electoral competition and in the legislative arena that will ultimately contribute to improved governance and more sustainable development. On the other hand, parties also able to hold governments to account on behalf of the electorate by analyzing, evaluating, executing and overseeing the implementation of political policies (Heywood, 2002:247).

2.2. Youth

Definition of youth is understood differently in different circumstances, especially with the changes in demographic, cultural, social, financial and economic settings. From the sociological perspective, some argue that youth is not just a biological category, it's more of a social age than a developmental period. It is described as a time of experimenting the youngsters with roles and identities, and preparing them for lives as full members of the social collective¹⁵.

⁹Ibid

¹⁰Sartori, Giovanni. *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

¹¹Downs, Anthony. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1957.

¹²Heywood, A. Ibid

¹³Diamond, J. & L. Morlino (2004). *The Quality of Democracy*. Journal of Democracy, Vol.15, Number4, pp.20-31

¹⁴Carothers, T., 'Principles for political party assistance', in OECD, (2014), *Accountability and Democratic Governance: Orientations and Principles for Development*, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264183636-en>

¹⁵Schäfer, Isabel, ed. (2015): *Youth, Revolt, Recognition – The Young Generation during and after the 'Arab Spring'*. Berlin: Mediterranean Institute Berlin (MIB)/HU Berlin.

According to the UNESCO 'Youth' is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group¹⁶.

However, while there are no universally agreed definitions of youth, some used the age group criteria for statistical and analytical purposes to evaluate the needs of youth and provide guidelines for youth development. For instance, whereas the World Program of Action for Youth refers youth to all those between the ages of 15 and 24, and the United Nations for statistical purposes also defines youth as those between 15- 24 years without prejudice to other definitions by Member States¹⁷, others adopted different range for example, Commonwealth defines youth as between 15- 29 years¹⁸, the African Youth Charter determines youth or young people as those persons falling between the ages of 15- 35 years of age¹⁹, The Middle East Youth Initiative defines youth as persons between the ages of 15-29 years²⁰, while the Jordan national youth strategy 2019-2025 defines youth as between 12-30 years²¹. It is clear that there are several definitions of youth age depending on different criteria. Some depending on the level of government (federal, provincial or local), some on the purpose (statistics, national or European program support), as well as on the type of policies (employment, housing, education, social services, and wellbeing, etc.) which Providing both enough space and enough flexibility to achieve more effective policies and procedures in different fields²². However, this paper-for statistical and analytical purposes and in line with the definition of youth in the Jordan national youth strategy 2019-2025, and according to article 6\B-2 and article 18 of Jordan's Law on Political Parties No. (39) Of 2015 -will adopt the (18-29 age group) as this age group is eligible to be founder or member to political parties.

2.2.1. Youth Engagement

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE) defines youth engagement as 'the sustained and meaningful involvement of a young person in an activity focused outside of themselves'²³. Others defines Youth engagement as the outcomes of youth involving in responsible and challenging actions, in addition, giving them an opportunity for planning and/or decisionmaking to enact positive social changes results in the improvement of human and social conditions²⁴. There are numerous advantages attached to the inclusion of youth in public affairs in general and political process in particular results in positive outcomes for young people themselves, agencies and communities alike. First, youth engagement will provide youth with skills and knowledge, and will enhance the sense of self-esteem, and connectedness; second, youth who are politically conscious will foster a rapid growth and development in all sectors of life; third, youth engagement is vital to protecting fundamental political and democratic rights and accordingly advancing political and democratic development; fourth, youth inclusion is essential to building stable and peaceful societies; fifth, youth engagement is pivotal to ensuring inclusive participation and embracing diversity by representing young people. In the political sphere, as stated by Huntington, the key difference between traditional and modern societies is high levels of overall citizen participation in politics and existence of open political system. Moreover, Huntington explored the concept of open political system by stressing on the necessity of creating a political system based on political pluralism and open competition which would represent and coordinate the interests of different social groups²⁵.

3. Political Parties in Jordan

An analytical reading to the partisan reality in Jordan clarifies that Political parties and movements in Jordan was permitted since the creation of the Trans-Jordanian (TJ) Mandate in 1921 until 1957. However, during the following 35 years, the political parties have been banned and repressed from 1957 until 1992 under martial law. In addition, the partisan political activities were considered illegal and punishable by law and many political parties' members were confined in secret detention centers due to their political activities. Therefore, the membership and affiliation of political parties had been declining due to the security consequences which they have faced, in addition to the general harassment by the government of those involved in political activities²⁶. The experience of political parties in Jordan can be divided into four phases:

¹⁶UNESCO website (Accessed in October 2020)

¹⁷Report of the Advisory Committee for the International Youth Year (A/36/215 annex)

¹⁸Rhona Smith & Sue Farran (2016) When is a Child not a Child and Other Questions—A Commonwealth-wide Overview, The Round Table, 105:4, 363-375, DOI: 10.1080/00358533.2016.1205356

¹⁹https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african_youth_charter_2006.pdf

²⁰<http://www.arab-hdr.org/Reports/2016/2016.aspx>

²¹https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Jordan_2005_National_Youth_Strategy.pdf

²²Perovic, B. (2016). Defining youth in contemporary national legal and policy frameworks across Europe. Youth Partnership. Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth. <https://pjpeu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668203/Analytical+paper+Youth+Age+Bojana+Perovic+4.4.16.pdf/f8de0a5ca08c> Accessed on 19 October 2020.

²³Pancer, S. M., Rose-Krasnor, L., & Loiselle, L. (2002). Youth conferences as a context for engagement. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 96, 47-64.

²⁴<https://www.scout.org/node/580815?language=en> (accessed in 22 October 2020)

²⁵Huntington S. P. (1996), *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.

²⁶Alazzam, Amin Ali. (2008)., *Political Participation in Jordan: The Impact of Party and Tribal Loyalties Since 1989*, Ph.D. diss., (Durham: Durham University, 2008) 142. (Accessed in October 28, 2020).

3.1. The First Phase from 1921-1950, Traditional Parties

From the establishment of TJ until the unification of the 'West Bank' into Jordan in 1950, political parties had been an expression of the social structure without any clear ideological program²⁷. Most of the political parties' demands focused on independence and development concerns and relying on the prevalent tribal structure in Jordan without proposing any political or economic platforms²⁸. Therefore, the founders and organizers of political parties in the Emirate of TJ until 1950 were all prominent traditional and tribal leaders: landowners and business leaders, tribal leaders (*sheikhs*), and religious figures without popular participation in these parties. As a result, the political parties were weak and lacking practical experience and true political ideologies, and tended to survive only for short period of time²⁹.

3.2. The Second Phase from 1950-1967, Ideological Parties

This period began after declaration of independence of the Emirate of Trans-Jordan in 1946, followed by the annexation of the West Bank in 1950, in addition to the 1948 war. These events led to significant changes in Jordan's population as a result of the arrival of Palestinians which altered Jordan's politics, demographics, socioeconomics and its cultural life. Moreover, a new constitution was adopted in 1952 that stipulated various democratic principles and provided a set of rights including the right of citizens to set up and join political parties³⁰, and this was confirmed by the passing of the first Political Parties Law of 1955. In the 1950s and as a consequence of the political events and challenges that have been appeared in the Arab world such as the Palestine problem and issues concerning liberation from the oppression of colonialism, the emergence of Communist parties and other political movements was observed throughout the world. Accordingly, this period witnessed an important social activism and political reform led to the birth of many ideological trends and establishment of nationalist, liberal, religious and leftist parties³¹.

However, as a result of the military coup attempt by Nasserists and leftist officers in April 1957, King Hussein responded by eliminating legal political parties and beginning a long period of martial law which continued until 1989³².

3.3. The Third Phase from 1967-1989, the Martial Law Period

Upon the imposition of martial law in 1957 and the outset of the 1967 War, electoral activities and parties were banned until 1989. This necessarily means changing in political environment and shifting away from political development as a large proportion of political activists had to work secretly and underground, which had been considered a setback for fundamental freedoms and a great democratic decline³³.

3.4. The Fourth Phase from 1989, the Initiation of Political Liberalization

After the April 1989 uprising³⁴, Jordan resumed its democratic process and a number of sweeping reforms have been adopted, the most important was the issuance of the Political Parties Law No.32 in 1992 which replaced the 1955 law, and accordingly more than 30 political parties emerged in political life, representing different ideological and political orientations. A quick look to the political parties founded in 1990s shows that these parties adopted the same political and ideological orientations that already adopted by Jordanian political parties which were operating secretly during the martial law period. However, by June 2003 there were 31 licensed parties in Jordan³⁵. As a result of the ratification of a new Jordanian Political Parties' Law No. 19 in 2007. On the one hand, new measures were introduced to license political parties such as increasing the minimum party membership from 50 to 500. In addition, the founding members need to be residents in at least five governorates. These changes threatened party's survival which they were already complaining of precarious and marginalization. Consequently, most of political parties haven't been able to comply with the new regulations as only 14 of Jordan's 36 political parties have been able to survive according to some Jordanian newspapers. On the other hand, the new law granted political parties public funding provided by the State/Government and gave them permission to set up partisan media outlets³⁶. However, the new political parties' law No 39 of 2015 eased the conditions for the creation of new parties: initially reducing the number of members required to establish a party from 500 to 150, the mandatory quota for women and youth membership which imposed by the 2012 law have been removed, and the number of governorate where the party needs to have members have been diminished as well. However, the new law introduced new restriction on the political parties as it becomes not allowed for them to receive donations or gifts from foreign sources³⁷.

These changes increased the number of political parties which are approximately 50 registered political parties according to the Human Rights Report of 2018³⁸.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Barakat, N. (2016), 'Women's role in Jordanian political parties,' Al Quds Center for Political Studies, ISBN: 978-9957- 427-53-5.

²⁹Alazzam, (2008).

³⁰ See Article 16 of the Jordanian constitution. Text of the 1952 Constitution on http://www.kinghussein.gov.io/constitution_io.html

³¹Al-Abdullat, Marwan, *Kharitat al-Ahzab al-Siyasiyyah al-Urduniyyah [Map of the Jordanian Political Parties]*, (1992), p.20.

³²Lust-Okar, E. (2001). THE DECLINE OF JORDANIAN POLITICAL PARTIES: MYTH OR REALITY? *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33(4), 545-569. doi:10.1017/S0020743801004044

³³Alazzam., 2008.

³⁴The 1989 Jordanian protests (Arabic: هبة نيسان, April boon) started in Ma'an on 18 April after the government cut food subsidies and increasing its price.

³⁵Majed, ziad (ed.). 2005, *Building Democracy in Jordan*, (Stockholm: Arab NGO Network for Development and International IDEA).

³⁶See Jordanian Political Parties' Law No.19, 2007.

³⁷ See the Political Parties Law No 39 of 2015.

³⁸See <https://jo.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/Human-Right-Report-Jordan.pdf>. To see the list of political parties in Jordan refer to <http://www.jordanpolitics.org/en/parties/1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%D8%A9>.

In conclusion, the Jordanian parties in this phase are mainly characterized by the following:

- Although there was a significant increase in the number of political parties. Yet, this number fluctuated, depending on the election periods and the laws on elections and political parties. The number of political parties is fluctuated and changeable between 14 and 65³⁹.
- Although there is an increasing in the number of political parties, but they still weak, and have vague platforms⁴⁰.
- The activities of those parties were concentrated in the capital and big city centers, and failed to reach other areas.
- Political parties lacked a wide popular base.
- The political parties are personality centered, where the party leaders' personality traits are dominant, and the loyalty in parties pledged to the founder rather than to the party's platforms or ideas.

4. Youth in Jordan

According to 2018 statistics of (DOS), the total population of Jordan is 10,458,413 (July 2018 est.). It is worth noting that Jordan is a youthful country as the youth population below the age of 24 years represent 54.12% of the population whereas those below 54 years make up 91.84% of the total population. However, the population above 54 years represents only 8.15% of the total population as it is clear in Table 1. More importantly, according to UNICEF report 68% (about two-thirds of the population) is under 30 years old⁴¹.

Furthermore, according to DOS report, the total median age is 22.8 years, with 23.2 for male and 22.3 for female.

Age Group	Percentage	Male	Female	Total
0-14 years	34.14%	1,835,094	1,735,773	3,570,867
15-24 years	19.98%	1,114,783	975,086	2,089,869
25-54 years	37.72%	2,137,424	1,807,573	3,944,997
55-64 years	4.64%	253,029	232,652	485,681
65 years and over	3.51%	180,652	186,347	366,999
total	100%	5,520,982	4,937,431	10,458,413

Table 1: Population of the Kingdom by Sex, (2018 est.)

Source: Prepared by the author based on DOS information

Jordan has one of the youngest populations in the world, this youth population is also very educated, boasting a 99% literacy rate. Although Jordan has one of the youngest populations in the world, it has also one of the highest unemployment rates in the MENA region. The unemployment rate in Jordan in general according to DOS reached to 23 % in the second quarter of 2020. However, in regard to the youth unemployment rate, the statistic shows that the youth unemployment rate in 2017 was the highest with 35.63%, while in the second quarter of 2020 was 34.96% as shown in Figure 4. It is worth mentioning that almost 60% of jobseekers, both male and female, are below the age of 25. Notably, according to the latest official statistics, the unemployment rate is even higher among those with university degrees (a Bachelor's degree or higher) at 23.2%. Additionally, nearly 26.7% of unemployed university graduates are male, while almost 67.7% are female⁴².

Figure 4

Source: https://www.statista.com/statistics/812127/youth-unemployment-rate-in-jordan/?fbclid=IwAR3VnPKrID5BGaaBDNwN_el5vK5x3F_VruhkyFbkz852YZlpSSOPQAgZ6zY

³⁹Barakat, Nitham., WOMEN'S Statistics in Jordan ROLE IN JORDANIAN POLITICAL PARTIES Al-Quds Center for Political Studies. Amman. 2016.

⁴⁰<https://jo.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/Human-Right-Report-Jordan.pdf>.

⁴¹<https://www.unicef.org/jordan/media/506/file>

⁴²http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/DataBank/EMP_Unemp_2017/EmpUnemp_2017Q3.pdf

5. Youth Engagement in Political Parties in Jordan (Analysis and Discussion)

No one can deny the importance of youth participation in decision-making process in general and in democratic processes in particular. It has been argued that a good democracy is a form of government that supports the inclusive participation of all citizens, particularly young people which constitutes nearly half of the world's total population and considered as one of the most influential groups in modern societies. In conclusion, as TomažDeželan argued 'more young people in politics makes for more social justice'⁴³.

5.1. Youth Participation in Jordanian Political Activities

Political participation includes various different kinds of political activities, traditional and nontraditional activities. Traditional such as: nomination to elected councils; voting and being members of political organizations; participation in the election campaigns of the candidates. Nontraditional activities such as: demonstrations, sit-ins, and writing in the newspapers about important political issues to identify the main forms of Jordanian youth participations and the main motives that lead them to participate or not. Questions from 1 to 6 of the questionnaires asked respondents if they either participated or not in the last parliamentary elections or other political activities that political arena in Jordan has witnessed in the last period such as demonstrations, sit-ins, peaceful protests or marches.

5.1.1. Traditional Participation

Question 1 of the questionnaire asked respondents if they have voted in the last Parliamentary elections (2020), and respondents were given two choices:

1. Yes (please move to question 2) or 2. No (please move to question 3).

As Figure 5 below shows, a majority of the respondents 63.3% did not participate in the last parliamentary elections compared with a ratio of 36.7% who did participate. It is worth mentioning that the percentage of voter turnout in 2020 parliamentary elections according to official statements was 29.9%. It is clear also from the Figure 5 that male youth tend more to participate than female youth as the majority of respondents whom they participated in 2020 parliamentary elections were male with 71.1% (133 out of 187), while 28.9% (54 out of 187) were female.

Figure 5: Respondents' Participation in 2020 Parliamentary Elections (in general and by sex)

Question two of the questionnaire asked respondent who had voted to identify his main motivation behind his decision. It is clear from Table 2 below that tribalism and social ties represented the main priority for whom they participated in the last elections. Over half of the respondents (52.4%) declared that tribalism and social ties was the most important motivation behind their decision to vote. The second motivation with 14.9% after the tribe effect was the respondents believe that their vote will make a difference and voting to right candidate can affect the course of political change. While only 14 out of 187 constitutes 7.5% who declared that they voted to support the party's candidates.

Main Motivation	Frequency	Percentage
Tribalism and social ties	98	52.4%
To enhance political change	28	14.9%
To support youth candidates	22	11.8%
To get personal services	17	9.1%
To support the party's candidates	14	7.5%
Other motivations	8	4.3%
Total	187	100%

Table 2: Respondents' Motivations for Participating in the 2020 Parliamentary Elections

However, in question 3 of the questionnaire the respondents who didn't participate in the last elections justified their decision by three main reasons entitled by (Dissatisfaction, Distrust, and Apathetic) as shown in Table 3.

⁴³European Youth Forum 2018, TomazDezelan, Youth and Political Parties: Toolkit for Youth Friendly Politics in Europe. Available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/37363/gender-equality_text-adopted.pdf

The Main Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Distrust in Jordanian parliaments	198	61.3%
Distrust in the integrity of electoral process and results	51	15.8%
Dissatisfaction with the candidates available	44	13.6%
Lack of interest in politics	19	5.9%
Fear of coronavirus	11	3.4%
Total	323	100%

Table 3: Respondents' Reasons for Non-Participation in the 2020 Elections

The first reason of youth non-participation in the last elections was their dissatisfaction with the ability of the parliamentary councils to play an effective role in political life as 61.3% of respondents declared this reason behind their decision not to participate. Overall, these findings are in accordance with findings reached by previous regional and international studies which declared that trusting level in Jordanian parliament is among the lowest countries as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Trust in Parliaments (Regional and International)

Source: <http://jsf.org/sites/default/files/EN%20Social%20Capital%20in%20Jordan.pdf>.

Table 3 also revealed that there is a significant distrust over the integrity of electoral process and results of parliamentary elections. In line with these results, many observers and candidates alleged that there was fraudulent votes and improper vote-counting procedures according to Independent Arabia newspaper⁴⁴. Furthermore, there is 5.9% who expressed their disinterest or apathy towards politics in general. However, it seems that Fear of coronavirus has impacted the level of participation as 3.4% hesitated to participate fearing of Covid-19.

5.1.2. Nontraditional Participation

Jordan has seen many protests in the last three years, such as protests against unemployment, inflation and corruption, demanded civic liberties and systematic reforms, and lately teacher protests. Question 4 of the questionnaire asked respondents if they have ever participated in any nontraditional political activities which Jordan has witnessed in the last period such as demonstrations, sit-ins, peaceful protests (whether inside the universities or other places). Respondents were given two choices: 1. Yes (please move to question 5) or 2. No.

Respondents who answered yes, they were asked to declare the main reasons behind their participation. The majority of respondents with 58.5% (298 out of 510) have declared that they have participated in nontraditional activities, whether demonstrations or peaceful protests as shown in Figure 7. While 41.5% of respondents concluded that they have not participated in any nontraditional activities.

⁴⁴<https://www.independentarabia.com/node/168841> (accessed at November, 2020)

Figure 7: Respondents' Participation in Nontraditional Activities

From figures 5.1 and 5.3, it is worth pointing out that youth tend to participate in nontraditional activities more than traditional activities male and female alike. Additionally, it is clear also that male tend more to participate whether in traditional or nontraditional activities than female.

To answer one of the most important questions that has been raised in Jordanian street 'Why Jordanian youth are protesting'. Accordingly, the questionnaire asked respondents in question 5 to identify the main reasons behind their decision to protest. Apparently, as clear in Figure 8, respondents conform two main reasons. 64.4% cite the present bad domestic economic situation the country is living (poverty, unemployment, high cost of living), as unemployment and economic issues are the main concerns of Jordanian youth. while 35.6% cite unprecedented corruption in the country beside nepotism and favoritism was behind their protesting.

Figure 8: Respondents' Reasons for Protesting

5.2. Youth Presence in Political Institutions

According to the IEC⁴⁵, the participation percentage from youth between 17 to 30 years in 2020 elections was 9.7% of the total voters. Furthermore, according to same report, this percentage gives a clear indicator that youth is not being a force of change in the political arena. More importantly, their presence in 2020 parliament was low also as the winners under 40 years was 10% of the winners⁴⁶.

5.2.1. Youth Enrollment to Political Parties

5.2.1.1. The Reality of Youth Engagement to Jordanian Political Parties

According to (JNCHR)⁴⁷ report issued in 2018, the number of Jordanian political parties was 48, and the number of parties' members reached 34,957. However, the number of young people affiliated with political parties in Jordan does not exceed 12,748 youth with 36.47%⁴⁸.

To clarify the reality of youth engagement to Jordanian political parties, questions 6,7and8 of the questionnaire asked the respondents if they are belonging to any political party or not, and if they are not, what are themain reasons behind their refrain from joining political parties. Question6 of the questionnaire asked the respondents if they are belonging to any political parties. The vast majority of respondents 83.1% (424 out of 510) declared that they are not affiliated with any political party, while only 86 with 16.9% answered that they are belonging to political parties. Of whom they declared they are belonging to political parties 71 (82.5%) are male and only 15 (17.5%) are female as shown in Figure 9.

⁴⁵Independent Election Commission

⁴⁶<https://mena.fnst.org/content/jordans-elections-citizens-distrust-winner>

⁴⁷The Jordanian National Center for Human Rights

⁴⁸<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8C-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8A>

Figure 9: Respondents' Answers to the Question: 'Do You Belong to Any Political Party?'

5.2.1.2. The Main Obstacles to Join Political Parties

To determine the main obstacles that prevent real and effective participation of youth in and with political parties, participants who said that they were not affiliated with any political party, were then asked if they intend to join any political parties in the future. In addition, for those who do not intend to join any political party, the questionnaire asked them to mention the main reasons for their refrain. The findings surprisingly illustrated that the overwhelming majority of participants 95.3% (404 out 424) were said that they do not intend to join any political party. Only 4.7% (20 out of 424) answered they would join political parties in the future.

The participants who do not intend to join political parties were asked to mention the main reasons behind their abstention. However, the participant declared many reasons which can be classified into four major reasons

5.2.1.2.1. Distrust

Confidence of youth in political parties in Jordan is very discouraging as:

- The respondents declared that they had no confidence in the programs of the current political parties as it does not offer clear proposals to address and actualize youth's goals and ambitions by resolving their main problems. The first and the most pressing issue facing Jordanian youth is unemployment. However, youth alleged that political parties have never adopted policies and programs that alleviate unemployment and poverty, instead according to their answers- political parties are interested in the personal benefits of their leaders rather than working in service of the people and society.
- The respondents declared also that they do not trust political parties as their participation in the last protests was very limited and their participation was only to promote themselves. The respondent's answers are directly in line with youth statements to some newspapers commenting on parties' participation in the last protests. They stated that the absence of Jordanian political parties from the political scene particularly the last demonstrations raised many questions about the roots of these parties in Jordanian society, their ability to respond to the feelings of Jordanians, to the degree that some youth described the last demonstrations by 'the recent demonstrations are an orphan without a father or mother, and no one can attribute them to specific political forces'. Others declared that political parties did not participate in the last protests because they 'distanced themselves from the clash with the state'⁴⁹.

5.2.1.2.2. Youth and Parties' Leaderships Mutual Distrust between Political Parties and Young People

Although one of the most important duty of political parties is to train youth activists to become political leaders, however, Jordanian young people are often excluded or overlooked from parties' leadership bodies according to their statements. The majority of respondents stated that 'Young people are not visible, their views, opinions, wishes and feelings are not really considered and their needs are unmet'.

The researcher interviewed the General Secretaries of the Jordanian political parties to find out their age groups and the percentage of youth leaders in their parties. The study results revealed that:

- Of the 48 political parties, the most majority of General Secretaries were in the (60-69) age group which constituting (60.4%, n=29), while General Secretaries in both groups (above 70 years) and (50-59) constitute 16.7%, n=8) for each group as shown in Figure 10.

⁴⁹<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2018/12/13/%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86>

Figure 10: The Age Groups of the General Secretaries of Political Parties

It should be noted that only (6.2%, n=3) were within the (40-49) age group, while no one of General Secretaries below the age of 40 years. More importantly, it is worth mentioning that only three women have reached the position of secretary-general of a political party.

5.2.1.2.3. Fearing

A significant number of participants mentioned that the fear of the security consequences from joining political parties was the main reason behind their reluctance to join parties. Despite the government's repeated assurances not to prosecute partisans and political activism, youth still fear to engage in political activism. The root causes of fearing to join political parties' dates back to 1957 when the regime introduced martial law and outlawing all political parties. Accordingly, the partisan political activities were considered unlawful and punishable by law and in most cases, members belong to and support a political party were deprived of jobs opportunities due to their political activities.

However, despite the termination of martial law in 1989, the party was no longer able to play an active role in political life. It became increasingly facing difficulties in attracting youth to join parties.

5.2.1.2.4. Lack of Knowledge about the Political Parties

According to a notable majority of the respondents, most of the Jordanian political parties are submerged as most Jordanians are uninformed about parties, and even less familiar with party platforms. As a result, Jordanian political parties through its life span were unable to build robust policy platforms that reflect youth's hopes and concerns. Therefore, parties need to have an independent mediato promote their issues and ideologies and more importantly to run professional campaigns aimed at articulating their policies to win elections, and forming governments.

It is important to mention that, no one of the respondents could mention more than two of the 48 Jordanian political parties, when the questionnaire asked them to mention the names of parties he knows.

6. Conclusion

- There is a mutual distrust between youth and political parties. Young people have a negative opinion towards political parties and political parties' leaders, and believe that parties' leaders act more in their own interest than for society. In turn, political parties' leaders see young people as unreliable and they don't give them any chance to get positions of leadership. And accordingly, youth haven't been given a real chance to take an active part in the decision-making.
- It becomes clear that young people do not believe and do not like to join the traditional political activities, and they are more interested to be engaged in non-traditional activities more than traditional politics, this fact confirmed by low turnout in parliamentary elections, and apparent propensity of youth to engage with informal politics.
- Young people believe that they are not visible, their views, opinions, wishes and feelings are not really considered and their needs are unmet. These situations led them to feel excluded and marginalized in their societies. In representative organs, there are very few young people. Their presence in 2020 parliament was very weak as the winners under 40 years was 10% of the winners. In addition, their presence in parties' leadership is missing completely.
- The Jordanian political parties failed completely to attract young people, address the main challenges facing them and failed to live up to youth expectations.
- The challenges facing youth to get involved to political parties and to be part of decision-making process are considered obstacles to youth, political parties and Jordanian democracy alike.

7. References

- i. Al-Abdullat, Marwan., Kharitat al-Ahzab al-Siyasiyyah al-Urduniyyah [Map of the Jordanian Political Parties], (1992), p.20.
- ii. Alazzam, Amin Ali. (2008)., Political Participation in Jordan: The Impact of Party and Tribal Loyalties Since 1989,' Ph.D. diss., (Durham: Durham University, 2008) 142. (Accessed in October 28, 2020).
- iii. Aristotle (1984). *The Politics*. The University of Chicago Press. p. 135.

- iv. Barakat, N. (2016), 'Women's role in Jordanian political parties,' Al Quds Center for Political Studies, ISBN: 978-9957-427-53-5.
- v. Barakat, Nitham., WOMEN's Statistics in Jordan ROLE IN JORDANIAN POLITICAL PARTIES Al-Quds Center for Political Studies. Amman. 2016
- vi. Carothers, T., 'Principles for political party assistance', in OECD, (2014), Accountability and Democratic Governance: Orientations and Principles for Development, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264183636-en>
- vii. Diamond, J. & L. Morlino (2004). The Quality of Democracy. Journal of Democracy, Vol.15, Number4, pp.20-31
- viii. Downs, Anthony. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1957
- ix. European Youth Forum 2018, TomazDezelan, Youth and Political Parties: Toolkit for Youth Friendly Politics in Europe. Available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/37363/gender-equality_text-adopted.pdf
- x. Heywood, A. 2002. Politics. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- xi. Huntington S. P. (1996), Political Order in Changing Societies, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- xii. Lust-Okar, E. (2001). THE DECLINE OF JORDANIAN POLITICAL PARTIES: MYTH OR REALITY? International Journal of Middle East Studies, 33(4), 545-569. doi:10.1017/S0020743801004044
- xiii. Majed, ziad (ed.). 2005, *Building Democracy in Jordan*, (Stockholm: Arab NGO Network for Development and International IDEA).
- xiv. Metcalf, Michael F. (1977). 'The first 'modern' party system? Political parties, Sweden's Age of liberty and the historians'. Scandinavian Journal of History. 2 (1-4): 265 287. doi:10.1080/03468757708578923.
- xv. Pancer, S. M., Rose-Krasnor, L., &Loiselle, L. (2002). Youth conferences as a context for engagement. New Directions for Youth Development, 96, 47-64
- xvi. Perovic, B. (2016). Defining youth in contemporary national legal and policy frameworks across Europe. Youth Partnership. Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth
- xvii. Plato (1935). *The Republic*. Macmillan and Co, Ltd.
- xviii. Rhona Smith & Sue Farran (2016) When is a Child not a Child and Other Questions—A Commonwealth-wide Overview, The Round Table, 105:4, 363-375, DOI: 10.1080/00358533.2016.1205356
- xix. Sartori, Giovanni. Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- xx. Schäfer, Isabel, ed. (2015): Youth, Revolt, Recognition – The Young Generation during and after the 'Arab Spring'. Berlin: Mediterranean Institute Berlin (MIB)/HU Berlin
- xxi. <http://archive.ipu.org/dem-e/idd/2014-youth.htm>
- xxii. http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/DataBank/EMP_Unemp_2017/EmpUnemp_2017Q3.pdf
- xxiii. <http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/jordanian-womens-report-on-the-occasion-of-the-international-womens-day-statistical-perspective/>
- xxiv. <http://jsf.org/sites/default/files/EN%20Social%20Capital%20in%20Jordan.pdf>
- xxv. <http://www.jordanpolitics.org/en/parties/1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%D8%A9>
- xxvi. <https://jo.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/Human-Right-Report-Jordan.pdf>
- xxvii. <https://jo.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/Human-Right-Report-Jordan.pdf>
- xxviii. <https://mena.fnst.org/content/jordans-elections-citizens-distrust-winner>
- xxix. <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/168841>
- xxx. <https://www.scout.org/node/580815?language=en>
- xxxi. https://www.statista.com/statistics/812127/youth-unemployment-rate-in-jordan/?fbclid=IwAR3VnPKrID5BGaaBDNwN_eI5vK5x3F_VruhkyFbkz852YZlpSSOPQAgZ6zY
- xxxii. https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/african_youth_charter_2006.pdf
- xxxiii. <https://www.unicef.org/jordan/media/506/file>
- xxxiv. https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Jordan_2005_National_Youth_Strategy.pdf
- xxxv. <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2018/12/13/%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86>