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**The Jordanian Experience with Political  
liberalization: 1989- present.**

**By**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the political liberalization process in Jordan since 1989. It first analyzes the steps undertaken by the late king Hussein, who responded to the riots of 1989 by measured doses of political liberalization (instead of repression.) It then considers how the political liberalization process unfolded during the reign of Hussein's son, king Abdallah II. The thesis argues that political liberalization process in Jordan has brought some changes to the Kingdom, primarily the lifting of martial law, a more vibrant civil society and the holding of periodic parliamentary elections. Yet this process has not fundamentally changed the nature of the Jordanian political system, which still does not meet fully the criteria for democracy.

## Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the political liberalization process in Jordan since riots broke out in the Kingdom in 1989, when in response King Hussein chose to replace repression by political liberalization until the present reign of King Abdullah II, who continued what his father began, while attempting to make some improvements. It also examines how Jordan during this period has dealt with pertinent local political and social changes.

Political liberalization can be defined as “A transition process from authoritarian governments to democratic ones”. A wave of political liberalization is “A group of transitions from nondemocratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period of time”.<sup>1</sup> A political liberalization wave also usually involves partial political liberalization in political systems that do not move sufficiently in the democratic direction.<sup>2</sup>

One should not mix between liberalization and democratization because they are not the same. Liberalization focuses on the establishment of civil and political freedoms,

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<sup>1</sup> . Bahgat Korani, Rex Brynen, Paul Noble, Political Liberalization and Political liberalization in the Arab World, p.7

<sup>2</sup> . Ibid, p.7

while democratization stresses the level of the population's participation in politics as well as the accountability of the country's leaders.<sup>3</sup>

The theoretically-informed literature on political liberalization has not given enough attention to the Arab region. As if the democratic concept is present anywhere, except in the Arab world, which makes this study more significant. The analysis of the political liberalization process in any country has to be conducted within a broader context. It should be related to the country's historical and social structure, and not only to its political features.

Concerning the Jordanian case, a high degree of political opening was marked in the Kingdom since 1989, especially when it comes to the parliamentary elections held in November 1989, and the suspending of the martial law by the government. These changes make Jordan commendable of a comprehensive study; in addition to numerous reasons that make Jordan worthy of a detailed examination, such as the fact that Jordan represents a case of political liberalization in a monarchical traditional regime, and offers a model of political liberalization in a divided society that includes two major ethnicities: Trans-Jordanians and Palestinians.

The political liberalization process in Jordan has brought some changes to the Kingdom, such as the lifting of martial law, and the holding of periodic parliamentary elections. Yet it has not fundamentally changed the nature of the Jordanian political system, which raises important questions about the significance of these changes. Such questions would include: To what extent are parliamentary elections in Jordan free of governmental control? How do major political groups (e.g. the Muslim Brotherhood) view the elections? To what extent does the Jordanian parliament exercise real influence

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<sup>3</sup> . Ibid, p.1

over the formulation of public policy? What are the principal constraints on the continued expansion of effective political participation, and under what conditions might these be overcome? <sup>4</sup>

In short, how does the Jordanian case clarify the problem of stepping further than the initial phases of political liberalization towards a political system that is distinguished by high degree of citizen participation in the political process?

In this study, I will be dealing with the Jordanian case during the last decade of the reign of King Hussein (since 1989) up until the present period of the reign of King Abdallah II. The study is organized as follows: Chapter one will be theoretical, focusing on the meaning of political liberalization and addressing, albeit very briefly, the growing literature on political liberalization in the Middle East. Chapters two and three look at the political changes that Jordan underwent during the last decade of king Hussein's rule concerning "Civil Rights" and "Elections". As for chapter four, it deals with the first years of the reign of his son King Abdullah. And while the thesis shows that the reign of King Abdallah did not heard major changes in the political realm; nonetheless it makes sense to organize the material on political liberalization chronologically distinguishing between the period from 1989 till 1999 and the period since 1999.

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<sup>4</sup>Bahgat Korani, Rex Brynen, Paul Noble, *Political Liberalization and Political liberalization in the Arab World*, p.71

## Chapter 1: Political liberalization in the Middle East

“Democracy is a form of government in which the people rule”<sup>5</sup>. It has made a large advancement all over the world, and raised high expectations and hopes for an improved world, politically as well as economically. The Greeks defined democracy as government of the people and rule by them<sup>6</sup>. This definition still has some validity but is no longer appropriate, because of the numerous issues it puts under question, like the identity of this “people”, the type of contribution to democracy we expect, and the conditions this contribution require in order to be affective.<sup>7</sup> Yet, it is impossible to have a more accurate definition for democracy, because of its fluid aspect that keeps changing with time following the constant changes in different societies. And as long as these societies progress and develop with a different pace, defining democracy precisely will be a subject of discussion.

As for political liberalization, we can define it by saying that it is “the transformation of the political system from non-democracy towards responsible and representative government within a democratic new system”<sup>8</sup>. In other words, political liberalization is the process that every non-democratic country has to go through, to reach democracy in the end. It requires having some basic rules and citizenship rights such as,

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<sup>5</sup> Georg Sorensen, Democracy and Political liberalization, Processes and Prospects in a Changing World, p.3

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.3

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.3

<sup>8</sup> Jean Grugel, Political liberalization, a critical introduction, p.3

public participation through fair elections with competition but no pressure, free press, and religious freedom, which will create one democratic state<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, the political liberalization process urges that all the government's institutions should be accepted by the people, be legal from their point of view, and represent them, which permits the state to present a structure in which people can live in democratically<sup>10</sup>.

Up till now, all Middle Eastern, including Arab, countries could not manage having the fundamental basics that can help them building a stable democratic system. And the continuing violence nowadays in Iraq and Palestine, as well as the violence committed by the authoritarian regimes against their own people in their own countries, are a major support for this theory.

In this chapter, I will summarize some literature on political liberalization in the Middle East through several selected recent works on the subject that include books and articles.

I will first start with the edited volume by Amin Saikal and Albrecht Schnabel, *Political liberalization in the Middle East: Experiences, struggles*, that discusses through several articles by a group of authors the basic problems and topics that influence the political liberalization process and its solidness in the Middle East and play a major role in its success or failure of the countries in the region. The book also focused on the limited role of the UN in bringing peace in the area.

“Security” was the key word to Schnabel in his argues. He believes that a working “security community”, conditioned with the secure local political and social

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.4

<sup>10</sup> Jean Grugel, *Political liberalization, a critical introduction*, p.7



policies inside the country itself, in addition to secure relations with the country's neighbors, can present an enduring stable regional peace<sup>11</sup>.

Schnabel further argues that the political liberalization process also cannot be achieved without "protecting minorities". Political liberalization will not only be non-lasting, it will also fail if the majority oppressed the minority while ruling a society that must invest all its efforts to work for a strong economical act, political stability, and the development of civil society<sup>12</sup>.

Etel Solingen believes that having a democratic regime in every country will eventually lead to international peace. According to her, the presence of democratic regimes in the Middle East countries will guarantee a stable peace in these countries and prevent the conflict between the states, because democratic regimes never fight other democracies<sup>13</sup>.

As for Mark Tessler, he investigates in this volume the public attitudes and what can we know through these attitudes about the linkage between Islam and democracy. He asks a very important question: "Are public attitudes toward more political liberalization and political openness influenced by religiosity and adherence to Islamic belief?"<sup>14</sup> He discusses that the stereotypical Western societies' perceptions believe that democracy and Islam are incompatible. According to them, the more religious people get, the less likely is that they hold democratic principles, because they tend to be more conservative toward any policy that could make any change in society.

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<sup>11</sup> Amin Saikal and Albrecht Schnabel, "Political liberalization in the Middle East: Experiences, struggles", p.8

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.8

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.9

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.13

Kamel Abu S.Jaber takes Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan as cases of Arab countries with incomplete political liberalization processes. Jaber believes that these countries have their basic institutional measures but with limited powers and authority, and their political liberalization processes are always subject to the short term calculations of individual leaders.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, in this volume, we find Amin Saikal discussing the relationship between peace and political liberalization processes, while taking Iran and Iraq as special cases. He believes that the Western model of democracy is not suitable to every country in the Arab region, and although regional Arab leaders use this model, but the truth is that it's only a cover for their authoritarianism.

As for Tom Najem, he contributed to this volume with his examination of the political liberalization processes in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. He believes that in the four states, Islamist forces are not the only reason for the lack of political liberalization, there are many other structural internal and external obstacles that blocked the way of economic and political opening<sup>16</sup>. And despite the differences between the fore mentioned four states, they all created or supported a strong authoritarian state that opposed the political, cultural, and economic liberalization. Najem believes that the only way to break this wall toward a real political liberalization is by a strong external or internal pressure that will bring many key factors to the political liberalization process such as, the role of the state and political institutions, economic development, social

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.14

<sup>16</sup> Amin Saikal and Albrecht Schnabel, "Political liberalization in the Middle East: Experiences, struggles", p.17

divisions, civil society, political culture and ideas, and transnational and international engagements<sup>17</sup>.

Another important book, which makes a significant contribution to our discussion, is Bahgat Korany, Rex Brynen, and Paul Noble's "Political Liberalization and Political liberalization in the Arab World". The book presents many case studies for political liberalization in the Middle East, in several Arab countries. And despite the several similar essentials that gathers these Arab states, such as the modern role of political Islam, the force of economic decline, the function of all monarchs in every political change, and the effect of provincial policies and conflicts, the case studies support the argument that there is a particularly Arab pattern of political liberalization and political liberalization. The authors believe that the Middle East has experienced a major liberalization process in the past two decades but not a real democratic reform.

Notwithstanding the pessimism that shows from many cases such the Lebanese civil war, and the uncertain democratic experiments in Algeria and Sudan, the authors believe that many countries in the Middle East are indeed a case of a long-term optimism. And even if the change in the Arab world is not as fast as Europe or any other region, but still they do believe that some kind of good change is going to take place in the societies, economics, and even in the regimes of the Arab world<sup>18</sup>.

The third book to be considered here is John C. Davenport's "Democracy in the Middle East", which examines three major topics concerning the Middle East, starting with the "Democracy in the Middle East" as a whole, and moving to the "American imperialism", and finally "Terrorism".

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.18

<sup>18</sup> Bahgat Korani, Rex Brynen, Paul Noble, Political Liberalization and Political liberalization in the Arab World, p.277

In the first part of the book, we have a discussion of the history of Democracy in the Middle East with all the struggles and movements its countries witnessed to achieve a democracy through changing authoritarian regimes to more democratic ones and gain more public powers through more civil rights, more civil society, wider political participation, and so on. In addition to an examination of the continuity and stability of this democracy which still raise a big question about if democracy will ever have the chance to not only endure but also increase in the Middle Eastern and Arab countries<sup>19</sup>.

In the second part of the book, the discussion is all about American Imperialism and the role the United States is playing as a dynamic negotiator for the political liberalization processes, and a promoter of democracy in the Middle East countries and also in other regions all over the world as part of its big plan of building a democratic, liberal, and diplomatic world on the solid ground of capitalism<sup>20</sup>.

Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that America's intentions and motivations behind all the effort its making to help this democracy to be real and stable, remain until this moment under question whether America is doing all this just to ensure a better future for everyone, or is it just an under covered plan to hide the real intentions of a world domination. And that is what the second part of the book is also examining and discussing.

As for the third and last part of the book, it highlighted Terrorism and Global Extremism. This part talked about the terrorist groups that chose violent ways such murder and suicide bombing as their weapon in fighting anything that is against their beliefs, and as their own strategy in making a change. In addition to the perverted

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<sup>19</sup> John C. Davenport, *Democracy in the Middle East*, p.10

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.11

motivations that seem to be logical only to these terrorists, and which drive them to carry out such violence and destruction in the name of religion without taking the innocent humans' lives into consideration<sup>21</sup>.

Heather Deegan's book, "The Middle East and Problems of Democracy", is one important contribution that I would like to add to my discussion. The book argues that most of what we can say about democracy in the Middle East is negative and pessimistic. Deegan believes that democracy as well as political liberalization in the Middle East is still very limited and needs a lot more attention and work to progress, and she backed up her theory with seven Middle Eastern countries as case studies: Jordan with its colonial background, poor economic, high level of unemployment, limited political openness and civil participation, and the Palestinian issue with all its political, territorial, and demographic problems<sup>22</sup>. Kuwait and the fact that without its oil wealth won't be very different from any other poor Middle Eastern country with an authoritarian rule and a major problem of unity which makes every attempt of political liberalization process an unsuccessful one<sup>23</sup>. Iran with all the repression used by the *Shah* and *Ayatollah Khomeini* for a long period, which caused demonstrations, strikes, and all kind of opposition movements, especially the Islamic revolution which demanded a new reformed constitution with elections included, and a stronger political life controlled by the country itself and not only by the leader. Yet, *Rafsanjani* made a big improving step in the road of democracy when he supported the right of assembly and elections, but what was still missing is the permission of having a legal opposition so the country can reach a full

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.12

<sup>22</sup> Heather Deegan, *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy*, p.33

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.41

democracy<sup>24</sup>. Syria with its enduring unpopular *Ba'ath* Party under the leadership of President *Assad*, and his regime which claimed to have many changes in its policies such having elections and a parliamentary government, yet not fundamental ones that could endanger the regime's powers<sup>25</sup>. Iraq with its division and insecurity within its borders, and its religious and ethnic conflicts, which make the country an inappropriate arena for starting a political liberalization process. And unless some serious changes toward this political liberalization take place, such changing the leadership or even liberalizing it as a response to an internal or external pressure, democracy will never have the chance to see the light in Iraq<sup>26</sup>. Israel with its creation which caused major unresolved problems within the Middle East, such as the Palestinian dilemma, the Palestinian refugees problem, the occupation of the land, and the mutual aggression between the Arabs and the Jews. And although Israel has a high level of democracy especially when it comes to elections, yet, its other aspects such the statehood, territorial borders, population, and citizen loyalty remained until now uncertain, which make the capability of beginning a new reformed policy a big challenge for Israel<sup>27</sup>. Finally, Lebanon with its weak political formation and leaders who serve only their own interests, in addition to the external pressures beginning with the Palestinian presence, moving to Israeli attacks, followed by the constant Syrian intervention which affected the Lebanese political system as a whole. Yet, Lebanon managed to uphold a certain level of democracy which is not totally complete, but at the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.58

<sup>25</sup> Heather Deegan, *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy*, p.68

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.81

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.101

same time it showed to be a promising one. This democracy showed the most by a relatively free press, political dialogue, and political participation<sup>28</sup>.

As for Roberto Menotti's article "Democratize but Stabilize, Democracy in the Middle East", it discusses the European policy makers' feeling of being less committed to the Middle East political liberalization than the US government is. Menotti believes that the European policy makers are more cautious than the US government, first because they have doubts about the top-down political liberalization that is being applied in the Middle East, with the majority oppressing the minority. And second because the Europeans have real concerns about the side effects of political liberalization regarding instability and migration in their region. Menotti also refers to the fact that where some European officials think that the US government could learn from the European caution, US policies highlight at the same time some areas where European policy could improve.

Furthermore, I will also include Daniel Neep's article "Dilemmas of Democratization in the Middle East: The "Forward Strategy of Freedom" to my discussion. Neep in this article discusses the policy of the US administration and its foreign policy in the Middle East. He believes that using the word "political reform" for the US acts in the Middle East will be more accurate than the "political liberalization policy", because the top-down political reform is more accepted in the Middle East than the instant political liberalization, which will allow them to control the speed of change to make sure that the right people are in the scene in the new political and economical strategy.

After reviewing all these readings, we can clearly notice that democracy and political liberalization became an international issue, or a universal concern to be more

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.117

accurate. Sure many countries had reached some good level of political liberalization and succeeded to maintain it, but the problem is still within the countries that are still under authoritarian regimes that managed to survive until now by claiming that they are introducing a democratic regime, yet acting completely the opposite. And the bigger problem is with the countries which managed to achieve democracy, but did not manage to consolidate it.

According to the "Freedom House" statistics, in 1972, only forty-three countries broke their authoritarian rules and got their democracy. At the end of 2006, the number of democratized countries increased to ninety<sup>29</sup>, which means that the global interest in democracy with all what it represents is in continuous augmentation, even if this interest is processing in different levels among various societies, every society with its capacity of accepting a big concept like democracy.

As for the Jordanian democracy and its political liberalization process, which is the core topic of our discussion, we can see that it was not discussed as it should be in all the fore mentioned works. This is why we will be having furthermore discussed details about Jordan's case in the following three chapters, concerning the basic elements that should be present in the political liberalization process that will eventually lead to democracy in the end, from civil society to elections, and finally the Kingdom's status under the reign of King Abdullah II. Jordanian civil society will first be discussed in the following chapter -chapter two- before moving to elections in chapter three.

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<sup>29</sup> Georg Sorensen, Democracy and Political liberalization, Processes and Prospects in a Changing World, p.159



## Chapter 2: Civil Society

The main purpose of this study is to examine the way in which Jordan is managing the transition from the reign of King Hussein, who ruled his kingdom for forty-eight years, and died in 1999, to the reign of his son King Abdullah II, who is facing new circumstances in his rule. The question posed is: to what extent the Hashemite monarchy is really searching to reform the domestic political system after 1989. Furthermore, how much the Jordanian society can handle such political and social transformation? Is political liberalization really possible in the Jordanian society? In that respect, what is the real role played by civil society and non-governmental organizations NGOs?

Many studies seem to link the Jordanian crisis that hit the country in 1989 to only economic factors, however, this is not true. The crisis that faced the country at that time was far more serious to be considered only economic for many reasons. First of all, Jordan's regional role, which is at the core of its regional and international relations, was declining. Consequently, Jordan needed to redefine its regional role to ensure the continuation of foreign assistance that the country has been dependent on since the creation of the state in 1921, after the rulers of Jordan realized the lack of their country's natural resources<sup>30</sup>. This attempt to regain the Western assistance during the late 1980s largely failed due to the West preoccupying in addition to the Soviet collapse and the emergence of democracies in Eastern Europe. But what gave Jordan a push towards

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<sup>30</sup> Ali Kassay, Jordan's process of political liberalization/ Jordan in Transition, George Joffe, p.49)

political liberalization was the participation of international human rights NGOs, which formed a relationship with local NGOs campaigning for similar objectives. Moreover, the Jordanian peace treaty with Israel in 1994 succeeded in re-establishing Jordan in a high position in Western priorities and restored aid to a very high level. However, this peace treaty was not quiet accepted in Jordan, in fact, it developed a strong anti-normalization movement in the country, to which the government responded by tightening the margins of liberty<sup>31</sup>. As a country with repressive state machineries, the political expression inside Jordan is totally directed by the state. And while the opposition can have some chances and opportunities to express its visions and opinions, criticizing the state will always be restricted to it<sup>32</sup>. Like in any society going through a process of political liberalization, Jordan faced the development of an anti-democracy reaction by the officials and the legislators who see in the call for democracy a challenge to the authority of the state. This call was strengthened by some publications against the government, but was weakened at the same time by some character assassination which limited it. In all this process, we must indicate that both groups- government and opposition- tried to justify their positions by stating that their policies would improve Jordan's international standing, while the other group would harm it.

One of the most important criteria to measure the transition to democracy in Jordan is "Civil Society" which has established itself at the beginning of the twenty-first century as a significant concept in the field of development policy and practice, and proved to be an important and essential ingredient in the process of political

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<sup>31</sup> Ali Kassay, *Jordan's process of political liberalization/ Jordan in Transition*, George Joffe, p. 62

<sup>32</sup> Chris Hann, Elizabeth Dunn, *Civil society: challenging western models*, p.168

liberalization<sup>33</sup>. Is the Jordanian government becoming more open to work civil society (NGOs, labor unions, business groups...etc)? Are these groups advocating democratic societies? These questions and many more will be discussed in this chapter.

The ineffectiveness of civil society in the Jordanian case is an important subject, because both of democratization and political liberalization in Jordan are part of the Hashemite survival strategy<sup>34</sup>.

Civil society in Jordan did not play an effective role as a shield between state and society. On the contrary, it had bad effect on the process of political liberalization. Although civil society in Jordan reflected a friendly life, it did not succeed to have any serious effect on state policy, which means that it has really acted as a cover for the unchanging socio-political reality of neo-patriarchy in the country<sup>35</sup>.

The Hashemite monarchy in Jordan confronted a major dilemma because of the political liberalization process. It also faced major difficulty in maintaining its legitimacy during the political modernization process. The fact that everything in Jordan, including schools, universities, and mass media, was controlled heavily by the state which has been crucial in its effort to maintain things that way, began to face the threat of sharing this control with some other institutions and organizations which was not any good for the monarchy's power<sup>36</sup>. This theory was mentioned earlier by Kamel abu S.Jaber in chapter one, when he said that democratization process in Jordan, as well as many other Arab countries, is a subject to the short term calculations of individual leaders.

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<sup>33</sup> Jude Howell, Jenny Pearce, *Civil society & development: a critical exploration*, p.141

<sup>34</sup> George Joffe, *Jordan in Transition*, p.xvii

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. xvii

<sup>36</sup> Chris Hann, Elizabeth Dunn, *Civil Society: Challenging western models*, p.167

Political liberalization, in its general significance, depends on two factors: the respect for the rule-of-law and the respect for the role of civil society. And the given concepts of political liberalization may become the basis for a new institutionalized political authority. However, the problem in Jordan is that the Jordanian civil society is inactive and its effect on the non-governmental organizations is very little.

Although opposition is an essential element in the democratic process, in Jordan, all political opposition and non-governmental organizations are weak and do not challenge the government. And even if opposition forces had a small act against the state, the Hashemite monarchy has successfully calmed them through repression. These moves towards liberalization in Jordan resulted from the need to redefine its regional role by reinforcing the links with the West after the potential economic collapse. As for the peace treaty with Israel, once signed, the Jordanian regime was able to dump its liberal posing and control the opposition forces. As is well known, the role of non-governmental organizations should create a united authorization through the working class associationalism<sup>37</sup>. However, in Jordan, this theory seems to be mistaken. Although the number of non-governmental organizations doubled between 1989 and 1999, they continued to be unpoliticised and political freedoms did not increase. This failure was due to the fact that all these organizations became instruments of state control in a regime survival strategy behind a frontage of political liberalization in order to confront an economic crisis<sup>38</sup>. And since there was no pressure from civil society on the regime, the elites that controlled it guaranteed their control through the expanding non-governmental organization sector.

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<sup>37</sup> George Joffe, *Jordan In Transition*, p.xviii

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p.xviii

But despite the optimism and interest in Jordan as a model of relatively successful liberalization, there is one concern that cannot be neglected: the persistence of the authoritarian regime, which makes wonder if Jordan is able to move beyond liberalization towards political liberalization?

Since 1989, a top-down liberalization process took place. At that phase, elections were held regularly, political parties were legalized, and Jordanians could actually question the role and powers of the Hashemite monarchy. As for the representatives of political and civic groups in the 1990s, they discussed regional and domestic issues without questioning the distribution of authority within the state, and from this we know that Jordan has just began a process to political liberalization and still have a long way to go. To ensure sustained liberalization, opposition groups in Jordan accepted some limits on the political reform, in a way to have guarantees for actors from both sides that ensure each side's interests and give a push forward to the political liberalization process.

The concentration of political interests within the Jordanian regime made its supporters away from facing the societal pressures that allow them to view political liberalization and its positive freedoms that can help it. And up till now, Jordan is still lacking for a clear force for democratic reform of the political system. This democratic reform is rooted in Jordan's present civil society and balance of class power. Jordan's political and economic elites, including most leaders of political parties and many NGOs, have some reasons to part from the authoritarian system that maintains their material benefits, which seems to be preventing the appearance of a private sector that might view its interests as distinct from the authoritarian regime.

It is worth mentioning that civil disorders in recent years were not escorted by

significant political organizations. All political parties were very cautious in dealing with protests. Up till now, the potential of Jordanian civil society to move today's process of liberalization towards political liberalization is not encouraging. In fact, the current highlighting on civil society as a mobilizer for democracy in Jordan is hard to defend. Thus, no real opposition or political parties exist in Jordan today due to the fact that Jordanian civil society has produced an international support and not a political reform. The 1989 transition to democracy in Jordan gave new expectations about political participation, freedom, liberalized elections, and high optimism that political liberalization measures would reduce the repression and eliminate state violence and authoritarian practices on civil liberties and freedoms. Because despite the series of relatively free and fair elections, and the legalization of political parties, the regime continued to limit opposition and suppress demonstrations, civic organizing, press, and any other modes of political participation. Both elections and political participation gave the regime the ability to point to concrete indicators of practical democracy. But at the same time, all actions made by the opposition are limited by regulative practices, which prevent real opposition from mobilizing in civil society.

When we say repression, we do not really mean the physical force that usually characterizes any martial law, it is rather what Quintan Wiktorowicz calls "the embedded authoritarianism", which means the social control assigned through complex administrative procedures, legal codes, and informal regulative practices made to limit opposition without having to use violence<sup>39</sup>. So technically, in such a political system, legal codes and administrative procedures became the new instruments of repression in

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<sup>39</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Embedded Authoritarianism, Bureaucratic Power and The Limits to Non-Governmental Organizations in Jordan* / George Joffe, *Jordan in Transition*, p.111

Jordan in a way to limit any challenge to the regime power.

Non-governmental organizations are frequently considered as the institutional expression of civil society, and they are very necessary for the consolidation of democracy. And the expansion of the NGO community is usually taken as a sign of a gigantic democratic culture. Yet, in Jordan, we must not be confused with the qualitative and quantitative significance of these NGOs. Because although the number of NGOs in the Kingdom has nearly doubled since 1989, but they are still depoliticized, and still didn't get a greater freedom in civil society.

NGO growth must be understood by the logic of the transition. Jordan's political liberalization is a defensive one, motivated by the need to keep stability and social control, without any will for a political participation. The state was manipulating the application of the law and administrative practices to guarantee that none of the workers in civil organizations will challenge the state or the government policies. In order to organize the civil society, the state required that any social group in the process of formation must meet three primary conditions.

First, NGOs must limit their work to a particular kind of activities registered by the state and abide by administrative requirements. This limitation was made to improve and increase the state's regulative capacity.

Second, these organizations cannot be involved in any kind of political activities. Only political parties can have these political activities, and even these parties have a very small effect on politics and hold a little importance in society. As for the NGO community, which represent the strongest organizational environment in society, is thus depoliticized.

Third, assertive and critical opposition leadership through NGOs is forbidden. The state directly interferes with NGO leadership structures to prevent and remove members that may be a threat to state interests.

All of these conditions are considered manipulative regulations and practices which are a concrete prove that the Jordanian system is a less visible of repression through embedded authoritarianism.

In the terms of conditions for participation, NGOs apply to a specific ministry for permission to operate and their activities are therefore limited to that ministry's regulation. So if an organization is applying for example to the ministry of culture, it must show that all its activities will only be related to the culture domain. This condition tends to separate NGOs into different categories where the respective administrative organization controls a particular category of activities. Organizations registered at one ministry are not permitted to get involved in activities that are related to another organization. This separation makes it easier for the state to supervise and regulate all NGO work in the kingdom.

One more important requirement by the state is that the organization must keep a detailed record of all its activities, and submit it in an annual report to the state. This record includes information on finances, board meetings, revenues, and working member, and so on. The state examines all these information in addition to the financial records, to make sure that none of the organization's activities or money is used or spent in a way to challenge or threat the authority of the state and government.

It is worth mentioning that the state in Jordan has the right of termination of any NGO and organization. The main reasons of termination are usually because the



organization did not fulfill its specified goals, or because it engaged in activities for which it is not registered, it failed to meet regularly, or didn't provide the administrative agency with relevant records, especially financial records.

In 1995, eleven charitable societies were dissolved. In 1996, eighteen were closed and in January 1997, five organizations were canceled by the ministry of social development<sup>40</sup>.

The ministry of culture has also suspended many cultural organizations. All these terminations and suspensions indicate that despite political liberalization, the state kept its right to control NGOs, and it also kept the will to cancel any organization that does not obey its regulation. In addition to that, the state has the right to interfere in the NGOs leadership and its organizational structure, in a way, if there is any violation of the legal requirements, the regulating Ministry has the right to dissolve the administrative committee of any society and replace it with a temporary one until new elections are held. Once again, this demonstrates the power the state has that gives her the ability to interfere in the internal affairs of NGOs despite the political liberalization.

In its mission to control NGOs and prevent the appearance of an organized opposition through civil society, the Jordanian state, as we mentioned before, forbade any misbehavior into the political field. Any kind of political activities are only permitted through political parties legalized by The Political Party Law, Law 32 of 1992.

This law specifies that 'The use of the premises, instrumentalities, and assets of associations, charitable organizations and clubs for the benefit of any partisan

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<sup>40</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Embedded Authoritarianism, Bureaucratic Power and The Limits to Non-Governmental Organizations in Jordan* / George Joffe, *Jordan in Transition*, p.118

organization, shall be prohibited' (Article 14) <sup>41</sup>

This separation between NGO activities and politics is also revealed in Law 33 of 1966, which forbids the use of NGOs for political achievement (Article 2). Even events, lectures, and activities in Jordan are controlled so they never contain any under covered political materials. And any disobedience can lead to legal actions, closure and detention.

Although government administrators argue that new political freedoms provide chances to organize political meetings through political parties, the productivity and effect of political parties is still doubtful because they do not really have much value to people. In a survey in 1995 by the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) at the University of Jordan, only 50 percent of those surveyed had even heard of the Islamic Action Front Party. And less than 25 percent were aware of other parties. This level of low awareness is related to the newness of political parties and their fast creation after the political party law, and also to the little impact political parties have in society, even the largest ones. In a recent survey by CSS in 2008, 98.6 percent of respondents claimed that they had never joined a political party and 92.6 percent said that they had no intention of doing so in the future.

The state uses embedded authoritarianism to make sure that the reliability of the separation between politics and all other forms of organized work is maintained. And since political liberalization began, cultural NGOs have clearly felt the state control and its heavy intervention.

Many workers in the cultural domain state that issues such as democracy, human rights and political freedom are cultural issues and not political ones. Therefore, they

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<sup>41</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Embedded Authoritarianism, Bureaucratic Power and The Limits to Non-Governmental Organizations in Jordan* / George Joffe, *Jordan in Transition*, p.119

should be allowed to discuss such topics in their meetings and not banned as is actually happening. And the only reason these workers are avoiding these discussions is to be safe from imprisoning and closure.

After the closure of the Karak Cultural Forum, because of the so called political activities after a lecture by Layth Shubaylat in which he criticized the government, the minister of culture banned any cultural meetings from taking place anywhere in the kingdom without prior approval from the cultural manager in the respective governate. This reaction caused a strong opposition from the cultural society all over Jordan. Later on, this directive was canceled, but all lectures about issues such as the temporary Press law, the economy and many others were canceled, and the state continued to intervene in the freedom of assembly in order to prevent NGOs from discussing political issues.

The state power was also continuously used to prevent the appearance of leaders in NGOs who could be a threat to the regime's power. All leaders and members must first be approved by the 'security department'. In other words, all elections and administrative board and members must be cleared by state agencies that are responsible of preventing group work that threatens the security of the state, or the Hashemite regime. Through this power, the state has full control over NGOs, and its leaders, members, and activities, in order to shape it all and exclude particular individuals who can be a possible threat to the regime from participating in NGOs. It is worth mentioning that the transition to democracy does not necessarily mean that the regime has surrendered its right to social control and power. On the contrary, if the political liberalization was motivated by what we can call a 'survival strategy', meaning that it intends to ensure the political survival of the regime, it is possible then that other policies and practices in politics will follow the

same strategy.

In an authoritarian regime, a sudden transition from authoritarianism to political freedom through 'shock democracy' does not always require related changes outside the political domain because there is insufficient time to cultivate the cultural and political resources necessary for such changes. Regimes that use the political participation to increase their survival may apply some repressive practices to ensure this survival and control, which is the case for embedded authoritarianism. These repressive practices show through technical processes, regulations, and practices, and hides within the law and the legalizations that are being manipulated to suit the regime's interest. This form of repression that characterize the embedded authoritarianism and it is different from the physical repression usually used in any authoritarian regime, does not end. And it always shows when embedded authoritarianism fails to provide the social control to maintain the regime's power.

Embedded authoritarianism and its continued application and intervention in NGOs in Jordan are only about the regime's power and how to maintain it and not about working on political liberalization. This intervention became an accepted limit in Jordan; it even became a structure of limitations fixed in the subconscious of the Jordanian society without any question, which is very dangerous since that acceptance certainly leads to an unquestioning acceptance of the conditions of power and control that form politics.

The Jordanian regime gave up the 1989 transition and manipulated it to serve its own power and stability. True they didn't use the physical repression, but the limitations continued. So we can say that to realize a real political freedom and democracy in Jordan,

embedded authoritarianism must be recognized and destroyed.

The existence of an opposition is very essential for the good performance of a democratic system, because opposition always questions government's policies in order to change them and even to grab power in the new government. The communication between the ruling government and this opposition is very fundamental for a healthy democracy and the analysis of opposition actions in democratizing states is very helpful for an overall evaluation of the process of transition from authoritarian to more democratic regimes. But, these transitions need the solid support of the people in an organized way and as spontaneous group participation which leads to a situation where the regime has no choice but to break resistance by force or to concede at least partially.

Once the authoritarian regime surrenders, the commitments of civil society towards real change in addition to the opposition's presence in the transitional process becomes more essential than ever. When the opposition has the power and the commitment to make a non-violent change in addition of assembling important political groups outside the previous regime is fundamental for a successful transition.

In 1989, Jordan started a political liberalization process which held important changes on the domestic view. However, evaluating the democratic transition after ten years shows serious weaknesses in democratic development. And while reforms were well progressing at first, the political liberalization process slowed down since the mid 1990s. These setbacks were clearly created by the regime in order to maintain and secure its power, in addition to the weak status of Jordan's political opposition that gave the opportunity to the monarchy to manipulate all regulations to protect its own power.

Following the economic strategy applied by the International Monetary Fund

(IMF) in Jordan in 1989 that caused a rise in prices of several basic commodities, the poor zones of Jordanians protested against the rise demanding more democratic rights. These protests allowed Jordan's opposition forces to participate in the political process, and they even gave the chance to people to participate in politics. And although this participation and its potential was limited, but it caused some major changes in domestic politics. It is worth mentioning that these opposition forces are supported by elements of Jordan's civil society, especially the professional associations, women's and cultural organizations, and student councils. To allow a larger amount of freedom without causing any danger to the state, the latter shaped a new legal agenda for the political liberalization process through three important documents, the National Charter, the Political Parties Law, and the Press and Publications Law.

The Jordanian Monarchy chose this strategy just because national pacts have proven to be a successful tool for democratic transitions in many countries, where the ruling group gets to confront the opposition which leads to more democratic freedom and even the involvement of new different political forces into the decision-making process<sup>42</sup>.

It is true that Jordan wanted to present itself as a country of political reforms for a long time, but this was not the case in reality. In the past few years, rather than enlarging and empowering the civil society participation in Jordan's public affairs, the Jordanian government has made it extremely difficult for NGOs to work or even exist in some cases with all the closure and sometimes imprisoning of members when their NGOs dare to criticize the government<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Renate Dieterich, *The Role of the Opposition/ George Joffe, Jordan in Transition*, p.131

<sup>43</sup> Wilcke, Christoph, *Human Rights Watch Organization, Shutting out the critics: restrictive laws used to repress civil society in Jordan*, p.1

The Right to Assembly, including public meetings and demonstrations, is a very important standard in civil society, which gives the chance to be freely expressed in a non violent manner. In Jordan, the government issued a temporary Law No.45 on August 22, 2001 called "The Law on Public Gatherings", which brutally restricts the right to peaceful assembly<sup>44</sup>. This law has been changed and affirmed by the parliament in 2004. Peaceful assembly is not totally prohibited now, but the governor must approve any demonstration or public meeting in advance. Yet, the Jordanian government selectively applies this law on public gatherings just to protect itself from being criticized by any of these assemblies or demonstrations. Governors in some cases simply reject giving the permission for a public meeting or a demonstration without even giving a reason. And while meetings sponsored by the government do not encounter any difficulty obtaining their permission, opposition's meetings could be rejected anytime just to prevent any critic that the Jordanian government could face<sup>45</sup>. The case is very similar when it comes to demonstrations. Jordanian authorities always misuse the law on public gatherings to prevent assembling in a peaceful public demonstration. The government occasionally permits some demonstrations to be held, but as usual any critic towards it is not allowed to be expressed freely, and the demonstrations' members remain unable to state their opinions even if it was in a very peaceful way<sup>46</sup>.

As a conclusion, we realize that Jordan has witnessed many changes when it comes to the political liberalization process since 1989. Yet, this political liberalization

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<sup>44</sup> Willeke, Christoph, Human Rights Watch Organization, Shutting out the critics: restrictive laws used to repress civil society in Jordan, p.6

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.9

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.12

won't be real and complete until the Hashemite Monarchy stops interfering in the civil society community in order to protect its own interests. And we must not neglect the role of the opposition in the political liberalization process, which the state should be more supportive to it by playing a positive role in reinforcing it due to the fact that opposition is a major part that should be present in any political liberalization, and stop playing a passive role in limiting it, which is the case in Jordan. The Jordanian laws and practice fall short when it comes to guaranteeing the freedom and protecting the civil society with all what this latter includes, from the right to assembly to protecting and empowering NGOs work and so on. In fact, the Jordanian government has abused the current laws just to limit the right of anyone who can be its opponent or a threat with his critics.

The Jordanian government should take real steps to prove that Jordan is a country of political reform. Legislations restricting the right to freedom of assembly should be modified requiring only a notice not an advanced permission. NGOs should be automatically registered without all this government testing and selecting. And what is most important is that the Jordanian government should not have any role of monitoring or interfering in NGOs work, funding, and management board. And dissolving these NGOs should be for a very good reason and should require a judicial order, because criticizing the government is a not a fair reason for shutting down any of these organizations, especially when it happens in a very random way that is not ruled by any law.

Without these conditions, Jordan will never have any progress in its political liberalization route, because hiding behind minor freedoms that do not have any effect or threat on the state's powers and rules knowing and neglecting the major democracy issues



such as human rights and political freedoms, is not considered as a real complete political liberalization.

After reviewing in this chapter the Jordanian Civil Society and its status in the Kingdom, especially the Non-governmental organizations and the media, and after discussing to which extent the Jordanian government was open toward the civil society work, we move now to discuss in the next chapter the Jordanian elections, which is also considered as an important criterion to measure the transition to democracy in Jordan.

## Chapter 3: Elections

Jordan's process of political liberalization and political liberalization began in 1989 as a response to many riots and political disorders in many parts of the country, after the reductions in state spending on food and other goods that led to a big price increases at a time where Jordanians were in a bad economic situation. What came as a big surprise to the regime itself, was that these riots had broken out in the most supportive of the Hashemite monarchy areas, which pushed the regime to begin with new reforms in the country that include calming down its domestic critics and opening the system to higher levels of political participation.

Two major points must be mentioned as we discuss Jordan's political liberalization. First, we argue that this political liberalization began as a defensive reaction for the economic pressures the country was going through which opened the door for a political opening just to ensure the regime's survival.

Second, we must notice that the political liberalization process started from above, from the Hashemite monarchy itself, and not from below through a large social movement, and this action only took place because of the economic pressures that led to many critics to the regime that wanted to gain back its public legitimacy, which gave the chance to all these new reforms to take place. It is the regime itself that stated that only political liberalization, freedom of expression, human rights and the accountability of

rulers will provide a route towards the political economy of peace, security and progress.<sup>47</sup>

Now, years after the Jordanian political liberalization process began, the question that we ask ourselves is how deep, true, and reliable this process has been? Especially that the first question that was asked at the beginning of the political liberalization process was: Can Jordan, with its tribal and family composition, be responsive to the concepts of democracy?<sup>48</sup>

The first full parliamentary elections since the 1960s were held in November 1989. Furthermore, subsequent elections took place in 1993 and 1997. So we can see, and although the political liberalization in Jordan was limited to some extent, but comparing to other Arab countries, we can say that Jordan was ahead in its process that included the loosening of government restrictions on the media, the lifting of martial law, the return to parliamentary elections, and the legalization of political parties.<sup>49</sup>

What is worth mentioning are the contrasting attitude between the regime supporters and the opposition towards Jordan's political liberalization. While the regime supporters see the process in a very positive way especially when it is compared to other Arab countries, the Jordanian opposition was not completely satisfied by the political liberalization process especially after the signing of the peace treaty with Israel in 1994<sup>50</sup>.

This issue which causes many opposite explanations opens the door for many questions concerning the political liberalization that should be asked and answered. How far has political liberalization gone in Jordan? Has the electoral process really provided

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<sup>47</sup> Heather Deegan, *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy*, p.19

<sup>48</sup> Hani Hourani, Hussein Abu-Rumman, *The Democratic Process in Jordan... Where to?*, p.301

<sup>49</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.16

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p.17

meaningful ways for political participation in Jordan? And can we consider this process a good sufficient material for political liberalization or it will lead Jordan to some level of progress that we won't be able to call real political liberalization?

I will be answering these questions in this chapter, and analyzing the political liberalization process through a discussion of the three elections of 1989, 1993, and 1997, every election by its own, followed by a discussion of what all three elections taken together can reveal about the state of parliamentary, political, and electoral political liberalization in Jordan. In other words, this chapter will explore Jordan's liberalization experience through the perspective of its national parliamentary elections.

### **The political system and the 1989 elections:**

Jordan has a government, with a royally appointed forty member upper house (Majlis al-'Ayan, or House of Notables or Senate), and a popularly elected eighty member lower house (Majlis al-Nu'ab, or House of Representatives).

Since the start of the liberalization process in Jordan, the democratic electoral process at the national level has been limited to voting for members of the lower house of parliament.

In 2001, the number of parliamentary seats in the lower house was expanded from eighty to one hundred four, but in all three elections of 1989, 1993, and 1997 that were held under King Hussein, the number of parliamentarians stayed eighty. This limited political liberalization process (which manifested itself in the resumption of parliamentary elections) did not reach the executive branch of government or the upper

house, and the prime minister remained a royal appointee and not an elected one. So basically, this chamber stayed unaffected by the political liberalization process, and we can also say that it has been used by the regime as a check on the limited power of the lower house.

Yet, although the parliament as the legislative power was to some extent considered as a weak power within the state, the prime minister still needs its vote of confidence for his appointment. And all draft laws have to pass through the lower and the upper houses before being initiated.<sup>51</sup>

After the 1989 elections, for example, the regime initiated a law that requires the approval of the senate on all bills from the lower house, which allowed the regime through the senate to veto any bill that the monarchy opposes.

What we can notice then is that the parliamentary aspect of political liberalization and elections has focused on the lower house. In all three elections of 1989, 1993, and 1997, the eighty members of the lower house were divided into twenty-one multimember voters, in which the regime reserved a number of seats for specific minority voters who usually are strong supporters of the Hashemite monarchy. These include six seats for the rural Bedouin, nine seats for the Christian community, and three seats for the Circassian and Chechen communities together.<sup>52</sup>

In the 1989 parliamentary elections, around 650 candidates competed for the eighty seats in the lower house. As for political parties, they stayed banned under Jordanian law, as they had been for more than thirty years. And despite the fact that all candidates were running as independents, both leftist and Islamist opposition named

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<sup>51</sup> Renate Dieterich, *The Role of the Opposition/ Jordan in Transition*, p. 133

<sup>52</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.21

some candidates. The political opposition succeeded better than even expected despite the official ban on parties. The Muslim Brotherhood had a very well-organized campaign and ran a list of twenty-six candidates. Twenty-two candidates of this list were elected in addition to twelve independent Islamists. Secular leftist and pan-Arab nationalist candidates took thirteen seats, nine of them were nationalists and four represented the more radical left.

What was very obvious in the 1989 elections was that the eighty parliamentarians were all males. Jordanian women had their right to vote in 1974, but no elections took place since then and until the 1989 elections which gave women the chance for the first time to vote and also run as candidates.

And although women formed 50 percent of the overall number of voters, they only represented 2 percent of the candidates for parliament, with none winning. Only one female candidate seemed to stand a chance of winning, her name was Tujan al-Faysal, who became the target of an Islamist campaign to stop her candidacy, which actually happened, her candidacy failed and no women were represented in the new parliament.

Following the 1989 elections, at least forty-four members of the new Jordanian parliament were members of the political opposition. However, the conservative and centrist parliamentarians balanced the parliament.

As for the prime minister, King Hussein appointed an experienced politician to this post: Mudar Badran. This decision was a big disappointment not only to the opposition but also to the public. Sure no one was expecting that this post would be given to an opposition candidate, but at least everyone were expecting a new prime minister who represents the new generation of leadership and not an expert Hashemite regime

supporter like Mudar Badran, the previous head of the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) or Mukhabarat, and former prime minister twice from 1976 to 1979 and from 1980 to 1984.

Following a difficult parliamentary debate, Badran was confirmed by the new parliament as the new prime minister. He formed a cabinet that included more than just members from the previous cabinets. He offered the Muslim Brotherhood four cabinet positions which they rejected because they wanted six positions and eventually they ended up with none. Badran also brought three independent Islamists into his cabinet, in addition to two members of the Democratic Bloc—a loose parliamentary grouping of leftists, liberals, and pan Arab nationalists<sup>53</sup>. Later on the number of independent Islamists in the cabinet enlarged to six positions.

After forming his government, Badran took several positive initiatives. He freed forty-nine political prisoners, loosened the government supervision over the press, reduced the role of the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) in political life, and returned thousands of passports that had been taken away from protesters. All these positive initiatives seemed to be some good and real results for the political liberalization process.

After the 1989 elections, which were relatively successful, things weren't quite calm. Only nine months after Jordanians elected their first new parliament in more than twenty years, the Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait, starting the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis and war. And while Jordan was attempting to stay on the barrier between its Iraqi and US allies, Jordan only gained international accusation and the stopping of aid payments from the United States and the Persian Gulf Monarchies.

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<sup>53</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.23

This economic crisis caused the eviction of almost half a million Jordanian and Palestinian workers with their families from the Gulf. These workers came back to Jordan all depending on the kingdom and its social services to help them. And eventually, Jordan managed to surpass the Gulf crisis and to recover from the hard economic crisis that hit it.

This attitude and stand of King Hussein made him win a whole public support in Jordan. The monarchy at that time took advantage of this public support and passed the new National Charter which came as an official approval of the regime on the liberalization process, and made clear that parliamentary elections, the more free press, and the return of multiparty politics would be the beginning for a new period in Jordanian political life.

Many in the opposition viewed the National Charter as a victory for democracy and pluralism in Jordan, but it also represented a triumph for the monarchy that approved on the political participation and opposition in the Jordanian politics, but only under the condition of the continuity of the Jordanian's monarchy existence. In other words, opposition would be tolerated, but only loyal opposition to the Hashemite royal family. In January 1991, the Islamists took many powerful positions, including the ministry of education, which shows that the Islamists' power was augmenting.

At that time, Abd-al Latif Arabiyyat, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected as Jordan's first Islamist speaker of the House of Representatives. As for Mudar Badran, he re-organized his cabinet and brought five Muslim Brotherhood members into the government, including Abdullah Akaylah as minister of education.



This high level of Islamist participation in both parliamentary and cabinet powerful positions did not last for so long. After several actions of sex segregation in some ministries, schools, and so on, Jordan witnessed a public negative reaction towards these measures – This Islamist attitude came on to enforce Mark Tessler’s theory that I mentioned earlier in chapter one, which says that the more religious people get, the less likely is that they hold democratic principles, because they get to be more conservative toward any political or social change. Six months later, both the Islamists and the Badran government were removed by the King, and a new more liberal government was installed under Prime Minister Tahir al-Masri.

The new government included centrist, liberal, and leftist ministers, but didn’t include Islamists. So within six months, the Islamist movement had threatened a vote of no confidence, which could bring the government down. That is why Prime Minister Masri decided to resign. Being excluded from the government, the Islamists tried to demonstrate their power in the parliament especially through their opposition to the direct talks with Israel which had a public support. What is worth mentioning, is that Tahir al-Masri was the first Palestinian to serve as Jordanian prime minister, which brought out the hostility of many conservative nationalists in parliament.

These two factors, and although Masri’s appointment as a prime minister seemed to be the beginning of a new liberal reformed era in Jordanian politics, made the Islamists and the conservative nationalists end this era very quickly by bringing down Masri’s government. Natural, and as we know, the Jordanian regime never wanted the political liberalization process to deeply change Jordan’s nature as Hashemite monarchy.

Also, the regime never wanted the process to extend to the executive branch of government, this is why it stayed in the legislative part, and it even was controlled.

It is very important to believe that despite the limited factors the political liberalization process has witnessed, the process was becoming more legitimate day after day through the changes it brought.

As for the elections, and considering that they were held within the frame of the limited political liberalization process, the elections seemed to be free and fair, and the opposition was represented more than the regime was expecting or even intending.

The political liberalization process and the 1989 elections may not have represented a complete political liberalization progress, but at least they pushed Jordan into the way of being a state-society country where there is more citizen and public participation, and less government supervision of political life.

The period right after the year 1989 is considered to be the freest period in the modern history of the Jordanian media. The government restrictions on press were reduced, many new newspapers appeared, and even many of them were criticizing sometimes the performance of various governments.

In 1992, and after issuing the National Charter, the lifting the martial law, and removing the ban on political parties, the political liberalization process seemed to be standing on solid ground more and more, especially that these measures encouraged the openness to political activities and political discussions in the press.

### **The new electoral law and the 1993 elections:**

Generally speaking, the 1993 elections were fair and free, despite the few problems that could happen in every country which is still new in democracy, and that was the Jordanian case.<sup>54</sup>

By the time of the 1993 elections, more than twenty political parties were legalized by the Ministry of the Interior. The number of voters for the 1993 elections increased from 41 percent in 1989 to 47 percent in 1993, which reveals the public excitement towards the political liberalization process. But this process stayed limited until that time in Jordan due to the fact that half of Jordanian voters stayed away from elections.

What was most noticeable is that most voters chose to vote for candidates they already know, or they felt that they will serve and help them in the future, without giving any importance to which party they represent, although they had a variety of political parties to choose from.

However, the various political parties ran the 1993 elections under a new temporary electoral law. The first law allowed every voter as many votes as there were representatives for their region.

In the 1989 elections, the Muslim Brotherhood was the only well organized political movement, which knew how to work the system to its own benefits.

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<sup>54</sup> Hani Hourani, Hussein Abu-Rumman, *The Democratic Process in Jordan... Where to?*, p.305

After the government officials discussed the amount of voting, in 1992 the regime issued a new electoral law that was held during the 1993 elections. The new law allowed only one vote for each voter, and reserved three seats for Chechens and Circassians, nine seats for Christians, and six seats for Bedouins.

Five hundred thirty-four candidates competed for the eighty available parliamentary seats, with twenty-five of the previous eighty parliamentarians. Only three women competed for seats, and one of them, Tujan al-Faysal, who was previously harassed during the 1989 elections, actually won the Circassian seat in Amman's third district with 1,885 votes<sup>55</sup>, and became the first woman in Jordan's parliament.

As for the Islamists, they were represented in the 1993 elections by their new political party, the Islamic Action Front. And while they won twenty-two seats in the 1989 elections, they jumped down to sixteen seats in the 1993 elections, and from twelve to six seats for independent Islamists.

This drop partially happened because of the restrictive social legislation that the Islamists backed earlier in parliament and was publicly rejected. But the most important factor for this change was the new electoral law itself, in terms of one vote for each person in each region.

Tahir al-Masri was elected as speaker in the new parliament, which was an additional loss for the Islamists. And although the Islamic Action Front represented itself as the unified voice of both the Muslim Brotherhood and independent Islamists in a try to reinforce its power within the parliament that was declining, shortly after the elections,

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<sup>55</sup> Mark Power Stevens, Post-Election Seminar, A Discussion of Jordan's 1993 Parliamentary Election, p.37

many independent Islamists resigned from the Islamic Action Front membership and became really independent.

The secular left did not fair any better than the religious right in the 1993 elections. While they were totally disorganized during the 1989 elections, they ran the 1993 elections with many parties, which split the votes of the leftist candidates, and the leftist party representation in the 1993-1997 parliament came limited one more time.

What is worth mentioning is that the parties' representation in the 1993 elections was generally limited, and the limitation was not only the case for the Muslim Brotherhood or the secular left. All parties' representation was limited in the new parliament. Only thirty-five of the eighty deputies in the new parliament represented political parties, and the rest ran in the elections and won as independents. And as a response to their electoral misfortune, right after the 1993 elections, all parties started to form, merge, split, and re-form again. It was like a new party system that was not working quite right, and many of Jordanian party officials knew that, but they justified this by referring to the fact that the political openness was still new, and it takes time for things to be well organized.

What was very worrying and troubling in this phase of the political liberalization process, was the high level of tension between the Transjordanians and Palestinians.<sup>56</sup> The sudden 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) re-opened the door for hostility in Jordanian society. For the country's political forces, the Accord meant that many old policies had to be changed to fit the new situation. And for everyone who opposed this Accord and any peace with Israel, signing

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<sup>56</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.28

the Oslo Accord meant that they should be readdressing who, and what, they were opposed to.<sup>57</sup>

The surprising announcement has angered King Hussein and the Jordanian government which has been warned for so long not to deal with Israel. But after the Oslo announcement the King and the government felt like they were being put on the margins. As a response, by October 1994, Jordan completed its own negotiations with Israel, plus signing a formal peace treaty with it, which angered the Palestinians in Jordan.

Despite the fact that the division between the Transjordanians and Palestinians already existed in the Kingdom, and for many Jordanians things were relatively the same before and after the 1993 and 1994 events in the regional peace process, yet the level of tension concerning loyalties and citizenship rights had clearly increased.

Opposition parties of both groups mobilized against the treaty. But knowing that they will never be able to undo it, the Jordanian opposition changed its strategy by trying to prevent the full normalization between Jordan and Israel by voting to block transnational and functional ties with Israel.<sup>58</sup>

However, the hostility level between the opposition and the government augmented, which made King Hussein take a pacifying initiative in a try to cool things off, so he appointed Abd al-Karim al-Kabariti to lead Jordan's government.

Kabariti's appointment was considered as a step forward not only because he was a liberal-centrist reformer, but also because he was a young Jordanian prime minister. The first thing Kabariti did was a campaign against corruption, but his appointment came at the same time when the regime wanted to increase the role of the Mukhabarat in

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<sup>57</sup> Mark Power Stevens, Post-Election Seminar, A Discussion of Jordan's 1993 Parliamentary Election, p.18

<sup>58</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah, p.29

political life after the hostility caused by the opposition concerning the peace treaty with Israel. This is why the evaluation of Kabariti's government tended to be mixed.

Many in the opposition praised the new prime minister for his dedication to achieve more pluralism and political liberalization, despite the expanded role and intervention of the Mukhabarat in Jordanian political life.

The 1993 elections really institutionalized the electoral process and made it an essential part in Jordanian political life. The lifting of martial law and the legalization of political parties certainly intensified the political liberalization process and pluralism in Jordanian politics.

What is worth mentioning though is that political parties did not gain the loyalty of most Jordanians at this early phase, and the new electoral law has been seen by many Jordanians as a limit for the democratic and parliamentary opposition in the kingdom. This is why the disagreement over this new electoral law continued after the 1993 elections and even through the next elections that were held after four year in 1997.

However, and right before the 1997 elections, parties continued forming positions and alliances then changing them to new ones, and by the time the elections were held, much of what seemed to be promising about the Jordanian political liberalization process appeared to be changing for the worse.

### **The opposition boycott and the 1997 elections:**

During the 1997 elections, new restrictions on the press and other political rights were held. Parties' hostility and division had reached the highest point it could get to,

which made the opposition boycott the elections just to destroy the credibility of the new elections and the new parliament.

The boycott of the 1997 elections that should be held in November started with four leftist parties in July 1997, followed by the Islamic Action Front (IAF) during the same month and finally by five pan-Arab nationalist parties.

What was more important is the unity of all opposition parties in their criticism. They all opposed the continuation of normalization of relations with Israel. And also they were against the temporary laws that the regime began in the summer of 1997 which included new restricted laws on public assembly, freedom of speech, press, publication, and so on. This factor could be considered as the main reason for the opposition's boycott due to the fact that they were opposing the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty before it was signed in 1994.

In the 1997 elections the opposition was still insisting on the cancelation of the one-person, one vote electoral law. And while the Hashemite regime took the results of the 1993 elections as an authorization for holding new main changes in the kingdom's rules and policies, especially the decision of continuing the peace treaty with Israel, the opposition parties rejected this peace treaty, and was completely not satisfied with the regime's renewed good relationship with the United States.

After eight years of political opposition in the parliament, the opposition parties felt helpless and proved their inability of making the regime change any of these big policy issues which caused a kind of disappointment within the opposition that included many limitations on the political liberalization process itself. And so we can see, as the



1997 elections were near, both of the parliamentary and party efficiency were really low which was a major step back for the Jordanian political liberalization process.

As we mentioned earlier, the Jordanian government issued a series of new regulations which included restrictions on press, rights of assembly and free speech. These regulations were declared in the summer of 1997. The regime posed new license requirements for papers before being published just to try to calm any critical publication of the regime.

By September 1997, the government suspended fifteen weekly papers, and even after the elections, the government continued its new regulations and withdrew the licenses of fourteen of the fifteen suspended papers.<sup>59</sup>

Given how much the regime was loosening its restraints on the media and the press which had them opened up since the political liberalization process started in 1989, the restrictions on the press and the media overall were very disturbing to Jordanians. What is worth mentioning though, is the fact that while some journalists, newspapers, and magazines were very critical and pushed the limits of political liberalization with their daring critical stories, others remained conservative and practiced the self-censorship rule in their releases.

The new regulations had a very negative response in the Kingdom. All international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch were very critical of the new regulations, especially when it comes to their timing, right before the November 1997 elections.

As for opposition parties, they all agreed, from secular left to religious right, that the regime's new rules broke the public confidence in the regime and the government

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<sup>59</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.30

when these two refused the opposition's demands that Jordan should change its foreign and domestic policies, which was a new bad hit to the political liberalization process, and things at that time seemed to be getting from bad to worse.

For all these past reasons, together, the leftist and Islamist opposition parties boycotted the 1997 elections. A little later, one of the centrist parties, "the Future Party" that included several former cabinet ministers joined the boycott which was a big surprise.

By mid-August, eighty well-known political figures including the two former prime ministers, Ahmad Ubaydat and Tahir al-Masri also joined the boycott. The importance of Ubaydat and Masri's boycott consisted in the coordination between a Transjordanian nationalist (Ubaydat) and the most well-known Palestinian politician in Jordan (Masri) which was a very big surprise for the Hashemite regime.

Yet, both of Ubaydat and Masri paid a political price for their opposition. On November 22, 1997, the king excluded both of them from the forty members of the upper house of the parliament that usually includes all former prime ministers. The upper house also didn't include any Islamists.

Joining the boycott by former regime officials really reinforced it. Yet, the government refused to agree to any of the opposition demands, and King Hussein made it very clear that the one-person one-vote law will remain; the process of normalizing relations with Israel will proceed, and the regime encouraged the opposition parties to return to the elections which they boycotted by their own choice, but no compromises were allowed.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.33

A month before the elections date, the opposition boycott started to be shaken. Ishaq Farhan, leader of the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and after the clear statement of King Hussein, Farhan changed the IAF demands from canceling the whole elections to a one-person, two-vote system which will allow the crisis to pass and the opposition to go back to elections.

The secular-left opposition proposed the idea of rescheduling the elections with a temporary review of the electoral law which can clear the air and make the elections more legitimate. Yet, both of the left and right wing opposition parties did not get any positive response to their softened demands and the elections were held as they were supposed to on November 4, 1997.

We should mention that although the secular-left parties loosened their demands after the king's statement in a try to make the crisis pass and run a fair election, but many of them stated that their criticisms were not limited to the elections, and they believed that the peace treaty process with Israel should be reconsidered.

Although the Hashemite regime refused to be put under any pressure from the opposition, and didn't respond to any of the opposition's demands, but the repeated criticisms and accusations to the regime hurt it to some extent.

In order to vote in the 1997 elections, all Jordanians over the age of nineteen except of the Jordanian armed forces, the security forces, the civil defense, members of the royal family, citizens in prison, the mentally ill, and those outside the country at the time of the election<sup>61</sup>, needed to present a government-issued voter card. The encountered problem was that some voters didn't get their card while some others received several ones. It

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<sup>61</sup> Mark Power Stevens, Post-Election Seminar, A Discussion of Jordan's 1993 Parliamentary Election, p.19

seemed that some people were hired to play with the voters' cards to create this chaos before the elections.

As a reaction to this problem, especially after the wide discussion in the Jordanian press about these acts, the regime appointed an official representative, Mazen al-Armuti, a well-known media figure, to lead the government's public relations campaign to improve the elections' image and save it from the charges of irregularities and the opposition boycott which had a remarkable effect on the elections' campaign that was simply weak and couldn't result but a weak parliament.

The 1997 campaign focused in addition to the Israeli peace treaty on the boycott itself. The government's ban on public demonstrations and party meetings, and the continuing checking on the campaign signs made the campaign anything but special. All the anti-Israeli signs were removed by the government officials, and many candidates chose to go with very general and innocent slogans with very little special political proposals.

The 1997 elections' results were not surprising at all, they came exactly as expected. The new Jordanian parliament was almost full of political centrists, pro-regime conservatives, and tribal candidates. Most of these candidates were independents, only five of the eighty seats in the parliament were won by candidates representing political parties.

The tribal candidates won more than half of the seats in the new parliament. The Islamists technically lost the elections, due to their limited participation. Thirty independent Islamists ran the elections, yet only six of them won their seats in the parliament. Four seats went to leftist candidates, but only one of them represented a

party: Khalil Haddadin of the Jordanian Arab Socialist Ba'th Party. The secular left and religious right's representation in the new parliament was very little.

As for women's representation, seventeen women contested the elections, but none of them won including Tujan al-Faysal who lost her re-election campaign. In other words, the new Jordanian parliament didn't have any women representation.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the opposition boycott, the main pro-regime party that participated in the elections, The National Constitutional Party (NCP), considering itself as the "party of the regime" failed to win eight of the ten seats the party was running for.<sup>63</sup>

The non-diversity of the new parliament shows clearly when it is compared with those of the 1989 and 1993 elections. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front won twenty-two seats in 1989, sixteen in 1993, but none in 1997. Only Islamists who contested the elections as independents managed to win only six seats, and ensured the minimum representation for the religious right in the new parliament.

Although the leftist candidates who quit the boycott won only six seats, but their results could be considered as similar as the ones from previous parliaments where their representation was also little.

As for traditional and conservative members of parliament, they had a huge increase in their seats within the new parliament. They won fifty-one seats in 1993 and sixty-eight from the eighty seats in 1997.

The 1997 elections, with the unfair new electoral law of one-person one-vote and the opposition boycott, brought the most conservative and pro-regime parliament and the smallest opposition representation since the political liberalization process started.

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<sup>62</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.34

<sup>63</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.37

Yet, we should mention that the Islamist decision to boycott the 1997 elections and their loss made them gain a positive position within the Jordanian society through their political activities and their general social services.<sup>64</sup>

Many Jordanian analysts considered the 1997 elections and its results as a big step backward from the previous ones which have a very negative effect on the political liberalization process.

Many Jordanian analysts shared their pessimism towards this issue, but given the new restrictions on the press, all publications, Arabic and English which were more daring, stayed cautious in their analyses.

All of these criticizing publications agreed that while the 1989 elections increased the power of civil society organizations and weakened the tribal bonds, and after years of democratic reforms, the 1997 elections brought back the press censorship, restricted public liberties, and also brought back the heavy tribal influence through the parliament. In other words, the 1997 elections cannot be considered as a top or a step forward in the democratic transition in Jordan.

Yet, we must not forget that the nature of the electoral system itself changed between the 1989 elections and the 1997 elections. In 1989, the voters had many votes which made them choose many candidates, some of them based on tribal bonds, some based on ideological similarity, and some based on individual candidate stands. As for the 1997 elections, the new electoral law one-person one-vote, didn't give the voters the chance to elect more than one candidate. This fact coupled with the absence of most political parties from the voting made the Jordanian voters vote for candidates each one

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<sup>64</sup> Renate Dieterich, *The Role of the Opposition/ Jordan in Transition*, p. 135

based on family and tribal bonds. This way of voting seemed to be the right and safe way to choose the candidate every voter wants to elect.

The overall participation in the 1997 elections was forty-four percent of all registered voters. Although this was a fall from the forty-seven percent attendance in the 1993 elections, but it was still an increase over the forty-one percent attendance in the 1989 elections.

These figures can mean only one thing, although the results weren't quite satisfying as they were expected to be, but it is a fact that Jordan's political liberalization process is moving forward even if it was in very small steps.

Yet, and at the same time, this low attendance caused a low level of public interest in the electoral system, and made the Jordanians voters loose confidence in their sense of political efficiency, which cannot be seen promising for the political liberalization process since 1989.

Given that elections are a major factor in the Jordanian political liberalization process, and after our discussion of the Jordanian electoral system, we can say that Jordan's political liberalization program has surpassed that of most of Arab states, despite the various delays Jordan faced. After all, political parties are now legal, elections are held on a regular basis, and martial law has not returned.

Yet, although political life in Jordan really changed in the period from 1989 to 1997, but some of that political liberalization and reform slowed down and slipped back in the last several years, especially after the new electoral law and the opposition boycott of the 1997 elections which delivered a centrist, conservative, and tribal parliament as it was the case before the political liberalization process started. These signs of backsliding

cannot be seen but threatening to the Jordanian political liberalization process that should be moving forward and not stepping back. In other words, the political liberalization process has gone forward in Jordan. The electoral process really provided meaningful ways for political participation in Jordan, but it proved that it was not a good sufficient material for political liberalization by itself. True it led Jordan to some level of progress, but this latter cannot be called a real complete political liberalization.

In chapters two and three, Jordanian Civil Society and Elections under the reign of the late King Hussein were discussed in detail. Now in the next chapter – chapter four- both of Jordanian civil society and elections will also be discussed, but this time under the reign of the new king, King Abdullah II.



## Chapter 4: Jordan under King Abdullah II

In February 1999, King Hussein died after years of battling cancer. Through the free use of various methods of political control and repression, the late King ensured that his successor would not face serious problems with the opposition. King Hussein's tactics to ensure his regime's survival allowed King Abdullah II to practice real legitimate political openings since he never faced any powerful opposition to his regime. King Hussein pushed very hard to promote the idea that the regime is inseparable from the political well-being of his country<sup>65</sup>, and he was able to gain his popular political legitimacy by capitalizing on his family's roots as descendants of the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad, and presenting himself as standing above the Jordanian political arena.<sup>66</sup>

King Hussein ruled Jordan for almost half a century, which made his rule the only one known for most Jordanians in their lifetimes. His death in 1999, the year which marked the tenth anniversary of the Jordanian political liberalization process, also marked the end of an era, and the beginning of a major transition in Jordanian politics. We should mention that Jordanians were surprised by the accession of Abdullah II as the new King and not Prince Hassan, King Hussein's brother. The late King changed his mind in his last days for some reasons that remained not quite well known, but from many readings, all we can say is that the reason maybe the behavior of Prince Hassan during the last

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<sup>65</sup> David Mednicoff, *Connections between Jordan and Morocco/ Jordan in transition*, George Joffe, p.100

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p.102

travel of King Hussein when it seems that he was trying to take over the reign by having some preparations<sup>67</sup>.

In this chapter, I will discuss the status and prospects of the major transitions to democracy in Jordanian politics, earlier discussed through the civil society and the electoral system factors under the reign of King Abdullah II. I will also discuss the changes within King Abdullah's II reign, and the political reforms through an analysis of the 1999 elections, the first elections held under the reign of King Abdullah II which was considered as a measure of the strength of Jordan's political liberalization, and after ten years from the beginning of this process, plus an analysis of the parliamentary elections held in the years 2003 and 2007.

Since its inception, the Hashemite monarchy intended to ensure its viability, by creating a bond between the regime and Jordanian society. Yet, all these reforms and changes, including civil society and political liberalization, will surely challenge the monarchy's traditional role in Jordanian politics.<sup>68</sup> Unlike the developed Western monarchies where the Monarch reigns and does not rule, monarchs in the Arab World hold the reigns of power<sup>69</sup>. In Jordan, the monarchy is the most powerful institution in the country's political life. Although the Hashemite family does not have any member in parliament or in the cabinet, the regime plays a major role through controlling and keeping great authority on various societies and organizations.

When Abdullah II came to rule, many Jordanians were happy with their new king although he had little political experience. And when his opponents started to criticize his youth and lack of political experience, his supporters highlighted his military experience

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<sup>67</sup> Alexander Bligh, *The Political Legacy of King Hussein*, p. 209

<sup>68</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.87

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p.87

and backed their support with the fact that King Abdullah's age when he ascended the throne was thirty-eight which is twice the age of his father when he became king<sup>70</sup>.

As his first official act, King Abdullah II named his half brother Hamza crown prince and successor to the throne, as his father wanted in his last wishes.<sup>71</sup>

The minute Abdullah II ascended the throne; the opposition started its dialogue with the new king to open up the political system, to continue the political liberalization process, and to reform the electoral laws. King Abdullah II carried on the "National Dialogue" his father started, and met with opposition party officials in early March 1999<sup>72</sup>, and also with the leaders of Jordan's professional associations who became a powerful substitute of the Jordanian party system which is relatively weak, and became an institutional base for the opposition within the Jordanian politics. Several months after the succession took place, Jordan held its new municipal elections.<sup>73</sup>

### **The 1999 municipal elections:**

Unlike the national parliamentary elections of 1989, 1993, and 1997, the 1999 elections were not for the national parliament, but they were for Jordanian local municipal positions in town councils and mayorships. The 1999 elections were very important for both regime supporters and opposition because they were the first elections held since the new King ascended the throne, and since the opposition boycotted the 1997 elections. Not to mention that the 1999 elections marked the tenth year of the beginning

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p.97

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p.97

<sup>72</sup> Renate Dieterich, The role of the opposition/ Jordan in transition, George Joffe, p.143

<sup>73</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah , P.98

of the Jordanian political liberalization process. In other words, the 1999 elections were considered as a test for the political liberalization process and its status after ten years from its starting, and also as a test of strength of the party system and of the possibilities for democratic opposition in Jordan. All regime supporters wanted the opposition parties to participate in the 1999 elections to legitimize the local elections. The opposition parties, in turn, wanted to be active and well represented in the new elections only if they were fair, which will make their participation a return to the political liberalization process.

Although both secular left and religious right in many opposition parties wanted the 1999 elections to be won by candidates from political parties and not based on family bonds, the majority of public seats were won once again by independent candidates supported by their own families.<sup>74</sup>

These results reflected the continuing mistrust of Jordanian voters of all parties and the weakness of the political party system itself. Most of these opposition parties had unclear policies and unorganized campaigns for the 1999 elections.

Although the opposition parties wanted to form a united front to present a common list, their negotiations failed due to the differences between opposition parties. As for the Islamic Action Front (IAF), they contested the 1999 elections alone, and they eventually came out with a big victory due to their great organization and high levels of participation from party supporters, while the left got weaker. The IAF won the mayorship and four of eleven seats in *Irbid*, Five of twenty seats in Amman city council, and six out of eleven seats in *Madaba* city.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.99

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p.99

Given their victory, and right after the elections, the Islamists announced their participation in the next parliamentary elections that were to be held in November 2001. They also proposed their demands for more reforms, beginning with the urge of changing the Amman city council's voting from electing twenty of the forty seats and appointing the other twenty seats from royal appointees, to electing the whole forty seats<sup>76</sup>.

The Islamists' second demand was the reforming of the one-person one-vote electoral law and the electoral districts so that populations would be better represented by their candidates, considering the number of contestants representing each district and the political background of each one of them<sup>77</sup>. In fact, the opposition parties proposed several substitutes for the current electoral law, but the regime's response was about the need for having a new national dialogue which the opposition did not believe in at all. Eventually, in July 2001, the government issued the new electoral law that unfortunately kept the one-person one-vote rule, but added numerous procedures to guarantee more accuracy and reliability to the electoral law and the system as a whole. The new law increased the number of parliamentary representatives from eighty to one hundred four, and the number of electoral districts from twenty-one to forty-five<sup>78</sup>. It also included new magnetic voter cards, and the elections' control and supervision was shifted from the Ministry of the Interior to the judiciary. And finally, the minimum age for voting was reduced from nineteen to eighteen<sup>79</sup>.

Following the announcement of the new electoral law, the government stated that the next parliamentary elections that were scheduled at November 2001 would have to be

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.100

<sup>77</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah, p.100

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.125

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.125

delayed to at least September 2002 to give time to prepare the new magnetic voter cards. The opposition did not favor the postponement. The new electoral law did not respond to any of the opposition's demands, even the one-person one-vote rule that was the main reason for the opposition's boycott to the 1997 election. Added to the last elections' postponement, these factors made the opposition parties think about boycotting the elections again.

Yet, what is worth mentioning about the 1999 elections is the low voters' turnout which was not impressive at all. None of the major Islamist parties had achieved even a fifty percent turnout. This low turnout made the government officials extend the voting for a second day. However, the voting remained limited and most Jordanians chose to stay home. As for the Jordanian women's representation in the 1999 elections, it came out to be very poor. Iman Futaymat, who was the first woman mayor in Jordan in the 1995 public elections, lost her position to a male contestant.

Only forty-four women contestants were running the 1999 elections against almost 5,000 men. This low number of women candidates was not only due to a lack of interest, it was also due to the fact that in some places in Jordan, parties refused to allow women candidates to run the elections according to the Islamic concept that says "women are equal but different"<sup>80</sup>. Eventually, women won only eight town council seats and no mayorships while men contestants won 2,038 council seats.<sup>81</sup>

The 1999 elections and their results were not a resounding success for the political liberalization process. They brought only negative effects and pessimism since the political party system remained weak, and many Jordanians continued to have little

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<sup>80</sup> Chris Hann, Elizabeth Dunn, *Civil Society Challenging western models*, p.166

<sup>81</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.101

faith in the electoral process as a whole – parliamentary or local municipal- especially that they didn't have a variety of choices in candidates to choose from.

Yet, there were few positive aspects that came out from the 1999 elections. The most important one was the return of the opposition to elections in 1999 after they boycotted the 1997 elections.

As for the media, and despite the continuing government restrictions, some journalists pushed individually the limits of the political liberalization process through publishing many critical articles and stories such as the corruption cases against government officials and the pollution of the Amman water supply in the summer of 1998<sup>82</sup>. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the viability of government restrictions on the media was being put under a big question mark in the presence of the satellite-dish which was expanding rapidly in Jordan and which the authorities could not censor or control, and also in the presence of the Internet which was not restricted at all.

### **The 2003 parliamentary elections:**

The 2003 elections were supposed to take place in November 2001, but due to the political instability in the region, especially the second Palestinian Intifada that started in 28 September 2000, King Abdullah II postponed the elections, using his constitutional powers to do so. Finally the elections were held on 17 June 2003 under the new electoral law which was issued in 2001. It gave women candidates six more seats, lowered the voting age from nineteen to eighteen, and increased the number of electoral districts from

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<sup>82</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah, p.121

twenty to forty-five<sup>83</sup>, while keeping the one-person one-vote rule, which made the new electoral law a dislike for many parties who found it unfair.

765 candidates ran in the 2003 elections; most of them were independent and did not belong to any party. Many opposition parties boycotted the 2003 elections as a consequence of the new electoral law which they found unfair. Yet, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) did not join the boycott; they ran in the elections but won only 16 seats, facing the independent candidates who won the majority of seats in the new parliament with 88 seats<sup>84</sup>. As for women's representation in the new parliament, and like we formerly mentioned, the new electoral law has assigned six seats as a special quota to ensure the women's participation in the new parliament. Eventually, the six female candidates who had the highest percentage during the elections were given these six seats<sup>85</sup>.

The fact that there were six female members in the new parliament which was the highest women's representation in all previous parliaments, added to the relatively high number of voters which reached 58.8 percent of registered voters which means that the Jordanians started to believe more in the electoral system and the political aspects as a whole, gave a good impression for the 2003 elections which constituted a positive factor and a push forward for the political liberalization process. Yet, it is worth mentioning that the party system did not mark any improvement, given that all parties in the 2003 elections did not achieve any remarkable representation in the new parliament, which means that Jordanians and until that time remained not fully faithful in the political party system.

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<sup>83</sup> Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Washington D.C.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

<sup>85</sup> Ibid



### *The 2007 parliamentary elections:*

The 2007 parliamentary elections were held on 20 November 2007. 885 candidates were contesting to win 110 seats distributed over forty-five electoral districts<sup>86</sup>. The candidates varied between independent candidates, political parties, and candidates under tribal support. The Jordanian largest party “The Islamic Action Front” also participated in the 2007 elections. The IAF ran the elections with twenty-two candidates, yet, only six of the Islamic candidates won, which marked a huge setback for the Islamic party and its influence among the Jordanians. In fact, and after the 2007 elections, the IAF lost forty-four percent from its popularity in Jordan<sup>87</sup>.

The Islamic Action Front party was completely unsatisfied with their results, especially that they won sixteen seats in the 2003 elections, and they already requested independent monitors to control the elections, but their request was turned down given that this would put the Jordanian elections’ integrity under question. We should mention at this point that Jordanian NGOs refused to monitor the elections due to the fact that the government did not give them a satisfactory and tolerable access to the voting centers especially during the votes counting<sup>88</sup>.

Like 2003 elections, the independent candidates won 98 seats which represented the majority of seats in the new parliament of 2007. The IAF and all other parties did not mark any improvement in the new elections; in fact, their position was constantly

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<sup>86</sup> Al-Ra’I newspaper, 18-11-2007

<sup>87</sup> Al-Ra’I newspaper, 29-11-2007

<sup>88</sup> Al-Ra’I newspaper, 08-11-2007

decreasing to the extent that from 37 candidates they came out from the elections with zero winning which was not satisfying at all<sup>89</sup>.

As for women's representation, the 2007 elections had witnessed the highest female participation among all previous elections. In fact, 199 women contested to win the assigned six seats guaranteed by the quota that was issued since the 2003 elections<sup>90</sup>. The voting turnout in the 2007 elections was relatively similar to the one of year 2003. Fifty-four percent of Jordanians showed up and voted, which shows that Jordanians are having more faith in the electoral system and political life, and that they are being more open toward women's representation in the elections, and the female status as a whole. Yet, this was not the case for political parties which were losing their credibility and influence among Jordanians, mostly due to the lack of organization, and the disorder in their electoral campaign which prevented them from gaining Jordanians' trust. Therefore, the 2007 elections' results were very similar to those of the 2003 elections which is a positive sign showing that the political liberalization process did not step back even though it did not mark any step forward.

We discussed earlier in the previous chapters the changes Jordan has witnessed within the political liberalization process during ten years. What we are concerned about at this point is the status of political transitions, the changes, and the political liberalization process itself after these ten years and during the early years of the new reign of King Abdullah II. So far, what we can obviously notice is that the succession of King Abdullah did not bring any basic changes in ruling the Kingdom. It was clear since

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<sup>89</sup> Al-Ra'i newspaper, 23-11-2007

<sup>90</sup> Middle East News, 20 November, 2007

the first year of the new king's reign that all expectations for more democracy won't be realized anytime soon.<sup>91</sup>

Up till now, the political liberalization process including the electoral system, civil society, and press freedom -which created a major challenge to the Jordanian political transition itself- remained incomplete. Sure it reached a certain point of improvement within the Kingdom, yet, we cannot call it a real complete political liberalization.

So will Jordan's society ever move on the way to a more meaningful true democracy that includes more pluralism, individual rights, and civil society?

Right after ascending the throne, King Abdullah II declared his intentions of continuing the political reform process. The King first met with the heads of opposition parties and professional associations, highlighting the need of a new national dialogue that goes along with the new reign. Later on, Jordan held its municipal elections in 1999 which were the first elections during the very first year of King Abdullah's reign.

King Abdullah's clear commitment to the political reform process had a positive effect on the various opposition parties who returned to participate in the political liberalization process through the 1999 elections after they boycotted the electoral system and the process itself in the 1997 elections.

However, the new king showed his commitment in a very unusual way when he showed up disguised in a series of unannounced appearances at various hospitals, ministries, and departments to check personally on public services.<sup>92</sup> These visits were surely planned to show the king's personal interest in public services and in applying the political reform, they also gave high hopes to Jordanians that major and immediate

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<sup>91</sup> Renate Dieterich, *The role of the opposition/ Jordan in transition*, George Joffe, p. 143

<sup>92</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.119

changes will take place in the kingdom even if it was in a slow pace, and made an important departure in the discussion of pluralist political liberalization, the coming out of civil society, and the role of a free press.

In 1989, the restrictions on the media were loosened. Later on, in 1993 a new press law was issued as a step toward democracy. Yet, this law required that any journalist must be a member of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) which is a government organization.

Furthermore, in the summer of 1997, the conservative government of Prime Minister Abd al-Salam al-Majali issued a temporary restrictive press law right before the elections, which increased the tension between the regime and the opposition, and made the latter boycott the 1997 elections.

Another press and publication law was issued by the Majali government in 1998 after the elections were done and the parliament was set which caused a major disagreement between the regime and the opposition. The mentioned law urged daily papers to secure 500,000 dinars, and weeklies 100,000 dinars<sup>93</sup>. This move was mainly made to close down as many papers as they can. As for individual journalists with critical publications, the government took them to court under the charge of breaking the various press laws in a very offensive way.

We could see that until back then, the media was controlled and penetrated by the *Mukhabarat*. Yet, in the summer of 2001, and after the big attack of the government and *Mukhabarat* against Riyadh Hroub, the owner and founder of the private and independent Arabic daily Al-‘Arab al-Yawm and the founder of the weekly “Shihan”, because of the high-critical publications his papers published concerning the fore mentioned pollution of

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<sup>93</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah, p.121

the Amman water supply, and the Israeli *Mossad's* failed assassination attempt against Hamas leader Khalid al-Mash'al in Amman, and many other stories, and after forcing Hroub to sell his majority shares in his papers, the government took a positive initiative by appointing George Hawatmeh as editor of the Arabic daily, *Al-Ra'y*, in the summer of 2001. Hawatmeh was the chief editor of the *Jordan Times* and was known as a supporter of democracy and free press. This move raised hopes once again for a more liberal advancement from the state.

By 2002, the reform process was getting to its thirteenth year, and still has not produced the political system that possesses the main features of a democratic government. Sure Jordan has witnessed some aspects of political liberalization in the lower house or parliament through the elections, but all these aspects came out to be very limited. And despite the opposition's efforts through its various political parties and professional associations, it failed in affecting the government policies and changing them.

The other aspect of the Jordanian political liberalization process is the civil society as represented by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The government restrictions on NGOs did not decrease when Abdullah II ascended the throne. And despite all the optimism about the new king's democratic tendencies and efforts, very few actions concerning the liberalization of these NGOs were taken.<sup>94</sup> In fact, numerous NGOs such as Mizan, The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies, the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists, and the Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies, chose earlier in 1997 to be registered as non-profit organizations rather than NGOs just to

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<sup>94</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Embedded Authoritarianism/ Jordan in transition*, George Joffe, p.123

stay away from restrictive laws on NGOs, which made the government in 2006 work on issuing new restrictions for non-profit organizations in order to control them too<sup>95</sup>.

Many of Jordanian NGOs were the most democratic organizations in the Kingdom. Yet, they were also highly controlled and restricted by the government in an attempt to limit their influence. The government officials tended to criticize every NGO that has connections from outside Jordan especially when it comes to the foreign funding of the NGO itself. These organizations were considered as spies as the *Ba'thists* and the Communists were considered before<sup>96</sup>.

This situation was unusual and strange due to the fact that the regime under the reign of King Abdullah II should have been more open since it was implementing new democratic and liberal concepts that should accept foreign and global connections and not be suspicious of organizations and NGOs and subject them to criticism and harassment, especially the human rights organizations that have these links. And sometimes even charging these NGOs with treason for receiving foreign funding, just because the regime officials claim that: "Nobody gives you anything without wanting something in return"<sup>97</sup>.

Many independent organizations and NGOs were trying very hard to have a major effect in respect to construct a significant civil society and real political liberalization. Yet, all their efforts turned out limited due to the fact that the regime considered that the political liberalization process was already done and completed. The efforts were only limited but not negative because there were many reform actions that took place indeed,

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<sup>95</sup> Human Rights Watch, Shutting out the critics, restrictive laws used to repress civil society in Jordan, p.24

<sup>96</sup> Curtis R.Ryan, Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah, p.122

<sup>97</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, Embedded Authoritarianism/ Jordan in transition, George Joffe, p.123

in addition to many reformers and democracy activists who continued their active dynamic work in order to achieve a meaningful civil society and democracy.

Capitalizing on greater government toleration of its activities, Jordanian civil society in the Kingdom has contributed to the emergence of more participatory politics, which once again came on to be limited. Yet, it made room for many chances and opportunities for activists with new developed ideas that can surpass the government's old ones. And while the political liberalization process has stepped backward after the 1994 elections, things never got back to the way they were before the 1989. In fact, we can currently find general publications for elections' records issued by foundations and universities such as the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies<sup>98</sup>. Research centers – such the independent *Al-Urdun al-Jadid* (New Jordan) Research Center<sup>99</sup> now can publish their own criticisms and analyses whether it was about parties, the press, or any side or institution of the political liberalization process.

As for NGOs, they managed to be the most promising aspect of the Jordanian political liberalization process when many of them – such the Arab Archives Institute- started to be connected with international human rights organizations such as the Transparency International and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network<sup>100</sup>.

Most Jordanians were happy with their new young king, and were hoping that he will achieve many reforms that will lead the country toward more political liberalization and away from conservatism<sup>101</sup>. Yet, Jordanians were still worried not only because of all the conservative officials who surrounded the new king, but also because of the

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<sup>98</sup> Curtis R. Ryan, *Jordan in Transition: From Hussein to Abdullah*, p.123

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p. 123

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p. 123

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, p.123

*Mukhabarat's* role that seemed to be increasing although the Kingdom's international relations have stabilized after the peace treaty with Israel, and the successful royal succession did not face any problems. The increasing role of the *Mukhabarat* can only be explained as a guarantee to the solidity of the succession and to ensure the strength of the crown. And while this role was negatively affecting the political liberalization process, Jordanians continued to believe that King Abdullah II will be on their side and work for their own benefits. According to them, the problem is not about the king himself rather about all the conservative officials remaining from King Hussein's regime. Consequently, the role of King Abdullah II in pushing the political and social opening forward to reach a higher level of political liberalization through the reformist agenda that he has adopted since his accession, will be the only key and hope to Jordan and Jordanians in order to continue the political liberalization process that will lead them one day to a more stable and enduring democratic government and not less.



## Conclusion

Jordan's democratic experience is considered one of the most distinctive in Arab countries. Due to opposition which shook the Kingdom, and pushed it toward a democratic path, political parties returned, and the whole Jordanian political ambience became more open, which modified Jordan's politics remarkably in a positive way.

Jordanian democracy flourished since the early 1990s, yet experienced a certain set back later on. This made it necessary for the regime to renew its commitment to the political liberalization process in order to preserve the Kingdom's future, within the framework of a democracy which will be able to serve public wellbeing.

Following the 1989 riots, serious changes were initiated by the regime. The most important initiatives that took place were the legalization of political parties, the holding of elections, the lifting of martial law – even though the Jordanian constitution allows the re-activation of this law anytime even during the political liberalization phase<sup>102</sup> - , and the establishment of an open political climate.

One may note that, since the onset of the political liberalization process, Jordan has had a better human rights record than its Arab neighbors. Jordan has more human rights groups than neighboring Arab countries and (more importantly) these groups enjoy more freedom of action.

Despite the changes that occurred since 1989, certain restrictions on political freedoms are still in place. These restrictions take the form of governments' acts such as

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<sup>102</sup> Paul J. Magnarella, , Middle East and North Africa: governance, political liberalization, human rights, p.89

arresting citizens during demonstrations, and the lingering oppressive presence of the intelligence services (*Mukhabarat*.)

In June 1997, the University of Jordan's Centre for Strategic Studies (CSS) released a survey that rated the Jordanian democracy at a 4.88 on a level of one to ten, with one standing for the beginning of democracy and ten for full democracy (Jordan Times 1997b).<sup>103</sup> These results were very similar to the ones of the same poll the CSS conducted in 1993. This means that most Jordanians still do not believe that their system operates on the basis of democratic principles. For example, Jordanians doubt that their parliament has real legislative power and they do not appear to have great confidence in the political party system.

This lingering doubts stem from the fact that the political liberalization process, and those committed to it, have not managed so far to make a change in the core features of Jordan's political and social life. The political liberalization process notwithstanding, the regime in Jordan, and in particular the monarchy, can still block changes that they are opposed to.

It is quite obvious that there is more democracy in Jordan today than was the case in 1989. This is largely due to the efforts of opposition parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the leftists, and civil society sectors. Yet, and in order to maintain the momentum of democratic change, citizens should feel that political liberalization is serving their needs; and that the process is not a limited and regime-managed opening; but a process that is leading to meaningful political democracy.

By that we mean the resort to transparent and competitive elections, and on a regular basis, to choose the country's policy-makers; and the presence of a government

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<sup>103</sup> . Ibid. , p.99

that balances the different types of people's interests, without identifying with one particular set of interests. In Jordan's case, and based on the discussion in the previous chapters, we can conclude that Jordan's political liberalization process needs four elements in order to transform into what we may call "real democracy". These elements are: 1) the existence of political parties, 2) the holding of fair parliamentary elections, 3) the entrustment of lawmaking to elected parliaments and accountable executives, and 4) ensuring meaningful freedom of expression and respect for human rights. Progress on these four fronts is indispensable for the consolidation of Jordanian democracy. Undoubtedly, Jordan has witnessed a major democratic transition; but the question remains: "can Jordan continue with this transition until it reaches the stage of consolidation?" Only time and the policy of King Abdullah II in consolidating these four aspects and guarantying the continuation of the political liberalization process can answer this question.

The Jordanian experience with political liberalization demonstrates that Middle East monarchies are probably better candidates for real democracy than their republican neighbors. Middle East monarchies seem to have realized that their long term survival hinges on recognizing and working with (rather than suppressing) civil society, resorting to elections, respecting human rights, and in general having good regime-society relations. Jordan, the small hereditary Gulf Sheikdoms, and even Morocco seem to hold better prospects for democracy than the Arab republics – such as Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Yemen. This means that Jordan's democratic process has to be taken as a message by other Arab monarchies to press ahead with their own political liberalization processes.

Yet, comparing Jordan with its Arab neighbors will be a hard mission due to the differences in circumstances in each country. In Algeria for example, democracy has been experienced in a very hard and cruel way<sup>104</sup>. In Yemen, the democratic experience was terminated from the first place<sup>105</sup>. As for Mauritania, things were not better with all the allegations that were made about negligence and misconduct<sup>106</sup>. Yet, Jordan's case could be taken as a different one from other cases due to the fact that Jordan is advanced over many Arab countries by its separation between the authority of the government and the authority of the regime, which do not exist in Egypt, for example, where the legality of the government and the regime are connected<sup>107</sup>.

It is hard for us to judge the Jordanian democratic process, due to the theory that says that any real democracy cannot be established if it was constantly suspended, and that is the case of Jordan's democracy which was interrupted several times, which slowed down the democracy process that did not flourish until 1989.

The playwright Bernard Shaw said that "it takes three generations to raise a democratic generation and a genuine democracy"<sup>108</sup>. So it seems that Jordan's democratic period has come with its new generation. This is why Jordanians have to raise their young children on the basics of democracy since their early ages, so they grow up skilled with dialogue, creativeness, and rationality in developing conclusions. In this order, fighting for public liberties and civil and human rights will not be left only to the government and political parties by themselves. Democracy in this case, will be a life style and a pattern that will positively affect people's attitudes.

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<sup>104</sup> Hani Hourani, Hussein Abu-Rumman, *The Democratic Process in Jordan... where to?*, p.313

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, p.313

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, p.313

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, p.314

<sup>108</sup> Hani Hourani, Hussein Abu-Rumman, *The Democratic Process in Jordan... where to?*, p.308

In the end, what can be said is that Jordan's democracy is still young and it still has a long way to go. This is why we cannot compare it to other advanced democracies which took a very long time to reach that level. Democratic education is essential in Jordan, in order to raise a new democratic generation that will work side to side with the government, help it to complete the political liberalization process, and to get to real democracy which cannot be complete nor by the government neither by the civil society by themselves. The Jordanian democracy as any other democracy requires the contribution of all society's sectors in order to achieve their goals, and in our case "Democracy".

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