Democratization
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fdem20

Elections under authoritarianism: Preliminary lessons from Jordan

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Version of record first published: 17 Jul 2006.

Elections under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan

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This study examines the politics of elections in authoritarian regimes, focusing on Jordan. Specifically, it considers (1) what is the role of elections in authoritarian regimes? (2) How can we understand voter behaviour in authoritarian elections? (3) How and why do candidates participate in elections? (4) How do state elites manage electoral competition? The fundamental contention is that elections under authoritarianism are an important arena for competition, but one over patronage, not policy. This has profound effects on electoral politics. Voters generally cast their ballots for those who can, and will, deliver goods; that is, they vote for candidates who maintain good relations with ruling elites, and with whom the voters have personal ties. Elites are similarly more likely to run in elections if they do not oppose the regime. The result is a pro-regime bias in parliaments, even in the absence of regime manipulation. Consequently, in contrast to conventional wisdom, elections are neither pre-determined 'contests' under the ruling elites' full control, nor are they major struggles between opposition and the regime; rather, elections in even very repressive authoritarian regimes are often true competitions that help to stabilize the regime. Authoritarian rulers can thus generally rely on institutions – not ballot-box stuffing – to manage elections, using districting and electoral laws to favour supporters. The study concludes with a discussion of implications for democracy promotion programmes.

Key words: elections; authoritarianism; Jordan; Middle East; democratization

Scholars have paid enormous attention to elections in established and newly democratic regimes, but they have largely ignored elections in the Middle East North Africa region (MENA) and in authoritarian regimes more generally. They easily eschew the *fallacy of electoralism*, which equates elections with democracy,[1] but many nevertheless accept a similar fallacy that 'full-blown' authoritarian regimes cannot have elections that are meaningful in any significant way. Early attempts to understand electoral politics in authoritarian regimes[2] have given way to scholarship focusing only on elections within a subset of 'competitive authoritarian' regimes.[3] The belief is that '[i]n full-blown authoritarian regimes, formal democratic institutions such as elections, parliaments, and courts either do not exist or exist merely as façades or legitimating mechanisms. They do not yield meaningful contestation for power or generate uncertainty with regard to the allocation of political authority.'[4]

Middle East specialists have also largely dismissed elections in the MENA. Many correctly point out that elections neither denote nor are destined to promote

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Democratization, Vol.13, No.3, June 2006, pp.456–471
ISSN 1351-0347 print/1743-890X online
DOI: 10.1080/13510340600579359

democracy.[5] Yet, while they focus to some extent on the relationship between elections and democratization, they pay very little attention to the politics of the elections themselves. A limited number of case studies have examined voters' and candidates' behaviours in some detail.[6] However, these studies have not challenged the widespread assumption that elections in authoritarian regimes are largely orchestrated events, in which candidates are strictly vetted and closely monitored, and outcomes are determined through ballot-box stuffing and manipulation.[7]

It is difficult, however, to reconcile this view of elections in authoritarian regimes with the evidence that parliaments in such regimes are politically significant. Gandhi and Przeworski have argued, for instance, that authoritarian regimes with parliamentary institutions tend to have longer life spans than authoritarian regimes that lack these institutions.[8] Further, Gandhi and Vreeland have found that parliamentary authoritarian regimes are less likely to experience civil conflict than their counterparts without parliaments.[9] Examining slightly different factors, Geddes as well as Hadenius and Toerell find that multiparty regimes are more durable than military regimes, indirectly supporting arguments that elections and parliaments may contribute to regime durability.[10] Brownlee is more sceptical that elections help to promote the survival of non-democratic regimes.[11] Nevertheless, the recent literature suggests that we should not quickly dismiss these elections as meaningless but, rather, seek to understand the politics and the impact of these elections.

More importantly, a closer look at elections in the MENA finds that political elites take the elections very seriously. Even where liberalization has been extremely limited or reversed, both incumbents and opponents vigorously debate rules governing participation. Candidates invest enormously in elections; even in the most seemingly repressive regimes, such as Syria and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, candidates spend large amounts of time and money on everything from lavish banquets and gifts to campaign materials and votes. It is hard to imagine that such debates would exist if institutions were completely meaningless, or that candidates would invest so heavily in elections if the outcomes were predetermined. In short, a serious study of electoral politics under authoritarianism is required if we are to bridge the wide gap between our assumptions about elections under authoritarianism and the reality witnessed on the ground.

Finally, there are important theoretical reasons to study authoritarian elections. Until we understand the politics of authoritarian elections and the institutions that govern them, we cannot distinguish elections that create momentum toward democratization from those which reinforce the existing regime. Scholars working within new institutionalism have argued convincingly that institutions can both affect and reinforce the distribution of power across actors, affecting not only the present but options for the future as well.[12] As March and Olsen argued, '[a]ctions taken within and by political institutions change the distribution of political interests, resources, and rules by creating new actors and identities, by providing actors with criteria of success and failure, by constructing rules for appropriate behaviour, and by endowing some individuals, rather than others, with authority and other types of resources.'[13] Examining the politics of elections under authoritarianism will allow us to distinguish who gains and who loses through electoral politics,

providing some insight into when elections either reinforce or undermine the current regime.

A study of elections under the full range of authoritarian regimes is also required if we are to 'unpack the grey zone' of hybrid regimes.[14] Munck and Snyder convincingly fault recent literature with conceptual imprecision and a failure to examine the 'dark zone'.[15] Indeed, some scholars' very definition of competitive authoritarian regimes puts elections front and centre, and yet at the same time, pays very little attention to what makes these elections 'competitive' or to understanding the nature of that competition.[16] A closer look at electoral politics in 'full blown' authoritarian regimes will contribute to this important literature on authoritarianism.

This examination of elections in Jordan takes a first step in this direction. It seeks to demonstrate that electoral politics under authoritarianism are both systematic and shaped by institutions, even if they are fundamentally different from electoral politics in democratic regimes. This study begins with a discussion of the role of authoritarian elections and then considers how the nature of elections, combined with institutional rules, shape both voter and candidate behaviour and alters electoral outcomes. The analysis finds that elections under authoritarianism can help stabilize the regime, even in the absence of electoral fraud. This essay thus concludes by considering the implications of this finding for democracy promotion programmes.

Before examining these elections, it is important to consider the advantages and limitations of analysing Jordanian elections. On one hand, Jordan is a particularly useful case to study. After having banned political parties in 1957 and then suspended full parliamentary elections, Jordan took major steps toward liberalization in 1989. Following rioting in April 1989, King Hussein announced the reintroduction of parliamentary elections, and eventually the legalization of political parties. This paved the way for a series of elections in which a range of forces, from Islamists to secularists, have participated. Moreover, the electoral system has not required that individuals run as members of political parties, allowing us to determine the extent to which party identification is salient. Finally, because Jordan is at the forefront of survey research in the region, a remarkable amount of data ranging from public opinion polls to electoral outcomes are available for the study of these elections. Thus, Jordanian elections provide an important window into the study of elections under authoritarianism. As we shall see, they yield somewhat disturbing conclusions for theoreticians and policymakers and suggest the need to extend the analyses of elections, focusing on elections in other authoritarian regimes and social conditions.

The Role of Elections

Elections, and the parliaments they help form, provide a critical arena of competition in authoritarian regimes. In large part, they are not generally manipulated. The government[17] and the people certainly recognize that incumbents can 'step in' when need be, either altering unacceptable outcomes or dismissing the parliament altogether, and in the process of elections, government and security forces may work to strengthen pro-regime candidates against the opposition. Yet, in marked contrast to conventional

wisdom that largely dismisses authoritarian elections as meaningless staged events, there is a significant amount of competition in authoritarian elections.

The competition is not over policy making. Many (and in some cases most) policy arenas are off-limits to parliamentarians,[18] a fact which is not lost on either parliamentarians or voters. Indeed, the 2004 democracy polls in Jordan found that only 7.34 per cent believed the parliament played a major role in legislation in Jordan. In contrast, 28.29 per cent believed the legislators did not have any effect on Jordan's policies.[19]

It is also not primarily a competition over the boundaries of participation and the future for democratization. Elections are to some extent a two-level game: one competition over the offices at stake and another over the rules of participation. This is true, for some participants and in some cases. Yet, it is not the only (or perhaps even the primary) importance of the electoral competition. In the 1997 Jordanian elections, when opposition to the 1993 electoral law was at its height and the retrenchment of democratization was hotly debated, less than one-third of candidates discussed 'strengthening democratic life in Jordan', and even fewer than 10 per cent focused on such issues as the revision of the electoral law, strengthening of political parties or further democratization in Jordan.[20]

Rather, elections under authoritarianism provide an important arena of competition over access to state resources. That elections and parliaments provide a basis for the distribution of patronage is not entirely unique to authoritarian regimes; to some extent, this characterizes electoral politics in democracies as well. However, in authoritarian elections, the distribution of state resources trumps by far any role of elections as arenas for contests over the executive or critical policies. Parliament is, rather, a basis from which one can call upon ministers and bureaucrats to allocate jobs to constituents. Indeed, in Jordan government ministers have reportedly complained that parliamentarians are pushing them to supply jobs,[21] at times 'threatening state institutions of scandalizing them in parliament if they did not react positively to their requests'. The result, according to one journalist, was that government institutions and ministries allocated 'an unofficial quota for parliamentarians' relatives and acquaintances to avoid friction with deputies, and better still, to secure safe haven from the deputies' comments and criticism'.[22]

At other times, deputies simply take advantage of the resources available within parliament. Perhaps the most notable example of this occurred when Speaker of the Lower House, Abdul Hadi Majali, allegedly hired his friends and relatives, along with those of his close deputies, to serve as the 80 secretaries for parliamentarians, bypassing the recommendations of a committee which had formed specifically to review the 400 applications.[23] Parliamentarians also have received discretionary funds which they can distribute as they see fit in responding to constituents' (and their own) needs. Importantly, the distribution of the discretionary funds is also at the government's discretion, which puts enormous pressure on the parliamentarians to 'play by the regime's rules' in the parliament.

Deputies are also under pressure from their constituents to provide these services. A survey of 400 Jordanians in 2000 found, for example, that the majority believe that they need *wasta* (or mediation) to get business done at a government office, with 45.83 per cent responding that they would seek *wasta* before beginning their task,

and 19.16 per cent looking for it after beginning. Not surprisingly, some deputies thus complain that the public lacks an interest in public issues, turning to the deputies instead only to provide everything from university admissions to appointments as ambassadors and ministers. As Sa'eda Kilani and Basam Sakijha conclude:

> parliament, whose main task is to monitor government's performance and legislate laws, is gradually becoming the haven for Wasta practices. Voluntarily or out of social pressure, parliamentarians' role in mediating, or, in other words, using Wasta between the citizen and the state is ... becoming their main task.[24]

It is important to note that this view of elections contrasts, to some extent, with the conventional wisdom that elections in authoritarian regimes add legitimacy to the regime, thereby promoting stability. Indeed, the logic underlying such arguments is not convincing. It suggests that individuals are somehow led to believe – often for long periods at a time – that their elections and parliaments give them greater input into decision-making than they do. Alternatively, the logic suggests that the electoral institutions cannot help to provide stability over the long run, as the added boost of legitimacy wears away. Abandoning a notion that elections provide 'legitimacy' allows us both to understand the politics of these elections and to shed the often-unwarranted anticipation that elections herald democratization.

Voting for *Wasta*

That elections are primarily an arena of patronage distribution has a significant impact on voting behaviour. Most obviously, voters tend to cast their ballots for candidates whom they think will afford them *wasta*, and not for reasons of ideology or policy preferences. They are also more likely to turn out to the polls when they believe that their candidates are close enough to the government to deliver state resources.

Casting Ballots

Jordanian voters seek representatives who will be willing and able to help them obtain patronage, rather than representatives who necessarily reflect their political views. When given the opportunity to do both, as we shall discuss shortly, they may be willing to cast ballots based on ideology. Yet the foremost priority in voting is not policy making, but gaining access to the state.

Voters thus often seek candidates who have contacts with or can remain in good graces with the state. One voter who had approached his deputy seeking *wasta* explained:

> I came to seek a job from the deputy of our district. He told us that the government does not listen to them these days. I wonder why the deputies oppose the government. They should comply with and obey the government's policies so that we can take our rights, because it is up to the government to pass anything. Frankly speaking, I will not elect anyone unless the government approves of him because we want to survive.[25]

Another woman echoed these sentiments, saying that members of her tribe had decided not to elect their current candidate again, even though he was from their tribe. He had failed to distribute the discretionary funds he received to members of his district. In the next election, they would support someone else, even if he was of a different tribe.[26]

The concern with voting for tribal members reflects a more general interest: voters not only want parliamentarians who can deliver, but they want representatives who will be willing to funnel these resources to them, personally. Indeed, the Jordanian democracy poll in 2003 found that more than one-third of voters voted for their candidate because he or she was a member of their tribe or family, and almost half (49 per cent) voted for a candidate with whom they had close personal ties.[27]

In contrast, voters do not cast ballots for parties. In the absence of significant policymaking power in parliaments, parties remain relatively unknown. Public opinion polls have consistently demonstrated that Jordanians pay little attention to the political parties. Only 1.3 per cent of respondents were or planned to be a member of a political party. Over 88 per cent were not, and 9.43 per cent did not understand the question.[28] Not surprisingly, most voters do not cast their ballots based upon party affiliation. Asked if membership in the Islamic Action Front (IAF) or any other party was a consideration in choosing their candidate, only 13.38 per cent of Jordanians chose their candidates because the candidates were in the Muslim Brotherhood-related IAF, and 6.27 per cent voted for candidates because they were members of another political party.[29]

Voters are also not compelled to vote for candidates voicing clear policy positions. In the 1997 Jordanian elections, losing candidates were consistently more likely to take policy positions than the winning candidates.[30] Voters were less likely to elect individuals with clear platforms. Indeed, in the districts of Aqaba and Ajloun, the winning candidates of the 1997 elections did not take a single stance on social, political or gender issues.[31]

Independent candidates win the majority of seats. In 1993 and 2003, candidates running on party labels won only 31[32] and 33 seats (or 38.75 per cent and 30 per cent of the seats), respectively. In 1997, opposition parties, including the IAF, boycotted elections, and party members' share of the seats dropped to 6.25 per cent (see Table 1).

This, in turn, affects the public's perception of political parties. They see parties as largely ineffective, unable to field winning candidates or influence government, and instead as merely fragmented, personalistic cliques. Indeed, less than one-fifth of Jordanians believed their parties had been somewhat or very successful from 1992 (when Jordanian parties were legalized) until 2004.[33]

The contest for *wasta* and state resources also affects Jordanians' attitudes toward their Members of Parliament (MPs). It is somewhat ironic that voters elect candidates based largely on their belief that the candidates' can provide for them and then complain that parliamentarians are primarily interested in their own personal and family interests. Yet the perception – and the complaints – are widespread. In 2004, only 18 per cent of Jordanians responding to polls carried out by the Centre for Strategic

TABLE 1
PARTY MEMBER CANDIDATES AND WINNERS, 1997 AND 2003

Party	1997		2003	
	Number of candidates	Number of winners	Number of candidates	Number of winners
Islamic Action Front	0	0	30	17
National Constitutional Party	11	2	13	11
Jordanian Leftist Party	4	1	4	2
Islamic Central Party	0	0	9	2
Popular Committee Movement Party	0	0	3	1
Welfare Party	0	0	2	0
Communist Labour Party	2	0	1	0
Arab Land Party	1	1	1	0
Jordanian Arabic (Ba'ath) Socialist Party	2	1	0	0
Arab Party	0	0	1	0
Democratic National Movement	0	0	11	0
Total	20	5	75	33

Sources: Hani Hourani *et al.*, *Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament: 2003–2007* (Amman: Sindbad Publishing House, June 2004), p. 201; Hani Hourani *et al*., *Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament: 1997–2001* (Amman: Al-Urdunn Al-Jadid Research Centre, 1998), p. 215.

Studies (CSS) of the University of Jordan believed that the MPs were primarily interested in the concerns of society and the nation.[34]

Voter Turnout

Voting for *wasta* also affects voter turnout: individuals who believe that their candidates are not well-connected enough to deliver *wasta* will choose to not go to the polls. This is shown in Table 2. In Jordan, most individuals of Palestinian origin have been less well-connected to the regime than those of Transjordanian origin, which form the traditional support base of the Hashemite monarchy.[35] Thus, we use the percentage of candidates of Palestinian origin as a proxy for the district's demographics since census data is not available. Where more candidates are of Palestinian origin and thus less likely to be closely connected to the government, the voter turnout is low. It appears that voters, believing that their candidates can deliver neither *wasta* nor policies, prefer to stay home.

Entering the Fray: Candidate Behaviour in Authoritarian Elections

The nature of elections in authoritarian regimes also affects candidates' behaviour. Most notably, candidates are not compelled to work with political parties. They do not seek the easy identification with political positions that such party labels provide, since voters seek access based on personal ties, not candidates with like-minded policy positions. Consequently, parties that exist tend to remain weak and are often personalistic. Most candidates, like voters, dismiss the utility of political parties. The only exception to this among Jordanian parties is the IAF. In this case, voter-recognition and substantial organizational resources of the party (given its

TABLE 2
VOTER TURNOUT, 1997 AND 2003

Electoral district	% of Palestinian candidates	% Voter turnout – 1997 (registered)	% Voter turnout – 2003 (registered)
Amman 2nd	73	20.74	40.62
Amman 1st	63	23.34	41.91
Zarqa	59	27.51	47.96
Amman 4th	43	28.05	51.38
Amman 3rd	32	23.74	41.85
Aqaba	22	60.78	63.17
Amman 5th	17	28.05	32.49
Balqa	17	47.95	70.70
Irbid	15	50.10	68.02
Jerash	13	64.70	82.54
Ramtha and Bani Kinana	12	60.17	
Karak	7.5	70.54	82.10
Qurrah and North Ghor	7	60.02	–
Tafileh	6	70.94	82.20
Ajloun	2.5	57.94	80.37
Amman 6th/Madaba	0	61.81	49.42
Central Badia	0	59.67	84.48
S. Badia	0	70.54	79.39
N. Badia	0	64.01	84.24
Ma'an	0	67.88	77.74
Amman 7th	–	–	68.93
Mafraq	–	60.56	81.76

Sources: Hani Hourani *et al.*, *Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament: 1997–2001* (Amman: Al-Urdunn Al-Jadid Research Centre, 1998), p. 207; Hani Hourani *et al.*, *Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament: 2003–2007* (Amman: Sindbad Publishing House, June 2004), p. 196.

strong links to the Muslim Brotherhood) bind party members and voters more closely to this party than to other parties in Jordan.[36] Indeed, in other cases, some candidates and campaign organizers interviewed in Jordan have argued that candidates avoid running on party labels, even when they are members. Party candidacy is a liability.

Weak political parties tend to make coordination among potential candidates difficult. This problem has been solved, to some extent, through tribal and family primaries. Yet, this has only provided a partial solution, and entry rates remain high. On average, seven to eight candidates have contested each seat in all elections since 1989.[37] Importantly, the rate remained high (and the parties remained weak) despite changes in electoral laws: the 1993 electoral law that created a more majoritarian system and the 2003 law which expanded the number of seats.

The cumulative result of weak parties, little coordination over entrance, and patronage-based voting is that there is high turnover in parliament. Candidates can easily enter the fray, and since it is more difficult for incumbent MPs to distribute limited patronage resources so as to satisfy all constituents than it is for new entrants to promise to please all, it is relatively easy for new candidates to defeat incumbents. For example, only 19 of the 110 members elected in 2003 returned from the 1997 parliament.[38] Similarly, only 20 of the deputies who won in 1997 elections were returning from the 1993 parliament. In short, there is little continuity across the parliaments.

Structuring the Competition

Incumbents use institutions to manage the competition. Through districting and electoral laws, they grant greater access to parliament to those from the traditional bases of support for the regime. These measures were particularly evident in Jordan, through the 1993 and 2003 electoral laws.

Gerrymandering

Districting in Jordan has clearly shifted political weight away from Jordanians of Palestinian origin and towards those of Transjordanian origin. This is evident in Table 3. Districts with more Jordanians of Palestinian origin are more likely to be under-represented than districts with Transjordanian populations. The most extreme case is in Amman's second district, which had almost seven seats fewer in 1997 than it would have had if all Jordanians were represented equally.

TABLE 3
DISCREPANCY BETWEEN SEAT DISTRIBUTION AND PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, 1997

Constituency	Population	Percentage of candidates from Palestinian origin (1997)	Seats allocated	Seats under proportional representation	Difference
Amman 2nd	517,269	73	3	9.9	−6.9
Amman 1st	318,821	63	3	6.1	−3.1
Zarqa	643,323	59	6	12.4	−6.4
Amman 4th	197,418	43	2	3.8	−1.8
Amman 3rd	160,445	32	5	3.1	+1.9
Aqaba	68,773	22	2	1.3	+0.7
Amman 5th	361,850	17	5	7.0	−2.0
Balqa	283,309	17	8	5.4	+2.6
Irbid	464,958	15	9	8.9	+0.1
Jerash	124,664	13	2	2.4	−0.4
Ramtha and Bani Kinana	143,002	12	3	2.7	+0.3
Karak	165,677	7.5	9	3.2	+5.8
Qurrah and North Ghor	146,831	7	2	2.8	−0.8
Tafileh	54,525	6	3	1.1	+1.9
Ajloun	95,698	2.5	3	1.8	+1.2
Madaba	104,062	0	3	2.0	+1.0
Central Badia	44,600	0	2	0.9	+1.1
S. Badia	49,869	0	2	1.0	+1.0
N. Badia	62,622	0	2	1.2	+0.8
Ma'an	58,635	0	3	1.1	+1.9
Mafraq	97,649		3	1.9	+1.1
Total	4,164,000	19	80	80	0

Sources: Abla Amawi, *Against All Odds: Jordanian Women, Elections and Political Empowerment* (Amman: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2001), Table 6, pp. 231–32; 'al-Jadwal Raqam 4: Tawzi'a al-Murashahin al-Urdunniyyin min Asal Filistin hasab al-Dawa'ir al-Intikhabiyya, 1997' ('Table 4: Distribution of Jordanian Candidates of Palestinian Background according to Electoral District, 1997'), in Hani Hourani *et al*., *Dirasat fi al-Intikhabat al-Niyabiyyah al-Urdunniyyah 1997* (Amman: Sindbad Publishing House, 2002), p. 24.

A new electoral law in 2003 did not rectify the problem of under-representation, despite long-standing complaints by the opposition. As Table 4 shows, 30 new seats were added to the parliament, of which almost 16 per cent went to Amman. Zarqa, which was also heavily under-represented, obtained new seats as well. The total increases, however, did not outweigh the previous deficits. Indeed, the number of seats distributed to Amman actually became less proportionate after 2003; Amman went from nearly 12 seats below a proportional distribution to nearly a 16 seat deficit. Indeed, both Amman and Zarqa, the two districts with the most significant Palestinian populations, remained significantly under-represented.

By gerrymandering, the government pushed seats, and the opportunity to gain access to state resources, toward traditional bases of support for the regime. The government granted more seats to those districts in which the majority of the candidates (and the population) were of Transjordanian origin than it did to districts where the majority were of predominantly Palestinian origin. This was despite the fact that Transjordanians make up the minority of the population.

Electoral Rules

The government also uses electoral rules to shape outcomes. In Jordan, the election law has been a consistent subject of debate and revision. Under each revision, the election law was written by counsels outside of the parliament and when the parliament was not in session. Each time, as well, it has been met with serious opposition.

The focus of opposition voices (those engaged in the two-level game over democratization) has been the one-person, one-vote clause in the electoral law, put in place after 1993. The major change in the rule was to reduce the number of votes per person from the number of seats in the district to a single vote. Opposition forces, and particularly Islamists, have objected to a pro-regime bias in the law. [39] In response, they boycotted elections in 1997, returning the most conservative candidates to the Lower House. Although the law was revised before both the 1997 and 2003 elections, it has maintained this controversial clause.

The impact of this law demonstrates important differences between elections concerning patronage distribution and those over policymaking. The conventional wisdom regarding such a change in established democracies, where policy outcomes are at stake, is that it should act to reduce the number of political parties. The more majoritarian the law, the more political tendencies coalesce. Smaller parties are eliminated, and a few stronger parties remain. Yet, the opposite effects are realized when patronage, not policymaking, is at stake. When granted multiple votes, individuals often cast some votes for candidates they expected could supply them with resources and other votes for those representing their ideologies. When restricted to one vote, however, they cast their ballot for their personal interests.[40]

The result was fragmentation. Political parties, and particularly the IAF, were hurt by the change. The IAF had been the single largest bloc in parliament, holding more than 25 per cent of the seats in the 1989 elections and entering into government during the Gulf War in 1991. Its parliamentary presence dropped significantly in the 1993 elections, perhaps due partly to controversial policies it had adopted in the previous term but also, and more importantly, due to the changed electoral law. It secured only a

TABLE 4
SEAT GAINS IN 2003 ELECTORAL LAW

	1989 Law				2003 Law						
Governorate	No. of districts	No. of seats	% of total seats held by district	Difference from proportionality, 1997 (no. of seats)	No. of districts	No. of seats	% of total seats held by district	Difference from proportionality, 2003 (no. of seats)*	Increase in no. of seats	% of seat increase granted to governorate	Change in proportionality (no. of seats)*
Amman***	5	18	22.5	−11.9	7	23	22.1	−15.9	5	16.67	−4
Central Badia	1	2	2.5	+1.1	1	3	2.9	+1.8	1	3.33	+0.7
Zarqa***	1	6	7.5	−6.4	4	10	9.6	−6.1	4	13.33	+0.3
Balqa**	1	8	10	+2.6	4	10	9.6	+3.0	2	6.67	+0.4
Madaba	1	3	3.75	+1.0	2	4	3.9	+1.4	1	3.33	+0.4
Mafraq	1	3	3.75	+1.1	1	4	3.9	+1.5	1	3.33	+0.4
Northern Badia	1	2	2.5	+0.8	1	3	2.9	+1.4	1	3.33	+0.6
Irbid**	3	14	17.5	+0.1	9	16	15.4	−2.3	2	6.67	−2.4
Ajloun	1	3	3.75	+1.2	2	4	3.9	+1.7	1	3.33	+0.5
Jerash	1	2	2.5	−0.4	1	4	3.9	+0.9	2	6.67	+1.3
Karak	1	9	11.25	+5.8	6	10	9.6	+5.8	1	3.33	0
Tafila	1	3	3.75	+1.9	2	4	3.9	+2.6	1	3.33	+0.7
Ma'an	1	3	3.75	+1.9	3	4	3.9	+2.6	1	3.33	+0.7
Southern Badia	1	2	2.5	+1.0	1	3	2.9	+1.7	1	3.33	+0.7
Aqaba**	1	2	2.5	+0.7	1	2	1.9	+0.3	0	0	−0.4
Total	21	80			45	104			24	80.00	
Additional seats for women		0				6			6	20.00	
Overall total	21	80			45	110			30	100.00	

*Calculations for disproportionality of 2003 seat distribution are based upon those of disproportionality in 1997 and are based only on the 104 seats (excluding seats reserved for women). The population figures for districts in 2003 were not available.
**Denotes districts in which Palestinian candidates ranged from 15–25%.
***Denotes districts with more than 25% Palestinian candidates in 1997.
Source: Hani Hourani *et al.*, *Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament: 2003–2007* (Amman: Sindbad Publishing House, 2004), p. 35; 'Amendment: Provisional Law Number (23) for the Year 1989 Amending the Law of Election to the House of Deputies', in *Law of Election to the House of Deputies* (Amman: Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Press and Publications Dept, 1993), pp. 34–36.

minority of seats in 1993 and then saw its presence further reduced through a boycott in 1997. At the same time, independents with traditional bases of support gained representation. The electoral rules – in authoritarian elections over patronage – acted to further weaken political parties. Parliamentarians increasingly tended to be more interested in obtaining and distributing patronage than in policymaking and democracy.

Debates over Reform

Debates over reform should be seen within this context. They are not insignificant: the palace's own promises of liberalization and talk of democratization opens the way for a continued dialogue and debate over how far Jordan is (or is not) proceeding on the path of democracy. It sets democracy as an ideal to be obtained, a standard against which they can measure. Yet there is a large set of political actors, increasingly invested in using parliament as an arena of patronage distribution, for whom democracy and policymaking is not a priority. Indeed, for many of them a move away from patronage functions and toward policymaking roles could only serve to weaken their influence.

The most recent debates over electoral reform in Jordan illustrate this well. On one side are the opposition-dominated political parties, which have vocally opposed the electoral law since it was changed in 1993. Indeed, it is the ability to do so – through conferences, books, speeches and editorials – that is the change in liberalization. These parties are led by the IAF, which has clearly lost the most from the change in the law. (Other parties are a little more ambivalent. They dislike the law, but also some have appreciated the extent to which it minimizes the IAF's influence.) On the other side, somewhat less vocal, have been those who have benefited from this change.

For the first time, mostly opposition parties have come together – with the encouragement of the Prime Minister – to draft an electoral law. The law is important for two reasons: first, the parties demonstrate a clear understanding that the ability of the parties to become stronger is closely tied to both electoral and party laws. Thus, the committees have drafted both laws and vetted them at conferences. At the same time, a 'meta-debate' over the debates over reform has emerged, in which politicians outside of the parties are calling for the 'widening' of the debate, including those who not interested in strengthening the parties in the debates over revisions.

Some argue that the patronage-based nature of parliament is driving this debate, as well as a discussion by the palace over decentralization. Put simply, the parliament has become increasingly demanding and expensive, putting a strain on the government itself. The cost of a conciliatory parliament more interested in providing *wasta* and obtaining resources than making policy or pushing for democratization, is rising. In the attempt to reduce these demands, the government is opening the door for much weakened political parties (who are not only fragmented but have little public support) to debate openly the need to strengthen parliament.

Toward Democracy?

A closer look at the mechanisms of elections shows how the apparently contradictory expectations about the relationship between elections and political stability may be

easily reconciled. The limited space for policy making in authoritarian regimes means that elections are more frequently contests over access to state resources than debates over policy. Voters recognize this, casting their ballots for those who can best deliver. Parliamentarians know this as well, seeking to meet constituents' needs rather than to undermine their relations with government. The result of such a situation is that parties are neutered, voters become cynical, and demands for democratization (as well as support for the forces intending to push for it) decline.

This has profound implications for democracy promotion efforts. Programmes intended to strengthen political parties in authoritarian regimes are unlikely to be successful. Authoritarian elections weaken political parties, fostering personalistic cliques rather than policy-orientated organizations. Attempting to strengthen parties by giving them access to foreign funding may only exacerbate this problem. Funding funneled to parties and related organizations in civil society may work simply to supply these elites with a second source of patronage. They can use this to gain support, but it does not change the fundamental nature of the parties, the strength (or weakness) of the legislature, or the types of voting. More importantly, such funding exacerbates the divisions between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', links party elites to the West, and delegitimizes the very parties that it is intended to support. This is especially true in the MENA, where the vast majority of the public is sceptical of the intentions of the West, generally, and the United States, in particular. In short, there are important reasons to believe that policies aimed at strengthening political and civil society create more problems than they solve.

The analysis also suggests that electoral observers will be less important in changing the balance of power in authoritarian regimes than is often supposed. It is only when the state elites' resources decline, making it difficult to maintain the distribution of patronage, that elections are likely to become highly contested battles over the rules of the game. In this case, electoral observers may play an important role in promoting democracy. Where this is not the case, however, electoral observers are not likely to change the outcome.

Indeed, the logic of authoritarian elections should lead us to question the value of pressing for, and applauding, the introduction of elections in authoritarian regimes. The excitement over the introduction of municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, for instance, may be misplaced. Such elections are more likely to help sustain the authoritarian regime than they are to promote democracy.

Indeed, if elections are to promote democracy, external pressure should be placed more on pressing for independent economic opportunities, expanding legislative powers, and reducing resources available to state elites in the centre of power. Elections are more likely to escalate tensions, create space and bring an added push for democracy when their role in distributing patronage and *wasta* declines. This will accompany the development of an autonomous private sector, which will reduce demands for *wasta*.[41] This is, of course, fully consistent with the long-recognized relationship between capitalism and democracy. It may also be the case when the state elites' ability to distribute patronage declines, making parliament an ineffective mechanism for *wasta* and patronage, even if alternative means do not exist. This is consistent with the relationship between economic crises and democratization. Finally, the

analysis suggests that democracy promotion efforts aimed at the strengthening of civil or political society are unlikely to be successful as long as tacit (or overt) support of authoritarian elites continues.[42] Until state elites' monopoly on rents is limited, real alternance in power is possible, and parliament is a mechanism for policy making, not for patronage distribution, parties will remain weak and democracy thwarted.

NOTES

1. Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, 'Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe', *International Social Science Journal*, No. 128 (1991), p. 78. See also Wolfgang Merkel, 'Embedded and Defective Democracies', *Democratization*, Vol. 11, No. 5 (2004), pp. 33–58.
2. Samuel Huntington and Joan Nelson (eds), *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Guy Hermet, Richard Rose, and Alain Rouquié (eds), *Elections without Choice* (New York: Wiley, 1978).
3. Staffan Lindberg, 'Consequences of Electoral Systems in Africa: A Preliminary Study', *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2005), pp. 41–64; Staffan Lindberg, 'When Do Opposition Parties Boycott Elections?', paper prepared for the international conference *Democratization by Elections? The Dynamics of Electoral Authoritarianism*, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE), Mexico, 2–3 April 2004, available at: http://www.svet.lu.se/Staff/Personal_pages/Staffan_lindberg/When_Do_Opposition5.pdf (accessed 8 October 2005); Shaheen Mozaffar and Andreas Schedler, 'The Comparative Study of Electoral Governance – Introduction', *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2002), pp. 5–27; Andreas Schedler, 'The Nested Game of Democratization by Elections', *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2002), pp. 103–122; Jonathan Hartlyn, Jennifer McCoy and Thomas Mustillo, 'The "Quality of Elections" in Contemporary Latin America: Issues in Measurement and Explanation', Paper prepared for 2003 International Congress of the Latina American Studies Association, Dallas, Texas, 27–29 March 2003.
4. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, 'Autocracy by Democratic Rules: The Dynamics of Competitive Authoritarianism in the Post-Cold War Era', revised version of paper prepared for Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association Meeting, Boston, MA, 28–31 August 2002, available at: http://astro.temple.edu/~lway/autdem (accessed 10 August 2005), p. 4.
5. Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 'Is the Middle East Democratizing?' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1999), pp. 199–217; Russell Lucas, *Institutions and the Politics of Survival in Jordan: Domestic Responses to External Challenges: 1988–2001* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005); Jason Brownlee, 'Ruling Parties and Durable Authoritarianism', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 2–5 September 2004; Daniel Brumberg, 'Democratization in the Arab World? The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2002), pp. 56–68; Bechir Chourou, 'The Challenge of Democracy in North Africa', *Democratization*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2002), pp. 17–39; Ellen Lust-Okar and Amaney Jamal, 'Rulers and Rules: Reassessing Electoral Laws and Political Liberalization in the Middle East', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2002), pp. 337–70; Marsha Pripstein Posusney, 'Multi-Party Elections in the Arab World: Institutional Engineering and Oppositional Strategies', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2002), pp. 34–62; Dankwart Rustow, 'Elections and Legitimacy in the Middle East', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, No. 482 (November 1985), pp. 122–46; Larbi Sadiki, 'Political Liberalization in Bin Ali's Tunisia: Façade Democracy', *Democratization*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2002), pp. 122–41. It should be noted that Anoushiravan Ehteshami argues, somewhat contrary to the arguments developed here, that elections serve an important role, helping 'political forces in the Muslim world learn to play by the given rules of the game . . .'. See Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 'Islam, Muslim Polities and Democracy', *Democratization*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2004) pp. 90–1110.
6. Abdo Baaklini, Guilain Denoeux and Robert Springborg, *Legislative Politics in the Arab World: The Resurgence of Democratic Institutions* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner, 1999); Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner and Daniel Brumberg (eds), *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Jacob Landau, Ergun Ozbudun and Frank Tachau (eds), *Electoral Politics in the Middle East* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Linda Layne (ed.), *Elections in the Middle East: Implications of Recent Trends* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987); Noha El-Mikawy, *The Building of Consensus in Egypt's Transition Process* (Cairo: American University of Cairo, 1999).

7. Andreas Schedler, 'The Menu of Manipulation', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2002), pp. 36–50; Caroline Boussard, *Crafting Democracy: Civil Society in Post-Transition Honduras* (Lund, Sweden: Lund Political Series 127, Lund University Department of Political Science, 2005), available at: http://www.svet.lu.se/Fulltext/Caroline_boussard.pdf (accessed 16 April 2006)
8. Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, 'Dictatorial Institutions and the Survival of Dictators', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA, 2001.
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11. Brownlee (note 5).
12. For reviews, see Kathleen Thelen, 'Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2 (1999), pp. 369–404; David Stark and Laszlo Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
13. James March and Johan Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 164.
14. Thomas Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2002), pp. 5–21.
15. Gerardo Munck and Richard Snyder, 'Mapping Political Regimes: How the Concepts We Use and the Way We Measure Them Shape the World We See', paper prepared for 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 2–5 September 2004.
16. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, 'The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2002), pp. 51–65; Larry Diamond, 'Thinking About Hybrid Regimes', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2002), pp. 23–35.
17. I use 'government' here to refer to the centre of power, as opposed to the cabinet, and use 'regime' to refer to the sets of rules.
18. As one Syrian parliamentarian reportedly exclaimed, 'We're Members of Parliament. We don't make laws!'.
19. Respondents were asked 'To what extent do you believe that the parliament is able to influence the government on the matters that pertain to its goals?'; 7.34 per cent believed it played a large role, 23.25 per cent that it had some effect, 23.61 per cent that it played a small role and 28.29 per cent that it played no role in policymaking; 16.99 per cent did not know and 0.5 per cent refused to answer or did not understand the question. Jordanian Democracy Poll, Centre for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, 2004, question 305.
20. Helmi Sari, 'Tahlil Mahtawi al-Baramij al-Intikhabiyyah li-marashahi al-Intikhabat li'aam 1997 fil-Urdunn', in Hani Hourani *et al*., *Dirasat fi al-Intikhabat al-Niyabiyyah al-Urdunniyyah 1997* (Amman: Sindbad Publishing House, 2002), Table 2, p. 72 and Table 7, pp. 78–9.
21. See *al-Bilad*, 13 April 2000 and *al-Shahed*, 6 September 2000, cited in Sa'eda Kilani and Basem Sakijha, *Wasta: The Declared Secret* (Amman: Jordan Press Foundation, 2002), p. 58.
22. Kilani and Sakijha (note 21), p. 57.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., p. 58.
25. Ayman Khaled in *al-Arab al-Yawm*, 13 April 2000 cited in ibid., p. 59.
26. Interview A, Author's Interview with Researcher in International NGO, Amman, Jordan, February 2005.
27. Democracy Poll, CSS, 2003.
28. Democracy Poll, CSS, 2004, question 302.
29. Democracy Poll, CSS, 2004.
30. Helmi Sari *et al*. (note 20), Tables 2–11, pp. 72–84.
31. Indeed, only one economic position is recorded: one winning candidate in Aqaba called for the development of tourism. Helmi Sari, 'Tahlil Mahtawi al-Baramij al-Intikhabiyyah li-marashahi al-Intikhabat li'aam 1997 fil-Urdunn' (note 30), pp. 78–83.
32. Hani Hourani, 'Intikhabat 1993 al-Urdunniyyah', *Al-Urdunn Al-Jadid*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 7–31.
33. Democracy Poll, CSS, 2004, question 301.

34. Democracy Poll, CSS, 2004, question 412.
35. This relationship holds despite the fact that Jordanians of Palestinian origin make up approximately 60 per cent of the population (exact figures are not available.) The exception is found in the business elite of Palestinian origin, who are a small segment of this population but have close ties to the monarchy.
36. It is beyond the scope of this investigation but important to note that the strength of the IAF, and Islamists more generally, may be due to the fact that MPs have greater leeway in making social policies than they do in legislating foreign or domestic economic policy arenas. As demonstrated in the early 1990s, the IAF can produce legislation regulating the mixing of men and women in government office, at hairdressers, and basketball games. For conservative voters, support of the IAF may bring policy gains in important social arenas.
37. Hourani, *Who's Who in the Jordanian Parliament: 2003–2007*, p. 198.
38. Ibid., p. 204. This represents 23.75 per cent of 1997 deputies and 17.27 per cent of 2003 deputies.
39. These pro-regime forces are predominantly tribal and in many ways represent socially conservative positions. In this sense, they are somewhat similar to (and at have times have joined forces with) the Islamic Action Front. The IAF, however, is socially conservative but demands significant political change. Indeed, it is a leading force in the opposition.
40. See al-Urdun al-Jadid Research Center, *Post-Election Seminar: A Discussion of Jordan's 1993 Parliamentary Election* (Amman: al-Urdun al-Jadid, 1995).
41. Similarly, Abdelaziz Testas concludes that economic diversification is needed in Algeria in order to reduce rent-seeking behaviour and promote democratization. See Abdelaziz Testas, 'Political Repression, Democratization and Civil Conflict in Algeria', *Democratization*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2002), pp. 106–21. The development of such a private sector is easier said than done. Private sectors dependent on the state (that is, crony capitalism) only tend to diminish prospects for democratization. See, for instance, Eva Bellin, 'Contingent Democrats: Industrialists, Labor, and Democratization in Late-Developing Countries', *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2000), pp. 175–205.
42. See, for example, Francesco Cavatorta, 'Geopolitical Challenges to the Success of Democracy in North Africa: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco', *Democratization*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (2001), pp. 175–94; Francesco Cavatorta, 'The International Context of Morocco's Stalled Democratization', *Democratization*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2005), pp. 548–66; and Ellen Lust-Okar, 'Democracy in Jordan: Opportunities Lost', USIP Workshop on 'Beyond Liberalized Autocracy?', *New Options for Promoting Democracy in the Arab World*, Washington, DC, July 18–19, 2005.

Manuscript accepted for publication January 2006.

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