

Parliamentary elections in Jordan

Jordanians will go to the polls on 20 September 2016 to elect a new parliament, at a time of unprecedented regional upheaval, an increasingly challenging domestic economic situation and high levels of public discontent. A new electoral law introduces multi-member districts and elections using a list system, replacing the 'one-person, one-vote' rule. This has prompted the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the main opposition party, which had boycotted the 2010 and 2013 elections, to participate in the election. Reducing the number of seats in the parliament from 150 to 130, the new legislation also provides for better representation of Jordan's largest cities while retaining quotas for women and minorities, including Christians, Circassians and Chechens. The IAF's participation in the elections increases their legitimacy. However, in view of the strength of the monarchy, few expect the composition of the new parliament to significantly alter the country's domestic or foreign policies.

Parliamentary system

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a constitutional hereditary monarchy with a parliamentary form of government. The [constitution](#) provides for a bicameral National Assembly (Majlis al-Ummah), with a Senate (Majlis al-A'yan) as its upper chamber, and a House of Representatives (Majlis al-Nuwwāb) as its lower chamber. The A'yan ('notables') of the Senate are appointed by the King for four-year terms; elections for the Nuwwāb ('deputies') of the House of Representatives are also due to take place every four years. The last Parliamentary elections were held in January 2013. The constitution grants the King wide-ranging executive powers, including the power to appoint and remove the prime minister, appoint cabinet ministers, dissolve both houses of parliament and postpone lower house elections for up to two years. The King can issue royal decrees that are not subject to parliamentary scrutiny and the cabinet can issue provisional legislation without parliamentary approval. Moreover, in May, parliament [approved controversial](#) changes to Article 40 of the Constitution, further [expanding](#) the King's powers by granting him the sole authority to appoint the heads of the military, security forces, police, senate and constitutional court, in addition to the regent and the Crown Prince. Some critics have derided the changes as a 'coup against the constitution and Jordan's political system', going so far as to claim that they effectively [abolish](#) the parliamentary system in Jordan.

Political landscape

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has registered more than 4.1 million voters, using a 'passive system' that automatically includes all eligible voters. In the run-up to the elections, the number of registered parties has risen to 50. Political factions can roughly be divided into Islamist, loyalist, and secular/leftist/pan-Arab. However, with the exception of the well-organised Islamist opposition, political parties in Jordan are very weak, and analysts note the absence of serious political platforms or debate. Most parties have formed around prominent individuals representing a particular family or tribe, and promote narrow local interests.

Islamist opposition

The Jordanian [Muslim Brotherhood](#) and its political arm, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), have formed the main opposition group in Jordan in recent decades. While the group has never [advocated violence](#) against the regime, it has often been critical of [official](#), especially pro-Western policies. In 1989, the IAF gained nearly one third of parliamentary seats, but its electoral fortunes declined over the years, largely [because](#) of changes to the electoral laws in force at the time. Internal divisions further weakened the organisation, leading to a formal split into two separate movements in 2015, followed by a government [clampdown](#) on the old Brotherhood. The new officially recognised movement, known as the Muslim Brotherhood Association (MBA), is closer to and less critical of the regime. The IAF, the MBA, and a second, more liberal Muslim Brotherhood breakaway



faction (ZamZam) are all [competing](#) in the elections. Under the new law, predictions concerning the outcome of the elections are difficult. However, observers believe the National Alliance for Reform (NAR), a [surprise](#) electoral alliance that the IAF formed to compete on [joint tickets](#) with other political groups, representatives of Jordan's Christian minority and several women candidates, may win between 13 and [25 seats](#).

Candidates

[Candidacy registration](#) took place over a period of three days, from 16-18 August. On 10 September, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) [published](#) a final total of 226 electoral lists, comprising 1 252 candidates, some 20% of whom are women. According to a [study](#) conducted by Jordanian elections monitoring coalition RASED, [39 \(out of 50\) political parties](#) are participating in the upcoming elections, but are together filing only [234](#) candidates (18%). Only 6.4% of the 227 electoral lists are party based. According to the study, the majority of lists represent tribal coalitions (43.5%) or a 'mixture of tribal and partisan affiliations' (11%). Some 39.1% of are composed of independent candidates.

2015 Elections Law

Under the [2015 Elections Law](#), passed by Parliament in February 2016, all candidates will run as members of lists. The winners of the 103 non-reserved seats will be determined based on open list proportional representation in each of 23 districts. A further 12 seats reserved for Christians, Circassians and Chechens will go to the candidates in the relevant districts with the greatest number of votes. 15 seats are reserved for women, a slighter higher percentage than under the previous law (which reserved 15 out of 150 seats for women candidates). The new electoral law, which abolishes the 'one-person, one-vote' rule in place since 1993 and redraws some electoral districts, has been welcomed by many as a step towards a more [democratic and inclusive electoral system](#). The 'one-person, one-vote' rule, together with [gerrymandered](#) electoral districts, favoured the representation in previous parliaments of pro-regime conservative tribal communities at the expense of communities more sympathetic to the opposition, especially the Muslim Brotherhood.

District and seat allocation for 2016 Jordanian parliamentary elections



Source: www.iec.jo, produced with support from the EU and UNDP.

At the invitation of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the European Union has deployed an [Election Observation Mission](#) (EOM) to observe the parliamentary elections on 20 September 2016. The 80-member EU EOM is led by Chief Observer [Jo Leinen](#), (S&D, Germany). The European Parliament is also joining the EU EOM with a five-member delegation led by [Mariya Gabriel](#) (EPP, Bulgaria).

See also the EPRS briefing on proposed [EU macro-financial assistance](#) to Jordan.