



NATO Foundation
Defense College



Source: [afp.com](https://www.afp.com)

Jordan Elections: silent news

Roberta La Fortezza

Dr La Fortezza, PhD, is an Intelligence and Security Analyst (MENA-Sahel)
and lectures at the University of Siena.

On September 10, 2024, legislative elections were held for the renewal of the lower house (House of Representatives) of the Jordanian Parliament. The Jabhat al-'Amal al-Islami (Islamic Action Front - IAF), founded in 1992 as a Jordanian political offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), obtained a relative majority, with 31 seats out of 138; the IAF has therefore tripled its representation compared to 10 seats in the 2020 elections and 16 seats in the 2016 legislature. The pro-establishment Charter Party secured the second place with 21 seats, while the Eradah Party came in third with 19 seats; 9 other parties entered Parliament, with a result between 1 and 8 seats; finally, 39 seats were allocated to independent candidates.

Party name	Number of seats from the national list (out of 41)	Number of seats from local districts (out of 97)
Islamic Action Front	17	14
Al Watani (National Charter) Party	4	17
Erada Party	3	16
National Islamic Party	3	4
National Union Party	2	3
Al-arid al-Mubarakka Party	2	0
Workers Party	2	0
The Nama Party	1	0
Civil Democratic Party	0	1
Labor Party	0	1
Youth Party	0	1

Source: Arab Reform Initiative

These elections were the first after the modernisation plan launched by King Abdullah II, in 2021, with the approval of the 2022 constitutional amendments, and the adoption of new electoral and political party laws. All of these reforms are intended to facilitate a modernisation process and the transition of the Jordanian institutional landscape from a model based on individual tribal affiliations and alliances, to a model marked by a greater prominence of political parties. A course of action that is expected to result in the enactment of the present system of appointment of the Prime Minister and Cabinet by the king within the next decade, introducing the traditional mechanism of a government backed by a parliamentary majority into the Jordanian institutional apparatus.

First, the IAF election's result is a symptomatic of the impact that the Israel-Hamas war has had on these elections. The increase in popularity of Hamas, a movement also related to the ideology of the MB, among the Jordanian population (more than half of whom are Palestinian or of Palestinian origin), and above all the brutal re-emergence of the Palestinian question "in the hearts and minds" of the population of the Hashemite Kingdom as a central issue largely explains the election result of the IAF. The group linked to political Islam has successfully capitalised on the widespread popular discontent regarding the conflict in the Gaza Strip, and, more recently, Israel's massive operations in the West Bank.

Since the beginning of the war in the Middle East, the Jordanian government followed the traditional policy of balancing its support for the Palestinian people with the desire to avoid a clear and irreparable rupture with Israel. Since October 2023, the large street protests against this mediation and moderation policy carried out by the Kingdom's establishment have been led by Jordanian political Islam groups, asking the government for a more aligned policy supporting Hamas, and even to renounce the 1994 Israel peace agreement. From this point of view, the vote appears to be symptomatic of the insufficient results of the balancing policy so far, thus opening the path to a possible rethinking.

However, we must not forget the domestic factors driving the excellent IAF electoral result. Firstly, the context of renewal in favour of a detribalisation of institutional structures and a specular strengthening of the role of the parties, has certainly favoured the IAF which, since its foundation, has been led by a class of political professionals and has flawlessly integrated itself into the traditional party method. On the contrary, a significant number of the formations that stood in these elections lack a historical structure, adequate electoral management skills, and solid local alliances.

Hence, the IAF has undoubtedly benefited from its previous electoral experiences, successfully presenting its own national list and local lists in the individual governorates, also activating functional alliances in numerous districts. On the one hand, this element demonstrates the political capabilities of the IAF, on the other hand, it leads to support the hypothesis that not all voters who have expressed their preference for the IAF, and consequently for political Islam, adhere to its ideological approach in a mechanical manner. Indeed, the MB party has been able to convey even a part of the votes of the left, traditional nationalists and tribal forces, through its political skills, the creation of alliances and the reference to the Palestinian question.

Secondly, the IAF's own social base, despite being strengthened by the current war in Gaza, is historically solid, having been constructed over decades of the party's activity, also due to its general integration into Jordanian institutions and national political life.

Finally, the IAF has probably also been successful to capitalise on popular discontent with the outgoing Jordanian political class, ineffective in countering economic stagnation. In this climate of disillusionment, especially on the economic growth front, the political Islam groups emerged as the only force able - and willing - to challenge the status quo and an alleged reformist immobility in the economic field by the Jordanian government. Once again, also from this last point of view, the recent vote reflects a transversal desire for change within a part of the Jordanian population, a desire that does not necessarily coincide with a radical vision or a direct alignment with all the positions of Jordanian political Islam as represented by the IAF.

The king remains the ultimate decision-maker, the guarantor of the institutional stability of the Kingdom and of Jordan's regional and international positioning, and above all the king appoints the Prime Minister and the entire Cabinet. It is highly unlikely that a member of the IAF will be appointed as the head of the country's government. It is more likely that the party affiliated with the MB will be able to obtain certain ministries, as happened for example after the legislative elections of 1989 when the MB groups won 22 out of 80 seats, and some of their members were subsequently included in the government led by Mudar Badran.

Despite the undeniable prerogatives of the king, the Parliament plays a significant role in Jordan's institutional life, both in terms of the proposal and legislative process, and in the legitimisation of the foundations of the constitutional monarchy and Jordan's democracy. The impact of the new political prominence of the IAF on the Jordanian balance will be determined by the approach that the MB party decides to pursue now that it holds the relative majority in Parliament.

At least until the nineties, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan adopted primarily moderate and loyalist positions in favour of the Monarchy. Both the Kingdom and the socio-tribal structures have shown the ability to stem and gradually marginalise the most radical instances that have emerged within the Brotherhood since the nineties, when in conjunction with the Oslo process, the Israeli-Jordanian peace agreement of 1994 and the eruption of the second Intifada, the Jordanian MB entered into crisis and divided into numerous factions with the prevalence of radical pro-Palestinian components adhering to the vision of groups such as Hamas.

The new political centrality of the IAF, especially if it will be associated with a renewed radicalisation of the party's approach and its narrower electoral base, could lead to an increase in internal tensions in Jordanian political life and even push the Kingdom towards a policy of greater intransigence towards Western positions and Israel. On the other hand, the Jordanian government itself could consider useful to capitalise the greater intransigence shown by political Islam, possibly also represented within the government, against Israel to support a more vigorous policy on a bilateral and regional level and, specularly, to support its positions in front of the essential US ally. The demands of the political Islam could become more pressing, and at the same time more useful from the government's point of view, especially if the current ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian groups were to move to the West Bank.

In fact, under the hypothesis of a growing destabilisation of the West Bank the Hashemite Kingdom would necessarily be forced to reevaluate its policy of moderation towards Israel in order to respond to imperative national security needs.