

Case Study #2: NDI and Al-Quds Partnership on the Jordan Parliamentary Monitor Project - Koebel Price, Lead Researcher

Adopted from the National Democratic Institute's *Political-Process Monitoring: Considering the Outcomes and How They Can Be Measured*

The 15th parliamentary elections in Jordan were perceived as a moment of change in the country. The new Members of Parliament (MPs) ran on platforms based on integrity and fighting for national interests, a change which excited and engaged citizens. Additionally, this election marked the first time that domestic CSOs monitored elections, signaling a shift from focusing solely on social issues to more active political engagement. Despite the high hopes for parliament, legislative performance and legislators' regard for the desires of citizens' concerns after the election remained unchanged. Despite political reforms over the last 15 years, the Jordanian Al-Quds Center for Political Studies discovered that the parliament's constitutionally provided legislative and oversight powers represented an unrealized opportunity for further democratization in the country. At the same time, civil society was frustrated by the lack of government transparency and accountability and felt that their participation had little impact. In response to these frustrations and opportunities and with technical support from NDI, the Al-Quds Center embarked on the Jordanian Parliament Monitor (JPM) Project in 2008 with the goal of improving the effectiveness and accountability of the parliament. Through parliamentary monitoring tools such as conducting a national survey, observing parliament sessions, and production of a report on the activities of parliament, the Center succeeded in deepening public participation in the political-process. Making the JPM Project findings public gave civil society actors the opportunity to utilize that information for more effective political engagement. It also improved Jordanians' knowledge of politics in their country. By accessing, analyzing and publicizing information about elected officials' actions, the project made use of, and expanded opportunities for political engagement that existed in Jordanian law, if not in practice. Prior to the JPM Project, information on Jordan's legislative processes was not publicly available, as the parliament itself does not have the capacity to record or make it available. Moreover, as project monitoring reports were published, the findings were used as focal points for unprecedented public forums at which MPs, CSOs and citizens met to discuss issues of community concern, the monitoring report, and the MPs' work in parliament. Throughout implementation of the project, the Al-Quds Center benefited from having a long-term strategy built on incremental change. This started with building the relationships, trust, and skills necessary to provide accurate information, and only then moving on to greater analysis, reporting, and inclusion of other actors. The Al-Quds Center also understood the importance of including issue-based CSOs in political-process monitoring activities and equipping them with the knowledge to impact their issues, thereby delivering real change to Jordanian citizens.

The Jordan Context

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament, the National Assembly or Majlis al-'Umma. Executive authority resides with the monarch, who appoints the 60 members of the Senate (also called the House of Notables or Majlis al-Ayan) and the prime minister, and must approve Cabinet appointees. The Chamber of Deputies (also called the Lower House, House of Representatives or Majlis al-Nuwaab) 120 members are elected, but the parliament consists principally of individuals with tribal and business affiliations, and is not a genuine venue for political parties to debate issues and represent citizens' interests.

Nabz-Iran: Working to Raise Awareness around Human Rights Violations in Iran

www.nabz-iran.com

Follow us on Facebook @ **ایران نبض** Nabz Iran

Follows us on Twitter @nabziran



In addition, laws governing elections, political and civic associations, and freedom of the press limit the opportunities and activities of democrats and activists.

When King Abdullah II came to power upon the death of his father, King Hussein, in 1999, his pledges for democratic reform suggested that the country would move purposefully toward democracy, increased government transparency, and more opportunities for citizens to meaningfully engage in political life. Modest progress has been made towards these goals: parliamentary and municipal elections have been held at regular intervals; participation of women as voters, activists, candidates, and elected officials has increased dramatically; and Jordanian civil society organizations have become more active in advocating for democratic governance.

Methodology

The analysis in this case study covers the 2008 - 2011 time period, during which NDI, with support from USAID, provided technical assistance to the Jordanian Parliament Monitor Project (JPM) of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies. It is informed by a desktop review of materials related to the project, including proposals and reports, key informant interviews and most significant outcome analysis sessions.

In January 2011, an NDI researcher traveled to Amman to work with local partner organizations and conduct research about both the political-process monitoring activities of Jordanian CSOs and NDI's supporting role. With the help of NDI's in-country staff, the researcher conducted 10 key informant interviews of partner and non-partner organizations' leadership and led two most significant outcome analysis sessions: one with NDI partner and Jordanian Parliamentary Monitor (JPM) project implementer Al-Quds Center for Political Studies and one with NDI program staff who had been responsible for supporting them. Representatives of various partner organizations provided invaluable insight into Jordan's political context and the challenges and opportunities for political activism.¹

Al-Quds Center for Political Studies

The Al-Quds Center for Political Studies is an independent research institute, established in Amman in 2000. The Center aims to provide a comprehensive and more accurate understanding of the developments and challenges that the Jordanian state and society are facing. The Center looks to examine, from all possible angles, the regional and international environments surrounding these developments, and to contribute to keeping the Jordanian and Arab public opinion informed regarding the strategic transformations that the region is witnessing.

The Jordanian Parliament Monitor Project

Since its inception, Al-Quds has worked to bridge the gap between Jordan's citizens and their elected representatives. Al Quds' public opinion research indicated that citizens were so frustrated by the lack of transparency and accountability, tribalism, and inefficiency in the

¹ Participating organizations included: Amman Center for Human Rights, Identity Center, The Human Forum for Women's Rights, *Al-Hayat* Center for Civil Society Development, The Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists *Al-Mizan* Center for Human Rights, National Coalition for Shadow Reports on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Nabz-Iran: Working to Raise Awareness around Human Rights Violations in Iran

www.nabz-iran.com

Follow us on Facebook @ **ایران نبض** Nabz Iran

Follows us on Twitter @nabziran



parliament that they felt that their participation had little impact and the entire system needed to be reformed. Over the course of its work, the Center concluded that the parliament's constitutionally mandated legislative, oversight and representation functions provided an important, yet unrealized, opportunity for further democratization in the country.

With assistance from NDI and support from USAID, Al-Quds launched the JPM project in order to help strengthen the roles of parliament and enhance the voice of citizens. The project sought to help provide information about the effectiveness of parliament and performance of MPs. Al-Quds based the approach on the belief that providing Jordan's citizens with reliable information to monitor their elected representatives' was essential to improving parliament's ability to carry out its duties.

The JPM project's objectives were to:

1. assess and enhance the performance of MPs in terms of transparency and accountability.
2. promote best practices for the Jordanian Parliament to implement its legislative oversight and representative functions.
3. encourage constructive interaction between the parliament, citizens, and stakeholders.

In order to accomplish these goals, Al-Quds has carried out a series of monitoring, reporting, and dialogue activities that centered on continual observation and reporting of parliament's actions. The initial sequence of activities included:

1. A national survey: Al-Quds assessed how citizens view MPs and the parliament and which issues citizens care about most.
2. Consultations with MPs: In order to understand how MPs prioritized issues and perceived their role as representatives, Al-Quds consulted directly with them.
3. Observation of parliament sessions: Two Al-Quds staff members monitored and reported on parliamentary sessions and committee meetings. The Center hired two additional staff to document and analyze their reports and the media's coverage of parliament. Data is collected from the parliament's official minutes, observer's reports of proceedings, and articles from four leading Jordanian newspapers, to be classified by one of parliament's three roles: oversight, legislation, or representation.
4. Roundtables and town hall meetings: Al-Quds conducted roundtables with approximately 25 CSO participants and town hall meetings that comprised approximately 60 participants, including MPs, citizens, academics, and representatives from CSOs and political parties. The agenda for each meeting entailed a JPM project introduction, followed by a discussion to gather qualitative information on public priorities, perceptions of parliament's and MPs' performance, and recommendations for the project's development. Subsequently, as monitoring reports were published, Al-Quds used report findings as focal points for a series of roundtables and town hall meetings at which an MP from the region, local CSOs and citizens met to discuss issues of community concern, the monitoring report, and the MP's work in parliament.
5. Web portal: Al-Quds launched a non-partisan web portal to assist public participation in the democratic process by providing information on legislative processes and tools for visitors to email their MP or join a chat forum. The site has given Jordanians a rare

Nabz-Iran: Working to Raise Awareness around Human Rights Violations in Iran

www.nabz-iran.com

Follow us on Facebook @ **ایران نبض** Nabz Iran

Follows us on Twitter @nabziran



window into the country's legislative processes, as the parliament itself does not have the capacity to record such information nor make it publically available.

6. Publication of reports on the activities of the parliament: The initial reports were published in 2009, and contained the first comprehensive data base of Jordanian parliamentarians available to the public, including CVs, committee assignments, constituency, political block affiliations, oversight activities, and an analysis of speeches regarding the government budget.

Considering the Outcomes

While disaggregation of the myriad forces influencing Jordan's democratization is not possible in absolute terms, the examination of the JPM project confirmed that Al-Quds has made significant progress toward the project's goals and in turn deepened democratic practices by establishing new norms and expectations for citizens' access to legislative information and the public's right to openly meet with and discuss the performance of their elected leaders. The JPM project activities, combined with the efforts of cooperating CSOs, MPs, and activists, as well as the reformist winds of the Arab Spring, have *given civil society a more informed and stronger voice in political processes, created expectations that these voices will be given more – and more meaningful – spaces for deliberation and that government is obliged to respond.*

The outcomes of the JPM project were analyzed in terms of citizen voice, political space, and government accountability.

Citizen Voice

As with similar situations, the most common complaint Al-Quds heard from Jordanians was that they could not follow what their elected MPs did in office due to a lack of transparency. Moreover, the Center's public opinion research indicated that this lack of transparency strongly discouraged citizen participation. Citizens need sufficient information about political-processes and actors in order to understand how they may have an impact. The research suggests that the factual and timely information provided by the JPM addresses this concern and offers a fundamental building block for increased citizen voice. The Center's strategy of presenting and discussing the JPM project's findings with representatives of the media, CSOs, political parties, and communities further helped build citizen voice by acting as an educational and training resource for CSOs and citizens seeking help understanding and engaging in the political-process. Such public dialogue efforts provide opportunities for civil society to build the analytical and participatory competencies necessary for effective political engagement. Not only did these public activities, such as media outreach, poll studies, and report dialogues, build citizen competencies, they had some of the greatest impact when it came to influencing MPs. By all accounts, the project's public forums have broadened and deepened Jordanians' knowledge of how politics is practiced in their country.

Furthermore, the JPM issue-based CSOs seemed to help strengthen the potential for future cooperation around issues of common interest. NDI has found elsewhere that these new alliances are important in establishing a more representative and credible citizen voice that has more influence over public policy. These types of networks give more citizens a stake in the activism and help create more links with parliamentarians and other decision makers.

Nabz-Iran: Working to Raise Awareness around Human Rights Violations in Iran

www.nabz-iran.com

Follow us on Facebook @ **ایران نبض** Nabz Iran

Follows us on Twitter @nabziran



Political Space

Recent years have seen a modest increase in Jordan's political space, as evidenced by the domestic election monitoring efforts of CSO coalitions in the 2007 and 2011 elections, and increased opportunities for civil society to comment upon, and assist with, government compliance of ratified UN conventions.

The JPM project made use of and expanded opportunities for political engagement that existed in Jordanian law, if not in practice. Nonpartisan parliamentary monitoring processes offered a rare entry point into Jordan's opaque political processes. Project leadership recognized that monitoring provided an opportunity for long term democratic engagement, and, rather than use it as a tool to expose poor performance or embarrass MPs, they strove to build trust with MPs and parliamentary staff by meeting with them regularly to seek their assistance and explain the process and goals of the project. They also made strategic decisions to begin by monitoring and reporting primarily on basic process information such as committee selection, legislation tracking and MP attendance, and collaborating with an array of civic and political actors as a means to establish the credibility necessary to secure and incrementally open political space for more substantive engagement. As a result, some of those who might otherwise be most threatened by such initiatives (e.g., MPs, political parties and blocks, and government officials) are working with Al-Quds and other CSOs in order to be more responsive. *This is demonstrated by the active participation of MPs in Al-Quds sponsored public events, at which provocative political matters, such as reform of the election or civic association laws, are openly addressed.*

Considering the Outcomes of the Shadow Report

It is too soon to gauge the long term impacts the JPM project will have upon parliament's accountability to the public. What is clear at the time of this writing is that, according to the Jordanians interviewed for this research, the project has helped *establish the expectation that CSOs and citizens have a right to initiate and participate in dialogue about substantive political and socio-economic matters and that parliamentary leaders are obliged to respond.* This is demonstrated by the various public forums at which MPs and party and government representatives actively engage with citizens and, significantly, the increased media coverage of such events and scrutiny of MPs' actions in delivering on their promises.

Table one below elucidates the JPM project's most significant outcomes as identified by research participants. It disaggregates these outcomes in order to highlight how they impacted the organizations and individuals directly engaged by the program, as well as substantial impacts on a broader circle of actors.

Conclusion

The JPM's political-process monitoring activities play an important role in democratization efforts in Jordan. Due to the project's web portal, periodic reports and public forums, Jordanian citizens and CSOs have access to information essential to understanding and meaningfully engaging in parliamentary politics. This has enabled involvement by more citizens, CSOs,

Nabz-Iran: Working to Raise Awareness around Human Rights Violations in Iran

www.nabz-iran.com

Follow us on Facebook @ **ایران نبض** Nabz Iran

Follows us on Twitter @nabziran



political parties and the media, and assisted in forging new, cooperative relationships between and amongst these actors.

The success of the JPM project underscores several lessons NDI has learned elsewhere. Foremost is that Al-Quds had a long range strategy for the organization's democratization work, into which political-process monitoring programs fit naturally. This allowed for an incremental approach that saw the Center's staff first build the relationships and skills necessary to provide accurate information, then move on to greater analysis, reporting, and inclusion of other actors. This established them as a credible, nonpartisan organization and allowed them work with multiple stakeholders, thereby occupying existing space and then expanding it to include more substantive political discourse and a greater range of organizations engaged. Second, Al-Quds' leadership seemed to instinctually understand that while democracy and governance-oriented CSOs such as Al-Quds can help make opportunities for citizens to learn about and engage in their political processes, those opportunities may carry little practical meaning for citizens. At the same time, Al-Quds recognizes the risk of these opportunities being diminished if not also occupied by citizens and other civil society organizations. Thus, the Center worked diligently to bring issue-based CSOs into political-process monitoring activities and equip them with the knowledge and relationships necessary to impact their issues. By effectively engaging citizens and government around matters that affect the quality of people's daily lives, these groups can play a vital role in establishing enduring democratic practices. Finally, Al-Quds effectively mediated the interactions between the various actors engaged by the JPM project, which helped shape political space around less adversarial relationships.

Nabz-Iran: Working to Raise Awareness around Human Rights Violations in Iran

www.nabz-iran.com

Follow us on Facebook @ **ایران نبض** Nabz Iran

Follows us on Twitter @nabziran

AL-QUDS PARLIAMENTARY MONITORING PROGRAM, MOST SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES AND ACTIVITIES (based on discussion participants' responses)

Engaged by PPM (as perceived by Al-Quds staff that participated in the group discussion)				External to the Program (as perceived by Al-Quds staff that participated in the group discussion)		
Al-Quds's Primary PPM Activities	Directly Influenced	Most Significant Outcomes Attributed to PPM Engagement	PPM Activities With the Greatest Impact	Group	Most Significant Impacts Attributed to PPM Activities	PMM Activities With the Greatest Impact
Polls, studies and reports Interaction with different stakeholders Media outreach Proposing amended legislation Networking and coalition building Website	MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More interaction • Increased interest in sharing information with Al-Quds' observers • Participation in relevant activities • Keenness on maintaining a positive image 	1. Polls, studies and reports 2. Proposed legislation 3. Media outreach	Civil Society as a Whole	More awareness of Parliament and MPs Better awareness and understanding of democratic culture	1. Polls 2. (tie) Website 2. Media 1. Media 2. (tie) Website 2. Polls
	CSOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership with Al-Quds • Demand for Al-Quds' PM services • Increased awareness of Parliament developments • Encouraged new initiatives to monitor Parliament by other CSOs 	1. (tie) Polls and reports 1. Networking and coalition building 1. Stakeholder interaction	Non-participating women's organizations	More awareness and participation in the legislative process and following their group-related issues and policies	
	Women's Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced partnership between Al-Quds and women's organizations • Increased awareness among women leaders on MPs' performance and women's representation in Parliament 	1. (tie) Media outreach 1. Networking and coalition building 2. Training	Professional Associations	More awareness and participation in the legislative process and following their group-related issues	

Nabz-Iran: Working to Raise Awareness around Human Rights Violations in Iran

www.nabz-iran.com

Follow us on Facebook @ **ایران نابض** Nabz Iran

Follows us on Twitter @nabziran

					and policies	
	Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness of Parliament Demonstrated interest in parliamentary monitoring reports Increased engagement in the legislative process 	1. (tie) Proposed legislation 1. Training 2. Polls and reports	Refugee Camps	More awareness; increased confidence in the democratic process; increased participation in elections	
Additional Impacts of the PPM program (as perceived by Al-Quds staff that participated in the group discussion)						
	Local Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better knowledge about MPs Better information on Parliament in general 		The Private Sector	More awareness and participation in the legislative process and following their group-related issues and policies	
	Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquired an independent and credible source of information on Parliament Increased interest in covering the activities of Al-Quds' parliamentary monitoring work 				
	Public Opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness 				
	Local Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness, especially women members in local councils 				
	Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased governmental openness regarding electoral reform and parliamentary 				

Nabz-Iran: Working to Raise Awareness around Human Rights Violations in Iran

www.nabz-iran.com

Follow us on Facebook @ **ایران نبض** Nabz Iran

Follows us on Twitter @nabziran

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitoring Sponsoring and participating in activities 				
	Senate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sponsoring and participating in activities Interaction with parliamentary monitoring reports 				
	Academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquired more resources of information on Parliament Increased appreciation of the project 				

Nabz-Iran: Working to Raise Awareness around Human Rights Violations in Iran

www.nabz-iran.com

Follow us on Facebook @ **ایران نبض** Nabz Iran

Follows us on Twitter @nabziran