



How Jordan's Political Parties Pursue Social Justice

An Overview of Social Justice in Political Party Ideologies, Policies, and Internal Practices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

In August 2015, the Jordanian government introduced a landmark draft election law. Reversing a quarter century of reliance on a single non-transferable voting system, the draft law proposes the introduction of an electoral system that reflects the one used during the 1989 Election in which voters were able to cast as many votes as there were seats in their respective constituency. This change would likely give parties an electoral advantage, as prior to the introduction of single non-transferable voting, the electorate frequently used only their first vote to support familial and tribal connections and then cast subsequent votes based upon ideological preferences. The new law would also encourage much-needed dialogue about ideology, as parties and candidates will have to come together on these issues when they form lists. With Jordan on the precipice of passing this law that could move parties out of the political periphery and into policy-making roles, it is crucial that Jordanians not only become better acquainted with political parties, but also the parties' commitment to the realization of a socially just society.

The preceding introduction paper to social justice in Jordan highlighted that the term "social justice" is commonly used in Jordan, but that understandings of this concept vary widely and are often very unclear. These findings were based upon Identity Center's interviews and surveys with the Jordanian people, but they did not engage with the political parties that represent them. The parties, however, also use the rhetoric of social justice, and the "realization of social justice" is included as a key goal in many of their platforms.¹ Understanding whether this rhetoric actually translates into socially just policies and internal governance, however, is less apparent. While Identity Center has previously compiled reports outlining the platforms of Jordan's political parties (and even worked with parties to help them to formulate effective platforms), this paper focuses on the parties' understandings of social justice, how the concept is represented in their platforms, and how effectively it is practiced inside the parties themselves.

1.2 Methodology

The research presented in this paper examines Jordanian political parties' views regarding social justice in order to both present a more comprehensive picture of how Jordanian political parties perceive social justice and social justice issues, as well as assess the extent to which ideas on social justice are integrated in their visions, platforms, and internal governance. Given the specificity of these research objectives as well as the limited availability of articulated views on social justice, this paper was largely dependent upon primary research. As such, the research team organized a three stage research plan consisting of (1) individual interviews with the heads of political parties, (2) a phone survey conducted with members of political parties and (3) a focus group meeting.

Because Jordan's political landscape is highly fragmented, currently comprising over thirty-five parties of differing size and importance, not all of the registered parties were involved in the research process. In each research phase, Identity Center selected participant parties based upon their position in Jordanian society and politics, as well as their political orientation. The aggregated data compiled from all of the phases consequently represents a good image of the overall political landscape, and enabled Identity Center to discern the main views on social justice present across the different segments of the political spectra.

For the first stage, Identity Center conducted thirteen in-depth interviews with heads of political parties, having formulated a range of questions that would allow it to draw general conclusions on its twofold research objectives. Accordingly, a part of the questionnaire consisted of open questions pertaining to the interviewed persons' understanding of social justice and social justice issues. Similar to the way Identity Center approached its social justice focus groups for its 2014 research, the interview started with these open questions to allow for the interviewee to present her or his own views on social justice before steering the conversation into a particular direction. The interviews also included questions that steered toward social injustices previously identified by Identity Center as a way of analyzing if – and

¹ See Identity Center, "Map of Political Parties and Movements in Jordan, 2013-2014," Amman, Jordan, January, 2014. <<http://www.identity-center.org/en/node/263>>

the extent to which – political parties' understandings of social justice challenge extant systems, customs, and values that perpetuate social injustices. Finally, the interview included questions pertaining to the platforms and policies of political parties on specific issues.

Following these interviews, political parties supplied Identity Center with the names and numbers of party members (10 parties supplied 10 names and numbers) with whom it subsequently conducted a telephone survey to better understand how party rank and file viewed social justice in their respective parties' platforms and internal mechanisms. Each phone survey participant was asked 11 multiple-choice questions and seven true/false questions. At the same time as Identity Center conducted this survey, it also convened a focus group meeting, where participants were asked questions that covered the same issues as the telephone survey, but in an open ended format, allowing the research team to better understand the phone survey and some of the possible motivations underpinning its results.

1.3 Background

The preceding introductory paper to social justice in Jordan explained that because Jordan's parliament has little power to direct policy, it has remained weak, and political parties have consequently remained even weaker. While elections began to be contested in 1989 following a twenty-year suspension, and a protracted ban on political parties (1956-1992) was lifted in the early 1990s, political parties have continued to be relegated to the political sidelines and their policies have largely been ignored during the last quarter century. The 1989 Election is widely regarded in Jordan as the freest and fairest in the Kingdom's history, but it represents an exception in Jordan's political history that was a product of the politico-economic challenges that the Kingdom was then facing.

In the late 1980s Jordan faced a severe economic crisis that threatened its ability to sustain its semi-rentier economy and patron-client system upon which its government's legitimacy depended. When Jordanians consequently went into the streets to protest their increasingly perilous economic positions, the government responded with the promise of a wide-ranging package of democratic reforms. These liberal reforms led to HM King Hussein's 1988 announcement that elections would occur the following year. In the election that followed, the Muslim Brotherhood won twenty-two of the eighty seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and independent Islamists took another twelve.²

The limited political opening, however, was quickly reversed when it led to fierce opposition against Jordan's post-Gulf War foreign policies. Jordan's rapprochement with Israel in the mid-1990s proved widely unpopular domestically, and the Brotherhood succeeded in rallying other opposition parties against the policy.³ Realizing that the reforms it had recently introduced were providing the parliament with more influence than it had originally intended, the government revised its electoral policies before the country went to the polls again in November 1993.⁴

The introduction of the 1993 Election Law exemplified a general loss of democratization momentum. The extant 1986 Election Law, which allowed multiple votes and encouraged alliances (thus benefiting larger parties, such as the Muslim Brotherhood), was replaced with a single non-transferable vote system (SNTV: commonly referred to as "one person, one vote").⁵ Previously, many Jordanians had based their first vote on tribal commitments, but had then used their remaining votes to support parties. The new SNTV system, however,

² Alan Cowell, "Militant Muslims Gain in Jordan Voting," *New York Times*, November 10, 1989. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/10/world/militant-muslims-gain-in-jordan-voting.html>>; Beverly Milton-Edwards and Peter Hinchcliffe, *Jordan: A Hashemite Legacy* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 195.

³ Mehran Kamrava, "Frozen Political Liberalization in Jordan: The Consequences for Democracy," *Democratization* Vol. 5, No. 1 (1998): 143; Betty Anderson, "The Status of 'Democracy' in Jordan," *Critique: Journal of Critical Studies of Iran and the Middle East* Vol. 10 (Spring 1997): 61.

⁴ Glenn E. Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 30, No. 3 (August 1998): 391.

⁵ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, "Law of Election to the House of Deputies, Law No. 22 for the Year 1986," May 17, 1986 <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/elect_law.html>; Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, "Provisional Law Number (15) for the Year 1993 Amending the Law of Election to the House Of Deputies," August 17, 1993. <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/elect_law.html>

combined multi-member districts with the ability to only vote for a single candidate. By limiting voters to a single vote in a society where tribal links remain paramount, the monarchy ensured that ballots would be determined by tribal affiliation, leaving no additional votes to support ideological sympathies.⁶ Reinforcing the position of tribal, loyalist candidates, the 1993 Election Law confined the parliament's political potential and has consequently become a central focus of the opposition in Jordan.

In response, the government has accompanied almost every election since 1993 with the introduction of a new election law and has initiated countless reforms, but none that has carried the potential to allow the development of a more representative parliamentary system.⁷ Tired of political inertia and the seeming pointlessness of participating in the parliamentary process, Jordanians formed informal political movements (*hirak*) in 2011 and went into the streets to demand change. Their rallies attracted wide attention and support and pushed the government to respond to these mass movements. Following the protests in 2011, King Abdullah II launched a comprehensive review process of the political system. Because demands for electoral reform featured prominently in the *hirak* demands, the King brought together a coalition of political party leaders, lawmakers, journalists, and activists in the National Dialogue Committee, which was charged with examining possible changes to both the Political Parties Law and the Election Law. Responding to the recommendations that the Committee suggested, the government passed a new Election Law in 2012, which *technically* eliminated SNTV after its nearly 20 year imposition.⁸

The new Law introduced a mixed electoral system that included a majority vote at the district level and a closed proportional list at the national level. Whereas opposition parties and movements had been calling for a system in which 50 percent of the seats would be allocated through proportional representation, the 2012 system designated only 27 out of 150 seats to a proportional system. The remaining seats were to be contested through a system that follows the key precepts of SNTV. Hence, even though the protests of 2011 officially led to reform and the removal of SNTV, the system's key precepts remain the method of determining the composition of the overwhelming majority of the house.⁹

Perhaps sensing that the new election law was insufficient to placate the opposition by itself, King Abdullah II announced that it represented but the first step toward realizing his "vision" of a parliamentary democracy.¹⁰ He argued that the next step toward achieving this vision was a rectification of the means by which governments are selected. Immediately before the 2013 Election HM King Abdullah II declared:

After the upcoming elections, we will start piloting a parliamentary government system, including how our Prime Ministers and Cabinets are selected. [...] Historically, the Prime Minister and Ministers have been chosen for their leadership qualities and expertise, and approved by a vote of confidence in Parliament. [...] However, it is important that we start building our system of parliamentary government. As a first step, we will change how the Prime Minister is designated after this upcoming election.

King Abdullah II's plan was designed to put Jordan on the path towards parliamentary government, but the requisite legislative capacities for greater involvement in the government

⁶ Amin Ali Alazzam, "Political Participation in Jordan: The Impact of Party and Tribal Loyalties Since 1989," Ph.D. Diss., Durham University, 2008 <<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2183/>> 137.

⁷ Marwan Muasher, "A Decade of Struggling Reform Efforts in Jordan: The Resilience of the Rentier System" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 11, 2011 <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/05/11/decade-of-struggling-reform-efforts-in-jordan-resilience-of-rentier-system/1gf>>; and Ibrahim, "Jordanian Vote Endorses Peace Effort."

⁸ Curtis R. Ryan, "The Implications of Jordan's New Electoral Law," *Foreign Policy*, April 13, 2012. <http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/04/13/the_implications_of_jordans_new_electoral_law>

⁹ Kristen Kao, "Jordan's Ongoing Election Law Battle," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, SADA, July 5, 2012. <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/07/05/jordan-s-ongoing-election-law-battle/ck59>>

¹⁰ In late 2012 and early 2013, HM King Abdullah II penned four discussion papers. The above plan was outlined in the second discussion paper. See HM King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein, "Making Our Democratic System Work for All Jordanians," HM King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein's Official Website, January 16, 2013. <http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/pages/view/id/248/print/1.html>

had not yet been established. The electoral reforms moved the system in the right direction, but they proved insufficient to incentivize the creation of a party-based parliament – or even to facilitate significant parliamentary cohesion.¹¹ As a result of these shortcomings, the parliament was unable to perform its newly designated tasks. In fact, two months after the parliamentary election the deputies had still not agreed upon a new prime minister and consequently caved under pressure from the Royal Court to extend the mandate of the incumbent head of the monarchically appointed, short-term government, Abdullah Ensour.¹² Ensour subsequently held consultations with deputies regarding the composition of his cabinet, but later proceeded to ignore their recommendations and formed the government himself.

Parliamentarians failed to play an effective role in helping to form the new government in 2013 because the system had not yet prepared them for this role. It had not encouraged them to work together as parties or as blocs. Recognizing this shortcoming, the government is now pushing legislation to change the system. In August 2015 the government proposed a new election law that addresses numerous, long-standing electoral concerns. With the opposition still fixated on the 1989 election, the draft law, according to the Prime Minister, is “more or less” a return to the system that was used in the 1989 election.¹³ As in 1989, voters will be able to cast as many votes as there are seats in their respective constituency. As such, the law will hopefully encourage Jordanians to vote not only along tribal lines, but also based on ideology.

Since 1989, parties and political platforms have been forced to take a backseat in electoral politics and decision-making in Jordan. The draft election law could help to change this. While it is unlikely that that law’s changes will have significant impact on the results of the next election, the law will hopefully prove the genesis of a process that will gradually render parties more central to the political system, and their ideologies more relevant to voters. As such, it is crucial that Jordanians begin to better understand how political parties view Jordanian society and how (or if) the parties will work to implement fair, socially just policies.

2. POLITICAL PARTIES’ PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

2.1 Social Justice in Principle

In the interviews and focus groups that Identity Center conducted with Jordanian political parties, their leaders and members unanimously asserted that they support social justice and that their policies reflect this commitment. Indeed, almost all of the parties include the “realization of social justice” as one of their platforms. But what does this vaguely stated commitment mean to the parties and how does it influence their policies and practice?

When asked what social justice means, most of the general secretaries of political parties defined the concept as a synonym for equality between all persons regardless of their sex, age, race, or religion. Most of the political party leaders and members explained that equality means that all Jordanians are treated the same by the law and that all possess the same freedoms to exercise their rights. This understanding of social justice was also reflected by the large majority of members of political parties who participated in the phone survey for this paper. When given three options of what social justice means, seventy-four percent of the respondents indicated that “social justice means that all citizens are equal in the law, and thus all are treated the same.” Similarly, eighty percent stated that social justice would be achieved by giving the same legal rights to everyone.¹⁴

¹¹ Marwam Muasher, “Jordan’s Proposed Constitutional Amendments – A First Step in the Right Direction,” Carnegie Endowments for International Peace, August 17, 2011. <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/08/17/jordan-s-proposed-constitutional-amendments-first-step-in-right-direction/5tz7>>

¹² Osama al-Sharif, “Jordan’s New Government: Same Old Politics,” *al-Monitor*, March 31, 2011. <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/jordanian-government-formation.html>>

¹³ Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour, quoted in Curtis Ryan, “Déjà vu for Jordanian Election Reforms,” *The Washington Post*, September 2, 2015. <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/09/02/deja-vu-for-jordanian-election-reforms/>>

¹⁴ Participants in Identity Center’s phone survey were asked to choose between three of the following options to the question “What does social justice mean?”: a) the law is followed exactly, so that all

If this focus on protecting the same freedoms for all Jordanians is viewed through the lens of the three conceptions of justice that were outlined in the introduction paper for this project, it most closely reflects the framework that is put forward in justice according to what is reasonable. Within that framework, equality – and, therefore, justice – is seen as a condition of sameness. In order to better appreciate the implications of understanding social justice in this way, it might be conceptually useful to consider possible differences between social justice and human rights.

If a society treats all persons the same before the law and guarantees them the same freedoms to enjoy their rights, then it can be said that this society is protecting members' human rights, as it would not accept any person to be denied his or her basic rights and freedoms. However, the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms does not equate to social justice. Even if a society perfectly protects human rights, this would not negate the possibility of gross inequality.¹⁵ Above the minimum protections of rights that they provide, human rights say nothing about the distribution of privileges and resources in a society. Hence, a society could protect human rights, but still allow a small segment of the population to control the majority of the political and economic power in the society.

Identifying social justice as a synonym for the protection of human rights, political party members and leaders did not suggest a framework that would necessitate redressing the biases of contingency (see page 13) or devoting more resources and privileges to those persons who are least advantaged and most in need of them. The parties only addressed minimum protections for all persons by providing them with the same freedoms. As such, they did not see that equality might require treating persons differently in order to make society more fair – or just.

2.2 Social Justice in Practice

The parties' equation of social justice with the granting of the same freedoms to everyone was reflected in their platforms and policies. Many of the issues that the parties identified as being socially unjust involve situations in which people are denied the same freedoms as others to enjoy their rights, particularly in relation to education, healthcare, and access to the labor market. In this respect, political parties pointed to large disparities between different regions and different income groups, emphasizing that everyone should have equal opportunities in these respects.

With these discussion of equal opportunities, some of the ideas that the parties put forward seemingly bordered on a conception of social justice as justice according to what is fair. Political parties, however, largely failed to differentiate between having the same opportunities and same rights and freedoms, using the two almost interchangeably. In many of the examples that they gave, political parties stressed that everyone should have equal rights; yet, they did not recognize that these guarantees in themselves do not ensure that everyone benefits equally from these rights nor enjoys equal opportunities. Due to the fact that people are born with different capacities and privileges, ensuring that everyone benefits equally from their rights requires a better appreciation of the pertinence of relevant difference to fostering equality.

This conception of equality as relevant difference was not reflected in the answers of political parties. Ideas about equal opportunities were substantiated neither by the view that achieving this equality might require treating people differently based on their relevant differences in order to achieve fairness, nor by suggestions that it might be necessary to establish

cases are dealt with according to the law; b) all citizens are equal in the law, and thus are all treated the same; and c) the law is the same for all, but each citizen is treated differently based on needs. The results: 8% choose option a, 74% choose option b and 18% choose option c. When participants were asked "is social justice achieved by giving the same legal rights to everyone?" 80% answered in the affirmative and 20% in the negative.

¹⁵ Samuel Moyn, "Human Rights and the Age of Inequality," in *Can Human Rights Bring Social Justice* ed., Doukje Lettinga and Lars van Troost, Strategic Studies, Amnesty International Netherlands, October 2015, 13-18.

<https://www.amnesty.nl/sites/default/files/public/can_human_rights_bring_social_justice.pdf>

mechanisms or institutions to compensate underprivileged groups. In effect, most of the political parties' conceptions of social justice reflected an understanding of equality as sameness, and their platforms largely focused on the provision of a social safety net rather than net equality.

2.2.1 Elements of Social Justice as Legal Justice

The interviews, focus groups, and phone survey all highlighted that the definition of equality prevalent in political party platforms remains dependent upon the issue to which the concept is being applied. While all parties espoused a theoretic conception of equality – and, therefore, of social justice – that was defined by all Jordanians' possessing the same freedoms to enjoy their rights, many of the parties' views vis-à-vis specific issues did not integrate this universal guarantee of freedoms. When they discussed individual issues, many parties did not even agree that all Jordanians, let alone residents, should be given the same freedoms to exercise their rights.

This was particularly salient with respect to women's rights. Despite the fact that political parties all support "equal" rights for women *in theory*, in regards to specific issues of women's rights, most political parties were happy to provide men with privileges that they simultaneously denied women. In the phone survey, focus groups, and interviews, participants were presented with cases in which women were given different freedoms through Jordan's legal system. However, most of the participants in these different research activities did not identify these situations as being unjust. Instead, participants explained that these situations were fair because they were based on Islamic law, long-standing frameworks, or socio-juridical norms.

When presented with the example of Jordan's Inheritance Law, which stipulates that women should receive less inheritance than their male family members, the majority of parties supported the law on religious grounds, arguing that the law was socially just because it reflects the constitution and Quranic laws. Depriving women of freedoms was also justified on other, more context-specific grounds. Regarding the possibility of matrilineal citizenship passing, party leaders and members concentrated on demographic issues, arguing that Jordan's precarious demographic balance would be destroyed if women were able to pass citizenship to their children irrespective of their father's citizenship. While many of these arguments are predicated upon tangible concerns, they, nonetheless, require depriving freedoms to specific social groups.

2.3 Social Justice as a Static Concept

By frequently reverting to an approach to social justice that closely reflects legal justice, most of the participant political parties referred back to Jordan's constitution and traditions to identify whether or not a situation was socially just. Such an approach renders much of social justice's conceptual potential void; instead of examining laws or systems to see if they are socially just, most of the parties instead used those laws and systems to justify the perpetuation of existing social injustices. The political parties used the Quran, constitution, or social traditions as a referential anchor for their platforms, arguing that its perfect implementation would bring about a socially just society. At the same time, a handful of members and leaders also stated that there are a number of countries in Europe (Sweden, most prominently) and North America where societies are very close to "reaching social justice".

While extant texts and traditions, and even systems in other countries, might serve as useful compasses toward social justice, a reliance upon them and a belief that they personify the end goal of the process limits the potential of social justice. The strength of social justice as a concept is that it does not have to be definitionally static. Social justice should be understood as a dynamic concept and its definitional parameters must be continually reexamined in an effort to benefit more and more people as societies continually push for a fairer society. This dynamic process allows societies to identify and address systemic discrimination that was neither understood in the past nor the present. Referring back to an existing document, system, or example from another country limits the potential of social justice and buttresses the existing borders of social justice.

2.4 Limiting the Borders of Social Justice

For social justice to remain a beneficial framework for analyzing society, its borders must constantly be expanded so that more and more social groups reap the fruits of a fair society. This requires reviewing a society's existing laws, institutions, and systems to determine whether they are socially just or whether they discriminate against a specific person or group of persons in a society. The desired result is the identification of injustice in systems that we now believe to be just because of pervasive hegemonic narratives of normality. This is the result we hope to obtain from a society's political elite.

When we asked participant political parties to identify key social justice issues in Jordan, their leaders and members focused on cross-cutting issues of national importance. Unlike in the focus groups and surveys through which Identity Center polled the Jordanian public for the previous paper, political party representatives did not confine their identification of social justice issues to local issues that personally affect them. This identification of larger issues that affect diverse groups across the country *seems* to demonstrate a more abstract analysis of structural issues of social justice. However, while the parties focused on issues of national importance, the issues on which they focused were all topics that are commonly discussed in everyday conversations in Jordan. When political parties were asked open-ended questions about key social justice issues in Jordan, the party leaders and members focused on economic inequalities, electoral prejudices, and unequal access to social services: each an issue that is part of an accepted discourse of safe topics that can be discussed in any public forum in Amman.

In our interviews, moreover, the political party leaders and members largely focused on superficial explanations for these inequalities, such as *wasta*. They did not point to the systemic sources of inequalities and thus were unable to provide effective solutions to the problems. As such, most of the parties' platforms are limited to the identification of these general problems, and do not provide alternate approaches or strategies. This surface examination and explanation of social inequalities not only limits one's ability to locate solutions, but it further restricts her or his ability to exploit the potential application of social justice as a framework through which to identify hegemonic narratives of normality. Rather than harnessing this beneficial lens through which to identify groups that face a social injustice that is masked as being normal, most political parties use "social injustice" as short hand to cover all of the standard topics of politically correct debate. This dictional discrepancy means that the borders of those groups to whom social justice applies remains limited – and so too does the potential of social justice as a concept.

3. SOCIAL JUSTICE IN POLITICAL PARTIES' INTERNAL PRACTICES

The understanding of social justice as a synonym for the protection of the same freedoms for everyone is also clear in the internal practices of political parties. In the interviews Identity Center conducted, many of the political parties' general secretaries emphasized that their support for social justice is not only reflected in their platforms and policies, but also through their parties' internal organizational structure. They stated that their respective parties pursue social justice in their internal practices by ensuring that their leaderships are elected democratically and by striving to advance the positions of women and youth in their parties. These claims were supported by the results of Identity Center's phone survey, in which a large majority of participations responded positively about the democratic selection of the party's leadership and the representation of women and youth in the parties' leadership positions.¹⁶

Despite these results, a closer look at the internal structure of political parties, their leadership positions, and their memberships reveals a different reality. Such an assessment

¹⁶ When phone survey participants were asked if the leadership of their party is elected democratically, 100% answered in the affirmative. When given the question if there are youth in the leadership of their party, 96% answered in the affirmative and 4% in the negative. When given the question if there are women in the leadership of their party, 88% answered in the affirmative and 12% in the negative.

demonstrates that the parties' democratic mechanisms lack efficacy and that women and youth – let alone other disadvantaged groups – remain underrepresented in key positions.¹⁷ While all political parties have officially integrated democratic procedures such as leadership elections and checks-and-balances systems in their internal structure, many of the parties are, in practice, led by a small number of personalities that have continuously remained in power for protected periods. An overwhelming majority of the eighteen political parties in Jordan that were established prior to 2010, have had the same secretary-general since their geneses. In those instances that democratic procedures have brought about leadership succession, moreover, these changes have often resulted in splits within parties and the consequent establishment of splinter parties. In fact, the highly fragmented nature of Jordan's political landscape can in part be attributed to the cycle of party secession that often accompanies the handover of power in political parties.

Not only does power tend to stay within the same ranks of a party, but these ranks also remain largely dominated by a uniform group of middle-aged and elderly men. In contrast to what the respondents in our research asserted, youth involvement in political parties is strikingly low, and only a small number of political parties have youth in leadership positions. While most political parties have youth committees that enable youth participation in the party, youth are often prevented from climbing up through the party hierarchies. Similarly, women are underrepresented in political parties and occupy only a small minority of leadership positions. Indeed, many of the more established political parties have no women in leadership positions – even when leadership is broadly defined to include the parties' political bureaus, central committees and leadership roles in regional offices.¹⁸ Of the thirty-seven extant political parties, only three are led by women.

Similar to what political parties' external policies and platforms revealed, the parties' theoretical support for social justice was not substantiated by their internal policies and practices. This further limits their potential to act as agents of change. While political parties carry the potential to serve as effective channels for the representation and participation of marginalized groups, many of the parties rely upon internal structures that yield a concentration of power in the hands of a small, uniform group. In effect, the social hierarchies present in Jordanian society are mirrored in the internal structures of political parties, thereby buttressing the *status quo* rather than transforming it.

4. CONCLUSION

Both in their conceptions of social justice as well as in their internal and external policies, political parties largely define social justice as all citizens possessing the same freedoms to exercise their rights. Conceiving of social justice as a synonym for legal justice, their internal structures and political platforms demonstrate both scant recognition of the social injustices that are endured by marginalized groups, as well as a poor understanding of societal structures that perpetuate these injustices.

In their political platforms, the parties all espouse ideas of equal opportunities for every citizen; yet, what this ambiguous terminology actually implies is the provision of all Jordanians with the same rights and responsibilities. As such, the parties do not support equal opportunities for all Jordanians but the protection of the same freedoms. The political party

¹⁷ This information is obtained partly through primary sources and partly through the page "Jordan Politics: Guide to Jordanian Politics Life", Phenix Economics and Informatics Studies, November 15, 2015.

< <http://www.jordanpolitics.org/ar/home>>

¹⁸ The political bureau handles the daily operations of a party and the central committee (elected by the national assembly) constitutes the highest elected body in the party. In 2010, figures showed that only four political parties had women in their Political Bureau or Central Committee. The percentage of women in political parties was 27.8. See: "المرأة و الحياة السياسية", *Al Ghad*, May 16, 2010.

< <http://www.alghad.com/articles/536816-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9?s=769af5823dce3757148dd7c2c7a6dfb5>>

members and leaders Identity Center surveyed largely overlook the fact that persons' relevant differences may require systemic redress to ensure the provision of equal opportunities.

The understanding of social justice as the protection of legal justice is reflected in most of the parties' policies. Nonetheless, in regards to specific issues, the majority of parties stated that they believed some Jordanians should be denied privileges that the state grants to others, and, thus, denied full membership within the society. Most of the parties defended, for example, Jordan's citizenship law even though it provides for the unequal treatment of women. In this respect, the political parties have failed not only to provide equal opportunities for all Jordanians, but also to protect their rights.

These conclusions raise important questions about the potential role of political parties in bringing about the reforms necessary to advance social justice in Jordan, casting a shadow over the political opening provided in the new Election Law. On the long run, the Law will likely enhance the position of political parties in the Jordanian House of Representatives, but the political parties have thus far proven largely unprepared to protect the rights of Jordanians if their mandates are expanded. In a society where social injustices are rampant and often disguised by hegemonic narratives, it is doubtful that political parties will pursue the requisite change to realize a more socially just society.