



Jordan Media Institute • معهد الإعلام الأردني

“Current events and political participation: Elections and the media”

Symposium

Amman - Jordan

Abstract

At a symposium held at Jordan Media Institute (JMI) on Monday, former Jordanian Prime Minister Abdelraouf Rawabdeh encouraged Jordan’s youth to get involved in political life and form political parties that reflect their beliefs. He added that democratic participation is the only tool for political reform.

The symposium, titled “Current events and political participation: Elections and the media,” was held in cooperation with Canal France International (CFI), and was moderated by Dr. Sabri Rabihat. Rawabdeh highlighted the foundations of the formation of the Jordanian state, and its national identity, as well as its sources of strength and the challenges that it has confronted in its first 100 years. Jordan, he said, was founded on the ideals of pan-Arabism, and it advanced a model of centrism and moderation in its public policy.

Rawabdeh also said that it was necessary for Jordan to carve its own identity, in order to confront the region’s historic and geographic challenges. He said this identity focused on the principles of the Great Arab Revolt, and the values that it represented for the advancement of the Arab nation, which was the cornerstone of Jordan’s national and Arab identity.

In his dialogue with JMI's students and gathered journalists, Rawabdeh said that democracy is a source of strength for countries and that it is not simply an ideology but rather a method of governance that takes root over time. He added that active political parties form the foundation of political participation and that democracy and parliamentary government rely on political parties and regular elections. Jordan, he said, is in need of dynamic, democratic political parties that are accepting of others, capable of putting forward ideas that serve the society.

He explained that while there are dozens of registered parties in Jordan, there are no truly effective ones. This absence paves the way for ideological, regional, utilitarian, and tribal foundations to control the electoral process. The real parties, by contrast, are able to present political programs and development plans and can weaken political money.

In response to students' questions, Rawabdeh said that the responsibility of choosing members of parliament falls on their popular bases. They must choose their representatives on the basis of clear agendas and development plans, and they should not reelect representatives if they fail to fulfill their duty to meet the aspirations of their constituents. He said that this is where the role of the media comes in, to supply citizens with information on the performance of their representatives, and on whether or not they are upholding their promises.

On the issue of Jordan's relationship with Palestine, meanwhile, Rawabdeh said that the relationship between the two peoples does not resemble any relationship between any other country and the Palestinian issue. He emphasized that the Arab unity between the two banks of the Jordan river is grassroots and democratic, and the

Palestinian issue was and still is the top priority of the Jordanian leadership and people.

In Qteishat's view, the numerous descriptions for the same crime, and the different degrees of punishment assigned to it by multiple pieces of legislation, are creating an imbalance in the law. They have led to a situation of "incoherence," pushing the public prosecutor to prosecute crimes according to the most severe punishment.

JMI Dean Dr. Ziad Rifai explained that discussing the media scene during this period is crucial given, on the one hand, the media's influence on society and, on the other, that it is a mirror for the latter. It is a window through which to study societal behavior and the changes therein, especially as there are now entire broadcasting stations not subject to censorship or editorial processes. Press freedoms, therefore, constitute a critical element in conveying attitudes and information.

The academic Dr. Amani Jarrar pointed to the need for journalistic material that serves the purpose of media work and addresses societal issues in-depth. In this respect, Qteishat and Al Khasawneh agreed that the current phase requires intensive, investigative journalistic activity to take up issues that have gone under-reported during the lockdown. The two experts beseeched journalists to pursue professional and responsible journalistic stories that serve the public interest and uncover the facts.

A series of questions and comments from the audience addressed expectations for what is to come after the pandemic. The human rights activist Dr. Nahla al-Momani stressed the role of the press in casting light on the degree of the state's commitment to enforcing the state of emergency to the narrowest extent and without infringing upon the political and civil rights of citizens. This accords with what is affirmed by

the fourth article of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the royal decree activating the Defense Law. Al-Momani added that the press should play a role in defending the freedom of expression that is at its core inherently.

Media professional Kathy Faraj spoke to the significant administrative and editorial pressures that journalists contend within the work environment, which limits their ability to produce independent, professional content that fulfills their lofty mission.

Qteishat and Al Khasawneh concluded by emphasizing that the media is a cornerstone of the state and a measure of its strength. As such, there must be a clear policy in the area of press freedoms. This pandemic should not be a step backward, they said, but rather an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between citizens and the government by streamlining the information that the latter has managed to provide - to an extent - during the lockdown.