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The general election of 1956 was a phenomenon atypical not only of the history of the Kingdom of Jordan but also unusual if one considers it against the background of the general situation in the Middle East. The extraordinary character of the election was primarily reflected in the fact that – according to a relatively widely shared belief of external observers – the election had been run in a fair manner. Simple as it is, this fact is atypical of the region. Until today, in many countries of the region parliaments still do not function. Wherever elections are regularly held, they are, as a rule, far from being fair. Another basic fact about the Jordanian election is that it was held at the moment when the Kingdom's population was politically agitated to such an extent that a possibility of introducing several important changes in many domains of life through parliament seemed almost certain. This is why the interest in the election was bigger than average.

Because of two reasons, the results of the election may serve until today as a practical indicator of the social mood prevalent both in the Kingdom of Jordan and, in a way, in the whole Middle Eastern area.

It goes without saying that the election of 1956 was held during a specific period when revolutionary changes were occurring in the Middle East. The results of the election reflected fairly exactly the attitudes shared then by the Arab masses. In spite of this, some specific problems also emerged then which have had a bearing on the politics in the region until today. Namely, by force of necessity, the fair election brought to light crucial structural issues that affected the Arab society.

Those reasons justify the structure of the following paper in which I will present the results of the election and the structure of the

parliament which was their effect. Taking this as my point of departure, I am going to discuss some more general issues which are related to the problematic of permanent political cleavages in the country. To embark on those issues, a general political situation in the Middle East which had led to the election of 1956, has to be outlined first.

The formation of the Kingdom of Jordan

The states currently existing in the Middle East were established only after 1918. The new political map of the region was chartered by Great Britain and France in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Noteworthy, the victorious European powers did not intend to create any state structures there but only their protectorates. It is not surprising then that the divisions introduced by the great powers in the region were artificial to a considerable degree. Nevertheless, while partitioning the Arab lands, they inadvertently created some geographical wholes. The divisions, executed between 1919 and 1921, irrespective of their genealogy, turned out to be quite permanent (Bartnicki 1974: 208–209).

The Emirate of Transjordan was one of the most artificial state structures which had emerged out of those processes. Its establishment was initiated by British authorities in 1921. The British wanted to reward the Hashimi clan ruling in Mecca and Medina for their support for the British political course during the First World War. The head of the clan – king Hussein Ibn Ali, a ruler of the holy Islamic cities, symbolized the pan-Arab movement then. He had a few sons. Two of them, emirs Faysal and Abd Allah were active leaders of the Arab revolt against Turks in 1916. The most famous of the king of Mecca's sons, emir Faysal was rewarded with a throne of the Iraq. However, his brother Abd Allah was also to be satisfied. Given the circumstances, Winston Churchill, the then Secretary responsible for the British colonies, offered the throne of a desert-like Transjordan to emir Abd Allah. The Hashimite accepted the offer (Peak 1958: 105).

The Transjordan territory was, formally, a part of Palestine. Announcing the so called Balfour Declaration on the 2nd of November in 1917, British authorities conceded to Jews the right to mass settlement in the Palestinian territories (*Konflikt...* 1999: 13). The separation of the lands east of the Jordan river – namely, Transjordan – was probably also to aim at limiting the area of the Jewish settlement to

the territories west of the Jordan river. At least such was the opinion of the Zionist organizations in the matter (Chojnowski, Tomaszewski 2001: 14–15).

Despite some initial problems, the British experiment succeeded. In the territories which were squeezed in between Syria, the Iraq, Palestine and Saudi Arabia, the Emirate of Transjordan (as a British protectorate) was established to be ruled by emir Abd Allah (*Prawo między-narodowe...* 1958: 195 and 200). The new ruler was loyal to British authorities. His Emirate counted initially slightly more than 200 thousand inhabitants whose number grew in the 1940s to about 350 thousand. In financial terms, the Emirate was totally dependent on British subventions (Peak 1958: 108–109). The Transjordan emir, according to the suggestions of his British protectors, granted a constitution to his Emirate and let elections be held. However, no political parties existed until then in the tribal society. The ruler tried in the circumstances to win the loyalty of some local leaders by means of building personal ties. He distributed state donations as private gifts. On the whole, until the 1940s, emir Abd Allah did not experience any real problems controlling the amorphic Transjordan parliament (Vatikiotis 1967: 48).

The situation changed radically as of 1948. A war broke out then which had been triggered by the proclamation of an Israeli state on the 15th of June in 1948. The new Jewish state was attacked by its Arab neighbours who declared that they were defending the Arab population of Palestine. The Transjordan army took an active part in the war. Admittedly, Abd Allah's forces registered a relative success fighting the Israelis. Part of Palestine – the territory known now as the West Bank of the Jordan and East Jerusalem – was incorporated into the Transjordan state. After the unification of 1950, the state's name was changed to the Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan (Sparrow 1961: 15).

In territorial terms, the gain was modest – only 3 thousand of square kilometers, but in terms of population, it meant a revolutionary change. The Emirate, counting so far slightly more than 300 thousand of inhabitants, expanded now to include an area whose population counted officially 720 thousand, but unofficially neared the number of 800 thousand. Moreover, there were in the area numerous cities where fully formed political parties functioned. Among the newly incorporated citizens, there were also refugees expelled by the Israelis from their traditional homesteads. The latter group was characterized by particular political radicalism (Dokumentacja prasowa 1956: 124 A).

All of the factors quickly led to forced abandonment of the old patriarchal political regime.

The incorporation of the Palestinian territories to the former Transjordan state resulted *inter alia* in the rise of a fundamentalist opposition to the ruling dynasty and its pro-British and West-oriented politics. The opposition was represented by Palestinians, in particular by the Palestinian refugees. Any symptom of a rapprochement between the Transjordan Kingdom and the USA or Great Britain provoked spontaneous protests in the milieu, whereas the ruling clan was accused of betraying the Arab interests. It was in connection with such accusations that on the 20th of July in 1951, the first ruler of the state, Abd Allah, was shot in Jerusalem. The event initiated a period of political crisis in the Jordan state. The crisis intensified when the son and successor of Abd Allah, Talal, was deposed from the throne after a few months because of his intensifying mental illness. As a result, a grandson of Abd Allah, Hussein Ibn Talal, who was only seventeen then, had to become a monarch in 1952 (Robins 2004: 74–75 and 88).

Forced democratization

The new monarch did not, of course, enjoy the authority possessed by his grandfather. A situation arose, quite untypical in the Arab kingdoms, in which the ruler ceased to play the role of a leading political factor. Ruling on his behalf, there were his grandfather's associates who had only experience adequate to the scale of the previous Transjordan state. They were unable to manage the wave of the growing protests in Palestine.

In the meantime, the situation in the whole Middle East became complicated. The pan-Arab movement gained in strength. The domination of the European powers was particularly disliked by the Arab masses, which in practical terms meant a dislike of Great Britain. Governments of many states were being accused of collaborating with London, of having contributed to the lost war with Israel and, lastly, of infringing on civic liberties. Selling themselves to the West remained, however, the major issue. Radicalized Arabs willingly drew on leftist, socialist slogans. They also repeatedly bandied visions of a single and united Arab state. After the monarchy in Egypt had been abolished in the aftermath of a military *coup d'etat* which took place in the night of the 22nd of July in 1953, this country became the center of a pan-Arab

movement, especially when Colonel Gamel Abdel Naser took full control of the country. Naser's government became politically allied to the USRR, introduced several social reforms and, finally, lent its support to the Palestinian demands intentionally escalating the conflict with Israel (Sidor 1969: 52).

The propaganda promulgated by Egypt was received warmly in the Kingdom of Jordan. The Palestinian masses sympathized with it fully. They believed that Egypt would be able to beat Israel and help them to gain back their homes after the Jewish enemy had been destroyed. In the period between 1955 and 1956, the political authorities in the Kingdom faced a permanent crisis. Mass riots forced cabinet after cabinet to resign even though police forces were used to repress the unrest. In March of 1956, Jordanian authorities made the British commandership of the Jordanian's army leave the country, including the commander-in-chief John Bagot Glubb. This move increased their popularity but the relationships with Great Britain, which so far had financed the army, became strained (Lunt 1999: 146–147).

When the British-French attack to seize the Suez Canal between the 31st of October and the 6th of November in 1956 proved to be a complete political failure, the Kingdom's authorities had no choice but to support Egypt and the pan-Arab cause. The masses, especially Palestinians, were in favour of Egypt as well of course. G.A. Naser earned the status of an idol in the region. In the tense atmosphere, an electoral campaign took place in the Kingdom of Jordan. An election followed.

The election of 1956

The election took place on the 21st of October in 1956. The pro-West authorities did not risk either postponing the election day until later or corrupting the ballot results – or at least the scale of the electoral fraud was not big. The authorities were afraid that an open forgery might in the situation trigger a general revolt. The unique situation enabled then to organize one of the fairest elections in the Arab world to ever take place. In the new state which Jordan had become after the incorporation of the part of Palestine in 1948, elections were already held in 1950 and 1954. Both had been rumoured to be corrupt. The election of 1954 was seen as particularly „managed" by the authorities. By contrast, on the 21st of October in 1956, not only

no electoral abuses were observed but the ballot results themselves evidenced that the authorities indeed had lost control over the way the ballot proceeded as well.

As a result, 40 deputies were elected to the lower chamber. The party of National Socialists won the biggest number of seats, that is 11. On the other hand, there were as many as 13 independent deputies. Among the latter, the most numerous were the deputies who followed the king's and the old Emirate's elites' directives. The other parties in the parliament were: Baath, counting 2 deputies, the National Bloc – perceived as an emanation of the Communist Party – 3 deputies, Muslim Fraternity represented by 4 deputies, the Party of Liberation – 1 deputy, the Arab Constitutional Bloc – 4 deputies and the Bloc of Palestinian Arabs, counting 2 deputies (Gubser 1983: 93).

Table 1. The election results in 1950 and 1956

Name of the political party	Number of seats won by the particular parties (the 1950 election)	Number of seats won by the particular parties (the 1956 election)	Views of the particular political parties as concerns home affairs	The attitudes of the parties towards co-operation with Great Britain and the USA
Independent deputies[1]	27	13	monarchists	co-operation accepted
Arab Constitutional Bloc	9	4	monarchists	co-operation accepted
Bloc of Palestinian Arabs	0	2	monarchists	co-operation accepted
National Socialists[2]	1	11	the pan-Arab left	co-operation rejected
Baath Party	0	2	the pan-Arab left	co-operation rejected
National Bloc	1	3	the left	co-operation rejected
Muslim Fraternity	0	4	islamic fundamentalists	co-operation rejected
Liberation Party	1	1	islamic fundamentalists	co-operation rejected

[1] The independent deputies did not represent a unanimous opinion. Nonetheless, in general, they did follow the line of the monarch and his government as regards foreign policy.

[2] National Socialists actually rejected co-operation with the West but, for tactical reasons, articulated the issue more leniently than for instance the Baath Party did.

It is worthwhile at this point to show the results of the election held in 1950 and to compare them with the just presented results of the election held in 1956. The comparison has been made easier with the results put into a table. The table contains both the number of seats won by the particular parties and a summary of views of the parties on issues related to foreign and home affairs.

The comparison of the two elections' results reveals that a significant shift took place in the political arena of Jordan (Dokumentacja prasowa 1956: 774H). The shift primarily involved a defeat of the monarchist and pro-West political option. The new parliament was dominated by deputies who were hostile to the co-operation with Great Britain, which so far had constituted the basis of the monarchy's politics. The table, presented above, shows clearly that the monarchist deputies had simultaneously accepted co-operation with Great Britain and the USA. However, after the 1956 election they were dominated by the pan-Arab option and the fundamentalists who were inimical to the West.

At the same time, the chamber became polarized. So far the parliament had been dominated by independent deputies. They constituted a group which had no clear-cut political views, representing local interests and not any more universal ideas. As a rule, they followed the directives originating at the king's court. They came mainly from the „old" Transjordan. In the aftermath of the 1956 election, three political groupings emerged whose views will be outlined now.

The first of the groups included most of the independent deputies and those members of parliament who belonged to the Arab Constitutional Bloc. The latter, in particular, were to constitute a pro-monarchist fraction. Their poor electoral result testified to the failure of the court and government to gain voters' support. Following the will of the court, the deputies of this fraction agreed to maintain the country's alliance with Great Britain.

The second group encompassed the winner party of National Socialists. The party's name, which evokes bad connotations in Europe, was to signify in Jordan a pan-Arab position of the party, while the slogan of socialism was then simply in universal use. The Baath Party's slogans were actually very similar. This party was to make a big career in Syria and in the Iraq. The party stressed an absolute primacy of pan-Arab goals over national ones believing, in general, that the existence of the Arab states, which had been established by European powers,

was an aberration. In other words, the national socialists were moderate pan-Arabists, whereas Baath's members represented an extremist version of the ideology. At last, the National Bloc. This organization was, in turn, led by communists, however, it did not propagate a communist programme. Its appeals addressed at voters stressed mainly anti-colonialism, Arab unity and moderate socialism. All three groupings demanded that Jordan's dependency on Great Britain should be limited.

Finally, there was an Islamist group which included predominantly deputies of the Muslim Fraternity which was a large Sunni fundamentalist organization. It resembled more of a social movement than a party, being active across the whole Muslim world, in some regions functioning legally, while in others acting in hiding. In Jordan of the 1950s, the Muslim Fraternity grew in strength. The Islamists promoted quite a complex political programme. They followed anti-Western attitudes and were familiar with elements of the socialist ideology. However, the absolute priority ascribed to Islam put the Muslim Fraternity at loggerheads with the pan-Arab camp, which, as they saw it, wanted to import from Europe a lay conception of the nation to the Arab world. According to the Fraternity, only *Umma* – a community of the faithful, should constitute a legitimate platform for Arabic political unity. The Liberation Party was another religious grouping which, however, in contrast to the Fraternity, turned out to be an ephemeral political entity. The Islamists were ready to support the left wing fighting for instance against Great Britain but simultaneously they were ready to get closer to the royal court just as well.

The consequences of the 1956 election

In the polarized parliament, Suliman Nabulsi, the leader of the National Socialists was endowed with a task to create a cabinet. He created a coalition composed of the National Socialists, Baath and the National Bloc. He could also count on the Islamists and part of the independent deputies in some of the political issues. The coalition initiated a decisively anti-Western political course. The British subventions were rejected and efforts were made to join the Arab bloc just formed by G.A. Naser (Gubser 1983: 93).

The Nabulsi government was in conflict with the monarchy as well. The prime minister tried in fact to take over all the political power in

the country. Theoretically, he had the right to do so having the support both on the side of the parliament and on the side of the Palestinian masses. However, he underrated the fact that the army was completely exempt from control by civilian politicians. He did not evaluate correctly the young king Hussein either. The king proved to be a clever politician who did not let himself to be pushed to a political backbench. Finally, Nabulsi overrated the capacity of Egypt and its president G.A. Naser. Ultimately King Hussein had the cabinet resign in 1957. In spite of numerous riots and protests, he managed to suppress the pan-Arab opposition in the years of 1957–1958. The parliament was dissolved. The next election, held in 1957, was again strictly controlled by authorities and its results reflected the authorities' and the court's preferences (Lunt 1999: 157).

The 1956 election turned out thus to have been an interesting but failed experiment. Democracy as a practical form of political regime and not a façade for elections did not stand the test of reality in the Jordan Kingdom. Nonetheless, the election provided an opportunity for some structural political features to be revealed which were significant both in the scale of Jordan and in the context of the whole region. As far as the Kingdom of Jordan is concerned, the elections brought to light with a full clarity a fundamentalist hostility that the Palestinian population felt towards the monarchy. The victorious pan-Arab camp shared the views of this part of the Jordanian population. The parties, which belong to the camp, only tolerated the ruling dynasty. The Hashimites had then to resort to ruling by violence. This made Jordan an enormously unstable state. Paradoxically, only its defeat in the war against Israel in June of 1967 and the loss of the West Bank of the Jordan river let the state regain some stability.

From the region's perspective, attention could be drawn to the cleavage that divided deputies into a pro-governmental and pro-monarchist bloc and two radical blocs. One of the radical blocs was pan-Arab, anti-Western and left wing, at least in the sphere of verbiage. Another was Islamist, constituted predominantly by the Muslim Fraternity. This other bloc cannot be really classified as either right wing or left wing in the European meaning of the terms.

Such a division into the three camps was typical of practically the whole Middle East – the Jordanian election made it only more glaring. Even the most specifically local Jordanian feature, that is the gap that existed between the old Emirate and the Palestinian territories which politically „thought" in completely different ways, might serve as an

illustration of a more general phenomenon which is the segmentation of the Arab societies. The societies are divided into rigidly structured local groups or, which is even more dangerous, into religious groups (occupying whole, continuous areas). Such groups are characterized by considerable durability. They do not exhibit any tendency to reach a compromise unless forced by superior authorities. This phenomenon is one of the biggest obstacles in the process of building mechanisms of real democracy in the region.

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