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The Political Reform in the Reign of His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein, Jordan Opportunities and Challenges

الإصلاح السياسي في الأردن في عهد الملك عبد الله الثاني بن الحسين فرص وتحديات

Keywords: The Political Reform, Jordan, King Abdullah II Bin Al-Hussein

الكلمة المفتاحية : الاصلاح السياسي، الأردن، الملك عبدالله الثاني بن الحسين.

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Abstract

This study focused on the political reform during the reign of King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein. It concentrated on the definition, principles, and fundamentals, constraints of political reform besides its stages and aspects . The study concluded that it is difficult to completely comprehend the impacts and results of a political reform, since the reform process has been continuing. The political reform in this period was characterized by the flexibility towards the people requirements and enhancement of citizenship concept and sovereignty of Law in order to achieve the multifaceted democracy that believes in debate and protects the national unity. Despite all these efforts, political parties in Jordan didn't play its real role in the political reform process. The study recommends making more efforts to spread the awareness for the civil and political rights of people as well as protection of human rights and freedom, besides the necessity to show the initiatives and achievements of Jordan under the reign of King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein.

Introduction

The political reform considered as the most important element in the exclusive reform system, where many analysts and observers indicate the necessity for political reform as the first step towards any other reforms. The political reform is the organizing framework of the society and the state. We find many problems such as unemployment, poverty and foreign workers even the collapse of exchange market as economic problems, but many specialists attribute real reasons of these problems to the disorder of political institutions. Therefore, many developing countries adopted reform projects that were announced to the public, but the critics against these projects focuses on that they were partial not comprehensive reforms.

According to the acceleration of changes in the international order at the present time, the Arab political regimes are obliged to match and comprehend these changes. These changes influence and will continue to affect increasingly these regimes. The negative or positive degree of impact depends on the Arab reaction to it, but the most important is the capability of Arab regimes to reshape its structures so as to deal positively with all changes, since these transformations provided opportunities that should be availed and utilized as well as the risks that should be agreed upon to avoid and review them.

The political reform aims of making changes in the structures of regimes and political elites, besides modernizing the legislations, laws and orders to be compatible the contemporary changes that lead to stability for society, political regime and the state as a whole(1).

The political reform process will not be serious and effective without securing the rights and freedoms and fighting all forms of corruption. It requires a time and planning to achieve its goals which will be reflected on the society.

The problem of political reform in Jordan is considered an emergent one, as in other Arab countries. The concept of political reform is considered one of the political concepts that attracted the

interests of political intellects despite their own attitudes and political, economic and social beliefs.

The orientation of Jordan towards the political reform began in 1989 aftermath of local, regional and international changes. At that year the stage of democratic shift began where the parliamentary life was revived, the abolition of martial laws followed by the issuance of the Law of parties in 1992, and the initiative of national agenda which is a long range developmental program that all successive governments are committed to its implementation.

The reign of King Abdullah II which began in 1999 is characterized by making several legislative and economic reforms as well as the political initiatives related to reform such as Jordan First, All of us are Jordan, the National Agenda and Jordan Carta for year 2005.

Since the beginnings of riots in 2011 in several Arab countries the Jordanian government, under the decrees of the King, formed a board for national debate that represents the political parties, civil society organizations, syndicates, parliament representatives, women, and academics to prepare a modern elections Law based on democratic practices, and prepare a draft of parties Law as well as studying any constitutional amendments to activate both Laws.

▪ *Problem of the Study:*

This study is an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. *What is the present status qou of political reform during the reign of King Abdullah II?*
2. *What are the dimensions of political reform during the reign of King Abdullah II?*
3. *What are the obstacles against the political reform in Jordan?*

▪ *Objectives of the Study:*

This study aims at:

1. *Recognizing the status qou of political reform during the reign of King Abdullah II.*

2. *Identifying the most important aspects of political reform during the reign of King Abdullah II.*
3. *Defining the most crucial obstacles against political reform.*

1. The Theoretical Aspect of Political Reform:

The concept of political reform is one of social concepts that create debate and discussions. This concept tackles one of the most important fundamentals in development of human societies.

For the challenges that encounter the Arab World, the Arab political regimes are not able to ignore the challenge of comprehensive reform in all dimensions of the state. It is necessary for any regime to adopt this comprehensive reform in order to enhance its legitimacy. There are many writings about the political reform, in the late times, and its adoption in the Arab World since it is the only approach to avoid the consequent destruction(2).

1.1 Definition of "Political Reform" Concept:

In the Language, reform means the review and changesto thebetter and abolishes any corruption, or it is the transition from a bad to a good situation through abolishing mistakes and improving the process. In Ibin Manthour: "Lisanul al Arab", the term Sallaha means the opposite of corrupted(3).

There are many definitions for the political reform. According to Samuel Hutington, the political reform is the transition from undemocratic political regimes to democratic ones. Others indicate that political reform is a process that needs review of the prevailing political principals and values due to its incompatibility to the care for life or invalidity, and adopt new alternative and new principles and values(4).

Oxford Dictionary defined the political reform as "amend or change the contradicted things to the better especially in the corrupted political institutions or autocratic regimes"(5).

In terminology, the political reform means: "the process of changing the institutional structure, functions, goals, thought, and practice, through the legal tools that are provided by the political regime"[6].

The reform is a positive response for change, development and growth to extend the range of freedoms and settlement. It is a change and amendment within the existing political regime through a comprehensive constitutional and legislative reform. It aims at restructuring the systems of political participation and representation upon democratic basis.

The political reform concept had became the most common one nowadays, since it is a people request through which they can achieve freedom, justice and equality in education, health and other aspects of life, as well as providing the opportunity for all people to participate in the reform process according to their capabilities.

The reform is also a government quest to gain more legitimacy because the government that loses its legitimacy will no longer be able to retain its authority[7].

According to the viewpoint of the researcher, the concept of political reform means adoption of vast and substantial changes by the state that include several principles as constitutional reform, transparency, recognition of the rule of Law, acknowledge the political pluralism system, and extend the range of freedoms. It is a complicated gradual process as a result of sustained efforts and practices in the political institutions that aim at improving the society and the state to achieve the status of civil society.

The concept of political reform overlaps other concepts such as the political development but it differs in that it deals in the legislative aspect of the political process. It focuses on amending or changing the Laws that may affect the democratic process to the best[8].

1.2 Requirements for Political Reform:

For the political reform achievement there are several requirements that should be considered:

1. *A legislative authority "the Parliament" that represents all spectrum of society, by its elected members through a fair and free election process, upon a modern election Law. This institution practices its control role on the executive authority and issues legislations to achieve the people will for justice and equality(9). Therefore, we can assure that the modern election Law is the source of a powerful and honest legislative authority that represents all segments of the legislative authority which represents all segments of the society besides that such Law is the main incubator for national options(10).*
2. *The executive authority that has the sufficient transparency which qualifies this authority to accept criticism and control by the legislative authority or by media. It should gain the confidence of the representatives besides its belief in the necessity and importance of political reform(11).*
3. *Judicial authority: an independent, fair and just authority, not biased to any other authority since it is able to enforce the rule of Law.*
4. *Civil Society Organizations: These institutions reflect the vitality of society and implant the democracy. Its role reflected by its capability to use the available experts to organize and activate the society to achieve the political reform(12).*
5. *Media: Media is the real mirror of democracy and applies the process of monitoring, advising and urging for reform. It is the fourth authority in the state.*
6. *Availability of political will and serious orientation towards adoption the political reform(13).*
7. *Popular and political bodies should agree upon the common requirements for political reform(14).*
8. *The courage to make amendments away from the considerations of narrow factional interests.*

9. *Private Sector: This sector dominates the economy of the state and its sources. It is the operative sector in society and plays a decisive role in its orientation towards supporting the political reform or not[15].*

Therefore, the political reform should be based on three fundamentals. Separation of authorities, link authority to responsibility and accountability and no grasp of both wealth and authority between the hands of individuals and groups[16].

1.3 Principles and Basis of Political Reform:

There are several principles and basis that should be considered when dealing into the political reform:

1. *The rule of Law: The democracy is useless without enforcing Law over all segments of society with justice and equality. Such enforcement over all people in the country enhances their feeling they are an important part of the state hence increasing their loyalty and affiliation to the country.*
2. *Political Plurality: This means that all individuals in society are allowed to create groups to present their opinions, through political parties, syndicates, clubs and societies.*
3. *Laws of Election: The success of public participation, effectively and efficiently, in the election process is a result of transparent and clear provisions and procedures of election Law.*
4. *Participation: The citizen should feel that his/her participation in the elections, either a candidate or a voter ,will be useful, so if the percentage of participation declines the reason will be the ignorance by state.*
5. *Corruption fighting : This principle is parallel to the principle of rule of Law. The corruption fighting will retain the public proprieties and dry up the sources of corruption.*
6. *Adoption of Decentralization: It includes the just distribution of authority, the fair distribution of development achievements among all localities, explore and encourage the competent and expert individuals from all parts of the country.*

7. *Change should be sustained, not retreated by the government. The temporary changes cannot be considered as a reform, since any transition from autocratic regime to a fragile democratic one is not a reform*[17].

1.4 Obstacles against the Political Reform:

The obstacles can be summarized in the following:

1. *Political Factors: These factors include:*

   a. *The weakness of political will of the governing elite, since reform requires a clear political will that has the intention for making important political changes such as shift of power and accountability of officials. The weakness, absence or cleavage of political opposition, beside ignorance of political programs to encounter the different crises, where all these factors will help the regimes to be reluctant to change and have intention to retain the status qou of autocracy.*

   b. *The absence or weakness of constitutional institutions besides losing its legislative powers or decision taking. The weakness or obscene of civil society organizations including the parties, syndicates, unions and societies. The low percentage of political participation especially by women, besides the growth of fear culture, un independency of judicial authority, which in turn make the reform tied to the will of elite groups, besides the political instability, extremism, terrorism, crisis and civil wars*[18].

2. *Cultural Factors:*

   The structure of society and its institutions and its patterns of behavior may support the incubating environment for reform or hinder it. The tribal or sectarian society refuses the change, so the reform process will be hard and slow, because the loyalty in this society will be to the tribe more than to the state. There is a weakness in the citizenship concept, since the citizenship is the source of all rights and duties. The political reform requires a

culture that assures the values of debate and tolerance besides renounce the violence and hatered. It also focuses on respect of law and creating the spirit of patriotism and loyalty to the state.

The religious beliefs and the domination of clergymen on the conservative segments of society affect the reform. If those clergymen don't support the political reform, the people may consider it illegitimate and refuse it. The call for birth control may contradict the beliefs of people so it might be rejected.

3. *Economic Factors:*

Countries that suffer from economic crises such as the lack of resources, weakness of potentials, increase of external (foreign) debt deficit, spread of high rates of poverty and unemployment, increase of population, disappearance of the middle class and low level of health; these factors will enforce the people to concentrate on satisfying the basic needs with no intention to the political reform. Such ignorance of reform is not justified since many rich countries didn't achieve the real democracy[(19)].

2. The Political Reform in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan during the reign of King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein:

The Jordanian experience in the field of political reform is somewhat consistent with the experience of reform in the Arab countries, especially in terms of the external international and regional pressures and the degree of response by the regime against these pressures[(20)].

Jordan began serious steps towards the reform, especially after the stage of democratic transition in 1989. The beginning of these steps was initiated by reviving the parliament then the revival of political parties followed by the national agenda which is considered a long term developmental program through which the government will be committed to on stable basis and included comprehensive

reform processes for all economic, social, political, cultural, intellectual and media aspects[21].

In this context, King Abdullah II, in his televised interview with Al-Arabiya Channel, in May 7, 2006, said: "Jordan is in front of a new phase of the democratic march, so this phase needs more legislations and Laws that should be issued quickly, like the Anti-Corruption Law, The Court of Grievances Law, The Printing and Publication Law, Anti-Terrorism Law, The Municipalities Law, Law of Political Parties and Law of public meetings". The King also assured that "national Agenda brought in proposals and solutions for poverty problem and unemployment, and that political development will not be active without national parties that have political, economic and social programs based on public [22].

The King, in many royal commissioning letters to the successive cabinets, focused on the necessity of pursuing the comprehensive course to secure a competitive state among the three authorities, as well as the satisfaction of people for the performance of parliament, besides that governments should attain and retain the satisfaction of parliament for its performance[23].

Jordan had selected the Royal Parliamentary Regime as the governing regime, while it implies the acceptance and recognition of political opposition as an expression of the freedom of opinion which all constitutions consider it an essential right for all citizens[24].

Jordan, in the late decade, had been surrounded by many international and regional consequences, such as the incidents of September 2001, and its role in raising the calls for political reform, the increasing role of USA after the end of cold war in 1991, followed by the occupation of Iraq by USA and topple its regime in April 2003, besides the proposed Great Middle East in 2004 by USA. These incidents continued to topple down the Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan and Yemeni regimes. At the present there are very violent fighting in Syria where opposition supported by the western countries call for transition to democracy and plurality instead of autocracy. The expansion range of extremism and terrorism added to these consequences which contributed to urging the authority in Jordan to

take measures that match the new consequences in the region and adopt to the developments of incidents.

Jordan has not been far from the public protests which prevailed the region beginning from the so called "Arab Spring" , where Jordanian people participated in more than 700 demonstrations that focused on the constitutional, political, administrative reforms besides fighting corruption.

King Abdullah II initiated the response to these calls through an initiative for a comprehensive program for the constitutional, political and social reform.

The public calls during the crisis times didn't exceed the peaceful demonstrations and calls for reform, and applied the nonviolent demonstrations, and didn't agree of what has happened in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria.

These peaceful movements were attributed to the agreement among political parties on the reform of royal regime not changing it despite the calls from some Salafi and Jihadist movements which don't believe neither royal regime nor democracy[25].

3. The Most Prominent Political Reform Aspects during the Reign of King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein:

There are several political reform aspects during the reign of King Abdullah II as follows:

1. The discussion papers:

Since 1999, when the King received his constitutional powers, he submitted several discussion papers in which he presented a clear vision for the comprehensive reform and the future of democracy in Jordan, and called for national debate about the reform and democratic transition.

1.1 The first discussion paper: Our march toward building the sustained democracy.

1.2 The second paper: Developing our democratic system to serve all Jordanian people.

1.3 The third paper: Roles awaiting us to achieve the successful renewed democracy.

1.4 The fourth paper: Towards a democratic empowerment and proactive citizenship.

1.5 The fifth paper: Deepening the democratic transition: goals, accomplishments, and political norms.

2. Establishment of King Abdullah II Fund for Development in 2001:

This fund is an NGO aims at achieving the development in all parts of the country, through setting up national development projects by the strategic partnership with the private sector and civil society institutions. It aims at improving the standards of living, executing an initiative of democratic empowerment to deepen the democratic culture, political participation and social responsibility.

3. *Issuance of Jordan First Document in 2002 which aimed at enhancing the basis of democratic state, strengthening the spirit of cohesion among citizens in order to participate in building Jordan, besides outweighing the Jordanian interest against other interests as well as the spread of respect and tolerance culture in addition to the rule of law, public freedoms, accountability, transparency, justice and equality.*
4. *Establishment of Political Development Ministry in 2003.*
5. *National Agenda in 2005, through which the officials and representatives of political parties and civil society organization set the principles that govern the process of political reform, recommend the necessary legislations to accomplish these principles. They also prepare the draft for elections Law to contribute to forming a parliamentary government, besides preparing the law of political parties as well as enhancing the presence of these parties in the scene.*
6. *Issuance of Jordan First Document in 2006: It aimed at setting comprehensive national perspective based on the common views among the components of Jordan society. That was planned to be done through vast participation in formulating the structure of*

decisions related to national mobility as well as implementing these decisions with following up by the King.

7. *Issuance of the Law of National Center for Human Rights in 2006.*
8. *Amendment of one-third of the Jordanian constitution articles in 2011.*
9. *Forming the Board for National Debate in 2001. It aimed at administering an intensive national debate on legislations related to the political work system and reviewing it to arrange goals that the government seeks to achieve, i.e: establishment of democratic and parties submission of the drafts of political parties and public elections Laws.*
10. *Establishment of Jordanian Teachers Syndicate in 2011.*
11. *Establishment of Constitutional Court in 2012 to explain the constitution and control the constitutionalization of laws and orders.*
12. *Establishment of Independent Electoral Commission: to monitor the parliamentary and municipalities elections.*
13. *Establishment of Royal Board for Enhancing the Integrity System in 2012.*
14. *Holding a national conference in 2013 to achieve consensus on the integrity system.*
15. *For the first time, the Fiscal Committee of House of Representatives discusses in 2013 the budget of Defense Ministry.*
16. *For the first time, the discussion of Royal Court Budget in 2014.*
17. *Establishment of the Administrative Court in 2015.*
18. *Ratification the Law of Political Parties in 2015.*
19. *Issuance of the Law of publishing and Printed Materials.*
20. *The draft of Elections Law sent by the government to the house of representatives for discussion in 2015.*
21. *Amend the articles 67 and 127 of constitution. The first one states that "an independent commission to be established to administer the parliamentary and municipalities elections, while the second one restricted the mission of army in defending the homeland safety.*

4. Results:

1. *It is difficult to completely determine the impacts and results of political reform since the reform process is still running.*
2. *Jordanians, represented by the political regime, made efforts to achieve an advanced level of political reform to match the developments in other countries in addition to respond to the external and internal pressures that call the Middle East countries to apply the democracy.*
3. *The political will on reform is existed and flexible towards the public quests, and enhancing the concept of patriotism and rule of Law as well as the political plurality that believes in debate and protects the national unity.*
4. *There is still lack and weakness in legislations and Laws related to achieve the political reform, since the legislative framework is the supporter of the reform policies, especially the Law of elections.*
5. *There is a weak coordination among the institutions of civil society due to the absence of common view to influence the political reform process, where some of these institutions make initiatives based on personal interests only.*
6. *Most civil society institutions have no public extension, thus influencing negatively its efforts towards the political transition.*
7. *Political parties didn't play its real role in the political regime of Jordan due to subjective and objective reasons. This role will be enhanced by modern Law of election.*
8. *There is a distinctive eligibility of the political, social and economic status-quo of Jordan to achieve an excellent shift in the process of political, economic and social reform, and building the state of Law and institutions besides building the society of justice and equality that respects the dignity, freedom and human rights.*
9. *Weak representation of women in the political process doesn't mean that the government excludes them from the participation. The Jordanian legislations have no discrimination against women.*

5. Recommendations:

1. *It is necessary to conduct more comprehensive studies about the future of democracy in Jordan in the light of regional and international circumstances.*
2. *Enhancement of the roles of political parties in the political scene and elections through linking the right for candidacy to the political positions of the membership of political parties. The political parties are still facing difficulties in implanting the party concept and culture among citizens and national institutions.*
3. *Release the increasing feeling of Jordanian people that there is a retreat in the process of reform, as a result of some segments with special agendas which have interests not related to the interests of Jordan.*
4. *Confirm that Jordan lives within unstable region that sometimes limits the continuity and institutionality, which in turn will be reflected on the priorities of development and concentrate on protecting Jordan against the external conspiracies instead of focusing on internal affairs.*
5. *Formation of an independent national commission to assess the political reform. This commission should be consisted of parties, syndicates and social powers and not tied to the government, to prepare reports every three months about the indicators of achievement.*
6. *Make efforts to spread awareness to the civil and political right and maintain it to protect the human rights and public freedom.*
7. *The foreign policy and diplomacy of Jordan should be included in the process of political reform. All Jordan embassies around the world are required to clarify the goals of Jordan, and follow up with international powers and their policies towards Jordan to serve the national goals.*
8. *Make efforts to encounter the opposite and negative forces that oppose the reform, and make efforts to reduce their political influence.*

9. *Fight corruption and protection of public finance besides the enhancement of integrity, transparency and rule of Law.*
10. *Develop the education in schools and universities to spread the culture of freedom, equality, justice and right, besides commitment, order, Law, ethics and society values, thought and culture.*
11. *There should be an executive authority with reform orientation, characterized by integrity, and a parliament that represents the will of Jordan people.*
12. *Enhance the belief in achievements and initiatives of King Abdullah II in all aspects.*

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الإصلاح السياسي في الأردن في عهد الملك عبدالله الثاني بن الحسين فرص وتحديات

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ملخص البحث

هذه دراسة للإصلاح السياسي في الأردن في فترة الملك عبدالله الثاني بن الحسين (٢٠٠٩-٢٠١٥)، تناولت التعريف لمفهوم الاصلاح السياسي، ومبادئه وأسسه ومعيقاته والمراحل التي مر بها هذا الاصلاح، وأبرز الجوانب الاصلاحية لهذه الفترة.

وخلصت إلى أنه من الصعوبة الإلمام التام بآثار ونتائج الاصلاح السياسي، إذ أن عملية الاصلاح مازالت مستمرة، وتميز الاصلاح السياسي في هذه الفترة بالمرونة اتجاه متطلبات الشعب وتعزيز ترسيخ مفهوم المواطنة وسيادة القانون من أجل الوصول إلى ديمقراطية تعددية تؤمن بالحوار وتحمي الوحدة الوطنية، ومع هذا فالأحزاب الأردنية لم تأخذ دورها الحقيقي في عملية الاصلاح.

وتوصي الدراسة إلى أنه يجب العمل على نشر الوعي بين أفراد الشعب بالحقوق المدنية والسياسية وحماية حقوق الإنسان والحرية، وضرورة بيان كافة الإنجازات والمبادرات التي حققها الأردن في فترة حكم الملك عبدالله الثاني بن الحسين (٢٠٠٩-٢٠١٥).