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# Democracy and the Tribal System in Jordan: Tribalism as a Vehicle for Social Change

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**Democracy and the Tribal System in Jordan:  
Tribalism as a Vehicle for Social Change**

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**Abstract**

This paper discusses the current state of the electoral system in Jordan, its relation to and impact on the tribal aspect of society, and vice-versa. The prominence of tribalism in the electoral process has brought tribalism to the forefront of discussions on both the political system and social development in Jordan. There have been many accusations from intellectuals of a “return to tribalism” in the past couple of decades as politics in Jordan have become increasingly “tribalized.” Through a discussion of the different political and social mechanisms in Jordan, I conclude that the tribal sentiment in Jordan is not to blame for the failures of the political system. Instead, it is the system itself, along with historical events, that have caused elections to become more localized and “tribal,” resulting in an inefficient government. Furthermore, I argue that the tribal nature of Jordanian society can actually be used as a vehicle to promote democratic ideals, by instigating social change and championing tribal values that are compatible with democratic ones. In fact, this process is already beginning to occur today.

**ISP Topic Codes:**

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## Introduction:

When economist Amartya Sen<sup>1</sup> was asked in 1997 what he thought was the most important thing that had happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he did not mention the two world wars, the first man on the moon, or the remarkable shift in the economic balance of the world. Instead he chose to highlight the rapid spread of democracy that this century witnessed, across all continents, religions, cultures, and economies of the world. Two-thirds of the nations in the world are now considered to be democratic. The championing of democracy as the only acceptable form of governance in a overwhelming majority of countries in the world, has sparked considerable debate over the necessary conditions for democracy, the events responsible for its appearance, its consolidation or disintegration, and its continual reemergence and reaffirmation. These debates have covered several all-encompassing issues such as economic conditions,<sup>2</sup> cultural considerations,<sup>3</sup> religious values, and historical progression.<sup>4</sup> There are popular beliefs that democracy is a universal value<sup>5</sup> and beliefs that it is compatible only with Western values.<sup>6</sup>

In the plethora of literature on the spread of democracy, the Middle East has largely been dismissed or ignored, as democracy has yet to take a strong hold on this region. Jordan is considered one of the most democratic Middle Eastern countries, and is heralded by the US as a beacon of hope for the rest of the Arab countries. However, the Hashemite Kingdom is still struggling to establish a fully functional and institutionalized democratic system, and is *not*

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<sup>1</sup> Amartya Sen is an accomplished economist and Nobel Laureate. He is known for his work on welfare economics, political liberalism, development, and the causes of poverty and gender inequality. He won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 1998.

<sup>2</sup> See Lipset 1959, 69-105; Olson 1993, 567-576

<sup>3</sup> See Almond and Verba 1963; Inglehart 1990; Diamond 1994

<sup>4</sup> See Huntington 1996; Rustow 1970

<sup>5</sup> See Sen 1999; Diamond 1994, 2006

<sup>6</sup> See Huntington, 1996

considered by most political scientists to be an electoral democracy.<sup>7</sup> Despite having regular local, municipal, and parliamentary elections, Jordan's political power is still concentrated in the executive branch of the government. Furthermore, there exists considerable censorship of the media, limits on freedom of association, and an extremely weak political culture, all of which are important components of stable democracy in any society.<sup>8</sup> Turnout at elections is consistently low, especially for young people. Youth turnout was only around 34% according to the aggregated exit polls from six of Jordan's 45 electoral districts.<sup>9</sup> There are penalties for speaking ill of the regime, and strict laws on the formation and meeting of both political and non-political associations.

In addition to the restraints placed on democratization by the state, the electoral system currently in place in Jordan lends itself to tribal, family-based politics as opposed to politics based on national, cross-cutting issues. Similar to many Arab countries and a few other countries in the world, the social system in Jordan is still largely based on tribalism and kinship relations, particularly in rural areas. This social structure is less prominent in urban areas, as the Palestinian-Jordanians that are concentrated there are considered to be less tribal. This system is traditionally patriarchal, though remarkably egalitarian when it comes to economic status, and inspires a fierce loyalty to the tribe from all members. In Jordan more so than some other countries in the region where ethnic and religious conflicts have dominated politics, tribalism plays an extremely significant role in the political process. It is deemed by some to be an outdated, backwards system. Speaking about the resurgence of tribal affiliation in politics an article published in 1984, a Jordanian journalist called tribalism "a kind of illness and affliction

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<sup>7</sup> See Diamond 2006; Freedom House 2009

<sup>8</sup> See Diamond 1994, 2006; Inglehart and Welzel 2003; Sen 1999

<sup>9</sup> Jordan Center for Social Research (JCSR) 2008

which eats the fortunes and sustenance of the people.” Yet those of tribal background tend to champion tribal values such as honor, generosity, and courage, and the peaceful reconciliation processes by which the tribes traditionally live.

However, my research does not aim to debate the merits of the tribal system (whether social or political), or the merits of the democratic political system. My research aims to prove that tribalism is not inherently anti-democratic, and may in fact be used as a vehicle for democratization in Jordan.

### **Research Questions:**

Are tribes political entities and what does this mean for democratization?

Are democratic ideals present in the values of the tribal system?

How can the tribal system be used to further the democratization of the political system in Jordan?

### **Hypothesis:**

My hypothesis is that tribalism has the potential to function as a vehicle for the development of democracy in Jordan.

This hypothesis is based upon two major ideas. Number one: although there are more preferable recourses to democratizing the Jordanian government, the current regime will not allow these changes to take place. These changes include reforming the electoral system by changing the one-man one-vote in multimember districts system, adjusting the districting laws for voting, and altering the laws concerning the formation of political parties. Number two: tribalism is an integral part of the Jordanian culture and society, and therefore cannot be removed from the process of democratization. It still has significant control over how Jordanians live, eat, dress, celebrate, solve conflicts, organize themselves, and make decisions. It is not only foolish, but also impossible to simply say that tribalism must be eliminated before democracy can be established. Furthermore, I do not believe that there exist any significant values in the sentiment of tribalism that directly contradict democratic ideals.

## Literature Review:

### Democracy

The concept of democracy is an extremely complex one, including but not by any means limited to, the existence of a government that is chosen by and represents the majority of the population. In political scientist, Larry Diamond's, most recent book, he outlines the "thick" components of democracy, which, when present, indicate that the country is a very "liberal democracy." These components include: freedom of speech, assembly, and discussion; ethnic, racial and minority freedom and rights; right to participate in political life; free, fair, and competitive elections; legal equality under one law and government adherence to this law; independent judiciary; freedom from torture and unjustified detention; checks and balances on control of power at the state level; a vibrant civil society; civilian control over the military.<sup>10</sup> It is towards the achievement of these components of social and political life that countries must strive when trying to democratize.

However, it is important to remember that democracy, although it is indeed a cross-cultural value, must not necessarily *look* the same in every country. As the ambiguity of these concepts shows, there is no specific electoral system required for the realization of democracy, just as there is no specific system of law, and, in my opinion, no intrinsic, required cultural features. For this reason, democratic values have been described by many contemporary political scientists as "universal values."<sup>11</sup> These values include those covered in the "thick" concept of democracy, or more simply the idea that every human was created equal, and that all were born with the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The prerequisites for democracy pose another difficult question for political scientists. It was thought by many scholars throughout the history of democracy that a country had to be

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<sup>10</sup> Diamond 2006, Chapter 1

<sup>11</sup> Diamond 2006; Sen 1999

somewhat affluent in order to democratize. However, Seymour Lipset's groundbreaking publication almost half a century ago, along with statistical analyses done by Adam Przeworski, have shown that the level of development in a country does not necessarily contribute to the appearance of development, but it is positively correlated with the consolidation and probability of sustaining democracy.<sup>12</sup> The economic conditions necessary for democracy have received a lot of attention in the past century, but I will not dwell on them in this paper. In addition to economic considerations, there has been a considerable amount of work done on cultural requirements for democracy. Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* posits that democracy cannot function in non-Western countries simply because of the fact that democracy first surfaced exclusively in Western civilizations. There exists in the West (and only in the West) "a sense of individualism and a tradition of rights and liberties," which are conducive to the formation of a democratic government.<sup>13</sup> In the Middle East in particular, Islam has often been targeted as the main limitation to the expression of individual thoughts and rights. For the purpose of my research I will assume that this is not the case, and hold this variable constant.

Korean leader Lee Kuan Yew posited that democracy would not ever work in Asia because Asian values are intrinsically non-democratic. Elitism is central to their value system, as is a blind allegiance to authority.<sup>14</sup> However, the success of democracy in Japan, South Korea, and other Asian countries has disproved this hypothesis. Although "Asian values" argument is not usually used to explain the lack of democracy in the Middle East, the lesson it teaches is that we must not make such sweeping assumptions about the cultural values of an entire region.

Additionally, Sen argues that "the championing of democracy and political freedom in the

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<sup>12</sup> Lipset 1960, Chapter 2

<sup>13</sup> Huntington 1996, pg. 71

<sup>14</sup> Zakaria 1994

modern sense cannot be found in the pre-enlightenment tradition in any part of the world, West or East. What we have to investigate, instead, are the constituents, the components, of this compound idea.<sup>15</sup> These basic democratic ideals include the opposition to bad leadership, the concept of equality, the rejection of exploitation, a natural suspicion of state power, and a respect for pluralism, diversity, and independent thought.

### **Tribes and Tribalism**

A tribe is described by expert Maurice Godelier as “a form of society that arises when groups of men and women who recognize each other as being related by birth or by marriage come together to act in concert to control a territory and appropriate its resources, which they exploit – together or separately – and which they are ready to defend by armed force.” “Territory” does not necessarily mean the traditional grazing and arable land needed for the tribes’ survival, as tribes are not confined to a specific area of land that they own, but territory may refer to a city, town, trade routes, or other areas. What makes a tribe unique, and different from an ethnic group of shared lineage, is in fact its political nature, and the fact that the tribespeople organize themselves in specific social and political systems.<sup>16</sup> In Jordan, as in other tribal systems, this involves a hereditary political power construction, the superiority of men over women, and a social system based on equality between the different segments of the tribe. The tribal system emphasizes equality through its fierce protection of any member threatened by another tribe or any external power. The traditional tribal leader, or sheikh, is a hereditary position, held only by a man, though there are many levels of sheikhdom, including at the lowest level the sheikhs of specific clans, the most powerful of which may be the sheikhs of a group of clans, and the most powerful of these are tribal leaders.

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<sup>15</sup> Sen 1997

<sup>16</sup> Godelier 2009

The tribal system in Jordan was established long before the advent of Islam, or even Christianity. The tribes were formed and organized thousands of years ago, and the fact that they still persist today, and still play a significant role in the socio-political realm of the state today is extremely pertinent to political discussion in Jordan. According to Godelier, there are two possibilities for tribes upon the creation of a modern state: the first of which being the “formation of States resting on tribes,” while the second is “the formation of States that have then gone on to destroy or marginalize the tribes within them.”<sup>17</sup> Without a doubt, Jordan belongs to the first category, which means that the only reason the tribal system is still pervasive here is the existence of a State that relies on the tribes for power, as “it has become rare for a tribe to exist independently of a State,”<sup>18</sup> and in Jordan’s case, likely would have been impossible. Under Ottoman control, tribes were accorded a very high level of autonomy, but were forced to register tribal land with the Empire. With the arrival of Amir Abdullah in 1921, the tribes first resisted the imposition of a foreign power, but were easily persuaded to abandon their resistance, obey state laws instead of tribal laws, and recognize Abdullah as their King. In return they received modern amenities, monetary compensation, and a guaranteed voice in the national politics of Jordan. These changes marked the beginning of an ongoing decline in the political strength of tribes in Jordan and set the tone for the future relationship between the tribes and the state.

The next influential change to this relationship was the settling of the tribes by King Hussein in 1958. Before settlement, the majority of tribal people in Jordan were still nomadic pastoralists, which made them difficult to monitor and control. The settlement campaign turned most of these Bedouins into stationary agriculturalists, and made it much easier for the government to control land ownership, implement education systems, and enforce laws. It took away one of the central

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<sup>17</sup> Godelier. 2009. Conference Handout, pg. 13

<sup>18</sup> Godelier. 2009 Conference Handout, pg. 18

characteristics of Jordanian Bedouin, thus detribalizing them to some extent. As a result, the concrete tribal system in Jordan disintegrated, and left behind a more fluid social structure that would be adaptable to the existence of a strong nation-state. Thus, when I speak about tribalism in Jordan today, I am not imagining the antiquated, anthropological idea that refers to tribes as rigid social compartments, but rather an intangible emotion that entails a varying degree of loyalty to a tribe, as well as the social sense of belonging to a certain people, which may, but does not necessarily, play a part in a person's everyday life. As for the tribal system, I think of it as Bates and Rassam described it: "one organizational principle in a dynamic and complex political environment."<sup>19</sup> The tribal system is still used in Jordan officially to "smooth things over"<sup>20</sup> and unofficially just as a form of social identification. In rural areas of Jordan, the tribal system is much more palpable and plays a larger part in people's lives than it does in the urban centers.

### **Politico-Economic History of Jordan**

Despite being located in one of the oldest regions of human civilization, Jordan is an extremely young country, and has ruled itself for just over 60 years. The region was ruled by the Ottoman Empire for centuries before the land was lost in the First World War to the Allied Powers, and was subsequently divided up by these powers to form the Levantine countries that we know today. Jordan became an emirate under Prince Abdullah bin Hussein of the Hijaz in 1921, son of King Hussein of Mecca, the ruler of what is now modern day Saudi Arabia. King Hussein agreed to provide men for Lawrence of Arabia's Arab Revolt to overthrow the Ottoman Empire, in support of the Allied Powers' against Germany and Austria-Hungary during WWI. The British government promised King Hussein full control over the Arab land that he was to help liberate

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<sup>19</sup> Bates & Rassam 1983

<sup>20</sup> Al-Turk, 2009

(present-day Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq). However, when the war was over, the British and French squabbled on their own over who was to take control of this land, giving only nominal control over Iraq and Jordan to Hussein's sons, Princes Faisal and Abdullah respectively. Worse even, they had announced in 1917 with the Balfour Declaration that they planned to make Palestine a Jewish homeland, creating a conflict that has had serious regional repercussions over the past century.

In 1921, Jordan became an emirate under Amir Abdullah and a British mandate, subject to the directions of a British advisor to the Amir. The advisor was given to ensure that Abdullah did not fulfill his desire to unite Arabia and liberate Syria from French control, and to “keep his ambitions under proper control.”<sup>21</sup> Even with these advisors in place, two out of the three British administrations in Jordan had a good deal of difficulty keeping a tight hold on their subjects and collecting taxes. They struggled with several rebellions from the Bedouin tribes that wished to govern themselves instead of answering to local governments run by non-locals. Nevertheless, Amir Abdullah was able to skillfully unite the fiercely tribal country through his policies of placating tribal leaders and enforcing the rule of law. In spite of the uprisings, most of the population was tired of the lawless, leaderless country, and were grateful for Abdullah's efforts to outlaw bandits and establish a stable society. The tribal leaders were pacified with money and governmental positions, and in return they agreed to submit to Abdullah's authority and laws.

Amir Abdullah bin Al-Hussein of the Hashemite clan of the Hijaz became King Abdullah of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1946. Just two years later, Jordan's army, the Arab Legion, entered Palestine to fight the new-born Israeli state in what would become known as *al-nakba*, or “the catastrophe.” In 1950, only two years after losing the 1948 war against Israel, King

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<sup>21</sup> Salibi 2006, pg. 96

Abdullah annexed the West Bank, which remained a part of Jordan until the next great confrontation, the Six Day War of 1967.

At the time of independence, the country should have been struggling economically, with little to no social capital or natural resources, but the British subsidy that had begun at £5,000 per month in 1921 had grown to around £2 million per year by the mid-1940s.<sup>22</sup> This foreign aid, along with the 1950 annexation of the West Bank, and increasing levels of economic and military aid from the other Arab countries, enabled King Abdullah to set up a semi-rentier state in Jordan. Rentierism is a form of politics through which a government uses externally generated funds, rather than domestically generated funds (tax revenue) to strengthen state autonomy. The state maintains control over the population not through overt repression, but instead “political legitimacy is, in a very real sense, ‘purchased’ through economic rewards.”<sup>23</sup> Petroleum rich Arabian Gulf states are classic examples of rentier states, where it is not uncommon for governments to collect 100% of their revenue from oil exports and other non-tax sources.

Jordan, despite not having any natural resources, has been able to maintain some semblance of a rentier state through the sheer amount of foreign aid and workers’ remittances, especially from those Jordanians who have gone to work in the oil-rich Gulf countries. This is one of the several ways in which the Jordanian monarchical regime has maintained legitimacy and uncontested power over the generally quiescent population. In 1987, the Jordanian government derived 37.9% of its revenue from non-tax sources, and only 23.7 % from domestic taxes. However, in the late 1980s, the country experienced a crisis of the rentier state that appeared poised to finally destabilize the regime. Worker remittances and aid from Arab countries peaked in 1981, but

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<sup>22</sup> Brynen 1992, pg. 78

<sup>23</sup> Bryen. pg. 74

subsequently began a downward slide that threw the country into debt and forced the current account deep into the red. The government was hesitant to upset the population by implementing austerity measures, but by the late eighties the economy was in such a dire state that the regime had no choice but to cut subsidies, even on essentials such as bread, milk and fuel. In April 1989, anger over the failure of the rentier state finally exploded into riots and extremely vocal criticisms of the government, mainly from East Bankers, traditionally the regime's key supporters. In order to make the population feel as if they were part of the decision making process, and soften the blow of the economic cutbacks, the regime decided to liberalize the political system. They held full elections in September 1989, lifted martial law in 1991, and legalized political parties in 1992. By-elections had been held for parliament in 1984, when King Hussein reactivated the parliament in order to prevent the number of the aging deputies from the necessary forty members.

Including the elections 1989, there have been five full parliamentary elections in Jordan since the Parliament was most recently reactivated. Elections held in 1993 were the first in four decades to be held with political parties legalized, though they were extremely weak and did not play a significant role. The Islamic Action Front (IAF), Jordan's strongest political party, boycotted elections in 1997 under the assumption that the new "one-man, one-vote" law would so tribalize elections that they would not have the ability to win any seats.<sup>24</sup> In 2001, King Abdullah II suspended the parliament and ruled by decree for two years, until full parliamentary elections were held in 2003. The IAF withdrew from municipal polls in 2007 after accusing the government of fraud and rigging the elections, but IAF candidates still won a small percentage of seats.

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<sup>24</sup> Al-Momani 2007, pg. 6

**Methodology:**

This research paper is a qualitative study investigating the potential correlation between tribalism and democratization in Jordan. It does not look at tribalism as a direct cause of democratization, but rather as a conduit for social change, which will pave the way for more institutionalized democracy. It discusses to some extent the degree of democracy that the country currently boasts, and the role that tribalism plays in the political system in terms of parliamentary elections and parliamentary duties. Finally, it looks at tribal values and the evolution of tribalism in relation to democratic values and the evolution of the political system in Jordan.

I conducted formal interviews with six individuals, which were supplemented by the informal conversations I have had about politics and the tribal system during my stay in Jordan. All of my interviewees were well-educated, accomplished academics, politicians, and businessmen. One of them did not wish to release his statement, so I used his opinions instead as a springboard for some of my own ideas. My objectives during these interviews were to investigate a range of general political conditions in Jordan, such as the “one-man, one-vote” election law, the lack of political parties, the role of tribalism in voters’ minds, and the issue of disproportionate representation in parliament. I also wanted to find out more about tribalism in Jordan, specifically the political values within the tribal system, and the actual way in which tribes organize themselves politically.

All of the interviews were semi-structured, meaning that I went into them with a set of questions, but I did not confine myself to these questions during the interviews. All of my interviews turned into conversations or discussions as the participants’ answers prompted me to come up with new questions and ideas on the spot.

My first interview was with American political analyst, Paul McCarthy, who has worked for the International Republican Institute (IRI) in Jordan for five years. The IRI aims to connect “citizens to their governments by involving them in decision-making processes and encouraging government bodies to be more responsive and accountable to their constituencies,” which they achieve by conducting regular polls and supporting government officials in trying to address the issues of the Jordanian people. My questions were general inquiries on the electoral system and its impacts. This interview was extremely helpful in my quest to learn more about what happens on the ground during the elections here and about the details of the electoral system.

I conducted my second interview with Dr. Waleed Turk, a successful businessman who was extremely knowledgeable and opinionated on the current state of politics in Jordan. My questions for him focused on the composition of the parliament and the possibilities for reforming the election law.

My third interview was with Jordanian political analyst Nawaf Tall, whose informed opinion was extremely valuable to my research. He has studied the election laws and is involved in the planning the potential changes the government intends to make to them.

Unfortunately, my fourth interviewee did not wish to release his statement, though his answers still gave me valuable insight into the subject of politics in Jordan.

The fifth interview I conducted finally let me into the world of a tribal member of parliament, the world that my previous interviewees had told me a lot about. Mr. Wasfi Al-Rwashdeh gave me a tremendously useful look into what it really means to have been elected with the support of a “tribe.”

Finally, I interviewed previous deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Saleh Zu'abi. This interview was not only helpful in terms of the information I gathered, but also in terms of the different points of view that I was able to obtain from Mr. Zu'abi and the theoretical impact this had on my paper.

I chose these people to interview because of the specific information that I needed to obtain, aside from the knowledge I could gain from the literature I gathered. I wanted to get an academic perspective on the election laws, their impact on the population, and the political culture of the population from the political analysts. I wanted to get an idea of what campaigning entails in Jordan, especially from a "tribal" candidate, from a member of parliament. The contact information for all of my interviewees came from my advisor, Dr. Mohammad Al-Momani, who also answered many of my questions in addition to providing me with potential interviewees. In addition to my formal interviews, I was able to gather a wealth of information simply from talking to different people during my three month stay in Jordan. I was living with a Palestinian-Jordanian family, spent five days in a village in the southern region of Jordan, and had countless interactions with new people every day.

The limitations on my interviews included cultural biases, both American and Jordanian. Most of my interviewees, although all were Jordanian except one, had been educated in the United States. This form of education would have had an impact on the political mindset of each of my interviewees, and in most of them I saw a positive impact in that they greatly admired the American political system. With reference to tribalism on the other hand, in some of my interviews I sensed a desire to delegitimize the tribes and dismiss tribalism as a backwards and politically destructive sentiment. This could either be a legitimate opinion, or a reaction to the fact that I am an American university student who may be expected to look down upon the tribal

system. In addition, I encountered a lot of repetition between my interviews, because as soon as I introduced my topic, my interviewees wished to comment extensively on the pitfalls of the current electoral system in combination with the tribal sentiment in Jordan.

Another limitation was simply the time constraint. Having to organize and complete all of my interviews and literature research in just three weeks was a difficult task. Having more time may have improved the quality of my interview questions, as well as giving me a chance to meet with more academics to obtain their views on the subject. One limitation that I had been worried about before the interviews was a possible language barrier, but this factor did not appear in any of my formal interviews as all of my interviewees spoke excellent English.

When I began my research, I intended to look for support for my hypothesis that tribalism could act a vehicle for democratization, but instead I found myself having to defend the idea that democracy could function at all within a tribal society. This unexpected obstacle made my interviews much more difficult, as I found myself discussing the presence of tribalism in elections and the weakness of the parliament, instead of the presence of democratic ideals within tribal values. However, this information ended up being extremely valuable, and also showed me that I had gone into my research somewhat naively, thinking that my interviews would immediately prove my hypothesis. Their input made my argument broader, deeper, and stronger.

## Findings:

In her work on the tribal system in Jordan, Linda Layne discusses the alleged “resurgence in tribalism” during the 1984 by-elections, a phenomenon that was fiercely condemned by many political scientists and intellectuals in the country. Today we find as many, if not more, such allegations against the tribal system. They identify tribalism as an available shortcut for politicians seeking office and for members of tribes seeking employment, university acceptance, and other services. Marwan Muasher, former Jordanian ambassador and deputy prime minister, lamented in 1985 the disproportionate value Jordanians place on tribal membership when he said “I wish to see people proud because they are part of a professional organization, not because they are members of a big tribe. I wish to see people proud because of their own personal achievements, not those of their cousins. And above all, I wish to see people proud because they are Jordanians, not only because of their surnames.”<sup>25</sup> Abdallah al-Kahtib went even further to say that “various administrative procedures will be canceled by the [creator of these procedures] if he is unable to get rid of tribes and subscribe to the administrative concept.”<sup>26</sup> However, it is my finding that neither tribalism nor the tribal system itself, are causing these failures in the democratic process in Jordan. It is the way in which the current political system allows the tribes to become political units and dominate the politics of the country, resulting in a decline in the quality of democracy, the quality of representatives, and the quality of the decisions they make for the people.

## Electoral System and Parliament

Jordan’s electoral system is based on single non-transferable votes in multi-member districts (SNTV/MMD) of varying sizes. This system is likely to produce a multi-party system with

<sup>25</sup> Muasher, Marwan. 1985. *The Jordan Times*. January 19<sup>th</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Al-Kahtib, Abdallah. 1985; cited in Layne 1989, pg. 27

extremely weak parties if the parties are big, but potentially strong parties if the parties are small.<sup>27</sup> However, Jordan has no significant parties at all, excluding the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, the Islamic Action Front. Thus, we see only the negative impacts of SNTV/MMD without the mitigating influence of a party system. Candidates' campaigns are overrun with clientelist and personalistic strategies, often kept within the confines of the kinship ties they have with their tribes. This is because the election law reduces each candidates' possible sphere of influence to its smallest possible size, which localizes the politicians' agendas.<sup>28</sup> As mentioned before, tribal relations in Jordan are much stronger at the local level, but this election law has resulted in their increased importance at the national level. A secondary result of this has been that parliamentarians are now simply expected to provide services for their people and do not assume responsibility for national issues.

Service provision by parliamentarians is not a phenomenon unique to Jordan by any means. It happens even in the parliaments of developed countries such as Britain and Japan. Remote areas that are not as well serviced by the government elect officials that will help them develop their towns and secure education and jobs for their people. MP Wasfi Al-Rwashdeh confirmed that this is indeed the case and that in his town of Shobak, there is a dire need for an improved education system, and more opportunities for his people to obtain jobs, as being so far away from any urban center makes finding employment difficult.<sup>29</sup>

Despite that fact that service provision can be considered a rather common parliamentary practice, it can still be harmful to the functioning of a national government. In Jordan, this is exactly the case, as not some but nearly *all* of the members of parliament are more focused on

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<sup>27</sup> McKean, Margaret 2009

<sup>28</sup> Abu Al-Khalil 2009; Al-Momani 2007, pg. 776

<sup>29</sup> Rwashdeh 2009

obtaining benefits for themselves and their constituents than they are on solving national issues. It was for precisely this reason that, on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009, King Abdullah II suspended the existing parliament and called for early elections, which by law must occur within the next four months, or the suspended deputies will resume their official duties.

Political analyst Paul McCarthy also stressed the role of parliamentarians as service providers, an idea which may at first be interpreted to mean that the members of parliament (MPs) are providing services exclusively for their tribes, which is not entirely true.<sup>30</sup> My results show that these services are not necessarily *tribally*-based, as many of my interviewees thought, but *regionally*-based. Al-Rawashdeh continuously spoke about providing services for his *town* or his *people*, and indeed his town of Shobak consists of four main tribes, all of which he has a responsibility to represent and support. Furthermore, he does not come from either of the two biggest tribes in Shobak, and also had to compete with two of his own cousins for his seat in parliament. Not only did he have to garner his own tribe's support, but he had to "break the rules" and convince families from the three other tribes to support him instead of a candidate for his own tribe.<sup>31</sup> The fact that he then won the seat shows that although MPs from more rural parts of Jordan *are* still being elected to provide services, they are not elected solely by their respective tribes, and therefore that the democratic nature of elections is not as a rule being derided by the tribal system in this way.

Aside from Parliament's failures, there were developments within this legislative body that were promising for democratic development. Although almost none of the Members of Parliament were united based on a party platform, they formed blocs within the Parliament in order to push

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<sup>30</sup> McCarthy 2009

<sup>31</sup> Rwashdeh 2009

certain issues and get things done. These groups are known to be transient, and formed only to achieve personal ambitions, such as placing one of their own as Speaker of the House.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, these groups *were* inter-tribal, inter-ethnic, and even inter-religious. Al-Rwashdeh's bloc, "the Ikha' group," contained about 20 members, including two Christians, around seven Palestinians, and Bedouin from every region of Jordan.<sup>33</sup> The transient nature of these blocs is criticized as an aspect of the personalistic nature and selfish ambitions of the parliamentarians, but Dahl argued in 1971 that this happened in Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, too. The Liberal and Conservative parties were first formed as parliamentary blocs simply to gain a majority, rather than to capture the hearts of the electorate.<sup>34</sup> Eventually, they became more permanent institutions known as political parties.

Political analyst Nawaf Tall argues that the problem with the electoral system is not the "one-man, one-vote" law (as it is known in Jordan). The problem is the districting. The gerrymandering of the electoral districts in Jordan in conjunction with the electoral system itself has resulted in a parliament that does not represent a majority of the population.<sup>35</sup> The one-man, one-vote system is used in many countries throughout the world, as the Jordanian government often points out, but in Jordan it exists in districts of varying sizes, meaning that each person's vote varies in political strength. The law was first implemented in 1993, and resulted in the devaluation of some voters' strength anywhere from one half to one ninth. Ten years later, the 2003 Temporary Election Law (TEL) gave the Senate, a royally appointed body, responsibility over the districting process.<sup>36</sup> Because of the gerrymandered districts, in 2007 a woman was

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<sup>32</sup> Al-Turk 2009

<sup>33</sup> Rwashdeh 2009

<sup>34</sup> Dahl 1971, pp. 36-37

<sup>35</sup> Tall 2009

<sup>36</sup> Chambers, Kufner, et al. 2006

elected to parliament from Karak 6<sup>th</sup> district with 700 votes, while a woman running in Zarqa 1<sup>st</sup> district won the support of 3,756 voters, but did not win a seat (Appendix 1).<sup>37</sup>

The districting has concentrated the political power in rural areas of Jordan, and left more highly populated urban centers such as Amman and Zarqa underrepresented. This same phenomenon afflicted Japan until the electoral laws were changed in 1994. However, before 1994, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) held onto power for almost four decades, using the SNTV/MMD system to their advantage and employing clientelist campaign methods which were sustained through their deep campaign chests.<sup>38</sup> Despite this one-party rule and lack of competition, Japan was considered a functioning democracy, and has since emerged from this pattern to elect coalition governments through a mixed electoral system of single vote and proportional representation. In Jordan, the lack of political parties means that the personalistic nature of politics generated by the SNTV/MMD system encourages people to vote solely along tribal lines, in contrast to the support for one party we saw in Japan. In the most recent 2007 parliamentary elections, exit polls covering six of Jordan's 45 districts showed that "Family, Tribal, and Town Affiliations" were the most important factors in voters' minds, coming just before "Good Service Provider." Only in the two Amman districts and the Zarqa district did "Religiosity and Party Affiliation" rate as the most important factor for around 10% of the people surveyed.<sup>39</sup> It seems strange that religiosity and party affiliation are in the same category, but this is because the only viable political party in Jordan is the IAF, and when voters claim that they will vote religiously, it usually means that they will vote along party lines – with the IAF.

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<sup>37</sup> JCSR 2008

<sup>38</sup> McNeil 1994, pg. 13

<sup>39</sup> JCSR 2008

## Historical Considerations and Processes

However, it is not the tribal system itself that has created these unhealthy political processes; it is the elections laws and the way they have made a social system into a political one. Nawaf Tall claims that tribes are not political units, though tribal expert Godelier is adamant that it is exactly their political nature that makes them *tribes*. There is no doubt that traditionally, tribes are political entities. They were originally formed in order for people to protect themselves and their land from invaders, and to control different groups' access to territory.<sup>40</sup> Tribes were necessary before there was a centrally administered system of law and order, and people needed some assurance of security.<sup>41</sup> Now, there is an established state in Jordan with an efficient security apparatus, but the tribal system still exists. They have lost their political autonomy, but have retained considerable political sway. Tibi claims that “though the tribe as an actual social structure has declined, in significance, the tribe as a referent for social identity and loyalty has persisted”<sup>42</sup> This is the way in which I have come to think of tribes in Jordan.

In Jordan, you do not have to dig deep to realize that the tribes here do often *function* as political entities, although if anything their individual political structures are disintegrating. As mentioned above, this is not because of the intrinsic political nature of tribes, because as Southall claims “no tribal society which has lost its political autonomy can continue to be a tribal society in the full sense.”<sup>43</sup> The primary reason for the tribes' role in national politics is the political system and the errors in the districting of the country. In addition to this, the lack of real political parties means that candidates have no way of organizing themselves, no support system for fundraising or campaigning, and no focus with which to run for office. Because of the lingering tribal social

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<sup>40</sup> Marx 1977, pg. 344

<sup>41</sup> Antoun 1972, pg. 87

<sup>42</sup> Tibi 1990, pg. 128

<sup>43</sup> Southall 1970, pg. 29

structure, many candidates have had to resort to this system in order to get elected. The late King Hussein banned political parties in 1954, following several assassination and coup attempts, and parliamentary elections in 1951 that were “dominated by radical party politics.”<sup>44</sup> Parties were not legalized again until 1992, almost four decades later. During this time, anyone associated with a political organization was prohibited from getting a job, as was anyone connected to him. Public political activity could result in arrest. These four decades of political oppression generated a fear of politics in the minds of the people, and a general apathy towards national decision-making (save for the uprisings in 1989).

The events that occurred between 1954 and 1991 were significant in pushing the people away from voluntary political aggregation and towards political decisions based on kinship. Black September in 1970, which can realistically be called Jordan’s civil war, highlighted the divisions between East Bankers (Transjordanians) and West Bankers (Palestinians), and showed them all that they were not in fact impervious to the violence that had been tearing apart the neighboring nations. They became fearful of political competition. Lebanon’s destruction at the hands of Israel and its internal political collapses, as well as King Hussein’s handling of the 1967 war with Israel generated greater respect and support for the way the King handled the political climate of the region, limiting the demands for political liberalization. In 1991, the electoral system was changed to “one-man, one-vote,” and King Hussein was content to allow the parliament’s quality to diminish as it became more tribal and service-oriented. The economic crisis of the eighties and the disgruntlement of the Jordanian tribes were assuaged by the tribes’ new ability to elect representatives who could provide services that the regime was no longer able to, all the while maintaining a façade of political liberalization.

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<sup>44</sup> Layne 1986. pg. 124.

However, as Linda Layne stressed in 1986, there has not been a “return to tribalism” in Jordan, and furthermore, the changes that have taken place within the notion of tribalism in Jordan have not endangered the process of democratization. Similarly, the fact that kinship ties play a large role in elections and in obtaining services today does not mean that the political mindset of the population is moving backwards. In November 2009, a meeting was facilitated by the International Republican Institute in Ajloun between the public and their municipal representatives. The seventy-five or so community members present in the meeting room represented every tribe in Ajloun. All issues raised were community issues, usually centered on the ever-present problem of water usage. There was but one personal issue raised, and the source of this issue was immediately admonished by the others in the room, as this meeting was for “real” societal problems, not for personal complaints.<sup>45</sup> This meeting signified that the population is not rigidly divided into specific tribes, and that trans-tribal issues *are* playing important roles in voters’ minds.

If we return to the comparison with Japan, it must be highlighted that the LDP remained in power only as long as they could provide political pork to the people and as long as they could use the electoral system to their advantage. In Jordan, it could be argued that the tribes are doing the same thing by using the kinship society in Jordan to maintain control of government services. However, the situation here may be more promising than that in Japan before the LDP lost its vice-like grip on power. The tribal parliamentarians do not represent a solid, united block of “tribal people.” Each region, each town, each family has its own needs. Furthermore, within each respective tribe we have been seeing the breakdown of their political strength and unity. As shown by Rwashdeh’s campaign, more and more people from the same tribe are running against

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<sup>45</sup> McCarthy

each other, forcing the population to look at characteristics other than the candidate's last name.

A copy of the exit polls published by the Jordan Center for Social Research tells us that:

- In Amman 4<sup>th</sup> District there were 4 'Hadeed' and 3 'Huneity' candidates competing.
- In Amman 6<sup>th</sup> District there were 7 'Abbadi/Manasir'
- In Amman 7<sup>th</sup> District there were 6 'Ajramis'
- In Irbid 5<sup>th</sup> District there were 8 'Obaidat', 7 'Malkawis' and 3 'Rousans'
- In Irbid 8<sup>th</sup> District there were 4 'Alawnehs' and 3 'Qur'aans'
- In Irbid 9<sup>th</sup> District there were 3 'Azzams'
- In Zarqa 2<sup>th</sup> District there were 9 'Zawahrehs', 10 'Khalylehs' and 3 'Ghweiris'
- In Bedu Wasat District there were 6 Al Fayez', 4 "Khraishas", 4 'J'bours',<sup>46</sup>

These numbers show that there is in fact competition within the tribes, something that we do not see at the national level due to the lack of political parties. The public no longer has but one choice to make, between their tribe's candidate and another's, but now they must choose between their own tribe's candidates.

### Changing Functions of Tribes

Up until this point I have had to defend the assumption that tribalism does not hinder the democratic process, and now I will go even further to say that the tribal system in Jordan, *as a social structure*, could even be seen as a vehicle for social change, leading to demands for a more institutionalized democracy.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> JCSR 2008, pg. 16

<sup>47</sup> Zu'abi 2009

The tribes are open to upward social mobility, which is occurring as the younger generations have greater access to education and employment opportunities. In the remote village of *Al-Qrein*, a father of ten boasted about the fact that all of his six daughters and four sons were educated, his eldest daughter had graduated from university and was working as a teacher, and the rest planned to follow the same course. Jordan's education system is considered by many to be the best in the Middle East, and this is evidenced by the 88.9% overall literacy rate and 99% youth literacy rate.<sup>48</sup> For the most part, both boys and girls are educated through secondary school, and an increasing percentage is obtaining post-secondary education. According to UNESCO, an even greater proportion of girls (40%) than boys (36%) were enrolled in tertiary education in the year 2007.<sup>49</sup> Even before these modern changes began, though, tribal values placed great emphasis on equality, as "tribes are essentially egalitarian – differences of status do not depend upon relative wealth or upon control of needed resources"<sup>50</sup> This is an intrinsically democratic concept, and one that was discussed earlier in this paper. The idea that all men are created equal is absolutely imperative to the implementation of democracy.

Furthermore, the old tribal hierarchy is falling apart because the traditional sheikhs are dying and no upcoming generation has been prepared to take on this role and fill the gap. The younger generations are thus freer from tribal responsibilities than their forefathers were. This has been an ongoing phenomenon that was accelerated by King Hussein's efforts to settle the Bedouin in the 1950s, as "socio-spatial transformation" has resulted in increased "individualization within Bedouin society in terms of gradual detachment from tribal institutions and obligations."<sup>51</sup> In Jordan this has meant the loosening of the socio-political tribal structure, but not necessarily the

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<sup>48</sup> CIA World Factbook. Accessed: December 3, 2009

<sup>49</sup> UNESCO 2007

<sup>50</sup> Pasternak 1976, pg. 17

<sup>51</sup> Meir 1996, pg. 193

sentiment of tribalism. It is this separation of tribalism as a *structure* from tribalism as a *sentiment* that will allow tribalism to act as a vehicle for democracy.

I asked several young adults in Amman if they voted in elections, and how they decided to vote. They answered that they did not vote because if anyone wants to get elected here he can simply ask his family to vote for him. Though this is not in any way the opinion of every Jordanian citizen, it is a good representation of how many people feel, especially and most problematically the younger generations. Political analyst Nawaf Tall confirmed that the problem of rural overrepresentation in the parliament is not caused exclusively by the districting and the electoral system, but also by the low turnout levels in urban centers such as Amman and Zarqa.<sup>52</sup>

Tribalism being as important a sentiment as it is, if used correctly by the governments, can be a motivational tool for increasing political participation. If political participation can become a valuable activity in the eyes of the tribes, it can be encouraged by respected tribal figures and transmitted through the kinship ties in Jordan.

### “Habituation Phase”

I mentioned earlier the Jordanian regime’s policy of political liberalization in the face of internal crises. Glenn E. Robinson called this strategic process “defensive democratization.” Robinson claims that these carefully planned liberalization measures implemented by the regime in Jordan have not contributed to the actual degree of democracy here, but have instead ensured the survival of the regime by placating the people with illusions of democratic freedoms.<sup>53</sup> However, I agree with political scientists Diamond et al. when they argue that the democratic systems themselves can slowly permeate a society, although at first they are simply mechanical

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<sup>52</sup> Tall 2009

<sup>53</sup> Robinson 1998

processes.<sup>54</sup> This idea contests a more classical theory of democratic evolution, which states that the people must actively express their desire for a democratic government in order for democratization to occur. Though the Jordanian people have only a few scattered times called for greater democracy, this sentiment is not prominent in people's minds here. Instead, the democratic processes that the government has implemented in order to placate the people (and arguably to placate Western powers, too) has introduced democratic thinking to the population. Evidence of this process has appeared in Jordan as some tribes have decided to run their own internal elections before the national elections in order to come to a communal decision on who will represent their tribe in the race. These unofficial elections have been called "tribal primaries"<sup>55</sup> and the general consensus I have gathered from those who participated is that they are free and fair. News of the election is usually passed by word of mouth, some tribes even conduct the election by secret ballot, and both men and women are eligible to vote. The candidates that are put on the ballot are those who nominate themselves to run, and I have not yet heard of any specific criteria that the candidates must match in order to enter these elections.

Though this is not a nation-wide occurrence by any means, it shows that the democratic mindset is indeed permeating the tribal one. Traditionally, tribal decisions were reached by consultative methods. The sheikhs and other important men from the tribe would come together to discuss the issue at hand. Each man would get his turn to speak, and the decision would be made through a process of discussion and eventual consensus. The opinions of the tribal elders carried more weight than those of the younger generations and women were not directly involved, though some people have claimed that they are consulted by their husbands behind closed doors.

However, these so-called tribal primaries show not only a willingness, but a desire from the

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<sup>54</sup> Diamond, Hartlyn, Linz, Lipset 1999, pg. 14

<sup>55</sup> Al-Momani September 2009

tribes to incorporate democratic processes into their decision making, and to involve a greater proportion of their members. Furthermore, Diamond et al. argue that this process will result in a more stable democratic system, as elites do not have to deal with sudden contests to power, and mass public participation comes gradually.<sup>56</sup> This results in a less polarized party system, a situation that is extremely scary in a region where radical political party systems have created extremist regimes and political turmoil. Dankwart Rustow called this the “habituation phase,” when citizens and politicians interact successfully under a new set of democratic rules so that eventually both groups come to internalize democratic norms.<sup>57</sup>

Although this “habituation phase” may be important to democratic development, it is also imperative for the people to support democracy and believe that it is the best system for them, otherwise the system risks collapse during the shaky transition to institutionalized democracy. The tribes are important here, because they are the traditional supporters of the regime, and have been the only demographic that has questioned the government and demanded more representation. During the 1989 riots, it was the rural, more tribal Jordanians that were causing unrest and calling for political liberalization, not the Palestinian origin population, or even the urban Jordanians. In fact, it is highly doubtful that the Palestinian-Jordanians will be the ones to demand more equality. The Palestinians that live here have developed a love for the regime because of King Hussein’s handling of the conflict and Jordan’s relatively welcoming atmosphere towards them. The majority of Palestinian refugees are, and have been, granted Jordanian citizenship, or they are granted visas to remain in the country for a month at a time, with little to no questions asked. No other country in the region, or elsewhere, has extended this welcoming hand to the Palestinians. Furthermore, the West Bank was a part of the Hashemite

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<sup>56</sup> Diamond et al 1999, pg. 14

<sup>57</sup> Rustow 1970

Kingdom for almost two decades, giving many Palestinians a sense of belonging and acceptance. Though the Palestinians are underrepresented in the government and there still exists a significant amount of discrimination against them in society, the realistic alternatives to this life are so much worse that there is little desire for political equality at this point in time.

### Regime Endorsement

The underrepresentation of Jordan's Palestinian population is one setback to democracy in Jordan that the tribal system does not look likely to fix. This is one duty that falls on the regime, which must change the election law, and the Palestinians, who must demand more representation by increasing turnout at elections and publicly calling for greater political power. The regime is accused of being fearful, not of increased Palestinian enfranchisement, but of the anger that they will face from the East Bank Jordanians if this enfranchisement is to occur. However, the fact that the legitimacy of the regime is not at stake in Jordan means that the government's fear is somewhat exaggerated. According to Lipset, the legitimacy of the existing government can allow democracy to happen, as the people believe in the government and trust their decisions.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the respect that the Jordanian population has for the regime, specifically the respect that the East Bankers have, is essential to the introduction of more democratic processes, as "democracy requires an authoritative, effective state" because the state has the capacity to enforce the rule of law and maintain political order.<sup>59</sup> Though the government's fear of rural Jordan's reaction is not completely unfounded, as there have been uprising from the tribes in the past, I believe the government is underestimating the tolerance of the average rural, tribal Jordanian. As mentioned before, the democratic system is seeping into the tribal mindset and increasing tolerance, belief in equality, and desire for self expression. Furthermore, the respect

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<sup>58</sup> Lipset 1994, pg. 8

<sup>59</sup> Diamond et al 1999, pg. 15

that these Jordanians have for the regime means that if the regime releases a statement justifying its actions, and the East Bankers are still sufficiently cared for economically and politically, there will not be great backlash.

The only reason for a backlash would be if services were no longer provided by the representatives of rural regions. Up until recently, these services were provided by the parliament, something that has caused significant anger from intellectuals in the country. As mentioned before, this has made the Parliament an extremely weak institution, resulted in the dissolving of the parliament in November of this year. The Jordan Times reported that “analysts, intellectuals and former lawmakers agreed that the Elections Law is likely to be amended in connection with the decentralisation law, which they expect to be endorsed as a temporary law during Parliament's suspension.”<sup>60</sup> Decentralization is an imperative aspect of a good government, as it allows the central government to deal with national issues, and leaves the service provision to municipal and local councils.<sup>61</sup> There is then a danger of corruption at the local level, though this is preferable and more easily managed than the corruption that currently exists at the central level. In this case, services would still be provided to the rural Jordanians through their municipal councils, which would also force tribes to interact in order to obtain services for the entire municipality.

### **Tribal Values and Civil Society**

Returning to the idea of tribes running their own “primaries,” it is apparent that some tribes themselves are acting as political parties. In fact, tribes themselves are often known to have their own ideologies.<sup>62</sup> Some tribes are known to be more rightist, others to be more leftist. They are

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<sup>60</sup> The Jordan Times. November 24, 2009

<sup>61</sup> Diamond et al 1999, pg. 18

<sup>62</sup> Tall 2009

not simply hereditary, emotional structures, but are instead complex and multi-faceted parts of society. They are contributors not only by being active, employed members of society, but arguably by acting in place of Jordan's considerably lacking civil society.<sup>63</sup> Civil society is described by many political scientists as an essential component of democratization, as it "enhances the ability of citizens to protect their interests and rights from arbitrary or capricious state power," though Middle East scholar, Richard Antoun, claims instead that "civil society is constituted by universal processes of trust and cooperation"<sup>64</sup> In Jordan, the tribes act as a component of civil society in that they resolve conflicts through extra-governmental, peaceful means. The ritual of tribal conflict resolution is well-known in Jordan, and fiercely debated, as it breaks down the central rule of law by allowing tribal law to take precedence. In these cases, the government withdraws from a violent feud and allows the tribes to declare *atwa*, or "truce," which is a limited period of time during which no violent retaliations are allowed, and the tribal representatives meet to work out a peaceful solution to the conflict. The aggressor and aggressed do not represent themselves, but instead are represented by their tribes, who are supervised by a third-party mediator.<sup>65</sup>

In this way, tribalism describes much more than a social structure in Jordan. "Tribalism" encompasses tribal values as well, which include courage, generosity, hospitality, honor, and respect. Tribes encourage respect for leaders, given that the leaders have sufficiently proven themselves to be responsible and worthy of respect. Though the son of a traditional sheikh automatically inherits his father's title, he does not automatically inherit his father's reputation. He, too, must prove that he is capable of caring for his people, representing them, and helping

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<sup>63</sup> Antoun 2000, pg.

<sup>64</sup> Wictorowicz 2000, pg. 43; Antoun 2000, pg. 441

<sup>65</sup> Antoun 2000, pg. 446

them solve their problems.<sup>66</sup> The specific sheikhly position is declining in importance, but the values that tribes place on good leadership survive, which shows that in the right electoral system, the tribes will be capable of electing good leaders.

## Conclusion

Tribalism in Jordan is a complex and ever-changing sentiment, that is close to the hearts of many and intricately involved in the political system. It is also a permanent aspect of Jordanian society that has the potential to be positively exploited in the development of democracy in Jordan. Its role in the electoral process has been condemned by many political analysts in Jordan as a backwards, traditional method of political aggregation. However, as I have proved in this paper, it is neither the tribal system nor the tribal sentiment in Jordan that are causing low levels of productivity in the government, a high degree of corruption, and the disproportionate representation in parliament. It is instead the electoral system that is at fault. The electoral system forces candidates to look to family members for support and use economic incentives to gather votes.

Furthermore, this social structure does *not* need to be eliminated before democracy can be institutionalized and internalized by the Jordanian society. In fact, democratic values are already pervading tribal ones as tribes conduct internal elections and tribal candidates do not hesitate to run against each other, even though it means competing with individuals from their own kinship group. Even historically tribes have been the primary actors in the demand for greater political liberalization in Jordan, causing some of the country's only unrest in 1989 when the regime failed to provide for the population as they had always done. As the regime's traditional support base, the tribal Jordanians can be the key to generating support for democratization initiatives. If

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<sup>66</sup> Zu'abi 2009

correctly taken care of and involved, the tribes will be able to disperse democratic values throughout their networks, generating a desire for democracy that has so far not been overtly present in Jordanian society.

We need to focus on tribal values, not tribal structures or processes. Amartya Sen endorsed this view when he encouraged academics to look not at cultural constraints, but at the presence of basic democratic values in different societies. In Jordan, these values include the merit of good governance, equality, honor, and generosity. Tribalism in modern social systems does not look the same as it did in ancient times or even the same as it did a century ago. It is not a rigid social structure, but instead a personal sentiment that successfully organizes Jordanian society and provides an identity, a safety net, and a moral civil society. There is no doubt that enforcing the rule of law in a country contributes to the stability of democracy, but in Jordan the use of tribal law in exceptional circumstances ensures the absence of violence in extremely emotional conflicts.

Although I champion the value of tribalism in Jordan, I recognize the need for a strong state and its willingness to institute true democratic processes. In Jordan, this is not only a requirement, but it is the necessary first step. I do not believe the Jordanian society is unreceptive to democracy, but it is not actively calling for it either. The government *will* be forced to further democratize not because of public activism, but because the current failures in the political system here are resulting in the diminished quality of the government. This is evidenced by the King's recent decision to dissolve parliament, citing the deputies' lack of productivity as the main reason. The same electoral system that has brought out the negative aspect of tribalism has also created an inefficient government, which is so crippling the regime's ability to function that they will be forced to change the election law and implement mechanisms for Jordanians to elect

higher quality candidates. I propose involving the tribes in this process, as they are the key to public endorsement of government proposals and can also function as a channel for true democratic ideals to reach all extents of the population.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study**

This study attempted to cover all aspects of the electoral process in Jordan and the role that tribes and the tribal sentiment play in this system. However, as the research was performed over the course of just three weeks, there are many areas that could be expanded upon. A thorough analysis of the election law would be useful in order to examine the minute details of the laws and their intended impact. The intended impacts could then be compared with the actual impacts that happen during the electoral process. This study would be carried out with the help of polls such as those produced by the JCSR and IRI.

Furthermore, this study aimed to prove a certain point, that tribalism can be used as a vehicle for the social change necessary to implement greater democracy in Jordan. However, in many of my interviews and in much of my research I found discussion on the political system in Jordan. For this reason I was forced to discuss this system and its effects in detail. My discussions of the political system and the tribal system are somewhat devoid of counter-arguments, which could have been used to strengthen my own argument, as not addressing them weakens my points.

Further research should be done into the current state of tribal sentiment in Jordan, as I used this term quite vaguely and without any quantitative support. There could be more research done into just how pervasive the tribal sentiment is in the everyday lives of both rural and urban Jordanians, both East Bankers and West Bankers.

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## Appendix 1

### 2007 Parliamentary Elections

#### Female Candidates: Winner and Runner Ups with Over 1,000 Votes

Candidate	District	# of Votes	Result
Hayat Al Musseimi [IAF]	Zarqa 1 <sup>st</sup>	3756	Lost
<b>Falak Al Jamaani</b>	<b>Madaba 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>3301</b>	<b>Outright Winner</b>
Nariman Al Roussan	Irbid 5 <sup>th</sup>	<b>2831</b>	<b>Quota/ Winner 5</b>
Samar Hajj Hassan	Amman 3 <sup>rd</sup>	2068	Lost
Reem Qassem	Zarqa 3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>1538</b>	<b>Quota/ Winner 3</b>
Amneh Al Gharagheer	Balqa 3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>1457</b>	<b>Quota/ Winner 6</b>
Sabah Al B'toush	Karak 3 <sup>rd</sup>	1450	Lost
Insaf Al Khawaldeh	Tafileh	<b>1370</b>	<b>Quota/Winner 1</b>
Haya Ibrahim Hake	Amman 6 <sup>th</sup>	1348	Lost
Tharwat Al Amro	Karak 2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>1174</b>	<b>Quota/Winner 4</b>
Fayqa Doukrani	Irbid 1 <sup>st</sup>	1145	Lost
Nuha Miqdadi	Zarqa 1 <sup>st</sup>	1140	Lost
Adab Saud	Tafileh 1 <sup>st</sup>	1063	Lost
Hamdiyeh Quaider	Karak 6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>700</b>	<b>Quota/Winner 2</b>

Source: Al Syjji Weekly

Jordan Center for Social Research. (2008, January 20) "Jordan's 2007 Parliamentary Elections:

Tracking and Exit Polls"

## Appendix 2

### Informed Consent Form Independent Study Project

Jennifer Rowland, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, United States  
School for International Training—Jordan: Modernization and Social Change

**Instructions:**

*Please read the following statements carefully and mark your preferences where indicated. Signing below indicates your agreement with all statements and your voluntary participation in the study. Signing below while failing to mark a preference where indicated will be interpreted as an affirmative preference. Please ask the researcher if you have any questions regarding this consent form.*

I am aware that this interview is conducted by an independent undergraduate researcher with the goal of producing an analytic study on tribalism as a potential vehicle for democratization in Jordan.

I am aware that the information I provide is for research purposes only. I understand that my responses will be confidential and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study.

I am aware that I have the right to full anonymity upon request, and that upon request the researcher will omit all identifying information from both notes and drafts.

I am aware that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and to terminate my participation at any time, and that the researcher will answer any questions I have about the study.

I am aware of and take full responsibility for any risk, physical, psychological, legal, or social, associated with participation in this study.

I am aware that I will not receive monetary compensation for participation in this study, but a copy of the final study will be made available to me upon request.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use my name and position in the final study.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use my organizational affiliation in the final study.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use data collected in this interview in a later study.

**Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Printed Name:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature:**

\_\_\_\_\_

***Thank you for participating!***

*Questions, comments, complaints, and requests for the final written study can be directed to:*

Dr. Raed Al-Tabini, SIT Jordan Academic Director

Telephone (962) 077 7463348

Email: raed.altabini@sit.edu