


## Article

# Partnership and Rescue Party and the Transformation of Political Opposition in Jordan

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**Abstract:** In Jordan, the main regime, as a successful political survival strategy, while skillfully forming a tight pro-regime political coalition all along, has kept an even firmer grip on the political opposition. The political opposition in the country, the Muslim Brotherhood, and its political wing the Islamic Action Front (IAF) being the leading front, sometimes boycotted the elections as a response to or compromised with the regime. This latter approach has also been embraced by the parties which emerged out of the MB, including the National Congress Party and the Muslim Brotherhood Association; however, another splinter party, the Partnership and Rescue Party (PRP) criticized them for their incompetence in acting as a true opposition. This is the juncture this paper problematizes—the IAF seems to have lost its ability to act as the main opposition, and the newly emerged PRP prospectively stands out as the leading candidate to replace it. This paper examines the transformation of the political oppositional block in Jordan and elaborates on its consequences for the MB and the regime–opposition relations. In relation to this, in the conceptual level, the paper also reflects on the relevance of this transformation to the post-Islamism debate: in this instance, the PRP denouncing the political Islamic ideology and positioning itself in the center of the political spectrum while maintaining the claim that it has taken over the main opposition role/legacy of the MB evoke a post-Islamist tendency. The argumentation in the article is built on primary sources, including interviews with the opposition leaders and prominent opposition members.

**Keywords:** Jordan; opposition; Islamist movements; Islamic Action Front; Partnership and Rescue Party; Salem Falahat



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## 1. Introduction

After Jordan became an independent state, many opposition groups with various ideologies emerged. Nasserists, Baathists, Communists and secular Palestinians/PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) were the leading contenders. Although in the 1950s and 1960s the Nasserists and Communists were strong in Jordan in connection with the developments in the region and the world, the Palestinians organized under the leadership of Yasser Arafat have been influential since the 1970s. The common point of all these groups is that they were in a fierce struggle with the Jordanian regime when they were strong. In the 1980s, Jordanian regime's repressive practices made the opposition quiescent. In 1989, the regime started the political liberalization process in order to meet the demands of the people who took to the streets to protest the bad economic conditions. This provided a political opportunity for the opposition to become active once again. However, it was the MB that started to fill the vacuum of political opposition in the country and for the next 30 years, the MB that had cooperated with the regime in its struggle against previously mentioned opposition groups between 1950 and 1990 became the biggest opposition in Jordan. This period has been marked by episodes of clashes between the MB and the regime; although the former adopted political strategies for shattering the democratic legitimacy of

the parliament and the government, the latter has gradually increased its pressures against the MB as a means for keeping political opposition in the country under control.

In due course, the regime's strategies turned fruitful for the government as the MB was split more than those before it was officially banned in 2015, and new opposition groups emerged with a tendency to align with the regime when necessary. These splinter groups included the Islamic Centre Party (حزب الوسط الاسلامي, ICP), Zamzam Initiative (مبادرة زمزم) and the Muslim Brotherhood Association (جمعية الاخوان المسلمين, MBA). There was also an uncompromising splinter group, the Partnership and Rescue Party (PRP), which, as this paper elaborates, stands as a candidate for replacing the MB and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (جبهة العمل الإسلامي, IAF), in terms of political opposition in the post-MB Jordan. Accordingly, this study argues that the IAF has long been faced with a survival problem, thus has started to lose its position as the main opposition group in the country, and it has been the PRP among the remaining opposition parties that has been endeavoring to fill the political vacuum through pursuing an inclusionary approach towards the dissident movements of all forms in the country, on one hand, and through embracing an unbending resistance against the regime on the other. The potential the PRP enjoys for moving into the main opposition role is what this research elaborates on. This role is also necessary to observe whether PRP's entrance into the political scene represents a change in broader Islamism in political opposition in Jordan, as the establishment of the PRP and its following political discourse and practice carry certain post-Islamist tones. These include, to say the least, the party denouncing political Islamic ideology and positioning itself in the center of political spectrum while maintaining the claim that it has taken over the main opposition role/legacy of the MB. The paper secondly offers a critical reflection on the PRP's relevance to post-Islamism discussion—the ignorance of such a discussion in the broader literature on post-Islamism further necessitates questioning of the transformation of political Islam in Jordan from the perspective of post-Islamism.

This study draws upon interviews the authors conducted with the representatives of almost all opposition parties in Jordan. The interviewees included Hemmam Said (the general guide of the MB), Ali Abu Sukkar (Former Secretary General of IAF), Murad Adayleh (Current Secretary General of IAF), Thabet Assaf (Current IAF spokesman), Salem Falahat (founding leader of PRP), Ayman Sandokah (political bureau member of PRP) and Rahil Garaibeh (Leader of Zamzam Initiative and of the National Congress Party, NCP, حزب المؤتمر الوطني). The interviews were conducted with the representatives of the political parties which took to the streets between 2011 and 2014, and were also included in the analysis. These interviewees included Nidal Madiye (one of the leaders of Jordanian Communist Party-JCP), Abla Abu Olbeh (the leader of the Jordanian Democratic People's Party-HASHD) and Akram Homsy (the leader of the Arab Socialist Baath Party-ASBP). All interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated into English by the authors. In addition, primary Arabic sources including press statements or party programs or bulletins, along with Arabic newspaper articles related to the subject of the study, have been utilized in writing the paper.

The article consists of five sections. In the Section 1, we discuss the emergence and transformation of opposition movements in Jordan since the 1950s, including a detailed analysis of the MB's emergence as the main opposition movement in the country. Section 2 focuses on how the MB, the most powerful political force of the last 30 years, has been weakened. Both the internecine struggles as well as the regime's approach towards these have shaped this process. The Jordanian regime has kept the internal fissures alive and encouraged splinter groups. We trace the formation of Islamic Centre Party (ICP), Zamzam Initiative and its political wing NCP and the MBA, respectively, and assess their crippling effects on the MB. The formation of the PRP and its relations with the MB and the IAF during this process are also analyzed in the same section. Section 3 discusses about the PRP's relevance to the post-Islamism debate. Sections 4 and 5 focus on the main question of the study, which is whether or not the PRP would be able to assume the role of main

opposition movement in Jordan, and whether a post-Islamist main opposition would come out of this. To answer these questions, the consequences of the PRP's formation and activities on the Jordanian opposition in general and on the regime are analyzed, respectively.

## 2. The History of Political Opposition in Jordan

Historically, the making of the ruling elite in Jordan is based on an opposition management strategy of the Hashemite dynasty—that is, co-optation, a straightforward approach to lure targets to cooperate. Accordingly, the diverse and unwilling tribes in the country were integrated into the Hashemite rule through the allocation of secured positions within the army or bureaucracy (Nanes 2008, pp. 88–89). The ever-growing merchants' loyalty, however, was ensured by facilitating their access to governmental and public resources (Greenwood 2003, p. 251; Robinson 1998, p. 387; Baylouny 2008, p. 287). Nevertheless, the formation of the ruling elite was mainly to facilitate the survival of the regime, yet still there emerged several opposition political and ideological groups (or threats from the perspective of the regime). The relations between the regime and these opposition groups can be divided into two periods: from the 1950s to the 1990s, and from the 1990s onwards.

Groups/ideologies that could pose a threat to the Jordanian regime from the 1950s to the 1990s were shaped by regional and global developments. For example, Nasserism, which was prominent in the region in the 1950s and 1960s, had many followers in the country. Similarly, the Soviet Union was influential in Arab countries; therefore, Communists formed an important opposition group. In the 1970s, both Communists and Nasserists began to lose their influence, but the secular and nationalist Palestinians in the country—in other words, the PLO under the leadership of Yasser Arafat—began to increase its influence. It should be clearly stated that the regime was supported by the founding ruling elites both in the fight against the Communists and Nasserists in the 1950s and 1960s and in the fight against the PLO in the 1970s. By the 1980s, Nasserism had lost its influence in the region and the Soviet Union was very weakened. Furthermore, since the PLO in Jordan was disbanded, the Palestinian nationalists in the country were intimidated. As a result, there were not any strong ideological-political movements left in the country, with the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood being the only exception. Additionally, this was due to the MB's adopting a cooperative attitude towards the regime in its fight against the political opposition in the country, including the Nasserists, Communists and secular Palestinians.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1980s, the regime gained almost absolute political power over the opposition groups, yet the country's weakening economic conditions led to public protests towards the end of the decade. The masses, including some tribes that have been part of the ruling elite (Susser 2013, p. 3), demanded radical change in the country. King Hussein initiated a political liberalization process in 1989 (Rath 1994), allowing the holding of elections that had not been held since 1957 in order to calm the people's and especially his natural allies' anger (Adams 1996, p. 510). In this sense, 1989 was a turning point for regime–opposition relations in the country—the opposition gained access to parliament processes. However, the regime made use of this change to further strengthen its alliance with the ruling elite, as the elections and parliamentary positions turned into just another means by which the ruling coalition was rewarded, and their loyalty was secured.

The 1990s turned into the era in which the MB left its position as an ally of the regime and turned in to a powerful opposition group. They criticized the regime on important national (amendments to election laws<sup>2</sup>, press-laws<sup>3</sup>) and regional (peace talks with Israel<sup>4</sup>) issues. During this period, the MB was quite strong, and its criticisms of the regime resonated with the public, whereas in 1950s, the MB only held 4 seats out of a 40-member assembly; it was able to win 22 seats out of 80 in the 1989 elections (Lust-Okar 2001, p. 548; Brown 2006, p. 5).

The MB participated in the 1993 elections; however, the 1997 elections revealed a novel dynamic for practicing political opposition in the country—not only participation, but also non-participation was employed as a political strategy for performing dissidence.

Accordingly, the MB, along with 11 other parties, boycotted the 1997 elections, and as a result, the turnout in the elections remained around 40% (Amawi 1994, p. 15). The key developments leading to boycotts of the elections were the amendments in the Laws on Elections, Political Parties and Press, which aimed at reducing the power of political opposition (Ryan 2015), and the peace treaty Jordan signed with Israel. This strategy of the MB continued from time to time until the 2016 elections—we will return to this point.

Diverging from its decision in 1997, the MB participated in the 2003 elections, held with a 2-year delay by the new king<sup>5</sup>, and sent 17 deputies to the assembly, whose number of seats was increased from 80 to 110.<sup>6</sup> Although far from its success in 1989, this result cannot be considered as a defeat for the IAF because the ICP, which was founded as an alternative to the IAF by some of its former leading figures and appealed to the pious electorate, was able to gain only two deputies in the election. However, it is difficult to say the same for the 2007 election, when the IAF was able to win only six seats. The other opposition groups also performed poorly. All Islamists, including the IAF, received a total of seven deputies, whereas left-wing parties could not win seats; all remaining seats were won by independents or tribal representatives. All opposition political parties in the country were not only dissatisfied with the election results, but also perceived them as rigged and unfair against them. The harshest explanations for this situation came from Rahil Gharaibeh of the MB, who stated that the regime had set a trap for the MB, the security of the ballot boxes was not ensured, fights broke out at some polling stations and the elections were manipulated and that the movement had the power to avoid the trap (Abu Rumman 2007, p. 75).

The MB, claiming that it was set up by the regime, decided to boycott the 2010 elections, aimed for the legitimacy of the regime to be questioned. The MB believed that the legitimacy of an assembly without representation from the IAF, the country's largest and perhaps the only well-organized opposition, should be put up for discussion. For this reason, by boycotting the elections, the IAF aimed to create a legitimacy crisis and to punish the regime that tried to prevent it. However, the 2010 parliamentary elections brought the most decisive victory in Jordan's history to pro-regime deputies. All but 15 seats went to pro-regime candidates, with the ICP gaining 1.<sup>7</sup> The opposition political parties were defeated badly.

All the elections after 2010 were held during or under the influence of the Arab uprisings. The MB took the developments in the region into account, especially in the lead up to the 2013 elections. It should also be mentioned that whenever there is a possibility of regime change that historically some Pan-Arab or leftist political parties were active in the process. At the time of January 2013, parliamentary election in Jordan, Mohammed Morsi was in power in Egypt, and the broader MB movement had gained important positions in Tunisia, Libya and even Syria. In such an environment, it is possible to say that the Jordanian regime was also uneasy. King Abdullah II, who listened to the demands of the people from the beginning of the protest demonstrations, undertook some reforms in order to preserve his regime. One of the most important of these reforms is undoubtedly the amendments in the election law. Accordingly, the number of parliamentary seats was increased from 120 to 150, and 27 deputies were allocated to the national list in order to allow more representation of political parties. In addition, 15 seats were allocated to women to increase female representation (Ryan 2012). Emboldened by the political developments in the Middle East in its favor, the MB declared that 27 seats for the national list was too low and boycotted the 2013 elections in order to put more pressure on the regime. Other opposition parties such as the JCP<sup>8</sup>, HASHD<sup>9</sup> and ASBP<sup>10</sup> also participated in the negotiations and boycotted the elections on the same grounds as the MB. Nonetheless, the MB's 2013 boycott decision deepened the disagreements that had emerged in the movement over the decision to boycott the 2010 elections. The ensuing discussions led to the formation of the Zamzam Initiative, another important break from the movement.

The overthrow of Mohammed Morsi by a military coup in July 2013 meant the beginning of a difficult period for the Muslim Brotherhood in the region as a whole as well

as in Jordan. Moreover, just before the 2016 elections, the movement was recognized as a terrorist organization by the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and upon this, the deputy head of the MB, Zaki Bani Rashid (the most important pro-Hamas figure within the MB), was arrested for criticizing the UAE in his own social media account ([Middle East Eye 2015](#)), which increased the tension. However, a bigger dispute broke out over the departure of Abdul Majeed Thuneibat, one of former MB leaders and formation of a new Muslim Brotherhood Association. This event, which represents the third major break away from the movement, will be discussed in the second part of this article. After these developments, the Brotherhood that was under the pressure of the regime faced being banned for the first time in its history.

Just when the tide was turning against the MB, both regionally and domestically, the IAF surprisingly decided to enter the 2016 elections ([Ryan 2015](#)). The MB, which previously sought to bring the legitimacy of the parliament and indirectly the regime into question by boycotting the elections, was seeking to prove its own legitimacy by participating in the 2016 elections as part of the National Coalition for Reform (NCR), a broad coalition which even included Christian candidates ([Malkawi 2016](#)). However, the result was still far from a success for the IAF as they won only 10 seats in the Parliament. Zamzam Initiative and ICP, both breakaways from the MB, each won 5 seats. A total of 95 independent candidates, almost all of whom were pro-regime, became deputies.

The 2020 elections are almost a repeat of the previous elections for the Jordanian political opposition. Similar to 2016, the IAF participated in the 2020 parliamentary elections on the National Coalition Reform Lists in order to consolidate its legitimacy. However, the party experienced a decrease in both their percentage of votes and the number of seats. The IAF won 6 seats, down from 10 in the previous elections. The coalition won 10 seats in the elections, but later 2 women deputies left the coalition, bringing their number of deputies down to 8 ([Ma'ayeh and Sweis 2021](#), p. 7). By participating in the 2020 parliamentary elections despite the existence of the laws it opposed, the IAF opened up to debate the party's identity as political opposition. This is crucial, as in the process the IAF experienced another important split; Salem Falahat, one of the most important figures of the Brotherhood, left the MB in 2017 and established the Partnership and Rescue Party (PRP). The PRP boycotted the 2020 elections, following the historical practice of MB. Since the voter turnout to the 2020 elections was only 29.9%, the lowest in Jordan's electoral history ([International IDEA 2021](#)), PRP turned into a possible candidate to replace the IAF's historical main opposition position. This is something we reflect on in the following sections.

### 3. Muslim Brotherhood and Its Splinter Groups

This section discusses the transformation of the political opposition in Jordan, with reference to the formation of several splinter groups from the MB. The section demonstrates the strategies the regime employed in controlling and managing the political opposition in the country, as the splinter groups were mostly backed by the regime or the MB's rapprochement with the regime led some members to form their faction to replace the MB's historical mission of opposition.

#### 3.1. Islamic Centre Party

The ICP's establishment coincides with the change of the ruling king in the country. It was the new King Abdullah II who supported the formation of the ICP. Prior to King Abdullah II, the regime had developed strong relations with some MB leaders such as Mohammed Abdul Rahman Khalifa, Ishaq Al Farhan and Laith Shubeilat in order to gain the support of the single Islamist party, the IAF, in a political landscape with multiple left-wing and secular parties being outnumbered. However, King Abdullah II did not establish a personal relationship with the MB leaders; on the contrary, he instead securitized the movement and rather supported the establishment of a new Islamic party in order to manage the Islamic opposition and, moreover, to change the equation of the representation



of Islamic votes in the political arena (Al Sunaid 2017). The ground necessary for the establishment of such a party began to form after the 1997 elections. Since the MB boycotted the elections, some MB members left the MB, claiming that the solution was not to boycott but to participate in the political process (Al Najjar 2013).

The ICP was established by the Jordanian ex-minister Atef Al Battoush with Islamic references and vision in 2001 with the participation of a group of politicians who left the IAF. However, unlike the MB, the ICP did not take an oppositional stance and has been in a good relationship with the state since its establishment. This is clearly observed in both the party discourse and the composition of the founding members: For example, ICP founder Atef Al Battoush was the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs in the cabinet in 1991 (Prime Ministry 2021a). Dr. Hayil Abdel Hafez Daoud, who was the ICP's vice-chairman of the political office during its founding and later became the party's general secretary (Jordanian Politics Life n.d.), also had a good relationship with the state for a long time, thanks to his position as "imam" (religious leader) in the Jordanian armed forces. Due to this close relationship, Daoud would be appointed as the Minister of Foundations in Jordan in 2016 (Prime Ministry 2021b). Similarly, another founder, Bessam Amush, who was a former leader of MB that left in 1997, was appointed as the Minister of Administrative Development a year after he left (1998–1999; Momani 2002).

Along with the member structure, the pro-regime position of the ICP was part of the party's efforts to become a "Jordanian political movement with national roots and without external affiliations" (Momani 2002). The party clearly states that it is not a *dawah* movement with foreign political connections unlike the MB. Again, contrary to the MB's critical attitude towards the regime's foreign policy, the ICP states that it fully embraces the Jordanian state's foreign policy perspective (Momani 2002). Moreover, the ICP did not hesitate to continue its activities using the official state and royal family funds which is clearly written on the official website of the party. Accordingly, Prince Ghazi from the Hashemite family participated in and supported most of the "Middle Way Forum for Culture and Thought", which was formed "to fight extremism and radicalism and reinforce the concepts of Islamic restraint among the sons of the *Ummah* and in the institutions of the *Ummah*" in leading up to the formation of the ICP. Working with the aforementioned motto, the Forum acted as a mouthpiece for the official Islamic discourse of the state and thus aimed to drive young people away from the MB (Ammon News 2009). The fact that the ICP participated in the 2003 elections under the umbrella of the National Democratic Bloc (Democratic Islah Committee) with four political parties close to the regime (Ateeq 2003) can also be considered as an indication of its pro-regime alignment (Al Rashwani 2004).

The regime's support for the ICP, however, often varied according to the effectiveness of the MB in the elections. For example, the regime did not sufficiently support the ICP in the 2007 elections when the MB was weak due to intra-party crises.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in the 2010 elections that was boycotted by the IAF, the ICP was able to win only one seat, which led to a crisis within the party and ultimately to calls for the party's dissolution (Al Najjar 2010a). After this heavy defeat, the following statement by a Jordanian state official disclosed the relationship of the regime with the party: 'the Jordanian state did not support the ICP even though the party expected strong government assistance in the 2010 elections' (Al Najjar 2010a). This was quite understandable, as there was no reason to support an Islamic party to compete with the IAF that did not participate in the elections and was deemed ineffective.

On the contrary, in the 2013 elections, the regime strongly supported the ICP in a political environment where the MB gained regional power and renewed its self-confidence. At a time when the MB was gaining strength in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and even in Syria, the MB of Jordan was also demanding strong reforms and constitutional changes from the Jordanian state during the ongoing protests in different provinces of the country. As a result of the regime's support during the elections, the ICP gained 16 seats in the 150-seat Jordanian parliament (Schenker 2016). This result is impressive and surprising for a party

that only won one seat in the previous elections. Similarly, the regime supported for the ICP in the 2016 and 2020 elections when the IAF was trying to be an effective actor. Thanks to the regime's support, the ICP gained 8 seats and 16 seats in the elections, respectively (Rudaw News 2016). In its message announcing the election results, after the 2020 elections, the ICP thanked King Abdullah II and the Jordanian government for completing the elections on time (Uneyzat 2020).

Nevertheless, although the ICP achieved significant success in the 2013, 2016 and 2020 elections, it did not appeal to the historical opposition voters to alternate the MB.

### 3.2. Zamzam Initiative

Although the ICP was a movement joined by those who left the MB, it was not directly formed as the result of a party split. However, the Zamzam Initiative, which was founded in 2013 under the leadership of Rahil Gharaibeh, a top MB leader, is the product of the split within the party over electoral strategies. The disagreements, which started with the debates about boycotting the 2007 elections and flared up following the IAF's unsuccessful 2007 election results (by gaining only six seats in parliament; Al Naimat 2014) resulted in the resignation of Rahil Gharaibeh, the head of the party's politics and media department along with two other members, Ahmad Kefaveen and Mamduh Al Muhaisen, from the Shurah Council in 2009. The group who resigned published a 15-item letter of departure, including the need to separate the Jordanian MB from Hamas in Palestine (Al Najjar 2009). In October 2013, this team developed into an official social movement called the Jordan Zamzam Initiative. Although the former prime ministers of Jordan, Marouf al-Bakhit and Abdul Raouf al-Rawabdeh, and many representatives of the Jordanian state and notables attended the opening ceremony of the initiative, the leaders of the Islamic movement did not participate. This indicates that the Jordanian state supported the establishment of this initiative, which was born out of intra-movement discussions, when the protest demonstrations led by the Islamic movement spread all over Jordan. However, Gharaibeh did not accept this fact, at least for a while.

In 2009, Gharaibeh and the people who accompanied the establishment of the initiative resigned from the MB's Board of Directors, but did not resign from the MB. Therefore, when the initiative was founded, Gharaibeh and his friends were still MB members, and Gharaibeh told Al Jazeera at the time the initiative was founded that "we will remain loyal soldiers in the ranks of the movement" (Ghabbon 2014). Gharaibeh answered the same question similarly posed by the authors when he was still the leader of the initiative and also a member of the MB.

We did not form the Zamzam to leave MB. Zamzam is not a political movement. The MB already has a political wing. Zamzam is an organization that was formed to deal with issues that MB does not pay enough attention to and care about. Social issues such as women's rights, civil society and dialogue activities are not given sufficient consideration by the MB. Zamzam was established to fill this void. (Gharaibeh 2014, Interview)

Despite this statement and their unwillingness to leave the MB, Nabil Kofahi, Jamil Dheisat, and especially Gharaibeh, were expelled from the movement in 2014 as a result of the MB's intra-movement disciplinary investigation (Ghabbon 2014).

Despite all his statements to the contrary, Rahil Gharaibeh, the MB's former deputy general auditor and part of the "Doves" group, was quick to transform the movement into a political movement and formed the NCP in 2015. It can be said that after the party was founded, its members established working relations with the Jordanian state. In this context, Gharaibeh, the founding leader of the initiative and the party, was appointed as the chairman of the National Human Rights Center in July 2019 (Ammon News 2019). The impact of this rapprochement was evident also when the four independent candidates were convinced by the regime for joining the NCP in the 2016 elections, where the party only secured one seat (Al Dahni 2016). The 2020 election results were a complete disappointment for the NCP, as the party, despite running with 17 candidates, did not win any seats in the

parliament. However, they still maintain a pro-regime position in their political position (Ghabbon 2020).

### 3.3. Muslim Brotherhood Association

Following the departure of prominent leaders with the formation of Zamzam, the MB experience another split. A former MB leader Abdul Majeed Thuneibat was expelled on allegations that he harmed the movement, and later, with the lawsuit he filed, he had the MB, which has been in existence for more than 70 years in the country, closed down.

Abdul Majeed Thuneibat had moved away from the movement—at least intellectually—due to the controversy that arose after the 2007 elections, similar to Garaibeh. As a result of his departure from the MB, Thuneibat was appointed by the King as a member of the Jordanian Senate (Ayan Assembly) in 2007, and thus honored/rewarded by the regime. He held this post until 2012. Although the MB objected to Thuneibat's presence in the Senate and demanded his resignation, Thuneibat refused to resign and insisted on staying in the Senate. Moreover, during this period the MB's relations with the regime had become tense as Jordanian authorities took strict security measures against the movement. Ultimately, Thuneibat resigned from the Senate. However, King Abdullah II rewarded Thuneibat again by appointing him as a member of the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission. Thuneibat accepted this task without consulting the MB, of which he was a member and, furthermore, one of its leaders.

Zamzam Initiative and MBA are generally interpreted as two independent splits from the MB. Despite the denials of organic relationship between the Zamzam Initiative and Thuneibat, Thuneibat strongly supported Gharaibeh and Initiative during its formation. Moreover, Thuneibat had called for reform in the MB in 2009 and 2010, just as the founders of Zamzam did. His reform ideas were not very different from the content of Gharaibeh's criticisms of the MB, focusing on prioritizing social issues, Jordanianization of the movement, and reviewing the relationship with both Hamas and the Jordanian state (Al Najjar 2008). Therefore, although at a first glance, the cases of Zamzam and MBA may seem to be two different conflicts, in fact they are both based on the debates that started within the MB after the 2007 elections, and the leaders of both organizations have made almost the same demands, particularly regarding the calls for the MB to acquire a national character.

The partnership between the two groups and their leaders was not limited to being on the same side in the discussions that emerged after 2007 within the movement. After Gharaibeh, Dheisat and Kofahi were expelled from the Brotherhood in 2014 for launching the Zamzam Initiative, Thuneibat attended a conference held in Irbid and criticized the MB for prosecuting the Zamzam founders and condemned the decision to dismiss them. One year later, Thuneibat requested from the Jordanian state authorities the appointment of a trustee to administer the MB (Al Jazeera 2015a); something led to his expelling from the MB along with a number of executives from the Doves group (Al Najjar 2010b; Islamists Movements 2016). In the same year, Thuneibat founded the MBA on the grounds that the Jordanian MB is an extension of the Egyptian MB and launched a legal war against the MB in Jordan. The Jordanian state authorities who evaluated Thuneibat's claims declared the MB as an illegal organization and transferred the headquarters, properties and assets of the movement to Thuneibat (Mashagba 2015), but also added that the MB could appeal the decision in courts (Al Jazeera 2016). The legal process initiated by the MB with the claim that the legality of the movement was based on the regulations dating from the 1940s and 1950s was concluded in July 2020, and the Jordanian top court found the defense of the MB insufficient and decided to dismantle the Brotherhood (Taha 2020).

### 3.4. Partnership and Rescue Initiative

After the last crisis led by Thuneibat within the MB, some leaders of the Doves group, who believed that the movement was going through a real and shocking crisis, launched an initiative called "Partnership and Rescue" in order to end the crisis. Among the most prominent names of the initiative were Salem Falahat, a former MB chairman, and Ishaq



Al-Farhan, a former Secretary General of the IAF, as well as Abdul Latif Araibat, Abdul Hamid Al-Qudah and Hamza Mansour. Launched in September 2015, the initiative argued that the crisis should be resolved through integrative and internal methods, as opposed to what Thuneibat has carried out, thus it invited the MB to refrain from speculative media discussions and to engage in dialogue (Al Hajj 2015). However, the Initiative's call has had significant repercussions within the movement and following the IAF's ignoring the calls for reform and dialogue, more than 400 people resigned from the party at the end of 2015 although they remained members of the MB (Al Jazeera 2015b). However, after the IAF's decision to participate in the 2016 elections, the initiative started the process of forming a party under Salem Falahat's leadership, and in 2017 the PRP was officially established.

Despite the presence of the IAF as the MB's political wing, the Brotherhood seems to have followed a different approach towards the founding staff of the PRP. Although the MB called on its members not to join the PRP, it did not initiate an intra-movement disciplinary investigation against the founders of the party and did not expel them from the movement (Falahat 2021, Interview). It is understandable that the MB's stance on PRP has been rather lenient, while being tough on the NCP and the MBA. Because the organizations founded by Ghariabeh and Thuneibat were interpreted as an operation by the Jordanian state to weaken the MB movement, whereas the PRP stood out as a party established without such support. It is for this reason that the MB welcomed the invitation of the Partnership and Rescue Initiative (Yousef 2016). Similar to the MB, the Partnership and Rescue Initiative also pursued a balanced approach, while criticizing the MB, the PRP was careful to stay away from any position that would strengthen the hand of the Jordanian state against the MB and to remain in opposition (Falahat 2021, Interview).

It is noteworthy that the PRP's founding charter defines the party as democratic and national, which clearly differs from the IAF. The charter states that the party is focused on solving the problems of the society, is action-oriented and will pursue these goals through civil and democratic means. In addition, the party ascribes to the principle of separation of powers. Accordingly, the party argues that the legislature, executive and judiciary should have equal powers and one should never be stronger than the other. Addressing the Palestinian issue, the charter also states that if there is to be a political union between Palestine and Jordan, it can only happen as a result of the free will of the two peoples (PRP Official Website n.d.). Additionally, the party charter does not contain any references to political Islam. Moreover, the party's emphasis on national identity is symbolized by the three colors that make up the party's emblem which is inspired by the colors of the Jordanian flag (Abu Rumman and Bondokji 2018, p. 100).

The diversity among the founding members suggests that the PRP was not established to divide the IAF, as the PRP appeals to much larger portion of the population than the IAF and it aims to fill a vacuum that the IAF has not been able to for a long time (Falahat 2021, Interview). In this sense, the PRP is open to establishing contacts with all political organizations that will act in the interests of Jordan. Undoubtedly, it will not be surprising that the PRP's presence in the Jordanian political scene with a new voice and vision will have some consequences both for the opposition, especially the IAF in Jordan, and for the regime. These will be discussed in the two empirical sections below, yet before this a discussion will be made on the relevance of the PRP's assuming the main opposition role to the post-Islamism debate.

#### 4. A Post-Islamist Transformation of Political Opposition in Jordan?

Would it be possible to consider the transformation of political opposition in Jordan as a shift away from political Islamism in favor of a post-Islamist position? As we will discuss right below, we can, yet only when we consider post-Islamism as a form of reliance to civic engagement in state-society relations and only with through taking into account certain contextual limitations.

Post-Islamism is a concept imbued with real analytical explanatory power—the scholarship, both historical and contemporary, benefitted from it a lot in explaining the trans-

formation of the Islamist political ideology and practice first in Iran and later in Turkey and other Muslim-majority countries. The concept was first used to draw attention to the so-called failure of political Islam as a project for revolutionary and state-sponsored endeavor for subsuming politics to Islam in the way to sharia-based transformation of both society and the state—Oliver Roy being the main supporter of the argument (Roy 1998). This argument evoked that the Islamist politics retreated “away from the fixation with state power and towards private expressions of religiosity” and took a form of dissident expression of political position against authoritarianism based on “individual piety” (Cavatorta and Merone 2015, p. 28). A second and most advocated use of the concept rather denied the failure of political Islam argument and suggested that Islamic activism is still alive yet took a different form of articulation. Accordingly, as Bayat (2013, p. 8) put forth, as part of post-Islamist transformation, Islamism turned into a reformist project evoking “rights instead of duties, plurality in place of a singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scriptures, and the future instead of the past”—a move “re-routing religious activism away from the state and, sometimes, from political issues altogether” for the sake of securing democratic co-existence and guarantees for religious rights and freedoms (Lauzière 2005, p. 241). It is thus a form of realization that Islam, while being compatible to democracy and modernity, does not necessarily need to have “answers to all societies’ social, political, and economic problems” and Islam’s “very survival as a religion depends upon achieving this compatibility” (Bayat 1996, pp. 45–46). Asef Bayat’s formulation of the concept was approached more welcomingly in the literature due to that it was not overlooking the possibility that Islamism can revive, thus that “ideological adaptation [of the Islamists] does not automatically translate into the dismissal of the whole ideological apparatus of Islamism” (Cavatorta and Torelli 2021, p. 5). In fact, as Cavatorta and Torelli (2021) further suggest, “the notion of post-Islamism that Roy worked with has been severely tested in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings”; the electoral success of Islamist parties following the uprisings showed, for instance in Egypt (of Muslim Brotherhood) or Tunisia (of al-Nahda) that “Islamist party politics was alive and well”, resulting in Roy’s “post-Islamism thesis becoming a target of scholarly criticism” (Cavatorta and Merone 2015, p. 28; Kaya and Mercan 2016).

Nonetheless, despite the criticisms post-Islamism still holds certain analytical explanatory power (see Lazreg 2021); mostly because it is believed that the concept can explain the tendency in the (former) Islamists of promoting a critical “dialogue between tradition and modernity, faith and freedom [and] religiosity and rights” (Mahdavi 2019, p. 23). Additionally, as seen in the public protests in the Arab Springs or in Iran’s Green Movement or Turkey’s Gezi Protests, the post-Islamism turned into an expression of “the *social* (though not necessarily political) climate and conditions” of the contemporary Muslim world in the form of a political discontent of the “ordinary people”—the idea behind this is that “post-Islamists are as diverse as conservative, (neo)liberal, and progressive forces” and their demand is not to have “a religious government”, but rather to transcend “Islamism in social, political, and intellectual domains” (Mahdavi 2019, pp. 16, 17, 26; Tabak 2017). This is the reason, indeed, Hossain (2016, p. 221) comes to be suggesting that “post-Islamism comprises aspects of passive secularism and passive Islamism within a democratic political setup and with a focus on economic development and equity, balanced with upholding human rights, women’s rights and broader economic and social justice”.

With a similar conclusion in mind, Mahdavi (2013, p. 67) suggests that post-Islamism is “a call for a grassroots and homegrown universalism from below to materialize Muslim modernities and Muslim democracies”. To Brahimi and Lazreg (2021, p. 15), this character of post-Islamism became possible due to that “it constitutes an attempt to reconcile Islam with liberal democracy, pluralism, and liberties”. Fasihi (2021, p. 2) by the same token holds that as a reconciliatory approach, post-Islamism “seeks to construct a secular democratic society whilst reserving an active role for religion with regard to questions of value, morality, and societal cohesion”.

With post-Islamism, should one then expect to see that Islamism in Jordan transforms into a call and search for a liberal democracy in the country? This would be an overstated expectation, yet particularly on the grounds of adopting a more secular political agenda, renouncement of political Islam, or seeking a civic societal compromise for co-existence in the country instead of a religious one, particularly the PRP, as a splinter from the Islamist MB, may stand out as the only alternative in the country in the making of a post-Islamist politics.

Accordingly, it is noteworthy that the PRP's founding charter defines the party as democratic and national, which clearly differs from the IAF. The charter states that the party is focused on solving the problems of the society, is action-oriented and will pursue these goals through civil and democratic means. In addition, the party ascribes to the principle of separation of powers. Accordingly, the party argues that the legislature, executive and judiciary should have equal powers and one should never be stronger than the other. Addressing the Palestinian issue, the charter also states that if there is to be a political union between Palestine and Jordan, it can only happen as a result of the free will of the two peoples (PRP Official Website n.d.). Additionally, the party charter does not contain any references to political Islam and some of its founding members are known for their criticism of political Islamism. Moreover, as a secular and civic reference, the party's emphasis on national identity is symbolized by the three colors that make up the party's emblem which is inspired by the colors of the Jordanian flag (Abu Rumman and Bondokji 2018, p. 100). Furthermore, the diversity among the founding members suggests that the PRP was not established to merely divide the IAF—the PRP intends to appeal to much larger portion of the population than the IAF and it aims to fill a vacuum that the IAF has not been able to for a long time (Falahat 2021, Interview). In this sense, the PRP is open to establishing contacts with all political organizations that will act in the interests of Jordan.

In short, the PRP defining itself as a centrist party other than political Islamist one, thus renouncing Islamism, plus its emphasis on nation as a civic category (other than a religious one) and inclusion of issues such as civil rights and freedoms in its constitution, give the party a post-Islamist appearance. As we will discuss below, this does not change the fact that other splinter parties of the MB as well can be discussed as sharing the post-Islamist mission. This would lead us to conclude that the MB's dissolution represents a transformation in Jordan from political Islamism to post-Islamism. The discussions below, regarding the consequences of the PRP's presence in the Jordanian political scene with a new voice and vision for both the opposition, especially the IAF, and the regime will help us to see the extent to which PRP could be considered as a post-Islamist movement and one can discuss about a broader shift towards post-Islamism among the MB splinter parties.

## 5. Implications of the PRP's Formation for the Opposition

The formation of the PRP had significant consequences for both the IAF and the Jordanian opposition in general. These are analyzed separately below.

### 5.1. Implications for the MB and the IAF

The PRP's formation has had three main consequences for the MB and the IAF. Firstly, the PRP represents the fourth break in the MB and with it the MB has weakened considerably, thus as of today, very few remain within the MB that have been within the organization since the 1990s. Almost all experienced politicians either moved to other organizations or are no longer politically active. As for the IAF, the general secretary Murad Adayleh and his team are relatively young and inexperienced. In the contrary, the PRP seems to be the one that has included the most influential figures among its ranks. With this advantage and the fact that some figures within the initiative who ended up not joining the party did not return to the IAF either, the PRP could be a candidate to become the most important opposition party in the country.

Secondly, the PRP is poised to steal the role of the main opposition from the IAF, and it does so by continuing the MB's traditional strategy of boycotting the elections. Traditionally,

the most important issue that the MB and its political wing IAF would stress during every election they boycotted has been the participation rate in the elections. Hemmam Said's following response to the author's question after the 2013 elections, when the movement felt the strongest due to regional developments, but had boycotted anyway for the goal of gaining more strength, shows the importance of the issue.

We boycotted the elections because the reforms we demanded did not materialize. Participation in the elections was very low. The figures (57%) given by the Jordanian regime do not fully reflect the reality. We know that especially in the capital Amman, the participation rate remains at 20%. Moreover, we think that if a fair election is held in Jordan where the overrepresentation of rural population that exists in the current election law no longer is the case, then the IAF electoral support will be around 50%. Because the MB has great potential in Jordan. The IAF boycotted the elections because it did not allow fair representation. As a result of the boycott, participation in the elections was at a very low level, which led the people to call the legitimacy of the parliament into question. (Said 2014, Interview, also see [France24 2018](#))

Chairman Said clearly establishes an important link between the turnout rate and the legitimacy of the elections and thus of the parliament. The 2013 general elections were the last time the IAF boycotted. The party decided to participate in the polls in 2016 and 2020 elections. According to official data, voter turnout was 57% in 2013, whereas it was 36% and 29%, respectively, in 2016 and 2020. The 2020 elections are important for the role change in the IAF/PRP relationship because, although the IAF entered the elections in the last two elections, the turnout was lower than in the previous elections and the party lost its historical opposition argument based on participation in the elections. On the contrary, the PRP emerges as the only party to boycott the elections. The fact that the turnout remained at 29 percent in the boycotted elections provides a great opportunity for the PRP to oppose the regime. Salem Falahat, the founder of the PRP answered the author's question about the meaning of boycotting elections for the party as follows:

Yes, we, as the PRP, boycotted this election and called on the public to boycott them. However, the 2020 elections are unique in many ways, especially due to the pandemic conditions. Therefore, I cannot say that the participation rate was 29% just because we boycotted and called for a boycott. However, I can safely say this: Our call to boycott the elections coincided with the low turnout in the elections. Regardless of the impact of the PRP's boycott decision on the voter turnout, the result proves that our party is acting according to the expectations of the Jordanian people. It is the result of our accurate understanding of the decreasing trust in the parliament and the people's despair of the parliament in its current state. All political parties and 29% of the public are together on one side, whereas the PRP and 71% of the public have come together on the other. (Falahat 2021, Interview)

Falahat's last sentence actually reveals the potential of the PRP as the main opposition.

The third outcome of the PRP for the MB and IAF concerns the discussions about the MB's inability of Jordanization, which is defined as the "national problem". Accordingly, the movement's relationship with HAMAS and its perspective on the Palestinian issue are at the forefront of the issues that the MB has been criticized for a long time in Jordan. The fact that a Palestinian-born Jordanian, Hemmam Said, was the leader of the movement for the first time in 2008 further increased these discussions. In addition, the fact that Zaki Bani Rashid, who is known for his strongest pro-Hamas identity in the MB, is the deputy general overseer of the MB and then the IAF after 2010 can be interpreted as developments that increase the Palestinian control in the movement. As a result, the Palestinian issue came to the fore in recent times in the MB's relations with the regime. For this reason, it would not be wrong to interpret that almost all the breaks with the movement, especially Zamzam and the MB Association, are based on the movement's perspective on Palestine.

There is no content related to Palestine in the statutes or discourses of these breakaway organizations from the MB.

Salem Falahat and his friends, who founded the PRP, are of Jordanian descent. Unlike other organizations, the PRP emphasizes the importance of the Palestinian question, but differs from the MB and the IAF in its view that the problem should be resolved with the free will of the people of the two countries. Thus, the PRP does not go along the official position of Jordanian state (while Zamzam and the Association do), but neither does it agree with the MB.

### *5.2. The Implications for the Broader Jordanian Opposition*

The formation of the PRP has several consequences for the broader opposition in Jordan. First, the MB has not been able to convince large sections of Jordanian society that the movement is Jordanian all along. A significant part of the society, especially those of Jordanian origin, has the dominant perception that the movement does not prioritize the country's own problems. In addition, the fact that the symbols used on the streets of Jordan and in the offices of the movement display the Jordanian MB's relationship with the international organization strengthens the aforementioned perception. Since the PRP does not have any international connections, it becomes possible to obtain the support of those who sympathize with the MB but approach it with caution.

Secondly, although some segments of society are concerned about the MB's inability to become Jordanian, another does not trust the movement's oppositional stance. Historically, the opposition parties in Jordan and their supporters saw the Brotherhood as a movement that could reach an agreement with the state on pragmatic concerns and be made part of the government by the regime. It should be noted that this view is based on the fact that MB has cooperated with the regime, especially in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (Abu Olbeh 2014, Interview). Moreover, the fact that the IAF participated in the 2016 and 2020 elections has increased the concerns of the Jordanian opposition about this historical practice (choosing to act within the system when there are many anti-system struggle methods). Here, we can say that the PRP did not cooperate with the regime in the last 5 years, at least from the day it was founded; to the contrary, it faced obstacles due to this. Even though this stance apparently harms the PRP in the short term, it is promising for those critical of the regime who want to see a real opposition movement that does not cooperate with the state.

Third, the historically assumed role of the IAF as the main opposition has been weakened by the dissolution of the MB. Accordingly, the MB, which is considered to be Jordan's most important opposition organization for the last 30 years, is in conflict with the regime, even though it is participating in elections and parliament with its political wing, the IAF. The MB officials are fighting for their survival in court corridors and public squares due to the closure cases initiated against the movement in 2015. The movement, which prefers to stay within the system while struggling for survival, does not have the option of giving up control in conflict with the regime. This weakens the opposition identity that the IAF has historically assumed. By forming the PRP, Salem Falahat actually aims not to become the natural heir of the conflict between the state and the MB. This strategy gives the PRP the freedom to criticize the regime as it wishes and to appeal to large masses, as it does not bear the political and legal burdens of the MB.

Although the three issues discussed above seem to be indirectly related to the MB, they actually show the handicaps and disadvantages of the Jordanian opposition in general. In order to overcome the constriction that the opposition has found itself in, the founders of the PRP have not defined the party as an alternative or hostile to the MB when it was first established, moreover, its practices and rhetoric signaled their intention to come together with other opposition groups. Thus, the PRP did not make any accusatory or degrading statements about the MB, which has been quiescent under pressure of the regime (Joneidi 2016). Moreover, the PRP displays an attitude that embraces all opposition in Jordanian politics. The following statement of Ayman Sandokah, one of the leaders of PRP explains their view on how the opposition should act:



We define political activism in Jordan as a “national liberation” struggle. At this point, all opposition parties in Jordan, including the IAF, should not consider the political struggle as a long-term competitive arena by competing with each other for power, on the contrary, they should act together. We think they should support each other. (Sandokah 2021, Interview; also see Alirsan 2016)

The fact that the PRP sides with all opposition reform movements in Jordan regardless of their ideological orientation or party affiliation under the motto of “national liberation” and calls for all to work together, and does not exclude the IAF, clearly reveals its will to strengthen the opposition in general (Sandokah 2021, Interview).

Another important development that shows the intention of the PRP to be a consolidator is the election of Mohammed Hammouri as its first chairman, despite the fact that Salem Falahat, one of the important leaders of the MB, founded the party. It should be said that Hammouri, who served as the Minister of Justice, is a highly respected and popular name in the country. This reputation of Hammouri, who stands out with his patriotic and nationalist side, is due to his strong statement on the separation of powers and checks and balances principle and that all powers should not be concentrated in the king alone (Dmour 2011). Hammouri, who played an important role in the party’s formation and the preparation of its charter, has publications that object to the MB’s views on Islamic thought, even though he is in agreement with the MB on issues of civil society, citizenship, and national identity (Abu Rumman and Bondokji 2018, p. 99). Having a more nationalistic interpretation makes it easier for the movement to reach out to large masses.

Another development that supports the PRP in this direction is that one of the founders of the party, retired Major General Salman Maaytah from Kerak, Jordan, has assumed the chairmanship of the party central executive council. As a member of a tribe within the ruling coalition, Maaytah has recently been known for his courageous stance against the regime’s decisions. For example, before the Arap Spring, on behalf of a group of retired soldiers, Maaytah made many calls to the people to overthrow the government of Samir al Rifai (Hhabbirni 2010). In addition, Maaytah sided with al-Hirak movement that has been leading organizer of large protests in the country since 2011. There are many other powerful tribal chiefs in the leadership of the PRP. In particular, those tribal leaders who were active between 2011 and 2014 when the popular uprising was at its most intense stage joined the ranks of the PRP (Allofjo 2011).

Defining itself as an exemplary strong opposition in terms of discourse and membership, the PRP also has been actively responding to important events in the country. The first serious incident after its establishment was the new income tax law passed by the government, which the PRP condemned and criticized. Moreover, not limiting itself to verbal condemnations, the PRP made a call to the public through the social media to demonstrate in the Fourth Square, in Amman. Although the demonstrations held one after another in the country were mainly organized by trade unions, where the party was not strong, the PRP, with its stance in these demonstrations, displayed an encouraging and hopeful patriotic stance for other opposition groups.

PRP showed a similar stance with its support to the teachers’ union. The PRP participated in the protests organized by the teachers’ union demanding bonuses and raises to improve the conditions of teachers living under bad economic conditions and strongly supported the union. However, as a newly established party, the PRP’s representation and influence in the union is very low. That the PRP did not remain indifferent to a problem that did not directly involve its own members, but that affected the vast majority of teachers in the country, brought great happiness to people who wanted to deal with the real problems of the country, especially union members. The party’s vice chairman who is among its founders was arrested during the protest in support of the teachers’ union and was released shortly after (Al Jazeera 2021).

Another important national issue recently causing heated debates in the country was the 15 years gas agreement signed between Jordan and Israel in 2016. The PRP was very vocal on the issue that flared up in early January 2020 with the first shipment of gas

within the scope of the agreement and continued throughout the year. Many opposition organizations participated in the demonstrations held on Friday, 17 January 2020 with the slogan “The gas of the enemy is an occupation”. The demonstrations, which included PRP officials as well as IAF leader Murad Adayleh ([Adayleh 2021](#), Interview; [Akour 2020](#)) yielded results, and after the demonstrations, the Jordanian government adopted the bill canceling the gas agreement on 20 January 2020. ([Al Khalidi 2020](#)). However, the parliament’s decision to cancel the agreement was referred to the Jordanian Constitutional Court which has decided in May that a natural gas deal between Israel and Jordan could not be legally canceled. In the statement reminding the public about the political powers of each branch of government, especially that of the king, the Court explained that the approval or cancellation of international agreements is under the authority of the king, and so the lower house does not have the authority to cancel an agreement in force ([Joffre 2020](#)).

It is possible to say that one of the pioneers of the natural gas protests in the country, where many opposition movements were involved, is the Jordanian socialist activist Hisham al-Bustani. Although Bustani, who was prevented from making statements in public and in hotels, was looking for a place to make his statements about the process, the PRP sent him an invitation and embraced Bustani, despite their difference of opinion. The PRP vice chairman Salem Falahat’s following statement is important in this regard:

As the PRP, we contacted Hisham Al Bustani, one of the pioneers of the campaign, and suggested that they use the party headquarters without any restrictions or conditions, despite the massive government pressure on the nationwide campaign against the gas deal. Bustani, who was very pleased with this offer, expressed his gratitude to the PRP. ([Falahat 2021](#), Interview—see [Albosala 2021](#) for Al Bustani’s relevant statement made in the PRP’s headquarters)

The fact that the PRP hosted these demonstrations, fully embraced the campaign despite the presence of many left-leaning individuals in the campaign, and sided with all of the Jordanian opposition based on a national orientation, avoiding the traditional alliances of the MB, is a clear indication of the party’s aspiration to become the main opposition movement as a unifying force of opposition. Confirming this stance, Salem Falahat told us in our interview that the party offered to use the party headquarters for the demonstrators without any restrictions or conditions, despite the massive government pressure on the campaign ([Falahat 2021](#), Interview).

Another initiative of the PRP in order to make its presence felt by everyone who pays the price for opposing the regime is the party visits to “prisoners of thought” arrested for expressing dissenting views on social media. The PRP did not limit their visits to those individuals whose ideological stance is close to the party. For example, the PRP officials visited the famous Jordanian dissident Ahmed Oweidi Al-Abadi, despite the great difference of opinion between him and the party. The PRP also participated in the action tent set up in front of the Jordanian intelligence center in Amman to protest the arrest of Oweidi without any legal charges. Likewise, the party made a statement on the issue of MP Osama Al Ajarmeh, who was arrested for speaking against the king, and blamed the parliament and the government for the rise in tension. The PRP was the only party that took a critical stance on this issue ([Al Baladnews 2021](#)).

Therefore, what would all these initiations the PRP run as part of its oppositional agenda mean for the MB, particularly with regard to post-Islamism? As a secular position, the PRP prioritizing the ‘national problem’, while distancing the PRP from the Islamist project, further crystalizes the MB’s Islamist stance on issues related to Jordanization—the MB has even become further crippled in convincing the populace regarding the movement’s Jordanianness. The PRP’s sheer emphasis on human rights and civic concerns including women rights and also its vocal calls for the separation of powers and the checks and balances as a patriotic stance further contribute to the party’s distancing itself from the Islamist legacy of the MB. However, it should also be highlighted that other splinters of the MB also, to a certain degree, carry the characteristics of post-Islamism—they all leave

the political Islamist mission, define themselves as centrist, rhetorically endorse to women rights and have no unease in cooperating with the pro-Western regime of the country.

## 6. The Implications of the PRP for the Jordanian Regime

The coup d'état in Egypt against Muhammad Morsi marked the beginning of a devastating turn of events for the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood as well. Since then, the regime has intensified its pressures against the group. The support provided to the splinter groups (the Zamzam and the Association) was part of the regime's broader strategy of further weakening the movement. Another strategy of the regime in this vein is to keep the Jordanian–Palestinian debate alive in the movement and in this regard encourage the departure of the Jordanian Doves group members from the MB. Thus, the regime was able to move against the MB via those figures that had started to distance themselves from the MB ideology based on their ethnic identity.

In this environment, PR (Partnership and Rescue) was established as an initiative to thwart the state-backed operations against the MB and prevent disintegration. Upon the failure of the Initiative—as mentioned in the previous section, although the initiative was welcomed by the MB, it caused discontent within the IAF—Salem Al Falahat started the process to register the initiative as a new political party. The party was founded on the principle of national identity in parallel with the efforts of the regime in this direction. However, as stated before, this was not carried out against Jordanians of Palestinian origin on the basis of the regime's expectations or to weaken the MB, but to construct a common ground for a more inclusive opposition. It should be noted that the potential of the PRP regarding this inclusivity was not taken seriously by the regime at first, as the following statement by the founding leader Salem Falahat suggests:

I can say that the regime did not cause major problems during the formation process of the PRP. This is probably because the regime had different expectations from the PRP. We understand this from the regime's approach towards PRP. The regime officials who were lenient at the beginning, started to act more harshly towards the party as time passed. (Falahat 2021, Interview)

What misled the Jordanian regime was probably how the PRP defined itself despite the presence of East Banker Jordanians. The PRP proclaimed itself to be a centrist party even at its founding and did not protect the political Islamist discourse and legacy of the MB. Almost all centrist parties in Jordan have historically existed as pro-regime, whereas opposition parties have an ideological identity—for example, the IAF's identity was based on political Islam, the JCP's was on Communism and ASBP and HASHD's were on socialism. Despite being a centrist party, the fact that the PRP is against the regime is a very new experience for Jordan.

Another aspect that distinguishes the PRP from other centrist parties and shows that it can be a real opposition is the party's perspective on the Palestinian issue. Apart from the IAF and some left-wing parties, there are not any other organizations that defend the Palestinian cause. In particular, the ICP, which defines itself as centrist, the NCP and the Association, which were established by separating from the MB, do not have a policy on Palestine. In fact, this is not surprising because both organizations have been formed based on the criticism of the MB's relationship with Hamas and on the movement's inability to become Jordanian. However, although the PRP has a majority of Jordanian descents, it has never cited Palestine and Hamas as a reason for leaving the MB. On the contrary, the PRP's charter includes Palestine issue. It brings a new perspective to the Jordan–Palestinian relations with the motto of “a solution based on the consent of the people of the two countries”, unlike the ICP, NCP and the Association that support Jordan's foreign policy favoring Israel. This perspective disturbs the regime because the PRP's approach does not ignore the Palestinian presence in the country, as the regime does, as well as the decisiveness of the Palestinian–Israeli relations in Jordan–Palestine relations.

Another indicator of the importance of the Palestine question for the PRP is that the second deputy chairman of the party is a Palestinian descent. At the 2017 General

Congress, although the founding leader Falahat was elected First Deputy Chairman, the Palestinian academic Ida Mutlaq became the Second Deputy Chairman. This preference clearly demonstrates the importance that the PRP attaches to “Palestinians” ([Ammon News 2018](#)). Moreover, the gender of Mutlaq acquires another important distinction of the PRP from the ICP, NCP and Association. In Jordan, women are not able to become senior executives in the IAF and in any of the parties founded by leaving the MB. Although Zamzam founder and NCP leader Gharaibeh complained about the MB not paying enough attention to women’s rights and representation during our interview ([Gharaibeh 2014](#), Interview) there are no women in the leadership of NCP and Zamzam. Therefore, the PRP’s preference of a woman deputy chairman also makes the party appealing to female voters. This contributes to the potential of the party to empower and gain support of the broader population, especially through the representation of women. This, in turn, has the potential to contribute to the strength of the PRP vis à vis the regime in terms of appealing to female voters in an election that the PRP decides to participate.

Another feature that makes the PRP advantageous is that the movement cannot be accused of “not being Jordanian enough” because most of the founders of the PRP are Jordanians of East Bank origin. Some are influential figures of Jordanian political history for example the retired soldier Salman Maaytah. He comes from the Maaytah tribe, one of the major tribes of the Kerak region, and the tribe has historically been pro-regime and in the ruling coalition, and many members of the tribe have occupied important positions in Jordan. For example, Samih Maaytah, the former Minister of Information has chaired the Jordan Press Foundation, which publishes daily newspapers *Al Rai* (in Arabic) and *The Jordan Times* (in English). Another important name from the Maaytah tribe, Musa Maaytah, has assumed the position of the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs ([Maaytah n.d.](#)).

In order to strengthen its centrist position and inclusivism, the PRP also establishes direct contact with other opposition parties that are not ideologically close to it, and this approach is well received by other parties and individuals opposing the regime and paves the way for joint struggle against it. The following words of Abla Abu Olbeh, the leader of the Jordanian Democratic People’s Party (Hashd), a socialist party founded in 1989 that defends the rights and emancipation of Palestine, indicate well what the PRP’s inclusivism means:

In 2012, everyone demanding reforms from the regime was on the streets. All groups historically opposed to the regime but with different ideologies were on the ground. Some Jordanians of Jordanian descent also took to the streets. During these demonstrations, the regime was very harsh, especially towards leftists whose social base was not as broad as the MB. There were many arrests. We could not get enough support from the IAF in the face of these treatments. ([Abu Olbeh 2014](#), Interview; also see [Al Ghad 2021](#))

Today, the PRP is making a move that the IAF did not in 2012 and tries to embrace all opposition.

Two practical issues are very important in understanding the PRP’s relations with the regime: The first of these is participation in the elections or rather the settling of accounts with the regime by boycotting them. The second is the struggle between the party and the regime during some crises that have arisen in the country following the establishment of the PRP.

As explained previously, the opposition in Jordan has constructed a relationship between either boycotting or participation in the elections and political legitimacy. Moreover, the regime is also making a similar connection. For example, right after the 2010 elections, state officials announced that the turnout was 53%, and the head of the Senate, Taher Masri, declared that the people did not vote for those who focused on their personal interests rather than parliamentary work. In other instances, however, the regime saw a low turnout as an advantage. For instance, although the voter turnout rates in Jordan are monitored by regime institutions and determined by the Independent Election Commission thus the data

on the election results are open to manipulation, the regime was confident in revealing that the turnout in the last two elections was the lowest in history.

Nevertheless, PRP has been insistent in defining boycotts and/or low voter turnout as a manifestation of regime legitimacy. Salem Falahat's following statement about the low voter turnout in the last two elections sheds light on the problem.

Our decision not to run is the result of us keeping the pulse of the people very closely. Although the low turnout<sup>12</sup> in the elections may not be the result of our call, it actually shows that we have correctly interpreted the people's demands. The public showed its distrust of the parliament by staying home during the elections. (Falahat 2021, Interview)

At this point, the revival of legitimacy discussions with the help of the PRP through their boycott of elections disturbs the regime and brings with it the hardening of the regime's attitude towards the PRP.

Another reason that led the regime to take harsh measures against the PRP is the party's serious and determined position in the events of great importance for the country since its foundation and especially after 2018. It should be noted that these events not only harden the regime's stance, but also bring prestige and fame to the PRP. For example, in one of these events, the PRP, which seriously supported the new income tax protests, found the opportunity to embrace the Jordanian opposition. After decisive protests, King Abdullah II took a step that could be interpreted as a move to calm the society; he dismissed Prime Minister Hani Al-Mulki and appointed Omar Al-Razzaz instead. The fact that one of the most important actors of the demonstrations that led to the change of the Prime Minister was the PRP, in fact, is important in terms of showing its potential (Sandokah 2021, Interview; see Al Sabeel 2020).

Another incident is the PRP's support of the actions organized by the teachers' union in 2018. In the face of the events that started to grow with the support of the PRP, the Jordanian state arrested some teachers and dispersed the protestors by force. In response to the regime's bringing up a case against the teachers, the PRP became a supporter of the "Teachers' Union case" by making political statements many times during the trial. The party, which closely follows the legal process, has repeatedly condemned the government's repressive policies in this regard (Sandokah 2021, Interview). When the regime blocked the Defense Committee of the Teachers' Union from making a public statement, the PRP gave a clear message to the regime by offering the union to hold the press conference at the party headquarters. The union accepted the PRP's offer with pleasure. Various institutions of the state contacted the party and demanded that they not allow the press conference. When no results could be obtained through persuasion, the governor of Amman gave instructions to prevent this press conference. In this context, the PRP headquarters was besieged by the security forces. Declaring that the demands of the state institutions and the Amman governorate are not legal, the PRP executives declared that they are determined to host the press conference at the party headquarters (Sandokah 2021, Interview).

It should be said that PRP leadership and members, who started to take action in all important developments in the country, especially in the case of teachers' union, were put under great pressure. For example, Salem Falahat was arrested for his strong opposition during the teachers' union protests, but was released after a short time. Similarly, Ayman Sandokah was imprisoned for a few months for criticizing a friendly country on his social media account. In February 2020, Bashar Rawashida, a member of the political office of the party and former Amman Hirak member, was sent to prison for a social media post. The regime had to release Rawashida, who started a hunger strike from the first day she was imprisoned and continued for two weeks (Sawaleif 2018).

The PRP did not give up in the face of arrests and continued its struggle. The PRP also took a strong position against the gas imports from Israel, which caused great controversy in 2020. The strained relations with the regime due to the serious and determined stance of the PRP in all important events of the country resulted in the Jordanian state filing a closure case against the party in March 2021. All of the PRP activities were suspended



until the closure case is concluded. After this, the PRP officials decided to continue their struggle by forming a new organization called “Change Initiative”. In the face of this situation, the Jordanian state abandoned the party closure case, fearing that the closure would lead to more supporters, and demanded that the party continue its activities within legal frameworks (Salam 2021).

Based on the above narration, we can argue that there are two important indicators showing that the PRP may be the main opposition in recent years and that it has a greater potential than IAF.

Firstly, the PRP faced a showdown in Jordanian politics that the IAF had not met before. The IAF did not face any danger of being shut down, even when the MB was facing closure case and the movement’s assets were confiscated. However, as a result of its dissent, a legal closure case was filed by the regime against the PRP. The fact that the PRP faced such a showdown, which even the IAF did not experience, reveals the potential attributed to the party by the regime.

Second, we must say that the Jordanian regime has historically used the reward-punishment strategy successfully in its fight against the opposition. In this context, important figures of the movement were arrested in different periods when the MB was effective or came into conflict with the regime. Examples of this are the arrests of the IAF general secretaries and MB deputy chairmen, Ali Abu Sukkar (for his visit to Abu Musab Al Zarkawi in 2006) (Abu Sukkar 2014, Interview) and Zaki Bani Rashid (for his criticism of the UAE, which designated the MB a terrorist organization in 2015) (Middle East Eye 2015). Similarly, it is possible to say that the Jordanian regime rewarded important figures when they gave up their opposition. A former MB leader Bessam Amush who had left the Brotherhood after the debates in 1997 and had become one of the founders of the ICP, was appointed the Minister of Administrative Development. Thuneibat, who moved away from the movement due to the discussions within the MB in 2007, was appointed to the Senate in a short time, and then to the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission by the King in 2012. By 2015, Thuneibat helped the regime in its fight against the MB by initiating the legal process that led to the closure of the MB. Similarly, Zamzam leader Rahil Gharaibeh was rewarded by first importing deputies from independents to his party in 2015, and then being appointed as the head of the “national human rights center” by royal appointment.

The regime tried to pursue the reward-punishment strategy on the PRP as well by offering various jobs to some individuals from the organization. However, PRP members did not respond positively to the proposals (Anonymous Interviewee 2021, Interview). When the reward method did not yield results, the regime implemented the punishment. In this sense, Salem Falahat, among the leaders who left the MB, has the distinction of being the only person who was imprisoned for a short time. Moreover, many individuals in the party, including Ayman Sandokah, were arrested at various times and sent to prison. Whereas there have not been any arrests of senior MB or IAF executives in the last 5 years in Jordan. The fact that the regime does not implement policies of arrest and repression against the IAF, but takes repressive measures against the PRP clearly reveals the potential of the party.

As a final example on this, as an initiative targeting also the PRP, a draft law on political parties and elections was discussed recently in the Parliament. Accordingly, Samir Rifai, former prime minister, was appointed by King Abdullah II as head of Royal Committee to Modernise the Political System, in June 2021. A total of 400 important names from different ideological wings including 5 MB former members such as Hamza Mansour, Former Secretary General of IAF and Dima Tahboub former deputy took part in this committee (Ammon News 2021). The PRP did not accept this committee and the vice-president of the party, Salem Falahat, criticized this draft and stated via personal Facebook account that the initiation was not *realistic* (Facebook Post 2021). The PRP, following this, brought together six opposition parties in September and published a statement that this commission was not *serious* and suitable for real change (PRP Official Website 2021). Nonetheless, the commission presented its proposals to the king in October (Prime Ministry 2021c). The

commission's proposal was suggesting strengthening the political parties, but at the same time it was transferring all powers of the government thus the Parliament, including the judiciary and security, to the King. The proposal was indeed restricting the parliament from *parliamentary* activities. There have been many criticisms on the Internet about the members of the IAF who remained silent in the face of this proposal (Facebook Post 2022). Would this potential be further advanced by the partial post-Islamist stances of the PRP? Indeed, considering that, as Falahat stated in our interview, the regime was welcoming towards centrism of the splinter groups of the MB—the same was the case for their leaving the political Islamist mission and legacy of the MB. In this sense, the regime was not in a discomfort from the post-Islamist shifts in the opposition, because post-Islamism meant the increase in centrism in the country which has historically mean having a cooperative attitude towards the regime for the political parties. However, PRP, while being centrist, positions itself as an opposition, and this is a new experience for the Jordanian regime—as a centrist yet at the same time an opposition movement, PRP faces hardships within this scope. The regime while not problematizing the post-Islamist tendencies, is worried about having a centrist opposition—the PRP's emphasis on republican values further increases the concerns the regime possess.

## 7. Conclusions

While trying to keep the opposition in the country under control, the regime has been in a constant conflict with the MB, which has been the most organized opposition with the broadest social base since the 1990s. In the process leading to the division and subsequent closure of the MB, the regime has pursued divide and control strategy vis-a-vis the opposition. During this time, as a result of the fact that many MB members were splitting from the movement, engaging with the regime and subsequently were being rewarded by the regime, opposition had lost its voice and credibility. The PRP, another MB-splinter group, seems to have emerged as an alternative to fill this political gap. Some of our findings support the premise that the PRP may become the main opposition force in Jordanian politics.

Although its founder was one of the most influential figures of the MB, with the emergence of the PRP, an opposition party with a nationalist identity, dominated by East Bankers was formed for the first time. The PRP, which includes nationalists, retired soldiers and Hirak members, has also come to the fore as the strongest opposition party with contributions of strong critical Islamist voices in a political environment where the IAF is struggling to survive, and thus has toned down its criticism of the government.

During very important events for the country such as income tax, teachers' union, gas imports from Israel, the PRP embraced political groups that were not ideologically close to the party, on one hand, and it started to emerge as the strongest political party against the regime on the other due to its inclusivity. This dimension of the PRP has aroused great respect and support from a significant part of the society, including the IAF, and other opposition parties in Jordan.

In addition to confronting the regime about the aforementioned issues, the PRP also gained the distinction of being the only political party to boycott the 2020 elections. The strategy historically pursued by the MB in rejection of the legitimacy of the elections and the parliament, especially during periods of increased tension with the regime, has been adopted by the PRP. The existence of a party boycotting the elections when the IAF, whose demands have not been met and whose parent movement, the Brotherhood, has been shut down by the government, had chosen to participate in the elections, is undoubtedly a situation that disturbs the regime.

Since the PRP has not participated in the elections, an instrument measuring the strength of the social base and public support of a party, we need to be prudent in claiming that "PRP is the new main opposition movement of Jordan". However, it is possible to state that in terms of its relations with the regime, as well as other opposition groups, the PRP now carries many of the characteristics that had enabled the MB and IAF to become the

main opposition in the country. Moreover, PRP has many advantages that the MB has not had historically. With the combination of these features, which have been widely explained above, the PRP seems to be ready for becoming the largest opposition group in the country.

However, one still needs to explain how far the PRP stands beyond the MB and IAF's Islamist legacy. In other words, what awaits us regarding the political position of this new potential main opposition party in Jordan, is it an adequately a post-Islamist one?

To begin with, the PRP defining itself as a centrist party other than political Islamist one, its renouncing of political Islamism and its emphasis on nation as a civic category other than a religious one (in the case of ummah), plus its inclusion of issues such as civil rights and freedoms in its constitution, lead us to argue that PRP is a post-Islamist party. However, it should be repeated that many of these listed concerns and positions have been shared by other splinter parties of the MB. This is the juncture we can discuss about a broader shift in Jordan from political Islamism to post-Islamism during the MB's dissolution.

However, particularly regarding the PRP, there are some issues making this judgement a short-cut conclusion, thus certain contextual factors constrain us to straightforwardly call PRP a post-Islamist party. Accordingly, the PRP acts as an opposition to a regime with good relations with the West; therefore, the party does not have an outlook similar to the other post-Islamist parties such as the AKP of Turkey (particularly in earlier period of its rule) that aspire to impose a westernization process in the country. Furthermore, we see that PRP, together with IAF, joins some protests criticizing the regime's absolute alignment with the West. Secondly, unlike some other cases, Jordan has a partial sharia regime and the PRP has no intention to change this—plus, the political Islamists (the MB and the AIF) in the country had never had an intention to overthrow the Hashemite rule and replace it with an *Islamic* state; therefore, the expected transformation within post-Islamism in terms of giving up the intention to form a religious-state never existed in Jordan. Thirdly, the existing scholarly discussions as well ignored the Jordanian case in discussing post-Islamism (see [Bayat 2013](#)). This is probably because the Islamists in Jordan still secure a relatively strong public support, something causing [Roy \(1998\)](#)'s 'political Islamism's failure' argument to dull further, thus preventing discussions on post-Islamic transformation. In addition, the Jordanian MB maintained a reconciliatory and reformist political opposition thus had never intended to overthrow the regime, against the revolutionary discourses, particularly of the leftist opposition blocks.

Nonetheless, despite these, the separation of groups from the political Islamist front and the formation of new parties prepares a ground for discussing the possible manifestations of post-Islamism in the country. The splinter parties positioning themselves as centrist further necessitates the possible post-Islamist repositioning. PRPs being established by an influential MB member, yet intentionally denouncing political Islamism while adhering to a project for expanding the domain of cooperation among the diverse components of the Jordanian society in favor of a sustainable civic co-existence in the country, makes us question how far the PRP can go in terms of post-Islamist direction.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion on the Islamic movements and their oppositionary involvements in Jordan, see Wiktorowicz (1999, 2000).
- <sup>2</sup> With the changes to the electoral laws in 1993, one-man-one-vote system replaced the one-person-multiple-votes system. This change prevented the practice of casting the first vote based on tribal identity and the others based on ideological identities, thus reducing the representation power of the political parties in the country. In addition, in the same law, the representation/population ratio of provinces such as Amman and Zerka, where those of Palestinian descent are concentrated, was decreased, while the representation/population ratio of provinces such as Tafilah-Karak and Maan, where pro-regime tribes primarily live, was increased (Sahliyah 2005, p. 118; Lust-Okar 2007, p. 105).
- <sup>3</sup> For the amendments restricting the criticism of the regime, see Lucas (2003).
- <sup>4</sup> For more comprehensive information, see Satloff (1995).
- <sup>5</sup> For a detailed analysis of the 2003 elections, see Ryan and Schwedler (2004).
- <sup>6</sup> The political party winning the most seats in the 1997 elections that the IAF along with 10 other political parties boycotted was pro-regime. The party's chairman declared at every opportunity that it was at the service of the Jordanian regime and King Abdullah II. For detailed information, see Irbid Chamber of Irbid Chamber of Commerce (2021) and Petra (2019).
- <sup>7</sup> There is not any clear information on the 2010 election results in either English or Arabic sources, including the official institutions of the state, and who the independent opposition candidates represent are not known (Al Jazeera 2010).
- <sup>8</sup> Jordanian Communist Party demanded democratic elections from the beginning of the protests and defended the idea that the political party quota should be 100% (Madiye 2014, Interview).
- <sup>9</sup> Hashd Party argued that the quota allocated to political parties should be 50% until the 2013 elections and rejected proposals for a lower rate (Abu Olbeh 2014, Interview).
- <sup>10</sup> Akram Homsy states that although they differ with the IAF on regional policies, they agree on some of the domestic issues, especially on amendments in the election law (Homsy 2014, Interview).
- <sup>11</sup> Since the ICP participated in the 2003 and 2007 elections not with an official list of candidates, but either through a number of independent candidates who would later join the party, i.e., a "secret list" or through alliances with other parties, the names of the deputies who entered the parliament for the party could not be determined. When the party announced its number of seats after the elections, it did not disclose which of the candidates who won were from its own organization.
- <sup>12</sup> The response of the IAF spokesperson Thabet Assaf about the elections in 2020 confirms Falahat: "First of all, I can say that the results announced in 2020 do not fully reflect reality, because the government openly interfered in the elections. However, we acknowledge that turnout was lower than the previous elections. Although, it can be said that the COVID-19 pandemic is an important factor in this, on the other hand, the low level of trust of the people towards the elections and the parliament also has an effect on the low turnout rate" (Assaf 2021, Interview).

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