

# THE ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF THE ELECTORAL LISTS' PLATFORMS

By:

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December, 2012

## FORWARD:

The intended elections for the Jordanian seventeenth House of Representatives scheduled for the twenty third of January 2013 is set to take place in response to evolving political awareness. Holding early parliamentary elections in Jordan represents a substantial step towards political reform. This awareness and demand for reform arises from a series of Arabian revolutions and uprisings starting in Tunisia and extending thereafter to many countries in the region, whereby political regimes in each of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen were changed.

The implications of which are still evolving in other Arab countries. Ever since, a conviction was formed in the official political mind, and is still standing, that holding early parliamentary elections in Jordan represents a substantial step toward political reform.

The present parliamentary elections are being boycotted by the largest political party in Jordan, the Islamic Action Front Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. Other parties including the leftist Popular Unity Party, and many other political movements, are in protest against the law under which the elections are being held in addition to demanding a minimum of a 50% increase in the number of seats allocated for the national electoral list. The boycotting parties demand constitutional amendments clearly fortifying the House of Representatives against dissolution, and the empowerment of the parliamentary majority to form the Government. In this position paper, the Phenix Center for Economics and Informatics Studies aims to explore the perceptions of the electoral lists (who will run for the elections) as to the nature of the economic issues undergone by Jordan, as well as the conceived solutions to overcome the economic problems.

The team of this position paper analyzed the electoral platforms of 32 out of 61 electoral lists. It is worth noting that it was not possible to obtain the electoral platforms of all electoral lists due to various reasons: many electoral lists did not issue an electoral platform but only announcing names of its candidates and some general slogans. In other cases, the team was not able to communicate with any members to obtain their electoral platforms, therefore, the team accessed 32 electoral platform and statement representing 52% of the total electoral lists<sup>(\*)</sup>.

## DIFFERENCE IN DEPTH AND VISION

Upon analyzing the obtained platforms and statements of the electoral lists, variations was noted in several areas: in handling and understanding economic issues, in the diagnostic position of the economic problems presently suffered by the Jordanian economy, and variation in ideas on how to solve these problems. This variation was obvious both in the diagnostic side, as

well as in terms of provision of solutions to impasses of the Jordanian economy. While most examined platforms and statements of the electoral lists tackled the Jordanian economic issues in general and without engaging in the details, others showed depth in addressing the economic issued; this has appeared more evident in the case of electoral lists emerging from political parties, or led by experienced political figures in political and partisan work (regardless if political figures worked in the Government or in the opposition). The electoral lists comprising of figures new to political and public service, showed weakness in addressing the economic issues.

Since the present experience is the first time in the history of Jordan where elections for some seats in the House of Representatives are to be held on the basis of electoral lists, some politicians, activists and those interested in playing a political role in the coming period utilized electoral platforms with predominantly fast

political statements and slogans lacking substance, the rest expressed forms of offering demands without policies or plans how to realize these demands. As a result, very few economic policies were presented by some of the electoral lists offering an alternative to the current policies.

## CONTENT LACKING SLOGANS

Many electoral platforms of the national lists presented propaganda slogans that included no specific positions, policies, or plans to tackle some economic issues. There were those merely demanding the carrying out of technical and economic studies for the projects of uranium, oil shale, renewable energy and Alresha gas, or those demanding the review of the privatization process. Others demanded reviewing the previous economic approach in total, and studying its impacts, as well as the adoption of a new state budget system. Some lists carried slogans such as: "Citizens' pockets are red lines" or "state's economic elements and sources of its national revenues are red lines." Demand slogans included giving priority to amending the social security, landlords and tenants, and tax laws in favor of the citizen; other slogans called for the restructuring of the Jordanian economy, building up a national social economy that considers the interests of all citizens' segments and "support the right to work", "enhancement of the economy", "review the minimum wage rate", "redrafting the social security law to suit all". Many electoral lists considered the economic issue to be on top of its agenda and promoted "no decent living without a strong economy". Other lists regarded that the change and development process shall move hand in hand with political reform aiming to achieve economic abundance, social welfare and political stability while others demanded the enhancement of the competitiveness of the Jordanian economy through adopting national and sectional competitive policies.

## MECHANISMS LACKING DEMANDS

Many electoral programs and platforms presented general demands without proposing specific perceptions or policies how to achieve these demands, such as: "caring for the transportation sector", "building up a stable social life, full of economic prosperity", "reconsidering the social security law in favor of the retired, and in support of the Social Security Corporation", "realizing social justice", "amendment of the social security law and the landlords and tenants law in favor of the middle class and the poor groups", "combating various forms of corruption", "adopting an effective and just system to share the Jordanian resources and wealth", "limiting the price increases",

"caring for the agriculture sector", "adopting a plan to develop the pastures". Electoral platforms also demanded the development of the sectors of health, education, agriculture and industry with slogans such as "encouraging the internal and external investments", "restructuring of all the independent institutions". Caring for the labors, farmers and the unemployed, achieving development and stability in all economic aspects, and strengthen the Government's role in controlling and organizing the markets.

## SPECIFIED CONTENTS

In opposition to generalizations presented by many electoral platforms and programs, some platforms presented specific economic proposals and policies, such as supporting the agricultural sector through encouraging the cooperative institutions' export capabilities, proposing a special law to organize the trade unions activities inline with the freedom of association principles, reducing the sales tax, renationalizing the privatized public companies, and providing subsidies to the jobless until they are employed. Furthermore, demands included the Government to hunt for outside labor markets to solve the unemployment issue, to direct the capital expenditures to development projects, raise the minimum wage rate, end the official protection given to the influential leaderships of the General Federation of Trade Unions, rationalize the Government spending, protect domestic industries, increase the tax on both the mining and banks sectors in order to increase the public revenues, limit public employment, develop alternative energy sources, attract foreign investments and direct the same to value added sectors, and invite foreign strategic investments in vital fields.

The above summary illustrates the different handling of the electoral platforms of the Jordanian economic issue based upon experience enjoyed by members and leaders of these lists and their vision toward the economic issues. The differences between programs and platforms of electoral lists emerged in particular from political parties formed only to engage in the elections.

\* The analyzed electoral platforms belong to the following electoral lists randomly listed:

National Union, National Current, Justice and Development, Voice of Homeland, Dignity, Justice and Freedom, Labor and Laborers, People of Determination, Labor and Professionalism, The People, Renewal, Justice, Islamic Moderation, National Reform, United Front, Democratic Renaissance, Homeland, Cooperation, National Action, Alaqsa, Nashama Alwatan (homeland solders), Strong Jordan, Change, Citizenship, Holly Jerusalem, Sons of Plowmen, Dua'a Bloc, National Accord Youth Bloc, Welfare, Determination People, Professional Sectors, Banner of Right.

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