

Public Opinion, Terrorism and the Jordanian Security Sector

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Introduction

The main characteristic of intelligence agencies is that they operate in secrecy, unlike governments these agencies do not seek popularity or public approval for their activities nor are they expected to seek such a position within public opinion. The secret nature of an intelligence agency's tasks and duties limits the ability of any study to explore public opinion perspectives on such agencies, and restricts the study to general perceptions, due to the lack of familiarity amongst the public on the actual tasks and duties of such agencies.

Accordingly this study is not a measurement of public approval of the intelligence department, similar to studies conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan measuring public opinion approval ratings of government performance, since the department neither seeks, nor is it expected to seek, public opinion approval. In addition to that, this study is not based on a single public opinion poll conducted by the Center, rather an analysis of an accumulating amount of data at the Center from several polls from the period between 2001-2007 that relate to Jordanian institutions, security, and terrorism, whereby it relies on polls conducted by the Center in March 2006, and January 2007, in addition to the World Value Survey 2001, opinion polls on terrorism in January and June 2006, and government approval rating surveys, in addition to many other surveys.

The March 2006 opinion poll was on the perspectives of a sample of Jordanian statesmen that consisted of former cabinet Ministers former Members of Parliament, and current Members of Parliament, on Institutional Relations in Jordan was conducted on a representative sample of 180 respondents. Analysis of the March 2006 opinion poll was delayed until the opportunity to conduct a poll on a national sample would arise. The national sample poll was conducted in January 2007

This study is the first of its kind in the region that aims to analyse the relations between different branches of the Jordanian state, civil and military, based on a huge data base from public opinion polls and surveys conducted in Jordan.

Background

Even prior to the Amman hotel bombings, the Jordanian security apparatus has enjoyed the highest level of trustworthiness within Jordanian public opinion. The World Value Survey in 2001¹ indicated that the Armed Forces, the Police Force, and the General Intelligence Department were the most trusted governmental institutions in Jordan. Not only were these three institutions the highest ranking² institutions but also, along with the

¹ World Value Survey 2001, Second Wave.

² It should be noted that amongst all institutions, including the non governmental institutions, the Mosque ranks Second in trustworthiness to the Armed Forces with %61 very large extent, 26.9 large extent, 7.5

government and the judiciary, they enjoyed a significant gap between them and other institutions in the country.

Table (1)
Level of trustworthiness of Institution

Institution	Very Large Trustworthiness	Large Trustworthiness	Little Trustworthiness	No Trustworthiness at All	Mean Rank
Armed Forces	63.5	28.9	6.6	1.0	2.54
Police Force	59.7	31.0	7.3	1.9	2.48
Intelligence Department	57.2	32.5	7.2	3.1	2.44
The Judiciary	51.2	36.0	9.3	3.6	2.34
The Government	52.1	31.3	12.4	4.2	2.31
The Parliament	30.3	34.8	21.2	13.7	1.81
Jordanian Press	22.8	36.5	32.0	8.7	1.73
Jordanian Television	20.5	38.0	29.5	12.0	1.66
Political Parties	11.5	14.8	28.3	45.3	0.92

The central role for maintaining Jordan as an oasis of security and stability in a troublesome region, hence the safe heaven for citizens of neighbouring Arab countries to escape difficult security conditions in their home countries, can be attributed to the role that is played by the General Intelligence Department. This central role was further imprinted in the mind set of Jordanians when the details of a foiled plot in April 2004 were made public. The thwarted plot aimed at crippling the Jordanian Intelligence through an attack on the Headquarters of the General Intelligence Department using tons of Chemicals, in addition to targeting the US embassy in Amman and the Prime Minister's office. The main objective was to destroy the Jordanian Intelligence Department due to its major role in combating terrorism in the region and foiling the attempts to undermine the security of Jordan. Accordingly, and particularly in the aftermath of the Amman hotel bombings, this central role became appreciated by Jordanian public opinion not only in the fight against terrorism, but in all aspects of political life in Jordan as will be seen below.

The Amman bombings in 2005 had a great impact in shaping Jordanian public opinion *vis a vis* terrorism in general, and towards terrorist activities that target Jordan in particular. This is evident in the opinion polls that were undertaken by the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan in 2004-2004 whereby the percentage of Jordanians that viewed Al Qaeda led by Osama Bin Laden as a legitimate resistance organisation decreased from %66.8 in 2004 to %20 in 2005, after the Amman hotel bombings. Accordingly the hotel bombing, in November 2005, had the direct impact in reshaping Jordanian public opinion with regards to terrorism and was responsible for the drop of the legitimacy of Al Qaeda by %46.8.

As far as the Qaeda faction led by Qarqawi, responsible for the Amman bombing, %92.1 saw it as a terrorist organisation and only %7.9 as a legitimate resistance organisation. As

little extent, 1.3 no trustworthiness, and 3.3 do not know. Thus overall the three security organisations in Jordan dominate three out of the four most trustworthy institutions in Jordan.

far as the bombings themselves are concerned, %99.3 of respondents viewed the bombings as a terrorist act, and a mere %0.7 as a legitimate act of resistance³.

Thus one can say that Jordanian public opinion in the aftermath of the hotel bombings had overwhelmingly condemned the bombing and a shift towards the condemnation of all acts of violence that target civilians⁴. In addition to that, and in the aftermath of the killing of Al Zargawi, the mastermind behind the Amman hotel bombings, and the act of four Jordanian members of Parliament visiting the condolences house of Al Zargawi, the majority of Jordanian public opinion saw that such an act was not justified %59.5. Public opinion, however was divided whether the action of the members of Parliament was acceptable, socially %54.5 saw it unacceptable, and %45.2 saw that their action was religiously unacceptable. Politically an overwhelming %80.8 saw that their action was not acceptable and %84.7 believed that parliament should take action against the four members of Parliament.

The public opinion's reaction towards terrorism, of which the reaction towards the four members of parliament is a manifestation of, can be understood in light of how Jordanians saw the Amman bombings. %80.3 of Jordanians saw that the attacks targeted the stability and security that Jordan enjoys in a region torn with turmoil in addition to the Jordan's economy and tourism⁵. Not only does this understanding of the motivation behind the bombing indicate what Jordanian public opinion believed to be the target of the attacks, but it also point out to what Jordanians view as their most prized asset i.e. security. Hence the hotel bombings targeted the lives and livelihood of Jordanians which in itself explains the overwhelming reactions towards the bombing and any sympathetic action that may justify such actions.

Thus the security and stability that Jordanians have enjoyed up until the hotel bombing, given the deteriorating security situation in the region particularly in Iraq, the occupied Palestinian Territories, and Lebanon, was appreciated amongst Jordanians as a cornerstone for the livelihood of Jordanians.

Institutional Relations

The Jordanian constitution states that the Council of Minister has the responsibility to run all affairs of the state, internal as well as external⁶, the Council on its part is accountable to the Jordanian Parliament whereby the Prime Minister and individual Ministers, individually as well as collectively, are accountable to the Chamber of Deputies with regards to the general policies of the state, as well as to the functions of each of the Council's Ministries⁷. The Jordanian Security Apparatus, in accordance with the respective legislations for each agency⁸, represents the arm of the executive Council of

³ Center for Strategic Studies Public Opinion Poll on *Post Amman Attacks: Jordanian Public Opinion and Terrorism*, January 2006.

⁴ In an Opinion Poll in June 2006 there was a decrease in the percentage of those who perceived the Zargawi organisation as terrorist to %77 as well as of those who viewed the hotel bombings as a terrorist act to %98.1 see, *Terrorism: The Aftermath of the Killing of Al-Zarkawi*, July 2006.

⁵⁵ Economic issues are the main top priorities for Jordanians, see Cetner for Strategic Studies opinion polls on government approval ratings surveys at: <http://www.jcss.org/SubDefault.aspx?PageId=36&PollType=1>

⁶ Article 45/1 Constitution of Jordan, 1952.

⁷ Article 51 Constitution of Jordan.

⁸ See Jordanian Armed Forces Law, 2001, the General Intelligence Law, 1964, the Public Security Law, 1965.

Ministers, under which the Jordanian state exercises its monopoly on the use of force in the country.

The centrality of national security issues for the Jordanian state and Jordanian public opinion, as illustrated earlier, has led to an imbalance within Jordanian public opinion with regards to public image of Jordanian institutional relations.

In a poll conducted by the Center in March 2006 on a sample of Senior Jordanian Statesmen, revealed that they view the post of Prime Minister as the most important institution in the Jordanian state, to be followed by the Armed Forces, the Intelligence Department, Parliament, and with a significant gap, the Public Security Directorate, and the Ministry of Interior. The significance of this poll and its results is that its sample is a knowledgeable sample of the power relations between these institutions from the practical experience that the individuals of this sample have through the posts that hold, or held in the past, as legislators or executives.

Table (2) Senior Statesmen

Rank the following institutions based on their importance in the Jordanian state...

	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	No Answer	Mean Rank	Overall Rank
Prime Minister's Office	37	21	13.6	13	6.8	1.9	6.9	2.3	1
Armed Forces	18	29	24.7	16	6.8	.6	6.9	2.7	2
Intelligence	25.9	16.7	17.3	13.6	14.8	6.2	5.6	3.3	3
Parliament	17.3	19.8	12.3	12.3	11.7	19.8	6.9	3.4	4
Public Security	1.9	4.9	14.8	18.5	18.5	34.6	6.9	4.6	5
Ministry of Interior	0.0	3.7	9.9	19.8	32.1	27.8	6.9	4.7	6

The ranking given by the Senior Jordanian Statesmen was confirmed in a national sample poll conducted in January 2007, with expected variations. The Prime Minister's office and the Armed Forces Maintained their ranks, the General Intelligence Department, however, ranked as the third most important institution with a significant gap, to be followed by the Public Security Directorate in the fourth rank, to be followed with another significant gap by Parliament and the Ministry of Interior.

Table (3) National Sample

Rank the following institutions based on their importance in the Jordanian state...⁹

	Percentage	Ranking
Prime Minister's Office	27.9	1
Armed Forces	26.1	2
Intelligence Department	19.5	3
Public Security Directorate	13.4	4
Parliament	6.8	5
Ministry of Interior	6.2	6

⁹ The data is derived form two different opinion polls whereby two different statistical approaches were used, nonetheless the rankings in both polls are comparatively compatible.

Parliament

The most noticeable result between the Senior Statesmen poll and the national sample poll rests in the Parliament's ranking that dropped from the fourth rank to the fifth¹⁰. This drop is understandable given the configuration of the Senior Statesmen sample, whereby two thirds of the sample consists of current and former parliamentarians. Thus it is quiet expected that Parliament would rank higher amongst the Senior Statesmen. Another aspect that comes into play with the low ranking of Parliament is based on the lack of public opinion satisfaction with the performance of parliament, whereby according to the Center for Strategic Studies polls only %36.9 were satisfied with Parliament performance in 2006, and this percentage has not exceeded %39 in the last 3 years¹¹.

In addition to that, and as indicated earlier in table (1), the level of trustworthiness of Parliament is extremely low in comparison with the other institutions ranked based on importance in table (3), this is very much related to the issue of the effectiveness and the impact that Parliaments has. The Jordanian Parliament has had a limited impact in affecting public opinion or the political discourse in the country, according to a Center for Strategic Studies poll in 2006, Parliament has not had an impact whatsoever on %56.8 of the Jordanians, had a negative impact on %27.9, and had a positive impact on only %8.4 of Jordanians¹². Thus not only did Parliament have no impact on the majority of Jordanian but Parliament's negative impact is three time its positive impact.

This low rating of parliament can be viewed in light of Parliament's relations with the executives and its role in holding the executives accountable. Polls have indicated that the priorities of Jordanians concentrate on poverty and unemployment on the one hand, and corruption on the other. While it is understandable that the legislators would have limited leverage with regards to the former, nonetheless, as far as the latter is concerned, Parliament has not assumed its core role in addressing the issue of corruption. Parliament according to a poll conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies on corruption in 2006, ranked as the fourth most effective institution in fighting corruption while the Anti-Corruption Department ranked first, National Media ranked second, and the Audit Bureau ranked third¹³. Interestingly, the Anti-Corruption Department is an executive administration that falls within the mandate of the Parliament, and the Audit Bureau which in itself report to Parliament at the beginning of every session or when requested¹⁴, nevertheless, these institutions ranked higher than parliament which has accountability and oversight as its core task in the constitution.

¹⁰ Even though the difference in ranking in the World Value Survey with regards to trustworthiness is of no statistical significance, yet the national sample poll on importance reveals a gap between the institutions, with the exception of the first two ranks, the Prime Minister's Office and the Armed Forces, which has a statistical significance. This should be taken into account in all references to trustworthiness rankings throughout the paper.

¹¹ Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, *Democracy in Jordan-2006*, 2006. Other unpublished research has indicated that the main reason behind the low performance ratings of Parliament amongst public opinion is parliament's inability to tackle poverty and unemployment, which is part of the executive mandate and is beyond the legislator's ability to tackle.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, *Corruption Issues in Jordan: A Public field Survey*, 2006.

¹⁴ Article 119, Constitution of Jordan, 1952

The Armed forces

As far as the consistent ranking of the Armed Forces, national armies always tend to have a high level of trustworthiness within public opinion as well as importance. In the Jordanian case, the Armed Forces have always had an important impact amongst Jordanian public opinion, in addition to its medical, educational and housing services that provide for a huge segment of Jordanians, the Armed Forces have established themselves as the final resort institution to get involved when all other institutions fail, this involvement is most evident in the rescue operations during snow storms, as well as some cases in combating crime.

The Jordanian security apparatus was born from the womb of the Armed Forces, and the three organisations enjoy the top three ranks in trustworthiness amongst Jordanian governmental institutions, thus it is not surprising that the mother of security organisation, the Armed Forces, assume the highest level of trustworthiness amongst all institutions in the country, governmental and non-governmental, and to consistently and firmly take up the second rank in importance.

Police Force-Ministry of Interior

While the Police Force is the second most trusted governmental institution in Jordan, and it ranked fifth amongst senior Statesmen and fourth amongst the national sample, the Ministry of Interior, of which the Police Force is linked to, has consistently ranked last between the six institutions. As far as trustworthiness is concerned, the Police Force scored over 8 points higher than the government.

These results illustrate the predominance of the issue of security for Jordanians, at the same time, the findings with regards to trustworthiness in 2001 and importance in 2007, and the drop in the ranking of the Police Force demonstrates the shift in the Jordanian public opinion's concerns and priorities towards the issue of terrorism, thus the higher ranking for the Intelligence department, discussed below, as opposed to law enforcement and crime.

The relation between public opinion, the Police Force, and the state is an interconnected relation that goes in both directions. The Police Force represents the first and most common contact between the individual and the state that monopolise the use of force. Accordingly the performance of the Police Force reflects on the image of the state in its entirety, as well as its institutional components. At the same time, the state, and particularly the government's performance, play an equally important role in shaping public perception and attitude *vis a vis* the Police Force. This interconnectedness of relations was best illustrated in the southern city of Ma'an leading to the full blown confrontation in November 2002, whereby the population of Ma'an, the Police Force, and the government all entered a vicious circle of mistrust and communication breakdown¹⁵.

The wide range of duties that are covered by the Police Force, that go beyond law enforcement, such as motor vehicle registration, environment, and family affairs, among many other duties, do play a significant role in increasing the Police Force's exposure to the public, which at times reflects negatively on the Force.

¹⁵ See Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, *Ma'an: An Open Ended Crisis*, 2003.

The Government

The Government represented in the Prime Minister’s Office was unanimously, amongst Senior Statesmen as well as the national sample, ranked as the most important institution in the country. As far as trustworthiness, however, it ranked fourth trailing behind the three security agencies. This result is connected to the gradual, yet consistent, decline in the Approval ratings¹⁶ of Jordanian governments. This consistent decline signals an increasing gap between the public and consequent governments whereby there has been a failure in addressing the issues of that concern the public most. These issues according to Center for Studies Polls are unemployment, poverty, and corruption.

The issues of unemployment and poverty do present an easier said than done challenge to the consequent Jordanian governments. Jordanian governments, with the varying tenures durations in office, over the last few years, have had little to show for in tackling this issue, and have concentrated on the public relations aspect of this issue, and progress with regards to poverty and unemployment is largely due to developments in the region rather than government policy.

The government’s ability to tackle the issue of poverty and unemployment is very much restricted by Jordan’s limited resources, as well as the regional instability that hamper government efforts to address this issue, particularly since addressing this issue does require more time and will not reflect immediately on government performance ratings, but will involve a longer period of time.

Corruption, on the other hand, which is the second priority to the Jordanian public opinion, can reflect directly and immediately on government performance ratings is not addressed in a way that is satisfactory to the Jordanian public opinion. In a recent poll by the Center, the overwhelming majority of Jordanian had no idea about the government efforts to fight corruption whereby %65.2 of Jordanian public opinion have not heard of any government effort to fight corruption and only %25.2 have heard of such efforts¹⁷.

Table (4)

Corruption issues

Have you heard of government’s transfer of case to the competent bodies due to suspicion of corruption				To what extent do you think the government is serious about fighting corruption on this issue
Case’s	Heard of it before being reminded	Heard of it after being reminded	Did not hear at all	Government seriousness
Ministry of Municipalities	10.1	13.2	76.7	60.8
Charitable Associations Union	7.4	8.5	84.1	57.4
Magnesia Corporation	3.3	5.5	91.2	58.0
Islamic Center Association	0.5	6.7	92.8	68.9

¹⁶ See Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, *Government Approval Rating Surveys, 1996-2006*

¹⁷ Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, *Corruption Issues in Jordan: A Public field Survey, 2006.*

As far as specific cases are concerned, as table (4) illustrates, the trustworthiness of government has reached alarming levels whereby its efforts to address the second most important issue for Jordanians do not get the attention of Jordanians, and at the same time, these efforts are not taken seriously. These results give an indication of a severe communication and trust problem between the public and the government, whereby government action no longer attracts large public attention, and when it does the majority do not take it seriously.

The General Intelligence Department

Even prior to the issue of terrorism becoming central, nationally, regionally, and internationally, the Jordanian Intelligence Department enjoyed a high level of trustworthiness as indicated in table (1), whereby it ranked third amongst governmental institutions. In addition to that the Department has been consistently ranked as the third most important institution in Jordan, as shown above in tables (3) and (4).

The raise of the issue of terrorism and the deteriorating situation in the region has made the issue of security more central amongst Jordanians. Even though some might argue that the issue of security and terrorism does not rank amongst the Jordanian public opinion's priorities, but unemployment, poverty, corruption, and other issues¹⁸, yet it was the sense of security that Jordanians had prior to the Amman hotel bombing, which Jordanians might have taken for granted up until the attacks, that allowed Jordanians to set their priorities as polls has indicated. This is evident in the way in which Jordanians defined the motivation behind the attacks as an attack on their lives and livelihoods.

The rise of terrorism and the developments in Iraq, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, and elsewhere in the region no longer allowed Jordanian to take their security for granted, and the Amman hotel bombing came as a wake up call to Jordanians that the security of Jordan is at the heart of their way of life and the betterment of their lives, thus Jordanian public opinion was hostile towards the actions and statement given by the four Member of Parliament which is a sign that public opinion no longer tolerated some of the ideas that might have been accepted prior to the attacks.

Another consequence of the attacks is that Jordanians came to realise that the security and stability that Jordan enjoys is no coincidence, but a result of the efforts of the Jordanian security apparatus, and the General Intelligence in particular. This brought an agency that usually operates in secret and seeks no popularity or approval into the limelight as the first line of defence against groups that target Jordan.

All this has led to the increase in the significance of the role that is played by the Department making this role subject to misunderstanding, and in most times exaggeration.

Table (5)

Do you think that the role of the General Intelligence Department in the affairs of the state is.....

	Senior Statesmen	National sample
Large	%75.3	%59.5
Medium	%18.9	%29.4
Small	%3.8	%6.4
No role whatsoever	%1.8	%4.7

¹⁸ See Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, *Democracy in Jordan*, 2006.

As shown above, the majority of Jordanian, as well as a vast majority of Jordanian Statesmen, think that the Intelligence Department has a large role within the Jordanian state. This present a contradiction between the data provided above and the rankings in importance provided earlier, particularly the ranking of the government as the most important institution and the role of the intelligence. This contradiction is resolved in the table below.

Table (6)

Do you support that this role should.....

	Senior Statesmen	National sample
Increase	%18.3	%56.2
Stay as it is	%51.3	%33.0
Decrease	%25.9	%6.6
There should be no role whatsoever	%4.4	%4.3

As illustrated by the table above, not only is the role of the intelligence large according to the national sample, but the majority of Jordanians support the notion that this role should increase from its current state, thus just under %90 of Jordanian believe that the role of the intelligence should not decrease, and the majority of whom believe that this role should increase.

Over two thirds of Jordanian Senior statesmen on the other hand, are either satisfied with current role of the intelligence or believe that there needs to be an increase in that role and less than % 30 believe that this role should decrease.

Thus the contradiction between the ranking of the government and the role of the intelligence department is mainly based on public support. While government approval ratings have been on a downward trend, the support for the role of the General Intelligence Department could not get any higher, hence supporting the results with regards to trustworthiness listed in table (1).

The role of the Intelligence Department has also been subject to exaggerations that have been misleading and ambiguous that implies that the Department has become the most important body of the Jordanian state. Such implications are confronted with the Jordanian Senior Statesmen ranking of Jordanian institutions, which presents a view of a sample that is familiar with power relations between different bodies of the Jordanian state. These relations were evident in the study conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies on the southern city of Ma'an, where the assessment of the Intelligence Department of the looming confrontation was much more realistic, closer to the views of the citizens of Ma'an, and provided solutions that could have led to averting the crisis that took place in November 2002. This assessment, however, was not taken by the government which choose a different course of action that led to the confrontation in aMa'an¹⁹. This example provides an insight into the role of the Department and the interaction between the different arms of the Jordanian state beyond exaggeration.

¹⁹ See Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, *Ma'a: An Open Ended Crisis*, 2003. p. 62-69, the study revealed that while the Ma'ani population was very hostile towards the government, the governor, and particularly the Police, they held a very favourable view with regards to the Armed Forces and the Intelligence Department.

In short, the role of the Department is based on public opinion support to maintain and even increase the role of the Department, this support is twined with a high level of trustworthiness whereby the combination of both further centralises the role of the Department within the Jordanian state, as well as amongst Jordanian public opinion.

Concluding Remarks

This study does not aim to advance, or promote, a body of the Jordanian state against the other, nor point out the public opinion's support, or lack of it, to this institution or that. The aim of this study is to shed some light on a serious imbalance within the Jordanian state between its different bodies. Past research done at the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, whether the Government Performance Rating Surveys or the State of Democracy Annual Surveys, have tended to evaluate the public satisfaction of a body of the state, Government or Parliament, over an extended period of time. These studies have shown a deteriorating trend that, if continues, can reach an alarming level.

This study has taken a comparative approach to the different bodies of the Jordanian state, thus instead of comparing past and present public opinion perspective of a single institution, it had opted to compare a selected number of institutions at the same time.

No doubt that the ratings and support, particularly amongst the national sample, that the General Intelligence Department has are the most surprising findings of this study, not only because agencies of this nature in the region are not expected to be popular, but also because intelligence agencies rarely expect, need, or seek, public opinion support.

This support for the Intelligence Department indicates that Jordanian public opinion evaluates and rates Jordanian institutions based on actual performance. The security apparatus in general, and the Intelligence Department in particular, have matched their performance with public opinion expectations, and have delivered the security that is becoming increasingly central in the Jordanian mind set since the Amman bombings.

The Government and the Parliament on the other hand, have failed to meet the public opinion expectation. True the issues of poverty and unemployment are extremely complex issues that are beyond the country's means, and the fruits of progress on these issues require a time element that is beyond the tenure of a government or a Parliament. The handling of the issue of Corruption, the second most important issue for Jordanians, on the other hand, is unjustified for both the executives as well as the legislatives.

To sum up, the ratings of the security apparatus reflects the failure of other bodies of the Jordanian state, as much as they reflect support and approval of the security apparatus. The irony rest in the fact that the institutions that should aim for public opinion support do not have it and that the institution that has the largest support, is the one that is least interested in such support.