

Jordan Program Summary

Since 2005, the International Republican Institute's (IRI) program in Jordan has focused on connecting citizens and government by promoting good governance, strong political parties, and public opinion research. IRI grassroots-focused activities encourage democratic participation on the national and sub-national levels by politically engaging civil society, particularly women and youth, and preparing political parties and candidates for elections.

Governance programs help local civil society groups connect with their governments by involving them in decision-making processes and encouraging governments to be more responsive and accountable to constituencies. Program activities include civil society advocacy training, citizen sponsored issue-forums, mayors' roundtable discussions, and training for mayors and their staff on constituent relations and communications.

IRI also provides regular technical assistance to political parties and candidates to strengthen their capacities and prepare them for the upcoming elections. IRI organizes trainings to help parties and candidates develop more effective platforms, campaigns, political messages, and internal communications plans.

All activities are all supported by regular public opinion research at the national and municipal level, helping focus government officials, key decision-makers, and political parties on the issues that matter most to the Jordanian public.

Local Governance

Public opinion polling shows a weak link between citizens and municipal governments with citizens rarely approaching municipal councils to resolve community issues. Similarly, municipal officials seldom contact citizens on issues of service delivery and customer satisfaction. IRI encourages constructive, effective and sustained interaction between citizens and local government as a means to local governance. The program incorporates a two-pronged approach: First, IRI works with citizens to help develop advocacy skills; and second, IRI trains elected municipal officials and their staff to be more responsive to constituents.

Citizen advocacy is encouraged through focus groups and issue forums. IRI conducts focus groups in each of its partner municipalities. During these sessions, a cross-section of citizens from each municipality come together to identify top local issues that need solutions and design advocacy plans to help raise public awareness of these issues. Aside from gathering valuable information about citizen priorities in each municipality, the focus groups are a collaborative and democratic process. IRI also enables local citizens committees to organize issue forums which bring together citizens and local elected officials to raise awareness of priority issues of concern and discuss possible solutions to outstanding problems.

IRI also holds workshops and trainings for mayors and local officials in communication, constituent outreach, and responding to municipal concerns. Polls enable municipal governments to gain a more comprehensive understanding of constituent priorities, satisfaction of local services and interactions with city hall. With IRI support, citizen groups and elected officials launch advocacy campaigns to confront issues in the municipalities such as infrastructure (road building and maintenance), city cleanliness and access to municipal services.

Support to Political Parties and Candidates

Jordan's 2007 Political Parties Law requires 500 founding members from at least five governorates for political parties to register. This law forced most parties to expand their membership into new governorates. A challenge to the political parties is building a national voter base by developing platforms and messages that resonate with the

grassroots community. Creating this nationwide base requires the development of strong party organizations with branch structures at the local level. IRI provides assistance on refining national party platforms, communication and recruitment techniques. Through promoting branch office development, IRI helps the parties' improve capacity to effectively project and disseminate national platforms and positions on specific issues to citizens at the local level. IRI conducts trainings and one-on-one consultations with party leadership, branch office leaders and youth members to help develop voter-friendly platforms, attract new members, and improve internal communications.

During campaign seasons, IRI organizes campaign training schools and offers consultations and training to political parties, candidates and campaign teams. Participants developed their skills in the following areas: campaign strategies, use of polling data, campaign management, message and platform development, communications strategies, public speaking and debating, voter identification and targeting and voter turnout techniques.

Public Opinion Research

IRI uses public opinion research, conducted in partnership with the Middle East Marketing and Research Consultants (MEMRC), to improve political party and municipal government's communication with constituents. IRI and MEMRC conduct survey research at the national and municipal levels. Polling provides decision-makers and the general public with an accurate picture of public opinion concerning political reform, democratization and the performance of elected officials.

