

# Mapping technocracy in Jordanian government: role and context (1989–2020)

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study examines the role of technocrats in Jordan’s public administration, with a focus on their influence during socio-economic crises. While technocrats are increasingly prominent in governance, their contributions remain underexplored, particularly in contexts where political and administrative systems intersect.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The research employs a qualitative analysis of secondary data spanning from 1989 to 2020, a period marked by the reigns of two monarchs and characterized by varying degrees of economic and social stability.

**Findings** – The findings indicate a steady increase in the number of technocrats, a corresponding rise in their influence over public policy-making and implementation, and the formation of a technocratic group with strong ties to the private sector.

**Research limitations/implications** – Understanding the impact of technocrats on policy and governance can inform future administrative decisions and the structuring of public institutions in Jordan.

**Practical implications** – This study offers actionable insights for policymakers and government institutions in Jordan and similar contexts. By delineating the operational role of technocrats in policy-making, it provides a framework for optimizing their expertise while balancing political oversight. The findings suggest that structured criteria for appointing technocrats—such as merit-based evaluations and clear role definitions—can enhance administrative efficiency. For practitioners, the study underscores the need for training programs to bridge gaps between technocratic and political leadership, ensuring cohesive implementation of reforms. These recommendations can inform civil service reforms and institutional design in Jordan and beyond.

**Social implications** – The study highlights how technocratic presence in Jordan’s government (1989–2020) influenced public trust and political participation. By shifting focus from broad “governance” to the “administrative/political system,” it reveals tensions between expert-driven decision-making and accountability. Socially, over-reliance on technocrats may marginalize public voices, exacerbating perceptions of elitism. Conversely, their expertise can improve service delivery, fostering confidence in institutions. The research calls for transparent mechanisms to integrate technocratic efficiency with inclusive policymaking, ensuring balanced representation. These insights are critical for societies navigating technocracy’s trade-offs, particularly in post-Arab spring contexts where bureaucratic legitimacy remains pivotal to stability.

**Originality/value** – The study examines a rarely researched topic in the Arab world. Understanding the influence of technocrats on the government is crucial.

**Keywords** Technocrats, Jordan, Government, Transjordan, Public administration, Public policy

**Paper type** Research paper

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## Introduction

The increasing complexity of modern societies necessitates specialized knowledge and skills within government bureaucracies. This creates opportunities for technocratic expertise to play a central role (Rockman, 2019). Jordan, like many countries, struggles with maintaining a careful balance between accountable government and effective administration of public policies (Alissa, 2007). For several decades, technocracy was the rational path through which the government sought to maintain such balance. This paper is a scientific effort to map technocracy in Jordan and the circumstances that surrounded the emergence of technocrats as influential players in the government and agents of change between 1989 and 2020. The analysis sheds light on the different aspects of technocracy, and its role in making and implementing public policies.

In the intricate tapestry of the administrative system, technocrats emerge as key figures, blending specialized expertise with problem-solving skills to navigate complex societal challenges (Gruendel, 2022). These individuals, hailing from diverse fields such as economics, science, engineering, or public administration, embody a fusion of technical proficiency and administrative acumen. Their ascent to prominence is often propelled by professional merit rather than conventional political pathways, earning them pivotal roles within governments, international organizations, and influential institutions (Bandola-Gill, 2021). The allure of technocrats lies in their unparalleled expertise and ability to proffer evidence-based solutions to multifaceted issues, transcending the limitations of partisan politics (Bani Salameh, 2017). Their indispensability is underscored by several factors: Firstly, technocrats' deep-seated knowledge allows for nuanced policy formulations grounded in empirical analysis, enriching government with insights untainted by political biases (Head, 2022). In times of crisis or instability, their adept crisis management skills become invaluable, steering governments through turbulent waters with a steady hand. Moreover, technocrats' influence extends beyond domestic borders, as they often represent their nations on international platforms, shaping global discourse on pressing issues like trade, climate change, and public health. Their technical prowess lends credence to diplomatic endeavors, amplifying their impact on the international stage (Camerlo and Pérez-Liñán, 2015).

Yet, despite their indispensable contributions, the rise of technocrats is not without contention. Discussions arise regarding the balance of accountability and the influential roles of non-political experts in governance (Carboni, 2023; Bani Salameh, 2017). The possible limitation of their legitimacy inherent in their appointment thus raises questions about representation, loyalty, and accountability to the people (principle). While they are appointed by the executive branch (government or cabinet), they become part of the agent or agent to the agent who is supposed to serve the people (principal) and ensure the best of public interests. This complex affiliation or identification may make it difficult for people to check on technocrats' decisions. Furthermore, being appointed by the government, they enjoy all the privileges of the latter, but at the same time, they may position themselves as separate from the government; their characteristics and interests may be different from those of the rest of the government causing potential fractions within the ruling elite (Hamid, 2014). Some observers note that technocrats may be perceived as less connected to certain societal issues, prompting discussions about enhancing clarity in decision-making processes to ensure broad representation (Murphy, 1998; Jabbra, 1989). Characterizing technocrats as a distinct group may lead to varied public perceptions, as some Jordanians associate such distinctions with complex social dynamics. Nevertheless, the symbiotic relationship between technocrats and government reform remains undeniable. Technocrats leverage their expertise, foster innovation, and champion transparency as catalysts for administrative revitalization and institutional resilience (Jabbra, 1989). Their endeavors epitomize a delicate balance between technical proficiency and democratic ethos, emblematic of the evolving landscape of the political decision-making system in Jordan. The increasing reliance on technocratic elites is often justified as a solution to complex economic challenges, but the effectiveness of these elites in addressing practical issues continues to raise questions among scholars (Esber, 2021).

In this research, we delve into the multifaceted realm of technocracy, exploring its nuances, impact, and implications on government's decisions and public administration in Jordan.

Mainly, the study will map the state of technocracy in Jordan and how technocrats' roles have increased over the years as the country witnessed economic transformation since the late 1980s. Unfortunately, and despite the importance of this topic, an examination of the characteristics and the pattern of the presence of technocrats is lacking, which impedes our ability to understand the influence of technocracy on public policy and the possible resentment of the people of the increasing role of technocrats (Bani Salameh, 2017; Aboelwafa and Yaghi, 2024). We propose that there will be a growing role of technocrats in the government (Proposition 1), technocrats slowly but steadily influence public policy and gain political influence (Proposition 2), and the growing technocracy in the political life in Jordan has led directly or indirectly to the establishment of a new influential political group that possesses elitist characteristics (Proposition 3). To examine these propositions, the study is structured as follows: after this introduction, there will be background and context, concept and theory, relevant literature, methodology, the emergence of technocracy in Jordan, technocracy and elitism, and discussion and conclusion.

### Background and context

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was established in 1946, but before this date, it was known as the Emirate of Transjordan (1921–1946). At the beginning of its existence, the public sector expanded rapidly as it was perceived to offer the most security and stability, leading to its growth. During the oil boom in the Arabian Gulf countries in the late seventies, a broad middle class of bureaucrats emerged in the public sector. This period positively impacted Jordan, including significant financial aid from the Arab Gulf states, totaling 7.3 billion dollars from 1979 to 1988. Additionally, the absorption of a large portion of skilled and trained Jordanian human resources and the rise of Jordanian labor currency transfers from Arabian Gulf countries, which accounted for more than 23% of the national income during the same period, contributed to Jordan's economic growth. Despite these developments, Jordanians have consistently favored public sector employment, leading the government to invest in a robust public sector responsible for implementing, supervising, and spearheading economic public policies. Over time, specialized public bureaucrats have transitioned into technocrats, aligning with the government's agenda.

The first Gulf War in 1981, followed by political and economic instability in the Arab world and its surroundings, led to reduced aid from the Gulf countries and a decline in Jordan's growth rates. By the end of 1988, Jordan faced a severe economic crisis, with foreign currency exchange reserves at their lowest, insufficient imports for more than a week, a sharp devaluation of the Jordanian dinar, and record inflation levels. Faced with these challenges, Jordan sought assistance from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, leading to the adoption of structural adjustment programs and economic reforms. These reforms necessitated the formation of technocratic governments capable of preparing economic programs with minimal political interference. The reliance on technocrats did not begin during these years of hardship, as further analysis will reveal the deep-rooted origins of this trend. Each instance of this approach has led to a significant shift in the characteristics and identity of the Jordanian political elite, transitioning from a predominantly political nature to a technocratic one, termed "techno-political." Additionally, the liberalization of the national economy during the eighties and nineties resulted in public sector reforms, including restructuring, deregulation, and privatization, which increased reliance on technocrats who were considered the government's agents of change.

### Concept and theory

The term "technocracy" originates from the Arabic word "tekneya" (تقنية), derived from "atkana" (أَتَقَنَ), meaning "to perfect something" (Elshakry, 2010). However, the widely accepted Western etymology comes from William Henry Smyth, who coined the term in 1919 to describe governance by technical experts rather than politicians (McDonnell and Valbruzzi,

2014; Larson, 1972–1973; Al-Ta'an, 2015). Technocrats are unelected specialists appointed to manage critical policies, acting as agents for the executive branch (DeMenno, 2019; Conti-Brown and Wishnick, 2020). While they often position themselves as independent, relying on rational, scientific approaches, their appointment by political leaders ties them to the political apparatus, raising questions about their autonomy (Putnam, 1977). This tension between technocratic independence and political affiliation remains a central debate in public administration and policy studies (Adwan *et al.*, 2018; Al-Mashaqbeh, 2019).

The American government serves as an example of how modern technocracy has evolved in public administration. In 1929, the demand for an efficient public sector during the Great Depression led the government to seek technocrats with specialized skills to manage the implementation of public social and economic policies (Rosenthal and Yodin, 1987). The technocratic movement in the US began in 1932 as part of the behavioral school, advocating for the provision of competencies and elites of engineers and economists to address the deterioration of economic and social systems (Burnham, 1941). This movement envisioned executive managers of economic institutions becoming a specialized elite exercising political, administrative, and economic sovereignty (Burnham, 1941). The rise of a managerial elite with power over economic resources resulted in the concentration of decision-making power among business, industrial, and financial elites (Mill, 1956). Subsequent studies highlighted the focus of technocratic and bureaucratic groups on modernizing ideas and reform practices to enhance productivity and alter traditional patterns of production relations (Box, 2003). Marcuse, in “The One-Dimensional Man,” discussed the role of scientific-technical rationality in controlling both the bourgeoisie and proletarian classes, suggesting that a technocratic class currently holds power (Marcuse, 1980). Habermas linked scientific progress with the expansion of central administration, controlled by a minority of technocrats exercising authority based on technocratic ideology (Habermas, 1970). However, public administration developed a different approach to technocracy, rooted in the long-standing politics-administration dichotomy (Raiu and Mina-Raiu, 2023; Wong, 2012). Scholars in public administration have focused on the unseen relationship between politics and administration, the conflict between the technocratic elite and the principal (citizens), and the impact of technocracy on public policy and the public sector.

### Relevant literature

The discourse on technocracy presents a dichotomous view of its role in government decision-making processes, with studies varying. Some emphasize technocrats’ positive impact on policymaking, while others highlight negative consequences. This dichotomy is crucial for understanding the complex dynamics and challenges technocracy introduces to Jordan. Bertsou and Pastorella (2017) note technocrats’ potential to drive economic growth, as seen in Indonesia’s policy influence over decades. Shiraishi (2014) acknowledges Indonesian technocrats’ skill in crafting effective macroeconomic policies. However, such policies often lean towards free trade and minimal state intervention, sometimes clashing with domestic preferences and facing limitations due to resource constraints. Therefore, the debate on technocracy touches on the democratic legitimacy of those technocrats who play a role in policymaking. Pastorella (2016) examines the critique of unelected technocratic governments in Europe, raising concerns about accountability and representation. While not inherently undemocratic, these governments can expose weaknesses in traditional party systems, especially regarding voter accountability. Schlogl and Kim (2023) and Yaghi (2023) highlight the delicate balance technocrats must strike between technological efficiency, social justice, professional competence, and public accountability. As technocracy relationships with the government are multifaceted, Shiraishi (2014) and Yaghi and Yaghi (2023) posited that technocratic solutions can be useful in the post-crisis period but the government needs to adapt to necessary political and social changes. Huskey (2010) also explained how technocracy’s characteristics vary by region, influenced by factors like regime legitimacy and elite

backgrounds. In all cases, concerns about democratic accountability and the sustainability of technocratic approaches persist despite the efforts of technocrats may make their decisions fruitful (Bani Salameh and Ananzah, 2015).

The interplay between technocratic government and good governance values is critical. Antonelli (2022) noted that technocracy's rise in response to complex challenges and the demand for data-driven policy, especially when crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, require innovative policies but also responsive, accountable, and transparent. Carboni (2023) posited that technocrats were instrumental in consensus-building and managing international financial pressures on the Tunisian government although their influence has raised serious concerns about accountability and transparency. These concerns increase as the influence of technocrats increases within ruling elites, especially when their technocratic approaches heavily rely on economic models with little regard to social and political considerations that may diminish political discourse and citizen participation (Kurki, 2011). However, several other researchers called for maintaining a balance between the government's need for technical expertise and the people's (principal) needs for accountability and other good governance values (Rockman, 2019; Delioui, 1992; Bani Salameh and Shdouh, 2018).

From a public administration perspective, technocracy is neither inherently good nor bad; it becomes problematic only when technocrats stray from public administration ethics including good governance (e.g. accountability and impartiality). Public administration theories acknowledge the fact that technocracy naturally arises from a bureaucratic system characterized by hierarchy, established rules, and meritocracy. This system should ensure that technocrats, as agents, serve the public's best interests. Public administration scholars prompted questions about democratic accountability and power balance (Bertsou and Caramani, 2020; Bani Salameh, 2017). While technocrats can significantly contribute to policymaking, their influence might reduce public participation based on critics who argue that an over-reliance on technocrats can disconnect the government from its citizens, potentially weakening its legitimacy (Carcasson, 2016). Jordanian scholars suggest that technocrats, as influential actors, face challenges in aligning their expertise with public interests, highlighting the need for robust governance frameworks (Mufti, 1999; Huneidi, 2014). The scholarly debate on technocracy in Jordan reflects a search for a balanced approach that leverages technocratic strengths while upholding good governance principles. In other words, a balance is needed to maintain a productive relationship between public administration (difficult to monitor by citizens) and politics (directly monitored by the King, parliament, and other stakeholders). Concerns continue about technocrats' oversight, neutrality, and the potential transformation of technocrats into an elite group that ignores public input, especially in educated societies (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2019; Al-Rousan and Al-Rusan, 2013).

A highly educated society, such as the Jordanian, demands technocrats to be neutral and fulfill their legal and moral responsibilities as agents who serve the best interests of the people (principal). These demands are well-addressed by the bureaucratic theory (e.g. Max Weber's ideas), which stresses the role of technocracy in serving public interest based on hierarchy, well-established rules and procedures, and meritocracy that values qualifications and experience rather than kinship or political favoritism (Peters *et al.*, 2015). Challenges in maintaining principal-agent alignment may arise when technocrats' roles in public policy are not fully harmonized with public expectations. Some deviation takes the form of overemphasis on efficiency to disguise poor responsiveness and accountability to the people (principal) (Ricks, 2018). In addition, there are questions about efficiency and equity as technocrats may achieve efficiency but without giving due consideration to equity and social justice (Beiser-McGrath *et al.*, 2022).

Technocracy sparks a diverse range of perspectives within public administration scholarship in AWS, as well as, in other countries. For example, unlike Allison (1971), Riggs (1971, 2016) acknowledges the potential of technocratic elites to modernize developing countries through their expertise and focus on economic growth, but he does not necessarily see technocracy as a threat to democracy. Allison (1971) stresses the need for political

judgment and broader societal values in decision-making to compensate for the limitations of technocracy and its inability to ensure accountable decision-making. Peters (1998) acknowledges the rise of technocratic expertise while emphasizing the importance of maintaining democratic control and accountability mechanisms for bureaucrats. Similarly, Sager (2007) and Yaghi (2023) recognize the value of expert knowledge but argue for a more balanced approach that integrates public participation and ethical considerations into policymaking. Recent scholarship explores the rise of “post-bureaucratic” governments, where public-private partnerships and networks involving both government and non-state actors blur the lines between traditional bureaucracy (clear separation between principal and agent) and technocracy (unclear boundaries between principal and agent) (Peters, 2018). Scholars like Hood (2014) examine the potential benefits and drawbacks of these evolving models without ruling out the advantages of any of them. Bannister (2017) asserts that public bureaucracy can protect the interests of the principal while serving the government’s need for legitimacy and effective public policies. In Jordan, Al-Ta’an (2015) explains the widespread fear among ordinary people from the growing role of technocrats and their inability always to make transparent and responsive decisions. Similarly, Bani Salameh (2017) stresses the need for clear channels of accountability checks on the growing numbers of technocrats who often hide behind politicians or make the latter a shield through which technocrats keep making important policy decisions with little or no parliamentary oversight. While the above discussion is an example of a large body of literature about technocracy, it does not depart from the old debate about the complex relationship between politics and administration (i.e. dichotomy) and how the agent can truthfully and morally serve the principal (McDonnell and Valbruzzi, 2014). But because the dichotomy is less popular among Jordanian scholars, the literature on technocracy in Jordan focuses on the linkages between technocrats and influential players in the Jordanian political stage such as the parliament, political parties, parliamentary blocks, and think tanks. The ongoing discourse, thus, reflects a search for a balanced approach that harnesses the strengths of technocracy while safeguarding good government practices and the interests of the Jordanian people (principle) (see, for example, Adwan *et al.*, 29,018; Alissa, 2007; Bertou and Caramani, 2020).

Synthesizing these scholarly contributions reveals that while technocracy can offer expertise and efficiency in government, it necessitates a careful balance with good governance values to ensure legitimacy, public participation, and the consideration of broader societal needs. The literature calls for continued research into the role of technocratic elites in the administrative and policy making processes and the development of frameworks that integrate technical proficiency with democratic principles to ensure these agents operate in the best interest of the people. This is even more urgent for Jordan as the question of technocrats is attracting growing interest from people and observers who perceive the role of technocrats negatively (Al-Rousan and Al-Rousan, 2013; Ryan, 2018). Based on the above, this paper will use evidence from secondary data to test the following propositions: Proposition 1: There will be a growing role of technocrats in the government; Proposition 2: Technocrats slowly but steadily influence public policy and gain political influence; Proposition 3: The growing technocracy in the political life in Jordan has led, directly or indirectly, to the establishment of a new influential political group that possesses elitist characteristics.

### Methodology

The study utilizes secondary (historical) data collected and compiled by the first and third authors. The analysis of technocracy is informed by several theoretical frameworks, primarily elitism and principal-agent theory. Elitism posits that a select group controls the core decision-making institutions, with variations observed across different political systems (Hilal al-Din and Massad, 2000). Principal-agent theory addresses the challenges of ensuring that an agent, who is authorized to make decisions on behalf of a principal, acts in the principal’s best interests. This is particularly pertinent when there is an asymmetry of information and the

potential for conflicting objectives. Analyzing the implications of the compiled data yielded informative tables that facilitated the answering of the research questions.

To operationalize the role of technocrats in policy making and implementation, we analyzed secondary data documenting their participation in cabinet decisions and legislative processes from 1989 to 2020. This included examining their appointments as ministers and prime ministers, their involvement in key policy reforms (e.g. economic restructuring, privatization), and their representation in parliamentary oversight mechanisms. Quantitative indicators—such as the percentage of technocrats in ministerial positions (Tables 1 and 4) and their educational/political backgrounds—served as proxies for their policy influence. By mapping these metrics against major policy shifts, we assessed the extent to which technocrats shaped administrative and political outcomes in Jordan.

Technocrats were identified based on (1) professional background, such as having an advanced degrees (Master’s/PhD) in technical fields (e.g. economics, engineering, public administration) and/or career trajectories dominated by specialized roles (e.g. central bank officials, economic advisors); (2) appointment rationale: direct recruitment into ministerial/cabinet positions due to technical expertise (e.g. during economic crises or IMF reforms), rather than partisan or tribal affiliations. Politicians were classified by (1) career history as having prior elected office (e.g. parliament), leadership in political parties, or public roles tied to constituency service or patronage networks; (2) policy orientation: Advocacy for ideological/platform-driven agendas (e.g. conservative/liberal reforms) over technocratic problem-solving. Hybrid (Techno-Political) cases (e.g. officials with mixed traits) were flagged per Putnam’s (1977) framework on elite roles, as cited in our manuscript.

## Analysis and discussion

### *The emergence of technocracy in Jordan*

In Jordan, the concept of technocracy is deeply embedded within the civil service system, which comprises government officials who are neither political nor judicial appointees but rather hold civil occupations within the public sector. These individuals are typically selected and promoted based on merit and seniority (Abd Manaf, 2017). The term “public sector employees” in Jordan broadly refers to those employed by government departments or agencies, including those in publicly funded organizations such as educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and local authorities (Isa et al., 2022). These employees are responsible for implementing government policies, delivering public services effectively, and working within the bureaucratic framework to ensure the smooth operation of public functions. While

**Table 1.** Background of prime ministers, 1989–1999

Prime Minister name	Date of Birth	Specialization	Occupational Background*	Political Views**
Zeid ibn Shaker	1934	MA in Military Study	Politician	Conservative
Mudar Badran	1934	Bachelor of Law	Politician	Conservative
Taher al-Masry	1942	Bachelor of Politics	Techo-Political	Liberal
Abdul Salam al-Majali	1925	Ph.D. in Medicine	Techo-Politics	Conservative
Abdul Karim Kabariti	1949	MA in Economics	Techo-Political	Liberal
Fayez al-Tarawneh	1949	Ph.D. in Politics	Politician	Conservative

**Note(s)** \*\*“Techno-Political” refers to somebody with a mixture of political and technocratic backgrounds,

\*\*In the Jordanian context, “Conservative” refers to political views that support the status quo and favor gradual political, economic, and social changes. “Liberal” refers to political views that favor fast political and social changes, and Western-style economic policies

**Source(s):** Authors’ own work

“civil servants” and “public sector employees” are terms often used interchangeably, they serve the public in different capacities. Civil servants typically focus on policy creation and implementation, whereas public sector employees may have more direct engagement with the public, applying policies through the services they provide (Al-Qeed *et al.*, 2016). However, this distinction is nuanced, as the term “public sector employees” is commonly used in Jordan to encompass all job types within publicly funded organizations. Technocrats stand out within this group due to their expertise and potential influence on political decision-making.

The term “technocrat” in the Jordanian context refers to public sector employees who possess specialized knowledge in fields such as economics, engineering, management, or education, and often hold leadership roles within their organizations (Brynen, 1992; Huneidi, 2014). Unlike ordinary public sector employees, technocrats may advise the government or make direct policy decisions, gaining political power and connections in the process. Some may even ascend to political positions like ministers, although they are not classified as “public sector employees” by certain laws, such as retirement laws, but rather as “politicians” (Yaghi, 2008).

#### *The growing role of technocrats*

The study posits a growing role for technocrats in the government (Proposition 1). The data suggests that the rise of technocracy began with the establishment of the public sector during the creation of the Emirate of Transjordan in the 1920s. Previously, Jordan was part of the larger Syrian region for over four centuries, consisting of various localities primarily inhabited by rural and nomadic communities governed by traditional leaders without a formal bureaucracy. Subsequent decades saw improved educational opportunities and increased urbanization, leading to significant public sector growth with more educated employees and experienced managers (Kumaraswamy, 2019; Benson, 2020). In the first thirty years of statehood, a new generation of public sector employees sought changes in social, economic, and political status, redefining loyalty to the political system based on education, competence, and leadership insights (Jaber and Al Batsh, 2016). Entering the public sector became the main avenue for achieving political and economic status, as evidenced by the elite’s dominance in ministries and government sectors. Their presence in key ministries with technical and strategic significance highlights their role in developing and implementing contemporary policies, particularly in areas requiring advanced technical skills (Kupo, 2010; Aledwan *et al.*, 2018).

An examination of secondary data on technocrats in Jordan shows that they typically hold positions where their expertise directly impacts policy decisions. These roles include (a) ministers (cabinet members) and prime ministers with significant influence over public policy, (b) policy advisors who analyze data, identify issues, and propose solutions based on their specialized knowledge, (c) policy implementers in leadership roles within public agencies managing key government programs and ensuring policy execution, and (d) crisis managers leveraging their expertise to navigate complex situations like pandemics or economic downturns. Table 1 demonstrates the role of technocrats as prime ministers, the highest public office a technocrat can attain.

While limited data were found about ministers during the thirties and forties of the twentieth century, Table 1 reveals that three out of six (50%) prime ministers could be described as techno-political as they came from technocratic backgrounds before holding a political position (Prime Minister). The nature of the policies that each Prime Minister proposed advised the labeling of their “political views”. While these labels, retrospectively, reflect the actual views of prime ministers during their time in office (Mufti, 1999; Bani Salameh, 2017), the labels may differ based on the assessment that different observers make. However, “conservative” or “liberal” does not affect the technocratic classification of the prime ministers, but only clarifies the diverse nature of the political views of the prime ministers.

The description of technocrats qualifies them to the highest position under the King, that is Prime Minister in which they can form a cabinet and make policies. As Table 1 indicates, 50%

of prime ministers holding their positions between 1989 and 1999 were technocrats. Similarly, between 1999 and 2020 as [Table 2](#) shows, ten prime ministers had technocratic backgrounds compared to only two who were politicians. These findings confirm *Propositions 1* and *2* as numbers in [Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#) show that more technocrats have held the Prime Minister position in latter years than did in the early years of the statehood. This increase denotes a significant influence over public policy and public administration knowing that the Jordanian cabinet under the Prime Minister is responsible for proposing policies and legislations as well as implementing them after they go through the Parliament and get legitimized by the King ([Tbaishat et al., 2019](#); [Taamneh et al., 2020](#)).

While Prime Ministers form their cabinets, the law maintains that Prime Ministers have the responsibility of staffing their cabinets by nominating the best candidate for each Minister's position then the King approves the list ([Al-Mashaqbeh, 2019](#)). This procedure is as old as the state itself and Prime Ministers tend to nominate those who can help the Prime Minister fulfill his obligation as the head of the government ([Momani et al., 2021](#); [Bani Salameh and Ananzah, 2015](#)). Therefore, forming a cabinet has never been an easy task, but rather a highly political process also a process of screening and assessing the profiles of a large number of candidates amongst which technocrats are increasingly dominating the candidates' lists. The test after the Monarch's approval of the formation of the cabinet is for the Prime Minister to present his agenda and his team of ministers to the Parliament. Often, approving the names of ministers by the Jordanian Parliament receives tremendous attention from politicians and ordinary citizens because for the Parliament to reject a particular Minister would require the Prime Minister to select another candidate and so on until all members of the cabinet get approved by the majority of the parliament members ([Massadeh, 1999](#); [Al-Mashaqbeh, 2019](#)). Ministers and their professional backgrounds (affiliation, experience, specialization, previous successes, etc) are scrutinized by the Parliament during the formation of the cabinet, hence issues related to failures and misconduct (e.g. bribe accusations or charges) surface. To get an understanding of the significant role of ministers and the relationship between them and the Parliament, [Table 3](#) shows the main characteristics of ministers and prime Ministers.

[Tables 1 and 2](#) indicate the level of education (Western education) and the diversity of the political views of Prime Ministers. The well-education can be linked to the ability of these high-level government officials to build expertise and grow their technocracy power. In a twenty-one-year period, 12 cabinets were formed, of which 10 Prime Ministers had technocratic backgrounds. [Tables 1 and 2](#) illustrate that the vast majority of Prime Ministers during the same period had an Anglo-Saxon educational background with diverse liberal and conservative political views. As technocracy dominates the backgrounds of Prime Ministers, the involvement and impact of technocrats on public policy is evident. Moreover, being members of the senior executive branch of government, they hold the highest leadership position to make public policies (*Proposition 2*).

[Table 3](#) details the presence of technocrats in the government as Ministers (cabinet members). From 1989 to 2020, there were 287 appointed ministers as members of nine cabinets (governments). Of this number, 57.4% of technocrats worked in senior administrative positions in the public sector before becoming ministers, 18.4% were politicians before their appointment in the cabinet (members of political parties), and 14.2% had membership in labor and professional career unions (syndicates). These numbers suggest that technocrats made the largest portion of cabinet members in about thirty years. Based on these findings, we conclude that technocrats occupied a sizable portion of all ministerial positions (*Proposition 1*). Moreover, occupying over 57% of all ministerial positions strongly indicates the level of involvement those ministers had in making and implementing public policies.

[Table 4](#) provides evidence of the growing role of technocrats in the Jordanian government. Between 1989 and 2020, there were 18 Prime Ministers of which 44.4% were technocrats. Moreover, between 1989 and 1999 there were 66.8% ministers with technocratic backgrounds. This percentage increased between 1999 and 2020 to 52.5%, which makes the average percentage of technocratic ministers 57.1%. As proposed in the study (*Proposition 2*), the high

**Table 2.** Characteristics of prime ministers, 1999–2020

Prime Minister	Date of Birth	Specialization	Country of Graduation	Occupational background	Political views
<i>Abdul Raouf Al-Rawabdeh</i>	1939	BA, Pharmacy	Lebanon	Technocrat-Politician	Cons.
<i>Ali Abu al-Ragheb</i>	1946	BA, Engineering	USA	Technocrat - Politician	Lib.
<i>Faisal Al-Fayez</i>	1952	MA, Political Science	USA	Politician	Cons.
<i>Adnan Badran</i>	1935	Ph.D., Science	USA	Technocrat-Politician	Lib.
<i>Nader Al-Dahabi</i>	1946	MA, Engineering (Armed Forces)	USA	Technocratic	Cons.
<i>Samir al-Rifai</i>	1966	MA, Economics	USA	Technocrat-Politician	Lib.
<i>Marouf al-Bakhit*</i>	1947	Ph.D., Military Sciences	U.K.	Technocrat-Politician	Cons.
<i>Awn Al-Khasawneh</i>	1950	Doctor of Law	–	Technocrat-Politician	Lib.
<i>Abdullah Al-Nsour</i>	1939	Ph.D., Economics	France	Technocrat-Politician	Cons.
<i>Hani Al-Mulki</i>	1947	Ph.D., Engineering	USA	Technocrat-Politician	Lib.
<i>Omar Al-Razzaz</i>	1960	Ph.D., Planning	USA	Technocratic	Lib.
<i>Bisher Al-Khasawneh</i>	1969	Ph.D., Law	U.K.	Politician	Lib.

**Note(s)** \*The table was prepared by the authors based on information from different sources  
**Source(s):** Authors' own work

percentage of technocrats involved in public policy decision-making suggests that for nearly twenty years that are covered by this study, technocrats remained influential in shaping public policies.

The constitutional relationship between the executive and legislative branches gives the ministerial council (cabinet or government) a direct and major role in making public policy (Massadeh, 1999; Al-Mashaqbeh, 2019). Therefore, arguing that the growing number of technocrats in the government is accompanied by an increase in their impact on public policy (Proposition 2) is a valid argument. Being part of the cabinet, either as a Prime Minister or a Minister, would automatically grant such a person a legal authority and practical role to be part of the public policy-making machine. Such membership entails a direct involvement in various aspects of public policy, mainly in proposing policies before sending them to the Parliament, approving policies after the legislative voting in Parliament, and implementing policies after the Head of State (i.e. the King) legitimizes them (Massadeh, 1999). Similarly, as the highest public official in the ministry and all its units, ministers play a significant role in implementing and evaluating public policies. Tables 1–4 reveal facts that confirm the numeric increase of technocrats in government as both Prime Ministers and ministers. Consequently, the impact of technocrats on public policy and public administration increases. It can be

**Table 3.** Characteristics of cabinet members, 1989–2000

Prime Minister	# Ministers in the Cabinet*	Professional syndicates	Private sector	Military	Judicial authority	Political party	Senior public sector positions
<i>Prince Zaid ibn Shaker</i> 4/27/1989	25	10	–	1	1	–	13
<i>Mudar Badran</i> 7/12/1989	37	6	3	1	–	5	22
<i>Taher al-Masry</i> 6/20/1991	28	1	3	–	1	1	22
<i>Prince Zaid ibn Shaker</i> 11/21/1991	27	1	–	1	–	1	24
<i>Abd al-Salam al-Majali</i> 05/30/1993	55	8	2	3	2	18	22
<i>Prince Zaid ibn Shaker</i> 1/8/1995	31	2	1	1	–	8	19
<i>Abdul Karim al-Kabariti</i> 4/2/1996	31	2	4	1	–	13	11
<i>Abd al-Salam al-Majali</i> 19/3/1997	30	8	1	–	–	8	13
<i>Fayez al-Tarawneh</i> 8/12/1998	23	3	–	2	–	4	14
<i>Sum</i>	287	41	14	10	4	53	165
<i>Percentage</i>	100%	14.2%	5%	3.4%	1.3%	18.4%	57.4%

**Note(s)** \*The table was prepared by the authors based on information from different sources

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

**Table 4.** Numbers of technocrats as prime ministers and ministers, 1989–2020

Characteristics	Number	Techno-politician	Percentage
Prime Ministers from 1989 to 1999 (10 years)	6 (6/10 = 0.60)	3 (3/10 = 0.30)	50%
Prime Ministers from 1999 to 2020 (20 years)	12 (12/20 = 0.60)	5 (5/20 = 0.25)	41.6%
<i>Sub-total</i>	18	8	44.4%
Cabinet members from 1989 to 1999	278	192 (192/278 = 0.69)	66.8%
Cabinet members from 1999 to 2020	611	321 (321/611 = 0.525)	52.5%
<i>Sub-total</i>	898	513	57.1%

**Note(s):** \*The first and third authors assembled numbers from various sources

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

concluded that the quantitative increase in technocrats in the government is profound and the source of technocrats' power over many aspects of public policy.

So far, evidence analysis confirmed the dominance of technocracy in the Jordanian government. However, the study proposed that such reality has also resulted in establishing a new influential group in the political arena that has an elitist nature (*Proposition 3*). The following discussion examines this proposition and [Table 5](#) provides valuable information about some shared characteristics of the technocrats group from 1999 to 2019.

**Table 5.** Distribution of ministers based on their socio-economic background, 1999–2019

Socio-economic characteristics	Members of government 1999–2003	Members of governments 2004–2009	Members of government 2010–2019
Upper Middle Class	115 (63.8%)	73 (47.7%)	85 (46.7%)
Mid-Tier Middle Class	25 (13.8%)	32 (20.9%)	37 (20.3%)
Lower Middle Class	5 (2.7%)	7 (4.5%)	9 (4.9%)
Land-Owning Class	10 (5.5%)	7 (4.5%)	5 (2.7%)
Businessmen Class	25 (13.8%)	34 (22.2%)	46 (25.2%)
Total: 515 (100%)	180 (100%)	153 (100%)	182 (100%)

**Note(s):** \*The first and third authors assembled numbers from various sources. The total number of members of government from 1999 to 2019 is 515

**Source(s):** Authors' own work

*Technocrats as elite*

Acknowledging that elitism and the way researchers use it is an intangible characterization of members of the government, labeling someone or some groups as “elite” remains subjective despite the observable evidence that can be collected about such individuals (Juraev and Ortikova, 2021; Adwan et al., 2018; APA, 2024). This is mainly because elitism is not merely a feature or static characteristic of a person but rather a reality that contains many sophisticated elements, such as psychological (e.g. feeling superior), social (e.g. higher SES than others), political (e.g. inherited political privilege), and racial (e.g. belonging to a racial group that dominated politics at a certain time). Thus, “elitism” and “elitist” are complicated realities within politics, and we can only attempt to reflect our understanding of what constitutes them based on some, but not all, criteria that researchers claim to be facets of elitism (Segre, 2017; Gordon, 2023). Taking these facts into consideration, we used only three widely-circulated criteria or characteristics that, if present in a person or a group, we can label as elitism, namely socioeconomic status (SES), land ownership, and business links (Mohamed and Stanek, 2021; APA, 2024).

In this study, the authors operationalized these characteristics by adapting definitions from the literature, in addition to their expertise in the subject matter (Hunaiti, 2008; Momani, 2020). Socioeconomic status (SES) was assessed using indicators such as education, income, and occupation. The Upper Middle Class was assessed using criteria including individuals with a bachelor’s degree or higher, holding managerial or professional occupations, and earning above 1500 JD monthly (the median wage of managers). The Mid-Tier Middle Class was assessed by having some college education, holding clerical or skilled labor positions, and earning within the median income range (500–1000 JD monthly). The Lower Middle Class was assessed by individuals having a high school diploma, working in semi-skilled positions, and earning below the median but above the poverty line (less than 500 JD monthly). Land Ownership was assessed by owning a minimum of a piece of land with an area of 5000m2 (Mazur, 2023; Ghanayem et al., 2022). Lastly, Business Involvement was determined by assessing the level of engagement and role in business activities, which includes owning a business, being active in daily management, and involvement in decision-making of a medium to large business (Abu-Mater et al., 2020). Most business involvement characteristics included holding an executive position (e.g. CEO) or a consultative position (e.g. consultant, advisor, or expert) (Sackmann, 2021; Al-Olaimat and Alamdaideh, 2022).

Using the three aforementioned criteria, Table 5 suggests that the largest number of government members in twenty years (1999–2019) belonged to the upper-middle class and businessmen groups. In contrast, a few of those members came from the lower-middle class. Generally, the study found that belonging to the upper middle class and businessmen groups were the two major characteristics that shape technocrats. Table 5 illustrates that members of

the government (ministers and Prime Ministers) who came from the lower middle class made up between 2.7% and 4.9% of all members of the government between 1999 and 2019, while those who belonged to the upper middle class made up between 46.7% and 63.8%. Similarly, members of the government who belong to the Mid-Tier Middle Class made up between 13.8% and 22.2%. These numbers show that there were more upper-middle-class officials than from other socioeconomic classes, which may support Proposition 3.

Table 5 also indicates that land ownership has not changed significantly, with the highest percentage of government members who own land being 5.5% between 1999 and 2003, and the lowest being 2.7% between 2010 and 2019. Those government members who come from the private sector (mainly holding high-executive positions) made up 25.2% of all government members between 2020 and 2019 compared to 13.8% between 1999 and 2003. The number of government technocrats with private-sector experience has continuously increased over the years, starting with 13.8% in the years 1999 and 2003. The private sector has been a significant exporter of professional and expert officials who work in top positions in the public sector. In principle, technocracy in Jordan, as shown in Tables 2–5, has steadily grown due to the dynamic relationship between the public and private sectors.

### Discussion and conclusion

This study critically examines the role of technocracy in Jordan's political fabric, elucidating its implications for governance, public administration, and policy formulation. Three core findings emerge: the ascendance of technocrats in governmental roles, their tangible influence on public policy, and the formation of an elitist technocratic cadre. These developments reveal a fundamental tension in Jordan's administrative evolution - while technocratic leadership brought technical efficiency to crisis management, particularly during economic reforms, it systematically altered the character of political life compared to periods of politician-dominated governance. The nuanced role of technocrats manifests in observable trade-offs: their specialized expertise enabled effective policy implementation during crises like IMF reforms, yet their dominance correlated with narrowed public participation in policymaking as technical decisions became increasingly insulated from parliamentary debate (Bani Salameh, 2017; Yaghi, 2023), and the marginalization of partisan platforms in favor of consensus-driven problem-solving (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2019). This contrasts sharply with politician-led cabinets (1989–1999), where tribal and party affiliations fostered broader constituency engagement despite often compromising policy coherence (Mufti, 1999). The government's rationale for integrating technocrats into pivotal roles, while leveraging their specialized expertise, has raised critical questions about democratic responsiveness, particularly evident during Jordan's 2018–2020 protests over technocrat-designed economic policies (Esber, 2021).

Empirical findings reveal technocrats' pronounced presence in influential roles, notably as prime ministers and cabinet members, with increasing influence over public administration. Typically hailing from Western-educated, upper-middle-class elites with private-sector ties, this emergent group's socioeconomic profile prompts concerns about an elitist technocracy potentially misaligned with broader public interests. While technocracy brings operational efficiency, it necessitates deliberate balancing with democratic principles. The study demonstrates that technocratic dominance improved policy implementation but inadvertently diluted political accountability mechanisms. Unlike politicians who traditionally mediated state-society relations through patronage (Ryan, 2018), appointed technocrats' executive-aligned authority has weakened responsiveness to public grievances, creating a paradox where economic policymaking becomes depoliticized while bureaucratic appointments grow more politicized, blurring ideals of neutral competence (Al-Ta'an, 2015). Ongoing research should assess whether this model stabilizes governance or exacerbates democratic deficits in hybrid regimes like Jordan. Recommendations include strengthening legislative oversight of technocratic appointments, developing hybrid governance models combining technical expertise with participatory mechanisms, and enhancing transparency in

expert-driven decision-making. Future studies should track evolving public perceptions longitudinally and conduct regional comparisons to identify optimal balances between efficiency and accountability in similar political contexts.

This study embarked on a critical examination of the role of technocracy in the political fabric of Jordan, aiming to elucidate its implications for public administration decision-making and policy formulation. The investigation substantiated three core propositions: the ascendancy of technocrats in governmental roles, their tangible influence on public policy, and the potential emergence of an elitist technocratic cadre within the political landscape. The nuanced role of technocrats, while not intrinsically beneficial or detrimental, is contingent upon their *modus operandi* and the public's perception thereof. The study's temporal scope, spanning from 1989 to 2020, underscores the pivotal nature of technocrats in Jordan, particularly in light of the political-administration dichotomy. The government's rationale for integrating technocrats into pivotal roles, such as ministerial positions, was predicated on leveraging their specialized expertise. Nonetheless, this has sparked a debate, with some contending that technocrats may prioritize self-interest over public welfare, while others advocate for their invaluable contributions to public administration.

The rise of technocracy in Jordan has been met with both acclaim, for its potential to catalyze policy innovation and critique, for its perceived detachment from public engagement and oversight. The equilibrium between technocratic efficacy and the tenets of good governance—accountability, transparency, and responsiveness—remains a pivotal area of debate. The significant role of technocrats in decision-making, often emphasizing economic priorities, invites further exploration of how governance can balance diverse societal needs.

Empirical findings reveal a pronounced presence of technocrats in influential governmental roles, notably as prime ministers and cabinet members, with a discernible trend of increasing influence over public policy and administration. These technocrats often hail from distinguished educational backgrounds, predominantly Western, and exhibit a spectrum of political ideologies. The data suggests the formation of a new political echelon characterized by elitist attributes, marked by socioeconomic status, land ownership, and business affiliations. This emergent group, predominantly upper-middle-class and business-oriented, constitutes a substantial segment of the government, prompting concerns about an elitist technocracy potentially misaligned with the broader public interest.

In summation, the study concludes that while technocracy brings specialized expertise and operational efficiency to government, it necessitates a deliberate balance with democratic principles to maintain legitimacy and foster public engagement. The scholarly discourse on technocracy is a testament to the ongoing quest for a harmonious approach that capitalizes on technocratic strengths while steadfastly upholding the principles of good governance. For Jordan, the integration of technocrats in the public sector warrants continuous vigilance to ensure that their technical acumen is harmonized with democratic values, thereby safeguarding the populace's best interests in the policymaking process. Ongoing research into the role of technocratic elites in government and the formulation of frameworks that meld technical proficiency with democratic tenets is imperative for a balanced and efficacious decision-making paradigm (Adwan *et al.*, 2018; Bani Salameh, 2017).

In light of the study's findings and the critical analysis of technocracy, particularly within the Jordanian context, the ensuing recommendations are posited for researchers and policymakers. Researchers are advised to pursue extensive longitudinal research to chart the trajectory of technocratic influence across diverse political and economic landscapes. It is important to evaluate the repercussions of technocratic influence on public contentment, policy outcomes, and economic indicators. This can be done by investigating the interrelation between technocracy and social equity and scrutinizing the effects of technocrat-driven policies on disparate socioeconomic strata. Future researchers need to explore frameworks that bolster the democratic accountability of technocrats, aligning their decisions with public exigencies and values. Researchers are also recommended to examine the role of media and civil society in monitoring technocratic decisions and fostering transparency. They can do this by using

comparative analysis and conducting comparative studies of technocratic government models to distill best practices and identify potential challenges by establishing an equilibrium between technocratic expertise and political discernment in exemplary public decision-making models.

Policymakers are advised to foster inclusive policymaking that engages many stakeholders and attempts to maintain a judicious balance between technical expertise and democratic representation, ensuring public interest-driven decisions by technocrats. Policymakers can amplify the transparency of technocratic decision-making through regular dissemination of policy initiative reports and their underlying logic. Refine communication strategies to demystify complex technocratic policies for the public, enhancing comprehension and support. In the dynamic relationship between technocrats and the executive branch, the parliament is encouraged to enhance legislative oversight to align technocratic contributions with public expectations (Bani Salameh and El-Edwan, 2016; Yaghi and Almutawwa, 2023). Being agents to the executive branch, technocrats should be checked for strict criteria that hold them accountable to the people (e.g. parliament).

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