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## Higher Education Institutions' Role in Developing Students' Political Awareness-the Hashemite University is a Model.

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### **Abstract**

*The study aims to examine the role of higher education institutions in developing students' political awareness, with Hashemite University (HU) serving as a model. A cross-sectional study was conducted in the first semester of the academic year 2023/2024, utilizing an online questionnaire with voluntary participation from students at Hashemite University. In total, (275) male and female university students participated in the study. The results indicated that students at Hashemite University have low levels of awareness regarding political issues and political participation. Notably, there were significant correlations ( $p < 0.005$ ) highlighting the crucial role of HU in improving students' political awareness, especially among female participants.*

**Keywords:** *Political awareness, political participation, Political freedom, Political Issues, Hashemite university.*

### **Background:**

The critical importance of youth political awareness in Jordan is undeniable, serving as a key factor in enhancing the current political landscape. An in-depth exploration of the integrated relationship between youth awareness and its societal outcomes is crucial for two primary reasons: establishing the significance of youth in society and enhancing their political interactions.

Individuals' political awareness mirrors their understanding of diverse political knowledge levels and the repercussions of their political involvement. Regardless of gender, today's youth are profoundly connected to their societies at various levels, spanning both the local (Jordanian society) and regional (the Middle Eastern society) dimensions (Al-Jalabneh, 2019). This heightened connection necessitates effective political participation among the youth, highlighting the imperative integration of political awareness into the educational framework of schools and universities. Such integration is vital for nurturing positive and productive thinking among the youth, ultimately raising their awareness of the interactive political dynamics between leadership and society (Al-Khawalda, 2021).

Political awareness, as a concept, encompasses a set of values and principles empowering individuals to actively engage in analyzing social problems, forming judgments, taking stances, and contributing to positive change (Ibrahim, 2017; Nor-Aldin, 2022). It relies on political knowledge, the ability to comprehend political issues, and endorsing specific political tracks through voting in various political organizations and party elections (AL-Shweihat, 2020; Zetra et al., 2022).

Al-Aqili and Tim (2005) assert that political awareness encompasses an individual's understanding of the political and historical reality, their role in the political process, political tendencies, affiliations with established parties,

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and electoral behaviour. This awareness extends to individuals recognizing their rights and duties in the political sphere, as well as the political freedom they enjoy in society. A mature political awareness leads to the formation of individuals who value and safeguard freedom, serving as committed and responsible pillars upon which society can rely to face its challenges. Moreover, it shields youth from hostile currents seeking to infiltrate society with harmful intentions (Martinussen, 1971; Othman and Abdejbar, 2022).

Youth is the main support of society and the essential force propelling its wheel of development and perfection (AL-Majali, 2021). The decline in political awareness among university students leads to the oscillation of ideas and the occurrence of contradictions between their beliefs and the political and social reality in society (Angelique et al., 2003). This contradiction makes them strangers to their society, and in turn, leads to the generation of discontent. The accumulation of discontent within students results in massive revolutions within the student community that may be transmitted to all sectors of society. This is precisely what happened in the student revolution in France in 1986 (Tantawi, 1996).

University students play a vital and dynamic role in political life through a range of activities and engagements. Positioned at the intersection of academic learning and societal influence, students can enhance their political awareness through diverse courses and discussions on campus. Actively participating in civic engagement, political activism, and joining student organizations dedicated to social causes, they contribute to shaping the political landscape. By organizing debates, discussions, and forums, students foster critical thinking and articulate their viewpoints on various political matters. Voting, running for student government, and engaging in research initiatives are direct ways students influence political life. Leadership development within the university setting prepares them for future roles in political leadership. Leveraging social media, students' express opinions, share information, and mobilize support, contributing to the digital dimension of political discourse. International perspectives brought by diverse student populations enrich political discussions, reflecting a comprehensive understanding of global issues. In essence, university students serve as active agents in political life, influencing opinions, policies, and societal development.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in nurturing students' political awareness through a comprehensive approach (Al-Shoubaki, 2018). They structure inclusive curricula that incorporate political science and civic courses, exposing students to diverse perspectives and essential political concepts. A key focus on critical thinking encourages students to analyze political events, forming well-informed opinions. Beyond the classroom, extracurricular activities such as political clubs and debate teams provide practical experiences, while community engagement initiatives and internships connect students with real-world political processes. HEIs contribute to global awareness through exchange programs, emphasizing media literacy to navigate information and fostering research opportunities in political science.

Numerous studies highlight the pivotal role of HEIs in enhancing students' political awareness, guiding them in political activities and effective interactions with governmental laws, aligning with the country's future vision (Abdullah, 2014; Al-Rasheed, 2010; Al-Zboon and Azzam, 2018; Asker, 2017; AL-Fadalah, 2021). HEIs serve as instrumental platforms shaping students' political awareness, promoting civic participation, and contributing to a well-informed citizenry.

The responsibility of higher education institutions lies in imparting values and principles to deepen students' understanding of political domains. This involves practical and theoretical experiences gained during their academic journey (Achour and Alghamdi, 2022). Strategies employed by these institutions include curriculum-based and extracurricular activities, aiming to enhance political awareness (Abdullah, 2014; Al-Zboon and Azzam, 2018; AL-Fadalah, 2021).

Recognizing youth as the main support of society (AL-Majali, 2021), a decline in political awareness among university students may lead to conflicting ideas and contradictions, fostering discontent and potential unrest (Angelique et al., 2003). Political awareness is evident through active participation in political life, including

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engagement in elections, contributions to campaigns, attendance at meetings, dialogues with leaders, financial support to parties, and public demonstrations (Al-Aqili and Tim, 2005; Nor-Aldin, 2022). Numerous studies in Jordan underscore the impact of youth political activities on social issues and national interests (Al-Khawalda, 2021; AL-Majali, 2021; AL-Shweihat, 2020; Al-Zboo and Hijjawi, 2016). Effective youth political participation reflects societal health and the successful pursuit of its collective course.

The Hashemite University (HU) prioritizes enhancing students' political awareness, recognizing the youth's crucial role in societal development (Al-Zyoud, 2015). The university achieves this through mandatory and elective courses covering diverse subjects such as Military Sciences, National Education, Citizenship and Human Rights, Law, Conflict Resolution, Leadership, and Media Literacy. Additionally, HU actively promotes political participation and party involvement, emphasizing the youth's significance in political decision-making.

To further increase youth engagement in the political sphere, HU aligns with the ruler's vision, fostering crisis leadership skills. In 2023, the university amended its student disciplinary system to permit partisan activities on campus, reflecting practices in higher education institutions in 2022. This amendment awaits official publication after submission to the Legislative and Opinion Bureau in September 2023 (Al-Domour, 2023).

In December 2023, HU conducted elections for student clubs, including the Political Development Club with 759 enrolled students. These elections offer students opportunities for active political participation, instilling a sense of responsibility towards political, economic, administrative, and national developments (The Hashemite University, 2023). Furthermore, on January 10, 2024, the Hashemite University Council decided to establish the Political Activities Department within the Student Affairs Deanship. This department aims to organize partisan work on campus, motivate student participation in political events, and modernize the political system, nurturing a politically aware generation dedicated to their homeland and Hashemite leadership (The Hashemite University, 2024).

The study aims to gain insights into effective strategies employed by higher education institutions, using the Hashemite University as a model, to develop students' political awareness and encourage their active and responsible participation in political processes.

## **1. Methods**

### ***1.1: Study questions***

The current study focuses on identifying the level of political awareness among Hashemite University students, considering it as one of the Jordanian higher education institutions that has demonstrated its ability to produce valuable educational outcomes nationally, regionally, and internationally. The Hashemite University leadership makes extraordinary efforts to develop its students' political awareness. Meanwhile, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. From the students' perspective, what is the level of political awareness that Hashemite University students have reached?
2. From the students' perspective, what is the level of awareness of political participation that Hashemite University students have reached?
3. From the students' perspective, what role does Hashemite University play in building the political awareness of its students?
4. Are there statistically significant differences, at the significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), in the students' estimates of political awareness due to variables such as gender and level of study?

### **1.2: Study design and setting**

This cross-sectional study was conducted using an online questionnaire in the first semester of the academic

year (2023/2024) with voluntary participation from students studying at Hashemite University. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Hashemite University approved the study.

### 1.3: The Study Population and Sample

The study community comprises all students at Hashemite University during the first semester of the academic year 2023-2024. The researchers opted for a convenience sample, and the sample size consisted of 275 university participants, with a female-to-male ratio of 3:1. Most of the studied population were pre-graduated students in their second year (n=199, 72.4%), and they belonged to the medical college (n=224, 81.5%) (Table 1).

**Table 1:** General characteristics of studied population

|                   |                  | Frequency |             |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------|-------------|
|                   |                  | Number    | Percent (%) |
| Gender            | Male             | 64        | 23.3        |
|                   | Female           | 211       | 76.7        |
| Educational level | First year       | 10        | 3.6         |
|                   | Second year      | 199       | 72.4        |
|                   | Third year       | 41        | 14.9        |
|                   | Fourth year      | 16        | 5.8         |
|                   | Higher education | 9         | 3.3         |
| Study Major       | Medical          | 224       | 81.5        |
|                   | Engineering      | 5         | 1.8         |
|                   | Scientific       | 16        | 5.8         |
|                   | Literary         | 25        | 9.1         |
|                   | Educational      | 5         | 1.8         |

### 1.4: Questionnaire validation, pilot testing, and reliability

#### Questionnaire validation

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on information gathered from literature reviews about the role of Higher Education Institutions in developing students' political awareness (Al-Zboon and Hajjawi, 2017; AL-Majali, 2021; AL-Shweihat, 2020). The questionnaire drafts were validated by a group of expert researchers.

#### Pilot test

The goal of this pilot study was to enhance our questionnaire. The questionnaire was tested on 5% (n=55) of the intended audience. Volunteers were requested to answer the questionnaire in Arabic, their native language. The volunteers comprehended the questionnaire, and after the pilot test, no modifications were deemed necessary.

#### Reliability

The reliability of each question was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha fell within the accepted range for all questionnaire items (0.7 – 0.9).

### 1.5: Statical Analysis

Data were compiled in Microsoft Excel, and statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS). The level of statistical significance was set at p-values < 0.050. T-Test and One-way ANOVA were employed to determine statistical differences among the means of independent groups. Additionally, descriptive tests (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were utilized.

## 2. Results

### 2.1: Assessment levels of students' awareness regarding a political issue

In general, low levels of awareness regarding political issues among students were reported (Figure 1). Approximately more than half of the participants expressed hesitance about having a sufficient level of knowledge about the Jordanian political system (n=187, 68.0%), the principles of citizenship and democracy (n=162, 58.9%), the Jordanian law of elections (n=170, 61.8%), and the Jordanian constitutional authorities (n=133, 48.4%). Only 42.18% (n=116) of the participants believe in the role of multipartyism in improving democracy.

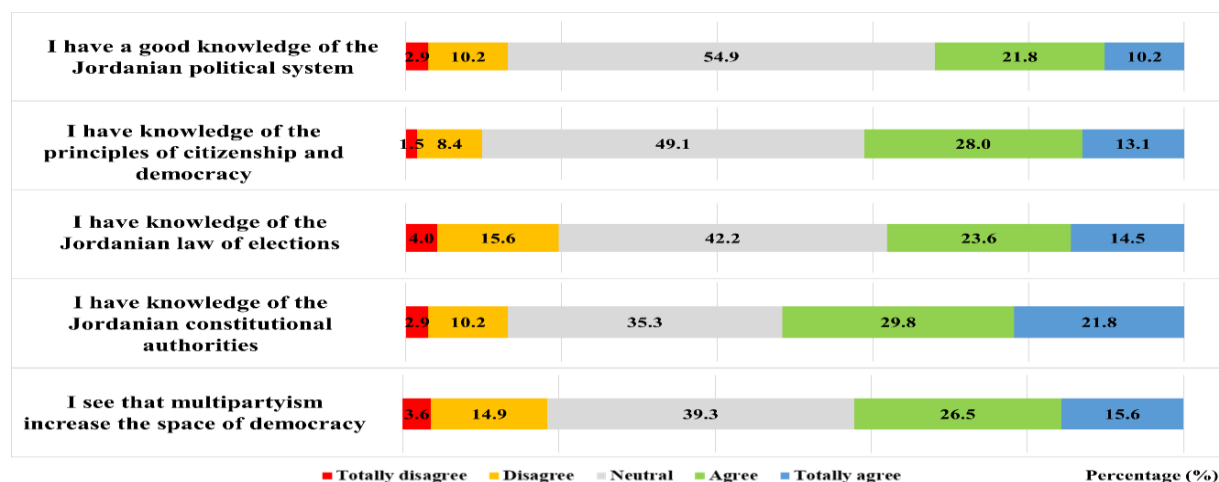


Figure (1): Levels of students' awareness regarding a political issue

### 2.2: Evaluate students' attitude regarding political participations.

A low-level response (indicating a lack of interest or a negative attitude) regarding political participation among university students was reported. Less than one-quarter of the participants expressed a desire to join a political party (n=42, 15.2%), showed no interest in politics (n=46, 16.7%), had no aspirations for political positions (n=51, 18.5%), and were unwilling to participate in student council elections (n=63, 22.9%) (Table 2). Although a low-level response was reported for all items, participants exhibited a better attitude towards the following compared to the other tested items: (i) "I am aware of political issues locally, regionally, and internationally," and (ii) "I follow political events and governmental activities," with agreement proportions of 48.4% and 43.7%, respectively.

Table (2): Political participations attitudes evaluation items

|   | Frequency N (%)  |           |            |           |               |
|---|------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|---------------|
|   | Totally disagree | Disagree  | Neutral    | Agree     | Totally agree |
| I would like to join a political party                | 83 (30.2)        | 88 (32.0) | 62 (22.5)  | 24 (8.7)  | 18 (6.5)      |
| I express my political opinion freely                 | 24 (8.7)         | 47 (17.1) | 102 (37.1) | 62 (22.5) | 40 (14.5)     |
| I follow political events and governmental activities | 28 (10.2)        | 36 (13.1) | 91 (33.1)  | 75 (27.3) | 45 (16.4)     |
| I participate in students' council elections          | 65 (23.6)        | 68 (24.7) | 79 (28.7)  | 35 (12.7) | 28 (10.2)     |

|   |              |           |           |              |              |
|---|--------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|--------------|
| I strive for political office   | 88<br>(32.0) | 81 (29.5) | 55 (20.0) | 29<br>(10.5) | 22 (8.0)     |
| I am interested in news programs that keep me updated to political issues   | 44<br>(16.0) | 53 (19.3) | 95 (34.5) | 43<br>(15.6) | 40<br>(14.5) |
| I am aware of the political issues locally, regionally, and internationally | 21 (7.6)     | 30 (10.9) | 91 (33.1) | 72<br>(26.2) | 61<br>(22.2) |
| I am not interested in politics   | 67<br>(24.4) | 78 (28.4) | 84 (30.5) | 29<br>(10.5) | 17 (6.2)     |

Note. N: Number, %: Percent

### 2.3: The Role of Hashemite University (HU) in Developing Students' Political Awareness from Students' Perspective

The active roles of HU in improving students' political awareness were demonstrated by achieving satisfactory rates for more than half of the recruited participants, as shown in (Figure 2). 62.9% (n=173) of participants were enrolled in academic courses related to political issues, 54.9% (n=151) of students witnessed the university's role in developing political awareness through courses and open-discussion groups, and 54.6% (n=150) of participants believed in the effectiveness of students' participation in decision-making at HU.

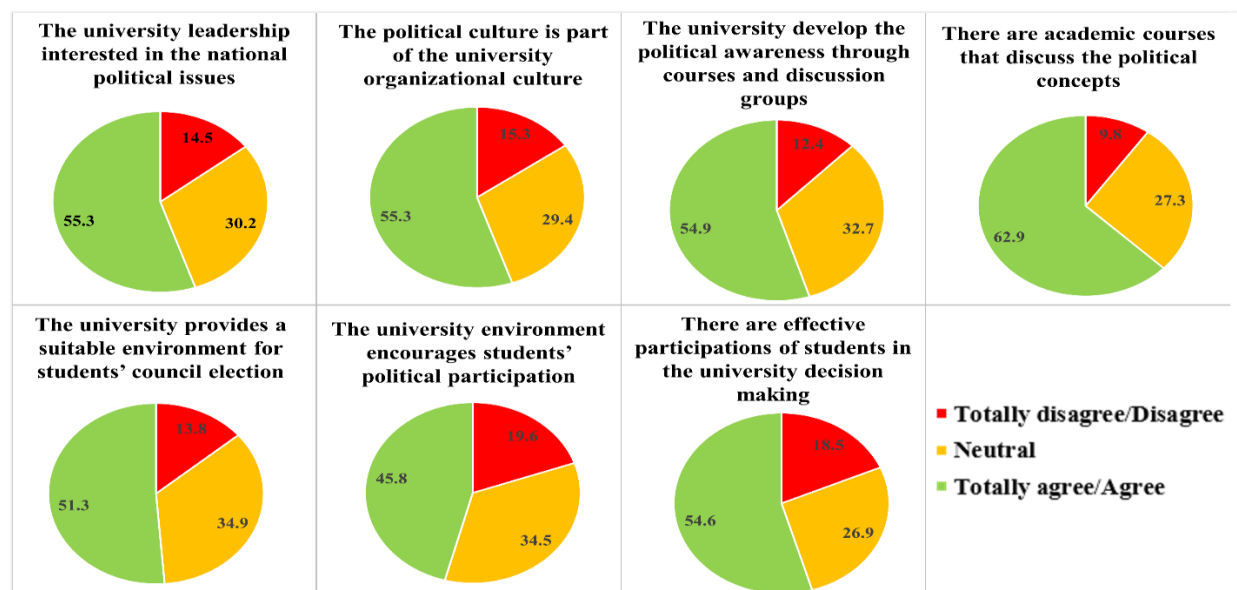


Figure (2): Role of HU in enhancing students' political awareness.

### 2.4 Impact of General Characteristics of the Studied Population on Students' Awareness, Attitudes, and Satisfaction Levels.

The female gender was associated with significantly higher satisfactory rates regarding the roles of HU in developing students' political awareness, especially in the following aspects: (i) The political culture as part of the university organizational culture ( $3.63 \pm 0.959$ ,  $p$ -Value= 0.007), (ii) The university developing political awareness through courses and discussion groups ( $3.71 \pm 0.956$ ,  $p$ = 0.008), (iii) The existence of academic courses discussing political concepts ( $3.84 \pm 0.937$ ,  $p$ = 0.015), (iv) The university providing a suitable environment for student council elections ( $3.59 \pm 0.969$ ,  $p$ = 0.016), (v) The university environment encouraging students' political participation ( $3.49 \pm 1.053$ ,  $p$ < 0.001), (vi) The effective participation of students in university decision-making ( $3.63 \pm 1.072$ ,  $p$ < 0.001) (Table 1).

The levels of participants' awareness regarding political issues, attitudes toward political participation, and

satisfaction levels about the roles of HU significantly vary based on education level (Table 2). Participants belonging to the first year of the study highly believe in the effectiveness of students' participation in university decision-making ( $3.60 \pm 0.97$ ,  $p = 0.037$ ) and express more concern about political issues at local, regional, and international levels ( $3.50 \pm 0.972$ ,  $p = 0.028$ ).

However, participants in the second year of the study were more inclined to believe in the university leadership's interest in national political issues ( $3.70 \pm 1.01$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ), the importance of political culture as a part of the university organizational culture ( $3.65 \pm 0.960$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ), and the university's role in the development of political awareness through courses and discussion groups ( $3.77 \pm 0.960$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Postgraduate students were reported to have higher levels of knowledge about the Jordanian political system ( $4.33 \pm 0.707$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), the principles of citizenship and democracy ( $4.33 \pm 0.866$ ,  $p = 0.037$ ), and the role of multipartyism in improving and increasing the space of democracy ( $4.33 \pm 0.707$ ,  $p = 0.039$ ). Additionally, they expressed more desire to participate in student council elections ( $3.11 \pm 1.616$ ,  $p = 0.027$ ), strive for political office ( $3.56 \pm 1.014$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ), show greater interest in news programs that keep them updated on political issues ( $4.56 \pm 0.726$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), are enrolled in academic courses discussing political concepts ( $4.11 \pm 0.928$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and believe in the role of university environments in encouraging students' political participation ( $3.78 \pm 0.833$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

The patterns of awareness, attitude, and satisfaction vary significantly according to the major of study (Table 3, Supplementary Table). The highest satisfaction rates were reported among students belonging to educational colleges, especially regarding aspects such as the university providing a suitable environment for student council elections ( $3.80 \pm 0.447$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and the university environment encouraging students' political participation ( $3.80 \pm 0.837$ ,  $p = 0.045$ ). Participants from medical colleges were more likely to believe in the university leadership's interest in national political issues ( $3.65 \pm 1.027$ ,  $p = 0.030$ ), whereas students in the engineering college were more interested in news programs that keep them updated on political issues ( $3.80 \pm 1.095$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ). Finally, students from literary colleges demonstrated a good knowledge of the Jordanian political system ( $3.80 \pm 0.816$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ) and a greater inclination to strive for political office ( $3.04 \pm 1.513$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ).

### **Discussion**

The findings of the study revealed low levels of awareness among students regarding political issues, indicating a need for additional efforts to enhance political awareness. Concerning students' political participation, the results indicated a limited response, aligning with the low level of awareness about political issues among Hashemite University students. This suggests that students lack sufficient knowledge about political life and the significance of engaging in parliamentary activities, highlighting the necessity for further initiatives to raise political awareness.

Interestingly, these results differ from the findings of Al-Saleem (2016) and Al-Shweihat and Hawatmeh (2014), who noted a moderate degree of political participation attitudes among Jordanian university students, as well as from the research findings of AL-Majali (2021), which indicated a high degree of students' attitudes towards political participation at Mutah University.

The results of the study illustrated the active role of Hashemite University (HU) in enhancing students' political awareness, with satisfactory rates observed among over half of the participants. Participants indicated that HU's efforts to increase political awareness were evident through courses, discussion groups, and academic programs delving into political concepts. The university environment was noted as conducive to encouraging students' political participation, and effective student participation in university decision-making processes was observed. The assessment of universities' roles in developing political awareness among students has yielded varied results in previous studies. While the studies by Al-Zboon and Hajjawi (2017), Al-Zboon and Ayub (2015), and AL-Shweihat (2020) suggested that the role of universities is at a moderate level, the study by Al-Slihat (2014) indicated that the role of universities in developing political awareness is at a low level.

There is a notable increase in female political awareness across various aspects, signifying a growing awareness among Jordanian women about the importance of engaging in political life. The media plays a pivotal role in augmenting political awareness and participation among females in Jordan (Jassam, 2017). Moreover, there is a local and global movement towards empowering women politically, fostering increased awareness of political issues, and promoting their participation in political life. Our study results align with the findings of Khazaleh's study (2018), contrasting with the results of Al-Saleem's study (2016), which suggested higher levels of political awareness and participation among males.

There is a distinct pattern in participants' awareness of political issues, attitudes toward political participation, and satisfaction levels regarding the roles of Hashemite University (HU). These patterns significantly vary based on educational levels and the study major (college) with significant correlations ( $p < 0.005$ ). This variance may be attributed to differences in personal interests among individuals, variations in their levels of political awareness, and disparities in cultures and social environments. Additionally, a significant role is attributed to the family in developing political awareness among individuals.

#### **4. Conclusion**

1. Based on the study results, it is crucial for Hashemite University and other Jordanian universities to focus on developing political awareness and encouraging political participation among their students through various strategies, including:
2. Attention of University Leadership to Political Culture: Prioritizing political culture is crucial for university leaders.
3. Development of Courses Related to Political Awareness and Participation: Enhancing academic courses related to the concepts of political awareness and political participation.
4. Conducting Seminars and Workshops: Hosting more seminars and workshops on the importance of political work and political participation by young people in all fields and genders.
5. Empowering Students for Political Dialogue: Empowering students with the ability to engage in meaningful political dialogue, aligning with the royal and governmental directions in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.
6. Developing Decision-Making and Problem-Solving Skills: Empowering students with the ability to make decisions and solve problems scientifically and thoughtfully.
7. By implementing these strategies, universities can contribute to the holistic development of students, preparing them to be politically aware, engaged, and capable individuals in alignment with the societal and governmental goals of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

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